

McLean County Museum of History
Ronald E. Cotner Collection

Processed by
Ashley Harris
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Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 Boxes
COLLECTION DATES:	1918-2023; mostly 1948-1955
RESTRICTIONS:	None
PROVENANCE	Gift of daughter Elizabeth McGinn in May 2025
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish this material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	Bensnyder was often used as an easier way to spell Bendschneider. Both are used to identify maternal relatives of Ronald Cotner.

Brief History

Ronald E. Cotner (1929-2009) was born and raised in Bloomington, graduating from Bloomington High School in 1948. He served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He married Lurleen Lindsey in 1966. Cotner worked for Caterpillar Inc. in East Peoria for 28 years before retiring in 1996.

Scope

The collection includes a scrapbook, photos, documents, and booklets from Ronald Cotner's time in the U.S. Navy; photographs and school records from Ronald's childhood; various documents, booklets, and photographs from Ronald Cotner's family, including his father (Claude Cotner), his mother (Marguerite Bendschneider Cotner), his sister (Carol Cotner), and some maternal relatives, etc.

Box and Folder Inventory

Box 1:

Folder 1: General

- 1.1.1 Obituary for Claude Cotner, father of Ronald Cotner, *Pantagraph*, 1 January 1967.
- 1.1.2 Obituary for Marguerite Cotner, mother of Ronald Cotner, *Pantagraph*, 23 November 1983.
- 1.1.3 Obituary for Ronald Cotner, *Pantagraph*, 31 March 2009.
- 1.1.4 Photocopied image of first side of funeral tag for Ronald Cotner, includes biographical information.
- 1.1.5 Photocopied image of second side of funeral tag for Ronald Cotner, includes image of Cotner and the lyrics to Taps.
- 1.1.6 "97th Birthday for Melba Jeanette Bendschneider Alsman," *Pantagraph*, 5 March 2023.
- 1.1.7 Obituary for Melba Jeanette Alsman, aunt of Ronald Cotner, *Pantagraph*, 19 December 2023.
- 1.1.8 Gift agreement for donation by Elizabeth McGinn in May 2025. Donor is the daughter of Ronald Cotner. Includes inventory of the donation.
- 1.1.9 Excerpt from the National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children website about Whitney Laurel Cole, Ronald Cotner's niece, and her murder.
- 1.1.10 Ronald Cotner Family Tree on Mother's Side, includes handwritten notes concerning members of Ronald's family who have materials within collection.

Folder 2: Scrapbook

- 1.2.1 Ronald E. Cotner scrapbook 12 ½ x 16 ½ inches, embossed cover “Photographs”: includes many photos of sailors and others, submarines (including a German submarine), a postcard, a navy base newsletter, *Patrol*, which mentions Ron Cotner on pg. 6 (March 26, 1949), and a navy poem all from Cotner’s time in the U.S. Navy. Includes some family photos. 85 photographs total. Broken down by size: 3 ½x4 ½ - 19 photographs (some dated to 1950), 4 ½x3 ¼ - 30 photographs, 5 7/8x 3 ½ - 12 photographs, 3 ¼x3 ¼ - 7 photographs, 5 1/16x3 ½ - 6 photographs, 3 ½x3 9/16 - 5 photographs, 3 7/16x5 1/16 - 3 photographs, 4 9/16x3 ½ - 2 photographs, 10x8 1/8 - 1 photograph.

Folder 3: Photographs

- 1.3.1 6 photos of change of command, Naples, Italy, 1 June 1953. Measurements of these photos include: 5x4 - 1, 4 5/16x3 3/8 - 1, 3 3/8x4 ½ - 1, 4 ½x3 3/8 - 3.
- 1.3.2 4 x4 15/16 photo of ship 859.
- 1.3.3 9 photos of model planes and their builders. Measurements of these photos include 3 9/16 x 5 ½ - 1 photograph, 3 ½x5 3/8 - 8 photographs.
- 1.3.4 4 ½ x3 photo of Frank Unger.
- 1.3.5 2 duplicate 2 ½ x2 ½ navy headshots of Ronald Cotner.
- 1.3.6 3 9/16 x 3 9/16 photo of Ronald (?) Cotner in navy uniform with a young child.

