



Artifacts



Cover and other art by Bernard Gilardi, courtesy Portrait Society Gallery, Milwaukee. Inside: President's Report by Phil Brown, p. 2; Flood pix, 3; Museum Report by Lori Brost, 4; Halloween pix, 5; Christmas events, 6; Photo Thingy by Holly Knoll, 7; Effigy Mounds by Justin Isherwood, 8-10; Copper point pix, 11; Gilardi by Uncle Dave, 12-13; Gilardi pix, 12-19; Ronald Reagan by Richard Jackan, 20-30; Uncle Dave, 31; Gilardi pix, 32.

SWCHC Year in Review

By Phil Brown
SWCHC President



Included in the following message are highlights presented at the SWCHC Annual Meeting, Sept. 20, 2010 – with a couple updates.

2010 has been a great year for the SWCHC.

Since the fall of 2009, we were busy preparing for the “Year of Betty Boop.” With the expected increase in traffic, we took on the goal of creating new exhibits and improving old ones. Thanks to a generous gift from the Mead Witter Foundation, we were able to upgrade the Mead Witter Family Exhibit, the Merchants Exhibit on the second floor and the Logging Room Exhibit in the lower level. On top of that, Dave, Lori and Holly were able to add a whole new look to the Front Gallery, which features our collection of Grim Natwick items. Lori reconstructed the Toy Room Exhibit on the second floor and Holly was able to find a permanent home for the Don Krohn Photo Exhibit in the alcove on the second floor. On the Museum grounds on Second Street, overlooking the river bank, Uncle Dave and Jim Natwick spearheaded the installation of a new historical marker dedicated to Jim’s great-uncle Grim.

The many efforts were rewarded. Since Memorial Day weekend, we have had almost 2,000 visitors come through the Museum, compared to about 600 visitors in 2009.

One of the accomplishments I am most proud of is the success of our digitizing efforts that began in 2008. SWCHC has taken a leadership role in preserving and disseminating history the modern way and was recently recognized for the outstanding online display of the Don Krohn/Lawrence Oliver photo collection. We now have approximately 5,000 photos and 3,000 negatives scanned. The efforts put forth by Uncle Dave, Lori, Holly, Katie Sigler, Mary Sigler and volunteer Hank Bruse are to be commended.

After three years of focus on digitizing, we are turning more attention to reorganizing SWCHC’s extensive archives on the third floor. Some day soon, we will be able to view a digital image on a computer or our website and know exactly where that item is in the building and who donated it.

In order to accomplish these rather ambitious goals for a society of our size, SWCHC is counting on your continued financial support. Within the next month, you will be receiving our annual appeal letter. Please take this mailing seriously and consider your most generous gift to the SWCHC. We look forward to your help so we can continue our mission of making South Wood County area history accessible to anybody who is interested.

The Big Flood of 2010

Right: Where the history mural used to be, below the dam at the “old swimming pool” park. It washed away September 25. Several videos of the event can be found online.



Photos by Uncle Dave



Second Street between Museum back yard and Elks Club

Museum Report

It's all about the holidays



SWCHC Photos

Halloween on Third Street

For the first time in a long time, 540 Third Street South welcomed children of all ages for trick or treating and what a treat it was. I would like to thank Deb Brey and Sarah Sigler for helping Holly and me decorate. Despite those decorations taking a beating from the wind last week, they provided the Halloween atmosphere we were looking for. We added pumpkins donated by Altenburg's that were either painted or carved by the Boys & Girls Club in Wisconsin Rapids. We appreciate their time and efforts in helping with our celebration.

A special thank you to our summer workers, Mary and Kallie, who, dressed as scarecrows, provided quite a few inquisitive looks, some screams and jumps and lots of laughs; but all in all added quite a bit of fun.

By Lori Brost, Administrator

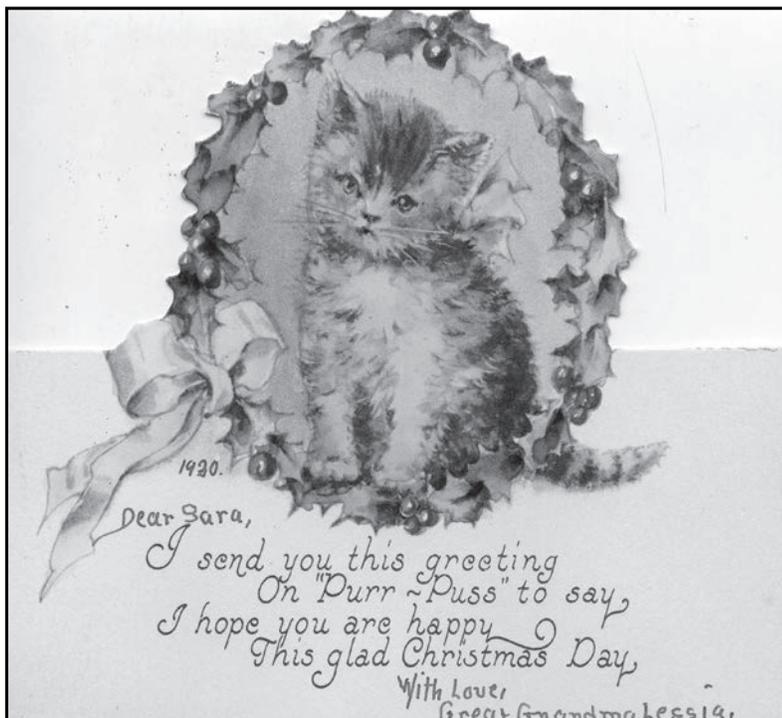




*Lea (left) and Mayci
Brost @ Museum*

Strange Visitors



from the archives*A Trip to Christmas Past*

The Museum would like to welcome you to join us for Saturdays in December as we celebrate the holiday season. Enjoy old fashioned cards created by the art classes from Assumption High School and festive decorations throughout the building. We will be open from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.

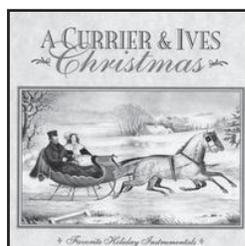
- December 4 – children are invited to come in and decorate cookies and visit with **Santa and Mrs. Claus** from 12:30 – 2:30 and hear some Christmas stories being read or watch some classic movies.

- December 11 – we will be hosting a **holiday social**. Stop to hear carols being sung by the choir from Assumption High School, warm up with some hot chocolate and listen to Phil Brown share history of Wisconsin Rapids around the Christmas tree.

- December 18 – we will be showcasing the **Christmas films**, “It’s a Wonderful Life” showing at 10:30 a.m. and “A Christmas Story” at 1 p.m.

- After Christmas we will be open from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. the week of December 27 through the 31st.

We are hoping to decorate the Museum in the Currier & Ives theme. If you have decorations that would enhance the season, we would appreciate your assistance.





Who are these guys?

Help identify similar photographs from our own past and have some fun reminiscing at the Museum, 540 Third Street S.



Photo Viewing Thingy

By Holly Knoll

Do you know a thing or two about the Wisconsin Rapids area and the people that once lived there? Do you consider yourself a history buff? Are you interested in finding out more about the area? Then this event is for you!

