

Samuels, Thomas W.

Interview by
Miss Betty Turnell

for the
Decatur Public Library

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DECATUR, ILLINOIS
PUBLIC LIBRARYThomas W. Samuels Interview

November, 1980

This is Betty Turnell speaking for the Decatur Public Library. Our guest today is Mr. Thomas W. Samuels.

Q. Mr. Samuels, I wasn't living in Decatur in 1974 when your book of memoirs, Lawyer in Action, was published. I'll have to confess that I hadn't heard of it when I invited you to help in this project, but since then I have read it and found it delightful reading and very uplifting and stimulating. In fact, some people might think a recorded interview is not necessary - our listeners could just read your book - but I feel it would be very valuable for this series to have your comments in your own voice. So if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few questions.

I know you haven't lived in Decatur all your life. When and where were you born?

A. I was born in Carrolton, in Greene County, Illinois, on April 1, 1886, just a few months short of 95 years ago.

Q. Yours has really been a wonderful life, hasn't it? Can you tell us something about your educational background?

A. I did my undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Illinois and I studied law at Harvard and at Illinois, graduating in 1914. Prior to entering the university I was graduated from the East St. Louis High School, which incidentally I think was the finest school I ever attended, despite the bad reputation East St. Louis has now.

Q. Well, that's high praise. After you received your law degree, you came to Decatur. When was that?

A. Yes, that was in the summer of 1914, just prior to the outbreak of World War I.

Q. How did you happen to come to Decatur?

A. I knew of Decatur as a medium-sized, enterprising city - a growing city - With many industries, good schools, good churches, a reputation for civic-mindedness. In short, I thought it was a good place to raise a family and practice law.

Q. I'm sure you haven't been disappointed. You've been here ever since, haven't you?

A. Yes. There was another reason that led me to come to Decatur. I had attended a trial, a murder trial, in Champaign, where Mr. Charles C. LeForgee of Decatur was the chief counsel for the defendant. I was very much impressed by his handling of that case, and I thought it would be wonderful if I could form some sort of beginning association with him. And that was one of the reasons I came to Decatur. I did apply for a job with him and got it, starting at \$75 a month, which was a fair starting salary in those days, particularly in view of the fact that in the next October, when I was married, I was able to obtain a very nice five-room apartment on the south-east corner of Decatur and Pine Street for \$25 a month.

Q. Well that tells us a little about Decatur at that time, but maybe you would like to tell us more about the kind of city Decatur was -- something about its stores, its government, its industries, public buildings, its leaders, etc.

A. Decatur was a city of about 30,000, as I recall. Politically it was run by a city council which was made up of aldermen elected from districts presided over by a Mayor. That system was subsequently changed. We now have a city commission, the commissioners being elected at large.

When I came to Decatur in 1914, Dan Deneen was Mayor of Decatur. Woodrow Wilson was President, Thomas Riley Marshall was Vice President, William Jennings Bryan was Secretary of State and Charles M. Borchers, father of Webber Borchers, was then or shortly thereafter, I have forgotten which, our Congressman. As I recall, James Hamilton Lewis was our United States Senator.

Physically I would estimate that not over one-half of the streets were paved. Those that were paved were paved with brick although Merchant Street was paved with cobblestones. Later some of the streets were paved with wood blocks but these blocks buckled in wet weather and this type of pavement was soon abandoned. There were few automobiles compared to the number of

cars that today swarm the streets. In 1914 you could buy a Ford for \$365.00. The Fire Department was still using some horsedrawn equipment. There were no parking lots as such in 1914; indeed there was no need for parking lots, nor for parking meters. And, the only stop and go sign I remember was located at the corner of Main and Water Street. It consisted of a wood shack wherein a policeman manually operated a stop and go sign. I don't mean to say that Decatur in 1914 was a horse and buggy town but Decatur still retained some of the aspects of a horse and buggy town. Only a few years before, Senator Joseph W. Bailey, reputedly the leading constitutional lawyer in the Senate, had stated publicly that if he could have his way he would make it a crime to drive an automobile on the public highway. Autos, he said, were dangerous to "other people". By "other people" I suppose he meant those who were getting about on bicycles, buggies and on foot.

