



50 Years Ago Blacklick Creek Claimed Two Lives

by Suzy Millar Miller

Kids growing up in the Burg often played in Blacklick Creek or French Run Creek. We waded there in the summer, skated in winter, and caught sunfish, minnows and crawdads whenever we could. No one particularly worried about us hanging around the creek. It was what kids did. We never thought about anyone drowning.

Both creeks often flooded and many basements on Lancaster Avenue were full of water. We knew the threat of rushing waters and tried to stay away from the creeks during high water events.

I grew up on Lancaster Avenue. On June 22, 1956, a flood from French Run and Blacklick Creeks rose and collapsed our basement wall and washed the sod from Budd Oldham's front yard. I rode in a rowboat up to my grandparents' house at 1221 Lancaster Avenue as our house filled with water. The event instilled a healthy respect for rushing water and what disasters could happen even on peaceful Blacklick Creek. Ironically, a tragedy would occur in 1969 that caused death to visit someone at 1247 Lancaster.



On June 23, 1969 Blacklick Creek claimed the lives of two men who were intent on saving three little boys who were caught in the rapidly flowing waters.

Reporter Joe Gillette of the Columbus Citizen-Journal wrote:

"A Little League baseball coach and a helpful neighbor drowned Monday night in rain-swollen Blacklick Creek in Reynoldsburg moments after saving the life of a 10-year-old boy who had fallen in the creek.

"The victims were identified as William (Bo) Joseph Merringer, 1247 Lancaster Avenue

and Harold G. Schenk, 39, of 6564 Red Fox Road. Both were pronounced dead at the scene after being pulled from the water by other rescuers and the Reynoldsburg Fire Department.

"A third man, who also helped rescue the boy, was pulled unconscious from the water and revived. He was identified as David T. White, Sr., 45, of 1554 Marvin Avenue and reported in satisfactory condition at Lincoln Memorial Hospital.

"The rescued youth was Eric Ashton, 10, of 1631 Lucks Road. The incident occurred about 600 yards behind the Reynoldsburg Municipal Building at 7232 East Main Street and adjacent to a Little League baseball field.

"Young Ashton told police he was walking along the west side of the creek with three other youths when one of the boys pushed him into the water.

"Merringer, whose home borders the east side of the creek, ran to the rescue after hearing the boys' cries for help.

"Schenk and White, whose Little League team was playing in the nearby field, joined the (continued on Page 02)

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scene moments later and saw the two struggling in the water.

"They too went into the water and the three men somehow got the boy to shore before being pulled under water by the strong undertow.

"An eyewitness, Tim Pfautsch, 17, of 7099 Ellen Ct., a worker for the Reynoldsburg Recreation Department, said he heard women and children screaming and ran to the rescue.

"I started to walk across the dam along the upper edge. About a third of the way across, I fell in and an unidentified man pulled me to the side and saved my life."

On the front page of the June 24, 1969, edition of the Little Weekly more information appeared:

"... According to Reynoldsburg Police, three Thompson boys, Donald and Ronald age 11 and David, age 9 of 1029 Pleasant Drive, and Eric Ashton, 10, of 1631 Lucks Road, had gone to Blacklick Creek above the dam with the intention of going wading. David slipped and pushed Eric into the water, the other boys joined him in the water and all four began wading downstream toward the dam where Eric and Ronald both slipped and got into trouble.

"Donald's call for help was answered by Mr. Merringer who entered the water and picked up Donald and threw him to the bank so he could get out.

"Donald pulled Ronald out by the hand, and then got a stick for Eric to grasp and pulled him free of the water.

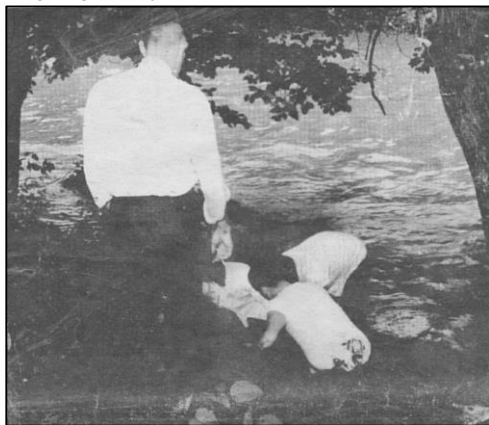
"During that time Merringer had become trapped in the dam's undercurrent and Mr. Schenk entered the water to assist him.

Both men were unable to free themselves from the undercurrent.

"Dan Hitchings, 29, 1800 Steckel Road, and Tim Pfautsch, 17, 7099 Ellen Court both entered the water to assist the men. But

Pfautsch got into trouble and was pulled to safety and Hitchings could not get to the men.

"David White, Sr., 1554 Marvin Drive, also attempted to help the men but was caught in the undercurrent. The current finally released Merringer, Schenk and White and they began to float downstream.



