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Historical Society at 50

Sammi King first wrote this article for the Daily Herald in January 2010.

Fifty years ago, a group of 22 men and women from the community met with the intention of preserving the town’s history. Some were local business people. Some were members of families who had their own rich history in our town. Others came out of a love of, not just the town, but a love of history in general.

The date of the first organizational meeting of the Batavia Historical Society took place on January 17, 1960 in the basement of the Batavia Congregational Church. There were forty-five founding members present at the first meeting. Robert Glidden, Raymond Patzer and Martha Wood were given the task of nominating officers, drawing up a constitution and establishing a museum.

“I had always been interested in history so I went down for the meeting,” said founding member, Betty Stephano. “I remember we had a small

storefront on Batavia Avenue and we would display things there.”

Stephano realized the importance of preserving history early on. One incident had a major impact on her.

“We purchased a home on north River St and I found some letters from the Civil War. I took them to the previous owner because I thought they really belonged to her family,” said Stephano. “I couldn’t believe it when she took the letters and burned them right in front of me.”

The first slate of officers for the Batavia Historical Society included Eunice Shumway, President; Sallie Krueger, Vice-president; Miriam Johnson, Secretary; Ray Patzer, treasurer and Malcom Derby, Philip Carlson, Viola McDowell and Carl More as Trustees. John Gustafson was appointed the Historian.

“John Gustafson had spent a great deal of time prior to that

meeting poring over magazines and newspapers and collecting much of Batavia’s history,” said Carla Hill, Batavia Depot Museum Curator. “Many of those original members, like Eunice Shumway and



the entire Gustafson family had been documenting our history long before the society was organized.

One of the initial projects of the society was the plaquing of homes and buildings dating 100 years or more.

The society has always been interested in collecting information that is important to Batavia's history. Whether it is a piece of clothing worn by an early settler or a photograph from a high school event, the Depot museum staff and their volunteers have documented and recorded everything for future generations. That even included an acquisition of 160 boxes of records from the Kane County court house in the 1990's.

One of the biggest moments in the society's history occurred on October 12 1973. That was the day that the CB&Q Depot left its home at Webster and VanBuren and traveled through town to its present location on Houston. The Depot acquisition was a tremendous community effort. A group of local business men and women raised the necessary \$31,000 to pay for the move and volunteers painted and restored it. The city waived all fees and the old depot moved very slowly through town "Nine blocks, one hill and a bridge away" to its final destination. A year later, the C.B. and Q caboose moved to the museum grounds. Since that time the museum has increased its space with the addition of the Coffin Bank, the Gunzhauser/ Smith gazebo and the addition of the Gustafson Research Center.

In 1998, the Historical Society's Board took on the long range plan of adding a research center to the existing depot. The society realized the need for a place where documents could be stored. They felt it was important for researchers to have a place where they could access important information about Batavia and the families who have called this community home.

Through special funding and the support of the park district, the Gustafson Research Center became a reality.

"History is an important part of our lives," said Hill. "And it's also important to those who move here or are visiting our community."

Charter Members

The following members of the Batavia Historical Society have been with us from the beginning, over 50 years! Please take the time to thank them for their continued interest and support in Batavia's history.

Mrs. Jeanette Anderson
Mrs. Robert V. Brown
Ruth D. Burnham
Mrs. Mary Conde
Dorothy Patzer
Jeffery Schielke
Betty Stephano
Lloyd W. Wood

Membership Renewal

It's that time of year again. **Membership renewal time.** If your newsletter mailing label has "2009" in the upper right-hand corner, your membership is expiring with this issue of the newsletter. If you want to keep receiving the *Batavia Historian*, please detach or copy the renewal form on the back of the newsletter and send your membership in to the address indicated. We look forward to continuing to hear from you.

New Student Members – Thank you to Nancy Hubbard and her 3rd Grade students from the Grace McWayne Elementary School who participated in the presentation at the May Historical Society Meeting. In appreciation of their efforts, the Board of Directors has presented them Honorary Junior memberships.

