

# WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE HERALD

A PUBLICATION OF THE WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS  
VOLUME 9 – AUGUST 2005– #13 – KIT ZINSER, EDITOR

## **From your president, Mary Jo Parish.**

If you happened to go to the Merchants' Tent at the Washington Cherry Festival, you had the opportunity to enjoy the Washington Historical Society's booth. This very attractive display was created by Patrice Essig and truly showed her decorating talents. Historic pictures of Washington were displayed along with interesting artifacts and items for sale. Additionally, the Time Travels in Trunks project coordinated with the Washington District Library took center stage. These items taken from the trunks generated the most interest with its artifact guessing game. Local residents Gwen Howarter and Fred Guinn each won a set of historic books for their accuracy. Trunk items on display were: Wrought iron toaster used in a fire place, World War II Navy shirt, Civil War wooden canteen, chicken water dish, slave shackles, wool carders, printer's typesetting tray, pestle, slave identification tag, block of pressed tea similar to those tossed into the bay during the Boston Tea Party.

Look for our booth again next year. We have even more ideas of how to get the Washington Historical Society's name out there and generate interest in our local history.

## **Programs For The Upcoming Year**

The Historical Society's Program Committee, chaired by Sue Freeburg, has been hard at work planning new and exciting activities for the coming year. You won't want to miss a single meeting.

Meetings are 7:00 p.m. on the 4th Monday of the month at the Presbyterian Church with the exception of September, December, March and April.

## **September 26 — From the Old to the New**

The September meeting will be held at the new Washington Middle School. Maureen Hotkevich's students have created a technology enhanced research project on the Denhart family. Student council members will escort society members on a tour of the building - a fun event for an organization dedicated to preserving Washington's past to get a glimpse into the future.

## **October 24th — A Swedish Settlement**

The program will feature the history of Bishop Hill.

**November 28th — History of Springdale Cemetery**

**December — Holiday House Tour**

**January 23rd — I Have a Story**

Long time Washington residents share their stories about living in our town.

**February 27th — A Beloved Country School**

The history of Pleasant View School—gone but not forgotten.

**March 27th — Denhart Building Revival**

The restoration process and tour of the Henry Denhart and Co. Bank Building on the square.

**April 24th — Victorian Architecture and Stained Glass**

The annual banquet will be held at Washington Middle School. The program features Rolf Achilles, curator of the Navy Pier Stained Glass Museum on Victorian Homes.

Please mark these dates on your calendar and be sure to invite a friend. New and renewed memberships are our greatest source of revenue. I feel sure these programs will generate an interest in preserving Washington's history.

Mary Jo Parrish

**From your editor, Kit Zinser.**

Since our last congress, I can't let the opportunity go by without mentioning the Memorial Day Parade and service. There was a great turnout and I was proud as I watched so many veterans and audience members who appreciated the efforts of our sons and daughters, husbands, wives, sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers who serve with honor our country. Another plus for Washington!!

Paula Kilby wrote about growing up in Washington from 1931 to 1945. Here are her words:

"What a wonderful small town—Washington—as I grew up there from 1931 to 1945. I was crushed to leave my best friends and hometown when we moved to Harlingen Texas. My grandfather, Paul Goddard, bought the local newspaper after being in the insurance business. He and my grandmother, Anna, lived in the cottage at 311 S. Main. I could go to their home from my house at 110 W. Holland through the back yard of the Habecker Funeral Home which was the A.G. Danforth home originally. I always ran because 'that's where they kept dead people.' One year, at age three, I picked all of the Asa Danforth tulips which were especially ordered from Holland. Our home life was typical, and my mom, Izzy, made sure the whole family sat down together for every meal. One Thanksgiving, we invited POW's from the [canning factory](#) over for a meal. My brother, Ed, was three years older than I and was the star of the high school basketball team. I went to first grade in a small one room house a block west of the square. I think I must have been around ten when the one and only movie theatre was built. Prior to that, we used to watch horror and cowboy movies on Saturday mornings in the old City Hall. I think we paid a dime for the new movie. I had to walk past two funeral homes and the spooky Lutheran church yard to get home after those movies, but it was worth it. I moved

quickly! Doc Mueri was my dentist in his one chair office. I bought shoes at J.J. Roehm's shoe store where I got to put my feet in the green glowing x-ray machine. My dad eventually bought the Tazewell County Reporter from my grandfather so I was raised with that newsprint smell and it was my job to look up news from 25, 50 or 100 years ago, and I ran the addressograph which made the mailing labels."

"My best friends were Jody Heyl (Mert), Marilyn Martini (Mel) and Marian Magee (Mag) - all M's and I didn't have a nickname. When we were freshman at the brand new high school, we were excused one afternoon because of a blizzard and we walked the mile to Mag's farm east of town. Sledding was fun at Eureka Golf Course. Our swimming hole was close to Eureka and Dick Meyers, George Herbst and Pen James joined us. One of my favorites was Gaga Tanton who lived at 205 S. Main. She made taffy for us to pull, always had rhubarb and took me to be baptized at the Presbyterian Church. My brother and I used to beg farmers who came by our home to throw out cobs of corn until my mom caught us. My brother and friends took me snipe hunting after dark at the old cemetery. The Heyl Pony Farm loaned out ponies for the summer, and I was lucky to have one until I saw a couple of snakes while riding, and returned the pony. I spent the night often at the Zinser home. Many nights we would bolt out of bed when the fire truck would tear out of the garage across the street. We could hear Doc Zinser turn over in his rope bed on the upstairs porch. Saturday evenings found us circling the square during the band concerts....lots of popcorn and conversation with my friends. I will never forget the fall burning leaves, summers swimming with my friends, and the heavy snow falling just at the right time—Christmas Eve. It's been fun and sad thinking about my childhood in Washington. Thanks for letting me share!" — Paula Kilby

Paula mentioned the band concerts which provided wholesome, community entertainment for years. Clem Baer recalls the band concerts were in existence long before her high school graduation in 1933. Now, a look into an evening's entertainment.

