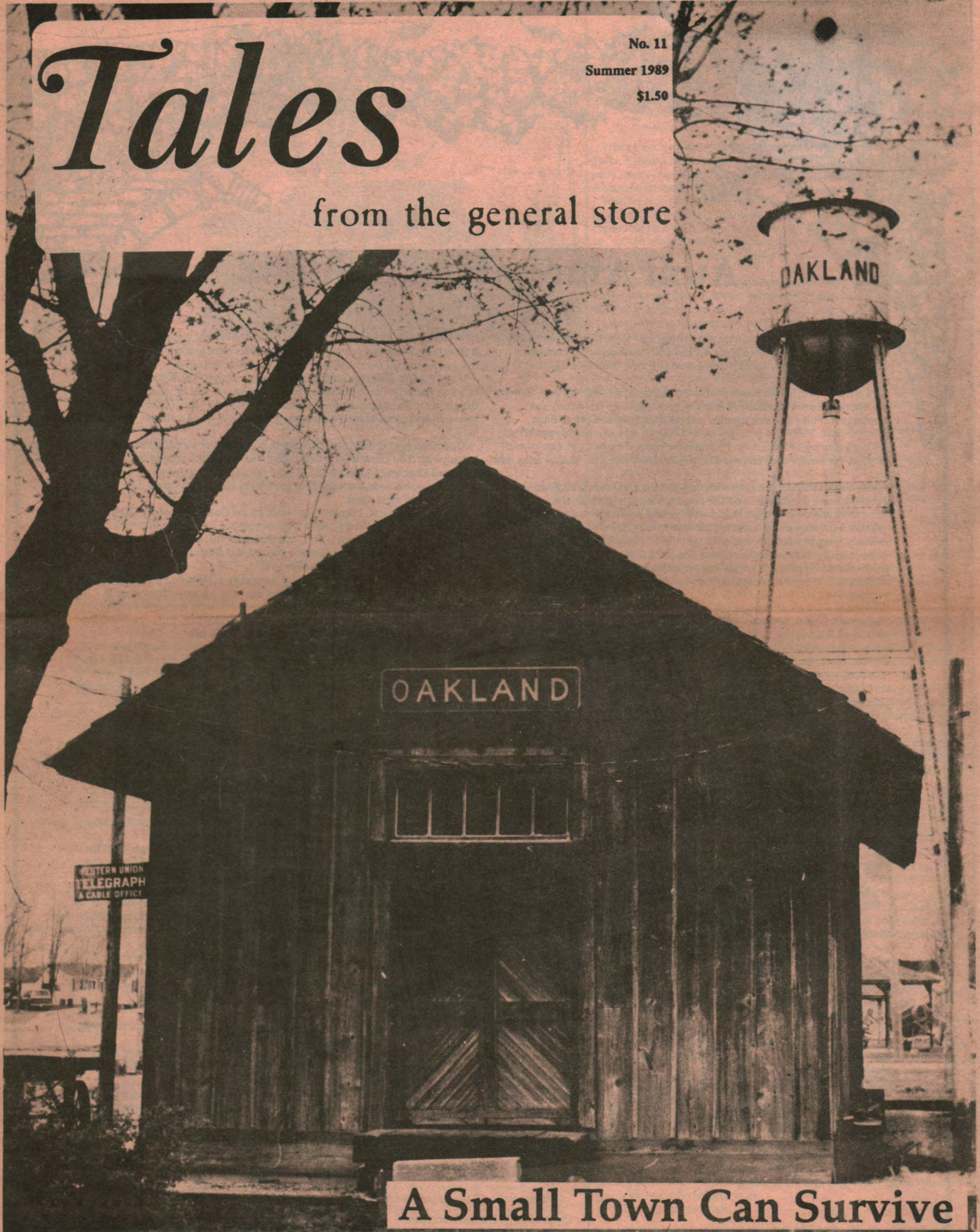


Tales

No. 11
Summer 1989
\$1.50

from the general store



A Small Town Can Survive



Aunt Annie visits Oakland

Dear folks,

Just had to let you all know what a charming little town I visited not long ago. It's not far from the old home place, tucked away up there in the northeast corner of Coles County. Town's called Oakland now. Used to be called Independence years ago.

For a little town, Oakland sure is abustlin' these days. I hear tell the **Chamber of Commerce** works hard and gives a big boost to all the businesses and shopkeepers. Folks all work together and put on an annual Corn & Bean Festival--Sept. 15-17 this year. It's quite a doings, they say, and always brings in a big gathering of folks. Don't surprise me none. Everybody in that town all keeps an eye out for each other and helps out 'cause that's the kind of folks they are.

Lady named Pat Stephen runs what they call the **Oakland Area Economic Development Foundation**. You can't hardly keep that girl still, she's got so many ideas arunning through her head. Why land sakes, she wants to get public restrooms, get someone to clear the snow from the sidewalks in winter, and someday bring in what they call a dinner theater where folks can eat supper and then see a play. Can you imagine that? She just keeps achurning ideas out. And, goodness, there's so much a body can do in Oakland already. I didn't have a chance to see everything or talk to many, and I stayed pert near the whole weekend.

Stayed in a couple of them bed & breakfast places that are a real booming business these days. Oakland has two of the purtiest old homes you ever laid eyes on all fixed up for folks who come avisting overnight or longer and want down-home comfort. The **Inn on the Square** (3 W. Montgomery) is that big Colonial house on the northeast corner of the square. They even have an old-fashioned tea room where you can have your dinner, or lunch as lots of folks have taken to calling it nowadays. And **Johnson's Country Home** (109 E. Main St.) is a big, two-story brick house they call an Italianate house because of its Italian features, I 'spect. It's got trees and some right nice rose bushes and flower beds all around.

If you're alooking for antiques, there's a whole passel of places in town. The **Log House** (101 N. Walnut St.) is an eye-pleasing restored antique itself. They say it's the oldest house in Oakland. It dates back to 1836, if you can imagine that. They got all kinds of fancy coffees and a stained-glass shop, besides all their pretty crafts. Inside there's the **Rasberry Patch Boutique** that's got ladies' clothes an' what you call accessories. Even have showin's in nearby towns.

Right down the street on the west side of that picturesque little old square that so many towns have done away with is **Antiques & Uniques** (Walnut St.). They've got more things for gifts in there than you can shake a stick at. The antiques bring back so many memories from the old days when I was just a wisp of a girl. An' they got a place in there called **The Greenhouse**, which of course is what you think it'd be, plumb full of all sorts of unusual plants.

Course you know how I take to old-time things and what a history buff I am. Well, wouldn't you know it, there's a feller north of town that's restoring a bunch of cabins into a little town called **Independence Pioneer Village**. He's got a homestead, a blacksmith shop, a schoolhouse, and I don't know how many other buildings that is open to the public so folks can learn about their history. Supposed to open the weekend of Decoration Day. He'll be having special doings like music shows, craft shows and antique auctions.

Oh my, how I do go on. But don't you know I'm agoing on some more what with all the nice little shops and stores with all kinds of purty things. Take that one in the Inn called **The Front Parlor**. Just awalking in likes to take your breath away, smelling all the flowers. And there are some mighty nice country decorations folks made by hand. I hear tell they are the largest dealer of David Winter Cottages around.

Splurged and got myself a right purty sweater at **Top of the Inn** fashion shop. Name tells you right where it is. Imagine such fine clothes and jewelry in a little old town like Oakland. They tell me they even have fashion shows on Wednesdays. Now don't that just beat all?

But then everything in Oakland beats all. The **Little Oaks General Store** (6 E. Main St.) has a nice assortment of gifts, too. They also sell dry goods and

fresh fruits and vegetables. Let's you take care of several errands at once. Reminds me of the old general stores when folks went to town and didn't have to go atraipling all over God's green earth to do their trading.

More 'n a few stores in Oakland are like that, though. The first thing you think of when you walk into **Martha's Paint & Wallpaper** (22 W. Main St.) is that there's got to be something for everyone in there. And I don't mean just paint and wallpaper. That Martha's even got things like T-shirts, balloons, cards and such like.

All the traipsing around and alooking in bound to make a body hungry. Did me anyway. You know what a sweet tooth I have. Well, I stopped in the **Oakland Pharmacy** (4 Main St.) to get a few things. Imagine how I felt finding an old-fashioned soda fountain. That strawberry soda was so good, I thought for a minute I was a kid again.

As you might guess, I couldn't just walk by the **Oakland Bakery** (10 Main St.) and smell fresh-baked goodies without going in for a taste, either. That bakery has been around since 1917, and the owner there now has been baking for 35 years. All them cakes, pastries, noodles and whatnot are made from scratch, he says. Yum, yum is all I can say.

Now down on the southeast corner of the square is **Hummer's Pizza Shack & Restaurant** (2 Main St.). Even their pizza crust there is made from scratch. Lady there says it's one of the best pizzas around. I never got around to that what with all the sodas and donuts, but I promised that lady and myself that I'd sure try one the next time I'm in Oakland. And I will, too.

You know, forgetting about the food and all, the nice thing about this town is that folks make sure they meet the needs of their neighbors. You don't have to drive over to Terre Haute or up to Champaign for a lot of things. Take **Taber Furniture & Carpet Center** (106 N. Pike St.) on the east side of the square, for instance. They've been in business nearly 25 years selling good quality merchandise. Store has a good kind of Mom & Pop feel to it, too.

Then there's **Ripley and Motley Insurance** (10 N. Pine) right down the street. Folks there help others look after what they got and help the town so that it can keep on flourishing. Don't seem to make much fuss about helping, but do it 'cause what helps one helps all.

Of course, the banks play a big part in the town's well being. The **Oakland National Bank** (12 W. Main St.) has a long history that dates back to 1873. I hear that back in 1923 there was a lot of hoopla when the bank was robbed. Thankfully for them folks, the insurance company made good. Now they have those fancy alarms so as nobody has to lose sleep for worry.

