



# Our Times

Volume 1 Issue 2

THE PEOPLE, HISTORY, AND CULTURE OF LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Winter 1996

*What did we do for fun?*

## Saturday Night in Logan County

Who can forget Alvey's Drug Store? Certainly not the generations whose trips to town included a stop there for medications - still compounded by hand as late as 1933. Alvey's carried everything from health items to cigars, and Evening in Paris perfume. The drugstore also had a soda fountain, featuring homemade ice cream brought over twice a week from Mr. Alvey's brother's drug store in Clinton. As a result, Alvey's was a popular spot on Sundays, when mothers brought their children in for chocolate sodas after church.

Homer Alvey, Sr., had come to Lincoln fresh from his graduation from Ohio Northern Pharmacy School in 1907. He soon had his own drugstore and later a son, Homer, Jr., to help him run it. The Alveys knew how to attract customers; as early as Saturday, December 14th, 1912, the drugstore had given out one free large goldfish per customer spending 25 cents or more.

It was no accident that the goldfish promotion took place on a Saturday. For several generations, Saturday night was the prime time for shopping. In the thirties, Mary Irish Alvey remembers that "the downtown was buzzing" on Saturday nights, with most stores open until ten and the drugstores (Alvey's,

Feuerbacher's and Pfau's) open until 11. After a full week's work, the farmers in particular were eager to get downtown to shop, see their friends, and maybe take in a movie or two. All that hadn't changed much by the fifties.

Saturday's entertainment began by driving downtown early to get a good parking place around the square. By evening, the crowds were so dense people could hardly get through. Raymond Merry remembers that, "the farmers were elbow-to-elbow, [verbally] threshing and doing their farm work. A policeman had to stand in the center of the street to direct traffic, and some of us Boy Scouts held our arms out to stop people from crossing." A couple of hours of such work would earn a Boy Scout a pass to the movies.

In 1936, movies were so important that reviews were printed in the *Lincoln Evening Courier* next to the ads. Moviegoers could choose from the Grand (built in 1895 as an opera house for vaudeville and stage shows), the Vogue, and the Lincoln. On Friday, January 3rd of 1936, the stage show "Lightnin'," played at the Grand with 40 people in the cast and orchestra. Saturday night brought the movie "Chinatown Squad," along with chapter 7 of "Burn 'Em Up Barnes," a cartoon, and the comedy, "My Girl Sally."



*Alvey's Drug Store in the Lincoln House, 1932.*

(Continued on page 2, Saturday ...)



## Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

Prairie Years Press  
121 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
217-732-9216

PUBLISHER  
Sam Redding

WRITER/EDITOR  
Nancy Lawrence Gehlbach

MANAGING EDITOR  
Darla Hamilton

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS  
Jenny Osborn  
Cari Redding  
Bailey Bassi



The mission of *Our Times* is to publish well-researched, interesting articles about the people, history, and culture of Logan County, Illinois.

*Our Times* is published quarterly and is distributed free-of-charge to all Logan County residents who request it.

Copies of *Our Times* may be obtained at Prairie Years Book Store at 121 N. Kickapoo Street in Lincoln. Or call to be placed on the mailing list.



## Publisher's Notes

A crowd gathered in downtown Lincoln that night, but not to hear a band or see a movie. They were attracted by a billowing cloud of smoke, the scream of sirens, and people running in the streets. Schick's Clothing Store was on fire; it was the summer of 1996.

The city police blocked the intersections with their squad cars and directed the sparse traffic away from danger. The firemen methodically positioned their equipment and calmly entered the dark building. They operated with such professional detachment that it was easy to forget the hazards awaiting them. The mayor, called from his own place of business just a block away, conferred with the fire chief, checked signals with the police, then asked the onlookers for their cooperation in maintaining a respectful distance.

Schick's owners stood in the alley behind their burning store, husband and wife, cleaving to each other, stunned, their children sitting on the curb behind them. In other places, a photographer, seeking journalistic acclaim for capturing faces contorted with agony, would have flashed a camera into their faces. But in this place, the photographer, like the rest of the crowd, maintained the respectful distance the mayor requested and shared the hope that crisis would not turn to tragedy.

