



IRVINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

December 2011

Volume I, Issue 111

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It was Dec. 7, 1941 and many Irvingtonians were enjoying a performance of Handel's Messiah at Thomas Carr Howe High School when Dr. John Ferguson interrupted the performance to announce that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese.

This memory of Mildred Allen, longtime Irvington piano teacher, is just one of many interesting recollections included in the Irvington Oral History Project collection that has recently been made available online by the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. Mildred, interviewed on June 15, 1987 by Janice Paul of the Hilton U. Brown Branch of the IMCPL, was one of many Irvingtonians interviewed in the 1970s and '80s. The IMCPL recently partnered with the IUPUI University Library and the Irvington Historical Society to digitize the materials. The taped interviews and the accompanying transcripts can be found at <http://digitallibrary.imcpl.org/ioh.php>.

Another Christmas-related memory included in the collection is that of Mary Josephine Delker Robertson, who was interviewed on Feb. 27, 1980 at her Ritter Avenue home by Lois Leamon of the Brown Branch Library. Mary was 92 years old at the time and was recalling the early years of the church she attended her whole life:

"The Irvington Methodist Church began in a schoolhouse on North Arlington Avenue, almost opposite School 77. Soon the church became too small. The building is now standing on East 16th Street and is used as a home. From there we built a church for \$800 on Arlington Avenue just south of the where the schoolhouse was. It was a little frame building. It had a stove and kerosene lamps. I remember the big Christmas Eve times we had there. The families would all be together and we had a big Christmas tree lighted with candles that you lit yourself. The children were given little boxes of candy to take home and then we'd walk home in the snow. We always had snow on Christmas day then. With the light of a lantern that my father carried we walked home and were ready for Christmas the next day."

Maybe someday in the future another oral history project will record the holiday memories of today's Irvington families. If so, I am sure that the Irvington Historical Society will be a part of it!

Happy Holidays!
Don Flick, IHS President

KILE OAK TILES

Laura Ruetter and Tim Taylor, former Irvington residents, created these unique tiles now available through special arrangement with the Irvington Historical Society. Laura and Tim now have their Arts & Crafts tile workshop in Port Townsend, Washington. They created this stylized study of the Kile Oak as a remembrance of their Irvington years. Hand made and glazed in shades of green, no two are exactly alike. Glazes will vary slightly from this image. Tiles are \$15 each, with \$7 shipping and handling. To pre-order: send a check payable to Irvington Historical Society to Paul Diebold, 66 Johnson Avenue, Indianapolis 46219, or email irvingtonians@gmail.com for more information.



CHRISTMAS 1861

by Steven R. Barnett, IHS Exec. Director

As Hoosiers across the state gathered in front of the hearth to celebrate Christmas 150 years ago, an empty chair or two carried the thoughts of those at home to distant campsites on frosty hills and meadows; along icy streams and snow capped mountains. The eighth month of civil war found thousands of fathers, sons, and brothers from Indiana serving in Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and the nation's capital.

A soldier identified only as "Snacks" at Camp Ma-Cauley, Paducah, Kentucky wrote in his letter published in the Indianapolis Journal, "Christmas has come and gone, not with that pleasant anticipation and greeting of years gone by. Different from all other days was it to us, however, for on that day we – yea even we – who composed mess No. 1, were greeted with a magnificent dinner by our messmate, Charley Maines. To Charley we are thankful, and to his worthy father, Rev. Samuel Maines of your city, the sender of all those delicacies which that day we did partake of, do we send greetings, wishing him a "happy Christmas." Christmas passed without anything very remarkable happening. Of course there was the usual number of "drunks" and "fights" that this day is always celebrated with. No one was killed, however, and a few black eyes will cover all injuries received."