Beginning in January, the South Wood County Historical Museum will begin a four-month photo-viewing program, event, or, for lack of the exact term, a thingy. On the second Wednesdays of January, February, March and April, we invite the public to come and view photos to be discussed as a group. A distinguished but fun-loving panel, including Uncle Dave and Phil Brown of the Den of Antiquities, will be on hand. We at the Museum are hoping for information on some unidentified photographs and also any stories or comments you may have on the photos. Each month will focus on a different topic.

Don Krohn Photographs

1950 River City
Wednesday, January 12, 2011
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Lawrence Oliver Photographs

Mostly Rural
Wednesday, February 9, 2011
1:30 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Wisconsin Rapids West Side

Wednesday, March 9, 2011
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Wisconsin Rapids East Side

Wednesday, April 13, 2011
1:30 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Events are free. The public is invited to all sessions.

Effigy: Testimony of the Hand

By Justin Isherwood

Our word *effigy* comes from a lovely rolling Middle English *effigie*, in turn from the Latin *effingere*, meaning ... fingers. Thus, to leave on the landscape in an ancient age, when nature quickly obliterated the signs of the human passage, some testimony of the hand.

Wisconsin Mounds

Pre-Columbian North America suffers under the dominant and monumental shadow of the Mayans, Aztecs, Olmecs, and Incas, whose effigies endure and cast a compelling spell worthy of their makers. Even as the Mayan calendar, celebrated for its celestial accuracy and math, is cited as the excuse for the goofy disaster movie “2012.”

When it comes to effigies, we well know the markers in the Egyptian Valley of the Kings and those left by the Romans, Greeks, and Han Dynasty in China. Indiana Jones and Robert Langdon play a role in our popular sense of effigy and perhaps treasure, and the relish of the ancient, the secrets, the codes, the catacombs of the Nile, the Euphrates, the Rubicon, the Thames – but not to include the Buena Vista outside our window. Nothing of the spectacular effigies exist in North America, save perhaps for Cahokia in Illinois, a once great Indian metropolis of 50,000 that curiously dissolved about the time of Columbus.

North American tribes in general terms did not express a “high culture” of the same urban components, architecture, language, art and governance as the cultures of South America.

Here is proposed a list of those causes that prevented Indian cultures from the same “high expression” found in Asia and Europe. A late start being the first, 18,000 years of habitancy, versus 50,000-100,000 years. Then, the lack of the horse and the wheel. Perhaps climate was a determining factor. Perhaps most diverting of all was the ease of life in North America, of hunting/fishing as a way of life, lacking the dependency of population to force its agriculture. Corn did

not arrive to cultivation in North America until 400 A.D. The potato took an even more circuitous route, established more rapidly in Europe than it was in North America.

In sum, North American tribes didn’t have critical economic or ecological factors driving their cultures. North America mimicked the tribal jealousies of the Old Testament, pitting family nation against family nation, each poetically “the people” and each with their god. It was as Black Hawk lamented, a social construct based on war, warriors and war stories.

Effigy mounds in Wisconsin reflect the pastoral quality of Indian peoples here and evidence of a routine transience. Migration was a way of life, the land mass available to tribal use was in constant flux. Beyond, permanence didn’t match the climate of North America, particularly in the northern tier.

Corn Culture

It is perhaps surprising to learn the prairie culture of the Sioux originated in Wisconsin, as did the Cree. The horse culture was a late arrival, predated by nomadic oscillation between woodland culture and prairie. When Lewis and Clark contacted these cultures, the Mandan, the Sauk, the HoChunk were influenced by the Cahokia corn culture and well on the way to displacing the hunt.

Wisconsin was a focal point for lots of reasons: spring and summer heat, lack of competition, a nice summer climate. The result was a mosaic of tribes, with quasi definitive boundaries, coupled with seasonal migrations that followed weather patterns and an astounding larder of the passenger pigeon and availability of wild crops (rice, geese, cranberries, ducks, arrowroot, cattails, sugar, basket ash).

The effigy mounds at Aztalan in southern Wisconsin are suggestive of semi-permanence and a stable life pattern with associated crops, whether wild or cultivated. Corn, known then as flint corn, was the principle contributor, the farther north, the



*Excavating
a Wisconsin
mound, 1899
(WHS)*

harsher became the growing climate. The isobars of weather forecasters demonstrate the regional chance of corn cultivation in the Midwest.

Corn found Wisconsin a jealous climate. Fields had to be highly selective to shield them from cold air as the case of any apple orchard. Soil needed to be of a rapidly warming type, well drained, with ample exposure to the sun.

These climatic tensions were exposed when the Sauk practiced a highly advanced corn culture, whereas the Menominee and Ojibwa had nothing similar. A land distance of a mere 50 miles effected this difference. In one place, corn could thrive, in another it could not.

This pattern is still with us. The modern corn growing season at Arlington is nearly two months longer than at Stevens Point. Corn, despite its crosses and hybrids, its \$400 per bushel three tier price ... is still a tropical plant.

Native hybridizing adapted corn to an ever harsher climate with a shorter summer. In its original guise, corn was a 150-day cultivar, but corn grown for the fur trade had a 72 day growing season. The natural selection of seed stock by the Sauk allowed them to practice growing corn in Wisconsin with some 500 acres of production by 1830. Fields were big enough to inspire land envy among the early wave of white settlers not about to commingle their culture – any more than was an Old Order warrior by the name of Black Hawk.

Farther north, the climate reinforced a more hunter/gatherer life style and their effigy mounds reflect this.

Bigelow & Ross

The Bigelow mounds of Plover and the Ross Lake mounds of Nekoosa are among the northern-most effigy structures in North America, fingerprints of a transient but closed loop culture that returned to camps in accord with a seasonally available crop. These effigy mounds reflect the broad resource use of these people, and their migrations within a regional set of life sustaining materials. Theirs was not one place, one home culture, yet their effigies express a modest luxury of life as it reflects a resource competence that allowed the time and energy to create mound structures not in themselves life sustaining.

Dixon

In 1955 Dr. George Dixon excavated the Bigelow site on the Wisconsin River at a prehistoric migrational intersection popularly called Plover Portage, coincidentally the first name of the wider region. Dixon was following hints of effigy mounds in the 1912 survey of the area by Collie and Becker.

Dixon's first excavations were on private property owned by a sympathetic English professor

at Central State College (UW-SP), Mary Elizabeth Smith (as Garrison Keillor has exemplified, it is right and good to praise English majors at every opportunity). The Plover site consisted of low relief mounds only slightly different in shape from cradle knolls left in the wake of a large tree's upheaval. The symmetrical roundness of the mounds was the only indicator that these were not natural formations of storm battered white pines. The Dixon field study found remains of an infant, an older child, and an adult, along with pottery, percussion hammers, arrowheads, shells, awls, knives, bits of bone.

At Ross Lake are more advanced effigy structures, including both oval mounds and animal effigies, about forty mounds within a confined area. The number suggests a larger community than occupied the Plover site.

Between Fragile and Defunct

The current status of both sites is somewhere between fragile and complete destruction.

