

More Iowa City History Than You Care to Know

One of the smartest things we Parsons grandkids ever did was to have our maternal grandfather George Frohwein (then in his 80's) document as much as he could remember about the high points of his life. This was back in 1984 and he whacked it out on his manual typewriter. Perhaps surprisingly, you might be interested.

Monona Iowa native George Frohwein attended the University of Iowa a century ago from 1918 to 1922 on an athletic scholarship, lettering three times in both baseball and basketball. As a pitcher he was the Hawkeyes' best hitter in 1922 with a .370 average, and in a 1920 Press-Citizen article he was described as "a stellar hurler, a crack infielder and some sticker." In 1921 he played center on the UI varsity basketball team alongside teammate Aubrey Devine (better known as an All-American quarterback).

Since the "new" field house wasn't constructed until 1926, SUI (as it was then known) basketball games were played at the men's gymnasium in the old Armory "at the foot of Washington Street." Side note: Hawkeye sports fans over age 50 may remember the horribly loud electric air horn used at the "new" UI Field House to signal time-outs and game-end ("there's the horn") at basketball and wrestling matches. My sister Cindy's husband Gary rescued it from a dumpster when he was working on the remodeling there in the early 1980's, and still has it if anyone wants to hear it. It is literally "a blast from the past."

Late in his senior year George realized he would be short one required course (Public Speaking) needed to graduate. He was already immersed in establishing a business partnership (originally Frohwein & Burns, now Tallgrass Business Resources) and never completed his degree.

George was a remarkable three-sport athlete although he didn't take up the game of golf until age 24, noting that the golf swing seemed similar to that of baseball. He was eventually credited with scoring seven holes-in-one during his lifetime, and once held the course records at the Iowa City Country Club, Fort Dodge Country Club and Muscatine Country Club, as well as winning several state golf tournaments. His wife Constance (among many other credits) was co-founder of

the Johnson County Red Cross Gray Ladies – the forerunner of U of I Hospitals & Clinics Volunteer Services.

George served on the Chamber of Commerce board, was Airport Commission chairman and Iowa City School Board chairman. When the location for the “new” high school (now City High) was selected in the early 1930’s, it was a great site on top of a hill, but on a dirt road just east of the city limits and perceived to be halfway to West Liberty. He used a newfangled invention called commercial radio to help sell the controversial location to voters; even so, the bond issue didn’t pass until the third try.

In his document, George wrote that he became “close friends” with SUI Art Professor Grant Wood, who was just seven years his senior. Wood invited George to watch him paint at his small studio on Iowa Avenue west of Close Hall (site of current Biology Building East), which George did several times.

George and Constance raised their family at 421 Melrose Avenue, across the street from both SUI head baseball coach Otto Vogel and SUI head basketball coach Rollie Williams. All the Frohwein kids and grandkids derived some income from parking cars on the Frohwein lawn for Field House and football stadium events. When Lucon Drive was constructed between the Frohwein house and the historic A.W. Pratt house next door, the street name was derived from the first names of the women residing in each; Lucille Pratt and Constance Frohwein.

Irving Weber (Iowa City Historian and UI’s first All-American swimmer) lived forever at 421 Melrose Court, which meant those of us living at 421 Melrose Avenue visited him regularly to exchange misdelivered mail.

George and Constance’s son George Jr. was project engineer for the Injun Explorer series of earth magnetosphere satellites designed and built at Iowa for NASA in the early 1960’s. He worked directly under Physics Department Head James Van Allen, often alongside the recently retired Don Gurnett. In 1966 George, Jr. accepted a position with Space Craft, Inc. in Huntsville, Alabama, where he worked on the TITAN and POSIDON missile projects. He later was project manager of an instrument package carried on Apollo V.

In 1950, George Sr.’s daughter Joan married Larry Parsons, who then joined the family business. They went on to have three children; Cindy, David and Doug. All

three of us happened to attend Roosevelt Elementary School where there is an entryway plaque bearing George Frohwein Sr.'s name, as he was chairman of the Iowa City School Board when the building was dedicated in 1931. When he died at age 94 in 1993 it was above-the-fold front page news in the Press-Citizen.

If you have elderly relatives who you don't know much about, it costs nothing to ask them to write something about their lives. You might do the same for yourself; presumably someone is going to need fodder for your obituary someday, and they may as well get it right.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is diligently working on his own obit, although he feels fine.