At Cantonment de Lamine, Missouri, Indiana volunteer "B" at the camp of the 26th Regiment recounted that Christmas had been celebrated "after the good old style.... extra rations of fresh beef were issued, and, thanks to the energy of our go-ahead sutlers, the boys' tables were bountifully covered with fresh oysters, pigs feet, canned fruits, and other delicacies." While on that special day far to the east, a "cloudless sky" and "atmosphere...pure and pleasant" sparked the phrase "Christmas gift" throughout the camp of the 7th Regiment, Indiana Volunteers at the "beautiful village" of Springfield, Virginia. Captain Will Banta, Company B, wrote in his letter that "at noon we all partook of Christmas dinner. I would be safe in saying that the men had bought and prepared two hundred chickens and turkeys, determined to live well one day, anyhow."

"Christmas day was a day of charming beauty," wrote Hoosier "R.M.H." from Washington, DC. While "the sun shone warm and bright all day...there was no jubilee...everybody felt a sort of lazy joy; there were no parties...no dance nor song, anywhere but in the theatre" and at the New Opera House featuring Christy's Minstrels. "These were jammed."

Three more Christmases would pass before most loved ones, separated by war, would finally be able to celebrate together in a nation united and at peace.

CHRISTMAS 1951

Kiddies Welcome Santa at Rogers



Santa's arrival each Christmas season is more exciting than the preceding one due to the eternal charm of childhood. Santa is shown with Harold Apple, manager of Rogers, 5620 East Washington, as the Irvington and East Side kiddies gave him a rousing welcome. (Kenny Stratman Photo)



**Visit Santa at
ROGERS
In Irvington**

- Every Friday 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
- Every Saturday 2 to 5:30 p.m.
and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

FREE TOYS FOR ALL THE KIDDIES

Free Parking in the Rear

Rogers **IRVINGTON**
JEWELERS **STORE**
5620 E. Wash.

Open Fridays and Saturdays Till 8:30 p.m.

Advertisement and photograph from the Dec. 7, 1951 edition of the Indianapolis (later Eastside) Herald.

Rogers Jewelers was located at the present-day Geneva Hair Studio. Harold Apple became store manager when Rogers bought the former Irvington Jewelers in 1946. Harold, a WWII veteran, and his wife Betty (Cox), both Howe High School graduates, raised four children in their home on Grand Avenue. While manager, Harold started the custom of children painting store windows during the Halloween Festival. Today Harold and Betty reside in the Castleton area. Santa was portrayed by Christian Park resident Hanson Givens. Givens, also a WWII veteran, died in Minnesota in 1998.

BROWN'S HILL – A LOST IRVINGTON TRADITION

Many people new to Irvington wonder about the boulders and odd hill-like form behind the gas station at the southeast corner of East Washington Street and Emerson Avenue. Was it a prehistoric earthwork? From where did the boulders come?

The truth is that it was a man-made feature, and was once the location of one of the most significant houses in Indianapolis. It was also the site of many fond childhood memories of winter outdoor fun for Irvington residents.

In 1891, Hilton U. Brown, Chairman of the Board of Butler University, and, at the time, manager of the Indianapolis News, was looking for a house site that combined several features: natural beauty, a hill or bluff, and access to or a view of a body of water. Irvington realtor C.W. Brouse pointed Brown to the site at the southeast corner of Emerson and Washington. Brown bought the land and had the site built up with fill soil so that a more dramatic bluff overlooking Pleasant Run Creek was created.

The Browns had architect John Stem build their 1892 house partly out of glacial boulders harvested from Pleasant Run Creek, giving the house a rustic look. Over the years, the Browns raised their children in the hilltop house, and welcomed children to play and sled on the hill. While today, the slopes at Ellenberger Park fulfill this role, in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, sledding on Brown's Hill was favored. Such elevations were not available many other places in Irvington.



Irvington Group artist Connie Forsyth captured Brown's Hill in this watercolor. The Forsyths lived across Emerson Avenue from Brown's Hill. Permanent Collection, Irvington Historical Society

Steve Barnett, the Society's Executive Director, states that the trick to sledding Brown's Hill was to build up enough speed to overcome the swale at the hill's base, allowing the sledder to teeter on the street's edge, without going out into Washington Street. Thankfully for all involved, Steve survived many such runs.

