



HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

SECOND QUARTER
NEWSLETTER – 2022

"from past generations to future generations"

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.” -Anonymous Author

Happy Spring to all our friends and supporters. We have all been waiting for these days of more daylight and warmer weather. What a joy to know however gloomy the day may be spring will come.

Hopefully we are moving forward from the Covid virus concerns and will be able to call those days history. The new concern we have is due to the war in Ukraine. This brings reminders of the wars our families have suffered through. Some of those experiences were of those who personally served our country. Other history preserved at our museums is from the loved ones who waited for them to return. Currently the main display at 190 S Main is an exhibit of artifacts from those days.

Coming in May is an outstanding exhibit created by Carolyn Pratt of the book *Growing Seasons* by her mother Elsie L. Splear, illustrated by Ken Stark. This is a nostalgic display the life of a farm family in the early 1900s. It is especially exciting for us to have the opportunity to share this family story with you as it actually took place in our own community. Many good things have been happening during the last couple months. To name a few:

- 1) We have a new sign on the front of 190 S. Main.
- 2) New front Window at Anderson House, strong winds caused the original that had a flaw to break. See the picture in this issue of the men from Commercial Glazing Inc. making the job look easy. Thanks for restoring our good look.
- 3) We have a new website. Check it out at herscherhistory.org. It is a work in progress but looking good already.
- 4) Judy Witheft has brought her skills to help create the website but is also assisting with other technical knowledge in the office.
- 5) New shelving for the benefit of more storage and ability to organize our collections has been completed. Thanks to Duane Wright.
- 6) Both 190 S. Main and The Anderson House have had some changes. Thanks to those who have made that happen.

Please follow our Facebook page - Herscher Area Historical Society, join our Facebook group - Herscher Area Historical Society/Kankakee County West, and visit our website above to see what is new. My appreciation to all who volunteer in so many ways to HAHS.

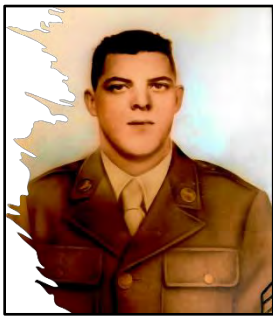
Carol Desch
HAHS President

MISSION STATEMENT

Herscher Area Historical Society's purpose is to capture and preserve history and artifacts related to Herscher and the surrounding area from past generations to future generations.

“KOREAN MEMORIES OF CORP THEODORE WRIGHT”

by Judy Witheft



On Sunday, February 6, 2022 at the Herscher Village Hall, Drew Wright presented “Korean Memories of Corp Theodore Wright.” Drew’s program was about his great uncle, Corporal Theodore J. Wright, the son of Van and Dollie Wright. The program

included letters that Teddy wrote home to his family describing his journeys and experiences while in the Army and Korean Conflict as Corporal Wright, RA 16 242 076, Corps of Engineers. The letters that we have in our possession began November 18, 1948, while in Stuttgart, Germany. Multiple letters to Teddy’s family were discovered in a box of keepsakes. The last letter received from Teddy was dated May 10, 1951 and was sent from South Korea. The letters described the many sites that Teddy was able to see while traveling and the personal situations he experienced while serving his country. Each letter asked about his mother, father, brothers, and sisters. The importance of having paper and stamps to write home was always a concern for Teddy. Personal notes about the progress of the farming back home in Herscher and even who his sisters’ current boyfriends were showed Teddy’s heart was always thinking of family.

Drew was able to track the journey that Teddy and his fellow soldiers were taking by the letters and dates. He started out in Germany from his letter in November of 1948. Then he moved to Busan, South Korea, then Ulsan, South Korea, and then upward to the northwestern part in Yongdungpo (Seoul), South Korea. In many of the letters, Teddy expressed that things were improving and he would be heading for home soon. Teddy was a military mechanic and bridge builder. It appears from the information we gathered that Teddy did not graduate from high school – attending only 2 (maybe 3 years) at Herscher High School. His love of mechanics and it is said his great knowledge of math drew Teddy to enlist in the Army in November of 1946. Teddy was able to work with and teach many soldiers on how to repair large equipment, which was being damaged by mines. The letters on the bridge repairs were probably the most hurting to read.

