

# Newsletter

Volume VII Number 4

July, 2000

President: Mary Jane Paez  
Vice-Pres. & Programs: Judy Bogaard  
Secretary: Madilyn Allender

Treasurer: Donald Zarley  
Membership: Ferne Michael  
Newsletter: Selma Duvick

## July Meeting

**Date: Sunday, July 30, 2000**  
**Time: 4:00 P.M.**

**Place:**  
**Crown Point Meeting Room**  
**Pioneer Parkway**

**Our Speakers will be**  
**Evelyn Temple Carlson and**  
**Dorothy Temple Mosier**

### **"The History of Herrold"**

Come and share a **potluck meal**. Bring table service and a dish to share, and enjoy the reminiscences of two Johnston natives

## At Our May Meeting: .....

Don Gerdom, Burlington native, and Johnston resident was our speaker. He is currently the director of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. A veteran of WWII

himself, he was injured on the field of battle resulting in his own paralysis.

After enlisting in the U.S. Army in December of 1942, Don trained as a Medical Clerk, and in Engineering in the ASTP program. He eventually joined the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and was sent overseas in September of 1944.

Don was wounded on November 21, 1944, near Suggarath, Germany, (near Aachen) while his Company "I" was attacking a pillbox. "A pillbox on a hill gave the Germans a controlling field of fire and they had brought our part of the advance to a halt" Don recalls. "Army intelligence sent us information that the pillbox was manned by green volunteers. What they didn't know was that during the night the inexperienced soldiers had been replaced by elite Panzer troops."

As they charged across the field, Don was hit by rifle fire near his left eye, and the bullet passed through him, the point nearly touching his spine. As he lay wounded, a piece of shrapnel struck his chin. His unit thought he was dead, and reported him as killed in action. But a medic found him some 31/2 hours later, and he was taken to a hospital in Liege, Belgium

There he finally awoke, but was blind for two days. His sight returned, but he was paralyzed from the waist down, and remains so. He is able to walk, but currently uses a wheel chair.

After 20 months of hospitalization and six surgeries to remove the bullet and rebuild his jaw, Don returned home to Burlington to marry and to enter in to what has been a fulfilling and useful life. He is active in advocating for people with paralysis; he studied for and achieved a master's degree in guidance and counseling. He has taught school, has served local governments, and has worked for the adapting of facilities for access by the handicapped.

And Don is a musician and singer, both of which have been a big part of his life, before, during, and since the war.

His life is a story of turning a disability into an asset and a positive force for service to his country and his fellow citizens.



### At our June Meeting.....

Mary Rittgers was our speaker. She told of the trips she and her daughter Mary Esther took a few years ago to research the location where Johan Augustin Rittgers, the ancestor of the local Rittgers family, first settled. (See the May issue of the Newsletter).

Mary and her daughter traveled to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, near the town of Luray, and to where Johan Augustin first settled a an indentured servant. Later they went to Fairfield County in Ohio where he and his family subsequently moved.

By using town and village names, photographs, and researching through phone books, even knocking on doors, they discovered people who were acquainted with the history of the area and were able to point them to the locations and to still other people who helped to fill in the family history.

Mary had numerous stories of coincidences and fortunate incidents and meetings that led her to the information of people she was seeking. As she noted, these "luck breaks" often seem to occur to genealogical research, and are a part of the joy of the search.

Mary and Mary Esther hope to return to the area and to continue to research the Rittgers family. She encourages anyone who has a similar interest in an area of family history to makes some plans, research a route, and to "just do it"!



### Looking Ahead: Programs for the Coming Months

Program chair Judy Bogaard has scheduled meeting programs for the remainder of the year! Meetings are at the Crown Point Center on Pioneer Parkway, unless otherwise noted.

Mark your calendars, and plan to attend

Wednesday, August 23, 4 p.m.:

Kathy Gourley who has researched the history, will speak on " Ft. Des Moines History in the 1840's"

Sunday, September 24, 4 p.m.

Connie Maxwell, Facilities Coordinator,  
City of Johnston, will speak.

**Topic: The 24-hour Relay Challenge**

This will involve the whole community.

Come and hear Connie tell about it!

Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 4 p.m.

Jim Sanders, Johnston City Administrator  
or Margaret Sharp, City Finance Director

**Topic: What's ahead for the City of  
Johnston**

Sunday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 4 p.m.

This is the Sunday after Thanksgiving

**Show and Tell: Bring items of historical  
or family interest- documents, photos, etc.**

**No meeting in December.**

**Note these dates on your Calendar!!!**



## From the President.....

In the past few months I have been in a number of cemeteries. Between tree planting in April and the flag pole dedication on Memorial Day I've been mostly at Ridgedale. Since the headstones have been steam-cleaned the whole place glistens.

Over the weekend before Memorial Day my family had a reunion in southwest Minnesota. We visited two cemeteries to see that everything was ship-shape for the holiday. At the Jasper Cemetery where my grandparents are buried, there are many plantings of fern leafed peonies.. These plants are rare and sell for big bucks in fancy catalogs.

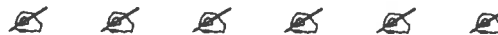
In June my cousin's husband died and I went to the funeral in Beresford, S.D., just south of Sioux Falls. In town, before the funeral I asked where the cemetery was. The answer was, "It depends.". Each church has its own. It turned out to be a neatly trimmed plot of ground out in the country.

