

# Chapman has kept track of pleasant history of Eagle

Wednesday, December 6, 1989

**EAGLE** — Harold Chapman is proud of his rural background. Born in November, 1897, in the town of Troy, he joined his four brothers and four sisters to make sure the family homestead was plentiful with its variety. His father's idea was to keep something of everything; like cows, pigs, chickens and horses, in case one item went down.

Chapman says keeping track of things, as he was taught on the farm, helped direct his interest toward bookkeeping. In 1916, he arrived in Eagle to keep books for Harry Smart, the Ford dealer in the area.

He's stayed in Eagle ever since, except for 1918, when he was drafted to fight in World War I. He was sent to Milwaukee for four months training, but the war ended when it did.

Back in Eagle, dancing in the former Masonic Hall to the two-step and waltz brought pleasure



Joan Holman

and an introduction to his future wife, Ruby.

"Dancing to music then gave you time to know your partner a lot better than the fast tunes now allow," he said.

It surely worked for this couple. They were together until her death at the Virginia Nursing Home last year.

Chapman married Ruby Rockteacher in 1920. Their home was built across from where he

worked. The furnishings consist of mementos of events and shared pleasures.

Chapman talks about many events he, Ruby and the village have shared. The bank robbery in 1920 brought an arch to his eyebrow as he said, "Ruby and I were in bed when Ed Lins, manager of the phone company, called to say the robbers had cut all the phone lines except his private one."

"I wasn't sure what I could do. Lins was calling out a posse. I got dressed and went out. Our band never did find the robbers, but it was an exciting time."

Chapman talks about other exciting things, "There was the circus train which would come from Janesville. It arrived very late at night during the 1930's. Our house is perfect for viewing because of its location."

The railroad brought development to the village.

Chapman recounts the many times in the 20s the cars would be filled with polished barley for Milwaukee's breweries.

He says, "There used to be a stockyard behind the present village hall. Farmers in the area could bring their hogs and cattle there for shipment to the Milwaukee yards. Also Eagle had a pickle factory and creamery. But the advance of motor travel and transport reduced the train's importance even if it did help Smart's business and my job."

Chapman was working as bookkeeper and sometime salesman. He says, "Joe Stute was the real dealer. But one day I sold two Ford touring cars, each for \$349. Of course, that was in the 1920s when that model was easy to sell."

In 1923, Chapman bought out Smart. A short time later, fire destroyed the building. In 1924, Chapman with help from his

father-in-law, Fred Rockteacher, built the present Chapman's Station.

Since then the business has been run by a Chapman. However in 1959, the first name changed from Harold to Russel when his nephew took over.

The senior Chapman knew it was time to retire when he couldn't call all the customers by name. He talks about the business as providing real service. The car windows would be washed and a check made under the hood and on tire pressure.

"Now there's no time for that; people are too busy and faces aren't familiar," said Chapman.

But he can still be found at his house across the street. He's keeping watch on Eagle and welcoming people who have time for a brief look at a pleasant past.

*(Joan Holman is a Freeman correspondent who lives in Eagle.)*

Winter 2000

## Harold Chapman

by Joan Holman (from a Freeman article)

Harold Chapman is proud of his rural background. Born in November, 1897, in the Town of Troy, he joined his four brothers and four sisters to make sure the family homestead was plentiful with its variety. His father's idea was to keep something of everything—like cows, pigs, chickens and horses—in case one item went down.

Chapman says keeping track of things, as he was taught on the farm, helped direct his interest toward bookkeeping. In 1916, he arrived in Eagle to keep books for Harry Smart, the Ford dealer in the area.

He's stayed in Eagle ever since, except for 1918, when he was drafted to fight in World War I. He was sent to Milwaukee for four months' training, but the war ended when it did.

Back in Eagle, dancing in the former Masonic Hall to the two-step and waltz brought pleasure and an introduction to his future wife, Ruby.

"Dancing to the music then gave you time to know your partner a lot better than the fast tunes now allow," he said.

It surely worked for this couple. They were together until her death at the Virginia Nursing Home last year. (Ed. Note: Ruby was born on Nov. 2, 1900 and died April 1, 1989 in Waukesha.)

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(Ed. Note: Harold Chapman died on December 29, 1996 at Westmoreland Manor House in Waukesha. The gas station he built was razed in November of 2000 and a new edifice is under construction on the same location. The house where he and Ruby lived still stands on this property.)

## IN MEMORIAM

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mukw orago chief 13 May 1987

Eagle Village  
Harold  
Chapman

# "Old fashioned" feeling remains in Eagle

by Nancy Lander

With the fast moving times and happenings here in the 80's, a pleasant escape for some city dwellers might be a drive through the Village of Eagle. To them it might seem that not much has changed in this little farm town over the years. It's quaint, small shops and high steeple topped structures reflect a true "old fashioned" feeling. And residents of Eagle take pride in that.

But there are still some who remember Eagle as it was over eighty years ago. One man by the name of Harold Chapman recalls the days when bank robbers galloped through

Main St. on dirt roads; when not a street light or telephone wire hovered over the houses; and when electricity and radios were just a wonderful dream.

Harold, born in 1897, grew up on a farm in the Town of Troy with his four sisters, four brothers, and his parents, Wallace and Anna Chapman. His family was poor and there was plenty of work in maintaining the farm. One sister, Eliza who has lived in Eagle most of her life, recalled their lives on the farm. "Our parents taught us how to live a good and simple life, though the work was anything but simple." Eliza is Harold's elder sister, and at the age

of 93, is doing pretty well.

