

RODNEY COLBY

(Illinois Chamber of Commerce)
This work of searching into the lives of cities and towns to find the intimate things about them is an interesting thing. Now take the case of Bloomington; I have just been poking about it for its intimacies and its close-ups.

How many people know why Margaret Illington came to choose that name, so famous on the stage for many years? Answer, Illin from Illinois; the gton from Bloomington. That famous star was born in Bloomington plain Maud Light. Bloomington has had its other notable and is making them today.

Sidney Smith, cartoonist, father of the Gump family, remembers Bloomington as his home during those youthful years when he found difficulty in making his art get him his panecakes. Another young artist has come out of Bloomington. He is Wallace Bishop, son of Stanley Bishop of the Bloomington Pantagraph. Young Bishop is in New York making his daily comic "strip" for a newspaper syndicate.

Richard Henry Little, of "Line" fame is from Bloomington. From there also came Rachel Crothers, noted playwright; Madame Salsman-Stevens, of histrionic glory; Marie Litta, famed songbird, now dead, born Von Elzner.

Judge David Davis, circuit rider, later chief justice of the Supreme court of the United States, and from there to the vice-presidency, lived in Bloomington as did Adlai E. Stevenson, another and later vice-president. I met the Reverend Joseph Fifer, one-time governor of Illinois, now more than 80, who goes to his office daily to work at his law. His daughter, Florence Fifer Bohrer, is Illinois' only woman state senator. Cecil Burleigh, one of America's greatest violin composers, now with the University of Wisconsin, is a former Bloomingtonian.

Hughitt Started There
Marvin Hughitt, for years president of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad, developed out of Bloomington that the first Pullman sleeper car was built. George Pullman, originator of the idea, supervised its building in the Chicago & Alton shops.

Bloomington has had much to do with the art and thought of state and nation. One of the state's normal schools is in Bloomington. Bloomington is also home of that old Methodist Episcopal university, Illinois Wesleyan. There's a story in that which shows something of the character of Bloomington.

The university was founded back in the early 60's. It struggled along as old schools used to do, plodding through the years. When there came a movement to raise it and carry its physical properties away in 1919 a check-up showed that it had 220 students.

Many merchants and business men who remembered it mostly for the small donations they had made commented, "Let it go and be done with it." But the old school had its friends. They employed the Rev. A. G. Carnine, local pastor who had made a record during the World war. His job was that rather intangible thing, publicity. He was to spend a year working up sentiment for the school. The end of the year came.

Raise Funds
Apparently he had done his work well. A goal was set. It was decided to raise \$600,000 to rehabilitate the school and keep it. In thirty days \$700,000 was raised. This was on agreement that the university would raise \$1,000,000 away from Bloomington. It got that, too. So \$100,000 has been spent for new campus; \$175,000 for a new gym; \$150,000 for new library. Because these things were done an eastern music publisher gave \$75,000 toward a new \$150,000 musical building. And the school since 1919 has jumped from an enrollment of 220 to 1,200. A law school is to be developed on the nucleus of the present one. The goal is to bring the law class of 75 to an enrollment of 400 in the next year or two.

John McBurnes, an old farmer of many acres of good corn land, was asked to chip in during the money-getting for the university. He gave somewhat but he told the committee he had an idea of his own. So he made a donation of \$125,000 for a memorial to soldiers. It is a fine building named the John McBurnes Memorial building. And out of that gift came something else; the state headquarters of the American Legion was moved from Springfield to Bloomington.

I cite these things to show how energy and action from within develop towns and cities; very often bringing important things from unexpected sources. It would have been easy to have let the old school pass out.

Burbank of Cornfields
Dr. James Holbert, they call him "Doctor Jimmie" in Bloomington because he is young and in the fullness of enthusiasm, is credited with doing some rather amazing things in corn research. He has been called the Luther Burbank of the Cornfields. He works in the laboratories of the Funk Brothers farm in co-operation with the federal bureau of agriculture.

"We have learned many things about corn," said Dr. Holbert. "We found that seed from the best grow 100 bushels of corn to the acre while seed from another ear, on the same soil, would run 120 bushels. We started out to find why. We have learned how, by breeding and selection, to increase the yield between ten and twenty bushels an acre.