The owner of the candy store across the street offered food and drink for the firemen. The Schick family was soon enveloped by well-wishers--their employees, the Main Street director, neighboring merchants, the banker, the preacher, and the insurance man. The destinies of so many people were linked in some way to that of the Schicks.

It is now late fall, the Christmas season is upon us, and Schick's has reopened for business. But the fire lingers in our memories, the fire and the people gathered around it. In small towns we still come together for entertainment, for celebration,

and in times of need. It is in the in-between times that we have isolated ourselves. Our paths seem not to cross so often in the daily living out of our lives. We are alone in cars, silent before the TV, engrossed with the computer screen, lost in the nameless faces at the mall. This issue of *Our Times* tells of times when we mingled more with one another--for entertainment and for comfort, to be sure--but also in the routine passage of each day. **SR**

(Continued from page 1, *Saturday...*)

The Lincoln Theatre celebrated its 13th anniversary in 1936 with a stage show featuring Uncle Ezra and his Hoosier Hot-Shots from W.L.S. and the National Barn Dance. The pride of the theatre was the great organ, played by John LaMothe and Joseph Bennis. Every week, patrons at the Lincoln were given the chance to play SCREENO and possibly win \$50 to \$500 in cash; that promotion continued into the fifties.

**I**n 1956, Logan County folks could drive their Hudsons and Ramblers out to the Bennis Auto-Vue to see James Stewart in "The Far Country," followed by "Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki."

While the grownups visited or shopped, children entertained themselves. Judy Lumpp recalls that in the fifties, little girls dressed in their organdy dresses to go downtown. Children who didn't have on their Sunday best and so didn't have to worry about scuffing their shoes, would walk the curb around the courthouse. Boys would play around the cannon, and all the children would spin around the meters.

Saturday night had always been a good night for courting, as the young men and women strolled around the square. Entertainment was provided by the Salvation Army singers, who probably didn't approve of the grandpas who stopped in at Bushell's tavern.

While the kids were checking out the new toys at Penney's, Ward's, and Sears, their parents might be browsing among the books at Purcell's or Callery's. Perhaps Dad was inter-

# Let's Go to a Show!

ested in a new suit from Griesheim's, Gleason's, or Jacob's men's stores. Mom might be trying on hats at Landauer's. Shoes could be tried on at Dehner's, Schoen's, or Rethaber's, where the salesman might climb a ladder to get the customer's choice.

Artcraft silk stockings could be purchased at Gerard & Wright dry goods, and furniture at Becker furniture store or Avery and Comstock.

Of course, Saturday night was a great night for grocery shopping. Mary Alvey's children often asked how she had managed for ten years without a car; easy - she walked downtown and picked out her groceries, and the stores delivered.

Mary remembers the sawdust floors, hanging meat, and big round butcher block at Hauffe's meat market. Her father would buy 25 cents worth of round steak; Mr. Hauffe would roll the steak up in a big package and throw in bones for their dog, Lady.

Kerpan's stocked mackerel - very salty until freshened and brought to a boil for breakfast. The Basket Grocery, Krotz's, Dumser's, Alexander's, and Kroger's were popular as well.

Jane Landauer says that farmers used to ask to leave their groceries at their store while they went to the movies, so Landaur's stayed open until the theatres closed.

Kresge's was the place to find all the little necessities of life and perhaps have a bite to eat, while a fifties graduate could go to Charter's to pick out her silver. Other jewelry stores were Brown's, House's, and Doty's. The evening might end at Marcucci's confectioners, with a soda or pink-and-white taffy. Hegele's dairy was the place for little kids to get a five-cent ice cream cone.

What's most amazing is that Saturday night in the thirties and the fifties were so much alike — even down to so many of the same stores. Forty years later, the advent of malls, video cassettes, and Wal-Mart have changed Saturday night beyond recognition. But Logan County is still a pretty good place to be on that night. ■

In Steve Bennis's Lincoln Candy Kitchen, located in what later became the Feldman building, the candy was made with pure ingredients. Bennis and his employees made everything from ice cream to the long candy canes that hung over the counters. Yes, Bennis had come a long way from the day when he hopped a freighter in Greece to come to the U.S.A.

