

# *The Tri-States'* **BALLROOMS & BANDS**



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TELEGRAPH HERALD • Thursday, April 27, 2023

# Dancing the night away



“Those were magic days,” said Wayne King II, of Sun City West, Ariz., son of the celebrated bandleader and Savanna, Ill., native Wayne King.

He was referring to the ballroom era, and he certainly was correct.

Tri-state area residents speak wistfully of the time when they waltzed, two-stepped or bunny hopped across a dance hall floor. Many met their future spouses there.

From the age of jazz to the dawn of disco, these venues served as gathering places for generations. Some might have been considered nothing more than roadhouses, but they served important roles in their communities.

Few of the sites remain, but memories linger among the dancers and the music makers.

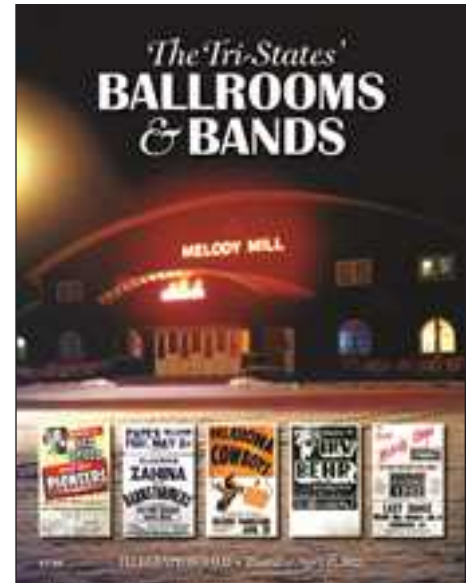
I had the privilege of meeting many longtime musicians and appreciate their willingness to pose for portraits. I feel that we have photographically assembled an all-star band of yesteryear.

And I would like to offer a big thanks to dozens of area historians — amateur and professional — for their assistance with this project.

We hope you enjoy this selection of the area’s ballrooms and some of the bands that provided the magic for a bygone era.

## Mike Day

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The lights from Melody Mill ballroom, once located just north of Dubuque along the former U.S. 52, glow during a winter evening. Norm Kirch photo contributed by Darlene Kirch. Band posters contributed by Ambrose and Duanne Pins, John and Carol Fay, Jackson County Historical Society, Jim Klein and Irv Koethe.

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# THE BALLROOMS

The origin of music is difficult to pinpoint, but it's likely that dancing was not far behind.

Fast forward a few millennia and, by 1920, social dancing had become America's most popular form of recreation, according to author Lon Gault, in "Ballroom Echoes."

In the early 1900s, dances were held in boweries and barns across the Midwest. The open-air and unheated structures were usable only in the warmer months. Opera houses and second-floor halls often hosted dances in the winter.

A better-suited type of structure would soon open its doors to such gatherings.

While the earliest roots of jazz can be traced to a century earlier, modern jazz took hold in the 1910s. The Black-born music genre — marked by complex structure and improvisation — experienced a surge in popularity via radio, sparking the development of ballrooms to accommodate a dance-crazy nation.

The 1920s saw the opening of several extravagant venues in the tri-state area, including Royal Palais in Galena, Ill.; Lakeside Ballroom in Guttenberg, Iowa; Lakehurst Pavilion near Maquoketa, Iowa; and Crystal Ballroom in Dubuque.

"They were a gathering place for generations of Americans. In the day, young people gathered together to listen to pop music, dance with the opposite sex, maybe meet somebody special, probably go out and drink some beer at intermission," said Dubuque's Paul Hemmer, radio personality, bandleader and author of "Entertaining Dubuque: The Untold Story, 1900-1999." "They were a place where young people could develop confidence. There were a lot of things about the ballrooms that I think go beyond what the bar is today."



*The Telegraph-Herald, Oct. 26, 1956*

Dubuquer Ralph Kluseman, president of the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Music Association, notes that ballrooms served as "entertainment meccas," and Iowa —



Ralph Kluseman

which one had more than 200 at one time — "did it probably at the best level of anybody in the United States."

"When these national artists would come to Iowa, they'd stay for a month,"

Kluseman said. "It was unbelievable. These ballrooms ... were the network that really created tremendous opportunities for all these artists to really stay active six, seven days a week, in some cases.

"This was where we brought people

together to build community, take down all the barriers so we (could) all become friends."

Less-elaborate dance halls, many in rural areas, were no less socially and culturally significant.

Drummer Bobby Greenwood, of Dubuque, a member of The Shades and Dick Buscher and the Cliches — both enshrined in the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame — recalls playing many dances at such halls.

"You'd be out in the sticks somewhere, and then all of a sudden, just about a half hour before you played, the place, the parking lot would just fill up with cars, all kinds of people from all over, (a) very rural-type thing," Greenwood said.

"(For) a lot of the farmers and country people and small-town people, that was their big night out. That was a Saturday night. And then it spread to Friday and Saturday nights. During the rock 'n' roll era, they were all lined up in front of the stage watching the band. Some of them were dancing. But a lot of the people were in the front just watching the music."

That music ranged from cowboy to polka to big band to rock 'n' roll, and the halls provided places where thousands of area residents courted their future spouses.

"One of the most gratifying things for me as a musician was watching the ballroom fill with people, smiling and happy," said Hemmer.

"(With) radios and the media that we had back in the day, you really couldn't experience what music was really like until you heard it live and you heard it in a ballroom," said Kluseman, likening a large dance hall to an amplifier.

Kluseman, who has performed — and danced — at ballrooms, describes it as "the most incredible experience."

"Not only is it people, but it's places that inspire."

# CRYSTAL BALLROOM

*Dubuque*



*Contributed by Carole Loetscher*

Edward C. Bartels stands outside the Crystal Ballroom in Center Grove, Iowa.

**O**ne of the area's most lavish ballrooms had its beginnings in a quiet hollow along Catfish Creek on Dubuque's south side.

In a community once known as Center Grove (since annexed into the city) was an area called Luther Park. Its most popular attraction was an open-air pavilion that hosted dances. Near the park was a three-story house.

About 1906, Edward C. Bartels purchased the pavilion and house and later had them moved from the valley to the top of the hill, along the road now known as U.S. 20.



Edward C. Bartels

"They put this huge house on logs, and horses pulled it all the way from down in Catfish Creek," said Bartels' granddaughter, Elizabeth Bray, of Dubuque.

Bartels established a park on land surrounding the dance hall and soon travelers were asking to pitch their tents on the property. Sensing an opportunity to accommodate the increasing number of visitors, Bartels opened a campground that included 31 cabins and shower facilities. The front room of his home became a store, where the family sold sandwiches, milk and candy to the campers.

"Grandpa was a real entrepreneur," said Bray.



*Contributed*

An open-air dance pavilion was the principal attraction at Luther Park at Center Grove, Iowa, during the turn of the previous century.

In 1928, work began on paving the "Hawkeye Highway" from Dubuque to Dyersville, presenting Bartels with another chance to capitalize on the increased traffic.

He closed the park for six months and began dismantling his dance pavilion. Its replacement would be more grandiose.

On Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 29 — just two weeks after the new highway opened — the Crystal Ballroom debuted. Billed as the "largest, finest and most modern ballroom," the building was of Spanish design and could accommodate 2,000

people. Above the 100-by-70-foot dance floor hung the dance hall's namesake crystal ball. It was crafted by family members from a ball of wire, plaster of Paris and tiny pieces of glass, and was illuminated by colored spotlights.

More than 1,500 people attended the opening event, many shuttled there from the city's west-end streetcar line by Interstate Power Co. buses. Music was provided by Zez Confrey and His Victor Recording Orchestra.

With prohibition as the law of the land, no drinking was allowed at the hall. Even when the temperance law was lifted in 1933, the ballroom remained dry. Among the beverages served were soda water and carbonated drinks from Dubuque's Cosley Bottling Works.

Another of Bartels' granddaughters, Carole Loetscher, of Dubuque, remembers dealing with those beverage containers.

"The dances were Wednesday and Sunday night," she said. "And the next day, the Cosley bottles had to be sorted, and it was hot and sticky, and we had to sort all those ... sticky bottles. Then we'd reuse them."

The ballroom also sold other soft drinks, and one brand proved difficult to obtain, recalled Loetscher.

"During the war, (we) couldn't get Coca-Cola, so my father made my sister, Sally, and me get in the car after school with



grandpa and we would go to the taverns, with just these two little girls that were in elementary school. We'd go in and ask for a six pack of Coke."

Bartels, along with sons Roy "Bud" and Carl "Doc," operated the establishment, but many other family members chipped in.

"We all worked there," Loetscher said. "All the grandchildren had to work at the Bartels' Cabin Camp and the Crystal Ballroom.

"People would go out to their car and they would drink out there in the parking lot, and so we girls would have to go out there when we were done making the beds and doing the pop bottles, and we'd have to go over there and pick up the broken glass in the parking lot."

"On Sunday afternoons at my house," Bray recalled, "we had to go out and set on the dining room table, the dance bills, and my job was to fold them. And my sister — who had beautiful handwriting — and daddy addressed them. Carole's father was an engineer, a civil engineer, and he was always out around the county. So, then he would take the dance bills and stop and post them at little stores, gas stations, taverns, whatever, along the way. That's how they advertised.

"It was important in all these little towns because those (were) the people who came into the Wednesday night dances."

Other help kept the ballroom running smoothly. A&P manager Rudy Kemp ran the concession stand and was known for his hamburgers. Brothers Dick and Walter Hoerner, both sheriff deputies, provided security. Bray's brother, Bobby Bartels, cleaned the dance hall floor, as did Francis "Dreams" Harty.

Harty was more than a custodian at the ballroom. He often was one of the main attractions.

Loetscher remembers her family giving him rides from his University Avenue apartment on Monday and Thursday mornings.



Contributed by Tim Krom

A poster advertising a wedding dance for Marie Willy and Harold Kaune at Crystal Ballroom on Nov. 29, 1939.

"He was the nicest man, and he was in demand as a dancer," she recalled. "It was the highlight of the dance night when the crystal ball went on and the other lights were turned off, and then (you'd see) Dreams floating around and these women all waiting to dance with him."

Bartels, who once played stand-up bass in the local Russo Orchestra, tapped into the big band market for his Sunday night dances. Performers included Earl Wood and His Music Masters, Cato's Vagabonds, Lloyd Hunter and His Ivory Tops, and orchestras led by such names as Ray Alderson, Leo Pieper, Russ Morgan, Eddy Howard, Art Kassel, Tiny Hill, Jimmy Dorsey, Lawrence Welk and Guy Lombardo.

Lloyd Streng, of Dubuque, recalls attending such shows.

As a teenager from Cascade, Iowa, Streng used to travel to the ballroom regularly in the late 1940s. He enjoyed the jazz and dance bands.



Lloyd Streng

"I didn't have a car at the time," he said. "I used to catch rides with the other guys that went."

One evening, he was supposed to meet a girl from Cascade at the dance hall. He knew she was short. When he spied a young woman who matched that description on the dance floor, he approached and tapped her on the shoulder.

"I thought I was asking this girl from Cascade for a dance. It turned out to be my future wife."

The case of mistaken identity eventually led to wedding bells, as Lloyd and Gloria were married on Aug. 5, 1950, and enjoyed 66 years of marriage before her passing.

Wednesday night shows at the Crystal generally featured country bands and often were reserved for wedding dances.

Helen Thill, of Dubuque, remembers visiting the ballroom with her siblings.

"It was a big night on Wednesday night.



Helen Thill

Tom Owen was the best for country-western. They were pretty popular."

Thill and her husband, Ken, had their wedding dance at Crystal Ballroom on Wednesday, June 26, 1946, with Lee Carlson's Cowboys providing the entertainment.

As more dance halls opened in the tri-state area, the Bartels kept tabs on how they were doing.

"Melody Mill was our competition," Bray recalled.

Loetscher remembers family members making trips into Illinois to check on another rival.

"Bud and Doc and grandpa would ride over to Moonlight Gardens about 10:30 to see if the parking lot was full."



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Dec. 23, 1928



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Oct. 26, 1930



*The Telegraph-Herald, Oct. 29, 1941*

One perk that the Crystal Ballroom offered was limousine rides. The family owned a red Packard that would make two or three trips a night, picking up dancers at downtown Dubuque intersections and bringing them to Center Grove.

Management kept detailed records on dances, down to the number of men and women who attended each night, because the former were charged a higher admission price than the latter.

"If they had a big night, it meant that they took in \$154," Loetscher said. "Like when Tiny Hill came, or Tom Owen and His Cowboys. Lawrence Welk came once before he got famous. That was big money then."

She also recalled that not all of the money made it to the bank.

"We were just fascinated to lift up the corner of the rug in the living room and there'd be all this money underneath it," Loetscher said.

"They also kept it under the dining room table," Bray added.

The extended Bartels family was able to financially survive the Great Depression and WWII, thanks to the ballroom.

"Daddy said ... people always had money to go to the dances," Loetscher recalled. "They came to the dances in spite of ... the Depression."

Bray said that "they did very well in the dance business, especially (as) it got into the '40s. Of course, the wartime took a lot of people, but they always had the dances.



*Contributed by Center for Dubuque History at Loras College*

The Irv Behr Orchestra performs at the Crystal Ballroom in Center Grove, Iowa, in 1938. From left are Irv Behr, Bill Lonergan, Richie Miller, Myron Biggins, Lee Dahms, Jim Squire, Shorty Schafert, Johnny Wetter, Louie Nye and Fred Wetter.

Except during Lent."

In 1944, the ballroom faced another challenge, this time in court. Edward, Roy and Carl Bartels and Edward's son-in-law Justin Conlan filed suit to dispute the payment of \$20.98 in unemployment taxes for musicians who performed at the Crystal. They contended that the bandleaders, as their employers, were responsible. A federal judge sided with the ballroom owners in the precedent-setting case.

By the late 1940s, with the advent of television and a generation of former soldiers and their wives starting families, ballroom attendance began to suffer. The Crystal started to cut back on dances.

Bray recalled one of the dance hall's final events, at a time when she was a member of the Girl Scouts.

"The senior Girl Scouts were having a dance. And somehow, my dad managed to book Les Brown and His Band of Renown and he (and) the Girl Scouts didn't have to pay. I think he probably donated his

service. I don't know how they got him."

The Crystal Ballroom's final hurrah was on Dec. 31, 1950, when Leo Beschen and His Cowboys played the closing show.

Loetscher's father, Carl Bartels, penned a "eulogy" of sorts to the ballroom, indicating that the venue's alcohol-free policy led to its downfall.

He stated: "In all the years we operated for my father, with Roy the brains, we never lost a penny and things kept getting better and better until beer and whiskey laws got so lax that young people had no restraints. That is when we closed the door, because we all had young families and we never intended or wanted a liquor license. We were not going to be a party to the debauchery of young people, especially if we always ran a tight ship and no monkeyshines of any kind."

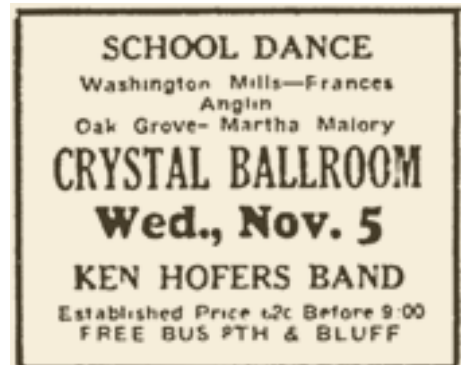
The building was sold and later housed Frank Hardie Advertising, NAPA Auto Parts & Supply and Rondinelli Music/Audio. It is currently home to The Bike Shack and The Shoe Shack.

"The dance hall served a lot of purposes," said Loetscher. "But it was wonderful fun."



*MIKE DAY • Telegraph Herald*

The building that housed Crystal Ballroom, at 3250 Dodge Street in Dubuque, is now home to The Shoe Shack and The Bike Shack.



*The Telegraph-Herald, Nov. 3, 1947*



# UNION PARK

## Dubuque

The Jazz Age was in its infancy when Dubuque's Union Park began its renaissance.

A July 9, 1919, flash flood had leveled the grounds and killed five park-goers. The Mammoth Theater, which contributed to the disaster by acting as a dam across the valley, was destroyed.

As the community recovered, the park was rebuilt. Dances were held in the remnants of a nearby pavilion.

In March 1923, Union Park management announced improvements to the grounds. A 150-by-50-foot swimming pool would be added, as well as a larger dance hall at the site of the theater. The dance floor of the new structure would be 98-by-74 feet — twice the size of the current pavilion's floor — and have a promenade around its perimeter. The project would cost \$10,000.

The old pavilion would be retained, as there was "considerable demand" for private parties, according to The Telegraph-Herald. The park had become more accessible to residents since a road to the area's foremost recreational center was paved in 1922.

The park opened for the 1923 season on May 24. However, the new dance hall was not completed until two months later.

The Dubuque Electric Company, owner of the park, decided to spend an additional \$20,000 to upgrade the "dance palace" during the off-season. Interior restrooms, check rooms and a smoking room for men were added. The interior décor featured Japanese rope draped in arches and nine gigantic chandeliers containing multicolored bulbs, which replaced the crystal ball that hung from the ceiling.

Newspaper advertisements began touting it as the "Largest and Finest Ballroom in the State." Among its first performers was Art Braun and His Novelty Boys, who took the stage on May 11, 1924.

In 1925, the dance hall finally was given a name: Sylvan Ballroom. It played host to such groups as Dubuque Girls Novelty Orchestra, Lalley's New Yorkers, The Alabamians, Bobby Griggs and His Original Iowans and Emil Flindt and His Varsity Band.

The following year, officials announced



TH archives

that Union Park had joined the Music Corporation of America's ballroom circuit, assuring patrons that they could expect "only the best and the most perfected dance orchestras," according to the TH.

On Saturday, Sept. 15, 1928, couples tested their endurance in a dance marathon. By Thursday, after 102 hours, seven remained. Perhaps to assuage boredom, one pair took a road trip without missing a beat.

The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal reported: "Boarding a large enclosed truck Wednesday evening, couple No. 1, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Trenery, waltzed over to the Royal Dance Palace at Galena, Ill., where they were successful in winning first money in a fancy fox trot contest, which was being staged by the management of the Royal Palace. A large crowd of Dubuquers followed the van from Union Park over and back. They were surprised when the local couple showed no apparent ill effect of the terrific strain."

By the 170th hour, two local dancers — Mary E. Brooks and Charles H. Kruse — had announced their surprise engagement. Promoters wasted no time jumping on the opportunity, making plans to convert the hall into a makeshift cathedral, donating bridalwear and promising to film the ceremony and fund the honeymoon. The marathon had already attracted 24,000 spectators.

The Sept. 26 nuptials went off as planned, with Brooks and Kruse, their attendants — the Trenerys — and the remaining three couples keeping their feet moving throughout the ceremony.

Wedded bliss did not sustain the newlyweds, as they dropped out after 291 hours. A physician and two nurses monitored the remaining contestants. By Oct. 1, park officials allowed free dancing for the public for the duration of the contest.

The competition finally came to a close at 5:26 a.m., Oct. 4, when Dubuquers Anita Weidner and James Justice bowed out. The Trenerys danced for another 34 minutes to take home the prize.

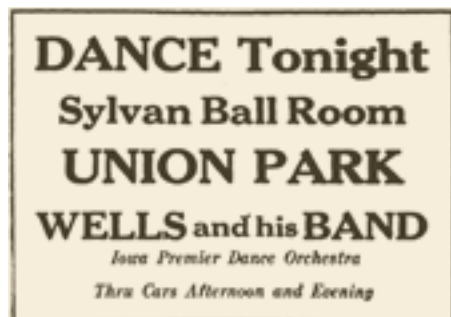
In 1931, the park opened on June 14 under a new name: Woodland. The site was being leased by the Woodland Amusement Co., which was managed by E.H. Johannsen. Interstate Power Company, which now owned the property, was just a year away from discontinuing its streetcar service throughout the city and now was running only buses to the park. Al Knight and His Ten Stars played the opening dance.

During the next three seasons, Woodland Ballroom hosted such nationally known acts as Duke Ellington and His Cotton Club Orchestra, Herbie Kay and His Aragon Ballroom Orchestra — featuring singer Dorothy Lamour, Art Kassel and His Kassels in the Air and Ted Weems and His Orchestra.

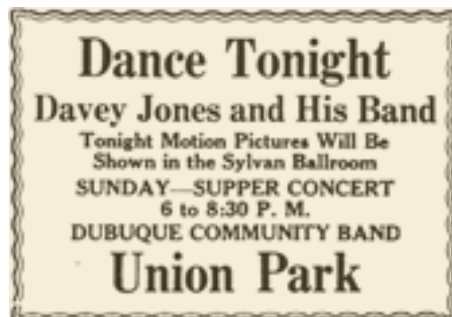
Perhaps the biggest name appeared at the ballroom's final show. Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians performed on Oct. 9, 1933.

Just months later, the park was sold to the Dubuque Amusement Corporation — composed of local investors, including attorney John J. Kintzinger — and the dance hall was dismantled.

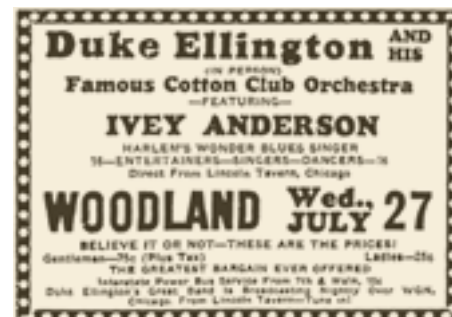
However, it soon would be resurrected as the area's premier ballroom: Melody Mill.



The Telegraph-Herald, May 2, 1926



The Telegraph-Herald, July 30, 1926



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, July 24, 1932

# MELODY MILL

*Dubuque*



*TH archives*

The A.Y. McDonald Mfg. Co. Centennial Exhibition draws a crowd at Melody Mill, north of Dubuque, on May 23, 1956.

An advertisement that spread across two full pages of the Aug. 5, 1934, issue of The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal announced the christening of what would become the tri-states' premier dance hall.

Melody Mill was sown from the memories and material of the Union Park ballroom. In 1934, the Dubuque Amusement Corporation had the dance hall dismantled and used the lumber to craft something even more elaborate at the former site of Nutwood Park horse-racing track and the city's airport, just north of Dubuque.

The corporation was led by Dubuque businessmen Harold H. "Buck" Kunz, John J. Kintzinger and Everett "Shorty" Akins, who supervised the monumental task of deconstructing and moving the ballroom, piece by piece, from its site a mile up a nearby valley. The roof trusses alone were 100 feet long and weighed four tons each.

In only five months, Melody Mill was ready to host its first dance. Robert E. Taylor was tapped to manage the venue.

The new building had the profile of a half-moon, with green shingled siding and aluminum trim. Its footprint was 100-by-162 feet, which included a 10,000-square-foot dance floor of maple. The orchestra shell stage was 32-by-16 feet. The hall also included a French cabaret, kitchen, checkroom and ticket stands in a Dutch windmill style.

A state-of-the-art audio system could carry the sounds of the orchestra to each corner of the room. An 8-foot tapered chandelier displaying revolving circular



*Contributed by Tim Krom*

rows of colored lights hung above the middle of the dance floor and was flanked by four smaller fixtures of similar design.

On the building's facade, towering above the acres of parking, was the venue's name, spelled out in 3-foot-high neon letters.

The music on the Aug. 8, 1934, opening night was provided by Music Corporation of America artists Louis Panico and His Orchestra, featuring red-headed torch singer Jean Faye. During intermission, a young accordionist — Dubuque's own



*The Telegraph-Herald, July 21, 1935*

A dance on July 24, 1935, raised money for Dubuquer Arnold Seitz, who was paralyzed in a 1916 accident at Union Park.



*The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Sept. 2, 1934*

Clarence Zahina—performed in the cabaret and pavilion.

The venue could be rented for dances, and among its customers were Roy and Mary Oldenburg, owners of the Royal Palais ballroom in Galena, Ill. They booked concerts that they felt their dance hall could not accommodate. One such performance by Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians drew more than 4,000 people.

The Mill, as it became known, hosted many of the biggest acts of the day,



including Paul Whiteman, Maurie Sherman, Ted Weems, Cab Calloway, Russ Morgan, Dick Jurgens, Shep Fields, Ray Pearl, Benny Strong, Orrin Tucker, Ray Anthony and Eddy Howard.

In 1947, Rose Kunz, widow of Charles G. Kunz — who had become sole owner after gradually buying the shares of his brother and the other stockholders — sold Melody Mill to Vince and Viola “Vi” Schulting, who had recently divested Moonlight Gardens dance hall, near Menominee, Ill.

The Schulings’ son, Merl, assisted with the operation of the ballroom and managed it during its last 10 years. He shared some of his memories, shortly before his passing in December.



Merl Schulting

“It was a great experience,” he said. “I did just about everything there. I worked there during the day. I was a bouncer, too. I had a special deputy’s badge.”

In an effort to maintain decorum, the owners expected proper conduct from its patrons.

“We had a policy that if you were fighting, you were barred for six months,” said the 6-foot-2 Schulting. “We had a dress code. We enforced it too. No jeans whatsoever. If they were wearing jeans, they didn’t get in.

“When we had teen dances, our policy was ‘Nobody leaves.’ Once you’re inside, you don’t leave. So, that went over good with the parents. They knew (their children) were in good hands when they went to the door.”

