

# Newsletter

Volume VII Number 2

March, 2000

President: Mary Jane Paez  
Vice-Pres. & Programs: Pat Wallerstedt  
Secretary: Beulah Darling

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

## MARCH MEETING

Sunday, March 26, 2000  
4.00 p.m.

Crown Point Meeting Room  
Program: To be announced

We will have a potluck meal  
Come and bring your table service and  
A dish to share

## January Meeting:

Our speaker, R. Wayne Skidmore, spoke to us about the early days of Pioneer Hi-Bred, (which Henry A. Wallace had incorporated as the "Hi-Bred Corn Company" in 1926) and his employment there. "Skid" graduated from Drake in 1933, with a degree in Commercial Sciences. During those depression days, he worked at a shoe shop for \$25 a week to earn money for college. After graduation he took a job with the "Hi-Bred Corn Company" as a bookkeeper. In addition, he had a milk route for the Morrison Dairy, which bought and delivered milk from the Pioneer herd. So he was doing milk deliveries in the morning,

and keeping the company books in the afternoon.

The offices for Pioneer were in a relatively primitive cinderblock building on the south side of NW 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, (then Johnston Road). Skid says the men employees had outdoor facilities, but there was a chemical toilet for Mrs. Laura Voorhees, secretary to Jay Newlin. Jay was the farm manager, and also was in charge of seed production.

Skid would eat lunch at the Club House, a farm house (former Wilson farm), where Pioneer sometimes housed and fed employees, especially seasonal ones; a meal cost 35 cents. Josie McGonigal was the cook.

In 1935 the Pioneer offices moved from Johnston to the Wallace Printing Building in Des Moines, from there to the Masonic Temple, to the Harger & Bliss building on Mulberry Street, and finally, to a building which had been a Railroad Hotel, also on Mulberry Street, and Skid moved with them.

During these years Skid worked as the office manager as the company grew. In 1935 Pioneer began breeding hybrid chickens. In 1936 two new plants were built at Durant

and Reinbeck, and 8 employees attended the Des Moines office Christmas party. Also in the 1930's the Illinois and the Indiana companies were started to market seed in those areas.

The drought years of the mid-thirties pointed up the advantages of hybrids over the old open-pollinated varieties of corn: the hybrids would make a crop, where the older varieties went barren under stress. So selling seed became an easier proposition.

Up until now the company had been known as the Hi-Bred Corn Co. But when other companies began to use this name, or slight variations, the company decided to add "Pioneer" to the name to distinguish it from others.

Labor was short during WWII and production of seed was labor-intensive. In the Algona area German prisoners of war were used to produce seed, and more and more women were hired to do detasseling and pollinating chores.

The company expanded to Canada in 1946, and later to overseas locations.

In 1965, R. Wayne Skidmore became the company's fourth president.

By the 1970's Pioneer was well established, but as it was privately held, with few shareholders, management succession was a problem. The decision was made to "go public", and this was finally accomplished in 1973, while Skid was president of Pioneer.

Besides hybrid corn, the company has worked with and sold, at one time or another, wheat, beef cattle, cotton, sorgum, soybeans, chickens and sunflowers, and

alfalfa. Hybrid corn has always been the most profitable.

During his years with Pioneer, Skid served as bookkeeper, office manager, as a sales manager in the Minnesota-South Dakota areas, and as the CEO at the time Pioneer "went public". When asked which of his roles in the growth of the company gave him the most satisfaction, he replied without hesitation: "Dealing with farmers, especially in South Dakota and Minnesota, when I was sales manager for the area".



## From the President.....

As members of the historical society, we have an interest in the past. One of our many links to the past is through our various pioneer cemeteries in the city. For being the final resting-place of many, these cemeteries have been fairly active places over the past few years.

After the city took over the care and maintenance of the three cemeteries in the early '90's, it was found that there were no records. The historical society worked at reconstructing the records by doing walk-through surveys and comparing the findings with the records that the WPA did of cemeteries in the '30's. For those of you who are new members or have become more active with the internet, those records can be found by logging on to:

[www.usgenweb.com](http://www.usgenweb.com).

