

LOCAL BOY MAKES GOOD –
THE STORY OF SOME OF NEW ALBANY'S SONS

“Local Boy Makes Good” is a phrase which has passed into the language – a phrase reflecting local pride in the accomplishments of those who have gone out from their local community to achieve renown on a wider stage. New Albany has had a goodly share of those whom the phrase applies. Today’s program is devoted to some of these sons of New Albany.

Nestling in the rugged Pennsylvania hills near Pittsburgh is the community of Ford City and in Ford City stands a statue of John B. Ford, the man for whom the town is named. The founding of Ford City represented a triumph over almost insurmountable odds – a story which had its beginning in New Albany. John B. Ford is well-known, of course, as the man who first successfully made plate glass in the U.S. – made it here in New Albany just after the Civil War.

But after that success, financial trouble plagued Ford’s every move. Finally, seeking to recoup his fortune in greener pastures, Ford was forced to borrow \$100 for travel expenses. He borrowed it from George Schmitt, a New Albany teamster who earlier had been hired by Ford to haul a sheet of plate glass to the Hieb tailor shop at 318 Pearl Street – the first American-made plate glass ever installed.

That \$100, borrowed in New Albany when Ford was 69, proved to be the key to ultimate triumph, and today Ford’s name is perpetuated in the Libby-Owens-Ford Glass Company.

Ford’s name will always be bright in the story of America’s industrial development. The name of another New Albanian is equally well known in the field of literature – the name of William Vaughn Moody. Moody, as Ford, was not a native of New Albany, but he spent his formative years here and graduated from New Albany high School in 1885 as class valedictorian. Acknowledged in the early years of this century as one of the leading Americans in the school of poetry known as “symbolism”, Moody’s first published

poem appeared in 1885 in the Public Press, a New Albany newspaper of that time.

It was at that time that Moody took art instruction from Ferd Walker, well-known New Albany artist, and it seemed he might make painting his career. But literature was his field and after his initial success as a poet he gained even greater fame as a playwright. His play, "The Great Divide," written in 1906, is still a landmark in the history of American drama and was made into a movie some years ago. Many New Albany residents declared they could recognize local personalities in Moody's plays.

Moody left New Albany before Warren Kerrigan arrived, but the two had one interest in common – the theatre. Kerrigan, though born in Louisville, was brought to New Albany by his family while he was yet an infant, grew up here and sang in the choir of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and was graduated from New Albany High School. He became an actor in traveling stock companies, but the advent of motion pictures provided Kerrigan his real opportunity. His role in "The Covered Wagon," one of the most famous of early motion pictures, made him nationally known and Kerrigan became one of the "matinee idols" of the 1920s. New Albany honored him by naming one of its early motion picture theatres after him.

A galaxy of other names are associated with New Albany – Mary Anderson, famous as an actress at the turn of the century, spent her girlhood on the farm which now is Mt. St. Francis Seminary. The Mary Anderson Theatre in Louisville is named for her. William Wallace Atterbury, head of the U.S. Army Railroad Corps in Europe in World War I and later president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, was the son of a minister of the Second Presbyterian Church on Bank Street. Camp Atterbury, near Columbus, Indiana, perpetuates his name. A literary figure of an earlier area was Forsythe Wilson whose poem "The Old Sergeant," is one of the better known pieces of writing from the Civil War.

And then there was Norman J. Colman, forgotten in New Albany today but one of the city's best-known citizens of a century ago. He was well-known in Greenville, too, as the first principal of the short-lived Greenville Seminary. Later he became the first man to occupy the cabinet post of secretary of agriculture.