Anna Eckert was one of Bennis's employees. One day, he asked her, "Annie, can you do me a favor?" Since he was her boss, she of course said, "Yes." Imagine her astonishment when Bennis continued, "I can't make it alone. Would you please marry me and become my partner?" Anna agreed to the unorthodox proposal, the couple married, and they had six children.

When moving pictures became popular, Bennis put up a screen in the candy store; anyone who spent ten cents in the store could watch a movie. Rival theatre owners got the health department to object, so Bennis simply moved the theatre to the back of the store. A player piano played "A Wetting of the Winds" over and over during the movies, whatever the subject matter.

Bennis built an open-air theatre, the Airdrome, in 1911 and later bought the Lyric Theatre from Leo Bernstein.

According to Chuck Bennis, "Everyone loved my dad." His lawyer and friend, Dean Gillette Hill, loaned him \$50,000 to build a new theatre. Bennis raised additional money by selling bonds; and the Lincoln Theatre opened on February 12, 1923.

The Lincoln Theatre had free shows for the orphan's home on Saturday mornings and SCREENO on Saturday nights. Patrons watched PATHE news, an 8 to 10 minute newsreel of current events. When Chuck was playing football for the University of Illinois, Bennis asked to keep any newsreel including an Illinois game; all the sections showing his son, he spliced together into one long reel.

Over the years, Bennis also owned the Vogue and the Grand (the former Broadway Opera House). The Grand saw its share of vaudeville, movies, dance recitals, amateur productions, and even cooking schools before burning down on February 14, 1960.

Bennis was in the process of building the Auto-Vue drive-in theatre, on the northeast edge of Lincoln, when the Lincoln Drive-In opened at the east end of Broadway in 1950. So Lincoln had two drive-in theaters, until the Lincoln Drive-In was destroyed by a storm in 1954. The Auto-Vue stayed open through the summer of 1982; also in 1982, the Lincoln Theatre was sold to the Kerasotes theatre chain. ■



Lincoln Candy Kitchen on Kickapoo Street in downtown Lincoln, about 1905.

# What Did We Do the Rest of the Week?

## *Growing up in the Twenties and Thirties.*

"It was an entirely different lifestyle," remembers Gertrude Sparks Munsch, of her youth on the farm. Gertrude, who celebrated her 80th birthday on October fifth, says, "There was no running to town three times a day like today, but you accepted it and didn't think anything about it."

**A**lthough farm children kept busy feeding chickens and doing other chores, they still had time to play. Gertrude remembers making hollyhock dolls and sneaking out to the chicken house for eggs to put in her mud pies. Playing grocery store in the empty corn crib with her neighbors was another favorite pastime. Even something as simple as filling her mother's bobbin on the treadle sewing machine was "quite a treat."

Winter brought paper dolls, checkers and Touring, Rook, parcheesi, and pinochle. Winter also brought Christmas, with one gift per child. One year during the Depression, Gertrude's parents gave her 75 cents - 25 cents to spend on each of her brothers and sister. The family still

laughs about how the children traded quarters so each child would have 75 cents to get what he wanted.

Travel was difficult, but the family did have social activities. Gertrude's earliest memories include riding in a carriage to church at Lucas Chapel. Snuggled up in a dark green lap robe with an orange tiger on the front, she rested her feet on bricks her mother had heated. Later, the family's first car boasted side curtains with isinglass windows for bad weather. Still, in March, when the "bottom went out of the roads," they had to revert back to the box wagon.

"Fun times were few and far between, but you had something to look forward to every couple of weeks," says Gertrude. The community clubs of Rabbit Flat and Mill Grove schools met together once a month at Lucas Chapel. Programs consisted of readings, singing, or plays. Gertrude's mother was active in the Lucas Chapel Woman's Club, and her father was a 50-year Mason when he died. Most time, however, was spent just visiting other families.



*Gertrude Sparks Munsch.*

As Gertrude grew up, she enjoyed attending dances. In the summer, a folding platform would arrive on a rack wagon and be placed in someone's yard. In the winter, a family would clear out one of the rooms of their house and roll up the rug so friends could dance on the bare floor. The band usually consisted of a banjo, a fiddle, and a piano. Since "those were hard times," the hosts would pass the hat to cover the expenses. Later, Gertrude attended Been's Barn Dances and visited Trenkle's dance hall. Gertrude's first husband Henry Franz played violin and saxophone in a dance band on Saturday nights.

