

Johnston (Station) Historical Society
Post Office Box 109
Johnston, Iowa 50131
www.johnstonhistoricalsociety.com

NEWSLETTER

Volume XI No. 1

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President: Mary Jane Paez

Vice-Pres. & Programs: Judy Bogaard

Secretaries: Marlys Seibert & Pat Wallerstedt

Treasurer: Robert Thomas

Membership: Garland Seibert

Newsletter: Selma Duvick

January Meeting

Sunday, January 25,
4:00 PM

AT THE SIMPSON HOUSE

(On Northglenn Drive, west of the Johnston
Library)

Bring snack food for refreshments if you
wish

From Our Construction Chief:

The Farmstead project is progressing with the help of several High School students and some court assigned community service persons. We need members and friends to come and assist. We can use people to help with various phases of the project from sawing boards to moving cabinets; there is work for all skills.

We have in-house bathroom and heat in both house and barn!

Funds are always needed to buy supplies and pay for work to be done by contractors when volunteers are not available to finish certain phases of the project. (See the "Wish list from the November 03 Newsletter for things you can "buy" for the house and barn.)

Any one in town or out of town who would like e-mail updates that outline status of the project as well as requirements for in-kind assistance or funds may send a request to Bob Thomas at rlt50310@aol.com

Bob Thomas

LOOKING AHEAD :

MEETINGS FOR 2004

January 25 (Sunday)

February 25 (Wednesday)

March 28 (Sunday)

April 28 (Wednesday,

Annual Meeting

May 23 (Sunday)

June 23 (Wednesday)

July 25 (Sunday)

August 25 (Wednesday)

September 26 (Sunday)

October 27 (Wednesday)

November 28 (Sunday)

All meetings, unless otherwise announced, at the Simpson House, on Northglenn Drive, just west of Merle Hay Road in Johnston

The message from Mary Jane Paez, "From the President " will return in March.

Bricks:

Thomas B. Leffler Johnston, IA	THOMAS B LEFFLER
Judy L. Anderson Johnston, IA	JUDY L. ANDERSON
Judith & David Bogaard Johnston, IA	JUDITH & DAVID BOGAARD
Lloyd & Phyllis Cherryholmes Des Moines, IA	LLOYD/PHYLLIS CHERRYHOLMES
M-Keds Ltd. Grimes, IA	LEROY W. SCHLENKER
Michael & Jo Hoss Ankeny, IA	MIKE AND JO HOSS
Thomas Evans, MD Johnston, IA	THOMAS C. EVANS PATRICIA A. EVANS
Anna Belle Moss Granger, IA	RICHARD A. MOSS GRANGER, IOWA
Emma Jean Stillwell Johnston, IA	DENNIS - LINDA MAX STILLWELL
Patricia Walker Woodbury, MN	ROY VERNON AND NANCIE A. HUNT
Audrey Archer Broomfield, CO	MERT & BERTHA HERROLD FAMILY
Donna Means Twin Lakes, MI	HOMER O. HUNT IDA FRYE HUNT

Many of the bricks that have been inscribed and returned to us have been installed in the patio. They look great!!

Contributions

A special note of thanks to:
Pioneer Hi-Bred International
Johnston, Iowa

Pioneer has stepped up once more with a generous gift of \$10,000, to be used to complete our house and barn renovation.

In addition, they have given the JSHS, under the Pioneer Volunteer Program, a grant of \$250 for Kathy Wallerstedt's volunteer work on the website for the Johnston Historical Society. Many thanks to both Pioneer and Kathy!

And be sure to visit the website:
www.johnstonhistoricalsociety.com

Scouts:

Mark & Mary Johnson
Omaha, NE

Frances Longo Melas
Escondido, CA

Richard & Bettie Franklin
Urbandale, IA

Jon Duvick & Carol Hendrick
Des Moines, IA

Caretakers:

Charles & Shirley Burkett
Johnston, IA

Joe & Arlene Shore
Johnston, IA

Memorial Gifts:

Mrs. Sandi Wahlert
Dexter, IA
In memory of Leo Seibert

Ralph Johnson
Dallas Center, IA
In memory of Mrs. Charlene Johnson Grey

Ferne Michael
Windsor Heights, IA
In memory of Shirley Miller

Gifts from the Wish List:

Bob & Jean Thomas
Des Moines, IA
Barn concrete Patio Fence

Water Fountain in the Simpson House

Elnora Masters
Urbandale, IA

Horizontal bar in Patio fence



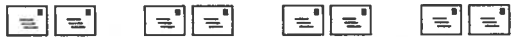
Renewals

Thanks to so many of you who have renewed your membership to the Johnston Historical Society! To those of you who have not done so, please send your check for \$10, single, \$12 family membership to:

Johnston Historical Society
Post Office Box 109
Johnston, IA 50131

(You can renew for more than one year!)

