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Long life, community and ‘characters’



Jack Wyant, grandson of Foster Wyant, presents his program July 2 in the Robinson Research Center.

Similarities between 1921 and 2021 also emerge in program celebrating Wyant family centennial

By CHARLES A. PETERSON

Foster Wyant was married in Granville in 1921, a century ago. His grandson Jack Wyant was in Granville on July 2 to deliver an address marking the centennial of that important family event in a program at the Robinson Research Center of the Granville Historical Society.

His presentation included not only the story of his grandfather and his impacts on the community, but also his thoughts on how and why Granville became the unique community it has always been, along with a fascinating comparison of current events between the years 1921 and 2021.

“The thesis I’m advancing today is that this village is unique compared to essentially all villages and towns west of the Hudson River, that the culture here has



Foster Wyant

produced a range of notable ‘characters’, and life 100 years ago today has some remarkable and unexpected similarities,” Wyant opened.

Spoiler alert: the similarities are striking.

Jack Wyant also christened several current and past village residents as official, loveable community “characters,” one aspect of many small towns like Granville, and the list includes his grandfather, of course.

Jack Wyant’s address was entitled “Foster Wyant’s Granville of 1921 – Some Perspectives by His Grandson,” and was the first Society program since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, when the Society’s activities and “society” in general were shut down.

“There are some cultural elements that one finds in a village, any village, but this one in particular has some unique cultural elements,” Jack Wyant said. “One of those is empathy – a feeling for one’s neighbors or other persons. And the other is the extent to which in a village, where people see each other and know each other, how characters can be cultivated. And, of course, we’re addressing one (Foster Wyant), but he, in the history of Granville characters, is not alone.”

Jack, a 1968 Denison University graduate and current part owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, lived in Granville as a small child and was president of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity at Denison when it pledged an African-American student, the first national fraternity with a racial “clause” to do so.

“Most people involved in the leadership of the fraternity turned against me and we ended up spending our senior year, seriously, with death threats — threats of injury,” Wyant said. “We discovered materials that set forth plans to harm us.”

A VILLAGE LIKE NO OTHER

Wyant concluded that Granville became unique because it was founded by another community.

“The uniqueness largely traces to being settled by an existing town, Granville, Massachusetts, located in the Berkshires,” he said. The Granville, Mass., leadership decided to create “a bunch of committees, send some parties out — way out west,” and “find a place that looks exactly like this. Let’s pick up the village and move there.”



Foster and Blanche Wyant. – *Wyant Family photo*

Wyant drilled deep on a general fact many Granvilleans already know, that the village was a planned community. “Planned in advance of arrival, planned as to street size, manner of governance. Remarkably planned,” he said. “And part of that planning had to do with education, a strong emphasis on it... and the focus on women.” He noted that Granville, during the 19th century, had seven educational institutions — five of them for women.

He recalled fellow Denison students during his time there in the mid-1960s complaining that Granville was “a little ant of a village that acts like an elephant.”

“Well, that was because of not only law enforcement, but governance. This has been a place since the beginning that has been heavily governed, to its credit — committees, leaders, organizations that helped drive the locale,” Wyant said. “It is and has been shaped by its small size. Neighbors know each other, know of each other, know their issues or their life experiences. Small scale comes into play.”

Wyant cited as an example of Granville’s empathetic nature his own experience with his father, also named Jack, made deaf by a case of whooping cough at age two, and Bill Joy, a Granville man he knew growing up here who became blind in mid-life.

“The community embraced them, helped them and clearly that is part of what happens in a village environment,” he said, “not in an urban or diverse

scattering type of environment.”

“How many porches are right next to the sidewalks in this village, enabling people as they stroll by to wave to people on porches and kibitz — share information, tell stories? And then when you add to it the interesting and attractive architecture here that originated in New England, and the rich greenery within this village, there’s a certain romanticism – kind of a romantic umbrella that’s over this particular village, and then when in a village there’s an integration or a connection of commercial, residential and public services, the village culture becomes strengthened or reinforced.”