At the Bigelow site, what was once an open river site high above the Great Elbow of the Wisconsin became a high value home development that public officials took no precaution to save as a heritage site. Here was the famous "Yellow Banks," known for a millennium among native peoples as an important hub in active trade life. What was a rare northern example of mound building was quickly platted and subdivided. Mounds, both known and unknown, were obliterated.

The Ross Lake effigy site fairs little better, currently a long term campsite (oh the ironies) with plug-in air-conditioned campers situated next to and on top of the mounds.

Problem of Low Relief

The inherent problem of these effigy mounds is their low relief; they don't register with the same tactile force as a pyramid or temple. Despite diminutive size, these mounds required a prodigious collective activity, even were it done by pickup trucks and wheelbarrows.

In the age of mound builders, their bulldozer was an ash basket and a stone adz was their shovel. Put in terms of human effort, these mounds reveal

an important social value, if more succinctly a message, a mark of striving humanity on their land, a message of their existence, at the price of one basketful at a time.

A Modest Remounding

Over time, these mounds have settled and eroded. Their profile has become indistinct, which leads one to an archaeological incorrectness.

Were these mounds reinforced ... rebuilt ... on the landscape, they would be better appreciated and more visible. In other words, the mounds remounded, retrofitted to better demonstrate the outline and totem effigies.

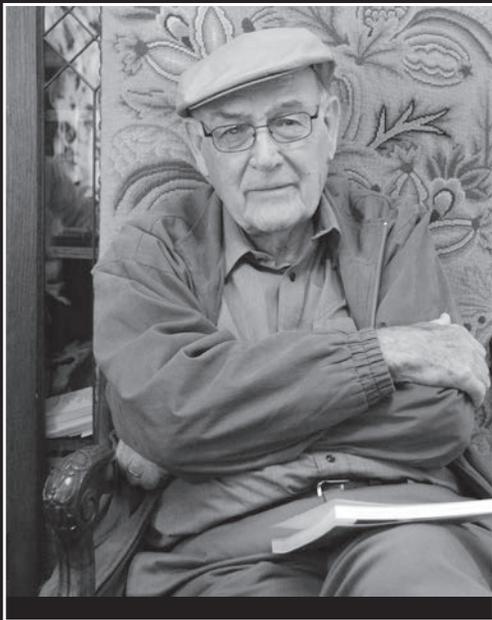
Despite that these mounds are in backyards and next to Winnebago campers, it seems both a violation and sacrilege that these sites are not visually punctuated and their presence visually established. To do so would require some readjustment of current use. With modest funds, combined with participation of high school/university students these mounds could be recreated and repunctuated on the landscape, complete with historical markers added to what are now private home sites. It might well be that an authentic effigy could add both value and cachet to the private home.

Because the effigy mounds of Central Wisconsin are of humble aspect does not mean they should be allowed to erode completely or to be desecrated, when only a modest effort is needed to reestablish the sites. How we honor these sites will be for private landowners and the public to determine.

Archeologists might cringe at words like recreation, reestablishment, re-mound, re-effigy ... but what's to lose? It is appropriate for the sake of history, as it is for sanctity, that means be found to restore the effigy mounds of Central Wisconsin. They offer a window into the past as nothing else; these mounds of our shy Midwest character are our standing stones, our pyramids. What they lose to grandeur, they gain through a poetic ease of matching the landscape as a haiku in grass and dirt. Time is right to put these effigies back on the map, and, if need be, to reinvent them.



Actual Size



Floyd Pagel

Copper Culture

It might have been a mound builder, 3,000 or more years ago, who last touched the artifact above. Almost 50 years ago, in 1962, Floyd Pagel, working on a new lawn on the southwest side of Wisconsin Rapids, dug up a clump of greenish gob.

Carefully nudging off the crust, Pagel unsheathed the copper spear point shown here, which he has graciously donated to the SW-CHC Museum.

Copper items, mostly mined in the Keweenaw region of Upper Michigan, were traded widely through North America but are rarely found in central Wisconsin. They are celebrated at Copper Culture State Park, Oconto.

Gilardi

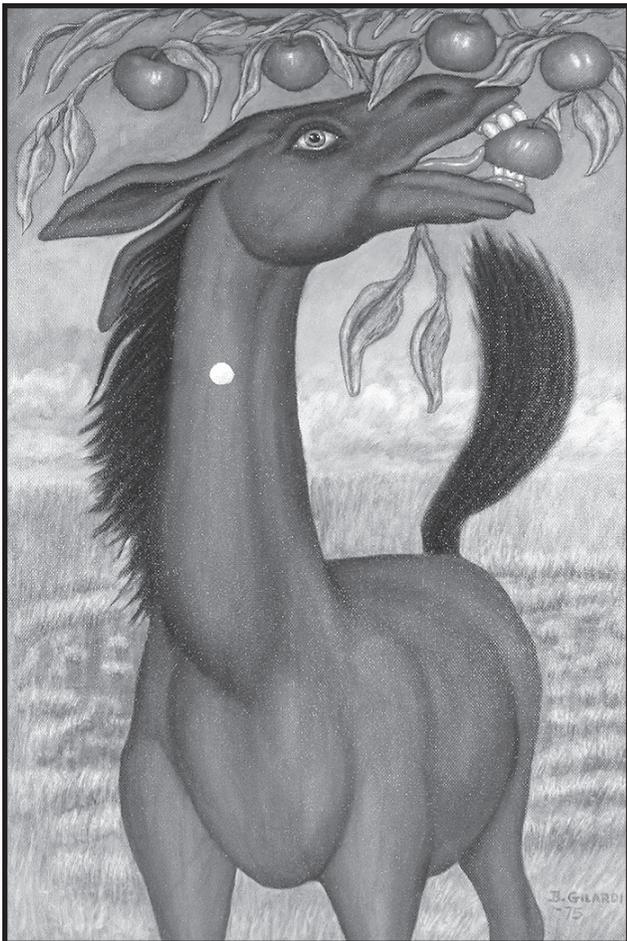
Home-grown artist had Genoa roots

By Uncle Dave

The news came from Debra Brehmer, formerly of the *Daily Tribune* and now director of the Portrait Society gallery, Milwaukee. She was planning a showing of paintings found in the basement of an imaginative and talented painter: Bernard F. Gilardi – from Rapids.

From Gilardi's Milwaukee *Journal-Sentinel* obituary, I learned he was Catholic, had been born into "a large family" in Solon Springs, Wis., and was raised in Wisconsin Rapids. He died in 2008 at age 88.

"Bernie proudly served his country during WWII in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He moved to Milwaukee where he met his wife and became a lithographer until his retirement in 1982.



By Bernard Gilardi, 20th Century

"He will be remembered for his friendliness and amusing sharp wit that reflects in his primitive style paintings, his lifelong hobby. He was a proud member of the Italian Community Center."

With this beginning, I traveled backward in time one step at a time.

When Bernard's brother, Bert, died, in 1970, at age 63, his obit said he was born in La Crosse and had worked as a carpenter at UW-Madison. Besides his immediate family, Bert was survived by his mother, Angeline Gilardi, Milwaukee, a sister, Sister Mary Rose, and six brothers: Joseph of Wisconsin Rapids, Harold, Bernard, Raymond and Carl, all of Milwaukee and Ralph, Sacramento, Cal.

