

A November to Remember in Topeka History

The month of November was a memorable month in 1905 for Topeka residents. Hoosier poet, James Whitcomb Riley was on hand for the dedication of the first Sycamore Hall on November 24, 1905.

Governor Frank Hanley and Judge William Babcock (a brother to J.N. Babcock, a leading member in Topeka's Sycamore Literary Society) of Cleveland were also among the dignitaries in attendance. The *Lagrange Standard* reported that, "It was a most unusual dedication ----- possibly without parallel in the United States ----- a \$10,000 opera house in a village of less than 500 population, dedicated to the use of a literary society and to the intellectual development in general, by the governor of the state, America's greatest poet, and other distinguished men, and the gifts of two wealthy men (Andrew Carnegie, Levi



Undaunted, Topeka residents resolved to rebuild their literary treasure. In September of 1915, the *Topeka Journal* reported that, "The rebuilding of Sycamore Literary Hall is progressing in a miraculous manner." The new Sycamore Hall served the residents of Topeka for several generations, standing as a center piece of the community. It was the site of debates, lectures, plays concerts and a variety of other civic events including high school baccalaureates and graduations. The last graduation exercises were in 1967. The building, which had fallen into disrepair, came down in 1980 ending Topeka's golden age of literary leadership. The monogrammed crest that graced Sycamore Hall's stage is on display at the Depot along with the ticket window, one of the theater-type seats and other items. - HG



**Hoosier Poet
James Whitcomb Riley**

Straus), one of whom had not heard of the Hawpatch, the 'Garden of Eden.'" Unfortunately the state of the art literary facility burned to the ground in April (16th) of 1915.

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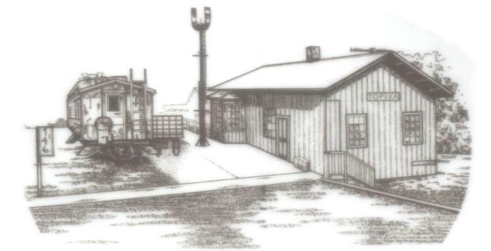


**Topeka Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571**



Mile 146

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Twenty Years of Preserving Topeka's Heritage

This year the Topeka Area Historical Society is celebrating twenty years of serving in the community. We are one of Topeka's best kept secrets. Some people think that all we do is sit around and talk about the past as we dust ancient relics. Unfortunately most Topeka residents have no idea what we do. Well, we do enjoy hearing about the past. And we are very proud of the preserved priceless artifacts from our past. But more than just keeping alive the past, we provide future generations with a historic compass. Someone has well said that, "A people who don't know their past have no future".

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When the Topeka Area Historical Society was organized in February of 1988, visionaries like Jerome Zehr (president), Ruth Johns (vice president), Elizabeth Rheinheimers (secretary-treasurer), Don Crouse, Dennis Fought, Glen Smith, Lloyd Woodworth, George Philley, Galen Yoder, Al Bontrager, and a host of others began with a clear purpose:

- To promote historical study and research, especially in and of the Topeka area of LaGrange County, Indiana, and the State of Indiana
- To provide a forum in which lectures and publications relevant to the study of history may be presented; and to collect, preserve, or restore, and make available to the public, historical publications, artifacts, relics, maps charts, pictures, manuscripts, buildings, structures, and all other objects or things of historical significance.

A fund was established with the hopes of purchasing the unused depot from the Norfolk & Western Railroad. One of the fundraisers was a quilt raffle put together by Bonnie Fought. A series of limited edition commemorative plates followed.

Unfortunately historical society president Jerome Zehr passed away in early 1990. Galen Yoder picked up Zehr's mantle with the goal to "set up a museum that will be interesting and educational for both adults and children." With the help of a \$3,000 loan from the Indiana Historical Foundation the purchase was completed in September of 1990.

In the years that followed numerous repairs and renovations were made to the depot. The roof had to be repaired, the building leveled, windows repaired, and gallons of paint. In September of 1992 we received our own caboose on permanent loan from the Elkhart Central Railroad Museum in Elkhart. While it needed a lot of "TLC", locating a set of original stencils and a fresh coat of paint worked wonders.

Today the Depot continues to serve as a community center piece and the repository of Topeka's rich history. Topeka Elementary School students annually visit the museum to see Indiana and Topeka history first hand. The Depot is open every Saturday morning from April to October.

Price is President

“From Hawpatch to the United Nations”

Bryon Price, born and reared in the Hawpatch, was elected president of the famous Gridiron Club in Washington at the club’s holiday banquet, reported the *Topeka Journal* December 16, 1937.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and other national leaders were among the guests.

