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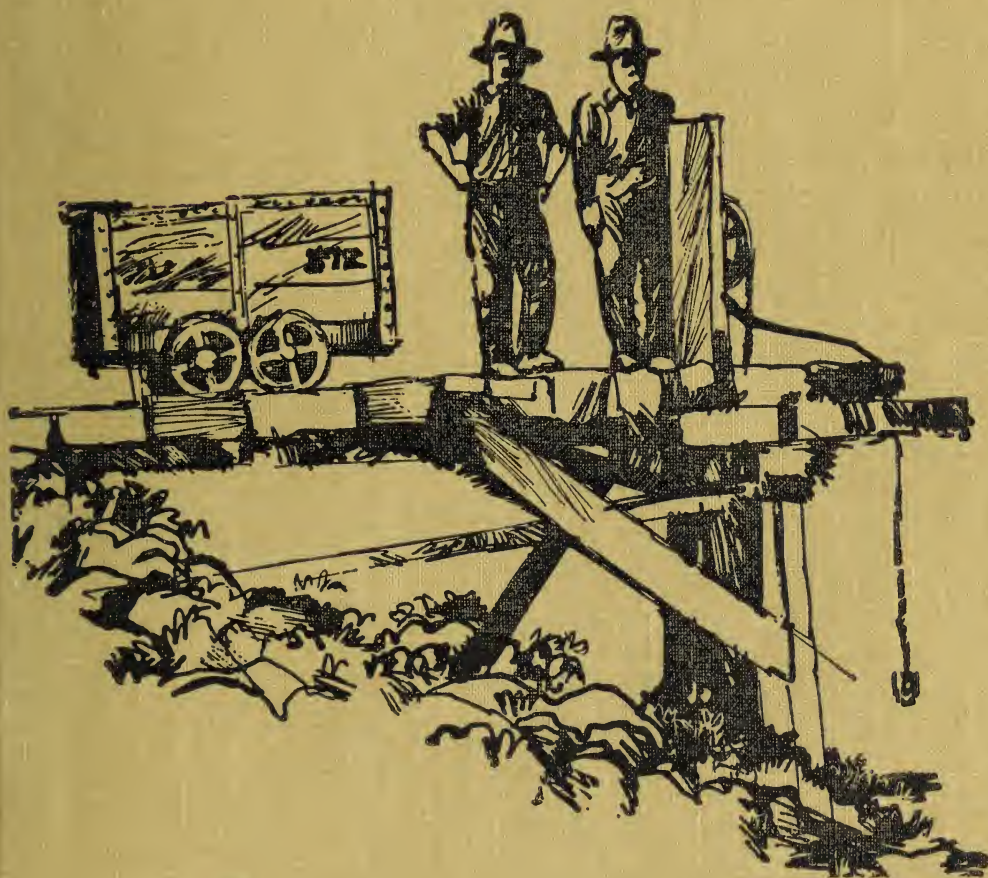
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# BIOGRAPHY IN BLACK

A HISTORY OF STREATOR, ILLINOIS BY PAULA ANGLE

INTRODUCTION BY TED WEBER



**BIOGRAPHY IN BLACK**

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**A HISTORY OF STREATOR, ILLINOIS**

**BY PAULA ANGLE**

**INTRODUCTION BY TED WEBER**

**PUBLISHED BY WEBER COMPANY**

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DESIGNED BY THOMAS GORMAN



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Ill. Historical  
Society.

Dedicated to

**LYLE KENNEDY**

East Street

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Lyle Kennedy of the Streator *Times-Press*, for his invaluable help in checking the manuscript for accuracy, in researching data, and in offering interest and encouragement; to Lyle Yeck, for his collection of historical pamphlets and other printed material; to the staffs of the Streator Public Library and the Chicago Historical Society for outstanding library service; to John R. Fornof for making available the facilities of the *Times-Press*; and to the Weber family for their aid and hospitality.

To the following Streator residents, for personal interviews that supplied me with much useful information: Andrew Bakalar, Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln Bundy, Lowell Dale, Charles R. Defenbaugh, Mrs. Wilbur Engle, John Gaydos, William Godfrey, Joseph Gothier, Fred J. Hart, George Hood, Charles Ieuter, Earl McNamara, Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Mulford, Charles Panno, Mrs. George Plimmer, Fred Renz, Frank Scharfenberg, Thomas Sillanpa, Reuben G. Soderstrom, and James Thorpe.  
P.A.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a story of unselfish love, backbreaking, brow-sweating work, frontier spirit, and a belief in the future. This is the story of people who made a home where there was none; who planted the trees where only prairie grass grew; who dug the soil and planted the corn, and dug deeper to suck black coal from the earth. This is their story . . . a BIOGRAPHY IN BLACK.

**T**HUS on a Sunday afternoon in March 1961, over Station WIZZ, began the first "Biography in Black" radio show—the life story of a town built over and nurtured by the precious black mineral below its surface. Many days and nights of painstaking research had gone into that first half-hour show and I still had twelve programs to put on the air, ten of which weren't even in the foggiest of outlines yet.

"Biography in Black" came about because of something I thought Streator or any other town needs in order to grow and prosper—civic pride. This to me is the most important basic factor in building a happy, economically strong community. We tried to point out that a town is a collection not only of buildings, factories, and sidewalks, but also of people, its greatest natural resource. It was the purpose of this series to tell in sound how people built a city out of a small, rough frontier settlement beside a river ford.

The task of turning out an interesting half-hour script every week, selecting the forty or fifty records that would be used for each program, researching the next week's script, and taping the actual show began to look like a monumental project. I managed to stay at least two weeks ahead of each air date by eating, drinking, and living with "Biography in Black" twenty-four hours a day for over twenty weeks,

Radio is an expensive and competitive medium, and in this day of music and news programing, my producing a historical program that required a listener's complete attention was quite a gamble. Jack Read of the J. L. Read Company of Streator was willing to take that gamble and sponsor the programs. I would like to thank him for the faith he exhibited in me, in the series, and in Streator. My thanks also to Lyle Yeck for his historical material, Maxine DeMuth and the Public Library staff for their cooperation, Jerry Dhesse for his script on the Cherry mine disaster, and Vernon Nunn and Jack Hallstrom for their help at WIZZ.

The series kindled an interest in thousands of people, who relived heretofore forgotten memories. This quality in the programs made "Biography in Black" very successful. The response was so overwhelming that I felt a book capturing the essence of and expanding upon the series would be worth while. I originally planned to publish the scripts of the shows but found that, although dramatic in content, they lacked the completeness necessary for a chronicle of this sort. Since the difference between script writing and writing a book was apparent to me, I began my search for an author. Paula Angle was my choice, and our working relationship has been a most pleasant one. I also want to thank Phillip Citrin for his counsel and advice, Tom Gorman for the design and production management of the book, and my father and mother, Ernest and Zelma Weber, for their help and understanding in making "Biography in Black" possible.

TED WEBER, 1962



# CHAPTER ONE

*An early map of the Illinois Country, published in 1697.*



## THE WAITING LAND

THE land of course came first—a flat expanse covered with long, coarse grass, its monotony broken by tree-bordered streams and occasional low hills. Wild animals roamed in abundance, the climate was temperate. This was the prairie, called by Carl Sandburg the “mother of men.”

Those who came to live on the land tamed it with farms, cities, railroads, and highways. They tamed it too with names for what they found and what they built. For example: *Illinois*, a state—named by the French after the local Indians, who called themselves *Illini*, meaning simply “the men.” *La Salle*, a county—named for the great explorer who, though his life seemed one long failure, gained an empire for France. *Streator*, a town—named by grateful people who felt they owed a like favor to the man who had “put them on the map.” These names, Indian, French, and American, make a small history in themselves, and focus the narrative of this book.



The first men to live on the prairie, and in the area which would later be called Streator, were Indians. Arrowheads and implements found along the Vermillion River indicate their presence, though in what numbers and at what time is not known exactly. Historians do know that in the late 17th century, northern Illinois was occupied by three principal tribes of

Indians—the Illinois, the Miamis, the Potawatomis. The Illinois Confederation consisted of five allied groups known as the Kaskaskias, Peorias, Moingwenas, Cahokias, and Tamaroas. Their original home had included southern Wisconsin and the area around Chicago, but by this date they had pushed southwestward because of pressure from the Iroquois on the east. The Illinois continued to move in this direction, several bands crossing the Mississippi River into Iowa. Many of the areas they left were filled by the Miamis and the Potawatomis.

All three tribes spoke Algonkian languages, those of the Illinois and Miamis being quite closely related, and maintained the same pattern of living. Their bark-covered lodges clustered in villages, where the women raised corn and from which the men forayed out to hunt buffalo and other game. Early explorers described the Illinois as expert archers and fast runners. The same general disposition may have characterized all three peoples; according to various accounts, the Illinois were timid soldiers, the Miamis mild-mannered, and the Potawatomis more humane than their neighbors.

In later years, Sauks and Foxes moved into northern Illinois from their original home to the northeast. Some settled in a large village at the present site of Rock Island.

Although the Indians were eventually displaced by the vastly more numerous (and vastly more acquisitive) white men, the two groups shared the land of Illinois for more than a century. The first whites to enter this uneasy partnership were the French, who traveled down into what was called the Illinois Country from Canada, where they had settled as early as 1608. From their settlements along the St. Lawrence River, they pushed south and west—adventurous explorers and fur trappers followed by dedicated missionaries. The first to reach Illinois were Father Jacques Marquette, a Jesuit priest, and Louis Jolliet, an explorer who had been born in Quebec. The two men (with five others) were sent out in 1673 to explore the Mississippi and, if possible, find its mouth. From the French post at Green Bay, they descended the Fox River, portaged to the Wisconsin, and paddled on down-



stream to the Mississippi. They continued south until they came to the mouth of the Arkansas River, where Indians told them of other white men ten days' journey southward. Marquette and Jolliet reasoned that these must be the Spanish and, fearing trouble, turned back northward.

On the journey back, the little group of Frenchmen took a different route, passing up the Illinois River to the Des Plaines and Chicago, and then northward via Lake Michigan. Marquette's description of the countryside along the Illinois River furnishes us with the first account of the land near Streator.

We had seen nothing like this river for the fertility of the land, its prairies, woods, wild cattle, stag, deer, wild-cats, bustards, swans, ducks, parrots, and even beaver; its many little lakes and rivers. That on which we sailed, is broad, deep, and gentle for sixty-five leagues. During the spring and part of the summer, the only portage is half a league.

Marquette also spoke of an Indian village called Kaskaskia, the Great Village of the Illinois, which was located on the Illinois



*In an idyllic setting—more romance than reality—a group of Illinois Indians presents a pipe of peace to French explorers. A drawing from a map of 1705.*

across from what came to be known as Starved Rock. The devoted missionary returned to this village in 1674 to preach to the Indians, but soon fell ill and died.

A few years later, the Sieur de la Salle came into the Illinois Country, determined to found a great trading empire in the Mississippi Valley. In 1680 he built Fort Crevecoeur near the present Peoria. During his great voyage of 1682, when he became the first white man to descend the Mississippi River to its mouth, the garrison mutinied and destroyed Crevecoeur. On his return to Illinois, La Salle built Fort St. Louis at Starved Rock. This fort fared little better than the first. Indians attacked it in 1684 and after La Salle's death three years later, his lieutenant, Henri de Tonty, moved the garrison to Peoria.

Shortly afterward, the French began to establish posts in southwestern Illinois. It was here—at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Fort de Chartres—that most Illinois settlement concentrated for the next hundred years. The northern part of the state was hardly affected by the growing rivalry between the French and British, or by the French and Indian War that culminated in British acquisition of the Illinois Country in 1763. And, even though the Lake Michigan trading post known as Chicago began to attract settlers after the Revolutionary War, its growth was gradual at first.

In 1818, when Illinois became a state, most of its population of 40,000 still lived in the south. In the La Salle County region, a few fur traders represented the only white men. A post of the American Fur Company, established on Bureau Creek in 1816, operated a profitable business until about 1830. Then the flood of pioneers that had begun the "Great Migration" from the eastern United States after the War of 1812 began to pour into the area. They would transform it almost overnight from wilderness to settled land.

## CHAPTER TWO

*Chief Shabbona in old age, from an ambrotype taken in 1857.*





## GRASS ROOTS —SETTLERS AND INDIANS

**I**N 1821 a lone horseman named Joel Hodgson explored the territory along the Illinois River in La Salle County. Friends in Clinton County, Ohio, had sent him westward to investigate the region for possible settlement. Hodgson seems to have lacked the self-sufficiency and daring necessary for his task. The vastness and solitude of the prairies overwhelmed him, and he admitted that even his horse became cowardly, hardly venturing to crop the grass and staying close by his master day and night. As did many early visitors to the prairie country, Hodgson felt that the lack of timber indicated poor soil and thus boded ill for farmers. He also feared that the region would be bleak and cold in winter. Two years later, a government report describing the area found "the climate inhospitable, the soil sterile, and the scenery monotonous and uninviting."

Although Hodgson's experience may have discouraged his friends in Ohio, other pioneers, equally interested in bettering their lot, must have seen greater possibilities in the land. In 1823, the same year of the government bulletin, the first settlers came to La Salle County and put up their cabins near Ottawa. The majority came from New England, New York, and Ohio, in contrast to the earlier settlers in southern Illinois, most of whom had come from the southeastern United States. When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, it proved to be as important in transporting settlers to the northern Midwest as the Ohio River had been further south.

The stream of pioneers was slow but steady. Illinois had gained a population of 157,445 in 1830; a year later, when La Salle County was organized, its population was estimated at 700.

The year 1831 is especially important to Streator, because it was then that the immediate area received its first settlers. In the La Salle County township of Bruce (then including both Otter Creek and Allen townships), the first settler was probably George Bazore (or Basore). He was a farmer who came from Indiana, where he had moved from his home state of Virginia. The Bazore farm was located about two miles northeast of Streator's city hall, near Otter Creek and the entrance of what is now Marilla Park. Others who came that same year included John Coleman and John Holderman, whose farms lay just west of the Vermillion River.

The area south of Streator (Reading Township in Livingston County) also received its first settlers around this time—two families from Ohio. Daniel Barackman (or Barrackman) moved with his sons James, Upton, Jacob, Benjamin, and Daniel, Jr., and his daughters Harriet and Mary Ann. Jacob Moon arrived with his children Rees, Albert, Thomas, and Margaret. These two large families, one early county historian noted approvingly, “went a good way toward settling the township.”

Hardly had the trickle of settlement begun when it was threatened by the terror of small frontier communities—an Indian uprising. Although the Sauk and Fox Indians had been moved west of the Mississippi in 1804, one band under Chief Black Hawk was dissatisfied and returned in 1832 to reclaim its old territory. The governor recruited volunteers, who assembled under officers of the regular army. Some troops attacked a small band of Indians on May 12, but fled ignominiously when confronted with a larger force. Although most of the subsequent fighting took place north of La Salle County, one incident occurred at Indian Creek, not far from Streator. John Hall gave an eyewitness account some thirty-five years later:

It was in 1832 and, as near as I can recollect, about the 15th or 16th day of May, that old Shabbona, chief of the Pottawatomies, notified my father and others that the Sauk and Fox Indians would probably make a raid on the settlement where we lived, and murder us, and

destroy our property, and advised him to leave that part of the country for a place of safety. But Indian rumors were so common, and some of our neighbors did not sufficiently credit this old Indian, and were advised to collect as many together as possible, and stand our ground and defend ourselves against the Indians.

The Hall family hid their heavy property, loaded the rest of it on a wagon, and set out for Ottawa. On the way they met another settler, a man named Davis, who suggested that they stay with him and others at Indian Creek, since the militia were out after the Indians. They took his advice, but it proved fatal. On May 20 a savage war party attacked the little group, killing John Hall's father and fourteen others, and carrying off John's two sisters, Rachel and Sylvia (they were later released unharmed).



*Cigar-store Indians march off into the wilderness with their captives, the two Hall sisters. This crude 1833 print does not identify the elegantly dressed young man.*

A second volunteer force proved more effective than the first. Under General Atkinson, the men marched north and defeated

Black Hawk decisively at Bad Axe, Wisconsin. This brief outbreak, the Black Hawk War, signalized the end of Indian troubles in Illinois, and its outcome encouraged further settlement in the northern part of the state. It took a while, however, for the area's inhabitants to relax their vigilance. An early historian of Livingston County wrote:

Even after the troubles were all over, frequent frights occurred. It is related of one of the Moons that, one evening on his return from work, seeing his wife at a distance from the house, he gave the well known Indian war-whoop, and was rewarded for his little pleasantry by seeing his wife go into spasms, from which she was recovered with great difficulty.

With the Indian menace dispelled, the area around Streator soon began to ring with the sound of pioneers' axes. Following is a list, with the date of arrival, of some of the earliest settlers in the surrounding La Salle County region:

- 1833—John Fulwider (also spelled Fulwiler, Fulwyler)  
     Gaylord Hayes  
     Norton and Agnes Mackey and their sons Rush,  
         Samuel, and Benjamin  
     William Morgan and his sons John and Rees  
     William Rainey
- 1834—Elizabeth Cramer  
     Norton Gum (Gunn)  
     John and David Souder (Sotter)  
     Thomas Sturgess
- 1835—Abraham S. Bergen  
     Eliza Collins  
     Nathan Morgan  
     William Reddick  
     J. W. Stephenson
- 1836—Reuben Hackett
- 1837—William Bronson  
     William Donnell (Downell)

Isaac Painter  
 Samuel Wauchope  
 1840—George Densmore (Dinsmore)

Early settlers in the Streator area of Livingston County included:

1833 —Emsley Pope  
 1835 —M. I. Ross  
 1837 —Andrew McDowell  
 1838 —Martin A. Newman  
 1840 —Ewin Houchin  
       Charles Paget  
 1840's—William Bowman  
       Samuel Broomfield  
       James and Malley Brown  
       Jacob and William Bussard  
       James Calder  
       Thomas Copes  
       Charles Dixon  
       Amos, Enoch, and John Lundy  
       Jacob Phillips  
       Zephaniah Schwartz  
       John and M. A. Smith  
       Charles, Harvey, and Samuel Thompson  
 1850's—Daniel, Elijah, and John Defenbaugh  
       Caleb and Jeremiah Mathis  
       John, John W., and Joshua Mills

Many of these pioneers, including the Mackeys and the Morgans, came from Fayette County, Pennsylvania. Connecticut, Ohio, and Indiana also contributed several families. Some, continuing their restless search for better opportunities, did not stay; John Morgan moved to Iowa, Thomas Sturgess to Wisconsin. The majority remained, however, and their descendants—often representing intermarriages of these early families—still live in or near Streator.



Reputedly the first person to settle in what later became the town of Streator was George Bronson, who came from Connecticut during the 1830's and bought 120 acres of land near Prairie Creek. On the north end of the lot at what is now 508 East Bronson Street, he carved a dugout from the side of a hill, also using rocks hauled from the Vermillion by ox team. (Later he built a small cabin on the property.) It was Bronson who helped build the cabin of John Fulwider, located at Broadway and Wasson, the site of St. Paul's Lutheran Church—probably the first building in Streator.

Newcomers acquired their land merely by occupying it. When titles were required in later years, they could be obtained by paying \$1.25 per acre at the nearest government land office. The settlers soon overcame their dread of the prairie, but many still preferred wooded areas. For one thing, wood was needed for cabins, fence rails, and firewood. For another, the prairie sod was extremely tough and difficult to break the first time without a team of heavy oxen.

Pioneers who traveled a long way brought only a few simple possessions and a little livestock. If they had a covered wagon, they might make a home in it until they had built a log cabin; otherwise, they constructed a simple lean-to shack. The cabins themselves were usually poorly constructed and small, sometimes no bigger than twelve by sixteen feet. A one-post bed might be tucked into one corner, with a crude table, cupboard, and chairs completing the furniture. Corn in various forms was the staple food. One man recalled later that "Meat was almost out of the question. We only indulged in the luxury about once a week." When the "luxury" did come to the table, it was probably game, for the Streater area boasted "deer in every thicket," opossums, raccoons, and squirrels. Other wild animals included wildcat and lynx, prairie wolf, otter, beaver, and muskrat. There were some buffalo in the early years, but the last was reported killed in 1837 at Troy Grove.

Life was hard and comforts few. For years, the farmers around Streator had to market their hogs at Grand Ridge and

carry their wheat to Ottawa to be ground. Many drove cattle and hauled corn a backbreaking ninety miles to Chicago, the round trip sometimes taking as long as three weeks. Such frontier amusements as cabin raisings, husking bees, and barn dances did not take place often, since the settlers lived so far apart. On Saturday afternoons there might be racing and wrestling and usually, after several convivial drinks, a fight or two, which made Monday a court day with trials for assault. Elmer Baldwin, an early settler who wrote the first history of La Salle County, wrote primly and probably inaccurately that "This practice has never prevailed to any extent in La Salle County. The few that favored such a course have yielded to a healthy public sentiment which has ever leaned to temperance and public order."

One can imagine that some of these Saturday gatherings might have been further enlivened by local eccentrics. Samuel Broomfield, for instance,

. . . was somewhat peculiar in some respects, more especially in his notions on the subject of religion. He greatly deplored the wickedness of the world, but, curious as it may seem, placed the responsibility on the Creator. He reasoned that if God created everything, He was also the author of sin. Further, that if God is omnipotent, He is not only able to control sin, but to abolish it; and that He is, therefore, directly guilty of all the wickedness in the world. He made frequent appointments to preach his peculiar doctrine, and discoursed on the subject with much ingenuity, but with poor success in the way of conversions. A favorite method of presenting his faith was to arraign the Author of the Universe as a criminal before a bar of justice, and then bring witnesses to prove Him guilty.

To balance the picture, the historian adds that "on other subjects Broomfield was sane, and transacted business with the utmost precision."

The common frontier hardships of poverty, brutalizing labor, and isolation were increased when nature turned enemy. Storms, tornadoes, droughts, and extremes in weather made a difficult life even harder. In the early 1830's, a severe winter storm

dumped two and a half feet of snow on northern Illinois, and an equal amount followed two days later. One result was a hard crust several inches thick, over which wolves chased the famished deer. One early settler, William Morgan, lost his way in such a storm and was found frozen to death only a few feet from his home. In the 1840's a flood of the Illinois River led to a cholera epidemic that decimated some river townships.

Other troubles plagued the early settlers. In 1837 there was an outbreak of lawlessness in the depredations of the so-called "Bandits of the Prairies," who roamed over northern Illinois, taking advantage of the openhanded frontier hospitality toward strangers. They stole horses and, it is reported, \$700.00 from a trunk under a bed—a sizable sum for the time and place. Farmers soon organized vigilante societies that quickly put an end to the thievery.

Sickness was common, especially malaria, known familiarly as "the ague," "the agger," or simply "the shakes." According to Baldwin, in 1838 "there was more sickness and more deaths in proportion to population than in any year since the settlement of the county." An early settler spoke of the swamps around Streator and recalled:

During the damp and sultry weather the air was as full of malarial germs as flies in a sugar barrel. Those days everyone had what was called the ague—we called it "agger" for short. Shake? Well, I should say so! No matter where you went, you could always see both young and old sitting out in the sun shaking like a leaf with the ague. For medicine we had what we called boneset tea, whiskey, and quinine and some took one kind or other of these, but still they would shake. Most all had the kind of ague that would shake us up in great shape every other day.

Less stoic was an old lady described by Baldwin. Weak and petulant after a long siege of malaria, she complained: "This is the most God-forsaken country under the sun. It is fit only for Indians, prairie wolves and rattlesnakes, and they have about got possession. I wish it was sunk!"

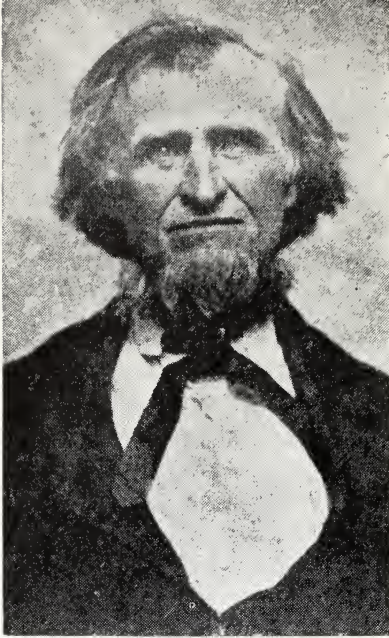
Meanwhile, during the 1830's, the United States was in the midst of a financial boom. It was an era of inflation and wild speculation, particularly in internal improvements, and Illinois was no exception. Ground was broken for the Illinois and Michigan Canal (between Chicago and La Salle) at Chicago in 1836, and a great number of Irish workers began digging. Even Streator had its planners. In the same year, the Mackeys and John Morgan laid out a so-called "paper town" on Norton Mackey's farm just north of "Old Grandad" Bazole's. The streets and lots of the proposed city of Van Buren came to nothing, however. And the following year, the boom collapsed in a panic and depression. Banks and businesses failed and hundreds of men were out of work. In Illinois, work on the canal was halted for almost nine years. By 1839 the price of wheat had fallen from \$2.00 to 50¢ a bushel and a work horse sold for \$50.00.

Although Streator area settlers continued much as before, they undoubtedly felt the pinch of hard times. With a shortage of money, most business transactions involved barter. The story is told of one farmer who, having no cash to pay for a letter held in the post office (recipients had to pay the 25¢ postage), finally claimed it in return for four bushels of wheat. Writing of the poverty of the times, Baldwin says:

A cheap garment then worn was made of a coarse material called *hard times*, composed of cotton and the coarsest wool, made like a frock, gathered at the neck, hanging loose to the hips, held by a belt at the waist, with loose sleeves. . . . It was worn at all times—at church, to town, or to Chicago.

Recovery was not long in coming, however, and was well under way by the mid-1840's. A stage line was opened from Chicago to St. Louis and passed through La Salle County. Work on the canal was resumed in 1846 and completed two years later.

The Mexican War caused scarcely a ripple among Streator area people. Not so events in California, where gold was discovered in 1848. The *Ottawa Free Trader* of March 1850 had this to say:



*Early settler Rees Morgan. After his trip to California in 1851, he returned to the Streator area to become a prosperous farmer and county treasurer.*

Our town has for the past week been every evening so crowded with California teams and emigrants, that the hotels have not been able to accommodate all. . . . On Fox River, we are credibly informed, the migration will average one out of every six able bodied men . . . while in our own County, although not as large as this, the proportion is yet fearfully large.

Among those from the Streator region who went west to try their luck were Barcroft Cunliffe, Fred Gleim, and Rees Morgan.

Beginning about 1850, Illinois entered a period of rapid expansion. In 1849, two fifths of the land of the state—about 15,000,000 acres—remained unsold. In 1857, less than ten years later, only 294,149 acres were left. Towns grew quickly, and streams of immigrants swelled the population of Chicago, Peoria, Springfield, and Alton. Probably the greatest single factor behind this growth was the railroad. In 1853 the first train of the Chicago and Rock Island line ran to La Salle. In the same year, the Illinois Central completed its tracks connecting Bloomington, Tonica, and Mendota. Several of the small towns west of Streator grew up along its route: Wenona (incorporated in 1853), Rutland (1855), Minonk (1856), and Lostant (1861). To the east were laid the tracks for the main line of the Chicago and Alton (later the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio), giving impetus to such settlements as Dwight and Odell, both incorporated in 1854. South-



ward other small communities were formed: New Michigan (now defunct), Reading (platted in 1850), and Ancona (laid out in 1854). New Michigan was the home of Livingston County's first newspaper, the *Vermillion Herald*, which published one lone issue in 1853. Reading at one time boasted three hotels and three general stores, as well as several other businesses.

These developments had little direct effect on the immediate Streator area. Two improvements did come in 1850; James McKernan constructed a dam and water wheel on the Vermillion River, where he operated a saw and grist mill; and the first recorded schoolhouse in the area was built along the banks of Otter Creek. But the region was still so sparsely settled that it afforded hunting grounds for a band of Indians led by old Shabbona, who many years before had warned John Hall's father of an Indian attack. Land had been set aside for the chief in De Kalb County in the 1830's, but in 1837 he and his family of thirty children and grandchildren moved beyond the Mississippi to a reservation. According to one account, his son and nephew were killed there, possibly in retaliation for Shabbona's warning to the settlers, and he brought his family back to Illinois in 1855. The land set aside for him had long since been settled by whites, and the Indians wandered about the area homeless and penniless for two years.

In 1857 the citizens of Ottawa provided Shabbona and his band with twenty acres of land and some buildings near Morris. It was here that Shabbona died in 1859. Even during these last two years, however, the old Indian continued to hunt over the land that had once belonged to his people. A member of the Dixon family many years later wrote about Shabbona's last visit to the Streator region. It was during the Christmas season and a foot of snow lay on the ground.

Old Shabbona camped out down here by the river for a time . . . the Indian chief and fourteen or sixteen of the remnants of his tribe came over here on a hunting trip. Their permanent camp was then near Morris. . . . It was Christmas day that I and several neighbor boys—the

*One of Shabbona's grandchildren, Little Smoke, had his picture taken wearing a turban and clutching bow and arrows.*



*Built by Elijah Defenbaugh in 1855, this small house of weathered boards, below, is still standing on the farm of Charles and Ammon Defenbaugh in Reading Township.*



Barnharts and Brown—went over to visit Shabbona. I was then probably fourteen years old. . . . The Indians were preparing dinner when we arrived and the meal was almost ready. They had three poles stuck up to form a tripod and over the fire was a kettle in which deer soup was being made. They had a deer head in the pot—and I recall now that it struck me as funny that the eyes were left in the head. They also had some corn in the kettle boiling. We were invited to have some of the soup but it didn't look good to us so we declined with thanks.

The Indians were very friendly toward us as they were to all settlers around here at that time. We were invited into their wigwams and there we met Shabbona. He could understand but little English. . . . We were asked to take the only seat available—on the ground, which was covered with robes and deer skins. . . . The Indians whom I saw in camp near here were variously garbed. All wore moccasins of deer-skin—several pairs to keep their feet warm—while some of them had clothes like ours and others deerskin garments. Deer was quite plentiful around here in those days. . . .

The boys with Shabbona on this trip were expert in handling a bow and arrow. I remember that they were very anxious to shoot at coins, and if they hit the coin it was theirs. Their aim was usually very good, but it seemed that they could shoot ten times straighter when a dime was put up than they could where a penny was the stake and the target.