Then out south of town pert near a mile is the **Oakland Bank Facility**. That's part of The Bank of Charleston, I hear tell. It's been there since 1986 and offers folks all the services any bank does.

Oakland wouldn't be on the map, though, if it wasn't for the rich farm land around it. That's what's at the heart of this town. The folks who help support the farmers know that Oakland needs to keep going. **Oakland Farm Supply** (29 E. Main St.) is the local Case-International Harvester dealer and has been in business since 1947.

And then there's the **Triple H Grain Systems, Inc.** out on the Oakland-Ashmore Road. They provide a place to store grain and even have a lawn and garden center for folks in or out of town. They've been servicing what they sell for 20 years now.

Tabor Grain (Teeter & Main Sts.) is a part of Archer Daniels-Midland/Growmark, I guess. They specialize in food grade corn, and have what you call state-of-the-art facilities.

Miller Grain, Inc. (#1 W. Main St.) went into business to specialize in food corn, too. The folks who run these businesses are always looking for ways to do their share to keep Oakland the kind of friendly, properous town it is.

The town sure is lucky to have so many people who want to do what they can to make sure the area grows and lasts. You don't see as much of that in the small towns anymore. And ain't that a pity? You must go visit there sometime soon. Tell them Aunt Annie told you about it. I can't wait 'til my next trip there. There's so much more I want to see.

God bless you and yours,

Aunt Annie

Contents

You can't keep a good magazine down

by Ray Elliott



On The Cover:

Beating the Odds 8

by Vanessa Faurie

Despite the trend of small towns fading into the past, Oakland continues to be a vibrant, thriving community with a proud citizenry.



A Country Editor 6

by Laurie Goering

The newspaper business was not an easy way to make a living for Champaign-Urbana's first publishers and editors. If they weren't arguing with unhappy advertisers or complaining readers, they were usually fighting each other.

The Tin Lizzie 11

by D. Edwin Howe

Fond memories, in poem form, will race across the minds of those who remember the first horseless carriages. Others will get a little history lesson.

Closed Inside Myself 12

by Cynthia Cox

A young girl learns to come to terms with the reality of her little sister's sudden death. In doing so, the girl rediscovers the closeness she shares with the rest of her family.

For Sale: Rural America 14

by Ray Elliott

There's a part of Crawford County that hasn't been discovered yet. All too often, its attraction is left unnoticed because it is so obvious and so much a part of the people who live there.

Departments

Mail's Here 4

Did You Know . . . 5

Tales from the general store

Editor
Ray Elliott

Managing Editor
Vanessa Faurie



Tales from the general store

is published by Tales from the general store, inc., a non-profit cultural journalism corporation founded to preserve the history and culture of the Midwest. Address all correspondence to: Tales from the general store, inc., R.R. # 2, Oblong, Illinois 62449. Or telephone: 217/351-4846.

The entire contents of Tales from the general store are Copyright 1989 by Tales from the general store, inc., and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without written permission from the publishers. Contents of the magazine may be offered to other newspapers and magazines through syndication and may be published in book form as the material becomes available.

Anyone may submit articles, photographs and/or drawings for publication in the magazine. If published, all material becomes property of Tales from the general store, inc. No responsibility for returning unused submissions can be assumed; however, every effort will be made to return all submissions.

Subscribers to the Casey Reporter, Marshall Independent, Martinsville Planet, Oakland-Hindsboro Prairie Sun, Robinson Daily News, Lawrenceville Daily Record and Robinson Constitution will receive the magazine as an insert to these newspapers as long as there is an agreement between publishers. Nonsubscribers to these newspapers may purchase individual copies of the magazine for \$1.50 or four-issue subscriptions for \$5. A limited number of back issues are available at \$2.50 each.

When I last spoke through this forum, it was in the 10th and last issue of *Tales*. Echoing Marine Gen. Chesty Puller from the Marine retreat in the early days of the Korean War, I said we weren't retreating, we were advancing in another direction.

That became necessary because of a lack of funding and a variety of other reasons, including the initial practice of giving the product away and depending on contributions to finance the project. But despite going "belly up," as the head of one financial institution that never contributed a penny to the project gleefully put it to me, the *Tales* corporation is intact, and the dream is still alive.

We still receive an occasional inquiry about the project and requests for back issues and subscriptions. One former reader told me some time back that while he had never met me, he had read and enjoyed *Tales*.

"You wrote about things that mattered," he said. "I'd like to see you bring the magazine back."

So would I. And here we are. Not only do I agree that we write about things that matter, but I think we provide an opportunity for students to learn to write and learn about history and culture in a way that isn't often provided in schools today: in a hands-on way that involves the community and keeps intact the philosophy that writing is best taught when the writing is for publication.

During the short time *Tales* was published, two student writers received national writing awards for work published in the magazine, one received a \$500 college scholarship and three student-written articles were included in an anthology now used nationally as a writing text.

When I first started seriously thinking about bringing *Tales* back last summer, I talked with former staff member Miles Harvey, now assistant managing editor of the Chicago-based *In These Times*. He suggested providing the magazine free to small dailies and weeklies throughout the Midwest and selling advertising to pay the publishing costs.

Ron Isbell, owner of Clark County Publishing Co. now printing *Tales* at cost and arranging for some of our typesetting needs, suggested starting with the original circulation and later selling the magazine to what he thought would be a small group of "dedicated readers."

After considering those ideas, here's the plan--a combination of the two: the issue you are now reading has been provided to Isbell's *Casey Reporter*, *Marshall Independent*, *Martinsville Planet* and *Oakland-Hindsboro Prairie Sun*, Larry Lewis' *Robinson Daily News*, *Lawrenceville Daily Record* and weekly *Constitution*, former and prospective subscribers in 25 states and other newspapers for reprinting articles.

Former staff members now working at other publications, free lancers and high school and college students will provide articles similar to the type published in past issues. I am teaching English at Urbana Senior High School and plan to use student writing from there.

To offset the costs, advertising is being sold. Small contributions are trickling in. The *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette* has provided a grant of \$475 to help get the magazine off the ground again and will reprint some pieces in that newspaper.

Leaf, Inc., the Chicago-area company that recently purchased L.S. Heath & Sons, contributed \$1,000 for support of the project. The Champaign-Urbana Community Schools Foundation for Educational Excellence is considering the *Tales* project as a potential program for area students to become involved in.

So we're on the way again and will determine whether to stay on a course generally described above or take another at a later date. Whichever way we go, we plan to go forward and hope you come along.

We won't be continuing the attempt to restore the buildings in Bellair, unless we find an angel who drops a million dollars on us or I win the lottery. And I think that's a shame because villages like Bellair are on a downhill slide.

Some of these towns and villages need to be preserved for posterity so future generations will be able to walk through living museums of the general store era as they now can through museums of earlier eras such as Lincoln's New Salem State Park and Colonial Williamsburg.

But that's life today. We'll spotlight some of those communities that are preserving their heritage and maintaining the small-town ambience that gives the Midwest a touch of class. One of those features is about Oakland--a town of about 1,000 people that is revitalizing its economy with restored historical sites, recreational areas, including a nine-hole golf course and Olympic-size swimming pool, bed & breakfasts and antique shops, and maintaining its sense of identity and integrity.

We will have a midsummer *Tales* Reunion Party in Bellair on the weekend of July 15-16 and renew old friendships, reorganize the Board of Directors and plan the future of the project.

That's the direction we're advancing. You can help make it a successful direction by dropping us a line, telling us somebody we might talk to, sending us a tax-deductible contribution or giving us any other information you think might be helpful to us.

I'll be checking the mail.

How to Order Back Issues

of

Tales from the general store

Issue No. 1

General stores, hermit Walter Whittaker, Augustus C. French Maplewood estate, storyteller Thornton Stephens, frog gigging, subsistence farming

Issue No. 2

Hog butchering, meat curing, butter churning, dressing chickens, Homer Adkisson's homemade car, tall tale of an Irish folk hero, benefit concert in Bellair, country living, old-time country doctor and his horse, Marvin Harrison's haunted clock

Issue No. 3

Burl Ives, spring fair, furniture refinishing, rug braiding, quilting, first signs of spring and childhood memories, "An Ode to the Backhouse," "Professor Whistledick and his Cure-all Elixir," by Thornton Stephens, Palestine history

Issue No. 4

One-room schoolhouses and the teachers and students who attended them, cooking and canning with Grandma, summer barnraising, ice cream social, White's country store, Merom chautauquas, powerhouses, fishing, gathering wood

Issue No. 5

Harry Caray, early schools in Crawford County, blacksmith Jim Tingley, George Gullett's baseball memories, trapping, recycling garbage into fuel, memories of an old man, "Cyrus Peck," by Thornton Stephens, pet squirrel, train trips, superstitions

Issue No. 6

Studs Terkel, printer Moran Keller, caning chairs, making molasses, the old Sears catalog, "If Grandpa could see us now," political action committees

Issue No. 7

Salt project in Maine, wild asparagus, Thornton Stephens collection of tales, Bellair history, Morea, how not to catch a cow, the hanging of Elizabeth Reed

Issue No. 8

Barnstorming race driver Bill Richter, fiddle player Harvey "Pappy" Taylor, "Aunt Melinda," by Thornton Stephens, old-time carpenter and Bellair restoration, prairie preservation, poetry, Walter Whittaker tribute

Issue No. 9

"Enoch's Comin'," by Ray Elliott, madstone as folk belief, memories of oil boom days, a child's pet remembered, St. Francisville history, poetry, country photo scrapbook

Issue No. 10

Tribute to storyteller Thornton Stephens, fortune telling with tea leaves, secret trapping bait, child discovers true fate of her grandfather, a family's pet pig, Benjamin Franklin autobiography

Single copies \$2.50 each

Send payment with order, specifying the issue number(s) and number of copies to:

Tales from the general store, inc.

