

The Batavia Historian

Batavia Historical Society

P.O. Box 14

Batavia, Illinois 60510

Vol. 46 No. 1

www.bataviainhistoricalsociety.org

January, 2005

Charlie Kline's Memories of Growing Up, Working and Firefighting in Batavia

"I was born in Batavia, September 5, 1918, and I attended the Louise White School and graduated from Batavia High School in 1936." That is how Charles Kline began the interview with Bill Wood and Bill Hall on June 29, 2004.

Charlie, as he was better known, had one brother, two years older. They lost their mother when Charlie was nine. At about the same time, his four year-old cousin Ray Anderson's mother died, so their grandmother took over raising the boys of both families in the home on Park Street. She was strict and insisted that the boys had to be in each night at nine o'clock, all the way through high school! (How would that go over today?) "One time," Charlie recalled, "we were sitting half a block up the street under a street light, talking to Johnny Kielion and Paul Stone. Up came Gram, waving her tiny arms -- she had a switch, swinging it back and forth.

"We would walk up River Street and see some of the spooky shows, Lon Chaney and Bela Lugosi, and we would walk home in the middle of the streets because we were so scared, But we had to be in by nine."

Asked about his schooling, Charlie recalled, "When I first started to

school, something went wrong with my knee, and my mother took me to school in a coaster wagon, going down Washington Avenue and dropping me off at the door of Louise White school. When she turned around and went back, I went up Van Buren Street. I had an awful time when I started school. Later I used to walk

to school with Don Schielke. He

would comb his hair and wet it down with water.

He lived on Columbia Street

about two blocks

down, and by the time we got to school in the winter time, his hair was icy -- he had crystals of ice.

"My first grade teacher was called Little Miss Olsen -- she was the sweetest little girl anybody would ever want to have for a teacher. Our second grade teacher was called Big Miss Olsen; she was the wife of Glen Oppfelt, then a partner in Bert Johnson's Drugstore on Batavia Avenue. And my third grade teacher was Adine Bergman; her brother was Gunnar Bergman, who was famous for ping-pong and quite a baseball player.

"My fourth grade teacher was Alma Anderson, a Batavia resident, and my fifth grade teacher was Edna Olsen. But I mustn't forget Miss White, the

principal. She watched over me -- every time we had to make Valentines in school for our mothers, I would cry. She was concerned and showed it; she said, 'Make one for your grandmother.' She was one of the best women in all Batavia at that time.

"In the sixth grade we started junior high school -- well, we still stayed at Louise White, but we had a home room desk, and we had to go the different rooms, such as for science and for literature. My history teacher was Alice Gustafson -- a wonderful woman, and we all know about her. In the seventh grade, my science teacher was Opal Emery. The literature teacher was Amy Bell. And Frances Neddermeyer was our English teacher; she had to drive all the way from Naperville every day in her Model T Ford.

"Miss Neddermeyer was a remarkable woman. One time there was a smart aleck boy -- I won't mention his name because he is still around -- who was acting up, and she said, 'George, please leave the room.' He had an ink pen in his mouth, and he went smart alecking out of the room; she came up behind him and hit him along the side of the head so hard that the pen flew out and hit the floor.

"Another time, I asked permission to leave the room to get a drink of water, and as I stepped out of the room I heard 'Slap, slap, slap.' There

"... and we would walk home in the middle of the streets because we were so scared ..."

Continued on p. 2

Charlie Kline's Memories of Growing Up, Working and Firefighting in Batavia

Continued from p. 1

was Miss Scott, in the cloak hallway with some mother who had been called down to correct her son. The mother had brought the father's belt with her, and her son was leaning over while his mother wreaked havoc on his hind end."

Asked about high school, Charlie continued, "All four years were in the Depression, and it was deep. [Ed. note: You can get an idea from the handmade program for the June 1, 1935, Junior-Senior Prom; note the dinner menu. What would today's students think, many of whom go to such places as Tribella and 302 West in Geneva for their prom dinner?]

"The basketball team, I think, won the Little Seven championship. The boys just started to get tall, 5'9 or 5'10, maybe 6 foot was the tallest except for Eugene Seymour. He was about 7 foot tall -- that's one of the reasons I think we won the Little Seven that year.

"H.C. Storm was a wonderful man, There were certain students who wanted to go to the University of Illinois, and he was helping them financially, out of his own pocket. I happened to walk out of the north end of the high school one day, and there stood Mr. Storm. He said -- and he knew every student by name -- 'Charles, where's your homework?' I said that I didn't have any, to which he replied, 'You go back in and get some.' That's one of the reasons that the old ones turned out to be so decent."

Asked about what he did when he got out of school, Charlie replied, "I started to work as an apprentice at the



Challenge. After two years there, I was drafted and was in Pearl Harbor after the bombing -- saw a lot of wreckage. My brother was in England and my cousin Ray was in Europe when we got word that our grandmother had died, but none of us could get home. There was a plane leaving for the West Coast every hour, and I put in for a leave but the captain said, 'No, you can't go home.' I had wonderful memories of her, and still have.

"When I got out of the service, I returned to the Challenge foundry and finished my apprenticeship. Elliott Lundberg worked in the office, and Eric Anderson worked in the foundry because his father, Big Oscar, was the foundry boss."

"What about the fire department?" Charlie was asked. "You were a volunteer there, weren't you?" "Yes," he recalled. I had 27 years, and my father and I together had 69 years as firefighters. Former Chief Richter said about my father, 'Bud Kline was the toughest firefighter I ever knew. We didn't have protective equipment in those days, as we have now, but he was a born smoke eater. He would give it everything he had.' And my nephew Dave was a firefighter, too.

"After seven years at the Challenge, it closed. I went to work for a while at Burgess Norton. Then Charles Dickenson, who was working at the Batavia Dairy, told me that there was an opening there. So I went and spent over twenty years with them. The dairy had three owners -- Frank Pierson, Melvin Kraft and Phil Ekman. People used to say, 'Kraft has the brains, Ekman has the money, and Pierson has the strong back.' Frank was a hard worker.

"Evelyn Mair, Tom's stepmother, worked there -- she was a wonderful woman. After a few years there, she decided to quit. She said, 'Mr. Pierson, I'm leaving in two weeks.' He didn't say anything. So, she decided later to tell him the same thing. He replied, 'Well, we all gotta go some time.' And that was it."

Asked what he did after the dairy closed, Charlie replied, "I had twelve years to go before I was 65. I got a job at Walker's out on Kirk Road. It was a good place to work even though pulling exhaust pipes was hard. I never had an easy job and never complained. Walker's had good benefits, and I quit the day I turned 65.

Although Charlie spent his working days at these companies, first the Challenge, then Burgess Norton, then the Batavia Dairy and finally Walker's, it is easy to see where his heart was -- with the fire department. His face lights up when he recounts his 27 years as a volunteer fireman.

Have You Paid Your Dues?

Many of you paid your dues at the December 5 meeting, but if you have not yet done so, an envelope is enclosed for your convenience. We -- especially Membership Chairman Alma Karas -- would appreciate your prompt response to avoid the time and expense of follow-up notices.

Dues remain the same for 2005 except for business and institutional members; their annual dues have increased from \$20 to \$50.

The Batavia Historian, recipient of the Illinois State Historical Society's 1997 Award for Superior Achievement, is published quarterly by the Batavia Historical Society. The editor, Bill Hall, will welcome any suggestions or material -- 630-879-2033.

The Depot Museum, a cooperative effort of the Society and the Batavia Park District, is open from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from March through November. The director, Carla Hill, can be reached at 630-406-5274.

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 2: The Early Batavia Years

In the July 2004 issue, we concluded with William VanNortwick's 1835 move, under the cloud of an undisclosed financial embarrassment, from New York to Batavia. His son, John, remained in New York, working on the canals, while William, acting on behalf of his son, was attempting to establish a milling business here. In this issue, we shall trace the developments over the next twelve years until John, upon completion of his work in New York, moved to Batavia with his family.

What brings this story to life is the voluminous family correspondence, which William's great-great-grandson, William B. VanNortwick, included verbatim in his VanNortwick Genealogy, a copy of which is in the Batavia Depot Museum. We cannot overemphasize what a gem this collection is, bringing early settlers to life and vividly telling us what life was like in the early days of our community. It gives us far more than mere names and dates.

In the story that follows, we find John's increasing frustration with his father's handling of what John referred to as "the Illinois venture." We see business alliances develop and sometimes fall apart with persons whose names are prominent in Batavia's

early history -- Judge Isaac Wilson, Joel McKee, Titus Howe, George Makepeace, Alanson House and Colonel Lester Barker. We are reminded how tight money was on the frontier when we watch a dispute over \$500 fester without resolution for more than five years. The dangers of mixing business and family are driven home as we follow the entanglement created when one of William's sons-in-law refuses to move from property owned jointly by the VanNortwicks and some of their business partners.

Most of all, we see clearly the risks that come from absentee ownership when inept management with frequent turnover, and possibly William's meddling, create continuing losses for John and his fellow New York partners. These problems are exacerbated by continuing cash calls, which some of the partners occasionally find it difficult to meet, and the apparent failure of John, in particular, to respond to urgent inquiries or to meet with others as scheduled.

With these observations, we shall get into the story. As before, with one exception we shall quote from the correspondence verbatim, not correcting spelling or grammatical errors or attempting to edit passages that may not be completely clear. We do this to

give the flavor of language that was prevalent in those days when many of the correspondents had little, if any, formal education. Although the grammar and spelling may be flawed, the writers had good vocabularies and knew how to express themselves. The only exceptions to quoting from the letters exactly as written are the occasional insertion of punctuation and the breaking into sentences of long paragraphs, especially William's.

- - - - -

In March, 1836, William, now settled in this area, wrote one of his frequent letters to John, who had remained in New York. After discussing the weather (which he concluded was not as bad as New York's), he reproached his son for not having written in some months. "We have received no letter from you since December or any of our friends at the east. In your letter you informed us you expected to come here this winter. We have three times received packages of newspapers. On a paper in the first package, you wrote you were going west in January, which we supposed ment here. Last evening we received a package. On one paper was wrote. 'I cannot see you this winter.' You may judge we were all very much disappointed. Why you should let the whole winter pass under such circumstances without writing to us, I can not tell.

"In my last letter I endeavored to press on you the necessity of coming here this winter, and I thought I gave sufficient reasons but it seems my reasons were insufficient or even worthy of an answer -- I know very well the expence and fatigue of so long a journey and the necessary loss of time and should not under existing circumstances press it upon you if did not think your best interest would not be promoted by it. Eaven if you should lose your place on the canals on account of it, no cuntry perhaps in the world offers greater inducements to enterprising young man with small capital than this, and if you should make this your permanent residence I have no doubt that in three years you would make more than you would in ten years on the canals."

A Gala Party For Museum Volunteers

On Tuesday, December 7, about 80 Depot Museum volunteers gathered for a luncheon and entertainment at Shannon Hall.

After a delicious luncheon, Chris Winter thanked all the volunteers for their efforts during the year and then paid special tribute to five: Georgene Kauth for opening and closing the museum on weekends; Kathy Fairbairn for scheduling volunteers; Marilyn Robinson for all she does in keeping the Gustafson Center running smoothly; and Sandy Chalupa and Dorothy Staples for maintaining records of the society's artifacts.

Then came the outstanding entertainment that Carla Hill and Chris had arranged. "Those Funny Little People" sang, danced and mingled with those in attendance in a performance that held everyone's attention. It was fun -- as usual.

And a note to non-volunteers: You, too, can enjoy this annual luncheon and receive a free Christmas ornament by volunteering in 2005. All you have to do is call Carla or Chris at 406-5274 or Kathy Fairbairn at 406-9041. You'll be surprised how much fun volunteering at the museum is.

Continued on p. 4

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 2: The Early Batavia Years

Continued from p. 3

Two months later, John had sent his father \$200 with a promise of more, but William was still dissatisfied with his son's tardiness in writing. "I ... had fondly expected a letter from you ere this if you knew how much anxiety I feel to be informed on the subjects I wrote to you about. My improvement here so much depends on your favourable condition to help me to means. I would barely mention to you that in order to get along with our business here I have been under the necessity of buying a span of horse and will want within sixty days [?] to pay for them over and above what I have formerly rote you. I want you to write to me immediately. Let me know about everything I rote about. I am preparing to build my dam. Should be glad if you could send me a mill wright. I do not expect you here this spring."

But William's concerns were not solely with business. In 1836 newly arrived Methodists in the Fox River Valley organized a church in William and Martha's home -- the first religious organization within the present city limits. It continued to meet in the VanNorwick home until 1852 when the growing congregation built its first church.

It would appear that difficulties with the dam arose because of what William perceived as "Howe's prejudice against me." After a round of negotiations involving several persons and the exchange of several properties, William advised his son that the problems had finally been resolved, but in such a way that John ended up as a one-quarter owner of the dam rather than one-third as originally planned -- all at a higher price. These negotiations must have been quite stressful because we find William's daughter Margaret writing to John that "Mother's health is quite improved since this purchase as the contention between Father and Howe is now settled."

Even with the reduction in John's interest, William claimed (possibly putting the best face on what had happened) that it was an advantageous arrangement since it brought in a man by the name of Boardman -- a "man of high standing and wealth and as a

business man especially in hydraulics works not surpassed by any in this country or almost any other and from his high standing and business habit the company will derive an advantage more than equivalent for the deduction of his quarter of the property -- the payments are to be made as follows: one thousand dollars down, \$2500 in three months, \$2500 in six months, the remainder in one year. Howe is to compleat and finish the dam and mill -- the company will own in all over eight hundred acres of land worth at least for farming purposes \$6000."

Still later in 1836, William wrote again to John, "I think proper to rite you again on the subject of your business here. In the first place I am perfectly satisfied as to the propriety of taking into the firm Mr. Boardman as I am persuaded no other man in this country could have bought Howe out -- but I am not so well satisfied about taking in Mr. Barker. This will reduce your share to one fifth instead of a quarter if you should agree to this arrangement." We have no indication how this transaction arose or whether it was consummated, although it probably was since we find William advising his son on how to pay his one-fifth share of some firm expenses. Presumably this Barker, later referred to as "Col. Barker," was the son-in-law of John Gowdy, the Revolutionary War veteran buried in the East Side Cemetery.

All this apparently involved moving the dam to a place where William and Howe agreed that it should be built. William seems to have taken satisfac-

tion in knowing that this would thwart Judge Wilson, who, William wrote, find is making grate calculations on the advantage resulting to him from the present location of the mill. This you will defeat by moving the present dam and mill."

In January, 1837, Alanson House, one of the partners, complained to John that "Ballard [first name Charles -- married to John's sister Frances] is determined to keep that place and refuses to pay any Rent or portion of its Products in consequence as Ballard says of your not doing as you agreed with him." This is a problem that would plague the business for years and will create friction between John and his partners, who thought, with what appears to be some justification, that it was a personal matter that he should get resolved.

In February, 1837, John made what appears to have been his first visit to Batavia, but there is no indication what decisions may have been reached. This must have been when, as reported in *Historic Batavia*, "the first plat of Batavia was made on the east side by VanNortwick, Barker, House and Co. with John VanNortwick doing the surveying."

Over the next few years, the matter of Ballard's refusal to move off what was claimed to be company property and John's continual refusal to pay Ballard the \$500 that Ballard claims John had promised him arises in letter after letter. So does the increasing irritation of the other partners that John does not take action to resolve

Continued on p. 8

Membership Matters

We continue to grow! With this issue, we shall be mailing almost 600 copies of the Historian -- and many of these involve family memberships that include at least two members. Growth isn't everything, of course, but it shows the support of so many people. We welcome this and urge those of you who can to participate in the society's activities.

Since the last issue, we have added as life members Richard Henders of Batavia and Patricia Snickenberger of Winnetka (gift from Oliver Wolcott). Other new members (from Batavia unless otherwise indicated) include Margo Cooper; Dolores Derrick (gift from Lorraine Winter); Claudia Goggin, Laura Lundgren (DeKalb), and David Pinner (gifts from Ardenne Pinner); Diane Wicklund Van Bavel (Woodbridge, VA), Greg Wicklund (Geneva), and Lois Wicklund (gifts from Pete and Leslee Kraft); and Dr. Edward D. and Rachel D. Williams (Santa Fe, NM).

We regret to report the death of life member Cora Mae West, known in Batavia as "the lady on the bicycle."

We received a gift from Sally L. Hazelton in memory of Adelaide Nelson.

Cruising, Growing up in Batavia And Other Memories of Bob Nelson

A recent newspaper story covered restaurants and cruising in the 1950s and referred to Batavia's Bob Nelson. Thinking this subject might be of interest to readers, Bill Wood and Bill Hall interviewed Bob on April 24, 2004 -- and we got a lot more than cruising.

Bob is well-known for his many endeavors in Batavia, including co-chairing the annual Brotherhood Banquet. Those who drop into McDonald's any evening except Saturday will recognize him as a regular member of the illustrious group that gathers there for an hour or so to solve the day's problems -- and just to reminisce.

"Bob," we asked, "the newspaper article on restaurants and cruising mentioned you and Jim Anderson. Who was the other one they mentioned?" "It was Kent Johnson," Bob replied, and then continued, "If you look back to the movie -- I don't know if you saw American Graffiti -- it gives you an idea about cruising. That was when kids back in the '50s and '60s were first getting cars, they were pretty neat and they would cruise. Our particular area of cruising was from Batavia up to St. Charles. There were no places in Batavia really, but Geneva had the Fox Valley Restaurant, and then we would go up Anderson Boulevard, which became Third Street in St. Charles. Then we would go out east to what is now Rex's Cork and Fork; it was Locke's Drive-in at the time. Back in those days, you had carhops. So you would go there and meet other kids from other towns and fall in love for a week or two.

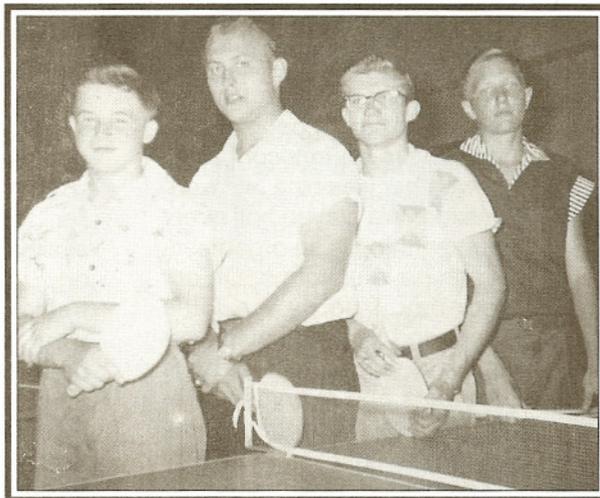
"Another place was Robert's Drive-in in Geneva at the "Y" where First and Third Streets split. Same thing -- they had carhops. And in Geneva for a while, on East State Street, there was a Dog 'n' Suds. We had a regular pattern, and we'd cruise up and down all evening long. It was a lot of fun, and a lot of great memories come from there. Some of the people I knew from the other towns, I still know. That's probably where I met them, back in those times when we were all in high school, or just out of high school."

"What year did you graduate?" we asked. "I graduated in 1958 -- born in 1940. I always say I was born in Batavia, but actually, like most of my generation here, the first week or so of my life was spent at Community Hospital in Geneva. So, I don't know if that makes me Genevan or a Batavian, but I guess I've probably been long enough here now to be considered a Batavian."