"Hitchings, Pfautsch, the Truro Township Emergency Squad, and other bystanders pulled the three to shore, but only White responded to first aid. Merringer and Schenk were both pronounced dead at the scene by John P. King, M.D.

"The bodies of both victims were taken to Rutherford Funeral Home. Merringer is survived by his wife, Mary Margaret; a daughter, Judith, 5; two sons, Joseph 10 and David, 2; his parents Mr. and Mrs. James Merringer of 1216 Lancaster Avenue; four sisters and two brothers. Schenk is survived by his wife, Patricia; two sons, Steve and John; and two daughters, Joan and Judy."

The Columbus Dispatch ran an article entitled Dead Man's Brother Prevented 3rd Death:

"Cool-headed first aid by one drowning victim's younger brother may have kept Monday's double drowning from becoming a triple tragedy.

"Witnesses said while William (Bo) Merringer, 29, lay dead on one side of the creek, his brother, John, 24, was administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to David White, 45, on the other side.

"White, the only one of three rescuers to survive a plunge into the creek, remained in good condition Wednesday at Lincoln Memorial Hospital. (continued on page 03)



Tim Pfautsch

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“There is no question in my mind,’ said funeral owner, Pete Rutherford, ‘that White would never have made it if it weren’t for Johnny.’

“The younger Merringer, a Reynoldsburg volunteer fireman, was one of the first on the drowning scene north of the city’s municipal building.

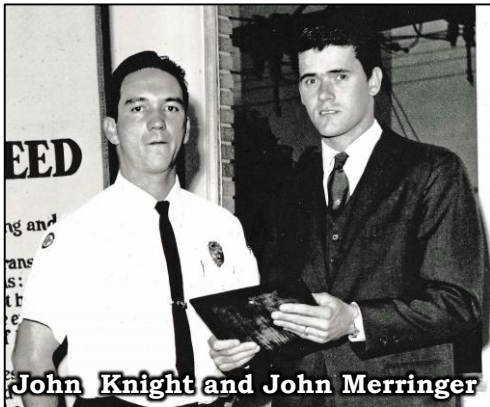
“Rutherford said Merringer began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on White as soon as he was dragged unconscious from the creek.

“He called across the creek as he was working and asked how his brother was,’ Rutherford said. ‘What could they do, but tell him he was all right?’

“Not until Rutherford had taken White to the hospital in the funeral home’s ambulance did John learn his brother was dead.

“Harold G. Schenk, 39, also drowned in the successful effort to save a 10-year-old boy who fell or was pushed into the creek while playing along the bank.

“Truro Township trustees and Reynoldsburg Jaycees are reportedly considering a special lifesaving award for John.



“But John, who lives with his wife and two children at 1155 Gibson Drive, Reynoldsburg, first must attend another ceremony – his brother’s funeral at 10 a.m. Friday at St. Pius Church.

“The service for Schenk will be at 10 a.m. Thursday in the Rutherford Funeral Home, 7369 East Main Street.”

According to John Merringer, Bo’s brother:

“While we were driving on French Run Drive, a fire alarm sounded for a squad run. I pulled over at the footbridge by the firehouse. Mary, my wife, says not to go. We have the kids in the car. The fire alarm goes off again for a fire run. I tell Mary to take the kids to her mom’s and I’ll come and get them.

“Chief John Knight meets Larry Blake, Jim West, and myself at the squad. He says that kids are in trouble in the creek behind the Merringer’s on Lancaster Avenue We



reach the scene and get out. Larry has the rope. Jim and Larry head down and I get the resuscitator. When reaching the dam, Larry was starting to tie the rope around his waist. I grabbed it telling him that I know he can’t swim. He gives me the rope. I start to tie off, but I see Dave White go under at the dam and I know where he’s going to come up. So I jump in that area and I was right, he was right next to me. With one pull, I pulled him from the current or back tow. I pulled him up to me and started CPR right in the middle of the creek. Then I dragged him to the far bank, toward the ball fields, where Pete Rutherford met me. He thought Dave was gone, but I said no, he isn’t while I continued CPR. His pupils started to react. Pete said they needed me on the other side, I saw someone fifteen feet from there, but several people were working on him (Bo). I went back across the creek where Mr. Harold G.

(continued on Page 04)

50 Years Ago Blacklick Creek Claimed Two Lives

(continued from page 03)

Schenk was located with people helping him. They gave me a change on CPR for him, but we couldn't save him.

"On a personal note, Pete Rutherford told me that on the way to Lincoln Memorial Hospital down Livingston Avenue every time he hit a bump in the road, Dave would spit out water. So when Pete saw a bump he hit it. I wanted everyone to know about this great man and about the good friends of Truro Township Fire Department.

"Heroes of June 23, 1969: Larry Blake, Jim West, John Knight, Pete Rutherford, Dan Hitchings, Tim Pfautsch, and Dave White. (Dan and Tim had to be the ones who pulled Bo and Harold out of the water.)

