



Mile 146

Winter - 2018



Volume 11

Topeka Area Historical Society



Ruth Johns

“Remembering Legacy of Mrs. Ruth Johns”

At every Westview High School sporting event, hundreds of people pass by the award plaques on the pillars just outside the main gymnasium doors without stopping to look at the names of the award winners. For that matter, most of the award winners know nothing about the amazing person for whom the honor is given. But, every year starting in 1979, an outstanding senior female athlete has been the recipient of the Ruth Johns Award. It is unfortunate that the memory of one of the most beloved teachers in the history of Topeka and Westview High School has all but faded. But for those of us who knew her and had her as a teacher, Mrs. Johns will forever hold a place in our hearts. She was the one teacher you did not want to disappoint in the classroom or in life.

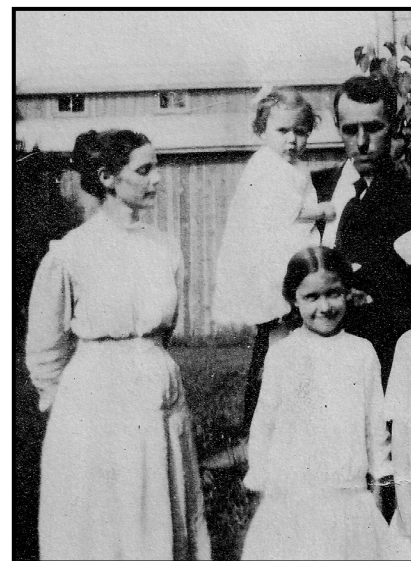
Ruth Johns was born on March 19, 1909, to Ingolsby W. “Goldy” (1880-1968) and Clara Belle Patterson Gnagy (1878-1939). She was born on a Friday, and on that day the first American airplane-manufacturing company was formed as Glenn Curtiss partnered with Augustus M. Herring to create the Herring-Curtiss Company. In Germany, Zeppelin I, with 26 passengers on board, made the longest controlled airship flight up until that time - 90 minutes.

On April 29, 1914, Ruth’s only sister Mary was born. Unfortunately Mary suffered from a heart ailment and in her last years was confined to bed. She died on September 20, 1931.

Ruth graduated from Topeka High School in the Spring of 1927. A Baccalaureate Service was held on Sunday, April 17th and Graduation was the following Friday night. There were 13 in her class, which included Helen Gay and Mildred Smith. Unfortunately the historical society does not have a photo of the entire class from that year.

Ruth’s next stops were at Goshen College and Ball State (then known as Ball State Teachers College) where in three terms she earned a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science degrees. Her Masters Degree came from the University of Iowa. Mrs. Johns always spoke fondly and with pride of her time at Iowa.

For 36 years Ruth taught business, math, and typing classes. She helped students at Topeka High School publish the student newspapers and yearbook, and then following school consolidation with Shipshewana, she continued to help Westview students with their student newspapers and yearbooks. Countless times she was the students’ choice for class sponsor. If she would have had her way, Mrs. Johns would have taught longer.



The Gnagy Family: Clara, Goldy holding Mary, and Ruth



Ruth & Mary



THS Class of 1927

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But with Westview's mandatory age limit policy, she was forced to retire in 1985.

On Christmas Eve of 1938, Ruth Gnagy was married to Ward Samuel Johns who was younger than Ruth having been born in 1912. Tom Johns says that his grandmother's wedding dress, in keeping with the season, was red. On January 21st of 1940, their only child, named after Ruth's grandfather and Ward's father, David Ray Johns, was born.

On May 26th 1953, death would strike another cruel blow to Ruth. Her beloved husband Ward, who was known for his size and strength, had a massive heart attack and died.

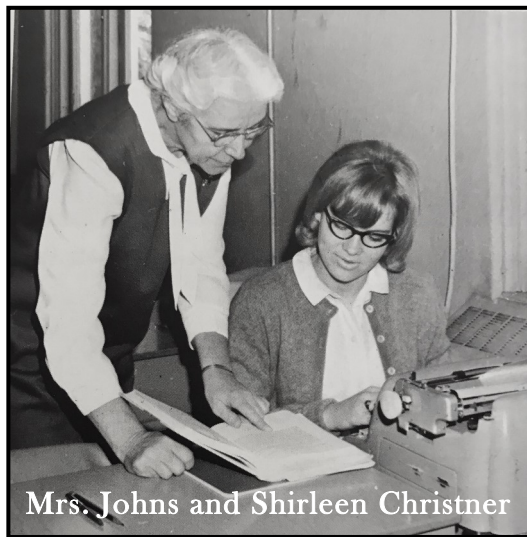
Sharon Turner posted the following obituary information on Ward's Find A Grave site:

