

# *GOOD TIMES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY*



An Iowa Sesquicentennial Project  
Red Oak, Iowa  
1996

# ***GOOD TIMES IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY***

**One Hundred Forty-three Years of Celebrations,  
Entertainments and Happy Times**

by  
**Elaine Artlip  
and  
Bettie McKenzie**



**An Iowa Sesquicentennial Project  
Red Oak, Iowa  
1996**

**Copyright 1996**

**The authors reserve all rights to this publication.  
No part may be reproduced without written  
permission.**

**Elaine Artlip, RR 2, Villisca, Iowa 50864 or  
Bettie McKenzie, 1100 Division Street, Red Oak, Iowa 51566**

Printed by  
THE ANUNDSEN PUBLISHING CO.  
108 Washington Street  
Decorah, Iowa 52101

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Shootin' Irons .....	2
Music .....	6
Dancing Feet .....	12
Baseball .....	24
Fourth of July .....	34
Agricultural Fairs and Shows .....	38
Racetracks .....	43
Parks .....	48
Fraternal Orders and Service Organizations ...	53
Women's Organizations .....	60
Military Organizations .....	64
Lyceums, Literary Societies and Debates .....	69
Chautauqua .....	70
Opera Houses .....	76
The Silver Screen .....	80
Tent Shows .....	85
The Circus .....	86
Carnivals .....	88
Annual Events .....	89
Happy Birthday to You .....	96
Horseless Carriages .....	100
Those Fabulous Flying Machines .....	103
Taverns, Roadhouses and Night Clubs .....	109
Country Clubs .....	111
Season's Greetings .....	112
The "Wheel" .....	117
Tennis .....	118
Bowling .....	120
Roller Skating .....	122
Horseshoes .....	124
Croquet .....	124
Kites .....	125
The Ole Swimmin' Hole .....	126
Radio .....	128
Hallowe'en .....	131
The Shivarree .....	132
Steamboating on the Nodaway .....	133
Clippings .....	135
The Mail Bag .....	137
Montgomery County Map .....	142
Bibliography .....	143





A watermelon party; #92, Leonard Schwinn collection. Photo courtesy  
State Historical Society of Iowa--Iowa City.

## PREFACE

The year 1996 marks the 150th year since Iowa became the twenty-ninth state of the union. This anniversary is being marked throughout the state with special events and celebrations. The mission established early in 1994 by the Montgomery County Sesquicentennial commission was (in part) to "Enhance understanding and appreciation of the individual and collective history of the county." As a part of the endeavors to fulfill this mandate, the county commission chose two publishing projects. The first was a compilation of military history, including biographical information, about the men and women of the county who served in World War II. The second project was this volume, *Good Times in Montgomery County*.

When history is recorded often the subjects are the great and momentous events, or perhaps the study is set in the framework of national issues such "World War II" or "The Depression". Daily lives, however, are made up of much lighter, more ordinary fare. Most midwesterners do not spend their days thinking of these great events, nor do we exist in sadness and sorrow, but rather we lead day to day lives full of sociability, friendship and good times. To keep our view of the past in proper focus, the authors of this book have chosen to look back to the county's beginnings and record some of the grandest of occasions, some of the best and most enduring entertainments, and some of the light hearted, happy times enjoyed in our southwest Iowa farm communities.

Much of the information in the book has been taken from the county newspapers. County histories have also provided material. A list of these resources appears in the appendix. When this project was begun, articles were run in local newspapers which invited public participation. People responded by writing their own memories of times past. Each high school in the county was invited to take part and two classes sent good times stories. Several oral histories were recorded by long time residents. Information from all of these sources has become a part of these pages.

Of course we have not told all the stories to be told, nor could we even use all the materials we received. We are grateful to all who took time to write and share memories. All of the letters and primary materials will be stored at the Montgomery County History Center. The Red Oak Express generously supported this project by providing many of the photos and the expertise to make all photos camera ready for the printer.

No reader will have a better time in reviewing these exciting, often delightful, down home, good time stories than the writers themselves. Just open up the book and jump right in. You can read it from front to back, back to front, or from the middle; there's no right way except to enjoy!

Elaine Artlip  
Bettie McKenzie  
May 1996



**Kelley family playing croquet; #89, Leonard Schwinn collection.**  
Photo courtesy State Historical Society of Iowa--Iowa City.

## INTRODUCTION

When the early settler arrived in Montgomery County he found a beautiful land, rich in the promise of a bountiful future. But the fulfillment of that promise involved hardship and privation. Life was serious business.

We all are familiar with the tales of those difficult times, but we tend to forget that there was a lighter side of the story. From the beginning the newcomer recognized the importance--the necessity--of social contact with his neighbor.

While the pioneer fended off the wolf at the door he may have been planning a shooting match or a dance.

In the first years most of the breaks in the daily routine were just another form of work but when the labor was shared it was lighter. Perhaps it was a cabin or barn

raising, a husking bee or a butchering. While the men worked the women prepared food for all. Probably they danced in the evening.

Sheep shearing was another shared task. Then the burs and other foreign matter had to be picked from the fleece. W.M. Moore, an early resident of The

Forks, as Villisca was first known, wrote,"...The wool picking was the women's job and it was an irksome one, so to make it an easier and more pleasant one, the women of the neighborhood would assist each other...The visiting neighbors did the picking and the hostess prepared food for them." (18 September 1931, *Review*)

At quilting bees the women enjoyed a social event while providing for a basic family need, and at the same time, added a touch of beauty to their simple homes. A number of years ago, there was a renewed

interest in the art, and at this time there are dozens of dedicated quilters in the county.

An entire settlement might work together to make sorghum molasses. When it was done the young folks could have a taffy pull.

From the earliest days of the county fishing was a popular pastime. No game fish were found in

the placid streams but the angler could provide food and recreation at the same time. As the mills were built those sites became favorite spots for fishing.

Schoolhouses began to appear here and there on the prairie. As soon as they were built they became the entertainment centers of their communities. Spelldowns,



singing parties and box socials were held. Literary societies were organized and lectures were given.

The type of recreation available depended to some extent upon where you lived. The *1881 Montgomery County History* tells us (page 445): "From the time Frankfort was established as the county seat there was a sharp rivalry between that town and Red Oak Junction, and marked contrast between the ruling types of society of the two towns. Frankfort was given to social pastimes of a literary and rather high-toned character...all that was possible of refining and elevating influences...

"Red Oak, on the contrary, seemed given over to saloons, dances, fights and all sorts of sensational doings, which would be talked about and reported abroad, so that the place got well advertised, for there was *something happening* all the time."

Gradually life became easier for the residents of our county. With more leisure time at their disposal they enjoyed the familiar pastimes and enthusiastically welcomed new diversions as they were introduced.

Let's follow the merry-makers through the years, and see if they did indeed have good times in Montgomery County.



**Picnic at Hawkins Park.** The Joe McGreer family enjoying life in Hawkins Park in 1914. The McGreer brothers, Joe and Bud, ran Hawkins park. Photo Express Reflections





## SHOOTIN' IRONS

When the early settlers came to Montgomery County, every male of the age of twelve or over brought at least one gun. The survival of the men and their families depended upon the skillful use of the weapons to provide food and protection. Hunting parties were the first sport, but shooting matches soon became a popular form of recreation among the pioneers. Gun clubs were organized and for many years provided the chief pastime for large numbers of men.

John Ross, the first settler, came to the county in 1849. The 1881 History states that he was an unerring shot with a rifle. He called his favorite gun "old Betsy".

### *Sciola-*

In December 1871 the *Villisca Iowa Mercury* reported that two hunters in the vicinity of Sciola had killed 23 deer during the winter. In January 1882, the *Review* told that there had been considerable shooting done at Sciola--at glass balls and a swinging target. "Some turkey matches were shot off, also some fellows shot off their mouths." A shooting match was held at the sportsman's cabin in January 1887. The cabin was a shack called the Robber's Roost, on the river near Sciola. In November 1889 the Sciola news said that the shooting matches had commenced again, "much to the regret of the ladies".

3 September 1890; *Review*: NOTICE: Persons who have been in the habit of shooting, hunting, fishing, etc. on the Sabbath day in the vicinity of Sciola and Morton's Mills, are hereby referred to Sec. 4072, of the Code of Iowa and notice is hereby given that the law will be promptly enforced hereafter. A word to the wise is sufficient.

Law-Abiding Citizens

### *Villisca -*

The Villisca men were out shooting, too, but the only evidence we have is a complaint. The *Review* of 4 April 1873 contained a notice to sportsmen: "We wish to call attention of sportsmen to Chapter 14 of the Laws of Iowa...it is a misdemeanor for any person to fire a gun in or near any feed lot where cattle or other stock are kept...The fine is not less than five dollars or more than one hundred dollars for each offense."

In January 1877 a tournament was held at the Villisca Shooting Gallery. At the state tournament held at Atlantic in June 1885 the Villisca shooting team tied for first, but lost to Algona in a shoot off.

"Another" rifle match was held in October 1889. "The sport is becoming more and more an American pastime." Day's new shooting gallery was opened in January 1900. A gun club was active in 1901 and '02. In May 1902 a live bird shooting contest was held at Tyler's park.

In May 1930 a ten-county meet was held on the government shooting range at Villisca. There were contests for both rifle and pistol shooting.

### *Morton Mills -*

In January 1885 the Morton's Mills young men participated in a wolf hunt. "No wolves but sad havoc was made among the rabbits." In March of '85, the group was called the Kimmel Shooting Club. In November 1886 shooting matches were held at Morton's Mills and Sciola on the same day. A Mortons Mill Shooting Club was formed in 1902.

### *Red Oak -*

According to the *Express*, the Red Oak shooting gallery went out of business in 1877. In May 1884 a pigeon shoot was held on the Red Oak fair grounds. Each

contender had a chance at ten birds. In June 1885 the Red Oak sporting club came home from the state tournament at Atlantic with second honors. But at the fair that fall they shot holes in the balloon.

The Red Oak Gun Club held a shoot in May 1887; all were welcome to participate. In 1893, the Red Oak club held its annual tournament at the club grounds southwest of the city. By 1902, the gun club met "at their park near the standpipe".

A side shoot contest was held in Red Oak in April 1905. One side consisted of men 50 years of age and over; the other team was young men. The old men won. In 1917, the Red Oak Gun Club met at Hossle's farm west of Red Oak.

A rifle club was organized in Red Oak in 1915. It had about 30 members.

#### *Stennett -*

The Stennett news of 1885 said "Jas. Seaman and Ed Bryson did the handsome thing by inviting winners of that hunt and their wives to an excellent supper Wednesday evening. Ed and Jim took the eating of crow pretty hard, but we guess they will recover." There was quite a crowd in Stennett on 27 November 1907. "John Perry got rid of a wagon load of turkeys and geese."

#### *Milford/Grant -*

A shooting match was held at Milford on Christmas Day 1886. In January 1890 the *Independent* noted that wolf hunts were all the rage at Milford. "Thus far more hunt than wolves." In 1912, a shotgun shooting match was held by the Grant gun club on Decoration Day.

#### *Stanton -*

A gun club was organized at Stanton in July 1892. The club was active for several years. Thanksgiving Day was a popular time for events. In November 1906 a gun club was organized by a dozen of the young men. In December 1910, a match was reported. "There were almost as many women as men, and they took a hand in the

shooting." An artificial lake was made on the John P. Larson farm east of Stanton in the summer of 1911. In November 1913 the *Review* noted that the Stanton Gun Club Thanksgiving Day Shoot would be held on the new shooting grounds just east of A.D. Anderson's. "Classes will be provided for ladies."

In December 1946 Ernie Johnson post of Stanton held a turkey shoot at the Stanton ball park. News items of January 1954 mention the Stanton Fox Hunt club.

#### *Elliott -*

In November 1910 the Elliott Knights of Pythias held a big clay pigeon shoot on Thanksgiving. After World War II the Amvets sponsored trap shoots at the ball park. There is a club northwest of Elliott in Pottawattamie County.

#### *Others -*

The local papers reported shooting matches in almost every community in the county. In December 1895, there was one at Climax, and one was held at Biddick on Christmas day, 1896. A shooting match was held at Coburg on New Year's day 1912. The Wales news announced in January 1913 that a Wales Gun Club had been organized with 12 members.

Hawkins Park opened in June 1913. One of the facilities provided was a trap shoot range. The park closed in 1917.

#### *Montgomery County Conservation League -*

The League was organized in 1939 as a result of a movement begun ten years earlier. In July 1940 arrangements were made to repair the dam at Grant and stock the river with fish. Several truck loads of bullheads were hauled into the county. Several thousand pheasants and several hundred quail were released. The League had 856 members by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. No meetings were held during the war. In January 1947 a revitalization of the League was planned.

#### *Villisca Sportsmen Club*

The Sportsmen Club was organized in 1949. An artificial lake was made in the

southeast corner of Section 19, East Township. It became a popular recreation spot for the 75 members of the club. It was stocked with bass, blue gills and bullheads. It also provided good hunting during the duck and geese seasons. The lake was still being used in 1956.

#### *Nishna Valley Rifle and Pistol Club -*

In 1952 the Nishna Valley Rifle and Pistol Club was organized. Meetings were held at the old Red Oak fire station, at Washington and Fourth. A range was built on the Victor Peterson farm, northeast of Red Oak. It had a pistol range, rifle range, trap range and targets for bow and arrow shooters.

#### *Frankfort Gun Club -*

The club was formed with six members. Land was rented and a trapshoot built on the north side of old US 34 just east of the Frankfort corner. One report says that it was in use by 1949. Trapshoots were held several times a month during the summer. Occasionally the locals competed with teams from other towns. The site was active through the mid-50s, and perhaps until the Walton ground opened.

#### *Sure As Shootin' -*

The Red Oak Sure As Shootin' Fox Hunt Club was started in 1954. It was still operating in 1958.

#### *Izaak Walton -*

A meeting was held in February 1934 to "revive the now defunct chapter of the Izaak Walton league". More than 30 signed for membership at \$2.50 per year. A game management area was established about a mile east of Red Oak on the north side of US 34. In April '34 a second area was selected three miles east of Stanton. Apparently the effort was not successful, but it is uncertain how long the group was active.

The Charter for the Izaak Walton League of America, Montgomery County Chapter, was dated 11 June 1952. There were 46 charter members; at one time there were 600 members. In June 1956

there was an Izaak Walton meeting at the "league trap house on No. 34".

In March 1958, plans were announced for a club house to be built near Viking Lake State Park. The Walton league bought a 10-acre tract a half mile west of the entrance to the park. The basement of the building was completed that summer, and was used. The upper portion of the structure was built some time later.

The league's motto is "Defenders of Soil, Water, Woods and Wildlife". The organization has planted trees, built shelter belts, landscaped farm ponds and raised quail and pheasant.

#### *Villisca "Ikes" -*

The organizational meeting of the Villisca Chapter of the Izaak Walton League was held in May 1954. There were eleven charter members. In August 1955, the League bought the East Township No. 5 school house and used it as a club house. In January '57, the *Review* reported, "The Izaak Walton League during the past year...painted the interior of the club house, raised and released 500 pheasants, installed a trap shooting range for day and night shooting, and established an archery range. Twenty-seven boys are taking a hunter's Safety Course."

The Walton women were organized in July with a membership of 49...Motto: Land Green; Water Clean."

For several years the Waltons sponsored a Kids' Fish Day. A large number of contestants fished for the prizes.

After a few years the local club decided that they couldn't afford the Walton league, so they dropped out and became the Villisca Community Conservation Club. The Walton league transferred the property to the Community Club 26 September 1960. That Club was disbanded and the property was sold 15 June 1966.

#### *Pheasants Forever -*

This is a national organization formed for the purpose of providing or maintaining suitable habitat to ensure an



adequate pheasant population for hunting purposes.

The Montgomery County chapter has been active for about five years. An annual banquet is the chief source of funding for the group. A payment is made to the national organization and the rest of the money is spent locally.

The chapter contributed \$10,000 toward the purchase of additional land for the Anderson Conservation project. They will pay a percentage of the cost of seed for acres left for wild life. The chapter owns equipment for tree planting and seeding; the implements may be borrowed.

Gun sports continue to be popular in the county. Southwest Iowa and Montgomery county are wild life havens. It is said that Iowa ranks second only to South Dakota in pheasant count. There are large numbers of quail and deer. Open seasons bring hunters from hundreds of miles around. They make reservations a year in advance and return season after

season, bringing a sizeable amount of money into the county.

The Hunt - contributed by Ryan Moestchen, student; Villisca High School:

It all starts the night before. Diligently getting ready for the next morning's activity. It must be deer season.

The alarm clock is an extremely rude awakening at four-thirty in the morning. We must get up this early for even though it is deer season the livestock still need fed. We hurry, as my dad is just as excited as I am.

It seems like a long ride to my grandfather's farm, and an equally long walk to the timber from the road.

The morning wastes away without any sight of deer although I can hear many shots. Finally my wait is over. The massive ten point buck strides into the clearing. Before I can react he is off again. I may have lost my only chance of the day, but at least I enjoyed that day.



## MUSIC



### *Vocal music -*

For the early settlers in Montgomery County the most important requirement of entertainment was availability. Vocal music met that condition, and so they sang. At home, at church services, at school and at parties their voices rang out. We have few accounts of such activities; it wasn't considered newsworthy.

### *Wales -*

All areas of the county sang, but Lincoln Township was outstanding. Those Welsh people could sing! And did. They were serious about the art. Wales events were not well-reported in the early days,

but by the 1880s the news was full of singing schools and concerts. Classes and performances were held in school houses and churches.

In February 1885, A.D. Hougas had nearly 100 pupils in his singing class at Eminence, (Wheeler's Grove, just across the line in Pottawattamie County). The Welsh choir gave a concert at Elliott in May 1885. The Wales Glee Choir and Male Chorus received an invitation to hold a concert at Henderson on New Year's Eve, 1894. At a concert in March 1896 sixty voices sang a number of songs, plus numbers by the male chorus.

In 1914, the Wales Choir, in national costumes, performed at the Monte Festo.

#### *Milford/Grant -*

Milford/Grant tradition says that Seth Smith came to Douglas Township in 1868, bringing a melodeon and ten children, all of whom sang. The family gave concerts in the little Milford schoolhouse.

In March 1875 an instrumental and vocal concert was given at the new Methodist church at Milford. The Milford Glee Club sang on the Fourth of July 1884. The Milford Musical Society gave a concert on Christmas night, 1885. The Milford male quartet entertained at the GAR campfire at Milford in 1891. The men were still singing in 1897.

In March 1931 radio station KICK reopened in Red Oak; in April a talent contest was held. The Blackburn sisters of Grant won several prizes and a contract for future appearances.

#### *Villisca -*

The Villisca Musical Club was organized in March 1875. In the early '80s a family named Ravencroft gave vocal concerts in Villisca and neighboring areas. A Villisca choir sang at some of the Old Settlers reunions in the 1880s and '90s.

In May 1900 the *Review* said, "The Choral Union is an organization of the vocal talent of the city which has for its object the cultivation and upbuilding of the music sentiment of the community."

A quartet billed for the 1913 Villisca Chautauqua failed to appear, and they were replaced by the Eureka Villisca sextet. They were "so good that they were invited to sing at the dedication of the Clarinda Armory". The sextet consisted of one woman and five men.

In February 1919, the Villisca band and the Liberty Glee Club welcomed soldiers and sailors returning from the war.

Early in 1930 a male chorus was organized in Villisca, and entertained at home and abroad for a number of years. A women's group, the Treble Clefs, was formed, but it didn't last long.

#### *Red Oak -*

"The singing was excellent" at the Fourth of July celebration in Red Oak in 1871. A Glee Club sang in 1875. In September 1887 the Red Oak Choral Union, recently organized, had 23 members. A Choral Society was formed in October 1898.

Haydn's "Creation" was presented at the Beardsley theater in February 1917. A large chorus of Red Oak singers performed the oratorio before a full house. They were accompanied by a small chamber orchestra. Another Choral Society gave its initial appearance at the Oak theater in April 1925. It had 38 voices.

Hall Clovis graduated from Red Oak High School in 1918. He studied at the Julliard Graduate School, and then joined the New York Opera Comique. In February 1940 he and his wife presented a concert in Red Oak. It was reported as the "Four-Star" event of the season.

The *Express* reported in June 1979 that the Red Oak Orioles were a group of senior citizens of the Red Oak congregate meal site.

#### *Climax -*

In July 1884 the *Telephone* said, "On the Fourth the Climax Glee Club performed its part with grace and ease." A music school was in session in July 1885, and in November they gave a concert. It was successful "in every particular".

#### *Elliott -*

Elliott had a musical society in 1886. News items of 1913 mention the young ladies' Nightingale Choral Club.

#### *Stanton -*

Stanton has an enviable history of vocal music. In June 1888 there were 60 scholars at singing school. At the Villisca Old Settlers Reunion in 1889 the Swedish Manerchor from Stanton performed. The *Review* of 2 July 1896 said, "At Stanton's midsummer day...There was some fine singing by the Arpe Sextet and solos by Prof. Johanson." A male quartet was singing in 1903.

The Stanton Oratorio Society was organized in 1914 and was still active in 1939.

In 1916 the 20th Century Glee Club became a member of the American Union of Swedish Singers, and changed its name to the Stanton Glee Club. In August 1916 a special train carried the Stanton Glee Club and Oratorio society to the Swedish day of the Clarinda Chautauqua.

#### *Wolf Ridge/Wallin -*

In 1888 a Glee Club of young women was formed in the Wolf Ridge/Wallin area to sing at Republican rallies. They were so successful that after the election they continued as a community singing society.

#### *Tenville -*

There were two singing schools in Washington Township in 1893. One was at the No. 10 school, where singing parties were frequent events.

#### *Sciola -*

In the early days Sciola was noted for its fine vocal music. A Grange picnic was held near Sciola in July 1874. "Singing was by Mr. and Mrs. Osman Rose and Mr. and Mrs. John Yergey." That quartet sang at most events at Sciola for a number of years.

In February 1884 it was reported that singing school had broken up. Sciola held a Fourth of July celebration in 1885. "The singing was grand." The Sciola Glee Club furnished the music at a Republican meeting at the schoolhouse in 1896.

On 19 February 1926, Sciola musicians broadcast a program from KSO, the Berry Seed Company, Clarinda.

#### *Women's Chorus; contributed by Ada Withrow, Red Oak:*

*Approximately forty women met in April 1948 to organize a Montgomery County Rural Women's Chorus. It was promoted and sponsored by the Montgomery County Farm Bureau Women. Mrs. Fred Shields agreed to serve as director; Mrs. Charles Krumme was the first pianist,*

*then Ada Withrow served for many years. The chorus wore black dresses with identical white collars.*

*The chorus took part in an annual contest and festival at Ames, under the direction of Max Exner who was the State Extension Music Director. Later there was the Farm Bureau contest as well. The Chorus received red and blue ribbons over the years and occasionally an outstanding or superior rating.*

*The chorus was active through 1964. At that time many women were taking jobs outside the home and the attendance dropped until it seemed impossible to continue.*

#### *The Music Company -*

In 1987 a group of fourteen men and women who love to sing got together under the name of The Music Company. The members are from Villisca, Stanton and Red Oak, and are directed by Marla Nelson. They sing all types of music, and have performed at many events in the area. A cassette recording of some of their favorite numbers is available.

#### *Instrumental music -*

The first musician in Montgomery county was said to be John Ross; he played a fiddle. Many of the early settlers brought violins to the county in covered wagons. The fiddlers contributed greatly to local entertainment by playing for dances.

By 1871, the date of our oldest county newspapers, Villisca and Red Oak each had a town band. Those municipal groups were popular, widespread and long lasting. Bands have been recorded in most of the towns in the county, and even in some rural areas.

For many years, towns enjoyed weekly band concerts during the summer months. The bands marched in parades and participated in other community events.

After World War I there was a sharp decrease in the number of bands. The Villisca municipal band lasted through 1942; it may have been the last one in the county.



### Villisca -

Villisca had a city band by the Fourth of July 1871. The *Review* boasted of "one of the best martial bands in the west". The Villisca band played each Saturday afternoon during the summer of 1876. A string band played for the platform dance on the Fourth. In '78 the band boys erected a music pavilion in the center of the park.

There were also private bands. In the early '80s Poston's Band was playing, as was a Dunn group.

In 1884 the Villisca band was incorporated as the Villisca Southwestern Band. The group continued for several years, and was very popular. The organization bought new uniforms in 1885, and the local news said "Our band boys have the nobbiest suits of any band in Southwestern Iowa." That was supposed to be highly complimentary.

The *Review* of 15 September 1887 said, "The Southwestern Band recently bought, at large expense, a set of silver instruments of Pepper's famous 'Specialty' make."

Villisca had an orchestra at least by 1881. In May 1889 a new orchestra was organized. The twelve members were from the Southwestern Band and the Dunn Brothers group.

In the 1890s a mandolin craze hit the county. The Ideal Mandolin Club was playing in Villisca by 1892. In August 1897 the paper mentioned a Ladies Mandolin Club.

In November 1899, Theron Bates' young ladies' band made its first public appearance, in stylish new uniforms of dark green cloth.

In 1900 a Trombone Band was formed. Over a period of years bands came, lasted a couple of years, and died. In 1913 a Firemen's band was organized.

In March 1920 the *Review* said, "Wilbur Rumsey, the blind fiddler of this city, won the gold medal, the first prize at the old fiddlers' contest in Omaha."

In 1924 there was a string band. A municipal band was organized in 1938, and it lasted up through 1942. In the 1930s

and '40s Bess Bowman's orchestra played for dances in many communities.

### Red Oak -

At the Fourth of July 1871 celebration in Red Oak the music from the Band "echoed in grand harmonic strains". In September 1872 the Red Oak Brass Band advertised for engagements "for all occasions". The Star orchestra was playing in 1877.

A "colored band" was formed in Red Oak in April 1879. In June the *Express* told that the colored band and the Silver Cornet band met unexpectedly at the corner of the square, and "The streets were flooded with band music." In 1883 the colored band was engaged to furnish music for the fair.

The same year the Davis Orchestra was said to be the best in Southwestern Iowa.

In May 1886 the Cornet band incorporated and took the name "Bruce Commandery Band". They ordered uniforms. In April 1887 the Bruce Commandery Orchestra was renamed the W.H. Evans' Music Store Orchestra.

In April 1889 the *Sun* said, "The Union Cornet band, known as the kid band, have never been paid for the campaign music they furnished the Republicans last fall." Edward White's orchestra was playing in 1889.

There was a mandolin club in Red Oak at least by 1893 when it gave an ocarina medley. In January 1897 the *Express* said, "A mandolin and bandurrie club has been organized by several young men of the city." (A bandurrie is an Irish drum.)

The Fenton Orchestra was reorganized in July 1909. Red Oak had a military band in 1910.

In 1912, the *Express* reported that the fiddlers' contest held at the Beardsley theatre was an amusing and entertaining affair. Twenty-one fiddlers participated. "Nearly all the old pieces that we used to dance to down on the farm were rendered."

Another military band was formed in 1918. In November 1919 Sousa and his band performed at the Beardsley theater.

In the 1920s Iva Kerrihard, a Red Oak violin teacher, directed a symphony orchestra. They performed locally and appeared on Shenandoah and Omaha radio stations. At the same time the four-piece Anna Thomas Orchestra was playing jazz. The Monte Carlo Entertainers were a seven-piece dance orchestra which played all through the 1920s. A group of the same name was playing in 1952, but it may not have been the same organization.

The Legion Junior Drum and Bugle Corps was formed in the spring of 1925. On 6 October the Corps participated in a huge Legion parade in Omaha. President Coolidge reviewed the parade and he sent personal congratulations to the boys for their fine performance.

In 1927 the band shell in the center of the city park was removed to make room for the memorial fountain which was built there.

Beginning in 1936 the Red Oak High School Band won four national championships in a row. The 18 May 1936 *Express* quoted a Cleveland (Ohio) critic as saying, "It remained for a Class B school to bring the house down...Marching twice as cockily, and, seemingly, twice as snappily as most of the larger bands, the Red Oak outfit broke into 'Ioway' in the midst of an intricate maneuver, and the roar of the crowd almost drowned out the music." In 1937 the band performed at Jackson, Mississippi. They stepped smartly across the field straight at the grandstand to a spirited rendition of "Dixie". The following wins were at Omaha and Colorado Springs.

The Montgomery Mountain Boys Band was formed in 1955 when a quartet played their guitars and sang in Fountain Square Park. They entertained at dances, fairs and on the same bill with well-known country performers.

#### *Milford/Grant -*

Milford/Grant had a band at least by 1876. In April 1878 the local reporter wrote, "The Milford Band boys are on their ear, have donned their high heeled boots and are scarcely approachable with

a ten foot pole. They received their new instruments last week...and were bent on a surprise serenade of the town. As all are new beginners with no practice the leader generously allowed each one to choose his own music...No damage was done except two busted horns, some cows bawling, some cats and dogs scared and we haven't heard of a rat in four miles of the place since."

The Milford band played at the Villisca fair in 1881. In 1888 they had a string band. In 1897 Milford was to have "a Marshal band. The sons of veterans will be the musicians". On Decoration Day 1916 the members of the Concert band were clad in new uniforms and caps.

During World War II Leo Spiker, a high school student from Grant, formed a music group. For several years, they played for dances all over southwest Iowa. The Rancheros, a country western group, played in the 1970s.

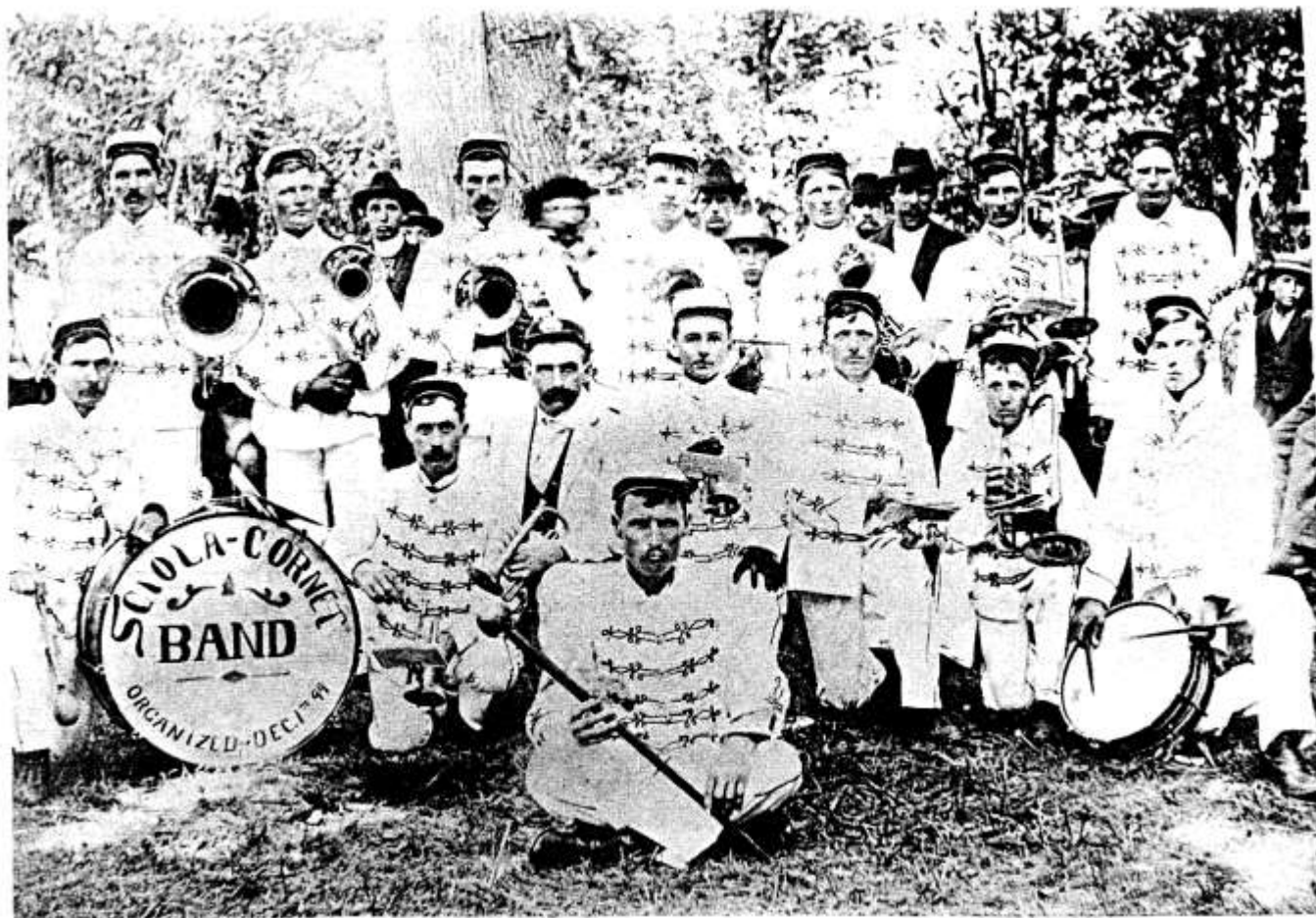
#### *Stanton -*

The Stanton Star Band was organized before November 1885. In April '86 local news said that the band boys were to have new uniforms. The Stanton Star Band gave a concert in Larmon Park in August 1886. The Band was incorporated in July 1888 and received new instruments.

A Silver Cornet band was organized in November 1900. In August 1917 the Stanton band furnished music for the departure of Co. "M" for the World War.

#### *Elliott -*

In September 1884 the Elliott band received new caps. The Union Social Band was playing in 1885. An Elliott Martial band and an Elliott cornet band appeared at a political rally in Milford in September 1888. In February 1893 the *Sun* reported that Elliott had quite a good orchestra. In 1903 there was an Odd Fellows Band. In 1904 a free concert was given by the Elliott Star Band at Wood's Opera House. An orchestra was organized in 1907. The Elliott drum corps won many compliments at the Villisca reunion in September 1907.



**The Sciola Cornet Band**, Organized 1899. Front John Mullen, Drum Major. Front row, left to right: Jesse Hinshaw, bass drum; Ben Moyer, cornet, Director; John Prather, cornet; Burleigh Mayhew, cornet; Lars Larson, cornet; Ben Moyer; Albert Sandosky, snare drum. Back row: Henry Butenhoff, tuba; Joe Marvick; Clay Mayhew; Clint Powers; Jess Sickler; Sumner Wheeler; John Sandosky, clarinet. Photo: Elaine Artlip

In 1912, Elliott had a Commercial orchestra. The Elliott concert Band appeared in new uniforms in 1916. "They are composed of a black coat and cap, trimmed in white. The caps have the word 'Elliott' embroidered on the front. The band will wear white trousers and shirts."

*Morton Mills -*

Charlie Atwood's string band was playing for dances in 1884. Moyer's Cornet Band was organized in 1888. In 1889 W.T. Atwood donated land, and the band erected a hall for their use. It stood on the road "running east and west past Mr. Atwood's and across the bridge

directly north of the mill". Many dances were held in the hall. Around 1900 it was sold to the Modern Woodmen for a club room.

*Climax -*

In October 1885 the Climax news said, "Climax is looking up. The city can afford a musical band."

*Pilot Grove -*

Pilot Grove Township liked music. There was a band in the Hart School area in 1888. The B & M Orchestra gave an entertainment at the Barr school house in August 1891. A brass band was organized at the Plowman school in 1892. In the



summer of 1893 John Biddick fixed a summer garden at his store, and furnished music every Saturday night.

#### *Dunnville -*

It seems that everyone who lived in the Dunnville area was a musician. Dunn's Orchestra went to Corning on New Year's Eve, 1887, where they played for the Firemen's Ball. In August 1888 Dunnville news said, "We have a good amateur drum corp which furnishes music at all meetings." In 1914 the Baker orchestra was playing.

#### *Sciola -*

A band was formed at Sciola in November 1899. It played for community events for a number of years.

#### *Tenville -*

The Tenville Orchestra was playing by 1899. Sometimes the group played for local events, but their chief purpose was social. They met in the homes of members, and whole families attended. Light refreshments were served; usually it was a bushel of apples. In 1904 they decided to "send for some music and learn something new". They were still playing in 1914.

#### *Coburg -*

In February 1890 the *Sun* noted that there was talk of organizing a brass band at Coburg. They practiced in the MWA hall and played for several years. A band was mentioned in 1912.



#### DANCING FEET

"Take your partner and swing around." The music was lively, the fiddler played and everyone was there. For this dance neighbors came from all the counties around--Page, Adams, Taylor and Montgomery. It was January of 1854, just months after Montgomery County was officially established. The place was John Ross' cabin in the eastern part of this county where Ross had been the first settler, reportedly moving on the land in 1849. The occasion was a working "bee" where families came to help a neighbor, and then all stayed on for the fun. In the afternoon there was a "grand supper" and a "hoe down" in the evening. The *1887 Montgomery County History* reports that a man named Lovelace was the fiddler and says, "There was a ten gallon keg of whiskey at the freedom of the guests", but the writer assures us that none of them got drunk.

There was dancing in the beginning of the county's history and it has never stopped. Newspaper accounts report every variety of dancing in Montgomery County--

dancing in the towns, in the smallest settlements and on the farms. People here have danced to fiddlers, to local musicians, to juke boxes and to the nation's biggest bands. They have danced as a group in a dancing club, attended community dances, danced in school houses, in churches, in their lodge halls, and in barns. They have danced at the parks, pavilions and on city streets. They have danced for their favorite holidays--Christmas and New Year's Eve, Washington's birthday, St. Patrick's Day, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and at harvest time. They have attended Firemen's Balls for over a century.

The early dances such as that held at the Ross house were square dances, perhaps called by a favorite caller other than the fiddler. A community was lucky if it had a fiddler who would provide the music and the early residents in Montgomery County had a fiddler in the person of John Ross himself. Ross was said to be illiterate. He came originally from Kentucky, moving into Missouri and

then to Iowa. He liked to live in unsettled territory and by 1857 had moved on from Iowa to Kansas. But in the earliest years he played his violin here and enjoyed its music. The story is that he was a very fine performer, but somebody had told him that a fiddle was the invention of the devil, and that all fiddling was sinful and iniquitous. He was told also that the Bible contained a statement that upon the return of the prodigal son there was "fiddling and dancing" in the father's house. Ross asked a neighbor about the wording in the holy book and was told that what it said was "music and dancing" and didn't exactly say "fiddling" took place on the return of the prodigal son. History does not report the effect this information had on Ross and the future of fiddle music in the early settlements. It is true that through all this time since 1853 there have been religious denominations that forbade or at least discouraged dancing, but these sentiments seem not to have inhibited the prevailing public interest in social dancing.

Cabin dances such as at Ross' home were held in homes as small as 16 by 18 feet. Furniture was moved out; perhaps a table was left for the fiddler to stand on. The rough plank floors of hewn logs laid on sills often had gaps in between and it called for quick feet from the dancers to manage. Country dances were held in any and every place that people would gather--a new home, a new school, a new store, or a new barn would provide a place and occasion. In a time and place where people were scarce it provided the excuse that brought them together. Young men and young women surveyed each other. It might be a wedding, a harvest time, a corn husking--anything was a reason for a "bee" or "frolic." If a fiddler were skilled he could play all night without repeating a tune. He might play a waltz or a polka as well as the popular square dances. Sometimes the dancing would be on a lawn as a sort of Virginia Reel with clapping hands. Settlers from the old world countries--such as Scotland,

Ireland or Sweden--often brought dances with them that they knew from their homeland.

Fiddlers and country dancing were popular throughout the pioneer settlements in the Midwest into the 1920s. In Montgomery County square dancing declined but did not disappear altogether as a variety of social dances became popular. After World War II square dancing was re-learned by a new generation that had been jitterbugging through the 30s and 40s.

Many references are made in the reporting of social news to "platform dances." The first Fourth of July celebration (1867) in the Forks was a picnic and platform dance. W.M. Moore wrote for the *Review* in 1932 that a platform of rough boards from the sawmill was laid the day before the dance. This provided a portable dance floor that was an improvement over the bare ground. An account of 6 July 1876 in the *Review* tells of the Centennial Fourth platform dance with the Villisca String Band and in 1884 platform dances at "Uncle Dock" Spargur's were reported as "getting extremely popular." Other news items up to the 1940s spoke of platform dances being held throughout the county.

As the county was settled following the Civil War, meeting halls were built, and social dancing and balls thrived. While there were only 1,256 people reported living in the county in 1860, by 1875 there were 10,839 residents. The population was young, energetic and prosperous--and so was the social life. In Villisca a news item of 1871 marked a benefit dance for the brass band at McMillan's Hall. McMillan's Hall continued for a number of years being named as a place for "social dances." It was a meeting place for a dancing club each two weeks in 1877.

The Villisca town hall hosted 80 to 100 couples for New Year's in 1879 and the news account says, "They wheeled through the maze of dances and the revel lasted until 5 in the morning." An early Firemen's ball was noted at the Villisca



town hall in 1879. The *Express* reported in December of 1877 that Frankfort (the little settlement that was the home of the first county seat) had a dancing club.

In Red Oak in December of 1876 the *Express* announced a Centennial Ball held at Bryson's Hall Christmas night which "promises to be one of the finest ever in the city." Such a local event was part of the national celebration of the country's founding. Red Oak boasted of a Firemen's Ball on Christmas in 1879. An interesting news account of 6 February 1879 reported "a mongrel dance in Barker's old saloon building last Thursday night. It was said to bear a striking resemblance to a red-skin war dance." We are left to guess what transpired at Barker's saloon.

One way dancing was learned and enjoyed among young people who were not able to attend the square dances and the balls was the "play party". Glade Corbin Flatt, who lived in the Grant area at the turn of the century, told of parties that the young people enjoyed where they sang folk tunes and danced. Parents wouldn't allow the young to go to "real" dances but they could go to "play parties". They might sing and dance to "Charlie is a Fine Young Man, Charlie is a Dandy" or "Here Stands a Dusty Miller." The Community Festival of 1874 at the Grant Mill turned over the third floor to a "play party."

County newspapers tell of a burst of dancing activity in the decade of the 1880s. By then the population was over 15,000. Reports from all around the county tell of military balls, firemen's balls, and dancing clubs held in local halls. Lodges were organized and their members held dances in the new lodge buildings. The many dance bands and orchestras noted indicate that in Montgomery County the public enjoyed all the "modern" couples dances as well as the familiar square dances. Waltzes, polkas and the schottische were the popular steps.

Many of the accounts tell of a masque or masquerade ball. A "Grand Masquerade

Ball" was held at Red Oak's Bryson's Hall in February 1881, in which over 100 persons participated and music was furnished by the Villisca string band. Another masquerade ball was held in March 1882 at the Opera House. In Villisca in 1882 such a ball was given and two years later there is an account of Stanton's first Masquerade Ball on the 12th of December at Hine's Hall. These holiday balls continued in Stanton for at least a decade as noted in 1894 when the 10th anniversary was reported. Not to be left out Elliott held a "masque ball" in 1886. Masque Balls continued to be popular through the turn of the century. In 1899 a Masquerade Ball was held at Moyer's Band Hall at Morton's Mill on December 22nd. In the spring of 1900 and again in 1905 the *Villisca Review* tells of Masquerade Balls, the 1900 one being given by Company "B" and the latter by the Firemen. In this newly developed county such formal festive occasions tell of an active social community which followed the trends set in the nation's most fashionable social centers.

In Red Oak the Knights of Pythias began holding dances in the 1880s. The Happy Hour Dancing Club was meeting in 1881 but lost its lease on a club room in 1887. However in December of that year the Armory was leased and dancing held there twice a month.

In Villisca the summer of 1885 the Engineer's and Firemen's Ball was held at the Opera House. The accounts says, "The hall was handsomely decorated from top to bottom. Creston's Orchestra disbursed excellent music. The Railroad boys are to be congratulated on the pleasant manner in which they entertained the crowd."

Later that year the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen gave a ball in Villisca. However most Firemen's Balls seemed to be hosted by local fire companies rather than railroad groups. Such sponsorship appeared in 1881 when the Red Oak Fire Company gave a ball at Bryson's Hall and in the following years when Red Oak's Clipper Hose Company No. 1 and the Fisher Hose Company appear as

sponsors for balls. In January of 1888 Villisca's Firemen's Ball was held with Dunn's Orchestra furnishing music and proceeds to be used for the purchase of a new (fire) bell.

The local military companies were also frequent sponsors of dances in their communities. Company "B" of the Fifth Regiment of the National Guard was organized in Villisca in 1876 and soon began holding dances. For New Year's in 1881 a Military Ball was given by Company "B" at the new Armory. The announcement of "Good music and a good caller" suggests that this was to be a square dance. In Red Oak, Company "K" of the Fifth Regiment of the National Guard was formed in 1879 and it, too, sponsored dances. An article in the *Sun* of 6 April 1888 told that this company was ahead \$105 on their prize ball given in Armory Hall where attendance was large.

In June of 1884 the *Express* recorded plans for an outstanding Fourth of July celebration. "A big time is expected at the Red Oak skating parlor on the Fourth of July. A regular old fashioned Fourth of July dance, commencing at 9:30 in the morning and continuing all day and evening. A grand exhibition on roller skates once in the afternoon and evening. Ice cream, lemonade, candies and refreshments of all kinds will be served in the rink. Admission to the parlor only 10c to gents and ladies will be admitted free."

The Villisca Opera House held balls during this decade. The *Review* told of a Grand Ball in January of 1883 where the Davis Orchestra of Red Oak ("which is considered the best of Southwest Iowa") was to play and advised the public "the strictest order will be preserved." In 1888 the Opera House held a New Year's Eve ball the proceeds of which were devoted to the purchase of a new concert organ.

Not only were the larger towns of the county having balls and dances, but the smaller communities were following suit. Many of these communities today have vanished but in the 1880s they were busy

neighborhood centers. In 1886 the *Sun* told of a Grand Ball at Climax together with an oyster supper. Other Climax dances included a New Year's Eve ball of 1887 "in the old store building." The Modern Woodman Halls at Biddick, Hawthorne and Wales were used for dancing and entertainment centers. At Milford, (the present town of Grant) in 1884 a ball was given at Howard's Hall when the Woods band furnished the music. In 1886 at Pilot Grove, the Bailey boys furnished the dance music and it was reported in the *Sun* that "the young folks (in Pilot Grove) have about three dances a week". During the decade of the 1880s in Elliott (a community of about 500 people) the social columns of the newspapers reported dancing in Fuller's Hall, in Stennett Hall, at Ammon's building and a Grand Harvest Ball held in the Baxter Hall.

While the majority of these accounts seem to indicate couple's round dancing, country dances also were in the news. In July of 1882, 105 people attended a housewarming for Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Wertman. The *Villisca Review* said, "During the evening the younger portion tried the new barn floor with some spirited and vigorous dancing."

Nathan Collins was a young man whose family lived near Elliott. His grandson, Carlos Merrick remembers a family story about young Collins. Nathan was sent by his father on an errand to the nearby farm, just a quarter of a mile away. He came upon a neighborhood dance in a home where they had taken the furniture out for dancing and many people were there having a good time. He didn't get home until 1 or 2 AM. While the outcome of the story is lost to family memory, the parents' concern must have been considerable as the story is being told today even more than 100 years after the event.

The earlier pattern of dancing and sponsorship of balls continued through the last decade of the century. Company "B" in Villisca sponsored balls on a regular basis, sometimes on Washington's birthday, sometimes on the Fourth of July

and other times at Christmas and New Year's. In 1897 Company "B" held a social dance at the Armory Hall. Of this event the newspaper said, "It will be strictly a partner dance hence it will be useless to apply for admission unless accompanied by a lady." Reading between the lines we may assume that dances had previously allowed singles to attend.

In Coburg, "The young people gathered at L. Ripples Monday evening for a dance," the 7 February 1890 issue of the *Sun* reported. The same issue said, "Coburgers attended a dance at John McDevitt's Saturday evening."

In Red Oak there were notices of the Harris Hook and Ladder Company, the Fisher Hose Company, the militia company, and the Red Oak Fire Department also sponsoring balls. There was a Young Men's Dancing Club which gave dancing parties at the Armory. In Stanton Hine Hall continued as a center of dancing activities. A notice in the *Sun* for 3 November 1893 said, "The dance floor of Ed Pace's new barn on the evening of October 31 drew a great crowd. As high as 64 numbers were called for one dance."

#### *The Twentieth Century:*

In the period before World War I the county population had leveled off at about 17,000. The rush of newcomers was slowed and it was time for the establishment of many new social and business institutions in the county. Fad dances were beginning to take over the national scene: The Bunny Hug, Grizzly Bear, Turkey Trot, Kangaroo-Dip. They no doubt made their appearance at the Montgomery County halls and pavilions. Vernon and Irene Castle were married in 1911 and they soon won the hearts of Americans with the sophistication and elegance they brought to new dances. They popularized the Hesitation Waltz, the Castle Walk and Maxie--also called the Brazilian Tango. A little dance step in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1913 became a hit. Harry Fox's new trotting step was part of that show and the foxtrot became a most enduring dance style.

In Montgomery County the Firemen and Militia sponsored balls that made the news. A March 1907 account reports more than 600 tickets were sold in Red Oak for the anniversary ball of the Red Oak Fire Department.

A January 1914 newspaper told of the Armory dance in Villisca with music furnished by the Dunn Orchestra and the notation, "It is the purpose of the management to hold these dances every two weeks." In March of that year the following item was printed, "The last farmers dance of the season will be held at the Armory March 19th and will be in the shape of a masquerade. Only rural residents will be entitled to dance although visitors may sit in the balcony and watch the fun, a small charge of 10c being made to help out on the expense. About 70 couples attended the dance last Thursday evening. Music was furnished by Dunn's Orchestra."

There was something new on the scene in October of 1914. There was a dance sponsored by the National Guard, then called Company "F", at the Armory in Villisca with music furnished by an Edison diamond point disc machine.

In 1913 a popular summer destination, developed by the McGreer family, was called Hawkins Park. This was an amusement area built on farm land south of Red Oak near Coburg. The railroad from Red Oak to Shenandoah ran near the park. By this time railroads connected every sizeable community in the county which made transportation to and from Hawkins Park convenient. Geraldine Long, a resident in the county since moving here as a child in 1907, remembers that she could leave Red Oak at 8 in the morning, spend the day and then return in the evening. There were rides, horse racing, swimming and dancing at the park. The dance pavilion was built in 1913 and was popular until the park closed in 1917 at the time of World War I.