One great issue agitating the people of the United States undoubtedly touched Streator area settlers—that of slavery. The decade of the 1850's witnessed increasing tension with each new crisis—the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, and the Dred Scott decision. At least one Streator settler was involved personally in the Kansas troubles. In the Barnhart Cemetery rests a square gravestone, slightly askew on its pedestal, bearing these words:

sacred to the memory of  
Wm. Phillips  
who at the early age of  
29 years & 5 mo's was  
murdered at Leavenworth  
city Kansas teratory Sept.  
2, 1855, while defending his  
rights & liberties at his  
own home against an  
armed band of ruffins

The famous Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 brought the "irrepressible conflict" home to Illinoisans, and the audience for the August 21st debate at Ottawa undoubtedly included men and women from around Streator. The Ottawa *Republican* of the



previous day went to no pains to hide its bias when it wrote of the "simple, unostentatious manner" with which Lincoln partisans would receive their hero, while commenting that "the Douglas worshipers have bled themselves freely for money to make an imposing reception for their idol," and disapprovingly adding that they planned to "tote him into town as the Hindoos would a pagoda." The debate began at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and held the attention of a large crowd for its full three hours. In the election later that year, La Salle County went Republican, though the state elected Douglas.

Meanwhile the abolition movement had acquired a large following in northern Illinois, reflecting in part the New England origin of many of its settlers. When the abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy was murdered at Alton in 1837, his fellow propagandist Benjamin Lundy came to Illinois from Ohio to revive Lovejoy's journal, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Lundy settled at Lowell in 1838, but he published only a few issues of *The Genius* before his death in 1839. Antislavery sentiment continued to be strong. Northern Illinois contained several "stations" of the Underground Railroad. Although, according to one historian, "to ask for a map of the routes of the railroad is to ask for a map of the routes by which the wily fox evades the hounds," it is known that runaways generally entered the state from Missouri at Chester, Alton, or Quincy. They were instructed to travel west of the Illinois River; one route followed the river up to Ottawa and Peru, while others converged at Knoxville and Princeton. The common destination was Chicago, a center of abolitionist activity.

As the controversy neared the climax of civil war, one incident occurred which throws light on the attitude of Streator area people at this time. In 1859 John Hossack of Ottawa, a rabid antislavery crusader, engineered the escape from court of a Negro fugitive who had been apprehended and whom the judge had remanded to the United States Marshal. Hossack and some companions took the Negro in a wagon across the prairie to the home of William Strawn, who lived about six miles east of where

Streator now stands. The Strawns, stanch abolitionists, were in Chicago attending an antislavery meeting. One Williamson Laughlin, whose own home on the county line was a station of the Underground Railroad, was staying at the Strawn farm in their absence, so it was he who took the Negro to Dwight, whence he was carried to Chicago and on to freedom in Canada. Hossack and others were fined and imprisoned but the Strawns presumably went free, probably regretting that their zeal for the cause had taken them away from the scene of the excitement.

On the eve of the Civil War, the Streator area was still one of small isolated farms and seemed destined for little more than a rural, if prosperous, future. While La Salle County in 1855 boasted 30,000 inhabitants, the first county directory, published four years later, listed only 152 Bruce Township residents, all farmers. (This number represents only heads of families, and should be multiplied by three or four to produce a better estimate of the township population.) In spite of appearances, however, changes were already brewing. In 1860, the year of pioneer George Bazore's death, Streator stood on the threshold of a new era.

## CHAPTER THREE

*Probably the oldest view of Streator. Main Street in the early 1870's.*



## COAL AND THE COLONEL

AS EARLY as 1697, when traveling with the explorer La Salle, the Belgian missionary Louis Hennepin had noticed coal along the Illinois River. His book about America, published the same year, contained a map showing "charbon de terre" near the site of Ottawa. His is one of the first written records of the great northern Illinois field, which at one time supplied millions of tons of bituminous coal annually. The growth and decline of this industry spelled life (and death) for hundreds of communities in the region. Coal made Streator, too, and for many years the town's destiny seemed to depend on the "black diamonds" that lay beneath it.

Father Hennepin probably noted the coal simply as outcroppings along the river bank, for the Indians made scant use of the mineral. White settlers too ignored it as long as they had a good supply of wood. In the Streator region, however, the original timber began to give out in the 1850's and people had to consider other forms of fuel. Luckily, the early pioneers had settled over an extremely rich coal field. There were two chief veins. The upper one—Number 7—measured about 5 feet thick and lay between 75 and 120 feet below the surface. The lower one—Number 2—averaged about a yard thick, from 100 to 125 feet below Number 7.

At this time there were three fords across the Vermillion River, one each at the mouths of Prairie and Coal Run creeks, and one about where Water Street now ends. It was at these locations, where scattered pockets were visible along the river bluffs, that men first dug out coal, some of it scarcely ten feet below the surface of the ground. Two Livingston County settle-



ments that owed their start to the early coal workings were Vermillion City, directly south of Streator, and Coalville to the west of it.

One of the first to mine coal for other than his own consumption was Francis Murphy, who began operations in 1851 near the present terminus of Court Street. Other small mines, called "drifts," were opened into the bluff along the east bank of the river at the foot of the present Hickory Street. It is said that the river and creeks used to run a golden yellow because of the sulphur water pumped into them from the mines along their banks. The coal, hoisted by horsepower to the top of the hill, was loaded into farm wagons for delivery, and cost from 75¢ to \$1.35 per ton at the mine. Most of it was used locally, although some was hauled to the Illinois River and beyond.

In the early 1860's English, Welsh, and Scotch miners—perhaps informed by some miners' grapevine—began to move into the Streator area. They burrowed into the east bank to "drift out" the seam of low-grade coal that lay about eighty feet below the top of the cliff. This increase in population, modest though it was, encouraged a few entrepreneurs. Josiah O'Neil hauled in a forge and anvil and set himself up as a blacksmith; as a sideline, using home-made pliers, he pulled teeth free of charge. His brother John opened a general store (probably the first store in the Streator region), to be followed soon afterward by similar shanty-stores built by James Huggans and Robert Duncan. It was John O'Neil who in later years claimed the distinction of giving Streator its first name—Hardscrabble. His store on the river bluff afforded him a good view of the steep slope below. One day as he watched two teams struggle up the hill pulling a loaded wagon, he commented that it was a hard scrabble (struggle) and promptly lettered the term on the front of his store. (The expression undoubtedly was more common a hundred years ago than today; only two years before O'Neil's inspiration, an unsuccessful ex-army officer named Ulysses S. Grant had given up trying to make a living out of his Missouri farm, "Hardscrabble.")

While the people of Hardscrabble were beginning to create a new community, a fellow Illinoisan, Abraham Lincoln—like most of them, a pioneer born out of the state—had run successfully for the presidency of the United States. His election in 1860 was the breaking point in the bitter struggle between North and South, and the nation plunged into war in 1861.

Only six days after the fall of Fort Sumter, a group of La Salle County citizens met at Ottawa and adopted the following resolution: "*Resolved*, That we will stand by the flag of our country in this her most trying hour, cost what it may of blood and treasure." It was this spirit that characterized almost every Illinois community, and the draft was hardly necessary in the entire state. The La Salle County Board of Supervisors granted \$8.00 to every man who volunteered between April and October. In Bruce Township, with 270 men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five liable to serve in the militia, 134 had volunteered by September.

Among those from around Hardscrabble who joined the army were Isaac Ammons, Milam J. Barrackman, Cal Bazore, James Campbell and his son John, William Cooper, David Funk, George Mackey, William Mason, Sherman and William McQuown, Lee Merritt, Tom Mowbray, Charles Mulledore, Abe O'Neil, Dell Osborne, Jack and Uriah Painter, Joe Pratt, and John Ryon. Though the records are incomplete, they indicate that the men saw varied service—Barrackman at Pea Ridge, Perryville, and Stone River; John Campbell at Missionary Ridge and Kenesaw Mountain; Mackey on Sherman's march; and Ryon at Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. Casualties there must have been, though their names are lost to us.

The war led to Streator's second name—Unionville. Stories vary as to whether the name represented simply the community's devotion to the Northern cause, or whether it symbolized the accord of Democrats and Republicans as soon as war actually broke out. Evidently many people regarded the change as merely symbolic, and continued to call the settlement by its original, more descriptive name.

Maggie Campbell, reminiscing in later years, has given a picture of Hardscrabble during the Civil War:

They had bazaars and community meetings both at Otter Creek and Unionville, where they engaged in work similar to that done by the Red Cross volunteers during recent wars—picking lint and making bandages and underwear for the hospitals.

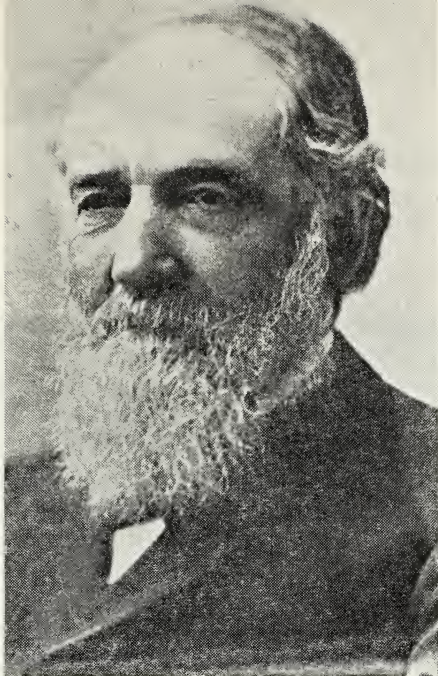
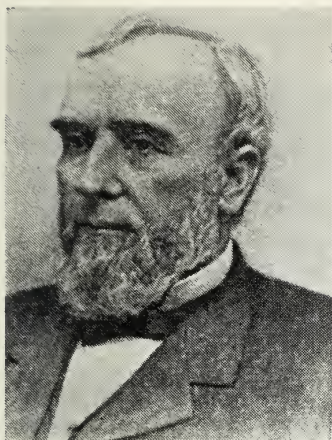
All during the war the post office [called “Eagle”] was about two miles from Unionville . . . and the school children usually went from school to Squire Painter’s house for the mail, and it came twice a week. . . . And when the spring or fall rains came the road was full of water in places and you had to walk on rail fences to get to the post office. . . . Overholt and Holmes had a general store at Reading. . . . But when the Vermillion was past fording you could not get to Reading and the road to Ottawa was nothing but mud and water, so supplies got quite limited.

. . . a stage line was established between Ottawa and Unionville, and many times the passengers who paid to ride had to get out of the stage and get fence rails to help pry the stage out of the mud. I doubt if the profanity was as common as now, although no prayers were said while the stage was being pried out of the mud.

There were debating and literary societies in the Blackwell school-house on Prairie Creek . . . when the protracted meetings were held in the winter and sleighing was good, the crowd would get into bobsleds and go wherever they were held, also to spelling schools and dances, getting home at all hours of the night.

The men who returned to Unionville after the Civil War found little change. There were probably a few new settlers and a few new shanties along the river where Water Street is now; the Springer and Painter store had opened for business in 1864. But when the town was platted on April 27, 1865, scarcely six square blocks were encompassed by its boundaries: Main Street on the south, Bloomington on the east, Kent on the north, and the river on the west. James Campbell, John O. Dent, Clark S. Dey, and Isaac A. Rice signed as owners of the land.

Insignificant as it must have seemed, Unionville attracted some attention, specifically from an Ottawa businessman named



*Dr. Worthy L. Streater, left, gave Streater its name and financed its first commercial mining operations. More personally involved with the town's future was Colonel Ralph Plumb, right, who devoted much of his life to Streater's growth and well-being.*

John G. Nattinger. When he learned that the area was producing coal on a small scale, he sent samples to a friend in Cleveland, Worthy L. Streater, a physician and investor. Streater and a group of businessmen formed the Vermillion Coal Company and arranged for a Civil War veteran to head their operations in Illinois.

To this man—Colonel Ralph Plumb—Streater owes a great deal. Born in New York state in 1816 and brought to Ohio at the age of two, he began work as a gardener, later operated a general store and practiced law. A fervent abolitionist, he maintained a station on the Underground Railroad and once spent three months in jail for participating in the rescue of a fugitive slave. He served his state as a representative for three terms in the legislature, his nation as quartermaster on General James Garfield's staff during the Civil War. Describing his coming to Streater, he said:

Streater is an accident so far as my part in its making is concerned. I had been mustered out of the army at the close of the war, and was looking for an opening, not knowing whether to return to the practice of law or not. I was traveling around Ohio visiting friends, and railroad

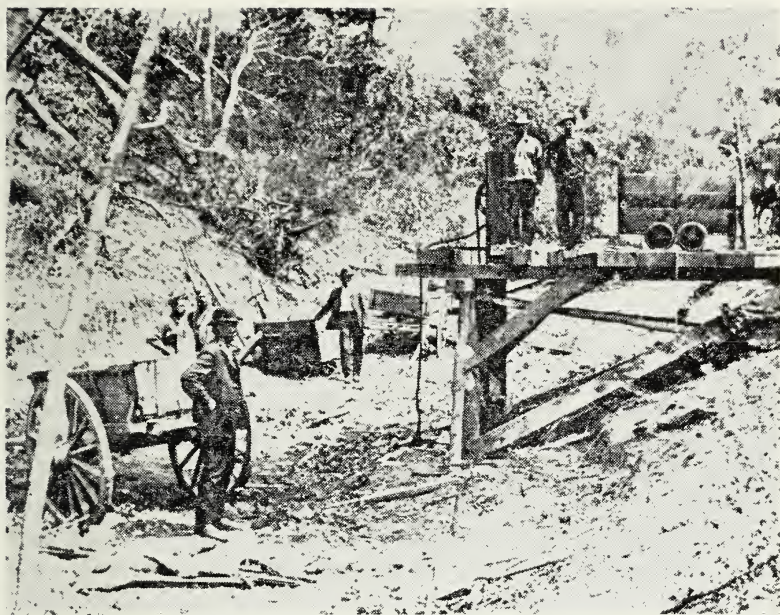


connections not being good I had to wait at a station for my train. It happened that an old friend was waiting for a train at the same place. Said he to me: "Colonel Plumb, what are you going to do?" I replied, "I don't know, I haven't decided yet." "Well," he says, "you are just the man we are looking for. My friends and I are interested in coal lands in Illinois, and we want you to go out and develop them." After inquiry I promptly accepted, and here I am. If I had not had to wait for the train I wouldn't have met Doctor Streator, and I would never have come here.

So, evidently by chance, Colonel Plumb did come to the little town of Unionville in January 1866, with instructions to purchase and develop 4000 acres of coal lands, as acting secretary, treasurer, and resident manager of the Vermillion Coal Company. He wasted no time. Under his supervision, miners went to work and sank the shaft of the company's first mine, the "Old Slope." Located east of the river, at the foot of Adams Street and just north of Cedar, the mine reached a depth of fifty feet and eventually covered about sixty-five acres. (It never became a large operation, in its heyday employing only between fifty and a hundred men and averaging seventy tons of coal a day.)

While miners worked below ground, workmen above were laying track for the first railroad into Unionville, the fifteen-mile "Stub End Road" that led westward to Wenona and a junction with the Illinois Central line. (It later became part of the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio road.) Halfway between the two towns grew up a small community which Plumb named Garfield after his Civil War commander. More than forty years later, William Parrett recalled:

I fired the first locomotive that ever pulled into this place . . . old 175—that was her number—but she was first known as "Ralph Plumb." She weighed thirty-six ton, and she was a good one for those days. I worked on her first way back in '67 or '68 on construction work. That was when the old Vermillion Coal Company built the first railroad line into this place. But the town wasn't known as Streator then—they



*Entrance to the "Old Slope" mine. This, the first of the CW&V mines in Streator, initiated a profitable enterprise that was to last for almost fifty years.*

called it "Hardscrabble." There were only a few people here and scarcely enough buildings to make a good bonfire. . . . The Vermillion Coal Company's slope was the only mine except a country bank or two along the river in that locality.

With the new mine and the new railroad, Unionville gained more settlers. A row of wooden shacks sprang up along the railway near the mine. Overholt and Holmes moved their store from Reading to Unionville and put up a two-story building at Main and Bloomington—a site later occupied by the Plumb Hotel. Just back of the store and fronting on Main Street was a three-story frame structure erected by Dr. E. E. Williams; its top floor was the chief place for entertainments prior to the construction of Oriental Hall. Zephaniah Schwartz, one of the earliest settlers

in Livingston County, moved to the growing community and built a large rooming house, called Streator House, on the southwest corner of Main and Bloomington.

Unionville was obviously growing beyond the boundaries drawn for it in 1865, so Colonel Plumb and other residents arranged to have it replatted. In the meantime, they gave the town its third and present name, commemorating the efforts of the Ohio doctor who believed in its possibilities. Unionville officially became Streator on November 26, 1867. Less than three months later, on February 10, 1868, Ralph Plumb as secretary—together with James Huggans, Albert McCormick, and William Rainey—signed the second plat, which extended Streator's boundaries south to Wilson Street, east to Wasson, and north to Morrell. In the spring a meeting was called "for the purpose of determining by vote the question of incorporating the town of Streator." On the night of April 9, a group of about seventy landowners and businessmen met above the Overholt and Holmes store. There they voted, 56 to 5, for incorporation, and later that month, the townspeople chose five trustees for the village council: H. R. Stout, R. P. Smith, Robert Hall, A. J. Baker, and George Temple. The new village was formally incorporated in 1870, with a population of 1486.

The council trustees buckled down to business and promptly voted themselves "two dollars for attending any regular meeting and one dollar for every special meeting." They then turned their attention to liquor, streets, sidewalks, and dogs. There were already five saloons in town, and the council set the liquor license fee at \$200.00. Efforts were made to improve the deplorable condition of the ungraded, unpaved streets, and a saloonkeeper named Wilks was allowed to pay for his liquor license by grading Main Street from the river to Monroe Street. An ordinance was passed requiring property owners along Main and Bloomington streets to build board walks in front of their property. A man was appointed to "kill and bury all dogs found running at large" for a fee of 50¢ per dog. The council also built a jail, appointed a police constable (salary: \$50.00 per month), and named a tax

assessor. Serving on the council must have been a thankless task. A member who resigned in 1875 remarked with bitter satisfaction: "Show me the man who can serve two consecutive years on that board without incurring the displeasure and hostility of some, and I will show you a man without the capacity or independence to fit him for that office."

If the city fathers of the new town were discouraged by the pace of civic improvement, they must have been heartened to learn—if they stopped to think about it—that industry could progress and prosper independently. In 1870 the Vermillion Coal Company opened its Number 1 mine, with a shaft located just north of Grant and east of Vermillion Street. This mine, the largest in the entire Streator area, was in the thirty years of its operation to spread over about 930 acres at an average depth of 80 feet. With a vein of coal between 4½ and 5 feet thick, the mine at its peak yielded more than 2500 tons a day, to make a total of approximately 5,000,000 tons. In 1871 the Vermillion Company united with the Chicago and Wilmington Coal Company to form the Chicago, Wilmington and Vermillion Coal Company—called simply the "Vee Cee" by local residents.

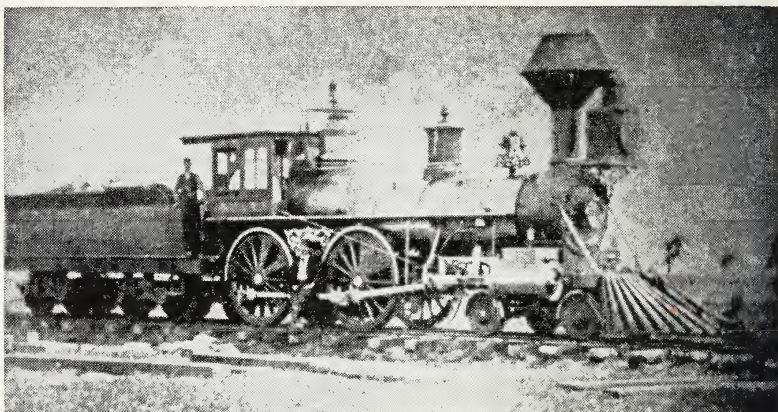
Competitors of course soon entered the field. Colonel Plumb, forming his own Coal Run Company, opened his so-called "Peanut Mine" on the west side of Vermillion Street just north of Coal Run Creek. In the mid-1870's, the Streator and Joliet Coal Company dug a 115-foot shaft near the end of John Street. The CW&V Company branched out with the first of its three Number 2 mines in 1875, its shaft located near the intersection of Bridge and Illinois streets. Other early coal operators included the Riverbank Coal Company and the Haswell mine, with shafts sunk south of the river and east of Coal Run Creek. John Kangley opened a small mine at Twelfth and Bloomington, the Coal Run Company its Eagle shaft on West Second Street. Another Plumb family venture was the Pekin mine, east of Otter Creek along the present Santa Fe railroad tracks.

Bad luck seemed to haunt the Plumbs. Digging at the Pekin operation was extremely difficult because of the presence of



both water and quicksand. And at their Peanut mine occurred the first mine accident of any consequence, when the diggings were flooded by Coal Run Creek in April 1878. When the rushing waters of the stream broke through the ceiling of one of the mine tunnels early one morning, only one man of the hundred or so at work was unable to escape to the surface. It was estimated that the mine swallowed up about 12,000,000 gallons of water before the break was repaired. Although the owners went to work to pump out the workings and resume operations, the mine never again yielded any substantial coal.

Coal mining created a demand for more and better transportation. The Illinois Valley and Northern Railroad was built from the northwest in 1870. Tracks were laid directly south from Ottawa the following year for the Ottawa, Oswego, and Fox River Valley line—later part of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. The Fairbury, Pontiac and Northwestern (soon to be known as the Chicago and Paducah and eventually part of the Wabash) was built southward from Streator, using the “Ralph Plumb” engine in its construction. Along its route were founded



*The “Ralph Plumb” engine, used in building the first railroad into Streator. It was a big day when the locomotive—with Lev Black as engineer and William Parrett as fireman—chugged into town, completing rail connections with the Illinois Central.*



Collins (later Manville) in 1869 and Long Point in 1872. The "Hinckley Road," or Chicago, Pekin and Southwestern, connected Streator and Pekin; after various other changes this stretch became part of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe in 1890. Because of its many railroads, intersecting to form a kind of iron skeleton, Streator was to grow in rather disjointed clumps, with few long avenues or unbroken vistas. And because the railroads were constructed for the most part without overpasses, accidents have been frequent throughout the town's history.

Industries set up shop in the growing community. W. H. Lukins opened a lime kiln at Broadway and Vermillion. At Hickory and Wasson stood the Graves Foundry and Machine Shop, which specialized in mining apparatus such as ventilating fans. The Greener brothers operated the Streator Plow, Wagon and Carriage Works on South Park Street.

The mines and railroads brought an increase in population, and Streator began to hear strange accents and foreign tongues on its muddy streets and in its crowded stores and saloons. With the railroads came the Irish, the "Paddies" who wrote many a page in American railroad history. Their shacks along the "Stub End Road" at the west edge of town became "Company Row." Number 1 mine brought English, Welsh, and Scotch miners from the eastern United States, and their cluster of houses around the mine received the nickname of "Hell's Half Acre." With the opening of Number 2 mine, many Germans came to Streator.

An 1872 directory of La Salle County lists approximately 715 heads of family in the town of Streator, from C. Aker, laborer, to T. Zweng, laborer. Among the varied occupations listed are teamster, miner, cornsheller, tailor, bartender, and gunsmith, along with a few more unusual—capitilist [sic], gent of leisure, bee raiser, and U.S. pension surgeon. One David Little, though listed prosaically enough as a barber, advertised not only "Hair Cutting, Shaving and Dying," but also "Cupping, Leeching, Bleeding and Tooth Drawing" (Bloomington, below Main).

In typical American fashion, the "joiners" were on the scene early. The Masons founded a lodge in 1868, the IOOF a year

later. Also typically American was a dutiful attention to education. The small Union School—the first within the town limits, still partly preserved in the house at 114 West Elm—was followed in 1869 by a more substantial frame building, the Central School, located at Bloomington and Bridge streets.

The first bank, opened by Ralph Plumb's brother Samuel in 1869, stood at 124 South Bloomington (now the *Times-Press* building) and was known as the Bank of Streator until it received a federal charter and became the Union National Bank in 1874. (Though a rival bank received the first charter as the First National Bank that same year, it had a relatively brief existence.) One of Streator's proudest enterprises, the Heenan Department Store, first opened its doors in 1867 on Bloomington Street; the store burned the following year and was rebuilt in 1869 at Main and Park. The latter year saw the establishment of the first newspaper, the weekly *Monitor*. A second journal, the *Free Press*, set up its presses four years later, and the two papers began a rivalry that enlivened the town for decades. A third sheet, the *Pioneer*, came into being in 1875, proclaiming among other things that it intended to treat the *Monitor* "with silent contempt." It seems to have received the same treatment, and enjoyed but a short life.

As in most frontier communities, formal church organizations gradually superseded the more emotional "old-time religion" of the early camp meetings. The first church in Streator, an outgrowth of the rural Galloway Church (organized in 1858), was the Park Presbyterian of 1870. A year later came the first Roman Catholic church, St. Michael's (later Immaculate Conception), long known as "the Irish church" after the parishioners it served. In 1871 the CW&V Company donated the site for the First Methodist Church at the corner of Monroe and Bridge streets; the Evangelical Church was founded three years later. In 1874 Riverwood Cemetery was organized (the name was changed to Riverview in 1909).

The citizens of the town even started a library, forming the Streator Library Association on November 15, 1871. Officers were

Samuel Plumb, president; Dr. E. Evans and the Reverend L. R. Woods, vice-presidents; V. G. Wilson, secretary; Dr. Thomas Croswell, treasurer; and C. F. Morse, librarian. Mr. Morse was probably not overworked, as the library at first consisted of only 111 volumes in one case lodged in the office of F. D. Dalton at the Bank of Streator.

One old settler complained about this period that "there were no amusements—you had to make your own," and another said, "The average worker had no diversion except to go to the saloon, play pinochle, and drink beer." Statements indicating preference more than necessity, perhaps, because diversions did exist. For example, Oriental Hall opened in October 1873 with a program of Swiss bell ringers, a ladies' cornet band, and Charles Harrison, humorist. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" played there in the spring. Jeffery's *Guide to the Opera Houses, Theatres, etc. . . . of America* noted in its 1879 edition (as well as later ones) that Streator was "a good amusement town." There were patent medicine shows, lectures ("Romanism" a favorite topic), and concerts. (A *Monitor* note in 1876: "Wenona takes the premium on having bad boys. One of them put cayenne pepper on the stove during Professor Higgins' concert the other night.") Everyone welcomed the first Streator Fair, held in early September 1873. Farmers came from miles around to exhibit and buy livestock, and the running and trotting races aroused keen interest.

Then there was the circus. In the early days, these came overland from Ottawa and set up their tents where Prairie Creek crosses Park Street. According to one oldtimer, they usually had "three or four buffalo, two or three camels, six or seven cages of animals and several wagon loads of poles and canvases, a couple zebras and not over two elephants." Children were let out of school, "in fact, the teachers, parents, and everyone around here took in the show."

There were other diversions which our blasé pinochle-players may have been too old, or too wary, to pursue. The *Monitor* commented philosophically on an early form of girl-watching.

When a nice young man plants himself at the corner of Bloomington and Main streets to see the girls passing on wet, slushy days, and he makes the astounding discovery that his soul's idol is flat-footed, bow-legged, with calves no bigger than a pipestem, and that she wears badly run down No. 7 boots, he retires from his post of observation to meditate in seclusion on the hollow mockeries of this world.

In happier circumstances, acquaintance might be furthered over a genteel game of croquet. When cold weather set in, there were sleigh rides and perhaps evenings in the parlor looking at stereoscope views of Niagara Falls. Here a caution, also from the *Monitor*:

Young man, if you have been burning up another man's fuel and coal oil all winter without arriving at a definite understanding with his girl, you may expect to be chalked down as a glaring fraud, and to have the scathing finger of scorn, as well as the black muzzle of a bulldog pointed at you, if you attempt to take up your swing on the gate where you left off last fall.

By 1874 Streator had a population of over 4000. The wooden buildings, hitching posts, and unpaved streets gave it a frontier atmosphere, though some improvements had been made. Saloon-keeper Wilks had finally finished grading Main Street east to Monroe (it had taken him four years, or an average of one block per year). Some local businessmen and shopkeepers had grudgingly complied with the sidewalk ordinance, and board walks stretched from the Streator House at Main and Bloomington to the railroad depot on North Bloomington. These plank walks, sometimes as high as three and a half feet above street level, were reached by ramps. Even without rain, snow, or mud, the going could be dangerous. The *Free Press* ran the following item one August day in the early 70's:

A Streator pup went for a rat with so much vehemence the other evening, as to entirely disappear beneath the sidewalk, one of the clap boards having been displaced some time since by the boys and split into kite timber. An upheaval in the flimsy slats, a few feet ahead, where the

dog came up to breathe, developed something in the shape of the maddest little sweet eighteen the *Free Press* reporter has seen since his arrival. She was assisted to her feet by an outsider who happened near.

To prevent such mishaps, John McDermott used to make his rounds with boards, saw, and hammer, repairing the walks.

The heavy reliance on wood as a building material created a serious fire hazard, and it was not many years before Streator suffered the first of several major fires. This one occurred on a hot July night, Saturday the 11th, 1874, and destroyed all except one of the buildings on the south side of Main Street between Bloomington and Park. It was generally agreed to have started in the rear of Manley's Hardware Store, because its causes were not definitely known. The *Free Press* headline read:

OUR FIRE!  
Guess how it Started  
We will never tell  
Because We Can't.

The volunteer fire department, with the aid of a bucket brigade, kept the fire from spreading, but losses still amounted to about \$150,000. The *Free Press* singled out for attack "the large crowd of stalwart men who looked on but wouldn't move a muscle," but commended the Fire Department and two volunteer helpers (one, from Bloomington, "having not a cent's worth of interest in Streator"). The paper also praised "the women who, by their pluck and daring, proved themselves to be more than heroines. . . . Miss Agnes Hall and Mrs. M. C. Donagho, assisted by four or five men, struggled with the engine all the way to Main Street."

New buildings soon replaced the charred remains and Streator people turned their attention to other matters. They organized a high school, and the first sessions were held in 1875 in rooms over the Streator Bank. Those of a military, or exhibitionistic, turn of mind formed the Streator Guards, and over a hundred men met in the old armory to drill and to parade in their uniforms, complete with pigeon-tailed coats, gaudy epau-



lettes, and high caps. Businessmen were concerned, for a Wall Street panic in 1873 had caused a nationwide depression. By 1875 Streator was complaining of "intensely hard times" made worse by crop failures. Many Americans from settled regions decided to try their luck in the Far West, where silver mines and the open range promised better opportunities. Early in October, the *Free Press* wrote that "scarcely a day passes but that from one to half a dozen covered wagons pass through town bearing sturdy pioneers for some western region where they expect to find cheap lands and a fortune."

Only a week later, however, the paper commented that "there is no lack of work for all who are willing to work in Streator now. The coal men are crowded with orders, and cannot fill them near as fast as they desire. Merchants are busy, miners are busy, mechanics are busy; the back of hard times is broken." This easy optimism probably sounded a bit hollow to the owners of the First National Bank, which closed its doors in 1878 due to the depression.

