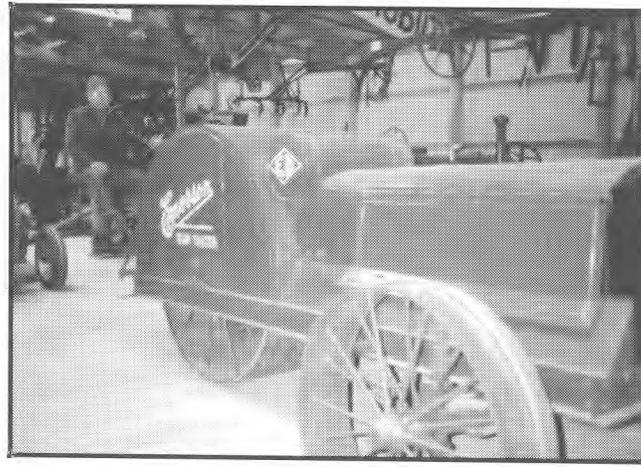

NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 37 DECEMBER 1999 NUMBER 4

YESTERYEAR MEMORIES & TREASURES



Upper photo: Warren Paulson sits behind a 1915 Rockford-made Emerson Brantingham Tractor, the oldest one in his collection.

Lower photo: Restored 1890 cookstove and a round 1905 ice box in a kitchen display at the Paulson's Argyle Road home.

Photos courtesy Helen and Warren Paulson

FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK

This issue features a 1930s attraction, the Paulson Barn Dance, and an on-going collection of memorabilia accumulated, restored and now displayed by Warren and Helen Paulson. One of 12 Paulson children, Warren still lives in the area--a mere three miles from his birthplace. The current Paulson residence on Argyle Road was acreage formerly owned by Helen's father. She has returned to her childhood locale.

Four sisters of Warren survive. Fern Pearson lives in Rolling Green, Rockford; Ruth Haines is in a Rockford nursing home; Phyllis Blair lives in Belvidere and Alice Vandewalker lives in Florida.

I'm indebted to Donald Paulson, Jr. of Burlington, North Carolina, who published a memory book in 1999 about his grandfather's family barn dances. (Copies available from him at 397 Edinburgh Drive, Burlington NC 27215 @ \$5.) Interviews with Warren and Helen, Mildred Washburn, Rose Meyer and Bernard Allen provided additional insights.

We realize that nothing stays the same. With this issue, I'm retiring from editing and publishing *Nuggets*. My files still contain a few more stories I'd like to write and I would be pleased to submit them to a new editor. Thanks for the privilege of bringing Winnebago history and personalities into focus.

Peggy Jensen

Peggy Jensen, Editor

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Presenters are needed for a Sunday, June 4, Cemetery Walk at Rockford's Scandinavian Cemetery on Guilford Road. If you'd be willing to tell the story of a relative or a favorite personage buried there, please call Bob Borden, 968-6700. Previous cemetery walks at Greenwood and Cedar Bluff intrigued both participants and visitors.

1999-2000 officers, elected in October:

President	Lou Suit
Vice-president	Marjorie Maney
Recording/Corresponding Secretary	Jean Lythgoe
Treasurer	Russell Carlson

The society is sponsoring an historical essay contest for area high school and home-schooled seniors. The winner will receive a \$500 scholarship and publication of the essay in *Nuggets of History*.

To fund the scholarship, historical society members are encouraged to make donations over and above membership dues.

Will you help? Send contributions to the Guilford Road address, attention Rockford Historical Society.

BARN DANCE, SATURDAY NIGHT

by
Peggy Dahlberg Jensen

First couple down center
And then you'll divide
Ladies to right, gents to left
Now honor your partner
and corner the same
Swing your corner and waltz
down the lane....

Hundreds of young adults (and often their parents, too) flocked to Paulson's Barn on Saturday evenings, 1935-1941. Located east of Rockford on Paulson Road between Harlem Road and Riverside Drive, this popular destination attracted pleasure-seekers from the surrounding area.