Another step back to 1963: at the Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln High School reunion, Class of 1938, for which he served on the reunion committee, Bernard's caricatures were prominently on display.

In February 1945, Bernard's brother, Harold, on military leave, visited their parents at 1050 Washington St. here. Harold had earlier met with Bernard, a PFC with Army transport, in North Africa; Ralph and Raymond were stationed in the Hawaiian Islands.

Dec. 11, 1943. Of the "Galardi brothers," (usually pronounced Jill-ARdi) Ralph was on a small island in the South Pacific, Harold was with the air corps in North Africa and Bernard had completed a course in radio at Scott Field, Ill.

In June 1940, before the war, Bernard left his Wisconsin Rapids home to take a six weeks art course at UW-Madison.

1938: Bernard, "Bony," graduated from LHS, having illustrated three years of the yearbook, *Ahdawagam*, with clever cartoons.

1937: When group secretary Bernard was pictured with the Catholic Youth Organization, he stood with president Woodie Swancutt, the famed boxer and military flier often featured here.

1932: Bernard won third place in boys horseshoe at the second-annual Kiwanis Water Frolic on the Wisconsin River north of Rapids.

1930 census: Joseph Gilardi, 51, and wife Angeline were tabulated in Wisconsin Rapids with children Carl, Harold, Ralph, Bernard, Mary Rose and Raymond.

1929: Bernard, 9, son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gilardi, 241 Drake St., while clinging to a rock below the Consolidated spillway, was rescued by fireman John Miller. Bernard had been walking home from SS. Peter & Paul school, when he saw the then-low stage of water and thought he might find some landlocked fish – before rising water cut off his escape.

1920: Bernard was not born soon enough to be listed on the 1920 census for his family, in Koochiching County, Minn.

1902: Bernard's father, Joseph, married Angeline Penchi at Genoa in what is now Vernon County, Wis.

1878: The father, Joseph, was born in the U.S.

Like neighbors in Genoa, Wis., named Buzzetti, Fanetti, Barilani, Levi, Pedretti, Penchi, Zabolio,

Gadola, Gianoli, Monti, Paggi, Francoli, Starlocki, Vener, Ghelfi, Curti, Trussoni and Guanella, Joseph's parents had originally come from northern Lombardy near the Swiss border. His village was named "Fraciscio."

Many of the Italian immigrants had come up more lately from the lead mining region north of Galena, Ill., some before 1860. At Genoa, farming and fishing, as they had been for many in Europe, were chief pursuits.

In a 1930 newspaper account depicting the Vernon County Italian settlement, one of the oldest residents was a "Mrs. Gilardi," who lived in a stone house built by one of the first settlers, reminiscent, said a reporter, of old world architecture.

It was also noted that, in the St. Charles Borromeo church at Genoa hung a valuable painting brought from Italy, a portrait of St. Charles himself, also a native of northern Italy. Italians, it has often been proven, can be talented artists.

Churches and Cathedrals in numerous locations across the world feature depictions of St. Charles Borromeo – such as this one, housed at Chiesa Di San Carlo Alle Quattro Fontane, aka Church of Saint Charles at the Four Fountains – in Rome, Italy.

Bernard Gilardi's paintings will be on display until January 8 at Portrait Society Gallery, 207 E. Buffalo Street, Suite 526, Milwaukee, 53202. More info at portraitsocietygallery.wordpress.com.



St. Charles Borromeo by Orazio Borgianni, 1612



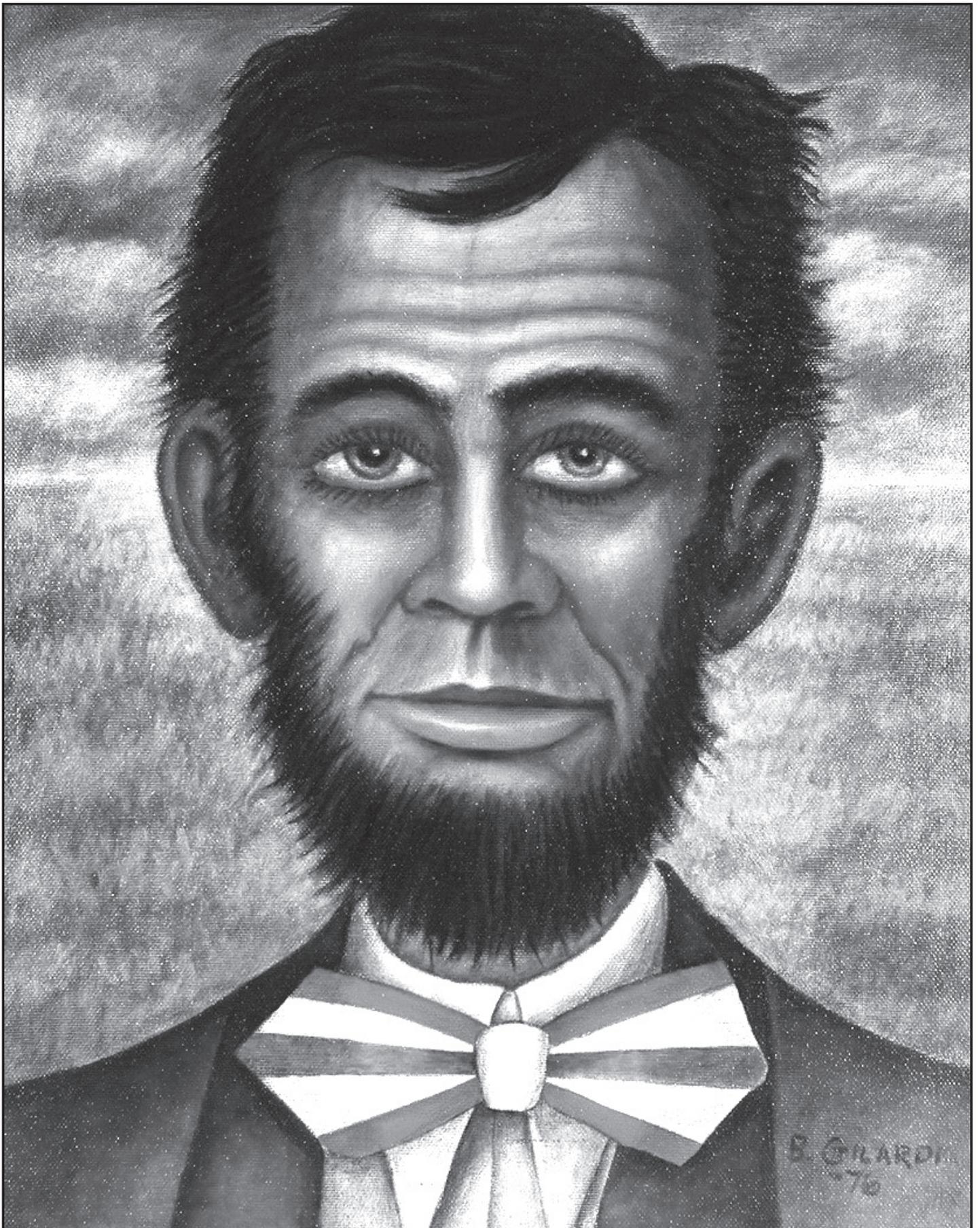
Art by Bernard Gilardi, Milwaukee, formerly of Wisconsin Rapids











Richard Jackan

The Boss

On the Ranch with Ronald Reagan

At the time I was born, July 3, 1944, my family lived in the second-story of my father's Grand Avenue grocery store on the West Side of Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. The first I can remember is running into the store and seeing my mother standing behind the counter and me telling her the back of my head had a bump. She asked me how I got the bump, so I told her I was playing with a rock and I threw it so hard that it went all the way around the world and hit me in the back of my head.

