

# *Tales*

from the general store

*Subsistence farming, life as a hermit, frog gigging*

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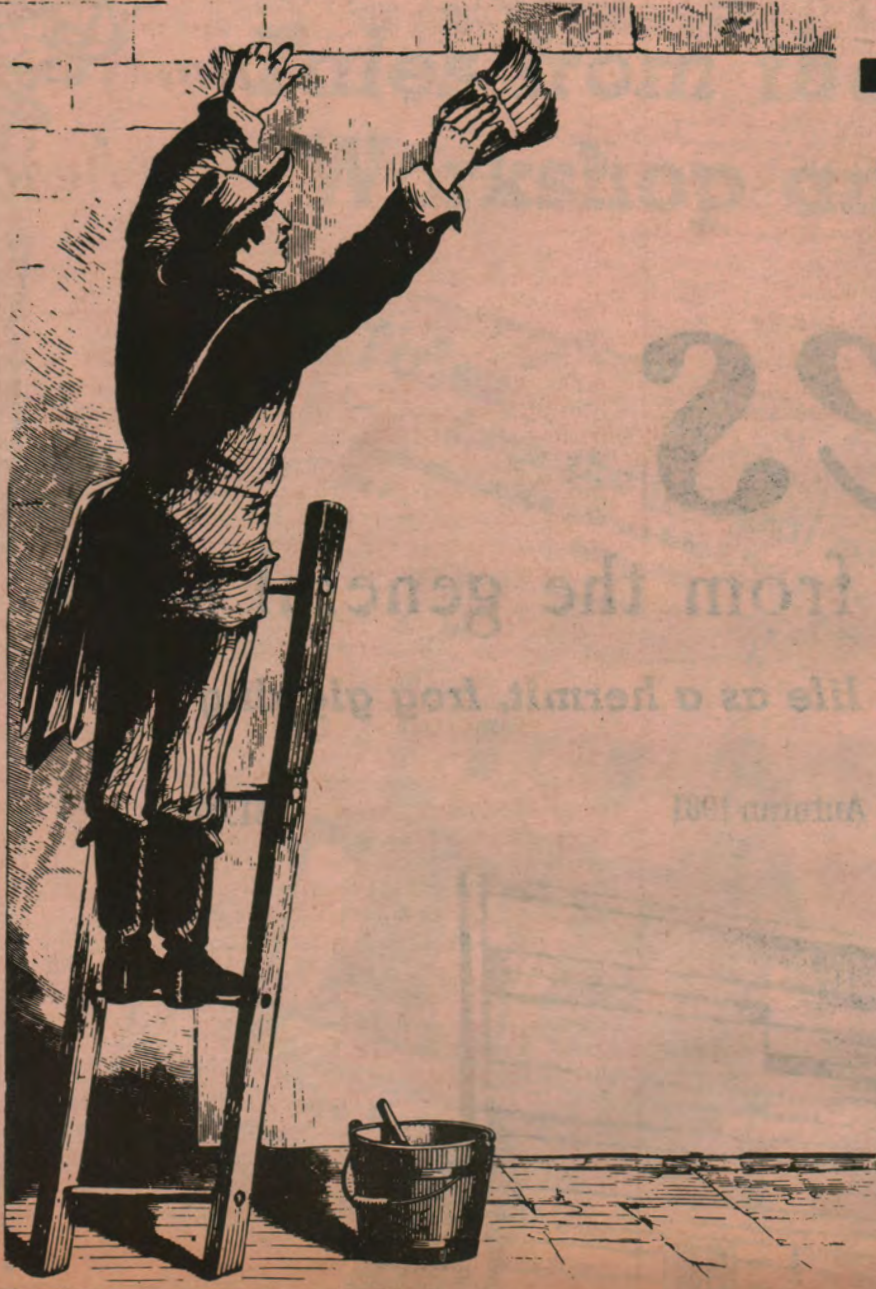


## **The Bellair Store**

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# The Restoration of Bellair

Tales from the general store, inc., has selected Bellair as it's headquarters because of the existing general store era buildings that lend themselves to restoration to that period.

The restoration project is dedicated to preserving a piece of the past so area residents will be able to visit a working general store community and students will be able to attend workshops there.



ABOVE: Bellair bank building today.



LEFT: Jake's, circa 1908.



BELOW: Bellair general store today.



Plans are underway to begin the restoration project by opening the general store where the headquarters will be located. And then going on to the restoration of the other two buildings which are pictured here. This is not going to happen overnight or without community involvement. People interested in the project should contact Ray Elliott, at Tales from the general store, inc., Rural Route 2, Oblong, IL 62449 or phone 618-569-5171.



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## General store

times over,  
not dead



by Ray Elliott

When I was a kid growing up in Bellair, the general store era was drawing to a close. But I can remember when the general store was the most important place in town.

And that was true of the general stores in thousands of small towns, villages and settlements that dotted the country, particularly in the Midwest and the South, during the last part of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s.

The churches and the schools had their roles, to be sure. But it was the general store where most people brought their eggs, cream, chickens and anything else they could trade (because cash was scarce) for everything from canned goods to longhorn cheese to overalls and long-handled underwear to pitchforks and crosscut saws.

Besides doing most of their trading at the store, it was at the store where people loafed throughout the day, telling tales and passing the time of the day with their neighbors. Or playing dominoes or 42. Or crocheting. Or just sitting around the warmth of the botbellied stove, drinking an RC or a Pepsi with a package of peanuts dumped in it.

It was at the Bellair general store that I first heard tales of early settlers and history of the area from the old men who loafed there. Some of the tales may not have been totally accurate, but they were probably just as accurate—and certainly more interesting—than what I read at school in history books that had been written about dates and places instead of about people.

It was at the Bellair general store that I learned you couldn't believe everything you heard, or even saw, by playing 42 with the older men, listening to them cajole each other and bluff their way through a low hand they had deliberately overbid. Or wanted to make you think they had.

Like the general store, the storekeeper was an important part of the community. He not only sold just about everything under the sun, he also gave credit and heard all the gossip, news and sports.

I probably would never have known who Lake Appling was if it hadn't have been for Harold Matheny, the storekeeper who ran the store most of the time I was growing up. The White Sox still aren't my favorite baseball team. But then I'm glad not everyone is a Cardinal fan, either.

Anyway, the importance of the general store had been changing over the years. Maybe it was the automobile that first made the change possible, allowing people to travel more easily to the larger towns to do their trading and see a movie or eat in a cafe; maybe it was something else.

Even the change made possible by the automobile was slow, though. I can remember hearing one of the old men tell about a man finally deciding to buy a car and driving it to the store for the first time.

Rather than drive it to the hitching post on the east side of the store building where he had hitched his horse for years, the old man drove the automobile right up to the front porch. As he approached the edge, he pulled back on the steering wheel and hollered, "Whoa, you son-of-a-gun. Whoa, there."

And he crashed into the porch. Just as the automobile followed the horse as the main means of transportation, the general store had followed the trading post of frontier days in retailing history in the United States. But that latter trend finally gave way to the department stores and supermarkets of today.

A February 1946 headline from the Casey DAILY REPORTER says, "Kent H. Morgan opens modern grocery store today." This modern store was a self-service grocery.

The article goes on to say that the store is "the 'last word' in a modern grocery. The walls are beautifully paneled in creme celotex, while the ceiling is a basket-weave pattern. Natural wood shelving displays brightly colored canned goods while a modernistic oval counter is at the front, where items will be checked out and purchased.

"Perhaps the most attractive of all is the tall, modernistic frozen food case, the roomy meat display case and the large natural wood walk-in box, which is completely stocked with a variable supply of fresh meats. A new glassed front completes the store, which is appropriately illuminated by fluorescent lights.

"Yet to be added to the fixtures are modernistic self-service fresh vegetable and dairy cases and a dry fruit rack..."

It wasn't anything like the old general stores. Of course. And that's pretty much the way it went around the country. Returning servicemen and young people began leaving the small towns and villages for the large cities and the high-paying jobs created by the post-war building boom and the technological advances that had come out of World War II.

And the general stores began dying for good. For some the death was lingering; for others it was immediate. The supermarkets and department stores replaced all but a few general stores. Even fewer exist today.

Such is progress. TALES FROM THE GENERAL STORE is not trying to change that. What we are trying to do is preserve a piece of that time and place and study the history and the culture from people who lived during the time. Those people won't be here forever.

We'd like to see the students in the local schools talking to these people and hearing what life was like years ago, recording the recollections and writing stories about them. Today's students and future generations of students would then have primary sources to look to for their perspective of their own history and culture.

We think it's a worthwhile project. What about you?

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Tom Phipps

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Walter Whittaker

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by Vanessa Faurie

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by Jim Elliott

Some tall tales and some-not-so-tall tales told by a 90-year-old man, a life long resident of the Crawford/Clark County area.



Thornton Stephens









Kibbie general store sometime around 1911-12 before James Randolph tore down the house in the picture and built a two-story frame house that stands today. Herb and Theora Russell (Randolph's daughter and son-in-law) closed the store in 1945.

## Did you know...

compiled by Becky Elliott  
Hinsdale South High, '85

### Old Doc Kibbie

Dr. Kibbie was a graduate of the medical department of the University of Michigan and took a four year residency in Europe. He served in the Civil War in 1867. He spoke French and German and edited one of the first Democratic newspapers in St. Clair County after the war in 1870.

Kibbie moved to Crawford County (Oblong) in 1878. It was also rumored that he was once the doctor for the famous James brothers.

### Crawford County formed

Patrick Henry, who was Governor of Virginia in 1778, divided his vast domain into counties. The territory north and west of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River was divided into one county called Illinois.

Henry appointed John Todd Commander and Chief or Civil Governor of this county.

By 1816 eleven counties had come from the one county of Illinois. The eleventh county formed was Crawford and it extended from the mouth of the Embarras River on the south and to Canada on the north.

### Wabash Township

Back in the 1800s Wabash Township was the largest township in Clark County. Having around 72 sections of land, it was almost as big as the State of Rhode Island.

### Wabash ferry

In 1817 it cost 6 ¼ cents for a man on foot to ferry the Wabash River.

### Lincoln relatives

Crawford County was home to several relatives of Abraham Lincoln, but unlike President Lincoln his relatives were staunch Democrats. Lincoln saw his first juggler perform in Palestine in 1860.

### Horse thieves

Around 1864 there was an organized gang of horse thieves along the Wabash River who also counterfeited both silver and paper money.

### Illegal execution

James Kelly, an inoffensive Irishman, was shot down and killed on the streets of Robinson on May 16, 1876, by a man giving his name as Zachariah Osborne.

Osborne, who had been around town begging for something to eat, shot Kelly. The murder was witnessed by the Sheriff and Osborne was arrested and taken to jail.

Even though there was talk of lynching Osborne, he was given a formal examination and committed to jail to await convening of the court in the fall.

The public feared that Osborne would escape and go unpunished and attempted to lynch him. The Sheriff stopped the crowd that time, but was unable to stop them some time later.

A week or so later during the confusion of an attempted escape by the prisoners, Osborne was grabbed by the crowd.

He was handled roughly by the angry mob and was unconscious by the time the rope, cut from a convenient awning, was placed around his neck. He was then drug to the courthouse yard and hanged from a tree limb.

Afterward a corner's jury was summoned, and since most of the mob were area businessmen who served on juries, it was decided that "Osborne came to his death

by hanging at the hands of persons unknown."

### Oblong in 1908

In 1908 Oblong had two banks, five dry-good houses, eight groceries, five hardware stores, two hotels, one flour mill, one weekly paper, five oil well supply concerns, five oil-producing companies and one telephone company.

### Indian massacre

The Hutson family, some of the first white settlers in Hutsonville Township, were massacred by Indians during the War of 1812.

The mother and six children were in their log cabin outside the fort when the Indians were on the warpath and were the victims of savage murders.

Hutson had not moved his family to the stockade where most of the pioneers had taken refuge because of the advice of an Indian whom he thought a reliable friend.

And Hutson was not killed when the Indians burned his home because he was traveling home from the Palestine Merom area. But he was later killed in a skirmish with another band of Indians while seeking revenge for his family.

### Lied about his age

In 1909 around the Hutsonville area, "Swifty" Jackson, colored, was arrested as a "slacker." "Swifty" told the registration board he was 32 years old and was informed it was not necessary to register if he was that old.

The registrar was suspicious and decided to look up his age. A birth record of a Mr. and Mrs. Jackson for a son was found in the county clerk's office and his age was given as 22.

This record caused his arrest and he was jailed to await a hearing. A letter was later received from his parents from Parkersburg, West Virginia, stating that "Swifty" was past registration age and had been born in London, England.

### Courthouse square

The street around the Robinson courthouse was used as a race track for the county fairs around 1856-57.

### Soap making

During the spring time soap making, the wise housewife stirred her soap "widdershins" that is from east to west, with the course of the sun. It was believed that to stir it in reverse would destroy all the cleansing qualities of the soap.

### County taxes

When Palestine was the official center of Crawford County, wolf scalps, valued at \$2 each, were made legal tender and were receivable for taxes.

### Gold for a dollar

Montgomery Ward's catalog of 1894-95 sold an 18k solid gold wedding ring for \$1, a bicycle for \$18 and a cook stove for \$18.73.

### Porterville or Eaton

Johnny Eaton, postmaster of the Porterville area gave the village his name. But the residents were not happy with the name and wrote to the government with several other names asking the government to change it.

The government wrote back that there were other names in other places just like the ones they had sent in and it was against the law to have two post offices by the same name. So legally the village is Eaton, although it has gone by several names in the past including Puckerhup and East Berlin.

### Bellair population

In 1929 Bellair had a population of 85. The village also boasted of three churches, two general stores, a blacksmith, a physician and a bank.

### Merom Island

Paul Lindsey came to Merom in 1860. He lived in a strongly built log house at the north end of the island that lies to the north and west of Merom Bluff.

The log house had underground rooms where Lindsey received and distributed stolen goods brought in by boat and where he entertained his business partners.

Since the island didn't belong to either Illinois or Indiana, Lindsey lived there and carried on his business for five years terrorizing the residents of Merom and surrounding areas.

But in 1865 when the "Boys in Blue" returned they set out to kill the rogue. Tradition has it that they put Lindsey in a boat and 40 men from both Indiana and Illinois shot at once. The log house was also burned to the ground.



Inside Kibbie general store about 1920. Pictured left to right: James Randolph (store owner), Al Curtis, Vic Curtis, Jim Curtis and Everett Randolph.



# Recipes, Remedies and Letters

## Recipes

### 1800 Chocolate Spice Cake

1 cup sugar  
½ cup butter  
1 egg  
1 ½ cups flour  
½ tsp salt  
1 tsp cloves  
1 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp nutmeg  
1 tsp vanilla  
1 ½ T cocoa  
1 cup buttermilk  
1 tsp soda

Cream sugar, butter, eggs together. Sift dry ingredients together. Dissolve soda in milk and add alternately with dry ingredients to creamed mixture. Beat until smooth. Pour in greased and floured pan 12 x 8 inches. Bake in preheated oven at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. Spread on the hot cake the following: heat 5 T melted butter, 7 T brown sugar, 5 T cream and 1 cup coconut. Mix well. Put on cake. Place in oven and broil until icing bubbles and is light brown.