Demie Anderson
Allison Bleakley
Julia Bobosky
Ezri Faivre
Sean Fegan
Taylor Fleury
Alexis Hamann

Connor Keiken
Callaway Knecht
Victoria Maddox
Isabelle Mole
Valerie Nelson
Abigail Spengler
Sydney Tschosik

A NICKEL A QUART

By Patty Vest Mugavero

More than anything, I remember the silence. In the late fifties and early sixties, South Forest Avenue was at the very edge of Batavia. Mr. Dahlstrom's cows were pastured on the corner of Forest and Pine, across the road from where his farmhouse and barn were located; and, at Raddant Road, true countryside began. In an age before air conditioned cars, we'd ride, windows fully open, into a land filled with wonderful odors, like timothy grass, growing in abundance. Woodland Hills had yet to be developed and the fields and full-grown oaks behind my home and running the length of South Forest lured me, for countless explorations. It was so quiet that we noticed any cars traveling down our road. To this day, I cannot fall asleep to "human noise" because of my childhood years spent listening to evening birds, crickets and other sounds of nature, as I lay in bed awaiting my dreams. Nature was, indeed, prominent and respected.

Just up the street, to the north, lay Cleveland Avenue, where Mae and Eddie Waterbury had what would be best described as a small truck farm. On perhaps two acres, she and her husband grew produce such as sweet corn, green beans and strawberries. It seemed like a lot of land, in part because their house was a tiny and simple frame structure, covered with the brown-hued shingling familiar to that era. The front door, as I recall, seemed to miraculously swell to allow the bulk of Mae Waterbury to enter and exit. I'd never before seen a woman like her. She was a large woman, who always wore flannel shirts and faded loose blue jeans, more like what a man would wear, at that time. Her husband Eddie was a small thin man, much shorter than she and a full generation older than Mae. I don't recall ever hearing him speak.

Out front, at the edge of their gravel driveway, there was a wooden stand, its planks painted yellow years before, where the produce was sold. It was a bit smaller, but very similar to the fruit and vegetable stand at the Theis farm, one of the neighborhood farms faded to memory by the development of Fermi Lab. Mae alone manned that stand and I can remember Eddie coming and going in his small pickup truck. He was a butcher by trade and worked for a local meat market. They were both originally from Southern Illinois. Mae's accent held a definite drawl.

Mornings in June, after J. B. Nelson School was finished for the summer, my sister Darlene Vest O'Neill and I would walk past the woods, the creek, and the few homes on our road, chatting as we walked to "work." Mae Waterbury paid us a nickel a quart for the strawberries we would pick. In her cheerful, booming voice, she'd "eye" our morning's work, ask us how many, and then count out the change. How rich I felt at the end of a few hours, walking home with 35 or 40 cents jingling in my hand! No doubt the majority of my earnings benefited Bortner's or Maves' store, where I could get a small paper bag, stuffed with penny candy (some items two for a penny!) which would last me a week. My sister, who was older and more prudent, must have saved some of her earnings.

Squatting in the rows, under blue skies and hearing mostly songbirds or quiet chatter of other children picking, I would discretely eat my fill of that juicy fruit as I also filled the square tan baskets, placed in wooden trays for the purpose of carrying our bounty, from row to unpicked row. Decades before I had even heard of the word "organic" I must have known what it was intrinsically because those berries were delicious. I don't remember ever finding a spoiled berry and I highly doubt that chemicals were used. Karen Johnson Gay prides herself on never, in years of picking for Mae Waterbury, eating a single berry. To this day, whenever Karen smells strawberries, her mind takes her immediately back to those days and those fields. She and her sister Martha Johnson Poe worked each summer for their spending money for summer vacation and for the Kane County Fair. Without this work, they would have had no extra money. Sammi Maier King recalls that her sister Maripat Maier Krueger (no doubt a sampler like me) would come home from picking with a red-rimmed mouth. I think I was so fond of and so accustomed to the quiet that I spent my strawberry picking time alone in my thoughts, oblivious to my surroundings. That's the way I still am, when I work with the land. My sister and I probably only picked for a few hours, in the morning after chores were done, and we were always home before lunch. Time was so slowed as a child that those dew-covered strawberry fields of early morning seemed to stretch lazily into summer days that went on

forever. We were grateful for something to fill our time before the Quarry opened at 1:00 P.M. and we could ride our bikes there for afternoon swimming. Strawberry season probably lasted into the later part of June. Karen and Martha went back later in the season, and picked green beans. But my siblings and I had mostly three whole months of open time to spend each summer and it did seem endless – in a wonderfully magic way.

Tim Sipes recalls picking strawberries for Mae Waterbury along with friend Jim Castner. What Tim remembers most is that we were all instructed to “heap the baskets” full of as many strawberries as we could possibly fit and then Mae would make ten quarts out of the nine we children had picked. Karen Johnson Gay can remember that practice as well. No doubt it was Mae’s way to best profit from the brief season.

