

[Page numbers in brackets are from numbering on the original 1970 typescript.]

### CHESTERTON 1902

Chesterton 68 years ago was a small town with a population of 500. The town limits were Porter Avenue on the south, Jackson Blvd. on the west, Woodlawn Avenue on the north, and Coffee Creek on the east. The streets were of native earth; muddy, dusty, or snow bound according to season.

There were no public utilities. Every home had a pump as well, a cistern, and a “Chick Sales” shanty in the rear. Many had a horse and barn; some kept a cow, and there were more chickens than people.

The Sunday night fire of April 6 destroyed nearly half of the business section. It burned all the buildings from the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad to Indiana Avenue. Remaining on Main Street [now Broadway] were the Myron Smith Grocery, the Ira Tillitson Saloon, the Sandy Harbrecht Saloon, the Chesterton Bank, the Moroney Building with a second-floor dance hall, the Charles DeMass Grocery, the Shanks Hotel, the Blatz and Bartel's Hardware, the Diddie General Mdse. [Merchandise], the Robert Woyan Drug Store, and the Johnson Bros. Grocery. Across the tracks were a photo gallery, feed store, and the Schaper Jewelry Shop.

West of 5<sup>th</sup> Street on Porter Avenue were only three buildings, the McClure home and farm structures, the Frank Brown brick house, and the Tribune Building at 15<sup>th</sup> Street.

[Page 2] Here was an apple orchard, picnic grounds, and flowing mineral well. This was the heart of the BOOM where hundreds of 25' x 125' size lots had been sold. But no one built. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Additions to the town remained as barren as a Texas prairie for many years.

There was a Poll Tax law in effect at this time; every able-bodied man between the ages of twenty-one and fifty had to work two days on township roads or pay \$3.00. If one failed to work or pay, the town marshal hauled him before Squire Pratt and fined him \$5.00. Nearly all the men paid the tax, and Harley MacPhearson, township road supervisor, used the money to hire teams [of horses] and men. He was having the remaining portion of an Indian Mound hauled to widen a narrow part of Dickinson Road. The mound was located on Calumet Road on the opposite side of the north edge of the Catholic cemetery. In 1924 Dr. Broad\* had a creamery built where the mound once stood. When [the mound was] entire, it was about forty feet long, seven feet high, and shaped like a tent. Here the young braves practiced archery, shooting at objects attached to the mound. The purpose of the mound was to retrieve their arrows and darts. A large number of arrow heads were found during the process of loading and leveling the earth.

Wages were low – \$1.50 for ten hours – but Arbuckle or Lyon coffee was only ten cents a pound; Peaberry, fifteen – grind your own.

There was full employment. Warren Featherbone \* [corset factory] employed a large number of girls; Hillstrom Organ Company at 5<sup>th</sup> and Main was shipping a large amount of their product to Sweden. Al Harper was superintendent.

[Page 3] The Chicago Hydraulic Brick Co. of Porter employed many men and purchased hundreds of cords of wood used in firing the kilns. The Anderson Brick Yard, located a half mile east of Calumet Road on Brummitt Lane, was also a large producer.

The Knickerbocker Sand Co. owned more than a thousand acres of land at Dune Park. It was dotted with beautiful dunes, white pine, and tamarack. There were many small, shallow pools where huckleberries grew in abundance, and served as food for the quail, pheasant, and partridge.

The steam shovels were loading four train loads of sand around the clock and shipping it to the Chicago area for track elevation; one north toward Lake Michigan; the other, east at Old Baldy.

Old Baldy was the largest of the Dunes; nature had placed it on a 40-acre track of marshland, blow outs [sic] from the north through the centuries had built it to a height of two-hundred feet.

Looking twelve miles northwest from Meade Hill on Calumet Road (now 49), you could see the top of Old Baldy glowing like the setting sun. It had been hundreds of years in the making. As the sand was removed to the once [original] marsh level, one would find deer horns and bones of animals slain by Indians many years before. Willows, cotton wood [sic] trees, and marsh grass would spring from the rich black earth to restore it to the way nature once created it.

[Page 4] West of 6<sup>th</sup> Street, there was only one building on Main Street – the Friday rooming house. It was receiving its patronage from the Featherbone Factory.

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In 1904 a Glass Manufacturing Plant [sic] was erected on Main and 12<sup>th</sup>. This brought in many new families who built homes. Chesterton began to grow.

In 1906 The South Shore Electric and Chicago, New York Air Line\* asked for a franchise to operate electric trains into Chesterton. The Air Line was granted a franchise by the Town Board of Trustees. The South Shore started construction the following year and had trains running from South Bend to Chicago in the fall of 1908. It missed Chesterton by two miles, following the old dunes sand road.

