

## One man's memories, from page 15

exploding that were stored in the house. People were afraid to go near the house for fear that some of the bullets might strike them. We didn't go near the fire. Claire's had a wood shed so they fixed it up to live in. Mr. Claire was gone at the time. He used to be a land agent for Foster; the same as Cesnik. He had his affairs divided. Where we lived, our south line was the dividing line. North of that -- Cesnik, south of that -- Claire. Mr. Claire was gone much of the time. He was an auditor with a good education. He was a professor at a college at Mt. Morris, Ill. He was an older man, so when he died, Cesnik took the whole thing over.

Another thing that stands out in my mind is the first tragedy that happened in Willard. The first place south of Lucas' was Joseph Bukovec, on the hill. In April 1913, they were burning brush. They would cut the trees in the winter time, piling up the brush from the maples, then burn them when they were clearing the land in the spring. Mr. and Mrs. Bukovec were burning brush on a windy day. The girls went to catechism that morning. (Father Kolan was here then, our first Slovenian priest.) They had no matches in the house -- forgot to buy them. They sent their 7-year-old girl, Louise (third oldest

girl) to get some coals from the brush fire with a small ash shovel. She was about an eighth of a mile from home when the wind blew her dress onto the coals. The dress caught fire. Mr. Bukovec heard her screams, told her not to run; but she ran away from him. By the time he caught up to her, all that was left was a small folded piece of cloth around her wrist. She was burned all over her body. They called Dr. Beckman from Greenwood. Julius Kleinshmidt brought him there with either Beckman's team or one he obtained from the livery. All the horses were lathered up with sweat because it was such hard going with two horses pulling a buggy with bad footing from so much mud on the roads. Dr. Beckman bandaged her up and put on salve, etc. He said he'd come back by train the next Tuesday or Wednesday. She never lasted the night and was dead by 3 a.m., Sunday morning. This happened on Saturday toward evening.

I and my mother were down there for awhile. We had to take her to Greenwood to bury her because there was no cemetery here. The train left at 7:20 in the morning, so my dad went to Bukovec's with his horse and spring wagon to load her casket to take her to Willard. Mrs. Bukovec rode with him and the rest

of us walked behind. We took her to church. My brother, John, and I were pallbearers along with John Cesnik and Frank Slonik. As we picked up the casket, it was made so cheap, the handles broke off. We carried it without handholds. A short service was held in the vestibule of the new church. She was taken to Greenwood by train and buried in the cemetery. They lost track of her grave; they have a monument up, but it's not where she is buried. I know that, because she was buried near the middle of the cemetery and the monument is near the north side.

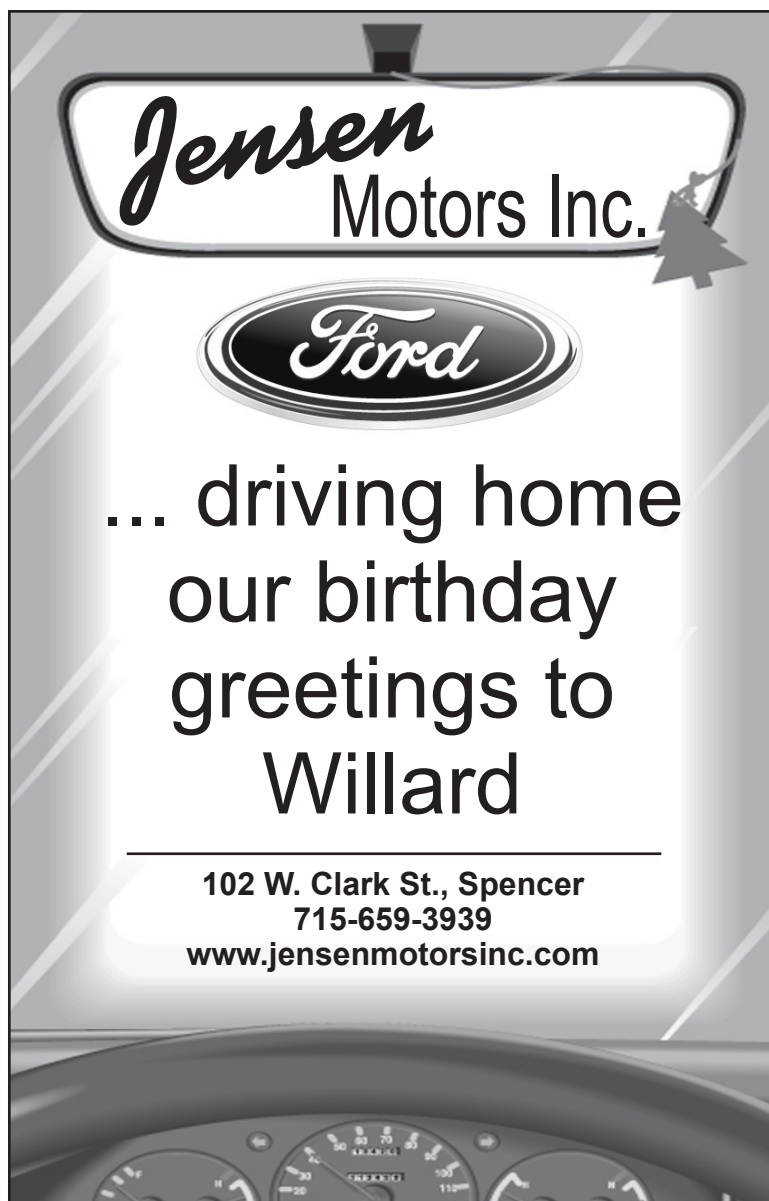
The next tragedy that happened was June 1913, the oldest son of Frank Kokaly. There was a man here by the name of Mike. He died in the late '40s or early '50s. He was married and had a family in Europe. He liked to drink. He had a partner named Matecic. They lived in a log cabin that was abandoned by Joe Kowsa, where he started a farm. (Hannah Kokaly used to live there. It's a brick house on the Rock Dam road -- first place on the right hand side, going west.) These two men lived there when they didn't have work. They worked for Cesnik. When Cesnik had the farm, they would cut cordwood in the winter time. They would be sawing away working like Sam