Another summer pavilion in the early part of the century was that at Riverview Park at the North Mill, which was located on the Nishnabotna river just north of



Red Oak. Geraldine Long tells of going there as a little girl with her brother Butch Kline. She says, *There the mill (dam) backed up the river and we had boating and you could swim, and there was a dance pavilion. I couldn't go to the dances, that was when I was little but I got to go with my older brother and his girl friend and another couple. They would drive a little old spring wagon with the back end cleared. I can remember sitting there in the back end with my legs dangling and I could watch.*

Butch Kline had a band that played for dances. Win and Fred Barnes were in the band. Sometimes they would go to the overhead bridge on the railroad track. Long says, *They'd get up there and start playing and the first thing you know, couples would gather round and square dance up on the bridge.*

Possibly inspired by the Castle's new dance step, the Tango, Red Oak High School students did a little secretive practice according to a story in the first edition of *The Tornado* (March 1914) a slim publication put out by Red Oak High School students. Telling of a Freshmen class party, the reporter says, "Mr. Williams caught Welch Pogue and Grace Hewitt practicing the tango in the boys cloak room to music radiating from Vergil's new bright hued cap" (no explanation available about "the cap").

World War I changed America. When the men came home a new era of music and dance was underway. In this county American Legion Posts were established in many communities and these organizations and their club rooms were social centers in the years that followed. Dancing was a part of the activities of post members through the next four decades. During the 20s the popularity of radio and movies brought more music and dance to the county. Jazz music became the successor to ragtime and some thought this music was an especially bad influence on the young people.

In June of 1925 the *Express* reported "Workmen broke the dirt in the American Legion park this morning for the new

dance pavilion to be erected by L.D. Whittington under a lease granted by the park commission. The building will be erected at an approximate cost of \$3,000. The building will be 48 by 88 feet. It will be complete with porches, check room, refreshment stand and side windows that swing out to make an open pavilion. Civic organizations and groups will be permitted to use the pavilion for entertainments and balls upon payment of a small rental fee. Mr. Whittington expects to conduct regular dances on Wednesday and Saturday nights. The building is to be located just west of the swimming pool and north of the grove."

The *Express* of July 1, 1926 reported "A carnival dance at the Uwanta dance pavilion will be held Monday night. Horns, confetti and noise makers will be distributed." This was the name of the pavilion until the Legion bought it. The Legion had been holding dances in the Armory and called it "Rainbow Gardens Ballroom." They continued to operate the "Gardens" in the winter and in the summer had the "Rainbow Gardens Pavilion".

In 1927 the Legion purchased the pavilion from Whittington for \$4000. It was enlarged and additional seating capacity was added. The platform on the dance floor was removed and a shell installed. About the opening the newly remodeled pavilion in April of 1928, the newspaper says, "The first official opening of the American Legion Dance Pavilion will be celebrated Wednesday evening when the dance board sponsors a big prize drawing and brings Pat Kroh and his Peony Park Orchestra here as a feature dance orchestra. A new 1928 Ford roadster will be given away at the dance."

A news item in 1929 said, "On the second night of the opening (of the Rainbow Pavilion in Legion Park) the Legion will give away its seventh car, 'The Challenger Essex Coach'".

The Hotel Johnson in Red Oak for many years had boasted of fine dining. It was the place where special celebrations and

dress affairs were often held. In January 1928 the Hotel instituted a Friday evening dinner dance with a six piece orchestra which played from 6:30 to 9 PM for dancing.

The year 1925 saw the construction of a new restaurant and dance hall in Morton Mills, one of the smaller settlements in the north east corner of the county. It was 40 by 90 feet with the restaurant in front and a hall at the rear. The first dance was given in the hall in November of 1925.

A popular rural dance hall north of Red Oak was in the little Wales community. Carlos Merrick, who lived in the Elliott area tells of the times when he was in High School. Merrick and his friends danced at the Wales Hall in the years 1925-1928. There was a large ball room, he says, and they always had a band or orchestra, maybe 10 or 12 pieces with men and women soloists. "I remember that we danced the 'Toddy'. I don't suppose anyone remembers that. It was after the Bunny Hug and the Castle Walk. They played all the popular music."

Some of Merrick's favorite songs were "When I was a Student at Cadiz", "Moonlight and Roses" and "Together We Two." The soloists were using a megaphone when they performed, Merrick remembers. Rudy Valee had made the megaphone for singers especially fashionable.

The Wales Hall, built in the fall of 1906 was located on the community's one main street. It was a large frame building, lit by electric lights, and with indoor plumbing. There were chairs or benches all around but no tables or refreshment areas. "We just went there and danced," Merrick said.

In Villisca the announcements of Company "F" hint of some of the social changes that the '20s were bringing. The *Review* reports, "The Villisca dance club wishes to announce...that the dances which they are running are to be carried on in the most proper manner possible. Absolutely no improper dancing is allowed on the floor at any time, and any intoxicated person will be refused

admittance." (No mention is made of the Charleston which was a popular dance of the period. Whether this was an "improper" dance with its youthful abandon, shimmy and shake isn't clear from the news item. Years of prohibition in Montgomery County didn't stop widespread use of alcoholic beverages which were supplied by entrepreneurial bootleggers here as elsewhere in the nation).

A well attended street dance took place in Villisca during July of 1929. The crowd was estimated at 1,000 people for a free pavement dance and band concert at the Tyler Bros. factory (a soft drink bottler) which was given in celebration of the new pavement on Fifth Street. Tylers gave away more than 1,000 bottles of Coca-Cola. "Music was furnished by Mrs. Roy Bowman's orchestra for the dancers who indulged in round and square dancing until 1:00 AM."

Later that year another free pavement dance, "A Night In Paris" was sponsored by the Villisca American Legion Post.

#### *The '30s -*

The arrival of the depression in the '30s, and the drought that devastated the county's farmers were overriding events of the period. More radio programming and more sophisticated movies brought the new music and dancing styles to the county. And the dedicated dancers of the county danced away the years. Annual military balls and firemen's balls stay in the news through the decade. Bess Bowman's orchestra played at the Jones Amusement hall in Grant in 1938. The Morton Mills amusement hall came down in 1937 only ten years after its opening.

Big name bands became popular nation wide. Duke Ellington played "It Don't Mean A Thing If it Ain't Got that Swing" and fast dancing was a national craze. Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey formed bands and played their theme "I'm getting Sentimental Over You" in 1934. Montgomery County dancers swayed to "Marie" and jitterbugged to "Boogie Woogie". Glenn Miller (born in Clarinda) organized his

first band in 1937, and soon Bob and Ray Eberly from Shenandoah become lead singers. Artie Shaw was playing his memorable "Begin the Beguine". Benny Goodman was heard across America on the radio and in 1937 won a national poll as the best band.

More and better cars meant that the young people could make a trip to Peony Park in Omaha for the grandest occasions. Carlos Merrick remembers a time when he danced to the Paul Whiteman Band which had brought an extremely large crowd to Peony Park.

The dance halls and pavilions were filled with the new music called "swing." Some were doing the Lindy Hop named after famed pilot Charles Lindberg. The Lindy Hop was the first "break away" dancing. The young women did not hug their partners as in the Grizzly Bear or Turkey Trot. Boys and girls improvised their own steps with the freedom to move and "swing". The clothes that this required were short skirts for the girls and loose fitting pants for the boys. Sweet music was also an important part of this era with the big band sound. Dressing in long gowns in a style set by Ginger Rogers was a wonderful way to enjoy the new dance music.

Two people who grew up in this county during this century are Ralph and Louise Herron of Red Oak. Both graduated from High School in the '20s and loved to dance. Their special memories include dances at the Odd Fellows Hall, and the annual Firemen's Ball which packed the Armory. They recall that big name bands such as Paul Whiteman, Les Brown and Lawrence Welk played in Red Oak.

Janis Roll Peterson's childhood was spent in a home where the parents were Swedish Lutheran in Stanton during the '30s. She remembers that her father loved to dance. She says, "I would stand on his tip toes and we would two step all over the house. Mother liked to dance, too, but due to her strict Swedish Lutheran upbringing, waltzing around the kitchen while preparing meals was about all she allowed herself to do." Peterson

writes, "We lived a couple of doors away from the High School Gymnasium and when Pete Kuhl and his Orchestra played we could sit on our front porch and hear the music." One year her father asked if she would go with him. "It was a lovely evening," she recalls. She attributes her father's love of dancing and to his being a "man of the world" to his service as a doughboy in World War I when he was in Paris at the war's end.

#### *The '40s -*

The teenagers of the '40s engaged in swing dancing with characteristic abandon. Girls and boys wore saddle shoes, and "bobby sox" became the description for a generation of adolescents. Jitterbug was the name given the fast dancing, and all the young were doing it.

The war affected the big bands as many lost players to the services. Top songs heard on radios and juke boxes included "We Three", "Careless", "Frenesi", "The Hut Sut Song" and "Elmer's Tune." Glenn Miller's band became a favorite with "In the Mood", "Tuxedo Junction" and "Chattanooga Choo Choo". In 1942 Miller, like millions of other American men, joined the armed services and formed an Air Force Band. In December 1944 his plane disappeared over the English Channel and the American public lost a hero.

In 1941 there was a series of dances reported in the *Express*. August 26, at Oak Hill country club "Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Swanson and Mr. and Mrs. M.D. Lomas will chaperon the 'Teenage members' at a dancing party at the club house." October 27, a party at Dreamland was reported; on November 12, "Jimmy Dale and his orchestra played at the Melody Club in Elliott." On November 20 there was reported the Hospital Benefit Dance at the Armory. A news article of 4 December 1941 said that the Letter Club (Red Oak High School) discussed an upcoming party, a banquet followed by a dance sometime during the Christmas vacation. The same issue of the *Express* told of a dance at



the IOOF Hall with "our regular orchestra, Robin Aces" and at the Red Oak Armory, an evening with Johnny Dickson and his band was available for 55c per person.

In Red Oak, Lovet's Ice cream Shop, owned by "Pop" Barnes was the place to have ice cream, a coke and dance to the latest hit records on the juke box. Lynn Adams of Red Oak writes about his mother, Gertrude Adams, who worked at Lovet's as he was growing up. He says, *When the war years came, many a service man returning home on leave would make one of his stops a visit to Lovet's for a malt and a dance with "Gertie."*

Teens growing up in Stanton as the decade ended would take the juke box from the first floor restaurant on the main street of the town, carry it upstairs to the Legion Hall, play its records and jitterbug to their heart's content recalls Bob Johnson, a long time Stanton resident.

On July 1, 1943 the *Express* reported plans for the Fourth of July celebration which included two big bands, the feature attraction, Jack Ross and his 10 piece orchestra direct from Chermont Ballroom in Omaha. The 1944 July Fourth dawn dance advertised "Basie Givens orchestra, a famous band of negro musicians playing from Midnight Monday and for the Tuesday PM and evening dance." On October 12 there was notice of a dance at the IOOF (Odd Fellows) Hall on Friday the 13th with the Monte Carlo Entertainers. On New Years Night, January 1, 1945 there was a dance at the Armory with Basie Given and his orchestra under the auspices of Co. "K". The Firemen's Ball of that year (February 15) began at 9 PM. The advertisement says "professional entertainment from Omaha have been engaged."

In the '20s, '30s, and '40s night life with dancing, often with drinking and gambling was enjoyed in local "clubs" and night spots. Gambling was not legal in the county but it persisted nonetheless. Prohibition ended in 1933 and liquor stores were opened in most

cities and towns. Beer parlors and taverns flourished.

Some of the disapproval leveled at dancing over the years was as often aimed at the environment in which people were dancing as at dancing itself. A 23 July 1945 *Express* article told of seven cafes which were raided and closed for having gambling devices. These were also the location of some of the public dance floors.

#### *The '50s and beyond -*

The '50s saw the decline of the big bands; ballrooms and pavilions closed. Television began to make a change in the social life of the country. Young dancers learned new ways to dance to "Rock and Roll" and the Elvis music which hit the nation like an earthquake. Young people liked solo dancing which was their preferred style in the '60s and '70s. High Schools sponsored sock hops, homecoming dances, and special proms. Teen dances were held at the Legion building, or sometimes in neighboring towns such as Shenandoah's Rose Park where rock and roll, and uninhibited amplifiers provided the new music for the solo dancing crowd.

Dancing styles may have changed but the most dedicated dancers continued to find a way to enjoy themselves and the familiar dance steps. The Firemen's Ball in Red Oak celebrated its diamond jubilee on Washington's birthday in 1953. Dick Mango and his orchestra played, and Annie Malony, the daughter of Mrs. Verni Combs was a vocalist with the band. The Hospital Benefit Ball was quite a social affair.

The Lorraine Post of the American Legion moved from their upstairs hall on the Red Oak Square into a new building on the county fair grounds in 1955. With a membership larger than ever before due to the return of the World War II service men, and with revenue provided by some busy slot machines, the club completed its new post home in September. As could be expected, members celebrated with a dance featuring the Mal Dunn Orchestra.

The new concrete block building was 100 by 60 feet. It remained the post home for just fourteen years. Legion membership grew older, their numbers smaller and the building became a burden. They sold it and it became a part of the County Fair complex of buildings, housing 4-H exhibits instead of happy dancers.

In the late 1960s the Arthur Murray studios played a part in the county's dancing history. Bonnie and LaVern "Speed" Dickerson decided to take up ballroom dancing and became students of Arthur Murray in Omaha, Nebraska. Soon they were skilled Arthur Murray Silver Dancers. The Dickersons became our local ballroom dance teachers and for nearly 20 years gave lessons to those who wanted to enjoy dancing. The Dickersons started their teaching careers as part of the adult education classes in Southwestern Community College. Their first students were mostly school teachers and young professionals in the local industries who had never learned ballroom dancing. In time, almost every age and interest group were represented in their classes. Teaching was done in homes and meeting rooms in communities as far away as Tabor, Malvern, Carson, Shenandoah, Stanton, Yorktown and Villisca.

The Dickersons always taught the waltz, the polka and the fox trot. Then as other steps became popular they would teach such dances as the bump, country dancing, the hustle, Texas two-step, and Cha cha. Latin dances were never very popular here, Bonnie Dickerson said, though they occasionally taught the rumba, or the tango. As teachers they provided their own music for the lessons, bringing a record player and the records they needed for each lesson.

Bonnie and Speed Dickerson were not only teachers, but always enjoyed just dancing for their own pleasure. In the '60s an elegant evening of dinner and dancing was possible with the opening of the Gold Crown Inn, a new restaurant-night club in Red Oak. There was a nice dance floor, a good place to have dinner and a bar for the now legal drinking in

Iowa. People could just go out for the evening and have a good time. There was often live music, generally a combo. Disco dancing was soon the newest, popular dance style. There was no dancing club as in early days, but always a friendly group who loved to dance. Long skirts became fashionable and dressing up for the evening was part of the fun. During these years there was dancing at the Elks Club, the Eagles Lodge and the Red Oak Country Club on a fairly regular basis. The Fourth of July dances held in the Legion Park Hall were popular events. Paul Moorehead was one of the popular bands at the old Armory where the Firemen's balls were held.

Another well known couple on the dance scene in Montgomery County were Keith and Jackie Evans. They came to Red Oak from Nebraska in 1950 so Keith could establish an upholstery business. Soon they became partners with Charles Wheeler in the roller skating rink (the old 1920s Legion Park dance pavilion). Keith went to workshops to study dance and figure skating about 1954 which led to his interest in learning more about dancing. The couple's interest in square dancing grew along with that of a group of local young people. While old time square dancing had a caller whose songs were memorized by the dancers, the new Western style square dancing had a language that the caller used, leading the circles into new and impromptu variations with his singing or "patter." It made dancing more interesting, a challenge for both dancers and callers. Many couples were having these dances in their homes using records or like Charles and Norma Wilson, on their patio. Since the Evans' home was not large enough, they invited the dancers to the roller rink. This began a second career of square dance calling and square dance instruction. Evans traveled seven states and as far as Chicago, Illinois to call dances; he invested in the sound systems and recordings needed. He sold his half of the roller rink, and devoted all his spare time to this calling and dancing career. As a couple



they soon began teaching all kinds of dancing, not just square dancing. They taught the fox trot, also called the two step, and less well known steps when their audience wanted to learn.

Johnny Roth was a partner with Keith Evans in the first western square dancing in the county. The two called together for two years. Roth's career expanded and took him from Nebraska to the east coast. He wrote and recorded several singing calls which he performed locally as well as on the road. Lowell Schaaf of Elliott also called dances with these men. Schaaf has called for over 30 years and is still calling square dances today.

In 1975 Evans stopped calling dances. His doctor warned that his health could

not stand the fast pace his business and his music career demanded. The Evanses continued to teach dance classes, even taking up instruction of Disco dancing at the Gold Crown Inn for two years.

All through the years, however, dancing has been a favorite pastime for Jackie and Keith. They remember dancing to music by the bands of Gib Krisinger, Marion Peters, Clark Bailey, Lee Williams and Johnny Leacox (the latter two were brothers whose home was in Shenandoah). As opportunities for dancing in Red Oak have declined they, like many other faithful ballroom dancers, have gone to Peony Park in Omaha (now also closed) and still go to ballrooms in Minden, Iowa, at the South Omaha Eagles, and the Lincoln Pla-mor.



**Red Oak square dancers:** Left to Right: Mildred and Bryon Wielenman, Gwen and Gordon Lary, Jackie and Keith Evans, Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Roth.: Photo: Mildred Wielenman

A third well known local music personality is Ivan Smith. Smith has played for dances either alone or with a small group since he was a very young man. Now in his 81st year after 60 years or more of providing music for the dancing public, he says, "I'd rather play than eat." He learned to play by ear using his father's fiddle. He taught himself to play an old fashioned pump organ, an electric organ, a guitar and a saxophone. For his first performance on radio in Shenandoah he played "Dill Picker Rag" about 1929.

Before he was married in 1934 Smith always carried his guitar with him and played whenever people gathered. His first paid engagement for dancers was with Guy Cornelison on the fiddle and himself on the guitar at a house dance. They started at 9 PM and played until daylight, getting paid \$1.50 each.

Smith was employed for 37 years by Iowa Power and Light and its predecessors, but his music remained his first love. There was always a group. For 20 years he played with his son Jerry, Clark Bailey, and Doc Schram. Even today he continues to offer music with other local musicians for those who still love to dance in his own building on West Coolbaugh in Red Oak.

During these years, Smith recalls house dances were always popular and his music generally included a variety of dance sets--a square dance, fox trots, waltzes, polkas and sometimes a schottische. He had one house dance in his own home, Smith reports. He had linoleum on the floor. The dance was for square dancers, and they had gravel on their shoes. As they danced around his floor, they wore off the top of his linoleum floor in a circle around the room. It was then he decided that he would not have house dances at his home.

There were many places to dance, Smith says, not only at the Armory, Legion Park, or local lodge halls, but also at night spots in Tenville, Dickeyville (east of Tenville), Bixlers Park north of Corning, and in the early

days at Biddick Hall northwest of Wallin and at Morton Mills.

As we near the end of the 20th Century and look back on our history, we know that dancing has been a part of our good times. Today the small community centers in Climax, Coburg, Hawthorne, Wales, Morton Mills, and Biddick have few residents. Their meeting halls are closed. In the towns the opera houses, the upstairs meeting halls, the dance pavilions are only memories. In Red Oak, the national guard built a new Armory west of town and its old building where so many grand balls were held became a furniture store. The old pavilion/ roller rink burned in 1963, the Lorraine Post Legion Club with its large dance floor was turned over to the county fair board in 1969. The Gold Crown Inn closed its doors to dining in the '80s.

In 1995 the firemen continue to host an annual dance, but without the excitement of the past. Even its 100th anniversary ball came and went without special celebration. The Hospital Benefit is an enduring social occasion, but with more diners than dancers. Ballroom dancing is still a part of many public celebrations. Bands make their appearance at special occasions in the country clubs and lodge halls. Nonetheless it is a quiet time in our dance history. The exhilaration of group dancing, the nostalgia of folk dancing, the abandon of fast dancing, the thrill of dancing "cheek to cheek" seem to be good times postponed, awaiting a generation to come.





## BASEBALL

George Washington's soldiers played a kind of baseball at Valley Forge in 1778. A standard set of rules was formulated in 1845, and interest in the game spread rapidly. It was a favorite pastime with service men during the Civil War and was played in Montgomery County at least by 1870.

Baseball has been the most popular and enduring team sport enjoyed by county residents. Kittenball (an early form of softball) and softball, for both men and women, have added to the good times, but have never generated the fanaticism displayed by both players and spectators of baseball.

Softball, a modified form of baseball, was developed as an indoor sport in 1887. In 1895 the game was adapted for outside play. The Amateur Softball Association began in 1933, and it sponsored the formulation of official rules. The term "kittenball" persisted in this area until World War II.

While most players were amateurs, it was not considered unfair if a good player or two were hired to improve a team. The practice was quite common; it was expected that teams would hire as much help as they could afford.

There was a small community of blacks in Red Oak and they fielded a team for several years after the turn of the century.

Stanton took its baseball especially seriously and in 1940 started an annual baseball day which attracted good teams and baseball celebrities. The 50th anniversary was observed in 1990.

Every community in the county, and some of the crossroads, played baseball at some time, and the local newspapers reported most of the games. Perhaps this account will recall, for all the faithful fans, those wonderful days of summer which are gone forever.

Baseball was different in the early days. In April 1925 the *Review* printed an article by D.A. Dickinson, who had been an early resident of the county. He said:

"That was in the days when ball players wore no gloves or mitts of any kind to protect their hands and even the catcher stood behind the bat without mask or any kind of protection, receiving with his bare hands the ball as it came from the pitcher. That was in the days, too, when the baseball rules required the pitcher to deliver the ball with an underhand throw, keeping his hand below his shoulder during the entire movement. It was just at the time the style of delivery was changed from the old form in which the ball was actually pitched by a swinging motion of the arm parallel with the body.

"...It was not for several years that the style of pitching which came into vogue that year gave way to the present form of pitching when the rules were changed allowing the pitcher to deliver the ball to the batter in any fashion he chose. With the old style pitching...it was easy for a batter to hit a ball, and it was not much of a ball game unless the score by the winning team ran up 35 or 40 tallies. Sometimes the score keeper, who kept a record of the game by making a notch in a stick for each score, filled a stick half a yard long with notches.

"But the newer styles of pitching cut down the batting averages of the old time players, and the advent of the catcher's mask, chest protector and gloves for all players added much to the efficiency of the players.

"The first baseball gloves were skin-tight, one for each hand and with covering for only half the length of the fingers so they would not interfere in throwing the ball."



### *Villisca -*

A game of baseball was played in Montgomery County in August 1870, when the *Clarinda Page County Democrat* said, "The two nines of the Aerial Baseball Club of Villisca scooped out the two nines of Corning on Thursday last."

In July 1871 the Farmers of Valley Township, Page County, "knocked the socks off" the Villisca Aerials, 26 to 49. So, the enterprising Aerials talked the Farmers into joining them in a new team under the name of "Union Club". At the Red Oak fair of 1871, the Union team "beat all competitors". The score stood Villisca, 63; Picked Nine, 18.

In 1872 the *Review* wrote, "Villisca will never win a game with Corning until they quit playing on Sunday." In 1875 the Villisca team was the Quicksteps.

The ball diamond was in the city park until 1876 when trees were planted there. There probably was a ball field on the flat south of town. It is uncertain just when a diamond was laid out at the fairgrounds.

Villisca held a tournament on the Fourth of July 1878. The prize, a rosewood bat and silver ball, went to Clarinda; the Ninespots from Coburg were second. In 1882 Villisca had an "out of town" field so they could play on Sunday. In 1886 they played "near the railroad tracks" and at the "old fair grounds".

In 1887 the Villisca Sleepers met only one defeat in the season. In 1889 it was the Razzle Dazzles. A new team was organized in 1896, and they were the Villisca Blues. They were the Whites in 1898. In 1901 the *Review* said, "Villisca has about the only good nine in this section of the country." The Villisca Red Sox were a "crack" team in 1904.

In 1909 F.P. Tyler leveled and drained his ball field, and built a grandstand. The Villisca team probably played there until 1921, when a new diamond was constructed north of town, across the road west of the country club. The Villisca Sleepers had a good team that year. There was a team up through 1928, when Villisca won third place at a

Red Oak tournament. By 1930 the Company "F" team seemed to be the only Villisca nine playing baseball; the Company team was active at least through 1935.

No further record of a Villisca town team was found until 1948 when a field was laid out on the Redfield land at the west edge of Villisca. That fall funds were solicited for improving the old Tyler field.

In February 1949 the Nodaway Valley Amateur Baseball league was organized. Villisca was second in 1950. They were the West division winners in 1951. Villisca didn't do well in '53, and dropped out of the league.

No one was playing baseball at Villisca in the late '50s. A group of teenage boys, most of them veterans of country school baseball, started playing, and soon others became interested. By 1961 the ball diamond was at the Enarson school building.

Nodaway was still playing in the Nodaway Valley League. In the mid-60s Villisca men started playing on that team. The home games were played at Villisca.

A Villisca team played in 1977. They played in the Southwest League in 1980. In April 1981 a Villisca town team was being organized. Apparently it wasn't successful as nothing more about it was found.

### *Villisca Soft Ball -*

In 1933 a kittenball league played at Tyler's field. In July 1935 the *Review* reported, "Villisca Takes Two Kittyball Games From Red Oak." A kittenball diamond was laid out in 1938 at the "south end of the new recreational center". The field didn't have lights, so the Villisca Barnstormers played under the lights of the football field.

The teams didn't seem to last; one was organized in 1958. The Villisca Merchants, organized in 1967, joined the Southern Iowa Softball League and tournaments were held in Villisca in 1968 and '69. On July Fourth and fifth 1980 a 16-team double elimination slow-pitch softball tournament was held in Villisca.

### *Villisca Women's Softball -*

A women's softball team was organized in 1977. It played at least through 1982.

### *Sciola -*

Sciola was playing baseball by October 1871 when the *Villisca Iowa Mercury* reported, "At the Villisca Fair ...Union BBC of Villisca best baseball club; Pioneer BBC of Sciola second..."

In 1880, Sciola played in the Mayhew pasture, north of Sciola. By 1887 they were playing on Bolt land west of the river. In 1896, the Sleeper's diamond was on John Gourley's land, "on condition there be no playing on Sunday". The Sciola Professionals played in Judd Mayhew's pasture in 1899.

In July 1904 the *Express* said, "Sciola - The farmers laid off last week on account of the wet weather. Not so the baseball boys however. They took the scalps of the Frankfort-Stanton combine without trouble at all--merely a work-out, score 36 to 4. On Friday they went to Villisca to play a match game with the Red Sox, the Crack (?) team of that place. They were true to their name, for they "walloped" Villisca in good shape. The city boys tried to make a kick on the umpire, but the real grievance was that they had been worsted by a few farmers in blue overalls and plowshoes who carried off all their money at odds of 5 to 3. Next!"

The Sciola Wallopers made history that summer. They were beaten once, but Villisca had to hire a pitcher, catcher and first baseman from Burlington to do it. There was a Sciola team through the 'teens, then in the early 20s Sciola men played on the Mill Grove team.

### *Red Oak -*

Red Oak was probably playing baseball by the early 1870s, but no firm record was found until June 1875 when the *Express* said, "The 'Nishna Valleys' are composed of young business men, and the "Silver Stars" are young lads...dubbed the 'Infants'. Their grounds at the foot of Coolbaugh street are complete..." In

1876 the team was the Hesperian Club. "There hasn't been an organized baseball club in the city this season," complained the *Express* in 1879.

In August 1911 the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* wrote, "It was on July 4, 1881, that the Council Bluffs Quicksteps had one of the hottest games in their history, against Red Oak. Council Bluffs won 10 to 8...Horace Deemer was pitching for Red Oak. He had taken his team for a long string of victories...Deemer had an out curve that was the boast of many loyal fans in his town..."

The Dynamiters were playing in 1884. In 1885 the new grounds were one block west of the old ones. The new uniforms were gray and black with the monogram "R.O." on the breast. In 1886 the ball park was enclosed with a ten-foot fence and an "amphitheater" built. Years later a story was told that the boards of the fence had many knotholes in them, through which the younger generation took in the games.

In 1887 the mayor ordered Sunday playing to stop. In June '87 the *Sun* noted, "Court adjourned on Friday to take in the ball game." Red Oak joined the Southwestern Iowa Base Ball league, and then withdrew. In '88 the Black Stocking team was organized. In 1894 it was the Black Diamonds ball club. In 1895 the team was playing at Pactolus Park.

In June 1900 the *Express* said, "It has been years since Red Oak had a good ball team." The ball club incorporated in 1903, and rejoined the Southwestern Iowa Base Ball league. In 1906 it was reported that a fine ball park was fixed up just west of town. Also, that year a black club was playing; the team continued for several years. In 1907 a Red Oak paper said, "Red Oak has eight or nine different teams."

In February 1907 the *Express* said, "Indoor Baseball is becoming a national game...the ball used is a hollow one about 17 inches in circumference and the stick...is a small one about two and a half feet long and about one and a half inches thick. It takes a tremendous smash

to knock the ball the length of the Armory...The pitcher must throw an underhand ball..."

A four-team baseball league was formed in Red Oak in 1909. The White Sox were organized in 1911. In 1914 the Red Oak team played in the Arnold pasture west of town. A ball field was made at the southwest corner of the Chautauqua grounds in the fall of 1915, and in 1916 there was a diamond at Hossle's farm.

There was a baseball diamond at Riverview Park in 1914 and '15. The park had its own ball team.

In 1914 there was a Twilight league game "practically every evening" at Pactolus park. In 1922 that diamond was described as "needing work"; the Twilight league had moved to the Chautauqua diamond. The Tuttle flying field diamond, north of Legion park, was still being used. A new ball field was made west of the old north mill. In 1923 the American Legion laid out a diamond on the Hossle farm. In 1924 the Courthouse Rats were playing.

In September 1927, Red Oak's "first annual baseball tournament" was held at Chautauqua park, with \$375 in prize money. For a time Red Oak didn't seem to have a town team. When one was needed, a team was picked from the better players in the twilight league and called the All-Stars. Occasionally a Twilight club played an out of town team. In the spring of 1928 a new community athletic field was built at the north edge of Legion Park; it included a baseball field. A new diamond was built at Chautauqua park in 1930.

The Legion spent several hundred dollars improving the diamond and erecting bleachers at Legion park; they sponsored a city team. The diamond was dedicated and the first game played by the new team Memorial week-end, 1930. In 1934 the All-Stars were second in the Southwestern Iowa Baseball tournament.

In 1935 the American Baseball Congress announced plans for amateur baseball tournaments on district, state and national levels. Red Oak was one of the

district sites in '35, '36 and '37. In '37, drastic changes were made in the rules and only four teams were eligible for the Red Oak tourney. Stanton won in '35 and '37, with Emerson the '36 winner.

The WPA did a lot of work on the Legion park ball field in 1937. The diamond was raised about a foot. New uniforms were purchased in 1938, but there was no team in '39. In 1940 the Red Oak Boosters team was organized; they played in '41.

In 1946 Red Oak won class B honors at the Council Bluffs tourney. The new \$8000 lighting system on the baseball field was dedicated the first of August 1947. In April 1948 the Red Oak club was named the Red Sox. Red Oak became a member of the Tall Corn League in '48, and in '49 won the league championship.

In November 1950 Lorraine Post American Legion purchased the assets of the baseball grounds at the Legion park. The Legion sponsored the ball team in '51. In 1952 the Red Sox joined the Southwest Iowa League. They played in that league at least through 1958. There was a Legion team in 1963.

In the 1 May 1980 issue, the *Express* said, "After a lapse of many years, town team baseball returns to Red Oak this season with the Red Oak A's, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors." The semi-pro Ambassadors were accepted in the Southwest Iowa Amateur Baseball League.

The team won the league championship in 1980 and again in '81. That year they finished second in the league tournament, won the NBC Western Iowa District Tournament and placed second in the NBC State Tournament, earning a trip to the National Tournament in Wichita.

A matching-funds grant made possible the installation of new steel and aluminum bleachers at the Legion ball park in the fall of 1980.

In 1982 the name of the team was changed from Ambassadors to the Red Sox. They won the National Baseball Congress District Tournament and took second in the state tourney; they played in the N.B.C. National Tournament at Wichita.



In 1983 the Sox compiled a 37-18 record. The players came from colleges and universities in nine states.

The Red Oak team became members of the Jayhawk League in 1984. The Red Sox won the 1985 N.B.C. state tournament, and were consolation winners in the National tournament in 1987. In 1996 the Red Sox joined the newly-chartered MINK League. (Missouri-Iowa-Nebraska-Kansas)

In the '80s the Red Sox sponsored baseball camps in neighboring towns, tutoring kids in baseball skills.

#### *Red Oak Softball -*

A Red Oak team was playing in July 1935. In 1937 Red Oak joined the Amateur Softball Association of America. Also in '37, a local softball league was formed with eight teams, and improvements were made on the Chautauqua field. Lights were installed at the diamond in 1945. In the early '50s the Red Oak VFW club won the district tournament of the Amateur Association.

At least by 1961 Red Oak was playing in the Southwest Iowa Softball league. In 1980 lighting was improved at the Chautauqua grounds.

Ball players are dedicated people. In July 1981 rain had made the field too soft for the scheduled Men's Softball League games. Larry Turner, member of one of the league teams, brought his helicopter to blow-dry the field. The games proceeded as planned.

#### *Red Oak Women's Softball -*

In August 1938 and again in 1939 Red Oak was host to the annual Western Iowa State Semi-Final Girls' Softball Tournament. Red Oak was playing in the mid-70s and in June 1980 entered two teams in the District 5 Women's Fast Pitch Softball tournament at Red Oak.

#### *Grant Township -*

In March 1876 the *Express* said, "The boys from Grant township and the boys from West township played a game of baseball on Saturday...in Joe Farren's pasture..." In 1878 they played Clarinda.

Sometimes the team was called Grant Center. They were playing during the 1890s and the early 1900s. In the 'teens they played at Hawkins park. In 1925 the *Express* said, "Baseball Sunday May 10-American Legion vs. Grant Township Clodbusters. One half mile south of Grant Center school."

#### *Grant -*

The first recorded game at Milford/Grant took place in March 1876, when the Milford club defeated Wolf Ridge/Wallin.

Houser schoolhouse news of September 1887 said, "We have a new baseball nine." The team was known as the Beardless Nine. Several of the young men were from the Houser area, but they played on the Milford field. The *Sun* reported in August 1894 that Milford "now has a baseball nine".

In November 1898 Milford defeated Lincoln Center 20 to 0. The *Express* said, "...all resulting from the thorough training given by Amos Paulin".

The Tenville news in August 1902 reported that the Milford boys had discovered that they couldn't play ball for the score was Tenville 24; Milford 12.

The Elliott *Graphic* predicted that the 1905 Grant team would be one of the best in southwest Iowa. "They are skinning a diamond and putting it in good shape. They have ordered new uniforms."

In June 1906 Frank Smith donated to the Milford baseball team the use of his pasture north of the creek for a ball field, "on condition that they will not play ball on Sunday or on the occasion of any religious or memorial occasion".

Grant won their own tournament in September 1907. They played at all reunions and homecomings. In August 1913 the *Review* reported that Villisca "was defeated by the Grant Maneaters".

By 1914 the ball field was across the road east of the mill. Home plate was at the northeast corner of the field, and they batted to the southwest. In June of that year, the Grant and Villisca teams

were threatened with arrest if they played on Sunday. They played anyway, and the result was a town vote on the question. Sunday ball was approved.

At the 1915 Homecoming Red Oak and Grant played for 15 innings, and ended in a tie, 2 and 2. There was also a game between two girls' teams. They were uniformed in short skirts and sailor jackets.

Grant was playing in 1919. In 1920 Villisca won a tournament played at the Donoho pasture south of town. That diamond was used all through the '20s and early '30s. During the middle '30s some games were played on a diamond at the south edge of town, just west of US 71. By the fall of 1935 the ball field was back across from the mill, with home plate at the southwest corner. In 1936 the Grant team was sponsored by the Chevrolet Garage.

Grant had a team through 1944. In '46 the returning servicemen organized a club which played at the Donoho pasture. In '47 a tournament was held in which six teams competed.

In 1948 the Grant American Legion purchased the site across from the mill and rebuilt the diamond. The new American Legion park was dedicated Sunday 30 May 1948.

In February 1949 the Nodaway Valley Amateur baseball league was organized. In September the Corning *Free-Press* reported that Grant had captured the league play-off championship.

In September 1950 the *Sun* said, "Frank (Hop) Kenworthy will be 'king for a day' Sunday when the town and hundreds of baseball players observe 'Hop Day' in honor of the old-time baseball star and manager of Grant clubs for many years. There will be a reunion of old-time baseball players and thus far responses have been received from several hundred ...A plaque will be presented to 'Hop' along with a lifetime pass to all Grant baseball games."

In '51 Grant was fourth in the Nodaway Valley league. In May 1952 Grant news stated that local merchants would

purchase new suits for the Indians. Grant didn't have a team in 1953, but must have been playing in '56. In '57 the *Review* said that Elliott was using members of "Grant's last year's team".

#### *Grant Softball -*

Grant had a softball team in 1938 when it was still called kittenball. They probably played off and on for years. At least by 1970 they had a fast pitch softball team. That team played for a few years.

The Grant Country Boys were playing softball in 1976. In June 1977 men organized a slowpitch softball team. They hosted tournaments in '82 and '86.

In May 1989 the *Review* said, "The Grant Boars ball team will be having a free breakfast on Memorial Day at the Fire station." That became an annual tradition. The team played in 1992; that was the last year.

In 1995 some of the former team members decided that it would be fun to play again, so they invited some neighboring towns to send teams to a tournament on 26 August. Griswold and Lyman came, and two teams from Corning. It was reported that they had a great time--until the next morning, when they decided they were too old for that sort of thing.

#### *Grant Women's Softball -*

Grant had a women's team in the late '30s. In 1948 two teams were organized, and they played for a few years. In 1970 a team was formed and in 1972 Grant businessmen furnished uniform shirts for the team. They played at least through 1977.

#### *Coburg -*

The Coburg Nine Spots won second place at a tournament held at Villisca on the Fourth of July 1878. In September 1884 the Coburg news said, "Coburg has one thing they can brag on and that is a base ball club. They will play any amateur club in Southwestern Iowa. They



have Red Oak, Essex, Villisca and Nodaway hanging to their belts." In July 1889 the *Sun* noted, "Coburg has a baseball club again."

In 1901 the Coburg team was called the Woodmen club. That lasted until 1904 or '05. The Coburg Boosters played in 1910, then in 1911 it was the Woodmen team again.

When Hawkins park opened in 1913 the diamond there became the home field for the Coburg Giants. The park closed in 1917.

In August 1921 Coburg hosted a three-day tournament, held on the school diamond. Climax, Nyman, Coburg and the Pumpkin Center team from Grant Center vied for the championship. During the games all the business houses in Coburg were closed. The team was playing in 1925 and in '34.

In May 1956 the *Express* reported, "Coburg town team tuned up for the coming Iamo league campaign by blasting Imogene 19 to 5 Sunday." In 1958 the Coburg Blue Sox were still a member of the IAMO (Iowa-Missouri) league.

#### *Coburg women's softball -*

A Coburg ladies' kittenball team was reported in August 1938. Nothing further is available.

#### *Stanton Vikings -*

Stanton had a ball team at least by March 1879, but apparently they just played locally. In August 1882 the Stanton news said, "Rumor has it that our baseball boys have challenged the Villiscians to play Saturday. This is the first challenge they have ever made."

In 1899 the diamond was in Bacon's pasture. In 1903 the playing field was a half mile east of town. New suits were ordered in September '03. The uniforms were gray with red trim.

The team rented S.A. Peterson's pasture in 1904. The club went on a tour that would take about three weeks. The Stanton book, *Lest We Forget* (page 152) says, "Within a few years, Stanton had a professional baseball team. Members were

paid...They would travel by horse and buggy...Each year they went barnstorming for a month...playing at fairs and meeting all comers..."

In 1906 the Eckland pasture was rented by the team for a ball park. Stanton played on Jake Johnson's farm in 1914, and in 1915 the *Sun* said, "The old grandstand in the pasture belonging to Louis T. Larson must be torn down this month." In 1918 the ball diamond was at Alamosa park.

At different times the Stanton team was called the Invincibles, the O.K.s, the Sterlings and the Tigers. The Coyotes were younger players. In 1929, Stanton had twilight baseball. The league continued for a number of years.

The team was first called "Vikings" during the early '30s. Stanton won the district amateur tournament at Red Oak in 1935, but lost to Emerson in 1936. Because the state tourney would be short one team, Stanton was allowed to compete, and they won. The team played in the national tournament at Louisville, Kentucky, where they were eliminated. The Vikings also won the 1937 district meet.

In June 1938 new flood lights were installed on the field west of town. The new Viking baseball diamond at Anderson Park was dedicated 15 August 1940 with the first annual baseball day.

In 1946 the Vikings resumed play interrupted by the war. They joined the Tall Corn League, and spent \$3000 improving their grounds. In May 1951, the *Review* said, "Stanton, where they live, eat and sleep baseball...sent a team over here that fairly ate up the Villisca boys...13 to 1."

In 1952, Stanton won the Southwest Iowa league championship. At least by 1961, the Vikings were playing in the Nodaway Valley league. That league was disbanded in 1975 and the Southwest Iowa Amateur Baseball League was formed. Stanton was a member and in '79 they were league champs.

The 50th anniversary of Baseball day was observed by the Stanton American Legion Post #406 on 29 June 1990.

*Stanton Softball -*

In 1944 and '45 Stanton was playing kittenball. They had a four-team league, with an all-star team for competing against other towns.

At least by 1980, Stanton was playing slow pitch softball. In June 1983 the second annual Stanton Shady Rest Softball tournament was played. In July 1990 the *Review* said, "The Shady Rest team from Stanton has advanced to the state play-offs in the American Softball Association...Advancing to state is nothing new, as it had become routine the last five years...The Shady Rest team is about twelve years old..."

*Stanton Women's Softball -*

The Stanton Legion Auxiliary had a baseball team in 1923. Stanton women were playing softball in 1976.

*Elliott -*

The first record found of Elliott baseball was in July 1885. They were playing in '86 and in 1891. No more games were found until 1902.

In 1910 the *Express* said that the Elliott Midgets defeated Red Oak "on the smoothest and best kept grounds in southwest Iowa". In June 1911 the *Express* noted, "the greatest battery team Elliott ever had". Elliott played in 1921; they probably played the rest of the decade.

There was an Elliott team during the 30s. In 1934 they played with the Nishna Valley league.

A team was organized in 1946. In '47 they became the Blue Sox. Elliott joined the Tall Corn league in 1948. In 1952 the team became a member of the Southwest Iowa league. The Blue Sox were playing in the Nodaway Valley League in 1967.



**Stanton Viking's 1936 State Champion baseball team. Photo: Swedish Heritage Center.**

#### *Elliott Softball -*

Elliott was playing softball in 1971. By 1980 they had a slow pitch team, which played for a few years.

#### *Elliott Women's Softball -*

The Elliott women played ball at least from 1972 through 1976.

#### *Tenville-Mill Grove -*

Tenville had a ball team as early as 1899; their diamond was near the Arlington Mill. In August 1900 the Tenville news said, "Tenville at Stanton - At the end of the seventh inning the score keeper ran out of paper so the game stopped. Score 11 to 31. Ask Stanton who won." Tenville men played on the Sciola team in 1904 and on through the 'teens.

In May 1921 the *Review* said, "Mill Grove Specials is the name of the newly organized baseball team." Games were scheduled with neighboring towns through 1927; that was the last year for the park and the baseball team.

In the spring of 1931 a baseball team was organized at Tenville and the diamond leveled. The Sunday afternoon games were popular, and bleachers were erected. The team was officially the Mill Grove Tigers but was known as Mill Grove.

A strong team was developed, and they played against the best. At a Fourth of July celebration at the park in 1934, the Black Barons of Des Moines defeated the Mill Grove team 6 to 5 in 11 innings, before a crowd of 1,000. The last game at Mill Grove was played in September 1937.

The Colts were younger than the players on the Mill Grove team. They were favorites of the younger people and a crowd followed them when they played away from home. 1935 may have been the last year for the Colts.

#### *Mill Grove Women's Softball -*

There was a Mill Grove girls team at the old park. In 1932, two kittenball teams were organized, one for married women and one for single girls. The teams practiced a lot but didn't play many

games. They played each other as well as teams from Nodaway and Highland.

#### *Morton Mills -*

Morton Mills had a baseball team as early as 1888. In 1906 the Cummins team indicated a political slant; Albert B. Cummins was governor of Iowa then. No further record was found until 1913. In 1915 the Morton Mills Neutrals were playing at Damuth's Park south of Morton Mills. The team hosted a tournament in 1921. They were still playing baseball in 1934; at that time the ball field was north of the church.

#### *Morton Mills Softball -*

A kittenball tourney was played at Morton Mills in June 1938. The home team won. In 1939 Morton Mills lost to the Red Oak IOwealth kittenball team. They played through 1941; that was probably the end.

#### *Morton Mills Women's Softball -*

The women's team was active during the late 1930s.

#### *Others -*

Many of the little communities also fielded teams during their heydays.

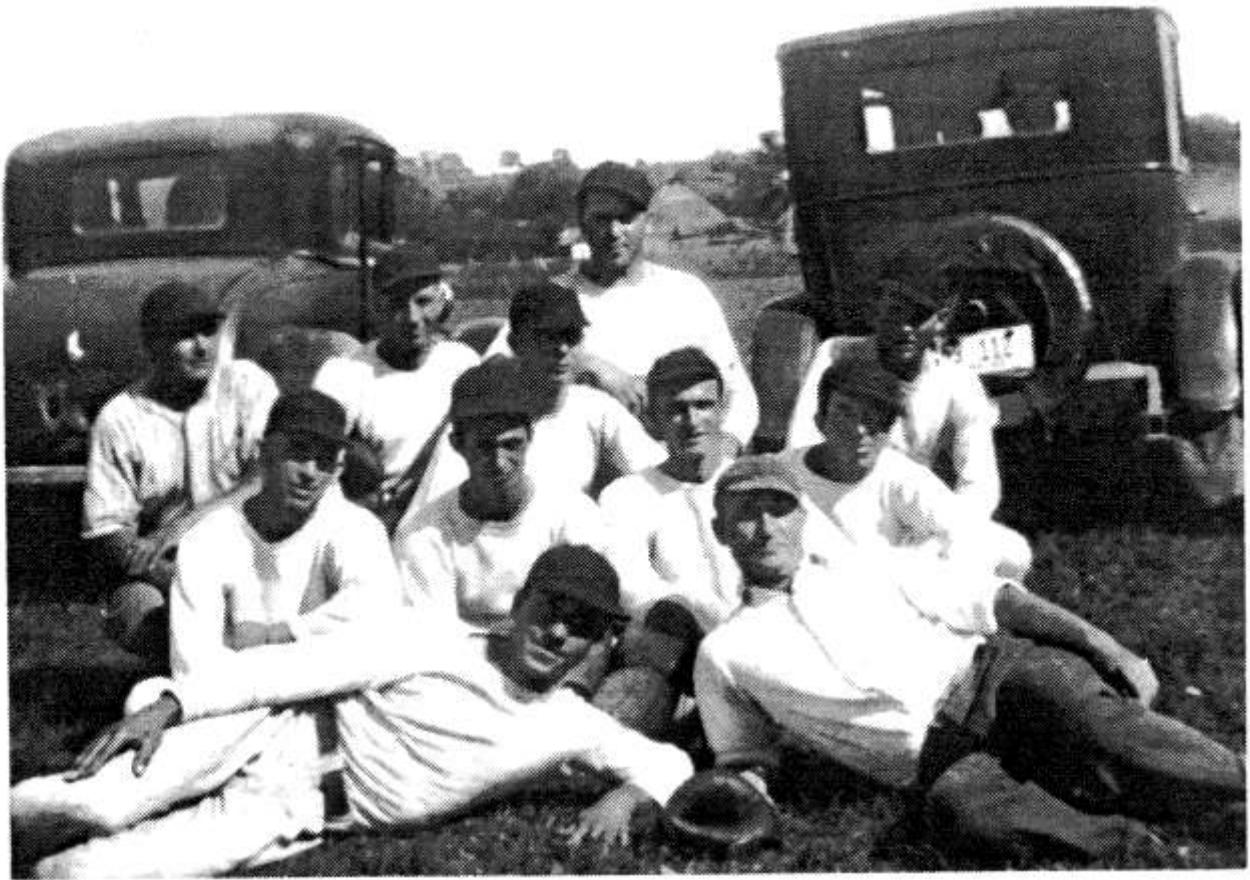
*Champion Hill*, in the northwest corner of West Township was playing in 1906.

A *Frankfort* ball team was active in 1878 and was playing in 1886. In 1904 they had two nines, one of married men and one of singles. A Frankfort news item of 1905 said, "The Frankfort base ball nine played a game last Saturday three miles southeast of Stanton with a club known as the Giggleville nine..." In 1906 it was the Frankfort Pumpkin Rollers, and in 1911 the team was the Ramblers.

*Hawthorne* had a ball team in 1887. They were playing in 1893 and 1894. In 1901 it was the Hawthorne Woodmen team; they played for a few years. In 1906 and '07 the team was called McPherson.

*Hacklebarney* had a team in 1887 called the Patterson nine. The Jack Oaks were the local team in 1906. Hacklebarney teams played occasionally through 1921.





**The Milgrove Tigers 1931.** Front row left to right: Joe Units, Floyd Carlson; 2nd row: Ed Gourley, Glen Jackson, Ed Hardisty, John Thorson; 3rd row: Ed Weeks, Jack Archer, Guy Cornielson, Weldy Larson; back: Orlo Calvert. Photo: Elaine Artlip.

*Indian Creek* had a baseball team in 1893.

*Patterson's Colts* were organized and managed by Vest Patterson. They played on Sunday afternoons in the early 1920s on Patterson land west of the Seven-Mile, southwest of Grant. At first it was just a neighborhood team, but as they improved they played other nines.

A *Pilot Grove* team was very active in 1886. The nine seemed to be centered in the Hart School area.

*Pleasant Ridge* had a team in 1936. No other record has been found.

*Scott Township* played at different places. In 1890 there were teams at Lombardy Grove and Blade schools. The Giggleville nine was playing in 1905. During Hawkins Park days *Scott Township* played there.

*Sherman Township* played at Hawkins Park in the 'teens.

