



Historical Society

## *Dwight Historical Society Newsletter*

119 West Main Street  
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Website: <https://dwithistory.org>

P.O. Box 294

Dwight, Illinois 60420-1321  
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Facebook: Dwight Historical Society

### **Mark your calendars for the following events:**

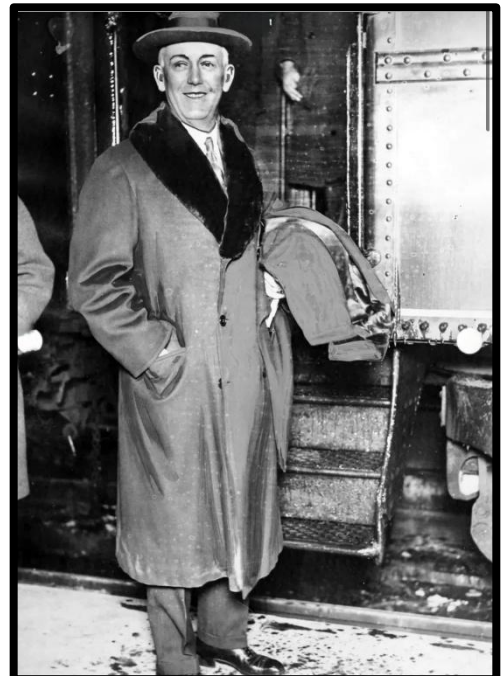
#### **Program: Frank L. Smith: The Ends Justified the Means**

**Monday, April 20, 2026 7:00 P.M. at the Dwight Historical Museum**

We are excited to welcome Bill Pearch, a DTHS grad, and a member of the Society for American Baseball Research, as the speaker at the April 20 meeting of the Dwight Historical Society. Bill will discuss Frank L. Smith's personal and professional life and his influence on Dwight's history, while highlighting his relentless pursuit of political office.

Col. Frank Leslie Smith (1867-1950) was a banker, real estate dealer, congressman, and baseball fan. A slender, self-made man, Smith adhered to a simple doctrine that empowered his rise from humble roots into the political sphere: the end justifies the means. This motto helped forge formidable business connections and amass political clout on local, regional, and national stages. That strategy allowed the Dwight, Illinois native to rise to national prominence. By that same measure, it established the framework for his ultimate downfall. More than 75 years after his death, Smith's name is all but erased from history.

A short Historical Society meeting at 7:00 p.m. will precede the program.



## Route 66 Red Carpet Corridor Weekend May 2-3

The Dwight Historical Society is celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Route 66 with a new exhibit in the museum as well as hosting several events during the Route 66 Red Carpet Corridor Festival.

**Saturday, May 2**

### Museum Route 66 Exhibit

The museum will be open from 9 to 1, showcasing the businesses that thrived in the stretch of Old 66 running through Dwight. Businesses featured include Groll's Red Crown Gas Station, Brilliant Bronze Gas Station, Clapp's Supermarket, Carmen's Fruit Stand, and Marx Garage to name a few.



### Vintage Baseball Game

Starting at 1 p.m., the Blue Island Brewmasters will take on the Lemont Quarrymen in a vintage baseball game, playing by 1858 rules at Renfrew Park. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy the game.

**Sunday, May 3**

### Museum Exhibit

The museum will be open from 9 to 1, showcasing the businesses that thrived in the stretch of Old 66 running through Dwight.

### Route 66 Panel Discussion

A panel of Dwight locals and natives, Phillip Becker, Jim Livingston, Don McNamara, and Harlan Olson will share stories and experiences from working at businesses along Route 66. The discussion will begin at 2:00 at the Country Mansion.

### Route 66 Trivia

Route 66 Trivia will follow the panel discussion at the Country Mansion at approximately 3:00. Bring your team or form one that afternoon and test your knowledge of Route 66 and other categories including cars, music, and candy.

## Historical Society Selling Commemorative Route 66 Items

### Custom Route 66 Quilt

Joy Ahearn, a member of the Dwight Historical Society, created a unique quilt highlighting historical local businesses along Route 66. Raffle tickets will be sold for \$10 each with the drawing scheduled for Dwight Harvest Day Weekend, on September 20.

