

# John Sehy

By

John Travis

John, born at home, a Roman Catholic and was of German descent. The extent of his education is unknown, but reportedly used good grammar. Very intelligent as he did his own book work and also kept the books and records for the church, St. Augustine in Ashland, Ill. John was on the board of school and church. He was kind, had a good sense of humor, brown hair and eyes, was heavy set - and was described as handsome (in Gertrude's notes).

The property encompassed 5 acres, and had a 2 story house with 5 bedrooms downstairs. The 2nd floor was all one bedroom. The other rooms consisted of a dining room, living room, kitchen and a summer kitchen all of which were large rooms. There were 6 wells on the property but they had no indoor plumbing. As they had no electricity, kerosene was used for lamps and was also used for cooking during the summer, while coal was used for heating and cooking in the winter. They maintained a huge garden, comparable to a truck farm in California. Grew every vegetable and fruit one could think of except citrus. Raised all of their own pork and beef - smoked the hams etc. - had 2 cows, 3 horses, chickens, ducks and geese. Made all of their own butter, cheese and ice cream. Owned a 2 seat carriage and a bobsled for winter travel.

While in Ashland operated a brick and drain tile factory located in front of their home from 1900 to 1930 that employed 4 or 5 men. There was a railroad siding on the property that he used to ship his brick and tile products. **The following information comes from a document prepared by Sister Helen Francesca for John Travis, January 26, 1980.**

The Sehy Brickyard Saga John, I would like to tell you about the integrity of your grandfather John Sehy, my father whom I admired so much. He modernized the brick and tile yard by building a large drying room, installing a steam boiler, a covered dirt pit with carriers or belts running from the clay pit to a mixing machine with automatic cutters from which the brick and tile were conveyed to the drying floor. He built two large kilns in which to burn the brick and tile, each with about twenty fire boxes.

Across the street from these kilns was a large farm. Mr. Howard E. Thornley, our neighbor, whose included an apple orchard and a garden near his beautiful home. Despite of the lawsuit remained cordial with neighbors. The gas that escaped from these fire boxes caused the leaves on the trees in the orchard and the plants in the garden to curl up. After all the expenses for modernizing the plant Mr. Thornley, a lawsuit filed by a neighbor (basis of suit was bad odors from the brickyard), took out an injunction against my father and the plant was closed down for a year. Dad won the case in the county courts. The judge told Mr. Thornley "You just can't take the food out of the mouths of these children". In spite of this he appealed the case to the State of Illinois. My father won the case in the State court also. The farmer was determined to appeal the case to the Federal court.

Dad saw in a Brick Magazine, which he received every month, that a man had received government rights on a fire box which consumed all the gases before they could escape while the bricks were being cured. He quickly wrote for the information and made a contract with the inventor to install these new fire boxes in his kilns. That ended the law suits but left my father with a large debt from which he never recovered and went into bankruptcy. The bank took over the brick and tile yard and hired my father to run it. Eventually it was sold to the son of Mr. Thornley. We girls had seen this coming. That is Gertrude, Ann, Marge and I so we went to Chicago and got jobs and when the climax came we brought Dad, Mother, Frank, Thomas and John to live with us in an apartment. After the brickyard closed they moved to Chicago, IL where John became a night watchman for the Chicago Tribune.

My father had what he called his office at the yard, which he had filled with all sorts of tools. He sharpened knives, scissors, plow shares for the farmers, he also mended pots and pans, etc. The people from came to bring these things to him. He did not charge anyone for what he did for them. Mr. Howard E. Thornley, who took out the injunction came too as if he were a good friend. Dad's motto was: "Money is not worth fighting for." Mr. Thornley and his family were devout Methodist people. When the court sessions ended Mr. and Mrs. Thornley were seen sitting in a rear seat of Saint Augustine Church and later Mr. Thornley came to Dad's shop and said: "Johnny (everyone called him Johnny - but to my mother he was John) Do you know why you won out in the end? It was because you had God on your side, because you are a Roman Catholic." The two families remained loving and loyal friends all through the years. The Thornley boys live on farms in Ashland and their sister Mildred lives in Springfield, Illinois. She and I correspond with each other almost as blood relatives.

I will try to make a family-tree going back to my grandparents after they migrated to America as we have no information prior to that. Cause of death was cancer of the intestines. Funeral services were handled by: Barr Funeral Home 6222 North Broadway, Chicago, Ill. During our ROOTS trip in 1977 we stopped here and walked around the property. In 1992 we learned that the Livingood family was the subsequent owner's and drastically remodeled the house. This partially explains the differences between what we saw and the description above. Mildred (Thornley) Leahy, a girlhood friend of Gertrude's showed us around and shared a few memories with us.