The story was told to me by my mother several years later.

[Dick's father, Raymond Joseph Jackan (1905-74) married Grace Antoinette Le Blond (1906-2007) in 1929.]

Close Call

The next thing I remember is being invited by my father's best friend to go on a short fishing trip.

We drove to a nearby stream and, after being there for quite a while, I had been walking along the bank and got rather thirsty. I spotted a can in the stream and it had water in it. So, being thirsty, I picked up the can and drank the water. After that, my father's friend took me back to the grocery store, where we lived. I was having trouble breathing and my father called my mother to see if she had any idea what could be wrong with me.

When my mother arrived, she was concerned with my breathing problems. She loaded me in the car and rushed me to the

hospital. As soon as the doctors examined me, my breathing was so bad they rushed me toward the operating room. Before they got there, they had to administer a tracheotomy. The doctor opened a hole in my throat. After we entered the operating room, they inserted a tube.

I remember being in the operating room and seeing the doctors operating on me. That is quite strange because I was only four years old and had never been anywhere near a hospital and knew nothing about doctors, much less being able to remember the inside of the operating room.

River City Break Up

After a long recovering period, we went back home to the grocery store. My mother was irritated about what happened and blamed my father and his friend for my problems. For a long time before my illness, my parents had not been getting along well and my problem brought their problems to a head.

The next day, my mother was doing the laundry by hand and she was working very hard. Not having a washing machine, she had taken the first half of the laundry downstairs and out back to hang on the clothesline. That portion of the laundry consisted of mostly sheets and white stuff, so when the other half of laundry was finished, she went out back to hang up the second half.

When she opened the back door, she saw that my father had started a fire to burn some boxes. When she went to the clothesline, she found black spots from the fire all over her newly washed sheets and white clothes.

She rushed into the store and while everyone was around, started chewing out my father for ruining her wash. He grabbed her arm to pull her into the back and started

screaming about her embarrassing him in front of the customers and basically roughed her up.

Just then, my mother's brother, Robert, came in the back room and found my father roughing up my mother. Her brother's first words to her were, "Would you like me to take you to my attorney?"

She said, "Yes."

After she finished seeing the lawyer, my mother decided she had enough of the situation with my father and asked him for a divorce. She made arrangements to leave Wisconsin and head for California, where my aunt had a ranch in the middle of the San Fernando Valley.

California Here I Come

When we left Wisconsin Rapids, in 1948, the train headed first to Chicago. My sister told me later it was the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. When we got to Chicago, we had to change to the Santa Fe. My two sisters had used the same train to go to California one week earlier.

The ride from Wisconsin to Los Angeles took us over two days. I was wound up, and, as my mother told me, sang a song most of the way, "California Here I Come," over and over and over, until she convinced me it was enough because it was disturbing the other passengers.

My aunt, uncle, their children, and my sisters, all met us at Union Station in Los Angeles. We loaded into their vehicle and headed for the San Fernando Valley.

The Ranch

After a tour of the sights along the way, we sighted the ranch, and turned into the gate. I had never seen anything so spacious. On

the left was a large orange grove, something completely new to me. On the right, was an open fenced field for horses to graze in.

After we drove up the driveway for about a quarter of a mile, on the left-hand side was the largest home I had ever seen. Entering the house, the first thing I saw, lying on the living room floor, was a tiger skin with the head still attached, a trophy my uncle had bagged.

After being shown the house, we were taken out through the front door to look at the ranch. Straight ahead of me was a line of eucalyptus trees on one side of a large riding arena. We were led to the guest house which was going to be where my mother, sisters and I would be staying.

After we finished checking out the ranch, we were invited into the main house once again to talk to my aunt and uncle about their interests. My aunt started out telling us about her equestrian accomplishments. She was in quite a few competitions at Devonshire Downs, the horse showplace of the San Fernando Valley. In later years, that area was turned into San Fernando Valley State College.

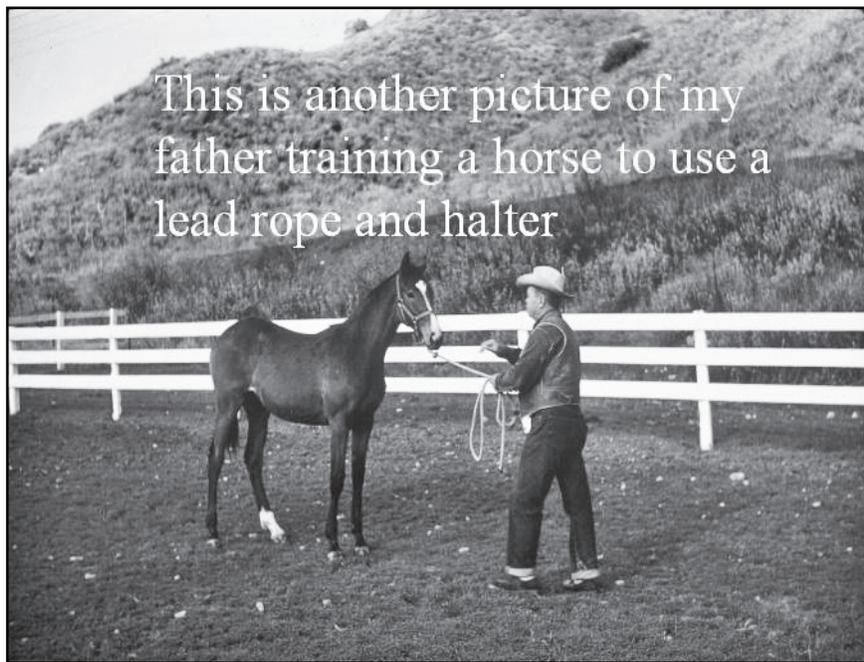
Then, she started talking about the movie stars that were living in the San Fernando Valley. She mentioned Monte Montana, Roy Rogers and more. At that time, I didn't recognize any of them. My mother mentioned one name I really got to know in later years and that was Ronald Reagan.

We lived at that ranch for quite a while until my mother found a job in the town of San Fernando and rented a series of three homes.

Ray Hired by the Boss

When we were living in the third home, one day, quite unexpectedly, my father showed up. Evidently, he had sold his grocery

*Ray
Jackan
pictured*



store in Wisconsin [to Joe Nuhlicek for the Chatterbox restaurant] and followed us to California to see if he might be able to re-establish the relationship with my mother. She convinced him there was no chance.

My father had some of the proceeds from the sale of his store. But he was not about to start a new grocery store in California. He asked my mother where he might get employment and, of course, she had no idea.

