

Mineral Point HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

The Old City Cemetery

by Joel Gosse

*Perhaps in this neglected Spot is laid
Some Heart once pregnant with celestial Fire;
Hands that the Reins of Empire might have sway'd,
Or wak'd to Extacy the living Lyre.*

- Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, Thomas Gray, 1751

Mr. Gray's words could not ring more true regarding the current state of Mineral Point's Old City Cemetery (OCC). The first cemetery of the town 'where Wisconsin began' is the final stop for many of the storied pioneers of Mineral Point, Iowa County, the mining region, and the former Wisconsin Territory, not to mention many of the individuals from the Mineral Point area who added definition to that era and later. Sadly, many of the grave markers in the old cemetery also record juvenile and infant deaths, young lives bereft of their chance to make their mark except for their names and dates inscribed on the stones. Unfortunately, on a majority of the stones and memorials in the OCC, the names and dates are experiencing the uncaring buffeting of weather, and even human actions, bringing about their own slow demise.

The Old City Cemetery is bordered by Second Street to the south and by the backyards of the houses on Front Street, South Wisconsin, and State Streets on the north, west, and east. The land it occupies was platted in 1837 as part of Irwin's and Others' Addition. The OCC's beginnings are not entirely certain, but the *History of Iowa County, 1881* relates that the cemetery began when a miner chose the area for burial, due to the position of a large tree on a hill. It is possible that this very tree now also rests in peace, with its deteriorating stump still anchored in the cemetery grounds. The old cemetery was the final resting place for victims of the cholera outbreaks of 1849 and 1851, of fatal mining accidents resulting from the search for black jack and dry bone, and of the many illnesses without a cure in the 1800s. One of the earlier Mineral Pointers of notoriety rests in the cemetery, the innkeeper Abner Nichols. With the formation of Graceland Cemetery in 1875, and with burial plots available in St Paul's and St Mary's cemeteries, the OCC apparently reached its occupancy limit by the end of the nineteenth century.

Who was the first person buried in the OCC? Who was the last? At this moment, neither question can be answered definitively, but that could change with the recent efforts to restore the cemetery as much as possible to historical accuracy and to its former beauty as once lauded in the Iowa County History's description of the OCC. Mineral Point resident Dave Larson has sparked renewed interest in restor-



Mineral Pointer Dave Larson has taken on the monumental task of repairing and resetting the damaged tombstones in the Old City Cemetery. Here he is at work on Margaret Ivey's stone. Margaret, wife of Henry John Ivey, was born in Redruth, Cornwall to William and Elizabeth Chinn and died in Mineral Point on March 12, 1867 at the age of 29.

ing the old cemetery and has obtained permission from the city to begin work. With his persistent efforts this restoration project has grown to include many other volunteers, including this writer, who share a likewise interest and concern. Recently, Larson and his restoration efforts were covered in an article in the *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*; his work is also detailed on a Facebook page the volunteers established to tell

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the story of the restoration and to keep the community up to date on its progress.

The OCC restoration group currently has discovered, repaired, and restored approximately 30 gravestones. Many stones have been found a few inches underground, absorbed by subsequent years of ground-cover. Many other stones, or pieces of them, have been scattered over the years. Apparently, several decades ago a crew of workers "cleaned up" the cemetery and removed broken gravestones, depositing them near Brewery Creek. At some point, two gravestones were found in stone work at the Walker House. Funereal embellishments from gravestones presumably from the old cemetery can be found in assorted local yards, serving as items of garden décor.

While many of the stones currently in the OCC appear to be worn to the extent of being illegible and unidentifiable, a little elbow grease and some Simply Green cleaner can unlock a surprising amount of information. Many identifications are confirmed by using mirrors or powders, such as flour, to help read inscriptions. Digital photos are also instrumental in modifying the image to reveal any hidden inscriptions. Last, but not least, Mineral Pointers' memories of relatives' stones are extremely helpful; one such recollection helped identify a stone that had only one legible letter on its face.

The cleaning and restoration of the stones is just one aspect of the project. Submerged grave markers have been discovered that do not correspond with the surrounding gravestones or with any of the other 70 stones existing at the OCC; whose grave is marked may remain a mystery forever, but the restoration volunteers hope that by piecing together as many clues as possible, at least some of them will be identified.