People were worried about sickness—about malaria, typhoid, smallpox, and diphtheria—and were urged to cut the luxuriant crop of weeds which was thought to be partly responsible. Some were apprehensive about the new gas mains, installed in 1876, though they made possible bright new street lights to replace the kerosene lanterns people had hung outside their homes. (James Ryon lit both types from the back of his pony every evening.) Law enforcement was a problem too. One citizen wrote the *Monitor* to protest the "brutal taste" of justices and officers who had sentenced a malefactor to wear a ball and chain through the city streets; it was pointed out that this was quite legal, if inhumane.

Worried by the growing number of saloons and public displays of drunkenness and violence, Streator residents took up temperance. The so-called Red Ribbon movement found adherents all over northern Illinois, and Streator was no exception. At a meeting of the Streator Literary Society in 1875, members debated the question: "Resolved; That Rum has caused more

misery than Fashion." Wrote the *Free Press* in 1878: "Every member of the village board has donned the ribbon and flaunt their colors in the open air." At a meeting of the men to organize a reform club, Colonel Plumb came forward, took the pledge, and made an address, reported as follows:

He expressed himself as being exceedingly well pleased with the movement, although he had been inclined to treat the work with a certain coldness. But from the magnificent proportions it had assumed and the probability of its accomplishing a vast amount of good in Streator he was constrained to believe he had not calculated well at the beginning. . . . He had made an estimate as to the cost of liquor that is daily drunk in Streator, and said it could not fall below \$400 per diem. He instanced if this amount should be spent in educational purposes, in macadamizing the streets, in beautifying and building homes, how much more beneficial and lasting would be the results, how society would be metamorphosized—how everything would be changed and how much more imposing an aspect Streator would present to strangers and travelers.

Though the temperance movement won followers, backsliding was common, the lure of whisky, beer, and pinochle remained strong, and few saloonkeepers went out of business.

By the end of the 1870's—scarcely a decade after Colonel Plumb's arrival in the little settlement of Unionville—the town had grown remarkably. People of many nationalities had flocked in, gone to work, and built homes. Schools, churches, and stores stood where only ten years before had been farms and timber. Endless tunnels and caverns underground echoed with the clink of axes and the rumble of loaded coal cars. Miles of railroad track linked the new community to others in the area, and to the growing centers of Chicago and St. Louis. It was essentially a frontier community, in many ways raw and crude—a rather unattractive town, not yet profiting from the graces and refinements of settled civilization. But it was vigorous and energetic, anxious to work, move on, make progress. In the next decade, it would do just that.

## CHAPTER FOUR

*Inside the Streator Bottle and Glass Company.*





## “STREATOR IS A SMASHING TOWN”

A SMALL item in the *La Salle Press* in June 1881 read as follows:

N. H. Deisher of Streator was over here a day or two this week to see his old friends. He says Streator is a booming town and he likes it first rate. We must caution friend D. to be very careful of himself, for there are lots of holes in the ground over there where people tumble in very frequently and are killed. Streator is a smashing town.

Though the punning *La Salle* journalist meant only to toss a barb in Streator's direction (small-town rivalries assumed almost paranoid proportions in those days), he was right. Streator *was* booming, and not just from the “holes in the ground” and the coal they yielded.

For the decade of the 1880's saw the development of new resources—resources which, though none knew it at the time, would help Streator survive when its coal mines failed. One was a clay and shale combination ideal for making brick, tile, and related products. The clay was found on or near the surface of the ground; the shale beds lay from six to fifteen feet below, varied in thickness from twenty to sixty feet, and stretched out over almost 20,000 acres.

As with coal, the Plumb family played an important role in developing the new industry. Colonel Plumb wanted a new house, and he wanted it built of brick. In 1874 he brought in a craftsman from eastern Ohio to make bricks for his fourteen-room “mansion” at the southwest corner of Broadway and Wasson and, incidentally, teach others how to do it. With Streator's building boom, the brick manufacturers had no trouble finding business



after the colonel's home was finished. In fact, the entire northern Illinois area furnished a good market for building materials; this was particularly true of Chicago, which had begun a gigantic rebuilding program after its great fire in 1871.

Colonel Plumb's imported brick maker remains anonymous, but we do know that another early entrepreneur in this field was John Kangley, who began operations in the mid-1870's at a location just north of his coal mine. Another early brickmaker was Thomas Willey, of Lacon, who opened a plant about 1876.

Bricks in these first plants were made by hand, and it was a slow and monotonous job. Workmen dumped the yellow clay and pieces of hemp rope into a tank containing an iron wheel with attached blades. A pole through the hub of the wheel was hitched to a team of horses; as they circled the tank, the wheel turned and its blades broke the clay into small pieces. Water was then added to form a muddy paste, which workmen shoveled out onto a platform. There they kneaded it and packed it into molds. (Hence the nickname "paddies" for the hand brick makers.) After these were turned out and dried in the sun for a few days, the bricks were baked in a kiln. "Lots of work for a small amount of brick," said one brick worker. And small wages, too: the men were paid on a piecework basis, 90¢ per hundred bricks.

The clay products business increased in the 1880's. Colonel Plumb's son John and his nephew Fawcett opened the Eagle Clay Works in 1880, the first plant to use machine methods. Located on the river about a mile south and a mile west of the center of town, the plant specialized in agricultural drain tile. The Eagle works were soon turning out 6500 tiles a week. Other companies in the tile business included the Streator Tile and Brick Works and Colonel Plumb's drain tile factory on La Rue Street just east of the Santa Fe tracks. By the fall of 1881, the latter firm was making between 60,000 and 80,000 tiles weekly. In 1882 came the Bruner Brothers Tile Works to the northeast. More brick plants opened, too: Vincent Kangley's hand brick factory in the town that now bears his name, and the Mulford

and Jackson brick plant in Streator. Colonel Plumb set up his Streator Paving Brick Company just east of the present Owens-Illinois factory, where the firm made sidewalk tile and a heavy paving brick called "cobble stone." Another Plumb enterprise, the Streator Brick Works, specialized in sand molded brick of great durability. It was soon turning out 20,000 bricks a day.

The 1880's saw still another resource added to Streator's coal, clay, and shale. This was silica sand, found near the surface of the ground and of good quality for glass. As was the case with clay, the industry caught on rapidly. The first glass factory, descriptively named the Window Glass Company (generally known as "the old window glass house"), opened for business in 1880 and soon employed 150 men. In the following year, Matt Jack established one of the most important of all Streator enterprises, the Streator Bottle and Glass Company. Although it had been organized in 1879 by a group of Streator businessmen, it was not until Jack obtained additional capital from Adolphus Busch (of the Anheuser-Busch breweries) two years later, that the company could begin actual operations. The plant was built in the summer of 1881 near the GM&O tracks just west of the "Old Slope" mine. It specialized, naturally enough, in pint and quart beer bottles, the first of which was blown in October of that year.

Two other flat glass companies of the same era were the Streator Glass Works, which turned out window glass on South Sterling Street, and the Streator Cathedral Glass Company, founded in 1886 for the manufacture of roofing glass and skylights.

Several new firms set up shop in the "smashing" town of Streator during the 1880's. Among them were Iwan Brothers, makers of tile ditching equipment, hoes, and plows; the Industrial Foundry and Machine Works; several planing and woodworking mills and the S. W. Williams paper mill; and the Streator National Chair Car Manufacturing Company, manufacturer of reclining chairs for railroad coaches. The Powers Hardware Company, founded in 1885, was to expand (as Powers and Williams) into the largest retail hardware store in Illinois.

Industry's ally, the railroad, had a new representative in the form of the Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa line, which reached the outskirts of Streator from Momence in 1882 (because of difficulties involving the right of way, the line stopped at Streator Junction); the Three I, as it was called, later became part of the New York Central. For one year only—1887—the Santa Fe line installed its car repair shops in Streator, where they sprawled out over ten acres east of the present depot. The car shops, which employed about 600 men, were moved out when the railroad extended its line farther westward.

As usual, more business meant more people. Reflecting the trend of general United States immigration at this time, many of Streator's newcomers were from central and eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Slovakia. Many Slovaks clustered together in Painter's Addition, to the northeast. Both Poles and Slovaks settled on the southern edge of town in the Vermillion City area (at this time generally known as "Old Number 3," after a CW&V shaft, or as South Streator). The oldest Slovak Lutheran church in America was built in this neighborhood, just west of Bloomington Street, in 1884. The first pastor, the Reverend Cyril Droppa, came directly from Austria-Hungary at the request of a group of Slovak Lutheran families.

Like many other Americans who have chosen to forget their own origin as immigrants, people in Streator felt superior to the newcomers, and settled on the term "Hungarian" as a handy catchall for the central Europeans. It was inaccurate—some say that only one family in all of Streator was of Hungarian origin—and was resented as derogatory by Poles and Slovaks alike. In an age that was outspoken about its prejudices, the local papers mirrored the feelings of the townspeople in their frequent disapproving references to the fights, drunkenness, and general "strangeness" of the newcomers. For instance, the *Free Press* in June 1881 reported on a wedding in "the state of Hungary, in Painter's addition, Monday evening, at which they had the usual trimmings, resulting in a tuss." The fight was continued the next night, but this time police stepped in. A hearing was set, at which,

said the *Press*, "an interpreter will be necessary to translate what they say into United States language."

The same note of good-natured condescension is apparent in the following tongue-in-cheek report:

A new plan for dividing the town into wards has been suggested. It is to make the division on nationality rather than street lines. There would then be an English ward, an Irish ward, a Welsh ward, a German ward, and a Yankee ward. Then when a man came to vote his brogue would be a test of his right to vote in that ward, and many complications would thus be avoided. The only trouble about this is that it makes no provisions for Hop Wah and Painter and his Hungarians, but then a miscellaneous ward might be established where all these odds and ends could be gathered.

Streator might deprecate its "odds and ends," but it was certainly proud of the growth they made possible. The population grew from 5157 in 1880 to 11,414 in 1890—a greater increase than in any other decade in the city's history. With a truly American interest in pure quantity, amateur statisticians labored happily. In 1881, for example, one estimated that a hundred houses were being built per month, taking an average of ten days to build and each housing five persons. (This would mean a monthly growth of 500 persons—probably a high estimate to begin with, and certainly one that did not hold steady.) Another soon afterward wrote confidently that "The growth of Streator has been very rapid, but withal substantial, and everything is indicative that before many years hence we will have a population of at least FIFTY THOUSAND."

One indication of Streator's growth was the newspaper business. The *Free Press* switched from a weekly to an afternoon daily paper in 1880, the *Monitor* two years later. A new journal, the *Independent-Times*, began as a weekly in 1885 and after a year began putting out a daily, morning edition. Foreign journals made their appearance, too. Two German papers, the *Volksblatt* and the *Beobachter*, established in 1884, combined in 1885. Three years later, the *Nova Vlast* ("New Home") found an audience among Streator's sizable Slovakian population.



By 1882 Streator was large enough to incorporate as a city, and in April the townspeople voted overwhelmingly to do so. On the night of July 3, the village became a city, and a city council replaced the old trustees. Offices were held by the following: Colonel Ralph Plumb, president; John E. Williams, clerk; John T. Kuhns, treasurer; J. T. Murdock, attorney; Joseph Mosher, superintendent of streets; Henry Smith, marshal; and R. A. Hattenhauer, park commissioner. The aldermen were John Arthur, George Bronson, J. C. Campbell, Hugh Hall, W. W. Haskell, B. A. Hattenhauer, J. M. Hess, Thomas Hudson, L. C. Mills, and Joseph O'Neil.

The new status of the town seems to have aroused less excitement than the Fourth of July, always occasion for great festivities during this era. Streator's own baseball team, the Reds, beat Chicago, and the *Free Press* wrote that "Considering the great crowd that thronged the city . . . the good order that generally prevailed was gratifying. Five persons were juggled in all, most of them being cases of plain drunk."

In 1884 a native son, Colonel Plumb, was elected to Congress; he served two terms as a strongly partisan Republican, and was noted chiefly for his support of the Library of Congress. The following year it was reported that the old corporation lines extended only about midway from the center to the edge of the city proper, and that if the city limits were extended correctly the population would total 13,000. In 1886 a Santa Fe locating engineer reported on Streator that "land is worth all the way from \$20.00 to \$150.00 per acre, the price of \$75.00 to \$95.00 per acre generally prevailing on the uplands while in the vicinity of Streator the value rapidly rises." Two years later it was reported that some city land which had brought \$10.00 an acre in 1868 was now selling for \$240.00 per front foot.

In spite of the burgeoning population and general prosperity, little had yet been done about paving the streets or sidewalks; an 1883 ordinance requiring walks to be cindered did not improve matters much. The city fathers began to fear for the safety of large buildings in the central business district because

of the coal workings that threatened to eat the city's foundations out from under it. In 1883 the CW&V Company gave all property owners between Hickory and Bridge from Bloomington to Sterling streets an opportunity to purchase the mineral rights at 50¢ per foot. The citizens quickly raised the money and therefore prevented this area from being undermined. It was at this time, too, that the coal company donated to Streator the land for the City Park.

The 1880's brought other improvements, one of the most important being telephone service. Wires were strung in May of 1881 and the first phones, seventy in all, were installed in June. Local papers carefully instructed townspeople how to hold and crank the new contraptions and how far away to stand, and warned them severely to "strictly avoid shouting." By October there were eighty-one exchanges; Heenan's store, by the way, had #1. Another innovation was electric light, initially used only for street lighting. The first lamp was installed at the corner of Main and Vermillion in April of 1885. A warm May evening of that year becomes vivid through this brief observation by a local reporter: "The electric light is indeed a wonderful contrivance. Last evening about ten o'clock we noticed two little boys playing 'Boston' under the glare of electricity. They seemed to enjoy it as much as if it was noonday." The Streator Gas and Light Company was organized in 1886, with Aaron K. Stiles as president.

Water was a problem. Individual wells were not feasible for a community growing as fast as Streator. The city dug an artesian well, but it seemed to present new problems. An 1882 report noted: "The artesian well water which is now left running at the corner of Main and Bloomington streets attracts considerable attention, and is being extensively used by parties in this locality for drinking purposes. Being quite salty it has a tendency to increase the beer traffic in that locality."

An ample public supply was certainly necessary, and controversy arose as to where it should come from. One group strongly favored Otter Creek, while another recommended the

Vermillion River. The former group carried the day, and the newly formed Streator Aqueduct Company inaugurated water service in 1886. In less than a year, however, it became obvious that the creek could not supply enough water for Streator's needs. In 1887 the company shifted its pipes and began drawing water from the river about three miles south of the city. All was still far from perfect. In 1888, a writer describing the beauties and advantages of the new town had to admit that "It has long been an open secret that the quality of Streator's water was one of its tenderest points . . . that . . . the river supply in its raw state is unquestionably bad, a fact that may be the more freely admitted now that scientific advancement has made it possible to absolutely eliminate all elements dangerous to health or comfort. How to kill the germs without killing the people has been a most anxious and perplexing problem." Happily, that problem was solved, although others—particularly those due to floods—were to plague the town for decades.

The streets rang with the sound of hammers and saws. The Plumb House went up in 1882, the Streator National Bank that same year and the Wilson and Kuhns Bank two years later. The first parochial school, St. Mary's, was built in 1880, but it soon became overcrowded and in 1889 St. Anthony's and St. Stephen's began classes. Colonel Plumb donated funds for a high school building, which was dedicated in 1882. By 1888 there were seven elementary schools and sixteen churches. And, though still housed in makeshift quarters, the library had increased to 4000 volumes. The City Hall was built in the mid-80's. Perhaps most important, Streator had a new hospital. The Sisters of St. Francis had begun taking patients in the Van Skiver home (across from the hospital's present location) in 1887; the first building of St. Mary's Hospital was opened the following year.

It was a lively time. For wintertime fun, townspeople liked riding on J. J. Geraghty's toboggan slide, swooping down the river bluff from the foot of Wilson Street. His roller skating rink in Oriental Hall was popular, too. Traveling professional troupes offered a remarkable variety of entertainment. In the winter of

1881, for example, energetic theatergoers could see the “4 Big Four 4” Minstrels, hear Swedish violinist Ole Bull, attend a concert by the Rivals Concert Company, enjoy Gilmore’s play “Humpty Dumpty,” and hope for uplift from a lecturer advertised simply as Mrs. Livermore—all within two weeks! And the following fall brought the one and only Buffalo Bill with his “mammoth combination” including Dr. F. (White Beaver) Powell, the medicine chief of the Winnebago Sioux Indians, and He-me-kaw, the “handsomest Indian maiden in existence.” Small wonder that the town soon felt the need of additional entertainment facilities, or that its benefactor, Colonel Plumb, should provide them. His Plumb Opera House opened in 1883, its ceiling hung with gas and kerosene lamps, its red velvet curtains trimmed with gold. The hall could hold 1300 persons but, due to the vagaries of show business, was not always commercially successful. A local writer observed a few years later that “Colonel Plumb expected no profit from it, and was not disappointed.”

Local talent flourished, too. One event long remembered was the Advertising Carnival held by the Ladies’ Library Association in the Armory in 1888. Leading merchants set up booths, and a hundred businesses and industries were represented in a grand pageant of “100 handsomely, magnificently, extravagantly costumed ladies, the youth and pride and beauty of Streator, a city that during the past few years has been making as great advances socially as it has been materially.”

Which is not to say that the less socially approved amusements lost favor. By 1887 there were thirty-seven saloons, and the local papers continued to run admonitory notices from time to time:

A gentleman of statistical turn of mind estimates that if the working men of Streator would, for one year, save the money they now spend for drink which benefits them not, they would at the end of that time have enough to start a national bank like Colonel Plumb’s, with a capital stock of \$80,000, and still have a large surplus.

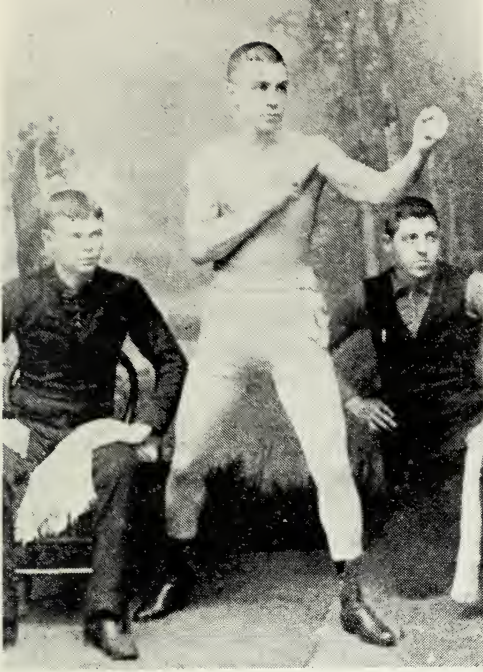
As if all this were not bad enough, a new vice hit town, and again the journalists felt called upon to take a stand:



While one of our reporters was wending his way home last evening about 8:35 o'clock, he overtook four young ladies on Wilson Street, and as he passed them he was startled by a puff of smoke being blown at him from four pairs of rosy lips. He then noticed that each one of the fair damsels had a cigarette in her mouth and was evidently having a big time. Now, girls, we won't mention names this time. But beware! We have a "hi like a beagle," and will publish you if again discovered indulging in this vile practice.

Certainly among the men, however, one form of entertainment had a stronger appeal than all the others. This was boxing. In these days, and in fact well into the next century, the sport was illegal in Illinois, as in most of the United States. The Queensberry rules had not yet been generally accepted, and the bare-knuckle contests that most fighters engaged in were regarded officially as a cruel form of sport to be discouraged. Unofficially, boxing matches were fairly common, at least in northern Illinois. Betting, of course, was the great incentive, and frequently involved large sums of money. Fighters trained in secret, usually on outlying farms, while promoters constructed boxing rings in the countryside near railroad tracks, spread the news of coming fights, and arranged for special trains. Spectators climbed on unaware of their destination, although they might expect to find themselves at such commonly used locations as Braidwood and Evans Station. Bob Fitzsimmons and Jim Corbett both fought near Streator, and the town produced local talent that included "Mysterious" Billy Smith and Tommy Johnston. But Streator's pride and joy was lightweight Billy Myer, "The Streator Cyclone." In 1886, for instance, he fought Chicago's Paddy Welch, the featherweight champion of Illinois, for \$1000. The train from Streator to Braidwood carried St. Patrick's band and 150 eager fans, who undoubtedly came home happier and richer when their boy won in three rounds. (Myer, by the way, fought for the championship in New Orleans in 1892, he lost to Jack McAuliffe and did little fighting of consequence thereafter.)

The town boasted several new stores, and papers advertised a variety of products. In 1885, for example, a May issue of the



*Billy Myer in the days of his triumphs as a bare-knuckle fighter. Posing proudly with "The Streator Cyclone" are Ed Myer, left, and Ed Pope.*

*Free Press* carried ads by Condren and Purcell (wallpapers, carpets, and mattings), D. Wolfermann (men's and boys' clothing), Hattenhauer and McDougall (paints, oils, brushes), Charles P. Swan (wallpaper, window shades), George M. Rigden (jewelry), and Goll's meat market (roast at 10¢ per pound). Other notices appealed to readers who might be interested in buying roasted Mocha and Java coffee (three pounds for \$1.00), taking violin lessons, having a well sunk, or purchasing the services of a Jersey bull. The ailing might be encouraged by a small headline: "Truth is mighty and must prevail. So also must Mishler's Herb Bitters!" (Invaluable for weakness, nervous exhaustion, dyspepsia, and kidney and liver complaints.) Dr. Kline claimed that his Great Nerve Restorer cured fits and epilepsy, while the sellers of Medicated Body Bands promised relief for a vast array of physical ills.

Basically, Streator owed its progress during the booming 80's to one chief factor—coal. The new clay products and glass industries were still essentially in their early stages. While water pipes were laid and telephone lines strung, while women rehearsed pageants (and their husbands congregated at saloons and bet on the fights), the real life of the city throbbed underground.

Every year brought new “holes in the ground,” as operators dug down for the coal that seemed to stretch out inexhaustibly. (It was often cheaper to sink a new shaft than to haul the coal long distances underground to an old one.) The CW&V Company opened its first Number 3 mine about 1880, its entrance south of Twelfth Street and just east of the Santa Fe tracks. This operation eventually covered about 440 acres, at an average depth of 65 feet. It was the opening of this mine, soon known as “Old Number 3,” that brought Streator’s first central European immigrants. The same period saw the opening of the Streator Coal Company’s two mines (“old” and “new” Number 4)—the shaft of the former at the south end of Coal Street, that of the latter on the old car shop property.

A second mine flood occurred in 1881, three years after the “Peanut” disaster, when Prairie Creek broke into the workings of the CW&V’s Number 1 mine. The break, on November 12, happened at about one o’clock in the morning, when the mine was not in operation, so that the only casualties were two drowned mules. The *Free Press* wrote proudly that “the water poured in without interruption. Where it went over the bank it made a cataract which some said reminded them in a small way of Niagara.” The company started pumping almost immediately, however, and the mine was soon back in operation.

More shafts were sunk, the CW&V’s “new” Number 3 in 1885 south of Livingston Road on the west side of the Santa Fe tracks; its second Number 2 mine (the “Barnhart Number 2”) two years later. The shaft of the latter, near Shabbona and Fourth, went down about 75 feet, and the mine worked out about 175 acres. It was this same year—1887—that would go down in Streator history as the year of the big explosion.

It happened at about 2:30 on the morning of April 21, during a heavy rainstorm. Lightning struck the small brick powder house of the Number 2 mine, where the company stored the gunpowder required for blasting out coal. A huge explosion wakened much of Streator, and a scene of wild disorder ensued. The story is told of one Jock McNeil, a saloonkeeper accustomed

to frequent violence on his premises, who had retired early that night to his lodgings behind the saloon. Aroused by the explosion, he stumbled out into the street (clad, it is said, only in his long underwear) and collided with a running policeman just as he discovered that the entire front of his building had collapsed in a heap of rubble. "Jock, what happened?" shouted the policeman. Replied McNeil, "I don't know, but there's been a hell of a fight here tonight!"

When the dust cleared, it was learned that the shaft buildings had been leveled and that over forty houses on Illinois and Livingston streets had been damaged beyond repair. Flying bricks and other debris had shattered windows as far as eight blocks away. Though there was only one fatality (a man asleep who was struck by a falling brick), many persons were cut and bruised. One paper reported succinctly: "Isadore Kopp kept boarders. Boarders will not eat on plates today. Not a whole dish in the house." And skeptically: "Nate McIntyre reports that he heard the explosion thirteen miles in the country. Great ear on that man, eh?"

The big question was: Had the CW&V Company stored dynamite in the shed? An Illinois statute forbade the storage of dynamite within 100 yards of residential property. Company spokesmen denied it, stating that the shed had contained only about 750 kegs of powder. Others insisted, however, that the shed held not only 800 kegs of powder but also 500 pounds of dynamite. A coroner's jury settled the matter legally by ruling that the shed had housed no dynamite—disappointing news for those who hoped to collect damages. These were estimated as follows:

Total loss of 40 houses @ \$500	\$20,000
Partial destruction of 100 houses @ \$100	10,000
Glass destroyed elsewhere	10,000
Loss to CW&V Co.	5,000
	<hr/> \$45,000

The mine was never reopened.



Floods and explosions notwithstanding, coal was king. In the year 1885, Streator produced more of it than any other town in the Midwest. Three thousand men worked in her twenty-odd mines, digging out a million tons of coal a year. The estimated monthly payroll, however, totaled a mere \$150,000—averaging \$50.00 per month per miner. Small pay for a ten-hour day, a six-day week. Wages were figured on a piecework basis, at this time generally 90¢ a ton for lump coal. Two men, working together as buddies and furnishing their own powder and tools, could surface five to seven tons a day.

It was common practice to pay wages half in gold, half in scrip. Although the scrip was honored only at the company store maintained by the individual mining company, various arrangements were worked out to circumvent such restrictions. For instance, since the CW&V store (established in 1877 at 317-319 East Main) had the largest stock of merchandise, company employees could exchange their scrip with employees of other mines at a profit. There were others who specialized in buying scrip for cash—at a discount, of course—in and around saloons. Payday sprees were common; the *Free Press* considered it newsworthy in 1882 to report that “but one drunk is reported for payday.”

Generally speaking, few miners made more than a bare living. According to one: “A man who mined coal for a living had to be more than a miner. You had to keep a cow, a pig or two, and plant a big garden in order to hold body and soul together. We were as poor as church mice.” The work was dangerous as well, because few precautions were taken against explosions, rock falls, and gas. Though Streator’s mines never witnessed a major disaster, few weeks passed during the period between 1870 and 1910 without at least one fatality underground.

Still, there were advantages. One oldtimer, who had “tried factories but went back to mining,” explained that in the mines “you had bosses but they weren’t looking over your shoulder all the time. You were on piece work and, in a sense, your own boss. If a miner wanted to make money he had to work and



*Miners below ground. The streaks of light are from the lamps in their caps. In the early days, these burned oil or a wax-and-kerosene mixture known as "Sunshine."*

that was all the boss he needed." And another added: "Don't forget . . . that a man who didn't care how many cars he loaded got stuck with a poor room. You had to be a good miner to get a good room; you had to get out that coal!" To the advantages of independence could be added another, less easily defined, nonetheless appealing.

Being down in a coal mine was like being in another world. There was a lot of fun as well as a lot of work. The young fellows kept things lively and didn't let the older miners grow old. It was like an underground saloon but without booze. It was a strict rule and also against the law to drink liquor in a coal mine. It was also against the rules to actually fight while underground. You couldn't hit another man or your job was gone, but the cursing was fierce. An argument in the mine would be fought out in some saloon later if the arguers were still angry. But in most cases the arguments were forgotten topside. It was two different worlds.

The growth, the bustle, the get-rich-quick fever of Streator in the 80's exacted their price. One was political corruption. According to election returns, Bruce Township voted for the Republican, James G. Blaine, against his victorious opponent, Grover Cleveland, in the presidential election of 1884. Four years later, again Republican (as the nation this time), with a

52 per cent increase in voting population, Bruce Township cast 1349 votes for Harrison, 1186 for Cleveland. Back of such neat statistical tabulations lies another story:

The superintendent of mines would herd the miners down and vote them to suit himself. Half of them didn't know what they were voting, but he'd give them their tickets and take them down and see that they voted. Heenan would corral another bunch who owed him or were trading on book, and he'd lock them in the store until the polls opened, and he'd send them down. Oh, it was swell here.

As to other vices, newspaper articles give some indication. In 1882: "How long is this thing to last is the question which agitates the minds of several of our citizens, or to be more explicit, how long are those two strumpets who parade the principal streets both day and night, going to be permitted." In 1887: "So long as great dray loads of beer are taken into the suburbs every Saturday and drunk every Sunday, crime must increase and morality suffer." And, two years later, a lengthy report:

Do you know them? Their names are Joseph Murphy (not the comedian), F. B. Wilson and Charles Wilson (no relation to our popular banker), John Hayes (not our local butcher), John Sullivan (not the heavyweight who divides pugilistic honors with Billy Myer), and lastly Thomas Murphy. No, you don't know them, nor does anybody else, though doubtless there was a time when they were "Somebody's Darlings," but now they are the scrawniest, toughest, dirtiest and ugliest lot of looking "vags" and bums that have been inside of the city jail since the good old Santa Fe construction days when police business was brisk. They are so unkempt a crowd that the police would not disgrace the patrol wagon with them, but forced them to walk to the city jail from the gas house, that paradise of bums, where they were gathered last night. For the next 30 days their address will be at the county jail, and Sheriff Morrissey has our sincere sympathy in his affliction.

One of the most interesting accounts of Streator during this era comes from the pen of an immigrant-turned-professor who

spent a few months in the town sometime after 1886. Edward Steiner, born in Austria and educated in Germany, came to America as a young man. After a succession of laborer's jobs in New York City, rural Pennsylvania, and Chicago, he decided to try Streator. (He had heard the name from Slovaks on the steamer, who were bound for its mines.) Although Steiner was later to become a minister and teach at Grinnell College, his Streator experience was that of the struggling, somewhat embittered young newcomer who has not yet found his place in the world. In his book *From Alien to Citizen*, he wrote:

The town lay uninvitingly among the coal mines which gave it life. Its geometric streets contained the usual stores with the invariable surplus of saloons. The residence district stretched in every direction; while at the most undesirable edges of town the miners had settled in hopeless, unkempt groups. These localities were known as prisoners are—merely by numbers, and were fast deteriorating; for the more stable and advanced population of Welsh and German miners was giving way to the changeable, newer, immigrant groups. . . .

Its upper current, as far as I could feel it, was dominated by two rival newspapers, which . . . flung Billingsgate at each other; and a German singing society which met every Sunday afternoon, and in which the drinking and the singing were so mixed that it proved quite distasteful to me.

My greatest attraction was a bakeshop and candy store combined, kept by some diminutive Welshmen who had been pushed up from the mine by the Slav invasion.

Steiner was referring to the Hill brothers; he probably found their store less accessible after he lost his first job, in a lumber yard, and with it his room in a downtown boarding house.

