



## Quarterly Newsletter

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December 2019

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## Saved from the Big Lake By Dan Coplen

### ***Syracuse men dared to rescue car at the bottom of Lake Wawasee***

Just about every young man dreams of getting a car, and in 1935 three young men from Syracuse got one in a most unusual way—they raised it from the muddy bottom of Lake Wawasee.



A 1934 Chevy Roadster

The car they got—described as a “light roadster”—was at the bottom of the lake because it had plunged through a hole in the ice on Feb. 24 of that year. At the time it went through the ice, the auto was being boldly driven across the mostly-frozen lake by its owner, Deloss Smith.

Smith was 27 then, and lived near Lake Papakeechee, which is just south of the big lake. His roadster—a Chevrolet—sank in about 25 feet of water.

As it was going under, Smith managed to pry open the car’s door, pull himself out and swim to the surface.

From there, he crawled onto the top of the ice, and most likely, began to count his blessings. He must have been shivering, too, and numb with cold. It is not known what the outside temperature was at the time of the accident, but it had to have been chilly.

Syracuse’s newspaper, *The Syracuse Journal*, reported that Smith drove his Chevy onto the ice in order to take a short cut between the south side of the lake and its north side. It said he turned onto the icy lake at what was called Greider’s Point [the end of Highland View Drive], and from there, started across to a place known as Johnson’s Bay.

Driving across the ice must have seemed like an adventure. As it turned out, though, taking that across-the-lake detour was probably the worst decision that a twenty-something would make in his entire life.

The ice should have been thick enough to hold Smith’s Chevy—the newspaper said there were eight or nine inches of it—but there happened to be an area of open water several hundred feet off shore. And wouldn’t you know it, Smith’s path across the lake took him right into that opening.

Smith’s Chevy plopped into that open stretch of water with what must have been a gigantic splash and quickly began nose-diving to the lake’s soggy bottom. There was no information as to how fast Smith was traveling when the car hit the water, but he was probably moving at a pretty good clip.

At the time, two men were fishing nearby and according to *The Journal*, they called out to Smith as soon as he inched his way back onto the top of the ice.

They asked if he was okay. Smith indicated he was.

Then the fishermen asked him where he lived. He said his home was three or four miles south of the lake.

“Well then,” the newspaper reported the fishermen as saying, “if you walk fast you can keep warm.” The anglers, it seems, were not about to interrupt their fishing to help someone crazy

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## Saved from the Big Lake...Continued

enough to drive a car into the lake. They also seemed to think that seeing a car plunge into a lake in the middle of winter was nothing unusual.

As it turned out, Smith only had to walk as far as “Frosty” Galloway’s Grocery, which was on the lakeshore not too far from where the car went in. Two brothers named Bundy happened to be in the grocery right then, and they did the neighborly thing. They dropped what they were doing and drove Smith to his home.

Afterward, Smith told *The Journal* that his escapade had given him a little bit of a head cold, but otherwise, he was no worse for the wear. The car, he sadly revealed, was not covered by any kind of insurance.

That should have been the end of the story. Car falls through ice. Car settles into the bottom of the lake. Car stays there.

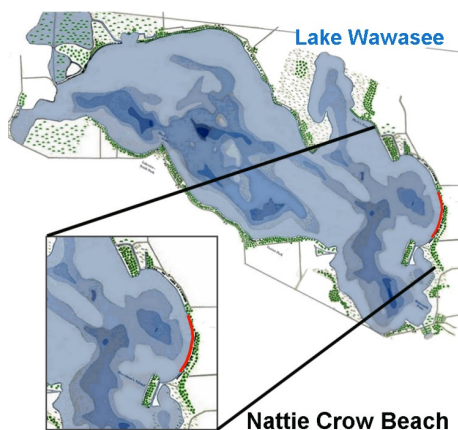
But the following summer a couple of young men from Syracuse—John Green and [Jim Fick]—decided to try to rescue that Chevy, which by then had to have been thoroughly water-logged. All they knew though, was that the automobile was at the bottom of the lake somewhere in a big area of water between the South Shore Inn and Morrison Island.

