

Johnston (Station) Historical Society  
Post Office Box 109, Johnston, Iowa 50131

# Newsletter

Volume VII Number 6

November, 2000

President: Mary Jane Paez  
Vice-Pres. & Program  
Secretary: Madilyn Allender

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



**TIME TO RENEW!! SEE THE LAST  
PAGE FOR A RENEWAL FORM.**

## November Meeting

Sunday, November 26<sup>th</sup>  
4:00 p.m.  
Crown Point Meeting  
Room

Program: **Show and Tell**

Bring your Genealogy Books,  
Your Old Family Photos,  
Your photos of early Johnston  
and of Johnston Schools  
To share with other members!!  
Guests are Welcome!  
No Potluck.

**Looking Ahead.....**

No meeting of the JSHS in December.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT.....

SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN 1994, THE Johnston (Station) Historical Society has been dedicated to the discovery and collection of historical records and artifact that relate to the history of this area.

To give you an idea of the scope of this possible collection, the articles of incorporation listed the following: histories, genealogies, biographies, descriptions, gazetteers, directories, newspapers, catalogs, circulars, handbills, programs, posters, letters, diaries, journals, memoranda, reminiscences, rosters, service records, account books, charts, surveys, field books, pictures, photographs, paintings, portraits, scenes and aboriginal relics.

Bearing this possible collection in mind, there has been much thought and discussion about the possible repository for same. The Society has now taken a new turn. We have been formally offered a beautiful large Johnston home by Laverne and Shirley Simpson.

They have also offered their barn. Both structures would have to be moved; a big, but rewarding task. This opportunity will necessitate fundraising to accomplish our goal.

We hope to ask for corporate support, write for grant assistance and solicit financial support from our members. We are in the process of investigating the costs involved with moving structures, foundations, utilities, etc. We will keep you posted as we find out more.

This is a tremendous opportunity for all who are proud of their heritage and the history and preservation of history of the area. As the Articles of Incorporation put it, "Understanding the history of a community is basic to our democratic way of life, gives us better understanding of our city, state and nation, and promotes a better appreciation of our American heritage."

(From the Editor:

Through the generosity and foresight of the Simpsons, we have the challenge and the opportunity to accomplish something substantial for the community. The house is currently located on N.W. 86<sup>th</sup> Street, north of a rapidly developing area. It was built by the Bauman family in 1910, and owned by the Garlocks, and now most recently by Laverne and Shirley Simpson. The barn is a remarkable structure built of clay tile.

*What a great enhancement for the City of Johnston!*

## August Meeting Report:

Kathy Gourley, a now a Field Historian for the Iowa State Historical Society, spoke to the JSHS about what can be called Urban Archaeology. In 1985, she, along with other archaeological investigators explored the route of the proposed Martin Luther King Parkway, along Market Street in downtown Des Moines.

This archaeological dig uncovered, under street surface, old construction remnants and debris left by numerous floods, evidence of what is called the second Fort Des Moines.

Excavating a trench along the route of the parkway, (Market St.) the investigators found, about 3 feet down, remains of a fireplace firebox. In this area they also found an inkwell, clay pipes, some coins dated in the 1830's and 1840's, and buttons of the type used on military uniforms of the period. The bricks found were made by the soldiers.

By using these and other clues, the investigators have confirmed that the officers quarters were on this site. There are maps which give a rough idea of the area, and the findings of the archaeologists and historians correspond with what the maps indicate.

Also found under the current surface of Market Street were bricks placed in 1892- the first paved street in Iowa. And underneath that, they found cedar block paving laid down in 1866.

Established by Captain James Allen and a company of Dragoons, this second Fort Des Moines was intended to enforce the treaty with the Sauk and Fox Indians, which said that they had to leave this area, their

traditional hunting ground, and move to Kansas by October of 1845. The fort was a temporary affair, built in 1843, not intended to be a place of defense, but to house the soldiers there to keep the peace. It existed for only three years.

The first Fort Des Moines was built in 1835 along the Mississippi River at what is now Montrose, in Lee County in south-east Iowa. Captain. Allen suggested naming this second one "Fort Raccoon", after the river, but his superiors overruled him.