Asked about his growing-up memories, Bob responded, "The first thing that flashes in my mind comes from Bill's reminder the other day that it was the 99th birthday of Jane Elwood, formerly Jane Tincknell. I sent her a card and reminded her that she and I opened the then new McWayne School on Wilson Street. I went from fourth grade in the old school into fifth grade at the new school. Miss Tincknell was my fifth grade teacher.

"As seventh and eighth graders, we had dancing lessons at Louise White School. I must admit that the real highlight was walking back home to the west side and stopping at Vic's 'Elbow Room' for sundaes and cokes. "And then there were the paper routes. Our boss was Jack Laydon, and we met in the basement of his store. This was in the days when you folded each paper and put them in a sturdy canvas bag to be delivered, usually on your bike, to your assigned neighborhood. The worst part was Sunday mornings when we got up at 3 a.m. so everyone could get their paper early.

"In retrospect, the thing I remember about growing up in Batavia is what an innocent time it was. I don't know if there was any crime -- you never knew about it. Kids all knew each other. A big thing was when the east-side kids joined us. When I was going into seventh grade, neither McWayne nor Louise White had enough room for all the students, so they took a few kids from each school and combined them in the basement of the high school -- the building that later became the middle school and then was torn down to make room for the new library. By sheer luck, Jim Anderson, Dick Isbell and I -- the three



Ping Pong Tournament at "The Huddle" - 1956
Bob Nelson, soph.; Jim Richardson, jr.; Wayne Lippold, sr.; and Byron Peterson, fr.

amigos of our day -- were selected to go there. So we were pretty happy about that."

Bill Wood inquired who some of Bob's teachers were in the basement of the old high school. Bob recalled, "Ruthe Seiler was my homeroom teacher for both years. And I remember George McCloud doing science experiments -- the nail in the coke bottle, making a door bell, things of that nature. There was Tom Wallace. And "Ace" Hapner was the basketball coach. Right around then Sam Rotolo came; he had us in football."

Turning to Bill Wood, Bob went on, "You asked earlier about my grade school teachers. I can name them all. Dale Winter was the principal at McWayne. First grade I had Leota Capps Wolcott -- I think it was her first year in teaching. Second grade was a lady named Eldora Hoover, whom I think," Bob said, turning to Bill, "you probably have heard of. Third grade was Georgia McLain, fourth was Mary Powers, and fifth was Jane Tincknell and Mabel Galloway. Sixth grade I had Mrs. Everett and Marlis Averill.

"As I said, it was an innocent time, and I don't remember being conscious of a world outside of Batavia. The first outside event that I remember hearing about was the Korean War. I remember this guy on the radio telling about the hordes of Communists pouring over the line, and I could just

Continued on p. 6

Cruising, Growing up in Batavia And Other Memories of Bob Nelson

Continued from p. 5

envision all those people who were against us, coming down and shooting guns and wiping out people.

"But still, it was an innocent time. When the weather was nice, we were always outside. We played ball every day. Now everything is so organized. They have to have uniforms. On our walk every day, I go by the Little League park and see the equipment they have. Have you seen those bags with all the bats and everything, really nice, just like the major teams have? And it's all right -- it's just that they can't do anything spontaneous."

"Where did you play?" we asked. "Either down at the Walnut Street playground, once in a while, or usually up to the athletic field. We grew up there. There was a main diamond up there that's still here, but there was one right next to the tennis courts -- just a small one -- that we used.

"The Batavia Cardinals played on Sundays on the main diamond. Maybe they weren't semipro, but they were just like semipro -- good post-college guys. A couple had even tried out for the major leagues. A guy named Ray Collins kind of ran things. He was an alderman later.

"There were no houses on Republic Road then, just farm fields, and the guys would sometimes hit a foul ball over there. Collins would pay you, either a nickel or a popsicle from the refreshment stand, to go through a hole in the fence and get it. But sometimes we'd go out there and hide the ball, then come back the next day and get it. These were nice baseballs, which we normally couldn't afford. Ours were all friction-taped up, just like our bats.

"Sometimes the players would break a bat and just throw it away. We were bat boys, and we'd take the bats home. We would put wood screws in them, run friction tape around the handles, and use them ourselves. Just another example of the innocence of those days.

"In the fall we probably played football. In the summer, swimming at the quarry -- I know there was a long stretch when I would go swimming

three times a day -- right when they opened up, then maybe later in the afternoon, and if my folks would let me, after supper. A lot of swimming at the quarry -- really a fun place.

"That Ray Collins I mentioned earlier," Bob continued, "also had responsibility for the Quarry. He'd be the guy on Sunday afternoons stopping the traffic and making sure the people were from Batavia. If they weren't, he'd charge them the appropriate amount. A guy running the stand, at least for one year, was Russ Ahern, who was the coach of the Hebron basketball team that won the state in 1952. A couple of years ago, they came out with a book about that team, *Then There Were Giants*."

"What about skating," we asked. "Yeah, I did some. The winters sure have changed. We'd go probably from November, sometimes through March. It would never melt enough that we couldn't skate. They would have a big old 55 gallon drum from Stephano's Body Shop, and we'd build a fire in that if it was real cold. A lot of kids skated. A couple of my classmates were rescued-- they skated too far up north one time and went in. Dave Mettel and Larry Ridgeway, both now gone, were saved by, I think, Donnie and Wally Benson.

"I don't want to forget to mention 'The Huddle,'" Bob continued. "All during my early years, and I believe for at least 20 years or so, we had a thriving teen center know as The Huddle. Started and staffed by adults, it was the 'thing to do' in Batavia. I believe it was open year-round, but most activity was centered on Friday nights after the games. We had light refreshments (pop, candy, etc.), some ping pong tables, and most important, probably, a juke box. Kids could dance, just listen, or just hang out and talk.

"Mrs. Hulda Scheidler was our adult chaperone for many years. She was honored as Batavia's 'Citizen of the Year' for all her many years of service to Batavia's youth. An absolutely wonderful woman."

Bob continued with recollections of his family, one of which is particularly indicative of how things have changed over the past fifty or sixty years. It was a different world, Bob recalled. "My grandfather was a custodian at Bethany Lutheran Church. Most people in that neighborhood went to Bethany. That's where they settled. But our family left the church for a few years, and I can tell you why -- I have told everybody else.

"When my grandfather died, he was not much more than a nominal church member. Back then, one of the traditions was that when a member died, they would ring the bell at noon the next day -- one ring for each year of the person's life. In those days people would count the rings and say, 'Yeah, that's so-and-so.' When my grandfather died, Pastor Haig came to the family, my Aunt Ann, and said, 'Now if you'll pay up your father's dues, we'll ring the bell' And the family left the church -- rightfully so, I think. But later I got jealous of the other kids going through confirmation and went back on my own in my junior year."

After graduation from high school, Bob worked at a restaurant for a while and then at Furnas. He recalls, "I can remember making a dollar sixty an hour, which was pretty good money back then. Then I heard about this place over at West Chicago that had just moved out from Chicago, Western Electric, and they were paying like a dollar seventy something. So I went over there and started on February 1, 1960. Except for a two-year interruption for military service during the Vietnam War, I worked there for thirty years. In 1990, I got a nice buy-out -- pension and full medical benefits.

"Then I worked for Al Birkeneder in his shop under Rachielles for almost ten years. After that I went to drive a school bus, and I just love that. I was at Laidlaw for two and a half years, and now I am in my second full year at Geneva."

This ends our story -- but not Bob's. We trust that he will continue to be a fixture in Batavia, as he has been for over sixty years.

COAL CRISIS HITS BATAVIA IN 1950

National Coal Miners' Strike Affects City

by Marilyn Robinson

January 9, 1950, United Mine Workers began a series of wildcat strikes that caused a major coal shortage in the United States.

Batavia soon suffered a severe shortage of coal. By January 13, the city had less than a week's supply on hand in local yards. Prospects of cold homes and closed schools and industries seemed real as the city's coal pile rapidly diminished with no prospect of getting new supplies.

Thorsen Lumber Company, Alexander Lumber Company, and the Plumer Fuel Company made efforts to take care of their customers as they divided their supply among those most in need.

As days passed and the coal production business remained at a standstill, the emergency became more grave. The Grace McWayne School was down to a three-day supply, and the other schools had less than a week's supply. Closing of the schools appeared imminent.

Public health was involved as

homes that were poorly heated, or not heated at all, became a menace to the health of residents. If schools had to close, it would seriously interfere with the education of children. Closed industrial plants would interfere with family budgets and the community's economy.

Citizens sent letters to President Truman urging him to get the coal miners back to work or declare a national emergency.

January 20 saw no relief. Conditions were worse than the week before. Dealers scraped the bottom of the bin in a desperate effort to keep fires going in Batavia homes. Zero weather did not improve the situation and meant that the little coal remaining was used up more quickly. McWayne School got a small supply of coal and did not have to close. A carload of coal from Kentucky was delivered directly to those homes that needed it most.

By the end of January, there was no coal on hand at the coal yards for a few days. Some cars did come in

but with not enough to provide for all homes and industries. Local coal yards required eight cars a week for normal winter conditions. "We are not getting anywhere near that amount. The situation is desperate," said Robert Thorsen.

By February 6, President Truman had invoked the Taft-Hartley Act against the coal miners. Their leader, John L. Lewis, advised the men to go back to work, but they defied him.

During February things continued as they had in January, but the first part of March saw zero weather that seriously affected the coal supply. Dealers ran out of coal for the many homes that had used their last shovel full.

Batavia's situation grew more desperate. "How long would it be before night meetings, schools, and other community gatherings would have to be called off?"

On March 7, the miners won a new contract, and the strike was over. It didn't take long before the coal supplies in Batavia were back to normal.

Record Attendance At Annual Potluck Dinner Meeting

About 130 members and guests attended the December 5 Annual potluck dinner meeting at Bethany Lutheran Church. As usual the food was delicious, and the program was outstanding.

In a brief business meeting that proceeded the entertainment, the members approved a change in the by-laws, providing for an increase in the board from eleven to thirteen members. Following that, the following officers and directors were elected: Richard Benson, president; Christine Winter, secretary, Jerry Miller, treasurer; and directors Philip Elfstrom, Robert Peterson, Marilyn Robinson and John White. Officers and directors continuing in office for another year are Patty Rosenberg, vice president and program chairman, Georgene Kauth, corresponding secretary; William Wood, historian; and directors Robert Brown, Carole Dunn and Alma Karas.

After the business meeting was adjourned, vocalist, Julieanne Vickers, entertained the members and guests with a variety of Christmas favorites.

A number of those in attendance bought cookbooks that Carole Dunn had prepared from recipes of dishes that members had bought to previous potluck dinners. If you didn't get a chance to buy one then, you can do so through the Depot Museum. They're a steal at \$5.

I Remember Batavia When

Heritage Roundtable at the Civic Center Tuesday, January 25

Please mark your calendar for Tuesday, January 25, 2005. The society will hold a Heritage Roundtable at 2 p.m. at the Bartholmew Room in the Civic Center on that date. The subject will be "I Remember Batavia When."

Be sure to come and bring your friends. Also bring photos or any other mementos to share. The discussion will be open and wide-ranging; we want to hear what you have to tell us about your memories of Batavia.

Following the session there will be light refreshments and a chance to visit with friends. We'll look forward to seeing you.

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 2: The Early Batavia Years

Continued from p. 4

the issue with his brother-in-law. House wrote John, "...[W]e are disappointed Ballard is dissatisfied which dissatisfaction seems to have arisen from an encouragement held out by you to assist him to \$500. Under such circumstances I think it devolves upon you as an individual to reconcile Ballard rather than upon us as a company to contest the point with him by Law."

John did write to Ballard stating, "I very much regret that I ever had anything to do with property on the Fox River." We know that nothing came of this because the "Ballard problem" continued to raise its head, without resolution, until at least 1841.

In August, 1838, William complained about the problems of old age in a letter to John: "[T]he mony was thankfully received and regret it very mutch that I am under the nesity of troubling you but so it is and I will not murmur or complain for, not withstanding old age, losses, crosses and disappointments meet together in me, yet the Good Lord is very kind unto me in giving us all to enjoy good helth and although we have but little of the wourlds goods we try to be contented and are trying to lay up treasure in heaven. I feel that these little conflicts and tryals will soon be over with me - - if I should be permitted to see three score and ten -- alas how few live to that age. Sixty years with its infirmities admonishes me my stay here is verry short..." How familiar such musings must be to many with ageing parents. (And William remained on this earth for sixteen more years!)

We find the partners increasingly unhappy about their investments and most of them, at one time or another,

anxious to get out. In 1839, apparently John was one of these. And there is dissatisfaction with the management of the company's affairs. In a January, 1839, letter to John, House complained about the performance of Boardman, who a few years earlier was hailed as the saviour of the business. He wrote, "I have no reason to question Mr. Boardman's integrity but doubt his ability to conduct our affairs as they should be." This is a line of dissatisfaction that will surface, time and again, over the next few years, with several targets other than Boardman.

In 1839, the first hints surfaced that William might be one of the problems in the operation of the mill. In a letter to John, apparently from George Makepeace, we find a discussion of William's health and the the statement: "I will remind you that he is growing old and his mind is failing fast." And then, we discover in a letter from William that the partners have been displeased because he has been logging on company property. Apparently Boardman had been unhappy about this, and William had offered to pay for what he took.

Now we again find William feeling rather sorry for himself. In a very long letter in May, 1839, he wrote: "I know I have been a grate trouble to you. Have patience a little longer. It will soon be over. I presume you think you will never be sutch a burden to your little boy. I fondly hope you never may."

It seems that William's interference was getting worse; in April, 1841, House wrote John: "One intimation in relation to your Father I verry much regret, and as difficulties or differences has arisen between the old

Gent and each individual having the property in charge before Churchill causes me to apprehend that something of the kind is now brewing. Churchill mention that the old Gent says that himself and young Parker (a ladd) is to take charge of the grinding mill in a few days exclusively, which he does not altogether approve. He sometimes countermands his orders in his absence, which is unpleasant and very improper, especially as all the responsibility devolves upon him and not upon the old Gent." A month later William told his son, "Now I think you better say nothing to the other owners about Churchill management -- they will be satisfied when they come here that he is not the man to manage business here and will find it necessary to buy him out."

We do not know what John's response, if any, may have been, but here as in other instances it seems that the absentee John leaves others to sort out problems that are essentially family-related.¹

Later that year, we find House returning to the partners' old refrain. In discussing a possible land transaction, he wrote John: "The slough and island ought to belong to the property there to make it valuable. McKee will probably ask more than it is worth to him, and again if he did not we are too poor to make any cash engagements. For My own part I am heartily tired of Western Speculation. It has been an incessant drain upon us without one cent return or, as I see, a prospect of it."

In May, 1842, John gave his power of attorney to his father-in-law, Meredith Mallory, to represent him in property "owned by me in company with Lester Barker, Alanson House, George R. Makepeace and J.S. Churchill." This was probably an initial step in edging his father out of the company's operations. Apparently in two letters, copies of which we do not have, John must have upbraided his father about something. William responds, "I think the first rather unkind. If you have been drawn into busines²

Let's Hope You Get This On Time

Some of you may wonder why you are receiving issues so close together. It's because some of you, possibly as many as one half, received the last issue almost a month late. Your editor and the membership chairman were among those who wondered when the mail would arrive.

It turns out that a number of copies were temporarily lost at the Postal Service's distribution center. We believe all were eventually delivered and have been assured that this issue will be handled carefully. We certainly hope so.

Continued on p. 9

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 2: The Early Batavia Years

Continued from p. 8

ere that is not likely to be profitable, I am not to blame for it. I have done the best I could under existing circumstances."

Moving forward to 1845, we see the same old problems continuing -- and John becoming increasingly exasperated. He wrote his father, "The fact is I am not made of money -- in order to meet my obligations I must have my pay as well as others -- I shall send no more money -- then the property must take care of itself..." And he concluded, "You may think some part of this letter is pretty short and sweet, be it so, you will understand that I have laid out a great deal of money in that country and not the first farthing² have I ever received in return for anything... I begin to think that it is about time the tables were turned and at least I feel that I should not be called up unnecessarily."

At least one other letter is missing, but it is apparent that the strain was increasing. In August, William wrote his son, "I received your letter of 17th of July last evening. After maturely considering, I have come to the conclusion that you had better send some person here to take charge of your property here as soon as you can make it convenient for I do not think that I am nor ever shall be capable of rendering service that will be acceptable."

Not having cooled off by the end of the letter, William reiterated, "In conclusion would call your attention to what I rote on the first page of this letter. I want and shall expect you to send some one to take charge of all, not a part of your property and businees here. I have ever endeavored to promote your interist to the best of my ability here and elsewhere... I can truly say i have not spent your money in disipation or extravagant living. My attachment for this place and your interist has been strong and ardent but can assure you if you wish to send Mr. Mallory here or anyone else to conduct your affairs here, I can give up my charge without a lingering wish to be in your way or theirs."

John responded promptly: "Your letter was duly received without consultation. I made up my mind on its receipt to send Mr. Mallory on to Fox River if I could get him to go. This I have at length accomplished although much against his wishes. He and Mrs. Mallory will leave here on Friday and will probably reach Fox River in nine or ten days."

The letter went on to say that Mallory would have charge of all John's business on the Fox River, although William could continue to operate the farm if he wished. He acknowledged that the situation would create embarrassment for Mallory and "may appear humiliating" to his father, but that he trusted they would be able to work this out "to the comfort and happiness of both."

Probably trying to soften the blow, John continued, "You said in a former letter that you did not expect that you would be able to carry on all my matters then to my satisfaction. This probably is true, and it may be the same may be said of any one who may attempt it -- I have no doubt of your entire devotedness to my interest in the management of my matters -- Your age and the hardships and trials you have experienced have in some measure unfitted you for so arduous duties and so much care and fatigue as is necessary to the successful management of my affairs there." John may appear to come off here as a rather "cold fish; however, we can well imagine that his father's actions, incessant letters of complaint and the unsatisfactory state of the business in Illinois had probably driven him near to distraction. How does one fire his own father easily?

In 1846, John was preparing to wind up his work in New York and move with his family to Batavia. Some of the correspondence then suggests that there was a lighter, warmer side of his character than we have heretofore seen. Writing to his father-in-law, he said, "I would send my love to Mari and children but I suppose it may be doubtful whether this will find them there -- I guess I may as well send it - if they are not there to receive it you

can hand it over to my next best friends." And then to his own father, John wrote, "When I left I placed William [then ten years old] at home in part under your control and direction -- I hope you will see at least that he is kept from loafing about and out of bad company."

We find no record of what John did regarding his property in the years immediately following or what the arrangements were with his partners, but an 1849 letter from House indicated a desire either to sell his interest to John or to buy John's. Apparently it turned out to be the latter because, as disclosed in *Historic Batavia*, Joel McKee and George Moss purchased the mill from House in 1850. John had discovered other fish to fry.

In the next issue, we shall trace the development of the VanNortwick business enterprises as John gets into railroads and other businesses, which in time were run by his son and grandsons. We shall hear no more about William -- although it is interesting to note that, despite his complaints about his health and advancing years, he lived until 1854, achieving what would then have been the ripe old age of 75.

Ed. note: It is obvious that the principal source for this story was William B. VanNortwick's *VanNortwick Genealogy*, but we had recourse to other sources. Marilyn Robinson has written extensively about the VanNortwicks in her *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*, and we also obtained information from Marilyn's and Jeff Schielke's *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia*.

¹ We may do John an injustice; he may have been more forthcoming than evidence indicates. It would appear that the family letters in the *VanNortwick Genealogy* come primarily from John's files, and ones that John may have written to William or his partners were not always saved.