A non-alcoholic facility, it provided opportunities for dancing from traditional squares to waltzes, polkas, schottisches jitterbugging. As a meeting place, it brought singles together. To this day, Paulson family members often hear, "That's where I met my wife or husband."

The Paulson Family

Fremont and Abbie Paulson had relocated from Kirkland in 1920 to this 160-acre farm site. Fremont's farming at Elm-Side included acreages of corn, hay and oats plus dairy cows and hogs. He also worked as a

Winnebago County Road Commissioner. The family included 12 children: John, Myrtle, Ethel, Harold, Fern, Grace, Ruth, Donald, Warren, Alice, Christina, and Phyllis.

Tragedy

Then on November 15, 1934, at 11:30 a.m., tragedy struck. It had been a drought year. Oat and hay crop shortages had prompted Fremont to plant millet, Sudan grass and soybeans (after July rains came) to supplement his supplies. In the fall when the crops were considered dry, straw had been harvested and stored in the barn along with millet and Sudan grass. But on that November day, millet and Sudan grass created a spontaneous combustion. The explosion blew out the end of the barn. Within 45 minutes, the structure had been leveled. Nothing remained.

Rebuilding

In the spring of 1935 a new barn rose where rubble had been. It cost \$3500: \$1800 for materials, \$1700 for labor @ \$1.50 per hour. General contractors Frank Ward and Bob Salley Sr. purchased lumber and material from Ralston's Inc. Argyle/Caledonia. Gravel for cement came from John Kelly's in Roscoe.

Cement was mixed by hand on site from gravel loaded in trucks with hand shovels. Teenage Paulson sons, Donald and Warren, often accompanied the truck drivers to help load gravel. Sometimes they'd be rewarded with a candy bar treat. In true rural spirit, Paulson neighbors and Grange members rallied to help in various ways.

A Barn Dance "Thank you"

Daughter Ruth Paulson and friend Margie Greenlee receive credit for suggesting a thank-you barn dance. On the last Saturday in July 1935, before hay had been stored in the mow, over 600 people flocked to the first Paulson Barn Dance.

And then ...

Its success led to weekly Saturday dances, 9 p.m.-1 a.m. through October. But now admission would be charged: 25

cents for men; 15 cents, women. Following the third dance, Fremont built a permanent stage in the mow to accommodate a five-or six-piece band.

To prepare the floor for dancing, Abbie, Alice and Phyllis not only swept the hay mow every Saturday before the dance, but they also spread cornmeal mixed with grated paraffin to give the floor a surface for dancing.

Bands

At first, the Menno Zimmer band played every dance. Next they alternated Saturdays with the Rhythm-Airs until the latter band played every week. Rhythm-Air members included Bernard "Binky" Allen, trumpet; Russell Smith, violin; Don McKibben, alto sax/clarinet; Wilbur Hendrickson, tenor sax/clarinet; Les Hendrickson, drums; Harry Nelson, emcee; Grace McKibben (mother of Don), piano. Their theme song: "Does Your Heart Beat for Me?" Fremont paid the orchestra \$15 per night.

Allen, the only member still living, describes their style as "ala Dick Jurgens." He remembers a repertoire that included then current favorites such as "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire," "Smoke Gets in Your

Eyes," "Stardust," and "Deep Purple." But for variety and to please the crowds, the band also played polka, schottische, jitterbug, circle two-step and waltz quadrille music. "I hated playing the waltz quadrille," says Allen.

Employees

Among staff members hired by Fremont, Jess Hall of Poplar Grove called the square dances and circle two-step. He received \$1 per event. A local deputy, Gus Peterson, helped to park cars on the farm and up and down the main road. The presence of Deputy Sheriff Thoren maintained order and prevented rowdiness. He received a whopping \$1.50 each Saturday.

Concessions

Abbie and the Grange women operated five-cent concession stands. Abbie sold ice cream bars, pop, candy and snacks from the southwest corner of the mow. The Grange women offered hamburgers, hot dogs and coffee at a downstairs location. Here they had a three-burner kerosene stove for coffee and hot dogs. They prepared hamburgers in a cast iron skillet. Made in advance, they were ready for the crowds during band breaks. Later, Gus and Annie Peterson

took over the downstairs concession.

