



# THE TOWPATH

Published Quarterly

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THE NEW BREMEN HISTORIC ASSOCIATION

JULY 2012

## New Cabinets for the Museum

We are fortunate to have many items donated to our museum. To protect and display all these items the New Bremen Historic Association Board of Trustees decided that additional cabinets were needed. They consulted with Aaron Barhorst of the Barhorst Woodworking Company in Ft. Loramie about building display cabinets to fit the museum spaces. Aaron made a visit to the Museum, measured the spaces and concluded that he would be able to build a cabinet in the Education room and another in the Military room.



Aaron Barhorst delivering the new cabinets.



The cabinets have now been installed and our Curators have begun the task of building displays. The new cabinet in the Military Room holds uniforms from WWI and WWII. In addition the uniform and flying items of General Tom Kuenning are displayed.

## New Bremen Museum Announces Summer Hours

**The Museum on North Main Street will be open each Sunday afternoon in June, July, and August from 2 to 4 PM.**

The New Bremen Historic Association began its **Summer Celebration** on June 3, 2012. This celebration is to honor individuals and families who will share their stories with us. We would like to record information about their history (important events in their lives) and their memories of earlier times in the New Bremen area. We have several of these stories recorded more than 30 years ago that are historic treasures.

Now we would like to add more interviews to our collection. Think about what life stories and memories you could share with future generations. Members of the New Bremen Historic Association Board will assist you in telling your story. There are no set topics and we will provide you with suggestions if you are not sure what to talk about. We will also record your information.

Please call 419-629-2856 to reserve a time to share your story. We would like to do this during the time the museum is open if possible but other arrangements can be made. If you have stories to tell, we would love to listen. Call now to add your story to our local history collection!

**“THE TOWPATH”** is a historical reflection of New Bremen and the surrounding area published quarterly by the New Bremen Historic Association. Any stories and/or pictures that our readers are willing to share are welcomed.

*Editors*

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**Board meetings are held the first  
Tuesday of each month at the  
Lockkeeper's House at 7PM.**

*From the MAILBOX*



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*Dear Readers: Thank you for your calls and letters.  
We love hearing from you. Gen & Joyce, Editors*

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**Jim Moeller** called to tell about his experience at the Speedway when he was 10 years old. He said the year was 1931 and his dad (Caddy Moeller) sold sandwiches and peanuts at the racetrack. Jim was selling bags of peanuts in the grandstand when the riot broke out and the fire started. He remembers how frightened he was and said it was a day he will never forget. (April 12, 2012)

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**Robert Gilberg** submitted a story for Towpath readers about his memories of the racecar built by Wehrman's and driven by John Wissman at the Speedway. See page 11.

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Enclosed please find my check for a donation. I enjoy the "Towpath" and read it from cover to cover. I have almost every issue from when it started. I really appreciate all the hard work that goes into it also. New Bremen will always be my home town...Thanks,  
**Bonnie Quellhorst Elsass** (April 16, 2012)

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... I have a strange question for you. When I was a kid living in New Bremen at Christmas time there was a Santa sleigh and deer every year that was strung across the street leading to the old American Legion. Do you happen to have a photo of that? Thanks, **Daryl Dammeyer** (May 22, 2012)

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**Dear Readers, Does anyone have a photo of Santa and his deer for Daryl?**

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## *Regarding Summer Celebration...*

What a great idea! I only wish my father were still here to share all of those stories....I did not live in New Bremen growing up, but visited my grandparents there from 1944 when I was born to 1962 when my Grandmother Kuck (12 N. Main) passed away. My father and I would visit New Bremen several times a year during the 15 or so years before he passed away in 2010.

Thank you for taking on this wonderful project for the benefit of the community. I look forward to reading the accounts that are going to be written. Hopefully we will be able to access them online since we live in South Carolina. I do not get back to Ohio very often now that my father has passed. Sincerely, **Sherry Biederman**. (May 21, 2012)

Hallo, aus Deutschland! Your email about the summer celebration caught up with me here in Germany. Actually, we have been here about three weeks and are flying home tomorrow. Naturally we had a great time visiting relatives and friends with kuchen and kaffee and wine fests all over the place. We also spent a long weekend in Prague in the Czech Republic. So alles gut im Deutschland! But we are ready to come home.

That's great about the recording of personal memories of the past before they slip away into oblivion. I think my contribution has already been made in *Recipes and Reminiscence*....**John Dickman** (May 23, 2012)

### **Items Recently Donated to the Museum**

Two large wooden boxes labeled Hobart Dayton. **(Donated by Dennis Burnell, April 29, 2012)**

Various tools and farm items (35) including a 1925 seed sower and a walk behind plow. **(Donated by Doris Blanke, April 29, 2012)**

Arcade nail file. **(Donated by Dave Heinfeldt, April 20, 2012)**

1983 20<sup>th</sup> Century Mother's Club cookbook "It Tastes So Good." **(Donated by Ruth Schulenberg, April 29, 2012)**

Gilberg & Hegemeier sponge, Gilberg nail file & rainhat, whisk brooms Rump Service Station & Purpus & Boesel Ins., coin purse American Budget, STAMCO tape measure. **(Donated by Carole Warner Laveen, June 4, 2012)**

Three early medical books **(Donated by Joyce Gilberg, June 4, 2012)**

## *FROM OUT OF THE PAST*

### **Tom Boesel's Funeral**

*New Bremen Sun 8/7/1914*

The sad and solemn funeral rites over the dead body of Tom Boesel were performed, Wednesday forenoon, in the vacant lot in the rear of the opera house block. Tom had become old and feeble, and of late was unable to distinguish one sound from another even though it were uttered in many languages, as he had lost the sense of hearing. Besides in his many encounters with rats and other rodents, he had once upon a time received an ugly wound under the chin which gave him much trouble, finally developing into a running sore.

