

The Enterprise

Berea Historical Society

Our 52nd Year

Fall 2011



The *Enterprise* is sent to all members of the Berea Historical Society

Non-Members \$1.00

BEREA STREETS WERE MY BEAT

BY Jack Gorman

Although we lived in Lakewood, Ohio, our family spent a lot of time in Berea during World War II, visiting the Charley Nold family. Charley had purchased the quarry that the family and guests used for swimming, boating, and parties. I spent the majority of my time out of school time at the Nold home on East Bridge Street. I was accepted as a member of the family by the children's friends and class mates. The youngest of the children "Hotch" and I spent our days in the quarry and roaming the streets of Berea.

My Dad, Jim Gorman, Mary Jane and I moved to Berea in 1945 and I enrolled in Berea High School as a Sophomore. In 1946 Henry Barr and Dad became partners and opened Barr and Gorman's Photo and Hobby Supply Shop at 44 Front Street between the Banks. Henry was the photographer while

Dad and Mary Jane ran the photo and hobby business. The Basset family, including Art, his father and brother were frequent customers. Art was a member of the high school hobby club, the Model Bugs, who flew control line airplanes in the high school gym in the winter. He was a student pilot and got his private license just as soon as he was 16. He followed in his father's footsteps by enlisting in the United States Air Force serving as a pilot. He was killed while in astronaut training in 1966.

I graduated from Berea High in 1948 and immediately went into the Army. By the time I returned to Berea in 1950, Henry Barr had started his own commercial photography business. Dad and Mary Jane, with the help of my foster brother, Ed Connolly, continued to operate the store as Gorman's.

I was accepted onto the Berea Police Department in March, 1951. The police station was located on the first floor of the City Hall, and included an office, locker room and

bathroom. Chief Yanke and Captain Kobie had a separate office where interrogations were conducted. There was a storage room and a two-cell jail located in the fire company truck house.

When Art Volpe, Jack Stewart, Jim Gorman (no relation) and I entered on duty, we swelled the department to about 10 total officers. Stancil Dembowski had the most seniority. Louie Root, Mike Kramer, and either Jack Cook or Dean Snyder were sergeants. Floyd Skorts, and George Kobie filled out the force. Pearl Claflin was the part time police woman, matron and truant officer for the city and school system. Stancil was nicknamed "Bullets" based on his alleged pursuit of bank robbers, firing his pistol until it was empty as he chased the felons down Front Street.

The department had two patrol cars. A 1950 Studebaker and a 1951 Hudson Hornet. The Hudson was the much better of the two. When Kaskey Motors sold the car to the City, the hood was locked. I believe it remained so for the entire warranty period. The Hornet was really a "hot" car in comparison to the Studebaker. However the Hornet's speed and acceleration had been limited, much to the frustration of some lead-footed officers, who will remain anonymous. After the lock came off, I took a look and it appeared that the throttle linkage had been shortened. It wasn't any great feat to

lengthen it and performance improved considerably. The Studebaker and the Hornet came together one night in front of Brown Hardware as Jim Gorman and Jack Stewart were responding to the same call. A Chevrolet was used briefly. The City purchased 3 Ford Police Interceptors, which were good, serviceable vehicles designed for police work.

Duties were patrol, responding to calls, and traffic enforcement. Additionally, during business hours, one officer was assigned foot patrol in the downtown area for parking enforcement and physical presence. The beat officer would randomly visit businesses and monitor the parking meters and no parking zones for violations.

The fine for overtime parking was 25 cents. A dollar for the rest including the dreaded double-parked car. Special attention was given to the banks at 9 AM and 3 PM on the theory that if the bank was going to be robbed it would be at opening or closing times.

During the night hours, officers cruised residential areas, monitored the attendance at bars remaining alert for intoxicated persons walking or driving. Traffic law violators and other law breakers appeared before the mayor for disposition. There were generally two one-man patrol cars on duty. Sometimes after midnight one of the patrolmen would walk the downtown business areas, checking doors and other areas of the businesses for security. We didn't have portable radios like they do today. There was a light that hung over South Front Street connected to the police station. If an emergency arose the officer on the downtown beat was supposed to respond. I never remember seeing that light lit, day or night.

I resigned from Berea's Police Department in 1955 to take employment with the U.S. Government. My Dad, Jim Gorman, died in 1963 and Mary Jane continued to run the Front Street store and added a store on Bagley Road. I was assigned to the Cleveland office in 1964 and our family took up residence on Fair Street. There was a new police station, City Hall, library, fire station and swimming pool occupying some of the old quarry property. It was surprising to see so many changes in town. The Police Department had grown with more cars, more officers, an office staff and radio operators. However Berea was still a comfortable and relatively small city.

We left Berea in 1973. We have returned many times and observed how Urban Renewal had eliminated the

south side of the business district and the businesses abutting the river. Traffic in and around Berea and the entire Southwest area had really increased. Mary Jane sold the business in 1979 to Ken & Donna McCarthy and moved to Arizona where she died in 1984.

We have returned less frequently after Mary Jane moved but I think all of our children have, as adults accompanied by their families, visited Berea and all of us still consider Berea, HOME.

* * * * *

BEREA CITY Hall - 1898-1970

A piece of history was destroyed on August 20, 1970, when wrecking crews began the demolition of the old Berea City Hall. The building, located on the corner of E. Bridge street and Seminary was constructed in 1898, after the original City Hall was destroyed by the huge fire of 1897, which took almost all of that entire block. City officials moved into the new City Hall in 1965 at the south end of Front Street. The fire department moved into their new "house" earlier this year.

The land was cleared for the parking lot across from our Post Office for an Urban Renewal project.
Cleveland Plain Dealer, 8/21/1970

EDITORS' NOTES

A BIG THANK YOU goes to Jack Gorman, Grand Island, New York, for sharing so many of his good memories of his days with the Berea Police force. His excellent article made us recall those truly great days and made us remember how in many cases we knew the policemen by their first names. They kept us safe and always had a friendly smile and wave for us.

As part of our question and answers series, we thought it would be fun if you could send us a list of the policemen you remember through the years and a little comment about them. I know you must have some good stories to share with our readers.

Dave & Louise Allen