The Air Line ran full-page advertisements in Chicago papers promoting sales of stock in its venture. They finally built the line from Gary to LaPorte with spurs to Valparaiso and Chesterton.

Colonel Hoard was a familiar figure during the construction. Patronage was not sufficient to make it pay. It operated a few years on stock sales. When that ceased, they had to junk the entire line.

1907 was a busy year. Morgan Park, east of Coffee Creek, was developed and annexed to the town of Chesterton. Many new homes were built.

The Home Water Company was organized. A Buffalo, New York firm erected a water tower and pumping station at 7<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. They also laid the water mains.

[Page 5] A Local Option Election was held the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in April [1907]. Wets and Drys had engaged in a furious battle. The Drys won, and the six saloons were out of business January 1, 1908.

The Claus Johnson Saloon Building, at the east terminal of Broadway (now Flannery's) failed to find a tenant. Mr. Jeffery [possibly Charles L. Jeffrey] asked me to join him, Edward Morgan, and Dr. [Charles O.] Wiltfong in building and operating a moving picture theater in the Johnson Building. The town had no electric power, so we bought a Nash 30 H.P. [horse-power] gas engine and dynamo and placed it in the basement. O'Brien of Gary did the electrical work. Joseph Ameling did the stage, inclined floor, and ticket booth. Then the picture screen and seats were placed, and in mid December the Lyric Theater was opened. A Vitagraph picture, "Romance of a War Nurse" (starring Florence Lawrence\*), was the first picture shown.

Maude Carpenter was the pianist. Many of the front seat boys and girls who brought candy or tossed paper wads at her are now grandfathers or grandmothers.

Marguerite Bennet was ticket seller; Cleo Gustafson was ticket taker; Ted Gustafson played the phonograph. It could be heard a mile away. John Pillman, Standard Oil agent, furnished gasoline at eight cents per gallon, no tax. A 1909 local option election was won by the wets; a saloon replaced the Lyric, which was later moved to Crown Point.

Charles Hillstrom was post master [sic] in 1902 and for the next several years; Charles Hazlett succeeded him. The first rural horse and buggy mail carriers were Enos Thomas, Herbert Toseland, and Albert Grieger.

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#### DO YOU REMEMBER?

George Batt, the hermit of the Dunes, lived in a drift wood shack near the tamarack swamp about four miles east of Dune Park. He resembled pictures of Robinson Crusoe with his drooping hat, shaggy clothes, and a gunny sack over his shoulder. If you met him in the Dunes, he would be carrying a gun. He frightened the "heck" out of the women huckleberry pickers.

Diana of the Dunes was a feminine “hermit” who lived atop a dune a mile west of Porter Beach. Many stories of her life and activities were published in Chicago and in local papers.

In November, 1906, a terrible wreck occurred on the B & O Railroad a mile west of Woodville. An emigrant train of wooden coaches crashed into the rear of a stalled freight, rolled down an embankment, and caught fire. Eighty-eight men, women and children were cremated. In March, 1920, a New York Central passenger train crashed through a Michigan Central passenger train at the Porter crossing. The two trains met at the same time in the same block. Forty-five were killed and many injured.

G.R. Williams had the first auto in 1908, a black Olds with high wheels and hard rubber tires. Dille and Morgan [had] the first fire truck, a red Reo; Sandy Harbrecht owned the first Ford Agency; the Waugh brothers owned the first gasoline pump, a 5 gallon Bowser, made in Ft. Wayne. In 1911, the Northern Indiana Public Service Co. built electric lines into Chesterton. The street lights replaced a large number of kerosene lamps on top of ten-foot posts.

[Page 7] Smith Construction Co. of Hobart built the first sewer system during 1914. It served only Broadway to Porter Avenue, Calumet Street to 4<sup>th</sup>, and emptied into a disposal tank on Porter Avenue at Coffee Creek.

In 1933 the Town Board awarded a contract to construct the 8<sup>th</sup> Street trunk sewer. The town purchased 7 acres of land from the Chicago Hydraulic Brick Co. for a sewage disposal plant at the Calumet River and 8<sup>th</sup>. They granted the town of Porter free entry into the sewer for the privilege of crossing part of their land. Six-foot diameter cement pipes were laid south from the river, terminating at Porter Avenue. These pipes were [laid] twenty feet deep. This depth was need[ed] to join the old sewer and end the pollution of Coffee Creek. The W.P.A. [later] built the Porter Avenue sub trunk at no cost to town or property holders. Sunderman Bros. of Gary built the north and west side sewer systems. The town was prepared to grow. It did.

If you are 75 years of age [born ca. 1895] or older, you may well remember some of the old mills and mill-ponds that were so essential to farming communities. The mills had huge water wheels; when the sluice gate was opened, the rushing water would turn the wheel and furnish power to run the machinery.

