

# Newsletter

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## March Meeting

Date: Sunday, March 28, 1999

Time: 4:00 p.m.

Place: Crown Point Meeting Room

Program:

We will have a potluck!!

Bring your utensils and a dish to share!

Our speaker:

Sharon Mahoney,

Mrs. Mahoney is a teacher in the Johnston Middle School

Her 8th grade class on Community Service Learning helped with the clean-up of Ridgedale Cemetery last fall.

She will speak to our group about this project-- and how we might cooperate on another

## January Meeting Report

**Invited Speaker at the meeting was Don Running**, one of those Johnston area residents instrumental in bringing about the incorporation of the city of Johnston.

Running described some of the process by which the unincorporated community of Johnston, sometimes called "Johnston Station" became the incorporated City of Johnston, and the roles which he and other played in this series of events.

In 1967 "Johnston" was essentially a school district, which had been consolidated, in 1914, from a number of rural school districts in mostly unincorporated areas.

Over the years there had been interest in initiating the incorporation of the community, but after the building of the Saylorville Dam, adjacent cities, Urbandale, Des Moines, and Ankeny which were growing, expressed an interest in incorporating areas of "Johnston" into their own boundaries.

These annexation intentions were serious, and later led to some boundary disputes which were eventually settled.

Dave Goss, Jr. a local businessman had, for some time, been lobbying, in the community and in the Lion's Club for some action to incorporate. He, and a number of other citizens felt that Johnston should be an incorporated community and responsible for its own destiny. At one time, Goss had his

## **Looking Ahead.....**

The **Annual Meeting** of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society, and election of officers will be held at the Crown Point Meeting Room at 4:00 p.m. on **Tuesday, April 27, 1999.**

**May Meeting:** Sunday, May 23, 1999

own attorney speak at a Lion's Club meeting about the process of incorporation.

The school board, too, was concerned because developers were pressing to build on what had been the Meredith Farm, along the west side of Beaver and north of Aurora Ave. This would bring more children into the district, but the tax base from residential property would not be sufficient to support their numbers enrolling in the school.

(Just a few years earlier, the development of Debra Heights, east of Beaver, had brought a large number of children into the district. The Johnston Schools had built a new building- now Lawson School-- to serve this school population, only to have the area vote itself into the Des Moines School District.)

Don Running was on the Johnston School Board at the time, and remembers talking with fellow board members Dwayne Wicker and Walter Eichhorn about this pressure from Johnston's neighbors. They reasoned that perhaps if Johnston were incorporated, it could control the kind of development which would bring a broader tax-base for school support.

Sometime in 1967 - Running does not remember the exact date - he, Eichhorn and Wicker decided to act, and met with Dave Goss at Running's home. They agreed that they wanted to work toward incorporation of a city of Johnston. And they agreed to call other interested citizens to meet with them .

The difficulty was that Iowa State law held that a community could not incorporate within 3 miles of the boundary of another incorporated community. The most heavily populated areas of Johnston fell within that prohibition.

The solution lay in initiating the incorporation in an out-lying area, and then, after the fact, having residents within three miles of the Des Moines City limits voluntarily annex themselves into the newly-incorporated city of Johnston.

Running called another meeting of those who had been contacted.

Among those attending were: Don Running, David Goss Jr., Arthur Green, Charles Iler, Laverne Simpson, Lloyd Busby, Alan Leffler, James Ahern, Lew Clarkson, Lowell Temple, Richard Franklin, Don Duvick, and William Myers. (Later on, Harold Southerwick and others became involved).

Those who lived outside the three-mile limit organized to carry out the necessary steps to incorporation.

As an attorney, Running took the initiative to investigate procedures which had to be taken under law to file the necessary papers with the District Court . Boundaries were set outside the 3 mile prohibition, and they included Camp Dodge and other properties north of, and just south of N.W. 70th Ave.

Approval for incorporation failed in the first election held early in 1968. But the group re-organized, and increased efforts to inform the local residents of the advantages of incorporation. There were opponents - one was the County Board of Supervisors. Others circulated "horror stories", and some false information about what would happen - our taxes would go up, we would lose police protection, etc.

According to Running, this was the most difficult time - the campaigning for the vote, answering objections raised, and trying to keep the process on track.

A second Petition to the District Court, signed by A.R. Green, Cleo Green , William C. Myers, Dorothy Myers, and Harold Southerwick, was approved on April 8, 1969, The proposition for incorporation passed by a 71 to 13 vote. at a June 23, 1969 election. In September the first city election was held; the Mayor, Harold Southerwick, and councilmen James Ahern, William Myers, Robert Rubel, Arthur Green, and Walter Eichhorn were sworn in to serve until January of the following year.