### Route 66 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Pottery

A commemorative pottery dish was commissioned by the historical society for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Route 66. The dish is available in several colors and costs \$15.



### Update on U.S. Postage Stamps

The first date of issuance of Route 66 stamps is May 5<sup>th</sup>. The stamps can be purchased online as well as in the post office. The pictures used for this collection were taken by photographer, David J. Schwartz, who has taken 42 trips on Route 66 over 22 years. If you are a Route 66 aficionado, you might be interested in his website, [picsonroute66.com](http://picsonroute66.com), where he has dozens of Route 66 pictures, including some from Odell and Pontiac--sadly, none of Dwight.



## Memories of Route 66

**Allen Gantzert:** Harvey and Janet Gantzert's farm and homestead was located along Route 66. Allen Gantzert recalled when three college girls travelling Route 66, got off the road and came to Gantzert's door. The date was July 20, 1969 and they came to ask if they could come in and watch the moon landing on TV.

**Brenda Fieldman Benzik:** At the mention of Route 66 memories, Brenda's immediate response was "the accidents". The Fieldman's lived along Route 66 and the first stoplight from Chicago was within sight. Brenda remembered that her parents were often the first people on the scene after an accident. Her mother would assist with injuries and her dad would help get the vehicles off the road. Vernon Von Qualen, the county coroner at the time, told her mother that the Fieldman's were the "first responders".

Brenda also recalled the Blizzard of 1967. The Coffeehouse restaurant was an oasis for many stranded Route 66 motorists. Brenda's parents, Brenda, and siblings, Paula and Rick all pitched in at the restaurant, cooking food and waiting tables.

**Don Neville:** Don recalled a story about his brother, Dave Neville. Dave was at the Sinclair Station, located at the intersection of Rt.66 and Rt. 17 when a car pulled in with several players from the St. Louis Cardinal baseball team. The players saw red-haired Dave and thought he looked like their teammate, Red Schoendienst, a future 10-time All-Star and MLB Hall of Famer. After hearing the story Gary and I looked up the player and saw a resemblance to Dave.

Don also told that his family lived on West Waupansie Street when Route 66 ran along that street. He remembers hearing the trucks go by all night long. After Route 66 was routed outside of Dwight, he said he had trouble sleeping initially because it was so quiet.

**Janet Neville:** My grandfather, Thomas McNamara, owned a gas station and trucking company McNamara's Oil, located on Route 66 across the street from Ambler's Texaco Station. When I was a child, my dad often took me and my sister, Cyndi to the station on Sunday morning. It was a hangout for the guys to sit around with my grandfather discussing local news or "chewing the fat". Patrick and Michael Malloy were frequent visitors there, brothers from Ireland who were "jag bosses" at the Keeley.

The station had a pop cooler with ice cold pop and there was always the hope (but rarely happened) that we could get one. The other appeal was a large candy case with 3 shelves of candy, with penny bubble gum on the bottom shelf. There was a greater chance that we might get some penny candy but only if we worked for it. The work involved dusting the candy case, cleaning the glass, and

sweeping the floor. The floor was an old wooden oiled floor, which never looked much better when we got done than when we started.

## Jim Finley, Dwight's Football Great, Visits the Museum

To the delight of the Historical Society, Dwight natives, Jim and Karen (Von Qualen) Finley visited the museum to donate some of Jim's memorabilia to our Sports exhibit. Jim was an outstanding Dwight High School and Purdue University football player. In his senior year (62-63) at DTHS, the Dwight Trojans ended the season with 8 wins and 1 tie. Finley and Gary Marx were named on the Daily News All-State Team that year. Recruited by Purdue University, Jim was on the team that won the 1967 Rose Bowl



game, named to the Hula Bowl, and set several records at Purdue.



Jim generously donated his signed commemorative Rose Bowl ball and another football signed by the Purdue team, which included future NFL Hall of Fame player, Bob Griese. Additionally, a Purdue letter jacket, Purdue sweater, photos and Purdue game day programs were also part of the treasure.

