

# WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# HERITAGE HERALD

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WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS  
VOLUME 9 – SEPTEMBER 2004 – #6 – KIT ZINSER, EDITOR

One of the many charms of Washington is the square. Put yourself in the captivating white shoes of the lady and her two daughters — She found most of her household needs right in the downtown area in the early 1900's. One could obtain the finest meat, cheeses, baked goods, yard goods, sundries, meet neighbors and friends, see a silent movie at the Airdome, cure what ails you, secure family finances and plan for the future all within four square blocks.



For the moment, I am going back to the 1940-50's era and beginning on Brecklin's corner, (Dick and Cliff's Standard Oil then) by the phone booth, I stroll past the city building which houses the jail, police station and city offices. In the town meeting and dance hall portion, Mrs. Grigsby conducts dance classes culminating in a dazzling recital, and the Washington Players hold court in the auditorium with many evenings of rehearsal, and set building. On performance night, it seems as if there is not an empty seat in the house. An anticipated hush, the lights dim and the heavy velvet curtain opens.

What a thrill to see familiar faces having a great time onstage — Clyde Nutty, Miriam Grimm, Ron Marshall, Martha Baer, Lois Sampson, Martha Jackson, Gwen Combs just to name a few. For teens in the 50's,

Mrs. Thrailkill organizes the Rec Club where teens can go upstairs to play records and dance. Apparel criteria: White buck shoes for the guys and Capezios and crinolines for the girls. The library is housed in the city building for a time and the librarian, Miss Harvey, reigns quietly from her very tall desk. Romani's Café (in 1952 changed to



Ray's Café) huddles beneath the city building along with the Lynxwiler Studio for professional portraits. Henry Esser Insurance is between the city building and The Spot which sports a black tile exterior with a bright neon sign.

Stepping across the alley and moving West now, I see Marshall's Tavern with its oval carved wood bar and red leather bar stools. Their signature chicken and shrimp draws thousands of loyal customers from everywhere. I recently ran into a Californian who knew Marshall's! The dining area is served by waitresses who wear white or pink cotton dresses and frilly aprons. The women, always well coiffed with a pert little headpiece, have a lacy handkerchief folded as a corsage and a fresh flower in a tiny glass vase on one shoulder. (one of my early aspirations was to be a waitress just like the ladies in Marshall's and then I realized how hard they had to work!) Service is friendly, fast and efficient.

Next to Marshall's is the Tazewell Theatre (Phone number 153). An outdoor theatre (showing silent movies) called the Airdome was behind L. Zinser's Pharmacy in the early part of the century. The marquee heralds the one movie showing and the sides show the coming attraction: Red Skelton and Esther Williams starring in "Bathing Beauty" Now Showing! Musicals, comedies and westerns are pretty much the fare of the day. Newsreels and then the anxiously awaited cartoons are shown just before the main feature.

The Brunenmeyer family operates the popcorn concession (and no theatre concession stand has equaled their buttered bags since!) An evening's entertainment could cost the Black brothers as little as 60 cents each! Continuing West, I walk past CILCO and step into Land's Clothing Store smelling of leather and fine wool. The store offers clothing and accessories for the male citizenry of Washington with tailoring on the spot, and WACOHI students purchase letter jackets through Land's. Holland's Barbershop is a must for the well dressed man and (fortunately, today, family member Elaine Lucas has restored a "must" for all of us (that will be another article). Next to Holland's where Blacks have their offices, was Washington Savings and Loan (Phone number 3).

Then the A & P Grocery store where teen Mahlon Blumenshine professionally stocks fresh fruits and vegetables. Career choices were difficult because I really liked the red cotton monogrammed A & P jackets and thought that the huge gold cash registers with

pearl buttons would be neat to operate. I stroll into Tully's Drug Store offering any sundry you could need. Teens could find soda jerk jobs and maintain an active social life as well, and certain ones could make the best chocolate milkshakes.



Washington State Bank prevails on the corner. Downstairs is Huey's Barbershop with its carved iron railing. Turning North on Main, we find Ray Heiple's Law Office, Dr. Cohen's office and Heine's Shoe Repair where hides hang from the ceiling and Heine cuts, stitches and creates long lasting comfort. Dr. Forrette and Modern Upholstery finish the North border of the square.

Crossing Main Street in front of Doc Monroe's Office (now the Doctors Museum) I turn South and see Reed's Garage with the tow truck's painted slogan Don't Cuss, Call Us. Uptown Bowl and the Pool Hall occupy the next building, and on hot summer nights you hear

the click of cues and billiard balls as cigarette smoke curls from the building.