A few drops of chloroform, a tin box, a little mound in the back yard, and that is all of Tom. In telling of the event, Charley Boesel says, "May be you fellows think that was an easy job for me. I had that cat for fifteen years and I want to tell you it was pretty hard to part with him."



**Edith Wissman has a 1912 Calendar Plate that advertises the First National Bank in New Bremen.**

**Edith, thanks for sharing this with us.**

## *Personal Interview*

### **Edna Schroeder Tontrup Shares Memories**



**Edna Schroeder Tontrup**

Edna Schroeder Tontrup remembers that her grandmother Rosina Rempe Ruedebusch was a cook on the boats that would pass by her canal house. Rosina's husband John Ruedebusch died in 1908 and she moved with her children to her father William Rempe's house on the bank of the canal at 216 North Walnut Street.



**Rosina Rempe Ruedebusch Tending Her Chickens**

Rosina was born in 1860 and married John Ruedebusch in 1882. After his death she did not remarry but worked as a cook to support her family including her sister's son who lived with them for 10 years.

Rosina died in 1944 but Edna has good memories of Grandma Rosina. She remembers her as always busy with her long dress covered by an apron. Edna told of visiting with her Grandma and cousins in that canal house at the end of Walnut Street.

During their summer vacation, the girl cousins

would help pick gooseberries from the many bushes that lined the lane. When Grandma had all she needed for cooking they could sell the extra quarts to the Arcade and other grocery stores in town. They also helped tend the large garden and cared for the rabbits and chickens. The cousins were happy to have 5 cents to get an ice cream cone.



**Rosina mowing. The garden is in the background.**



**Leroy & Marie Tangeman, Naomi & Edna Schroeder Grandchildren of Rosina Rempe Ruedebusch**



**Rosina Rempe Ruedebusch with her Grandchildren Orville Ruedebusch, Margaret Ruedebusch Slattery & Paul Ruedebusch circa 1919**

We thought that Rosina would be the only topic of our interview but Edna also kindly shared other memories and family pictures that were so interesting we included them and expanded the article.



**Edna Enjoying a Ride**

Edna was born on the family farm on State Route 219 in 1926 to Leo and Mary Ruedebusch Schroeder. Edna remembers her father's favorite horses Betty and Bob.



**Leo Schroeder with Betty & Bob**



**Leo Schroeder (Edna's father) with Betty & Bob.**



**Mary Ruedebusch Schroeder standing on right. Mary is the mother of Edna Schroeder Tontrup. Harry Hartwig is seated. Names are unknown of the other two individuals.**

Another memory was of the family farm stand where they sold strawberries for 25 cents a quart. Fresh dressed spring chickens were sold for 50 cents.

Edna attended the Huenke country school on 66A during her early years and graduated from Memorial High in St. Marys in 1943. She met her husband Louis Tontrup at a dance at the Lock Two dance hall just after he returned from service in World War II. They married and had four children- Sandra, Sharon, Steven and Stan. Sharon is deceased but the others live nearby.

She stayed home with her children for the first twelve years of her marriage and then went to work at Good Year in St. Marys. She was there just a short time when her husband Louis wanted to return to live in New Bremen. They bought a house on Water Street and all of her children attended and graduated from NBHS in 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1974. Edna began working at Crown Controls in 1960 and remained there for 30 years. She built and inspected rotators and remembers that she enjoyed her job.

Her life changed when she lost her husband in 1974. She remained in New Bremen until 1984, but then made a decision to move to St. Marys to be closer to her sister, Naomi Schroeder Rison. Edna continues to enjoy her friends and her ties in New Bremen. She is a member of the Legion Post 241 Auxiliary here, a life member of the NBHA and in a card club that has been together for many years.

Thank you, Edna, for sharing your pictures and your memories. We enjoyed our visit with you.



**Edna Schroeder Tontrup**

## **POLIO (Poliomyelitis, Infantile Paralysis)**

If you were born before 1955 you will probably remember a great fear that parents and children encountered each summer and fall. In the 1940s and early 1950s, parents and children feared that they might contract poliomyelitis and become paralyzed or die. There was no cure known and the disease seemed to be on the increase at that time. The first case of polio in New Bremen was reported in July, 1949. One month later it was reported that 6 of the 17 polio cases in Auglaize County were in New Bremen.

### *New Bremen Sun*

July 21, 1949

...**Dr. Rabe** called attention to the five polio precautions as listed by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis:

1. Avoid crowds and places where close contact with other persons is likely.
2. Avoid over-fatigue caused by too active play or exercise or irregular hours.
3. Avoid swimming in polluted water. Use only beaches or public pools declared safe by local health authorities.
4. Avoid sudden chilling. Remove wet shoes and clothing at once and keep extra blankets and heavier clothing handy for sudden weather changes.
5. Observe the golden rule of personal cleanliness. Keep food tightly covered and safe from flies or other insects. Garbage should be tightly covered and if other disposal facilities are lacking, it should be buried or burned.

The disease poliomyelitis, also known as infantile paralysis, was not a new disease. It had been round since ancient times and generally was considered a minor childhood illness. The polio virus was discovered in the early 1900s but there was no cure once contracted. The disease usually occurred in the summer or autumn, was mild and provided an immunizing protection for the child.

