



Frankfort Area Historical Society of Will County, Illinois

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July-August 2021

*The FAHS continues to explore the role of Balchowsky's department store in Frankfort and the legacy of Eddie Balchowsky, grandson of store founder Bernard. **The department store and Eddie's life are highlighted in a new exhibit at the Museum.** The exhibit includes a video of Eddie's unique story and music from his "For Freedom" compositions. Visit our museum to learn more.*

Below are testimonials of past residents taken from the oral history archives at the museum.

Remembering Balchowsky's



Souvenir from Balchowsky's 40th anniversary celebration.

Marilyn McManimen (1926 – 2017): Balchowsky's was located on Ash Street.... At any rate, everything was there. That's where the old folks that came in from the farm would trade their wares, they would bring in their butter and eggs in and trade them for flour or whatever. And the big pickle barrel was always there, and we had to dig in for some pickles. You could buy yard goods there and it was a great meeting place. The women would all meet there and

trade their things and the men would go to Baumann's and have their beer. And the whole day spent in town. So, Balchowsky's remained a long time and we really enjoyed that place.

Frank Bobzin (1898- 1994): They sold just about everything you could think of outside of meat.

Walter Pfaff (1897 – 1992): I think they (Balchowsky's) had about 13 clerks in that store. The whole upstairs was full of stoves – and mostly stuff to cook with and all of that. Then downstairs on the north side was all men's suits. You could go in there and buy a suit just like you could down in Joliet. On the south side was the grocery department and if you wanted anything and they didn't have it in the store, they used to make one trip to Chicago a week and pick it up for you. They had a great big salt shed for the farmers that would come in and buy rock salt for their cattle. And, of course, Baumann's was on the corner. That was the old tavern.

Norman "Happy" Bettenhausen (1924-): Balchowsky's Department store – a kinda egg-barter trade – cash and carry operation, kind people and friendly employees. Just can't forget their barrel of candy kisses.

At the turn of the century, Constable Knippel had the dual job of law enforcement officer and lamp-lighter. Each evening just before dark, he would make his rounds lowering each lamp, lighting it, then raising it back into position. The lamps were hung on pulleys over the intersections. To conserve on tax payers' money, he would make the rounds once again at 1:00 a.m. and turn out all of the lamps.