

Remembering

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by

Fred South
Prophetstown Area Historical Society
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Introduction

John Sibley was quite a fixture in town when we arrived in 1964. He was about 80 years old at the time, but still very active, living another 18 years. I met him at Fenn Drug, where he spent a considerable amount of time. He was known for a variety of activities, being a very talented fellow, as you will see in the pages below.

John Sibley-going strong at 90

Nov. 28, 1978

About the only concession to advancing age that John Sibley will make is a cane. Otherwise, he does things about as well as most younger men and often he does them with more gusto.

This coming Sunday, John's family will holding an "open house" to help him celebrate his 90th birthday. I can write this because his daughter will have him out of town from the time the paper comes out until Sunday afternoon...the day of the "open house."

At 90 people have started taking it easy. But not John. When he was 80 he bought a bunch of brushes, canvas and paint and started laying the paint on the canvas. He has been constantly improving and at 90 his work is extremely good.

Most of his paintings are of landscapes. He does many of them from memory, but most are done from photographs he has taken. "I really can't get out and paint on location like some painters do," he said during an interview last week. "Instead, I usually shoot a picture and then enlarge it. I hang it on my easel (he built it himself) and then start painting." So far, John has painted approximately 150 landscapes and has sold enough to pay for his painting supplies.

"I have painted 25 bridges, but they go around tearing down the bridges as fast as I can paint them and there are not many left," he said.

When asked why he painted landscapes, John said, "Because I am a realist I guess. I don't care much for abstract pictures like so many of the artists paint today. I would rather look at a painting and not have to guess what it is I am looking at."

At the present time, John paints about two hours in the afternoon and sometimes a little longer. He does the painting in a little corner of the front of his house located on Park Ave. in Prophetstown. Surrounding the corner are canvases in various stages of completion. John figures he will get them all done by the time he reaches 100 years of age.

John and his wife Martha moved to Prophetstown on December 28, 1936 (he recalls dates very well). He went to work as a body and fender man for Sibley and Mosher Pontiac-Cadillac while he was in his early 50's. However, in 1943 he began "moonlighting" for Fenn Drug fixing watches and clocks. He later began working for the drug store full-time and retired just two years ago.

While John Sibley is well known for his expertise with cameras (he got his first one in 1906) his painting ties in well. While he may not be a Grandma Moses, the paintings of various barns, shacks, water scenes and other outdoor scenes he has painted over the past ten years will bring memories of life around Prophetstown that memories alone cannot capture.

Happy birthday, John. We will have to do another interview when you hit 100.

The John Sibley home



This John Sibley home was on the northeast corner of Market and E. 3rd Street. A. J. Mattson, who built the First National Bank building at 112 E. 3rd Street, wanted to build his home here. So this house was moved to Park Ave.



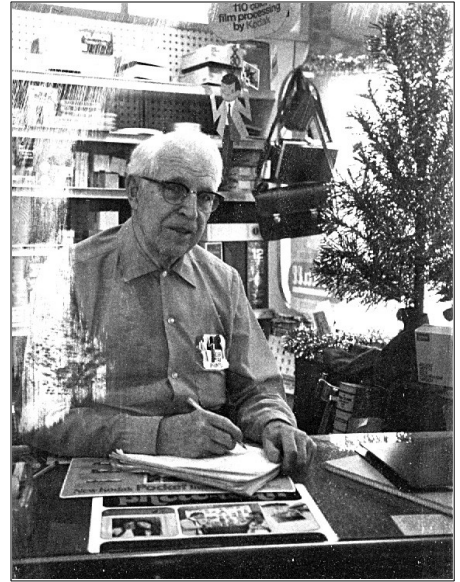
EARLY 1900 PHOTO — Mr. and Mrs. John Sibley are shown on the porch of their residence on Park Avenue with the barn and windmill in the background. A part of the Sibley home was an early Main Street store front. The

original part of the home was built next to the first bank. Sibley was an avid photographer and in later years a "Grandpa Moses" artist. He died in 1983.

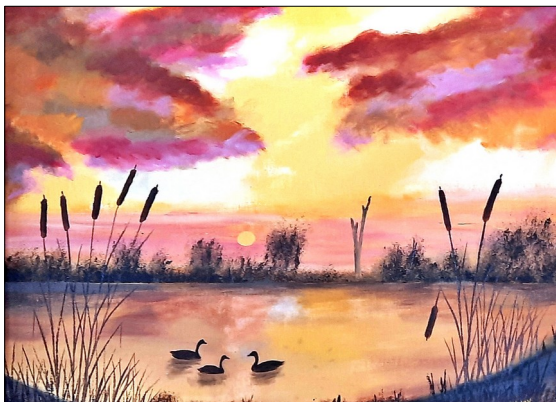


This is the house now.