This will lead you to the USGW Tombstone Project link. Viewing the Registry will bring you to select the state of Iowa, the Polk County, and, *voila*, our Johnston cemetery surveys.

The symbiosis between the Society and the City has been really good. We presented a design for a new gate at Ridgedale, the City paid for its manufacture. We solicited donations for flagpoles, the City paid for transportation and installation. The Society has had clean-up days at the cemeteries with a lot of cooperation from the City and Johnston 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

This spring the tombstones in all three public cemeteries will be steam-cleaned, something made possible by a Community Betterment Grant from Polk County. Veteran's graves have been identified and new grave markers will be installed this spring.

The Society is applying for a grant for planting trees at Ridgedale. Hopefully the grant will be approved; but in the process, a landscaping plan has been professionally done to beautify the east end of Ridgedale.

The pride we have in our past is reflected by the care we have for our cemeteries. Whether you have ancestors buried in the Johnston cemeteries or not, they are nice places to visit.

## Annual Meeting

**T**he Johnston Historical Society will hold its annual meeting on **Tuesday, April 25 at 4:00 p.m.** in the Crown Point Meeting Room.

There will be election of officers, discussion of changes in articles of incorporation and by-laws, and other business of the society. **Plan to attend!**

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## Notes From The February Business Meeting.....:

### **The Flagpole at Ridgedale Cemetery will be dedicated on Memorial Day, May 29<sup>th</sup>.**

We have had another contact with a descendant of a Johnston pioneer family through the Tombstone Transcription Project. Mary Jane Paez heard from Al Hemminger, who has family buried at Ridgedale Cemetery. Myrtle Van Dyke researched the local ancestry for Mr. Hemminger, who lives in Livonia, Michigan.

Tombstone cleaning will begin when weather is warmer; this project is funded by a grant from the County.

Bill and Jane Wagner have made a contribution of \$300 for trees to be planted at Ridgedale Cemetery. The JSBS voted to add \$200 to their donation, to be included in a request for a matching grant .

Connie Maxwell reports that the City is planning to develop a web-site on the Internet, and that it is possible that JSBS could have a link to this site. We'll keep you posted on this; it could be a great opportunity for members out of this area to keep in touch!

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## **The McGrane Family: A follow-up**

**T**he material and photos of the family and career of Bert McGrane, Des Moines Register and Tribune journalist and sports-writer, are currently on display at City Hall, and we reported on this story in the last issue of the Newsletter.

However, we wish to correct some errors, and to add to the story.

Bert, and his wife Veronica had 5 children (not four): Miriam, a retired Mercy Hospital nurse, who now lives in Beavertdale; Lawrence Michael (Mike), who was an attorney and judge in northwest Iowa, and who died in 1996. William (Bill) lives in Grays Lake, IL, and works in public relations for the Chicago Bears. Elizabeth (Betsy) Haberer is a nurse and farm wife in Boone, IA. Martin (Marty), the youngest McGrane, is a journalist and lives in Madison, SD.

Louis Bertram (Bert) McGrane died in 1987 and his wife Veronica died in 1989.

Miriam McGrane Martin provided the materials for display. Many thanks to her and to other family members for sharing the story of this distinguished sports-writer, and former Johnston resident..



### CIVIL WAR VETERANS AT RIDGEDALE CEMETERY

THE JSHS has another display at City Hall which local members may want to view. Ferne Michael has researched the Civil War veterans who are buried at Ridgedale cemetery, and featured are their names, and rank and service, if known.

Also in the display are enlarged lithographs of Civil war actions in which Iowa units took part, and which appeared in contemporary

issues of Harper's Weekly. The veterans are::

Joshua E. Boyd

Matthew Dickson: Private in the 205<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry.

Henry Herrold, jr: Private in the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry

Joseph Herrold: Private in the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry.

