

# Knox Characters I Have Known

by ALEXANDER L. JONAS

These vignettes were presented by Alexander L. Jonas over radio station WKVI on Almo Smith's "Musical Stepping Stones" programs on Thursday evenings during the years 1969 and 1970.

This little volume is dedicated to the many fine people, past and present, who have left their mark in the golden loam of Starke County, Indiana, thereby creating a heritage for our coming generations of which they may be extremely proud.

## CHAPTER ONE

Coming to Knox ever since 1914 and finally making it my permanent home in 1920, I soon discovered that along with its outstanding home-like atmosphere, Knox numbered among its citizenry a group of characters in numbers far in excess, percentage wise, of any other community to my knowledge. These folks became known for several reasons — some because of physical abnormalities — some because of unusual mental deficiencies — some because of uncommon brilliance even though they did not have the benefit of a formal education - and some because of constant classic humorous performances. Yet all of them achieved a start of stardom because of their rare characteristics. I will try to list each one and show why he became one of our better known characters. I may, inadvertently, leave some out of this treatise and I must limit my remarks on each one since some of them would require a sizable volume to list all the traits which made them an unusual personality.

Where to start? Well, - - let it be JOE FITZ. Joe was a giant of a man well over six feet tall and weighing considerably over two hundred pounds. He was the owner and operator of the Fitz Hotel which was later known as the Travelers. For his large size he had a small, round head and was reputed to be a hermaphrodite, but he always exhibited keen business judgment. He operated a saloon in the basement of his hotel and the story is told of how each Christmas he would scan his ledger and pick out the dead beats who owed him money and because of that they no longer patronized his establishment. To these he sent a note saying they should come in to see him and get their Christmas present. When they seated themselves at his bar, he would draw a glass of beer which he presented to them along with a statement of their account marked paid. He then advised them that from then on they owed him nothing, but when they wanted a drink and had the cash, they should patronize him. This practice cost Joe a few dollars, but thereafter he had all of their business.

I cannot leave Joe Fitz without mentioning ISAM, who was a lovable colored man serving as Joe's bell hop. He was unusual in that being colored he was indeed a minority, but he was loved and respected by all. In addition to working at the hotel, Isam took care of several families' horses, grooming and currying them expertly.

Isam's successor as a bell hop was CHARLIE HEINLINE who was a dwarf. I would estimate Charlie's size at about forty inches and in those days the traveling men traveled by train and stayed in the local hotels at night. What a sight it was to see little Charlie lugging the huge valises. However, he did have a small two wheeled truck which he used to transfer the luggage to and from the railroad stations.

We had other fine hotel people particularly around Bass Lake where in those days vacationers would spend a week or two since that was the era before good roads and fast cars. They would come to Knox on the Nickel Plate or to Bass Junction on the Erie where a spur would take them to the south end of the lake and there they were met by one of George Peterson's three boats - the proud, double decked Majestic capable of holding three hundred adult passengers or by one of his two smaller boats named after his daughters — the Con-radine and the Letha Mae. GEORGE PETERSON was a master boat builder and his boats would deliver their passengers to one of Bass Lake's hotels - Chitticks, Henry Behms, Hewitt's which was known as the Center View, the Hay House which was operated by Frank Hay, possibly our first conservationist, Rannells, the Kaiserhof, Emighs which was the Best View and the Taggart operated by my friends Will and Nell Bogan.

Mentioning the BOGANS, I must tell an amusing incident concerning Nell Bogan. She always was found rocking herself on the porch in front of their office and one extremely hot day in the midst of a prolonged heat wave that registered one hundred degree heat for over a week, a traveling man drove up and asked Mrs. Bogan if she had a cool room since he had not slept a wink for several days. Of course this was long before air conditioning, but Mrs. Bogan assured him that he had no further worries since she would give him a room that had a permanent cool breeze regardless of the weather. Well - - the stranger retired to his room and during the night the heat wave was broken and the temperature dropped almost forty degrees. In the morning Mrs. Bogan was rocking in her accustomed place when the traveling man appeared, and greeting him she hoped that he had a good night's sleep and that he enjoyed the usual fine weather to be found at the Taggart and that he was comfortable and cool. "Good Lord, Lady", he replied, not knowing that the heat wave was broken, "was I COOL, gosh, Mrs. Bogan, I ALMOST FROZE TO DEATH."

## CHAPTER TWO

Possibly our most famous character was CHE MAH. He was born in the Chusan Islands off the coast of China of normal size parents. He was found there by P. T. Barnum who exhibited him around the world as the earth's smallest human being. Barnum advertised him as being twenty-eight inches tall, one inch shorter than the famed Tom Thumb. How he came to Knox I do not know, but he retired here as one of our most respected citizens. He had an excellent mind and for those days he amassed a sizable fortune. He was married to a fine woman, known as Mrs. Cleveland, and who was over six feet tall and he had a normal sized son. Actually CHE MAH, was thirty inches tall, which by any standard is still very short. He never cut his cue and always dressed as an Oriental. He is buried in Crown Hill cemetery.

