

Olney Memories # 163

May 6, 2025

Welcome to Spring dear friends. I see and hear the Olney area and those around are being more than blessed with ton's of rain and I sincerely hope everyone is ok. I have talked to friends and have seen pictures on FaceBook of all the water and I can't imagine where all of it is going to go, but I somehow know it will manage to go somewhere....away from where it should not be!

Please REMEMBER to send me your new email address if you have switched providers.

Now we are going to switch subjects for a few pictures in this issue and focus some on the Band and Chorus Students that were under the Direction of Gus and Mary Silva. What a team they made in the musical world in ERHS teaching careers and in Olney too, for their musical performances ratings in high standing ! So many pictures, I need somebody to organize them, but I don't even know if they could. I gave up years ago! But rest assured I got em!! J Look hard at these and I'm sure you will see a lot of people you will recognize....

The pictures below are from the Sliva Salute if you will remember that was held quite a few years ago now, and yet not so far in some ways. As you look at these you hopefully you will see maybe yourself and or friends of yours that were in the band or chorus. I wish I could say exactly the year the Salute was held but I will say 1989?? Now that will give us all something to talk about for sure....what WAS the exact year this wonderful event was held and what memories do you have yourselves to send in about this special weekend that was special to you. It doesn't matter what the memory is, just send it in.....it's fun to reminisce.















Ann Weesner King
Class of 1960
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John Helm
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My very first car was a 1948 Cadillac Series 62 4-door sedan - I was 17 years old and riding my bicycle past Eagleson Olds-Cadillac when I noticed a car sitting at the very back of the used car lot. I got curious and rode over to look at it. You will see it at the end of my note to you. It was dark grey - the pigment had gone out of the paint. One of the salesmen - I think it was one of the Eaglesons had seen me and came out. I asked what he knew about the car - he said it was just an old Cadillac, with 80,000 miles on it. In those days that was a LOT of miles on a car. I asked him if I could drive it - he asked if I had my drivers' license with me. I did, so he put a dealer license plate on it and I drove it a few blocks. It had an automatic transmission on it - I noticed it didn't shift just right. No power steering either. I brought it back to the dealership and asked the price on it -\$375. I bought it, asking that they take a look at the transmission. It wasn't shifting right because there was no transmission fluid - in order to put fluid in it I had to roll back the carpet from the inside of the car - there was a tiny little dipstick on top of the transmission and I was told I would have to routinely check the tranny to make sure it had transmission fluid in it. To actually fix it would have meant putting a new rubber seal between the engine and the transmission, an expensive venture. Every Saturday morning I would roll back the carpet - the stick showed it needed tranny fluid in it. Eventually I put so much fluid in

it that the rubber seal became flexible and I didn't have to have that fixed! I weighed 110 pounds soaking wet and it was a real chore to parallel park the car. I had had the car delivered to me by putting it in the parking lot at the high school - I wanted to give my steady girlfriend Helen Shultz a ride home in it. My steady girlfriend Helen became my wife - I had first seen her when I was 13 and she was 12 - I never looked at another girl, EVER. We were married when we were in our 20's. She died just 5 months short of our 50th wedding anniversary. I have an enlarged photo of her from the Olnean yearbook - I talk to her every day.

Here's a photo of my dear old Cadillac –



.....Ann here,..... I'm sitting here in my computer chair just thinking what a soft, smooth, cool ,ride your 1938 Cadallac had back in the day! Wow! It sure was a beauty! You sure got a catch, the car AND your girl!!

JEH

Class of '58

Nancy Bowles

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Thanks, Ann. Always fun to see Olney memories, especially May Day pics!

Nancy Dycus Bowles

.....Nancy, I said in the last issue that was the last of the May Day Pictures, but Look Out, We have some more that were sent in by Larry Judge!! J So many plus you seem to really be enjoying these fun May Day pictures !!

Nancy Bowles, M. Ed.
Class of '69

Wayne Smith
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Oh, Mrs. Griffen, Senior English! Mr. Milspaugh! Mr. Petty.

Ann, I just remembered that Mr. DeBarr developed brain cancer in our Senior year. Genie Weber and I were co-editors of the Tiger Rag, and we would go to his house to get approval/edits, etc. before going to print. We went until he could no longer manage. So sad, and he was young and had young children....

“Albert J. "Bert" DeBarr, 43, Chemistry Instructor at the East Richland High School and combat veteran of World War II, died Sunday morning, February 27, 1966 at the Richland Memorial Hospital. He and his wife, Joanne had made their home at 519 North Washington Street for the past ten years. Bert moved to Olney approximately 18 years ago.