² It is interesting to note that here, as late as in the 1840s, we find much of the correspondence referring to shillings and farthings.

Batavia Historical Society Membership 2005

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Dues Structure:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joint/Family | \$15.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Junior | \$2.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom | \$5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (each) | \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (family) | \$150.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Institution | \$50.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Institution Life | \$150.00 |

Prompt payment of dues is appreciated!

- You may put your name, address, and membership category on a separate sheet if you do not want to clip the above form.
- If you would like to give a membership as a gift, send the above information and dues to the Society and indicate in the box above that it is to be a gift. The gift membership card will be mailed to you so that you may enclose it with a personal card or note.

Mail to:
Treasurer
Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

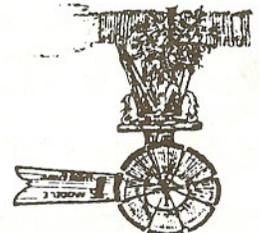
This membership is being given as a gift

Officers
President: Richard A. Benson
V.P. & Program Chairman: Patty Rosenberg
Recording Secretary: Christine Winter
Corresponding Secretary: Georgene Kauth
Treasurer: Phillip B. Elfstrom
Historian: William J. Wood

Directors
Robert V. Brown
Carole Dunn
Alma Karas
Robert F. Peterson
Marilyn Robinson
Editor: William D. Hall
Museum Director: Carla Hill

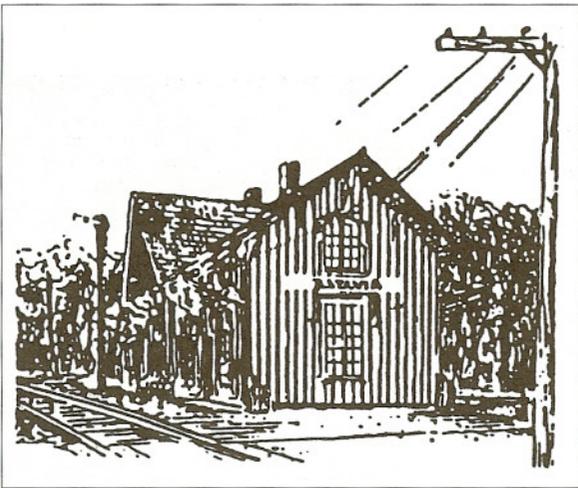
Dorothy Hanson
932 Gosselin Circle
Batavia, IL 60510

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BATAVIA, IL 60510
PERMIT NO. 291



The Batavia Historian

Batavia Historical Society

*P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510*

Vol. 46 No. 2

www.bataviainhistoricalsociety.org

April, 2005

The VanNortwicks in Batavia Part 3: Building the Empire

In Parts 1 and 2, we traced the movement of the patriarch, William VanNortwick, from upstate New York to Batavia in 1836 and his ventures into business here on behalf of his son John, who remained in New York. There John worked as an engineer on the construction of the New York canal system. As we found in the voluminous correspondence between the two, the cooperative effort between father and son was not always successful and was frequently accompanied by stress and acrimony. At the end of Part 2, we find John moving to Batavia and relieving his aging father of his business responsibilities.

As we shall see, it was John who laid the groundwork for the family's business empire and what became, for those days, a large fortune. Although his sons continued his work, most of the initiatives into a wide complex of businesses, here and in Wisconsin, began under John's direction. John appears to have an eye for business opportunities and to have been a risk-taker, willing to venture into a variety of businesses and just as willing to rebuild or to move on when misfortunes overtook his businesses.

As with Parts 1 and 2, the principal sources of information for this story come from the *VanNortwick Genealogy*, compiled by John's great-grandson William B. VanNortwick; *John Gustafson's Historic Batavia* by Marilyn Robinson and Jeffery Schielke; and *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home* by Marilyn Robinson.

In 1876 when he was 67 years old, John VanNortwick wrote a brief summary of his life. In it he told that, after the 1846 suspension of the public works in New York, "... I moved my family to Batavia, Illinois, where my father's family had resided for some ten years. At this place and vicinity I had made considerable investments in land and water power some time previous.

"In 1847 I was engaged as assistant engineer in the construction of the Government dry dock in the Navy Yard at Brooklyn. In the spring of 1848 I relinquished my situation at Brooklyn and entered upon the duties of Chief Engineer of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad [a predecessor of the Chicago Northwestern] and as such had the charge of the construction of that work. During this



Continued on p. 2

Home of John VanNortwick; later Batavia High School's home economics building

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 3: Building the Empire

Continued from p. 1

time I was also consulting engineer and a director of the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company and subsequently was for eight years the President and acting Chief Engineer of that Company."

There we learn quite a bit about John in a few spare, clear words. He was not a man for minutia. But we know a few details that were covered in the October 2004 issue dealing with the 150th birthday of the railroad station that now houses our Depot Museum. It was John who, as chief engineer of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, purchased the *Pioneer*, which became the first locomotive of the Chicago Northwestern and is now on permanent display at the Chicago Historical Society. It was also John who made this locomotive available for opening the line to Batavia's Burlington depot, now our museum, in 1850.

John was apparently quite successful with his railroad and other businesses because he wrote: "For several years after retiring from [the railroad] I was quite out of health and traveled extensively in this country and Europe. Recovering my health I have not resumed active business further than has been actually necessary as President of a bank and two large manufacturing companies in our village -- having good and competent assistants. Have also considerable interest in a manufacturing company in Chicago and elsewhere as well as considerable land interest but being in good hands need little attention."

To get a picture of John's business activities during and after his association with the Burlington, we shall quote

The Batavia Historian, recipient of the Illinois State Historical Society's 1997 Award for Superior Achievement, is published quarterly by the Batavia Historical Society. The editor, Bill Hall, will welcome any suggestions or material -- 630-879-2033.

The Depot Museum, a cooperative effort of the Society and the Batavia Park District, is open from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from March through November. The director, Carla Hill, can be reached at 630-406-5274.

at some length from the excellent summary in Marilyn Robinson's *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*.

"It was during this time that John became acquainted with Daniel Halladay through John Burnham. John urged Halladay and Burnham to move to Batavia to be closer to the windmill market. The U.S. Wind Engine and Pump Co. was established in Batavia in 1857 where Halladay would make his mills.

"In 1867 John bought controlling interest in the Batavia Paper Company and became its sole owner two years later. The company expanded into one of the largest paper manufacturing companies in the country [at one time producing almost all of the print paper used by the Chicago Tribune]. John furnished the farmers with rye seed to get them to raise straw for use in his paper making. At harvest time, the farmers' teams lined up for nearly a mile along Water Street and to the west, waiting to unload their straw for use in the manufacture of paper.

"The company made paper bags, too, in buildings along First Street. The Western Paper Bag Company opened in 1882. It was one of the first manufacturers of square bottom bags. Some sources say the bags were invented in this factory; other sources say differently.

"The factory made twenty different-sized grocery bags and paper flour sacks. Sixteen machines made 1,500,000 bags a day. The plant closed in 1900 when it became too expensive to ship wood pulp from the family's mills in Wisconsin after local lumber was used up.

"The family did not limit its investments to Batavia. John's two sons, John S. and William M. entered the empire. In Appleton, Wisconsin, in 1873 a ground wood mill was organized, with William M. as a principal stockholder. He bought the company in 1876, and it operated with father John as its president and son William as vice-president. In 1881 ... John S. moved from Batavia to Appleton to look after the family's interests there.

"In 1888 sons William and John



Mari Louise VanNortwick's wedding in home of her father, William M. VanNortwick, below portrait of her grandfather

established the VanNortwick Bank in Batavia and built the building at 12 West Wilson Street. By 1896 the bank was insolvent and was taken over by the second First National Bank of Batavia, which is today's Harris Bank of Batavia.

"In 1890 the VanNortwick Paper Company listed these businesses on its letterhead, all with offices on the second floor of their bank building -- VanNortwick Paper Company, Appleton Paper & Pulp Company, Kaukauna Paper Company, Combined Locks and Paper Company, Wisconsin Sulphite Fibre Company and Western Paper Bag Company.

"William M. and John S. were in charge of the Appleton Manufacturing Company in Wisconsin. They made mills that competed with those of the U.S. W.E. and Pump Co. In 1894 the men brought their business to Illinois and settled just north of Batavia between Fargo Boulevard and Fabyan Parkway. They built a company town named VanNortwick. Fire destroyed the plant six years later, and it was rebuilt in Batavia. One of those remaining buildings is now the Batavia Government Center."

Beginning about 1870, John and his wife made Batavia their summer and Franklin, Louisiana, their winter residences, "avoiding," as John wrote, "the

Continued on p. 9

The Story of Gladys Larson And the Founding of the Valley School for Exceptional Children

Gladys Larson, now 91 years old, was a founder of the Valley School for Exceptional Children and the first recipient, in 1958, of Batavia's Citizen of the Year award. We're sure you'll find her achievement both interesting and inspiring.

"I have lived in Batavia all my life," Gladys Larson began an interview conducted by Bill Wood and Bill Hall. "In fact, I have never lived much further than two blocks off of Jackson Street -- I just kept moving south. I was born in May of 1913 in an apartment on the corner of McKee and Jackson.

"My parents, John G. Swanson and Emma Anderson, had been neighbors and childhood sweethearts. My dad was born in Sweden, and my mother in Batavia. Our apartment was kitty-corner from my Anderson grandparents; my Swanson grandparents lived kitty-corner from them on Jackson. In fact, my Grandmother Anderson was the midwife at my birth. Our families were very close, and I was very fortunate to have four grandparents, to learn from and to love.

"My dad worked for the Bellevue greenhouses as a rose grower. Eventually the Wolcott brothers sold the business to him and his partner, Berger Nystrom. They ran that for quite a while. With my mother working at the Bellevue sanitarium, it was probably inevitable that their childhood romance would ultimately end up in marriage.

"I started school at the Blaine Street School. Along with a couple of my friends, Bernice Olson and Doris Anderson, I skipped second grade. Starting with fifth grade, I went to the

old McWayne School. Grace McWayne was the principal."

At Batavia High School, Gladys recalled Helen Brauns' class in the old home economics building adjoining the high school, formerly the John VanNortwick home pictured elsewhere in this issue. "We were brought up never to spend any money that we didn't have. Well, I had a sewing class at one o'clock, and we were supposed to have bought a yard of goods to bring to sewing class. I had forgotten to ask my folks for money to get it. I can't go to class without it, I thought, so I went to Anderson's store and charged fifty cents worth of material. I forgot to tell my dad about it, and when he got a bill in the mail, I tell you I got a chewing out. 'Don't you ever, ever charge anything again in your life,' he told me.

"My mother was always the one who was called on in the family for crises. My dad was a community servant all his life. He was an alderman for twelve years from the second ward, and a trustee at Bethany Lutheran Church for about the same length of time."

"You must have seen a lot of changes," Bill Wood observed. "Yes, when Dad was alderman, there were still dirt streets. I remember them paving Main Street at that time. His big concern was that they were going to macadamize everything so that there wouldn't be any place for water to go -- he had a big concern about that."

Asked when she graduated from high school, Gladys replied, "In 1930. Because I had skipped second grade, I was only seventeen when I graduated. After that I went to Geneva to

register for nurses training at Community Hospital -- I always thought my calling was nursing -- but I was too young and they told me I would have to wait a year. Of course, that was a big disappointment to me, but I was offered a job there as a clerk in the office while I waited. But the next year, I didn't pass the physical; the doctor found that I had a heart murmur. I had had that since seventh grade, and it never bothered me; however, the doctor thought nursing would be too difficult a job. He said I should continue working there.

"In the meanwhile I had married my high school sweetheart, Ralph Larson, in 1938. In 1942 I left the hospital to have my family. Our first child was born that year, but he lived only six months. Our second child was born the next year, and he lived to be only four months old. The doctors didn't think it would be wise for us to try to have more children, so we adopted a little girl, who was born in January of 1944.

"Dorothy was a beautiful baby, so well received by all of us. We dearly loved her, but by the time she was two years old, we realized she had problems. We went to many, many doctors, finally winding up at Menninger's many years later. They said she would be better served by living in an institution where she would get more help. That was a huge disappointment for us, of course."

Gladys resumed, "Dorothy had been in kindergarten. Marguerite Brown was her teacher, and she was the most patient woman because Dorothy was quite a trial. She sat under the desk and didn't participate. We did try her in first grade at Blaine Street School, but that didn't work out. The teacher said that if Dorothy kept coming, she was going to leave.

"Then we tried her with Leota Capps Wolcott, who actually did very well with her -- helped her a lot and taught her how to begin to read. Then in second grade Eldora Hoover was her teacher. She knew that Dorothy needed special help that she wasn't going to get where she was. So, with her advice, we took her out of school and had to find something else for her

I Remember Batavia When

Heritage Roundtable - January 25, 2005

If you weren't at the Heritage Roundtable, "I Remember Batavia When," held on January 25, you missed a lively and entertaining session. In fact, it was so good that a number of people have asked for a repeat performance.

Bob Peterson, who organized the event, moderated a spirited and wide-ranging discussion about people, buildings and events that played a large part in Batavia's history. Mounted photographs that Carla Hill and Chris Winter selected from the Society's collection enhanced the program.

After the roundtable, Carole Dunn hosted light refreshments, and people enjoyed a chance to continue their reminiscences.

Continued on p. 4

The Story of Gladys Larson

And the Founding of the Valley School for Exceptional Children Continued from p. 3

to do. The only place we could find around here was Mooseheart. We took her there every day for therapy. It worked out for a while, but it wasn't enough."

"That is what led you into starting the Valley School for Exceptional Children?" we asked. "Yes," Gladys replied. "Well, I didn't do it alone, you know, because you can never do anything like that by yourself. It was in the fall of 1952, I think, that Dorothy White Clark, who was a speech therapist in the school system, came to me and said she knew of a parent group in LaGrange. She invited me to go with her to a meeting to see if we could get something started.

"There was nothing in the way of special education in Batavia in those days so I talked to several of my friends who had children with special needs. One family was the Malnors, whose son Tony was a special education student in Aurora at the time. Five families met for the first time at my house. Besides the Malnors, there were Ed and Nellie Millet and Helen Johnstone -- I don't think that Gilbert came to that first meeting -- and Mrs. Flanagan, who didn't return -- she didn't feel that it was what she needed. That was in April of 1953, and we all felt that we would like to get something started, but we really didn't know how to go about it.

"But we got a lot of help from the LaGrange group that had started a school there. They would come to the parent group meetings with us, and we would visit them. After a little time and after a series of well-publicized items, there were twenty-five interested people at our meeting held a month later. In one month, we had reached that many people who were interested in helping us do something for their children.

"Although we elected officers and felt that we wanted to do something, we didn't know who we were going to find to help us. I remember going to J.B. Nelson, who had been my teacher when I was in school. He just shook his head and said, 'Gladly, you don't know what you are getting into.' And I replied, 'Well, I don't know either, but I think it's worth a try.'"

After a pause, Gladys continued, "It came up that the old Manual Arts

building, at the corner of Lincoln and First Street, was vacant. As our plans progressed, we were offered the use of the school rent-free. Then it was a question of whom we would get for a teacher. I knew Helen Sykora Frisch, who had just left teaching; she also had a child who had been institutionalized and needed special help. We decided to ask her. Helen Johnstone said, 'Well, Helen Frisch is a member of my church, and I think I can convince her.' And she did, but only for a two-week trial period. So, after we had done a lot of scrubbing, cleaning, and painting, we opened Valley School in May, 1953. After four weeks, Helen decided she would like to continue.

"In September, 1953, we really started -- with fourteen children, I think. Our boundaries were Oswego, Elgin, West Chicago and Elburn. Our purpose was to train the children as well as we could. Although we received a permit from the State of Illinois, we didn't want an affiliation with the state that would result in its coming in and testing the children. That would exclude many of them because some were severely retarded.

"We had to do everything, including the janitor work. I remember that Don Anderson used to get up early to stoke the furnace so that it would be warm enough to start the school. Many of the mothers were volunteer helpers. I was there, I think, every day, every week.

"The children we started with at Valley School ranged in age from five to nineteen. They represented various types of retardation -- educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, and those who were there for custodial care.

"Helen Frisch," Gladys reminisced,

"was an extraordinary person. Her key was consistency, sticking to the same plan and being firm. I remember asking Jean Anderson what Billy thought after he came home from school. 'I asked what he did,' she said, 'and he replied, 'Teacher said sit down.'" And, of course, that was a struggle for many of them because they were hyperactive. One little girl just ran all over the room and she'd be up pulling curtains down. She eventually was placed in Kankakee.

"Of course, we had our regular parent group, and this was important because we could discuss our problems and try to help each other. We would wind up thinking, 'I wouldn't take her problems -- I'll keep my own because they're what we are used to.' The education of the parents, it turned out, was almost as important as helping the children."

"What about help for the teacher," Gladys was asked. She replied, "We had many volunteers from Batavia. Esther Swanberg was Helen Frisch's first helper. Marge Phillips Holmberg came to help, and she became a regular employed teacher. We started out with those three people, and a while later Betty Perry, wife of Arthur Perry, superintendent of schools, taught for a while. Later a retired teacher from Elgin, Miss Osttick, joined the staff.

"We did a lot of recreational work with them -- games and music, which they related to well. And we would take the children out for walks. -- to the library, to the fire station, to the banks. The kids really became well known all over town because they walked everywhere. Any minute accomplishment of the students thrilled us and them. This was a place where they were totally accepted and loved.

Continued on p. 7

Does Your Address Have a Red Dot?

If you find a red dot on the mailing label of your *Historian*, our records indicate that you have not paid your dues for 2005. Please send in your dues promptly in the enclosed envelope so that you will continue receiving the *Historian* and other mailings from the society.

We all dislike losing members, but it is agony for our membership chairman, Alma Karas -- she takes it personally!

Working at the Old Batavia Bank

by Alma Karas

I started working at the Batavia National Bank the week before my folks moved to Batavia, June 1, 1962. It was great - I was almost 20, and the group was so much fun. I really made some lifelong friends during the eleven years I worked there. They included Lois Kraft, Linda Stephano, Pat Rumpel Jeske, Harvey McClurg, Sol Carlson, Linda Bowron, Bob Riley, Don Lowe, Marilyn Anderson, Gladys Noren, Marilyn Phelps and many others. When I started, the bank was in the midst of remodeling, and the tellers were in the back room where the bookkeepers always were. The customers were using the backside entrance. Walter Johnson [the president] hired me, and it was pretty much on the spot.

Ernie Nelson was still there, and he would do anything to keep us all in stitches. Walter took life a little more seriously. And Elliott Lundberg, the vice president, was always available for a short story and a small lecture. These guys really knew about everyone in town and what was going on. I don't think a young single guy could have bought a house in those days. The prevailing belief seemed to be - he wouldn't have any strings - nothing to keep him from getting up and leaving.

Walter Johnson never acted like he needed anyone, but oh my he missed his wife so much when she died. They had never had any kids. His wife even had a dinner party at a restaurant and a shower for me when I got married.

I started out in the bookkeeping department. In those days we had those huge posting machines. We would put the checks in order and divide them in thirds, and 3 of us would post them to the business or individual's accounts. In those days if you had a check that wasn't printed and it said some common name like Lucille Miller or June Carlson, we would have to know what her husband's name was to get it on the right account. And believe me it happened occasionally that we wouldn't get them on the right account.

