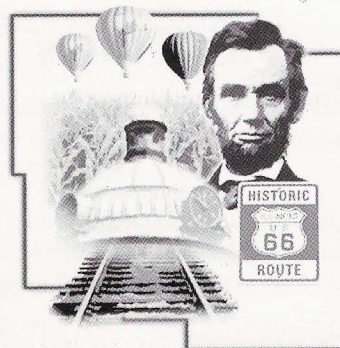


Our Times

Winter 2001

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

volume 6 issue 4



Home, Sweet Home

Illinois Odd Fellows' Children's Home—A Brief History

Bob "Bump" Lamm arrived with his three brothers at the Orphans' Home in Lincoln in 1930, the day before his third birthday, with just the clothes on his back. The orphanage would be his home for the next fifteen years.

Bob's mother and dad had been killed in an automobile accident. His father had been an Odd Fellow, so Bob and his three older brothers were allowed to enter the lodge's home for the orphaned children of its members. (His little sister was too young; his older sister, at 16, was the age at which children had to leave.)

Leaving home and moving into a strange place wasn't easy for three-year-old Bob—and of course he cried. The older boys didn't throw him into the sticker bush, because he was too young, but he found out soon enough that tears were not acceptable. "You didn't want to be a sissy," he remembers. Even so, every year, when his sisters left after their annual visit, he practically "tore the

door off the car," he says.

Still, Bob got used to life at the Home. "We had fun," he says. "We were well fed and well educated." And mischievous—as we shall see.

The Orphans' Home was begun by the Sisters of the Rebekah Degree, the auxiliary organization of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

The Odd Fellows had begun in England in the 1700s as a social and self-help organization for the working classes. Philanthropic societies were usually formed by the aristocracy; that common men would have a mutual aid fraternity was considered "odd"—and the name stuck.

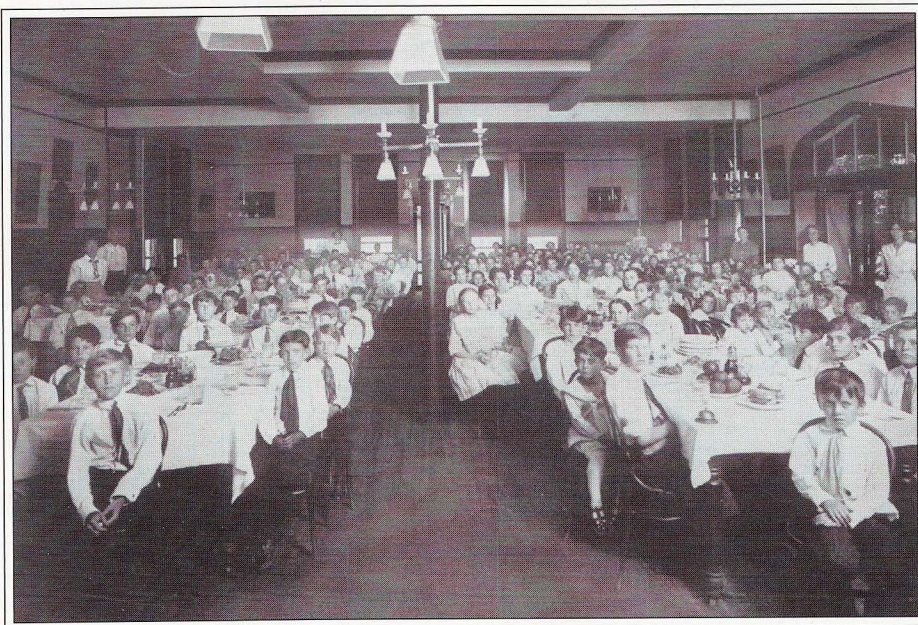
The first American lodge was established in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1819.

In 1889, the Illinois Rebekahs secured a charter from the state to form a corporation known as the "Odd Fellows' Orphans' Home." They built the Home in the city of Lincoln, which had donated 40 acres and \$10,000 towards its construction.

In 1891, the corporation offered the partially-completed Home and grounds to the Grand Lodge of Illinois, which accepted the gift—and the responsibility for its support—in 1892, after a stiff battle.

The Illinois Odd Fellows' Orphans'

(Continued on page 2)



The Children's Dining Room of the Orphans' Home, c. 1911. Boys and girls sat separately; talking during meals was forbidden; and governesses checked to see that plates were emptied. Staff ate in a separate dining room; the superintendent and matron had their own dining room. Our Homes, c.1911.

Our Times

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Publisher's Notes

James Whitcomb Riley, in his signature Hoosier dialect, penned his first rendition of "Little Orphan Annie" in 1885. When it appeared in his collected works, in 1916, it included the following inscription:

*To all the little children: – The happy ones; and sad ones;
The sober and the silent ones; the boisterous and glad ones;
The good ones – Yes, the good ones, too;
and all the lovely bad ones.*

The Odd Fellows' Orphans' Home was a haven for all the little children, even, as this issue of *Our Times* makes clear, the lovely bad ones. Or at least a few ornery ones.

