Olney Memories # 123



May 13, 2016

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Dear Readers of the Olney Memories.

 Here is the OM # 123 I promised you last week that would be coming out shortly. How wonderful it is to have these contributions coming in at a rapid rate! Keep it up, think we all are enjoying this ☺. Also remember to keep me updated on your e-mail changes. Thanks.

Ann Weesner King

Pianoann97@aol.com

Class of ‘60

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Loy Zimmerle

HARVEYZimm@aol.com

Olney History aka Goose Nibble

By: Walt Ryan

Published: Thursday, July 17, 2008 2:24 PM in the ODM

 You’re an old timer if you can remember:

The penny scales in front of the dime store that printed out your weight and fortune on a cardboard about the size of an air mail stamp-oh yea the air mail stamp, what ever happened to it?

When the Little Farm Market was the only place open on Sunday, now it is about the only place closed on Sunday.

When walking on Coach H.E. Wright’s gym floor in street shoes at central school could almost get you expelled, if he could only see it now.

The bright yellow horse drawn ice cream wagon with a cow bell tied to the wheel that brought kids running from all directions-a double dip cone for 5 cents wow.

Jackson Hospital.

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The ice man - put the card in the window with how many pounds at the top of card and he would put in your ice box.

Bill Piercefield’s horse drawn snow plow on city walks.

Butter nut bread.

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Slim Rogers’s junk yard at the Y

15¢ and 25¢ hair cut

Superintendent CT Cramer and RW Jacques

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When gas stations would try to lure you in for a 10 gal fill up with free glasses or dishes-now a fill up cost more than a full set of china

Shopping Main ST on Sat night and finishing it out at Mike’s Ice Cream Parlor

Life without electricity when Aladdin lamps and coal oil lanterns lit the home and barn

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Holloway all day suckers that really lasted all day

RCA dog Nipper standing sentry on the sidewalk in front of Bourells music store, Nipper was about 4 feet tall.

5 drug stores in one block between Walnut & Fair - now not any remain

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Eagle stamps - with a full book was worth $2.25 cash

Plastic Man comic books

When the path to the outhouse was paved with ashes from the stove

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Whitemore Hotel

When Popular Mechanic magazine cost 25¢

Long after electricity came to the farm, grandma continued to say “blow the lamp out”

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When oil cloth and Linoleum was the extreme home makeover of the 30’s and 40’s

Leo Jennings and Joe Bunn flying U controlled model airplanes or Central School playground - until one got away and went through Mr. Leathers 6th grade class room window

When you got your fist TV - how about your 1st radio

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When rubber guns made from wood and red inner-tubes was the weapon of the day for young cowboys on stick horses

When every tool box had a left handed monkey wrench

Blow the lamp out - Good night

Walt Ryan

Olney

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Harvey Zimmerle

Haveyzimm@aol.com

Settlement of the Richland County area began around 1815 when Thaddeus Morehouse a native of Vermont arrived by Conestoga wagon and built a log cabin along a stagecoach route that ran from Vincennes Indiana to St. Louis. This log cabin operated as a hotel and tavern. Richland County was organized as a county in 1841 when it was formed by a partitioning of Edwards County. There was some talk of naming the county Reed County after the Reverend Joseph Reed, an early Settler. Mr. Reed modestly declined that honor and suggested the name Richland County after the county in Ohio where he originally made his home. There was some controversy regarding the location of the county seat. In spite of the fact that it was only a settlement and planned community Olney was determined the choice based on a donation of land and the central location. The name of the town Olney was suggested by Judge Aaron Shaw who desired to honor a friend and Lawrenceville banker, Nathan Olney it was not until 1848 that Olney was incorporated as a village. For several years there was no county Courthouse. County Commissioners met in the cabin of Benjamin Bogard. The first court building was a log cabin which the county shared with the Methodist church.. In 1843 the county contracted to build a new courthouse. Once completed it was said to be the finest in this part of the state.. A newer courthouse was built in 1873. An impressive building this courthouse burned in 1914 , the fire possibly caused by the spark from an Illinois Central engine landing in a pigeon or sparrow nest that occupied the cupola of the cupola of the courthouse. The present courthouse was built at a cost of $100,000 around 1916 .on the same site. The Civil War brought a great deal of turmoil to the County as there were sympathies for both sides. Lincoln and Douglas spoke at separate political rallies in Olney September 20, 1856. The Olney paper was said to be the first newspaper to endorse Lincoln. While most citizens rallied around the Union it was necessary to have troops stationed in Olney to enforce the draft as union deserters were found refuge among local citizens. It was reported that on one occasion the Sheriff of Jasper County along with a pose from Jasper and Crawford Counties were headed to Olney to free Union deserters held at the local jail but turned back when they learned that local citizens were guarding the jail.. The local paper was accused of Copperhead sympathies during the war and as a result, a group of Union Soldiers home on leave wrecked the presses of the Olney Weekly Press. Overall however the county was pro Union and an estimated 1700 Richland County citizens fought for the Union in the Civil war. Nearly 1000 Olney residents served in World War I and during World War II Richland County may have been the only Illinois County outside of Cook that provided 4 generals for the war effort. The first census of Richland County was in 1850 at which time 4,012 people resided in the county. . One hundred years later the 1950 census found Olney to be the population center of the United States.

