

# Rediscovering ILLINOIS

by LESTER COLBY

Towns, people, houses. Stores built around court houses. Houses, people, towns. No man ever went to live in a town he'd never heard of. When we analyze towns we find some prominent and well-known towns just as there are some prominent and well-known people. That's ink.

Corn, corn, corn! Everywhere you turn these days you hear the cry of corn. Men gathering to cuss and discuss corn. Meetings to urge legislation about corn. Relief for the corn-growers. Corn, corn, corn. When and where did this sudden shouting to the skies about corn begin?

Eat corn, more corn, more corn! This corn craze which has all but shoved the Charleston back onto page eight started, ladies and gentlemen, in the little city of Morris, Illinois!

**Morris Is Center**  
Morris, down in Grundy county, county seat, is in the center of a remarkable agricultural belt. So when corn is sold at fire-sale prices it hurts. F. H. Hayes, corn-fed citizen of corn-fed Morris, got to thinking about corn until his tongue clucked and his eyes popped. So he called in some of the boys and talked corn. He became chairman of the first Corn Day committee of the first town in the U. S. to cry out a corn protest, organize a chorus of complaint, scream in the ink of the daily press—and lord how the farmers rolled in.

Cal Coolidge and his well known United States know what happened immediately thereafter. So—Morris wrote its name, and the name of corn in bold letters across the pages of every newspaper in the land. And then I went to Morris to see this town which so suddenly had consumed ink—so startlingly—until it blazed like a comet in a moonless sky.

Where's Morris, you ask?  
**Between Joliet and Ottawa**  
Ten miles below the point where the Kankakee and Des Plaines rivers unite and so form the Illinois river is the place that has been called the Rip Van Winkle city of the upper Illinois river valley. It is about midway between Joliet and Ottawa and once upon a time long, long years ago was bigger than either of them.

Then the Great Sleep came on. This Rip Van Winkle city is known in the postal guide and the Rock Island railroad time card as Morris. More than forty years ago it had a population of about 5,000. At the beginning of 1925 it still had a popu-

lation of about 5,000. Forty years with every day the same!

Morris became a rather important point quite early in the history of Illinois. It was on the old Illinois & Michigan canal in the days when that was a busy artery for freight. A considerable manufacturing center grew up for it had two early-day transportation outlets—the canal and the railroad.

But Morris' desire for growing lapsed and it developed the greatest curse that can come to a city, a curse that has choked the life out of many a town and made it a business graveyard. Morris' curse was factional politics. Factional politics is the art of putting a united foot flat in the face of every fellow who belongs to the opposing faction and shoving him back down again.

And through all the years that Morris had the political complex it attained little of real value to itself in city building.

**Awakening Comes**  
More recently Morris has shed its political complex and has developed a progress complex. It is working! Well, in the last twelve months there has been spent a total of more than \$1,500,000 in Morris in industrial and civic expansion and betterment.

Figures, you ask? The Morris Paper Mills and the Self-Locking Carton Co. are putting in developments that will cost easily more than \$200,000. Probably another \$200,000 has gone into home-building. The new M. E. church cost \$70,000; remodeling the Masonic Temple, \$35,000; Country club, \$30,000; Newport building, \$30,000. The Morris Milling Co. is remodeling the old brewery at a cost of a pretty penny.

And so the Rip Van Winkle city of the upper Illinois valley is stretching itself.

**Great Paper Mill**  
We went on a tour of the plant of the Morris Paper Mill. Tour is correct; it's a journey. For many years this plant was more of a liability than an asset. Then, with the development of the new Morris, came reorganization and new financing.

The mill makes boxboard. It operates chiefly on paper waste from Chicago, St. Louis and other cities in this district. Old paper is sorted and reduced to pulp. For twenty-four hours a day, six days in the week, a steady stream of boxboard flows from the giant paper machine.

This sheet of new boxboard, 72 inches wide, moves at the rate of three miles an hour, 72 miles in 24 hours, 432 miles each 6-day week, 22,464 miles in 52 weeks. They told me that it takes 40 cars to move in a new paper making machine. A new one, more than doubling the capacity of the mill, is just being set up.

We go to the box mill and find out what happens to the new paper. Here great presses cut out the board into shapes. They are printed with firm names and advertising. Who buys paper boxes? Every business house in the United States.

**Through Printing Press**  
Here, in this Illinois town, I saw paper boxes going through the printing presses, receiving the imprints of houses in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, Atlanta, Philadelphia and dozens of cities between. State street merchants and the Chicago packers are among the biggest buyers.

What's a paper box order? One order which came into this Illinois plant last year called for 84,299,000 cartons of one design. All exactly alike! One company, making a medicine in common use, gave an order for boxes totaling \$4,000. The company has about 7,000 "live accounts," according to W. H. Beckwith, the man chiefly responsible for building up the business, and the boxes are printed in up to four colors.

When next you buy a suit, crackers, sausage, bacon, yarn, soap, washing powder, toilet articles or nuts, bolts or screws—the chances are the box came from the Morris mill. You can usually tell by the imprint. The old tin container appears to be vanishing.

**Another Big Plant**  
Morris the home of the biggest plant in the world specializing in window sash pulleys. It has just got the contract for the new \$26,000,000 Stevens hotel job in Chicago—1,600 dozen pulleys. It made the pulleys for the Illinois Merchants bank building and the Drake hotel, Chicago, and manufactures an average of about 1,000 dozen pulleys a day. About three dozen pulleys go into the average house. Figure it out.

This plant with 125,000 feet of floor space, employing 110 men, is operated by the Coleman Hardware Co. It has in connection a gray iron foundry.

**Flour Mill**  
The Morris Milling Co., which will be in operation in about 60 days, will be the city's first flour mill and will have a capacity of 400 barrels a day. A new type of mill is being built and it is planned to manufacture machinery for equipping other mills of the same type here.

The claim of the makers is that they have devised a way to remove ergot from flour. The presence of ergot in flour has cost the millers of America millions of dollars and ever since chemists learned of it millers have worked to eliminate it.

Some of the other plants in Morris are the Woelfel Leather Co., 75 employees; Illinois Foundry, 70, and the Northwestern Novelty Co., manufacturer of vending machines, etc., 25.

The Morris Cutlery Works makes pocket knives.

Morris also has an established industry in the growing of sweet clover seed. It sends out about \$250,000 worth of it yearly exporting to Canada, Mexico and New Zealand.

**Growing Now**  
That's about the picture of Morris, the Rip Van Winkle city, the town that stayed about 5,000 for forty years while it was mired, neck-deep in politics. Morris is thinking of growth now. It predicts 10,000 people in five years. That's the growth complex working. Morris will be on the new Lakes-to-Gulf waterway. More great hopes. Hopes of growth, people, factories and—higher prices for corn. When you eat your patriotic corn menu think of—Morris.

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