In the mid-1940s, the KDTH Barn Dances hosted at The Mill were at the height of popularity. The Grand Ole Opry-style event,



Contributed by Darlene Kirch

Johnny Cash visits with Melody Mill owner Vi Schulting (right) and daughters Shirley Schulting and Darlene Kirch in the mid-1950s.

created by the Dubuque radio station’s husband-and-wife team of Mack and Sandy Ford, featured a troupe of musicians and comedians that exuded country charm.

“We always had wedding dances on Tuesday. Practically every Tuesday,” Schulting said.

At the time, couples would rent the hall and charge admission for their guests. After paying expenses, they kept the balance of the money, so a sizable crowd was desired.

“We had three brothers that were always coming out there. There was competition amongst them to see which one got the most people at the door.”

No liquor was served at the site. Ice and soda were sold, but customers had to bring their own vodka and whiskey for mixed drinks.

“We were selling ponies — I think they were 8-ounce bottles of beer — for 25 cents,” Schulting recalled. “And people loved those small bottles.”



Contributed by Darlene Kirch

Melody Mill owner Vince Schulting (right) welcomes bandleader Guy Lombardo during an appearance in November 1963.

As with many area venues, dances were not held during Lent. Instead, the hall was rented for activities such as boat shows, club dinners and wrestling matches.

Dubuque promoter Ken Fenelon coordinated the latter, bringing in such names as Verne Gagne, Billy McDaniels, Farmer Jones, Bob “Mr. America” McCune and Hans “The German Giant” Herman. Heavyweight boxing champ Joe Louis even made an appearance ... as a referee.

“Our main problem ... with wrestling, was keeping the spectators away from the wrestlers as they came out of the ring,” Schulting said.

He recalled the many stars that performed at The Mill, including bandleaders Sammy Kaye, Russ Morgan, Jan Garber, Tiny Hill and Freddy Martin — with singer Merv Griffin, and country crooners Jimmy Dean, Sonny James, Conway Twitty, Wanda Jackson and Webb Pierce, whose high-pitched voice left an impression.

During the show, Schulting spoke to one of Pierce’s entourage.

“I told the guy, ‘To tell you the truth, I don’t like his voice. When Johnny Cash is singing, ... you know there’s a man up there singing. But Webb sings, sometimes I thought he was a girl.’ And he said, ‘Hey, I think so, too.’”

Cash, indeed, left no doubt among his fans that he was the godfather of country music.

“He was (at Melody Mill) 10 times and, God, he just packed the house. I think he was the most popular country and western guy we had there,” Schulting said. “(When) he was just starting out, I think we paid him 1,500 bucks.

“Most of the performers were very nice people. These guys would get out and mix with the crowds, and you kind of had to watch them so that somebody wouldn’t do something funny to them.”

Schulting got to interact with many of the stars, and recalls keeping an eye on one young performer, Brenda Lee.



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Melody Mill boasted a 10,000-square-foot maple dance floor.



*Contributed by Jo Ann Lovett*

Jerry Lee Lewis visits with fan Janet Althaus during a Sept. 20, 1957, stop at Melody Mill.



*Contributed by Darlene Kirch*

Louie Armstrong warms up backstage before a show at Melody Mill.



*Contributed by Carl "Ace" Metz*

Country singer Marty Robbins performs at Melody Mill in the late 1950s.

"She was 12 years old when she came and nobody was watching her. She's running around outside, so it was my duty to follow her and keep track of her. She did a beautiful job of singing. But after she was singing, she liked to run around and I had to follow her all the time. I guess I was sort of a (chaperone)."

Another regular performer was bandleader Lawrence Welk.

"Lawrence was a pretty good friend of my father's," Schulting said. "About that time, one of his sponsors was Oldsmobile. And they would show up in Rocket Oldsmobiles — the whole band — and park right in front. I think they probably stopped at the local Oldsmobile dealer and got what they could.

"My favorite was Guy Lombardo. (He) was the only band we've ever had that only played 3½ hours. Normally it'd be four hours with intermission. It was 3½ with him. So, if you started at 9, he was done at 12:30. He was worth it. I think we had to pay him \$2,500."

Top-tier entertainment was the norm for Melody Mill. Musicians included Count Basie, Les Brown, The Dorsey Brothers, Spike Jones, Louie Armstrong, Andy Williams, Roy Acuff, Patsy Cline, Carl Perkins, Gene Vincent, Frankie Avalon, The Everly Brothers and The Beach Boys.

Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson were scheduled to appear at a Teen Jamboree on Feb. 10, 1959, but were killed in a plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa, just a week earlier. However, the show continued with the rest of the originally scheduled performers — The Crickets, Frankie Sardo and Dion and the Belmonts — and Frankie Avalon and Jimmy Clanton, who filled in for the late singers.

Schulting couldn't verify the rumors that his parents turned down an offer to have Elvis Presley play at The Mill, but he had his doubts.

### The Johnny Cash recordings

Several years ago, Jim Klein, who performed with the Koethe Melody Kings at Melody Mill's final dance, came across a treasure.

Klein, who has a recording studio in his Dubuque home, was asked to review some recordings that were made by the late local musician George E. "Duke" Frederick.

"While I was going through, I ran across this thing and I listened closely to it and it sounded like Johnny Cash," said Klein. So, I listened to the whole thing, and here it was one of his performances at The Mill. But it wasn't the best quality. I transferred it over onto my machine, which has all kinds of gizmos and gadgets, and I started working with it. Pretty soon I got it sounding much better, so I put it on a CD."

The date of the performance is unknown, but Cash himself notes while on stage, "It's nice to be with you in Dubuque again for our 15th time, and I hope you're enjoying our part of the show tonight."

"I don't know if my father had a chance at Elvis or not, but that wiggle of his was causing all kinds of problems. You know, Dubuque is Catholic, and he was afraid of what it would do to the prestige of the ballroom. The fee would have been astronomical at that time, because he was at the height of his career. I don't know for sure whether he was offered and we turned him down or not, but dad would not have even tried to get him.

"But we had everybody else, though. We had ... Jerry Lee Lewis. He was goofy. He was a good show, though."

Crowds also filled the hall on Friday nights for local and regional bands led by Gus Fuhrman, Larry Foster, Irv Behr, Joey Paradiso, Leo Greco and Tom Owen.

"That was our real mainstay because we always had good crowds on Friday night because people really loved the music we had," Schulting said.

There was always a bit of competition with some of the other big dance halls in the area, such as Royal Palais in Galena, Ill., Lakeside Ballroom in Guttenberg, Iowa, and Crystal Ballroom in Dubuque.

One thing, though, that The Mill shared with the Crystal was "Dreams."

"Frank Harty was his name. He was our ticket taker at The Mill. Everybody called him 'Dreams,'" said Schulting. "He was a great dancer. The girls just loved dancing with him. He came from Crystal, and he worked for us a long time."

The busy-ness of the venue called for planning and coordination — inside and out. The sheriff deputies on duty often helped patrons align the cars in the spacious parking lot. By the end of the night, more assistance was required.

"If it was a big crowd, they'd go up there and halt traffic on the highway so that the people from The Mill could get out. Otherwise, they'd probably never get out of there."

A change in Iowa's liquor laws in 1963 — requiring dram shop liability insurance with liquor licenses — and the passing of Vi Schulting the previous year signaled the ballroom's coda.

"Liquor by the drink really killed us, because up to that time people would bring their own whiskey bottles in. We only sold beer and pop, of course, but no whiskey," said Schulting. "Then, all of a sudden, Iowa had liquor by the drink and you ... had to go by that and that really hurt us. It was the beginning of the end."



On June 16, 1964, tri-state residents found bad news on their doorstep.

The headline on the front page of The Telegraph-Herald read “Melody Mill Purchased by Power Firm.”

Interstate Power Company had bought the 55-acre site for industrial development. Melody Mill would close within two months.

The dances that summer were bittersweet for the thousands of patrons who had come of age at the ballroom. They flocked to the hall for once last turn on the dance floor. Some nights were so crowded that a few brought their own tables.

Leo Greco played the last Friday night dance on Aug. 7, but an Appreciation Dance was held the following Monday.

“What we wanted to do was try to get rid of some of our stock, like beer and pop ..., so we just said admission was 25 cents,” recalled Schulting.

The Koethe Melody Kings had the honor of the parting song. Band members recalled the mood that night.

“It was ... a sad time for everybody, because that was kind of an institution,” said Jim Klein, of Dubuque, who sat in with the band that night.

Trumpeter Duane Koethe, of West Des Moines, Iowa, remembered that “there (were) an awful lot of people there. It was a sad day to see that place go.”

An auction of the ballroom’s contents — including 1,000 wooden folding chairs, three bars and two grand pianos — was held on Aug. 22, just weeks before the building was dismantled.

Schulting disputed the commonly held belief that the dance floor was relocated to the Dubuque County Fairgrounds, which had been the original plan.

“One time I was out at a wedding dance (at the fairgrounds) and I measured the floor boards and ours (were) thinner than those,” he said. “They bought some of our chairs. And they bought some of our coat racks. But they didn’t get the floor.



TH archives

More than 400 tri-state square dancers filled Melody Mill on May 8, 1960, during the annual Round-Up sponsored by the “Y Swingsters” of Dubuque.

“There are a lot of people, I think, that have something from The Mill that they’re holding on to. It does my heart good when I’m reading (obituaries) — not that the person died — (but) when they say they met at Melody Mill. That’s always nice to hear.”

Several other tri-state residents recall their days at Melody Mill.

**George Pemsal** and Eugene “Gene” Konrardy were such good friends that they joined the U.S. Army under the “buddy system” in 1959. The Dubuquers trained together at Fort Gordon, Ga., and served the rest of their three-year tours in Germany.



George Pemsal

“Once we returned back to Dubuque, we decided to start going out to the Melody Mill,” Pemsal said.

At a time when patrons had to provide their own whiskey for mixed drinks, the pair would make a purchase on the way to the dance hall.

“We would always stop in at The Atom, north of Dubuque — Joe and Margaret Hefel ran that — and we’d get our fifth and go out (to Melody Mill) and buy our set-ups,” Pemsal recalled.

“One night, my friend and I were going out there and we were looking for a place to sit down at a table,” Pemsal said. “I suggested, ‘Let’s just try right over there in that area. There’s going to be a lot of traffic.’ That was where a lot of the women would be going back and forth.”

Pemsal guessed right as two women soon passed by, catching their eyes. They watched as the pair sat at a table by themselves. Pemsal decided to walk over and ask one of them to dance.

He was promptly turned down with a polite “No thank you,” and returned to his seat in disbelief.

Konrardy, however, was not discouraged by Pemsal’s failure, and went to ask the woman’s friend for a dance.

“And her friend got up and danced with my friend for a while,” Pemsal said.

He sat and watched as another gentleman successfully asked the woman for a dance. During a break in the music, Pemsal regained his courage and decided “to give it another try. ‘I’ll wait ’til the music starts ... and I’ll go ask her again,’” he thought.

His second effort was met with, “Sure.”

Pemsal later asked the woman why she had turned down his first request. She revealed that she had promised the first dance to her cousin, the man Pemsal saw dancing with her.

“Well, the night went on then and we danced more dances,” said Pemsal. “We got together and then we started dating.”

Both couples — George and Sarah and Gene and Cathy — ended up tying the knot within a couple of years.

“We had some great times out there,” Pemsal said of Melody Mill. “A lot of people had great times. It was a place to meet somebody who you may end up marrying, like we did.”



TH archives

Arriving at the 14th annual Charity Ball at Melody Mill on Nov. 24, 1962, are (from left in left photo) Mrs. William Hagerty, Mrs. James Mulgrew, James Mulgrew and William Hagerty. More than 750 attended the event, and danced beneath white netting draped from flocked trees at the center light and extending to pillars on the sides of the ballroom.



*Contributed by Dawn Andracchio*

John and MaryAnn Hansen enjoy an evening at Melody Mill in 1957.

**John Hansen**, of Asbury, Iowa, met his future wife through a mutual friend while at Melody Mill in 1952.

"I went alone to The Mill one night, met MaryAnn, and have been dancing with her ever since," wrote Hansen.

The couple went to see many of the big names that appeared on Sunday nights, but also enjoyed the Saturday appearances of local and regional acts like Larry Foster, Joey Paradiso and Leo Greco.

The Sweetheart Ball was a favorite for the couple. Patrons sported formal gowns and suits, and had their photos taken in front of a huge heart. MaryAnn even altered her wedding dress, wearing it to many of the formal dances.

**Donna Baumhover**, of Hazel Green, Wis., remembers a highly anticipated trip to Melody Mill, circa 1956, that didn't end well.

"(Johnny Cash) was playing at Melody Mill, so a bunch of us teenagers went out. Girls and guys. He was signing his name on the hands of the girls. We thought that was the best.

"My boyfriend said he best not be doing that to me. Well, he did. So, he came down and he was going to beat Johnny Cash up. Anyway, he was ordered to leave the premises."

Baumhover recalled that her boyfriend, Jack Fluhr, "played Mr. Macho (and probably thought), 'I would have taken care of him.'"

"(Cash) had enough guys standing around him that nobody was going to get to him anyway."

Fluhr did leave the building, but it wouldn't be the last time Baumhover saw him.

"He did become my husband."

**Joanne Childers**, of Dubuque, remembers that "if there was any big band that came to Melody Mill, ... we were there. We'd always have a great big table of all our friends, family. And I'm telling you, the drinks really flowed like water."

One night, in particular, was quite memorable for her ... and the rest of the dancers.



Joanne Childers

Childers and her husband, Wray, farmed near Graf, Iowa. One morning, Wray caught a barn owl when he was milking the cows. He put it in a bag and cut holes for air.

"We went to the dance that night. It was wintertime,"

Childers recalled. "Wray and I got out there and (were) dancing. He had left his topcoat on because he had the bag inside there, and he let (the owl) loose and it flew up to the windows on the west side of Melody Mill. And it sat in one of the windows."

A former classmate of Childers' shrieked and screamed, "An owl! Oh. My God! Oh, my God!"

"And I knew Merl (Schulting, the manager) and if it hadn't been that he knew Wray and I, we'd have got kicked out, he said. Because he had to take the big, long rod and get (the owl) down."

**Karen Watters**, of Dubuque, met her future husband, Loras, at a dance in LaMotte, Iowa. The two later became ballroom dance instructors. She related, via email, her memories of visiting Melody Mill.

"When we started dating, it was a special treat to go to the beautiful Melody Mill. I had gone there a few times earlier at age 14 with my parents and thought I was in heaven, listening to the beautiful ballroom music. There was a wonderful wooden floor that the dancers would glide across. The decorations were always beautiful too. Unfortunately, my 'heavenly' experiences were short lived as Melody Mill was closed a few years later.

"I can still remember driving past The Mill on my way to work at John Deere, and looking forward to the Friday night dance. We saw Brenda Lee, Conway Twitty, and Jerry Lee Lewis and more perform.

"Then the day came as I would drive by, watching my beloved Melody Mill being torn down. I shed a few tears on that sad day!"



*Contributed by WMT NewsRadio*

Leo Greco (with accordion) led his popular Cedar Rapids, Iowa-based band.

**Ambrose "Ambie" Pins**, of Epworth, Iowa, and his wife, Duanne, considered Melody Mill their favorite dance hall.

"There was always somebody there you



*Contributed by Carl "Ace" Metz*

Couples including Carl "Ace" Metz and Diane Disch (left) and Eldon Wilgenbusch and Virginia Klein (right) enjoy an evening at Melody Mill circa 1957.



Mabel Strub and Don Hartmann arrive at the Sweetheart Dance at Melody Mill on Feb. 13, 1955.

*TH archives*



knew. No matter when you went," he said.

The couple also had a favorite performer.

"When Leo (Greco) was there, we were there for sure. He was enjoyable ... a wonderful band to dance to," Pins said. "We'd go up and talk to him when he had a little intermission. We just took to him and loved his music. He was a very nice person."



Ambrose  
Pins

Leo Greco and His Pioneers were based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His band toured the area, playing primarily country music, and were regularly featured on WMT radio.

Through their many interactions at The Mill, the Pinses struck up a friendship with Greco, even inviting him and his wife, Louise, to their Bankston, Iowa, farm.

"They (came) out to the house one Sunday and visited. They had to see the farm," Pins said. "They didn't stay just too long. About two hours, I think."

The Grecos later returned the favor, inviting the Pinses to their Cedar Rapids home.

And when Ambie and Duanne married on Nov. 13, 1956, their wedding dance featured music performed by their favorite band: Leo Greco and His Pioneers.

**Carl "Ace" Metz**, of Dubuque, spent much of his young adulthood at Melody Mill, often with his fellow musicians from the Oak Ridge Riders band. Naturally, they preferred to attend shows featuring country acts like Marty Robbins, Webb Pierce and Red Sovine.

"When (Bob O'Connell) and I would go to these dance halls, we wouldn't be pickin' out dollies to dance with, we'd be standing up by the bandstand, watching the musicians and the pickers to see how they did it," said Metz, who plays steel guitar. "These guys were our idols because they were pros. And you're just doing it for kicks and giggles and a few bucks if you can get it."

He recalls Johnny Cash's group's arrival at The Mill.

"They would come in an old Cadillac, and that's the way they got around. They would put all (those) instruments and sound stuff and themselves in that Cadillac and go down the road."

Metz got to have conversations with many of the stars, including legendary steel guitar player Lloyd Green and Little Jimmy Dickens, whom he described as "just as common as an old shoe."

He was able to get up close and personal with another singer.

"I was probably 19 years old. And this night, Hank Thompson and the Brazos Valley band was at Melody Mill and (Wanda Jackson) was the guest appearing with them. After the show, I went up by the stage. It was wintertime, because she had a full-length coat. And one of the guys went



Contributed by Carl "Ace" Metz

Carl "Ace" Metz meets country singer Wanda Jackson during her appearance at Melody Mill in the mid-1950s.

to get her coat and when he brought it, I took it from him and I held it for her and she slipped one arm in. And, as I turned the coat, she slipped her other arm in. And I kept holding the coat by the lapels and I pulled her toward me and I kissed her flat on the mouth. She was a little doll."

But Metz's bachelor days soon came to an end.

He and some musicians gave a group of girls a ride to Melody Mill, stopping at a drive-in restaurant on the way there. One girl in particular caught his attention.

"A couple weeks or so later, I happened to be out at Melody Mill ... and there she was with some friends," Metz recalled. "And, it happened that night that Johnny Cash was at The Mill, and I went and asked Diane if she would like to go up and watch Johnny Cash. She said, 'Yes.' And it was customary at that time when you were watching a show, you just stood up by the stage and

you would stand behind your lady and have your hands kind of around her waist."

The couple began dating — attending many more shows at Melody Mill — and eventually were married on Aug. 6, 1960.

**Darlene Sexton**, of Asbury, Iowa, remembers attending many dances at Melody Mill as a young woman in the early 1950s.

"There were several of us girls that worked at Roshek's, and when Roshek's would close on Friday nights around 9, we would all go out in the front of the store or on the side of the store and there would be a couple of cabs waiting there. We were all fairly young; later teens, early 20s. And we would get in the cab and we would go out to Melody Mill.



Darlene  
Sexton

"You had a lot of friends already there, and relatives. If we needed more tables, we would put tables together. We would have fun and dance."

Sexton recalls hearing Ted Weems, Eddy Howard, Louie Armstrong and — one of her favorites — Vaughn Monroe. "He had a good voice," she said.

When the band would break for intermission, members of the group would get their hands stamped, pile in one of their friend's cars, and drive to one of the drive-in restaurants — Mainliner or Quonset — at the edge of the city.

"We would go there and order burgers, and sit in the car and talk. And then finish up and head back to Melody Mill."

During a visit in 1952, a friend of her group introduced Sexton to his cousin, Dick Smith. The couple began dating and eventually returned to The Mill to attend a wedding dance. Sexton recalled the surprise Smith had in store while they were on the dance floor.

"All of a sudden, he stopped, and tapped the guy next to me on the shoulder. And they turned around and it was his parents. And that's how I was introduced to them, my future in-laws. On the dance floor at Melody Mill."



TH archives

By early October 1964, just weeks after the ballroom's final dance, demolition was underway at Melody Mill.

# EAGLES HALL

## Dubuque

By the mid-1920s, jazz had taken hold of Dubuque's entertainment scene. The demand for another downtown dance hall was so great that one was developed in an unlikely place — the third floor of the former Dubuque Herald offices at Sixth and Locust streets.

Located across from Washington Park, the Parkside ballroom opened in the building that was now headquarters for the Fraternal Order of the Eagles on March 17, 1924. Joe Kayser and His Orchestra played for the St. Patrick's Day celebration.

The hall held regular dances — though it was closed during the summer due to the heat — and enjoyed popularity during its first year. Bands of local, regional and national prominence graced the stage. They included Dubuque Girls Novelty Orchestra, Mose Piquette and His Iowa Corn Huskers, Swany and His Swanee River Entertainers, Flindt and His Orchestra, Harry Fitzgerald and His Rhythm Kings, Dexter and His Serenaders, Ernie Young's Famous Seattle Harmony Kings, and Vic Meyers and His Brunswick Recording Orchestra. The most popular local group was Wise's Imperials, who performed at least once per month.

Parkside billed itself as the place "Where Dubuque Dances." It offered several promotions to draw crowds, including free admission for women on Ladies Night, prizes for winners of fox trot and waltz competitions, and a drawing for a \$125 Yavapai onyx lamp.

The six-day American Legion Charity Frolic in mid-December featured nightly dances, three vaudeville acts and a contest to crown "Dubuque's Most Popular Girl."

The 1926 season was marked by controversy when management petitioned the City Council to permit dancing on Sunday. The city generally followed the state's antiquated "blue laws," which prohibited the activity. The Rev. Dr. A.R. McLaughlin, who represented the Dubuque Ministerial Association, protested that Sunday dancing was "an unnecessary invasion of the Sabbath." City Solicitor M.H. Czizek, though, stated that there was no ordinance that banned it.

Feeling the early strains of the Great Depression, Parkside closed midway



Contributed

The building that once housed the Fraternal Order of the Eagles, formerly the office of the Dubuque Herald, was located on the southeast corner of 6th and Locust streets in Dubuque. Ecumenical Tower now is located at the site.

through the 1930 season. The following year, a new dance hall opened on the building's second floor, which previously was home to an indoor golf course.

Danceland featured bands such as Herb Heuer's Vagabonds, Hal Richter and His Orchestra, Al Knight and His Ten Stars, Bobby Griggs and His Orchestra, Earl Wood and His Music Masters, Virginia Raven's Orchestra, Dexter's Pennsylvanians, Justin Conlon's Orchestra, Lew Gogerty and His Carolinians, with its banjo-playing director, and Herbie Kay and His Great Orchestra, featuring chanteuse and future Hollywood star Dorothy Lamour.

To ease the financial burden on its customers, the dance hall began offering Scotch Night dances, at which admission was reduced to 25 cents per person.

Danceland closed shortly into the 1934 season and, by the fall, was replaced by College Inn, described as a "night club" by The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal.

The venue opened with a "Big Floor

Revue," with music by house band Bill Beck's Collegians, renamed two weeks later as Bill Beck's Rhythm Boys. The event was broadcast over Dubuque radio station WKBB, which added nightly programming from 9:00 to 9:15 from the hall.

College Inn also initiated Discovery Night, an amateur show that solicited singers, dancers, musicians and whistlers to compete for a \$15 first prize. On most nights, there was no cover charge. However, when big-name bands, such as Charlie Agnew and His Famous Orchestra, appeared, a nominal fee was required.

By early 1935, vaudeville shows were the dominant entertainment at the club, though large dance orchestras led by Don Meyer and Doc Lawson played during the hall's waning days.

It closed at the beginning of the following year.

The Eagles Hall eventually met its demise as well, when it fell to the wrecking ball during late-1960s urban renewal. The site is now home to Ecumenical Tower.



The Telegraph-Herald, Nov. 3, 1924



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Jan. 31, 1933



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Feb. 22, 1935



# THE DELLS

*Durango, Iowa*



*The Telegraph-Herald, Sept. 4, 1936*

**D**ubuque County pioneers Jacob and Philomena Breitbach had operated a dance hall on the floor above their tavern in Durango, Iowa, for decades. On July 23, 1935, a new dance hall at the site would put the railroad town on the Dubuqueland entertainment map.

The Dells, hailed by *The Telegraph-Herald* as the area's "newest suburban resort," also boasted a tap room, picnic grounds, recreational field, tourist cottages and an automobile service station.

"The dancing pavilion has floor space 90 feet by 40 feet, and when not in use for private parties will be operated cabaret style," according to the newspaper. "Ample dancing space" was promised for the nightly dances.

The resort's location in a cool, wooded valley etched by the Little Maquoketa River led to its slogan of "It's cool at The Dells."

The site was managed by Harry Tapelt and Clifford Harker. It served local products such as Dubuque Star Beer, Dubuque Packing Co. ham, bacon and sausage, Cosley beverages and Mulgrew ice.

The Shim Sham Club Orchestra provided the music on opening night.

In 1936, a two-night engagement by former Dubuque resident Louis Joseph — better known as vaudevillian "Frisco Joe" — attracted a full house. The comedian had been credited by O.O. McIntyre, a popular columnist of the day, as the man responsible for "more gags and wisecracks than any other living American." His popularity also stemmed from his dance act, dubbed the "Jewish Charleston," in which he shuffled and spun across the stage while wearing a derby and puffing a cigar. His orchestra accompanied him to The Dells.

