

## Borden's Elsie the Cow at the 1951 Van Wert County Fair

Elsie, the Borden cow, was one of the greatest advertising icons of the 1940s. She was promoted all over the nation and first gained international attention at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. During extensive WWII promotional trips around the United States, Elsie sold \$10,000,000 worth of war bonds. This wartime exposure resulted in her becoming a beloved symbol of healthy milk, cheese and dairy products. Elsie, always a tan-colored Jersey cow, stood as a symbol of everything that was right with American dairy farming.

On Wednesday, September 5, 1951, Elsie was rushed for a one day appearance at the Van Wert County Fair from her engagement at the Michigan State Fair. Her first stop was at the Borden Cheese Plant (the area of the current CVS Pharmacy store in Van Wert) where ceremonies started her procession over to the Fairgrounds.

All 400 Borden employees greeted Elsie in front of the plant. The Van Wert High School Band was present for the famous cow's arrival. After a welcoming at the plant, Elsie was escorted to the Fair by the Van Wert City Police Department, with Sergeant Leonard Conn at the front and Van Wert County Sheriff F. Roy Shaffer in charge. This was a short parade, but it was big show in Van Wert as the Wren High School Band marched first, the Van Wert High School band second and many local dignitaries wanting to be part of the action trailing in their best vehicles. The talented and pretty Wren Band majorettes strutted to the Fairgrounds, spinning their silver batons while leading the entire procession. Once at the Fair, Van Wert Mayor Martin W. Feigert presented Elsie with a three-foot long golden key to the city. Her Borden representative, George Wilson, Vice-President of the local Borden Plant, accepted the key. The Van Wert Kiwanis Club presented Elsie with a new member apron and crowned the famous bovine as their Kiwanis "Coween" of the Fair. Her crown was a shiny milk pail.

Present at the fair from the Borden Plant were S. J. Young, General Manager; H. E. Lower, Assistant Manager; Marshall Young, Field Development; and Frank Giessler, Director of Public Relations.

Kiwanis Club members in the ceremonies were Frank Giessler; Harry Walter, President; Jack Weaver, Secretary-Treasurer; W. A. Eisenhauer, Director; C. R. Baker, 2nd Vice-President; and Joe Gleason, 1st Vice-President.

Here is Elsie in her boudoir being serenaded by the Wren High School Band on September 5, 1951. Shown in the picture from the left are: Mrs. Corrine Snyder, Band Director; Barbara Weaver, Drum Major; and Majorettes Kay Poling, Marcile Hurless, and Donna Kreisler. Happy flicks of her tail and constant mooing for the Wren Band meant Elsie was happy with their performance.



Elsie was recognized at the state level by the Ohio Publicity and Development Commission who presented her with a large plaque that bore a replica of the Great Seal of the State of Ohio. This recognition was in honor of the contribution of the Borden Company and their famous advertising cow to the advancement of cheese making in Ohio.

Elsie's boudoir was set-up in the old Art Hall with all the normal household comforts. It was estimated 20,000 people pushed through the fair that day to view Elsie. (This Art Hall, circa 1912, was a large brick building and was demolished and a new structure, the present day Commercial Building, was constructed on the original concrete floor in 1979.)

At the end of the day when the fair closed, Elsie returned to the Michigan State Fair where her husband, Elmer the Bull, and her son, Beauregard, anxiously awaited her safe return. They were nearly as famous as Elsie herself.

Van Wert's beloved old Borden Cheese Company no longer exists. Even Borden, Inc. is gone. Ownership of the Borden brand and Elsie herself has passed through several companies. It licenses them to the companies and associations, like the Dairy Farmers of America, who sell these products. Elmer, who was used to represent Borden's chemical division (no longer in existence), lives on as the advertising symbol for Elmer's Glue. Elsie, 70 plus years later, and through at least 29 different Jersey's serving in the position, continues as a powerful advertising symbol. She is featured on Eagle Brand condensed milk and Borden Cheese products.

For Elsie's visit to the fair, Borden's mailed an invitation inviting each of the 28 recorded groceries in the City of Van Wert. It could be assumed the other grocery stores in Van Wert County were included. The invitation offered those who visited Elsie a free picture, a good advertising ploy on Borden's part. Van Wert's own famous photographer, Gordon Todd, handled the photography duties for the Borden Company.

Those 28 grocery stores in the city and the many more located throughout the rest of Van Wert County must have sold a record amount of Borden dairy products after Elsie's visit to Van Wert. Frank Giessler of Borden's, who made the local deliveries to the groceries in the Borden's truck, must have packed in the dairy products until his tires were nearly flat to keep up with the orders.



"Coween" Elsie had done her job very well. Imogene Doner (VWHS '50), who would become Mrs. Richard "Dick" Hughes (VWHS '45) a year later, is shown posing with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harley Doner, alongside the famous Elsie on September 5, 1951. Imogene's mother was the former Anna Passwaters from Willshire.

The Doners were owners and operators of Doner's Cash Grocery at 406 S. Wayne Street in Van Wert. They later sold the grocery to Frank Antus in 1954. The grocery building still stands on Wayne Street at Jennings Road, but not in the same spot. It was moved further back from the road in later years. When the Doners ran it the front door was very close to the street. In recent years it was spruced up and used as a home. Today it is the location of Nicko's Pizza, 404 S. Wayne Street.

Imogene (Doner) Hughes grew-up on South Vine Street at number 416 and she had one other sibling, an older brother named Leroy. However they were 18-1/2 years apart, perhaps making Imogene a little bit of a surprise, but certainly no afterthought if you are acquainted with her. Imogene worked at the family grocery for 12 years as well as the old Balyeat Furniture store and Horace Mann School.

The Hughes have two children with the youngest, Deborah Lynn White (VWHS '75), living in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. Younger son Kevin M. Hughes (VWHS '79) resides in Van Wert. (As of 2007.) Imogene's husband Dick passed away at the end of 2006. He was a Post Office employee for 37 years and had a stint in the military and worked briefly at the old Continental Can Company.

Dick was a man of many talents and for a good number of years was a sports writer for the Van Wert Times Bulletin. His tutelage came under Jerry Agler and Clair Buechner, learning the craft of writing a sports tale from the best. Dick was not an athlete himself, but loved sporting events, especially baseball.

He was a true Chicago Cubs baseball fan, but time ran out on Dick to see a winning tradition for his favorite pro club. While at the Post Office, Dick was never assigned a rural delivery route, so he decided he would deliver something with a country flavor. He did just that by handling a Times Bulletin newspaper rural route for many years.

Dick's father, Howard Hughes, along with Otto Huffine operated Campbell's Hardware in Van Wert. Howard also worked at the old coal yard down on Lynn and Woodland streets. Slow down a little when you next pass there and you will see the old red barn on the north side of Woodland, east of Lynn, a leftover of a long forgotten business.

**Local merchant, Charlie Williman (right, with hat), has his picture taken by local photographer Gordon Todd on September 5, 1951. Elsie, the Bordon cow visited the Van Wert County Fair on September 5. The man on the left is unidentified.**