Riley's poem ends with words of warning from Orphan Annie to the children who gathered around the fire to hear her stories:

*You better mind yer parunts, an' yer
teachurs fond an' dear,*

*An' churish them 'at loves you, an' dry
the orphant's tear,
An' he'p the pore an' needy ones 'at
clusters all about,
Er the Gobble-uns 'll git you
Ef you
Don't
Watch
Out!*

Hurray for all the good folks who dried the orphans' tears at the Home over the near-century it operated in Lincoln! What good service they made of their lives, what admirable devotion.

My four grandparents were Odd Fellows and Rebekahs, as were my parents at one time. I only remember that they went to "lodge." Learning now of the noble contribution their organizations made to the children's homes and "old folks'" homes, I am especially proud.

In eighth grade, my school's basketball team played against the team from the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School in Normal. I remember feeling sad for the kids who played against us in the old gym on the ISSCS grounds. When we left the gym after the game, I saw the cottages scattered amidst the big oak trees, and someone explained that the ISSCS kids lived in the cottages, with house parents. They even ate meals in the cottages, like families. Knowing that made me feel a lot better.

Orphanages may have been a vestige of the nineteenth century, clouded in Dickensian images of gruel by candlelight. But they were also places of hope and opportunity. The line we all recall from "Boys' Town"—"He ain't heavy, he's my brother"—is laden with sentimentality; it is also nearly scriptural in its power to engulf our hearts with waves of sheer love. **SR**

(Continued from page 1)

Home opened on January 26, 1893; by November of that year, 61 children had been admitted. The order also opened an Old Folks' Home in Mattoon in 1899, and by 1913, there were 54 Odd Fellows' homes in the world.

The Odd Fellows were the first fraternal organization to establish a home for the orphaned sons and daughters of its members. After 1912, children who were missing just one parent, called half-orphans,

were admitted, too. In the days before social security or aid to dependent children, this benefit, plus the Old Folks' Home, made the lodge very attractive.

In fact, seventy-year Rebekah member Maxine Menzel remembers that many of the little towns she drove through with her family when she was young had their own Odd Fellows buildings, each decorated with the three links that represent Friendship, Love, and Truth.

By 1908, the Orphans' Home had added a West Cottage, East Cottage, school building, girls' dormitory, and domestic science and manual training buildings.

A separate gymnasium was completed in 1925. A superintendent's home, built in 1928, completed the semicircle of buildings at 721 Wyatt Avenue.

In front of the buildings was an enormous lawn with shade trees, huge flowerbeds, a circle fountain, and a wide brick walk that the boys kept weed-free by crawling on their stomachs and gouging out every weed or blade of grass with a rusty spike nail.

Lodges around the state supplied everything from clothing to furnishings and Christmas gifts, and many rooms had a plaque on the door with the name of the lodge that had furnished it.

The first superintendent and matron of the home, Mrs. Lizzie L. Morrison, was followed in 1906 by Dr. J. A. Lucas, a retired minister, and his wife. He served as superintendent and she as matron, until his death in 1926.

Edgar Dobbs went to live at the Home in 1912 when he was six. In his book, *Uncle Ed Remembers*, he recalls that Dr. Lucas was a loving "grandfather" of all the children—albeit a strict one.

A naughty little boy could find himself polishing the long hallway floors or being disciplined by his governess with a heavy razor strap, a five-inch paddle, or even a dose of castor oil.

At its peak, the Home held almost 200 children, and every one had some sort of job: washing dishes, milking cows or cutting hay on the 156-acre farm,

taking a turn at pushing one of the six or seven hand mowers in use at one time over the big front lawn—in other words, doing the many chores required to run a home that size.

Eleanor Auer Lamm's mother, Lucille Harford Auer, came to the Home in 1918 when she was nine years old and "learned to work hard" there, says Eleanor. When Eleanor was a little girl, her mother taught her how to make a bed the Home way: taking the top sheet off and putting it on the bottom, and putting a clean sheet on top.

Eleanor's mother worked in the kitchen with Miss Foote, learned to sew at the Home, and got a good education. "She thought it was a wonderful place for her," says Eleanor.

It wasn't all work. The boys played baseball games against teams from town; the children crossed Primm Road to see a circus set up in a field; and the band took trips to entertain lodges all over the state, the children staying in the homes of lodge members. Eleanor's mother, who played the trombone, even went with the band to Niagara Falls on the train.

In 1904, after the Grand Master of the Illinois Odd Fellows had raised \$2,000 from the lodges, about 100 Home children took a five-day trip to the World's Fair in St. Louis, even staying in a hotel. (In 1933, the Home children would attend the Century of Progress in Chicago.)

Dr. Lucas was followed in 1926 by Roy Johnson and his wife, Icie, whose sons, Bob and Jim, grew up with the other children there.

Thekla Stoll Hoefer taught kindergarten, physical culture, and dramatic art in 1928-29. The kindergartners enjoyed dancing to the phonograph in the kindergarten room in the gymnasium and loved to interpret nursery rhymes and poems.

At the end of the year, all ages of children were involved in a program based on Greek mythology that was presented on the front lawn near the

statue of Rebekah.