The resort had a successful but short run. Despite a remodeling, it closed its doors in 1940. For seven years, the property sat vacant, until it was purchased by an enterprising Elmo Jameson.

On Oct. 29, 1947, what would become Nu Dells/Club Elmo held its grand opening with a free dance. Music was provided by Eldon Stierman and His Rhythm Riders.

Jameson's daughter, Bev Giraudo, of Kentfield, Calif., was 6 when her family moved to Durango.

"They had performers," she recalled about the dance hall. "Sometimes people would



**MIKE DAY** • *Telegraph Herald*

The building that recently housed the Vacationland boat dealership along Iowa 3 in Durango, Iowa, once was home to a resort that included a dance hall.



*Contributed by Bev Giraudo*

Elmo Jameson owned and operated Nu Dells/Club Elmo resort in Durango, Iowa, circa 1947 to 1950.

just come by and want to play there.

"(There was) a Black band that was playing there, and one of the guys was outside in front one day. I went out to talk to him, and he said, 'Oh, I broke the string on my instrument and I can't replace it.'"

She asked why.

He replied, "Well, because I can't go in a store."

"Why can't you go in a store?" she asked.

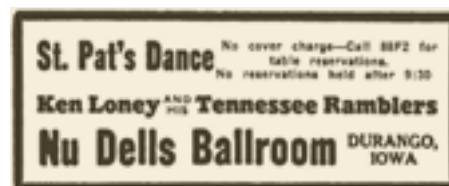
He said, "I'm not allowed."

"I said, 'Well, I can go in stores for you.'"

And he just kind of smiled."

Giraudo recalled that someone did replace the musician's strings.

"I was really pretty young, but I was kind of shocked by that whole thing," she said.



*The Telegraph-Herald, March 16, 1949*

Giraudo also remembers that her older sister, Jo, used to perform during the club's amateur night, a popular event.

"She used to sing there sometimes and if anybody else wanted to perform — get up and sing — they could too."



**Bev Giraudo**

Several of Jameson's relatives provided the labor at the resort, as cooks and waitresses.

"It kind of kept the whole family employed," said Giraudo. "That's how it was in those days."

You supported your family.

"They had chicken in the

basket," she said about the resort's specialty. "I remember quite a bit of that."

Like its predecessor — and other neighboring establishments — Nu Dells/Club Elmo was the site of raids by the sheriff's department for illegal gambling devices and liquor, and for serving alcoholic beverages on Sunday.

By 1950, Jameson, always an entrepreneur, turned his attention to his new chainsaw business. He closed the resort and, over the next several years, focused on "anything that moved," according to his daughter. His passions included motorcycles, cars, boats and airplanes.

The building eventually became home to the Vacationland boat dealership, which closed in 2021.

"It was a lot of fun, I think, for a lot of people," Giraudo said about her father's brief venture with the dance hall. "A lot of good times. But just for a short while."

# PAPE'S BALLROOM

*Balltown, Iowa*

**J**ohn Fay, of Dubuque, considers himself the luckiest man in the world because of a visit to Pape's Ballroom, in Balltown, Iowa.

Fay was 22 years old and fresh out of a stint in the Navy when he attended a 1965 New Year's Eve gala at his favorite dance hall, just a few miles north of his parents' Rickardsville farm.

Admission was \$1.50. Ray Alto's band was playing, and there would be hats, horns and noisemakers available.



John Fay

Fay was alone that evening. Just before midnight, he walked down the right side of the dance hall and saw a "beautiful lady standing there with friends. I looked at her and she looked at me, and I asked her for a dance.

She said, 'Yeah.' So, we danced just as they were playing 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

When the song ended, Fay wished her a "Happy New Year" and let her return to her friends.

"I went home alone as usual," he recalled.

The following Sunday morning, after he had finished his chores and attended Mass, he drove to Dubuque and stopped for cigars at Hunt's United Cigar Store on West Eighth Street.

"There she was, behind the soda fountain, working."

Fay was surprised to see his dance partner from Pape's.

"So, I sat down, asked her for a date. She gave me her name and phone number," he said. "The rest is history."

John and Carol (Richard) Fay were married Oct. 15, 1966.

George and Lenore Pape opened the 120-by-40-foot ballroom in 1936. Some of the early musical acts included the Black and White Orchestra, Joe Fisher's Orchestra, Ray Slotzenberg's band and Whitey Woelk.

The dance hall also hosted a Cedar



*The Telegraph-Herald, June 14, 1942*



*Contributed by Denise Sigwarth*

The building that formerly housed Pape's Ballroom — later known as Deerland, J. Witty's and Great River Roadhouse — along Waupeton Road in Balltown, Iowa, was razed in May 2022.



*Contributed by Joanne Chadima*

The WMT Bohemian Band, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, played several shows at Pape's Ballroom in the 1930s and 1940s.

Rapids polka band on a memorable night in January 1940.

"My dad played the tuba in the WMT Bohemian Band," said Joanne Chadima, of Fairfax, Iowa. "They went up to Balltown to play this wedding dance and ... it was very snowy."

Chadima's father, Joseph Cervený, was tabbed to drive the group to the gig in his Buick Straight-8.

"(The storm) was so bad that the people weren't showing up. (The band) got to the ballroom and they set up and started playing and, evidently, everyone started dialing the phones. They had the telephones that had the two rings — a long and a short — and word got around, and they had a nice crowd for their dance in the middle of a snowstorm."

Over the years, the ballroom had an assortment of owners — including a partnership of bandleader Clarence Zahina and Moonlite Gardens proprietor Thomas Francis Cashman in the 1940s — and names. It became Deerland in 1967, J. Witty's in 1980 and Great River Roadhouse in 1994.

Irma Hefel, of Balltown, has witnessed



*Contributed by Bonnie and Wayne Cook*

Wayne Cook tosses the garter at his wedding reception held at Deerland (formerly Pape's Ballroom) in Balltown, Iowa, on Nov. 24, 1973.

the evolution of the dance hall.

She and her husband, Jim, had their wedding reception at Pape's in November 1960 and they have lived across the street from it since 1964.

"Our kids all went over to the dances and we did too," said Hefel. "A lot of country bands. Big crowds."

"You used to look down the gravel road and it would just be solid cars. They had no place in the parking lot up there. They all had to park along the roads, all the way up along the highway. A lot of them in your driveway."

"I always liked it though, because our kids, I always knew where they were. That they were just across the street."

"And ... we'd go over real early in the morning and pick up beer cans."

The venue closed in the late 1990s and the building was razed in May 2022.

"There was a lot of stuff going on," Hefel said of the decades of activity at the ballroom. "A lot of people. And they all had good times."



# IMPERIAL GARDENS, WORTHINGTON MEMORIAL HALL

*Worthington, Iowa*



*“Worthington, Iowa, 1893-1993”*

Students at St. Paul Parish in Worthington, Iowa, perform a play at Imperial Gardens in Worthington.



**MIKE DAY** • *Telegraph Herald*

Worthington Memorial Hall in Worthington, Iowa, opened in 1953 and continues to be the focal point of community events.

In 1930, Worthington, Iowa, businessman George Tobin purchased a building that once housed a garage and an area used as a theater. He teamed with J.M. Kohn to develop the property — currently the site of City Hall — into the Imperial Gardens dance hall.

According to the centennial book, “Worthington, Iowa, 1893-1993,” the pair added railings between the support posts to create a walkway around the perimeter of the building, where benches were placed along the wall. They added lattice and colored lights to the ceiling and mirrors to the posts, with arches in between. The maple-floor ballroom was colored in orange and blue.

The hall attracted dancers from area

communities and could accommodate 500 to 600. Dances were held every Thursday, except during Lent. In its first few years, performers included orchestras led by Speed Webb, Harold Lyman, Clyde Grant, Eddie Kiene, Matt Rehm, Jimmy Garrigan, Stan Stanley, Frenchy Graffolier and Bob Snyder. In later decades, such names as Don Hoy, Leo Pieper, Larry Foster and Leo Greco would take the stage.

The venue also was used for school stage productions, banquets and bazaars, as well as roller skating during the winter.

By 1949, Imperial Gardens was near the end of its run. It later was condemned for its unsafe structure and eventually demolished.

However, there soon would be a larger

gathering space to take its place.

In 1953, residents approved a \$25,000 bond to finance the construction of a 103-by-82-foot community building on the town’s northeast side. Residents and farmers donated their labor.

On Nov. 25, Worthington Memorial Hall held its first dance, with Minnie Pearl as a special guest. The 850-seat venue could not hold the crowd.

During the next 70 years, the venue hosted hundreds of local and regional bands. The recent Benefit the Vets events have drawn such notable acts as Mark Chesnutt, Tracy Byrd and The Bellamy Brothers, with Sawyer Brown scheduled to appear this year.

Not bad for a city of 382.

# EMPIRE BALLROOM

*Manchester, Iowa*



*Contributed by Manchester Press*

A May 3, 1955, storm blew off part of the roof and facade of the Empire Ballroom in Manchester, Iowa.

Near the current site of Fareway grocery store at the foot of South Franklin Street in Manchester, Iowa, was once a building that housed the Kennedy Buggy Co. and, later, the Knights of Columbus. It seemed to be destined for destruction.

On June 14, 1925, flash flooding from the nearby Maquoketa River undermined the structure. The Manchester Press reported that “the rear foundation wall gave way and about one-third of the building caved in.”

The section later was replaced atop a solid foundation, and the Knights continued to meet there for several more years.

In 1932, the second floor of the site became home to the Empire Ballroom, which hosted dances to the tunes of touring bands.

Some of those providing the music in its early years were Clyde Grant and His Iowans, Fred Dexter and His Pennsylvanians, El. Curley and His Collegians, Herb Heuer’s Vagabonds, Cleo-Irene and Her All Girl Band, Lloyd Wells and Ralph Slade of Savanna, Ill.

The ballroom thrived into the 1940s. The following decade, the tide began to turn.

On May 3, 1955, a violent storm blew off part of the building’s roof and upper façade, crashing onto a gas pump and farm implement below. Though the structure eventually was repaired, the site lost some of the magic it once held. Dances became more infrequent.

In late 1966, the Empire Cue Café and Roller Rink opened at the site. Owned by Charlie and Darlene Barker, the Empire again hosted occasional dances, to be geared toward the teen crowd.

The Barkers’ son Jeff, of Dundee, Iowa, remembers the Saturday night events.

“One of the favorite groups up there was Do’s and Don’ts.”

The Host of Others, from Waterloo, and The Third Store were among the other performers.

The Barkers’ venture lasted about a decade.

In June 1991, the building faced its final blow ... when it fell to the wrecking ball.

# LAKESIDE BALLROOM

Guttenberg, Iowa



Contributed

Lakeside Ballroom, in Guttenberg, Iowa, opened on Aug. 18, 1927.

The nearly century-old Lakeside Ballroom, located along a Mississippi River backwater known as Bussey Lake at Guttenberg, Iowa, is steeped in history.

It was built during the Prohibition era and still houses the original ticket booth, cloakroom, stage and trap door to the basement, where the first operators hid their illegal liquor.

William H. "Bill" Kann Sr. owned a general store and grain warehouse in Guttenberg. He and his wife, Josephine, played instruments, as did their seven children, who received weekly lessons from a music teacher from Dubuque.

In 1927, sons Edmund "Sonny" and William Jr. "Bruder" purchased land on the city's north side and hired master carpenter Louis Schroeder to build a 150-by-80-foot dance pavilion at a cost of \$17,000. It would serve as a stage for the family's performances, as well as a venue for concerts by local and touring groups.

The maple-floor dance hall, at the current intersection of North Fourth and Cincinnati streets, opened on Aug. 18, 1927, to the sounds of Little Benny and His Ten Tiny Tots, from Minneapolis, Minn. Sonny and



Contributed

The dance floor at Lakeside Ballroom measures 126 feet by 60 feet.

Bruder's brother, Carl, was a saxophonist with the group. The crowd was estimated at more than 1,800. The Guttenberg Press praised the Kanns for their "most modern and up-to-date dance pavilion."

The roof of the building bore the ballroom's name in gigantic white letters, which provided a navigational guide for pilots. To the northwest of the hall was a grassy landing strip for planes. It was here that Sonny used to return from Chicago with plane loads of moonshine for his clientele, according to William H. Kann's

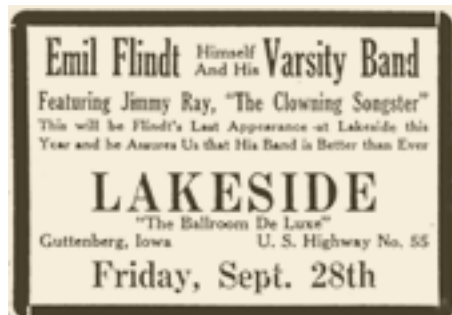
granddaughter, the late Barbara Kann Leitgen, who provided the information for the building's application for the National Register of Historic Places.

Dancers arrived by automobile, train and boat. The Kanns often ferried residents of Wisconsin communities across the river, where they were shuttled to the dance hall by limousine.

Many orchestras composed of Black musicians headlined shows during Lakeside's early years. Among those were Jesse Stone and His Blue Serenaders, Polk and His St. Louis Ramblers, Jimmy Wade and His Club Alabam' Orchestra, and Jimmy Raschel and His New Orleans Ramblers.

The Kanns sold their venture — which included an adjacent baseball diamond for their semi-professional Lakeside Giants — to Ed Eberhard and Del Morley in 1935. The pair added a bar room along the building's south side and expanded the west side to include bathrooms and more seating. Their efforts to lure bigger and better-known dance bands paid off.

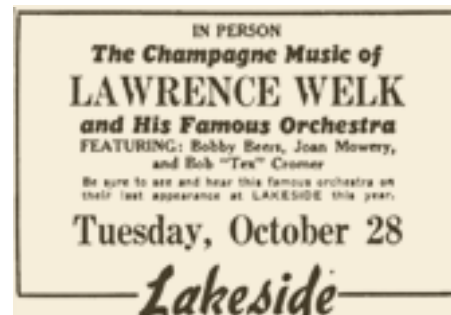
Soon, orchestras led by Ted Fio Rito, Kay Kyser, Art Kassel, Don Reid, Eddy Howard, Wayne King and Dick Jurgens



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Sept. 27, 1928



The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, July 12, 1931



The Telegraph-Herald, Oct. 26, 1947



were attracting crowds to dance beneath the lattice ceiling and art deco light fixtures. On July 22, 1940, Lakeside presented the champagne music of Lawrence Welk at the “bargain admission” price of 66 cents per person, plus tax, according to an advertisement in The Telegraph-Herald.

The ballroom survived the Great Depression but faced a different threat in the following decades — floods. The most recent — in 1965 — covered the dance floor with 5 feet of muddy water. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was prepared to scuttle the building using dynamite if it became dislodged from its footing and threatened the nearby Lock & Dam No. 10.

Russell Reinitz operated the dance hall from 1947 to 1975, during which time the dance music evolved from Big Band to western swing to rock ‘n’ roll.

Reinitz recalled one the ballroom’s legendary parties in a 1977 Telegraph Herald article.

“Every New Year’s Eve, we would throw a bunch of party hats and horns from the stage,” Reinitz said. “One year, the crowd made such a mad dash for them that an

8-by-8 (inch beam) broke under the floor and we had to get some hay rope to encircle the area, but the people kept on dancing and celebrating until we closed for the night.”



Dick Kann

When Guttenberg resident Dick Kann — a distant relative of the founder — began a 25-

year stint as co-owner and manager of the ballroom in 1975, he made an effort to book nationally known artists such as Bobby Vee,



Contributed by Lakeside Ballroom

Billy Bishop and His Orchestra perform at Lakeside Ballroom.

Dion and the Belmonts and The Grass Roots.

For the last group, “It was standing room only,” said Kann. “You couldn’t fall down. They were lined up four deep over to the floodwall to get in. We went in the next day with barn brooms, and we had three pickups with racks full of beer cans.”

Kann also had the chance to feature musicians who were on the eve of stardom.

“I had Mickey Gilley ... here on a Saturday night,” Kann said. “Monday night he was on

the Country Music Awards and he won the Most Promising Male Artist Award.”

Kann and his family played host to many of the stars. He took singer Johnny Tillotson to his sister’s home, where they had supper and shot hoops. The family also took a couple members of Herman’s Hermits for a boat ride on the river.

When Tommy James’ entourage forgot to pick up his check for performing at Lakeside, Kann tracked him down at the



Contributed

Lakeside Ballroom, like the rest of Guttenberg, Iowa, was prone to Mississippi River flooding until a dike was built following the 1965 flood.



Contributed by Lakeside Ballroom

Frank Barry and His Band of Stars perform at Lakeside Ballroom.

Pink Elephant motel in Marquette, Iowa, where James invited him into his room for a drink.

Local bands such as Saddletromp and Tussle attracted younger crowds. Jim Scheffert, who managed the Lakeside bar in 2022, grew up just a few blocks from the hall.

“Back in the ’70s, every weekend, we could hear the music at our house and there’d be a line out the door,” he recalled. “My sisters would be here for dances. They all three had their wedding receptions here.

“It’s a special place to a lot of people,” he added.

The ballroom hosted many other events as well, from euchre tournaments and pool tournaments to arm wrestling and mud wrestling.

“(And) Chippendale dancers,” said Kann. “I had them on a Sunday afternoon, and ... 700 women paid to get in.”

Kann and his fellow co-owners continued to invest in the building — adding a new roof and waxing the floor twice a year — and learned that it took a village to run the business.

“We had a lot of loyal help, a lot of in-laws and friends that tended bar,” he said. “It’d be nothing to have six, eight bartenders, two or three bouncers, a ticket taker, whatever else.”



John Hess

John Hess, of Guttenberg, took over ownership in 2000. He attended dances at Lakeside during his high school and college days in the late 1960s, so he knew the ballroom’s importance to the community.

During his three years at the helm, Hess coordinated an annual dance especially for older adults that followed the high school’s Saturday night prom.

“The next day, Sunday afternoon, ...

Hunter Fuerste (or) Memories of Eddy Howard would come and play, and we’d have our Spring Ball,” Hess said. “We’d have charter buses from Independence and Waterloo (Iowa) come over. And the place was all fixed up really nice from prom.”

In 2006, the Lakeside Ballroom Preservation Committee sought \$10 million to convert the ballroom into a regional community center. The plan included an indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, walking track, sundeck, meeting room, glass atrium and a bridge connecting to the riverfront walking trail. Funding for the project never

materialized, but the venue continued to host events such as Veterans Dances and Christmas Balls.

The current owners of Lakeside, Kyle Selberg, of Guttenberg, and Ron Shorkey, of Roland, Iowa, have been fine-tuning their vision to again make music the centerpiece of the ballroom.

“We’re trying to figure out what’s the right formula for having live music here,” said Selberg.

The pair have hosted local bands most weekends since they took the reins in early 2022.

“We’re looking at doing more of the bigger events ... four or five times a year, getting bands like Head East, and we’re getting some connections to get some bigger bands,” said Shorkey. “We’ll see where it all goes, but I think we’re heading in the right direction.”

Selberg said he plans to replace all the doors and will be looking into a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system for the ballroom.

“We need to address the lattice in the (ceiling),” he added. “There’s been a lot of champagne bottles uncorked with the corks flying up and hitting the ceiling and putting holes in it.

“There’s a lot of deferred maintenance to it, and we need to start addressing some of that, but we want to do it in a way that preserves the original stuff as much as possible.”

Lakeside Ballroom has established itself as a cultural treasure. It was inducted into the Iowa Rock ’n Roll Hall of Fame in 2001 and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2002.

“There’s a lot of history in that building,” said Hess.



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Ron Shorkey (left), of Roland, Iowa, and Kyle Selberg, of Guttenberg, Iowa, are co-owners of Lakeside Ballroom, in Guttenberg.



# NEW VIENNA COMMUNITY HALL

*New Vienna, Iowa*



MARIAN KLOSTERMANN • *New Vienna Area Historical Society*

The New Vienna Community Hall in New Vienna, Iowa, opened in 1926.

A Dyersville Commercial article published just months after the New Vienna Community Hall opened proclaimed that, "There is not another town the size of New Vienna in the state that can boast of such a fine community building."

The 96-year-old hall, indeed, stands as a shining example of how important a gathering place is to a city. The pace at which the hall was conceived and constructed serves as a testament.

Following the inaugural meeting of the New Vienna Picnic Association in October 1926, a special vote on building a new town hall and community center was held on Nov. 4. By an 89-22 margin, voters approved bonds not exceeding \$6,000 to finance the construction of the hall, which would include a 99-by-80-foot dance pavilion on the main floor and council rooms, fire department headquarters, community meeting rooms and restrooms on the lower level.

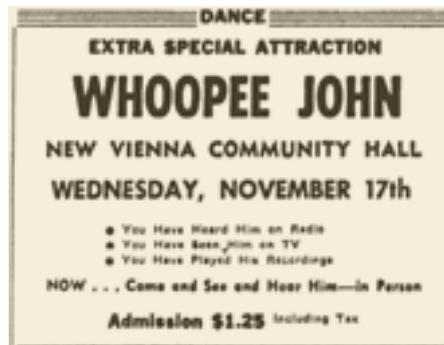
Work began immediately. The foundation was laid within two weeks at the site of the former market square on Columbus Street (now known as U.S. 52). Construction of the massive structure was completed less than two months later.

"The pavilion is the largest equipped with heating facilities in eastern Iowa," reported the Dyersville Commercial.

A grand opening dance was held on Monday, Jan. 17, 1927. Lloyd Wells and his 9-piece orchestra provided the music.



*Dyersville Commercial, 1927*



*The Telegraph-Herald, Nov. 14, 1954*

There were more than 1,100 paid admissions, which included 425 couples. The event raised \$525. Additional dances within the next month brought in enough money to retire the first \$1,000 in bonds.

The Dyersville Commercial stated that, "The excellent community building reflects creditably the progressiveness of

the citizens of our neighboring town."

H.B. Willenborg, former mayor of Dyersville, just five miles south, complimented New Vienna's "cooperative booster spirit."

A formal opening of the hall was held May 2, with music provided by Clyde Grant and His Iowans, "a peppy aggregation of modern entertainers."

It took just over 10 years for the bonds to be satisfied, and the hall continued to be the social center of the city.

Over the decades, it hosted the likes of Virginia Raven's Orchestra (1929), Bill Kuchemann and His Chateau Band (1933), Bobby Griggs and His Orchestra (1936), Moeller's Accordion Band (1940), Sid Cross and His Orchestra (1946), Whoopee John (1954), Irv Behr and His Rhythm Boys (1959) and Frank Barry and His Orchestra (1966).

Marian Klostermann, president of the New Vienna Historical Society, remembers attending dances there in the late 1950s.

"That was a big deal," Klostermann said. "We also had sock hops in there. That was the place where all the teenagers went."

The dances have become less frequent in recent years, but the hall still is used for wedding receptions, anniversary parties, club breakfasts and dinners, 4-H activities and community events such as the St. Boniface Catholic Church annual picnic.

"It's still making money," said Klostermann.

# LOMBARDI'S BALLROOM

*St. Catherine, Iowa*

When Vernon Lombardi purchased a small grocery store, tavern and gas station in St. Catherine, Iowa, in 1948, he couldn't have imagined how his investment would blossom.

"It wasn't much of a business," recalled his son, Kent Lombardi, of St. Catherine. "It didn't have any plumbing or anything. Just a little store."

Over the years, a larger tavern, storage tanks and living quarters were added.

By the early 1970s, Vernon's ambition got the best of him.

"One night, I'm sitting up there with mom," Kent remembered. "And all of a sudden, we saw these big earth movers come down, and Mom said, 'Well, I guess he decided to build a ballroom.'"



Kent Lombardi

The project was "massive," he said.

"When we went to pour the cement, we had every cement truck in the city of Dubuque," he said. "There were two cement companies then. And we had to use them both to get that

cement, because (the foundation) was 100 feet across, 75 feet back. The back wall was 135 feet, and thick and tall. It was a huge undertaking."

Lombardi's Ballroom opened in 1973.

"Initially, it was going to be strictly for ballroom dancing," said Kent. "And it evolved into a wedding reception/entertainment center.

"It was laid out perfect for weddings. If (guests) wanted a drink, they'd go to the main bar. If they wanted a free beer, they'd go to the other bar. It was set up really nice."

Mike Reiss, of Dubuque, played many wedding receptions at the venue with the Mike Reiss Band and Rocky Top.

"It was a beautiful place," he said. "It had a beautiful dance floor, and the stage was set up nicely. They had lights for the stage, which, at that period of time, was kind of unique. And they had a nice set-up with the bar at the end of the hall.



*Telegraph Herald, May 30, 1974*



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Lombardi's Ballroom, along U.S. 52 in St. Catherine, Iowa, opened in 1973.



*Contributed by Mike Reiss*

Dining areas were located on each side of the dance floor at Lombardi's Ballroom.

"Lombardi's was kind of the shining star of the time because it was new. I think they had a disco ball in there. That was another big deal. And they had plenty of parking close to it, so elderly family members didn't have a hard time getting in and out either"

The ballroom also made a name for itself with its concerts.

