
DANE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



The Dane County Historical Society Office and the Otto Schroeder Records Center are located in the lower level of the Lussier Family Heritage Building on Lake Farm Road just south of the Beltline near Lake Waubesa.

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Write Your Life Story: It's the Right Thing To Do

By Anne Short

Anne Short has been teaching Reminiscence Writing classes for over 20 years. In this article, Anne shares ideas about how to get started in preserving your stories for the future.

Everyone has a story to tell and no one but you can tell your story. Every story is unique. When you write your life story, it becomes a historical record, a treasured legacy for your children, grandchildren and generations to come.

Plan your journey.

You are embarking on a trip down memory lane. As you would whenever you contemplate a trip, start by gathering information. Relive your memories by talking to others in your family. Page through photograph albums and scrapbooks, look at old home movies, play recordings of the "golden oldies" – the songs you heard as a child, and danced to at the prom. Recall the stories that are told and retold whenever the family gets together on special occasions. Think about which pictures you may want to include.

If you'd rather not travel alone, join a writer's group or a class. You will meet kindred spirits who give you support, encouragement and helpful feedback.

Decide on your itinerary.

Make a vertical timeline from the day you were born to the present day. Using the information you have gathered, list events you want to write about. You can add others along the way as they come to mind.

Choose a format to serve as your road map and provide a focus to keep you on track. Decide whether to tell your story chronologically, or under topical headings such as *Childhood Memories, School Days, Special Friends and Mentors, Marriage and Family, Career, Hobbies, Volunteer Work, etc.*

Start writing. You're on your way.

Set aside a special time to work on your project and enter it on your calendar like any other appointment. Write the first draft quickly, concentrating on the story – *what* to tell, rather than *how* to tell it. Tell your internal editor to take a nap.

You may want to begin with a brief summary of your family background: where your ancestors came from, information about your parents.

A computer with word processing software is not a necessity, but it's a helpful tool that makes recording and editing your stories much easier. Even if you have access to a computer, you may be more comfortable using the old-fashioned pen and a yellow pad for the first draft. Whatever works best for you is the right approach.

Follow the road map as you go along, but feel free to take side trips. Sometimes a story develops a life of its own, with unexpected twists and turns. The best scenery is usually off the beaten path, not along the freeway.

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Write Your Life Story (*Continued from page 1*)

Heading down the home stretch.

When the first draft is ready, put your project on the back burner and enjoy a time out. After a break, wake up that internal editor and review what you've written with a fresh set of eyes. If you enter your manuscript on a computer at this point, you will find rewriting and editing much easier. Enlist help, if necessary. (Computer savvy grandkids often enjoy showing off their skills to a grateful grandparent.) Reliable tour guides for the last part of your journey are *The Elements of Style* by W.R. Strunk and E.B. White, and an up-to-date dictionary. Keep them at hand as you make additions, subtractions and corrections until you have everything just the way you want it.

Find the exact words that express your meaning. Use dialogue and imagery, to add sparkle. Lighten your baggage by deleting superfluous words. Add important details you overlooked. Finally, check grammar and spelling, make sure pronouns and antecedents match, banish dangling participles. Be sure to save everything on a diskette as you go along.

When the final draft is ready, get a second opinion from someone whose judgment you trust. Print the master copy, plan your layout and insert pictures with the help of a desktop publishing program. Making multiple copies is easy and inexpensive.

Distribute the finished product to family and friends and take your bow.

“Generation to Generation”

By Eileen Kalscheur Aeschbach.

Eileen, a descendent of a pioneer Dane County family, grew up on a farm near Verona. She is the author of numerous books including The Kalscheur Kids, Generation to Generation, and the Herman and Helena Kalscheur Family Tree. The Dane County Historical Society is pleased to have several of her publications at the Otto Schroeder Records Center

When I was five years old, my mom and dad gave me a brand new red coat for my birthday. It had two rows of black buttons down the front. Each row had four buttons. It had a matching red hat, trimmed in black, and matching snowpants. I also received a big sucker. Mom wanted to take my picture, so I put on my new coat and hat, got my little red wagon and my teddy bear. Teddy went everywhere with me. My godfather, Ed, gave him to me for my first Christmas.

We went outside for the picture because our camera had no flash. It was a beautiful fall day, that 11th day of November. There was no snow on the ground as yet, but the big shade tree in our front yard had shed its leaves. I stood on the sidewalk with Teddy in the wagon, proudly holding my big sucker. I was small for my age and I wore the coat a number of years before I outgrew it. My two younger sisters wore the coat after me. Then Mom gave the coat to her brother Herb and his wife Katie who had 14 children, of whom half were girls. With the exception of their oldest girl, who was older than I, all the girls in that family in turn wore my little red coat. When my sister Nancy had two daughters, my Aunt Katie passed the coat back to Nancy.