Pictures of John Sibley



John Sibley Paintings
These are in the possession of the
Prophetstown Area Historical Society



Camera Club

The Prophetstown Camera Club had its beginning in the late 1930's when a group of photo enthusiasts began to meet.

For the past 25 or 30 years meetings have been held once a month in the basement of the Henry C. Adams Memorial Library. During this past year, when the library basement was utilized to expand its services, the club meetings are now being held in one of the rooms in the basement of the Prophetstown Methodist Church.

Camera Club programs consist of slides or movies by members or guests who have taken interesting trips or have pictures of hobbies or some special interest to show the members. This results in a wide variety of programs. General photographic topics are also discussed.

After the meeting coffee and cookies are served and a short social period is enjoyed.

One project for many years has been that a member furnish a slide program at the Prophet Riverview Center every month or two.

In years past the membership has numbered as high as fifty. More recently the membership has dropped to about one-half that number and new members would be welcome.

John was a founding member of the Camera Club.

Camera Club Holds Meeting, Program

From the *Sterling Gazette*, July 24, 1964.

A mixed program was enjoyed by members of the Prophetstown Camera Club at their meeting on July 22 at the club room at the Henry C Adams Memorial Library at 8 pm.

It was announced that a card had been sent from the club to Ed Kemmus who is in the Kewanee Public Hospital.

The meeting was conducted by vice president Merle Kemp in the absence of President Philip Oetzel.

A discussion was held on getting a slide program with a taped commentary on Central City, Colo. It was decided to get the program if possible.

Slides taken in Decatur by Clark Obendorf were shown. Obendorf also showed slides of Starved Rock, Bentons Port, Iowa and of the Kid's Parade. James Duff showed slides of Mobile, Ala. and New Orleans. La and Karl Fellows showed slides on a variety of local interests.

John Sibley presented a series of slides tracing the life cycle of the Monarch Butterflies and showed slides of the center of flowers and slides taken at St. Augustine, Fla.

The next meeting be held Aug 26.

Cal Schuneman Remembers John Sibley

"Ah yes, John Sibley was an intelligent man who worked at Fenn's and lived in a small one story house on Park Ave. John was interested in many subjects and seemed able to discuss anything. He had an old car which he would use for an annual trip to the West, Colorado and Wyoming. As I recall he and his wife camped along the way. In the West they gathered rocks which he brought home and polished into jewel like pieces. He was an avid painter, especially of old farm buildings. I always thought John lived an interesting life, on a bare bones budget."

John Sibley's Obituary

John S. Sibley



John S. Sibley, 306 Park Ave, Prophetstown, 98, passed away Monday, March 19 in his home in Prophetstown.

Graveside services will be this Thursday, 11:00 a.m. at Riverside Cemetery. Rev. Bruce Janes, pastor of the United Methodist Church will officiate.

John S. Sibley was born on December 8, 1885 in Nichols, New York, son of William and Phoebe (White) Sibley. He was educated in New York schools and an original member of the Prophetstown Camera Club and the United Methodist Church.

He was a carpenter, wall-paper hanger and owned a

sporting goods shop. The couple moved to Prophetstown in December, 1936, where Mr. Sibley was employed at the Charles Sibley Garage. He was a watch and camera repairman for 33 years at Fenn Drug Store, prior to his retirement in January, 1973.

John Sibley and Martha Tripp of Owego, N.Y., were united in marriage on August 16, 1911.

Survivors include two daughters, Mrs. William (Gertrude) Mattingly, Prophetstown and Martha Heuer, Byron, Ill.; two brothers, William of Owego, N.Y. and Roy of Norfolk, Va.; five sisters, Genevieve Brainerd, Owego, N.Y.; Lucy Sibley of Owego, N.Y., Ruby Tyrell, Owego, N.Y., Hazel Pitcher, Norfolk, Va. and Shirley Roper, St. Augustine, Fla.; 6 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife in 1978.

A memorial has been established.

Martha Ellen *Tripp* Sibley

BIRTH	2 Oct 1889 Corbettsville, Broome County, New York, USA
DEATH	31 Aug 1978 (aged 88) Morrison, Whiteside County, Illinois, USA
BURIAL	Burial Details Unknown
MEMORIAL ID	76976810 · View Source