Ralph Klinge and Ed Schuett knew every street, alley, tree, dog, and horse, every farmhouse and shop and family, in old Gross Point, the German-American village extending west from Ridge Road to Locust Road that was absorbed by Wilmette in 1924. As little boys, before the First World War, they began helping to deliver groceries and newspapers all over town, an experience that gave them a detailed mental picture of the area and the people who lived there that they would retain for all of their long lives. When we lost Ralph and Ed this past year - Ralph last November, and Ed just this past August - we lost not only two longtime friends and supporters of the Historical Museum, but two of our community’s most precious living links to a vanished world from which few records survive.

Continued on
**FEATURE ARTICLE**

**Gross Point Boys** (continued from front page)

The unpaved length of Ridge Road, muddy in winter and dusty in summer, was at the center of both boyhoods. A lamplighter went along Ridge on his bicycle every day to tend to the gas lamps, and the road was lined with taverns, separated by vacant lots with sheds for horses. Ralph Klinge was born near Ridge and Lake in 1910 over a grocery that stood where Treasure Island is now. The store burned down a few months later, and Ralph’s father bought the building at 821 Ridge, next to what is now the Ridgeview Restaurant, and moved the family into the second floor. If you look closely up near the roof, you can still make out traces of the white paint that once spelled out “Klinge and White,” the grocery run by Ralph’s father and uncle. Little Ralph helped stock the shelves, serve customers, and make deliveries.

Ed Schuett was born in 1911 just east of the ridge, and grew up helping his uncles in their newspaper distribution business. All his life he remembered Dick, their old white horse, who pulled the delivery wagon down the dusty lanes to all the taverns and houses, while Ed and his brother sat behind, binding papers. In the winter, they had to slap their legs to keep warm as they rode along. If Dick needed a shoe they headed over to Henry Hoth’s blacksmith shop on Wilmette Avenue, just east of where Mitch’s gas station is now.

Church and school for both boys was in the old St. Joseph’s that stood next to the cemetery on the northeast corner of Lake and Ridge; mass started at 8:00 in the morning and school followed, lasting until 4:00. Classes were still a mixture of German and English, and sermons at St. Joseph’s were in German, too; Ralph remembered that German disappeared overnight from both school and church when war was declared on Germany in 1917.

Ed’s whole family went down to the depot to say goodbye when his Uncle Peter Scholten went off to France in World War I. Father Vattmann lived on Lake Avenue, and when the Armistice was signed in 1918 he came to St. Joseph’s and got Ed and Ralph and all the other kids out of school for the celebration. Resplendent in his army chaplain’s uniform, Vattmann gave each child a flag to wave, while a band played. “It was one of the happiest occasions I can ever remember,” Ed told us.

Between chores and school, they somehow found time for play. Ed recalled catching frogs at Frog Hollow, the swampy meadow where the Mallinckrodt convent was just being built, and fishing from Gage’s Pier in No Man’s Land. In the summer there was swimming in a gravel pit behind 2007 Wilmette Avenue, where Hollywood Court is now, and in Doetsch’s Pit that later became Lovelace Park. Ed’s Uncle Peter drove a delivery wagon for the Frank Meier Ice Company, and the kids used to ride along on hot summer days and suck the chips of ice that splintered off the big blocks. Ralph’s family had a makeshift baseball diamond on the vacant lot where Wilmette Tailors and Cleaners is today. Sodas at the ice cream parlor in the Mick building were a nickel, and dances were held on the second floor of the old Gross Point Village Hall, now the home of the Historical Museum. In the winter the best skating ponds could be found a block west of 21st street.

Ralph and Ed were wonderfully generous about sharing their memories of these and many other experiences, and their recollections are forever preserved here at the Museum for all to read. It has been a privilege to know these special “Gross Point boys,” and we will miss them very much.

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The Museum Seeks Your Wartime Photos and

We are planning a new exhibit at the Historical Museum about Wilmette and the North Shore in wartime -- from the Civil War forward -- and as we put the exhibit together, we’d also like to expand our permanent collection of this kind of material. If you have photos (originals, not scans), letters, posters, diaries, clothing, or other items that reflect life on the Wilmette home front, or the experience of Wilmette servicemen or servicewomen during wartime, please get in touch. We are especially eager to collect items from the Korean War and Vietnam War eras, including ones that reflect local issues and controversies. Please contact us at museum@wilmette.com or by phone at 847-853-7666.