



Urbandale Historical Society Newsletter

4010 70th Street

Urbandale, IA 50322

(515) 270-2917

www.urbandalehistoricalsociety.org

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Centennial Celebration

Question - Why we are celebrating the Urbandale Centennial? **Answer** - Early residents in the area wanted to have a grade school in addition to McDivitt Grove and Center. They raised \$2,000 and build a two room school located at 70th and Douglas. As part of Iowa school consolidation, the community had to become incorporated. Following legal procedures, a vote was scheduled for citizens in the area and there were 49 unanimous votes cast. Urbandale thus became an official community in April 1917!

The Centennial Steering Committee has decided instead of commemorating just a single date, they wanted a number of events throughout the year. There will be many opportunities for citizens to learn more about what makes Urbandale special and why we can be so proud of our community. The celebration will be launched with a free community picnic at Walker Johnston Park on July 2nd from 11:00 - 1:00. A brief program will be held at 11:30 a.m. with the Urbandale Community Band and the Senior Singers performing. Organizations are invited to present informational displays that tells their group's history and explains their purpose.

Historical Society members are taking an active role in the planning for the Centennial. E. J. Giovannetti and Scott

Raecker serve as co-chairs with Mary Polson as coordinator. Don Brush is serving as treasurer. Virginia Gee attends the meetings as a resource of historical information.

Organizations are encouraged to prepare a written history to be included on the Urbandale Centennial web site. This will also be included in a commemorative publication being developed by Pat Finnerty. Histories of city departments, schools, businesses, churches, etc. are being collected.

Program Meeting Topics

At a meeting in January, Kevin Conway and his son, Ryan, described the work involved, research, planning, and construction completed on what was known as the MacRae house at 72nd and Douglas. The farm house was built in 1871 by the Michael family, so is possibly the oldest existing home in Urbandale. John and Blanche MacRae came to Urbandale in 1910 and went into the dairy business. They made a number of changes in the house and called it Auchmore because of Mr. MacRae's Scottish heritage. John also sold cream separators and Delco light plants. Some of the farm land was sub-divided into MacRae Highlands. Mrs. MacRae was known for her large peony garden and was once named by a local newspaper at Mother of the Year.

Most Urbandale residents have fond memories of making a trip to Riverview Amusement Park. In February, Ed Linebacker gave an interesting review of the history and projected plans for Riverview Amusement Park. The park was open from 1915-1978. Though the rides have been gone for many years, attempts are being made to renew the property for public use through the Des Moines Park Department. To learn more go to www.riverviewparkdsm.com.

In March, Norm Huitt brought examples of his extensive collection of nutcrackers - large, small, wooden, iron, unique, modern. Norm provided an interesting history of the different types represented.

Early Urbandale businesses were the subject of the April meeting. Virginia Gee compiled information from early histories and city directories of the businesses located from the trolley turn-around at Roseland, up 70th to the intersection with Douglas, and Douglas east to the city line near Merle Hay Road.

Many changes were made from the establishment of the Beach Brother Store in 1904 through the 1950's. In addition, the Urbandale Community Church, Urbandale Schools, and Urbandale City Hall were also discussed. People attending enjoyed sharing memories about the various business from their personal experiences.

Bus Trip

The 46th bus trip sponsored by the Historical Society was held on May 10th. The first stop was the Sweet Vale of Avoca Museum with an extensive collection of items, some arranged in "rooms" and others as displays. A unusual wild animal display of over 75 mounted heads and animals from countries all over the world featured a musk ox and Arctic wolf.

Mission Central in rural Mapleton is a Midwest headquarters that supports Christian missionaries throughout the world. An interesting display of weapons, musical instruments, clothing, and other artifacts are arranged depicting different parts of the world.

Lunch was served at the Beef and Brew restaurant in Mapleton with the traditional pie ala mode for dessert.

The Museum of American History is located in the former Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church consecrated in 1896 (The last service was held in 1984). Keith Robinson purchased the building to develop it as a museum for his extensive collection of historical artifacts and political memorabilia.

The day ended with a quick tour of the William Ring House, the first frame house in Maple Valley. It was built in 1865 with walnut lumber. The house was restored by local volunteers including high school students.

Thanks to Bob Simon, Pat Finnerty, Norm Huitt, and Janice Winey for their work in providing another interesting and unique bus trip.

Ice Cream Social

Another long-time tradition for the Historical Society is the Annual Ice Cream Social which will be held on June 26th.

The event as first planned in 1994 was to feature homemade ice cream, pie or cake, as well horseshoe pitching and croquet for entertainment. A newsletter account later describes the event,

“We underestimated the number of people who would come. Wayne Robbins was desperately making ice cream on the back porch while people stood in line. Anne Ulm went home and got some baked goods out of her freezer. Weather cooperated and music kept the crowd interested. Profit the first year was \$519.”

