



# HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

## FIRST QUARTER NEWSLETTER – 2024

*"from past generations to future generations"*

### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Looking back over 2023 to projects and goals accomplished, we now look to 2024 with the same desire to open new doors into the history of the area.

Volunteers planned and hosted events that featured "Through the Century," a spring Bridal Show where granddaughters and great granddaughters modeled their historic bridal attire, and also a summer sports display and get-together of early local sports figures. These are the stories that come alive.

We are always pleased when someone might share perhaps an old letter that may have been safely tucked away for years or a picture gathering dust in the attic. Knowing the beginnings and/or struggles, successes, and failures enlightens us all about the folks in this historical area. Preserving what we have acquired for the generations to follow is a meaningful goal for this new year.

There are various ways to volunteer including writing an article about your family or business history, hosting one Sunday a year for 2 hours in either of our museums, suggesting or presenting a program of historic significance, or working on a display. Perhaps your interest would be to enter donated items into a computer. Are you handy with a hammer or paintbrush? There is a place for you. Everyone has a "seat at the table!"

Many heartfelt thanks go out to those volunteers that have worked towards the new facelift on main street, maintained the yard at the Anderson House, helped with our Christmas decor sale and bake sale, written stories, researched, planned events, made repairs, set up displays, filed and kept minutes and finances in order, contributed to the news, put together the quarterly, helped in mailings.....and all this to hold on to history.



The museums evolve because of you and are preserved FOR you. Join us!

Mary Kirstein  
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.*

## CHRISTMAS DÉCOR & BAKE SALE A SUCCESS



The 5th Annual Christmas Decor & Bake Sale was held at the Anderson House on November 11th and 12th. With donations from the community, an array of holiday decorations were offered for sale, along with fresh baked goods made by our Museum Board members and other volunteers. There was a great turnout for the event with support from the community. Board member Judy Witheft said, "People came specifically looking for Christmas Village Sets." She said the artificial trees and dishware also sold quickly. Vintage items were also an interesting feature for many visitors. At the bake sale, there was an array of items



from pear jam to breads and cookies. The most popular items were the homemade pies. Items left over from the sale were taken to the Herscher Legion Community Building Santa Shop on November 26th. All items at the Santa Shop were \$10 and under and geared towards kids shopping for their families' gifts. Stuffed animals and holiday ornaments seemed to move off the shelf the quickest. Funds raised from these sales are used to update and expand our museums. As you take down this year's holiday decorations, if you have items you would like to donate for next year's sale, please contact the museum to arrange a drop-off time. Drop-off dates continue until January 15, 2024. You can contact us by phone at 815-426-2627 (leave a message) or by email at [herscherareahistory@gmail.com](mailto:herscherareahistory@gmail.com).



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## 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 on the Fourth Monday of each month at 6:00pm in the spring and summer and at 4:00pm in the fall and winter. Exceptions will be posted at 190 S. Main and on our website at [herscherhistory.org](http://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.

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## THIS “N” THAT #2

by Bob Voss

In one of our past newsletters I asked:

- Does anyone know who Vernon Street was named after?
  - I got a call from our friend Paul Lund who said it was Vernon Kirschner
- I asked if anyone knew where First Street was.
  - FYI it is a half block long and extends from Elm Street to the HHS property by Don Fleischauer house.
- Clyde Street remains a mystery
- And then there is Joyce Street.
  - Joyce Street shows up on some old drawings and also on Kankakee Co. GIS. It runs from the alley between Oak and Elm right through the Methodist Church’s parking lot. Obviously, Joyce St. never was built.

I have asked my fellow Herscher Historical Society members “What is the most historical artifact that we have at the Museum, Anderson House, or Annex?”

- Carol – the gunter chain used by early surveyors
- Mary – letters from soldiers and town fathers
- Bob – the Pilot Township Secretary ledger with first entry in 1857
- Ron – the application for Herscher’s incorporation
- Cindy – the Stereoscope (early version of a View Master)
- Janet – furniture at the Anderson House

Others:

- John Herscher’s family bible
- Original town layout
- Arrowhead collection from Milks Grove Township
- Lots more. We invite you to come look at these artifacts at our Museum, Anderson House, and Annex.

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## **JUDY AND RON GOLEMBIEWSKI**

by Carol Webber

What do Dennis, Roger, Richard, MaryAnn, Donald Alan, and Becky Wagner have in common? They are all first cousins to Judy Herscher Golembiewski.



Judy’s father was H. Vern Herscher, whose grandparents were Frederick Herscher (1839-1907) and Emilia Falkenbury (1846-1936). Judy’s paternal grandparents were Henry R. Herscher (1877-1967) and Eva Ewing (1879-1950). Henry was the Herscher depot station agent until 1948 when he retired after 52 years of service to the railroad.