Thekla remembers that the children were responsive and well behaved. "They had to be," remembers Catherine King Morehead Milleville. "Boy, [the teachers] were so strict!"

Catherine came as a young teacher in 1930 and taught the third and fourth grades for three years, receiving \$85 a month and her room and board. The children were not allowed to run between buildings, she says, and the teachers were strict about the children's language and how they treated one another.

It paid off. Children who grew up at the Home learned discipline—the men breezed through the service, says Bud Petty—and good manners. "Formers" include teachers, attorneys, a judge, an Illinois Speaker of the House (Jack Walker), a sports reporter, prominent citizens, a Grand Master (President) of the Illinois Grand Lodge—and a whole slew of hardworking, decent folks.

Later superintendents and matrons were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kahney, Mr. and Mrs. William Vehrs, Mr. and Mrs. William Wilson, Harry and Ruth Trott, Duff and Lela Roberts, Edward and Pearl Spooner, and Bob and Darlene Wick.

Important Dates

1944: The Home begins accepting dependent children of non-members whose families, orders, or the courts pay \$25 a month.

1947: The name is *officially* changed to Odd Fellows' Children's Home. It's gone by that since at least 1936.

1950: The Home school is closed, and the children begin attending Lincoln elementary schools.

1967: A ranch-style home accommodating 48 children is dedicated. Razing of older buildings continues.

1977: With six youngsters in residential care, the Home begins day care.

1990: Andy Flake, the last resident, graduates from high school and leaves.

1993: The Home surrenders its license for residential care to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Since 1893, 1,670 children have lived there.

2000: The day care center closes on June 30th. Only the gymnasium, the superintendent's cottage, and two garages remain. Central Illinois Economic Development Corporation runs a day care center in the main building; the YMCA rents the gym. ■



Manual Training Workshop. Our Homes, c. 1911. "Formers," former residents, are grateful for their care and that families could be kept together.

The Johnson Years: 1926-1940

Lowell "Buddy" Petty and his older brother Bill were the envy of the other boys when they arrived at the Home in the thirties. Although they were only five and six, they went to live on the fourth floor of the main building with their two older brothers. Usually, little boys lived in West Cottage.

On the main floor of the cottage, behind the sewing room, was a long room with cubbyholes, each with a different child's number on it. Bob Lamm was number 78: his washcloths and towels and all his clothing—the patched jeans, underwear and socks, clean shirts, necktie and good pants—had a number 78 on them and were folded and kept in that cubicle. His toothbrush had a piece of tape on it with a 78 and hung on a cup hook under the number 78.

Any other belongings were kept in personal boxes "strung around the wall," says Bob, in the basement. If a child complained that he didn't feel well during the day, he had to go lie on his box—there was no going back to bed. If he was really sick, he ended up in the "hospital" on the top floor of the older girls' dormitory or confined to a separate room in the cottage.

The basement also held the showers, where the little boys bathed every Wednesday and Saturday night, under the watchful eye of their governess. If she had to "slip off and do something," says Bob, the boys would throw soapy water on the marble floor and "go sliding on our bellies and playing tag."

The boys ate their meals in the dining hall in the domestic science building with all the other children. When they heard the ringing of the cowbell outside the door, they went inside, cleaned up, stood by for inspection of hands, and then lined up to go into the dining room and find their assigned tables. After the children sang grace, a little bell was tapped, and everyone sat down.

There were 18 tables, usually eight to a table and each one with an older boy or girl in charge. There was a birthday table, too. Unlike earlier years, children could talk to the others at their table, but not from one table to another. Edith Winings [Schmitgen] was caught doing that and didn't get to see the

movie the next time one was shown at the chapel in the schoolhouse.

Sometimes, says Superintendent Johnson's son Bob, the dining room would become "absolute bedlam." That's when Mr. Johnson would appear in the doorway—and the room would immediately become silent.

Roy Johnson was an orator, "who could make a little statement into a speech," says Bud Petty. When he was through speaking, he would ring the little bell, and the children could go back to eating.

The morning that Penny, the Home's pet dog, returned after missing for months, Mr. Johnson suspended the rules and let him lie down in the dining room while the children ate their breakfast. (On an earlier occasion, when Penny was picked up by the dogcatcher, the children had collected pennies to bail him out.)

The children ate lots of navy beans, corn bread, porridge, peanut butter, stew, chicken and eggs from the Home's farm—run first by Raymond Dobbs and later by Ed Wilmert—and a mixture of ground beef and vegetables called slum gullion. A favorite breakfast was cocoa and toast.

There was plenty of fresh produce from the garden—presided over by a dignified Englishman named John Wakenshaw—and plenty of milk from the farm's Holstein cows. There were raspberries, too, picked by the children themselves.

John "Jake" Liebman remembers that on more than one occasion, he snuck out a five-gallon tin can of peanut butter to give to children from town who had come out to beg for food.