Fortunately, I had previously met the Slovaks with whom I crossed the ocean, and with them I again began life, as a miner. I must confess that the work brought me no joy and I never learned it with any degree of proficiency.

This change removed me somewhat more from the town, necessitating, as it did, my living in an isolated Slovak "patch" near the mine,



which I think was known as Number 3. The boarding house was presided over by the wife of one of my fellow-workmen, and was as neat and clean as a woman could make a house in which from twelve to fifteen men ate and slept, and in which she was also trying to rear her little family.

What made her task more difficult was the fact that the "patch" seemed to be a law unto itself, as far as cleanliness or even sanitary conditions was concerned. The only time it realized that it was under some government control was when the officers came to interfere in the not infrequent brawls.

The miners were entirely out of touch with the community, except through the saloons, which were still in the hands of Germans and fairly decent; especially one of them, whose owner rarely stepped behind the bar; and whose children were prohibited from patronizing the place.

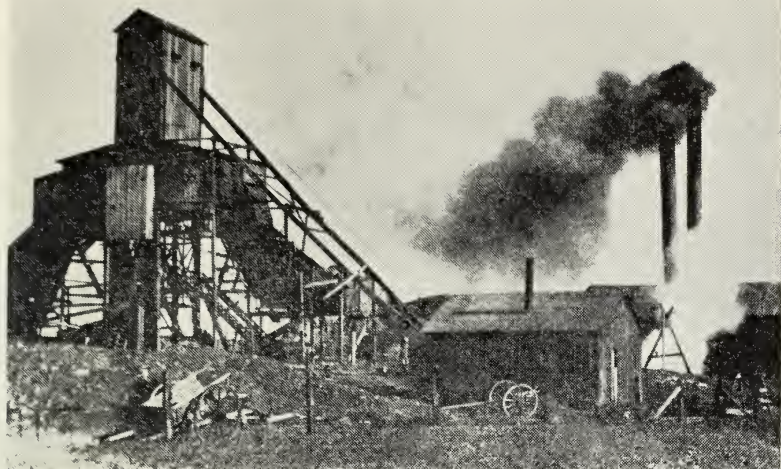
The town as a whole was law-abiding and respectable, and its general influence upon the foreign group was good. If there had been some man or group of men who would have brought the community and the strangers into vital relationship, the results might have been far better than they now are.

The number of Slovaks was small enough at that time to have discovered and developed leaders among them. But there, as everywhere else, we were regarded as inferior interlopers and treated with contempt.

Steiner taught English to his fellow immigrants and also, being of an atheistic turn of mind at the time, lectured them on the futility of religion. But he had little leisure time.

Regularly every day except Sunday, I descended into the mine, which was then being worked at a low level, and little by little all the resistance I had felt to this form of labor disappeared; although I never descended without fear, and never saw daylight without joy.

The man with whom I worked, whose helper I was, an uneducated unspoiled Slav of about thirty, had come, like most of his kind, lured by the high wages. He had left his wife and little children behind, to labor, stint and save, and hoped finally to lift himself above the low social and economic status which was the lot of his class. He talked to me frequently of the pain of the parting and the joyous anticipation of



*Shaft buildings at the entrance of the Streator Coal Company's "old" Number 4 mine, at the foot of Coal Street. The so-called "slack field" is now a baseball diamond.*

going home. His whole mind was set upon the increase of his savings, and he toiled like a man hungry for his work, as in his stolid way he faced unflinchingly the dangers of the daily task.

We worked in close proximity, rarely being more than ten feet apart. One day I was loading the car when the roof of the chamber gave way. In falling, a huge slab of rock became wedged between the car and a corner of the chamber. The lighter end was on my side and the heavier part fell upon my companion, crushing him beneath its weight. He was taken out alive, lingered a few weeks, and died.

Steiner soon moved on to better circumstances. He came back years later, softened in mood and full of praise for a man about whom we shall hear more later.

It was more than twenty years before I returned to that mine, but I did not descend. Above it in a spacious auditorium, I lectured to some who knew me when, with miner's cap and blackened face, I walked through that city—to many more who did not know that I ever had been there; while a few among the number were of supreme interest to me.

One of them, a Welshman, risen from the mine, had lifted the community with him and permeated it with his practical idealism. His influence was felt in every mine and shop of his state, and even beyond its borders. He was the "strong man, the hiding place in time of storm" for the lesser folk; the man for whom men and communities wait—too often in vain.

Because the men who thus arise are so rare, and the cities blessed by them so few, I shall name both. The man is J. E. Williams, and the place, Streator, Illinois.

## CHAPTER FIVE

*Streator's own team, clear of eye and serious of mien.*





## THE 90'S BRING WAR AND A SCANDAL

**T**HE year 1890 was Benjamin Harrison's second in office as President. Idaho and Wyoming joined the Union, and the population reached 63,000,000. William Dean Howells published *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, though people were much more interested in reading Kipling's *The Light That Failed* and Francis Crawford's *A Cigarette Maker's Romance*. The United Mine Workers was organized, the pneumatic hammer was patented, and all over the country amateur photographers were busily snapping pictures with Mr. Eastman's new Kodak.

For Streator, 1890 brought some new developments, together with the comfortable assurance that life was continuing in its accustomed pattern. A new enterprise, the Alliance Manufacturing Company, set up shop and began building, repairing, and selling farm implements. Three new glass companies opened for business: the Streator Rough Plate and Glass Company, the Flint Glass Factory (along the Santa Fe tracks at Grant Street), and the Art Glass Factory. A farseeing editorial in the *Free Press* went so far as to remark that "It is very evident that future manufacturing enterprises in Streator will largely be confined to the glass industry." But familiar patterns continued, too. It was a big year for church socials on parsonage lawns. The summer meeting of the Streator Driving Park Association sponsored horse races from July 29 to August 1 before capacity audiences. Both Wallace Company and Barnum and Bailey brought their circuses to town. The latter's street parade was witnessed by thousands, who saw the chariots of Blue Beard, Mother Goose, Santa Claus, and the old woman in the shoe, as well as seven open dens of lions, tigers, hyenas, wolves, and bears, a herd of elephants, a



drove of camels with chariots, zebras, Shetland ponies, knights in full armor, performing horses, and a “mechanical automatic steam musical chariot.” True to form, there were complaints about the number of saloons—now up to seventy—and pride in the streetcar line under construction. All was looking up, in short, and one local journal commented: “When the streetcar line is completed why not extend an invitation to neighboring towns to come and see us? Take them around to the new bottle works, new gas and electric light plant, new flint glass house, the new window factory, etc. At that time Streator will be using electricity for all the various practical purposes to which it has so far been successfully applied.”

The decade has become known as the “gay 90’s,” and in many ways it was a happy time. The phrase would have rung somewhat hollow to many people, however: drought-plagued farmers of the Great Plains, businessmen bankrupted by a severe depression, workmen striking for higher wages, soldiers dying of fever in lands whose names they could barely pronounce. Streator, too, felt the influence of these sobering events. The depression had its effects, particularly when local miners went out on a protracted strike. Some of her boys went off to war. And a scandal at home impugned the integrity of some of her own citizens.

These events took place against a background of general prosperity, however. As the key to Streator’s booming 80’s had been coal, so a chief factor in its continued growth during the following decade was glass. By the mid-90’s, there were 1000 glass blowers in and around Streator, many of them foreign born (the majority Germans). Matt Jack’s Streator Bottle and Glass Company employed the largest number, and managed consistently to weather all financial storms. By the end of the decade, another large operation opened. This was the Western Glass Company, makers of wire glass used extensively in skylights and wherever fire was a danger.

It was the glass blowers who were the elite of Streator’s working class. Their heyday was the fifteen-year period beginning

about 1890, a period that ended with the coming of mechanization. For the glass blowers were craftsmen; they were "hand" glass blowers, who followed an ancient craft. In a factory where bottles were made, molten glass was produced in open cauldrons. Glass blowers stood on trestles above the cauldrons, armed with iron tubes from eight to twenty feet long (the longer the tube, the bigger the bottle). A bottle blower dipped into the cauldron, gathered a lump of molten glass on the end of his tube, and swaying the mass, blew gently until a bottle resembling the desired shape emerged. He then snipped this "slug" off with his tongs, inserted it in a mold, and blew some more until the bottle was completed.

Working conditions were often unpleasant. Factories were unheated in the winter, and workers stood by the open-hearth furnaces, their faces burning and their backs icy. Pneumonia and other bronchial troubles were common. The furnaces were usually shut down from July to October, partly because of the need to overhaul and reline them with fire brick, and partly because of the heat. One item from a July 2, 1890, newspaper read:

Yesterday was the last day of the fire at the Ottawa flint house and the blowers all stopped working at 9:30 in the morning. They went in a body to the office and informed the manager that the heat was too intense for them to stand it any longer and that they would have to stop. Although they left a furnace full of glass, the company made no protest over the action of the men, merely saying that were they in their places they would not want to work.

Boys sometimes started to work in the glass plants when they were as young as eight. They served as apprentices—gathering boys, "snap-up" boys, and blowers' helpers—until they were about fourteen, working fourteen hours a day for 15¢ an hour. One man, recalling that he went to work in a glass factory at the age of twelve, speaks of carrying bottles from the blowers to the tempering room—walking an average of four miles an hour—as "the hardest work I ever did." By the time apprentices graduated

from half-pint bottles to five-gallon jugs (made from sixteen pounds of molten glass), they were ready to be full-time glass blowers. The rewards were impressive. At a time when skilled miners were earning about \$2.00-\$3.00 a day, experienced bottle blowers averaged closer to \$7.00. They were paid by the bottle, and a highly efficient worker might earn as much as \$15.00 per day, in gold. Even though the blowers themselves received only about 80 per cent of their wages—the other 20 per cent going to the apprentices—their earnings were sizable. Little wonder that, on payday, the glass blowers were “kings of the drag.” They lived high, and policemen had their work cut out for them.

An oldtimer reminiscing about this period described how the town was divided into sections and “it was as good as barb wire in each section.” North of Prairie Creek was Shanty Hill, while Riverside, to the west, was known as Dog Town. Between Main and Hickory stood Bulldog Alley; all of the alleys between Main and Bridge were lined with houses. West of the high school was Twister Hill, so called from the German “twister” blowers who settled there. (When blowing a bottle, usually the larger sizes, a “twister” rotated it to prevent it from sticking; bottles blown this way had no seam mark from the mold.) At Park and Bronson was Bung Town—plenty of beer, also a bakery inhabited by a local character called Queen Anne. In those days, by the way, an eighteen-ounce glass of beer cost a nickel. “That ain’t beer,” said the oldtimer, “it’s dope.” He recalled with relish:

If I went up to Bung Town I had a fight on my hands then and there. We only had one policeman. If a fellow wanted a fight he went down to Main Street and he was promptly accommodated. A policeman would come along, stand around and watch the proceedings awhile, separate them, and say “Now boys, come on, we’ll go back in the alley and we’ll just see who’s the best man.”

In addition to the industries already mentioned, several other enterprises started business in Streator in the 1890’s. One was Adolph Stauber’s pants factory, which employed chiefly women. Gus W. Wenzelman’s factory produced farm equipment

on Iowa Avenue. Shortly before the turn of the century the Vulcan Western Company began manufacturing tin plate.

The clay industry expanded, too. C. C. Barr established the Barr Clay Company in 1892, its plant located along the river south of the city. The firm specialized in paving brick, turning out the first one on July 5, 1893. Within five years the plant had a monthly capacity of 150,000,000 bricks and was employing 120 men. The year 1892 was also the first year for the Streater Clay Manufacturing Company, makers of sewer pipe, flue linings, and wall coping. Two years later a merger of the Streater Tile Works, the Eagle Clay Company, and Colonel Plumb's Streater Paving Brick Company consolidated into the Streater Paving Brick Company; at this time it made chiefly paving blocks.

The variety of industries and the growth of the labor movement were reflected in the formation, in the spring of 1891, of the Trades and Labor Council of Southern La Salle County (because of its Streater headquarters, generally known as the Streater Trades and Labor Council). Each union was represented on the Council in proportion to its membership. At this time the twelve unions that belonged averaged three members each; the coal miners were the largest group, with nine delegates. The Council was instrumental in promoting Streater's first Labor Day celebration that fall.

The school system took advantage of home industry by building the first brick school, Garfield, in 1894, to replace the Central School. The East (later Plumb) School also dates from this decade. Civic improvements continued. One was the street-car line, already mentioned, which was first operated by Pinckney Barr. Before this time, the only public transportation had been horse-drawn buses that made trips from railroad stations to hotels, and horse-drawn hacks, the taxis of the day. The rails were laid during the summer of 1890 and the line was almost ready for passengers by October. Reported the *Free Press*:

The street cars are delayed by the non-arrival of crossings. The cars, six in number, are the regulation full-sized car such as are used in



St. Paul and other cities, 23 feet long over all. Bells and checks and everything else is ready. The tickets are copper, about the size of a cent piece with a square hole through the center, with "Streator Railway Company, one fare" on one side and a picture of a street car on the reverse. The street cars arrived this morning on the Santa Fe and they are beauties. There are six of them of the latest pattern. They are yellow top and bottom with a green waist band. . . . the cars are finished like a palace.

On the 8th, the boilers were fired up and one car was run out. Again a detailed report:

Everything run smooth except the burning out of one of the dynamos. . . . The cars run smooth except round the curves, but this little trouble will be all right after a few trips and the roughness of the rails and wheels get worn off. They make very little noise and the horses don't seem to mind them much.

The line was officially inaugurated on the next day when the mayor and city council, together with a group of editors and businessmen, took a ride out to the end of the line.

There were a few other improvements, too. In 1893, Main Street was paved as far as the Wabash tracks, and five years later businessmen along the street were putting in cement walks. The new City National Bank opened in 1891. The following year, the YMCA opened a branch in Streator. It was first located over a store building on the south side of Main Street between Bloomington and Park, but in 1894 rented new quarters on North Vermillion Street. It was during this period that the Salvation Army officially began its work in Streator. Although records show that the first Christian Salvationists came to the town about 1889, it was not until 1895 that three women officers—Captain Rogers and Lieutenants Johnson and Baker—were given formal charge of the organization in Streator. One of their first, and most famous, recruits was Sarah Siddall, who signed on as senior soldier at the age of 50.

Many women's study clubs were founded during the 90's, launched with such earnest scholarly names as "E Re Nata"

("according to our needs"), "Klio" (the muse of history), and "Philomathean" ("lover of learning"). (An earlier counterpart was "Callere"—"to know well"—founded in 1888.) A gentleman writer of the period commented that "There are men's clubs and women's clubs, but candor compels the writer to say that those directed by his sex are mainly for relaxation and pleasure, while those of the ladies are without exception devoted to intellectual pursuits. Something of the same restless energy that the men have thrown into industrial activity has found outlet by the women through their study clubs and kindred activities." For example, "E Re Nata" devoted its first year, 1893, to the study of art so its members could fully enjoy the World's Columbian Exposition then attracting thousands of visitors to Chicago. (Streator residents have a physical reminder of the fair in St. Casimir's Church, which was originally part of the Russian exhibit at the fair.)

Streator continued to be represented in Congress by a local businessman. Walter Reeves, who was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1894, was re-elected in 1896 and 1898.

During the 90's, the bicycle was the do-it-yourself amusement par excellence, and Streator was no exception to the rule. Among those who had a passion for "wheels" were Harry Lukins, Ted Taylor, Andy Anderson, J. C. Barlow, and Fred Le Roy; Art Smith was particularly envied for his \$125 nickle-plated Ide machine. Bicycle clubs were formed, races were held on Main Street, and boys rode around the countryside to qualify as "century riders" (those who had logged 100 miles on the open road). The trip to La Salle, Utica, and back was a favorite. Bicycles even figured in evening parties:

A bicycle "paper chase" was indulged in last night by about one hundred riders. Two young men started from the park, each carrying a small bag filled with paper cut in small pieces, which they scattered along the route they traveled. They were given a few minutes start, and then the crowd of riders endeavored to follow them by the trail left by the paper. The race ended at the social given at the home of Dr. Dicus.



*In the heyday of the bicycle, Streatorites pose in front of a favorite shop. At left and right in the doorway are Sam and Will Van Loon. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Hicks stand at the curb.*

*Streator's "Honey Boy" Evans, right, as he appeared in blackface make-up. His talent won him a secure place in the roster of minstrel show "greats."*



Headliners continued to appear at the Opera House. More important, Streator people were beginning to make a name for themselves, and for their town, in the world of entertainment. One of these was George Evans, a minstrel singer better known as "Honey Boy" (from the song he wrote, "I'll be True to My Honey Boy"). The Evans family was Welsh, with the Welsh

feeling for song, and both George's mother and his brother Charlie sang beautifully, too. In fact, one who knew them all claimed that Charlie was a better singer than George. Another opinion had it that George "didn't know a note from a drumstick, but he could sing." Be that as it may, young George joined Haverly's Minstrels at the age of twenty-one, and a year later—on June 1, 1892—made his first professional appearance in his home town.

A *Free Press* review listed the principal numbers: three by other members of the cast, and the fourth

... "Only a Ringlet of Hair," by George Evans. Mr. Evans was vociferously applauded and kindly responded by singing "I'll Take Thee Back Again, Kathleen," and was rewarded by receiving two handsome bouquets. While bowing his acknowledgment Mr. Ross Bean stepped out on the stage, and in a few well chosen words presented George with a beautiful gold-headed cane. George swallowed his Adam's apple four or five times, and then thanked the donors and audience for their kindness. Mr. Evans is yet a young man and is considered one of the best ballad singers on the minstrel's stage.

For once, local pride did not mislead the home-town journal. Although "Honey Boy" may, as one Streatorite claims, always have been self-conscious when singing in his home town, he quickly earned a top place for himself in the entertainment world. He appeared on the Keith and Orpheum vaudeville circuits and in 1908 was the star of Cohan and Harris' revival of minstrelsy in Atlantic City. In 1910 he bought his own minstrel show, in which his act, "The Seven Honey Boys," was a favorite with audiences. As well as the song that gave him his nickname, Evans wrote a perennial favorite, "In the Good Old Summertime," and several others that capture the flavor of turn-of-the-century America: "Standing on the Corner, Didn't Mean no Harm," "Down Where the Watermelon Grows," and "Come Take a Trip in my Airship."

Beginning in the 90's, Streator's baseball team, the Reds, hit its stride. This particular group (several used the name) was



organized in 1891 by Ed St. Clair and played on a lot where the Grant School was later built. Well-known players at this time included pitcher Johnny Maher; catcher Pat Burke; Dick Purcell, first base; Charles Ieuter, second base; Ed Quinn, third base; shortstop Danny Lynch; and "Spikes" McAllister in left field. For an important game against Ottawa, Joliet, or La Salle (fellow members of the Illinois Valley League), the Reds might import a semiprofessional player to better the odds. For example, they paid Clark Griffith \$25.00 one October day in 1894 to pitch against Marseilles. Another season they opened the park in South Bend and, as the phrase went, "loaded up" by hiring both a pitcher and a catcher. A special train out of Streator carried 1500 fans, happy to be on hand when the home team won 6-5 in twelve innings.

Probably Streator's most colorful contribution to the world of entertainment was the Streator American Zouaves, the drill team better known as the "Zoos." George Knox, a member, explained how the group (formed officially January 2, 1897) got started:

The Zouaves were not organized as a drill team originally. We were a crowd of young fellows, most of whom were employed by the Streator Art Glass Works, and for want of something to do for amusement we started a sort of social and athletic club. . . . About this time the American Zouaves [of Ottawa] had the reputation of being the best drilled set of men in the country. . . . One of our men mentioned one night that it would be a good idea to start a drill team and capture a few laurels for ourselves. . . . The ultimate idea was, of course, to beat Ottawa.

After their first appearance on May 4 at Galesburg, before a GAR encampment, the Zouaves went on to perform all over northern Illinois. (A log, now in the Public Library, lists many of the appearances, with such notes as "1898, August. Henry. Under canvas rained like hell.") They did their drill with lightning speed, the specialty being wall scaling so fast that no music was fast enough to serve as background.



*In one of the high lights of their performances, Streator's Zouaves scaled a wall with military precision and great speed. The eighty-member drill team toured with the Keith and Proctor vaudeville circuits, and with Buckskin Bill's Wild West Show.*

In 1898 the Zoos turned professional, joining a vaudeville company which performed that year in Chicago, the following year in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The Zoos were a great attraction, rivaling in audience appeal such stars as Will Rogers, Lily Langtry, Houdini, and W. C. Fields. They toured England, Germany, Russia, and South Africa. The sad end of the group, professionally, came in 1905 when McCaddons Great International Shows, with which they were appearing in France, went into the hands of receivers at Grenoble and was sold at public auction.

Young ladies and gentlemen continued to court and be courted, and the newspapers continued to take a lively interest in what might be considered matters that were none of their business:

The gentleman who escorted a young lady home from the show last evening, and stood in front of the open door to bid her good night, should be more careful. The light within the home revealed his loving caresses to a passerby, who heartily enjoyed the scene. If the gentleman had been from Chicago we would have thought nothing of it, as they will do anything at any time, but he wasn't.

Even calamities kept to the same old pattern when another big fire broke out downtown. It began at about 6:30 on the evening of November 22, 1897, after an oil lamp exploded in the millinery department of Heenan's store. The volunteer fire department found the water pressure very low, their first hose broke, and they had no ladders. Ottawa sent firemen, but under the circumstances it was little wonder that in two hours the walls had fallen and nothing remained of the three-story building but the basement and a smoldering mass of ruins. The damage was estimated at \$200,000 (with insurance covering \$125,000). As to casualties, they amounted to a singed beard and a cut leg. The latter was suffered by one of the Plumb Hotel maids who, when she heard cries of "Fire!" from down the street, must have felt the hotel was in danger. She rushed to move her trunk to safety and in so doing dropped it and inflicted a four-inch gash.

A new store building, far surpassing the old one in size, went up the following summer. It was this new and larger store—still standing on the corner of Main and Park—which came to be the biggest in northern Illinois outside of Chicago. It carried a great variety of merchandise, and introduced to Streator such innovations as installment buying (one third down, the balance within a year).

Although Streator's coal output declined somewhat in the 90's, the industry was still a healthy one. The CW&V Company opened its third and final Number 2 mine in 1895, with its entrance located about a quarter mile east of Otter Creek Street just north of the Santa Fe tracks. The shaft was sunk about 100 feet and the mine eventually covered around 250 acres.

The miners of this period—like many of their fellow workers—were growing increasingly dissatisfied with their situation. As





*Heenan's Department Store, at the northwest corner of Main and Park. At about the time this picture was taken, a Streator lady of fashion could purchase a marten scarf (ten tails) for \$4.98, a Russian lynx muff for only \$1.25.*

early as 1891, American farmers and laborers worried by poor crops and low wages had banded together to form the Populist party, dedicated to a program of social reforms. Its strength, shown by the million votes polled in the 1892 presidential election, increased with the financial panic and depression that struck the country the next year. In 1894 came the fiasco of Coxey's Army, as well as the far more serious Pullman Strike in Chicago. Businessmen were reassured when McKinley defeated Bryan for the presidency in 1896, but the new President's confidence in his "full dinner pail" policy was not enough to encourage everyone. In 1897, led by the recently formed United Mine Workers, miners all over the country went on strike.



In Streator the miners left their jobs in June and did not return to work for six months. This was the longest coal strike in the town's history but, according to one observer, "There was never any bloodshed. The old miner of those days was the squarest [most honest] man. He would never quit work willingly, but if he did you could never get him to go back." During the long strike, John E. Williams organized and led the Business Men's Auxiliary League, to provide help to the striking miners. Their aid was supplemented informally.

A couple miners would go out to the country and say to a farmer, "There's a hog, how much do you want for it?"

"Well," he says, "it's worth so much money."

"All right, we'll take it. When we get back to work we'll come and pay you for that hog."

And their word was always good.

Commented another miner, "The miners would go on strike and it would be until the next strike getting paid up. Scabs? They just knocked the hell out of them and that's all there was to it." At any rate this storm was weathered without too many ill effects. Wages were increased, and the men went back to work in December.

The depression had side effects in Streator. The City National Bank folded in 1897. Several saloons went out of business, though the *Free Press* contended that it was their "low moral tone" as much as depressed business conditions that accounted for their demise. Those who still had the adventurous spirit could strike out for distant parts; an 1897 newspaper thoughtfully included a map showing the two main routes to the Klondike, where gold had recently been found.

As a matter of fact, Klondike gold helped end the depression, and by 1898 the worst was over. Americans had a new worry, however, in the form of Cuba and relations with Spain. Troubled conditions in the Spanish colony had been a source of anxiety for some time, and many Americans felt that the United States should step in and put an end to what they felt was blatant

misrule. They intensified their campaign when the American battleship *Maine* exploded in Havana harbor in February 1898. Relations between Spain and the United States became extremely strained by late April, and volunteer units were called up throughout the country.

One of these was Streator's own Company A, which left for Camp Tanner, near Springfield, on the night of April 26. The company, commanded by Captain William Higby, First Lieutenant Charles P. Gaut, and Second Lieutenant Benjamin R. Hall, included nine noncommissioned officers and twenty-six privates from Streator, with additional men from Dwight and Chicago. At Springfield, on May 10, it was mustered into service, becoming part of the Second Brigade, First Division, Third Illinois Volunteer Infantry.

Meanwhile Streator played host to the annual Illinois GAR encampment, and the deepening crisis provided a handy background for saber-rattling speeches by men who, for the most part, were too old to have to fight any more. Newspaper reports described the May 10 address of Commander Schimpff, who, in referring to "the present difficulty with Spain, said he was reminded of that favorite song with the soldiers, 'There's a hole in the bottom of the sea.' It was very appropriate, and Spain would find many a hole in the sea before the war was over." Bluster and confidence pervaded the air. On the big day, May 11, the Streator Reds beat Danville 7-0, two GAR campfires were held, and a mammoth parade attracted spectators from all over the area, as well as four pickpockets. The telephone operators shared in the fun by posting the following telegram in the lobby of the Plumb House: "Washington—Two United States warships were taken by the Spaniards yesterday—with a kodak."

The threat of war grew more and more imminent. On May 16, the Third Illinois left Springfield, supposedly for Tampa, Florida, but arriving instead at Camp Thomas in Chickamauga Park, Georgia, on May 20. Here the boys of Company A were busily occupying themselves collecting Civil War bullets and complaining about the lack of "beer and spirits" in their camp

(the Fourth Ohio, just west, had both), when war was officially declared on May 21. The conflict was far away, however. When Sergeant Roy E. Stiles wrote home later that month he indulged in the soldier's immutable privilege of griping (about the heat and lack of mosquito netting) but went on to describe with no little enjoyment the pageantry of army life: "It is a great sight to stand at the edge of the woods and see guard mount. The regimental bands play, while the sun makes the moving bayonets flash a silver light against the background of green."

In the weeks that followed, Company A, like so many soldiers before and since, played the army game of "hurry up and wait." So little happened that even a rainstorm became news for the home folks. Wrote one boy: "Chaplain Bruner said Sunday that he had prayed for rain, and Wednesday Major Jackson asked him to pray for it to stop. However it is still raining." July 3 brought Commodore Schley's victory over the Spanish fleet under Cervera, but still the Third Illinois waited.

At least one Streatorite saw action during this time, however. Charles Fallon had enlisted in Troop E, First United States Cavalry, and took part in the Battle of Santiago. When it was over, he wrote this cheerful letter home to his wife:

I have had some very narrow escapes, for my hat was torn on my head and men were shot by my side. . . . one man . . . made some remarks that made us all laugh. We had to throw ourselves flat upon the ground and we were still laughing at the remark he made when he started to say something else, but was shot in the mouth; the bullet went through his jaw and out of his mouth. You would have laughed if you had seen the face he made.

Finally, in the wake of General Miles' invasion of Puerto Rico late in July, the Third Illinois moved southward and sailed on the *St. Louis* for Arroyo, on the southern coast, early in August. Here they had the pleasurable experience of being welcomed as liberators without having to do much fighting, for only a few "bushwhackers" remained in the hills. In late August, M. L. Opdycke wrote home that, after a few initial skirmishes

with the Spaniards, things had settled down to routine. The men liked the scenery, the people, and the cheap cigars. Reported Harry Trout to his mother: "Say, this is God's country—a fine climate and all kinds of fruits and vegetables. All it needs here is a few Americans. . . . Tell father I will send him a Spanish scalp." According to Leon Baldwin, the boys were all growing mustaches and beards and there was "lots of rum and gin, but to drink it makes one think it is oil."

An armistice had been signed on August 12, but war's great ally, disease, was no respecter of documents. Yellow fever and malaria were sweeping through the camps. Streater's only casualty of the war, Claude Peters, died of fever on August 23, at the age of twenty. (Burton Bradish, of Ransom, met the same fate.) More and more complaints filtered back to the folks at home; food was poor and many men were sick. A special correspondent reported in late September that "you can see suffering from fever and starvation on every hand. . . . The men have got so sick of poor canned tomatoes and salty canned roast beef, and their stomachs are so weak that they cannot eat them."

Congressman Reeves went to work in Washington, as did many other representatives of people who were tiring of the "splendid little war." Early in October the government announced that all volunteers would soon be withdrawn from Puerto Rico; the Third Illinois sailed from Ponce November 1 and arrived in New York ten days later. And on the 12th of November, at 8:30 on a Friday night, Streater's veterans arrived via a special Santa Fe train from Chicago. The town went wild. An immense crowd surged around the depot, and escorted the returning soldiers to the Armory down a Main Street hung with flags and bunting, bright with bonfires. In fact, the crowd was so great that the prepared speeches could not be given. A joyful town was content to listen to band music and inspect the souvenir guns, bullets, straw hats, and a Puerto Rican parrot that looked "like a big Irish canary." Things had calmed down enough by the following week for a more dignified reception, where the speeches finally got a hearing.



It had all been rather good fun, and when Company A was mustered out of service on January 20, 1899, the men reportedly sang this song (to the tune of "Illinois"):

Sing goodbye to Uncle Sam  
 Bully boys from Illinois;  
 He can keep his old salt ham,  
 Hearty boys, raise a noise!  
 You're a brick, dear Uncle Sam,  
 But we're out now, you can gam-  
 Ble, and we do not care a clam,  
 Jolly boys, happy boys;  
 Whoop 'er up, who gives a slam?  
 Hunky boys!

Streator's returning Spanish American War veterans were greeted by a new sight—and a flourishing scandal. For years the townspeople had felt the need of a bridge over the river at Main Street. Finally the contract was awarded to the Lafayette Bridge Company, of Lafayette and Indianapolis, Indiana, which constructed the span during the summer of 1898. The bridge, with a metal substructure and four-inch boards on top, stretched all the way to First Street. But something was wrong. It was ungainly to look at and unsteady to travel on. Young men in the area found that they could create a thunderous reverberation when they raced horses across it. Poor construction was obviously at fault. Soon the rumors spread that there had been graft—specifically, that certain aldermen had been bribed to award the contract as they had.