He talked about repairing bridges at night only, during the cold winter season, and



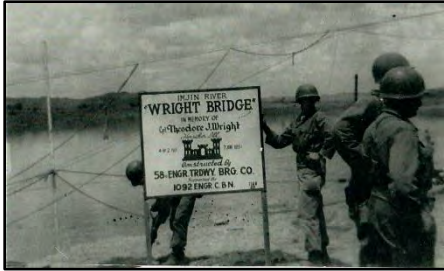
wading thru the water with ice chunks so large they would knock you over if you were hit by one. One of the repairs lasted for over 48 hours straight in the freezing water; however, the crew was successful in repairing the bridge so the supplies could be delivered.

Teddy’s sister, Alta Merrill, was lucky enough to receive an email from one of the men that was in Teddy’s command. He was able to give us a few events that led to the death of Corporal Wright. His letter read as follows: “We had been given the mission of installing a bridge far upstream across the Imjin. After reconnecting the site, nothing appeared unusual except the bridge assembly area was small and would be congested. Shortly after we moved onto the site, several rounds of indirect fire came in close to us. Someone made the decision that we would move back offsite and return during the night to assemble our float bridge under blackout conditions. We returned in the dark and within minutes there was a loud explosion in our assembly area. Because it was close, I could not differentiate the explosion from an incoming round or a mine. I decided it was most probably an incoming round because we had received some earlier. Since we were working under total blackout conditions and based on the assumption the explosion was from incoming fire, we began pulling back off the site. Then, it was determined our truck-mounted air compressor had hit a mine. After we recovered Cpl Wright and cleared the area, I encountered the 1 Corps Engineer and told him of the situation. Although bridging requirements, primarily on the Imjin River, did not slow down, being located in one place gave us a chance to improve living conditions. As part of those improvements, we erected a structure to provide recognition of the loss of two of our comrades – Cpl Theodore J. Wright, June 6, 1951 and Pfc Carl R. Gibbons, Aug. 1, 1951. – and to record the bridges we had constructed.”

Although the current surviving family members have little memory or some never knew Teddy, we are very grateful that many of his letters were kept so that our family could get to know the man he was while

serving his country. Using the internet, we have also been able to research locations and bridges that Teddy may have constructed and/or repaired while in Korea.

Corporal Theodore J. Wright was born September 1, 1928. Ted entered the Army in November of 1946. He was a member of the 58th Engineer Treadway Bridge Company, U.S. Army. Ted was the son of Van and Dollie Wright, brother to Edward and Orville Wright and sisters – Doris Wilson,



Mary Pelehowski, Dolores Wright, and Alta Merrill. Ted died in the service of his country on June 6, 1951 as a result of enemy action on

the front lines in Korea. Along with a memorial structure built by the bridge Ted was killed on, he also received a Purple Heart.

This journey with Teddy's memories makes us thankful and appreciative of all of our men and women in service in the past and those currently fighting for the freedom and the many privileges we have. Drew emphasized that we should take time to say a prayer for all of our service men and women and give them appreciation each day.

Rena and Bob Eich

by Carol Webber

Rena Eich was born April 2, 1941, in Reddick, Illinois. Her parents are Francis (Frank) M., Sr., and Zelma (Milling) Guest.

Rena's parents welcomed eight children: Francis M. (Mick), Jr., Mary Lou Guest Ericsson, Inez Guest, Kay Guest Smith, twins John (Jack) Carl Guest and Jean Carol Guest Boiling, and Verla Guest Jordan. Only Mary Lou and Verla survive today with Rena.

Rena remembers, "I was only four years old when my dad went to Chicago on the local train for a physical exam for the draft for World War II." However, since the year was 1945, the War soon ended, and Frank was honorably discharged in order to return to Reddick to support his wife and eight children.

