

# **ECHOES OF CEDARVILLE MAY 2012**

*Cedarville Area Historical Society*



## *Museum Opens Saturday May 5*

The Cedarville Museum will open the 2012 season at 1 p.m. Saturday, May 5. It will maintain 1 to 4 p.m. hours Saturday and Sunday through October 28.

The two room first floor exhibit area will have twelve local exhibits, four that are new. Two new displays highlight the history of the Red Oak Methodist Church and the Richland Free Methodist Church. A third exhibit contains the exquisite dresses of a Dakota farm girl who died in 1917 at the age of 19. The final new

exhibit tells the story of the 36 Jane Addams relatives buried in Cedarville Cemetery near the famous village native.

Holdover exhibits feature Cedarville area World War II veterans, the county's Civil War role, Cedar Creek photos, Jane Addams, Hull-House, Cedarville School, the origin of early settlers, village architecture and area stone projectiles.

Admission is free to historical society members; \$3 to others over twelve.

## **Memorial Day Parade, Picnic May 28**

The Cedarville Memorial Day parade will step off at 10 a.m. Monday, May 28, from in front of the telephone switch building on Mill Street, just south of Second Street.

The parade will be headed by Cedarville's American Legion Post 1224 under the command of Steve Myers. Traditionally, the spectators — always numbering more than the parade marchers — become participants in the procession once

it has started.

The marchers will stop at the Cedar Creek bridge for a prayer, the casting of flowers into the creek and a rifle salute. The procession will then go to Cedarville Cemetery on Red Oak Road.

The Cedarville Historical Society picnic on the Cedarville Museum grounds will start at 11:30 a.m., rain or shine. The museum will be open for free tours.

## Memory of a Cedarville Grandmother

*(In the April issue of the historical society newsletter, Cedarville native Rick Noble, now living in Wisconsin, wrote about his life in the village in the 1960s. This month he eloquently remembers the life, philosophy and passing of his grandmother Alice Fink. It's an example of a personal history at its very best. Jim Bade, editor )*

The undertaker sat across from me, his fingers steepled, looking excruciatingly sympathetic. He exuded quintessential decorum on this deary Friday afternoon with his ramrod straight posture, perfectly tailored European style suit and polished Florsheims. *No casual Fridays at the mortuary*, I mused.

It was barely six months earlier that my wife and I had welcomed my grandma, Alice Fink, into our home and our lives. Her only child, my mom, Dolores Noble, was lost to a brain aneurysm a few months earlier while vacationing in Arizona and had stashed Gram in foster care. Now, fragile and alone, Gram had no one to turn to, nowhere to go. So we fixed up the dining room on the first floor near the downstairs bath, rented a bed and officially became members of the "Sandwich Generation," those with kids and their elderly relatives under one roof — sort of like the Waltons, but without the sophistication.

Gram was a joy at first, irrepressibly up-

beat and serving up stories like the butterscotch candies she had hidden on her at all times. Most of her conversations involved her medical procedures, her friends (all with old-fashioned names like Bertha and Ester), or her friends' medical procedures. Talking to her was like mining for diamonds; turning over the most ordinary stone might uncover a gem.



After all, she had lived through some of the most interesting times in modern history. Born eight years after the Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk, she watched men walk on the moon. She endured the Great Depression, all the popular wars, the Red Scare and the creation of the internet. While most of humanity is only a couple of generations thick, she was four. She had perspective. One morning as we sat in my kitchen, its countertops brimming with appliances — a toaster, blender, juicer, can opener, espresso machine, etc. — I asked, "Gram, what's the best kitchen gadget

they've come up with in your lifetime?" She sipped her coffee, nodded toward the sink and said, "Running water."

Her childhood was hard, beyond most of our ability to comprehend. Her mother, Eleisa, was married at least five times and birthed way more babies than she could afford, including Gram and her identical twin sister, Ruth. Always a lady, Gram never used profanity and rarely uttered a disparaging word, even about the mother who eventually abandoned her.

I witnessed her most scathing remarks, hurled at the TV during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. "That Monica," she said, wagging an arthritic finger, "she's trouble. And HIM, what a nincompoop!"

Shortly after they turned twelve, the state placed Gram and Ruth into separate foster homes around Dixon, Illinois. They were more like indentured servants, really. Gram lived on a farm, tending the cows and chickens, working long hours into the night. Ruth lived with a doctor's family, cleaning the office and caring for his children. The sisters scarcely saw one another.

Gram quit school after the eighth grade to work full time, although she remembered her days at school fondly. "You know, I was in the same class with that actor who went on to be president," she once remarked offhandedly. "Ronald Reagan?" I asked incredulous. "Yeah, that's the one." She looked both ways as

if telling a secret. "He was such a SNOT!"