*Stennett* had a team in 1906 and '07. No further records were found of baseball, but in the 1930s *Stennett* played softball.

The *Stratton* team was playing regularly during the summer of 1915. In August 1933 the *Stratton Juniors* played the *Mill Grove Colts*.

The *Van Horn Mill* diamond was there by 1879 when a game was played on the Fourth of July. Games were played there occasionally until the 1950s.

*Wales* had a ball team at least by May 1890 when uniforms were ordered. They were playing in 1894, 1902 through 1905 and again in 1915. In 1939 the *Wales Wolverines* were playing. The *Wales Sluggers* played at a Farm Bureau picnic



in 1939; one of those teams was probably softball. In the late 1970s Wales was playing in a Red Oak softball league.

*Wolf Ridge/Wallin* had a ball team by March 1876 when they lost to Milford. The team was active during the 1880s. In September 1886 they were called the Wolf Ridge Invincibles, but in October they were the Wolverines. In 1888 a news item said that the ball grounds would be on J.T. Askey's meadow.

It isn't known just when the pasture west of the church was first used as a ball diamond. In 1939 the young men of the community installed lights on the field. They cut trees for the light posts, and made reflectors. Both men's and women's softball teams used the field for a number of years. Several tournaments were held there.

*West Township* had a ball team at least by March 1876. They were playing in 1885 and '86. There were several teams in West Township and it is difficult to determine which one is meant. A news item of 1886 said that Climax had two baseball nines. They were still playing in 1903 and 1907. In 1911 it was the Climax Woodmen. The IXL school area had a team in 1886 and 1893. Salem was mentioned in '93 and '94. West Township was playing in 1907. A township team played at Hawkins Park in 1916.

In 1925 a *township baseball league* was organized. There was a game at Chautauqua park every Saturday afternoon during the summer. All equipment was furnished by the Red Oak Community Club and the games were free. All townships participated except East and Washington.



#### FOURTH OF JULY

According to the 1881 History (page 450) the first county-wide celebration was held at the school house in Frankfort on the Fourth of July 1858. "After the speech there was a free dinner, and plenty for everybody to stuff himself as tight as a bologna sausage--plenty of wild game meat and everything else besides."

There is a report that a celebration was held in Grant Township on the same day.

There is no record of another Independence Day observance until after the Civil War, but by 1871 the day had become a popular annual event, with celebrations held in several communities each year. Dances, parades, bands and fireworks were added to the programs.

After the turn of the century there were still many such events, but over time they seem to have been held less often.

In the 1920s community organizations in Red Oak began to add professional

entertainments to the programs. By 1929 Lorraine Post in Red Oak developed a successful format which brought thousands to town for the Fourth each year. There were all the traditional amusements plus booked entertainments which could include carnivals, daredevil acts, stage shows and parachute drops. A car was given each year to a lucky ticket holder.

For 35 years the Legion celebration in Red Oak dominated the local Fourth of July holiday. As the years passed the Legionnaires grew older, their membership declined and the tradition ended. In the years since, there have been occasional large celebrations in the county, and many fireworks displays, but with increasing frequency the date is unnoted except as a holiday from work.

In May 1932 the *Review* printed an account by A.M. Moore of the first Fourth of July observance at The Forks (Villisca) which was held in 1867. "It was to be a family picnic and platform

dance." Rough boards were borrowed from the sawmill and laid the day before. Doc Spargur came with his fiddle, neighbors came with baskets of fried chicken and wild gooseberry pie for their dinners. After the Declaration of Independence was read "the music started and away they went. It was quite a celebration."

The *Review* reported on the Fourth at Red Oak in 1871. More than 4,000 people attended. "The singing was excellent and the music from the band echoed in grand harmonic strains. The barbecued ox, brought whole to the table, added gratety (sic) to the occasion and with its accompaniments of bread and cheese, supplied the wants of the multitude..."

In 1872 the *Review* said, "The Villisca Celebration was a grand success and a credit to the town. There were no fights, and but one man drunk, and he is always drunk."

The Fourth was celebrated at Milford/Grant in 1874. The Grant & Greeley swing (an early merry-go-round) was advertised, "The largest and best swing in use." There was a picnic; the program included the "Modoc Horribles" and fireworks.

1876 - The Centennial Fourth! Red Oak planned to have the "grandest celebration ever had on the Missouri slope". \$1,000 was given away; the John Robinson Circus was in town. And the "baseballists" were in good trim for a game.

Elliott observed the Fourth in 1880. The entertainments included "croquet, swings and amusements of all kinds, including grace hoops". (Note: What are grace hoops?) A large crowd came from Red Oak on the train.

The festivities of 1881 were subdued by the news of the shooting of President Garfield. At Milford the old soldiers conducted a sham battle and there was a barbecue.

Climax celebrated Independence Day in 1884. On the program were the Climax Glee Club, a bountiful dinner, a boat race, a dance and fireworks.

In 1886 at Stanton the procession, headed by the Star Band, marched from town to Larmon's Park. The Declaration of

Independence was read and orations were given. Then came a picnic dinner and races. In the evening there was a dance at Hine's Hall.

At the observance of 1887 in Villisca, a stage coach robbery was part of the program. The coach was "held up" by a party of desperados who took valuables from the passengers. A party of cowboys swooped down and rescued the victims.

In 1888 the woods at Mortons Mill were full of people. Moyer's cornet band played, W.W. Merritt spoke, and there was a good program of amusements with a dance in the evening.

Some 700 or 800 people celebrated at Hawthorne in 1889. There was a dinner at noon, followed by speakers and music.

The *Sun* tells us that the 1890 celebration at Red Oak was the biggest ever held in the town. Approximately 15,000 people were present, including Gov. Boise. The officers of the grand lodge of Iowa A.F. & A.M. came and the corner stone of the new courthouse was laid with due pomp and ceremony. There was a prize parade of firemen, baseball games, and a balloon ascension and parachute drop.

There was a celebration in Milford in 1892. Headed by Moyer's Cornet band and Reed's drum corp "the callathumpians, hoodoos, hoebokins and hob-goblins paraded the street in all their fantastic hideousness." Amusements included two shooting galleries, a swing and a dance floor.

In 1896 Coburg observed Independence Day with a picnic.

Two thousand people gathered at Tenville in 1900. There were speeches, plenty of amusements, music and a picnic dinner.

In 1901 a local paper observed that Red Oak's celebration was the first since 1890.

Elliott had a hot time in 1902. Although covered with a blanket the fireworks were accidentally set off. They "threw balls of fire at the crowd which was unarmed. The better part of valor was

simply to get away from there, and they ran as fast as they could to a place of safety. The battle was fierce but did not last long. No one was killed."

In 1904 F.P. Tyler held a celebration at his park in Villisca. The Red Oak band played, there was baseball, races and fireworks. Crystal Lake was open for swimming and boating. Admission to the grounds was free.

Twenty acres had been prepared at Sciola in 1906, but by 9:30 a.m. it was difficult to find a hitching place. Between 1,500 and 2,000 people were present to enjoy the ball games, music, basket dinner and speaking.

There was a large attendance and general enjoyment at the picnic at Stennett on the Fourth, 1907.

In 1910 Villisca entertained the Southwestern Iowa Firemen's Tournament on July Fourth and 5th. About 10,000 attended the first day.

Hawkins Park opened in June 1913. "Memories of Hawkins Park" by Dorothy McGreer White, tells us that on the Fourth 1913 the attendance was about 5,000, the highest one-day count in the park's brief history. "Crowds were everywhere, including the walkway on the suspension bridge, which created an unexpected event. The anchor at the west end of the bridge gave way and the bridge slowly descended to the water amid much screaming. No one was injured, but it must have been an exciting ride!"

Riverview Park celebrated in 1914. There were speakers, band music, movies and various contests. The Riverview Park baseball team played Henderson and there were fireworks in the evening.

The Stratton community celebrated with a picnic in 1915.

In 1916 several hundred people gathered at the old Dick Woods place at Center Ridge. There was a ball game, trap shoot, tug-of-war and horse shoes. A Ford won the quarter mile race with a horse.

Elliott observed the Fourth in 1919. There was a parade and a ball game. "The aviator broke his plane while landing after his first flight."

In 1923 the Red Oak Legion sponsored a celebration. They held a race between autos worth \$25 or less. Each entrant had to agree to sell his car for \$25 if the committee thought he was running in one worth more money.

1926 was the Sesquicentennial anniversary of Independence Day, so everyone was celebrating--right? Wrong! There wasn't one public observance in the county. There was a dance at the pavilion in Legion Park and the Red Oak country club planned a good time for members.

The *Express* said that Red Oak wasn't celebrating because of "undesirable consequences of the celebration in the city last year". The papers had covered the '25 event extensively, but there was no hint of problems.

In 1927 the Red Oak Legion held a dime dance in the pavilion, and had a fireworks display. One source said "\$18 worth of fireworks".

The Red Oak Legion sponsored the celebration in 1929, and gave away a car, beginning a tradition of many years' duration. The Legion had donated a car in '28, but shared responsibility for the observance with other groups.

An all-day celebration was held on the Fourth 1936 at Mill Grove Park. (Tenville) The local team defeated the Capital City Monarchs from Des Moines, 8-7. There were kittenball games and athletic contests. The evening program featured a platform dance and fireworks. A charge of 25 cents admitted a whole family for the entire event.

The 1942 Legion Celebration at Red Oak was billed as the last big-time July Fourth for the duration. Barney Oldfield, Jr. appeared with the Death Drivers. They performed demolition stunts with junker cars.

The Red Oak Legion arranged a rodeo for their 1944 event. Art Fritchen brought his riders and bronchos. No fireworks could be obtained and of course there was no new car to give away.

In 1948 the Jimmy Lynch Death Dodgers performed in Red Oak. There was a big parade in 1952, the first since the war.



1958 was the year the Red Oak Legion presented their Fourth of July program on Labor Day. The traditional observance fell victim to a flood.

1965 was the end of an era. It was the last Fourth of July program of the Red Oak Lorraine Post. (The last car may have given in 1957 or '58) The Round Up Riders Saddle club of Red Oak put on two horse shows.

In 1970 the Red Oak Heritage Foundation sponsored a two-day celebration, 3rd and 4th July, called Red Oak Heritage Days. A film produced by the Union Pacific Railroad, "Tracks of the Iron Horse", was shown. There was a parade and musical programs.

Most communities in the county observed the Bicentennial anniversary of Independence Day in 1976, but Villisca was the only place which held the celebration on the Fourth. The *Review* said, "Not in the memory of anyone living has there been such a celebration in

Villisca." The afternoon program was held at the new band stand in the park.

In 1983 the Grant United Methodist Church sponsored an old-fashioned celebration. The entertainment included ball games, contests and a talent show.

Homecoming '86 festivals were held at Grant and Stanton in May and June. Villisca celebrated on the weekend of the Fourth. The *Review* said, "W-h-e-e! ...did we have a good time! They came from San Diego, Atlanta, Chicago, Ft. Worth and Tokyo to join in the Villisca Homecoming '86 celebration...1,100 were served at the all-class alumni banquet..."

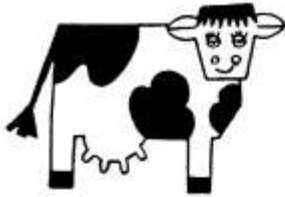
The fifth annual Coburg Show and Tractor Pull was held July Fourth weekend 1988. Features of the event included a threshing demonstration.

In 1992 Villisca held the annual Heritage Days over the Fourth weekend. The theme was "Cruisin' in the '50s". The musical "Gypsy" was playing at the Rialto.



**In the good old summertime.** Clarence Kneedy, family and friends at Pilot Grove. Photo: Florence Peterman





## AGRICULTURAL FAIRS AND SHOWS



Agriculture has always been the basis of the economy in Montgomery County. In the earliest days, everyone was directly involved in farming. Agricultural fairs were organized for a dual purpose: to show what had been accomplished, and to demonstrate how the results could be improved upon in the future. Entertainment had no place in the original plans, but it was soon apparent that people wanted and expected to be entertained, and if they were not, they wouldn't attend the fairs.

The first Montgomery County Agricultural Society was organized in 1859. It was dissolved after the 1861 fair by the priorities of the Civil War.

From about 1870 private fair associations were formed to sponsor agricultural exhibits and horse racing. Stock companies were organized to own the land and put up the buildings both in Villisca and Red Oak. The stockholders expected to profit from their investments but those endeavors, on both sides of the county, were plagued by financial problems. Fairs were discontinued and reformed but even the generally successful races were unable to keep the societies solvent.

The organization formed in Red Oak in 1879 was the most successful one; it ran through 1894, but was in debt when it disbanded. The Villisca fair was terminated in 1900 but Red Oak tried again. It was in 1913 that the board announced, with finality, that "Fairs don't pay."

The Montgomery County Farm Bureau was formed in 1918 as part of a national organization. In 1919 the Bureau sponsored the first of a series of county picnics. The events were like county fairs without the races.

The non-profit organization had a large membership, providing a broad

financial base for its projects. By 1932 the 4-H clubs were co-sponsoring the annual event. The meetings were held at various places in the county through 1940; since then the shows have been at Legion Park in Red Oak.

In 1956 another Montgomery County Agricultural Society was formed which has sponsored a county fair each year since then. The organization, known as the fair board, is financed primarily by county tax money. It usually receives a small amount from the Iowa State Extension Service. The board also receives significant income from rentals, sponsorships, donations and special projects.

The Montgomery County history books tell us that the first agricultural fair in the county was held at Frankfort in 1859. The exhibits were meager: some butter and one cheese, one agricultural machine, and a few head of livestock. But the fair was the great event of the period. Nearly every family in the county was there, and there probably hasn't been one since that was enjoyed more.

Fairs were held at Frankfort in 1860 and 1861. In April 1861, the *Page County Herald* published the list of premiums offered by the Montgomery County Agricultural Society for the third annual Exhibition, "which is one of the most liberal ever offered in the west. There are counties now in western Iowa with fully double the population of Montgomery that cannot sustain an agricultural society."

The Civil War intervened, and no more fairs were held until 1869. By that time the center of activity had shifted from Frankfort to Red Oak Junction.

In October 1919 an article appeared in the *Sun*, contributed by an early settler. "Few people now here know that the first fair held at Red Oak was on the

north side of the square in a building and the stock was shown on the street. The next fair (1870) was west of the waterworks bridge half a mile on the south side of the present road.

The *Express* reported that in 1871 the Agricultural Society had secured "a baloon (sic) 65 feet in diameter and 90 in height". In 1872 the *Review* said, "the fourth annual exhibition of the South Western Fair Association will be held at their grounds near Red Oak 23-26 September. \$5,000 in premiums." The association didn't own the land, but erected the necessary buildings.

In the fall of 1873 the society held a fair on the open prairie west of town. The *Express* reported that there was some friction in planning the 1874 fair, but it was held. The disagreement concerned the acquisition of a permanent site; the controversy became so bitter that no fair was held in 1875, nor in succeeding years. The fair buildings were sold. In June 1875, the reporter for Lincoln Township said, "We are almost tempted to think that the County Fair will be held in Lincoln Township this year, as John Langly is having the Fair buildings put up on his farm."

In July 1879 plans were announced for organizing an Agricultural Society in the county. It was to be a joint stock company. Articles of Incorporation were drawn up, and arrangements made for the purchase of land. Then a defect in the title of the land was found, and a new site was selected. A 40 acre tract was purchased on the north side of the road west of the Coolbaugh street bridge.

A half-mile track was laid out, and necessary structures built. It was a rush job, but by 7 October, opening day, all was in readiness. There were 75 open stalls and 40 box stalls, a Floral Hall, high board fence, ticket office, amphitheatre to seat about 1,000 and a judges stand in the center of the track. The *Express* pronounced the fair an unprecedented success. "Mr. James Hart of Milford has a check row of his own invention on the grounds which attracts

considerable attention. It appears complete in all its arrangements and we should judge it to be a very superior machine."

The fair was held annually. In 1885 an old settlers society was organized. In 1887 there was a fire at the fair grounds which consumed 90 cattle stalls. The *Sun* complained in '88 that the fair was not as good as usual. "One thing the fair lacks is special attractions. There is no balloon, no oratory, no parades." But in '89, the directors and stockholders "are rubbing their hands with glee. It has won back the reputation injured last year."

In 1892 the association had to rebuild structures damaged by the wind. The *Sun* noted that a new attraction was introduced. "The bicycle races proved a very popular feature of the fair, many people taking more interest in them than in the horse racing."

There were races in 1894, but the other parts of the fair were not held because of the drought. The fair grounds were rented to Morris Jones; the greater part of his stable was quartered there.

In January 1895 the Montgomery County Agricultural Society sold all of its property at auction, including the 40 acres of land; the society ceased to exist.

Morris Jones was building a mile race track at his new Pactolus Park which would be more attractive to the public. The fair association was already in debt, and could see no possibility of future improvement, so the board voted to disband. Jones offered to rent his park for a one-week fair each year.

Red Oak business men sponsored a county fair at Pactolus Park in 1897, in connection with the races. About 10,000 people visited the fair in 1899.

In April 1900 the Montgomery County Fair Association was organized as a private corporation. W.W. Marshall had acquired title to Pactolus Park, and 4 June, 1900, he sold the north half of the park to the association for \$10,000, including stables, grandstand, and so on. In 1901 the corporation purchased the

south section of the park. That summer the race track was shortened to one half mile.

In October 1901 the *Review* said, "The County Fair attracted a large group of gamblers. After a number of complaints the law arrested nine and the rest fled."

Fairs were held through 1906. Attractions at the 1906 event included speed exhibits by a motor cycle man.

In 1907 the Montgomery County Fair Association changed its name to the Montgomery County Race & Amusement Association. The *Express* said, "Past experience in...county fairs has discouraged the fair management in ever being able to pay expenses, so the agricultural features will be eliminated."

In May 1908 the fair grounds were leased to private parties until 1 March 1909. 5 June 1908; *Express: Adv.* - Cow pasture at the Fairgrounds. \$1.50 a month.

In August 1909 the Fair Association sold 14 acres from the east side of the park to J.M. Keyte and F.M. Whittier; the tract bordered on Fourth Street.

Race meets were held each year through 1912, when another agricultural fair was held, but it was the last one. In November 1913 the *Review* said, "The fair association quits. It doesn't make money." The corporation ordered all its buildings on the fair grounds sold.

William Tenney bought the buildings and razed them. He used the salvaged material in the construction of Riverview Park, on the site of the North Mill.

The Southwestern Iowa Agricultural Congress was organized in October 1915. The main object was to hold a big agricultural show the next fall. The show and race meet was held at Hawkins Park in September 1916. McGreer Brothers had made improvements for accommodation of the meet, including a new half-mile circular race track. There were farm displays, races and ball games.

The night program featured a naval battle, with miniature battle ships on the lake and forts on the banks.

Something like 10,000 rounds of ammunition were purchased for the war.

The agricultural show was repeated in 1917. The farm products were good and numerous. There were races, ball games and a wild west show.

In September 1919 the Farm Bureau sponsored a picnic and stock show. It was held at the H.H. Pierson farm near Morton Mills. There were exhibitions of cattle and classes in stock judging. Classes for women were also held. Entertainments included baseball, horseshoe pitching and other athletic contests.

The picnic became an annual event. In 1920 and '21 the meeting was held on the Stennett school grounds. After that it was held at different sites in the county. It was very popular and drew huge crowds. There were large exhibits of agricultural products, livestock and women's work. It seemed that each year the hosts would try to provide a program which would outdo the one of the previous year. Other sites included Elliott, Red Oak, Stanton, Villisca and Grant. A system of township baseball teams was organized, and they competed at the picnics for a number of years. At Elliott in 1924 Scott township won for the third consecutive year, thereby retaining the cup. There was an airplane at Grant in 1927.

By 1932 it was the Farm Bureau picnic and 4-H Achievement Day. Again it was held at Grant. It featured a stellar speaking program headlining Gov. Dan W. Turner. A speaker's platform was erected in the beautiful 30-acre homecoming park and an amplifying system was installed. 4-H livestock specimens...exhibits by the ladies and girls...baseball games...horse shoe pitching...a free picture show.

In 1935 the meeting was held in Red Oak, on the public square. The event was in Villisca in 1940, and since then has been held each year at Legion Park. After 1946 the picnic feature was dropped and it became the 4-H Achievement Show which was held annually through 1955.

In February 1956 a Montgomery County Agricultural Society, generally known as the fair board, was organized for the





**Horses on parade.** Horse racing and agricultural fairs were held at Pactolus Park from 1895 through 1912. There are cars in this photo so it was taken toward the end of the era. Photo: Express Reflections.

purpose of sponsoring and conducting an annual County Fair. The first Fair in over 40 years was held in August '56. It was rather small because of limited facilities. A number of attractions drew good crowds. In 1957 a full program was offered. A fair has been held each year since then, with more and better facilities being added.

County Fair entertainments were held at the baseball diamond in Legion Park over the years, but beginning in 1977 there was a change. At that time fencing and bleachers were installed at the southeast corner of the tract purchased from the Legion in 1969. Since then all night time fair events have been held at that location. In 1980 the fair board erected a large auditorium building on the new property.

#### *Villisca Fair -*

Representatives of Montgomery, Page, Adams and Taylor Counties met in August

1871 and formed a Union Agricultural Society. It was late in the season to start such a project, but they rented grounds at the east edge of Villisca and began preparations for a fair.

It was 6 October when the *Review* said, "When completed the fence will be six and one-half feet high. The track is well-nigh completed, and pens and stalls for accommodation of stock will be erected in a few days." The fair was held the last of October.

In 1872 the paper stated that "The track is undoubtedly one of the finest in the State; the grounds are all fenced and wells of pure water and other conveniences have been prepared." The organization became a joint stock company in 1873.

The *Express* reported in October 1874 that "the exhibition was comparatively meagre...The race track was the center of attraction. The horses are unusually excellent."



In October 1875 the *Review* said, "The cattle show is the finest ever witnessed here. Visitors are flocking in. The entry clerk is rapidly going crazy from listening to 40 fellows at once...A real live omnibus will run to and from the depot..."

In 1876 the Association erected a "large and commodious amphi-theatre". The space beneath it was divided into food stands. More stalls for livestock had to be built.

In September 1882 the *Review* lamented "the seventh consecutive Fair that has been spoiled by stormy weather...not half could hear Gov. Gear's speech on account of the high wind...On Friday there were drifts of snow." Perhaps that explains why all the property of the association was sold in August 1883.

On 31 August 1892 the Villisca Union Fair association was incorporated. Work was started on the fair grounds. In 1893 a fair was held. The girls' bicycle race was one of the special attractions. Children's Day was successful; a small army of them surrounded the steam swing.

No fair was held in 1894 because of the drought. In 1895 police duty was by the members of Company "B" in full uniform. There was a new floral hall in 1896, and not enough stalls. A fair was held in 1897; it was the last one. In 1898 the event was cancelled because it fell on the same dates as the Omaha Exposition.

1 February 1900 the *Review* reported, "It was decided to take immediate steps toward closing up the Union Fair association...A paying fair is a rare thing. People have simply lost interest in county fairs...For sale 33 acres, track, sidewalks, over \$2,000 of buildings..."

In the spring of 1900 the property was sold to F.P. Tyler who opened an amusement park on the site.

And so the agricultural fair endures, under one name and then another, and still the people come, to exhibit, to learn and to have a good time.

"Hog Wash" - by Heather Gage, student; Villisca:

Last year, for the first time, I took hogs to the Montgomery County Fair. First we had to wash our hogs when we got them to the fairgrounds. Boy, was that an experience! I was soaked from head to toe. Then we had to fill the pens with wood chips and get feed and water. Every morning during the fair we had to get there early and stay late at night to feed and water the animals. The best day, though, had to be the day we showed them. We got there about six in the morning and started showing about nine. We had to give the hogs another bath and make sure they stayed clean til' "showtime". One of the great moments has to be when I got my check for my hogs and premiums from my ribbons!

The Fair - by Adrian Wolfe, student; Villisca:

In 1990 I attended the Montgomery county Fair where I entered three market lambs. These lambs were not good enough to win, but were good enough for me to make some money and have some fun.

While attending the fair I went to the horse pull; it is interesting. I also helped show a friend's hogs, which brought back old memories of when my sister and I used to show hogs.

On Saturday I went to the cattle show and then attended the Demo-Derby, one of the highlights of the fair.

Sunday is a bad day for most of us in 4-H. It is the day for selling livestock. It's kind of bad seeing those animals that we had worked with all summer just leave in a matter of seconds. But there is a teen dance which kind of makes up for it.

Great Memories - by James Hammerstrom, student; Villisca:

When I was about twelve years old, my family and I went to a county fair in Red Oak. Even though we had a hard time finding a place to sit, the show looked as if it was promising. For the first stunt, a car would drive over a man's

chest. The man did not even flinch. It was awesome! For the second stunt a man did a wheelie all the way across the ring with a motorcycle. This was even more exciting. The stunt men did some other stunts with knife-throwing and fire-eating people. But the stunt I really wanted to see was the twenty foot robot



The red man and the white man had at least one thing in common: they each had a strong itch to see who had the speediest horse. Frank Archer was a boy when he came to the northeast corner of the county with his family in 1854. Later he told his daughter that he had raced with the Indians on their race tracks along the West Nodaway River.

The 1906 History (page 221) recorded an early race. At the first county fair, at Frankfort in 1859, "Much merriment was caused by an improvised horse race" held on the open prairie. In the years since then much time and money have been invested in the pursuit.

In October 1919 an article appeared in the *Sun*, contributed by an early settler. He told of a county fair held on the Red Oak city square in 1869. A driving team took first premium as "roadsters". In 1870 the fair was given one half mile west of the waterworks bridge. They had trotting races and a few fights between drivers.

Newspaper accounts of the '71 and '72 fairs don't mention races, but probably there were some. Races were held at the 1873 and 1874 fairs. In February 1876 the *Express* commented that those fond of horse racing had been enjoying themselves a short distance from town. A County Agricultural Society was organized in 1879 and land was purchased. A half mile track was laid out and an amphitheatre built. Running and trotting races were the center of attraction at the fair.

that would transform into a car. Just my luck, the show was cut short because of rain.

Stunt people have always fascinated me and those stunts I saw at the county fair were the best I had ever seen. This was probably one time I will never forget.

## RACETRACKS



In 1880 the Agricultural Society was enrolled as a member of the "National Trotting Association". Under that banner a June race meet was held. About the first of 1881 a jockey club, the "Red Oak Driving Park Association" was formed.

In 1884 the Fair Association track was designated a National track. In 1888 an offer of \$10,000 was received for Redwald, a Red Oak horse. Offer declined. Races were held at the fair grounds through 1894; in January 1895 the fair grounds property was sold and the Agricultural Society was disbanded.

### *At Pactolus Park -*

In the late fall of 1893 the Standard Trotting Horse company moved to Red Oak from Kenosha, Wisconsin, bringing about 60 fine horses with them. Morris J. Jones, head of the firm, rented the fair ground as quarters for the horses.

In May 1894 Jones bought land adjoining the city on the north and built a mile race track. Jones named the property Pactolus Park in honor of a trotter he owned. Jones sold a half interest in the park in January 1895, to Palmer L. Clark.

*Her name was Alix - by Helen Murphy of Red Oak:*

*Horse racing must once have been a lot of fun in Montgomery County. Alix Avenue in Red Oak is a pleasant, level little street separating the Good Samaritan Care Center on the north from Russ Benda*



**Alix, Red Oak's famous racer.** Shown at the old fair grounds west of the Nishnabotna River on Coolbaugh street in the 1890s. Photo: Express Reflections.

Field, the ball diamonds and fairgrounds on the south. People tend to call this street "Alex". It's really "A-lix", named for Queen Alix, known in the 1890s as the fastest trotter in the world.

One of our family keepsakes is a thin silver spoon engraved with a sketch of an elegant horse standing in a paddock and the inscription "Alix 2:03 3/4", still legible through a number of dents made by a baby (my father) cutting his teeth.

A fascinating, almost forgotten page in local history is the story of the horse races at Pactolus Park (where Legion Park is today).

Horse-fancier Morris J. Jones sponsored the Pactolus Park addition, named for one of his many race horses. It included a regulation one-mile track, a

spacious amphitheatre, suitable barns and 300 box stalls.

In the summer of 1895, according to newspaper microfilm in the Red Oak Public Library, everyone in the county was ready for the "June Races". The mile track was in prime condition. Special trains were scheduled from four directions to bring a crowd of 10,000 to 15,000 persons to watch the running.

Private homes were opened to some of the visitors. Some slept in the Pullman cars in which they traveled. Others bedded down on cots in offices, hotel lobbies and 30 "private boarding homes". One-hundred-fifty cots were available at the Odd Fellows Hall.

Stands seating 3,000 were ready for the five days of racing. Under the stands



was a restaurant operated by an Omahan named Johnson, who brought 80 helpers, 1,000 pies and 20,000 rolls.

From Texas and California, New York and Canada came 380 entries to compete for purses totaling \$30,000--a lot of money in those days.

Admission was 50 cents. On Ladies Day, admission was waived for the fair sex and on Militia Day, Fireman's and Railroad Day you had only to show your hat or badge to get in for half price.

Star of the show was the little trotting mare Alix, owned by Morris Jones, president of the Standard Trotting Horse Company of Red Oak. Rumor had it that James Gordon Bennett of the New York "Herald" had sent a cable from France offering to buy her. Offer not accepted.

It was a brief, shining moment of fame for Red Oak, a pretty fair frontier version of the Kentucky Derby.

Unfortunately, torrential rains flooded the race area, a disaster from which there was to be no recovery.

All that remains is the thoughtfully-named level street, with fitness fans and high school athletes running near the track where once Queen Alix trotted her way to victory.

After the '95 race meet was over, the paper reported that the great turf meeting at Red Oak "was sadly interfered with last week by the rain. Parts of Thursday morning's program had to be abandoned and the track could not be used at all Friday and Saturday."

Much money was lost on the venture, and the sponsors were never to recover from the misfortune. Jones held a meet in June of 1896; it was on a much more modest scale, but it too lost money, although the local reporter described it as the "best race meeting ever held in the West".

In September 1895 the Gentlemen's Driving Club sponsored harness races. In 1894 Jones had sold a half interest in Alix to Monroe Salisbury; in May '96 Jones again became the sole owner of the famous horse. In June '96 a world's

record was set at Pactolus Park. In 1896 Palmer L. Clark disposed of his half interest in Pactolus Park to Hugh Jones, brother of Morris J. Jones, who immediately sold his interest to W.W. Marshall.

Morris Jones gave a four day racing meet the last of September 1897. That seemed to end Jones' active connection with the race track although he didn't sell his remaining interest until January 1900. Local business men sponsored a Fair in 1899. Large crowds encouraged another attempt, and in 1900 a private group put on a fair.

A Montgomery County Fair Association was organized and in the summer of 1900, purchased the north half of Pactolus Park. In January 1901 the group acquired the south section of the park. The track was shortened to a half mile. A Gentlemen's Driving Club was organized, and gave matinee races for several years.

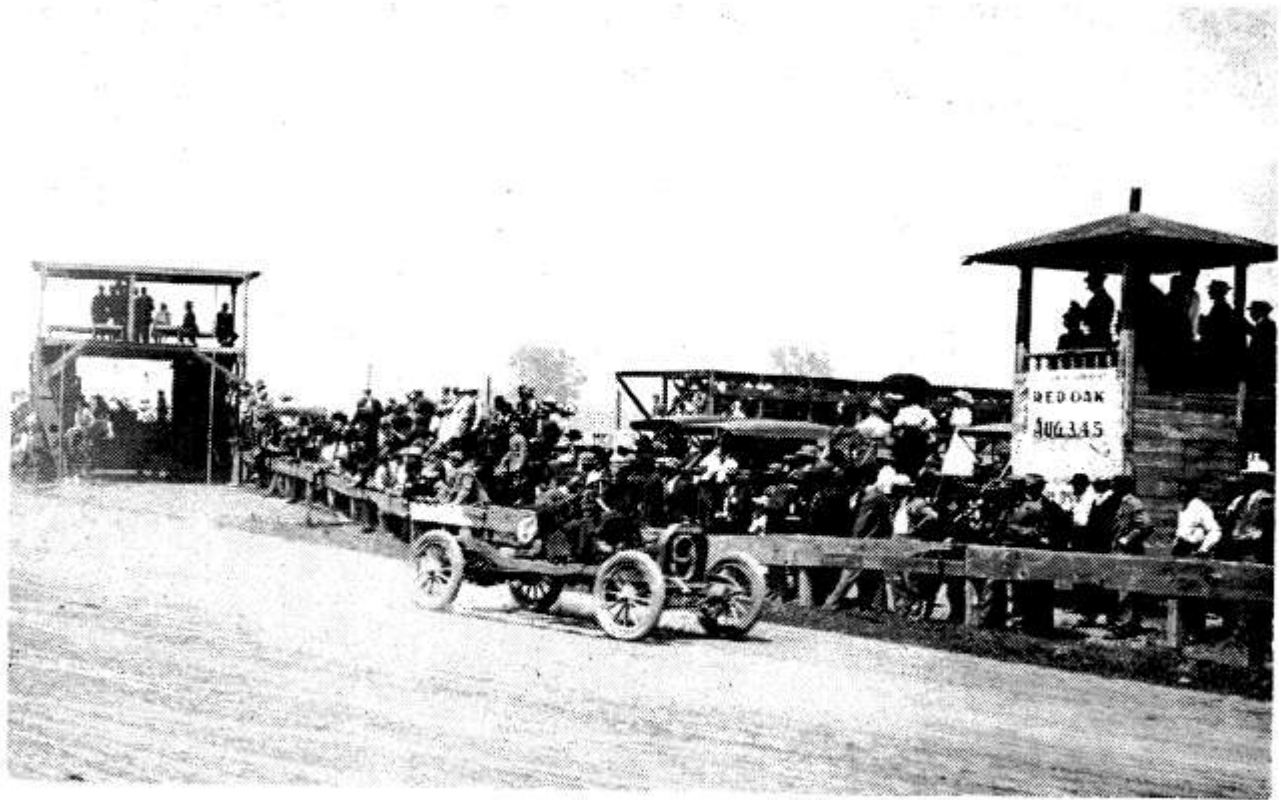
In August 1901 it was announced that Red Oak belonged to the Southwestern Blue Grass Circuit and the Southern Circuit. The Fair Association held fairs through 1906. Then in February 1907 the *Express* said, "The Montgomery County Fair Association has changed its name and for a year at least will hold its meeting under the name of the Montgomery County Race and Amusement meeting. Past experience has discouraged the fair management in ever being able to pay expenses."

That arrangement was to last through 1911. In 1908 auto racing was introduced to the meet. The Tri-State Short-Ship Circuit was organized in 1910; Red Oak was included. The Red Oak Automobile Club sponsored a race meet in June 1910.

This account was taken from a story written by Bill Baxter which appeared first in the *Omaha World Herald* and then in an August 1976 *Express*. "Eddie Rickenbacker, famed World War I pilot, is also remembered as a race driver, and he got his start in Red Oak in the summer of 1910.

"He was only 19 at that time and lived in Omaha. He ventured to Red Oak





**Auto races at Pactolus Park.** Races were held in the years 1908-1912. Photo: Express Reflections.

that summer to compete in a 25-mile event on a half mile dirt track. 'I was selling Firestone-Columbus automobiles ...My car was a new model just in from Columbus. It had the country's first 4-cylinder engine. And it was left-hand drive...At that time all American cars were driven from the right-hand side.'

"That Red Oak race boiled down to a battle between me and Walter Smith, the local Chalmers agent, driving a 30-horsepower Chalmers Detroit. But as our roaring racers churned around the dusty oval, gouging ruts and piling up ridges in the dirt, my right rear wheel collapsed. The little car turned broadside, busted through a fence and rolled over, throwing me out..." The race was over for Eddie.

The Southwest Iowa Race Circuit was mentioned in 1911. In June the *Express* called Pactolus "the best half-mile track in Iowa". There was horse racing at the County fair in 1912, perhaps the last

racing on the track. In 1915 the property was sold and the track destroyed.

#### *Villisca -*

In February 1930 W.M. Moore had one of his articles about The Forks in the *Review*. He mentioned a race track south of town. It is uncertain when a track was laid out on the flat land near the river but it was probably at an early date. It was used as late as August 1876, when the paper reported several races on the track south of town.

In the summer of 1871 the Union Agricultural Society was organized; they had a track ready for the fair that fall. In September 1872 the *Review* said, "The track is undoubtedly one of the finest in the State."

At the 1874 Fair the *Express* noted that the race track was the center of attraction. "It remains a fact that people get excited easier over a trotting or pacing match than almost anything

else." In 1875 the "driving track at the Fair Grounds is now in excellent condition."

In July 1879 a trotting club was organized for the purpose of holding races. They were held on the fair grounds.

In 1883 the fair association was disbanded. It wasn't until 1892 that a new Fair Association was organized. It was found that the old track was 27 feet short, so it was lengthened to the full half-mile.

In September 1893 the *Review* Fair Daily reported, "The society has arranged for an exhibition of hippodrome racing for the afternoon of each day. Two men, each riding two horses, will make a race around the track."

The 1896 fair had about 50 running horses. Then the fair folded again, and a Jockey Club was organized to hold races. In August 1899 the *Review* said, "By Tuesday noon 120 horses had registered at the fair grounds. Every box and open stall is occupied while the overflow is cared for uptown."

In 1900 F.P. Tyler bought the fair grounds, and the Jockey Club continued to use the track. Then, in August 1905, the *Review* reported, "The Villisca Jockey Club is probably a thing of the past. The weather was fine during the three-day meet, but the attendance was not much larger than last year."

That seemed to be the end of organized races. F.P. Tyler invited the public to use the track at no cost to exercise their horses.

#### *Hawkins Park -*

Hawkins Park was located four miles south of Red Oak, on the west side of the Nishnabotna River. It opened on 14 June 1913. A race track circled the ball diamond. A grandstand was built on one side. The management promoted races for both horses and cars.

*Memories of Hawkins Park* by Dorothy McGreer White says, "The racing rules must have been quite lenient. Ives Boyington would drive his Model "T" racer

with a man on the running board for ballast. Another car, being larger, couldn't make the curves easily and would come around with corn fodder trimming.

"Horse races were as exciting as the car races. One sorrel would run until a certain spot was reached where a nearby corn field enticed him to leave the track."

In May 1916 a crowd of about 2,000 attended the dedication of the new half-mile track. In the race between a Ford and a horse, the horse won.

The Southwestern Iowa Agricultural Show and Race meet was held in September 1917. That was the last year for the park and its popular race track.

#### *Caywood track at Milford/Grant -*

In June 1887 the Milford news said, "Quite a number of our citizens are purchasing road carts. The road to Caywood's race track presents a lively appearance on pleasant evenings."

In April 1892 the Milford news lamented, "We are sorry to learn that after service last Sabbath a horse race was instituted and engaged in by some of the heretofore reputable young men of the community. Through regard for Christian parents we forbare the publication of their names. Boys, take our advice and effect a radical reformation at once, or the first thing you know, you will be squirming in the relentless grasp of the iron arm of the law."

Most communities had race tracks at one time or another. Sciola was probably one of the first to lay out one. The Damuth family had a track on their farm south of Morton Mills. L.R. Fuller kept a track in Pilot Grove Township, and there were races near the Stewart school house in Washington Township.

#### *Coursing Races -*

In 1913 Red Oak went to the dogs. A coursing group was organized, and joined the National Coursing Association. In October '13 the Aberdeen cup meet was held at Pactolus Park. The *Review* said, "This

is something new in this state, seeing greyhounds chase rabbits."

In September 1914 the local papers said, "Everything is in readiness for the coursing meet which takes place here (in October). Greyhounds from 15 states will contest for the famous Waterloo cup... The entries in the main event are limited to 64 dogs...The grounds are ready and the jack rabbits to the number of 125 are being trained over the grounds every day

## Riverview Park

### PARKS

The grounds of the water mills became the first parks in the county. There were mills north and south of Red Oak and at Stennett on the Nishnabotna, and at Climax on Walnut Creek. On the West Nodaway mills were located at Milford/Grant, Morton Mills and Arlington/Tenville. The Van Horn Mill was northeast of Villisca on the Middle Nodaway.

The millpond and the pool below the dam provided facilities for fishing, boating and swimming. The grassy banks with their tall shade trees enticed picnickers and campers. In the 1870s there was a baseball diamond at the Van Horn mill.

In June 1891 the *Sun* reported that the North Mill was becoming a popular pleasure resort. "A boat house has been built there and row boats have been bought to rent out to pleasure parties."

The Tenville news said in July 1899, "The (Arlington) Mills of this place are becoming famous as a summer resort. Tents are frequently seen pitched on the banks of the river. Fishing is superb and the cool shade and balmy atmosphere invigorates all who take advantage of the delightful spot for an outing."

#### Larmon Park -

In the spring of 1886, P.J. Larmon established a park on five acres of

to teach them escapes where they are expected to elude the pursuing dogs."

Red Oak entertained the National Coursing meet for the Waterloo cup in October 1919. It was held in the Hossle field a mile west of Red Oak. Attendance reached 1,100 daily. The *Sun* complained that the rabbits hadn't arrived in time to become familiar with the escapes, and the hounds caught a large number of them.

ground just east of Stanton. A stream was dammed, making a small lake with a fountain near the dam. Walks and seats were constructed, and a croquet court laid out. By August, '86, the pond had been enlarged and a "beautiful little boat" had been added.

In December 1887 the *Sun* reported that the pond in Larmon's pasture was covered with very fine ice. In July 1892 the newly organized Stanton gun club had their first shoot at Larmon's park.

The young people of Stanton were using the park in the summer of 1897. In late 1899 a few boys rebuilt the dam to make an ice skating rink.

#### Tyler's Park; Villisca -

In the spring of 1900 F.P. Tyler purchased the old Villisca fair grounds. Tyler announced plans to preserve the features of the grounds, and to add an artificial lake. By that fall the excavation was completed and the lake filled. It was called Crystal Lake. A shelter house was built for ice skaters. Tyler also cut ice from the lake for his business.

The fair grounds race track was used for a few years. The Villisca baseball team probably used the ball diamond at the park until 1921.

It wasn't until the summer of 1902 that a bathhouse was built. Tyler also





**Boating at Hawkins Park (1913-1917).** Photo Dorothy White.

purchased a freezer so that he could sell ice cream. In 1903 ten boats were acquired to be used on the lake. That fall the lake was enlarged to cover about seven acres.

A toboggan slide was completed in time for a big Fourth of July celebration in 1904. Equipment to furnish electricity for the park was installed in 1906. In April 1907 Tyler purchased a small steamboat at Grant, and moved it to his lake where it was fitted with a gasoline engine. He called the boat "Princess Irene". In 1909 a motor launch and four steel rowboats were purchased.

Tyler owned a bus, one of the first gasoline vehicles in Villisca. It was used to transport people from town to the park for 10 cents a ride.

The Villisca Commercial Club rented the park for the summer months in 1922 and established a tourist camp. No more celebrations were held there.

*Hawkins Park - contributed by Dorothy McGreer White of Red Oak:*

*Hawkins Park was located four miles south of Red Oak and two miles north of Coburg on the west side of the Nishnabotna river. The park was opened in the spring of 1913 by McGreer brothers on their farm. It operated each summer through 1917 when our country became involved in World War I. It was named for the first settlers on the land, the Hawkins family, and their name was used to identify the Hawkins bridge near-by.*

*The park consisted of an island beside the river and a higher mainland area. They were connected by a suspension foot bridge since the island was surrounded by water where row boats and motor boats were used. Attractions on the island were the skating rink, playground with equipment for younger children and a picnic area. On higher ground was a refreshment stand and close by a carousel*

and circle wave swing. Above this, on level ground, were a ball ground and race track, the latter used for both car and horse racing. On the north side of the park was a swimming pool and bath house. On the south was space for parking and tents for campers.

#### *Riverview Park -*

From Who's Who and Why; Red Oak, 1915: "RIVERVIEW PARK - When the North Mill burned, late in 1912, people feared that the old pleasure resort would be no more. But W.A. Tenney has come to the rescue with Riverview Park. He has located a restaurant and electric power plant on the very foundation of the old North Mill. He has built a skating hall, a bowling alley, a slippery slide and other devices of the modern pleasure resort. He has opened the park to the public for boating, tenting or picnic privileges. Go out there, hire a tent and enjoy outdoor life."

When the buildings at Pactolus Park were sold, Tenney bought them, and salvaged the lumber for the new park, which opened 31 May 1914. Lowell White was employed by Tenney to help raze the Pactolus buildings and construct the park facilities. He said, "I ran the steam engine for the merry-go-round." Fourth of July celebrations were held at the park in 1914 and 1915; transportation provided from the square in Red Oak was free. In 1915 free roller skating was offered on opening day. Many dances were held there. The park sponsored a baseball team. Riverview Park was open only two years; perhaps the competition from Hawkins Park was too strong.

#### *Mill Grove Park -*

Around the turn of the century there was a wooded area just south of the Arlington Mill, on the east side of the West Nodaway River in Washington Township. It was unimproved, but became a popular spot for picnics and other gatherings. It was called Evans Grove.

The land was purchased by R.A. Dunn. In 1914 Dunn improved the grove by adding

picnic tables, fireplaces and a well. He called the tract "Mill Grove Park".

The park was an immediate success and drew large crowds. In 1918 the river was straightened, putting the park on the west side of the river. In 1921 a ball diamond was laid out, and the Mill Grove Specials team was organized.

In 1927 the Dunn property was sold. The new owners cleared the timber and farmed the land. That ended the park, ball diamond and ball team.

In the spring of 1931 local baseball enthusiasts laid out a diamond on the east side of the river at Tenville. Games were played and soon the grove behind the diamond was being used for picnics. Tables and playground equipment were added. The site was called Mill Grove Park as a continuation of the former park.

The Mill Grove Tigers erected bleachers to accommodate the large crowds that attended the games. A refreshment stand was added. All through the depression years the social life of the community centered in the park; that was the only place a family could afford to go. Ball games were usually free, with a hat passed for expenses. Fourth of July celebrations were held there; 1,000 people watched the ball game in 1934. The last baseball game was played in September 1937, and the park faded away.

#### *Tourist Parks-*

In 1919 the state primary road system was created, and the main east-west road through the county became Iowa Primary No. 8. The war was over, people were prosperous, and automobiles were becoming more dependable. It was anticipated that the new highway would carry a large number of travelers who would be looking for a cheap place to camp for the night.

The first tourist park in the county was opened in 1920, at Mill Grove Park, in the east side of the county. There travelers could camp free of charge, and enjoy the use of fireplaces, tables and water. There was a playground for children.

In April 1921, the Red Oak park commission opened to tourists the three acres surrounding the standpipe. "Cement stoves" and picnic tables were provided for the guests, and city water was available.

By July the *Express* reported that the fame of Red Oak's tourist park had spread far and wide. "Whether the tourist is going east or west they say they hear of the Red Oak camp and always with the advice to stop here if they can. It is one of the best advertisements Red Oak has had for some time." Many of the travelers coming in drove under the pavilion and didn't bother to pitch a tent.

In 1922 the Villisca Commercial Club opened a tourist park at Tyler's lake. During the middle '30s Villisca maintained a tourist park on the water tower grounds at the north edge of town.

#### *American Legion Park -*

For many years Red Oak had fair grounds and race tracks to provide pleasure and recreation. Pactolus Park was sold in March 1915, but by then Hawkins Park and Riverview Park offered convenient entertainment. By the time Hawkins Park closed in the fall of 1917, the county was involved in World War I.

Peace finally came. People were tired of war and worry and work. They wanted to relax, play and have fun, but there were few recreational areas available. Then in April 1921 the local papers announced that the city was dickering for old Pactolus Park.

In January 1922 the *Sun* reported that the Red Oak park commission had authorized the city attorney to start condemnation proceedings against the owner of the fair grounds property, "in the hope of having the grounds ready for improvement next summer. They want to fix up the old racetrack and put in a swimming pool".

Agreement was reached, and in November 1922 the park commission announced that the new park would be named "American Legion Park". The pool

was built in 1923; it opened in August under management of the Legion.

The pavilion was built in 1925 as the Uwanta Dance Pavilion; it opened on the Fourth of July. In April 1927 the Legion dance board bought the structure and operated it as the Rainbow Gardens Dance Pavilion.

In the late '20s the Legion sponsored a miniature golf course at the park.

In the spring of 1928 work was started to build a community athletic field at the north end of Legion Park. Early in 1930 the American Legion rebuilt the baseball diamond. Tennis courts were constructed at the south end of the park in 1933.

Many improvements were made in 1936 and '38 as WPA projects. Those included a filter plant for the swimming pool, a new bathhouse, work on the baseball field, a covered grandstand and a shelter house for the picnic area.

Fourteen acres off the east side of the park had been sold in 1909. In June 1939 the Legion purchased that tract and made it available for overflow crowds. In the summer of 1943 the Legion pavilion was used as a skating rink. The Legion leased the pavilion to C.W. Wheeler in 1948; the grand opening of the Stardom Ballroom and Roller Rink was 19 August. Wheeler remodeled the building so that it could be used in the winter. In 1955 the Legion erected a building on their property (now known as the Girls 4-H building) for post quarters and a dance hall. They sold the land and building to the County Fair Board in 1969.

There was a fire at the Stardom Dance Hall and Roller Rink in August 1963; the fire department burned the shell later that fall. It was not replaced.

By the summer of 1977 there were major problems with the swimming pool. It was closed for the '78 season. A new pool was constructed in 1979 and opened in 1980.

In September 1979 the *Express* said, "Red Oak City council accepted a bid for construction of a new fire station... The (building) is to be constructed in Legion



Park south of the football stadium..." The official ribbon cutting ceremony for the new fire station was held on Sunday 5 October 1980, as part of Fire Prevention Week.

In 1992 a building was erected in the park for the storage of Court of Honor flags.

#### *Anderson Park; Stanton -*

In the summer of 1915 a subscription was being circulated to raise money to purchase ground for a city park.

In December 1938 the *Review* said, "Stanton's city park will be improved this winter under provision of a newly approved WPA project...Work will include ...installing backstops for tennis and kittenball diamond."

The new Viking baseball park was dedicated 15 August 1940 with a baseball day, the first of a long history of such celebrations. Lights were installed and many events have been held there.

#### *Viking Lake State Park -*

It was the summer of 1939 when the first talk was heard about a lake between Villisca and Stanton. It wasn't until April 1951 that the Legislature voted funds to acquire land for the lake. In 1955, the land, approximately 1,000 acres, was purchased. Construction of the dam began in April 1956. Later that summer a contest was held to name the new lake; Viking Lake was the name selected.

