AS I RECALL

FORWORD

Reminiscing is the pleasant prerogative of older people. Two projects, my helping Cindy Gale with her "History of the Nicol Sand Company" and my own difficulties in accurately putting together a history of our own Shan Agra Service, have prompted me to put down on paper some of the recollections of my lifetime. So quickly memories fade; dates and even the very sequence of events blur with the passing of time. Perhaps sometime, someone may find these notes interesting and not judge me too harshly for the vanity of autobiography.

My game plan would be to add to this file, from time to time, as opportunity and ambition allow. Immediately, I become aware of my limited talents in the area of writing and so will plan to be more concerned with portraying facts, atmosphere, color, and points of view from an era rather than with literary quality.

How far back does one's memory go? Undoubtedly, it varies much with each individual. Vaguely, I can remember straining to reach forbidden things on a kitchen shelf barely forty inches high; I recall having been comforted by my father after having been frightened by Santa Claus on what must have been my second Christmas; I have no recollection of a motor trip to Michigan, when I was about a year and a half old, pictures of which remain. I do not recall the family events surrounding the birth of my sister Muriel in 1923, but I do definitely recall the happy excitement when brother Lee was born in 1925.

Hopefully, time and ambition providing, I may be able to include in these files some family history beyond my recollecting but as told to me by others.

GRANDPARENTS

Born October 3, 1920, I am the eldest of the seven children of Albert Adolph Nicol and Ida Louise (Nobis) Nicol. Our maternal grandparents were William and Eliza (Nobis) Lovekamp and paternal grandparents were Gustav and Mary (Treibot) Nicol.

Grandpa Gustav's (1865 - 1948) forebears were among the German Lutheran immigrants who settled in the St. Louis area in the pre-civil war era. Grandma Nicol's (1868 - 1960) forebears were French Catholics who had settled in the same area at a time of which I am not knowledgeable. Grandpa apparently worked at farming in the area just east of St. Louis with more failures than successes. In the mid-1890's, he loaded his family and possessions on a railroad car moving to Paragould, Ark. in pursuit of cheap land and more profitable farming. Our dad was born there in 1897, the fifth of the eleven Nicol children who grew to adulthood (three others died as infants).

The Arkansas venture turned out to be a fiasco and the family returned to Illinois nearly bankrupt. They settled near French Village and worked at farming until Grandpa drifted into the foundry sand business in 1903 and moved to Collinsville. That business thrived and expanded to other localities (see Cindy's "History of the Nicol Sand Company") including Arenzville, providing the opportunity for our parents to get together.

Grandpa Nicol was one of my sponsors and my impressions of these two grandparents are naturally colored as seen by the eyes of a small child. During my early childhood, our family would make three or four business trips a year to Collinsville. Physically Grandpa Nicol was a big rugged man, probably about 6'2", weighing 220 pounds. He had a pleasant personality seasoned with a good sense of humor and a twinkling smile yet

GRANDPARENTS

there was a suggestion of stubborn determination when aroused. Grandma had an opposite personality. She was a sassy little French girl probably only 5'5" and a little on the plump side with an opinion on everything, formed more often by intuition than logic, which she freely thrust on everyone around. She was definitely boss of the family including Grandpa but projected an expression of love and respect which all returned in like measure.

Grandpa Nobis died six months before I was born so my notes about him are as told to me. Fredrich Henrich William Nobis (always called William) was born on November 24, 1861, in Gothmold, Westphalia, Germany, having three older brothers and three older sisters and a younger brother, Charles. Their father was a big, strong wagonmaker but William and Charles being deemed too small for that business were apprenticed out for two or three years (at no pay) to learn the shoemaking trade. At age eighteen, William immigrated to America (brother Charles came over two years later). He had cousins in Beardstown and worked there in a shoe store for three years during which time he learned to speak English. Probably through German church connections, he became acquainted with Grandma Nobis and moved to Arenzville setting up a shoe store in partnership with Charles which didn't do very well. They moved to the farm just north of Arenzville in 1899, then back to town in 1913. Grandpa was plagued with asthma much of his life and that frail health caused him to set up a cobbler shop at home until he finally wasted away in the spring of 1920.

Grandma Nobis, also one of my sponsors, lived with us until she died in 1939, so we know her much better than the other

GRANDPARENTS

grandparents. She was born on her father's farm north of Arenzville in 1865. I have no knowledge of her early life but one can conclude that it was typical farm living of that era.

Grandma Nobis was a good, kindly person. She exercised grandmotherly discipline over us, children but never in an unduly harsh way. Both in pleasure and exasperation, she often found it necessary to revert to German, her mother tongue, to express herself, with such expressions such as, "Ach du meine Lieben", "Dummer Esel", "Dumm Kopf", "Aus Gespielt", etc. Vanity was one of her characteristics. We, children used to tease her by saying something flattering about Mrs. Witte or Mrs. Roegge which always aroused Grandma to remark that she was just as good. She was especially proud of her singing voice which was a few tones shriller than anyone else in the congregation and a few decibels louder, much to the embarrassment of her grandkids.

The usual mother-in-law conflict existed in our family but was kept above the heads of us, children. At one point, Grandma went to live with her son, Julius, for a year or so but then came back to live her last years with us, when Julius moved to Michigan. Grandma suffered from rheumatism and for a time in the mid 30's was bedridden, however, she recovered to become ambulatory in her last few years. She died of heart failure and old age, 1939.

Albert Adolph Nicol was born 9-21-1897 on his father's farm near Paragould, Arkansas. He was a very sickly new-born and so was baptized immediately for fear he might not survive. In this confusion his two names were transposed on some birth records and only in later years was it established that his first name was truely Albert. A few months after his birth the family moved back to Illinois nearly bankrupt taking up residence in a very humble house near French Village. In 1903 the family moved to Collinsville as Grandpa drifted into the foundry sand business and began to enjoy a bit more prosperity.

Dad attended Holy Cross Lutheran School for all his grade school years. Much of the instruction was in the German language which practice was abruptly change on the threshold of WW I. Instead of the local high school Dad enrolled at the Lutheran Teachers College at River Forrest a suburb of Chicago. No one seems to recall how long he attended there . . . we guess probably only two or three semesters. He had quit school to go into his father's sand business in Arenzville. There he roomed in the home of our Grandparents Nobis which not unnaturally had much to do with his getting acquainted withand on Nov. 2, 1919 marrying our mother.

Ida Louise Nobis was born in Arenzville on 1-7-1897. At her age of two her parents moved to their farm a mile north of town deeming that a better place to bring up their children. They moved back to Arenzville when mother was 16 which was about the same time that our Dad came to that town. Grandpa Nobis was plagued with very frail health and it fell to his sons to do most of the farm work; mother recalled herself often riding a horse out to round up the cows at milking time. Against the turbulant background of wartime small town America, our parents lived their late teen years. One can only speculate about their pains and pleasures . . . surely village and church affairs were important parts of their living. Mother did not attend high school and her grade school was at the Lutheran school from Sept. to Thanksgiving, then the Lovekamp country school for the rest of the year.

Dad stood an even six foot tall and weighed about 180 during his working years although getting quite a bit heavier after retiring. Mother was about five foot three in heighth and all lifelong stayed a trim 110 pounds. They both enjoyed remarkably good health even into their golden years and they both enjoyed and thrived on hard work.

Dad had a sharp mind quickly coming to logical conclusions which, once arrived at, he defended vigorously. With some good reason he had enormous confidence in his own physical and mental abilities and enjoyed competition in both areas. Shoveling sand was hard work and Dad took pride in having done more of it and for a longer time than any of his many employees. During the depression years he sometimes supplemented the family income by working in the grain harvest fields. He also tried selling Lutheran Aid Assn. insurance for a few years but that didn't seem to catch on. Dad's temperment, abilities, and inclinations naturally moved him into leadership positions in community, business, church, and school affairs and he down through the years enjoyed serving in many such officies.

In politics Dad was an outspoken Republican. He often boasted of having never "voted a straight ticket" however I doubt if any Democrat running for a more important office than weed commissioner ever merited his support. He argued that Herbert Hoover was a very able president even when it was not popular to do so. (incidently later history has largely vindicated that position). In contrast Dad had very little respect for Franklin Roosevelt nor for his New Deal. For quite a few years Dad served as the Arenzville Supervisor on the Cass County Board and I'm sure their meetings were the more lively for him having been there. With just a little tongue-in-cheek Dad used to say that he was not always right but that he was never wrong. However many times he would return from a meeting quite abashed feeling that he had argued too vigorously or will too little grace. This son of his understands that feeling!

Mother's temperment was the ideal counter-foil for Dad's brashness. She avoided tears and arguements but in her own quiet way shaped the life of our family. Probably even more than either of them realized, Dad leaned on Mother's good judgement and gentle nature down through the years. They shared a deep Christian faith, a quiet sense of humor, and a sincere love for each other. They were not physically demonstative of their feelings . . . only one time in my life did I ever see them kiss, and that was in their last years. I don't recall ever hearing a harsh word or an arguement between them.

After moving to Savanna they developed a very pleasant friendship with the Fred Withharts making many auto trips with them and for many years sharing a house on Key Largo, Florida during the Winter months. Dad and Fred shared a common love for fishing, hunting, and arguing and enjoyed many fishing and hunting trips together sometimes taking their wives along. I had the pleasure of accompanying them on several Canadian trips and on some visits to Florida. While trying to free a snagged fishing line one day in Florida, Dad had the lead sinker fly back into his face breaking his glasses and slicing his eyeball. After futilly trying to save that eye it finally had to be removed and a glass one put in so Dad got along with only one eye during his last ten years.

For most of 1967 Dad was aware that he had a physical problem. I was along on a Canadian trip with him and Fred that September and Dad was obviously hurting. A few weeks later he underwent surgery at Monroe. The surgeon performed a colostomy but reported that the cancer had spread to his pancreas and was inoperatable and that Dad "wouldn't be with us long". Dr. Hussey's son was working at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital in Houston and made an appointment for Dad. He and I flew down there assuming it was just to be a few days of testing, instead they wanted him to stay for a few months. We rented a light-housekeeping apartment and Muriel came down with Mother. In the following weeks various family members shared visiting with the folks in Houston while Dad was receiving treatments.

Finally Dad was able to return home, the cancer not cured but arrested, and was able to enjoy relatively normal living for a few months. This included several Canadian fishing trips and I was able to go along on one of them. A highlight of this period was the folks being privileged to observe their 50th Wedding Anniversary which was a treasured full-family event. But gradually the cancer grew and Mother and Dad had to return to Houston. I was with them the week of his exploritory surgery which confirmed that the illness was terminal. Dad was able to return home to Savanna and for a period of several months gradually withered away until, completely worn down, he passed away on June 10, 1971.

Mother patiently endured the many months of Dad's illness leaning heavily upon her children and her Christian faith. She was to live alone for the next ten years quietly contented and always busy with household or church related activities. However her strong, healthy body too began to give way to the years. She passed away quietly in her sleep on March 18, 1982.

I recall saying to my brothers and sisters on the evening of her death, "Tonight for the first time in our lives we will be going to bed with out the prayers of our Mother to support us." And speaking at their Golden Wedding I expressed a thought which I'm sure is shared by my brothers and sisters, ". . . we could wish for nothing more than that our children might always think as highly of us as we today think of our own dear Father and Mother."

THE VILLAGE OF ARENZVILLE

The Village of Arenzville, 40 miles west of Springfield, in Cass County, Illinois was "hometown" to the Albert Nicol family in the 1920's and 30's. It was the shopping and social center for some 500 in-town residents and for the agricultural community extending in a five-mile or more radius from the town. Arenzville had known a more important past in the era of horse-drawn communications and was destine to decline even more in importance as better cars and roads and communication facilities made distances less and less significant.

Nonetheless, Arenzville in the 20's featured three auto dealerships, a meat market, four general stores, a blacksmith shop, two farm implement dealers, a harness and leather business, several filling stations, two restaurants, two pool parlours (soft drinks only since prohibition was in force), two banks, two hardware stores, two grain elevators, a furniture store, an electrical appliance business, a fire station, a funeral establishment and a post office. If one needed an auto mechanic, a welder, an electrician, a plumber, a tinsmith, a cobbler, a butcher, a well digger, a carpenter, a stone mason, a seamstress, a music teacher, or a lawyer, one could have been found in the Arenzville of that day, furnishing state-of-the-arts abilities. Two doctors in general practice served the town.

Besides the Lutheran parochial school, the town had a three-room grade school and a high school. Several country grade schools in the surrounding agricultural area also served the town. The Trinity Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) was the largest church in town having a membership about equal to that of the other three smaller churches, a Roman Catholic, a Methodist, and a Presbyterian. There were also several small country churches in the farming neighborhoods.

