

**JOHNSTON (STATION) HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**P.O.Box 109 Johnston, Iowa 50131**  
**6161 Northglenn Drive – at Johnston Commons Park**

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Email address: [JSHS6161@aol.com](mailto:JSHS6161@aol.com)      Telephone: (515)331-0687      **JHS is a 501(c) (3) organization**

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President: Mary Jane Paez

Treasurer: Robert Thomas

Vice President/Programs: Judy Bogaard

Membership: Garland Seibert

Secretary/Newsletter: Mariys Seibert

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President's Column

May, 2006

People frequently think of history as what happened a long time ago. We have some recent history makers in our midst.

On April 30, Quinn Sypniewski, a 2000 Johnston graduate, was selected at the 166<sup>th</sup> overall pick in the fifth round of the NFL draft. After playing football as a tight end for the University of Colorado for six years, Quinn became the first Johnston athlete to be drafted in the NFL. He will be on the Baltimore Ravens team. Quinn is the son of Cheryl and George Sypniewski. His dad, Coach Syp, was the football coach at Johnston for many years.

Summit Middle School placed second overall in the junior division of the National History Day Iowa competition in April. Seven students will advance to nationals in June at the University of Maryland. Claire Nagel, a seventh grader, wrote a paper about Simon Wiesenthal, who was a Holocaust survivor and hunter of Nazis. Three sixth graders, Chase Wallace, Grant McDonald and Andrew Haler recreated a replica of the front of a Higgins boat to display their exhibit about Omaha Beach and D-Day in World War II. Kathy Paul, who works with the students as her job of gifted students coordinator, has instilled a passion for history and research in the students.

A third Johnston history maker is third grader, Abby Gorsche. Abby's essay was chosen from 278 entries nationwide as the national winner. She wrote about what it would be like to live in 1879 just after the first light bulb was introduced to the world by Thomas Edison. The writing contest was sponsored by Scholastic and General Electric. Abby won a \$5,000 savings bond and a box of books. She also was honored by a visit to her school by Kerri Strug, the 1996 Atlanta gold medal gymnast. Two other qualifiers were Dirk Opland and Blake Schlawin, Summit Middle School students. They used video clips and audio narration for their presentation of "Martin Luther: Taking a Stand for his Beliefs". Johnston's seven national qualifiers are among the 25 from the whole state who will go to the national competition

**We are so proud of our Johnstonians.**

Annual Report  
April 26, 2006  
Johnston (Station) Historical Society

Today is our first annual meeting to be held since we have created a museum. It has been five years since we signed an agreement with the Simpsons to accept their donation of the house, barn and windmill. It is less than four years since we moved the structures to Johnston Commons. Who could possibly have imagined the hard work and determination that has brought us to this point. Last June we opened our doors to display some of the artifacts that had been stored in member's closets and under beds. Since that time, thousands more accessions have been archived and added to the collection that tells the story of the history of Johnston.

We have lost a few of our members along with the stories they could have told about their life and times in Johnston. We have been fortunate to have been the beneficiary of a donation earmarked for video equipment that we will be able to use to record the stories of many Johnstonians, both young and old.

Over the past year, we have had monthly open houses and numerous tours of the museum. We have become noted for having information relating to the history of Johnston. The schools, the library, the city and the newspaper have relied on the Johnston Historical Society as an accurate information resource.

The Simpson Barn has become a valued landmark in the community. Numerous weddings, reunions and parties have taken place in the barn.

In our articles of incorporation, our purpose and function are defined that we will "discover and collect any material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area..." We also "will provide for the preservation of such material and for its accessibility..." "The Society will disseminate historical information and arouse interest in the past..." We are continuing with our mission.

HERE ARE FOUR QUICK QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

1. The world has had the Hoover, Electrolux, Oreck, but Johnston has had \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Name the two large dance halls that were in Johnston at one time or another (barns not included).
3. Name two brothers, Johnston graduates, who made a name for themselves in the 1930's and beyond, playing golf.
4. What activity was the Johnston School Band involved with on weekends during WWII?

