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Tales



PORTRAIT
of the
ARTIST
Billy Morrow Jackson

Tales

from the general store, inc.



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**The difficult is easy;
the impossible takes
a little longer.**

Dear Readers:

Just before the end of the student teaching period last spring, my student teacher asked me about my commitments in life. Because of the context of the discussion, the question took me slightly aback. I stuttered and stammered, thoughts racing through my head.

"Well, as a teacher," I said, stalling and wishing I could answer in general terms rather than specific ones, "of course, I'm committed to education. I like what I'm doing and care about young people.

"But I think if you're really asking about an in-depth, back-to-the-wall type of commitment, I'd have to say the only thing I'm truly committed to is the Tales project and that aspect of my teaching and writing life. If it weren't for Tales and the opportunity to work with young journalists, I'm not sure I could stay committed to a career that is held in such low esteem by the general public and faces so many problems brought on by the changing society and educational budget crunches."

That may sound somewhat arrogant and presumptuous in talking about a project that has struggled along hand-to-mouth with the majority of the funding coming from my own pocket and contributions from a small group of faithful supporters. But I really can't think of anything I do as an educator that I believe in as much or am as committed to as I am writing and the teaching of writing through the Tales project.

Like other similar projects, Tales is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization that relies on contributions and grants for support. Other than the small group mentioned above, public support for the Tales project has been pitifully little over the years. Grants have been virtually non-existent. Both are necessary for any successful project.

At a fund-raising seminar last summer, it was suggested that non-profit organizations should always say that things are going well because people only give to successful organizations. While that may be true and the advice sound, it is also dishonest, misleading and contrary to what the Tales project, and educational in general, is about.

Be that as it may, the Tales project struggles along from issue to issue, scraping together money to pay the bills but never finding enough to purchase all the equipment (we have been able to purchase computers for circulation, typesetting and layout but still need a laser printer) needed for desktop publishing, money for a grant writer and fund raiser, and normal operating expenses.

It is rather ironic that most of the financial support continues to come from the Crawford and Clark County areas of southeastern Illinois where the project was founded, although articles about that immediate area and student involvement from area schools are minimal. That's also true of newspapers willing to pay printing costs and insert *Tales* for their readers.

With all the talk about teachers needing relevant and innovative projects to motivate students, community support for education and business people making noises about getting more involved in education, I see little help for Tales other than what I get from a few of my students and friends and the Urbana High School administration. Everybody talks, but few act when it comes to financial support, participation and assistance.

Government is no better. A congressman with a bulging campaign war chest and no viable opponent for years says he'll consider a contribution, then doesn't bother to answer further requests; the former secretary of state doesn't bother to answer a letter asking whether he'll stay on the board as governor; a state representative who says he "always answers correspondence" doesn't bother to answer a request for someone to speak to a class.

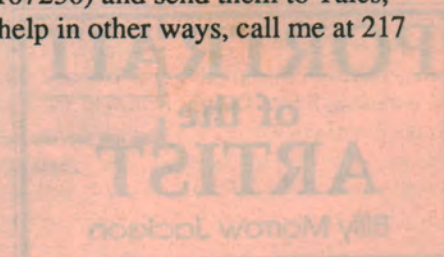
And so it goes. Perhaps the fund-raising experts are right. Correct, anyway, about the financial success necessary to secure contributions. But I'll continue to be committed to the project as long as students keep writing the kinds of pieces that are included in this issue and keep taking the chances writing requires of them.

To continue that commitment, however, I'll need your help. While I'm teaching, accompanying students on field trips to the Art Institute in Chicago, a journalism conference in Washington, D.C., and Estonia and Russia (check the next issue of *Tales* for the results), revising the advisory boards to include people with the interest and finances to make a difference and mounting an annual fund-raising campaign, you could help tremendously by sitting down right now and making a generous contribution to the Tales project. You'll be glad you did.

Please make checks payable to Tales from the general store, inc., (IRS # 37-1107230) and send them to Tales, inc., RR#2, Box 401, Urbana, IL 61801. For more information on how you can help in other ways, call me at 217 337-6510 or 384-5820. Let's make a commitment to the future together.

Sincerely,

Ray Elliott
President & Editor



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Tales from the general store, inc.

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Sometimes things do come between a man and his horse

By Ray Elliott

Standing there looking at the palomino at the state fair last summer and knowing that he was going to be given away to somebody who really wanted him took me back to a late summer day nearly forty years ago and another horse I really wanted.

When I got home that afternoon from the one-room school just down the road from our place that I attended as a fifth grader, I saw a beautiful pinto horse, saddled and ready to go, standing patiently at the clothesline pole he was tied to at the edge of the garden. My heart was beating double-time as I walked up to him as if I were going to mount him and ride away.

He looked around curiously at me. I rubbed his nose gently and caressed the worn saddle on his back. If I could just have a horse like this, I thought, I'd be happier than anything.

The horse tossed his head and jumped sideways as I turned quickly and dashed to the house, completely missing the two steps on the back porch when I jumped and landed right at the door. Inside, I ran to the living room where I saw my 75-year-old grandfather sitting in a big stuffed chair, quietly bouncing my little sister on his knee and talking to my other sister who sat on the arm of the chair. My mother and our next-door neighbor were talking to each other.

"Hi, Dad," I said. "Is that your horse? He's purty. Where'd you get him? What're you goin' a do with him?"

"Whoa, there," he said, chuckling slightly, his eyes bright with laughter. "You talk too fast. Slow down. Yes, he is mine. I bought him from Vern Seaton the other day and just rode him down here the 'safternoon."

"You rode him all the way down here from Aunt Nellie's?" I asked. I was sure that was at least ten miles. And I thought my grandfather was much too old for that.

"Thought I'd bring him down here for you," he said quietly.

"For me?" I hollered, glancing quickly at my mother. I knew she didn't like for me to be around horses. When Jon Parker and Donal Purcell brought their horses around and let us younger boys ride them, she always forbade me to ride, telling me I'd get hurt. But I always rode anyway. "Yippee! Rocky won't hurt me, and I'll take good care of him. Honest I will. Can I have him?"

"Now you know you don't have any place to keep a horse," she said. "I don't know what he brought it down here for, anyway."

"For me, for me. That's what. And we could keep him over at Ross' place."

"In the chicken yard? He doesn't want any horses over there."

And he didn't because I dashed out of the house and ran over to ask him. To cut the story short, though, I wasn't allowed to keep the horse, despite my crying and pleading. My heart felt like it was breaking in two as my grandfather patted my shoulder, said, "I'm sorry, son," and swung up into the saddle.

I watched him ride off and ran to the corner where he turned east and watched him until I could no longer see his lone figure in the fading evening light. Then I walked slowly down the road, kicking a rock and watching the dust puff up between my toes.

Shoot, I thought, I won't ever get a horse.

That all came back to me in a flash as I looked at the palomino and remembered all the years I've wanted a horse since then. This time I have a place to keep one, and my mother has no say in the matter. Getting the palomino would fulfill a boyhood dream I've had for many years, I'd have a horse to ride on trail rides and Sunday afternoon jaunts with my friends and the horse would have a great home.

I was literally in tears myself when I finished writing that story for the "Solid Gold Futurity—WFMB Free Horse Giveaway" contest. No way, I thought, can I not win that beautiful horse. And when I received a letter from the folks at Sold Gold Futurity that I was one of the ten finalists in the contest, I knew the horse was mine.

Since "the winning finalist (had to) be present for the presentation ceremony" in the Coliseum at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield, I headed out. The winner was "to be announced at approximately 6 p.m." during a horse show and other events. I was beside myself, straining for a glimpse of the horse and trying to contain my happiness.

Six p.m. came and went. I watched greased pig races, a mutton-busting contest (where small kids actually rode sheep) and several specialty acts which now escape me. Finally, the winner was unceremoniously announced, none of the essays, including the winning one, was read, and a 16-year-old girl came out of the crowd and led the palomino from the arena.

I watched them go and saw my grandfather riding off in the fading light of that long-ago evening. Some things never change, I thought, and got up and slowly walked out of the arena and to the car.

Mail's Here

Others value the past

Thank you for the copies of *Tales*. It pleases us to know that there are others who value the not-so-distant past. Value is in the ears of the hearer, and it seems that many persons in today's world are moving too fast to hear anything. And, regretfully, I am there myself more days than I would choose to admit.

—LYNNE PETERSON
Bemus Point, New York

Another satisfied *Tales* reader

I loved the issue you sent me (published in fall 1990). The writing was excellent, and the topics were so interesting. Thanks for turning me on to it! I really admire you for continuing the project—I know how much love and care and time you put into it.

—TRACEY CONRAD-KATZ
Urbana, Illinois

Reminiscing about the summer of '84

How's life at the store? I still have fond memories of going to meet the hermit's brother, interviewing cattle farmers and carpenters, painting houses and fixing plumbing, swimming at your friend's pond and Miles (Harvey) going crazy over having clean yaks (underwear), digging a

foundation, living on Corn Flakes, hot dogs and Heath bars, lying on the bed of a pick-up truck under rushing stars and leaning tree branches, even weeding corn fields under a beating sun.

Best of all I recall the fine and talented circle of people I met and miss.

I take it you know Wayne Sallee's been published a couple of times in *The Year's Best Horror Stories* and has a deal for his first book.

By the way, in your summer issue I especially liked Ray's (Elliott) sketch of the used car salesman, Vanessa's (Faurie) profile of The Bird Man—who seems like a caring, but not sappy man—and Anna Fox's life's awakening in Chile. She is an observant, direct writer with a feel for both the detail and the larger world. Better keep her. Good luck and take care.

—BOB McCOPPIN
Chicago, Illinois

Editor's Note: Bob McCoppin was one of several vagabond-adventurer writers and artists who spent the summer of 1984 in Bellair to work on the Tales project.

Glad to be back in the newspapers

Glad to see *Tales* back in

distribution with the local papers. Keep up the good work.

—RONALD BAILEY JR.
Robinson, Illinois

A thorough reader

Enjoyed the fall issue of *Tales*. Read it from cover to cover.

—SUE HESKETH
Mahomet, Illinois

Bringing history alive for students

After reading an article in the newspaper about you and your *Tales*, I thought that your publication might add life to my American history classes. Could you send a sample?

Best wishes in your endeavors to make history "alive for students."

—ANNE E. POOL
Paris High School
Paris, Illinois

Word gets out across the airwaves

During the holidays, I listened to a very interesting discussion having to do with Illinois history on WLS radio out of Chicago. During that discussion, a lady called in and mentioned your publication, *Tales* from the general store. She was very enthusiastic about it.