THE VILLAGE OF ARENZVILLE

The Burlington RR serviced the town having a resident depot agent who was also the telegrapher. A passenger and mail train made daily runs both north and south and a "local" freight train made pick-ups and deliveries several times a week.

There were no paved roads into town. Many concrete roads were constructed in Illinois in the 20's but the nearest one to Arenzville ended at Concord four miles away. Automobile travel south therefore was an adventure in muddy weather and often impossible. The roads north of Arenzville presented another problem due to their loose dune like sand.

Sometime in the late 20's, the Nicol Sand Company contracted to cover this loose sand with a layer of clayish gravel to be mined from the Louis Lovekamp farm. Uncle Irvin's new-fangled gasoline shovel was shipped from Greenville, via railroad flat car and Dad's fleet of three Model T dump trucks, augmented with Uncle Al Nobis' truck, took on this job. That power shovel was a Rube Goldbergish combination of belts, pulleys, cables, clutches, etc., and Uncle Irvin became a local celebrity as the machines operator.

Until the crash in '29, the 1920's were quite prosperous times. That decade immediately following WWI witnessed the world about us making up for the interruptions of the war years in the fields of farming, building, manufacturing, etc. New inventions and new technologies were then coming on stream for general use. All in all, it was a heady time to be alive!

At that time, we were only a generation beyond the Wright Brothers' pioneering days and the airplane, having demonstrated its abilities in war service, was now for the first time being used for passenger and mail service. The flying aces of the war

THE VILLAGE OF ARENZVILLE

were our heroes and anytime an airplane was heard overhead, people stopped what they were doing to observe it. Lindberg's historic solo flight over the Atlantic was the mind-boggling event of the decade.

Almost every home had a telephone, usually a cumbersome box attached to the wall featuring a hand crank and an ear piece on a long cord. Party lines, especially in the rural areas, were an accepted hazzard or source of entertainment depending upon the housewife's bent for gossip. Our family had a private line and a little nicer phone which stood on Dad's desk, however, telephoning was still a job requiring two hands. All calls had to go through the central switchboard in town, which was manually tended twenty-four hours a day. As late as 1939, Frances worked as an operator in that office.

The story of our village would not be complete without some mention of its unique annual homecoming holidays known in later years as the Burgoo but in my earliest recollection known as the A.T.A Picnic. This A.T.A. (Anti-Thief Assn.) had been a quasi-vigilante group whose origin may have dated back to post-Civil War days but by the 20's had become more of a social or service fraternity. At one time there may have been some racial connotation to its origin for still in the 30's it was generally understood that no colored person dare let the sun set upon himself in Cass County. While outrageous bigotery today this attitude was only a little worse than normal in those times remembering that as late as WW II a colored person could aspire to no position higher than Stewards Mate in the U.S.Navy.

The name Burgoo comes from a soup which originated in our Southern States. At one time there may have been a precise recipe for this dish but my impression always was that the kinds and amounts of ingredients usually depended upon what was readily on hand. The soup definately had to contain squirrels, chicken, beef, and pork plus an assortment of potatoes, corn and other garden vegetables. The whole collection was cooked for many hours outdoors in a large cast iron kettle and was the dining centerpeice of the celebration. Never taken seriously but always making for good storytelling was the perennial rumor that the area stray dog and cat population always seemed to be noticeably smaller immediately after the burgoo.

The event was usually held early in September lasting for two or three days. Entertainment varied with the imagination and the ambition of the committees in charge. Prominent were band concerts, amatuer shows, school productions, professional acts, political orations, etc. Baseball games, horseshoe pitching contests, and other athletic activities also contributed to the entertainment. However, it has been the homecoming opportunities for retelling old stories which has sustained this event even unto the present time.

It was in this business that I had my first work-for-pay job, that during my eighth grade year. Edgar "Das" Lovekamp ran this business in the depression years, a trade he had learned from his father, repairing shoes and harness. Farmers brought their worn and dirty harness to this shop and my job was to completely disassemble these sets. Das repaired the straps, reins, tugs, etc. while I was able to re-rivot the hames. Next I laced theleather parts on a strong strap and dunked the whole set in a barrel of neatsfoot oil. After allowing them to drip dry over night I then reassembled the harness which was no job for anyonesqueamish about dirty hands.

A seasonal part of this business was repairing binder canvases. These were the conveyor systems which took the cut grain from the sickle bar to the binding machinery. Again Das did all the canvas repairs while I was assigned the job of replacing the oaken slats attached to the canvases with staples and rivots.

I can't recall what my wages were on this job but suffice it to say that I only worked there one summer before starting to work at Zulauf's Store where my pay was 50¢ per week.

OUTDOOR MOVIES

There is room on this page to mention an interesting part of our entertainment scene in the early depression years. The local merchants sponsored free movies in the village park every Wednesday evening during the summer season. Cowboy and Indian films were always popular as well as some slapstick comedies. I recall that these features were usually well attended and Wednesday evenings the stores stayed open for the area shoppers.

THE NICOL HOME IN ARENZVILLE

Home for the first twenty years of my life was the house in Arenzville, just east of the Catholic Church ... it is typical of our town for me to have to admit that to this day, I can not tell you the name of the street on which we lived. Our Grandparents Nobis had purchased this house when they moved into town from their farm sometime prior to WWI. The house continued to belong to Grandma Nobis, who lived with us until her death in 1939. The financial arrangements between our parents and Grandma were never known to me but my impression would be that they were very vague.

The house originally was a square frame structure with a kitchen and living room on the south side separated from two bedrooms on the north side by a stairwell providing access to an upstairs dormer and a full basement. Sometime later, but before my time, a south "front" room was appended with another dormer room above; the basement under this south addition was never finished. Also there was a backporch and pantry on the east side of the house. The full basement featured a large utility room and on the north side a fruit cellar and a coal bin.

The house was heated by a kitchen range fired with corncobs, wood and occasionally coal, and by a "base burner" in the living room. A base burner required anthracite "hard" coal which fed downward as it burned from a magazine which held about two buckets of coal enough to last all day in even severe weather. The upstairs dormers were heated through a register immediately above the base burner. A small wood burning stove in the basement used to heat laundry water provided some heat for that area. The base burner provided clean steady heat and the blue flames visible through its isinglass windows are a fondly remembered, cozy, cheery sight. The range fire was allowed to die out every evening and our mother's last chore every day was to clean out the ashes and

THE NICOL HOME IN ARENZVILLE

kindle the range for the next day, and her first chore every morning was to touch off that fire. The range was replaced during the heat of summertime by a kerosene burning cook stove out on the back porch.

Rainwater was collected from the rooftop and stored in a cistern on the north side of the house. This soft water was brought into the kitchen by a hand operated pump and could be also pumped into the basement for laundry purposes. Drinking water came from a well near the back door also using a hand pump. A pail of this hard water was always on hand in the kitchen. During my earlier years, this well also served as the refrigerator; a bucket on a rope was lowered to near water level in the depth of the well so that the natural coolness there kept milk, butter, etc., fresh in the summertime. It was probably in the late 20's, when we got an icebox for the back porch and availed ourselves of the services of the local iceman who delivered 50# chunks of ice as needed.

The house was equipped with knob & pole wiring which provided 110 volt electricity for lighting. We didn't have many appliances. Mother had an electic powered washer in the basement from early on but I can remember the times when she first got an electric iron, a toaster, and a popcorn popper. Getting our first radio is a well remembered event. It was an Atwater-Kent set about the size of a breadbox with a large horn shaped speaker atop. Tuning in a channel involved alining three capacitor knobs individually which always took some careful adjusting. It was a mind-boggling experience to be able to tune in far away broadcasts at first and as time passed, a pleasant evening ritual was a gathering of the family to listen to Amos & Andy, Lum & Abner, etc.

THE NICOL HOME IN ARENZVILLE

A kitchen sink was the only facility in our house for washing, shaving, etc. A large galvanized tub was used for more complete bathing and Saturday was its day of use. About the time I became a teenager, this old tub was replaced by a regular bathtub, ingeniously located under a hinged table top in the pantry. That tub had a drain but no other plumbing. Hot water was provided (and carefully rationed) either from a teakettle or from a warm water attachment on the kitchen range. The other bathroom needs were met by a "two holer" privy out beyond the chicken yard, always equipped with last years mail order catalogues. One quickly learned to avoid the slick pages.

Our backyard featured a large three stall garage used to house and repair the family cars and the sand trucks used in Dad's business. We also had a unique building just east of the back door always referred to as the "shop". This had been Grandpa Nobis' cobbler shop after his health became so fragile that he could not work up town. We used this buiding for utility jobs. Attached behind this building was our smoke house used to cure meat at butchering time. Still further east was the chicken yard enclosing a hen house and a wood shed.

THE NICOL FAMILY LIFE

Whatever affluence our family had prior to the 1929 crash, immediately disappeared and during the depression, we were rather desperately poor. The only reality which made this more bearable was that all your friends and neighbors were in the same straits. Nonetheless, we were never hungry since we were able to produce much of our own food and both Mother and Grandmother were very adept at fashioning good nourishing food from rather meager supplies.

Just south of our house was full sized lot used as a garden in which we raised potatoes and other vegetables. The harvested potatoes were stored in a bin in our fruit cellar along with many, many cans of the surplus beans, tomatoes, etc. We were fortunate to have two big red-cherry trees which never failed to produce a big crop and three apricot trees which produced only every few years depending upon the early frosts. These fruits along with those from a row of tame gooseberry bushes and the wild blackberries which grew in abundance, were also preserved in long rows of fruit jars for later pie making. Mother often canned a bushel or more of peaches each season and a few bushels of apples purchased from local farmers were also stored away for winter eating.

Every winter, we butchered three or four hogs usually exchanging work with Uncle Jule's for this chore. The hogs were purchased from local farmers (quite often from Uncle Al) and were killed in our back yard. A scalding barrel fashioned from a 55-gallon oil drum was attached to a low work table. Water for scalding was heated in a huge iron kettle which was also used the next day to render the lard and cook the sausage meats. After the carcasses had been hung to cool overnight in the garage, the second day's work began with cutting the meat into hams, bacons,

loins, etc. Trimmings were made into pork sausage and the fat diced into inch square hunks to be rendered into lard. Hams, bacons, and some sausages were then hung in the smoke house where a smoldering hickorywood fire cured them. This meat remained hanging in the smoke house until used up the following summer. As food, this meat was long on flavor but short on texture and made for some rather vigorous chewing as it became older. Some chops and sausages were "fried down". This process involved thorough frying and then covering with melted lard and storing in large stone jars. This meat was retrieved during the following months as needed, simply heated and served. It had a tendency to get an "old" taste as time went by and we were always glad when it was finally all used. The heads, feet, and other scrap meat are thoroughly cooked at butchering time, the meat retrieved, mixed with flour, corn meal and various seasonings, packed in cloth bags, cooked some more, and then set aside to cool. This made "Blutwurst". The name survived from the old German recipe which used the animal's blood but in our time, this was wasted. Blutwurst was sliced and heated and made for some very tasty eating, usually at winter breakfasts.

Chickens were an important part of our food plan furnishing a steady supply of eggs and a limited supply of birds for frying and roasting. When nature's call provided the opportunity, a setting hen was allowed to incubate a clutch of eggs which in about three weeks produced a brood of chicks. The mother hen took able care of the chicks until they got big enough to fend for themselves in the chicken yard. All the males except one kept for breeding purposes were used as fryers and the young hens were added to the laying flock which was kept at a manageable size by culling out birds for roasting. This chicken

business provide me with one of the few jobs which I thoroughly disliked, namely, cleaning the chicken house periodically. It was a dirty, stinky chore and one could always imagine lice-like things crawling under your collar and in your hair.

An important supplement to our meat supply was the fish and wild game we were able to catch. One of the good things about the depression years is that more time was available for fishing and hunting. Besides the fun of hunting, squirrels, rabbits, quail, and an occasional pheasant provided a welcome variety to our meals. New crop squirrels were just right for eating, about the time mulberries got ripe and that signaled the opening of the hunting season even though that was a full month before the legal season opened. While there is a sizeable deer population in Illinois now, they were all but extinct in our childhood years. Dad enjoyed hunting and was a crack shot with a shotgun, I on the other hand could never hit any thing moving but could hit a squirrel in a tall oak treetop, in the head with a rifle. Dad belonged to a duck hunting club (Frances' Grandfather Corcoran was one of his favorite hunting companions) and maintained a duck hunting area in the Sangamon River bottoms. It was in those days legal to stake out live decoys and feed corn to entice the migrating waterfoul. It was not uncommon for Dad to bag fifteen birds (mostly mallards) on several days during the season which was the legal limit at that time. Wild ducks made good eating but cleaning them was a chore. Unlike chickens, ducks have oily feathers for floatation and so resist scalding and must be plucked dry. That was a tough job and when you tied into fifteen birds, the whole family had to help and it took all evening.

