

Recalls Fondest Memories of Days Gone By

By Wilhelm (Mike) Kautz

Dear Harry:

In regard to your Sil-Tennial Celebration, we have been following your preparations closely thru your paper, and we certainly want to commend all of you for your enthusiasm. And your Sil-Tennial Belles! Their numbers are becoming legion. You know, I just love celebrations, and wish I were there to lend a hand.

It was very kind of you to imply that I might have something to offer in the compiling of your historical document. I take it that you have already amassed much data, and may I remind you that you are fortunate indeed to have a Paul Beidler at your command. There is a man who has given his entire lifetime to the task of gathering local news, and I know to the countless Mt. Pulaskians scattered around the country, Paul will always be "Mr. Mt. Pulaski" — their historian. So, it is my considered thought that whatever my contribution might be, it could easily find its counterpart in events that Paul has already given you.

As the time approaches for your Sil-Tennial celebration, you Mt. Pulaskians will again find yourselves in your traditional role — that of the genial host. And it is in this capacity that I find some of my fondest memories.

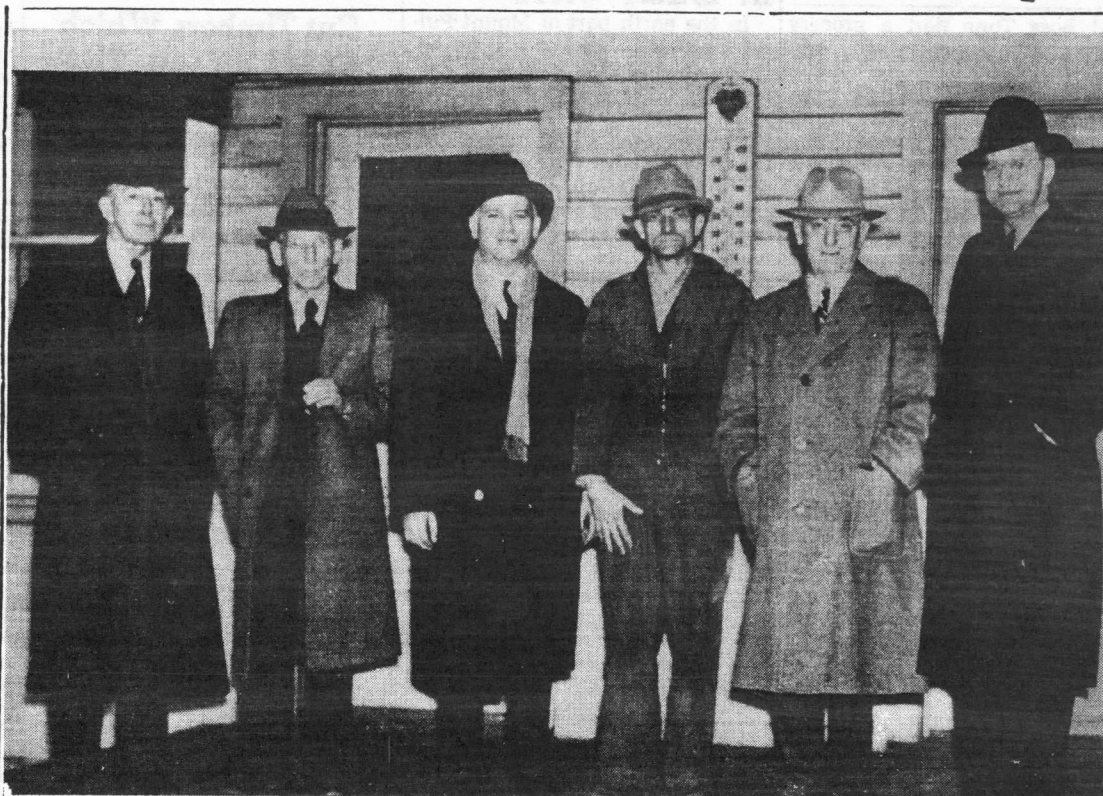
Meeting the Trains

You know at the turn of the century the automobile for all practical purposes was non-existent, and the railroads did a tremendous passenger business. There were 10 or 12 passenger trains thru town daily — and don't forget, they stopped, too. We were all mighty proud of that. On special occasions we have had special trains to bring some of our more distant guests. Upon arrival, one of many committees saw to it that they were made to feel at home. So, shortly before train time, the Mt. Pulaski band assembled on the west side of the square, headed south on Washington Street and was on its way to the depot. And don't forget, it was a marching band, too. There must have been 25 or 30 pieces. And here were all of us kids trying to get just as close as possible to our favorite section. I was always partial to the trumpet. And here we were marching along awaiting the roll of the snare, and up came "Under The Double Eagle", and I tell you, Harry, the devil himself couldn't have stopped us.