The early symptoms were fever, malaise, headache, nausea and vomiting. More severe cases might have muscle pain and stiffness in the neck or back with or without paralysis. If the central nervous system was involved then 25% of the severe cases might have mild disability, 25% might have permanent paralysis while the other half would have no residual effects. If brain cells were affected the disease could be fatal.

The increase in the number of severe cases in children and in adults in the 1940s was believed to be linked to the improvement in living standards and sanitation. It was conjectured that more adults were

developing the disease and becoming paralyzed because they had not acquired the mild infection when younger which would have provided some immunizing protection for them.

Several factors brought the disease and its effects to the public's awareness. Franklin D. Roosevelt contracted poliomyelitis in 1921, suffered paralysis, but went on to win the United States Presidency in 1933. The National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis was formed in 1937 and became quite active to bring the disease to the awareness of the public through newspapers and television. The Foundation provided financial assistance to stricken families by raising money to help with the costs of iron lungs, increased medical care and therapy expenses.

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### **A SURVIVOR'S STORY**

**By Mrs. Roger (Vernita Heinfeld) Scheer**

*(Vernita was one of New Bremen's early polio victims in August, 1949)*

July and August of 1949 were hot, dry months. People had flu-like symptoms with headaches, aching muscles and high temperatures. Some were diagnosed with polio which was determined by doing a spinal tap.

St. Rita's and Memorial Hospitals in Lima accepted polio patients. One area was set aside as a quarantine section. Visitors coming in had to wear a gown and mask; also, visiting hours were in the evening for one hour for parents or spouses only while patients had a temperature and likely to be contagious.)

Treatment in the early stage was hot packs made of wet wool heated blanket pieces that were placed on the muscles that were affected. The therapist was Betty Bachmann, who had been at Walter Reed Hospital, working with men who had been in World War II. She worked with all the patients, using massage and manipulation to strengthen and loosen paralyzed muscles.

There was also the Hubbard tank-a large stainless steel tank with warm water. It was easier to move the whole body in water.

There was a paraffin tank used mostly for the hands. It covered the hands and the heat made the muscles easier to massage and manipulated.

There were a number of small children who had polio, some under a year old. One little boy, probably 4 or 5 years old, couldn't walk, but after treatments his strength came back and one day he started to walk again, going up and down the hall. Then the nurses had to "keep up" with him!

*A Survivor's Story continued...*

Whenever any patient could move one finger we all found out about that and were happy for that accomplishment. Some patients who had more severe cases often didn't recover the use of their affected muscles.

There was also the bulbar type of polio that affected the breathing and swallowing. Those patients were placed in iron lungs and later rocking beds were used.

By Vernita Scheer

In 1952, poliomyelitis reached epidemic stages when 58,000 new cases were identified in the United States. 40,000 of those cases received assistance from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. This awareness fueled a desire to find a way to stop the epidemic by increased research. A big moment occurred when Edward R. Murrow interviewed Jonas Salk on the CBS television program "See It Now" and he announced that a vaccine would soon be available.

***Saturday, October 11, 1952, New Bremen Sun***

The medical research world today hailed the announcement of a new polio vaccine that can be mass-produced cheaply as a giant stride toward conquering the disease.

The people of New Bremen supported research and The National Foundation's March of Dimes Campaign.

**CHILDREN IN ANNUAL BASKETBALL GAME FOR POLIO FUND**

*New Bremen Sun, June 19, 1952*

Two picked neighborhood basketball teams have staged their annual polio benefit game in the Amstutz garage at 23 South Walnut Street. Instituted last year, the children themselves developed the idea for the annual contest as their contribution to New Bremen's polio fund.

This year's game was won 54 to 47 by the team composed of Wayne Amstutz, Jan Belton, Dave Schaefer, Jack Schroyer and Randy Shoemaker with Roland Luedeke as coach. Members of the losing squad, coached by Ferdy Wint and Jimmy Opperman, were Tommy Wissman, Denny Wint, Johnny Schroyer, Stanley Amstutz and Jimmy Kettler. Ray Meckstroth was the official referee.

Total proceeds of \$14.00 were realized from the game and popcorn and lemonade concessions operated by Kathleen Pence and Roslyn Shafer. Pony rides were

enjoyed by the children during the early evening. Virgil Amstutz, father of Stanley and Wayne, showed pictures he made of last year's contest which netted \$12.65.

In **February of 1955**, *The New Bremen Sun* issued a report by **Mrs. Roger Scheer, County Chairman**, that total March of Dimes contributions would exceed \$2100.00 for New Bremen and German Township. Workers were:

Lawrence Schwartz had charge of Lock Two solicitations. Township workers include: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Wehmeyer, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Moeller, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Sollman, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Tangeman, Mr. and Mrs. Merlin Roettger, and Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Fark.

Members in the PTA campaign are Mrs. Katherine Grothaus, President, Mrs. O. C. Ruedebusch, Mrs. Bus Bruner, Mrs. Carl Schrage, Mrs. E. A. Fledderjohann, Mrs. Roman Stueve, Mrs. Ray Hirschfeld, Mrs. Cade Schulenberg, Mrs. Lester Howe, Mrs. Ronald Douglas, Mrs. Omer Tangeman, Mrs. Fred Wellemeyer, Mrs. Frank Dicke, Mrs. Nick Grilliot, Mrs. Leander Landwehr, Mrs. Wesley Howell, Mrs. Robert Marshall, Mrs. Charles Hay, Mrs. Wilson Braun, Mrs. Norman Scheer.