The next big task was to bring in all of the properties within that three-mile limit south and west of the newly-incorporated city by voluntary annexation.

## February Meeting Report

Members of the Lions Club were mobilized to cover the community, to visit all residents, and invite them to sign petitions to annex themselves into the City of Johnston. They armed themselves with plat maps of the area, and information and petitions, and set out to cover the territory. This huge undertaking received a real boost when Pioneer Hi -Bred petitioned for voluntary annexation.

Gradually, as property owners petitioned themselves in, Johnston became an intact city, eventually stretching from beyond Camp Dodge, to Interstate 80 on the south, and from the Des Moines river west to what is now 100th Street.

In addition to the many members of the Lion's Club, who worked so diligently to get annexation petitions out and signed, and including those mentioned above, others who took part in the early organization of the city were: Al Aulich (first city clerk), Lucille Southerwick, Robert Rubel, Lawrence Oliver, Paul Gomis, Robert Swanson.

(The "rest of the story" of Johnston's early years can be found in the record put together by the Historical Society, to be found in the Johnston Library )

Every community owes thanks and gratitude to those who had the foresight to look ahead and were willing to work toward goals which would enhance the lives of all its residents.

Johnston exists because of the efforts of Running, Goss, and the many others mentioned in this chronicle.

### Business:

The city has ordered a flagpole to be erected at the Valley View Cemetery. Ray Schliehs will investigate possibilities for funding this.

Ferne Michael brought a panoramic photo of the Camp Dodge remount station, taken in about 1917, which she purchased from a local antique store. The photo is captioned "Auxiliary Remount Depot # 322, Camp Dodge", and shows several mounted troopers, corrals, and stables.

**Members met at the Johnston High School Library**, where Mary Jane Paez and Dennis Yoshimura of the Johnston High School faculty, demonstrated, on a big screen, the many options and sites on the internet where genealogical information can be obtained.

We were pleased to welcome several interested guests.

We looked at the information from our own cemeteries as entered in the Tombstone Transcription Project. ( From Barrel of Genealogy---

<http://cpcug.org/user/jlacombe/marl/html>

### Business:

Ray Schliehs announced that purchase of the flag pole at Valley View will be funded by Mrs. Bunny Swanson, the Johnston Lions Club, and the Urbandale Veterans of Foreign Wars. The city will erect the flagpole, with dedication possibly on Memorial Day.

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## From the President.....

Sorting through your loved one's things is difficult at best. When my father died in 1974, my stepmother sorted for us, and my siblings and I were given what she thought we might want. We got a box of old photos that we gave a cursory glance to and put it away. Young parents of small children have

different set of priorities. Those photos are now treasured.

When my mother had to go into a nursing home, after a series of mini-strokes left her incapable of living alone, we were faced with sorting. Having lived in an apartment for a few years, she had reduced her treasures to what she could fit into her "Fibber McGee" closet. Mostly, we packed up things that she might possibly ask for.

Mother lived for six years in the nursing home and not once asked for anything. I still have boxes of notions, crafts, yarns and memorabilia. My good sense tells me to get rid of some of it, but my sentimentality won't let it go. I keep thinking that I should finish some of her projects, even though my left handed crocheting would make a unique finished product.

The point of my story is that I feel that some of this sorting should be done before it becomes a daunting task. Give your children some of the memorabilia with the stories that go with it so they can learn the significance of the event. All too often I find beautiful old photos wind up in a flea market stand. How truly sad! Give useful items, those not wanted by heirs, to charity.

Mom used to make crazy patch and granny squares lap robes for the Vet's home out of scrap fabric and yarn. When she would to get the paper in the morning, she frequently found bags of these castoff outside her door. That's my inheritance and I treasure it. Now all I need to do is find a place for my mismatched Tupperware lids.

Mary Jane Paez

## New Members

Welcome to the following New Members:

Shirley (Schleibs) Adams  
Des Moines, IA

Suezanne Bilz,  
Santa Barbara, CA

Kathy Lauer,  
Federal Way, WA

Mary (Barnard) Petterson,  
Seattle, WA

Wilma Werner,  
Montour, IA

Linda (Goodman) Benson,  
Plano, TX

Wilma Vicena,  
Panama, IL

## CONTRIBUTIONS

AND THANKS to those members who have made a contribution to the JSHS in January & February:

John and JoAnn Thiesen  
Madrid, IA

Ruth Dougherty  
Santa Monica, CA

Martha W. Stevenson  
Edgartown, MA

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You can contribute more than money !!! Send us your stories and your photographs !! (We'll make copies.)