Price was in charge of the Washington offices of the Associated Press at that time. He had joined the AP in 1912. During World War II, from 1941-45, Price was Director of Censorship for the United States.

A graduate of Topeka High School in 1908 and Wabash College, Price was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Price. He was a brother to Mrs. R.L. Thompson, Mrs. Willis Leming, Lewis Price, and Earl Price.

In February 1954, Price retired as

assistant secretary general of the United Nations. He was 62. He had served “seven years as the highest ranking American in the UN,” according to the February 3, 1954 *Topeka Journal*. During his tenure as head of administrative and financial services, Price saved the United Nations a billion dollars on its permanent headquarters, it was revealed.

Price planned to retire to a small town in Maryland, where he looked forward to “growing tomatoes and cutting grass,” the *Journal* reported.

- Reprinted from *Celebrating a Century 1893-1993* © 1993 TAHS

Nuclear Censorship

During World War II scientists around the world, especially in America were making significant breakthroughs in nuclear energy.



Byron Price
1891-1981

American nuclear scientists voluntarily agreed not to publish their findings in this explosive field.

In June, 1943, Director of Censorship Bryon Price sent a confidential note to

20,000 news outlets asking them "not to publish or broadcast any information whatever regarding war experiments involving production or utilization of atom smashing, atomic energy, atomic fission, atom splitting, or any of their equivalents, the use for military purposes of radium or radioactive materials, heavy water, high voltage discharges, equipment, cyclotrons, and the following elements or any of their compounds, namely, polonium, ytterbium, hafnium, protactinium, radium, rhenium, thorium, and deuterium." - HG

TAHS Quiz

- In what year was the Hawpatch (Topeka) settled?
- When was the “village of Topeka” (Hawpatch) platted?
- When was the Town of Topeka incorporated?
- What is the meaning of the Indian word “Topeka”?
- Who were the first white settlers in Topeka?
- In rail miles, how far is Topeka from Chicago?



You NEED to Join !

It’s Time to Renew

Now is the time. We need you to renew your membership in the Topeka Area Historical Society . Your \$10.00 annual membership is invaluable. That is less than a dollar a month. We’ll send you meeting announcements and the “Mile 146” TAHS newsletter.

Please renew your membership TODAY.

- Answers:
- 1) 1832
 - 2) June 14, 1893
 - 3) 1913
 - 4) Potato
 - 5) Anthony Nelson
 - 6) 146 miles

Urgent Need: Depot Roof Needs Repairs

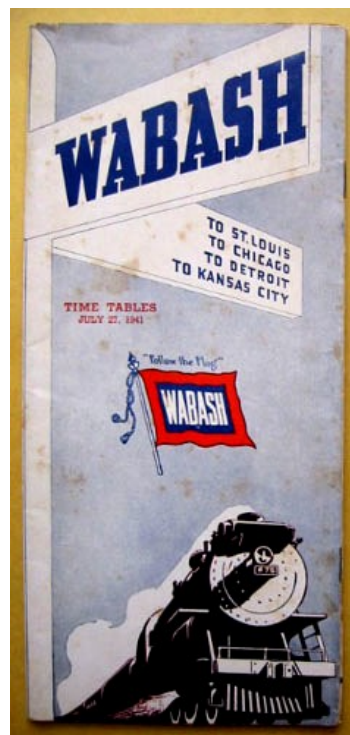
We need your help to repair the Depot roof. The old roofing must be replaced before winter. We have several major leaks, especially on the northeast section. Cost estimates are coming in around \$6,300.00.

The Depot is both an important historical site as well as the repository for irreplaceable artifacts. Very few communities are fortunate enough to have such a wonderful piece of their history. We must preserve it along with the history of this great community. To do that, we need your help.

The historical society does have some money in savings, but repairing the roof would take almost every dollar we have. We would not be able to pay our on-going utility costs or the other operational expenses.

Help us keep Topeka’s rich heritage and history alive by sending your check to help cover the cost of repairing the Depot roof. Checks should be made out to:

Topeka Area Historical Society



**Ruth Johns 1991 “Heart of Gold” winner
Dr. John Egli at the wheel with Tom Miller**

TAHS Charter Members

Charles & Shirley Anders
Warren & Glory Arnold
DeWayne & Mertice Bontrager
Marlene Campbell
Carl & Sue Christner
Don C. & Jean Crouse
Chris & Joy Deisler
John A. & Deborah Egli
David R. & Bonnie Fought
Dennis & Charla Fought
Maggie Glick
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Galen & Esther Yoder
Maynard & Marietta Yoder
David Jr. & Fannie Zehr
Jerome & Waneta Zehr

Topeka Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

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