Since CHE MAH was sort of a showman, I am reminded of JOHN BARNUM. He was a member of the Barnum family who lived in a little humble home on Pearl Street where the telephone company has their garage. Each one was a character in his own right. There was ELIHU who was a justice of the peace and big GEORGE of whom the story is told of how he hiked all the way to Indianapolis to enlist in the Spanish-American war. But the most colorful of all was JOHN BARNUM who always wore a heavy gold chain across his vest, from which dangled a large gold medallion. He was very proficient in the art of sleight of hand. He traveled extensively throughout the country practicing his profession and returned home just once a year. This he did to pay his obligations which he had contracted before he left the previous year and then before starting out again he would go into debt for a complete new outfit which he would pay for when he returned the next year. JOHN BARNUM never failed to meet his obligations.

Since I am mentioning a traveler, I must mention GOVERNOR MANSON. Mentally he was deficient. He always dressed in an old army uniform and covered his chest with all types of campaign buttons which he presumed were medals which gave him the impression that he was governor, hence his nickname. He made excellent string hammocks which he sold as he walked from town to town in this area. He came to Knox periodically and whatever became of GOVERNOR MANSON is a mystery, but he was known to all.

We had several other mentally deficient characters who in their own way achieved a sort of stardom because of rare characteristics. There were the twin brothers ELI and LEVI STRINGBACK. Daily they roamed our streets bragging

about their pugilistic abilities even though a good strong wind would have blown them right off their feet.

HI MILLER was also seen daily on our streets and for the past many years has lived in state institutions. I understand he is now in Fort Wayne. He was the butt of many jokes by our pranksters which he took good naturedly until he had his fill when he would loudly exclaim, "Am getting mad now."

For a long time PACER WILSON lived at the county farm. He was built strong and stocky and when you approached him you never wanted to tell him to pace, because at that suggestion he would knock you down and run right over you.

Slightly above this group were several like HENRY DENTON who did light work and one day while caring for Mrs. Gus Reiss' lawn she constantly corrected him and insisted that he do the work the way she wanted it done. Finally having listened about as long as he could take it, he asked, "Mrs. Reiss, where do you bury your dead?"

DUTCH BILLIE could be seen weekly pulling his little wagon filled with calves' brains, livers, and kidneys which he peddled to local housewives.

Then there was ANDY SHE'LL who because of his slight build was nicknamed PONY, and he also was one who looked for jobs with little labor involved. Modern plumbing has deprived our juvenile pranksters the pleasure of upturning the outhouses on Halloween which in the old days was an annual custom. On one occasion Pierce Whitson hired PONY to guard his toilet, but it was a chilly night so PONY went inside, sat down and promptly went to sleep. The boys came — upset the toilet on its door — trapping PONY. He remained there until morning when his cries for help, with his head protruding through one of the holes brought the Whitsons to his rescue.

PEG LEG HARRISON was Knox's own Long John Silver and was our most proficient gambler. He labored not, but made his living playing poker. Many a local railroader would regretfully remember the poker game with PEG LEG the night after payday.

I cannot omit from our characters CHARLIE PARKER who is still living. It would make quite a novel if someone would write a story of CHARLIE'S life. He has done everything — everywhere. One night he entertained the local Kiwanis Club by blowing up an automobile tire with his mouth. We thought he would burst, but he made it.

## CHAPTER THREE

We had several practical jokers whose characteristics generally were that they enjoyed playing stunts on others but never relished the activity when they were the object of the prank. WILLOUBY McCORMICK was one who played tricks on anyone who was around and in the days before the automobile he operated a livery stable. I wish propriety would permit me to tell some of his original stories which always boasted of his sexual prowess.

Possibly our most active practical joker was our barber, CLARENCE "DUTCH" SLIDINGER who always was playing a trick on someone. In the 1920's he 'Operated a shop in the basement of the Fitz Hotel and since shaves cost only ten cents in those days, the men would get their morning shave at the barber's instead of shaving themselves. DUTCH'S brother in South Bend sent him a beautiful parrot which he caged in his shop and of which he was rightfully very proud. I had just moved to Knox from Chicago and I was indeed a *green-horn* when one morning Charlie Baker who worked for us showed me a small egg and asked if I knew what it was. He explained that it was a pullet's egg and I asked him if he could get any more. He said that his sister, Mrs. Meineke, who with her husband owned the farm north of town that Thelma Bennett farms part of today, had many chickens and it was no problem to get these pullet eggs. I suggested that each morning when we went to get shaved that one of us would place one of these eggs in the parrot's cage giving DUTCH the impression that his bird was laying eggs. That morning I took the egg and when I entered the shop DUTCH was busy shaving a customer and our aristocratic looking attorney, Charles Hamilton Peters was reading the morning paper underneath the parrot's cage. Unnoticed I slipped the egg into the cage and sat down to await developments. In a minute or two the parrot picked up the egg and dropped it to the floor right next to Charles Peters who shouted, "Good, Lord, DUTCH, your parrot laid an egg". Of course the egg broke, but DUTCH was truly excited and each morning unknown to anyone except Baker and me, we placed an egg in the parrot's cage and the bird continued to drop them out. DUTCH and his egg laying parrot became the talk of the town and needless to say DUTCH enjoyed being in the limelight. Mrs. Seagraves came to DUTCH and told him that she had a male parrot and would like to bring him to the shop to mate with DUTCH'S female bird and then they would raise parrots. DUTCH was enthused, so Mrs. Seagraves brought her bird to the shop and the parrots were placed together in the same cage. Well -- they took one look at each other and before they could be separated they tore almost every feather off of each other until they were almost as bare as a billiard ball. DUTCH couldn't understand so he called his brother in South Bend to learn what he did wrong. The brother told him not to be such a fool since he, too, had a male parrot. Of course it was too good to

be a secret any longer so Baker and I told how we had planted the eggs. DUTCH was indeed crushed and for several weeks we didn't dare to have DUTCH give us our morning shave for fear of an accidental throat cutting. DUTCH finally moved to Champaign, Illinois where he opened a ladies' beauty parlor and he died there a few years ago.

