

Prophetstown:

A Place for Practical Jokes

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by

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Prophetstown Area Historical Society
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Introduction

Those of us who have lived in Prophetstown for a long time have found this to be a place of practical jokes. A while back one of the .pdf articles I posted was about **Allen “Bud” DeWeerd: The Prophetstown Prankster.**

But Bud was not alone, for there were others who enjoyed a prank or two or three . . . Todd Welaever, Prophetstown correspondent for the Moline Dispatch, chronicled some of these event in his article: **“Prank Puts Winning Wheels on Hold – Almost.”**

These pranks even found their way into our schools, some of which will be included. In addition, the pranks described in the Bud DeWeertd article will be included, as well.

Many names will be excluded for various reason. ☺

Prank puts Winning Wheels construction on hold ... almost

By Todd Welvaert

Staff writer

PROPHETSTOWN — Lunacy and madness.

That's what I'd gotten myself into this time. My heart had been screaming for days, "Nothing good can come from this." But my head would not listen.

"You ready?" Prophetstown's Police Chief Mike Fisk asked.

"Yep," I flat-out lied.

Oh sure, Chief Fisk helps the town's doe-eyed children find their way and little old ladies get across the street. But spend a little time with him and you get the idea the Good Chief Fisk is buried somewhere in a shallow grave, and this one, the Bad Chief Fisk, the impostor who managed to escape detection, is merely biding his time.

"This is going to be great," he said giddily, completely insane and not at all in the good way. It all started innocently enough. I was working on a story about practical jokes for April Fool's Day and asked Chief Fisk if ever he had fallen victim.

His eyes glazed as he recounted his tale. And before I could extricate myself from the conversation, he began plotting. I became an integral player in the scheme. I was in too deep. But before he divulged his plan, he told his tale.

"I always suspected two fellow officers, Jamie Thomas and Eric Nelson," the chief said, his jaw clenched. "It was just after Christmas and an ad appeared in The Echo (Prophetstown's weekly newspaper), 'Will pay \$5 for discarded Christmas trees. Will pick up,' with my home telephone number.

"I couldn't use my phone for weeks. It never stopped ringing. I was getting calls from all the area townships. People were getting confrontational when I tried to explain what had happened. I finally taped a message on my answering machine with sirens in the background, explaining our warehouse had burned down and we would no longer be able to take any more

Christmas trees, but offered a forwarded number, the Echo's telephone number. It was a good one. I still need to get those guys back."

After the story, he described his plot, which called for us to terrorize Libby Goodman, administrator of Winning Wheels, a local health-care center. The chief rationalized the plan by claiming Ms. Goodman had played practical jokes on him in the past.

The plan was to tell Ms. Goodman the state had found an area of "suspected historical significance" under the site where a \$1 million Winning Wheels expansion was starting. Construction would have to be stopped or delayed.

Chief Fisk arranged for a friend, Bill Bollman, to pose as a collector of Native American artifacts. I and a Dispatch/Argus photographer rounded out the merry team of ne'er-do-wells.

Maybe it's not completely Chief Fisk's fault. Prophetstown has a twisted history of practical jokes. Maybe it grows from being a close-knit community. People, normal people, don't do things like this to strangers.

Neil Robinson, editor of The Echo, has played his fair share. Over coffee, he recounted some favorites.

"Out in the subdivision, there were three guys who all went out and bought new mo-peds one year," he said. "They all got the same brand, same make and were all bragging about the gas mileage they were getting. Two of the guys decided to have some fun, and started sneaking into the third guy's garage in the middle of the night and putting a pint of gas into the tank.

"Pretty soon the third guy is bragging about getting 200, 300 and 400 miles to the gallon," he said. "After a few weeks, they reversed the prank and started taking gasoline out. Pretty soon he was getting 25, 10 and then five miles to the gallon and wondering what in the hell was wrong with his mo-ped. He was

pretty hot when they let on."

A practical joke doesn't need to be intricate or time consuming, fellow conspirator Myron Hofmeister said, recounting his brightest moment.

"I had a neighbor who was always whining about mowing his grass, and at that time he had this little yard," Mr. Hofmeister said. "So, one night, I went over with my spreader and a couple bags of really good fertilizer and put it on his front yard. He had to mow that front yard about three times a week for the whole summer. His brother lived next door and finally let on."

