



JOHN RILEY NEWSPAPERMAN

Gathering oral history is a tradition in the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. Early on, printed accounts of charter members were gathered into scrapbooks. Today, the tradition continues with reminiscences collected on cassettes. This is a brief highlight of a modern day interview by Connie Lektzian-Scafe.

John Riley, who lived all but three years of his life in Oakland County, tells of the time between two world wars when continued prosperity seemed so assured that few were prepared for the depression that followed. In spite of hard times, those were days of family closeness and endeavors to help others, when Pontiac was a thriving, busy town.

The family moved into Pontiac in 1915 when John's father Ralph Riley, accepted a job with Parmiter Hardware, a store located within Chase's department store. This was the senior Riley's field of expertise, having spent years as a hardware salesman. He settled his family comfortably on Mary Day Avenue.

John attended the new and innovative Webster School, with its separate classroom outside exits. This was a one of a kind in the area.

Later, at Pontiac High School, John became a part of the championship band developed by Dale Harris in the late 1920's. For two years, he was a part of the Pontiac Motor Band, an organization formed by automotive employees and their families. However, they welcomed outside musical talent. Pontiac was bustling with civic and social events and the band was kept busy. They were in parades for everything from Masonic conventions to Memorial Day activities. They also marched in the big annual Armistice Day parade with only a change of name. For that one day they became the 327th Field Artillery Band.

By the time John was in his teens, the Parmiter hardware business was thriving and moved into its own building at Huron and Perry streets.

The automotive industry was also booming and on its way to becoming the chief industry in the area. There was a snag, however. Workers pouring into town couldn't find a place to live. The Modern Housing Company was busy developing the Perry Park neighborhood to provide homes. The builders were in a hurry. It was this rush that gave John and his brother Frank their first jobs. After school, during vacations and on weekends, they raced between the store and the building sites delivering construction hardware. In lieu of a delivery van, they made do loading up the back seat of their father's Olds touring car with such things as kegs of nails and plumbing supplies.

John got into his second job as a volunteer. By now, the depression had swept through the country. Thousands were out of work, out of money and out of food and clothing. The Red Cross set up an emergency depot at the old Oliver Buick salesroom on West Pike Street. From here food, household items and clothing were distributed. John's idea was to help out a few days a week. In six months, it became a full time job. A system was set up so that people in the city came to the depot for

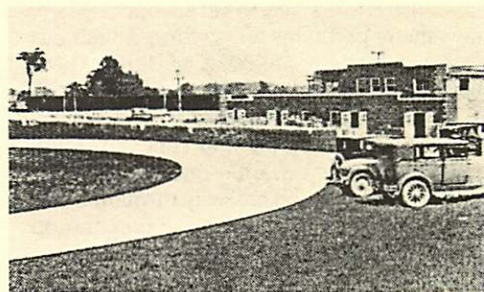
needed items. A motor route had drop-off points in Royal Oak, Milford, Highland and Waterford townships. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration soon picked up the funding for this program and John's salary was \$1.00 a day.

The program, a forerunner of today's social services, outgrew its space on West Pike. A move was made from there to a storage plant. This was next to a railroad siding in what is now the county courthouse complex. John became head of the Com-

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*John Riley
1934 Relief Worker*



*Cement Block Plant
Oakland County Complex, Telegraph Road*



*Chase's Store - location of Parmiter Hardware,
East side of Saginaw Street, Pontiac 1925*

**ANNOUNCING
Ice Cream Social Time!**
Sunday, August 12th from 1:00 to 4:00
the Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society once again hosts this annual event for the pleasure of members, guests, and the general public at Pine Grove. See enclosed invitation for the details. Hope to see you there with us!

(Continued from page 1)

modities Distribution Department and was given the use of the old block plant. As a prison, it housed trustees who made cement blocks for county construction. He set up office in the warden's quarters.

John's department not only distributed materials throughout the county, he also had to acquire the needed clothing from the wholesalers. For this, he paid with federal vouchers, which in turn could be redeemed at a bank.

Baby's layettes were one of the most needed items and the wholesalers chuckled at the 20 year old unmarried John Riley who bought more layettes than most department stores.

