

Bennett B. Dewey

After an exciting childhood and a successful career as a journalist, Ben Dewey moved to Johnston Station in 1910 to enjoy better health for his wife in the country. His home on NW 59th Ct. was the second house built in the area. At the time, Merle Hay Road was just a cow path.

He was a founding father of the Johnston School District. Five one-room schools were consolidated and a new kindergarten through ninth grade school was built in 1915. He served on the School Board for 20 years. He also served on the County Board of Adjustment for 10 years

In 1912, he took a job to be the secretary for the Polk County Board of Supervisors. He did that job for 18 years. With all his county experience, he ran for Supervisor and was elected for three six-year terms, serving northwest Polk County. This was all before Johnston was incorporated in 1969 and he used his office to take good care of Johnston's needs.

In 1917, when Camp Dodge became a regional training camp for World War I, he was instrumental in getting NW 58th St. (later Merle Hay Road) paved with bricks to accommodate heavy military traffic. NW Beaver Drive had been the original route chosen, but land-owners wanted to be paid for their land. Ben negotiated with the NW 58th St land-owners who donated their land for the cause.

He owned much of the land on NW 59th Court. and by 1935, built almost all of the houses on that street where he lived. In 1946, he acquired the land and building where the original Johnston Lions clubhouse was located. He was a charter member of the club and made a good deal with the Lions. The treasury couldn't handle the purchase, so members bought shares ranging from \$10 to \$100 and Dewey was paid. The certificates were redeemed by members as the club's fund raising made it possible.

He was a champion for the poor and was instrumental in needed reforms of the Polk County Poor Farm. As reported in the Des Moines Register in 1942, "He literally transformed (that) institution from a place of abhorrence into a comfortable and pleasant home for the old people and the mentally unfortunate." That land is now used by the Polk County Sheriff's department.

In 1948, after his service to Polk County, he started his own insurance company. He operated that agency until 1975.

In 1979, Johnston's first park, Dewey Park, was dedicated and named for Bennett B. Dewey. The city purchased Dewey's 9.8 acre land for the appraised value of \$50,000. \$25,000 was obtained with a federal grant and \$25,000 was to be paid by the city. Ben Dewey donated \$10,000 to make the purchase possible. He had wanted to donate the land but that would have voided the grant.

Ben died at his home on September 24, 1980 at the age of 94. During his 70 years in Johnston, he did more for the community than can be counted.