

## POINTS OF VIEW

## History lesson

## The past comes alive in stories from individuals

**S**ome big stories never make the history books.

Last spring I wrote about the 1927 school explosion in Bath, a village 10 miles north of Lansing. Andrew Kehoe, a school board trustee, dynamited the school and his own farm buildings, killing 46 people, including himself, the superintendent and three dozen children. I noted how several history books either failed to mention the enormous disaster or kissed it off in half a sentence.

Next day Howard Walker called and left a message. The 93-year-old retiree had visited the site, and would I like to see his 1927 snapshots? Yes, indeed. And was I interested in his view of the train wreck near Plymouth that was the worst in Michigan history? Yes, again.

Walker lives in Plymouth. During that fateful week in 1927 — the same week Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic — he had been

teaching in Lake Odessa, not far west of Bath, and drove to the disaster site. He snapped pictures of the bombed consolidated school and the tiny graves decorated with flowers. The photos, still crystal clear, make you choke up.

Perhaps memories of the Bath explosion are so horrifying that historians, like village residents, go into denial. Townsfolk have a simple memorial but to this day are touchy about discussing the tragedy, I hear. Kehoe's wife was buried under her maiden name. "The maniac" himself was buried in an unmarked grave in the pauper's corner of a different cemetery.

Walker was 6 when the state's biggest train wreck occurred not far from his boyhood home. The current issue of Michigan History magazine, devoted entirely to our railroad heritage, contains a two-page spread of photos on the wreck in Salem Township, just west of Plymouth. Says writer Tiffany Dziurman:



TIM RICHARD

"Michigan's worst train wreck occurred near Salem on 20 July 1907. The crew of a westbound local freight ignored an order giving them 'the right of way over everything but first class passenger trains.' They forgot about a running eastbound special Pere Marquette passenger and proceeded on the tracks. The resulting collision killed 31 people and seriously injured 100 others."

Walker was raised on a farm near Gaffredon Road and M-14 freeway in Salem Township and walked with his father to the site. "It was a head-on crash. One engine was on its side. Cars were on top of each other. There was a pile of (victims') shoes," he recalled.

The passengers were bound to Detroit's Belle Isle from Ionia. "A lot were from Howell," Walker said.

I checked indexes of two authoritative histories of Michigan. Guess what. Nothing about that wreck. Lots of material about railroad safety problems and workers compensation, but nothing about any of the disasters.

So who is this gracious gentleman with the nearly perfect memory who had viewed the aftermath of two of Michigan's worst human disasters?

The farm boy often visited Plymouth and recalled the John Gale store. Later Watkins went to Ypsilanti State Nor-

mal School, now Eastern Michigan University, and took the Lake Odessa job for a year.

He spent most of his adult years in the Five Points area of old Redford in northwest Detroit and taught drafting, English, social studies and math in the Detroit public schools. A daughter, Donna Grater, was recently widowed.

Walker told some great yarns about how teachers dealt with discipline problems in the schools, but that's beyond the scope of today's column.

I guess the moral is that history is more than political events and social movements. There are thousands of individuals' stories. It's valuable that we have the Howard Walkers to refresh our memories.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His office number is (313) 349-1700.

## Europe shows political, monetary unions don't work

**D**espite the drumbeat for NAFTA, a troubling question remains as to what NAFTA proponents plan next if Congress passes NAFTA.

If, as is the case in Europe, eventual political or monetary union among the NAFTA countries is the eventual goal, we must debate the impact that would have on our sovereignty and our society before Congress votes on NAFTA.

Europe provides a stark example of how a free trade agreement will likely evolve into monetary and eventual political union, a truly borderless continent.

In 1957, six European countries, among them France and West Germany, formed the Common Market to reduce and later eliminate tariffs among its members — much like NAFTA would for the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The Common Market evolved into the 12-member European Economic Community. The EEC permitted work-

er access to jobs throughout the community and later began to control currency valuation through the European Monetary System.

With economies battered by high German interest rates, Britain and Italy this past summer withdrew from the monetary system. Britain, especially, fears closer monetary union in Europe will drastically limit its options in dealing with structural unemployment and stagnant growth. Since Denmark rejected the Maastricht treaty that would create a common European currency, debate has raged in Europe over the wisdom of joining the disparate cultures and histories of the western European nations into a monetary and political union.

Europe has drawn the picture of where a trade union like NAFTA will eventually lead. What differs the European experience from our own will be that, unlike Europe, the U.S. and Can-

## GUEST COLUMN

ada will be joining into a trade union with an undeveloped economy, Mexico, having weak social and physical infrastructures, while the EEC formed with nations having comparably advanced economies. Because there have not been any comparable unions in history from which to make a judgment, no one can accurately predict what impact an EEC-type union will have on any of the NAFTA nations' economies.

If the plan is to meld Mexico eventually into the U.S. and Canada like the nations of the EEC plan, we must debate the impact of the union before it happens or run the risk of seriously undermining the U.S. economy. It is not fear nor attacks on opponents that should drive the NAFTA debate. Rather, there must be a full, open de-

bate on where NAFTA is to lead us and how we can best adapt to the changes in our economy that NAFTA and what comes after NAFTA will bring.

If, on the other hand, political or monetary union is not a long-range objective, there is little question the only beneficiaries of NAFTA are large multinational businesses. No small business or individual could invest any substantial sums of money in Mexico because NAFTA does not include a private dispute resolution mechanism. A company facing legal problems in Mexico would have to write off its loss or risk dealing with the vagaries of Mexican law and its court system.

At a conference on NAFTA sponsored by the University of New Mexico held in Santa Fe Oct. 29-30, 1993, Mexican lawyers warned that even arbitration, the preferred method of dispute resolution in international business transactions, has significant draw-

backs when it comes to dealing with Mexican courts against a Mexican business refusing to pay an arbitration award against it.

Large businesses, though, have the leverage to prevent any substantial investment loss by the threat of moving out of Mexico if confronted with expropriation, theft or other losses. With no national industrial policy to promote and nurture U.S. businesses, wage earners lose with NAFTA because there are no assurances their jobs might not eventually go to Mexico. NAFTA cannot help but accelerate the pace at which wages will seek their lowest level, moving jobs that millions of Americans have counted on to the lowest wage NAFTA country, Mexico. As jobs go south, our standard of living might go that way as well.

Gary Kohut lives in Troy and is a practicing attorney in Birmingham. He ran for U.S. Congress in 1986 and 1988.



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