Times were grim for the automotive plants and Fisher Body was closed down. General Motors offered the use of its cut and sew upholstery department. Many unemployed got their first job in years cutting and sewing pants, shirts and dresses for the Relief Administration. These were passed on to the needy and the workers got some pay along with commodity vouchers.

About 1935, John Riley decided it was time to move on. He took a job at GM's Truck and Coach Plant and after one day, decided that was not for him. Next he collected delinquent accounts for Sallan Jewelers. In those days, Sallan's was glad to have 10¢ a week come in on some accounts. Not a high paying job but John bought his first car while working there. It cost \$75.00 in unpaid storage fees from the Motor Inn Garage. It was a 6-wheel Pontiac sports coupe, 6-Wheels? Four on the ground and two in the fender wells.

In late 1938, when he was about 26 years old, John began work at the Pontiac Daily Press (later the Oakland Press) in display advertising. With the economy still depressed, it wasn't easy to get accounts. Many days the department felt getting 2 inch ads was an achievement. What he didn't know was that he had begun a 40 year career with his hometown newspaper.

Shortly after World War II began, John, now married, was drafted into the Quartermasters Corp. About halfway through training, his group was made grave registration unit. This entailed battlefield work identifying the dead and gathering personal posses-

sions forward to the families. At one point, he spent 10 months in Honolulu in the administrative part of this unit. October of 1945 found him in the Army of Occupation in Hokkaido, Japan. John was a 1st Lt. working in the slot of a battalion commander. He had the eerie experience of walking through the town for two days without seeing a single Japanese. They were fearful that the Americans might pillage and destroy as the Japanese army had. The first person John spoke to was a bank president, a graduate of Ohio University. John's unit had gone there to confiscate the currency, but found instead a vault full of whiskey - which they purchased from the bank.

Back home after the war, John made plans for the future. His family intended that he go to college, but the depression changed that. Correspondence courses in business administration served him well later in his career. It was not his intent to return to the newspaper business but several visits from his old boss, Dock Brodie, changed his mind. He began as an advertising salesman and found that the contacts he'd made in his earlier jobs were invaluable in this new position.

He had a keen interest in the activities in Oakland County. He served on the Pontiac Central City Association, which later became the Pontiac Business Association, Board of Directors at Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital and as Chairman of Pontiac General Hospital Building Authority. Like many long time residents, he was greatly disappointed to see the demise of Pontiac's stores and businesses, feeling that much of this was due to lack of foresight.

Over the years, John saw many buildings destroyed that should have been left standing. In part, he listed the lovely octagon house that sat on Huron between Williams Street and the railroad; the Buckley and the Murphy homes near Bagley and Wright's Planing Mill on Orchard Lake Avenue. All of these would be of historical interest today, or used for homes.

Four decades after returning to the Oakland Press, he retired as Vice President of Marketing.

Book Review F.Y.I.

(Wisner Library)

1. The Pictorial Encyclopedia of Fashion

(604 pages)

By Kybulova, Herbenova, Lamarova

2. Paris Fashions of the 1980's

(88 pages)

Edited by Stella Blum

This issue's F.Y.I. column is in response to the enthusiasm shown at our "Blooms and Bonnets" celebration at Pine Grove on May 20th when our guests strolled around with hats and clothing of yesteryear.

Book #1: This encyclopedia of fashion is mainly pictorial, but is complete with interesting cultural and political information that could easily lend itself to a fashion show script. This fascinating collection of fashions spans the world as well as the ages of the world. The book explains fashion as:

"Fashion in the widest sense comprises all outward manifestations of civilized behaviors which receive general acceptance for a limited period of time."

Book #2: Also pictorial in nature, this book's format more closely resembles the "magazine look". The pictures, "fashion plates", are so clear and definitive, they would lend themselves to a slide presentation or perhaps to transparencies for overhead projections. The book describes fashion of the 1890's as:

"The 1890's was a dynamic era which ushered in new industry urbanization, a growing middle class and a relaxation of rigid moral standards. Nightlife flourished in popular restaurants, theaters and dance halls. Popularly known as the, 'Gay Nineties', this decade produced a unique fashion image still admired and imitated today, reflecting a new vitality and changing role for women.