In the 1920's the drug store that was operated by Luther Everts was then owned and operated by Herbert Koffel whose pharmacist was Bill Kellogg and whose wife Pearl waited on the customers and took care of the soda fountain. It was the custom for the young women of the community to gather around the fountain every afternoon and over their sodas and sundaes they spilled all the gossip that was prevalent at the time. Our telephone company was then owned by W. S. DANIEL and his son, SMITH DANIEL, was the chief trouble man and installer of new phones. SMITH was another one of our practical jokers and since the number of phones in our community was limited in those days, SMITH knew by heart everyone's phone number. He was installing a new phone for a woman in the east side of town who had just recently moved to our community from Chicago. Radio was then becoming very popular and she inquired from SMITH why Knox did not have a radio station. SMITH assured her that we did have one — known as the Knox Broadcasting Station and if she would call the number he gave her inquiring if it was the Knox Broadcasting Station that their receptionist would give her a listing of the programs for that day. The number he gave her was Koffel's Drug Store and when SMITH finished his work the first number she called on her new phone was the one he had given her. Mrs. Pearl Kellogg answered the phone and you can imagine her feelings when the voice on the other end inquired if this was the Knox Broadcasting Station. SMITH is still living in Livonia, Michigan and Mrs. Kellogg is living in Warsaw, Indiana.

A very good friend of mine, the medical doctor HARRY BELL cannot be excluded if we tell the folklore of the community. He was a good doctor of which many interesting tales could be told. One afternoon he related that he just came from a female patient who was so dirty that he couldn't examine her. So he told her to take a bath and wash from her head down as far as possible and then from her toes up as far as possible and then before finishing to wash possible.



## CHAPTER FOUR

We had several legendary "horse traders" and I would like to start with ISADORE M. DUKES who was affectionately known as I.M. Volumes could be written about him, but I must relate the tale of his trade with Warren Terry. Warren wanted I.M.'s horse which he agreed was better than his, but to make the trade. Warren offered to throw in a harness. This seemed fair to I.M. and they shook hands and called it a deal. Warren went over to Horner and Kreuter's hardware store and bought a little dog's harness which he gave to I.M. saying, "here is your harness, I.M." There was no weeping — I.M. had made the deal and he kept his word. I.M. had a goose which he called John and which followed him around town like a dog. If I.M. went into a store John would wait outside until I.M. reappeared. One day John was stolen and I.M. traced him to a commission house in the old South Water Street market in Chicago. He went there and told the owner that he had his goose. The man replied that he had hundreds of geese in the crates, but I.M. insisted that if the man would give him a chance he could find his goose, to which the man agreed. I.M. spoke with an accent but he stood among the crates and shouted, "Chon, Chon." Almost immediately a goose stuck its neck out of a crate honking and honking. "That's my Chon," I.M. cried and he paid the man and retrieved his goose.

Another famous trader was DUDE GREEN the father of our present Robert Renview Green the fourth. DUDE stuttered and always had a pocket full of pine sticks which he whittled as he sat on the curbs of Main Street. A trader would come - sit next to DUDE and make an offer, but DUDE would never utter a word. The fellow would keep on talking and receiving no response he would continue to make his offer more attractive. When DUDE felt "the price was right" he would stutter, "It is a deal" and once agreed it never was changed.' DUDE always said, "Let the other fellow do all the talking and when he has come down to the right figure — take him." Frank Kurtz idolized DUDE and when Frank was a small boy DUDE took him on a little swapping trip. They started out with a pen knife and when they returned after making many deals, Frank had a pony.

FRANK KURTZ was quite a character himself. I must relate one of FRANK'S choice escapades. He was coming home on the Nickel Plate's midnight train from Chicago and the only vacant seat in the coach was next to a little old lady who inquired from FRANK if he knew when they would be in Knox and explained that she had baked a cake and some pies for her son and his family in Knox and which she had in the basket on her lap. FRANK assured her that he was well acquainted with the community and was getting off the train there himself and would help her off with her basket. She was very apprecia-

tive. As the trains approach Knox the tracks make quite a curve where the Hem-old elevator is located, and as it was approaching this spot, FRANK told the old lady that he would take her basket for her and give it to her at the station. She thanked him profusely. FRANK stood on the open platform which the trains of that day had and when it hit this curve, FRANK with his hands full and not being able to hold on to anything, was tossed off and landed unjurt next to the roadbed. I can wager that that little old lady, after searching in vain for FRANK and her basket, never trusted a stranger again the rest of her life.