My father knew about my aunt and uncle's ranch so he decided he would visit with them. They offered him a position as a ranch hand. After several weeks of his handling the animals and managing the ranch, they were so pleased with his efforts they offered him the position of foreman.

After quite a while, my aunt and uncle were talking to Ronald Reagan one day and he told them he had just purchased a ranch out near Malibu Lake and was looking for a foreman. The next day my aunt and uncle told my father and he said he would be interested. He accepted that position and started working at Yearling Row ranch.

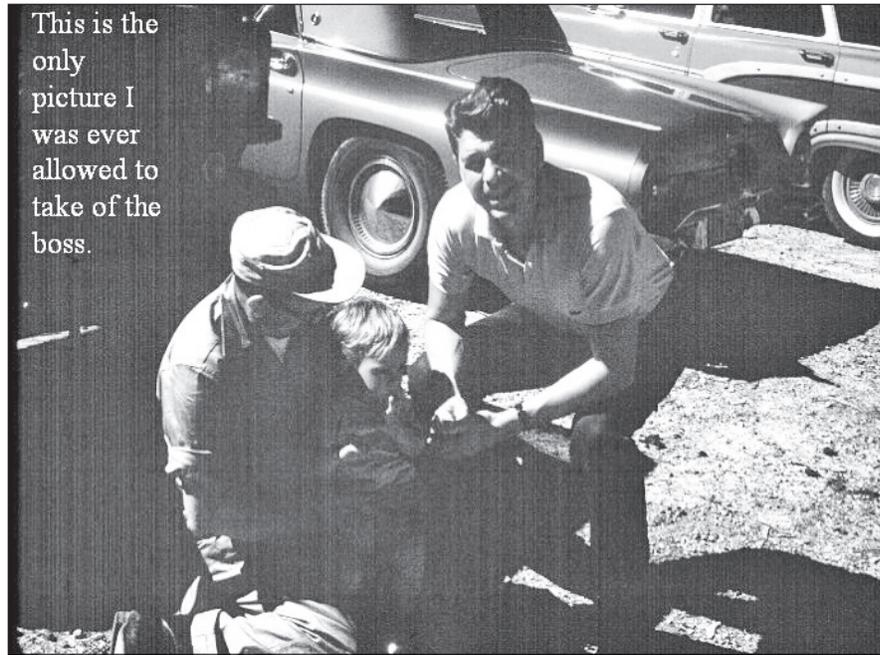
Yearling Row

After he'd been working there for several weeks, my father called my mother and asked her if she might be willing to let me visit for a weekend. My mother thought it over for a while and talked to me about it. I was of course excited about visiting my father on the ranch.

The next weekend my father drove to San Fernando to pick me up and that weekend started my many visits to Ronald Reagan's ranch. The ranch was 27 miles from my home in San Fernando. In those days that trip took a while because there was no freeway.

The next morning, I woke up and my father was ready to show me the chores he did every morning. We went outside. The sun was up and I could see the ranch was quite beautiful.

I started looking around and saw a small building used for all the gardening equipment. Beyond that was a riding arena which I learned later was used by Mr. Reagan for practicing riding and jumping. Looking a



little to my left there was a white staircase which led up to a platform. Up the staircase in front of us was the most beautiful swimming pool I had ever seen. As I later found out, it was 20 ft. wide, 40 ft. long and 10 ft. deep. At the far end of the pool, Mr. Reagan had installed an Olympic style diving board. Beyond the diving board was a bathhouse.

The Reagan Agenda

As my father was driving me home, he told me he would like to show me a lot more about the ranch. If I came on a weekend, Mr. Reagan would be there so I could meet him. He said, "Talk to your mother and let me know."

My sisters and mother greeted me at the door and started asking me questions about my weekend at the ranch. "Did you meet Ronald Reagan? Tell us all about the ranch."

I told them Mr. Reagan had not been at the ranch, because, as my father explained to me, he only came to the ranch once or twice a week alone and once in a while on weekends with Nancy and his son Michael. When they were with Mr. Reagan, my father said, Dad usually stayed inside his ranch house, unless Mr. Reagan needed his assistance. But during the week, he helped with anything Mr. Reagan might need him to do, including readying his horse or supplying him with firewood for his home in the Pacific Palisades. They would go out into the woods and cut a dead tree down with a chain saw, which Mr. Reagan always insisted on doing himself.

Big Weekend

The next Friday afternoon came along and Dad picked me up on time. So we headed out to the ranch, had dinner, watched some TV and hit the sack. The

next morning we got up, did all the chores, had breakfast and cleaned up all the stalls. Dad told me Mr. Reagan usually showed up between 10 to 11 a.m., so we had to wait a while before we spotted a red Ford Woody station wagon passing from right to left on Mulholland Highway, which you could see looking up the hill from where we were sitting. Dad said, "That is Mr. Reagan. He will be driving up the driveway soon."

Mr. Reagan turned into the main yard and parked his Woody in the garage. I had never seen him before because I had never been to a movie or had viewed any television, so I had no idea what he would look like.

My father introduced me.

Mr. Reagan said, "Glad to meet you," and shook my hand.

He was a really nice man. He stood about a foot taller than my dad and looked like he was ready to go to work.

The next thing I knew, Dad was telling Mr. Reagan that he had started teaching me how to work around the ranch. All three of us walked to the barn and Mr. Reagan said, "Ray, bring out Black Beauty," which was his horse, "and I'll saddle him up after I show Dick the tack room."

Mr. Reagan showed me all the English saddles he used for riding and jumping. We came out of the tack room and headed for the front of the barn. Dad had already brought Black Beauty around and tied him to the rail.

Mr. Reagan headed back into the tack room and came out carrying his saddle and bridle. Earlier he had put on his riding apparel which

consisted of a long sleeved shirt, a pair of riding pants and riding boots with spurs.

He mounted Black Beauty and headed over to the riding area and said, over his shoulder to my dad, "I'll show your son how I can ride and jump Black Beauty."

Mr. Reagan started riding around and around in the riding area. After he got the horse warmed up, he rode Black Beauty towards the first three rail jump, jumped right over it, turned the horse around, came back and jumped over another jump to the right of the first jump and he made that one also.

That was the very first time I had ever seen any horse jump over anything; needless to say I was very impressed. My father opened the gate and Mr. Reagan said, "I'm off for a short ride."

Mr. Reagan rode up and stopped next to the gate, released the latch and pushed the handle to the left – pushed the gate open, rode through the opened gate, rode to the other side of the gate, pushed it closed, pushed the handle right and locked it. He did all this while sitting on his horse. Once again I learned a new lesson.

After arriving at home I unloaded my stuff and said goodbye to Dad. He said goodbye to me.

My mother and sisters were all sitting on the front porch. When I walked up, everyone started asking questions about my visit.

I spent quite a while telling them all about meeting Ronald Reagan, seeing him and Black Beauty and all the things I could remember. We agreed, "That was quite a weekend."

Michael

After we left the ranch and before I got home, Dad said, "I was talking to Mr. Reagan and he said, 'The next time Dick is



Ronald Reagan at Yearling Row Ranch (Publicity Photo)

coming to the ranch, let me know and I will bring my son Michael.” That began a very long friendship with Mike Reagan which lasts to this very day.

