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Growing Up in Metamora in the 1940's and 50's



We recently spent an hour and a half with one of our favorite contributors and Metamora historian, Bob Remmert. You've probably seen Bob at the Saturday morning Farmer's Market working on his art work. But Bob, a life long Metamora resident, also has a wonderful recollection of growing up in Metamora during the 1940's and 50's. Bob loved history and learned a lot as a child by talking to the town's "old timers." Soon to be 80 years old, Bob sat down with us and shared those memories of a delightful childhood growing up in a much slower paced Metamora – and world.

My, have times changed!! No TV, no internet, gravel roads, toys made out of pressed wood (don't leave out in the rain) and, our least favorite - outhouses (yuck)!! But it really was a good life.

We are in the process of transcribing the voice recording into print, but for now we thought you would enjoy some of the highlights.

1. Many old timers, including Sep Waldschmidt, May Grob, John Isch and daughters Wilma and Madeline, Bill Williams, the Briggs, the Herrings, and more, told Bob about Metamora's past.
2. Omer Wernsman had the Frosty Custard ice cream store on the southeast corner of Rt 116 and Spring (west of Sue's.) The foundation was only recently removed.
3. There were also gas pumps on Rt 116 slightly east of the used car lot (old druggist Isaac Wikoff's house.)
4. Bob's mother would tie a box on to his tricycle with a note and 50 cents and send Bob to Isch's who would fill the order.
5. John Isch had a "wonderful assortment of penny candy" and would throw in a couple of extra pieces for Bob with the change left over from the 50 cents.
6. Ed and Bill Briggs did the interior work on the Biltmore House in South Carolina. Many fine Metamora homes were also done by them.
7. There were several hotels in Metamora over the years – the Metamora House (torn down in 1915), the Carpenter House (which was still a boarding house in the 40's), the Boswell House (research shows 2 different locations), the American Hotel (picture later in the newsletter), and Uncle Johns (the old jail.)
8. Indian Rock at Black Partridge Park was the site of school picnics and could accommodate 15-20 picnickers. (It is down from Page Point at Oakwood Cemetery.)
9. Dr. Jim Whitmire lived in the Hugh Abel house at 120 S Menard. Dr. Zack Whitmire lived in the house behind what is today the Subway (105 S Menard.)
10. Frank Wagner was in charge of County Welfare during the Depression and kept many families afloat – often using his own money to help out.
11. The Sinclair Station was kitty cornered from Mason's funeral home. Started by Mr. Rohman, Hansie Miller later took it over. Hansie wasn't always concerned about getting paid - "oh, just catch me later" - even with out-of-towners.
12. Hansie lived in a very small one room house near the CFCU kiosk. He might have even used the gas station's bathroom because his house didn't have one.
13. The Castle Tavern sat on the northeast corner of Rt 89 and 116 (former Hanover's location). It was moved one block south and still sits there.
14. A brick building replaced it. It was a grocery store and pub – Sy's. Free movies were shown in the summer on its parking lot.
15. The 40's and 50's Metamora had lots and lots of service stations – and saloons!
16. The Lincoln Tap on the east side of the Square was run by Bennie Morris. Benny was "5 foot 18 inches tall." (6'6")
17. The Heintzmann Grocery Store (southeast corner of Partridge and Davenport) had a "wonderful meat counter." They also traded customers for eggs and chickens. (Side note – this store is the ancestor of IGA).
18. Anheuser Busch built the tavern ran by Joe Noe (today the Dietel residence).
19. The building on the northeast corner of Partridge and Menard was the dental office of (the first) Dr. Heinzmann and later his son. It was also the home of the KC's. (east and across the street from Eli's.)
20. Theobald's Restaurant sat on the southwest corner of Rt 89 and Rt 116. Bob's mother got a \$100 tip, which she split with a co-worker, from the infamous gangster John Dillinger.
21. Ezra Schlipf opened the International Harvester dealership in the Chimney Dr.'s building in 1941 on Rt 116. Staff included Wilbert Eckstein (Bob's father-in-law), Herman Elbert, Mr. Kershgessner, and more.
22. Paul Wagner had the excavation business where McBride and Shoff is today. He dug many Metamora basements.
23. Bob claimed Schierer's had the "best ice cream anywhere."