### Date Roll

Mix in a sauce pan: 2 cups sugar and 1 cup pet milk. Cook stirring occasionally to 236 degrees or until a few drops form a soft ball in cold water. Add 1 cup chopped dates and continue to cook to 260 degrees or until a few drops form a hard ball when dropped in cold water. Remove from heat. Add 1 cup chopped nuts and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Cool at room temperature without stirring until luke warm or hand can be held on bottom of pan. Beat until stiff enough to be kneaded. Shape into long roll. Wrap in damp cloth. Keep in cool place. Remove cloth to cut slices as needed and wrap again.

—Anna Randolph

### Gingerbread (1935)

2½ cups flour  
½ tsp salt  
1 tsp soda  
1 tsp cinnamon  
½ tsp ginger  
½ cup shortening  
1 cup brown sugar  
2 eggs  
1 cup sorghum molasses  
1 cup boiling water

Cream shortening and sugar. Add eggs and sorghum molasses. Then the dry ingredients along with the hot water. Bake in a 9 x 13 inch pan in a 350 degree oven.

### Persimmon Pudding

One half gallon persimmons before rubbing through colander. One half gallon sweet milk, 2 cups sugar, 3 eggs, ¾ teaspoon soda, 1 small teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, 1 tablespoon of butter, one half gallon flour. Bake in a slow oven for 1 to 1½ hours at 250 degrees.

—Martha Newberry

### Oatmeal Cookies

1 cup flour  
½ tsp salt  
½ tsp baking powder  
½ tsp soda  
½ cup brown sugar  
½ cup granulated sugar  
½ cup shortening  
1 egg  
1 T water  
1 tsp vanilla  
1½ cup rolled oats

Sift flour, salt, baking powder, soda together. Cream brown sugar, granulated sugar, shortening, egg, water, vanilla and rolled oats together. Gradually combine the two mixtures. Add ½ cup nuts and ½ cup raisins, optional. Drop by spoonfuls on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes.

—Mary Elliott

### Potato Candy

1 small potato cooked until it will mash like mashed potatoes. Drain. Add powdered sugar until stiff enough to roll. Vanilla may be added. Roll out. Spread with peanut butter. Roll as for jelly roll. Cut in pieces.

### Sunday Morning Breakfast Cake

1 cup sifted flour  
1 cup sugar  
2 eggs  
¼ cup milk - add 1 tablespoon oleo or butter  
1 tsp baking powder  
¼ tsp salt  
1 tsp vanilla

Sift flour, baking powder and salt together three times. Beat eggs until very thick and lemon color (about 3 to 5 minutes by hand). Add sugar slowly while continuing to beat eggs. Add vanilla, sifted dry ingredients and beat well. Quickly stir in hot milk and butter. Pour quickly in greased pan 9 x 13 or thereabouts. Bake 350 degrees for 25 minutes until done.

Topping: Cream together ¼ cup oleo or butter and 2 tablespoons cream or canned milk. Add ¾ cup brown sugar and cream well. Add chopped nuts or coconut. When cake is done spread topping over warm cake in pan. Place under broiler for a few minutes until golden brown. Serve while warm, but it is also good cold. Watch closely while in broiler.

—Theora Russell

### Dry Yeast (1915)

3 small potatoes  
small handful hops  
2 tablespoons sugar  
2 tablespoons salt  
1 quart flour

Boil potatoes and hops in 1 quart water until potatoes are tender. Mash potatoes fine in separate crock. Add sugar, salt and flour. Pour water from potatoes over flour while water is hot. Have 1 pint of good yeast soft, when potato mixture cools add good yeast, stir together. Let get light. Mix this in meal to form large cake, let dry for later use.

### Floating Island

One quart of milk, 5 eggs and 5 tablespoons of sugar. Scald the milk then add the beaten yolks stirring a little of the scalded milk into them to prevent curdling. Stir constantly until of the right consistency. When cool flavor and let it get very cold and before serving beat up the whites of the eggs to a stiff froth, fold into pudding.

### Hush Puppies

2 cups cornmeal  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 tablespoon flour  
½ teaspoon soda  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 cup buttermilk  
1 whole egg

3 tablespoons chopped onion (fine)

Mix all ingredients, add onion, then milk and last the beaten egg. Drop by spoonful (teaspoon) into hot grease with fish as it is being fried. Drain on paper, the same as fish.

### Sweet Pickle Chips

14 cucumbers  
1 quart white vinegar  
8 cups sugar  
2 tablespoons salt  
2 tablespoons mixed pickling spices (tie in a bag)

Pour boiling water over cucumbers for 4 mornings. On the 5th morning slice ¼ inch thick. Mix syrup and heat to boiling point and pour over pickles for 4 mornings, on 4th morning put in jars and pour hot syrup over and seal.

### Sorghum Pie

2 egg yolks beaten  
½ cup sugar  
1 tablespoon flour  
pinch salt  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 cup sweet milk  
¾ cup sorghum  
1 teaspoon allspice  
1 teaspoon ginger  
1 teaspoon nutmeg  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
2 egg whites - stiff

Mix spices with sugar, then mix well in order given and bake in moderate oven for 40 minutes.

### Gooseberry Cake

1½ cups sugar  
½ cup lard creamed with sugar  
2 eggs  
2 cups flour  
1 tablespoon cocoa  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
2 teaspoon baking powder  
¼ teaspoon cloves  
2 cups gooseberries  
1 cup gooseberry juice or milk  
1 teaspoon soda  
½ teaspoon allspice  
dash salt

Cream sugar and lard—add eggs. Combine dry ingredients and alternate with juice or milk. Add vanilla and gooseberries. Pour into 2 round layer cake pans. Bake at 350 degrees until toothpick inserted in cake comes out clean. Ice with your favorite icing.

### Apple Hermit Cookies

Cream ½ cup butter or shortening with 1 cup brown sugar. Add 2 eggs. Beat well. Stir in 1 cup each, chopped dates and peeled apple, ½ cup rolled oats and ½ cup nuts. Add 1¾ cup flour, sifted with ½ teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon baking powder and ¼ teaspoon salt. Mix well and drop by teaspoonfuls onto a greased baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees about 15 minutes. Makes 4 or 5 dozen cookies.

## Remedies

### Cure for Pneumonia

A poultice for pneumonia can be made out of dry mustard and water. Spread it on a piece of flannel and place on the chest...

Fry onions in hog lard. Spread on a piece of flannel then place on the chest. The fever will soon break...

### Earache or Toothache

Tobacco smoke blown in the ear will cure an earache...

Put corn meal in a pan and get it real hot. Put it in a bag and use for an earache or toothache...

### Coughs and Colds

To cure the croup take a half teaspoon sugar with a few drops of kerosene on it...

Use a mixture of vinegar and honey for coughs...

For the croup: melt butter and molasses together and give to the child until heshe vomits...

### Chapped Hands Only

Urinate in a basin and then wash hands in the basin. Leave on until dry, then wash hands. Cures immediately...

### Tonics

Spring tonic: pepper grass, mint, first dandelion leaves and sorrel mixed with vinegar and honey and eaten as a salad...

Tonic: jamaica ginger root, wild cherry bark, sassafras bark, dandelion root added to 1½ pounds white sugar, 1 ounce of cream of tartar and 2 gallon water. Boil 10 minutes and take off fire. Then add 1 cup of hop yeast. After a few days you will have a pleasant beer which used thrice daily will purify the blood...

### Miscellaneous

Onions eaten raw will purify the blood...

Peach leaves crushed and made into a poultice and then wrapped around a cut helps it to heal...

### Rheumatism Cure

Three tablespoons of lemon juice per day will cure rheumatism. If this doesn't relieve the pain, rub coal oil on the rheumatic area...

### Remedies for Rodents

To banish rats from the premises use pounded glass mixed with dry corn meal placed within their reach...

Sprinkle cayenne pepper in their holes...

Place gum camphor in trunks or drawers and mice will never get into them...

### Cleaning

Salt will remove the stain from silver caused by eggs when applied with a soft cloth...

A soft cloth wet in alcohol is excellent to wipe off plate glass and mirrors to prevent their becoming frosty in the winter...

Water stain on varnished wooden surfaces may be removed with vinegar if done immediately...

Iron rust may be removed by rubbing thickened lemon juice and salt on the rust spots. Place the article in the sun. Two or three applications may be necessary...

Aluminum pans that are badly discolored may be brightened by boiling apple parings in them for a short time...

An artificial flower arrangements can be cleaned easily by spraying with some liquid window cleaner containing ammonia. Let it stand a few minutes and rinse off with warm water...

### How to keep well

Don't sleep in a draft  
Don't go to bed with cold feet.  
Don't stand over hot-air registers.

Don't eat what you do not need, just to save it.

Don't try to get cool too quickly after exercising.

Don't sleep in a room without ventilation of some kind.

Don't stuff a cold lest you should be next obliged to starve a fever. Don't sit in a damp or chilly room without a fire.

Don't try to get along without flannel underclothing in winter.

## Letters

### Former store owner writes to TALES

... Old Bellair has quite a history. I purchased the store in 1929, and the old store building was built 40 years before I bought it. After buying the store, I tried to put Old Bellair back on the map and tried all sorts of projects to get people and customers to come to Bellair. The stores at Casey and Oblong were my competitors, and I realized I'd have to do something they were not doing to get people to come to the store and hope to get business.

I first started showing free movies projected out of an upstairs window to a screen I had placed west of the store building. The films I showed were furnished by various companies such as railroads and farm programs (which showed the advantage of using fertilizer which was not used much then). Movies also showed the making of steel and rope. Various others were furnished free to me except the transportation charges. All would send a film of comedy to go along.

Then, too, I had a Charleston dancing contest as well as a fiddler's contest. A professional pugilist in Terre Haute who ran a boxing business and was looking for new talent said he would be happy to put on some boxing exhibitions for a few weeks. There also was a lighted croquet court and horseshoe pitching contests. All of this was held outside. In the two or more years I had them, they were not rained out a single time and were always on Friday nights.

In the winter time, we put on a home talent show upstairs which had been cleaned out. I purchased lumber and local help built benches and a stage. This always drew quite a crowd. And we had 42 with dominoes every evening inside the store building.

So the old Bellair store was a place where everyone liked to come and visit and play or watch as something new was planned each week. On special occasions, such as Halloween or New Year's, we would throw a party upstairs and play games.

Dr. Ferguson, who was a medical doctor in the Civil War was the local doctor, and he had the post office in his office. When he closed his office the post office was moved into the Bellair store. So I was postmaster for a number of years.

Business was good and I got such a kick out of it, working in the farming season from 6:30 a.m. til 10 o'clock or later some evenings. I was so busy and not eating regular it finally affected my health, and I was forced to sell. ... It was an experience that will never be duplicated, and I am happy that I had a part in it.

Yours,  
H. Ray Purcell  
Gaylord, Michigan



# Hermit's life not for everyone, but it's the only one for Walter Whittaker

by Ray Elliott

Ask Walter Whittaker, rural Lawrenceville, why he chose to move out in the woods and live the life of a hermit, and he'll probably shake his head, look at the ground and tell you he doesn't know.

Spend a little time with him and he'll probably end up telling you something like, "Oh, I just never could get along with anybody, especially my relation. I was always fussin' and quarrelin' with somebody. I just thought I'd get back here where they couldn't bother me, and I couldn't bother them."

Never married, Whittaker joined the navy during World War II when he was past 40 years old. At the time, it seemed as though he had little choice.

"He was the only single guy in the county," Whittaker's 84-year-old brother, Ed, said. "They was takin' lots of married men, younger men with families. This old Captain Cook was on the draft board and knew Walter most of his years."

"He told him, he said, 'Whittaker, you're gonna have to do somethin'. You're the most talked about man in the county, not bein' in the army and bein' single.' He said, 'You better get in there, for they're gonna draft you.'"

Whittaker took Cook's advice and joined the navy. Sent to Alaska with the seabees, he worked on construction until the war was over. It was during this time that he'll tell you he sometimes helped unload ships and carried 100-pound gunny sacks of coal in each hand from where the crane left them to where they were stacked.

**I just wanted to get that dang war over with an' get home again"**

"I just wanted to get that dang war over with an' get home again," he'll tell you. But they hated me because I worked hard. Them navy guys, they all made fun of me, 'cause I didn't drink beer or smoke any. I said, 'Well, you guys smoke all you want. I don't like it. I don't want any.' My dad always taught me not to use it. And I never did smoke or drink. Maybe that's what's wrong with me."

Sometimes he'll laugh a little and look at a sockless foot or the missing index finger on his right



Walter Whittaker relaxes in his brother's cabin north of Lawrenceville.

hand where he got a redwood splinter "pickin' up bottles in a California beer joint" that went undetected by navy doctors until the finger had to be amputated. It was amputated in front of the knuckle, he'll tell you, so he "could still have a little to wave at the girls."

Then he'll go on with the story.

"There was 13 million guys in the navy, and the first thing they told us was to never go anywhere

by yourself," he'll say, flicking a fly from his tattered, patched overalls or taking his patched-so-many-time-straw-hat-that-you-can-hardly-tell-it's-a-straw hat anymore from his head and holding it in his gnarled hands.

"One day I was goin' to town. I was a little ways off, and I was walkin'. The old lieutenant and two or three more of 'em stopped and they said, 'Where you goin', Walter?' And I said, 'I'm goin' to

town.' 'Why,' one of 'em said, 'you ain't supposed to be out here by yourself.' I said, 'Well, they won't nobody come with me.'

"Kinda tickled me in a way. Oh, I just never would go with 'em, and they didn't want me. I was always teasin' 'em and makin' 'em mad. Scufflin' with 'em and wrasslin' and holdin' 'em down. They couldn't stand that."

There seems to be nothing left of that personality, nothing to

suggest why he's chosen to live in the woods for the last 30 years or more. He isn't sure how long it's been. Or doesn't care.

Now he'll greet you with a "Get out and come on up." And he'll tell you stories from another time, another place. Still, you won't deny that the man you're talking with "marches to a different drummer."

**"Marches to a different drummer"**

Whittaker was born and raised near the old Blackburn School north of Lawrenceville, three miles south of where he now lives. When he first left home he may have been 18; he may have been 20. He doesn't remember. That's been a long time ago for a 79-year-old man who measures time by bad winters and dry summers.

Whenever he left, though, he left with three other Lawrenceville boys and caught a west-bound freight train. That was the beginning of 15 or 20 years of roaming the country, working about any place he landed.

"It's a free ride, see, an' you're not supposed to do it," he'll tell you about riding freight trains. "Me and old Mart Zehner and Red Brashears and Earl Childers, I believe it was that went that first time. We got outside Garden City, Kansas, and I said, 'I'm gonna go over to this farmhouse to see if I can get me a job. Come with me.'