Fishing was not too good in the Arenzville area although we

occasionally caught enough carp, bluegills, bass, or bullheads to make a meal. Often when cane pole fishing proved unproductive, we resorted to hand fishing. Catching a fish in their element took some skill which we mastered by trial and error. Once in a while, you lucked upon the bonus of finding a snapping turtle. Capturing a turtle required some careful doing since they are equipped with mean claws and a very dangerous set of jaws. The trick was to press the animal to the bottom and then carefully feel along its shell edge until you found three bumps, that's where the tail was, which you then used to catch and carry your prize. Cleaning a turtle also presented some unique problems which one had to master but the rewards were some very tasty eating.

Hiking, usually with several other boys of my age, was a favorite pastime. Exploring the woods and streams, the sounds and smells of all outdoors, made for many hours of wholesome entertainment during my pre-teen years. I learned to swim in a little stream which flowed through Uncle Al's woods. Sometimes, we would improve the swimming hole by erecting a small earthen dam to raise the water level. On one such occasion, while we were enjoying our adventure, Walt Roegge came upon us. The stream we had dammed also ran through his pasture and he was concerned for the drinking supplies for his livestock. He was more amused than angry and only asked us to relieve his watering problem.

As we got a little older, we extended our adventures to Indian Creek, swimming, exploring, hand fishing, etc. Indian Creek normally is a clear, tranquil, meandering stream but one time, when it was in flood stage half full of surging, muddy water, we undertook to follow the example of some older boys and swim

from the railroad bridge downstream to the next bridge. It wasn't really so very dangerous for by that time we could swim like muskrats and the surging current did most of the work, however, we deemed it prudent not to report this adventure to our mothers. For that matter, probably many of our hiking adventures would have given our mother just cause for concern had she not had a firm conviction that special guardian angels are kept busy just looking after little boys.

Baseball was always an important part of the Nicol life. Having been brought up just across the river from St. Louis, all of Dad's family were rabid fans of the Cardinals and Browns. Quite often taking in a ball game was included as a part of Dad's business trips to Collinsville, and occasionally, not even this excuse was needed to prompt a trip to Sportsmans Park. One such trip sticks in my memory. Just Dad and I alone attended this game when I must have been seven or eight. The hated Yankees were playing the Browns and at one point, the St. Louis pitcher, whose name has been long since forgotten struck our Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in tandem. Ruth later hit a home run and the Browns lost the game but that pitching feat remains a high point.

Dad considered himself, and may have been, the best baseball player in the Arenzville area. Easily, he was the most knowledgeable of the baseball rule book, a copy of which he invariably carried in his uniform pocket. Out-smarting one of the country cousins or pulling some trick play, legal by some obscure rule, was probably more fun for Dad than would have been hitting a home run, all the more satisfying for the high spirited arguments provoked. Dad organized and promoted teams and leagues and baseball games became an important part of our Sunday after-

noon entertainment. While our Mother was indeed a baseball widow, I often heard her rationalize that she would rather have her husband expend excess energy on baseball than in any other vices one could mention.

For many years, the baseball diamond was in Roegge's Grove several miles east of town. This acreage was a cow pasture during the week and while the skinned infield was easily cleaned, the outfield was dotted with cowpies. This created some problems on balls hit into the outfield and hastily fielded.... therefrom my have arisen the common baseball cliche, "he threw the ball and had something on it". One of my jobs at these games was to retrieve foul balls and another was to pass the hat among the spectators sometimes numbering several hundred. If the collection merited it, I might earn a dime for doing these chores.

Our dining room which also served as Dad's office was the setting for our wintertime entertainment. Two daily papers, the St. Louis Globe Democrat and the Springfield State Register were eagerly read by all. Checkers, dominos and various card games idled away many an evening hour. After the advent of radio, we enjoyed listening to Amos & Andy, Lum & Abner, Jack Benny, etc., on a regular basis.

Our front room was closed off all winter in the interest of saving fuel except for about two weeks beginning on Christmas Eve. As we came home from the Children's Christman Eve Service, all eyes looked to that front room window. Mysteriously, while we were at church, that room was opened and a Christmas tree erected and lighted. There followed a happy hour for opening presents. This front room housed a player piano which Mother could play well enough to accompany a few hymns and carols.

THE NICOL FAMILY LIFE

Music had a very small part in our family life, until the younger children grew to school age. A sizeable stack of piano rolls were used quite a lot when the room was open in warm weather. Uncle Doc gave me a violin but I never took a lesson partly because of the cost but mostly due to my lack of any apparent musical ability.

There was a certain ritualistic discipline in evidence at our meal times, this because of Mother's inherent inclinations toward orderliness and because there were always eight or more sitting around our table. Meals were at a percise time each day, everyone was expected to be there, and everyone had an assigned place at the table. The younger children were always lined up by the kitchen sink for washing before each meal with seemingly special attention given to ears and other awkward places. The Lord's blessing was always asked before the meal began and thanks offered at meal's end. There was little formality about our eating, however, good manners were taught and displayed. From garden, smoke house, cellar and chicken coop, our Mother fashioned simple but nourishing meals in quantity and quality surely adequate for our large family.

All our family meals were eaten around the large kitchen table with the dining reserved for family living, except on the few occasions when important dinner guests were entertained.

Just as there were precise eating arrangements, so there were precise days for various family activities. Sunday, of course, was the Lord's Day, Monday was washday, Saturday was bath day, Friday was baking day, etc. Cleanliness was next to godliness in Mother's eyes and that pertained to clothes, house, dishes,

and children. Laundry was done in the basement. We had an electric washer but stubborn problems had to be left to an old fashioned scrub board. There was quite a bit of hand labor in the whole operation. Everyone took a bath on Saturday and very seldom in between times. On Friday, Mother always baked a week's supply of bread, usually some coffee cakes and enough pies for Sunday dinners. There are few tastes or smells to rival that of freshly baked bread, however, it got stale quickly and by week's end was getting rather chewy.

On warm summer evenings, when the day's work was done, the family usually gathered on the front porch for a pleasant hour of rest and visiting. Sometimes, Mother would treat us to a pitcher of lemonade and once in a great while, we could afford a quart of ice cream from town. About once a month, a shopping trip was made to Beardstown and my most remembered feature of these trips was that Grandma Nobis always bought a hand of bananas and that was a real treat for us, youngsters.

Alcoholic beverages were never an important part of our social life. During prohibition days, Dad tried his hand at making a keg of wine or some hard cider or some homebrew, occasionally. I recall that these efforts were quite amateurish and not very important to us. The home brew making process sometimes went poorly and the still of the night might be interrupted by exploding beer bottles which had been prematurely bottled.

AUTOMOBILES OF THE 1920's

The first family car that I can remember was a Gardner touring model which must have been purchased about the time our folks got married. It was the vehicle used on the 1922 Michigan trip, which I know of only from old pictures. It was a two-seated family car equipped with a fabric top which could be retracted and carried behind the back seat. There were also fabric side panels with isinglass windows for use in severe weather. A spare tire was mounted on the rear end and luggage carriers could be attached to a long running board on each side. It did have electric lights and I believe it was powered by a four-cylinder gasoline engine with an electric starter. About 1925, Dad acquired a second car, a Model T Ford Coupe to be used on his business trips. In the late 20's, the Gardner was traded for a Nash Sedan and the Ford for a used Chevy Roadster which sported a rumble seat. These last two cars were especially important to me since it was with them I learned to drive at age fourteen, legal in those days.

Before my time, but remembered from old pictures were some WWI vintage Armleder trucks used in the sand business. These solid-wheeled heavy machines were not at all adapted for working in loose sand and Dad was finally able to convince Grandpa Nicol to trade them in for three Model T Fords. These trucks I remember well. They were equipped with a small sand box which dumped by gravity. They had to be hand cranked and when the ignition timing was not carefully tuned, they were subject to kicking-back which contributed to some broken arms. They required quite a bit of mechanical repairing and so Dad and his crew spent many an evening fixing up these trucks for the next day's work.

One morning when I was about eight or nine, while showing off for the benefit of one Harold Meyer, I started up one of these trucks and backed it out of the garage. Whatever euphoric points

AUTOMOBILES OF THE 1920's

I may have made with this school mate quickly dissipated as Mother came storming out of the house amd led me into the house using one ear none too gently as the handle. I didn't get a thrashing only because our Mother had a more effective punishment, namely, grounding me on a chair for quite awhile. For that matter, I don't recall ever getting a real sound spanking from either of my parents, sure, a few well deserved and well placed swats occasionally, but never a sound angry thrashing. By the time Lee and Abb came along, this strategy seemed to have changed and Mother wore out a lot of switches and yardsticks on them.

Considering the nature of small boys, this being sentenced to sit quietly on a chair for five, ten, or fifteen minutes (the punishment was made to fit the crime) was a considerably more painful and more effective form of discipline. One had to sit quietly, no wiggling, no talking, and invariably, your foot would start to itch or you imagined a bug crawling on your neck and you could only sit and watch the clock tick off your sentence and that clock conspired to slow down almost to the point of stopping entirely. Of course, what made this all most disagreeable was that all the time your Mother was working nearby with a frown on her face; being separated from your Mother's goodwill is the ultimate burden for a small boy.

JOHN ZULAUF & SON, MEATS & GROCERIES

About the same time I entered high school, I became an employee of Zulauf's store and continued to work for them until I graduated four years later. The elder John Zulauf had begun this landmark business in Arenzville many years before. He had fathered a large family from four different wives and some of these children had worked in the store at various times. One of his daughters married our Uncle Alfred Nobis and we remember her as a kindly patient lady. By the time I came upon the scene "old" John was a very feeble old man who shuffled up to the store on nice days and I knew him only well enough to say the usual hellos. Actively running the business and my boss was "little John" whom every one called Johnny.

Paul Roegge was right hand man to Johnny and occasionally, when there was an extraordinary load of butchering to do, half-brother Art Zulauf helped out. I was hired to do those bottom of the totem-pole jobs such as sweeping, dusting, stocking shelves, etc. Store hours were from 6:00 to 6:00 except on Wednesday and Saturday evenings when we stayed open at least until 9:00. Johnny himself kept the store open most of Sunday also. So all the while I went to high school, I worked before and after school, Wednesday evenings, all day Saturday and most vacation time. In all fairness let me note that Johnny was very generous in giving me time off for school functions, parties, etc. My starting salary was 50¢ per week and I had worked up to $3.50 by the time I was a high school senior. I considered myself the luckiest kid in town to have such a good job!

The store and shop area was a room of about 24 x 24 feet dimensions; We had a walk-in cooler with a capacity of about 20 carcasses and behind the front store room were two equal sized rooms, one used for storage and the other for butchering cut-

up work. Behind this building was the butchering "kill" facilities. Immediately west of this main building were two shed type structures used mostly for junky storage. Zulauf's Store was first of all a meat market, however, we also carried a full line of groceries, some hardware items, and even a few dry goods items. Most of the prepacking so common today was unheard of in the 20's and many staples such as salt, vinegar, beans, eggs, cookies, dill pickles, etc., were carried in bulk and measured out as ordered by the customers. Commercially manufactured cold meats and cheeses were also displayed in bulk forms and sliced off at the time of sale. Fresh meat cuts such as steaks, chops, roasts, etc., were cut from the larger carcass parts as ordered by the customers. Slicing cold cuts, grinding hamburger, and waiting on customers were jobs that I was soon able and expected to do.

Beef butchering was done either on the farm where the animal had been raised or at our backyard facilities. The beef was first stunned with a rifle shot in the head and then killed by cutting its throat. Skinning came next to remove the hide and then it was hoisted with a block and tackle to treelimb or a roof beam to facilitate gutting and quartering. The beef quarters along with the usable organ meat were then carried to our cooler. The clean up operations were usually my department. To salvage the tallow from the internal organs involved cutting them into fist-sized chunks which were then, along with other fat trimmings, rendered out in our hog scalding vat. The hot tallow was then strained through burlap and stored in old wooden barrels. The hides had to be stretched out and thoroughly salted down with rock salt. A couple of times a year, a Jewish dealer from the city came by to purchase the hides and tallow.

JOHN ZULAUF & SON, MEATS & GROCERIES

He naturally insisted that all loose salt be shaken from the hides and these were all dirty smelly jobs especially in hot weather.

Hog butchering was usually done in our backyard although occasionally, the killing was done on the farm and the dead animal trucked in for the rest of the job. The scalding vat was a big bathtub-shaped tank made of cast iron under which could be built a raging wood fire. When the water temperature was exactly right, the dead hog would be dumped in and sloshed around for a few minutes and then pulled out onto the work table where the bristles were scraped off. The rest of the procedure was similar to beef butchering except that hog carcasses were halved rather than quartered. Hog fat was worked up in the back room and the lard rendered there under more sanitary conditions. Also in the back room, sausages of various kinds were prepared and the heads and scrap meats cooked and made into "pudding" meat.