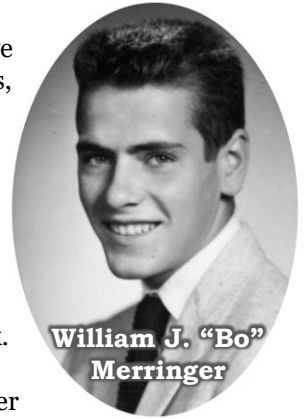
"The words of Jesus Christ: 'This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

"God Bless – John C. Merringer"

The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission awarded five medals for the actions that day: Dave White, Dan Hitchings, and Tim Pfautsch were each recognized for their heroism. William Merringer and Harold Schenk were awarded for their bravery posthumously:

"William J. Merringer saved Donald G. Thompson, and died attempting to save Ronald D. Thompson and Eric T. Ashton respectively, from drowning, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, June 23, 1969. Donald, 11, Ronald, 11, and Eric, 10, called for help from turbulent water below a dam in a creek. Merringer, 29, plasterer, ran to the creek, entered the deep water, and swam to Donald, who was nearest the bank. After towing Donald to safety, Merringer started toward Ronald and Eric, who were farther from the bank. He became caught in a reverse current and began spinning head over heels. Donald ran downstream to shallow water and waded to the opposite bank, where a pile of cement debris extended into the creek. Ronald and Eric managed to move to near the debris; and Donald aided them from the water. Merringer later was thrown free of the reverse current and, inert, floated into shallow water. Others removed him, but he could not be revived.

"Harold G. Schenk died attempting to save William J. Merringer from drowning, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, June 23, 1969. Merringer, 29, plasterer, who had entered turbulent water below a dam in a creek to aid three boys, became caught in a reverse current and began spinning head over heels in the deep water. Schenk, 39, mechanical engineer, entered the creek from the opposite bank, swam to near Merringer, and attempted to grasp him. He was unable to do so because of the somersaulting of Merringer's body. Schenk then also became caught in the reverse current and was spun head over heels. Both Merringer and Schenk later were thrown free of the turbulence and, inert, floated into shallow

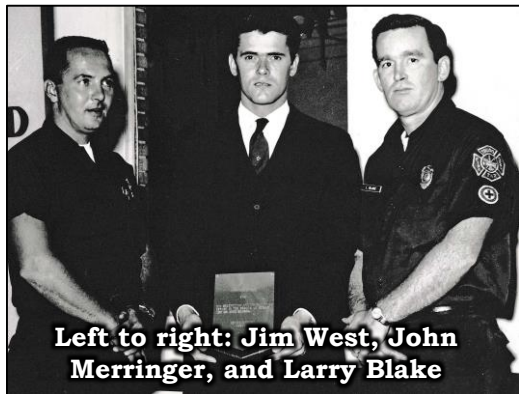


(continued from page 04) water. Others removed them, but they could not be revived.”

Another article, source unidentified, was titled “**Greater Love Hath No Man**”:

“Two Reynoldsburg men made the supreme sacrifice Monday evening that others might live. Both victims undoubtedly knew they were in danger when they decided to help but they didn’t question, they acted. Of such stuff heroes are made. The community as a whole joins in offering condolence to the families of the two. Their grief is great. But they may find some solace in the knowledge that William Merringer and Harold Schenk acted from their deepest feelings. Their sacrifice is proof of the basic goodness of man.”

The first three photos are identified as follows:



Left to right: Jim West, John Merringer, and Larry Blake

Rescue workers drag swollen waters of Blacklick Creek for a body. Water in foreground indicates speed and undertow. – *Columbus Citizen-Journal* Photo

Tragedy – Members of the Truro Township Volunteer Fire Department Emergency Squad attempt to revive one of the men caught in the swirling waters of Blacklick Creek Monday – *Little Weekly* photo.

Tim Pfautsch - *Columbus Citizen-Journal* photo

On June 23, 1969, two families in Reynoldsburg experienced a life-changing event. Harold Schenk and Bo Merringer were both family men whose decision to save several children in peril reflected their selfless love of others.

This summer, we invite family and friends of anyone involved to join us as a community at JFK Park. We plan to honor their memories and share a celebration of their lives. Bring your own picnic. We will gather on Sunday, June 23rd, 2019 starting at 3:00 PM in the Gazebo.

Please contact Steve Schenk at steve.pam.schenk@gmail.com for details and to RSVP.

Sunshine Committee

Do you know someone who needs some Sunshine?

Contact Wendy Raftery if you are aware of an RTHS member who could use a Get Well, Thinking of You, Sympathy, or any other type of card for some added sunshine in their life...