In October 1957 the *Review* said, "The dedication of Viking Lake State Park took place on Sunday October 27...Governor Herschell C. Loveless accepted the park on behalf of the people of Iowa."

The 150-acre lake was stocked with fish but fishing was not allowed until 30 May 1959. There are facilities for swimming, boating, camping and hiking. Many species of wildlife inhabit the unimproved areas of the park.

#### *Pilot Grove Park -*

In May 1967 the Montgomery County Conservation Commission purchased twenty acres in Pilot Grove Township, six miles east of Elliott. Pilot Grove Park was opened in 1968, and is open from April to the middle of October each season. The tract includes a small lake for fishing, and has a wooded camping area, a covered picnic shelter, recreational facilities and rest rooms. A bridge dating from 1876 was placed across the lake, but is not open to automobile traffic.

#### *Hacklebarney Woods Park -*

In February 1977 it was announced that "Hacklebarney Woods" had been selected as the name for the new county park which would be located on US 34 in Washington Township. The hilly portion of that area has been called Hacklebarney since the early days. The heavily wooded 230 acres is the largest solid tract of timber remaining from over 5,000 acres that originally covered the Hacklebarney hills.

In 1978 a federal grant of \$26,265 was received for development of the area. The park includes picnic and playground areas, fishing access, nature and hiking trails and a scenic overlook.





## FRATERNAL ORDERS AND SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS



Fraternal societies are descended from the craft guilds of the Middle Ages. Common interests bring the membership together. In general, the groups serve benevolent purposes and offer mutual aid to their members, both of which can take different forms.

In one respect they are all alike: they provide a social service through good-fellowship. From before 1880 until after World War I secret orders were the chief, and sometimes only, social outlet for large numbers of people. The societies also offered cultural opportunities. In addition to the regular meetings the organizations sponsored picnics, dances, lectures, theatrical productions, and other festivities. And they enjoyed the colorful rites and regalia of the orders. Beginning with the Valley Lodge Knights of Honor in 1878 a very large number of fraternal benefit lodges were organized in the county. In 1894 a Red Oak paper noted that there were 18 secret societies in town. Most of them were of short duration, but there were a few which affected the lives of many people.

Newspaper accounts seldom tell when a chapter was disbanded so the following accounts often omit those dates. Today there are few active lodges in the county. The Masons continue in Red Oak, Elliott and Stanton. In Red Oak the Elks, Eagles and Faith Rebekahs still remain.

### *Masons -*

Freemasonry was the earliest order to reach the United States. The basic principles of the society are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. The Masonic organizations do much charitable work. Perhaps the most notable endeavor of the local lodges was the laying of the cornerstone for the courthouse in 1890.

The Masons haven't held as many public functions as some of the other organizations, but they have enjoyed many picnics, dinners and dances within the order. In 1919 the first annual county picnic was held at Grant. The program included music, speaking, a tug-of-war and a baseball game.

*Red Oak* - Red Oak Lodge No. 162, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons, the first lodge in the county, was organized 16 November 1861. Montgomery Chapter No. 57, Royal Arch Masons, was instituted 1 July 1870. Bruce Commandery No. 34, Knights Templar, was organized 17 April 1878. For a number of years the group sponsored a very successful band. In August 1895 the Commandery attended a Boston conclave. A special train of four Pullman sleepers and a baggage car conveyed the party.

Reed Lodge, a black group, was formed in 1878. They were still active in 1886 with 15 members.

From 1892 through 1896 there were newspaper accounts of Cryptic Masons. Hiram Council No. 30 was organized by 1913. In September 1949 Hiram Council No. 30, Royal and Select Masters, was formed. The Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America was active in Red Oak but it has been difficult to pin down dates. There was a Shrine club organized about 1892, and again in August 1920, when over 100 men were initiated into the order at a conclave in Red Oak. There were more than 800 visitors in town for the event. The Shriners support 22 Shrine hospitals for crippled children. They wear red fezes and have fun.

About the first of 1919 the Red Oak Masons joined the Nishna Masonic circle.

Oak Chapter No. 95, Order of the Eastern Star, was instituted in March 1891. The group is still active.



**Red Oak's Hotel Johnson.** The hotel was a gathering place for organizations, private parties and festive occasions. Photo: MCHS archives.

*Villisca* - Montgomery Lodge No. 270, A.F. & A.M., was organized 5 November 1869. Around 1920 there was mention of *Villisca* Mystic Shriners, but it is uncertain if there was a local chapter, or just members. There were members of the White Shrine of Jerusalem in town, who went to Shenandoah for meetings. Montgomery Lodge celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1969. In May 1987, the group disbanded and joined the Nodaway lodge.

*Villisca* Chapter No. 80, Order of the Eastern Star, was formed about 1890. After the *Villisca* temple was disbanded, the Star members met at the Stanton Lodge hall from December 1987 through February 1995. In March '95 the group affiliated with the Corning Eastern Star.

*Grant* - Centennial Lodge No. 373, A.F. & A.M., was organized in 1876. The lodge hall was burned twice in the early years. In the fall of 1901 a new building



was erected; when the group disbanded in 1974 they gave their lodge building to the American Legion and Auxiliary.

*Elliott* - Summit Lodge No. 493 A.F. & A.M. received a charter 5 June 1888. A news item of 1936 reported that the local lodge had entertained the Griswold Masons at a pinochle party. In 1975 Walter Buffon was appointed to serve as Grand Tiler of the Grand Lodge of Iowa.

Elliott Chapter No. 458, Order of the Eastern Star received a charter 23 October 1913.

*Stanton* - A fraternity of Masons was organized in Stanton in 1922. About a year later, Tarkio Lodge No. 645 A.F. & A.M. was instituted 12 July 1923.

#### *Odd Fellows* -

In England, in 1819, a group of men banded together for the declared purpose of uniting in brotherhood and of rendering assistance to every brother in need. Others considered them visionary at best, and referred to them as "those odd fellows". The group accepted the term and became the "Independent Order of Odd Fellows".

In August 1921 members of the IOOF and Rebekah lodges of Montgomery County held a picnic in Mill Grove Park. Villisca defeated Red Oak in the baseball game. There was horseshoe pitching. The Tuttle airplane from Red Oak flew over, and dropped a parachutist.

*Red Oak* - Red Oak City Lodge No. 176 was organized 24 August 1869. Valley Encampment Patriarchs No. 76 was instituted 20 October 1875. On 12 December 1878 Montgomery Lodge No. 387 was instituted. The Red Oak and Montgomery lodges were consolidated 24 July 1883 and called Union Lodge No. 176. Red Oak Canton NB 14 Patriarch Militant, Uniform degree, was organized March 1887.

The Red Oak lodges gave many dinners and festivals to support their benevolence programs. The Red Oak order disbanded in 1995.

Daughters of Rebekah Lodge No. 47 was organized about 1870. Five years later they surrendered their charter. Faith Rebekah Lodge No. 174 was organized 19 December 1892. Again a Rebekah Lodge was organized about May 1915. For a number of years Faith Rebekahs have sponsored an annual craft show in Red Oak; it is a large event, attracting many dealers.

*Faith Rebekah Lodge* - by Margaret Nelson, Red Oak:

*First and foremost was the true fellowship for each other and their families, there were picnics, ball games and dances. Round and square dances were held every week with the local Anna Thomas orchestra and one from Villisca playing. It was a proud day when a maple floor was laid making a better floor for dancing.*

*Villisca* - The first IOOF lodge was organized in October 1871. Villisca Encampment No. 148 was organized about the first of May 1892. In January or February 1895 a Canton Uniform Degree IOOF was established. On 26 February 1963 Villisca Lodge No. 219 consolidated with the Red Oak Union Lodge.

Rebekah Centennial Lodge No. 58 was instituted in May 1889. It was disbanded sometime prior to June 1913 when another lodge was organized. In January 1944 IOOF and Rebekah lodges opened a youth center in their hall.

*Elliott* - Unity Lodge No. 456 was chartered 19 October 1882. In 1896 the lodge bought land and erected a two-story building. Their lodge hall was on the second floor and the ground floor was used as an opera house. The property was sold in December 1898, but the IOOF continued to meet on the second floor. Around the turn of the century the lodge had a band. On 9 April 1929 Unity Lodge consolidated with Union Lodge No. 176 of Red Oak.

Hope Lodge, Daughters of Rebekah was instituted in February 1896. Another lodge was instituted in May 1915; it was still active in 1928.

*Ancient Order of United Workmen -*

The object of the order was the moral, intellectual and social improvement of its members, the promotion of fraternity and philanthropy and the protection of each member's family against want and suffering. In 1905 the Southwestern Iowa Association held a picnic at Villisca. The Shenandoah band came, there was a balloon ascension, and other festivities.

*Villisca -* Stillians Lodge No. 196 was organized in June 1879. The lodge was reorganized in June 1884, and seems to have been called Loyal Lodge No. 176 after that. It lasted a long time.

Roseville Lodge Degree of Honor of the AOUW, was organized in October 1898. It was still active in 1965.

*Red Oak -* Nichols Lodge No. 224 was organized by June 1881. Upchurch Lodge No. 283 was instituted in January 1888. It was still active in December 1907.

*Knights of Pythias -*

The name of the lodge was taken from the tale of Damon and Pythias, friends who were willing to die for each other. The order's foundation principles are Friendship, Charity and Benevolence. It provides sickness and death benefits to its members, as well as homes for the aged and infirm.

*Red Oak -* Laramie Lodge No. 152, K of P, was instituted in January 1885. Uniform Rank No. 24, K of P, was instituted in December 1886. In August 1896, Section No. 3264 of the Endowment Rank K of P was organized. A Dramatic Order Knights of Khorasson temple was organized in March 1899.

No date was found for the disbanding of any of those groups, but in the summer of 1956 a new Knights of Pythias lodge was organized.

Sappho Temple, Rathbone Sisters, was constituted in November 1894. Both the Knights and the Sisters gave many public entertainments.

*Villisca -* Anniversary Lodge, K of P, was instituted in February 1885. In July 1887, Division 30, Uniform Rank, K of P, was formed. The Uniform Rank surrendered its charter in March 1901.

On Valentine Eve, 1895, the Villisca Knights were meeting in their hall when there was a knock at the door. The *Review* said, "It was a ghostly spectacle that met the astonished gaze of the knights. Twenty-two figures draped in white silently glided in and began slowly marching around the hall; but when the knights pulled in their eyes, which were hanging out on their cheeks, they saw this visitation was a company of valentines, for each figure carried a big card inscribed, 'I'm your Valentine'. In that uniform disguise, very few of the ladies were recognized and many the funny mistakes made in choosing a valentine."

The Knights of Pythias disbanded in January 1913. A Villisca lodge reorganized in June 1916.

Anniversary Temple No. 33 Lodge of Pythian Sisters organized in February 1893. They had disbanded before 1913 but were reorganized by November 1926.

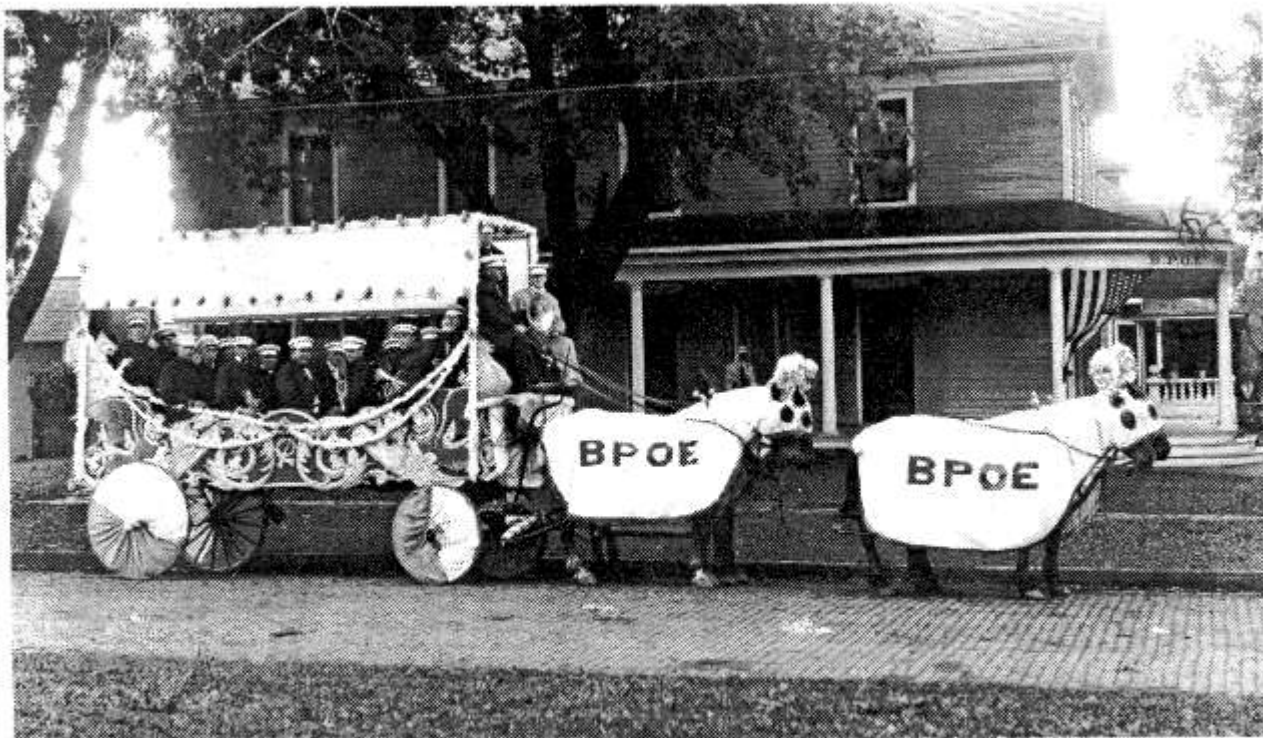
*Stanton -* A Knights of Pythias lodge was instituted at Stanton in February 1894. They were still active in 1914.

*Elliott -* The Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 204 was instituted 1 December 1904. After the second annual side hunt in January 1907, the lodge sold 262 rabbits in Omaha. The group last reported to the state grand lodge in July 1926.

*Modern Woodmen of America -*

The Modern Woodmen of America was an insurance order. It was popular, widespread and long-lived. At the turn of the century a district group of local lodges was known as the Southwestern Log Rolling Association.

The Royal Neighbors of America was formed in 1889 as a reorganization of the MWA Ladies Auxiliary. In 1929 the Royal Neighbors declared independence from the Modern Woodmen.



Horses dressed in Elks clothing for a grand parade. Photo: Express Reflections

*Red Oak* - Red Oak Camp of Modern Woodmen No. 338 was instituted in April 1887.

Union Camp No. 671, Royal Neighbors of America, was chartered in April 1897. They were still active in 1938.

In March 1909 the Royal Neighbors advertised a social featuring a "Bloomer Drill". The *Express* commented, "The Modern Woodmen who had wives in the drill felt considerably relieved when the ladies entered the room with their dresses adorned with purple and white paper flowers."

*Villisca* - A Camp of Modern Woodmen was organized 21 September 1892. In May 1903 the camp had 175 members. The group was still active in 1941.

Golden Rod Camp, Royal Neighbors of America, was organized in December 1896. They were quite active in Villisca social life. A reorganization of the Royal Neighbors was effected in October 1923. RNA No. 485 was still active in 1959.

*Stanton* - Cedar Camp of the Modern Woodmen was instituted in Stanton in December 1892. It was still active in 1931.

Stanton Royal Neighbors organized in February 1904. In February 1909 the group consolidated with Union Camp 671 of Red Oak.

*Elliott* - Woodmen records tell us that Live Oak Camp 1917, MWA, was chartered on 27 February 1893. The Camp was dissolved on 12 May 1958. Its eleven members were transferred to a Council Bluffs Camp.

A Royal Neighbor Camp was formed before 1905; it was still active in 1935.

*Biddick* - Willow Dale Camp of Modern Woodmen was organized at Biddick in August 1896. They met over the blacksmith shop until 1906 when a new building was erected as a lodge hall. The structure was used as a community center and dance hall until World War II.



A lodge of Royal Neighbors was organized at Biddick in April 1903. In July 1905 the group consolidated with the Elliott camp.

*Grant* - A Modern Woodmen camp was organized at Grant in June 1900. It was not listed in county camps in 1914.

Grant had a Royal Neighbor camp but dates are not available.

*Morton Mills* - Morton Mills camp was organized about 1900. In 1901 they purchased the band hall. It was used until 1917; after it was sold the camp met in the schoolhouse.

*Coburg* - The Coburg MWA camp was organized in January 1901. The lodge hall was above McGreer's store. The group was not listed in 1914.

*Hawthorne* - The camp was organized before February 1901. In 1905 the building containing the lodge hall was moved to McPherson. The structure was sold in April 1907.

*Climax* - The camp was organized before February 1901. They built a two-story structure. The camp met on the second floor; there was a store in the first floor. There was a MWA baseball team in 1911.

*Stennett* - A Camp of Modern Woodmen was organized in February 1901. They met over the store. The group was not listed in 1914.

*Wales* - No date was found for the organizing of the Woodmen Camp at Wales. In the fall of 1906 a building was constructed for a lodge hall. In December 1912, the Woodmen voted to disband. Some members joined other camps of the order. At that time the Brotherhood of Yeomen of America was meeting in the hall; they were still there in 1915. The hall was used as a community center and dance hall until it was sold and moved in 1936.

*Knights of the Maccabees* -

The Maccabees were an insurance order; their lodges were called tents or hives.

*Red Oak* - Nishnabotna Tent No. 15, Knights of the Maccabees was organized in September 1892. In September 1903 Red Oak Division Uniformed Rank Knights of the Maccabees was organized. A local paper said, "Fatigue uniforms and swords have been ordered." In February 1913 the order of the Modern Maccabees was reorganized.

There was an organization of the Ladies of the Maccabees but dates are not available.

*Grant* - Maccabee Tent No. 1333 was organized in 1896. They were still active in 1912.

The ladies' Maccabee lodge was organized before 1906.

*Villisca* - A tent of Knights of the Maccabees was instituted in June 1897. It must have disbanded, as another Maccabee lodge was established in Villisca in March 1912.

*Elliott* - The Maccabees organized at Elliott in March 1912.

*Woodmen of the World* -

The Woodmen of the World was a secret insurance order. It was founded about 1890 with headquarters in Omaha. One of the practices of the order was to place monuments at the graves of deceased brothers.

*Red Oak* - Red Oak Camp No. 75, W.O.W. was organized in October 1895. The camp was active in 1918.

No date is available for the organization of Harmony Grove, No. 171, Woodmen Circle; it was before January 1913. They were still active in 1940, when the district convention was held in Red Oak.

*Sciola* - Camp No. 248, W.O.W. was organized in Sciola in February 1899.

*Villisca* - W.O.W. had a camp in Villisca at an early date, but it was dissolved. Another camp, No. 479, was organized 30 October 1914. It didn't last, either, and in August 1919, they tried again.

*Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks-Red Oak* - There has been only one Elks lodge in the county, and that was a near thing. In 1913 the rules of the order limited new chapters to towns which had a population of over 5,000. A special census was taken in Red Oak, but by the time it was finished, the requirement had been changed, restricting lodges to cities of over 10,000. Since Red Oak had started the necessary procedures they were allowed to continue and Chapter 1304 was chartered 28 May 1913.

The Elks are active in community affairs, including charity work. In 1921 an *Express* heading said, "Saint Nicholas Will Drive a String of Elks to Red Oak." The Christmas tree in the park became an annual event for the kids.

The BPO Does, Drove No. 22, was organized 11 April 1931, with 39 charter members. In 1953 the local Does hosted a district meeting. The group surrendered its charter in April 1965.

*Fraternal Order of Eagles* -

*Red Oak* - The Red Oak Eagle Aerie was instituted 19 October 1947. In '48 they sponsored the "Eagle's Nest" youth center. They have done much for the benefit and encouragement of young people.

The Eagle's Auxiliary was constituted 11 June 1950.

*Service Clubs* -

By the turn of the century the fraternal orders had passed the peak of their influence. The downward trend was first noticeable in fraternal benefit organizations; many of them had disbanded, and membership in others was declining. The principles of brotherhood no longer held the absorbing interest of former years.

Then a new type of society was introduced, which became known as a service club. Such groups are usually composed of business and professional men or women. They promote fellowship among the members and are devoted to the principle of volunteer community service.

The idea of the service club originated in the United States, but has spread to many other countries. Rotary, the first such club, was formed in Chicago in 1905. Other clubs followed in rapid succession, and attracted large memberships.

Each year, service clubs carry out thousands of local community projects, ranging in complexity from sponsoring bazaars to building hospitals and summer camps for underprivileged children.

The last thirty years have seen a sharp decline in membership of such community groups. There are fears that America's stock of civic involvement is disappearing.

*Rotary* -

The goal of Rotary is international peace and understanding with fellowship as the cornerstone. The name was derived from the plan of rotating meetings among offices of the members. It is a patriotic and service organization. Both men and women are members.

*Red Oak* - Red Oak Chapter of Rotary International was organized 9 December 1919. In 1926 Rotary visited rural areas of the county. In August they went to Sciola. After a picnic dinner a ball game was played. The reporter said, "The ball was a large soft cotton ball covered with soft leather, and the diamond was about half the regulation size." Sciola won.

In September 1963 Rotary dedicated its new outdoor amphitheater in Chautauqua park.

Women are now accepted as members of Rotary but in an earlier day they were not. At least by 1930 the wives of Rotary members were called Rotary Anns. They had no formal status, but attended guest days and other special events of Rotary.

### *Kiwanis -*

Kiwanis Club of Red Oak is a part of an international organization, formed in 1915, to render civic and social service to their communities. Their motto is "We Build". The Red Oak club was organized in 1974; it has sponsored many activities in support of youth, including its annual fund raising for the tennis program, assisting Nishna Productions and establishing the playground for Sunshine 'n Rainbows day care center.

### *Lions -*

Lions International promotes high ethical standards and the encouragement of efficiency in business and professions. Their motto is Liberty, Intelligence, Our Nation's Safety.

The group has specialized in eye care. They started the tradition of white canes for the blind and introduced the use of seeing eye dogs. There is a school in Michigan where the dogs are trained. The Lions also sponsor ear research.

*Red Oak* - The Lions Club was organized 27 September 1938. Beginning in 1950 the Lions sponsored an annual marble tournament for the kids of Red Oak. It continued for several years.

*Villisca* - Villisca Lions received a charter in October 1946. The club was active at least through 1951. Then in March 1987 another club was organized.

*Elliott* - The Elliott Lions Club was active in 1983.

*Stanton* - The Stanton Lions received their charter in January 1987.

### *Optimists -*

Purposes include the expansion of optimism as a philosophy of life, and to aid and encourage the development of youth.

*Red Oak* - The Red Oak Optimist Club calls itself the "Friend of Youth". They were active by 1971. The group holds annual sledding parties for people of all ages; hot dogs and hot chocolate are served. The club supports a Lifeline in Red Oak.

*Villisca* - The Optimist Club has surrendered its charter, but the former members meet as a club.



## WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women have found friendship and fun in the many clubs and organizations to which they have belonged. While the groups have differed in purpose and style, they have the common thread of uniting women doing activities they really enjoy.

### *Sororities -*

Some groups have been organized as were the men's lodges with part of the formal ritual or organization known only to members. Two of these active today are the P.E.O. and Beta Sigma Phi.

P.E.O. is an international women's organization with an interest in

providing increased opportunities for higher education for women. It was organized as a college sorority on the campus of Iowa Wesleyan College, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa in 1869. The organization supports several educational funds and Cottey Junior College in Nevada, Missouri.

A society was organized in Red Oak the first of March 1896. It is uncertain how long it was active, but Chapter HB was chartered on 28 January 1930.

Villisca Chapter CH, P.E.O. was organized 8 March 1902 and has been active continually since that time. The Chapter supports the usual projects.



Beta Sigma Phi is also an international benevolent women's organization and was founded in 1931. The first Red Oak chapter, Zeta Kappa was organized in 1955. The second, Xi Gamma was started in 1965 and the third, Preceptor Upsilon began in 1972.

#### *Service, Educational, Professional Clubs-*

Many women's groups were formally organized with specific objectives in mind. The earliest clubs were temperance associations. Other groups such as literary societies were formed and then discontinued as times and interests changed. Some of the most enduring organizations are active today.

Formed in 1917, Altrusa International is a service organization of executive and professional women. The name is a derivation of "altruism". The Red Oak club was chartered 25 April 1925. The local group has contributed to hospital projects and other civic improvements. In 1959 Altrusa started a long-term plan to beautify the city square park.

The American Association of University Women was begun in 1881 by women college alumnae. In October 1922 the *Review* reported a Montgomery County branch of the AAUW was formed in Red Oak "several months ago". The present group was organized in 1938. Its objectives have included "lifelong learning" for members, activities that promote education of women, support of higher education institutions for women and in recent years efforts devoted to a wide variety of programs involving issues of gender equity.

The Book and Study Club in Red Oak began in the 1920s and for 70 years has held regular meetings to review the latest books and share enthusiasm for literature.

The Business and Professional Women were organized nationally in 1919; the Red Oak club was authorized 10 September

1947. The purpose of the club is to elevate the standards of women in Business and the Professions and to extend opportunities to women through education. BPW has sponsored many worthwhile community efforts that include purchase of hospital equipment, student scholarships, donations to Camp Sunnyside and the community Service League. Each year they have honored employers or business associates at an annual "Employer-Employee" night.

Delta Kappa Gamma Society was founded in 1929 in Austin, Texas to extend aid to women teachers and students by funding scholarships, and developing loyalty and high ideals in the teaching profession. Between the years 1955 and 1957 ten local teachers became members of the state organization. In April 1959 these and others joined to become charter members of the local chapter named "Alpha Theta". The chapter holds regular meetings throughout the year and its membership includes educators from Stanton, Villisca and Red Oak.

Entre Nous Club, Stanton, was organized in May 1932 with 16 charter members. The purpose of the club initially was to study "French, drama and pictures". Over the years the subjects of study varied and included current issues, arts and crafts, quilting, Indian cultures, and many travel programs. The club sponsored Stanton's long running Santa Lucia celebration each year. The Club historian noted in 1989, "We have been busy these 56 years, learning, working, helping, with lots of fellowship and fun". It remains associated with the General Federation of Women's clubs.

Elliott's Research club was founded 12 February 1910 and became federated in 1913. It was instrumental in starting Elliott's first library in 1919 and continues to support that project. The club has been involved in community improvements while undertaking social activities for members. The Research Club

and Stanton's Entre Nous are the only two county groups still part of the General Federation of Women's clubs that once connected dozens of Montgomery county clubs with the national organization.

Friendly Study Club of Stanton was organized in the fall of 1957. The purpose of the club was to promote friendship and understanding; the club motto was "In learning to live, we live to learn". They organized summer reading at the Stanton library, and started the first home room mothers program for elementary schools. The club has sponsored students at music camp, have planted trees, given to the Industrial Foundation, supported Bike-a-thons and Santa Lucia. Federation membership has been dropped.

The Red Oak Monday Club is the oldest Red Oak women's club in existence today. It was founded in Red Oak on 21 October 1895 and became incorporated and federated 10 January 1896. It has provided opportunities for study, self improvement and for community service. This club organized the first committee for a public library, worked for "village improvements" such as paved streets and a clock in the court house. It has supported the local schools and improved education. The women maintained interest in public affairs, supported a new Department of Education in the 1920s and lobbied in Iowa for better highways. Such improvements as public rest rooms, the fountain in the Square, and improvements in the cemetery were its projects. Special departments have included art, music, home, garden, literature, history and physical culture. In 1957 the club was given its present home, the Ada B. Hysham house which remains the club headquarters today.

Red Oak Federated Women's Club was begun in 1932 as a junior club but after becoming a senior club has remained independent of the Monday Club. It has discontinued Federation membership.

20th Century Club, Stanton, was started 2 February 1924 with six study departments: home, economics, music, garden, drama and health. Its community projects have included a piano given to the high school, a traveling library, Christmas and care packages, money for a shelter house in Anderson Park and scholarships to high school seniors.

Red Oak's Mother's club was organized 6 March 1935 and dropped the Federation connection in 1938. The club meets monthly for social and learning experiences. It has given support to the local library, and held "spook, hobo, hippie, pajama and galloping tea parties".

The Villisca Reading Circle was formed 11 November 1911. At their first meeting, 7 December 1911, the Passion Play was read.

In June 1912 the group was reorganized as the Progress Club, with 40 members, and was federated. The name may have been selected as a continuation of a Progress Club which had been active in the 1890s; it was a chautauqua club. By 1913 the new group had an Art and Music department; other divisions have included Domestic Science, Book Forum, Literary Club, Arts and Crafts, and Garden Club. Over the years departments have been combined or dropped, and now there are two: Domestic Arts and Literary Book Club. Federation was discontinued in 1984.

An account of women's service clubs in the county would be incomplete without mention of one no longer active.

The Women's Booster Club of Grant was started in July 1916. In 1917 it was reorganized as the Homemakers Club, and joined the Federated Clubs. Local projects included Chautauqua programs and lecture courses, sponsoring cooking schools and community Christmas trees, and planting iris at the cemetery. In November 1939, 19 members had a "field day"; they picked 19 bushels of corn for the Iowa Federated Women's Club fund.

The Federated clubs of Montgomery county placed an historical marker at the site of Frankfort, the first county seat. When the memorial was dedicated 24 November 1939, Ruth Curry, member of the Homemakers, was chairman of the county group. Members also held federated offices on the district and state level.

#### Social Clubs -

Every community in the county has had a number of women's social clubs. The groups may have been organized for a specific purpose, such as sewing, cards, quilting, gardening, or other interests, but all of them have provided friendship and social reinforcement. There was one particular type, known as a neighborhood club, which flourished in rural areas. All of the groups were "worthwhile" but a club in Larson District No. 1, Scott Township, was named the Worthwhile Club.

In the 1920s the State Extension service offered lessons on Homemaking to the rural women of the county. Women of No. 1 district gathered for the lessons, and the group evolved into the Worthwhile Club. As part of their service to the community, the club remembered each person who moved away and gave each bride or groom a gift; there was a gift for new babies and plants for anyone in the hospital. Their activities were probably typical of all such groups, as was the comment made by member Esther Larson in 1976, "but most of all we just enjoy visiting with all our neighbors".

The Sunshine Garden Club of Grant held a flower show in 1949, and repeated the event annually for a number of years. Its 50th anniversary will be in 1996.

#### Women's Church Related Groups -

Virtually every church in the county has a women's group that is vital to its operation. Thousands of church women have done good works and had good times from the first days of the county's founding.

Some of these experiences might be summed up in remarks made by Betty Wenstrand at Women's History Day, March 1993, about the Presbyterian women:

*You ask, what have Presbyterian Women contributed to the history of our Red Oak Church? Let's face the facts: Blood, sweat and tears; money, music, mission sewing, concern, companionship, kids, grandkids, community service, volunteer work, Sunday School teachers, flowers and janitorial work. Compare it with the marriage vows, "in sickness and health, 'til death do they part" and they keep on working!*

The First Baptist Women's Fellowship in Red Oak is part of a congregation that was organized 31 August 1856, a year before the city of Red Oak was platted. Its Ladies Home Mission Circle was organized 14 February 1877. These church women are typical of the many other groups that have served chicken noodle suppers and held bazaars to support good works. They have participated in foreign mission projects, cut quilt blocks, have taken care of their own church needs, and have maintained that special sense of fun while doing it. A long time member of First Baptist Church, Blanche Draper Brayton, wrote a letter to the congregation in 1970, on the occasion of the 114th anniversary of the church, relating some of her memories:

*We rode to church and Sunday School in the horse drawn surrey with the fringe on top. We never missed a service. As a young woman, I worked in the Ladies Aid. I remember once when we were having a church supper to honor a new minister, we younger people were waiting on the tables. One of the older ladies who thought she was the only one who could bake a good cake brought her cake in and said that we were to save it until the new minister and his family came in. She put it on the shelf and went out and sat down. Bertha Sisson, whom few will remember, said, "How do we know her cake is so good? Let's try it." When Mrs. L. came after her cake and told us that the minister was there-- Well we just couldn't imagine who made the mistake of cutting the cake and leaving none. I will say that the cake was super; it was a burnt sugar cake and I can taste it yet."*





Overseas during World War I. A cartoon from Alvin A. Johnson's collection of items from 168th Regiment, 42nd (Rainbow Division). MCHS archives.

#### MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

During a war, the fighting men forge strong bonds of trust and brotherhood. After the conflict is over they turn to those brothers-in-arms for friendship and understanding. The social connections lead to formal organizations, designed to remember the fallen comrades and to further the interests of the members.

##### *Blackhawk War -*

There were very few veterans of the war of 1832 in the county. In July 1880 they joined the Mexican War soldiers in a reunion at Red Oak.

##### *Mexican War -*

The 1846 soldiers met in Red Oak in 1880. Early in January 1884 local veterans attended a reunion in Des Moines.

##### *Grand Army of the Republic -*

The first post of the G.A.R. was established in 1866. Civil War veterans

of the Union Army were eligible to join. The movement spread rapidly, and for many years was a strong political force in the nation.

*Red Oak* - Post No. 117, G.A.R. was organized 3 August 1867, but in a few years it gave up its charter. Lyons Post No. 9 was formed in May 1878; it lasted about six months.

In May 1880 the Red Oak veterans were hosts at a reunion of old soldiers. Nearly every town for miles around was represented. Perhaps the success of that affair inspired the Red Oak veterans; another post was formed 19 September 1881. The name selected has been long forgotten; as the members entered the street after the meeting, they heard the news of President Garfield's death. They immediately returned to the club room and changed the name to Garfield. Post No. 57 was successful. The unit entertained at many reunions called "campfires".

In November 1887 a Sons of Veterans camp was formed.

Garfield Women's Relief Corp No. 264 was organized 4 January 1893. They gave many festivals and socials to raise money for community service. The Ida McKinley Circle G.A.R. was organized 11 January 1908. A Circle was still active in 1948.

In the 1920s there was an organization of Daughters of the G.A.R.

*Villisca* - Cutt's Post No. 271 G.A.R. was mustered 28 January 1884. A few months later the name was changed to William Lundy Post. After a few years interest declined, and the charter was surrendered. Many records were lost in a fire.

In August 1900 it was decided to have the old charter renewed and new members were added. In March 1909 a sub-committee was formed, called the "Villisca Union Veterans Society", the object of which was to hold a soldiers' encampment in Villisca annually for five years. The post disbanded in 1938.

Robert Lincoln Camp Sons of Veterans was instituted in March 1886. The group formed a martial band. Robert Lincoln Camp No. 71 was reorganized 16 May 1888.

William Lundy Women's Relief Corp No. 107 was organized in April 1886. John A. Logan Circle No. 36 was organized in April 1901. In October 1910 the ladies were called G.A.R. Camp No. 3.

*Elliott* - The G.A.R. Post at Elliott was organized 2 July 1884. In August 1906 the post entertained the Cass County Veterans Association annual reunion. The *Graphic* was printed daily and distributed free to all visitors. Extra trains ran from Red Oak.

The Women's Relief Corp at Elliott was organized in November 1890.

*Grant* - Dick Rouet Post No. 472 G.A.R. at Milford/Grant was organized 8 February 1890. That fall they purchased a small building and erected an addition to it. In 1897 the post acquired a Civil War cannon. It was fired at local events, and

was also taken to veteran's celebrations in many surrounding towns. The Post entertained the Cass County Veterans Association several times; in 1905, Gov. Cummins was the principle speaker.

By 1921 there were only three members of the Post left, so they disbanded, and deeded their hall to the Sons of Veterans. A Sons of Veterans lodge was organized in March 1886. Larey-Cooper Camp No. 157 Sons of Veterans was organized November 1920.

Grant Circle No. 7 Ladies of the G.A.R. was organized 19 September 1890. The Circle worked for community betterment projects. The group was still active in 1938.

#### *Spanish-American War -*

By 1902 there was an Iowa Society of Spanish-American War Veterans. Before 1918 the United Spanish-American War Veterans was formed. Starting in 1921, the southwestern Iowa Camps met for an annual picnic and reunion. The group met at Mill Grove park at Tenville in 1932 when 150 veterans heard Gov. Dan W. Turner speak.

*Villisca* - In November 1902 the Rodney K. Clark Post No. 6, Iowa Society, Army of the Philippines was organized at Villisca. In October 1924 Villisca veterans joined the United group with the organization of the Marcellus Miller Camp. The Ladies Militia Auxiliary of Company "B" was organized in Villisca in 1898. In 1899 the Company "B" Guards was formed; it consisted of 36 young ladies. Organization of the ladies auxiliary of the United Spanish-American War Veterans was effected in November 1924.

*Red Oak* - Camp Thomas J. Zuber No. 24, United Spanish-American War Veterans was mustered 14 November 1918. The local group was still meeting in 1938.

#### *World War I -*

No date is available for the organization of Montgomery County Barracks No. 1406. It was reorganized in

February 1961. The members seem to have been from Villisca and Stanton. Red Oak's Company "M" held an annual reunion, so perhaps they were not interested in a county-wide organization.

#### *American Legion -*

The American Legion was established 15 March 1919. The number of local posts increased rapidly. The order has welcomed the returning veterans from each succeeding war. In 1921 the first Poppy Day was held in the county. That activity has raised much money. A Montgomery County Legion chapter was formed in March 1925. It encouraged cooperation between the posts.

*Red Oak -* American Legion Lorraine Post No. 67 was chartered 23 June 1919. During the years since then the organization has compiled an impressive record of community service.

The post fielded a baseball team in 1920, and continued an active interest in the sport.

"Forty and Eight" was said to be the fun organization of the American Legion. A club was initiated in November 1921. Members came from several other towns.

At least by 1922 the Legion was operating the Rainbow Gardens Ballroom in the armory. In April 1927 the Legion dance board purchased the Uwanta Dance Pavilion in Legion Park, and renamed it the Rainbow Gardens Pavilion.

Lorraine Post is best known for its Fourth of July celebrations. The Legion sponsored the event in 1923 with ball games, auto races, a dance and fireworks. In 1927 the post gave a dime dance in their new pavilion on the Fourth and had fireworks. In 1928 the Legion, assisted by the Chamber of commerce and other groups, sponsored an Independence Day celebration, "the first in several years". The post gave away a new car, the fifth one which they had given. The first four were not given on the Fourth. In 1929 the Legion carried out the Fourth festivities by themselves and gave away a car, establishing a tradition which

continued for many years. It is uncertain if a car was given in 1958 when the celebration was postponed until Labor Day because of floods on the Fourth. There was no car in 1959 or after that. The post sponsored the Fourth celebration for the last time in 1965.

In June 1939 Lorraine Post purchased fourteen acres of land between Legion Park and Fourth Street. In 1955 they erected the building known today as the Girls' 4-H building. The Legion sold the building and the land to the Montgomery County Agricultural Society in April 1969.

After the sale the Post purchased a building in the 200 Block of Coolbaugh Street. There is a restaurant in the front part of the structure, and the Post club room is in the rear area.

American Legion Lorraine Unit No. 67 Auxiliary was organized October 1921. The unit supports a number of civic projects including Poppy Day and services for veteran hospitals.

Early in World War II the Victory Club was a local organization of wives, mothers and sisters of men in the service. In September 1942, the Club became an official member of the United Service Women of Iowa.

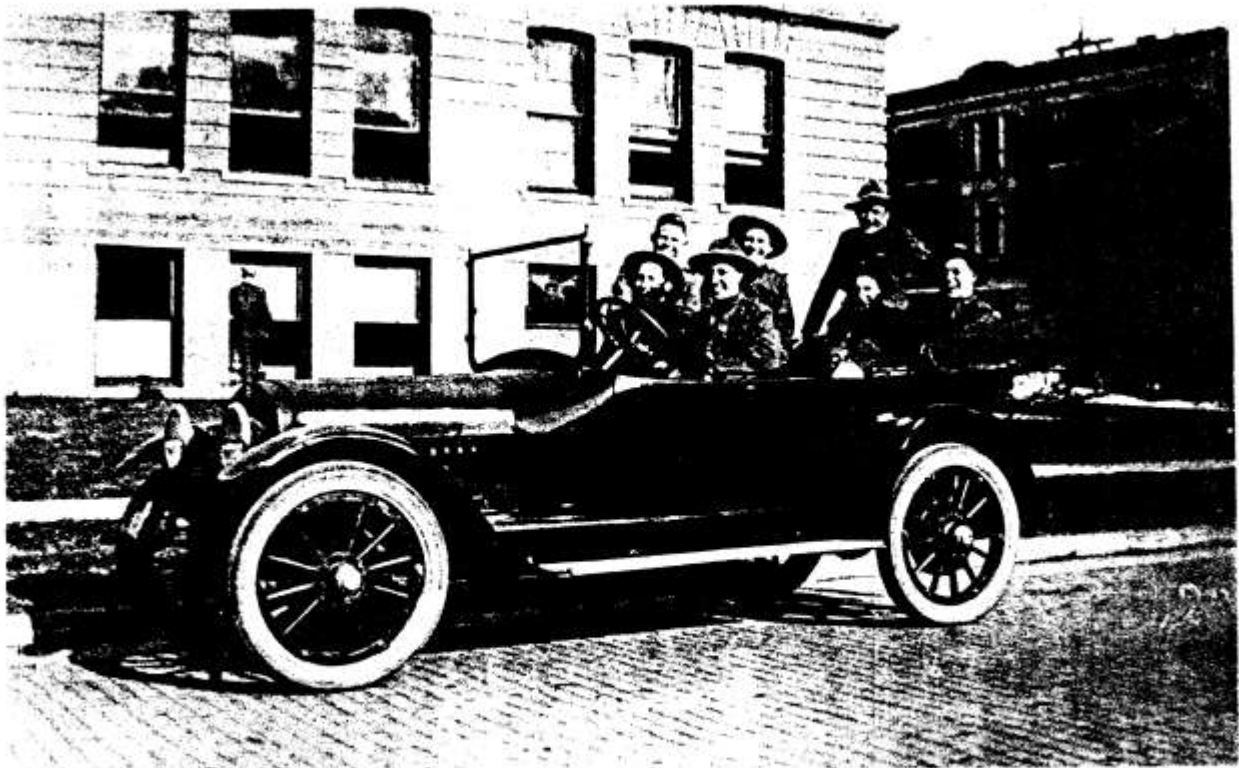
*Villisca -* Ker-A-Vor Post No. 251 American Legion received its charter in October 1919. The name means "a place to rest" and was named for a camp in France. By 1925 the group was dormant, but by June 1926, the unit was active again.

In the 1920s and early '30s the Post took a lively interest in the promotion of aviation. In August 1929 the Legion painted VILLISCA in letters fourteen feet high on the roof of the high school building as an aid to aviators.

In May 1947 the Legion purchased the Villisca Country Club at a Sheriff's sale; they still own it.

Probably the Post's most notable achievement has been its supper to honor former prisoners of war. It has been held annually on 7 December since 1948. The traditional menu is stew and black bread.





1917-Seven young Red Oak men graduated in uniform, having enlisted for military service.  
Express Reflections.

Ker-A-Vor Post No. 251 American Legion Auxiliary was organized in June 1921. The group has been active in veterans' welfare as well as local concerns.

*Company "F" Association* - In July 1951 a reunion of World War II veterans of Company "F" was held in Villisca. Eighty-five old soldiers came, from as far away as Pittsburgh. In Milo Green's report of the event he said it was "the loudest, happiest gabfest of reminiscing" he had ever seen.

When it was decided to continue the reunion an informal organization was effected, called the Company "F" Association. The group meets annually on Saturday of the Memorial Day weekend.

*Stanton* - Ernie Johnson Post No. 406 American Legion was organized in January 1920; the charter was issued 21 September 1920. In 1938 the post purchased the Swanson building and remodeled it.

The post is best-known for its Baseball Days. The first one was held in 1940 and then was held annually. Among other projects is the yearly visit of a Legion Santa to the children of the town.

Ernie Johnson Unit No. 406 American Legion Auxiliary was chartered about the first of February 1921, the first in the county. The unit has had a full program of community service and veteran projects, but have also had some fun activities, such as a baseball team in 1923.

*Grant* - Rupert Knee Post No. 445 American Legion was organized in March 1920. In the fall of 1921 the post erected a building for their use. By 1925 the group had become inactive. Interest was renewed and by June '26 the post had 25 members.

In 1948 the post purchased grounds for a ball field and dedicated it as American Legion Park. The post's building had become unsafe and was razed in 1979. The post conducts services at the

cemetery on Memorial Day and provides a firing squad when requested.

Rupert Knee Post No. 445 Auxiliary was organized in June 1921. The unit has contributed substantially to veteran projects as well as to local causes. To provide funds for their work they have given so many suppers, parties, bingo games and so on, that they earned the name "Pick and Shovel Gang".

*Elliott* - American Legion Norbert T. Wilson Post No. 490 was chartered 10 August 1920. The unit had died before April 1925, when the post was reinstated. The *Graphic* started a fund to provide a meeting place for the Legion, but in June '26 there were only eleven members and they soon disbanded.

*Veterans of Foreign Wars* -

*Red Oak* - Darwin R. Merritt V.F.W. Post No. 2265 was chartered in October 1931. Men who had served overseas in the Spanish-American War or World War I were eligible to join.

For a time the V.F.W. operated the Wagon Wheel Cafe. It closed in August 1950. The local post originated the Montgomery County Court of Honor in the early 1960s.

V.F.W. Darwin R. Merritt Post Auxiliary No. 2265 was instituted 18 July 1935. Times were hard. Most members paid the annual dues of \$1.20 at 10 cents per month. The unit has served dinners, sold chances on quilts, had bake sales and other means of raising money for their veterans' projects and community activities.

*Villisca* - Wesley R. Miller V.F.W. Post No. 8998 was chartered 6 March 1947. In 1986 they bought a building and remodeled it. The post provides a color guard or firing squad when requested. They have had a strong program for young people. The post sells flagpoles at cost and installs them. The V.F.W. sponsors bingo every Saturday night at their post; all proceeds are used for benevolence and community projects.

An Auxiliary to Post No. 8998 V.F.W. was organized in June 1948. Wesley R. Miller No. 8998 V.F.W. Auxiliary was chartered 23 November 1986. Among their many projects they hold an annual Christmas shop for children to buy gifts for their family members. They serve luncheons for friends and family following funerals.

*Amvets* -

From *Elliott Centennial Book*; page 44: Elliott Amvet Post No. 35 was organized in early 1946. Some good stag parties were held. The post sponsored trap shoots at the baseball field. They owned the Melody Club in the late 40's. Amvets, in cooperation with the local business men, published a History of Veterans of World War II and Gold Star Boys, and gave copies to parents of Gold Star boys.

*American War Dads* -

A chapter of the American War Dads was organized in Red Oak about the first of December 1944.





## LYCEUMS, LITERARY SOCIETIES AND DEBATES

The Lyceum was established to provide intellectual and cultural opportunities. The programs included literature, lectures, debates and concerts. The 1906 History tells us that the first Lyceum in Montgomery County met at Frankfort, perhaps about 1860. It became the principle form of entertainment in that community and nearly every adult participated.

During the winter months the ladies prepared the first county newspaper, called "The Frankfort Lyceum Budget". It was read at meetings; then the men discussed some subject previously selected.

There is no record of other societies of that type until the late 1870s, and surprisingly, the earliest ones seemed to be in the rural areas. The towns had many organizations, each presenting numerous programs for its members and the public. Town residents also enjoyed more sophisticated entertainments given by traveling professionals.

In December 1890 the *Sun* reported in the Salem news, "The IXL literary society is flourishing finely...the exercises are of a high character. The IXL is the oldest literary society in the county. This is its 13th year." IXL was No. 6 district school in West Township.

The Lincoln Township news in the 31 January 1879 *Express* told of a successful lyceum held weekly at the Powell school. "The entertainment is carried on all in Welch."

In February 1879 the lyceum at the Hatswell school in Walnut Township (Garfield) was "still aglow". In December 1879 the *Review* said, "The Sciola people will soon organize a Lyceum and a prominent feature will be a Lyceum Gazette."

The 21 January 1884 *Telephone* tells of a lyceum at the Illinois school No. 8, West Township, where "the topics of the day are discussed weekly". In January 1886 the "Lone Star" Lyceum and debating society was organized at Coburg. A Stanton literary society was active in 1889.

During the 1890s an improvement organization of some kind met in almost every rural schoolhouse in the county. The list included the Hawthorne Institute and the Climax Keystone literary society. The popularity of the meetings continued through the first decade of the twentieth century.

Some of the groups preferred debates to other types of programs. These are some of the subjects debated during the '90s:

Resolved, that dancing is dangerous to the young generation.

Resolved, that the credit system should be abolished.

Resolved, that fictitious literature is detrimental to mankind.

Resolved, that bachelors should support old maids.

Resolved, that the lawyer system is a nuisance.

Resolved, that the printing press has been of more benefit than the steam engine.

Resolved, that liquor has caused more suffering than war.

The programs presented at those early meetings were prepared by a local committee, and in general were given by local talent. When Chautauqua assemblies were started, booking agencies were organized which supplied the talent for summer Chautauqua circuits. During the



winter months the speakers, musicians and other performers were available for the popular Lecture Courses, which consisted of several monthly programs.

Over the years the type of material presented gradually changed from educational and cultural to programs of entertainment, although still of a higher moral value than other amusements. In 1921 the Villisca program was called an entertainment course.

Red Oak had a lecture course at least by 1893. It was sponsored by the high school. The '94-'95 course was managed by the YMCA. In 1913 the Lyceum programs were given in the Beardsley theater. The Senior class contracted for the 1917 course, to be given in the auditorium of the new high school. In 1923 the program was called a Lyceum.

In 1901 the Villisca lecture course was sponsored by the Library Association. They continued to arrange the program until 1910, when no course was given. Then the high school managed the series for several years. The Progress Club took on the responsibility for a period. By 1922 the American Legion was in charge.

CHAUTAUQUA  
MORTON MILLS  
AUGUST 26-29, 1916

#### CHAUTAUQUA

Circuses, tent shows, carnivals, live theatre, musical revues, lectures, concerts, opera--entertainment of every variety made its way to Montgomery County during the early years of its settlement. These traditional entertainments were familiar to audiences around the world, but one kind of event was uniquely American: the Chautauqua. The Chautauquas were summer programs held out of doors for several days which combined the best in entertainment with education and religion. Chautauqua developed in the last part of the 19th century and became a part of American culture, especially strong in the midwest for over thirty years.

