

Re-discovering ILLINOIS

by LESTER B. COLBY
ILLINOIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

That can of "sugar corn" which you bought at the corner grocery and opened for your dinner this evening had a romance of Illinois sealed between its unromantic covers. You may not know it but the packing of sweetcorn, in the central west, was started in Hoopston almost a half century ago. This year was the forty-ninth "pack."

You may not know it but Hoopston is a city of 6,000 that has grown up almost entirely around the canning industry. You may not know it but seventy-five per cent of the machinery used in the entire fruit and vegetable canning industry in the United States is manufactured in Hoopston.

37 Carloads a Day
It may surprise you when I tell you that there is a can manufacturing plant in Hoopston, making completed cans out of flat sheet tin, so marvelously equipped that its twelve automatic can-making machines can turn out, all soldered and tested, 3,000 cans in a minute; 180,000 an hour or about 1,500,000 in a working day—which is 37 carloads of cans! That's cans.

Hoopston is in the northern end of Vermilion county, near the Indiana state line. Something in the soil there somehow meant a better, sweeter sweetcorn. That was learned by the early growers and they bent their backs to the opportunity. The season's pack in Hoopston in 1925 was 800,000 cases or 19,200,000 cans. It fell off in 1926, the crop yielding only about 16,800,000 cans.

In this lesser yield this season is something else for us to think about, a story of the battle to give you that can of corn you had for dinner tonight. It is a story of an army of workers fighting against difficult odds to win. For this year the fields were flooded by rains that came in torrents.

For days the packers in the district feared that you would not be able to have that can of corn and if you could not have it their crops would be only waste. Two canning companies in Hoopston had ployed and tended during spring and summer about 15,000 acres of sweet corn. Farmers, who sell them corn, had grown another 5,000 acres.

Water Waist High
They were disturbed when, as the picking season came, floods poured in to their level acres and the waters stood waist high. But man is hard

to beat and the army of pickers waded into the fields. All day they toiled in the cold water and soft mud.

When the wagons were loaded it required six and eight-mule teams to get them out. The animals tugged those wagons to the concrete roads. Twenty-five rubber wheeled tractors came to the rescue and the wagons were made up into five-wagon trains on the hard highways.

"Men who risked sickness, who toiled long hours in distress, concrete roads and gasoline saved the crop—or the most of it," said one of the packers to me. "It cost us a heap of money but, well—I guess we were saved financially for the loss of the crop would have meant bankruptcy."

It was a big job. One company operated 220 wagons to get the corn to the plant. And the packer added this bit of information:

"Either one of the two plants here packs more corn yearly than any other plant anywhere."

Can Enamelled Inside
If you look inside your can after the corn is emptied, if the can comes from Hoopston, you will find something else. For this year, for the first time, the inside of the Hoopston cans are enamelled. That's to give you a prettier corn. Beauty in manufacture has extended even to corn.

There is a trace of sulphur in sweet corn. The action of sulphur on tin is chemical. It has meant a slight darkening of the golden-white meat of the corn. It does not hurt it at all, chemists say, but it is not so pretty.

So after years of experiment a way has been found to keep the corn free of this slight discoloration. The thin surface of grayish enamel, baked on under intense heat, means that the corn never touches the tin. And something more is done to please the buyer!

The great corn-canning industry in Hoopston began a half century ago in a very small way. First only a farmer or two grew the corn and it was canned in mashift plants. For years all of the canning equipment was made locally—because there was no place to buy it.

Sprague Started It
"Then about forty-five years ago a 'down east Yankee,' Welcome Sprague by name, came to Hoopston from Farnham, N. Y. He set out, in a small way, to manufacture canning machinery. Today that plant has grown into the great Sprague-Sells Corp.

It makes any kind of canning machinery wanted and ships all over the world. Special machines are designed for any purpose. They are made to operate under the "continuous" plan. Belts and chains and moving "sidewalks" keep the cans in steady

motion. They never stop during the process.

When a can moves into an oven or heating chamber it keeps going, slowly under the heat, and comes out cooked. The speed of the moving parts regulates the time under heat. And today everything imaginable is canned—except oranges and lemons, perhaps, for no way has been found to can satisfactorily these citrus fruits. I said everything is canned. I meant almost that for even fertilizer, they told me at the plant, is now being canned for certain special purposes.

The company was surprised a few months ago when it was asked to design a machine for "filling" tins with fruit cake dough. Here was a new idea. For the making of fruit cakes, in large quantities, with citrus and raisins and nuts and all that goes into fruit cakes, had become an industry of large proportions.

Fruit Cake In Cans
The manufacturers set about it. After a time a machine took form that today is filling from forty to fifty fruit cake tins, ready for the bake ovens, per minute. Some products are canned at the rate of 120 cans a minute per machine.

I mentioned the heavy rains. They told me that the rains this year created another problem. Heavy rains meant heavy moisture content in all field crops. Canning plants were quickly in trouble. Early batches, at canneries all over the country, did not turn out well. Some of them spoiled.

