HOT TYPE

Danville Lynchings

July 25, 1903

n May 25, 1895, two 21-year-old Vermilion County men had been lynched by an angry mob, mostly farmers, who were certain that the men had brutally assaulted young Laura Barnett of Indianola.

After breaking into the county jail, the men snatched John W. Halls Jr. and William Royce from their cells, put a 15-foot-long rope around each of their necks, took them to the Gilbert Street Bridge over the Vermilion River, and after an agonizingly long wait, threw them over the side. Halls died almost immediately, but Royce struggled, and it may have taken as long as 15 minutes before he expired.

No one was ever convicted of the murders. No one could identify any members of the lynching party. Even a local judge who had been at the courthouse and tried to dissuade the mob said he could identify no one. It was just too dark, he said.

As bad as those murders were, however, the 1903 lynching of John D. Metcalf, also by an angry mob in Danville, was much worse.

It came amid an eruption of race-based lynchings throughout the United States. There had been at least 115 lynchings of blacks in 1900, 130 in 1901 and 92 in 1902. In June 1903, a black teacher from Belleville had been lynched after he allegedly shot the superintendent of schools in St. Clair County.

In Danville, there was heightened concern about the increasing number of blacks in the community, attracted there by construction work on the interurban railroad line being built from Urbana. Two incidents had exacerbated the situation — the death of an elderly white man, allegedly by a black man, and the assault of a white woman, also supposedly by a black.

John Metcalf had come to Danville from Evansville, Ind., after race riots there. He got a job with the interurban construction crew. On the night of July 25, Metcalf was outside Shermayer's saloon on East Main Street, when he ran into Henry Gatterman, a local butcher, and another man. The men got into an argument over whether Gatterman had called Metcalf a racial epithet, a row ensued, Metcalf drew a revolver and twice shot Henry Gatterman. Gatterman died a short time later and Metcalf was arrested and taken to the Danville City Building.

The Vermilion County Jail in Danville where Sheriff Hardy Whitlock and his deputies made a heroic stand in 1903. Photo courtesy of Vermilion County Museum.





Sheriff Hardy Whitlock, third from left in front row, poses with sheriff's deputies in front of the sheriff's residence in Danville. Whitlock's children are pictured in the back row. Photo courtesy of Vermilion County Museum.

Within minutes a mob estimated at between 3,000 and 4,000 people had gathered outside the building, some crying "Get a rope" and "Burn him at the stake."

Police, armed with guns and clubs, stood guard at the building but apparently made little effort to stop the horde. Danville Mayor John Beard was at the building and later said, "With all the officers of the law in the city the lynching could not have been prevented. It was useless to shoot into the mob."

The crowd jammed the city building. Metcalf was found in a cell, "thrown to the floor, kicked almost to death and was then thrown through a window into the heart of the howling mob in the street," according to a story in *The Champaign Daily Gazette*. He was dragged through the streets and apparently died as he was being kicked and beaten. A rope was strung over a telephone pole and Metcalf's corpse was hoisted above the crowd. Shots were fired into it. One shot sliced through the rope, and the body fell to the pavement. It was again dragged through the streets, then set afire in front of the county jail. "Hundreds of women and children watched the sickening sight," said *The Gazette*.

The mob then turned its attention on the jail, where two other black men were being held. Sheriff Hardy Whitlock stepped outside and begged the crowd to leave. "You are doing wrong," said Whitlock, who had been a constable in Danville in 1895 when Halls and Royce had been lynched. "You will regret what you have already done tomorrow and you should go home and allow the law to take its course."

After a long siege in which the crowd tried to break down the jail's doors with a battering ram and Whitlock and his deputies fired shots into the crowd, it finally dispersed. For days afterward, Whitclock was congratulated by everyone from President Theodore Roosevelt to Danville's banking community as well as in editorials in many of the nation's newspapers.

The Danville Daily Democrat condemned the mob but also blamed Metcalf. "The men who participated in the mob Saturday night can offer no excuse for the lynching of the negro, nor the scenes of violence which will make the night one long to be remembered by the citizens of Danville. There can be no doubt but that the negro Metcalf deserved the punishment of death, but it would have been inflicted by the court of Vermilion County had the negro been given a trial. A legal execution would have satisfied every desire for vengeance and would have been ample warning to the criminal, both black and white."

