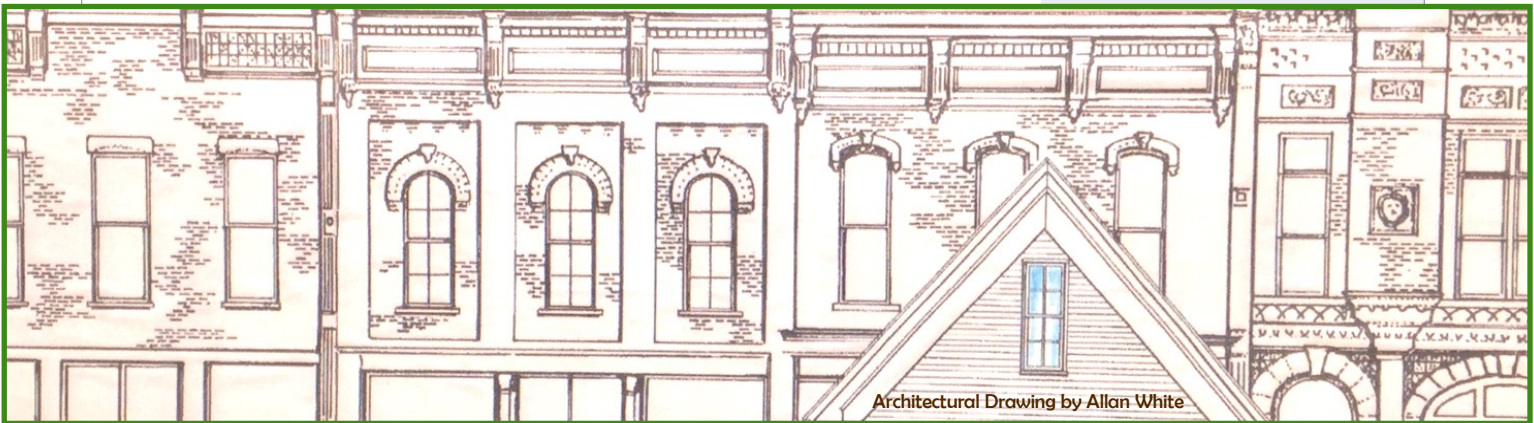


Fall

2021

North Manchester HISTORY

*Interpreting the History
of North Manchester
and the Eel River Valley*



THE FALL

Mark A. Spalding was born in Rhodesia. After his military service there, he came to the United States where he earned multiple Bachelor's and Master's degrees. He taught at Zimbabwe, Los Angeles and Manchester College. In 2007 he was diagnosed with cancer and dealt with much pain but lived a busy life until 2020. In addition to teaching, he was an author and poet. This was written in 2015.

It was a crisp, clear fall afternoon, with the faint chill of winter in the dry air. The sun shone a pale yellow in the steel-blue sky, and leaves rustled occasionally in the oak and elm trees, but with no hint of wind at ground level, where fading shades of yellow, orange, green and russet littered the sidewalks, lawns and verges of North Manchester—and where a smell akin to cured tobacco lingered in the air.

I decided to take a brief walk and was on my way to drop off my utilities bill at the town hall. Elm Street was silent, save for my seventy-something-year-old neighbor, Tom Pinson, who was rhythmically raking leaves into a neat pile by the side of the road. As I passed by he stopped momentarily, wiped the sweat from his brow, and nodded a greeting.

"You know what I like about the Fall?" he asked.

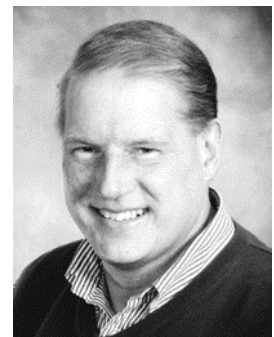
"No, what?" I replied.

He smiled wisely, leaned on his rake, and said, "It shows that even death can be a beautiful thing."