There were very few sheep raised in the Arenzville area, so we very seldom had any mutton to butcher and sell. I vividly recall one occasion when the boss took in a crate of chickens to satisfy a past due account. He assigned me the job of butchering them. I had often watched my mother butcher chickens but had no experience in that area of my own. However, by the time I had worked my way through some twenty birds, I was beginning to get the hang of it. Another job assigned to me was "candling" eggs. Most farmers kept a flock of chickens in those days and their surplus eggs were brought to our store to be traded for groceries. Sometimes these farmers were not above including a nest of eggs they might have found out along a fencerow, so the candling process was necessary to cull out the rotten eggs.

JOHN ZULAUF & SON, MEATS & GROCERIES

A few of the prices of those days might be worth mentioning: a loaf of bread cost 10¢; a pound of hamburger,15¢; a dozen eggs, 20¢; a bottle of pop,5¢; etc.

I have always remembered my experiences at Zulauf's as pleasant and valuable parts of my education. In a quiet way, there I learned many little things about selling and merchandising, about serving the public and serving the employer, and about my own abilities and human nature in general.

FARMING IN THE 1920's

There was an unusually close bond of friendship between the Albert Nicol family and the Alfred Nobis family. When Uncle Al's first wife died in 1924, leaving him with five small children, the fine Lutheran custom of having sponsors came into play. Baby Harold went to live with Uncle Jules; Alma, of my age, went to live with the Fred Kleinschmidts; and Edna, four years my senior, came to live with us and thus became a big sister to me until Uncle Al married Aunt Louise Zulauf and was able to re-establish their own home.

Uncle Al farmed the old Nobis farm which still belonged to Grandma Nobis. It was just a mile from our house and I had many occasions to visit there, for example, when Abb, Joyce, and Shirley were born, I was deemed too old to have underfoot and so spent a few happy days on the farm. Cousin Melvin was old enough to handle all farming jobs and Cousin Eldore had a natural knack for tinkering with all things mechanical. All these things were a constant source of wonder and adventure to me.

There were a few cumbersome tractors being used in the 20's but most farming was done with horse power. Uncle Al had a team of heavy horses, a team of frisky red mules which only Melvin could handle, and a team of gentler black mules. Mule-back riding was one of the things we enjoyed. Eldore rode the black mule named Jack while I rode the more gently Jenny. Riding a mule bare-back with only a flimsy bridle to steer with posed some problems for a town boy like myself . . . on steep inclines there was always the fear of sliding off the rear end of my mule.

The threshing season was one of highlights of the farm year.

FARMING IN THE 1920's

Wheat, one of the main crops, was first cut with a binder and tied into bundles which were then gathered into shocks to further cure. Neighborhoods then organized into help-sharing threshing crews. The man who owned and operated the threshing machine was looked upon with the same kind of respect one now sees doctors enjoying in our hospitals. The threshing machine itself was called the separator. It was about the size of a modern semi-trailer and was an awesome combination of belts, wheels, screens, shakers, blowers, etc., and in operation gave forth a lot of noise and dust. The separator was pulled about and, once set up, powered via a long drive belt by a ponderous big tractor. The first I remember were steam engines but they soon gave way to gasoline powered machines.

Once the separator and engine were carefully set at the chosen site, the whole operation began. Rack wagons went into the fields of wheat shocks where pitchers forked the now dry bundles aboard. The loaded racks then pulled along side the feeder end of the separator. Often times the horses took a very skittish view of standing near this noisy, dusty machine and skilled horsemanship was called on to settle them. The sheaves were systematically fed and disappeared into the mysterious bowels of the separator. The straw was blown onto a huge stack to be used for winter bedding and the grain was augered into a box wagon standing along side. These box wagons then slowly wended their way into town where the grain was deposited to be stored or to be loaded onto rail cars for distant markets. As little boys, we enjoyed meeting these incoming grain wagons at town's edge to hitch a ride to the elevator. The drivers usually indulged us so long as we behaved and did nothing to scare his horses.

FARMING IN THE 1920's

Quite often, Cousin Eldore landed the job of waterboy on these threshing runs and often I rode along for the adventure. Our vehicle was a horse and buggy and our job was to keep a supply of cool clean water to all the workers. We pumped the water from the nearest well and carried it in burlap wrapped jugs.

A memorable feature of the threshing runs was the great dinners. The farmwife on whose place the days work was being done was expected to furnish dinner for the entire crew. There developed a kind of friendly competition among the various wives to see who could put on the most bragged-about dinner. As a result each dinner was a banquet done justice to by many hearty appetites.

Uncle Al kept a few dairy cows which had to be milked by hand twice a day. After a supply of milk for family dining was saved, the rest of the milk was ran through a hand operated cream separator. The cream collected was used to churn butter and the surplus taken to sell in town at the Creamery. The skimmed milk remaining was mixed with grain and fed as slop to hogs.

Corn was another major crop of our area. Some of it was cut off at harvest time and shocked to be used as fodder for winter feeding. Most of the corn was however picked by hand and stored as earcorn in cribs. Hand corn picking was an art and serious competition developed between young men. Corn picking contests were held and widely attended. Anyone who could pick a hundred bushel a day was considered to be pretty good, although, some men beat that a lot. The operation consisted of the picker hustling through the field taking several rows at a time,

snapping the ears from the stalks, and tossing them into a wagon being pulled alongside. Horses were trained to pull the wagon in phase with the picker and well trained corn-picking horses were highly valued.

The sandy soil around Arenzville was well adapted for growing melons. Uncle Al always raised a sizeable patch of water and musk melons. Raising melons involved a lot of hand work. Some of the melons were marketed locally and some were sold to wholesalers who came out from the larger towns. Uncle Al was one of the few farmers who owned a small truck and so was able to peddle melons in neighboring towns.

I had the good fortune to be invited to go along on some of these melon peddling expeditions. Melvin was always the boss, Eldore was the truck driver, and I helped ring door bells. The Model T truck would be loaded the night before with water-melons and muskmelons and we would get a good early start the next morning for our trip to Jacksonville. There Melvin would select a prosperous looking neighborhood and we began method-ically ringing backdoor bells offering melons for sale. A large watermelon cost a dime and for the same amount you could buy several muskmelons. Since I was just a little shabbily dressed ten-year old at the time, the housewives whose door-bells I rung were inclined to view me more with pity than annoyance, hence, I had pretty good success. Once in a while, the local police hassled us a bit since local merchants didn't appreciate our competition . . . Melvin would argue just a little and then move on to some other neighborhood.

TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL

One of the most treasured advantages of growing up in Arenzville was the opportunity it afforded to attend this parochial school.

Trinity Lutheran Congregation was founded about 1870 by some of the German people of the area. The fine brick building which continues to ably serve to this day was built about 1910 by the grandparents of our generation. The school building we, Nicol children studied in was directly behind the church and had been built sometime earlier. It was of simple frame construction and consisted of a single room of approximately 24' x 30' dimensions. A small sink at the back of the room took care of hand washing needs and drinking water was kept handy in a twenty-gallon stone jar. It was the older boy's job to keep this jar full from a well in the teacherage yard. There was an outdoor privy for boys and one for girls.

Most of the children of the congregation attended this school making an average enrollment of about twenty-five in grades one through eight. Some of these children who lived on out-laying farms walked three or four miles to school every day with their parents giving them a buggy ride only in very severe weather. We, Nicol children lived close enough to go home for noon meals but most of the students carried a lunch pail.

I suppose all first graders fall in love with their teacher and I warmly remember our Miss Magdalen Drawe. Velma Roegge was our teacher for the next three years. For fifth grade we had a coarse rugged male teacher named Krause whose memory brings no respect at all; the fact that he remained only one year probably attests to the fact that the church fathers shared my low opinion of him. Our teacher for my last grade school years was a Mr. George C. Folkerts. He was a meek and kindly

TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL

man and surely an able teacher but one who was in some ways poorly used by the congregation. At the bottom of the problem was the fact that his "Call" included playing the church organ and leading the choir and his abilities were somewhat limited in these areas. Accentuating the problem was the fact that several women in the congregation were blessed with exceptional musical talents. There developed a squabble between those who favored using the talents of these women and those who saw no sense in paying someone else to do the job Mr. Folkerts was already being paid to do. This all degenerated into a foolish and shameful fuss which saw the anti-teacher group openly ridiculing Mr. Folkerts even in front of his students. Our parents sided with the pro-Folkerts side as did I personally and I was old enough to recognize that some who should have known better were carelessly breaking the fourth Commandment.

Our school day always began with the singing of a hymn and a prayer. The next period was for studying Bible History and Catechism on alternate days. Rev. Tonn taught catechism to the older grades, for the first years using the upper rooms of the teacherage and later using a basement classroom in the church. The remainder of the day was used for teaching the basic reading, writing and arithmetic. It bears mentioning that this secular part of our education proved to be equal or better than that received by the public schools we competed with in high school. School studies always came easily for me and I don't recall ever doing much home work. I always enjoyed reading and made it a practice to read through the reading and history and geography textbooks during the first weeks of school and then never study them much again. I eagerly read everything in our

meager school library especially enjoying histories, biographies, and such authors as Jack London and Zane Gray.

Highlighting every school year were the preparation for the Christmas Eve program and for the school-end picnic program. Several weeks before these events we began preparing songs and recitations and the tempo of anticipation steadily accelerated to the climax of those days. One Christmas Eve stands out because of the personal embarrassment that came my way. A few days before Christmas, I was speeding around the school building just as Art Schlueter was doing likewise in the opposite direction. We met exactly at the corner; his forehead zeroed in on my mouth. As a result that Christmas Eve, I was sporting a couple of very fat lips as I did my recitations before the whole congregation. I still have a chipped front tooth as a memento of that occasion. These Christmas Eve services were the highlight of the holiday season for the whole congregation and are treasured memories of my childhood.

The end-of-school year church picnics were also well attended by all members of the congregation. They were held in Roegge's Grove where a temporary stage was erected along with a large refreshment stand selling ice cream, pop, etc. The presentation of the school students was first on the program. These songs and recitations were of a more secular nature than the Christmas Eve selections. The balance of the afternoon was devoted to various games and visiting. The teenagers (Walther League) usually had a program prepared for the evening's entertainment. The school board presented each child with a 10¢ token which was added to savings each of us had been hoarding for the past

TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL

several months and was now to be recklessly spent at the refreshment stand. I always put a good deal of forethought and planning on how to most wisely spend money which usually totaled less than 50¢. You could get a lot more satisfaction from a 5¢ bag of peanuts, for example, than from something like an ice cream which cost the same but had to be eaten quickly.

Besides the Christian Day School, our church featured a large Sunday School for children and adults, which met before the main church services. One day during my junior high school year, Rev. Tonn called me aside and suggested that I should become a Sunday school teacher. This was a bit unusual because all the other teachers were ladies but the idea did intrigue me a bit . . . and one didn't argue with Rev. Tonn. So began my teaching career (sister Joyce was in my first class) which was going to continue at St. Peter-Savanna, Immanuel-Freeport, and our Saviors-Freeport covering some forty years all told. These teaching experiences were very rewarding not only because of the Christian duty involved but because the appreciation gained for the art of teaching and for expanding my knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine. It has been well said that a teacher always learns more than he teaches.

Religion was always a most important part of the Nicol family life. Our faith was firmly based on the premise that the Bible was the verbally inspired Word of God. We recognized the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true statement of doctrine, not because it was Lutheran, but because it was in complete harmony with Scriptures. From earliest childhood, we were made aware of God's presence in our lives and were taught to appre-

ciate and use the power of prayer.

Rev. E. F. Tonn was our pastor for most of our growing years. . he baptized, confirmed and married me. He was a stern, no nonsense kind of man who didn't smile much but one who went about his pastoral duties with great dignity and unquestionable ability. Probably if one of us as a child would have tried to visualize God in human form, He would have looked a lot like Rev. Tonn. He was not above the stopping in the middle of a sermon to point a finger at some little boy who was misbehaving . . . all the gradeschool boys sat together in the front pew near the pulpit. Any unfortunate lad who became the focus of such attention (it never happened to me) was in big trouble, not only the embarrassment of the moment, but the sure fury that was to break out the minute he got home.

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

High school was the next step up the educational ladder for the graduates of our parochial school, for the public grade school, and for the several country schools of the area. I enrolled as a freshman there in the fall of 1934. Ours was a class of about 25 and was recognized as the "largest and dumbest" class ever to enroll. Some 15 of us graduated four years later hopefully, somewhat smarter.

