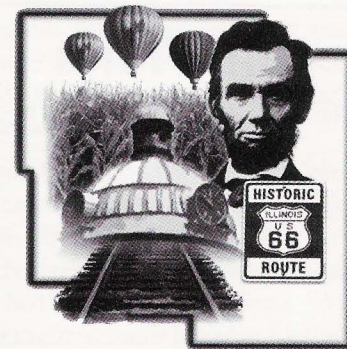


# Our Times

Fall 2002

The People, History, and Culture of Logan County, Illinois

volume 7 issue 3



## Factories of Yesteryear

### Lincoln Garment Factory

All her life, Velma Dierker kept the thimble she had received as a gift when she was just five years old. A tiny size four, the little thimble symbolized a life spent as a seamstress. Velma sewed as a child, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. As a widow, she supported herself and her daughter, Alice [Paulus], as a zipper setter at the garment factory in Lincoln.

The Mitchell Brothers dress company moved into the Lincoln Commercial Club's factory building at 220–226 N. Chicago Street in Lincoln in June of 1926. For sixty-seven years, a garment factory operated on that site.

Sixty-seven years of sore shoulders and backs from bending over to sew amidst the deafening roar of the sewing machines. Years of feet encased in boots in winter to keep out the cold and—before the advent of air condition-

ing—hair soaked with sweat on hot summer days.

Shirley Hunter sewed at the factory between 1945 and 1950 and remembers that sometimes it was “so ungodly hot, you just couldn’t breathe.” The workroom had fans, but she couldn’t have them blowing on her: they ruffled up the material, and “the supervisor would see it and make you tear it out.”

Still, Shirley enjoyed the work and the lunch hours spent talking about children and families.

Over the years, a few men worked at the factory, including cutters Jack Estes, Lowell Bree, Eddie Humbert, Bill Fisher, and Lloyd Baughman. Lester Geer was a mechanic, and Jim Sutherland was a presser. But the garment factory was primarily a woman’s operation.

### **Making 8,400 Dresses in a Week**

As in home sewing, the first step in making a garment was laying out the fabric. At home, though, the fabric isn’t on enormous bolts, and it isn’t laid out on long tables. And no home seamstress cuts through 500 pieces of material at one time, as the men operating the cutting machines did.

All those pieces were separated into



Elizabeth Schaub (right) looks on in 1962 as Helen McBryant sews. Velma Dierker is at left. Owners after Mitchell Brothers were Lalor and Stark, Four Sisters, Katzenberg & Rivkin (then called Lincoln Allied Garment Co.), John W. Shaw, and Smoler Brothers of Chicago. Long-time managers were Foster Lalor and Readis “Pete” Poole. Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History.

(Continued on page 2)

# Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

**Prairie Years Press**  
121 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
217-732-9216

## PUBLISHED AND EDITED BY

Sam Redding

## RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY

Nancy Lawrence Gehlbach

## ADVERTISING/CIRCULATION

Pam Sheley

## MASTHEAD DESIGN

Scott Fulk

The mission of *Our Times* is to publish well-researched, interesting articles about the people, history, and culture of Logan County, Illinois.

*Our Times* is published quarterly and is distributed free-of-charge to anyone who requests it.

Copies of *Our Times* may be obtained at Prairie Years Bookstore at 121 N. Kickapoo Street in Lincoln or at any of the publication's advertisers. Or call to be placed on the mailing list.

## On a Personal Note by Pam Sheley

Factories. Buildings made of brick, concrete. Large stacks belching gray smoke into the skies. Funny smells emanating from the walls. Trucks arriving and departing at all hours of the day and night. Noises from the very heart of hell escaping out of the windows. We see the buildings as scars on the skin of our otherwise picturesque world. We realize the need for factories. We appreciate the products they make and the income they give us, but our hearts do not warm at the sight of them.

Our own town has had its share of factories that produced such products as glass bottles, fine china, and cleaning products. The buildings are not attractive. There is nothing that endears them to us. So why should we care about their survival or decline?

Lehn & Fink closed in 1996. They had a long history in Lincoln. L & F. Sterling Drug. Dorothy Gray Cosmetics. They produced Lysol cleaning products, cosmetics, baby wipes, and family. Yes, family. My husband Doug worked for Lehn & Fink

from the time he graduated from high school until the closing in 1996. During that time he worked in three different departments, mainly on second shift, and he came into contact with hundreds of people that he would not have had the chance otherwise to meet. He ate with them. He laughed with them. He shared time and experiences with them.

In 1988 he married me. While working on our guest list, he informed me he was going to put an invitation on the bulletin board at work. I'm sure my mouth dropped open. I was still working on who was not going to make the list out of my immediate family, and he was putting up an open invitation to over 400 people! But that was his family. He couldn't imagine slighting someone by forgetting to include him or her on the list. While they did not all show up (thank goodness!), they did collect a large sum of money to put in a card and give to us as a wedding present. They were celebrating with one of their own.

Several years later, our daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. We were thankful for the insurance Lehn & Fink provided; otherwise it would have been a daunting financial burden. Doug's "family" could not let us face the illness alone. Again, they passed the hat and collected money for us. I can still remember the gratitude we felt when we realized we were a part of such a caring community. But that is what family is for, isn't it? Now, years later, with our daughter healthy, people Doug worked with still ask about her and inquire about her progress.

Over the years we have seen some of our large employers close their doors. We have become a town of small businesses and commuters. The loss of our factories has been much more than an economic tragedy to our community. It has been a loss to the social and emotional structure that makes a community a home. We have lost our extended sense of family. **PS**

*(Continued from page 1)*

bundles at the splitting table, each bundle with its own number. When the bundles arrived upstairs where the sewing was done, they were sorted. Each piece that went with a dress had a bundle number, and workers matched them up so there would be no shading. Then a bundle of work was tied up with a ticket listing the operations that needed to be done.