We would post all the checks and deposits each day to the general ledger on these machines and then we would post them by machine to the individual statements. At the end of

the day the ledgers and statement total had to match or we would be there checking totals until we did agree. Then once a month a couple of people would figure by hand the service charge for each account and we would post them first to the ledger and then to the statements one at a time - balancing at the end.

Above the bank were the offices of attorneys Benson & Mair, later Benson, Mair & Gosselin after John Gosselin joined the firm. They would come down and have us witness wills and notarize documents for them. Tom Mair was a good friend of Elliott's -- they may have in the same class in high school along with Bert Johnson and, perhaps, Francis Youssi.

In those days Oma and Jack Capacosa ran the small restaurant next door, which is actually part of the bank building these days. George Kramer's mother made all the homemade pies for the Maroma Restaurant. They were wonderful. They had wonderful Italian beef sandwiches also. Two doors from the bank was Rachielle's Pharmacy, and we made many more trips in there to buy candy than we should have. Bill and Doris Rachielle's were always there, and there were at least three of the Milroy teenagers that worked there, Peggy, Jane and Tim, I think it was. Across the street next to Vic Anderson's real estate office was a small meat market owned by two brothers. We would go over there to buy coffee and crackers for coffee breaks.

Once during the remodeling, we had gotten the drive-up opened in the back when word came that we were supposed to be robbed. Seems that robbers thought we were vulnerable in our disorganized remodeling condition. We had sheriff's police with shotguns in the bank for a day or two. Can't remember if anyone else got robbed during that period but nothing happened while I worked there.

I did meet my husband Chuck Karas at the drive-in window of the bank. The first time we went out, he tried to get me to buy, saying that he



Bank President Bob Riley, Earl Mueller, Elliott Lundberg, Alma Karas. Seated: Pat Jeske, Walter Johnson and Linda Bowron. Photo from Alma Karas' scrapbook - 1967

was short of money. I said, "Wait a minute -- you have \$300 in your checking account. He was surprised and later he said he married me so I could keep track of his money.

Bob Riley, who later became president, paid me a great compliment when he said that my personality was good with the customers and that he wanted me up front so that I could talk with people when they came in. When I was his secretary, my dad would come in and stand by my desk on Saturday and say, "This is my daughter." It was sort of funny but sweet. And my mother-in-law would bring my son down to see me when they walked downtown.

Too bad they didn't pay me enough to live on. By the time I quit working there in 1973, I was making about \$6,000 a year. In those days, most of the bank women were wives or young girls and not self-supporting.

During my eleven years there, we had an employee who embezzled money from his church, a pregnant wife of one of the tellers who died with child, and several of the girls who got married, Eleanor Issel's son Dan got rich and famous. Elliott used to go to the BHS basketball games with us if we got him a ticket to see Dan play. Dan's sister Kathy worked with us at the bank also.

For all his protesting I always knew that Elliott got a kick out of my girl friends and me. One day he went to lunch with us up to Roberts' on the corner of Rte. 31 and Third St., south of the railroad in Geneva. I did drive a

Continued on p. 8

A Batavian's Connection With Ronald Reagan

The story that follows comes from an interview that Bill Wood and Bill Hall had with Ruth Foland Johnson on July 13, 2004. In a future edition, we hope to cover some of Ruth's experiences when she and her first husband, Harold Foland, owned and operated the bowling lane in Batavia.

"Eureka College," Ruth Foland Johnson began, "had a wonderful drama department for a small school. They went to a drama tournament, I guess you would call it, at Northwestern while my first husband, Harold Foland, was in school. Northwestern was famous for its wonderful drama department, but Eureka College won. The play was *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and Ronald Reagan had the lead as the famous detective Sherlock Holmes.

"But let's go back and start with how Harold happened to go to Eureka. He was down at the University of Illinois, and the Depression hit and banks went broke. His money was in a bank, so he was broke, too. He happened to be dating the daughter of the president of Eureka College, and she said, 'Harold, I'm going to call my dad and see if he can get you in Eureka.' And that's how he happened to go to Eureka the second semester; they managed to make some kind of a financial arrangement.

"Ronald Reagan was the same age as Harold and had graduated from high school in the class of 1928, I imagine in Dixon. Harold, though, stayed out a year and worked in Chicago at Firemen's Insurance Company, so he didn't start college until the fall of 1929, and Ronald Reagan was always a year ahead of him"

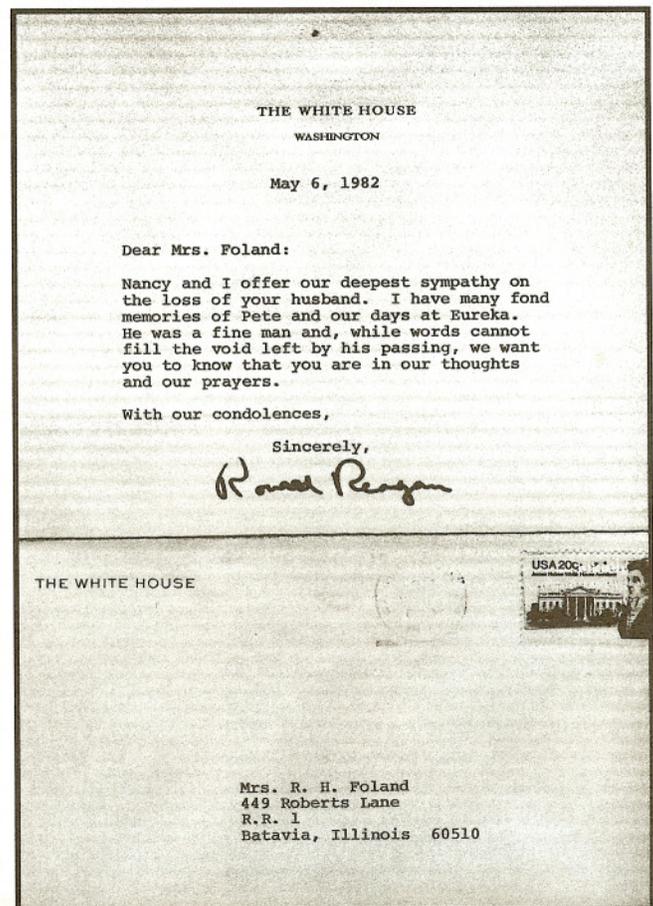
Ruth continued, "The reason they were such good friends was that they played all the athletics -- football and basketball -- together. When Reagan graduated, he was president of his class, and Harold followed him as president of the next class. They always teased one another -- Reagan would say that he delivered the gavel to Harold in a great ceremony, al-

though that wasn't true at all. Their connection with Eureka continued after graduation because it was a small school and all the kids were so close.

"During the war, Reagan would come through St. Charles to visit out in Dixon -- whether his parents were still alive then, I don't know. But he would call Harold and say, 'I'll meet you at the Baker Hotel for lunch.' I wish I had had a chance to know Reagan better, but when he called Harold in those days I was busy raising four kids. If Harold went out for lunch, why he was a free spirit and I wasn't. You never know when a lunch is with a future president -- even though he was an actor, I just thought of him as was one of Harold's college buddies.

"Later, when we retired and moved to Florida, there were a good many people in Reagan's and Harold's classes that lived there. Immediately we became involved with reunions down there. One man whose name I can't remember was ahead of them at Eureka, and he became the manager of the Illinois people when Reagan was running for president. He organized a big rally in St. Petersburg, and of course we went. It was a wonderful rally -- just like the old-fashioned ones, with straw hats, popcorn and beer, balloons and all kinds of banners.

"Because Harold had lost both of his legs to diabetes by then, he was in a wheel chair, and we were given seats right in front of the dais. When Reagan came to the podium, he looked down, recognized Harold, and stepped down with his wife, calling out, 'Pete Foland [the name Harold



had gone by in college], what are you doing here?' And he introduced his wife to us. That's the only time that I met him.

"Later," Ruth recalled, "all of Reagan's classmates from Eureka got an invitation to his first inauguration. By that time, however, Harold was having health problems and we couldn't go. But they had a private section set up for Eureka classmates and friends -- I thought that was a real nice thing.

"Somehow a journalist with the Sarasota Herald heard about Reagan's coming down from the dais and speaking to Harold; he came out and interviewed Harold and wanted him to tell of his memories of Reagan. I never saved that newspaper nor do I know what happened to the invitations. Maybe they got lost in moving. I do wish I had them now.

"But the important thing is the great memories."

The Story of Gladys Larson And the Founding of the Valley School for Exceptional Children Continued from p. 4

"We were supported by the community chests of Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles and by groups such as the Kiwanis Club, the VFW and Mothers Clubs. Furnas Electric was a big helper. For the first couple of years, I was public relations; I would go out to church, philanthropic and other groups. That was how we earned some of our money.

"Eventually, though, Ralph and I had to place Dorothy, so I had to go to work to earn some money. I went back to Community Hospital, working in the X-ray department. After a while I changed jobs and began working for a psychiatrist, Dr. David Swanson. He was just opening his office in Geneva; then about six months later, he was made assistant chairman of the psychiatric department at the Loyola Hospital. He asked me to go in there with him, and I was there for about ten years.

"In the meantime," Gladys continued, "we had placed Dorothy, which was a job in itself because there were so few places available. To make a long story short, when she was fifteen she finally wound up at Elgin State Hospital, as our pediatrician suggested. She was there for quite a while, and then we tried her at Bethphage in Nebraska. That didn't

work out; she misbehaved so badly that they couldn't keep her. But the minute she knew we were coming, she was a model child. I sometimes think that if we had flown out there instead of driving, she would not have realized how far away we were, and it might have been different.

"Twelve years later when Ralph and I were visiting in California, our son David, who was adopted two years after Dorothy, called. He was just devastated. He said, 'Mom, they moved Dorothy to Kankakee, and they didn't even call to ask me. I don't know what to do.' I told him we'd take care of things as soon as we could get home. But it turned out that the move was for the best. At Elgin, every time we would leave her, we would all cry. We tried to bring her home every weekend, which was probably the wrong thing to do because she, and we, had to readjust each time. She's done well in Kankakee, although she has a lot of physical problems. She is in a wheel chair all the time, can't use her hands, and needs a feeding tube.

"But Dorothy was a blessing to us in many ways because she could be just as funny and loving as she was unpredictable. We learned a great deal from her. It was harder on my husband than it was for me because

he was very tenderhearted. It bothered him a great deal when she misbehaved. But I tried to do things as you would do with any normal child. I took her shopping with me, and many times would have people look at me as if to say, 'That child needs a good spanking.' And I thought, 'You don't know the half of it.'"

We asked Gladys when the Valley Sheltered Workshop began. "I think it was 1966," she replied. "It started over on North River Street. That space became too small, and the City of Batavia let them use a garage between Main and First Street, behind the buildings on Batavia Avenue."

"Did the school stop when the workshop started?" Gladys was asked. "I don't think it did, right away. But I think as the children progressed enough so they could go into the workshop, the school was finally phased out. And there weren't enough new ones coming in -- by that time we had special ed in Batavia."

This ends the story of Gladys Larson's involvement with the Valley School for Exceptional Children -- and what a story it is! But Gladys' life obviously did not end then. We hope to tell you more about her later life and the artistic accomplishments of her husband, Ralph, a well-known painter in this area, in a future issue.

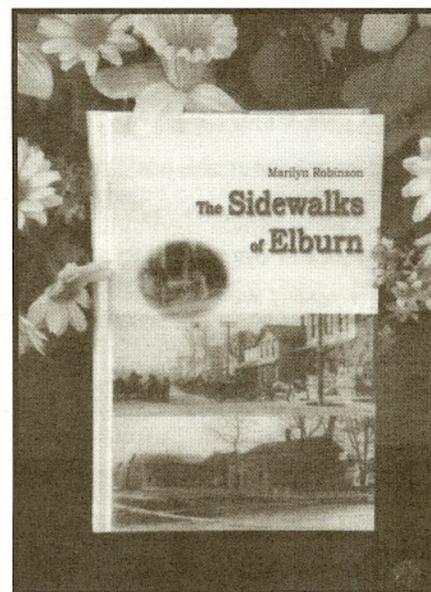
A Privy Digger's Treasures Our Entertaining Spring Meeting

by Chris Winter

As members arrived at the Spring meeting of the Batavia Historical Society on March 13, they saw before them three tables containing china and serving dishes, vintage medicine bottles, pottery, glass lamp shades and remnants of 19th century porcelain dolls. Could this be a program where someone shared the story of their family heirlooms and antiques?

Actually, these items were unearthed from area privies (outhouses) by Tom Majewski, the Privy Digger. Tom told the history of the privy, derived from the Latin word *privatus*, meaning private. He then went on to reveal how he became interested in unearthing 19th century privies as a hobby and shared stories of his findings. "The dig is especially exciting when a bottle from a local merchant is discovered and we can then research the history of this community", said Tom. His most unusual artifact found was a full set of dentures from the Civil War era!

If you have a home that was built before 1900 and are curious about what treasures might be buried on your property, you may contact Tom Majewski at 630-778-1932. He will be happy to discuss this process in detail. Most items found are offered to the homeowner and care is taken in replacing the dirt and sod so you won't even be able to tell where they were digging. History is found in the most remarkable places!



PLEASE SEE INSERT

Membership Matters

Since the last issue, we have added as life members, some of whom were previously annual members, the following (from Batavia unless otherwise noted): Sharon Breedlove (Ritchey, MO - gift of Diane Bergquist), Denis and Nancy Bowron, Mr. and Mrs. Gus Flodstrom, Richard A. Henders, Don and Joan Johnson, and Tom and Joanne Zillman. Other new members include Richard Anderson II (Downers Grove - gift of Richard and Marilyn Anderson), Ken Bowgren (St. Charles), Judi and Don Conditt (San Diego, CA - gift of Dale and Donna Womack), Tami DiPietro (Peoria, AZ - gift of Richard and Marilyn Anderson) Ben Hansford (Elgin), Ann (Thompson) King (Fleming Island, FL), Don Lindman, Roger and Norma Pieratt, Ellen (Abernathy) Poulson (Tucson, AZ), Virginia Schroeder (St. Charles - gift of Richard and Jeanne Schroeder), Laurie E. Smallwood (Eugene, OR - gift of Bill and Barbara Hall), Merrilee (Richter) Stanley (Suffolk, VA - gift of Ann King), and Mary Stephano,

We regret to report the deaths of Bernice J. Anderson; Louis Charles Berndt; Lyle Bergman, a longtime volunteer at the Depot Museum; Jerry Harris, a life member, former treasurer and member of the society's long-range planning committee; Hazel B. Hawse; Eleanor Johnson, a longtime volunteer at the Depot Museum; Lyle

Nelson; Mary Ellen Bohler O'Dwyer; and Walter Stephano.

We received gifts in memory of Lyle Bergman from April A. Arena, Dolores and Myron Bergman, Theresa M. Bergman on behalf of friends and relatives who sent cash and checks, CORE Class at the Health and Wellness Center (Theresa C. Peterhans), De Vroomen Holland Garden Products, Ruth B. Jonas and Cheryl Schreiber, Thomas G. and Deborah S. LaLonde, Andrew and Florence Liedberg, Marilyn G. Robinson, and Dorothy Willey; in memory of Robert Wendell Conde from his niece Barbara Conde Hopkins, great-nieces Sara Brown and Jane Hopkins, and great-nephew Stephen Hopkins; in memory of Jerry Harris from Corinne McRoberts Albright, Richard and Lois Benson, Frank and Sue Blazek, Anne Breon, Jan and Ray Bristow, Deborah A. Demanno, Carole and Marvin Dunn, Richard and Sandra Eckblade, Wilman and Frances Favero, William and Barbara Hall, James and Dorothy Hanson, Bert and Ruth Johnson, Rosalie M. Jones, Alma Karas and Yangling Zhang, Lloyd Kautz, Gladys Larson, Leo and Inge Martin, Michael L. and Darlene M. McGuigan, Robert and Suzanne Peterson, Robert and Betty Riley, Marilyn G. Robinson, Janet E. Tevis, Sally L. Trekell, John O. and Gail C. Tuohy, William J.

Wood, and Stanley and Diana Zorc; in memory of Hazel Hawse from Alma J. Karas and Yangling Zhang; in memory of Eleanor Johnson from Philip B. Elfstrom, Kathy and George Fairbairn, Kathy Langston, Carl and Leslie Lundberg, Barton Payne, Chuck and Sue Payne, Esther Pearson, Gwendolyn Pearson and Norm Potosky, Marge Pearson and Bob Gottlieb, James and Sylvia Roberts, and Robert and Marlys Swanson; in memory of Walter Kauth from Robert J. and Susan E. Ducar and James R. Anderson; in memory of Mary Ellen O'Dwyer from Alma J. Karas and Yangling Zhang; and in memory of Joan Trendall from Batavia Senior Citizens Club (John Marcoux).

We also received a \$100 gift from Erdene and George Peck.

Are We Bumpkins?

In the October, 2003, issue, we carried a story about the Dutch origin of our city's name of Batavia. Member Bill Cavender has now sent us an excerpt from the *Arcade Dictionary of Word Origins* by John Ayto that describes the origin of the word "bumpkin".

"Originally," the dictionary says, "bumpkin seems to have been a humorously disparaging epithet for a Dutch person: in the first known record of the word, in Peter Levins's *Dictionary of English and Latin Words* 1570, it is glossed batavus (Batavia was the name of an island at the mouth of the Rhine in ancient times, and was henceforth associated with the Netherlands). It was probably a Dutch word, boomken 'little tree' (from boom 'tree,' related to German baum 'tree' and English beam), used with reference to Netherlanders' supposedly dumpy stature. The phrase 'country bumpkin' is first recorded from the later 18th century."

According to Bill, an admitted lover of words, "glossed batavus" apparently means batavus was another word for bumpkin. Perhaps we should not have let this secret out!

Working at the Old Batavia Bank Continued from p. 5

little faster than most, and this day he literally pulled my foot off the gas pedal. He said it just wouldn't be fitting for us to get a ticket speeding to lunch when his wife was in the hospital having a baby -- Dan.

Elliott Lundberg used to give all of us who smoked a terrible time. He would playfully grab your cigarettes and either crush them or pitch them across the bank lobby. He was really obnoxious in a loving, fatherly way. We all learned to avoid him and keep our cigarettes in a safe place. Well, after I quit smoking for a full year, I told him that, after I had suffered all his verbal abuse all those years, he should take me out to dinner to celebrate my "quitting smoking" anniversary. He agreed to this, and we went out to dinner for the next ten years on my anniversary.

The Batavia National Bank later sold out to a bank group and became the Batavia Bank. Then it changed to the Gary-Wheaton Bank and then the First National Bank of Chicago and now it is Bank One. I worked there for 11 years. There is no longer any resemblance to the fun place where I used to work.

Ed. note: Now you know that Alma had a life other than bugging those of us who don't pay our dues on time!

The VanNortwicks in Batavia

Part 3: Building the Empire

Continued from p. 2

unpleasant climate of both places." There is a story, which we have been unable to verify, that John tried to claim Louisiana as his home to avoid taxes in Illinois. This is difficult to understand because Illinois had no income tax then or for years later and it doesn't seem that residence would have affected the tax status of his property. Whether literally true or not, it is a good story and probably has its roots in John's well-known attention to money.

Running into tight finances in 1875, John sold his farm on West Main Street. The house there was later occupied by the Gustafson family and is now the home of Gary and Sammi King. When his finances recovered, John built a large new home on Batavia Avenue, between Wilson and First streets; this home later became a part of the Batavia High School, now the site of the Batavia Public Library.