Speeches Galore

As I recall, there were no formal ceremonies at the depot. Regrouping of kids and band, with our guests on the sidewalk, and we were headed north up Washington St. to the court yard. After the guests were settled, and the band was enjoying a coffee break, our part of the welcoming ceremonies was over. At this point someone would give a welcome address. In most cases this spot was given to one of the elderly citizens. You must bear in mind there was no dearth of speakers. They spoke before dinner, after dinner, and after supper, and they spoke with a vehemence that would put a lot of present day orators to shame, and as I recall, they spoke extemporaneously, too. It has been said no one enjoys a speech as much as the speaker, but that was not the case with these folks. They were a patient lot and their applause was vigorous and spontaneous. This patience was born out of a dearth of entertaining media.

If the question was asked what was your biggest and best celebration, I would hardly be in a position to say. I was born in 1894 and lived in the 3rd ward for 62 years. That's just one-half of your 125 years. So placing events into two categories, you have the period 1836 and 1898, and from there to your Sil-Tennial. In the first group are the events as they were told to me, and in the latter are those that it was my very good fortune to



POLITICAL LINEUP in which "Mike" Kautz was involved during Dwight Green's candidacy for Governor. Mike will probably want to shoot us for using this picture for he was caught at an awkward moment — whiskers and all — when

this group descended on him unheeded at his elevator one morning. Left to right: Fred Reinders, county chairman of the Republican party; Joe Kretzinger, Chestnut; Dwight Green, "Mike", Everett Jarvis and H. J. Wible. —Times-News Photo.

have experienced first hand.

Semi-Centennial Biggest

I guess, without question, one of your biggest events was the Semi-Centennial held in 1886. My good friend, the late John Christman, was quite a historian and he had one of the Semi-Centennial posters. For the life of me I cannot recall whom he gave it to. (We have it, Mike!) No doubt, it would give you much valuable data. Old Settlers day was strictly a Mt. Pulaski affair, and in fact, I believe the whole county took an active part. These were great events and must rank high in importance. Fourth of July was, of course, celebrated by everyone, but seldom was Mt. Pulaski outdone. As I was told, it was some time during the 75's that the colored folks of Central Illinois chose Mt. Pulaski as the site for their Emancipation Day celebration. They came by train and marched from the depot to the Capps Park in the north end of town, and it was the first time many of the young people had ever seen colored folks.

I recall one outfit that gave us a balloon ascension every day for a week — shows of every kind and description. I recall the first house of mirrors that came to town. That was quite a unique experience — you just couldn't get out of them. Then we had the traveling medicine shows. They, as a rule, spent a week in town and gave a different show every night, and upon each purchase of \$1 or more you were given a coupon that entitled you to cast your vote for one of the local contestants in their beauty contests. You have no idea the enthusiasm that was engendered at these contests.

Hypnotism Popular

Then we had the winter season too. They made one week stands in the Scroggin Opera House. It was the time of the travelling hypnotist, and there was always a willingness on the part of a few of our more courageous citizens to submit to hypnosis. I assure you there were many skeptics too that questioned the whole procedure. The hypnotist always carried an assistant with the show, and this patient soul must have spent a good part of his life under the influence — and of all the things he was subjected to! The crowning event came when he was hypnotized, taken downstairs, and placed upon a bicycle that had been placed in one of the store windows somewhere along the west side of the square. It was placed on a rack, elevating the back wheel off the floor, and this gentleman mounted it and started to ride. They

were protracted rides. I have forgotten the exact number of hours he spent in this ride, but it was at least a 24-hour stretch, and it is considered thought that it was even longer. This, of course, was quite an attraction, and there were intimations that some folks were going to stay up all night to watch for irregularities. I never heard of any discrepancies. It was interesting, too, to watch his reactions to whatever his imagining terrain might be. There was exertion on the hills, relaxation on down-grade, and then of course, the nonchalance of the average cyclist on level ground — all very interesting. Subsequent events have proven that it was all quite genuine, and certainly hypnotic therapy today has contributed much in the treatment of mankind ills.

Walking Age

I like to think of this period as the age of walking. People who were in business around the square, regardless of how far out they might have lived, always made two round trips from home to business each day. The Sunday stroll was almost an institution. It sort of had a "Gay Ninety" flavor. Papa and mama, with the younger kids racing ahead, crawling fences and what have you, the older ones sort of bored with the whole thing, reluctantly bring up the rear. Teen-agers walked to the creek and back.

The thought has just occurred to me what an important part the railroad station played in the lives of all of us. What a pleasurable pastime it was to walk to the depot to see the trains come in — who was coming and going, and always the possibility that we might see a newer and bigger steam engine.

The telegraph office was the source of all news bulletins. And, then, there was State Fair time and more special trains. From the north they came as far as Gilman and of course, filled up on the way. The P.D. & E. had one each way, and they transferred in Mt. Pulaski to the main line. That took more time. What enthusiasm! And why not? They were going to the Fair, and in most cases they had the invaluable shoe box that held their lunch. Oh, Harry, it was a great age and best exemplified in the song immortalized by the late Harry Lauder — "Never had a lot of money, but always had a lot of fun."

