



KEEPING TRADITION DOWN THE ROAD

Descendent of Kelly Road namesake doesn't want name changed.

By Gordon Witcynski
Macomb Daily Staff Writer
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Laura Kelly likes having a street named after a family member – and she wants to keep it that way.

(Pictured left – photo by David N. Posavetz, Macomb Daily Staff).

Kelly Road in Eastpointe was named after her great grandfather, John Kelly Jr., a farmer and former Gratiot Township justice of the peace. Laura Kelly is

opposed to a petition drive started by political activist George Lawroski to change the name of Kelly Road to Eastpointe Boulevard.

“I don't know what's wrong with him but Kelly Road is known by everyone and the name shouldn't be changed,” said Kelly. “I don't know of one person who agrees with him.”

Lawroski is the man who five years ago finally convinced East Detroit voters, after two failures at the polls, to change the name of their city of Eastpointe.

Lawroski said a name change would “give more class” to Kelly Road and convince city officials to landscape the boulevard. The city recently applied for a \$100,000 grant which would dramatically improve the appearance of the boulevard by adding trees and shrubs and a sprinkling system.

“I'm against changing the name of Kelly,” said Eastpointe Mayor Harvey Curley. “And if he somehow gets enough people to sign his petitions to get the item on the ballot I will come out and actively campaign against it.”

Curley said Kelly Road has not been ignored by the city council. The city through the grant application through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, is taking steps to improve the aesthetics of the boulevard on the city's east end.

“Changing the name of Kelly is ridiculous,” said Curley. “It also would create a hardship on the people who live there.”

Laura Kelly, a plumber, says John Kelly Jr. was born in 1857 in Hamtramck, the son of an immigrant. His father, John Sr. bought 66 acres of farm land on Pumpkin Hook Road for \$6,250, and the street later was renamed Kelly Road.

Kelly said at first the people of the area wanted the road leading to the Kelly farm named Morang. She said neighbors put up a sign Kelly Road which led to Kelly's farm but it was often knocked down.

According to a historical book, Kelly was known as Pumpkin Hook Road because someone "hooked" Casper Salter's pumpkins. The name was changed by John Kelly Jr.

His farm was opposite the present site of Detroit's Denby High School. He put the sign on his barn and everyone started calling the road Kelly Road, said Laura Kelly.

"It's not just our family name. It's for all the people who have streets named after them," said Laura Kelly. "Change is good but don't erase history."

"You can forget who you are and where you came from."



The Salter Home
Built in about 1870
Picture was taken around 1880. On the front porch, from left to right are Casper, Joseph, Mrs. John Salter (Sophie Geller) holding John, Helena (mother of Andrew Young), Casper, Mary, and John Salter (son of Casper). The house still stands at 15303 Seven Mile Road, Detroit, MI. Picture taken from the book, Assumption Grotto Parish 150 years of Faith, 1832-1982 by Catherine Bicknell, Ph.D., Our Lady Press, Detroit, MI page 66

LETTER WRITTEN BY LAURA KELLY TO THE EDITOR:

Laura Kelly
13 March 1996



Dear Editor,

John Kelly Jr. was born February 12, 1857 in Hamtramck, MI son of immigrant farmers; one of eleven children his father purchased 66 acres of farm land on Pumpkin Hook Road for \$6,250 from Fred Juif of Grosse Pointe Township. His son, John Jr. took over the farm and also served as Justice of the Peace. People seeking his services often got lost on the many dirt roads. John solved the problem by painted KELLY'S ROAD on a piece of wood and nailing it to an oak tree at the intersection of Pumpkin Hook Road and Tailor (Tailor Road is currently Houston-Whittier). When the city incorporated the area the road was officially named Kelly Road.

A glance at plat map, circa. 1875, and headstones in area cemeteries reveals names of earlier settlers lent their names to streets and avenues, i.e. Schoenherr, Gitre, Young. Cadieux. Morang, and of course Kelly.

As the 80+ descendants of “The Captain” John Kelly Jr., we think preserving the history of the community before casting a vote for change.

Very Truly Yours,
The Kelly Family

The Detroit Newspaper: 26 February 1996- By Mark Puls/The Detroit News

George Lawroski has Eastpointe residents playing the name-game again, which in the past meant that not even city hall signs were safe.