At the age of 21, Harold was discharged from the army and soon after that he married. In 1924 he built Chapman's Gas Station and worked there for 35 years until he retired in 1959. His brother Archie helped him manage the station all those years and he can still be found behind the cash register. Archie's

son Russell now runs that station. Harold remembered that when he opened the station in 1924, the price of gas was 15¢ a gallon and fuel oil was 7¢ a gallon, and he had a real laugh about that!

Harold recalled that in the same decade the day that the station and most homes in Eagle received electricity. But his favorite reminiscing was hearing the first radio broadcast from Madison. He and his wife Ruby drove to La Grange, Wisconsin where a friend put headphones on them so they could hear. It was a weather report, but that didn't much matter to them, soon after that, in the late twenties, Eagle had radios, and quoting Harold "That was a big as those VCR things are now!"

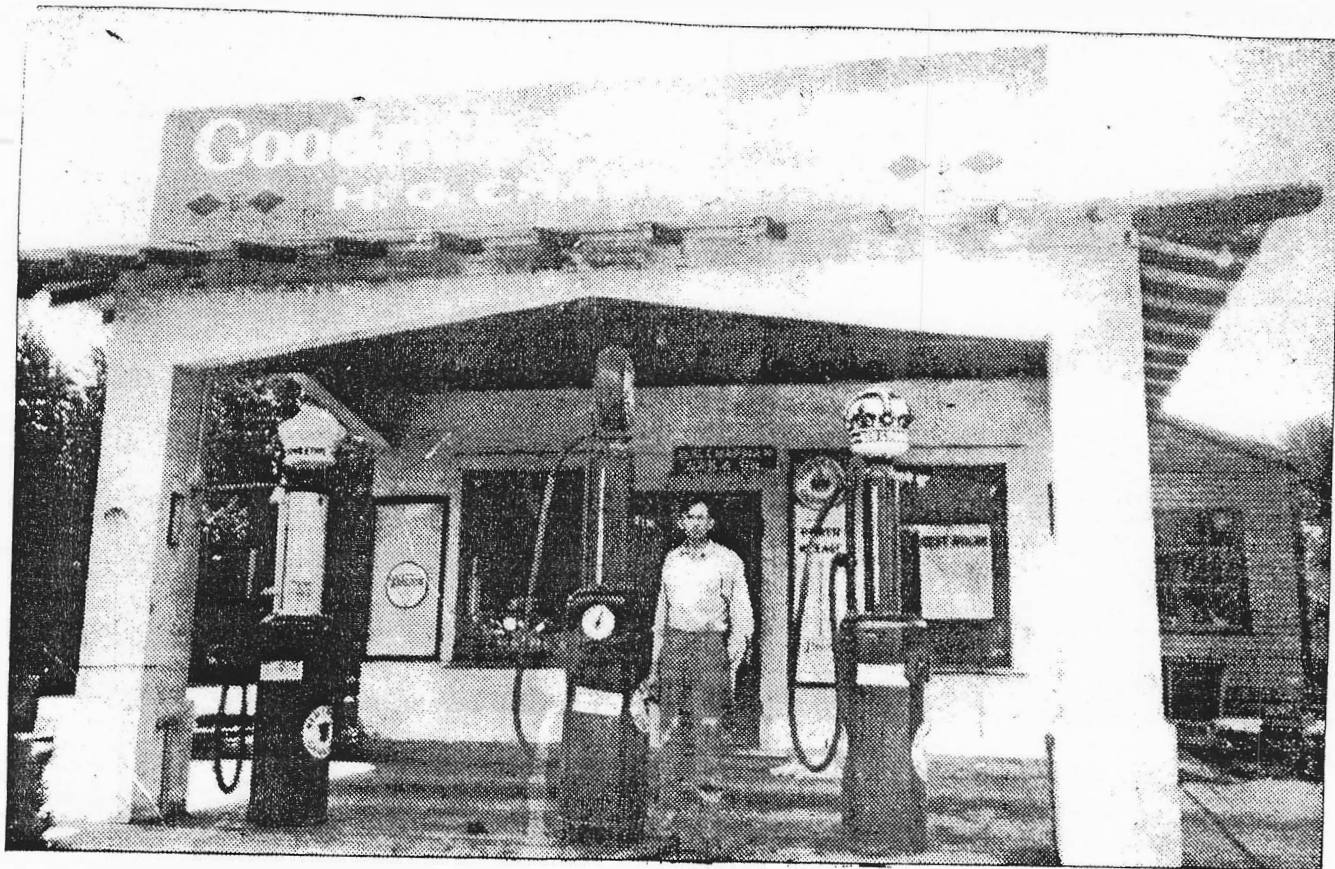
The Milwaukee Railroad

used to have a beer train that went through Eagle at midnight every night, and the Southwestern Railway had a passenger train that went through Elkorn. There was an ice house on the route to Elkorn that at one time employed over 100 men, and the train had cars for the ice to deliver along the way. Harold enjoyed remembering that "something in the past."

Harold will be 90 years old come this November, but his age certainly hasn't slowed him down much. A devoted husband, he travels to Waukesha four times a week to see his wife

Ruby, who lives there in a nursing home. The other day he could be seen mowing his beautiful kept lawn up and down the hill. He mentioned to me that most everyone in Eagle are strangers to him now. But Harold is by far a stranger to Eagle,

Like someone out of a Norman Rockwell sketch, he sits on the porch after supper, and only he makes the picture complete. It was an honor to meet Harold Chapman, and to have a chance to talk with him. *He truly deserves merit for his years of service and friendship to the Village of Eagle.*



Chapman's Gas Station was built in 1924. This photo is one taken some time ago.



Harold Chapman





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#### Chapman's

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Harold remembers that when he started in 1924 the price of gas was .15¢ a gallon and fuel oil was .07¢ a gallon. In that same decade electricity came to the station and most homes in Eagle.



Harold Chapman

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