"They wasn't no use goin' over there, they said. I went over there. Just an old man and woman livin' there. Horsepower them days, you know. Cut their wheat, I asked. And they said, 'Well, we was just sittin' down to have some breakfast. You better have some.'

"I said, 'Well, I better go back and tell them guys to come. How many of 'em can you use?' He said, 'Well, I can use 'em all.' Went back out there and couldn't see no one. They'd walked on down the railroad. Cut out to somewhere. Never seen 'em for years. I went in and worked for this guy, threshin' I don't know how many bundles of wheat."

From there Whittaker headed west. Hopping off a freight train in Denver, some kids tried to rob him.

(Cont. on next page)





Taking "Tales" workshop members on a tour of the place he's called home for over 30 years, Whittaker explains a practice long since gone of tolling the church bell one time for each year of a person's life at his funeral.

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"They was a bunch of young whups there," he'll tell you. "Wasn't any of 'em as big as I was, but as old and they tried to rob me. I'd just back off, away from 'em. If they'd crowd me too much, I'd just back up and act like I was gonna hit 'em."

"They finally just give up and quit botherin' me. They knowed I was alone, see, and they figured I had some money. But they didn't get it. Hardly anybody'd fight me. I just bluffed 'em, I guess. I wasn't afraid of nothin' or nobody."

That attitude, about 225 pounds on a 6' frame and the desire to fight led Whittaker to the ring as a sparring partner for some big-name heavyweight boxers who trained in California where he worked in the oil fields.

### "It's a free ride, see, an' you're not supposed to do it"

"Yeah," he'll say in the same low, almost noncommittal tone of voice he uses when he talks about anything else in his life. "I used to fight old Jack Dempsey, Luis Firpo, Jess Willard—all them prize fighters out in California."

"I just exercised them guys. I knocked 'em back and forth, outrun 'em or get away from 'em or somethin'. Hit 'em and then got out of the way quicker 'n they could get to me. Old Mart Zehner, he was out there, and he called me Firpo even after we got back here."

"I sure put the hammer on a lot of 'em. If I'd just wanted to get in there and get in the big money, I could of won a lot of fights. I could of whipped any of them guys that I practiced with."

### "I used to fight old Jack Dempsey ..."

Dempsey? you might ask, knowing that Whittaker has already told you that he thought Firpo was the best fighter.

"I believe I could of," Whittaker'll tell you as his eyes catch a weed, a berry or he thinks of a story or an idea, according to where he is at the time. "I believe I could have done as good as any of 'em. But I had a good job. I'd just as soon work."

A lot has happened in his life since those days. Somewhere along the line he'll tell you he found the time to travel. He went wherever the urge or inclination led him, including all over the United States, Mexico, South America, Africa, China, Australia and India. It was in India that he saw the metallic blue-green splendor of the peacock in its native habitat.

"I like them peacocks," he'll tell you talking about the ones he used to have and how he'd liked to have built a big shed so he could keep it heated for the peacocks in the winter. "They're a torpical bird, you know. They'll freeze to death in winter."

It has been several years since he's had any peacocks, although you'll still see a skinned one or two tacked to a wall somewhere as he shows you around the place. And now he'll tell you he's gotten rid of the last of his chickens, too. Coyotes and stray dogs got to getting too many of them.

"Now I sure miss them chickens," he'll tell you. "I like to raise chickens."

From the common chicken to the strutting peacock, Walter has raised about every kind of fowl around. He's raised turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas, pheasants and quail.

"Old Ed," he'll tell you, "found a nest of quail eggs when he was cuttin' hay and give 'em to me so an old banty hen could hatch 'em. Well, the old banty raised 'em. But the quails would follow the turkeys every place they went."

"I had a golden pheasant hen, too. And I crossed her with an ordinary rooster. Boy, that old thing, he got bigger than any of 'em. But he didn't live very long."

"The only one I ever heard of. Never talked to anybody yet who ever heard of one. He was a funny lookin' thing. Looked a little bit like a pheasant, but quite a bit bigger. Several colors. He wouldn't have nothin' to do with none of 'em. They'd all fight him off."

But then one day the pheasant started setting.

"He kinda picked out these old hens he run with," Ed said one day when Walter was talking about the pheasant. "There was an old hen settin' up there in the box, and he got in another box. And he stayed there. I told Walter, 'Put some eggs under him.' He hatched off a bunch of chickens and as them chickens got out on the ground, he brought 'em down in the woods and raised 'em."

things Ed has been collecting for over 40 years.

The cabin, built by Robert Samuel Reed in 1859, was torn down and rebuilt by the Whittakers in 1961. This is noted on a blackboard inside the cabin.

### "Now I sure miss them chickens ... I like to raise chickens"

"Guy that owned this old log house was gonna bulldoze it down and burn it," Water'll tell you as he takes you around and tells you what things are, how they were used or where they came from. "Ed said, 'I'd like to have it. We'll take it down.'"

"Started in on Easter Sunday in '61, and I believe we had it down in a week. Had a bunch of kids helpin' us. Them old logs, I thought they'd weigh a ton. But I could lift 'em, they'd dried out so light."

Since then, Walter'll tell you, over 4000 people from across the country and around the world have visited the cabin. He knows the number because he'll have you sign the guest book before you leave.

Under the date on the blackboard that tells when the cabin was rebuilt is the Whittakers' guest policy. It says:

"You are welcome. Everybody's religion and politics are O.K. with us, so let's not discuss them. This is a place of recreation and contentment. We treat it as our home and ask that you do the same, so we can ask you to come back."

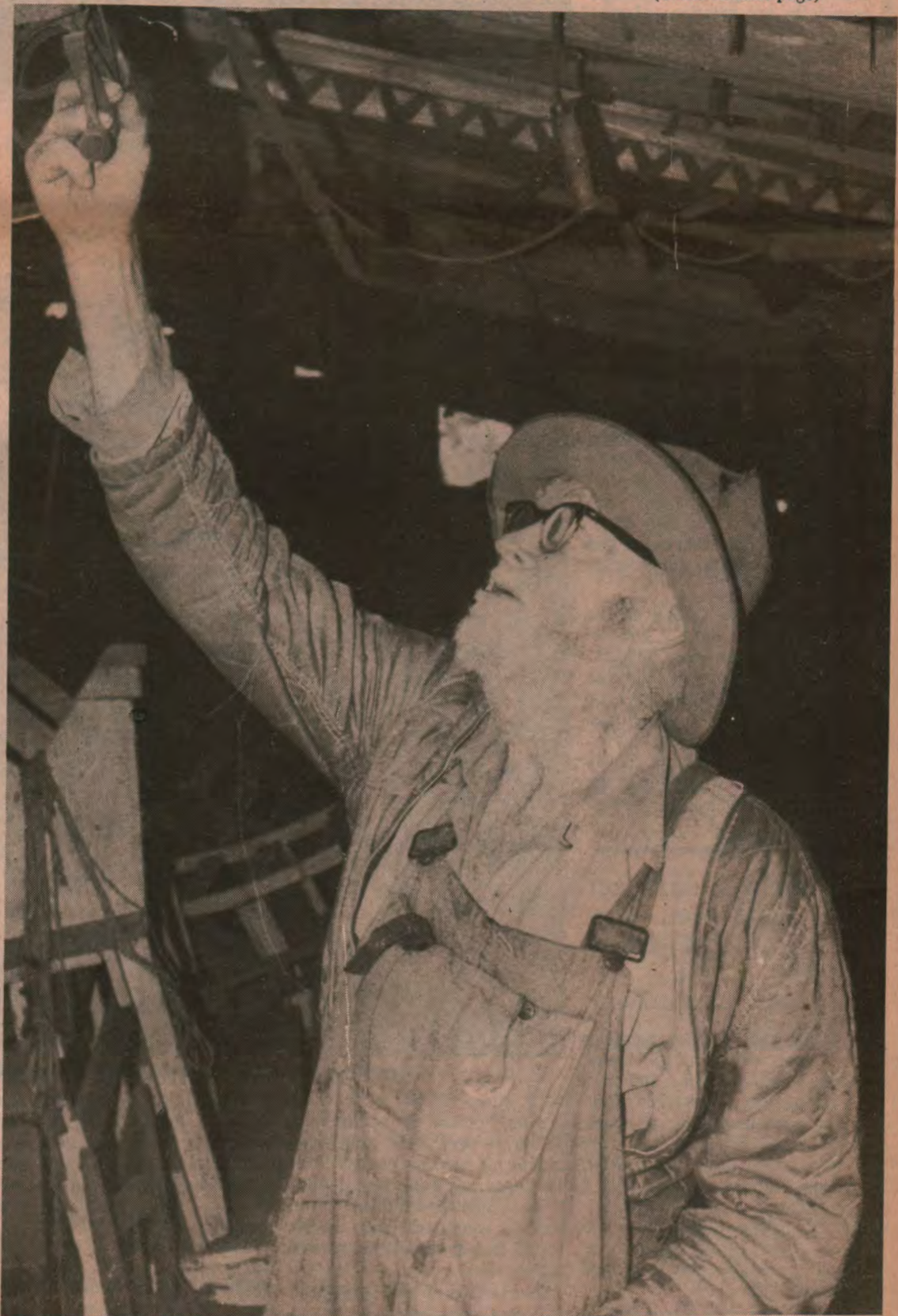
The bi-focal wearing, white-whiskered, shell of the former man who could carry a 100-pound gunny sack of coal in each hand, Walter Whittaker'll talk to you about the things in the cabin, occasionally stopping in mid-sentence to tell you about a piece of furniture, a string of goose eggs on the wall or anything else that crosses his mind.

"Take a look upstairs," he'll say, pulling down the rope that brings the ladder from the loft. You'll gasp slightly as you peer over the edge of the floor and stare in the face of a wolf, mouth open, fangs bared.

"Scared, ain't he?" he'll ask no one in particular. "They caught him in a fox drive over here south of Russellville after World War II. Nobody wanted it, so I brought it out here. Knowed an old guy in Pinkstaff who was a taxidermist. He fixed it up for me. Did a good job on it, too."

Sitting in the cabin after he gets tired of standing or walking around, Walter'll sit and point with his cane at a picture of a "Senorita" he got in Mexico or at

(Cont. on next page)



Whittaker explains the function of a piece of farm equipment from days past, and demonstrates how it works. He says he could operate all the equipment scattered around his brother's farm.



(Cont. from page 8)

a piece of furniture. Whatever it is he points at, he's got something to say about it.

"Now that old organ," he'll say. "I forgot where old Ed got it. He picked it up somewhere. And that old victrola there. Have to wind it up, spring broke on it and it's full of mud dobber nests. Same way with the organ."

And so it'll go.

Although the cabin is furnished, Whittaker stays at another house just through the woods and across the pond. When the Whittakers reconstructed the cabin, they built a fireplace at one end and left a cook stove at the other. Then shortly after the rebuilding was completed, Walter's old house burned.

"I had an old heatin' stove in one room," he'll tell you, "an' back in the kitchen I had an old cook stove. So I just got up one mornin' an' took a shovel full of coal out of the heat stove and put 'em in the cook stove."

### "Never even had a girl friend"

"Scattered fire all along the way. I got down the hill a little ways and looked around. The smoke was comin' out the winders. Aw, she did burn quick. They was enough logs left over from the cabin to build me one up there in the old place about 10-15' square."

And it's in that 10-15' square that Whittaker has lived since the old place burned. He's added a shed-like building that has everything from chicken nests to bee hives either in or around it.

Inside the building with glassless windows, Whittaker has a stove, feather beds and other odds and ends he's collected since the fire 20 years ago. He sleeps there most nights, but on summer days he rests in the cool of the old cabin or out on a set of bed springs he has rigged up under a tree.

That's the way he's lived since about the end of World War II. After he came back from the service, Whittaker moved back on the home place near Blackburn School where he had heired 100 acres.

"Yeah," he'll say, walking around or grabbing a bit or a ball and chain that once held a horse or a slave. "I had a shack in the side of the hill there. Called it a cave. There was a big spring there. I had water hooked up to that spring."

"Then old Ed, he wanted me to sell out down there and come up here. Wanted me to help him with this place, I guess. So I did. Wish I'd stayed down there, though. I liked it better."

### "I just eat old bachelor mulligan"

"But this is the best life in the world to me, anyhow," he'll tell you. "Suits me just fine. Used to be just me and my dogs and chickens and cats. There in that cold winter I had dogs and chickens and peacocks and geese and ducks that froze to death. I got a white cat up there that's ears are froze off."

Whittaker goes to bed at sunset and gets up at sunrise and keeps from freezing to death on those cold nights by sleeping between four of his feather beds and from some heat from the small wood stove.

"Yeah," he'll tell you, "I'd freeze up if it wasn't for them feather beds around. It's kinda hard to get 'em warm, but after you get 'em warm they stay warm. 'Course I don't sleep very much. Just lay there and listen to the chickens crowin', dogs barkin'. That's the only music I got. Suits me all right, too."

### "That dog'd eat more fish. But she wouldn't eat a catfish head"

About the only thing Walter Whittaker'll say doesn't suit him or that he'd do differently if he had his life to live over is that he might like to have a wife.

"Never knowed what to say to 'em, though," he'll tell you about women. "Never even had a girl friend. I know a 100 old widder



Walter watches "Tales" students on a visit earlier in the summer. The horse weeds surrounding him are usually mowed by mid-summer.

women an' 20 old maids. Lived by themselves. Got 'em a car and a good income and a good home. Never did take any of 'em for a buggy ride.

"All of 'em asked me to come live with 'em. I think they're kiddin' me. Probably call the sheriff if I did. They don't none of 'em want me. I don't blame 'em."

Other than that, Whittaker seems content with his life in the woods without most of the modern conveniences people nowadays take for granted. Even his diet is simple.

"I don't do much cookin'," he'll tell you. "I just eat old bachelor mulligan, if I do. Throw somethin' in an' boil it. But I eat Kellogg bran, drink milk an' eat honey. Honey an' milk, that's my main eatin'."

"Oh, I eat persimmons, wild cherries and blackberries. Blueberries, may apples and paw paws. There ain't nothin' better 'n a paw paw. Better 'n any banana you ever ate. I can eat my fill of 'em anytime. They agree with me, too."

Lots of things seem to agree with Whittaker but after spen-

ding some time with him you probably still won't know why he's chosen to live the life he has lived for so many years. Yet you'll be glad you met him, glad you've had the opportunity to share time with him. There'll be a hundred stories he's told you that you'll remember for years to come.

"Used to have an old collie dog," you'll remember his telling you. "She liked to fish better 'n anything or anybody in the world. Best dog I ever had. I called her Jeanie."

"Got her from a lady named Jeanie. Ed's got her brother. That dog'd eat more fish. But she wouldn't eat a catfish head. She'd spit it out. She knowed them bones was in there."

### "But this is the best life in the world to me"

"I don't know what happened to her. Always heard that when a dog gets old, they'll go off and hide and die and you'll never find 'em. I always thought she was in an old bulldoze pile. But, gosh, you couldn't get up under there to

see or nothin'. I sure hated to lose her. I sure thought a lot of that old dog."