(614) 262-2673 Please call after 2:00pm

Write “SUNSHINE” in the subject line of your email:

cdutchman1@aol.com



THE COURIER

May 2019 Issue

Reynoldsburg-Truro
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2019 CALENDAR

MAY 2019

Publish May Courier

10 – FRI – Herbert Mills 3rd Grade Tour 9:00-1:00

11 – SAT – Wilma (Wiswell) Turner

Celebration of Life

1:00-5:00 Groveport Town Hall

648 Main St. Groveport OH

14 – TUE – Board Meeting - 7:00pm

18 – SAT – Western Electric Open House 10am-2pm

21 – TUE - Max & Erma's Fundraiser – All Day!

27 – MON – Memorial Day Service – 9:30am at

Seceder Cemetery

JUNE 2019

04 – TUE – Chipotle Fundraiser 4:00pm-8:00pm

11 – TUE – Board Meeting 7:00pm

15 – SAT – Community Yard Sale & Open House

9:00am-4:00pm

22 – SAT – RAIN DATE for Yard Sale

22 – SAT – Alumni Walk-Thru, 10am-12pm

RHS Class of 1958

22 – SAT – Deadline for July Courier

23 – SUN – Tribute for Schenk & Merringer

3:00 pm, at JFK Park

25 – TUE – Family Indoor Picnic, 6:30pm and

General Meeting, 7:00pm

JULY 2019

Publish July Courier

16 – TUE – Board Meeting, 7:00pm

20 – SAT – A Trunk of Circus Memories

Open House 10:00am to 2:00pm

23 – TUE – Max & Erma's Fundraiser

MAY 21, Tuesday – Max & Erma's All day restaurant fundraiser. Please join us! The meatloaf rocks!

JUNE 4, Tuesday – Chipotle 4:00pm to 8:00pm – We need \$300 in sales to get 33% of the profit. Help us reach goal!

JUNE 15, Saturday – Community Yard Sale. Please Participate! We need to sell more spaces! Tell your friends & neighbors to rent a space and sell their stuff! Your trash is someone's treasure.

David W. Reidel

A Trusted Partner for Your Peace of Mind

President

dave@reidelinsurance.com

Box 543, 7540 Slate Ridge Boulevard

Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068-0543

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Local Members & Friends



You will find three inserts in your *Courier* this month. They include the Community Yard Sale, a Max & Erma's fundraiser, and a Chipotle fundraiser.

Interurban - A Reynoldsburg Vignette



Illustrated and Written by Colin Sutphin

A chronology...

Let's go back a century. It was early spring in 1918. In Europe, the Great War was in its fourth year. Operation Michael was launched March 21. This German offensive was a series of attacks along the western front and northern France, designed to push back the French, British, and American forces. Unknown at this time, an armistice would be signed in November.

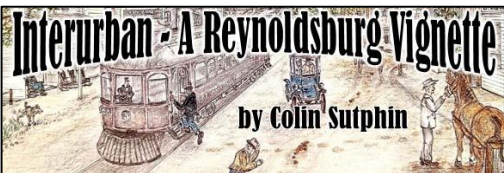
A flu outbreak was just beginning in Europe and America, although it wouldn't have much effect in central Ohio until October. This pandemic influenza would take the lives of over 20 million young adults worldwide, including 675,000 Americans. Cities along the east coast from Boston to Baltimore were most affected, with Philadelphia being hit the worst. My

own family history reflects this awful time.

Reynoldsburg, a village of more than 300 inhabitants, is located on the National Road about 11 miles east of Ohio's capital city, Columbus.

In the area around Reynoldsburg, having just come out of an extremely cold and snowy winter, the farmers enjoyed a fairly dry month of March. This would allow the teams of horses into the fields for plowing. Osborn's (Connell's) was doing a brisk business in farm implements and hardware.

In 1803 president Thomas Jefferson had Congress declare an area, 4½ miles wide starting at the Scioto River, and extending far into Licking County, the "Refugee Lands." *(continued on page 08)*



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Displaced families from Canada were encouraged to settle there. They were forced to leave Canada because of their loyalty to the American Colonies. Reynoldsburg is in the middle of these Refugee Lands.

Many of the people in this area were of English, Scottish, or German ancestry.

The Columbus, Newark, & Zanesville Electric Railway was providing passenger and cargo service through Reynoldsburg in 1918. It was an "Interurban" transit service that was available from 1904 to 1929, traveling east and west on Main Street several times a day. Car No. 67, built in Newark, Ohio, by the Jewett Car Company was over 60 feet long and carried as many passengers, plus baggage. It had all the modern amenities, including electric lighting, heat, and toilet. The round-trip fare from Reynoldsburg to Columbus, about two bits.

Electrification of the village wouldn't happen until 1922. The modern age was upon us. Trains, airplanes, automobiles, electric power, moving pictures, and soon the radio. It was a wondrous time.

Our Story....

