



Andrew C. Neff - 1962

*I had a dream last night.*

*Like most dreams, the details were specific but the structure was chaotic. I was in a college history class but the time frame was the present. There were not enough chairs, so I had to sit on the floor – lie on a mat actually, like in kindergarten. And as with most school dreams, I couldn't remember if I had ever been to that class before, having lost my schedule. The teacher came around picking up our assignments. Naturally I hadn't completed it, but inquired if I could turn it in next Friday. There was a bit of back and forth negotiation because I wasn't going to do it if I couldn't get at least some credit.*

*The assignment was odd for a history class – write a one page handwritten essay on “What makes me smile?” I thought to myself, “Why handwritten?” I surmised I could compose it on a word processor and then simply hand copy it. But then I got to thinking that maybe this devious teacher would use this essay as a baseline of my writing ability to compare to a handwritten essay on the final exam. Although I didn't resolve this conundrum, I immediately thought of what I would write and composed it in my mind in my dream.*

*What follows is a simple dictation.*

## What Makes Me Smile?

Well, lots of things make me smile of course, but I can relate a specific event that brought a big smile to my face. Labor day weekend, my wife, Carol, and I were attending the *Great Gauga County Fair*, just east of Cleveland, Ohio. We had just entered the fairgrounds when we heard the PA announcer reminding fairgoers about the Frog Jumping contest coming up.

Immediately, a smile spread across my face because my father, Andy Neff, was responsible for that event. Well, not directly at this fair, but he was the inspiration for all the frog jumps throughout Ohio. And that smile broadened when I realized that of the 34,000 people at the Fair that day, only two of us knew this fact.

The story starts in 1962 when I was only nine years old. My hometown, Valley City in Liverpool Township, just south of Cleveland, was celebrating its 150th anniversary, known as a Sesquicentennial. For an impressionable nine-year old, it became a life-changing whirlwind year of events, parades, and festivities.

Dad loved history and he loved living it. When he heard about the milestone event, his enthusiasm at the initial planning meetings got him elected co-chairman with Duane Naftzger. Their leadership and hard work resulted in many, if not most, of Liverpool Township citizens becoming involved. Dedicated residents were on every type of planning committee, and they sketched out events and

celebrations for the entire year.

Townfolk dressed in old time clothes: women in bonnets and prairie dresses, and men wore everything from buckskins to frock tail coats topped off with a bowler hat.

Men grew beards – as a resident, you had to purchase a permit to remain clean-shaven. Being just a kid, I couldn't grow a beard but let my hair grow (I even won the longest hair contest). Dressed in my ill-fitting long-tailed black coat, string tie, and top hat, I think I looked more like a poor Dickensian waif in an era of buzz-cuts.



Duane Naftzger

Andy Neff

Dad also took on the job of township historian. He researched and wrote, along with Duane, and with the typing skills of my mother, Lillian, a short commemorative book about the history of Liverpool Township. He quickly discovered that this 1962 celebration was two years late!

He uncovered that in 1810, a Seba Bronson, Jr. had settled in a promising spot along the West Branch of the Rocky River, later known as Hardscrabble. Bronson soon noticed that the Indians in the area were obtaining salt from an unknown source. Salt in those days had the value of gold, as it was vital in the preservation of food.



Bill Riffel  
Walter Metzger

Jay Reynolds  
Tony Stafinski

Bob Filous  
Kenneth Mellert

Luke Fitzsimmons  
Sid Burton, Jr.

conveniently forgotten to history.

With the celebration now officially corrected to 152 years, one of the planned summer events was a weekend celebration called *Old Time Threshing*. This was akin to a county fair in the late 1800's with steam powered threshing demonstrations, horse pulls, flint lock rifle competitions, and chuck wagon dinners. Dad wanted every-

thing to be authentic. He abhorred the idea of paper Coca-Cola cups littered about, so he found a distributor who bottled up "Valley City" brand Sarsaparilla. But Dad also knew the event needed something special for the kids.

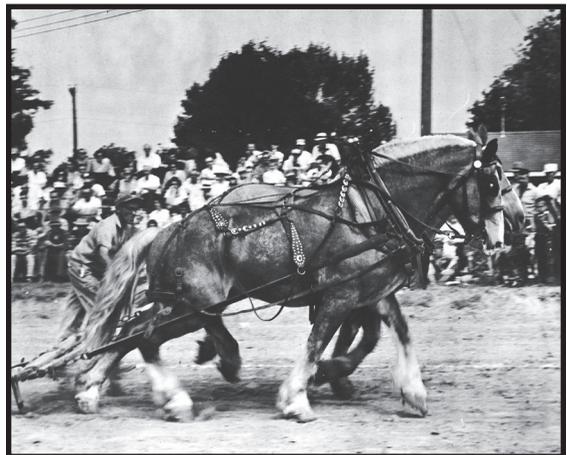


Brian Neff

A Potawatomi Indian offered to reveal the location for five silver dollars. Not having the full amount, Bronson took on a partner, Captain Jared Pritchard, from Columbia, just a few miles north along the river.

While seeking a clear legal title, other men now became aware of the potential for profits from this salt spring.