Wyant said the post office, library, and the downtown square with places such as Sargent’s Market and other interesting locales were among the places where Granvilleans gathered to communicate and get to know each other.

“Until 1955 it was very important to go to the post office because there was no mail delivery,” he said. “And at the post office, knowing what time different people in town would go to check their post office box, people would go to either convey information or obtain information. The water fountain at Taylor’s (Drug Store) served a similar purpose, and Sinnett House (the senior citizens’ organization that was forerunner of today’s Licking County Community Center) later began to serve that purpose.”

1921 AND 2021 — THE SIMILARITIES

Wyant noted that this family centennial observance is “book-ended by 1921 and 2021” with remarkable similarities many are not aware of.

“We’re mindful of the fact that there have been two pandemics of note 100 years apart, he said of comparisons between the Spanish Flu and today’s COVID-19 outbreak.

“Spanish Flu has some interesting history attached to it. You know that it had nothing to do with Spain. ‘Spanish’ Flu originated in an army barracks in Kansas. Kansas is a state in America,” Wyant said, drawing laughter. But the name stuck, he said, because “President Wilson and his colleagues were concerned about military personnel learning that we created and were disseminating or spreading the flu, that he didn’t want to refer to it in any way that would cause people to know the truth.”



Foster Wyant as a young man. --Wyant Family photo

Wyant said that Wilson, the incumbent president a hundred years ago, lost his re-election bid in part because of a slow response to the pandemic of his day and a recession. “People tend to think of recessions or depressions starting in 1929, but there was a deep recession in 1920 and 1921, following the impact of the pandemic and following the return of the soldiers from World War I, which ended in November of 1918.”

He noted that Wilson’s counterpart one hundred years later, Donald Trump, was not re-elected either, in the wake of the COVID pandemic and the short recession that resulted. Additionally, with the presidential election the party in power changed in 1921 from Democrat to Republican and vice-versa in 2021.

What’s more, he concluded that in both years, the pandemics were downplayed.

Wyant said that according to historians, the 1920 recession was largely prompted, or accelerated, by the “Feds,” leading to another potential similarity for today.

“At the time there was a great debate, as there is today, about what should the Feds do to reduce the impact of a pending recession,” he said. “And it was



Two clocks help date this downtown Granville photo to circa 1921, the village Foster Wyant knew as a young man.

- Granville Historical Society photo

determined that the most important action that could be taken was to significantly increase interest rates. And it backfired. What's in the headlines today? Should the Fed increase interest rates or not, and while I've not seen any member of today's Fed reference a hundred years ago, the fact is that not doing so today, as was done a hundred years ago, is arguably a way that we can avoid the initiation or a deepening of a potential recession."

Other points of difference:

"Wars have occurred prior in both of these two time periods, one colossal (World War I), one obviously, in a word, smaller (Afghanistan), but still consuming substantial resources of the nation," he said.

As for the post-war recovery back then, "The Roaring twenties came along, until 1929. Today people are talking about a surging or a soaring twenties, leading to who knows what?"

There are similarities in the world of transportation, Wyant added.

"It was the age of the automobile," he said of 1921, give or take a few years. "Part of the argument

for the Granville Inn was, 'Hey, people were going to start taking vacations in their cars.' Maps of Granville were sent to tourist organizations in Chicago and New York, telling them how to get to Granville in their newly purchased Model-T Fords. Meanwhile the electric Interurban was shut down in 1923 and what's the topic today? Electric vehicles, electric transportation and trillions of dollars to go into Amtrak to put us back into public transportation, a hundred years later."

In the realm of social injustice, there are more similarities, he submitted.

"There's a lot happening with respect to social injustice today," he said. "Interestingly it was true a hundred years ago, and before and after. But in 1921 the Tulsa situation occurred, (when the entire African American community in that city was attacked by white Tulsans and burned down, with hundreds of Black people killed) of which we're all aware." By comparison, in 2021, he cited the impacts of the 2020 murder by a police officer of George Floyd, a black man in Minneapolis.

