

DIXON: 1930!

By Shannon Chenoweth Graham

(The author's father, Dr. Samuel James Chenoweth, established an office in Veasman Drug Store in Dixon in January, 1930. This is a condensed and edited version of a longer article she has written about her recollections of the community while she was growing up at that time).

Dixon of 1930 was a boom town. Union Electric was building Bagnell Dam and the highline to carry electricity from the dam to St. Louis. Ajax Pipeline from Texas was laying pipeline and building a

The main highway running through the edge of the business district was a gravel road, state highway 28. As today, it extended from a few miles outside of Vienna all the way to Route 66, which is now known as I-44. Highway 28 was a treacherous mass of hairpin turns and hills. A car of the day was stretched to the limit at 55 miles an hour. Many people owed their lives to the fact Grandpa couldn't go any faster. Car accidents were common, as a skid on loose gravel or on a curve could send you into a ditch. Or, someone who had too much to drink coming on the inside of a curve could

The river roads in those days were disasters. There were ferries in some places, but many times you had to ford the river at the shallowest place. These roads were just wide enough for one car, with places provided for meeting another car every half mile or so. In summer, you could "eat dust" for some distances until you could pass a car. Doctors drove Chevrolets or Fords. Anything larger could drag in the ruts or stall you on a tree stump that hadn't been grubbed out in the middle of the road. If you got stalled on one of those isolated roads or had a flat, you could sit for an hour

had a minor in music. Music was a way of life. The lessons, the practicing, the rehearsals, you took for granted. They were not a chore. You had a town's reputation for music to uphold and you didn't dare not to measure up to those who had gone before you.

Everyone in Dixon played bridge. Dixon had three bridge clubs. Once a month, husbands were invited for an evening of socializing.

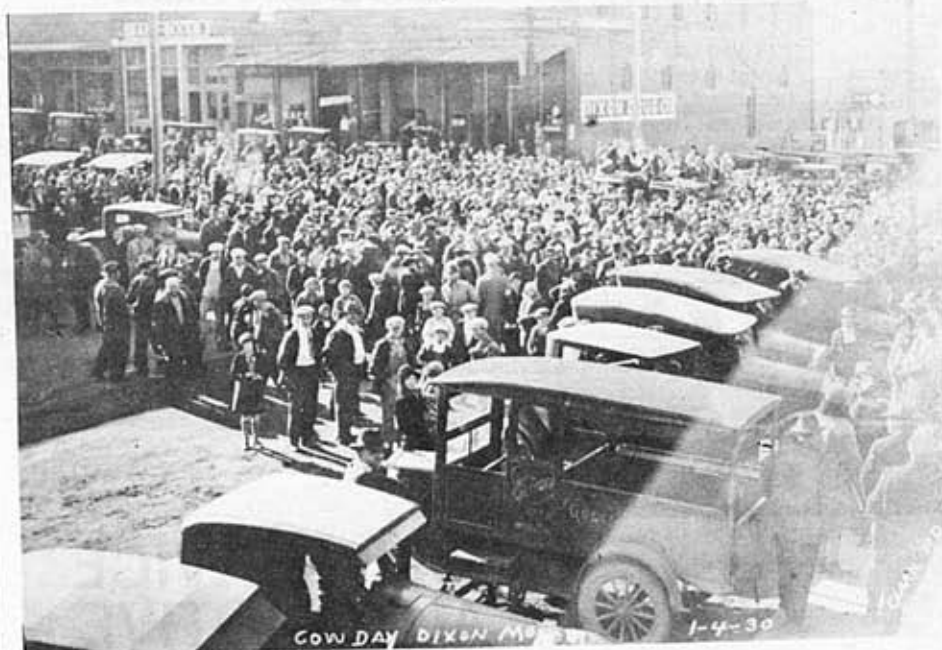
The young people had jigsaw puzzle parties. They were all the rage with a new puzzle arriving at the drug store every week. Some of these parties ended with spin the bottle,

all over town. Everyone knew who you were and your parents. If you got hurt, they took you in until you could be picked up, bandaging knees and elbows and furnishing lemonade and whatever was needed. Some children were as accustomed to the loving arms of their neighbors as their own mother's. If you came home from school and your mother wasn't home, you could always go a half dozen places until she returned.