Five years ago, Lawroski successfully crusaded to have the city’s name changed to Eastpointe from East Detroit. Now, he’s campaigning to change the name of Kelly Road to Eastpointe Boulevard, arguing that any city of distinction needs a showcase boulevard that bears its name.

Lawroski plans to ask the city council Tuesday to place the issue on November’s ballot.

His cause seems to have won some support. Some council members say they are willing to let residents decide on the name, and a local paper ran a poll that found residents support the idea by a 3-1 margin.

Some council members are willing to put the issue on the ballot, but won’t likely vote for change on their own. The council has the power to change any street name.

“I would support it,” said councilman Frank Akavitti Jr. “The city does need to improve the perceptions of Kelly for retail. But the residents should decide.”

Council member Flo Abke doubts that a name change will boost businesses along the street the way the city name change boosted real estates values.

Others wonder whether the crusade is change for change’s sake.

“He’s at it again,” said Eleanor Jurkiewica, who knows not to underestimate Lawroski. She said it would be a hassle to change her Kelly Road address.

Business owner Nancy Riopelle of Castaway Treasures said the name change would be costly in new advertising.

Imagine the confusion for students at Kelly Middle School. The school is part of the East Detroit School System - - named after a city that no longer exists - - and the school is named after a road that may soon no longer pass through Eastpointe.

“It’s funny,” said Assistant Principal Frank Valenti. “But it won’t make a difference.”

(As of 2004 the name of Kelly Road still remains).....

**See Story: Preserve Name of Kelly Road*

SOURCE:

**Assumption Grotto Parish 150 years of Faith, 1832-1882
by Catherine Bicknell, Ph.D., Our Lady Press, Detroit, MI**

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HAMTRAMCK TOWNSHIP:

The Church of the Assumption was first located in Hamtramck Township¹⁶, a division of land created after the War of 1812 and named for Colonel John F. Hamtramck, of Quebec. He had joined the American army during the Revolutionary War and in February, 1793, served under Anthony Wayne in the Northwest. As Commander of Detroit during the American occupation, he won the affection and respect of the city. When he died in 1803, he was buried in St. Anne's churchyard.

¹⁶The area became part of Grosse Pointe Township in the late 1840's, and of Gratiot Township in 1909.

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GREINER:

John and Catherine Greiner moved to Detroit from Alsace-Lorraine, in 1831. John was a schoolteacher and later became a farmer. They brought with them their four children: John Paul, Nicholas, Andrew, and Michael. Six more children were born to them in this country: Joseph, Catherine, George, Charles, Peter Paul, and Caroline. The Greiners lived in a large frame farmhouse across Gratiot from the Church of the Assumption. The family became prominent and gave their name to the area, the post office being alternatively known as Conner's Creek and Greiner, Michigan¹⁸. The post office was Michael's and was part of the brick house and store which he built south of his parents' house on Gratiot. Nicholas preceded Michael as postmaster and his house was north of Michael's facing Seven Mile Road.

When Father Vandendriessche was appointed pastor, Nicholas Greiner invited him to live at this house until he could build a rectory. Michael was married to Catherine Pulcher and their children were Mary, Edward, Caroline, Josephine, Rose, Grace, James, Emma, and Martin Cestine. Mary became the wife of David Trombly. Emma married Herman Mayer and, after her death, he married her sister, Rose. **Joseph Greiner, the brother of Michael and Nicholas, lived on a farm on Seven Mile and Pumpkin Hook.**

¹⁸A post office for the area was established in 1855 and designated "Conner's Creek." From 1893 until 1899, the name changed to Greiner. It was known as Conner's Creek again until 1907.

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LANG:

Joseph John Lang was born in 1780 in Prussia. He was one of the first settlers on the Hessian Road. His son, **Joseph John**, helped build the Church of the Assumption and Joseph John's son, **Philip**, later hauled stones for the Grotto. **Philip** had several sons. **Arnold** and his wife, **Florence**, live today in East Detroit. **Norman's** widow, **Evelyn**, lives nearby. The widow of **Ervin, Isabell Kelly Lang**²⁰, lives in Fraser, MI and **Clarence's** widow, **Bernadette Hoefler Lang**, lives in Grotto parish.