Frank was a truck driver and drove to Kankakee to the "ice house" on the west side of Kankakee to pick up blocks of ice to deliver to homes with "ice boxes." The ice was chopped in the winter from the Kankakee River. During harvest season, he hauled grain for area farmers. In 1947, Frank Guest became the Reddick postmaster for which he became well known in the West County.

"We lived on Route 17 in Reddick in Kankakee County," Rena remembers, "and the County line between Livingston and Kankakee Counties was just west of our home. If we decided to 'run away' to the next County, we just jogged west from our home."

Her family had four gardens, growing food items for their meals. "One garden was in our own yard, but the others were scattered around town. We cut grass for one lady in return for the use of her garden land for our vegetables. At harvest time, we did a lot of canning and trading of vegetables so that we would have food for the winter months." Her grandparents lived near Essex and had an orchard with fruit trees (with the fruit to can) and cows, whose milk produced butter and other products for the family. Rena remembers working in those gardens and helping harvest and prepare the food.

"When we were young," Rena recalls, "we found ways to entertain ourselves by walking along the railroad tracks in Reddick (the trains were fast and dangerous), playing hopscotch, jump rope, and races, as well as putting on our made-up plays with costumes and a blanket taped up to cover the doorway between the dining room and living room for the stage curtain. I made up a game of bobbing for plastic Easter eggs instead of apples. Everyone played; great fun." Rena



GARAGE SALE

May 13, 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM
May 14, 8:30 AM – NOON
161 W. Myrtle, Herscher

MUSEUM HOURS

Main Street Museum

190 S. Main, Herscher
Open Fridays 9-11 AM
and the First Sunday of
Each Month 1-3 PM

Anderson House

161 W. Myrtle, Herscher
Open the First Sunday of
Each Month 1-3 PM

Museum Board Meetings take place at the Anderson House at 4:00pm on the Fourth Monday of each month. Exceptions will be posted at 190 S. Main and on our website at herscherhistory.org. All members are welcome to attend.

Call the Museum at 815-426-2627 to visit the museums at a time convenient for you.

wore poodle skirts, bobby socks, and black and white saddle shoes like so many of her friends and classmates. She fondly remembers playing the Monopoly board game, scavenger hunts, and buried treasure hunts.



Rena commented: "After the depression, our family had shoe stamps and sugar stamps, and we would trade with our neighbors and relatives. There were good memories, but also some hardships for our large family. We never had enough shoe stamps for the ten members of our family, and

often I would put cardboard in the sole of my shoes and continue wearing them. My grandparents often had extra shoe stamps for us."

She commented that shoes were ordered from Montgomery Ward's catalog and arrived by mail. "We had to carry water from the neighbor's well since we had no running water and used a cook stove, heating it with cobs and coal. When I was 16 years old, my dad put in the plumbing for running water and a shower."

Rena remembers when she got her driver's license by going to Kankakee to take the driving test in a Studebaker, after high school driver's education class.

She played the drums in the Reddick High School band; Mr. Fair, the band teacher, chose the instruments for each student to play, and all her siblings played in the band...saxophone, French horn, flute, and others. Rena and her siblings continued to play even after high school, and when the family met for Christmas, each brought the instrument to play together. Each had good musical talent, and the talent continues through the next generations. "Even this Christmas, when our family met at our daughter Lesa's home for the holiday, the children and grandchildren brought their instruments to play."

Rena graduated from Reddick High School and then attended St. Mary's School of X-ray Technology in Kankakee, from where she graduated in 1961. Both Rena's parents and all eight of the children graduated from Reddick High School.

She met her future husband, Bob Eich, at the Chris's Lounge in Dwight, Illinois. "It was a place in Dwight where people went after work to enjoy the evening, and by chance we met there," Rena remembered, and 62 years ago they were married on February 11, 1961, at St. Rose Roman Catholic Church

in Kankakee, near where she had attended X-ray training. When first married, the couple lived in Campus.

Interestingly, in 1961, Bob was hired at the St. James Hospital, in Pontiac, IL, as the Engineer for the hospital, and Rena then was hired as an X-Ray Technician at the hospital. In 1969, when Bob was hired as Chief Engineer for Joliet Junior College for its new construction site, the family moved to Joliet.