"We were the place to go," said Kent. "Every Saturday night we were just packed. We had something that nobody else had. We had a dress code. So, you had to dress up to get in. No blue jeans, no sleeveless shirts, no hats, no pliers hanging from your belts, none of that.

"My mom, she ran the door. She was very strict, so it led to not having too many problems. When you got 500 or 600 people in there drinking, you'll have a few."

Kent handled the bookings. "At that time, we had the top big names in country," he said. "We had Mickey Gilley and (Billy) 'Crash' Craddock and ... Jeannie C. Riley. We had some rock bands. We had Herman's Hermits and the Grassroots and then we ended up with some big bands: Eddy Howard and His Orchestra, and Al Pierson and His Orchestra, and Tommy Dorsey and His Orchestra and a couple other ones.

"We had Mickey Gilley four times. He was a 'rock star.' He got so drunk one night he fell over backwards playing the piano.

"The biggest rock band we had was Rocket 88. They did a '50s show, but they did skits. They would do a Little Richard skit where the lead guy would dress up as Little Richard, and they did a Jerry Lee Lewis where you actually light the piano on fire. I mean, every time Rocket 88 came, which was only twice a year, we would sell them out in 20 minutes. They were just fantastic.

"When my dad designed the place, he designed it right. Each bartender had his own station, so we didn't have to grab bottles from somebody else. So, we had four in the main bar, one in the back bar, 300 pounds of ice in front of us. On a Saturday night, we'd pour fifths of Kessler as our bar whiskey. We'd go through 60 bottles, just Kessler."

Kent believes all the hard work was worth the effort.

"You meet a lot of nice people, especially the brides and grooms," he said. "You'd bend over backwards to make sure they got everything they wanted. It was just a lot of good memories. Especially at the end of the night, we'd all sit around and we were so tired and worn out. You pour that many bottles and that much beer, you're just mentally whipped, and we'd sit down afterwards and have a cocktail with all the help.

"It was amazing, but it was a lot of work." After 10 years, Kent felt burned out and decided to hang it up.

"I told Dad, 'That's it, buddy.'"

For the next two decades, Kent tried his hand at a few other professions. But, when his family's ballroom came up for sale, he bought it.

He returned to manage Lombardi's from 2006 to 2012.

"It was just a hoot," he said.



# LAKEHURST PAVILION

*Maquoketa, Iowa*



*Contributed by Richard Rockrohr*

Lakehurst Pavilion was located along on the Maquoketa River, northwest of Maquoketa, Iowa.

**O**n May 23, 1936, an early Saturday morning fire destroyed the Lakehurst Pavilion near Maquoketa, Iowa, bringing to an end “one of the most popular buildings of its kind in eastern Iowa,” according to *The Telegraph-Herald*.

The arched-roof dance hall was located on the grounds of a popular picnic area along the Maquoketa River. It opened on July 22, 1923, at a site formerly known as Pinhook, home of the Riverview Country Club.



**Abraham A. Hurst**

Maquoketa banker and Jackson County Supervisor Abraham A. Hurst had the hall built at the same time he and other investors were constructing — just upriver — a dam, substation and powerhouse for the newly incorporated Maquoketa Hydro-Electric Power Co.

The Lakehurst resort included cabins and

a miniature golf course. Just west of the dam was Blackhawk Dells swimming beach and a ride known as “Shoot the Chutes,” in which up to a dozen riders were packed into a large, flat-bottom boat, propelled down a slide and catapulted off a ramp into the river.

The annual July 4th celebration, complete with fireworks, brought big crowds. An estimated 15,000 attended the event in 1929, as reported in the Maquoketa newspaper.

The resort also established itself as a venue for popular dance bands. Big-name acts included Ted Weems, Ted Fio Rito and Wayne King and His Aragon Ballroom Orchestra.

Hurst billed his site as “The Dance Pavilion that is Different.” He drew patrons from as far away as Dubuque, Clinton and Davenport, promising “a nice, cool, respectable place where perfect order reigns and the big crowds dance.” Hurst insisted on high standards of conduct and, thus, did not

allow drinking in the hall.

Smoking, however, proved to be the fatal blow for the pavilion.

A meeting of the second district Townsend club took place at the resort on Friday, May 22, 1936, and a dance was held that evening, ending just before midnight. Flames were first spotted by the Lakehurst grounds superintendent at 4:15 a.m. Saturday.

The *Telegraph-Herald* reported that Hurst “believed one of the attendants at the meeting had carelessly thrown a lighted cigarette in the hallway of the building while leaving the building and that the cigarette was responsible for the blaze.”

He estimated the loss at \$15,000 to \$20,000. The facility was only partially insured.

A temporary dance floor was constructed to accommodate some scheduled events, but the site never regained the magic it once held during the Jazz Age.



*Contributed by Richard Rockrohr*

Lakehurst Pavilion was located just below the dam.

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Just 50 Minutes Drive With Parking All the Way

**Lakehurst Pavilion**

MAQUOKETA      IOWA



*The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, July 23, 1930*

# MELODY PARK

*Preston, Iowa*



*Contributed by Jackson County Historical Society*

Circa 2002, the remains of Melody Park's dance hall sit under a canopy of oak trees a mile east of Preston, Iowa. The building no longer exists.

In the fall of 1929, Preston, Iowa, entrepreneur Mike Farley was finalizing his plans for a tourist camp a mile east of the city.

The stock market crash and ensuing economic woes did not deter him when he began excavating for the resort's three-acre lake the following March. After installing a gated steel dam and a concrete spillway along a branch of Copper Creek, the heavy spring rains quickly filled the basin.



Mike Farley

By the summer of 1930, the 19-acre Lake Farley Wood opened to visitors. Guests who paid the 10-cent admission fee could enjoy a ride on one of the boats — crafted from 2-by-10-inch planks and sheets of tin — or ride the zipline-style swing, which carried passengers along a cable to a splash landing in the lake. Landlubbers could spend time at the picnic and camping grounds, furnished with prefab Gordon-Van Tine cabins. The resort also was home to a baseball field, a miniature golf course, horseshoe pits and an open-air dance pavilion.

Farley had purchased some half-moon trusses that were used at a railroad roundhouse in Savanna, Ill., and erected a steel roof over the dance floor. Sunday night dances became quite popular.

So did the barnstorming airplane flights that occasionally were offered to attract more visitors to the park. Farley's son



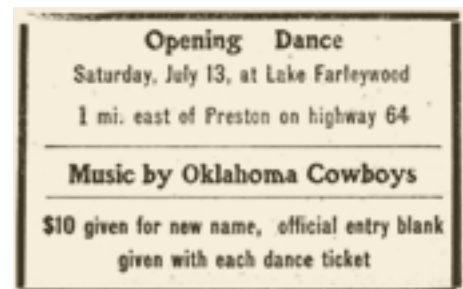
*Contributed by Archie McNeil*

After five years of improvements to the site, Albert and Louise McNeil opened Melody Park in 1946.

Basil, who managed the grounds, perished during the crash of one such flight in July 1932. The elder Farley's son-in-law, Skip Streusser, took over the reins for the remainder of the season. However, misfortune soon would strike again.

Within a year or two, a flash flood destroyed Farley's dam, and the lake disappeared. The financial strains of the Great Depression eventually took its toll on attendance, and the park was shuttered.

Albert and Louise McNeil, who farmed nearby, rented some of the land for crops. In 1941, the property was offered for sale, and the McNeils purchased the entire 19 acres.



*Contributed by Jackson County Historical Society*

With the outbreak of World War II, the resort remained idle, but the family spent the next five years making improvements to the site. The McNeil's son Archie, now of Maquoketa, Iowa, remembers the work on the dance hall.

"It was just an open-air ballroom, no sides on it. Nothing," he said. "And that roof leaked like a sieve, and then it would blow in from the sides. So, my dad ... put a new floor in it. And he used the old floor for boarding it up and some old boards he had around to enclose the whole thing. Dad cut all wood by hand, no electricity. He took the old tin off, put shiplap on and a tar paper roof. And it didn't leak."

Roller skating had damaged the previous softwood, so the new oak flooring was a welcome change. The portable surface was purchased from Leo Helmle of nearby Spragueville.

On Saturday, July 13, 1946, the McNeils held an opening dance, with music





Contributed by Jackson County Historical Society

provided by the Oklahoma Cowboys, a Jackson County band.

Admission was 65 cents per person, 15 cents of which was tax. Albert greeted visitors while Louise sold tickets. Archie helped his Uncle Hugo Thielen at the park's gate, while other uncles and aunts sold hamburgers. Archie's sister JoAnn sold pop and candy bars.

There was a law enforcement officer present at each dance. The establishment did not sell cigarettes or alcohol, though guests could bring their own drinks.

A contest was held that night to select a new name for the site. Guests jotted down their suggestions and put them into a box. The McNeils chose Melody Park as the winner.

For the next 15 years, dancers filled the hall, polishing the floor with their cowboy boots and dress shoes. Crowds often



Contributed by Sam Droessler

Tom Owen and His Cowboys were a popular group in the tri-states, and a regular at Melody Park.

numbered between 200 and 300. When Tom Owen and His Cowboys first played Melody Park in 1947, 814 tickets were sold. The band was quite popular, but pricey, Archie noted.

"You had to guarantee him \$125 outright," Archie said. "And then he took 70% of the take after that."

Other popular bands included Leo Greco, Whoopee John, Kenny Hofer, Clarence Zahina, Leo Beschen, Arnie Paulsen, Wade Law, Cedar Valley Cowboys, Frank Buhr, Andy Doll, Johnny Ketelsen, Joe and His Troubadours, Orlie Workman, Don Rhine's Ridge Riders and The Western Playboys.

In a history of the park she penned in 2001, Louise recalled that "at each dance, there had to be a good, long square dance. Usually a circle two-step, some waltzes and fox trots."

Lloyd and Waneda Michel, of Preston, remember attending many dances at the

hall when they dated in the mid-1950s.

"It just was a nice, friendly place," said Waneda. "People from around this community went out there."

"It was a good place to go every Sunday night," Lloyd added. "Go dancing and have a few beers out there. Dance, take a break at intermission. They made some good hamburgers."

He recalled that the entrance was on the east side of the building and stage was at the far end and that there was no air conditioning.

"There'd be big side doors on the south side and the north side to let down in the summertime to get air," he said.

By the late 1950s, however, the increasing prevalence of television resulted in dwindling attendance, according to Archie.

"When you had to pay \$85 — that's what (the bands) charged, some of them up to \$150 — and pay for the electricity and all this and that, you were losing money," Archie said. "When your costs get more than your receipts, you better quit."

The final dance took place in July 1961, with one of the hall's mainstays, the Oklahoma Cowboys, providing the music, just as they did during the park's opening 15 years earlier.

Archie McNeil still owns the property, which is now vacant, save for a grove of oak trees. Attempts to preserve the dance hall with a new roof and fortified trusses were no match for the elements. The building collapsed during a storm in the early 2000s. The lake is now a hay field. The only remnants of the resort are six concrete slabs upon which the cabins rested.

Archie looks back on Melody Park's heyday with fondness and pride.

"People had a good time. A good many matches were made out there. I look in the paper and I see where somebody's celebrating their ... wedding anniversary. That's where they met."



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Archie McNeil, of Maquoketa, Iowa, stands near the former site of Melody Park, a resort that his family operated near its Preston, Iowa, farm (right) from 1946 to 1961. Concrete pads where cabins once stood are visible. The dance hall was located among the trees behind McNeil.



Contributed by Jackson County Historical Society  
The Oklahoma Cowboys provided the music at the last dance at Melody Park, just as they provided it at its opening 15 years earlier.

# MOONLITE GARDENS

Menominee, Ill.



Contributed by Connie Kusske

After Thomas Francis Cashman purchased Moonlight Gardens dance hall, near Menominee, Ill., in the mid-1940s, he changed the spelling of the name. As for the missing “s” on the sign, Cashman’s daughter, Connie Kusske, of Mendota Heights, Minn., said, “I have no idea, but it probably fits better on the sign that way, right? One less letter.”

**O**n Saturday, July 25, 1931, “the largest outdoor pavilion in northern Illinois” opened near Menominee.

Midway Gardens, aptly named for its location halfway between Dubuque and Galena, Ill., on U.S. 20, could “accommodate five hundred couples,” according to The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal. Eddie Kiene and His Gypsy Serenaders offered music for the grand opening, and “five specially detailed policemen” were in attendance, providing “adequate chaperoning.”

Vince and Viola Schulting established the dance hall next to Midway Garage, which was owned by the neighboring Schonoff family and included a cafe, store and residences. The Schultings had been renting the garage, which was destroyed by fire less than two years later.

From the beginning, the hall attracted many notable bands whose tours brought them through the corridor from Chicago.

“It was quite a place,” said the Schultings’ son, Merl, who passed away at age 94 in December, shortly after sharing his memories with the Telegraph Herald.

“I can remember the night that Lawrence Welk played at the Moonlight Gardens,” he



The Telegraph-Herald, Dec. 6, 1944

said. “We had so many people that ... we had to go over to adjacent farmland and park them because we didn’t have that much parking there. It was a sell-out.”

Schulting also said a performance by Wee Bonnie Baker and her all-girl band of “California Sweethearts” was quite memorable for him as a teenager.

The family lived in an apartment on the upper floor. Schulting remembered that the establishment had a couple of slot machines and offered roller skating on a temporary rink set up beneath a tent outside. The name was changed in 1937 to Moonlight Gardens, a reference to beds of white flowers that reflect the ambient light of the evening.

In December 1941, Schulting was helping prepare for a Sunday evening dance when his

parents learned of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The family made the decision to continue with the event.

“Everything was all set up. The band was coming,” he said. “It maybe helped people forget about Pearl Harbor, made it a little bit easy for them.”

By the mid-1940s, the Schultings turned their attention to another business venture — Dubuque’s Melody Mill — and sold Moonlight Gardens to Thomas Francis Cashman.

Cashman was a businessman who grew up on a farm in north central Iowa. He created the Cashman Ballroom Co. and, by 1947, he owned five: Pape’s Ballroom in Balltown, Iowa; Crystal Lake Beach, in Beaver Dam, Wis.; Waverly Beach, in Beloit, Wis.; Rainbow Gardens, in Belvidere, Ill.; and the newly renamed Moonlite Gardens.



Thomas Francis Cashman

“He had enough ballrooms that he (gave) one to each of his siblings to start their own business,” said his daughter, Connie Kusske, of Mendota Heights, Minn.

She believes her father’s interest in music led him to invest in dance halls.





Contributed by Connie Kusske

Moonlite Gardens owner Thomas Francis Cashman prepares to hang posters for upcoming acts at the ballroom. Next to him are his daughters Julie (left) and Connie.

“My dad was a good singer, and he liked to sing and dance,” said Kusske, who felt her father wanted a place where people could celebrate life.

“He was a lot of fun, a lot of high energy and always working, always busy,” she said. “If he wasn’t organizing the dance hall, he was going around putting up ads on what was going to happen, which bands were coming there. And that’s how he met my mom ... putting up one of these ads for Moonlite Gardens. She worked at ... the Greyhound bus station (in Dubuque).”



Connie Kusske

Like the Schultings, Kusske, her parents and older sister, Julie, called the ballroom “home.”

“We lived above the dance hall and heard the music every night when we went to sleep,” she recalled.

Among those dancing below was Mary Fleege Stanton, who grew up in Galena and now lives in Rockford, Ill. She frequented the venue with her high school friends in the early 1950s.

“It was the worst thing that could happen if we couldn’t make it to the Moonlite Gardens on Sunday nights,” she said. “We went about every Sunday night. We used to have so much fun out there.”

The group particularly enjoyed the circle two-step.

“That was when all the men would form a circle, and all the ladies would form a circle,” she said. “And then they’d go in different directions and, when the music stopped, you danced with whoever you were next to.”

Stanton and her friends created nicknames for some of the men with whom they were paired. One was known as “Pump Handle” for his up-and-down arm movements, and another was remembered for staying in one spot and wearing “a real scratchy sweater.”

But, she felt many of the guys “were wonderful dancers.”

“It was really, really an enjoyable time,” she



Contributed by Carl “Ace” Metz

Carl “Ace” Metz and Diane Disch enjoy an evening at Moonlite Gardens in the late 1950s.

said. “It was a good, clean, fun place to go.”

Steel guitar player Carl “Ace” Metz, of Dubuque, recalled a visit to the hall that he and Bill Wiederholt made following a gig by their band, The Oak Ridge Riders.

“We stopped into Moonlite Gardens just to wet our whistle, and somebody came out where we were and asked if anybody played steel (guitar),” he said. “They pointed at me, and the guy asked me if I had a volume pedal. So, I said, ‘Yeah. It’s a Bigsby.’”

“Oh, great!” he said. “Can I borrow that for tonight? I left mine on the last show I did.” And it turned out to be Jimmy Day, who played steel guitar for Ray Price a lot of years and this night, though, he was with Jim Reeves. And I just felt honored to let him use that pedal!”

The crowds from such big-name acts kept Kusske’s family busy. Her mother and aunt assisted with the business, selling tickets, bartending and serving loose meat sandwiches.

Howard Schonoff, of Menominee, Ill., also spent weekends during his high school years working at the dance hall with his grandmother, checking coats and helping in the lunch room. His parents’ farm was located just east of the dance hall.

The most unusual thing Schonoff ever saw



The Telegraph-Herald, Oct. 25, 1957



The Telegraph-Herald, Feb. 7, 1958



Contributed by Jo Ann Lovett

Singers Don and Phil Everly pose with fan Janet Althaus during their appearance at Moonlite Gardens on Sept. 8, 1957.

at Moonlite was a girl who could “walk all the way around the dance floor on her hands. She’d go completely around. And she was good at it, too — never fell down.”

The largest crowd he remembers came to see The Everly Brothers on Sept. 8, 1957. The cars filled the parking lot, spilled into a field across the highway and into his parents’ pasture.



Howard Schonoff

“At that time, they were becoming very popular,” he said.

Schonoff recalls that the girls gathered around the stage to hear the brothers perform.

“They’d be screaming and hollering,” he said. “It was quite the deal.”

Kusske nearly ended up with a souvenir from that evening.

“The Everly Brothers, they left their shoes there,” she said. “So, my mom and dad gave those to our (male) cousin because we’re girls. We don’t wear that.”

Other notable performers who appeared at Moonlite included Gene Vincent, Wanda Jackson, Marty Robbins, and Red Foley, advertised as “the Missouri Ed Sullivan.”

The ballroom also became a regular stop for regional bands such as Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers, Kenny Hofer and His Midwesterners, Frank Buhr and His Midwest Ramblers and Tom Owen and His Cowboys.

In January 1960, Cashman raffled off a Ford Fairlane 500 to boost attendance, but he must have sensed that the ballroom’s best days were behind it. He closed it by the end of the following year.

The hall reopened in 1962 with new ownership and a new name — Dreamland Ballroom — but the venture lasted only a year. By the mid-1960s, the adjacent building was converted to apartments and the dance hall was dismantled, with the salvaged wood repurposed at nearby farms.

Kusske knew it pained her father to leave the business, but she cherishes her memories of the dance hall days.

“It was a lot of fun,” she said. “We really enjoyed it.”

# ROYAL PALAIS

Galena, Ill.



Alfred W. Mueller Collection at Galena Public Library

The Royal Palais, built in 1924 by Henry J. Oldenburg and sons Roy and H.A. "Doc," was located along U.S. 20 west of Galena, Ill.

When Henry J. Oldenburg bought the 300-acre Ryan farm west of Galena, Ill., in 1912, area residents could not have envisioned that the site eventually would become a hub of the city's social life.

In 1924, Oldenburg and his sons, Roy and H.A. "Doc," began work on a 13,000-square-foot, suspended-floor dance hall near the property's 24-room mansion.

"They were carpenters and farmers," said Roy's daughter, Linda Pluym, of Galena.



Roy Oldenburg

"They hauled gravel with a horse and buggy from the gravel pit out there on the way to Chestnut (Mountain)."

The ballroom was completed the following March and was described by the Galena Daily Gazette as "one of the most up-to-date and prettiest dance pavilions in this part of the country." It was equipped on all sides with large drop doors, which could be opened for ventilation. A well-lit parking lot was available, as well as police officers to maintain order. An advertisement in The Telegraph-Herald noted that the hall was located on "the cement road," a stretch of U.S. 20 that recently had been paved.

The Royal Dance Palace held its grand opening on Wednesday, April 15, 1925, with music provided by Weber's Orchestra. Dances were promised every Wednesday thereafter.

The ballroom changed its name to the more exotic Royal Palais the following year. Its location along the heavily traveled corridor from Chicago made it attractive for bands on the Midwest circuit. One such act performed there on Aug. 30, 1927.



Contributed by Tim Krom

"Jelly Roll" Morton and His Red Hot Peppers played jazz "that sweeps you off your feet."

The Galena Daily Gazette reported that the band drew "one of the largest crowds of dancers to attend a dance in this territory. It was estimated that over six hundred couples were on the dance floor and the crowd stayed until the last strains of 'Home Sweet Home' were played."

Roy married in 1928. His bride, Mary, soon became a fixture at the ballroom, where she

sat on a red stool, greeted guests and took tickets for nearly 50 years.

The hall was constructed with booths along the length of each side. It had a hat and coat check area, two bars and a stage at the far end.

"Bands would stay up in the Ryan mansion next door," said Pluym. "On the second floor, there were guest rooms."

"(My parents) used posters ... to advertise around the surrounding towns," she recalled. "My dad would put them in ... barbershops and bars, so they knew there was a big band coming."

For decades, the venue hosted some of the region's — and country's — top orchestras, led by names such as Lawrence Welk, Art Kassel, Ted Weems, Kay Kyser, Guy Lombardo, Ralph Slade, Ray Alderson, Larry Foster, Jan Garber, Russ Morgan, Ted Fio Rito, Gus Fuhrman, Will Thorpe, Skippy Anderson and Jimmy Dorsey.

Tom Golden, of Galena, Ill., remembers a performance by bandleader Tiny Hill, who was billed as "350 Pounds of Fun."

"One night he was playing the Palais and it was so hot he kept on stripping (off his clothes)," Golden said. "By the end of the night, he was in his underwear."

Dave Knoebber, formerly of Galena and now living in New Buffalo, Mich., recalled an incident at the dance hall in the early 1950s.

"(It) happened in the middle of a polka," Knoebber said. "The one side of the floor under the booths collapsed down into the crawl space. I ran to our booth, and one of the girls was sitting on top of the booth and flooring. She held the half-empty bottle of vodka up and said, 'I saved the booze.'"



"But everybody danced," said Pluym, of the ballroom's popularity. "The whole dance floor was filled. We just had big crowds."

By the 1960s, the style of popular music had changed, but the enthusiasm hadn't.

"The Royal Palais was the place to be for teenagers from the Galena area," remembers Jerry Clark, of Madison, Wis. "There was a dance there every other weekend and sometimes every weekend. The most popular band was The Natives. The Palais was always filled to the brim when they played."

Ann Schoenhard, of Freeport, Ill., recalled that the hall was "a happening place to be for dances and weddings and any kind of big party. That's where everybody went.

"I had my wedding reception there in 1970," she said. "I was so excited to dance with my older brother because he was a very good ballroom dancer."

Pluym and her husband, Ken, took over the dance hall in 1976. Four years earlier, they had established the adjacent Palace Campgrounds. The 50-unit Palace Motel, also on the property, was constructed in 1961.

The Pluymys soon found that it was difficult to have so many businesses co-exist at the site.

"We had dancers there until 1 in the



Contributed by Sid Anderson

of Elizabeth, Ill., and Rosalie Bearsley, of Hanover, Ill., attend a dance at the Royal Palais in 1957. Music was provided by The Fabulous Dorsey Orchestra. The couple later married.

morning and my campers had wanted quiet hours at 10, so we just decided to close (the ballroom)," Linda said.

The dance hall's last season was 1982. It was dismantled in 1998.

The area was developed into a business park and now is bustling with traffic and commerce. In a tribute to the Galena visionary and his sons, the road that cuts through the property where the ballroom once stood bears the name Oldenburg Lane.



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Linda Pluym, owner of the Paradise Bar & Grill in Galena, Ill., keeps a sign from her parents' dance hall on the wall of her business. Roy and Mary Oldenburg operated the Royal Palais ballroom in Galena from 1925 to 1976.

# GRANDVIEW PAVILION

*Elizabeth, Ill.*

In the spring of 1925, a "cement highway" was laid on the stretch of Route 5 between Elizabeth and Woodbine, Ill. The project was part of the nation's new highway system that included converting and connecting existing roadways into the coast-to-coast U.S. 20.

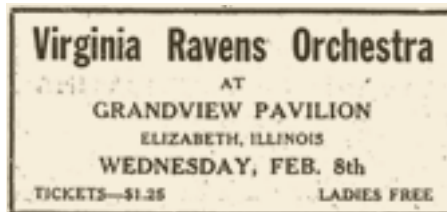
Perhaps hoping to capitalize on the surge of travelers along the corridor, a group of investors from Elizabeth — Benjamin Blewett, Orville Goldsworthy, Lewis R. May and Glen Bryant — began construction of a dance hall on a ridge overlooking a valley between the two communities.

By August of that year, 54,000 shingles were being applied to the roof of the structure, according to the Galena Daily Gazette. Soon afterward, 5,000 feet of maple would be laid for the 70-by-70-foot dance floor.