Elliott subscribed to a course for the 1901-02 season. They presented a program at least through 1908.

Grant joined the lecture circuit in 1904. The course for 1907 cost \$320. In 1912 the *Review* said, "The Bachelors' Club of Grant recently closed a contract with a representative of the Midlands Lyceum Bureau for a five number course." The Grant business men sponsored the program for a time.

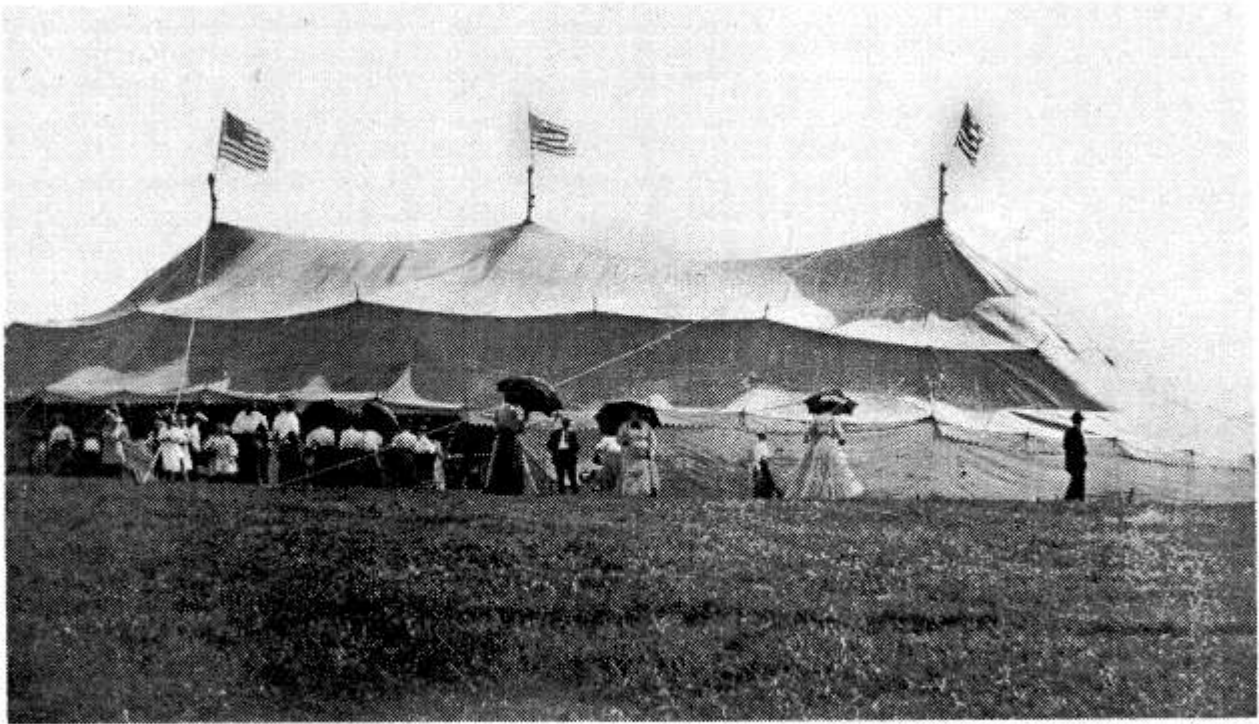
A Literary Society met at the Wales Woodmen Hall most years from 1904 through 1916.

Stanton gave a series at least by 1905. The Luther League sponsored the course in 1913-14.

In October 1916 the *Review* said, "Recently Morton Mills has agreed to try another...elevating institution--a Lyceum course." They subscribed for a series for '17-'18; that may have been the last one.

By 1920 interest in lecture courses had declined as the popularity of automobiles and movies increased. Then radios became available, and the entertainment programs were ended.

The idea first grew from Chautauqua Lake, New York in 1874 when a gathering or assembly for church school teachers was held. This expanded to provide instruction in languages, theology and courses for public school teachers. A correspondence school, called Chautauqua University, was established by 1878. Every city or town with an aspiring intellectual circle formed a local Chautauqua club. In November 1886 there was a Chautauqua Circle in Red Oak. By 1891 both Red Oak and Villisca newspapers report meetings of Chautauqua groups. For example, the Red Oak Chautauqua society had a program in October of 1891 which called for a sketch of "Colonial Life", reading of "Little



**When Red Oak's Chautauqua was held in a tent, 1905.** Dearborn Collection, Red Oak Public Library.

Miss Flite", a selection from Bleak House, a paper "Supreme Court" and a pronunciation test.

In October of 1892 the Villisca Chautauqua Circle had a review of Grecian history and assigned certain chapters for members to read. In June of 1896 the *Review* reported that the Villisca Chautauqua Circle marked the end of the regular four year course. In 1897 Elliott established a Chautauqua Circle. There are reports of activities of these Chautauqua groups well into the 1900s.

The entertainment programs and tent shows that were established under the name "Chautauqua" had no direct connection with the New York organization but were capitalizing on the fine reputation earned by the Institute and its study courses.

The first sponsors of these local Chautauquas made their own choice of program participants and were called "independent" Chautauquas. About 1904 booking agents began organizing package

programs and planned routing arrangements that most efficiently brought Chautauqua to the public; these were called "circuit" Chautauquas. The series of events would last several days and performances were offered to the public in tents that could accommodate as many as two or three thousand people.

Red Oak scheduled its first Chautauqua in 1905 from 29 June to 6 July. Eight days of events were held in Pactolus Park. It was a grand beginning. The Rev. Wm. Murchie, the Presbyterian minister, was secretary of the early Red Oak assemblies and he was credited with much of their success. The tent grounds were lighted by electricity. There were lodging accommodations for those who wished to sleep on the grounds at 25c per night. Tents and cots rented from \$2.50 to \$6.00 for the season. Camp furniture could be rented. A dining hall was provided as well as a place where teams could be fed and cared for. Special rates within 150 miles of Red Oak were offered by the railroad.

The opening address was given by America's most famous orator, William Jennings Bryan. Jane Addams, the world famed social settlement leader, Edith Henry Wallace of Des Moines and Governor Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin were on the program. There was a children's hour each week day morning and a Bible address that followed.

The 1906 Chautauqua was held in Red Oak over the 4th of July "in the northeastern part of the city, on high ground, near the standpipe." There were about 3000 people in attendance on opening day. The Chautauqua Association had an option for purchase of the grounds which it later exercised. That year there were three rest tents sponsored by the Monday Club, the Woman's Relief Corp, and the WCTU. Some 20 tents were occupied by campers. There were several lectures each day, and in between there was the American Vitagraph moving pictures and a magician. Musical programs were presented by Midland Jubilee Singers and The Welsh Prize Singers male quartet. There was a baseball game between Grant Center and Stennett.

In 1907 the Chautauqua session was held 8-15 August. There were 85 people on the program and more than 50 numbers. A season ticket was \$2.00. There were lectures by political and business leaders, music by the Wesleyan Quartet and the Innes Orchestral band. By contract the Innes band received the largest share of proceeds. The single ticket sales for its performance was also the largest of all that year's events, testifying that it was a very popular attraction. Among the offerings repeated on request were selections from the opera Parsifal. Also there was "the ever entrancing entertainment of moving pictures", a presentation by Prof. Pamahasika and his trained pets, and Lou J. Beauchamp, the laughing philosopher. There were religious addresses, the most notable by W.A. "Billy" Sunday on "Booze and Baseball". The Clarinda Chautauqua, called by the *Sun* "one of the best and oldest in the state," was in session the

same time as the Red Oak Chautauqua, and Red Oak's financial success despite the competition gave encouragement to the project of building a permanent Chautauqua auditorium for Red Oak. The tent blew down as it was being erected in 1907 which surely was another reason why the community wanted to build a better facility.

In 1908 the contract was given for the new steel auditorium which was begun in June to be ready for the 12-20 August Assembly. In the next ten years the wide variety of Chautauqua programs continued.

As the Red Oak Chautauqua prospered the smaller towns of the county also arranged for their own Chautauqua sessions. In 1912 Villisca held its first Chautauqua 20-27 July on the Lincoln School grounds with a program furnished by the Midland Chautauqua circuit. The next year Miss Bertha Tyler was in charge of a young people's hour and it was reported that the Kaffir Boys Choir drew the largest audience in its history. The third year pleased its sponsors but the 4th year Villisca Chautauqua reported a loss. In 1916, 1200 people heard Helen Keller in Villisca and William Jennings Bryan was also a featured speaker.

Both Elliott and Stanton in 1913 became Chautauqua sponsors. In 1914 Morton Mills had its first Chautauqua with the Jones Chautauqua system of Perry, Iowa. This was a success and a contract for the next year with the Imperial Chautauqua Circuit was let. Its sponsors bragged in 1915 that this was the only town of its size in Iowa, perhaps in the US, which had a Chautauqua session each year.

Perhaps in response to this county wide competition, in July 1915 the *Sun* carried an advertisement which extolled the Red Oak Chautauqua and said "Ours is a real Chautauqua. It was originated by our own people for our own people. It is not run for financial gain, but for the social, mental, esthetic and spiritual enjoyment of the people of this community. Its officers and workers are big hearted men who give freely of their



money and efforts for this and every other movement whose object is to make Red Oak a better place in which to live...Ours is not a hodgepodge street carnival or hullabaloo gotten up to make money for some individual that is ready to fool people for money." Despite this editorial comment, this is no evidence that Red Oak sponsors actually wanted to lose money on the Chautauqua assembly, and financial concerns were always present as the next year's program was being considered.

Annual Red Oak Chautauqua programs followed in the years prior to World War I, with season ticket sales somewhat smaller than in the initial years. In the beginning year the assembly grossed over two thousand dollars in revenue, but by 1916 a sale of \$1100 for season tickets was considered successful. That year a

movement was under way to divide the ownership of the land and the sponsorship of the performance in order to have separate organizations that would then provide protection of the property "in case there is considerable deficit in the future".

Red Oak's Chautauqua had a patriotic theme in 1918 as the program ran from 19-25 August. There were the many topical lectures including those presented by Irvin S. Cobb, the "greatest war correspondent and humorist"; Dr. Sadler on the German Autocracy; Senator Kossinger; Humorist W. H. Miller; Dr. Stanley Kregs on Salesmanship and Dr. J.S. Ladd Thomas on Lloyd George. Musical features included the Grenadiers, Hruby Bohemian Orchestra, The American Quartet, Jubilees with Fanny Mae Miller, Hawaiian Singers and players and the Liberty Girls.



**LADIES PLEASE REMOVE YOUR HATS.** The popular Innes band during Chautauqua. It appears that this photo was taken during the 1907 performance before the pavillion was built. Photo: Charles Smith Collection, MCHS archives.

There were exhibits, demonstrations and talks on the subjects of drying fruits and vegetables, canning, sugar saving, wheat substitute, meat savers, clothing conservation, egg packing and candling, club work and child welfare.

Stores closed during the day so employees could go to Chautauqua. Every issue of local newspapers carried items related to the death or injury of local men in the European war. Chautauqua was a part of the community response to the war and the sale of season tickets reached \$1000. The 1919 program was equally educational and entertaining. For the first time Red Oak sponsors signed up with a scheduling company, the Redpath Vawter Lyceum Bureau. The season ticket price was still \$2.00 for 8 days and included an exhibition of military flying. The aerobatics of the Curtis JN4 were superb. Lt. Fred Taylor also offered local passengers a ride for \$20. Young Tom C. Murphy signed on as his first customer. As the plane took off it hit a group of telegraph wires and crashed. The pilot was sent to the hospital with broken ribs, his plane badly wrecked, but Murphy walked away with some bruises about the head and on one leg, perhaps a little wiser and more cautious for the experience.

In July of 1921 there was the first Flying Meet in this part of the country and thousands attended. On August 12 the Farm Bureau scheduled a county wide picnic and all day festivities which were reported to have 2,000 cars and 10,000 people (probably a very generous estimate) gathered at Stennett. Perhaps it is not surprising that the 1921 Chautauqua program, sandwiched in between the big events and with a season ticket price of \$2.75, (higher than in the past) was \$200 short of its guarantee.

In 1921 the City of Red Oak took title to the eight and two thirds acres owned by the Chautauqua Association. "Red Oak now has a playground, picnic, athletic or most any other kind of park except golf links and a race track..." says the *Express* 21 July 1921. The city

agreed to assume the indebtedness of the Chautauqua Association of \$750 which had been incurred by some grading work done at the park in 1915. One of the first things the city did was order a new roof for the pavilion.

The 1920s provided an abundance of public amusements in Red Oak. The opening of the swimming pool in 1923 instituted regular summer water carnival events drawing entries from neighboring communities. The Farm Bureau picnic traveled to a different county community each year, attracting thousands of enthusiastic participants. There were large and small circuses and traveling carnivals, sometimes two in a summer. In town, every day there were two movie theatres each showing films with matinees and evening performances, often different films each day. The theatres were cooled and had increasingly entertaining and artistic offerings. Of course there were city bands playing regular free concerts. There was also occasional live entertainment on stage at the Beardsley. The American Legion put on minstrel shows to benefit its projects. In most years there was a fall festival held in September.

After 1920 the Redpath Vawter system provided the programs for eight more years for the Red Oak Chautauquas and the ticket season price returned to \$2.00 after 1921. Until 1926 season ticket sales provided the necessary support to bring a Chautauqua program. In 1924 there were 14 entertainment events during 7 days, with 7 lectures, the concerts, musical groups, and dramatic companies providing a wide variety of programming. Beginning in 1925 there was a decline in the number of lectures offered, and the Sunday programs were left to the local community to sponsor and bring the religious message. Program bills included fewer performers; the main events were musical groups or concerts and performances by a theatre company. The 1926 season produced a deficit, the 1927 season increased the deficit to \$550 and the 70 guarantors were requested to pay

\$9.00 each before the 1928 program could be scheduled. Redpath Vawter had been budgeting about \$1600 for the season's entertainments, and this had to be met in advance by the sale of season tickets; if the sale was not sufficient to cover the costs guarantors promised to make up the difference.

On 2 August 1928 the *Express* carried an editorial which told the story. "Chautauqua has lost its absorbing interest among the rank and file of the public. The old days of taking a vacation during chautauqua week are echoes of the past. The public has to be urged to attend. Attendance lags and finances drag.

"Chautauqua programs still maintain their excellence. The variety is good. And no one can question but what the program is worth more than the \$2 expended for it. The trouble lies with the public's change of sentiment and interests.

"The chautauqua is competing with many varieties of entertainment. The radio provides good things at no cost. The motor car is used for vacation jaunts, theatres are active. Most of all the public has but little time for lectures or solid, substantial, entertainment. It craves knick-knack stuff, joyrides, sensational and racy diversions. This is the present trend of affairs...

"But we are of the opinion that the old methods of demanding a local committee to underwrite a guarantee for the chautauqua program every year is obsolete and wrong. The chautauqua is a business institution operated for financial gain and it should stand on its own legs..."

The 1929 sponsoring committee switched companies and scheduled with Ellison White for a five day program with afternoon and evening events but the public still did not respond. There was a \$500 deficit and the committee threw in the towel. The *Express* headlined on 26 August 1929 "Chautauqua is dropped today." There was no 1930 contract.

The county's smaller town Chautauquas continued through the '20s with even more resiliency than the county seat had shown. There was a four day Chautauqua in Grant in 1930 and the county's last reported Chautauqua was held in Elliott in 1931.

#### *Postscript -*

When the Red Oak Chautauqua pavilion was built in 1908 it was quickly erected and met with enthusiastic public support. Sixty years later as deterioration set in and Red Oak citizens had to determine the fate of the old structure, the decision was not such an easy one. In the 10 June 1968 issue of the *Express* the Red Oak Park Board asked the community to participate in a decision as to whether or not to preserve the shell. The estimated cost was \$12,000 to \$15,000. The vote was 114 to 26 to keep the pavilion. Most respondents to the vote said it should be saved to provide a cool, shaded area for picnics, reunions, and other events.

In October of that year the Jaycees undertook a project to restore the Chautauqua pavilion and began a fund raising campaign. By then contractors were estimating the cost of restoration at \$17,000. The Park commission did not have funds available for the work due to the cost of battling Dutch Elm disease. Almost two years later in May of 1970 the Jaycees abandoned the project due to lack of funds. The \$3,300 raised was to go to the beautification of Fountain Square Park.

The idea of keeping the pavilion would not die, and on 25 February 1971 a new committee was formed to save the structure. The Chairman of the new committee, Travis Tinsley said there was about \$10,000 available to restore it including the money previously raised. In 1972 historic research was completed and the Red Oak Chautauqua pavilion was listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service. This would make it eligible for federal funds for its restoration and development. The restoration cost was estimated at \$42,000. It was two years



more before a federal grant of \$10,000 was approved and Bob Caswell was then Chairman of the Chautauqua Restoration Committee. More private fund raising followed, and according to the *Express* of 29 August 1974, \$22,000 was available to add to the Federal grant. Still this was not enough money and Red Oak's City Council was again on the spot to vote funds or not to vote funds to save the pavilion.

R.J.Swanson, Red Oak attorney, writes of a special day that he remembers as one of his "good times" in the practice of law. Swanson says:

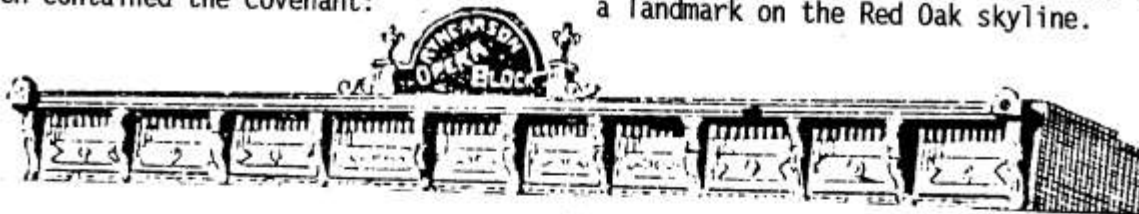
*It appeared the restoration efforts were completely lost until a special joint meeting of the City Council and the Park Commission was held October 10, 1974. That meeting was attended by a number of the Restoration Committee members as well as many others, some of whom favored destruction of the pavilion.*

Swanson served as the Restoration Committee's legal counsel. He read from the deed how the City had acquired title which contained the covenant:

...and the further consideration that the grantee (City) herein agrees to maintain said premises and keep up the pavilion against ordinary wear and tear...

Swanson explained that from 1921 until 1974, a period of over fifty years, City records fail to reveal any funds expended for the maintenance of the pavilion. The roof was falling in, and the supports were rusting. It was apparent the City had not abided by the covenant to maintain the pavilion. Mr. Swanson stated that while he disliked the thought of taking such action, if the Council ordered the destruction and removal of the pavilion, he would be compelled personally to take the matter to Court and seek an injunction against the City. Swanson received the support of fellow attorney and long time resident Jonathan B. Richards who said he would join in as plaintiff in the suit.

With this kind of encouragement, by a vote of 3-2, the council expended the \$16,000 needed. So the Chautauqua pavilion was restored for the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration and remains today a landmark on the Red Oak skyline.



OPERA HOUSES

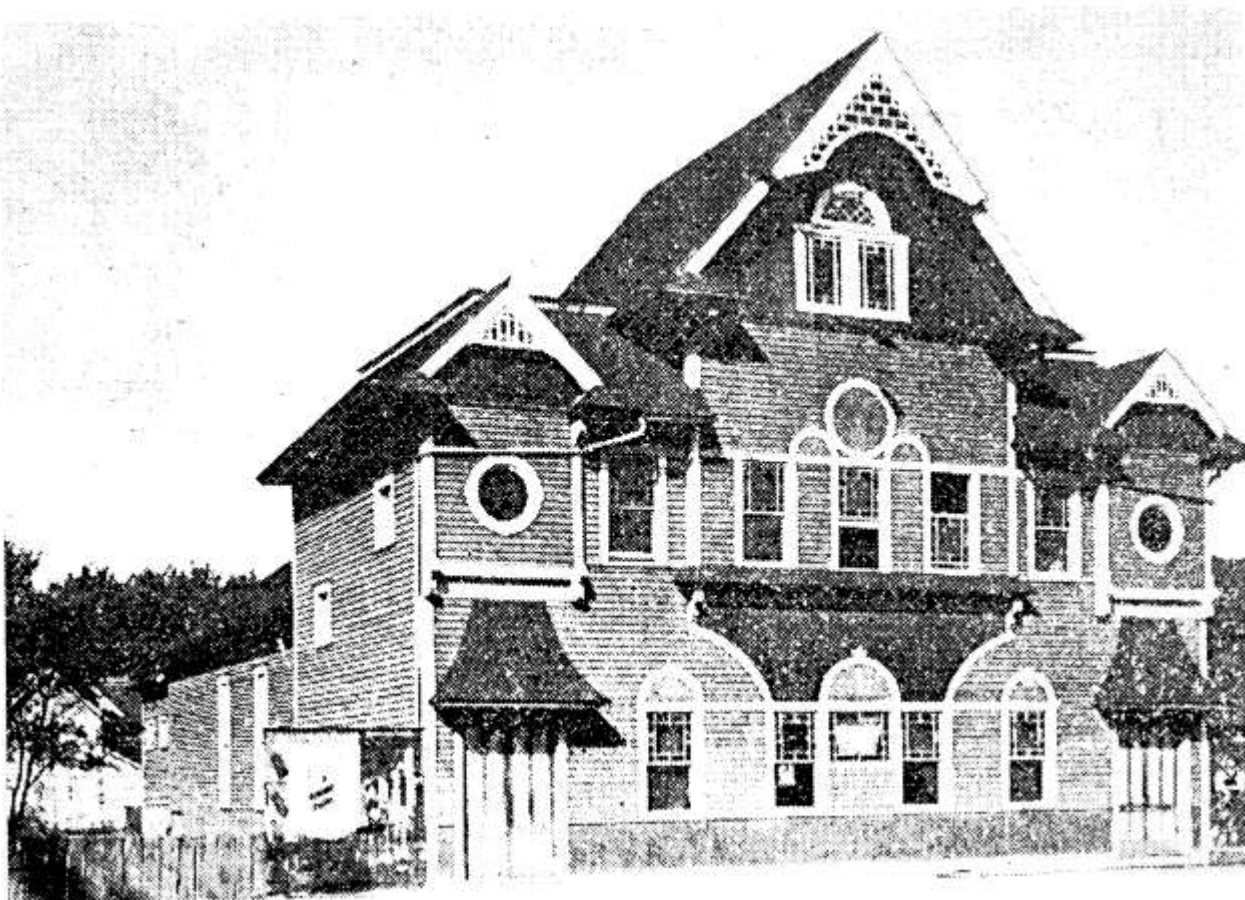
The term "Opera House" presents an image of grandeur, on the order of La Scala in Milan, where grand opera is sung. In early Montgomery County, an opera house was a building where public entertainments were held. Usually the structure had been erected for another purpose, but there were a few opera houses which were built for that use.

Our oldest county newspapers contain ads for various performances and amusements. Those were held in large rooms on the second floors of store buildings. At that time such accommodations were called "halls".

#### *Villisca -*

In Villisca, in 1871, McMillin's Hall was the place to go, especially if you wanted to dance. In 1875 dances were being held in Ferguson's Hall, and Swiss Bell Ringers performed there in '76. 1877 saw the end of Ferguson's Hall, but Hyde's Hall was mentioned. And they were still dancing at McMillin's Hall.

In 1878, the lack of suitable facilities led to the organization of the Town Hall association. The 19 December *Review* announced, "On New Year's night, there will be a grand Dedication Ball at the new Villisca Hall...The proceeds will



**Villisca Opera House.** The original section was built in 1878. In 1896 the old Baptist church was added to the south end.

be devoted to seating and lighting the room." The new building was on the north side of Fourth Street, in the 200 East block.

The new hall was a busy place. Dances, theatrical entertainments, band concerts, lectures and minstrel shows were held there.

In the fall of 1880 a new armory was built in Villisca. Company "B" gave a military Ball on New Year's Eve.

In 1881 the town hall was called the opera house. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was presented in November. The *Review* said, "The Company travel and live on their own Palace Hotel car." The 1882 Military Ball was at the opera house.

In February 1883 a roller skating rink was opened in the opera house. It was soon discontinued because of damage

to the floor. In 1884 Stennett's hall and Lundy's hall were mentioned.

In March 1886 Company "B" bought the opera house at tax sale. Their name does not appear in the transaction, but the *Review* identified the Company as owner when the place was enlarged and remodeled in 1887. A grand ball was given in 1888, with the proceeds to be used for buying a concert organ.

In April 1890 the *Review* announced Lavenburg's Equine Paradox at the opera house. "A car load of the best educated horses ever appearing on any stage." Other offerings included Uncle Josh Spruceby, Lane Comedy and Hewitt's Musettes.

In October 1892 the *Review* reported that Company "B" must have a new dress uniform. "That's why they want to sell the Opera House."

2 July 1896; *Review*: "At last! At last! The Villisca opera house on Fourth street between Second and Third Avenues, is about to be greatly enlarged and improved. Mr. West has bought the Baptist church building and is moving it to the south end of the opera house, thereby increasing the seating space and lobby as well as a roomy gallery."

The new opera house opened in November '96, with seating capacity of 750, of which 200 were in the balcony. "The stage is the most capacious between Ottumwa and Council Bluffs."

In 1902 Company "B" leased the house for one year. Around 1908 F.M. Childs, manager of the opera house, put together a local show group that became a traveling company.

In September 1911 Manager Childs installed a new set of scenery for the opera house. Then, in December 1912, it was announced that owing to the great difficulty in heating and also the fact that it was not altogether safe for public use, the opera house was closed.

The new Villisca armory became the show house, and in November 1913, Company "F" purchased a portable stage, 24x20 feet, complete with curtains, scenery, dressing rooms and so forth.

In November 1918 the old opera house was sold, and was razed.

#### Red Oak -

The *Express* of 1874 reported entertainments at Cook's Hall and Shanks Hall. In December 1875 "Haymakers", an operatic cantata was given at Roach's Hall, with full costumes, scenery, and action. In June 1876 Plunkett's Constellation entertained at Roach's hall. "They avoid anything but moral and hightoned pieces."

In August 1876 work was progressing on Bryson's block which was south of the alley on the east side of the square. In October the *Express* reported that "Bryson & Son will finish off two-thirds of their new brick block for an Opera House...This is something badly needed in Red Oak." The opera house was on the second floor.

A Centennial Ball was held at Bryson's hall on Christmas night 1876. In November 1877 Miss Nellie Boyd opened in the comedy "Frou Frou". Ads said, "Notwithstanding the great expense of this troupe, tickets will be placed at the lowest limit, 50 cents."

In 1880 Bishop & Houghton began construction of a new opera house at the east end of the north side of the square. The building was 45x112 feet, with a seating capacity of 1,000, and cost about \$20,000. It was heated with steam and lighted with gas. A furniture store occupied the ground floor.

Memorial services for President Garfield were held in the Bishop & Houghton Opera House 26 September 1881. That was the earliest date found for use of the new structure. The *Telephone* reported that some people were apprehensive about attending the memorial; they were afraid the building would collapse. Three days later scheduled entertainments began.

The opera house was built by George West. The Red Oak Library holds a letter written in 1953, by George's son, H.H. West. He said, "...My sister and I attended a minstrel show in the opera house. I remember how I yelled when a huge alligator slithered out of the wings and grabbed a little pickaniny by the seat of his pants as he was fishing in a painted lake..."

"The Hibernian Blondes" appeared at Bryson's Hall in April 1881. Apparently this was not a family type show. One of the complaining letters to the paper called it a "disgraceful traveling nuisance".

Beginning in October 1881, Bryson's hall was enlarged to include the last third of the upper story. It was remodeled and opened in December as the Gem Opera House. The *Telephone* commented on having two opera houses in town.

The Bishop & Houghton Opera House burned one night in the last part of September 1882. Houghton had sold his interest in the building not long before the fire.



Samuel D. Rynearson purchased the Bryson block in October 1885 and became the proprietor of the Rynearson Opera House. In 1886 it was renovated.

In 1888 the armory was made available for public suppers, entertainments, and so on. In 1882 an armory had been built on Railroad Street; it is uncertain if that is the one referred to.

In September 1889 arrangements were made whereby the opera house joined the Des Moines circuit; most of the companies that played in Des Moines would also visit Red Oak.

In 1893 there was a lecture at the opera house on "The Uses of Ugliness". In November '95 the *Express* said, "The Rynearson opera house is dingy, delapidated, barnlike, too small and badly arranged."

In 1897 the rent for the opera house was increased; the managers objected and opened the Evans Theater in the new armory, built in 1896 on the corner of Sixth and Coolbaugh.

The Rynearson facility was remodeled as a billiard parlor in January 1902, but by 1903 it was the opera house again.

In the spring of 1908 it was announced that L. M. Beardsley would construct a new opera house on the east side of Third Street between Coolbaugh and Washington. The Beardsley Opera House opened in March 1909. It cost \$25,000 and could seat 850. The old opera house passed into history.

But the heyday of "legit" theater had passed and after a few years no more stock companies or vaudeville troupes came to town. Live entertainments, including local productions, were staged there occasionally through the '20s, but the Beardsley Theatre became primarily a moving picture house.

In May 1937 Milledge & Son Hardware was in the old Bryson block. They expanded into the second story of the building, and discovered countless theatrical posters, pictures and billboards.

The *Express* said, "Old timers will recall that about 1905 the present hardware store and the Green Parrot Tea Room was



**Beardsley Opera House.** The location was about 406 Third Street, Red Oak. Built in 1908/09, the building was occupied by the Grand Theater when it burned in 1932. Photo: *Express Reflections*.

a single building with an opera house on the second floor." The old ticket window was still there. Bright-hued banners decorated the walls. Nearly a wagon load of "junk" was carted away. Its removal was the final curtain on an entertainment which had been playing in Red Oak since the 1870s. And the Milledges couldn't have dreamed of what their junk would be worth today.

#### *Milford/Grant -*

An 1879 news item said that Milford had a town hall. In 1883 Henry Howard fitted up a store room, "plastered, seated and adorned it with lamps" to be used as a town hall. Many dances were held there.

In 1886 Blanchard's hall burned, and then Caywood's hall was mentioned. By 1889 it was Howard's hall again. Public events were held in Wahlund's hall at the turn of the century.

Early in 1913 a large new garage opened. The upper floor was used for entertainment purposes and was called the opera house. It was used as a movie theater and skating rink; many other local events took place there. Around 1940 the building became the Jones Amusement hall, and the ground floor was used for entertainments.



#### THE SILVER SCREEN

In March 1895 an Edison kinetoscope "peep-show" visited Montgomery County. Only one person at a time could see the moving pictures, which lasted for about 13 seconds. After large projection screens were introduced, traveling entrepreneurs occasionally presented a show in an opera house or tent. The jerky, flickering images provided the

#### *Elliott -*

In August 1885 Elliott dancers attended a grand Harvest Ball in Baxter's Hall. In 1893 the Gitchell Comedy Company played at Petty's hall.

In January 1897 an opera house opened on the ground floor of the new IOOF building. In December 1898 the property was sold; the opera house was moved across the street, above the Woods Drug Store, and was known as the Woods Opera House. It was still in use in 1916.

#### *Stanton -*

Stanton residents were dancing at Hine's hall by June 1886. "About 2 o'clock it began to rain and kept everyone there until daylight."

The last of March 1887 Dr. C.W. Hine bought used scenery and fixtures from the Villisca opera house. It took three wagons to move the material to Stanton where Hine used it in his hall.

In January 1889 a company of young people from Dunnville gave a play, "Nevada; or The Lost Mine" at Hine's Hall. Peterson's hall was the entertainment center in 1907. In 1912 reference was made to the "opera house".

Around 1900 lodge halls were built by a number of small communities, including Coburg, Climax, Hawthorne, Wales, Biddick and Morton Mills. Public entertainments were held in those structures for as long as the buildings were available.

slang name for early movies: "the flickers". The term was soon shortened to "the flicks".

Each year the technology improved and kept people coming back for more. The first motion picture theater in the county opened in Red Oak in 1907. Villisca's first movie house started in April 1908 and by that summer people in Grant were

watching the flicks. The movies were getting longer; consecutive showings were scheduled one hour apart.

Sometime in the late 'teens an aluminized projection screen was developed which reflected virtually all of the light straight back. It was associated with old-time movie palaces, which tended to be narrow, but had very long distances between the projector and the screen.

At least by 1921, the new improvement was called a "silver screen" and the term was soon expanded to include the pictures shown on the screen. The slang name was in common use during the '20s and '30s, and is still heard occasionally.

An interesting note indicates that when 3-D movies were introduced in the '50s they were shown on an aluminized screen.

During the '20s most of the pictures were comedies, and while popular and successful, were still silent.

The silent movie is seldom accorded the respect it deserves. A new medium was developed which learned to tell a story through pictures alone. For 30 years the screen entertained throngs of viewers, and then suddenly, the silent pictures were gone, relegated to the free out-door movies in small towns.

The first talkies and then ever improving sound beckoned county residents to the movies during the '30s. Musicals, dramas, comedies, classics and famous Hollywood names filled the screens during the depression years. Patriotism and upbeat movies were part of the World War II home front entertainment. And after the war, the "drive-in" became a part of Montgomery County life for the next 40 years.

There was a sharp decline in attendance at local theaters as nearly every home acquired a television set, and receipts fell even more as VCRs were added to home entertainment. By 1963 Red Oak had just one theater left and soon that one showed films only on week ends. Villisca's Rialto closed in 1987. Although the Red Oak Grand has been

rescued by an infusion of community raised capital, the problem still remains.

The question being debated now is very similar to the one asked about the Chautauqua in 1928: "If it can't stand on its own legs, should the community be raising money to support a profit making enterprise?"

Whatever the answer turns out to be, it is clear that "Going to the movies" has been part of the good times in Montgomery county for 100 years.

#### *Red Oak -*

In March 1895 the people of Red Oak were invited to view the kinetoscope, one of Edison's marvelous inventions, which was on display at Heckert's restaurant. The *Express* said, "Figures and scenes are reproduced in action and you see them as in actual life." The picture machine was called an animatograph in April 1897. It reproduced lifelike scenes upon a canvas the size of the entire stage. Until about 1905 motion pictures were usually shown as just one act on the entertainment bill.

American Vitagraph pictures were shown at the 1906 Chautauqua. There were two "electric theaters" giving moving picture exhibitions at the 1907 Race and Amusement meet.

The Majestic theater was in the Armory during the summer of 1907. That fall it reopened in its new theater, located on Coolbaugh street, next door to Hinchman's drug store. The Star theater was already operating when the Comet Amusement Company opened in Red Oak in September 1908. In May 1909 the manager of the Comet opened an air dome or outdoor theater.

The new Beardsley opera house opened in March 1909. In December 1910 L.M. Beardsley and the Red Oak Military Band joined in opening a theater at the opera house; it was called the B-B Picture Show. The *Express* said, "The plans are to give a first class moving picture entertainment and music every night of the week when there is...no other



attraction scheduled." In the summer of 1911 the partners opened the B-B Gayity (sic) Garden, an airdome. The firm was dissolved in March 1912; Beardsley continued the business alone.

In November 1913 the Comet theater of Red Oak was in the Houghton block. The Beardsley summer garden was opened at Third and Grimes in June 1914. The Scenic and Elite theaters were running at that time.

The 19th day of May 1919 was a memorable occasion. Company "M" had come home from the war and thousands of people gathered in Red Oak to welcome them. The impressive reception and big parade were recorded on movie film, and then the picture "World War Heroes" was shown in the Beardsley Theatre. Twenty years later, in November 1939, the old silent film was shown at the Iowana Theatre.

In July 1919 the Beardsley Theatre advertised, "We have installed a cooling system...which keeps the theatre 15 degrees cooler than outside."

In 1920 the theaters opened on Sunday, and the City Council approved an ordinance prohibiting Sunday amusements. In October 1922 "Buffalo Bill" was featured at the Scenic Theatre. By 1924 the theaters were again open on Sunday.

The Iowana Theatre opened in November 1923 with Jackie Coogan in "Long Live the King". The *Sun* reported, "The theater is one of the finest in the state...It seats nearly 600 people."

In the spring of 1925 a contest was held to rename the Beardsley and it became the Oak Theatre. The new manager hired Tuttle's plane to drop advertising on the town. It was the Beardsley again by April 1929 when the first talkies in the county were shown.

In the fall of 1930 the Beardsley Theatre was closed for extensive renovations, which included the installation of RCA sound equipment. It reopened as the Grand Theatre on 27 November with Marie Dressler and Wallace Beery in "Min and Bill". The Beardsley opera house, which housed the Grand Theatre, burned in April 1932.

C.A. Johnson was manager of the Grand when it burned. His son, Richard Johnson of Omaha, recently talked of his memories of the Grand. He said that the theater was relocated to the old Thos. D. Murphy calendar building on Coolbaugh Street.

Traveling production companies invited all the kids in town to be in movies; then parents paid to see the resulting film.

The Grand showed a lot of cowboy movies, with stars like Hopalong Cassidy and Zoro. Some western stars came to the theater and did fast draws on the stage.

Johnson said that each showing started with a newsreel, which was especially important during World War II. Next was a cartoon; perhaps "Porky Pig" or "Mickey Mouse". A one-reeler, or short, was an informational presentation. Then the feature attraction was shown.

The Grand organized a safety club for children. Tickets were sold to merchants, who gave them to kids. The theater awarded prizes, including a number of bicycles.

Parents dropped their children at the theater, and left. After the second feature the management had to wake the kids and call the parents to come get them. Johnson said, "We did a lot of babysitting".

"Gone with the Wind" appeared at the Iowana in 1940. Beginning on 29 March, the film was shown three times daily for seven days.

In July 1942 the Red Oak United Service Women's Club made arrangements for the Red Oak Camera Club to film color movies of the families of Red Oak's National Guard members. The movies were sent to the boys in Ireland.

In December 1962 the Grand Theatre bought the Iowana Theatre, and closed it the first of 1963. For over 60 years the Grand provided entertainment for the people of Red Oak and vicinity, but it closed the first of 1995 due to poor condition of the premises and lack of patronage; Fridley Theatres, the owner, had no plans for reopening. The Red Oak community organized a funding drive

through advance ticket sales and in three weeks raised \$50,000. In November Fridleys started a complete renovation of the building, and the attractive new theater opened 14 February 1996.

#### *Villisca -*

Life Motion Pictures were shown at the Villisca Opera House 16 April 1900, and occasionally after that. In 1906 a tent moving picture show visited Villisca. The Crescent Moving Picture Gallery opened in April 1908 on the west side of the square in Villisca. It closed in November 1908 and movies were then shown in the opera house.

In July 1909 the owner of the Cozy Theater opened an airdome on Fourth street. The *Review* said, "Mr. Ford has arranged to serve cool refreshing drinks and ices at tables within the enclosure."

In January 1911 the *Review* reported, "The Detroit is the name of a new photoplay theatre which will start in the building formerly occupied by the Orpheum on the east side of the square." When the Unique Theatre closed in February 1912, the *Review* commented, "Villisca can't support two theaters." The Cozy theater was remodeled in May 1914. It had 400 seats and "four OZO ice coolers".

In May 1914 the Villisca and Corning militia companies held joint maneuvers two and a half miles east of Villisca. An enterprising Mr. Tinsley, from Corning, filmed the activity for inclusion in a movie. A crowd of around 1,500 interested spectators watched. The *Review* said, "The Villisca Firemen's Band was present and furnished music during the dull moments ...A sham battle was staged in front of the camera..." The movie, "Saved by the Stars and Stripes", opened in the Villisca theater.

In July 1914 the manager of the Villisca theater announced that he had arranged to show Pathe Daily News, one of only five theaters in Iowa to handle the feature. It cost \$6 a night.

The Cozy theatre burned in February 1929. Dr. Childs, the owner, bought the Villisca Theatre.

In the summer of 1942, Villisca's Company "F" was in Ireland. Plans were made for taking movies of the home folks and sending them to the boys. The Chamber of Commerce purchased film and a date was set so that country people would be in town. The movies were shown in the Rialto, and then sent overseas. Over forty years later the reels were found and transferred to videotape.

In May 1960 the *Review* said, "Judd Holdren, who was born and raised in Villisca, is the star of the 'Lost Planet' which is playing at the Rialto."

In 1974 a community theater group was organized and presented occasional live plays and musicals in the Rialto. The two types of entertainment coexisted until 1987, when the last movies were shown. Villisca Theatre, Inc. continues to operate the facility with various events taking place there.

#### *Grant -*

It is uncertain when the first moving picture was shown in Grant. In July 1908 the local news reported that the show at Wahlund's hall drew the usual crowd. In December 1913 the *Review* said, "Grant now has a moving picture show. Pictures are shown in the opera house three nights each week." Movies were shown in the Legion hall after it was built in 1921.

#### *Elliott -*

The first motion picture show in Elliott was in 1909. A few years later there was an open air theater on the water tower lot. An account said, "Every available tree and building were full of kids who couldn't dig up a dime." A theater opened at the opera house in January 1914. The *Review* said, "The show is equipped with a new Edison machine." A new building was erected for the picture show and in January 1918 the *Sun* said, "Elliott's new picture theatre, the Scenic, opened last Thursday evening."

The picture house was called the Starr Theater in the early '20s when operated by Earl Starr, editor of the *Graphic*. On your birthday you were admitted free.

The theater had been closed for about five years when it reopened the first of December 1934 as the "Dallas". Stage shows were given for a few months, and then movies returned.

*Around Town With Kay; Catherine Carson; 1979; page 8: For years I played the big Concert Grand piano; I was the last of the real live pianists. Since the floor sloped and the roof leaked, the piano pedals were always half immersed in water.*

*The piano was used long after sound movies came in because the Elliott city fathers who "owned" the theatre could not afford the new Vitaphone equipment--so we still played silent films.*

Probably the city council sponsored the movies to try to keep the theater open. The show house closed and reopened a number of times; no date is available for the final closing.

#### Stanton -

In June 1913, two picture shows opened in Stanton; neither of the proprietors knew the other was making such plans. R.W. Freeland opened an airdome in the south part of town. He had rented the old Methodist church building for a year, so the movie was shown there when the weather was bad. E.S. Peterson also opened a theater.

#### Coburg-

In August 1911 the Coburg MWA camp arranged to show moving pictures once a week. They planned an airdome.

Coming all Next Week	
<b>August 7 to 13</b>	
At The	
<b>AIRDOME</b>	
THE POPULAR	
<b>Broadway Girls</b>	
Musical Comedy Company 12 People mostly Girls	
Featuring	
<b>The Broadway Quartette</b>	
And a big Beauty Chorus of Singing, Dancing, Girls and Funny Comedians, a complete change of Program every night	
Show Starts at 8 P. M.	10 and 20 cents

#### Free Movies -

"All Montgomery County roads lead to Elliott on Wednesday night. 'Hurry up with the milking, Bill; you know it's Wednesday. It's Harold Lloyd tonight.'"

On Sunday, 24 September 1924, the Des Moines Register devoted a full page of the magazine section to Elliott. The article told of a novel activity in the small town.

The local merchants had been concerned about the loss of trade in the town. The community club took up the problem in an effort to reverse the trend. Then someone hit upon the idea of having a free picture show on Wednesday nights. In the summer of 1923 seats were put up on a vacant lot on Main street. The 1924 summer theater was in the park. As many as 1,000 attended the weekly show. The merchants considered the project successful.

During the depression '30s, merchants in small towns sponsored free outdoor silent movies, on that same theory that a crowd attracted to town would spend some money. Rows of plank seats were set up in a vacant lot and were usually full. The entertainments were given in Grant, Elliott, Coburg, Stanton and Morton Mills. In the later '30s some of the towns showed talkies.

#### Drive-In -

The new Drive-In Theater west of Red Oak opened the first of June 1949. It enjoyed great popularity. Parents could take their kids, a huge bag of popcorn and something to drink. When the popcorn was gone the kids went to sleep. The screen was blown down in a storm in August 1959 and was rebuilt. The theater was remodeled in 1968. It probably closed after the 1987 season.



1916 - Sun





## TENT SHOWS

Strolling performers, with nothing but what they carried on their backs, entertained at hamlets and crossroads. More affluent groups traveled in wagons. They played on the ground, or on the end gates of the vehicles. As tents became available, a company which was able to acquire such a convenience considered itself one of the elite.

Tent shows appeared in Montgomery County at least by 1870, and they were still here after 1960. During all those years, the traveling companies brought theater to a people eager for entertainment. Many of the companies played in halls and theaters during the winter, and then traveled with tents during the warm months.

In August 1871 the *Review* said, "Willard's Troupe of dramatic performers will pitch their tent on the Public Square next Saturday." The shows appeared occasionally through the '70s and '80s, but by the 1890s they were everywhere. 1889--Uncle Tom's Cabin at Villisca. 1891--H.W. Smith tent show at Milford. 1894--Uncle Tom at Stanton. 1896--Milford; "a show struck our town. The tent was full to overflowing." 1897--Alix; "there will be a tent show Wednesday night."

1900--Terry's Uncle Tom's Cabin at Villisca. Uncle Tom shows were a perennial favorite. These were not all the same company; all troupes did Uncle Tom and some specialized in it.

In 1903 Angell's Comedians (sic) performed in the Evans theater in Red Oak. That is the earliest record found of Angell's in this county; in later years they were known as a tent show.

In May 1907 the Lewis show "gives its performance in a large tent which will be located on West Coolbaugh." The Chase-Lister Theatre was in Red Oak in 1908.

In 1911 the Hughes Comedian Show visited Coburg. A vaudeville tent show, Senrab Shows, came to Villisca in 1913.

In June 1914 the *Review* said, "Angell's Comedians, one of the largest dramatic companies playing under canvas ...give good clean moral and late city plays at popular prices."

In 1915 the Angell's were at Grant. The *Review* reported that "a different troupe of Angell's" came to Villisca in 1916. That fall Alle-Beon Players were at Morton Mills. In May 1917 the Grant news said, "Harry Jarvis left last week for Walnut, where he will join Angell's Comedians. Harry goes to play the cornet." The tent shows carried their own orchestras.

In August 1919 the *Express* said, "Angell's Comedians will make their first appearance in Red Oak next week." They had forgotten about 1903.

In 1925 the Villisca city council refused to permit tent shows to set up on the streets, so the advance man had to arrange for a vacant lot. In 1926 Angell's played in Villisca for the thirteenth consecutive summer. Hatcher's Players made their first visit in 1927; Angell's were there, too. J.J. Colley's shows visited the county in 1929. "All shows strictly moral".

In May 1932, the *Review* said, "J.S. Angell was in Villisca the first of the week attending to the advance work in connection with the appearance of the Hatcher players in their big brown tent. The admission is ten cents.

"Mr. Angell has been coming to Villisca each season for the last 25 years, beginning when he owned the show known as Angell's Comedians."

The Hatcher's Players were reported at Grant in 1938. They also played at Elliott during the '30s.

In 1951 the *Review* noted, "After a lapse of ten years the Hatcher Players (or rather the Sun Players, who are successors to Hatcher's) will return to Villisca."



## THE CIRCUS

The Civil War was over. People were tired of the work, of the worry and of their drab lives. They wanted to be entertained, to have color and excitement and new things to see. So when the circus came to Montgomery County it was welcomed with enthusiasm.

There is no record of just when that first little wagon train came rattling over the prairie, but it was at least by the late 1860s. It was the leader of a very long line. There have been dozens of shows which performed here, sometimes five or six different ones in a season. They ranged in size from that first small group to giants such as Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey. They have arrived in horse drawn wagons, in long railroad trains and in motor trucks.

The circuses drew huge crowds; as long as the big shows came large numbers of people flocked to the exhibitions. Even today it would be difficult to find someone who had never been to a circus.

Tom Cooney came to the south east corner of Montgomery County in 1857, at the age of eleven months. In an interview with the *Review* in July 1945, Mr. Cooney stated that he attended the first circus to come to Villisca. It was in the summer of 1867, and the tent was on the square which is now the city park.

"It was a one-ring show with performers on a trapeze, sleight of hand artists, trained horses and other attractions, but there were no wild animals. The outfit traveled on horse drawn wagons."

An August 1961 *Express* said, "The Sun Players, who have been appearing at Red Oak for 31 years, will make their annual visit next week. Formerly the Hatcher Players, this is one of the two Toby shows left in the United States." The Sun Players returned to Red Oak in 1967.

In July 1874 the *Express* wrote, "Times are never too hard to prevent people from seeing the circus...and Robbins' show was well patronized." In August '74 the International Show came to Red Oak, and the *Express* said that enough money was spent "to buy several good sized farms."

Howe's Show attracted five thousand persons to Red Oak in June 1875. "The street parade was the grandest ever witnessed in the west. The chariots were gorgeous in appearance."

In June 1877 Sells Brothers Circus advertised a hippopotamus as a special feature, "imported at a cost of \$18,000".

Many circuses found their way to Villisca. In August 1878 the *Review* said, "Bless our lucky stars, Villisca in all reasonable probability will not be compelled this year to suffer the great annual nuisance, a circus."

Cole's show visited Red Oak in 1879, and was well patronized. The *People's Telephone* announced in June 1881 that "W.C. Coup's Monster Circus is coming... Four separate and distinct rings are used during each performance."

In 1884 the Ringling Brothers of Baraboo, Wisconsin, started across the country with a small circus traveling by wagon. That little troupe would become one of the giants of the industry.

In May 1889, F.J. Taylor's circus, starting out from Creston in wagons, was billed for Villisca, Stanton, Elliott and Emerson. It skipped Red Oak "on account of the license being too high."

In June 1890 Sells Brothers circus came in from Clarinda on two special trains of fifteen cars each. "They have added a flock of ostriches and a Bun Yip, or devil horse, to their show."

The *Sun* of September 1892 reported that a great crowd was in from the country to attend Ringling Brothers 3-ring circus. "There was a fine street parade and the circus performance was one of unusual merit and included many new features."

Tolbert and Co.'s Grand Exhibition was at the Villisca Fair Ground in May 1898. "Chariot race, Roman Hippodrome Race, Greyhound and horse race, Pacing Ostriches." The Yankee Robinson Wild Animal Show made its way to Grant in May 1906.