Changes in the conveyance of information fit into

this discussion as well, Wyant contended, with a decided hunger for news both today and back then, with today's trend of electronic media replacing newspapers and magazines.

"*McCalls*, the *Saturday Evening Post* – there were a number of publications that attracted people," he said of new media in 1921. "The media was highly respected a hundred years ago, much less so today.

"And immigration is still in the forefront, not yet being solved," Wyant said. "It was a hot topic 100 years ago, and of course is today."

Technical revolutions were at work during both eras, he continued, noting *Saturday Evening Post* interviews of Americans in 1921 asking, "What are your fantasies?" Leading answers, he said, included installing electricity, which came to Granville in 1921.

"When did the sewer system begin construction?" he asked of early 20th-century Granville. "1916, a little over a hundred years ago."

Controlling one's home temperature — "What a clever idea!" — easy cooking as opposed to complicated cooking and flying in airplanes were other survey answers. "How about some elevators and escalators, and maybe photographs that are color? This is what the *Saturday Evening Post* reported as being on the forefront on the minds of people one hundred years ago."

"So the Roaring Twenties came along — unprecedented growth," Wyant said of a century ago. "We 'think' we are at the beginning of some unprecedented growth."

Politically, Wyant said, discussing inequality, partisan politics, and economic irresponsibility, "It's same old-same old. And it was more divided (one-hundred years ago) than I think we generally realize, and it's sure divided and partisan in today's world."

ABOUT THOSE CHARACTERS

About the "characters" with whom Wyant started his talk, assuming many of them were well-educated, and his descriptions of several of them included positive contributions to the community:

"Harry Bolen (a longtime village employee, original member of the Granville Volunteer Fire Department and Santa Claus during the holidays), known because he rode his Naughty Lady of Shady Lane in the parades," which was an old gray horse



Foster Wyant at work on chores during a fall day in Granville. – *Wyant Family photo*

outfitted with a sign with the afore-mentioned title.

"Wally Chessman (an author, historian and Denison University professor), distinguished in various ways, but apparently known more as an absent-minded professor."

"The Flower Lady (Esther Coffey), engaged in recycling before people heard of it and traded in stuff for money to then buy flowers to then go and plant in public places in and around the village."

"Gordon Galloway, a computer geek who would go into the bank every two weeks with his paycheck and say, 'I want to cash my paycheck from Denison,' where he was on the faculty, 'and give it to me in two-dollar bills.' And the reason he wanted two-dollar bills is so he could walk around the community being funny handing people and paying for things with two-dollar bills."

"Robbins Hunter became known because he was right next to the library in what used to be the Phi Gam house (now the Robbins Hunter Museum) and had an antique operation there. And somehow was selling to all these fancy movie stars in Hollywood, which made locals wonder, 'What were those

connections?”

“Eric Jones might stand out. Best bank leader and lender, distinguished citizen, and where is he today at age 75? He has turned into a sixties-style hippy, up on a mountaintop north of Phoenix, and he rides a motorcycle.”

“Sally Jones Sexton. Obviously she’s been the subject of gatherings of this enterprise. And, what a story. A pretty wacky, amazing character. I remember her from our life in and around Granville and the (Granville) Inn and isn’t it interesting that she was voted among the top 100 horsemen, so to speak, of the last century. She rode like a champion because she was. And she’s part of the story here.”

“Eurie Lothridge, unusual because she was so well-educated. She fixed barbed wire in various places (and later assembled a collection of various types of barbed wire that she donated to the Granville Historical Society) and she loved beer cans and buttons, and if you think about some decades ago — five, six, seven decades ago — people didn’t know about Heineken and Amstel or any of these beers from foreign places. She’d go abroad to buy and bring back the cans in order to show off part of her collection.”

“Fred Palmer (a local Realtor) had Post Office Box number one —a big deal to him. He liked to tell people about it. And he asserted his getting an honorary degree from Granville High School after earning his normal high school degree.”

