

Washington Historical Society

Heritage Herald

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HEAR YE HEAR YE

November Meeting

Washington Presbyterian Church

November 22, 2004 - 7:00 p.m.

From your president - Joyce Nordheim

November Meeting

Our November 22nd meeting will feature Vicky Hineman as she discusses "How Peoria's Medical Community Developed." Bring a friend and enjoy an evening of fellowship with other Washingtonians

CHRISTMAS HOUSE TOUR

The annual Christmas House tour will be held on December 7th from 1 - 4 p.m. and 6 - 9 p.m. We will have four lovely homes open this year, including the restored former Mason White Funeral home on South Main. Tickets are \$10.00 in advance, \$5.00 for children. At the door, tickets are \$12.00.

There will be a tea at the Zinser House. At 8:00 p.m., we will honor the Restoration Committee who has overseen the entire process from cracked plaster and outdated wiring to a beautiful home restored to the 1925 era. Come and rejoice with us at this wonderful transformation.

GIFTS FOR CHRISTMAS

During the Christmas walk, we will be selling our reprinted and updated historical books and bricks for the front walk. The two volume set is \$25.00 and wrapped ready to go. The brick orders will be sent to the inscribing company in March and should be in the ground in May. Each brick is \$100.00.

PICTURES

If you happen to have Washington grade or high school class pictures and don't know what to do with them, we would love to put them on file. We now have a picture storage system that would be valuable for people who come in looking for that kind of information. If you don't want to part with the originals, copies would be fine. For that matter, any pictures of Washington happenings would be great. The more information you can provide about the picture (names and dates), the better. Just send them to WHS, Box 54, Washington, IL 61571 or call 444-2113 for pickup. Thank you.

From the editor - Kit Zinser

A special thanks to Don and Dee Lott. Their expertise and help has been invaluable. Check out their website Wacohi.com. Thanks also to the able assistance of Bob Dubois and Tom Hexamer, and Pam Tonka. Jim Nutty has provided fodder for additional stories soon to come. Betsy Coons (first female counselor at WACOHI) has renewed her ties to Washington.

Recently, over parmesan encrusted scallops and a crisp Chardonnay, Tish Putnam Waron shared memories of her family with me. Tish lives in her childhood home with her two sons, Cam (a culinary student) and Jimmy (technology student) adjacent to her grandparents stately and elegant home on South Main Street. She is the surviving daughter of Jane and James Downing Putnam, granddaughter of Robert Guest and Hazel Barrett Dickinson who helped Washington flourish.

Robert Guest Dickinson lived on an adjacent farm in Eureka to Hazel Barrett. As the children of farmers, a bond developed and their traditional love story thrived. Upon marriage, the couple moved to Washington. Tish's great-grandfather, R.B. Dickinson purchased land in 1898 for his sons at the south end of Wood street. Robert built a factory in 1910 to provide for his family and generations of Washingtonians, and the seasonal jobs were coveted. The factory canned fresh vegetables brought in from surrounding farms. He later sold the factory to Libby while serving as a manager over many factories in the area. Interestingly, when Libby requested a "perfect" pumpkin pie recipe, it was Hazel Barrett Dickinson who (after subjecting her children and grandchildren to copious amounts of pumpkin) concocted a sublime and flawless creation. You will find the recipe on Libby cans today!

In 1945, Libby contracted with the government to house German prisoners of war. The prisoners were probably treated more cordially than expected. Farmers and businesses sometimes utilized the readily available work force. Some of Washington's sidewalks were laid by German POW's. Many prominent Washington residents hailed from Germany; the Roehm's, the Rickman's, the Pfeiffer's to name a few. Conversations held through the barbed wire fence perhaps made the prisoners feel less lonely. There was one publicized account of an escape. A prisoner named Reinhold Pable diligently plotted his escape, evaded the guards and cautiously made his way to Chicago where he operated a book store for a number of years before he was deported. After the war, Libby's sold the factory to Champion Furnace Company. Allied Railway and Faubel and Son Ready Mix occupied adjacent buildings. The tradition of prosperity continued.