Sue Blankenship moved with her young family to Cleveland Avenue in the late 1960s. By then, Mae was alone and she worked the land with the help of a few young people. Sue recalls Mae’s friendship with Sue Armentrout and that Sue’s son Mike lived with Mae at that time. “My kids – all of us – we just loved her,” says Sue. Sitting in her little house, visiting Mae, Sue remembers it to be quaint and simple, with just curtains between the rooms. Sue was a young mother and Mae’s home, to Sue, seemed full of over-stuffed furniture and like a “typical old person’s home.”

Martha Johnson Poe, who, after marriage, moved next door to the Waterbury place, would also visit her former employer in that tiny home. “It was fun to visit with her,” says Martha. “She was easy to talk to and we just chatted about everyday stuff, on Sunday mornings.” By that time, in the late 1970s, Mae, a widow for about a decade, had let the fields go to seed. She sold her property and was the eighth person to move into Riverain Apartments when it opened, in 1982. Martha was still living next door and witnessed the small home blaze to a memory when the Batavia Fire Department had a practice burn on the site.

Just how old the home was and how long had it been a truck farm remains an unknown. Tim Sipes’ uncle, Kenneth Isbell, picked strawberries on the property in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Along with his brothers Lester and Steve, Kenneth picked the produce for pennies, his choice, since it made his earnings look like more. Kurt Maves, who lived down the street from the Waterburys, recalls

Mae’s voice as “gravely” yet with sweetness to it. It’s a voice that I still vaguely hear, from somewhere deep in my memory. Early on, there were chickens on their place, as well; and eggs had been sold at the stand along with the head lettuce, cabbage, and red potatoes, Kurt remembers. Although he had picked strawberries for Otto Meier, when Cleveland Avenue was a mere road with open land both north and south of it, just a bit east of the Waterbury place, Kurt’s sister Cordie picked for the Waterburys. Kurt’s memories extend back to the mid 1940s and he can only remember Mae and Eddie Waterbury living on the property. “They were such wonderful people, just a delight,” says Kurt, who added, “Everyone enjoyed them so much.”

Jean Rompel moved into Riverain a few months ahead of Mae Waterbury. Although busy with her ailing husband, Jean knew Mae slightly, and she had left a positive impression on her. Sue Blankenship again encountered Mae Waterbury when Sue’s mother-in-law, Ora, got one of the first apartments at Riverain. By then Mae had moved on from her “farmer jeans” and wore slacks – or an occasional dress. She was still an outgoing person, as Sue recalls, and well liked in her new home. In an album from the early years of Riverain, there are scattered photos of Mae and an account of her going to Disneyworld with another resident. She stood out, taller than most of the others in the photos, but Mae had become thin. She had begun wearing glasses and her teeth, perfectly even, look false. From an interview at Riverain in May of 1987, just after a recent hospitalization, Mae was described as enjoying her life there, especially her walks along nearby Fox River. Even then, she spoke of “the good old days” as better, when people “cooperated” and “helped each other.” Mae described her childhood as one of “hard work” but that she was grateful for the values working had given her.

Mae Waterbury was born on a farm on May 4, 1901. She lost her mother when she was just three and her father remarried, eventually bringing the family to a total of 16. She went to a one room schoolhouse. Mae married a man from the area and the couple moved to Aurora. She was a widow when she met and married Eddie, in 1942. They purchased the property and moved to Cleveland Avenue that year. Mae never had a child. Her friend Sue Armentrout had health issues and moved into Riverain, sometime after Mae, as a woman only

in her 50s. It was Sue's son Mike whom Mae informally adopted as the son she never had, caring for him as a child and keeping photos of him on prominent display. Just months after that interview, on December 7, 1987, Mae Waterbury died. She and Eddie are buried in River Hills Memorial Park, with a simple marker and the saying, "*In God's Loving Arms.*"

Truly in another world and another time, children always addressed elders by "Mr." or "Mrs." and adults, whose demeanor really was more formal than it is today, seemed absolutely ancient to our young eyes and limited experience. Mae was unusually spry and active for a woman in her late fifties and early sixties, at a time when most women lead more sedate lives. No doubt there are others in the community with stories of picking produce for

the Waterburys. Maybe it was not even the peak time of their truck farm, this story that I recall. But this is my story – and that of my peers – that documents memories of a time we can only poorly begin to explain to a world long moved beyond a simple truck farm, the opportunities it gave to neighborhood children, and the link we all had, at least at one time, to the immediate satisfaction of hand-picked fruit, an innocent joy we have no doubt missed. A shadow of our childlike selves still yearns for one last taste, one last smell, one last and gentle reminder from Mae not to "pick any green 'uns, hear?" as our young fingers reach out tentatively for one last and delicious link to the land we had all so intimately known.