They made whole-wheat flour that was whole (nothing added or subtracted), rye, buck-wheat, and corn meal. The mill was a busy place grinding grain for the farmer, and furnishing a vital product to the nearby community.

[Page 8] Pierce's Mill on Salt Creek was surrounded by a large wooded area. It was located five miles west of Valparaiso in Union Township. Gosset's Mill in Portage Township was also on Salt Creek. Both ceased to operate when the creek became too polluted, before 1910.

Long's Mill and pond was four miles southeast of Chesterton; Brown's Mill, a half-mile east of 49 on Sidewalk Road.

All types of pan fish abounded in all these ponds; and if you caught a speckled bass and [sic; with] pumpkin seed [bait], you added a lot of color to your string [of fish].

A Mr. Cooper \* operated a mill at Porter Avenue and Coffee Creek during these years, but he used steam power.

Sager's Mill on Sager Lake at the south edge of Valparaiso was a fine recreation area for fishing and boating. They had a “chute-the-chutes” which drew large crowds on weekends.

The Porter race track (a mile west of Porter) was built in 1912. A clay-over-sod was the fastest mile track in the country. It opened in September. The New York Central built a side track and ran excursions daily. The governor cited the owners for violating an Indiana anti-betting law. After running six weeks, a company of militia was sent here, and they closed the track. Many of the horses were sold to local residents for driving purposes.

Chesterton once enjoyed perfect railroad transportation. Ten suburban trains made round trips from Chicago, and five through trains stopped each way to take on or to leave passengers. A ten-ride ticket to Gary cost \$1.55; a ten-ride ticket to Chicago, \$4.25. All suburban trains stopped at 15<sup>th</sup> Street; one could ride to 15<sup>th</sup> Street for 5 cents.

When the Dunes Highway was built (together with better cars and balloon tires) the public began to desert the railroads. They found that they could ride from their home to the job where parking space was provided.

Patronage decreased to a point where the railroad was losing money on each run, so suburban trains were removed from service. Later the N.Y.C. sold the depot, freight house, and some acreage and abandoned the town as far as passenger service is concerned.

However, they left a few mementos: the shrieking whistle, roaring trains, diesel smoke, blocked crossings, and the thump, thump, thump of flat wheels on some of the freight cars, but (like the mail) they must go through.

Note on author: Arthur “Art” Rader (1883–1976) was born in Davenport, Iowa, spent many years in Chesterton, and died in Elroy, Wisconsin. His wife was Mary Celeste Diehl (1892–1977). Their children were Marilyn Rader Aikman (1920–2013) and John Rader (1922–2016). Art's parents were John August Rader (1855–1926), born in Germany, and Elizabeth Ann Whalen (1862–1961). Elizabeth was born in Porter County and died in Chesterton, one month after her 99<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Page numbers referenced in these notes are the pagination of the present edition, not the original.

Note, p. 1: Dr. Broad refers to Dr. Samuel Broad (1861–1938). Born in Canada, he married Drusilla Broad (1861–1933). Their son, Robert E. Broad (1898–1977), was born in Illinois (possibly in Momence, where his parents are buried) and died in Chesterton. He taught school in northern Porter County for 40 years. Robert's wife was Mabel Lindstrom (1899–1983) of Pine Twp.

Note, p. 2: The Warren Featherbone corset factory was owned by Edward Kirk Warren (1847–1919) of Three Oaks, Michigan. Warren developed a more satisfactory women's corset by using bones from turkey wings (e.g., feather-bones) as a replacement for whalebone corset stays (small whalebones were less flexible and broke easily.). His Three Oaks corset factory is on the National Register of Historic Places. Warren Dunes State Park and Warren Woods, both in Berrien Co., Michigan, were developed by Edward Warren.

Note, p. 2: Chicago, New York Air Line refers to the Chicago-New York Electrical Air Line Railroad project, proposed in 1906 and abandoned by 1908. The ambitious, unfeasible project called for a 750-mile railroad between Chicago and New York City, with no grade crossings, no grade elevations over 1%, and a 10-hour high-speed run, with sustained speeds over 75 mph.

Note, p. 3: “Romance of a War Nurse (1908)” The actress mis-named here was likely either Florence Auer (1880–1962) or Florence Turner (1885–1946), both of whom starred in this film.

Note, p. 5: Horace L. Cooper, Sr. (1834–1917) came to Chesterton in 1902 to be John Ketrings' miller. He bought Ketrings' mill in 1903 and operated it for ca. 11 years. Cooper's Mill produced wheat, gram, rye, buckwheat & corn flour. The site of Cooper's Mill, on the NE corner of S. Calumet at Porter Avenue, was later the site of Smith Motors and, more recently, the Hugh Hopkins Small Motor Repair shop. Horace L. Cooper, Jr. (1893–1972) owned and operated the Aron Theater until 1959. He was a former Town Board member.

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