The chief mode of transportation in Decatur was street cars which ran very nearly over the whole city, -- West on West Main, North on Edward Street and on Water Street to the Wabash Depot, all beginning and ending at Lincoln Square where the transfer house which is now located in Central Park. If you were coming East on West Main and wanted to go to the Wabash Station, you got off at the Transfer House, were given a transfer ticket, and then got on a street-car for the Wabash station, all for a nickel. Indeed you could travel all over the city for a nickel.

What is now South Shores, a city in itself, in 1914 was entirely a wooded area.

As I recall, Pershing Street was a township dirt road which, incidentally, did not receive its name until after World War I. It, of course, was named after General Pershing. What is now Pershing Road was then bounded on both sides North and South by farm land. Speaking of farm land and farming, few, if any, soybeans were being raised in 1914. Most farmers had not even heard of soybeans. Mr. A. E. Staley Sr. visited farmers throughout the region urging them to plant soybeans. Gradually they began to accept his advice. In 1921 or thereabouts the Staley Company began the commercial processing of soybeans, but even then there were not enough beans grown to keep the plant running throughout the year. There is no doubt that Mr. Staley was the founder of the great soybean industry of today. To him must be given the credit for making Decatur the Soybean Capital of America.

The interurban railroad ran to Springfield, North to Bloomington and Peoria and East to Champaign. It was a very popular means of transportation. The Wabash, now the Norfolk and Western Railroad and the Illinois

Central did a flourishing passenger business, North to Chicago and South to St. Louis. Later the Wabash was to build the Bluebird which was one of the finest passenger trains in America.

Hardroads were practically non-existent. Routes 2 and 10 were not completed until some time in the 20s. I don't recall that there were any hardroads in and out of Decatur in 1914. Many farmers opposed hard roads on the ground that they pre-empted good farm land, an objection that has been carried over to other improvements.

- Q. Mr. Samuels from what you have said, I take it that life was rather simple in Decatur as compared with today, was it not?
- A. Yes. There was no television, no air-conditioning and no radio. There were no drive-in theaters, no drive-up banking. Most of the houses built in that era were built with an outside front porch so that the residents not having inside air-conditioning could move out on the front porch in the evening to cool off. There were no electric refrigerators. People had ice boxes into which the ice man dumped 25 or 50 pounds of ice a week. You let him know how much ice you wanted by displaying a number on a large red card placed in a window facing the street. A good deal of this ice was harvested from

the Sangamon River in the winter months. There were horsedrawn vehicles in Decatur in 1914. A livery stable was located at the corner of West Main and Church Street. Automobiles on the public highways were so rare that horses would be frightened and there were many runaways. It was not uncommon for the driver of a vehicle to get out at the approach of an automobile and hold his horse by the bridle until the automobile had passed.

There were no supermarkets in 1914, but many small grocery stores which made house to house deliveries. Very few women -- none that I now recall, smoked cigarettes. Women wore very long skirts in those days, so long that they were forced to lift them when they crossed wet or muddy streets. A woman who wore pants, if you could imagine such a thing, would have been considered brazenly immodest, if not immoral. And, the long, flamboyant multi-colored slacks and garish jackets so commonly seen on men today would have marked the wearer as either a clown or some kind of a nut. Many men chewed tobacco and there were cuspidors in almost every office and store. We had no fancy telephone systems in those days. Most telephones were hung on the wall. I remember seeing the late Albert G. Webber, grandfather of Judge Webber, leave his desk and go to his phone which hung on the wall and stand there for 15 minutes while carrying on a conversation with his client.