That's the problem with practical jokes. No one wants to be outdone. In small towns like Prophetstown, memories are long. Grudges and feuds are fueled with plastic vomit and burning sacks of doggie doo. Mr. Robinson said the best quality of a great practical joker is knowing how far is too far.

"A farmer who lived outside of town, was driving his girlfriend and her parents around one night and decided to have a little fun," Mr. Robinson said. "He mentioned he was running low on gas and was going to sneak into a local farmer's driveway and steal some."

"The girl and her folks were just aghast as he turned off his head-

lights and coasted into a driveway. He slipped out of the car, and filled 'er up while the parents ducked down in the seats. 'They never know and they won't ever miss it,' he told them. What he didn't tell them was the driveway was his and he was stealing his own gas. That girl told her friends she would never talk to him again, before he told her the truth."

Thursday, Chief Fisk's plot against Ms. Goodman went off without a hitch. Office personnel crowded the windows as two uniformed police officers and a newspaper staff car pulled up in front of Winning Wheels.

Ms. Goodman appeared as Mr. Bollman was explaining the historical significance of a stone arrowhead, now in an official-looking evidence jar. Chief Fisk and Mr. Bollman played off each other's dialogue perfectly.

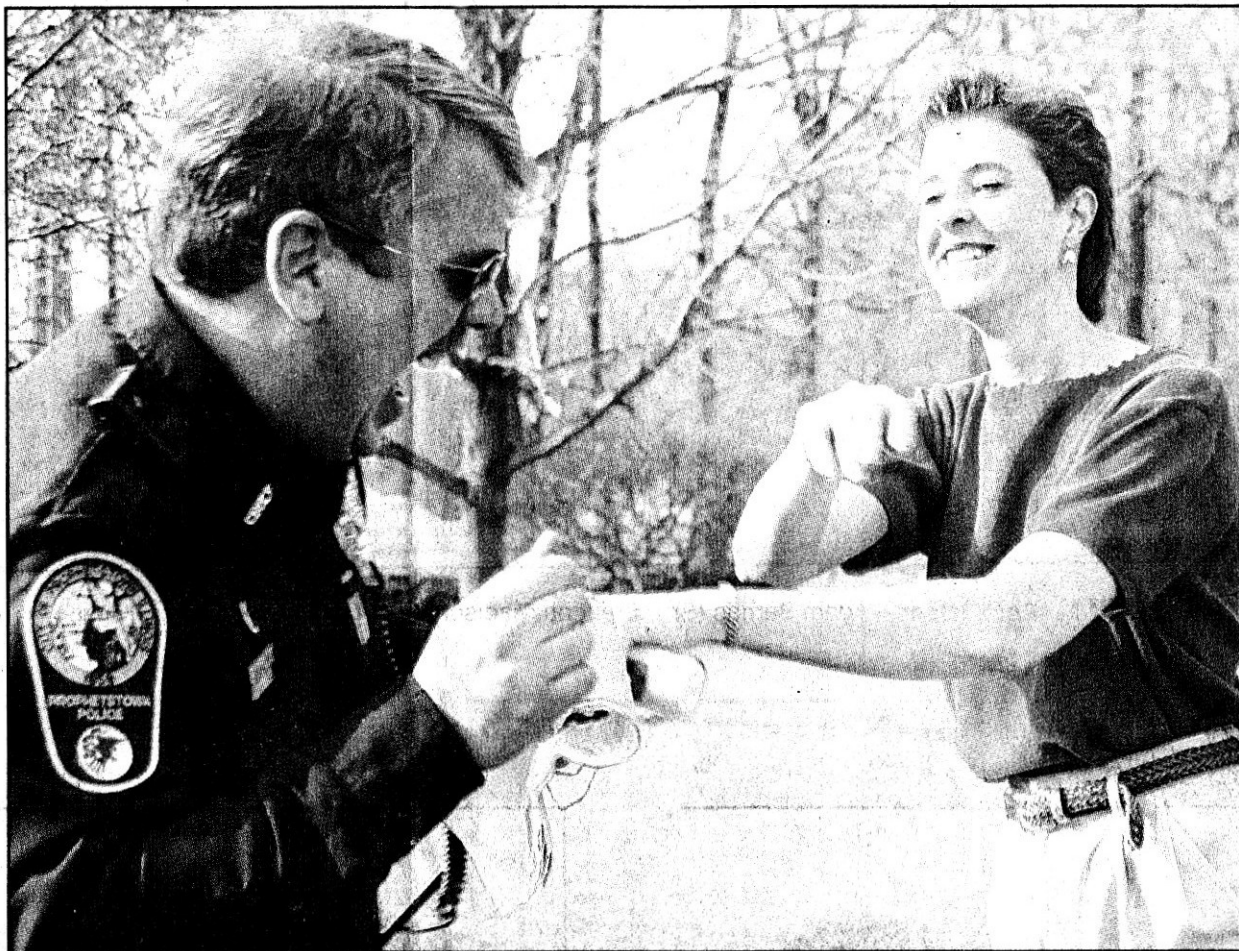
Ms. Goodman's face paled and she forced a smile as Chief Fisk, face set in stone, explained he had good news and bad news. The good news: the construction site might be an important addition to the historical register. The bad news: the state archaeologist wouldn't be able to evaluate the "find" for six weeks. Construction had to stop immediately.