Folder 4: Group Photographs of Ronald E. Cotner/Carol Cotner

- 1.4.1 8 1/16 x10 photograph of Ronald Cotner and fellow students seated in a 4th grade classroom at Trinity Lutheran. Ronald is noted as the student in the striped shirt.
- 1.4.2 Scanned image of unidentified matted photograph, Hawking Studio written in lower right-hand corner. Flag identifies Ronald Cotner in the group, second row second from right.
- 1.4.3 Unidentified group photograph mounted on 10 ¾ x12 5/8 mat, includes Ronald Cotner. Ronald is in the second row from the bottom, and second from the right.
- 1.4.4 Scanned image of unidentified matted photograph, Hawkins of Bloomington, Ill. printed in lower right-hand corner of mat. Flag identifies Carol Cotner in the group, first row first on right.
- 1.4.5 Unidentified group photograph mounted on 11 ¼ x13 ¼ mat, includes Carol Cotner, Ronald’s sister. Carol is in the bottom row, first on the right.

Folder 5: Ronald E. Cotner Miscellaneous

- 1.5.1 *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, booklet by Henry W. Longfellow, published by F.A. Owen Publishing Company in Dansville, NY, 1938, owned by Ronald Cotner.
- 1.5.2 Trinity Lutheran School Report Card, Ronald Cotner, 1941, with envelope.
- 1.5.3 Bloomington High School Diploma, Ronald Cotner, 4 June 1948.
- 1.5.4 Bloomington High School Senior Activities booklet, 1948. Ronald Cotner and Roy Bensnyder listed under Prom Committees.
- 1.5.5 Menu for Christmas meal in Christmas card from J.R. Tucker, Commander, 25 December 1949.

- 1.5.6 Secrecy Agreement, Elementary Course in Cryptoanalysis, 12 September 1952.
- 1.5.7 Federal Tax Withholding Statements for Ronald Cotner, 1953, 1954, 1955.
- 1.5.8 Letter from L. Pogrow, Acting Head, Employment Branch, Industrial Relations Division, to R. E. Cotner saying it is not possible to anticipate vacancies for the position of yeoman, August 22, 1955. Attached: Civilian Marine Personnel Rates.
- 1.5.9 Purchaser's Receipt from National Rifle Association, 4 October 1955.
- 1.5.10 National Rifle Association Certificate of Life Membership, 6 October 1955, with letter of welcome from F. C. Daniel, Secretary, 11 October 1955 and National Rifle Association Life Membership Card, all within National Rifle Association envelope.
- 1.5.11 Joke card, Award for Effort for "Battle of the Bed Pan" for Ronald Cotner, signed by Mary Lee Joseph, 18 December 1955. Includes paper bed pan combat medal.
- 1.5.12 Shipping document for 1 CTN pistol, Red River Arsenal, Texarkana, TX, 13 January 1961.
- 1.5.13 3x8 plastic door plate "operations office/Submarine Squadron One."
- 1.5.14 Envelope from USS Besugo, SS321.
- 1.5.15 10x8 photograph of unidentified submarine officer.
- 1.5.16 Cryptology sample and message, one sheet.
- 1.5.17 Price list for weapons, weapon parts, and ammunition for National Rifle Association members.

Folder 6: Claude Cotner, Ronald's Father

- 1.6.1 Three receipts of money owed by Claude Cotner, related to Pontiac automobile, 1927-1928.
- 1.6.2 Typed agreement for sale of real estate William G. Peirce, seller; Claude J. Cotner and Minnie Blanchard Cotner, buyers. Notarized 19 January 1929, by Clinton H. White.
- 1.6.3 Letter from Claude Cotner at the Illinois State Farm in Vandalia, IL, to Marguerite Cotner in Bloomington, IL, concerning a request to visit him at a penal farm, with envelope, 18 August 1937.
- 1.6.4 Letter from Claude Cotner to Marguerite Cotner in Bloomington, IL, concerning their relationship, 7 November 1938, 3 pages, incomplete.
- 1.6.5 Letter from Claude Cotner to Marguerite Cotner, titled "Last Letter," concerning their relationship, date unknown.