I would appreciate any information you can send me about it.

—MRS. SHARON MYERS
Prospect Heights, Illinois

Editor's Note: A good friend to the Tales project, Rose Fox of Evergreen Park, was listening to a talk show one day on WLS radio that featured a man who travelled throughout Illinois, talking to groups about all the small towns and their history. Rose called in to tell the interviewer and guest about the Tales project and how it focused on similar themes. Apparently, Rose was a big hit, and the two wanted her to tell all about us. So Rose gave the Tales project a big promotional boost over the airwaves of one of the most far-reaching radio stations in the country. Since then, we have received calls and letters from people all over who heard the program and want to know more about the project. Thanks, Rose!

Appreciating tangible reminders of the past

By Nancy Gilmore

When I was growing up, one of my favorite pastimes was visiting my grandparents who lived in the little rural town of Wahoo, Nebraska.

My grandfather was a retired farmer and I remember his face, craggy from hours of working in the sun, and how his sky blue eyes sparkled when he greeted me as I stepped off the bus from Omaha. My grandmother would have homemade kolaches, warm from the oven, waiting for me when Grandpa and I walked in the door. The large kitchen in their big, old white house, was the center of family activity and something good was always cooking, the aromas rising even to the second floor bedroom, where I slept under a goose-down quilt at peace with the world as the trees rustled softly outside my window.

It must have been the warm and loving atmosphere of that old house, the "things" that made up its surroundings, and, of course, its inhabitants, that later in life would lead me to become a lover and collector of antiques.

I specifically remember, on those grandparental visits, playing in one particular room upstairs that my grandmother used for storage. What a treasure trove of keepsakes—old china-head dolls that had belonged to my aunts when they were small; trunks full of old pictures and lots of doilies and linens that my grandmother loved to crochet for hours on end. There were many framed pictures of saints, and odds and ends, probably long forgotten by Grandma, that kept me entertained for hours on end.

It wasn't until years later, after my family had moved to the Chicago area, that my hankering for things from the past began to grow. It started when a friend and I were "junking" for a dresser I needed for a new apartment in the city. We found one, crammed in the back of an old shop in Glenview. It looked like it had seen better days—grungy with years of dust and grime, its ornate, framed mirror cracked with age and its hardware falling off. But the price was right: \$30.

My friend and I hauled the dresser home to Elmhurst and down to the basement of my parents' house where I spent the next month of evening winter hours stripping and refinishing. When it was done, the light oak finish gleamed like new and all the

Victorian features and fretwork came alive again. At the time I had no idea of its worth. I only knew that I loved it (and do to this day).

That "find" was the first of many that would come along over the years. There was an old iron stove and a marble-topped commode which, after stripping off its coat of white paint, was burlled walnut. It came from my husband's family farm. Other finds were a solid brass teapot with a hallmark, picked up "on the cheap" years ago on a trip to New England and a collection of wonderful old English cups and saucers that I "saved" from being tossed out by a friend who didn't appreciate their beauty.

There was a time, in the not too distant past, when driving along a country road could net a real find at a yard sale or even in town when people were selling their old junk (many times, real antiques) for a pittance. We all know that isn't true anymore. People have learned the value of pieces they own—things that can be one of a kind or that simply will never be made again. When they're gone there won't be any more coming down the road.

So many times, when I am antiquing with friends at a mall, in a shop, at an estate sale, something will catch my eye that will pull me back to my childhood. My friend and I will poke each other and say, "Remember those dishes? My mother used to have a set like that," or, "I remember seeing those Staffordshire dogs in my grandmother's house." The prices on these bits of nostalgia are far more today than their original cost, and in the case of some really fine collectibles, will only appreciate more as the years go by.

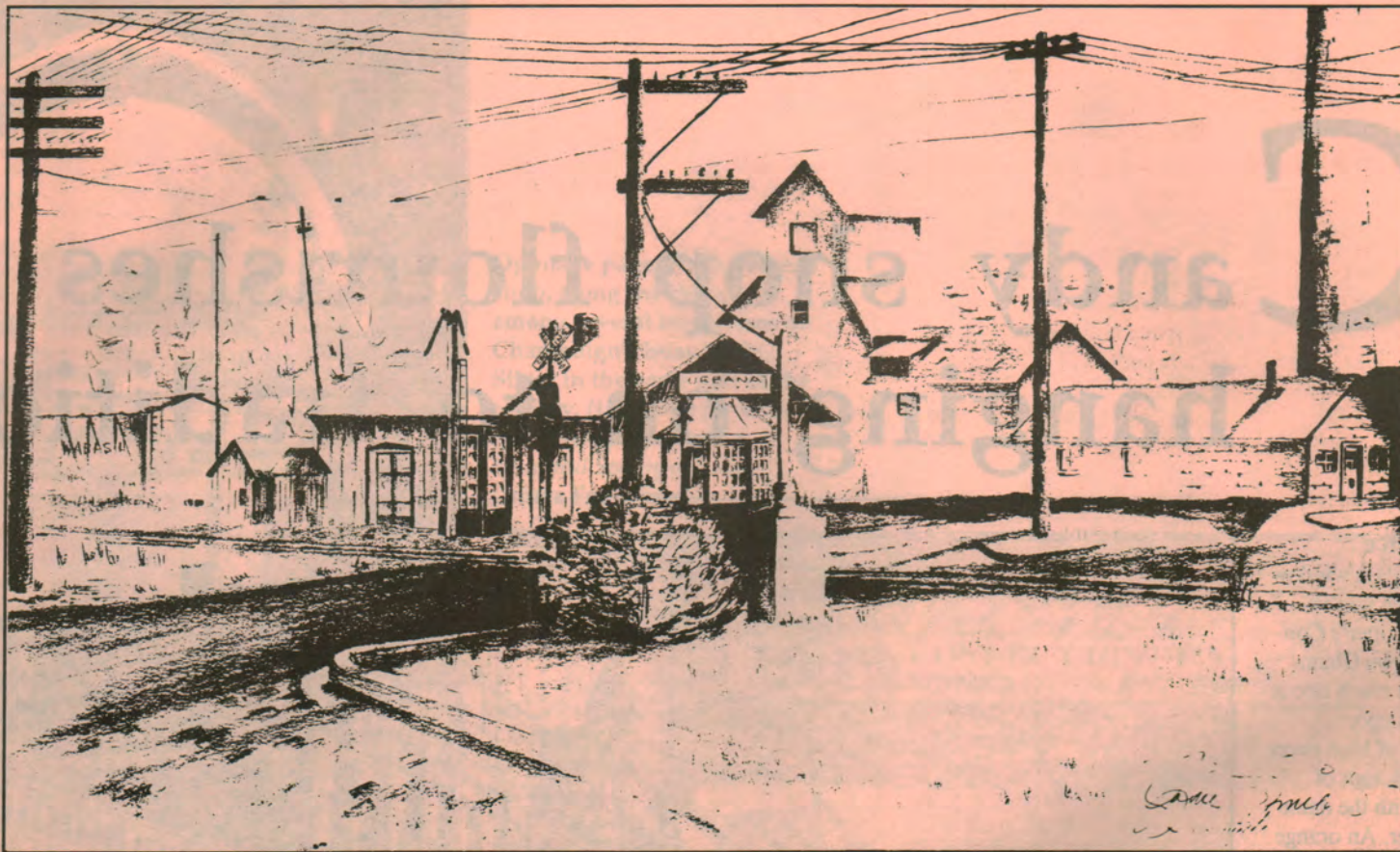
My present home reflects an eclectic collection of furniture and knick knacks that I have hauled home from antiquing over the years. Victorian furniture is probably my biggest passion—I think because of the beautiful woods, the craftsmanship and the warm feeling it brings me from the historic past.

Like they say about art, the beauty of an antique is in the eye of the beholder. You adopt it almost as a member of the family. It is an integral tie to the past—something to cherish like the feelings of warmth and love that I experienced so long ago on those wonderful visits to Wahoo and to the house of my grandparents.

Sit right down and write us a letter.



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



Artist John Smith of Urbana did this sketch of the old Urbana railroad depot in 1949. Today the building is home for The Station Theater, which showcases community performances.

Print courtesy of H. Burton Downs

Did You Know...

Cairo's varied past

Cairo, Illinois, was named by a St. Louis businessman because of his belief that the area surrounding the town bore a distinct resemblance to Egypt and its capital. According to *The Encyclopedia of the Midwest*, the company building the town, the Cairo City and Canal Company, was invested in by such unlikely speculators as Charles Dickens.

The Cairo Company saw the area as a great investment because of its site on the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, but the company soon over-extended itself and went bankrupt. Cairo was almost abandoned by 1850 when a federal grant was awarded to finance a railroad running through Cairo.

The tracks which became the Illinois Central Railroad were then the longest in the world at more than 705 miles. This renewed trade route through Cairo, according to the encyclopedia, revived its economy and increased its population by 1,000 percent.

Although farther south than Richmond, Virginia, Cairo played an integral part in the Union Navy's blockade of the Confederacy during the Civil War. And Cairo was one of the many northern towns which accepted trains full of freed slaves during the Reconstruction era.

Throughout the first half of the

20th century, Cairo and the surrounding area was important in agriculture as well as river and rail traffic. But as river transportation decreased and highway transportation became more prevalent during the 1950s and '60s, Cairo and its economy became depressed. Even the construction of Interstate 57, which runs through the town, has not helped pull the region out of its economic slump.

Now the town has the highest unemployment rate in Illinois, according to Del Dahl, communication and marketing specialist for the Illinois Extension Service, and is always hovering on the edge of racial conflicts rooted as far back at the Civil War and Reconstruction.

— Jeremy Colby
senior, Urbana High School

Roads patterned after Indian trails

We may have the Native American to thank for many of our society's modern highways. According to Jude Caton in his *Sketch of the Pottawatomies*, the tribe traveled across what is now Illinois in single file, creating narrow, direct paths that connected the most prominent points throughout the state.

Settlers in the early 1800s used these roads as guides when they first arrived in the area, according

to *The History of Champaign County*. Most of these early "highways" were plowed under, but those that were most useful became wagon roads, possibly serving as a pattern for the modern road system in Illinois.

— Lori Adams
senior, Urbana High School

Governor sued

In 1824 Madison County filed a slavery suit against the governor of Illinois--sort of.

