

URBANDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Winter 2026

Christmas at the Olmsted-Urban House



The Urbandale Historical Society welcomed the 2025 Christmas Season in fine fashion. The weather was not too bad when we started the decorating, next a winter wonderland, then back to seasonal temperatures.

Regardless, Santa and the Elves made appearances.



On Sunday, Dec. 7 we had our Traditional Open House with refreshments, music, tours and good joy. The next Sunday, Dec. 14 we had a visit from the old man himself, several elves and lots of activities for all. The Barn was open for tours and a 'cookie walk', a chance to

pick up some delicious cookies for yourself and friends. Activities for the children were available as well as tours of the house and of course, refreshments and music.



The house was decorated in her finest with the Christmas tree and toys, train and the spirit of Christmas throughout.

Historical Society Program Series

We had several informative programs last year in our program series. In Sep. we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Urbandale Library at its location on 86th St. Our Oct. program featured Msgr. Beeson and a

talk about St. Gabriel's Monastery. Nov., we heard about the founding and history of Mercy Medical Center. Dec. was our Christmas Open House and festivities.



We will continue with our programs the second Sunday of each month at the Urbandale Library from 2-4 pm.

Programs for 2026

- **Jan 11, 2026: From the Flynn Farm to Living History Farms** with Elizabeth Keest-Sedrel.
- **Feb 8, 2026: History of the Urbandale Golf and Country Club** with Todd Carberry.
- **Mar 8, 2026: The Eddie Tipton Affair and the Iowa Lottery** with Terry Rich.
- **Apr 12, 2026: The Story of Merle Hay Mall** with Liz Holland
- **May 17, 2026: Tour of Urbandale from its Early Days to Today** with Pat Finnerty.
- **Jun 14, 2026: War Begins – April 19, 1775; America 250th Birthday** with Kevin Parmenter.

Open House

We have the House open the first Sunday of each month from 2-4 pm for tours.

Happening at the Olmsted-Urban House

A group (Deb Jacobs, Ginny Campbell, Nona Warden, Meribeth Haynes and Janet Dunn) has been working for several months now organizing the new Urbandale

Historical Room upstairs which houses city and school memorabilia. New displays have been placed in the room, the new bookshelves now contain Urbandale yearbooks and different city organizations who have donated materials, along with the new flipchart being organized with class pictures and city and school pictures and various articles. In addition, notebooks are being organized by the decades with city and school articles in them.

Please watch for the May Urbandale Living magazine where the Urbandale Historical Society will be featured as celebrating their 50th Anniversary.

Joe Lamb shared with the Society two Route Books of his Father from their Dairy Business of 1936-37. How prices have changed. We are looking forward to connecting these with directories from that era to confirm who lived where.

Historical Society 50th Birthday

Yes, we are looking ahead at our 50th birthday for the Urbandale Historical Society. At their Sep. 21, 1976 meeting the Group there was some discussion regarding obtaining the Karl Urban property and the future plans for the Urbandale Historical Group. On Oct 19, 1976 there was considerable discussion of the charter for the Historical Group. The purpose of the organization was to *“collect, preserve and maintain historical memorabilia of Urbandale for the purpose of education and information”*. On Nov. 16, 1976 the By-laws were presented and discussed. After some revisions they were accepted and the organization became the Urbandale Historical Society. Ed Spiller was elected President, Cameron Spiller - Vice President, Mea Nelson – Secretary, Marjorie Wittenbaugh – Treasurer, Louise Lamb – Historian and Reporter, Trustees were: Hazel Demerjean (1 yr, Sr. Trustee), Helen Peterson (2 yrs, Jr. Trustee), Frank Gibson (3 yrs, Jr. Trustee). The new officers were to over in Jan 1977. Thus, the Urbandale Historical Society was born!

Look for more stories of the history of the Urbandale Historical Society in coming newsletters, our website (www.urbandalehistory.org) and our Facebook page.

