

# North Freedom Achiever born in 1914

*Tales of Earlier Days,*

**By Bob Dewel—Story No. 450**

On a winter morning in 1914, a young girl quietly opened the door to a staircase in a downtown North Freedom building. In her arms was a sickly baby boy, hardly a month or so old, swaddled in various garments to protect it from the elements.

Placing the baby on the stairway, she perhaps gave it a farewell kiss, and quickly left. Later in the morning a mournful train whistle could be heard leaving the station—headed for Minnesota.

The child was not the young girl's, but that of her parents, an itinerant mine worker and his wife, who already had at least six children. Neither she nor any member of the birth family would see the boy again for some 12 or 13 years, and the relationship was not revealed to the young boy at that time.

The building was the Lange building, and was the only structure in the then booming iron ore village of North Freedom that had steam heat day and night, a help for the sickly child. Despite the lonely arrival, the child was not unexpected at the Lange building. A loving but childless North Freedom couple would see him grow to manhood, success, respect, and international recognition.

## The Agreement

Times were tough in 1914, especially so in iron mining areas dominated by U.S. Steel, including the local Oliver Mining Company. The birth family had learned of their impending transfer to back to Minnesota. Moreover, the birth Mother had broken her arm. Care for the ailing child might suffer, perhaps prove fatal. But there were friends in North Freedom. There was a childless couple with the means, desire, and demonstrated love to care for the child---Richard and Martha Lange.

We know something about the delicate agreement, thanks to Joe Ward's thorough and considerate report in his recent book, "North Freedom, the First 100 Years". While the broken arm was healing, the baby was left to live with the childless Lange's in their apartment in the heated Lange building, which also conveniently housed the office of a physician, Dr. Wetmore. Apparently bonds were formed between the two couples, overcoming religious differences—the Lange's were Protestant.

A delicate agreement was carefully prepared by Dr. Wetmore, the Catholic priest, the child's father, and Mr. Lange. The child was to be left with the Lange's for as long as they could care for him. The religious faith would be his choice when old enough to decide. No claim or contact with the child was to be made without the agreement of the Lange's. The paper was signed by the four men named above.

The agreement would take effect if and when the parents delivered the child, which they did as described above. It was later reported that after removing to Iron Mountain, MN, the family had 10 additional children. In a letter written years later the by then grown man was profuse in his appreciation for the home and love provided to him by the Lange's.

There's much more to be written about this boy, who became known as Phil C. Lange. North Freedom can be proud of the name this man made for himself. That part will have to wait a week or so, to be told in another story.



The Lange building in North Freedom. Contained in the upper level was the Richard Lange apartment, where Phil Lange spent his youth. Nearby was the office of Dr. Wetmore. The only North Freedom building with steam heat, it provided warmth for the sickly child, as well as ready access to Dr. Wetmore. See an associated article about Dr. Wetmore's son, Alexander who, like Lange, achieved national and international achievement in their chosen professions.