Even with plenty to eat, the boys couldn't resist the temptation to break into the kitchen at night. They had the opportunity. The girls set and cleared the tables, and the boys filled and emptied the dishwasher. Sometimes one of the boys would slide up over the walk-in refrigerators



Basketball Team, c. 1940. No. 13 is Bud Curry; no. 11 in the back row is Bud Petty. Second from right in back row is Bob Lamm. Courtesy Bob Lamm.

("reefers") and hide there until dark, when he would unlock the door and let in a group of his friends.

One night, so the story goes, Jim "Clops" Clowers, Howie and Floyd "Ted" Lamm, Forrest "Doggie" Petty, and Eddy Rawlings snuck in to get some chocolate éclairs (a Sunday night treat). They were filling their pockets when Howie and Clops dropped a group of trays on the granite floor.

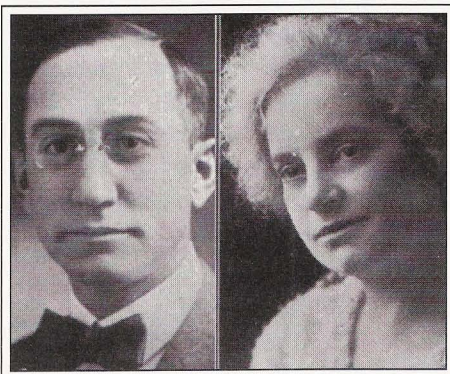
When governess Frances Barr and cook Sadie Lake came to investigate, all was in place—even the trays. The boys were in the reefers, hiding behind the sides of beef in the back.

Sadie Lake may have known they were there, but she didn't admit it to Frances, who was very strict. Instead, the ladies had a midnight snack while the boys froze in the reefers.

Sadie Lake was "the best," says Bob Lamm. If the boys snuck off the grounds to go fishing at one of the bridges on Primm Road, she would cook whatever little fish they caught.

The kids slept in dormitories, sometimes two or three to a bed if the Home was crowded. When Bob was eight, he was given the job of caring for a dormitory, a room called Flora, after the lodge that had furnished it.

He made the eight beds every day. Saturdays, he stripped and made the beds, scrubbed and waxed the floors, and washed the windows—standing on a ledge to do the outside panes.



Superintendent and Matron Roy and Icie Johnson. Courtesy Bob Lamm.

After the room was inspected, Bob could go outdoors. "But that doesn't mean you're free to play," he remembers. First each child had to take a tin can and walk over the grounds, picking up sticks or rocks. At last the children were free to play marbles, fly kites, make elaborate roads in the sandbox for their "cars,"—pieces of two by four—and play football or baseball.

The Home had a fine baseball diamond, and Roy Johnson always managed to find money for a few athletic supplies—although Bud Petty remembers having to stuff a handkerchief into his hand-me-down glove because there was no leather left in the palm. The band even had a baseball team that played teams in the towns they visited. Sometimes Emil Verban (who later played in the Major Leagues) came along to give the team an edge.

The gymnasium was a great attraction to town children—the kids from St. Patrick's parochial school spent a lot of time there. In 1939, the Home's heavyweights won the grade school state basketball tournament. The coach was Lowell Unzicker, and former coach George Conner had taught the boys well. Baseball games were umpired by Paul Sollars, who had been raised at the Home. He drove the bus for band trips and was governor for the older boys.

Many of the boys played sports in high school. Dan LaValle played on the first Lincoln high school basketball team to go to state (in 1929). Willard Smith was a great athlete in football and basketball, and Charles Scott, George Rendek (later Grand Master, i. e., President, of the Illinois Odd Fellows), Roy Hindman, and the Lowry boys were fine athletes. The whole school was saddened when high school freshman Frankie Maccarrone ran home from football practice one day, caught a chill, and died of pneumonia.

The Home athletic coach was always the manual training teacher, as well. One night in 1931, Bob Johnson and John "Dempsey" Winings broke into the manual training room to make a grave marker for a dog, Lady, that had been hit by a truck and was buried in the walnut grove. The boys were caught by the teacher, Mr. Vehrs. He was "quite irate," says Bob, "until he learned what we were doing . . . then he pitched in and helped us get the job done." Mr. Vehrs later became a popular Home superintendent.

Kids built lamps, kites, and other small items in manual training. The year Bud Petty was in eighth grade, the boys made screens for every window in the main building. Edith Schmitgen remembers using a double boiler in domestic science class and also that many of the girls had a younger girl to look after.

Professor H. O. Merry was the director of the band, in a day when kids' bands were still something of a novelty. The band played at lodges across the state, often heading up parades in the little towns they visited. They played at the Old Folks' Home in Mattoon and went with the Home kids on the interurban to the Odd Fellows picnic in Bloomington.

Professor Merry was also the high school band director, and many of the Home kids played in that band. For three years, the high school had no bass horn, so Huie Petty carried one back and forth from the Home—with the help of Leonard "Mack" Maccarrone. Bob Smith followed Prof. Merry as director.

Many Home kids were talented in speech and drama in high school, recalls "town kid" Bill "Soup" Gossett. Kids took piano lessons (Eugene "Tub" Rawlings and Bob Lamm played a duet of the Minuet in G), ballroom and folk dancing in the former kindergarten room in the gymnasium, and even tap. "They tried to give us a little bit of everything," says Bud Petty.

