THE 1929 TORNADO  
By Ernest Baumgartner

Ernest Baumgartner, who now lives in Verona, has many memories of earlier times in Mt. Vernon. He recalled that after the Colby-Eggiman garage burnt down in 1925, he hauled some of the blackened bricks to his father's farm. They cleaned them and used the bricks to build a milk house that still stands on the farm.

Ernest also remembers the deplorable shape of the roads around Mt. Vernon in earlier days. The road in front of the school would be "solid mud," and often knee deep. Vehicles would get stuck and the cars would have to rely on their four legged predecessor, the horse, to pull them out. One such incident happened near the Mill Hill when one of the La Follette family was mired in the mud. Ernest and his horse managed to pull the car to solid ground. The driver gave him a dollar for his effort, a fair amount of money at that time.

Ernest hauled milk to the Mt. Vernon cheese factory, which at the time was a cooperative. The holding tank in front of the factory had to be pumped occasionally, and the Colby brothers would pump the sediments into their six-hundred gallon water wagon to be spread on the fields. The water wagon was also used to power a steam operated threshing machine.

At one time, large turtles and fish were abundant in the mill pond. One year, some trucks from Chicago came and caught enough mud turtles to fill up 20-fifty gallon barrels with turtle meat.

The most exciting episode recalled by Ernest happened in 1929. Ernest was threshing at the Amil Colby farm, when the crew saw a funnel cloud in the distance. As the tornado came toward them, they could see the whirling cloud picking up trees across the marsh, but fortunately, the storm changed direction before it reached the men. The tornado caused extensive damage at the Leonard Marty farm, as well as John Harker's, and the Stamm's. The tornado picked up a pump and casing out of a well, also threw a heavy horse drawn disc some 400 rods, and took entire fence lines, posts and all, and rolled them into large balls of wire and wood. Ernest said that he actually found pieces of straw that went through tree trunks. That was some storm!

DOWN MEMORY LANE  
By Ben Goebler

It all started in the year of 1937 in the Town of Primrose. This was the year after we had experienced a very severe winter in 1936. I was a student at the Plainview one-room school house which housed grades one through eight. The teacher at that time was Mrs. Margaret (George) Lee. She was a very disciplinary and thorough educator.

It was a beautiful spring day that two other boys and I decided to skip school after the last recess until school was let out. It was the time of year when spring flood waters were overflowing their banks on the creek. The three of us invented a sport we called pole vaulting over the creek. As any young boys, we couldn't see the possible danger in this sport, like drowning perhaps. However, little did we know, there was even more danger ahead for the three of us that day. Well, when it was time to go home, we walked slowly up the hill to the school house to get our dinner pails. Who was there to meet us but our teacher, Mrs. Lee. She promptly told us to get in the school house and to sit down at our desks. She, in her stern way, lectured us about our behavior and the fact that we had skipped school. When she was finished, she went back to the storage room where wooden "boards", among other things, were kept that were used to fuel the wood stove that heated the school room. It was slightly dark in the school room because of the lack of electricity and it became even darker when she came back with a board in her hand. One by one we were asked to stand up by our desk and lean over. It was then that we found out just what an oak board can do to prevent a child from skipping school! "A lesson" learned and never forgotten by Don Hamilton, Tim Schnieder and Ben Goebler. The three of us were reluctant to tell our parents, of course, because in those days, school was for learning and not for "hankie pankie."

And now for the rest of the story. As a young boy of 11 years, I never dreamed of what the future had in store for me. My family and I lived through some difficult years and then moved to Mt. Vernon into our new home which had electric lights. My two friends, Don and Tim, and I all finished our education in separate schools, and I later served in World War II. I came back home to work in the Nelson store which I had also worked in while finishing high school. The owners, Andy and Lucy Nelson, had purchased the store from...
the Koch Brothers. I also worked for the next three owners of the store, Wallace & Westby, Sam Bieri and Ray Davis. I then bought the store from Ray Davis in 1952 and named it Benny’s General Store. My wife, Darleen, and I operated it until 1959 and then sold the store to Amos Austin.

It was then, that grade school incident popped up again to haunt me. It happened that my old teacher, Margaret Lee, lived in Mt. Vernon and was a customer of our store. One quiet afternoon, Mrs. Lee and I started a conversation about that incident. She remembered it, and earnestly tried to apologize for what she had done. But I explained that I felt that it was us three kids who had been in the wrong that day, for skipping school.