Editors Notes

We are in need of stories and photos about the bowling alley. Please send your thoughts to the Editor at king60510@aol.com, or mail them to *The Batavia Historian*, 1117 Main St. Batavia, IL 60510.

Did you leave a winter scarf at Bethany Lutheran Church after the December Potluck? The staff at Bethany found a black scarf and it is being held in the church office. Call Mary at 879-3444 for more information.

We apologize for not letting you know about the postponement of the winter newsletter. Since there wasn't sufficient interest in holding a special event, we plan to do a special edition of the newsletter this fall commemorating fifty years of Batavia's history.

We will soon be looking for stories about Batavia Schools in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of our schools. Do you have any recollections about a certain school? Did you have grandparents who shared stories about the East and West high schools or playing basketball at the gym that still exists in the Hubbard's Ethan Allen building? We're looking for stories about schools in Batavia for a future issue.

Calling All Boy Scouts!

2010 is a landmark year that commemorates 100 years of Boys Scouts in America. The Depot Museum is planning an exhibit this fall that will feature Scouting in Batavia and we're asking for your help. If you still have Scout uniforms, caps, badges, merit pins, or photos that we might include in this exhibit, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact Chris Winter at 406-5274. We are particularly searching for a picture of the Boy Scout cabin that was along the west bank of the Fox River. Please search your attic, your brother's attic, your parent's attic and let us know if you have a picture of this cabin!

We are also working with the Boy Scout Troops and Cub Scout Packs to have a community celebration on the Riverwalk on Saturday, August 28. This event will feature Scouting skill demonstrations, relay races, a Scout talent show, fishing on the pond, pinewood derby races, and much more. It should be fun for young and old; something for the Scout in each of us. So, mark your calendar now and watch for more details in the Summer!

News From the Museum

by Carla Hill, Depot Museum Director

The museum has re-opened on March 8, for the 2010 season.

Spring was a very busy months at the museum. We gave tours to approximately 600 Batavia school children that visited the museum as part of the third grade Batavia history unit. Chris Winter has once again put together a wonderful exhibit "Batteries Not Included", which is a fun exhibit that includes vintage toys and games that are run by the power of your imagination. Be sure to stop in and see this very interesting display.

This year promises to be a very exciting one. The museum

will host its fourth annual Batavia Quilt and Textile show on July 16, 17 and 18. The show promises to be even better than last year. We will once again be looking for volunteers to help out at the show. Everyone who volunteers for a two or three hour shift will receive free admission to the show. If you are interested in volunteering for the show, contact Chris or Carla at the Museum by calling 630-406-5274.

The museum is also sponsoring a Mary Todd Lincoln Strawberry Tea Civil War Era Fashion Show at the Batavia Park District Eastside Community

Center, Shannon Hall on Sunday, August 1. The event will include several noted Mary Lincoln presenters as well as tea, coffee and assorted desserts. Tickets for the event will go on sale after May 15.

We are looking forward to a great Summer!

We are always looking for new volunteers at the museum, especially for the Gustafson Research Center. If you are interested in volunteering, call Lois Benson at 630 879-1080 or the museum at 630 406-5274.

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter:

Bailey Moffitt, Batavia IL
Arlene Martenson, N. Aurora IL
Julia Dawson, Batavia IL
Kyle Hohmann, Batavia IL
Linda M. Berg, Greenville WI
Diane Lavoy, Geneva IL
Kim & Sherry Carlson, Aurora IL
Laura Aanenson, Champlin MN