Q. Mr. Samuels you said that Decatur had good schools when you came in 1914.

A. Yes that is true. Decatur has always had good schools, but many of our fine schools today did not exist then. For example: Eisenhower High School, MacArthur High School, Lakeview High School and Richland Community College.

Q. How about the churches of Decatur in 1914?

A. I remember that the First Baptist Church was located on North Water Street where the vacated J. C. Penney store is now. The present Baptist Church on Prairie Street was not built until the late 1920s. The Central Christian Church in the 600 block West William was not built until the 1950's. The First Lutheran Church on West Decatur was not in existence in 1914. The same is true of the Pilgrim Lutheran Church on North Oakland and the Westminster Presbyterian Church on West Main. The St. Thomas Catholic Church on North Edward was not built until many years later.

Q. Mr. Samuels, do you recall some of the industries that were operating in Decatur when you came in 1914?

A. Yes. There was the Staley Company which had been established in Decatur only a few years before; there were the Bear Harvester Company, the Chambers, Bering, Quinlan Company which had its plant on North Jasper, The Capital Combination Fountain Company on East Division Street which manufactured soda fountains,

The Decatur Brick Manufacturing Company on North Park Street, the Decatur Bridge Company, later known as the Mississippi Valley Structural Steel Company located at the corner of Eldorado and the CH & D Railroad. Then there were the Decatur Coffin Company on North Morgan Street, the Decatur Foundry on North Lowber Street, the Decatur Ice Cream Company on North Edward Street, the Decatur Lumber and Manufacturing Company in the 600 block of North Water, the Decatur Manufacturing Company on East North, the Faries Manufacturing Company on East Grand, Field and Shorb on West William, Flint, Eaton & Company, manufacturers of pharmaceuticals on East Main Street, Irwin-Neisler and Company, also manufacturers of pharmaceuticals on North Franklin, H. Mueller and Company on W. Cerro Gordo, Muhlenbruch Glove and Mitten Company in the 300 block of North Main, J. G. Starr and Sons Harness Company on North Broadway, Stevens Manufacturing and Foundry Company on East Cerro Gordo, the Union Iron Works in the 600 block of East William and the Walrus Manufacturing Company on the Southeast corner of Broadway and Wabash. That is all I can recall at the moment.

- Q. Well, that is an impressive list. Decatur has always been industrialized?
- A. Yes.

Q. What was the financial climate of the city, Mr. Samuels?

A. I would say that it was good. Taxes were low. We had no sales tax. The income tax law had just come into effect in 1913 and was comparatively insignificant. There was no tax on the first \$20,000 of net income and a tax of only 1% on the next \$50,000.

Q. Quite a contrast as compared with today's tax burdens?

A. Yes. We had no zoning laws to contend with, no labor laws and no environmental laws which consume so much of the businessman's time today.

Q. Mr. Samuels, can you recall some of the outstanding leaders of Decatur during the period of 1914 to 1920?

A. Yes. It seems to me that we had a good many outstanding businessmen and leaders in those days. I cannot recall all of them, but some who come to mind are: A. E. Staley, Adolph Mueller, Edward P. Irving (Faries Manufacturing Company), T. T. Roberts (Decatur Coffin Company), W. J. Grady (Faries Manufacturing Company), O. B. Gorin (President, The Millikin Bank) R. A. Meriweather (President, National Bank of Decatur), Andrew Kenney (President, The Citizens Bank), Howard Schaub (Decatur Review), Frank Lindsay (Decatur Herald), Mrs. Della Gusshard (Gusshard's Dry Goods Company), Attorney Robert P. Vail, Mell Wood (Decatur Bridge Company), Pat Wood, Charles Borchers, Dr. Will Barnes, Dr. M. P. Parrish, Porter Millikin, Jerry Donohue,

