

Stanwood Area ECHOES

Newsletter of the Stanwood Area Historical Society

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Stanwood Area Echoes

Issue No. 67 : Summer, 2020

THE SILVANA DAIRY COMPANY IN 1916



SAHS 98.45.05

In 1916, the Silvana Dairy Company handled 20,000 pounds of milk daily and manufactured a high grade of cheese that found a ready market. Note the horse-drawn wagon with milk cans and men on the dock holding large blocks of cheese. The photographer was John Wagness.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends:

The summer of our discontent—2020. It is becoming more apparent that we have a long way to go to counter the tragic effects of Covid-19 as a society and as a historical society. We have remained dark at the museum since March 11th and right now have no plans to open our doors to the public or to advertise for rentals of the Floyd for the rest of the year. New cases of the virus have emerged in Washington state and in many parts of the country, providing a sober reminder of the challenges we face particularly as we go into the fall months.

With that reality, we obviously canceled the 4th of July and Ice Cream Social this year, the first time in 45 years that the Society has not sponsored the event. We do not anticipate holding the 21st year of the Old Fashioned Christmas in December nor does it look like our winter concerts such as Jeffrey Cohan will be staged. This is all disappointing and has obviously hurt our overall financial situation.

However, we do have some good news along that line. The Stanwood Camano Area Foundation granted us \$6,000 from their Covid Relief funds allowing us to pay our bills for April, especially our property tax. We are deeply grateful to SCAF for their support. We also received \$10,000 from the Stillaguamish Tribe for assisting in painting and repairing the Floyd Norgaard Cultural Center. That along with other private donations have allowed us to hire a paint contractor, D.G. Hopkins Painting & Island Custom Pre-Finishing, who will begin work this summer. Our appreciation to Donny Hopkins and his sons for fitting us into their already packed schedule.

We may have to dive into our savings to complete the \$50,000 needed for this project, but as stewards of this magnificent historic structure, nothing could be more important than preserving this community legacy building. Our appeals to state and county agencies were not approved, so once again we turn to the Stanwood Camano community for help in raising the required funds to complete the work. Whether you are new to the area or have family roots going back

generations, we hope that you will see the value in preserving an understanding of how this region developed and the people who built it.

The story in this quarter's newsletter is about Emma Josephine Thorsen, a 28-year-old from Silvana who joined the nursing corps. She is the only woman honored on the Veterans' Memorial next to the Floyd. The young Red Cross nurse died in November 1918, a victim of that year's influenza pandemic as she cared for sick soldiers at Camp Dodge, Iowa. I offer this as a cautionary tale. Although our medical techniques and technology have greatly improved, many in 1918 failed to heed the warning signs; an ominous flag for many in our society today. But also, I think Emma's story personifies the selfless commitment of our front line workers today who brave the unknown and unseen to fulfill their personal mission in life. I think the last three stanzas of Edwin C. Hofert's poem "The Calling," says it pretty well:

"The caring heart [God] put in you.
As you put others first.
Leaving only one path to take.
In you there was a thirst.

Not seeking fame or fortune.
Born with a tender touch.
You are who you're meant to be.
That's why you care so much.

Because caring don't take practice.
It's not something you rehearse.
You answered a special calling.
When you became a nurse.

Sincerely,

*Richard Hanks, President
Stanwood Area Historical Society*

**Follow us on Facebook and
check out our websites for
updates and virtual tours.**

AS IF GOD WAS CALLING THEM

By mid-April 1918 there was a heightened level of concern among medical officers at Camp Dodge, Iowa. Soldiers at this central training facility were dying at an ever-alarming rate and they weren't sure why. Fifteen soldiers had died in less than a week of pneumonia prompting an investigation. The fatality rate was 30 percent for those soldiers affected. Although reports existed of influenza throughout the Midwest in December of 1917, staff at Camp Dodge thought the more likely source of their problem was the vigorous drill duty of the troops while being exposed to the thick dust clouds that swirled through the encampment. Camp Dodge was a central post for the training of army troops heading for the war in France—both African American and Anglo. Before the year was over the demand for nurses became desperate. Seven of them would die at Camp Dodge, including a 28-year-old Red Cross nurse from Silvana, Washington.

Born on August 30, 1890, Emma Josephine Thorsen grew up on a dairy farm. Her Norwegian father, Halvor, came to the United States in 1887 where he found work in the mines of Michigan and Colorado and finally the logging camps along the Stillaguamish River in Washington where he may have developed his support of the Socialist Party cause. After a short adventure in Alaska, he returned to the area and began farming. Emma's younger brother Carl remembered the raw landscape where he, Emma and their siblings grew up with few roads. School was a four mile walk along narrow trails through hollows and hills to nearby Bryant and later the Silvana schoolhouse.