According to Emily McWhorter, whose article appeared in the March 1984 edition of *Illinois History*, Vol. 37, Governor Edward Coles had a suit bought against him which had to travel to the Supreme Court before it was finally dropped in 1827. The lawsuit claimed that Governor Coles broke one of the slavery laws of the state of Illinois. Ironically, the governor was firmly against slavery.

Coles moved from his late father's plantation in Virginia to Illinois in 1819. He took the slaves with him that he had inherited from his father. During the journey to Illinois, he told them they were free to go because of his strong feelings against slavery. When Coles arrived in Illinois, he gave each of the slaves a certificate of emancipation and one hundred sixty acres

of land to the head of each family so that the now ex-slaves would be able to make a living.

Despite his apparent good nature toward the ex-slaves, Coles was sued by Madison County during his term as governor in 1824. He was charged with violating a law which required the freer of slaves to pay a bond to the county in which they were freed. The reason for the law was to help insure that the welfare of the freed slaves wouldn't become a financial burden on the public.

Coles' defense argued that he didn't know about the law, and it wasn't written until he had arrived in Illinois and told his slaves that they were free. But the case wasn't dropped until 1827 when the Supreme Court overruled the law.

— Phillip Beth
senior, Urbana High School

Shelbyville woman invented dishwasher

The dishwasher was invented by a woman in Shelbyville, Illinois, according to *Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things*. In 1886 Josephine Cochrane, the wife of a wealthy politician decided to create a machine that could wash her dishes. She frequently gave informal dinner parties and was

sick of her good china being broken when servants did the dishes.

In a wood shed connected to her home, Cochrane measured her dinnerware and made individual wire compartments to hold them. These compartments were fastened around a wheel that was set into a copper boiler. As a motor turned the wheel, hot soapy water squirted from the bottom of the boiler and cleaned the dishes, then another burst of water rinsed them.

Cochrane soon got orders from Illinois hotels and restaurants who thought the invention would save them money and prevent dish breakage. She patented her machine in December 1886, and it was called "the best mechanical construction, durability and adaption to its line of work" at the 1893 World's Fair.

Eventually Cochrane joined forces with an Ohio manufacturer and produced Kitchenaid dishwashers.

— Michele Spence
graduate, Urbana High School

Correction

Urbana High School senior Phillip Beth wrote about the Rock Island bridge controversy in the last issue of *Tales*. The article was inaccurately attributed to another student.

Candy shop flourishes by hanging on to traditions

By Michele Spence

Look through the glass window and you might believe you've gone back in time. Vriner's Confectionery in downtown Champaign, Illinois, looks much like it did ninety-two years ago.

Tiny ceramic tiles of blue cover the floor, making a design of narrow hexagons, with the name Vriner's in the center. An orange tube light reads BANANA SPLIT above the thirty-two-foot marble counter and soda fountain, circa 1908. A 1940s Wurlitzer juke box sits in the center of the restaurant. The sound of Patsy Cline singing "Crazy" plays clearly in the background.

The long display case to the left of the door is filled with just about anything a candy lover could want—homemade taffy, cookies and various candy bars and hard candy. The old Blackjack and Clove gums are there, too. The smell of french fries and fresh onion rings catch your nose as you are seated at an old booth made of rich, solid walnut. The table tops are made of marble and seem smaller than restaurant tables today. All the necessities are provided—an ash tray, ketchup, mustard, malt vinegar, salt and pepper. Mirrors with traces of old red and blue paint spelling out SHAKES and COLD DRINKS hang on the walls above the tables.

Vriner's still serves Cokes that the waitresses make by mixing the syrup and soda water. There's also fresh-squeezed lemonade, phosphates and Green River, a lemon-lime fountain drink that was popular in the 1950s.

The menu may have contemporary prices, but the food it lists, such as homemade soups, sandwiches and hamburgers, is similar to the items served years ago. And you still get generous servings.

People of all sorts seem to be seated in the booths. Businessmen in suit coats reading their newspapers seem quite content to sit near the teenagers with torn



jeans and shaggy hair. This comfortable atmosphere is one of the attractions of Vriner's. People of all ages and personalities come through the doors and feel like they sort of belong.

"The atmosphere is nice," said Eric Hansen, a 17-year-old student and part-time Vriner's employee. "The people I work with and the ones who come in are really cool. I get to meet all kinds of people. It doesn't seem like work at all."

And reminders of the past seem to spark many conversations, according to another part-time employee, Michael Baldwin.

"People seem really interested in the history of the place," Baldwin said. "Younger people sit down and talk about poodle skirts and wonder what it would have been like to come when Vriner's was the normal place to hang out."

The history all started when Greek immigrant Peter George Vrinios came to the United States

in the late 1890s. He worked in Chicago selling produce from a wooden wagon until he earned enough money to return home to Greece and marry his young fiancée. He planned to bring her to Champaign and open a candy store. Upon returning to the United States, he shortened his name to Vriner and his dreams of living with his new wife and opening a business in America, the land of opportunity, finally came true.

In his shop, homemade candy and ice cream were the first featured specialties, and as time went by, it became one of the most popular hangouts for young people as well as the most popular confectionery in town. Business was good for the Peter Vriner, and he was pleased with how his hard work had paid off.

Eventually, though, Vriner became ill and died in 1929. His two young sons, Samuel Peter (or Tyke) and Willie, then took over the family business. At the time

of Peter's death, Willie was in college and Tyke had just finished high school, but they believed they could handle their father's legacy. The elder Vriner had left a notebook filled with recipes, and both boys had grown up learning the trade. They continued to operate the business as their father had, not changing the recipes or the traditional setting that he would've thought important.

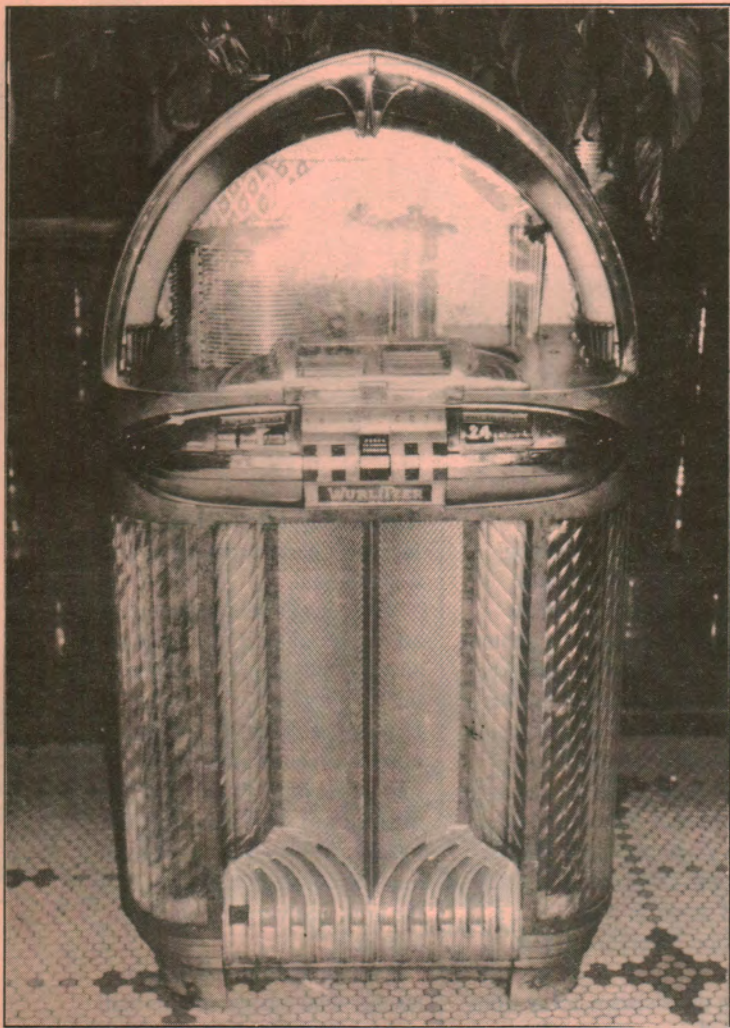
When the United States entered World War II, Willie went to Germany and was killed in action. Tyke was then left alone with the restaurant and the sadness of losing his brother. Eventually, Tyke's own children were old enough to help and made Vriner's a true family business again. The children learned the traditions of making candy and ice cream just as he had. As Tyke got older, he watched his children take on most of the responsibility of the restaurant.

As time passed, business in the area dwindled in part because of the construction of a large mall north of town and the loss of many local stores. Customers consisted mostly of local businessmen and the occasional out-of-towner who had a long wait at the train station across the street who came in for a meal or drink.

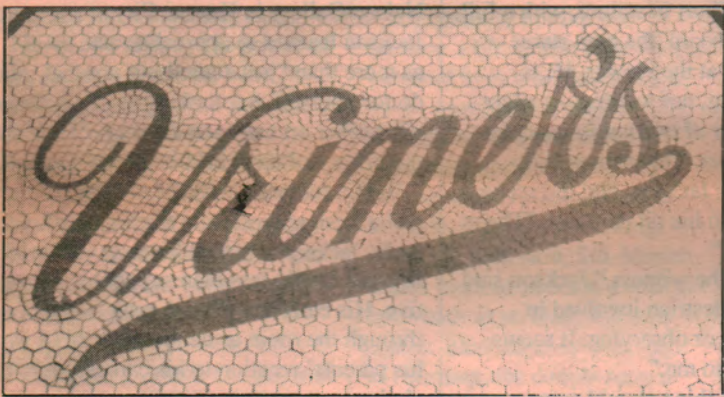
It wasn't long before the Vriner family was barely making ends meet after covering all the costs of running the restaurant. They considered closing down, but they knew it would break their father's heart. So they ended up renting the restaurant an did eventually sell Vriner's in 1988.

New owner Bob Rowe was a University of Illinois graduate who had studied restaurant management.

"As a student, I always thought Vriner's was a great place, but it wasn't living up to its full potential," Rowe said. "The hours were too short and the menu was small."



Opposite page: Peter Vriner's shop, along the right, is among several businesses on Champaign's busy Main Street in the early part of the century. (Used with permission of the Champaign County Historical Society and The Urbana Free Library.)



But when Rowe heard it was for sale, he jumped at the chance to own it. "It was cheap," he added. "And I decided to make it everything I thought it could be."

Since Rowe had no experience making ice cream, candy, malts or cream sodas, Tyke patiently taught him the traditions and passed down the notebook of secret recipes.

"Learning everything was fun," Rowe said, "but it was also a lot of work. Things that look simple often take hours, especially if you're doing it the old-fashioned way."