Many years later, at a V.F.W. meeting, I mentioned to my old friend Don Hamilton that Mrs. Lee’s children were having a 90th birthday celebration for her in Deforest, Wisconsin. They had invited her friends and family to join them. So Don Hamilton and his wife, Bernice, and my wife, Darleen, and I went to Deforest to wish Mrs. Lee a happy 90th birthday in the year of 1994. It was one of the happiest moments of her life when Don and I hugged her. Our old friend Tim didn’t make it because he had passed away. However, there was one thing we did not mention while we were there... she never caught us when we tried smoking corn silk under the bridge.

**Rain Water**  
*By Walter Brink*

Softwater, a gift from heaven is free for the asking, but to use it, it has to be collected and stored for use. When Mt. Vernon came into being, the rain barrel at the corner of the house served that purpose. As the years passed other means were devised. Cisterns, which held the collected water, were built in basements or underground to prevent freezing. My grandparents had one in their basement. When I was a child, I enjoyed pumping the soft rain water to an attic tank. From there, gravity furnished soft water any where in the house. In 1929, my parents had such a cistern beside the house and it was filled with softwater from the roof. A hand pump in the wash room was primed and softwater came forth. With the coming of electricity, pressure pumps brought hard ground water into the house. But the groundwater was not soft. Here is where Zwald’s Water Softening Service from Mt. Horeb came to the rescue of homeowners in Mt. Vernon. Nowadays, it doesn’t have to rain to have soft water.

**The Split Log Drag**  
*By Delma Donald Woodburn*

Delma Donald Woodburn, at the age of 96, has a lot of memories of Mt. Vernon. She recalls having a lot of fun in the Mt. Vernon area, especially in the winters. Delma liked to be outside, and remembers climbing all four sides of Donald Rock. Fourth of July celebrations and school play days were most enjoyable times. The Marty boys, John and Miner, made her a pair of stilts and she became proficient at walking with them. Delma remembers a humorous incident when her parents gave her some money to buy some shoes at the general store. The only shoes that fit her were high heel shoes. She bought them, but her parents made her return them for a more sensible style.

Delma says that one winter the snow on the side of the highway was ten feet high. Snow and kids always make for some good times. The Marty’s made Delma a pair of skis. They soaked two boards in hot water and turned up the ends. The hill behind the school house was a favorite run. Sometimes Delma would get to ride on the runners of her father’s cutter.

Back before the days of pavement and black-top, the care of the rural roads were left up to
individuals to maintain. During spring thaw or rainy weather the roads would become very rough on account of the deep wagon ruts. Winter weather added to the difficulties. One tool that improved the roads was the split log drag. The logs would be split and built into a wide frame and the horses hitched to it. The horses would go up one side of the road and down the other to slat the water off and to level the road bed. This would also provide a gradual slant in the road to help with drainage. Later, in the early 1900's, limestone was crushed and smoothed over the roadbed to stabilize the roads.

**CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF THE ZWINGLI CHURCH**

Growing up two miles north of Mount Vernon, in Springdale Township, during the late 1950s and 1960s, I was in three communities' histories: Springdale, Mount Horeb and Mount Vernon. My family's Mount Vernon connection was the Zwingli United Church of Christ and its community of faithful worshipers. My parents, John and Leona Bigler, who moved into the Martin and Anna Bang farm after they were married in February 1945, officially joined the church April 14, 1946. My sister, Bonnie, and I were both baptized and confirmed in the church.

A child's memory of social history can be very different from an adult's. My parents always chose to sit in a back pew, usually the second one on the right. From this vantage a fidgeting child could observe everyone in attendance. I especially remember the Tasher sisters, who, like everyone else, were very friendly. But from childhood I remember most the "neat" hats they wore, the
reflections from their hair pins dancing on the ceiling, and the melodious sound of their names in unison, Eva, Iva and Emma. We thought they were triplets, though actually only two were twins. Then there was Mrs. Stamm and her stylish fur collar with “real” animals’ heads! The men all wore suits and ties. We children despised the Sunday morning ritual of donning formal clothing, but that's the way it was done in those days.

Reverend Pautz seemed “very official” in his long, black robe as he preached from the wooden pulpit in the center front. The tall chairs behind him looked like kings’ thrones to a child, making his position even more authoritative. Reverend Pautz’s wife was also my teacher at Ridgeview School, so not only did I have to behave on Sundays, but weekdays as well.