Johns, -- Ward Samuel, was born Nov. 13, 1912, and passed away at his home in Topeka, Ind., May 26, 1953; aged 40 y. 6 m. 13 d. He was the son of Ray O. and Fannie Johns. On Dec. 24, 1938, he was united in marriage to Ruth Gnagy and to this union was born one son (David). His father preceded him in death on June 4, 1943. Surviving him are his beloved wife and son, his mother and stepfather (Mr. and Mrs. Ora Bingham, Lagrange, Ind.), one brother (Dewayne, New Paris, Ind.), and his father-in-law (I. W. Gnagy) besides many other relatives and friends. He accepted Christ as his personal Saviour and united with the Mennonite Church at an early age. He has been a faithful member and worker in the church, and was a loving husband and father. His sudden passing came as a shock and he will be greatly missed in the home, the church, and the community. Funeral services were held on May 29 at the Maple Grove Church in Topeka, Ind., with C. Norman Kraus and Edwin J. Yoder in charge. Burial was in the Maple Grove Cemetery.

At the January 2018 Topeka Area Historical Society meeting which honored the legacy of Ruth Johns, at least one former student remembered attending that funeral. "It was just



Ward & Ruth's wedding photo
December 24, 1938



Mrs. Johns and Shirleen Christner

so sad; I can still see her bending over the casket saying her last 'Good-byes'...her grief was beyond words."

In the years that followed Ruth poured her heart into raising David, into her students and the MYF group of the Maple Grove Mennonite Church.

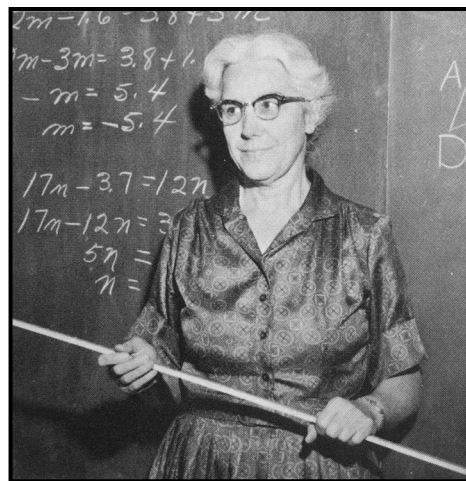
One summer, it was the year I got my permit to drive, she loaded up several of us from the youth group and took us (I was the only guy) at her own expense to Kansas for the wedding of the young pastor who was serving an internship at Maple Grove.

In those days there were no interstate highways, only two lane roads. About six or seven hours into the trip she looked at me and said, "Harold, I am so tired; you are going to have to help drive!" For a teenage guy with only a learners permit, it was both exciting and scary. Fortunately everything went well and there were no accidents. However, my mother was horrified when we got home and she heard about all the driving that I had done. Quite honestly, as far as I was concerned it all felt rather manly!

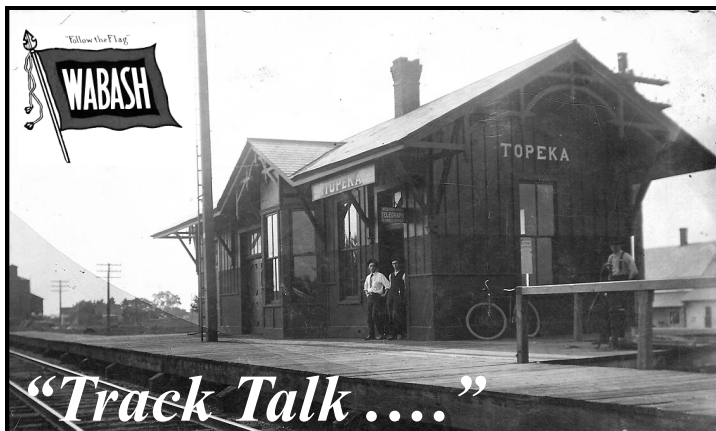
In the years following her retirement Ruth stayed active in the community. She was instrumental in forming the Topeka Area Historical Society and was a charter member. She was a member of Indiana Retired Teachers Association, National Retired Teachers Association, Maple Grove Mennonite Church and Women's Missionary and Service Commission.

Mrs. Ruth Johns stepped into eternity on December 10, 1994, and is buried alongside her beloved husband Ward in the Maple Grove Cemetery. At the time of her death she had one son, three grandchildren and a great-grandchild. Her son David died unexpectedly in August of 2004.

Ruth's grandson Tom and his wife Doris live in the family home on South Main Street and have three grown children. Tom and Doris continue to be active in leadership at the Maple Grove Church. Tom's two sisters live in Goshen where his mother Janet worked in the school's athletic department and his sister Dawn still teaches.