A few long moments passed before Chief Fisk let her off the hook. "You know, this would make a great April Fool's joke," he said, his face breaking into a wide grin. "If someone could pull it off."

Ms. Goodman's reaction was quick. Let's just say Chief Fisk is lucky his years of police work have taught him how to take a beating.

An ugly truth about practical jokes is that participating in one means positioning yourself as a future target.

It's too bad really. I like Prophetstown. I wonder if the paper is still looking to fill the opening at the Helsinki bureau.



Dana Gardner / staff

Libby Goodman of Prophetstown shoves Prophetstown Police Chief Michael Fisk when she realizes that he has pulled an early April Fool's joke on her Thursday afternoon. With the assistance of friend Bill Bollman, Rock Island Argus and The Dispatch reporter Todd Welvaert and photographer Dana Gardner, Chief Fisk convinced Ms. Goodman, who is the administrator of Winning Wheels, a local health-care center, that the center's planned \$1 million expansion was located on a historic site and would have to be stopped.

Prophetstown Practical Jokes Began Early

Carl O. Swanson wrote about Prophetstown

As I remember

Practical joke is well-kept secret

By Carl O. Swanson

There was one trick played in town that was kept a secret for over 50 years as to who did it.

There was a family living in the old George Bowen house on West Grove Street. When the father came home from work, there were 20 some kittens around the house. He thought the only way to catch them would be to feed them. As he had a cow to be milked, he could give the kittens part of the milk. While they were lapping up the milk they were picked up and put in 2 gunny sacks. The father and the older boy carried them up town and dumped them through the back door of Sherm Baldwins grocery store, now occupied by Moew's Electric. In a few minutes the father and the boy walked around to the front of the store and watched the commotion inside through the front windows.

Mr. Baldwin and clerks with brooms and mop sticks were trying to drive the kittens out. Some of the kittens were climbing the shelves and

canned goods were tumbling to the floor and others were so scared, they hid under the counters. Finally the father and the boy walked inside and the father asked them, "What's going on in here?"

Mr. Baldwin with a lot of profanity said, some brainless idiot dumped a lot of kittens through the back door and I would like to get hold of the rascal. The father to prevent any suspicion bought a few things and walked out.

After more than 50 years, the boy was living in Chicago. One day he was notified that his brother was seriously ill in the Sterling Hospital and he took the train to Sterling. That same day I went to Sterling Hospital to see my cousin and I met the old boy. He asked me a lot of questions about Prophetstown where he was born and raised and graduated from high school. During our conversation he told me about the dirty trick he and his father played on Sherm Baldwin with the kittens.

Their names were Peter and Carl Erickson.