24. Wartime: Bob remembers “the sky was black with planes” on D-Day. Blackouts were practiced because Cat was a war materials supplier. A civil defense person would check to houses to make sure no light was showing through the windows and would knock on the window if he saw anything.
25. Nothing was thrown away during the war. Even gum wrappers were saved for aluminum. Gas and sugar were rationed. Tires were patched. Wood was reused. Victory gardens were common.
26. Saturday night entertainment featured the WLS Barn Dance on the radio.
27. Some farmers still farmed with horses in the 1940’s.
28. If meat or cheese had “green” on it, you just scraped it off and ate it anyway.
29. Clothes were often made out of flour or feed sacks. Tuned-in producers knew that clothes were made out of their sacks so added designs to make them more appealing and ready to be converted to clothing.
30. Rudy Kennell had a big dairy farm 1.5 miles north of town before Schierers Dairy.
31. Children made May baskets. They contained candy and flowers. Children would put them on the porch, knock on the door and run.
32. Bob’s family had one radio until his mom got a small one for the kitchen. They didn’t have a TV until after Bob left home.
33. Bath night was something. The tub was brought in and placed near the cook stove. (Don’t get too close or you’ll get burned.) After the kids got their bath, the water was replaced and mom and dad got clean water.
34. Toys were made of pressed wood and glue. If they were left out in the rain or wet grass, they would disintegrate.
35. A lot of ball was played on the old Grade School ball field (Gene Kennedy’s and other’s property today.)
36. Old Settlers was the last week in August before school started. Tickets were 10 and 15 cents.
37. The circus came to town and would set up on the old Grade School grounds (201 W. Partridge). Bob and his friends got caught trying to sneak in by Howard Mason. But Mr. Mason was nice and gave them a free ticket.
38. Bob’s family only went to Peoria a couple of times a year and seldom ventured more than 30 miles from home.
39. There was an informal drag strip on Rt 89 from the pump house to the first cross roads. The cops knew about it but looked the other way.
40. Schupp’s Rythym Kings was a favorite local dance band. There were 2 places to dance – the American Legion and the VFW (today MerriLee’s). Members of Schupp’s band were Lloyd Schupp, Art and Herman Grebner, Darlene Klein, Charlie Todden (drums) and Al Rebose (sp?) on the banjo.
41. Mothers told their sons to stay away from the Carpenter House. (You can guess why...!)



American Hotel above; Dr. Knoblauch’s office on the right

Is this the same building?



Where Was the old American Hotel Located? – What do You Think?

We have two conflicting versions about where the old American Hotel was located.

One source places the old American Hotel on the southeast corner of Rt 116 and S. Menard (now the Metamora Center – Bob’s TV.) It’s the picture on the left above. If that’s accurate, is the white 2-story building in the right side of the picture Dr. Zack Whitmire’s house (#7 on the attached map)?

A second source places it on the northeast corner of Davenport and Partridge (old Legion site.)

Comparing the two pictures above, it seems like maybe the old American Hotel lost its upper balcony and later became Dr. Knoblauch’s office. It has the right number of windows, shape, etc.

But how do you account for the 2-story building in the right side of the picture of the American?

What do you think?