Payment on the bridge was held up pending an investigation of the "boodling" charges. Early in January 1899 a grand jury indicted John H. Beeker of Peoria, who represented the Lafayette Company, for bribery. The bridge company in turn sued the city for payment. While the case dragged on, the bridge itself remained a continuing object of interest and scorn. A January issue of the *Free Press* carried a poem on the bridge by B. T. Keating, with this memorable fifth stanza:



*The ill-fated Main Street bridge. According to John E. Williams, the outcome of the case "spoke volumes for the sound civic spirit of the citizens" of Streator.*

There are many imitations, where  
Some millions have been spent.  
But this noble architectural span  
Has never cost a cent.  
And while the old Vermillion rolls  
We'll always bless the giver,  
While we gaze in holy horror  
On the bridge across the river.

Later that year the city council rejected an offer of the bridge company to accept payment of \$14,750 (instead of \$24,800) in return for relinquishing all claims against the city. In December the bridge inspired the following news story:

## SCARED IT TO DEATH

George Cutler, the poultry dealer, is now a pronounced opponent of any compromise in the bridge case. Yesterday George met a party of gypsies while he was touring about the country in search of fowls and of course he was bantered as to a horse trade. Now the animal George drove never created a sensation because of its beauty or its wonderful bursts of speed, but served the purpose, for it was used very well. After some dickering with the tribe George finally parted with his horse for one which appeared to be much more valuable.

Happy in thinking how he had outwitted the gypsy, George started for home. All went well until the new bridge was reached. Then the animal began to tremble, breathe hard, and otherwise act strangely. When it reached the bottom of the toboggan slide it turned its head, gave one horrified glance at the structure, and fell dead in its tracks.

Eventually the case was decided in favor of the city of Streator, at least to the extent that the Lafayette Company had to come and remove the bridge. The great expense caused the construction firm to go out of business.

By the end of the decade, Streator's population had grown to 14,079. There were five large glass factories and several brick and tile works, while local mines were still producing thousands of tons of coal a day. Seven railroads served the town, and the schools had a total enrollment of 2400 pupils. Many people felt there were still too many saloons, and a new menace in the form of the slot machine troubled reformers.

In 1899 there was a new long-distance telephone at the Plumb House, "all right" was a term of enthusiasm, entertainers sang "coon songs," and women were briefly apprehensive about a Streator criminal nicknamed "Jack the Hugger," who popped out of dark corners merely to hug the women he caught.

John E. Williams, writing in the magazine *Carter's Monthly*, summed up the town this way:

Streator, Illinois, is not a beautiful city. It is a town in the making; not yet a finished product. Its wealth and energies are devoted to deepening and broadening the foundations of its industrial life, rather

than to smoothing out the wrinkles of toil from its face or adorning itself with the fruits of its labor. It is still in its iron age; its golden age is yet to come. The rude framework that supports the social fabric stands out bare and grim, as yet uncovered by the accretions which in older cities soften and mellow, if they do not conceal, the rough beams which knit the structure together; and the play of those elemental energies which propel the industrial mechanism and thereby vivify and vitalize the social life, are still plainly visible. . . .

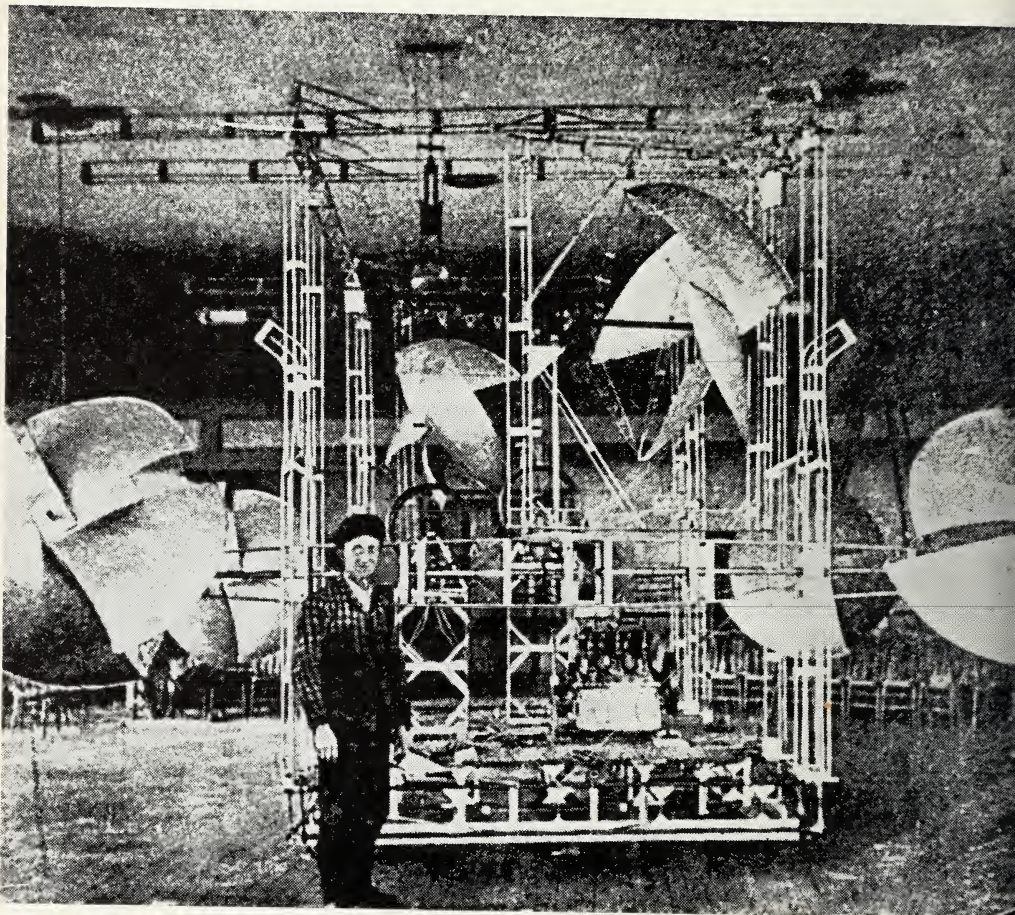
The gilded youth of the second generation, who wastes in idle elegance the earnings of his father's toil, has hardly made his appearance here as yet. The men who made the city are still in command. The gospel of work is everywhere not only preached but practiced. . . . There is no leisure class . . . Social affinity has not crystallized into social caste. . . . Streator . . . is the product of native forces working from within outward. Unlike made-to-order towns of the Pullman type, its growth has been spontaneous. . . . It is, therefore, an indigenous product, as much the creature of its own organic potency and environment as the flower that blooms by the wayside or the trees that adorn its parks.

In the barer language of today, Streator's rough edges were still very much in evidence. But the 90's had brought some change, and the town was more sober and more mature as it stood on the brink of a new century.



## CHAPTER SIX

*William Reiferscheid and his airship. Only the frame is shown.*



1900-1909

## A NEW CENTURY, NEW DEVELOPMENTS

**S**AID Mr. Dooley, whom everyone seemed to be reading in 1900:

Prosperity is th' buckho now. Barrin' a sthrike at the stock-yards an' a hold-up here an' there, Prosperity has come leapin' in as if it had jumped fr'm a springboard. Th' mills are opened, th' factories are goin' to go, th' railroads are watherin' stocks, long processions iv workin'men are marchin' fr'm th' pay-car to their peaceful saloons, their wives are takin' in washin' again, th' price iv wheat is goin' up an' down, creditors are beginnin' to sue debtors; an' thus all th' wurruld is merry with th' on'y rational enjoyments iv life.

And so it was in Streator in the early days of the 20th century. The even rhythm of life seemed to proceed with regularity, even monotony. But changes did occur, some so subtle as to be unrecognizable at the time, some sharply and suddenly.

Take the year 1900 (when the town was offering 2¢ a head for dead sparrows). On the stage of the refurbished Opera House one could see, among other things, "Way Down East," Mme. Modjeska in "The Royal Box," "Quo Vadis," and "A Trip to Coontown." The newspapers ran stories on Chinese tortures and commented on the case of a man of sixty-five who had applied for a license to marry a thirteen-year-old girl, her mother consenting to the match (all names given): "The man is an old fool and the girl's mother is a still bigger one." The city council in January passed a resolution of sympathy for the Boers of South Africa in their war against England and in May received a letter from the Assistant Secretary of State of the Transvaal thanking the officials—or at least so the aldermen supposed, since no one could read Afrikaans. D. C. Murray and Company had trouble

with silkworms. The store had promised to have 1000 of them in their window on a Tuesday morning in May, spinning silk industriously, but the curious who came to see them had to wait until late that afternoon. "The reason for the delay," explained an advertisement, "is that they were shipped here by the American Express, and as that company don't come into Streator the worms lay at La Salle all day, and finally got here by the Adams Express. We are very sorry to have caused anyone disappointment, and wish to say that the worms will be in the window until Saturday." There followed a complete schedule of their day-by-day activities.

Both candidates for the vice-presidency came to town, Democrat Adlai Stevenson in October and Republican Theodore Roosevelt a month later. The (Republican) *Free Press* spoke disparagingly of the small crowd at the depot to greet Stevenson, though acknowledging a larger one for his talk at the Spalding Lyceum, adding that he "does not enthuse an audience . . . but impresses one as being in earnest." Governor Roosevelt, late of the Rough Riders, aroused considerably more excitement. The Burlington, IV&N, Three I, and Wabash railroads all ran special trains into town, and crowds were on hand to watch the candidate in a 10 A.M. parade down Main Street to City Park. There Roosevelt spoke briefly, saying that "The Republican party stands for the honor of the flag, and I appeal to the young men to see that the country stands right." Thereupon, though the star performer of "Roosevelt Day" departed, the town continued to celebrate, ending with a mammoth evening parade that lasted until midnight—5000 marchers, it is said, and 20,000 witnesses, with bands and floats from all over the county.

The year 1900 also witnessed two events of greater importance—important not so much in themselves as for what they symbolized. One was the coming of the automobile. The first of the horseless carriages hit town on May 22, driven by Hi Henry, head of a troupe of minstrels. It was reported that

Hi Henry and his locomobile attracted more attention today than a circus. As an advertisement for his minstrels it was a huge success. The



parade was to have taken place at noon, but "der masheen" was out of order, and the big crowd was compelled to wait until about 2 o'clock. As the parade came up Bloomington Street past the Garfield School the pupils were all lined up to see the queer vehicle, and one little girl was given a ride in it. . . . The streets were crowded with people all along the route of the parade.

The following spring, I. F. Richard, an optician, became the first Streatorite to own an automobile (a lever-controlled Oldsmobile); other pace-setters were J. B. Loot and T. E. Taylor. The "machines," at first a curiosity and soon a convenience, were to change the whole character of the American small town.

Another portent of the future was the closing of the Number 1 mine. This event did not by any means signalize the end of Streator's coal industry. Several mines founded after it remained in operation. That same year, the Howe Coal Company opened a shaft near Cedar and Water streets. The CW&V Company itself was to open another mine—its last Number 3—seven years later, on the site of the present Anthony Company. However, most of the coal in the upper, or Number 7, vein had been exhausted. Digging now was concentrated in the Number 2 vein, some 100 feet deeper. From this time forward, coal mining became less and less profitable in the Streator area. No one could point to a single event or a single year as the beginning of this decline, but the year 1900 is probably as convenient as any.

The 20th century, then, would bring stability and a leveling off. The population, for example, increased by fewer than 200 persons in the first decade of the new century; it stood at 14,253 in 1910. The newspapers began to admonish citizens to boost their town, rather than criticize it. And of course civic endeavors did continue. New fraternal orders were founded: the Elks in 1900, the Knights of Columbus in 1903, the Eagles in 1904; the Masons dedicated their new temple in 1906. The Streator Independent Telephone and Telegraph Company was organized in 1901, with its offices on the second floor of the Plumb Building at 321 East Main (a new building went up in 1905). The Peoples Trust and Savings Bank opened in 1907.



Probably most important for Streator's coming-of-age was the new library, built with the aid of Carnegie funds. Colonel Plumb was instrumental in arranging for the building, which was begun in 1901. It was completed early in 1903, and dedicated on the evening of January 30, the handsome structure jammed with spectators. The newspapers noted that, although Colonel Plumb attended the dedication, he was too ill to deliver his speech.

For another era was drawing to a close. Plumb was in his eighties, and increasingly subject to the infirmities of old age. On March 29 he observed his eighty-seventh birthday and on April 8, scarcely a week later, a case of grippe proved fatal to Streator's founder and benefactor. Tolling bells announced his death and on Saturday, the 11th, all businesses were closed while private funeral services were held at home and a memorial service took place at the Opera House.

But of course life went on. For one thing, this was the spring when Streator's own inventor, William Reiferscheid, built an airship to enter in competition at the St. Louis World's Fair later that summer. With the backing of the newly formed Chicago Aerial Navigation Company, Reiferscheid worked long and hard in Oriental Hall building a giant balloon, pointed at each end, from which hung a frame that in turn supported six propellers. The papers boasted that "scientists and the most skillful engineers who have examined Mr. Reiferscheid's model and drawings pronounce it the best and most scientific airship ever invented." Scientific perhaps, but practical no. The ungainly creation simply would not work. It ended its days on display in City Park, where curious and destructive boys made short work of its delicate structure.

Summer came, and with it Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers "colossally consolidated menageries, circuses and hippodromes." Warm weather brought picnics, the annual caravans of gypsies, fishing in the Vermillion, home-made ice cream—and summer storms. The one that blew up on the afternoon of Friday, July 17, at first seemed no different from hundreds that

had passed through Streator. Late in the afternoon the sky darkened, a slight breeze quickened, and rain began to fall. As people took shelter, however, they realized that the wind was no ordinary one. Branches were ripped from trees and debris hurtled through the air. Over the sound of the screaming wind and whinnying horses could be heard the wrenching and splintering of wood, the crash of brick and glass. One small boy herded home the family cows, realizing only when crushed in his mother's frantic embrace that he had plodded sturdily through a great storm that would afterwards be known as "Streator's cyclone."

The tornado had gathered force northwest of Streator, near Spring Lake, where it demolished the ice house of the Home Ice Company and crushed both a wagon bridge and that of the IV&N railroad over Eagle Creek. Reaching the Vermillion, it tore away half of the trestle work of the Three I railroad bridge (where the New York Central now crosses the river), as well as the clubhouse at the golf course—now the Streator Country Club—and the Vulcan Works. Then it whirled eastward, destroying the three-story brick building of the Stauber pants factory and ripping off part of the Dickerman School. It next hit the baseball park (where the Reds now played—at present the Anthony Company), the Electric Park (a dance hall and concessions at the intersection of Bloomington and what is now the Anthony Company drive), and the Streator Trotting and Fair Association grounds. It demolished the amphitheater and bleachers at the baseball field, a theater and refreshment hall at the Electric Park, and an amphitheater and three stables at the race track, as well as all the fences in the area. Moving eastward, the raging wind dropped considerable debris—including a live horse—beyond the Burlington tracks, and caused serious damage in Kernan, Ransom, and Kinsman before dying down.

Six people in Streator lost their lives. Though fortunately the employees at the Vulcan and Stauber factories had left work by the time the storm hit, a watchman at the Vulcan Company, Richard Purcell, was killed. Near the race track lived James Doyle, who was in charge of the track and grounds. He was not



*Crowds of curious onlookers inspect the wreckage of Adolph Stauber's pants factory after the cyclone of 1903. Note the stack of trousers piled on the ground.*

at home at the time of the tornado, but his wife and son were fatally injured. When the stables went down under the fury of the gale, Nelson Bivins, Charles Snyder, and William Brown were killed. Several Streatorites were injured, eleven homes had to be razed because of storm damage, and total losses were estimated at \$275,000.

Naturally no one talked of anything else for days. The *Free Press* reported that the streetcar company did a tremendous business Saturday and Sunday, carrying over 7000 sightseers each day. "Kodak people," it was reported, "were as thick as flies and relic hunters left no object in sight that would serve as a memento of Streator's greatest tragedy." Some enterprising townsfolk put up refreshment stands at the driving park and Vulcan works on Sunday. People chuckled over such anecdotes as this one, reported in the *Monitor*:

Earl Barclay, employed at the Electric Park, ran to the stage as the wind came up and hung onto the piano for safety. When the cyclone struck he and the piano both went up into the air. On striking the ground he was thrown into the Mt. Pelée scenery and stuck. Mr. Barclay is badly shaken and scratched, but he is shaking hands with himself today. While enroute he lost his coat and vest, the wind tearing them off of him.

This scenery was not merely a canvas backdrop, but an elaborately constructed plaster of Paris miniature of the famous volcano that had erupted the year before on the island of Martinique. As the climax of each evening's entertainment, Streator's own Mt. Pelée had belched flames, poured out smoke, and shattered in a final horrendous explosion, much to the delight of the younger spectators.

A more serious note was struck in Monday's paper:

While Friday's storm did great damage and was a calamity to the city, its injury was far from irreparable and there is but one thing to do and that, to set to work with a little more vigor and purpose. Streator doesn't lack for either vigor or vitality and now is the time to display both.

The most important structures, particularly the bridges, were restored immediately. The baseball field, the grandstand and some stables, and the Vulcan works were also rebuilt. However, neither the Stauber company nor the Electric Park ever opened their doors again. It was the lack of recreation facilities that seemed to bother people most. Said the *Free Press*:

Streator is now in hard lines so far as amusements are concerned. With the race track gone and the Electric Park, the ball park and golf club's house swept out of existence there is now little to do but sit in the city park once or twice a week at band concerts or else go and drown one's sorrows at the swimming pool. And, when Sunday comes around, it is likely that some people will be driven into church from sheer loneliness.

The cyclone's depredations were bad enough, but that winter came the disastrous Iroquois Theater fire in Chicago, which focused attention on dangerous conditions in theaters and forced several to close. The actors in an entertainment called "Pickings from Puck," playing in Streator, were ordered by the show's owner to disband or go on half pay for two or three weeks. The company chose the latter course, but was plagued by poor attendance.



Things picked up the following year. A ragtime band appeared in the city, along with "Macbeth" and "The Wizard of Oz." Victor Talking Machine records sold at Mills and Hupp for 25¢ and 50¢. In 1905—the winter a telephone operator attempted suicide by taking carbolic acid, and it was explained that "the reading of books of the trashy sort is supposed to have been the cause of her trouble"—the Opera House booked "Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons and dainty Julia May Gifford in 'A Fight for Love,' a scientific and dramatic play" in which Fitzsimmons took part in a three-round "glove contest." The Elks Ball in February was described as the "most brilliant social function of its kind ever held in the city." There was a fourteen-piece orchestra, and a railing to separate dancers from mere onlookers. In each corner stood a refreshment booth, where "a gentleman of color served lemon frappe with cakes to those who cared to indulge."

Speaking of the Elks, they had started sponsoring, in the early 1900's, an annual minstrel show that was to continue for several years. Some of the well-known "end men" were George Hood, Ralph Lindsay, Ralph ("Bo") Johnson, Chris ("Pick") Windus, Ralph Bawden, and William ("Kiddo") Grant. There were many music groups, the best-known being the Illinois State Band, with W. J. Sowers, a local music teacher, as star cornetist. The Reds continued to please fans with good baseball. This was the era of the legendary Turnipseed at left field, of centerfielder Tommy Brownlee, and pitcher "Big Joe" Viskocil. At least two local players of this period went on to the major leagues. George Cutshaw, born in Wilmington in 1887, played second base with Brooklyn from 1912 through 1917, with Pittsburgh through 1921, and two years with Detroit. From 1915 to 1926, Tommy Sheehan, of Ottawa, pitched for Philadelphia, the New York Yankees, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh; he later became head scout for the Yankees.

But it was June of 1905 that brought something new—Chautauqua. These traveling tent shows combined intellectual uplift, entertainment, and outdoor life, and enlivened the summer

doldrums of American towns for a generation in the early 20th century. Streator's first Chautauqua was managed by James Speed and the dining hall was run by ladies from the Good Will Church. The Villa Park grounds (in the area later called Highland Park) were enclosed with a wire fence, lights were strung in, and a tent seating 1500 was erected. By the opening date, Friday, June 30, fifty families had put up their own tents as temporary living quarters, and hundreds were on hand for the Reverend Sam Jones' opening talk at 2 P. M., "A Medley of Philosophy, Fact and Fun." The ten days that followed brought a variety of activities. There were games and crafts for the children and cooking lessons for the housewives—a typical lecture offering recipes for boiled steak, cheese fondue, egg timbales, and spice cake. Mr. Speed gave nature talks, musical groups performed, and lecturers delivered talks on such topics as captivity by Macedonian brigands and life in Japan.

Outstanding that first year were a Father Vaughan—for whom the stage had to be cleared because of his "enthusiasm and vivacity, so destructive to furniture"—and Eugene Debs, whose address was titled simply "Social Problems." According to the *Free Press* reporter, Jeanne Passe-partout (curiously enough, a man), "the rains descended and the floods came and beat upon the tent and still the crowd gathered; everyone wanted to hear Debs." The United States, Debs said, must have a more equitable distribution of wealth, and he predicted that "when great capitalists, such as Rockefeller and Carnegie, get through with you, then you will be ready for us [the socialists]."

Busy Passe-partout overheard someone remark that "the people of Streator have gone crazy over this Chautauqua business." Indeed the enthusiasm had become so great that a "permanent" auditorium of wood, seating nearly 2000 persons, was later built. It should not be imagined that everyone in town took a vacation to frolic outdoors. Many went to the park only for special events such as the Fourth of July celebration, and even when families camped out, most men continued at their jobs, spending evenings and weekends at the park. But Chautauqua

was a special boon to the glass workers, who had time on their hands in the summer.

This would soon be changed, however. In the year 1903 occurred an event of importance for Streator's future, the invention of the automatic bottle-making machine. A scant three years later, the American Bottle Company bought out Matt Jack's Streator Bottle and Glass Company and that same year installed some of the new Owens automatic machines. This was of course the beginning of the end for the hand glass blowers, but a boon for Streator's glass industry. So important did the machine become that by 1909, when the Thatcher Manufacturing Company of Elmira, New York, set up a glass bottle plant in Streator, it relied exclusively on machines for bottle blowing. (The company had actually started its factory in 1908, but a windstorm destroyed the original building before operations started, and the second was not ready until the following year.)

The first decade of the new century was an active period for the business community. Some Streator men had a brief and unsuccessful speculative fling in the gold fields of Colorado when they backed the Streator and Cripple Creek Gold Mining Company. The diggings explored at a depth of more than 100 feet early in 1903 but, although gold was found, there was not enough to pay for taking it out. In 1906 the Chicago, Indiana and Southern Railroad bought the Three I line, prompting the nickname "Cissies" for the road's employees—a new incentive for payday fights. In 1907 the National Drain Tile Company, with its main offices in Terre Haute, Indiana, opened a factory in Streator.

Several varied and generally long-lived businesses were founded during this period. One was the Gahm Manufacturing Company, makers of windmills, elevators, and other farm equipment (this was later to become C and D Fabricators). In 1904 D. W. Archer opened a canning factory, which, bought in 1911 by C. S. Crary, was in turn purchased by William R. Benner in 1935 and became the Streator Canning Company. Another firm to undergo several changes was the Metal Stampings Company established in 1904 by Paul R. Chubbuck and L. P. Halladay; from

STREATOR MOTOR CAR COMPANY, STREATOR, ILLINOIS

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were Eddie Rickenbacker and the Fisher brothers, Frederick, Charles, and Lawrence.

Halladay made about 900 cars a year, at an average sale price of \$1500. The first car was sold to Adolph Iwan, who ran the Iwan Manufacturing Company. About 1916 C. C. Barley purchased the company and added a new, custom-made model, the Roamer, patterned frankly on the Rolls-Royce and selling for \$3750. Not long afterwards, the Barley Motorcar Company moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan (taking very few Streatorites with it), and in a few years went out of business, chiefly as a result of stiff competition from mass-produced automobiles.

As the year 1909 drew to a close, Streator could look back on a decade of accomplishment. Its people had repaired the ravages of the 1903 tornado. A new library added to the city's cultural facilities, and vigorous young industries helped strengthen it economically. There were six new schools—North (later Greeley), Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Grant, and McKinley. An interurban line connected the town with Ottawa. For fun there were Chautauqua and the new “biographs” (with complete plots given in the newspapers in case the flickering images on the screen failed to convey them).

Even the disruptions caused by industrial progress were less serious than in many areas. The hand glass blowers displaced by the new machines found other work in the expanding glass factories. As the coal mines yielded less and less, many miners switched to other types of work. Some moved on to nearby towns.

One of these was Cherry, a small community of some 2000 persons northwest of Streator. In November 1909 the St. Paul Coal Company, which owned the mine, employed a total of 481 men and boys. So many of them were from the Streator area that Cherry was known as a Streator “colony.”

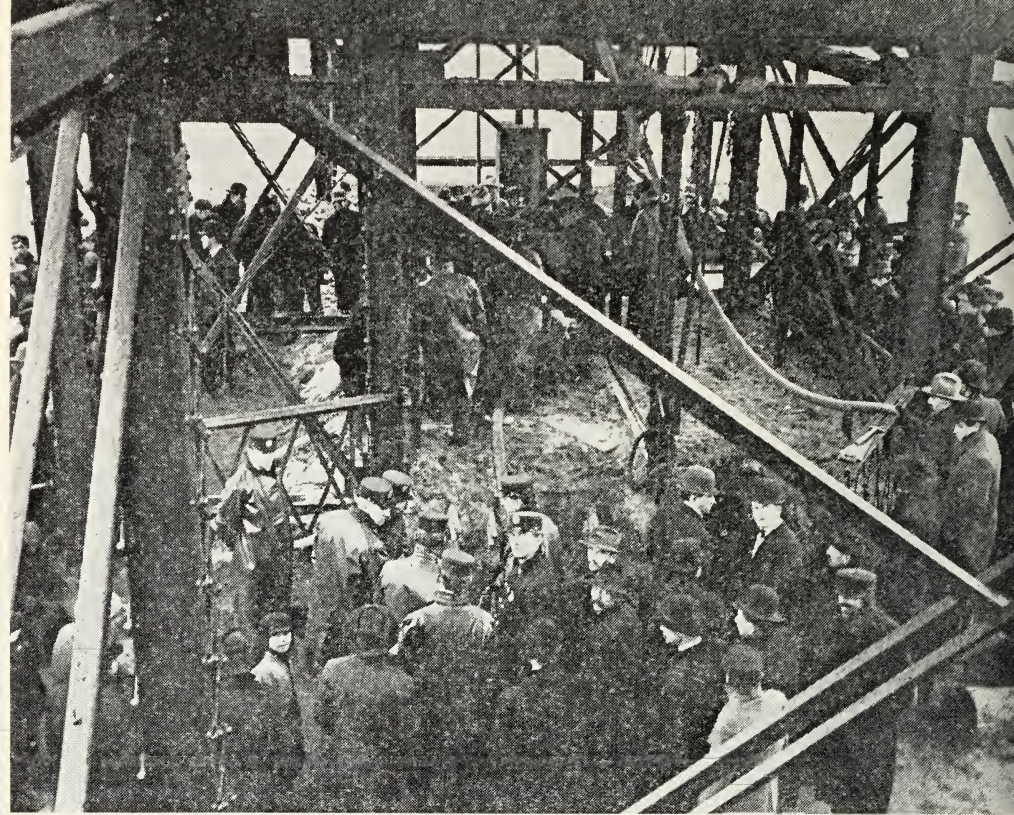
The mine at Cherry was a large one, considered clean, safe, and well run. There were three veins, with most of the work at this time in the second, about 360 feet down. On November 13, a Saturday, work proceeded as usual, with the sounds of picks, men chatting, and rumbling mule-driven cars echoing through

the tunnels. Because a power line had broken a month earlier, the mine was lit by open kerosene lamps, which cast a flickering light through the underground passages. About 1:15 in the afternoon a coal car loaded with six bales of hay (fodder for the mules) was shoved out of the elevator at the second level and hitched to a train. Some feet farther along the hay was dropped off to await the trip down to the mule stable on the third level. Somehow the hay caught fire—either because of oil dripping from one of the lamps or from a fallen lamp itself. At first no one thought much of the fire, and attempts to put it out were somewhat disorganized. In minutes, however, the beams overhead had caught fire and flames licked outward at an ever-growing rate. The burning hay was then dumped down the shaft, but it became jammed there and did not fall to the third level. There was no underground alarm system in the mine, and although miners nearby soon realized that the blaze had gotten out of hand and that the only course left was to flee, men in distant tunnels worked on unaware of what was happening. Soon the corridors were filled with smoke, flames, crashing timbers, and men running frantically to the one escape shaft that remained open.

Above ground, puffs of smoke rising from the shaft were the first sign of trouble. The alarm was sounded, and a crowd of anxious relatives and other townspeople soon collected. Mine superintendent John Bundy, of Streator, was one of the first on the scene. (In later years, one of his sons recalled that he had wanted to go too, but had been admonished by his mother, "Don't you go over there—your father's got his hands full." The boy never saw his father alive again.) Dr. L. D. Howe, also of Streator, physician for the mining company, went below to help but was soon raised to the top and forced to remain there in order to minister to the injured.

Bundy headed a group of twelve volunteers who made six trips back and forth on the cage to search out and bring up men trapped below. After the seventh descent, the signals to the operator on top were weak and confused and for agonizing min-





*Two scenes at Cherry. Feverish activity at the entrance to the mine shaft, above, contrasts with the numbed patience of those who wait for news, below. In a letter, one miner wrote: "Dear wife, don't grieve; we will meet again in a better land."*



utes he refused to pull up the cage despite frantic pleas from bystanders. When he finally yielded, the hushed onlookers saw to their horror only twelve blackened, twisted bodies—men who had given their lives for their friends. Along with Bundy there were Alexander Norberg, the assistant mine manager; John Sczabrinski, a cager; Joseph Robeza, a driver; and Robert Clark, Andrew McLuckie, James Spiers, Harry Stewart, and Mike Suhe, all miners. The three others, who did not even work at the mine but had rushed over to help, were Dominic Dормento, a grocer; John Flood, a clothier; and Isaac Lewis, a liveryman.

After this, the cage was lowered and raised many times, but it always returned empty and so was soon halted. Tons of water were poured in, but fell to the third level and had little effect on the roaring inferno in the second vein. Late Sunday heavy planks were thrown over the shaft opening in an attempt to smother the raging flames; wet sand was dumped on the planks and the airshaft sealed. The town reached the brink of riot when those with relatives below realized that some men might manage to climb to the surface only to find their escape cut off. On Wednesday, when rumors circulated that sounds of thudding had been heard below, two companies of state militia were brought in to quiet the townspeople.