Harvey Zimmerle

Class of ‘57

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Olney History aka Goose Nibble

By: Walt Ryan

Published: Thursday, July 17, 2008 2:24 PM in the ODM

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Blow the lamp out - Good night

Walt Ryan

Olney

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 Bits of History from Richland Country’s Past –

 Rus E. Scherer Class of 62

                                                 DID YOU KNOW ???

The first political ownership of the territory now known as Richland County was by the French. In 1702 the French settled in Vincennnes which became the most important French settlement in this territory.

In 1841 Richland County was carved out of the easterly part of Clay County and the western part of Lawrence County, which were both originally part of Edward County – a block of land that once included the eastern half of Illinois and Wisconsin, reaching to the border of Canada.

Before the white man settled in Richland County, the Indians hunted here. After the war of 1812, a settlement was made and the Indians gave up their lands and went father west and north. The last Piankashaw, common to this area of Illinois and Indiana, was a woman who died in Olney in 1932.

Our town’s name came from Judge Aaron Shaw, who had suggested the name of Olney after his loyal friend Nathan Olney, a Lawrenceville banker.

In the early days providing a place for the county and circuit courts to conduct business was no easy task. The first commissioners met in the nearest available cabin. One located just east of Olney on the Trace Road. Rent was $1.00 per month with the county furnishing the stove for heating and the cabin’s owner the wood. Several other structures followed. One building, 40 feet square and two stories high, was painted white and known far and wide as the finest courthouse in the part of the state. The courthouse that preceded the present building was an imposing structure with an elevation of 52 feet and surrounded by a dome that reached an awe-inspiring height of 122 feet. This building lasted until 1914 when it was destroyed by fire, possibly caused by a passing Illinois Central train when a spark from the engine lodged in one of the hundreds of pigeon and sparrow nest the infested the cupola.

Richland County has a rich military history, built by patriotism and commitment. An 1865 report showed Richland County furnished a total of 1,577 men during the Civil War, 54 more than government quota. Nearly 1,000 men served in World War I, including John R. Lindsey, a brigadier general. The original registration in the draft enacted in 1940 showed 2,148 names from Richland County during World War II. The county produced four World War II generals-William Campbell, Frank Shilt, Edmund Sebree and Reginald Harman-giving Olney the nickname of “The Town of Generals.”

The 1950 Census placed the U.S. Center of Population a little west and north of Dundas, on the Carl Snider farm. On October 18, 1951, a large parade and celebration brought out 25,000 residents and visitors, including Gov. Adini Stevenson, Sen. Paul Douglas and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

Olney was a typical county town of the nineteenth-century Midwest. With stores strung along the main street, the bustling area was the hub of activity for the surrounding countryside.

The real growth of Olney began in 1855 with the completion of the O & M Railroad. On once occasion in 1858, 17 carloads of immigrants, with their household goods and faming utensils, landed at the Olney depot.

Through Lincoln and Douglas never debated in Olney, both presidential candidates spoke at separate political rallies in Olney on the same day, September 20, 19856. A special plaque commemorating the occasion is located on the courthouse lawn.

Most Richland County natives have no idea the Village of Claremont was once a resort town. A large lake once extended on both sides of the railroad tracks on the west side of Claremont. The lake-supporting boat rides, a large hotel and summer resort-was a popular “Sundaying” center in the 1880’s and 1890’s. Special train excursions ran from St. Louis to the Claremont resort.

Claremont had its spot in national politics. Miss Marie Brehm, a teacher at Claremont School during the 1887-88 term, was an ardent advocate of prohibition and women suffrage. Her interest and enthusiasm in temperance and moral welfare cause her to travel widely throughout the world. She worked her way to the top of the National Committee Prohibition Party in 1920 and was on the Prohibition Party’s ticket as candidate for vice president of the United States in the 1924 national election.