----One more little tidbit for you 'old timers'. Close your eyes and dream, dream, dream: of Big Reeds' on Forest; Riverview Amusement Park and the Riviera & Tromar Ballrooms; The open-air Val Air ballroom; Midtown and Urbandale roller rinks; Ice skating at Witmer Park; The Beaver Theater on Saturday matinee; watermelon hunting (helping yourself!); sledding down Hyperion hill; Camp Dodge Pool; taking the Inter-Urban to Des Moines with a bunch of kids for the day. But best of all in the summer - no organized activities with matching uniforms, umpires or refs, concession stands, bleachers, lights, press coverage and I don't know what all. You know I guess we really were quite lucky to have lived 'away back when'. I know I was. Dick T. (1950)

**WE CAN ALL HELP BY SENDING OBITUARIES OF GRADUATES, INFORMATION REGARDING THEM, TO HELP DICK GET HIS 1920-1955 RECORDS COMPLETE....AND, HELP THE REST OF US RECORD THOSE FROM 1955 ON! We also would appreciate your families' brief story to put placed on file with all the others we have - newer residents as well as long-time residents make up the history of the community. Use the email address for the Historical Museum: [JSHS6161@aol.com](mailto:JSHS6161@aol.com) or mail to the JSHS at P.O.Box 109, Johnston 50131**

**INFORMATION IS DESIRED** - regarding the Presbyterian Church that was located on Beaver Drive, near Ridgedale Cemetery. The house was later moved to a location just north of Hyperion, on the east side of Beaver Drive and was occupied by the Brown Family. We have several interesting stories but need some documentation to back up the stories. The sign from the church as well as a photo are on display in the front entrance of the Simpson House.

**DONATIONS:** Randa Duvick/David Grosnick \$20  
Girl Scouts Of America Troop #188 - \$25  
Wes Jordan \$2000  
Candy and Dennis Elwell \$500  
Elnora Masters \$50  
Roger and Betty Wigton \$25  
Jim Sandegren \$10  
Howard Hunt \$25  
Vivian Zimmerman \$40

**OUR SYMPATHY TO:**

**The family of LaVerne W. Simpson, who passed away on Saturday, May 13, 2006 at age 89 years. LaVerne is survived by his widow, Shirley, two sons, Joe Simpson ('65) and Jeff Simpson ('67) and their families.**

**Richard & Evelyn Kuefner (members of JSHS) on death of their daughter, Becky Jo Kuefner Kuehl , April 10, 2006..**

**To the family of Betty Fitzsimmons who passed away on March 27. Betty and her husband, Don, are long-time residents of Johnston. Their daughters graduated from Johnston High: Doris & husband Larry Elings ('58) and Diane Suby ('62). Betty was a sister-in-law to JSHS members Barton and Virginia Schlenker.**

**To the family of Rilma Leeper Rice, JSH 1941. Rilma died April 14 and is survived by her husband Don, and son Jim.**

**NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, 4:00 P.M. May 24, 2006-----Bob Simon of the Urbandale Historical Society will present the program: 'THE HISTORY OF MERLE HAY'.**

**GREEN DAYS BEGIN ON THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2006. That evening the Historical Society will host the Barn Owl Band at the Barn, from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m.**

On Saturday we will participate in the parade at 10:00 o'clock a.m. We would like to have as many members as possible join us. Please leave a message at the Museum so we can get in touch with you as to location and time to assemble for that parade.

The Museum will be open for tours from noon until 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. We need volunteers to help with the children's 'old fashioned' crafts in the barn on Saturday afternoon.. Please phone us at: 331-0687 and leave a message for when you can help.

Saturday evening, June 17<sup>th</sup>, there will be The BATTLE OF THE BANDS - at the Barn and featuring at least seven teen bands competing against one another.

*Open House: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month from 2:00 to 4:00*

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*"Wrinkled was not one of the things I wanted to be when I grew up!*

MARK YOUR CALENDARS ----

There will be a Blue Grass festival at the Barn on Aug 5, 2006.

**FLOWERS HAVE BEEN DONATED:**

Ray Schleihs has given us bluebells and chives.