## In Memoriam

**Melba Sorenson**, long-time Johnston resident, died on Sunday, March 7, 1999. She was born in Dickens, IA, and later moved with her family to his area, graduating from Johnston High School.

Melba was a Charter member of the JSHS, and had been very active in the community. She was noted for her work with the Johnston Garden Club, and was a judge for the National Garden Club Association. Members of the Johnston community, and many others will attest to her talent in creating flower arrangements and decorations.

Melba was a school bus driver, and a member of the Johnston Lionels.

Her friends and the Johnston organizations to which she gave her time and talents will miss her.

The Johnston (Station) Historical Society sends its sympathy to Melba's family, children Kathy, Kris and Kurtis, and to her grandchildren.



**Orval "Chubb" Kinsey**, a life-long resident of Johnston, and a Charter Member of the Johnston (Station) Historical Society, died on Sunday, March 7.

The JSHS extends its sympathy to his wife, Jean, and to sons Steve and Chris, of Polk City, also a member of the JSHS.



## The Inter-urban and the Johnston Depot

**W**hen the Inter-urban Railway, an electric railway, was constructed from Des Moines through Johnston in 1905, and eventually on to Perry, there were numerous "stations" en route. Most of them were just platforms, where farmers could put out milk for the creamery, freight could be picked up or dropped off, and some of them had a small shelter next to the platform for waiting passengers. The Railway hauled coal from local coal mines, and gravel from local gravel pits, and livestock as well as passengers. There were two stations at Camp Dodge, one called "Arsenal", and another up the line at Herrold. But Johnston station actually had a depot for some years.

The Johnston "depot" was a small frame structure, built probably some time between 1905 and 1910. Known as the Vorhees building, it was located to the east of the tracks, just north of the intersection of N.W. 62nd Ave. and N.W. 59th Court (Dewey Road). An ad in the Grimes phone book for 1913 stated that passenger tickets were for sale at the Johnston Station. A passenger could travel from Des Moines to Perry and points in between,

The coming of the railway brought electricity to the area, and nearby residents were able to "hook-up". The Fruitland-Brennan Association was formed by those homeowners who wanted electric service. (This was 25 cycle power; later on, in 1948, when Iowa Power brought in lines at 60

cycles, householders had to replace some electric appliances, such washing machines and refrigerators.)

For a number of years, the inter-urban prospered, especially during World War I (1917-1919) when Camp Dodge generated business, both passenger and freight. But in 1922 the Inter-urban company went bankrupt, reorganized, and the name changed to the Des Moines and Central Iowa Railroad Co.

In May of 1928 Clarence Vorhees sold, for \$150, "the south 15 feet of the Vorhees building on the Des Moines and Iowa Central Railroad known as the Inter-urban depot" to Worthy Surber. Here Mr. Surber established a barber shop, next to the ticket office of the Inter-urban.

On January 14, 1936, a heating stove caused a fire which destroyed the building, which was unoccupied at the time. Mr. Surber was away doing barbering at the Polk County Home, and Mrs. Laura Vorhees, the station agent, was not on duty. Her son, Grant Vorhees, had been in the building earlier to check the stove and then went on to school.

About half an hour later, after Vorhees left the building, local farmer Henry Schlenker discovered the blaze, and spread the alarm. Mrs. Bernice Scott, principal of the High School, which was located just west of the "depot-barber shop", called out some of the senior boys to help put out the blaze. Among these were Bill Ivers, Gerald Davis, Andrew Surber, and Grant Vorhees,

Other bystanders tried to help by collecting fire extinguishers from near-by businesses, for Johnston had no fire department at the

time. The extinguishers helped to check the fire so that the barber shop fittings could be carried out. None of the ticket office could be saved. A freight car next to the building was ignited, but the crowd of men and boys managed to move it away, and put out the flames.

But the building was beyond saving, and it was never re-built. Mr. Surber eventually established his barber shop to the south of Carter's Store, on the south-west corner of N.W. 62nd and Merle Hay Road.

Subsequent to the destruction of the depot, incoming freight was deposited on a platform just to the west of the tracks, and stored in a small warehouse nearby. Don Zarley remembers that during the late '30's and early '40's it was the job of the boys in his family ( Guy, Bob, and Don) to meet the 1:40 p.m. and 3:40 p.m. trains from Des Moines, to receive freight and packages destined for Johnston, and to put it in the warehouse.

Passenger service on the Inter-urban was a great convenience. It was in heavy use for both personnel and freight by Camp Dodge during World War I. And local residents took the Inter-urban to go to Des Moines. Patty Byers, now Patty Wallerstedt, came to school in Johnston on the Inter-urban, from her home just east of what is now Skyline Drive. She boarded the train along Lower Beaver Road, near what is now Lenc Nursery. And other students came to school on the Inter-urban from up the line, from the station at Herrold.