Children had always had to leave the Home at age 16, a policy that concerned the Johnsons. It was changed after two boys who left were found "practically starving to death," says Bill Shoemaker, and someone had to make a special

trip to Southern Illinois to pick them up. After 1934-35, students could stay until they graduated from high school. Each eighth-grade graduate usually received a ten-dollar gold piece to use for schoolbooks.

Irene Deiss Tumilty remembers waiting at her house on the corner of McLean and Decatur for “the gang from the Orphans’ Home to come by” and walking downtown to the high school together.

Barefoot all summer, their feet hardened by walking on cinders, smarting from bee stings, and dressed in coveralls, the boys at the Home had their share of adventures.

One of the more dangerous ones for the young teens was playing tag on the slate roof of the main building. “I still have bad dreams about that,” says Bob Lamm. The huge gutters were rotten, and “we were scared we’d slide down and hit that gutter and go right through,” he says.

One night Bob Johnson and Russell Krager snuck out to Lincoln Lakes and took a lifeboat out. They were found by the night watchman, who had a bright flashlight and, says Bob, “the biggest dog I ever saw in my life.” The watchman let the boys stay all night and took them back on the steam engine in the morning. When he asked Bob his name, he said, “Bob.” “Bob White?”

“Yes,” replied Bob.

A Few Unforgettable Characters

Pauline Strampp served as Home secretary from 1938 until 1994, living on the grounds most of that time. She says that typically, “the matron was the mother type, and the superintendent was the father type. When Mr. Johnson clapped his hands, you had to look out.”

Roy Johnson was closer to the older boys and traveled with them on their band trips. His wife was closer to the younger boys like Richard Byrd—who never forgot how she consoled him when he was a lonely new orphan boy. She was instrumental in changing the name from Orphans’ to Children’s Home.

John and Katherine Coates lived in an apartment above the dining room. She ran the kitchen; he ran the laundry, with the huge tubs and enormous mangles for ironing sheets. Mr. Coates oiled roller skates for the kids, sharpened pencils until he had four to five inches of lead for drawing, and carved monkeys from walnuts.

Mr. Houk kept the coal fire going for the boiler that heated all the buildings. Once he promised Glenn Dale “Pigtail” Walton a bicycle if he would paint his car. The old bi-

cycle had a wooden rim, and Primm Road was gravel in those days. The first time out, Pigtail rode off the brick at the end of Wyatt Avenue and fell into a chuckhole on Primm Road—and the wheel broke. That was the end of the bicycle.

Frances Barr came as a teacher in 1895 and served for 52 years—many of them as a governess of boys.

Ambivalence

Every Christmas, each child made a list of three wishes. One year, Edith Winings [Schmitgen] wished for a sewing basket, a doll, and a little jewelry box. She got the basket and the doll. (In 1927, A. F. Dougherty of Lincoln donated 50 sewing baskets, and the lodges were generous.)

Not everyone got all of his or her wishes. One former who lived at the Home during the Depression remembers that his friends got presents from their families. He had to be satisfied with a couple of handkerchiefs, an orange, and some candy.

Money was in short supply. Kids could earn a little by giving tours to the Home board members when they came for their quarterly meetings—if they got a quarter, they felt wealthy.

Some children could not adjust to the rules. Jake Liebman’s sister Eva left as soon as she was able, and Art Larson’s father remarried so he could take his children out of the Home.

It was hard for kids to return after visiting relatives during the summer. Bob Lamm had a little sister who lived with his older sister. Every time he returned from a visit to their home, “when we would drive down Wyatt Avenue and hear that old cloppity clop of the bricks, I knew immediately [that we were going back] and I couldn’t be with my sister,” he says.

And yet, formers wonder aloud what would have become of them without the Home and remember the Johnsons with gratitude and affection. The kids made life-long friendships, and a few of them—like George Rendek and Mildred Cebulski—even married each other. ■



The Children’s Home Band. It was all boys during the Johnson years and possibly even before that. Journal, Grand Lodge of Illinois, 1936.

Sons and Daughters Come Home Again

In 1922, thirty former Home boys and girls who were back home for Christmas formed an organization that became the Sons and Daughters of the Illinois Odd Fellows' Orphans' (later Children's) Home.

Beginning in 1923, the group held a reunion every Labor Day weekend, where, says Bill Shoemaker, the formers visited and "told lies"—stories of their days in the Home.

Former Home secretary Pauline Strampp was always surprised at "the things you didn't know they did," she says. One boy told her, "You didn't know I walked around the ledge of the girls' building, did you?" "No, I didn't," laughs Pauline.

Jayne Dial Rawlings, wife of "Donkey," recalls that formers and their families stayed in the Home. Women and children slept on the third floor of the girls' dormitory.

The weekend included a banquet at the Home, followed by a dance at a local hall. Housemother Ma Green took care of the children while the formers partied at the Maple Club, says Jayne. There was a memorial service for deceased members, and the formers treated the Home children to a cookout on the grounds.