Brown's Hill, however, did not survive. Hilton U. Brown lived on as a widow until 1958. After several years, the vacant house was demolished. Brown had hoped for the city to add his property to the Indianapolis Park system, but, ultimately, the site ended up in the hands of an oil company. By the early 1970s, Amoco had removed most of the hill and built a gas station on the site. Boulders from the first story of the Brown mansion were used to build retaining walls. Despite the loss, local traditions of winter fun live on at Ellenberger Park, and, the Brown's Hill sledding tradition remains a strong memory for many present and former Irvington residents.

IHS JOINS TOY DRIVE!!

This year, The Irvington Historical Society will participate in the in the 11th annual WRTV 6 Toy Drive. City-County Councilor Ben Hunter and Warren Township Trustee (and IHS board member) Jeff Bennett are spearheading this year's collection and distribution of toys on the Eastside. A toy collection box will be located at the Bona Thompson Memorial Center on Saturdays and Sundays in December from 1-4 p.m.

Irvington residents are encouraged to drop off new, unwrapped toys and games. If you choose to assist financially, you are asked to make your donation in the form of Walmart gift cards. Walmart helps by generously providing an additional discount on the toys that are purchased—allowing limited resources to be maximized.

This year's toy distribution will take place December 19-21, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., in the Family Life Center located behind Post Road Christian Church (1112 N. Post Rd.). Toys will be distributed while supplies last.

Help us make the season brighter for many families in need. For more information on the toy drive and how to participate, contact Ben Hunter (bdhunter@sbcglobal.net) or Jeff Bennett (jdbennet@indy.gov).



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE IHS!

ABE MARTIN
OF IRVINGTON Says —



With apologies to the President, but this time of year some of us still have HOPE that we see some CHANGE.

Current Exhibits

“Tim Engelland: 25 years of Painting”, through December 31, 2011

“Classic Women Artists of Irvington” (from the IHS and Portfolio Club collections, featuring Constance Forsyth, Dorthy Morland, Hilah Wheeler, et al) through December 31, 2011

Permanent Exhibits & Attractions

International Harvester Memorabilia

Eastside Fire Museum

Irvington Garden Club Conservator

IHS Bookstore and Gift Shop (new and vintage)

“Influence of the Railroad on the Development of Irvington” (including scale model of Pennsylvania Railroad and the original Irvington commercial district)

“The Civil War and its Influence on Irvington” (featuring exhibits on Camp McClellan, historic lithographs of notable battles, etc.) through November 14, 2011

IRVINGTON GREETES COLOGNE

Members of the sister city committees of Cologne, Germany and Indianapolis were the guests of Irvington Terrace leaders recently as they toured Irvington to see the many improvements in the neighborhood. The delegation visited the Pennsy Trail and the Bona Thompson Center, had lunch at the Legend Café, and planted an oak tree at the Irvington Community Middle School. Steve Barnett, IHS Executive Director, was on hand to provide historical and cultural insight into Irvington, including some of its early German settlers.

IHS MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Immediate Benefits for New Members:

- * Discounts from Irvington Merchants – All members, new and renewed, will receive a card for discounts at the following merchants: Annie’s Apparel, Bona Thompson Conservatory, Bookmamas, Black Sheep Gifts, George Thomas Florist, Lazy Daze Coffee House and Wee-Play.
- * Gift – All new members may pick-up a gift on their first visit to the Bona Thompson Memorial Center.

Annual Member Benefits:

- * Special invitation for all events at the Bona Thompson Memorial Center.
- * Newsletter
- * 10% discount on Irvington Historical Society items at the Bona Thompson Memorial Society Gift Shop.
- * Holiday gift.

To Join:

Please complete the following application and mail it along with your annual membership dues for \$25.00 to the

Irvington Historical Society
5350 East University Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46219-7009

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email Address _____

For more information about the Irvington Historical Society visit www.irvingtonhistorical.org.