He was born in East Moline, Illinois August 30, 1922, son of Emil and Alice De Doncker DeBarr.

Bert served overseas with the U.S. Army's 29th Cavalry during the Normandy invasion and other European combat areas, earning four bronze combat stars. He was a member of the Methodist Church.

Mr. DeBarr was for a number of years news director for Radio Station WVLN in Olney, and until this season he was the station's play-by-play sportscaster for about five years.”

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/44704736/albert-debarr>

Wayne Smith, Ph.D.
Class of 1961

..... Thank you Wayne, for bringing Mr. DeBarr's History to our attention. I remember him well, and I'm not sure if it was from school or the radio station or both, but he was a solid figure in my mind. And He definitely served out country well and he deserves our recognition. He went the extra mile letting your and Genie go to his house for the effort of the Tiger Rag! Another way this showed what kind of man he was doesn't it! Ann

Tom Signley

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Can a Small Town's Protections for Albino Squirrels Inspire Other Cities to Guard Wildlife Against Cats?



Olney, Illinois, has taken steps to protect an iconic mammal from domesticated felines, setting a possible model for other places to follow

Michelle Mastro

February 18, 2025

An albino squirrel peeks out from within a tree. Courtesy of City of Olney, Illinois

Early one morning, licensed wildlife rehabilitator Belinda Henton was making her rounds in the annual albino squirrel count in Olney, Illinois, a small Midwest town known regionally as “the home of the white squirrels.” A few minutes into her stroll, Henton spotted her first albino squirrel of the day, an adolescent with conspicuous pink eyes and a bushy snow-white tail. It was playing in some tall grass or foraging for food, as squirrels do.

But unbeknownst to the critter, a large predator lurked nearby. It wasn't a hawk, owl, coyote or other wild animal, but a domesticated cat, crouching behind a tree like a hunter ready to strike. Seeing the young squirrel in danger, Henton did as any citizen of Olney would do, quickly intervening to shoo the cat away. The feline ran off, and the squirrel escaped.

Yet the decline in white squirrel numbers in Olney is bigger than one loose feline. Free-roaming cats—domesticated cats that aren't confined to a house—are the squirrels' true No. 1 predator.

The cats are such a problem that the city passed an ordinance in 2002 decreeing that the felines could no longer run freely. That cats target small native species, like squirrels, and put a significant dent in their numbers is well known. A 2013 study, for example, found that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.3 billion to 4 billion birds and 6.3 billion to 22.3 billion mammals annually.

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What makes Olney a special case is the residents' attitudes toward free-roaming cats. Many cat owners are notoriously attached to the idea that their pets must roam freely. A recent study showed that in the United Kingdom, while most cat owners articulate discomfort about their cats' hunting prowess, they still feel they have no right to keep them indoors—but Olney residents say no. And they are going above and beyond to curtail the number of killings committed by cats.

If other towns adopt their approaches, it could save small animals of all kinds—including the millions of birds lost every year to cats, along with those rare and precious white squirrels.

Olney's white squirrels are an albino variant of the eastern gray squirrel, and while the eastern gray isn't in immediate danger of extinction, these creatures' albinism makes them very rare indeed; colonies of white subspecies are hard to find, and only a few cities like Kenton, Tennessee, and Brevard, North Carolina, boast them. And being albino leaves the animals at an incredible disadvantage. Albinism—a recessive trait that both parents must carry to guarantee their offspring have the gene—usually comes with an inherent evolutionary handicap, as the lack of pigment in their eyes increases glare from the sun, temporarily blinding the animals. Seeing and avoiding predators like cats becomes difficult. For those reasons, the squirrels are less likely to survive into adulthood to breed, and thus less likely to spread their genes.

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An upside of being rare is that the squirrels have become a major tourist attraction for the city. Images of the white squirrels are plastered on the city's signage and municipal buildings, and represented in souvenirs at local gift shops eager to spotlight the town's favorite resident. To keep track of the albino squirrels, the city spends three days in October counting them, with volunteers like Henton scanning tree branches, wandering through parks and peering under bushes in search of the critters.



White squirrels are featured on signs and murals around Olney. [Courtesy of City of Olney, Illinois.](#)

Since 1997, the counts have concluded that the albino eastern gray squirrels of Olney have been slowly disappearing, says Henton. "If early reports from 1941 are to be

believed, there had once been 800 albino squirrels,” Henton says. “Recent years suggest we have more like 80 or so left.”