Sunday school consisted of Bernice Moore at the big upright piano, leading us children in such songs as “Jesus Loves Me.” A special song would be sung for all those celebrating birthdays during the week, and a bank in the shape of cake with real candles set into the top would be passed to receive our pennies.

After singing, we would file into the basement for our Sunday School lessons. Each grade went to different areas, which were separated by dark green drapes suspended from rods. We sat on wooden chairs and benches while our teacher recited Biblical stories. We later colored scenes relating to the lesson, such as Noah’s Ark or the burning bush.

After church, we would visit Walter and Hilda Loseneger, Zwingli Church members and long-time friends of my parents, who lived in the big house just across the street. Their kitchen was warm and inviting, and there was always fresh baked cookies. Hilda was a devoted helper at our family’s gatherings, so devoted that she seemed like family. To distinguish her from my aunt of the same name, my mother would refer to my relative as “our Hilda.”

Now when I visit Zwingli’s Sunday morning services, I notice how much remains from those years. Although some things have changed, my parents still faithfully attend and still reside in the same pew. Familiar songs are sung by the same warm-hearted people who were there when I was young, but they are now joined by a new generation whose own children are storing new memories.

OPOSSUM ON THE BLOCK  By Ann Strain

The following stories are some that I can recall of my family living in Mt. Vernon. The Strain boys, Danny, Gregg and Jack, were always getting into some kind of mischief.

When my son, Jack, was about four years old, we had a scare. There was a pile of leaves in our backyard and little Jack set them on fire. When I noticed the backyard burning, I also could see that the flames were heading towards the Moore’s house. I was afraid their house would catch on fire. I rushed out and started pumping water, carrying two pails at a time and tried to put it out. I was so upset that I was crying. I couldn’t put it out fast enough. Quickly, the men in the neighborhood came with shovels and dug a ditch so that the fire couldn’t cross over to the Moore’s house. The fire department came too, but the local men had it under control by the time they got there. Our son, Jack, had seen his father burn leaves so he thought he could do it too. I don’t know where he got the matches. It is wonderful how a small community works together when someone needs help. I was so thankful for everyone who helped.

Here’s another story about our son, Jack, again when he was four years old. One day, Jack and his brothers Danny, Gregg, and their friend Gary, were walking behind the Moore’s house. The older boys wanted some apples off of Moore’s apple trees. Gary told Jack to throw a stone at the tree to knock down some apples. Instead of hitting the tree, the stone hit a passing car and broke the windshield. The woman who owned the car went over to the school and blamed Gregg for the incident. She thought Gregg was the one who had tossed the stone. It actually had been Jack who was responsible, even though he hadn’t meant to hit the car. That little guy always seemed to be getting into trouble.

Ole Way used to play war games with the boys around town. He would take them down to the stream and have them go through mud, and one time he told them to jump in the water. Gregg was quite young and didn’t know how to swim yet. He jumped in and went under the water several times so Ole had to pull him out. One day I was coming out of the church after a Guild meeting, and Reverend Pautz was there. At that moment, along came my boys, Gregg and Danny, completely covered with mud. It was a most embarrassing moment for their mother.
Years ago, at Della Way’s house, the young kids in town used to gather upstairs and play records. My son, Danny, played a record over and over and over and and one of Della’s sons told him if he played it again, he would break it over his head. Danny played it, and he did break it over his head.

I can also remember that Benny Goebler’s store was sort of a hangout for the boys in town. My son, Mike, was over there a lot. Benny would tell the boys about his Navy experiences. He also had a soda fountain which was popular. The kids in town also used to like to go out to Donald’s rock and climb it. One time Gregg was there, and he thought he saw a rabbit go into a hole. He put his hand in and got bit. It turned out to be an opossum. They had to catch the opossum and kill it. Then they took it to Benny Goebler’s store and laid it on his chopping block, asking him to cut off the head so that it could be sent in to be tested for rabies. Benny said, “I just scrubbed that block!” Thank God the opossum was not rabid, or Gregg would have had to be given a lot of shots.

One time, Gregg and Danny were playing football, and the football went into the street. Jack Bishop came along in his car and ran over it by accident. The boys felt bad about losing their football, but then, when Christmas came, Jack gave them a new football. They were happy about that.