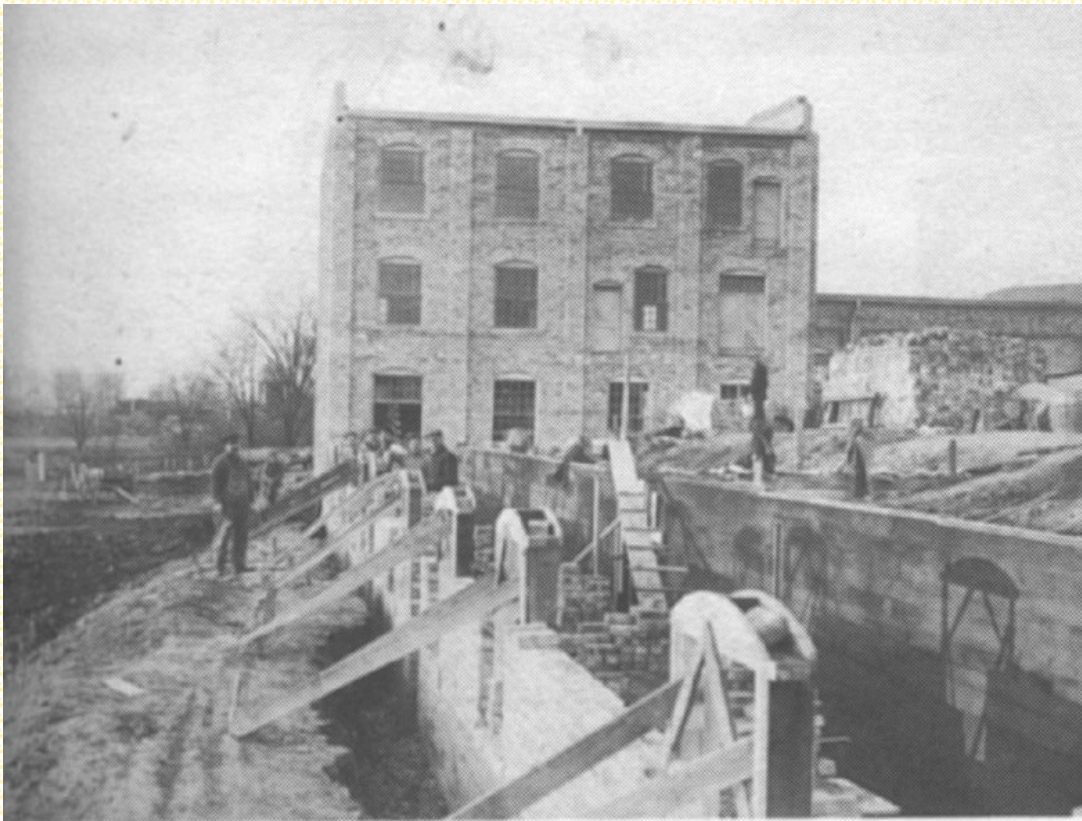
May can be a fickle month and 1964 was no exception. It was more like August—sort of a sultry, phlegmatic evening. Most windows nearby were open to catch a puff of air. A neighbor heard popping glass and the boom of an explosion. The fire department was alerted at approximately 9:15p.m. The dispatcher dialed a number and held the ring until all volunteer firefighters picked up the call. Fire siren screaming, the men rushed to the station for equipment. Tom Boyd was fire chief and called on five other departments for assistance - Morton, East Peoria, Germantown, Eureka and Northern Tazewell. As they arrived, the devastation was obvious. By 11:00 p.m., the fire was uncontrollable. Townspeople rushed to the scene and helped as they could. One firefighter recalled that Tor Faubel jumped on a tractor and picked up sand to bury the gas tanks from the flames and heat. Rae Ebert built a water curtain to be used between the gas storage tank and the burning building. Wives of the firefighters and rescue squad, an integral part of the volunteer effort, brought food and drink to the exhausted men. In the eerie night glow, the women also safeguarded the ever curious children watching the inferno. By midnight, the roof caved in, and the firefighters labored until daybreak to save the other buildings.

This was just one of the sieges faced by the indefatigable volunteers of the fire department and rescue squad - Tom Boyd, Dick Scott, Red Blumenshine, Frankie Johnson, Orin Fortney, Kenny Gregory, Bob Dubois, Orville Gossmeier, Bob Gossmeier, Rollo Nieukirk, Bill Shelander, Vern Aberle, Francis Bockler, John Crandall, Daryl Malcomb, John Blumenshine, Willard Reed, Norm Kice, Clarence Rider, Rae Ebert, Guido Tiezzi, Gerv Reed— just to name a few. During cleanup, an old German rifle was found. No one knows what happened to the rifle. The cause of the fire was never determined. These volunteers put their lives on the line along with their wives, and they responded unwaveringly and continuously to the needs of the community. Their names are many and their contributions today and yesterday are indelibly imprinted.

During the night, Robert Guest Dickinson stood in the shadows as his building was devoured. Tears streaming down his face, he turned and slowly walked home. An era had ended.

However, he and Hazel lived on in the grand old home for many years. Tish fondly recalls family gatherings. The kids had free roam of the downstairs and utilized the long, winding banister as all kids do. Once dinner was served, however, deportment was much more demure—prim and proper with muted conversations at the massive dining table. Grandmother and Grandfather Dickinson created a legacy for the family to cherish. He lost the love of his life in 1969, and Robert Guest Dickinson left us in 1978 at the age of 92.

Last Sunday evening, just about twilight, I rode my bike to the cemetery. As I looked to the right just before crossing the old stone bridge, I thought I could almost hear the splashing and laughter of the kids in 1925 swimming in the factory water cooling tank. Was it the rumble of cars over the railroad track on North Wood or the steady thump and clang of canning machines that I discerned? The sun was fading. Was that the spectre of a German prisoner walking down the fence line or just a tree's shadow? I hurried on. What a rich history that building and family provided for the town. Now, as Tish said, "Just ghostly memories."



Building of Cannery Factory 1910

Under construction in 1910



Libby McNeill and Libby in operation



Hazel Dickinson left, daughter Margaret, R.G. Dickinson



This is the devastation as seen by Robert Guest Dickinson in the early morning hours of May 10, 1964.

P.S. Some quiet research in the library brought me in proximity to the microfiche. The machine whirred articles in front of me...blurry visions. I would spy an article and slow it down, back it up and read. Back and forth, back and forth..faster, slower and then I realized what motion sickness must be. The able library staff seemed undaunted by my pale green complexion and glazed

eyes. I stopped. They delved. However, does anyone remember where the Minniehaha restaurant was on the square? I also want to do memories about Goat Springs. I need your help. December will be Christmas past, gifts and games of yesteryear. I would be happy to hear from you. 444 3026 or k.zinser@netzero.net.

Until next time.....