John did not share his parents' deep

religious convictions. As he wrote in 1876, "I was educated under strict orthodox notions, my parents being staunch Methodists. I attended that church quite regularly and contributed largely to its support, also the same to the Episcopal church of which I am now and have been for many years a vestryman, although not a member of any church. [As a matter of fact, John, whose wife was Episcopalian, built and donated Calvary Episcopal Church to the congregation so that she would not have to travel to Geneva for church!] I cannot quite subscribe to all the tenets of either, but I believe they are doing much to benefit our race."

Perhaps we should not read too much into his use of the word "race;" he may have meant the human race. It is interesting, however, to note a comment in his 1876 life summary: "Have a good opinion of Lincoln but a better of Douglas." It may be that his

views were influenced by his half-time residence in the post-Civil War South.

In concluding that summary, he wrote: "By hard labor and economy with judicious investments of my slowly increasing income I have accumulated what to me is a competence...." And well he might say that. As Marilyn Robinson wrote, "When John died, he was the wealthiest man in Kane County. He had come west with \$3,000 in stocks and gold, financed his father and his sons, had gone broke more than once, and still left an estate worth over \$1,400,000, an immense sum in 1890."

John's sons, William M. and John S., together with their sons (also named William and John), continued and expanded the family businesses. William M. built a large mansion on the northeast corner of South Batavia Avenue and First Street, immediately south of his father's home. It was there that, his daughter Mari Louise married U. S. Senator Guy Goff of West Virginia.

Batavia's last direct connection with the VanNortwick family, which played such a large role in our history, was William B., John's great-grandson. It is this William who, although he had not lived here since childhood, left a substantial bequest to the Batavia Historical Society that has enabled us, among other things, to invest in the building of the Gustafson Research Center. Remember this the next time you visit the Depot Museum, and take time to spend in the VanNortwick Room.

Two Centenarians Honored Sally Adams and Jane Elwood Celebrate Lives of Service to Batavia

On January 29, Sally Adams, a resident of Batavia for 53 years, celebrated her 100th birthday. Born in Jerseyville, Illinois, she married Arthur Adams in 1927. They lived in Missouri and Kansas before returning to Illinois in 1952.

Although Sally began her career as a high school physical education teacher, after moving to Batavia she taught second grade for 20 years at the Louise White School. She also worked for many years at the Batavia Public Library. She was the Senior Citizen Representative to the U. S. Congress Commission on Aging, and in 1983 received Batavia's Citizen of the Year Award.

Now residing at The Holmstad, Sally is the mother of four children, who have given her six grandchildren. On December 19, 2004, her family gathered at the Holmstad to celebrate her birthday. She is a member of the Congregational Church in Batavia.

Jane Elwood, who became 100 on March 5, is a lifelong resident of Batavia. Born Jane Tincknell on South Batavia Avenue, she attended the Central School (later the old Grace McWayne School) and Batavia High School.

After a few years teaching in neighboring rural schools, Jane was hired in 1929 as a teacher in Batavia. She retired in 1960 after 30 years at the Grace McWayne School.

In 1958 she married Frank Elwood. Four years later they took a trip around the world on a freighter that carried twelve passengers. Jane still lives in her home on North Jefferson. A lifelong active member of the United Methodist Church of Batavia (the pastor says she missed only three Sunday worship services in 2004), Jane was honored by a birthday party at the church following the 9:30 service on March 6.

An Interview with Jane appeared in the October, 2000, issue of the *Historian*.

Museum Is Open

The Depot Museum reopened the first of March. If you have not already been there, you should come and see the new exhibit Chris Winter has prepared on the history of Batavia churches. We're sure you will enjoy it.

As always, the museum can use volunteers. If you are interested in becoming one, please call Kathy Fairbairn at 406-9041 or Carla or Chris at 506-5274. It's fun -- you'll be doing yourself a favor by joining.

Batavia Historical Society Membership 2005

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Dues Structure:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joint/Family | \$15.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Junior | \$2.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom | \$5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (each) | \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life (family) | \$150.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Institution | \$50.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Institution Life | \$150.00 |

Mail to:

Treasurer
Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

This membership is being given as a gift

Prompt payment of dues is appreciated!

- You may put your name, address, and membership category on a separate sheet if you do not want to clip the above form.
- If you would like to give a membership as a gift, send the above information and dues to the Society and indicate in the box above that it is to be a gift. The gift membership card will be mailed to you so that you may enclose it with a personal card or note.

Editor: William D. Hall
Museum Director: Carla Hill

Marilyn Robinson
Robert F. Peterson

Alma Karas
Carole Dunn

Robert V. Brown
Directors

Historian: William J. Wood
Treasurer: Philip B. Elfstrom

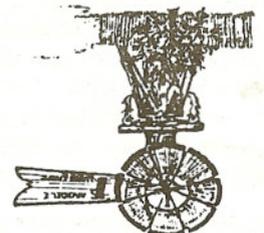
Corresponding Secretary: Georgene Kauth
Recording Secretary: Christine Winter

V.P. & Program Chairman: Paty Rosenberg
President: Richard A. Benson

Officers

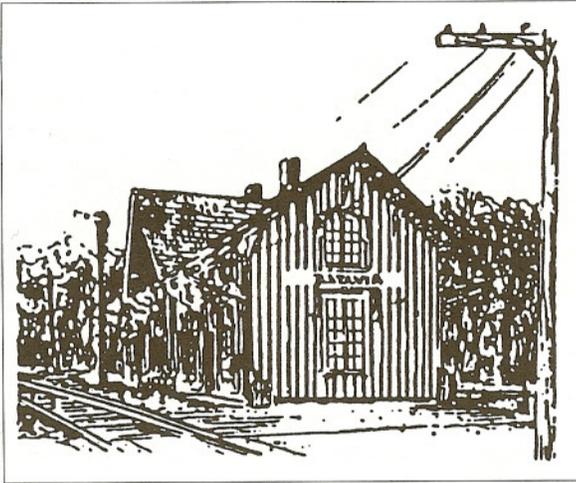
Dorothy Hanson
932 Gosselin Circle
Batavia, IL 60510

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BATAVIA, IL 60510
PERMIT NO. 291



The Batavia Historian

Batavia Historical Society

*P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510*

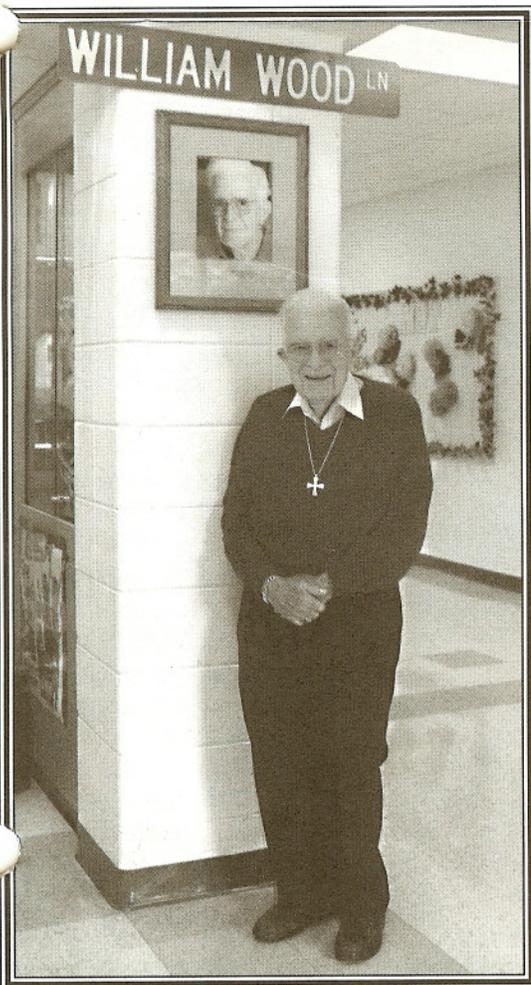
Vol. 46 No. 3

www.bataviainhistoricalsociety.org

July, 2005

William J. Wood -- The Society's Historian 1920 - 2005

To many people, Bill Wood was the heart and soul of the Batavia Historical Society. A charter member, he long served as the society's historian. We shall sorely miss him.



When death came to Bill Wood on the evening of June 9, it came as he would have wished -- in his own home, surrounded by his many books. Despite continuing health problems and recent hospitalizations, Bill had maintained his zest for life and his interest in others to the very end.

It is impossible to capture the essence of Bill Wood in a few words; he was a man of many and diverse interests whose life touched his beloved Batavia in many ways. His departure leaves a huge gap in his wide circle of friends, the many organizations he served, and in the entire Batavia community.

Bill was not a native of Batavia, although that is hard for anyone to remember. After his tour of duty with the Eighth Air Force in England from 1943 to 1945, he made Batavia his home. The community, its people and its history, became his passion.

Just a brief listing of his accomplishments suggests the measure of the man. He served for six years as a teacher and seventeen years as principal of J. B. Nelson School, where the street in front is named William Wood Lane in his honor. In 2003, a new elementary school

in southeast Batavia was named Hoover-Wood in honor of Bill and his foster mother, Eldora Hoover. In more recent years, he was involved with the Batavia Foundation for Educational Excellence.

His community involvement was by no means limited to education. He served as a member of the Batavia Board of Police and Fire Commissioners, trustee of the Batavia Public Library District, charter member and historian of the Batavia Historical Society, and member of the Batavia Access Committee. In 1976 he was named Batavia's Citizen of the Year.

Bill was devoted to Holy Cross Church, where he formerly served as organist. A large part of his life was Marmion Abbey, where he was a member of the Benedictine Oblate. Every Sunday afternoon would find him there at vespers.

But enough of his accomplishments -- it was on the personal side that Bill left his mark on so many people. Mayor Schielke, whom Bill often referred to as "the son I never had," said, "He taught each of us how to grow old with great dignity ... and how to love and be loved, and how to bring a smile to the face of each person time and again."

Continued on p. 2

William J. Wood -- The Society's Historian

Continued from p. 1

One of Bill's regular haunts, and perhaps one of the most important, was the Gustafson Research Center at the Depot Museum. He had a tremendous curiosity, about people and about information. He could be found almost every afternoon at the Center, looking up some facet of history that intrigued him or helping others with their searches. Along with Marilyn Robinson, he was the person everyone turned to in any search for some elusive fact in Batavia's past.

After initially resisting having his name appear on Batavia's new elementary school, Bill came to cherish the relationship and the time he spent with the students and teachers at the Hoover-Wood School. They reciprocated his love and showed it with a signed banner that covered an entire wall of his room during his last hospital stay.

Another of Bill's loves was the Senility Club, a group of older men who met for lunch each Tuesday to discuss Batavia history and whatever else might interest the members. Bill had been saddened in recent years at the loss of fellow members he cherished -- Don Schielke, then Bob Phelps in 2002, Elliott Lundberg in late 2003, and earlier this year the newest member, Jerry Harris. It was Bill who drove the other members to lunch, most often at Bill's beloved Harners', and it was Bill who worked on rescheduling a lunch if conflicts arose. He couldn't let a week go by without conversation with these friends and, at the time of

his death, was searching for ways to replenish the membership, which had dwindled to three.

Similarly, Bill was devoted to the group of friends that met at 9:30, every night but Saturday, at McDonald's. He loved people and conversation. Friends who invited Bill to dinner knew that the evening would be early since Bill would not want to miss McDonald's.

Another place one could always count on finding Bill was at the bi-weekly city council meetings on Monday, where he always occupied a front-row seat. He attended because of his intense interest in the city and everything that affected it. An even greater reason, perhaps, was his close relationship with Mayor Schielke.

But it was as a human being that Bill shone most brightly. The Rev. Joe Rippinger of Marmion Abbey noted that Bill had a way of bringing people together from all types of backgrounds. "His family," Rippinger said, "was people of every faith, political party and race."

And so we say goodbye to our friend, Bill Wood. As Tom Schlueter eulogized him in the Kane County Chronicle, "He was a gentle soul who spread goodness wherever he went. How many people can we say that about?"

"The world seems a little less gentle, a little less civil, a little less dignified without him. It will be up to us to pick up the slack. It won't be easy."

Addresses Renumbered in 1947

Anyone who has done research on the history of his home or other buildings in Batavia has undoubtedly discovered that they carried different street addresses before the mid-1900s. Following is the notice sent out in 1947 to explain the change to residents and other building occupants.

The last paragraph stresses the importance of placing addresses where they will be easily visible from the street. Anyone who has tried to make deliveries in Batavia knows that a reminder of this need is as essential today, in many cases, as it was in 1947.

A new numbering system based on each 20 feet to an odd or even number is necessary. It will follow the plan used in large cities, which uses 100 numbers to a block, that is, the first block will have numbers from 1 to 99, the second block from 101 to 199, and so on. The river will remain the dividing line for east and west numbers. Wilson Street will remain the line for north and south numbers.

This plan has been discussed favorable for many years but the cost of sending out men to measure each block has prevented its adoption. As the numbers as first assigned were for the purpose of mail delivery, the post office, in cooperation with city officials, is now assigning new numbers.

Your new number is _____. Please erect this number on or soon after

Sept. 1, 1947. However, when reporting a fire, the firemen will appreciate if it you give the new number now. this will tell them exactly how many blocks to go and will result in fast action on their part.

When the new numbers are erected, they should be placed where they can be read easily from the street. The farther back your house is from the street, the larger the numbers should be. It has been noted that some houses have been painted recently and the numbers are now the color of the house so as to be practically invisible. Other numbers have been placed over doors. Later, porches were added, so that the numbers are now hidden and, at night, are in such shadow that they cannot be read.

The Batavia Historian, recipient of the Illinois State Historical Society's 1997 Award for Superior Achievement, is published quarterly by the Batavia Historical Society. The editor, Bill Hall, will welcome any suggestions or material -- 630-879-2033.

The Depot Museum, a cooperative effort of the Society and the Batavia Park District, is open from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from March through November. The director, Carla Hill, can be reached at 630-406-5274.

Chuck Beckman

A Life of Service to Batavia

Selection to serve as Grand Marshal of Batavia's Loyalty Day Parade on May 1, 2005, was a fitting tribute to Chuck Beckman as he ended a record-setting thirty years on the city council. But serving the city he loves in that capacity was only one facet of Chuck's life -- a life in which he has served as an air force mechanic, a fire fighter, a businessman, and most of all a dedicated family man.

The story that follows is based on an interview by Bill Wood and Bill Hall on February 23, 2005.

"Before I was born," Chuck began, "my parents lived in Aurora, and Dad worked at the D.F. Sperry foundry in North Aurora. When he went in and asked for a half day off to go up to the county clerk's office in Geneva to get a marriage license, they darn well fired him. Because they had a lot of work to do, they didn't want him to take a half day off to go up there. And they wouldn't take him up there, either; he had to walk across the river and catch a bus -- no, a streetcar I guess it was back then. Go up there and then wait for another streetcar to come back to work after he had gotten the marriage license."

Until Chuck was two, his family lived in a house they rented from an uncle on East New York Street in Aurora. After the birth of his brother Jim, the family moved to a little house on South River Street in Batavia. From there they moved to Church Street, next door to Harold Maves' store, and then over to McKee Street, where Art Jaschob used to live. Neighbors that Chuck recalls from

there included Reverend Forstberg of the Covenant Church, Mel Kraft and Frank Pierson, whom Chuck remembered as a particularly dear friend.

The family's last move during Chuck's boyhood was to a house on Blaine Street that his father bought from his grandmother. By that time, there were five kids in the family, of whom Chuck was the oldest. As Chuck recalls, "We were a nice family, a good family, and Mom was there for us all the time. But she also worked hard -- down at the Anderson greenhouse and at Mercy Center, where she knew enough about nursing to take care of people along with whatever else came along -- wherever they wanted her, that's where they'd put her. One week she'd work in the kitchen, and the next week she'd be down in the laundry.

iams." "Roger and I grew up together," Chuck continued. "We used to hunt -- we were big hunters with our BB guns and slingshots."

Asked how far he went in school, Chuck, replied, "Freshman year. The war was on, and employers would take about anybody. And I was a pretty husky guy, not very big, but I did a lot of work. I worked for Thorsen's Lumber -- Kahlke's then -- and Alexander Lumber. I worked two days for Plummer's Coal Yard up on Wilson and Prairie.

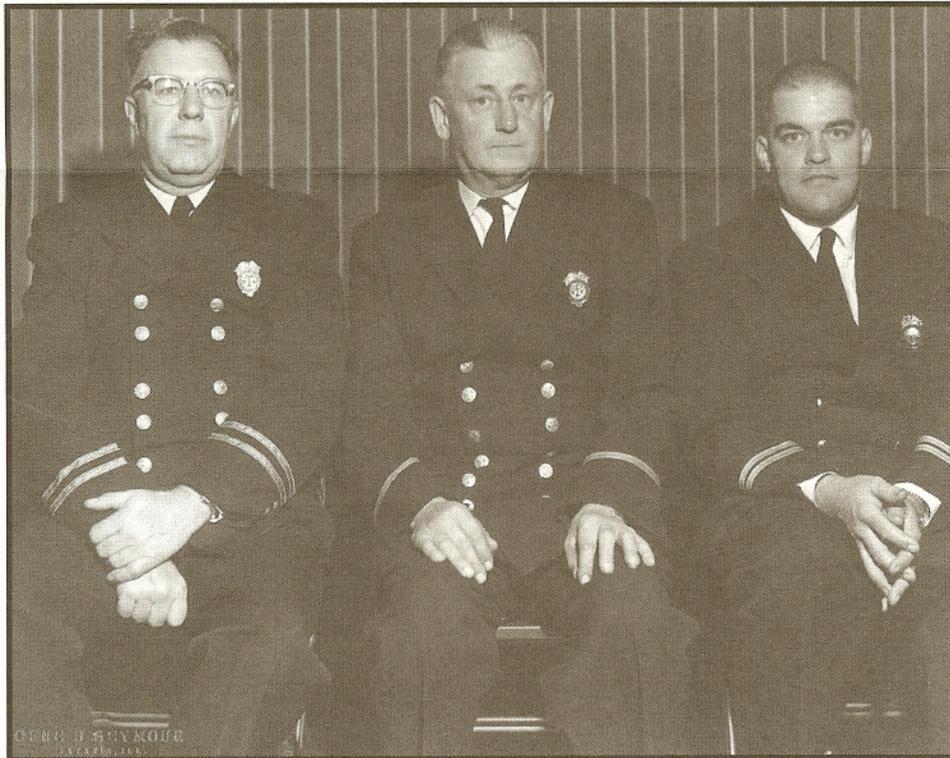
"Then I unloaded coal at the Batavia Body Company; we were the only kids that would do it, me and Melvin Patzer. My younger brother Jim would come and help us, but he was kind of short for such work, smaller than I was. He couldn't throw the coal over the side. We used to get twenty-five dollars to

throw a carload of coal off over at the Body Company and the city. At the city, Dad came down and helped; we didn't get any money for that, but it paid the electric and water bills. Times were tough, you know, especially with five of us kids."

After a pause, Chuck resumed, "I worked on the railroad one summer -- there were probably fifteen or twenty of us kids. We rebuilt the line from the Lindgren Foundry all the way down to Barber Greene in Aurora. We built all of that, us kids and two Mexicans. If you're good driving spikes, it takes three hits from two guys.

One guy hits twice and the other hits once; the next time, the second guy twice and the first guy once.

"I was only fourteen, and my brother Jim was thirteen, but we were driving those spikes on the railroad. Those memories are precious. How many kids ever got to work on the railroad?"