Another big attraction of the decade of the 1880’s was the Illinois State Fair, held in Olney in 1887 and again in 1888.

The lack of television, movies and the automobile was no hindrance to the enjoyment of life in the 1880’s. Visiting was popular and church festivals and suppers were commonplace. For the cultured, the Opera House was well attended. And roller skating was becoming an attractive amusement.

In the mid 1890’s, the citizens were excited over the possibility of getting the Eastern Illinois Normal School. With assistance for the Business Men’s Association (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce), Olney entered the fight to win the school. The new school’s trustees made two trips to Olney and were favorably impressed. However, on September 5, 1895, notification came that Charleston had been selected as the site for what is now Eastern Illinois University.

Richland County has produced two U.S. Congressmen: Former sheriff George Shipley who, at the time of his election in 1958, was the youngest member of Congress: and the Class of 1962’s own Terry Bruce, elected in 1985, who served as majority whip at-large during his second term.

The first school in Richland County was near Watertown, a small village on the west bank of the Fox River near present-day Olney. The school was partitioned off one end of a tavern and furnished with slab seats and board desks. One of the students was Elijah Nelson, a grown man who attended the school located near his house. There being no steel pens in those days, a principle examination for being hired as a teacher was the candidate’s ability to construct a pen from a goose quill.

An interest in a college at Olney predated the present Olney Central College but some 70 years when Olney as one of the cities considered a site for Eastern Illinois University. A citizens committee was formed on August 27, 1957, to pursue bringing a junior college to Olney. A 1959 survey revealed an overwhelming support for a community college, with more than 50 percent of high school seniors indicating they would attend a two-year college in Olney. When Pure Oil decided to close its transportation operation in Olney, the company was persuaded to deed its 13 acres of land and large office building to the district. On September 15, 1962, a referendum to establish a junior college passed by a 5-1 margin. Classes started in September 1963.

It is believed The Olney Times was the first paper in the United States to come out openly for the election of Abraham Lincoln for President in 1860. By 1890 four newspapers-three weeklies and one semi-weekly-were published in Olney.

In 1898, Dr. George T. Weber left Ingraham, obtained his medical degree, came to Olney, bought the old Arlington Hotel and established the Olney Sanitarium with a capacity of 15 beds. In 1907, the Olney Sanitarium was incorporated under the laws of Illinois with the establishment of a training school for nurses. Over the years, other Weber family members joined the staff and at one time four brothers and two sisters were working together.

In May 1949, petitions bearing 1,600 signatures were presented to the Country Board of Supervisors requesting a special bond issue for construction of a 120-bed county hospital. Voters approved a special election in October 1949 and within four years the new hospital was dedicated, giving Olney the largest hospital in a wide area. Over the years the hospital has been expanded and improved upon numerous times.

Bird Haven, the Robert Ridgeway Memorial Arboretum & Bird Sanctuary, is located near East Fork Lake. Ridgeway was a noted ornithologist, scientist, artist and author. After a distinguished career, including a 50 year association with the Smithsonian Institution, he retired to Olney in 1916 and developed Bird Haven, a bird sanctuary and experimental area for the cultivation of non-native trees and plants. In the 1920’s, this tract was said to have been second only to a tract in Japan in the number of species of plants in contained in one area.

In 1925, a city ordinance was passed giving the right-of-way to a white squirrel on any street in Olney. In 1943, Illinois legislators passed a state law declaring “It is unlawful for any person to take white squirrels in the state at any time.”

On March 1, 1870, an association of musicians, under the name of the Olney Silver Cornet Band, was incorporated. In the early 1880’s, the organization was enlarged and the name changed to the “Olney Cornet Band,” which was the official band at the Stare Fair held in Olney in 1887 and 1888. Following several more reorganizations and name changes, the band became the Cummins Municipal Band in 1932, the name it holds today. The band is believed to be the oldest continuously municipal band in Illinois. At lest on musician from the class of ’62, Paul Parker Gay, still plays in the band at the weekly summer concerts held in the Olney City Park.

Charles B. Tripp was born in Woodstock, Canada on July 6, 1855. The family moved to the area (near Sumner) after his father retired from the railroad. Tripp attended school in Olney, and was very successful in life despite the fact that he was born with no arms, not even shoulder blades. The deficiency prompted him to go on to accomplish greater tasks and live a normal life. He became an experienced wood carver and furniture maker using only his feet, which he had trained to do the tasks most people use their hands to do. As a means of showing people he could do anything a person with arms could do, he traveled with Barnum & Bailey Circus for 19 years. He married late in life and continued to travel with the circus in the summer, while spending the winters in Salisbury, North Carolina. During the winter months he often made his living by making furniture until the circus would return. He died of pneumonia in 1930 in Salisbury. His body was transported to Olney by train for burial in Haven Hill Cemetery.