²⁰**Kelly Road was named after her father, John Kelly.**

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Carved into the cornerstone on the left, dated A.D. May 29, 1881, are the words: "Upon This Rock I Will Build My Church, Pope Pius IX, R.I.P. and Pope Leo XIII, Presented By This Congregation." The cornerstone on the right reads: "Most Rev. John Carroll, Died 1815, Rt. Revb. P.P. Lefevre, Died March 4, 1869. Donated By Rev. Amandus Vandendriessche." Inside the Grotto, the four rows of stones rising from the floor are inscribed with dedications. The letters carved on some have become illegible over time, but the ones that remain are a treasure of parish history. They read as follows:

In Memory of the LII Year of the Marriage of Philip Wiegand & Anna Mandel

In Memory of Bruno Van Damme, Wife and Family

In Memory of Rev. Father A.F. Bleyenbergh, Pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Detroit, 17 years, died 1885.

Given by Wendelin Baumgartner & Wife Fr. Anselm

Given by Charles Maddelein & W. Rosalia Velyn
 Donated by Henry Brinkers and Wife Cath. Koch
 Donated by the Boys of the Cath. School of the Assumption
 In Memory of Peter Ja. Viaene, July 12, 1865 & W. R. Vandendriessche by Miss Mary Viaene
 Patrick Lappin & Wife Mary....³⁰
 Donated by John Brinkmann & Wife E. Dreisbach
 In Memory of Anthony Schaid by his Wife Anna Reuter
 In Memory of Francis Weber by his Wife e. Reichenbach
 In Memory of Rev. Gustave Limpens
 In Memory of Eva Hauck by Wendelin Sprenger
 Given by Hugh McCarran
 Donated by Casper Salter
 Given by Michael Schoenherr and W.M.A. Young
 Given by Philip Kerwin & Edward Chapoton
 In Memory of Joseph Gerardy
 ...celebrated his Golden Jubilee 1882, George Godez, Died January 1883, R.I.P.
 In Memory of Rev. M.E.E. Shawe, and English Noble and Soldier, Ordained in France was Pastor of the
 Cathedral of St. Peter & Paul, Detroit, was fatally injured in coming to the consecration of the Assumption
 Church, died May 10, 1853, R.I.P. Donated by Mrs. Frances Elliott.
 Given by Gerard Keiles & W.J. Viet
 Given by Anthony Baumgartner & W.T. Zuger
 Donated by Rev. Theophilus Buyse
 To the...Very Rev. Gabriel Richard, Elected to Congress in 1825, died September 15, 1832 a Victim of his
 Heroic Charity in the Cholera '32, Donated by Hon. Wm. G. Thomson, Alex Chapoton, T.P. Hall, W.Y.
 Hamlin, Mrs. E. V. Watson, George H. Hammond, Daniel Scotten, John Moran, James Edson, Celimene,
 Beloved Wife of F.F. Palms, R.I.P.
 Given by John March
 Donated...Rev. L. Sifferath
 Given by Blasius Zuger & W.J. Elspas
 Donated by Rev. G. Tileck
 Silver Jubilee November 5, 1882, of Very Rev. Ed Joos as Director of the Sisters Servants of the I.H.M.
 In Memory of Michael Kratz by his W. E. Arnauld
 Donated by Rev. J. Francis Broegger
 In Memory of Her. O'Leary & W.M. O'Sullivan by Florence O'Leary
 Donated by Rev. Camillus P. Maes, Sec.
 ...Winkelmeier
 ...Waterschoot
 Donated by John Salter
 Donated by...Wife Marg. Girard
 Donated by Anth'y Reichenbach & W. Odenbier, Records their S. Jubilee October 29, 1882.
 Given by Francis Ternes and W. Helen Brinkers
 In Memory of Louis Diegel by his Wife E. Reichenbach
 In Commemoration of my First Mass Celebrated April 9, 1882, Rev. D. C. Coyle.
 In Memory of my Prematurely Departed Parents Louis Compeyn, Renilde Constance De Donder, Donated
 by Mary Elodia C. Compeyn.
 Donated by Henry Diegel & Wife Mag. Schoenherr
 Donated by Anthony Phent & Wife Mar Brinkers
 Donated by Thomas Corby & Wife Anna Lappin
 Donated by John Corby & Wife A. Trombly
 Donated by the Girls of the Catholic School of the Assumption
Given by John Kelly & Wife....Collins
 ...Corby...Wife Mary Foley

Word of the new shrine soon spread and people began to make pilgrimages. Crutches were left behind as a testimony to the power of prayer.