Mrs. Harold Opperman, Mrs. Frederick Luedeke, Mrs. Gregore Gast, Mrs. Harold Looker, Mrs. Paul Pape, Mrs. Clifford Quellhorst, Mrs. Don Seyfried, Mrs. Robert Campbell, Mrs. Paul A. Dicke, Mrs. David Anthony, Mrs. Harry Gilbert, Mrs. Ralph Dietrich, Mrs. H. P. Baur, Mrs. Jack Hirschfeld, Mrs. Robert Weinberg, Jr., Mrs. Richard Dammeyer, Mrs. Don Kettler, Mrs. Alvin Wagner, Mrs. James Cumming, Mrs. Elton Bruns, Mrs. Ray Warner, Mrs. Ted Scheer. (*New Bremen Sun* February 10, 1955)

On **April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1955** the Salk vaccine was given to 108 children in the first and second grades of the New Bremen schools. 118 students were eligible to receive the free vaccine supplied by the Infantile Paralysis Foundation but six students were absent and four were unable to present parental consent forms. The second shot was scheduled to be given in two weeks. The parents were told that they would have to pay for the third or booster shot to be administered in about seven months. The inoculations were given by the Auglaize County Health Department under the direction of Dr. Brent Welsh, Health Commissioner. (*New Bremen Sun* April 28, 1955)

... By Genevieve Conradi

## Our Historic Road

*Fred Wiemeyer has a map of the state of Ohio which was printed in 1834. The census of 1830 is given in connection with it. There were no railroads in the state at the time and the Miami & Erie Canal was completed only to Dayton. State highways and common roads were the principal means of transportation and they are designated on the map just like the railroads are now. Auglaize County was not in existence then and New Bremen and St. Marys were in Mercer County....New Bremen Sun, 1895*

When this map was printed one of the principal means of transportation at that time, the Piqua - St. Marys Road ran through New Bremen. Today this road can be traced by starting from the south as it entered New Bremen on Washington Street, turned left onto Monroe, right onto North Main, left onto Pearl and right onto what is now 66A.

The early name of the roadway was the **Auglaize Trail** and it had been used well before 1834. The trail was part of a portage that extended from the Loramie Creek (also known as the Western Branch of the Big Miami River) on the south to the head waters of navigation of the St. Marys River on the north. Native Americans used this portage until they were removed from Ohio. Over this portage traveled the Shawnee chiefs Tecumseh, Logan, Blue Jacket, Capt. Johnny and Black Hoof to meet with the Indian agent Col. John Johnson at Piqua.

American military troops also used this portage but needed to cut a wider road through the heavily forested area to move their supply wagons. In 1790 General Harmar moved over 1000 troops north over this road. General Anthony Wayne's army traveled south over the route from their victory at Fallen Timbers to their winter quarters at Ft. Greenville in 1794. Since these were not meant to be permanent roads, troops took out only as much timber as needed to let the wagons pass. The portage was so valuable to transportation it was noted in Gen. Wayne's 1795 treaty with the Indians. The treaty stipulated the portage through Indian lands would be open to people of the United States.

This portage was in the Northwest Territory of the United States until 1803 when it became part of the state of Ohio. During the War of 1812, the road was used by General William Henry Harrison as he traveled to his post at Ft. St. Marys. The Ohio Legislature in 1820 provided for the formation of Mercer County from ceded Indian Lands. It was from these lands that the Bremen Society scouts chose the site for New Bremen. According to an article written

by C.M. Smith in the 1887 business directory of New Bremen "the site (for New Bremen) was chosen on account of its superior natural advantages in regard to the strikingly fine appearance of the landscape". Perhaps this was due to the partially cleared road. In 1833 Main Street was platted along this road as were part of the streets of Washington and Monroe. It was the route followed by our first settlers as they traveled north from Dayton through Piqua.

When the Miami and Erie Canal was completed through New Bremen in 1838 some adjustments to the road needed to be made. One example of this was the Monroe Street Lift Bridge built where the road crossed the canal



**Monroe Street Lift Bridge over Canal. (Schwietzman's Drug Store can be seen in Center of Bridge after the Band.**

The growth of the town and more traffic turned the dirt road to mud in the rain and snow. There are stories of horses standing knee deep in mud at the hitching posts. Stepping stones were placed so pedestrians could cross the streets.



**Muddy Washington Street ca.1900.**



**Schulenberg-Laut Block on Monroe Street.**

In a letter to the *New Bremen Sun*, Civil War veteran William Schulenberg remembered when the sidewalk on the north side of Monroe Street from Main to Water Street was made of logs. The logs were flattened on one side, chained together and tied down with stakes. This was done to keep it from floating away in the frequent high waters.

According to the “Ralph May Remembers” book, the tracks of the Western Ohio Interurban were laid following the road in 1902 and trolley wires were suspended from poles on either side of the road.



**Interurban tracks and trolley wires on poles that fed power to the Interurban car.**



**Interurban Car in front of the Schulenberg-Laut Block on Monroe Street.**

Within the town the road was graveled and later paved with brick on a layer of concrete. In 1924 the road was designated Ohio State Route 66 from Piqua in Miami County to northern Fulton County close to the Michigan border.

The named changed to Ohio Route 66A north of New Bremen when Route 66 was rerouted, widened and straightened to St. Marys beginning at the Washington and Monroe Street intersection in New Bremen. Widening this intersection necessitated the Post Office which had been built on the northwest corner in 1955 be torn down in 1958.



**Dangerous Curve on Route 66A Heading South to New Bremen. (Photo by Gen Conradi, 2012)**

During its centuries of use this historic road running through the heart of New Bremen has been traveled by countless people using many modes of transportation. The early travelers walking a narrow dirt trail could not have imagined travelers today driving cars on a wide state highway. However in 2012 just as in 1834, the road is still our principal means of transportation.