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1:00p—4:00p

William Edward Billings

Newspaper Publisher

by Gladys Airgood

William Edward Billings was born in Decatur, Ill. on September 21, 1869. In 1889 he started work on the Cerro-Gordo New Era newspaper and purchased it in 1891. In 1900 he bought the Rays of Light newspaper and moved to North Manchester, Ind. In 1904 he married Anna Pearl Leffel. They had one son, John Milton. John had no children.

William published the Rays of Light, changing the name to the Tribune, until 1913. He revived the Manchester News in 1913 and then combined the News and the Journal (the News-Journal) in 1920. This was a time of prosperity.

He published an eight column newspaper on Thursday and a six column one on Monday. He gave the newspaper a more modern look and style. He still copied articles from big city papers but added more local news. He also added columns about history such as "Twenty Years Ago". He published the News-Journal until 1936. When he retired he was presented the Star of Service sponsored by the Kiwanis at a well attended banquet. This was in recognition of unselfish service to the community. It emphasized that he consistently wielded an uplifting influence in the area.

He was very interested in local history and after selling the News-Journal he continued to write for the newspaper. In addition he published several short books about the area: *Tales of the Old Days*, *Tales of a Hoosier Village*, and *Our Town*, available at the Manchester library and *Historic Homes of North Manchester* and *North Manchester Industries Past and Present* at the Center for History.

William lived out his life in the town he loved and died in his sleep in 1952. He is buried in Oaklawn Cemetery.

The talk he gave when he received the Star of Service award was so well received it was printed in its entirety in the News-Journal.

BILLINGS SPEECH IN ACCEPTING STAR OF SERVICE, 1937

Today, as probably many of you know, is my birthday. Next Sunday will be my 37th birthday in North Manchester. It was on the evening of September 26, 1900, that I stepped from the Continental Limited train on the Wabash, turned to Main Street, and asked Charley Reed, long since gathered to his fathers, the way up town. He pointed east on Main Street, said: "Go straight ahead, and keep on going." Through all of these years, I have found Charley's advice good, and in my humble way I have tried to go straight and keep on going.

In the something more than a third of a century since that day many changes have come to North Manchester—most of which we have reason to hope have been for the better. There was not a foot of pavement in the whole town; wooden sheds extended from most of the store fronts over the sidewalks, while the streets were lined with cobblestone gutters in which horses stamped at flies during the summer, and from which they splashed mud on passersby in wet weather. A few comparatively small factories were in operation. The standard wage was about a dollar and a quarter for a day of ten hours. Nor were we unhappy. It was then that Riley wrote of the Hoosier state; “Take us back to Indiana where we were so happy and so poor.” Lately we are coming to know that higher wages and more leisure hours do not always bring the acme of happiness—that our increased wage does not always bring with it the ability to buy more real comforts, while our extra leisure hours often call for too great an expenditure of both energy and money.

Manchester College, to which today we can point with honest and justified pride, had just gone through a number of years of vicissitudes, and was facing an uncertain future. That was only two years after Otho Winger, now the energetic and tireless president, tired of teaching Indians in Grant County, made his first trip to North Manchester, coming here to see if he could get into the college as a student. He has often told me that he based his hope on the fact that the college management was not as particular then as now, so he was accepted. When he reached the Big Four station on his way home, “Spotty” Bussard named a price for a ticket to Marion that was ten cents more than his cash capital, and no amount of eloquence through “Spotty’s” ear trumpet would lower the figure. Nothing daunted, Mr. Winger, or Otho as he was then and is still generally called, walked to Urbana where he could buy a ticket ten cents cheaper, thus balancing his budget, and rode home in state to return here as a student for four years and later in 1911 as college president. It was while Otho was a student that L. D. Ikenberry came to Manchester College, coming from Missouri, and demanding to be shown. A quiet, methodical man, he has guarded the college finances, and planned its building and expansion projects.