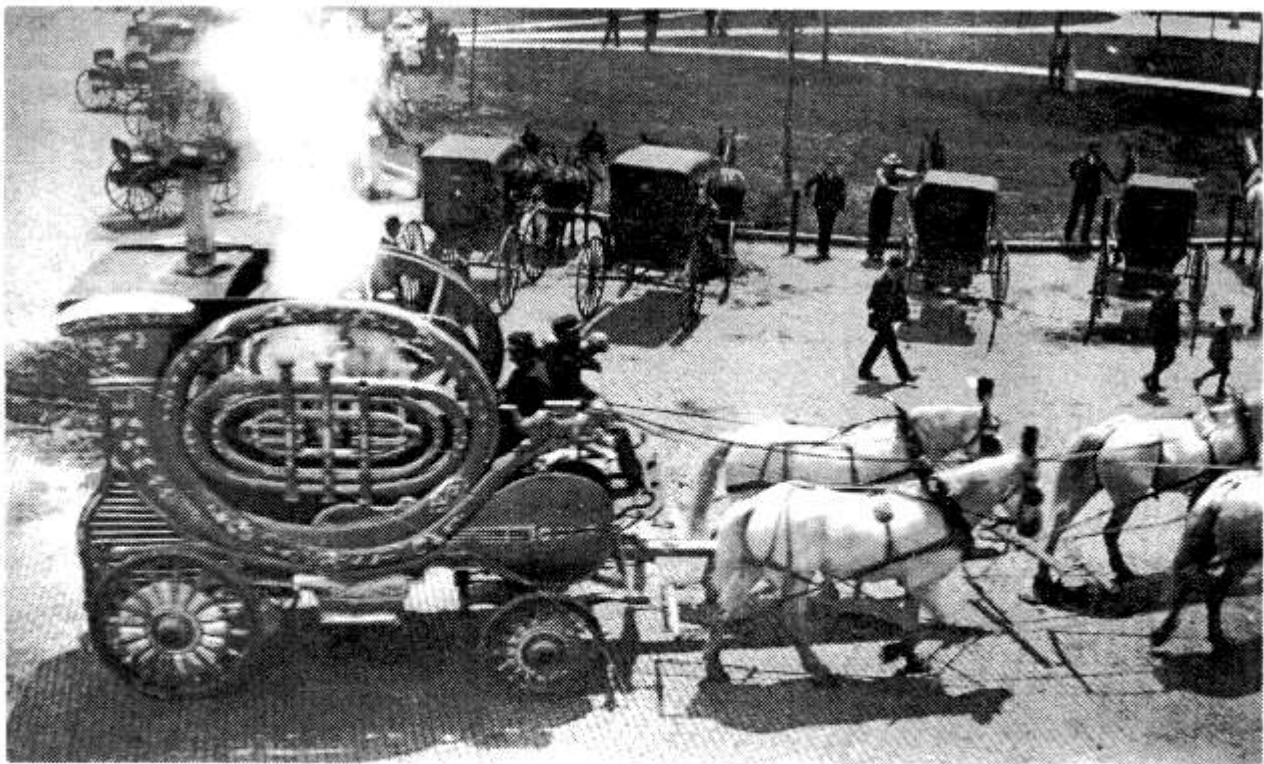
In the 23 August 1907 *Sun*, the Barnum & Bailey management announced that "it is probable that the present season will mark the absolute limit a circus may reach. A greater number of cars would overtax the power of the railroads."

"The old time circus gave a performance that required practically no paraphernalia. The performers were without impedimenta outside of their costumes. The Barnum & Bailey circus of today uses five trains of railway cars."

Montgomery County had its own circus. In November 1921 the obituary of Samuel P. Wallace called him a pioneer showman and said that he entered the circus business "25 years ago when he was a resident of Elliott. His circus was known as 'The Golden Rule Shows.'"

In April 1915 the *Sun* reported that the Wallace shows had gone on their annual tour of the middle states. "From now on through the summer the Red Oak attraction will be away from home. The equipment of the shows are moved from place to place by four automobiles, one trailer and two horse drawn wagons."

It would not be a circus without clowns. In September 1916 the *Sun* said, "Yes, Gollmar Bros. America's Greatest Shows have clowns, all kinds of them."



**Circus parade in Red Oak.** Early 1900s. Note the brick paved streets and the paved sidewalks in the square. Photo: Dearborn collection, Red Oak Public Library.



In August 1924 the *Review* noted, "Saturday was circus day in Villisca, and Robbins Bros. big show with its blare of brass bands, glitter of tinsel and spiel of spiels attracted hundreds of folks. Every seat in the big top was filled. Clowns got laughs and children fed peanuts to the elephants."

Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey circus came to Red Oak in September 1926. The *Sun* reported that 20,000 spectators saw the show. In June 1936 a large crowd attended the Orange Brothers circus held in Grant.

The *Review* reported that the 1940 Jubilisca came to a successful close. Jay Gould's circus was there, and included the elephant, "Baby Mine", owned by Iowa school children. Kids had taken their pennies to school, and added them to a fund to purchase the little elephant.

Over the years the number of circus companies and local exhibitions gradually decreased, although there was still an occasional show. The Allen Bros. circus visited Villisca in August 1991. There was a circus in Red Oak for Junction Days in 1994.



## CARNIVALS

"Swing! Swing! The largest and best swing in use, called Grant & Greeley will be at Milford on the Fourth of July 1874." That was the earliest mention found of an amusement ride in Montgomery county, but it seemed to be well-known at the time. There is no record of the appearance of the swing, but it may have resembled one described in a book about merry-go-rounds, *A Pictorial History of the Carousel*:

"...a small centerpole carousel with sweeps from which hung chains. Small park-type benches hung from the chains."

Contemporary sketches show that such devices didn't have platforms. They were traveling swings, built to be easily moved. The swings were probably propelled by horses, although very early rides were man-powered.

At the Fourth of July celebration in Villisca in 1876, "a revolving swing was kept up until a late hour." The swings were reported at festivities all through the '70s and '80s, with no additional information given.

In September 1891, the *Review* noted that three local men had bought a steam merry-go-round. In December of that year, the "steam riding gallery" went into

winter quarters in Villisca. Another item said, "An amusement building is being erected on the east side of the square for the chilerun (sic) both old and young."

At the Villisca fair in September 1893, what was probably the same contrivance was called a "steam swing". If they were that confused, it's no wonder that we are puzzled.

The merry-go-round has always been popular and continues to maintain its standing as most loved of all amusement rides.

From the earliest days of the county wandering entertainers performed here: jugglers, acrobats, minstrels and clowns.

Whenever an entertainment was held, large numbers of amusements of questionable honesty and morals appeared. Included were games of chance, and other gambling devices, as well as side shows of various types.

In October 1872 the *Review* said, "A regular sell was the one-horse show, 'under pavilion,' Tuesday night, so say the people who were sucked in. It will exhibit every day during the fair; the female who accompanies it swallowing all the snakes that may be brought in."

At the Villisca fair in October 1875 the paper reported, "What a slew of

sideshows, fiddlearians, organistas and the like. Look spry and you will also see several of those bees'waxen fingered gentry, who go about seeking whom they may bamboozle out of their hard earned nickels."

By the turn of the century, some of the mechanical rides, performers and other amusements, shady or otherwise, were collected into entertainment companies which traveled from town to town. The groups were called "Carnivals".

Traveling carnivals have been especially welcome in small communities where organized entertainment is limited. Sometimes they have just appeared, on their own, but usually they have been engaged for a specific occasion, such as a fair, homecoming or Fourth of July.

In August 1903 there was a street fair and carnival in Villisca. Rajah, the high wire-walking elephant was there. The *Review* said, "There were only two fakes, the wild man and the snake eater."

Villisca's Mid-Summer Carnival was held in August 1906. Parker's White City on wheels entertained the crowds. A balloon made daily ascensions. Balloons appeared at many carnivals, but it is uncertain if they were part of the company or an extra feature. The *Review*

said, "The Parker shows are clean, moral and entertaining."

In June 1917 the Tom W. Allen show was in Red Oak, sponsored by the Elks lodge. The *Sun* reported that there was "a wide variety of entertainment, including numerous riding devices. The show carries a good band." There was a carnival at Elliott in September 1917.

Lorraine Post American Legion Drum and Bugle Corp sponsored an old-time carnival and street fair in Red Oak in June 1925. The Isler Shows were located on the streets around the square. The company traveled with fourteen shows and five riding devices. The Legion was raising money to pay for band uniform.

There was a carnival at the Red Oak Fourth of July celebration in 1928, and probably at all subsequent Independence Day events sponsored by the Legion.

Carnivals were booked for Villisca's Jubilisca celebrations and Red Oak's Monty-Festo. The shows were a part of county fairs and Farm Bureau picnics. Towns as small as Grant had carnivals; in September 1947 Soo Rides and Amusements was there. There are still many traveling carnival companies and they continue to come for the county fair and Junction Days.



## ANNUAL EVENTS



A number of communities in the county have sponsored celebrations so successful that they were repeated year after year. Themes have included Old Settlers Days, Homecomings, Corn Festivals and modern events such as Heritage Days and Junction Days. The entertainments have been as diverse as the spectacular Monty-Festos and the Coburg tractor pulls.

Over the years thousands of people have enjoyed these festivities; perhaps these accounts will recall the good times.

### *Old Settlers Days -*

*Villisca* - An Old Settlers reunion was held in Villisca in August 1889. There was lots of music, an oration by W.W. Merritt and a dance in the evening. A special train came from Clarinda; there were about three thousand in attendance.

The reunion was held annually through 1921 and a few in later years. There were crowds of from 3,000 to 8,000 people each year. The event was rather low key at first; it was intended to provide the pioneers an opportunity to get together

and remember the early days. Gradually more and more entertainment was added until the day became about the same as other celebrations.

Ball games were standard fare. In 1895 there were horse races. In '96 a log cabin was built in the park. Antiques were displayed there.

In 1897 an Indian Massacre was staged at the cabin. Just in the nick of time a troop of US Regulars arrived and drove the Indians off. But in the confusion the cabin caught fire, and the fire company was called.

After the fairs were discontinued the reunions became even more popular. In 1901 from 8,000 to 10,000 attended. Other years saw military drills, horseshoes, balloon ascensions and free movies. The last reunion was held in 1929. While a crowd in the park heard talks by old-timers others were enjoying rides in an airplane. The pioneer era was over.

*Elliott* - The earliest account found of Old Settlers Day in Elliott was in 1894. At the reunion in 1895 an organization was formed for the purpose of holding the entertainment annually. In 1904 a baseball tournament was held during the festivities. The *Sun* reported 3,000 people at the 1907 celebration. The 1910 event may have been the last one.

*Grant* had thrown some spectacular parties over the years, including one in 1911. No such opportunity had appeared in 1912, so they held a Homecoming. Attractions included a balloon ascension and parachute drop, five slack wire and swing acrobat performers, merry-go-round, skating rink, dance floor and baseball.

It was so much fun that they decided to make it an annual event. They may have missed a few times, but the festivities were staged most years up through the '20s.

There may have been an occasional celebration during the '30s. Then after the war the event was revived and held annually for a few years. In 1948 the program included the KMA Country School.

*I Remember* - by Helen Blackburn of Grant:

I was probably ten or twelve years of age when this story unfolds. It was a Grant homecoming, probably taking place in the late 1920s, in a grove of shady trees in the southwest part of town. We could never wait for the time when so many people would come to attend the three day celebration! There was a large stage made of planks for the programs. The Grant band always played, and I would sing a solo accompanied by my sister, Aleda, at the piano. I still remember singing "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles". I don't recall ever having stage fright, but I probably did.

Uncle Sam Atwood, Joe Atwood and Clyde made taffy at the homecoming. The men would first put up their stand with decorations in red, white and blue. They had a large hook fastened to one side of the taffy stand. How they did work pulling the taffy up and down over the hook, until it was hardened. The taffy was then removed from the hook, cut into five inch lengths, wrapped in wax paper and was ready to sell at five cents. I wonder how many can remember eating the white taffy with the pink stripe through the middle of the bar? The Atwoods traveled to many celebrations making and selling their taffy.

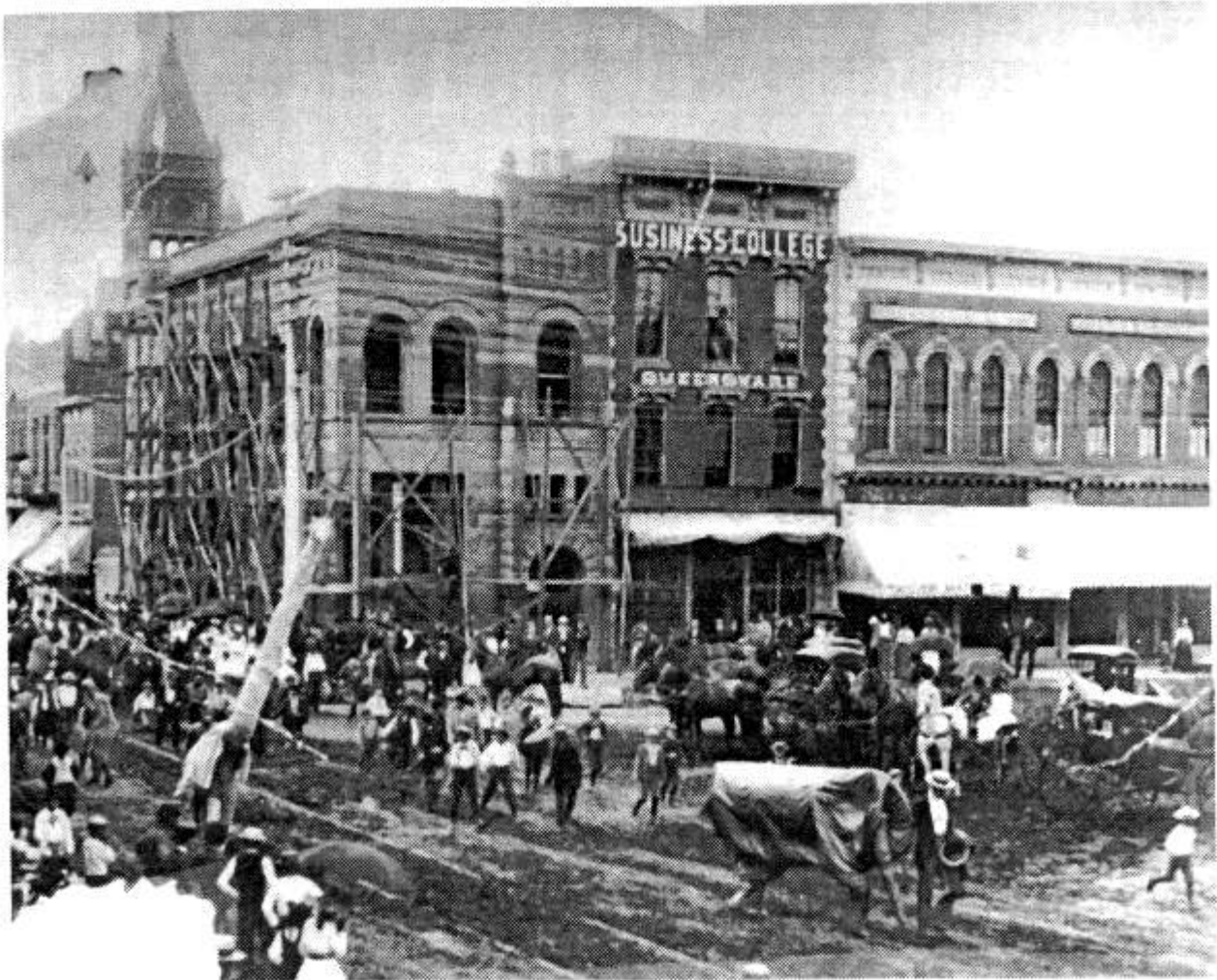
Today the shady grove is a corn field. I never go by the field but what I can still see the merry-go-round, the taffy stand, and all the things that were enjoyed in the grove years ago.

*Stanton Midsummer's Day* -

Midsummer's Day Festival is a Swedish tradition commemorating the longest day of the year. The businessmen of Stanton sponsored such an observance in June 1896.

The *Review* of 2 July reported the event: "The Stanton people have established an annual picnic day as near midsummer as possible and last Wednesday they nearly deserted the capital of Scott and held the picnic at Arlington Mills. Many people along the road joined in the procession. About 150 teams passed the





**Just after a grand parade in Red Oak looking toward the Court House, about 1894. Photo: Frances Houghton**

Mills and the crowd was estimated at from 700 to 1,000. C.H. Wallin of Stanton was Master of Ceremonies...Speeches were made ...There was some fine singing by the Arpe Sextet and solos by Prof. Johanson. The May Pole dance was an interesting feature..."

In 1912 a county-wide festival was established as an annual event to be held in Chautauqua park. Swedish Monitor Club was organized 1 September 1915, for social and educational purposes. The Club sponsored the annual observance in 1916, '17 and '18. In 1917, 2,500 people attended. In 1922 the Stanton people met in Mill Grove park for the Swedish annual midsummer picnic. Three ball games were a

feature of the day. The event was celebrated irregularly, if at all, for many years.

In 1994 the festival was revived with a celebration held at the Swedish Heritage and Cultural center in Stanton. The event included Swedish folk dances and costumes, and the raising of a May pole. The observance was repeated in 1995, and the Stanton Historical Society plans to hold the Festival annually for many years to come.

#### *Monty-Festo -*

Of all the festivals held in the history of the county, surely the grandest were the Monty-Festo celebrations. In 1914

Judge H.E. Deemer originated the novel plan for "county wide entertainment, combining all desirable features of the old time county fair, the street fair, agricultural short courses", including "the Russian market day, the corn festival, the ball tournament, the town athletic tournament, the Firemen's parade, the Ames short course programs, the community music festival, the Fourth of July celebration" and carnival rolled into one great event. Named "Monty" for Montgomery County and "Festo" for festival it was a truly local endeavor. The events were sponsored by the Red Oak Commercial Club and the attractions were free. Judge Deemer suggested that local merchants keep open house with displays of goods in their stores and out-of-town merchants display their wares in booths built around the squares of the city. Street booths would have exhibits of stock, produce, factory goods, home cooking and township displays. Thus in September of that year Monty-Festo was a three day event with Indian night, a pageant, a community chorus, a pioneer night, and a jollification night with fireworks. Company "M" put on a battle scene, there were athletic events, automobile parades, representatives of the state colleges and universities, and the 55th Regimental band played. Monty-Festo was wildly successful; thousands enjoyed the celebration.

The Knights of Monty-Festo were soon organized as a big fun making secret organization of Red Oak business men for the purpose of good fellowship. The Knights had their own rituals and George M. Kerrihard was the first sublime sultan. The Knights wore fawn colored trousers with red coats and helmets for their first parade, followed by 25 of the "faithful" attired in bright green trousers cut after the latest Turkish styles with fawn colored waistcoats, elaborate buttons, and red boleros. Each of the "faithful" wore a red fez. The 1915 Monty-Festo became "the biggest thing ever attempted in Iowa" according to the local press. The next year's event

was equally ambitious. The three day 1916 Monty-Festo boasted of parades which included 68 industrial floats, Civil War veterans, a Grant and West township cavalry troop, decorated baby carriages and world class live stock. Pageants included models of a locomotive and of the ships, the Mayflower and the Santa Maria. There were township exhibits, and local talent which appeared in three street dramas performed at the city square. Three bands from the county played, 18 police were on hand to handle the traffic and street illuminations were put up between midnight and daylight to delight the crowds. Monty-Festo was not planned to generate money, and the cost was absorbed by Red Oak business men. With each township presenting exhibits, floats and displays, and groups from other towns in the county participating Monty-Festo was a good will and friendship promotion.

In August of 1917 it was announced that due to the "many calls for financial assistance in preparing for the war" the (Commercial) club considers that it will be best to postpone the Monty-Festo for a year." However it was not until 1920 that the celebration was re-organized. Judge Deemer had passed away in the intervening years and organizers noted that he had charge of the talent shows and as there was no one else qualified to continue "this work", the pageants were discontinued. However entertainment history was made as a huge fall "round up" with a rodeo company was part of the celebration. There was paid admission for this show. Free attractions included an aerial exhibition by local pilot C.E. Tuttle, boxing matches every afternoon, two orchestras and street dances, even a "colored" dance at Buehler's rink. The *Sun* said that the crowds were the greatest in history, in fact too many (an estimated 12,000) were at the Cowboy roundup and the grandstand began to sag. Some people left but nobody was seriously hurt, the newspaper reports.

However successful the 1920 Monty-Festo might have been, another celebration



**Red Oak Express decorated delivery truck. Monty Festo 9-15-'22**  
Photo: MCHS archives

waited until 1922. This may have been because the first Flying Meet in the area was held in June 1921. It attracted crowds reportedly as large as 10,000 people. Also in August 1921 for the second year in a row the Farm Bureau held a day long picnic full of events and attractions at Stennett to which there was reported to be 10,000 in attendance. With a Chautauqua also competing for the attention of local citizens, 1921 may not have seemed the right year for a Monty-Festo.

The 1922 Monty-Festo was again a wonderful occasion. Three days with great crowds, good weather, a Ford parade, an industrial parade, floats, packed parks, band concerts, science displays, pavement dances, carnival attractions and baseball games. A musical comedy company was engaged (no longer were there local talent shows). Especially noteworthy was the Electric parade in which 42 illuminated floats took part. It was the last Monty-Festo for more than a decade. In 1935 and again in 1948 and 1949 Red Oak revived the idea of a Monty-Festo celebration, but these revivals were not

able to "bring back the good old days" of the earliest Monty-Festos.

#### *Elliott Fall Festivals-*

On the last weekend of September 1917 the Elliott Amusement Company staged a Fall Festival. There was a good crowd and free attractions, including a balloon ascension and trapeze acts.

By 1930 the event was called "annual" and continued for several years. A Fall Festival and Corn Show was staged in October 1938. Thousands of people came to inspect the exhibits and enjoy the Jay Gould carnival.

The first of an annual horse show and festival was held in 1945. The program seemed to be the usual event plus horses. By the late '40s ball games were played each year.

By 1955 the celebration was a fall festival, sponsored by the Activity Club. A free beef barbecue was served. The event continued for many years. The last account found was in 1980.

A Summer Slam was held in 1994, and in '95 the event was called Elliott Days. A celebration is planned for 1996.



### *Villisca Jubilisca -*

In September 1938 a three-day fall festival was held in Villisca. The "progress of time" parade had nearly 100 entries. There was a carnival, horse show and football game.

It was decided that the entertainment should be an annual event, so a contest was held to select a name. The winner was "Jubilisca". The program was held through 1941, then it fell victim to the war.

In 1946 Jubilisca resumed with an observance of the Iowa Centennial. The Tyler airport opened with an air show, and the Page County 4-H Rough Riders performed.

Jubilisca was held annually through 1949, and was then dropped.

### *Tenville's deer feed- by Jon McAlpin; Omaha:*

When I was growing up out on the farm, the month of January marked an annual event which came to be called the deer feed. It was always held in Buzz Artlip's metal building in Tenville where he had his egg business.

The deer feed started in 1964 as a thank you to all the landowners who had permitted Glenn Findley, Al English and my dad to hunt deer on their property. Somehow over the years it grew into a significant annual event open to the public with a free-will offering taken at the door.

I still have fond memories of space heaters, wooden picnic tables and the aroma of deer meat slow-cooked in barbecue sauce. The actual meal consisted of barbecued deer meat sandwiches, Glenn's special smokehouse pork and beans of deadly potential, potato chips and Kool-Aid or coffee to drink.

Faces, many now long gone, lined the picnic tables and were set in smiles of rural ecstasy while kids chased each other down the aisles amidst the low roar of conversation and laughter as neighbors renewed friendships which had expanded over a lifetime.

Later in the evening, tables would be pushed back to permit enough room for

Jerry Cooper, Mervin Laire and a few others to set up their electric guitars and serenade us with choruses of Red River Valley and other old standards. It topped off the evening and made the night complete for all.

The last deer feed was held in 1973. Both Al English and my dad moved out of the community and the event just seemed to fade and finally to die.

I wish that I could go back and experience one of those deer feeds all over again. I would go from table to table, dodging kids in the aisles, and visit with both old and newfound friends about livestock and crop rotation. I would cherish every moment of it as we listened to the choruses of Red River Valley and I would be comfortable with just being one of the guys, one of the participants in this thing we call community.

### *Eshelman's Show -*

Albert Eshelman had been preparing for the event for more than seven years when the first Southwest Iowa Antique Machinery and Threshing Show was held the first of August 1969, on the Eshelman farm at the east edge of the new Pilot Grove Park.

The show featured the display and use of old-time machinery. The chief attraction was a huge steam engine powering a threshing machine. Horses pulled hayracks of bundles up to the separator.

A large metal structure was filled with antiques, containing everything from button hooks to automobiles. Old buildings on the grounds included the Wilson post office, a blacksmith shop, a barber shop (with bathtub) and a rural school.

The show became a popular annual event, and drew large crowds. The last show was held in 1984, and the collections and grounds have been sold.

### *Red Oak Junction Days -*

Before the turn of the century the official name was "Red Oak Junction". In

June 1979 a celebration called Junction Days was planned to commemorate Red Oak's historic past. Highlights of the occasion included a 10,000 meter run, bluegrass music and fiddlers' contest, a melodrama, "He Ain't Done Right by Nell", in Rotary bowl and a square dance. All activities were free.

And something new in the sporting world was added: the Great Pleasant Jones Memorial Race. The 1856 census tells us that Pleasant Jones came to Iowa in 1855. Part of the town of Red Oak is built on his land. The *Express* describes the event: "Teams of four persons each will participate. The race will be held in three segments. First is bicycling for approximately nine miles; second is running for about 3.5 miles, ending at Viking Lake boat dock; third is canoeing at Viking Lake ending with canoeists to foot race to the finish line in Viking Lake picnic area. Teams include one bicyclist, one runner and two canoeists."

Junction Days became a popular annual observance with new events added each year. In 1980 the three day frolic featured a parade, a pig roast and surrey and stagecoach rides. The celebration closed with fireworks.

The revived Great Pleasant Jones Memorial Race led the attractions in 1982. Also featured were a horseshoe tournament, cow chip throwing and a dance. A theme is selected for each year's observance, and have included "Salute to the Red Oak Worker"; "Love Our Kids For a Brighter Future"; and in 1995, "Still on Track".

*Good Times-* by Jessica Bergren, student; Red Oak High School:

*I've loved Junction Days ever since I was little, because there's something to do for just about everyone. From age three to seven, I participated in the Big Wheel races, the hula hoop contest, and the pet judging, in which I would enter a couple of kittens. I also enjoyed the different varieties of carnival games, like basketball, the darts, golf, and the bean-bag toss.*

*I always loved the parades! It was a time when the adults would come to the square to see all the different floats, and the little children would come for the candy. We would always push our way up to the front of the crowd to see who could get the most candy. Our enemy always ended up being the bigger and faster kid next to us, who ended up with more candy stuffed into his pockets than we did.*

*There are the 10-K and the two-mile fun run. My uncle helps organize the runs, so he asked my sister and me to get some friends together to help. We would pile about seven of our friends into the back of our truck and go to our water station. We would fill tons of cups with water until we saw the runners coming; then we would hand them the water as they ran by. We even got t-shirts for helping. It was a lot of fun.*

*Stanton Lakefest -*

Stanton held a Lakefest in 1985. As many as 5,500 people attended in 1987 when the 30th anniversary of Viking Lake State Park was celebrated with a rededication ceremony. The responsibility for Lakefest was shared by the Stanton and Corning Chambers of Commerce, with the sites alternating between Viking Lake and Lake Icaria.

Activities have included square dancing, softball and baseball, volley ball, hayrack rides, barbecues and fireworks.

*Viking Lake-* by Angie Bergren, student, Red Oak High School:

*My favorite memory of Viking Lake is Lake Fest '93. It was so much fun. There was music, dancing and singing. But the best part was the fireworks. There were so many of them, and they were all so beautiful. I really like how the pontoon boats were in the water and all lit up with lights. The reflection of the lights off the water was pretty.*

*Viking Lake has always been a fun place for me. I plan to keep making great memories there.*

### *Villisca Heritage Days -*

Villisca had celebrated "Homecoming '86". It was so successful that it was decided to continue the festivities. A plan was contrived for an annual celebration which would recognize the cultural and historical inheritance of the community. The event would be called "Heritage Days".

The first program, in June 1987, was an observance of the 75th anniversary of the Villisca ax murders. A drawing was held for a free weekend in Villisca.

In 1988 the focus was on 1927. As an advertising stunt, the committee "adopted" a small pig. They named it "Willard" as a name sake of the TV weatherman, Willard Scott. The premise of the promotion was that if Scott did not appear at '88 Heritage Days, Little Willard would be barbecued in the park. Scott didn't visit but he mentioned the promotion twice on his national broadcast.

A theme is selected for each year and they have included a tribute to Villisca's outstanding record in World War II, railroad history and a western setting.

In 1994 an all-school reunion was held. Gov. Branstad rode in the parade and dedicated the new fire station-community building. Villisca Theater, Inc. observed its twentieth anniversary.

*Heritage Days- by Julie Barker, student; Villisca High School:*

*Heritage Days is a weekend in which we celebrate the history of the town. It is a fun, relaxing gathering of families and friends.*

*There are many activities that people can do any time during the weekend. I like to go to the square first, where there is a flea market. Many people are selling practically anything anyone could want. Sometimes t-shirts made especially for Heritage Days are for sale. Then I look at store windows, which have displays that deal with the theme of Heritage Days. The Olson-Linn Museum has old automobiles, farm equipment and tools that I enjoy looking at. There are gorgeous quilts on display for everyone to see. Children are not left out; they can ride a miniature train or ferris wheel.*

*My favorite part of the celebration is the parade. It consists of antique vehicles, commercial vehicles, a band, children, horses, and sometimes floats. Some of the children are dressed in costumes, while others are riding decorated bicycles. All of them are hoping to win some money for a prize.*

*In the evening, there is a talent show. I get a wonderful feeling when I see so much talent in one place. When the weekend is over, everyone is ready for a break.*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU



It is customary to view certain anniversaries as special. Golden weddings usually call for formal observances, and degrees of longevity may be honored.

Civic entities also have birthdays. Montgomery County has commemorated a number of local, county, state and national anniversaries. The first such occasion was in 1876.

Fourth of July -

Impressive plans were made in the county in 1876 for the 100th birthday of the United States. Red Oak arranged the "grandest celebration ever had on the Missouri slope".

In Villisca the Centennial Fourth dawned with a salute of 38 guns. The parade line stretched for two miles. Many from Sciola and Milford attended. After a



basket dinner the people gathered at the speaker's stand to hear the "Early History of Villisca and Vicinity".

Entertainments included a platform dance and revolving swing. The city park was lit with Chinese lanterns. There were fireworks and a dance in the evening.

The Sesquicentennial anniversary of Independence Day in 1926 was unnoted in Montgomery County. There wasn't one public Fourth of July celebration in the whole county. In October an observance of the birthday was given in Villisca.

The *Review* said, "One of the best home talent entertainments seen in Villisca in a long time was the pageant 'America Forever'. The pageant was given under the auspices of the Ladies Aid society of the Methodist church, assisted by many from the other churches and other organizations of the city. It was directed by Miss M.C. Mathews of Chicago. Music was furnished by the Presbyterian Church orchestra."

The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission was organized to promote and coordinate the observance of the 200th birthday of the United States. Planning was started in 1975. Most of the communities in the county qualified for a Bicentennial Flag, but there were three towns which held large celebrations. Villisca's festivities were held on the Fourth and are reported elsewhere.

*Red Oak* - In July 1975 a booklet of 28 drawings of various historic scenes of the county was sold to raise funds for the coming event. Red Oak's Bicentennial flag was presented at the county fair.

The celebration, "Up and Away, USA" was held in Red Oak June 11-15. It featured such events as a Flag Day program, presentation of a Bicentennial citation from President Gerald Ford, presentation of Century Farm awards and a Pageant, "The Sound of My Voice."

Other entertainments included Queen contest, beard contest, square dance, games and races, exhibits, displays and

unveiling of the Bicentennial quilt. About the first of December the Red Oak Bicentennial Time Capsule was buried in Fountain Square Park.

*Grant* - The Bicentennial committee compiled a "History of Grant and Douglas Township"; the book and commemorative plates were sold as fund raisers. The first event was held on Memorial Day, with the crowning of a king and queen, and dedication of the new flag pole and the Old Mill marker, both of which are at the fire station.

The Bicentennial week-end opened on Friday evening, 25 June, with a Grant High School alumni reception; approximately 350 attended. The Bicentennial Rock for the school house site was dedicated.

On Saturday the Iowa State University drill team raised the flag at 10:00 a.m. There were approximately 90 entries in the parade. There was a horseshoe pitching contest. The pageant, scheduled for Saturday evening, was postponed until Sunday evening because of a storm.

Each county in the state was asked to supply a rock from which a map of that county would be cut; the pieces would then be assembled into a map of Iowa. Montgomery County's rock came from the Grant Rock Quarry; it was taken to Des Moines in August.

#### *Iowa Statehood* -

In 1896, Gov. Drake issued a proclamation asking the people of Iowa to remember the Fiftieth anniversary of statehood. He suggested that, on the 28th of December, the flag be displayed on homes and businesses.

1946 - A Centennial program to observe the 100th anniversary of Iowa statehood was held in conjunction with the annual Farm Bureau Picnic and 4-H Achievement Show, in August 1946.

The "Barn Dance Frolic" of station WHO, Des Moines, gave two performances. A free dance was held on Washington Avenue

between Fourth and Fifth Streets. Commemorative half-dollars were available.

In September Villisca's Jubilisca featured a Centennial parade and antique displays.

About the first of December the Captain of the battleship *Iowa* announced that the ship would cancel with its post mark all self-addressed stamped envelopes sent to the ship in advance of December 28. The plan promoted the sales of the Iowa Centennial Stamp.

1996 - Notice came from the state level that each county was expected to "do something" for the Sesquicentennial year of 1996. So, early in 1994, a Montgomery County Commission was organized. Some proposed projects were approved and work was begun on the compilation of two books. One was to be a military record listing all men and women of the county who served in a military organization during World War II; brief biographies would be included. The second book would be called "Good Times in Montgomery County."

Various means of funding the activities were available. Bicentennial license plates were placed on sale with each county receiving a share of the proceeds. Each county received one commemorative coin from 1946 which it was free to use as it saw fit.

#### *Montgomery County Centennial -*

In May 1953 a contest was held to select a name for the Montgomery County centennial celebration to be held for a full week, 23-28 August. Janet Anderson, 15, of Stanton submitted the winning name, "Cavalcade of the Century." The name was used for souvenir booklets compiled by the Business and Professional Women, which were sold for 50 cents as a fund raiser.

The festivities opened with a flight breakfast at the airport. That evening a religious observance was held, presenting a 400-voice choir. An historical parade was featured on the second day.

Tuesday was Industrial Progress day with open houses at several business plants. A free street dance was held on the northwest corner of the square.

Wednesday was Young America Day, with activities for the children. Governor Beardsley opened the first showing of the pageant by crowning the centennial queen. A cast of 450 portrayed the county's history.

Thursday was Ladies' Day and the second showing of the pageant, "Cavalcade of a Century".

Oldtimers Day and beard contest judging marked Friday, with the third showing of the pageant.

Saturday was American Heritage Day with a Mardi Gras parade and the final performance of the pageant. A carnival was open all week.

#### *Villisca Centennial-*

On 12, 13 and 14 September 1958 Villisca joyfully observed its first hundred years. An estimated 10,000 spectators lined the street as the Centennial Parade passed in review. More than one hundred floats participated. Radio KMA covered the event.

The Villisca Spectacular, a pageant written, directed and presented by local talent had a cast of 135. On two evenings it played to standing room only crowds.

There were whisker and costume contests, a Kangaroo Kourt, and a horse show. A Religious Rally on Sunday afternoon closed the week-end event.

#### *Elliott; 50th and 100th -*

On the third and fourth of October 1930 Elliott held a two-day celebration. The annual corn and poultry show took place on Friday. In the evening a home talent program was given, followed by a movie.

On Saturday was the Golden Jubilee commemorating the founding of Elliott fifty years earlier. More than 4,000 watched the big parade which recalled the early history of the town. The old time band led a train of eight covered wagons and numerous other wagons and buggies.

The floats featured such things as an early country school and a saloon of yesteryear. Eight Indians in war paint and feathers rode horseback. The old time fire department was on hand.

In the afternoon there was a band concert, speaking and a football game. A free barbecue and concert finished off the day. A street carnival was in town all week.

On the sixth of April 1979 a standing room only crowd attended a program at the Elliott gym. Music, a style show and "The Wedding of the Century" were featured. The evening of entertainment was a fund raiser for the Centennial Celebration.

The Centennial program ran 31 August and 1, 2 September. Highlighting the festivities was the pageant, "Whistle Stop U.S.A." Crafts, antiques, quilts and old pictures were on display. An alumni gathering was held and the Centennial Band, "The Imperfects", played.

There was a grand Centennial parade and a children's parade. "Spanning the Century" styles were modeled. At noon on Sunday the Time Capsule ceremony was held. A horse show on Sunday evening ended the celebration.

#### *Red Oak Centennial -*

The Red Oak Centennial celebration was held 1-5 July 1969. It included children's parades, a dance at the Elks Club, Offutt Air Force Band, a slate of Little League baseball, the Hawkeye Jamboree, square dancing, a hypnotist, Red Oak National Guard Drill Team, whiskers contest, jet fly-over, country music show, Model A parade, Centennial parade, horseshoe pitching contest, horse show, teen dance, and fireworks. Everything was free except the Carnival.

#### *Stanton; 100th and 125th -*

Four hundred people gathered at Mamrelund Lutheran Church on the evening of 28 November 1969, to participate in a dinner and program which was the last event of the first hundred years of the church.

The second century was welcomed with a Centennial celebration which began on Sunday 21 June 1970 with Religious Heritage Day and ran through Sunday 28 June. The festivities included such events as a watermelon feed, a pony pull, square dancing and a carnival.

Wednesday, Swedish Heritage Day, was the grand opening of the Centennial. Events included bells, time capsule ceremony and Swedish folk dancing.

Ladies' Day started with Koffee Klatches. "Century of Fashion" modeled more than 60 costumes. Crafts and antiques were displayed. There was a horseshoe pitching contest.

The historical pageant, "Gracious Heritage", was presented several evenings. The largest parade ever held in Stanton was on Saturday afternoon. The Marshalls were Sigmund Larmon of New York and actress Virginia Christine, better known as "Mrs. Olson" of Folger coffee fame. The final performance of the pageant on Sunday evening rang down the curtain on the Centennial.

Valkommen! That was surely the most frequently heard word in Stanton during 4, 5 and 6 August 1995. The community was celebrating its 125th birthday, and went to great lengths to welcome visitors to the party.

The three-day celebration offered something for everyone. Highlights included a stage show, "Stanton's First 125 Years", dedication of the Swedish Heritage and Cultural Center, and the 125th Birthday Party. There were a number of places to eat, and a Beer Garden. Walks, bike rides and two dances were available for the energetic. And last but not least, reminiscing, remembering (and some lying) at class reunions.

#### *Courthouse Centennial -*

On the Fourth of July 1890, 'midst pomp and ceremony the cornerstone of the Montgomery County courthouse was laid.

The Centennial observance of that occasion took place on 23 and 25 June 1990. On Saturday the Grand Lodge of



Iowa, A.F. & A.M. and Red Oak Lodge No. 162 conducted the rites connected with the rededication of the cornerstone. There was a Time Capsule ceremony. The Eastern Iowa Brass Band gave a concert on Sunday afternoon.

Beginning on Friday evening an original drama was presented in the courtroom at the courthouse; it was given eight times to full houses. "A Terrible

Stillness", by Rebecca Christian, re-enacted two trials connected with the Villisca axe murders of 1912, possibly the most notorious court cases in the 100 year history of the court room. Each evening a jury was selected from the men attending the play. They sat in the jury box, and were required to reach a verdict concerning the guilt or innocence of the accused.



HORSELESS CARRIAGES



During the 1890s rumors of a new invention began to circulate. It was said to be a four-wheeled vehicle, in which people could ride. But there were no horses hitched to it, and it rolled down the road with no visible means of propulsion. At first such reports were dismissed as idle tales. But the stories persisted, and eventually people began to refer to the contraption as a "horseless carriage".

In March 1900 the *Review* reported that Brelsford was "putting up" a horseless carriage. "It is a daisy and will be a wonder for Villisca as such a thing has never been in town before." Apparently the daisy didn't run, for in March 1903 the *Review* noted the appearance of the first automobile in Villisca, "owned by E.C. Hough. It is propelled by a gasoline engine."

According to the *Express* of 15 March 1901, an auto run by steam came to Red Oak with an out of town show.

The *Sun* tells us that in May 1902, T.B. Draper bought the first cars owned in Red Oak. One was for two persons; the other would seat four. They were steam driven, with the boiler heated by a gasoline burner. "They are equipped with acetylene gas headlights, sidelights, have heavy rubber tires, and are in every way up-to-date. Mr. Draper will take a

trial spin as soon as the streets are free of mud."

At Red Oak in 1902, the Fourth of July "turned out to be a fine day." Motorcycle and automobile exhibitions were held. Also in July William Thomas' automobile came. The *Sun* said, "A representative of the company came Wednesday and supervised getting it in trim for running and gave instructions as to the handling. It was running for the first time yesterday afternoon. It has seating capacity for 16 people. It is driven by a gasoline engine of 18 horsepower and can be run at a speed of 16 to 20 miles per hour. Mr. Thomas will use it for pleasure parties and will run it to and from the trains."

S.P. Wallace was the proprietor of the Red Oak street car line. The city wanted to pave some streets and asked Wallace to pay for the paving between his tracks. He refused, so the city pulled up the tracks and paved over the space. Wallace sued, but nothing ever came of it. The Thomas bus replaced the street car. Apparently the bus wasn't completely satisfactory as Thomas was using a horse drawn vehicle again in 1907.

A news item of 1905 said there was a Degarrison car in Milford, but no details were given. In July 1907 the *Express* reported that Milo Foy had his auto in

good running order. "This is the only touring car in this place at present."

The Tenville news of 1907 tells that an automobile passed through Tenville one evening traveling at a rate of 45 miles per hour. "It passed P.S. Focht's on its route to Villisca as he was milking one of his cows and P.S. says it went through there and back before he had time to finish milking that cow. Well, that's going some!"

In March 1908 the *Express* noted that Lou Ashby was driving a new automobile, "one of his own construction".

Gov. Cummins' visit to Villisca in May 1908 created a flurry of activity. The *Review* said, "F.F. Jones expected to escort the governor from the depot in his car, but something had gone wrong with the pesky car. Mr. Jones made arrangements for the use of another, but while waiting for the train a tire went flat. Dr. Jackson was summoned, but his car was out of gasoline. The governor of Iowa was conveyed up town by means of a horse and buggy."

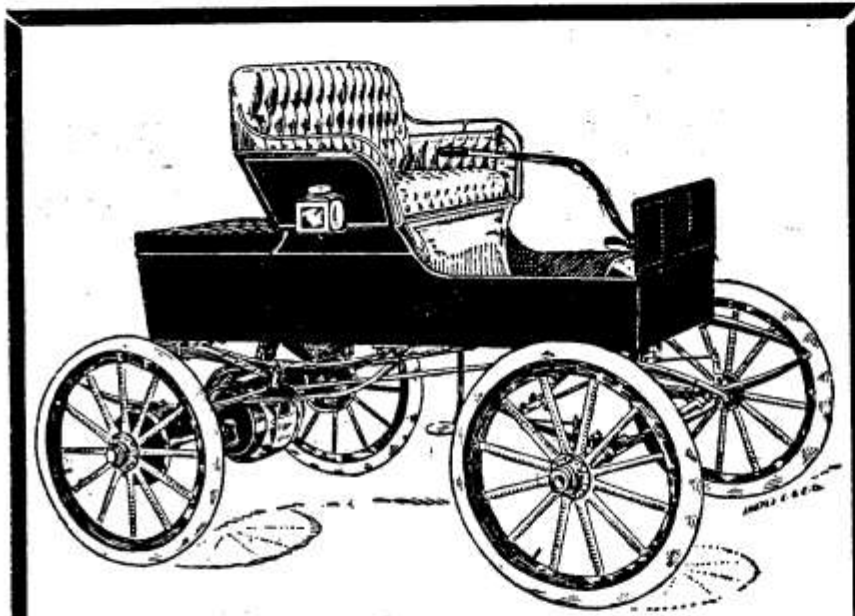
At the Race Meet in Red Oak in September 1908 an auto race was held.

"The ten laps was accomplished in very quick time by Mr. North in his Buick." Eddie Rickenbacker wrecked his Firestone car at the 1910 races.

In 1911 the *Express* conducted a subscription contest with an auto as first prize. "Almost three hours were required to wade through the mass of votes and the announcement was made that Mrs. Carl Oliver had won the Overland automobile, a machine that costs, on the market, \$1,000 and is a standard of excellence in its class." The *Express* held at least two more such contests.

In 1911 Shepard & Hawkins Good Clothes Shop in Red Oak gave away a Lilliputian automobile "to a boy or girl not over 18 years of age. The Lilliputian auto is not a toy but a practical, well built car...one cylinder, water cooled, wheel base 68 inches, weight of car 400 pounds."

May 1911: After July first every automobile in Iowa must carry its number both in front and behind.



## AUTOMOBILE FOR SALE!

As I desire to purchase a larger car, I offer my Pope-Waverly Electric for sale.

Above cut shows car very well except it has wire wheels. Has been run less than 1200 miles. Is in most excellent condition and capable of unlimited usefulness yet.

New cost of such a car with necessary equipment today is about \$1,000. I will make a **VERY LOW CASH PRICE** or **WILL TRADE IT FOR SMALL HOUSE AND LOT.**

**M. N. SPENCER.**

Express 1906



**Ives Boyington in Monte Festo parade for Hawkins Park 1916.** Photo: Dorothy White

When Hawkins Park opened in 1913, public transportation was needed. "Jap" Houser of Coburg drove a two-cylinder Jackson Hack to and from the park, while Tom Ballard carried passengers from Red Oak in a two-cylinder Reo.

In May 1914 the Thomas Transfer Company advertised regular trips every thirty minutes to Riverview Park with their 16-passenger motor bus.

An auto show was held in the Red Oak armory in June 1914. Thirteen local men had exhibits representing 18 different makes of cars. Five thousand people attended the last day.

In August 1915 the *Express* said, "After a successful trip of three or four weeks the Red Oak boys who compose the Pan American Auto Polo teams came home Saturday. The teams are composed of two drivers, three mallet men and an umpire. They carry four cars with them, all Fords

built over especially to withstand the hard usage...and the players wear clothing and head gear to protect them. They have met with abundant success wherever they have gone. The team is to appear at the Monty-Festo."

In September 1916 a Grant news item said, "The race between a Ford and a horse was won by the horse."

*The Model T Racer - by Chester Larson of Griswold:*

*Kenny Brown and I were very good friends while we were growing up west of Grant in the 1920s. Ken's first car of his own was a used Model T Ford coupe. He drove it most of the time he was in high school. After graduating, he decided to strip the box-like glass cage from the running gear and make a light-weight open-air racer for summer use. He sent for a racing body kit from Sears and*



Roebuck, and after many hours of mechanical work it was ready for the road. Ken put in a high-speed ring gear, complete with foot feed. The "little bug" was really snappy and seemingly light as a feather in a wind storm.

On Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons Ken took to the road, and often invited me to ride with him for a "little spin" on the highway and around the country. We drove over some sharp hills at full throttle, "just for kicks". The hind wheels were occasionally off the ground as we went over a sharp knoll.

Some of the side roads were narrow and at high speed one tends to drive near the center of the road. It was a thrilling ride I will never forget and I shudder to think what might have happened if we had met another car near the top of a hill. People who met or saw the red racer on the road said unpleasant things about those wild kids. Ken never said much about it but I think he was advised to "park the darn thing" and drive his daddy's sedan which he did more or less, until purchasing a near-new Chevrolet.



#### THOSE FABULOUS FLYING MACHINES

##### Balloons

History doesn't tell us when the first hot air balloon arrived in Montgomery County, but it was before 1871, when plans for a balloon ascension at the County Fair didn't indicate anything unusual or remarkable. An item from the *Express* said, "The Agricultural Society of this place has secured the services of H. Denneston with a baloon (sic) 65 feet in diameter and 90 feet in height."

"Baloon ascensions" were advertised for the Centennial Fourth of July in Villisca in 1876. The big bags became standard features of celebrations and fairs; frequently they were added attractions at circuses. In 1880 Cooper & Jackson's Circus had a "Monster Air Ship" at Villisca. During the mid '80s the county fair usually had a balloon.

Things didn't always go smoothly. In 1885 the *Sun* said, "The balloon was to have gone up Wednesday afternoon, but there was too much wind for one thing and too many little holes in it for another thing, the latter the result of being too near the shooting match. It went up yesterday but left the balloonist behind."

In 1890 there was a huge Fourth of July celebration in Red Oak, in connection with the laying of the cornerstone of the courthouse. The *Sun* said, "Prof. Thompson...is engaged at an expense of \$425. His balloon is no hot air affair, but is a regular gas balloon and a big one." The ballonist was usually called "Professor".

After the Fourth the paper said, "In filling the balloon it caught fire and a great hole was burned in it. This hole was patched hurriedly and the ascension made. The patch was put on with safety pins, long stitches, etc. and there remained scorched places. The balloon was in a very unsafe condition but the aeronaut went up a short distance and made a parachute descent."

In 1891 the *Sun* reported that the balloon ascension in connection with Taylor's circus was a very successful one. The balloon went up nearly half a mile and "the aeronaut dropped with a parachute, performing on a horizontal bar as he came down".

At the County fair in 1893, the *Sun* noted that "The young woman aeronaut is paid \$50 each for the first two ascensions and then \$20 each for each ascension...On

Tuesday the aeronaut came down in Asa Taylor's feed lot...Yesterday she came down near the south mill. She sends a dog down in a parachute and then after sailing considerably higher, so high that she looks no larger than a doll, she cuts another parachute loose and drops ..."

In August 1906 a carnival brought a balloon to Villisca. When the balloonist tried to jump, the parachute caught on something, and the performer experienced some wild swinging before he finally landed safely. The Grant Chief announced plans for balloon and parachute exhibitions at the 1912 Homecoming.

Hawkins Park was the site of a number of balloon ascensions. A Harvest Festival was held the first of September 1913. That scheduled ascension wasn't given "on account of the bag burning up."