In this chapter I mentioned Dude Green so I think it is apropos that I include the present day ROBERT RENVIEW GREEN who I am sure all will agree is quite a character himself. I feel I should tell an incident or two that happened to RENVIEW which might make him blush a bit if that is possible. He was born and raised in the same house that is his home today and two doors south, where Carl and Grace Sellers now live, was the residence of Gus Reiss and his family. This was RENVIEW'S second home and since he was a couple of years younger than Sylva, she acted as a sort of big sister to him. He never thought a second time about asking for something to eat or staying for dinner at the Reiss' and when he didn't behave Mrs. Reiss would threaten him by saying she would dress him in Sylva's dresses. On one accasion she did just that and from then on RENVIEW was a good little boy at least when he was at the Reiss'. He left Knox in 1920 to make his fortune in Tulsa, Oklahoma and while there he married Molly. He returned to Knox in 1945 to look after his real estate interests and for awhile he had a position with Frank Kurtz as a salesman. In those days it was the custom of several of our men to spend their lunch hour in the rear of Reiss' Clothing Store, — there was Doctor Bortz, Harry Oaf, Don Lara-more, Matt Kaiser, Frank Kurtz and several others. One day RENVIEW walked in and stated that he would like to live again in Tulsa if he only had the money to get there. In a matter of seconds the fellows who were there threw bills on the table totaling well over five hundred dollars and Frank Kurtz who was RENVIEW'S boss at that time and who was on his way out of the store, overhearing RENVIEW'S statement cried out, "Boys, if you are short — I will make up the difference." Of course this was all in fun, but such gestures and such pranks are only played on those for whom we have considerable affection.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The young people of today have no idea how much all of us relied upon the railroads for transportation up until about twenty-five years ago. During World War 1, I was stationed in Chicago and my marriage to my sweetheart, Sylva, was delayed because of the war. However, I was privileged to get a pass to come to Knox to visit her on week ends. I would ride to Knox on the Saturday night Nickel Plate train and would return to Chicago either on the early Monday morning Nickel Plate or go to Hamlet to catch a late Pennsylvania train on Sunday evening. If I went to Hamlet their livery man, Bill Groshans, would come to Knox to pick me up and drive me to Hamlet in a carriage drawn by a beautiful Horse. One Sunday evening as I was about to buy my ticket for Chicago, James Bell, the station agent at Hamlet, making a patriotic gesture, stated that I was to have a ticket at the rate of one cent a mile. The railroads did this for men in uniform, but I explained to Mr. Bell that I was not entitled to it since I was only on a pass and one had to have a furlough or a leave to receive the reduced rate. He insisted that I was to have it - so for several weeks I returned to Chicago for about seventy-five cents a ride. Coming to Knox the following Saturday after my first reduced fare trip, I sat with SHIRLEY PETERS, who definitely was a Knox character and who was a sailor stationed at Great Lakes. SHIRLEY was the son of Bob Peters, the inventor of the then radically new large Peters fishing reel. Digressing for a moment, this new type of large reel became quite popular and it is interesting that in addition to the Peter's Reel another large reel was developed also in Knox by Henry Keist. SHIRLEY was married to Ava Henderson the daughter of Dr. Alexander Henderson, who operated the first bank in Knox in the rear of his drug store in 1882. I told SHIRLEY about Mr. Bell's decision to give me the cheap rate to Chicago and he being very much interested said that from now on he would go with me to Hamlet to get the reduced fare back to Chicago. We did this for many weeks when one Sunday evening, when it so happened that SHIRLEY was not with me, that Mr. Bell stated he had made a mistake and that I owed him several dollars. I knew this was a fact, so I paid him, but then he wanted to know where the sailor boy was since he, too, owed some money. I told Mr. Bell that I would tell the sailor the following week which I did, but SHIRLEY never went to Hamlet again and I presume that Mr. Bell charged the loss to experience possibly thinking that the sailor was lost in action.

At that time we had a dentist in Knox by the name of Dr. Hubert Stoddart whose office and home was where Mr. and Mrs. Roy Johnson now live and who was married to a very dear friend of ours and a brilliant woman. MYRTLE TALBERT STODDART who decided that since her husband was a dentist that she could be of considerable help to him by becoming a dentist too. She

studied in Chicago and each Saturday night she would return to Knox with me on the late Nickel Plate train — she would get on in down town Chicago while I boarded the train at the Englewood station. Whenever I returned on the early Monday morning train she also was on it going back to school, but again I would get off at Englewood while she would ride on down town. It is hard to believe, but the trains each way in those days were loaded with Knox people. One Monday morning going in we both fell asleep and when the train arrived at Englewood, I left without waking her. Returning to Knox the following Saturday night, MYRTLE was seated in the rear of the coach and seeing me get on at Englewood, she astonished the many Knox passengers aboard and raised quite a few eyebrows when she loudly exclaimed, "Al, when I awoke last Monday morning you were not by my side."

For many years ROBERT RANK was our one man police force and he did a credible job but he surely was a sight to behold in his uniform. Even though his education was very limited he was the town's philosopher and it is unfortunate that someone did not record his many brilliant utterings. I remember once taking him to a district Kiwanis convention. He told me that his daughters had put a sizable sum of money in his pockets the night before while he was asleep. I commented how wonderful that was and that he was carrying more money on him than I had with me. He replied that that was the difference between a rich man and a poor one because the poor one always carried all he had with him.

Without telling any episodes I must mention the names of some of the characters we had out in the country like the VanLoons, the Hanes' and Antrum and Granville Putckett.