Then you'll remember, too, Walter telling you about how he feels about getting old, living the life he does.

### "Everybody's got to die. I've about lived my term"

"I was sick this mornin'," you'll remember him saying. "I ate somethin' that made me sick, I guess. Dizzy, I couldn't walk. I just laid back down an' in a little while I was all right. But a guy gets that away when he gets old."

"It's púrt near a mile over there to Ed's. Over a half a mile to the first neighbors, and I'd die before I got there."

"That don't worry me none, though. Everybody's got to die. I've about lived my term. I tell a lot of 'em when I get ready to go, I'll just go out here in the woods, keel over and let the varmints eat me."



One of Walter's favorite places to pass the time of day is his bed under the tree. He can often be found there or in the cabin, resting but not sleeping much because of the aches and pains of age and a long list of injuries accumulated over his lifetime.





The Bellair general store in the late 1940s when Harold Matheny was the storekeeper.

## The Bellair Store - - - -

Just a lot of memories now

On May 20, 1844, John Ryan bought Lot 20 for \$25 and built a log store. It was destroyed by fire in 1850. The community helped him build a big, new frame building. Thirty-seven years and eight owners later, Amos Fouty bought the store on July 15, 1887.

Son-in-law Frank Harris tore down the old structure, erected the two-story building in the alley and had it rolled into where it stands today. A dozen men have owned or operated it since.

--from "The Story of One Town," a history of Bellair by Lucille Randolph

by Vanessa Faurie.

Now only four of those owners or their wives are around to remember what it was like to run the old store. Back then 25 or more people were there some nights.

But not anymore. The Bellair store is almost 100 years old, and the mice and the cobwebs use it. There aren't any more cool summer nights when the men around town go to the back of the store to talk or play 42, using nail kegs with boxes over them or hard-backed benches for chairs.

The women don't sit on the long, wooden benches to talk and crochet while others wait at the counters as clerks gather their orders. Kids don't run and play outside on the porch, either. And no one relaxes on the benches that sat on each side of the front door.

People only did those things at a time when they had to depend

more on their neighbors to have a good time instead of on a car or TV. People depended upon each other in Bellair, as they did in many other places during that time.

"O' course, back in those days, we didn't have television, too many radios an' those things," Oletha Matheny said as she remembered when she and her husband, Harold, owned the Bellair general store from 1941-55. "It was more jus' freindliness an' gettin' together an' seein' your neighbors when you went to town."

"It was more jus' freindliness an' gettin' together"

Matheny sold the store in 1955 when her husband died.

"He'd always told me, 'If anything happens to me, don't run this store,'" she said. "That was because it'd be too big a job for me."

But now Matheny sat in a rocking chair on her front porch in Robinson, talking about the importance of general stores to the community.

"Like sometimes now, I go get my groceries an' I don't see a soul I know," she said. "But in the smaller towns, if there was somebody you knowed, then usually you didn't have to be in a awful big hurry that you didn't stop an' visit with people a lot. You see, that was part of it."

Howard Knicely was part of it in the early thirties. He went to work for owner Ray Purcell at the Bellair store evenings and before school when he was in high school in 1929, just after Purcell bought the store.

"I started out makin' egg crates for a cent a piece," Howard said. "You know, nailin' 'em. They bought a lot of eggs then. I could make 30 or 40 cases a night."

After nailing crates, Knicely started weighing and buying chickens, handling eggs and testing cream.

"I was testin' for butterfat one time," he said. "You have to stir it to get a good sample. Well, I stirred up a five-gallon can an' got a rat."

Eventually, though, Knicely became a clerk and waited on customers as well as worked at the post office that was in the store. He also pumped gas from the two glass-topped gas pumps out in front of the store. He worked seven days a week at \$6.50 a week.

In addition to the gas pumps, a grease rack and a croquet dia-

mond were set up outside. And movies were shown on a screen that was hung on the west side of the store. There were plays and musicals over the weekends on the second floor of the building. A stage stood at the north end, and rows of chairs filled the rest of the floor.

Knicely liked his years at the Bellair store. He got to know everyone as well as making some money.

"I wouldn't know just how to describe it," Howard said, looking back on his job. "It was a good experience, an' I'm glad I did it."

Knicely quit his job in 1935 to go to school. Purcell wasn't left empty-handed, though. He had other help, including his twin sister, Fay, who started working in September of 1933 as a clerk. She didn't leave until 1952 after working for three different owners.

Now living in Mattoon, Fay remembered working from 8 a.m. to noon, then from 5 p.m. until 9 p.m., six days a week. Working at the Bellair store, according to her, meant doing "anything that needed to be done"--from candling eggs to pumping gas.

"An' in the beginning, the gas pump wasn't electric," Purcell said. "The hand pump was on the side of the tank."

She remembered waiting on customers while they all talked. But she didn't get too many chances to visit.

"It was just a little country store," she said. "But we had quite a lot of loafers. It was the folks that was there that did most of the talkin'. And there was always a loaf o' bread or a box o' crackers open, an' they'd buy lunchmeat and make their own sandwiches or somethin' like

that. But I'd be up and down waitin' on customers."

During the time she worked in Bellair, Purcell collected newspaper clippings and other things for a scrapbook she started around the time of World War I.

"I just saved anything that was unusual," she said. "Anything an' everything."

One of the things she saved was an old playbill from 1942, announcing an upcoming show at the store. It read: "ALL STAR WEDDING Bellair, ILL. Friday, April 3. Sponsored by the Red Cross. Curtain 8:00. Each character a man--each man a lady. Children 15 cents, Adults 25 cents tax included."

There was also a list of the cast and their characters. People like Art Farley, now mayor of Oblong, played Sally Rand. Harold Matheny, owner of the store at the time, played President Roosevelt and Riley Chapman was Eleanor Roosevelt.

Some other characters included Shirley Temple, Gene Autry and Carmen Miranda, played by Earl Adkisson, Roy Mikeworth and J. R. McCollough, respectively.

"They had some really good plays," Fay said, laughing. "The times and the people who are still around have really changed since then."

Along with the people who have changed since the time they were in the play, Purcell remembered some changes around town in the 19 years she worked there.

"Electricity was put through Bellair while I was there," she said. "That was one thing that was a change."

Before electricity, Delco lights from a battery plant in the back

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of the store lighted the store. "I remember the Delco lights very well," she said. "I went back there one time. It wasn't stopped, an' I thought it was the gas main that didn't shut off. It splattered oil all over me."

And the only heat for the store in winter was the potbellied stove. For Purcell, working behind the counters was "like wadin' through ice water." She left her job at Matheny's Bellair store in March of 1952 to take care of her mother who had burned herself and needed help to get around.

Fay's brother ran the store until 1937. And Ray Purcell and, Ada, his wife of 58 years still remember the years they spent in Bellair. But because of Ray's hearing problem, Ada did most of the talking during a recent phone conversation from their Gaylord, Michigan, home. She also worked in the store.

"I didn't work all the time," she said. "Our daughter, Betty, was quite small then. Ray opened up at 6:30 durin' farm season six days a week, an' sometimes was there til 10 at night. He'd be open til noon on Sundays."

"Everybody'd just visit an' talk about the happenings o' the day. If someone had a problem like an illness or something, that would be mentioned. Or if you could help in any way if somebody needed it, most everybody in the community was willing to do what they could."

People also talked about the big subject of the times—the Depression.

"Oh, they talked about how serious the economy was, like they do today," Ada said and laughed. "Things don't look good today, even. But there's always one or two in a crowd that get too riled up, or someone thinks they know everything. I don't remember that too much, though."

Because of the hard times, people bought a lot of goods on credit. And while the Purcells lost some money, Ada said it wasn't any great amount.

"Durin' the Depression, there was some that could hardly make

### "Durin' the depression ... there was some on WPA"

it," she said. "There was some on WPA. An' the banks were closing."

The Bellair bank closed in 1931. And it was robbed in 1929. But the Purcells had little problems with robberies or break-ins.

"Cept one time in winter," Ada said, laughing a little. "Some boys broke in an' stole some rabbits. But that was about it."

There were other aggravations. Vacations weren't a big part of a storekeeper's life. And sometimes running the store could be frustrating with all the work and people.

"At times you'd get a little discouraged," Ada said. "But that's only natural. Like maybe you'd want to go some place or do something, an' you couldn't get away cause you had to go to the store. It wasn't such a bad thing after all, though. It was an enjoyable time cause you could visit with different people."

"Now in the summer, it got pretty hot in there," she said. "We didn't have any fans. An' in the winter, everybody'd see which one could get the closest to the potbellied stove. Course that's when we really had the

good times cause people'd stay at the store longer, an' they wouldn't have to be in a hurry."

The Purcells kept a radio in the store, and everyone listened to the Cardinals' baseball games and music like fiddler's contests. "Fibber McGee and Molly" and Red Skelton were on a lot, too.

But then in 1937, Ray's health wasn't good and he sold the store.

"He did hate to sell out," Ada said. "But he jus' was no longer able to take care o' the respnsibility of the store."

In April, Roy and Fannie Johnson who now live in Oblong took over the store. Roy has become virtually bedridden because of poor health, but Fannie spoke of the more than four years they ran the store.

"Yes, we bought it in '37," she said, holding her hand to the frame of her glasses as if it were helping her remember. "Oh, we sold feed. We sold dry goods, notions, ice cream, groceries, an' just about anything you could name."

Johnson sat back in a chair in her living room and talked about the role she thought the general store played in Bellair.

### "... at the time, people didn't go like they do today"

"Ya see, at the time, people didn't go like they do today," she said. "Some of 'em didn't even have cars. They depended on the country stores for their groceries, especialy."

"An' then, o' course, the social time came in cause they didn't

have any place else much to go like the kids do now an' take their cars an' jus' run here, there an' every place."

But it seemed to Fannie that there were always people coming in and out of the Bellair store during the long week when the store was open from six in the morning until about ten at night and eight until noon on Sundays.

"The store was generally full throughout the day," Johnson said. "We had them old schoolhouse, recitation benches that we would sit on. An' course we had chairs all around an' tables for their dominoes. There never was any time they wasn't comin' in. That's the reason I was near wore out. I wasn't used to stayin' up, an' I got so sleepy."

Sometimes the store was even open as late as 11 p.m. and midnight when there were 42 tournaments and plays. There were also some musical shows with banjos, mandolins and other string instruments.

A long, rectangularly-shaped, two-storied building with 15' ceilings, the store stretched out a 100 feet from the street to the rear exit where it had built onto it a sprawling one-story shed.

"Oh, it was quite big," Johnson said. "I 'spect on the one side was the main counters we sold over. They was on the west side. Folk's come an' give us their order, an' we would write it down in a book. Then we'd gather the things up for 'em."

"But on the east side, we had counters with glass in 'em an' had our notions in 'em, like

(Cont. on next page)



Ada and Ray Purcell, who ran the Bellair store 1929-37, in a photo taken circa 1975.



Fay Purcell, clerk at the Bellair store 1933-52.



Howard Knicely clerk at the Bellair store 1929-35.



Harold and Oletha Matheny who owned the Bellair store 1941-55 with their two daughters, Shirley and Sharon at the time the Mathenys ran the store.



Ruby Ritter in front of the Bellair store sometime in the late 1950s.



Fannie and Roy Johnson owners of the Bellair store 1937-41 in a photo taken of them about the time they ran the store.



Bill Ritter in front of the Bellair store shortly after the Ritters bought the store in 1955.



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thread an' needles—little things for 'em to see. Up in front, we had the pop case out in the middle o' the floor. And then they had what you called a potbelled stove that's always been there that we heated the store with. Course that's where mostly all of our chairs an' benches were.

"We had shelving all along the east side, an' that held our dry goods an' hardware. An' then on the west side, why, we'd have all our groceries. In the back was a meat counter. An' then clear on back we had a little petition where we went back in to do the eggs. Then back just a little was a little place to test the cream."

The eggs that people brought in had to be checked to see that they weren't bad. A box with a hole in the top of it and a light inside was used to see the outline and color of what was inside the egg and to check for spots.

"I 'spect we even got some with chickens in 'em sometimes," Johnson said, laughing.

### "Doin' the tradin'"

When people sold cream or eggs to the store, instead of being paid, they could be credited with an equal value of groceries and anything else they wanted to buy in the store. It was known as "doin' the tradin'."

The Johnsons also gave credit to customers, usually on a one-month basis.

"It's not like it is now," Fannie said. "We didn't investigate an' things like that. We knew just about everybody, an' I guess Ray Purcell advised us who to credit an' who not to. It wasn't so established to customers as it is now."

"Well, even when Ray wanted to buy an' the to buy the store, Roy says, 'Well, we don't have the money to buy it.' An' Ray said, 'Well, I think Granddad'll (John Pyane) furnish it.'"

"So we went up to John's, an' Roy signed a note at four or five percent interest. An' we got the store on just our note. We was real pleased with all our dealin's in the store. We never lost a lot o' money, but we did lose some."

Like other general storekeepers of the time, the Johnsons kept their credit listings and other accounts in a type of desk made by the Macaskie Company. It was about three feet wide with a straight back. The front slanted down and files folded out to keep individual records.

To get the goods the Johnsons sold, they would place an order to the Hulman Company in Terre Haute every week and pick it up themselves.

"Now we did have our feed delivered," Johnson said. "An' that was from Oblong. From Monte Eagle Mills. But the rest of it was from Terre Haute."

Unlike the Purcells who never really had a break-in, the Johnsons did have burglars while they owned the store.

"They broke in through the front window once," Fannie said. "It looked like a woman's footstep that stepped in the window. They got a li'l bit of our money, but somebody told us it was goin' to be broke into so we took our money home with us every night or hid it. Got some of the cemetery money, too."

"At the time, people gathered in money to take care o' the cemetery," Johnson said, explaining. "Now around here, we have a regular feller to take care o' 'em. But they didn't before. They'd use this to hire somebody to mow an' things."

With all the time, the hard work, the break-in, the four years that the Johnsons owned the store were still happy ones.

"I always liked workin' in the store," Johnson said. "We ran another store down here in Oblong. The girls that helped us didn't like for me to be there cause I liked to keep it clean, you know, dustin' an' things. Roy didn't make 'em do that too much when I wasn't there."

### "But it was just about as happy a time as any"

"An' there was another thing. We had a radio in the store. An' jus' like these soap operas that you see from day to day now, they had them over the radio. Course when I was home, I kinda got use to hearin' 'em. That's one thing I

had to give up cause they'd want to listen to the sports.

"That's when I started to get fiesher cause I ate chocolate candy," she said and laughed. "But it was just about as happy a time as any."

The Johnsons sold the store in December of 1941 to Harold and Oieta Matheny, who had previously owned a service station for 13 years in Yale. The store was rewired for electricity when the Mathenys took over.