R.R. 2

Oblong, IL 62449

(Supply is limited)

Mail's Here

Something missing as landscape changes

Dear Editor:

Your goals of preserving the history and culture of the general store era are deserving of attention. I have long felt that the people of central Illinois were more or less helpless observers as something of value slipped away. No one can blame them because the economic climate changed, but it does hurt, nevertheless, to come home and find not only the general stores gone but the hedge rows, the little corners of land where schools sat, the state banks in the small towns, the restaurants and quite a few nice old taverns, and the pheasants.

My nephew showed me a town near Louisville, Ill., (in the summer of 1984)--I think the name was Sailor Springs, but I may have it confused--where someone had been saving a few of the older buildings. But it also looked like the resort, which once drew hundreds of tourists from Chicago to drink the spring water (putrid stuff!), had collapsed and was beyond recovery. What a sad loss.

...I think whenever you start trying to preserve history and culture, you run smack into the problem of writing about it. Preserving buildings is one thing, but preserving memories in oral histories and the like may be even more important. And going a step further to create journalism that can entertainingly report on a culture, bring it to life, and preserve it seems tremendously important.

--NORMAN SIMS
Professor of Journalism
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA

Editor's note: Norman Sims is from Mattoon.

Scholars' gold mine remains untapped

Dear Editor:

I read with excitement the plans for *Tales'* return. You seem to have things very well thought out. I think you're right to concentrate on the magazine. Given limited resources, saving the spirit and history of Bellair seems to me more important than saving its structures. Still, I hope that when things are rolling along with the publication, you'll devote a few hours to preservation of the buildings.

It strikes me that Bellair would be a virtual gold mine, in an odd way, for historians, anthropologists, archeologists and other social scientists. The fact that it never really entered post-World War II America--that it's a

village that time forgot--would seem to make it an ideal lab for the right academic(s).

My point is this: There have to be some big-wig scholars in our many regional colleges and universities who specialize in studying the culture and/or architecture of the pre-World War II Midwest. And these people may have their own projects, parallel to *Tales*, and their own funding sources, that could be applied to Bellair. You may want to look for a partner who would leave the magazine to you and would take over the preservation for his/her own purposes.

Perhaps the idea of Bellair as a "Williamsburg of the Midwest," as a tourist center, is wrong-headed. What if it was utilized primarily as an educational tool? I can envision some future Saturday night in Bellair in which half the people sitting around a bonfire are journalism students from Urbana High, and the other half are archeology students from, say, the University of Iowa.

But you're right--concentrate on the magazine for now.

-- MILES HARVEY
Assistant Managing Editor
In These Times
Chicago, IL

Words preserve essence of fading memories

Dear Editor:

You have done it. Your *Tales from the general store* magazine is great. You have painted a word picture capturing the essence of the heart and soul of the country store, patronized by generations of pioneers and their descendants.

Now it is fading from the scene like the log cabin, the horse and Model T Ford--all of which played such an important role in the evolution of our country. The general store, where we listened on the radio as the "Babe" hit World Series home runs, the Howe barber shop/restaurant/pool room across the street and the Bellair bank are now silent. But on a stormy night, I'll bet you can still hear the rattle of dominoes and a deep bass voice leading the singing as former patrons gather to reminisce.

How do I know? For years it was the habit of my late brother, Lloyd, to clip (Ray Elliott's) column from the (Robinson) *Daily News* and save them for me to read on my frequent visits to the home place near Bellair. I enjoyed reading the memoirs--unusual for someone (Elliott's) age.

What have you done? You

have provided me a valuable and interesting addenda to my own memoirs. So keep it up. Your issue No. 4 brought back memories of my own schooling at Elbow. You would probably be surprised to learn that my father, J.A., a farmer, oil man and barber, attended Merom College and taught at Mulberry, Dogwood, Union and Round Prairie, while Lloyd taught two years at Liberty.

Your *Tales* inspired me to write a poem about the Model T. While many are probably too young to remember the tin Lizzie, I'm sure there are a number of old-timers around who still do.

-- D. EDWIN HOWE
Springfield, IL

Editor's Note: The poem, "The Tin Lizzie," is on page 11.

Reader looks for Bellair family ties

Dear Editor:

We were glad to learn you still have copies of *Tales*.

My husband Wayne's parents are Crystal and Lewis Ramsey. We have the Lessell Ramsey history book and found Mable Elliott and her grandmother, Martha Rebecca (Ramsey) Newberry (1881-1948).

I am presently researching several relatives in the Bellair area, including the Adkissons. Crystal's mother was Imo Hackett and Eliza (Harmon) (Adkisson) Hackett. Eliza was first married to Thompson Adkisson and had four sons, Ham, Harmon, Bill and Byron. We've not found too much on J. Hackett and would like to learn more.

Then on my side, I'm looking for info on the Blines who settled near Bellair ca. 1852. Isaac and Margaret (Lingafelter) Bline homesteaded two miles east then north about one mile. Then my next generation was William Bline (b. 1858) and married Lucy Harris, daughter of Thomas Jefferson Harris (1835-1894), also of Bellair. I understand T. Harris had a general store at one time there and possibly died from picking up the wrong bottle under the counter and drank rat poison.

I talked with Lucille Randolph last summer and learned some history of Bellair. But if you know of anyone that would be able to either visit or correspond with me about Bellair or any of these families, it would be great.

I wish Wayne and I had been interested in all this a few years ago when *Tales* was active and we could have attended the Bellair activities.

-- DEANN RAMSEY
Casey, IL



Back in the late 1920s, this goat and wagon made frequent trips around the square in Bellair. From left to right, Thornton "Junior" Bline, Donald Trigg and Lowell Trigg posed on the wagon in front of the Bline home. Donald and Lowell's father, Ross Trigg, had a blacksmith shop in town and put some brass knobs on the goat's sharp horns--but not before the animal cut Donald on the upper lip, which resulted in a scar he has to this day.

(Photo courtesy of Donald Trigg)

Did You Know...

Oblong math team wins state title

Students from Oblong High School took top honors for small schools in the Illinois Council of Teachers of Mathematics State Math Contest in April. The math champions from Oblong scored 806 total points among the schools with fewer than 750 students to beat out Johnson City with 722 points and the University of Chicago Laboratory with 708 points. More than 1,700 students from 290 schools competed in the contest held at Illinois State University.

1947 mine disaster shocked Centralia

On March 27, 1947, a coal dust explosion at the Centralia Coal Co. No. 5 mine southwest of town killed 111 men. It was a disaster that would later prompt stricter enforcement of mining safety regulations because an investigation of the incident

showed 51 violations of 60 safety codes.

While the doomed miners waited helplessly as the poisonous gas slowly snuffed out their lives, they wrote farewell notes to their families. Folk singer and songwriter Woody Guthrie later wrote a poignant song about the tragedy called "The Dying Miner."

But as one man, whose father and three cousins were killed in the mine, told an Associated Press reporter years later, "Coal miners (and their families) are a different breed of people. You are born and bred with the idea... that eventually that chunk of coal is going to get you if you are a coal miner. But I don't think anyone ever dreamed it would be of this magnitude."

Author recalls days of Casey childhood

Former Casey resident Harris L. Hitt wrote a book about his boyhood experiences in the town between World War I and the Depression. The humorous

book, "Five Senses, Four Seasons," features fishing trips, 5-cent matinees, box suppers, threshing days, household chores and many other aspects of small-town life.

Chew on this bit of history

Gum-chewing has been practiced for more than 2,000 years. The ancient Greeks chewed gum from the resin of the mastic tree. American Indians chewed chicle gum from sapodilla sap. And American colonists chewed spruce gums. Paraffin gums came onto the scene in the 19th century.

In the 1870s, American inventor Thomas Adams began marketing chicle-based gums such as peppermint, spearmint, Black Jack (licorice), clove and cinnamon. Arch competitor William Wrigley Jr. didn't join the gum business until the 1890s.

Bubble gum was introduced in 1933. And the Bazooka penny bubble gum was first sold in 1947 by Topps Chewing Gum Co.

Sugarless gums were available as early as the 1940s.

Although baseball cards were first packaged with cigarettes and tobacco in the 1880s, they slowly made their way into candy in the first part of this century, and then into bubble gum wrappers in the 1930s.

-- Source:
Chicago Sun-Times

Naturalist's legacy safeguards nature

What is now the Robert Ridgeway Memorial Arboretum and Bird Sanctuary in Olney, known as Bird Haven, was once a summer retreat for the naturalist and his wife, Julia. Theirs was a "serious effort to produce something useful, at least to future generations."

Ridgeway bought 18 acres in Olney in 1906 and built a small cottage with a porch, where they could sit and enjoy the sounds of nature. Ridgeway died in 1929 at the age of 79, and his grave is on the property.

Most of the original sanctuary was destroyed to make way for the East Fork Lake. But the remaining acreage has been under the care of the Illinois and Richland County Bicentennial Commission, the Ridgeway Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, the Ridgeway Memorial Association and the city of Olney. The porch has also been reproduced on the Ridgeway's cottage site.

Milk bottle trivia

The first milk bottle was made in 1866. And Alexander Campbell has the distinction of being the first person to deliver milk in bottles, which was in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1878.

The cream-top bottle appeared on doorsteps in the 1930s, but they became obsolete with homogenization.

During World War II, the bottles featured painted slogans and pictures in support of the war effort.

-- Source:
The Chicago Tribune

In the second half of the 19th century, life was hard for

A Country Editor



By Laurie Goering

In 1852, Colonel William N. Coler bought a printing press in Cincinnati, floated it down the Wabash Canal, hauled it by horse-drawn wagon to Urbana, and set himself on the road to financial ruin within a year as Urbana's first newspaper editor and publisher.

Coler, as it turns out, was just the first of many early Champaign-Urbana editors to find that a prairie editor in the last half of the 19th century led a precarious existence. Editors, it seems, were forever scrounging for money, suffering verbal and physical assaults by rivals and facing pressure by both politicians and advertisers. Their outspoken, audacious attitude also stirred more tempers than dollars among their readers. Life was sometimes exciting, but never easy, as one editor lamented.