When I was nineteen and at my pretentious, moody best, I left the safe harbor of Cedarville to "find myself" in grand Kerouac style, knowing full well that my folks were only a phone call away. At nineteen Gram, longing for stability and routine of a family she never had, moved into a tiny apartment in Rockford with Ruth and Ruth's shiny new husband, Harold Mellon.



*Alice Fink, Rick's grandmother*

Sepia-colored photos of the time show a handsome girl with a full figure and clear blue eyes. "Like snatches of a summer sky," according to my grandpa, Mike Fink. That sort of flowery language coupled with good old Midwestern pragmatism is what swept her off her feet. Grandpa had the heart of a poet and the

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strong graceful hands of a woodworker. He played the ukulele and sang Hawaiian love songs in his deep baritone, but only to her. "I'm most admired," he'd explain, declining requests, "because I can play the ukulele . . . But won't."

Soon they were married and Grandpa started building a home for her, one salvaged 2 x 4 at a time. His plan was to start with a garage off the alley and build the main house to the East, on Lafayette Street proper, when things improved. He finished the garage, but the country was still deep in the throes of the Great Depression, so they converted it into a one bedroom cottage and moved in, secure in the knowledge that when prosperity came, which was just around the corner, they'd build their dream home. Gram lived there for the next sixty years. They raised a daughter, went to church on Sundays, grew their own vegetables and in general, enjoyed the passage of time. Too soon Grandpa was gone and the rest of us just drifted away, but Gram still had her friends and neighbors and they did the neighborly thing, checking on her every day, getting their grandsons to mow her yard.

And then there was John. Twenty-odd years after her one true love left the world, Gram found a bachelor farmer from Monroe who liked to dance. They polkaed, dined, played euchre and traveled America by Greyhound bus. "It's \$99 to ANYWHERE in the USA," Gram

gushed. There was talk of marriage, but neither could afford the cut in Social Security. After two years of courting, on a gorgeous sun-drenched morning in spring, Gram returned from getting the Sunday paper and found John dead in his field of a heart attack. I spoke to her by phone a few days later.

"It's too bad about John," I said. You must be heartbroken."

"Yes, it was terrible," she admitted. Ever the optimist she added, "But you know, up until then it was a pretty good week end."



And so it went. One by one, everyone she knew either died or wound up in nursing homes. Nobody came around anymore. When the neighbors to her left

put up a swing set and those on her right erected a plywood skateboard rink where Miriam Conner's grape vines had been for forty years, she knew it was time to leave. Reluctantly she sold the house and moved into an assisted living apartment in Minnesota to be near my mom.

It's said that growing old is a process of slowly losing your potential so that by the time you're dead, you're pretty much out of options. At twelve I remember thinking I'd grow up to be a ball player or an astronaut or even a rock star. By eighteen I had accepted the fact I swung like a rusty gate, got motion sickness and that leather pants made me chafe. Gram's options were narrowing and she knew it. After Mom died, she realized she had come full circle and would be living off the kindness of others. And it hurt.

She came to us in July, full of hope and longing, misery and death. No one could have predicted how she would touch our lives. It was a gift that my children got to know her. She showed them how to



*Rick's mother Dolores Noble in 1957*

hunt four leaf clovers on a lazy summer day, how to find pleasure in simple things. Her recipe for longevity was enjoying every minute and surrounding herself with people. "Always look for the good in others, find joy where you can and take care of your teeth," she advised.

There are sad deaths, bad deaths, and yes, good deaths. A good death is when you're remembered more for how you lived than how you died. Gram had a good death. We were at her bedside when she went gentle into that good night. I'll never forget the moment when all the tension and sorrow melted from her face and was replaced with a glow of peace. She looked like the girl in the old photos again.

The hardest thing in the world to do is to watch someone you love die. The second hardest is to die yourself. Death is our birthright, our heritage. It's what makes life so sweet. The best gift we can give the dead is to go on living and giving. That, and remember to floss.



*Rick, left, and his siblings Mike and Jane in undated picture*

## Iowa Reader Ties up Some Loose Ends

By Jim Bade  
President, CAHS

I don't like stories without an ending. They leave too much to speculation.

For that reason I was pleased to receive an e-mail this month from Jill Minehart, Traer, Ia., putting the finishing touches on an article that appeared in the July 2010 issue of the historical society newsletter. (*She found it on our website.*) The article referred to Julia Eastman Brace, first teacher of Cedarville's Jane Addams, and concluded with the observation that Mrs. Brace was alive in 1929 but the date of her death was unknown.

Mrs. Minehart had the answer. Quoting from a April 23, 1936, story in the Fredericksburg (*Ia.*) News she wrote:

"Mrs. Julia Fadora Brace, 89, past state chaplain of the Women's Relief corps of the Grand Army of the Republic and also past national aid to the president of the same organization, died suddenly at 2 a.m. Wednesday (*April 15*) at the home of her daughter, Miss Letty M. Brace...