We find ourselves on a small farm north of the National Road. It's along the Wagoneer's Road a goodly piece. A young man lives there with his family. His name is Rayford; everyone calls him

Rafe. His day starts before Sun up. Bare feet on the cold wooden floor alerts the senses. A splash of water from the ewer and bowl helps brighten the face. Rafe quickly dresses then heads for the kitchen where he takes wood shavings from the tinder box, opens the door on the cast-iron stove and puts them under the kindling. One match lit and he has a blaze started. Soon a good fire is going, filling the house with warmth. His

mother will begin cooking, and the aroma of a good breakfast will waft throughout.

Meanwhile, Rafe is in the barn doing chores. The horses, hogs, calf, and chickens need to be fed and watered. A horse looks gimpy on his

left foreleg. Rafe gently runs his hand down the horse's leg, lifting it as he selected the hoof pick. Carefully he removes a stone lodged next to the tender frog. "You'll be fine," he says, talking to the animal.

He seizes the egg basket with this morning's freshest.

Rafe's father is in the shed repairing equipment.

"Son!"

"Yes Sir," is his reply.

"Before you go to Columbus, I need you to stop by the mill to check on my seed order. And, tell the miller I'll be out of cracked corn by mid-week. I'm going to need two hundredweight. Also, stop in Osborn's and order a set of knives for the sickle bar mower. First cutting of hay is only a month away." Rafe's father hands him a ten-dollar gold piece and says, "Have Mr. Osborn put \$7 on my account. You can use *(continued on page 09)*



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a dollar or so today but bring me back the change." They have a good relationship, Rafe and his Pa.

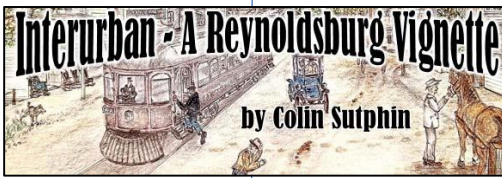
After a hearty breakfast of eggs, Mom's homemade biscuits, gravy with fatback grease in it, and coffee, Rafe is ready to head out. He walks along the Wagoneer's Road past Forrester's Lane. Since it is Saturday morning, there are few wagons coming from the stone quarry. As Rafe passes the cemetery on the hill, the morning sun casts angular shadows from the gravestones. He wonders what lives would those men have had if they'd survived the war with the South two generations earlier.

Arriving at the mill Rafe seeks out the miller, relaying his father's instructions. On his way out he cuts through the yard of the log house in front of the mill. The old dog on the porch growls.

He calls the dog by name, who now, tail wagging, comes out to greet him.

Hurrying along Main Street, he heads straight for Osborn's. Once in the hardware/implement store at the corner of Apple Alley, Rafe, following his father's orders, quickly finishes his business, now with three Morgan dollars in his pocket.

As he leaves Osborn's, he glances to his right. The Interurban is just now pulling in, leaving two argent rails glistening in the morning light behind. A man with horse and buggy pulls to the side, the trolley giving the animal a fright. Rafe dashes to board the train,



skillfully avoiding the steaming "apples" freshly deposited in the street by the skittish horse. On

board, the conductor is finishing with delivery of goods for the Triangle Store. Rafe waits patiently, then hands him a Morgan silver dollar, stating, "One round trip to Columbus please." His change is six bits. That would be three Standing Liberty quarters. Making his way past the haze of the smoking room, he enters the main passenger area looking for a good seat.

Already aboard are a man with his wife and daughter, farmers from east of town on a visit to the city. And a well-dressed swarthy man, Mediterranean maybe. A curbside window seat will do just fine.

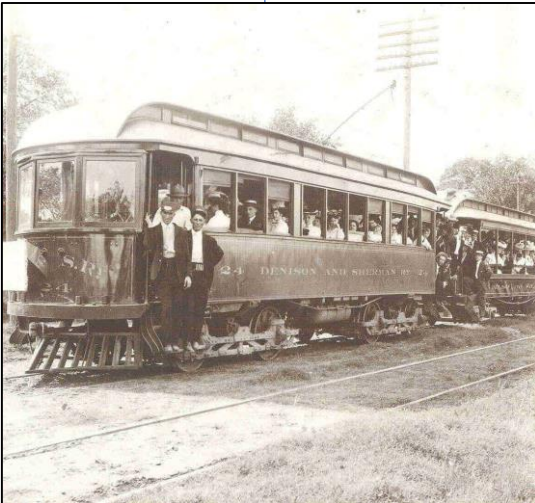
As they depart Reynoldsburg, Rafe sees a car pass by. It's cobalt blue and tall with a lot of glass. Not a sound as it passes. "Must be that Baker Electric Car,"

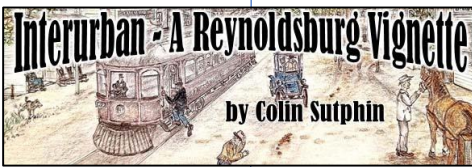
he thinks to himself. They head west toward town, now by the gravel pit in Hibernia. Soon they're passing the suburban farms nearer to Columbus.