"Oh, a country editor!" wrote the editor of the *Champaign Patriot*, published from 1862 to 1865. "Poor, dilapidated, miserable, two-sided pliant object of martyrdom; credit gone, no money, no friends, no independence, no state printing--no hope of it; an abundance of assets on the book, a seedy coat, boots down at the heel and out at the toe, lots of enemies, plenty of opposition and Job's comforters by the score."

Coler, who gave the county its first paper, the weekly *Union*, had even more problems. One was finding subscribers. In 1852, Champaign County's population numbered only 6,000, mostly

rural folk spread throughout the county. A few readers could pick up copies of the *Union* at one of the county's three post offices at Urbana, Homer and Mahomet, but free rural mail delivery did not yet exist and most people were simply out of reach. As a result, Coler and Henry Kirk Davis, a printer and Coler's partner in the venture, printed only a few hundred copies each week and sold even fewer.

With such a limited number of readers, advertisers--potentially a major source of income--also were scarce, and expenses soon began to exceed income. Printing supplies created an especially heavy financial burden for Coler and Davis, since they had to be boated down the Wabash Canal just as the press had been. Operating expenses ran \$30 to \$50 a week; an experienced printer at that time earned about \$8 a week.

The *Union's* office reflected the paper's poverty. One room, 18 feet square, housed the whole operation in a back corner of the Urbana courthouse, where court was in session only six days a year. Each week, the printer Davis labored over tiny pieces of metal type, arranging the edition letter by letter into page forms. Then, after mounting a form onto the press, he set a sheet of newsprint on it and pulled a lever to lower the platen and press the sheet against the inked form. One by one he created each finished page through the same slow, tedious process. Finally, he arranged the metal letters back into their boxes,

ready for the next edition. In winter, the type chilled his hands in the tiny room, which a wood stove "warmed, but did not heat," according to Champaign County Judge Joseph O. Cunningham, later an editor himself.

Coler also created hardship for the newspaper with his political rantings, which drove away some of the few readers that he could reach. Reflecting Coler's Democratic sentiments, the *Union* came out strongly in favor of Democrat Franklin Pierce in the 1852 presidential election. Pierce won, defeating Whig candidate Winfield Scott. "The tone of the sheet left no doubt of its position upon the issues of the day," Cunningham wrote, "for it struck hard blows for Frank Pierce and the Democracy from this date until the success of General Pierce was secured at the ensuing November election."

Coler's partner, Davis, saw the Democratic victory as his chance to escape the poverty of rural publishing; he left for a job with the new administration shortly after the election. The *Union* continued to "attend with no profit and much loss of time," Cunningham noted, but Coler held on until July 1853, when he sold the paper to Cunningham and another printer, Benjamin A. Rooney. Under its new owners, the paper bumped along its money-losing track, bringing in a total of only \$700 before expenses the first year. The press and equipment alone had cost \$600.

In May 1857, another editor and publisher team joined the

"Poor, dilapidated, miserable, two-sided pliant object of martyrdom..."

**"Poor, poverty-stricken
pedagogue of ink and
ideas..."**

poverty-stricken ranks. Across the mile-wide ragweed field to the west, in West Urbana (now Champaign), L.G. Chase and Albert Gore began publishing *The Spirit of the Agricultural Press*. By fall, however, Chase and Gore had had their fill of newspaper poverty and, leaving the paper's equipment to their creditors, "wended their way to other parts," as Cunningham put it.

Then, in 1858, John W. Scroggs bought the used publishing equipment of the *Spirit*. Soon he started West Urbana's *Gazette*--and a cross-town rivalry between the *Union*, *Gazette* and other later papers that would last almost a century.

A bitter feud erupted between Scroggs of the *Gazette* and Cunningham of the *Union* in 1858, according to Champaign County historian Natalia Belting. After one argument, word got out that Cunningham had endorsed the *Gazette*. Cunningham was indignant: "To say that we ever endorsed the silly twaddle of that dirty sheet, which he dignifies as 'sentiments,' is the most graceless lie ever told," Cunningham wrote, adding a reference to Scroggs as a "little liar and a dirty puppy."

Scroggs, in turn, wrote a verse prophesizing the *Union's* downfall, then made a few observations of his own: "The *Union* doesn't have any effect upon us, not in the least. It comes to us still-born, with congenital rickets, like its pusillanous editor."

Although Scroggs and Cun-

ningham battled only with words, later editors brawled with fists as well. During a "very active war," the editors of the *Gazette* and the *Champaign County News* (a later paper) repeatedly exchanged "scathing editorials blaspheming each other." The E.B. Chapin, the *News* editor, was found lying on Hill Street one morning, "bludgeoned on the head." He eventually recovered to continue the battle, according to William Judy, who later edited the *Champaign-Urbana Courier*.

When editors were not being beaten or browbeaten by rival editors, the readers got in a few blows of their own. Scroggs, in an editorial in the *Gazette*, charged that a saloon keeper named George Hodges was partially responsible for the death of a derelict who had died of acute alcoholism. When the two next met, Hodges decided to even the

score. "Hodges, having encountered Scroggs on a downtown street, requested that the editorial be retracted. Scroggs refused and the two fought until spectators separated them. A justice of the peace fined Hodges \$15," wrote David Wrone, a prairie press historian.

Fires, as well as fights, made the newspaper business difficult and dangerous for some editors. Frank Snyder, editor of *The Republican*, an Urbana paper, saw his newspaper office destroyed by fire in October 1871. By December, Snyder had rebuilt and was publishing again. Then, in 1874, the office was again destroyed by fire. Snyder rebuilt. In 1878 a third fire burned through the office. Again Snyder rebuilt and continued publishing. By 1880, however, he had sold the paper and abandoned the publishing business.

Facilities, too, continued to present a problem, even for those who were not plagued by fires. The *Gazette*, in its early years, was housed in a shaky building in West Urbana, described by Scroggs in dubiously complimentary terms. The office, he wrote, "was in the second story of a balloon frame building on a corner. The entrance was by a flight of stairs on the outside of the building in the rear. The structure was a tough one, for it could shake and sway in a gale of wind without tumbling down."

For editors who managed to stay sane and solvent through disasters, decrepit facilities and assaults on their characters, though, even more trials lay ahead, especially in politics.

Each paper in the late 19th century was generally aligned with one of the major political parties or party factions. Editors were forever in trouble with political leaders, who expected unquestioning support from "their" paper. Editors were expected to be cheerleaders for the party and its candidates, even if they had sharp differences of opinion. Condemnation and a loss of subscribers awaited those who refused.

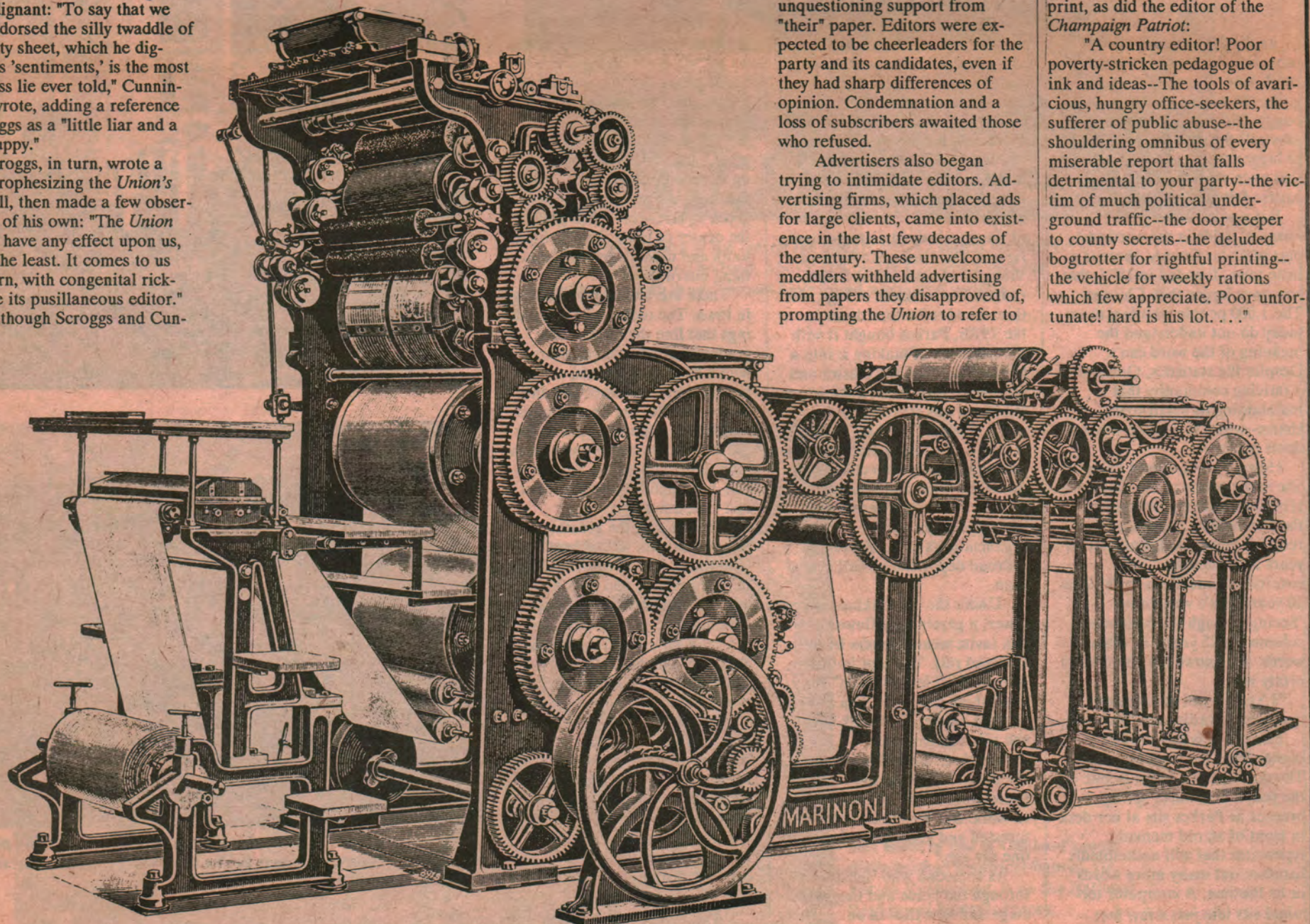
Advertisers also began trying to intimidate editors. Advertising firms, which placed ads for large clients, came into existence in the last few decades of the century. These unwelcome meddlers withheld advertising from papers they disapproved of, prompting the *Union* to refer to

them as "unmitigated humbug." Independent advertisers also occasionally withheld advertising from papers with which they disagreed.

