

**Legends of Freeborn County**  
**Remembering the way it was in the 1950's**  
**Legend #66 September, 2005**  
**by Bev Jackson, Executive Director FCHM**

It was a Saturday morning in late August 1956. I had slept in and then eaten a dish of my mothers fresh canned peaches and a couple of slices of toast for breakfast. Because it was a beautiful day, I counted out my tips from the day before and set out out for Penneys. I didn't have my driver's license yet, but i was used to walking everywhere I went. We lived on James Avenue south of Seventh Street, so the 20 minutes or so to downtown was an easy walk. The day before I had spotted a brown plaid fabric in Penneys, and I'd decided to make a skirt for school. I didn't need a pattern, just three yards of fabric (full skirts and lots of can-cans were popular then), thread, a zipper, and a button for the waistband. Since i had learned to sew in seventh grade, I had made many of my own clothes, so this was not a big project.

Walking past the A 7 W , I remembered the summer before when "The Yellow Rose of Texas" was no. 1 on the hit parade, and how on Saturday nights all of us carhops would walk back and forth for miles carrying nickel root beers to the customers. I we were lucky, we would bring home a quarter in tips. Five or 10 cents left on the tray was a big deal. This year I was working as a waitress in the coffee shop of the Hotel Albert. The customers and atmosphere were different than the root beer stand., and tips reflected my "uptown" job. A dollar or two a day was the norm.

When I passed the Big dipper, I thought of the night before when my friends and I had stopped in after the movie at the Broadway Theatre. My favorite treat was a strawberry soda. When i passed Arneson's Hardware, I looked for the hardware store's pickup. Mrs. Arneson was great about hauling us girls around in the back of the truck when our excursions took us too far fro walking or biking.

As i approached downtown, I checked the clock in the court house tower. It kept us on time for school, or confirmation class, or the movies, and we appreciated the convenience. When I passed the Coffee Shop, I noticed that it was not very busy, and I was glad that I didn't have to go to work until five that afternoon.

I made my purchase at Penneys, fabric for 59 cents a yard and a 20 cent zipper, and headed back home. I might even get that skirt cut out and partially stitched before I headed back to work later.

In 1956, I thought that Albert Lea would always stay the same. Every store and restaurant and theatre would always be there. It was wonderful growing up safe and secure in a community where adults watched out for you and your friends, where mom was home fixing pork chops and mashed potatoes for supper, and dad's job at the American Gas company was secure.

I never dreamed that in the future, I would walk down Broadway and not see Western Grocery, the courthouse clock, the Hotel Albert, the Evening Tribune, the Broadway theatre, KATE radio, Gulbrandson's Hardware, the popcorn stand, Walgreen Drug Store, Montgomery Ward, Wallace's, St. Paul Clothing, Bisgaards Shoes, Sander's Drug Store, the Rivioli Theater, Spurgeon's Skinner-Chamberlain's department store and grocery store, or the Freeborn National Bank.

Little did I know, that Woolworth & Co., Three Sisters, Gildner-Lagesons, the Brownie Bakery, the Albert Lea Bakery, the First National Bank, and Spicer's Drug Store would all disappear, and that if I had left Albert Lea and returned 45 years later, I would recognize less than a handful of businesses.

I didn't know either that girls sewing their own clothes, and moms canning fruits and vegetables, and students walking from one side of town to the other, and 5 cent tips, and 25 cent movies with no ratings (they were not necessary) would all become a part of memory and no longer reality.

The media tells us that our quality of life is improving, and I do have to admit that without air conditioning, these past few weeks would have been miserable, and I'm really enjoying my new computer, but I guess that I'm getting to be an old fuddy-duddy. There was much to be said for (Heaven help me, I'm going to use that phrase) "The Good Old Days," and somehow I wish that for just a few hours, we could all experience Albert Lea the way it was in the 1950's. Then everyone could see what my memories are made of.