We recommend these books as an excellent source for those interested in pursuing the history of fashion.

- Pauline Harrison

WISNER LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

Touch the Earth - McLuhan

Scrapbook - Oakland Co. Obituary 1987-1988-1989

White Lake Township Cemeteries

21 Etchings of Vintage Cars 1920, 1930, 1940

Places of Worship - James Ward

Oxford Township Cemetery - Eastern Division

Bound Over - Indentured Servitude - VanDerZee

Book of Indians - William Brandon

Memorial Address of the Life & Character of

Abraham Lincoln - Bancroft

Eric Sloan's America Barns & Bridges

Illustrated History of the Civil War - Humble

Guide to Roses - Coggiatti

Pontiac: the Complete History 1926-1986

Patriots - The Men Who Started the American Revolution - Langguth

We wish to thank the following persons for donations to our Research Library: Faye Donelson, Mrs. Sam Harrison, Rex Lamoreaux, Rose D. Lewis, Jean Milton, and Robert Norberg.

In Memoriam

Fred Crossman
Pauline B. Holtom
Dr. Conrad R. Lam

Membership

We welcome four new members:

Ms. Margaret Steward
Mr. Ted Spehar
Ms. Beverly Moss
Mr. James R. Ward

BLOOMS, BONNETS ... (and showers)

May 20th at Pine Grove marked a first for the Oakland Pioneer & Historical Society as a May outdoor event. Usually our Annual Dinner took place in May, but since our "Annual" is now in January it was decided that we would enjoy springtime at Pine Grove in this fashion.

A nice sized friendly crowd showed up in spite of the uncertain weather – and rain it did. But the sun also shown on our enthusiastic ladies (and gentlemen) amongst the hats and flowers. Everybody gathered around the star of the show, Jane Windeler, who arrived at the wheel of her resplendent 1904 open air Buick Speedster complete in duster and vintage bonnet.

Margaret Ann Jackson presided as mistress of ceremonies in her special warm and entertaining style. Our "hats off" to all the hat modelers! Ladies, you all reigned supreme. Hats, both modeled and displayed, were from our own Society's collection as well as from the private collection of Margaret Ann Jackson.

Chairperson, Ruth Priestly prepared and served hors d'oeuvres and punch. She also created a colorful "Blooms & Bonnets" tree with the help of our talented Crafters Group. It was an inspiring afternoon.

– Pauline Harrison



Left to right: Joyce Scafe, Elsie Patterson, Ada Ellis, Shirley Redmond, Rosamond Haeberle, Ann Morrow, Marion Roush, Jean Giddings



The Jim Tedeso Jrs. and guests



John Madole in his Arizona hat



Jean Milton and Margaret Ann Jackson



Kitty Daggy



Jane Windeler and her 1904 Buick Speedster (left to right): Shirley Redmond, Jane Windeler, Ada Ellis, Connie Scafe



Jim and Elsie Jacobs

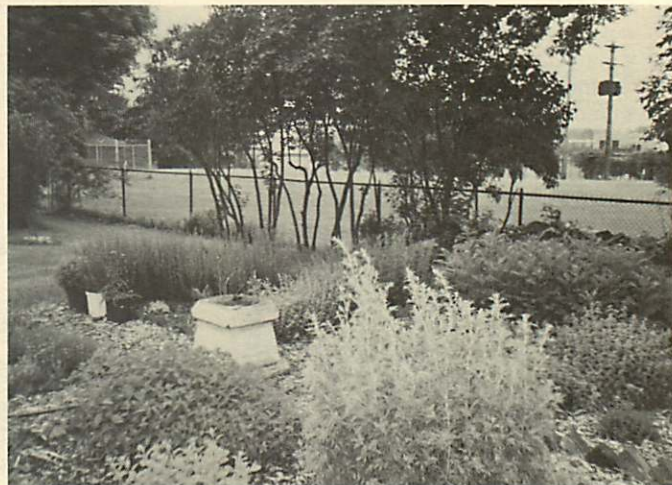
SUMMERTIME AT PINE GROVE

The gardens at Pine Grove are beautiful! We are ready for company. You are encouraged to bring your friends, family and summer visitors any time between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday thru Friday. Guides are on hand for small groups – larger numbers can be handled upon appointment with the office. Last tour of the day starts at 2 p.m. Please note Sunday tours have been eliminated.