The high school occupied the top floor of the same building which on the ground floor housed three grade school class rooms. All high school students were required to stay in the large assembly room except when attending their specific subject classes. Four years of English were required, two of Latin, two of Math, two of history. Physics, Agriculture, Commercial Law and a few others were somewhat optional, although, each student was required to take four subjects each semester. There were no shop courses, nor Physical Education, nor drivers training. The only musical education offered was a once a week group singing session in the assembly hall.

I believe it can be said that we had some very good teachers in most subjects but one stands out above all the rest, Mr. Homer Dalhman, who was principal of the school for all the years our class attended. Having been exposed to a great variety of teachers during my educational career, I feel qualified to say that Homer Dalhman was the best. He was just a natural born teacher with the knack of making something like Algebra seem darn simple, you just felt ashamed not to master it. Aside from my father and Rev. Tonn, no man has had a greater effect on shaping my life than this rather unique and very gifted teacher.

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

Arenzville High School did not have a gym until PWA funds made it possible to build one. This new gym attached to the old building was first ready for use in our senior year. Prior to getting the gym, we did have varsity coaching and competition with neighboring schools in baseball and track. It just happened that there were in our class some pretty good athletic abilities. We had an exceptionally good track team and already in our junior year were competing very successfully with larger neighboring schools . . . we didn't have much depth but we captured way more than our share of firsts. I, for example, could run a mile in 5:00 already in my junior year, a time which to this day will win a lot of high school track meets. I can also boast of having won a varsity letter in baseball, all four years which sounds somewhat better than it was, considering that our tiny school didn't have all that many players to choose from. Good athletes notwithstanding, our record in basketball was pretty bad in that one year of competition our new gym made possible. We just had never played basketball and all those little things which our competitors had been practicing since grade school were all skills neglected. I, for example, had only seen one high school basketball game in my life (at Collinsville) before playing on the varsity in our first game. Suffice it to report that our record for the year was 1 - 20. The little town of Brooklyn was our only conquest and that on the second to last game of the season. The basketball humiliations of the winter did give us some extra incentive in the spring track season in which we ably refashioned our tarnished reputations.

A little interesting drama of my senior year might bear mentioning. That year, I opted to take five subjects instead of the

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

required four. This was not prompted by a great thirst for learning. I wanted to take Physics which sounded very interesting and was the subject of choice for most of the boys in the class but Frances was taking Commercial Law with a smaller class and I had a great yearning to be with Frances for reasons completely removed from academic. At the end of the first six weeks, my Law grades were pretty bad and Mr. Dalhman was the teacher. He gave me the option of giving up either baseball or dropping the fifth class. I probably made a dozen visits to his office in the following week trying to persuade him to allow me to play the one more remaining game of the season and still continue with the Law class. Several times I felt I had him just about to agree, however, I didn't play in that last game and I did bring up my grades to a respectable level before the semester ended. This episode probably reveals something about the character building talents of Mr. Dalhman and probably something about me.

We did not have a lot of extra-curricular activities. There were no proms although a few class parties, weiner roasts, and the like. It was at one of these weiner roasts in our sophomore year that I first dated Frances and of course added a whole new dimension to my education and life. We had a Latin Club which met once a month . . . I was its president one year . . . which was designed to be of both educational and social value. The Agriculture students had their FFA organization and there was a forensic club which engaged in competitive public speaking. Considering that I have in my lifetime had many occasions to do public speaking, I can't quite understand my having had no interest in that activity during my high school days.

COLLEGE

Of the fifteen seniors who graduated from Arenzville High School in the spring of 1938, five that fall enrolled at the University of Illinois . . myself, Bob Clark, Charles Goodpasture, Martin and Bob Burrus. Bob Clark and I teamed with two graduate students, Charles Ater and Ralph Ginter, also form Arenzville, to rent a two-room basement housekeeping apartment on Green Street. Charles Goodpasture roomed elsewhere but ate his meals with us. The Burrus cousins joined Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity. We practiced very light housekeeping but both food and living conditions were adequate for our needs and were at least as good as those of many fellow students at that time.

One of the prime attractions in favor of enrolling at the U of I was financial. As a land grant college, tuition was minimal; less than $50 took care of all enrolling expenses including Lab and book fees and a pass to all main athletic events. One share of the apartment rent was about $2.50 per month and food prices reflected the low levels of the times. I had saved a few dollars from my years of working at Zulauf's and my folks helped a little even though times were still pretty tough for them and they did have a lot of others to feed and care for. There were no jobs available for freshmen in the University area.

The price you paid for the low tuition was being required to take R.O.T.C. Bob Clark and I were assigned to the Coast Artillery while the other three Arenzville boys became Cavalry recruits. Neither instructors nor students took this training very seriously. It consisted of one hour of classroom theory each week and one hour of drill with WWI vintage equipment or manual-of-arms drill. The $10 athletic pass provided our most

COLLEGE

valued source of entertainment for we could take in Big Ten quality sports events such as baseball, basketball, football, track, wrestling, etc. We didn't miss many of those contests.

Coming from a tiny high school, we were at first somewhat overawed by the students coming from the much larger big city schools, however, we soon came to realize that they had no advantages over us either academically or in worldly wisdom. One intangible that we did quickly become aware of was the attitude of our teachers; whereas in high school, the teachers had a more personal interest in your progress, the college instructors were very remote and even seemed to expect to flunk out half the class and could care less if that happened. Also the volume of work expected and the pace of instruction was vastly accelerated as compared to our high school experience. While I had been able to earn A's and B's in high school with out much effort, in college I struggled to make a high C average.

My high school track successes had left me feeling pretty cocky about my athletic abilities so I went out for freshman track. Again I soon realized that Big Ten level competition is quite removed from that of high school. Both the Illinois and the Florida State High School champion milers were my competition there and they could beat me every time so I found myself running third or fourth. There wasn't any funding around for intra-school track competition at the freshman level. We did compete in some "telegraph" meets. We would, for example, run against Purdue with they running on their own track and we on ours and then comparing the time by telegraph . . . that was not very satisfying. I did not go out for track in my sophomore

COLLEGE

both because of my job and because I correctly realized that my abilities were limited in the level of competition.

Before going to college, I had never put much forethought on what kind of career might appeal to me. Dad suggested that I become a chemical engineer (neither he nor I had much understanding of what that entailed) however, it sounded pretty exciting and so I enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts. Chemistry students were required to have a reading knowledge of either German or French. I opted for German and this proved to be my poorest subject. Chemistry, both classroom and Lab, I found to extremely interesting although, I soon realized that the life of a chemist had no appeal to me.

My second year at the University began on a distinctly upbeat note. There was the typical sophomores confidence of knowing one's way around, my living conditions were improved, and my financial problems were under control. I rented a room on Locust Street from one of the many housemothers who catered to students and I arranged to eat at a similar boarding house. I have forgotten the cost of room rent but for $4.50 a week, I got two good meals, six days a week and a big Sunday noon meal. My job was working at O'Neil's Market in Champaign. This market featured meats, groceries, fresh fruits and vegetables for retail customers but also catered to restaurants and fraternity and sorority house on a wholesale level. My job was delivering to these customers using an older Chevy panel truck. Consequently, I can boast of having been is some of the finest establishments in the twin cities . . . but in the service entrances usually toting a box of groceries or a sack of potatoes.

COLLEGE

During the preceding summer, I had been able to earn some cushion money hauling road cinders on a WPA project. Dad allowed me to use his sand truck to haul these cinders from a railroad coalcar to the country roads under repair. The joker was that these WPA laborers assigned to shovel onto my truck had no incentive for working and were notoriously lazy. Since I was being paid for piece work, I usually impatiently grabbed a shovel and loaded a sizeable share of the cinders myself.

Another improvement of my second year was transferring from Chemistry to Mechanical Engineering which much more fitted my natural inclinations. For that 1939 Christmas, I gave Frances an engagement ring. There never was a down-on-one-knee engagement scene for us . . . we just seemed to have drifted into an understanding beginning way back in early high school days. This ring sported the biggest diamond I could buy for $18 and I paid half down at point of purchase. The balance I earned doing Zulauf's year-end inventory during that holiday vacation. When we displayed the ring and what it implied to my folks, Dad reacted with a very sour look but Mother, more understandingly, smiled a little even though it was clearly understood that we were entirely too young to be thinking about such serious matters.

That Holiday Season also witnessed an event which was destined to completely change the course of my life. Dad had already made a firm committment to open a sand business in Savanna, Illinois and during that vacation I accompanied him on a scouting trip to that area. As he revealed his aspirations to me and pictured the opportunities he visualized and I looked upon the Savanna area, the decision came to me to quit school and become

COLLEGE

a sandman. In retrospect, that decision came from a cumulation of reasons: While I had demonstrated my ability to handle college level studies, I also came to realize that acquiring a college degree did not deserve the social and economic status many attributed to it. My inclinations and talents were more tuned to self-employment and physical rather than mental exertion. While I was earning at 25¢ per hour, $10.00 a week, and could get by on that amount of income, working forty hours a week took some time from my studies and left very little time for the social life so important to college students . . . besides my girlfriend was a hundred miles away. Helping establish a new sand business in Savanna was an attractive challenge which also would provide the time and money for Frances and I to get married. Also Dad was still struggling financially and could very well use my help.

THE SAVANNA SAND BUSINESS

Having made the decision to go into the sand business, I went back to school following the 1939 holidays to finish out that third semester should I ever wish to resume my academic career . . . even though I knew in my heart that such was most unlikely.

Early that spring, Dad and I made a machinery buying trip to a small town in Ohio where we had heard of a defunct cement plant being liquidated. We purchased an ancient Stedman Mill and an equally antique 100 HP electric motor. We filled our sand truck with an assortment of pulleys, line shafts, conveyor belts, etc., and thus had the makings of a sand mill. The Milwaukee RR people in Savanna, seeing the prospects for some good freight business, were very cooperative and we leased a a building site in their switch yards along with mineral rights to the sand on their property.

One Dutch Harling was enlisted to help with our building. Dutch was a competent carpenter when he was sober but had a weakness for long weekends. The first need was for an office bunk house. We at once saw the feasibility of transporting workers from Arenzville where beside Dad's old crew, there were plenty of good depression trained men eager to work for our 25¢ an hour, whereas in Savanna we would have to recruit unknown men contaminated by the unionized railroad and Ordnance Depot experience. The bunk house went up quickly. It was a simple shed like structure about 14' x 24' with the east two-thirds used for living space and the west end partitioned off for sleeping facilities. A plenteous supply of excellent drinking water lay just a few feet below ground level which we tapped with a sandpoint and hand pump. Other toilet facilities were the nearby bushes.

THE SAVANNA SAND BUSINESS

Charlie Herbert's pool hall business had gone belly-up and he became our resident cook and housekeeper. A few well deserved compliments from us always prompted him to greater culinary achievements and every meal became a banquet featuring plenty of simple but very tasty food. This happy arrangements lasted about a year until Charlie became amorously involved with some gal he had met in a downtown tavern causing him to get a little careless with the grocery money. We promoted him to millman and hired a lady cook named Nellie who cooked well enough but came burdened with a lazy husband who could not hold up his end on a sand shovelling job. Finally, she made a couple of suggestive passes at Dad and we sent them both packing. Still these were fun days. . . young bodies and hard work made for hearty appetites. Horseshoes and pinochle were our usual entertainment. The crew commuted to Arenzville every weekend, a distance of 190 miles. Dad bought a new 1940 Ford sedan for this purpose. It cost about $900 and proved to be one of the best cars we ever owned.

Sometime in the mid-thirties, Dad had made business connections with the Manley brothers of Rockton, Ill., who besides being producers of coarse moulding and silica sand, brokered the complete line of foundry sands. They came to rely on Dad to furnish their fine sand line. To Dad's advantage, this allowed him to concentrate on production as the Manleys took over the merchandizing part of the business. Also Dad could through them have access to such larger customers as John Deere, International Harvester, etc. Manleys had discovered the sand deposits around Savanna and, impressed by his integrity and ability, asked Dad to develop the new business.

THE SAVANNA SAND BUSINESS

Savanna served by two railroads and in easy shipping distance from many large foundry centers, was ideally located for our purposes. We were pleased to discover that there was an abundant supply of good quality foundry sand in the area ranging in grain size from the very finest to medium coarse. We mined a deposit of exceptional fine sand from what is now the new Methodist church property. It lay under an overburden of hard sticky clay and those of us who toiled with spade and shovel there will always remember that spot. The sand on the Milwaukee RR property was so close to our mill site that we could have loaded the first few carloads with a wheelbarrow. We also mined some coarser sand on what is now the Savanna City Dump site and finer textured sand from what is now the Bill Ritchie farm. Some of the sand on the Ritchie site lay on a steep hillside which called for ingeneous road building. I remember one hassle with brother Lee. He was still in high school and naturally quite proud of his driving skills and on this occaion got stuck on one of the roads I had built. There ensued a rather heated discussion about his driving abilities as compared to my road building talents!