Somewhere along the line, the coat was shortened to fit whoever was wearing it at the time. When my girls were born, Nancy gave the coat back to me. Annette and Brenda were each 18 months old at the time they wore it. They were far enough apart in age and size so that when Annette outgrew it, Brenda could wear it. I



Eileen and her new red coat and hat, red wagon, and teddy bear.

just had to take a picture of each of them in that coat. I took them outside and they stood there with their little red wagon (not the same one that I had as a little girl) and inside the wagon was Teddy. Yes, it was the same teddy bear that I had in my picture.

I still have the coat, packed away for the next generation, and yes, I still have Teddy.

“One Day In December”

By Jeanne Tierney Berigan.

Jeanne grew up on the east side of Madison, but has now lived on the west side for many years. She worked at the UW-Madison School of Library and Information Services for over 20 years and is an active volunteer at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish. She married Leroy (Skip) Berigan in 1954. They have six children, 17 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

The sky was a gray December as my sister Pat and I headed home from the theater after the Sunday afternoon movie. Light snowflakes floated in the air. Not a storm, just a forerunner of the winter to come.

Life was peaceful for this eight-year-old girl growing up on Madison's East Side in the early 1940s. I loved the parochial school, where I was in third grad. My sisters and cousins had all gone to this same school. Since I was the youngest in a large extended family, it seemed a long time before I was old enough to be one of the gang. Living across the street from Lake Monona meant swimming every day in the summer and skating and cold weather fun in winter. My parents didn't worry when we walked to what was then the Eastwood Theater. When we got there, we met our friends and spent a delicious time in the make-believe world of the darkened theater.

That Sunday we had attended the nine o'clock children's Mass at St. Bernard's Church, read the funny papers, and eaten the big dinner Mother served at noon every week. Most other days we ate at five o'clock when Dad got home from work. Sunday was different. Eating at noon left the afternoon free for other activities. My two oldest sisters would go their friend's houses or stay at home to read, wash their hair, and sometimes, have an afternoon date. Mother usually took a nap and Dad would read and listen to sports on the radio. Pat, the sister closest to my age, and I headed for the one o'clock double feature with our dimes for admission and a nickel or two for candy.

As we walked home after the movie that day, Pat and I discussed what we would like for Christmas. The stores along Atwood Avenue had just started putting up their holiday decorations. In those days, stores waited until after Thanksgiving to think about Christmas. We did most of our shopping on the street although Mother took forays to the Square for important purchases. There were lots of store windows for us to look at. The hardware store, which carried an extended line of toys before Christmas, always had an intriguing window display. I wanted to look at the beautiful dolls for a long time, but Pat was twelve and didn't care much about dolls anymore. She was more interested in clothes. She was hoping Dad would buy a record player for the family this year.

The wind picked up off the lake as we turned onto Lakeland Avenue where we lived. It was much colder

near the lake, so we quit talking and buried our faces in our coat collars as we scurried along. We wanted to get home to our nice warm house with leftovers from dinner and hot chocolate. We ran up the driveway and hustled in through the back door. We hung our coats on the hooks Dad had installed in the back hall and left our boots on the boot rack.

Mother wasn't in the kitchen. That was strange. We went through the kitchen to see where everyone had gone. As we entered the living room, I could see right away that something was terribly wrong. The air was tight with tension. I had a sick scary feeling in my stomach as I looked at everyone. The family was gathered around the radio, not talking, just listening to the announcer. His voice was harried, almost frantic, as he described the destruction of the United States battleships and thousands of people killed in a place unknown to me.

Mother was standing, holding a towel as though she had just dried her hands. Dad was sitting forward in his chair with his head bent. My oldest sister sat hunched over on a hassock, her hands clasped tightly together. My next oldest sister sat on the couch, staring into space. I didn't understand what was happening, but when I asked, I got shushed.

I didn't know that this was a day that would change our lives. The world of a little girl in the Midwest would expand. Names like Guadalcanal, Bataan, and the Philippines, maps of the Normandy Coast and North Africa would be featured in the newspapers. My cousins would soon be in uniform. Blue stars on a red and white banner appeared in windows; later, sadly, when family members were killed or wounded, gold or silver stars. Words and phrases like rationing, gas coupons, victory gardens, USO, and War Bonds entered our vocabularies.

That day I remember so well more than 60 years later was December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor Day.