The OCC group is drawing extensively on past endeavors to record the gravesites in the old cemetery. A local church women's group listed the names and dates on all legible and extant graves in 1966. In 1976 the Mineral Point Women's Club backed a project to "restore" the graveyard; they also compiled a list of names and dates that



Vandalism has caused more damage to the Old City Cemetery than weather or the passage of time. In 1994 the grave markers of Dr. David Ross and of John Ross, who died in 1850 and 1848, respectively, were still standing. In 2015, the stones are still in the cemetery but badly broken.



Weather has seriously deteriorated most of the stones in the Old City Cemetery. An attempt in 1976 to protect some of the broken pieces by mounting them in a cement slab unfortunately accelerated the process. The photo on the left was taken in 1994; the one on the right shows the same stones in 2015.

were still legible at that time, and in addition collected many of the broken pieces and cemented them into concrete berms. Unfortunately although this was meant to preserve, the angle at which the stones were placed actually accelerated their deterioration by weather. In 1984 an Eagle Scout project mapped what was left of the gravestones.

The restoration volunteers are merging these sources and developing a list of the names of those buried in the cemetery, along with their birth and death dates. Since most of the entries on this list are incomplete, frequently lacking birth dates, death dates, first names, and sometimes last names, the group is using the resources of the Mineral Point Library Archives to find obituaries, genealogical, and biographical information about the people buried here in an effort to fill in the missing data. The list, which at present numbers 425 names, is being refined and revised with the help of this author's efforts in transferring the Archives' death records from a DOS-based computer to a contemporary, searchable, database. The DOS computer holds death and obituary records of Mineral Point residents from the 1830's to about 1998 with approximately 14,000 individual records, of which the author has transferred almost 10,000, currently.

The goal of these combined efforts is to physically restore the Old City Cemetery as best as possible and to create from the listing an interpretive display center within the grounds. While all the stones will never be found or restored, restoring as many as possible will bring the place close to its original purpose. Additionally, a definitive map and display will allow a visitor to envision the cemetery as it was as well as to easily find the location of a particular burial.

Ideas for the future might be to create a virtual and interactive cemetery map online, and to use Smart Codes near the grave sites to provide background stories of some of the cemetery's more well known residents to interested visitors. Creating facsimile stones to replace missing ones, to augment the existing surviving stones has also been discussed.

To view reports and photographs of the work in progress, including aerial views of the cemetery, visit the group's Facebook page "The Mineral Point Old City Cemetery Project." Anyone interested in assisting any part of the project is invited to contact David Larson at 608-987-0174.

Thanks to Shan Thomas and David Larson for providing background and information for this article. ●

Remembering Jane Cluthers

The restoration work on the Old City Cemetery brings to light names of long ago Mineral Pointers, some of them leading lights of the community, some of them “characters,” one of the latter was Jane Cluthers. Her story is well told by Bertha Kitchell Whyte, author of several books about Wisconsin decorative arts and antiquities. The following is a transcription of an undated newspaper article found in the Mineral Point Library Archives.

Wisconsiniana — A Legend of Mineral Point Strange Story of Jane Cluthers

By Bertha Kitchell Whyte

The “diggings” of Mineral Point have been deserted these 30 years. But a responsive soul cannot stay there long without yearning to do some open pit mining — for the old Cornish folk tales immured in the ruins. This “mineral,” as the miners called the lead ore, is still there.

Take, for instance, the story of Jane Cluthers.

Jane’s history was unearthed as the writer’s insatiable antiquarian curiosity led her into the china cupboard of a lifelong resident of the town. It was further intrigued by a Chinese teapot, a Staffordshire figure and a metal bird whose bill held cloth while it was being hem-stitched and whose back served as a pin cushion.

All The Children Worked for Her

They were gifts, my hostess said, from Jane, an old crippled lady. From Jane, too, had come a tea set of delicate pink and white china on a tray, all of eggshell thinness. And when a rare old blown glass mug also turned out to be a present from the “old lady” my interest in her identity was too definitely roused to be silenced.