Below, meanwhile, some men had remained alive for awhile, unable to reach the shaft because of the heat and deadly gases. They clustered together in trapped and hopeless little groups. Beside the body of a young miner named Sam Howard, a recovery team found this note: "There are a good many dead mules and men. I tried to save some but came near losing myself." Other entries followed, and finally, a weak scrawl dated 12:44 P.M. on Monday: "Our lives are giving out. I think this is our last. We are getting weak." The shaft was uncovered on Thursday, November 18, and firefighting resumed, but those who went below returned to the surface only with the dead as mute evidence of the tragedy below. As the bodies were placed in tents to be identified by sobbing wives and children, the death toll mounted above 200. (It would finally total 259.)



One event brought relief to some and hope to many more. On November 20, rescue workers exploring a remote tunnel came upon a few enfeebled miners who led them to a small group of men that had managed to live through a week of deprivation and despair. The group, totaling twenty-one men, was led by George Eddy of Streator, who later described how he had been on the surface when the fire started and had gone below as soon as he saw smoke. After he and several others had notified as many men as they could, they approached the mouth of the entry, but found that they could not get out.

We were blocked in on account of the black damp and smoke; we went back up the entry and tried to go out another road and we found the black damp was stronger there than it was where we were, so we went back into the main entry again. Then we tried two or three times to get out on Saturday and Sunday, but we couldn't get out; every time we would try it we were further away from the bottom, so we saw that we were not going to get to the cage because the black damp was pressing us in from both sections and we knew it was going to fill up the face and that we would smother in there. . . . We went in and built a wall across the second west entry and we built across the first west entry of dirt and we were inside there seven days.

Of the twenty-one who were rescued, one of whom later died, John Lorimer and George Stimac (or Stimez) were from Streator, and Thomas White from Kangley. Another survivor, named Antoniese (or Antenore), recalled:

It was strange to see how the different races acted. The English sang, the French talked, the Italians prayed and the Austrians and Lithuanians wept. Often the English and the Italians would join in singing hymns. At last John Lorimer, a Scotchman, was the leader. . . . "Abide With Me" was his favorite song. We all learned it.

Many of the others wrote notes to their families, and on the back of one was found this testament, signed by all twenty-one men: "We the undersigned do not blame anyone for the accident that happened to pen us in here and we believe that everybody has done all in their power to relieve us."

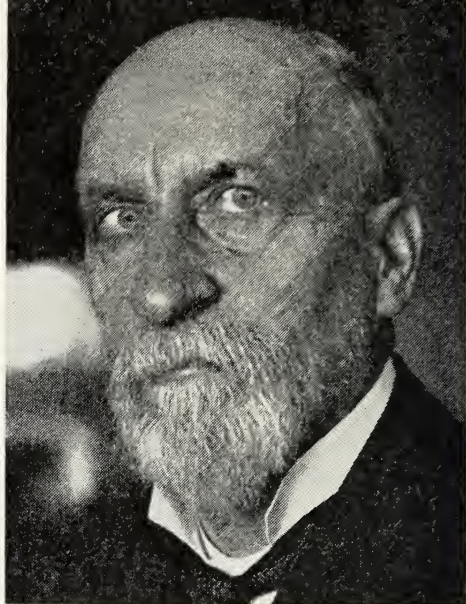
Although the rescue attempts continued until November 25, no more survivors were found. Since the fire could not be extinguished with water, the mine was sealed with cement. This cover was removed on February 1, 1910, and body recovery resumed; the last body was brought up on July 7. The mine then resumed work, and continued in operation for some ten years.

From the beginning, Streator had been vitally concerned with the Cherry disaster. On the first evening, November 13, a special CI&S train left the town at 11:30, carrying 200 persons—nearly everyone with a friend or relative in the mine. Of the 259 dead, many had considered themselves Streator people, and their bodies were moved back to the town for burial. The *Free Press* in November listed some forty-six as “Streator’s dead,” though this number included men from Heenanville and Kangley, and the list grew longer as more bodies were recovered. Because of the mobility of the mining population and the confused records (some Slavic or Lithuanian names may have as many as five variations), it can probably never be ascertained exactly how many of the Cherry dead were from Streator.

What mattered was that there were 630 survivors—160 widows and 470 fatherless children—who somehow had to be provided for. Private contributions started pouring in immediately from all over the nation, with Streator alone contributing almost \$5000 by the end of November. These, together with donations from the United Mine Workers, Red Cross, and other organizations, eventually totaled over \$444,000.

Meanwhile, official bodies had gone into action. These included the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, which, for all practical purposes, owned the St. Paul Coal Company; the United Mine Workers; and the consuls and other representatives of foreign governments whose nationals were involved. Official records gave the following national breakdown of the men who lost their lives in the Cherry mine disaster: Italian, 73; “Slavish,” 36; Austrian, 28; Lithuanian, 21; Scotch, 21; German, 15; French, 12; American, 11; Swedish, 9; Polish, 8; English, 8; Belgian, 7; Irish, 3; Russian, 3; Greek, 2; Welsh, 2.

*John E. Williams, whom Earling praised for "transmitting the materials of a great tragedy into an instrumentality of a great service to mankind."*



The Milwaukee road, a \$400,000,000 corporation, was under no legal liability for the disaster beyond the resources of the coal company, which totaled about \$350,000. If the coal company were sold, it would go into bankruptcy and would probably yield less than its true worth.

Into this tangle of legal complications and aroused public opinion stepped John E. Williams of Streator, who had been serving as vice-chairman of the Cherry Relief Commission. He volunteered his services as a disinterested mediator, spent many hours analyzing the situation, and conducted negotiations. President Albert J. Earling of the Milwaukee road announced: "We acknowledge a moral obligation," and eventually the company added \$400,000 to the amount privately subscribed. The final sums allotted to surviving dependents were worked out on the basis of the English Workmen's Compensation Act of 1906, which Williams had studied carefully. The official report of the disaster noted that "the credit for the settlement belongs almost exclusively to Mr. Williams."

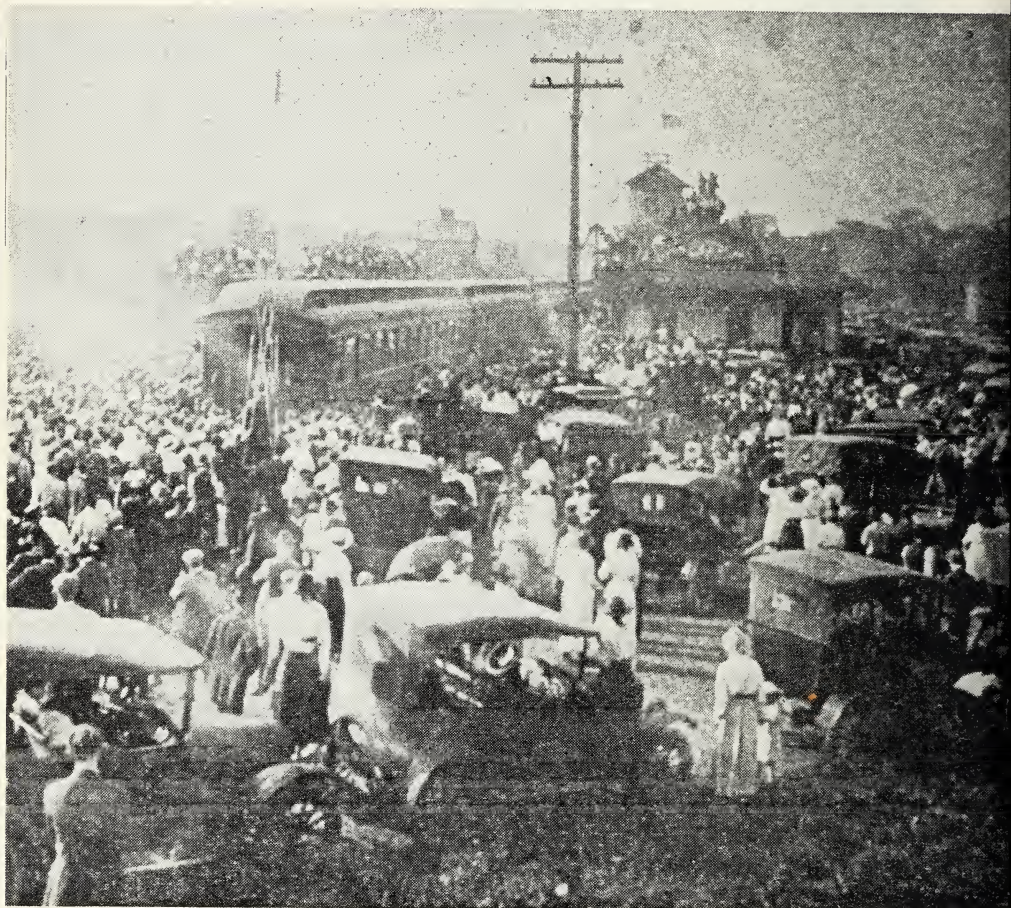
Out of the tragedy came new mine safety laws, more thorough inspections, and improved mining equipment. The men who died, especially those who gave their lives for others, would never be forgotten. And Streator had special cause for pride because of its own John E. Williams. His skill, humanity, and hard work played a major role in preventing the Cherry mine disaster from creating bitterness and hatred among the thousands of persons whose lives it affected.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

*Sending off the second quota of draftees, September 15, 1917.*



## THE “BEST LITTLE BURG” DOES ITS BIT

**B**ACK before the First World War,” reminisces a Streator newspaper man, “everybody used to go out to Spring Lake. There was boating and fishing, people packed picnic lunches, and it was a favorite hangout for kids. We had a good time in those days.” Even to people born after this period, the years before 1917 have about them an aura of leisure and tranquillity, uncomplicated by great and pressing problems—an aura destined to vanish in the smoke of Ypres and Belleau Wood. To the inhabitants of a small midwestern town, the Balkan states with the odd names were far away, and Prussian generals seemed scarcely more substantial than the heroes of Victor Herbert’s operettas.

People in Streator were more apt to be interested in the price of coal or corn, the big wedding of the season, or the year’s Chautauqua program. In the winter, though there were fewer stage shows, the theaters offered the newest silent pictures and hired local talent to provide mood music from the orchestra pit. Summer brought the Northern Illinois District Fair, with its exhibits, horse races, and “Glad Way” carnival entertainment. For those who liked Western adventures, there was the novel *Hopalong Cassidy*, published in 1910 as the first of a series by Clarence Mulford, born in Streator in 1883 (he moved as a youth to New York State and ventured only once in his life into the West about which he wrote).

More serious concerns also occupied Streator’s attention. One was the Salvation Army, which had received a great impetus in 1909 with the coming of Captain Frank Ketcham, an unusually energetic and dedicated officer. His strong tenor voice added vigor to the street-corner meetings, and soon he was campaigning to

raise funds to build a permanent home for the organization in Streator. Fawcett Plumb in 1911 offered the Salvation Army for a period of sixty days "the first half of all money realized from the sale of the odd numbered lots in the new Central Park Addition to the City of Streator," an offer which yielded \$4000 for the building fund. In September of that year a benefit concert at the Opera House—featuring a song titled "Ketchum! Fetchum!"—yielded additional funds, and later that month ground was broken at 126 South Bloomington Street. The citadel was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 30.

Under the leadership of John E. Williams, the Sunday Evening Club sponsored lectures, admission 25¢, at the Good Will Church (now VFW headquarters at 305 East Hickory). The club offered such well-known speakers as Robert Ingersoll, a personal friend of Streator druggist W. W. Woolley. The town's religious preferences were surveyed in 1912 by the Reverend W. C. Miles, who commented:

It appears that practically all of the foreign element from whom information was obtainable are identified with some church, usually Catholic, Lutheran, German Evangelical or Russian Greek. . . . Of the whole population, American and foreign not identified with any church, nearly all express preference for some denomination of the Protestant faith. Comparatively few refuse to give information, and there were no confessed infidels.

In 1912 Andy Patterson, the Reverend George W. Stoddard of the First Baptist Church, and the Reverend C. A. Decker of St. Paul's Lutheran Church organized Streator's first Boy Scout troop. There were new farm organizations too: in 1912 the Livingston County Soil and Crop Improvement Association (after 1920 known as the Livingston County Farm Bureau), and in 1913 the Better Farming Association, which changed its name the following year to the La Salle County Farm Bureau. A permanent home for the YMCA was built in 1914 at Monroe and Bridge streets, the \$80,000 structure made possible by a substantial donation from Mrs. Marietta Reeves.



The year 1914, so fateful for the nations of Europe, was a placid one in Streator. In January, the shooting of two timber wolves along the Vermillion River made news, and the same issue of the paper advertised a hat for the militant suffragette "on the line of a German military cap, giving the fair wearer the appearance of a lovely Valkyrie." That month Streatorites could see the play "Little Lost Sister." This "Timely Play Tending to Expose and Wipe Out the Traffic in Girls (YOUR DAUGHTER MIGHT HAVE BEEN ELSIE WELCOME)" was recommended by the *Independent-Times*: "Beaming with heartless [?] throbs, wholesome pathos and lingering humor . . . should be seen by every man, woman and child in the country." The New York Central bought the CI&S line, a Ford runabout sold for \$500.00, and a package of Camels cost 10¢. When war broke out on July 28, the *Independent-Times* story, "Austria Declares War on Serbia," competed for attention with a large headline announcing the Elks mule race, and the paper devoted much more space to the New Haven railroad scandal, Miller's carnival, and Dr. J. Blair Guthrie, who, appearing at the Opera House, held out hope to men of all ages suffering from "varicocele blood poison, nervo-sexual debility and all diseases peculiar to men."

There were continuing changes in the business community. The coal mines were producing less and less; the value of coal mined in the Streator area fell from \$2,166,000 in 1900 to \$1,878,900 in 1910, and continued downward almost every year thereafter. Though it was estimated in 1912 that there were still fourteen mines operating in and around Streator, they employed only a few hundred men. Just two years later the old Chicago, Wilmington & Vermillion Coal Company teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, went into receivership, and emerged as the Chicago, Wilmington and Franklin, with most of its assets in Franklin County, far to the south.

Glass workers were still in the throes of adjusting to new conditions in the industry. At a bottle blowers' convention in Atlantic City in 1910, the president of the association spoke of the "trade crisis" in the industry, reminded his audience that

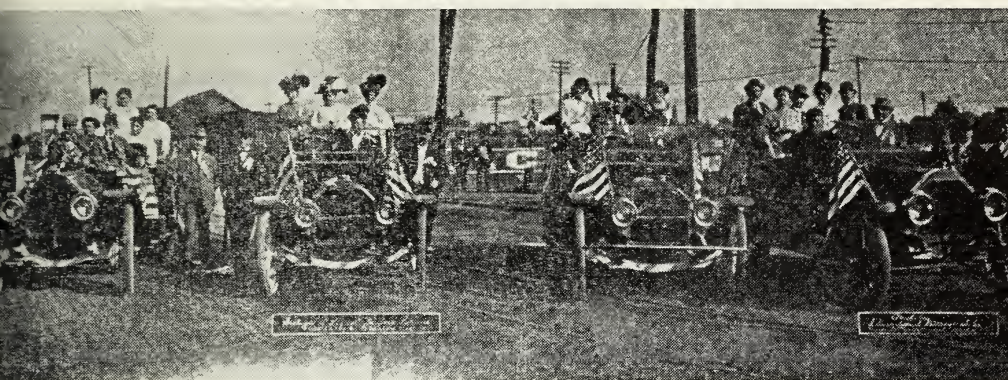


there was still a great demand for hand labor in many factories not equipped with machines, and recommended bravery and fearlessness in endeavoring to adjust "to the inevitable, meeting the manufacturers fairly and squarely in the readjustment that cannot be avoided." In December of that year the *Free Press* noted:

Fires were lighted on Wednesday of last week in factory No. 3 at the American Bottle Company's plant in this city and blowing will probably begin about December 15. This furnace contains 14 rings and amber glass will be produced. Employment will be given to about 80 blowers on the larger sized bottles. When this factory starts all the factories in the city that employ blowers will be in operation and there will be about 300 skilled workmen holding steady places. This looks something like old times and means a great deal not only to the blowers themselves but also to the city of Streator.

The need for new business activity was reflected in the establishment of a Streator Chamber of Commerce in 1915. The National Drain Tile Company, which had come to Streator in 1907, in 1917 formed a new company, in which local investors purchased some stock, and became the Streator Drain Tile Company. Three new firms were the Dependable Company of 1913, makers of corrugated metal products; the Kennedy Manufacturing Company, which began making truck bodies in 1915; and the Anthony Company, founded by William Anthony in 1917 to manufacture hoists, dump trailers, truck cranes, and other similar equipment.

It was during this period, not long before America's entry into World War I, that the Streator area had its one and only experience with convict labor. The year was 1915, a time when the state penitentiary at Joliet had a record number of inmates, partially because it was releasing fewer parolees (Chicago judges had protested that too many prisoners were paroled there). To relieve overcrowded quarters, the penitentiary sent honor prisoners out to build roads in various areas. For example, Beecher in Will County had made use of prison labor for road building in



*Assembling for group photos, a favorite American sport. Above, the Elks Minstrels gathered about 1915 in front of their building on North Park Street. Below, in Roamer cars, are saloonkeepers and their families at the CB&Q station on Hickory Street.*

1914. In 1915 Reading Township proposed to build a twenty-mile macadam road and, since no private firm could underbid the low price for convict labor, the commissioners arranged for prison help (and crushed stone) from Joliet. In April the township built a large hall north of Reading, naming it Camp Moon after the Santa Fe railroad station nearby. A private construction firm excavated the roadway. On May 13 the first of fifty men arrived under Captain T. G. Keegan and Carl Munson. First the convicts laid a narrow-gauge railway track for the steam engine and dump cars that would carry the roadbuilding materials. Then they spread the base of crushed rock in the excavated roadbed, covered it with asphalt, and used rollers to pack the road firmly into place.

That summer was not complete for Streatorites without a trip to Camp Moon. Sundays and holidays were visiting days, and crowds trooped in to gaze at the dining hall, the small army tents where the men slept, and of course the men themselves. To supplement their wages of 50¢ a day, the prisoners made watch chains, fobs, and bracelets of leather and horsehair, which they sold to the sightseers for "cigar money." No untoward incidents occurred, and by fall Reading Township had a fine new road and the honor prisoners were back in Joliet. (Soon afterward, however, the warden's wife was killed by a trusty in an honor camp elsewhere, and the state discontinued the practice of hiring out convict labor.)

Meanwhile German armies had marched through Belgium only to be stopped at the first Battle of the Marne; miles of trenches were dug across the Western front; the *Lusitania* went down with 128 Americans aboard; the French held off the Germans at Verdun; and Russia erupted in revolution. German submarines waged havoc with American merchant shipping, and finally a grimly determined Wilson warned Congress that the world "must be made safe for democracy." On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the war. The long picnic was over.

The "war to end wars" involved just about everybody in the United States, sooner or later. On the day the United States joined the conflict, Streator's Charles P. Gaut began organizing a company of volunteers, who were soon marching with broomsticks in a field near Riverview Cemetery. Early plans called for an American force of 1,200,000 men, and Gaut calculated that Streator's share, in proportion to its population and size, would be 180 men. One Streatorite, arrested in Ottawa a few days after war was declared, pleaded patriotically in court:

"Your honor, judge, these Germans got my dandruff so heated up yesterday that I went out and got jagged . . ."

"Well, that isn't the question here. Are you guilty to the charge preferred," spake the Court.

"Guilty."

"Six sixty and costs," said the judge.



The *Free Press* immediately offered American flags for sale at only 90¢, and reminded Germans in the United States that none of them could "afford to be disloyal." A total of twenty-four German-born nursing nuns from St. Mary's Hospital promptly began reporting to Ottawa in groups of four to take out naturalization papers. John E. Williams was named Federal Fuel Administrator for Illinois, and a Streator Red Cross chapter was organized in early May, setting up headquarters a month later in the Masonic Temple.

Of course war was not a total preoccupation. Townspeople were glad to see the season's first gypsies arrive to camp out in the "free pasture" north of town—an unfailing sign of summer. Another seasonal harbinger was the departure for its summer tour of the Nat Reiss carnival show (also called "The World at Home"), which—under the direction of Omar Sami—wintered at the Streator fairgrounds and played there to open and close each season. The Knights of Columbus presented "The Dingbat of Gar," at the Plumb Theater (as the Opera House was coming to be called), a show praised as "the best home talent production put on in Streator, barring none." An era came to an end when the city council passed an ordinance prohibiting free lunches in Streator saloons. This was done at the request of the Liquor Dealers' Protective Association, which hoped to reduce expenses as well as the number of panhandlers. Newspaper readers were advised by a battleship commander that, contrary to popular opinion, men who wore wristwatches were *not* all mollicoddles; he sported one himself, and would not be without it.

Streator was also busy making a movie, under the direction of Plumb Theatre manager Edward Scheibel. (Locally produced and shown, such productions were fairly common in this era; of a later effort, made in the 20's, it was said, "it didn't have sound but it did have an odor.") The story of "The Wrecker" concerned a railroad executive, President Essington of the MN&Q Railroad (played by Mayor T. G. Essington); Bernard Powers, superintendent of the MN&Q (Harvey Julien); his wife (Mrs. J. O. Miller); Helen, their daughter (Marcella Cray); and two



MN&Q engineers, Jim Hilton (W. H. Jennings) and Jack Manning (William J. Sullivan). The melodramatic plot pitted hero Manning against villain Hilton, involved the affections of pretty daughter Helen, and ended on a predictably happy note with virtue triumphant.

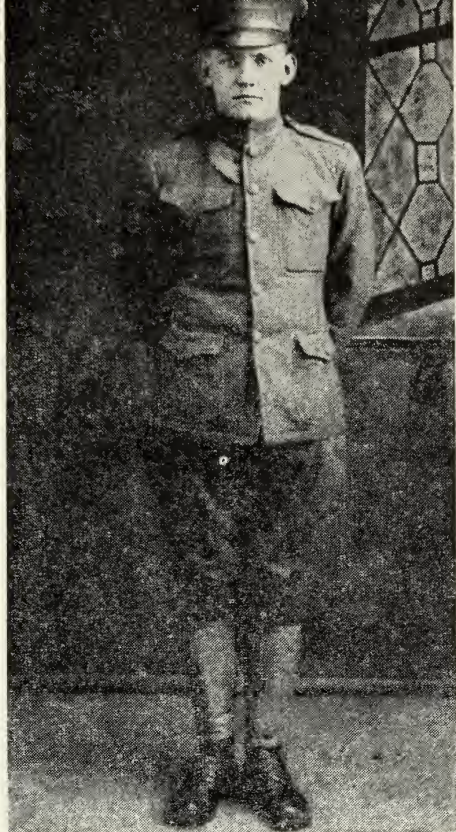
Meanwhile Gaut's volunteers marched up and down with their broomsticks. Some got impatient and enlisted; among the first was Tad Reno, who, since he was only seventeen, had to take his mother along to the marine recruiting office in Chicago so she could give her permission. Joseph Elias also signed up with the marines, while Lyle Phillips joined the army and Max Hepler and James Fraser volunteered for the air corps. But it was not to be that kind of war. In late April Congress passed a draft law, and on June 5 all men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty had to register. In Streator, with almost 1500 men in this category, registration proceeded smoothly, according to the newspapers.

Absolutely no trouble was experienced. . . . The young men seemed perfectly willing and many of them anxious to register and there were not a great many exemptions asked. . . . Tact was shown by the judges when ticklish cases were introduced, but everything went lovely.

One wonders whether the patriotic imbiber with the aroused "dandruff" was anxious to register, and whether "everything went lovely" for him.

In July came what some referred to as the "human lottery" when the numbers were chosen that would determine which young men would go to make up the initial quota of 687,000 troops. Edwin S. Harrison of Streator was the first man in La Salle County to be called, out of a total of 3000. The Streator district was expected to furnish 303 draftees, and those whose numbers had been called reported for physical examinations in August. Streator was proud of its "Sammies" and honored them with a banquet in Good Will Hall and a "patriotic demonstration" and musical program in the park early in September. The first fourteen left on September 5 for Camp Dodge, near Des

*Leslie G. Woods was not yet twenty years old when he was killed in the bombing of an American hospital in France.*



Moines. Thereafter groups of various sizes—from 5 to 150—left every two weeks or so for the duration of the war.

No sooner had it sent off its first draftees than Streator learned of the death on September 6 of one of its volunteers. Leslie G. Woods had been a member of the hospital corps and one of the first Americans to land in France. Serving in an American hospital on the French coast, he and three others were killed in a German bombing raid. Woods was one of America's first five casualties in the war, and was later honored by Streator's American Legion, which named its post after him.

Streator responded with enthusiasm to the war emergency. George Riteman sent word from Camp Dodge:

Streator boys are all making the best of army life. During the first week in every company they were grouped together, now their groups have been dissembled. . . . An officer remarked the other day that he believed the Streator contingent of September 19th possessed a stronger comradeship among themselves than any particular group in the whole cantonment.

Cooperation was the watchword at home, too. When it came to Liberty Loans, for example, Streator oversubscribed every time. The first, in June 1917, set the Streator quota at \$300,000; the town pledged \$390,000. For the second, in October, townspeople subscribed \$862,800, more than \$70,000 over their quota. The third loan, in April 1918, was also oversubscribed; in the fourth, Streator, pledging \$903,600 against a goal of \$754,750, had the largest oversubscription of any district in the county. In a fund drive in March 1918 conducted by the Salvation Army, Streator became the second city in the United States to top its goal. Women worked at Red Cross headquarters preparing bandages and toilet kits. They knitted caps, socks, gloves, and scarves with such eagerness that a newspaper reporter felt called upon to conduct a survey of ministers, all of whom admitted that they opposed knitting in church. There was even a small-sized war scare at home, or at least so the *Independent-Times* thought.

The mysterious workings of the sinister pro-German methods of paralyzing industry in this country seemingly were brought closer home to Streatorites, when it was found out that a big stick of dynamite had been found buried in a car load of coal at the upper factory of the American Bottle Company Tuesday afternoon. [New Year's Day, 1918]

The writer, noting that the coal was shipped from southern Illinois (a sure indication of the decline of Streator's mines)—an area that also supplied some government installations—theorized that the explosive may have been destined for one of these. For those who might scoff at the idea of sabotage in Streator, he added:

People are apt to be skeptical in considering the possibilities of facts which seem astounding to them, but in these days, when daily reports are sent in from all over the country telling of the effects of explosions which are traced to friends of Germany, one should not guess that because a thing is local it is without connection with that almost invisible system which has played havoc with American industry.

That winter was notable for record cold; a blizzard on January 18 sent the temperature down to  $-20^{\circ}$  and brought transportation to a standstill. There were lightless nights, gasless Sundays, workless Mondays. Stern posters reminded everyone that "Food will win the war" and urged housewives to use substitutes for wheat, sugar, and meat. The war came closest to most Americans through such work of the Food Administration Bureau and its tireless head, Herbert Hoover. Not that it was all taken with the greatest seriousness. Streator people chuckled over this doggerel:

Little Herbie Hoover's come to our house to stay,  
 To make us scrape the dishes clean, and keep the crumbs away.  
 An' learn us to make war bread, an' save up all the grease,  
 For the less we eat of butter, the sooner we'll have peace.  
 An' all us other children, when our scanty meal is done,  
 We gather up around the fire an' has the mostest fun  
 A-listenin' to the proteins that Herbie tells about,  
 An' the Calories that git you  
     Ef  
         you  
             don't  
                 watch  
                     out!

By the end of February, Streator had a total of 527 men in service, 252 of them enlistees. William Katus, stationed at Fort Terry, New York, wrote to his parents about their drill sergeant, who said, "Damn it, men, you drill like veterans! You drill the best of any company out here!" Katus went on: "We all thought he was kidding and laughed, but he told us he meant what he said. . . . And no wonder. Look who we are, and where we are from: Streator, Illinois, the best little burg on the map!"

The men who crossed the Atlantic and tasted the bitterness of battle naturally had different tales to tell. Wrote William Elliott, with the 104th Massachusetts in France, after five days at the front:



We lived in dugouts, which were very crudely constructed, as they were put together in a hurry. The huns gave us a very lively time while we were there, sending large shells, three and six inch. . . . We had two scares from gas attacks, but there was nothing to it. We did not sleep at night, as then is when the fighting is done. . . . I saw many rats, and to tell the truth, they were as big as half grown kittens. . . . The dugout I was in was occupied by another fellow and myself, and was very small. There was not room to stretch out and we had to sleep curled up. . . . I did not get much sleep.

Elliott, who was wounded shortly afterward, later received the Croix de Guerre from the French government.

Another Streator boy, Chris Campbell, also tried to picture life at the front for the folks back home. In August 1918 he wrote to his friend Dave Morse, ending with an accurate prediction:

It sure is some relief to be back away from the line for a few days after being up there for 36 days, like it was Fourth of July everyday. I would like to explain to you, Dave, but I can't do it—you've got to go through it to feel it. But can say it is no place for a man with weak nerves. I saw fellows that were big, strong huskies, but the continual fire of big guns and shrapnel flying around and the gas—it just made them cave in. . . . You won't believe it, Dave, but it is just like an earthquake. . . . When I stop and think of it, now that I am back here, it makes a great chill run down my back. . . . I think if we can keep the boche on the go the way they have been for the past month and a half it will be over by this winter.

Archie Crouse had a lighthearted attitude toward one of the soldier's traditional foes:

My bunk mate and I make a raid every day on those things they call "gray backs." I found about a dozen on me and my buddy found about the same on him. . . . I know there was one running over me last night and if he had stubbed his toe and fallen down I know I would have had to go to the hospital—he was so big. Ha ha.

One who saw a good deal of action was Charles Schmitz, a second-generation German-American who had joined the army

at sixteen and served in the Far East for six years before being sent to France. In a letter to his father, he explained how

. . . the last time we were in the trenches I called on the Germans in their own language to come on and fight, and then told them to go to the right or to the left. They got in front of my gun and when they were within ten yards of me I turned loose with my automatic rifle and mowed them down.

Schmitz later won the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre.

In spite of such vivid reminders of the loyalty of its citizens, both German- and native-born, Streator was not immune to the war hysteria that swept the country. In April of 1918, the residence of Christopher Baker on La Salle Street was daubed with yellow paint because of accusations that he was a "money slacker." (Baker, seventy-five years old, retorted that he had contributed to the Red Cross and had bought a bond, but that he had an income of only \$2000 a year.) That same spring the *Majestic* showed "The Kaiser—The Beast of Berlin," advertised as a "picture to make your blood boil—Every American should see it!" The teaching of German at the high school was suspended, and the *Volksblatt-Beobachter* newspaper, accused of being pro-German, went out of business. The Mozart Club, a music group for girls, became the Chaminade Club, replacing the name of a "German [sic] composer" with that of a French woman "whose numbers are familiar to the girls." The papers ran the usual atrocity pictures with accompanying diatribes against "the atrocious Hun."