Richland County is perhaps the Chowder Capital of Illinois, if not the world. Chowder is believed to have originated in the early 1900’s and probably stemmed from the southern dish known as “Bourgeois” and prepared using every type of meat available, from squirrel and rabbit to beef, pork and chicken. In Richland County, there are church chowders, village chowders, club chowders and private and backyard affairs that stretch from Noble to Claremont and from Dundas to Parkersburg, with Calhoun, Passport and Wynoose and Others in between.

On September 16, 17 and 18, 1954, the National and Illinois Soil Conservation Days and Plow Matches were held at “Onion Hill” in northwestern Richland County, a little more than a mile from the newly designated Center Of Population of the United States. The Illinois State Police estimated for the first day at 21,000 to 25,000, on the second day between 60,000 and 62,000, and on Saturday for National Day, approximately75, 000 to 80,000 attended. Honored guest speakers included Ezra Taft Benson, the United States Secretary of Agriculture, attending for President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who sent a letter of regret; and Illinois Governor William G. Stratson.

The Great Depression lasted for nearly 10 years, but in Richland County, the Depression began to end in 1936. By 1939 some people, perhaps half of the population, “never had it so good.” The reason was the discovery of oil. Although parts of Richland Country never produced a well, the surrounding counties of Clay, Jasper, Marion, Wayne, Jefferson, Clinton and Washington counties, comprising the Illinois Basin, were very productive. Many of the larger exploration and service companies built headquarters in Olney, which brought an oil boom to the area that lasted through the 1970’s.

Rus Scherer

Class of ’62

Ron Scherer

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 Ann,

These are not exactly my memories of Olney (I’m not that old yet), but I thought OM readers might be interested in reading them, especially in view of the upcoming 175th anniversary celebration of Olney and Richland County on July 22-24. They are excerpts taken from the new book, “Before the Big Yellow Bus,” which I wrote, along with my cousin, Yvonne Scherer Meckfessel. They are items about Richland County’s early educational system and the nearly 100 local schools that once existed in the county. Some items go back to the days before Olney and Richland County were officially formed in 1841. (There are lots more where these came from, but I didn’t want to load you down with too many at once.)

* In the early days, all education was done in the home, at least where the parents themselves were literate. The year education in the local area moved out of the home was 1822, nearly 20 years before the formation of Richland County. In the small settlement of Watertown (now defunct), near the banks of the Fox River, just west of present-day Olney, a young man named John I. Chauncey began teaching school in a tavern that had been partitioned off on one end and furnished with slab seats and board desks. The school was not just for young children – a grown man, Elijah Nelson, who lived half a mile to the west on the Trace Road, was one of his students. After just a few short years of successful teaching, Mr. Chauncey died at a very young age. After his death, the question arose as to what they should do for a casket. At that time, there were no sawmills in the country. John Evins had just erected a cabin in what is now Noble Township, in which he had laid a very nice puncheon floor (pieces of broad, heavy timber, roughly dressed, with one face finished flat). It was proposed to take some puncheons out of the floor of this cabin with which to construct the coffin. Thus, in a rude casket made of slabs was one of the first teachers of Richland County consigned to his last home. (Source: Illinois State Historical Library, Counties of Cumberland, Jasper and Richland, 1884)
* (From the Olney Times, Nov. 4, 1885) – Did it ever occur to parents that it was a duty they owed their children to visit the public schools at least once a term? Show that you feel an interest in the schools, become acquainted with the teachers, let them know more of your children than they see in the school room. You would not commit the care of your favorite horse for six hours a day to a stranger without learning something of him or her. Then why not be particular about your children?
* (From the Olney Times, Feb. 25, 1859) – Two boys attending one of our schools got into a fight a day or so ago, when one of them drew a sling-shot and very scientifically used it about the other’s head, knocking him senseless., in which condition he remained for some time. It’s high time that Young America should be taken care of since they are weighted down with such warfare.
* (From the Olney Times, Mar. 14, 1883) – Olney needs school facilities. We have one public school, with about 1,000 or 1,200 children in the building, surrounded on two sides by railroads. The school building is in the west end of town and very inconvenient to a large number of pupils. Every disease to which children are subject, when it breaks out, exposes the whole school. A fire or a cyclone puts the lives of more than a thousand children in impertinent peril.
* (From the Olney Times, May 27, 1885) – The School Board has determined to begin at the coming of the school term, the strict enforcement of the compulsory school law, and every offender will be dealt with to the fullest extent of the law. Such action would be commendable in the eyes of all good citizens who are utterly tired of the gangs of worthless boys who litter on our streets during all seasons of the year, blockading sidewalks and obstructing the passage of pedestrians.
* (From the Annual Report for 1874, Article 10) – Duties of the pupils: No pupil will be allowed to use chewing gum or tobacco in any form, nor obscene or profane language, nor engage in any quarrel or boisterous conduct either on the school premises or on the way to or from school.
* (From the Olney Times, Jan. 7, 1885) – Olney boasts of the handsomest schoolmarms of any city in Southern Illinois.
* (Source, anonymous, from the Parkersburg “Parkerette”) – To parents: If a child annoys you, quiet him by brushing his hair. If that doesn’t work, use the other side of the brush…on the other side of the child.

