

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

October 1993

Share Session

A cool October evening found us at this month's share session. Present were Cris Ketcham, Harriet Rasmussen, Toot & Betty Vaughn, John Earl, Dot Blenis, Rosemary Lambert, Alice Roe, Ray & Marge Bennett, and Connie and Don Teator.

Don brought several dozen postcards given to him by Edna Zivelli, who had received them from Merle Powell. Most of the cards were to Lawrence Powell and Bertha Davis who would later wed. Most of the cards seemed to be sent from places traveled to; others showed holidays, flowers, and a few risque (for that time) covers.

Don also showed the pictures of Wessel's garage loaned to him by Flip Flach. The garage was on the site of today's barbershop. Also shown were pictures that Debra took of the Freehold post office before its October 12th move around the side of the present building.

Harriet had compiled a list of Greenville area Civil War veterans. Six of ten died in action, while smaller fractions of enlisted men died from other towns. Harriet also related more of the Taylor diary, especially his trip to Philadelphia for the World's Fair.

Cris read a letter dated 1815 from her 3-great grandfather to Guilford, Vermont from Manchester, Ohio. This relative would eventually live in Moline, Illinois.

John Earl brought a couple puzzlers. One was a snow knocker, used to knock packed snow from the horse's hoof. The other was a bark spud, used to peel bark from a tree. A discussion followed that centered around how an industry can grow or decline in face of change. Don suggested that John could lead a program on his blacksmithing interests.

NOTES

1. CORRECTION: Last month's newsletter referred to tax exemptions for residents with low income - \$10,000-\$11,000 or less. What I forgot to add was the age requirement of 65 years or older. I hope the assessors didn't get a rush of applications from the younger crowd. (Thanks, Chris, for catching my blooper.)
2. Our next program on November 8th will be a homemade program. I will bring several dozen pictures from which to select the pictures for the next two or three calendars. Once selected, captions will be researched and written.
3. Included on the back is a reprint of a Mike Ryan Mountain Eagle article on Phil Ellis.

BY MICHAEL RYAN

GREENVILLE -- Phil Ellis, the irascible editor of the Greenville Local, is fond of describing himself as "a great man of generalities," which is a good thing because it isn't always easy getting things right running a smalltown newspaper.

Ellis doesn't admit to much. He claims if he did, "They'd put me in the clink." But, he does confess to being somewhere around 72 years old and though he tries to pretend it isn't, his heart, if it's anywhere, is with the Local.

"Just don't hold him to any facts. Or pin him down on a date. If we print an old picture or article I never say it's absolutely from the year 1974 or anything," says Ellis.

"I'll say it's from about 1974, give or take twenty or thirty years. That way, nobody can yell at me."

Some might say that's no way to run a newspaper, but Ellis has always done OK doing things his way. "I don't give a hoot about anything or anywhere except Greenville and you can quote me on that," he says cantankerously.

"People not from here might think it's strange to have a paper with so much little news. They call it gossip. They say to me, 'Who cares about so-and-so going to the dentist or about such-and-such visiting their grandmother in Florida?'"

"But you'd be surprised. This newspaper is different from anything I've ever seen. If people want county or state news, they don't want the Greenville Local. I think we do a pretty good job. Maybe the best in the world."

Not a heck of a lot has been said or done in Greenville over the past hundred years or so that hasn't showed up in the pages of Ellis's weekly chronicle, unless it's a killing or the like.

There was the time the minister's daughter was found floating in the creek, murdered, but that was before Ellis came along.

Nowadays, he's more than happy to keep it. "A live, clean newspaper devoted to the great-er Greenville area," and proud of that it's the oldest weekly newspaper in Greene County.

"They say the Local is 130 years old but I couldn't tell you for sure," says Ellis, trying to sound disagreeable. "All I know is that when I took over this job, I got hell for not having a centennial celebration."

"But, that would have meant going out and selling advertising and I hate to sell advertising. I hate it. That was thirty years ago this coming November,"

Pausing to relight his pipe, which he lovingly refers to as

his "crutch," Ellis recalls how he ended up as a newspaperman. "I have no idea," he says. "I grew up in Greenville, graduated around 1939 and went to Delhi College. I studied building construction and got an Associates Degree, although I didn't know what the hell that was at the time, and I still don't."

"I went into the Navy for three years and served on a little subchaser. It was a good ship. Small. Very informal. We kept the banana route open between New York, Panama and Guantanamo Bay."

"After the Navy, I came back here and put up a few small homes with a fella named Rudy Yanz. He was good. I was just a good BS'er. I got married and decided to move to California."

"My wife passed away out there, but before she died she made me promise to bring the kids, our daughter Ramona and son Curtis, back here to be raised by her mother."

"Well, to make a long story short," says Ellis, still in the same breath, "I expected to go back to work with Rudy Yanz but the day I got home, he moved to Florida."

"So, I got my pipe out, thought about things a little, and one day answered an ad in the Local. Elsie Roe had died. They were looking for a new editor. I'm usually timid but I did something out of character. I went over to the owner, George Blezarde's house, and introduced myself as the next editor of the Greenville Local."

"He said to me, 'Phil, you gotta realize there are a lot of people interested in the job,' but I said, 'That's a bunch of hooey and

even if it isn't, I'm the best. I got the job.'"

Folks around town seem pleased with the product, whether it's trying to figure out who's who in the often featured Mystery Photo, or being enlightened about little-known tidbits.

Like the recent story about the State's plan to build a bridge in nearby Oak Hill, spanning the Squirmier Valley Creek. The problem was, nobody knew where Squirmier Valley Creek was.

So, ever-reliable Phil dug out his maps and atlases and found the missing waterway, only to hear from good neighbor Porter Wright, who had even older maps and atlases, that there was no such place as Squirmier Valley Creek.

If truth be told, Wright said, it was DeWitt Creek. "I'm still hearing about that one," Ellis snarls.

Despite the periodic corrections, it hasn't been a bad run, one that may or may not end soon. "I've always been lucky," Ellis says. "I've had good correspondents and loyal advertisers. I haven't thought much about getting out but in the back of my noggin' I always felt I'd make it to thirty years and quit. Then again, I never put dates on anything so I might stay longer."

"The Local is great for me. It keeps my adrenaline moving. Plus, I don't know if there's anybody out there yet who can do as good as job as I do."

Seriousness aside, Ellis has pondered what will become of the Local when and if he's not around.

"When you kick the bucket, you kick the bucket," he says philosophically. "I guess they'd have to put something in the paper about it, but I'm sure the town will move along without me."

"I've always believed that as long as people remember you, you're not dead. So, just burn me up and get rid of me."

And spread his ashes in Squirmier Valley Creek.



LEE FERRIS/MT. EAGLE

CAUGHT IN THE ACT...Phil Ellis, at ease with his pipe, piano, papers and memories of the past.