Each woman specialized in a differ-

ent operation: putting together the front of a blouse, setting in sleeves, putting on collars, or inserting zippers, for example. Twenty to 30 operations were often required to complete a garment.

On a typical dress, the first girl would make the sleeves, tie them into the bundle, and pass it on to someone like Leona Apel, who did nothing but make fronts. She passed the bundle to the girl who did nothing but set collars. Someone else would put on cuffs, and another girl would set in the sleeves.

One special machine was used to make buttonholes and one to put on buttons. The hemmer was used just for hems.

When a girl finished a bundle, she tore off a ticket and stuck it on a gum sheet she turned in at the end of the day, so someone in the office like Carol Estes or Ellen Lichtenwalter [Moore] could calculate her pay. She put her time clock number on the ticket fastened to the bundle, next to her operation.

When a garment was completed, an inspector like Marie Stoltzenburg would look it over. If there was an error, she found the number of the girl who had done that job and returned the garment to her so she could do it over.

Usually, women were paid extra for any work they did beyond their quota, so someone who was fast, like Velma Dierker, could make quite a bit more money. If a girl had to stop to correct an error, she might not make her quota, much less anything additional.

Once, Shirley Hunter tried to tell her supervisor that a group of sleeves had been cut wrong and wouldn't fit into the blouses. "You can make them fit," the woman insisted. After Shirley completed four big bundles, the supervisor from Chicago came through and declared the work unsatisfactory. Although Shirley wasn't blamed, she spent an entire week redoing the sleeves—losing a whole week's pay.

Edna Turner [Mara] spent three summers in the '50s putting buttons on dresses, working as fast as she could to make money for college. She summed up her experience with piecework in a speech she gave in school, titled "A

## Race Against The Clock.”

Cleada Stoltzenburg worked at the factory from 1936 to 1983. In later years, girls were paid by the hour; if repairs had to be made, Cleada made them. When she retired, factory manager Pete Poole asked the service girls, “What are you going to do when you have repairs?” “I’m going to call Cleada up,” they replied. “No, you won’t,” said Cleada.

Cleada’s sister Hilma was a floor supervisor: she gave the women their work and made sure they did it right.

Esther Smith worked at the garment factory from 1956 until it closed in 1993. When she became a supervisor, she trained new people and shepherded the garments through her department, making sure the girls made their quotas and showing them how to speed up if they didn’t.

The supervisor had a quota, too; if it wasn’t met by the weekend, the girls would work on Saturday mornings. Usually the work was welcome, because it paid time-and-a-half.

For years, supervisors wore dresses or skirts and blouses and hose, because “we were a dress factory, and not a pants factory,” Esther says. When the factory began making slacks, “it was a happy day for all of us, because we could wear slacks.”

Esther loved to sew and also enjoyed working “with a bunch of women,” most of whom had been there for years. Leona Apel, for example, was not only a good seamstress—she was a good baker. “We sampled a lot of her baking,” Esther remembers.

Esther learned a lot, finally helping with pricing and making samples. After the Chicago office sent a sample of an order, she made four or five dresses from scratch and sent them back for approval. Sometimes, when Esther went over the dress with assistant plant manager Elizabeth Elkins Schaub, they would find a shortcut that could save money.

Elizabeth set the prices to the vendors based on the cost of the fabric and

what the company paid each operator to do her job, i.e., a sleeve setter was paid a certain amount for a certain type of sleeve.

Over the years, the factory sewed for Penney’s, Sears, Ward’s, Avon, and New Process mail order company. Some labels were Bea Young, Bea Active, and Kay Ashton. Spurgeon’s in Lincoln carried clothes made at the factory.

In later years, the factory had an outlet store at 126 N. Chicago Street and later next door to the factory; employees could buy their clothes at a discount. Esther bought fabric from the company, but often “you get so tired of looking at it, you wouldn’t want it,” she says.

“We would have big orders, and you would see a style and think, ‘That’s really cute. I like that, and I love that material,’” says Esther. “But by the time you got through with that cut, you didn’t want any part of it, because you had looked at it so long and seen so much of it.”

Once Cleada Stoltzenburg worked fourteen days straight on quilted robes. Even on a shorter run, doing

the same thing over and over was “always monotonous,” says Cleada. Still, on a long run, repetition helped operators to speed up.

When the dresses were completed, a presser like Marie Kurtz pressed them on the steam presser. That area of the factory was the hottest—and the last to be air conditioned. When Elizabeth Schaub became factory manager after Pete Poole retired, she “raised cane,” says her daughter, Donna Holton, until it was cooled.

A finisher like Jo Ann Awe boxed garments, and they were sent out by Lincoln Transfer and other trucking firms. In 1957, the company was producing 8,400 dresses a week.

Elizabeth Schaub started working at the factory in 1929. During her 65 years there, she was sent to open a new factory in Herrin, put in charge of a factory at Mason City, and ended up as manager in Lincoln.

The worst part of her job was telling employees the factory was closed after the Smoler brothers sent everyone home on June 7th, 1993. Overseas competition had undermined America’s clothing industry. ■



Informational pickets, '70s. Courtesy Cleada Stoltzenburg. When Cleada became secretary-treasurer of the union in 1964, it had over 200 local members. The day the factory closed in 1993, 30 seamstresses were at work.

# Stetson China Company

**E**rnie Hunter was discharged from the Army in 1946 and went to work at Stetson's China, where his father, Sam, was a kiln operator.

Ernie was a cup handler. He would pick up a cup, balance it right below his chest on his stomach, pick up a handle and dip it into the proper adhesive, place the handle in exactly the right place on the cup, and hold it there until it stuck. He did this to hundreds of dozens of cups, standing up, for eight hours every working day.

