



Confluence

The Czech that Bounced

Eleanor Marilyn “Lyn” Vodak Larkin



Quite a name for quite a woman who was born 5 October 1916 in Hillsboro, Wisconsin. Lyn was the oldest of four children born to Frank and Emilia Vodak. Lyn’s siblings were Lorraine Vercelia, Leland Francis, who became a popular trumpet player in the area, and Ronald Charles. The family moved to Beloit in 1925.

Hillsboro Wisconsin, at the time of Lyn’s birth, was known as the Czech capital of Wisconsin because of its large Czechoslovakian population. Being Czechs themselves the Vodaks were at home in Hillsboro and Lyn’s memory of the town and her Czech heritage would never be forgotten. After settling in Beloit Lyn, over the years and leading to her death in 1996, would amass volumes of genealogy, documents, land deeds and marriage certificates along with a variety of mementos pertaining to her deep roots. She even wrote a 500 page autobiography entitled The Czech that Bounced.

Lyn did bounce around the country, too, after graduating from Beloit High School in 1934, marrying Don L. Burgess in 1937 - divorcing in 1939 - then settling in San Francisco before the outbreak of WWII working as Office Manager for the Beverage Industry News. Her colleagues called her “Vodie” and

she managed the phones, researched, wrote articles, maintaining contacts in the beverage industry throughout California and beyond from 1939-1946.

During a six hour blackout in Frisco, 12 December 1941, Lyn married a patent attorney named James Larkin. The story of their wedding with the difficulties of marrying during a blackout, with forgotten rings and flowers and closed stores made it into the bridal edition of the Beloit Daily News later in Lyn’s life. Frank’s work took the young couple to Ohio for two years, then to Elmwood Park, Illinois for the next twenty five. Frank retired in 1972 and the couple returned to California settling in Laguna Hills. They spent seven years there before moving to Beloit. Frank died here in 1982.

It was during the 1980’s that Lyn began
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The neighbor and her dog walk every morning when the weather is good. They walk again in the later afternoon up and down – east & west – Portland Avenue. Each time they’re gone for quite a while. A thought comes to mind with this walking which affords a look at the history, a broad stroke look, of Portland. For the sake of the story that follows, let us make her an immortal and her dog, too, we wouldn’t want her to be alone.

The woman and her dog would have a regular, worn, dirt road to walk on starting around 1850. It would come to be known as Portland Avenue later but its first designation was as Division Street, then as Milwaukee Street, and ‘C’ Street before coming to be called Portland Avenue at the turn of the 20th century. In the mid 19th century until the mid 1880s the area at the west bank of Rock River, the beginning of Portland, was undeveloped and ran up to present day 8th street with not much beyond that point but country. One would pass on the walk during this time from the banks of Rock River, with perhaps a boat or two at port, west to 8th amidst a few dwellings and under a canopy of lovely Dutch elms. The lady and her dog cool and content, undisturbed on their leisurely stroll in an almost bucolic setting and a relatively short walk it would be. Not like the one they would take 162 years later if they were to walk the length of present day Portland.

With the turn of the 20th century, in 1904 to be exact, the walk would take our companions from the banks to Townline. The lady would be able, if desired, to refresh



herself a bit with a rest on a step or bench at the new business Advance Grocery, located at 609 Portland. Maybe the owners, the Ellingson brothers, would have said hello. By 1907-'08 she and her dog would notice the new Parker School which was recently built to replace the older one that Beloiters of the time referred to as the Old Stone Pile or Old Number Two. Located at 5th & Port-



land Parker would come to be phased out of use by 1967 and torn down in 1969 to make way for apartments for the elderly with low incomes. By 2012 these apartments would make way for newer ones serving the same kind of population.

By 1914 our immortals would be able to stroll all the way out to McKinley. There would be from Rock River out to the 1600 block of Portland, homes and businesses, though the businesses would be east of

Hackett Street. Names of the folks along this route would be P.M. Newton, Simon Sevin, A.C. Morse, C.E. Inman, W.C. Hopkins and Alfred Fossum among others and who knows, maybe all with a friendly “good morning” to our walkers. By 1922 Portland ran out to the 1800 block. And in that year the City Barns were open for business back at 200 Portland Avenue.