Folder 7: Marguerite (Marge) Bendschneider Cotner, Ronald's Mother

- 1.6.1 Scanned image of confirmation certificate for Marguerite E. Bendschneider, 5 April 1925 2 pages.
- 1.6.2 8 x 10 ¹/₁₆ photograph of employees at Paul F. Beich Company, 28 August 1933.
- 1.6.3 8 x 10 ¹/₈ photograph, Good Will Anniversary Party of Candy Makers Local Union #342, April 19, 1938. Envelope from United Photo Shop in Bloomington, IL included.
- 1.6.4 Newspaper photograph, "Booms Again," Ronald Cotner at Miller Park during the Fourth of July. "4th of July 1941" written at top of photograph and "Sonny" written over Ronald in the photograph.
- 1.6.5 6 ¹⁵/₁₆ x 4 ⁷/₈ photograph of bowling team posing with bowling balls, Merry-Go- Round Season – 1941-42 April 29, 1942. Note written on back reads "Marge Cotner (Ronald's Mother) first from left."

- 1.6.6 6 ¾ x4 ¾ photograph of bowling team, Merry-Go-Round Season 1941-1942 April 29, 1942. Note written on back reads "Marge on first left."
- 1.6.7 "Sweet Talk" booklet, January 1966. A publication for friends of Paul F. Beich Co. Marge Cotner's photograph and name on last page.
- 1.6.8 "Sweet Talk" booklet, April 1969. A publication for friends of Paul F. Beich Co. Includes photo of 5-year old Whitney Cole, who was murdered subsequently at S&S Liquors when she was 24. Marge Cotner's granddaughter.
- 1.6.9 Newspaper clipping, "Enact Fairy Tale," photo of Ronald Cotner as Cubby Bear in school play, undated.
- 1.6.10 Newspaper photograph, "Shock Troops," photograph of Trinity Lutheran Scrap Paper Drive, undated.
- 1.6.11 Newspaper photograph, "Thousands of Bags Are Filled With Candy for Christmas Jubilee," young women filling bags at Beich Factory, undated.
- 1.6.12 Small booklet in German, *Das feierliche Glücke gottfeliger Confirmanden am Tage ihrer Confirmation*. Published by Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis, MO.
- 1.6.13 4 x10 unidentified group photograph. Note on back directs to the child in the front row sixth from left. (Ronald?)
- 1.6.14 Scanned image of photograph of bowling team. Flags identify Marge and Melba in photo.
- 1.6.15 8 1/8 x9 15/16 photograph of bowling team. Note written on back identifies Marge Cotner first from left, and Melba second from right.
- 1.6.16 8 1/16 x10 photograph of bowling team. Note written on back identifies Marge Cotner first from left and Melba second from right.
- 1.6.17 Matted photograph of Carol Cotner, Ronald's sister. "Carol's conf." written on back of mat. "Hawkins of Bloomington, Ill." printed below and to the right of the photo.
- 1.6.18 Matted photograph of Ronald Cotner (?). "Hawkins of Bloomington, Ill." printed below and to the right of the photo.
- 1.6.19 Paper card with sailboat string design.
- 1.6.20 Paper card with ship string design.

Folder 8: Carol Cotner, Ronald's Sister

- 1.8.1. ½x5 photograph of young Carol Cotner, with envelope from Harbican Studios, 21 November 1935. Notice of C.O.D. Delivery and a brochure about Harbican Studio's Children's Photograph Contest are included in the envelope.
- 1.8.2. Postcard to Carol Cotner from Ella Knuth, 11 September 1941.
- 1.8.3. 5 1/16x7 photograph, Junior Walther League East Bay Camp, July 30-August 6, 1944.
- 1.8.4. Confirmation Booklet, Carol Cotner, 25 March 1945, with envelope.
- 1.8.5. 4 11/16 x3 9/16 photograph of adolescent Carol in a swimsuit.