Just weeks later, on Thursday, Sept. 10, the Grandview Pavilion, about a mile and a half east of Elizabeth, would host its grand opening. The newspaper described it as "one of the finest and most modern pavilions in this section of the state." The Bernie Schultz Orchestra, of Davenport, Iowa, provided the music.

In 1929, the property was purchased by William Kaufman of nearby Stockton, who vowed to continue the tradition of quality entertainment.

In January 1933, the newly formed Elizabeth Amusement Co. took over



*Freeport Journal-Standard, Feb. 6, 1928*

operation of the hall, renaming it Paradise Ballroom.

The Freeport (Ill.) Journal-Standard noted that "the interior of the well-known pavilion is now being redecorated with a color scheme of black and orange, and new lighting effects will be used to provide most attractive surroundings," and that management promised to "secure leading orchestras to suit the most particular requirements."

The Paradise hosted its first dance on Valentine's Day. The event was heralded with much fanfare, including a basketball game. The newspaper reported that "the Torbert Drug Girls, one of the fastest teams in the middle west, will play against the Elizabeth Advertisers for the pre-dance attraction at the high school gymnasium, commencing at 7:30 o'clock."

The ballroom's location along U.S. 20 helped it lure acts playing the Midwest circuit, but the hall continued to host local functions, as well.

A 1934 Labor Day celebration put on by St. Mary's Catholic Church at the



*Freeport Journal-Standard, Aug. 11, 1934*

neighboring Terrapin Ridge tourist camp included kittenball, a coon hunt and "the giving away of the two black sheep of the parish," according to the Freeport Journal-Standard. It concluded with a dance at Paradise, with music provided by Bill Beck and His Orchestra.

The proprietorship of the ballroom again changed hands in November 1934, with Wallace Dales and L.L. Read, both of Elizabeth, taking over. Within a few years, the dance hall was sold and renamed "Wagon Wheel." After a few more changes in ownership, the property ended up in the possession of St. Mary's.

The Rev. Bert C. Jaeger, the pastor, announced in May 1943 that the building would be razed and, to help alleviate a housing shortage, the wood distributed for construction of area homes and barns.

And, on the site of the ballroom, a small cottage was planned.

# WHITE'S BALLROOM

Rockville, Wis.



*Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm*

White's Ballroom (right) and White's Tavern (center) once were the hub of activity along U.S. 61 in Rockville, Wis., shown here circa 1947.

**A**mong the earliest memories of Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm, of Oregon, Wis., is watching her father, Elam Leppla, operate a steam shovel to break ground for White's Ballroom in her hometown of Rockville, Wis., circa 1937.

Dozens of townsfolk turned out for the event, and many later pitched in to construct the building.

Wilhelm's grandfather, Bill White, had the dance hall built next to his tavern along U.S. 61.



"Susie" Wilhelm

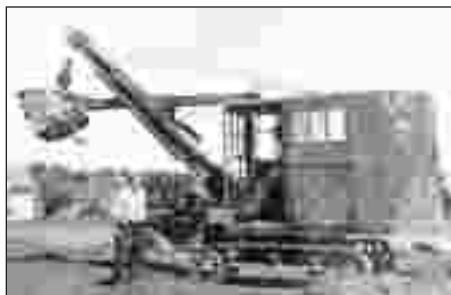
"We lived right across the road from the ballroom, and we lived in a bunkhouse, because my dad and (grandfather) did a lot of the road construction," Wilhelm said.

She also remembers her mother taking her and her younger sister across the street to watch a sign painter create images on the drop curtain to be used in the new ballroom.

"At intermission, Grandpa would always have to roll away that," Wilhelm said. "It had advertising all the way around it."

Wilhelm had an opportunity to be in the spotlight at an early age.

"Every time Tom Owen's Cowboys played at the dance hall, just before intermission, there (were) about seven of us kids and, of course, we were Grandpa's grandchildren and their friends, ... and we'd get up on the stage, and the band would play 'Playmates' and we'd sing to that," she said. "Half of Rockville was at



*Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm*  
Elam Leppla operates the shovel while his father-in-law, Bill White, surveys the work at the future site of White's Ballroom, circa 1937.



*Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm*  
Family, friends and neighbors help pour the concrete floor.

the dance, so they would come up front and listen to us, clapping. So, then we got to sing two songs. So, we sang, 'You Are My Sunshine! We thought we were pretty good.'

Cowboy bands were quite popular at the dance hall, attracting enough patrons



*Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm*  
Ballroom owners Bill and Belle White stand outside their other business, White's Tavern.

that their autos often lined both sides of the highway. Sometimes people danced outside when the building filled up.

"Seemed like Clarence Zahina played about every Tuesday night and Tom Owen was always on a Friday night," recalled White's grandson Bill White, of Platteville,





Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm  
 Doris Bartels Keene and Robert VanNatta (lower left) join the dancers at the Potosi High School prom at White's Ballroom in Rockville, Wis., circa 1950.

Wis. "They used to have awful big crowds. "Grandpa White owned (the ballroom) and he more or less was the boss, but his oldest son, Forrest White, he's the one that actually tended bar there, took care of it."



Bill White

Wilhelm recalls that her grandfather "did not tolerate any man to come into the dance hall with his hat on. He would go and he would knock it off of him. He always was strict about that."

The ballroom had wooden doors that swung open for ventilation, and an old wood stove in a corner by the entrance.

"The floor was real nice," recalled White. "You'd just slide right across it. (Grandpa) had people working for him that kept it up. It was a real nice dance hall."



*The Telegraph-Herald, Jan. 24, 1952*

White, in fact, frequented the ballroom in his younger days.

"Pretty near, I never missed a dance until I went in the Army in 1950," he said. "I used to go down every Tuesday night and Friday night.

"I just always had a lot of fun down there. And once in a while, I used to get in a fight or two. And I was pretty good with fighting. Uncle Arnold, he was Golden Gloves boxer, and he taught us kids how to box. We'd go out in back, out down in the field there in the back, and we'd have it out.

"My Grandpa White would call my dad up and say, 'You tell that son of yours,



Contributed by Lucille "Susie" Leppla Wilhelm  
 Family and friends of Bill and Belle White (right), owners of White's Ballroom in Rockville, Wis., gather near the touring bus for Tom Owen and His Cowboys, a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, band that appeared regularly.

Billy, if he can't come down here without getting into a fight, he stays home."

Sam Droessler, of Kieler, Wis., often worked at the ballroom in the 1960s, when he played in bands led by Irv Behr and his uncle, Gene Droessler. He recalls many wedding, anniversary and benefit dances at the hall.

"On an open dance night, Arnold (White) and his wife would sit at a little table and collect the admissions in a cigar box," he said. "Most bands, without a sponsor, would work for a percentage of the gate."

Some of the popular local groups were Country Playboys, Ernie and His Playboys, The Country Kings and Jack Busch Orchestra.

"There was a side door exit near the bandstand," Droessler said. "This led down an outside set of steps to the back door of White's Tavern. But during intermission, you would need a shoehorn (to get the crowd through)."

The ballroom last was owned by Bill and Eileen Rojemann. It met an untimely demise when it burned during an overnight fire on June 1, 1977.

"There's probably half of the people in Potosi and Tennyson area that ... met their husband or wife at the dance hall," said Wilhelm. "It was a popular place."



White's Ballroom was destroyed by a fire on June 1, 1977.

Contributed by Alan VanNatta

# TWILIGHT BALLROOM

*Dickeyville, Wis.*

**J**ohn Melssen, of Platteville, Wis., is very familiar with the former Twilight Ballroom in Dickeyville.

Melssen was born and raised in the house across the street from the dance hall. He met his future wife, Mary Anne, at a dance there. And when they married on May 24, 1955, the couple had their wedding dance at Twilight.

As early as 1914, Bart Wiederhold ran the Diamond Hall in Dickeyville, hosting such acts as the Dubuque Harp Orchestra, Imperial Orchestra of Platteville and Mound City Harmonizers. In the 1920s, he was listed as proprietor of Dickeyville Pavilion. By 1937, Wiederhold was advertising dances at the village's Twilight Ballroom.



John Melssen

The most recent property was a series of separate but connected buildings — a dance hall, a bar and a general store — operated by Bart and his wife, Kate.

That venue intrigued Melssen when he was a boy.

"We used to sneak over there and listen to the bands," he said.

"And sometimes, when they pulled in to unload their equipment, we'd hang around, maybe carry a little something in."

The Twilight hosted many local acts, including Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers, The Country Kings, Jack Busch Orchestra and Ernie and His Country Playboys. The last group played for the Melssens' wedding dance.

"It was mostly a Droessler (family) band," said Melssen. "Those Droessler, I always said they could walk by an instrument and it'd start playing. They were about that talented. Like Ernie, he played saxophone and clarinet and piano."

Mick Hauber, of Dickeyville, also grew up next to Twilight. The owners were his great-uncle and great-aunt.

"My mom and dad owned the place right next door to it — the Dickeyville Locker at the time — and we'd always take ice up in our wagon to ice down the beer and pop," he said.

He also would mow the lawn and help set up for the evening dance.

"At night, my dad was ... a bouncer up there," he said. "The next day, we'd go up and clean up because people would always make a mess outside. We'd always find some loose change, usually from people who were sitting around on the lawn."

The dance hall, though, wasn't always a work site for Hauber.

"When we were kids, we used to go up there and goof around," he said. "When there wasn't a lot going on, we could ... pretend we're playing hockey. We'd throw some wax



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

The building that once housed the Twilight Ballroom in Dickeyville, Wis., now is an apartment complex.



Contributed by John and Mary Ann Melssen

down on the floor."

Dorothy "Dot" David, of Potosi, Wis., attended dances at the Twilight more than 75 years ago. She lived outside Dickeyville and would stay with a friend in town.

"We went to that ballroom quite a bit because we danced three times a week," she said. "That was probably our only recreation."

David and her friend not only frequented Twilight, but also made trips to Melody Mill in Dubuque; Moonlight Gardens near Menominee, Ill.; White's Ballroom in Rockville, Wis.; and Brandt's Hall in Kieler, Wis.

"We never had (a) car," she said. "I don't know how we ever got there. But we walked to the Twilight Ballroom. It was a very popular place."

In fact, David and her husband, Marvin, had their wedding dance there on Sept. 28, 1948.

Melssen, too, recalled his youthful days attending dances at Twilight.

"If you wanted to dance with somebody, you'd go out and ask them," he said. "Maybe they'd say, 'Why, I've got the next three dances booked,' but I'll be the fourth one. They usually played about three songs for each dance set, ... maybe it'd be a waltz or a foxtrot. And you'd wait around for that fourth dance to come up and go look up the girl."

Karen Reese, of Dickeyville, recalled her teen years at Twilight in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

"The girls would dance. The boys would watch," she said. "But they always had a circle two (-step). This would ... be before intermission, and that's when the boys kind of mingled with the girls a little bit more."

Reese said she and her friends could purchase soda from a bar that ran the length of the building. The legal-age — 21-and-older — crowd was required to step outside the hall to enter the adjoining building for hard liquor.

Hauber noted that the venue also hosted many wedding dances and offered an added convenience for the large crowds.

"There was a guy in Dickeyville by the name of Walt Obershaw," Hauber said. "He always had a rolling bar, and it would be set up right at the end of the lot. And that's what they used for weddings a lot of times. It was in a trailer, and they would pull it with a pickup truck and set it up for the weddings."

The good times, however, came to an end when the ballroom closed around 1962. The building was remodeled and converted into apartments. The wing of the building that held the bandstand was removed and is now the site of a patio.

"It was a heck of a dance hall back in its day," said Hauber.

"We have a lot of good memories of that place," said Melssen. "There (were) a lot of romances started there."



# RAINBO PALACE

Fennimore, Wis.



Contributed by Tom Newberry

The Seventh and Madison streets building that once housed August Maso's garage later became home to the Rainbo Palace dance hall in Fennimore, Wis.

**O**n Saturday, May 27, 1922, August J. Maso held an auction of auto accessories to liquidate the garage he operated at Seventh and Madison streets in Fennimore, Wis. He stated in an advertisement that he planned to convert the 6,000-square-foot building into a community center.

And he followed through on his promise.

By 1924, Maso's Hall was hosting musical comedies and dances.

A Nov. 9, 1928, dance featured a Mardi Gras Queen Contest with \$100 in prizes. Joe Brozik and His 10-Piece Milwaukee Collegians provided the music.

Attendees at an April 4, 1930, event were serenaded by the Nye Adams Wine Jackets.

Within the next two weeks, the venue changed its name. The hall was known for the colored lights that reflected off the rotating, mirrored ball hanging above the maple dance floor. It would now be known as Rainbow Palace.

The venue soon was promoting dances featuring groups such as Virginia Raven's Orchestra, Skarning Old Time Dance Band, Flo Wilson and Her Orchestra, Mac-Kyle Rhythm Kings, Eli Rice, and Herb Heuer's Vagabonds. In the summertime, music wafted out the building's many windows so that passersby could enjoy the bands.

By mid-1931, it had dropped the "w" from its name.



*The Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal, Oct. 8, 1931*

The hall hosted high school proms and graduations, amateur nights and a barn dance variety show that drew an estimated 3,000 people to its three performances on May 13, 1937.

Edward Heberlain, Jr., took over management of the Rainbo Palace in the summer of 1938. He rebuilt the orchestra stage and redecorated the dance floor. On July 12, the hall hosted a carnival dance, with complimentary hats, balloons and whistles, and music by the Bennett-Greten Orchestra.

The Rainbo also became a popular site for roller skating. A Jan. 11, 1939, advertisement

in the Fennimore Times noted that there was "skating every night except Tuesday and Saturday, featuring Mary Jayne Williams at the console of the new Hammond organ playing your favorite popular pieces in perfect skating time."

The Iowa Ramblers played at a dance on May 2, 1940, but the site's use for recreation was soon furloughed.

In June 1944, the Parker Pen Co. opened an assembly plant in the building when its Janesville, Wis., factory was converted to manufacturing fuses for shells during WWII. It employed up to 200 at its peak, before closing in December 1949.

Dances resumed in 1950, with Uncle Julius and His Boys providing the music at an event on Aug. 11. The last dance hosted at the venue was on March 17, 1951, when the Veterans of Foreign Wars sponsored a St. Patrick's Day event featuring Walt Siechert and His Orchestra.

Later that month, Tel Rad, which manufactured radio and television components, moved into the building. It closed in September 1954.

Five years later, roller skating returned and lasted until February 1959, when heavy snow collapsed the roof and walls of the building. Through much community effort, the hall was rebuilt and skating resumed, allowing new generations to have fun under a shower of rainbow-colored lights.

# MODERNISTIC

*Boscobel, Wis.*



*Contributed by The Boscobel Dial*

The Sid Earl Band plays at a 1944 New Year's Eve dance at Modernistic.

**B**ehind the stone façade of the former World of Variety store in downtown Boscobel, Wis., is a time capsule from the 1930s. In fact, it covers about half of the second floor.

Businessmen John J. and Louis Ruka had the building constructed in 1876. The upper floor included Ruka Hall, a space used for governmental gatherings, theater performances and dances.

In the late 1930s, an ambitious renovation began to make the hall “the pleasure spot for both old and young in the future,” according to *The Boscobel Dial*.

Local carpenters Harry Hitesman and Adolph Kratochwill led the transformation, removing the old stage and creating a half-dome band shell to better project the sound throughout the room. The area was bordered with a state-of-the-art, multi-colored lighting system.

Similar lighting was used in the center of the hall, where four pillars were decorated as palm trees, and along the walls, where mirrored, tin sconces glowed. The architecture reflected the Art Deco style of the day.

In anticipation of the expected crowds, 30 floor joists were added, and the dance floor was resanded and refinished. New restrooms were built, as well as an updated check room with coat racks and a window for dispensing cigarettes and candy.

Brush artists Thomas Clark and Henry Schuler took on the interior design, adding a bold “Welcome” above the stage.

The renovated ballroom was leased by Elmer “Bill” and Ruth Hall. Perhaps in a nod to Milwaukee’s famed Modernistic Starlight Terrace — known as “the world’s largest ballroom” — Boscobel’s new dance hall was dubbed the Modernistic.

On Feb. 9, 1938, a grand opening dance was held, featuring the music of Jimmy Smith and His Dixieland Kings of Swing. The Halls would follow with weekly dances at the venue, including one in which Lawrence Welk provided the music. Wedding dances also were popular.

An article in *The Boscobel Dial* noted



**MIKE DAY • Telegraph Herald**

The Modernistic ballroom opened on Feb. 9, 1938, in Boscobel, Wis. Cables anchored into the dance floor were added decades ago to stabilize the downtown building’s stone façade.



*Contributed by The Boscobel Dial*

Sam Stevenson (center) and Bill Rickli (right) and their partners dance beneath artificial palm trees at Modernistic.

that, “Sometimes, in winter months when temperatures were below zero, steam generated by body heat from throngs of dancers would pour out of the windows of the old Modernistic so that strangers passing by thought the place was on fire.”

After 10 years, the Halls turned over the keys to a trio of new investors.

Betty Mindham France, of Stoughton, Wis., grew up in Boscobel and attended dances at the Modernistic as a teen in the late 1940s and early 1950s. She remembers ascending a long flight of stairs to access the hall.

“Six Fat Dutchmen played several times, and ... there weren’t six, they weren’t fat and they weren’t Dutch either,” she said. “We



**MIKE DAY • Telegraph Herald**

The Modernistic is on the second floor of a building at 1018 Wisconsin Ave. in Boscobel.

danced waltzes, circle two-steps, square dances and polkas.”

She recalls that adults and children attended dances together back then and that the site was used for roller skating for a brief time.

The venue finally closed circa 1954, as the swaying and vibrating of the floor was impacting the retail space below, at times causing items to fall off shelves.

By the 1970s, steel cables were anchored into the joists below the dance floor to stabilize the building’s façade, which was becoming detached from the structure.

With safety measures in place, business continued to flourish on the floor below for decades until World of Variety closed in 2018. Next Gen Flooring now occupies the space.

Upstairs, though, a perfectly preserved band shell sits idle. Shiny sconces still line the walls. A 1930s ledger displays the expenses. The area is accessible only by an extension ladder via a small opening in the 13-foot ceiling of the main floor.

For now, the ballroom remains mothballed.



# CHECKERBOARD BALLROOM

*Prairie du Chien, Wis.*



Contributed by Prairie du Chien Historical Society



Contributed by Chelle Fulcher

The Checkerboard Ballroom, along U.S. 18 in Prairie du Chien, Wis., operated from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s.

Trying to capitalize on the swing music that had dominated American culture for a decade, Al Winter and Robert Zahn had a ballroom built along U.S. 18 in Prairie du Chien, Wis., in 1947.

"It was after the second World War and the whole idea was to capture the Big Band Era," said Al's son, Bill Winter, of Prairie du Chien. "Well, that kind of phased out just as that building was built."

Of the headliners who performed shortly after the Checkerboard Ballroom opened, Winter noted, "(My father) did have some names there."

Indeed, he did.

Within the span of about a year, beginning in February 1948, the Checkerboard hosted some of the country's top orchestras, including those led by Gene Krupa, Ray Herbeck, Lawrence Welk, Shep Fields, Orrin Tucker, Art Kassel and Ted Weems.

In 1950, after Al sold his interest in the ballroom to Zahn, the Winter family left Prairie du Chien.

The big band concerts became fewer, but events such as roller skating, wrestling and wedding dances kept the revenue flowing.

To make the surface more danceable, wood was added on top of the building's terrazzo flooring, which was patterned in 9-foot squares of red and white. The checkered motif eventually was re-created on the hall's arched ceiling.

As the years moved on, the musical



Griff Williams Archive

The Villa Ball was held at the Checkerboard Ballroom in the 1950s.

spotlight began shining on regional bands, including Ray Alto and His Orchestra and Bobby Hankins and His Blue Boys.

"Andy Doll always played there," recalled Mary Alice Osterhaus, of Prairie du Chien, who attended many dances at Checkerboard with her future husband in the mid-1950s.

"When we were dating, we went there all the time," she said. "We danced almost every Sunday night or Saturday."

"We met lots of different people from all over. They came from Montfort and Dodgeville, Boscobel and Iowa. There was

always a big crowd. It was just a fun place to go."

Lavon Wilkinson, of Platteville, Wis., grew up in Boscobel, Wis., but attended a few dances at the Checkerboard when he was in high school.

"Back then there (were) two types of bars: 18-year-old beer bars and 21-year-old bars that had hard liquor," Wilkinson recalled.

When he turned 18, he made his rite of passage.

"There was a door going from the main ballroom into the bar in the one back corner of the dance hall, and they would have a guy there checking your IDs. His name was "Judy" Oswald."

Julius Arthur Oswald was a fixture in the city's business district, taking on custodial duties and odd jobs. The Checkerboard was one of his haunts.

The early 1960s brought a taste of rock 'n' roll to the ballroom via The Road Runners.

The group consisted of Prairie du Chien High School students Ron LaPointe, Steve Miller, John Biley, Larry Geisler and Pat White.

"Although most attractions at the Checkerboard were professional musicians, somehow we did get a gig," recalled White, of Port Washington, Wis.

"(We) did many of the instrumental songs popular at the time, such as 'Walk, Don't Run,' 'Sleep Walk,' 'Raunchy' and similar tunes."

The Checkerboard finally closed its doors in 1967, and Big Bear hardware store and Little Bear Den tavern soon filled the space.

Though the ballroom lasted only 20 years, it provided a gathering place for a generation to make lasting memories.



Contributed by Larry Geisler

The Road Runners perform at Checkerboard Ballroom circa 1961. From left are Steve Miller, Larry Geisler, John Biley, Ron LaPointe and Pat White.



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

The Checkerboard building is now home to Fireworks Outlet & Cheapo Depot.

# DRIVER OPERA HOUSE

*Darlington, Wis.*

Excitement was in the air for the 1951 firemen's ball in the American Legion Hall in Darlington, Wis. Scores of dancers packed the second-floor on St. Patrick's Day to kick up their heels.

However, the event turned out to be the hall's last gathering of its type for nearly 70 years.

"The floor and the building shook so much, the fire chief at the time condemned the building," said local historian Stan Krahenbuhl. "He said, 'No more large groups up here.'"

For decades, the building sat neglected, with rainwater from a leaking roof rotting the beams and flooring on the upper level, and floodwaters from the nearby Pecatonica River undermining its foundation.

Darlington businesswoman Laura Jenkins, who had an interest in its preservation, purchased the building to save it but lacked the funding. In 2007, the nonprofit Driver Opera House Restoration Inc. was formed and, five years later, it bought the building from Jenkins.

The group is in the midst of a \$4 million renovation to restore the theater and dance hall to its former glory.

The building, at 250 Main St., was built in 1883 by Yorkshire immigrant and dry goods merchant Josephus Driver.



Josephus Driver

The first floor contained retail establishments. The upper level housed a flat-floor opera house with a raised stage for traveling theater groups, which came to town via the railroad.

"He built the opera house more for his (two) sons, ... for their entertainment," said Krahenbuhl, vice president of the restoration group.

After securing donations and grants — including one from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for flood mitigation — work began in 2017 from the ground up.

"The old limestone basement was shot," said Krahenbuhl. "If it wasn't for the debris that flooded in over the years, the basement would have collapsed."

The building was put on stilts, and the muck was excavated. A new foundation was poured



*LaFayette County Historical and Genealogy Society*  
A parade streams by the Driver Opera House (right) in the early 1900s.



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Stan Krahenbuhl is the vice president of the Driver Opera House Restoration Board of Directors, a group dedicated to preserving the dance hall in Darlington, Wis.



*LaFayette County Historical and Genealogy Society*  
A cast of nearly four dozen took the stage for a show in 1940.

that extended four feet into the first floor, which rests on a 2-foot-thick slab of waterproof concrete.

"During the first phase, we had to run columns up and put I-beams in to re-support the roof because, as the basement dropped, everything dropped," Krahenbuhl said. "So, they raised (the dance hall) floor about four inches. Before they did any remodeling, you walked up here and the floor just bounced."

A freight elevator shaft has been constructed, and future projects include a sprinkler; a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system; replacement windows; new bathrooms; a warming kitchen; a catering area; a sound booth; and a lighting booth.

Money from rental of first-floor retail space has added to the group's restoration coffers, and the purchase of an adjacent hotel has opened a new revenue stream.

Ten members of the board co-signed for a \$50,000 loan to install the first heating unit and have insulation added.

"There was never any insulation in here,"

noted Krahenbuhl. "It was heated with a pot-belly stove, so there were step chimneys throughout the building."

Many of the original furnishings will be retained, including the ticket booth, columns, wainscoting and hardwood floor, which will require heavy sanding. Rotted areas of the stage will be patched with wood salvaged from the first floor.

"We got a lot of historic credits through the state and the federal government for restoring it, so they want you to use as much of the original material as you can," said Krahenbuhl.

The restoration efforts often uncover traces of bygone days. Beneath the front edge of the stage is a galvanized trough that held the kerosene lanterns used as stage lights. And, beneath the stage itself was a pile of pint and half-pint bottles.

"The guys would come up here and sneak a few, and then they'd throw it under the stage," Krahenbuhl surmised.

By May 2019, enough work had been completed to host the hall's first show in 68 years. More than 300 turned out for a performance led by Jim Jacobson. Two years later, the Pop Factory Players presented "The Fantasticks."