Ada watched the graceful branches of the huge old Maple tree sway in the light breeze, the sun toying playfully with the evening shadows. Small talk with Mrs. Ferris - the supper dishes done. The Watson sisters, Nellie and Fanny, walked by and nodded and spoke, "Are you going to the band concert this evening, Ada?"

The old woman rose from her lawn chair, turned it over in case of rain, and stepped into the house. After a cool bath, she dipped the oversized powder puff into the pale yellow oval box of Muguet Lily of the Valley and turned the bathroom into a cloud of white. She buttoned her best summer dress, slipped on her white dress shoes complete with silk laces, put on her white gloves (even though it was 80 degrees outside), checked her straw purse for a clean handkerchief and \$2.00 and strolled toward the square.

The band concert was an opportunity to socialize with friends and neighbors and enjoy the sounds of Henry August Esser and Eldon Hirstein, conductors and John Diemer and Marguerite Lucas, songsters.

The drummer was Bob (Brute?) Hornbeck who was deaf. Other band members included O. Habben, Mr. Decker, Mr. Slonneger.

The bandstand had strung around it a halo of yellow bug repellant bulbs. No matter, the cicadas competed with the band on every level. Children played noisily, running and chasing around the coping and bricks. It was a great chance to have full rein of the square—no traffic to speak of.

Frank Smith, Mr. Blaylock and the Reed brothers provided traffic control. Walt Holland placed his popcorn machine in front of his barber shop/pool hall cranking out some grand buttery popcorn. Local churches and organizations provided homemade pies and cakes by the slice. Steimle's and Tully's brought the ice cream! This was an opportunity for retail merchants, Ben Franklin, J.J. Roehm's shoe store, Mary Spring dress shop, Herbst Hardware, McBride's, Johnnie Leonard's bakery, Steimle's, the A&P Grocery to display their wares and merchandise. One Wednesday night, little Tommy Hexamer won the grand prize donated by Ben Franklin's Dime Store. When they called the winning ticket number, Tommy was so excited he didn't hear what the prize was. He stepped up onto the bandstand to receive his prize in front of a very large audience and was a bit embarrassed to accept a life size doll, complete with blinking eyes, pink dress, baby bottle. The conductor had a great time pointing out the winner was a nine year old boy—Tommy didn't go to band concerts for several weeks thereafter.

Teens circled the square (think about it!) hoping their parents wouldn't notice the fact they hadn't stayed in one spot for more than five minutes, guys would hang on the light standards hoping to get a glimpse of that special girl. Everyone dressed up and depending on your age, you might sport a white blouse, nylon scarf knotted at the neck or around your pony tail, flats, full skirt with crinolines OR white buck shoes and chinos, button down shirt and a flat top. Spence Galland was the king of white bucks. He probably stopped every five minutes to brush the dust off.

The older folks drove to the square, and you wanted to be early so that you could get a good parking spot. Windows were cranked down by sheer manpower, car doors opened wide and there was ample chance to talk to your neighbor between tunes. At the end of each selection, light applause came from those sitting on the square coping and noisy appreciation emerged in the form of honking horns. If you were early and lucky, you got to watch the band members settle in, tune their instruments.

Dee Dee Lucas Fletcher remembers her mother preparing for her appearances. "Mom always washed her hair and would sit outside to dry it. (No hair dryers in those days). She fussed over the dresses she wore when she sang. She would entertain us at home with singing and whistling. She had to go to Eldon Hirstein's house (upstairs on Main Street) to get the music. She chose songs from the popular musicals—South Pacific, Carousel, Showboat. Mom practiced in the upstairs of the old city building. I remember going with her—it was hot and all the windows were open. I could hear the traffic going by outside. Mom loved to sing and it always pleased her when it meant something special to people. She often wrote special words to songs to personalize them for individuals. Dad was her biggest fan. He loved to hear her sing and was so proud when others would compliment her."

A truly hot August night—not a breath of air and the band members wiped away the sweat with large white handkerchiefs while bugs whizzed past flitting from one light to the next. Mr. Esser raised his baton—a little ivory thing with a tiny egg shaped wooden handle and a hush fell.. He tapped the music stand and everyone waited expectantly. One rousing number to the next—a waltz, a pop number, Rhapsody in Blue, String of Pearls, the Grand Ole Flag. Then, she was standing at the steps...Marguerite Lucas was introduced. She took the stage regally in a floating, efflorescent frock. She picked up her music, nodded to the conductor and the concert really began. She sang, she piped her lyrics to the crowd and at the end, louder applause and whistles! I knew a star!

The playing of the Star Spangled Banner signaled the end of the concert and children ran to their parents, tired, ready to go home.... a drop of chocolate ice cream on that pinafore or cotton shirt and half a bag of popcorn leftover to be savored while sitting on the porch waiting for the upstairs bedrooms to cool off.

Look in the second floor windows, right corner and see Marguerite and the band members practicing?



To the right is the original bandstand.



Below is the more sophisticated version..not yet having the brick foundation.