Jane’s real name was Crothers, but “Cluthers” she was called up to her death and “Cluthers” she will remain to those who, as children, used to fetch and carry for her. I shall give the story as my hostess told it:

“When I was young, Jane lived near Pridix’s Hollow. It was really Prideaux’s Hollow, but the Cornish changed it to Pridix’s Hollow. They were always changing names; for instance, they called Penhallygan ‘Pennyleggin’. They built groups or rows of houses right near wherever lead was found and that was why Mineral Point never was laid out in streets but along roads which led from one group of stone houses to another.

Affliction Blamed on Beggar’s Curse

Jane was crippled from childhood before she came with her parents, brother and sister, from Cornwall. Her sister was crippled too, and the family explanation was that a beggar asked for bread one day and was refused. As a result he “ill-wished” the girl babies of the house and they never walked again.

“The sister died shortly after they came to Mineral Point, brother James became a miner and Jane, who grew up in a wheel chair, kept house for him with the aid of the townspeople and farmers of the countryside.

“We girls would stop in every day and wash her, make the beds and even make bread and pies under her direction. We thought it was fun. Jane would say, ‘Poor Jimes, he works so hard. Couldn’t one of you children bring up a bucket of water, or a bucket of coal, or an armful of wood?’ The children would wheel her to church. Her one accomplish-



Jane Cluthers in her home on Shake Rag Street. She and her brother, James, are both buried in the Old City Cemetery, where their tombstone spells their name “Cruthers.” “Jimes” died in 1908, apparently with a hidden nest egg of almost \$8,000. His obituary says “Mr. Cluthers was of a mild retiring disposition to an exceptional degree, and for some years has been regarded as one of very meager circumstances, hence his revealing shortly before his death the fact that he was the possessor of some money which he had been accumulating since his return from California in 1866 [was surprising.] Suffice it say his possessions were ample to have kept him and his afflicted sister in comfortable circumstances during their lives without the receiving of support from a charitable public for years, as they have.” photo from the Mineral Point Library Archives.

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Plays at Orchard Lawn

By Nancy Pfothenauer

In a recent conversation with Mineral Pointer Patricia Harris, she mentioned that she and her late husband Walter (Bud) Harris were in a Shakespeare play at the Gundry House in the summer of 1954. "We weren't dating at the time," Pat said. "I was friends with Bud's sister. I don't know how Bud got involved with the play, you wouldn't think it was something he would do. But he was in it and so was I. He was Oberon, King of the fairies and I was the Queen of the Amazons." She also mentioned that Bud wore tights for his part and we joked about finding an old photo him in the tights. Well, a run through the microfilm at the Library Archives and an online search for photographs revealed not only several newspaper stories about the play but several photographs of the actors, including one of Bud in tights!

The play was "Midsummer Night's Dream" and the editor of the *Mineral Point Tribune* was full of praise for the preview performance to which he was invited. In the August 12 issue he said "Along about 9:30 p.m. last night John Walsh rubbed his jaw and mused "Methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face." Walsh, through devious workings of a malignant sprite, assumes the head of an ass for the brightest role in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." We doubt if Shakespeare meant it this way, but the play seems to be a show piece for Bottom, Snug, Flute, Snout, and Starveling... an... is by far the funniest sequence on the stage. Last night's preview audience paid it the compliment of laughing so hard half of the lines were lost."

The paper covered the actual performances as well. The reporter again praised the actors but mentioned that attendance was not what was expected. (Even though the local high school English teacher promised to credit any student who attended the play with the equivalent of one book report.)

The review in the August 19 issue said "Mineral Point Amateur Players scored another big success in the production of the Shakespearian comedy 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' The play was produced under the able direction of Ulmont Healy at the Historical Society grounds four nights last week with the final showing on Sunday night.

Evidently many local people are not interested in Shakespearian plays, for the attendance was not near what was expected. With almost perfect weather for outdoor productions, the cast, which was entirely amateur, did an exceptional job in portraying the characters in this difficult comedy.

The museum grounds, with a profusion of shrubs and trees, made an ideal setting for the play.

