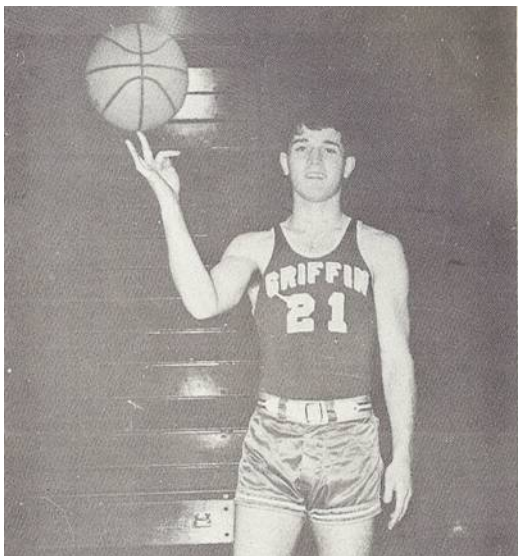


Larry Gietl – 1966
1509 Holmes
Hawthorne Place
Neighborhood Association
December 1, 2008



LIFE IN HISTORIC HAWTHORNE

Larry Gietl is as nimble at writing as he is at balancing a basketball on his fingertips. He grew up on Holmes Avenue in the 1950s and 1960s. He tells us what childhood was like living in Hawthorne fifty years ago. His story begins on page 4.



Benjamin Franklin statue
Franklin Life buildings – South Sixth Street

Residents of Springfield have driven by this statue of Benjamin Franklin for sixty years. It's on the cover of our current newsletter because there is a connection - an important link - to a family who lived in Hawthorne

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Place. The explanation can be found on page 6.

Luminaries for December 24

Neighborhood block captains will deliver candles and sacks to each Hawthorne neighbor in the week before Christmas. Residents are asked to provide sand or kitty litter to add weight to each bag. If everyone will set their luminaries out at dusk on December 24, there should be a uniform glow around our sidewalks and streets for about four hours.

If residents would like longer-burning candles they may certainly substitute them in the sacks that are provided. The sacks should be placed at curbside on Holmes, Whittier, and Cedar. They are placed in the boulevard curbside on Lowell.

Again, our thanks to Karen Newbold for organizing this annual luminary display.

Holiday Party

Mike and Beth Trojahn of 1314 Lowell will host the annual Hawthorne Place Holiday Party in their home on Sunday, December 14. The event is scheduled from 2-5 PM. Each family is asked to bring a dessert or an appetizer to share. Drinks will be provided.

Next Board Meetings

There will be no Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association board meeting in December. The next meetings will be:

Tuesday, January 6 – Room 106
Tuesday, February 3 – Room 201

These meetings are at Laurel Methodist Church at the corner of South Grand and Walnut.

All are welcome!
Please attend.

Painting the Town Red

The official theme for “America in Bloom” (and thus “Springfield in Bloom”) is “Paint the Town Red.” This national beautification effort encourages towns, neighborhoods, and individuals to help organize clean-up projects and to enhance public and private spaces with plantings.

The city of Springfield provided free Red Oxford tulip bulbs for those who were willing to plant them on public or common grounds. Five Hawthorne volunteers gathered on Saturday, October 25, and spent the morning planting 200 red tulips – but also some yellow daffodils - around the Hawthorne Place signs.



Colored Glass Collection

The city of Springfield will be accepting all colors of glass bottles or jars from residents. Not acceptable are glass kitchenware, window panes, or light bulbs. Residents must deliver items to the Public Works Garage at 300 N. 17th between 8 AM-12 PM on Saturday, December 6. For more information call the Division of Waste & Recycling at 789-2327.

Fall Festival

Randy Stieren (1330 Lowell) coordinated the Hawthorne Place Fall Festival on October 4. The day's events included a pet parade, face painting, children's games and activities, a fire truck visit, a chili cook-off, a potluck dinner, and a bonfire as the evening darkened.

The chili cook-off winners were: Marcel Yoder (traditional), Ann Vandiver (non-traditional), and Randy Stieren (hottest).

Our thanks to Randy for all his good work. Thanks also to the parents who volunteered to assist with the activities for children.

Some photos of the day are on the next page.

Photos from the Fall Festival



Amanda Lobmaster & Ben Yoder



The art of walking on stilts made of coffee cans.