...By Joyce Ruedebusch

### Brief New Bremen School Timeline

- 1833 - Bremen Society designated land for first school on Main Street
- 1845 - School enrollment grows to 67 students and larger school is needed
- 1846 - Two room school built on North Franklin Street
- 1857 - New Bremen school was one of four schools in the German Township School District. The others were **Ober Bremen School** on Cherry Street, **North School** on Lock Two Road, and **West School** on Route 364. (The School District name changed to New Bremen in 1914 when the Rural School Code Act put the schools under the authority of the Auglaize County board.
- 1877 - After annexation of Ober Bremen by New Bremen new **Union School (Central)** was built on South Franklin Street and Ober Bremen School closed
- 1923 - North School closed
- 1953 - West School closed and all elementary students in New Bremen district are schooled in the eight classrooms of the Union School.
- 1956 - Union (Central) School abandoned and the Plum Street Elementary School opened.
- 1963 - Addition built to east wing of the elementary school. The New Bremen School enrollment in 1963 was 816 students.

(For more information about West Side School – see *The Towpath* October 2006)

### Report Cards

The schools of New Bremen have grown and become technologically advanced over the years but some things have remained constant. One of those is the need to report student progress and behavior or deportment. This has been done since the beginning of the school system through report cards. In the early years these reports were written on heavy weight card stock which is probably how they became known as report cards. Now reports are done on computers and copied on standard paper.

Though report cards have always been issued, the reporting scale has varied. Some years students received percentages or number grades on a 1 to 4 scale and other years the grading scale used letter grades. Another constant has been that report cards are always sent home in cardboard envelopes. **For over 50 years those envelopes have been donated by the First National Bank of New Bremen, a practice which is still in place in 2012.**



Report Card Envelope  
School Year 1926-7



Report Card Envelope  
School Year 1956-7

### Grading Scale for 4<sup>th</sup> Grade School Year 1922-23

To the Parents: You are requested to give the grades of your child careful consideration. 90 to 100 signifies excellent work, 80 to 90 good, 70 to 80 fair. Below 70 poor. Please visit the schools and consult with the teacher and Supt. concerning the work of your child. Only by co-operation can we secure best results for the children.

### Grading Scale for 4<sup>th</sup> Grade School Year 1952-53

The Interpretation of the Grading System is as follows: A or 4 is EXCELLENT; B or 3 is GOOD; C or 2 is FAIR or AVERAGE; D or 1 is BELOW AVERAGE; E or 0 is FAILURE. A plus mark (+) indicates above average. A letter (N) indicates normal or average. A check mark (V) indicates below average. No check mark indicates no report.

### Grading Scale for 4<sup>th</sup> Grade School Year 2011-2012

GRADING SYSTEM		
A 96 - 100	B- 87 - 88.9	D+ 73 - 74.9
A- 94 - 95.9	C+ 85 - 86.9	D 67 - 72.9
B+ 92 - 93.9	C 77 - 84.9	D- 65 - 66.9
B 89 - 91.9	C- 75 - 76.9	F Below 65

S - Satisfactory
NI - Needs Improvement
✓ - Skill needs improvement

## The Race Car on the Corner



By Robert Gilberg

It used to sit out there on the corner of the intersection where route 66 (Ohio Rt. 66 that is) made a sharp left turn to the west before curving northward out of town, and on past the local racetrack. On that sharp corner was the Lone Pine gas station. The little car sat there on most Sundays on a small patch of grass under the huge pine tree out in front of the gas pumps when a big race was going on up at the New Bremen Speedway. It was there to attract race fans in for a fill-up, or refreshments on their way to or from the racing. It was one of those things that could just grab a 12 year old kid so much he couldn't think about anything but having one of his own. It was just beautiful with chrome, spoke wheels and a chrome exhaust pipe running the entire length of the car from engine back past the rear wheels. After a while, and as I grew through my early teenage years, the car no longer was seen sitting in its customary place on those Sundays and it retreated into the back of my memories as I became too "mature" for things like miniature race cars.

I now had a driver's license and, in partnership with my older brother, owned a car. You see, once you own something like a 1949 black Ford 2 door coupe standard model with 6 cylinder engine), you are a little too cool to be thinking about things like miniature race cars. Your head is full of things like chrome shift knobs, rear seat speakers, white wall tires and fender skirts. Serious stuff for "older" boys! But, driving our car around required money for gas, insurance, tires and the neat stuff mentioned before.

Fred, who owned and ran the Lone Pine gas station was rumored to be looking for a part time worker ('means high school kid working for \$.75/hour.) The deal was to include working over Fred's evening dinner breaks, all day Saturdays, as well as helping open up in the mornings for an hour or two. I needed some breaking in. And I was a little small in those days at 5 ft-9 in. and 118 pounds! But I think Fred was desperate. There were plenty of bigger guys around. And there were others around who had actually worked in gas stations before with useful experience. I think the thing that sold him on me was that I lived with my parents in a house we rented that was right behind the Lone Pine. That meant I couldn't easily hide when things got too busy on a Sunday afternoon, or it was a slow day and Fred wanted the afternoon off. All he had to do was look to see if our '49 Ford was in our driveway and he knew there was a good chance I would be home. Or, he could just call Mom and tell her he needed me. But I didn't mind since I always needed money.

Over the next two years or so, Fred and I got used to one another and I got a good handle on what was needed and how to do it. I became a pretty reliable kid. I remember working on winter days with bad head colds when it was so cold outside that the windshield I was trying to wash for a

customer would just freeze up into a sheet of ice before I could dry it. I felt kind of heroic about being able to do this kind of stuff for 2 or 3 hours a day at the Lone Pine in miserable winter conditions. Fred did it 7 days a week, 12 hours a day!