A community existed around this second Fort Des Moines, consisting of the soldiers, fur traders, an Indian Agency, small Sauk and Fox villages, and a few civilian pioneers. Eventually, a town was platted on this site.

Old maps of the fort indicate that there were quarters for officers, and 7 barracks. After the fort was abandoned, it is speculated that portions of the buildings were used for various purposes. Over the years, floods, dumping of rubble and fill of various kinds, covered the site. There were serious floods, in 1851, 1903, and 1914. Eventually the mouth of the Raccoon River was moved to the south, now south of Sec Taylor Stadium, to eliminate the sharp angle where it originally met the Des Moines River, and so the original location of the fort, at the junction of the rivers, was lost.

In 2000, continued digging under parking lots and railroad yards, in the proposed parkway route, has brought to light evidence (pottery, and arrowheads) of the existence of a prehistoric native American Oneota culture that at one time occupied much of the mid-west. These artifacts date back to as early as 1100 AD.

State historians and archaeologists are excited about these discoveries that can tell us about the history of the people who once occupied this land.

Ms. Gourley also gave a concise history of the relations between Indians and the U.S. government, the gradual ceding of territory by the Indians to the United States government, and the various treaties and how they came about, leading to the establishment of what has become our capital city.



September Meeting:

## The 24 Hour Challenge Relay

Our speaker, Connie Maxwell, who is the Facilities Coordinator for the city of Johnston, explained the 24 -Hour Challenge Relay as an exercise in community building. It is a program which has been successfully implemented by schools and civic groups across the country.

Why would we want to do this in Johnston?

Johnston has become a large community made up of many smaller ones – neighborhoods and groups, if you like. And this has happened so rapidly in the past few years that the smaller communities have not, in many cases, become integrated into the large one – the City of Johnston.

These neighborhoods or groups may not see the need to band together for a common purpose, and to form friendships and

feelings of safety and order with others outside their boundaries.

However, we need to create a sense of belonging and usefulness, especially in our schools.

If we are bonded together, we can make a strong positive community statement about who we are, and about what we believe in and how we should behave toward one another.

The 24 Hour Relay Challenge is an event designed to bring together members of all communities, adults and children, for a common purpose, and in this way to foster the possibilities for collaboration on other community projects in the future.

The Event itself involves youth and adults from varied backgrounds forming teams of 10 people. There can be 30 to 50 teams. Each member of a team walks, jogs, runs, for a mile, and then passes the baton to another team member. Just as the relays are run at the Olympic Games, or the Drake Relays!! This cycle is repeated for 24 hours. And so, for a day, an originally disparate group works together as a team. And strangers become friends.

A support group of volunteers provides food, drink, entertainment, and other activities while the relay is in progress.

This is a big undertaking, and volunteers, especially from business and Johnston organizations are needed – for food, for security, for entertainment, as well as organization and planning!

Connie and several other local people went through in-depth training last January with Chris Pack, of *Community Matters*, the

group which originated the 24 Hour Relay Challenge

**Put the date for Johnston's event, May 19-20, 2001, and the place, the Johnston Middle School, on your calendar!!**

But even better, Connie asks that if you think you might be interested in helping, but need more information, you may contact her at Crown Point, ph. 251-3707, or by e-mail at [cmaxwell@ci.johnston.ia.us](mailto:cmaxwell@ci.johnston.ia.us).

As the song says, "This could be the start of something BIG!"



## SEPTEMBER MEETING:

Jim Sanders, who is Johnston's City Administrator, brought our group up-to-date on what the city plans for improvements.

Among the projects discussed was the installation of limestone monuments with decorative clay panels, which are being constructed, initially at the intersection of N.W. 86<sup>th</sup> Street, and NW. 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. (The JSHS was consulted as to the appropriate designs for these panels to reflect the history of the City).

Plans are to place similar structures at the intersections of Merle Hay Road and N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, and also at the intersection of N.W. 66<sup>th</sup> Avenue and N.W. Beaver Drive.

Jim also spoke of the concept plan of the Johnston Commons area, north of Maurice's warehouse, and where the library is now under construction.