It is difficult to pick out the work of any one actor over the others. The work of James McNeill as Lysander, Marilyn Adams as Hermia, Gertrude Dalles as Helena, Myra Pilling as Tatina, Jerry Whitford as Demetrius and Walter Harris as Oberon, was outstanding. Sharon Holland, as Puck, showed a lot of promise.



The front porch set the scene for the play. Left to right: Marilyn Adams, James McNeill, Milton (Mick) Nelson, Pat McGettigan (now Harris), Gerald Adams, Gertrude Dalles, and Jerry Whitford.

The comedy part of the production centered around a group led by John Walsh as Bottom, Quince, Dr. Charles Larson, Snug, Ernest Springer, Flint, Dick Martin, Snout, Clinton Avery, and Starveling, James Dolan. This group put on a play for the gentry which proved to be a scream from start to finish. John Walsh, in the lead, was a show in himself.

We hope the small patronage will not discourage the group from continuing their work with another production next summer."

Cast members, in addition to those mentioned above were:

Theseus, Duke of Athens — Milton Nelson; Egeus, father of Hermia — Gerald Adams;

Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus — Pat McGettigan; Peaseblossom — Dorothy Williams; Cobweb — Jacqueline Dunn; Moth — June Meuer

Mustardseed — Judy McGraw; other fairies attending their King and Queen — Claire Holland, June Laverty, Judy Coyle, Betty Carey.

Midsummer Night's Dream was not the first "play on the porch" at the Gundry House. The previous year local amateur players produced "Kiss and Tell," a comedy that was a huge Broadway hit in the early '50s. Apparently, local people were more inclined to attend a contemporary comedy than a Shakespearian one as the five night run drew large audi-



John Walsh brought down the house as Bottom. Left to right, are Ernie Springer, John Walsh, Dick Martin Jr., and James Dolan. Photos from the Wisconsin Historical Society.

A scene from the local production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." in 1954. Left to right: Myra Pilling as Titania, Walter (Bud) Harris as Oberon, and Sharon Holland as Puck.

ences, in spite of bad weather. In fact, the company added two extra performances to accommodate those who had been rained out of the originally scheduled ones.

The *Tribune* loved this play, too. A review in the July 30, 1953 edition said "If anyone had told me before I saw this play that any group of home talent amateur players could render a thoroughly professional performance, I would have said that they were crazy, that it couldn't be done, but that is exactly what I saw, a professional performance by a group of amateurs."

A week later, the editor was still praising the performances. "The play, *Kiss and Tell*, which was produced for five nights last week will be produced again for two nights, Friday and Saturday.

Rain interfered to a great extent with the play, in fact, the weather was good only one night during the five night's showing. On Saturday night the show was practically rained out.

It is by popular request that the play is being continued this weekend. Scores of people are holding tickets, and were unable to get to see the show last week.

All who have seen *Kiss and Tell* were high in their praise of the work of the cast and the efforts of director Ulmont Healy. In fact the whole production has had such a fine reception by the general public that there is some talk of organizing a "Little Theatre" group which would produce stage shows from time to time in this city.

Many people from surrounding towns who attended *Kiss and Tell* were amazed at the caliber of acting, and were high in their praise of Mr. Healy's work in directing. Both Madison papers and both the Madison and Monroe radio stations gave space and time in praising the production.

We again suggest if you haven't seen the play, that you get over to the Historical Museum on Friday or Saturday evening by 8:15. You can't buy as good entertainment any place for one dollar."

The paper provided publicity for the play ahead of time as well. A week before the first performance, the editor reported "Gertrude Dalles and Betty Clauer will be playing the role of the 16-year-old Corliss Archer, the junior miss with a penchant for mischief making that manages to bring hilarious confusion to a customarily peaceful suburban community.

Jimmy Kruse will be seen as the youthful Dexter, the boy next door who aids and abets the silly Corliss in her dizzy escapades. Jack Humbert will be seen as Pvt. Earhart, the other young man in Corliss' young life.

Julie Fernekes will portray Corliss' girlfriend, Mildred Pringle, who adds to the misunderstandings and complications in the comedy by keeping secret her marriage to Corliss' brother, to be played by Russell Crick. Mildred's tattle-tale brother Raymond, will be acted by Teddy Harris and Douglas McKenzie, Jr.

