



The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 1

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Roots
Quarterly
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The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter is a publication of the Gogebic Range Genealogical Society, Inc. The Newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and September. We are located in Ironwood, Michigan, USA. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 23, Ironwood, MI 49938.

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Membership dues are based on a calendar year starting with the date of enrollment. The expiration date of your membership is shown on your membership card. If renewal of the dues is not received by the expiration date a reminder is sent. The reason for this is twofold. First and foremost we value your membership and hope you continue to support us. Secondly, our Bylaws state that a member in arrears 30 days after the anniversary date shall be removed from the rolls. Please keep in mind that one reminder only is required in this same section of the Bylaws and is sent in hopes that your membership continues without a lapse. If any member has a question regarding this please feel free to contact us.

Thanks for your continued support.

Norrie Location: The Great Depression

Much of the country felt the effects of the Great Depression immediately; people lost their jobs and businesses failed. Gogebic Range mines continued production. The depression was an era of both good and bad times and people who had to live through it remember the good parts. There were weddings and other social events. The Norrie Amateur Sports Club started. There was a radio in nearly every home and "Tom Mix" and "Jack Armstrong" were favorites of children. Women listened to soap operas like "All My Children", "Ma Perkins" And no Sunday afternoon was complete without listening to "Gangbusters", "Inner Sanctum" and many others. It only cost a dime to get into the Rex Theater for the Saturday matinee. Kids always seemed to have something to do in the Norrie. In the summer there was baseball and fishing. In the winter it was trapping, sledding and skiing.



"Black Thursday" signaled the onset of The Great Depression. Banks all over the nation began to close their doors because they had no funds to pay out to their customers. Prices went steadily downward until the summer of 1932. The National Metals Bank in Ironwood was one of the 5,000 banks in the United States that had to close its doors.

Alex Randa, who we introduced in the last issue of the Newsletter, had all of his savings in that bank. He lost every dime. One by one, his boarders lost their jobs and they left; he had to close the boarding house at 131 E. Oak St. Alex was forced to get a job as an underground miner. Alex was one of the fortunate men. Most who lost their jobs became disillusioned over the lack of employment possibilities and chose to leave. The lead mines of Butte, Montana, were where many men went in search of employment. Families also gravitated southward to Milwaukee, Chicago and Detroit. Job pickings there were no better than they were in Ironwood, however. Some families had relatives elsewhere and sought their help.

Dale Hawley who lived on Larch Street with his wife Sigrid and their four children, moved first to Lorain, Ohio and then to Lansing where he worked in REO automobile factory. His story is similar to the fate of many families who helped Norrie Location to grow. Moving to "the city" appeared to be the answer to the economic crisis that hit oh, so many.

The REO plant soon closed and the family moved back to Ironwood. Dale got a job with the Ironwood police department as the truant officer for the Ironwood public schools. As it was with the Hawley family, there were no real benefits found by moving to the city. Some stayed there anyway, but many moved back to the Norrie.

Radio, the Depression's Great Escape

Two factors changed the face of radio programming during the lowest ebb of the Depression -- a disastrous season on Broadway in 1931, and the desire of advertising agencies for better bang for their bucks. The collapse of the Live Theatre drove many of the top names of musical comedy and vaudeville into broadcasting -- Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Burns and Allen, and many others all turn to radio during these years, and in doing so, the emphasis in programming turned away from local talent and toward Big Names.

The Depression's darkest months fell in the middle of 1932: 15 million are unemployed in the US, and more than 270 thousand families faced eviction from their homes. By September of that year, more than 34 million Americans were without any income whatsoever, and the nation had witnessed the grim spectacle of tanks rolling through the streets of Washington, DC, against an army of unemployed veterans. Americans were desperate for escape, desperate for anything that will take their minds off the horror of the times. And they get it -- in a pop-eyed, hyperkinetic Broadway clown. Eddie Cantor took the nation by storm with his satirical run for the Presidency, setting an audience record never to be equaled by any other continuing radio series.

Nearly every family had at least one radio in The Norrie. WJMS was the local radio station and distant stations like WLS and WGN from Chicago were heard also.

A new approach to children's programming came in the '30s -- rollicking, rousing, blood-and-thunder serialized adventure: epitomized by a blank-eyed frizzy-haired funny-paper heroine: Little Orphan Annie. On radio, lost the harsh ultra-right-wing political overtones of Harold Gray's comic strip -- and became the personification of an aggressive childhood: solving mysteries, exploring the world, and horrifying concerned parents for more than a decade. From the drooling hard sell of the Ovaltine commercials to the endless send-away-premium offers, "Annie" set the tone for an entire genre: Jack Armstrong, Tom Mix, Captain Midnight, and Hop Harrigan.