Through the years, with Wayne's hard work and leadership and improved planning, the Ice Cream Social has been not only an important community event, but one of our most important fund raisers.

Calls will be made soon to ask for donations of pies and cakes.

In addition to the homemade ice cream, there will be music, old cars to view, house and barn tours, and community fellowship.

Plant Sale

Another successful plant sale was held on May 7th under the leadership of Anne Ulm and a crew of dedicated volunteers.

Historical Society newsletters give first mention of a sale of donated plants and cookies in 1988 with a profit of \$169. Through the many years the sale's popularity increased with profits even reaching over \$1,000. Many Urbandale residents have benefited by being able to purchase a variety of plants at reasonable prices.

In recent years fewer members live in houses where they have gardens and plants to donate. Because of this, it was decided that no plant sale is scheduled for next year, unless new leadership is found to carry on the tradition. Please contact us if you are interested.

It is expected the Urbandale Garden Club may hold their annual plant sale on the Historical Society grounds next year on a different day. On a smaller scale, they offer plants donated by their members with profits going to service projects and scholarships.

New Board Member

We are pleased to announce that Pat Finnerty has agreed to serve on the Historical Society Board of Directors. He and his wife Marilyn have been supporting members for several years. Pat will assist President Norm Huitt with Buildings and Grounds, and Bob Simon with Bus Tours and Programs.

Members Remembered

This has been a difficult spring for the Urbandale Historical Society as many persons important to our history have passed away.

MARY LOONEY was 98 when she passed away on January 13th. She had been active in many community groups including Lioness Club of Urbandale, Legion Auxiliary, and the United Church of Christ. She and husband, Cecil, worked hard on many projects related to the Historical Society. Mary particularly was responsible for cutting out news clippings and obituaries from the newspapers and filing them for our records.

WAYNE ROBBINS died on January 19th after an extended illness at the Iowa Veterans Hospital in Marshalltown. From the 1980's Wayne was instrumental in all phases of the work related to the acquisition, restoration, and maintenance of the Olmsted-Urban House. Through his leadership the barn was built and many items from his personal collection are displayed. It was fitting that the barn was dedicated to him last June at the Ice Cream Social. Wayne had been a long-time member of the Urbandale Historical Society, serving on the Board as head of Buildings and Grounds, and as President for 14 years.

Another loss to the entire community was the passing of **BERNEDA MILLIGAN**, 98, on February 14th. She and husband Dale raised their family on the farm in the west part of Webster Township. They played an important role in many aspects of Urbandale's development. Berneda was an excellent source of history and was one of the surviving members of the Daughters of Ceres, a group of farm

women first organized back in the days of Mrs. Martin Flynn.

March 10th marked the passing of another Urbandale icon, **MADLINE KALOIDES**, 96. She was named Citizen of the Year in 1994 for her work in the community. She was one of the early members of the Historical Society and was president when the purchase of the Olmsted-Urban House was completed in July 1987. Through fund-raising, dealing with city departments, restoration work, acquiring furnishings and memorabilia, and organizing programs and events; Madeline provided outstanding leadership. She started writing the Historical Society newsletters in 1988 and continued for many years. She also led in the efforts to raise money to get the barn built to supplement the farm heritage of the Olmsted family. She served as president for 14 years.

Another long-time member important to your history was **MARGE WITTENBAUGH**. She died on March 11th at the age of 93. She co-owned and operated Wittenbaugh Construction with her husband Harold for 40 years and many Urbandale residents are living in Wittenbaugh homes. In addition to her leadership in the community, Marge took an active role in many projects of the Historical Society and served as treasurer for 25 years.

TRUMAN LEWIS, 83, died on May 3rd. He was known for 30 years of service to the Lions Club and volunteering with Urbandale Little League and Boy Scouts. He and his wife Delores have been long-time members and supporters of the Historical Society.

Reading through the collection of newsletters, the clippings, and photographs in the historian's books, it is amazing what these people have contributed to the Urbandale Historical Society in the past 30 years. There is a great challenge for us to continue to preserve Urbandale history and maintain the Olmsted-Urban house and the property for the community.

Future Programs

We appreciate Bob Simon obtaining speakers for our meetings covering a variety of subjects. We welcome your suggestions for future programs or people you know who can present on a topic.

Plan to share your memories at a meeting this fall focusing on fun and entertainment in Urbandale. What do you remember about the skating rink, Urban Theater, Lions Club shows, school dances, athletic teams, hanging out at the drug store, horse shows, drag strip races, and community picnics?

Save the Date

What: Annual Ice Cream Social

When: Sunday, June 26 2:00 - 4:00

**Where: Front Lawn of the Olmsted-Urban House
4010 70th Street**

You will have a choice of pie or cake, and a beverage to accompany the serving of ice cream.

Vintage automobiles will be on display and the house and barn will be open for tours.

Save the Date

What: Urbandale Community Picnic

When: Saturday, July 2 11:00 - 1:00

Where: Walker Johnston Park