Bert Butzer, a prominent farmer in Portland Township, came to town and bought a box of hog rings and, while in town, dropped into Glen Wheat's Clothing Store for a chat with Glen. [It was at 310 Washington St.] Bert laid the hog rings on the counter and, during the conversation, Glen slipped the hog rings out of sight, unnoticed by Bert. When Bert got home he had no hog rings. It finally dawned on him that he laid the rings on the counter and it was one of Glenn's tricks. When Bert went to town, again, he slipped a dead hen into a paper sack and walked into the store and, when Glenn wasn't looking, placed the dead hen into a drawer back of the counter. One morning, the atmosphere was unbearable

Frank Ballard, Sr. was also on the street in the mornings and before returning toward home got some meat in the meat market. On the way, as usual stopped at Frary's office where a lot of retired farmers gathered most every day discussing problems of the day.

Frank sat down on a chair and placed the meal under the chair. A man sitting behind Frank reached under the chair and grabbed the meat and went out the back door. When Frank was ready to go home, his meat was gone. They searched the whole office. Frank went out the door madder than a wet hen and when Frank arrived home his wife was frying the meat.

Practical Jokes in Prophetstown Schools

Practical jokes also found their way in to the schools. Back in the late 1960s one of the teachers at Prophetstown Elementary was hired to mow Adams Field. It was located where the apartments are now and was used as an athletic field by the grade school. He usually mowed on Saturday morning. This particular Saturday he opened the door at the school where the riding mower was kept and out jumped a huge black dog, which scared the daylights out of the poor guy. The dog was well known in the neighborhood and was very friendly. The coaches and their team had left early that morning for an out of town athletic event, coaxed the dog into the room and shut him in, leaving the mower guy to experience his “event” of the day.

In 1969 Prophetstown Junior High, which had been in Prophetstown Elementary was relocated to Lyndon. It was a different community, but the practical jokes continued. Someone took a wheel out of the secretary’s chair, cause her a fright when she sat down. That was only one of a myriad of things that happened.

One of the coaches handed out every Friday, during the football season, a sheet for the students to guess those weekend scores. On Monday the sheets were tabulated and, as was expected, the coach bested the students. But the coach made a serious mistake. He filled out his page using a pencil. One of the other teachers spotted that and decided to intervene on the students’ behalf. After the coach left on Friday afternoon, that teacher change the scores that the teacher had written in. Suddenly, on Monday morning and for a number of Monday mornings after that, the coach came into the teacher’s lounge in a bewildered state. He was shocked that he was no longer winning every week. Eventually, it became known what was happening. A few weeks later the teacher who pulled the stunt came back after lunch, turned on the projector to show a movie only to find that the coach had replaced the film with one on science. That teacher did not teach science.

One of our teachers held a birthday party for his daughter. A group of the daughter’s friends were invited. It came time to take a picture of the group, but there was one little girl who kept making funny faces and would not stop. So the picture was taken anyway. Many years later, while showing a set of slides to the class, that picture was placed on the screen, with everything blocked put except for the little gal making funny faces. The class heard a loud “Oh no!” and saw this particular gal slide way down in her desk with a very red face. Her classmates thought it hilarious. She did not and told the teacher her graduation party, which was a few weeks away, was off limits.

One of our coaches found that once in a while when he put his street shoes on after practice that someone had placed a rolled-up banana peel in the toe of the shoe.

Years ago there was a picture in a popular magazine showing what scientists thought about the evolution of the human race. There were a number of drawings starting with a slumped humanoid and progressing to one of a modern human. One teacher acquire a picture of a coach, used a razor blade to extract the head of the coach, made a slice in the last picture of a modern human and slid the coach’s head up through that slit. Then posted it on the library bulletin board. Lines of students stood there viewing the display until it was taken down.

The practical joke which resulted in we teachers being “invited” into the principal’s office was this one. There was a certain teacher who was known to play these kinds of jokes on others. So the “others” decided to get even. There were two ways into this teacher’s room. One was through the office and the other was through the door in the hallway. Those involved in this event, locked the office door to the room then tied a four-foot piece of oak across the hallway door, securing it to the door knob. Lunch time came and the teacher found both of his exits to be blocked. So he began pounding on the hallway door and yelling “Let me out!” Those who had planned the little episode did not know that this teacher had an appointment with a parent that noon. The parent arrived at the door as the teacher inside was pounding on it and yelling to be let out. That was not the sort of event anyone had anticipated. The principal told us he liked our sense of humor, but what we had done was “over the top.”