It worked out for both of us. He got time off for a decent dinner and visit with his family in the evenings and some time off over the weekends and I got money for my teenage life. Guys like to hang out at gas stations too! Friends would usually come by in the evenings to fill up, have a Coke, smoke (we all smoked as soon as we could) and shoot BS. It was the social center of my life. We talked about cars, girls and Rock and Roll. Sounds familiar, right?

My education as a skilled gas station attendant was a little bumpy though. There really were some rough spots when Fred had to have the patience of Job. However, Fred through great restraint, patience and his desperation for part time help overcame his instincts to fire me and continued the never ending education of young Bobby Gilberg. I had done all the usual raw recruit screw ups; drained transmission fluid instead of engine oil while performing an oil change; opened overheated radiators without letting things cool down first and so flooding engine compartments from the surging radiator fluid; punctured inner tubes with the tire irons while attempting to fix flat tires (but I did patch that nail hole, why is it still hissing ...) and more. But slowly over time I think I was useful to him. That is, until the night of the Little Race Car Incident.

The Little Race Car was the prettiest miniature race car anyone in New Bremen had ever seen. By miniature, I don't mean to imply that it was a tiny thing that was only a model. This little car actually was big enough that a kid maybe around 10 years or so old could actually get in and drive. And it didn't have any lawn mower engine in it for power. It had a for-real motorcycle engine that produced serious horse power, and as we'll see, made for a faster than expected ride.

It had been built in the 1930's by a local machine company, Wehrman's Machine Shop, with great skill and precision. The car was modeled after the short track car driven frequently in those days by Mauri Rose, who later became a three time Indy 500 winner. We all had heard about how lucky Johnny Wissman got to drive demonstration laps at the speedway in the car at all the big races back in that era.



Mauri Rose and Johnny Wissman

Turns out, Fred now owned the little car at the same time I was working at the Lone Pine station. One night my Dad had come into the station to gas up and BS a little with us. Fred was back from his evening dinner and was getting ready to

close when my Dad asked him about the little car. My recollection all these years later is that Fred gave some vague answer, like: "don't have room for it anymore, too much bother" or something to that effect.

My Dad went on reminiscing about it for a while, going on about how he remembered Johnny Wissman running the pretty thing around the track in the 30's when all the big racing names came to town to run on the New Bremen Speedway. I think all the talk of those days and the pretty little race car re-kindled some interest in Fred that night. The next Saturday Fred told me to bring my Dad along over to the station and he would show us the car. So that Saturday, we went into the barn-garage behind his house, which was across the street from the Lone Pine. There it was. Behind a pile of discarded stuff from the gas station, Fred's house, and old Hudson stuff (Fred loved Hudsons), sat the pretty little thing. Under all the dust and grime you could still see the chrome spoke wheels and chrome exhaust pipe. It had a chrome radiator shell at the front end of a beautifully fabricated sheet metal body which was painted in a metallic bronze color. Even though I was now a pretty mature kid of 16, I was still knocked out by the car. The workmanship was beautiful. It had knobby dirt track style tires that looked like the real things, but in miniature. The whole car looked exactly like a real car, but in 1/3 scale. Fred showed us it's JAP motorcycle engine, and the belts and pulleys of the drive system. It even had a little leather covered seat that looked like it had been made in an upholstery shop.

It was a few days later, in the evening, when we were closing the station for the night that the events of the little race car transpired. It had been a slow evening and just before closing time, when my Dad, who had stopped for gas and a few other of my friends who had been hanging out with me at the station that evening, were all surprised to see Fred roll the race car out of the back room and out under the big roof that covered the gas pump area. It was after 9:00 PM, and quite dark. Fred kicked on the JAP motorcycle engine's kick starter lever a couple of times and it started! Since it had nothing but a long, chrome straight exhaust pipe with no muffler, it sounded wonderful! A terrific ripping sound when it was revved up. Fred revved the motor up and down, up and down for several minutes until the engine had warmed up enough that it would idle smoothly by itself. It sat there running and looking great, when suddenly Fred said, "Get in there, Bob!"

"Get in there" was an impossible act to perform. The car had been built for boys eight to ten years old, not one sixteen. I could get "on" the car, but I couldn't get "in" the car. Getting on the car meant sitting up on the tail with my feet down in the cockpit resting on the seat. And holding the steering wheel meant hunching over and reaching down and forward to grab it between my ankles. So there I sat, on the tail of the car thinking "how do I drive from up here?"

Fred said something about "here is the brake and there is the clutch" and waved at some pedals and levers down in the dark bottom of the cockpit. I didn't even have my feet down there in the darkness for they were still planted on the leather seat bottom, when he moved something down there and gave the car a little push forward. It took off like a banshee!

I didn't even have my feet down in the pedal area of the cockpit and it was running off with me! No foot on the brake pedal because I had no clue of knowing where it was and no foot on the gas pedal because I didn't know where that was either! And the car was tearing off with me at gathering speed. It just ran off with me out of that pool of light around the Lone Pine and into the dark of North Main St. where it makes a bend into the country and heads toward Lock Two. I could barely keep my balance sitting up there on the tail of that little car which was now showing just how fast it could run.

I need to add at this point that New Bremen had some really lousy roads at that time. We were not a wealthy community and roads were seldom repaved just for the purpose of making them smoother. They were just patched.....and repatched forever. In other words, they were terrible. We used to joke that the cornfields surrounding New Bremen were smoother. And here I was heading down one of the worst streets....in the dark.....sitting up high on the back of an out-of-control race car!