It was an important job that paid well, but it took its toll in sore and tender fingers as the years went by. And when Stetson's closed in 1965, Ernie, who was head of the union, lost his newly granted three weeks of paid vacation and his pension. Some of Stetson's workers went to work at a pottery in Ohio, but Ernie told his wife, Shirley, "I'm too old to enjoy factory work anymore."

For 46 years, the china factory provided employment in Lincoln. In 1962, it was the largest manufacturer of hand decorated dinnerware under one roof in the world and Lincoln's biggest industry in payroll and personnel, employing 792 people with an annual local payroll of more than \$4 million.

## Illinois China Company

Lincoln's Stetson China factory was the direct descendent of the Illinois China Company, which the Lincoln Commercial Club was instrumental in bringing to Lincoln from Roodhouse, Illinois in 1919. Lincoln residents had to raise \$50,000 in stock—two-thirds of the capitalization when the company was incorporated—before the company would move.

The factory was built on a three-cornered strip of ground along North Kickapoo Street at the intersection of the Illinois Central and Chicago and Alton railroads and the Illinois Traction System. At first, the pottery made only white ware. After a fire destroyed the building in 1922, leaving only the kilns, stockholders built a new factory that was 50% larger and also produced decorated china. They also added a sprinkling system.

In 1928, local people owned almost all the stock. Officers were David H. Harts, president; W. W. Houser, vice president; William M. Coogan, secretary;

and F. W. Longan, treasurer. The board of directors was J. W. McGrath, William Kahn, D. H. Harts, W. W. Houser, and F. W. Longan. James Shaw was general manager.

In those days, almost everything was done by hand. The clay was mixed on site: a small car with scales ran on a track alongside the storage bins, so ingredients could be weighed. When the mixture was complete, it was purified—which included using magnets to extract small bits of iron.

In the clay shop, workmen shaped the plates, cups, and saucers, using molds that were made in the plant. After the ware dried, it was put in containers called saggars and fired in a "biscuit" or bisque kiln. Another coating—this time of thin clay—another firing (in the gloss or glost kiln), and the china was finished unless it needed to be decorated.

Most of the decorating—from patterns bought in England or Germany—was done by "decalcomania transfer"—what we today would call decals. But each gold or colored band was painted on by a man with a striping brush, who turned the plates on a revolving stand as he worked.

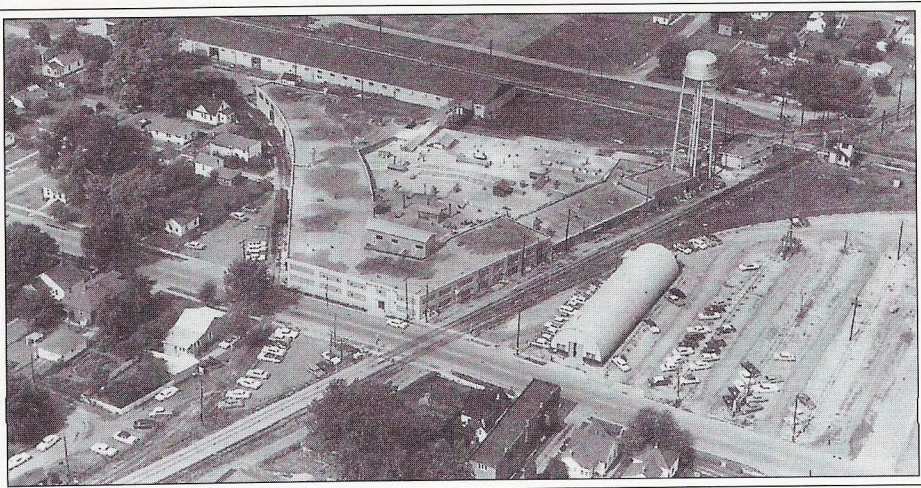
After glazing and another firing, the dishes that passed inspection were ready to be packed in oats straw and sent off. In 1925, the local pottery was supplying 45 Kresge stores with decorated china.

The potters belonged to the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, Local 116. Members played baseball in the Industrial Twilight League.

## Stetson China

In 1946, the Illinois China Company was bought by the Stetson China Company of Chicago. Reinhold Schweikert was retained as sales manager and William Coogan as plant manager.

Stetson China had plants at Chicago;



*Aerial view of Stetson China. Building with rounded roof is outlet store, now the Kickapoo Street Dollar Store. The rectangular building across the street is Krotz & Sons. Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History.*

Hobart, Indiana; and Detroit, Michigan. J. W. "Joe" Stetson was a self-made man who had spied the beehive kiln chimneys of the Illinois China Company on his trips to Chicago and St. Louis and decided he would give Lincoln "a real china producing pottery" (*Lincoln Daily Courier*, March 13, 1962).

The old plant had 50,000 square feet of floor space and employed 80 people. The modern factory Mr. Stetson built on the site had 265,000 square feet in 1962 and employed almost 800 people.

Where work in the old factory had been done by hand, this factory was automated. In 1946, Joe Stetson hired toolmaker Harry E. Sillett. Ken Sillett says his father and Bob Hickey designed and built much of the equipment in the machine shop on the grounds. It included automatic decorating machines that sprayed the edges of the dinner plates, automatic stamping machines, and conveyer belts. After he left the service, Ken himself worked on a kiln gang at Stetson's. Later, plant manager Jewel Short learned Ken had been to engineering college and hired him as assistant chief plant engineer—helping his father. Ken held that job from 1955 to 1958.

The more automated the plant became, the more compressed air it used. "We built that 210-horsepower air compressor . . . that used to keep them awake at night on the other side of town," says Ken. It would "huff and puff all night."

They built a building across the railroad tracks—shipping and receiving and a finish plant—and got permission to cross the tracks with a conveyer, which was "no small procedure," says Ken. They also built a second plant, which was later sold to Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company.

