

WASHINGTON HERITAGE HERALD

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From the Editors Desk. "Buy a Commemorative Brick and Help Pave the Way From Our Past To Our Future"

Two members of the Historical Society were recently shoveling snow from the brick sidewalk in front of the Zinser House when one of them quoted the following line from *Don Quixote* by Cervantes: "There is a strange charm in the thoughts of a good legacy."

Everyone of the 450 inscribed commemorative bricks laying in front of the Society's property is someone's "good legacy", not only to their family, but also to the Washington Historical Society and to the Washington community.



Yes, 450 bricks, representing \$45,000, has enabled the Society to complete the purchase of the property and to undertake many restoration projects. You may add significantly to this legacy by ordering a brick inscribed with your name; your name and that of your spouse; names of other family members; a deceased person; your business or organization; or your name and year of your WCHS class.

The 25th person to order a brick prior to March 1, 2004 will be awarded a free brick. Call Joyce Nordhielm at 444-2113 to complete this opportunity to leave a "good legacy".

An Open Letter to the Washington Historical Society Membership. Dennis Walker, a 1956 graduate of Washington Community High School and now a resident of Muskegon, Wisconsin, submitted the following recollections of an event that occurred in Washington in 1954. He reports that "...this was probably the most discussed local event of 1954." The event was covered in the *Tazewell County Reporter*.

Has It Really Been Fifty Years?

On a frigid, blustery day in early January 1954, the national spotlight was aimed at Washington, Illinois, for a brief moment. The national media, corporate bigwigs and television personalities congregated at Commercial Square to honor a local 10 year old boy who had just won the Grand Prize in a nation-wide contest.

The prize was a traveling display vehicle that the Ralston-Purina Company, sponsors of the TV program, had built to promote their products and the program at stores, festivals, etc. around the country. This display consisted of a full sized tractor-trailer with a 30 foot mock-up of a space ship permanently mounted on the trailer. This unit, having completed it's career as a display, had it's interior stripped out, and the space ship gadgetry was replaced with a dining room, an eight place bunk room, and a small kitchenette. For a ten year old boy, this made a very deluxe tree house, without the TREE!

The Grand Prize, dubbed "The Ralston Rocket," arrived on schedule at Commercial Square, along with the reporters and dignitaries. All of the schools let out early so everyone could participate in the festivities. The WCHS marching band joined the party, trying to play without having their lips freeze to their horns.

Mayor Zimmerman began the presentation, declaring that, "Today is RICKY WALKER DAY!" Then the Ralston-Purina representative made a little speech, as did the "Captain" of the TV Space Ship, who then presented Ricky with the keys to this Rocket! Cardboard "space helmets" were passed out to a few hundred would-be "Space Cadets" in the audience and everyone was allowed to look over the Rocket and visit with Rick.

(Continued from front page.) and the TV folks. The ceremony ended just before frost-bite set in and Ricky's father, John Walker, a career trucker, drove the Rocket to their home at 315 Wagner Street and parked it in the driveway. For the next 5 months or so, every kid who wanted to, got to visit and satisfy his or her curiosity about the Rocket.

FOOTNOTE TO THE OPEN LETTER - By and by, the novelty of Rick's Rocket wore off, and his folks decided to try to put the thing to work. Any proceeds would go toward Rick's education. In late January they had loaned the Rocket to the "March of Dimes" campaign in town, hoping to attract more donors, and in that effort the Rocket proved quite successful. In the summer, 1954, they leased the Rocket to carnival interests in Wichita, Kansas. After a year we got it back and it sat in the driveway until the next summer when the Rocket was sold to a promoter in Mt. Sterling, Illinois. The tractor was sold to a Chicago paper box company where it finally had to really work for a living! The next thing to depart was the Walker family itself. In August, 1956, Mr. Walker, who by this time was working for a Detroit based tank truck company, received a promotion requiring a move to the main office. In early September 1956 all five members of the Walker family bade a fond farewell to Illinois, our home for the past twelve and a half years. We moved to Michigan. We all live in Michigan today, scattered from Saugatuck to Sault Ste. Marie. - Dennis Walker

CEMETERY WALK - 2004

The Washington Historical Society is again planning to hold the Cemetery Walk. Anyone who has family background information pertaining to someone buried in the Glendale Cemetery and would like that person/persons represented in the Walk call Jean Keely (444-2467) in this regard. Also needed, are "actors" to portray those being honored, guides, and traffic controllers. The "celebration" will be held in Glendale Cemetery on a date yet to be determined.

REPORT ON JANUARY MEETING

Approximately 50 people attended the January 26 meeting and enjoyed the program entitled, "I've Got A Story." The storytellers - Fred Joos, Helen Lytle, Ed Bradle, Lavonne Adams, Pat Essig, and Elmer Zimmerman kept the audience highly entertained.

For those who were unable to attend the meeting/program an opportunity does exist to view a video recorded during the presentation. Call Ralph Woolard at 444-2845 to arrange viewing time, etc. A copy of the tape may be purchased for \$5.00.

SOME TRIVIA

During the past year the Zinser House and The Village Doctor Museum has welcomed visitors from Indiana, Ohio, California, Missouri, Arizona, Colorado, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Montana.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

February 23 - "Fighting for Freedom, Midwestern Women Abolitionists" by Stacey Robertson

March 22 - "Washington Authors and Artists"

April 26 Banquet - "Historical Crooks and Characters Of Central Illinois" by Prairie Story Tellers