On to Bexley for a stop at Capital University. As the trolley slows, Rafe's gaze is fixed out the window. YES! She's there. At the curb stands a

comely young woman with brilliant red hair. Her name is Meredyth, and she is a sophomore at Capital. The conductor puts down the step for her to board. Rayford and Meredyth are courting. They correspond frequently, albeit not seeing

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each other for months. Clearly Rafe is smitten...

As she takes the seat next to Rafe, he leans over and whispers in her ear. "You're my ain true love." She knows and smiles at him. He thinks, "My grandpa was a smart man." For you see, this was the phrase he always said to Rafe's grandmother so many years ago.

Our young couple continue their trip into the capital city. They arrive at the downtown station by late morning. Their plan is to catch a quick lunch at a nearby cafe, then go to the Southern Theatre at Main & High to watch a flicker. There's a matinee showing of a new picture called "Hearts of the World" starring Lillian Gish. It's a love story in the midst of the war in France. Later perhaps, window shopping at the F&R Lazarus store and maybe Montgomery "Monkey" Ward too. A nice sit-down dinner and then Capitol Square to perambulate early in the evening before returning to the station.

The pair board a late trolley back to

Bexley where Rafe bids farewell to Mere. With a smile that she can see, but with a sigh in his heart, he waves as the train pulls away.

Rafe sits silently reflecting on the day. It has been wonderful. The motorman graciously lets him off at the intersection of Graham Road. It's just a short hike up the Wagoneer's Road to the farm. Arriving, he goes straight to his father's desk, there placing down the money that remains. Then, to bed, for in the morning, he must hitch the horse and buggy after doing his chores. The family will be going to church, for it is Sunday.

Though our main characters are fictitious the places and times are fairly accurate. This story conveyed life as it might have been a century ago.

I hope you enjoyed it.

Colin Sutphin

The color pencil drawing depicts Reynoldsburg in 1918. The early spring morning scene on Main Street looks east from Apple Alley. Some of the people and vehicles are reflected in the story.

SUPPORT LOCAL HISTORY

Join the Reynoldsburg-Truro Historical Society

Individual - \$20 Family - \$25 Sustaining - \$30 Contributing - \$50 Life Membership - \$300

Name _____

Additional Names _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Make Check Payable to RTHS and mail to: RTHS, Box 144, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068

Invite your friends to join!

BOARDROOM BRIEFS

by Mary Turner Stoots



The following is a summary from the Board Meeting that was held on April 16 26, 2019.

Our Board Meetings are all open to the membership and you are always welcome to join us:

- 5 Sympathy cards were sent to various members within 3 families, 4 Get Well cards, and 2 Thinking of You cards by the Sunshine Committee
- The furnace needs servicing
- The Barn indoor lighting has been updated and replaced
- We have a new (donated) wheelchair ramp for the annex
- New slat board replaced the bulletin board in the Lower Level
- A new pegboard has been installed to hold Gift Shop artwork
- The Vendor-Only Yard Sale name has been changed to **Community** Yard Sale
- So far, the RTHS Facebook page has reached 295,623 people
- Upcoming Events include:
 - 04/20 – Open House
 - 04/23 – Card Party
 - 05/10 – Herbert Mills 3rd Tour
 - 05/11 – Wilma Turner Celebration of Life Party
 - 05/18 – Western Electric Open House

- Several web & phone inquiries were received
 - Ralph Herbert – Asking about Spring Lakes off 204
 - Kelly Cruse – Asking about the timing of our dues
 - David Mulder – Sent website information for imprinted and branded items
 - Linda Bidwell asked Mary Stoots to be replacement speaker for a men’s luncheon at Wesley Ridge
 - City BBQ asked for vintage pictures
 - Mary Jo Stapleton asked to schedule an alumni walk-thru for her RHS Class of 1958
 - Whitehall Historical Society offered to give us duplicate newspapers
 - Richelle Bhandari asked Mary Stoots to be replacement speaker for a women’s luncheon at Wesley Ridge
 - The City has agreed to replace the signs on Main Street and change them from ‘Heritage Center Museum’ to ‘Historical Society Museum’
 - The 2019 Calendar was distributed with additions:
 - **05/23** – Reynoldsburg Senior Center Tour
 - **05/29** – Alumni Luncheon Walk-Thru – Class of 1967
 - **06/04** – Chipotle Restaurant Fundraiser
 - **06/22** – Alumni Walk-Thru – Class of 1958
 - **07/20** – A Trunk of Circus Memories Open House
 - **08/07** – City BBQ Restaurant Fundraiser
 - **Nokia** donated several display cases and a variety of Western Electric artifacts
 - **Wyoming, Ohio, Historical Society** donated an original ledger hand-written by David Graham
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BOARDROOM BRIEFS

by Mary Turner Stoots



(continued from page 11)

