

OUR SISTER TOWN

Braidwood IL

We rolled into Braidwood in the late afternoon. We crossed and re-crossed the railroad tracks looking for the main street. Funnily enough, although the listed population for Braidwood IL is 5200, making it bigger than Braidwood NSW, its main street is modest by comparison.

My initial contact was Wayne Saltzman who had, with his wife Gerry, visited Braidwood NSW in 2010. Fortunately for me, John Stahel remembered Wayne from his visit to our museum and gave me a lead to follow.

Wayne Saltzman is a long-time resident of Braidwood and was the mayor 2003-2007. I asked Wayne about his time at City Hall.

"Well, I did something that's never been done here before, I won as a write-in. My name was not on the ballot paper. I had to teach the people how to do a write-in so I went door-to-door. I had things I hung on the doors to show how to do it. And it proved to be successful."

"After election day I went to the county clerk's office with my paperwork and she came out and give me a hug and a kiss. She said, 'You made history. You did something that's never been done in the state of Illinois'."

"But I didn't get re-elected. Braidwood has a thing about one-term mayors. The last time there was a two-term mayor was around 1951. Jimmy is our mayor right now and I'm his campaign manager. We're going to see that he gets re-elected because he's doing a lot for the town with drug enforcement and he's changed the way police operate."

"Before he became mayor they had a system where an officer could win a TV by writing the most number of traffic tickets. So they were stopping them for goofy

A write-in vote is allowable in some elections in the United States. Voters can ignore the candidates on the ballot paper and simply write in the name of someone they prefer. According to Wikipedia, in the 1997 election for mayor of Talkeetna, Alaska, 'Stubbs the Cat won over the two human candidates. He was re-elected every mayoral election thereafter, and served until his death on July 2, 2017'. Hmmm, Wiki or wacky, you be the judge.



THREE MAYORS OF BRAIDWOOD. JIM VEHR'S [LEFT] THE CURRENT MAYOR, WITH WAYNE T. SALTZMAN AND SUE GRYGIEL, BOTH PREVIOUS MAYORS.

things and a lot of them were senior citizens, too.

"The word went out, 'avoid Braidwood' and people were going out of their way to stay clear of us. You can't do that in a small town."

Wayne Saltzman took me to City Hall to meet the current mayor of Braidwood, James A. Vehrs. I asked him how he liked the job.

"It's been a learning experience. I'm a heavy equipment operator by trade. I'm not a politician, I'm just here to take care of our senior citizens and help the town go forward."

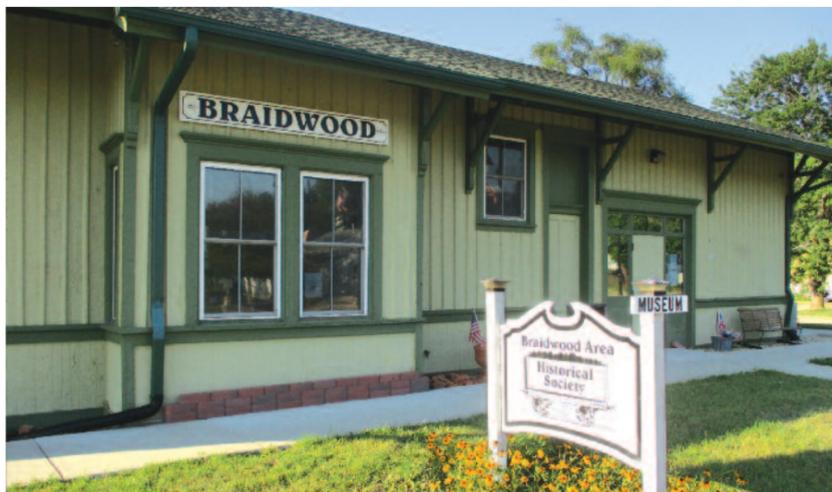
"In the last few years our economic development has been very slow, but now this past year, it's really booming. We have over 25 new housing permits going on in the town and we've got a new hotel coming up. We had 58 lots in a subdivision that went bankrupt that city took over years ago. That's sold now to a developer who's putting it back on the market."