Late in the war came an enemy more dangerous to those behind the lines than any German—influenza. Sweeping through the nations of the world, it struck small and large cities alike, and hit Streator in the fall of 1918. Hundreds fell ill, and the newspapers printed instructions for treatment. The city closed churches, theaters, and schools, washed down the streets as a protective measure, and forbade leaf-burning because it irritated the sick. The hospital was full, and emergency quarters

were set up in the Elks building with twenty beds and two nurses from Chicago. By the middle of October, thirteen had died, and by the end of the month Streator's flu cases had reached a thousand. Women volunteered their help to nurse the sick, and some sacrificed their own lives. The first was Mrs. Edward Reinel, who died late in October. Miss Helen Riggs, a schoolteacher, and Mrs. W. P. Crabbe both succumbed in November. Over twenty-five had died by the end of the war, and at its close many hundreds still faced a long convalescence.

Word of the armistice was received at 2 A.M. on November 11 by the newspapers, which immediately notified the mayor. Fire bells were rung, and Streatorites poured out of their houses to celebrate above the clamor of factory whistles and sirens. After a parade that afternoon, there was a mass meeting in the park where Mayor Essington gave an address, as did state representative Reuben G. Soderstrom and Richard F. Purcell, city chairman of the United War Work Drive.

It was finally over—the excitement, the anxiety, the hard work, and the deprivation of war. Of the 1500 men from the Streator area who had gone to fight, 28 would never return. Still, it was a time of rejoicing. The decade ended, as it had begun, on a note of hope and prosperity. The Crawford Car Shops employees, sporting on their backs the results of full employment and good wages, prompted Streator's nickname for the 1918-1920 period, the "silk shirt era." Almost a thousand men worked for Crawford in this peak period, and they helped set the tone for the immediate postwar years. There were other signs of optimism and expansion. Streator chapters of both Kiwanis and Rotary were founded in 1919. Families everywhere were learning the joys and sorrows of owning an automobile; a *Free Press* survey made in 1918 counted 537 cars in the downtown business district on a Saturday night.

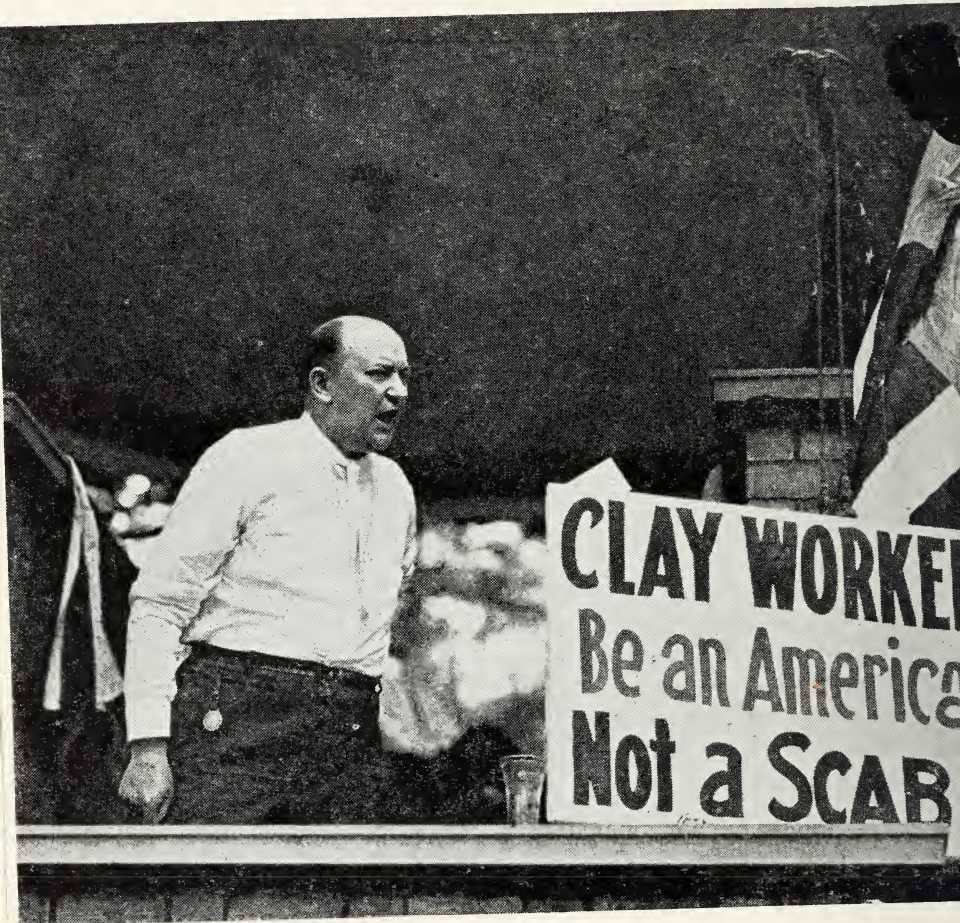
When the year 1919 ended, President Wilson had returned from Europe to urge the United States into the League of Nations, had suffered a paralytic stroke, and had seen the Senate reject his proposal. America was turning its back on Europe,

concerned more with strikes at home ("bolshevists" lurked under every bed), votes for women (the Nineteenth Amendment was making the rounds of state legislatures for ratification), and Prohibition (there was a rush to lay in a stock of liquor before it went into effect in 1920). Wilson had said, before he collapsed, "I can predict with absolute certainty that within another generation there will be another world war." But few Americans in the hopeful year of 1919 believed him.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

*Victor Olander of the State Federation of Labor, City Park, 1922.*



## HARD TIMES AND GOOD

**O**NE night in the early 1920's, a busy printer in Streator went home and composed the following verses:

### STREATOR ON SATURDAY NIGHT

We've been used right royally elsewhere,  
 In visits to towns of more fame—  
 And enjoyed the sights and many bright lights  
 While playing the visiting game;  
 But however joyful and rosy  
 The appeal of a foreign sight,  
 We've oft found ourselves a-longing for  
 Streator on Saturday night.

Streator boasts of no world attractions,  
 Has no seashore, nor mountain peaks high—  
 But while roaming afar, where these things are  
 Our people admit (on the sly)  
 That New York is all right on Sunday  
 And 'Frisco on Wednesday is bright—  
 But no place in our splendid nation is  
 Like Streator on Saturday night.

All things unite in an effort  
 On this famous eve of the week  
 In a manner caressing, with nothing distressing  
 To of hospitality and good fellowship speak;  
 There's a smile on each face congenial,  
 There's the handshake that you feel is right  
 The place of which I am speaking,  
 Is Streator on Saturday night.

For a pleasanter and happier Saturday,  
 With crowds more generous and kind,  
 It's our proud boast—from coast to coast—  
 Would be mighty hard to find;  
 For Main Street its kings and its barons,  
 With our toilers join hands in delight,  
 And surely make all things alluring  
 In Streator on Saturday night.

Any city may have a feature  
 That brings to it fortune and renown,  
 But to my notion there's no mountain or ocean  
 Looms up like this night in our town.  
 Friends—Let's give a toast to our people—  
 Whose sorrows and troubles take flight,  
 To the love and cheer that's displayed—no discomfort  
 In Streator on Saturday night.

Poets who rave of the Rockies  
 Of oceans, of cities, of flowers  
 It's one safe bet that they haven't yet  
 Witnessed the feature that's ours;  
 Because then when their minds are a-pondering  
 And in memories allowed to delight,  
 They'd find but one topic to write on—  
 That's "Streator, on Saturday Night!"

Reuben G. Soderstrom had come to Streator in 1900 at the age of twelve and had gone to work first in a bottle plant and later as a printer's devil for the *Independent-Times*. During World War I he was elected to the state legislature, where he soon became a champion of organized labor (he was later to be elected president of the Illinois State Federation of Labor). About the poem he says: "I went home on Saturday night and wrote six stanzas in about forty minutes' time. I didn't show it to anybody for about eight months because my associates were a pretty rough bunch." Mike Reed, editor of the newspaper, to whom he showed it, commented that "some of it's real poetry,

but a lot is folderol." About his reason for writing "Streator on Saturday Night," Soderstrom explains simply, "This was a real live town with a lot of pioneer spirit."

Like the doughboys who had written from faraway places during the First World War, Soderstrom was expressing the loyalty and pride that Streator people have felt for their own home town. The years from 1920 to 1940 were probably the most difficult in Streator's history, but the city survived, due in large part to this spirit.

In 1920 a typical Streatorite might be concerned about the "Black Sox" scandal in Chicago baseball or the vague threat of the "yellow peril" in the Orient. He might be building his own radio set (complete instructions given in the newspaper) with the hope of plucking Detroit's Station WWJ out of the ether. He watched Douglas Fairbanks in the movies, peppered his conversation with new slang words like "daffy," "vamp," and "snappy," and liked to keep up to date on such current phenomena as flappers and jazz. As usual, local critics had strong opinions about trends of the times. The *Independent-Times*, in a favorable review of "The Chocolate Soldier," took advantage of the occasion to cast a few stones:

In the days of despair, the present, with the "jazz," the tin-pot tunes, the meaningless lyrics, the shimmy, St. Vitus' dance, and the plotless plots, dealing invariably with bedrooms, night gowns, and series of rapid fire epigrams which would have made mother hold cakes of ice to her burning ears, one almost despairs in the search for something which one can label music.

The typical Streatorite of 1920 faced hard times, and they were not long in coming. One important factor was Prohibition, which went into effect on January 17, 1920. The day before, one newspaper predicted: "Streator, it is thought, will meekly obey the big dry law; will accept without a kick the new order of things . . . the new lid will be nailed on so tight that no one will care to attempt prying it off." The writer may have been a wishful thinker, but he was certainly no prophet



when it came to Streator's meek obedience. For one thing, "the big dry law" dealt a staggering blow to the American Bottle Company, whose chief product was beer bottles. The company was able to remain solvent; it had been given an extra margin of security when purchased by the Owens Bottle Company in 1916 (in 1929 the parent company became Owens-Illinois, and its Streator branch was also rechristened). Production was sharply curtailed, however, and many people suffered. Nor were Streatorites by inclination prepared to accept without complaint the abrogation of their time-honored rights to buy and drink what they pleased. Like people throughout the country, they found that prying off "the new lid" was quite feasible, and a bootlegging industry sprang up almost overnight to make, supply, and serve the alcoholic beverages forbidden by law.

As in many areas, a great number of those involved in bootlegging were Italians, possibly because of the Italian tradition of homemade wine. Along Water Street, for example, almost two out of three households had stills. Local suppliers began on a small scale but some were soon carrying on a brisk trade. A former Streator bootlegger describes how he made alcohol: In a fifty-gallon barrel he would mix twenty-five gallons of lukewarm water, one hundred-pound sack of corn sugar, and two pounds of yeast (his first batch, with sixteen pounds of yeast, was unforgettable, he admits). This mash fermented for about ten days until it had "settled down." (Corn or other grain was not used unless a corn taste was specifically desired; the corn had to be ground, a chore with which most men did not want to bother.) The mash was then heated in a still and run through coiled metal tubing. After distillation, which took about three hours, there remained approximately five gallons of 90- to 95-proof alcohol. A higher proof could be obtained by running the alcohol through the still a second time, reducing the volume by half while doubling the proof; this "Straight A" product was sold only to wholesalers, who added distilled water to reduce the alcohol to the standard proof. Plain alcohol was known technically as "alky"; when colored with burnt sugar to re-

semble whiskey, it became “moonshine,” or “moon”; adding a small amount of essence transformed it into gin. (Actually most bootleg hard liquor was known as “moon.”) In addition there was bootleg beer, called “homebrew,” or simply “brew.” One favorite drink around Streator was “Patrick’s Half and Half,” half alcohol and half white soda, bottled with a hole in the cork to prevent explosions.

Making liquor in quantity required a fairly elaborate establishment. Since the distilling coils had to be cooled with running cold water, farm outbuildings near streams were sought-after locations. One local entrepreneur maintained a continuous operation with three shifts—each including a cook, a vatkeeper, and a helper—plus a trucker to pick up supplies and deliver the finished product after dark. A local food warehouse was the principal sugar supplier, while several handymen in the area became adept at rigging and servicing stills.

By the late 20’s, according to one estimate, there were about fifty Streatorites in the business of making bootleg liquor. They helped supply the Chicago area as well as their own local needs, but were not involved with Capone; nor was there the cutthroat competition common in many places. As the number of suppliers increased, the price for a gallon of alcohol fell from \$25.00 to \$5.00. These were wholesale prices. Most townspeople paid more when they bought from a supplier or at a “blind pig” (speakeasy). A so-called “coffee shop” license cost \$100.00 a year, but when the town needed extra revenue, authorities would launch a series of raids and fine bootleggers and blind pig operators \$100.00 apiece. In general, local officials were content to close their eyes to Prohibition violations unless they received definite complaints. (The wife of one bootlegger recalls: “I used to wonder who snitched on us—then I realized that the mash smelled like hell!”) Federal raiders were more active. By the early 1930’s they had perfected the techniques of mass raiding, sometimes sending out seventy-five men to hit twenty or more speakeasies at once. “Was I famous!” boasts a bootlegger who had his share of raids and arrests, “My name was in the paper

alla time. It was a good ad for me!" To protect their not inconsiderable investment in time and money, the bootleggers were glad to pay a kind of legal insurance, \$25.00 per month, to two Streator men who in return provided their clients with bail money and a legal adviser from Ottawa.

Most people laughed at Prohibition. Since liquor was not on sale at dances or other public functions, those who attended carried their own; one Streator clothier liked to point out that his suits had "pint pockets." People remember how, out in the rural areas where many stills were located, cows sometimes got drunk from partaking too freely of stream water where dregs from the mash had been dumped. One local brewer delivered his product in what had been a milk truck, which still bore the proud slogan "Watch Our Cream Line."

Some fought back. As early as 1922, the city council adopted a resolution urging passage of a bill legalizing wine and beer. In 1925 the Streator branch of the National Association Opposed to Prohibition launched a drive for a thousand paid-up local members to further the organization's aims: amending the law to allow people to serve beer and light wines in their homes.

Whether they laughed or protested (or approved), most Americans came to realize that "the big dry law" was unwise. One of Streator's most successful bootleggers believes that "Prohibition was the worst thing that could happen in this country" because it bred a wholesale contempt for law. In 1927 the local paper summed it up this way:

We used to have about sixty-five saloons, now we have about the same number of "coffee houses."

We used to get five hundred dollars a year license; now we get one hundred dollars a year from the "coffee house."

[The customer] used to get a drink of good beer, whisky or wine for a moderate sum. Now he gets poison, and pays five times as much for the privilege.

Prohibition accounted for only some of Streator's troubles during the 20's. Agricultural prices fell, and farmers suffered

from a steadily declining income. There were appeals to consumers—a full-page ad in a February 1922 issue of the *Independent-Times* exhorted readers to “just see that one food produced from corn is on your table at least ONCE each day”—but they failed to accomplish much. As a market center for a rich agricultural area, Streator naturally felt the effects of the farm depression.

Probably most important of all were labor difficulties. They erupted all over the nation almost as soon as the war was over, and strikes by steelworkers, railroad workers, and coal miners virtually paralyzed large segments of the economy for months. Anti-Bolshevik feeling, aroused by events in Russia, became less discriminating as it grew more intense; socialists and labor organizations became suspect during an orgy of Red-hunting. Violence flourished in the climate of bad feeling that developed. In the southern Illinois coal fields, bitter conflicts between miners and operators culminated in the “Herrin massacre” that tore Williamson County apart in 1922.

Streator had been active in labor affairs for decades. Through its Trades and Labor Council, according to Soderstrom, it made “as great a contribution to the labor movement as any city in the country.” Among the Council’s prominent members were Manley Davis, Jake St. Clair, and John M. (“Dad”) Hunter, president of District 12 of the UMW—the last-named described by Soderstrom as an eloquent speaker, “Christlike, but for labor.” Relations between labor and management had been generally amicable and characterized by mutual respect and trust. These friendly feelings, however, degenerated in the early 20’s. One contributing factor was the announced departure, late in 1921, of the Crawford works for Kankakee. In an atmosphere of labor-management hostility, each side blamed the other for the heavy blow.

Just after Christmas that year, a two-column announcement appeared in the Streator press. It listed several points—including the lack of population increase, the loss of manufacturing plants due to the “labor situation,” and the reputation of



Streator as a "closed shop town"—and followed them with a "Declaration of Principles of the Employers of Labor in Streator." Among these were the following: "No person will be refused employment . . . on account of membership or non-membership in any labor organization"; "Employers must be unmolested and unhampered in the management of their business"; "We disapprove absolutely of strikes and lock-outs"; and, finally, "We declare our unalterable opposition to the Closed Shop and insist that the doors of no industry in Streator be closed against any workmen." It was then explained that several of the signers had contracts with various labor unions, but that after their expiration the factories would be operated on the open shop basis. Those who signed were J. F. Morris for the Streator Drain Tile Company, E. F. Plumb for Streator Brick, R. H. Green for Streator Clay Manufacturing, C. C. Barr for the Barr Clay Company, P. R. Chubbuck for the Metal Stampings Corporation, C. E. Ryon for Western Glass, and thirteen additional employers.

Behind this action was a movement that had been launched through a local club to persuade employers that the open shop was the best solution to Streator's problems. Stanch advocates included Ermin Plumb of Streator Brick and George Sopher of the American Bottle Company.

In a town as labor-conscious as Streator, the movement did not go unchallenged for long. Early in January, under the headline "OPEN SHOP? NEVER!" the papers printed an answering announcement signed by thirty union locals, from barbers to sheet-metal workers. After denying labor's responsibility for Streator's troubles and proclaiming that "decent labor will not stand for scab shop," the declaration concluded, with oratorical flourish, on a note of appeal to the union men and women of Streator: "Stand by your guns, stand by your union, it will keep you from becoming a weakling, a suckling, a truckling. You may not become a plant straw boss, but by God the union will keep you free and thus we will continue to do our share to keep the state of old Abraham Lincoln the way Abe Lincoln intended it should be—FREE!"

In the ensuing months labor-management antagonisms were intensified, and many townspeople were drawn into the controversy. The Streator Drain Tile Company terminated its union contract in January. That same month there was violence at the Metal Stampings plant between union and non-union workers, and the factory closed down for a week. As contracts expired, many union laborers quit and employers replaced them with non-union workers, sometimes from out of the area. The Streator Clay Manufacturing Company hired several men from southern Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee (thus the word "Kaywy"—for Ky.—as a term of abuse). Union men picketed, circulated leaflets, threatened out-of-town "scabs," boycotted open shop manufacturers, and though there were no full-fledged riots, according to a labor leader, "kept the hospitals full." Employers discovered the injunction, and judges issued them to the Metal Stampings, Streator Clay, and Streator Drain Tile companies to prevent interference with their operations. Labor representatives complained to the city council that the sheriff was making deputies out of factory personnel. They also pointed out that repressive measures were unnecessary; with over 2000 men out of work, only one union worker had been sent to jail for disturbing the peace.

As the quarrel dragged on, emotions cooled and both sides listened more willingly to compromise offers. The city council appointed a mediation committee late in 1922. Negotiations between management and labor were resumed, delegates talked over their differences, and contracts were eventually renewed. Bitter feeling persisted for a long time, however, and the open shop question remained a local political issue for the next twenty years.

An indication of troubled times was the susceptibility of some Streator men to the militant chauvinism of the Ku Klux Klan. In 1922, there were night meetings at Starved Rock, Manville, and Ottawa, where, within a circle of parked cars with blazing headlights, hundreds of "novices" from the region including Streator were initiated. Aside from dressing in sheets, burning

crosses, and indulging in impassioned oratory, however, Klan members in the area did little and the movement died down after a few years.

In spite of its problems, Streator planned large-scale improvements and worked hard at effecting them. The new Chamber of Commerce early in 1921 listed Streator's needs, among them a new high school, better sewers and street paving, establishment of a park system, rehabilitation of the fairgrounds, stimulation of home industry, and better hotel accommodations. (Local wags liked to advise travelers: "If you stay at the Plumb, you'll wish you'd stayed at the Columbia; if you stay at the Columbia, you'll wish you'd stayed at the Plumb.") In February the town adopted the commission form of government, by a vote of 1388 to 231. By the end of the year, a progress report in a local paper spoke of "the high school about to rear its stately building, the sewer system under way, paved streets all planned for."

Another big plan successfully carried out was the Historical Pageant, sponsored by the YWCA in 1922 to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of settlement around Streator. (Strictly speaking, the pageant was a year late.) Mary Taft, sister of the sculptor Lorado Taft, came to town in mid-May to start rehearsals of a cast numbering nearly a thousand, recruited through schools and clubs.

On the big day, June 22, stores closed early so that their employees could be on hand in Marilla Park at five o'clock when the pageant started. The crowd was estimated at between 3000 and 5000. After a Prologue, in which dance teacher Rosalind Hupp played Spring, there were five main sections—Indian Life, Pioneer Days, Industry, Beginning of the 20th Century, and World War—with several Interludes. In appropriate costumes appeared Mother Earth, King Coal, Queen Glass, and Prince Clay. An orchestra played for the songs and dances of groups representing the various nationalities that had settled in Streator. There were second-grade girls as Summer Flowers, second-grade boys as Butterflies, eighth-grade girls as Winter Winds. Seventeen of the Zouaves drilled in some of their old routines, although

they were too old to climb walls. The grand finale featured Miss Streator (Mrs. Virginia Le Roy), who delivered a stirring monologue, in part as follows:

I am coal and glass and clay. I am the brawn of labor; the enterprise of capital. I am broad thoroughfares and parks and playgrounds. I am flowers and sunshine and green lawns. I am homes and shrines of worship. I am organizations, church fellowship, fraternal spirit; I am competition, strife, bloodshed, destruction . . . I am Streator, the unafraid; born in the bowels of the earth where darkness and grime abound; where clay awaits the moulder's touch, the potter's wheel. Up, up I rise, glorified through the efforts of my people; who transform me out of coal and clay and glass, out of competition and hate and distrust into this shining temple of civic beauty. . . . Here I am today, wondrous fair, radiant with unfolded possibilities, needing only one more element to complete my destiny. Where is Community Spirit, the fusing glory of which is to change me from all my sordid past into the grandeur which is mine? Come O gracious spirit of tolerance, of large sympathy . . . proclaim to the world that henceforth Streator is ready this incomparable June day to embrace Community Spirit and in her healing love and understanding bind together all the elements which make me possible—into the greater, more glorious Streator I yearn to be.

Whereupon Community Spirit (Mrs. Grover Daniels) appeared with Education, Religion, Commerce, Recreation, and Games, was welcomed with renewed fervor by Miss Streator, and joined with everyone present in singing a song written for the occasion (to the tune of "America the Beautiful"):

Oh beautiful for civic pride,  
For schools and churches free,  
For belching chimneys call to toil  
And homes blest majesty;  
Oh Streator City Beautiful,  
God keep thy honor bright,  
Let sons so true and daughters too  
Stand firm for truth and right.

"A wonderful spectacle," wrote the *Free Press* reporter, regretting only that "some of the episodes were too long and



darkness fell before the spectacular finale could be witnessed to good advantage." The *Independent-Times*, with perhaps a more personal interest (it was published by the Le Roys), had nothing but praise for the three-hour extravaganza, and commended the effects achieved by the artificial lighting in the last two episodes.

The new high school was dedicated on November 16, 1925. Streatorites were proud not only of the building itself, but also of the athletic teams that were making a name for Streator High School all over the state. With the coming of Lowell ("Pops") Dale as athletic director in 1918, high school athletics gained an importance they were to hold for the next thirty years. Year after year, football, basketball, and baseball teams won championships—both in the Illinois Valley Conference, and in the Big Twelve (to which Streator belonged from 1930 to 1950). Dale has said that it was not difficult for him to strengthen the athletic program, because "Streator has always been good for sports and people were interested." Under his leadership, boys worked hard to train, and enthusiastic crowds came to watch them play—whether baseball on a sunny spring day, football on a crisp fall evening, or basketball in the steamy warmth of the high school gymnasium.

Three young men who grew up in Streator in the 20's and 30's later had brief careers in big-league baseball. Andrew Bednar pitched for Pittsburgh in 1930 and 1931; Kenneth ("Ziggy") Sears was a catcher with the Yankees in 1943 and the St. Louis Browns in 1946; Ralph Novotney had one year, 1949, as a catcher for the Chicago Cubs.

Public golf came to Streator through the generosity of Andy Anderson, a local printer who had a nationwide business in the Chautauqua field. In February 1925 he announced that he would finance the rebuilding of a recreation center on a forty-acre city-owned plot north of town. This land, the home of the old Streator Trotting and Fair Association and, later, the Northern Illinois District Fair, had fallen into neglect since fires in the early 20's had destroyed both the grandstand along the race track and the

dance pavilion. Anderson's plans called for a new golf course, a children's playground, a baseball diamond with clubhouse, and tennis courts. Soon came the announcement that the manager of the new golf course would be Streator's former Salvation Army commander, Captain Frank Ketcham, who had retired to California a few years earlier. He returned to town in August, commenting on California: "Well, if there had never been a town like Streator, I would say that it's the best place in the world." In September, as the new recreation grounds took shape, they were renamed Anderson Fields.

Another indication of Streator's interest in sports was the inauguration by the *Times-Press* of Golden Gloves tournaments in 1929. This was the first year that other newspapers were invited to participate by the *Chicago Tribune*, which had initiated the program three years previously.

Sports might flourish, but live theater was moribund in Streator. The last troupe to play the town regularly was the Gale Players, a group that specialized in mysteries and comedies. When the curtain rang down on their final performance in the mid-20's, local theaters offered only motion pictures and the vaudeville acts that occasionally accompanied them. Gone too was Chautauqua, a casualty of the war. But those who were looking for live entertainment did not have to rely solely on athletics and concerts in City Park. From the early 20's until the Second World War, Americans took to the dance floor as never before. Popular bands toured the country, setting up their music stands in one dance hall after another. Streatorites had a variety of places to choose from. They could ride the interurban up to Illini Beach, four miles south of Ottawa, or drive out to Del Monte Gardens (across from what is now radio station WIZZ), or Indian Acres, about a mile farther north. In the 30's there were shows at the new Armory on West Bridge Street.

Big-name attractions included Wayne King, Cab Calloway, Paul Whiteman, Jan Garber, and Guy Lombardo. During the "swing" era ushered in by Benny Goodman in the mid-30's, crowds gathered to listen and dance to the music of Hal Kemp,

Dick Jurgens, Eddie Howard, and Herbie Kay (who featured a pretty brunette singer named Dorothy Lamour). In the 20's pints of moon and bathtub gin circulated to "Avalon" and "Barney Google," while the soberer 30's brought longer skirts and "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" The dances changed but the saxophones played on.

So Streatorites went their way in the 20's, coping with Prohibition and unemployment, planning, building, and amusing themselves. As for excitement, most of that was vicarious, via the newspaper and radio. It was a time of "ballyhoo" over "tremendous trifles," with columns of copy devoted to stunt flying and flagpole sitting, and banner headlines proclaiming the latest crimes of violence. There was the Hall-Mills murder, the Loeb-Leopold "thrill killing," the furor over Sacco and Vanzetti. Hollywood provided a rich field for sensational journalism with such scandals as the death of William Desmond Taylor, the trial of Fatty Arbuckle. (The *Independent-Times* blamed the stars' misbehavior on the meretricious roles they played; what was needed was "real characters of real men and women, living their real lives . . . instead of the glittering vampires Thedabaraizing life.") Suddenly Streator itself was plunged into notoriety with a murder that made front pages all over the country.

It involved the family of H. C. Hill, a prominent Streator physician. There had been gossip about the Hills for some time: Dr. Hill and his wife were separated, reputedly because of her violent temper and possessive jealousy. At home there was only a son, Harry, who in August of 1927 was twenty-two years old. Harry, a slight, blond youth of amiable disposition (recollections about him include such phrases as "a heart as big as all-outdoors," "wouldn't hurt a sparrow," and "would give you the shirt off his back"), had a job representing a Chicago advertising agency, but seemed to spend much of his time gambling. In August Dr. Hill came into possession of a check for over \$1000 made out to Harry and signed by Mrs. Hill. He became suspicious, knowing that Harry had sometimes forged checks when in need of money, and decided to discuss the matter with Mrs. Hill.

When questioned as to her whereabouts, Harry reported that his mother had gone out of town, but his contradictory explanations disturbed his father even more. On the night of August 22, Hill went out to the big house at 518 South Bloomington and, receiving no answer at the door, fetched his friend Dr. George Dicus. As the August night fell, the two men tramped through the empty rooms, found nothing undisturbed, noted the dining room table set for two. Then in the basement they came upon a place where the paving bricks had been removed and the soil turned over. Thoroughly worried by this time, Hill called William Robb, chief of police, who dug carefully and soon uncovered the body of Mrs. Hill. She had been shot behind the left ear and had lain in her shallow grave perhaps two or three weeks.

Police immediately began questioning friends and neighbors of the murdered woman. From an old handyman, Peter Busch, they learned that Harry had recently asked him to tamp down the earth and clean the floor in the cellar, but not to dig too deep. What the local paper (as of 1927 the consolidated *Times-Press*) called "the finger of circumstantial evidence" certainly pointed to Harry, and the state's attorney drew up a warrant for his arrest. Even more damaging, Harry had disappeared and, while his father proclaimed his belief in the young man's innocence, a nationwide alarm went out. For the next few days, the townspeople talked of little else; lest they feel superior in their innocence, the *Times-Press* editorialized with Biblical zeal:

Harry Hill was not a criminal. He was the victim of a poor home environment, a still poorer community environment, and worse than all the victim of his own weak and wayward nature. . . . Mrs. Hill was not a normal woman or mother. She was excitable, violent, possibly unbalanced mentally. . . . The Hill boy . . . had no home influences of the normal, wholesome, kindly nature. He did not have a father's dominating care and guidance . . . And to crown it all the community did him all the harm it could . . . It would be folly to attack the gambling places, pool rooms, coffee houses . . . because this is our responsibility . . . there is such a preponderating influence for evil in this town, it is a wonder there are not more youths committing violent





*Harry Hill in conference with his attorneys. In front, left to right, are R. C. Osborne, Hill, W. C. Jones, A. H. Shay, and Lee O'Neil Browne; at rear is bailiff A. Mason.*

deeds. . . . Crimes are not isolated, independent acts, they are the fruit of long years of demoralization, and it behooves us to plant and nurture the seed which shall bring forth the fruit delectable to all mankind.

On September 2, police in Seattle, Washington, tracing the license number of a Ford car sold there, arrested Harry Hill and held him in jail. Harry, stoutly denying the murder, said he had been in Streator on the night of August 22, but had left when he saw police cars parked in front of his home—his hasty act prompted by apprehension but not guilt. The young man was brought back to Ottawa a week later and, in an interview with William Godfrey of the Streator paper, appeared jaunty and confident. "Harry," asked Godfrey, "you seem to be in a rather jubilant mood for one languishing in a jail cell . . ." Young Hill replied that he hadn't a thing to worry about, and added: "I find this place a lot more attractive than the one at Seattle. However, it's nothing to go into hysterics about, and I wouldn't give much to stay here for any length of time."