No one was ever charged with the murder of John Metcalf. Hardy Whitlock later served as the county treasurer and eventually moved to near Detroit, where he died in 1948 at the age of 81. He is buried at a cemetery in Georgetown, his home town.

WILL.

Operating In The **Open**

The bridal party at the November 1923 Ku Klux Klan wedding at the Illinois Theatre in Urbana. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.

HOT TYPE

Nov. 26, 1923

n the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan was at its social and political height, operating as openly as the Boy Scouts, the PTA and the Chamber of Commerce.

In Urbana, it used the recently purchased Illinois Theater for its meetings and ceremonies, including perhaps the most unusual wedding in the history of Champaign County — a Klan-officiated union, on Nov. 26, 1923, of Miss Helen Reynolds of Sidney, whose father, J. J. Reynolds, was head of the county's chapter of the Klan, and

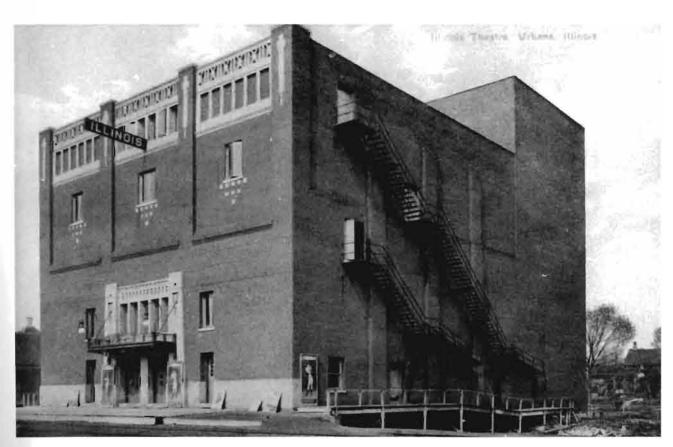
It was, The News-Gazette reported, "the first Klan wedding in the county and the Harry Lee of Homer. ceremony was performed by Rev. O. K. Doney of Urbana, a state officer of the

The marriage ceremony was part of a two-day Klan convention that also featured organization." the "naturalization" of 600 new members, a Friday night banquet at the Inman Hotel in Champaign, the dedication of the theater to the Klan, an open meeting at Crystal Lake Park in Urbana and a musical program following the wedding.

The keynote speaker for the weekend's events was Dr. Hiram Wesley Evans, a Texas dentist who earlier in 1923 had overthrown William Simmons, the head of the Klan since 1915. Although there were no quotes in The News-Gazette story from Evans's appearance here, he was paraphrased. "Mr. Evans gave the history of the order, financial and otherwise, and made an address that was free from bitterness and cast no reflection on anyone or their religion," The News-Gazette reported.

"The negro problem, he stated, had been a real problem for many years and is still unsolved and he does not expect the Klan to solve it, but he does not believe in their intermarriage with whites and for them to be treated on an equality with whites."





Illinois Theatre in Urbana. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.

The Klan was nearing its peak membership in the United States, an estimated three million in 1924. The Klan's political clout was so strong at that time that it is credited with getting Congress to pass the Johnson-Reed Act, which restricted the flow of immigrants into the country.

Although the Klan was anti-black, anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish and anti-union, the organization managed to portray itself in positive terms, standing up for all things "American," including strong morals, fraternity and, especially, temperance and the enforcement of Prohibition.

Locally, it had a presence in many Protestant churches. In December 1922, for example, 20 members of the Klan entered a revival meeting at the First Baptist Church of Urbana, gave "a liberal purse of money" to Rev. Arthur Burch of the church and asked him to read a manuscript from the pulpit. He complied. The congregation, The News-Gazette story said, applauded the masked Klansmen.

"I am not a member of the Ku Klux Klan," Rev. Burch said after the Klansmen had left his services, "but the times are such that men from all parts of the country are flocking for such an organization for the enforcement of our laws."

Also in 1922, Klan members marched openly through Champaign at the funeral of W. P. Foote, a local grain broker. And there was a large Klan demonstration near Fisher, with an estimated 3,000 Klansmen taking part.

The Klan became more bold in 1923, with at least three local cross-burnings. The first was in early April in the area near the Champaign Country Club when a 40-foot high flaming cross lighted the sky. A few nights later a burning cross was planted in front of the University of Illinois Administration Building. And on April 18, a large cross was discovered in flames in north Urbana. No Klansmen stayed at any of the incidents.