Answers:
1) Clara Belle Patterson
2) 1927
3) Un. of Iowa
4) Jean Miller
5) \$18,946.40



Bob Miller Takes Honor Flight

Robert "Bob" Miller (THS Class of 1948) joined several other area veterans on October 24th and boarded "Honor Flight 26" in Ft. Wayne to spend the day visiting war memorials in Washington D.C. Accompanying Miller was his son, Kenny, who was only 5 months old when his father was drafted.

Miller, who had previously been given a deferment, was drafted by the Army in March of 1955 and served in Korea as medic until January of 1957.

Bob & Donna Miller still live in the area. They are members of the Topeka Mennonite Church.



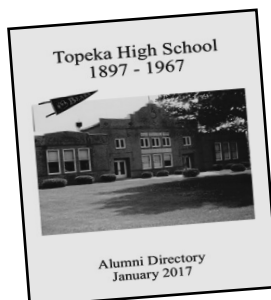
THS Alumni Directory

We still have copies of the final edition of the Topeka High School Alumni Directory that are available for purchase. The cost is only \$10.00 (plus \$5.00 shipping) for what is sure to become a collector's item.

This 116 page spiral bound volume is filled with the name of each graduate, numerous class photos, and other special features that celebrate the 70 year history of Topeka High School.

Order your copy from:

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



Coming Events:

March 20, 2018 "The LaGwana Story"

May 15, 2018 "The Josiah Henson Story"
 The Inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe's
 Uncle Tom

**Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings are held
 at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM
 Everyone is welcome**

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

New website:

Be sure to visit the historical society's new website at: **www.topekahistoricalsociety.com**.

Our thanks to the folks at LaGwana Media, especially Justin Geigley, for a marvelous job on a much needed update.



The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. What was Ruth Gnagy's mother's name?
2. What year did Gnagy graduate from Topeka?
3. Where did Ruth Johns get her masters degree?
4. Who was the first Ruth Johns Award winner?
5. How much did it cost to pave Main Street?



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Topeka Area Historical Society
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www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

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The Hawpatch History Detective

“The greatest thing to ever happen in Topeka?”

I remember one day asking the late Mary Jane Seagly, “What was the greatest thing you remember happening in Topeka?” Mary Jane, who passed away in April of 1998 at the age of 101, responded without hesitation. “Getting paved streets!”

Today we take paved streets for granted and are upset when the “potholes” aren’t filled within a day or two. But in the early days of Topeka there were no paved streets; everything was dirt. And if there was a sidewalk in front of the store, it was most likely made of boards. Needless to say, when it rained getting around downtown was not a very pleasant experience, especially for the ladies.

So when the Topeka Town Board awarded a contract in August of 1922 to have Hawpatch Street (now Main Street) cemented that was big news. We don’t know who was awarded the contract, how many blocks were cemented, or how long it took to complete the project. But we do know that the cost was \$18,946.40. *HG*

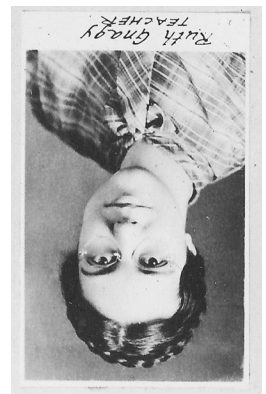
Ruth Johns Award Winners

1979 Jean Miller
1980 Laura Roy
1981 Joy Swartzentruber
1982 Beverly Miller
1983 Sheila Yoder

Ruth Johns Award Winners Continued:

1984 Donna Christner
1985 Lisa Bowen
1986 Lisa Helmuth
1987 Angie Christner
1988 Jenny Miller
1989 Julie Jensen
1990 Doretta Byler
1991 Doretta Mast
1992 Deann Christner
1993 Esther Weaver
1994 Dawn Miller
1995 Teresa Gingerich & Anika Egli
1996 Tina Stemm
1997 Christy Flowers
1998 Caryn Yoder
1999 Nicole Williams
2000 Jennifer Wingstrom
2001 Ashli Christner
2002 Shelly Peasley
2003 Jessie Lau
2004 Michelle Miller
2005 Whitney Christner & Jamie Gallmeyer
2006 Julie Wingstrom
2007 Michelle Haney
2008 Melissa Mast
2009 Cathy Wingstrom
2010 Morgan Mc Farren
2011 Kelsey Christner & Candice Stutzman
2012 Skyler Carpenter
2013 Olivia Miller
2014 Brooke Yoder
2015 Sidney Byrkett
2016 Miranda Kreese & Maria Mc Coy
2017 Karyssa Davis

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