

JOHNSTON Historical SOCIETY

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

President Mary Ann Roberts
Secy-Treas. Ray Schliehs

NEWSLETTER

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September Meeting

Date: Wednesday September 24, 1997

Time: 4:00 p.m.

Place: Crown Point Meeting Room
(on Pioneer Parkway)

Program: Dick LeCroy, Vice-president of the Polk County Historical Society, will speak on the Society's current programs, and plans.

July Meeting Report

Members met at Crown Point to discuss plans, possible new projects, and status of ongoing projects. General consensus was that the society needs a place where documents and artifacts which have accumulated can be placed for preservation and access. The cemetery census is ongoing (see below). Ways and means was discussed, but no action was taken.

Bob Thomas continues to work on the gathering of information on the History of Johnston. He reported that there have been some volunteers to research some sections of the local history. Those in progress include: Camp Dodge, Early History of Johnston Cemeteries, Johnston Fire Department, and the Fruitland-Brennan Improvement League.

Still needed are volunteers to research the following: Early Businesses, Johnston School History; Johnston Churches, Johnston Clubs, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Johnston Pioneers, and the Geologic History, including the Saylorville Gorge.

Some discussion of new projects included a suggestion that we enlist the cooperation of the Johnston School system in bringing the research into local history to the attention of faculty and students, and encouraging them to participate with us in local history projects, such as the updating of information in our current written History. Three members presented our suggestions to the Superintendent, Richard Sundblad. (Nove. meeting tentatively scheduled for Wed. Nove, 19th)

New Members

Welcome to the following new members: Kenneth and Nancy Rittgers Chris Kinsey
Johnston, Iowa Johnston, Iowa

Cemetery Census

Work on this project continues, with the recent census of Valley View and Kinsey/Lawson cemeteries. The information gathered will be coordinated with already existing lists, and eventually will be available at Johnston City Hall.

Any one with family lots in Valley View, Ridgedale or Kinsey/Lawson cemeteries, or information regarding lots, is asked to please contact the Society at P.O. Box 109, Johnston, Iowa 50131.

President Resigns

Mary Ann Roberts has resigned her office as president of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society. She cited press of other obligations as preventing her from carrying out the duties of president. We are happy to report that she will continue her membership and her interest. Vice-president Mary Jane Paez will serve as president pro-tem.

Class Reunion

Eighteen members of the Johnston High School classes of 1933, '34, 'and '35, and seven guests, met for lunch and a reunion at the Greenbriar Restaurant on Friday, September 5. Most of the alumni came from the central Iowa area, but 5 traveled some distance (Chicago, Denver, the West Coast) to attend.

After spending time reminiscing, exchanging stories and showing photographs, they toured the new high school addition with principal James Casey, and marveled at the contrast between this school and their own alma mater, vintage 1915 and 1919.

Alumni who attended are: Class of 1933: Helen Andrews Sherrard, Marjorie Bauman Gleason, Audrey Herrold Bricker, Geraldine Roth Ottens, Esther Seibert Peitzman, Benford Walker.

Class of 1934: Mary Lathrum Warner, Catherine McDivitt Ellings, Al Aulich, Evelyn Temple Carlson, Margaret Swanson Pennington, Mildred Andrews Leonard, Evelyn Herrold Bachman.

Class of 1935: Carle Hall, Dick Kuefner, Ray Schlenker, Ray Schleih, Eva Rastovac Frazier. Also among the guests was Dorothy McDivitt, Class of '36.

Sycamore Park

Located on the west bank of the Des Moines River, and on the south side of Kempton Drive, Sycamore Park was one of the attractions of the Johnston area in the 1920's, '30's and 40's. People came from Des Moines and the surrounding area to enjoy its facilities. The name "Sycamore Park" appeared on an arched sign over the entrance drive, and the grounds were shaded by a fine grove of mature sycamore trees.

The park featured a large frame dance pavilion, painted white, with shutters along the sides which could be raised to open the building to the outdoors, and to let in the air (and no doubt mosquitoes). In addition, there was a typical round covered bandstand on the grounds. The dance pavilion was recognized for its fine dance floor, and local bands played on Saturday nights for public dancing during the summer. Occasionally a "name" band would appear. The park was owned by a Mr. Sample.