Left to right: Chief Bud Richter, Asst. Chief Gunnar Anderson and Capt. Chuck Beckman

"And I started work early -- ten years old peddling newspapers. While doing that, I got hit by a car down by the old Lincoln Inn. I went to sixth grade -- me and my friend Roger Williams -- with my arm in a cast. Do you remember Roger?" "Yes," Bill Wood replied, "his father was a famous coach at Mooseheart, Johnny Will-

Continued on p. 4

Chuck Beckman

Continued from p. 3

How many kids have ever unloaded coal out of a coal car -- or lumber? But I couldn't unload the cement cars because I couldn't pick up ninety-four pounds -- I was too short and would fall over when I tried.

"Right beyond Alexander's and Thorsen's down at the foot of Houston, there were hobo camps along the river. Guys would be sleeping in caves. All along the riverbank little huts and caves. In the wintertime they would get into Rogers Brothers Galvanizing or the drop forge and sleep where it was warm. That was in the early '40s.

"In 1948 I was working for Norm Anderson's dad. He had a wooden leg. But boy, you talk about a carpenter, he could get up on a roof and put more nails in a roof than any two-legged carpenter could. He taught me how to use a hammer. I was putting a roof on a garage up on Webster and Prairie when he saw me holding a hammer with quite a bit of the handle sticking out behind. He said, 'Let me see that hammer,' and he pulled out his saw and sawed the end of the handle off. 'You aren't supposed to use a hammer that way,' he said. 'You're supposed to hold it at the end. When you learn how to do that, we will throw this hammer away and get you a proper one.'"

Something that was said reminded Chuck of Frontier Days in 1947 or 1948. "Everybody had to grow a beard," he recalled. "And I was out there trying to grow a beard, and I didn't have much in the way of whiskers, you know. I don't remember where it was, maybe over at the fire station, but a bunch of us guys had our picture taken with all those whiskers. That's the kind of thing I remember -- people should come forward and tell their stories, you know.

"It was about that time -- August 4, 1948 -- that I married Norma Allison, who is still my wife after almost 57 years. The wedding, conducted by Pastor Forstberg, was in the Covenant Church. It was on a Wednesday night; everybody thought that was nuts, but still it was a church wedding. We moved into the house on Blaine Street with my family.

"I was only 20 years old when I first got on the fire department part-time-

- you were supposed to be 21, but they couldn't get anyone. Before that I used to get to the fires ahead of the fire department. I learned the code and where the fire was, and I had an instinct for getting there. I remember the Ottinger fire. Mrs. Ottinger was com-

where, for every railroad and wherever some farmer had cows crossing the tracks.

"Come Christmas, I got permission for Norma to come down, and I could go off the base with her. We'd been married then for about three years.



Chuck Beckman with F. Womack and "Streamer"

ing down the street crying, 'My baby's in there.' And being 20 years old, I was going to be a hero and get that kid out of there. I opened the door, and a puff of heat and wind hit me and I was out on the sidewalk -- it blew me right out of the house. Just then the kid came out -- walked right out and passed me -- only two feet tall and coming out under the smoke. I'll never forget that -- one of my first fires.

"In 1951 I went into the air force and was gone four years. I've often wondered why I went in. My dad was mad at me -- he wanted me to join the navy. But I didn't want to -- I always figured it was too far away to swim to shore. That was my biggest fear. Of course, I never figured on being in airplanes, either. I was more mechanically inclined."

Asked where he was in the service, Chuck replied, "I started out down in San Antonio, where I had twelve weeks of basic training. It took four days, on a milk train, to get there from Chicago. That train stopped every-

She had to come to the base and sign me out like a little kid. We got two days out. Then it was back to the base and tents. We were living in tents, colder than you know what -- ice on the fire barrels and cold showers. Oh boy, you learned a lot of things like shaving with dry razors because you didn't want to put that cold water on your face.

"After New Years, Norma went back home. The end of February I went to Ft. Ord, California, for mechanics school. I found a place to live, so I called her and my brother Ollie, who drove her and another girl they picked up in Indiana out to California. Then we flew Ollie home -- no, we gave him a ticket and he went home on the train. We were there for ten weeks, in a tiny cottage. After graduation from that school, we drove back home on a thirty-day leave.

"At the end of my leave, I flew back out to California and boarded the USF Altman, a troop ship bound for the Far East. We dropped 180 airmen off in

Continued on p. 7

More Sears Houses We've Gained 12 -- But Lost a Big One!

In the January 2003 issue, we featured Batavia's Sears houses and included pictures of 26 of them. Additional information appeared in the next two issues. We can now offer our readers a major update.

The March 4, 2005, *Chicago Tribune* carried a story about ongoing research on Sears houses by Rebecca Hunter of Elgin. We got in touch with her, and she provided us with a list she had compiled of Sears and other mail order houses in Batavia. Most of these we already had, but she identified twelve Sears houses that were not on our list, as well as five mail order houses sold by other companies -- Harris Bros., Lewis, and Gordon - Van Tine.

We did lose one Sears house -- and a big one -- in comparing her list with ours. Our January 2003 issue fea-

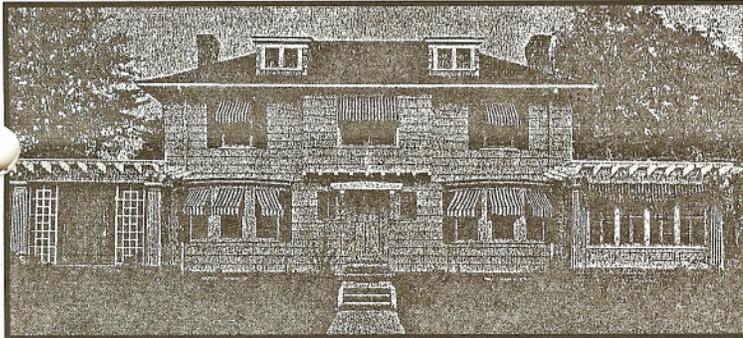
tured on the first page the house at 233 South Batavia Avenue, which we identified as the Sears "Magnolia" model. Our identification was based on information in Thomas Mair's *Batavia Revisited*, although we will admit to having had some reservations in comparing that house to the "Magnolia" illustration in the Sears catalog. A picture from a Sterling catalog provided by Ms. Hunter clearly shows that our reservations were justified and that she is right in identifying that house as "The Vernon" by Sterling -- see them side by side on this page.

We have included pictures of the newly identified Sears and other mail order houses in this issue, together with their model names. In a few cases, Ms. Hunter had put question marks beside the model names, and we have included these.

We have placed in the Gustafson Center a copy of the material Ms. Hunter sent us, which includes some model names of Sears houses that we pictured earlier but were unable to identify by name. For anyone who might be interested, Ms. Hunter provides research on Sears houses for a fee.

Our search for Sears and other mail order houses is ongoing. If anyone knows of mail order houses we have not listed, now or earlier, please tell us. Also, give us any corrections to information we have included; there were many "look alikes" when these houses were built. Indeed, when we asked to photograph one house that we had been told was a Sears house, the owner told us it wasn't -- that he was the second owner and knew the man who had built it!

See more houses on page 6.



The Tale of an Organ Pumper

John Gustafson

Today an electric motor is an essential part of a church organ. Earlier it was a pumper. The pumper operated a bellows that provided air for the pipes in order that sweet music could come forth. The pumper was usually a boy in his early teens. For this labor he got the magnificent sum of ten cents an hour. I can remember earning my first money at pumping. I thought I was on my way to being a financial magnate. For other jobs such as mowing lawns, raking leaves, beating carpets, weeding gardens, etc., I had been getting the customary compensation of five or six cents an hour. But ten cents an hour was something stupendous.

Of course, at first I pumped for the organist only when she practiced. This

was much harder than during a regular church service because you didn't get much respite -- you pumped nearly continuously, and it was hard work.

May I explain the mechanics of pumping an organ? The pumper pumps like all get out until the air-box or reservoir is full of air. You know this when the gauge, a lead weight on a string in front of you on the side of the organ, is at the bottom of its course.

Then you can rest -- sit down, look out the window, or carve your initials on the wooden pipes. But you have to keep one eye on that lead weight in its inevitable climb upwards, showing that the air is being consumed by the pipes at the behest of the organist. When it reaches a certain height on the gauge, you have to pump the air-

box full again -- or else! Or else the air is exhausted, the music ends in a most horrendous gasp, and the organist slams in a stop that hits the side of the organ with a report loud enough to wake the dead or, at least, loud enough to arouse you, the pumper from your daydreams.

This only needs to happen once, and I can assure you it won't happen again, especially during church service. That is the height of ignominy as I know from experience.

Ed. note. Marilyn Robinson came across this story in John Gustafson's journals, which are kept in the Gustafson Center at the Depot Museum.



346 N. Batavia, Sears "Berwyn"



221 Madison, Sears "Berwyn"



242 N. Lincoln, Harris Bros. "H 1017"



421 Cleveland, Sears "Hathaway"



531 W. Illinois, Sears "Berwyn"



446 Madison, Lewis "L Wellington"



331 Blaine, Sears "Flossmoor"



419 Chestnut, Sears "Starlight"



430 Elizabeth, Sears "Winona"



611 N. Washington, Sears "Wellington"



7 N. Mallory, Sears "Van Page"



817 W. Main, Sears "Conway"



830 N. Park, Harris Bros. "H 1025"



917 N. Washington, Sears "Crescent"



736 N. VanBuren, Gordon Van Tine
"G 616 W. Potomac"



743 N. Prairie, Gordon Van Tine "G 541"



409 N. Hamlet, Sears "Hampton"

Chuck Beckman

Continued from p. 4

Hawaii, along with some sailors; then we dropped off some more sailors in Guam; and finally we arrived in the Philippines, where I got off. I was stationed there for eighteen months, and I never got to bring Norma over because I didn't have the 'stripes.'

"While I was there, I got a chance to go to school in Japan. A kid was supposed to go but got sick, and they told me if I wanted to go in his place to get my duffel bag and go to Base Operations. We boarded a C47, stopped in Formosa and ended up in Japan. I went to automotive mechanics school, which was truck mechanics. I got big trucks to work on there, which helped me as far as my rating was concerned, but the fact that I hadn't graduated from high school held me back on promotions. Had I graduated from high school, I'd have made staff sergeant in four years, and then I would probably have stayed in the service.

"Back in the U.S., I was stationed at Edwards Air Force Base. I lived in Lancaster, off base, and even rode fire trucks while off duty. When I told them I was a fireman, they wanted me to join them when I got out of the service, but I was too short. They said, 'We'll get you passed for that. We'll take you down and massage you the night before and put you to bed; you'll stay in that bed all night, and the next morning we'll carry you across the street to the doctor's. When they get ready to measure you, you get up and get measured -- if you pass, then you've got it.' But nothing came of that. When I got out of the service, we returned to the house on Blaine Street -- and the fire department. It wasn't until 1957 that we moved to our place on Midway."

"When did you start your garage?" Chuck was asked. "February 1, 1957. And two weeks after I started it, Bud Richter came down and wanted to know if I wanted a full-time job as a fireman. I said, 'Sure.' They had Fred Womack and Bill Thrun, and I believe Don Neuses. Womack quit and Bill Thrun went on the police department. Then when Johnny Cryer quit, that's when Bud came and saw me."

Recalling some of the Batavians he had worked with on the fire department. Chuck said, "Besides the chief,

Bud Richter, Bob Hodge was still there. And Johnny Shumway and Harold Peterson -- I got on right after Harold. Then there were Charlie Kline and Otts Johnson. Do you remember Otts? He was great."

Asked how he was able to handle the garage while working as a fireman, Chuck explained, "We used to work 24 hours on, and then we had 48 hours off. So I had two days in the garage. Following his surgery, my dad had to quit working at Sperry, and he would come and sit at the garage. He'd keep the fire going and answer the phone. It was a godsend for him and for me. He would chase parts and sell gas. I remember it was 15 or 20 cents a gallon. People would come in and say, 'Fill it up.'"

"Back to the fire department, Bud Richter was a good teacher and very strict. The biggest thing a lot of kids have trouble with -- and I still do -- is tying knots. Bud would have us stand out there on the street practicing knot tying, with everybody watching. And we had a lot of practice climbing ladders. They'd place a big ladder up in the alley, not the one on the truck but a fifty-foot ground ladder. They would raise that thing with ropes up on the top of it. And then you'd climb it -- the

trick was in going over the top. A lot of guys wouldn't get ten feet off the ground when they'd get the shakes; they'd hang on and you couldn't get them off.

"One thing Bud told us many times was about driving fast. He said, 'Remember, if you pile that truck up on a corner, a block and a half from a fire, that truck isn't going to do anything. You're out of business. You go too fast around a corner, and you roll it over -- it isn't any going to be doing any good at the fire'

"It could be awfully hard work. You'd run into a house with an 83-pound respirator like we used to carry. Maybe you've come a block and a half, and you run up stairs on the porch, then in the house, and find that the guy is upstairs. So you've got to carry that thing up a flight of stairs, then turn and go up the other half. You'd be all pooped out by the time you got there. But I was so blessed with the fire service. That job was meant for me, and I loved it."

"When did you quit the fire department?" he was asked. "I got hurt in 1973 at a fire on Rte. 25 and State Street -- a big two story house across from the old Louise White School. I

Continued on p. 8

WHAT'S NEW AT THE MUSEUM?

Carla Hill, Director

The museum reopened on Monday, March 14. We experienced a very busy April and May with over 490 Batavia third grade students touring the museum.

Chris Winter has been working on the preparation of a new "Batavia Artists, Past & Present" exhibit that will be in place by July 1. This exhibit is being done to go along with the Batavia "Art In Your Eye" art show and school that begins in mid-July and ends with the Art Show on August 12 and 13 on the Riverwalk.

We are also chairing the Local Arrangements Committee for the Illinois Association of Museums Conference, which will take place in October. Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles are hosting the conference.

The museum celebrated National Volunteer Week on April 17-24. The museum has over 100 volunteers who actively participate in the operation of the museum, from being a docent to working with the collections. We are very fortunate to have so many dedicated volunteers. Fun Fact* A recent study by the Independent Sector indicated that 83.9 million American adults volunteer, representing the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion dollars.

We are looking forward to a wonderful summer season at the museum with many new exhibits and programs. We are always looking for new volunteers. If you would like to volunteer at the museum or the Gustafson Research Center please contact Kathy Fairbairn at 406-9041.

Chuck Beckman

Continued from p. 7

tried to run to the fire house -- it was next to the old city hall -- and beat Johnny Shumway, who was at the foundry. I tripped in a hole or something. I fell and hurt my back -- couldn't walk, damned near paralyzed. I did shuffle up and got there in time to take the truck, Engine 3, to the fire. But I couldn't get out of the truck; they had to carry me out and lay me on a stretcher on the street.

"I had treatments for a week and was heavily bandaged. Finally they put me in traction at the hospital. And I had to wear a brace for three months -- couldn't do any work. After about six months, they said, 'Now you can go to work.' Richter asked if I could do all the work. I said I didn't know but would do what I could. 'Well,' he asked, 'can you pick up a hundred pounds?' I said, 'Hell, no -- I wouldn't even try it,' and he replied, 'I can't use you.' So then I had to go on disability, and that is when my pension started.

"The fire department provided some work for me at the garage, but I never

got much work from the city. There was a reason for that -- we didn't want people talking. But you've never heard me complain about not getting enough work from the city. I got my livelihood for twenty-five years, plus thirty years on the city council -- I'll never get rich on that job! The city has been good to me."

That brought up the question of when, and how, Chuck got on the city council. "It was in 1973, I believe," he responded. "Bill Reese was moving and had resigned and I came to Mayor Bob Brown with a petition to take Bill's job on the council. Then Bill came back and asked Bob if he could get back on the council. Bob told me that he was going to give the seat back to Bill but asked if I would take a seat on the zoning board of appeals until the next election and then run for it. I did, and two years later I ran for and was elected to the city council.

"That's when the council met in the old city hall." "Do you mean the old city hall down on what is now Shumway?"

Bill Wood asked. "No, we were in the old one-story building on the island -- the one with the rats, cats and bats -- the one where the roof leaked.

"Yes, I've seen a lot of changes over my thirty years on the council, but they've all been good years. It's always been said that we'd have disagreements among the council members, but then we'd go out for coffee together. Or we'd go down to the VFW -- that's when I was drinking. But I'd only have two beers -- I was always a two-beer person. Then I'd button it up and go home."

When Chuck stepped down as alderman on May 2, he had completed a record-setting thirty years on Batavia's city council. And serving the day before as grand marshal of Batavia's Loyalty Day Parade capped it all off. As Chuck was quoted in the Kane County Chronicle, "I've had so much support from people. I'm living my dream." And what more could a person ask from life?

An Interesting Coincidence

Many Batavians undoubtedly remember the story of Bernard L. Cigrand, a dentist who lived at 1184 South Batavia Avenue from about 1912 until 1932. He is widely credited with conceiving the idea, while teaching school in his native Wisconsin, of observing June 14 as the birthday of the flag. This was the date on which, in 1777, Congress officially adopted the Stars and Stripes as the flag of the United States.

According to Marilyn Robinson's *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*, "he held the first observance of Flag Day in 1885 by assigning students to write themes on the American Flag. It was then that Bernard began his struggle to make Flag Day a national observance."

Recalling this, we were surprised to find the name Dr. B. L. Cigrand in *The Devil in the White City*, a book about Chicago's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the exploits of a serial killer who operated near the fair. H. H. Holmes, a handsome, young,

nonpracticing physician with a charismatic manner, had built a small hotel near the fair and lured attractive young ladies either to work for him or to take up residence in his hotel. Sooner or later these ladies, most of them scarcely more than girls and new to the big city, disappeared without a trace.

It so happens that one of these girls was 24-year-old Emeline Cigrand. "In October [1892]," *The Devil in the White City* tells us, "two of her second cousins, Dr. and Mrs. B. J. Cigrand, paid her a visit. Dr. Cigrand, a dentist with an office at North and Milwaukee Avenues on Chicago's North Side, had contacted Emeline because he was working on a history of the Cigrand family. They had not previously met. 'I was charmed by her pleasing manners and keen wit,' Dr. Cigrand said. 'She was a splendid woman physically, being tall, well formed, and with a wealth of flaxen hair.'" That was the last time they saw her.

Among others, it was the Cigrands who unsuccessfully bombarded Holmes over the next few years in search of missing relatives. In the turmoil surrounding the Columbian Exposition and the numbers of young ladies arriving in Chicago to see the fair or seek employment, the police gave no attention to reports of missing girls. It was only several years later after a murder in Philadelphia and the long search for some of Holmes' victims by a determined Philadelphia detective that at least a part of Holmes' killing spree was uncovered.

Although the timing and the unusual name Cigrand led us to believe that the dentist referred to in *The Devil in the White City* was the same Dr. B. L. Cigrand who was behind the establishment of Flag Day and lived in Batavia for twenty years, we didn't want to jump to conclusions. Discussion with Marilyn Robinson, however, revealed that our Dr. Cigrand had lived

Continued on p. 9

Who are they?



If you know, please call Carla or Chris at 406-5274

Membership Matters

Since the last issue, we have added as life members the following Batavians who were previously annual members: Charles Karas and Eric and Michele Nelson. Other new members (from Batavia unless otherwise noted) include Rosemary (Dibenardo) Gasper (Lockport - gift from Denese Leadabrand), Tom and Gerry Kusterman, Kathy Matthews (St. Charles), Donn and Joan Scherer, and Louise Von Hoff (St. Charles - gift of Shirley Johnston).

We regret to report the deaths of Ethel Larson Krupp, Erick Nordstrom, John Shumway (a life member), and William J. Wood (see story in this issue).