Such a disagreement even helped create one paper during that period. In 1891, the *Champaign County News* opened its doors, with support from F.K. Robeson, founder of the present-day Robeson's department store in Champaign. Robeson had refused to advertise in the *Gazette* because of political differences brought about by a split in the Republican Party. But as this new paper grasped for additional advertising support, it split advertising revenue as well, making survival more difficult for all the town's papers.

In time, many papers died, and their editors trudged off in search of less disheartening work. But a few managed to survive, and some editors even found time to bemoan their fate in print, as did the editor of the *Champaign Patriot*:

"A country editor! Poor poverty-stricken pedagogue of ink and ideas--The tools of avaricious, hungry office-seekers, the sufferer of public abuse--the shouldering omnibus of every miserable report that falls detrimental to your party--the victim of much political underground traffic--the door keeper to county secrets--the deluded bogtrotter for rightful printing--the vehicle for weekly rations which few appreciate. Poor unfortunate! hard is his lot..."



Beating the Odds

The people who live in and care about Oakland, Illinois, do whatever it takes to maintain the quality of life in their town

Text & photos by Vanessa Faurie

As the 21st century approaches, the small towns of rural America are all too quickly going the way of the horse and buggy. Older residents retire, jobs call the younger ones away to bigger cities, and the buildings that once charmed the town square fall into disrepair.

But nestled among the farmers' fields in the northeast part of Coles County, there is a little town, founded in 1835, that was once larger than Chicago. The 1,000 people who live there today do not understand the meaning of the word can't. Despite the statistics, Oakland is a thriving community that is maintaining its small-town charm--which is just the way residents prefer it.

Helen Parkes should know. She is the editor of the Oakland-Hindsboro weekly newspaper, the *Prairie Sun*. She's been the resident journalist for almost 30 years and counting. She's covered city meetings for at least 20 years. She's written her "Seeing through the front door" column for 25 years. In other words, she knows the community pretty well.

"I 'spect I can damn near quote every ordinance," she says.

Her office is just around the corner from the town square. The door is open to let in one of the year's first warm spring breezes as Parkes sits at her desk in front of an old manual typewriter that will undoubtedly hammer out many more words in its lifetime. A computer terminal sits idle just a few feet

away. Dozens of plants flourish along a large ledge in front of the picture window that runs parallel to the street.

Parkes is considered one of Oakland's movers and shakers. She was the force behind the formation of the Landmarks, Inc. historical society in 1969, which acquired the 1847 home of one of the town's most distinguished figures, Dr. Hiram Rutherford. When Oakland's oldest house, rumored to be made of logs, was threatened to be torn down in the 1970s, Parkes bought it with the intention of making it into a landmark. When the plaster and laths were torn away, a two-story log home was revealed underneath. Today, "The Log House" is now a beautifully restored antique and country collectible shop owned by Glen and Marilyn Little, but there are several other buildings under the organization's care, including a railroad depot and a Mail Pouch barn.

Under the old Oakland water tower, a gazebo and flower garden invite weary passers by to stop and rest. The sign in front of it reads, "Helen's Park." But don't think she'll give you a straight answer if you ask why she gets so involved.

"I reckon 'cause I'm easy," she'll say. "They ask me to do something, I'll do it. I don't have to work. But it's better to be interested and keep going for someone my age."

As someone who "lived through the horse and buggy stage and now flies in an

airplane," 82-year-old Parkes has no intention of slowing down. She is proud of the town and its people, and she will work to keep it that way.

"The looks of Oakland are great," she says. "They've cleaned up the center of town. It's attractive from the highway. We have a green square--just green grass in the center of town. An' I'll fight tooth and toenails to keep anything out of there."

There are few empty buildings in town. The older, ornate buildings that line the square have gradually filled over the years with a bank, restaurants, a bakery, furniture store and antique shops. But the one business that receives the most praise for sparking a lot of new business in town is the Inn on the Square, a bed & breakfast owned by Max and Caroline Coon.

"The inn was the greatest thing to happen to Oakland in a long time," Parkes says. "You'd think everybody had gotten around to here, but they keep coming."

After it sat vacant for nine years, the Coons purchased the old Colonial home in 1986. The original structure dates back to 1878, although an addition was constructed in the 1960s, and the couple wanted to do something to save it. The rooms were filled with either junk or antiques. With the help of high school students, rooms were cleaned, repairs were made and the original glory of the old house

Continued on page 10



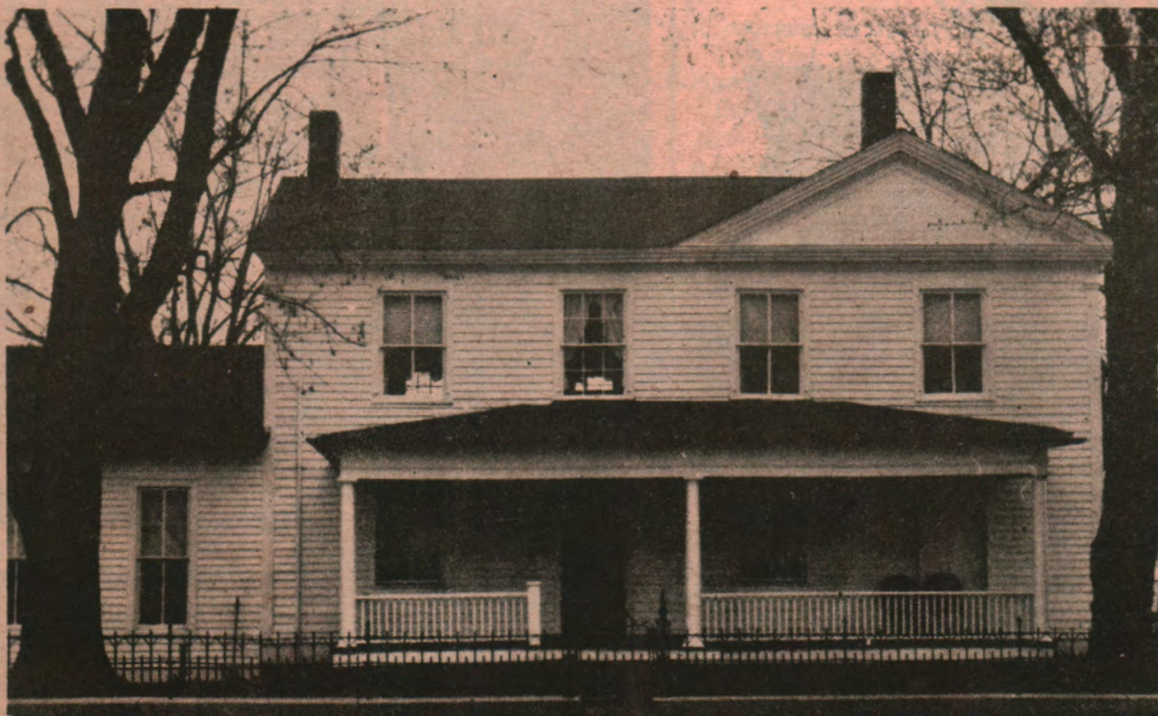
The oldest house in Oakland was once a mystery, hidden by plaster and laths. Today, it is home to The Log House country collectibles and antique shop.



Continued from page 8
 The inn was built in 1840 by Dr. Hiram Rutherford, one of Oakland's most distinguished historical figures. The inn was the first building in Oakland to have a portico. It was the first building in Oakland to have a sign. It was the first building in Oakland to have a porch. It was the first building in Oakland to have a balcony. It was the first building in Oakland to have a garden. It was the first building in Oakland to have a fountain. It was the first building in Oakland to have a well. It was the first building in Oakland to have a clock. It was the first building in Oakland to have a bell. It was the first building in Oakland to have a door. It was the first building in Oakland to have a window. It was the first building in Oakland to have a roof. It was the first building in Oakland to have a floor. It was the first building in Oakland to have a wall. It was the first building in Oakland to have a ceiling. It was the first building in Oakland to have a foundation. It was the first building in Oakland to have a chimney. It was the first building in Oakland to have a porch. It was the first building in Oakland to have a balcony. It was the first building in Oakland to have a garden. It was the first building in Oakland to have a fountain. It was the first building in Oakland to have a well. It was the first building in Oakland to have a clock. It was the first building in Oakland to have a bell. It was the first building in Oakland to have a door. It was the first building in Oakland to have a window. It was the first building in Oakland to have a roof. It was the first building in Oakland to have a floor. It was the first building in Oakland to have a wall. It was the first building in Oakland to have a ceiling. It was the first building in Oakland to have a foundation. It was the first building in Oakland to have a chimney.



Left: The opening of the Inn on the Square was a catalyst for many new businesses in Oakland. Above: Inn owner Caroline Coon sits before a hearth many visitors have found warm and inviting.



The home of one of Oakland's most distinguished historical figures, Dr. Hiram Rutherford, is on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Continued from page 8



Robert Lee continues restoration work on the cabins and buildings that make up the Independence Pioneer Village north of town.

was restored and ready for the Coons' plan to turn it into a bed & breakfast.

"I'm sure everyone thought I was crazy," Caroline Coon says. "And I don't blame them."

If anyone thought that then, they don't now. The Coons happened to get in on the ground floor of what is now a booming business in Illinois. The bed & breakfast inn is a growing attraction for quaint little towns across the country. It is a throwback to the simple pleasures of the Victorian era.