**LOOKING OUT THE KITCHEN WINDOW**

By Julie Stapelmann

We moved into the former “Losseneggler” home in July, 1977. My husband, Gordon, and I had one baby boy at that time. We immediately began to remodel the home, which included a partial new basement and removal of a large porch in the front. The porch was replaced with a flower garden and a surrounding stone wall. This has brought us much enjoyment. The church is centered beautifully in our kitchen window, and has long been inspirational as we go through life’s trials over the years. We have raised three boys and the church has been the anchor in our lives. I have received much gratification from teaching music in Sunday School and being the pianist and organist for our church for nearly twenty years. We recently remodeled our barn into a workshop which gets much use. We especially enjoy gardening and depend on the produce in the fresh, frozen, canned and dried forms. We make our own sauerkraut, horseradish, sausage, and jellies, and enjoy fresh watercress.

George and Margaret Lee were our close neighbors for many years. George had his 80th birthday on the same day as our oldest son, Adam, had his first birthday, so we celebrated that special event each year. We had a dog that loved to steal Margaret’s slippers off their porch. George was always mowing yard it seemed. The first time we saw him laid flat by the push mower, we thought he had died! We ran up to him, he opened up one eye and said, “I’m just resting—I get tired.”

One night I drove into our driveway with our three boys. We had just gotten out of the car when the car started rolling backward. I tried to get in to stop it, but couldn’t. It rolled faster and faster across the street and down Gerald Trainor’s driveway, through their garage sale tables and into their barn! Gerald immediately got into the car and saw that it was in park, but had jumped out of gear. Luckily no one was hurt. Unfortunately the garage sale items were not very salable.

**CHILDHOOD GAMES**

By Susan Strain Boure

I was 11 years old when we moved to Mt. Vernon in 1954. I have some fond memories of the one-room school that I attended. Mrs. Laura Norslien was my teacher and what a good person she was. She not only taught the three R’s to grades 1-8, she also taught us much more. She taught the older girls to crochet, and we made some lovely doilies. She was a great outdoors person and loved playing softball. We had some wonderful ball games, sometimes the recess was extended if it was a close game. We all loved that! I remember the park across the road from the school where we all went for recess. In the fall we played in the leaves, making huge piles to jump in or use as leaf houses. In the winter we made big circles in the snow and played duck, duck goose, or made snow angels. Other games we played were red rover and starlight, starbright, hope to see a ghost tonight. All of us kids played outdoors from morning to night. We did not have a television yet, so we came up with our own entertainment. No one locked their doors or worried about crime. Kids were free to go fishing or swimming in the creek in warm months. In the winter, it was sledding and ice skating parties.

When we lived in Mt. Vernon, it had two grocery stores, two bars, one church, a gas station, a
feed mill and a telephone company with one operator who connected each call by hand. The phone was a great source of entertainment. It was a black crank phone on the wall. Everyone with a phone had a code that was their signal, like two long rings and one short one. You soon learned everyone’s code so that you could answer yours or listen in on someone else’s. This was called rubber necking.

I remember Fridays were the delivery day for Benny and Darleen Goehler’s grocery store, and a lot of us kids would help Benny put away all the stock he received that week. It was fun, and we looked forward to it. When the work was done, Benny made us malts or sundaes from his soda fountain.

My favorite memory from Mt. Vernon was the day of November 3, 1961. That was the day when Marcus Bovre and I were married in the Zwingli United Church of Christ by Reverend Zane Pautz. We will celebrate our 35th anniversary together this year.

Dear Esther,
Sugar is sugar,
Salt is salt.
If you haven’t been kissed,
It’s not my fault.
-V. Hefty

Dear Esther,
I’m just a little girly,
My name is Bonnie Bell.
I live in old Mt. Vernon,
Beside the whippoorwill.
-B.B.W.

Dear Esther,
Apples grow in California,
They grow in Florida too.
But it takes a state like Wisconsin,
To grow a peach like you.
-B. Berg

Dear Esther,
When you get married,
And have some twins,
Come over to my house,
For safety-pins.
-Your friend, Anna

Dear Esther,
Two in a hammock,
Oh what bliss.
When all of a sudden,
They went like sqw:
-Alvin

Pen and pencil drawings by Esther Eggimann, 1937 and 1938. From two of her Mt. Vernon School autograph books that she enhanced with many of her artistic sketches. Her classmates wrote poems and notes to her on the pages. Esther was age 13 at the time.
-Courtesy of Esther Geiger.