Emma worked as a servant in Everett while studying to become a nurse at Providence Hospital, graduating in 1915 alongside fellow classmate Mayme Downs. We don't know why Emma decided to join the nursing corps but we do know that her assignment to Camp Dodge came at the height of the influenza epidemic—like a storm, one writer remembered. Nearly 14,000 personnel would be hospitalized for influenza at the Iowa camp which prepared men for combat overseas. According to science historian Carol Byerly, the Iowa facility "had one of the worst records among Army camps" for infections and deaths.

Thorsen, Red Cross nurse Irene Robb and the other nurses were part of roughly additional 400 nurses who were sent to Camp Dodge to help with



the outbreak, working 12 to 14-hour days. Robb wrote of the difficult time. The nurses worked in hallways and wards crowded with the ill and dying without protective clothing, adequate procedures or any medication or vaccines. According to one group of researchers, "in spite of their technological poverty, nurses and physicians stuck to their posts in the face of the most lethal medical disaster in history." Robb's letter home speaks to the exhaustion of tending for so many without sufficient help; some nurses responsible for 150 patients at a time. Robb said that when it was all over, she would simply collapse until she recovered from all the sadness she had witnessed. Her patients were "grand men" and so appreciative of all that was done for them, "which was really ...very little," she wrote. "It seems just as if God was walking up & down the ward just calling those he wants & they just all go," she wrote family members.

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Pneumonia took the life of Private Wayne Loveless on January 22nd. In early February a black officer reportedly died of the lung ailment, followed a few days later on February 18th by two more recruits—one a Choctaw Indian, the other white. This was no isolated incident among army camps in the country. At Camp Cody in New Mexico ninety percent of deaths since November 1917 were attributed to pneumonia. That figure was under 50 percent for Camp Dodge. Some studies point to China as the source of the original outbreak and even Kansas is seen as a possible early center since 48 soldiers died at Camp Funston in that state in March 1918 at the same time pneumonia was taking lives at Camp Dodge. Ironically, an article in the February 18th *Evening times-Republican* of Marshall, Iowa lauded the sanitary conditions at the Iowa camp. "Cleanest camp in the country," a writer for *Collier's* magazine reported after visiting. It was in line with the camp's reputation. The Secretary of the State Board of Health declared the camp a wonderfully healthy place—joking that the only place where that was questionable was the camp rifle range.

By the latter days of April 1918 almost two thousand men at Camp Dodge were hospitalized with as many as 32 a week succumbing to the assault on their pulmonary system; the largest death rate at any cantonment in the country. Men believed to be unfit for the rigors of army life were being weeded out and discharged. Deaths from the disease reportedly dipped for a time in May by 10 percent with the army's surgeon general proclaiming that general health conditions in the camps were "very good." June reports declared that the problem was "rapidly decreasing" from 112 deaths in April to only 55 in May of 1918.

Pneumonia seemed to vanish from the headlines of local Iowa newspapers in July and August with the downturn in cases. Camp Dodge again focused on training the thousands which were being readied for the European war. To rally public sentiment and sell bonds, soldiers gathered and formed human statues of iconic American symbols in the summer of 1918; everything from a bust of President Wilson to the Liberty Bell and divisional patches. Specially built towers were constructed to aid in organizing and photographing this human spectacle. At Camp Dodge 18,000 troopers gathered on the drill ground on August 22, 1918 to create the "Goddess of Liberty" which stretched for a quarter of a mile—"a living representation of Liberty