"I just loved it," she says. "It's a neat house."

Within six weeks of its opening, the Inn on the Square was off and running. And although Coon advertises some, she says most of her guests hear about the inn through word of mouth. That word reaches over a 100-mile radius from Decatur to Champaign to Danville to Terre Haute, IN, to Effingham.

The largest percentage of Coon's business is from the tea room on the main floor of the house, where customers can enjoy a quiet afternoon luncheon. Last year, more than 16,000 people ate lunch at the inn.

There is also a women's dress shop and a country collectible

store in the house.

"It's not about to level off," Coon says, but she will not be such an integral part of it much longer. The inn went up for sale recently after her husband became ill. Coon wants it to remain an inn because there is a lot for people to see and do in Oakland.

Guests can easily fill a weekend with local activities. There aren't very many small towns that can boast of having its own nine-hole golf course, an Olympic-size swimming pool, a state park, restored historical sites, a library, a senior citizens center and a children's day care center. But the biggest draw of the year, by far, is the annual Corn & Bean Festival in September.

"It's up to each individual town to do what it can," Coon says. "There's always been a small core of people to keep Oakland in the map and to keep it going. It's a unique town, we think. It's got enough civic pride and vision--which I think is kind of neat."

Marilynn Little, owner of The Log House, would have to agree. She takes pride in the antiques and crafts she sells in the historical landmark just up the street

from the Inn on the Square and makes it a point to find one-of-a-kind items.

She and her husband, Glen, became more acquainted with the oldest house in Oakland when Parkes was working on its restoration. She asked Glen to sandblast the logs on the inside of the house. The house, circa 1836, became a museum of the period that was open by appointment only.

In 1986, the same year the Coons opened the inn, the Littles bought the log house for their shop and opened it to everyone. Every Christmas, "their favorite time of year," they have an old-fashioned open house, including cookies and punch. The aroma of seasonal potpourri wafts throughout the shop as visitors browse among the handmade quilts, dolls, wreaths, stained glass, hand-dipped candles, gourmet coffees and teas and numerous other items to discover.

"It's a warm atmosphere," Little says, "and I think that's what brings people back. People, for the most part, are very sweet and understanding and very interesting."

People are at the heart of Oakland's economic success. But it is a carefully planned success. As executive director of the Oakland Area Economic Development Foundation, Pat Stephen has the official job of promoting Oakland. It is a job she enjoys very much.

"The greatest thing for me is to help people," Stephen says. "Then I'm really complete. This town already has that feeling. They wanted to know if I could keep up with them; well, sometimes they have to slow me down."

There is no typical day for Stephen. She spends a lot of them writing letters and articles, talking to people, traveling and gathering new ideas and visiting businesses interested in expanding.

Some of the future projects she has on her agenda include public restrooms and proper electricity for public areas, snow removal for sidewalks, more lodging, more restaurants, and industry and small business that's agriculture-related to help support the area's commodity base.

"(The people of Oakland) are not afraid to take chances," Stephen says. "They don't like the words, 'I can't do that.' In other communities, that's a good crutch. Fear of the unknown is the worst thing of all. But if you look back at how we've evolved, it's that somebody took chances. You don't get anywhere if you don't go on."

Perhaps a good current example of that is Robert Lee's project just north of town. With the help of his family and some friends, he is reconstructing several old cabins that will be



The side of a barn was utilized for advertising space years ago.

known collectively as Independence, Oakland's original name.

Lee claims he was just going to build a cabin to visit and get carried away. But his plan is much grander than that. When the pioneer village is completed, there will be 14 structures on 22 acres, including houses, a summer kitchen, barns, a smoke house, a blacksmith shop and a one-room school.

"I've always been interested in taking things that were old and broken and fixing them," Lee says.

He brought most of the cabins up from Tennessee, marking every log so they could be reconstructed in Illinois. Lee believes in the potential of a worthwhile business venture in Oakland and is funding the project privately. The site is just north of his home and near the Sunshine Estates Christian Retirement Center, which he and his wife founded and he is the chairman of. He is also a minister who pastored two churches for a total of 29 years.

The long hours and hard work can be frustrating some-

times, as well as lonely. But Lee is planning a grand opening for Memorial Day weekend and hopes the project will interest some volunteers. He plans to hold special events throughout the summer, such as gospel and bluegrass performances, a medicine show and an antique show. The ideas seem to pour endlessly out of Lee as he walks around the building sites.

"I enjoy it," he adds. "I have to be doing something. I enjoyed finding the cabins and talking to the people and getting the history.

"I have an advantage, though. Having a name like Robert E. Lee, the (people in Tennessee) were very open about talking with me," he says and laughs.

New projects and ideas are blossoming in Oakland year-round, it seems. They take root and flourish with the constant nurturing of its citizens. Pat Stephen believes it is because the people are so close and have great pride in what they have kept through the years.

She says, "It's like living in a large family with 1,000 members."



Although no trains make their way through Oakland anymore, the old depot has been restored as a reminder of the past.

The Tin Lizzie (1908-1927)

The best car made, if you were to ask me
Was the one Henry Ford called his Model T
So listen my children while your grandpa reveals
The story of a flivver* that helped put us on wheels

Ford made it for the farmer, like the ones around
Bellair

And he made it so sturdy it would go anywhere
It would go in the mud, it would go in the snow
If you kept in the ruts, and if you went slow

If the roads got slippery because of the rains
All you had to do was put on the chains
The old touring car had a spare on the back
You could choose your own color so long as it was
black

I would say forty was about the top speed
But you cruised along at twenty with no 55 to heed
With the cutout open and the wind in your ear
Its chuggin' down the road was a pleasure to hear

It cost three hundred dollars from Detroit F.O.B.
And they shipped it broken down from the factory
The crates came in by train and my dad was able
To put the Fords together in the Oblong livery stable

It only had four cylinders to make it go
And you shifted from the battery to the magneto
The gas tank was hidden underneath the front seat
Ford's open touring car was really hard to beat

When you took the eggs to town come a Saturday
You had to "harness up" the old Model T
You got out the pump and you gave the tires a lick
And you checked the gas supply with a measuring
stick

Checking the oil petcock you crawled underneath the
flivver
And if the oil was low, another quart you'd give 'er
Then you funneled in the gas from a five-gallon can
And you filled the radiator, then the trip began

When you backed it out the barn which was filled with
hay
It was up to the chickens to get out of the way
And the sad-eyed dobbie with harness unencumbered
Had no way of knowin' that his days were numbered

It had a thing on the front that they called a crank
If you wanted it to start, you gave it a yank
And if a quarter turn was to no avail
You had to spin the crank and twist its tail

It broke many an arm and you felt like a fool
If the spark wasn't back it would kick like a mule
Since the many broken bones was a bone of contention
They started lookin' 'round for a better invention

A few years later when they got a little smarter
They added a thing that called a self starter
And when it was summer you almost cussed
When you got yourself passed and you ate their dust

It had three pedals, which was really neat
Without a gearshift you could shift with your feet
But that made sense when you went for a ride
With fingers on the throttle both hands were
occupied

The pedal on the left side made the car go
When you pushed it to the floor the car was in low
When you let the pedal back then the car was in high
When the roads were frozen over you could really fly

With the pedal half down it was in the neutral zone
You pulled the brake lever when you left the car
alone

The pedal on the right was for braking purposes
If the brakes were weak you used the reverses

The reverse was in the middle of the other two
If you didn't set the brake it would run over you
Sometimes the low bands would wear out until
You had to turn around and back up the hill

It had no footfeed for the foot to feel
And you pulled a gas lever near the steerin' wheel
The throttle and spark were on the steerin' column
You pushed 'em up and down to control the volume

There were no windshield wipers but bless their hearts
You could open the windshield which was made in
two parts
And there wasn't any horn on the steering post
You squeezed a rubber horn which was noisier than
most

It didn't have a door on the driver's side
To get in your seat o'er the side you had to slide
We had no garage, Dad kept it in the barn
When you want to make a turn you stuck out your
arm

When you had to use the car in the middle of the night
You lighted up a match and lit the carbide light
It had a tool box on the side running board
Where you kept all the tools that a man could afford

On a cold winter morning when the engine wouldn't
fire
You got out the jack and jacked up a tire
You poured boiling water on the necessary part
To hasten vaporization so the engine would start

You tinkered with the coils and checked the
commutator
And you got Lizzie started either sooner or later
One thing Leaping Lene lacked was some sort of
heater
And you checked the radiator from the MotoMeter

The radiator heated and the water would boil
To keep the stuff from freezin' you added alcohol
Then you opened up the petcock and left it to drain
With an old sprinklin' can you filled it up again

You put on side curtains for the cold and the rain
But the wind whistled through, it was all in vain
Whenever you got stuck in an old mudhole
You went over to a rail fence and got you a pole

And you pushed and you pried to get the car through
The wheels spun mud 'til you were covered with goo
Getting crossways in the ruts was quite an aggravation
If the mudhole was too deep, a horse was your
salvation

Yes, the Model T Ford was the best in many ways
People drove them forty years to the end of their days
Sixty years later you seldom see them
Unless you go down to the old car museum

Though I haven't driven one for half a century
Recollectin' that old Ford is a pleasant memory
I am now a few years older, but I would shout with
glee
If Henry would deliver me a brand new Model T

But I'm afraid my wife would pitch a great big tizzie
If I showed up in Sun City with my new Tin Lizzie

-- D. Edwin Howe
Sun City Center, 3/23/83

* The bumps and jolts were good "f' the liver," so they
got to callin' the thing a flivver.

Closed inside myself

By Cynthia Cox

The sky was dark the day she was buried. I had to sit in the front of the limosine with the driver because I was the one who was able to climb in by myself. My face was as dark as the day and appeared blank. The rain had slowed to a misty haze when I stepped out of the limo and into the grassy cemetery. I walked toward the small coffin and sat in a chair under the dark green tent.