³⁰Dots (...) indicate that the rest of the inscription is undecipherable.

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THE APPROACHING STORM

In their desire to complete the Grotto, Father Van and his parishioners neglected the problem of replacing the old frame schoolhouse. In August, 1883, a committee wrote a letter of complaint to the Bishop, enclosing copies of a petition and letter which they had presented to Father Van. In the letter, they had said: "Rev. Father, we assure you that all we do is for the welfare of the school and church, namely to avoid the storm, which is rapidly approaching." The following resolutions were put forth in the petition:

Whereas on the 15th day of July, our priest published in church that if the people of the parish wanted Sisters to teach school, he would give them two weeks time to see how they can support them, if they did not make any provisions within the time specified, he would have to make his own arrangements.

Therefore since the Bishop's rules compel all Catholic children to attend a Catholic school, to which rules we humbly submit.

We are satisfied that our school has not been properly conducted for years, by a teacher, which we were compelled to have, against the will of the majority of the people, and which is not able to conduct our school in a proper manner, therefore, be it resolved.

First: To have a change in teachers, Sister, or a qualified male teacher, with an assistant if necessary.

Second: We are willing to build a schoolhouse, and support a good school if properly managed.

The parishioners complained that a young woman was unable to control so many students, and that the old schoolhouse was too small. School enrollment was close to one hundred, all under the care of Mary Compeyn³³, who had come back from Belgium with Father Van in 1876.

Finally, the writers accused their priest of "bad management of the financial part of the Parish," The letter to the Bishop was signed by Anthony Diegel, John Schoenherr, Joseph Pulcher, George Jahn, Jerome Trombley, Anthony Baumgartner, and Nicholas Young. For confirmation of their complaints, they referred the Bishop to nine priests, including Father Van's brother, Rev. Charles Dirscoll, of Cincinnati, and two priests who had been raised in the parish, Fathers F. Pulcher and Fridolin Baumgartner. The letter to Father Van was signed by sixty-one parishioners, including members of founding families and prosperous landowners, such as Michael Greiner, Anthony Pfent, Dagobert Juif, David Trombly, George Morang, and **John Kelly**.

³³She had dedicated a Grotto stone to her deceased parents in 1881, from which it may be presumed that she was an orphan and Father Van had taken charge of her.

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EIGHT MILE HOUSE: Detroit, Michigan

Mary and Joseph Wirtz bought the building and land on the southwest corner of Seven Mile and Gratiot from Dagobert Juif, in 1866. The tavern was built sometime between 1875 and 1880. The Wirtzes later sold it to Pete Girard, and it became known as Girard's Eight Mile House.³⁶ The cross street at Gratiot, called Girard, was later changed to Seven Mile Road. The "mile roads" were measured by their distance from City Hall to their intersections on Woodward. The place where Seven Mile crossed Gratiot was actually eight miles from City Hall; hence the name of the tavern. For a number of years, the Eight Mile House alternated with Michael Greiner's general store as the site of the Conner's Creek post office.

The Eight Mile House was always busy. Besides offering food, drink, and relaxation to travelers, it was a place of refreshment for hunters in the fall and horsedrawn sleighriders in the winter. In the summer, the hotel made a picnic grounds and food available for picnickers.