“Buck Sargent might take the cake. Buck called spouses ‘battle axes,’” despite being a village councilman and acting village manager for a time.

ABOUT FOSTER WYANT

Regarding the criteria for his grandfather’s inclusion as a Granville “character,” Wyant had plenty of ammunition.

Foster Wyant lived a centennial of his own, passing away in 1994 just 12 days short of his 100th birthday, four days before his wife, Ida Blanche Wyant, died. They were married on May 29, 1921, and immediately bought the house at 418 E. Broadway, living their entire married lives there.

Foster, a 1913 Newark High School graduate, Jack Wyant said, worked while attending school.

“At age eight he was picking elderberries and was selling them for five cents a quart,” his grandson related, suggesting to anyone present under the age

FOSTER WYANT’S FAVORITE ‘QUIPS’

- **His view of attorneys:** “Are just like whiskey, some are better than others.”
- **After 73 years of marriage:** “Not nearly long enough.”
- **On automobiles:** “Keep your gas tank full, cars drive better on full than empty.”
- **On politics:** “We need both parties to avoid dictatorship.”
- **On Republicans:** “If they don’t like social security, why don’t they send their checks back?”
- **On longevity:** “You rust before you wear out.”
- **On morning:** “Honey vaccinates me with a phonograph needle every morning.”

--From Jack Wyant’s July 2 program

of 15 that they use Foster as a role model. “He sold newspapers. And at age 16 he delivered groceries, got up in the morning and hitched up the horses in the barn, went to the store — White Brothers grocery — got the orders, put them in the wagon, distributed them around town to customers, went back and still walked a mile and a fourth to school and arrived by eight o’clock and was never late — well, according to him.”

While in college at Wittenberg University he was a conductor on a streetcar in Springfield, was an officer in the U.S. Army, and was employed at Rutledge Bros. men’s clothing store in Newark. After retiring in 1960 he was construction superintendent for the Granville Ohio 16 bypass during the 1960s and then became bailiff for the Licking County Common Pleas Court, before “retiring, sort of,” as Jack Wyant put it,

Personality traits that made him a character, Jack Wyant stated, were his “frequently repeated quips and sayings.”

“Every time you ran into him, and you’d say, ‘Hey Foster, how are you?’” Jack Wyant recalled, “he’d say, ‘Well, I’m sober!’ I think the truth is he drank pretty heavily off and on until age 50 and boom, stopped, and for the next 50 didn’t have a drop.”

“He would also say, ‘Seldom have a bad day,’ the moment he’s asked.”

Foster frequently would tell someone he’d just met that “they had gone to different schools together,” the grandson said. “When toasts would occur around a dinner table — a special occasion — he’d be the one who would utter this toast: ‘May

your wife and sweethearts never meet.”

Foster often would puzzle the waiter when he would order a “Pine Float,” which was a toothpick in a glass of water, Jack Wyant said, drawing laughter. “And as to the alcohol that he stopped drinking, he made the point that it’s just made to sell, not to drink.”

Regarding attorneys, with whom he had considerable contact during his time as bailiff, he said, “Some are just like whiskey, some are better than others.” Responding to an NPR reporter who asked him in an interview, “How do you feel about being married for 73 years?”, Foster’s reply was that “It wasn’t quite long enough.”

Jack said that when family members pushed Foster to reveal what he believed were the secrets to success, he frequently said (of Granville), “It’s living in what he called the Village of Knowledge, which had the purest air in the universe.”

“And you know this to be true,” Jack Wyant said. “And exploring Granville history tells you that there used to be a lot of industrial activity and it all went away when railroads and highways went past other villages and towns.”

“Of course,” Jack continued, “he said, ‘Take pride in all you do, but, beyond that, take pride in everything with which you are associated, do your homework. And you gotta keep your heart beating.’”

Charles A. Peterson is the editor of “The Historical Times.”