In 1940 - 41, as the whole country geared into the war effort, our sand business also boomed. At the peak of our shovel and spade era, we were commuting two carloads of men each weekend from Arenzville and bunkhouse living during the week. We found ourselves loading three railcars a day. This operation required two truck crews (two spaders and a crumber) hauling from pit to mill, two men shoveling into the feed auger, and two men "shoveling back" in the boxcar. It was hard work making for calloused hands and lean bodies.

THE SAVANNA SAND BUSINESS

In 1942, we remodeled the mill installing a rotary kiln gas fired dryer and a set of vibrating screens, this to improve our product. We also invented self-feeding hoppers which the trucks could dump into directly. Conveyor belts under the hoppers were driven at variable speeds controlled by a drive fashioned from two used truck transmissions. We also acquired two other labor saving machines, a boxcar loader to eliminate the shoveling back and an end loader (they had just been invented)to load our trucks.

The laborer commuting and bunkhouse system had become increasingly cumbersome and expensive and with the new labor saving machinery we now abandoned it. We purchased two houses, one in Highland Park and one in Chestnut Park and persuaded the Charles Long and Wemer Lovekamp families to move to Savanna as permanent employees. Uncle Elmer Nicol moved to Savanna and took up residence in the bunk house . . . he was to run our new end loader. This arrangement lasted only a year until Elmer and Marge came to realize that the bunkhouse locale was not adapted to raising their three pre-schoolers and so they returned to Collinsville.

My writings about the Savanna sand business parallel those of Cindy Ritchie's fine work "The History of the Nicol Sand Business" which should be read in conjunction with this story.

THE WILBUR NICOL PRE-WAR FAMILY

Frances and I got married on December 8, 1940 in Trinity Lutheran Curch in Arenzville. Dad didn't much approve of us getting married so soon, suggesting that we wait until money was in a little better supply. Mother, on the other hand, with probably a little better insight into the needs of this young couple and a little better sense of priorities, encouraged us to go ahead. Dad had to OK our getting a marriage license since we were still too young and for a while, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, threatened to sabotage our plans. After I had paid the pastor and organist, we had something less than twenty dollars left and this financed the two-day honeymoon to Chicago. Then it was back to work in the sand business. We lived with the folks until the following spring at which time we built a house on Milwaukee RR property in Savanna.

It was a very humble tiny three-room plus bath building of simple frame construction and set on a series of piers fashioned from three concrete blocks each. Dutch Harling helped me for a few days until I had expended all the $600 I had borrowed for the project. I continued to finish and improve the building as time and money permitted ending up with a total cost of under $1000 some two years later. The sand business had improved to the point of our needing a second sand truck so Dad repurchased the old CS-35 International he had a few years earlier traded in on our good truck. Frances and I loaded all our possessions on that sand truck and journeyed to Savanna to take up residence in our new house. We didn't have much furniture, some borrowed, some second-handed. I had built in some cupboards and we had a kerosene stove to cook on. The house was heated by an oil burner in the living room. That same summer, we purchased an electric range and refrigerator from Grandpa Wilson's company and he came up to install them.

THE WILBUR NICOL PRE-WAR FAMILY

He also helped my build a small basement room to accommodate a gas hot water heater. A large lot sized garden west of the house furnished avocation as well as supplement our grocery supplies. Until the Longs moved to Savanna, we had no close friends to visit. We became members of St. Peters Lutheran Church and drove to their services in a sand truck until the employee commuting days were abandoned. We quite often took in a movie on Sunday evenings which cost a dollar. My pay was twenty-five dollars a week on which we managed nicely. Fishing was another part of our recreation.

It was a happy day in June of 1942, when our son Kirby was born. It was with no little pride that I phoned the folks to inform them that they were now grandparents. These were happy days as our young family endured and enjoyed all the pleasures and problems common to young people. Our business was going well, we were young and healthy, Kirby was as fat as a butter-ball and a constant source of wonderment as he learned to walk and talk. This happy existence continued until that landmark day came when I was drafted into war service. The business game plan had been for me to learn the business to the point where I could relieve Dad of some of the managing duties at Savanna but just when I was about to get the hang of it, there came the draft notice which was to change our whole life plan.

One day stands in my memory above all others of that time. Kirby was less than six months old as I came trudging home from work, one day. As I stepped in the door, a terrible sight met my eyes. Baby Kirby was in the midst of a convulsion in the arms of a crying terror stricken Frances. A convulsion as we later learned is nature's way of combatting a high fever

and while terrible to watch is really not too serious. However, at that first sight I thought our precious little baby was dying as did Frances. I took him into my arms, totally helpless and panic stricken, and prayed the most sincere prayer I have ever uttered. It was a wordless plea which amounted to a simple "help us" and almost instantaneously, that baby quieted down in my arms.

There are those who scoff at the power of prayer and would dismiss this experience as a simple natural happening and coincidence. They miss so much! I have had many occasions to lean upon the power of prayer but this one will always stand out as a beautiful moment in our lives.

WORLD WAR II

In common with teenagers throughout history, our generation viewed with kindly condescension the perceived mistakes of our elders. Living as we were in the immediate wake of WWI, we had first hand experience with the economic consequences of that conflict and we were personally acquainted with disabled veterans. Of one thing we were blindly confident: Never again would we be so foolish as to get into another war. How wrong we were!

During the 30's, Hitler and the cancer of Nazism were rising in Europe, Mussolini was raping Ethiopia and North Africa and the Japanese were rampaging in Manchuria and China. Sure, we read about these things but they were half a world away and not of much importance in our daily lives. Then came that infamous Sunday, December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. It was almost incredible . . . little Japan attacking us . . . a mouse biting an elephant . . . we'll quickly smash them! It took sometime, six months or so, for us to really grasp the magnitude of what was happening! Our invincible battleships were suddenly being sunk; Singapore fell easily in February; then Manila, Corrigidor, Bataan, Wake Island. Gradually, it soaked in that we were looking at "sweat, blood, and tears", and it was going to take a long time. Indifference quickly gave way to concern and a whole range of emotions - anger, fear, frustrations took over, but the bottom line was grim determination and a massive surge of patriotic zeal.

Our whole lifestyle changed. Many foodstuffs were rationed, such as sugar, meat, coffee, butter, etc. Automobiles, gasoline, tires were also rationed and our factories quit making such consumer products as refrigerators, stoves, washing machines, etc. Since our sand business was producing foundry sand, we

WORLD WAR II

were able to buy tires, gasoline, trucks, tractors, etc., and I was deferred from the early draft for similar reasons. For example, we were in '42 & '43 shipping three carloads of fine sand to the Maytag Company who was making gun turrets for our bombing planes. Brothers and friends were drafted, some were wounded, some were killed, and in the first years of the war, it seemed that all the news was bad.

In the summer of '44, the draft boards were ordered to give no more deferments to any healthy man under 26 years of age and so I was sworn into the United States Navy on my 24th birthday, October 3, 1944. Some major adjustments had to be made in our game plans. Our Dad at first tried to manage both the Arenzville and the Savanna operations but soon found that rationing and time just would not stretch that far, so our family abandoned Arenzville and moved to Savanna. (See Cindy Gale's "History of the Nicol Sand Company"). Frances and Kirby, at first, planned to stay in our little house in Savanna but soon these plans also had to be altered. These were troubled times for our young family. I vividly recall the morning I boarded the train in Savanna (incidentally, my first train ride) bound for Chicago and Navy duty. A new adventure, yes, but filled with uncertainty; getting wounded or killed is something one usually thinks of as happening to other people, but we all read the papers and had friends and relatives in the service.

That first day in Chicago was a memorable blur. I was, from the moment I got on the train in Savanna, like an object on an assembly line, carried along completely out of my own control

and in the company of many others equally bewildered. Questions were asked, forms filled out, shots injected, liberties taken with my body and mind so that by evening, I found myself in a barracks at Great Lakes Training Center completely exhausted. I happened to get into the Navy quite by accident. At one point along the line that first day, it was necessary to undress for a physical. The clothes check room was manned by "volunteers" periodically grabbed by the petty officers in charge and I just happened to come along at the right time. My reward for this duty was a "chit" to someone down the line which would give me a choice of which branch of service I would be assigned. The Navy Seabees had been getting a lot of favorable publicity and were doing the kind of work I was accustomed to, so when the opportunity came to cash my "chit", I opted for the Navy. About a half-hour later, I learned that the Seabees were fully booked so I stepped out of line and returned to the assignment desk to tell them I had made a mistake and really wanted iinto the Army Engineers. This whole exercise on my part only put a little humor into the otherwise dull routine of the officers-in-charge who sharply informed me that I was in the Navy. In retrospect, I now recognize that this was a blessing.

Boot camp at Great Lakes was designed by the Navy to, in ten weeks, transform a civilian physically and mentally into a sailor. There were about 120 recruits in our company, one-third each from Illinois, Missouri, and Alabama, in age from 18-35, from all walks of life and all kinds of lifestyles. We were quartered on the second floor of a hastily built barracks building. Aside from being separated from my family, I got along fine in boot camp, learning a lot of interesting things some of which later were very usefuly. I was used to plain

food and hard physical labor so that was no problem, quite in contrast to some of my mates. Our company leader was a professional boxer from Kansas City who did his job Navy fashion and gave me no trouble, again, quite in contrast to some who tried to give him a bad time. About all I had gotten from three semester of R.O.T.C. at the University was learning close order drill and how to march; this came in handy in boot camp.

Toward the end of boot camp, every one took an aptitude test to determine which branch of Navy training he would be best suited. However, in 1944, the Navy desperately needed trainees for radio technician work and so it was ordered that anyone making above a certain score on the aptitude test would automatically be "volunteered" into Radio Tech School. I was one of three in our company to so have our destiny altered - in retrospect, another blessing. An interesting aside to my being forced into R. T. school was that on my way into Chicago that day in October, a fellow draftee from Savanna, Robert Williams told me about this Navy R. T. program for gifted students who would be put into an abbreviated boot camp. Since I knew absolutely nothing about radio, I did not pursue his suggestion. He did enlist in the special program and later flunked out, whereas, I was accidentally thrust into the program and finally spent all my Navy career going to school.

About halfway through boot camp, we were allowed a visitor's day. My folks, Frances and Kirby came to Great Lakes that day. At the completion of boot camp, we were granted a week's leave. These were bittersweet interludes marred by the knowledge that they would soon be over - tender moments well remembered.

WORLD WAR II

My first station in R.T. training was at Theodore Herzel High School in Chicago, taken over by the Navy and intended to be a one-month screening course. I found myself now in the company of men of high intellectual caliber - recent high school graduates, college men, teachers, and even some professors. Never a great scholar and now, several years away from college math, I had to work hard to keep up with this school work. Chicago was considered to be a "great liberty town", the food was great in the civilian run H.S. mess hall, and now, having attained the rank of Seaman, I had some privileges. One such was being able to take weekend leave, if you had a relative in Chicago. Having no such relative but wanting to spend weekends with Frances, I made a deal with a friend of my Dad, Fred Hoppe, to be my uncle. He allowed me to use his address as my Chicago "home" and promised to cover for me should the Navy check out my story. (They never did.)

This happy arrangement was interrupted one weekend when Frances came to Chicago and found me sick. We had a hotel room and I was so sick that even the usual family relations were foregone. The next morning, I reluctantly put Frances on a train for home and staggered back to Navy sick bay. I had a raging fever and a rash all over by body. The hospital corpsman took one look and ordered me to a hospital at Great Lakes. I had scarlet fever and learned that it was epidemic in the area. They took me to Great Lakes in an ambulance and I was so sick that some nurse undressed me without my being aware of it.

I phoned Frances the next day to inform her of the exposure but fortunately, neither she nor Kirby caught it. In about a week,

the fever let up but I had a massive sore throat for the next six months. We were quarantined for a month before I could return to my studies in Chicago, so I used three months getting through this four-week course.

An interesting aside: While in the hospital in Great Lakes, we got acquainted with a group of men who had gotten shot-up on Guadalcanal. In a vivid way, the ugliness of war was brought home to us. They told us, only partly in jest, "We're willing to give the Japs everything west of the Mississippi".

After graduating from the school in Chicago, I was assigned to the R.T. school at Great Lakes. This was a twelve-week course stressing Math, Physics and Electronic Theory. After each two weeks, you took a test, if you passed, you advanced; if you flunked, you took the two weeks over, if you flunked the second time, you were out of the program and into a less demanding school or to sea duty. We studied hard since sea duty was where the shooting was!