You need to renew if the number after your name on the address label reads 03.



Letters:

A request from Charlotte Kunce of Sully, IA asks for information on an ancestor of hers. She writes:

“I’m still looking for any information on Jacob Shirbroun. I found him in the 1856 census living in Polk County. He married Catherine Lawson, J.M. and Elizabeth Lawson daughter, in September 1863. My grandfather was George (Franklin) Shirbroun and he was born in Polk County somewhere between Johnston and Camp Dodge. If anyone could help me on this I would really appreciate it.”

Ferne Michael was unable to find definitive information for Ms .Kunce, and so we are passing her request on to our readers.

If you have information that might help her, the address is Charlotte Kunce, 1002 Second St. Sully, IA 50251

In Memoriam

We received information that Walter Olmstead, of Vista, CA, longtime member of the JSHS died last year. We send sympathy to his wife Marianne and his family.

Shirley Miller of Des Moines died on December 21, 2003. Shirley was a certified genealogist, and active in the Iowa Genealogical Society and the Pioneer Sons and Daughters, and she was a member of the JSHS. The JSHS sends sympathy to her friends and family.

The following story is taken from the Northern Polk County News, a newspaper published and distributed in Johnston in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Jeanne Hansen was the editor.

A number of feature articles written by the late Mrs. Eunice Heard were published from time to time. This is one of them, from August 20, 1970

McDivitt Cemetery remains at the corner of Meredith Drive and NW 70th Street, a silent reminder of the pioneer church built there in the late 1800’s.



History of the McDivitt Methodist Church

By Eunice Heard

Early in 1875, the families (in the area) got together and decided it was time to get busy with the building of the church. The area was cleared and leveled, the plans were studied and discussed, and they all went about getting the farm work out of the way as early as possible.

I asked the "Old Timers", where did you get the money? Didn't you have budget, or a drive or a long time pledge, as churches do now? A grandson of Mr. McDivitt answered me thoughtfully, "We all knew how to work at building, for most of us have helped each other build our own homes; the flat glaciated rocks from along the ravines were used for the foundation. The lumber was sawed, but mostly the farmers would go to a mill not too far away, bring home what they needed in their lumber wagons and pay for it each trip. There wasn't much money, but we all knew how to use what we had, and we wanted this church."

The church foundation was laid quickly and by late summer the roof was on. Nobody remembers exactly the size of the church, but they were sure it was 50 feet wide and possibly 100 feet long from front to back (it faced south). The walls were 18 feet high and the ceiling resting on these walls seemed very elegant to some of the women. Most of the early homes had low ceilings for warmth.

A raised and railed platform made a place for the pulpit and the little pump organ on one side, and a pot-bellied stove on the other.

Coal Mines

The church was heated by coal from one of the nearby mines. Few people now realize that after the early glacial drift down into our area, there were a million or so years of growth of vegetation, later resulting in veins of coal, which covered much of central Iowa. (*The deposits of vegetation that formed coal were laid down before the glaciers left their drift Ed.*) Most of the coal still lies there buried under a few hundred feet of sod cover. Mines were opened after 1875 all over the county. Several were located in the McDivitt church area. The closest was "Riders" mine just a couple of miles west of the church. Farther south in the heart of Urbandale there was one called No. 6; a little farther south about where the K-Mart is located on Hickman was Beck's Mine (*known later as Urbandale Coal Company. Ed.*) And there were many more. A government report at the turn of the century says a third of a million tons of coal were mined in the area. The new railroads were the best customers.

The "Old Timers" built a good coalhouse at the back of the church, and kept it supplied, hauling it in at \$3.25 per ton, as needed, and taking turns. Privies were added at the sides of the coal- house, and before winter, left-over lumber was made into a shed where horses and buggies could be driven under for protection. There was only room for three buggies. If you came late, or on horseback there was a good fence on the west side to tie up.

Again the question came up — How much debt did the church have? Who helped pay for it. Was it a missionary church? All the answers were emphatically "No". When the

building was finished there were only a few little bills and some more things we needed or wanted. The men from the new Polk City church had come and helped us out several times — just as we had gone to help them with their building earlier”.

Church Bell

There was one more thing — proudest of all was a fine bell to be placed in the belfry. Mr. Ray Stewart says it was a “hefty” bell but they got it up and in place on heavy walnut wedges. No one remembers who paid for the bell or how much it cost, but many think it was the Conference. They remember as young children watching it hoisted into place, and hearing it rung for the first time.