The car's steering was very quick. A little turn of the wheel, in true race car fashion, gave immediate and fast reaction. So to make matters worse, now that I was bouncing around trying to find a way to maintain my balance atop the car's tail, I was also trying to find out how to steer this speeding thing. Small turns of the steering wheel resulted in fast, cutting arcs with the car sweeping from curb to curb with me lurching violently from side to side trying to stay upright. Picture a bronco rider at the rodeo!

And as the little car sped away with me toward Lock Two and beyond, it was also getting to be pitch black because we were now out beyond the "town" homes and getting into the first of the small farms surrounding the town. No street lights here! Not even front porch lights! This was getting to be a serious problem now. The little car had no lights of course and so no automobile drivers were ever going to see me. And there was a country road intersection coming up faster than I wanted to think about and I did not know how to get the car stopped. It is true that at that time of the evening and that era in the 50's there was not likely going to be any traffic on those roads since most folks were at home either in bed or watching their new color TV. But you never know, and with my luck with Fred's stuff, 6 cars could be converging on the intersection.

I had to either get stopped or at least slowed down enough so I could turn around and get back to the Lone Pine. Figuring out how to stop would have been preferable but I couldn't do it. I managed to get my left foot way down into the cockpit on the side where there should be a brake pedal. This did not help my balance problem at all though since now I didn't have the advantage of one foot on each side of the seat that allowed me to use one foot, then the other to counter balance the bumping and swerving. I was sort of leaning forward now, and to the left with my left leg stretched way out to press against the brake pedal. And I couldn't get very good leverage against the brake pedal because my butt kept wanting to slide off the back of the tail if I pressed too hard. But, since I couldn't find the clutch, I needed to press very hard on the brake pedal to try to slow

the car because I couldn't get the engine disengaged! Talk about a Catch 22!

I pressed the brake as hard as I could without sliding backward off the car and it slowed some. We came to a place in the road where I knew it would be wider because of mail box pull-offs and driveways and I determined that it was now or never. I had to either turn around here at whatever speed I could get down to, or I was going to have to chance the intersection and go on.....but to where? Going on might as well mean forever.....or at least past the cemetery and on to New Knoxville where I was likely to get arrested at the speed trap coming into town. So, going on was not an option.

When I approached the critical point of no return, I pulled the car way over to the right side of the road where I began to send up a shower of gravel. Then as I arrived at the widest spot I cranked the steering wheel over hard left and leaned as far to the left side of the car I dared. Hoping my lowered center of gravity and offset weight would keep the car from turning over, I hung on as the little car did what a good little race car should do: it skidded sharply to the left, made a 180 degree turn and headed off the other way! Cool! I had passed that critical maneuver! Now, all I had to do was get back to the Lone Pine without hitting something, falling off, or being hit by someone.

I found out later what was going on with the car. First, the idle adjustment on the carburetor had been left in a highly advanced position where it was normally set for warming the engine. That is why it just ran away with me. Second, the car's clutch was a lever that disengaged a system of belts and pulleys that were the cars drive system. That has to do with why I could not find a clutch pedal on the floor. Third, when I was pressing on the brakes and slowing the car, the belts and pulley's slipped enough to slow the car. But I didn't know that then, and frankly didn't have time to think about it. All I knew was that I had managed to get turned around and was now heading back to safety and that friendly pool of light back at the edge of town. Of course, the problem was going to be when I got there, "how am I going to stop this thing?"

Just getting slowed down again wasn't going to cut it. All I needed to do was hang on through the last, bounding curve and I was within striking distance of safety. And I was actually beginning to formulate a plan for my arrival. It had to do with a large thick hedge between the back side of the Lone Pine property line and my folks rented place. Maybe it could be used as a soft crash barrier that I could steer the car toward just before I jumped off to safety. I would get skinned up a little, and the car would lose a little paint, but everything would work out OK.

Unfortunately, we never got to try the soft crash landing! I just went over the side like a rag doll after about two, wild left-then-right, twitches by the entire car. There was no question of trying to heroically hang on and fight my way back into the cockpit and bring the raging thing under control. It just chucked me off of there like a sack of potatoes and that was it. I bounced and rolled a little there in the darkness and listened to the sound of the little car as it flew on across the road without me.

Because of the darkness, I couldn't see what was happening. But I could hear the sound of the guys running down the street from the Lone Pine, yelling excitedly among themselves: "Where's Bobby?" "Why didn't he drive it back?" "There he is, out in the road!" "Bobby, why did you get off it?" "Look at what it hit, you jerk!"

Well, I was pretty bruised and scratched and had lost some serious skin on my elbows and forehead. But, there was no way I was going to mention those minor wounds as I saw Fred looking at his pretty little race car. It was lying on its side. The engine had shut itself off by running out of gas as the tank emptied itself from sustained damage. The car had hit the corner foundation stones of Mrs. Schmidt's house and was now a pile of twisted metal and bent chrome. The front axle was badly bent; the car had a major straightness challenge about midway between the axles in the frame. Those pretty chrome spoke front wheels looked like pretzels and the polished chrome radiator shell now had a huge V shaped smash in it that fit very well around the corner of the house foundation. That was what we could see in the dark with just a quick inspection. Mrs. Schmidt's house was in good shape with no visible damage

Fred was another story. He was speechless. He had loved that little car, treasuring and protecting it and, probably against all his instincts, brought it out for us all to see as a favor. Now it was junk. Fred never talked about that car again to anyone that I know of. My Dad, who was known around town as an ace mechanic able to fix anything had offered to repair it. Fred turned him down with no explanation. I continued to help Fred because he still needed time off and had occasional special needs at very busy times. The good thing is that eventually his pain over the affair, while never going completely away, diminished to the point that things became normal again between us.. After all, with all those mishaps between us, we were always going to be able to have those events to look back on and have a good laugh.