(Henry and Joseph's brother Jonathan Herrold was killed at the Battle of Stone's River in Tennessee in 1862)

Thomas McDowell: Corporal, 23<sup>rd</sup> Iowa Infantry. Wounded 7 June 1863 at Milliken's Bend LA. Died of wounds 26 August 1863 at Eddyville IA.

Andrew Jack

Andrew Jackson Reed: Private, 15<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry.

Robert White Schiffler: 46<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry.

Jesse R. Stallworth: Private, 11<sup>th</sup> Iowa Infantry.

Edward C. Wilson: a Pennsylvania Regiment.



### *New Members*

Welcome to these new members:

Elaine (Bilz) Berry  
Troutdale, OR

Daniel Duvick  
Madrid, IA

William McGrane  
Grays Lake, IL

Martin McGrane  
 Madison, SD  
 Miriam Martin  
 Des Moines, IA  
 Helen M. (Ferrel) Moore  
 Sun City, AZ  
 Bliss (Michael) Williams  
 Litchfield Park, AZ  
 Abby Lauer  
 Alachua, FL  
 A.E. Hemminger  
 Livonia, MI  
 New member last month,  
 James Reihsen  
 Johnston, IA

As of January 1, 2000, the JSHS had 204 memberships: 124 single, and 80 family. We lost 6 members through death last year.



*Class Photographs*

If you are a graduate or former student of Johnston High School **we'd appreciate receiving a copy of your class group photograph.**

Actually, it is Ferne Michael who would like to hear from you, for she wants to use these photos as a part of the JSHS display at the OASIS event on May 26. In addition, the photos will be a part of the All- Johnston Alumni Reunion which is scheduled for Thursday, September 27 to Sunday, September 30 2001, and then they will

become a part of the Historical Society collection.

Ferne already has photos from classes 1938, '40, '41, '42, and 1954.

Look through your school memorabilia, and if you have a class photo, make a copy (most copy businesses can make good ones quite inexpensively), and send it to:

Ferne Michael  
 7214 Riete Ave.  
 Windsor Heights, IA 50311-1304

And if you are able, please provide the names of your fellow classmates.  
**THANK YOU!!**



**Contributions**

Thanks to the following for contributions to the JSHS:

Ruth (Hunt) Stone  
 Seattle, WA  
 Al E. Hemminger  
 Livonia, MI



**Our Best Wishes for Good and Speedy Recovery:**

Don Denman is back in Des Moines after undergoing treatment in Texas. He is currently at the Powell Center, at Iowa Methodist Hospital.

Bill Herrold continues to recover from effects of a stroke. He is at home.

*The Schlenker Family:  
From Baden, Germany  
To Johnston, Iowa*

The year 1848 marked a time of unrest in Europe, and especially in the German Confederation of states. In addition to a business depression, and overpopulation, there were serious crop failures. Many people of the land immigrated to America at this time.

A number of Americans of German ancestry can trace their forebears to this period.

One of these immigrants was Theobald Schlenker. He was born in Baden, Germany (southwestern Germany) in 1826. By 1848, he was an officer in the Imperial Army, and, with six fellow officers, he became involved in an insurrection in Baden. When the insurrection failed Theobald and two fellow officers, named Strube and Siegel, fled to America. (Siegel later became a general in the Federal Army during the Civil War.)

Theobald Schlenker came up the Mississippi River (he probably entered the United States at New Orleans), and settled in McGregor Iowa, in Clayton County. While there he received word of the death of his father. He could not return to claim any inheritance, for he would have been executed for his activities in 1848.

Instead, Theobald sent a friend, John Huser, also from Baden, to investigate. When Huser returned, he reported that there was no estate, and, it is said, immediately left for the West, where he appeared to be a wealthy man.

In Clayton County Theobald met and married Maria Louisa Mahle (later became Malley). She was also from Germany, in Mecklenburg (North Germany along the Baltic coast.) Her father, Franz Mahle, had been involved in the 1848 insurrection there, and immigrated to Iowa.