Ultimately, Bronson and Pritchard lost their claim to the politically connected Justus Warner. And although for the next two years there were various settlers in and about the area, when Warner officially brought his family to the township in 1812, Bronson was

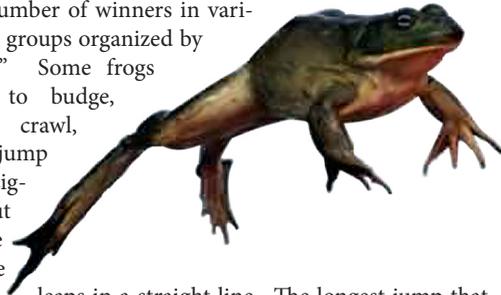


He had always been a voracious reader and a great fan of Mark Twain. He recalled that Twain had written a short story in 1865 called, The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County. This story recounts a small-time Cali-

fornia gambler, Jim Smiley, who would bet on anything and everything. The story climaxes with a bet involving jumping frogs. When Jim isn't looking, a stranger pours lead shot into the mouth of Jim's frog, Dan'l Webster, weighing it down and thus winning the bet.

Dad also knew that Calaveras County continued to celebrate their namesake story with a yearly frog jumping contest. He wrote to the organizers, got the essentials about rules and procedures, and proposed a frog jumping contest for the *Old Time Threshing* weekend. He and Duane were savvy enough to procure a proclamation from Ohio's Governor Rhodes, stating Valley City was the "Frog Jumping Capital of Ohio."

Dad, as a natural master of ceremonies, helped out as the frog jump announcer, introducing contestants and exhorting these frog jockeys to inspire their frogs to jump by yelling, screaming, blowing, but not touching. The rules were pretty simple: you plopped your frog into a small circle in the middle of a large canvas, the frog got three jumps, and the distance was measured from the middle of the circle to the last jump. There are a number of winners in various age groups organized by "flights." Some frogs refuse to budge, some crawl, some jump in a zig-zag, but some make grand leaps in a straight line. The longest jump that weekend was 10 feet, 6½ inches.



The feel-good result of that successful year-long Sesqui-centennial celebration, inspired Valley City to keep the old time threshing show, now renamed *Old Time Days*, as an annual event, and the Frog Jump became the centerpiece under the able leadership of Jay Reynolds.

I was recruited, still in my top hat and tails, to add excite-

VALLEY CITY SESQUI-CENTENNIAL "SHOOTS THE WORKS"

# OLD TIME THRESHING

WITH STEAM ENGINE POWER  
... ALSO ...

## PONY AND HORSE PULLING CONTESTS AT VALLEY CITY, OHIO

SESQUI-CENTENNIAL PROGRAM

# JULY 21st & 22nd

EVENTS STARTING AT 1:00 P. M. EACH DAY  
On The Paul Hasel Farm on County Road No. 63  
ABOUT 1/2 MILE NORTH AND 1/2 MILE EAST OF U.S. 42, N.E. COR. OF TOWNSHIP

PONY PULLING CONTEST - JULY 21 - STARTING AT 2:00 P. M.  
HORSE PULLING CONTEST - JULY 22 - STARTING AT 2:00 P. M.

Other Featured Attractions . . . .

### Flint Lock Buckskin Rendezvous

SEE THE BROADCASTERS ABOUT THE OLD FLINT LOCK RIFLES FOR PRIZES JULY 21

### Frog Jumping Contest, July 21-22

FIRST TIME IN MEDIA COUNTY . . . FOR YOUNG AND OLD . . . CONTESTS OUT OF MARCH TWENTY ERA . . .

### Steam Engines Performing Daily

IT'S ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL AGES

### Chuck Wagon Dinners Served On The Grounds

You Will See Most of the Local People in Old Time Costumes and Dress

ADMISSION TO LAKE . . . CHILDREN UNDER 10 FREE WITH ADULT

**Big Parade on July 21st--Starting at 12:00 Noon in Valley City**

ment with a drum roll and cymbal crashes for each of the leaps. After several years, the *Old Time Days* faded and it became simply the *Valley City Frog Jump* – still going strong today.

The year 2001 marked the fortieth consecutive frog jump and it was dedicated to Andy Neff. Despite a recent stroke and in a wheelchair, he attended – not seeking thanks or glory, but relishing in the satisfaction of an inspired community celebration. He passed away two years later at the age of 84.

Dad freely admitted, he hadn't invented the Frog Jump. Since he had just borrowed the idea from Mark Twain and Calaveras County, he was never bothered by all the copy-cat frog jumps that sprang up in community fairs and town celebrations throughout Ohio. He saw it as bringing joy and excitement to adults and kids everywhere.



Winners of the 49th Annual Valley City Frog Jump

Which is why attending the *Great Geauga County Fair* and hearing that Frog Jump announcement definitely made me smile.

Brian Neff  
September, 2010

© 2010 by Brian L. Neff  
Thanks to the fact-checking of my mother, Lillian.  
Thanks to the Valley City Frog Jump for the winners photo.  
Thanks to Valley City Sesqui Inc. for the images from the 1962 Scrapbook.