Cynthia & Tracy O'Connell, Geneva IL, gift of Betty Wormwood.
Greg & Sharon Cryer, Batavia IL, gift of Rick and Sandy Eckblade.
Luane Tharrington, Oklahoma City OK, gift of Norma and Nancy Freedlund.
Susan & Steve Lusted, Batavia IL, gift of Betty Wormwood
Linda G. Maves, Batavia IL, gift of Mary Hayes
Jean Bailey, Oxnard CA, gift of Gerry Miller.
Todd Montgomery, Batavia IL, gift of Sandi Moreland.
Barbara Bigelow, Ketchikan AK, gift of E. Louise Tregellas
Nellie Blacksmith, Batavia IL, and Milton Samuelson of Batavia IL, gifts of Muriel Samuelson
Kim & Sherry Carlson, Aurora IL
Ralph & Roberta Jaschob, Park Rapids MN
Mary Ann Leonhardt, Chula Vista CA

In addition, the following people have joined or upgraded to Life Membership status. Thank you very much:

Noreen & Kathy Jasinski, Batavia IL, upgraded to Life
Jody Switzer, Batavia IL, upgraded to Life

Barbara Barajas of Batavia, and Ken Anderson, Hilton Head SC, gifts of Gary and Nancy Anderson
Batavia Women's Club, upgraded to Life
Harry Beresford, Valparaiso IN
Barbara Bigelow, Ketchikan AK, gift of Louise Tregellas
Paul Mileris of Omaha NE

SANBORN MAPS – PART 1

By Marj Holbrook

Sanborn maps introduction

The Depot Museum is fortunate to have a collection of some Sanborn maps. These huge maps, which need to be spread on a table, were published by the Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Limited, in New York City from the mid-1800s to about 1963 and depicted buildings in every community in the United States.

The maps were used by insurance underwriters to determine insurance costs, especially in the event of fire. The diagrams indicated the type of building – wood frame, brick, stone, etc. – the prevailing winds, information about fire protection and other pertinent data. They also showed streets, property lines, rivers, streams and railroad tracks.

This year, the museum has received 8.5 by 11-inch copies of some maps from 1885, 1891, 1897, 1907, 1916 and 1928. The copies were made by Steve Lorenz of Somonauk, a friend of Dan Holbrook's, from material available temporarily on the University of Michigan web-site. Until the maps were made available on the web site, they had to be purchased from the company.

Sanborn maps/Batavia fire fighting and water supply

Today, Batavia has top-quality fire protection and water supply. Residents expect quick response from trained firefighters who use expensive equipment to protect homes and industries throughout the town. They also expect – and receive –

outstanding care from paramedics, some of whom also are firefighters.

The city has two almost-new fire stations, one on each side of town, complete with training facilities, bunk rooms, state-of-the-art communication and even space for small community meetings.

More than 100 years ago, Batavia's water facilities, in regard to fire protection, was "not good" according to the 1891 map produced by Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Limited of New York City.

The company's comprehensive maps show every building in town and chart the progress of the city in its efforts to supply water for fire protection, industries and residences. The maps also list other city improvements over the years.

October 1885: The company data in the top right corner of the first page in 1885 says Batavia had a population of 4,000. For fire fighting, the community had one hand engine and independent hand carts.

October 1891: Conditions hadn't improved. The map says water for factories is "not good." The town had no fire department, one hand engine which was not in good order, and one hose cart with 1,000 feet of hose.

December 1897: Batavia now had a water works owned by the city with a water supply from a 1,300 foot deep artesian well and a reservoir of 4,500 gallons. The pumping capacity was 1.5 million gallons in 24 hours. Batavia also had a fire department

of 26 men, partly paid, but no fire alarm system. It had two hose carts. The community also had 9.5 miles of water pipe which ranged from 4 to 10 inches in diameter; 13 triple and 47 double hydrants. But streets were not paved.

January 1907: Water supply – and protection – had improved. The Sanborn map indicates water came from one 1,300-foot-deep artesian well; two cisterns, one holding 4,500 gallons, the other 5,000 gallons, which were filled from the well. Water pressure for fighting fires was 100 to 110 pounds per square inch. There also were 13 triple and 53 double hydrants.

August 1916: Batavia had public electric lights! The population was 5,000 and the city had a direct pressure system of water works owned and operated by the city. There were two deep wells, 1,300 and 2,000 feet; pumping capacity of 143 gallons per minute and 96 double and 12 triple hydrants. The volunteer fire department had 30 members, three hose carts, and 3,000 feet of rubber-lined cotton hose. There was a fire alarm whistle at city hall. The city also had one day and one night policeman and a half-mile of brick paving.