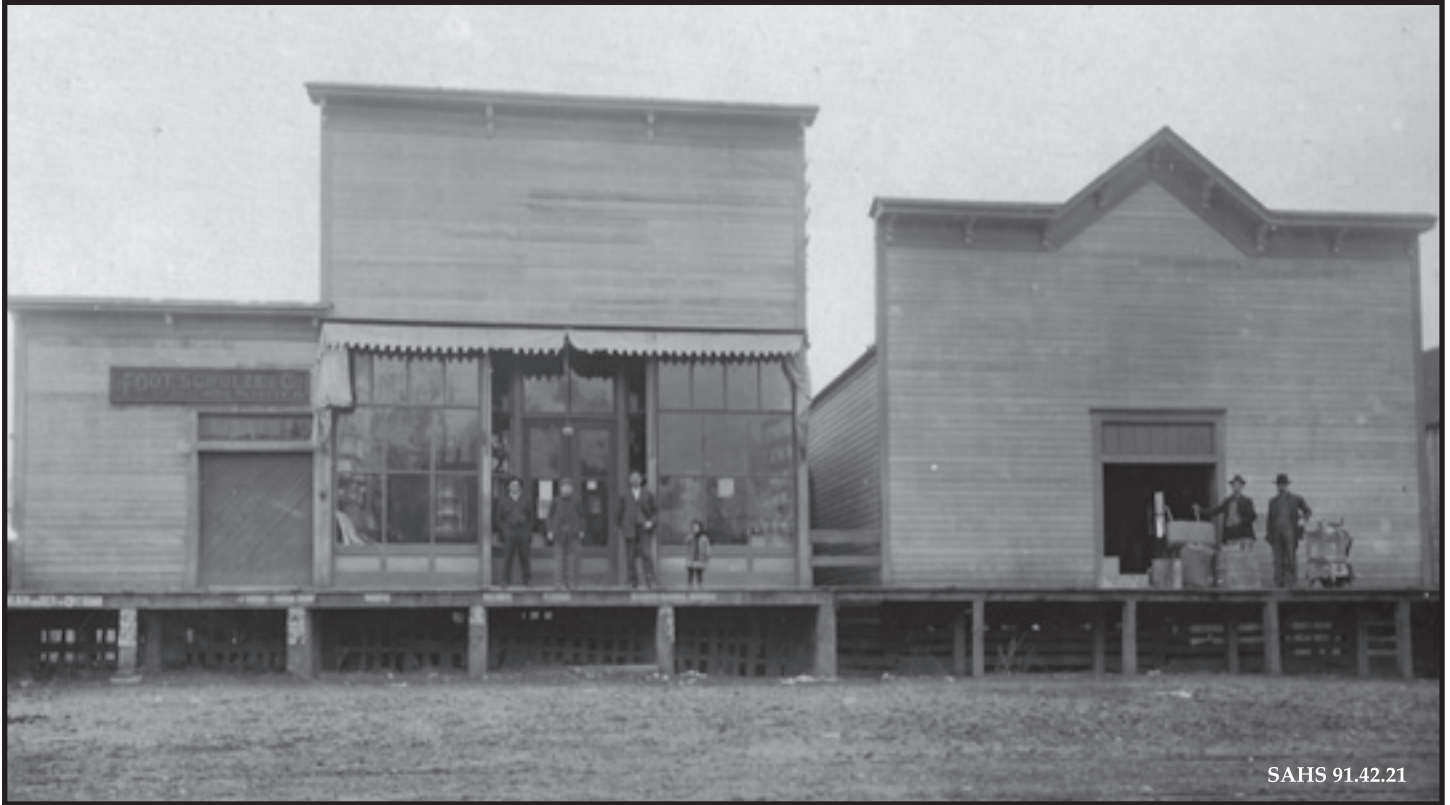
Enlightening the World," as described by the *Bottineau [ND] Courant*. Dressed in woolen uniforms, twelve men fainted in the 90 plus degree heat.

A wave of warm air persisted through the sultry beginning of September in Iowa. The first publicly identified case of influenza at Camp Dodge was said to be September 13 however a 2011 study of autopsy samples showed the first verified influenza fatality was a soldier at Camp Dodge on May 11, 1918. This faceless enemy, which had never really left, struck with a vengeance by September 29th. The next day a small paragraph in the *Evening times-Republican* announced "Camp Dodge Invaded" by influenza and a quarantine was expected. But the article only made it to page eight of the paper. On the same page, alone amid stories of livestock prices, an article warned that flu was expected to "grip half of Nation," but the story downplayed the risk. While as much as 60 percent could be infected, the vast number of people were expected to recover according to officials.

Over six thousand soldiers were ill in the first week of October overwhelming Camp Dodge's medical services. The *Des Moines Register's* Frank Santiago wrote that camp documents showed that "many soldiers who awoke healthy were sick by noon. They were dead before supper. The stunning speed of death left the camp reeling." Division surgeon Lt. Colonel E. W. Rich stopped issuing daily reports saying they were causing "unnecessary worry." Documents would later show that 100 men died the first week, 350 the following week and 450 by mid-October, surpassing what would end up being the official count.

Lt. Colonel Rich lifted the quarantine put in place at Camp Dodge by October 27th. The *Denison Review* reported a great relief in the camp as soldiers celebrated with "parades, band concerts [and] resumption of all kinds of amusements and the mingling together as in the past." The "terrible visitation" had reportedly left as fast as it had come. A month later it was reported that a little over 10,000 influenza cases resulted in almost 2,000 cases of pneumonia leading to 702 deaths. Historians, however, place the death toll at around 1,000. It was reported that the majority of the victims were black; three to one according to a study published in 1919 by the assistant camp epidemiologist.

