

JOHNSTON Historical SOCIETY

(Station) P.O. Box 109, Johnston, IA 50131-0109

President Mary Ann Roberts
Secy-Treas. Ray Schliehs

NEWSLETTER

Vol. IV

No. 6

Published BiMonthly

November 1997

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

November Meeting

Wednesday, November 19, 1997

Time: 4:00 p.m.

Place: Crown Point Meeting Room

Speaker: Dr. Richard Sundblad, Superintendent, Johnston Schools
will speak on
Partnering Possibilities

New insights on our focus
AN IMPORTANT MEETING
(Expect some lively discussion!)

September Meeting Report

Richard LeCroy, vice-president of the Polk County Historical Society, was the invited speaker.

The Polk County Society has been concerned with the impact which Des Moines road construction has had on several historical sites. He cited several recent incidents, including the demolition of the Shops Building in Des Moines, and the routing of by-passes in and around the city.

Discussion of a new library for the city of Des Moines has focused attention on the current library building, and the Polk County Society is interested in the preservation of this building.

Mr. LeCroy's interest is also in the construction and preservation of trails through the Des Moines Metropolitan area, and in particular the Riverview Park location.

There was some discussion of the suggestion that the local historical societies (i.e. Polk County, Johnston,

Urbandale, Ankeny, Polk City, Big Creek and others) might cooperate on a project of mutual interest as a number of groups on a grant application makes it more acceptable to the grantors.

During the following business meeting, Mary Jane Paez presiding, Ray Schliehs reported that the JSHS participated in the Johnston Schools Homecoming Parade, with Ray, Bob Thomas and Judy Bogaard riding in her convertible. This gave the JSHS some publicity, and contributed to community awareness.

Continued discussion of the need for a place to store and preserve acquisitions of documents and artifacts led to the formation of a committee to investigate possibilities. Members are Beulah Darling, Ray Schliehs, and Ken Wallerstedt.

Re: Writing our History Project:
Carroll Broadie is working on the history of the Fire Dept.

Ray Schliehs will contact local churches to request histories.

Membership Notice!!!!

Please note: If you find an 97 S or 97 F following your name on your address label, your membership renewal is due. Send in the enclosed renewal form.

Those members who joined in the last half of 1997 have been credited through 1998.

Our first meeting of 1998 will be on Wednesday, January 28th.

Note this on your calendar.

Changes Along Merle Hay Road

Those Johnston residents who regularly travel along Merle Hay Road cannot be unaware of the many construction projects under way. But there are also other changes which have occurred.

During the past twelve months or so, a number of older Johnston residences have either been moved or have succumbed to the wreckers, as follows:

The Longo residence, just north of City Hall. Demolished.

The Huth home, also at one time the residence of the Foshe family, across from St. Paul Presbyterian Church. Demolished.

A Schlenker farm residence, occupied, among others, by the Swanson family in the 1930's and located south of Johnston Drive (N.W. 54th Avenue). Demolished.

The frame Rittgers residence (demolished), and the brick Walter Rittgers home (moved), both formerly located at the south-east corner of Merle Hay Road and N.W. 62nd Ave.

Not on Merle Hay Road, but moved to Toni Drive from N.W. Beaver Drive last fall is the T.A. Rittgers home.

Family History is Fun!!

Do you have an ancestor who obtained a land patent (first Land- owner) for this area?

Do you have a copy of your ancestor's will?

Do you have any old newspaper clippings you will share? Old photographs?(We copy & return).

Do you know of someone who might have knowledge of early pioneer families? The JSHS would like to hear from you! (See address above).

More on the Cemetery Project

Ferne Michael and Bob Thomas have been in contact with the Veteran's Administration concerning the installation of grave markers for Civil War Veterans who may be buried in any of our three cemeteries and for whom there is no such marker.

The markers will be of stone, upright and individualized to conform with those already in place. The details of installation of markers have yet to be worked out.