**Henry and Eva lived on East Chicago Avenue near Main Street and just east of the Herscher fire station (now County West Therapy Center) and across the street from the Herscher Depot. “Every Saturday night, we would travel to Herscher from Kankakee to visit my father’s parents (Henry and Eva Herscher).”** (photo above right) Judy remembers her father (H. Vern Herscher – 1909-1975) very fondly:

“My father was a man of few words. Consequently, people tended to focus on what he had to say when he expressed his feelings on things. He was a patient man with a good sense of humor and worked crazy hours. He would get up in the middle of the night, go to the Butternut Bread depot to see the drivers off on their routes, and then stop at Hanson’s diner for breakfast on his way home where he went back to bed about the time we were all getting ready to start the day. He would sleep a few hours and go back to work around lunch time, in order to be there when the drivers returned. We usually waited until he came home to eat supper as a family.”

“My Dad was the glue that kept our little family unit intact. He was quick with numbers, a good money manager, and loved routing our family road trips. If David was here, I know he would agree that Dad was always our trusted advisor. We were comfortable talking to him about anything, and we knew he would protect our privacy. Old as I am, I miss him so very much.”

Vern’s only sibling was Loretta Porter Coonrod Blair, and she was also Judy’s godmother. Loretta lived in South Carolina until her divorce from Oscar Porter. They adopted a son Gilbert. In Chicago, Loretta worked for Aetna Insurance, and she became one of the first woman underwriters. When she married Nathan Coonrod, the couple moved to Jacksonville, IL, and she became the first postmistress to manage a postal substation in Jacksonville while being Superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School. When she retired, the couple moved to Florida and then South Carolina where Nathan died. Loretta returned to Illinois, living in Pontiac and Kankakee, and soon married (briefly) Chester Blair at Judy’s Kankakee home. Chester preceded Loretta in death; Loretta died in 1976, at 74 years old.

Judy commented, “My Aunt Loretta instilled in me the importance of approaching one’s life work in terms of a career, rather than a job. She broke several ‘glass ceilings’ during her working days and believed in setting goals, then stretching to achieve them.”



Judy’s mother was Marian Louise Wagner Herscher (1909-1999), whose parents were Adam Jacob Wagner (1875-1959) and Katie A. Obrecht (1872-1959) and lived in the “Inkster House” in Herscher, but moved to Kankakee before Judy was born in 1937.

**Photo left of Vern and Marian Herscher.**

“My mother was an excellent seamstress (in reality a tailor),” Judy said. “She made almost all my clothes, even tailored suits. When I got married, my mother and I designed my wedding dress, which she constructed. She also made three bridesmaids’ dresses, including the headpieces, and designed and made her own dress. She also enjoyed other handiwork: needlepoint, crocheting, knitting, quilting, and more. Unfortunately, I have difficulty replacing a button,” Judy admitted.

Marian’s three sibling brothers were Elwyn Arthur Wagner (1903-1987) and wife Viola Alvina Larke (1904-1995) with son Roger Wagner and wife Pat; David O. Wagner (1913-2005) and wife Alice McCarty (1918-2019) with son Dennis David; and Donald R. Wagner (1913-1995) and wife Kathryn (Kate) M. Diefenbach (1913-2008) with children Richard, MaryAnn, Donald Alan, and Becky Wagner. David O. Wagner and Donald R. Wagner were Marian’s twin brothers.

Judy was born in Kankakee’s St. Mary’s Hospital on September 8. She was christened by the Reverend Irv Stehr, her mother’s cousin. Her godparents were her Aunt Loretta and her Uncle David O. Wagner. “We lived with my mother’s parents (Adam and Katie Wagner) when I was growing up at 855 South Fourth Avenue in Kankakee. Many of the neighbors and friends from my early years became lifelong friends.” In 1959, the family moved to 1476 Sunset Lane in Kankakee’s Gracefield area into a home Judy’s parents built. By that time, Vern, Marian, and Judy were joined by David Vernon Herscher, Judy’s only sibling, who was born on February 9, 1951.



**Judy remembers, “Probably one of the most significant memories of my teen years was the birth of my brother David. I was 13 years old when he was born. While the age difference could have made relationships complicated, David and I were extremely close from the very beginning.”** Unfortunately, Judy also remembers the saddest day in her life. “On July 28, 1974, David died as a result of an auto accident in West Liberty, Iowa, at the age of 23.”

Judy attended Kankakee public schools: Washington Grade School, Westview Junior High School, and Kankakee Senior High School. “I have always been career oriented,” Judy admits, “and I was not anxious to leave home after graduating from high school. When I was offered a clerical job at Kankakee’s City National Bank, I jumped at the opportunity, working there for 15 years and progressing to commercial teller, handling business, real estate, and personal loans.”