Joyce & Richard Betz gave us hollyhocks (plants and seeds), mint, and baby iris. We have some 'Mystery Flowers' planted on the south east side of the barn. These flowers include daylilies, sage, salvia; Shasta daisy, and gazania. **"Thank you!"** to whomever planted them. They are receiving water regularly and are looking good!

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There are still some renewals to be received. **New Memberships** are always appreciated and are just **\$10 for single** membership and **\$12 for a family** membership. Please invite at least one friend, neighbor, or relative to join our group. Memberships support and keep the JSHS a viable organization. Thank you so very much. Of course, we always enjoy the visits to the Museum. There is a lot to see and learn from the archives of photos, histories, and stories of the area.

**ANSWERS TO MARCH NEWSLETTER QUIZ:** note: Ray Schleihs came up with all the answers!!

1. Johnston's school colors were blue and gold but were changed to purple and gold sometime around 1927 or so, according to information at the museum. (D.T. says that, "once a year in the fall, the colors changed to black and blue after the Ankeny football game!!")

2. Vee Dowling, retired 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher of the 40's died 4/12/95 in Great Falls, VA. She had been born 4/26/1889 & missed her 106<sup>th</sup> birthday by 2 wks.

3. William "Bill" Peterson ('28) and Irma Richardson ('31) married, both worked for the school district, and their three children graduated from JHS: William Peterson, Jr. ('52); Elizabeth Peterson McCarl ('55); and Robert Michael Peterson ('71)

4. The Polk County basketball tourney at its zenith had the following schools: Johnston, Alleman, Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Elkhart, Farrar, Grimes, Mitchellville, Polk City, Runnells, Sheldahl, Urbandale, Valley, White Oak and Woodside for a total of **16** teams,-most or all games were held at Valley elementary. A great time was had by all!!

Answers to quiz in this newsletter (May):

1. Johnston has the Rastovacs (Rasto-VACS)
2. Sycamore Park (west of Fisher bridge on the south side) .  
b. Rainbow Gardens (attached to the back of Robinette and Hunt garage).  
Editor's note: In the July 1997 issue of the newsletter, mention is made of a meeting on January 26, 1927, of the Women's Social Circle of the Federated Church of Johnston. They voted to "serve refreshments at the dance to be given in the new garage". On March 3 of that same year the motion was made that they **not** serve at the dance and the motion carried! One might wonder what the objection was. "The "new garage was undoubtedly the Johnston Station Garage, located on the west side of Merle Hay Road just south of the Carter's Store, and owned by a Mr. Alley."
3. Pat ('26) and Don ('34) Willcox. Their family lived on Fruitland Drive, first house west of the tracks on the north side. Their's was a large family. Part of an elite set of golfers in the 30's and 40's in Iowa, Pat was probably #1 for quite awhile. Pat married Evelyn Hollett('26) and they are buried at McDivett Grove Cemetery. Both men were first class. Pat helped develop miniature golf in Des Moines across from the Des Moines airport at the NE corner of Fleur Drive and Army Post Road. There still is a golf business there.
4. They played band concerts at the Recreation Center at Camp Dodge for the soldiers. Their director was Mr. Umphrees.

### **OF INTEREST**

The signs from the Bauman House and farmstead have been prepared and are professionally lettered. These will soon be in place - one at the front of the house and the other alongside Northglenn Road. These will be a very nice addition to the historical site.

Bricks from the reconstruction of the Merle Hay Road/N.W. 70<sup>th</sup> Avenue intersection have been delivered to the site, are cleaned and stacked, ready for use under the deck at the west end of the barn.

Information is being gathered with the hoped-for end result of gathering interviews for permanent placement in the museum.

There are lots of exciting things in the process and it could be even more exciting with your help.

**???????**Where are these items? Do YOU know**???????**

1. What happened to the picture of George Washington that hung in the Study Hall at old school building?
2. Whatever happened to the School's Bell? ( Note: the old school building torn down in 1985)

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING IS MAY 24; 4:00 P.M. AT THE BARN.**