Ferne's research on Ridgedale Cemetery has found the following Civil War Veterans buried there: Thomas McDowell, Henry Herrold jr., Joshua Boyd, Robert W. Schiffer. If any of our members have knowledge of Civil War Veterans who might be buried in any of our cemeteries, please contact Ferne or Bob at the Historical Society.

Homecoming Reunion at JHS

Johnston High School alumni and alumnae gathered for a multi-class reunion during the recent homecoming festivities. Those from classes 1944 through 1950 met for a buffet and the Homecoming game on Friday evening,

and then for a dinner and program at Hyperion Club on Saturday night.

Those who attended, by class, and their home states are:

1944 - Raymond Vignovich, CA; Jane Ann Hall Wissink, IA; Robert Grahl, MD.

1945 - Richard Mott, IA; Patricia Byers Wallerstedt, IA; Harold and Betty Otto, IA; Lillian Ansley, CO.

1946 - Floyd Woods, IA; Harry E. Nagle, IA; Helen Moss Tufts, IA

1947 - John Betz, IA; Charles Harding, IA; Margaret Goodman Klobnak, IA; Lois Manny Ostrand, IL; Adriana Ansley Lutter, IL Donald Zarley, IA; Doris Jeffrey Misner, IA.

1948 - Louella Frey Elings, IA

1949 - Roger Wigton IA; Beverly Betz, IA

1950 - Richard Tarlton, IA; Laverna Kirkpatrick Lawson, CA; Carol Rittgers Dickenson, CO; Mary Ann Rittgers Robert, IA; Jack Hauser, IA.

More about these classes and their activities in school during those years, as well as at this recent reunion will follow in the next Newsletter.

We still have t-shirts!! Call Ray Schleih!!

The Other "Dodge City"

Nearly as ephemeral as the mayfly, and, as one newspaper account expressed it, "built in a night", the commercial development in Polk County known as "Dodge City" existed for less than two years.

Located on Beaver Road across from the Camp Dodge cantonment and "just north of the large reservoir now under construction", the city was conceived and built to serve the needs of the military personnel at Camp Dodge during World War I.

After the United States entered World War I in April of 1917, Camp Dodge, which had limited facilities, but a good location, was selected to be one of the training camps for what was

known as the National Army, and extensive construction was begun in July of 1917.

Local businessmen were not slow to recognize the possibilities for service to (and no doubt for profits from) a new and potentially very large group of customers-- the new recruits and conscripts, and the large military staff of the new establishment.

A Mr. R.R. McCutcheon laid out sites for 25 stores and businesses, and by August 5, on the east side of Beaver Road, and across from the camp entrance, the Camp Dodge Auto Supply, providing gas, oil tires, and accessories, was open for business.

Many other businesses were to follow, with the restriction in the leases that they must be branches of those already established in downtown Des Moines. The buildings were also required to meet certain "sanitary standards"; all were faced with stucco, and featured "large plate glass windows". And there were to be concrete side walks. They also anticipated something not found in downtown shopping areas--- evening hours, for the convenience of the soldiers! !

Foremost among the establishments completed and opened for business was the Dodge City Hotel-- 120 rooms-- and constructed of "wood and beaver board", managed by E.L. Daugherty.. Over the short time it was open, it claimed to have served over 10,000 guests

Familiar names (at least, to residents of Des Moines) were to be a part of "Dodge City". There was a Frankel Clothing Store (called an "Army Supply Store"), and Chapman's Drug Store, a branch of the one at 42nd and University in Des Moines.

A movie theater called the "Trilby Theater" was constructed, seated 2800 people, and it advertised that "only the highest grade picture shows at the downtown houses will be exhibited". Other entertainment might be had at the Tyrrell Pool Hall, which also served food. And Mr. Tyrell had a tailor shop in the Dodge City complex.