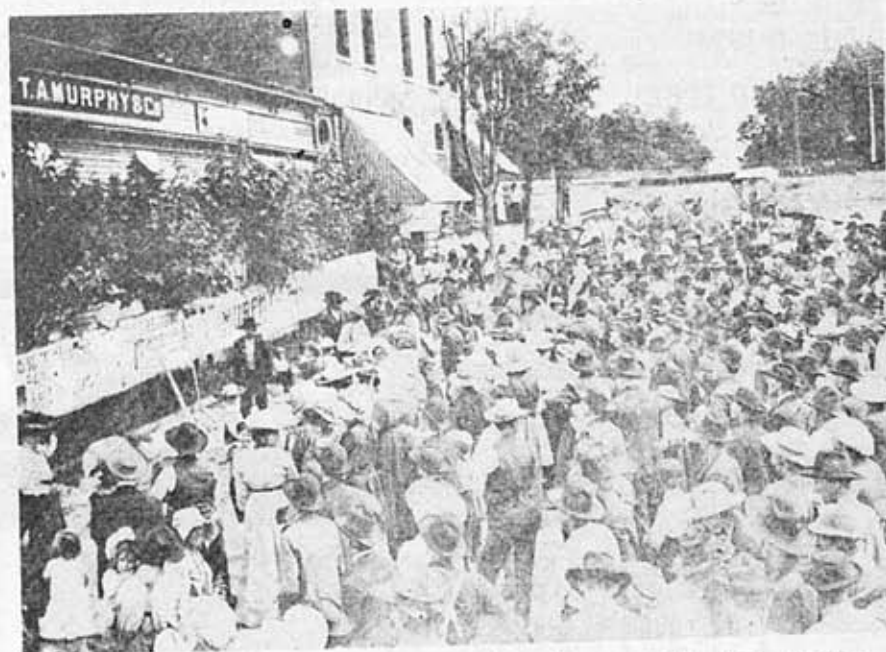
When summer came, we swam and fished in the Gasconade. A number of families had club houses on

ponds within walking distance and we skated. A ride on a sled towed by a car or a walk in the snow were also popular. A girl had her first date at 12 or 13, usually with the boy next door.

In downtown Dixon there were two stores exclusively for groceries and meat, The Leader on the corner of First and Second Streets and Krogers on Second Street next to the Veasman Drug Store. There were several barber shops and restaurants, two department stores-- Gilberts and the Mercantile; and a clothing store. There was



Cow Days in Dixon, Jan. 4, 1930.
(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)



According to Fred Schubert, TA Murphey used to give away a ticket with each \$100 purchase. At the end of the month a drawing would be held to give away a free cow.

(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)

pump relay station just outside Dixon. The town was filled with men working on these projects. Some had brought their families, most had not. Prohibition was still controlling liquor sales, but there was plenty of homebrew available.

The men worked hard and played rough. Gun fights, fist fights, and knifings could erupt at any time on the streets or in a store day or night. At times there would be a killing, but this was rare. From time to time, a man had to be rushed to Mac Farland Hospital in Rolla or St. Mary's Hospital in Jefferson City, where it took a skilled surgeon to save his life.

mean instant death or serious injury. It kept doctors working long hours.

The ambulance service was maintained by Gilbert Funeral Home, operated by Fred and Joe Gilbert. The Gilberts also owned a general store and furniture store across the street from the funeral home. Until 1950 in small Missouri towns, vehicles that were a hearse at a 2 p.m. funeral might be rushing someone to the hospital as an ambulance at 4 p.m. Somehow, we never seemed to mind.

Doctors still made house calls. The territories were large. A house call could mean anything up to 20 miles out in the country.

before someone came along.

There was always something to do. The high school had an excellent music department with cases full of music trophies won in state competition in Columbia and in other smaller contests. The school had a band; orchestra; boys', girls', and mixed glee clubs; boys', girls', and mixed quartets; and instrumental and vocal quartets and trios.

There were musicals, which often included those people in town who still owned instruments and kept up their music. There were two music teachers in town besides the high school music teacher and a grade school teacher who

post office, and other harmless diversions. There were no drugs or liquor at such parties. Most were supervised by one or more parents. Occasionally we met at one house or another to dance to the Victrola or to gather around the piano and sing. You felt free to drop into anyone's house anytime and in any numbers and the refrigerator would be stocked with goodies, cookies, Cokes, candy bars, and ice cream. It seemed mothers were always prepared.

Children were safe anywhere in Dixon. There wasn't anything to harm you, as long as you stayed out of town on Saturday afternoons. You could walk

the river and we had picnics and swim parties. Hardly a summer passed without a drowning or two. The Gasconade was wide and deep. The floods in the spring and fall washed out the banks and changed the river bed. So, a place that was safe one year would not be safe the next. The older young men who were good swimmers usually checked out the river before others went in. No one swam alone. It was too dangerous. Big Piney at Jerome was another story. It was shallow and much safer. Most young people and their parents were good swimmers.