Through a mutual friend, Judy met Ronald David Golembiewski. Ron was born at St. Mary’s Hospital on April 3, 1936. His parents were James and Lillian (Staniszeski) Golembiewski. Lillian was born in Kankakee on April 15, 1908 and died in an auto accident near Pensacola, Florida, on August 13, 1970. James was born on July 27, 1901, and he died on November 8, 1975.

Ron’s maternal and paternal grandparents were all born in Poland. His mother’s father, Steven Staniszeski, worked for Northern Illinois Gas Company in Kankakee. He carried a small translation dictionary to work every day and taught himself to speak English. Ron’s paternal grandparents migrated via Brazil where Ron’s father was born. When he was still a youngster, his parents continued their migration and settled in Illinois.

Ron attended St. Stanislaus Elementary School in Kankakee and graduated from Kankakee Senior High School. Obviously, Ron was raised in a Roman Catholic environment, but joined Saint Mark United Methodist Church shortly before his marriage to Judy in 1960. Ron had one brother, Richard, born June 23, 1945. Richard died an untimely death in 2006, as a result of a heart attack.

Ron always had an analytical mind, and he was interested in engineering and drafting. He attended Illinois Institute of Technology at night after graduating from high school. He worked as a draftsman at Manco Manufacturing and David Bradley, both in Bradley, IL. After the couple was married, Ron worked for Bennett Industries in Peotone, IL. **Ron’s photo right at 3 or 4 years old.**

Judy reports, “Ron’s mother used to like to tell a cute story about when Ron was a little boy (probably 4 or 5) and liked his Grandma Staniszeski’s pancakes. So, Ron’s mother would carefully place two raw eggs—one in each of his hands and walk with him out to the alley behind their home. Grandma S lived about a half block straight down the alley. She would tell him to be very careful and take the eggs to ‘Babka’ who would make him pancakes for lunch. Seldom could he make it all the way with both eggs intact. He would either get excited and squeeze one too hard or get distracted and drop one. But Ron still remembers the small pancakes slathered with butter and sprinkled with sugar that he would roll up and eat at Babka’s.”



On June 4, 1960, the couple was married at Saint Mark’s United Methodist Church in Kankakee. “We lived for two years at the Jaffe Apartments on Court Street, and then built our home at 1464 West VanMeter Street in Kankakee’s Gracefield.” **(photo of Judy and her father Vern Herscher, walking her down the aisle in the dress she and her mom designed and Marian constructed.)**

In 1970, Judy became a legal secretary for Edwin Mortell, who had an office in the City National Bank building, where Judy was working. “I spent the next 15 years in his employ. During that time, Mr. Mortell became a partner in a Chicago law firm. He was licensed to practice law in Illinois and Florida and was invited to relocate to Palm Beach to establish an office for that firm. I was invited to join in that endeavor. If I had stayed in Illinois, I would have had to commute or move to Chicago to find comparable work; I agreed to give Florida a try.” Such a move seemed totally out of character to Judy who lived in Kankakee all her life.

She relayed, “I would have to leave my retired mother alone since both my father and brother had died. However, she encouraged me to take the position and said she would go with me and stay until I got settled.” In the mid-70’s, Ron owned and operated a plating company in Bradley. The business was struggling during a period of increased environmental regulations affecting the industry, and he closed it in

1984 to relocate to Florida with Judy. Once in Florida, he switched his focus to Information Technology (IT) and worked for Phillips Electronics. When Phillips closed their Florida facility, Ron took a position as IT Administrator for Corenet Global, a non-profit corporate real estate foundation. Corenet was based in Atlanta, and Ron worked remotely from the couple's Florida home until he retired in 2009.

When the law office where Judy worked with Ed Mortell did not thrive, it was closed, with Ed and Judy being offered transfers back to Chicago. "By then," Judy reports, "both Ron and I were settled in the Florida lifestyle, and I had no interest in moving to Chicago. I was offered a position with Harris Trust Company of Florida, where I remained for 15 years. I started out as a secretary and worked my way up to Trust Officer and then Vice President.



"My next position was an offer from U. S. Trust Company (based in New York City) for an opening in their Palm Beach Office. U. S. Trust had the distinction of being the oldest trust company in the United States. I was Vice President/Trust Administrator for the company until I retired in 2008. It was a rewarding and interesting chapter in my life." Surely, Aunt Loretta would have been proud! Now, Judy and Ron spend some time during their summers at the Sunset Lane home in Kankakee.

Through all their travels and life changes, Ron and Judy have had loving companions. "We had three adorable Miniature Schnauzers, and we miss them every day," she sadly remembers. "They were Katherine who helped me move and get settled in Florida, Cassandra who guided me through grief after my mother's death, and **Alexandra (photo of Ron, Judy, and Alexandra)**, who

helped me to adjust to retirement (a big leap for someone so dedicated to her career)."