"We have also learned that there are twelve chief diseases which attack corn. We have found that if you reduce the phosphorous ration in the soil one corn will be reduced 60 per cent in yield while another will be reduced only 2 per cent.

"We have found that under the same circumstances one ear of corn will rot 75 per cent while another will rot not more than 1 per cent. We have found that one type of corn will stand up where another will fall down, circumstances and soil the same. We are breeding a corn that will stand. We have learned about how corn gets its nourishment; it eats soup, you know."

And out of this knowledge, I am told, the science of rationing corn, the control of the fungi that attack it, will come dividends of many millions of dollars to the corn growers of America.

Home of Easter Rabbit
I found in Bloomington the home of the Easter rabbit. That is a busy rabbit these days. Its daily lay, under pressure, may be 200,000 eggs in all the colors for which an Easter rabbit is famed. It is the home of the Easter rabbit because Santa Claus recently moved out.

Santa and the rabbit operate in the candy factory owned by the Paul Beich Co., "say Bike's." This plant, home of the "Lady Betty" turns out about \$1,500,000 worth of candy a year. From 300 to 450 people are employed, according to season.

What goes into candies? Filberts from Turkey, almonds from Spain, oils of orange and lemon from Italy, gum arabic from Africa, egg albumen from China, menthol and agar from Japan, chocolate beans from South America, Africa and Ceylon, sugar from Cuba and Hawaii.

Machines in the plant costing \$10,000 each wrap and automatically box 7,000 boxes of caramels alone a day per machine, 240 pieces in a box! One day a few months ago a manufacturing establishment in Bloomington sold more than \$4,000,000 worth of its goods in one hour and got the checks with the orders! The business at that time was not five years old. The man who heads that house is C. U. Williams, maker of the "Oil-O-Matic" oil burner.

Mr. Williams was a photographer when the post card craze struck some twenty-five years ago. He sent out a corps of photographers all over the country, order takers too, and made a fortune. His was the second biggest post card business in America.

After the war, as in the case of so many other men, he had to start pretty much over again. He is reckoned Bloomington's wealthiest citizen today. He's sold on Bloomington and Illinois as the proper place to do business in. He remarked to me:

"The fact that the five most successful oil burning manufacturers in the country are all located in Illinois." The \$4,000,000 sale, mentioned above, was put on during a convention of 1,000 dealers and salesmen from all over the United States, and some other places, who gather at the plant yearly. David R. Forgan, Chicago's veteran banker, watched the spectacle with some amazement.

This company, down in Bloomington, spends \$75,000 a year in advertising to tell its story to the people. Bloomington's largest industry is the Chicago and Alton railroad shops with 3,000 employees and a payroll estimated at \$4,000,000 a year. The Meadows Mfg. Co., foundry, farm machinery and electric washers, etc., \$600,000 in plant investment, is another large industry. Some of the city's other products are medicines, clothing, food products, freight and passenger cars, flour, cigars, cereals.

Federal estimates, made last fall, gave Bloomington 30,421 population. That places it fifteenth among Illinois' cities. But the town of Normal, home of a state normal school, adjoins it. In both cities and immediately around them, according to local estimates, are about 40,000 persons.

The same authorities give Bloomington a payroll of about \$10,000 a year. And let me say something about that payroll. All has not been always attar of roses in building Bloomington. Once a stove foundry, burned. To save it to Bloomington it was refinanced, locally. The agricultural slump slipped up behind its greatest agricultural machinery plant. There was a time when the pot that kept the oil burner burning was out of fuel. There have been other instances, plenty of them.

Organization Aids
What happened? On all these occasions the Association of Commerce swung into work. It was the Association of Commerce that dug up the needed financing, and that saved the Wesleyan university for Bloomington, too. It has won for Bloomington the name, "The city that takes care of its own."

The Association of Commerce has functioned, unwaveringly, for 25 years. It has an annual fund of two dollars per capita, \$60,000 in a 30,000 town, with which to carry on for Bloomington. To save its industries the Bloomington Association of Commerce has gone out and raised whatever money has been necessary whenever needed.

Dean Thompson, of the University of Illinois, once said that the Bloomington Association of Commerce was the best in the United States in any town of its "size and weight." Good authorities say that without such an Association of Commerce there would be no such Bloomington and no payroll of \$10,000,000.

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