Green, *The Journal* reported, was 23 at the time and the son of Mr. and Mrs. Clark Green; it said [Fick] was 20 and the son of [Mattie Fick]. Those two may have also received help with their rescue operation from [Fick’s] brother, Nathaniel.

The youth adventurers began their reclamation project by purchasing the title to the underwater roadster from Smith, who must have figured that after several months in freezing water the Chevy would be worthless. According to the newspaper, the boys got the title for \$10.

Next, the young men fashioned a diving helmet out of pieces of scrap iron and made a raft out of several used, five-gallon kerosene cans. Air was circulated into the helmet by way of a hose and an air pump that in normal times was used to pump up automobile tires. When all that was in place, the Syracuse men pushed the raft into the lake and used it as a platform to begin searching for the car.

*The Journal* and the Warsaw newspaper, *The Daily Times*, differ on exactly how the search was done. The Syracuse newspaper indicated it was conducted by dragging an anchor along the bottom of the lake; the Warsaw newspaper reported that the men took turns putting on the helmet and searching for it under the water. Maybe they did both.



No matter how it happened, though, the roadster was located on July 17, 1935. It was stuck nose first into the lake’s silty bottom.

Once the men knew the car’s exact location, their next challenge was finding a way to raise it to the surface. According to *The Daily Times*, they did it by filling 80 large-sized oil drums with water, sinking them to the bottom, and then attaching them to the car. To do all that, they probably used the diving helmet; a rope was used to haul the young man wearing the helmet back to the surface.

Once the oil drums were in place, the men used an air pump to push the water out of them and air in. Doing that caused the drums to rise, bringing the car up with them. An old motor from a Model T seems to have been used to



Galloway's Grocery

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During this grant season, the museum has applied for a grant from the Ken & Lela Harkless Foundation for operation expenses. We should know the results of the grant application sometime in mid-December. The museum also applied to the Kosciusko County Community Foundation for a grant to further our education services, update lighting from fluorescent to LED, and install additional storage within the museum. We should know the results of the grant by mid-January.

It is with great sadness the museum learned of the death of Vance Lopp earlier this month. Vance was a supporter of the museum both in knowledge and financially. He would often come by the museum to donate items, pass on information, or just have a quick chat. He would also be in attendance at most of the museum's programs. Vance's presence will be greatly missed, and we wish to offer our condolences to the family during this time of grief.

Museum activities since the September newsletter have included the following:

- **Indoor Garage Sale**—During the fall indoor garage sale, the museum staff took over the kitchen to offer concessions. This year marked the third year the museum has offered concessions. We brought \$185 in profits thanks to food and plastic ware donations from staff and the board.
- **Fall Carnival**—The museum offered a cotton ball ghost craft to all of the children attending the Fall Carnival festivities on October 26. While the community center had many more attendees, the museum had its largest turnout since it began participating in the Fall Carnival with 203 people visiting during the 2-hour event.
- **Breakfast With Santa**—This event, which takes place December 7, will offer children the opportunity to make our traditional "Reindeer Food" for Santa's reindeer and to make a twig reindeer ornament. The reindeer ornament craft will be led by Deb Connett, paraprofessional at Wawasee Middle School.



*Stop by and see our "Recent Donations" display!*

### Recent Donations

- **Myrna Harting**—"Show 'n Tell" Phono Viewer, PictureSound program books, record books
- **Judy Kline Smith**—1920s photo of Syracuse High School play cast
- **Steve Sharp**—Ron Sharp's Chronicles originals and extra copies
- **Susan Reiff**—La Petite Shoppe sign





operate the air pump.