Folder 9: Ronald Cotner's Maternal Relatives

- 1.9.1 Certificate of Scholarship from Lutheran School in Bloomington, IL, Harry John Bendschneider, 14 June 1920.
- 1.9.2 The Augsburg Drawing Book owned by Melba Bensnyder, published by Augsburg Drawing Company, Morristown, TN, 1924.
- 1.9.3 Booklet, *Graded Memory Material for Lutheran Schools*, published by Concordia Publishing House Print in St. Louis, MO, 1924. "Lawrence Bensnyder" is written on front.

- 1.9.4 Certificate of Baptism, Roy Gene Bendschneider, Bloomington, Illinois, 30 May 1929.
- 1.9.5 The Augsburg Drawing Book owned by Melba Bensnyder, published by Augsburg Publishing Company, Incorporated, Morristown, TN, 1931.
- 1.9.6 Certificate of Honor for perfect record of attendance, Trinity Lutheran School, Roy Bensnyder, 2 June 1939.
- 1.9.7 Trinity Lutheran Report Card, Roy Bensnyder, 1940, with envelope.
- 1.9.8 Bloomington High School Diploma, Roy Gene Bendschneider, 4 June 1948, secured to envelope with string.
- 1.9.9 Handwritten notes about Prosperity Club, Hulda Bendschneider (Ronald Cotner's Maternal Grandmother).
- 1.9.10 3 ³/₄ x2 ¹³/₁₆ photograph of Melba and an unidentified woman in front of ship.
- 1.9.11 3 ⁷/₈ x2 ³/₄ photograph of Melba and an unidentified woman.
- 1.9.12 3 ¹³/₁₆ x2 ³/₄ photograph of Melba and an unidentified woman on a ship.
- 1.9.13 4 ⁹/₁₆ x2 ³/₄ photograph of Melba posing for photograph with seven unidentified women.
- 1.9.14 4 ¹¹/₁₆ x3 ⁹/₁₆ photograph of Melba in a swimsuit.
- 1.9.15 Scanned image, Title page, Holy Bible, Authorized (King James) Version, belonging to Lawrence Bendschneider and/or Neoma Bendsnyder and/or Roy Bendsnyder, 2 pages.
- 1.9.16 Small Christmas card from Herbert H. (unknown) to Roy B., brother of Marguerite Bendschneider Cotner, with envelope.
- 1.9.17 Safety Measures in the Chemical Laboratories, Ed Bensnyder (Ronald's uncle) written at top of page, 4 pages.

Loose items:

Certificate for Perfect Attendance, Marguerite Bensnyder, Bloomington, ILL., 18 June 1925.

Diploma for Eighth Grade Graduation, Neoma A. Bensnyder (Ronald's maternal aunt), Trinity Lutheran School in Bloomington, IL., 12 June 1938.

Certificate for Perfect Attendance, Ronald Cotner, Bloomington, IL., 10 June 1943.

Diploma for Eighth Grade Graduation, Roy G. Bensnyder (Bendschneider), Trinity Lutheran School Bloomington, ILL., 10 June 1943.

Diploma for Eighth Grade Graduation, Ronald Cotner, Trinity Lutheran School Bloomington, ILL., 8 June 1944.

8 x 22 ¹/₂ rolled photograph, Co. 229 – W. O. Williams, CSC & G. E. McClintlock, BMC – Co. CMDRS – 16 Aug. 1948 U.S. Naval Training Center Great Lakes, ILL. Written note on back identifies Ronald E. Cotner in the second row, eighth from the right.

8x10 ¹/₈ rolled photograph, Enlisted Basic Submarine Course Section No. 18 Class No. 41 Jan. 24, 1949. Written note on back identifies Ronald Cotner in the bottom row, first from the left.

Certificate for completion of Basic course of study, U.S. Naval Submarine School, R.E.C. Cotner
SA U.S.N., New London, Connecticut, 31 January 1949.