The worst part of Ken's job was "being on call 24 hours a day." One winter, the night watchman called Ken in the middle of the night. A wet snow was falling and had piled up a foot deep on the decorating department's roof, which was about to cave in. "I called a couple of the labor pool guys and got snow shovels," says Ken, and they spent the night shoveling snow off the roof. Or a kiln car (a car with a series of shelves that the bisque ware was stacked on) would need to be rebuilt at 3 a.m., and someone had to do it.

Otis Morris came to work at Stetson's in 1950, working at night as a ware carrier while operating his repair shop at the Logan County Airport during the day. After it was discovered that he was a certified mechanic, Otis was put into maintenance.

At that time, clay came from Tennessee. As it moved through the assembly line, a machine sliced off a piece of it, which fell onto a mold on the jiggering machine. That machine pressed the clay onto the mold to make the front of a plate; then a tool pressed down on top of the clay to form the back.

Flatware, plates, bowls, saucers, platters—they each had to have a tool to design the backside, and it was Otis's job to make that tool. Tools wore out pretty fast—sometimes a tool wouldn't last eight hours. If it was nicked, chipped, or worn, it wouldn't make the plate properly. Some tools lasted as long as a week, but they all wore out.

"The machine operator would take the tool off and call me up, and if I didn't have that tool ready, I was in big trouble," says Otis. To make a plate tool from scratch out of carbon steel took four to five hours, and he made dozens. "That wasn't necessarily the most healthy job," he says. "You breathed carbon dust. I wore goggles and sat on a stool all day and made tools."

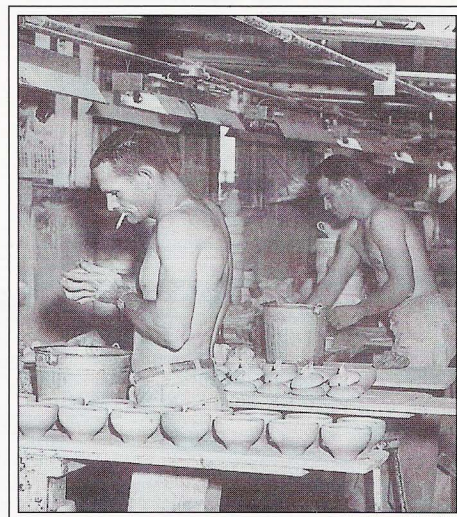
Otis worked in the tool crib, where he used a telephone to stay in contact with all the departments. One day, Joe Stetson came down to use Otis's phone because "there were too many ears in the front office," says Otis. Joe had a small argument with his wife; after he hung up, he turned around and said,

"Did you hear that, Ote?" "I didn't hear a thing," Otis replied.

When Joe learned that Otis had an airplane, he asked him to fly him to Chicago. That was the beginning of a long friendship. Otis flew Joe wherever he needed to go, and Joe poured out his problems. Then he'd point to Otis and say, "You be careful what you talk about."

Soon Otis was a foreman in the clay shop, supervising 38 women and five men on one of the three daily shifts. It was a challenge, but he "enjoyed every minute of it," he says. Otis preferred the night shift—during the day, "plant politics flew around like confetti." Frank Tate was superintendent in the clay shop; Rose Durr was quality control inspector over all shifts.

Otis remembers Don Sutton, who was in charge of making sure the kilns were lighted and the right temperature,



*Placing sugar bowls in the kiln. Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History.*

and Albert Kapik, a talented machinist. Bill Smith was a well-known electrician. Jane Landauer, personnel manager, loved fun, "and we made fun out of everything," says Otis. Ann McKibben worked with Jane.

Ruth Musick worked in the office as Mr. Stetson's secretary and credit manager.

*(Continued on page 9)*

# Lincoln Casket Company

George Treatch worked at the Lincoln Casket Company in 1942-43. Although his tenure there was brief, he never forgot his work, as his son Fred will attest.

Fred was 12 when his grandfather, Fred S. Treatch, died in 1952 and was buried in his hometown of Galesburg, Illinois. Because Galesburg was on railroad time, Fred and his dad arrived after the funeral had begun. His dad took a look at the casket and said, "Son, that box looks familiar." After the funeral—when everyone had left and the undertakers had closed the lid—he crawled underneath the casket to take a look.

Sure enough, George's serial number was on the bottom. He had built the casket; it had somehow made its way to Galesburg; and his own father would be buried in it. He had been eyeing the box all through the service, and he knew his own work.

Fred's mother didn't always appreciate her husband's workmanship. Once her husband made her a cedar

chest at the factory. It was square, rather than long and narrow—but it still looked like a casket, remembers Fred. It was so heavy she couldn't move it. She wanted it out of the house.

"My dad put his last breath into it, and then she didn't like it," says Fred.

Of course, caskets—or boxes that resemble them—aren't to everyone's taste. But if you grew up with them, as Margaret Schonewise Newhouse did, you didn't think much about them.

Margaret's dad, Carl, and Elmer Mosier were drivers for the casket company during the Depression. They picked up coal for the boiler at Greenview and delivered caskets—both out of town and to local funeral homes like Sheets and Goff. On weekends, they took turns serving as watchman.

Margaret and her parents lived in a little house next door provided by the company. On weekends, she

used to play hide and seek in the empty factory with Dick Mosier.

Children wouldn't be allowed the run of a factory today, but that was a different time. Paul Heins lived at 581 S. Elm, along the railroad; he cut through the casket company grounds on his way to Zion Lutheran parochial school on Pulaski Street.

Paul had neighbors who worked at the factory, and he liked to watch them unload the boxcars of wood. A boxcar might contain rough lumber for cloth-covered caskets or a whole carful of walnut. He also enjoyed going inside the factory to talk with the men who worked there. If they gave him scraps of wood and cloth, he took them home to make little caskets. That's how natural the business was to him.