John Stencel, now 88 years old, a retired biologist who taught at Olney Central College, the originator of the squirrel count in 1977, is one of the few researchers seriously studying the area’s albino squirrels. “Cats are predators of the albino squirrels,” he says. If something isn’t done to help the squirrels, Stencel reasons, their local extinction—meaning they no longer exist in a certain area—could happen as early as 2034.

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To even the squirrels’ odds of survival, the city passed other ordinances to go with the one that makes it illegal for cats to run at large. Another ordinance gives squirrels the right of way on all public streets, sidewalks and thoroughfares in Olney, and implements a \$750 fine for harassing one. “We only enforce the ordinance if it is a deliberate car strike,” Henton says, “or when people are purposefully hurting the animals.”

These efforts could explain this past year’s albino squirrel count’s slight increase from years prior. On average, the 2024 count included 1,007 gray squirrels counted, and 81 albino white squirrels counted—an increase from the previous year’s 73 albinos. “Based on gathered numbers, the gray to albino ratio in 2023 was 11.75 to 1 compared to the gray to albino ratio in 2024 of 12.43 to 1,” says Kelsie Sterchi, Olney’s city clerk, who organized the 2024 squirrel count. Though the increase is small, it is a push in the right direction.

To complete this year’s count, squirrel lovers came from Missouri, Indiana, Iowa and all over Illinois. Henton isn’t surprised by the interest in squirrels and says in recent years people came from as far away as New York. “There was a Squirrel Lovers Club in Chicago that would come down and count every year,” Henton recalls. She says that one member “moved here a few years ago just to be closer to the squirrels.”

The number of people caring about the plight of squirrels, regardless of their hue, may be at an all-time high. The euthanasia of an Instagram-famous pet squirrel by New York wildlife officials even became a campaign talking point days before the 2024 U.S. presidential election—and a running gag on social media.

The white squirrels have certainly captured the hearts and minds of Olney residents. “They’re not like other small mammals coming into yards. People like to watch their antics and feed them,” Henton says. “Last year, the [city of] Olney gave away 200 bushels of corn to anyone who wanted to come and get them to feed the local squirrels. Everyone was jockeying for a place in line, you’d swear the carnival had come to town.”

Your readers might get a kick out of this article.

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/can-a-small-towns-protections-for-albino-squirrels-inspire-other-cities-to-guard-wildlife-against-cats-180986007/?utm_source=smithsonianmag&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=editorial&lctg=93488547

Tom Singley

Class of '61

Marilyn Treece

witchmarilyn@yahoo.com

I also had Mrs. Godfrey for kindergarten.

Marilyn Treece

David Schnautz

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Good morning. Larry Judge already said they ended the May Day Parade in 1977. This was the last year I went to Olney schools. I remember their being a parade for every year I attended Central. Walking all through town and seeing people come out on their porches on the back streets and then shutting the main streets down to have the parade. What a big deal it was. Looking back I guess Central was the only school to have to worry about the railroad tracks. I am sure they didn't shut the trains down. We just had to be careful and use our common sense.

My teachers at Central School starting in maybe 1970... Mrs. Godfrey, kindergarten, (a large intimidating lady, (especially to a kindergarten boy). 1st Mrs. Hatch, 2nd Mrs. Hatch, 3rd Mrs. Jones (I think from Newton), 4th Mrs. Whitaker (my favorite), 5th Mrs. Stanley, 6th Mrs. Czemski, (a very different lady type teacher) and Mr. Wendling as Principal. Lots of memories climbing up those huge stairs, both inside and out.

.....This is Mom Ann,.....My other son Danny Schnautz , had Mrs. Brock for 2nd grade at Central School and also Pam Fietz for 3 Grade I believe.

David P. Schnautz

Class of '82 (if we had not moved to Texas)

Dan Kinman

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I'm totally impressed by people who remember all their teachers. Wow

Dan Kinman

Class of 1970

Roy Doolin

roydoolin@hotmail.com

In Olney Memories #161 Feb, 8, the first May Day Parade picture is from my 5th grade class. The man is MR. Holt. I also recognize Cheryl Craig in front with the black skirt and white purse and Mary Sure Lawley further back with a black blouse and an umbrella. Mr. Holt was my first man teacher and my favorite elementary school teacher. I often thought of him when I was a Speech Therapist in schools. That must have been about 1956. I enjoy Olney Memories. It was create growing up in Olney in the 50's and 60's.

Roy Ed Doolin

Class of 1964

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