Eileen Kalscheur Aeschbach and Jeanne Tierney Berigan have both been students in Anne Short's Reminiscence Writing classes which have met on the west side of Madison every fall and spring since 1986. Their articles originally appeared in publications featuring writing by those who attended the classes. "Generation to Generation" was published in the 1995 collection of stories "One Day in December" appeared in the 2005 volume. The Dane County Historical Society's Otto Schroeder Records Center is pleased to have a complete run of the nine Reminiscence Writing anthologies.

Dane County Historical Society Saturday, May 5, 2007 Sun Prairie

Historical Marker Dedication

“First Rural Free Delivery in Wisconsin”

2:00pm

Sun Prairie Post Office

1715 Linnerud Drive • Sun Prairie

Annual Meeting 2007

3:00pm – 5:00pm

Westside Community Service Building

2598 West Main Street • Sun Prairie

Corner of Grand Avenue (Hwy C) and West Main Street

This year's presentation will be on
Rural Free Mail Delivery in Wisconsin

A special Commemorative Postal Cancel will be available for sale at the meeting.

Proposed DCHS Bylaws Changes

Attention DCHS members! The Board of Directors has proposed the following changes to the Dane County Historical Society Bylaws. Ratification vote on these changes will be held at the annual meeting, **Saturday May 5, 2007, 3:00 pm.** Approval of Bylaws changes requires a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members present at the meeting.

ARTICLE II. MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Qualifications

Proposed New Language

b. The membership year shall be from **January 1 through December 31**. Membership shall terminate automatically for non-payment of dues sixty (60) days following the date on which payment is due and that shall be **February 28**. Memberships terminated for nonpayment of dues shall be reinstated as of the date payment is received and shall continue until the end of the membership year. New members joining on or after **November 1** shall remain members through the following membership year without additional charge. Those joining earlier in the year shall remain members until the end of the current year.

ARTICLE III. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Section 1. Composition of the Board

Proposed Additional Section

e. The Board may elect a former board member, after his/her term of office shall have expired, as a Board Member Emeritus to honor those who have given distinguished service as members of the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors shall establish selection criteria for awarding of emeritus board status. Emeritus status for any specific board member shall be nominated by the Board of Directors, and voted on by the full membership at the annual meeting. Emeritus board member status is honorary; emeritus board members are not entitled to vote on Board decisions.

Rural Free Delivery

By Mary Clark

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

Today, most of us take for granted the dependable daily delivery of the U.S. mail to our doorsteps. It was not always so, and it was especially not the case for the hard-working families who lived on the farms and in other rural areas around the turn of the last century.

By the mid 1800s, the United States had already established an intricate system of postal delivery. Post offices were established in every state. Both city dwellers and farmers traveled to the post office in town, often housed in the general country store, barber shop, or in the front room of someone’s house, to collect their mail. The post office became a social focal point of most towns. However, delivery of the mail out to individual homes was not included in that service until later. In 1863, Congress provided that free city delivery service be established in larger communities of over 10,000 residents; and with that exciting new service came new requirements. All of a sudden, people were required to put street addresses on their letters for the first time. The establishment of mail delivery in a city was not just a convenience; it had an additional effect on the growth and improvement of an area. In order to have their city or town considered for mail delivery service, a municipality had to provide sidewalks and crosswalks; had to ensure that the streets were named and adequately lit; and had to assign numbers to the houses.

Even with the town improvements and the convenient city mail delivery service, rural families were still not served by the post office. They still had to travel into town to pick up or to post their letters and pack-



Mail wagon, circa 1889. Photo ID: 34276. Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

ages. Trips into town were rarely made more than once a week. After several false starts, Congress appropriated \$40,000 in 1895 to experiment with rural free delivery.

Among the very first experimental rural delivery routes were the routes that began in Sun Prairie in Dane County. That first Sun Prairie experiment in 1896 began with four carriers on four different routes. Each carrier rode 20 to 30 miles daily, delivering mail to an area of 58 square miles, for a salary of \$25 a month. The experiment succeeded, and the Post Office Department initiated another route out of Marshall on September 5, 1899. In 1900, it began circuits from Belleville, Cambridge, Deerfield, DeForest, Middleton, Morrisonville, Mount Horeb and Verona, as well as Madison and Stoughton.

The National Grange had lobbied strongly for the establishment of free rural mail delivery, but the proponents of rural delivery were often met with opposition from those who felt that beginning such a service would surely bankrupt the country. Oftentimes, the town merchants were opposed to expanding mail delivery out into rural areas as well. They depended on the farm families’ regular trips into town for supplies and trade. With regular mail delivery out to the countryside, trips into town for those folks would be fewer and farther between. There were others who were also not so happy to see the expansion of rural mail delivery, because where the rural delivery expanded, the importance and the influence of the fourth-class postmasters declined. This resulted in the elimination of many small rural post offices.