**Event coordinator Randy Stieren
1330 Lowell**



**Eight Hawthorne canines assembled for the
pet parade.**



Sherman (as a hotdog) & Forest (as Count Dracula)

A Holmes Avenue Childhood by Larry Gietl

(Larry Gietl grew up at 1509 Holmes. He emailed some recollections to share for the previous newsletter which featured a story about his family. But his memories are so rich that they perfectly evoke a place and time. It seemed best to wait and print them separately – and intact – in the current newsletter.)



Larry Gietl, age 5 (1954)

Riding our bikes down Cedar Street, we would cut the corner onto Holmes Ave. by riding over Elmer Suckow's lawn. Elmer didn't like that so much, so he put up a little fence on the diagonal to stop us. In fact, no one really liked kids riding bikes over their lawn. Jim Healy hated it when we threw the little white rocks that covered his driveway and Mrs. Pohl would sometimes throw us out of the vacant lot behind our house and north of Senger's.

With neighbors understandably irate at bicycle trespassers, let me tell you about the exclusive neighborhood shortcut at 1509 Holmes Avenue. It seems that it all started with Mrs. Churchman (mother of a future Springfield mayor) who took the bus to work every day. The closest stop to her house on Walnut Street was the one on the corner of Holmes and Cedar. My mother, Angela Gietl, allowed Mrs. Churchman to cut through our back yard, over the patio/basketball court, and down the driveway and onto the street.

This route saved her a very long walk each morning. We didn't have a gate on the back fence at the time, which was quite convenient for the bicyclists who used the same shortcut on their way to Blessed Sacrament School. We actually had a bike path/rut right through the middle of the yard. There was always someone cutting through our yard. I can still picture Dink Sullivan zipping through our yard on the path.

Speaking of the yard, back in '61 to '63, it was also known as Burdock Field (named for the big-leafed vegetation growing by the back fence), home of the BSS Whiffle Ball Tournament. We had at least five, maybe six osage orange trees (hedge trees) growing along the alley. These trees had those "hedge apples" big as a baseball, light greenish yellow with knobs all over them, and we loved to throw them against the telephone poles and smash 'em open. Anyway, we had tree houses in four of the trees. The one next to the gateless opening of the fence was actually two stories and served as our press box during games. If you cleared the trees without hitting a leaf it was a home run, hit a leaf you got a double. Players included Pat Sponsler, Rob McHenry, Mark Sullivan, Biggy Flynn, Tom Hiler and many others from the neighborhood and school.

Baseball was the hot game back then; we played constantly. I was awakened many a morning by those little white rocks from Jim Healy's driveway thrown against my second story window by McHenry or Sponsler or Flynn, and we would hike off to BSS for a game of Indian Ball. We'd play most of the day and then go to McHenry's house and drink soda and sit around the Shit Wheel (an oversized tractor tire filled with sand and cat-do) and figure out what to do next.

One summer we built a clubhouse in McHenry's back yard. It was fairly big as I recall. We dug a huge hole and built over it giving us plenty of headroom. Building materials included real estate signs, garage

siding torn off garages (thank-you Jim Drew), and any wood found in the alley. It must have been quite a sight for people going to church on Sunday at BS. McHenry's house was at the corner of Holmes and Laurel, a stone's throw (or maybe little white rocks) from the church.



Larry Gietl in 1958. He was nine years old.

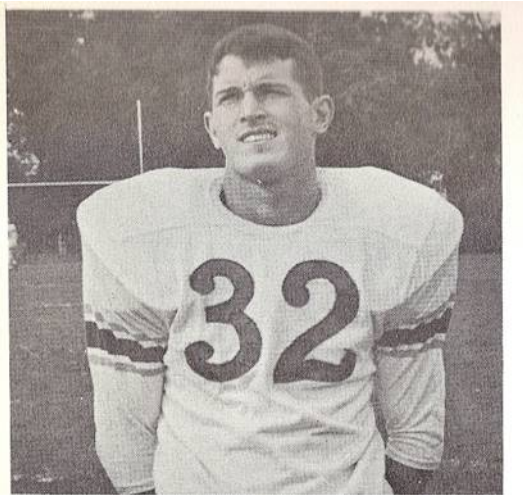
Back to 1509. I had a paper route (Route 720) which included Holmes Avenue. Every morning I'd roll the papers on the front porch, put 'em in the canvas Journal bag, put the bag on the handle bars with S-hooks, grab a baseball bat and be on my way. The bat was to fight off the dogs that chased me down the street. In those days dogs kind of ran wild, and there weren't too many house dogs, as it seemed everyone left their dogs outside.