By experiments it was found that with the added moisture content the materials, no matter what, and whether raised in Ohio or Illinois or Colorado—for it has been a wet year everywhere—had to be cooked longer and under more heat. But it was done.

I had heard of this in an individual plant or two but I had to go to Hoopston to find that the problem was general. For only at Hoopston could I find men who had their fingers on the pulse of the nation's canning industry. This is the center, the capital of Canningdom. The quality, texture and taste, they tell me, as a result is the best ever known.

A Big Business
You may ask if this canning industry is really a big business. You may be convinced when I tell you that the other day the Sprague-Sells Corp., of Hoopston, gave one order for 250 tons of steel—to go into canning machines.

Hoopston has made its imprint on the canning industry in other ways. Take the case of H. W. Phelps, president of the American Can company with great plants scattered all over the country. He was a Hoopston boy, got his start here with the Union Can company, of Hoopston, an im-

portant plant in its beginning but a unit of the American Can company now. It is the plant I told you about that can make 3,000 completed cans in one minute when going all speed ahead. Mr. Phelps lives in New York but often "comes back home."

"Holy City"
For fifty years or more certain wags have called Hoopston the Holy City. Should you go to the Dearborn street railway station in Chicago today and ask for a ticket to the Holy City the ticket agent, without hesitation, probably would hand you a paste board giving passage to Hoopston.

That name was applied in jestularity in the beginning because there never has been a saloon in Hoopston. Those who laid out the town on prairie land saw to that and it is in the titles and deeds. Hoopston beat the Rev. Mr. Volstead to it by a lifetime or two. And Hoopston takes pride in the fact.

The salary of the mayor of Hoopston is fifty cents a year, by ordinance, and the aldermen get twenty-five cents a year. The city has \$50,000 in its treasury. At times it has even loaned its surplus money to its own business people at interest.

Yes, romance, adventure, prosperity, development, important human events—all these things and many more—can come out of a tin can. The next time you prod a tin can with a sharp point of a can-opener think of Hoopston, home of 6,000 people, a city built on tin cans and canned food-stuffs, the Holy City in Vermilion county, Illinois.

DETECTIVE NOVEL LIKE WORD PUZZLE

Writer In Scribner's Declares This Feature Makes This of Story

The detective novel is a glorified cross-word puzzle, asserts Willard Huntington Wright in the November Scribner's Magazine, and therein lies the secret of its popularity.

"If we are to understand the unique place held in modern letters by the detective novel," he says, "we must first endeavor to determine its peculiar appeal; for this appeal is fundamentally unrelated to that of any other variety of fictional entertainment. What, then, constitutes the hold that the detective novel has on all classes of people—even those who would not stoop to read any other kind of 'popular' fiction? Why do we find men

like Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt—college professors, statesmen, scientists, philosophers, and other men concerned with the grave, more advanced, more intellectual problems of life—passing by all other varieties of best-seller novels, and going to the detective story for diversion and relaxation?"

"The answer, I believe, is simply this: the detective novel does not fall under the head of fiction in the ordinary sense, but belongs rather in the category of riddles; it is, in fact, a complicated and extended puzzle cast in fictional form. Its widespread popularity and interest are due, at bottom and in essence, to the same factors that give popularity and interest to the cross-word puzzle. Indeed, the structure and mechanism of the cross-word puzzle and of the detective novel are very similar. In each there is a problem to be solved; and the solution depends wholly on mental processes—on analysis, on the fitting to-

gether of apparently unrelated parts, on a knowledge of the ingredients, and, in some measure, on guessing. Each is supplied with a series of overlapping clues to guide the solver; and these clues when fitted into place, blaze the path for future progress. In each, when the final solution is achieved, all the details are found to be woven into a complete, interrelated, and closely knitted fabric."

Two is company, three a crowd, and four is enough for the candidate to report a "large and enthusiastic audience."—Detroit News.

Report of increase in the number of fatalities at grade crossings goes to show that dodging the iron horse is one of the deadliest of American sports.—Boston Transcript.

Spain has never had a society of Daughters of the Revolution, but it hasn't been for lack of revolutions.—Boston Globe.



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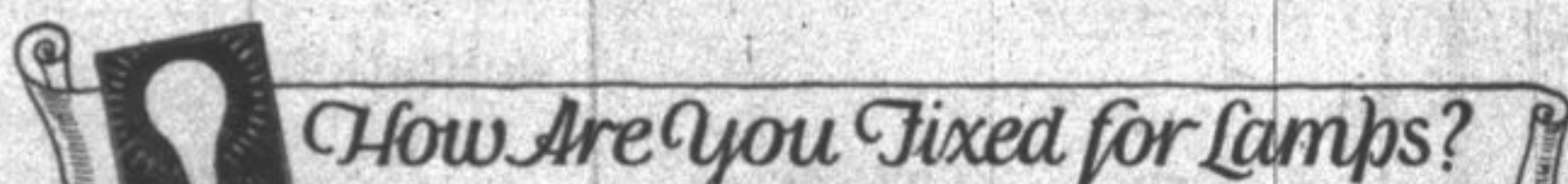
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