"Mrs. Brace, who came here from Algonia, Iowa, two years ago to make her home with her daughter had been ill only for a few hours prior to her death ..."

The article continues with the information that Mrs. Brace was the first teacher of Jane Addams and was related to

Daniel Webster.

The article ends with details of her life, her 1866 marriage to Civil War veteran Sylvester Nash Brace, her burial and her five children including her daughter Letty, who was a friend of Mrs. Minehart.

Although the newspaper was published in Fredericksburg, the daughter lived in Waterloo, Ia. Letty never married and died in 1965.

Mrs. Brace was born in New Hampshire in 1846. She was the daughter of Edward and Susan Eastman. The family moved to Stephenson County when Julia was ten.

Edward Eastman died in 1885; his wife died in 1888. Both are buried in Cedarville Cemetery.

Thank you, Mrs. Minehart, for giving us the ending of the story of Mrs. Julia Brace. However:

Julia's husband, Sylvester, who died in 1918, was a member of the Sixth Illinois Infantry Regiment in the Civil War and he wrote a war time journal that was purchased on the internet a short time ago. Wouldn't it be interesting to read the contents of that journal?

Another story without an ending.

## CAHS Picks Elevator Firm, Architect

The board of the Cedarville Area Historical Society has chosen Nu-Trend Accessibility Systems, Inc., of Moline, Il., as the supplier of the elevator to be installed in the Cedarville Museum.

The board also named Freeport architect Chris Fye to work with the board in preparing plans needed to make physical changes to the museum interior before the elevator can be installed.

Nu-Trend's proposal calls for their work to cost \$22,944. Three proposals were submitted to the board. The cost of mak-

### *Live Music Series Tickets Now on Sale*

Tickets for the Cedarville Museum series of three programs featuring historical commentary and live music your Stephenson County ancestors would have heard are now on sale. The one ticket that gives admission to all three is \$20. No single program tickets will be sold.

All programs are on a Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. July 3 will feature gospel with Carl Cole and Company; July 24 will showcase the male barbershop quartet "Cadence"; on August 21 "Styles Junction" will perform Appalachian bluegrass.

Checks should be sent to CAHS, P. O. Box 336, Cedarville, Il. 61013.

ing the interior changes has not been determined. Competitive bids will be sought from local contractors with the option that CAHS volunteers will be able to do some of the work.

The lift will transport handicapped persons between the first and second floor, giving easy access to the second floor program room and research center. It will be usable by persons using a wheelchair or those with walking difficulties..

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*The historical society is recognized as a non-profit organization by Illinois and the U.S. government and as such has been designated as eligible to receive tax deductible gifts under the IRS tax code regulation 501 (c) (3).*

## ***Free Friday Night Movie Dates Are Set***

The dates for the outdoor June and July free Friday night movies at the Cedarville Museum have been scheduled.

June 1 — “The North Avenue Irregulars” with Cloris Leachman, Barbara Harris and Karen Valentine.

June 8 — “McLintock!” with John Wayne, Maureen O’Hara, Yvonne De-Carlo and Jerry Van Dyke

June 15 — “Operation Petticoat” with Cary Grant, Tony Curtis, Joan O’Brien and Dina Merrill.

June 22 — “Please Don’t Eat the Daisies” with David Niven, Doris Day, Janis Paige and Patsy Kelly.

June 29 — “Forever Darling” with Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz and James Mason.

July 6 — “The Miracle at Morgan’s Creek” with Eddie Bracken, Betty Hutton and William Demarest.

July 13 — “Nancy Drew, Reporter” with Bonita Granville and Joan Leslie.

July 20 — “College Swing” with Bob Hope and Martha Raye.

July 27 — “Which Way to the Front?” with Jerry Lewis and Kaye Ballard.

## **Dr. Wendell A. Cox CAHS Member Dies**

Dr. Wendell A. Cox, a member of the Cedarville Area Historical Society, died April 23 at the Freeport Memorial Hospital due to complications from pneumonia.

Dr. Cox was born in 1940 in Freeport, but was raised in Cedarville. He married Marsha Samuelson in 1965.

Dr. Cox was president of his 1958 Freeport High School graduating class. After high school, he attended Florida State University where in 1962 he received a bachelor of science degree. He received his doctorate of optometry in 1967 from the University of Houston.

Dr. Cox was a practicing optometrist in Freeport for 30 years, retiring in 1997. He was also a licensed real estate broker from 1976 through 2011.

In high school he participated in football, basketball and track. He continued to play basketball and softball for many years after high school. He was an avid and accomplished golfer. He also loved traveling and fishing.

He is survived by his wife, his son Steven of Freeport and two granddaughters. He was preceded in death by his parents and a brother, Ronald.