The new system led to the closing of scores of rural post offices throughout the county, thereby eroding a long-time source of political patronage in the form of postmaster appointments handed out by Elisha Keyes, the postmaster at Madison and the county’s Republican Party boss.

Forward! A History of Dane, the Capital County,
Allen Ruff and Tracy Will. 2000.

The country roads were often little more than dirt paths when rural service began. That meant that much of the year they were mud. Spring and winter months often made the roads impassable. Early rural letter carriers made their rounds on horseback, in buggies, and during the winter months, in sleds. Unlike city mail carriers, the rural carriers were responsible for purchasing their own vehicles; and were also responsible for supplying, feeding and stabling their own horses. Pay was small and conditions were often harsh.

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The rural carriers are under the supervision of the second, third and fourth-class postmaster, from whose office they start daily. The pay of the rural carrier is by no means large. He receives \$100 per annum and is required to furnish himself out of this with a horse and a vehicle as well, if one is required. While the remuneration for this hard and sometimes dangerous work is not great, no difficulty has been experienced on the part of the postoffice department in obtaining efficient and faithful carriers. In two instances girls have qualified for this arduous position, and it is stated that they are as faithful and unflagging in the performance of their duties and as devoted to the service as the men.

Daily Northwestern (Oshkosh, WI), Dec. 15, 1899

The RFD experiment turned out to be a raging success. It was extremely popular with the rural constituents. As farmers across the country learned that all they needed were 100 signatures on a petition requesting the service, petitions began to flood the Post Office Department. Postmasters had the right to refuse service to any route with poorly-kept roads; so in order to coax delivery routes to their areas, citizens were motivated to build, maintain and repair local roads and bridges.

Rural carriers carried more than the mail. They could provide the latest local news or the current price of goods in town. Patrons expected a lot from their carriers. In addition to collecting and delivering mail, they also sold stamps and money orders out of their buggies or wagons. The carriers essentially operated traveling post offices out of their vehicles. They might also be asked to run errands or to read or write letters for those who could not read or write themselves.

Rural Free Delivery service was a welcome improve-



W.C. Kern, R.F.D. Carrier, Route 1, Park River, North Dakota, 1914. Reprint courtesy of the Fred Hultstrand History in Pictures Collection, NDIRS-NDSU, Fargo.

ment for the isolated rural farms. Finally, farmers could get timely livestock quotations and produce price information, which allowed them to sell their stock and goods at the best time. Weather forecasts were delivered directly to farmers, along with newspapers, magazines and mail-order catalogs from Sears and Montgomery Wards. In 1897, one year after the start of the rural free delivery, Sears boasted that it was selling four suits and a watch every minute, a revolver every two minutes and a buggy every ten minutes. And within five years, Sears had tripled its revenues.

In 1898, when the postal service asked for citizen evaluation of the experimental phase of Rural Free Delivery, Nathan Nicholson of Newcastle, Indiana noted that, "I am taking two daily papers now and took none before. I send and get more letters since this has started. We can keep better posted on the war, markets, weather, politics, etc. It has got me spoiled."

By 1902, Rural Free Delivery had been established throughout the United States, and soon the word "free" was dropped from common usage as it was implied. In the Department's 1902 annual report, postal officials noted that "the people are demanding the service with impatient earnestness." That year, it became an official government service; and the rural face of America was changed forever.



Wisconsin State Journal, January 30, 1902

DID YOU KNOW? "Neither snow nor rain" Contrary to popular belief, the quote at the beginning of this article is not the official motto of the U.S. Postal Service. According to the Postal Service, this inscription was supplied by William Mitchell Kendall of the firm McKim, Mead & White, the architects who designed the New York General Post Office building in 1912. Kendall explained that the sentence appears in the works of Herodotus and describes the expedition of the Greeks against the Persians under Cyrus, about 500 B.C. The Persians operated a system of mounted postal couriers, and the sentence describes the fidelity with which their work was done.



*Rural Free Delivery in Westminster, Maryland, 1899.
Photo courtesy of the National Postal Museum Library.*

My Dad, in the Early Days of Rural Mail Delivery in Dane County, Wisconsin.

The following is an excerpt from a reminiscence written in 1984, by Glen W. Wheeler, longtime Dane County resident. A typescript copy is available in the Dane County Historical Society's, Otto Schroeder Records Center.

My father, Leslie C. Wheeler, and Leonard Veerhusen were the first R.F.D. (Rural Free Delivery) mail carriers from the post office in Windsor, Dane County, Wisconsin. Deliveries made 6 days a week, 2 holidays a year allowed, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Deliveries were made on Memorial Day and July 4th, and New Years.