Later that summer a huge Klan meeting was held at Crystal Lake Park. The News-Gazette published a photo of the gathering but did not report on what was said.

In 1925, the Klan's image was severely damaged by disclosures that the its grand dragon in Indiana, David Stephenson, had battered and raped a woman who later killed herself by taking poison. He was convicted of second-degree murder. In addition, state laws against wearing masks cuts into Klan membership, as did reports that some of its leaders were swindling

In Urbana, the Klan-owned Illinois Theatre burned down in 1927 and was never rebuilt. The Klan never regained the prominence it had locally just a few years earlier. And by 1933, the Depression and bad publicity had reduced national Klan membership to an estimated 100,000.

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The Death Triangle

July 22, 1926

T t may have been the bloodiest year in Champaign County history. The coroner's office reported that there were 51 violent deaths in 1926, including 11 suicides, eight murders and six train fatalities. It included the July 22 murder of Morgan Knox, the mysterious July 29 death of Mrs. Anna Carmody Edwards and the Aug. 8 suicide of J. J. "Jake" Michaels, a former Champaign police chief. All, it turned out,

The blood began flowing when the body of Knox, a 54-year-old black man, was found along a dirt road northeast of Urbana. He had been shot 17 times. Almost were connected. immediately, Carmody Edwards was implicated. Knox had owed her money and she was listed as the beneficiary on his life insurance policy.

But eight days later, Carmody Edwards was found shot through the head on a country road south of the Champaign Country Club. A suicide note was found nearby. But police turned their suspicions on Michaels, because of business associations he

Michaels was questioned at a coroner's inquest at the Champaign police station, had with Carmody Edwards. He told the jury that he believed Carmody Edwards shot herself, but the jury recommended that Michaels be held. As he was being led away by Sheriff John Gray, Michaels remarked, "I suppose I'll be charged with accessory to murder." Gray responded, "I'm sorry, that's what it will have to be."

Michaels then raised a revolver he had concealed and shot himself in the head. A fourth principal, Allen Thomas Jones, later divulged details that seemed to explain the case. Jones, who was convicted of being an accessory to the murder of Knox and was sentenced to 14 years in prison, told how he had assisted Michaels and Carmody Edwards. But it wasn't until Knox's body was exhumed and an autopsy was done that authorities learned he also had been poisoned.

Jones told police that Michaels had helped him buy a new car in exchange for Jones's help with "a job." On July 22, after he had finished his shift at the Illinois Central yards, Jones went to Carmody Edwards's house and was told to help remove

"I believe he's going to die and I don't want anything like that to happen in my a sickly-looking Knox. house," she told him. "You've got to take him away."

Jones resisted, but Michaels said, "We were good to you when you bought that car and we can make things still easier for you."

Carmody Edwards added, "You'd better take him, for something's going to happen to you if you don't. The Ku Klux Klan will get you just the same as it got

They put Knox in the back of Jones's car, took him to the rural area and dumped the body, which they then riddled with bullets.

Later, State's Attorney Roy Cline announced that the body of another victim— Mrs. Mary Wells, allegedly shot July 6 by her husband — had been unearthed and it

"I am convinced that Mrs. Carmody Edwards poisoned Mrs. Wells," Cline said. was found that she also had been poisoned. "I am convinced she killed Morgan Knox. I am convinced she killed other colored residents of Champaign-Urbana. I am convinced that C. H. Mathews, colored undertaker, and Maria Smith, housekeeper for Mrs. Carmody, were scheduled for death

Cline said that Carmody Edwards "was in the habit of calling on colored people at the hands of Mrs. Carmody." when they were ill and it makes me wonder how far this poisoning business has gone. The death triangle story was made famous nationally when it was told on the

radio in 1938 and again, in 1952 on television's Big Story series on NBC.

The Great **Train** Robbery **Solved**

Sept. 8, 1926

hampaign County and The News-Gazette couldn't have been prouder after three thieves who pulled off a \$480,000 jewel heist on an Illinois Central passenger train were captured within 12.5 hours.

The trio had come south from Chicago on an IC train, and 20 minutes north of Champaign, they broke into a stateroom occupied by three diamond salesmen. They pulled guns on the salesmen, took a satchel full of jewels, bound their victims with steel wire and hopped off the train in Champaign. They took a cab to Urbana, where they hired another cab to drive them to Kankakee.