The pupils of the public schools were housed in the old Central and West Ward buildings. Fire fighting equipment included two hose carts, also a hook and ladder truck. When a fire alarm sounded it was a race between Peter Mowrer and Frank Messmore, the two downtown draymen, as to which could get to the hose cart with their mules to pull it to the fire. The first one there got a dollar.

The North Manchester fairground had fallen into disuse and neglect, a rendezvous for card players, for that was in the days before the ladies, God bless them, had taken the playing cards away from the men and turned them to contract bridge. Today that old fair ground is graced by a palatial home for the aged that is our pride and the envy of many other states besides Indiana. The Peabody’s had not yet come to North Manchester. What is now a part of the Peabody Seating company factory was then an empty and unused building, echoing to the footsteps of ghosts of unsuccessful manufacturing projects. To raise money to start a factory fund an old-fashioned square dance was staged in the building, with George Byrd, who represented the entire colored population of the town, doing the calling. Shortly after that dance the Peabody School Furniture Company opened its factory in the building, and the Peabody family of three that has had an important part in the affairs of this city became residents. Today the Estelle Peabody Memorial home stands as a monument erected to a worthy wife and mother by James B. Peabody, the chapel, tower and nearly completed addition to the home as a memorial by the son to a respected father.

As I first knew North Manchester electric current in the day time was unthought-of. Once for a particularly swell wedding it was arranged that the current should be turned on for a couple of hours during the afternoon so the bridal couple could step out upon their matrimonial pathway in a blaze of glory from sixteen candle power carbon lamps. At midnight the current was always shut off. It was in our newspaper

continued on Page 5

Times Were Hard for the Early Brethren Immigrants to the Eel River Settlement:

What Life Was Like for the Solomon Metzger Family

By Tom Brown

A brief recap of Part 2. There were both advantages and disadvantages of immigrating to the newly established Eel River Settlement in Northern Indiana. Jacob Metzger's youngest son, Solomon, experienced both, which will be outlined in this Part 3 portion of the Metzger's move to Eel River Community.

Solomon and his brother-in-law, Joseph Fruit, arrived at their respective farm lands in the winter of 1850. Their first task was to build a suitable shelter for their permanent move two years later. Their 28-day journey included heading north from the Dayton area to Greenville, Ohio, where they caught the National Road heading to Indianapolis. From Indianapolis they followed a well-established Indian Trail to Logansport where they took the Wabash and Erie Canal to Lagro. Fortunately, Joseph Metzger, Solomon's older brother, was well established, having moved to the Eel River Community three years prior. Solomon and his brother-in-law, Joseph Fruit, stayed with Joseph Metzger and his family getting tips on how to build a cabin, live off the land, clear forest land for farming and most importantly, borrow tools to accomplish these important tasks. Like most area farm land, Solomon's land was all virgin timber with walnut, white oak and cherry trees, some as big as 4½ feet in diameter. There were no roads, only paths and an occasional house between his land and the nearest town, which was North Manchester, about 4 miles as the crow flies to the south and east. There were about 30 Brethren families already in a 4 mile radius of his land. Solomon and Joseph Fruit worked hard helping one another, building each a crude log structure, not good enough to be called a cabin, but good enough to keep most of the worst elements out. They also cleared enough land to start a crop of corn the spring of 1852, thus taking two full years of arduous labor to accomplish these simple tasks. Solomon and Joseph married their wives when they returned to Ohio, in 1852 and left for their new homes at Eel River Settlement in the spring of that year. To give some perspective to the year 1852, the Studebaker Brothers opened up their blacksmith shop in South Bend (population 1600), Daniel Boone, escorted settlers through the Cumberland Gap, and Chicago had a population of 28,000.