Theobald and Maria moved to Polk County, to a farm on what is now NW 58<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just east of Woodside School. They had 9 children. The eldest was William (born 1858). William married Catherine Schnoor (born 1862), who came from north of Perry. Her brother, Henry Schnoor, married William's sister Maria Louisa.

After their marriage, William and Catherine moved to a farm just north of the Polk County farm, on East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, where there was also a coal mine.

William and Catherine lived to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. They had two children: Henry William, born 1884, and Luella Catherine, born 1886.

Catherine Schlenker bought 80 acres on what is now NW 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Johnston, located where the High School now stands. In about 1904 or 1905 Catherine gave this farm to her son Henry. William had a farm located on the east side of Merle Hay Road, just north of the current Interstate 35-80 interchange. This farm, also known as the Swanson farm he gave to his daughter Luella.

Henry's move to the farm in Johnston involved fording the Des Moines river at the foot of NW 62<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, now where the MidAmerican Energy transformer station is located. The bridge across the Des Moines River had not yet been built.

In 1907 Henry Schlenker married Mabel Miller. She came to Des Moines from

Peoria, IL, with her mother, who was a milliner. Mabel, before her marriage, was largely responsible for the support of her mother and her brothers and sisters.

Henry Schlenker and Mabel had six children: Clarence, Leroy (deceased), Veda, Raymond, Margaret (deceased) and Barton. Henry was a farmer, a market gardener, a trucker, a school bus driver and an orchardist.

On their 80 acres, the family grew vegetables: corn, carrots, cabbage, and other garden produce.. Ray and Barton remember working in the garden where they weeded the garden and harvested vegetables. Henry and Mabel would then travel to Des Moines, hauling produce in their truck to the City Market, where they had a stand. This was a wholesale market, downtown adjacent to the current location of the YMCA. The family also had pigs and chickens, and at one time, a greenhouse.

Henry Schlenker owned several trucks over the years. One of the first ones had a chain drive, and solid rubber tires. He bought a second-hand truck which at one time had been owned by Younkens; the name was still visible on the side.

Later, he bought a Model-T, and mounted a bus coach on the chassis; thus he owned his own school bus, and, for 16 years beginning in the mid-20's, had a route on Beaver south to Lower Beaver, and in the Lovington area. During the summer months a flatbed was substituted for the coach, and used for hauling everything from vegetables to coal to bricks for the highway.

In the 1920's, Henry Schlenker put his farmland into an apple orchard. He cultivated between rows with a one-horse

plow. Ray Schlenker remembers leading the horse.

On Armistice Day of 1940 Iowa and the mid-west experienced a severe and sudden freeze which destroyed many orchards. In the Schlenker orchard many of the older trees, which were more susceptible to the frost, were killed. Younger trees sometimes survived, and with pruning continued to produce.

In reminiscing about growing up on the farm, Ray and Barton remember going to the Carter's store to pay the grocery bill. And Ray remembers square dances held at the home of a Kuehl family, who were at that time living in the house which was later the Bilz residence, and is currently the Stillwell home on NW 62<sup>nd</sup> Ave.

In 1955 the farm was sold to Pioneer Hi-Bred Corn Company (now Pioneer Hi-bred International). Henry Schlenker died in 1958.

(Many thanks to Ray and Barton Schlenker for information on their family)

## Renewal Notice.....:

### Look on your envelope mailing label.

If there is a "99" after your name you need to renew your membership for 2000. Please do renew, and send \$10 for a single, \$12 for a family membership to:

Johnston Historical Society  
Post Office Box 109  
Johnston, IA 50131

See the back page for a photo of the Schlenker farm.



The orchard at the Henry Schlenker farm in about 1930. View looks to the North-east; the line of houses along the Interurban tracks on NW 59<sup>th</sup> Court appear as a diagonal across the upper photo. The Beaver Road Ridge and the old Carl Rittgers farm appear in the upper left corner.