**Our January Meeting, Sunday,**  
 January 28, 2001, Judy Bogaard has invited Jerry Miller, Restoration Painter, to speak. He has been a restoration painter for both Terrace Hill and the Iowa Sate Capitol, and will present a slide show on the restoration of the Iowa State Capitol Building.

**In Memoriam**

**William Herrold**

William Herrold, of Des Moines, died on September 18, 2000, at Iowa Lutheran Hospital. Born in Perry, he had lived and worked in Des Moines, and was employed by Firestone Tire and Rubber Co.

Bill was a Korean War Marine veteran, and active in the Highland Park Community Action Association. He joined the JSBS in 1997, and with his wife Shirlee had been a regular attendee at meetings until his recent illness. We all will miss him.

The JSBS sends its sympathy to his wife, Shirlee, and to his family.



**Ted Miller**

Word has been received by the JSBS of the death, in October, of JSBS member Ted Miller. Ted graduated from Johnston High School in 1942, and was employed as a painter at Camp Dodge. He was a resident of Dallas Center. We send sympathy to his family and friends.



**Contributions:**

Many Thanks To the following for contributions to the JSBS. (They are tax-deductible):

Margaret Sharp  
 Johnston, IA

In Memory of William Herrold:  
 Ferne Michael,  
 Windsor Heights



**STILL LOOKING FOR CLASS PHOTOS:**

Ferne Michael continues to look for Johnston High School class photos to complete the collection for the All-Class Reunion next September. She will make copies and send the original back to you. Ferne recently received a 1944 photo. For those still needed, check your last issue of the newsletter.

Send to: Ferne Michael  
 7214 Reite Ave.  
 Windsor Heights, IA 50311-1304



In the first years of the publication of the *Northern Polk County News*, the late Mrs. Eunice Heard wrote a number of feature stories for the paper about various locations in Johnston of historical interest. We think they are worth re-printing. Here is a timely one.

From Northern Polk County News,  
 November 12, 1970  
 Editor: Jeanne Hansen

# THE MERLE HAY BOULDER A NEGLECTED LANDMARK

By Eunice Heard

A mud and dust covered boulder rests on a strip of open ground amid the highway construction work on Merle Hay road just north of the Merle Hay Plaza. This huge glacial boulder, which is geological history, was pushed here from the Lake Superior area of Canada, and has a very interesting history.

In 1917, just ahead of the First World War, Merle Hay Road was a country lane, very muddy when it rained or snowed and sometimes in flood as the Des Moines River backed up so the Beaver Creek bridge could not be used

War loomed, and Camp Dodge was designated as a large centralized camp. The army needed, and built the highway, which is still in use. We were told it was the first paved highway to be completed out of Des Moines. If so, it was the beginning of the vast network of highways which cover our state now.

This new highway was dedicated and named for the first Iowa boy to give his life in battle at Bethelmont, France. (Two other Iowa boys fell in the same battle). Merle Hay was his name, and his home was in Glidden, Iowa.

A great granite boulder, a glacial-born relic of the ice age, was found on the Craig Findley farm two miles west of Johnston (on N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, west of 86<sup>th</sup> Street). It was brought to the most sightly spot on the road, where a rise in the ground commanded a view in all directions. On Memorial Day of 1921 it was dedicated.

The letters of his name were chiseled into the granite and painted white so they could be seen at a distance. Lafayette Young, publisher of the *Des Moines Capital* was in charge of this exercise, along with Supervisors L. Martz, John Steward, C.E. Keeling and B.B. Dewey, secretary to the supervisors.

The *Capital* reported the large boulder now rests at the highest point along Merle Hay Road bears this inscription: "MERLE HAY ROAD - 1917." A Mr. J.C. Wickham ventures the surmise that, although the war has been ended in less than 3 years (previous) many tourists and travelers driving along Merle Hay road are ignorant of the monument and its meaning. In 20 or 30 years from now few, if any, would grasp the significance of this imposing stone. The boulder should be lettered or a bronze tablet should be placed on it setting forth who Merle Hay was, and why the road was named for him.

"In his supreme sacrifice the people of Polk County have named the road after its first war hero. The board of supervisors should see to it that the boulder is suitably marked so that his name and supreme sacrifice shall live as long as the stone endures."