There was the Dodge City Photographic Gallery, a jewelry store, and that necessary

establishment, a barber shop. Others were Reinke's General Store, and a restaurant. In the August 1917 announcement of this retail district, a bank was planned, as well as a grocery store and restaurants, a cigar store, ice cream parlor and delicatessen.

No doubt this all became a bustling commercial area, but it was gone in a few hours-- almost completely destroyed by a fierce fire on January 26, 1919. Most of it had been in existence little more than a year.

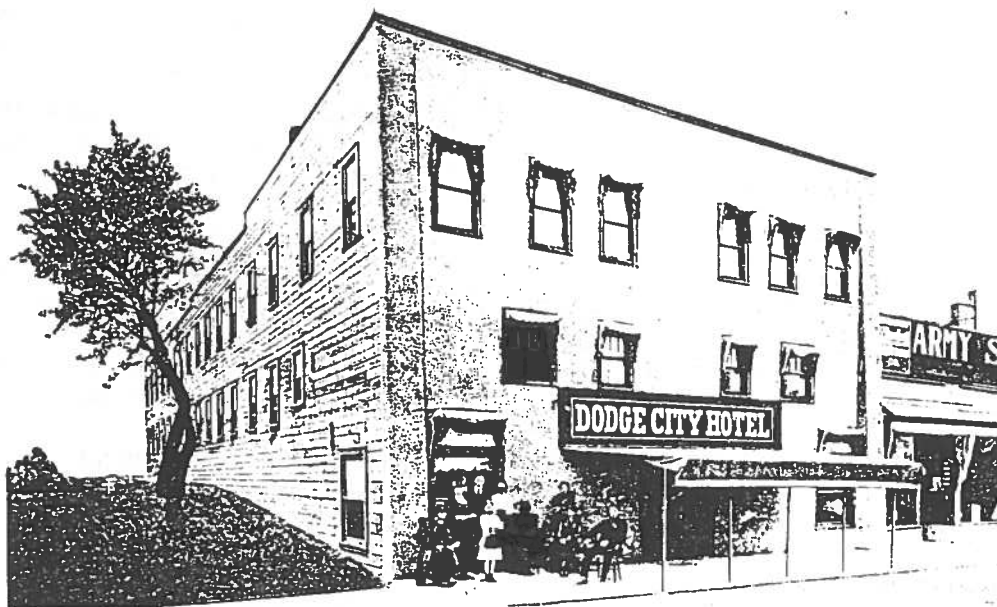
According to newspaper accounts of the time, the fire began in the back of the pool hall at about 1 a.m., and was discovered by a porter there. In spite of efforts by Camp Dodge firefighters, nearly the whole of Dodge City was consumed. All that remained, though somewhat scorched, were the Dodge City Hotel, the Frankel clothing store, and the Dodge City Photographic Gallery.

It should have been no surprise that the fire burned so fiercely. The buildings were constructed nearly entirely of wood and plasterboard-- or "cardboard", as some accounts say; "... the hotel walls are made of thin beaver board."

Although some of the loss was covered by insurance, there must have been no strong impulse to re-build, for the war had been over for two months. The Dodge City Hotel did continue in operation, for some months at least after the fire, serving returning soldiers and families and friends.

A passerby today finds the location of this early "strip mall" somewhat unlikely; though N.W. Beaver Drive is increasingly undergoing development, still there is a distinctly semi-rural feel to the area. Look for the place, past the water tower, across from Camp Dodge where NW. 63d Court branches off at an angle from Beaver Drive. There may still be remnants of concrete footings to be found. A local resident remembers taking part in the breaking up of just such remains.

Thanks to Bob Thomas and the Gold Star Museum for providing reference material. Reference sources: The Des Moines Register, The Des Moines News, The Des Moines Capital, The Des Moines Evening Tribune.



From a picture postcard of the Dodge City Hotel, taken in 1917 or 1918. A corner of what probably was the Frankel Army Supply store can be seen on the left.