The sermon was a blur to my memory. I simply sat there and tried to look attentive. The reverend said his parting words and we all rose. I turned to see my mother reaching her hand out to touch the iron vault that encased the coffin. A sharp pain shot through my heart and I felt the tears strain my vision. There was a hand on my shoulder and I recognized the flowery scent. It was Aunt Nancy, my mother's sister.

"You have to be strong for your mama now, honey," she said in her rich Tennessee accent.

She was right. I would have to be strong for my whole family. I would have to help my family realize that Jennifer was dead. But how could I make them realize this if I didn't believe it myself? A four-year-old girl wasn't supposed to die, especially when that little girl was my sister.

My beautiful baby sister with her blonde hair, cut short to frame her small round face. Her eyes were as dark blue as a starless night, with long dark lashes outlining them. She had a short nose that turned up when she laughed and a mouth that puckered when she pouted. I smiled at being able to remember her so well, and I began to think back to a time just before her death. . .

"Cyndi, I'm scared. Please let me sleep with you," she begged through her tear-filled eyes. She did look scared, standing there in her pink satin nightgown, the salty tears streaming down her small, doll-like face. The doctor said the only way she would learn to sleep in her bed was to simply let her cry herself to sleep, Mom and Dad had told me.

"No Jennifer. There's nothing to be afraid of. So stop messing around and go to bed," I ordered, trying to be firm. She knew she was defeated. With a mixed look of pain and fright, she turned and slowly walked down the hall to her room.

That was two days before she died. Why didn't I grant her small wish? It was only for one night. One night I could have had with her before she rode her bike to meet Debra at the bus stop only to be hit and killed.

The fact that I had two more younger sisters didn't affect me. They could never take the place of what was lost. I would comfort them as much as possible, but only from a distance.

I closed inside myself, boxing up my inner feelings to hide them from anyone who might try to look. I became strong all right, but not the kind of strength my aunt had intended. I strengthened like a rock, impossible to break. I grew distant from my family. I never let them see any pain I might have had.

* * *

The walk back to the limo seemed like an eternity. The rain had softened the earth beneath my feet and the heels of my shoes sank into the ground with each step.

Our church, which we rarely attended, held a dinner for the mourners. I have a vague recollection of this event. I can only remember many sad people who didn't know what to say to us.

That night my sister, Stacey, and I were in our room listening to the radio. There was a knock at the door. We looked at each other and let out a deep sigh.

"Come in," Stacey said. Her voice sounded hollow. The door opened. Behind it, my parents and, now my youngest sister, Debra were standing. They looked unsure or uneasy. I wondered how anyone could look lost and bewildered in their own house. Then I caught my own reflection in the mirror hanging on the wall. The sight caused me to draw in a sharp breath.

I saw a young girl whose eyes were deep. I looked into the eyes and saw nothing. Emptiness hovered over the face as clouds cling to the sky, covering its openness.

The sight made me sad and I wanted to comfort the girl in the mirror. I wanted to hold her and tell her it would be over soon. I couldn't do that. I would comfort no one. It caused too much pain to be held or consoled. I had had enough suffering.

"What's wrong?" I asked them. I was surprised at the coldness in my voice.

"Cyndi, honey, Debra needs to sleep here tonight," my mother said. She was fidgeting. I knew that there had to be more.

"And?" I asked.

"We thought that you could sleep in her and Jennifer's room tonight. If you like it there, you could move in and have your own room."

"Of course, you can stay in here if you would feel more comfortable," my dad added.

So, this was how I would get my own room, I thought. Did I really want it that badly?

"Sure. Why not," I said, matter-of-factly. I didn't feel like looking at them.

"Thanks, Cyndi," Debra said, sounding relieved. "I promise I won't get your bed messy and I'll make it in the



morning."

"Don't worry about it, Deb," I said, trying to reassure her. "And you can sleep with any of my stuffed animals."

I forced a smile on my face to show her I meant it. My mom tried to hug me, but I moved from her grip. It was much easier for me to avoid them that way.

Within a month, Debra and I had switched rooms.

* * *

"Cyndi, Dad's back with the tree."

I was lying on my bed, listening to the radio when I heard Debra announce the arrival of the Christmas tree. It was two months after the funeral and a week before Christmas.

With a heavy sigh, I rolled off the bed and made my journey to the living room. I couldn't believe I wasn't excited about Christmas. Normally, I couldn't wait for my parents to go out so I could search high and low for presents. Now, even decorating the tree is a chore. All these thoughts flew through my mind on the short walk down the hall.

When I reached the living room, I noticed Dad had already set up the tree. It was medium-sized with full green needles. The smell of pine tickled my nose and I felt something like a smile form on my lips. Maybe this will be fun, I thought.

There were several boxes filled with ornaments and garland surrounding the tree. I glanced in one of them and saw familiar stars, silk balls and angels. Seeing my old friends increased my desire to make this a big event.

"Come on, guys!" I yelled through the house. "Let's start on the tree."

Slowly, they all came from their hiding places. My parents were actually smiling. Deb and Stacey saw the tree and dove for the ornaments.

"I call the lights," I said, grabbing a string of them. Putting the lights on was my favorite job.

"Who wants hot chocolate? Mom asked from the kitchen.

"I do," everyone answered at once. We all giggled at that.

"No, Cyndi," Dad said. "You wrap the lights around the tree, like in a circle. Not up and down or whatever you're doing."

"Are you criticizing my handiwork, Dad?" I asked, trying to look hurt.

"Grrrrr," he said. That's his reply to sarcasm.

"Oh, no," Debra said.

"What?" Stacey asked.

"We don't have enough hooks for all the ornaments."

Mom came out of the kitchen and said, "Don't worry. I'll just run to the store and get some."

"But, Mom," I said. "It's dark out. Won't the stores be closed?"

"No," she answered. "I'll just go to Eagle. It's not that far."

She quickly went to the foyer closet and put on her coat. She seemed anxious, almost too anxious, to leave. This struck me as strange. But as quickly as the thought entered my mind, it left.

"Well, let's finish the rest of the tree while she's gone," Dad said. I thought I caught a glimpse of a grin on his face.

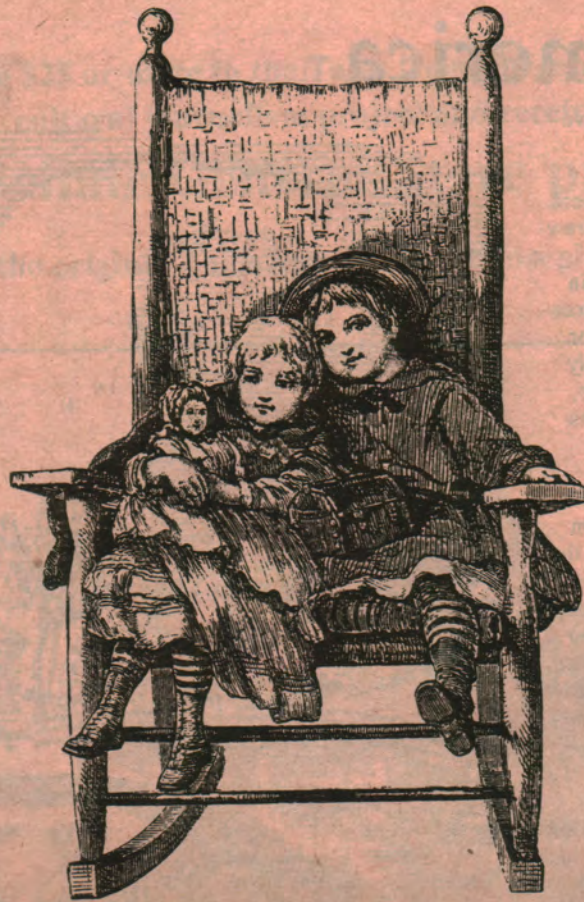
An hour went by and Mom still hadn't come back. I was beginning to worry.

"Dad, where's Mom?" I asked. "She should have been back by now."

"I don't know," he replied. He was totally relaxed. I couldn't believe it.

We had gotten bored with the tree. We even rearranged the decorations several times. Looking at it, I realized we didn't need anymore hooks. There were plenty of ornaments on the tree already.

I was just about to make my discovery known when the



doorbell rang. No one moved. We simply stood there and stared at each other, the same message coming from our eyes. Something terrible has happened.

"I'll get it," I said, heading down to the front door.

The trip was short and when I reached the door, I stopped to look outside. The person standing on the porch was no stranger. It was Mom. And there was a large cardboard box next to her. I threw open the door.

"Mom, where were you?" I asked, almost scolding her. Excitement seemed to radiate from her face, enhancing her soft features.

"Well, I ran into Santa," she began, "and he said to give this to you girls."

Out of the box, she pulled a frightened beagle puppy. He had a large, red Christmas bow tied lovingly around his neck.

"Oh! Is his really ours?" I asked, grabbing him out of her hands. He felt soft and warm. I giggled as his soft tongue tickled my chin.

Debra and Stacey rushed down the stairs to see what the commotion was about. When they saw the dog in my arms, they gasped and raced to hold him.

"Is it ours?" Debra asked. "Is it really, truly ours?"

"If you feed him and promise to take care of him," Mom said.

I handed the puppy to Stacey and followed Mom upstairs.

"Mom, where did you get it?"

"We ordered a puppy from some breeders last summer," she said. "They called us after the accident and asked us if we still wanted him."

I turned and looked down the stairs to see Dad playing with our new family member. It was amazing how young he looked just then. The shadow had left his face and was replaced with a chuckling smile.

"What's his name, Dad?" Stacey asked.

"Rusty."

There were no objections. The name stuck.

That's how it would be from that moment on. The closeness, the unquestioning trust would always stay with us. You see, we share a common bond. And it is unbreakable.

Cynthia Cox is a member of the graduating class of 1989 at Urbana Senior High School.

Did You Hear The News?

Order a four-issue subscription
to
Tales
from the general store
for only \$5.00!



Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Send this form and payment to:

Tales from the general store
R.R. 2
Oblong, IL 62449

The Last Word

For sale: rural America

By Ray Elliott

Nobody has to tell you that hard times have hit the country again. All you've got to do is look around and see local community groups and political action committees (PACs) working to bring to small towns and rural areas prisons, hazardous waste dumps and a plethora of other service and industrial outfits that would supply jobs and pump money into the local economy.

Last winter, a county tourism committee voted to advertise Crawford County in *Midwest Living* magazine as a "desirable place to visit or establish a business." The committee applied for grants from a \$1.2 million state fund to promote tourism in the state and solicited contributions from local service organizations, businesses and government groups to pay for the advertisements, the *Robinson Daily News* reported.

It was also reported in the *Daily News* that the tourism committee was discussing the possibility of designing a county flag. Such a flag would presumably aid in attracting tourists and businesses to visit and/or locate in Crawford County.

Looking over the list of tourist attractions in the newspaper article and those listed in a travel brochure put out by the Crawford County Historical Society, people familiar with the area can see many places they've been and a number of historical facts they know.

But they might not see much that would make them visit Crawford County if they hadn't been born and raised there or if they didn't still have parents, other relatives or friends living there.

That's not to take a thing away from the Hutson Memorial Village in Hutsonville or the annual reenactment of the massacre of the Isaac Hutson family by Indians in 1813. The sacrifices the pioneers made in settling this country are interesting, noteworthy and need to be remembered.

Nor is it to take away from the significance of the Oblong Oil Field Museum or the quality of the Palestine Rodeo and Pioneer celebration held each Labor Day. The museum is a rare display of oil field equipment that was an important part of developing the local economy. And the rodeo stimulates the economy while bringing a unique type of entertainment to the area.

Nor is it to say that the wildlife areas, the parks, the rivers and other attractions aren't as fine as any in the country. Crawford County and the surrounding counties in eastern Il-

linois and western Indiana have an abundance of interesting things to do and some of the most beautiful scenery anywhere.

It's just to say that the Crawford County so many people know isn't the one described in the tourism brochure. That Crawford County remains hidden or hasn't been developed. A *Daily News* article and the brochure, for example, refer to Robinson as the home of author James Jones and the place he began writing "*From Here to Eternity*."

Yet nowhere in Robinson can you readily find evidence that Jones lived and worked there--the man who, better than anyone else, recorded for posterity the exact moment the United States and the world was thrust into the modern age as the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and launched the Pacific Theater of World War II.

A genuine tourist attraction and service to students and literary and historical scholars could be realized by recognizing the contributions Jones made to literature. Gathering a collection of his works and memorabilia and opening a James Jones Library and Museum in the old Carnegie Library where he allegedly developed his literary interests would be a step in that direction.

Perhaps Jones' local reputation for decadence and arrogance has prohibited that. But that notwithstanding, and considering the need for local points of interest to attract visitors, Crawford County is every bit as decadent and arrogant as Jones ever was and needs to recognize a man people will be reading for as long as man is alive to know what it was like for the common soldier who fought in World War II and what it was like at that moment in history.

Beyond that, there is much that could be done in Crawford County and environs to put the area on the map for tourists and prospective businesses. And what could be done doesn't have to be as elaborate as the restoration Laird and Donna Dart have apparently done with the Welcome Inn Bed & Breakfast in Oblong.

For example, while standing in the back of Preservation Hall in New Orleans' French Quarter last fall, listening to the Dixieland jazz band playing that night, I was reminded of Crawford County and much of its authentic appeal. The venerable institution known as Preservation Hall is a weathered building with yellowing walls and a bathroom tacked onto the back corner of the building.

The inside walls probably



have not been painted since Louie Armstrong played there as a young trumpeter more than 75 years ago, yet people crowded in and stood shoulder to shoulder. Everyone peeked around the person's head in front of him or her to see the aging musicians play.

As strains of music that made New Orleans famous the world over echoed through the old building and spilled out through the windows and doors onto the street, a friend next to me turned and said, "Looks like Bellair to me."

Without the music, of course. But that's pretty much it. There are hundreds of places in New Orleans and other areas around the world where the architecture is kept pretty much as it was when it was built and people who made significant contributions to society are remembered.

Not so in Crawford County and much of the Midwest. Here we bring out the bulldozer and cave in our architectural history and heritage or cover it up with siding and plaster as was the case

with an old log house in Oakland you can read about in another story in this issue. And in Crawford County people discuss James Jones, if at all, as an arrogant, decadent son-of-a-bitch who did everyone a favor when he moved on to New York and Paris.

Nowhere in all the reports or meetings on bringing prisons, hazardous waste dumps and all the other businesses to small towns across the Midwest do you hear much about the effect of those job-producing services and industries on the quality of local life, except that it would provide jobs and pump money into a sagging economy.

Speaking about my own concerns of bringing a prison to Robinson to a local mover and shaker, I asked if anyone had ever considered how it would change Crawford County demographically, how it would change the kind of people living in the area and the resulting criminal activity.

"I've checked with people in Danville about that," the mover and shaker said. "They say it

hasn't changed the make up of its population at all."

Of course not. But then Robinson isn't Danville, either.

It makes more sense in the long run to build prisons in areas where the most crimes are committed--Danville, East St. Louis, Chicago, Decatur, Peoria, Rockford and other similar cities--rather than ship convicted felons to small-town America where they receive fewer visitors, do harder time and are more likely to return to prison as a result.

And it makes more sense to dispose of hazardous waste of any kind in the area where it is generated, rather than ship it to small-town America where it is buried forever and future problems, however far down the line, must be dealt with by later generations.

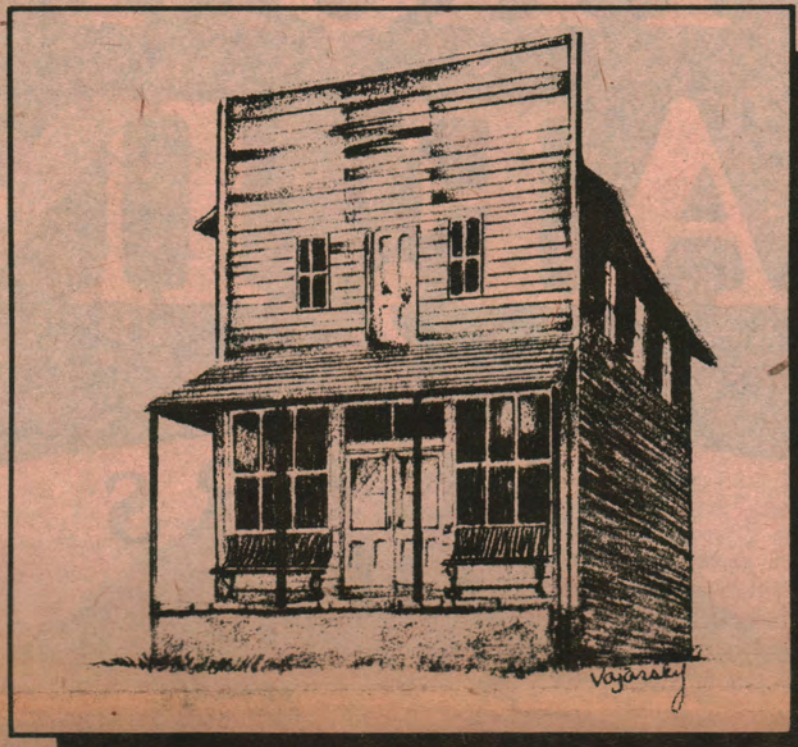
At this point, there is no question that Crawford County is, as the tourism committee says, "a desirable place to visit or establish a business." Or live. And with quality jobs and an eye to the past, it undoubtedly could remain that way.

Remember the good ole days . . .

Donate \$25 or more to the Tales from the general store
cultural journalism project and receive a

Bellair General Store print

from the original Tales logo drawn by Joseph Vajarsky



Actual size 6 1/2" x 7 1/2"
(Suitable for framing)

Send your tax-deductible contribution to:

**Tales from the general store
R.R. 2
Oblong, Illinois 62449**

I have enclosed a contribution in the amount of \$ _____
Please send my Bellair General Store print to the following address:

Name _____

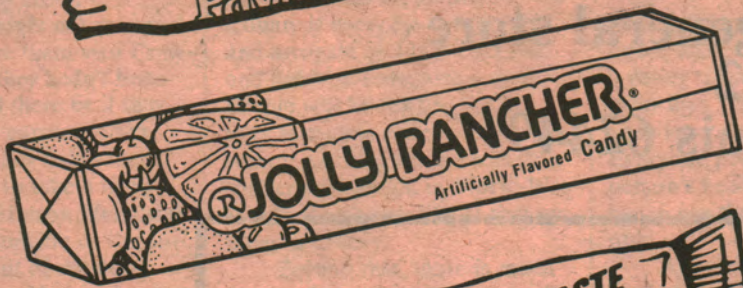
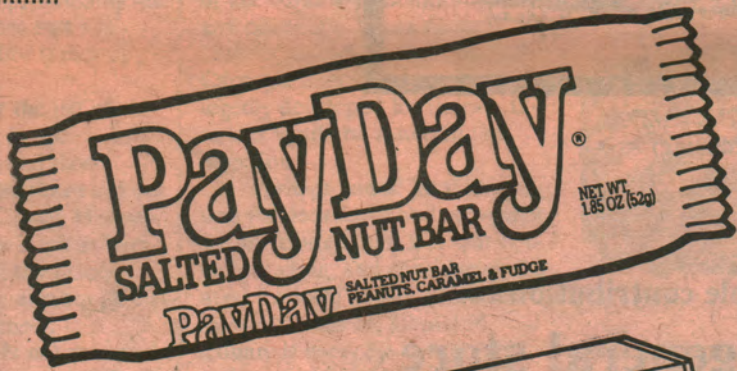
Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

(while supplies last)

BEST WISHES FROM LEAF, INC.

MAKERS
OF



LEAF, INC., BANNOCKBURN, IL 60015