June 1928: The city's population remained at 5,000, but city utilities had improved. Firefighters had a direct pressure water system from two deep wells and 20 miles of water pipe ranging from 4 to 10-inch size. The fire department had a full-time chief, two partly-paid firefighters, and 17 volunteers

who were paid on a per-call basis. It also had a fire station on South Island (now Shumway) Avenue at First Street. The station housed a Persch combination truck with hose, chemical and pump. And fire alarms were by whistle and telephone. The fire station was north of City Hall which also housed the city's electric and water departments.

Sanborn maps/City of Batavia

In 1885, Batavia had a roller skating rink on North Water Street. The rink was about where the Methodist Church now has its parking lot and Hubbard's Home Furnishings has its office specializing in business furniture. This was decades before Funway opened its roller rink and entertainment center on south Route 25.

That early roller rink is shown on a detailed map published by the Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Limited of New York City. The Depot Museum recently received maps from 1885, 1891, 1899, 1907, 1916 and 1928. The series shows Batavia's growth in buildings, manufacturing, merchandising, schools, churches and streets over a period of 43 years.

The 1885 maps show lots of open space in the burgeoning community, but also document industry lining the Fox River and "the pond."

Churches

Batavia was a city of churches:

In 1885, the Congregational Church was at its present site on South Batavia Avenue but did not have its two additions. The church is the oldest in Kane County.

Bethany Lutheran Church was on South Washington Street (now Lincoln Street).

The Methodist Episcopal Church was at the northeast corner of South Washington and First Street. The limestone building was originally built as a church, was later a Batavia Public School and is now Buttrey-Wolfe Insurance Agency. By 1891, the present Methodist Church facing Batavia Avenue was completed.

In 1885 and 1891, Holy Cross Catholic Church was on the east side of Batavia Avenue north of where the Batavia Methodist Church now stands. By 1897, the church had completed its handsome limestone sanctuary at East Wilson and Van Buren streets. The church building is now the East Side Community Center owned and operated by the Batavia Park District.

In 1897, the plat shows the Swedish Methodist Church at McKee and North Washington streets.

The 1885 map shows a Baptist Church in the middle of the block of North Washington Avenue, but the corner of Washington and Wilson was vacant. The congregation later built there by 1891. That church building is now vacant; this past year the congregation moved several miles west and was renamed as Faith Baptist Church of Mill Creek.

Streets

The late 1800s must have been a confusing time for people trying to find an address in Batavia. Several streets on both sides of the river had the same names.

There were two Jackson, two Jefferson and two Washington streets. On the east side of the river, Jefferson Street extended south from Wilson on what is now Route 25 (River Street) One block east Jackson Street went south from Wilson across Webster to Laurel Street. On the west side, Jefferson and Jackson streets were in the same place they are today.

While the other duplicate names were changed earlier, the Washington name was not resolved until February 1967 when the City Council voted to change the name of Washington Street on the west side to Lincoln Street.

In 1907, the plat shows that Mallory Avenue replaced Lincoln Avenue on the city's far west side.

There were other name changes: Today's Harrison Street on the west side was formerly Commercial Street. And South Street on the east side has long been known as State Street.

In 1891, Cottage Street on the east side was renamed College Street. In 1916, Fayette Street, a two-block long street on the city's east side, was shown as Lafayette Street on the Sanborn map.

And bridges over the pond and the Fox River were listed as "stone viaducts."

Hired Girls

By Sammi Maier King

Anna Lindgren was only six years old when she came to America with her mother, Josephine and two sisters, Vera and Julia. After making the long voyage over the Atlantic, the Swedish immigrants arrived at the Boston port and arranged for a train to take them to Chicago. There they met Anna's father, Andrew who had come to America a year earlier to find work and make arrangements for his family to join him.

Before coming to Batavia, the family lived on a tenant farm west of Elburn. There the family grew, with the births of four more children, Leonard, Ethel, Evar and Pauline.

When Anna reached the age of 12, she was told by her father that she needed to quit school and help support the family. Her English was perfect and she would be able to make more money as a hired girl. She desperately wanted to stay in school but her father had already made arrangements for her to do light housekeeping for a family in the area. She was supposed to help with the children and help with the cooking.

Anna would soon learn that not all people in the world are honest and good. Her duties at her new position didn't only involve housekeeping she also was required to do farm chores, lifting heavy barrels and carrying heavy pails of water and feed. It was hard work and when she complained the mother berated her.

