May Meeting

Wednesday, May 27, 1998

Time: 4:00 P.M.

Place: Crown Point Meeting Room

Program:

We'll be hearing from Forrest McClure about his family and his grandfather, John Johnston, Superintendent of the Beaver Valley Division of the Interurban
Railway, for whom the City of Johnston is named.

March Meeting

Scheduled speaker Susan Nystrom was unable to attend the meeting. (See Annual Meeting Report)

Business conducted:

Discussion of search for museum space, and investigation concerning possible acquiring of the old farm house on the original Rittgers farm on N.W. Beaver and Merle Hay Road. Possibilities for a membership survey, and participation by JSHS in Johnston Green Days.

Annual Meeting

Members of the JSHS met at the Crown Point Meeting Room on Tuesday, April 28, 4:00 p.m.

Officers were elected. (see below)

Other Business: There was discussion of placement of a flag pole at the Kinsey-Lawson Cemetery. Ray Schleihs will research possibilities for costs, etc.

The Board recommended that the meetings in July and September be on Sunday afternoon. Moved and voted that the July meeting be on a Sunday. Place and program to be determined.

The question of dues was introduced. It was decided that a decision on regular membership dues be deferred. Corporate memberships will be \$25 per year.

Treasurer Ray Schleihs gave his report.

Bob Otto, one of the founders of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society, and Betty Otto, were elected as Honorary Life Members of the Society. Bob was the first president of the JSHS, and served until April of 1996.

Bill Wagner, architect and local historian, was named an Honorary Life Member of the Society, in recognition of his help in establishing information on the farmhouse on the old Daniel Rittgers property on N.W. Beaver Drive.

Program:

Sue Nystrom, 6th grade teacher at Johnston Middle School spoke on her work with school children on Iowa and local history, and of her interest in the history of the Johnston Community.

Ms. Nystrom is looking for local resource people to speak to her classes, and to suggest topics which would interest the students.

She suggested the possibility of having a "Community History Week" to encourage further interest in Johnston History.

Pat Wallerstedt and Ferne Michael will work together to develop resources for school classes.

NEW OFFICERS AND

COMMITTEES

Officers elected:

President: Mary Jane Paez

Vice-president & Program Chair:

Pat Wallerstedt

Secretary: Beulah Darling Treasurer: Don Denman

Directors:

Mary Ann Roberts (3 years) Irene Aulich (2 years) Judy Bogaard (1 year)

Committees:

Membership (open)

By-laws: Ken Rittgers

Projects: Bob Thomas

Ways and Means:

Louis and Gay Friestad Bill and Shirley Herrold Margaret Pennington

Finance:

Louis Friestad Ray Schleihs

Acquisitions: (open)

Program:

Pat Wallerstedt

Archive: Bob & Shirley Johnson

Public Relations: (open)

Audit: (open)

Phone: Ferne Michael

Genealogy: (open)

Museum/House:

Ray Schleihs, Chair Beulah Darling Lloyd Michael Bob Thomas Ken Wallerstedt Barbara Zorn

Genealogy: (open)

Newsletter: Selma Duvick

Ray Schleihs.

Members will note that there are 6 committee positions which have not been filled.

You are encouraged to consider volunteering for a committee where you think you may be interested and able to help. Call Mary Jane Paez!!

From the President:

Memorial Day means many things to many people. For some, it is merely a day off from work. Others might plan family get-togethers for this long weekend. The real meaning of Memorial Day has been lost for many.

After the Civil War, May 30th was declared as a patriotic holiday to honor the graves of the soldiers. It had been a custom in the South, to strew spring flowers on graves. In 1868, the practice of decorating the graves with flowers and flags was started. The ensuing wars have broadened the numbers of graves to be decorated.

What started as strictly a military honor, has further developed into a widespread practice to remember not only members of the Armed Forces, but also relatives and friends who have died. Passing by cemeteries at the end of May, one frequently finds freshly planted pots of flowers, silk or plastic arrangements or flags of all sizes placed by the headstones.

As we remember our relatives and friends who have died, whether in the military or not, it is a fitting time to let the younger generations know who these people were and how they lived. As members of an historical society, we know the importance of history.

Write down stories telling about those people who have passed on. Keep their memory alive in the minds of all. These stories will last far longer tan any decoration for their grave.

Mary Jane Paez

The Johnston (Station) Historical Society extends its sympathy to

Mary Rittgers and her family on the death her husband, Clarence Rittgers on April 12, 1998.

Esther Peitzman and her family on the death of her husband Herbert Peitzman on May 12, 1998

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Letters

From Gene Hoover, of Melbourne, FL who sent a donation in honor of the Nick Orlich family:

"It was at Johnston where I learned the value of good friends and the value of efforts by the whole community and our good school leaders such as Bernice Scott and Mrs. Ballue. I should have never left the community"......

And from Nick Orlich, of Kingwood, TX:

"I am constantly amazed at the changes in the little village of Johnston whenever I visit the home place.....It is still nice to go back home to our roots, since we have many fond memories of growing up in that small town".

From Raymond Orlich, of Downey, CA:

"For the record: I am one of 11 children who attended grade school and graduated from Johnston High School (1934). This record I do not believe will b equaled."