Starting in 1929, each Son or Daughter received a copy of *The Mouth Organ*, with news of the formers.

The Sons and Daughters donated many thousands of dollars to the Home over the years. An early project was redecorating the chapel in the schoolhouse, where every school day had begun with a short service. Later, the group contributed to the restoration of the gymnasium and donated playground equipment in honor of Pauline Strampp. It also gave financial support to other formers.

Every year, as they left, the superintendent would say, "Remember, next year we'll see you at home." The last official reunion was held in 2000. ■

Not Just Odd Fellows' Kids

Over the years, many families of children have grown up at the Odd Fellows' Home in Lincoln. William "Joe" Crowe is grateful that his family was one of them.

Joe came to the Home July 8, 1963, with four of his brothers, when he was 11 years old. He was joined in 1964 by two of his three sisters (the other one was adopted) and in 1966 by his younger brother.

"My parents and grandparents weren't even related to the Odd Fellows," says Joe, so he is very grateful the Home took his family in.

When the Odd Fellows opened the Home in 1893, it was the only order that provided a home for the orphans of its members. As other orders built homes, and social security and widows' pensions made it possible for families to stay together, the number of children in the Home decreased.

In 1944, there were only 44 children in residence, so the Home began admitting dependent and neglected children placed by the courts, the counties paying towards the children's care. Parents, friends, guardians, and other orders could pay to have children live there, providing there was room for Odd Fellows' children.

Joe was one of those court children. "Up until I came to the Home, I took care of myself," he says. Delivering groceries, shoveling snow, washing windows—from the age of five or six, Joe had to worry about finding food and even knowing when to get up in the morning.

In April of 1963, his middle sister and the five older boys rode to El Paso, Texas, in the back of their grandfather's truck, where their dad went to work for his brother. After school let out, "my dad kicked us out and put us on the train," says Joe, and sent them back to Illinois with nothing. The children had nowhere to go except to a friend's house until the

county placed them in foster homes. "They put me the furthest away, because I was the orneriest," says Joe.

At Lincoln, Joe moved into the older boys' dorm with his older brother. The three younger boys were in the smaller boys' dorm. Was he scared? "I can't ever remember being scared or lost," he says. "I'd already been lost long before that."

Joe's mother got a job and visited the kids, but his father never returned.

Joe says the best part of being raised at the Home was knowing that "somebody did care about you." Not every child liked the rules and regulations, but they "gave me that second chance that I didn't have when I was out running the street," he says.

Joe was one of the last children to live in the old buildings. When the Home family moved into the new, one-story Home in 1967, Joe noticed a change. A child had a lot more space to himself in the old buildings, so when the children were more confined, they got into trouble more. Still, Joe thrived on the routine and the opportunities he wouldn't have had in a foster home.

If the circus came to town, the Home kids were there, so people could see that "we were just as normal as they were, even though we rode around on a bus that said 'Odd Fellows' Children's Home.'"

Joe graduated in 1972 and joined the military. After he returned to Lincoln, he worked at the Home as a maintenance man and relief parent. Through his lodge work, he became a member of the Children's Home board and served as administrator from 1995 to 2000. He still lives in the superintendent's cottage.

Joe remembers . . . helping build the white fence surrounding the pony pasture . . . a United Nations Pilgrimage trip . . . attending Jr. Lodge meetings . . . his high school graduation party. ■

From 1967—DCFS & Day Care

Darlene Wick remembers the time a former resident of the Children's Home brought his son to visit. The father had been in charge of the four ponies and was telling his son how great his life had been at the Home.

"Tommy, you ran away three times!" said Darlene. "Why [did you do that] if it was so great?" His answer? "I couldn't understand why I was separated from my sisters. They were at home."

During the years Robert and Darlene Wick were superintendent and matron at the Odd Fellows' Children's Home (1967 to 1994), they found that children whose parents were deceased were easier to work with than children who were sent by the courts. Court children couldn't understand why they were there.

Bob had served on the Home board, and when the Wicks came to the Home for his monthly meetings, they got to know the children. When the Home needed a new superintendent, they thought they could make a difference to the 36 children who lived there.

But "it takes more than love," Darlene says. "You couldn't do anything about the parent not showing up when they said they'd show up; you couldn't do anything about the unkept promises. The only thing you could do is be there, talk to them, and provide them with professional help."

Darlene tried to do the things for the children that she did for her own daughter, Connie (who was four when they moved in). The housemothers "probably thought I was really being picky," she says, "because every time we took the children somewhere, they had a chart to follow: brush teeth, take a bath."

There were lists for everything. Once their German band was about to perform in Collinsville, when the tuba player said, "I forgot my mouthpiece." Darlene had listed the tuba, the stand, and the music—but not the mouthpiece. Instead of the brand-new tuba, they had to borrow an old beat-up one from the local school. "You can't have a German band without a tuba," says Darlene.

There were charts for piano lessons and charts for doing homework. Saturday mornings, the children did their chores; after lunch they got their allowances and went downtown. Sunday afternoons were for movies; the theater billed

the Home, and the kids had ten-cent tickets.