And just about everything continues to be done the old-fashioned way at Vriner's. You can sit down and eat freshly baked cookies or peanut brittle. There are also cinnamon balls, Easter egg candies, caramel apples and candy canes from which to choose. Rowe even allows customers to help occasionally.

"Around Christmas there are

loads of little kids who come in with their classes or sometimes their grandparents," Michael Baldwin said, "and they want to make candy canes."

Even though having lots of little kids around may make things more difficult for Rowe, he thinks the kids enjoy it a lot, so he welcomes them back each year.

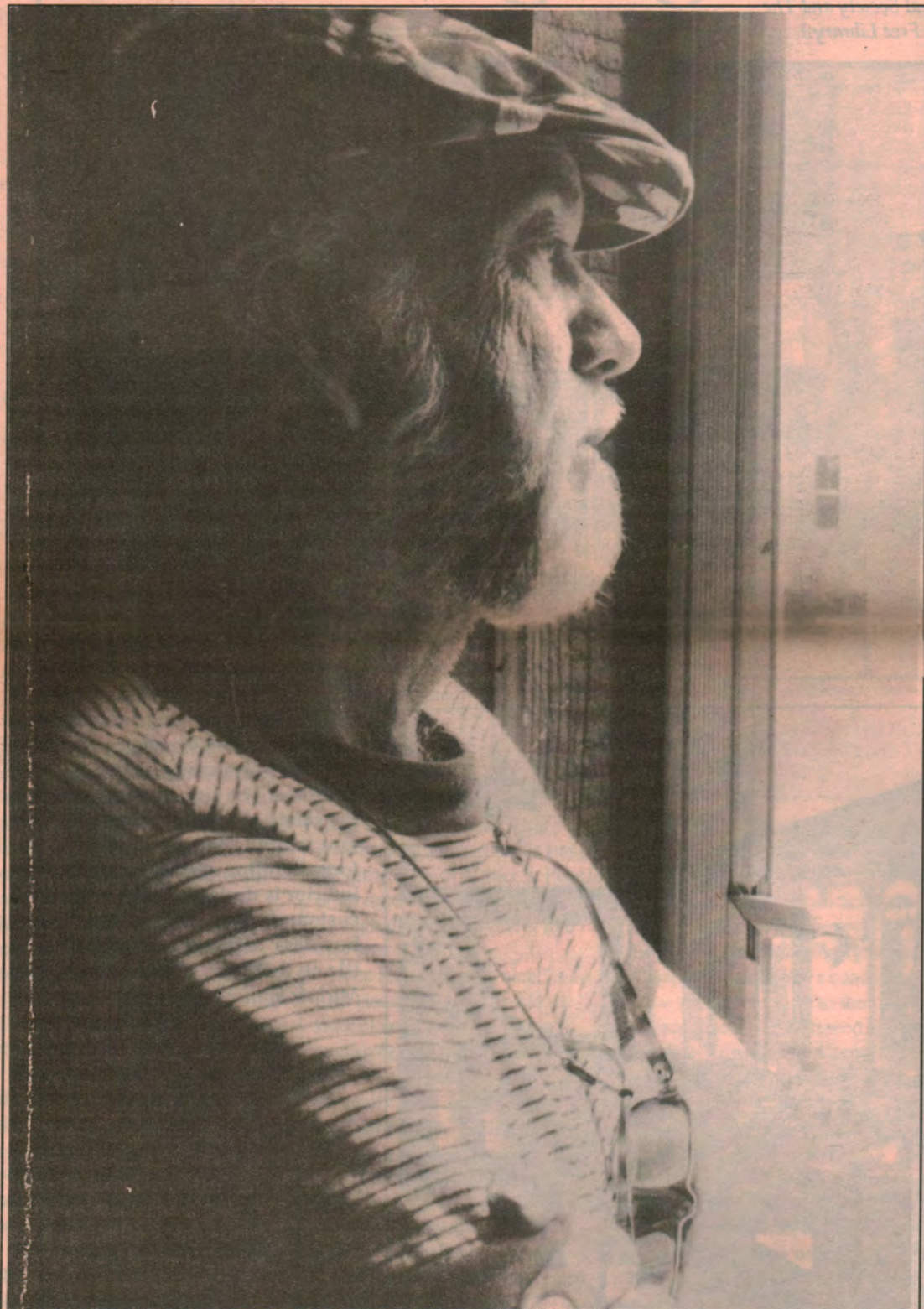
When it's time to leave the restaurant, the bill is paid at the old cash register that rings a bell when the drawer opens. Then you walk out the door and back into the 1990s. Yet you know that the next time you happen by Vriner's and look in the window at the Coca-Cola trays, tiny glass bottles and an old ice chest, you'll be looking at the past in living color.

Michele Spence is a 1991 graduate of Urbana High School and is a former editor in chief of the UHS student newspaper, The Echo.



Clockwise this page, beginning at top: The Wurlitzer jukebox plays many old favorites. The sign outside the candy shop and restaurant reminds patrons of its long-standing service. The interior is designed to take customers back in time. The business' namesake is set in tile on the floor. (Photos by Michele Spence.)

O The Art of Observation



BILLY MORROW JACKSON

By Lori Adams

Dozens of people clutching magazines, newspapers and cigarettes sit anxiously in the crowded room, pensively content, each in their own thoughts. A man at the counter searches his ticket for a time of departure while another glances at his watch. A woman on the bench applies lipstick to her tired face, while a young mother comforts her anxious child. This isn't an unusual scene, at least not in a bus station. Everyone is just waiting.

But in the distance, away from the crowd, is a man standing alone. Short in stature, with a full, silvery beard, the man stares straight at the viewer. He is watching, not waiting—a silent observer of every unsuspecting passenger. This man is Billy Morrow Jackson, and the scene occurs in his oil painting, "The Station."

"I'm the witness," Jackson said, "the pedestrian involved in looking or observing. It seems natural to me."

If one thing should come natural to Billy Morrow Jackson, it is art. His home in the Old Town District of Champaign is adorned with his most recent works of art, including linoleum block prints vibrant with color and shape, flowered prints of his wife and himself, numerous sketches and a mural. Then he casually points out an ink drawing of an airport scene not unlike "The Station."

"It's people coming together for a short period of time, all with different stations in life, different destinations," he said. "The idea intrigues me."

It intrigues him so much that he intends to do a series of works, including a large mural, centered around the concept of stations.

"I'm bringing the past and the present together in the kind of momentary position people have in a situation like that," Jackson said.

He reflects that combination of the past and the present through his art and in his life. Born in

Kansas City, Missouri, in 1926, Jackson's early exposure to art was minimal.

"I've always been interested in art and pursuing it in one form or another, although at that time in this country, at the tail end of the Depression, it wasn't looked upon with much value by my immediate family," he said. "We were all just scratching for a living, and it didn't seem to make much sense. But for some reason the urge was very strong, so I kept at it."

It was an elementary school teacher who recognized his skill and enrolled him in classes at the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City. Jackson learned to appreciate art as more than "just something you do for yourself, but looking at what other art has been done in the history of the world."

With a renewed sense of ability and a fresh appreciation for his trade, Jackson returned home to find his family less than supportive. His embracing laugh rang through the room as he recalled his parents' reaction to his career choice.

"They just looked at it as an oddity—like, 'Isn't that odd, he can draw,' but never really thinking there was any way to survive economically," he said. "So while I was nice and curious and an oddity, I was never much encouraged."

But Jackson does not harbor any resentment toward his family. "No one in my family could have pursued anything creative because they were so caught up in just getting along from day to day. Given the opportunities, who knows what people might have been in those days? Whatever creativity they had was exhausted on just getting along if they possibly could," Jackson said.

"The light pressure my family finally put on me was like, 'Oh, you've got this talent and you've got this education; you should go into commercial art or become an advertising man or go into a studio where there's an older guy and when he dies you can take over his business.' But I wasn't



One of Jackson's oil paintings, "Like Loda."



Siti-Mariah: "I help him; he helps me."

interested in that at all. I just let the chips fall where they may."

Never one to deny the power of fate, Jackson spent the next 20 months after high school in the Marine Corps stationed at Okinawa during World War II. He then returned to St. Louis and attended classes at Washington University on the G.I. Bill where he pursued his art "with an even greater seriousness."

In 1949, after receiving his BFA degree, Jackson and his wife spent a year in Mexico. There Jackson documented the strength of the Mexican people in his early woodcuts and linocuts. But it wasn't until he was working as a display designer in California that he decided to move to the Midwest. At the suggestion of a fellow student, Jackson applied for graduate school at the University of Illinois.

"I've been here ever since," he said.

Few people who are familiar with Jackson's art would question his connection with the Midwest. In Champaign-Urbana his most popular works have been his prairie paintings. The landscapes, most of them depicting old farms in the distance, illustrate the vastness of the local prairie. But Jackson insists it is inaccurate to label him as "the Prairie Painter," as he often has been called.

"It is not as cut and dried as an art historian or critic would like to say it is," Jackson said. "While it's nice and neat to put things together that way, it isn't the way

an artist's life is."

It's certainly not the way Jackson's life is. His creative and personal lives are "interwoven," never working in a single medium or on a single piece.

His wife knows better than anyone about Jackson's hectic lifestyle. Beautifully striking, with rich, dark skin, Siti-Mariah shares in all of Jackson's endeavors—both as an artist and as a person. Married three years ago in February, the couple have a mutually beneficial relationship.

"I help him; he helps me," she said simply.

Mariah, a native of Malaysia, met Jackson while studying at the University of Illinois. Mariah's sculptures bring to life images of underwater plants and creatures. Together, the artists make a wonderful team.

"We criticize each other and help each other in respectful ways," Jackson said. "She's got plenty of creativity. She's got all kinds of ideas just spinning around her head all of the time."

Mariah encountered a lot of the same discouragement in her career as Jackson did. While a student in Malaysia, she was advised to pursue an academic career instead of art.

Jackson admitted he "didn't realize that you could take a creative life and pursue it in a professional way, get a great deal of satisfaction from it and survive in some way." However, they both agree that this is a fallacy in society that must be overcome.

"A lot of people are led to believe that art is just sitting around like this, and you have an inspiration and just dash out and create," Jackson said. "Actually, if you're serious about it, it's a very, very disciplined way to live. There just isn't any other way to do it.

"I know for many years here, and to some degree it's still true, art education was the coach or math teacher taking some time to run off some mimeographed drawings for the kids to color in and that was called art. Some of that still goes on, to some extent, but fortunately, with the advent of art education, they are getting some very real direction into their own creativity and skills."