While at Lyndon Junior High we had a librarian who traveled between schools. One day she forgot to put on her parking brake and found that her car had drifted across the parking lot when she went to go home. The next day, when leaving school, she found that her car had been tied to a light pole with rope.

Our Superintendent at the time was known to be a procrastinator. Some decided to get him an honorary membership in The Procrastinators of America. It was assumed that he would mention having received his

certificate. If that should have happened those who pulled the prank had a ready answer: “Oh, sorry, we intended to tell you, but never got around to it.”

On my 45th birthday this is what my car looked like when I attempted to leave school late that afternoon. The interior was filled with balloons, many of which had to be popped before I could drive home.



We at Lyndon Junior High had no idea who had played some of these practical jokes, though different parties were blamed. What we did find out at the custodian's retirement party was that he had been responsible for some of them. It was a shock, because he was a quiet sort of guy whom no one had expected.

Other Prophetstown Events

In August 1988 I turned 50. Came home from school that afternoon and this is what I found in my front yard. There was a cake made of foam rubber, covered with chocolate icing.



One of our neighbors in Brook Haven got married and went on their honeymoon. Coming home they found an old out house sitting in their drive way.

Years ago there was a fellow in town who had a two car garage. One of the garages was filled with a variety of items, but not a car. A friend threatened to place a Sanford & Son sign above that garage. The show ran for five years in the 1970s and featured Fred Sanford as a junk dealer. However, the guy with that packed garage claimed that he knew every item that was sitting there. A friend decided to prove him wrong. That guy had a rather unusual toilet in his basement; one which flushed up so the waste could exit to the septic tank. It was a relatively new product and did not work well at all and did not even look like a regular toilet, because it had no water tank. When it was discarded it was placed in that fellow's garage. Months later he cleaned the place out. When asked if he noticed any thing unusual among the items he had not. Then was told that the toilet he removed was not his, but belonged to that friend and was put there to prove he did not know every piece of junk that was in his garage.

Taken from the Allen “Bud” DeWeerd Article

From Bud Thompson:

“There was a story going around: Bud and Dr. Tyler (local dentist) were pals. They enjoyed playing tricks on each other. One morning Bud went dashing into Doc. Tyler's office (it is gone now) and said he had a bad tooth-ache. Doc. got him in the chair and Bud pointed out which one was hurting him. Doc. poked around and said your bad tooth is on the bottom, not the top as you are saying. Bud got upset and said: ‘I know which one is hurting, just pull it.’ So Doc. Did, showed Bud the tooth he just pulled and said: ‘this is a good tooth, the bad one is still in your mouth’”.

From Cal Schuneman:

“Oh yes, good old Bud. He certainly loved a practical joke, unless he was the victim. When most business people went to Chuck’s Place for morning coffee, Bud would sometimes announce ‘John, I’ll buy your coffee today.’ John, assuming his bill was paid, would leave Chuck’s and go on his way. The problem was that Bud did not pay Chuck. Bud thought that was great fun. Chuck not so much, he would need to follow his customer down the street and ask for payment.

“For years, Bud’s store and Bob Jackson's barber shop adjoined. They would clear the snow from their walk and pile it all in the other doorway.

“Harold Plautz never took the keys out of his car when he parked on Washington St. Bud would sometimes move Harold's car and park it far from where it was left.”

From Dolores Francis:

“I really didn't know Bud very well. We bought the store from him when it was advertised that he wanted to sell for health reasons. He loved to play jokes I'm told. He also visited the store many times after selling because it was his life. And I know now what it means, because it became my life and I loved it.”

From Eileen Detra:

“I don’t know about him. But, Jesse James, his step-son, was in my class of 1960 and he was known as very humorous and actually very witty and funny - kind of class clown who became a Superintendent in Michigan and then Rock Falls with a doctorate in education!

Bud was always friendly and actually walked around the store following you in case you pick pocketed something.”

From Fran Hansen Hamann

“Bud & Arlene DeWeerd were a big part of my youth. Arlene was always sweet and kind with a warm smile. Bud also had his kind and gentle side, but with it also came the heart of a prankster. At times he would be joking in some way, but it was difficult for me to know when that was; his facial features usually remained flat and without expression.

