

A Seeker's Journal

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SHOELESS JOE JACKSON AND THE ZILLMER CONNECTION

By Delores Miller

THE SMALL VILLAGE OF Marion, WI in the early years of 1900 was home to two Zillmer brothers. John Albert, my grandfather, boozed while trying to sell insurance and raise a large family to do dairy farming. Eight children, Minnie, John, Ella, William (my father), Alma, Adeline, Fern and Edwin. Education ended for all after eighth grade.

Carl Herman Zillmer lived in town, had a dray and grain business; a prosperous leader of the community. Never drank, and from records preserved, bailed my grandfather out of several financial messes. Three children, John Ewald, Emil, and Clara. All graduated from high school and college. Emil went on to become an architect in Grand Rapids, MI. Clara and husband took over the insurance business. John Ewald (1887-1969) began working for the railroad at Woodruff, WI, married, and had two children, Evan, Sr. and Fern.

I have always been interested in family history and genealogy. For over 100 years, these two branches of the Zillmer family avoided each other. Doing research, I contacted them; some willingly gave information, others ignored me. So it was a surprise on the internet a few years ago, when an Evan Zillmer, Jr. of Florida was interested in contacting other Zillmers and we began a lively exchange of information. He comes north twice a year and I show him the "high spots" of Zillmer history.

Just recently he found a picture of the Chicago Black Sox Baseball Team of 1919. It was in the collection of old photos of John Ewald Zillmen and it seems he spent a year with the team, barnstorming around the country while he left his wife and two small children at Woodruff to fend for themselves. By this time he was 32 years old.

So young Evan of Florida contacted the Shoeless Joe Jackson's Virtual Hall of Fame website at blackbetsy.com and they said the photo is extremely rare and one that they had never seen and would be valuable at auction. This was before the Black Socks Scandal of 1921-1922; before they changed their name and were banned from professional baseball forever—and most scattered to the four corners.

Among the people identified in the photo are: Buck Weaver, who played third base; Swede Risbert, short stop; Happy Felsch, center field; and Eddie Cicotte, pitcher. Joe Jackson was not in this particular photo, but John Ewald Zillmer was. No wonder our whole family is interested in the Shoeless Joe books by Bill Kinsella and the Field of Dreams movie site in Iowa. #



A Few Words On

SCOTTSDALE ... A GATHERING

IN MAY OF 1951 I spent a few minutes in Benson, AZ while the passenger coach that I occupied along with twenty-four other apprentice seamen plus one grizzled old salt who lead us, was switched from one track to another before we resumed our journey from San Diego to Pensacola. I specifically remember the event because someone broke an egg on the rail to prove how hot it was. The egg quickly sizzled to well done. My next view of Benson came in May of 2005 as my wife Jean and I passed through on our way to Scottsdale.

My preference for surroundings includes heavily wooded rolling hills, frequent streams, large cultivated fields and a homestead now and then. As we journeyed further west the landscape told us that we were far from home—strangers in a strange land.

Jean and I talked about the settlers who must have endured incredible hardships as they passed through these areas so many years ago, and of the red men who watched their land become the home of unwelcome invaders with new diseases, terrible weapons, and endless streams of people just like themselves.

Such thoughts of history quickly vanished as the AAPA meeting room began to fill with travelers from all points of the country and friends old and new welcomed each other. My last AAPA convention was in Tampa, FL, and I delighted in seeing others from that meeting. I have often felt that AAPA conventions are, in effect, a family reunion; that feeling was intensified as activities unfolded during the convention. Whatever differences may exist between members, they never seem to cause a rift, and the group seems united in celebrating the cause of amateur journalism.

As in those early western horse operas, the time for parting came all too soon, and each would go his separate way until the next meeting called them together again. I found the drive of four thousand miles to be well worth the effort; Jean and I look forward to the next time when we come together again in celebration of our most wonderful hobby.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts of Mike O'Connor and Greg McKelvey who did a marvelous job putting together the events of this convention, the memory of which will warm us on cold nights.

--Hugh Singleton