And from Frances Badgley, of Redding CA comes a long letter with a delightful description of the Herrold school in the late 1920's and early 1930's, along with class photos!

Look for this in the next newsletter.

New Members

Ferne Michael, former membership chair, has brought in a record number of new members during the past two months. Thanks, Ferne for a job well done over the past few years!!!

Welcome to new members: Emma Jean Armstrong., Lakewood, CA

Mary (Vignovich) Ferguson Johnston, IA

Donald & Patsy Gerdom Johnston, IA

Eli Orlich Phoenix, AZ

Violet Robinson Des Moines, IA

Darrell Stuck Lake Forest, CA

Judith Lee Sullivan Colfax, IA

Catherine Brandon Montrose, CO

Esther Murray Dayton, IA

Richard Murray Dallas, TX

Marna Parker Austin, TX

Laurayne Robinette Urbandale, IA

Margaret Sartain Means, KY

Elsie Sheeder Guthrie Center, IA Mary Smith Saratoga, CA

Leona Sutton Des Moines, IA

Patricia Walker Woodbury, MN

Bill Wagner Dallas Center, IA

Clifford & Patricia Walsh Johnston, IA

Howard A. & Beverly L. Shelton Johnston, IA

Mark Miller Adel, IA

Ray Pugh Johnston, IA

Val Bilbrey Granger, IA

Francine & Ron Canfield Johnston, IA

Gwen Beck Johnston, IA

Steve & Debra Straw Johnston, IA

Local residents may want to stop at City Hall to look at the photographic montage in the hallway display case. The original is at the Iowa Genealogical Society, and was copied by Ferne Michael, who has lent it for display.

There are 455 photos of Pioneer Polk County Residents-- each one numbered and with a key to enable identification. A number of the names are recognizable as current family names in the county, (such as Hubbell, Savery, Jordan). Also to be found are some early Johnston pioneers such as McClain, Andrew, McDivitt, Oyler, and Lawson.

From Orchard Farm..... To Rittgers Oaks

Another piece of Johnston's history is about to disappear.

The farmstead located on the south-west corner of Merle Hay Road and N.W. Beaver Drive, and just east of Hyperion Club, has been a landmark, situated as it is on a high ridge overlooking the Beaver Creek valley and the town of Johnston.

Tradition says that what is now N.W. Beaver Drive was once an Indian trail, and numerous Indian artifacts have been found on this farm over the years.

This property, along with that across Merle Hay on the south-west corner, was originally settled by members of the Rittgers family. Complete abstracts are missing, but a land patent for Daniel Rittgers exists, and the suggestion from other abstracts in the vicinity and old plat maps indicate that this land was once owned by his nephew, Jacob R (Jake). Rittgers.

Daniel Rittgers, Jacob B. Rittgers and and other brothers and sisters came to this area from Ohio in 1853, and Jacob R. (Jake) Rittgers was the son of Jacob B. Other members of this family settled land in many other locations in what is now Johnston.

The plat map names this particular property as "Orchard Farm".

In subsequent years, the farm was owned by a Tom Hefley, and then by J.J. Newlin. Tenants have been the Steve Barnholt family and most recently the Paul Gomis family. It consists of an original farmhouse, with a wing

added on, a fine old barn, a chicken house, crib, cellar, and a number of other small outbuildings, in a grove of mature oak trees.

The farmstead is now a part of the development planned by Hubbell Realty, and soon will be demolished to make way for homes in the development to be called "Rittgers Oaks".

The Johnston (Station) Historical Society was offered the farm house as a possible headquarters/museum at no charge except. for the cost of a move to another location.

Several members of the Society, and the committee met at the farmstead with Bill Wagner, a local architect and historian, who was contacted by Ferne Michael. The group was looking for his opinion on the age of the home, and whether part of it might not be the Ridgedale school, which had been moved from its original site north and west along Beaver across from Hyperion Field Club; or possibly the old Ridgedale Post Office.

Examination of construction style, and the appearance of nails in construction, led Mr. Wagner to the conclusion that the original house may date from the 1850's. However, an addition on the east of the original house, which it was suspected might be the old school house, or post office, was somewhat newer, and probably was built after the 1880's.

The older part of the house is very probably, then, one of the oldest, or the oldest still standing in the Johnston area. Found in the walls of the house were newspapers dating from 1905, and an old 19th century medical book.

Mr. Wagner and members of the committee spent some time examining the condition of the house, and especially the floor joists and foundations see if a move was feasible. The general conclusion was that the house could not be moved with any hope that it could hold together, and restoration would be expensive and very difficult.

At a special meeting on April 8, members of the JSHS voted to decline the offer of the house.

We are still "looking for a home".

(Thanks to Dick Mott and Mary Rittgers for help and information)



The Old Rittgers Farmhouse, Johnston, Iowa 1998

Yes, we still have a few Johnston Historical Society T-shirts-- about 6 in number and XL in size. Price: \$11.00, for out-of-towners, the

shipping and handling is \$2.00. Get in touch with Ray Schleihs, 5465 N.W. 55th Ave. Johnston IA 50131, phone 276-0309.