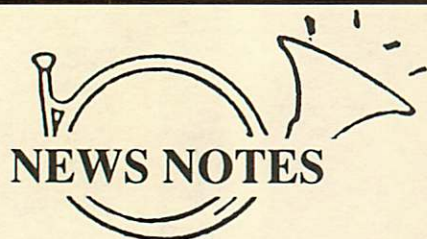
The Research Library is also open during the week and our librarian on hand to offer special assistance on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.



Rose Garden as you enter Wisner House



Herb Garden by Jim Tedesco



This “ole” house continues to receive tender loving care from our dedicated volunteers of the Grounds and Maintenance Committee. Sulky and sleigh have been painted. Clarke Kimball’s vegetable garden near the Carriage House continues to delight the “city” guests – many who have never seen a tomato grow. The Guides Room will soon have a new decor as Elliott Plante applies new wallpaper and paint. The front porch is being painted by George Ruge. Lillian Paull keeps Jack Moore busy as she continues to find just one more area for shelves needed for the Library. Don Daggy is delighted with the newer mower provided by the Adlers as he mows the grass. The Oral History Room also has had an up-date with new shelves for storage. The Smokehouse is targeted for needed repair.

• We appreciate the monetary support from our many members. The GM Job Bank

Program also has provided much needed assistance. An added blessing is the many hours of labor from our dedicated volunteers, for which we express our thanks!

• Bob Reynnells, Jack Moore and Sid Olson have presented their Vintage Farm and Work Tool program to many groups, including the Civitan Club in March. Their new brochure is available upon request as is their program. Our Farm Museum in the lower level of the Carriage House is exceptional in the quality of tools and displays.

• Congratulations to Francile Anderson, former OCPHS Board Member who was elected to the Education Hall of Fame by Michigan Congress of School Administrators.

• Hammering Out The Past by OCPHS Board Member and archaeologist Charles Martinez, dealing with our prehistoric Indian artifact collection, is being completed for publication by the Society.

• Lenna McIntyre reports six new guides have completed their training and the updated Guides Manual is in use. We encourage you to join this group of volunteers as guides are continually needed for our programs.

• Harriet Robinson and Karen Kasari, GM Job Bank volunteers, have been assisting with transcribing our oral history tapes and researching our newspaper collection for obituaries. This data will be available in our Research Library.

• We will miss the late Dr. Conrad Lam, Director of the Franklin Village Band, which performed for many years at our Ice Cream Social. Dr. Lam was also well known as a cardio-vascular surgeon at Henry Ford Hospital.

• Oak Hill Cemetery dedication June 14, 1990, as a National Historic Site, was well attended by Society members. Rain changed the plans and the program was held at the Congregational Church in Pontiac, which really provided a better setting for the program. We all enjoyed Betty Adams and Jerry Roe’s remarks for the Michigan Historical Commission. Reine Haskins, the great-great-granddaughter of Stephen Mack, and her husband Harold, enjoyed having family members with them as they were honored.

Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. John Buchanan and Mrs. Anna Lee Slater Kennedy for their generous contribution to the memorial FUND in memory of Fred Crossman.

ACCESSIONS

Thanks to the following donors to the Wisner collections:

Jean Giddings Chamber pot marked RHINE by John Edwards.
Collection of antique trims and jewelry

Miriam Grinnell Estate Dress, blouse, apron Circa 1890-1910

Rex Lamoreaux Rockingham vase. Charles Piquette, engraved M.W.
Hand forged tools and lantern Circa 1820

Jack Moore Dietz farm lantern

Marion H. Roush Men’s hats

Ruth Navin Taylor White muslin pantaloons and slip

Orpha Williams Collection of 16 antique hats 1890-1900

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