

MANSFIELD MEMORIES:

Frank Cervelli set a flagpole-sitting record

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One of the most peculiar fads to take hold in the United States was the flagpole sitting trend of the 1920s. It entailed a person climbing a pole and staying at the top for an extended period of time. A sitter would remain aloft day and night on a chair or platform affixed to the top as long as their endurance held out.

Alvin “Shipwreck” Kelly began the nationwide trend and would become America’s most famous pole sitter. Kelly set a new record in the summer of 1930 when he sat atop a pole in Atlantic City for 49 days and one hour. Kelly’s feat inspired Frank Cervelli of Mansfield to break that record.

Frank Cervelli was 18 years old when he constructed a 30-foot pole outside his mother’s house at 29 Angell Street. His pole was reported to have had a “wide platform near the top” with a “comfortable seat.” A canvas offered some relief from the elements. Frank climbed to the top of his pole at 8 o’clock on the morning of July 26, 1930, with an eye on Shipwreck’s record.

Frank’s mother Jennie ran food up the pole to keep him strong. He read and played records on a phonograph to pass the time. As word spread Frank began to attract curiosity seekers. The Mansfield News reported that “scarcely a day passes that does not bring several automobile parties from out of town.” A gang of friends came by daily to keep Frank company and offer encouragement from below.

The most trying moment came at about 2 pm on Saturday, August 9th, when a heavy storm rolled through Mansfield. “Boy, what a storm,” Frank wrote.

Seeing the clouds moving in Frank asked his mother to send up his rain coat. He planned to get under his canvas when the rain began.

“Then it started to rain and what big rain drops with plenty of wind,” Frank wrote. “The wind almost blew me off. The pole was bending. I did not know what to do.”



Frank Cervelli, 18, of Mansfield set a flag-pole sitting record in 1930. |

MANSFIELD'S POLE SITTER TO DESCEND WITH NEW RECORD

Plans to come Down Sunday with
Record Better Than Kelly's.

With an endurance record for continuous pole sitting which will smother the 1117 hours claimed by the famous "Shipwreck" Kelly in the south, Frank Cervelli plans to descend from his perch atop a 35-foot pole near his mother's Angell street home Sunday morning at 8 o'clock. At that hour he will have completed 1200 hours in the air.

At 2 o'clock this afternoon he had been at the pole top 1158 hours according to statistics, having climbed aloft at 8 a. m. on July 26. This record, Cervelli declares, beats what was claimed as the mythical championship when a Pittsburgh lad was obliged to climb down from his pole to attend school on September 2 with a record of 1,019 hours.

Frank tossed away the canvas for fear that it was catching the wind and forcing the pole to bend.

"Then I got hold of the pole with two hands and held on for dear life. Some of the boys asked me if I wanted to come down. I said, 'nothing doing.'"

Frank escaped the ordeal unscathed.

Frank Cervelli ended his pole sitting odyssey at 8 a.m. on Sunday, September 14, 1930 after 1,200 hours, eclipsing Shipwreck Kelly. While attracting some local interest it is not clear if Frank received much national attention.

Frank's record was later broken by fellow flagpole sitters.

Frank went on to serve as a cook with the Merchant Marine, then returned to Mansfield where he worked at the chocolate factory. Frank and his family living in Plymouth, Michigan when he

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