All summer, Gertrude held her breath, hoping the threshing would be done in time to camp at the Chautauqua grounds for the programs of study and fun. In 1936, the program included Eagle Plume, an Indian who brought with him \$1,000 worth of plumage. The note on the

Chautauqua grounds held by Lincoln National Bank had been paid that summer by the sale of \$50 bonds in a drive to "Save Chautauqua!"

But times were changing. In the early twenties, Gertrude listened to radio for the first time at the home of Dr. L. T. Rhoads. Passing around earphones and turning three dials to get the station, Gertrude got a foretaste of what was to come. With improved communications and better roads, a way of life was ending.

## **Other Early Memories**

Mary Alvey remembers dancing to "Glow Little Glow Worm" at Mrs. Houser's dance recital at the Grand Theatre and buying a season ticket to swim in the pool in Mrs. Houser's back yard.

Raymond Merry remembers picnics and wiener roasts in the timber, ice skating on Lincoln Lakes, and charivaris (shivarees). A few days after a wedding, friends would kidnap the bridal couple and drive them around town. The ride would end at their new home or a restaurant, where the bill would be paid by the newlyweds. Merry remembers treating at the Prairie Trails Restaurant, where the bill came to "seven bucks, and I wasn't sure I could pay it!" He and his bride returned home to find the toilet covered with catsup and the oven full of toothpaste.

Tressie Kenshalo remembers vaudeville shows and dinners for the threshers served at the Methodist Church in Latham.

Gertrude Munsch remembers when the high school didn't serve meals. Students would go to Hauffe's bakery on Broadway to buy a bun for a nickel, then down the block to Alexander's for a slice of meat.

Many Logan County residents remember the Works Progress Administration's recreational division which planned amateur shows and sports events and taught rug weaving at the courthouse. Local merchants sponsored professional WPA shows on the courthouse lawn, until the county board complained about the trampling of the grass and sent future shows and Legion concerts back to Latham Park. ■

## Growing up in the Forties and Fifties.

By the time Judy Stoll Lumppp was born in 1946, radio was well-entrenched in American culture. During her childhood, Judy remembers waking up to Earl Layman on WPRC.

Judy recalls that children made their own entertainment. The little girls in her neighborhood made hollyhock dolls, just as Gertrude Munsch had thirty years earlier. They liked to mix and match the colors from the hollyhocks growing in the alley behind their homes.

The covers of the Sears catalogs were stiff enough to cut out paper dolls, which the girls could dress from the pages of the catalog. Shoe boxes lined with wallpaper made very satisfactory jewelry boxes, and wallpaper books from Feldman's provided kitchen paper for their shoebox houses.

Judy and her friends had a wonderful time playing house with a blanket slung over the clothesline or in the wooden playhouses that belonged to Ann and Jean Hauffe and Eunice and Donna Wall (no boys allowed).

Judy remembers birthday parties with as many as 20 children present, a fallout shelter on the courthouse square, sugar cubes laced with polio vaccine, and high school productions at the Grand Theatre.

The children decorated their bikes for the parades. The unions and factories participated in the Labor Day parade; and Judy herself rode in a convertible as 1963 Homecoming Queen.

Summers in the fifties included the children's book club at the library, the Logan County Fair, and swimming at Lincoln Lakes. In 1956, 790 children registered for Learn-to-Swim Week, sponsored by the Red Cross under the supervision of Mrs. Maxine Werschey, aquatic director for the recreation department.

Circuses had always been popular in Lincoln. The Lewis Brothers Circus, which visited Lincoln in 1936, had arrived in 65 trucks and trailers. The 1956 Miller Brothers Circus held its two performances at the Lincoln Speedway; the circus management, in conjunction with the Partlow and Rust auto dealership, gave free t-shirts to all the boys who attended.

The Elks raised money for charity through their Fourth of July carnival, although they no longer gave away a car. (In 1936, the grand prize in the "Sunshine Bonds" drawing had been a "De Luxe Plymouth Touring Sedan.")