Offer it and they will come

Word spread throughout the area about these barn dances without "commercials." Fremont did order matchbook covers printed with information and the Grange often placed flyers on car windshields. Occasionally, WROK's Man-on-the-Street would interview Fremont. (*Warren Paulson would appreciate receiving a matchbook cover if someone is willing to part with it.*)

The end

The days of carefree dancing came to an end in 1941. Then the Paulsons discontinued their Saturday barn dances. Young men had gone off to war following Pearl Harbor; gas rationing curtailed travel except for necessities.

Even so, Bob Keller, a local barber, rented the barn and tried to maintain the dances. The crowds no longer came and the last dance occurred, July 1942.

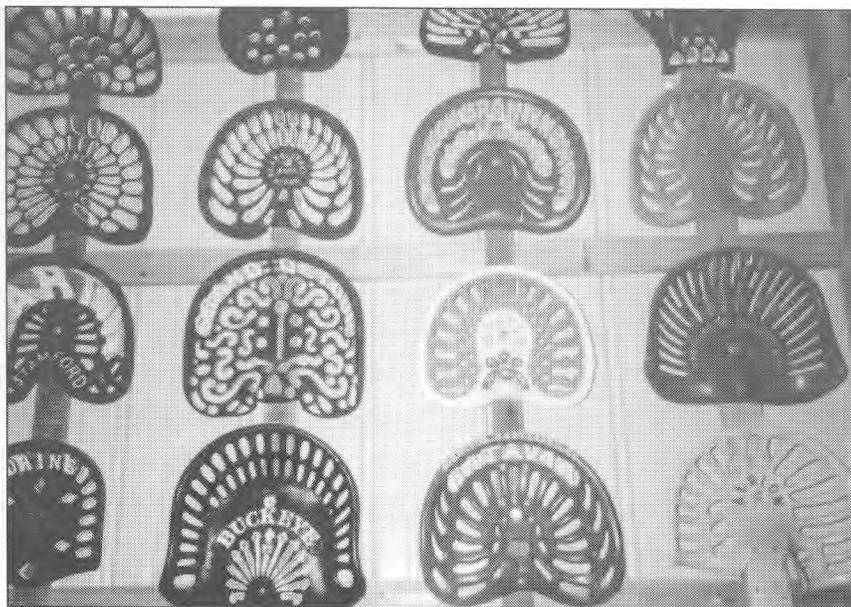
An era had ended. But memories lingered, especially among those who had met a life partner at Paulson Barn Dances.



Warren admires one of his 300-plus miniature farm equipment pieces.



Helen entertains guests with a happy smile and a lively piano-roll music.



Warren displays his 520-piece collection of cast iron seats by hanging them on the wall.



Warren and two friends--Merle Johnson and Stan Jensen--pose with Warren's favorite a 1948 McCormick Orchard Tractor.



A general view of the barn display shows tools and signs hanging from walls and ceiling. In the foreground, left, a Montgomery Ward gas engine power unit; right, a 1902 Emerson-Brantingham carriage.

Barn Dance Matches

Harold and Mildred

Washburn recently celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary. They met in 1937 at the dance and married five months later. Mildred says, "I lived on the farm next door to the Paulsons. I came to the dances with my parents. My mother worked at the Beaver Valley Grange concession stand selling hot dogs, hamburgers and coffee--all for five cents." "Harold, originally from Oklahoma," Mildred adds, "came to the dances with his parents from the Genoa area."

Rose Guler met **Herbert Meyer** at the Paulson Barn Dances. Then, about 18-20 years of age, she and "a bunch of girls" would frequent various dance places, including also New Milford and Perryville Grange events. Rose and a friend shared driving either in Rose's Model A Ford or in a friend's "old Plymouth." The Guler-Meyer marriage survived 50 years until Herbert's death in 1992. They enjoyed shared athletic interests, especially fishing and bowling.