Newlyweds Make Home In Campus

After reviewing the positive aspects of Herscher and its school district, Bob and Rena agreed to move to Herscher to begin a business to care for the plumbing and heating needs of Herscher and the surrounding area. Rena has been an integral part of the success of their business, along with Corey and so many talented workers.

Besides helping with the family business, Rena also worked in Herscher for Dr. Sinha for five years and for Dr. Dubravec for ten years. Both doctors had offices on Main Street near the post office. Her work included both X-raying patients and taking EKGs in the Herscher doctors' offices.

For 49 years, Rena and Bob have lived in Herscher, six years at 275 East Myrtle where they first had their business location. Then, after building a new business site on Tobey Drive, the family lived for 43 years at their home at 156 East Fourth, very near the Herscher Intermediate School and across the street from St. Margaret Mary's Roman Catholic Church.

Bob and Rena's great joys are family. Their four children include their oldest son Michael, now deceased.

*Lesa Eich Kline (59) lives in Saunemin and has retired from a successful career as music/band director for Prairie Central High School in Fairbury. Lisa plays the Alto Saxophone and joins the Pontiac Community Band in the summer. Lesa's son is Eric Hall (40) who is the band director at Dwight High School. Eric plays the trombone. Eric's wife Amanda teaches music in Odell and plays the oboe. Eric and Amanda's children (Bob and Rena's great-grandchildren) are Addison Hall (13) who plays flute, Kylie Hall (12) who plays trombone, and Harper Hall (4) who plays.

*Steven Eich (57) lives in LaGrange and works as an electrical engineer in Chicago. "Steve runs, bicycles, or takes the Metra to work from LaGrange," reported

Rena. He too plays the trombone. Steven's wife is Anna who has a home business as a translator with her German heritage. Their children are Linnëa (21) who is a student at Lake Forest College in archeology and who plays the flute and guitar and Emerson (18) a graduate of Lyons Township High School who plays the piano, organ, bass guitar, and tuba.

*Corey Eich (52) lives in Herscher with his wife Loretta and daughter Bella (11). Corey began working with Bob in the R. Eich and Sons Heating, Plumbing, and Air Conditioning business when Corey was 18 years old and mastered his craft through 34 years of service to the Herscher and surrounding communities. Since the Eichs have retired, Corey now has been named Power Plant Engineer at Riverside Medical Center. Loretta and Corey married after attending Herscher High School; their son Trevor died at birth. Daughter Bella attends Limestone Middle School and plays the flute and excels in her schoolwork.

Rena is not a big fan of Labor Day and its busy activities; however, she does enjoy visiting with friends, playing a great game of bridge, and golfing at the Shamrock Golf Course.

Her words to live by are "the customer is always right," which served her family well with the many years in business in Herscher. She also likes the phrase TGIF!

Robert (Bob) L. Eich was born May 21, 1936, in Campus, Illinois, the son of Roy and Viola Zeller Eich.

Bob's siblings are Evenlyn (Evie) Eich Hanlin and James (Jim) Eich, who are deceased, plus Gene Eich, Charles (Chuck) Eich, Leroy Eich, Gary Eich, and David Eich.

"Our family moved from Campus to Chicago from 1936 to 1937 in order for my dad to find work to support our family. We lived in a house at 3600 South Palina, and my dad worked as a Chicago Police Officer." The family did move back to Campus at the south end of town, but Bob reports, "We were very poor, and I had to start working at 13 years of age during the World War II years. Many items were

rationed after that war ended, but conditions did get better in the following years.

"As a teen, I had a job taking care of the milk cows which my older brothers milked. I also worked in the family garden. We grew many items for our family meals, such as corn, peas, tomatoes, beans, and lots of potatoes, which were canned and stored in the basement for winter. We had fruit trees for canning that crop also."

Bob said one of his tasks was to take the four quarts of glass bottles of milk "with three inches of cream on top" to customers on a route and pick up the empty bottles for refills. "We made butter and cottage cheese also."

