

P.O. Box 112  
Wapella, Illinois 61777  
April 29, 2017

DeWitt County Restoration Association  
c/o Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau  
100 South Center Street, Suite 101  
Clinton, IL 61727

Today I looked at the Brady Realty ad in the Clinton Journal. The portion that prompted this letter is the listing for 705 North Side Square, the Magill House.

When my Great Uncle Jim Walsh was a young man, he would ride the Green Diamond train to Chicago for two reasons. One, my great-great grandfather owned a farm across the road from a Mr. Freudenstein. That name is on several buildings on the Clinton square. For several reasons, Uncle Jim's dad asked his neighboring land owner what he was doing with his money. Land prices were too high. Mr. Freudenstein said his family had bought a silent movie theater in Chicago. So, Uncle Jim's dad bought an interest in one. That was one of the reasons for his trips, to keep tabs on the operation of the movie house.

The second reason he liked to go to the city was because his cousin was a city detective. Apparently, Jim would spend his time going about the city with him in relationship to his work. Uncle Jim was acting like he wanted to leave home and the Wapella area to join the Chicago Police Force.

There is a saying about "Irish Sons of Irish Mothers." Like many other Irish mothers, his mother did not want Uncle Jim to leave home, so she said to her husband Michael E. Walsh, "You go to town (Clinton) and buy that farm down the road." It was 160 acres. She said, "You buy the first 80 acres in your name and put the other 80 acres in Jim's name."

When Uncle Jim, a young man of about 25, got off the train in Clinton, he found out he was in debt for 80 acres of good farm ground. Who says you can't keep them down on the farm?! He would never have gone against his parents, especially his mother.

So, this is where the Magill House comes in. The former tenant of the farm left mid-summer. One day, possibly while sitting in the driveway of the old barn with his hired man, Uncle Jim said, "Let's see if there are any potatoes in that patch the man abandoned." To make a long story short, they plowed enough potatoes to fill up to two or three boards of a box wagon.

Apparently Uncle Jim knew the owners of the hotel and that they fed a lot of people. He hauled his windfall to Clinton, and the potatoes were scooped through something like a coal door into

the basement where they would keep well in the cool and in the dark. He made \$50, a lot of money for the time.

I may have that actual wagon sitting in my machine shed. Uncle Jim held his land through the Depression that started in late 1929. He said that at least the land would buy a few sandwiches for his nieces and nephews and their descendants.

In the late 1960's, Uncle Jim had old Bill Smith draw up his will and trust agreement. The Smiths were in the Ohio Building on the second floor. He patterned his trust like the one drawn up by C.H. Moore. The farm is now part of the J.J. Walsh Trust.

His prediction about that same land benefitting his nieces and nephews and their descendants has proven true. His name was put on the 80 acres at \$175 per acre, and it now brings in \$335 per acre per year. And the story goes on.

To give credit where credit is due, I believe John Leo Walsh has shared the story with me over the years. Uncle Jim told and shared a lot with me, but in this case, John is "The Teller of Tales."

Regarding this piece: "Once a gift is given, it is given."

Enjoy,  
Jim L. Hull