Bette McGuire, a high school friend of Alice Paulson, came to the dances from Rockford with her brother Russell, "Red." Even

an October snowstorm didn't prevent them from making the all-important eight-mile trip. With visibility blurred it was almost impossible to see the road. Red stood on the running board of their Model A Ford to guide Bette at the wheel. **Alice** introduced her **brother Donald** to **Bette**. They, too, married.

Other marriage duos "made in the barn" include **Alice Paulson** and **Bob Vandewalker**, **Bob** and **Ila Price**; and **Les** and **Gladys Gill**.

Parental approval?

Not all parents approved of their teens attending these dances. Helen Hull, whose parents farmed on Argyle Road said, "I went once or twice without my parents knowledge. My fun ended when on a Sunday morning at church in the presence of my parents, one of the boys asked, 'How did you like the dance?'" Mortified at the disclosure, Helen never returned.

Helen and Warren

But Warren Paulson did meet his intended in a barn. He says of his 56-year marriage, "I met Helen in a hay mow." Warren explains, "Some of the guys and I would shoot pool at the Argyle Pool Hall. When we'd spent our

dimes or quarters, we head over to the Hull barn. We'd play pingpong and shoot baskets in the hay mow." Helen's parents approved of that kind of entertainment.

Life on a farm

Helen's father Uriah Hull had purchased a 60-acre farm on Argyle Road in 1939. The family moved from a "modern" home in Loves Park to a country site without a furnace and no indoor plumbing. "My mother Dora and I cried for days," says Helen of the drastic change in lifestyle. She commuted to Harlem High School, retaining association with friends. A turning point in accepting rural life happened, says Helen, "When my brother put me on a tractor."

Uriah Hull, a meticulous farmer, posed problems for each state milk inspector. Finding nothing amiss, each one explained, "I have to write something down or my superiors will think I didn't come here."

1943

Warren and Helen married in 1943 and farmed on Paulson Road next door to his parents farm. Once again Helen experienced "primitive" conditions. They did not have electricity until 1948 and waited until 1958 for indoor

plumbing. Helen's earlier tractor experience prepared her for plowing and cultivating on this farm.

Farmer-turned-salesman

Meanwhile Warren added a supplemental vocation. He began selling farm machinery in 1957. He dealt in short lines such as Badger Northland, New idea, and Allied. "I climbed into silos for 33 years," he says of sales related to barn cleaners, silo unloaders, manure handling, plus haying and feeding equipment. He gradually diminished his own farm activities, selling his cows in 1965. His only son Wayne was not interested in the family farming tradition.

A Yen for the Past

Warren's sales vocation led indirectly to an avocation. In 1962, he'd heard about an estate settlement in Caledonia. Among items for sale, a 1928 Model A Ford would go to the highest bidder. Warren's bid exceeded others by \$5. He went home with the car, the first of his collectibles. Next he purchased a 1924 Model T Ford. And then a houseful of antique tools. He stored farm equipment offered in trade when he sold newer pieces. He acquired old tin advertising signs, cast iron seats for

horse-drawn machinery, tractors, hay forks, plows, corn planters, toy versions, hog oilers, and other memorabilia connected with farming. The collecting bug had bitten Warren.

Helen's hobby

Helen, too, developed an interest in collecting. She had received some of her mother-in-law's china and glassware. That led to her interest in Amberina glassware, R.S. Prussia China, Hummel plates, souvenir spoons, cast iron dogs and more.

Back to Argyle Road

In 1970, Warren and Helen knew that her father had put his 60 acres up for sale. He had received an offer of \$500 per acre. Warren asked, "Would you sell it to me for the same price?" His father-in-law agreed. That purchase provided a "retirement plan" for Helen and Warren. They built a home on the Argyle Road property in 1989.

Since then, they've rented their 160-acre farm on Paulson Road. Warren moved three miles from the home where he was born and Helen lives on the property where she spent her teenage years.