And so we did; through my college years when I would just go in to visit or help him out, and beyond when I began my career as an engineer down in Dayton. Finally I lost track of Fred and the little race car when after a few years in Dayton, my new wife and I headed for California.

So the little race car disappeared again. This time forever, as far as I know. There has been a rumor told to me by my brother that the car had been sold to a farmer out east of town who had intended to repair it. But, as the rumor goes, the farmer lost interest in the task and the car was supposedly thrown out with the trash.

But maybe that is all it is, a rumor with no basis in fact. Maybe someday a young boy in New Bremen will find that pretty little race car hidden away in a barn, covered with dust and junk. And maybe that young boy will get his Dad to bring it home and repair it so it can again sit out on some prominent corner under a big shade tree on nice days, pleasing the eyes of passersby and inspiring other young boys yet again.

Hopefully though, when they do start its engine, it will be in the daytime and on a very big, smooth parking lot.

## History Mystery Page

Thank you, everyone, for your phone calls, e-mails and letters! Are you ready for the new challenge? Remember to write, call or e-mail your answers...



**Who is it? And why are they dressed as elves in 1959?**



**Who is it and where are they in this 1942 picture?**

**The items below can be seen in the NBHA Museum. Tell us what they are.**



**What is it?**



**What is it?**

Please drop a line to us at *The Towpath*-NBHA, P.O.Box 73, New Bremen, Ohio 45869

Or call or e-mail your answer to

Gen at [gen@nktelco.net](mailto:gen@nktelco.net)

Joyce at [jdr@nktelco.net](mailto:jdr@nktelco.net)

Your answers will appear in the next issue of

*The Towpath*

## History Mystery Page Answers for the April Issue



**Kettlersville School about 1925**

Thanks to Vic Maurer and Bonnie Quellhorst Elsass for identifying the members of this class.

**Row 1.** Arthur W. Maurer, Katherine Maurer Phipps, Naomi Poppe Trump, Howard Stein, Theodore A. Maurer, Jr., Frederick H. Maurer, Lucille Hirschfeld Meyer, Ruth Becker Prueter, Lula Becker Shield, Ralph Harlamert, Mildred Schwaberow Gruebmeier **Row 2.** Ms. Christine Elsass (Teacher), Ruth Eversman Cory, Llewellyn Holtkamp, Karl Bartenstein, Willis Harlamert, Edward F. Maurer, Esther Headapohl Dicke, Paul Poppe, Anna Mae Maurer Katteerhenry, Evelyn Stein Billing, Oneta Harlamert **Row 3.** Lloyd Harlamert, Robert Schwaberow, Ralph Schwaberow, Richard Langhorst, Irvin (Red) Blakely, Merlin Blumhorst, Wilson Hirschfeld, John Schwaberow, Merlin Tangeman, LaRose Sollman Maurer **Row 4.** Richard Maurer, Marvin Roettger, Paul Headapohl, Edith Sollman, Glenna Harlamert Fogt, Myra Poppe Kindred, LaRue Fark McCormick, Alice Hulsmeyer



**Genevieve Conradi, Dennis Dicke, Roger Katterheinrich, 1958**

...Don't know who played for the Roode Sisters in 1958 but I recall my sister Carol playing the piano for the girls when their mother brought them to the home farm at Moulton for Tap lessons. This would have been around 1954 or earlier?  
**Ned Wibbeler**



**Picture #1-Nancy Lampert Busse, Carolyn Weinberg Stucky, Linda Rupert Meyer**

**Picture #2-Jane Gruebmeier & Bev Fledderjohann identified the girls from Gym Class. From bottom-Bev Wehmeyer, Connie Luedeke, Sharon Tontrup, Sandy Kuenning 2<sup>nd</sup> Row-Kathy Henschen, Donna Dicke, Carolyn Weinberg 3<sup>rd</sup> Row-Bev Widau, Mary Wissman Top-Jane Moore Gruebmeier**



**Jim Rempe** identified the cigar mold. Thank you, Jim.

**Richard Roediger** also identified the cigar mold and said that he has seen a number of these items during his career as an auctioneer. Richard lives north of Philadelphia and hasn't been in New Bremen since the early 1990s, but he remembers many of the people and enjoys hearing from them. I enjoyed talking with you, Richard.

### Membership Report This Quarter

(Dennis Dicke, Recorder)

#### NEW MEMBERS

- 4/11/12 Nancy Anderson
- 4/11/12 Carole (Warner) Laveen
- 4/11/12 Linda Meyer
- 5/08/12 Steve & Connie Wills

#### MEMBER DEATHS THIS QUARTER

- 5/12/12 Victor W. Schneider
- 5/17/12 Barb (Oldiges) Egbert
- 5/17/12 Jane (Gilberg) Talan
- 5/28/12 Robert S. Nagel

#### MEMORIAL DONATIONS

- In Memory of Alfrida Wessel by Susie Hirschfeld**
- In Memory of Dr. Kenneth Ziegenbusch by Marie Gardner**

#### OTHER DONATIONS

- Mike Gast
- Eldon Smith
- Bonnie Elsass

### VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM

The third grade students of New Bremen Elementary School visited the museum on May 3, 2012. Mike Staton, Curator, welcomed the students to the Museum.

They had wonderful questions for the curator and we hope they will visit the museum often.

### VISIT YOUR MUSEUM SOON!



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