Chicago was the capital of country music during the twenties and early thirties -- and WLS was its headquarters, reaching a vast audience all over the Midwest, including Norrie Location. The primary showcase for the station's impressive roster of musical talent is the Saturday night "National Barn Dance" program --on the air since 1924 -- and when this series moves to Chicago's Eighth Street Theatre, soon to be known as "The Hayloft," it enters its golden era. In 1933, the show goes national: and Lulu Belle and Scotty, the Hoosier Hot Shots, the Vass Family, the Maple City Four, Uncle Ezra, and all the rest find a whole new audience.

Movie theatres interrupted their screenings to air "Amos 'n' Andy" over their sound systems. Department stores really do broadcast the show over their public address speakers. Water consumption really does take a drop for fifteen minutes, six nights a week. And when Andy Brown is taken to court by his beautician fiancée Madame Queen in early 1931 -- the climactic event in a storyline that's been brewing for over a year -- an estimated 40 million listeners hung on the outcome of each night's episode.

It wasn't radio's first running gag -- but it's the most memorable of its time, as Gracie Allen began popping up on programs all over the radio schedule, asking for help in locating her enigmatic "missing brother." The bit grabs the national imagination during the most wretched of Depression winters -- and vaults Burns and Allen to the front ranks of radio's comedy stars.

The Lone Ranger, no matter what they claimed at WJMS, didn't found the Mutual Network. When the Masked Rider Of The Plains rode onto stations in Cincinnati, Chicago and New York -- by arrangement of the Gordon Baking Company -- he strengthened the links that already exist between WOR and WGN, stations that are already on the way to becoming the nucleus of that new chain. And more important, The Ranger goes on to become radio's most enduring contribution to American popular culture -- and one of the best-known fictional characters of all time.

Radio listeners were glued to their sets in horror on the night of March 1, 1932 as NBC and CBS broadcast a steady stream of bulletins detailing the story: the toddler son of aviator Charles A. Lindbergh was kidnapped from his New Jersey home. Perhaps the most poignant radio moment in the entire case comes the day after the kidnapping, as NBC staff announcer Ben Grauer read an urgent message to the kidnapers from Anne Morrow Lindbergh -- giving the recipe for the

baby's special formula. The first chapter of the story came to a tragic conclusion on May 12th, when the child was found dead -- leading to a two-year search for the killer. On September 19, 1934, a German-immigrant carpenter from the Bronx was arrested and charged -- and radio was once again in the thick of coverage, as Bruno Richard Hauptmann was placed on trial for his life -- a trial which, with radio's help, quickly degenerated into a media circus the likes of which wouldn't be seen for another sixty years.

He was more important as an impresario than as a performer -- and the "Fleischmann's Yeast Hour" is the reason why. Rudy Vallee had been on the air for Fleischmann since 1929, broadcasting an hour-long program of dance music, broken up only by the appearance of a single guest star each week. But beginning in October 1932, Vallee and the staff at the J. Walter Thompson agency dramatically revise the program format: de-emphasizing Vallee's performances and turning the spotlight on a continuing parade of guest artists. Big names, famous names, old names and new names -- for the next seven years, the Vallee program features the best that Broadway and Hollywood have to offer -- and Vallee gains a reputation as radio's foremost talent scout. Whether he himself is actually entitled to that reputation is a question that can be debated: some claim he did run the show -- and none claimed this more energetically than Vallee himself -- while others say he was just a front man and embittered JWT staffers did all the work. The truth is probably somewhere in between -- but the importance of the show itself is beyond question: it's the pacesetter for every variety series that would follow.

FDR's first Fireside Chat aired on local radio on March 12, 1933. "My friends", said the President, "I want to tell you what has been done in the last few days, why it has been done, and what the next steps are going to be." In a calm, reasoned, thirteen-minute talk, the new President outlines the steps taken to prevent a full-scale collapse of the nation's banking system -- explaining the complexities of industrial economics in terms that any citizen can understand. This gentle, informal approach projects the atmosphere of a man talking to his neighbors by the fireside -- and CBS-Washington manager Harry Butcher coins an enduring phrase to describe the style: a "fireside chat."