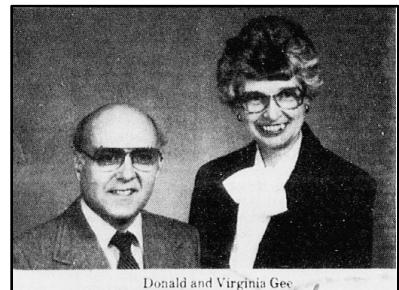
Urbandale Newspapers

We have been hinting over the past few newsletters of a project we have undertaken with Advantage Archives to digitize and make available, at no cost, the old community and school newspapers of Urbandale. While

not complete as we still have some of the Urbandale Press Citizen and some BlueJay Chatter to yet complete, much is available. These can be accessed from the Advantage Archives site: Urbandale Historical Society - Community History Archives) or a link from the Urbandale Public Library database resource: (Databases Urbandale Public Library). We will have link on our website (www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org) soon.

There is a wealth of information and fun reading in these old newspapers. For example, what do we know of Virginia Gee? This is from the July 10, 1986 issue of the Urbandale News article for their 25th Wedding Anniversary.

“Donald and Virginia Gee, 4216 64th St., Urbandale, celebrated their wedding anniversary July 2.



Donald and Virginia Gee

Don is a farm management specialist for the Iowa State University Extension Service. Virginia is the Adult Services and Audio-Visual Librarian for the Urbandale Public Library.”

“They and their two children have lived in Urbandale for 17 years. Lorraine will be a senior at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, this year. Steen will be a junior at Urbandale High School.”

Spring Plant Sale



The Historical Society will be having its' second annual plant sale in May. There will be Annuals, Perennials and Hanging Baskets. Kids will once again will have the opportunity to pot

a free Mother' Day flower gift. We will welcome donations as you start to separate and divide your plants this spring, watch for details on how you can donate on our website or leave a message and we will call you back. ALL proceeds from the plant sale benefit the Urbandale Historical Society.

Hartsook Family

As mentioned earlier, the Historical Society has been working on a project to make available in digital form past issues of the Urbandale school and community

newspapers. This project is supported by grants from the Urbandale Library and Endow Urbandale and support of the Urbandale City. You can access these archives at [Urbandale Historical Society - Community History Archives](#). The following are from this archive.

HARTSOOK FAMILY: Urbandale News Sun, April 22, 1966 (by Iyleene Lemon)

"Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Hartsook moved to Urbandale 48 years ago – and today Mrs. Hartsook, her daughter Mrs. Fred Schwartz (3114 70th), her son Dave (3112 70th), her grandson, Larry Hartsook and great grandson, Mark Hartsook (4216 70th) are making Urbandale their home.

In October, 1917, Mr. and Mrs. Hartsook purchased an alfalfa field from John Hopkins, built their home during the winter and moved into it in May, 1918, located at 3116 70th St. At the time there was a farm lane but no road in front of their home. It wasn't until paving went on Douglas that council would agree to grade the strip between the end of 70th and their lane. Because of the paving project, they could not use Douglas and made a road in nothing flat.

The reason for the curve on Rocklyn Dr. was that the owner of the orchard at Hickman and 70th would not sell it, nor agree to let the road go through the orchard, so it winds and bends west to 70th.

Mr. Hartsook was credit manager for Charles Hewitt and Sons Wholesale Grocery for 35 years. On the school board for 12 years, his name is in the corner of the present junior high school at 70th and Douglas. Twelve votes named him to the board. There was a one room school when they moved here and 2 room when he was on the board. He died in 1957.

Going back through the years, Mrs. Hartsook recalled they had to cross the street car tracks 3 times to get to the grocery at 70th and Roseland because there was no road. The streetcar curved from Urbandale Ave. to 70th and Roseland where the city hall is – this was called Rocklyn Station and was the turnaround.

Although there were several dairies (Lambs, Valerius and others) the Hartsook's bought a cow from Harold Lamb in order to have milk, since dairies took their milk to Des Moines.

During the first world war Camp Dodge took over inspection of sanitary facilities as Urbandale was withing 19 miles. The Hartsooks got permission to install a septic tank from Camp Dodge.