## CHAPTER SIX

It has always been my contention that the state of Indiana has had more politicians to the acre than any other state in the union. Every Hoosier considers himself a politician and really our state can boast of some great ones. Our own Starke County has had her share and to enumerate just a few, there was John L. Moorman who was a national figure in the Republican Party and it has often been told how he was one of those in the smoke filled room at the National Convention that nominated Warren Harding for President. Herbert Koffel was also prominent in the state Republican Party serving for years as a trustee of the Michigan City penitentiary. On the Democrat side we had James Fletcher who was a leader of that party in the state for a long time, and of course the most famous Democrat of all — Henry Schricker. We had several of our citizens representing us in the state legislature. To name just a few there was Oscar B. Smith, Claude Steele and his son Howard, and Oliver Cannon. While visiting recently with Senator Oliver Cannon, we reminisced about the old days and he told me some interesting tales which I should like to pass on for posterity. He mentioned BRAD GLAZEBROOK who was one of our less popular attorneys but he was well regarded as an astronomer. When the country was greatly concerned as to whether we were to survive when the earth was to pass through the tail of Halley's comet, I believe that was about 1910, the local citizenry turned to BRAD for his opinion. He responded by announcing that he would be on the corner where the Moose parking lot is now located when that event would take place and he would explain what was happening. That particular evening there he was — and addressing a group of several hundred local people he told the story of the comet and at intervals of every few minutes he would point to the skies and loudly exclaim, "Just look at those sparks." Of course, at first he was the only one to observe this imaginary phenomenon, but as a good example of mass hysteria, it was not long before BRAD had the entire crowd seeing hot glowing particles.

Then Oliver spoke of PETER VANDERWEELE, who became one of our prominent merchants. PETE was born in Washington Township and at an early age he realized that the soil of this township did not present much of a future for him. He came to Knox and secured a position in Jake Bozarth's store at the magnificent salary of \$2.50 per week. PETE'S frugality was well known and out of his weekly pay he finally managed to save the great sum of one thousand dollars. He learned of a store that was going out of business in Twelve Mile and he was able to purchase the entire stock of merchandise with his one thousand dollars. PETE moved his purchase to Knox, rented a room which served as his store and which was the beginning of his successful career. Speaking of his

frugal nature, the story is told how after he retired, PETE would go to the grocery and buy a sweet roll or donut and then go to the Coffee Shop, order a cup of coffee which he would drink with his sweet he had purchased elsewhere.

I have previously mentioned our hardware store of Horner and Kreuter, and I would like to add a word about a wonderful fellow, HUGH KREUTER, who in my opinion was more Indian than any other white man I ever knew. We would go fishing and he would make his own tackle even the hooks and he would catch his own bait — frogs, grasshoppers, worms and minnows. When we were ready to go home, he would tell us to go without him. Then Hugh would get a blanket out of his car, wrap it around him and spend the night on the ground wrapped up in his blanket.

I hope my readers will pardon my personal reference, but the night that I gave these stories on the air, I mentioned that station WKVI had two new listeners that evening in the persons of my daughter and son-in-law, Bob Cooper, who were hearing this program for the first time. I stated that my daughter, ROSALYN, is a bit of a character, too. She was born in Chicago, but we moved to Knox when she was only two months old so she was raised in Knox and considers herself a native and as a matter of fact in all her travels she still believes that Knox is the center of the universe. Since Knox did not have a Jewish Temple, Sylva and I felt that as ROSALYN grew up she had to have some religious training, so we sent her to the Methodist Church Sunday school, which she regularly attended for many years. As a child when she was asked what was her religion she always replied that she was a Methodist Jew. During this period while visiting in Chicago, Sylva and ROSALYN were invited to a birthday celebration for a small son of one of our dear friends. During the afternoon the hostess had each one of the children do a little something for the entertainment of the group. When it became ROSALYN'S turn and to the astonishment of our Jewish friends, she sang "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Again I would like to reminisce and mention an era in our past that I am sure will tug a bit at our heart strings as I recall the names of a group of men who contributed so much to our heritage. The building that stood where the present Coast-to-Coast store is now, was the lodge building of the Knights of Pythias. That was the most active lodge that we had in town before the turn of the century and was the center of most of our social activities. At that time our most talented musician was Elias E. Reed who organized and directed the Knights of Pythias band which played at all of our town's celebrations. A few members of this band were Cal Fuller, John Swartzell, Harry Loring, Frank Green, William Solliday, Clayton Bish, A. W. Swartzell, Ernest Bozarth, and Mahlon Hartzler. About 1900 the lodge building was completely destroyed by fire and the K of P lodge never actively functioned again in Knox. The lot was bought by John Horner and Gus Reiss who erected the present building on this site in 1902 and in passing I am sure many will recall the fine stage performances which were given in the old Opera House. Elias Reed was not to be discouraged and he organized a kid's band — some of whose members were Howard Ham, Bert Lundin, Lowell Spiker, Herb Laramore, Harold Loring, Ralph Gorrell, Albert Hermance, Jim Basney and Harry Groshans, and he directed a town band as well. Surely many of us recall our Wednesday night band concerts when all of our stores remained opened, the farmers would come to town and visit with their friends on our streets as the band stand was wheeled in place at the intersection of Main and Lake Streets, and the band would play for an hour or so for our entertainment. WHAT A WONDERFUL MEMORY! Besides the men previously mentioned, others that played through the years were Charles Lundin, Jake Byers, Roy Savery, Ollie Hepner, Russell Thompson, Chris Newby, Lewis Moreland, Leslie Miller, Bob Edgell, Virgil McCormick, Grant Green, Bruce Wilhelm, Charles Peele, Irvin Oaf, Rudy Stark, Floyd Green, John Loring and Clarence Savery. When Mr. Reed died the directorship was taken over by Harry Loring and the band continued until the high school created a band which really took over the functions of our town band and the Wednesday night concerts became a thing of the past. However, to us who remember - there will always be a place in our hearts for our town band — the Wednesday night concerts and the men who made this possible.

