Resident recalls Eagle

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Harold Chapman was reflected in the triangle shaped mirror which, he suggests, was once a church window. Chapman has made Eagle his home since 1916.

by Joan Holman

Harold Chapman can remember and relate to Eagle's growth. He's helped with much of it. Since he's always been interested in keeping current. Chapman takes pleasure in getting the facts in the proper place, even though there's plenty of both.

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

Chapman said his pleasure probably started on the farm in order to direct his interest toward bookkeeping. In 1916, he arrived in Eagle to keep books for Harry Smart, the Ford dealer in the area.

That scenic village has been home ever since, except for 1918 and World War I. He was drafted and sent to Milwaukee for four months training; upon its completion came the end of the fighting.

Back in Eagle, dancing in the former Masonic Hall to the two-step, waltz and schottisch brought enjoyment and the introduction to his future wife, Ruby. As he said, "Dancing to music then gave you the time to know your partner a lot better than the fast tunes our children presently jump to."

It surely worked for this couple. They were together until her death in 1988.

Chapman married Ruby Rockteacher in 1920. Their home was built across from his place at Smarty's agency. The present furnishings consist of events and shared pleasures. There's a restored rocker. It was rescued -from a throw out- at the village furniture store.

A triangle shaped mirror suggests it was once a church window. "That's true," said Chapman. He got it when the Eagle Methodist Church was enlarged. Also oil holders, decorating the living room wall, were once used to illuminate sheet music for the church organist.

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 Eagle phone company , called to say there has been a robbery. The men had cut all the phone lines except the 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 recalled other things, "There was a circus train which would arrive from Janesville. It got here very late at night during the 1930s. Our house was perfect for viewing because of its location. We could sit on the porch and see the road and the tracks below and, of course, monitor the circus train. I suppose this was the Eagle preview of the Milwaukee circus parade."

The railroad brought new development to the village. Chapman recounted the many times in the 20s when the cars would be filled barley for Milwaukee's breweries.

He said,"there used to be a stock yard behind the present Village-Town 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 "some time" salesman. He said,"Joe Stute was the real dealer. But one day I sold two Ford touring cars, each for $349 Of course, that was in the early 20s when it was easy to sell this special model."
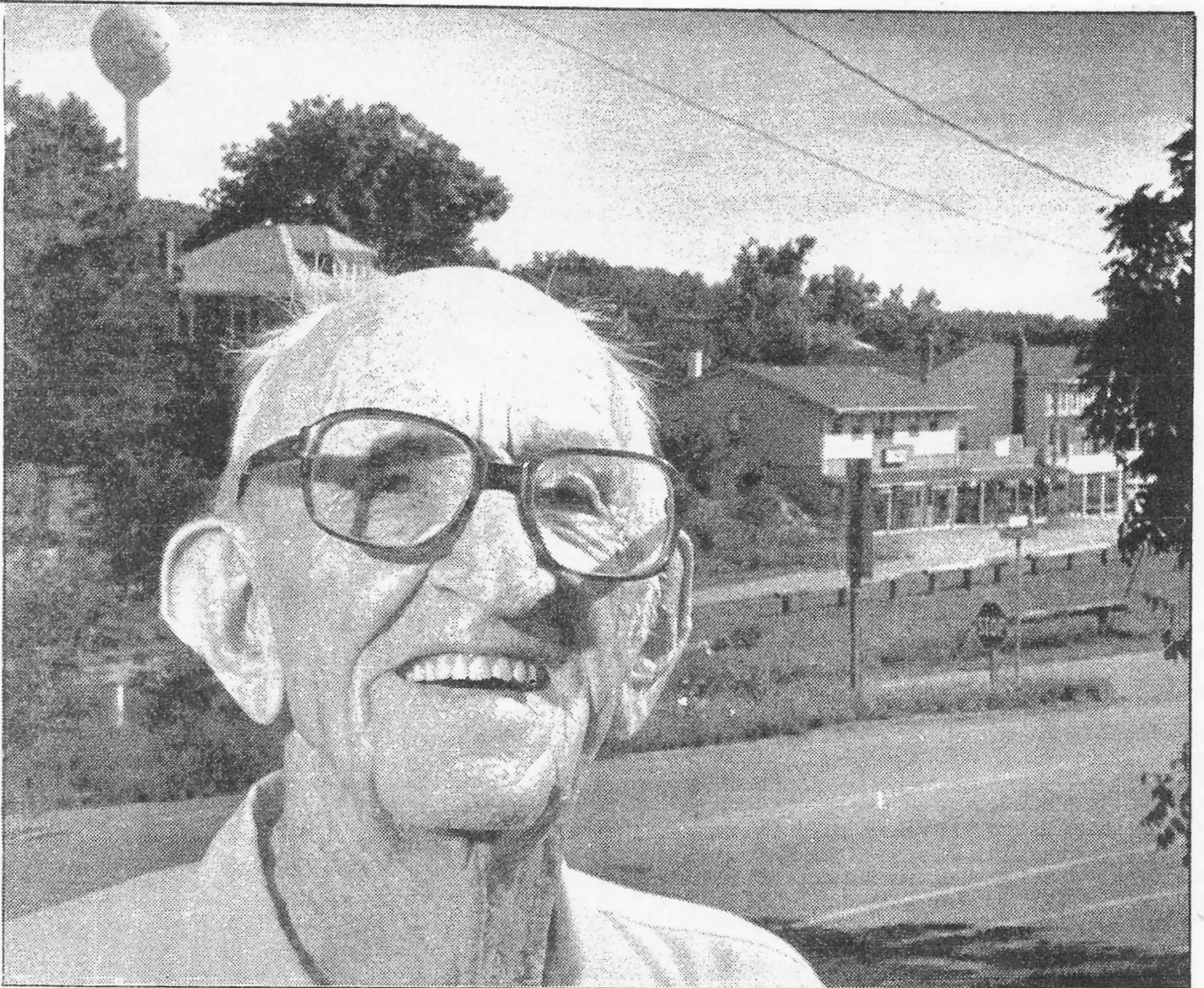
In 1923, Chapman bought out Smart. A short time after that a fire destroyed the building. The next year, 1924, with help from his father-in-law, Fred Rockteacher, Chapman put up the present Chapman's Station.

Since that date the ss has been under C n. However in 1959, the first name changed from Harold to Russell when his nephew took over.

The senior Chapman wanted to retire when he realized he couldn't call all customers by their first names. Eagle had grown and the are developed as a tour attraction with Kettle Moraine Forest and Old World Wisconsin.

Harold can still be seen, watching the present day world go by and a few trains pass, from his house across from the station. And he is still keeping watch of things.

Journal photo by Carl D. Hoyt

At 89, Harold Chapman remains vigorous, alert and as happy as the smiling water tower behind him

The Chapman service station in Eagle now sells groceries as well as gas and oil