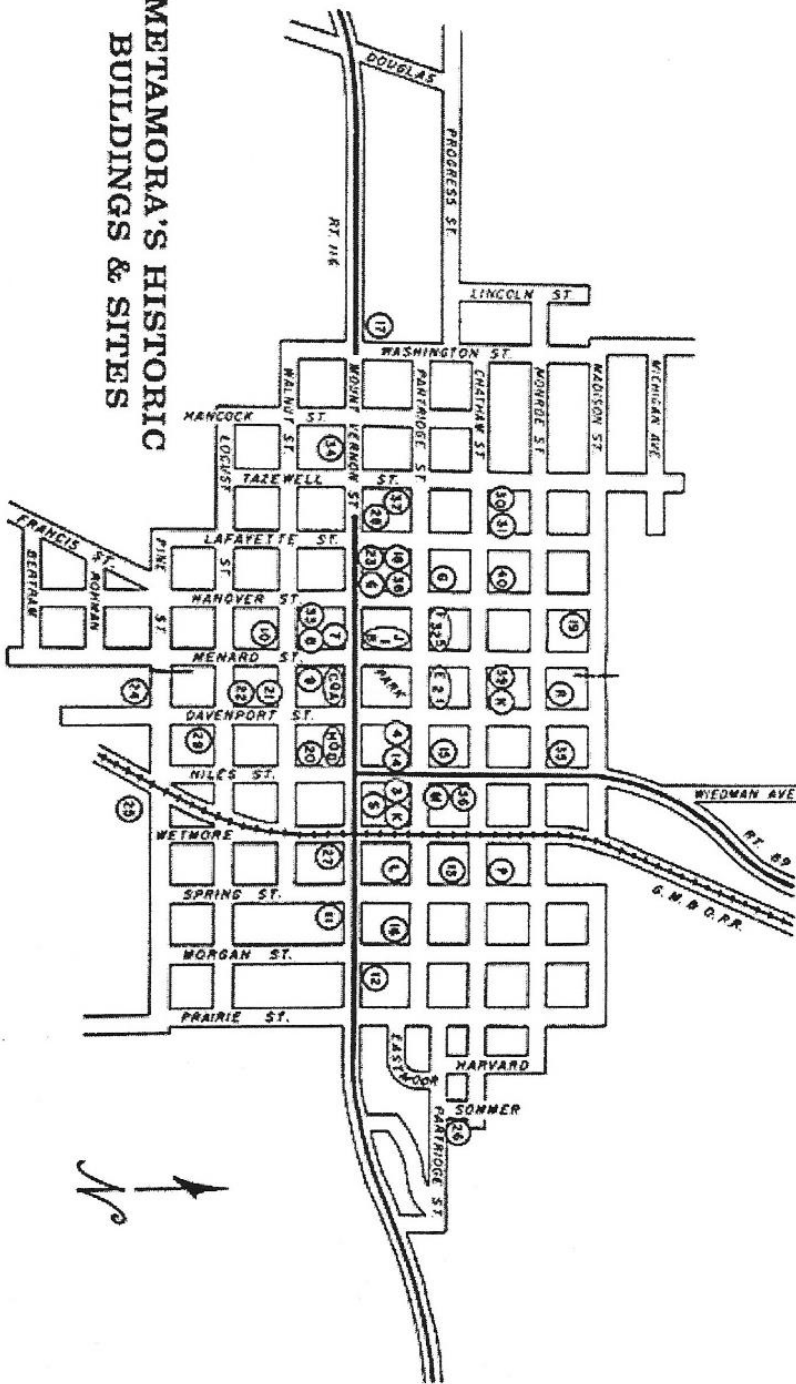


The Carpenter House – second building from the left.

It was a boarding house in the 1940’s

Historic Sites

METAMORA'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS & SITES



~25~

EXISTING

1. Metamora Court House, 113 East Partridge
2. Charles Werner Building, 109 East Partridge
3. Old Jail Building, 304 East Partridge
4. Wilcox Building (bank and groceries), 128 North Davenport
5. John Isch Building, 101 West Partridge (groceries and dry goods)
6. Lamson House, 115 North Hanover
7. Zack Whitaker House, 105 South Menard
8. John L. McGuire House, 121 South Menard
9. Dr. Jim Whitaker House, 120 South Menard
10. George Leman House, 1.04 West Walnut (home of Adlai E. Stevenson Sr.)
11. Isaac Althoff House (dentist), 504 E. Mt. Vernon
12. The Bassett House, 901 East Partridge (Deputy County Clerk)
13. Hubert Adams House, 416 East Chatham
14. J. C. Irving House, 222 East Partridge (Deputy Circuit Clerk)
15. Dr. J. I. Knoblauch House, 219 East Partridge
16. Henry Martin House (original tall box), 515 E. Partridge (1891, Clerk of County Court)
17. The N. P. Baker House, 605 W. Mt. Vernon
18. Sgt Ebert House, 220 West Partridge
19. Hippolyte Jaquet House, 422 North Hanover (cabinet maker)
20. W. K. Briggs House (undertaker), 121 South Niles
21. H. Conrad House (dry goods), 205 South Davenport
22. Peter Schurz House (banker), 221 South Davenport
23. Van Fellisch House (law), 215 West Mt. Vernon
24. Gordon Wilson House, 120 East Pine
25. John Page Farm House (Attorney), 901 East Partridge
27. Samuel Hesse House, 106 South Wetmore
28. David Stoner House (mechanic), 301 W. Mt. Vernon
29. John L. McGuire House (original), 300 South Davenport
30. John Dell House (first Post Master), 303 West Chatham

NON-EXISTING

31. George Horro House (hardware store), 305 West Chatham
32. Abersoi Stove (grocery), 109 West Partridge
33. John Snyder House, 119 West Walnut
34. Rachel Bana House (furniture), 406 W. Mt. Vernon
35. Theena House (Salford), 401 North Niles
36. Kellogg's House (wagon manufacturer), 222 North Niles
37. Hanna Tanton (remodelled), 314 West Partridge
38. Barbara Pederman House, 123 West Hanover
39. Barbara Pederman House, 121 West Chatham
40. Joe Schneider House, 303 North Hanover
- A. Metamora House, 101 S. Davenport
- B. Carpenter House, 105 N. Menard
- C. Clifton House, 100 E. Mt. Vernon
- D. Bosworth House, 218 E. Mt. Vernon
- E. Faltzsch and Chilly, Lem, Olin, 107 E. Partridge
- F. Baratz Church (1854), 119 W. Partridge
- G. Old Gate School (1872), 201 W. Partridge
- H. Peter Winland General Store, 200 E. Mt. Vernon
- I. Somers Hall, 115 N. Menard (Belsly & Belsly Implement Co.)
- J. Scholl Blacksmith Shop, 115 N. Menard
- K. Christian Church (1850), 318 East Partridge
- L. Episcopal Church (1847), 418 East Partridge
- M. Congregational Church (1848), 301 E. Partridge
- N. Site of Old Foundry & T. Warden-Jeweler, 121 E. Chatham
- O. Jacob Reeder (owned flour mill)
- P. The Old Creamery, 415 E. Chatham
- Q. Shettery Millinery, Gardeners Store (part of old G & B building)
- R. Will Cassell (Broker & Lender), 405 W. Davenport
- S. Briggs Undertaking Parlor, 305 E. Mt. Vernon

Contact Us

Questions, ideas - Love to hear from you

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