Another fine musician and a great character whom I cannot omit is my good friend JOE HARRINGTON who passed away just recently. JOE could not read a single note of music, but he could play anything requested on the piano and was the source of much pleasure when he performed with his guitar. JOE had an uncontrollable temper and his standard answer to one's greeting

of "How are you, JOE?" was "Sober, darn it." By trade he was a tailor and an excellent one, too, but unfortunately like many other people he detested that which he could do best. Years ago he operated a tailor shop in Knox across the street from the court house and made suits for men particularly those hard to fit. His shop was heated by a large stove. Those of you who remember Judge Chester Pentecost knew that he had one leg much shorter than the other by several inches. JOE made a beautiful expensive suit for the Judge and when it was finished the Judge came in to try it on — well — unfortunately JOE had made the wrong pant leg the short one. Of course, there was nothing that JOE could do about it except to make a new pair of trousers. But not JOE! He was so enraged at himself that he took the coat, the vest, and the defective pair of pants — rolled them all up into a ball and put them into his stove<sup>1</sup> burning the entire suit to ashes.

In the old days we had many home talent shows mainly to raise funds for some worth while project. My wife, Sylva, wrote and produced many of these and I am reminded of a minstrel show that she put on several years ago. When the casts were all male, as was the case in this instance, it was a general practice for the so called thespians to imbibe some liquid refreshment before performing. I presume this was done to give them the courage to appear before their fellow towns-people. Well, on this occasion the actors absorbed just a bit heavily and when the end men started to tell stories that were just a little risque and which were not in the script, Sylva not only was frustrated, but she was "fit to be tied" and did not know just what she should do. One of the soloists was CHARLES MACKEY who had a tremendous voice and who was to sing "Old Man River". He got before the footlights and as usual he sang beautifully, but he weaved forward and back and we had to hold on to his coat tail for fear that he would fall into the audience. After the show, which really was a great success, one of the women in the audience came to me and stated that she felt that CHARLIE MACKEY was the star of the show, saying that he played the part of a tottering old colored man perfectly as he sang so well. Of course I had to agree, although I did not tell her that he tottered so well, we almost lost him over the footlights on several occasions.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

As I mentioned the characters I have known in Knox, I usually have given some humorous story concerning each one of these old time citizens of our community. However, I feel that I must now mention the names of several women who have left their marks upon our society and in so doing they contributed so much to our heritage. There are no humorous incidents associated with them, but each one deserves a special place in our hearts for giving so much of herself to make our lives a little bit more worthwhile. As I mention their names, I am confident many of you will recall with considerable affection some association you had with at least one of these great ladies.

May I start with two school teachers, TINA FOLTZ and RUTH PALMER -who dedicated their lives to the education of our children. Practically all of our native adult residents in our city today began their education with TINA FOLTZ and then a couple of years later in the third grade they were privileged to be instructed by RUTH PALMER. When I think of the tremendous dedication of these two women, I must comment on how fortunate we were and how deserving it was when we memorialized their memories by naming our two elementary schools the TINA FOLTZ SCHOOL and the RUTH PALMER SCHOOL.

How many of us remember the hours that PEARL LARAMORE, the mother of Judge Don Laramore, gave to us so that we may have a public library in the little frame building that stood where the post office is today. Surely it was not the meager salary which she received that prompted her to give us this much needed service, but rather PEARL LARAMORE was motivated by an irresistible impulse to serve her fellow citizens.

When I think of serving people I must recall the Christmas Cheer that MRS. JOHN L. MOORMAN and MRS. GUS REISS provided for our less fortunate citizens for many years at the holiday season. Before our service clubs and other groups fulfilled this need, MAUDE MOORMAN and FLORA REISS labored for many days each year before Christmas raising funds, filling and delivering baskets and then out of their own pockets contributed the difference needed to secure sufficient food and toys to give each of our needy families a Merry Christmas.

Then there was HAZEL STEELE, the lady who brought so much fame to our fair city. She was the State President of the Federation of Woman's Clubs

besides serving as President of the Mississippi Valley Conference of this organization. She dedicated her life to serving the desires and the needs of women and pages could be written about her achievements. Her deeds were recognized when in the autumn of HAZEL STEELE'S life she was named as Indiana's Jewel when each state in the nation was asked by the General Federation of Woman's Clubs to name their outstanding member.

It has often been said that the inspiration of every great man was his lady behind him, and I am sure that Henry Schricker would have been the first to admit that his renown was accomplished only with the aid of his MAUD. Mrs. MAUD SCHRICKER is now living in Indianapolis, but wherever you go in our great Hoosier state and Henry Schricker's name is mentioned, immediate reference is made to MAUD and what a grand person she is. Her home spun attitude which was one of Henry's greatest assets is common knowledge. How she baked cookies for the Girl Scouts, even while she was our first lady, is always remembered. MAUD SCHRICKER was truly Indiana's first lady.