When we got off the bus that first day in Great Lakes, the officer-in-charge asked for anyone a little older than the others. I was 24, so he picked me to be in charge of the group. I had a title like platoon commander which sounded good at home but was really accidentally thrust upon me. My duties were roll call, morning and night, a report to make daily and to be drill master, so one hour a day, I drilled my company in marching and of course, was in charge of marching to classes and mess hall. Aside from the dubious honor, I had the privilege of weekend leave every weekend. This got me in trouble, finally!

WORLD WAR II

We were allowed to travel 100 miles from base on our I.D. card and anyone could still get overnight leave on weekends if "he had a relative in the area". I stretched my permission to go home to Savanna every weekend. After about 10 weeks, the Navy brass woke up that many seamen were lying about their "relations" so a big crack down was arranged. I admitted going a little beyond my 100 mile limit while most of the others with less honorable excuses admitted nothing. I was called before a "Captain Mast" (the first step in Navy judgment) and declared a P.A.L. That means prisoner-at-large and meant I was restricted to base and was required to sign in twice a day. I compounded the problem by missing my first sign in. It was to have been at 0400 which my civilian mind recognized at 4:00 rather than 2:00. This really upset the applecart and I had to appear in a line up before the Captain again, along with a whole bunch of various offenders. Before adding to our sentences, the Captain asked if anyone had anything to say. More sensible and experienced culprits remained silent but I was getting a little mad at this whole string of events, so I stepped forward to the surprise and annoyance of the Captain. What I said was something like this, "I'm in this whole mess because I was honest enough to admit that I exceeded the 100 mile limit by about 20 miles so to be with my wife and child, whereas, a whole lot of others who spent the weekend with some whore in Chicago and remained silent got off scott free". The Captain covered his amusement with some witty remark but added nothing to my punishment, however, I remained a P.A.L. and didn't miss any more roll calls.

Trouble did continue to plague me in that I flunked the last two-week exam and had to take that over. Actually, that was a good

thing for me because I was having touble keeping up with the more gifted scholars in my group. I passed the next time and was assigned to the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas.

After a week's leave at home, I was off again to Texas. We rode down on a troop train that took 3 days to get from Chicago to Corpus Christi. It was July and hot and we were all filthy by the time we arrived. We were quartered on Ward Island and began a nine-month study of Aviation Electronics. We were taught how to repair and maintain such gear as transmitters, radar receivers, bomb sights, I.F.F. gear, etc. I found the work interesting with more screwdriver and plier work and less theory of math and physics and never again did I have trouble keeping up with my fellow students. I did, half way through the course, have grades good enough to "earn my rate", a navy milestone. Henceforth, I was an Aviation Electronic Technician, 3rd class, which insignia I wore proudly.

Because we were supposed to be doing especially sensitive work and in a crash program, we found it to be good Navy duty in Texas. One privilege I had was to live off base, if I had a family. That sounded good, so Frances and Kirby shared an auto ride to Texas with another lady from Savanna. Now, Corpus Christi was a rather small town and there were too many servicemen around. We found it impossible to find any place for a wife and child to stay, so very sadly, we decided that Frances and Kirby couldn't stay in Texas. Again, fate was smiling on us because at that same time, Grandma Wilson fell from a horse and injured her back so Frances and Kirby went to live with and care for her for the rest of the war.

WORLD WAR II

Navy duty on Ward Island was pretty good. Due to the top secret gear we were studying, security was quite tight. We were isolated on an island connected to the world only by a narrow causeway, the island was further protected by a perimeter chain link fence, and our study area was still more secured by a similar enclosing fence.

Studying and lab work took most of our time with little time assigned to the usual Navy activities. We could occasionally, get passes to town but there wasn't really much interesting to do there. We had a movie on base which changed features four times a week and that was our principal after-work entertainment. Food was pretty good and the hot Texas weather bearable.

We had a regularly scheduled P.E. program besides basketball and tennis facilities for free time use. One P.E. activity involved a run around the island perimeter. While this was torture for most of my mates, it was easy for me and I even set a base record time for the course. Naturally, I told my mates that this ability came from my good, clean living habits. That good will got shot down when a week later, a Frenchman from an adjoining barracks broke my record . . . he smoked, drank, and boasted of a lifestyle that no one could have considered "good, clean living".

Another P.E. program consisted of two weeks of boxing. Now for anyone with a nose as big as mine and my natural inclinations for self preservation, boxing is not the sport of choice. One memorable incident occured: the Ensign instructing us "volunteered" me as his opponent to demonstrate the correct defense of a hard right hand. When he ordered me to hit him hard with

WORLD WAR II

a right hand (I've always been confused between right and left), I popped him right on the nose with a pretty good left. Fortunately, he didn't get mad and everyone had a good laugh at my embarrassment.

Among interesting things connected with my studies in Texas were flying trips out over the Gulf for field experience with radar gear. Less interesting was my breaking a bone in my hand playing basketball. The only good thing about that experience was getting a chit from the doctor excusing me from all marching and guard duty. When the hand got well, the doctors forgot to retrieve that chit and I used it the rest of the war. I graduated from the school in March of 1946, the war was over and servicemen were being rapidly discharged on a point system based on family status, tour of duty, etc. I accumulated enough points for discharge one week after graduating from R.T. school and eagerly accepted my discharge.

All in all, my Navy experience was pretty good; I was glad to serve my country, the hardships were surely bearable compared to many others who made much greated sacrifices.

Brothers Lee and Abb, both drafted right out of high school, had much more dangerous duty than I. I shall try to get them to add their stories to this book.

WW II BROTHER LEE'S STORY

Brother Lee reached draftable age right in the middle of the war. He was sworn into the Army at Rockford's Camp Grant on June 10, 1943. Nine days later found him at Westover Field , Mass. in basic training with the 881st Airborne Engineers. That outfit was destine a year later to be badly mauled in the Normandy invasion when in a disasterous foul-up they were shot up by some of our own planes. However Lee transferred from them to the 1896th Aviation Engineer Battalian (Company B) just then being formed at the Richmond Army Air Base in Virginia. He was to serve with that outfit throughout his army career. From July 31st to Nov. 29th they were busy building an airfield at Elko, Va.

After a short furlough home in January Lee's outfit shipped out to Camp Stoneman, Ca. and from there on March 12th embarking on an Army transport ship and arriving at Milney Bay, New Guinea on April first. Six days later found them at Lae, N.G. which was still a combat zone and they were put to work building an airstrip. They departed Lae on July 31st arriving at Biak, Dutch East Indies just ten days after our forces had made a foothold there so they experienced bombing raids by the Japs every night for awhile. For most of the next four months they worked on Biak constructing an airfield and building a hospital.

Lee's outfit left Biak on Christmas Day 1944 to be a part of the Philippine Invasion force heading for Luzon. He and most of his outfit along with their equipment were aboard the USS Kyle B. Johnson a Liberty ship type transport. On Jan 12th while in the South China Sea they were attack by seven Jap Kamikaze suicide planes. Six were shot down but one managed to hit their ship entering and exploding in the very hold where Lee and many of his closest buddies were trapped. Lee remembers the next terrifing minutes only as a blur and surely no one who has not experienced it can possibly understand the horrors of those next few hours. The only possible way they could have escaped would have been through the hole the Jap made entering . . . there were explosions, fire, shrapnel. Lee and six or seven others found themselves floating in the ocean in life-

jackets, cruelly burned and wounded, their convoy having had to go on without them. They were to remain in the sea for four or five hours until darkness overtook them. Finally they were fished out by a following LSI, then sea-transferred to a LCM, and then to a LST as their rescuers sought medical help so obviously needed. Finally they got them aboard a combat evacuation hospital ship for emergency first aid.

Not until Jan. 20th could they be transferred to a regular hospital ship, the USS Marigold, which got them to Hollandia, N. G. 51st General Hospital. There Lee recognized his new APO number as the same one his high school classmate, Dean Zulauf, had been using. He was thus able to contact "Butch" who immediately wrote to our family that Lee "was badly wounded but would be alright", this message reaching our parents just one day before the dreaded "Missing in Action" message came from the Army.

This whole series of coincidences . . . Lee being one of the few survivers from his group, his rescue from the sea, the odds of two Arenzville classmates meeting halfway around the world, the letter arriving just in time to spare our family the agony of all that a MIA letter implies . . . can only be viewed as the gracious hand of Providence in our lives!

Lee was awarded the Purple Heart on Feb. 10th and had healed enough (although his left hand was still useless) to be dicharged from the hospital on Feb. 20th. Now he and a couple buddies were adrift in wartime confusion seperated from their old outfit. They managed to hitch a ride on a B-24 Bomber to Biak and then on a C-47 Transport to the airbase on Leyte getting there March 4th. Three days later they got to Nichols Field, Manila and, finally, two days later on March 9th rejoined their old outfit in the Lingayen Gulf just in time to return with them the next day to Manila where the Army was was just going in to liberate that city.

On May 3rd Lee had to go back into the hospital in Manila due to his bad hand and four days later was shipped back to Biak, ironically,

into the same hospital his outfit had built a few months earlier. On May 28 he was able to rejoin his old outfit in Manila which was just then being loaded on a ship for the invasion of Japan. Along here somewhere Lee had another week in the hospital to take care of a fungus ear infection. They left Manila on Oct. 3rd landing in Yokohama on Oct 21st. A month later Lee left Japan getting into Fort Lewis, Tacoma, Wash. on Dec. 9th. Two days later he shipped out for Fort Sheridan near Chicago where Lee was discharged on Dec. 16, 1945 returning home and the sand business.

Lee's wartime story would not be complete without some mention of his trip to Wisconsin to report to Clarice Schadewald about the events surrounding the death of her friend who was his best friend in the Army. This acquaintence blossomed into a happy ending the details and development of which had better be left to their own telling.

WW II BROTHER ABB'S STORY

Abb enlisted in the Navy on Jan. 9, 1945 just six days short of his eighteenth birthday. He entered Boot Camp at Great Lakes but managed to avoid most of that by enlisting in the SeaBees who were just at that time recruiting carpenters. (No one remembers Abb ever having demonstrated much skill as a carpenter ?). The next two months he spent at Camp Edicott near Providence, R.I.. Abb recalls one weekend leave in New York City . . . his assessment, "the Big Apple is a cesspool!"

He left Central Station via the 20th Century Limited and the Hiawatha trains for a leave in Savanna only to get very sick enroute. He had been caught up in the same scarlett fever epidemic which I had fell to about the same time. Muriel met his train, took him to Dr. Hussey who hussled him off to quarantine at S.O.D. He was there for three weeks attended partly by German P.O.W.'s who seemed to enjoy sticking needles into "enemy" navy men.

Abb returned to the East Coast via Chicago. The war in Europe ended while he was in Rhode Island. Next he went by troop train to Treasure Island near San Francisco, then via Liberty ship to Pearl Harbor where he stayed a week. Then aboard the USS Pennsylvania he made a thirteen day voyage to Saipan where he was to be stationed for eleven months. Saipan is a a small 21 by 7 mile island and Abb was in charge of waterfront maintainence there. With the war ending the great Navy organization entered a time of extra confusion. Abb mentions that there were on the island some 10,000 Navy men and only 10 Navy women the significance of which can only be imagined. Abb has related a host of interesting anecdotes from his Navy experience however it is probably best that they not be recorded in writing.

Abb started home on the USS Hermitage, a coverted Italian luxury liner, via Guam to Treasure Island where he was discharged from the Navy. While Abb was doing his Navy duty classmate Joyce Daune Beard was teaching school at the Roegge's Grove country school. Now she met Abb in San Francisco and they were married in the Chapel on

Treasure Island on July 15, 1946.

Abb and some buddies bought a 1937 Hudson Terraplane automobile in California to drive back to Illinois. Those cars are obsolete now; that one was about obsolete then and collapsed completely in the process of an overhaul job Abb attempted in the sand company garage back home.

With the formal surrender of Japan on Sept. 2, 1945 WW II was officially over. As the world, our country, and our families now rapidly, almost abruptly, went from wartime to peacetime living great changes of both immediate and long range consequences were thrust upon us. Rationing and most wartime regulations had ended; factories returned to making consumer products although a definate sellers market prevailed until the backlog of demand could catch up; wartime inventions and technologies were being adapted to peacetime uses. As America hastened to dismantle its hugh armed services a flood of discharged vertrans came home hoping and expecting to resume civilian living only to encounter many changes, some actual, some more subtle, wrought by the war . . . things would never be exactly the same again!

In the year 1946 our parents were firmly established in their home atl703 Chicago Ave. where they would live out their lives. The Arenzville era was behind. They were now a partof the church, social, business, and community life of Savanna. Brother Dwight was in the second grade at the Avenue School. Sister Shirley was in the seventh grade there, blissfully unaware that H.S. freshman Bill Ritchie was in her future. Sister Joyce was a High School Junior and just possible aware of classmate Darwin Goss.