“My Dad, (Kenny Hansen), owned and operated Hansen’s Coffee Shop with my Mom (Mildred Hansen). Bud often would come in for breakfast, before opening the Ben Franklin (sometimes called the five & dime store in the 50’s) for the day. Dad and Bud seemed to be on some kind of race to see who could out prank the other. I don’t remember what pranks Bud did on Dad but I do remember one that Dad did on Bud.

“Bud came into the Coffee Shop early one morning, sat at the counter in his usual spot, put in his order for one large pancake, milk and coffee. I guess Dad was feeling perky that morning and decided this was his day to pull a prank on Bud. Dad poured a nice round circle of pancake batter on the grill, neatly placed a freshly cleaned can lid on top of the batter, and carefully

poured more batter over the whole thing. I was a young girl at this moment in time in the early 1950's. As this special pancake was delivered by the waitress to Bud, I watched, hardly noticed, from the kitchen door. Bud went through the motions of buttering and smothering his pancake with syrup. Took his fork to cut off a bite. When the pancake did not budge to offer up a bite, Bud took his butter knife and fork to see if that would solve the problem. Suddenly, he stood up, slammed his utensils down on the counter and stormed out of the Coffee Shop front door. I suppose the clue was when the pancake appeared to be shiny on the inside like never before.

"Dad was red faced and teary eyed with roaring laughter. I have no idea who was the 'prankster victor' between these two over the years."

From Fred South:

"We built our Brook Haven house in 1966. In 1972, Bob and Nova Schultz built on the lot just south of us. Bob, some of you will recall, ran the Thermogas business in Prophetstown. He and Bud DeWeerdts were quite a pair, always at each other. In 1972, Brook Haven was not yet in the City of Prophetstown, so we had our own rules to live by. One rule was that no trailer houses could be used. Bob had purchased the lot and just before construction started he asked me to go out at night, mark out a place for a trailer on the lot, using stakes and string. Bud DeWeerdts also lived in Brook Haven. Apparently, in the morning, he looked down the street and saw the stakes and string I had placed the night before, noting it was a layout for a trailer. Shortly thereafter, the word was all over uptown that Bob was going against the rules and was putting a trailer on his Brook Haven lot.

"Bob loved it; thought it a hoot. Actually, he and I had designed his house the winter of 1971-72 and the contractor, Red Blackert, was set to begin construction. Of course, all Bud knew, or thought he knew, was that Bob aimed to put a trailer on his lot."

From Lorraine Thompson:

"I remember Bud well. It happened that he worked with my mother around 1946 in the office at Clinton Corn, which I believe is now ADM. We often shopped in Ben Franklin, and it was fun to go into Bud's store. There were double doors and a bubble gum machine on the outside. When giving the change back, he would keep a grip on the coins or bills in his hand and pull back quickly before us kids could grab a hold of it. He used to have a candy counter in front, and we would select butterscotch or chocolate candies that were placed in little white bags. Once, around Christmas time, when I was by myself and went to pay for candy, the nice clerk said Bud had told her it was already paid for. When I got to the car and told Mom, she got a big smile on her face and said it sounded just like Bud. He always said hello and had a big smile. His wife was also very nice."

From Tracy South-Paulsen:

My strongest memory of him is that he teased us kids when we would come into the dime store. If we bought candy, he would palm it, or our change we were paying with and try to convince us that we hadn't given him enough. Then, he would pull it out of our ear and ask us why we were keeping change or candy in our ear. LOL!! He was always so funny. I was used to teasing, coming from our house, so I guess it made me feel at home when he teased me. I remember taking my money into the store and pouring over the penny candy to figure out what I should buy. I loved Sixlets and Smarties, but often ended up with Jolly Rancher sticks, which you can't buy anymore. Just thinking about those Jolly Ranger Sticks makes my mouth water! Ha! I was lucky enough to have him live in our neighborhood. I remember going down to visit him and Arlene. They were always so kind and welcoming to us kids. I was so sad when he passed away. The dime store wasn't the same without him in it.

From Elizabeth Robinson-Green:

I just remember he always teased us when we went into the store. I never knew if he was serious or not. He would stand with us as we made decisions on which penny candy to buy and give us suggestions, then help us count out our change on the counter.