Every summer, the Home was host to a bus of 40 high school students from California who were on the two-week United Nations Pilgrimage for Youth to New York, sponsored by the Odd Fellows. "We housed them all and mixed them in with the Home children," says Darlene. "We were doing laundry all night."

The Home housed the Illinois group, as well, and over the years, several Home children went on the trip.

The men's board of the Home met monthly, while the Auxiliary (women's) board met quarterly, and they always stayed at the Home. Each board had its own permanent room in the board hall.

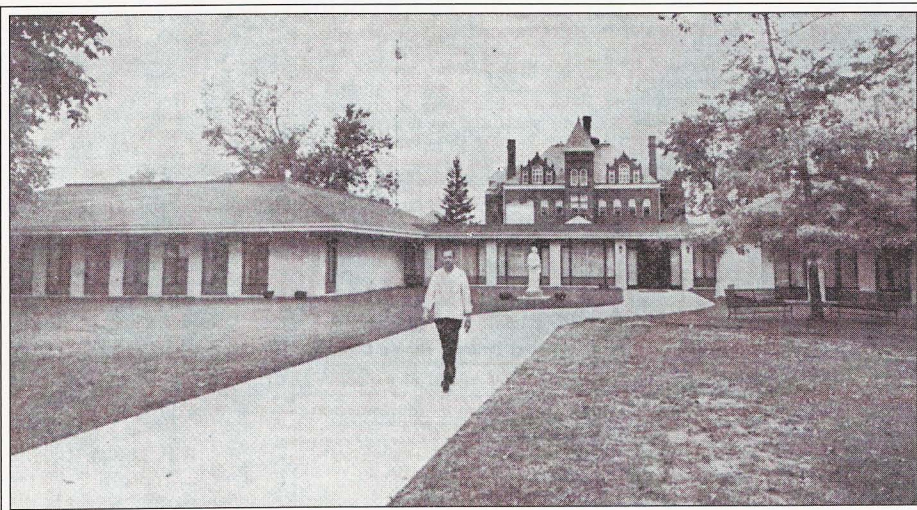
Every year in March, the president of the Auxiliary board sent a check for money she had raised during her term. The children would put on a party, with a different theme every year. The sponsors and state officers of the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs were invited and stayed in the Home.

The children continued the tradition of performing throughout the state. They had a chorale group and a band and took dancing lessons at the Talent Workshop. When they were learning to do the Lindy, Darlene brought over her old 45-rpm records, and they would all go down into the recreation room in the basement to dance.

Darlene enjoyed taking the children shopping for school clothes—the older girls in a group to Penney's—and new clothes for Easter.

Every year at Thanksgiving, Bob and Darlene would pack the kids and their suitcases into the Home's bus and drive up to Rockford, where the kids would spend the holiday in lodge members' homes.

Each child had a sponsor, who sent money for birthday and Christmas



Superintendent Bob Wick stands in front of the new Home, with the old administration building in the background. All the staff and children ate together in the dining room. The State-Journal Register, October 15, 1967.

presents. The children made out Christmas lists, and Darlene tried to get them each a good outfit, a play outfit, and a toy. Every child had about five gifts to open Christmas morning, so Darlene spent “night after night after night” wrapping presents in Santa’s workshop—the men’s boardroom.

In 1974, the children took part in a six-week program of day trips paid for by Title I. Some of the teachers were Paul and John Beaver and Bobbie Connolley. Among other activities, they saw the play *1776* at Sullivan and visited the Wisconsin Dells.

Of course, discipline was necessary and usually meant being grounded or having TV privileges taken away. But one year, Clifford Wilson made a paddle for Bob Wick in woodwork-ing class at the junior high school.

One Sunday, a group of boys—including Clifford—attended the Christian Church and stole some cigarettes on the way home. The housemother found the cigarettes and sent the boys to the office. They had to give the cigarettes back and also pay for them.

“You know that paddle?” Bob told them. “You each have three swats coming, but I don’t feel like doing it today.”

About three days later, Clifford came to him and said, “Mr. Wick, could I



Erica Mahler [Boss] & Annie Mahler [Evers], 1978. One year, little Annie ran up and stole the Baby Jesus out of the manger at the center’s Christmas party. Odd Fellows Children’s Home 100th Anniversary 1889-1989.

have my three swats today so I can stop thinking about it?” He didn’t get them. Bob laughingly said, “You get out of here,” and that was that.

“I enjoyed being with the kids, and when it came to reprimanding them, it upset me,” says Darlene. “Bob and I, many a night, would be so upset because we had to confront somebody” and were worried about what to do.

In 1977, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) started taking children out of institutions and putting them into foster homes. One family who took a grade-school boy into their home had been talked into “rescuing” him from an institution. Years later, when Darlene saw him again, he had been in his 20th foster home and was working on his GED. By June 30, 1976, there were only five children living in the Home. In 1993, the Home discontinued residential care.