They took over on December 1. Six days later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

"Everybody in town was pretty upset when war was declared," Matheny said. "I remember they had a farewell party for us in Yale. Everybody thought about the ones that'd have to go to war. It was a lot of the conversation at the time. I can't remember when we got word when some o' 'em got killed, but I remember them happenin'."

In addition to the plays and musical shows, the second floor of the store was also used during the war for dinners for the soldiers before they left or when they were home on leave.

"An' durin' the war, the only time we had the store closed was on Friday afternoons," Matheny said. "We had to haul in most everything we sold from Terre Haute. But things were scarce. People'd expect Harold to be home. An' by the time he opened later in the evenin', they'd be there grabbin' everything."

"We might get a stalk o' bananas or two stalks. That'd probably be the most we'd get because that'd be all they'd allow us to have. They'd be gone jus' like that."

The bananas stalks hung in the back of the store by the meat counter. Occasionally, they'd last a few days. But because

things were hard to get, that wasn't often.

Matheny remembered selling things like sugar that was kept in a drawer behind the counter. They would scoop whatever was ordered into sacks. They also sold flour in sacks that women made dresses and other things from.

"Actually, it was quite pretty material," Matheny said, holding a pillow slip with pink flowers as an example. "This is the only one I have left."

The flour and sugar were stored on the west side of the store. Up in front near the window on the same side was a six-door ice cream case. Next to it were two candy cases, one with a curved-glass top sitting on top of a long, rectangular glass case. Both bowl and bar candy were sold.

Across the small aisle in the middle of the store stood the

(Cont. on page 19)

## The Moonshine Store, one of the last of a dying breed, hangs on



The Moonshine Store, originally built by Roscoe and Ransom Deverick in 1911, is run by Enid Misner today.

by Vanessa Faurie

Moonshine is one of the few general stores still open for business. After supermarkets and better roads came along, the general stores didn't seem to have much purpose.

But Moonshine still does. At least for the people who live nearby.

"People would miss it if it wasn't here," Enid Misner, owner of the Moonshine store, said. "They like it like this."

Even now, farmers and other workers come by to eat lunch or just visit in the morning. And people stop in usually when they only need a few things. Just like before.

"Ain't changed much in this place," Misner said as she stood behind one of the wooden counters, wearing a smock. "Course I didn't come to Moonshine that often when I was little.

But we don't buy eggs or chickens an' cream an' things like they used to."

Yet with its metal, patterned ceiling tiles and old display cases and shelves, walking into Moonshine is like walking back in time.

"The ceiling's original," Misner said. "People notice that the first thing when they walk in here. It's antique. The squares are screwed together. You don't see that kind anymore."

"The shelves are the same ones, too," she said, then pointed from one glass showcase to another. "Now that there round case—my father used to run a store over east and that came from his store. And so did that showcase there. They been here quite awhile."

The only difference now is the shelves and cases are filled with dishwashing liquid and ready-made cake mixes and other pre-packaged goods. Misner also has a lunch counter in the back of the

store for sandwiches.

"We always had them," she said about selling sandwiches. "But they increased. I'm not really set up for what I have. There used to be so many people in here, you could make a restaurant out of it."

Although Misner doesn't start to make sandwiches until noon, if someone wants to take a lunch to work, she makes it for them in the morning.

"I'm here at 6:30 in the morning," she said. "Sometimes a little before. Then I close at six in the evenin'. But in mid-winter, I might not come so early."

She laughed and continued, "I'm still open at seven, but you know, people ain't movin' as much."

But someone is usually in the store much of the time. Especially in the morning.

"Well, there's a lot runnin' in now," Misner said. "And now, you might see 15 or 20 men in here

jus' to get together for a little bit."

The men sit on the two benches that line the counters near the middle of the store. Wearing overalls, work clothes and caps that advertise seed corn and fertilizer, they eat sandwiches or drink coffee and talk about what last night's rain did to the crops or how long it's been since they saw the customer who just walked in.

People have been getting together at Moonshine at the present location since 1912 when Roscoe Deverick and his brother, Ransom, built the store. Misner has been running the store since 1964. She has kept it going since the death of her husband, Raymond, in 1978, but wonders sometimes if she should.

"I really need to be thinkin' about quittin'," Misner said. "I might sell the place if the right guy came along. But I'm liable to

(Cont. on page 18)



# Maplewood, a home fit for a governor

by Maureen Foertsch

From a distance, the house spread across the green, hilly field almost looked lived in. But a closer view of the green, peeling paint, broken windows and crumbling porch extending the full length of the long house told another story.

If the walls of the house located south of Palestine could speak, they would speak of history. A portion of the house which Illinois' ninth governor, Augustus C. French, built on the land still stands. For more than one hundred years, though, the house has been in the family of Mary Wapner and her mother, Helen Fife Fitzpatrick.

"My grandfather, William Fife, bought the nucleus of the farm, including the house, from Governor French's widow, Lucy French, in 1865," Fitzpatrick said, recounting the property's history while sitting in the living room of her home in Robinson where she has lived since the death of her husband, Russell.

"There's a story that my grandfather came from Ohio to Illinois looking for some land to buy and to settle in a different place from the rest of his family. He stopped in a hotel in Sullivan, Indiana, and he overheard two men talking about a farm that was for sale at Palestine.

"They said that the widow French was ready to sell, and she wanted a quick sale. Well, he hopped on his horse and rode over here (French's farm) like mad and bought it before those two men were through talking about it."

Lucy French sold the house and 320 acres of land to Fife for \$5400.

"I could tell after reading Governor French's will why his widow was in such a hurry to sell the farm. Because the will mentioned if she remarried, what she had wasn't hers any longer. So she sold it the next year after he died, then remarried soon after and had the money."

Lucy was French's second wife. On February 3, 1840, he purchased the original house and

160 acres for \$2000 from Joseph Kitchell, father of French's first wife, Clarissa Kitchell. Both she and a son died shortly after she gave birth.

Born in New Hampshire where he attended a Dartmouth college and later became a lawyer, French's political career in Illinois had just begun. In 1839 he took the position of receiver in the land office in Palestine. Following terms in the 10th and 11th general assemblies, the lawyer became a presidential elector in 1844. In 1846, French, a democrat, was elected governor of Illinois.

His second term in 1849 made him the first Illinois governor to be re-elected. During those terms as governor, French lived in the home south of Palestine which he called "Maplewood."

"He had to travel back and forth from Springfield," Fitzpatrick said, "although I don't think they've ever given the house credit for that (being French's residence while serving as governor) since they have a landmark in town where he once lived. According to the centennial book of Palestine 1861-1961, at the time of French's election he lived in Palestine at a site later occupied by the Palestine Lumber Company.

"He lived in that house in Palestine when he was governor," she said. "And he built a beautiful house there where my grandfather bought. It was a southern-colonial house—long with pillars all across the front of it."

The beauty of the house was not enough to keep French there until his death, though. After his two terms as governor were completed, French moved to Lebanon, Illinois and accepted the Chair of Law at McKendree College. He died in Lebanon, September 4, 1864, at the age of 56.

Shortly after French's death William Fife, Fitzpatrick's grandfather made his move from Ohio. He had left Strabane, Ireland in 1832.

"My grandfather came from Ireland on a boat, and it took him six weeks to get here," Fitzpatrick said. "There was a bad storm during the trip, and they're supposed to have thrown all their possessions away, including the records. So my grandfather always said he didn't know how old he was. Of course, he did."

Fife may not have been definite about his age, but he was certain of his religion.

"They tell a story that on the first day he was there," Fitzpatrick said, "down in the boonies, you know, he started down the road looking for a church and found one at Mores. That was an important part of his life. He was a staunch Presbyterian and the whole family had to be Presbyterian."

"The house Governor French built, the nice-looking, southern-colonial, burned to the ground one day when my grandfather's family was at church. That should have been a lesson to them."

Fitzpatrick laughed for a moment then returned to remembering the house.

"Yes, that house burned to the ground, with the exception, they think, of the back end of it which French used as a schoolhouse for area children. In fact Roy Foxe is still living, and he remembers his father talking of going to school at Governor French's."

It is believed that Foxe's father attended the school at French's in about 1856 and that the teacher, Sarah Wheeler, cooked the noon meals for the children and lived in a room above the section of the house used as the school.

"The Crawford County Historical Society has contacted me," Fitzpatrick said. "They wanted to move that part of the house to restore it. I said, 'Well, you want to get proof before you do that.' I think it could be proved by the way it was built. It has corner cupboards and cupboards underneath and three doors to get into it."

But the historical society got no part of the house. And while it has remained in the Fife/

Fitzpatrick family since William Fife purchased it, for a time, no members of the family lived there.

"My father grew up there," Fitzpatrick said. "But he and my grandfather started the first state bank in Palestine, and they all moved to town in about 1900 and had a family who wasn't related farm the land."

Fitzpatrick and her husband were the next family members to live in the house, but they did not move there until 1940.

"We bought the farm from another heir and my father, who owned part of it. We now have the original French farm and land added to it. There are 480 acres now. I think a lot more could be cultivated if the woods were cleared out, but it's beautiful as it is."

Though Fitzpatrick may have found the woods surrounding the house to be beautiful, she did not have the same feelings about the care involved with owning her home.

"It would kill a woman to take care of that house," she said. "I remember trying to find curtains for that front room—the bay windows and two others. There are 11 foot ceilings, and I think it took 75-76 yards of material. You couldn't possibly get any ready-made . . . you had to get them made. I did manage to get some course, heavy-linen-like stuff made. And I learned that upstairs I could get colored sheets. They would just about do."

"I did have a woman who helped me once a week. My husband insisted I keep all the books on the farm. He didn't have the time. And I kept good books. He had all the washing and ironing done, and I was to do the books in return."

In "return" for the hard work which was a part of caring for such a large home, Fitzpatrick did have a beautiful home.

"It used to have a fancy railing all the way across the front and shutters all over the house," she said. "Every room, almost, has a bay window, and there were shutters on each side of those bay win-

dows. Those shutters were in the attic when we moved in. We made some little doors out of them. Each room has access to a flue, so you could have a stove or a fireplace in every one."

"And the house has huge walk-in closets. One closet was about as big as one of my bedrooms," she said, speaking of her present home, where she lives alone.

Remembering her first night alone at her house in Palestine caused Fitzpatrick to laugh.

"There was originally a back stairway which I think the hired hands and children were supposed to use," she said. "Fitz had gone and a neighbor boy came by and asked if I knew the house was haunted. I said, 'No, I didn't know.' He said, 'Every night at midnight your grandfather Fife is supposed to come down these backstairs.' I said, 'Well, I'm not scared. I've got a gun by my bedside if there are any ghosts around.'"

Fitzpatrick didn't find it difficult to stay in the house alone for one night, but she didn't want to stay there alone for the rest of her life.

"My husband died in '61, and I was tempted to sell it. I couldn't manage it—I thought I could. So I had a farm tenant, but it's been five or six years since anyone has lived there."

While no one as lived in the house for several years and Fitzpatrick feels that its reconstruction would cost "more than anyone would want to pay," she expects the house to stay in her family.

"As far as I know it will," she said. "I've got four grandchildren now."

And when those four children visit Governor French's "Maplewood," perhaps the old walls will speak to them. In their imaginations, anyway, history can come to life once again.

All the walls may not have been a part of French's home, but the land which will someday belong to Fitzpatrick's grandchildren once meant enough to a governor

(Cont. on page 18)



A view from the southwest of what remains of the Maplewood estate of Illinois' ninth governor, Augustus C. French. Located south of Palestine, the original French home burned in the 1860s and the present house was built. Only the back of the house survived the fire.





The house in which Thornton and Mabel Stephens spent many of their 66 years together.

## Thornton sez: Tales by an old story teller

by Jim Elliott

Thornton Stephens, Annapolis, says he's lived within the sound of his own voice for most of his more than 90 years. For 66 of those years he's lived with his wife, Mabel. Like a lot of things, he has a story about that.

"Now my wife and I, well, we grew up kinda together," Thornton says. "She moved into the neighborhood when she was eight years old and weighed about 40 pounds at about that high.

"We went to the same school and learned the same things and were so near alike that we thought maybe we could hit it up together. Well, it just so happens that we've been around together, we've been married 66 years.

"Some guy at Oblong, fella that runs the flower shop down on the corner, asked me how long me and my wife have lived together. I told him then it was about 60 years, and he said, 'Say that's a long time to just have one woman.'

"Well, I said, 'she sure as thunder wouldn't a allowed me to brought another' in there.'"

He slaps his legs, laughing and goes on to another story. This time it's about smoking cigarettes and drinking whiskey.

"Now then I've smoked for 55 years," he says "and in doin' that I inhaled all the smoke. I had pneumonia about five times and sore throats many a times.

"One morning my throat was ahurtin' worse than ever, I said to myself, 'I'm not gonna smoke til I have to,' and I moved by tobacco 'round here to the other pocket so I wouldn't just automatically be fired up and agoin'.

"That's been long years ago, 20 or 25 years ago. But the doctor had told me about that sore throat. He said, 'Now it's virus sore throat' and . . . a . . . he said, 'I've not got any medicine that'll do a virus any good.'

But he said, 'You go ahead with your hot salt-water gargle and your whiskey treatment and maybe you'll get after it a bit.' Well, I said, 'Ain't you afraid I'll get the whiskey habit?' 'No, not at your age,' the doctor said.

Thornton pauses and goes to get a small medicine bottle filled with whiskey for the treatment he takes about a pint of a year. Then he says his family came to America on the Mayflower with the Pilgrims. Well, not exactly.

"My grandfather," Thornton says, "was a British soldier during the War of 1812. Somewhere around Washington, D.C., he

deserted. They called that goin' over the hill. Now he probably went over two or three hills before he stopped runnin'. And then maybe changed his mind.

"But he married a woman, I hear my dad says was a Low Dutch. He thought that meant dirty Dutch. But it meant Holland Dutch, and they were known as the cleanest people in Europe.

"Anyhow, he married a Low Dutch woman, and they had a family of six children. He had a lease on a track of timber there in southeastern Indiana, Decatur County, Indiana when he decided to leave with a wife and six kids.

"Well, they immigrated here to this country. But this lady's ancestor was with the Mayflower. You know, the Mayflower and the Speed Bell? They had been over to Holland and picked up this woman's ancestor.

"But they didn't want their kids to grow up to be Holland-Dutch so they came back to England and . . . they couldn't get the Speed Bell repaired or any other ship, so they all piled into the Mayflower and started.

"Well, you know the story about 'em a comin' across the ocean. They'd go about so fer one day and the storm would blow 'em back. And there was that young man from Holland, he was on there and he'd prance around over the deck at night and he'd say they'd never make it, they'd never make it, they'd never make it.

"One morning he didn't come up for breakfast so they went down to investigate, and his bed hadn't been slept in. They hunted the ship over and didn't find him. And well behold ye, he was gone.

"Well, the guard that was on deck said about eight bells he heard a big plunk in the water and he supposed it was a big fish. 'Well, we just as well divide up his stuff,' one man said. 'I want his axe,' one said. 'I want his gun,' another said. And when they hunted around for them and, behold ye, they was gone.