Jackson was part of this new awareness of art through education. During his 33 years at the University of Illinois, Jackson saw countless students undoubtedly influenced by his ability and inspired by his dedication.

Strangely enough, however, he entered education not out of a noble desire to educate but simply out of necessity.

"Whether you're an actor, a dancer, a writer, an artist or a painter, you have to find, in addition to your work, a way to survive, a way to subsidize your work so that you *can* work," he said. "That is why I got into teaching—because I found I could have more research time. I didn't get into teaching because I'm a passionate educator. I found it was a very compatible way to

survive and to create. I never lost sight of why I got into teaching—so I could produce."

And Billy Morrow Jackson has produced. The countless works he has created throughout his life are scattered in museums, private galleries and homes, and are reproduced around the country.

Jackson recently had a show at the Jane Haslem Gallery in Washington, D.C., where Haslem has represented him for 25 years. The show was a great success, despite the apparent art recession.

Jackson was also chosen as one of four artists in the state of Illinois to paint a nine-by-nine mural in the State Capitol Building in Springfield as part of its 100th anniversary celebration. Jackson was assigned the theme, "Social Reform and the Progressive Movement," and chose to center around the famous social worker, Jane Addams. The resulting mural, "The Key," was completed in August 1989.

"The Key," along with dozens of Jackson's other works, was recently reproduced in a book about the artist published by the University of Illinois Press. *Billy Morrow Jackson: Interpretations of Time and Light*, by Howard E. Wooden, depicts a multi-faceted man, an artist who continually reaches to achieve new heights in his personal and professional endeavors.

Although Jackson retired from his teaching career in 1987, he has by no means slowed down his fast-paced life. His wife, new

house and new studio have kept him as busy as always.

"I don't miss teaching," he said. "I've been too busy. We've both been too busy. We have been, in a nice way, exhausting ourselves."

The two spent much of the last three years together constructing their studio, a three-room attachment to their house which has a warped gym floor from a local high school and, appropriately, walls from an old barn.

"It was just what we wanted," Jackson said with a nod and convincing grin, "rich in texture."

As he sat in his house and spoke, Jackson's hands seemed to be creating entire murals in the air, his eyes constantly observing every detail around him. With the conviction that surrounds him constantly, he summed up his life philosophy in one simple sentence, "You have to find something and go for it, and give it everything you can."

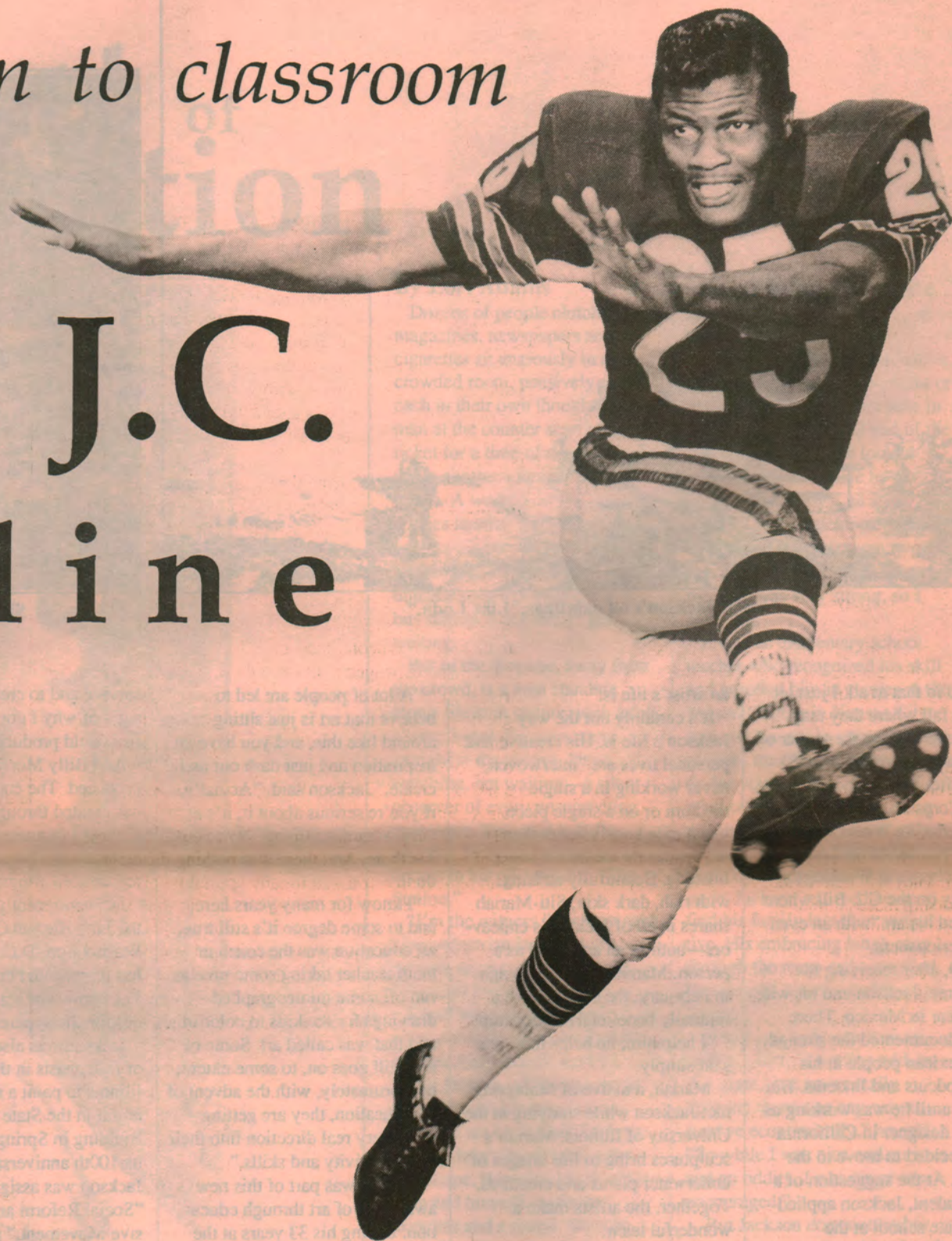
His eyes moved to some portraits on the wall. Almost like a kind of signature, Jackson's image appears in almost all of his murals and portraits.

"I'm my most available model," he said then laughed. "Besides, I'm such great subject matter. I couldn't resist. Who needs still life when Billy is here?"

Lori Adams is a senior at Urbana High School.

From gridiron to classroom

J.C. Caroline



By Jeremy Colby

My first day as a seventh grader at Urbana Junior High School began as I walked down the stairs that led to the gymnasium. I was lucky enough to have first hour P.E. As I passed through the door to the gym, a voice bellowed throughout the large room.

"Mr. Caroline's class to the right; Mr. Minnes' to the left," a tall black man with graying hair said.

As I approached the man, I wondered if he was going to be my teacher.

"Whose class are you in, son?" he asked, looking at me.

"My schedule says I have Mr. Caroline," I said.

"Well, that's me. Why don't you have a seat over there with the others," he said, pointing to several students who looked as confused as I felt.

A month into the semester, my parents explained to me who J.C. Caroline is.

"He played football for Illinois," my father said. "For the Bears, too, I think."

John Gremer, a college teammate of Caroline's at the University of Illinois and a P.E. teacher at Urbana High School, expressed it a little differently.

"J.C. was probably the finest college back of his day," he said.

This "finest back" enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as a freshman in 1952. Although he had been outstanding in track and tennis and an undefeated boxer during his high school years, it was his talents as a halfback on the gridiron that would bring him fame on Illinois' Zuppke Field.

Those were the days when Coach Ray Eliot was at the helm of the Illinois football team. The Fighting Illini didn't do much recruiting back then; Eliot believed that if a player had the desire to become great, he would come to Illinois. But Caroline, although having all the desire that Eliot talked about in his fiery speeches, wasn't too familiar with Illinois, its coach or the team when he came out of high school. The reason he came to Urbana-Champaign for college was because a businessman from his home town of Columbia, South Carolina, had ties to the school and wrote several letters of recommendation to the Illinois coaching staff for the young athlete.

Several aspects of Illinois surprised Caroline upon his first visit to the Midwest.

"I kind of expected the University of Illinois to be in a larger city (because I was) coming out of the South and not being familiar with the university," Caroline said. "I was a little shocked when (the train) dropped me off in Tolono ... and I had to take the bus into Champaign. But I was pleased when I got in and saw the campus."

Because he came from the South, Caroline was also surprised at the treatment of blacks in Urbana-Champaign.

"I grew up in a segregated environment," Caroline said. "Back in those days, parents usually geared you to being discriminated against. (At Illinois,) if you wanted to go in a restaurant, you would go in. Down south you would have to look for the ("No Colored") sign."

At the time, freshmen were not allowed to play varsity collegiate sports, so Caroline had the 1952-53 year to adjust to the university and its surroundings. Yet the year off from sports did not hinder his athletic growth at all.

In fact Caroline started at halfback for the Fighting Illini as a sophomore, led the nation in rushing and became the first Illini football player to be a consensus All-America

since Johnny Karras in 1951.

"I was pleased with my accomplishment," Caroline said. "It felt good ... because everybody was pulling for me and praying for me. I knew that a lot of my former teammates and classmates back down south were pulling for me. I felt good about making those people who wrote letters of recommendation for me proud."

The Illini, led by the backfield of J.C. Caroline and Mickey Bates, were ranked seventh in the nation and tied Michigan State for the Big Ten championship in 1953. But because Illinois had made a more recent appearance in the Rose Bowl, it was the Michigan State team that made the 1954 trip to Pasadena.

The next season, Illinois was not nearly the powerhouse it had been in Caroline's sophomore year.

"I felt the next year (1954) was when (Caroline) really proved his All-America stature," Gremer said. "We did not have a good team his junior year, but he never complained. He never ran any differently than he did when he was a sophomore. He still ran hard, and to me that's

when he really proved that he was an All-America (player).”

It was after that frustrating season that Caroline decided to pursue a career as a professional football player. Because he left the University of Illinois before graduating, he had to play in Canada during the time he would have been a senior. That was because of an NCAA rule that has long since been stricken from the books.

After playing the 1955 season in Montreal in the Canadian Football League, Caroline was drafted by the Chicago Bears of the National Football League. Although he was an All-America offensive halfback in college, he rarely played on the offensive side of the ball in the NFL.

“(I would play offense) only when players got hurt,” Caroline said. “I would go and play (offense) for about a week, then I would go back to defense. But after about the first three years, I played strictly defense.”