We received gifts in memory of Robert W. Conde from Georgene Schramer and Kenneth C. and Jacqueline R. Upham; in memory of Jerry Harris from Eric and Michele Nelson (Jerry's daughter) and Norm and Laura Salamone; and in memory of their parents, Henry and Mayme Theis and Leo and Margaret Groener, from Ray and Anita Theis.

We also received gifts from Robert W. Buchanan and Byron and Gerry Nelson.

Coincidence

Continued from p. 8

in Chicago prior to moving to Batavia so we are comfortable in assuming that the two are one and the same person.

Editor's note: We would recommend to readers two books that provided us with the material for this story. *The Devil in the White City*, recently the subject of a book discussion at the Batavia Public Library, is a fascinating account of the building of the Columbian Exposition's "White City" in 1893, as well as a recounting of Holmes' serial killings and the search for his victims. And anyone wanting to read fascinating stories about early Batavians and their families should be sure to read *Batavia Places and the People Who Called Them Home*; this book can be purchased at the Depot Museum.

Batavia Historical Society Membership 2005

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Dues Structure:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Individual | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Joint/Family | \$15.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Junior | \$2.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Classroom | \$5.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Life (each) | \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Life (family) | \$150.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Business or Institution | \$50.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Business or Institution Life | \$150.00 |

Mail to:
Treasurer
Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

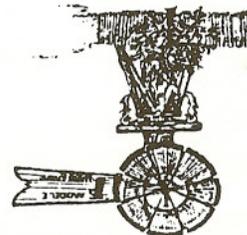
This membership is being given as a gift

Prompt payment of dues is appreciated!

- You may put your name, address, and membership category on a separate sheet if you do not want to clip the above form.
- If you would like to give a membership as a gift, send the above information and dues to the Society and indicate in the box above that it is to be a gift. The gift membership card will be mailed to you so that you may enclose it with a personal card or note.

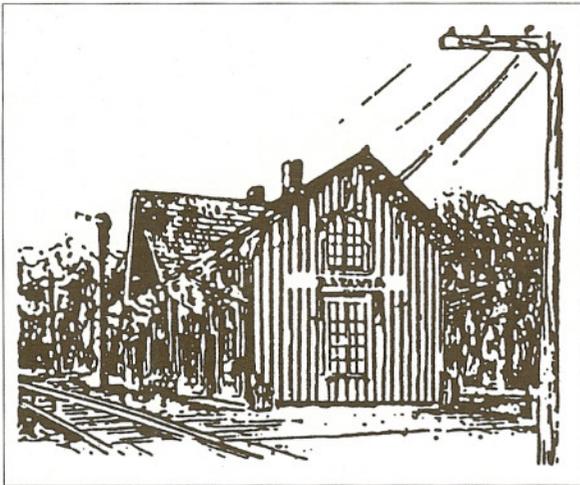
Officers
President: Richard A. Benson
V.P. & Program Chairman: Patsy Rosenberg
Recording Secretary: Christine Winter
Corresponding Secretary: Georgene Kauth
Treasurer: Philip B. Elfstrom
Historian: William J. Wood
Directors
Robert V. Brown
Carole Dunn
Alma Karas
Robert F. Peterson
Marilyn Robinson
Editor: William D. Hall
Museum Director: Carla Hill

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BATAVIA, IL 60510
PERMIT NO. 291



The Batavia Historian

Batavia Historical Society

*P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510*

Vol. 46 No. 3

www.bataviainhistoricalsociety.org

October, 2005

The Story of Josephine Melgoza An Early Hispanic in Batavia

According to Josephine Melgoza, when her mother, Maria Cardenas, and her sisters and brothers moved to Batavia in 1953, they were only the second Hispanic family in town. Her story that follows, which is based on a July 12, 2005, interview by Alma Karas and Bill Hall, is a noteworthy chapter in the history of Batavia.

Josephine, the youngest child of Miguel Cardenas and his wife, Maria, was born in Ottawa, Illinois, on May 6, 1934. The Cardenas family had come from Salamanca, Guanajuato, Mexico, to Ottawa, Illinois, in 1923, although the father had been in and out of the United States since he was twelve years old.

Josephine's oldest sister, Catherine, didn't start school until her brother, John, was eight; her mother always said that her father didn't want them to start until they were a little older and could defend themselves from other kids. Because the family then spoke only Spanish, Catherine cried when she began school because she didn't know what they were saying. But by the time Josephine started school about ten years later it was different -- she spoke both Spanish and English.

Josephine recalls Ottawa as "a nice, very nice town, famous because of the Lincoln and Douglas debates." In 1939, however, her widowed mother needed work and there was little opportunity for employment there. "Friends of our family in Ottawa," Josephine said, "knew one of the two Mexican families in Geneva, the Aylalas. The other family was the Melgozas, Valeriano and Alvina. Both men worked on the Northwestern Railroad. Mrs. Melgoza was going into the hospital for surgery, and the Aylalas told our Ottawa friends that the Melgozas needed someone to come and take care of Mrs. Melgoza and the children. Because my mother was a widow, they thought that maybe she would be able to come and help out.

"I kind of remember them coming to ask Mother if she would be able to come and help out. Mother took me out of kindergarten -- I was five -- and took me with her. My oldest sister, Catherine, must have been about 15 or 16. She told my mother 'Yes, Mama, I'll be able to take care of my two brothers and my



Maria Cardenas and daughter Josephine

two sisters.' Back then, you know, girls of 14 were capable of taking care of a household.

"So then my mother came up to Geneva to take care of the Melgoza household, and I came along with her because back then a woman never traveled alone. That's just the way it was then."

"Afterwards," Josephine continued, "my mother and Mrs. Melgoza developed a very good friendship. The Melgozas

Continued on p. 2

The Story of Josephine Melgoza Continued from p. 1

would come and visit us in Ottawa, and Mrs. Melgoza would say, 'Why don't you come up and work in Batavia? There's a lot of work there.' So little by little, Mrs. Melgoza, who was working at Campana, encouraged my mother to come. She did and was hired, as a janitress because they didn't need anyone in the factory at the time.

"My mother worked there until her retirement; by that time, I was out of school. I was the youngest, and my sister Carmen was going to college in Chicago at St. Xavier's. My sister Cora was in nursing school in Ottawa. We had bought our first house at 911 Washington Avenue. My niece lives

there now, although the house was torn down and rebuilt.

"After I finished school, I worked at a few places, first DuKane and then at Hawley Products and Standard Steel. But I felt I should try the beauty profession. My sister Cora was told by her hairdresser that the American School of Beauty Culture in Chicago was the best one at the time. So we went into Chicago to find out, and that's how I ended up going to beauty school."

"Did you take the train to Chicago?" Josephine was asked. "Yes, the 7:23, and it still leaves at that time. I usually came back on the 5:05. George Neri's wife, Pauline, from St. Charles was going to beauty school, too, and Beulah Izzer from Geneva -- we would all ride together.

"So, I went to beauty school, but when I got out there were no jobs. I don't know why I went to the bank, probably to borrow money to finish off paying for my schooling, and I was talking to Mr. Paddock, the president. He asked me where I was going to work; I said, 'Well, I don't know, but I don't want to go in and out of Chicago.' And he said, 'Why don't you go up on Batavia Avenue to the Polly Anne Beauty Shop -- my wife's been going there for 29 years. Anne Johnson needs someone there.' So I went out where my sister was waiting, and I said, 'Come on, turn the car around. Let's go up on the Avenue.'

"I went into Anne Johnson's shop across from the A&P, now Bank One, and said, 'I just came from the bank, and Mr. Paddock said you needed someone.' And she said, 'Yes,' and she must have asked, 'When can you start? I said, 'Don't you want me to do a head of hair so you can see what kind of work I can do?' "No," she said. Later she told me that if Mr. Paddock recommended me, I would be all right. And so I started."

Asked about Anne Johnson, Josephine replied. "She was born in Batavia, but her mother died when

she was small, and she was taken to an orphanage -- in Nebraska, I believe. Her father settled close by so that he could visit the children every weekend. It was a beautiful story -- the way life should be. After she was 15, they came back to Batavia. She got a job in Aurora with Miss Lightcap, who had the only beauty shop there that did marcel waving with a curling iron. That's where Ann learned. In 1929, she told me so many times, Mike Shomig built that building at 121 Batavia Avenue. He went to talk to her about opening up a beauty shop there.

"She did, and it was the first beauty shop between Aurora and St. Charles. By the time I joined her in the 1954, she had others working for her. Helen Anderson, Cliff's wife, worked for Anne. I worked for her for thirteen years. That was a good long time. After that I worked out of my own home. And through the whole time, I really enjoyed it because I met such fine people. Anne always said she had the best customers, and she did. Erma Jeffery, Jeff Shielke's aunt, was one. And Eunice Shumway, who was a founder of the historical society, was another of my customers. She used to come in on Mondays. Iris Elfstrom, Phil's mother, was a customer."

"When did you get married?" Josephine was asked. "In 1957," she responded. "My husband, Raul, was born and raised in Mexico. His uncle, Valeriano Melgoza, sponsored him and brought him to this country in 1955.

"He didn't speak English when he came. I must have said something to Miriam Johnson, one of my fine customers, about my husband needing help to get his citizenship. She said, 'Josephine, there's a retired teacher who would like something to do.' So I mentioned this to my sister Cora, the nurse, and she said, 'Oh good, I'll send Jose, too, and the children. That's how it happened that Eldora Hoover tutored my husband and my brother-in-law to become American citizens. I always told my husband he knew the Constitution better than I did."

"How many children do you have," Josephine was asked. "Three," she replied. "My oldest son, Paul, lives in Georgia. He is what they call a



Raul and Josephine Melgoza

The Batavia Historian, recipient of the Illinois State Historical Society's 1997 Award for Superior Achievement, is published quarterly by the Batavia Historical Society. The editor, Bill Hall, will welcome any suggestions or material -- 630-879-2033.

The Depot Museum, a cooperative effort of the Society and the Batavia Park District, is open from 2 to 4 p.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from March through November. The director, Carla Hill, can be reached at 630-406-5274.

Continued on p. 8

REMEMBERING the Borg House

Marjorie Carlson Withers

Marjorie Withers is a granddaughter of Patrick and Charlotte Borg, who married in 1893 and moved into the house at what is now 227 South Jefferson that Patrick had just built. As she tells in this story, she has given the Society a wealth of information about this house, the basis of a related story in this issue. Marjorie has also given us information about her family and holidays she enjoyed as she grew up in Batavia; these are available at the Gustafson Center and will probably be covered in a later issue of the Historian.

Episodes of "getting rid of things" occur to all of us, but especially in one's twilight years.

In one of my scavenger clean-outs this year, I came across some old receipts, diaries, etc., lovingly kept for many years by my mother's sisters. Aunt Dorothy and Aunt Louise lived nearly all their lives in "the old homestead" (the Borg house) in Batavia, so naturally had a few keepsakes to be passed on. As their only living niece, I ended up with a precious boxful of goodies that I relished going through--reliving events as I went. But that "getting rid of things" urge prevailed, and some of these items were earmarked as "giveaway".

Thus, one day, I e-mailed the Batavia Historical Society. Chris Winter, who replied, seemed eager to accept the receipts, pictures, etc. that I was offering. She was most gracious and agreed to see my husband and me in July, when we planned to drive from our home near St. Louis, to Batavia.

That Monday morning at the museum, Chris seemed intrigued by the items I spread before her. One was a receipt from a long-defunct 1890's pharmacy in Batavia--and she seemed thrilled with that. Some of the other well-preserved pieces of paper were receipts my Grandfather Borg had kept from the building of his house at 113 (now 227) So. Jefferson St., which was finished in 1892--just before my grandparents were married. I have such fond memories of that old place! I told Chris that every year or two, when visiting in Batavia, I'd



Borg/Fessler House Today

wanted to talk to the present occupants. And every time, I'd tell myself that would be too intrusive. But Chris said I should really do so. After Jerry and I had looked around at the super museum displays, and were preparing to drive home, Chris again urged me to visit "my" house. So at last I decided to try.

Julie Fessler seemed delighted to meet someone knowledgeable about her house, so immediately invited me in. It was a wonderful, nostalgic feeling, walking through those very familiar rooms. Julie and Ron have made great improvements to the house and

I marveled at each one. But the thrilling part was seeing that they love old houses and are most anxious to preserve the 1890s look of this one.

As I was leaving, Julie asked if I knew what happened to the etched glass window that was in the front door. I explained that the last family occupant of the house--my aunt, Louise Borg--still loved the old homestead and wanted a memento. So she had that beautiful window removed from the door and put into a lovely oak frame. Thereafter, she lovingly displayed it in her front window the rest

Continued on p. 4

BUILDING the Borg House

In the related story "Remembering the Borg House," Marjorie Withers tells us that her grandparents, Patrick and Charlotte Borg, moved into their house at what is now 227 South Jefferson after their marriage in 1893. She has also given us some fascinating documents relating to the building of the house; these are now in the Gustafson Center. It is clear from these that the house did not spring into being overnight. Indeed it took several years, probably because Patrick must have done much of the work himself while holding jobs, probably at the Appleton Company as well as the U.S. Wind Engine & Pump Co., and because funds for buying material and paying carpenters took time to accumulate.

Patrick William Borg, born in the Gothenborg area of Sweden in 1865, joined his older brother Ben in Batavia in 1883. On October 3, 1888, the brothers bought adjoining lots nos. 4 and 5, block 2, Institute Addition to Batavia for \$1,800, payable \$300, with interest at 7%, annually until paid off. This contract was superseded on August 15, 1890, by a new contract with Sarah E. Stephens; at that time the two lots were split, with lot no.4 to Patrick and lot no. 5 to Ben.

Although Patrick would have bought materials and worked on the basic structure in the meantime, the first bill we find for work on the house is dated August

Continued on p. 4

BUILDING the Borg House Continued from p. 3

10, 1890; it is from August Dalstrom, written in Swedish, for carpentry work in the amount of \$169.72. There is a \$272.71 bill dated the next day from H. B. Bartholomew for flooring, moulding, shingles, etc. Other bills from Dalstrom and Bartholomew for flooring and siding followed over the next couple of months.

By September and October of that year it appears that finishing work was taking place. Hartsburg & Hawksley in North Aurora (a firm still in business until recent years) billed Patrick \$179.96 for brackets, moulding, windows, doors and turned posts, and Edwin Meredith provided \$51.12 worth of locks and hardware. There was a paint bill for \$7.45 from L. J. Patchin. After November 23, 1890, we find no further bills for construction.

Financing was another matter. On October 10, 1890, Patrick W. Borg executed a note for \$1,000, with interest at 7%, payable \$100 in one year,

REMEMBERING the Borg House

Continued from p. 3

of her life. But it came to an unfortunate end. Precious as it was, even with a lot of TLC, that etched glass window was broken during packing up Louise's things after her death. So Julie asked if I might have kept a photo of the window. Jerry was sure we had taken a picture, as Louise was so fond of "her window". Another search through more boxes at home, and one was found! We sent it to Julie, who hopes to have the window reproduced. I sent her many earlier pictures of the home's exterior, too. Ron thinks he might have the newest posts reproduced, to keep the authentic look of the front porch. But the best news was this: Now that the age of the house can be authenticated by the receipts I brought, the Fesslers have applied for a historical plaque for this dear old house! In my mind, it is well-deserved!

All of this has been a lot of fun and most gratifying to me. My grandparents' house--where I spent many happy days, holidays and every single Christmas Eve--is being lovingly and painstakingly cared for. Thanks to the Fesslers and the Batavia Historical Society for this great experience.



Borg House Earlier Years

\$100 in two years, and \$800 in three years, secured by a mortgage of George E. Watson. We saw evidence of payments and renewals to 1907.

How strange these amounts appear today, when the average home costs over \$200,000 and their owners carry mortgages larger than what their grandparents made in a lifetime. It is a graphic example of what has happened to the dollar over the past 100 years or so. But it is also illustrative of

the patience our grandparents and great-grandparents exercised in waiting for their dream of owning a home to come to fruition.

The accompanying pictures, an early one undated but undoubtedly taken before 1950 and the other a current one show how few external changes have been made over the years and how lovingly the house has been maintained.

Remembering Bill Wood

Nancy N. Pearce

Those who knew Bill Wood claimed him as a special friend. We all have our own loving memories, and this is one of my favorite memories of my friend and my principal at J. B. Nelson.

All my life I have had such an unreasonable fear of mice that it borders on the absurd. As I entered my first grade classroom early one morning, I heard suspicious rustlings and squeaks. Under the feather duster, the gift of one of the children, a large family of mice had established residency. This was my worst nightmare.

Pale and panicky, I tore down to Bill's office, so breathless I could scarcely tell him of the horror I had seen. He sat me down in his chair and sternly told me not to move. A few minutes later he returned, brought me a glass of water, and walked me back to my mouse-less room. I didn't ask nor want to know what heroic measures he had employed.

This would be the logical ending of the incident, but with great empathy and understanding my principal and my friend walked this coward to her room every day for four weeks. Each time he checked all corners where trouble might lie, reassured the coward that all was well, and then left to attend to the lesser duties of running a school.

I never forgot this most thoughtful of gestures. I wish I could say I no longer fear mice, but sadly I do.

Our Wedding in Difficult Times

Helen Bartelt Anderson

Born in 1914 on a farm in Batavia Township, Helen Bartelt Anderson has been one of our most faithful and most popular contributors. She and her husband, Cliff, now live at the Holmstad in Batavia.

In 2000, the Society published *Memories of a Childhood*, Helen's stories of life on the farm that had appeared in the *Historian* over the years. This book is available for purchase at the Depot Museum.

My father's death in 1930 from a farm accident had brought so many changes in our daily lives. Mama was so devastated and overwhelmed. Dr. West tried to help her fight the deep depression that enveloped her. He advised Mama to get away from the farm for a week.

Mama or Uncle John contacted Mr. Beamer, the developer who sold Papa some land in Texas. He came to see Mama and invited her to go on the train full of people he was taking on an excursion to Texas. I was a senior in high school. I gladly accepted Mama's invitation to accompany her. Mama and I both had a great time even though the only people we knew were Uncle John and Aunt Lina.

The week passed quickly. We were met at home by my brother, Roger, and Uncle Charlie, who both had the flu. I was also met by a pile of books and assignments. I had to study hard to catch up in order to graduate. Mama was in better spirits than she had been for a long time and seemed glad to start cleaning up after leaving the boys to do all her work.

Cliff Anderson had seen something in me that he liked. It took several years after high school for me to agree to "go steady" with him. I enjoyed my freedom. For a few years I worked for the advertising department at Campana. It was clean, enjoyable work. Our boss was Mr. Harry Fisher. He was a wonderfully kind leader and director.

Many decisions were put off by Mama including what to do about Cliff's and my wedding. Mama said, "I'm sorry, Helen. Right now I cannot afford the wedding for you I have dreamed and planned on giving you. You and Clifford will just have to wait a while."

Mama really wanted to better prepare us for our futures, but the money just wasn't available for either of us. I went to the Batavia National Bank and talked to Mr. Walter Johnson about a loan to go to the Gertrude Hale Beauty School in Chicago. He laughed at me. The economy in the land still suffered from the stock market crash in 1929. I had no collateral. I had much to learn.

Somehow, Mama was able to pay for the training for me to learn to be a beautician. Every day I took the "third rail" to Chicago to the Wells Street station and transferred to a loop train to State Lake Theater. The beauty school was located on the 13th floor.