Neal Piek – brought a Proclamation and Franklin County Flag

donated by the City of Reynoldsburg

- **Phil Vaughn** - Negatives from Doral Chenoweth of the Little Weekly. Neal will convert to digital for us
- **Wendy Wheatley Raftery** – donated a Girl Scout Sash

A BIG THANK YOU to:

Jim Diuguid for building pegboards, hanging slat-board, moving things around in the Gift Shop, staging t-shirts, hanging new lights in the barn, giving tours to third-graders, building handrails, putting in a ramp to the annex, cataloging new donations, and the countless other tasks he performs every time he is at the museum

Judy Diuguid for cleaning in museum, staging clothing in the Gift Shop, repairing broken dolls, and helping Jim elsewhere when we need you the most!

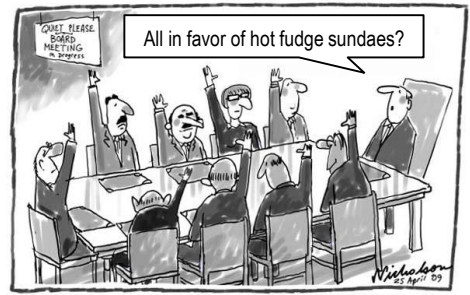
Suzy Millar Miller for donating YTD Corresponding Secretary expenses, publishing an Outstanding Roster, and helping to make the Courier look professional

Wendy Wheatley Raftery for her dedication to our membership, and donating all of the YTD postage and other card expenses for the Sunshine Committee

Kim Fisher for bringing us food! And for spreading 10-12 cubic yards of mulch over all of our gardens! The RTHS facility looks better than any house on the street!

Cheryl Foley – for taking the president for a speaking engagement at Wesley Ridge and for helping whenever we need an extra hand

Barth Cotner, Rachael Reynolds, Cheryl Foley, Dick Barth, Jim & Judy Diuguid, Carol Deuber, Neal Piek,



RTHS 2019 OFFICERS

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Mark Myers, and Kim Fisher for helping with the French Run Elementary third-grade tour
Mark Myers, Dick Barth, Kim Fisher, Don Larimer, Lib Murphy, John Kreitzburg, and **Nokia Bell Labs** for helping with the delivery of the new Western Electric cases and staging all of the artifacts

- All agenda items were covered.
- Motion to Adjourn at 8:15 pm
- The next meeting is scheduled for May 14, 2019

The Return of Western Electric

by Mark Myers

Saturday, May 18, 2019 - 10:00am to 2:00pm

Across from Mt. Carmel East hospital, at 6200 East Broad Street, a single large building is the only structure left from a once powerful company. Behind it, invisible from the road, lies a massive concrete slab, once the floor of the largest single-story building in Ohio. Twenty-one football fields could fit inside. The Western Electric plant, which once drove the economies of several suburbs east of Columbus, especially Reynoldsburg, has finally left town.

The end came slowly, in stages, over many decades, through several name changes: Western Electric, to AT&T, to Lucent Technologies. The location moved from East Broad to Rings Road in Dublin. Employees stayed on through it all and did basically the same work but under different ownership.

One of those who worked at Western Electric was Lloyd Parkinson of Reynoldsburg. He was attending a retiree luncheon one day and took a few pictures. He brought the pictures to the next get-together, and a lady asked him if he would take more pictures and share them with the group. Soon everyone knew of Lloyd's collection, and he kept the albums in the back of his car and his camera up front in case he met someone on the street whom he knew from the plant. Then he could take their picture and show them the albums. Others heard about his collection and gave him pictures from the

plant. Within a few years, his collection had grown to over 6,000 photos. A friend of his, Sallie O'Dell, had already amassed 1600 obituaries of those who had worked there. The collections grew too large and heavy to transport and store. Lloyd and Bev Cote, members of the Reynoldsburg-Truro Historical Society (RTHS), asked if the Society would be interested in receiving the books.

Western Electric had triggered the housing and population boom in Reynoldsburg in the late 1950s, leading to the eventual designation of Reynoldsburg as a city on January 5, 1961. The International Brotherhood of



Electrical Workers Local 2020, which represented the employees, built its Union Hall in town.

Inside that mammoth building, the plant did not make telephones but made the switching equipment that enabled one telephone to connect with any other telephone in (continued on Page 14)

The Return of Western Electric

by Mark Myers

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the world. Switching cabinets: some the size of refrigerators, some so big they were built on a truck frame so they could be driven right out of the plant. All switch components were made in-house.

Here was a strictly organized and governed workforce which worked three shifts, seven days a week. Gary Bogart, the paymaster at the plant in the mid-70s, said recently, "When I cut paychecks, it was over 13,000 at a time."

The eight-hour day could be brutal: i.e., using a "wire gun" to reach hidden terminals, or threading by hand all the strands of a cable.