Day Care is Added

In 1977, the Odd Fellows began a day care service in one section of the Home building. Cleola McCormick Fletcher worked there from 1978 until 1994, many of those years as program director. Her assistant was Cheryl Boyd Elkins. Cleola says there were waiting lists for all ages, and women used to call her the day they found out they were pregnant to get on the list for baby care.

The Odd Fellows’ Children’s Home Day Care Service served parents from all over Logan County. It was licensed by DCFS and eventually accepted children from six weeks through fourth grade. Summers were especially busy after the latchkey program for school-age children was begun.

The center had a baby room—with Disney characters on the walls that were painted by Lynn Hewett, Darlene’s niece—and separate classes for toddlers, two-year-olds, and three- and four-year-olds. Kindergartners and older children rode to school in one of two 15-passenger vans. (Robin Ingram was in charge of transportation and was the main driver.) In 1994-5, average daily attendance was 136.

The children used the gymnasium, and the “grounds were wonderful,” says Cleola, “because we had lots of room to take them outside.” The children also took part in activities at the recreation center nearby. On summer days, it wasn’t unusual to see a group of preschoolers and school kids dressed in swimming suits and carrying towels on their way to the pool. The kids had their own T-ball team, too—so they could be transported once instead of 20 different times.

The center had its own laundry service; its own janitor and groundskeeper, George Sheley; and its own cook, Laramie Ruder. Logan County Health Department Nurse Kathy Blaum came out to give children their immunizations and was always available to answer medical questions, and Bernadine Grimm taught tap, ballet, and acrobatics. Barb Brandt worked with toddlers for years.

The cubbyholes in each classroom were filled with everything from diapers, formula, baby food, and an extra change of clothes, to treasures for show-and-tell. Most of the children came as babies and stayed all the way through, and Cleola says the best part of her job was watching them interact and grow and learn new things. Probably half the employees had been there for years, too.

It was difficult to keep qualified teachers, who were required to have two years of college and six credits of early childhood education or early child development. Since the Odd Fellows didn’t want to charge the parents too much, teachers’ pay was low. As more day care and after-school programs came into being and local factories closed, the center became harder to support. It closed June 30, 2000. At present, the Central Illinois Economic Development Corporation leases the building for its day care center. The YMCA leases the gymnasium. ■

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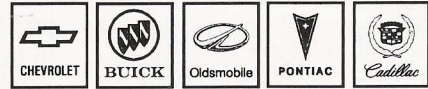


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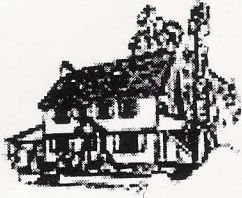
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The Odd Fellows in Lincoln

Odd Fellows Lincoln Lodge No. 204 was chartered in 1856. Its building, at 112 S. McLean, was dedicated in 1916. Over the years, several different businesses were located on the first floor, including Langellier Motor Company and the *Courier*. Lodge rooms were on the third floor and consisted of a lodge hall, kitchen, and dining room. The building was sold to Glenn and Marilyn Buelter in 1977. Today, No. 204 owns a building at 401 N. Limit. Once a men's organization, it now accepts women.

Don Klockenga, who belongs to No. 204, says he has made a lot of friends all over the state through the Odd Fellows. When Joe Stone was Grand Master (President) of the Illinois Odd Fellows, Don was one of his officers and traveled with him. "People who don't belong to fraternal organizations don't know what they're missing," he says. "It's kind of special." The local lodge used to hold ice cream socials and pancake suppers. It supports many charities, says former Noble Grand (President) Bill Rose. Internationally, the Odd Fellows give scholarships, support visual research, and provide nursing homes and low-rent housing for the elderly.

Orphans' Home Rebekah Lodge No. 9 was chartered in 1891, amidst the excitement of building the Orphans' Home—hence its name. The Rebekahs presented the Home with a large clock, which stood in the hallway outside the office in the administration building. Maxine Menzel remembers that the sewing circle had their sewing machines on the fourth floor of the Odd Fellows' building, where they made and repaired clothing for the children at the Home and quilts that they raffled off. Men could belong to the Rebekahs, although Maxine says men showed up mainly when needed to climb ladders to decorate the hall. Locally, says Irene Tumilty, the Rebekahs baked pies for the reunions and fixed lunches for special occasions held here. Today, Orphans' Home Rebekah Lodge No. 9 meets at Friendship Manor.

Lincoln Rebekah Lodge No. 204, chartered in 1995, meets at 401 N. Limit.

Friendship Manor was dedicated in 1981. Located at 925 Primm Road in Lincoln, it has 124 apartments for low-income elderly people. Joe Stone is the administrator.

The Illinois Odd Fellows State Headquarters is located at 305 N. Kickapoo. ■

Material in this issue came from *History of Logan County Illinois 1911*; the *Courier* under its various names; Children's Home 50th and 100th anniversary books; *The History of Our Homes I. O. O. F.*, 1913; *Uncle Ed Remembers* by Edgar Dobbs, 1973; *From an Orphan to Grand Master* by George Rendek; copies of *The Mouth Organ*; Odd Fellows' publications; Lincoln city directories—and our friends.

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