A Granville crossword puzzle

THEN AND NOW

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18					19				
20					21							22		
		23		24				25			26			
27	28					29			30					
31				32			33	34		35		36	37	38
39			40		41				42		43			
44				45		46				47		48		
			49		50			51			52			
53	54	55				56			57					
58				59			60	61			62		63	64
65			66								67			
68						69					70			
71						72					73			

ACROSS

- Felix the Cat, e.g.
- Marcel Marceau at times
- al-___ W. Bank territory
- Words in Mr. Bill’s lexicon
- Weinberg or ant
- Old Colony’s #811 or young archaeologist White
- McFarland Law Office will file one for you
- At least John Jones’ gem wasn’t renamed this
- Sugar ___ Hill
- It preceded Polaris
- Uncle, in some classrooms
- Famous pueblo in New Mexico
- Put that way
- What Art Garfunkel has in the rain
- Canning items at Ross Granville Market
- Holophane VP
- Oops, to Ovid
- Thicket
- Made nat Taco Dan’s
- You can ___ Wildwood Park’s picnic tables
- Pelatonia is one
- On the menu at Victoria’s Parlour
- Internet pioneer
- Ornamental vase at McPeek’s
- Big month on Granger Street
- What a place without a lofty nest has
- Three Tigers’ parent
- The ___ MVP is often

- quarterback
- Tyler Perry’s TV channel
- Certified rating
- ___ Pub & Deli, before Brews
- High rollers to our north
- Canopy in Hawaii
- What they do at the Michael D. Eisner Center
- Like the Buxton Inn’s ghosts
- Ger. Maidens
- Granville’s finest do this to speeders
- It flows through Hamburg
- Athiests’ equivalent of a messiah

- Hooch at Hashi
- A smelter’s inventory
- Who to ask about the Ohio 37 bridge
- Angus Young’s band
- Bob ___ of the Grateful Dead
- Most hair at Kendal
- CMH touchdown, hopefully
- Pokeman character
- Broadway Pub does this
- Tom & Katie’s daughter
- The sea eagle
- Designated info. recipient
- Why a one-eyed man is king
- What a brother does to annoy his sister
- Clumsy one
- Not the speedo
- Boss at Day y Noche
- Used a Kabota from Fackler’s
- Do something special
- Park Shai might sell you one
- Could be employed
- A real chuckle, for texters
- Arbiter of US labor laws
- Singer ___ Fitzgerald
- ___ Creamcheese, Zappa groupie
- Sault ___ Marie

This Granville crossword puzzle was created by Peter Gilbertson, of Granville.

Crossword answers

A	V	S	E		E	B	T		R	E	T	E		D
S	T	R	F		E	R	O		E	T	O	M		E
U	T	U	E		S	T	T		H	H	S	T		M
S	E	O	F		E	N	A		T	C	O	N		M
		S	T		F				A	H	C	I		A
E	I	R	E		A	O	N		T	C	O			
N	R	U			O	H	A			E	P	E	R	C
R	U	O	T		N	O	T		A	E	S	N	I	D
E	S	F	O		C	M	R		R	R	E	O	E	C
			D		I	L	U		R	T	E	M		Z
A	V	S	O		T	O	S		S	O	A	T		
O	I	T			N	O	T		S	A	E	F	A	O
N	N	I	N		O	S	I		N	E	D	N	E	I
N	A	H	T		E	M	A		D	A	O	N	H	O
A	H	M	A		D	M	I		S	M	N	O	E	T

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The Granville Historical Society is an all-volunteer, non-governmental not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization with membership open to all. Joining the Society is a delightful way to meet people who share a love of and interest in Granville's rich, well-documented history. Monthly programs, quarterly publications, and a museum that is open five days a week during the season are some of the ways that enable Society volunteers to share facets of what makes Granville so fascinating with members and guests. Volunteers are welcome in the Archives and Museum Collections areas, as well as museum hosts.

Please visit Granvillehistory.org for further information about all that we do and how you can get involved.

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