Bob remembers his dad getting a job at the Joliet Arsenal in 1940, and he vividly remembers his grandparents, uncles, and his family listening on that fateful Sunday when Pearl Harbor was bombed. "We were all around the radio listening to the details, and I was told to be quiet so they could hear the words. My six uncles all joined the services."

The railroad was an important part of the Campus community, bringing goods and transporting products north from the local farmers. "The trains seemed to stop in campus to fill up with water for the steam engines. One time a troop train came through, and the train seemed to be delayed as I watched as the soldiers got off to take a break. One of the soldiers gave me his mess kit with the stainless steel eating utensils, and I thought I had a great prize. The soldiers also went to the tavern and completely purchased every potable item in the place," reported Bob. "When the War was over, the troop trains still stopped in Campus, and the soldiers still partied."

Besides taking care of the two cows for the family, Bob also had the job of leading the gentle work horse from McGuire's barn in the middle of town north to the tile yard, where the horse would pull the trailers of tile to various locations in the tile company's yard. Then, Bob returned the horse to the barn and fed and provided water for it. "One day when I was in fifth grade and leading Dobbin, the horse, the eighth grade bully Dick approached us. Dick always picked on me and tried to tear the patches off the knees of my jeans, plus he taunted the girls in our school of all eight grades. His mother was the upper grades teacher, and Dick was fully a head taller than any of us students and was really mean. Dick took a rock and threw it at Dobbin, striking the horse on the head harshly. I just came unglued," Bob remembers, "and I beat that kid until he was crying



on the ground. My grandpa came by about that time, and instead of scolding me, Grandpa said to Dick, "You got what you had coming."

Later that day, the teacher/mother and Dick stopped by the Eich home to report that Bob had beaten the son. Bob knew he was guilty of the beating, and fortunately Grandpa intervened again and explained how Dick had injured the work horse and thus deserved the retribution. "The next day," Bob reports, "I was the hero of the whole school. Dick acted better from then on, and my school days were definitely more enjoyable."

Bob remembers that for fun, "I went fishing in the Campus Pond and played baseball in the school yard with the neighborhood kids."

When Bob was in the eighth grade in Campus and about to graduate to Reddick High School in 1950, a tragedy occurred that he and many others will never forget. The Banner Blue train was barreling down the tracks at its usual 90 miles per hour near the school. A carload of seven school children and driver Mr. Kane were crossing the tracks as the train streaked by, smashing the car and killing everyone inside. "I heard the noise and saw the smoke and debris in the air and went to investigate. As I got to the bridge, I noticed the head of a student on the bridge and immediately turned around, beginning to realize the great tragedy I was seeing. Three of my eighth grade classmates were in that vehicle, so there was no graduation, and our lives were forever affected," Bob recalls sadly. The train was going so fast that it could not get stopped until it reached Cardiff.

In 1953, at 17 years old, Bob applied for an apprentice plumber's license, and he says, "I worked under my dad Roy who was a licensed plumber. Roy was the plumber at the Dwight Veterans' Home as well as serving nearby communities."

In 1956 when Bob was 20 years old, he got his Illinois State Plumbers License and worked in Dwight for Moyemonts Plumbing and Heating until 1961, when he was employed by St. James Hospital in Pontiac, IL. He had married Rena Guest on February 11, 1961, so the couple moved to Pontiac, where Rena worked for St. James Hospital as an X-ray technician.

A wonderful opportunity was offered to Bob in 1969 when he was hired by Joliet Junior College (the first Junior College in the United States) as Chief Engineer of the new buildings and to establish the Maintenance Department for the Junior College. The family lived in Joliet for the next several years as he

helped create that new maintenance system. He enjoyed the job very much.

Bob asked the JJC Dean of Students to provide him with a list of area schools that were fiscally and educationally sound. The list included Herscher and New Lenox. The Eich family wanted to move to a good educational location where the Eichs could operate a plumbing and heating business dealing with customers.