By then, police had learned of the robbery and set up roadblocks on all major routes outside of Champaign-Urbana. In Paxton, the thieves and their innocent driver came upon a police officer standing in the middle of the road, swinging a red lantern. One of the bandits shoved a gun into the back of the driver and told him to "drive for your life." Two blocks later, as the car sped past, a second officer fired on the car and punctured a tire.

Four miles later, the car overheated, and the group was forced to walk in the rain to Loda. They ditched the jewels at the Loda stockyards, then headed to Buckley, still on foot, where they eventually collapsed and fell asleep inside a dry barn owned by George Pacey. They awakened to find themselves surrounded by lawmen.

"I'm glad you'll be able to take a crack at them down here," a Chicago detective told The News-Gazette. "These crooks have too many influential friends in Chicago."

State's Attorney Roy Cline kept up the tough-guy talk. "I'm going to do my best to see that they get life," he said. "We want every crook in the world to know that Champaign County is bad medicine."

The men pleaded guilty and were sentenced to life in prison, which, in those days, meant they'd be eligible for parole in 10 years. "I could see nothing for me in making a monkey of myself by standing trial in this case," said 42-year-old George Brown, alias Meyer Mendelshon.

The day after the thieves were captured, The News-Gazette wrote in an editorial: "Bandits of every description are finding Champaign-Urbana and vicinity poor hunting grounds."

After the three had pleaded guilty, another editorial hailed the local law enforcement. "Champaign County has just given the remainder of the state a lesson in law enforcement, a lesson that it would be well for certain for other sections of the state to copy," the newspaper boasted.

"It is not the punishment of the three that is the big issue. It is the lesson that Champaign County is teaching the 'big' fellows. It shows that they do not come too 'big' for Champaign County. It is to be deplored that in some instances, in some localities, the so-called 'big' criminals do not fare as badly as do those of lesser reputation. But in Champaign County there is a brand of justice that reaches the big fellow, and no doubt those who are inclined to commit felonies will give this serious consideration before trying any of their stunts here."

KKK's Theatre Burns

April 3, 1927

hen it opened on March 3, 1908, the Illinois Theatre was hailed as "The Theatre Beautiful" with the largest stage in Illinois outside of Chicago. Financed with local capital, it was the pride and joy of Urbana and was designed to be every bit as elegant and comfortable as the Walker Opera House on the west side of Wright Street.

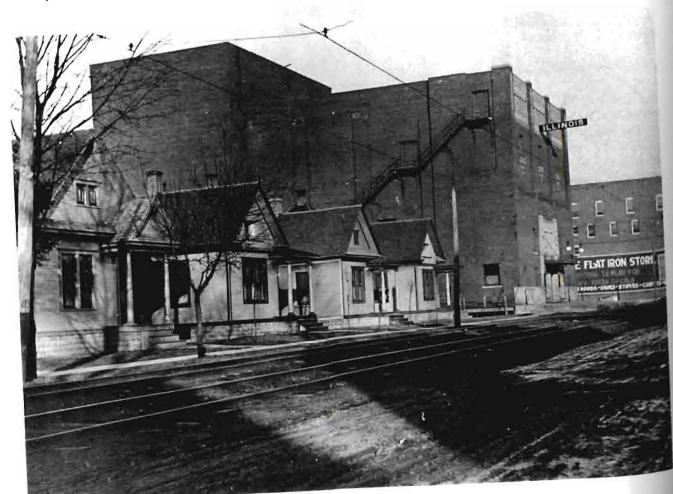
But by the 1920s, the theater had degenerated into a venue for burlesque, amateur shows, prize fights, wrestling matches, even cock fights. In its last years it was the home of the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan.

On April 3, 1927, the brief life of the Illinois Theatre ended in a mysterious blaze, the origin of which was never determined. For years, there were rumors that it was burned down by local enemies of the Klan, but that was never proven.

In 1906, the Illinois Theatre was proposed for a spot behind the Flatiron Building (which also burned down, in 1948) between Main Street and Railroad Street (now Springfield Avenue) in downtown Urbana. The lavish plans for the building once included not only an opera house but a store, a dance hall and a rooftop garden. Those were scaled back so that the final \$55,000 structure was nothing more than a theater, but a grand theater it was.