Clyde Lyon (Lyon Lumber Company), Dr. Will Chenoweth, Harvey Greider (Greider's All Night Cafe, Southwest corner Water and Main), Attorney William E. Redmon, States Attorney, J. M. Brownback (The Millikin National Bank), Charles C. LeForgee, Charles M. Powers (Orlando Hotel), H. I. Baldwin (Grain business), Frank Evans (Grain business), Robert I. Hunt, Clay Dempsey (Union Iron Works), Judge John L. McCoy (County Judge), J. N. Patterson, County Clerk, John Allen, Circuit Clerk, John McEvoy (Home Manufacturing Company), W. J. Osgood (garment manufacturer), Dr. Silas McClelland (Trustee, Millikin Estate), John L. Bennett (insurance), W. P. Shade (insurance), Rev. J. Murphy (St. Patrick's), the Maffit family (Decatur Ice Company) Harvey Gebhardt (Gebhardt Store) Dave Folrath (Folrath Shoes) Lloyd Snerly (grocer and banker) T. J. Prentice (Linn and Scruggs), Judge Nelson (donator of Nelson Park), W. L. Huff (Huff Lumber Company), Leonard Gray (Combination Fountain Company), Arthur and Fao Wait (Wait-Cahill), W. L. Shellabarger (early car dealer) whose son, William L. (Bill) Shellabarger in the early 1950s established WTVP, Decatur's first television station which later became WAND. I am afraid I have missed others equally outstanding. I knew them all personally. All of them, without exception, are now gone.

Q: Mr. Samuels you have mentioned some of the physical changes that have taken place in Decatur since 1914. Can you mention some of them?

A: Well there was the beautiful Masonic Temple now located on North William Street. It had not then been built, nor had the Staley Office Building, the present Post Office building, the present County building, the Sears store, Montgomery Ward, the Staley Viaduct and Lake Decatur. The Decatur Memorial Hospital then known as Decatur and Macon County Hospital was built in 1916. Of course, we didn't have General Electric, Caterpillar, Borg Warner, Firestone or ADM. In 1914 the Post Office was located on the Northeast corner of North Main and Eldorado. Our present Post Office building on North Franklin was built many years later. The Decatur Club Building now on West Prairie was not then in existence. In 1914 it occupied the fifth floor of the Citizens Building. The Club moved to its present location in 1930 or thereabouts. On the site of the present Decatur Club building stood an old frame dwelling and the Christian Science Church or Reading Room, I have forgotten which.

Neither the Wabash railroad (now the Norfolk and Western) underpass at Main and Oakland, nor the railroad underpass on North Monroe had been built at that time.

At the time I came to Decatur the city was known as a theatrical town. Many of the leading actors and actresses of the country performed in the old Powers Theatre which was located where the present Millikin National Bank is. That opera house burned down in 1910 and was replaced by a store and office building which was first occupied, as I recall and I am not sure about this, by Morehouse and Wells Hardware Company and

later by Linn and Scruggs Dry Goods Company and after that by Staubers Dry Goods Company. Then the building was converted into an office building and was known as the Standard Office Building (at one time the home of the Standard Life Company). Finally the building was converted into a bank and office building and is now the home of The Millikin National Bank.

When I landed in Decatur in the Summer of 1914, Decatur had only three banks; The Millikin National Bank, The National Bank of Decatur and The Citizens National Bank of Decatur. The Pershing National Bank, South Shores Bank, Soy Capital Bank and Northtown Bank were to come much later. The same is true of Security Savings and Loan and First Federal Savings and Loan. As I recall, the Mutual Home and Savings Association occupied the field alone at that time.