Earlier this month, when we traveled to north of Albany, N.Y. to see our daughter and her family, we saw numerous overgrown, weedy cemeteries that could only be identified by a plaque near the road saying that the place dated back to the 1700's. Nobody has been there since the 1800's.

My sister-in-law has a couple of aunts who are buried in Albany. Dorothea asked if I could possible go to find the place. After some searching we found the site and walked in to find the burial plots. The weeds were thick and the soil was still mounded even though the last burial was over a year ago.

I can tell you that coming home and seeing our cemeteries made me proud of what has been accomplished here.

"We live as long as we are remembered." –  
Old Russian Proverb found on the US  
Genweb website.



## Silent Auction

Margaret Pennington reports that the MJSHS made more than \$345 from the silent auction at Johnston Green Days. Many thanks to Margaret for organizing the auction, and to all those who contributed items.

The unusual hand-carved cane in the auction was made and donated by member Karen (Dewey) Miltenberger.

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## Gifts to the Society

Members of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society have had several garage sales recently, and have donated the proceeds to the JSHS.

Marvin and Mary Helen Straker have contributed more than \$600 from these sales in the name of the Bice sisters: Agnes Walker, Ferne Michael, Evelyn Frondle and Mary Helen Straker.

Added to this fund are proceeds from the sale, at our "rummage" sale last September, of a large collection of Santa Clauses, which belonged to Mary Helen, as well as numerous jig-saw puzzles.

These funds are designated for the eventual move of a house/museum that we hope will serve as a home and headquarters for the Johnston Historical Society.

Many thanks to these members for their efforts and their generosity!



## Welcome to New Members

The Johnston (Station) Historical Society welcomes the following new members:

Ruth Biddle  
Des Moines, IA

Donald and Mildred Peitzman  
Johnston, Iowa

Dan Johns  
Urbandale, Iowa

Teresa Lane-Agan  
Des Moines, Iowa

Chris Fox  
Johnston, Iowa

Alan McPherson  
Urbandale, Iowa

Barb & Gordy Allen  
Johnston, Iowa

We hope that those of you who live in the vicinity will want to attend our meetings, and to take an active part in discovering and preserving the History of Johnston. And guests are always welcome at meetings!!

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## Johnston Alumni Association

A Johnston Alumni Association has been formally organized, and is planning activities for all Alumni and former students of Johnston Schools.

One of their special projects is the planning for an All-Class-Reunion

This will be held September 13-16, 2001, so you alums have a whole year to make plans to attend.

To join the association (\$15 per year) or for more information write to

Johnston Alumni Association  
c/o Community Education  
P.O. Box 10, Johnston Iowa 50131



## CITY HALL DISPLAY OF WWII VETERANS

The display cases along the hallway at City Hall will soon be featuring members of the JSHS who are also Veterans of WWII.

Ferne Michael has gathered flags of four services, Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force (at that time the Army Air Corps), along with photos of veterans at the time of their service, and a brief description of their service experience.

Also on display will be a couple of service uniforms, taken out of moth balls especially for this occasion!!

You are invited to stop by and look at photos of some of your Johnston acquaintances, and marvel at either how young they looked, or how well they have aged.

These are some of the people that Tom Brokaw has called "The Greatest Generation".

(If you are a WWII veteran and would like to place photos and information about your service in our archives, write to:

Ferne Michael; 7214 Riete, Windsor Heights, IA 50311-1304)

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## Disappearing Houses

Residents of Johnston, both former and current will remember the attractive bungalow which occupied the north-west corner of Merle Hay and N.W. Beaver

Drive. It was recently demolished to make way for another house.

This was the home of the Hummel family until recently. It was built in 1924 by Henry J. Hummel, and was owned by the family until 1992.

It was sold again in 1998, and though the current owner had hoped to move it, the project proved too costly.

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## In Memoriam

Members of the Johnston community were saddened to hear of the death of Yvonne Gay Friestad on June 28, in Des Moines.

Gay was born in Des Moines, and lived in this area and in Johnston most of her life. She had been a school teacher, and homemaker, mother to her eight children, and grandmother to 14 grandchildren.

Gay was especially interested in the activities of Senior Citizens, and served on the local advisory board. She loved to travel. She and her husband Louis, who survives her, have been vital members of the Johnston community for many years. They were charter members of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society.

To Louis and all of Gay's family, we send our deep sympathy.

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**Do you need to renew??** Check your address label; if there is a "99" following your name you need to renew your membership. Send your \$10 or \$12 to the Johnston Historical Society at P.O. Box 109, Johnston IA 50131



### Fullerton's Western Serenaders Sycamore Park, Johnston, Iowa

In the September 1997 issue of the Newsletter we wrote about the local attraction known as Sycamore Park, which was located on the south side of Kempton Drive, just west of the Des Moines River bridge. Privately owned and run, the park featured a band-stand, a fine dance pavilion, and picnic facilities. It was used by many local groups as well as individuals, and was open in the 1920's or earlier, through the early 1950's.

The photograph above, given to us by member Lois Waggoner, is of the

"Fullerton's Western Serenaders", one of the bands that played for dances and entertainment at Sycamore Park. It was probably taken during the late '40s or early '50 s.

Those members of the band identified are: Pianist, Rose Bowen, grandmother of Lois Waggoner; Saxophone (lower left) Ronald Baer, and fiddle (lower right) Charlie Caldwell. Can anyone identify others in the band, or the date of the photo?

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The Johnsston (Station) Historical Society is an IRS code 501 (c) (3) organization