"Yes, well, you know the story. After a long trip across the ocean one evening late the watch man on deck hollered, 'Land ahead!'

And they all run and looked, and behold ye, there was land.

"Well, it was too late for them to make a landing that evening so the next morning Miles Standish and his six soldiers thought they would go. They had seen a smoke on shore. They would go and find out what it was, if it was some natives that they'd have to fight.

"But they pulled up under some brush and tied their boat up, and they got out on land in military formation. Miles Standish was leading them and they seen the strangest building they'd ever seen in their lives. It was built out of logs and the roof was clapboards.

"They got right up close and there set a man a readin' a daily newspaper, smokin' a corncob pipe. They got right up close to him, and he heard 'em and dropped the paper down and, behold ye, it was that guy that had disappeared off a that ship.

"He said he'd seen they wasn't gonna—or so he thought they wasn't gonna—make it, and he took his gun and axe and plunged in and took a dead reckoning on the North Star and headed for New England. 'And here I am,' he said. 'I built this cabin and cut ten cord of wood.'

"Just then the door opened and he said, 'And I married the old Chief's daughter.' She stepped out of the door, the most beautiful woman you ever seen, with hair braided up and hangin' clear below her waist. Oh, how they did love each other there and rejoiced that they'd found him safe and sound.

"Now he was an ancestor of my Grandmother Stephens."

Thornton laughs again and goes to another story related to the weather. This summer has been wet, but Thornton remembers one not so wet.

"The summer of 1901 was the driest summer I ever knowed," Thornton says. "I was ten years old that summer and was learnin'

to swim. But along about the first of July the creeks dried up, and I had to put off my swimmin' lessons til the next year.

"And ya know the green frogs, they climbed the trees and built nests up there like squirrels and raised their young ones up there. And the fish dug holes in the sand down about eight inches and raised their young ones down there. It was fun to creep along there on the sand and listen to them old fish agruntin' to the young ones as they nursed them like an old sow nurses her pigs.

"Well, when the rains finally did come in the fall of the year, the . . . a . . . frogs they brought their young ones down out of the trees, and the creek was just full of fish six inches long that had never learned to swim. Their mothers had to stay with 'em fer about a month to train them fish how to swim.

"And that was the driest year I remember."

That's one of his favorite stories. But he likes dog stories, too. Many of us have owned dogs and had strange experiences with them. So has Thornton, he says.

"Now Old Bugle isn't all of it my story," Thornton says. "I read enough of it in the 'Cappers Weekly' that gave me the inspiration of usin' it and enlargin' on it.

"Well, a good many years ago when I was much younger than I am now, it was my good fortune to own one of the finest hound dogs that ever lived. Old Bugle was his name. And on a clear cold night you could hear him for miles away by the most melodious voice that any dog ever had.

"Well, I hadn't hunted but two or three times that fall and I was alistenin' on the radio and the weatherman said, 'Ya better put on yer longhanded underwear tonight because it's gonna get real cold and frosty.'

(Cont. on page 18)



Thornton pauses, trying to remember a specific part of the tale he is telling.



Thornton finishes one of his tales and enjoys the laugh with everyone else.



# Frog gigging, a - - sticky business

Just the mention of them makes some people crawl with fear over the green slimy reptiles. To others, it produces visions of cute, little Kermit hopping and splashing through a playful brook.

But to mention frog legs, there are only two points of view. To someone from the city, as I am, frog legs are a delicacy one can find only in restaurants that serve fine, expensive cuisine. But to someone who has lived in the country, the mention of frog legs connotes a vision of true adventure. And good eating.

Being from the city and being tossed into the backwash of country life is like being a newborn baby again. The sights, sounds and fashion of life are completely alien, forcing a city kid to start on a whole new learning experience. When someone asked me if I'd like to go frog gigging, I said, "Sure . . . but what's frog gigging?"

Russ Harper



A closer look at what every frog gigger seeks.

by Beverly Elliott

Russ found out a little about frog gigging, but we didn't find many frogs during the week of the Tales camping trip in June. So I was elected to do the story.

Ummph!

Frogs, toads or anything green and slimy have always given me the creeps. When I was young and had to walk from the garage to the house at night, I would always run because there were toads along the sidewalk. And I was afraid they would hop on my feet.

While I'm still not crazy about frogs or frog gigging, I've begun to get used to frogs after going gigging with a couple of beginners and Roger Walden, veteran frog gigger and Porterville area resident. Assuring me that I wouldn't have to touch any of them, or get too close, Walden headed his Chevy pickup down a little lane that led back to a frog pond.

"Now I like to go with three people," Walden said, explaining a frog gigging trip to me. "That way you can have a gigman, a lightman and a bagman. Usually when there's a rookie going, he's the bagman."

You don't need a lot of expensive equipment, Walden says. Oh, you might need some bug spray, but all you really need are some old clothes, boots, a good, strong light, a bag or bucket and a good gig.

A gig looks like a small pitch fork, one like the little red devil holds, and is attached to the end

of a long bamboo pole with plastic tape. Walden files his gig prongs to a needle-like sharpness so it'll slip into the frog easily. Nice thought.

Then the gravel lane turned into the bumpy surface of a field and my stomach began to flutter as Roger stopped the pickup. Getting the equipment out, he told us the only real danger to frog gigging was getting stuck with the gig.

According to Walden, the best way to keep from sticking anyone is to hold the gig up in the air while walking around.

Shining his light over the pond as we walked he said, "The pond with the most cover around it, the real brushy ones, are usually the best for frog gigging. The harder they are to get around, the more frogs they'll have."

The pond had quite a few cattails around it, some brush and a lot of mosquitoes. Straining my eyes to see where I was walking, worrying about a frog jumping on me, I followed Walden and the light to the edge of the water.

"Tonight's a pretty good night," he said, glancing at the partial moon. "It's just my own philosophy, but I think you can get more frogs when there isn't any moon out. I think the moonlight makes 'em spooky."

Letting my eyes follow the light around the pond, I could see a few green glowing eyes on the bumps sitting here and there on the

water. The light did something to them. They just sat there, mesmerized by the light and unable to move.

"There's one," Walden said, whispering hoarsely to the man with the gig. "You've got a new gig, so you've got to get the first frog."

"They're hiding . . . they've heard about us."

Cautiously making his way to the edge of the pond, the man searched for the victim. Taking careful aim he lunged forward, and I could no longer see it. But I did hear the kerplow in the water as the gig plunged into the frog. And I heard the cry of "I got him, I got him."

Holding up the frog, Walden told us that it was a good shot because it had gone in right behind the head. "Cut the legs off right below the body," he said, pointing to the frog's hip joint and telling the man to cut the legs off there. "I like to cut their legs off right away so they won't hop away on you. Sometimes they'll hop away even though they've been gigged."

Dropping the legs into the bucket Walden said, "That was a good-sized one. Now the meat is just as tender on the big ones, so you want to get them and let the little ones grow up."

Having lived through one gigging experience, I was hoping we wouldn't find another frog. And we didn't find another easily. Peering around the water's edge, I wondered where they had all gone.

"I got him, I got him."

"Well, this is the middle of the season," Walden said, "they've probably heard about us."

One of the beginners took the light and began to search for another frog. They had all decided that I needed to see another one gigged.

"Right there, in the grass," the man said, holding the light on what looked like a clump of grass.

Again the quick short jab, the distinctive kerplow and another pair of legs to put in the bucket. Walden got that one.

"Sometimes it's easier to get to them from the water side of the bank instead of the shore," he said, looking for another frog. "It's better because of the brush and whatnot on the bank."

"But you have to go real slow and be real quiet and make as few waves as possible so as not to scare them away. On a real good night where there's lots of frogs, you may scare in some of 'em, but there's always going to be some to gig."



With his gig stick in the ground, Roger Walden cuts the legs from a freshly gigged frog.

"Sometimes it's even worthwhile to go back around a pond," Walden said as we continued to walk around the pond. "Maybe even three or four times. I've been to a couple that are so good that you can go around them all night and there'll still be frogs there."

"Of course, you don't have to gig frogs in a pond; you can get them in a creek or a river. They're just easier to find in a smaller body of water."

Hearing a big frog croak across the pond, I asked where it had hid from us.

"It's probably just a tape recording," Walden said and walked slowly along.

And it might have been, because we never saw another frog and were almost eaten by mosquitoes. So we walked back to the truck. Almost thankful I still wondered where the frogs had gone.

"They're hiding from us," Walden said. "I told you they've heard about us."

Sure, I said. Seriously, I wondered if a pond could be depleted.

"I doubt it," Walden said, "but you should—once you gig a pond, wait a year, or two even, if you gig a lot of them. You want 'em to grow up. It takes three to four years for a bullfrog to reach maturity."

I still had a couple of legs left to learn. Skinning the legs and cooking them. It really didn't prove to be a problem. Walden just takes a pair of pliers and pulls the skin off the legs.

And the rest I could already do. You soak them in salt water, floor, season with salt and pepper and fry in a skillet of hot grease until golden brown.

Or you can cook them over an open fire and eat them with wild garlic and butter sandwiches, so I've been told.

Looking back over my frog gigging experience now, frogs aren't quite as green and slimy as I thought. But I still like them best when they're golden brown.



Roger Walden holds two frogs he and Terry Maus gigged on a previous outing that Walden said were so big that one of them had three "lobsters" in it.



# Living off the land still possible today - survival the reward

by Donna St. George

Times were simple and uncomplicated in the older days of country living during the era of the general store. Days were long on the farm, lasting from sunrise to sunset; meals were plain and natural. People were close to their families and close to the land.

Tom and Becky Phipps of Lerma have returned to times like these.

For the last six years, Tom, 33, and Becky, 29, have struggled hard to escape from being controlled by "the system." Phipps and his family severed most of their ties with modern American society and are now "living on the land."

Talking about the ideas behind this concept and the reality of it, Tom says his family is happy with its lifestyle. They love the peace and tranquility of their seven-acre farm south of Charleston and enjoy feeling self-sufficient.

With an income of less than \$2500 a year, most people would undoubtedly consider the Phipps very poor. But Tom argues his family is far from poor. They are "culturally rich" and very content, he says.

And they wouldn't have it any other way.

Unlike most farmers who grow few crops, the Phipps' farm is diverse and their crops provide only for their own subsistence. The plots are small and include everything from lima beans to grapes. Every inch of the seven acres behind the house is laid out so it is used fully. The barn, rabbit hutches, chicken pens and garden all blend in together, separated by small-mown paths that join pasture for three head of cattle.

"Diversity is stability," Tom explained. "When you study biological systems, that's all there is to it. So if you're going to live on the land, that's the way you've got to garden."

Living on the land hasn't come easy to the Phipps. Tom spends a great deal of his free time researching new ways to farm and experimenting with new methods of growing. His nontraditional farming methods result from a solid education in biological sciences and many of intense hours reading and researching.

"I'm an incessant, athletical researcher and reader," he said. "I always examine possibilities.

I go see what other people do and experiment myself."

Experimenting and extensive research have aided Tom's expertise in other areas as well. The Phipps' small income is not drawn from their crops at all, but instead from Tom's second occupation—making banjos.

Inside a small, well-kept shop in the corner of his barn, Tom spends a large part of his winter months making banjos. Although he constructs only two to six banjos a year, his long hours and expert craftsmanship are obvious in his finished products. The finely polished surface of a banjo

neck he's been working on for three years hangs above his work bench in the center of his shop, revealing his own intricate inlays of fingerboard drawings set in pearl.

"I once made a banjo for a person who won a banjo contest in Tennessee and made a couple records," he laughed, adding that he usually sells his banjos—which cost about \$1300 each—to collectors and investors, rather than musicians. "Musicians usually can't afford them."

Tom learned his trade from "a lot of library work" and his own background in banjo playing. He

could not build a banjo, he says, unless he played the banjo.

"I couldn't build a proper guitar because I don't play it," he said. "You ought to play what you build."

And his expertise in banjo making, as in farming, is derived almost entirely from his own techniques. He's never had an apprenticeship and never watched another banjo craftsman, he admitted. Yet, his experimentation with the craft has helped him to invent a technique in banjo making that prevents warping from both side of the banjo's neck.

He discovered the new technique "after making banjos for a while," he said, adding that "it wasn't anyone else's idea."

Conforming with the Phipps' ideology, Tom's source of income is stable and almost eliminates altogether "the need to interact with the system," he said. "The economy can get pretty wild, and I'll still survive without losing my shirt."

Money only makes people dependent on the system and its institutions, Tom said, insisting "we just don't spend money. We buy a few clothes. But Becky makes a lot of them, too. We heat exclusively with wood and use electricity sensibly.

"The system just never made any sense to me ultimately," he contended. "It's hard for me to look at anyone who's got a nine-to-five job as being anything but a wage-slave. I could never identify that strongly with the American middle-class type of package."

The Phipps' family lifestyle is, indeed, very different from most contemporary living. Their only utility bill is a \$5 to \$10 monthly electric bill for lighting they use during the evening. They have a wringer washing machine, a wood-burning stove, no refrigerator and no telephone.

Tom says he is "defiantly barefoot" as he walks through his manure-ridden cow pasture, dressed in tattered Levi shorts and a worn t-shirt. His shoulder length hair is tied behind his neck. His wife, Becky and daughter, Stella, are dressed in cutoffs and smock, sundress and diapers, without make-up or frills. Becky's long black hair is tied together behind her head and contrasts sharply with Stella's thin blonde hair.

Chores from grinding whole-wheat flour to making chicken feed comprise the major part of each day. Travel for the Phipps rarely extends farther than the perimeter of their own farm.

But times haven't always been so simple for the Phipps. Tom attended college for botany and zoology throughout his bachelor's, master's and until near the completion of his doctorate degree. He says he was always close to the land when he went to college at Eastern Illinois University and then at University of Illinois, but he was temporary-

(Cont. on next page)



Tom Phipps explains the art of banjo making, from which he is able to make some money to supplement his family's subsistence farming lifestyle.



A banjo neck that Tom Phipps has been working on for three years. The designs on the neck are Phipps' originals and have been cut from blocks of pearl.



(Cont. from page 16)

ly caught up in the academic world.

"I really got into the achievement thing for a while," he explained. "I was still loving the land but trying to express that love academically.

"About the time I ended school, it all started coming together," he said. "Suddenly, I had a package that was useful for something besides staying in the system."

When Tom was to begin his Ph.D. dissertation, he said he realized he did not want to be part of the establishment any longer.

"A Ph.D. dissertation is bullshit," he said. "You play political games with your superiors. The only reason for doing it is to get a job in the system. Well, since I didn't want anything to do with the system—I didn't want it owning me—I had no need for a Ph.D."

Tom still subscribes to the importance of a good education, and he and Becky already spend two hours daily teaching and reading to Stella. However, a good education can be taught at home, Tom says. He will not send Stella to a public school unless, at some point, "she really wants to go."

"We can provide a better education for her," he said. "There's absolutely no positive

function in sending kids to an institution unless they want to go. If they want to go, then it's a social thing and the kids recognize that.