When I met Mike for the very first time, we hit it off. He was only going to be there for one-day, but we started planning for the next time we would get together.

Mike and I both had very good imaginations. The next time we got together, both of us had a lot of time to think about things, like hiking through the hills of the ranch. So we talked about going on hikes around the ranch but neither one of us had seen much of the ranch or knew where to go.

Mike and I decided to ask our dads about where we should go. Asking questions of our fathers was not something we had usually done, because the both of us were very independent.

When he heard about our idea, Mr. Reagan spoke up first.

“Ray and I will take you guys in the Jeep and point out all the areas you could explore safely.”

After Mr. Reagan and Dad showed us around the ranch, we came back to the main

yard. We all jumped out of the Jeep and Dad said, “It’s about time so I’ll go into the ranch house and make us all some lunch.”

Mike, Mr. Reagan and myself walked over to the barn and Mr. Reagan said, “Dick have you ever seen a hayloft?”

After he showed us where it was, he said, “There is a ladder built into the wall on the far end of the barn and you both can climb up and explore the hayloft. But before you guys go up, there are a few things I must warn you about.

“Once you climb up the ladder, you will be approximately 15 feet off the ground, so make sure you always watch your balance.

“There are several hundred bales of hay all around the hayloft and there are rows between the bales for access to large holes in the floor, used for loading the feeders in the corners of the stalls below; so watch out because, if you fall into one of those holes, the horses will mistake you for food, and you can guess what that means.

“Also, both sides of the hayloft are set up exactly the same. If you want to go to the other side, there is a wooden bridge set up from one side to the other and you can cross

that bridge, but remember to watch your balance.” As I learned over the years, Mr. Reagan always explained everything in detail.

To our delight we scrambled up the ladder and started checking out the hayloft. It was exactly as he had explained.

Once we got a look at both sides of the hayloft, we heard Dad calling us for lunch and so I had another experience. We all went into the ranch house and of course into the kitchen which had a good-sized table. Dad had everything set up for lunch, so we all sat down at the table and started eating.

After we all finished our meal, Mr. Reagan started talking, which over the years I found out was one of the most interesting things about him. He described his plans for the ranch. He mentioned building jumps for his horses and making riding trails in areas that were not accessible at that time.

Over the years, a lot of things came out over the lunch table.

I can remember one time talking about him working for General Electric. Of course that was the TV show. After he'd been working for them for quite a while, they built him a home in the Pacific Palisades, which was called the General Electric Home of the Future.

After lunch, Mike and I headed outside. Mr. Reagan came out of the ranch house and said, “Let's all put our bathing suits on and head up to the pool.”

When we got up there, Mr. Reagan [a former lifeguard] looked at his watch and said, “It's only been half an hour since we ate lunch so let's sit by the pool for another half-hour, because after eating you must wait one hour before swimming for safety.”

After waiting, Mr. Reagan checked his watch and said, “It's time.”

Mike and I both jumped up and dove into the water. Mr. Reagan and Dad walked around to the shallow end, sat down on the edge of the pool and watched us while we swam.

So after that, Mr. Reagan and Michael got into their red Ford Woody and started driving home. That was the end of Saturday but I was happy I still had Sunday.

□

Minding the Fences

The next time Dad drove me home, he said, “Why don't you ask your mother if she would consider letting you spend part of your summer with me?”

When I got home, I ran into the house and Mom was there by herself, so I asked her if she would consider allowing me to spend some time during my vacation with him on the ranch. About a week later, she said, “After talking to your father, I agreed to a couple of weeks at a time.”

When vacation started, Dad picked me up that Friday night and we headed for my first full two weeks at the ranch. The first week started out by doing all the usual chores my father had taught me when I first visited.

Dad told me Mr. Reagan usually visited once or twice a week, usually Tuesdays and Thursdays. He always went over his plans with Dad. The tasks could be leveling off some of the roads by using the Ford tractor with a blade, building jumps for Mr. Reagan's riding adventures or anything else.

The first thing Mr. Reagan was concerned about was checking out all of the three rail fencing used for holding the race horses in the pastures.

If anything protrudes from the fences such as loose nails sticking into the pasture area or loose boards, the horses have a habit

of rubbing up against the fence to scratch themselves and as Mr. Reagan explained, anything sticking out of the fence when they rubbed against it could cut their hide. If that happened, it could cause an infection. He said, "With horses as expensive as these are, you don't need to lose them because of a fence malfunction."

When we finished walking around the inside of both large pastures, Mr. Reagan was pleased with the condition of the fences and he said, "Let's go back to the main yard."

Dad got out of the Jeep, turned around and said, "I'm fixing lunch and I will call you guys when it's ready."

Mr. Reagan said, "Dick, while we're waiting for lunch I'll show you around."

We headed for the barn. Before entering, he pointed out two doors (the doors were so big, I thought they were the side of the barn) and walked over to the right door and pulled it to the left.

It seemed to me the whole side of the barn was moving. Later I found out the dimensions of the doors were 17 ft. high by 10 ft. wide. Mr. Reagan told me the doors were used only in the rainy season. The reason they were so big was because they needed to allow fully loaded hay trucks to unload in the barn.

We walked around for a while and heard Dad call us for lunch so we went in for lunch. When we finished lunch, Mr. Reagan said,

"I have an appointment this afternoon so I'll have to cut the day short."

First Pay

One Saturday, I was mowing the front lawn of the main ranch house, when I looked up and saw Mr. Reagan. He went from the gate to the main door of the ranch house and I assumed he was changing to go riding.

A while later, I was putting around the yard with the lawn mower, mowing all the grass I could, when Mr. Reagan walked over and asked me to shut off the lawn mower. Needless to say I thought I was in trouble.

The Boss said "Dick, you seem to be doing quite a good job on my lawn. How long have you been able to do this job?"

I said, "Mr. Reagan, Dad taught me last year and I have been mowing the lawns every other weekend since he taught me."

Mr. Reagan said, "Well Dick you seem to be doing a fine job and for this fine job I will be paying you every other week that you mow the lawns front and back."

That was the first time I had ever been paid for working on the ranch by Mr. Reagan. Before that, Dad had given me spending money every time I went home, but I did not consider that to be pay for working with Dad on the ranch – just spending money.



Michael Reagan and Richard Jackan

On a Saturday morning, I had been mowing all the lawns around the main ranch house when Mr. Reagan showed up and walked out to where I was finishing up mowing the back lawn. He walked over and said, "You are doing a really good job," and handed me a crisp five dollar bill.

In those days, 1954, a five dollar bill was a lot of money and the beginning of my quest for financial gain. After that day, I realized I could make money.

Dad decided to take me home at the end of that weekend. On the way home I talked about how lucky I was because I was being paid while I was having a wonderful time. Dad explained to me that anything you are interested in can be profitable.

Promotion

After several weeks, on a Saturday, I was once again mowing the lawns, when Mr. Reagan walked up behind me and asked me to stop and talk. He asked me if I was pretty comfortable operating the lawn mower.