- Q. Mr. Samuels you have mentioned Lake Decatur. Maybe you could tell us why the dam was built and what led to the building of the Lake.
- A. The Staley Company had been established in Decatur just a few years before I came. They immediately started using large quantities of water in their manufacturing process. The water was obtained from the Sangamon River. The Sangamon River was really not much of a river and it became quite sluggish during the late

summer months. The City of Decatur also obtained its water supply from the river. As the Staley Company grew it became evident that it had to have a larger source of water. In fact, it looked like Staley would have to leave Decatur if it couldn't get more water. The late Mr. Staley, Sr., sensing the problem and anticipating the serious need for a larger supply of water, purchased a large tract of land on the Illinois river near Peoria with a view to moving the plant there. Community leaders in Decatur and many city officials recognized the seriousness of the problem and were quick to do something about it. They organized the Decatur Water Supply Company and issued stock. The proceeds from the sale of stock were used in large part for the building of the dam and construction of the Lake. In the Spring of 1920 a contract for building the dam was let to L. N. Cope & Son who were then prominent contractors of Decatur. On July 3, 1922 the dam was completed and a great celebration was held on July 4, 5, 6 and 7 on the banks of the Lake and attended by thousands of citizens and visitors. It was a great day for Decatur.

Prior to the building of Lake Decatur, the Staley Company at its own expense had built a small dam but it was totally inadequate. There is no doubt that the

building of the dam and Lake Decatur have been a great blessing to our city and I am sure that except for Lake Decatur, we would have lost the Staley Company which would have been a serious blow to Decatur.

Q. Mr. Samuels you also mentioned the Staley viaduct. What brought that about?

A. The highway where the viaduct now is, that is, beneath the viaduct, was known as 7th street, an extension of what is now 22nd Street. This street ran North and South through the Staley property and north over the Wabash tracks. It was a dirt road and streetcars ran over it. This street or highway divided the Staley property very awkwardly. It was difficult for employees to go back and forth or to move products over that street. It was also dangerous for traffic to cross the Wabash tracks. So it became clear that there would have to be some kind of an overpass or viaduct. Now the dividing line between the City of Decatur and the township of Decatur bisected this highway where the viaduct now is. That is, South of the dividing line was the City of Decatur and North of the dividing line was the township. Thus, four parties were affected, namely: The Staley Company, the City of Decatur, the Wabash Railroad Company, and the Township of Decatur. Representatives of these four parties got together and began working out a contract for the construction of a

viaduct. It fell to my lot to represent the Staley Company in this undertaking. The City of Decatur was represented by its then corporate counsel, Lee Boland. The Wabash Railroad Company was represented by Mr. N. S. Brown, then its general solicitor. I don't remember who represented the Township of Decatur. It was agreed that each of the four parties was to contribute to the cost of the viaduct. I don't remember now in what proportions. The four of us worked on the contract through the summer of 1925. About the time it was ready to be submitted for signatures, Mr. Boland who was a good lawyer, but who had a tendency to find objections to anything that needed to be done, came up with a unique objection. He pointed out that the dividing line between the township and the city would bisect the viaduct. That would mean, he said, that the South half of the viaduct would be within the city and the North half within the township. Mr. Boland said he could find no authority in the statutes which authorized the city to build one-half a bridge and certainly not to pay for part of a bridge outside of the city and in the township. He said that would be like paying for a bridge in Indiana. It was an interesting and clever point and gave us considerable pause. Finally, I pointed out that Thomas Jefferson had some

doubts about his authority to purchase the Louisiana Territory but nevertheless he buried his objections and proceeded to perform the act. I suggested that we do likewise and we did. The viaduct was completed some time in 1926 and I have never heard any objection to the legality or to the wisdom of the undertaking.

Q. And they were able to pay for the whole bridge and to finish it?

A. Yes. In later years the city vacated that portion of the street underlying the viaduct so that the Staley Company by law now owns all that part of old 7th Street lying below the viaduct.

Q. And the viaduct is a city street and State Route 2, is it not?

A. Yes.

Q. Well, that was a very satisfactory conclusion to that problem.

A. Yes.

Q. When you came in 1914 we were right in World War I, weren't we?

A. Not yet. It was in mid June of that year that the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria was shot by a Bosnian Serb and that incident led to Austria-Hungary declaring war on Serbia. This was followed almost immediately by Germany declaring war on Russia. We didn't get into the war until 1917.