"I want to allow my kids to simply grow up and feel in control of themselves, and feel they have a lot of self-esteem," he said. "I don't want them to feel they have to put up with a lot of unnecessary bullshit and that kind of thing."

Education got Tom where he is, he says, and he wants the same for Stella.

"We want her literate because it's a weapon for personal power," he said. "She's got to be literate in computer, too. We want her to master the three R's and the computer."

But Stella's education will never come from electronic media in the Phipps' household.

They have "no television in the house and there won't be as long as we have kids," he said. "I think TVs are pernicious and a mistake to live around. Television's just not a good thing to have around the house.

"Television as a device mesmerizes one or puts them into an alpha state which precludes their being systematic and critical with the information that's coming in," he explained.

Television interrupts cultural continuity, too, Tom said. It has

become "the national parent" in recent years.

"It's a bad thing to have around if you have kids because they imprint on television rather than the people around them which is absolutely disruptive to society," he said.

Many people are critical of the Phipps' lifestyle because of their extensive education, he noted. Living on the land would be more accepted as ordinary for people who had not attended college.

"What I'm doing, for a lot of rural kids, would be considered retrograde and what their grandparents did," he said. "Most people a generation older than we are thought it was kind of odd—and there are some people who still do."

But because the Phipps have been successful at living on the land, "the strange kinds of glances at each other and cracks have disappeared," Tom said. "Generally, the people around us have respect for us now."

"For a while, people just didn't understand what the devil we were doing. Local farmers thought I was nuts—I gave up a fancy education and that kind of thing."

The Phipps' "fancy education" has been useful in everyday living on the farm. Tom's extensive education in the biological sciences, in addition to his continued research, has decreased the number of visits that the Phipps make to the doctor and they rarely go to the dentist.

"I read about nutrition and hygiene," Tom said, adding that his college background was very similar to medical school training. "We can always shuffle in an emergency. We don't piss off doctors, and we know how to get a hold of them."

In keeping with their beliefs, Becky gave birth to Stella at home and delivered her herself.

"Anyone there besides the mother is interfering as far as I'm concerned," Tom said. He was present at Stella's birth only "to do all kinds of gopher stuff. A woman simply makes her nest and has her baby as her body tells her. Stella's birth went fine—we handle things like that."

The Phipps handle most of their other medical situations as well. The times that they have visited the doctor "could have been avoided with hindsight," Tom said. They avoid dentist visits and dentist bills by eating only the proper foods that do not contribute to tooth decay, while taking bone meal and yeast to prevent their teeth from rotting.

"I brush my teeth for cosmetic purposes once a week," Tom said. "If I get any



Becky, Stella and Tom Phipps on their seven-acre farm south of Charleston.

kind of rotten flavor in my mouth, I know it's because I've taken in too many carbohydrates or not enough bone meal."

"I view a dentist as someone who really depends on sugar abuse," he said, explaining that they use honey but never eat processed sugar. Teeth will not rot "if you have the right elements in your system."

Food expenses for the Phipps are almost non-existent, since they grow almost everything they eat. Tom says their purchases include only spices, brewer's yeast, oil and "that's about it." They maintain a sensible diet that includes a once-a-week meal of meats like pigeon, rabbit, duck or beef.

"We eat pretty much the way people ate before the Industrial Revolution except that we don't make glaring dietary errors because of gross ignorance," he said. "We don't get scurvy in the winter, either. We always try to have as much fruit and vegetables as possible."

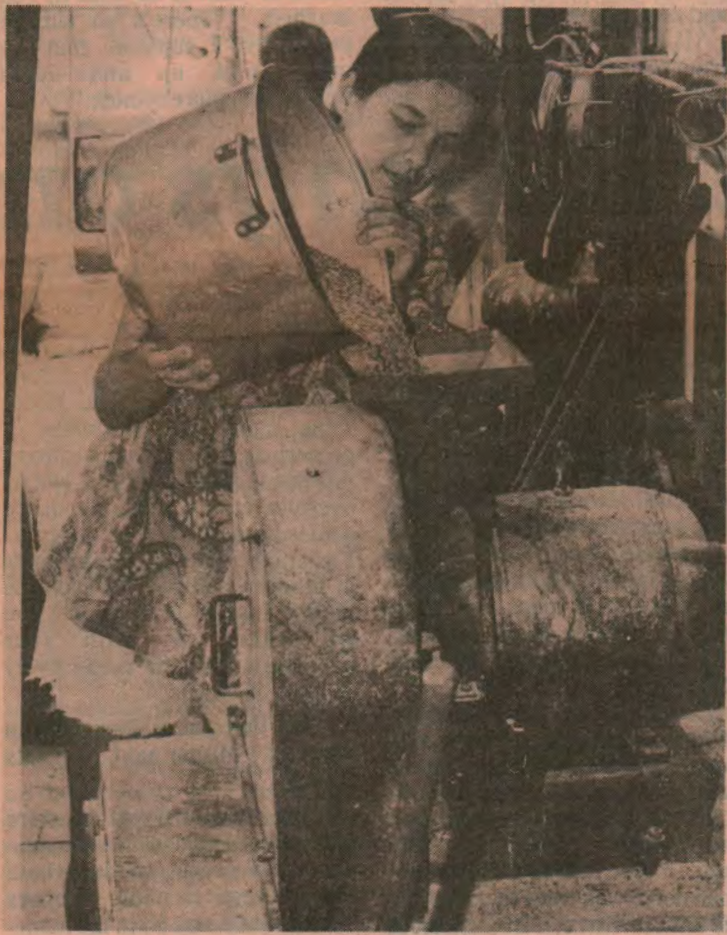
Since self-sufficiency, not profit, is the chief motivator for the Phipps, they are continually striving to prove that they can get along without any entanglement with the system whatsoever. One of their major undertakings recently was to prove that it didn't take gasoline to plant their crops.

"We planted them with the tiller," Tom said. "We had a trial run where we used no gas at all to see if we could do it—and we could. It could be taken care of with the hoe."

Although the Phipps may be viewed as farmers, they are very different than their contemporaries, and recognize this quite readily.

"Current high technological farming is so centralized," Tom said. "People always operate in debt and they operate with few crops, which is in defiance of the rhythm of nature a little bit. Farming is often forced in their laps."

(Cont. on next page)



Grinding wheat for whole wheat flour is one of Becky Phipps many duties on the family farm.



Becky serves home-canned grape juice and applesauce cupcakes to her family and "Tales" guest. Tales camper Lance Gallagher holds Stella.



Seconds later the flour is ready for baking and cooking. For finer flour, Becky, runs the ground wheat through the grinder several times.



## PALESTINE, ILLINOIS

THIS AREA REMINDED FRENCHMAN JOHN LAMOTTE OF THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY. PALESTINE, WHILE A MEMBER OF THE LASALLE EXPLORING PARTY, HE BECAME SEPARATED FROM THE GROUP, TRAVELED DOWN THE WABASH RIVER, AND FIRST GAZED UPON THE REGION IN 1878. OTHER FRENCH SETTLERS CAME DURING THE 18TH CENTURY. THEN, BY 1812, THE WESTWARD MOVING AMERICANS BEGAN CONSTRUCTING FORT LAMOTTE. AS THE PALISADE FILLED WITH SETTLERS, THOSE DESIRING MORE ROOM MOVED A FEW MILES TO THE NORTHWEST AND ESTABLISHED FORT FOOT. THE SETTLERS IN FORT LAMOTTE WERE THE CORE OF THE TOWN OF PALESTINE, PLATTED IN 1819 BY JOSEPH KITCHELL AND EDWARD CULLON, THE SETTLEMENT SERVED UNTIL 1843 AS THE CRAWFORD COUNTY SEAT. THE GROWTH OF THE TOWN LAGGED UNTIL A UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE, OPENED IN 1821, GAVE NEW IMPORTANCE TO THE COMMUNITY. THEN PEOPLE CAME TO BUY LAND, TO ATTEND COURT, FOR ENTERTAINMENT, AND TO HAVE THEIR GRAIN MILLED. OTHERS, LIKE ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN 1830, PASSED THROUGH THE BUSTLING TOWN ON THEIR WAY TO SETTLE IN ILLINOIS. THE LAND OFFICE CONTINUED TO GIVE PROMINENCE TO PALESTINE. ROBERT A. KINZIE CAME IN 1831 TO PURCHASE 102 ACRES FOR \$127,688, AN AREA WHICH BECAME THE NUCLEUS OF CHICAGO. AUGUSTUS C. FRENCH (1808-1864) SERVED AS A RECEIVER IN THE LAND OFFICE FROM 1839 TO 1843. A NATIVE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, HE WAS THE FIRST "YANKEE" TO BE ELECTED GOVERNOR OF ILLINOIS, CHOSEN IN 1846, FRENCH WAS FORCED TO STAND FOR RE-ELECTION UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF 1848 AND WON.

ERECTED BY THE DIVISION OF HIGHWAYS (ILL. DEPT. OF TRANS.) AND THE ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

State highway sign west of Palestine notes the town's history and resident governor, Augustus C. French (1808-64).

## Old story teller

(Cont. from page 14)

"Well, I done that very thing. I put on longhandles—they had a row of buttons up the front and there was an opening behind for convenience with a button to close it, but it seldom ever was. Afterwhile my wife and I went to bed, and I don't think I had snored but three or four times til she hit me in the ribs with her elbow and said, 'Wasn't that a hen squall?'"

"Well, I hadn't heard anything. Presently, I did hear a hen squall and then I remembered I hadn't shut that chicken house door. I bounded outta bed and grabbed

at my gun and shells and took off down the frosty walk with my barefeet. And Old Bugle followed along as though he thought he might be needed.

"I peered in the chicken house as best I could. I didn't see anything. Then I stooped over to better look under the roost and just then something as cold as Greenland gouged me in the rear through that opening in my underwear. Whatever it was caused that gun to go off. I had it all ready cocked and at attention.

"Well, that was Old Bugle's nose. Just then my wife come

with the flashlight, and I looked around over the roost and, behold ye, there was 13 dead and dying hens.

"Well, we set up til three o'clock in the morning aputtin' them hens in the freezer. Then after the chores were all done the next morning, Old Bugle went with me to the woods on his last trip; he never came back.

"I never again wanted to hunt after night or own a hound dog. Could you blame me?"

Thornton tells a lot of other stories, too. But they'll have to wait for another time.

# Moonshine Store still hangs on

(Cont. from page 12)

be here til I die. I'd like to have had a new building, but everybody says, 'No.' They like it like this. Well, I'm too old for a new building now, but it'd been nice.

Even when she has doubts, Enid enjoys working in the store.

"I don't know why, but I do," she said, mentioning, too, that she works 11 hours a day, six days a week. "Sometimes you get overworked. You do that everywhere. I mean, people do that every day now, seems like."

The store is the busiest when people are busy, according to Misner. She usually works straight through the day, although sometimes her kids and granddaughter help, too.

"These men usually come more than today," Misner said. "Now the guy that run it before, Brian Williams, had the first TV in the community, an' they used to come an' watch TV. On Saturday night it was full.

"The women'd come, but not too many. They visit now if somebody's in here. You take time to visit with people for a few words. But they don't come in the morning like the men do. But people like to have fun and to come an' chit-chat.

"One man came in, I don't know what his business was down here, but he thought people wouldn't go into town very often. He asked how often people went into town. I looked at him and said, 'Oh, once a day an' sometimes twice.'"

She laughed and said, "He could hardly believe it."

Although Misner jokes that sometimes the store seems to be open 24 hours, she does close the store for holidays like Christmas or for funerals.

Like owners before her, Enid still gives credit to some customers.

"Too much sometimes," she said, laughing. "Oh, people around here pay you, but once in

a while somebody'll move in an' you'll help 'em out. I tell 'em if your word's good, I'll help you out. But it's not always that good. Actually, you don't lose a lot, but you lose some."

But the goods people bought on credit before are different than what they buy now. Things like sugar and flour that used to come in 100-pound bags and had to be scooped out are in the five- and ten-pound bags.

"There's really a lot in here when you get to lookin' around," Misner said. "There are so many things that are ready-to-eat. I have some of them, but I don't have near all cause I wouldn't sell all of 'em. I don't have room, anyway."

Only the first floor of the store is filled with goods, though. The upstairs is used for storage. When Moonshine was built, lodge meetings were held up there. Then the owners before the Misners made it into an apartment. And the Misners lived in there for nine years.

Looking around the store again Enid said, "There's probably

things I don't have. But now the pop, Pepsi is the main seller. Coke—now it'll sell as much as Pepsi in some locations, but it sure don't here. Coke comes about once a month. Pepsi comes every week. Some people still put peanuts or red hots in their Pepsi. And some mix 'em."

Red hots and peanuts in pop have been popularized through a country and western song. But other things about Moonshine get attention from outsiders.

"Once the chemical company that puts the chemicals in the detergents we sell was here," Misner said. "They were doin' a lot of work in the oil field. Well, they thought the store was really somethin' an' took a picture of it."

"I reckon they were going to put it in their book or somethin'," she said and laughed. "They'd seen the chemicals they'd sold in this little store down here."

Moonshine still gets the detergents and most of the other goods from the Hulman Company in Terre Haute who has delivered goods to Moonshine every week for years.

## Maplewood

(Cont. from page 13)

to lure him temporarily away from Springfield and his gubernatorial duties.

"Maplewood," the land south

of Palestine, could likely have been an inspiration to a governor—its history still can be an inspiration.

## Livin' off the land

(Cont. from page 17)

"It's horseshit to think you have to own a lot of property to farm," he said. "People are brain-washed by the system."

The elimination of many farm laborers with the influx of high technology, has added to the increasingly poor conditions of urban ghettos, Tom asserted.

"With migration to the city, people shut a lot of economic doors to being self-sufficient," he said. "If you're going to be poor, you're a lot better off in an environment that's surrounded by green and at least can have fresh tomatoes and all that stuff, rather than being boxed in (the city)...."

Tom also admits that deciding to live on the land and be self-sufficient is no easy feat. With the cost of farm land, shelter and tools, the initial investment is large and actually becoming self-sufficient—with no debts—would take an extensive commitment and a long time.

"It would take people starting from scratch 15 to 30 years to be self-sufficient," he said, "and

that's a lot of devotion and dedication for people. That's one reason why more people aren't doing what we're doing, quite frankly."

The Phipps received their land, house and some tools from Tom's parents, so their transition to self-sufficiency took only five years.

"It's an enormous thing to deal with for people who are wanting to be self-sufficient and don't have the land, because the price of land is outrageous," Tom said.

But even if the Phipps were to somehow mysteriously inherit a million dollars, Tom says their lifestyle would not change. Tom and Becky are both doing just what they want to do. They are committed to living on the land and keeping distant from the system.

"To be perfectly honest, if we got all that money, it would take us six months to go through the shock of what to do with it," he laughed. "There's an outside possibility, I suppose, that we might pick up and move somewhere more remote."