Fall brought football games at Woodlawn Field (present site of Kroger's). Winters meant basketball; in fact, Judy's future husband Mike played on the Lincoln team that beat Mt. Pulaski for their seventh straight regional championship.

Sports were also important to grownups of both sexes; the Friday night Lincoln Ladies' Bowling League included the Lincoln Garment and Radio Lab-TV teams. Perhaps women were becoming more liberated; in 1955 President Eisenhower praised Secretary of Welfare Mrs. William P. Hobby as a "symbol underscoring the idea that properly trained women are just as able to handle important jobs as men are" (*Lincoln Evening Courier*, May 18, 1955).

However, while Judy studied her lessons at St. Pat's parochial school and danced in Amelia Darby's recitals, times were changing. In 1956, the *Courier* reported that an attack of Dutch Elm disease in Illinois was expected to worsen; when it did, Lincoln lost many beautiful trees. More importantly, the peace of the fifties would soon be shattered; and 44 of Judy's high school classmates would go to Vietnam. After the sixties, Lincoln and the country would never be quite the same again.

### Other Memories

Lincoln College professor Paul Beaver remembers his days as a basketball player at Middletown High School in the fifties. One of 18 kids in his class, Beaver earned a letter sweater at the age of fifteen and found that made him something of a celebrity in the county.

The newspapers carried complete accounts of all the games, so barber shop patrons would call him by name and comment on his playing the night before. Since few players wanted to risk losing their status as athletes, the coach's word was "absolute law," and breaking his rules meant being kicked off the team, players had good reason to stay out of trouble.

The county schools played on Tuesdays and Fridays, so their students came to Lincoln on Saturday nights to attend basketball games or go to the movies. After a stop at Tibb's High Spot for a soda, they would often end up at the rec. A former roadhouse (Coonhound Johnny's) which had been moved to Lincoln, the rec had a pool table, ping pong, and a jukebox that Norman Newhouse kept warm playing "Great Balls of Fire."

Teenagers listened to Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard as they "cruised" out to the A&W or Riggs's drive-in to see who was there. Gasoline was 35 cents a gallon; so a group of young people could easily swing enough for a trip to Springfield and back. ■



Judy Stoll Lumppp, Marilyn Stoll Long, Phyllis Zurkammer White, and Tommy Dale Zurkammer in 1953.

# The American Legion Band

*The audience sat in their cars and honked their horns in appreciation.*

"Too many people don't give a darn about bands anymore," sighs Raymond Merry.

When Merry was growing up, it was different. His mother walked her children downtown to hear French's band. In Emden, people arrived at band concerts early and backed up to the curbing to close off the street. Later, Merry could hear the Legion band playing outside as he and his friends filed into the Lincoln High School auditorium for the Armistice Day assembly each November 11th.



*The American Legion Band in 1958.*

Merry caught the band fever and bought a cornet as a senior in high school. Lincoln College, which he attended after graduating from high school in 1933, had no band. His cousin, Paul Merry, was director of the Legion Band and invited him to sit in and play. (The band was only 50-60% Legion members at one time, anyway; non-members were welcome but could not go on trips.)

Information in this issue comes from interviews with Logan County residents, the 1982 *History of Logan County Illinois*, and the *Lincoln Courier* under its various names over the years. Several Lincoln High School yearbooks were also used to verify information.

Correction: Former Logan County Superintendents of Schools were E.H. Lukenbill and D. F. Nickols. The 1911 *History of Logan County* was written by Lawrence B. Stringer. Does *Our Times* regret the spelling errors in its first issue? You bet! And we promise never to make another mistake.

We would very much like to thank all the people who have called with information and graciously loaned materials to us. We hope to incorporate some of these materials in future issues.

Merry played in the band for many years, finally becoming a Legion member after World War II. He remembers Tuesday night practices in the courthouse basement and Thursday night band concerts in Latham Park, with the audience sitting in their cars and honking in appreciation of their favorite numbers. The band played marches, the pop tunes of the day, and overtures and other "long-haired stuff."