I'd pay my bill every week at Bart's Store on Laurel. Bart's was a store with a fine offering of canned goods from before WWII. The empty bottom shelves were perfect for sitting on and we would spend time there sipping Cokes and eating candy. Every now and then my mom would send down to Bart's to get a

loaf of bread. She would sometimes send down to Ernie Galli's store on Conkling and Walnut, but that was more of a real store, unlike Bart's fine establishment.

1509 Holmes was a great place to grow up. I would run home from school at BSS every day at noon for lunch. I'd whip up a couple of baloney sandwiches and pour a glass of milk with four spoonfuls of Hershey's Syrup, then run back to school and be on the playground faster than those who brought their lunch.

Our house had a very tall TV antenna tower next to the porch. This was a great way to enter the house if I happened to come home late at night. Up the antenna tower, step over to the porch roof and then thru my front bedroom window. Quite convenient.



Larry Gietl in 1966

The following are just some random neighborhood thoughts: Running down the street in our swimming trunks during rainstorms....People voting for president in Jennings garage....walking home from school with Bobby Stephens, he shouting Eisenhower, I shouting Stevenson....the little mound of speckled cement by the street off Armitage's driveway...Jim Drew throwing eggs at cars....dogs chasing paperboys....My Uncle Joe (Springfield bus driver) dropping

me off in front of my house instead of the regular stop....Shoveling snow from our driveway and Msgr. Schwartz walking by and saying "You'd have to be mighty sober to make it up that path"...Nick McRobers pushing my brother Bernie off Henry Robinson's deluxe playhouse roof and breaking his leg....Playing in the attic of Jill Jordan's garage....Mr. Senger building his garage with a Lucky Strike hanging on his lip throughout the entire project....Playing football in Pohl's vacant lot (when Mrs. Pohl was out); we actually had a first down chain (rocks tied to each end of a rope)....Our garage which never had a car in it....Jim Healy's garage which had every Illinois license plate from the teens to the sixties nailed to a wall....The pool room in our attic, pool table, stand-up ash trays, bar, etc....College kids painting our address 1509 on the cement stoop by the sidewalk....Dad putting MDIX on the porch. Our house was white up until about 1971 when dad had it sided red saying "I won't live in a white house what with that asshole Nixon in the White House." Holmes Avenue paved with bricks....George Flynn taking his *Illinois State-Journal* every morning from my bundle because I woke up too late....

Show me a house with a convenient cut-thru and I'll show you a happy home.



**Larry Gietl's graduation photo
Griffin HS – 1967**

(Larry Gietl excelled in athletics at Griffin High School. He also served on the staff of *Chimes*, the school paper, and was elected to the National Honor Society. Today, he is the owner of Gietl Sign Company, Inc. in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.)

Francis O'Brien & the Benjamin Franklin Statue by Tom O'Brien



**Francis O'Brien and his son, Tom (age 2).
The date is May 1940 and they are standing
in front of their home at 1317 Whittier.**

(In April of this year the statue of Benjamin Franklin at the Franklin Life Building was recognized with a Mayor's Award for Historic Preservation. Tom O'Brien spoke at the ceremony and recounted his father's work in the statue's creation and installation. The following story was published in the *State Journal-Register* on April 28, 2007.)

The sale of the Franklin Life building to the Illinois State Police, and the murmurings about what to do with the great bronze statue of Benjamin Franklin that stands on the west lawn of that property, has brought back some sepia-toned memories I'd like to share about that work of art, how it came to be there, and the wonderful unveiling ceremony that introduced it to Springfield in 1949.

My father, Francis O'Brien, was among the old guard – a director and a senior officer – at Franklin Life in its glory days and (as was the great pride for the rest of his life) the person who proposed the idea of the statue, chose the artist and planned one of the great celebrations in Springfield's history when it

was dedicated. I was 11 at the time, nearly 60 years ago, and had the good fortune to know sculptor James Earle Fraser, to see that artist at work in his studio, and to witness the statue's unveiling from a front row seat.

The name of the sculptor he chose, James Earle Fraser, may not be known to many today, but his art is – the buffalo nickel is his work, and the iconic “The End of the Trail,” not to mention the bas-relief “Pioneers” at the southwest side of the Chicago’s Michigan Avenue Bridge and the bronze of Theodore Roosevelt in front of the Museum of Natural History in New York. Many have seen Fraser’s statue of the Mayo brothers in front of their Minnesota clinic or his Gen. George Patton on the parade grounds at West Point.