When asked about favorite memories, Judy reports the following stories:

"When I was in first or second grade, my parents and I, together with Uncle Elwyn, Aunt Vi, and Roger Wagner, drove to Rapid City, South Dakota, to visit my Uncle Dave and Aunt Alice Wagner. Uncle Dave had been drafted into the U. S. Army Air Corps and was stationed there. We all stayed in small cabins at the foot of a hill a short walk from where Alice and Dave lived. A couple hours each day, Roger and I spent in our respective cabins (under our mothers' supervision) doing school work lessons brought from our teachers. That was a condition that allowed us to be absent from school. We met some of Uncle Dave's Army buddies who entertained us royally by showing us how they helped capture Billy-the-Kid and other Old West bandits. Their performances were hilarious: certainly worthy of the Broadway stage!"

When Judy and cousin Roger were in their pre-teens, they took tap dance lessons together at the Nat Levy Dance Studios in Kankakee. **The photo right is of Judy and Roger in their dance costumes.** "We performed in several recitals at the Kankakee High School Auditorium, and we danced with a group of entertainers sponsored by the Red Cross that arranged programs for hospitalized soldiers, such as the Veterans Administration Hospital in Dwight, IL."



When asked about memories from past Labor Day celebrations, Judy had several to report: "We always attended the Labor Day Celebrations in Herscher. My father recorded moving pictures of many of them. Because he was the manager of the Kankakee Butternut Bread terminal, one year when my brother David was about eight years old, my mother made him a 'Butternut blue/white checkered gingham shirt,' and he rode his blue/white crepe-paper-decorated bike in the parade. An earlier year I think, Roger and I rode in the parade on the Herscher Chevrolet float. **One special memory was Ron and I being honored to represent the Herscher Area Historical Society by riding in an antique car with Rodney Schwark in the 2019 parade.**"

When asked about the holidays and their celebrations, Judy comments as follows: “I have a collection of ornaments and holiday decorations that are treasurers (probably only to me). Each year when I put them out, they bring back memories of friends, families, and occasions that I cherish. I was blessed to grow up in a peaceful home surrounded by people who loved and guided me wisely,” Judy said. “My parents and I traveled on annual road-trips.”

Judy remembers, “Growing up in a home with parents and grandparents, I found that our home was always a meeting place for family Christmas gatherings. My mother’s family and extended family made up of aunts, uncles, and cousins always gathered for Christmas dinner and gift exchanges. The Herscher family was much smaller, but whenever possible, we celebrated Easter at Aunt Loretta’s home. She lived in Jacksonville, Illinois, for many years, and we would pick up Grandma and Grandpa Herscher and travel down State for a long weekend.” Judy reported the following vacation story with a scare involved: “Donna Ferden and I worked at City National together, and before she was married, she and I traveled on vacation. The TWA Constellation plane we were traveling on was forced down in Grand Junction, Colorado, because of a loss of two of the four prop engines. What an experience; I have been a white-knuckle flyer ever since.” Judy also added, “I have always been anchored by my faith in God, attending Sunday School and church every Sunday. When brother David was old enough to attend Sunday School, I started co-teaching the Kindergarten Class. I was on the Board of Trustees, Secretary of the Administrative Board, and served on many committees. I remained active in Saint Mark’s Church until 1984 when we moved to Florida. In Florida, Ron and I joined the Royal Poinciana Chapel in Palm Beach. The chapel is intra-denominational so you can become a member and yet retain membership in another church. I served terms on the Board of Directors and was Treasurer at the chapel. We maintain our membership at both churches today.”

Her favorite Bible verses are the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), and Judy’s most challenging Bible verse is from Luke 12:48, “from those to whom much is given, much will be required.” Judy remarks, “I have been the recipient of so many blessings during my lifetime; how will I ever repay them?” Her closing comments are that Ron and she felt honored when asked to serve on the HAHS Foundation Board. “I have always been interested in my ancestry and proud to carry the same name as the Village. I feel it is important to preserve the history of the families who called this corner of the world home. Their dreams and labors are what built a viable, prosperous community, and I am pleased to play a small role in helping preserve their stories.” Certainly, Ron and Judy’s lifelong contributions for good have enriched hundreds of people.

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Contact Us:

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**Website:** herscherhistory.org

**REMEMBER HERSCHER AREA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN YOUR ESTATE  
PLANNING**

Your legacy is important to us and our community. Please remember the Herscher Area Historical Society in your final wishes and estate planning. Your gift will ensure that the work of capturing and preserving the history of Herscher and County West continues for future generations. If you have questions, please contact the museum at 815-426-2627 and we will direct you to our legal advisor.

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