She helped with the PTA electioneer for a water issue that was defeated twice before they got water to Urbandale. This was during the term of Mayor Munn.

The 1931 tax valuation excluding agriculture land of Urbandale was \$66,435. The agreement with Des Moines was for 30 cents per 1,000 gallons. The cost to the citizen for connection between their home and the main was \$20.00. Another memory she has is that of the bell from McDivitt Grove Church which was given to the Community Church in 1959 when the landmark was torn down.

When asked what the biggest improvement has been, she mentioned the facilities – water, gas, sewer – and having neighbors. She recalls when there was nothing but farm land and coal mines (Des Moines Ice and Fuel and Urbandale Coal Mine) from her back yard to Adel. She could see the West Vue Screen until new homes were built. Before they sold 300 feet of their land to Stone-Ridge plat, they had a garden and 20 fruit trees."

HARTSOOKS HAVE HISTORY: Urbandale News August 20, 1981

"Dave Hartsook, owner of Hartsook Hardware on Douglas Avenue, has been an Urbandale resident since 1918 when he came here with his parents and older sister.

Urbandale was a small community but he had enough friends for games and they played six-man football when they could round up a side. He and Harold Wittenbaugh carried daily papers, the beginning of their business careers.

Urbandale had a few problems then and water was one of them. Dave's father had a well that was deeper than others in town and put in a water system with a supply tank upstairs and the family had modern plumbing before most of their neighbors.

Water was piped to Urbandale in 1934 with a sewer system and some paved streets coming a few years later. That's when Urbandale started to grow.

In 1955, Dave bought the hardware store on Douglas Avenue. The substation post office was located there until the post office on 71st Street was built. The hardware store was also a variety store with sewing notions and caps helping to fill the shelves.

Prices are higher than they were in the early days of



Grandmother Hartsook holds great-grandson Mark while son Dave and grandson Larry watch.

his business. For example, a *Tru Temper* tile spade that used to sell for \$2.98 is priced today at \$25.95. A wooden four-quart *White Mountain* ice cream freezer that went for \$19.95 back then now sells for \$69.95 in a comparable model.

Dave has always been an active Urbandale citizen and booster. When the Chamber of Commerce organized in 1958 with 44 members, Hartsook was elected president. He is still a Chamber member and is also in the Lions Club and serves on the city's Board of Adjustment.

The business area around 70th and Douglas has remained basically unchanged except different owners. The drug store was formerly owned by Harry Mershon while Bob Sellers had the gas station across the street and Noel Thompson had a grocery store between the hardware and drug stores. The barbershop and tavern were east of Hartsook's store.

Across the street by the gas station was a small building with some used clothing and an engineer; the southwest corner of 70th and Douglas was the Urbandale school house.

David and Ruby Hartsook have three children - Larry, Al and Ruby - and five grandchildren. Dave's mother, Lucile, and sister, Dorothy, with her husband, Fred Schwartz, a retired school teacher, all live in the same area on 70th Street in Urbandale today. Mrs. Hartsook will be 94 on August 28."

HARDWARE STORE: Urbandale News, May 5, 1983

"Change is something Dave Hartsook has seen a lot of since he opened his hardware store in the 6900 block of Douglas Avenue in 1955.

Now he's going to become part of that change, but you may have to look closely to see it.

Last week, Hartsook handed over the keys to the store to new owner Mike Ball, one of the 28 people who expressed interest in buying the place when it was advertised for sale.

But Hartsook, a lifelong resident of Urbandale, will still be on the scene. "I don't want to get out entirely," he said. "I've got to have something to play with."

So, he'll work part-time three days a week for Ball "until Mike fires me." But his semi-retirement will give him time for other pursuits like golfing, fishing, traveling and taking in some major-league ballgames. Then there's that list of "honeydo" projects around the house. "I'll do anything but wash the windows," he says.

The hardware store now owned by Ball was started more than 50 years ago by Dick Kennedy, but the Hartsook family has been in Urbandale longer. Hartsook's parents came here in 1917 and bought an acre of land near the old trolley line that ran down Urbandale Avenue and was the town's main connection with the city. "There used to be an old trestle where the trolley crossed Merle Hay Road," Hartsook remembers. "People don't believe me when I tell them about it."