Caroline played professional football for the Bears from 1956 to 1966. During his eleven years as a pro, he had the honors of being named to the All-Pro team his rookie season, going to the championship game twice and leading the Bears’ defense as captain in their 1963 championship game victory over the New York Giants.

Although he cherishes the win, Caroline does not wear his NFL championship ring often.

“(The championship and the ring) are important,” he said. “But to me, those are materialistic things, and I don’t hang too much on materialistic things because they will wear out. They will deteriorate. They will fade. And I don’t worship material things.”

After the championship win, Caroline played three more seasons in the NFL. Then during the spring training camp before the 1966 season, he retired from professional football at the age of 34. Caroline always had wanted to finish his college studies, so when he retired, he went to Florida A&M University where he received his degree.

Following graduation from college, Caroline spent ten years back in Urbana-Champaign. He was first the freshman and later the backfield coach at the U. of I.

He left the university in 1976 to work in the real estate industry. And in 1979 he began teaching in the P.E. departments of Urbana middle and high schools.

“I feel that the kids need someone to relate to in order to (learn) that your accomplishments on the athletic field are not eternal,” Caroline said. “A lot of kids ask, ‘Why do you work here—you played eleven years of pro football?’ It’s an honest way of living, no matter what the title is.”

Caroline plans to teach at Urbana for seven more years until he turns 65, then retire do he can travel with his wife. With such a successful life, it might seem hard to find one greatest accomplishment. But it isn’t for J.C. Caroline.

“My biggest accomplishment was marrying my wife and having a family,” Caroline said without hesitation. “We have a successful (twenty-seven-year) marriage and a successful church family, as well as our (two) beautiful kids who also are involved in church activities. Those are the things that I cherish. I am not hung up on the rings or the championship—those kinds of things aren’t as important.”

Although his football accomplishments are not the most important ones for Caroline, he was honored with other former Illini standouts as the University of Illinois football program celebrated its one hundredth season of competition. A video commemorating this first century of tradition, *Oskee Wow Wow*, takes a good look at many of

Illinois’ great players from 1891 to 1990. The player who seemed the most flashy, the most athletic, was J.C. Caroline. The clips of him running sixty yards past hoards of defenders for a game-winning touchdown against Purdue seemed retrospective of the clips shown of legendary Harold “Red” Grange only a few minutes earlier. During these scenes, the announcer was quick to point out Caroline’s athletic ability.

Many would attribute this talent and ability to hard work and dedication alone, but Caroline believes something else is involved.

“All blessings come from the Lord,” he said. “He gives you those blessings. It is up to you to fulfill your abilities. We all have talents, we all have gifts. They’re different. It is up to you to find out what your gifts are, what your talents are, then work toward achieving them.”

Caroline’s spiritual beliefs were taught to him by his parents, and many people think those beliefs and way of life make him someone special.

“J.C. hasn’t changed a bit since the first day I met him,” Gremer said. “He has always been the same way he is right now. When he came to the University of Illinois, he didn’t drink, he didn’t smoke, he didn’t swear. He didn’t do any of those silly things that a lot of the kids did. And he still doesn’t. Being an All-Pro, an All-America, didn’t change him a bit.

“He lived in the Parade Ground Unit huts just like the rest of us over there. And there was nothing different about him. He never asked for any special favors or anything. He was just as common as an old shoe.”

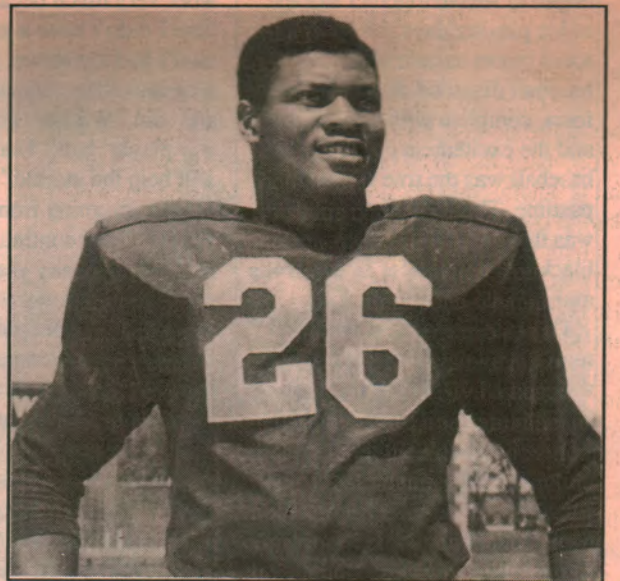
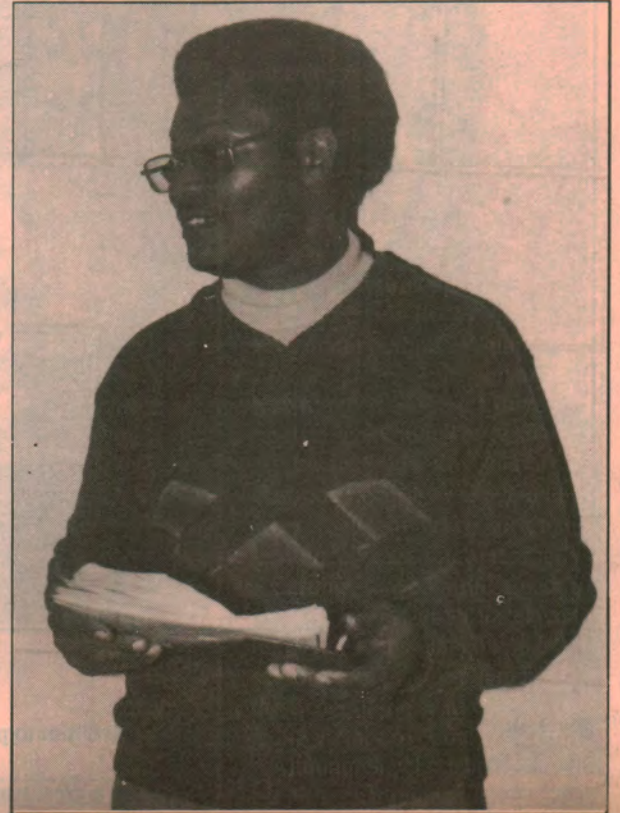
And that is how Caroline continues to live his life.

“As you get older, people tend to forget you,” he said. “Many of the students I teach don’t even know that I played football unless they saw the *Oskee Wow Wow* movie or their parents told them. A lot of them will forget anyway.”

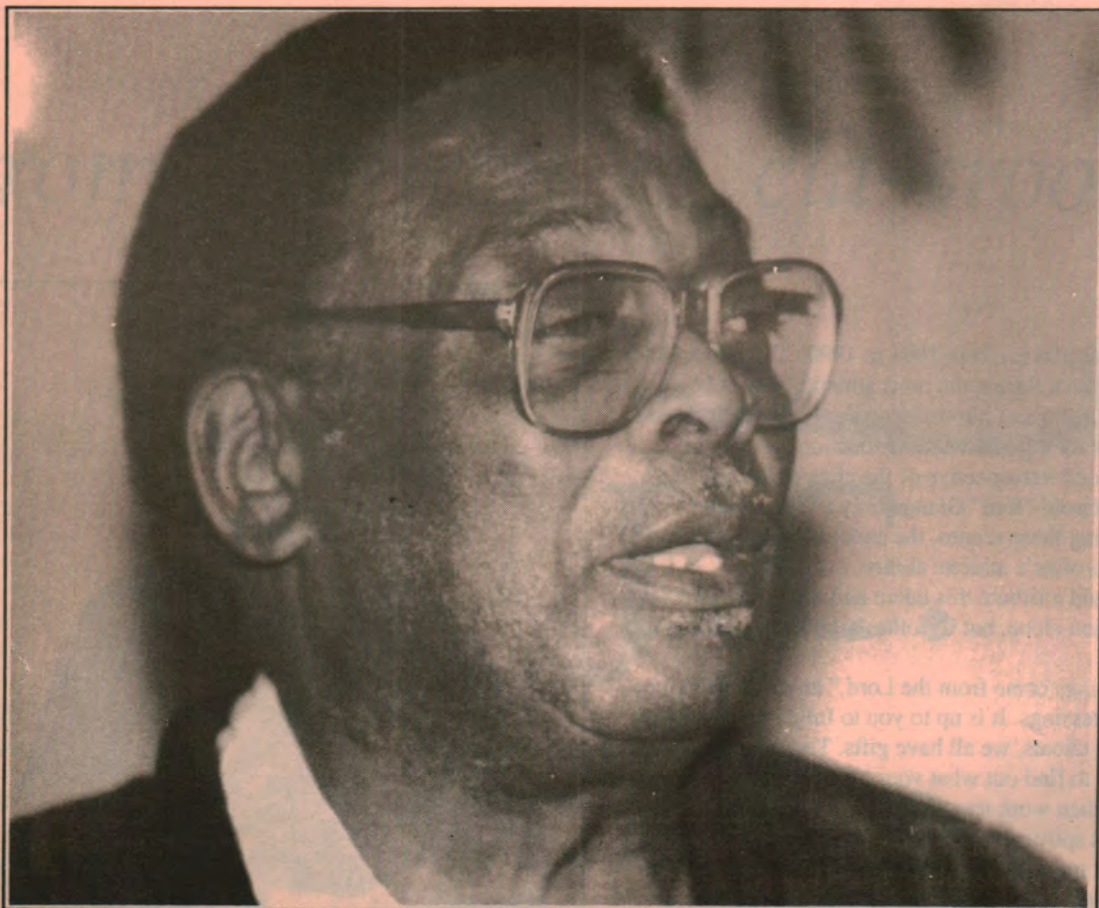
Fame can never last forever, especially in today’s world of disposable heroes. And even if every seventh grader walking down the stairs to Urbana Middle School’s gymnasium knew about Caroline’s athletic accomplishments, it wouldn’t matter much to him.

“It’s nice to be recognized for your talents, but, like I said, there are more important things to me.”

Jeremy Colby is a senior at Urbana High School and will attend the Washington Journalism Conference in Washington, D.C., in March.



Caroline teaches physical education at Urbana High School (above). His football days at Illinois are pleasant memories (below), but the real glory days, Caroline says, are those with his family.



L.C. Utley

Photo by Steve Schomberg

A major league player

By John Schomberg

L.C. Utley looked beyond the space occupied by his sofa to see the right-field fence and the plush grass of the outfield. As Utley began to weave together stories of his playing days, his living room began to fade away. A baseball diamond slowly took form, complete with players, fans and the excitement created when baseball was the true national pastime. The field that appeared was there to tell the story of a black baseball player in the 1940s and '50s.