The first couple winters were the hardest because Solomon and Joseph could only clear a couple of acres of ground a year, and the winters were considerably more severe than what they were used to in southern Ohio. The Metzgers and Fruits, along with their livestock, literally lived on corn, having it in one form or the other most every meal. If it weren't for Solomon's well established older brothers, Jacob, Jr. and Joseph, as well his brother-in-law, Joseph Fruit, Solomon and his wife Barbara would probably have packed up and headed back to Ohio, as many families did. Barbara's sister, Catherine, and her husband, Abraham Heeter moved back to Ohio the first winter. They up and left one day not telling anybody about their leaving. When they got back home they wrote Solomon, the following letter:

March 15, 1854

I take my pen in hand to inform you that we are all well and at present hoping that these few lines will ask your forgiveness for pulling out on you so suddently.

continued . . .

We discovered in a rather personal way, HOMESICKNESS is something that there aint no cure for lessen you do somin about it and rite soon, which we did. Now that were home were feeling fine and dandy. We could see no future in us living up your way where you'd get frostbite in November, eatin nothin but corn, and we think that we can do better by staying here where land is clear and then we will not have so much hard grubbing and cratchin. And here we needn't to get upon a stump and log to look around and see where we are! Hopin this letter finds all well. Wed be much obliged if you would sell our remainins and send up the money as were stain with Catherin's folks and we be needn some money to get a place of our own. We forgot to clean out our root cellar. You and Barbara can have it for your trouble.

Your brother-in-law, Abraham Heeter

Don't think that very thought didn't cross Solomon and Barbara's mind a few times during those first couple of years!

For those who stayed, there were many rewards. Their church was the pillar of their community and faith in God and one another got them through not only the good times, but the hard times as well. Solomon and Barbara with their 12 children, 7 boys and 5 girls, made their 240 acre farm prosper. By 1860 the village of North Manchester had a population of 400, boasting two mills, one for sawing lumber, the other grinding grain and that was all that was needed for this community. That same census indicated that most surrounding townships were occupied by Brethren families. Although the canals in Indiana were a complete failure, bankrupting the state, Indiana was still the 6th largest by population. The Civil War ended up becoming a prosperous era for the local Brethren, as while most able bodied men joined the army and left their farms, the Brethren being pacifist stayed home, tended their farms and prospered from rising food and land prices.



. . . Billings continued from Page 3

office that the first electric motor was put into service. That motor was in place several days before the current was available, and employees of the electric company as well as those of the office stood around with open mouths as the switch was turned.

Automobiles were unknown. The first to be seen here arrived on Sunday morning. The churches were nearly deserted while crowds watched it for almost hours as it made its more or less faltering way along the street. Then the first car to be owned in North Manchester—whether it was Tom Peabody's Old Reliable or Olinger and Warvel's three wheeler, that looked like an invalid chair, and was run—sometimes—by a one lunged decidedly asthmatic gasoline engine. Through all these years Tom Peabody has been known and credited as a particularly safe and careful driver. It is related that once in the early days while taking an extremely talkative friend for a drive, he hushed his friend into silence by saying, "Oh Gee, do you think I can talk while I am driving twenty miles an hour?"

(continued in next issue)

Travel Tales

By Bernie Ferringer

The North Manchester Historical Society/Shepherd's Center travel group recently traveled to Holmes County in Eastern Ohio on September 9-11. Our group of 41 travelers immersed ourselves in the history and beauty of the area.

After a pleasant bus ride on our coach, we arrived for our two-night stay at The Amish Door Inn at Wilmot, Ohio. This was a beautiful hotel in a tranquil country setting. We had a family style Amish dinner that evening at the hotel's restaurant.

The second day we started with a tour at the Warther Museum in Dover, Ohio. This was a fantastic museum of the lifetime wood carvings of Ernest Warther. Mr. Warther started carving at age five. He left school after the 2nd grade to help out at home. He is widely known for his carving of steam train locomotives. He did many other carvings in his lifetime including scissors and pliers made from one piece of wood. The museum also includes the family collection of Indian arrow heads and artifacts found in an eight-mile radius of Dover. His wife also has a collection of over 73,000 buttons. More information available at their website: thewarthermuseum.com.