Brother Lee , discharged in December of '45 had begun a storybook acquaintence with Clarice Shadewald which was to develop into their marrying in December. Lee returned to the sand business and was to continue in that career until retirement time. Brother Abb was discharged from the Navy in July. Joyce Dawne Beard waited out Abb's war time teaching a country school and now went out to marry him in the chapel on Treasure Island. Abb also entered the sand business for awhile but then followed the oil drilling and road building business finally settling in Oregon which continues to be their home. Sister Muriel had married Harold Buck a year earlier. Harold had been deferred from service duty due to an ear problem and had been furnishing Dad much appreciated help in the sand business. Now

They began farming Dad's Florian farm. This venture evolved into the feed business which was to become a very successfull career for them.

I was discharged from the Navy in mid-March of '46 and also returned to the sand business. I had given only scant consideration to the feasibility of going into the electronics field which, in retrospect, may have been a milestone mistake. My Navy schooling and experience in maintainence would have given me the foundation to get into the rapidly expanding television and electronic fields. One can only speculate how such a move might have altered our lives but at the time the sand business seemed more attractive.

Frances and I and four-yearold Kirby returned to our tiny house in Highland Park. Needing a car and low on the waiting list for a new one, we bought our first auto, a 1937 "60" Ford. That car was pretty well worn out when we got it but it served us for a year. Needing bigger and better housing we set about building our second house on a lot a block west of our first one. I designed the new house and constructed the concrete block basement myself but hired a carpenter crew from Lanark to built the rest of it. Our total cost was about $6000. We sold the old one to Edgar Harry for $3500 plus his 1944 Ford car (as a mailman he had priority to buy a new one). This made a satisfying and profitable deal for all. Son Jan was born January 5, 1947 shortly after we moved into the new house.

Not a part of 1946 but a part of our war story was Abb, Lee, and I taking flying lessons. The G.I. Bill, misused by us as by many others, furnished the opportunity and we all earned pilots licences in 1948 and had the same experience, once the free lessons were used we couldn't afford to fly. My total flying time is just 51 hours, one hour beyond that required for a licence.

The Albert Nicol family was not to be immune to the problems which develop as the families of the children begin to build their individual lives. In the immediate post-war years it soon became obvious that there just was not enough room in the sand business for all of us. From this situation developed one of the most regretted episodes of my life, a bitter quarrel with my father. The basic disagreement came from my feeling that, having contributed more time, labor and enthusiasm to the formative years of the Savanna business, I should be more than just another laborer in the overall game plan. While Dad recognized and appreciated my point of view he still had to consider his own still growing family. To my shame I was not big enough to simply walk away from that business and seek out a new career elsewhere, rather we allowed the quarrel to degenerate until for a period of several months we could not speak to each other.

Finally our Christian training came to the rescue. On a well-remembered Sunday morning I went to Dad's house and said that I could not go to the Lord's Supper worthily so long as our quarrel presisted. In a tearful moment we shook hands and time has long since erased the bitterness.

Having now definately left the sand business I now had to find some thing to do. Gardening had always been a pleasant avocation for me and my building and machinery skills pointed to farming as an attractive way of life. Only partly in jest I said that I knew a lot of pretty stupid people who were making it farming, why not I? Fortunately the Good Lord deals kindly with children and fools!

I made several trips into Wisconsin looking at farms advertized for sale in farm magazines and almost bought one near Merrill. Fortunately Frances had the good sense to balk at moving so far away. Then we learned of a farm operation for sale in the Polsgrove area some six and one-half miles northwest of Mt. Carroll. In September

of 1948 we purchased that operation -- land, crop, livestock, and equipment for about $15,000. This buying "lock, stock, & barrel" is not the usual way farms are started and found me suddenly responsible for chores the evening of the purchase.

The land was an L-shaped 120 acres bounded on the long east side by the Plum River. The most productive field was about 30 acres of river bottom land which was however subject to disasterous flood-every few years. About 35 acres of upland completed the tillable acreage. The balance of the farm was pretty good blue grass pasture with some brushy waste land. The initial purchase included 10 milk cows, 4 bred sows, 80 laying hens, 2 dogs, anda supply of cats. The buildings were a small rather rundown dairy barn and silo, an old horse barn, a small hog house, a two stall garage, and a real nice chicken house.

The house was the outstanding feature of the farm. It had been built in the 1920's so extravagantly that the owners got into financial trouble and lost the whole farm. On the ground floor was a large kitchen, a pantry, a dining room, a living room, and a full front porch. The second floor had four bedrooms, a bath, and a full glassed-in sun porch. The basement had a fruit cellar, a utility room and a coal bin along with a large wood or coal fired furnace which provided heating for the entire house. There was a bottle gas range for cooking in the kitchen.

A 32 volt electric system furnished lights and power to pump water into an attic tank for water pressure for the bath and kitchen. A bank of storage batteries had to be charged every few days using a gasoline powered generator in the basement. The 32 volt system was discarded in a few years when the federally funded R.E.A. came into our area and furnished conventional 110-220 service. Electricty and a bathroom were not commomly found in the neighboring homes at that time. This large stucco-clad house was still in pretty good condition when we bought it needing only minor repairs.

Financial problems were are immediate and constant companions. We had taken over a Federal Land Bank loan in the purchase deal and counted on selling our Savanna house to pay the remainder of the contract. When the house in town proved harder to sell than we anticipated we were in big trouble fortunately rescued when Clarence Doty took the house off our hands. The local bankers naturally looked upon our financial sheet as a disaster area however the P.C.A. were willing to furnish us some operating funds. Our meager income was from the sale of milk, eggs, grain, and pork. Fortunately with no rent to pay and producing most of our own food we managed pretty well even though netting only about $1000 per year. If there was a bright side to that dismal picture it was that we never did earn enough to have to pay income taxes.

Probably that first evening when I sat down to milk ten cows by hand it should have dawned on me that there was an awful lot about farming which I knew nothing about. We had some very nice neighbors, noteably the Darryl Rockafellows, who helped me with a lot of little problems. Also I read everything I could find about the business of farming and was soon able to compete favorable with my neighbors. While it has never been my nature to readily admit having made mistakes, there were many nights when I went to bed very depressed realizing that I had a "tiger by the tail". Fortunately I have always had a great capacity for work and was able thus to simply overrun manyof my mistakes.

An early move was trading the F-12 Farmall and related machinery which came in the purchase deal for a Ford tractor and some modern equipment. When the R.E.A. made it possible I also installed a used Surge milking system to take much of the drudgery out of those chores. Renovating the buildings and fenses were fun jobs for me and caring for the farm animals I also found interesting and challenging.

Although we were fifteen miles from Savanna we continued to be active members of St. Peters congregation there. Our farming years parallel the tenure of much respected Pastor Hillemann in that church. It was while he was there, in 1952, that their new church was built however my farm work prevented me from doing as much as I might have liked toward that project. It was several years into our farm stay before we felt able to afford a TV set being one of the last in the neihgborhood to get one.

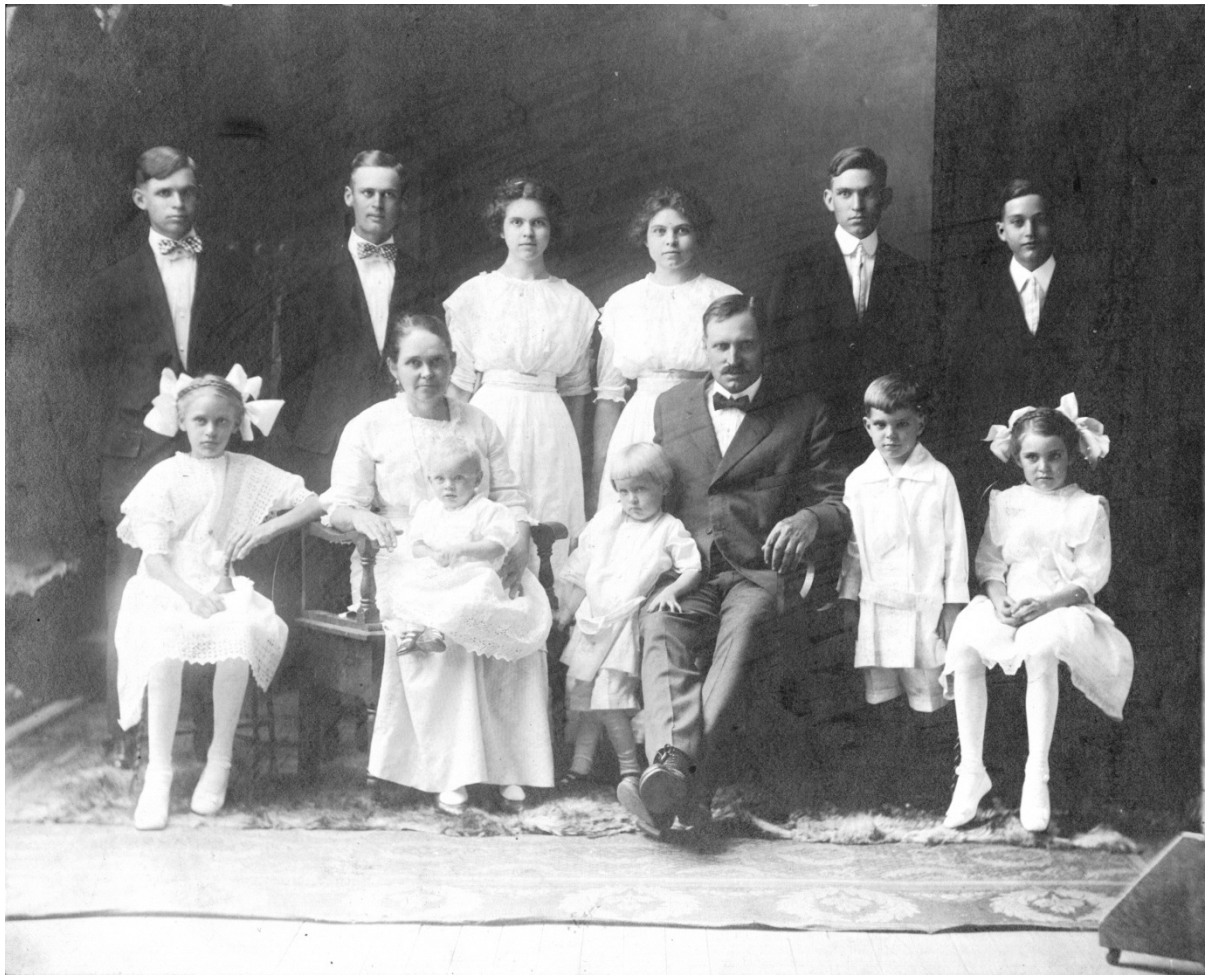
One room country schools were still in use in our Woodland Township although in their last years. As district treasurer I had the interesting job of selling these buildings at auction when in 1950 the rural districts combined with Mt. Carroll. Kirby attended the Polsgrove, the Zion, and the Olive one room schools for his first years of schooling. Jan became a first grader just in time to begin his education in the town schools. A landmark highlight of our farm years was the birth of daughter Susan on May 12, 1951. She was to be just old enought to start her schooling in Shannon after our farm adventure had ended.

Upon the recommendation of Clarence Doty I became a Producers Seed Corn Dealer about 1951. Hybrid seed corn was just then being used by almost all farmers and my job was calling upon my Woodland Twp. neighbors, taking their orders, and delivering the seed at planting time. Apparently I done well enough to have my territory more than doubled for the next season. From this experience I learned a lot about corn growing and about on-the-farm selling. This along with the goodwill I developed in the area proved to be very valueable as I drifted into the feed business a few years later which events I have written about in "My Story of a Feed Business".

In retrospect our seven years of farming, while entered into with the reckless enthusiasm of young people not too knowledgeable of what they were doing, were pleasant growing years for our family.

The following pages of photos of the Nicol family were added by Molly Daniel from images she located on the internet, 2015.

Gustav and Mary C. (Tribout) Nicol



Mary and Gustav Nicol (Sr.) family, 1914 - Back row: Edward, Irvin, Ida, Alma, Albert, Royal Front row: Elsie, Mary holding Elmer, Gustav Jr., Gustav Sr., Howard, Louise.

Photo from Ancestry.com (contributed by member *keagasam)*

Albert Nicol and Ida (Nobis) Nicol wedding, Arenville, IL, Nov. 2, 1919
From left: (?) - first woman is either Selma Nobis or Sarah Roegge - Royal Nicol, Albert Nicol, Ida (Nobis) Nicol, Otto Lovekamp, Elsie Nicol.

Photo from Ancestry.com (contributed by member *keagasam)*

Ida Louise Nobis