Between the church and the Eight Mile House were Joe Greiner's and Dagobert Juif's farms. The Juifs' gristmill was on the north side of Gratiot, east of Seven Mile Road. Across Seven Mile from the Eight Mile House was Charley Girard's house, then the district school, and then the Maddeleins' farm. Across Gratiot from the Eight Mile House was Anthony Pfent's house, Pfents' blacksmith shop, and Joe Schmitz's house. The Pfents had also bought the old B.F. Gardner Hotel, at the site of the present Kresge's, and converted it into a hardware store. Anthony Pfent had four sons, Joe, George, Anthony Jr., and Ed. His head blacksmith for a time was August Fruehauf, who later moved up Gratiot closer to Detroit and began his trailer business. Beyond Pfent's hardware store was **George Kelly's** cider mill. He and his wife **Mary Juif**, lived in a white frame house on the site where Montgomery Ward's Department Store now stands.³⁷

The oldest residence still in existence dating from this period is the old Salter House, located today at 15303 Seven Mile Road, near Morang. John Salter and his wife, Sophie Geller Salter, built the house sometime before 1880. Andrew and John Young's mother, Helen A. Salter, was born there, and generations of the Young family were subsequently raised in it.

Paul Schoenherr opened Schoenherr Road from Girard (Seven Mile) to Pig Tail Alley, or State Fair. **What is now Kelly Road was first known as Pumpkin Hook after someone "hooked" Casper Salter's pumpkins. The Terneses, Grants, Diegels, Buckleys, Salters, and Kellys all lived there. The name was changed to Kelly Road by John Kelly, a Gratiot Township justice of the peace, who lived opposite the present site of Denby High School. He placed a sign on his barn which said "Kelly Road" and the name took hold.**

Greiner, or the Grotto Road, began at the junction of the Townline Road (now Hoover). The community there was known as "Smock Town" because the men – the Ackleys, Trombleys, Kettles, Metters, Schroeders, and Gietzens- all wore blue jackets when they farmed.³⁸

³⁶Spilos, Steve, "Land of the Forward Look," *Chrysler Magazine*, September 1955.

³⁷Spilos, Steve, "Anthony Pfent's Blacksmith Shop," *Northeast Detroit*, October 1947.

³⁸Spilos, Steve, "Pranksters were Busy in Early Northeast Detroit," *Northeast Detroit*, November 1957.

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FATHER RONAYNE:

On December 1, 1899, Father James Ronayne became pastor of Assumption Grotto Church. Born on January 28, 1851, in Elgin, Ontario, he was educated for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary, Cincinnati, and St. Francis Seminary, Milwaukee, and ordained February 10, 1881. His first assignments were at St. John's, where he was stationed a year, and Hubbardston, where he remained for three years. Before being transferred to Assumption Grotto, he served as pastor for fifteen years at Stoney Creek.

Father Ronayne's pastorate was the last during which the Grotto was a country parish with a sizable group of German-speaking parishioners. Life was still slow in those days before the widespread use of the automobile. Parishioners who were children during the first decade of the century remember the priest making home calls on his bicycle, carrying the sacraments to people who could not come to church and visiting the sick. He would ride down Gratiot and all the way back to **Pumpkin Hook**, both of which were dirt roads.

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FIRST CHURCH BURNS DOWN:

The best remembered event during the pastorate of Father Ronayne was when Father Van's old church burned, in 1907. On New Year's Day, during 10 o'clock Mass, a fire started smoldering in the attic. The church had no basement, and the large furnace stood on the ground floor near the front of the church, on the right. It was bitter cold that day and the furnace was working on both new burners. Sparks must have escaped into the attic. Pete Dedenbach, the caretaker, said later that he felt responsible because there was a large crack in the chimney which he hadn't gotten around to fixing.¹³

The church was made of brick, but the interior of the square parapet and the steeple were made of wood frame and shingles. Arthur Trombly remembers forbidden climbs up into the parapet and looking out through a broken shingle across the woods toward Lake St. Clair.

Arthur and Sylvester Trombly's family pew was four rows from the front, off the center aisle of the church, and both boys were at 10 o'clock Mass, as were Delia young, Bernadette Hoefer, and **Mabel Kelly**.¹⁴ Father Ronayne had chosen the vanity of earthly possessions as the theme of his sermon that day. Suddenly, one of the kerosene lamp chandeliers fell in front of his pulpit. The congregation was startled, but the priest simply said, "It is nothing but a little glass which can be replaced."¹⁵ Delia Biermann remembers that he said this just went to show that all things perished. Then a second, larger chandelier fell a little further up from the Trombly's pew, and Sylvester remembers that the kerosene splattered on Angela Gitre's skirt. This time, it was seen that the end of the cord was smoldering and sparks were coming out of the ceiling. Someone said: "Fire, Father," and the church was quickly evacuated. At that time, the congregation was still small, and there probably weren't more than two hundred people in the church.