Later, when Paul worked at Holland and Barry funeral home, he attended conventions with Don Holland. The casket company people always talked about the fine workmanship of the Lincoln Casket Company.

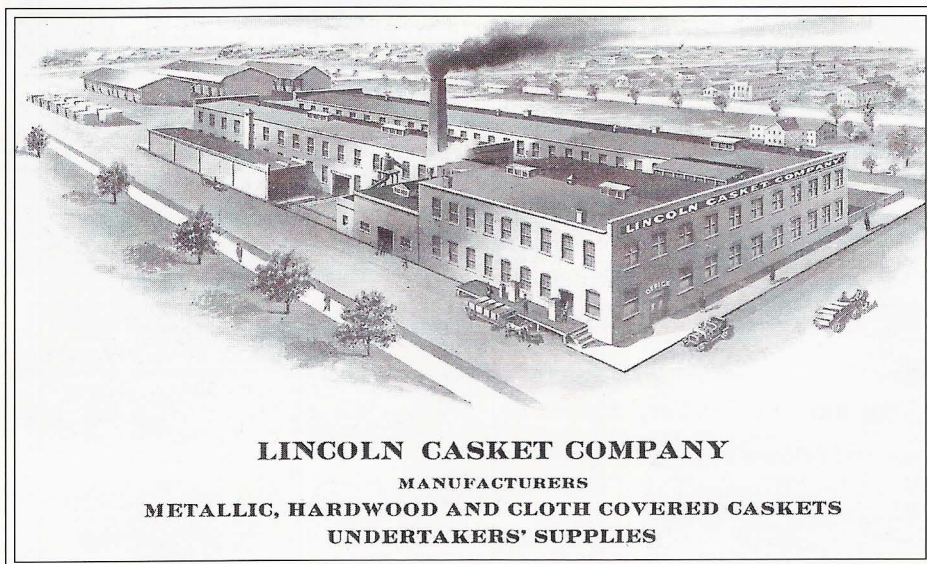
Owner Leslie Dowling was quality conscious. He would raise the lid of a new casket just an inch and drop it. If it didn't snap shut, it went back to be done over.

## Early History

The Lincoln Casket Company was organized in 1895 by William H. Dowling, Leslie's father, who had worked at the National Casket Company in Chicago. Thomas Dowling, William's brother, was also involved.

The company first operated in a former furniture factory at the junction of the Chicago and Alton Railroad and the Peoria and Evansville branch of the Illinois Central in Lincoln.

In 1899, the company was incorporated, and a two-story brick building with drying kilns was built at 109 Third Street. By 1911, the casket



*Lincoln Casket Company, 109-113 Third Street, Lincoln. A whistle at the factory kept almost everyone in town informed of the time by sounding off at 8:00 a.m., 12:00, and 1:00 and 5:00 p.m. Earl LaPanse was plant manager, while Roy Layman handled cost accounting and production scheduling. Carl Ackerman was a truck driver in the '40s. Illustrated Lincoln Illinois.*

factory employed 35 workmen and produced about 30 caskets a day.

The plant served downstate Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Indiana, and as much of the St. Louis market as it could capture. The company sold directly to undertakers. Two or three salesmen canvassed the territory, beginning with William Dowling himself. In later years, the salesmen flashed handsome color catalogs.

## ***In the Lumberyard***

Lumber was stored under a pole-and-beam roof in the yards, extending in front of the Armour plant.

In 1928, woods used included cypress, chestnut, walnut, oak, pine, and even mahogany from Cuba and the Philippines. The cheaper wood was used for cloth-covered caskets, a poor man's only option. (The cloth disguised the wood's poor quality.)

Dave Armbrust's dad, Ray, ran the shipping department for years, like his father, Jake, before him. After the casket factory closed, Ray worked for Myers Industries for 27 years. Still, he never forgot what he learned at the casket factory.

At the end of his dad's life, when his health was failing, Dave carefully broached the subject of a funeral. His dad quickly made one thing perfectly clear. "I don't want no damn cloth-covered casket!" he said.

Ironically enough, these days, cloth caskets are usually more expensive because of the handwork involved.

On September 27, 1944, a fire destroyed the casket company's lumberyard. The building was saved by the firemen and the sprinkling system—which poured water down the south wall—but the wooden water tower burned down.

Firemen wet down the galvanized iron shed where lacquer and thinner were stored. Had it gotten hot enough, it would have been "like a bomb," says Dave Armbrust.

## ***Inside the Factory***

After wood was dried in the kilns, it was made into casket shells in the woodworking department. Claude Mileham took meticulous care of the 135-horsepower steam engine that powered an overhead power shaft. Each of the shapers and milling machines, the saw—all woodworking equipment—was driven by belts that ran down from that shaft.

It was hard on Claude when the shop was electrified and the steam engine was sold as scrap iron.

The metalworking department was housed in an addition on the west side of the main building. Steel, copper, and other metal caskets were produced there. Hardware was also cast in that department.

Caskets rode up in a large hand-pulled elevator to the second floor of the original building to be lacquered. The interior department was also on that floor. Foreman Ed Hickey, Sr. supervised the building of the cloth interiors.

Ed Hickey, Jr. remembers watching Ben Morrow grab a handful of tacks and put it in his mouth, then pick up a magnetic tack hammer. He would work a little tack out of the edge of his teeth and put it on the tack hammer. With one stroke, he would drive the tack in the right place, ending up with fancy folds in the fabric lining the casket.

"I used to ask him, 'Aren't you afraid you'll swallow that?' Of course, he wouldn't answer me until he got his mouth empty," Ed laughs.

A roomful of ladies lined up at sewing machines sewed casket linings and made pillows stuffed with excelsior—which arrived at the factory in blocks and was shredded on site. Silks and other expensive fabrics were stored in a big fireproof vault on the first floor.