Suggesting that swing music began with Benny Goodman will earn you a derisive, deserved sneer from fans of Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman and other great Harlem bands of the twenties. But that distinctive span of time we think of as the "Swing

Era" did begin with Goodman, and his tenure on the Nabisco "Let's Dance" program. For many listeners, it's their first real exposure to "hot" music -- and the program starts Goodman on the way to being crowned King of Swing. Maybe some people tuned in "Let's Dance" for the mellow melodies of former Clicquot Club Eskimo, Kel Murray, or to rhumba with Xavier Cugat -- but it's Goodman's contribution to this three-hours-a-week series that's earned it a place in history.

"Round and round she goes and where she stops nobody knows". Major Edward Bowes took the nation by storm with his Sunday night new-talent showcase, moving a longstanding local New York feature to a high-profile Sunday night slot on NBC. Never mind that, as a Radio Guide expose reveals, elements of the show are rigged -- the idea of young entertainers from Mudville, USA getting their big break on the air ignites a craze for amateur entertainment that inspires a range of imitators. Few of the Bowes discoveries amount to anything -- but there are a few who stand out, including a skinny singer from Hoboken who appears in September 1935 as a member of a pop quartet. His Bowes experience proves something of a dead end, but fate has other plans in store for Frank Sinatra.

The "Love Story of the Century" transcended national borders, as the people of the Norrie joined with the rest of the English-speaking world in listening to the thin, weary voice of a man who gave up the throne of the world's most powerful empire for the woman he loves. The poignant broadcast by Edward, Duke of Windsor, is the single most-listened-to moment of the 1930s.

Mae West met Charlie McCarthy on December 12, 1937. "Why Don't You Come Play In My --- Woodpile," purred the sultry movie star to a flustered wooden puppet, to the nervous laughter of the studio audience. Earlier in the evening, Mae West had traded mild ribaldries with Don Ameche in the famous "Garden of Eden" sketch as a guest on the Chase and Sanborn Hour -- and it's that sketch that generates all the uproar, thanks to complaints from Catholic religious authorities in New York. But the truly explicit material comes later in the evening in Miss West's innuendo-filled exchange with Charlie McCarthy: possibly the bluest ten minutes ever aired.

Like a lot of legends, the story of Orson Welles and his Martian Invasion has grown with the telling. It's probable that no more than six million people heard the broadcast, and Professor Hadley Cantril in his landmark study of the "invasion" estimated that at most only about a million people were actually fooled -- out of a total population of

around 150 million. Rumor tells us that it caused a near panic in the Norrie when it aired on October 30, 1938.

FINAL CHAPTER WRITTEN IN HISTORY OF OLD LANDMARK¹

I was looking at the year 1928 for items to put in our "What was Happening Then" feature when I stumbled across the following:

What is probably the final chapter in the history of an old landmark at the Norrie location was written Saturday when flames practically destroyed the house in which Jack Riitari, also known as "Riitari Jack" and "Finn Jack" made his home.²

More than 20 years ago, Riitari and his wife, who died many years ago, started a dance hall in a huge structure on the highest point of the Norrie hill, between Oak and Pine streets. The old hall, built of rough boards, unpainted, was the scene of many dances before "Finn Jack" and his wife "got religeon" and turned the dance hall into a church.

Later the building was vacant, save for the rooms occupied by Mr. And Mrs. Riitari, until it was divided into living quarters for several families. One night, 15 years ago, the building caught fire and burned almost to the ground. Driven by a high wind, huge embers were carried almost across the mine caves.

After the fire, Riitari built over the lower part of the house. After his wife's death, he continued to live there.

When the fire department was called shortly after 9 o'clock Saturday night, the house was a mass of flames. The cause of the blaze could not be determined, but it is believed to have started from an overheated stove. Riitari was not at home when the fire started and when the last ember had been extinguished and the wind, at below zero temperature, was rattling the charred boards that were left standing, he had not returned.

No estimate has been made of the loss, but it was believed to be approximately \$1,000.

REMEMBER WHEN? (With Eddie and Joe)

Rubber straps cut from old inner tubes were used as "backstraps" on skis for bindings

How many remember sliding on the snow in "the caves" on a piece of cardboard?

¹ Ironwood Daily Globe, 1/2/1928

² "Finn Jack" was one of several colorful characters that Norrie location produced. He wore a red stocking cap all year round, regardless of the weather. He made his daily round of homes to have a cup of coffee with the owner.

Boys made "rubber guns" and had rubber gun fights

We dug garden worms, put them in a Prince Albert tobacco tin and rode our bike to the river. Then we cut a "Government" pole and took the fishing line which was wrapped around a thermos bottle cork, tied it on and started fishing.