- Q. Was Decatur affected by the war?
- A. Yes it was a very tense time.
- Q. Maybe you could tell us something about the end of the war in 1918?
- A. There was an unbelievable amount of joy and jubilation - Singing, dancing, bells ringing, whistles blowing - just an outburst of happiness for the end of a struggle which had cost the lives of many Decatur boys.
- Q. So it was a very joyous time.
- A. Indescribably so.
- Q. Human relations are very important to any city and I believe you served on the Human Relations Commission. Could you tell us about that.
- A. I served on that commission for a number of years. The movement for providing greater respect and greater privileges and opportunities for the black race was just getting underway. We used our offices to help build a better ethnic climate in Decatur. I think we succeeded. We got in touch with all employers in Decatur to determine if they were employing blacks and whether they could find their way to employ more blacks. I think we made the people of Decatur more conscious of the problem than they had been before.

- Q. Mr. Samuels I understand that Decatur once had a tuberculosis sanatorium. Do you have any recollection about that?
- A. Yes indeed. I served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Macon County Tuberculosis Sanatorium for 33 years during which time the sanatorium was built in 1921 next door to what is now the Decatur Memorial Hospital. It was a county tax supported institution and T. B. patients were treated there until tuberculosis, like polio, was finally conquered by one of the wonder drugs.
- Q. Mr. Samuels was St. Mary's Hospital in existence when you came to Decatur in 1914?
- A. Oh yes, then and for a long time prior thereto. It occupied the building on the Southeast corner of East Wood and Webster, now or until recently used as an office building by the City of Decatur. I think St. Mary's continued there until they moved to their beautiful new hospital building on Lake Shore Drive about 20 years ago.
- Q. Mr. Samuels your profession was law. How has the practice of law changed over the years?
- A. It has become much more complex and much more specialized. As I mentioned before, the tax law was very simple. There were no labor laws. We didn't have the Securities Act to contend with which we have today. In the early

days the rule was "caveat emptor" -- Let the purchaser beware. Today the rule is "Let the seller beware". When Lincoln practiced law his library consisted of about six books. Today a good working library requires some 6,000 to 8,000 books. Every two years the legislature turns out some 2,000 or 3,000 pages of new laws. Much of it is ill considered, overlapping, and confusing. By the time the courts get it construed, we get another batch. The same goes for Congress. In addition, the courts of last resort turn out over 60,000 final decisions a year so that the sheer task of finding the law and keeping up with it require hard work.

- Q. What was the name of your law firm when you came to Decatur, Mr. Samuels?
- A. LeForgee, Vail and Miller. Robert P. Vail was a fine lawyer, the son of the late Circuit Judge, Edward P. Vail. Philip Miller was an easterner, a graduate of Harvard Law School and a protege of Felix Frankfurter who later became Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Philip Miller was the first of three Millers in our firm. The second Miller was Charles Y. Miller who became a Circuit Judge in Macon County. And, the third Miller was Carl R. Miller who is a senior member of our present firm of Samuels, Miller, Schroeder, Jackson & Sly.
- Q. Who were some of the leaders of the bar at that time?

A. I would say that Hugh Crea was the leader of the bar at that time. Incidentally it was he after whom Crea Street was named. It was said that Hugh Crea would have been named to the Supreme Court of the United States had James G. Blaine been elected President. I would also name C. C. LeForgee, Isaac Buckingham, William E. Redmon, Hugh Housum, William J. Carey, James T. Whitley, Sr., Jacob H. Latham, C. C. Walters and John R. Fitzgerald, among the leaders of that time.

Q. How about Thomas Samuels?

A. No. Certainly not then.

Q. Later?

A. That is not for me to say. Incidentally, every lawyer at the bar when I came here and every lawyer living at that time in Springfield, Clinton and Champaign is dead. I have survived them all.

Q. That is a distinction. You said that Crea Street is named after Attorney Hugh Crea. Is it not true that Samuels Street is named after you?