Extra caskets were stockpiled in cubicles in a large storage area of the

main building. Ideally, a funeral director would use one of those caskets or one from his funeral home.

But, says William Dowling's grandson Bill, a call could come in at any hour asking for delivery of a casket of a given size to be ready at a certain time. Then "it was a fire drill" to get it finished, on a truck, and to the funeral home—whether it be in Lincoln, Springfield, or Des Moines.



*Carl Schonewise with his truck in front of the casket factory, late '30s. Courtesy Margaret Newhouse.*

Ray Armbrust used to tell about the time a Jacksonville undertaker called with a special problem. A very elderly gentleman was on his deathbed, and there was one space left in a mausoleum that had been designed for older, smaller coffins. Workers at the factory removed the molding from a standard coffin to make it fit and sent it off.

When Ray bumped into the undertaker two or three years later, he asked him, "How did that coffin work?" "We don't know," was the reply. "He healed up."

In 1946, Lincoln Casket Company settled with the new upholsterers' union after a 24-week strike. Thirty days later, the plant had not achieved production standards. Leslie Dowling's sons, Ward and Bill, were not interested in joining the corporation, and it was dissolved.

The facility was sold to the Lincoln Store Fixture Company. It opened January 1, 1947, making greeting card cabinets for Walgreen's. It is now at 2200 W. Fifth Street and is known as Myers Industries, Inc. ■

# A Factory Incubator

**I**n November of 1913, the city of Lincoln celebrated the turning on of cluster lights on the square (five globes in a cluster). During the festivities, the sound of a siren suddenly pierced the air. It seemed to be coming from the Lincoln Casket factory.

Indeed, the siren had been installed as an experiment at the casket factory by The Typhoon Signal Company. That company had settled into the Lincoln Commercial Club's new factory building at 220-226 N. Chicago Street.

In May of 1913, the board of directors of the Lincoln Commercial Club consisted of Lynn Parker; Adam Denger; Samuel Plant; Dean Hill; Ted McGrath; Walter Niebuhr; Dr. E. C. Gaffney; James Hoblit; D. H. Harts, Jr.; E. MacDonald; Nate Landauer; and Ben Eckert. These were business and professional men who could make a difference if they wanted to—and they did—even when it meant building a building to bring a new factory to town.

In July, the organization was incorporated and purchased two lots, 80 x 150 feet, on North Chicago Street, for the purpose of building a two-story brick building in which The Typhoon Signal Company of Chicago could set up shop. The building, designed by local architects Deal and Ginzel, cost about \$5,000; the company would pay 6% interest to the holders of notes until it could buy the building itself.

The Typhoon Signal Company made electric sirens and horns: automobile horns, railroad horns, fire alarms, and mine and crossing horns, among others. Electric horns were thought to be a great advantage over steam whistles: certainly, flipping a switch was easier than maintaining the steam to power a whistle. As for the Typhoon type "F" automobile horn—available in black enamel, brass, or nickel—it was the result of five years of research. Designed to be used on the outside of the auto, it retailed at \$4. Perhaps the backlog of orders (33,000 waiting to be filled when the factory opened) had something to

do with the company's subsequent demise.

For the new company was not to be. By May of 1914, it had reorganized; in 1915, it closed and declared bankruptcy. The Commercial Club paid the \$3,600 remaining on the notes that had been signed by Lincoln men to finance the factory building.

The next tenant of the building was The Linway Company of Chicago, which leased the Typhoon company's equipment in 1916 and set to work making patented automatic screw drivers, mops, saws, and the like.

By 1919, the building's tenant was a branch of the International Shoe Company. Women at the Lincoln factory stitched uppers for the shoes made at the company's Springfield factory. The Lincoln factory employed 65 girls and women and had an annual payroll of \$50,000 when it moved to Springfield in 1925.

By June of 1926, the Lincoln Commercial Club had been replaced by the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, which still owned the little building on Chicago Street. That June, Mitchell Brothers garment company leased the building; for 67 years thereafter, a garment factory operated in that building.

In 1928, the Chamber initiated a successful \$25,000 campaign in subscriptions from local people to build an addition to the factory building. The Chamber burned the mortgage on the building in 1944. In 1946, the Lincoln Allied Garment Company purchased the property, as well as the Goldsmith property to the north on Chicago Street.

In the late '60s, the Lincoln Garment Company opened a factory outlet store next door to the factory, at 230 N. Chicago Street. The garment factory closed in 1993, and the property was sold in 1996. It is unoccupied at present. ■



The factory building built by the Lincoln Commercial Club, at 220-226 N. Chicago Street. Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History.



*(Continued from page 5)*

When Mr. Stetson became ill, his son-in-law, Burt Chudocoff, took on more responsibility. By 1959, he had replaced Jewel Short as general manager. In 1962, Frank Tate was plant superintendent; Russell Irish was works manager.

Only first-class dinnerware had the Stetson name on it. Probably 70% of that dinnerware was sold to Marshall Burns company in Chicago, which distributed it through grocery chain promotions.

If a piece wasn't up to standards—if it had a piece of dirt in the clay that left a black mark, for example—no name was put on it. The quality control people boxed it up to be sold as seconds, under the company name of Direct Factory Promotions. They also sent some home with employees.

One problem that plagued the factory was that handles on a particular teacup just would not stay on. The consensus in the factory was that the style should be discontinued—but the public wanted it. Engineer Valentine Weis finally solved the problem.

## **Decorating and Other Hand Work**

Although the plant was mechanized, there were many jobs that required the human touch. A cup stripper like Mary Lichtenwalter, for example, took cups off the molds.

A plate came out of the mold with a sharp ridge on the edge. A worker would put a stack of a dozen plates on a spinning plate and use a tool to take off that ridge—one plate at a time. "The poor girls had to do that all day," says Otis.