The big news of the 1920s for Portland was the bridge going up. It went up in 1927 and that gave Beloit three bridges spanning Rock River east to west. The other two were Central (present day East & West Grand Ave.) and Shirland Ave. It also gave our friends another 500 feet to walk. She and her dog would have found plenty of room to walk on either side of the bridge with 6 feet width of sidewalk. From the late 1920s to the late 1930s Portland businesses began to pop up all along the street from the 20 block to the 700 block. Rock River Grocery was at 29 Portland, Riverside Tavern at 39 Portland, Stop-In Tavern at 100, The Beloit Street Department Yards at 105, J. Black & Company at 158, Parris Grocery at 609 (replacing the earlier Advance Grocery) and the Portland Avenue Drug Store at 611. Regarding residences along the way, Vince Stankewitz was living at 154 Portland in 1933. The Stankewitz’s would make an impact on the old street but that wouldn’t come until the later 1940s.

The 1940s saw a real surge in numbers of residences and of businesses as did our immortals who still walk today. They – the nameless lady and dog – would have noticed

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Beloit Historical Society

Confluence

845 Hackett St.

Beloit WI 53511

Address Service Requested

Visit our web site at beloithistoricalociety.com

The Vision of the Beloit Historical Society is to make history a focal point of community pride and to serve as a constant reminder to the community of its great and diverse heritage.

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Beloit Historical Society

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Newsletter Contributors: Paul Kerr, Dwight Alton, and Sue Kurth; layout by Jen Scott.

Board meetings are the third Thursday of every month at 4:15 p.m. and are held at Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett Street.

The Newsletter, Confluence, is published quarterly for the membership of the Beloit Historical Society to inform readers of Society activities as well as educate them on the history of Beloit. The Beloit Historical Society manages two sites, Lincoln Center Museum with main offices at 845 Hackett St. and Hanchett-Bartlett Homestead, 2149 St. Lawrence Ave. For further information please call (608) 365-7835 or e-mail us at Pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com. Or see our web site at beloithistoricalsociety.com.

Walking Portland (continued)

the new Post Office substation at the old Portland Avenue Drug Store, Quigley's Ray Tin Shop at 111 Portland, A.B. Welding at 113, Luedke's Grocery at 609, J&J Furniture back down on 29, Dixie Cream at 53, the Sportsman's Tap at 100, Peg's Cheese House Restaurant at 121 and yes, the Stankewitz sons, mostly George, who after WWII, gets the Pop House going at 158 Portland. The Pop House became a major attraction of this street of ours into the '70s.

The modernization of Portland with telephone poles, cables, wires of all sorts, traffic, noise, always old neighbors moving out and new ones moving in would prove exciting to our immortals or a real pain missing the comfort of those Dutch elms and the protective canopy it provided for a shady walk on Portland. Today's walk would take them all the way past Bittel, past streets named after some of the country's Presidents, to a dead end behind a field that is managed by the Beloit Historical Society with a home off to the right and a 2241 Portland Avenue address. Back and forth they walk, east and west on Portland. Maybe we'll find them another street to walk on in the time to come.



Upcoming Events

The Beloit Historical Society's **Annual Appeal** will arrive in your mailbox by mid November and once again we hope you will support us with a financial contribution. The last two years have been very good for us because of you and both years we exceeded our fund-raising goal. Our goal this year is to raise \$14,000. Please helps us if you can.

A **Book Discussion** of Jackie Dougan Jackson's latest volume (Vol. II) The Round Barn: A Biography of an American Farm will be held at the Historical Society on December 12 from 5:30-7 p.m. We hope you join us as Jackie discusses her new book and partake of refreshments and friendly conversation. Stop by at 845 Hackett St. and learn a little something about a rich part of Beloit's agricultural past. No charge for this event.

An **Evening at Lincoln Center** is scheduled for February 15, 2013 with appetizers served at 6 p.m., dinner and program to follow. The program is *Pop Goes History: Understanding America through its Popular Culture* and is presented by Kurt Leichtle. Join us for our first program of the new year. Price is \$35 for members/\$40 for non-members. For further information please phone us at 608-365-7835.

The Czech that Bounced (continued)

Eleanor Marilyn "Lyn" Vodak Larkin

to write in earnest. She wrote short stories, poetry and articles. Back in San Francisco Lyn had taken creative writing classes and this background and subsequent writing finding print in the Beloit Daily News, Hillsboro Sentry-Enterprise, Koret Living Library, Beloitana Collection at Beloit College and other magazines such as December Rose and Rockford Review helped gain her membership into the Newspaper Institute of America by the end of the decade. She also won some notoriety through contests such as Yarns of Yesteryear sponsored by the University of Wisconsin.