Oh, yes, I had almost forgotten, this was the era of the big circus and they all travelled by special train. Most of them stopped in Mt. Pulaski, either for wat-

er, or to transfer to one of the other lines. It was such a pleasant experience. You do appreciate the importance of our depot, do you not?

The Corn Age

Your picture showing the dumping of ear corn on the ground certainly prompts a little reminiscing on this important segment of our economy. Years ago you would see long rows of single plank cribs located near the elevators. These crib sites were quite common throughout the corn belt. Come shucking time and they were all filled with ear corn. In some cases this corn was destined for the eastern market. In fact, eastern interests bought and paid for much of it. It was held in these cribs, not necessarily for price enhancement, but to dry out.

And, come summer, nature and time had completed the drying out process and the danger of heating was at a minimum. It was then scooped into wagons, taken to the elevator for shelling, then loaded into cars for shipment east. As corn moved to the elevators at shucking time, it was discretionary with the elevators how many loads went into the cribs and how many were to be dumped in the elevators for immediate shelling and subsequent shipping to points close to home, where the time element held the chances of heating to a minimum. Now this choice always prompted much controversy.

Would you believe that most people were anxious to scoop the corn into the cribs? I think they were given something like one-half cents per bushel extra for the chore, and of course that meant that much extra money for a plug of chewing tobacco. Chewing tobacco was big business. The outstanding brands were Horseshoe, Starr, Square Deal, and many others that I have forgotten. If your teeth were bad, they had a shredded product that was mighty good, too. It sort of makes my mouth water just to think of it. I often wondered how many pounds it took to harvest a crop of corn.

Yankee Wind Mill

Agriculture has always been your lifeline, and I presume it will continue so for many years to come. At least, I would hope so if I were still living there. Had it ever occurred to you what it took to keep agriculture going at the turn of the century, and what it takes to keep it rolling today? Now there is no point in going back too far, so in order to maintain some semblance of chronological order, let us take the self-binder, gang plow, and

many other improvements for granted. However, civic pride has prompted me to exclude the windmill in these early refinements. The time of its introduction is somewhat vague, but I do know that the Yankee Wind Mill was one of the Mt. Pulaski's finest products. For many years it gave employment to quite a few people. Its acceptance was quite general throughout central Illinois, and I think some wandered out of the State. What a service they rendered over the years.

Riding Cultivators Controversial

Another refinement came upon the scene — one that was accompanied with some controversy. I have the riding cultivator in mind. All were in accord that it did make the task much easier, but the question was — could a man ride and cultivate corn as effectively as he could walk and do the job? There was much displeasure displayed by many landlords and there were intimations that there might be some changing of tenants if these things were indulged in. Consequently, some rode and some walked. I might interpose with this comment — I don't suppose you could tell the difference. Then the opposition yielded on the laying-by of the corn — it would be all right. Then it was agreed that it would be all right to ride the last two times over. And finally everybody was riding.

As I recall there were two types of these walking cultivators. One had a tongue and the other was a tongueless affair. There were two wheels, held together with an arch of some sort. Heavens knows what the tugs and shovels were hooked to. This is the one that intrigued me most. When you got to the end to turn around, the whole thing just sort of collapsed. But after you got turned around and lined out, it was a thing of beauty. That was especially the case if you had a good team of mules, and a man who knew how to plow.

The coming of the combine is all too recent to merit much discussion. However, it too, came with certain misgivings. Unquestionably, if ample time is given for ripening and drying, your overall quality is superior to the old shucking and threshing methods. We have seen heavy rains play much havoc with shocked grain, and then the long drying process made for long and unsatisfactory harvests. On several occasions I have seen wheat threshed from the shock in October.

Stacking Grain

Years ago there was another method known as stacking of grain. The bundles were built into large cone shaped stacks and if properly erected could withstand much adverse weather. There were a few men in every community who could do this stacking properly. Their services were much sought after. This practice, I presume, was brought about by lack of equipment, and it enabled the farmer to choose his threshing time. I believe the combine was the first labor-saving device that really helped the farm wife. It did away with the big threshing dinners. My, what feasts! I shall never forget all the many different kinds of pies — pies with crusts on top, pies with strips on top, and pies without any top at all. It was no place for calorie counting.

Today, with the tendency away from the rural communities to the cities, it is interesting to note the reverse of that trend before, and a number of years after the turn of the century. Years ago, come March 1st, the trek to the farm began. This provided local employment for the young men of the community and there was some augmentation of this local pool from the outside, too. As a rule these engagements ran until corn husking. The gathering of the corn was labor's bonanza. They came from Southern Illinois,

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