John Walsh and Mrs. George Kjelland will be seen as Corliss' parents, whose quarrels with Mr. And Mrs. Pringle, to be played by Max Fernekes and Ava Fernekes are said to provide some of the most amusing scenes in the play.

Other roles in the Historical Society's production of "*Kiss and Tell*," which is being directed by Ulmont Healy, have been assigned to Gerald Adams, Philippa Gibbon, Douglas McKenzie, and Clint Avery."

The editor apparently showed up for some of the practices for he said: "With preparations going on for the play *Kiss and Tell*, which starts next Tuesday evening, the porch at the Museum is taking on the appearance of a stage, which is a new chapter in the life of the old Gundry mansion.

During open hours from one to five, the museum is a quiet, cool place for visitors to browse through and view the exhibits, but after dark it takes on a new character with its blaze of lights and activity inside and outside until after eleven o'clock." ●

News from Orchard Lawn

by Ainsley Anderson

Change is inevitable. Without change, history wouldn't have much story to tell. However it comes, better or worse, change affects us all. Even with dedicated efforts to stop change and preserve moments in time at Orchard Lawn, change has affected us this year.

We learned very late last year of Matt and Denise Ostergrant's departure from the Mineral Point Historical Society Board of Directors due to health concerns. Before I began as the manager at Orchard Lawn in December of 2011, I somehow had never had the pleasure of meeting Matt and Denise. How glad I am to have had this opportunity. When I started, Matt was the newly elected President of the Board, taking the baton from Jim Stroschein, whose leadership had so elegantly led the society to the preservation of Orchard Lawn.

Matt and I learned together what we needed to do to bring Orchard Lawn up to a new level. We rebranded Orchard Lawn to appeal to a wider audience — and it worked. The wedding bookings doubled. We had lengthy discussions planning what was next — where do we go from here?

Conversations with Matt always started on topic. I found him to be a patient sounding board for my many ideas for improvement. Once we hammered out everything that needed to be discussed we were free to discuss any number of topics after that — and they varied. Meetings that probably should have been an hour turned into at least two hour discussions on various artifacts around the house or particular quandaries related to displays. And as they tend to do, our conversations went elsewhere from gardening to travel to quoting movies. He really could do a number of fabulous impersonations.

And so, here I sit. It's September. We've gone three quarters of a year without Matt and Denise on the board, guiding our efforts. We've gone three quarters of a year pulling

ourselves together and realizing that Matt and Denise did so much for Orchard Lawn and for the Mineral Point Historical Society — so much more than any of us will truly know. They dedicated an unfathomable amount of time and energy to the restoration efforts. Denise's organization, planning, and sense of style brought forth many absolutely charming events.

Change. Much has changed. The make-up of our board has changed. I have gone from managing Orchard Lawn, overseeing the tour guides, and scheduling weddings to Executive Director. I approach this new role with pride and optimism. I am proud of the work that Matt and Denise and Jim and so many others have put into making Orchard Lawn what it is today. I am humbled by the dedication that so many have shown to make the Mineral Point Historical Society what it is today.

We are privileged to live in a town that genuinely embraces its history and has for so long. I am grateful to oversee this historical gem in Mineral Point. I see beyond the walls and acreage of Orchard Lawn into a town full of potential. I sincerely believe that the Mineral Point Historical Society can help create an even greater appreciation for the history of the people, the traditions, and the buildings that, together, make our town home.

Thank you for your support of the Mineral Point Historical Society. Many thanks are due to our dedicated Board of Directors, whose vision will carry us forward for many years to come. I welcome your thoughts, memories, and visions for Orchard Lawn and for the Mineral Point Historical Society.

I embrace the past and those whose dedication has given us so much. I look to the future with hope that we will honor their hard work and confidence that we will continue to preserve the unique history that makes Mineral Point so special.

I'll miss our chats, Matt. Thank you for everything. ●



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ment was knitting but she also moved herself about the room and swept with a small broom.

"Farmers would bring wild plums and these were kept in a barrel besides the spring which flowed in the basement of the house. Jane would say 'Take some plums as a reward when you bring up the water.' But she would be very cross if they took too many. Three was the limit, and there was one little girl who was never allowed to fetch Jane's water again because she took a large handful.

