

# WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE HERALD

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Volume 9 — March 2005 — #11 — Kit Zinser, Editor

From your president, Joyce Nordhielm.

## *Hear Ye Hear Ye*

The March meeting will be on the 28th at 7:00 p.m. in the Presbyterian Church. The program will be Historical Moments in Time with Photo Restoration by Becky Dailey.

The April meeting will be on the 25th at 7:00p.m. in the Presbyterian Church. The program will feature Zachary Borders presenting Architectural History of the Washington Square.

## *In Memory of Marguerite Lucas*

Marguerite Lucas, beloved member of the Washington Historical Society and resident of Washington passed away on January 16, 2005. She had been in ill health for several years and made her home at Rosewood Nursing Home. Marguerite served as President of the Society for almost ten years and was an active member many years before that. Those who worked with her found her to be a charming spirit. (Ed. Note: I am planning on doing a story on Marguerite for May in time for Mother's Day. Anyone wishing to share stories is welcome to contact me. KZ)

## *Pictures of Old Washington*

The Society is offering a set of 52 Black and White (Sepia) pictures of old Washington. They are printed on four calendars and are suitable for framing. They can be purchased for \$10.00 a set at the Zinser House during regular hours or mail your request with a check for \$13.75. You won't be disappointed!

From your editor, Kit Zinser.

I was fortunate to receive from Russ Brunnenmeyer his "History of Grandpa and Grandma Brunnenmeyer –John and Lena." He tells it so lovingly —well, you'll see. Russ's words:

"Grandpa and Grandma originally lived on a farm at the end of South Main Street, Washington, Illinois Township. They sold the farm in approximately 1896 and moved to Washington where they opened a restaurant in a building somewhere on the North side of the square.

Grandpa then opened his saloon and operated it as such until 1906 when the City voted to go dry after which he opened his grocery store in the building next to the alley and a meat market in the other building. He purchased some meat from Peoria Meat Packers and also slaughtered some himself all prior to World War I.

During the 1920's he consolidated the two into the one grocery store moving the meat market and walk in cooler to the rear of the grocery store. Behind the grocery room was a small room used for storage of merchandise prior to stocking the shelves. In the rear of that area was the bakeshop where all the breads and rolls sold daily were baked.

Raw peanuts were purchased in one hundred pound bags, and, as peanuts were needed for sale, Grandma would roast them slowly in the ovens of the bake shop." (Ed.note: Baking bread aromas AND fresh roasted peanut smells? Nirvana! My grandmother ordered raw peanuts from the Brunnenmeyers and treated our family to the baking process and presented the roasted, salted peanuts as gifts. My brother still talks about his "presents" from "Danny", Ada Zinser Kern. Said the Sigma Chi frat brothers envied him always.)

Russ continues: "Until I started school, I made sure I was in the store when items ordered from Peoria were delivered to be sure that I got the first pickle from the pickle barrel or the first sample of sauerkraut from its barrel.

From the very beginning of the grocery business, credit and home delivery were big selling points. Grandpa started with a team of black horses named Babe and Bill, and Chet was the delivery boy. Every now and then, Bill decided he didn't want to wait until the individual's order was delivered so he would take off and Babe had no choice but to follow.

When motor vehicles first became available, Grandpa sold Bill and Babe which I thought was the worst thing he could have done. He bought a chain driven truck which was then used for deliveries.

One amusing story relating to the truck was when Grandpa first decided to drive it. A warehouse stood across from the alley where Grandpa stored larger items such as salt blocks for cattle and the one hundred pound bags of salt. Chicken pens were located in the rear. Between the store and the building to the West was the garage where the truck was kept. Grandpa saw how Chet drove the truck so he thought he would give it a try. He got in, put it in gear, looked out the rear window to see where he was going, let out the clutch and lurched into the wall of the building in front of the truck. He climbed out and never drove again.

