

## **THE STAR ON MAIN STREET**

**by Marlene Schmalbeck**

The history of the original star in Monticello came about recently in a letter Virginia Drafahl received from her friend Joyce Pease Bender. Mr. Lora Ray Pease was Joyce's father. She explained his unusual name saying her dad was of English-Dutch descent. In England the name of Lora was not unusual for a man.

She believes her father made the Main St. Star in the early 1930's she remembers it always hung there. Mr. Pease continued to hang the star every year well in to his 70's. It seems no one else wanted to do it. During his later years, Joyce said, "My mother would worry herself sick for fear my dad would fall." The star was suspended across Main St by cable. Years after Mr. Pease passed away Ernie Gempeler took care of hanging the star. Ernie said there were several years when the star wasn't hung because the owner of the building across the street didn't want the cable attached to that building. When Nanette Hilliard bought that building she agreed the cable for the star could be attached again. As the years went by the weather took its toll on the old star and it needed to be replaced. Gempeler commissioned Larry Strause to make a steel star. Each year the star is put up by Kubly's Tree Service. Tom Kubly and his son Jeff donate their time and equipment. The new star has lights and shines in all its glory up and down Main Street between Gempeler's Supermarket and Nanette's building the Total Look. Co. One winter some years ago, actually it was December 2001 Jim Holz had a terrible accident while driving his pickup truck on a local town road. After the accident his family and friends realized Jim would be hospitalized for a long time. As he lay in his hospital bed Jim's friends told him, "The Star (on Main St.) will not be taken down until you come home." And so it was that the star was not taken down until Jim finally returned home in February of 2002. Three years ago Ernie Gempeler turned the star project over to the Village of Monticello.

Lora Ray Pease life in Monticello is a story unto itself- He was born in Winslow, IL in 1887. He and his parents Charles and Cora and twin sisters, Vena and Rena, moved to Monticello in 1900. The family moved into a house on Railroad St. now Lake Ave. After Lora completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade he worked on a section crew with his father for the Illinois Central Rail Road which was one of the two railroads that ran through Monticello at that time. Lora lost the upper part of two fingers when another crewman dropped a rail tie on his hand. It was around that time that his mother became very ill. Lora told his daughter how he and the twins remembered their father taking their mother on a cot and boarding the train to Chicago. His father, had a brother living in Chicago and the family felt "someone in the big city" could help her. She died of cancer in Chicago leaving her husband, 14 year-old Lora and his 7 year-old sisters. After the death of his wife Charles was seldom home leaving Lora with the responsibility of his two little sisters. From then on Lora took care of the girls buying food and paying rent when he himself was just a young boy. Lora said there was very little food and often they shared their food with the next-door neighbors. He remembered someone giving the neighbors a watermelon and both families shared it for dinner. Lora recalled how his little

sisters would try and use their mother's recipe to make a cake. "They could never figure out why it didn't turned out until a neighbor told them they needed to add flour. (Flour wasn't written on the recipe it must have been assumed that everyone knew they had to add flour.)" In 1910 Rolph Brother Builders hired Lora as a carpenter. He worked on the construction of a building on Main St. Joyce said, "That building would have a very special connection to our family." Later Lora became a 'tinner' for the Voegeli Hardware Store. (a 'tinner' cuts and solders tin to make or mend an item.) While at this job he met Louise Bolhalter. She had come to Monticello from an area settled by the Swiss at West Bend, WI. She must have felt at home here in Green County where she taught at a country school. Louise didn't learn to speak English until she went to first grade. Lora and Louise were married on December 23, 1919. That was the end of Louise's teaching career. At that time women were not allowed to teach school after they married. Louise began selling waist cinching corsets worn by the women of that era. She traveled by train to various towns in the area selling and fitting ladies with Spirella brand corsets. The Peases first daughter, Lorna Louise, was born in November of 1920 and her mother took her along on her sales visits. Mr. Pease credited his wife for earning enough money for them to open a hardware store in 1927. The Pease Hardware Store was in the same building he had helped the Rolph Brothers build in 1910. Today that building houses The Dining Room at 209 S. Main St. Pease wanted to meet the needs of the farmers as well as the people in town. He would open the store at 6 a.m. everyday except Sunday to accommodate the farmers who brought their milk to the cheese factory. On Saturdays the hardware store was open until midnight to serve the farm families who came to Monticello to shop and socialize. When Joyce was a freshman in high school her mom and dad completely remodeled their home building a second floor with three bedrooms and a bath and adding a new kitchen and another bedroom on the main level. At the same time they enlarged the living room. This industrious couple did all the work themselves after closing the store in the evenings they would work until two in the morning until they finished the work on their home.