Though much work is left to be done, the Driver Opera House has become a working venue, hosting community programs and concerts.

"Ken Kilian's band played here twice," said Krahenbuhl. "And the first time they played here, we didn't have any heat up here, and it was a real cold night and their horns were freezing up on them. But they said the acoustics (were) amazing. Those old engineers knew what they were doing."



# BALLROOM LOCATIONS



- |                                |                               |                                     |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> Checkerboard Ballroom | <b>7</b> Grandview Pavilion   | <b>13</b> Melody Park               | <b>19</b> Royal Palais              |
| <b>2</b> Crystal Ballroom      | <b>8</b> Imperial Gardens     | <b>14</b> Modernistic               | <b>20</b> Twilight Ballroom         |
| <b>3</b> The Dells             | <b>9</b> Lakehurst Pavilion   | <b>15</b> Moonlite Gardens          | <b>21</b> Union Park                |
| <b>4</b> Driver Opera House    | <b>10</b> Lakeside Ballroom   | <b>16</b> New Vienna Community Hall | <b>22</b> White's Ballroom          |
| <b>5</b> Eagles Hall           | <b>11</b> Lombardi's Ballroom | <b>17</b> Pape's Ballroom           | <b>23</b> Worthington Memorial Hall |
| <b>6</b> Empire Ballroom       | <b>12</b> Melody Mill         | <b>18</b> Rainbo Palace             |                                     |

# THE BANDS

**M**usicians were the lifeblood of ballrooms, and the emergence of these specially-equipped dance halls offered opportunities to a wider range of artists.

Philip Martin, in his book, "Farmhouse Fiddlers," points out that the fiddle, once the beating heart of barn dances and rural parties, lost favor among performers as jazz music and ballrooms blossomed. Instruments such as piano, saxophone, clarinet, trumpet and trombone were better suited to the new music and cavernous venues.

Ballrooms were more than a source of income for musicians, said Dubuque Paul Hemmer, radio personality, bandleader

and author of "Entertaining Dubuque: The Untold Story, 1900-1999."



Paul Hemmer

"They provided ... a place to express your creativity and experiment with sounds, get praise (and) admiration from people who enjoyed the band,"

Hemmer said. "I loved doing the ballrooms to try out new arrangements that I did.

"Couples who would stop by ... would reminisce about their favorite bands and how a particular song or orchestra meant a lot to them. That's pretty important stuff"

Bringing those melodies to the masses was not without sacrifice. For most band members, music was a second job, one that required a commitment. Many evenings and weekends were spent apart from the family, and performances required much work beyond playing an instrument.

Larry Richardson, of Galena, Ill., remembers his father — drummer and bandleader Jimmy Richardson — telling him about the Oriole Hall at 16th and Central in Dubuque. Band member Harley Grant once called the elder Richardson about a gig there.

"Jim, I got good news and bad news," Grant told him. "The good news is we got a job. The bad news is it's on the third floor."

Jim Klein, of Dubuque, led his group, The Countrymen, for decades. He described a typical night as "long."

"It takes a while to get there, a while to set up, then you play for four hours, and then it takes a while to tear down and a while to get home," he said. "But if you didn't enjoy it, you wouldn't do it."

Dubuque Shirley "Biddy" Ramstedt, whose father — Russ "Crazy Legs" Evans — played drums with the Gus Fuhrman and Joey Paradiso orchestras, recalled that the men "lived and breathed music."

Contributed by Kalmes Restaurant and Catering

"They all moved around and played in each other's bands," Ramstedt said. "They were all buddies. It was nothing for them to come to the house and jam. And they did a lot of that."

There was much camaraderie among area band members, as well as fluidity in the lineups. Thus, the histories of area groups often are intertwined. Many had to reorganize or disband during World War II, as men were called to service. Other musicians broke away and started their own ensembles.

But when these groups took the stage, their professionalism shone.

"There's something ... to be said about having people on stage that not only you click well with, but you're creating something that's rather magical, said Dubuque Ralph Kluseman, president of the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Music Association. "It's almost like catching-lightning-in-a-bottle kind of an experience. You know what it is. You know it when you see it. You know it when you feel it.

"(Music) really does bring people together. It is the universal language."



# LEO BESCHEN AND HIS COWBOYS



*Contributed by Francis "Fritz" Ames*

Leo Beschen and His Cowboys, pictured in front of Melody Mill in Dubuque, featured (standing, from left) Carl Pfeiler, George Cushing, Leo Beschen, Harold Gottschalk, Ray Beschen, (crouching, from left) Jim Beschen and Fritz Ames.

**A**round 1945, at the height of the singing cowboy craze sparked by Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, a local band was born — Leo Beschen and His Cowboys.

The group was the brainchild of Key West, Iowa, resident Leo Beschen, who utilized the musical skills of his sons Ray, a drummer, and Jim, a trumpet player.

Around 1947, Francis "Fritz" Ames, of East Dubuque, Ill., joined the band at age 15, before he could even drive.

"(My parents) used to drop me off down by the (railroad) tunnel, on Jail Hill, and I used to walk home after the jobs, carrying my horns," he said.

"My dad had to sign for me when I joined the union to be with that band."

Ames was with the group for about three or four years.

"We played almost every place you could think of where they could hold a dance," he recalled. "We played some barns where we'd set up that little bandstand in a corner ... , and that's what we would try to set up on."

Leo managed the band, which traveled to shows in a limousine embellished with the group's logo on its sides. His wife, Marie, served as a chaperone while the band played out.

"I can remember that Mrs. Beschen was always with us and she watched the boys, ... watched all of us pretty close," Ames said. "We walked a straight line. No drinking."

The band rode a wave of popularity in the tri-state area, performing a Sunday radio show — Beschen's Record Roundup — on WDBQ and playing dances at White's Ballroom in Rockville, Wis., and Danceland

Park in Bellevue, Iowa, with regularity.

In 1953, Ray and Jim were drafted into the service during the Korean War, putting the band in flux for a few years.

By the late 1950s, the musicians were back in the saddle, with three of the Koethe brothers — Eldon, Irv and Duane — joining the mix.

In late 1960, Leo retired from the music scene and turned over the reins to the Koethes, who purchased the group and renamed it Koethe Melody Kings.

Jim's son, Dean Beschen, of East Dubuque, Ill., said the local success of Leo Beschen and His Cowboys has made family members wonder what the band could have achieved if the Army hadn't borrowed two of its musicians during their prime.

"They might have been big time," Dean said.

# KOETHE MELODY KINGS

Some groups have gimmicks. For the Koethe Melody Kings, it was four brothers fronting the band. And they were the real deal.

As their poster advertised, the Koethe brothers — Eldon “Eldy” (accordion), Irv (alto sax), Duane “Dewey” (trumpet and guitar) and LeMar (guitar and drums) — specialized in “playing your favorite old-time western and modern dance music.”

The Sherrill, Iowa, siblings segued into that genre through an area band called Leo Beschen and His Cowboys.

Irv and Duane were introduced to Beschen’s band through their music teacher. In need of a saxophonist and an accordionist, Beschen offered jobs to Irv and Eldon.

Duane was told his chances of becoming a member of the band were slim as Beschen’s son Jim played trumpet.

“Pretty soon, they gave me a call and said, ‘We want to put two trumpets on.’ Holy Smoleys. So, that’s how I got in there,” recalled Duane, of West Des Moines, Iowa. He was just 16.

Two years later, in 1960, Beschen approached Eldon to let him know he was quitting the music business and insisted that the Koethe

Duane Koethe

brothers take over the band. Eldon refused, but Beschen pleaded, “You can’t let this dance band die,” according to Duane.

The three brothers, along with their youngest brother, LeMar, discussed the proposition. Beschen wanted \$2,000 for



Contributed by Irv Koethe

The Koethe Melody Kings — billed as “The Band That Says Let’s Dance” — provided the music for the final dance at Dubuque’s Melody Mill on Aug. 10, 1964. From left are LeMar Koethe, Duane “Dewey” Koethe, Mike Neyens, Victor Neises, Irv Koethe and Eldon “Eldy” Koethe.

the bookings and the stretch limousine bus. The brothers decided to make the investment and added LeMar to the group.

“We each threw in 500 bucks, and we said if we don’t make it, we only lost 500 bucks (each),” said Duane.

For their first gig, Beschen offered the brothers the New Year’s Eve date he had booked. They jumped on the opportunity.

“We got double pay on New Year’s Eve

at the ballroom,” said Duane. “That was standard.”

Beschen also offered them something that would help define their image. He had some music fronts in storage from an orchestra known as “Melody Kings.” Thus, was born the Koethe Melody Kings.

The group maintained two members of Beschen’s band, as well as its country flavor, but included more contemporary dance tunes. Irv handled the bookings and did most of the driving and emcee work.

“We played whatever was requested, anything that came along,” said Irv, of Guttenberg, Iowa. “If you requested a polka, I’d tell you when we were going to play it. That (might not) be the next number, but it’d be two, three numbers down. I had three songs set up in each dance group.”

Keeping the crowd happy was important, Irv noted. It was the same with the ballroom owners, who wanted bands to maintain their fan base by performing regularly at their venues.

“They’d get upset if you didn’t (play once or twice a month), because you’d get a crowd following you,” he said. “And they didn’t want to lose that crowd.”

The Koethes played all of the large — and some of the small — ballrooms in the tri-state area.

“Melody Mill, of course, was a favorite because it was right in our backyard ... and paid the most,” said Irv. “We had over 2,000 people at different times.”

In fact, the Koethe Melody Kings had



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Irv Koethe, of Guttenberg, Iowa, and his band, The Koethe Melody Kings, played at many area dance halls— including Guttenberg’s Lakeside Ballroom.



the distinction of playing the final dance at Dubuque's premier ballroom on Aug. 10, 1964.

"We had a packed house," recalled Duane.

"An awful lot of our relations came to our dances at the Melody Mill ballroom," he added. "I think we played almost every cousin's dance when they got married. And we played a lot of their wedding receptions, too."

The Melody Kings' travels were not without adventure, as Duane recalled about a trip to the Blue Moon in Elgin, Ill., in the band's Chevrolet stretch limousine bus.

"Irv was driving. And (we) come up over a hill, across the bridge, and there stands a deer," he said. "We hit that puppy head on. We called a wrecker, and the wrecker picked up the back end of the bus. And we

stayed sitting in the bus and he towed us. But, as the cars come up behind us, they're shining their lights right in the front windshield and we're sitting there, looking at them. That was quite a deal."

At another gig, damage also occurred, but in the ballroom.

As the band members arrived and unloaded their gear, they began setting it atop the stage, where a grand piano sat. Unbeknownst to the musicians, the far leg was positioned preciously close to the edge of the platform. When Eldon plunked down his accordion case, the vibration was just enough.

"And that brought the piano, kind of going south," said Irv. "And when it flopped over, there were keys, everything, all over the place."

Fortunately, the owner's son directed the band to the back room, where he had a

spare piano.

By the late 1960s, the band added Eldon's daughter as a singer. However, it was not her first time sharing the stage with her family.

"I started singing when I was 7 with ... Leo Beschen," said Betty Welu, of Dubuque. "He was out of Key West. I think Dad played with him first, then Irv joined him, and then I sang for him a couple of times ... at Moonlite Gardens."

Band members tended to favor songs that featured their instruments. With Irv, it was "Sail Along Silvery Moon." Duane enjoyed "Happy Trumpeter." But the family's musical talent worked in perfect harmony for 10 years, until the group disbanded in 1970.

"Me and Irv, we were really in sync with each other," said Duane. "We really worked well together."

## THE COUNTRYMEN



Contributed by Jim Klein



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

LEFT: The Countrymen, a Dubuque band, consisted of (back row, from left) Jim Klein, Joe "Red" Smith, Dick Pregler, (front row, from left) Jerry Heinz, and Harvey Frederick.

RIGHT: Jim Klein continues to play bass with The Sounds of Nashville and record music in the studio in his Dubuque home.

Jim Klein, of Dubuque, started playing in a band when he was in high school.

"We started monkeying around, 3 or 4 of us, when we were all like 15 years old, but that never really resulted in anything big," he said.

But Klein stayed dedicated to his guitar playing and, as a young man, landed a spot with the Koethe Melody Kings — a band that featured four brothers — when one of them left for a six-month stint in the National Guard in the early 1960s.

Klein had to step aside when the brother returned but was hired back during another personnel change. When Klein landed a job on the night shift at John Deere Dubuque Works, he again had to leave the band, though he did return to fill in for a special

evening — Melody Mill's last dance on Aug. 10, 1964.

In early 1965, during his time away from the band scene, Klein made a musical shift.

"While I had a little time on my hands, I decided to go out and buy me a bass," he said. "I bought a cheap one first, and I plunked around on it and I decided that would work, so I bought a better one."

Later that year, Klein formed his own group, a five-piece band called The Countrymen.

Klein remembers traveling to gigs in Harvey Frederick's "big, old school bus. We kind of froze in that."

They group was together for 2 to 3 years before some members tired of the grind and left.

The remainder continued as a trio, with Klein on bass, Frederick on drums and Don Cain on lead guitar.

The Countrymen were together through the mid-1970s and performed at venues such as Pape's Ballroom in Balltown, Iowa; Lakeside Ballroom in Guttenberg, Iowa; Checkerboard Ballroom in Prairie du Chien, Wis.; and Dubuque County Fairgrounds.

After a "sabbatical," Klein dusted off his bass and, for many of the past 45 years, has been playing with local bands. He's been a member of County Line, The Night Shift, Radio Flyer and, currently, The Sounds of Nashville.

"I'm still at it," he said. "I'm too old to walk, but I can sit on a stool and play."

# CLARENCE ZAHINA AND HIS BARNSTORMERS

**T**ri-state area residents who tuned in to Dubuque radio station KDTH from 1945 to 1948 often stopped what they were doing when they heard the familiar sound of a rap on the door being broadcast.

It was followed by a hearty, “May we come in?” and a chorus that began, “We are knocking on your door today, And we hope to entertain you if we may.”

That was the opening to the Sunday afternoon show by Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers, a cowboy band based in Dubuque.

Zahina was from a musical family of four children, each of whom learned to play an instrument. His aunt, Kathryn Holz, was a singer. Clarence received instruction on the piano and trumpet and, by his late teens, had turned his attention to the accordion. He took a few lessons from future brother-in-law Vince Chewing at Renier’s music store but was primarily self-taught.

At 19, Zahina began playing at venues across the city. In 1933, he joined Harv Cox and His Montana Cowboys, and later had stints with Koste Hawaiians and Moeller’s Accordion Band. He was the featured musician at intermission at the grand opening of Melody Mill in 1934. During this period, Zahina had the opportunity to perform on local radio station WKBB.

Within a few years, Zahina had his own band, initially called Clarence Zahina’s Oldtime Band, and his own radio show.

His nephew, Allen Zahina, of DeWitt, Iowa, remembers attending the broadcast sessions.

“He was on KDTH radio every Sunday, ... sometime noon or thereafter — Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers,” Allen said. “And my dad ... would make us go down there with him. We’d sit there, and we actually enjoyed it.”

By the mid-1940s, Clarence, who married Mary Waddick in 1936, was raising three daughters. They, too, soon would join the music business.

Mary Jane Clauer, of Dubuque, Zahina’s third daughter, recalls that she and her sisters sang together at holidays when they were young. It wasn’t long before they were enrolled in lessons.

“We started before we even got in kindergarten,” Clauer recalled. “We were going to the University of Dubuque. (Oldest daughter) Jannan started there. They put her in lessons when she was 3. I think I was 4. I wasn’t in school yet. And then, by the time I was in about fourth grade, I was studying under a professor at the UD. And I liked it!”

The girls studied voice, violin and piano and occasionally sang on their father’s radio show.

Meanwhile, Zahina’s band was in demand at area dance halls. The group was perfectly suited to perform at the popular barn dances



*Contributed*

At the height of its popularity, Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers played six nights per week in a four-state region and appeared on radio and television. This 1958 publicity photo was shot in the studios of WISC-TV in Madison, Wis. From left are Walt Paar, Fred Wetter, Frank Reinert, Jerry Ripper, Clarence Zahina, Darlene Zahina and Jannan Zahina.

at Dubuque’s Melody Mill.

In 1951, at age 14, Jannan joined the band. “(She) was very, very talented,” Clauer said. “She could play the fiddle, like the ‘Orange Blossom Special.’ She could really play. She was an excellent musician.

“She still managed to graduate from high school,” Clauer added. “Did her homework in the car. Of course, some mornings she’d run out of the house and she’d have on two different colored shoes. Quite a life for someone young.”

Second daughter, Darlene, was 16 when she began performing with the group and dropped out of high school because of the rigorous schedule.

With the addition of the sisters, who played their instruments and sang duets, the Barnstormers’ popularity soared. Zahina’s life was as busy as ever.

In 1956, relief came in the form of a manager, who took over the bookings.

Soon the band was making television appearances, performing shows on WISC in Madison, Wis., WMT in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and KWWL in Waterloo, Iowa. The Barnstormers were working nearly every night of the week.

“We’d go and do those shows and then go to the dance job,” recalled Clauer. “Sometimes, if Dad wanted us to do a record, after we got done, we’d drive all the way to Chicago with no sleep practically.”



**MIKE DAY** • *Telegraph Herald*

Mary Jane Clauer, of Dubuque, used to perform with Clarence Zahina and the Barnstormers, a band led by her father. She sang and played bass guitar. In recent years, she gave piano lessons in her home.



About this time, Zahina's fourth daughter, Carol Ann, also began appearing with the group on TV and at concerts.

Clauer, who had hopes of attending college to become a concert pianist, officially joined the group in 1959, when she took over for her sister.

"Darlene was getting married as I was graduating, and so the switch was made at that time," said Clauer. "And I don't think people even realized it because we both had the long hair."

"I switched over to bass guitar, which was what Darlene was playing. When you take that many years of piano, you can switch over to almost any instrument."

"(Jannan) and I sang duets together, and we did a lot of The Everly Brothers."

In fact, Clarence Zahina and His Barnstormers once opened a show for The Everly Brothers. And Johnny Cash. And Marty Robbins. And Jim Reeves. And Ray Price. And many other top country stars.

The sisters' sweet harmonies and western-style fringe outfits often made them the main attraction.

A show at a small bar in Soldiers Grove, Wis., left a lasting memory for Clauer.

"Somebody stole my cowgirl boots off of the stage. I was so upset," she said. "I had to go without my cowgirl boots for a while, (and) we had to go to Chicago."

In the late 1950s, the band began a series of engagements at Tommy Bartlett's Water Show in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., to support Bartlett's sponsorship of the Barnstormers' WISC program. They performed with many stars of the Lawrence Welk Show, including The Lennon Sisters.

The beauty and bustle of the area appealed so much to Zahina that he retired and moved his family there in 1962. He built a home and resort in Lake Delton. He eventually returned to music when he formed a trio to perform in clubs and, later, played organ and accordion at Ishnala Supper Club.

Zahina remained in the Dells area until his passing in 1986, but he left a legacy with tri-state area residents.

A musician at heart, perhaps his farewell was found in the closing lines of his radio theme song.

"Comes the time when we must go our way, For we can no longer play for you today."

## THE COUNTRY KINGS



Contributed by Francis "Fritz" Ames



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

LEFT: The Country Kings featured (back row, left to right) Gerald "Bud" McFarlane, Donald Boal, Francis "Fritz" Ames, Ted Watson, (front, from left) Louis Banfield and George Cushing.

RIGHT: Saxophonist Francis "Fritz" Ames, of East Dubuque, Ill., strikes a pose next to a portrait of himself taken 60 years earlier.

Francis "Fritz" Ames, of East Dubuque, Ill., not only has witnessed the evolution of the local music scene during the past 75 years, he's been part of it.

Ames got his start playing clarinet and saxophone with Leo Beschen and His Cowboys as a teen in the late 1940s. By the early 1950s, he had joined Irv Behr and His Band. He later had stints with the Cedar Valley Cowboys and Ernie and His Playboys.

Near the end of 1960, the latter band was in search of a new leader. Ames took the reins and changed the name to The Country Kings.

"We tried to stay up on the stuff that was real popular in the country western," Ames said, but he also expanded the song list to include more genres.

"We played the standards, and we played a little rock," said Ames. "Foxtrots, ... occasional polka. A lot of request stuff.

Anything that was popular, pretty much, we'd pick up."

"'Careless' and 'Daydreams' and 'Does Your Heart Beat for Me?' That was a medley of three numbers that people seemed to like real well. That was your Big Band stuff."

"We always called ourselves 'The Danciest Band in the Land.'"

Ames maintained the same lineup of musicians for the first 15 years. His five bandmates were Gerald "Bud" McFarlane on trumpet, George Cushing on accordion, Ted Watson on drums, Donald Boal on lead guitar and Louie Banfield on guitar, foot pedal bass and trombone. Several band members shared singing duties.

"We pretty much played by ear," Ames said. "We didn't really have a whole lot of sheet music. We played often enough that we stayed in pretty good shape."

The group played often at Dubuque's

Melody Mill, including eight shows in the ballroom's final year. They also had a standing engagement at Royal Palais in Galena, Ill., playing the New Year's Eve dance 10 years in a row.

"So often, the weather wanted to get bad about New Year's Eve," Ames recalled. "And that was a good-paying night. New Year's Eve used to pay double, in union wages."

The band later expanded its range, playing as far away as Waterloo and Davenport in Iowa, McFarland and Janesville in Wisconsin and Freeport and Elgin in Illinois.

When original members eventually left the band, Ames replaced them and continued the group until 1995. He then began trio work with different musicians.

"I played up to about four years ago," he said. "I'd still be playing if there was someplace to play or some people to play with."

# OKLAHOMA COWBOYS



*Contributed by Laurel Williams*

In 1950, the Oklahoma Cowboys, a popular band in eastern Iowa and northwest Illinois, included (from left) Milton “Smitty” Schmidt, Irvin “Sam” Herrig, Gil Stromeier, Harry Miller, Harold Zeimet and Sterling Turner.

Imagine the excitement if the top stars of country music formed a single band. That was the equivalent of what happened in Jackson County in the mid-1940s.

Gil Stromeier was born into a musical family from Spragueville, Iowa, on Sept. 8, 1900. His father played the button concertina, and his mother played the mandolin. Gil first took up the cornet, then became self-taught on the saxophone and clarinet. He and his brother Percy, who played the accordion, would join their parents for mini concerts at house parties.

Between chores on the family farm, Stromeier kept up with his music. In 1930, he formed Stromeier’s Melody Makers. The five-piece group played Big Band music and soon was packing dance halls and boweries across eastern Iowa, where they traveled while pulling their gear — and musicians — in a trailer fashioned out of an old Ford coupe.

The late H.P. “Doc” Hoffman, who drummed for the band, recalled in memories he penned in 1983 that the band was the only

one with a washboard player. He also related a story about a show the group played at the Grand Ballroom in Nashville, Iowa.

“Just after intermission, when we boys had all been out behind the schoolhouse, Gil was standing on the stage playing his sax, when a lady came to him and asked, ‘Do you know your zipper is down?’ Gil said, ‘I don’t think so, but if you’ll hum it for us a couple of times, I bet we can play it for you.’”

Meanwhile, another group was making a name for itself in the area. The Shields Brothers band included three siblings — Ray and Jim Shields and Glen “Red” Henton.

“We played a lot,” recalled Henton, of Maquoketa, Iowa. “One boy played the guitar. I played rhythm, and the other boy played bass. And they were all good singers. They really could sing. So, it made three-part harmony just beautiful. People loved it. It went over big.

“We traveled all around,” he added. “We worked for (a) booking company out of Des Moines, Iowa, and we played wherever they booked us. Not so much the taverns, but



*Contributed by Laurel Williams*

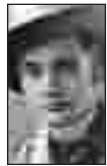
Gil Stromeier, of Spragueville, Iowa, played saxophone and clarinet in several bands.



mostly the good places, the nightclubs and stuff like that.”

At the same time, Fay Moeller was touring the area with his Timber City Cowboys, formerly known as Faye and His Pals.

Moeller sang and played violin, string bass and musical saw. His drummer had left his earlier group to form Oscar Beck and the Footwarmers.



Fay Moeller

In the late 1930s, with the singing cowboy era nearing its zenith, Stromeyer’s band merged with Beck’s. Around 1942, as many young musicians were drafted into the Army during World War II, members of Moeller’s band joined the group, which renamed itself the Oklahoma Cowboys.

In late 1945, after Henton was discharged following his military service in Burma (Myanmar), he began playing guitar and singing with the Cowboys as well.

Over the years, other top musicians in the county — some of whom had played in members’ previous groups — took part in stints with the band, including accordionist Harold Ziemet, bassist Milton Schmidt and trumpeter Irvin “Sam” Herrig.

The group was a sensation, rivaling Leo Greco and His Pioneers and Tom Owen and His Cowboys in popularity throughout the tri-state area.

“We were playing just about the same amount of engagements as they were,” said Henton about the latter.

Stromeyer’s daughter, Laurel Williams, of Preston, Iowa, noted that the band’s schedule from October 1947 included 25 dates.



Contributed by Laurel Williams

The Oklahoma Cowboys perform during the Freeport (Ill.) Day parade on Oct. 28, 1948.

“It was early morning when they got home again. We were farming and (Dad) came home and, of course, we helped milk,” she recalled about her father’s short night before morning chores.