I said I was very comfortable and really liked mowing. He asked me if I thought I could mow the grass along both sides of the driveway from the main yard to the main gate, which was 3/8 of a mile.

I said, "With a good lawn mower like this one I will do a good job."

He said, "If you can do the job, I will double what I'm paying you now."

From that weekend on, I was mowing all the lawns around the main ranch house and the grass along both sides of the driveway.

I started mowing on Sundays because Mr. Reagan started bringing Mike with him on Saturdays when I was there. I really liked exploring the ranch with Mike and we also hit the swimming pool for long swims.

That was the schedule I lived with for the next couple of years. I really had a good time, but I always kept an eye on Mr. Reagan. When he saddled up his horse and went on his ride, I would always follow him as far as I could and watch as much as I could. At that time, I often dreamt of riding a horse, but I needed to wait for the future.

Pomona Hal

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When my father picked me up for my two week Christmas vacation, I jumped into his Buick and we headed for the ranch. I noticed something was mysterious about him.

After driving for a while, he started asking me about everything concerning Christmas and what I thought I might be receiving for presents.

"Mom said I should make out a list and send it to Santa Claus and Santa Claus makes Christmas perfect."

Dad said, "I know this is a week and a half before Christmas but sometimes Santa Claus comes a little early and I think he may be coming early this Christmas."

I asked why he thought Santa Claus may be visiting early and he said, "Santa Claus visits early on special occasions."

I asked what special occasion could be happening.

"You'll have to wait and see."

We got to the ranch late that night and had dinner, watched some TV and headed for bed. The next morning was the best in my 11 1/2 years.

First, we went out and did all the usual morning chores. After breakfast, we took the horses out to their fields, piled the droppings in front of the stalls, loaded up the trailer and went out to the field and fertilized it. When we drove back to the main yard, I looked to

the left and saw a horse trailer sitting in front of the barn with no car or truck to pull it.

We drove up to the trailer, got out of the Jeep and walked around to the rear of the trailer. I looked into the trailer and saw a very large brown horse's hindquarters.

Dad said, "Looks like Santa showed up."

"How could Santa have gotten the trailer here?"

"Haven't you ever heard of reindeer?"

We opened up the back of the trailer and Dad backed the horse out.

"Now that you have a new horse for Christmas, you'll have to figure out a name for him."

After lunch, Dad and I started talking about a name for my new horse but I could not come up with one. Dad said, "This is not establishing a name for your horse."

I said, "I have been thinking about every name that would be good for a horse but I can't think of one."

Dad said a name should describe something about the horse. "So let's see if we can think of something about the horse, like where is it from?"

I said, "I don't know where the horse is from," and Dad said, "We bought him from a ranch in Pomona near the racetrack, so if that's where he's from, we should call him Pomona something."

I thought about that for quite a while and decided I would use a name like one of my friends. That name was Hal. We decided on "Pomona Hal."

The next day, Mr. Reagan and Mike showed up with a horse for Michael's

Christmas. It was a very nice looking Palomino.

I ran over to Mike and congratulated him for his Christmas present.

The rest of the afternoon, Mike and I led our horses around the main yard and started talking about the name I had given my horse and I suggested Mike should name his like that. But Mike said his Dad and he had

discussed naming the horse and they had already decided on the name, Rebel.

After walking the horses around the yard for quite a while, Mr. Reagan suggested we take a quick afternoon swim. While we were all standing in the shallow end of the pool, Mike started talking to the Boss about him spending more time at the ranch. He said, "Mike I will

have to talk this over with Ray."

So Mr. Reagan and Dad got out of the pool and sat down at the table and discussed the situation. Mr. Reagan said he would arrange for Mike to spend weekends at the ranch. That pretty well topped off our Christmas.

Riding Lessons

□□

The next weekend Mike showed up with the Boss. They both got out of the Woody. Mike had a suitcase and said, "I'm here for the weekend."

Dad took Mike into the ranch house. After he showed him around, they came back out and Mr. Reagan said, "It's about time I showed you guys how to ride a horse."

The Boss had us bring our horses around to the hitching rail in front of the barn and tie them to the rail.



*Nancy and Ronald Reagan
at Yearling Row Ranch*

“I’m about to give you guys a lesson in saddling up a horse,” he said. “Come into the tack room and we will collect your saddles and bridles and I will show you both how to get yourselves and your horses ready for a ride.”

The first thing he showed us was how to put the bridles on our horses. The next thing was putting a small blanket over the horses back just behind the shoulders. Then, he showed us how to put the saddles on and how to tighten them.

Once we got the bridles and saddles on, the horses looked pretty good. The Boss said, “I forgot one important thing. Guys, go into the tack room and bring out the hooks for cleaning the horses hoofs.”

After we completed getting the horses ready to ride, the Boss said, “Let’s get you guys up on your horses and Ray and I will walk you around in the riding arena until you both feel comfortable.”

That was the first time I had ever been on the back of a horse, but it was not the last, because after that for several years, Mike and I rode our horses constantly.

After our dad’s had walked us around the ring for quite a while, Mr. Reagan said, “I have to show you guys how to sit in a saddle and use the reins. I think it’s about time we take the lead ropes off and you guys walk the

horses around the ring by yourselves.”

From then on Mike and I started riding every time we got a chance. When we had learned to ride, we both wanted to explore the whole ranch, of course on horseback. Every time we got a chance, we saddled up and rode around the ranch as much as we could. We proceeded to get rather good at riding.

Mr. Reagan showed up one day and saddled up his horse and said to us, “It’s about time you guys take a ride with me.”

We had already had our horses saddled up so when the boss said, “Let’s go,” we were ready.

The first ride we took, the Boss led us completely through the ranch and pointed out things to us we had never seen on our previous rides.

Everywhere we rode, Mr. Reagan told us stories and he was a master story teller. A lot of those stories were about his experiences in the movie industry. He told us about making movies, his days on radio and being a lifeguard earlier and all the responsibilities that included.

Every time the Boss started talking about a subject, he completely covered every aspect about it and what effects it may have on us. He described everything to us in terms we could understand. He was the most interesting person I had ever spoken with in my life.

More to the Story

This is just the beginning. For more of Richard Jackan’s life and times, see the website:

www.ronaldreagansyearlingrowranch.com.

Jackan, a native of Wisconsin Rapids and now a contented 66-year-old Californian, says he made a fortune promoting Krazy Glue before it slipped through his fingers. His account of working on the Reagan ranch is an experimental publishing venture in which an introduction such as this is available for free and further chapters can be purchased.

Whether you consult the website or not, Dick would be glad to hear from anyone here, especially those who knew him or his family or has an interest in Ronald Reagan. His email is rich4pool@aol.com. He will call you back if you prefer.

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Stop in with \$20 or mail to SWCHC OFFER, 540 Third Street S., Wisconsin Rapids WI 54494.



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Artifacts, a local history magazine and newsletter for the South Wood County Historical Corp. welcomes contributions of writings and photographs relevant to the greater Wisconsin Rapids area. For a year's subscription and membership send \$20 to the address above. Questions? Contact Lori Brost, Museum Administrator and assistant editor, 715-423-1580. lori@swch-museum.com

