

Looking Back: 1966 FHS grad is fine-tuning local history

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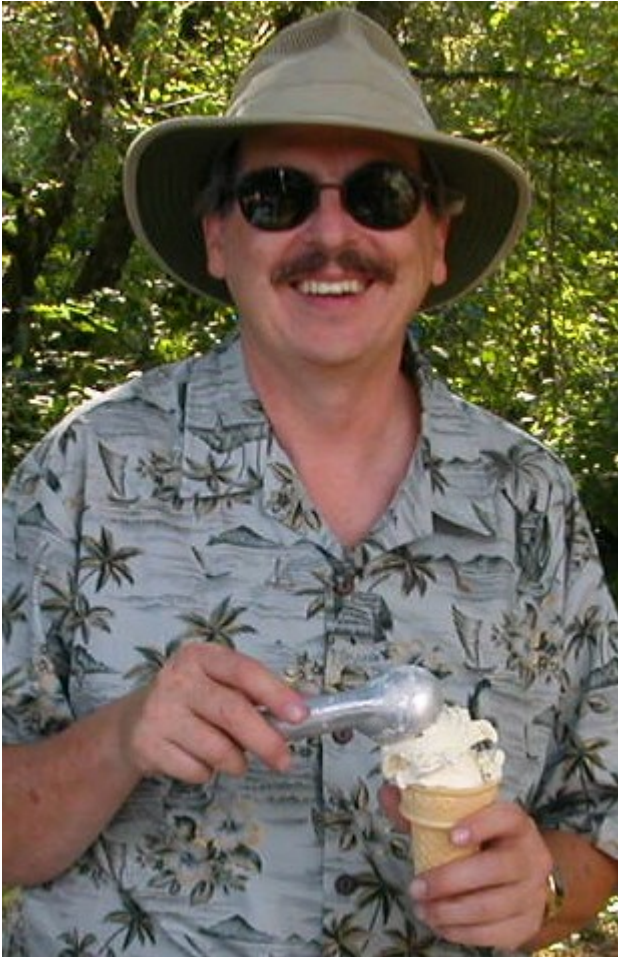


Illustration 1: Robert Bike today

Robert Bike probably knows as much about Freeport as anyone alive. How did Robert gain all this knowledge?

Well, in the first place Robert is the second generation of his family to graduate from Freeport High School. His father, Ralph Bike, graduated from FHS in 1931, his mother, Anna Wienand Bike, in 1939, and his sister, Claudia in 1962. Robert's Uncle Robert Wienand was with the class of 1943. Robert graduated in 1966.

Robert now resides in Eugene, Oregon, but his ties to his hometown are tight and live on, generating from hours he can't even count spent in research. He organizes his findings under categorical titles and stores them on his personal website.

Bike has a rather unusual place to go for one of his primary sources of information. Well, it has been "The Polaris," the FHS yearbook, the volumes of which he has collected many. Bike has also added to his stash, some of the information acquired from the responses he

receives via his personal Website.

"Comments, questions and suggestions are always welcome," Bike states.

Exploring Local History

Bike says he also has "an extensive collection of memorabilia from Freeport and Stephenson County," and promises that as time allows he'll scan anything he deems valuable and add it to his material.

Bike finds this an enjoyable hobby and adds information as he finds time. It is a work in progress, like an exploration. He invites people to "Have fun exploring!"

"I am the sole judge of what I put on this site," Bike affirms. "This is my hobby." He is also a licensed massage therapist in Eugene, Oregon. He has information that he plans to

publish on this site “at some point,” but says it isn’t ready yet.