In the middle ‘40s Fraser was famous, busy, in demand – and old. He took some persuading to accept the commission. But when he did – and when progress became much slower than hoped for – my father became concerned that he might not live to complete it. As it turned out, longevity was not the problem. Artistic temperament was.

The artist’s changing timeline was not working very well with the proposed dedication date. My father had managed to negotiate a day for the unveiling ceremony that accommodated the common calendars of the vice president of the United States, Alben Barkley; Gov. Adlai Stevenson; the attorney general; the insurance commissioner; the mayor; and numerous other dignitaries. That’s not to mention Benjamin Franklin’s great-great-great-great-granddaughter Ann Otway Byrd Castle, who was invited to pull the actual string to unveil the statue. In the summer of ’49, as that date approached, and the artist anguished over his creation, there were anxious days in our household. I remember talk and letters and phone calls between my father and Fraser, who resented being rushed and once complained of being “bullied.” But if father was nothing else, he was a poised gentleman who could handle a

difficult situation with grace. The artist’s ego was stroked, the work arrived in time, and the men remained friends until Fraser’s death.

The statue was finished well enough in advance of “D Day” – and to the great satisfaction of both sculptor and client. The finished casting was sent off on a flatbed truck from a foundry in New Jersey to Springfield. But somewhere in Indiana the cargo wouldn’t clear an unanticipated low overpass. A lower flatbed had to be sent to finish the trip (along with an enormous piece of hydraulic equipment to lift the statue from one truck onto the other). Even the second truck had to deflate its tires to get Franklin’s head to clear the overpass; then a portable compressor had to be found and dispatched to re-inflate the tires for the rest of the trip. The statue arrived and was in place just in the nick of time.

Meanwhile, my father was continuously calling the offices of everyone scheduled for the dedication dais, making sure that all of them would actually appear. The only one that presented a problem was Vice President Barkley. For reasons discovered later, Barkley was off the radar because he was courting a woman in St. Louis. For days preceding the ceremony, no one in his office would admit to knowing where he was.

Seating for the ceremony covered the vast lawn in front of the company buildings and bleachers for additional seating were erected all the way across Sixth Street to the cathedral’s property on the opposite side of the street. Traffic was diverted for several blocks for days. To great relief, the vice president’s plane landed at Capital Airport on the appointed morning and Barkley, the principal speaker, appeared and was introduced by Gov. Stevenson. The statue was unveiled.

Sometime during the 1960s, my father became concerned for the safety of the statue and arranged for a casting of the head of Franklin

to be reproduced. He felt that if the statue were damaged it would be most difficult to replace and repair Fraser's representation of Franklin's head. He told me the spare was delivered and stored in the company's basement vault. But what has become of it is unknown to me.

Fraser often remarked to my father that he was especially proud of this particular piece of his work. I have a fondness for it, too, and occasionally pull over on Sixth Street for a look and to remember these things.

The O'Brien Home on Whittier



1317 Whittier (June 2, 1940) - the O'Brien family home from 1940-1952.

Francis O'Brien (1903-2001) studied advertising and marketing at New York University. He also earned a doctor of law degree. He brought his family to Springfield in 1940 when he accepted a position with Franklin Life Insurance. He was elected vice president of the company in 1947 and became a member of its board of directors in 1950. A resident of Springfield for sixty years, he was active in many civic organizations, served on several boards, and was much honored.

Francis O'Brien married Margaret Ziegler (1903-1989) in 1935. When they lived on Whittier their young family included Charles (b. 1936), Tom (b. 1938), and Peggy (b. 1942).

Unveiling the Franklin Statue



September 8, 1949: Charles Becker, Ann Otway Byrd Castle, Alben Barkley, Adlai Stevenson, and James Earle Fraser.



1941: Tom & Charles O'Brien beside the family car at 1317 Whittier. The original brick garage at 1319 Whittier is visible in the background.



Easter 1944: Margaret O'Brien with her three children: Charles, Peggy & Tom on their front lawn. The east side of the north end of Whittier is visible across the way.



**May 1946: Tom O'Brien, Charles O'Brien,
Richard Triebel of 440 S. Grand Avenue W.,
and Peggy O'Brien.**

**They are sitting between 1317 and 1319
Whittier.**



Hawthorne Place News 2008

Here is just a sampling of news from our
neighborhood from the past year.