Hill, for two weeks. Cesnik would pay them and they'd go on a drunk till the money was gone. They'd sober up and repeat the cycle just as regular as a clock. Later, Matecic went to Oregon and was killed in the woods, according to Mike. Mike was a card, he used to talk and tell about what he had in the old country. How he had snaka (pine forests). He showed us a letter from his wife. He said she was always asking him for money. One time, he had a \$10 gold piece. My dad said, "You'd better send it to her and not spend it for booze." Dad saw him later and asked if he had sent her the the dollars. He said "yah", but I know he didn't. Gosh, he was a corker. This old Mike and Mr. Frank Kokaly were turnpiking a road from the corner, south of Bill Petkovsek's (it went past our school), where the road goes north from where Snedic's live now.

In Snedic's house, at that time, lived a man named Joe Tomsic. He worked for Cesnik as his hired man. Cesnik always had a hired man in those days. Selling land for Foster, you didn't work on the farm. You hired all the work done. Joe had a boy the same age as me. He and I used to go to school together. One day in January 1911, he didn't come to school. He said he was sick. We knew what was wrong with him. He

had a big head; it was awful large, I thought, but he was nice bright boy. Shortly after, we heard he went blind. He went to the Marshfield Hospital. We heard he was going to Milwaukee because he had a brain tumor and needed an operation. We all wrote letters to him from school. The sister read them to him because he couldn't see. He knew who wrote. We went to see him the night before he went to Milwaukee. He had the surgery but when they cut into his skull, the pressure was so great, his brains burst right out. He died right there on the operating table. He was not brought home but was buried there. Folks were so doggone poor. They had built the log cabin where Snedic's live. It's been sided now and has an addition to the north to make the building T-shaped.

Mike was living in this house in June 1913, when he was turnpiking this road. Mike had a revolver in his trunk. The brothers, Frank and Tony Kokaly (Tony was younger) (sons of Frank) would stop there once in awhile when Mike was home and take things out of his trunk. They saw the revolver in the trunk. Mike locked the trunk; they watched where he put the key. Mike locked the door but he didn't carry the key with him. He put it up somewhere where it couldn't be found, but they knew where to get it. They used to carry dinner up to Frank Kokaly Sr. and Mike that their mother prepared. The men didn't come home to eat but ate on the job. On the way back, the boys stopped at Mike's house. They took the key, opened the door, got inside, found the key to the trunk and opened it. Frank took out the revolver and shot himself right through the abdomen. I heard the screaming. I was working in the garden hoeing corn. It was young Tony running home. Pretty soon word came that Frank had shot himself accidentally. He didn't know any better, he just bumped the trigger. Frank was just 7 years old. He walked out of the door, collapsed on the doorstep and died. Later, Mr. Kokaly stopped over at our house. He wanted me to go to Willard to meet the train and order some whiskey and a veil for his wife. I took it to them a couple of days later on the morning of the funeral. When I went in, I saw Frank was laid out on a table of some kind (he didn't have the casket yet). Mrs. Kokaly had a glass on his abdomen (like a magnifying glass). She took it off and showed me his wound. That afternoon we had the funeral. Old Andrew Korenchan (he built and lived in the house that Frank Debevec lives in) was a carpenter and built a casket for the boy. Frank was put in the casket, loaded on a spring board, hauled to Greenwood.



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