Justice proceeded without undue hurry, however. On October 15 the grand jury indicted Harry Hill for his mother's murder; a month later the trial was set for December 27. It was announced that the prosecution would be in the hands of La Salle County state's attorney Russell O. Hanson, with Andrew O'Connor of Ottawa as special counsel. The impressive defense team consisted of A. H. Shay, chief counsel; R. C. Osborne, Dr. Hill's lawyer; W. C. Jones; and Lee O'Neil Browne, a lawyer and state representative from Ottawa.

The first three weeks of the trial were spent selecting a jury of twelve men (only one, William Seipp, from Streator). Then the prosecution set out to convict Harry, its main contention being that he had killed his mother because he feared that she would learn of the checks he had forged in her name. Hanson emphasized Busch's evidence, as well as Harry's flight after the discovery of the murdered woman. The defense countered with a theory that Mrs. Hill had been killed by a burglar, denied that Hill had had the damaging conversation with Busch, and called in several character witnesses, including Reuben Soderstrom and Lowell Dale (Harry had been a cheerleader while in high school). Throughout the trial, Harry seemed self-possessed, attentive, and unemotional, although once in a fit of temper during questioning by the press, he lashed out and hit Willard Edwards, a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune*. Without calling him to the stand, his lawyers rested their case on February 10. Four days later, after Hanson had delivered a comparatively brief summation, the defense astonished everyone by waiving final arguments, thus preventing the prosecution from taking full advantage of O'Connor's vaunted oratorical powers. Browne, his opposite number in this respect, of course lost his chance too, but the defense presumably felt that this was not too high a price to pay for O'Connor's silence.

The jury began its deliberations on Tuesday, February 14. They remained behind closed doors throughout the next day—a day when Browne, showing visitors around his home on the Fox River, slipped, fell into the water, and quickly drowned. Thursday brought from the deadlocked jury a request for release, denied by the judge. Finally, on Friday, a mistrial was declared after the jury reported a deadlock on the forty-third ballot (nine for conviction, three for acquittal). A second trial was scheduled for April.

So Hill remained in jail. Undoubtedly many Streator people felt that this was where he belonged. His pleasant personality notwithstanding, they thought he was guilty, that family money and political influence had saved him from a worse fate; some

believed that bribes had persuaded one or more of the holdouts to vote for acquittal. In any case, when April came around, a thinner, paler Harry Hill appeared in court only to be released on \$20,000 bond after the judge ruled that the venire of jurors had been drawn up improperly. Hill emerged from the county jail with these words: "I am absolutely innocent in every form, shape, and manner and I am so glad to get a breath of fresh air that I can't find words to express myself."

Harry Hill was never tried again. Several dates were set, but each time his lawyers obtained continuances on various technical grounds. The young man got a job at the Streator Motor Company, a Studebaker agency, and took up flying. Twice he had minor crackups, once he almost walked into a revolving propeller. Then, in June 1932, on a short pleasure flight with two friends, his plane went into a nosedive just east of the Ottawa airport, killing all on board. The reason for the crash was not readily apparent. Hill's death, like the event which brought him notoriety, remained an unsolved mystery.

(Another local man made the front pages shortly after Harry Hill, in considerably less lurid fashion. Clyde William Tombaugh, born in Streator in 1906, had moved to Kansas while still a boy, later studying astronomy at the state university. Named assistant at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, when he was only twenty-three, he won worldwide acclaim from scientists a year later with his discovery of the most distant planet in our solar system, which he named Pluto.)

Meanwhile Illinois, in the words of one historian, "rode serenely upward toward a golden plateau of permanent prosperity presided over by the Republican party as fairy godmother." Streator's progress on this economic joyride, however, was not so smooth. In the mid-20's the Vulcan Works went out of business and the streetcar ended its operations. Streator became a one-newspaper town in January 1927 when the *Independent-Times* combined with the *Free Press*. Later that year the doors were closed for the last time at Heenan's department store and its stock was sold to pay creditors. The end of the decade saw the





*Workmen and officials involved in a WPA project of the mid-30's—repaving East Bridge Street—took time out to have their picture taken beside the First Methodist Church.*

final run of the interurban, and in 1930 the Western Glass Company shut up shop.

Thus it was that Streator suffered prematurely from the financial doldrums in which the entire nation wallowed after the stock market crash of 1929. It was the greatest depression the United States had ever known, with plummeting incomes, factories shuttered, millions unemployed. President Hoover tried to help the situation by aiding business, without much avail. Roosevelt's New Deal initiated a vast program to get the country back on its feet. But it took time.

In Streator, the number of unemployed during the early 1930's has been estimated at between 3500 and 4000 men. This high total resulted not only from the shutdown of businesses and utilities, but also from cutbacks in the brick, tile, and glass industries. The WPA meant a great deal to the town, which maintained several projects under its auspices. Work crews repaired streets and constructed a football field for the high school. Russell Daughterity, who had played football with Red Grange at the University of Illinois, directed a recreational program, with the aid of Helen Lightholder and Joseph Gothier. (One project was a Washington Bi-Centennial Pageant on July 4, 1932, at Marilla



Park. Hulda Greenberg directed the cast of 250, which included Frank Gotch as George Washington.) All told, there were around fifteen separate payrolls under the program. The average WPA worker was paid \$44.00 a month; street construction workers, with the highest salaries, received \$65.00 a month.

The town did not rely totally on federal aid in dealing with Depression hardships. It maintained a soup kitchen in the city barns on Oak Street. A charitable organization, the Red Stocking Club, collected contributions in money and kind to make up Christmas bags for children. For over ten years, the gay red stockings, filled with toys, candies, and nuts, brought holiday cheer to as many as 4000 children annually. There was even a revival of interest in coal mining. Some entrepreneurs leased what had been considered worked-out coal diggings in order to take out the low-grade refuse coal that remained. This they sold on the local market for 50 to 75 per cent less than the "imported" variety. (They also removed many pillars of coal, thus causing settling and property damage, especially in newer residential areas. The Illinois Department of Mines eventually ordered many of these mines sealed.) Other businessmen tried strip mining, scraping off ten to forty feet of topsoil to get at the low-grade coal that lay fairly near the surface. None of these operations made their owners wealthy, but they provided some jobs, as well as cheap coal.

Not all was gloom during these hard times. Prices were low; in 1933 pork shoulder roast sold for 7¢ a pound, Maxwell House coffee 27¢ a pound. The repeal of Prohibition pleased just about everybody, except for a few bootleggers and hardshell "drys." When beer became legal early in 1933, Streator "bottle house" workers celebrated with a spontaneous parade through the business district. Later that year the Twenty-First Amendment went into effect, and "pint pockets" were no longer in style.

Even before the end of Prohibition, the criminal elements that had battered on it, realizing that their livelihood would soon vanish, began turning to other forms of crime. Armed robberies increased, with banks especially favored targets. In 1932 Streator's

own Union National was hit. It happened this way: On May 15, a Sunday, Earl McNamara (then assistant cashier of the bank), his wife, their three young daughters, and McNamara's father-in-law and nephew returned late from an excursion to Starved Rock State Park. Minutes later came a knock at the door, a mumbled request for directions, and suddenly an invasion by six men, armed, polite, self-assured. They planned, they announced, to remain at the house all night and rob the bank the next morning. McNamara explained later: "I knew what to do in case of a robbery—protect anyone nearby and cooperate with the robbers." He handed over his bank keys as requested and then, like the rest of the family, tried to relax and sleep a few hours. Four of the men left early in the morning, unlocked the bank, and were waiting when the janitor arrived at 6 A.M. At eight o'clock, the leader of the gang accompanied McNamara down. (The sixth man remained behind to guard the inhabitants of the house; it was he who would drive the getaway car.)

At the bank, the robbers greeted the employees as they swung open the door, tied them up, and made them lie down on the floor in a corner (President William H. Boys was allowed to sit in a chair). The men, who had obviously studied the bank operations closely, knew that the vaults would not open until 8:30, but grew impatient and asked McNamara to open them with the combination about 8:20. Then, pillowcases in hand, they scooped out several packages of bills, totaling \$5000, and \$14,000 worth of gold in \$20 gold pieces. While his companions opened up the tellers' chests, one of the men put in a call to the getaway driver. At 8:40, the five left the bank carrying a total of \$52,000, climbed in the waiting car, and roared away.

Immediately the bank notified the police and sheriff, the insurance company, and the banking associations to which it belonged. The getaway car, a stolen Plymouth, was found later that day near Marilla Park. Said McNamara: "I declared right away that it was an inside job. Those fellows had too much information to have just walked in off the street." The first arrests, a week later, confirmed his opinion. Taken into custody

were Clarence C. Goss, Streator's assistant chief of police; George Kmetz, the day patrolman; and Frank Cingrani and Joe ("Steamboat") Cusmano, local bootleggers. Goss had given himself away almost at the beginning when, in a conversation with a homicide policeman in Chicago, he had spoken of the total number of men in the gang—a figure which he at the time should not have known. After cross-examination, he and Kmetz confessed their part in the crime and implicated several others, spurred on undoubtedly by the fact that, although they had helped plan the robbery, they had not received their share of the money. That same day, two Chicagoans, Alex Brown and Louis Katzint, were arrested. Shortly afterward Charles Tilden, the gang leader, was apprehended in Minneapolis and Frank Pierson taken at Boston, leaving only one man, Frank Zimmerman, at large. All the men were held at Ottawa awaiting trial when, on June 15, gangsters raided the county jail and escaped with the five out-of-town robbers. The whole operation began again. Eventually all the men were caught, tried, and sentenced. Police retrieved between \$12,000 and \$14,000 in stolen funds.

Not long afterward the First National Bank in Marseilles was robbed. In January 1935 a gang of four men attempted to rob the State Bank of Leonore. Charles Bundy, bank president, had been warned by townspeople, who were suspicious of the four strangers that had come to town the night before. The robbers, caught in the act, fled and were trailed for several miles. Before they were seized, they had killed Bundy and Marshall County Sheriff Glenn Axline. Richland Supervisor Charles Seipp, who was wounded, died soon afterward. One bandit killed himself and the other three were later executed.

Meanwhile came the bank holiday of 1933, with all the banks in the country closed for ten days. The Streator National Bank was judged sound enough to continue operating. The Union National, however, was kept closed for nineteen days and reorganized, after which time depositors waived 35 per cent of their deposits (they later received the full amount plus 2.6 per cent interest).

By 1939, Streator—like the rest of the nation—had almost fully recovered from the long slump. Its population, which had stood at 14,779 in 1920 and—decreasing for the first time in its history—fallen to 14,728 in 1930, showed a modest increase to 14,930 in the 1940 census. A new bridge crossed the river at Main Street, where the “noble architectural span” had caused so much trouble at the turn of the century. An airport, the Streator Air Service, was laid out just east of town in 1937. Employment was up and industry seemed to be on a sound basis.

Much had happened in the world beyond. What Roosevelt called “an epidemic of world lawlessness” had turned Spain into a battlefield where countrymen fought each other and foreign nations tried out the weapons they had been perfecting. Poorly armed Ethiopia was defeated by Italy, Japan invaded China as part of its “New Order” for East Asia. Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany and ordered his army into the Rhineland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. On September 1, 1939, German troops marching into Poland set off the most devastating war in history. The people of Streator, like those who did their Saturday shopping on Main Street all over the country, felt isolated from the cataclysm. But their peace would not last long.



## CHAPTER NINE

*The Streator Canteen on a busy day during the war.*



## FACING THE FUTURE WITHOUT FANATICAL HYSTERICS

THE WAVE of the future is coming," wrote Anne Morrow Lindbergh in 1940, "and there is no fighting it." It seemed indeed at this time as if many Americans stood facing Europe, waiting for something unknown and menacing. People in Streator read the newspapers, listened to the radio, discussed, predicted, worried. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 was almost literally a "stab in the back," doubly treacherous because unsuspected.

The Second World War kindled a sense of urgency, danger, and effort that seemed vastly more serious than the emotional binge aroused by World War I. As an editorial in the local paper said: "We have most of us lived through one World War and lots of us got the fanatical hysterics pretty bad. Let's have none of that this time." Possible defeat and the actuality of death were present from the beginning. Two men from the area were killed at Pearl Harbor—Harold Christopher of Dwight and Leo Jaegle of Leonore. At the first wartime draft registration, held in Streator on February 16, 1942, it was remarked that "... while there was the usual banter on the part of many registrants, a grimness was evident, as in many instances fathers and sons marched in together to add their names to the roster."

By May of 1942, according to a *Times-Press* survey, there were 541 Streator men in the service; another 273 from towns in the vicinity brought the area total to 814. The town's first wartime Fourth of July celebration honored three Streator sailors who had survived the sinking of the *Lexington* in the Battle of the Coral Sea—Joseph Teyshak, Edward Bradach, and Louis Wargo. Streator's first official casualty of the war was Ensign

J. J. Mulvihill, Jr., who crashed to his death on September 24, 1942, near Norfolk, Virginia, when his training plane failed to come out of a dive during target practice. The first casualty in action was Thomas Dunn, who was killed in North Africa on April 9, 1943.

This time, unlike 1917-18, the United States did not rely on voluntary economies to conserve food and strategic materials, but turned early to rationing and other government controls. In May 1942, Streatorites registered for sugar rationing books, and a total of 14,465 individual stamp books were issued. Soon eager citizens were combing cellars and attics to collect their quotas of scrap—be it metal, rubber, or paper—and housewives began saving grease and used tin cans. Silk stockings vanished from store counters (along with Lucky Strike green), and “liquid chiffon” leg makeup was advertised to take their place. During Streator’s first blackout, on August 12, most townspeople obligingly pulled shades and doused lights, although a few curious folk spent the time milling aimlessly about the downtown streets. A local reporter sent out to cover the event found little that was noteworthy and, after stopping to listen musingly to two young girls sitting on a slag heap singing “Somebody Else Is Breaking my Heart,” wandered back to his office to write that the blackout had been a success. When gas rationing went into effect in December, drivers were urged to stay under 35 miles an hour and entreated constantly: “Is this trip *really* necessary?” The cigarette supply dwindled. In March 1943, meat was added to the list of rationed commodities.

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1942, work had begun on a war project that soon became one of the most important in the Streator area—the Seneca shipyard. The Chicago Bridge and Iron Company, under contract to the navy to furnish LST’s, built the installation on 200 acres of land it owned along the Illinois River twelve miles east of Ottawa. In a matter of weeks the site was leveled and shops set up in everything from circus tents to cement warehouses. Houses were built and trailers moved in for workers and their families. The first keel was laid on June 15





*The Seneca yard's first ship, LST 197, participated in several invasion actions. It is shown, docked and unloading supplies, in the harbor of a small Italian town.*

and the former swamp rang with the hum of trucks and cranes, the sizzle of acetylene torches, and the crackle of welding.

The employees of the Seneca yard—a total of 27,000, with a record 11,000 at one time during the peak year of 1944—included hundreds from Streator and the vicinity. The pay was good although working conditions were often far from pleasant. Seneca had colder winters and warmer and more humid summers than Streator, and many people suffered from bronchial troubles of various sorts (losing one's voice temporarily came to be known as "Seneca Croup"). The first ship was launched on December 13, 1942—one of the coldest days of the winter—by Mrs. Harriet Williamson, a welder. About 5000 spectators lined both shores of the river in  $-9^{\circ}$  weather to watch as LST 197, its prow draped with flags to conceal its still-secret landing doors, slid sideways down the launching way. Unfortunately, the waves were bigger than expected, and several spectators on the opposite shore were drenched. This somewhat haphazard approach was typical of the early war effort all over the country. Says one Streatorite of Seneca: "There was a lot of waste and hurry, but they *did* build boats"—157, to be exact, before the yard closed in 1945. After launching, the ships were commissioned and crews came aboard to take them down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico and the open sea.

In Streator itself, the Anthony Company was extensively engaged in war production, supplying everything from trench shovels to trailers for delivering bombs. The plant employed three shifts seven days a week, with a payroll over twice that of peacetime. All major Streator plants received the Army-Navy "E" for exceeding production quotas.



With Seneca and the Anthony Company on the preferred list for labor, several home industries felt the pinch of the manpower shortage. One interesting solution was adopted by Wilbur Engle, who ran a florist, nursery, and produce business. Among his enterprises was that of canning asparagus, the delicate stalks of which must be picked at just the right time to avoid loss. For three summers during the war, Engle "imported" around twenty workers from Jamaica, who lived at the greenhouses from April 15 to July 1. Devout Anglicans, they at first refused to work on Sunday, until shown graphically one Monday morning that asparagus ready for picking one day is so much waste the next (they were paid by weight). Streator people remember the concerts of religious music the Jamaicans performed in the area's churches. Later in the war, German prisoners of war were brought in to help the Streator Canning Company process vegetables.

To most people in and around Streator, any discussion of the Second World War sooner or later leads to the subject of the Streator Canteen. This undertaking grew out of the Parents Service Club, which was organized early in the war to pack cigarettes and supply other needs for men and women in the service. Club members noticed that men from the many troop trains passing through town on the Santa Fe jumped off whenever the train stopped briefly, in order to buy snacks and coffee wherever they could be found. Several persons felt that Streator itself should do something to help out. In the fall of 1943, three women—Mrs. George Plimmer, Mrs. Irl Shull, and Mrs. Ray Eutsey—were delegated as a committee to investigate the situation and make plans. Many said it was impossible: there were hundreds of servicemen through town every day, the cost of feeding them would be tremendous, the depot had no facilities. "Well," answered those who favored the project, "it could be done if we worked hard enough."

And work they did. Early in November, a canteen committee was formed by representatives from each organization in town, money was pledged, and the ladies set up a small serving area in the train station. (Mrs. Plimmer has been teased ever since for

her remark that "If we just had a nice table here in the corner, that's all we'd need.") Early on Sunday morning, November 28, a small group of women, who had made sandwiches and ten gallons of coffee, met at the station at 5 A.M. Shortly after 6—when the first train had come and gone—they found there was nothing left. Hastily they took up a collection, bought more food, later ground up what was left of their Sunday roasts for sandwich filling, and somehow got through the day. The first weeks were like that—improvised, frantic, and exhausting. The three women who had organized it rarely left the canteen for the first month.

Gradually systems were devised to make things simpler. The high school contributed a coffee urn; more supervisors volunteered; a depot storeroom was furnished for making coffee and sandwiches. Groups not only from Streator but from all over the area, as far away as Spring Valley on the north and Flanagan on the south, took "days," contributing food, money, and workers. (In the entire history of the Canteen, only one of these groups failed to show up.) One farmer donated a hog. A tag day in June 1944 raised \$1300 to pay for a kitchen at the back of the depot. At first volunteers walked through the trains with food, but the practice was discontinued when one of the women barely got off a train before it pulled out of the station. Later local carpenters devised cigarette-girl carriers, and groups of women stationed themselves with these at intervals along the train platform. Besides beverages and sandwiches, they had special seasonal treats—Easter eggs, Thanksgiving turkey, fresh fruit in summer.

The Canteen fed thousands of G.I.'s—soldiers, sailors, and marines from all corners of the United States. They laughed, cracked jokes, made passes at the pretty girls; at least one romance—between a soldier and a hostess from Pontiac who wrote her name on the paper sandwich bag she gave him—ended in marriage. One train was full of boys who piled out of the cars in wonderment at their first sight of snow. As early as December 1943, the women were serving 6700 a week. By April 1944 the daily record hit 3650, and throughout that year the monthly average stood between 40,000 and 50,000. One day

Claudette Colbert and Shirley Temple stepped down for a breath of fresh air; another day it was Amos and Andy. Wrote a sailor: "It was the only stop on our whole trip from San Francisco to Great Lakes where our boys received this sort of welcome." And an army sergeant sent a note: "Streator will always hold a warm spot in the hearts of service men who are fortunate enough to stop over with you for just a few minutes." Hundreds of trains and thousands of cups of coffee after the chaotic first day, the Canteen closed on May 28, 1946. It had meant a great deal to the town. As one faithful worker put it: "People came from miles away to help, and Streator became known all over the world."

Meanwhile Streator men were struggling through the mud of Europe and battling the Japanese and boredom in the Pacific. On the home front people learned the intricacies of the priority system, wore short skirts and cuffless trousers to conserve fabric, bought war stamps and bonds. Ever-busy press agents persuaded movie actress Veronica Lake to uncover *both* her eyes (as some sort of safety example for factory workers) and Ann Sheridan to announce that she was packing away her sweaters for the duration, remarking primly that "big sweaters on little girls cause accidents, little sweaters on big girls make men whistle." Not that everybody saw eye to eye on just what the war effort should entail. There were strikes and shutdowns, and Private M.L.C. wrote angrily from North Africa:

Say, what's the matter with all the people back there? Going on strikes and raising hell. All they are doing is prolonging the war. I read in the papers of coal strikes and strikes of all sorts. Maybe they would like to be here in my shoes. . . . I'll trade them and give them five years of my life to boot. They are acting like a bunch of kids. Do they know there's a war on?

As to letters, wartime censorship deprived them of substance, but it had no effect on quantity. For example, a local men's clothing merchant, Frank Scharfenberg, began writing to "a few fellows that had worked in the store" and soon found himself receiving and answering up to fifty letters a day. He put a special

desk and mailbox in his store and sent mail free for people who used them. Scharfenberg's policy was to send good news only, keeping it "folksy, neighborly, optimistic, boosting." He sent news of the town and of other service men and arranged for get-togethers when he heard of Streatorites stationed in neighboring areas. Beginning in January 1944, a weekly column in the *Times-Press*, "A Letter from Home," contained excerpts from the letters (the name was changed to "Streator Sidelights" after the war). When it was all over, Scharfenberg estimated that he had written more than 21,000 cards and letters.

The war ended officially with Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945, and Streator's victory celebration began seconds after the formal announcement. Although Mayor Halfpenny ordered the taverns closed almost immediately, his move had "little visible effect on the merry-makers," who jitterbugged and conga'd down the city streets. Statistics tell only one story: 3000 service people from Streator, 83 of them women; approximately 1800 draftees, 1200 volunteers; 83 men killed, hundreds wounded. What the war meant—to the people involved and the world it had changed—only time would reveal.



In the decades after 1945, Americans grew used to a state that was neither peace nor war, but something in between. A newly harnessed force, atomic energy, frightened even the men who understood it. There were other new developments—television, guided missiles, artificial satellites, space flights, mccarthyism, Freedom Riders, a Beat Generation.

In writing about the recent past and Streator's part in it, one can only summarize a few events and let time place the correct emphasis upon them. Naturally enough, many of the things that happened reflected trends that were affecting the whole nation. Industrial expansion was one of these. Several new firms located in the town. Three came in 1946 alone—Knoedler Manufacturers, which made tractor seats and farm implements;



F. X. Neumann and Sons, manufacturers of concrete blocks, metal window frames, cement, and waterproofing compounds; and a Streator plant of the Smith-Douglass Company, a fertilizer concern with plants throughout the Midwest. The following year Thos. J. Lipton opened a tea-processing plant in Streator, and in 1948 J. L. Read established a factory for the manufacture of salad dressings. An old Streator industry, the Streator Brick Company, was sold to the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company of St. Louis in 1952, and became a division of the larger firm. In 1957 TIMCO (the Transportation Industrial Manufacturing Company), with its head offices in Chicago, opened a plant in Streator for the manufacture of refrigerator car interiors, aluminum siding, and fire-resistant aluminum foil.

Even before the war was over, Streatorites had initiated a new project, the Streator Hobby Show, that grew in scope and became a popular annual event—mirroring a new interest in home arts and crafts that was generally called the “do-it-yourself craze.” The show, first held in 1945, was set up as a showcase for local hobbyists in all fields, the only restriction being a ban on live pets. The Streator Hobby Council, formed the following year under the presidency of Carl Hoban, included twenty-four members, each representing a special hobby. The show is held in the Illinois State Armory for three days and nights on the third weekend in April, unless Easter interferes. By 1962, it had grown to include 300 exhibits, and required twelve truckloads of equipment—tables, guard rails, and a registration desk—stored between shows at Charles and Ammon Defenbaugh’s farm south of town. Each year there is a special theme, generally a hobby field such as music or rock-collecting. The show is free, though guests (averaging between 10,000 and 15,000 each year) make small contributions to help defray costs.

There were setbacks in these years, due chiefly to disasters, natural and otherwise. One problem Streator had faced periodically for many years involved its water supply. Almost from its beginning in the 1880’s, the Streator Aqueduct Company (after 1939, the Northern Illinois Water Corporation) had had troubles

with flooding and water pollution. Particularly severe storms in 1933 had caused floods that cut off service for several days. In 1951 came the worst flood in the city's history.

During the spring and summer, the Mississippi, Arkansas, and Big Muddy rivers had been among those that overflowed their banks, and tornadoes struck several areas. On Monday, July 9, heavy rains in the Streator region transformed the small and placid Vermillion into a broad torrent. Reaching a height of eighteen feet, it flooded farm lands and west side residential areas, and thirty families along Bridge, Murdock, and First streets had to be evacuated. By the time the river crested at 5 A.M. Tuesday, the pumping station had suffered an estimated \$200,000 worth of damage, and the city's water supply was shut off.

Acting Mayor Robert Drysdale declared a state of emergency, and immediately plans were made for water to be sent in from Ottawa, Oglesby, and Springfield. State Senator Fred J. Hart was instrumental in securing the aid of the National Guard, which hauled water and protected evacuated homes. For several days families walked and rode to City Park, carrying receptacles of all sorts, to replenish their water supply. Free typhoid shots were available in the high school gym. Meanwhile volunteer crews worked around the clock to clear debris out of the pumping station. On July 14 the water was turned on again, although residents were warned not to drink it without boiling; on July 24 the water was finally declared safe for drinking. Soon afterward the water company made plans to build a new plant on the hill above the old one.

The year 1958 witnessed a series of disasters that earned for it a place alongside the years 1887, 1897, 1903, and 1909. The month was July, which seems to have seen more than its share of Streator catastrophes. In the early hours of Monday morning, July 14, a downpour soaked the town, inundating about fifty homes. The sewage disposal system was damaged, and the cost of rehabilitating it estimated at \$250,000. (The La Salle-Livingston county region was subsequently designated a disaster area by the Small Business Administration.)

Only a few hours later, while people were still assessing the damages, a tremendous explosion rocked the downtown area and dense clouds of smoke and licking flames soon enveloped the Williams Hardware building at 115 South Vermillion. In the words of an eyewitness, veteran clerk Joseph Kmetz:

I was standing near the north door leading to the alley, when all of a sudden there was a terrific blast from above. In another second, I was being showered with brick, mortar and all kinds of other debris. I heard screams as I saw what looked like tons of stuff pouring down on the mezzanine floor and I heard the screams of the women who were working there in the office. It was a terrible sight, and as it looked like the whole top of the building was giving in, I ran outside.

Firemen rushed to the site and spent hours getting the fire under control. There were six fatalities, including Donald Williams, the owner, and his sixteen-year-old son Allen. The building—one of the largest hardware stores in the state—had to be razed, and the loss was estimated at \$500,000. An inquest a few days later was unable to reach definite conclusions, but indications seemed to point to a possible gasoline leak in the basement, and there were some who felt the management to have been negligent in repairing it.

Within two weeks, the few people in downtown Streator during the dinner hour heard sounds of crashing and splintering, and rushed down Main Street to find that the old Armory, on the corner of Bloomington, had suddenly collapsed. Because of the time of day, there were no casualties. The building was soon pulled down and a Woolworth's store built in its place.

Between 1940 and 1950, Streator underwent its most sizable population growth since 1900—part of a nationwide phenomenon known as the “population explosion.” The mid-century census total for the town reached 16,469 and a corresponding increase in the city's unincorporated areas brought the estimated population of “Greater Streator” to 22,500. Several new developments accompanied this growth. The Community Chest was organized in 1949, as well as the Visiting Nurse Association. A Little League base-

ball program was launched in 1952. The year following, Streator had its own radio station, WIZZ, with broadcasting facilities north of the city in "The Pines" restaurant building. (Television was still a new innovation and most people went to taverns to watch it, but within a year or two the tall ungainly aerials began sprouting from the town's housetops.) The city improved the downtown area in 1955 by installing mercury vapor lights on Main Street from the bridge to the Santa Fe tracks, on Bloomington from Bridge to Elm streets, and a block each direction from Main on Park, Monroe, Vermillion, and Sterling. That same year it built two handsome new schools—Northlawn on East First Street and Oakland in Oakland Park. In 1958 it opened a municipal swimming pool on West Main.

During the same summer, a group of townspeople interested in the theater, led to Mrs. James Peterson, the high school speech instructor, and Dr. William Schiffbauer, met and organized the Community Players. The sole production of that year, "Harvey," drew good crowds to the high school auditorium, and the group did two old favorites the next summer—"Night Must Fall" and "Blithe Spirit." Through the generosity of Mrs. Wilbur Engle, who donated an unused produce warehouse west of town, the Players had their own theater for their third season, in 1960. They offered a great variety of productions at the Engle Lane Theatre—readings, one-act plays, evenings of "Music from Broadway," and two original musical comedies by a local author-musician, James Smith.

There were other changes. Expansion and building programs were carried out at St. Mary's, St. Anthony's, and St. Stephen's schools. New churches went up all over town. Seven-Day Adventists, largely with their own hands, built a church on the southeast corner of Park and Bronson which was debt-free when dedicated in 1954. Trinity Lutheran Church, at East Main and Route 17, dedicated its new building in 1954 and added a parsonage across the street two years later. Also east of Streator on Route 17, the redwood Church of the Nazarene was completed in 1958. St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church bought the old



Plumb property at Broadway and Wasson and, after razing the house, finished its large new structure in 1959. In 1961 work was begun on a new St. Mary's Hospital, with only one section of the old structure retained for records and offices.

Streator played a part in Cold War preparedness efforts. Beginning in 1956, the town has served as headquarters for men in training as DEW line operators for the radar installations across northern Canada. The project is operated by the Federal Electric Corporation, a subsidiary of IT&T, under the jurisdiction of the Air Force. At the actual training site, located six miles southwest of town, installations simulate a main DEW line station. In town, the project has leased the Columbia Hotel for classrooms and living quarters, and the 110 students in each training course spend ten weeks there before beginning their eighteen-month stints on the line itself. Approximately 60 per cent of the men are from Canada and the British Isles. Because of their intensive training and temporary residence, they have kept to themselves and, except for special events such as Christmas, little effort has been made to integrate them in Streator activities.

As Streator neared its hundredth birthday, its population stood at 16,868, according to the 1960 census. Statistics showed that it had an annual birth rate of 900, and that there were 31 churches, over 50 miles of streets, almost 10,000 telephones, and about 6500 housing units. Its people had lived through violent change, and their horizons had been extended far beyond their town and state, beyond their own country. In a time of vast metropolitan complexes, its own existence as an independent entity sometimes appeared in doubt. But the drive and spirit of its people had helped it survive when many neighboring towns had withered and died. Its future seemed assured as long as people could say, as did one man who had lived there all his life: "This is a wonderful place. I grew up in Streator and so did my kids. My home is here, my interests are here. It's a democratic town and a great community."

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