December 20, 2007: Elizabeth “Betsy” Chapin died at the age of 87. She was born in Minneapolis, MN and graduated salutatorian at Carleton College in Northfield, MN. She was a skilled knitter, avid swimmer, and played the piano and organ. Betsy and her husband, John, raised five children at 1324 Holmes. She had been our Hawthorne neighbor for nearly sixty years.

May 29, 2008: Edward Russo (1612 Lowell) was part of a team that researched and designed the exhibit “Springfield As Urban Frontier, 1818-1836.” The display was on view at the Iles House through October 1.

June 2, 2008: Clarissa “Tiss” Cullen (1609 Lowell) celebrated her 90th birthday. Tiss has resided in Hawthorne Place longer than anyone.

July 4, 2008: Jim Morris (1328 Holmes) was among a group of Springfield residents profiled in a *State Journal-Register* story titled “The Patriots.”

Also, Jim and his wife, Sue, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2008.

September 5, 2008: Kate Terese Lambert was born to Andy and Theresa Lambert (1525 Lowell).

September 12, 2008: Aasne Vigessaa (1319 Whittier) starred as Guenevere in a six-show run of the Lerner and Loewe musical *Camelot* at the Hoogland Center for the Arts.

November 4, 2008: Kent DeLay (1330 Lowell) was a candidate for the Illinois State House, District 99.

and also –



Jack Daniels
1319 Whittier

September 12, 2008: Jack made his theatrical debut as Horrid in the musical *Camelot*. Horrid is the companion of Pellinore, a comic and elderly knight. Although Jack had a non-speaking part he made every appearance count. He was totally at home on the stage and charmed the audience with each entrance. He would stretch and lay beside Pellinore as naturally as any devoted canine. A high point came when Jack took center stage, faced the audience, and scratched his right ear with his left hind leg, his only hind leg. Applause.
Bravo, Jack!

And a heart-felt thank-you to all our advertisers :

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HAWTHORNE PLACE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

What is it? – The Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association is an organization for residents of Whittier, Lowell and Holmes between South Grand and Laurel – the boundaries of the 1902 Hawthorne Place subdivision. The organization advocates for the neighborhood, sponsors social activities, and is a forum for working on neighborhood issues.

History – The Hawthorne Place Neighborhood Association held its first meeting at Laurel Methodist Church on October 27, 1994. The organization grew out of the effort to get a stop sign installed at Holmes and Cedar. Neighbors discovered the benefits of a group effort and a group voice.

How to join - Membership is \$20 per family for a first time membership and \$10

per family for a renewing membership. To join, contact Membership chair Burnell Heinecke (522-3842). Also, let Burnell know if you do not want to be listed in the neighborhood directory.

Directories – Neighborhood directories are available to members. Contact your block captain if you need a directory.

Neighborhood Officer – Hawthorne Place is protected by the Springfield Police Department. Donald Bevins, our Neighborhood Police Officer, can be reached at 741-0988. If there is an emergency situation call 911.

Alderman – Hawthorne Place is in Ward 6. Our alderman is Mark Mahoney. He can be reached by phone (544-7944), email (mmahoney67@hotmail.com), or regular mail (1520 Lowell).

N. Holmes
Beth Faulkner – 1420 Holmes (744-0295)

S. Holmes
Eva Hawley – 1524 Holmes (523-2236)

N. Lowell
Beth & Mike Trojahn - 1314 Lowell
(744-7303)

S. Lowell
Jim Huston – 1524 Lowell (528-5256)
Edward Russo – 1612 Lowell (414-0052)

N. Whittier
Martha LeMay – 1421 Whittier (241-7829)
Lindsey Trojahn – 1317 Whittier
(789-1315)

S. Whittier
Linda Riebling – 1500 Whittier (523-1450)
Marty Vandiver – 1528 Whittier
(523-3544)

Volunteer. Get involved.
Your neighborhood needs you.

Newsletter – The neighborhood newsletter is published quarterly. And the newsletter is self-supporting – thanks to our advertisers. Three cheers to them! Rates are \$10 per issue for a business card space or \$40 per year. Interested? Call Marty Vandiver (523-3544)

- jah

Block Captains – The neighborhood is divided into six “blocks,” with block captains elected to represent each block on the association board. The blocks consist of the north or south section of a street, separated by Cedar Street. Three block captains are elected each year to a two-year term at the annual meeting in the spring.

The following is a list of the current block captains.