Continuing South, Smith Electric and Gas Appliances complement Herbst Furniture and Hardware. Doesn't matter if you are buying a new set of dishes or a room full of furniture, Herbst has it. The Ben Franklin Five and Dime Store occupies the building next to Herbst's. Games, toys, dolls, candy, yard goods and eager young patrons keep the clerks busy. Steimle's Drug Store occupied the space Foster's Jewelry does today. One could buy almost any medical device at Steimle's along with prescription drugs. The marble topped fountain was saved by Don Gronewold when he later opened his long running pharmacy (still serving generations of Washingtonians today!) Steimle's offers hand packed pints, quarts and gallons of ice cream (even a vanilla cone for the errant Airedale) along with ice cream sodas especially made by Mr. or Mrs. Steimle. They were successful in handing down the very special soda technique to their personnel.



Crossing Peoria street, if I look to my right, I see Garber Ford Motor Company where Lindy's now resides. Did you know that Ford Motor Company would send the new models, and the dealers would have a place to "hide" them until the unveiling? I walk past the tiny diner called Mickey's Diner complete with a live monkey.

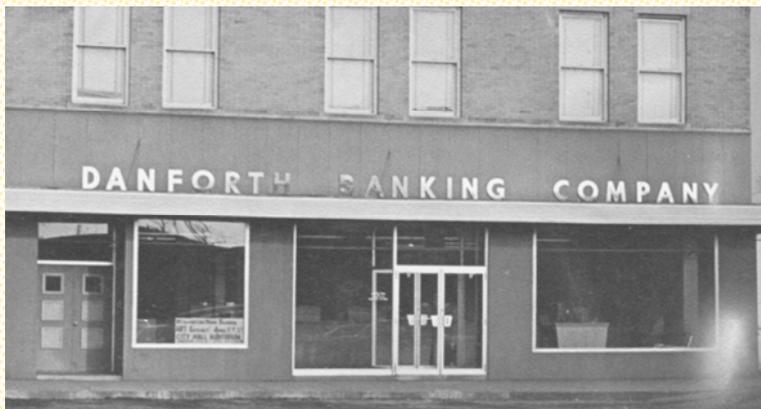
Spring's Dress Shop sells hosiery, (two pieces of silk hose in the shade of your choice

nestled in a very thin box surrounded by tissue paper) jewelry, hats and dresses at reasonable prices, and my first purchase, an Easter hat (a little pink flowered number-\$4.00), came from Springs. Next to Spring's is Menz Grocery - always home style service and quality products. Adjacent to Menz is Johnny Leonard's Bakery. While you can purchase freshly baked bread and glazed doughnuts, Johnny makes wonderful Graveyards and lime phosphates! To order a birthday cake is an event. Johnny bakes double layer square cakes which fit perfectly on great grandmothers crystal cake stand. Choose the cake flavor (always chocolate) and the color of roses on the creamy icing. Neatly tied with string in a white cardboard box, you feel as if you are walking out with a great treasure!

I amble past Ideal Hardware and into Paul's Grocery for more home style service and fresh ground meat. The warm oak floors and well stocked shelves invite me in. Are you tired yet? I had a lime phosphate at Johnny's Bakery so I can trek on. As I cross South Main heading East, I look down South Main and can see Bride's Tin Shop, Washington Jewelers and Meyer's Studebaker along with Dr. Bennett and Dr. Clymore's offices. On the same side as Roehm's Shoe Store on South Main is Fred Lehman Insurance and Kenneth W. Black's Law Office. Mr. Black is only two blocks from home! Roehm's Shoe Store (on the corner of South Main and the Square) has shod generations of Washingtonians. The old plank floors creak, and the red carpet is only for trying out your new shoes.

If you aren't sure of your size, Bea Roehm will let you use the "XRay" machine which shows your bones in glowing green. Just the thing we kids hoped to see! The smell of leather imbues the store with stacks of boxes neatly arranged up to the ceiling. What an adventure at least twice a year—Before school started in August and then right around Easter time. Shoes lasted longer then — you had school shoes, Keds for gym and dress up shoes.

Next to Roehm's was Chuck's Barber shop. The powdered brushes and razors stand neatly under the large mirrors and the scent of aftershave wafts out onto the Street. Everyone looks sharp as they step out. The Tazewell Reporter publishes in the building