Lyn was involved and committed to the communities in which she lived participating in many activities but still, after two marriages, several jobs, traveling and writing she would feel disappointment and communicate in her autobiography: "There was no chance I would ever have the love I wanted. It was ironic that I who had once been so determined to be a career woman had married so I wouldn't be alone...No one deserving had come along. No one appreciated my capacity for loving, for giving. But I had learned to stand on my own two feet and I had managed in spite of all tragedies."

This is just a sketch of Lyn Larkin's life, a Beloiters with an interesting story whose collection of letters, genealogies, writings of all sorts with accompanying photographs reside at the Historical Society. If one is curious to know more about perhaps what those tragedies were, we invite you to have a look at "Vodie's" autobiography The Czech that Bounced.



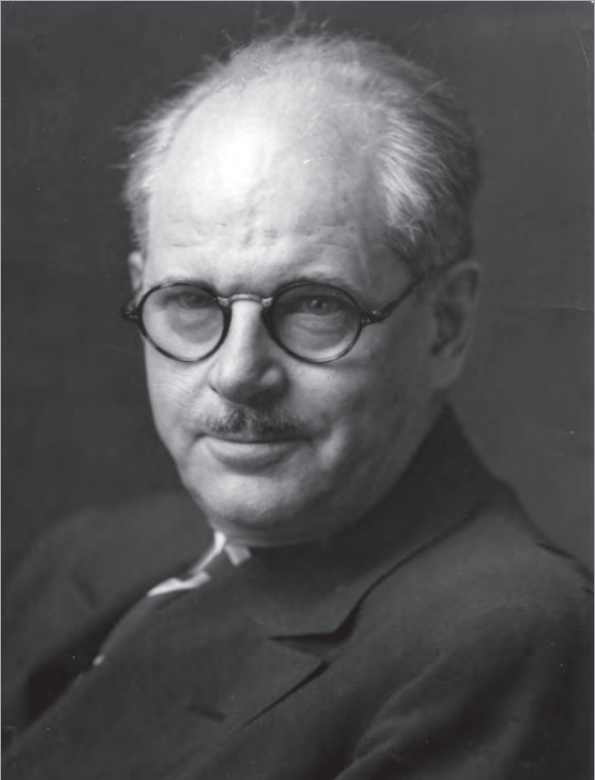
Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling

Jay Norwood Darling, 1900 graduate of Beloit College, became a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize with his environmental-themed cartoons. Jay, who eventually and popularly would become known as Ding Darling, was born in 1876 and died in 1962. Ding whose home state was Michigan moved with the family to Sioux City, Iowa in the later 1880s finally arriving at Beloit College in 1895.

After graduating in 1900 Ding worked for the Des Moines Register and for the New York Herald. He started his career in 1906 and ended it in 1949. Along the way he made a name for himself in the environmental world of conservation and bird wildlife as well as fame and fortune as a syndicated cartoonist with his masterful cartoons which appeared in over 150 daily newspapers.

In 1924 Ding Darling won the Pulitzer for a cartoon titled In the Good Old USA. Ten years later his peers voted him the best cartoonist in America. Then, again in 1943, he won the Pulitzer for the cartoon titled What a Place For a Waste Paper Salvage Campaign. Most of Ding's cartoons reflected his concern for the environment and it was this keen interest that led him to forsake his \$100,000 a year job as syndicated cartoonist in 1934-'35 to become chief of the U.S. Biological Survey in Washington, D.C. for \$8,000 a year. He went on to become a founding member of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and today, if you care to travel to Sanibel Island in southwest Florida, you can visit the J.N. Darling National Wildlife Refuge named for Ding in honor and memory for all he accomplished in environment causes.

Another of Beloit's interesting characters to pass through town and on to national fame as cartoonist and environmentalist.



Scenes such as this, depicting wounded soldiers, were what a bus of 48 guests saw October 10 when Beloit Historical Society sponsored the trip to Kenosha's Civil War Museum. The group also saw a portrayal of the life of Cordelia Harvey who, along with her husband, ran a general store in Shopiere. He later became governor and she went on to make her own mark during the war. A book on her life, written by Betty Walrath Solem, is available at the Lincoln Center for \$13. After a delicious lunch at the Boat-house Pub and Eatery, the group stopped at the Jelly Belly Factory for a tour and shopping.