The job was even more difficult because Anna didn't sleep well. She wasn't accustomed to sleeping in the barn and was afraid of the hired hands who also slept there.

When she returned home to her family she was tired and haggard. Born with a dowagers hump, her back ached so bad that she could hardly stand. Her mother took one look at her and told Andrew that no daughter of hers was going to do this kind of labor and sleep in a barn.

Anna's mother learned of another woman who was looking for a Swedish girl. Josephine knew her and offered Anna's. The couple, LaVerne and Harry Kelly took Anna into their home and treated her as if she was the daughter they never had. Anna cooked and cleaned for them and loved them as she loved her own parents.

A few years after leaving their home, Anna married John Kiefer. They had one child, a girl, whom they named LaVerne Harriet, after the couple who had been so kind to Anna.

John Kiefer died of pneumonia leaving Anna alone to raise her baby. She sought employment at the phone company but was told that she wouldn't be able to do the job because of her back. When the phone company decided to put a switchboard in Elburn, Anna again applied with the phone company. She was very proud to be Elburn's first telephone operator. After moving with her parents and siblings to Batavia Anna transferred to the Geneva office where she served as an operator and supervisor for forty two years. When she received her citizenship she changed her name to Ann because she thought it sounded more American.

Ann, my grandmother, never forgot the kindness of LaVerne and Harry Kelly. Neither did my mother, who spent her whole life wanting to be named anything but LaVerne Harriett.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Batavia Depot Museum is sponsoring the **4th Annual Batavia Quilt & Textile Show** on July 16-18, 2010. The steering committee is looking for volunteers for the three day show which will be held in the air-conditioned comfort of the Eastside Community Center and Shannon Hall, 14 N. Van Buren Street. Shifts of 2 to 2.5 hours are available on Friday from 1 – 6 pm; on Saturday from 10 am – 5 pm; & on Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm. Volunteers will receive free admission to the show for each shift that they work. Don't miss out on the fun! Call Chris or Carla at 630-406-5274 today to sign up.

HIRED GIRLS – Part II

By Kenneth Oliver Wolcott

One facet of family life in those days deserving mention is The Hired Girl, rarely called a "maid" in our circle. The average person of your generation reading or hearing of them is inclined to regard them as an unnecessary luxury, and to feel that "keeping a maid" indicated either great affluence or an attempt to show off -- to keep up with the Joneses. This is far from the case. There were very few really wealthy families in Batavia -- possibly the Newtons, the Van Nortwicks and one or two others came closest. There were comparatively few that could properly be classed as "comfortably well-to-do", this including the Henry Wades, Mallorys, Prindles, Uncle Henry, Dr. Patterson and a few others. But nearly all of our friends and many of our other neighbors had a hired girl and kept her busy, often ten or twelve hours a day, seven days a week. It is scarcely possible for you, indeed it is very difficult for me looking back over some seventy to eighty years to my own childhood experiences, to comprehend the tedious hours of endless housework which have been abolished by the modern, push-button gadgets.

I shall mention only a few:

1) Keeping the home fires burning, in the kitchen all day, winter and summer; in the various stoves all around the house during cool or cold weather.

2) Gathering all kerosene lamps from every room in the

house, cleaning and polishing all lamp chimneys, filling lamps and returning all to their respective locations.

3) Sweeping and dusting with broom and dust cloth, every room in the house at least once a week; living room and dining room brushed up daily.

4) Complete laundry for the entire family including "boiled shirts" for the men; ruffles and flounces and many skirts, shirt-waists and unmentionables for the women and girls; all bed-linen for the family and guests, if any; also table-linen -- tablecloths and linen napkins. All washed by hand, hand scrubbing in water pumped and carried by hand and heated on the hot stove, then the entire washing carried out-doors, hung up to dry, taken down, carried back into the house, sprinkled, folded and later ironed with a heavy, hot flat-iron heated on the hot stove, summer and winter.

5) Baking -- cakes, cookies and pies, as well as several large loaves of bread to be raised, kneaded and baked twice a week.

6) Preparing, cooking and serving twenty meals a week including washing and putting away the dishes, setting table for the next meal, etc.

7) Baby-sitting afternoons and evenings.

This list is far from complete. There is much more, particularly for families with babies or small children, or (as in our case) where horses, cows and/or chickens are kept. The hired girl was not ordinarily

involved in the outside care of the animals but it always involved extra dishes, hot water, dirt tracked in, etc.