Landmarks

Visitors have no trouble locating the Paulson acres. A

pair of bowling ball posts mark the driveway; tractor wheels adorn the mailbox; a sign reads "District of Kintyre." (Warren explains that area Scottish settlers emigrated from County Kintyre. He acknowledges that fact with his sign.)

Lining a block-long winding road that leads to the home, a lifesize "shadow" farmer figure waves a flag and sports a "Hi" sign. Another sign reads: "Please watch out for old folks. Thanks." Scattered in the yard, visitors see rusting hints of Warren's collection: a hay loader, a road grader, a 1921 Emerson Brantingham tractor (with missing parts); and a 1920 Fordson tractor.

A barn for the collection

To the right a 170-foot long barn and shed house Warren's ever-expanding collection of farm memorabilia. Among the treasured acquisitions he values his oldest farm tractor, a 1915 Rockford-made Emerson Brantingham. In 1994, Warren drove it in the July 4th parade.

Always room for more

Not yet satisfied with the collection's scope, Warren and Helen travel to distant states-- such as South Dakota and Missouri-- to attend auctions.

Their home

Built on a hillside with a southern exposure overlooking a 3/4-acre pond, the Paulson's home houses other collectibles. Helen displays china, glassware, plates and other pieces in attractive cabinets, breakfronts and on shelves in kitchen, dining and living rooms. Cast iron dogs huddle along baseboards. Her mother's braided rag rugs add country charm to kitchen and dining areas.

There's more!

Downstairs, in a display kitchen area, an 1890 cook stove, restored to shiny black by Warren, serves as a repository for other collectibles including a three-iron holder. A white circular ice box, vintage 1905, sits next to it. A table is set with period dishes and flatware; cupboards and counters overflow with utensils. Again, tasteful displays eliminate any suggestion of clutter.

Music, too

A player piano stands against an inner wall ready to entertain with songs. Helen precedes visitors downstairs so that she can welcome them with songs. She might select favorites such as "Hello Dolly," "It's a Long,

Long Way to Tipperary," "When Irish Eyes are Smiling," "Goodnight Irene," or "Marizy Doats."

Toys

Besides about 35 children's pedal farm implement toys in the outdoor barn, Warren has another collection indoors. A toy room, with floor to ceiling shelves, houses over 300 miniature tractors and farm equipment pieces.

This hospitable couple welcome visitors for guided tours, including both barn and house, with no charge. (Call 885-3846 to schedule a visit.)

The Paulson's passion for collecting, restoring and maintaining yesteryear's treasures resembles a full-time vocation. Warren points to a sign in his barn:

"God put me on earth to do a certain number of things.

I'm so far behind now, I'm never going to die."

Sources: Donald Paulson Jr., *Paulson Barn Dances*, 1999. Blum, Martha. *Illinois Agrinews*, November 7, 1997. Interviews with Warren and Helen Paulson, Mildred Washburn, Rose Meyer, and Bernard Allen.

NUGGETS OF HISTORY, is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, 6526 Springbrook Rd., Rockford, Illinois, 61114. Society members receive NUGGETS upon payment of annual dues. New rates, effective January 1, 1998: Family @ \$15, Individual @ \$10, Contributing member @ \$25, Life member @ \$150. Mail check to: Membership Chairman, Rockford Historical Society, 6799 Guilford Rd., Rockford IL 61107.

Statement of Purpose: To enlighten and to educate people about their place of residence, to entertain with stories and fact, and to enrich lives regarding what is available to enjoy, to treasure and to honor.

1999-2000 Officers

President	Lou Suit
Vice-president	Marjorie Maney
Editor Emeritus	Robert Borden
Editor/Publisher	Peggy Dahlberg Jensen
Contributing Editor	Hazel M. Hyde
Circulation Manager	Richard J. Marsh

We welcome manuscripts and photos, related to area historical events and personalities, for publication consideration. We reserve the right to edit and to condense. For return, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Send to: NUGGETS EDITOR, ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 6799 GUILFORD ROAD
ROCKFORD IL 61107

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
6799 Guilford Rd.
Rockford IL 61107

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
ROCKFORD, IL.
PERMIT NO. 320