The house is located at 230 N. Monroe Street. It is now the home of John Winzenried. During World War II Mrs. Pease would write Christmas letters to every Monticello soldier. She would attend the band and choir concerts so she could tell the men she had seen their children – how nice they looked and how well their children had preformed. Helen Loveland said Louise was also known for the root beer she made. "It didn't have any fizz, but it was good."

It was about 1946 when Mr. Pease was able to buy the building his store was in. It was the same building he helped build 36 years earlier. He serviced all the appliances bought at his store. He considered it his responsibility to repair them for no charge. Mrs. Loveland said, "There wasn't anything Mr. Pease couldn't do." Lora Pease served on the Monticello Village Board as long as his daughter Joyce can remember. When he died all the businesses in town closed during the time of his funeral. Joyce says, "Apparently there were many things my sister Lorna and I didn't know about." After their parents died they learned if someone came into the store and needed winter boots, hats or warm winter jackets and didn't have

the money to buy them they never left Pease's store without the items they needed. Lora would carry customers "on the books." Perhaps, Mr. Pease remembered how it was not to have the money to buy things he and his sisters needed.

Mrs. Pease passed away in 1962 and Lora died in 1964. After their dad died Lorna received a letter with a check for \$1400. The sender wrote they owed this money to the store and since the girls probably didn't know that they wanted to be sure and pay their debt. Joyce can remember that if it was a good year it was possible for her parents to make \$5000 at their hardware store.

Joyce was very close to her dad's sister Rena who married Hank Elmer. The Elmers raised the daughters of his brother. The girls were 4 and 6 years old when their mother died. The youngest girl Helen and her husband Merlyn Loveland now live in Monroe. Joyce married Willard "Bink" Bender. His job took them to New Prague, Minnesota. He became president of the State Bank of New Prague. Joyce was the Public Relations Director for the local hospital. Both are now retired. They have three children – Lora Louise, Mike and Mary Jane. Joyce's sister Lorna married Joe Viney a Green County attorney and the Vineys had four children- Joseph, William, Louise and Jeanette. Lorna passed away two years ago.

## THE END

### ADDENDUM

Dear Marlene,

How can I thank you for honoring my parents with your story. And for sending me a copy of the story. Virginia is sending me copies of the paper. She is sending one for each of my grandchildren and for me. She told me the papers were given to her to give to me. Thank you very much. I DO appreciate it.

Thank you also for sending the picture of my dad.

I will be going through old papers and pictures and can send a few via e-mail for the historical society if you think they would like them. For example, my Uncle Charlie must have spent *some* time in Monticello because I just ran across a picture of him with some basketball players--seems like he was the coach, otherwise I don't know why he would have been pictured with them. All have uniforms on but him.

(Will be a while tho before I get all that sorted thru and organized.)

Marlene, would you please send me your phone numbers again and your regular mailing address. I'll put them away properly this time. (I have such a mess now I can't find them.)

Also want to tell you one little correction--perhaps can change if you put the article in Historical society stuff. My folks didn't just work those hours on the house during my freshman year--they started work on the house when I was in 1st grade and didn't finish till I was a freshman in HS. (They didn't just remodel,

they actually tore out the whole upstairs and rebuilt new, and much the same except for the area of the dining room downstairs.

They tore back walls to the studs and added on when remodeling. I don't know how they did it. And I don't know how I could be so oblivious to their hard life at that time. I try to justify it all as just plain stupidity on my part. PLUS my folks never made it sound like the stuff they did was a BIG deal, so I guess I didn't realize the great effort and sacrifice they were making till I was an adult.

Thank you so much for giving them the recognition. They truly deserve it. They were such good, such unselfish people.

Thank you again.

Very sincerely,

Joyce B.