Jim and Karen reminisced with members of the historical society. Jim and Kim Drechsel compared notes on DTHS Coach Gilkey's football plays, which Jim admitted using in his own coaching career. Karen enjoyed the poster of her father, Vernon Von Qualen, posing at the Texaco station on Route 66 and the mannikin (which Karen donated) dressed as a 50's waitress. Our DHS treasurer, Bev Hoffman Jensen and her husband Lee were there to see Jim, her first cousin. And not to be forgotten DHS President Mary Flott and her husband Bill were there to accept the donations.



## *Historical Wanderings... ..*

When Jim brought his sports memorabilia, he also brought "on loan" the scrapbooks that his mother, Thelma Finley, had lovingly put together of her son's high school and college football years. I pulled out a few that I thought might be of interest.

### *Unbeaten Dwight Dumps Plainfield*

*The Pantagraph* 10-7-1962

Undefeated Dwight took the opening kick off and drove 78 yards to score the first of five touchdowns as they defeated Plainfield 33-6, here Saturday.

Jim Finley capped the drive by tossing a six-yard pass to Roger Phillips for the score. Finley converted to give the Trojans an early 7-0 lead.

Finley threw for three touchdowns in the second quarter. The first one was a 37 pass to Jeff Gray for the score.

After this he completed the stanza by throwing a 43-yard strike to Jack Kiper and a 45-yarder to Dan Hoffman. The half closed with Dwight leading 27-0.

The teams traded scores in the last half. Dana Rosendall heaved a 35 yard touchdown pass to Don Widman to boost the Trojans' margin to 33-0.

Plainfield got its score in the final period when Jim Weller plunged over from the three yard line. For the day, Finley hit 13 of 18 passes for 208 yards.

### *Marx, Finley On Daily-News All-State Team*

*The Dwight Star & Herald* 11-29-1962

The Chicago Daily News' Little All-State team was headed up by two Trojan gridders, Gary Marx and Jim Finley. ....

"Tackle Gary Marx, 6-1, 258 pounds, was a bulwark on defense for unbeaten Dwight, averaging 8 tackles a game. Biggest player on the Little All-State team, Marx is fast for his size and was sometimes used for pulling and leading interference."

"Finley was an all-around threat for Dwight on offense and played defense as well. He ran, passed and did the punting."

### *Coach Gilkey to Rose Bowl*

*The Pantagraph* 12-18-1966

Bill Gilkey has been coaching football for 26 years, the last 10 at Dwight, but Jim Finley is the first Gilkey-coached player to ever appear in the Rose Bowl.

An all-state quarterback at Dwight, Finley plays flanker back for Purdue.

Gilkey, his wife, and approximately 20 others from Dwight will attend the Rose Bowl. ....

Bill points out that Finley has started every Purdue game the past two seasons. "He was a doubtful starter just once," said Gilkey. "Last year, he received a kidney injury in the Michigan game and was doubtful for Michigan State. He was in the infirmary all week but was discharged on Friday and started on Saturday".

Finley was married last summer to Karen Von Qualen, a former Dwight High School cheerleader. He intends to teach and coach after graduation. Finley holds the Purdue record for one game pass receiving yardage. He caught 11 passes for 159 yards against Michigan last year.

He also shares the school record for most pass receptions in one game-11. As a junior, Finley caught 33 passes for 424 yards. This past season, Jim caught 26 for 438 yards.

### **Historical Society Meeting Dates**

The meeting dates in 2026 will be **April 20, June 15, August 17, and October 19.** A program follows the business meeting. If you have any suggestions for a program or would be interested in presenting on an aspect of Dwight history, please contact Mary Flott at 815-584-2107.

### **Docents Needed for Museum**

We are always in need of docents to help keep the museum open to the public. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the second and fourth Saturdays. **Upcoming dates are: April 11, 25; May 9, 23; and June 13, 27.** Please consider volunteering as a docent by contacting Mary Flott at 815-584-2107.

### **\*\*\*\*\*Membership\*\*\*\*\***

*It's not too late to renew your membership.* You can go on our website, [dwiththistory.org](http://dwiththistory.org) or mail it to: Dwight Historical Society; P.O. Box 294; Dwight, Illinois 60420.

Individual memberships are \$15 and a Family membership is \$20.