A county-wide patriotic rally was held in Red Oak in June 1917. One of the attractions was a balloon ascension and parachute drop. The Sun said, "this... will attract much attention owing to the important part balloons are playing in the World war."

It attracted attention, but not necessarily for the reason given. On the first attempt, made in the morning, the bag ripped just before the ascent was to start. It turned over and hung on the top of a building. It was evening before it was repaired. Then it rose, but the gas began to leak out, and the balloon came down on some electric light wires. The Sun reported that the aeronaut "had a narrow escape from electrocution".

IOWA AERIAL NAVIGATION CO.

OF RED OAK, IOWA.

No. of Certificate

No. of Shares

To Whom Issued,

of

From Whom Transferred,

Received this \_\_\_\_\_ day of

188\_\_\_\_\_



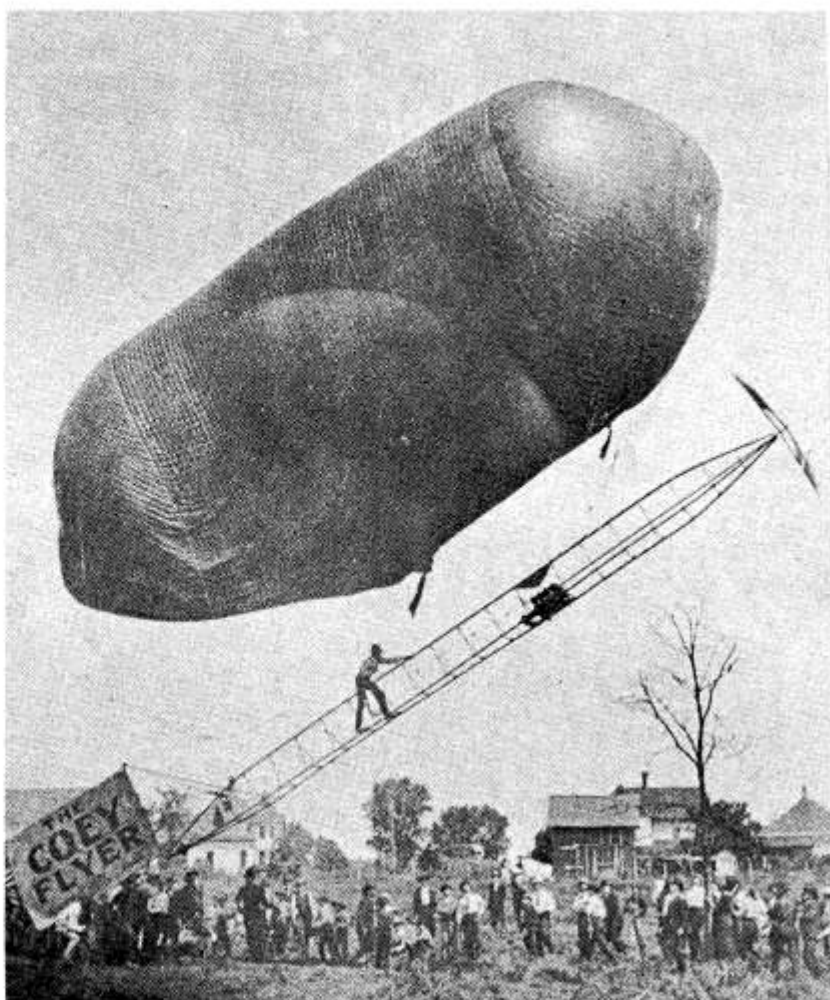
### Iowa Aerial Navigation Co.

Reproduction of an actual unissued stock certificate of an enterprise of George M. West. West was the architect and contractor of many local buildings, including Stanton's Old Main, several Red Oak schools, and the Bishop and Houghton Opera House. Photo: MCHS archives.

## The Airship Comes to Red Oak

The performance of the airship during the 1907 race meet had been disappointing. Saturday, 3 August, the day after the meet, was a fine day, so Horace B. Wild, operator of the Eagle, took the craft up to show what it really could do under favorable conditions.

Sam Payne, proprietor of the Johnson House, offered to treat Wild to a fine dinner if he landed the ship on the roof of the hotel. The 9 August *Express* said, "...Aeronaut Wild steered the airship around the court house tower and landed on the Johnson House. He came down just a little too hard and snapped the framework of his car..."





Airships -

There was much interest in development of a lighter-than-air ship which would give the pilot more control of his craft. Some odd theories were advanced but probably none stranger than one found in the 5 June 1885 *Sun*.

"George M. West the well known architect and builder of this city has invented an aerial navigating machine... He had studied the subject for 29 years, and from close observation...of birds, has taken for a model for his machine the form of a fowl...Mr. West claims that by inventions of his own, he can add propelling wheels that have a lifting force as well as a propelling force. The machine is inflated like a balloon, except a portion of the hull in which are apartments for passengers. There is a pilot house on top.

"Mr. West is forming a stock company ...to be called the Iowa Aerial Navigating Company..."

Apparently the public was not impressed with this weird contraption; nothing more was found on the subject.

The gasoline engine provided the controlled propulsion system needed, and the airship was developed. The first such craft to be seen in Montgomery County made an unscheduled stop.

In 1907 Clarinda arranged to have an airship exhibition as the principle attraction at their Fourth of July celebration. The *California Arrow* ascended, but the wind was so strong that the ship was carried rapidly away to the north. It landed four or five miles northwest of Villisca, creating a lot of excitement in that area.

That same summer Red Oak made plans for a Montgomery County Race & Amusement Meet, arranging for an expensive list of entertainments. The featured attraction was the "Eagle", a 75 foot airship. The *Sun* reported, "Rain the first day, high winds, and a balky gasoline engine, preventing the airship from making satisfactory flights, made the Race & Amusement meet a losing venture financially."

One night the craft was left tied to a post at Pactolus Park. It broke loose, and next morning the search party found it on the ground near Elliott.

*Flying Machines and Aeroplanes -*

It was in December 1903 that a couple of bicycle mechanics from Ohio changed the world forever. But it was several years before the Wright Brothers' invention appeared in Montgomery County.

The *Express* of 29 August 1913 said, "...three-day Harvest Festival to be held at Hawkins Park next week...And the first aeroplane flights ever made in this county will be given on Wednesday and Thursday when an experienced aviator will make two flights daily, weather permitting..." The next week's paper said, "Wednesday the monoplane man gave two good flights..."

In October 1919 a coursing meet was held at the Hossle farm a mile west of Red Oak. Two planes were there during the meet. They used the Hossle pasture for a landing field, and took passengers for rides. One of the planes also visited Villisca, Grant and Elliott, carrying passengers at those places. At that time C.E. Tuttle ordered an American Curtis biplane, at a cost of \$4,000. It was the first plane owned in Montgomery county.

Early in June 1921, the local papers reported that Iowa's first Aero Meet was to be in Red Oak later that month. It was held in the field south of the George Bishop farm, southwest of Red Oak.

The 27 June '21 *Express* reported that thousands of people attended the big aerial meet. "All kinds and makes and colors of planes were here. There were the Curtis "Jennies", the Orioles with their orange colored bodies, there were Standards, Canuck Curtis, Laird Swallows, Lincoln Standards, Hiso Standards, O.N.X. 5's, the Lark...and the Kite, the smallest ship known which has successfully made flights. This tiny ship weighs 300 pounds." Another item claimed they built a special fence around the Kite so someone wouldn't accidentally step on it.



**First airplane in Montgomery Co. Hawkins Park 1913.** Photo: Dorothy White.

There was a big delegation of wing walkers, parachute jumpers, and others who furnished entertainment for the crowds. The Burnham brothers of Council Bluffs, who were Villisca natives, brought their plane to the meet.

The federal government was so pleased with the plans for the meet that it made available movie films which had been taken of aerial action in France. The pictures were shown daily.

After the meet, Pete Tuttle hired some of the crack flyers, and staged a number of aerial meets in the mid-west. In April 1924 he arranged for a flying school to be conducted at the Hossle field.

In June 1930 an air tour stopped in Red Oak. Sixty-one planes put on an air circus at the Jack Harris field, southwest of Red Oak. A glider was demonstrated.

In 1931 the *Sun* reported that about 5,000 persons witnessed the Des Moines *Register & Tribune's* autogiro exhibition at the Hossle pasture, where the exhibition of the "windmill" airplane took place. "The promoters claim it will be the flivver of the air...The 'Windmill' plane can land and take off almost vertically...it landed at the Legion park field." That was the Tuttle landing field, and it was north of the park.

In August 1932, there was an air circus at Villisca. The Embree brothers of Grant purchased a plane in 1933.

In 1940 the city of Red Oak leased Frank Hossle's pasture and established the Red Oak Municipal Airport. That fall the local Junior College introduced a course in aviation.

In February 1942 Red Oak became the first designated airport in Iowa. During

World War II air traffic operated under strict controls. The C.A.A. selected a few Iowa air fields as regional centers. Red Oak was headquarters for all planes in the southwestern Iowa C.A.P. flight. Any planes that didn't operate from an official field had to be completely dismantled. Local planes were forbidden to fly beyond a 25-mile radius except by a special C.A.A. permit. There were nine planes based at Red Oak, seven of them coming from neighboring towns.

In 1944 the city relinquished the property to Earl McQuown, who arranged for flying lessons to be given there. Red Oak voted a bond issue for a permanent municipal airport in April '46. The Hossle farm of 158 acres was purchased in 1947.

Early in '46 the Southwestern Iowa Airmen's Association was organized to stimulate local interest in flying. In April '46 Tyler Brothers purchased two Piper Cubs, and constructed a landing field at the east edge of Villisca. The same summer Frank Fryer developed a field on his farm southeast of Villisca. A feature of the 1946 Villisca Jubilisca was an air show at the Tyler airport. Nearly 50 planes participated.

In 1948 Russell Larson built a landing field on his farm at the north edge of Grant.

The first annual flight breakfast was held at the Red Oak airport 8 July 1951. Prized were given to the oldest and youngest pilots, and the plane coming the greatest distance. In 1960 the weather was foul and no planes came. There were 1,000 for breakfast in 1969. The flight breakfast continues to draw planes and crowds each year.

The Tyler airport at Villisca was closed in April 1956.

The Iowa Flying Farmers met 21 May 1949 at Tyler Brothers airport at Villisca.

Icle (Mrs. Frederick) Fisher of Villisca was named the 1956 Iowa Flying Farmer Queen. She represented Iowa in the national competition in New Orleans.

The Iowa Flying Farmers State Convention was held in Red Oak in March 1967. There was a three day program.

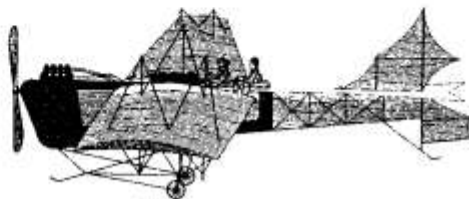
*When airplanes fly from your fields - by William Arnold, Red Oak:*

*The first one I remember was when I was pretty young, more than 70 years ago. My father George Arnold let our field be used for an airfield. The pilot had a bi-wing, or two wing plane. He gave rides from the field taking people up. My dad was to get a free ride but he didn't want to go up. Our farm was west of town, north of the old highway 34, across from when the armory is now.*

*The biggest plane I remember was a trimotor, a Ford motor plane that was an 18 passenger plane. It landed on Axel Swanson's farm. It was aluminum covered. This was about 1929, just when old 34 was being rebuilt. I went up in the plane. I wasn't afraid. It was really a big plane and I remember the lights were coming on in the town as we flew around. The plane came just for exhibition and to take passengers for rides. The field that was used was just a cultivated field that had no crop in it at the time. It was a wonderful ride.*

*I remember other planes in the early 30s. One was a four passenger plane--a fair size plane for the time. It was a single motor plane from Tulsa, Oklahoma. Carrol Pierson had a one wing plane that flew out of our farm. Merrill Altaffer had a one wing job too. He didn't have such good luck. We had a stack of timothy on the northwest corner of the field and one time he took off and didn't clear the stack. The plane flip flopped. He and the passenger both got out and found another plane and went up that day anyway!*

*Pete Tuttle used to fly a lot. He had 10 or 12 planes at a time.*





## TAVERNS, ROADHOUSES AND NIGHT CLUBS



In the early days of Montgomery County, taverns not only dispensed whatever was available to drink, they also served as stage coach stops, restaurants and hotels. Usually the post office was in the tavern.

The 1881 History (page 506) tells us that J.J. Zuber kept a tavern at Oro, two miles north of Red Oak, in 1854. Zuber was also the postmaster and he and the post office moved to Red Oak Junction in March 1858; likely the tavern moved, too.

About 1854 the Perry Carr family settled in a log cabin at Carr's Point in West Township. They kept a tavern, where stagecoaches and freighters stopped. In September 1976 a Memorial Rock with plaque was placed near the site where the cabin stood.

The Sciola Tavern was a busy place in the summer of 1864; in fact, business was so good that Thomas Nelson, the owner, was erecting a larger building. Sarah Nelson, wife of Thomas, described the business as "keeping entertainment".

The place was crowded with travelers day and night. Sarah said, *We entertain a great many soldiers. I enjoy myself very much talking with these soldiers.* Nelson was the Sciola postmaster; the post office was in the tavern. (From letters written by Sarah Nelson)

In April 1878 the *Telephone* said, "The devil's den on the other side of the river has been cleaned out and the infamous fellows who run it are now in jail. Villainous specimens of whisky, gin and brandy were found and taken as contrabands of war...We hope the law... will keep any one else from trying to run such a sink of iniquity."

In September 1889 the *Sun* reported, "It is said that there are twenty nine bootleggers in this town."

### *Pig 'N Whistle -*

The public was invited to an opening dinner and dance on 19 February 1925, at the Pig and Whistle. Music was by Mary and her Jazz Boys. The Pig was a roadhouse on old 34, west of the Country Club. The proprietor, Tom Jones, had a reputation around Red Oak prior to that, and it wasn't long until he was in trouble again.

The first of January 1928 the Red Oak township trustees refused to grant Jones a license for 1928, as a result of many complaints. By that time the place was called Pig 'N Whistle.

A number of raids were made without much effect. But finally, the first of November '28 the *Express* reported that a court order had been issued. It said that Jones must "vacate the premises, tear down the building or sell the property within 60 days." Jones had been indicted on a charge of maintaining a liquor nuisance. No further record was found.

The word around town was that Jones was a front--that the place was actually owned by local business men.

### *Pine Room -*

A service station had stood on the northwest corner of the intersection at Tenville since 1927. In January 1941 the property was leased to Carl Fore and C.W. Rodgers of Griswold. They enlarged and remodeled the structure.

In April 1941 the *Review* announced the opening on 25 April of the Pine Room dine and dance hall at Tenville. "The new room is finished in white pine, with a row of booths and tables on one side. It opens into the lunch room, and there is an opening for serving diners at the booths...A basement under the new pine room is equipped with wash rooms."

It was a popular place and drew large crowds, but had a rather stormy history. In November 1946 the district court was hearing arguments in an action aimed at closing the Pine Room. The club remained open, but in February 1949, the Pine Room was fined \$200 in an action resulting from a Sheriff's raid in November 1948.

The Pine Room burned to the ground in the early morning hours of 4 December 1950. It was not rebuilt.

*Melody Club - by Curtis Eshelman of Arizona:*

*In the late '30s my father, the late Albert Eshelman, had negotiated a franchise to sell Minneapolis-Moline farm machinery. A rather large tile block building was constructed at the south edge of Elliott.*

*Then machinery manufacture came to a stand-still as the factories started building jeeps, tanks and battleships. That good new building couldn't just sit idle, so A.C. built a hardwood dance floor over the rear two-thirds, with a sandwich and coffee bar in the front section. The "Melody Club" opened in May 1941.*

*The Club was open nightly except Thursdays and Sundays. There were booths, tables and a nickelodeon. There was a small band stand where Jim Dunfee and Les Kuester and their bands played live on Saturdays and some holidays.*

*Many nights I'd work at the door, collecting "cover charges" of a couple bucks each. The small coffee shop was busy with sandwiches and shakes. There were a lot of people who enjoyed the Melody Club and even today, fifty-plus years later, some old timers will say, "What good times we had there", at a time when people needed some good times.*

*In August 1945, Dad sold the Melody Club and went back to the farm machinery business.*

Later history of the club is rather uncertain. The building was heavily damaged by fire about 1948, but was rebuilt. The club was operating in April

1949 when the manager was fined \$300 on a liquor charge resulting from a raid by the Sheriff, but was closed by 4 December 1950 when the structure was completely destroyed by fire.

*Del Mar -*

In the spring of 1944 Bruce Orton erected a garage building on the west side of US 71 at Tenville. In the spring of 1945 an addition was built and about the first of August the Del Mar, a dine and dance club, was opened in the annex. In the early morning of 2 October 1945, three months after it opened, the club and garage were destroyed by fire. The garage was rebuilt, but not the club.

*Cobblestone Inn -*

Perhaps in the mid-40s the Cobblestone Inn was opened in Coburg. It was a dance hall and restaurant. There was a nickelodeon and sometimes live music was provided. It was said to be a "pretty rough place", and lasted only three or four years.

## Pig and Whistle

INVITES YOU TO ITS  
Opening Dinner and Dance  
**Thursday, February 19**  
6:30 P. M.

---

—MENU—

Smothered Chicken with Natural Sauce	Peas
Mashed Potatoes	Celery Pickles
	Cranberry Jelly
Hot Biscuits	Coffee
Apple Pie	Cheese
	Tea

---

CARNATION FAVORS

Fried Chicken Sandwiches	Pie	Cake
		Coffee

All kinds of Cold Drinks  
All Popular Prices

---

Music by MARY AND HER JAZZ BOYS.  
Mary, piano. Casson, violin. McCully, trap drums.  
Entertainer—Gertrude Brooks.

DANCE AND SUPPER \$1.25 ... SINGLE ADMISSION 60c

---

**Thomas G. Jones, Prop.**  
HARDING HIGHWAY—ONE MILE EAST OF RED OAK



## COUNTRY CLUBS



Golf is known as the game of Royalty. A golf-type game was played by the Romans nearly 2,000 years ago, but it was the Scots who first made holes in the ground for the sport. The modern game of golf was brought to the States about 1890.

Since it takes about forty acres to lay out even a modest course, country clubs were developed to answer the need. The local papers relate the trials and tribulations of establishing a golf club at the turn of the century.

### *Red Oak -*

The first of October 1897 the *Express* said, "Red Oak has a full pledged (sic) golf club and in a very short time the field north of the standpipe...will resound to the wack of the golf stick...The local organization is entirely informal in order to reduce the expenses of learning to play. The golf club costs \$1.75 and the balls are about 25 cents a piece. Each player is supposed to have at least one club and several balls."

A short time later it was reported that the initial steps towards organizing a formal club had been taken. "The links will be immediately improved by cutting the weeds."

In November 1901 it was said that a "country club" had been formed. In March 1902, arrangements were made to lease the Quinby pasture. Dues were set at \$5.00 per year.

An architect from Omaha was engaged to lay out the links. He said that the club "has one of the best golf links in the west". There was to be room for tennis courts and croquet grounds. Plans were made for building a club house, which would contain lockers, toilet rooms and parlor, and would cost \$600 or \$700.

There was a problem with long grass on the links, so a horse lawnmower was purchased. That didn't seem to do the job. In July 1902 the *Express* said, "The grounds of the Country Club are in fine shape now...Several weeks ago a man came along with a drove of sheep hunting for pasture and about 1200 of the animals were turned in on the golf grounds with the result that the grass is now short."

A meeting was held in September 1917 to make plans for organization of a new country club. By March 1919 the Red Oak golf club had been formed, and in July of that year the group terminated the lease on the 44 acres north of Chautauqua Park. In December the deal was closed for the Tomlinson farm two miles east of Red Oak.

The first tournament at the club was held in June 1921. By September work had started on tennis courts, and the permanent links were being prepared. Then the club found itself in financial trouble. There is a long article in the 31 August 1923 *Sun* explaining the problem and the solution. It resulted in the dissolution of the Red Oak Country Club and the organization of the Oak Hill Country Club. The new arrangement became effective early in 1922.

The Oak Hill Country Club opened in June 1923. There was a club house of sorts, but it was small, as a dance floor had been built for the occasion. It rained, so there was no dance.

Ground was broken for a club house in May 1924. The new \$15,000 club house of the Oak Hill Country Club was dedicated in November 1924. The nine-hole golf course was formally opened; temporary putting greens had been used previously. In 1988 the back nine holes were completed, making an eighteen hole course. Over the years the club has added



a swimming pool and improved facilities. It maintains a dining room and hosts a year round calendar of social and golfing events.

#### *Villisca -*

In October 1922 a meeting was held in the Villisca armory for the purpose of organizing a country club. Thirty acres of land a mile north of Villisca was purchased and a course laid out. A club house was built in 1923; it has been remodeled several times. Eighty players entered the tournament held at the club in September 1923.

In 1940 the site was called Hill-Valley Country Club. Then operations were suspended during World War II.

In May 1947 the country club golf course and club house were bought by the Villisca American Legion at a Sheriff's sale. The club is governed by a board composed of members of the community.

The club house was severely damaged by fire in September 1953. The club has seen many changes in the past 73 years, including the ring of golf cart shelters around the south and west sides of the club house.

#### *Elliott -*

What is the definition of a country club? Is a golf course required? If someone says they had a country club who are we to dispute it?

The Elliott Lion Tamers met at the Elliott Country Club, which was a log cabin near the river south of town. In June 1922 the local news reported that the Club was busy; they had entertained their families and were to have a Father-Son day. The site was still used in the '30s.

The *Graphic* noted in November 1926 that the Lion Tamers met at their shack and played pinochle until nearly dawn. "We understand that the sale of rolling pins has been quite brisk since then."

*From Around Town With Kay; by Catherine Carson; 1979; page 1: (In the late 1930s, "Tate" Collins of Hampton, Iowa, a former member of the Lion Tamers wrote a guest column for the Graphic. He said:)*

*Speaking of the Old Lion Tamers brings back plenty of pleasant memories. That particular 'night out' has been missed by myself more than any other thing since I have left Elliott.*

*The road to the old Club House south of town was nothing to write home about especially in wet weather. I recall one night when at least five cars were hung up in the Weidman gumbo. Halbert's old chariot that weighed something less than two flat cars was abandoned completely.*

*"Hill" got out to engineer the job and we had to hunt him with a lantern. He was up to his armpits in the ditch. Just starting to show light in the eastern horizon when we hit town."*



#### SEASON'S GREETINGS



#### *Merry Christmas -*

Christmas probably has been anticipated by more children and observed by more adults than any holiday the world has known. Everyone has treasured memories and humorous stories of Christmases past. Perhaps this small collection will reflect some of the ways in which we have celebrated the day and the season.

From the early days of the county the local churches were centers of social activities as well as of spiritual concerns. The two were combined in one particular practice which seemed to be common to all early churches: the Christmas tree. That is what the event was called.

An 1876 *Review* tells us of a Christmas tree at the Milford Methodist Church. It

was a very large and beautiful tree, "heavily laden with several hundred very substantial and valuable presents; the best of all was that old Santa Claus was present in person...After much merriment and fun he ordered the tree unveiled and the presents distributed to their rightful owners." The program also included talks, prayer and choir music.

That observance was probably typical of the event as held in all the churches and most of the school houses. That seemed to be it, as far as Christmas presents were concerned. Each family took gifts for its members and they were placed on the tree. Of course that was in the days when a child was happy to receive one present. In some communities efforts were made to provide gifts for children who otherwise would not have received any.

By the 1890s some churches were looking for new ideas for the annual event. A ship, heavily laden with gifts, docked at the Stennett Church on Christmas Eve, 1892. The Villisca Presbyterians were an imaginative group. In 1891 they built a castle. In 1894 Santa came down the chimney of a snow covered cabin. "Rebecca at the Well" was the theme for 1896. In 1898 Mrs. Santa brought a huge yellow pumpkin.

Dancing seemed to be a popular holiday activity during the 1870s and 1880s. A Centennial Ball was held on Christmas night, 1876, at Bryson's hall in Red Oak. The Red Oak firemen gave a Ball on Christmas night in 1878. In 1886 both Climax and Elliott held a dance on Christmas Eve.

Also in 1886 the Morton Mills news announced that the West Nodaway gun club "are counting on a good time at their shooting match on Christmas Day."

*A Christmas Memory; by Jeanne Honette; Stanton:* (The following account was taken from a letter written by Minna Hawkins Coppage, the mother of Mrs. Honette. Mrs. Coppage was born near Stanton in 1881.) *Having lived to be an octogenarian I remember my first years of driving to*

*church at five o'clock in the morning on Christmas Day. We lived several miles out in the country and seeing the lighted candles in the windows of our church as we drove into town was quite a thrill. If we had snow we were bedded down in the back of our home-made sled, dad and mother on the seat in front, our Swedish string of bells on the horses. We were so cozy on the straw in the bottom of the sled and my mother's wedding gift of a buffalo robe kept us warm.*

In 1890 the *Sun* reported that Bruce Commandery band gave an open air concert in the park at Red Oak as a Christmas present to the people.

It was traditional for each rural school to present a Christmas program for the patrons of the district. The *Express* tells us of such an entertainment in 1890. "Our Christmas tree at the Cram school house was a perfect success. The program for the evening was just splendid, after which Santa and Mrs. Santa arrived with many beautiful presents for all. Everything passed off splendidly until Santa caught his foot in one of the supports of the tree, tipping it over onto Mrs. Santa, and scaring the poor creature into fits. The tree was soon hoisted and it was found that she had only 'hollered' before she was hurt."

On Christmas night 1894 Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Smith of Milford entertained sixty local children in their home. There was a Christmas tree with a gift for each child.

In 1905 the horseless carriage was considered an impractical curiosity, but the Christmas shoppers gathered in front of the window of the Jones hardware store in Villisca and smiled. The *Review* said, "The reason is that Santa Claus, in effigy, is doing a stunt in a Scott Smith Special automobile there and people want to see him."

In 1921 an *Express* article said, "Saint Nicholas Will Drive a String of Elks to Red Oak." The Elks Christmas tree in the park became a popular annual event for the children.

### *The Baird Christmas Lights -*

No one knows just when this tradition started, not even the Bairds. But it may have been around the mid-'60s. Jack remembers that the family was given a few strings of lights by a friend and put them up on the house. The children liked them so the next year they added more and the annual display was established.

By 1980 the project had grown to include 4500 lights which outlined fences, trees, a tractor and the house and barns. An Omaha TV station featured the display in a Christmas Eve program.

The next ten years saw a huge increase in the size and complexity of the show. By 1990, 30,000 lights were used. Additions included a large cross on the roof of the family home, a miniature church complete with steeple and stained glass windows, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the whole Peanuts gang, Sesame Street figures, a doll house, a space ship and a 50 foot Christmas tree. A combine had also been decorated, and it seems to have been the all-time favorite with the visitors. The Baird lights were featured in the *Country* magazine.

The 1995 display includes a full-size Santa Claus, new choir figures and a piano and player in the church. The holiday event continues to draw thousands of visitors each year.

### *Good Times in Montgomery County - by Christi Carbaugh, student; Red Oak High School:*

At Christmas time the whole town gets involved. Many people dress up for work and decorate their houses with every yard decoration you can think of in every color of lights imaginable. There is one house that sticks out in my mind. It's a place not too far out in the country. Baird, that's his name; he decorates his house and makes it so beautiful. There are millions of lights. Each year since I was a little girl, I have looked forward to our yearly drive out to see them.

### *Christmas shopping in Villisca- by Susan Stewart Shavee, Des Moines:*

Buying Christmas presents, giving them to people I love, and watching them unwrap their treasures makes me feel warm all over. I hate wrapping them though, but it is fun to choose paper and ribbons and doodads to turn purchases into beautiful packages.

Growing up without much money made Christmas shopping a challenge to find or make just the right thing. My brother was pretty easy: baseball cards, books and Cherry Mash candy bars were typical choices. In fact, those are the things I still buy him. I usually could save enough of my allowance for at least one of these things.

Grandma Stewart was pretty easy, too. She lived with us when she was not teaching country school. I've always described her as "Grandma Drill Sergeant." She really could have worn army boots, and no one would have been surprised. She ran a tight ship, as they say, and was one tough cookie. You could buy her anything in her favorite color, green, and she was happy. The family usually bought her a green dress, and Jim and I pooled our pennies to buy her sheet music. She loved to play the piano, though she could never play it softly.

Dad and Mom were really hard to buy for, but for different reasons. I always wanted to get my mother everything, because she truly never wanted anything for herself. It was difficult to limit the possibilities. Dad, on the other hand, had no hobbies, and even if we did come up with an idea, it was a lost cause. Inevitably, he would go to town on Christmas Eve and buy himself whatever we had chosen for him that year. He had two of a lot of things. We always bought him a box of chocolate-covered cherries. He loved them. It didn't seem to matter how many boxes of those he received. Others in the family had the same gift problems with him.

My brother and I would always ask our mother what she wanted and every year from the time I can remember until she died she would always tell us "just a nickel handkerchief". When I was little,



my shopping opportunities were limited to Dunn's Variety, Honeyman's, and Eddie Weiner's grocery. In those days, you could buy a pretty handkerchief for five pennies. Over the years I bought a lot of them, though with inflation the cost changed. Now you would have to search long and hard to find a handkerchief of any kind.

Buying the handkerchief was not enough to give our mother who we loved and admired and wanted to give the most precious of gifts. So often we would get a bottle of Blue Waltz perfume, the finest our money could buy. Sometimes we would get her a coconut or avocado if Eddie had them.

My favorite gift turned into a life-long tradition--and that was to purchase the most unique Christmas ornament for our tree. Some home made, some purchased. My mother looked forward to see what the new piece would be for the year and collected them lovingly.

Christmas is an emotional time for most people and certainly for me. It is filled with memories and traditions. I get teary-eyed when I unpack the ornaments from my mother's collection. There is Rudolph from my first Christmas tree. The light bulb painted red and yellow and covered in glitter with a pipe cleaner around the end as a hanger. My brother made it for Mom one year. It is the ugliest thing imaginable, but it would not be Christmas if it were not on our tree. There are many, many others, and most special of all, a white dove of peace for the top of the tree.

When I look back on those Christmases and think about how I planned to find the most special gifts, the only one that really counted was love. Though my parents and grandmother are no longer here, each year I remember how special those Christmas gifts to them were.

*A Swedish Christmas Tree - by Norma Anderson, Red Oak:*

Early immigrants from Sweden brought a lovely tradition which is still enjoyed in Swedish homes at Christmas time.

Many families in the old country couldn't afford a Christmas tree so they made one of available odds and ends. It was called a LJUSKRONA or light crown.

A hole was drilled in the center of a square of heavy board, for a base. A length of broom handle, fitted snugly into the hole, formed the trunk of the tree. Then branches were added with a candle holder on the end of each limb. Each branch was wrapped with fringed white tissue paper. The finished product was hung from the ceiling and came to be called a chandelier.

When I was a child we had a small house and a large family so we had room only for a ljuskrona.

Today we have two of these ornaments in our home. One belonged to Harold's Requist grandparents and is unusual. It is the only one I have seen with branches made of wood; there are holes in the ends for candles. We keep it decorated with the traditional tissue, which has to be redone about every five years.

The other one was made for me by my father. It is typical with branches of wire. The ends of the wires were shaped into candle holders by winding them around a piece of pipe. This one is wrapped with commercial roping. The trees are no longer hung, so an extra candle has been added at the top, making nine on each of ours. They are usually called candelabras.

There are still a few Swedish homes in the county where the candelabra is an important part of Christmas tradition.

*A Christmas Tree - by Marian Samples; Omaha:*

When Earl brought the Christmas tree home I was certain I had never seen a more beautiful tree. It was December 1955--our last Christmas on the farm. We were moving to Omaha in February. All of the Omaha relatives were coming for Christmas Day and a farewell to the farm.

Fourteen month old Shirley had cooperated by taking a nap, as I busied myself in the kitchen with turkey and all the trimmings. The tables were set--

everything seemed to be under control. Three year old Mary and six year old Lee were playing in the living room, excited about cousins coming and the opening of gifts. All of a sudden there was a big thud--then complete silence. Our beautiful tree was laying across the living room floor when I went to look. I sent the kids to their beds, and went into the bathroom to cry. It was then the relatives came into the house shouting "Merry Christmas!"--and they couldn't find a soul! They saw the tree, and began setting it up, trying to straighten the lights and ornaments back where they belonged. The day went very well but I will always remember the Christmas tree of 1955.

The modern way to celebrate Christmas is to board a plane and go anywhere in the world, yet we try to spend the day with family. It would be difficult to find anyone preparing turkey and pumpkin pie from scratch but we enjoy the traditional menus. The home made presents have given way to expensive gadgets--don't forget the batteries--but we want to give gifts to our loved ones. As we prepare for this happy blend of old and new we still greet one and all with that ancient wish, "Merry Christmas!"

*and Happy New Year! -*

In an earlier time New Year's Day was an important social occasion, observed in a formal manner. Ladies held open house; elaborate preparations were made for both refreshments and decorations. Gentlemen, arrayed in their finest, called on the ladies and sampled all of the goodies as they went from house to house.

Quite a departure from the usual order occurred in Villisca in 1888. The *Review* reported, "The somewhat novel venture made by the gentlemen who kept open house on this New Year's Day of leap year was an unqualified success. A score or more of ladies responded to their invitation."

An item from a January 1889 *Review* describes a more traditional approach.

"About 40 ladies kept open house New Year's afternoon and evening. The preparations for callers at each place were quite elaborate and flowers and fruits combined with more substantial creature comforts made the round a continual feast of dainties. Some of the souvenirs displayed originality and all were elegant and appropriate."

In 1901 the *Express* reported on another type of observance. "The social committee of the Monday Club...held open house at the Knights of Pythias hall New Year's Day from 5 to 9 o'clock. Tables had been arranged for cards for those who stayed long enough to play. A dainty luncheon was served."

*A Birthday - by Elaine Artlip; Tenville:*

New Year's Day was my grandfather's birthday, and the anniversary was observed by the extended family. Aunts, uncles and cousins gathered for a big basket dinner at noon. Then the adults visited, catching up on the family news and gossip. We kids preferred to play outdoors if the weather was agreeable. We had sleds and ice skates; we could play snow games or dry ground games as appropriate. In foul weather we had dominoes, checkers, Flinch and Old Maid cards, and a carom board. If we were too exuberant we might be banished to the barn.

By 1942 things were different. The *Review* said, "The annual midnight 'Whoopee' show and New Year's party at the Rialto theatre next Thursday night will be a 'knock-out'. There will be hats, horns, serpentine and balloons to lend color to the evening gaiety. On the screen will be Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth in 'You'll Never Get Rich'."

Today a traditional New Year's means "in front of a television set". Observance of the Sesquicentennial New Year's found millions of people watching the parades and the football games. If guests were invited they were expected to keep their eyes on the TV, too. Large

amounts of snacks were provided, served with an endless supply of beer. We can't imagine how people will welcome the New Year in another one hundred or one hundred fifty years, but probably one tradition will survive: people will still be stuffing themselves.



## THE "WHEEL"



The bicycle arrived in Montgomery County in 1881. In April the *Telephone* reported that the bicycle mania had struck Red Oak. "A partial cure for this complaint is sometimes found in serious bruises and bloody noses. A broken limb or a cracked cranium is a sure cure."

In September 1881 the *Review* said, "The first bicycle made its appearance on our streets this week...Every few minutes the applause of the audience of bystanders announces the fall of another victim of misplaced confidence."

A bicycle tournament was held in Elliott in July 1885. In May '86 the Milford news said, "George Cary, David Vetter and others are learning to cut various capers on the bicycle." In February 1894 Vetter bought a new bicycle with pneumatic tires.

There was a bicycle at Pilot Grove in 1890. Bicycle riding in Elliott was regulated by ordinance in the summer of 1893.

For the election in November 1893 arrangements were made for bringing the election returns by bicycle from all those precincts that could not be reached by telephone. "They left here at 4 p.m., got the Douglas township returns about 10 o'clock, made the run of eight miles to Sciola in 50 minutes and had to wait an hour for the count of Washington township and made the 14 mile run to Red Oak in one hour and 40 minutes." Others went to Lincoln, West, Pilot Grove, Garfield and Grant Townships.

1894 was a busy year for cyclists. Villisca dealers carried "the old

reliable Columbia; Altair, a new machine; Varsity and Courier; Cleveland and the Western; the new Spalding; the Monarch; the Count; from \$60 to \$125." Bicycle Day was 19 September 1894 at the county fair. A parade and races were held. A Wheelman's Club was organized in November at Villisca.

In October 1895 the Milford news reported, "E. Ackerman has traded his bicycle to Free McConoughey for an old fiddle. Either fiddles are high or wheels are low."

In August 1897 Johnny Holmes of Villisca entered the bicycle races at Council Bluffs, and lowered the state amateur half mile record by one second. "He rode the Tribune racer."

The *Sun* observed in July 1915 that a number of boys in Red Oak had been playing bicycle polo. "To grown-up people...their antics are almost unbelievable."

In 1938 a bicycle club was organized in the Stewart school community.

Bicycles were in the news in the summer of 1973 when the first *Register's* Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI) was organized. It became an annual event. A different route was chosen each year, and in 1976 Red Oak was an overnight stop for RAGBRAI IV. Four thousand hungry riders descended on the town. Several service organizations tackled the job of feeding them. In 1984 the route led from Stanton through Tenville and on to Corning.

They stayed overnight in Red Oak again in '86, then went north to Elliott.



In 1989 they visited Stanton again and then north to Griswold.

In 1992 the *Review* said, "Villisca threw a party and RAGBRAI XX came." A special edition of the *Review* was printed, there was free entertainment in the park, and the streets were lined with food stands. About 8,000 riders came through town.

Spoke Folks of Southwest Iowa was established in 1993. The purpose of starting a bicycle club was to encourage and support the enjoyment of social and

family activities and also to promote an awareness of the importance of wearing a bicycle helmet. In 1994 Spoke Folks was chosen out of the state of Iowa to receive a \$1,500 grant for bicycle safety. Roxanne Culver was the driving force behind a successful program presented in the Stanton and Villisca elementary schools; fifty helmets were given out during the program. Culver was presented a "COMMISSIONER'S SPECIAL AWARD FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY" in Des Moines; she also appeared for the program in two issues of the magazine *Crossroads*.

## TENNIS



The origins of tennis have been traced to the early 13th century. The name of the sport at that time translates as "game of the palm" which describes the way it was played. The development of the racquet is uncertain.

In Europe tennis was known as a "gentlemen's game", and that concept accompanied the sport when it was introduced in the United States about 1880.

That perception may have resulted from the fact that it was an expensive pastime. Building and maintaining a court was a costly undertaking, and early ones were private or club sponsored. The game wasn't popular with the general public until community courts became available.

Tennis was played in Montgomery County at least by 1888. In the early 1900s courts were built in several communities, but they tended to be short lived. The game is popular in Red Oak today and Villisca still has courts.

### Red Oak -

In May 1888 the *Express* noted that "Lawn tennis is becoming a popular game because the ladies can take a hand." That is the earliest mention found of the

sport in Montgomery county.

In July 1892, Red Oak won second place in a tournament at Malvern. In the summer of 1893 there was a "tennis lawn" at George Marshall's residence.

A tennis club was started in July 1895, and a tournament was held at Pactolus Park. The Olympic Club was organized about the first of April 1896. Courts were to be built on the quarter block east of the Masonic building. Nothing more was found concerning tennis until 1906, when they were still playing on the fair grounds.

In May 1907 the *Express* said, "The 'Old Maids' Tennis Club is the name of an organization that has its rendezvous on the stand pipe grounds. Intruders are not allowed on the premises, so you need not go there expecting to see who belongs to the club. There are twelve of 'em."

In August 1911 representatives of twelve towns met and organized a permanent Southwestern Iowa Tennis Association; Red Oak was included.

Lawn tennis grounds were included in Hawkins Park facilities in 1913. The park was open through 1917.

The Red Oak Tennis club was reorganized in 1914 and courts were laid out at the east end of Reed Street. The

members attended the Southwestern Iowa Tennis Tournament at Manawa. The *Sun*, in April 1915, said that the Tennis Club had "offered recreation to a number of business men for the last season or two."

Work was done on the ball field at Chautauqua park in October 1915. Preliminary work was done to add tennis courts to the area. In September 1916 the news mentioned the Alottairaquet club.

Tennis courts were constructed at the Red Oak Country Club in the fall of 1921. During the '20s private courts were built on the Houghton property on Boundary and at the Elwood home on Reed Street.

The Red Oak Tennis Association built two courts at the south end of Legion Park in April 1933.

The Southwestern Iowa tennis tournament had been discontinued, and in August 1939, Red Oak tennis players attempted to revive it with a tournament held at the Legion Park courts.

A Red Oak Tennis association was organized in 1946. In 1960 the Red Oak Park Board promoted tennis by instruction, tournaments, and so on, as part of its Recreation department.

Tennis courts were built as part of the new high school sports complex and were opened to the public. There are a number of public and private courts in use. The popular summer programs support leagues and tournaments for many people.

#### *Villisca -*

In the 1890s Villisca high school girls were playing lawn tennis for physical education classes.

In 1906 the Villisca Tennis club was organized and two courts were built "on Dr. Kelsay's lot on High Street". In 1907 many games were played on "the various courts of the city".

In April 1915 the Villisca Lawn Tennis Association was organized. Their court was on the lot west of the E.E. Jenkins residence. "For smashing, scientific, right-up-to-snuff tennis there was nothing that could beat it." That was the opinion of the *Review* in July 1915, concerning the local tourney.

The *Review* of 24 July '15 said, "It was not until recently we learned we could play tennis. Out of four teams in the semi-finals at the tournament of the Southwestern Iowa Tennis Association at Council Bluffs two of them were from Villisca. Both teams lost...(but) they were the talk of the tournament...Raynor is in the semi-finals in singles." Raynor won the singles. Quite a record for Villisca in their first entry in the tourney.

Play continued through '16 and '17 but was dropped in '18. In April 1919 an organizational meeting of tennis players was held. The *Review* reported, "This year the game is to be revived with all the old vigor."

No further account of Villisca tennis was found until 1938, when locals were playing at the Country Club and the new Recreation Park. The sport died out again during World War II.

In August 1965 new courts were built east of the Enarson school. They were constructed so that they could be flooded for ice skating in the winter. But even new courts didn't seem to kindle an interest, and little tennis is played in Villisca.

#### *Elliott -*

In 1906 the *Graphic* stated that tennis courts would be built just west of Mont Hites' paint shop. A number of Elliott business men and clerks organized a tennis club in September 1916. A court was laid out just east of Dr. Alliband's residence.

No further account was found until May 1941 when new courts were built on lots west of the library and town hall, on the north side of Main Street. They were heavily used for a time.

#### *Stanton -*

In July 1907 the local reporter said that tennis was growing to be a popular sport in Stanton. "There are now two tennis courts, another one having been established on the old right-of-way, which is a most appropriate place."

There was a tennis club in Stanton in 1915. "Their courts are in excellent condition." In August 1916 the local reporter said that the tennis club had become active again and was "practicing for matches with other clubs in this part of the state."

In the late 1920s a clay tennis court was built on the Ossian farm just southwest of Stanton. It was the only local court at that time so the town kids used it, too. The Ossians had the equipment for lining the boundaries and so forth.

There were tennis courts at Anderson Park in 1938. In 1959 there were paved courts on the Stanton school grounds.

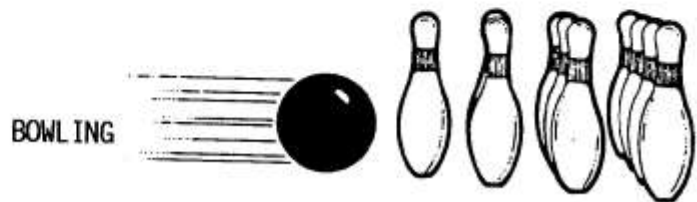
*Grant -*

A double tennis court was laid out in Donoho's Addition in May 1913. A club was organized with a limit of 25 members.

In June 1917 the *Chief* noted that Bert Porter had built a fine tennis court at the edge of his alfalfa field. Sometime after 1920 a tennis court was built on the former site of the Baptist Church; it was in use in 1927 and '28.

*Hawthorne -*

Hawthorne organized a tennis club in the spring of 1907. The court was across the street from the store. It is uncertain when the play was discontinued.



Ninepins. Tenpins. Duckpins. There are a few others, but they have had no impact on Montgomery County. Ninepins, also called skittles, was brought to New York in the 1600s by Dutch settlers. Rip Van Winkle would have been familiar with the game; the strange beings who put him to sleep for 20 years were playing ninepins.

Perhaps around 1825 players began to move from the traditional bowling greens to indoor alleys. The sport was immensely popular but gambling on the game became so widespread that it was considered a social evil. In 1841 Connecticut outlawed "bowling at ninepins." Bowlers evaded the ban by adding a pin, and "bowled at tenpins".

A variation of the game using smaller balls and pins was introduced in 1900. A story says that during the first game, when the ball struck the pins, a spectator remarked that they "flew like ducks". Hence the name "duckpins".

Bowlers are sometimes referred to as "keglers". The name dates back to the Middle Ages when ancient Germans rolled stones at war clubs called kegel.

The *Review* of 3 December 1891 said, "There will be a shooting gallery and bowling alley opened up in the Spargur building."

No other account of bowling was found until October 1901 when the *Express* noted that a bowling alley was being installed in the Ryneerson building. The Southwestern Iowa Horticultural Society met in Red Oak in December 1901 and the treasurer submitted a report of the meeting to the *Sun*. He said, "The convention was held in Ryneerson's opera house. Underneath there was a bowling alley, the noise from which was a constant annoyance. It seems strange that men will spend their time and money in such a senseless occupation as setting up wooden pins and then knocking them down."

It probably wasn't a result of that complaint but the alley closed in February 1902. By that time Will Marshall had opened an alley in the basement of Houghton's bank. Teams were organized for regular play. "Ladies day brought good attendance."

In January 1902 an alley was opened on the east side of the square in Villisca.



The *Review* said, "Only those who conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen shall be permitted to enter the room and they expect to make and keep it a fit place for refined and respected people." At a party at the alley "there was a great deal of merriment at the expense of the unsophisticated."

F.E. Kenworthy built an addition to his billiard hall at Grant and put in a bowling alley in December 1908. In 1909 the Villisca Invincibles trounced the Omaha Happy Heppes.

A new alley opened in Villisca in 1912. Mayor Ingman rolled the first ball, getting seven pins. In January 1913 Red Oak played Creston at Villisca, and the winner met the Invincibles.

There was a bowling alley at Riverview Park at least by 1915. In October '15 the Red Oak team won three straight games from Shenandoah. At about that time there seemed to be a sudden loss of interest in bowling throughout the county.

The next record found was in the fall of 1926, when Jeffers Bowling Alleys opened under the Houghton Bank. In December 1927, Grant was "again defeated by Red Oak". In January 1929 a tournament was held at Binau's alleys in Red Oak.

The *Sun* of 4 December 1936 announced the opening of the new Packard Bowling Alleys in the Red Oak Odd Fellows building. "Ladies will always be welcome and will find nothing that can offend."

It was around 1937 that an alley was opened in Stanton. Lawrence Saemisch was probably the proprietor. He opened a duckpin facility in Elliott about 1938. Neither place lasted long. A number of men now in their 70s remember setting pins in the Elliott alley.

Some of the regular Stanton bowlers wouldn't give up their recreation when the local alley closed. Possibly in the early '40s they each contributed to a fund and bought a building. They improved the structure and built a pair of alleys, providing a place of recreation for themselves and others. No date is available for the closing.

Five new regulation tenpin alleys were opened in the Murrey building on Reed Street, Red Oak, in September 1939. The new alleys replaced the B & W Alleys. Jimmy Pilkington was the manager.

Max and Vernon Stennett owned and operated a bowling alley in Elliott in the 1950s. Max's widow, Lyda, of Denver, wrote about the business. *It opened in 1956 and was located in the building next to Carson's market on Main Street. There were four alleys; the fellows bought them in Ankeny, I think, and Roy Baker hauled them to Elliott for us. They were actually duck pin alleys, and used small balls. (I still have one.) Of course we used people for pin setters. I believe we called it "Elliott Bowling Alley"--very original! We had several Leagues and did very well. We moved to Wyoming in the latter part of '58, and Vernon operated it for a while, closing in '59 or '60.*

When the site closed one alley was installed in the basement of the Christian Church. It is said that it wasn't there long; kids went down and made a racket at inappropriate times.

There was a flurry of activity in the bowling business in the early '60s. In January 1960 the Villa Lanes opened at the lower end of Third Avenue in Villisca. There were six lanes and a snack bar. Brunswick automatic pinsetting machines were installed in August 1961. In March 1963 the alleys became "Leisure Lanes". The lanes were open during the 1970-71 season; no date is available for the closing.

In May 1961 Harry P. (Hap) Connor started remodeling work at 208-210 Reed Street, Red Oak, for a new bowling alley. The article in the *Express* said that he had operated the Red Oak Bowl since November 1950. The new facility was to have six alleys with automatic pinsetters and underground ball returns, a snack bar and a soundproof ceiling.

Also in the spring of 1961 a new building was constructed on US No. 34 west of the Starlite Motel. A 12-lane bowling alley was opened there and is still in operation.

In 1978 Richard Meyers owned and operated Red Oak Lanes.

From the 2 August 1994 *Express*: "Red Oak's Mike Carlson, bowling for only five

years, entered the state tournament for the first time in 1994...and was all-events champion...Further, Carlson was second in singles."



## ROLLER SKATING

A skating mania struck Montgomery County in 1883. It hit first at Red Oak where a rink was opened in the armory in February. But not to be outdone Villisca opened two rinks in March.

The new Smith rink in Villisca boasted of a 120x30 foot floor of hard maple. The *Review* said of the Lutton Rink, "The illumination by Dr. Grove's gas gave it a very brilliant appearance, and the amphitheatre seating was just the thing. Mr. Lutton uses the Henley, Muncie and Fenton skates, and anyone can have their preference."

In May '83 the *Telephone* reported Red Oak skating rink No. 3 was "of few days and full of trouble. Busted." A hard wood floor was put in the Red Oak armory and a rink opened in December '83. In January '84 the *Telephone* said that the manager had fully redeemed the rink from the bad repute it had fallen into in former days.

The *Telephone* complained in April 1884, "Husbands are compelled to stay at home and cook their own meals--caring for the dependent members of the families while wives become willing victims of the skating rink craze...this act of social depravity...these modern Olympic hells..."