The Oklahoma Cowboys headlined at the region’s biggest ballrooms — Melody Mill in Dubuque; Fairyland Ballroom in DeWitt, Iowa; Moonlight Gardens in Menominee, Ill.; and the Masonic Temple in Freeport, Ill. — as well as small dance halls and barns.

“We’d go in and play, and you couldn’t get within a mile of the place,” said Henton. “You just couldn’t find a place to park.”

One of the favorite venues was Melody Park near Preston. The band played at the grand opening of the dance hall in 1941 and performed there regularly for 15 years. Fittingly, the group played at the final dance

when the park closed in 1961.

The band’s music, of course, was country-flavored, but it also included fox trots, polkas and waltzes. Some favorite songs were “Josephine,” “Sleepy Time Gal,” “Let Me Call You Sweetheart,” “Yes, We Have No Bananas,” “Tennessee Waltz,” “The Anniversary Waltz,” “Anytime” and “Sioux City Sue.”

“I liked ‘Old Shep,’” said Henton, of the bittersweet song by Red Foley. “A lot of people loved it.”

On New Year’s Eve, 1966, the Oklahoma Cowboys played their last dance. After a quarter-century of entertaining the populace, those in Jackson County’s supergroup of country musicians went their separate ways.

Just as Shep’s master said to him, “We’re parting, but you understand.”



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Glen “Red” Henton, 102, of Maquoketa, Iowa, played guitar in several Jackson County, Iowa, bands, including the Oklahoma Cowboys.



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Laurel Williams, of Preston, Iowa, daughter of the Oklahoma Cowboys’ Gil Stromeyer, displays a poster of one of her father’s other bands.

# JACK BUSCH ORCHESTRA



*Contributed by Frankie Brandt*

Circa 1939, the Busch Family Orchestra, of Cuba City, Wis., featured siblings (from left) Leo, Joe, Clarence, Alinda and Jack.

**“T**hey were farmers. All six of them,” said Larry Busch, of Lancaster, Wis., about the Jack Busch Orchestra. “They were a working band. They’d milk the cows, go play a gig, come back home and milk the cows again.”

Larry, who has fronted his own family band — the Larry Busch Orchestra — for decades, is the son of Leo, one of four brothers — and a son and a nephew — who formed the Jack Busch Orchestra.

The family band got its start in the late 1930s. Brothers Clarence (drums), Jack (string bass), Leo (saxophone), and Joe (guitar), and sister Alinda (accordion) composed the Busch Family Orchestra, which played venues near their hometown of Cuba City, Wis.

Clarence eventually dropped out of the group to focus on his family, and youngest brother Arnie took over drumming duties. The band added Jack’s son, Bob, on tuba and Cuba City High School band director Russell Shannon on piano. With the additions came instrument changes to enrich the sound. Jack switched to trumpet and tenor sax and Joe to clarinet and sax. And, years later, when Alinda’s son, Frankie Brandt was old enough, he replaced Shannon on keyboards to again make it an all-Busch family lineup.

“I started when I was a junior in high school, before I had a driver’s license,” recalled Brandt, of Leadmine, Wis. “I was 14 or 15 years old. I learned in a hurry.”

Brandt considers himself a self-taught musician, as he never received piano lessons nor did he read music.

“I was lucky enough to have the ear to know if a chord was right,” he said.

Brandt recalled that Jack’s given name was John.

“When he sent the information to make the first posters, the guy wrote ‘Jack Busch’ instead of ‘John Busch’ so they went by Jack, which was even better.”

By the late 1940s, the Jack Busch Orchestra was in full swing.

“A lot of weeks we played five nights, five out of seven,” Brandt recalled.

Larry Busch noted that during a February in the late 1950s, his father’s band played 24 of 28 days.

“In the month of February, there’s no field work or anything on the farm.

“They just played a whole lot,” Larry said.

“Back in the day, they played lots of weddings.



*Contributed by Frankie Brandt*

Members of the Jack Busch Orchestra, based in Cuba City, Wis., were (front row, from left) Jack Busch, Leo Busch, Joe Busch, (back row, from left) Frankie Brandt, Arnie Busch and Bob Busch. The group featured four brothers — Jack, Leo, Joe and Arnie — Jack’s son, Bob, and the brothers’ nephew, Frankie.



**MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald***

Frankie Brandt, of Cuba City, Wis., sits behind a Hammond B200 organ he purchased from Dubuque’s Ken Mott more than 50 years ago.

And when they got into the ‘60s and ‘70s, they were playing a lot, mostly in northern Illinois. Belvidere, Rockford. Towns like Mount Carroll and Sterling and Rock Falls. So, about every weekend, they were in northern Illinois.”

Brandt remembers those one-nighters well. “Our main area for the band was Freeport and Rockford, and not much north,” he said.

“We played all the fire departments from there to halfway to Chicago.”

The group also hit the dance halls closer to home, including Melody Mill, Moonlight Gardens and Royal Palais, and played for many local events, including high school proms.

“If we played Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom (one) time, we played it 500 times,” Brandt joked. “You played it at the grand march. You never knew how long the grand march was going to be, and we played it nonstop.”

The group’s theme song was “Dancing and Dreaming.”

“We played it the first number and the last number,” Brandt said.

“They were a dance band,” Larry Busch said, “A band that’s going to play strictly for dancing — polkas, waltzes, ballads, swing tunes, fox trot. Circle two-step was always a big hit. Variety is a lot better, especially when you’re playing for a big crowd.

“They always kept up and played contemporary songs as well as some of the old standards.”

The band was together for more than 50 years, finally wrapping it up in the early 1990s.

In the spirit of “Swing and sway with Sammy Kaye” — a slogan of the famed band leader — an appearance by the Jack Busch Orchestra was dubbed by dancers as “Shove and push with Jack Busch.”

“I don’t know where that got started,” Brandt said. “I think it was some local thing. Because if we’d get to Rockford or Durand or Belvidere or not too much north of Beloit, ... we never, ever heard anybody say that to us.”

“It ain’t a bad thing,” he added. “If they think we’re as good as Sammy Kaye, I’m going to mark that on the hoghouse door!”



# JOEY PARADISO ORCHESTRA

Joseph A. “Joey” Paradiso might be considered the George Bailey of area bandleaders.

Like the lead character in “It’s a Wonderful Life,” Dubuque native Paradiso never got to fulfill his youthful wanderlust but, instead, touched the lives of many tri-state residents.

Paradiso began playing music while in grade school. His daughter, Kristy Ogryzek, of southwest Florida, has a cherished photo of her father and his brother holding their instruments.

“Uncle Frank played clarinet and Dad (had) the trumpet,” she said.

Joey Paradiso spent some of his young adulthood traveling, but it was not the way he had intended to see the world. After enlisting in the U.S. Army during WWII, he was sent overseas. Fortunately, he found a role in a military band, where he honed his craft.

A few years after he returned from the service, Paradiso had a chance to audition with one of the famed Dorsey brother’s bands, according to Ogryzek.

“He was married to my mom by this time, and they had my older brother, Tom. So, he auditioned with the band and was offered a position. But his father, being old-school Italian, said, ‘You know, you’ve got a wife and a son and your place is here in Dubuque, Iowa, supporting your son and raising him and working.’

“So, he never went. (It was) so unfortunate, because that was pretty big for him.”

By the early 1950s, Paradiso had assembled his own orchestra. He specialized in swing, with an affinity for Glenn Miller and Guy Lombardo.

On occasion, he would throw in a polka, Ogryzek said, “because he did have an accordion player, Ray Alderson.”

He eventually established a friendship with Vince Schulting, owner of Dubuque’s Melody Mill.

“He really enjoyed my dad’s music,” Ogryzek said of Schulting, who “wanted a back-up for whenever he couldn’t get the headline entertainment.”

“So, he asked Dad if he would consider playing at The Mill every so often, or when they needed him.”

The partnership worked out well. As the de facto house band, Paradiso got to open for acts like Brenda Lee, who took the time to visit his Dubuque home.

“He and mom would take us down to The Mill on occasion when he was playing down there or when they had the big headliners come in,” Ogryzek remembers. She also recalls when Kate Costa, wife of trumpet player Joe Costa, would “be in the audience with my mom and she’d get up (on stage) and belt out a song.”

Paradiso played for many church, school and benefit dances, as well.

“Dad did a lot of local. He did a lot of high school proms back in the day.”

In the early 1960s, when Paradiso was working at Lorenz Religious Goods Store, at 15th and Central in Dubuque, a Wahlert High



*Contributed by Paul Hemmer*

The Joey Paradiso Orchestra, of Dubuque — pictured at Melody Mill in 1953 — featured (from left) Harley Grant, Paul Powers, Bill Buri, Joe Thielen, Howard Smothers, Joey Paradiso, and Marge Kutch. The musicians’ “fronts” were created by Joey’s sister-in-law, Veronica “Billie” Paradiso.



*Contributed by Pamela Guzzo*

Frank (left) and Joey Paradiso pose with their instruments during their childhood in Dubuque.

School student stopped in to ask him about his career as a musician.

“He spent the whole day with me, telling about his experiences with the band,” said Paul Hemmer, of Dubuque, who went on to lead his own orchestra. “It was important to me at that time, because I was vacillating between wanting to do music and wanting to do radio. But he was so kind and so thoughtful about that whole experience.

“Joey was a great guy,” said Hemmer, who later sat in with Paradiso’s orchestra while in college. “He was dedicated to music. He really loved it.”

Frank Wagner, of Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis, agreed. As a Loras College student in the late 1960s, he subbed as a trumpeter in Paradiso’s band.

“At that point, I’m just a young kid who’s thrilled to be playing with just about anybody and so, for him to give me a chance, I always appreciated that,” Wagner recalled. “I think he treated his band members well. He was certainly good to me and an enjoyable person to play with. I remember him as being a nice man who was lots of fun.”

Paradiso also made an appearance on the silver screen when he assembled and led a band in the homecoming scene of “Gaily, Gaily,” a movie partly filmed in Galena, Ill., in 1968.

Paradiso’s career, however, was cut short when he suffered a near-fatal heart attack in 1970.

“At that point in time, my dad had to quit playing trumpet,” Ogryzek said.

Giving up his orchestra was devastating to Paradiso, but he was able to live vicariously through his son, Tom, who was a member of local bands Hampton Road, Stamina and Yesterday’s Children.

“My father traveled with (Yesterday’s Children), and ... gave them advice. Because they didn’t know their direction and he had already ‘been there, done that.’”

Paradiso stayed active in the community as a part of many civic groups and organizations, including Knights of Columbus, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Lions International, Boys Club Boosters, Dubuque Blood Bank, Commission of the Blind and Drum & Bugle Corps. He and his wife, Thelma, operated the Lux Club during the mid-1970s.

Paradiso passed away in 1976 at age 56, leaving a legacy of music and memorable moments.

“He enjoyed it. You could tell that he loved it,” said Ogryzek. “Unfortunately, was not able to chase his dream. (But) he was able to live it out in Dubuque, Iowa, thanks to Vince Schulting.”

# IRV BEHR AND HIS ORCHESTRA



Contributed by Francis "Fritz" Ames  
An early 1950s version of the band included (back row, from left) Jim Squire, Kenny Loney, (front, from left) Francis "Fritz" Ames, Jim Scherr, Irv Behr and Jimmy Adaman.

Irwin J. "Irv" Behr had music in his blood. He dropped out of high school to play with his band. He was just 16.

"He loved playing," recalled his daughter, Mary Jo Weitz, of Dubuque.

Though he spent most of his life working at the family's implement store — first with his father, then with son, Rich — his accordion was his muse.

By 1938, at age 18, Irv Behr and his orchestra were performing at the Crystal Ballroom in Center Grove (now part of Dubuque), Iowa.

"That was his gig," said Weitz. "He played a lot of places: Melody Mill, Moonlight Gardens, ... Stockton, Ill., and Freeport.

"Most all Saturdays, my dad was busy. He was gone. We had family dinner, and he would be off and running. He'd go down on a Saturday night, then come back, get home at like 3 in the morning after playing."

It was a lot of work, but Behr loved it. He described it as "a profitable hobby," according to Weitz.

"While he couldn't sing, he had an ear for music," she said. "Somebody would throw out a



Contributed by Vern and Gladys Sindt  
Irv Behr and His Rhythm Boys, circa 1960, featured (from left) Jim Scherr, Louie Banfield, Jim Squire, Irv Behr, Joe Huseman and Vern Sindt.

song, or the name or something, he could kind of pick it away on his accordion. He liked polkas. I mean, he was German, so he did that."

Like many bands of the day, Behr's group had members adept at playing multiple instruments. Walt Pregler, of Dubuque, recalled that when Irv Behr and His Band played his 1955 wedding reception, one musician put on quite a show.

"The big feature of that afternoon was Harley (Grant) playing the clarinet and the saxophone at the same time," Pregler said. "He played 'Yakety Sax,' which is a very, very active number. He did a good job."

Sam Droessler, of Kieler, Wis., — who led his own band, Sammy J and the Entertainers for many years — played for Behr in 1963 and 1964. He reminisced about his days with the "bandstand clowns."

"Most bands had at least one, but Irv Behr and His Rhythm Boys had them in spades," he said.

At the time, the lineup was Behr on accordion, Jimmy Scherr on trumpet, Jim "Fats" Squire on drums, Walt Paar on guitar, Droessler on sax and clarinet and Droessler's father, Al, on Fender bass.

"They had many short and clever skits," said Droessler. "One involved Scherr and Paar. It consisted of a toilet seat with a guitar neck attached and the six strings across the hole. With clever trickery, Scherr was suddenly a guitar player."

Despite the shenanigans, the group was professional, as Behr insisted on union musicians.

"That was huge to my dad," Weitz said. "Some of the guys, the core group, were with him forever," she added. "I mean, they could almost read each other's mind (and) probably didn't have to do a lot of practicing. You get that habitual, and then just plug somebody else in if you need to fill in."

Following his retirement, Behr continued to spend his time making music with his accordion.

"He would go to nursing homes for entertainment, and he absolutely loved it," Weitz said. "That was just to see people be happy and listen to music. Some people in the nursing homes ... can't hardly talk or function, and they'd be sitting there and they'd be hearing the music and they'd be nodding their heads and tapping their feet. He really, really enjoyed it."

Behr passed away at age 84 in 2005.

Weitz treasures the paraphernalia she has saved from her father's playing days. One advertising card, which includes a photo of the band, states, "In planning your next occasion, whether it be a private party, public dance, special 'western' night, or any occasion that will require music, drop me a line or phone me collect. My library of dance tunes is quite complete."

Weitz notes: "He signs it 'Musically yours, Irv Behr.'"



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Sam Droessler, of Kieler, Wis., played clarinet and saxophone with Irv Behr and His Rhythm Boys from 1963 to 1964.



# WAYNE KING AND HIS ORCHESTRA

Though he was known as the “Waltz King,” leading the band at one of the country’s biggest ballrooms and playing on a presidential stage, Wayne King had a humble — and rough — beginning in Savanna, Ill.

King was born in 1901 and had three brothers. His mother died when he was 7, and, because of his father’s job with the railroad and battle with alcohol, the boys were sent to an orphanage in Davenport, Iowa. They later moved back to Savanna to live with relatives, allowing King to graduate from his hometown high school in 1920.

Seeking a fresh beginning, King moved to Chicago and took up residence at the YMCA while he worked as a life insurance salesman.

After buying a book and a saxophone, King began practicing with a passion.

“He went on and practiced every night until almost, who knows what hour, every day,” said his son, Wayne King II, of Sun City West, Ariz. “He would put pillows around the sax so that he wouldn’t wake up the rest of the people who wanted to sleep at the YMCA.”

King soon mastered his instrument and landed a seat in the Dell Lampe Orchestra, leading the reed section at Chicago’s new Trianon Ballroom, billed as “The World’s Most Beautiful Ballroom.”

During his time there, King played a role in the destiny of a yet unknown musician, according to Savanna’s Gary “Scott” Law, who has dedicated a Facebook page to the city’s favorite son and helped establish the Wayne King Room at the Savanna Museum and Cultural Center.

“One evening, a young man approached Dell and asked if he could join the orchestra on the stage,” Law said. “Dell saw the young musician played the accordion. It caught Dell off guard, and he kindly told him that he didn’t think he could use an accordion player.”



MIKE DAY • *Telegraph Herald*

Larry Busch, of Lancaster, Wis., played tours with Wayne King in the 1970s.



“Wayne King: Savanna’s Most Famous Native Son” Facebook page  
Savanna, Ill., native Wayne King (center) once led the band at Chicago’s Aragon Ballroom.

During a break, Lampe asked King’s opinion on the matter. King was willing to give the man a chance and Lampe had him join the orchestra when it resumed playing.

“Well, the dancers responded well and the young accordionist received more than one standing ovation,” Law said.

By 1925, the man was leading his own orchestra. His name was Lawrence Welk.

King also moved on to bigger and better things. William and Andrew Karzas, who operated the Trianon, had been impressed by King’s talent, instinct and leadership, and asked him to lead the band at its newest venture on Chicago’s north side — the Aragon Ballroom.

From the beginning, Wayne King and His Orchestra infused waltzes throughout the evening’s setlist. At a time when hot jazz was all the rage, dancers took note. The live broadcasts over WGN Radio furthered King’s popularity. Announcers referred to him as the “Waltz King,” and the name became his tagline.

He had developed a unique sound, described by King himself as “melodious music,” according to Law. “He really became famous and relatively rich because of the radio.”

But another medium would put King into America’s living rooms. His self-titled television show aired from 1949 to 1952 across NBC affiliates in the Midwest. The 30-minute program featured live performances of many popular songs King co-wrote, including “Goofus,” “Josephine,” and his signature tune, “The Waltz You Saved for Me.”

“My dad was a great showman, but he was more than that,” his son said. “He was a musician of the dance crowd. His trademark was more than instrumental. His trademark was a unique

bonding between (him) and the audience. And he told me one day that he, within five minutes of the opening bell of a dance, he knew exactly what type of music to play. He was that in tune to the people, and it was a unique relationship that he had until he could no longer do it.”

One fan of his was Dwight D. Eisenhower, who personally chose King to play at his 1953 presidential inaugural ball.

By the early 1970s, King had slowed down, touring about 10 weeks of the year.

“That way, he got to keep his hand in it and have fun and yet he was semi-retired,” Law said.

Larry Busch, of Lancaster, Wis., who has performed professionally for 57 years, played trumpet for King during three “three-weeks-and-a-weekend” tours that spanned from 1973 to 1974.

“Most of the musicians on his band at that time were the musicians that had played with Jan Garber,” he said. When that band went through a transition, they were eager to join King’s group.

“He was a really nice guy,” Busch remembered. “Real soft-spoken and always friendly and always nice. Never upset about anything.”

“He was a good, good person,” King’s son said. “A really interesting and upstanding guy.”

“He was always very proud of the fact that he was from Savanna,” he added.

In November 1970, King returned to his hometown to give a concert “completely at his own expense, paying the band, everything, as a tribute to Savanna,” his son said.

King returned for an encore in 1981, and retired two years later. He passed away in 1985, and remains “Savanna’s Most Famous Native Son.”

# LARRY FOSTER ORCHESTRA

**M**aurice Germain began his lifelong love of music at Dubuque's Washington Junior High School, where he took lessons on the trombone. Later, he joined the Senior High School band, which performed at Chicago's Soldier Field in 1935.

While still a student, Germain sat in with "Bus" Canfield and His Orchestra on weekends. He was with the group when they shared a revolving stage with Lawrence Welk during a homecoming performance in Minnesota.

Following graduation, Germain studied under Tom Temple in Appleton, Wis. When he returned to Dubuque, he took over Canfield's band.

Germain's daughter, Nancy Germain, of Dubuque, recounted her father's dilemma when booking his first engagement.

"He got his first job. Somebody called him up and wanted him to come play. And he didn't have a name yet. He had to quick come up with a name."

Nancy wasn't sure how he landed on "Larry Foster" as the name for his orchestra, but "it was a spur of the moment. He took it from something."

About the same time, Maury got married, finished mortuary school and embarked on a 58-year career as an embalmer at Egelhof Funeral Home in Dubuque.

When World War II broke out, Maury was not able to join the service because of medical issues.

"So, he (led) one of the very few bands that were still around through the war ... so he got to play a lot then," Nancy recalled. "But I don't know how he found that many guys ... to play."

But play they did, as the Larry Foster Orchestra took its place among the big bands on the area music scene. Maury burned the midnight oil as his unlikely pairing of professions kept him busy.

"Between the funeral home and the band, he did not like us being on the telephone," Nancy recalled. "Well, three teenagers in the house, especially a girl teenager, I was always on the phone. And my dad (would say), 'Get off the phone. I'm playing tonight.'"

"My dad would work until 4 in the afternoon, or 5. And he'd come right home from work and he had to leave. He might sit in the chair — and it wasn't even a rocker — and doze for 15 minutes and then he'd be up and getting ready to go. Sure enough, the phone would ring an hour before, maybe two hours before he was to leave and it was somebody calling in, saying they couldn't make it. So, Dad would be calling this guy, this guy, that guy, begging him to play that night."

Nancy also remembers the many charity balls and school dances at which



*Contributed by Nancy Germain*

The Larry Foster Orchestra performs at Melody Mill in 1945. In the first row (from left) are Maury Germain (a.k.a. Larry Foster), Harold Hicks, Gordon Fear and Hugh Cherioli. In the second row (from left) are Charles Coffee, Bill Beck, Don Meyer, Dutch Giese, Clarence Gordon and Bernard Dillon.



*Contributed by Nancy Germain*

Maury Germain (right) got his start with "Bus" Canfield and His Orchestra, of Dubuque, pictured here in 1933.

her father performed.

"He played for all my proms. I went to Wahlert High. It was great. Louis Fautsch ... asked me out for one of the proms because of my dad, because he thought it was so neat that my dad was going to be playing it."

Band members traveled together in a bus with the group's name emblazoned on its side. The early-morning trips back home from gigs were sometimes an adventure, on one night in particular.

"It was snowing all the time they were (at the dance), and they're going down the highway, not much traffic at all, but there was this huge drift across the highway. Dad went right through it, and the drift literally, it was like a tunnel. It stayed up. I think they actually drove back the next day to see it because they couldn't believe it themselves."

Hunter Fuerste, of Dubuque, remembers the bus well. Fuerste, who leads his own American Vintage Orchestra, grew up a few doors down

from Germain on Dubuque's South Booth Street, and would see the bus parked in the neighborhood near Apel's Supermarket.

A fellow trombonist, Fuerste later became friends with Maury and the two would have weekly dinners together, with Germain sharing stories about his Big Band days.

One that Fuerste recalls hearing involved an appearance by the Larry Foster Orchestra at the Danceland ballroom in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. At the time, Ray Anthony's 1952 novelty song "The Bunny Hop" had created a dance craze, in which participants formed a line and hopped across the floor to the beat.

"(The dance) was on a second floor," Fuerste said, "and it was an old, old building, and the owner came up and said, 'Whatever you do, do not play The Bunny Hop.' Because he was afraid if everyone hops at one time — 400 people — the floor gives way. And all night, (Maury) said, everyone came up (and) said, 'Do The Bunny Hop. Do The Bunny Hop.' And he just couldn't do it. In the end, he just finally did it. And the (owner) was furious."

While attending the Dubuque performance of a nationally touring band, Germain became friends with a fellow bandleader.

"Eddy (Howard) came to Melody Mill and Mom and Dad went to see him for the first time," his daughter said. "At the break time, they got to talk to him. That's how they started to become friends."

"Eddy would actually call him up ahead of time and he, one time, stayed at our house instead of staying at the hotel and I had to give up my bedroom for Eddy to sleep. They had a lot of fun with Eddy Howard and the whole family."



"After he died, his wife — Eddy's wife — called my dad and offered ... all of his music to my dad."

Germain performed Howard's work for years. In 1994, he sold the arrangements to the late Jerry Accola, of East Dubuque, Ill., who built his Memories of Eddy Howard Orchestra around the music.

Germain finally — and reluctantly — hung up his baton in the mid-1960s, after

he and his wife, Betty, purchased the Siesta Motel, west of Dubuque on U.S. 20.

When Betty passed in 2006, Maury moved to Bethany Home retirement community, where Big Band melodies would emanate from his room.

"There were so many (residents) that remembered him from the band and the funeral home, so he was in seventh heaven, walking around," Nancy said. "I

think he thought he was still in the band. After dinner, he'd go table hopping, just like he did on break."

Maury Germain passed away at age 96 on May 23, 2013, but he left many former ballroom dancers with fond memories.

"Dad never made big money doing it," Nancy said. "It was just more love of doing it than it was the money."

## ANDY DOLL BAND

**T**he Andy Doll Band, which promoted itself with the slogan "6 men, 16 instruments," showcased some versatile musicians. And chief among them was its leader.

"My dad could play the piano, the violin, the bass violin, the guitar. He played mostly guitar. He could play the clarinet," said Doll's daughter, Anne Sellers, of Fayette, Iowa. "He played just about anything you put in front of him."

Andrew Joseph Doll grew up in a musical family in Wauzeka, Wis., where the children often gathered to sing ballads and church hymns while their mother played the organ. The first instruments Doll learned to play were the harmonica, Jew's harp and organ. He became enamored with the guitar when he was given one by his Uncle Alphonse. Lessons followed.