Ron Scherer

Class of ‘62

( PS….OM Readers, I’ve read the book “Before the Big Yellow Bus” and enjoyed reading it very much! ☺ Ann )

Janice Bagwell Ma

jleahma@comcast.net

Hi Ann,

Loved your story!  That must have been a lot of fun!  Kind of like the poem, isn't it?  Too bad your name isn't Mary.  You know--Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow--and everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go--it followed her to school one day--and so on.  Really fits.  On my mothers' farm, they used to raise sheep for many years.  The little lambs were always so cute.  Sometimes a mother sheep would reject a baby for some reason or other (usually because of twins, I think) and we would have to take the lamb into the house for a while to bottle feed it and then later take it to the barn to do so.  Loved the little things!  Didn't like them as well when they were full grown, especially the males.  They'd try to hit us from behind when we weren't looking.  If we saw them coming in time, it was always a mad dash to try to make it up and over the fence before they'd reach us!

May Day.....very few people in our country celebrate it anymore and even fewer remember what it was all about.  It was a celebration of winning workers' rights.  The fight in the US had been a long and hard one with many people losing their lives.  All they wanted was decent pay and safe working conditions.  Eventually they also wanted medical benefits and pensions.  For years they enjoyed all of these.  Now these are being lost.  The elite rich (remember the Panama Papers) are looting and stripping the country of its assets and in the form of low wages stripping the people of their assets--even letting foreigners join in.  They forget what this system gave them, a country to pursue their dreams.  Now they insist it was ALL done by them alone--no mention is made of living in a country with OUR laws, OUR educational system, OUR infrastructure; no, it's all THEIRS--and they send all the profits to off shore accounts.  And they strip away the rights that American workers won, safe working conditions, FAIR working conditions, decent wages.  Yes, the meaning of May Day has been forgotten.  The fight of the workers has also been forgotten.  Workers today are being forgotten.

I really enjoy the articles you send me.  I often spend hours on Facebook.  There's just so many interesting and informative articles.  I guess you could say I'm an information junkie.

Your friend,

Janice Bagwell Ma

Class of ‘61

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Doug Berger

douglasberger@nyc.rr.com

As for the orphan train story...I found that so sad.

Can you imagine being a little orphan, parents gone, a child, yanked from the only life you know (even if it is an orphanage), herded on to a train, then herded out like cattle or slaves to be selected...?

Then if you "won," you got to be an indentured worker -- and not, typically, someone's beloved, adopted child, OR rejected and sent packing on the next orphan train back to the city?

Speaking of which...are you familiar with this best-selling novel called, I think, "The Orphan Train."  I've not read it, though it's on my to-read list.

https://www.amazon.com/Orphan-Train-Christina-Baker-Kline-ebook/dp/B0089LOG02?ie=UTF8&btkr=1&redirect=true&ref\_=dp-kindle-redirect

Doug Berger

Class of ‘78

Barbara Eli Price

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Ann I enjoyed so much reading about your little lamb story. I can just picture you pulling that little red wagon down Main Street with your lamb in the crate.  That was an unusual pet to bring but I am sure all those kids still remember you bringing your little lamb to school with you.

I remember a few May Day parades from high school. We didn't participate in grade school.  The one I remember the most was our senior year in Distributive Education.   We had a float with a water dunking device. Bo Garretson was in the seat where balls were thrown.  He got dumped in the water a few times.  It wasn't a particularly warm day either.

Barb Price

Class of ‘62

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