Those were the days when major league baseball didn't see the talent and character of a black ball player, only the color of his skin. With the cheers of the fans also came the jeers of racism as the Negro League and semi-pro ball were the black man's only options, and bigotry was part of the big leagues.

Utley began his career as a shortstop on the 1936 Champaign Giants at age 16. He then found himself busier than ever when he went to Civilian Conservation Corps camp and participated on two baseball teams and two softball teams. In 1940 Utley helped organize the Champaign Red Sox and was at the peak of his career as he led the Corn Belt League in batting in 1940 and '41 and led the Eastern Illinois League in 1942.

World War II took Utley to Italy and with him went his baseball skills. His commanding

officer asked him to put together a team.

"We had a great team," Utley said, "except all the boys that were on my ball team didn't go to work very much because every time I didn't have a game scheduled I had a practice. Some of the sergeants didn't like to too well and said, 'We ain't gonna win no war playin' ball.' I said, 'But it will help the morale.'"

After returning from World War II, Utley continued in baseball for many years—playing, organizing teams and giving tips to youngsters. His sharp bat and strong arm brought him many honors on all-star teams and subsequently the love of the fans.

It was on these all-star teams and on his semi-pro teams that Utley played with and against some of the greats. His eyes began to get a little glassy and a broad smile spanned his face as he remembered Hall of Famers Satchel Paige and Lou Boudreau.

"He was a great ball player," Utley said of Paige. "He was the kind of guy who purposely walked the bases loaded and then called the outfielders in on the edge of the grass. Then he'd strike out the side. He was wonderful. He just got into the majors late, and he was still pretty good even then."

The best players Utley ever saw never had a chance to make it to the majors. Because the color barrier wasn't broken until 1947

by Jackie Robinson, the greats that Utley rubbed elbows with never had a chance at a big-league swing. He recalled playing with A.J. Drake, a catcher who had played with the American Giants of the Negro League and a strong black team called Palmer House of Chicago. Utley remembered a game that they both played in Leroy, Illinois.

"Drake would get in the box, get some dust on his hands, get

up there (to the plate), take his swings and then look. The pitcher would throw the ball right down the middle, and he'd just look at it. Then the pitcher would get two strikes on him, and he'd just look.

"He'd step out of the box and get a little dirt on his hand. He'd look out and look around, and this is what he did the first time: He pointed to the right field and waved him back, telling him to go back to the fence. The right fielder looked at him and laughed. I'd heard about him, but I was so young—16 or 17. I hadn't been around him to see him play.

"So the pitch came up there and out over the fence to right field, looked at it and smiled, tossed his bat and trotted around the bases."

Utley told about Drake's next two at bats, which had the same results only they were home runs to left and center field. Utley paused as a kind of sadness filled the room as it sunk in that a man of such power and skill didn't have the opportunity at the majors. Utley could only shake his head, stare me in the eye and say, "Drake was the greatest ball player I've ever known."

After playing with such greats, it didn't take much imagination to wonder why Utley wasn't in the only major league a black man could know at the time, the Negro League. It wasn't a matter of opportunity; it was a matter of choice.

Utley was recruited by the Kansas City Monarchs just before he was to enter the Army. He performed well in front of the scouts and was offered a contract "guaranteeing so much a month, lodging, food and traveling on buses." Although Utley realized the magnitude of this opportunity, he also realized the importance of commitment and didn't sign on with the Monarchs because, he told them, "Uncle Sam is after me."

While Utley recalls his chance at the big leagues, his many batting titles and his games with the greats, he also remembers the darker times.

"That was back in the days of prejudice," Utley said as he covered ground he'd known all too well in his playing days. "We rode on trucks with cushions and seats and everything, but we always parked our trucks headed out because a lot of things happened in those days. They talked something terrible, called us all kinds of names."

Utley recalled a particularly scary fourth of July night that pitted his team, leading the Corn Belt League, against Buckley, the leader of the Eastern Illinois League.

"I'll never forget. I was playing shortstop and a boy named Elec Randall was playing left field. I didn't know what was happening, but there were some kids on the fence throwing green apples at Randall.



In 1947, Utley coached basketball in Decatur. (Photo courtesy of L.C. Utley.)

"I looked around and he was charging over towards the fence, and the pitcher hadn't thrown the ball or nothing and I was wondering what in the heck was happening."

Utley paused for a deep breath. "He was scaring those kids so they cut out all between the cars, but the people in the stands saw this, the Buckley folk, and they came running through and I moved out and let them go on through shortstop. They went on out there and gathered all around him, and we thought we were going to have a war before the night was over."

After a little while the game carried on, but so did the tension.

"We had a black umpire, and his name was Wardell Jackson," Utley said, then took on the role of Jackson as he looked straight ahead and followed the pitch into the catcher's glove.

"Jackson said, 'Strike!' And so the batter looked around and said, 'Nigger, what'd you say?'"

Utley's face then took on a look of fear as he reenacted the umpire's reaction. "He said, 'Ball.'"

Utley's team made it through that tough situation, although the players had to lose the game in order to get their money. Utley was obviously a bit jittery considering the tempers between the two teams.

"At the time the game was over, all the lights went out and I forgot it was the fourth of July," he said.

"All of the lights were out and someone started shooting and carrying on. And I said, 'Oh, Lord, it's happening!'"

Utley and his all-black baseball teams often didn't receive hearty welcomes as they ran into signs at the city limits that read such greetings as, "Read Nigger and Run. If You Can't Read, Run Anyhow."

Despite having to tolerate such unwarranted hatred, Utley never lost his love for baseball. In the '50s, "the legs were going and naturally the arm wasn't the same," but Utley continued playing until he had to turn to being a coach and spectator around Champaign-Urbana to satisfy his hunger for sports.

There was a note of sadness in his voice when he addressed the demise of our national pastime.

"People just don't follow things like they used to," he said.

Utley is happy to say that in some places where he found prejudice earlier in his career he later made friends with the area ball players. But just because many people's hearts and minds have opened up and baseball is on its way toward becoming a color blind sport, Utley warned that prejudice is not a thing of the past.

"You'll find it still exists in some places," he said.

Utley is pleased that baseball is now integrated, but he also sighed at his missed opportunity.

"I was too near Jackie



Robinson's age. I couldn't get in the majors because the barrier hadn't been broken."

Through the ups and downs of his baseball experience, L.C. Utley has persevered and still wears a smile on his face when he talks about the good ol' days.

The sights, sounds and smells of the ball park that seemed so vivid began to fade away as I exited Utley's home. But the players, the stories and the game

itself will never lose their place in Utley's heart.

John Schomberg is a senior at Urbana High School. He recently was named the 1991 Illinois state winner of the "Voice of Democracy" essay contest sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and placed fifth nationally. He will attend the Washington Journalism Conference in Washington, D.C., in March.

Top left: Utley makes his batting stance in Gibson City in 1940. On the bench behind him are Zeke Bryant, left, and Charlie Hussey. Top right: Utley at the corner of Vine and Ash in Urbana in January 1946 after returning from the Army. Bottom (left to right): Umpire Wardell Jackson, Terry Kizer, Utley and Kenneth Johnson at a game in Buckley. (Photos courtesy of L.C. Utley.)

Preservation group buys time for old theater

By
Mehrddad Azemun

The Orpheum Theater in Champaign, an important historical and cultural landmark in the Champaign-Urbana area, is in danger of being torn down. But a local preservation group has championed the Orpheum's cause and is now looking for the support of the community.

For more than a year now, the Preservation and Conservation Association (PACA) has been appealing to the city of Champaign not to demolish the theater. The city purchased the Orpheum from the George Kerasotes Corporation (GKC) in March 1990.

The Orpheum was designed by George Rapp, an 1899 alumnus of the University of Illinois School of Architecture. Rapp and his brother, Charles, went on to form the architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp which designed more than four hundred theaters, including the Paramount Theater in Aurora and the Chicago Theater.

The Orpheum, one of Rapp's earliest works, was completed in 1914. The theater was built to include storefront spaces, an adjacent warehouse area and second-floor rooms that were used by the entertainers who performed in the Orpheum. But the real gem of the theater was the auditorium. The oval-shaped hall seated eight hundred and included seventeen loge boxes separated by Corinthian columns which featured classical garland ornamentation.

These boxes (as opposed to one balcony) help give the theater "a more intimate feel," according to Karen Kummer who has been instrumental in the PACA's mission.

The loge boxes and ornamentation are the features that help distinguish the Orpheum from other theaters. Not only does the Orpheum have admirers nowadays—it had its fans when it first opened, too. According to the



Champaign Daily Gazette, reporting on October 20, 1914, following the opening night of the theater, (the Orpheum) "so far surpasses anything ever undertaken in this part of the state that its full beauty cannot be wholly described."

Along with the Virginia Theater in Champaign, the Orpheum became a popular stopping point for such vaudeville performers as Will Rogers, Al Jolson and the Marx Brothers. With the advent of "talkies," the popularity of vaudeville waned and the Orpheum became a movie house. (See Tammy Cohen's article, "Vaudeville Days in Champaign-Urbana," in the Spring 1990 issue of *Tales*.) It operated as such until 1985 when George Kerasotes Corporation closed it down.

When the theater was purchased by the city of Champaign, the city council began to consider tearing the Orpheum down to provide parking space for the downtown area. When the PACA learned of these plans, it decided to start the movement to help save the Orpheum Theater.

Since that time, the PACA has

organized the Orpheum Preservation Committee (headed by Charles Butzow), held public meetings, raised money for the cause of the Orpheum, and in July 1990 organized a volunteer crew to help tear down the 1960s aluminum facade that covered the exterior. With grants received from the Illinois Arts Council and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the group hired Michael Hardy, former director of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois, to conduct a community needs assessment. The PACA also received funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Recently the PACA has had success with its plans. In early December 1990, the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council approved the National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Orpheum. The designation helps to point out the significance of the theater. Last year the National Trust of Historic Preservation (a state and national group) also recognized the Orpheum's significance.

However, a lot of work remains to be done. The Orpheum has been deteriorating for some time now. Because of a hole in the theater's roof, for example, the ornate plaster detail has been worn by years of cold weather. At a November 1990 study session, the Champaign city council approved a measure to allow the Orpheum Preservation Committee to winterize the theater. This included patching the leaks in the roof, putting in a temporary electrical system, reworking the boiler and providing heat for the theater to prevent further damage to the building.

The estimated cost of the project was \$21,000. Because of the cold weather and the possibility of more damage to the Orpheum, the PACA has been working to raise this money as quickly as possible.