A. Yes.

Q. Mr. Samuels do you have any advice or recommendation for the young people of today?

A. I don't think so. I often feel sorry for young people of today who are pushed, pulled, and battered by so many distractions -- rock and roll, basketball, football, television, radio, movies automobiles and so

forth. I don't know how they get any work done. I wonder what kind of man Lincoln would have become if as a youth he had been subjected to all of the distractions of modern youth.

Q. So you think it isn't easy to be a young person today?

A. Yes I do think that, although I would like to be one of them.

Q. You wouldn't mind starting over again?

A. No. Knowing what I know now.

Q. Great. Mr. Samuels we certainly want to thank you for sharing your reminiscences with us. It has really been inspiring to take a look back over your very long and productive life and all the many contributions you have made to Decatur only a few of which you have mentioned, and we want to thank you very much. It has been a pleasure to hear the comments you have made for us today.

You have been listening to Mr. Thomas W. Samuels giving us his memories and impressions of life in early Decatur, and this is Betty Turnell for the Decatur Public Library.



Cartoonist, others

By RON INGRAM

Herald & Review Education Writer

Cartoonist Bil Keane, creator of the Family Circus, is a self-taught artist who began cartooning in high school and worked as a newspaper illustrator.

Gov. James R. Thompson assisted his father in his office during his school years and began his law career in the Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

Retired Decatur attorney Thomas W. Samuels, 103, earned his first money splitting wood for a neighbor while in his early teens.

These three men were among 11 people who responded to letters written by 58 eighth-grade students in enriched language arts classes taught by Dorothy Sallee at Roosevelt Middle School.

The students asked 37 persons who are noted on the local, state and national levels to write and tell them about their first job, what they learned about work from that job and what effect it had on their lives.

Among other respondents were U.S. Rep. Richard Durbin, D-Springfield; Decatur schools Superintendent Walter Warfield; University of Nebraska women's basketball coach Angela Beck, a Decatur native; and author Ellen Conford.

Students who received responses indicated they enjoyed the experience.

"It was a chance to meet people we've never met before and ask them how they grew up," said Amy Richards, a daughter of Harry and Monica Richards. "You don't know these people. But you want to see what they were going to say."

"We got some of the best

'It was a chance to meet people we've never met before and ask them how they grew up.'

- Amy Richards, student

advice about jobs because these people are the best," said Bob Messenger, a son of Steve and Joy Messenger. "They told us to hit the books and get as much education as we can" to be successful.

The students worked in pairs. Some of the pairs not only wrote a letter but also interviewed Roosevelt faculty members to get their reflections on their jobs.

The results of their letter writing and interviewing will be compiled in a book, "First Impressions of the Wonderful World of Work," which the language arts students will distribute later this month to all Roosevelt eighth-graders.

Rather than letters, several celebrities sent the students biographical information or autographed pictures. Among these people were CBS television commentator Andy Rooney, Peanuts comic strip creator Charles Schulz, Muppet creator Jim Henson and talk show host Geraldo Rivera.

Eighth-grader Jill Moran, a daughter of Michael and Sheila Moran, said her class found many