"They didn't have gravel roads all the way when my father had his store," Misner said. "He had to drive the horses and wagon into town an' pick up the stuff. Now we have some wholesale stuff that comes out o' Newton. About everything I buy from them I can get from Hulman Company. But they just always came through with aspirins an' such like."

"There's a truck from Newton where I get my candy an' cigarettes, too. That truck has come through here for about 30 years. The same driver came for about 25, then he died."

That's what happened to many of the neighborhoods that supported other general stores around Moonshine. They died.

"Really you stayed in your own neighborhood, though," Enid said. "But just north, east an' then north was what they call the Needmore Store. It was about five miles. Wouldn't be very long now. Then there was one two miles west and the ones in Bellair and Annapolis. And my father's store was just about three or four miles east o' here."

Each store had its own personality as well as its own customers. Misner had a copy of a notice from an old Moonshine store that read: "Moonshine 1889. Call on or send to Moonshine store for all kinds of groceries, notions and ordinary dry goods such as prints, shirts, overalls, etc. A fair and square deal is my motto and golden rule. I will take and exchange all kinds of produce and pay for such the highest market price hoping you will favor me with your patronage. I am respectfully William St. Martz."

"Now that was a Moonshine up the road," Misner said, "not this building."

It's the area, not just the store that's called Moonshine, though. And some people wonder where Moonshine got its name. Rumors have it that it was from the homemade liquor, moonshine. But Misner heard a different story.

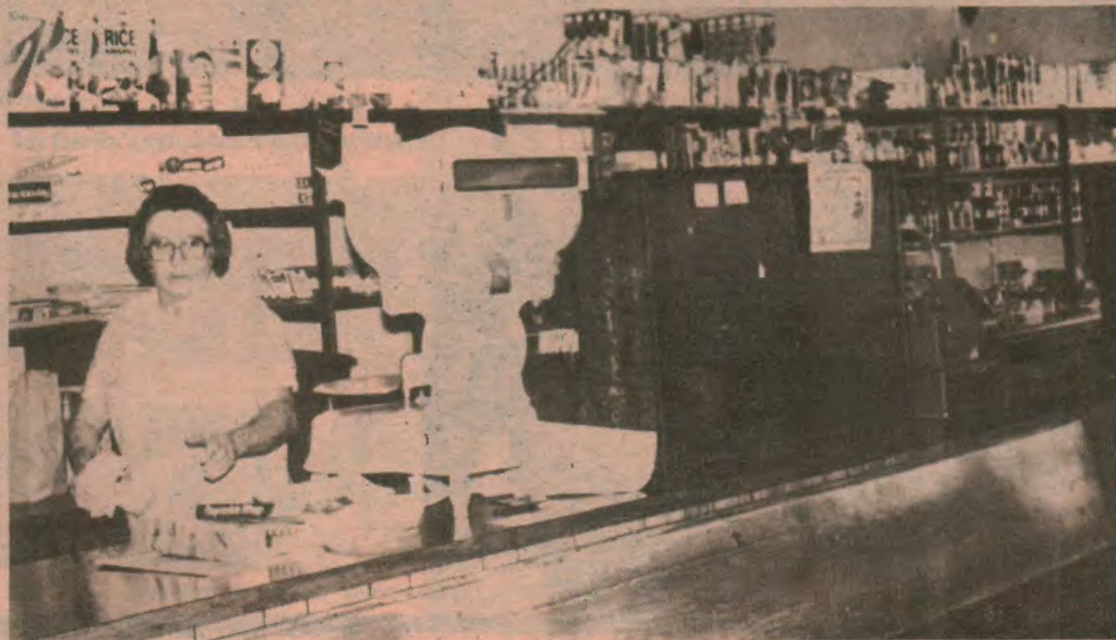
"Well, I was told that when they laid out the roads that it was low here," she said, "an' the moon was shinin' on the water. And they called it Moonshine. I don't know if that's right or not."

Whichever way it is, the Moonshine store gets a lot of publicity because it's old and one of the last stores of its kind. Changing customs keep Moonshine going.

"Like my father went somewhere to work," Misner said, "he'd carry his dinner pail. He wouldn't think about runnin' into town for somethin' to eat. Course he couldn't then. And a few people carry their dinner pail yet. Most people don't, though. A lot of 'em will run in here."

So it seems the Moonshine store is going to be around for a while longer. And that's the way people seem to want it.

Maybe it's because they don't want to carry dinner pails or because they want a place to meet for coffee. But then maybe what they really want is to hold on to a piece of their past.



Enid Misner at work on a typical morning at the Moonshine general store.



# Memories from the Bellair Store

(Cont. from page 12)

Coca-Cola cooler. The six-ounce Cokes and seven-ounce 7-Ups stood up to their necks in cold water on the left side; the Pepsis and RCs were on the right with the flavors in the middle.

Behind the pop case, there were bread and cookie racks. The store was a familiar sight to many. Mable Elliott, who still lives in Bellair, remembered what the store was like from a customer's point of view.

"They had square boxes of cookies in the racks," she said, remembering the general-store ways of selling different items. "They bought 'em that way. There was a metal frame with glass in it to show the cookies. Course some of it got broke out.

"The lid was on a hinge. They would put this on the box, an' then they'd open it jus' like a lid. When you wanted cookies, why, they'd get in there an' get 'em out an' weigh 'em.

"They even had a vinegar barrel you'd pump your vinegar out, along with sellin' nails, bolts, brooms an' mops an' everything like that. Had chicken an' hog feed. An' they sold coal oil or kerosene, too."

Oletha Matheny remembered the kerosene.

"Yes, we had that old crank kerosene," she said. "If you wanted a gallon o' kerosene, you turned a crank an' the kerosene came out. If you wanted five gallons, you turned it to five gallons.

"My daughter, Sharon, wasn't very old an' Harold's brother and wife was there, an' they had a little grandson, Larry, with 'em. I think the funniest thing was when they were playin' once, an' they were hollerin' down in the tank. It'd have a hollow sound, an' they was havin' fun. First one an' then the other would holler.

"Well, Sharon had her head down there a hollerin', an' Larry turned the crank an' got her head soaked with kerosene. I don't know how long it took to get that smell out o' there. It's funny to look back on, but it wasn't funny at the time"

The old crank telephone hung on the west wall back behind the Macaskie desk about the middle of the store. Both were central to the operations of the general store.

"On the old crank-type phones, everybody's'd ring, an' they'd all listen so you couldn't talk about your neighbors, that's for sure," Matheny said, laughing. "Other people really used it more than we did, though. If they didn't have a telephone, they'd just come an' use it."

When the Mathenys ran the store, much of the credit kept in the Macaskie desk was for oil field workers who were paid twice a month.

"Harold'd laugh an' say, 'Your payday is my payday,'" Oletha said. "But we scarcely lost any money. That's the kind of credit we did. We didn't let people have it long term, and we usually knew when we were going to get our money."

Competition between stores in the area was another fact of life for the general storekeeper. As Matheny said, "General stores was quite common. You always had a little competition."

Some of the competition were the huckster wagons that drove around the country. It was like a grocery store on wheels. Goods were stacked on shelves on both sides of the back of the truck or

wagon. Orders were placed at the back as the huckster stopped at each farm house, buying eggs and even selling ice cream.

Each store usually had its own customers, though. But Oletha remembered a time when they got a sudden rush of new business at their service station in Yale.

"There were a couple of little boys that never had any money to spend," she said. "My brother-in-law, Cecil, was livin' with us at the time, an' he felt sorry for 'em.

So he bought some pop for 'em an' those little boys went up town an' said, 'There's free pop down at Mathenys.'

"I think every kid come runnin' down there," she said, laughing. "They didn't realize Cecil had paid Harold for it."

But for Matheny, running the Bellair store was an enjoyable time in her life, even though they didn't have time to take vacations.

"That was something that we should've done but we didn't," she said. "As I look back on it, it was a lot o' work. But everybody worked that way. We were together an' that was the happy part of my life."

Matheny sold the Bellair store in 1955 to its last owners, Bill and Ruby Ritter, who had run Ritter's store three miles northwest of Bellair for 20 years.

During those last 15 years, the Bellair store wasn't as much a gathering place as it used to be. People still came by to visit, but then there were better roads and supermarkets and people were traveling more.

According to Ruby Ritter, now Ruby Hickox who still lives near Bellair, there weren't as many people in Bellair anymore—either they died off or moved away. The store was changing, too, though.

"We rearranged the counters to make 'em look more like the modern check-out counter," Ruby said. "That's when we took one o' them counters out an' put the lunch counter there. You know, we did a pretty good business around lunch time then."

With the addition of the lunch counter, the Ritters sold most of the same goods as the owners before them. And they also gave credit.

"A little too much sometimes," Ruby said, laughing. "But we got away from the credit by that time.

"Had a fella that was workin' on a drillin' rig up around Moonshine that came in an' told me he forgot his checkbook. He wanted to know if he could have some gloves an' just a few items. An' he told me he'd leave me his watch cause he'd be passin' though the next day, an' it'd be his guarantee.

"Well, I let him have the stuff. When he came back for his watch, why, he got quite a bit more stuff. He gave me a check for it an' picked up his watch. An' his check bounced."

She laughed and said, "I lost it all. But I don't think it was over \$10 or \$15."

The Bellair store still had a kind of reputation for having whatever people needed.

"If there was things you couldn't find somewhere," Rudy said, "people'd say they'd come to Bellair to find it."

People couldn't say that after 1970, though. Bill Ritter died in October of that year. Ruby had a sale just after Thanksgiving and the store was an empty shell, holding fading memories of a time gone by.

"A fella from Oblong wanted to

## All Star Wedding

AT

## BELLAIR, ILL.

ON

## Friday Evening, April 3

SPONSORED BY THE RED CROSS

CURTAIN 8:00

- CAST -

Butler—Elza Wiman  
Town Gossip—Kenneth Farley  
Ima Jilt—Vaughn Monrone  
Shirley Temple—Earl Adkisson  
Aunt Jemina—Willey Wiman  
Baby—Olen Sandiford  
Gene Autrey—Roy Mikeworth  
Country Cousin—Lester Payn  
2nd Country Cousin—Oval Finney  
Carmen Miranda—J. R. McCullough  
"Ike" Pedler—John Linkenfelter  
Old Black Joe—John Downey  
Pres. Roosevelt—Harold Matheaney  
Eleanor Roosevelt—Riley Chapman  
Mae West—Valmore Jones  
Sally Rand—"Art" Farley

'Lil Abner—Harl O'Dell  
Daisy Mae—?  
Bride—Cam Crandall  
Groom—Bill Larrison  
Minister—M. E. Harris  
Ring Bearer—Rex Dean Saniford  
Bridesmaid—John Adkisson  
Best Man—Wiman  
Pianist—Oletha Matheaney  
Father—Ova Chapman  
Mother—Chester Payn  
Twins—Rex Monrone  
Lowell Livingston  
Aunt—Henry Straker  
Uncle—T. N. Matheaney

Children 15¢ tax inc.

Adults 25¢ tax inc.

## Each Character A Man - Each Man A Lady

Showbill from a 1942 play at the Bellair general store.

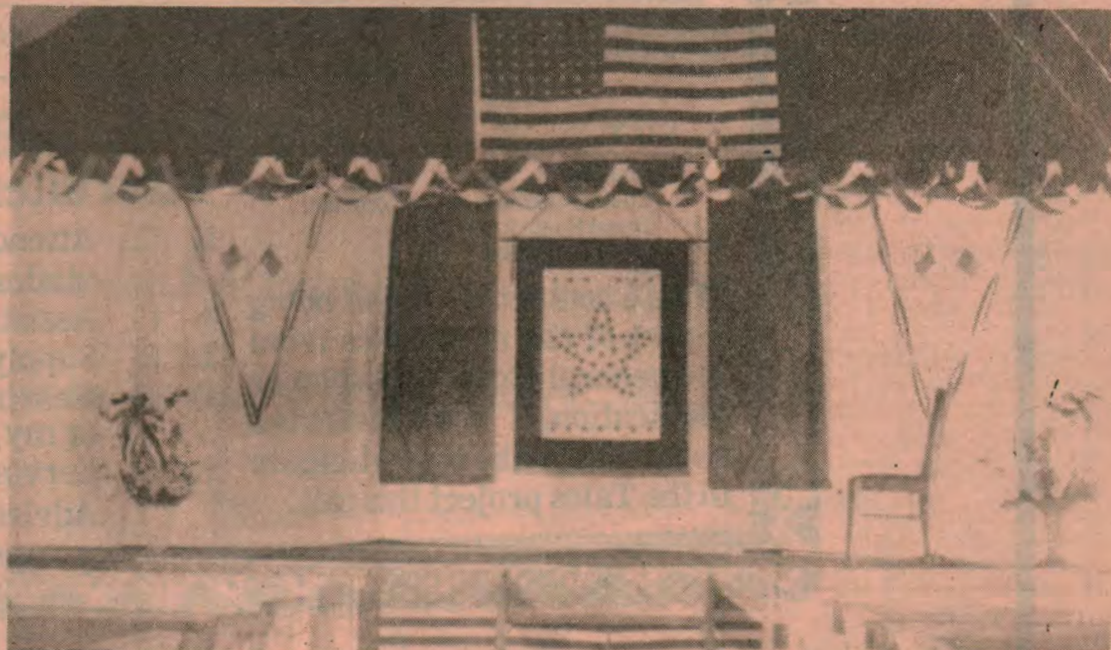
buy the store complete an' put in an antique place," Ruby said. "He wanted my house, too. An' at the time I didn't know what I wanted to do. He was kind of interested in it, but he didn't want the store unless he could have my house, an' I didn't want to sell it. "Other than that, I didn't have

any other chance to sell the place.

I wonder sometimes if I should've sold it to him."

After her husband died, Ruby was glad to get out of the business. They had planned on selling out that summer, anyway, because business was dropping off.

"But I always enjoyed it," Rudy said of her 35 years in the general store business. "I missed the store. I missed seein' people an' talkin' to people. Sometimes I get a little homesick, too. I hated to see the store leave there. And I hated to be the one that done it."



The stage in the upstairs section of the Bellair store as it was decorated during World War II. When area servicemen came home on leave, suppers were often held in their honor.



Be a part of the next  
**Tales from the general store  
 Workshop and Publication**




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**THE FALL WORKSHOP  
 AND PUBLICATION:**

Preparing for winter as people did during the general store era will be the main theme of the fall issue of Tales from the general store. Workshop participants will be learning how people used to live not so long ago. Come to the Bellair general store on Friday and Saturday, November 27 and 28, 1981 and watch or help butcher hogs and chickens. Food and drink will be served throughout the day. Plan to attend.

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**I am interested in:**

1.  Attending the workshop as a student/teacher
2.  Assisting with the butchering
3.  Supplying hogs or chickens for butchering
4.  Hearing more about the project for myself or my school
5.  Serving on the Board of Directors or Advisor groups

Please contact me about being a part of the next Tales from the general store workshop or publication. I have indicated how I would like to participate in the Tales project this fall.