Once the church was empty, Father Ronayne and some of the men began to rescue what they could: the blessed Sacrament, statues of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and St. Anthony, the priest's vestments, the scared vessels and books, etc. These articles were taken to the school and the priest's house, which was connected to the church by a boardwalk. The fire department was of no use because the church was located outside the city limits. A bucket brigade was formed, but the fire was soon burning out of control. As a precaution, the men poured water on the roofs of the school and nuns' house to protect them from flying cinders. Fortunately, the wind was blowing toward the cemetery, so neither the school and convent nor the rectory were burned.

When nothing more could be done, the congregation stood in front of the church and watched it burn. Within half an hour, the wooden roof had fallen and only the four outside walls and the brick exterior of the steeple were left standing. The steeple was topped by a metal weathercock which was a landmark in the area. Before falling, the weathercock paused for a long moment at a 45-degree angle above the flames. When it fell, Sister Evangelista clasped her hands and cried out. In no time at all, the sacred old church was a charred and smoking ruin. The Sisters and many of the congregation were in tears. Finally, two of the walls and the brick part of the parapet were all that was left standing.

The church was fifty-four years old when it burned. The greatest loss was of the interior adornments which had been so painstakingly provided by Father Van. Anthony Young told his daughter, Delia, that it had taken one man seven years to complete the interior wood carvings.

The altar rail, the gallery rail, the baptismal fount and the niches for the statues were handcarved from walnut and years were spent in the task. This work can never be replaced. Later three marble altars were installed and they are destroyed; also a beautiful pipe organ imported.¹⁶

The old organ would be especially missed by the altar boys and schoolboys. Volunteers from among them always had to be on hand when it was played to generate air, stepping alternately into two stirrups hanging from the wall.

Shocked and saddened at their loss, the priest and his parishioners set about to see what could be salvaged to rebuild the church. It was thought at first that the two remaining exterior walls could be saved, but while deliberation was going on, a strong wind came along one night and blew them down. This was interpreted as an act of God, so during the winter months, the brick tower was torn down and the debris carried away.

On November 25, 1907, Father Ronayne signed a contract with F.J. Herman, a contractor from Toledo, Ohio, and the architect, W.R. Dowling, to build a new church.

¹³Spilos, Steve, "Tombstones Relate Work Well Done," *Northeast Detroiter*, February, 1948.

¹⁴All five have described the fire in interviews. The married names of Delia, Bernadette, and **Mable** are:

Mrs. Ben Biermann, Mrs. Clarence Lang, and **Mrs. Erwin Lang**.

¹⁵*Detroit News*, January 2, 1907.

¹⁶*Detroit News*, January 2, 1907.



The sixth, seventh, and eighth grades standing in front of the old Grotto School entrance in May, 1909.

Fifth row: Elmer Decker, Anthony Schulte, Vincent Lefevre, Rose Wancour, Mary Van Overbecke, Gertrude Gietzen Alice Vanthomme, Lucy Huys, Delia Young, Genevieve Brinkman, Sister Reginald.

Fourth row: Joe Reichenbach, Rudolph Barbaret, Sylvester Kranz, Edmund Lefevre, Mercedes Boucher, Mamie Young, Ella Diegel, Christina young, Charlotte McCarthy, Mary Meerchaert, Cecelia Salter.

Third row: Charley Dulzo, **George Kelly**, Joe Gietzen Edna Krohn, Julia Salter, Hida Schultz, Beatrice Ameis, Clara Young.

Second row: Elmer Whitoff, Joseph Biermann, Wilfred Trombly, Alfred Smith, Zelma Claeys, Catherine Bour, Clar Lefevre, Madeleine Nuytten.

Bottom row: Johnny Schoenherr, Arthur Diegel, unknown, Eugene Michaels, Genevieve Trombly, Susie DeMurray, Annie Jahn, Effie Schoenherr.

Picture taken from the book,
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