The CYO dances at the Bessemer City Hall

The KDAL Bandstand that came to play records at dances

Roller skating at the Colonial and at Phil's in Kimball

Before Spruce Haven there was Hidden Valley a little farther down the road. It was on a farm which had been owned by some friends of Eddie Sandene's parents.

How about playing knife? How the knife landed is how the score was counted. It was easy to put the knife through someone's tenners doing that.

How about spool tractors, also rubber band powered.

Then there was the big button on a string which we twirled to wind it up and then it would go whir, whir. These did a job in someone's hair.

Every boy had a slingshot, otherwise known as a "linky" in their back pocket. Only the finest stone, about the size of the tip of your thumb, worked best for the shot.

If YOU have a suggestion for "Remember When", send Joe an email at grampa@thecarlsonclan.com. We'll put it in our next issue!

WHAT WAS HAPPENING ON THE RANGE?

JANUARY 1903³

- The Kilties, the famous Scotch-Canadian band played at Pierce's

³ Ironwood News Record

Opera House.

- O.F. Stabler of Ironwood advertised for 500 men to chop wood paying \$1.25 per cord. "Clean, new camps, splendid location, the finest hardwood timber. If you can chop, it will pay you to investigate at once."
- Thos. Finnegan is the new chief of police of Hurley, succeeding John Sealy, recently elected sheriff of Iron county.

JANUARY 1928⁴

- The population of Ironwood was estimated at 20,460 consisting of 3,888 families. There were 3,712 iron miners, 1,350 transportation workers, 1,252 in trades, 637 professionals, 785 domestics and 813 clerks.
- The Bessemer township board voted that roads in the Puritan, Ironton and Davis locations will be plowed in the future.
- Thirty couples attended the dance given at the Elks hall on New Year's Eve by the Married Peoples dancing club of Bessemer. Excellent music was furnished by a Ramsay orchestra.
- On January 6, the Michigan Nighthawks played at a dance at Simonich Hall in Jessieville. Gents paid 15 cents and ladies got in for 10 cents.
- The Irondrome Ballroom in Bessemer hosted the Red Jacket Orchestra. Admission was 75 cents for gents and ladies paid 25 cents. Bus service to Ironwood was free to ladies after the dance.
- The Rex Theatre in Ironwood showed "A Picture for Men who Know Women—and Women who Think they Know Men": Framed, starring Milton Sills. Added attractions included "Felix the Cat" cartoons.
- The Puritan Bluebirds basketball team met the Ramsay Junior Rangers at the Puritan gym. The Bluebirds had been victorious over the Ironton Scarlet Tanagers.
- On January 11-14, everyone flocked to the Gogebic Range Poultry Show in Ironwood at the Schneider Building.

JANUARY 1953⁵

- The Balkan Strings of the Tamburitzans played at the Anvil Palms Tavern hosted by John Jurakovich. The tavern was 1 ½ blocks south of the Anvil School.
- Playing at the Wakefield Theatre was "Lure of the Wilderness"

⁴ Ironwood Daily Globe

⁵ ibid

- starring Jean Peters and Jeffrey Hunter. "Also News and Short Features".
- The Ramsay Theatre showed "Dreamboat" starring Clifton Webb and Ginger Rogers.
 - The Ironwood Theatre had Loretta Young and Jeff Chandler starring in "Because of You".
 - At the Rex in Ironwood was a double feature on January 3: "Mutiny" starring Max Stevens and Angela Lansbury plus Gilbert Roland in "Apache War Smoke.
 - At the Range in Hurley were Maureen O'Sullivan, Edmund Gwenn, Charles Drake and Bonzo in "Bonzo goes to College". (Bonzo was a chimpanzee if you recall).
 - For several weeks, there were ads for the in person entertainment by Vaughn Monroe at the Ironwood High School. He signed autographs at the Johnson Music Store. Also appearing was The Camel Caravan. Admission ranged from \$1.80 to \$3.60.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

There are nearly 600 active and guest members from all over the world in our database.

A membership report of our active, dues-paying membership by State and Country and got these results: There are 27 States and Canada represented in our membership. The majority comes from Michigan and Wisconsin with Illinois a close third. The rest of our members range from one to seven per state with several from Canada.



Our Officers are
Gary Harrington, President
Diane Egan, Vice President
Pam Bretall, Secretary
Eddie Sandene, Treasurer

Our meetings are held at the Bessemer Library on the 2nd Saturday of the month from 10 am to noon
Everyone is invited to attend.
If you are from out-of-town, please stop and visit us.