Other workers stacked plates on foot-length boards, placed them on racks with wheels, and wheeled them into the curing room. Kiln placers put the ware in the kilns; kiln drawers wore heavy gloves to take the hot ware out. But one of the most fascinating jobs to outsiders was hand painting.

Tilly Upton was the boss of the hand

painters when Otis Morris worked at Stetson's. "She was so critical," says Otis. "When she picked up a plate, it couldn't have anything wrong with it, or she'd stomp her foot"—and yell at her painters. She could get away with it.

Alma Aderman Buchholz was a hand painter at Stetson's from 1948 to 1949. After an instructor taught her how to paint, she sat at a table, picking up a plate from a moving belt, painting her part, then putting it back on the belt. She was paid a salary and also by the piece. The woman at the end of the belt took the dishes off and counted and boxed them, dividing the piecework up among the group. The woman at the head of the belt set the pace. Millicent Armstrong was at the head of Alma's belt. She wanted to make money, so she worked hard—and so did everyone else on her belt.

Each woman had a piece of slate in front of her with paint on it, and a special brush depending on what she was painting—because everyone painted just part of the picture. A woman might paint two or three stems or two or three leaves on each plate that came her way. Eventually, she might work her way up to painting flowers. Alma painted leaves and also fruit. If she changed jobs, she had to wash her slate off before a new color could be added.

The line didn't stop very often. The plates just kept coming, and "you would put [the plate] on the side if you couldn't do it, until you got caught up," says Alma. If a woman didn't take her plate off, her neighbor would have to grab it. If someone had to leave, the neighbor would line up her plates on the table until someone else could come over and help her catch up—a floater or someone whose table wasn't busy. But Alma enjoyed the work; the day went fast.

Mary Garton Aderman says she probably painted 100 different designs while working at Stetson's in the '50s. The first pattern she painted was dogwood, and she painted a lot of it. Of the eight girls on the belt, three were leaf girls, while one painted nothing but dots. Edith Toll, the head of Mary's belt, painted flowers. The supervisor was Martin Suman; Marjorie Murray and Kathryn Shull were inspectors.

Mary became good friends with the girls she painted with. She remembers Dolores Bannister, Dorothy Franz, Reba Laubenstein, Pat Falkner, Kathy Hopp, and Mildred Simpson. While they worked, they talked—trying to name state capitals, for example. Mary ate many lunches with fellow painter Donna Lessen: a sack lunch or a meal at Krotz and Son's lunchroom across the street or at Donna's home. If they ran uptown to the Gem, they "really had to hurry" to get back to punch the time clock within the allotted half hour.

Mary enjoyed the work, but she got tired of doing "all those leaves at one time." She wore a finger stall—a protective sheath of rubber—on each finger, but her fingers still got sore. Occasionally, she would be sent to another area to paint pitchers. "They were big things to handle," says Mary.

For a while, Mary worked at the sample table with Kathy Hopp and another woman, making up designs for the plates. After designer Alfred Dube designed patterns, the better painters made up 25 or 50 samples and developed a procedure for running the production line. Most commonly, Al would decorate a 10-inch plate and work back from there to cups, saucers, and bowls. He would sign and date his sample plate. When the women at the sample table were through with it, he would give it away.

Mary didn't work at the sample table very long: the pay was a flat salary, and there was no way to make more money, the way she could on the belt.

## **Stetson Closes**

Plagued by foreign competition and the introduction of Melmac (which Stetson's itself produced at Manitowoc, Wisconsin), the factory closed in 1965. ■

Dear *Our Times* Reader,

Many appreciative readers ask us what they can do to support the continued publication of *Our Times*. The answer is simple: thank our sponsors, patronize their businesses, support their organizations.



### *The Christian Village*

1507 Seventh Street  
Lincoln, Illinois 62656

217-732-2189

Compliments of  
**GRAUE  
PHARMACY**

Your JCPenney Catalog Merchant

LINCOLN, ILLINOIS

Free Delivery / Drive-Up Window

Dennis Graue, R.Ph.

Mike Rohrer, R.Ph.

## **MAPLE RIDGE**

**Care Center Retirement Village**

A FIRST HEALTH CARE COMMUNITY

2202 North Kickapoo Street • Lincoln, IL 62656

(217) 735-1538

### **Care Center**

120 Bed Facility • Admissions Tours seven days a week • Medicare, Medicaid, Private Pay, Private Insurance, and VA Contracts • Full Rehabilitation Program, \*Physical, \*Occupational, \*Speech • Skin and Wound Care • Podiatric, Dental, and Optometry Services • Hospice • Respite • Wide Variety of Activities and Special Events

### **Retirement Village**

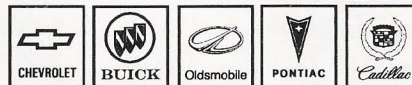
38 One Bedroom Apartments • Each with own entrance and deck • Low monthly lease includes all utilities • 24-hour call system in bedroom • Complimentary on-site laundry • Housekeeping, Laundry Service, and Meals available.

Call 217-735-1538

for a tour today!

*Our 48th year of quality sales and service.*

## GRAUE INC.



1905 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
217-735-4444



## Key Printing

1112 Keokuk Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656

217-732-9879

Fax: 217-732-9866



Open 6:30 am Mon. - Sat.  
Till 10:00 pm Mon. - Th.  
Till 11:00 pm Fri. & Sat.