How many of you remember TILLIE HOLLINGSWORTH? Every summer day in the 1920's and 1930's TILLIE would don her black bathing suit and hie herself down to the old swimming hole in the Yellow River where she would perform the task of life guard for the little children. In those days the Yellow River provided the only swimming facility that we had for our youngsters, and without any compensation, Tillie would be there every day doing her job. Her only reward was the knowledge that she was doing a very necessary task and I am sure there is no one that knows just how many children owe their lives to TILLIE HOLLINGSWORTH. Surely we should erect a plaque somewhere near the Yellow River bridge to honor her memory.

I may have unintentionally omitted some women who did outstanding work for our community in the old days and I must pay my respects to our present "gals" who have taken up the cudgel and are doing such fine work. I would be remiss if in the former group I did not mention my own great lady, SYLVA JONAS. I doubt if there ever was anyone who by their own efforts raised as much money as SYLVA for community projects. She wrote and directed plays, minstrels and pageants besides actively working for communal organizations like the Red Cross, Woman's Club and American Legion Auxiliary. She, too, brought fame to our city by the acclaim of her poetry throughout the nation and she has always been tireless in her efforts to provide programs constantly for many different organizations. SYLVA JONAS' ability has been recognized nationally by being listed in Who's Who of American Women. We have been truly fortunate through the years to have had these great ladies working for the best interests of our city and I am proud to be able to salute them.

## CHAPTER NINE

Through the cooperation of our brilliant retired photographer, Stella Bonner, I want to relate some tales about that legendary character, MILTON SEA-GRAVES, whom I am sure none of you will identify by that name, but Milton was one of six children, born about 1866, and as a young lad he was tagged with the nickname BUNK because of his natural gift for telling tall stories. Many anecdotes could be written about BUNK SEAGRAVES, Curt Sar-ber and Beaver Finch, who spent most of their time on the Kankakee River, but BUNK was the outstanding character and during prohibition he would drink anything that contained alcohol — canned heat, hair tonics, extracts — in fact what he drank would have killed most any other human being, yet BUNK lived to a ripe old age. Everyone who ever came in contact with BUNK has some favorite heart warming story to relate. In his youth BUNK, when sober, worked on the railroad and he was a good worker, finally being elevated to the post of engineer. To celebrate the event BUNK painted the nose of his engine red which he did, he said, to match his own. However, the railroad took a dim view of red nosed engines and severed their relationship. Also in his early manhood, BUNK was wisked off to fight Spaniards in Cuba. His troop train was wildly rocketing through Georgia when he asked and received permission to talk to the train's engineer, saying, "I don't mind dying in a war, but darned if I want to get killed on this jerk-water railroad." He did crawl up to the engineer and succeeded in having the train slowed down. His outfit never got any farther than Florida and BUNK spent half of his service in the guardhouse. When he came home a crony asked BUNK if he saw any hard fighting, to which he replied that he was where the bullets were the thickest. His questioner was truly surprised until BUNK explained that he slept under the ammunition wagon. About ninety percent of BUNK'S company suffered from malaria and when he was asked how he avoided the disease, he stated that he drank enough to stay immune. BUNK would constantly ask his friends for a small loan, of course, to buy liquor. Often he would come into the bank to tell Henry Schricker that he wanted to negotiate a loan of fifty cents. Waving a finger he would say, "Henry, I know what you're going to say - but don't say it." Then Schricker would ask what he needed the fifty cents for and BUNK would reply, "Oh, if we've got to go into all that, we might as well forget the whole thing, you bankers are all alike." As BUNK was returning to his abode on the Kankakee one day after purchasing some liquid refreshment in town, a fast train approached and since he was walking on the railroad right of way, he had to jump off the tracks to avoid being hit. This incident became known and BUNK was asked if he was hurt, to which he replied, "Oh — it was just awful — I BROKE a full quart." Because of his drinking habits his friends thought that

he should have a guardian and our illustrious attorney, Paul Reed, agreed to serve for them before our court. When the matter was presented, BUNK'S wit and humor brought so much hilarity to the court and such delight to Judge Pentecost personally, that the judge dismissed the proceedings and BUNK never did have a guardian. One day BUNK was hunting down on his favorite Kankakee River when a stranger asked him if he was having any luck. BUNK bragged that he had lots of mink, otter and muskrat hides in the shed which at that time were all out of season. The stranger said that he didn't think that BUNK knew who he was and showing his badge he stated that he was the game warden. BUNK was ready and he said to the man, "I guess you don't know who I am?" When the warden said he didn't, BUNK exclaimed, "Well, I am the biggest darn liar in the State of Indiana." In a certain deep pool in the Kankakee lurked a monstrous pike. Dozens of anglers had hooked him only to lose lines and lures. BUNK prowled the swamps until he found a bullfrog "as big as a goose" (according to BUNK) which he put on a shark hook and finally caught the pike. Of course, this is BUNK'S story and he related that the fish had so many spoons in his mouth that he jingled like a sleigh at Christmas and he concluded that those lures were all he wanted. So he filled his tackle box and threw the pike back into the river, saying he was only a minnow anyway. BUNK always took care of his widowed mother, Phoebe Ann and after she died, his last bit of self-imposed responsibility vanished. BUT NOT HIS HUMOR. No situation, no matter how dismal, could quench his effervescent wit. He spent a big part of his life in jail and when asked what he was doing there, he always replied, "Trying to get out!" In 1946, past eighty years old, BUNK fell and broke his hip and was taken to a VA hospital in Danville, Illinois where he died. He is buried in a small obscure grave in Oak Park Cemetery. Some may say his was a wasted life — but most of us remember that BUNK SEAGRAVES left his town such a legacy of laughter that he has become a legend. Surely he steadily skidded down Whiskey Hill — but in all his life he never made an enemy. - WAS SUCH A LIFE REALLY WASTED?