At noon we headed to Zoar, Ohio, for lunch and a guided tour of this German community. Zoar was active from 1819 to 1898 as a communal society of German religious dissenters. Everything was owned by the community and all residents received their share of what was produced each week. This worked pretty well until after the Civil War when the younger generation started to realize that a completely different way of life was outside Zoar. Today the town has about 65 residents and relies heavily on tourism. We all enjoyed the very informative tours provided by our guides.

We returned to our hotel for a very short break and then headed to Berlin, Ohio, for a buffet dinner before enjoying a lighthearted show at the Amish Country Theater. It had lots of good laughs but also had good musical segments as well.

The third day it was time to head back to Indiana. On the way we stopped in Bucyrus, Ohio, at Pickwick Place. It is a combination of a farmers' market and The Stalls, a place where one can find a wide array of handmade goods created by Ohio artisans, vintage items, and unique gifts, all under one roof. Some stayed at Pickwick Place to grab a bite at the lunch wagon while the rest of us went across the street to Crossroads Factory Store to shop for their candles and many other gift items. We then returned to Pickwick Place to get our lunch to go; so, we could board our bus and head back to Indiana.

Thank you to everyone that joined us on the first trip in almost two years. I think we were all excited to get back on the road. It was great to see the veteran travelers make the first timers feel welcome and a part of the traveling family. Everyone was on time and didn't complain about our busy schedule.

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From the Director

It is hard to believe that we find ourselves at the end of summer about to set sail on the color waves of fall. We have had an active summer enjoying lots of young visitors and hosting the Indiana Historical Society's traveling exhibit, *Securing the Vote: Women's Suffrage in Indiana*, and opening our second new exhibit for the year, *Local Heroes*.

The number of summer campers from North Manchester Parks & Rec. were nearly double in number from a year ago. The Thomas Marshall Home hosted scores of kids and families for their summer reading and gardening activities and even some sidewalk art. It was great to see so much activity at TMH.

Recently we have been enjoying lots of attention thanks to our visiting artists, Becky and Mike Kock and their canine companion, Otto. Becky, a former art teacher, approached us late last year about creating an interactive mural in our alley. We are so glad that she reached out to us! They have created beautiful butterflies that are a great addition to our entryway. The Center for History would also like to thank **Midwest Eye Consultants** for their contribution to this project. It definitely adds a little "eye-candy" to our downtown!

October will be your last chance to see our 2021 exhibits: *The Little Black Dress* and *Local Heroes*. In November we will begin preparing for our end of year event – **Market @ the Museum**. Last December this event was more successful than we could have imagined and our hopes are this year will go just as well. All of our 2020 artists are returning and we are expanding the number of artists - creating an even better shopping experience. **Market @ the Museum** will open Nov. 30 and continue through Dec 11. Hours will be our normal Tues. – Sat. schedule.

Our Annual Fund Campaign begins in the fourth quarter. We appreciate all that our members do and the faith placed in us in preserving the artifacts and stories of our community. Please consider supporting our mission with a contribution to this campaign. *Your gift* truly makes a difference!

Laura Rager

Director, Center for History



Summer
Events
2021



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HI Center for
STORY
North Manchester

North Manchester Center for History

Mission Statement

The North Manchester Center for History of the North Manchester Historical Society serves to promote the Society's mission as a nonprofit educational association that collects, preserves, and interprets the history of North Manchester and northern Indiana (the area of the Eel River Basin) from the arrival of the first Native Americans in the region to the present day through the collecting and preserving of books, documents, artifacts and other cultural objects. The Center interprets its collection to the public by means of a museum facility, educational programs, lectures, public events and publications and encourages others to help collect, preserve and interpret the history of North Manchester area.

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