## Coffee House

*A Brilliant Way to Perk Up Your Day*

Historic Sangamon Street  
201 Sangamon St.  
Lincoln, IL 62656

*Great Minds Drink Alike*

*Abraham Lincoln Tourism  
Bureau of Logan County*

Promoting Economic Development  
Through Tourism

(217) 732-TOUR (8687)

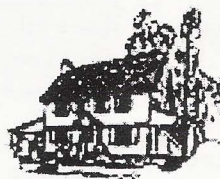
FAX: 732-6293

E-MAIL: [tourism@abelink.com](mailto:tourism@abelink.com)



303 S. Kickapoo Street

Lincoln, Illinois 62656



**Roger  
Webster  
Construction, Inc.**

**Your full service contractor!**

303 North Sangamon Street, Lincoln

Phone: (217) 732-8722

E-mail: [rwinc@ccaonline.com](mailto:rwinc@ccaonline.com)

Web Address: [www2.ccaonline.com/rwinc](http://www2.ccaonline.com/rwinc)

Lincolns Only Full Service Store

LINCOLN



HOMETOWN PROUD

713 Pulaski  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
(217) 735-2221

BILL CAMPBELL  
CHARLIE LEE

**Pink Shutter Thrift Shop**

A resale shop owned and operated by

Abraham Lincoln Memorial  
Hospital Auxiliary

Great selections of clothes and  
accessories

Tax deductible donations  
accepted daily

114 N. McLean

Mon. & Sat. 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Tues. - Fri. 9 a.m. - 4:45 p.m.

*Compliments of*  
Isaac, Emily,  
Hannah, Grace, Cole,  
and Halle

*The next generation of*  
Our Times supporters



**Bassi Construction**  
Dale A. Bassi

*Restoration • Renovation • New Construction*

511 N. Ottawa St. • Lincoln, IL 62656  
217-732-1028

Stocks, Bonds,  
Mutual Funds,  
CDs, IRAs

Bob Neal  
Jim Sparrow  
*Investment*  
*Representatives*

218 South Kickapoo  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
1-217-735-2585

**Edward Jones**  
Serving Individual Investors Since 1871

*Thank you, Our Times,  
for celebrating Logan County's  
rich and unique heritage.*

Clyde & Shari Reynolds



The Maple Club

1458 State Route 121 • Lincoln, Illinois 62656

*It's time to plan your Christmas party!*

Call Joyce for reservations at (217) 735-1275

*Holland and Barry, Ltd.*

FUNERAL DIRECTORS

325 PEKIN STREET  
LINCOLN, ILLINOIS 62656  
(217) 732-4141

EDWARD M. BARRY

**Lincoln Public Library**

A Carnegie Library Established in 1902.

Our collection includes local history / genealogy of Logan  
County as well as local newspapers back to 1859.

725 Pekin Street / Lincoln, Illinois 62656 / 732-8878

**Prairie Years**

Quality Toys and Gifts  
Books  
Scrapbook Supplies

Publisher of *Our Times*  
121 N. Kickapoo Street / 217-732-9216

*Three Roses Floral*

123 S. KICKAPOO  
LINCOLN, ILLINOIS 62656

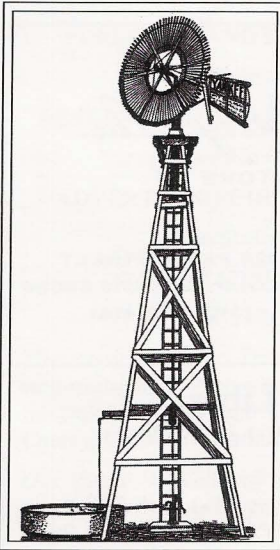
WILLIAM E. BREE

Ph. 732-3116

If you enjoy *Our Times*, thank its sponsors.  
*Our Times* is their gift to you.

## A Few Forgotten Factories

**LINCOLN CORK-FACED COLLAR COMPANY:** This firm was brought from Washington, Missouri and incorporated in 1890. Incorporators included well-known Logan County names: Foley, Frorer, Harts, Boyd, and Hoblit. The factory was located on South Kickapoo Street (present site of Logan County Highway Department). Cork-faced horse collars were sold as light, cool, elastic, durable, and non-irritating. Reorganized as the Lincoln Illinois Horse Collar Company in 1910, the company employed 25 to 40 men. In 1919, the factory burned down.



Yankee Windmill. Mt. Pulaski Times-News, Sil-Tennial Edition.

**LINCOLN MATTRESS COMPANY:** “We make lying easy” was the slogan of this company. Organized in 1899 by Charles A. Fisher and Frank Frorer, it moved into the building vacated by the Lincoln Casket Company in Lincoln. When it burned down, the company was reorganized and built a plant on North Chicago Street. It closed in 1926. It had sold to six of the larger St. Louis furniture stores, until a St. Louis bed company began selling one million mattresses a year.

**MT. PULASKI WINDMILL COMPANY:** This company produced the Yankee Windmill—so named because it was invented by J. M. Whitney, a Yankee from Connecticut who moved to Mt. Pulaski in the 1890s and later sold his interests to the local windmill company. George and Adolph Vonderlieth were early owners. The firm sold several thousand windmills to Central Illinois farmers in the days before electricity. The windmill was constructed of wood and pumped water directly into a stock tank. In 1914, more than 60 were in use on the Warner estate near Clinton. After farms were electrified, the company became a plumbing firm. ■

Material for this issue is from the *Courier*; *Mt. Pulaski Times-News, Sil-Tennial Edition*; *History of Logan County Illinois 1911, 1982*; *Lincoln, Illinois: A Pictorial History*; and the memories of our friends.

## Our Times

Prairie Years Press  
121 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656

## Our Times

The People, History, and Culture of  
Logan County, Illinois

### Inside This Issue

Lincoln Garment Factory

Stetson China Company

Lincoln Casket Company

A Factory Incubator

A Few Forgotten Factories

*Lehn and Fink, PPG, and other  
factories will be featured in the  
next issue.*

PRSR. STD.  
US POSTAGE PAID  
LINCOLN IL  
PERMIT 337

---

The People, History, and Culture of Logan County, Illinois