Now, almost 50 years later, the speaker could not but believe his prophecies have come true. Speed and traffic are a part of our way of life, and the boulder lies in the mud and dust of the narrow strip of ground between the access road and the highway. There is no way to park or slow down, so the boulder goes completely un-noticed.

At my request a young friend of mine volunteered to get a record for me from the bronze inscription. Armed with some wet rags to wipe off the face, he returned a very muddy boy, with the following inscription:

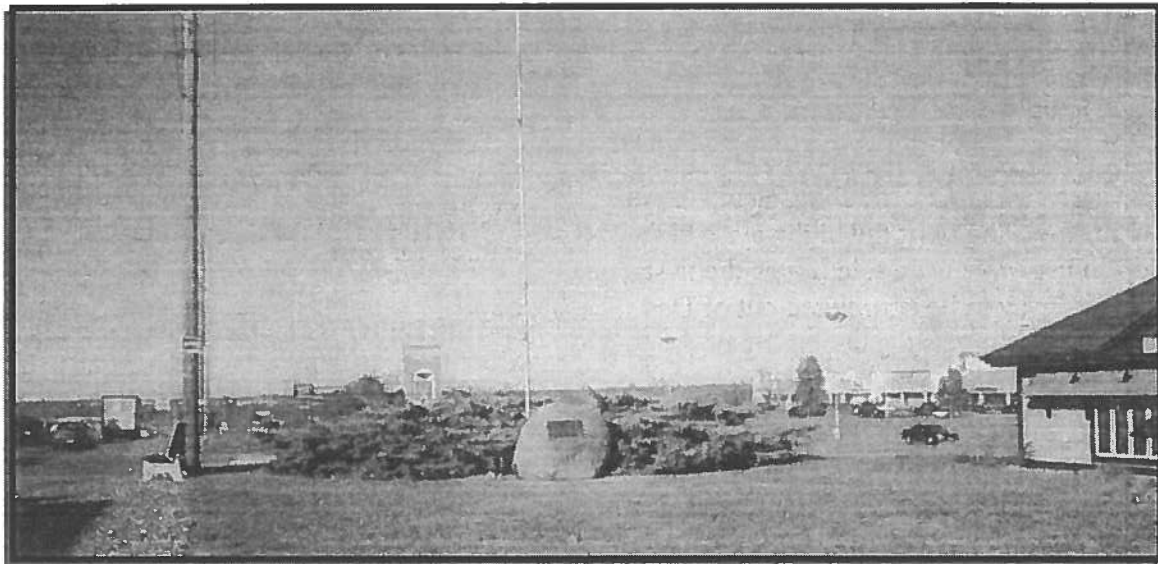
In Memoriam  
First Iowa Soldier Killed  
In the World War  
Born in Carrollton, Iowa  
July 30, 1896  
Killed Nov 3 1917  
Near Bethelmont, France  
On the First Raid.

He is probably the first person to read it in a long time and know of its significance.

Could this boulder, while it is disturbed now be relocated to some place along the road from the Plaza to Camp Dodge where a

place could be planned for interested people to park and get a closer glimpse of this very fine historical landmark?

(Note: At the time Mrs. Heard wrote about the monument, road construction was in progress on Merle Hay. (Indeed, it seems as if it has never stopped!). Since that time, the boulder has been located near its original spot, next to a flagpole, and attractively landscaped with evergreen shrubs. It is easy to miss as you drive along Merle Hay, but if you enter the Haymarket Shopping area, across from the cemetery, and walk to the east shoulder of the road, you will find the Merle Hay Boulder.)



THE MERLE HAY MEMORIAL, FALL 2000

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Yes, I want to renew my (our) membership to the Johnston Historical Society.

(Check your newsletter mailing label. If it reads "00" after your name, you need to renew)

Single membership: 1 year for \$10.00 ( ) I want to make a year-end contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Family membership: 1 year for \$12.00 ( ) Tax-deductible, IRS code 501 (c)(3)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check to:  
Johnston Station Historical Society  
P.O. Box 109  
Johnston, Iowa 50131