It was all in the eye of the beholder. The *Express* said, "The new skating rink is one of the finest in the state, being large, well constructed and fitted up in the best of shape...Prof. Dillon is wonderful in his performance on skates, jumping fifteen feet over two chairs, turning hand springs and various other feats..."

In May 1884 the *Express* said, "Another race came off at the skating rink. The potato race was won by George Harris, picking up eight more 'Murphies' than any of his competitors."

The Villisca skating rink was booming in December 1884. The managers opened a rink in Elliott, and then in January the news reported that said managers had "folded their tents and silently stole away." Leaving some bills, no doubt. In October 1885 Company "B" moved into the rink.

The management of the Red Oak rink provided extra entertainment for their patrons. In 1885 they arranged "skatorial amusements" for the Fourth of July. Other attractions included an exhibition of stilt skating, Russian athletes and Dolly Stone, a skating horse, "the only horse in the world that has ever mastered the rollers. Dolly travels in her own private car."

The skating madness ebbed and flowed over the years. By 1887 the public had lost interest and nothing was found on the sport until 1906.

Then the fever struck Villisca and Red Oak with rinks opening in both towns. In January 1907 the management of the Red Oak rink "reserves the right to refuse admittance to objectionable persons. Ladies admitted free." At the same time the Villisca manager "emphasizes the fact that he will maintain a quiet and orderly place."

A rink was opened in Stanton about the first of March 1907. "Mr. Peterson has procured 36 pairs of skates."

Another lull in the business--then in 1912 a rink was opened in Villisca. 1913 was a big year. Captain Ross of Red Oak went to Chicago in January to purchase a quantity of roller skates. The plan was to open a semi-private rink in the armory for the people "who would like to try again the elusive rollers but who do not care to get in such a large crowd as is nearly always to be found at the rink." In February a rink was opened in the upper story of the new garage at Grant, and a group of young people started a private rink in the hall at Coburg.

Hawkins Park opened 14 June 1913 and the skating rink was a popular place. *Memories of Hawkins Park* says, "Romances flourished as couples glided around the rink to the music of the big organ." The park closed in the fall of 1917.

Riverview Park opened in 1914. On the opening day of the 1915 season there was free skating all day. The park ran for only two years.

In December 1914 Company "F" purchased 72 pairs of skates and opened a rink in the Villisca armory. The Company advertised skating on Christmas afternoon in 1915. Apparently the rink was open until the Company left for the Mexican border in 1916. Then came a lengthy gap in activity.

A dance hall was built in Morton Mills in 1925. It wasn't long until skating was introduced there. The building was torn down in 1937.

In March 1929 Company "F" reopened a rink in the armory. They advertised 150 pairs of Chicago skates. "Good order guaranteed. Adult 35 cents; children 25 cents". A rink was running in Grant in 1932.

In July '43 a special meeting of the Red Oak city council was called to cope with a skating hassle. The Legion had leased its pavilion for skating purposes, and the park board complained that it had no right to do so. The paper said the board's chief objection to the rink was the competition it would make for the swimming pool. No action was taken.

The Legion leased the pavilion to C.W. Wheeler in 1948; he opened it in August as the Stardom Roller Rink and Ballroom. Improvements were made so that the building could be heated. When the structure burned in August 1963 it was called a Roller Rink.

In the summer of 1978 a new building for a skating rink was erected in Red Oak on the northeast corner of Fourth Street and US No. 34; it was called Skateway. No date is available for the closing of the rink. The structure was vacant for some time and now houses a college.

Styles change, even in roller skates. For a hundred years millions of kids spent countless hours rolling around their neighborhoods and at rinks on traditional skates. Now they feel deprived if they don't have in-line skates.

*Good Times in Montgomery County - by Sarah Petty, student; Red Oak High School:*

*When I was little, I always went skating at Skateway. Every Friday night my friends and I would meet out there, and we would have lots of fun. I remember everything about going there. The songs and the games like Limbo, Four Corners, the Cups, and so on. I also remember all the birthday parties I used to go to out there. We would skate awhile; then we would eat cake, and finally we would all sit in a big circle and watch the person open presents.*

*I thought partner skating was the best. Either a girl would pick a boy to skate with, or a boy would pick a girl. They would skate around, holding hands. We thought it was such a big deal.*





## HORSESHOES



According to an old superstition, if you find a horseshoe and nail it over the door to your house witches cannot enter. The belief that a horse shoe is a symbol of good luck is ancient and widespread.

From the earliest days of the county men were tossing horseshoes at a stake. There was no cost and the game could be played anywhere. It has been reported that horseshoe games were played at the mills when those sites were the centers of their communities. Courts were built in back yards, fair grounds and parks. The game was so common that it wasn't considered newsworthy and was not well reported.

In July 1901 the *Review* said, "Horse Shoe is the pastime at present in Grant, and there are some dandy players, too."

Villisca's first Horse Shoe Pitching Contest was held on Old Settlers Day in September 1914. The event drew hundreds of spectators and furnished plenty of amusement. Sixteen teams were entered in

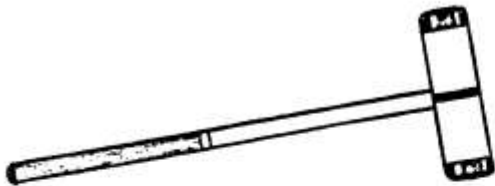
the contest. The *Review* said, "The Horseshoe Club which has a membership of 50...will see that it is conducted properly."

The Red Oak Horseshoe Club held a local contest on Thanksgiving Day 1922.

A township tournament was held during the summer of 1925. The games were played in Red Oak on a vacant lot on Reed Street. The city erected lights, and games were played every Saturday night. Nine townships participated.

In August 1946 a horseshoe tournament was a feature of the 4-H Achievement Show and Centennial, held at Legion Park. The winner went to the state fair. A horseshoe pitching contest was sponsored by the County Fair in 1961. Two cups were awarded to winners.

In 1971 the Outdoor State Horseshoe Pitching Tournament was held during the County Fair. There were seven classes for men and one or two for women. The second annual tourney was held at the 1972 fair.



CROQUET



Croquet is an ancient European lawn game. It was brought to the United States about 1870 and soon spread over the nation.

Most people just positioned the wickets and posts on their lawns, but a few fanatics constructed permanent courts with all the precision of an engineering feat.

Croquet had arrived in Villisca by September 1871 when the *Review* said, "Croquet is fast becoming the popular amusement of our lads and lassies. We believe the game to be innocent and a

pleasant recreation." In the spring of 1877 the *Review* predicted that "Croquet will soon roll like a tidal wave over the land."

By June 1878 croquet was the favorite amusement of the young people in the Wales vicinity. In December '78 in Walnut Township parlor croquet was the pastime. "The game is new and interesting."

Elliott had a croquet court at the Fourth of July celebration in 1880. In 1885 the Elliott news reported that moonlight croquet was the latest amusement.

Milford news reported in 1885 that Henry Howard's croquet ground was a popular resort. "It is nicely shaded by trees and most inviting."

A court was built at Larmon Park in 1886. At Biddick croquet parties were popular. "Some of our young people are getting to be really expert at the game."

In the early 1890s there were courts in Stanton. A court was planned for the Red Oak Golf Club in 1902. In August 1917 the *Chief* reported exciting games being played at Grant.

Many families still own croquet sets, and get them out occasionally, especially for family reunions and other groups.



## KITES

*Homemade Kites - by Elaine Artlip; Tenville:*

*I grew up in the make-do generation: make it or do without. That applied to kites, among other things. My older brother was the chief engineer; I was in charge of paste. It took lots of flour and water paste to make a kite; also needed were a couple of sticks, brown wrapping paper and some string. The tail was made of strips of rags knotted together. Small sticks could be tied in to give the proper balance. We did buy string but for pennies we could get a ball of strong cord. Our kites would fly for hours, tugging at the farthest reaches of our strings. At supper time we staked the kites and left, confident that they would still be flying when we returned. At dusk we reeled in our birds by winding the string around the stakes. Then we were ready for the next day's kite flying.*

"Kites of Spring is going to be a celebration for kids of all ages--it will include kites, artists and fun." So said the announcement of an event to be held 28 April 1979.

The *Express* reported, "Some 300 persons were in attendance for 'Kites of Spring' kite flying held Saturday at the high school practice field area with the event co-sponsored by Touchstone and the City Recreation Department. Kite flying, kite building, kite history and culture

were included." The event was held in 1980 and 1981.

*Go Fly a Kite - by Carolyn Cole Gage, Villisca:*

*You know what's wrong with this country? There are not enough kite flyers. We in America need to take mini-vacations to assemble and then fly our kites with, of course, some time outs as we attempt to untangle them from lilac bushes, apple trees and house gutters.*

*Saturday our family took advantage of the pleasant morning which initially began with just the right amount of breeze. We had three kites among the six of us who ranged in ages from just-turned-seven to grandmotherly. The wind caught the kites almost immediately, and they climbed skyward with just an occasional wayward dip toward the ground. Launching the kites was easy as one and then another of us ran across the yard, evading the tree stump, clothesline poles, and assorted dogs.*

*Kite flying teaches cooperation and coordination. The proper distance is supremely important both on the ground and in the air. On land, one must keep track of the other flyers, so there are no collisions. High in the air the kites can come dangerously close, risking tangling in each other's string or even more tragically have one string slice through another. If this happens, the freed kite sails off over the trees. In a*

moment of compassion common among kite flyers, the orphaned flyer is often offered to share another's kite.

There is also risk. Is it wise to touch the sky by unrolling yards and yards of string? Or is it better to be safe--keeping the kite on a tether no higher than the roof of the house? The latter is still dangerous for with a sudden down draft, the kite will plunge to the ground. Kite flying, proper kite flying that is, has no margin of safety. Kite flying requires no batteries, computers, expensive machinery, nor any great skill. It does require an appreciation of the outdoors and an acceptance of the camaraderie that bridges the age gap in the group. Above

all, it teaches that a few minutes of joy need not be dependent upon mall shopping, resort vacations, nor a new car.

The 1995 Heritage Days included a Kite Flying Contest. The only account found of the event said:

"There once was a young man named Scott, who liked to fly kites quite a lot. While his kite sailed high on the breeze the others got caught in the trees. It sure was not much of a race and Lindburg remained in first place".



#### THE OLE SWIMMIN' HOLE

Swimming didn't seem to be a big thing with the early settlers. No doubt there was some going on, but the activity wasn't recorded in history books and there is little to be learned from folk lore. The water mills were logical sites for such sport, but likely the participants were all male.

In June 1886 the *Sun* noted that the pond in Larmon's park "is being made useful and luxurious as a swimming pool." A feature of the Fourth of July 1896 in Villisca was a swimming race in the mill pond at the east edge of town.

In the summer of 1901 F.P. Tyler opened Crystal Lake to "bathers". The Villisca site became a popular resort. The bath house was built in 1902 and the toboggan slide was completed in time for the 1904 Fourth of July celebration.

Undated clipping from the Review:

To the Ladies of Villisca !!!!! Do you know that Villisca has the finest bathing pond in Southwestern Iowa? Do you know there is nothing immoral in bathing in a bathing resort? Do you know

that nothing that would shock the most modest lady is allowed at Tyler's Park? Do you know that ladies in towns both larger and smaller than Villisca go bathing in these ponds? Do you know that Villisca ladies go bathing in these ponds in other towns? Do you know that you will feel a whole lot better after bathing in this pond and chuting the chutes than bathing in a bath tub? Once you go into this pond, with a cement bottom and water changed every week, all well water, you could not be kept out. We know you want to come in so don't be like a bashful boy sucking his thumb. BRING YOUR HUSBAND. BRING YOUR FELLOW. BRING YOUR PREACHER. BRING YOUR GRANDMOTHER. BRING the whole family and you will have the time of your life. Open day and night. We use our own electric light system. Ice cream at the park at all hours.

Yours truly, F.P. Tyler

In the spring of 1913 McGreer Brothers were constructing the various facilities needed for Hawkins Park. The *Sun* of 11 April said, "Improvements here



include a bath house, toboggan, spring board, etc. Various depths of water will be provided and the pool will be filled with clear well water from a power pump. A natural sand bar gives the pool a first-class bottom." The park was open through the 1917 season.

Red Oak's swimming pool at American Legion park opened for use in August 1923; it was managed by the Legion. In 1938 the WPA constructed a 88x28 foot bathhouse with the city of Red Oak sharing in the cost.

Villisca's pool and bath house were built by the WPA as part of a \$40,000 recreation center. The pool was opened the last of June 1937. Few towns as small as Villisca have pools.

By 1977 there were serious problems with the Red Oak pool, and it remained closed through 1978. In November a bond issue for a new pool was passed and a new facility was constructed in 1979; it opened in 1980.

*The Old Swimming Hole on the Seven Mile-  
by Chester Larson; Griswold:*

After a long hard year at the country school we boys looked forward to warm vacation weather, when we would head for the river only a quarter mile away.

Our favorite spot was at the bend in the river where a spreading elm tree hung over the water providing shade on a hot day. The water was a bit murky, but it mattered little to us; it was wet and cool. We spoke of the water as being knee or belly button deep, or other points on our anatomy. We had no bathing suits or trunks. No one had ever thought of cutting off an old pair of pants. "Skinny dipping" was better anyway. We shed our overalls and shirts (we didn't wear underclothes in the summer) on the grassy bank of the stream, never thinking anyone would ever see us. We were later told of a twelve-year-old girl taking her father's high powered field glasses up to the second floor and watching us disrobe. She told her mother, and mother told father and father told one of us boys we should wear bathing suits. We boys didn't

speaking very kindly of this noney girl who sneaked upstairs to spy on us. She should have been helping her mother, and minding her own business.

*Funny Story - contributed by Denny Neal;  
Villisca:*

In the summer of 1932 while working on the Tyler Brothers Dairy Farm in the east edge of Villisca my dad, who was managing the farm at that time, sent me to a corn field east of the Middle Nodaway River to cut cockleburrs.

Tyler Brothers had a spotted mare they used on a spring wagon to haul 10-gallon cans of buttermilk from the buttermilk well near their factory to the farm to feed the hogs every morning. In the afternoon I had permission to ride Old Spot.

I took my hoe, got on Spot and headed for the field located between the main river and the old river bed. The field was bordered by timber on the east. It was hot. There was no breeze and the corn was two feet taller than my head.

Every so often I would come out of the field near where I had tied Old Spot to cool off. About the middle of the afternoon when I came out to rest Old Spot was gone. I decided to walk along the river south to see if I could find her. A little way down the river I heard some girls talking and giggling. I decided to investigate. The hemp weeds had grown about six feet tall so I crawled through them so I could see who was making all the noise.

Tyler Brothers had built a resort house called "Idle Nook" on the west side of the river that was used for a sort of weekend retreat. The Boy Scouts and other groups used it quite often. Tylers also dredged out a fairly large hole in the river that was used as a swimming pool. This was before Villisca had a pool.

I assumed the girls were wearing bathing suits since they were of high school age. When they saw me, however, they ducked down in the water with only their heads showing. They were skinny dipping. We had a pretty lively and

interesting conversation going on, me on my stomach peeking through the hemp weeds and the girls showing only their heads above the water. This was much more fun than cutting cockleburs in that hot field and I had temporarily forgotten Old Spot.

All of a sudden I felt a rather hard kick on the bottom of my feet that jolted me clear to the top of my head. I was so engrossed in my conversation with the girls that I didn't hear my "boss", Dad, come up behind me.

Dad said, "You are supposed to be cutting cockleburs. What are you doing here?" I said, "I am looking for Old Spot. She got lost." To which Dad said, "Did you expect to find her in the swimming hole with the girls?"

Old Spot had gone home. Dad had decided to bring her back to the field to see if something had happened to me. He

was holding her by the reins with a half grin on his face. I could tell that he wasn't quite as mad as I first thought he was.

Then he said, "I think you had better get back to cutting cockleburs. You have had enough fun and rest for now."

The girls thought the whole episode was rather funny and so did I after it was all over with. Dad never did say so but I think he got a little kick out of it, too.

## ATWATER KENT



RADIO

The history of radio in Montgomery County can be traced back to pre-World War I days. In November 1928 the *Sun* reported that Merion C. Harris of Villisca first became interested in wireless from an old catalogue in 1912, "and up to the time of the world war he operated with all that was available at that time." Foss C. Hush, a resident of Red Oak, installed a receiving set so as to obtain government time. Later he installed a sending set. Frederick Peterson, a teenage boy living in Red Oak built a 50 foot aerial near his home. After war was declared the government ordered all amateur stations dismantled.

After the war, Mr. Hush, then living near Climax, again installed his instruments. The station was considered powerful for its time and could receive messages from as far away as the Hawaiian Islands.

Young Peterson rebuilt his aerial; in September 1919 the *Express* said that he

was the owner and operator of the only wireless apparatus in Red Oak. "At present he has no sending set, but just the receiving apparatus."

The new instrument seemed to have great attraction for young boys. Directions for building crystal sets could be found in magazines and in Scout material. In May 1921 the *Grant Chief* reported that Paul Wahlund, age 14, had built a wireless receiver, and was getting market reports from Omaha.

When the war restrictions were lifted Merion Harris continued his radio work and became a licensed operator. By 1926 he had entered government service and had a battalion control station of the army amateur net. His station was a complete 10 watt set with phone attachment.

In June 1922 the Department of Commerce licensed ten broadcasting stations to operate in Iowa. One was WGAJ in Shenandoah.



### **Early Radio Broadcast**

Clifford Palmquist (left), Ralph Palmquist (right) and an unidentified man tuning into the latest in communication, the radio, in 1921 or 1922. Photo: Express Reflections.

On 22 February 1924, Henry Field began daily broadcasts from his new 500-watt station, KFNF, The Friendly Farmer Station, in Shenandoah. In the early days each station arranged its own programs. Henry Field's daily Letterbasket visits were popular as were the religious services. Performers were not paid but there seemed to be no problem finding talent; everyone wanted to get on the air. The Cornfield Canaries and the Seedhouse Girls were regulars, and fiddling contests were always well received.

In the summer of 1924 the Earl May Seed & Nursery company constructed a studio in its administration building, which was connected by telephone wire to station WOAW in Omaha. The Shenandoah hookup broadcast one hour each week, plus a monthly two-hour evening program. The company received a license in the spring of 1925 to operate its own station. The first broadcast of Station KMA was made

12 August 1925. The station's slogan was "The Cornbelt Station in the Heart of the Nation."

Early programs included May's Mandolin Musicians, How-Do-You-Do-Boys, Blackwood Brothers, the Dixie Girls, a children's hour and a home gardening program by Lina Ferguson.

KFNF and KMA joined to bring the 1925 World Series to their listeners. Neither station was licensed to be on the air all afternoon, so KFNF broadcast the first innings, then listeners switched to KMA for the rest of the game. The announcer was receiving his information on the game by telegram.

In 1926 the first network, the National Broadcasting company, was formed. The number and quality of programs increased rapidly, as did the number of receiving sets.

On 22 September 1927 the *Express* said, "Radios will be tuned in tonight to the Tunney-Dempsey fight in Chicago. A



number of radio parties have been planned."

The Red Oak Radio corporation was organized early in the summer of 1927, but the Commission would not grant a wave length so the firm leased the Atlantic station, KICK, and moved it to Red Oak. It had to divide time with Burlington. Preliminary tests of the 100-watt station were conducted the first part of November. The east wing of Hotel Johnson was remodeled into a broadcasting station.

In January 1931 it was decided to move the station to the Tuttle park on Summit Street. KICK reopened 11 March 1931 with a jubilee. Local talent was joined by 23 artists from Omaha and the program lasted until 12:30 a.m.

The listening day soon became divided into time slots which still prevail today. The early morning hours belonged to the men. They could get news, weather forecasts, market reports and farm programs. Those features might be repeated during the noon hour.

In the late morning and early afternoon hours women listened to homemaking programs and dramatic serial stories known as soap operas. One of the most popular and enduring programs was "Kitchen Klatter". It was started at KFNF in the late 1920s, then moved to KMA in 1939. In 1948 the program was syndicated, returning to KMA in 1972. It and its accompanying magazine had a large following until its abrupt halt in 1986. First soap operas included "Ma Perkins" and "Stella Dallas".

Late afternoon programs were for the children. They loved "The Green Hornet", "Inner Sanctum", "The Shadow", "Jack Armstrong, All-American Boy", "Captain Midnight" and "The Lone Ranger". By collecting such things as cereal coupons or gum wrappers kids could obtain neat prizes like secret decoder rings or detective kits.

The evening hours were devoted to "family" programs. KMA's Country School may have been the most successful program the station produced. Professional music

and drama from New York or Chicago came into Montgomery county homes. We laughed with Amos and Andy, Fibber Magee, George Burns, Groucho Marx, and Baby Snooks. We debated the merits of contestants on Major Bowes Amateur Hour. We had front row seats for the world series and championship boxing matches. Politicians harangued and preachers exhorted.

The *Review* reported the beginning of Villisca's Fall Festival in September 1938. It said, "Foster May, newscaster from the WOW radio station in Omaha made his regular daily man-in-the-street broadcast here in the city park. He interviewed several pioneers who had gathered here for the old Settler's Day celebration."

In April 1968 the *Express* said, "Ground was broken here Saturday for Radio Station KOAK...Installation of twin 230-foot transmission towers will commence late in April. The offices, studios and transmission equipment will occupy a frame building to be erected on the site after the towers are installed."

The radio was the chief source of entertainment and information until the introduction of television, and is still enjoyed daily by a large listening audience.

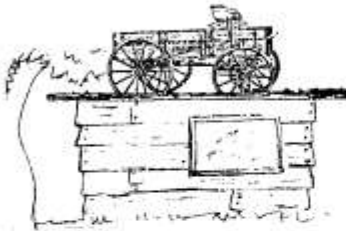
*Radio in 1923 - by Chester Larson; Griswold:*

*We were one of the first families in our immediate neighborhood to have a radio installed on a free trial basis from a dealer in Elliott. It was a five-tube radio with a large separate loud speaker of the horn type. Outdoors a 150-foot wire antennae was strung from a telephone pole to a tree. As I remember, the total price was \$175 which was a lot of money in that day. This radio failed to perform satisfactorily and the dealer brought out another make which was somewhat better. The Atwater Kent was all enclosed in a fairly large wooden case which we set on a stand.*

*Our second radio lasted a number of years and it was about the only hobby my dad was interested in. He sat and*

listened to it continually when he was in the house. A couple of our neighbors came in weekly and helped him listen. They would try for distant stations such as

WLS Chicago, The Nashville Opera, Pittsburg, and Del Rio, Texas, down on the Mexican border. Within a few years radio was at its best.



## HALLOWE'EN

It has long been traditional for people to observe Hallowe'en by giving parties. In 1901, members of the SOVB Club at Villisca entertained their masculine friends. The *Review* said, "The ladies were attired in long black robes and hoods."

In 1907 the *Sun* reported, "There were 110 guests at a party given by Mrs. Thomas D. Murphy and Mrs. Wm. Cochrane at the Murphy home. The preparations were elaborate, and included jack-'o-lanterns, witches, hob-goblins, black cats and owls. There were three gypsy fortune tellers and a wizard. An orchestra provided music."

Boys, large and small, celebrated the occasion in less formal ways, usually to the dismay of their elders.

In 1899 Hallowe'en was observed in the usual manner by the mischievous boys of Red Oak. The next morning found many outhouses overturned and benches, chairs, gates and swings scattered about the town.

At Elliott, in 1909, buggies and vehicles of other descriptions were found anywhere from the top of a telephone pole to the roof of the elevator. The Sciola boys were out in 1911. The local news reported one buggy was stripped of the wheels and hoisted to the top of a box car on the switch and tagged for shipment, while the wheels were raised to the top of Mr. Whitney's windmill tower.

The *Express* said the Wales boys had a good time in 1914, "visiting the various farmers, removing wagon wheels, unbuckling harness, fixing singletrees on

the branches of cottonwood trees, turning cows out to pasture, etc. Ed Jones' buggy spent Sunday on the roof of the school cob shed."

Quincy Dunn related a story about his father. It seems that, one Hallowe'en evening, quite a number of years ago, George Dunn was returning home when he saw a group of boys dive into a ditch in an effort to escape detection. Assuming that they planned to pay him a visit, George hurried home and made a few preparations.

He tied a rope to a stake and then laid it out under the big window of his home, and across the drive into some bushes. Taking his shotgun along, George hid behind the bushes and waited.

The boys came, and reached up to the window with their tic-tacs. (For the uninitiated a tic-tac is a little gadget made of a notched spool and a rubber band. It looks innocent enough but when it is run up the window pane it makes a horrible racket.) At that moment George fired the shotgun. He dropped the gun and jerked on the rope. As the boys turned to run they tripped over the rope and fell. One yelled, "I've been shot!" As George picked up his equipment, he felt that he had had a fine Hallowe'en.

*Hallowe'en Prank - by A. Nonymous:*

Some fifty years ago, a group of young men decided they should pull off a sensational Hallowe'en prank. Their decision was that nothing was to be destroyed; it must be something that had never been done before. Several plans

were discussed, but finally, they agreed upon one. This would be their last Hallowe'en because they knew they would be in military service within a few months.

It was decided that an outhouse from a closed local country school was to be placed on top of the high school building. A pickup was needed, equipment to hoist the object to the roof and ladders to get to the roof. It was fortunate that a roof repairman had been putting a tar coating on the roof of the school building. He had not removed his ladders and a pulley setup on the roof, used to take up the tar and other materials to repair the roof.

The fateful night arrived, everything was in place, the outhouse was on the pickup, four people were on the roof, and others went by the City Hall to lure the night constable away from his usual parking place. The pickup backed up to the school building, a sling was already in place and the object was on its way to the top of the wall in a few minutes. Those at the top set up the outhouse and went down the ladder, being careful to

replace everything in its original place; the pickup was long gone and everyone involved disappeared into the night.

The next day at school, the principal called a few students to meet with him in the lower hall. He said he was not accusing them of putting the outhouse on the roof but suggested it be removed as soon as possible. Also, he informed them the roof repairman was going to remove his equipment on Saturday and he was going to need some help. The principal told the young men to be there to help; if they did, nothing would be done about the prank. He didn't explain what would happen if they didn't comply. That night, the object was removed from the roof and returned to the place from which it came. On Saturday morning, several young men volunteered to assist the repairman remove and load his equipment.

The only reason for relating this story is to prove that with a little bit of innovation, engineering and initiative a Hallowe'en prank can be played without destroying any property or endangering any lives.

## THE SHIVAREE



The proper spelling is "Charivari". Keyboards usually do not contain the symbols to indicate Webster's version of the proper pronunciation. Most everyone takes the easy way and calls it a shivaree.

The practice was quite common, and was reported in local news. But no details were given--everyone knew what a shivaree was! Early reports seem to indicate that this custom started as a serenade of respectable music, but somewhere along the way it degenerated.

It seems that in the spring of 1878 there was an outbreak of matrimony in Lincoln Township. The local reporter

said, "Our young people availed themselves of the opportunity of giving each couple a serenade and the boys were well received at all places and treated to pies, cakes, candy, cigars and apples."

In March 1882 the *Review* said, "A charivari afflicted Jas. Parrish and wife Tuesday evening. All the boys, young and old, were there and Bedlam was silence in comparison."

In December 1887 the *Express* complained, "...rowdies are allowed to annoy any wedding that may take place in town, by ringing bells and yelping about like so many Comanche Indians. Our



officers, instead of letting the boys have their fun, should promptly arrest and put in jail all who take part in a charivari."

No community was small enough to escape the practice. In April 1901 the Hawthorne news said, "There was a sound of revelry in our usually quiet hamlet last Thursday evening, the occasion being the bringing home of a bride by Uncle Josh Tupper. Bonfires lit up the hillside, drums, horns, kettles, and any old thing that would make a cheerful noise was brought out. A train which had just pulled into the station took up the chorus and whistled long and loud. Uncle Josh joyfully treated the crowd."

In January 1906 the *Review* said, "A charivari is a burlesque serenade with a medley of music of harsh, incongruous noises, as on tin pans, horns, etc., sometimes given in rural neighborhoods to newly married people."

The 1990 Stanton history book, "*Lest We Forget*" tells a good story. (page 163) In 1911 a newly married couple managed to

evade a big shivaree crowd. That annoyed the would-be noisemakers so much that the next night they kidnapped the bride and kept her all night.--well-chaperoned, of course.

In March 1913 the Centennial (West Township) news said, "One evening last week the neighborhood was awakened by the rattle of musketry and other inventions that had a tendency to make night hideous. The Mexicans hadn't jumped the border; it was just a large party of men and boys who were giving a charivari."

23 March 1939; *Review*: "A group of friends of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Frey, who were married recently, and live on a farm southeast of Villisca, gave the couple a dynamite shower and charivari Monday night. Three sticks of dynamite hung on a fence 'woke up' the newly wedded couple, blew out twelve window panes and cracked seven others."

Mrs. Frey reports that the blast was set off by the bridegroom's brother. A red flare was lighted at the same time; the newly-weds thought the house was on fire.

#### STEAMBOATING ON THE NODAWAY



In 1886 a boating mania struck Milford/Grant. The mill pond provided excellent facilities for boating, and a row boat was built. Soon sail boats were skimming across the water above the dam.

In the summer of 1888 some enterprising citizens built a small steam boat to run on the pond. On holidays and celebrations it carried passengers a mile or so up the "raging Nodaway" at 10 cents a trip.

Another boat was built in 1892. It, too, was used on holidays, but was a work boat the rest of the time. It hauled rock from the quarry to the dam. The *Sun* said, "She is a snug craft of two tons burden."

The *Independent* reported that on the Fourth of July 1892 "The ponderosa was pushed to her utmost capacity, in fact, she strained her gizzard and sprung a leak in transposing artillery, ammunition, cannon, soldiers, musicians, camp-equipment, camp followers and munitions of war from the main land to the battle ground."

In August 1896 the Milford news said, "The steam boat built and owned by Frank and John Smith, running on the Nodaway as a pleasure boat was a great attraction during the soldiers reunion here last week. The boat is of the side wheel pattern, is eight feet wide and 22 feet

long, twelve feet to the top of the upper deck and is equipped with an engine of six horsepower. The boat is guaranteed to safely carry 25 passengers."

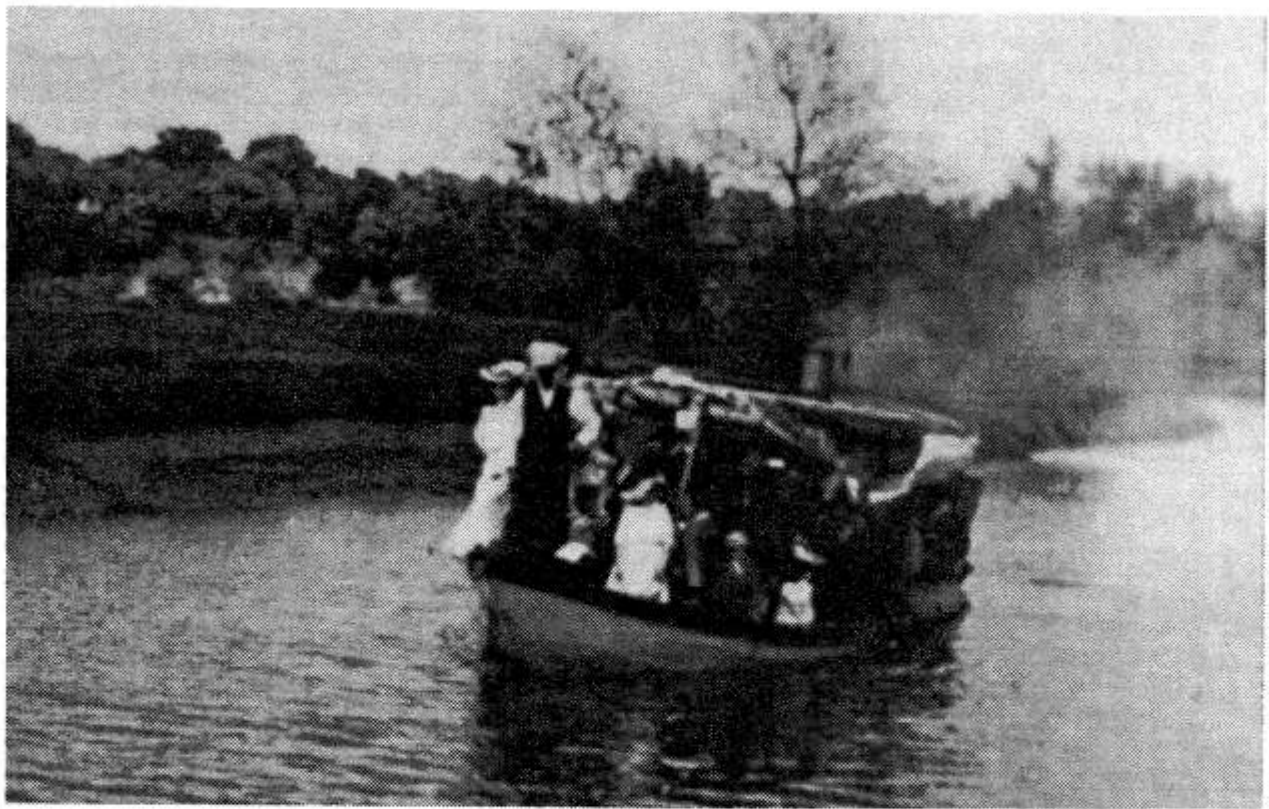
In September 1896 the steamboat was taken to Villisca for use during the fair, where it carried passengers on the Middle Nodaway.

A steam boat was an attraction for the Fourth of July celebration in Grant in 1902 and again in 1903, when the *Sun* reported that S.E. Smith's steamboat was equipped with a new 6 horse upright boiler. "It plied back and forth on the river all day and had big patronage."

In August 1905, the *Graphic* said, "The heavy fog delayed steamboat traffic a little yesterday morning. The constant use of the fog horn and the cannon on the shore prevented any collisions. The Milford Roller Mills have shut down so the water will be deeper for the boats."

Records aren't good enough for an accurate count, but it seems that there were three boats operating at times.

The last steamboat was used at Grant in the summer of 1906; in the spring of 1907 it was sold to F.P. Tyler. He moved it to Villisca where it carried passengers on Crystal Lake at Tyler's amusement park.



**Riverboating, Montgomery County Style.** A pleasure boat on the Nodaway at Grant. 1905.  
Photo: Gerald Schuler



## CLIPPINGS



Some interesting news items have not been used. They are too good to discard, so here they are for your enjoyment.

December 1862; *Clarinda Herald*: The Hon. J. B. Packard delivered the Thanksgiving address at Frankfort.

10 December 1878; *Express*: The liveliest and most interesting sleigh ride of the season was by a number of lads and lassies from this place to Emerson Tuesday night, about a score in one sleigh. What makes it peculiarly lively and interesting was the number of upsets and other mishaps while making the rounds, which took about eight hours.

10 July 1879; *Review*: The first archery tournament in western Iowa was held at the Fair grounds in Villisca on the Fourth. The first shooting was rather wild. The prize, a fine bow and arrows, was worth working for.

19 December 1884; *Express*: Washington Township: Our Democratic friends held their Mug-wump pow-wow last week over Cleveland's election. They believe in letting their light be seen so they made their bon-fire on the hill east of Sciola, and regardless of expense, they squandered three gallons of coal oil, one kerosene barrel, and a wagon load of old lumber.

1 May 1885; *Express*; Villisca: Parcheesi is a very popular game.

14 October 1887; *Sun*; Coburg: The ladies of Coburg are invited to a carpet tacking party next Friday at the home of Mrs. George Stibbins.

27 January 1888; *Sun*: A regular coasting mania is raging in Red Oak these beautiful moonlight nights. Grown people, whole parties of them, take as much pleasure in the sport as the children. The mania is interfering with the attendance at the revival meetings and

when a coasting track runs past a church the hilarity disturbs the services.

1 June 1888; *Sun*: The Kickapoo Indians will give a variety performance at the ball park Saturday evening, which will include exhibition shooting, wild west business and a balloon ascension.

24 May 1889; *Sun*: A man exhibiting the Edison phonograph, or talking machine, amazed and entertained a large number of the pupils of the city schools at the opera house, on Monday afternoon after school.

3 March 1892; *Review*: A progressive Crokinole party was given by Miss Sarah Platter at her home on Wednesday evening. There were twelve couples present.

10 June 1892; *Sun*: The tally-ho coach fitted up by H.C. Houghton and L.H. Tonner is a daisy vehicle to ride in. They got it out Wednesday evening with "Dad" Locke's four horses hitched to it and took a lot of their friends out for a drive over the town. The coach will hold 18 persons, nine on the inside and the same number on top. It is one of the P.B. Tracy overland stages rebuilt, handsomely painted and newly upholstered.

22 August 1895; *Review*: The whittling contest Monday evening was quite satisfactory socially and financially. Riley Maupin was awarded the prize, a pocket knife, for the best piece of work.

16 November 1899; *Review*: Corning High School and Villisca High School teams of young misses played a game of basket ball Wednesday p.m. at the Villisca Fair Ground. Few of our citizens had ever seen the game, which is a refined sort of football with the rough and tumble features eliminated. Villisca won 14 to 6. A return game will be played at Corning soon.

12 August 1909; *Review*: Entering ten races and winning six first prizes and



one second prize and \$335 out of a possible \$430, the Villisca Firemen's Running Team has returned from the firemen's state tournament at Davenport with laurels enough to cause deep seated envy to rankle in the breasts of a goodly number of other Iowa cities and towns. Some of the good folk of Davenport had never heard of Villisca and thought it was some kind of disease. They know better now. It is said that the sale of pocket maps reached the highest it has been in years.

15 May 1914; *Sun*: A checker tournament played in L.P. Priesman's cigar store yesterday morning between Red Oak and Shenandoah experts was won by the local team.

3 December 1915; *Express*: About 100 men gathered at the Johnson house on Thanksgiving evening, the occasion being the annual possum feast which Mr. Payne gives on this date. The first of these feasts was given by Mr. Payne for his friends in 1896.

3 February 1922; *Sun*: Elliott: Some 200 people of this town were given a treat last Friday when they witnessed a game of hockey on the ice, commonly known as shinny, between teams representing the business men of the north and south sides of Main street. The north side won by a score of 13 to 11.

3 August 1923; *Sun*: Tuesday August 1 was celebrated in Red Oak as Emancipation and Jubilee day, and some 500 colored people from this and neighboring communities were in attendance. D. Desdune's colored band from Omaha furnished the music during the day and his orchestra played for the dance at night in the armory. The hall was decorated for the occasion. There was a parade in the morning and a ball game between a colored team and the Red Oak Cubs, which the latter won.

27 July 1928; *Review*: Adv.- The Fort-Peck Rodeo Company will show at the Damuth farm on highway No. 71 on July 29 at 2:30 p.m. Thirty-five head of horses, steers and mules; bronco riding, steer riding, bull dogging. We will offer \$25

to any man that will bring in a horse we can't ride. We will offer \$25 to any man that will ride one of our horses. Admission Adults 50 cents - Free Parking.

27 June 1946; *Review*: Mrs. Russell Winter of northeast of Villisca won the women's national hog calling contest held Sunday in Omaha. The contest was one of the features of the hog raiser's picnic held annually.

6 September 1951; *Review*: The small boys' dream came true here Friday--he got all the watermelon he could eat for nothing. It was free for everybody, furnished by the Chamber of Commerce.

20 February 1958; *Express*: ELLIOTT-Pinochle is a favorite pastime in this community--so much so the players have their own building devoted exclusively for that use.

Several years ago a fund was raised here to build the 10x20 foot building referred to here as the "Pinochle Palace". It is maintained through donations.

The metal-sided building is lined and insulated. It is heated in the winter and cooled by means of a fan in the summer. It has electric lights but for obvious reasons no telephone.

The cards played in the building are all strictly in fun and no gambling is permitted.





## THE MAIL BAG



This book contains about three dozen different topics, but people have contributed several good times stories which do not fit any of those categories. So here is our "this 'n that" section.

*A Boy's Good Times at the Turn of the Century - by Ed Bell, Hanna, Alberta:*

I was born July 26, 1894 in Pilot Grove Township. My early life was like that of most farm boys of the time. I had brothers and sisters to play with. Most of our toys were homemade, although we did have some marbles. Our father built our wagon and sled, but my older brothers may have made such things as tops, kites and willow whistles. My sisters had home made dolls.

When I was six our family moved to a farm a mile east and a half mile north of the Mayflower school house. I started school for the spring term; Della Kenworthy was the teacher.

We had many things to do at recess and noon. In good weather we played games. Ante-over the school house was one and there were a lot of foot races. We played baseball. The girls played, too. Some of them were better than the boys. Two captains were chosen and then we drew for the teams.

In the winter we went sleigh-riding and built snow men and snow forts. We made a double circle track in the snow, and the one who was "it" tried to catch the others.

There was a pump organ in the school. Usually the teacher or one of the older girls could play. We had a Christmas program each year. The whole community came to see us and a lunch was served afterward.

At that time the school year was divided into three terms, and we had some kind of program or special day to close each term. In good weather we always had a picnic. Our families came to the closing events.

Each fall we picked up nuts for winter use. We had hickory nuts, hazelnuts and black walnuts.

My brothers and I hunted rabbits. The only gun in our family was an old muzzle-loader musket, and we weren't allowed to use it when we were small. But we had a dog that was fast enough to catch a rabbit if it didn't find a hiding place quickly. I did use the old musket some when I was older.

We observed birthdays in our family. There was always some little gift, and it was a special occasion.

The Fourth of July was a big day. We always had fire crackers. If we stayed at home we might make ice cream. Usually we went to Grant for their celebration. We took a picnic dinner and spent the day. The brass band played and some years there was a merry-go-round. I remember seeing the little steamboat going up and down the river but I didn't ride on it. In the evening there were fireworks.

I remember at least one parade with old soldiers marching but I don't know if it was on the Fourth or at another celebration. I saw several platforms made for outdoor dancing but our family didn't dance, so we didn't attend.

Like all children we looked forward to Christmas. We always had a tree. Gifts were wrapped and placed on the tree. On Christmas morning we opened the presents. Then there was a big dinner. Sometimes relatives came to our house, and other times we went to their homes.

We attended church and Sunday School. Services were held in school houses and we went to different ones. There was lots of singing but I have never had an ear for music, so it didn't make much of an impression on me.

I don't remember just when we first had a telephone, but it did make some difference in our lives. A "company call" was put out at a certain time each day and the operator gave all the local news.

It was like having a radio, before it was invented. Two Ashbaugh girls ran the exchange in their home in Grant.

There was no water near our home so we didn't do much swimming and fishing. My brothers built a dam on our place, and when it rained enough we had a little swimming hole. There was another one in a small creek about a mile and a half from our house. We went to Stennett once to fish, but we didn't catch anything.

My brother had a bicycle. I wasn't big enough to ride it so of course I did anyway. One day I hit a rut in the road and upset. It bent the handlebars on the bicycle.

We went to Red Oak sometimes. I went to a circus there, and to a horse race. I also saw my first movie in Red Oak.

When I was a kid we had a pony called Kitten, which we sometimes drove to school on a two wheel cart, and sometimes we rode with as many aboard as could find

"settin'room". When I rode to Strand for the mail I would carry a small cob of corn. When I was ready to go home I would throw the corn on the ground in front of Kitten; when she reached for the corn I would jump on her neck. She would throw her head up and throw me on her back.

Perhaps my experiences with Kitten led to my later life in Alberta. I broke and trained horses, and competed in rodeos. I built my own ranch which operated for more than sixty years.

I had seen only one car and had never ridden in one before I took my first train ride. In April 1909 I and my family boarded a train in Red Oak to go to our new home in Alberta, Canada. Eighty years passed before I returned to Montgomery County in 1989. And now, six years later, November 1995, at the age of one hundred one, I am back again. I am pleased to add my story to your Good Times project.



A picnic at Frankfort in 1918. Photo: Dr. Helen Dearborn Collection, Red Oak Public Library



*Word Games - by Helen Murphy; Red Oak:*

Early settlers brought with them a cost-free and easily accessible source of entertainment--word games.

Education was highly prized, partly because many people felt that a few years of schooling were all they could aspire to. When higher grades were established in Red Oak, youngsters living in the country often boarded with townspeople so that they could attend high school.

Spelling "bees" were (and still are) a competitive schoolroom activity.

Parlor games were played mostly with words, with no need for boards or counters (maybe a milk bottle). Twenty questions, hangman, puns and riddles, charades. Games based on letters of the alphabet, on words repeated in whispers, or words that rhymed.

Descendants of the settlers still play some of those games, especially useful on car trips with children. And they are still fun.

Can you define in rhyming words a glass weapon? A licensed dog? The White House?

*Joys of an Outdoor Life - by Evelyn Williams; Villisca:*

I am fortunate that I grew up in an outdoor-oriented family--a family that got its kicks from fishing, hunting, trapping, picking wild berries, and gathering nuts and bitter-sweet in the fall.

There were the many picnics we had. The weiner roasts with burnt toasted marshmallows. Half baked potatoes packed in mud. Apples or eggs roasted in the fire were a delicacy. Stew scorched in the bottom of a syrup pail made us think we were having a feast.

The watermelon patch. The haymow where kittens were found and there was a hay rope to swing on. Walking barefoot in the dew. The aroma of fresh mown hay. Playing in the creek. Moonlight nights with hayrack rides or sliding downhill in the snow.

It was an everyday blessing, free for the taking.



**Fishing, a timeless pleasure.**

John Gourley at the Nodaway River at Tenville. Photo: Elaine Artlip

*Fun-Time Memories - by Molly Dunn, student; Villisca High School:*

As a child I can remember the snowy winters with snow angels and building snow forts. Many of our neighborhood friends have had great snowball fights. And who could forget the sleigh riding parties we had.

And there is always the summer. My cousins and I would all play dress-up. We would get all "decked out", then put on some type of play we wrote ourselves and put it on for our parents. That was a great time! We also would play board games in Rob's garage. We would have them set up all summer long.

Summer was also the time to fly kites. All the neighborhood kids would fly their kites together on the hill at the Nodaway school. I can remember running through the sprinklers at my house on a hot day. Playing Hide-n-Seek was another neighborhood game.

Night time in the summer was fun, too, when Rob and I would go night crawler hunting. When our flashlights and buckets were in hand, we were set. Rob's dad would go with us and we would go all over town. We even found a few crawdads.

*Fishing- by Nathan Harder, student; Red Oak High School:*

It was the summer of 1994 and I had just moved here. My dad decided it was time to find a great fishing hole, so we tried Viking Lake. We caught a small number of fish, but each time we went the number got smaller and smaller.

Then one weekend I had my dad drop me off at a nearby pond which wasn't fished often. I slapped on a lure and started fishing. Twitching and jerking on the first cast, I caught something. I reeled it in and saw before my eyes a two-and-a-half-pound bass.

I was so happy that I pulled out my stringer and hooked up the fish and was in business. I kept on the same lure and cast away. I couldn't believe it; another fish about the same size. In what seemed like minutes, I had a stringer full of

fish and it was time to go. The little pond turned out to be a big fish market!

Robbie Dunn, student, Villisca High School, also likes to fish. He said: Another relaxing idea is fishing. Many people find great joy and relaxation from fishing. Others find it frustrating because they do not have the patience and time to sit and wait. I really enjoy fishing because fish is free food. All I have to do is hook it and cook it.

*Camping - by Laura Lindberg, student; Villisca High School:*

My family and I usually go camping at Viking Lake State Park each summer.

Everything is so peaceful, unless you camp next to dogs! The smell of all the camp fires gets me in a camping mood. We enjoy roasting marshmallows over the fire to make S'mores. Sometimes we sing around the fire.

We always go down to the beach and swim or rent a pontoon boat. When we rent a boat my dad lets my sister and me drive it around the lake. As we go along, the water laps up against the boat and it's a relaxing sound.

During the day we take nature trails and walk up to the lookout tower and everything is so beautiful.

My dad and I always go fishing. We can't camp without getting out the fishing poles. We may not catch anything but I love to fish! Viking Lake will always be a fond memory.



*Good Times - by Lesley Penry, student; Red Oak High School:*  
*The streets are filled with snow.*  
*Winter is here, there are things to do.*  
*Places to go.*  
*Go to K-Mart and make a purchase.*  
*Find a gold chain at Berggren Jewelry.*  
*Stare at the pumpkin watertower.*  
*Watch the snow fall.*  
*Go to 4-H and listen to everyone*  
*Make decisions about what to do.*  
*Have another fundraiser.*  
*Sell cookies, breads, pies, and homemade candy*  
*to shoppers who walk by.*  
*Drive through the town at night.*  
*Look at the prize-winning lights.*  
*Wish that we did not have to go to sleep yet.*  
*Pay attention to the radio.*  
*Listen to see if there are any school closings.*  
*Wait to go back outside to play in the snow.*  
*Go sledding down Chautauqua hill.*  
*Watch all the kids have their thrills.*  
*Take pictures of the trees.*  
*Get ready for a movie.*  
*Watch the gleeful sky as clouds move in and out.*  
*Watch the nights get longer and days get shorter.*  
*The days come and go.*

This Sesquicentennial year will be filled with special events and festivities. When Montgomery County observes the Iowa Bicentennial in 2046 perhaps people will look back and say, "What good times they had in 1996!"

# Villisca Will Celebrate



1905 - Review





## Bibliography

History of Montgomery County; Iowa Historical and Biographical Co., Des Moines; 1881  
A History of Montgomery County, Iowa; by W.W. Merritt; Express Publishing Company, Red Oak, Iowa; 1906  
The Encyclopaedia Britannica; 15th Edition  
Lest We Forget; A History of Stanton, Iowa; by the 20th Century Federated Club, Stanton, Iowa; 1989-1990  
Elliott, Iowa; 1879-1979; by the Elliott Centennial Committee  
A Pictorial History of the Carousel; by Frederick Fried; 1964  
KMA: The First Sixty Years; by Robert Birkby; KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa; 1965  
Who's Who and Why; Red Oak, Iowa; 1915

### Newspapers:

*Villisca Iowa Mercury*  
*Villisca Review*  
*Red Oak Express*  
*Red Oak The People's Telephone*  
*Red Oak The Sun*  
*Red Oak Independent*  
*Clarinda Page County Herald*  
*Clarinda Page County Democrat*  
*Council Bluffs Nonpareil*  
*Des Moines Register*  
*Elliott Graphic*  
*Corning Free-Press*