"It's not supposed to be a full-time job. But it's what you want to put into it. One of our elected state reps on the 75th district for the state of Illinois once asked me if I ever thought it would be like this. I told him, 'You know what? I was Grand Knight for the Knights of Columbus for seven years and I've volunteered all over town. I know about community service'. I get paid \$5000 a year which comes out to about \$319 a month after taxes. You know what? I probably spend that much in entertainment."

"I'm gonna be honest with you; there's some days where I'll tell my wife, 'Hey, the whole day's for you, hon'. I make a couple telephone calls but I don't come to the office every day. I'm an outdoor person, I like to be out on the street."

Across Main Street from City Hall is the Braidwood Museum. There I presented to the museum our Braidwood goodies that Annie Clarke had given me to foster inter-town fraternity.

THE BRAIDWOOD MUSEUM.



MAIN STREET, BRAIDWOOD ILLINOIS WITH CITY HALL AT RIGHT.

I met Braidwood Area Historical Society president George Kocek along with Ed Bunting. George gave their story:

"The railroad came through here in 1855. It was a small, small town but the railroad came through because it was a straight route from Chicago to St. Louis. Then in 1864 coal was discovered by accident."

"A farmer was sinking a water well when at about 80 feet down, he hit rock. He got a bigger drill and he hit coal. It wasn't the best quality in the world but it was good enough. About a month later, him and his buddy dug a shaft and started bringing up coal. Pretty soon, the big money people from Boston got involved, they figured out there was a lot of coal here and then the big money and big companies came in. There were 10,000 people here in those days."

"Our James Braidwood was from Scotland. He was brought in by one of the big mining companies. He was a deep shaft engineer."

"Your Thomas Braidwood Wilson, a surgeon, came out from the same country. He was also a well-respected man who had a town named after him. That's amazing to me, the similarities."

"When James Braidwood arrived here the town was called Stewarts Grove. The railroad stopped a little bit north of town here, not far. There was a man named Stewart who sold wood as locomotive fuel to the railways at that time. He sold them wood and water. It was called Stewarts Grove, because they would stop and get wood and water. It wasn't until August of 1865 Braidwood was known as Braidwood."



THE MAYOR'S 'MAN CAVE'.

Later in the day Wayne and I went to visit mayor Jimmy relaxing in his 'man cave' after a day at the office. Bourbon and beer seemed to be the order of the day.

At the time I was going through one of my 'dry' spells and so I had to politely and reluctantly decline their kind offer of drinks. It did however prompt Jim to broach the subject of medical marijuana. His wife has suffered chronic arthritis for years and mainstream medication was starting to seriously affect her stomach.

Marijuana is legally obtained in Illinois by patients with a prescription and their carers who are both issued with a permit ID card that looks a bit like a drivers' licence. Jim showed me the package containing four lozenges. Of course it's not legal for other people to purchase, possess or consume these 'loopy' lozenges so I couldn't really try one, could I?

Chicago IL

And so I found my way to Chicago by train after a night of struggling with the timetable and the instructions for purchasing Amtrack tickets online. I had to make several feverish calls to the American cousins to sort it out.

"What's the matter with you?" they asked. "You usually can handle these things without having a vague attack". Anyway, a good night's sleep fixed it and in the morning Wayne drove me to Wilmington, the closest station up the

DRAINAGE

track towards Chicago. The rail line has been upgraded to cope with High-Speed Trains but alas our sister town no longer qualifies for a railway station — another connection between our communities.

And so to Chicago. If you think Lake Burly Griffin is big then Lake Michigan will expand your horizons considerably, out of sight in fact. We joined a few hundred other people and a microphone man for a cruise on the lake. He told us how the Chicago River was once an open sewer and garbage disposal method that flowed into Lake Michigan. The city's drinking water came from the lake and even though the intake had been moved many times further away from the river mouth, by 1900 the situation was dire.

So, did the city fathers think of another, more environmentally friendly way, to dispose of their toilet waste and trash? Not on your Nellie! Smart city engineers figured out that by digging a new channel inland, the flow of the Chicago River could be reversed and all the pollution would flow away from the lake, into rivers through other inland states and eventually down south as far as the mighty Mississippi.

This 'Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal' was in 1999 named a 'Civil Engineering Monument of the Millennium' by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Wipe bottom, wipe hands, flush daily with 1 billion US gallons from the lake and problem solved.

CRUISING ON LAKE MICHIGAN.