The money the band earned from their concerts at Latham Park, the county fair, and state fair contests was used to pay the director, buy uniforms, and take trips to state and national Legion conventions. While the band was too small to participate in most national contests, they enjoyed marching in the parades. Parades would last for 24 hours; the band would enter on a certain street, parade to the end, and exit as the parade continued on. Merry remembers parading past the White House at the last big Legion convention in Washington, D.C. in 1954.

Dave Hanger and Paul Rankin were the later directors of the band, which finally disbanded in the sixties. ■



*Tri-Police Swim Party at Lincoln Lakes. Courtesy Larry Shroyer photographic collection/Lincoln Public Library District.*

If you enjoy *Our Times*, thank the people listed below. Better yet, patronize their businesses. *Our Times* is their gift to you.

Store Hours:  
 M-F 9-6  
 Fri 9-8  
 Sat 9-5  
 Sun 12-5  
 Phone: 735-1932

**Schick's Clothing**  
 Downtown Lincoln

Proud to be a part of the  
 Lincoln/Logan County Community

Bring this coupon in for discount.

**25% off**  
 any one regular priced item

 **Key Printing**

1112 Keokuk Street  
 Lincoln, IL 62656

---

217-732-9879  
 Fax: 217-732-9866

**Continental Cablevision**

Ann Workley  
 Advertising Sales Representative

---

125 N. Kickapoo Street  
 Lincoln, IL 62656  
 217-735-3448

Unique Country Gifts & Gourmet Foods  
 Cards • Candles • Candies

December Hours  
 M-F 10-8  
 Sat 10-6  
 Sun 1-5



Bring in this ad for **20% off** our new  
 Smith & Vandiver Aromatherapy Bath & Accessories  
 in our Country Victorian Room.


732-4489 • 111 S. Kickapoo Street • Lincoln, IL



**STAN ROUSEY**  
 President

214 N. Chicago  
 Lincoln, IL

*Our 44th year of quality sales and service.*

**GRAUE** 

**CHEVROLET ■ BUICK ■ GEO**

1905 N. KICKAPOO ST. :: LINCOLN :: PHONE 735-4444 or 1-800-475-8258

**What is Prairie Years?**

Three rooms filled with  
 new / used books, plus:

- Beanie Babies
- Art Prints
- Chess Sets
- David DeCamp Ornaments
- Bookends/Bookmarks/Book lamps
- Note cards
- Video Scrapbooks

**15% Off**  
 any one item

---

121 N. Kickapoo Street  
 Lincoln, IL 62656  
 217-732-9216

**Edward Jones**

Serving Individual Investors Since 1871

**Robert F. Neal**

513 Broadway  
 Lincoln, IL 62656

217-735-2585  
 Toll Free: 1-800-441-2585

# That Was Then . . . This Is Now

- Then:** It's Saturday night, and all the stores are jammed.  
**Now:** It's Saturday night, and the video stores are jammed.
- Then:** Lincoln has three movie theatres and two drive-ins.  
**Now:** Lincoln has one movie theatre with four screens.
- Then:** Seven hundred ninety kids take swimming lessons at Lincoln Lakes.  
**Now:** Six hundred twenty kids play soccer through the YMCA.
- Then:** Little girls make hollyhock dolls.  
**Now:** Little girls dress Barbie and Ken.
- Then:** Young people go to platform dances and charivaris.  
**Now:** Bootkickers raise the roof at line dances.
- Then:** Families live in cottages at the Chautauqua grounds for a summer of fun and study.  
**Now:** Families live in former Chautauqua cottages at Lincoln Lakes year-round.
- Then:** The Legion band entertains on Thursday nights in the summer.  
**Now:** Would-be singers entertain with karaoke year-round.
- Then:** The WPA sponsors softball and basketball games.  
**Now:** The rec center and YMCA sponsor team sports, 10K runs, and indoor tennis and racquetball.
- Then:** Friday and Saturday nights are reserved for high school football and basketball games.  
**Now:** Some good things never change.

## Our Times

The People, History, and Culture  
of Logan County, Illinois

### Inside This Issue

Saturday Night  
in Logan County

Let's Go to a Show!

What Did We Do the  
Rest of the Week?

American Legion Band

That Was Then . . .  
This Is Now

## Our Times

Prairie Years Press  
121 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656

U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Lincoln, IL  
Permit No.  
337