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Jeanna
Mark and

's share early work experiences

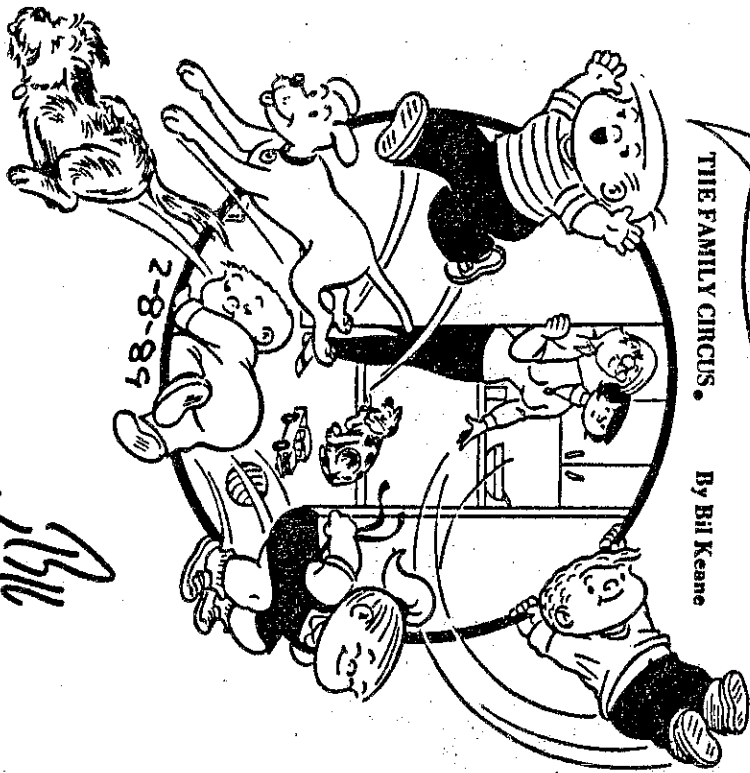
Newton Herald & Review

May 6, 1989

HI TO ALL
OUR FRIENDS AT
THE ROOSEVELT
MIDDLE SCHOOL!

THE FAMILY CIRCUS.

By Bill Keane



PERSONAL CARTOON: Bill Keane sent this drawing to students.

of the celebrities started out just like anyone else — babysitting or mowing lawns — and they wound up with everybody knowing their names.”

Jeanna Skelley, a daughter of Mark and Carol Skelley, said just

getting a letter was interesting in this time when few people to write one another.

“All of the students worked hard on this,” Sallee said of her assignment. “Those that didn’t get a letter back were disappointed.”

Samuels’ letter among favorites at Roosevelt

A favorite among the letters Roosevelt Middle School language arts students received in response to their inquiries on first jobs was the one from Thomas W. Samuels.

Samuels, who practiced law in Decatur for many years, was inducted into the Decatur Hall of Fame in 1988.

Here is the letter he wrote Feb. 14 to Amy Richards and Jill Moran:

“Hello to both of you and to the students you work with.

“I thank you for your nice letter. I think you have chosen a good subject, namely, the wonderful world of work. There are, of course, many other subjects that you could work on.

“You asked me what was my first job and what lesson did I learn from it. When I was about your age we had no electricity or gas. Everybody used wood, both for cooking and heating. Every Fall homeowners would purchase a supply of wood for the winter. The wood came in sticks about six feet long and about six or eight inches in diameter. One of my neighbors had ordered their Fall supply. It was stacked in a row which was about five feet high and 10 or 12 feet long. He asked me to saw this wood into pieces of useable size. He promised to pay me \$1 or \$2, I have forgotten which, if I would do this work and completed it, but he said I was to get nothing if I didn’t finish it. I accepted the offer. It was the middle

of August and it was very, very hot. There were times when I thought I couldn’t stand the heat. I was soaked with perspiration but I kept going and then I would say, ‘Why should I take this punishment. It is just too much.’ And again I would consider quitting, but I kept at it and finally finished the job and got my pay.

“What lesson did I learn from this work? I think it taught me the importance of sticking to the job, never giving up, never to be a quitter, a dropout, always to keep hammering away. Once you have chosen a goal or decided what kind of man or woman you wish to be, work at it hard. Don’t let anything detract you from your goal. The world stands aside for a determined boy or girl.

“I thank you again for writing me and I hope my reply will be of some help to you. I am presently in the Decatur Memorial Hospital and I have dictated this letter to my secretary who will sign it on my behalf. In a few weeks I shall be 103 years old. As you can see, I have kept at it for a long time.”

Very truly yours,
Thomas W. Samuels

— RON INGRAM