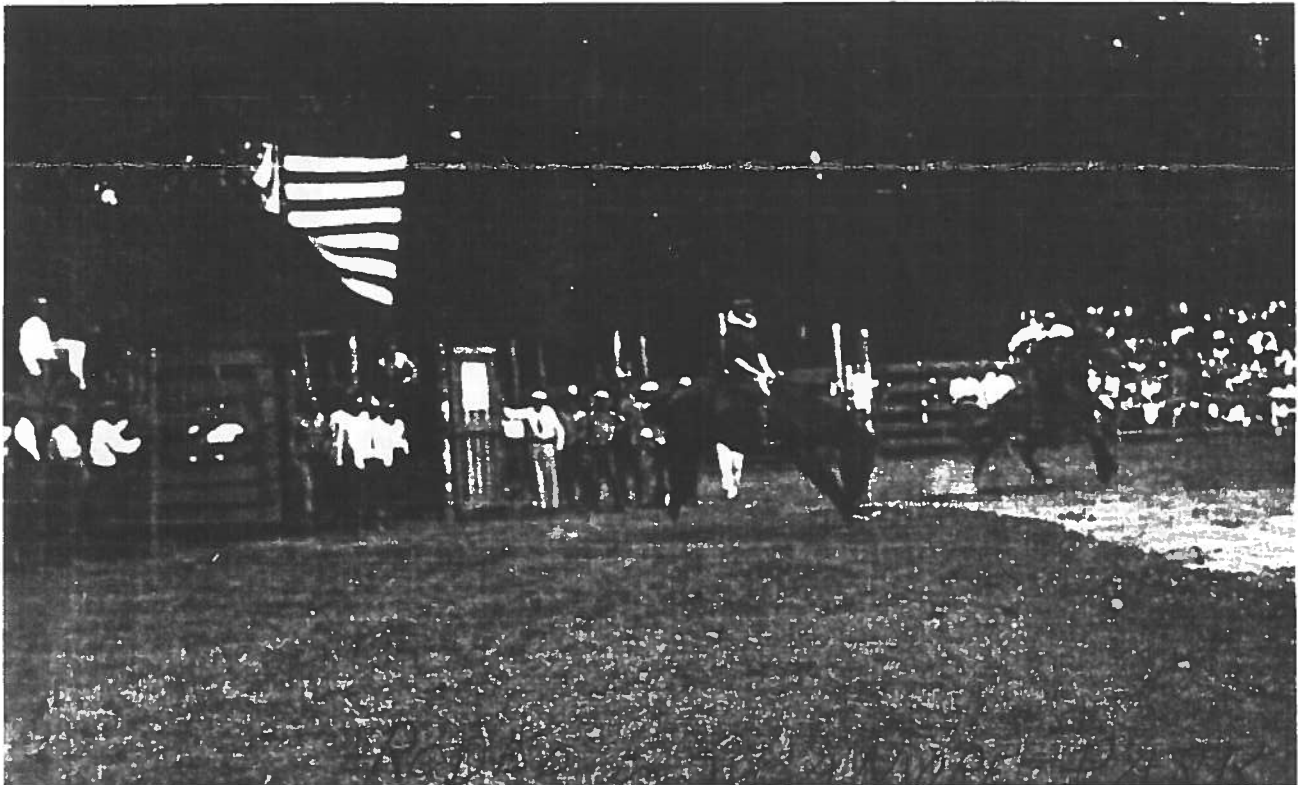
In addition to dances, Sycamore Park was used by various social, civic and trade groups such as the Lumbermen's Association, for gatherings, and for many years the end-of-the year school picnics for the Johnston Schools, a tradition of the times, were held there. Since the building was close to the river, and in the flood plain, it was vulnerable to any serious flooding over the years.

Sycamore Park was still in use as late as the end of the 1940's, but by the 1950's the building was somewhat derelict. It was finally abandoned, and the underbrush took over. After the town of Johnston was incorporated, an effort was made, by the city parks and recreation board, the Johnston Garden Club, and other interested citizens, to clean up the area. They installed picnic tables with the hope that it would serve as a local park and picnic site. But problems with vandalism, and the prospect of flooding in future, led to the area being abandoned once more.

In August of 1927 a rodeo appeared at Sycamore Park. It was sponsored by "a man from Collins": "Carr's Rodeo, One Day Only-- Featuring Jimmy Nesbit"!

Bessie Carlson- at that time Bessie Lundstrom-, who had attended and graduated from Johnston High School was a good horsewoman. As a matter of fact she had frequently ridden her horse to Johnston School from her home in Crocker Township, on the east side of the Des Moines river.

Bessie entered the rodeo competition. She rode the bucking bronco, and in her own words, " got thrown, hit on my head & didn't get hurt."! Bessie says that the rodeo encamped at the park for several days. Later in that month it appeared at the Dexfield Park (in Dexter, IA) and Bessie, nothing daunted, again entered, and rode a steer. No report on how she did!



Sycamore Park, August, 1927: Bessie Lundstrom Rides the Bucking Bronco at the Rodeo

Today the site of Sycamore Park can be found by the approach over a culvert (installed when the road level was raised, and a new bridge constructed in the 1950's), located on the south side of Kempton Drive (N.W. 66th Ave.) just west of the Des Moines River bridge. The "Park" is now a designated wildlife refuge under the protection of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Information, Please!

If members and/or their families have information, clippings, photos (we will copy and return to you) concerning Sycamore Park, or any other aspect of Johnston history, the JSHS will be grateful to receive it. Also, any corrections to information in this newsletter are welcome!! Address: JSHS, P.O. Box 109, Johnston IA 50131.

*****Thanks to Bessie Carlson for information, photo, and Rodeo Handbill.*****
The Johnston Station Historical Society is a tax-deductible organization under IRS code 501(c)(3).

Don't miss this!

CARR'S

RODEO

Sycamore Park
ONE DAY ONLY

SUN. AUG. 14

AT 2:30 P. M.

20 THRILLING EVENTS
THRILLS AND SPILLS GALORE!

See the Girl Ride the Horse That Jumps Over the
MOON

And Many Other Interesting Features—Featuring
JIMMY NESBIT
WORLD'S GREATEST COWBOY CLOWN.

50-Cowboys & Cowgirls-50
75 Wild Horses — Old Mexico and
African Bramah Cattle--75

Admission 50c

Sycamore Park is 7 miles N. W. of Des Moines. Go North on Merle Hay Road to Johnson Station, turn East—or, North on 6th Ave. to School House and turn West—follow signs.

Advertising Handbill for Carr's Rodeo, Appearing at Sycamore Park, Johnston, Iowa on August 14, 1927 (courtesy Bessie Carlson)