Anne Johnson hired me as soon as I finished school and received my license. Her Polly Anne Beauty Shop was right next door to the hardware store where Cliff worked. Anne said that might not work out very well, but she was only fooling.

The farm was doing better. The hardware store was recovering from the depression. Cliff and I talked about marriage. Mother-to-be Anderson suggested that if we could not have a regular wedding, perhaps we could be married by Pastor Nordlander at the parsonage. "We would be happy to prepare a wedding supper for you." Mama agreed to that plan, and so did Cliff and I. Mama would help provide the food.

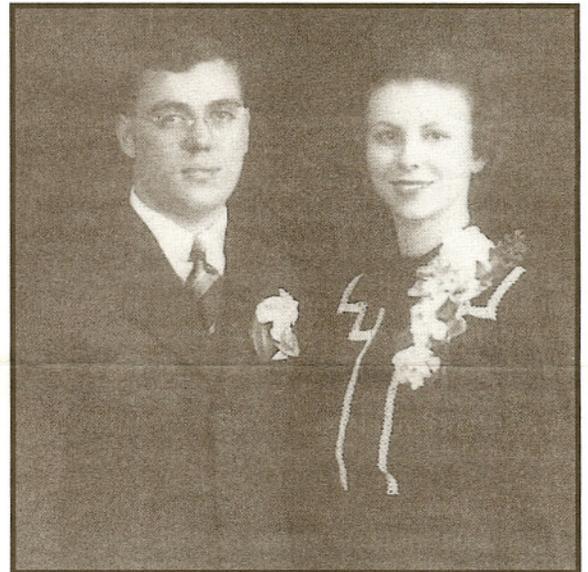
A few weeks later, we stood on the wide lower step of the parsonage's large winding stairway with our attendants, Edith Peterson and Harold (Bud) Carlstedt. It was there that we repeated the sacred wedding vows of always being faithful. The date was September 11, 1937, at 4:00 p.m.

After the ceremony, we drove to the photographer to have a wedding picture taken. The photographer was Mr. C.A. Lund. His camera sat on a tripod, and he threw a black cloth over his head. His daughter assisted him.

Our guests were waiting when we arrived at the home of Cliff's mother and father. We walked into the dining room to see a beautifully set table with

flowers and candles. Mama had made a large bowl of chicken salad. With a plate of mother Alma's Swedish rolls, the supper was perfect. Cliff's Aunt Jennie had made a very tall angel food cake with pale pink frosting. It was a wonderful ending to a beautiful reception. Thoughts of regret have never entered our minds.

I was a very tearful bride as we left our reception to drive to Rockford, the first night of our honeymoon. Does every bride start her wedding trip in tears? Was I really ready for marriage?



Cliff and Helen Anderson's 1937 Wedding

The next morning we left for Minneapolis and arrived late in the afternoon. We checked into our hotel room. Being hungry, we left our luggage and went out to find a nice restaurant. Feeling great, we went back to our hotel room. When we opened the bathroom door, 1,000 cockroaches scampered to safety. Even as a farm girl used to all kinds of bugs, I told my new husband he would have to call the manager to move us to another room. After much grumbling and arguing, Cliff did call, only to discover that they had given us their last vacant room. We took our luggage to another hotel across the street, minus cockroaches.

Because of hurt feelings, we slept back to back all night. We were un-

Continued on p. 6

An Enjoyable September Meeting

Chris Winter, Secretary

The fall meeting of the Batavia Historical Society began in the city council chambers with the election of officers. The members approved the following slate of officers and directors: Patty Rosenberg, Vice President; Marilyn Robinson, Historian; Georgene Kauth, Corresponding Secretary; Directors, Bob Brown, Carole Dunn, Alma Karas, Gary King, and John White.

After the brief business meeting, the members traveled to the farm and cabin site of John and Mary Lou White on Main Street. John shared the story of how they purchased the 1840s cabin from the Aquila Cook family in Richland County, Wisconsin, and transported and reconstructed it on their property. There are many bits of local history behind the primitive pieces that are beautifully placed inside the cabin. The porch flooring was constructed from planks that came from a Challenge Company water tower that once stood on the Warne farm on Seavey Road. The pine floor inside the cabin was cut from trees that were sheared by a tornado on a neighboring farm on Main Street. The fireplace mantel came from the John Bartelt farm and the hearth stone from Oakley Skow's farm on Bartelt Road. Batavia windmill weights and an iron Sperry cauldron are prominently displayed on the stone fireplace.

The sunny September weather and the hospitality shared by the Whites made a most memorable day!



Whites' 1840s Cabin

Membership Matters

Since the last issue, we have added as life members the following, who were previously annual members (from Batavia unless otherwise noted): Richard Riseling (Callicoon Center, NY), Spillane & Sons, and Robbin Hall Wheatley. Other new members include John Anderson, (North Aurora), Betty Boyd (San Jose, California), Alan Drover (gift of Ruth Burnham), Ronald G. and Julie Fessler, Emily C. Kaus (Montgomery), William R. LeKander (Springfield, MO), Josephine Melgoza, Doris K. Miller, Debra Petges, Mrs. Alan (Donna Schiedler) Read (Indianapolis, IN), Janet A. Siers (Gilberts), and Gary Woods.

We regret to report the deaths of Sally Adams, a life member whose 100th birthday was reported in the April 2005 issue; George "Johnny" Hansford; and Mary F. Mullen.

We received gifts in memory of Robert W. Conde from Georgene Schramer and Kenneth C. and Jacqueline R. Upham; in memory of Jerry Harris from Eric and Michele Nelson (Jerry's daughter) and Norm and Laura Salamone; in memory of Lorraine Harwig from Eldon and Jo Frydendall, Jeff and Barbara Gross and Pearl Swanson; in memory of Hazel Hawse from James R. Anderson; in memory of Eleanor Johnson from Batavia Senior Citizens Club; in memory of Mary F. Mullen from Den-

nis Erford, Thomas Peterson, Patrick Sage and Edward Symons; in memory of their parents, Henry and Mayme Theis and Leo and Margaret Groener, from Ray and Anita Theis; in memory of Bill Wood from James R. Anderson, Ruth Burnham, Bill and Barbara Hall, Gerald and Karen Miller,

Alma Karas and Yangling Zhang, Bob and Rhonda Nelson, Loraine Peddy and Timothy Renaud.

We also received a gift from Polly Ernzen in honor of the Hills' 40th Anniversary and undesignated gifts from Robert W. Buchanan and from Byrc and Gerry Nelson.

Our Wedding in Difficult Times

Continued from p. 5

aware of a bad thunderstorm during the night, which soaked a spot on the bare floor by the open window. A hug and a kiss in the morning made us ready for a happy day ahead.

After visiting Cliff's former football coach in Minneapolis, we were on our way to Rochester. After spending two days there, we returned to our new apartment on Jackson Street in Batavia. Jennie Peterson, Cliff's aunt, who was the church organist, owned the house and lived upstairs.

The apartment was beautiful. I was eager to learn to use the electric stove, refrigerator with freezer on top, indoor bathroom with hot and cold running water, and a new kitchen table with four matching chairs. They were stained a pale green. It was like a dream come true.

The first morning after our trip, Cliff set our little kitchen table with our pretty new dishes. He said he wanted bacon and eggs -- I had thought cold

cereal! He then went outside and said, "Call me when it's ready." It took so long for the electric burner to get warm. I put a slice of bacon in the pan, thinking it would take a long time. I peeled an orange for each of us and turned around to see our bacon burned to a crisp. I turned the burner down and fried an egg for each of us. The eggs burned to charcoal. Cliff thought breakfast should be ready. Why hadn't the burner cooled off? Right then I decided we would have to get another stove.

To add to my problem, Cliff came into the kitchen along with his next-door cousin, Esther, our first guest. I believe the old saying: "When a bride marries, she marries more than a husband, she marries a family." But I learned to love all of those dear Swedish people.

And, best of all, Cliff's and my happy marriage is still going strong after 66 years.

Don Carlos Newton's 60th Birthday Recalls Advances Seen in His Lifetime August 1892

Don Carlos Newton is best known in the history of Batavia for being president of the Newton Wagon Company, founded by his father Levi Newton. He also served as a captain in the Union Army during the Civil War. We are grateful to Marilyn Robinson for finding and sharing with us the remarks he made during the celebration of his 60th birthday.

By Marilyn Robinson

Don Carlos Newton was born in Alexander, New York, on August 26, 1832. He came to Batavia when he was about 22 years old in 1854.

In August 1892, forty relatives and friends gave him a surprise party to celebrate his 60th birthday. The Rock City Band and Miss May Wolcott provided music. Miss Mattie Prindle, Oscar Cooley, and H. N. Wade sang songs. Rev. R. I. Fleming gave a Bible reading, and Prof. William H. Crawford gave a humorous one.

D. C. Newton expressed his appreciation by telling about Batavia when he first came here. He lauded his mother and his wife. Unfortunately, these words were not preserved. But his reminiscences about his early childhood were and I found them in the collection of John Gustafson's papers. He had copied them from Mrs. Jack Schimelpfenig's scrapbook.

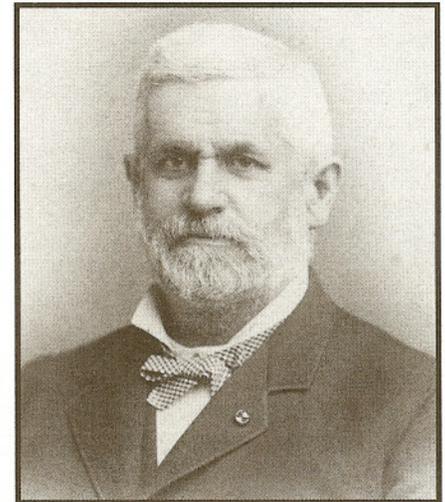
Capt. Newton's remarks tell us how seeing a modern convenience for the first time frightened a young lad. They also show that people's reactions have not changed much. Captain Newton's fright at seeing his first locomotive wasn't much different from mine when as a young girl, I heard my first jet airplane flying overhead. I wanted to run from what sounded like constant thunder. It was only after hearing more planes that I could identify the new noise coming from a clear sky.

The captain told of improvements that had come since he was born in 1832. "Well do I remember that cold, snow day in the winter of 1841 when the first pioneer locomotive came down near the town where I lived [in New York] through what was called the deep cut and blew her whistle, the first one that had ever reverberated through those hills. How we boys left school and ran up there some three-

quarters of a mile and walked through the snow, until we stood in its presence, almost awe struck. How, while I stood there with uplifted hands warming myself, the whistle blew. How quickly I turned and ran through the deep snow until I could run no farther and turned to see what had become of the engine for I had no doubt but that the boiler had burst. (I had read of such an occurrence, and only three fragments would be found of it.)

"A few years later, some men came along the railroad track, putting up poles, and soon after some others stringing wires. In those days, I had to go after cows and as the pasture was across the railroad track, I started one night a little early, thinking I would study out the mysteries of the telegraph. I sat down by a pole, and for minutes intently watched the point, where the wire was wrapped around the glass to see if I could detect the passing of a letter. I failed. I did not know the message passed through the wire and not over it.

"A few years ago, while away from home, a Chicago friend wrote me of the wonders of the telephone. How they had connected Chicago and Milwaukee, and that a concert could be given in Chicago and listened to in Milwaukee. I did not understand it. I could not understand it. I do not understand it yet.



Don Carlos Newton

"Just think of it. During these 60 years that the great U. S. has increased in population more than 50,000,000 and in riches nearly 1 billion. I do not know as my coming and being here had anything to do with it. I do not know as I am to blame. In all the world's history this has been the grandest time to live. We have lived more, seen more, and perhaps have learned more than 5 generations of our ancestors. There has been more to see, more to learn and men live more than ever before.

"Again my friends I thank you."

Imagine what D. C. Newton could have seen had he not died the following year, October 1893.

Scratch Two "Sears" Houses

In the last issue we updated our early story on Batavia's Sears houses with pictures of additional ones identified by Rebecca Hunter of Elgin. Readers have challenged the identification in the case of two of these houses, both on Madison Street.

Bess Dougherty wrote us: "The one listed for 221 Madison Street is not a Sears. It was built in 1947 and 1948 by Carl Anderson (Dirty Doc), and Jack and Bess purchased it in 1949. We lived there until Feb. 2000. Carl built it and lived in the basement until it was sold."

Ben Hansford of Elgin called and said that the house at 446 Madison is not a Sears house. As we recall, he told us in the telephone conversation that he was the one who built the house. He has promised to send us information on that and other matters of interest.

We are satisfied that this information, which comes firsthand, is correct, and we shall remove these homes from our "inventory" of Sears houses. We would point out, however, that it is not incompatible for a house to be a Sears house and still to have been built by the first owner. After all, especially in the earlier years, all that Sears provided were material and instructions. In many cases, one of which Beverly Waterfield described with respect to her father in the January, 2003, issue, the purchaser did all the work except possibly for basement excavation and wiring.

The Story of Josephine Melgoza Continued from p. 2

systems engineer with IBM. My daughter, Linnea, lives on North Avenue. She is married to Bill Funk and has Linnea's Skin Care on River Street, across from the bank. My other son, Phillip, is a barber and works in one of the shops in St. Charles."

Asked how a Mexican family selected the name Linnea, Josephine said, "When I was twelve years old and lived in Ottawa, I helped clean homes. I worked for a Dr. Carter's wife, and her little girl was Linnea. I liked the name, and I said to my sisters, 'If I ever get married and have a little girl, that's going to be her name.' When I worked for Anne Johnson, she told me, 'That's a Swedish name -- did you know that, Josephine?' I didn't know that until she told me."

"Do you ever go back to Guanajuato, the part of Mexico that your family came from?" we inquired.

"Un huh. We still have the home of our grandparents there, which we would like to sell. I am the youngest, and it's time for us to get rid of it."

"Aren't your children interested?" "No," Josephine replied, "they travel on conducted tours. Several years ago before my husband had a stroke, I urged my kids, 'Please come and see how we fixed up everything here, before it's sold.' But they haven't been back since. My daughter said, 'You spend more money here, Mom, than if you go on a tour where everything is planned for you.' And it is true. But Guanajuato is beautiful -- it's my favorite city, even more than San Miguel de Allende."

"When did your husband die?" we inquired. "In 2002. He had a stroke in 1999 -- we happened to be in Mexico, right there in Guanajuato. We were staying along with friends at the Hotel Luna where there are all the mariachis every night. I brought him home on the plane. My daughter was on the phone constantly and said, 'Mom, you had better be sure he is all right because once he is on that plane, they are responsible for you.' So I told my husband, 'Please, be strong, and he said, 'I'm okay, I'm okay.' Once we got here, we took him over to emergency at Provena. And it was a stroke."

"He recovered all right -- I would say almost 90 or 95%. But that's when I realized that we had better do something. So we went a couple of times to Arizona because my daughter liked it so, and then we bought property there. He loved it. I liked it, too, but after he died, I came back. That's a place for couples. I thought, 'I don't even have a cousin out there.'"

Even at the time of her husband's death, Josephine's sense of humor came through. As she tells it, Bryan Moss at the funeral home was going over the paperwork with her and asked, "Are you the legal next-of-kin?" to which Josephine replied, "I am an American." They repeated this confusing exchange a couple of times before they discovered that Josephine thought she was being asked, "Are you an illegal Mexican?" She tells this story with one of her frequent laughs.

So now Josephine is settled for good in Batavia, her home for over 50 years, near her sisters, a son and a daughter, and her two grandchildren. Her life is another story of the ethnic experience, be it Mexican, Swedish, African or what have you, assimilating into the American way of life -- as she says, "in a fine community like Batavia, with the good leadership of our mayor."

SAVE OUR HISTORY!

Thank goodness for Marjorie Withers! And may there be others like her. When we first saw her story in this issue entitled "Remembering the Borg House" and saw how her idea of "getting rid of things" led to our getting irreplaceable family documents, we had a distressing thought. How often may people in her situation, no longer living in Batavia, have solved their "cleaning out" problems by throwing such items in the trash? What may we have lost of our history because it ended up in the hands of people who no longer had a Batavia connection?

We are pleading with you not to let that happen. If you have photographs, documents, scrapbooks or other documents or artifacts that are relevant to our history, let the Society have them for the Depot Museum. If they are items that you or your family wish to retain, we will be glad to make copies for our archives and return the originals to you. Just call Carla Hill or Chris Winter at the museum -- (630) 406-5274.

Help preserve Batavia's history!

WHAT'S NEW AT THE MUSEUM?

Carla Hill, Director

It is hard to believe that fall is quickly approaching. This summer has been a busy time for us at the museum. This summer marked the 14th anniversary of the summer passport program that brings families from all over the Chicago area into the museum.

We also took part in the new Batavia Fine Arts Festival. Chris Winter has been busy working on new displays for the museum. Her latest exhibit, "Batteries Not Included," featuring games and pastimes from the past has received many compliments.

In August the Coffin Bank received a much-needed new coat of paint, thanks to the efforts of Henry Carlson who arranged for the work to be done as his Eagle Scout project.

Chris and I are continuing to work on new programs and trips that are being offered through the museum, including the ever-popular trip to the Newberry Library. We have ordered the 2005 ornament for the museum, which will feature the Newton Wagon Company. As in the past the museum volunteers will receive the ornament as a gift at the annual museum volunteer Christmas party.

We are looking forward to a great fall and winter season at the museum. Always anyone interested in volunteering at the museum should contact Kathy Fairbairn at 406-9041 or Chris and Carla at the museum at 406-5274.

Immanuel Lutheran Church Band

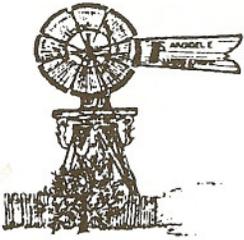


Undated - probably c. 1900

The Immanuel Lutheran Church Band: organization and individuals identified by Harold C. Miller, 217 State St., Batavia, Illinois.

Seated, left to right: Jake Follmer, Henry Jordan, August Jordan, Fred Haringe, George Thrun, Max Thrun, Edwin Miller, Julius Prehn

Standing, left to right: Herman Plautz, Bill Schwerer, August Miller, Professor John Geiss (director), Ed Jordan, Harry Jaschob, Otto Mier, Alfred Wilke



Batavia Historical Society

P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

BATAVIA, IL 60510
PERMIT NO. 291

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Officers

President: Richard A. Benson
V.P. & Program Chairman: Patty Rosenberg
Recording Secretary: Christine Winter
Corresponding Secretary: Georgene Kauth
Treasurer: Gerald Miller
Historian: Marilyn Robinson

Directors

Robert V. Brown
Carole Dunn
Philip B. Elfstrom
Alma Karas
Gary King
Robert F. Peterson
John White

Editor: William D. Hall
Museum Director: Carla Hill

Mr. & Mrs. James Hanson
932 Gosselin Circle
Batavia, IL 60510-4511

• If you would like to give a membership as a gift, send the above information and dues to the Society and indicate in the box above that it is to be a gift. The gift membership card will be mailed to you so that you may enclose it with a personal card or note.
• You may put your name, address, and membership category on a separate sheet if you do not want to clip the above form.

Prompt payment of dues is appreciated!

This membership is being given as a gift

Mail to:
Treasurer
Batavia Historical Society
P.O. Box 14
Batavia, Illinois 60510

- Individual \$10.00
- Joint/Family \$15.00
- Junior \$2.00
- Classroom \$5.00
- Life (each) \$100.00
- Life (family) \$150.00
- Business or Institution \$50.00
- Business or Institution Life \$150.00

Dues Structure:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Batavia Historical Society Membership 2005