"Jane would encourage people to bring her presents which she kept in a corner cupboard. It was overflowing with eggcups, cups and saucers and evidently some fine pieces of china and glass to judge from the keepsakes she presented to her favorites when she was old.

"If she remembered a gift someone thought of bringing her, but which hadn't materialized as yet, Jane would be very cross about it. Of course she wasn't universally popular for some people thought she was what would now be called a 'gold digger'. But she must have had personality. She had all religious denominations, both Catholics and Protestants, working for her, although her own church was the Primitive Methodist.

"Farmers from near and far brought her and 'Jimes' milk, butter, clotted cream, pasties, cords of wood and fresh vegetables. At Christmas time, her chest of drawers would be filled with saffron cake and cookies. The cake alone takes about 50 cents worth of saffron at a baking. When James died, in his bedroom was found \$8,000 in gold, silver and bills.

"One of Jane's sayings when she didn't like a man was "I wouldn't marry him if he was covered with gold diamonds." ●

In Memory of Matt Ostergrant

Joy Gieseke, MPHS Board President

Mineral Point lost a dear friend this summer, and we will be forever grateful for the privilege of knowing him. If I were to list all the many things that Matt Ostergrant did for the Mineral Point Historical Society, I would fail miserably. I am quite certain that only Denise knows for sure how many hours he spent there, and perhaps even she does not know the extent of the work he did for us. The truth is that Matt did none of it for personal recognition or awards. In true Matt style, his obituary is more of a love note to our community and to his beloved Denise than it is about his life and accomplishments. I do hope he knew how very much he meant to us and how much his work will continue to make our lives richer. As we carry on without Matt, may we all realize how important “community” is and may we all remember that we live in one of the very best, made possible because people like Matt Ostergrant have cared so much and given so generously.

The next time you enjoy an event at Orchard Lawn, or tour the house, or simply stroll through the grounds, take a moment to think of Matt and send up a word of thanks. ●



Matthew W. Ostergrant | November 27, 1961 – July 21, 2015

Remember me
as you knew me,
warts and all.

While any disease is certainly no gift, many gifts were made possible as a result of being the reluctant host of pancreatic cancer. First, the gift of humility, as I was quickly reminded of my mortality and that we really are just vapors that appear for a little while, then vanish away. More humility as my independence began to erode. Then the many gifts of gratitude that arrived with cards, prayers, phone calls, gifts of food, transportation to appointments, help with chores—all the positive energy that family and the friends in this incredible community of Mineral Point sent out to us. To be the instrument of enabling such outpourings of support, concern and love was a humbling experience, again filled with gratitude.

No, I've fought neither a brave nor a valiant battle with my cancer; rather, I've tried to coexist with it, encouraging it to give up the fight and retreat. Reminding it that I'm the “alpha dog” and that while wanting to conquer me physically, it has never had a chance to conquer my spirit and will. The worst part of all this will be to leave the fragrance of my life—my wife, Denise. No one could have asked for a better soulmate and companion to go through the journey of this present life. My belief is that we have journeyed together many times before. My hope is that we journey together many times to come. I wish with all my heart that her comfort and success in carrying on without me is buoyed by the continued outpourings of love and support that we've so far been richly blessed with by our family and friends. The best decision we ever made was to “take the leap” and move to Mineral Point. Living here has brought us the rewards of volunteering and serving others while reacquainting us with “community”—something we had not experienced since growing up in our hometown. My deepest thanks for welcoming us and for all the support during my illness. My thanks to our families, the great team at Dean Hematology and Oncology in Madison, Agrace Hospice Care, and to Claudia Gehlhaart who kept my energy strong and moving in the right direction.

Keep your eyes and ears open—you'll probably see me around. ●

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January 1, 2016 to December 31, 2016

All members receive the newsletter
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Mineral Point
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From the Collection: There's a story here, but we don't know what it is. Who are these kids who look none too happy about being asked to pose for the photographer? What's with the dish the boy on the left is holding? Where did that Big Jo cap come from? Whose porch are they on? Are they brothers and sisters? Cousins? The photo collections are full of charming mysteries like these. We'll probably never know the answers to the questions, but we can enjoy the pictures, regardless.