It was to be rung for some 75 years to help with the life of the church, sending out its sweet tones over the quiet countryside to call everyone to church or other special times, and tolling for funerals. There was another bell, or set of three bells in the belfry of the Catholic Monastery on the corner of Merle Hay Plaza (*now Merle Hay Mall*) where Younkers store now stands.

Other than horseback, the bell was the only way to communicate quickly with the people of the countryside for it was many years before the advent of the telephone or radio in the area.

When the church was dismantled in 1950 an auction was held to dispose of things inside the church. The Church of the Open Bible had leased McDivitt’s church for some time and was building a new church on 68th and Douglas (in Urbandale). They purchased all but one of the pews. It is owned by Mrs. Virginia Betz, daughter of Ray Stewart. (*The late Virginia Betz was a charter member of the JSHS. Her daughter, Judy Bogaard, member of the JSHS, says the bench is still in the Betz family. Ed.*)

These pews had been made from fine native lumber, slabs of walnut selected by the men for quality and size. They would be 16 to 18 feet long, and no piecing was done. They were sturdy pews and served well for long years, but no one had gotten around to sand and polish them. No one minded that they were “in the rough”; they did not dress up for church — just cleaned up.

The men from the Open Bible church took them apart and made them into beautiful and durable tables to use in their church all finely finished and polished. They are in regular use at this time. (1970)

Along about this time a new Urbandale Congregational church was built, (*a new sanctuary was built over the old basement church which was already there. Ed.*) and the “hefty “ bell was placed in the their belfry, where it is no longer used while electric chimes replace it. (*Actually, it was in use for many years, into the 1990’s, and sounded on Sunday morning. Ed.*)

Water was a problem for the church and also for the new school house nearby. There were numerous springs over the area, but not close by. An artesian well had been opened in the Lovington area, but the water was tainted and stained by minerals, so it was closed up. Water for both the church and the school was always carried by the older boys from a farm house some distance west or a spring in a ravine to the east.

Preachers

Circuit riders came early to McDivitt’s Grove, irregularly at first, but followed by more regular help from the Des Moines Conference Seminary at Indianola (later called Simpson College), with student preachers. Still later, an ordained preacher came to live at Polk City serving their church and McDivitt’s Grove on Sunday afternoons. It is said that a Dr Holmes, who

served for some time, later became president of Simpson College.

How were these preachers paid, we asked. Our "Old Timer" said, "They did not have a stated amount, but never went away from our church without a collection being taken and all given to him. He was given feed for his horses, fruit and vegetables from bountiful farm gardens, and whatever else that could be shared. Some of the preachers had regular jobs during the week".

Rev. Swope was one of these. He was a farmer who owned and lived on much of the area covered now by homes in Debra Heights. His daughter Alice taught in the school next to the church, and many "Old Timers" remember going to school to her.

Rev. Swope was furnished with a portfolio which contained several ready-to-use sermons. He would select the one he thought best, and carry it to the field in his pocket to study as the horses rested at the end of the long furrows. Then he would shout the sermon to memorize it as he guided the horses back and forth. Mac Byers, an old friend who lived on the top of the hill to the north, told me he used to listen to him. (*Mac Byers was the father of JSHS members Pat Wallerstedt and William Byers. Ed.*)

There are few things remaining to remind us of this early church. The little cemetery lies quietly among the trees. There is a well worn pew, a "hefty" bell, a Bible used on the pulpit for years with records of births and deaths in it, some old song books and a post card stamped "McDivitt's Grove".

The "Old Timers" remember it as the center of their worship, their place to meet each other in good times and bad, and a very good place to bring up fine children.

(Editor's notes above by Selma Duvick)

Thirty Years Ago in Johnston

In 1974 the city of Johnston was preparing for the construction of a water system. The city signed contracts for this construction in January, and in February the local paper featured a photo of huge pipes waiting to be laid beneath the Des Moines River.



And finally:

Getting out of a Bad Fix

A businessman who had been through several years of depression decided he needed a vacation. When he discussed the matter with his wife, she said that she wanted to go along with him on the trip he wanted to take around the world. He agreed, and then she added that she would like to take her mother along. He wasn't sure he wished to take his mother-in-law along with him on a trip for his health, but he finally agreed, and they all went on the trip.

One day when they were in Central Africa, camping out in the open, they arose in the morning to find the mother-in-law was missing. They looked for her for some time, and finally found her standing in a cleared spot in the forest with a roaring lion ten feet away.

The wife cried: "John, John, what shall we do for Mother?"

He looked the situation over carefully, meditated for a moment and said, "Mary, it looks to me as if the lion got himself into that fix. Let him get out the best way that he can".