According to mayor and city historian Dannel McCollum, "Time is not on the side of the theater."

Outside of these immediate goals, the PACA is also looking into the future of the Orpheum. The group is studying the

The architectural charm of the old Orpheum Theater in Champaign has suffered over time. But now there is hope for a restored future.

possibility of converting the theater into a children's museum and community cultural arts center. This plan would preserve the auditorium with the second level to be used as office space.

With the success the PACA has had, it no longer looks as if a miracle is needed to save the Orpheum. What the PACA does need is the support of the community—not only to recognize the historical, architectural and cultural significance of the Orpheum Theater, but to donate time and money to the cause.

The loss of the Orpheum Theater would be "a detriment to downtown Champaign," Karen Kummer said, "and a real loss of history."

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The Last Word

Lessons of the past remembered

By Phil Beth

It was an amazing sight: A 60-year-old man wearing a nylon stocking on his head was teaching a dozen 5-year-old kids how to be bloodthirsty pirates. The man was my grandfather, Hadley Read.

With the help of my grandmother's stocking, he put on a show at my pirate-theme birthday party. Most of the bandana-headed youngsters yelled and screamed with delight, but a few were genuinely terrified. The show was meant to give the kids entertainment rather than nightmares, and it didn't quite go as planned. But it remains a vivid memory for me to this day. And that's the point.

Memories are thought of as interesting bits of nostalgia, but they are actually much more. In some small way, each memory we have affects the decisions we make and our sense of who we are as individuals. Our decisions are made by knowledge from the past which gives us current information to help in our choices.

As individuals, our personalities are determined by the experiences and people who have affected us in our lives. Many people, especially teenagers, have a difficult time finding their own identity. As a teenager, it has been a great help for me to look back at my past in order to discover who I really am.

Everyone has a different way of looking back on his past: reminiscing with friends or relatives, looking at old photo albums or returning to places that hold special memories. In my case I go up to the attic. Although my attic is very dusty and, at this time of year, cold, I spend as much time there as in any other room in the house.

I have filled the attic with memorabilia that have made me who I am. The rug which covers the floor is the same one I used to play on when it was in the living room of my old house. Pictures of famous people whom I have admired and learned from cover the walls. A makeshift bookshelf is used to display significant items from my past. The shelves are burdened with old toys, a piece of driftwood I found as a boy, an old railroad spike, three fishermen carved out of wood

and other souvenirs, and many artifacts which were given to me by my grandfather, Hadley Read, before he died.

Hadley gathered these artifacts from all over the world. I have a lamp from Indonesia, wood carvings from Africa and art from the Middle East. My favorite item is an intricate, metal Viking ship, but I don't know where it came from. These souvenirs had once reminded him of the many adventures he had experienced. Now they remind me of him.

I was only 8 when Hadley died, so I saw him with the limited perception of a child. Only now can I begin to appreciate what a great man he was. He published books and poetry and was a master at communicating with people. Hadley might meet someone at the bus stop and become life-long friends with him. I believe that Hadley, too, realized the importance of looking back.

One of his books, *Morning Chores and Other Times Remembered*, was a collection of poetry in which he recalled his childhood on a farm in Iowa during the Depression. Many of the poems reflect the importance he placed on the past to teach him the lessons of life that would never be forgotten.

Just as Hadley Read looked back on his past, I can look back on my own to see how he has influenced me. Hadley always enjoyed the simple things in life. He liked nothing better than to have a hot cup of coffee and enjoy an interesting conversation with his friends or family.

As I grow older, I am acquiring a love of communications (and coffee), and I understand the unquestionable importance of family and friends. The themes of communication and friendship were so prominent in Hadley's life that he wrote two books about communications and, with the help of Mary Andersen, wrote a beautiful book of poetry about friendship.

Hadley Read also influenced me in more subtle ways. As a young boy, he took me on many "adventures" in order to give my mom a break from the never-ending hell of raising me. One of these adventures might consist of

anything from spending the day at a neighbor's farm to running down to the bank to get a lollipop. We sometimes went fishing together at Lake of the Woods near Mahomet, where we would spend the entire afternoon just soaking up the atmosphere of a pretty fall day. I learned—if a child can learn such things—that life is what you make it and anything can be an "adventure" if you view it as such. In retrospect, I doubt if anyone loved life more than he.

Love of life, for Hadley Read at least, meant not only enjoying the good things but making the best out of bad things.

Every night after dinner he would have what he called "floor time." He would lumber from the dining room into the living room and lie flat on the floor. Everyone was invited to join him, and for my brothers and me it was like a game. We would lie on the floor with Grandpa, listen to music and just talk for what must have been hours. What Hadley never told anyone was that his emphysema was so bad that he had to lie flat on the floor in order to breathe



Hadley Read--teacher, author, poet, grandfather

easier. No one except my grandmother knew that until after he died.

It seemed that Hadley Read could make the best out of anything. As I look back at his old letters, I see that he even made the best out of his own impending death.

In a letter written to notify his friends that he had a malignant lung tumor, he wrote, "... facing up to that reality (of death) has helped me to savor life and the

joys of living even more in these past few months than ever before ... death or the prospect of death is simply a reminder that there was a beautiful life."

I can only hope to have a similar outlook when the time comes for me to face death, which is just another lesson Hadley has taught me. Of course, many other friends and family members probably have influenced me just as much. But it seems particularly important to remember someone who was only a part of my life in years past. Each person from my past has somehow changed my personality for better or worse. To truly analyze my own character, I must always remember these people and what they did to affect me.

Looking back on old memories always seems sad. Life in the past seemed simpler and we long for a time in our lives that we can never quite have back. The truth is, however, that life was never really simple, and it was filled with as many bad experiences as there were good ones. Each bad memory, along with those good ones, has made us who we are today. When looking back, it is important not only to remember but to think about how the memory has changed you and affected the decisions you make in your present life.

I will never forget Hadley Read. Equally as important, I will never forget the part of him that is still alive inside of me.

Phil Beth is a senior at Urbana High School. He will attend the Washington Journalism Conference in Washington, D.C., in March.

**There were seven of us then
when I was growing up
believing as I did
that all tomorrows were forever.**

**Seven of us.
My Mom and Dad, three brothers, counting me,
one sister for the three of us,
and then the hired man.**

**Seven of us.
To share the house and farm the land.
To talk at night
about those things that families talk about—
the price of corn, the newborn colt
the miracle of Lindbergh's flight
to Paris all alone.**

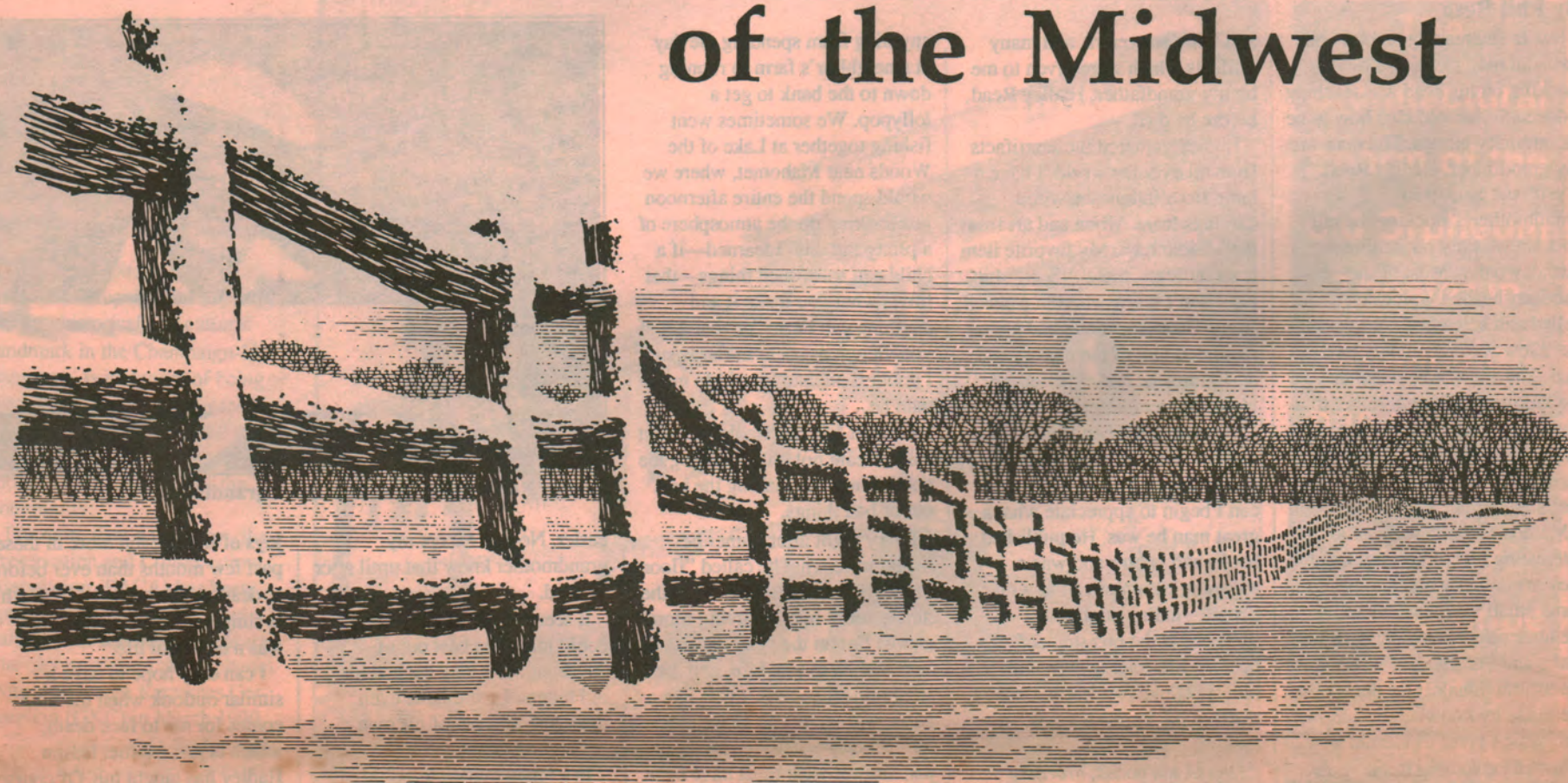
**Seven human beings.
Laughing, talking, loving,
fighting for our right to be.
So much alike in many ways.
And yet so different as all human beings are
in how we looked at things
and how we dreamed our dreams.**

from The Family, by Hadley Read

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