## CHAPTER TEN

I would like to say a word about a real old time character whom I am sure many of us will recall with quite a bit of affection. I am indebted to our former resident and prosecuting attorney, Ted O. Hays, for most of the story about SQUIRE HENRY CLAY ROGERS! Ted now lives in Indianapolis and I might add is quite a character himself. HENRY CLAY ROGERS was born in the State of Delaware right after the Civil War and received his formal education in an academy in that state. When he arrived here he was considered one of the best educated men in Starke County and he served as deputy county auditor and was always interested in the dredging of ditches to drain our swamp lands. He began his career in Knox as a school teacher and constantly chewed tobacco. As a reward to his students for being good, instead of the then common practice of letting the children clean the black boards and the erasers, he permitted them to clean out his "spit box". He was our first County School Superintendent which position he held for eight years. He was a brother-in-law of Austin P. Dial, who was president of the Farmers State Bank and who willed practically his entire estate to SQUIRE ROGERS. Most of our folks in those days owned a driving horse, but HENRY ROGERS had a race horse which he ran at our fair grounds which were located on the east side of what is Heaton Street at the south end of town. It might be mentioned that a few of our citizens did have race horses and the most interesting fact of that time was that the famous jockey, Tod Sloan, was born and raised at Ober and the first horse he rode was given to him by Dude Green. Tod Sloan raced many horses at our fair grounds before he became world famous. HENRY CLAY ROGERS in the latter part of his life was a Justice of the Peace and he understood the rules of evidence and ran a good court. He enjoyed marrying people and he claimed that in the thirty years he served as Justice of the Peace, he married about twenty-five hundred couples. This figure I believe to be a bit exaggerated but it was well known that if by some chance he did not get to marry a couple, he was very unhappy. In answer to your greeting, "Good morning. Judge, how do you feel?", he would always reply, "I am right side up, with care devine, and with no visible marks of God's displeasure upon me."

Since I mentioned the draining of our swamp lands to create the fertile farms that we enjoy today, I must mention the man who possibly did more than anyone else in Starke County and who indeed was one of our early distinguished characters, HENRY C. ROBBINS, an attorney whose home was where Mrs. Mackey now has a rooming house. He was the father of Mrs. Pentecost and one who believed that the future of our county depended upon the draining of the marshes. This indeed was a very controversial subject and created many ani-

mosities among those both for and against these drainage projects. Before a ditch could be dug, it was necessary to secure a certain number of property owners to sign a petition in favor of the plan. In order to get the job done, HENRY C. BOBBINS purchased a tract of very cheap land in Davis Township which he called the town of North Star which he subdivided and presented a lot to several of his friends in Knox asking that in return they sign his petition. This they did and because of that the BOBBINS Ditch became a reality. Overcoming the serious opposition which he encountered, he transformed practically worthless land into some of the most productive acreage in the state. He was considered one of the most knowledgeable attorneys in the state on the drainage laws. Possibly one of the most interesting things about HENRY C. BOBBINS was the fact that he was a practicing spiritualist and spent considerable time attending seances to communicate with departed loved ones.

I cannot end my stories about characters in Knox without mentioning my very dear friends HABBINETTE and WELDON BOGAN. They are now living in Tucson, Arizona because of HABBINETTE'S health and we all miss them very much. Some people are accident prone, but the BOGANS were always prone to create amusing incidents in most anything they did. WELDON'S parents were hotel people and they along with his aunt, Harriet Andres, operated the Taggart Hotel at Bass Lake for many years. One morning WELDON came to his aunt and told her that he had just finished gargling with the last bottle of Listerine which they had. Aunt Hat told him that she had used the last of the Listerine and asked WELDON if he used the small bottle with the toothpick in the cork. When he replied that he had, she told him that that was a specimen that she was taking to the doctor for a urinalysis that morning. Several years ago HABBINETTE was taking her small grandson to LaPorte for Christmas shopping, and while there a terrible snow storm developed. However, she stopped in the dime store and bought Craig a small toy shoe that was filled with candies. She was rushing down the street in a hurry to get home because of the blizzard when Craig yanked at her hand and told her that he had lost his shoe. HABBINETTE assured him that because of the heavy snow she was in a hurry to get home and that later she would buy him another. She hadn't gone very far when a lady tapped her on the shoulder and asked her if she knew that her little boy was barefoot. Another amusing incident involving HABBINETTE was when she was putting a snow suit on Craig who complained that his grandmother was hurting him by her forcible efforts to get the suit on him. After struggling for several minutes she examined the inside of the suit and discovered that she had not removed the coat hanger and was trying to get the garment on Craig, coat hanger and all.

## EPILOGUE

It has been an extreme pleasure to compile this little history of the characters that I have known in Knox and I hope it has brought some pleasure to my readers as they reminisced with me. My words, I am sure, created a smile or two and possibly some may have even shed a tear, but I pray that my efforts may inspire others to put in writing what they, alone, may know about our community. It is unfortunate that as we pass on, what knowledge we have of our past is lost, if it is not recorded. So let us protect our heritage by permanently registering what information we may have, so that coming generations may be proud to say, "MY HOME IS IN STARKE COUNTY, INDIANA."