In winter, we had Weiner and marshmallow roasts. There were several large

one lawyer in town, two doctors, an osteopath, a dentist, and two beauty shops. There was one car dealer who sold Chevrolets and several repair garages. There were two hotels, two Methodist Churches, a Baptist Church, a Christian Church, and a Church of God. There may have been other smaller denominations but I do not recall.

Once a year, Fontinelle Stock Company came to town for two weeks and presented plays usually with a "Toby" character. There were several of these travelling, acting companies that came to Dixon in the summer. Most of the time, these were tent show



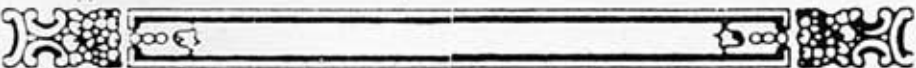
companies that set up in the Dixon Park. There was always at least one terrific thunderstorm during their stay and everyone ran for cover. When the storm was over, no matter the time of night, we returned to the tent and the show went on.

Sunday morning found a large number of people in church. There were choir

practices and also programs on Easter, Christmas, and Sunrise Service on Thanksgiving (I don't know why, it was a tradition in the Baptist Church and we all attended).

Dixon was a good place in which to grow. The town had much to offer a child in the way of music, culture,

and experience. It had good schools, excellent and caring teachers, and wholesome amusements that sent you into the world with a foundation built on morality, ethics, and love of God, country, and your fellow man. No one raised in Dixon had to escape to find out who he or she was, he or she already knew.



Saturday crowd in Dixon.

(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)



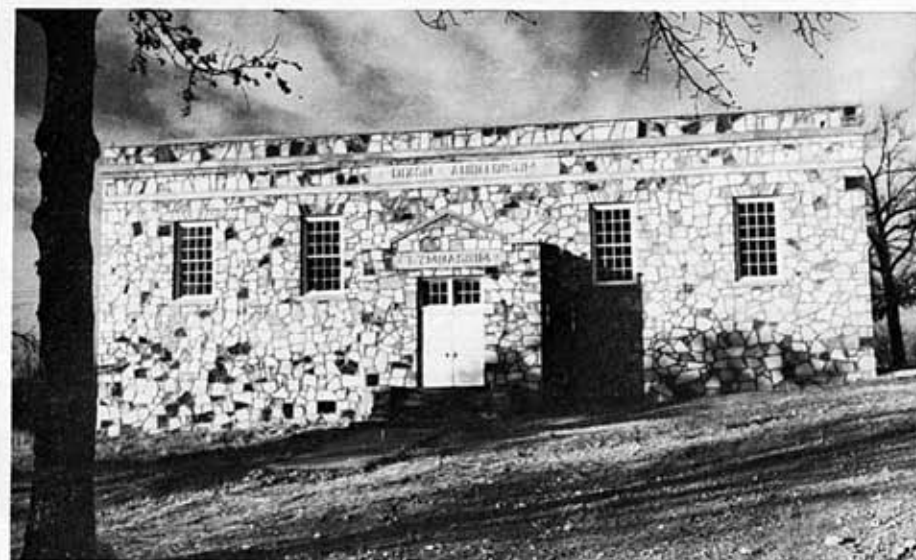
Dixon High School Girls Glee Club - 1934 — First row: Pauline Baker, Mary Lynch, Naomi Christesen, Aileen Cain, Evelyn Ramsey, Shannon Chenoweth, Ruth Fergus, Gladys Robertson. Second row: Catherine Ramsey, Ora Merridith, Catherine Perkins, Erma Rollins, Evelyn Scott, Cora Merridith, Margaret Rollins. Third row: June Sewell, Helene Miller, Eileen Claiborn (Wright), unknown, Helen Crider, Mary Perkins, Verla Copeland. Fourth row: Opal Pendleton, Dorothy Ryan, Ethel Dodds, Geretta Grempcynski, Eunice Sooter, Ruth Crum, Marguerite Elkins, Teacher: Margaret Lewis.

(Photo courtesy of Shannon Chenowith Graham)



Dixon High School.

(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)



Dixon High School Auditorium.

(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)



Dixon High School Band — 1934. First Row: June Sewell, Lois Gilbert, Mary Perkins. Second Row: Naomi Christesen, Aileen Cain, Shannon Chenoweth, Marguerite Elkins, Ruth Veasman. Third Row: Margaret Lewis, Director, Don Raymond Stevens, Robert Wiese, Robert Shelton.

(Photo courtesy of Shannon Chenowith Graham)