Dad's routes covered 27 miles, the morning route east of Windsor, afternoon route south and west of the village. On morning route he usually used 1 horse and buggy or cutter, afternoon he usually used a team, finishing between 4:30 and 7:00 P.M. depending on the weather and how much snow to break through in the winter. In those days, the mailman had to cut the fences when the snow was deep in the road, the mail must be delivered, unlike the rules today. This required dad to have 5 to 7 horses at all times account of horse throwing a shoe, a split hoof, shoulder sore or going lame.

In 1913-14-15, I was a youngster and went with dad almost every day in the summers and many days in the winter unless storming real bad. I bundled up in a big fur coat of mothers with warm soap-stones under my feet, a scarf and blankets with nothing showing but my eyes. The morning run in winter if

real cold Mrs. Casey, mother of John, the undertaker in De Forest, and Willy, would see us approaching from the south and Mrs. Casey would have Willy come out and invite us in. Willy would take the horse and blanket it and get it out of the wind while Mrs. Casey made cocoa for me, and tea for dad and set out some goodies she had made. After a short break Willy would bring the rig up and we would be on our way again.

People in those days relied on the mailman for help in various ways. He would have to make out money orders, and have change along to handle and carry stamps. This was necessary as there was a lot of catalog buying then, Sears, Montgomery-Ward or Butler Brothers and others. This is a problem when the weather is below zero with a brisk wind, or in a rain-storm, to look over the order, make out the money order, make change, seal envelope, put on stamp, leave change in the mailbox along with their mail.

I mention people appreciated the rural mailman in those days. It showed up especially at Christmas time. They would tell dad to plan on bringing his sleigh and team for the pick-ups. At Steve Lampman's it was 10 bags of oats, Casey's 5 bags oats and 5 of ear corn, Dan Vincent 5 bags oats, a ham at Hauge's and Schweb's, and fresh meat at butchering time at Helmke's. It was same on the afternoon route. People would bring out a jar of fresh home churned butter, pail of honey or sorghum, or some home cured meats. August Roeske gave dad a goose almost every fall. We then had good home rendered goose-grease for rubbing our chests when we caught colds in the winter. One that was very special was Johnny Fisher from Westport route. Every fall he would deliver two triple wagon-box loads of wood to our home in Windsor. One load of fire wood for kitchen stove and the other chunk wood for the furnace. He would always say, "That's for bringing our mail regularly, no matter what the weather."

Those interested in early rural free delivery routes may wish to consult G.R. Angell & Co.'s *Directory of Dane County, 1904-08*. This book devotes 116 pages to listing the 91 RFD routes in Dane County, along with an alphabetical listing of families served by each route. It includes interesting and valuable information about these farms. First names are supplied for family members; farm acreage is provided; note is made when the title of the land is in the wife's name; and renters are also listed.

The Otto Schroeder Records Center has two copies of this book.

Dane County Historical Society
3101 Lake Farm Rd.
Madison, WI 53711

Check your mailing label. If it doesn't say 2007,
your membership has expired. Please renew now.
If it says "COUR" this is a courtesy copy.
See insert for membership information.

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President's Message

I just have two reminders for all members. First: Please, please, please renew your membership now. You will remember that we changed the DCHS membership year to a January-December calendar year, so we are hoping that all the existing members will remember that and will "re-up" right away. A renewal form is included with this newsletter.

Second: Pay attention to the announcement in this issue about the annual meeting and marker dedication on May 5, 2007. We hope to have a fruitful membership meeting and a very interesting program on Rural Free Delivery in Wisconsin. Mark your calendars now. You won't want to miss it.

2006 was a very good year for the Society. Thanks to all the members for your interest and your support. The Dane County Historical Society depends on you for its very existence.

Mary Clark, President

NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS (Spring 2007)

Welcome Aboard!

The following members are either new or returning members to Dane County Historical Society since the last newsletter. We are pleased to welcome them and appreciate their support.

John & Bernice Gorman
Carol J. Guenther
Ann Hartung
Kevin Kurdylo
Fred & Nancy Risser
Dann & Jean Willett

The Dane County Historical Society Newsletter is published quarterly (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter), by the Dane County Historical Society and printed by The Printing Place. Submissions are due 15 days prior to publication. Reader reviews, testimonials, flak and flattery, are also welcome. Send to: DCHS Newsletter, 3101 Lake Farm Rd. Madison, WI 53711. E-mail: danecountyhistory@sbcglobal.net
Mary Clark, President, Howard Sherpe, Editor, Dane County Historical Society