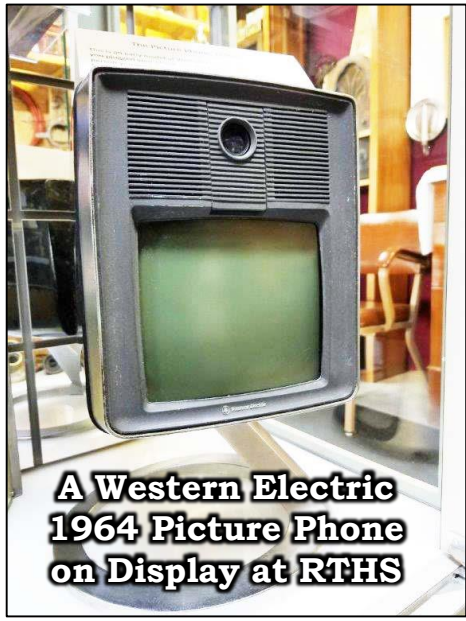
The plant housed three cafeterias, its own security force, its own hospital, and its own fire engine, with aisles built wide enough for it to pass. A rail line came in and out of the building.

The company, realizing the immensity of its workforce, and always vigilant about morale, sponsored many activities for its employees: softball and bowling teams, contests, educational advancement; gave awards and bonuses for superior work, and encouraged community involvement.

One of the premier community-minded groups at the plant was the Telephone Pioneers of America, who supported causes such as Special Olympics, nursing centers, and school programs, and were there to help any person in need. They also sewed "care bears" for traumatized children and heart pillows for cardiac patients. The Pioneers still meet monthly and collect for charity.

Another facet of the plant was its

research and development arm, Bell Labs, whose employees designed and tested equipment not only for Columbus but for other Bell Labs around the country. Labs inventions affect all of us: the first transistor, which replaced bulky vacuum tubes, leading to miniaturization and computers, the first solar cell, and fiber optics. Columbus Labs' work in electronic and digital switching helped



**A Western Electric
1964 Picture Phone
on Display at RTHS**

do away with the telephone operator. They also played a key role in the development of the touch-tone phone, the 800-dialing system, and the DEW Line (Distant Early Warning) radar link across North America. Most importantly, Columbus Bell Labs produced the early cell-phone switching systems for the whole country! Remember the sheds that stood at the bottom of the early cell phone towers? The equipment inside was all designed and built on East Broad Street.

The retirees take pride in these accomplishments. They sense the part they played in the legacy of a company that has been helping connect the world since 1869. And they are very grateful for

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The Return of Western Electric

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the secure, well-paying jobs that they had. "It was our home away from home," many say. "We looked out for each other." Husbands worked with wives; children followed parents into careers at Western Electric.

But Columbus was also affected when the tech bubble burst in 2000, and layoffs started. The last switching cabinet was shipped in September of 2008; by 2011, with only 30% of the manufacturing floor being utilized, Alcatel-Lucent, the new French owners, decided to close the plant and move Bell Labs to Dublin. The manufacturing plant was razed in 2014, with only the front administration building left standing. Nokia, from Finland, purchased Dublin Bell Labs in 2016, but now has decided to move on also. The Labs, employing the last of those who started at 6200 East Broad, left Dublin on March 31, ending sixty years of research and development in Columbus.

Much has happened in those years. When the first spadeful of dirt was lifted for the new Western Electric plant in May of 1957, Russia's Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, was only a few months away. In 1962 Bell Labs built Telstar (the only satellite to ever generate a number-one hit song), the satellite which ignited trans-Atlantic television and telephone communications. Bell Labs, under the Nokia name, is currently developing the communications system for the next moon landing.

Western Electric and its allied companies may be gone but memories are not. RTHS will protect and display

the photographs, documents, artifacts and memorabilia from the plant. Western Electric has returned, to yet another location.

The collection will be open to the public at the Reynoldsburg-Truro Historical Society Museum starting Saturday, May 18, when all those who ever worked for Columbus Western Electric/AT&T, Lucent Technologies/Bell Labs are invited to a special Western Electric Open House. Thereafter, the collection will be open for visitors and researchers at the regular monthly open houses. Former employees are invited to submit pictures for inclusion in the albums, which are completely indexed.

Visitors can bring anything related to the plant to share with others and are asked to help identify those who are not yet named in the albums.

The museum is located at 1485 Jackson Street in Reynoldsburg, across from the Hannah J. Ashton School, one block south of Main Street stoplight #8. Open House events are on the third Saturday of every month January through November from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Admission is free, but donations are always welcome. Tours, refreshments, back parking lot and street parking are available. For more information or to see upcoming events, please feel free to visit our website at www.rths.info, contact us via email at RTHSCourier@aol.com, or you can call the museum at 614-902-2831.





Thank You!

For a Successful
Board Game & Card Party