Shortly after World War I, the truck was sold, and groceries were delivered by an outside source. This system was used until the early 1930's when a new truck was purchased, used for home deliveries and daily trips to Peoria to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Grandpa preferred to pick out his own produce rather than depend on someone else. The meat packers in Peoria learned quite soon as to what quality meats Grandpa expected. If not up to the highest quality, back they went!

Poultry was kept in three large pens in the rear of the warehouse. Chickens were the main source of poultry which were purchased or bartered from local farmers. During the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, the demand was large. These items were dressed the night before the holiday based on customer orders. Grandpa would kill the chickens by chopping off their heads. Dad, Chet and I would dip the chickens in hot water and remove the feathers. Mom and Ruth would clean and gut the birds. Grandma would then double check to make sure it was clean and ready for sale. Eventually ducks and turkeys were added. After I finished college, I no longer helped so am not sure when the family poultry production ended.

Upstairs above the grocery store was a cigar making venture operated by Frank Blumenshine and Max White. All the cigars were hand rolled from leaf tobacco. This business continued until the late 1920's. After that time, the area was converted into an apartment.



#### **Gehres Cigar Company**

The shop was located over the present WRC Real Estate Building. In 1916 Isadore White and Frank Blumenshine were making "Game Trout" cigars, with Fred Gehres checking their work.

As customers paid their bills, Grandma would make up a sack of candy in appreciation of the business. They continued this grocery business until the summer of 1944 when Grandma died. At that time, the business was turned over to Chet and Ruth. They converted to self-service until 1948 when they transformed the business into a restaurant and tavern called the SPOT. Chet and Ruth operated the Spot until 1952 when the business was closed and the two buildings were sold to Essig Real Estate Company." So ends an era that created such wonderful memories.

Thanks to Russ and his son Bob for sharing.

#### **A memory of The Spot:**

As a child, I was fascinated with the exterior of the Spot. It looked glamorous with its shiny black façade and neon sign. Sort of—New York comes to Washington's square. My father found it quite satisfactory and enjoyed the camaraderie. Boz, the local constable, spent his "off time" commiserating with his constituents. After a particularly wet spring, dad commenced construction on our outdoor barbecue. The afternoon was a bit sultry, but that didn't stop our neighbor, Scranton Fuller (Fleeta's husband), from walking to Steimle's to get a soda. As he sauntered past our driveway, we heard a blood curdling scream. Scranton was portly but very stylish and sophisticated. I never saw Scranton in anything but white shirt, tie and dark suit—and if he didn't have a cane, he sported a snazzy umbrella. My dad dropped the cement laden trowel

and dashed to the front yard only to see Scranton pointing and sputtering at something in the gravel. Dad reached down and picked it up by its very small nubby tail. Scranton scurried home and dad plopped the reptile into a screened box. Amazing little fellow (the snake, well, maybe dad, too) - it coiled, rattled and struck at the screen. Where to go to verify the capture of a small rattler? **The Spot, of course.** Dad found a patron from Tennessee who came to assist in the identification. Now, DNR personnel probably would pooh pooh the notion that timber rattlers still existed in the heart of Illinois. However, owing to that gentleman's expertise about the very wet spring, new construction and his personal history, confirmation was offered. After a quick excise of the fangs, the snake and Dad returned to the Spot. Boz was idly sipping a cool drink and as the reptile slithered its way down the bar, Boz pulled his gun and told my dad he didn't know whether to shoot my dad or the snake. Father and the reptile were asked to leave the premises.

Disposal of the snake became paramount since we had a teenage neighbor who was into taxidermy and dad was afraid the poison sacs might still be intact. Since Dexter (Poindexter) was passionate about stuffing things, Dad was worried that his passion might overcome common sense. The snake was buried in a secret location (probably at midnight). Fortunately, Chet and Ruth didn't seem to hold a grudge and we were able to enjoy the Spot as long as it existed.

Thanks so much to all of you who contribute to this newsletter. I would love to hear your Washington memories. E-mail [k.zinser@netzero.net](mailto:k.zinser@netzero.net)



Grandpa (John) and Grandma (Lena) Brunnenmeyer in their store.  
Honor and character prevail in Washington!!