When the roadster was back on the surface, the boys pulled it to the east side of the lake, which turned out to be a distance of about two and a half miles. From there, they towed it to an area known as the Crow's Nest. When the Chevy was finally back on solid ground the young men began working to get the car back in running shape. Before long it was purring—more or less—like a kitten.

The car's radiator was still in good shape, the Syracuse newspapers reported, something it attributed to the fact that it had been filled with antifreeze. Its tires were still in usable condition, too.

And with that, the young men had a car to call their own.

All in all, it must have seemed like a miracle. After all, who gets a car at the bottom of a lake? But they had more than an automobile. They also had an amazing tale to tell.

**Director's Note:** This story by Dan Coplen came from the Spring 2017 edition of *The Thaddeus*, a quarterly publication by the Kosciusko County Historical Society. Dan's original story cited James Flick and his mother Matty Flick, but upon further research, the museum finds that these people are James "Jim" Fick and his mother, Mattie Fick.

# Upcoming Events

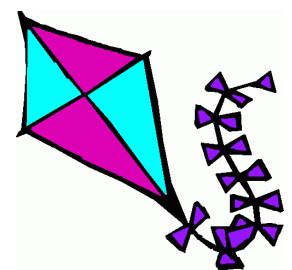
- December 7: **Breakfast With Santa, 8-11a.m. Crafts in Museum**—Traditional "Reindeer Food" by Jamie Clemons and a new "Twig Reindeer Ornament" by Deb Connett.
- December 22-January 6: **Christmas Break**—Museum will be closed for Christmas Break and will reopen January 7, 2020 at 10a.m.
- **Second Saturdays, 10a.m.-2p.m.**—New, hands-on family activities focused on historical crafts and the community. Each month's activity will take place on the second Saturday of the month inside the museum.



\*January 11—Paper crafts

\*February 8—Board and card games

\*March 14— Make a kite





## Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum

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Website: [www.syracusemuseum.org](http://www.syracusemuseum.org)

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

### Have you seen our online “Donate” button?



This link allows you to securely donate using your credit card or PayPal account.



## End-of Year Giving & Sponsorship Letter By Jamie Clemons

**It's not too late to get in your end-of-year donations!** The museum is reliant on donations from the public in order to make our budget each year. Donations help support the funding of programs and general upkeep of the museum and its artifacts.

Please keep in mind that giving is in addition to your membership fees and is not required but greatly appreciated. Any donations postmarked or dropped off by December 31, 2019 will receive a thank you letter to be used for tax purposes for 2019, where applicable. Credit card donations can be made by visiting our website and clicking the secure PayPal “Donate” button. A letter and statement for tax purposes will also be sent to those who choose the “Donate” option.

In May 2020, members and the community will receive a sponsorship letter. In the past, donations gathered from the sponsorship letter help the museum to keep on the positive side of the annual budget. It costs the museum approximately \$100 each day we open our doors. This figure does not include replacing display cases and other special projects. This figure represents the daily operating expenses. The museum operates on a donation and grant basis, and it is important that we stay fiscally sound in order to be good stewards of all of the time, money, and materials associated with our wonderful space.



**If you carry a “Family” or “Individual” membership, your membership to the Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum is up for renewal.** Membership entitles you to first-hand information of Museum happenings and the knowledge that you are helping the Museum carry out its mission of preserving local history.

To continue your membership, please fill out this brief form:

Name:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
E-Mail:	

<b>Membership Type:</b>	<b>Price:</b>	<b>Total Enclosed:</b>
Individual	\$30 Annually	
Family	\$50 Annually	
Corporate	\$100 Annually	
Donation		

Thank you for your support. Please make checks payable to “Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum” and mail with completed form to:

**Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum**

**1013 North Long Drive**

**Syracuse, IN 46567**

Questions? Call 574-457-3599 or E-Mail: [director@syracusemuseum.org](mailto:director@syracusemuseum.org)

Check here \_\_\_\_\_ if you would like to receive your quarterly newsletters by E-Mail.