Bob drove to Herscher, since his brother worked at the Natural Gas Plant and he knew Bill Leiser. "As I drove to the front of the school on Main Street, Clyde Diefenbach was sweeping the sidewalk, and so I asked him who I could talk with about the school. Clyde took me directly to Superintendent Kenneth Seebach," remembers Bob. "I told Mr. Seebach that I had done some research and that the Herscher School District had a reputation for being fiscally and educationally sound. That put the biggest smile on Mr. Seebach's face, and he proceeded to give me the grand tour of the school buildings once he learned I wanted to start a plumbing business."

Mr. Seebach told Bob, "We really need a plumber in Herscher, and if you move here and start a business, I will guarantee you three years' work just in our school system, which includes several schools." Bob reports, "Mr. Seebach was wrong; he supplied us with five years' of work in the school system since there were many repairs to be made."



The Eich family moved to Herscher in 1973 to open and operate a plumbing and heating business. "I was lucky to have met School Superintendent Kenneth Seebach; he was instrumental in our moving to Herscher and starting this venture. I will always be thankful to him," Bob commented.

Over the years, he and Rena have met some great people, helped with important projects, and remember some interesting events. For the couple's 50th wedding anniversary, a celebration was held at the Dwight Country Club with family and friends.

While a successful businessman in Herscher, Bob also was an integral part of the community. Bob reports, "In early 1973, I was approached by the then-Fire Chief Spud Lambert, asking me to join the Pilot Township Fire Department as a volunteer. I served

with the Fire Department until I retired in 2013, after 40 years. Chief Al Ramsey presented me with my #13 helmet as a retirement gift.”

Bob said that during his years with the fire department, “We helped with many fires and accidents. Besides those negatives, we all enjoyed the planning and donating our time for the annual Fireman’s Ball and the many fish fries. Also, in the early years, we competed in Water Barrel Fighting with other communities.” Bob explained, “Water Barrel Fighting is a time when you find out what a ‘team’ is for: it is much easier to handle a water-powered heavy hose with five people than by yourself.”



Son Corey followed Bob by serving as a Volunteer Fireman for 32 years, achieving the title of Assistant Chief for 14 years. Corey was instrumental in bringing Santa to Herscher for 29 years.

Also, Bob was elected to the Village of Herscher



In front, Village president Bob Eich and clerk Audrey Sommer, and in back, trustees Jim Feller, Earl Datwiler and Marie Hendrix took their oaths after being elected to the Herscher village board 25 years ago.

Board in 1975 when Jim Orrison was Village President. Bob commented, “My goal was to obtain a good water supply for the Village. With the help of some of the Natural Gas Company’s

records, we discovered a good supply of water three miles east of Herscher on Route 115. The test well drilled in 1977 delivered 900 gallons of water per minute, and the water quality was very good.”

After that, permission was granted by the Village of Herscher to install a water service line for those three miles at a cost of \$300,000, and with that, Bob says, “We have the best water in the State of Illinois.” Bob was elected Village President in 1978 and served until 1981. One of the major events of his term was the Centennial Celebration. “Serving as Village President is a good education for all residents in the Village,” Bob commented.

Bob joined the Herscher Lions Club, is still a member, and served several years as President of the local Lions Club. “During that time, I worked on the Board to establish and build the new Legion Community Center, which opened in 1998, and is an

important part of the Herscher Community.” Bob received the Community Service Award from the Herscher Chamber of Commerce in 2013 at the Herscher Community Building.

After almost 50 years of serving the County West community with their plumbing and heating needs, Bob and Rena sold their business and are now retired. They lived at 275 West Myrtle for 6 years with their original business site and at their current location 156 East Fourth for now 43 years when they built a new business site on Tobey Drive.



Many, many area residents are so grateful for the friendly, helpful, and efficient service provided all those years from Clifton to Joliet, from Dwight to Kankakee, and all places County West.

Bob comments that there were no “good old days” since he always had to work, and Labor Day was always the same with many tasks to do. His words to live by are that he wishes more young people would be willing to learn the trades and work with their hands. Plus, “putting in a good day’s work has never hurt anyone as far as I know.”

WE HAVE A WEBSITE!

Visit our new website at herscherhistory.org to learn more about the Herscher Area Historical Society and see some of the interesting things we do.

Contact Us:

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