And long before he opened his store, which became a popular spot for swapping the latest news and notes, Hartsook kept the town informed of happenings by delivering newspapers. He mounted his bicycle daily to bring the *Des Moines* paper to all 300 families then living in Urbandale.

He was also, shall we say, instrumental in the first Urbandale school band, playing the saxophone in the band concert in eighth grade, two days after his parents had provided him with the horn. "Wasn't too bad," his mother noted for a historian of the event.



Later, he helped start the first Urbandale Chamber of Commerce, serving as president of the fledgling organization in 1958. He had owned the hardware store for three years by then, having given up the painting and decorating business which had him on the go all the time.

Douglas Avenue was then just a two-lane street and a grocery store was located just west of Hartsook where the pharmacy and a restaurant are now. Not everything has changed, however. *Stormy's Tavern* and the barbershop have remained his neighbors on the east all these years.

New owner Mike Ball said there may be a few changes in the hardware store and he may have some new types of merchandise. But Ball, who has been a mechanic and truckdriver, says he plans to keep the bench in the back of the store where friends like to gather for a sit and a talk.

Dave will still be there - maybe not as much - but he'll be there. "I kind of have a habit of being here," he said. After 28 years, it's not a habit; it's a way of life."

The Hardware store is gone but the building still exists. Mike Ball sold the Hardware store to Brad Zaun (former Mayor of Urbandale) in 1988. Brad closed the Hardware



Stormey's) and previously by Colby Properties.

store in 2011 and it became the site of JLM Shooter Supply. The building is owned by Randy Stevens (owner of

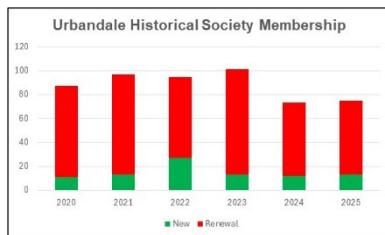
Membership

New members

Jon & Jennifer Kramme
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515-865-1229
jdkramme@icloud.com

Membership Report

The chart shows our membership numbers for the past 5 years by 'New' and 'Renewal'. Note that our membership has dropped since 2023 but remained steady for the past two years. We typically carry people on our Membership Roster for 3 years without renewal before we drop them from the roster. We provide the Newsletter and other communications to those on our Roster and consider them as Members.



	New	Renewal	Total	Roster
2020	11	76	87	123
2021	13	84	97	136
2022	27	68	95	157
2023	13	88	101	166
2024	12	61	73	162
2025	13	62	75	149

With rising costs, we need to look closely at our expenses. While we have been quite fortunate in securing Grants and other funds, we are still primarily membership based. We appreciate your continued support and ask your help by encouraging your friends and neighbors to join and support the Urbandale Historical Society not only with membership but becoming engaged with our program and activities.

With our fiscal year running from Jan through Dec now is the time to renew your membership. You can send us a check or go online at: www.Urbandalehistoricalsociety.org/membership.

For all who have renewed for 2026, Thank You.

Acknowledgement of Supporters



URBANDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP AND RENEWAL APPLICATION

Membership is on a calendar year: Jan. 1 to Dec. 31
Donations are tax deductible.

Supporting: \$25
 Sustaining: \$50

Patron: \$100
Benefactor: \$500 and up

Name on permanent plaque: \$1,000 and up
Other

Special Gifts – Memorials are appreciated

Name: _____

Spouse: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip _____

e-mail address: _____

Would be willing to receive the newsletter electronically (need e-mail address)

Please indicate your interests below:

Collecting & preserving Urbandale's history
Tour Guides for School Groups & others.
Building/Grounds/House Maintenance
Special Events and Projects (Ice Cream Social Christmas
Office work
Have Urbandale information, photographs or memorabilia to donate or lend for copying.

Gardening /Yard work
Programs and Trips
Publicity
Housekeeping
Refreshments

Website: www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org

e-mail: urbandalehistory@gmail.com

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