Textbook or instruction book for secret communications, blue 3-ring binder, 11 3/4x9 3/4, front
part is missing. Two assignments marked “confidential” are included at front of binder.

14 x11 photograph of an infant in a white outfit, seated on a patterned chair. “1st born Fritz
(Marguerite’s oldest brother)” written on back of photograph.

7 13/16 x10 photograph mounted on a 11 7/8 x13 7/8 mat. Photographed in a church during an
event. “The Gross Studio Bloomington, ILL.” printed in the center of the mat beneath the
photograph. Notes on photograph mat include “Trinity Lutheran” as name of the church and
“Fritz – Ronald’s uncle on Marge’s side” indicating that Fritz is in the photograph.

11x13 15/16 rolled photograph of submarine 524 surfacing.

7 7/16x18 3/16 panoramic photograph of Paul Beich Co. employees.

6 15/16x18 3/16 rolled panoramic photograph of Paul Beich Co. employees. Note on reads
“Caroline & Mrg worked @Beich’s”.

Box 2:

Loose items:

Comprehensive Bible History for Lutheran Schools in the Words of Holy Scripture, published by
Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO., 1918, owned by Roy and Neoma Bensnyder.

Little Folded Hands: Prayers for Children, compiled by Louis Birk, published by Concordia
Publishing House, Saint Louis, MO., 1912. “Marguerite Bendschneider Feb. 19 – 1919”
written at front of book.

Book of song lyrics and poems, copied by Marguerite Bendschneider/Bensnyder, circa 1920s.
Some songs/poems were written by Marguerite. List of identified songs included in
accompanying document.

Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain, published by Whitman Publishing Company, Racine, WI, 1931.

Daily Prayers, selected and adapted by C. Abbetmeyer, published by Concordia Publishing
House, St. Louis, MO, 1935. “Marguerite Bensnyder” written in front of book.

Scrapbook primarily of song lyrics copied by Marguerite. Several small items included such as
newspaper articles and a church publication, “Central Illinois District Lutheran,” Rock
Island, ILL. February 1936.

Christmas gift to Ronald Cotner, Christmas 1941. Note folded into small paper airplane included.

“Most-Used Navy Terms, 3,000 Terms Written in Gregg Shorthand” booklet compiled by Harry W. Newman, published by The Gregg Publishing Company, 1942. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ x5 $\frac{2}{8}$ inches.

Gideon's New Testament, note in back of book states Cotner's “Decision to Receive Christ as My Savior, 14 July 1948.

Bloomington High School Yearbook, Aepix 1948, Ronald Cotner. Ronald's senior photo is on page 20 which is marked with an orange sticky note.

Essentials of Russian, A.V. Gronicka and H. Zhemchuzhnaya-Bates, published by Prentice-Hall Inc., 70 Fifth Avenue, New York, 1950. Education manual printed for the United States Armed Services Institute. Enclosed in the book are a letter saying the textbook must be returned and one page of handwritten translation of two phrases. The textbook is enclosed in a paper book cover.

Instructions for the Navy Personnel Accounting System, Part I, Department of the Navy Bureau of Navy Personnel, Washington, D. C., 1951, binder, 8x10 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Political Italian notebook, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch three-ring binder of handwritten lessons, some graded in red pencil. Includes a loose page of translations dated 12 October 1952.

Thorndike-Barnhart Handy Pocket Dictionary, edited by Clarence L. Barnhart, published by Garden City Books, Garden City, NY, New Revised Edition, 1953, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ x7 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches . Handwritten note on front cover reads “Ronald E.C. Cotner Staff, Comstrikforsouth BLDG “L” Room 310.”

Day Book containing song lyrics copied by Marguerite Cotner; a few copied by Carol Jean Cotner, Ronald's sister.

A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO. Owned by Lawrence Benschneider.

Blank journal with Ronald Cotner's name and rank written inside. “Ronald E. Cotner, YN2(SS) 302-66-44 Staff Commander Submarine Squadron One c/o Fleet Post Office San Francisco, California.”

Blank journal inside U.S.S. Besugo journal cover.