But with the increasing use of the automobile for travel, rail passenger service was less and less in demand. Passenger

service was ended in 1948; the electric lines and poles were taken down, electric engines sold, and diesel engines took over. The Inter-urban became exclusively a freight hauler.

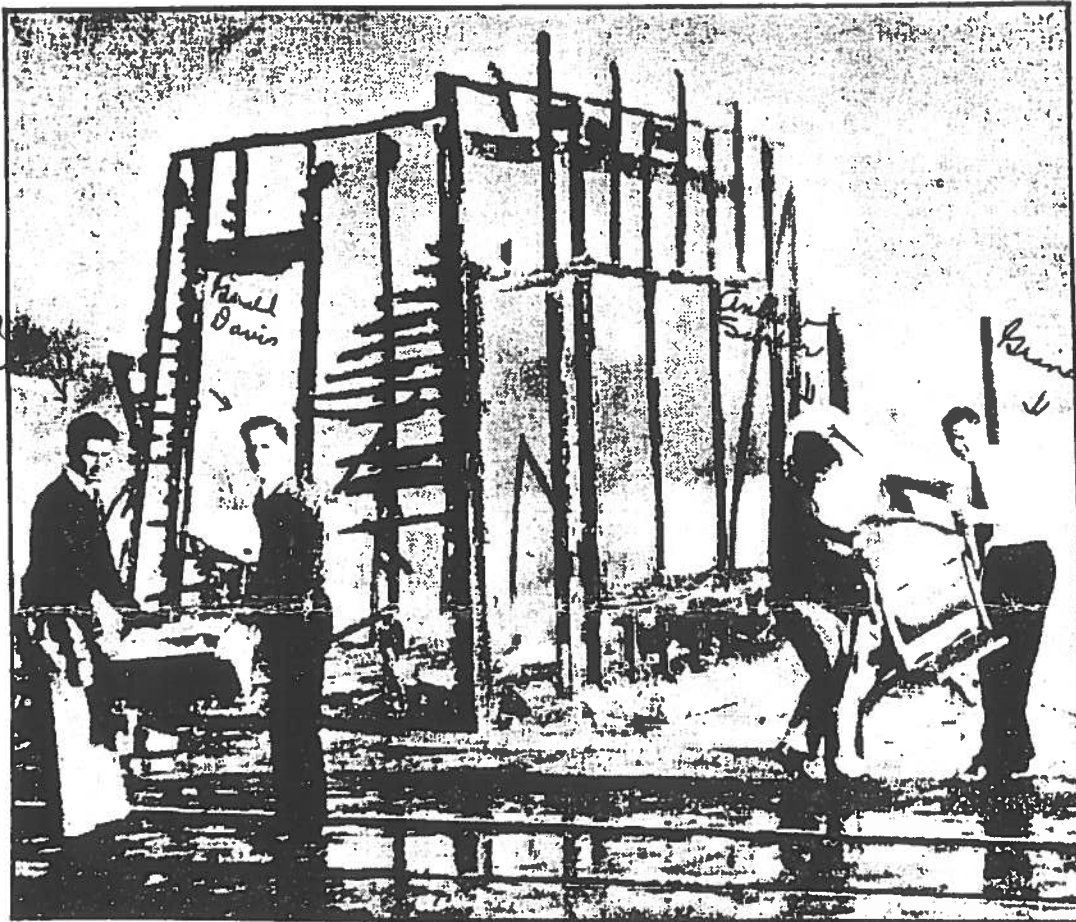
Over the years, fewer and fewer trains came through Johnston. In later years, they provided service for the Iowa State liquor ware house at Camp Dodge.

In the 1970's trains stopped altogether. The line was sold again, and the tracks were torn

up. The city of Johnston bought the land in 1984. For some years the right-of-way through Johnston was converted into a water drainage canal.

Just recently, a portion of this land has been paved, and serves as a bicycle trail. The old trestle which carried the trains over Beaver creek is still standing. This, and a brick building just south of N.W. 55th Ave, and west of Beaver, which was an electric generating station, are all that remain of the Inter-urban Railway.

## STUDENTS CUT FIRE LOSS



Students of the Johnston school here are carrying barber shop equipment of W. C. Surber, Johnston barber, to safe distance from fire which

destroyed the barber shop and railway ticket office building Tuesday morning.

From left to right: Bill Ivers, Gerald Davis, Andrew Surber, and Grant Vorhees  
Photo from the Des Moines Register, Jan. 14, 1936.