As the children grow older they usually contribute somewhat on the positive side, partially offsetting the extra laundry, food, dishes, etc., they require. The boys usually helped at least in pumping and carrying water, bringing in the wood (fuel), keeping the coal scuttle filled, carrying out ashes, garbage, etc. The girls sometimes made their own beds and perhaps some of the others. More rarely they did, or helped to do, the dishes and other kitchen work. Mother and, I believe, most of the other women used to plan most of the meals and do some or most of the cooking. Frequently they also helped out with the other house-work, particularly on wash-day. Mother was usually busy around the house most forenoons and often much more of the day. Most housewives made most of their own and their children's clothes. In many cases that applied to boys' as well as girls' clothing.

For all practical purposes there were no hospitals then. Nearly every baby was born in his mother's own home. All childhood diseases were treated at home. Accidental injuries, broken limbs, all illnesses, light or serious diseases up to and including the terminal one were cared for in the home by the mother.

Another factor helping to account for the widespread employment of hired girls was

their availability. There was virtually no female labor in industry then except in textile mills and the garment industry, both non-existent in our area. Most girls left school at 14 or 15; very few went beyond High School. If there were younger brothers and sisters the older girls helped out at home and "learned the trade" against the day they got a home of their own to manage. If the family were hard-pressed or if the girl were unusually independently minded she might go "to help out" a relative or neighbor during an illness or other emergency. Sometimes that might last for years. Of course that did not enhance a girl's social standing, but if she handled herself tactfully she could continue with her friendships and some social life. Really, there was not very much other opportunity for her. She could be either a dressmaker or a teacher. There were a few -- a very few - women clerks in stores -- bakery, dry-goods, etc. There were also a very few trained nurses. I cannot now remember knowing one in Batavia, aside from those imported for service at Bellevue Asylum who were never included in any of our social activities. Some offices were just beginning to hire women "typewriters". (I never heard the word "stenographer" until I was well over a dozen years old; it did not come into

common use in Batavia until much later.) Neither the Newton Wagon Company nor the Appleton Co. hired any women in their offices until years later.

Something like half the population of Batavia's population on the West Side were Swedish, largely recent immigrants. When their girls finished or quit school they were eligible for housework. Reasonably accomplished, competent, experienced girls were paid three to four dollars a week (plus room and board, of course). A few exceptionally capable, good housekeepers and cooks got (and earned) five dollars, possibly in rare cases more, after years of service. But these were exceptions.

Women who needed help but could not or would not meet the three-dollar rate could usually get a green girl who spoke some broken English but had no experience in housework, American style, for two dollars. I remember one "green girl" Mother had fresh off the ship, knowing a few words of English and nothing else -- even when Mother shouted to help her understand better. It was generally agreed among the women that "it does not pay to train a green girl. After doing most of her work for her for two or three months to show her how, then picking up after her for another three months, she goes and gets a job with

someone else as an experienced girl for three dollars. They don't show any appreciation or loyalty at all."

The Paper Bag Company then began hiring a considerable number of girl operators. Their pay was low, perhaps \$4. to \$5. or \$6. per week -- without board of course. But the girls could still live at home, pay \$2. or \$3. toward the family budget and still have as much or more for themselves. Much more important was the fact that they had all their evenings off and their work week ended at 5 PM Saturday. That situation aroused the housewives of Batavia as nothing else did.

Sometimes a hired girl would remain with a family for many years. Not all were Swedish, although most of them naturally were. We had one Irish girl, Hannah O'Boyle, who was "in office" at the time I was born and remained with us until I was five or six, a total of nine years with the family as I remember it. The Henry Wade's Christine was a permanent fixture there for many years, as was Uncle Henry's Katy. Uncle Henry and Aunt Helen, by the way, always had two girls and a man which were really needed for their large house, large family and the huge lawn, barn, and garden -- the latter of course requiring the hired man. They were all kept comfortably busy.

Next Historical Society Meeting

The next meeting of the Batavia Historical Society will be on Sunday, June 27, 2010, at 2 pm. The meeting will be held in the Batavia City Chambers, 100 N. Island Ave. Batavia Mayor Jeff Schielke and Batavia Police Chief Gary Schira will present an overview of the Batavia Police Department, past and present.

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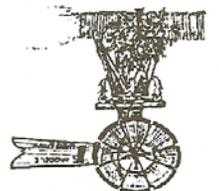
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