Doll and his brother, Lawrence, who also played multiple instruments, soon began performing at house parties, talent shows and club events. Later, he played in an extended family band and with other groups in the Prairie du Chien, Wis., area.

Doll then hooked up with Don Rhines and His Ridge Riders, from Iowa, and eventually bought out the band. On May 17, 1952, the Andy Doll Band debuted.

To be more centrally located in his playing area, Doll moved to Edgewood, Iowa, and, later, Oelwein. His country swing music, which included many original compositions, became popular enough to spark a fan club, which put out quarterly newsletters. The band had a Saturday show that was broadcast on Oelwein radio station KOEL, and its touring range spanned from eastern Wisconsin to Minnesota to South Dakota. In 1957, Doll purchased a bus to make the trips more comfortable during the group's hectic schedule.

The band members produced 45 rpm records — some recorded in Nashville, Tenn. — which added to their popularity. Many were sold from the stage at their performances. Some of the group's most popular songs were "Wild Desire," "Goodbye Mary Anne," "Highway to Heaven," "The Banjo Waltz" and "The Hot Chicken Polka." The group's theme song was "Goofus," a playful, bouncy tune about life in a band, co-written by Savanna, Ill.,



Contributed by Anne Sellers

The Andy Doll Band, based in Oelwein, Iowa, promoted its multi-talented musicians with the slogan "6 men, 16 instruments." Doll is third from left.

native Wayne King.

From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the Andy Doll Band consistently was ranked among the Best Western Dance Bands in the U.S. by the National Ballroom Operators Association.

Bill Reints, of Oelwein, joined the group in 1960, and he fit right in.



Bill Reints

"I played three saxes — alto, tenor and soprano — and trumpet, and chorded a little bit on the banjo and played some bass," he said.

With their multiple instruments, Reints, Doll and Clarence "PeeWee" Cherrier — who played guitar, banjo and tenor sax — played out front, with the drummer, bass player and accordionist/piano player in back.

Over the years, the band opened for such stars as Johnny Cash, Roy Acuff, Roy Clark, Ray Price, Wanda Jackson, Pee Wee King, Little Jimmy Dickens, Brenda Lee and The Everly Brothers.

At one point, the band increased to seven members, requiring its slogan to be



Contributed by Bill Reints

An advertisement for the Andy Doll Band featured its unique touring bus.

altered to "7 men, 17 instruments." By the mid-1960s, the group was down to five. It disbanded in 1969.

Doll then focused his attention on Oelwein's Coliseum Ballroom, which he had purchased in 1962. He passed away at age 65 in October 1984.

Sellers remembers her father as being respectful and active in the community.

"I think people admired him," she said. "(His musicians) all say that they were very proud to be members of his band."

# THE SHADES, DICK BUSCHER AND THE CLICHES



*Contributed*

Members of The Shades perform at Melody Mill in Dubuque, circa 1961. From left are Ronnie McDonald, Bobby Greenwood, Jim Sawvel, Joe Hedley and Boyd Stoewer.

In the late 1950s, when rock 'n' roll music officially had become cool, Dubuque was introduced to The Shades.

In 1957, a group of teen musicians gathered to create a band. Among them was drummer Bobby Greenwood, of Dubuque.

"It started when we were in junior high school," he recalled. "Bill Nank and Joe Hedley and myself tried to put a group together. It never took off. We just did some playing for private parties and stuff like that."

The group then added guitarist Ronnie McDonald and saxophonist Boyd Stoewer. When dynamic lead singer Jim Sawvell joined the band, its fortunes changed.

Playing songs by rock pioneers such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Buddy Holly, the band established a following in the tri-state area.

"In 1959, on Dec. 13, The Shades had their own night at the (Melody Mill) ballroom as 'Dubuque's Own Teen Band,'" recalled Hedley, of Litchfield, N.H. "We all thought, 'This was it, the big time.' Having



*Contributed by Bobby Greenwood*

Posing for a promotional photo are The Shades' members (from left) Ronnie McDonald, Bobby Greenwood, Bob Smith and Denny "Truck" Tranel.

our name on the show list was awesome."

And the good news only got better.

"We were thrilled when asked to be the opening act for some of the rock 'n' roll stars



*The Telegraph-Herald, Dec. 9, 1959*

of that time," Hedley added.

The Shades provided warm-up for Jimmy Gilmer and the Fireballs, Johnny and the Hurricanes, Freddy "Boom Boom" Cannon, Bobby Rydell, Bobby Vee and The Champs, with lead guitarist Glenn Campbell.

In its later years, which spanned into the mid-1960s, the group featured different members, including Artie Mentz, Bob Smith, Terry "Mouse" Williams and Denny "Truck" Tranel. The band eventually began touring and cutting records at studios in Chicago and the Sauk Prairie area of Wisconsin.





*Contributed by Bobby Greenwood*

The lineup for Dubuque rock 'n' roll band Dick Buscher and the Cliches featured (from left) Ken Loney, Dick Buscher, Bobby Greenwood, and Joe Huseman.

Greenwood remembers the good times he had with his bandmates during The Shades' run.

"We all got along well," he said. "We'd tease each other, joke with each other as musicians do. I think that probably, subconsciously, removes the stress, or puts together some camaraderie. It's like a family. Musicians are a subculture unto themselves. They have a lot of weird things that seem weird to normal people, but musicians, we just laugh at it. It was just a lot of joking, a lot of carefree fun."

Greenwood later left the group to join another band that was surging in popularity: Dick Buscher and the Cliches.

Guitarist and vocalist Buscher was a Dubuque native who enlisted in the Marines as a high school student in 1956. He honed much of his musical talent and showmanship as a member of a service band while stationed in Okinawa. He performed for U.S. troops and made appearances on Armed Forces Network television broadcasts.

Buscher returned home on a hardship discharge after his mother died in 1958.

Later, he focused his musical ambition and formed his eponymous band, playing at clubs and dance halls in the area. At a 1963 Independence Day teen dance at the Hawthorne Street boat ramp, the group opened for Bobby Vinton. Buscher also had a chance to play at Dubuque's Melody Mill in its final year of operation.

His rockabilly-flavored music was a hit, especially with the young crowd. The band recorded and released five singles, including "Blue Heart" and "Run, Boy, Run," which enjoyed regional success.

Over the years, various musicians filled roles with The Cliches, including Joe Huseman, Ken Loney, Terry "Mouse" Williams, Roger "Jason Chase" Hesseling,

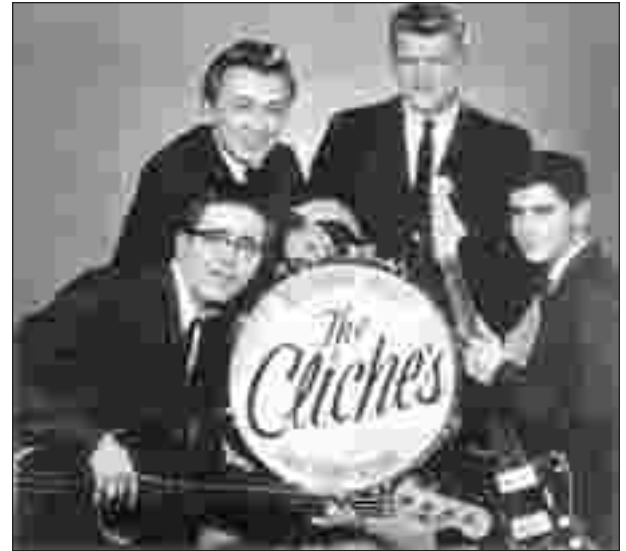
Ronnie McDonald, Denny "Truck" Tranel, Boyd Stoewer, Nick White, Tom Weig and Harry Blewett.

Blewett, of Zephyr Hills, Fla., recalled one show in which the audience was especially enthusiastic.

"The crowd was really, really into it, (so) I stood up on top of the drums. And that got them going pretty good," he said. "I thought I was going to break my neck. I never tried that again."

He also had another harrowing experience while traveling with his bandleader.

"Dick flew an airplane, so sometimes we'd go check out a venue beforehand," he said. "And we flew down to Savanna (Ill.) to look at a place. When we were leaving



*Contributed by Dick McGrane*

Another version of Dick Buscher and The Cliches included (from left) Tom Weig, Harry Blewett, Dick Buscher and Nick White.

the airport, Dick reached over to pull the door shut for me, to make sure it was shut tight, and he snapped the handle off. And the door flapped all the way home from Savanna to Dubuque, and I was wetting my pants!"

In 1969, Buscher moved to Spencer, Iowa, to open an Electrolux business. The following year, he was killed in a plane crash while commuting.

Greenwood remembers Buscher as "a great guy. He was wonderful to work for, wonderful to work with. He taught me a lot about the music business."

In 2000, Dick Buscher and the Cliches were inducted into the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame. Three years later, The Shades joined them.



**MIKE DAY** • *Telegraph Herald*

Dubuque drummer Bobby Greenwood was inducted into the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame as a member of both The Shades and Dick Buscher and the Cliches.

# LAVENDAR HILL



*Contributed by Jean Walachy*

The original members of Lavendar Hill, a Dubuque-based rock band from 1964 to 1979, were (from left) David Hamilton, Ron Roeth, Bernie Essex, Randy Hawker and John D. Walachy.

**F**rom the beginning, John Walachy was dedicated to his music.

At age 12, Walachy received his first guitar. He took lessons and practiced religiously. In 1964, while a freshman at Wahlert High School in Dubuque, he sought out classmates and began putting together a band, which practiced in his family's garage on Glen Oak Street. The boys learned songs by Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, Bill Haley and The Beatles.

Walachy had a knack for marketing, sending promotional materials to schools, bars and dance halls. He soon began securing gigs.

The band initially called itself the Lavender Hill Mob, copying the title of a 1951 British comedy film starring Alec Guinness. Years later, after Walachy received a cease-and-desist letter, he shortened the name and changed one of the vowels to become Lavendar Hill.

The group played school dances, wedding receptions, ramp dances, bar room gigs and ballroom concerts, and eventually earned a reputation as the loudest rock band in the tri-states. Walachy kept his

ego in check by also playing less-raucous engagements — the guitar Masses at Nativity Church.

After high school graduation, Walachy enrolled at Loras College. When his family moved to Massachusetts because of his father's job transfer in 1970, he remained in Dubuque to finish school and focus on his band.



Jean Walachy

In 1971, John met his future wife, Jean, while playing for a volunteer event that she was attending.

"The band was not work for him — he loved it," said Jean, who now lives in Holyoke, Mass.

"When we started dating, I realized that the band was a big part of his life story, and it was who he was."

Walachy did love the band, but he had no visions of grandeur. Instead, he approached it with common sense.

"John's band never went on the road because he couldn't see the value of it," said Jean. "Because all or most of the people that he had had other jobs or they were going to school, and that was his situation.



*Contributed by Mike Lieb*

When I met my husband, he was playing in the band, going to Loras part-time, worked at Stanley Home Products and he sold advertising."

Walachy took his music career seriously and acted in a professional manner. He joined the Dubuque Musicians Association Local 289, American Federation of Musicians.

"Like any good leader, John fostered the development of the band members," said Jean. "At one point, a young man wanted to





*Contributed*

A later version of the band featured (from left) Perry Keating, John D. Walachy, Peter S. Finger, Ron Roeth and David Hamilton.

play in the band but did not have the funds to purchase a drum set. John ... bought the drums so he could join Lavendar Hill and set up a payment plan so the drums could be paid off over time with the band earnings."

Over the years, the group had 25 members, whose wardrobe evolved from bell bottoms to matching Zayre discount store apparel to tuxedo shirts. The band's playlist grew to include songs by Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Uriah Heep, Aerosmith, Bachmann-Turner Overdrive, Bad Company, REO Speedwagon, The Eagles and Chicago.

Drummer Mike Lieb, of Dubuque, joined the group at age 15 in 1975.

"John and I became friends quite quickly as we rode together to and from gigs," Lieb wrote in his recollections of the band, now archived at the Center for Dubuque History at Loras. "I soon realized that he was a very well-educated and focused person. He handled all of the band business, bookings, band rehearsal times, and everything else that goes along with running a band. His dedication and loyalty to the group earned my respect very quickly."

The group's last bass player, F. Michael Miller, now of Indianola, Iowa, also shared an admiration for Walachy in the memories he penned.

"John taught me how to be a rock musician. How to set up, interact with the crowd, handle drunks and hecklers. How to have an effective rehearsal. He taught me how to prepare for a gig: songs learned, gear in good order. He was kind and direct with suggestions and criticisms."

But, Miller added, he also knew how to have fun.

"We would sometimes give fake names when we introduced the band, or John would

say that I was from Liverpool. I used to wear a British cabbie cap at gigs."

Walachy's dedication to the band lasted 15 years, right up to its final show in 1979.

"His last job was the night our son was born," Jean recalled, "and he left me in labor at the apartment with no transportation. You know, the show must go on. But I did finally get a ride to the hospital and he made it (back) in time for our son's birth."

Walachy passed away in September 2011, just a month after the group reunited for a couple of performances at Rock & Roll



*Contributed*

Rewind at Diamond Jo Casino's Mississippi Moon Bar in Dubuque. In 2018, Lavendar Hill was inducted into the Iowa Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame.

In his honor, Jean set up the John Walachy Music Legacy, which sponsors the Iowa Rock Music Camp and Iowa Rocks Talent Contest. The latter offers students a chance to compete for a recording session and a scholarship, ensuring that the next generation of musicians will have a chance to experience the same joy that Walachy felt about making music.



*Contributed by Mike Lieb*

Lavendar Hill reunited in 2011 for a Rock & Roll Rewind performance in Dubuque. Members included (back row, from left) Mike Lieb, Perry Keating, John Walachy, Rick Spiegelhalter, Mike Addyman and (front) Benji Kruser.

# THE NATIVES

The 1960s British Invasion hit Dubuque not only via four lads from across the pond, but in the form of several high school students from across the river.

In early 1965, Ken Heim, formerly of Hazel Green, Wis., got to know Tom Bussan and Roger Julian, of Galena, Ill., while the trio rode the bus to Wahlert High School in Dubuque. He knew the pair had been experimenting with bands for the past couple of years.



Ken Heim

“Tom asked me if I wanted to buy his guitar because he was getting a new one,” recalled Heim, now of Fitchburg, Wis. “And I’d wanted a guitar since I could walk, so I talked to my parents and I got it as an early birthday present, and (Tom) agreed to give me lessons as well.”

During one session, Tom was excited to share the latest song he had learned.

“He started singing and playing Roy Orbison’s ‘Oh, Pretty Woman,’” Heim said. “He got through the first verse and I sang harmony with him through to the end, and the next day, he and Roger grabbed me and said, ‘Hey, you want to sing with the band?’”

Word got around about the young group, which included Bill “Bugs” Eaton on bass, and, within a few weeks, the band was asked to play a May 1 show at Chestnut Hills (now Chestnut Mountain) for some visiting students on a senior class trip.

“We had never even rehearsed,” said Heim.

Nor did the band have a name. Members conceived “The Natives” on the drive to their first gig.

The students arrived by train and were dropped off at the base of the resort’s ski hill and transported to the lodge via chairlifts.

“Our audience was 200 girls from a Catholic high school (near) Chicago, and they thought we were The Beatles. So, I said, ‘I have found my calling.’”

Within the next couple of months, the band members fine-tuned their music and their line-up, adding Randy “Radney” Wilcox on vocals.

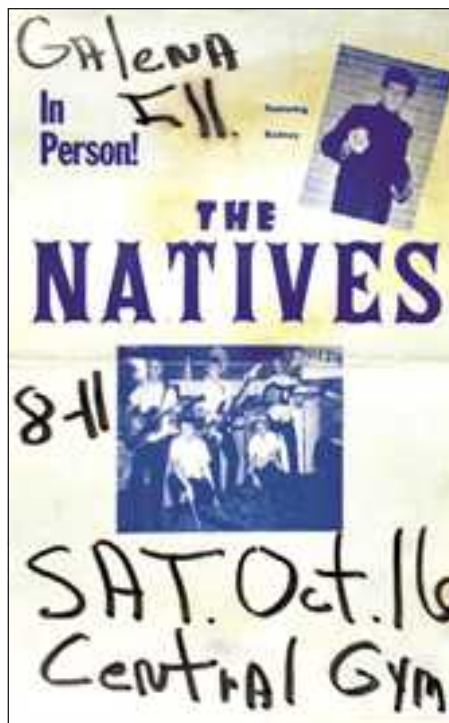
“Randy ... was just eccentric enough, on and offstage, that he kind of built a persona about himself,” said Heim. “And he was a really good singer, a really good entertainer and we, with two guitars, a bass and drums, would try any song.”

“We were influenced by a group from Freeport called The Nomadds,” said Bussan, of Galena. “We kind of patterned ourselves after them. They did the English music. They did The Searchers, The Beatles, The Stones. And we did everything we could to be like them. They only played for a couple years, but they were terrific. So



Contributed by Randy Wilcox

The Natives were a British Invasion-inspired band based in Galena, Ill., from 1965 to 1969. From left are Ken Heim, Roger Julian, Bill “Bugs” Eaton, Randy “Radney” Wilcox and Tom Bussan.

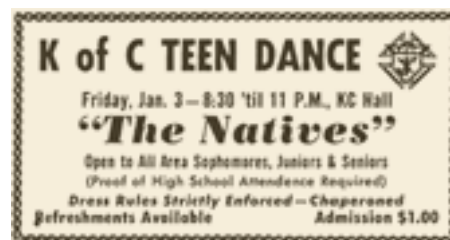


Contributed by Randy Wilcox

that was our template for the band.”

The Natives’ popularity “skyrocketed” that summer, according to Bussan.

“We started doing the English sound and really very few people in Dubuque were



The Telegraph-Herald, Jan. 2, 1969

doing that and it was mostly greasers still sticking with the R&B and doo-wop and Elvis.”

Heim recalled that the group tried to stay on top of each song release.

“We’d learn it as soon as it came out. I remember when ‘Satisfaction’ came out, Tom ran up to the music store and bought what they called a fuzz box — a distortion pedal — so that he could play that guitar lick on ‘Satisfaction.’”

Band members, though, realized that it sometimes took months for the popular songs of the day to receive Midwest radio airplay, so they devised a workaround.

“We had a friend in New Jersey who would send us the latest singles by The Beatles and we would learn them before they ever hit the radio (here),” recalled Heim. “And it wasn’t uncommon for people to come up and say, ‘I heard you guys on the radio singing that song, you know the one you got, ‘Nowhere Man.’”





*Contributed by Randy Wilcox*

The Natives pose for a promotional photo in their four-button suits. From left are Denny Kuhl, Roger Julian, Randy “Radney” Wilcox, Tom Bussan and Ken Heim.

“We had a lot of fun with that,” he added. “The Beatles were our heroes.”

The Natives played shows at their hometown’s Turner Hall and were regulars at Chestnut Hills and Galena’s most famous dance hall.

“The Royal Palais was our home,” recalled Heim. “(Owners Roy and Mary Oldenburg) treated us like their kids and we just had tremendous times out there.”

After an appearance at a Dubuque Council of Catholic Youths dance at the Knights of Columbus Hall, “it was gangbusters in Dubuque,” Bussan said.

The group had gained a loyal following. That was evident during its appearance at one of the city’s “ramp dances,” held atop the Locust Street parking ramp.

“One night we had a thousand up there and they wouldn’t let any more up,” Bussan remembered.

The band also played at the city’s American Legion Hall and Dubuque County Fairgrounds ballroom, and ventured into Wisconsin.

“We’d go to Platteville,” Heim said. “We had a big battle of the bands up there one time with Vilas Craig and the Vi-Counts and it was Fourth of July and we were at the armory. It was about 95 degrees and 95% humidity and the place was packed.

“It was really fun to have those kinds of fans to play to, because they truly did love what we were doing. They would follow us to almost every gig we played.”

Attendees at the group’s very first concert showed their devotion as well. The Natives were booked for a couple of dances in Tinley Park, Ill., based on their debut performance at Chestnut Hills.

“We had more of a reputation than we probably deserved,” Heim said.

Like most bands, The Natives experienced personnel changes over the years, adding Denny Kuhl on bass and Mark Everist on vocals. Tom Meinders, who preceded Everist, added some new flavor to the group’s repertoire.

“He was a White soul singer,” Heim said. “So, we’re a Beatles band, but we’re learning James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Temptations ... really cool stuff.

“We used to rehearse religiously every week,” he added. The group had a playlist of more than 800 songs, including cutting-edge compositions like “Papa’s Got a Brand



*Contributed by Randy Wilcox*

The Natives perform at their last show at the Royal Palais in Galena, Ill., on May 31, 1969. Tom Bussan plays guitar while Roger Julian plays drums.

New Bag” and “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band.”

“We had, I think, a pretty good thing going. I know it was a lot of fun.”

The band was together for just over four years. Julian had plans to join the Air Force when he and Bussan graduated from college.

“Everybody heard that the band was going to break up and we got calls like crazy,” Heim said. “We wound up playing 28 gigs that (final month). There was one day that we played three in one day. Because everyone wanted to hear the band one more time.

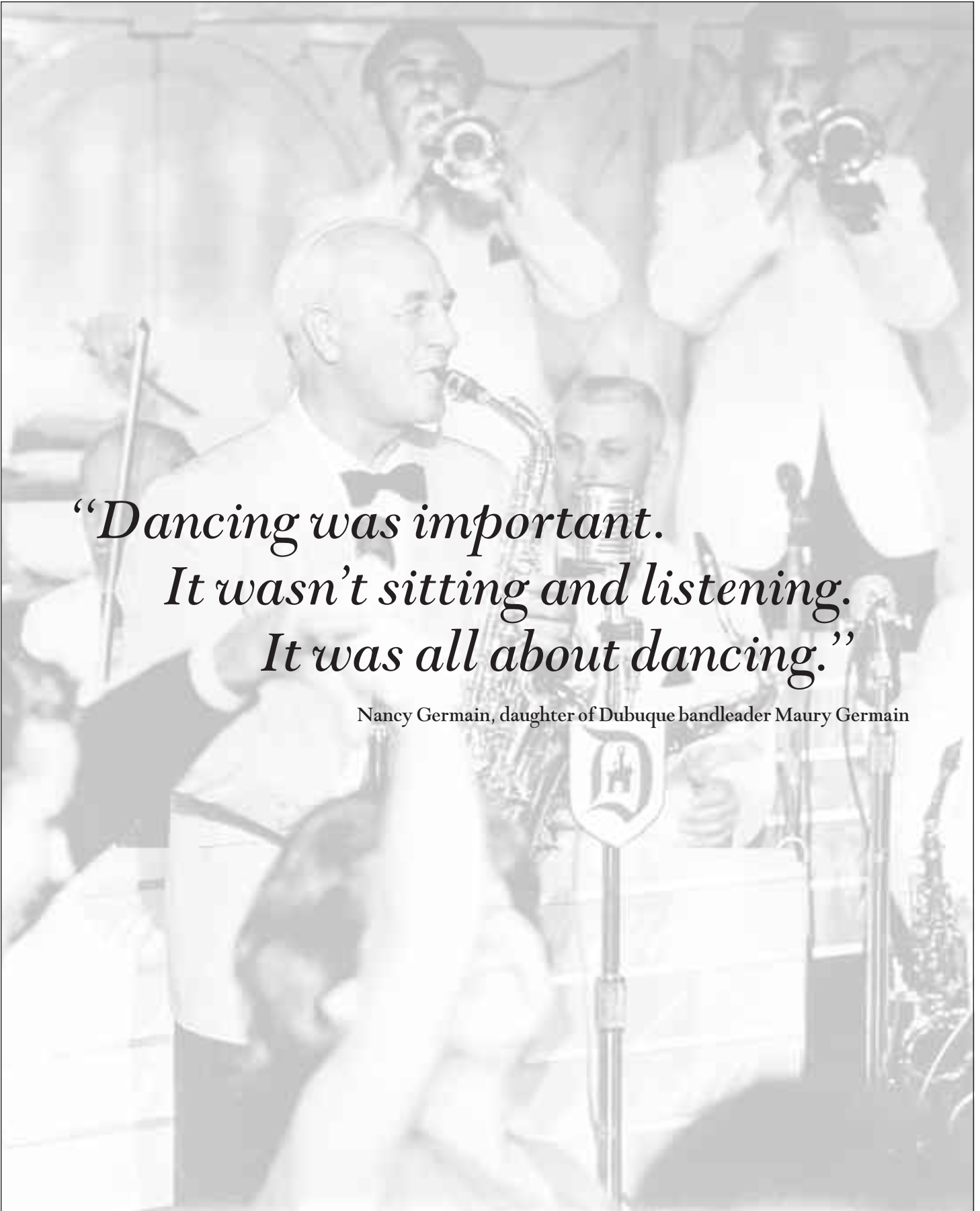
“On that last day at the Palais on May 31, 1969, the last set we played was all Beatles.

“Every song.”



**MIKE DAY • Telegraph Herald**

Tom Bussan (left) and Bill “Bugs” Eaton, both formerly of The Natives, have been together with the Galena, Ill.-based band Sunshine for the past 50 years.



*“Dancing was important.  
It wasn’t sitting and listening.  
It was all about dancing.”*

Nancy Germain, daughter of Dubuque bandleader Maury Germain

Savanna, Ill., native Wayne King plays saxophone as he leads his orchestra. King was the bandleader at Chicago’s famed Aragon Ballroom and toured the country, playing many tri-state area venues.





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