No evidence could be found, however, that the deaths from pneumonia at Camp Dodge in the spring of 1918 were included in the final tally of influenza deaths. Of the seven nurses listed as



An early photograph, ca. 1908, of the Botten Brothers store in Silvana with dirt streets and raised sidewalks. Iver Botten is third from the left with his daughter, Sylvia. Iver and his brother Peter started the store in Silvana in 1899. Peter went back to Norway in 1908.

dying during the epidemic at Camp Dodge, Everett resident Mayme Downs died October 24th followed a month later on November 24th by Emma J. Thorsen of Silvana township. A Red Cross history noted that "Red Cross nurses and nurses not enrolled, nurses available for service later on and nurses who would never be eligible for permanent enrollment, packed their kits, boarded the trains and proceeded like soldiers to the camps." Nurse Robb remembered that the soldiers died as if God was calling them. Nurses heard that call as well.

by Richard A. Hanks

"As If God Was Calling Them" is an excerpt from a new book by Richard Hanks called *Solemn, The Drums Thrill - Essays on the Fallen Heroes of Stanwood Camano: World War I to Afghanistan*, which will be coming out on Veterans Day 2020 as a fundraiser for the Stanwood Area Historical Society.

Sources: *Evening times-Republican*, February 18, May 30, June 18, Sept. 30, Oct. 19, 1918; *Ottumwa Semi-Weekly Courier*, Jan. 15, 1918; *Denison Review*, April 10, April 24, Oct. 30, Aug. 21, 1918; *Bottineau [N.D.] Courant*, Oct. 10, 1918; Robb letter in Frank Santiago, *Des Moines Register*, November 1999, digital re-release March 11, 2020, <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/local/2020/03/03/influenza-outbreak-700-soldiers-died-1918-iowa-camp-dodge-johnston-army-base-national-guard-flu/2843939001/>; *Des Moines Register*, August 19, 1983; *Journal of Minnesota Medicine*, v. II. No. 8, August 1919; Carol R. Byerly, "The U.S. military and the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919." *Public health reports* (Washington, D.C. : 1974) vol. 125 Suppl 3, Suppl 3 (2010): 82-91; Dan Vergano, "1918 Flu Pandemic That Killed 50 Million Originated in China, Historians Say," *National Geographic Magazine*, digital publication January 24, 2014; G. Dennis Shanks, et al, Low but Highly Variable Mortality Among Nurses and Physicians During the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4941589/>; Ancestry.com; Files of the Stanwood Area Historical Society Archives.

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SAHS Memorials

In Memory Of:

Vickie Lund Anderson	<i>Laurie Ware</i>
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SAHS Donations

- Dave & Bobbie Eldridge
- Pat Bronson
- Steven Youngren
- Dennis Anderson (for Bill Blandin's help)
- Jeffrey & Linda Pearce (to honor Dave Eldridge)
- Gayle Brulé
- Floyd & Delores Jones Foundation
- Judith Pieper
- Stillaguamish Tribe (to paint The Floyd)

SAHS Board Meetings are normally held every month on the Third Monday at noon on the second floor of the Eldridge Research Center. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic our board meetings will be held at The Floyd in a socially-distanced environment, with masks and limited seating. If you wish to attend the board meeting, please call and let us know you are coming.

We would like to thank our 2020 business sponsors who have stood by us throughout this COVID-19 crisis. Please support them!

Stanwood Area Historical Society Sponsors

PRESERVING THE FLOYD



The Floyd Norgaard Cultural Center will soon be available for the arts, music, theater, cultural events and use as a public hall for family events, weddings, reunions, birthdays, conferences & business meetings.

Generous donations from the community and the Stillaguamish Tribe have allowed us to repair and paint this beautiful hall during the summer and fall.

To get prices or make a reservation, text or call 360-629-2972, email us at sahs.diane@gmail.com or visit us at thefloydnorgaard.weebly.com.

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GET INVOLVED...STAY IN TOUCH

The Stanwood Area Historical Society is a special place. It collects and conserves the wondrous treasures of history that define our community. Your participation would not only assist in this crucial protection of our past, but would make you part of our important work. You can make a difference. Join SAHS today!

Memberships are due annually in January. This is a significant means of support for the Society and includes a subscription to the newsletter. SAHS is a tax-exempt non-profit organization and depends on gifts, bequests from individuals and groups, fundraising activities and membership dues for its financial support. Your contributions are tax deductible and will be used only for the preservation of the history of our area.

- Individual Membership: **\$20.00**
- Family Membership: **\$25.00**
- Student (Under 15) Membership: **\$5.00**

- Donation: \$ _____
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