## **DANFORTH BANKING COMPANY**

128 Commercial Square

Phone 35

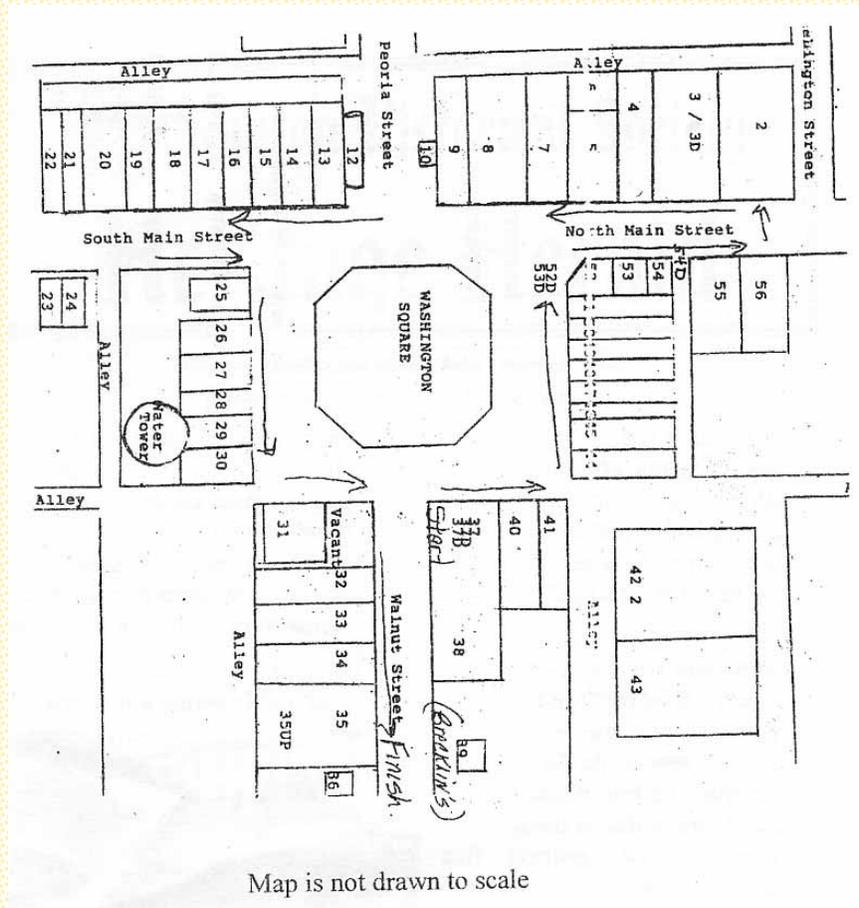
between Chucks and Dr. Mueri's dental office where Mabel Corpe has met and comforted incoming patients for many years.

Next to Dr. Mueri's is the South Side Tavern - a homey tavern-where many town events are conceived and implemented. Then came Findley's Meat Market where meat is fresh cut in front of your very eyes. Many holiday tables are laden with turkeys and hams and roasts from Findley's. Turning North

again from Findleys, the Danforth Bank served customers for over one hundred years.

A right turn down Walnut Street to the East Rays Toggery sat next to John Diemer's Used Furniture. The Kern Korner (formerly Ullom Jewelry) was adjacent to the Post Office. Dr. Kinsingers dental office was upstairs.

Del Rayleen's Beauty Shop (coifs for the prom) presided on the corner. My time warp is ending. I am now looking at the BP sign and the phone booth on the corner. One thing hasn't changed. Today's proprietors on the square (and throughout our fair city) still hold the same values and loyalty to customers as they did in the past. That is commendable and sustaining to Washington residents.



My next endeavor is to record the stories behind Washington family businesses because so many Washington enterprises are generational.

Your thoughts and memories are history for another generation. If you want to take a walk around the square, I would be happy to record your reminiscences. Please contact me at 444-3026 or my email is k.zinser@netzero.net or drop me a line at 307 E. Jefferson. This is your newsletter and I would be happy to research (with you?) and publish any article you wish to see in print. I appreciate your time and effort.

# Announcements

## September Meeting

Washington Presbyterian Church  
September 27, 2004 - 7:00 p.m.

The September Meeting, on September 27th will feature Mr. Greg Shaw of the Historical Society of McLean Co. His program is entitled "Why bother with Historic Preservation?".

## A Big Thank You

During August the Society held two special functions. We want to publicly thank all those who helped with the Cemetery Walk and the Evening of Nostalgia. Both functions were highly successful.

## Brick Sales

Several months ago, we started a free brick program. We have been numbering each brick order since then. If you happen to be the 25th, 50th, 75th, etc. customer, your brick will be free. The bricks have three lines of inscription with 13 characters on each line available for your choice of wording. They are priced at \$100.00. There are not very many spaces left in the front walk. After it is filled, we will start on North Main and continue to the driveway. Put your brick in the walk for the generations to come!



## Book Sales

The Society has a set of books containing textual and pictorial history of Washington available. The pictorial history is a reprint and update of a 1906 book. The story book was first printed in 1925 and there updated to 2000. The set is \$25.00 and is available at the Zinser House during regular hours or by calling 444-2113.

## There are Openings

We are always looking for volunteers to man the Zinser House. If you are interested, please call 444-8123 for further information.