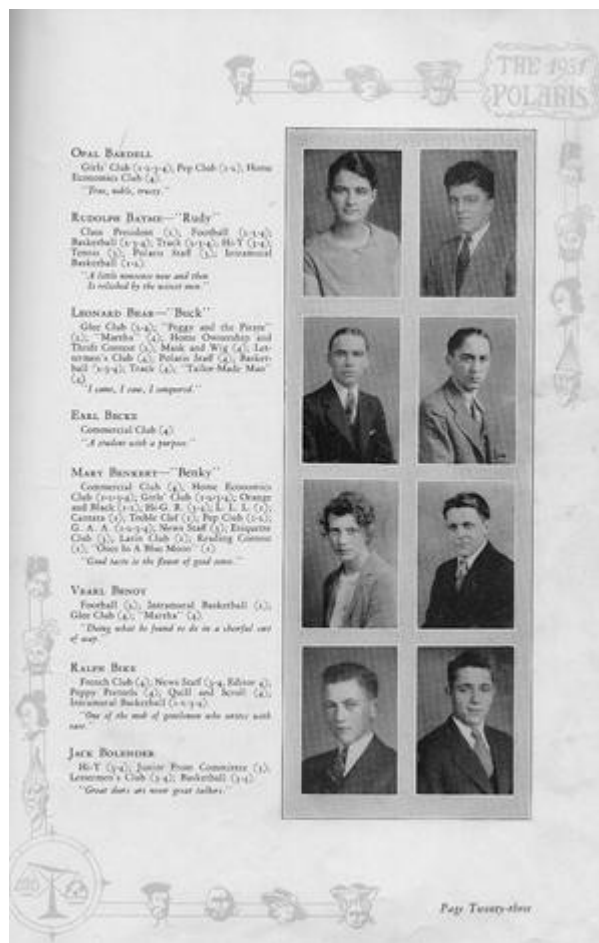


Illustration 2: Ralph Bike in the Polaris yearbook

He has copyrights to all his text and photos except for, he says, the photos and direct quotes from the Polaris and other material in the public domain.

The history of Freeport School District has been one of his main focuses, and he has accumulated an impressive file. He has a list of all the 30 principals who served Freeport High School from 1854 to the present. He lists their years of service up through 1979 but says he need some help for the years from then on.

Bike also has a chart listing the total enrollment of Freeport High School from 1863 to 1969, along with the number of graduates. He goes on giving much of the same information for Freeport Junior High School. Amazing!

One chart titled, “The Graduation Classes of Freeport High School, Freeport, Illinois,” allows access to information on graduating classes from 1850 to 2014. He invites readers to “Click on any year to read about that class.” He says that “bolded” years include scans of various facts from that year’s Polaris: stories about a

particular graduate; a list of that year’s graduates; or perhaps something that happened in Freeport at that time.

Not all years are completed however, Bike states. He would like to acquire those issues of the yearbook which he doesn’t already have.

A Fine-tuning of History

Robert Bike’s e-mail address is robertbike@comcast.net for those who’d care to share information with him.

Bike’s material includes photos of the various high school structures over the years and a history of the evolution of public education in Freeport and the surrounding area. It is the most detailed history of the development of local schools your Looking Back writer has ever laid eyes on. Bike said, however, he has gained some information from this Looking Back series.

Freeport formally organized a school system in 1840, he states. A school opened in a house at the northwest corner of Main and Chicago with three women teachers, Rothilda

Buck, Lucinda Williams and Morilla Williams. He names D.A. Knowlton, a pioneer merchant in Freeport, as the builder of a schoolhouse on Broadway, near his store. William Bulkley was the teacher. As readers may recall, Knowlton Park is in that vicinity on Broadway Street, where the Knowlton store was located. Knowlton is said to have cleverly maneuvered the routing of the stagecoach line past his store.

Bike goes on with a detailed history of various aspects of Freeport and Stephenson County. The titles are intriguing. One I myself intend to pursue is titled “Famous Freeporters.” A cursory scan of the list reveals a number of famous people whom many of us would not suspect had Freeport ties. That will provide some interesting exploration.

So, bit by bit, Bike is filling in many blanks of local history, and he apparently loves what he does. He also bids his readers to join in the search. “Have fun exploring! There is lots to see!”

What Was His Motivation?

You might wonder what sent this man into this research mode? He said attending his 40th class reunion was a catalyst. True, there were things he always liked about Freeport, the Union Dairy, for instance, the high school, other landmarks. But the reunion, and seeing his former classmates, must have gotten him thinking.



Illustration 3: 1966 Polaris yearbook with Robert Bike

People started writing to him and he began buying copies of the Polaris yearbook on e-Bay.

“After acquiring some of the issues,” Bike said, “I started ‘Googling’ some of the seniors to see what they had done with their lives and found several celebrities.” That whetted his curiosity and found him digging deeper, researching more.

Our conclusion: Robert Bike wouldn’t work that hard at it if he didn’t get satisfaction out of it. There has to be pleasure in finding new nuggets of information, new stories to pass on.

Bike is doing a great job of pinpointing some little known facts from the past of this area, and won’t it be fun to learn of those unheralded Freeport newsmakers and perhaps send out some surprising new information to you readers.