Designed by architect Joseph Royer, who also designed the Champaign County Courthouse, Urbana High School and a number of other local buildings, the theater was 80 feet high on the Main Street side and 127 feet long by 70 feet wide. It had a seating capacity of 1,400 on four levels — the parquet and dress circle, the first balcony, seating capacity of and gallery. In addition there were five boxes on each side of the stage at three levels. The boxes were decorated with roses and cupids.

The Illinois Theatre in Urbana. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.



"The interior of the building is handsomely decorated," reported *The Champaign Daily News*. "The decorations are of an old rose tint and all seats and draperies will be in accord with that color scheme. The walls are harmoniously tinted, the painting and penciling are in keeping. In fact, the artistic sense of this great University community has been consulted in every way."

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The stage was 68 feet by 42 feet with a 35-foot proscenium arch. There were 14 dressing rooms, each with hot and cold water.

The Illinois opened with a performance of the musical Marrying Mary, starring Marie Cahill. The show's producers revised the lyrics to some of the songs, The Daily News noted, at one point mentioning the rivalry between Urbana and Champaign.

Over the years the Illinois was graced with local musicians Sol and Julius Cohen, as well as nationally and internationally known performers including Al Jolson, Enrico Caruso, Eddie Cantor, Otis Skinner and the great Sarah Bernhardt.

The latter appeared at the theater in October 1917, during her 10th and final American tour, and performed in two productions, *Cleopatra* and *From the Theatre to the Field of Honor*. Julius Cohen called the performance a "theatrical event which stands out in the history of the Twin Cities," which did not mean that it was outstanding. He said that Bernhardt's 72-year-old "voice of gold had deteriorated into a shrill falsetto." In fact, the most memorable part of her troupe's visit to Urbana was a small fire that rousted 30 members of the cast from the Columbian Hotel in Urbana. No one was injured, but *The Daily News* noted that many of the French girls left the hotel in scant attire. Mme. Bernhardt was staying not in the hotel but in a private railroad car parked at the Big Four depot.

In 1923 the theater building was sold to the Zenith Amusement Co., which leased it to the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan held a variety of events in the building, from Christmas parties and lectures to a Klan wedding and banquets.

The building also was available for rental and was used by local schools. The last event in the building, in fact, was a production by the Columbia School parent-teacher association on the Friday night before the early Sunday morning fire.

The blaze was reported by a passing University of Illinois student at 2:15 a.m. By the time firefighters got there, attempts to save the building were futile, and they devoted their efforts to preventing the fire from spreading to nearby buildings.

Although the cause of the fire was never determined, the exalted cyclops of the Klan in Champaign County, J. J. Reynolds, said that he had received numerous threatening phone calls recently, although the threats were made against him and not the Klan. He refused to reveal to reporters the content of the calls except to say that one man "cussed" him and "called him names" before hanging up.

Although the Klan pledged to rebuild on site of the Illinois Theatre, it never did. The brick walls of the building were later used as the shell of an apartment complex on Springfield Avenue.

Last Hanging

Dec. 23, 1927

ohn W. McKinney, the tough old Champaign County jailer, said he was glad that he wouldn't have to witness any more hangings. The Legislature had determined that no county, except Cook, would carry out its own executions. Capital punishment in cases from the other 101 Illinois counties would be inflicted only at the Joliet and Menard state prisons.

So the hanging of Herschell Andrews on Dec. 23, 1927, would be the last one in Champaign County. McKinney had been there in 1898 when Dick Collier was hanged and in 1921 when Johnny Christmas was put to death.

"McKinney is a believer in the old adage," The News-Gazette wrote, "that there is some good in the worst of us."

Andrews, 35, had been convicted of murdering Thomas Tate, a 65-year-old laborer, on Christmas morning 1926 at a restaurant and pool hall on North Fourth Street in Champaign. "Andrews had an idea that drunkenness should excuse a man of a crime," The News-Gazette reported. "No argument could change his mind on that score."

John McKinney said that Andrews was a model prisoner during his nearly oneyear stay in the jail. "In all that time, the colored man never caused him the least bit of trouble," The News-Gazette wrote. "At all times, he was considerate of the turnkey. Jacob Becker, the night turnkey, also speaks highly of Andrews as a prisoner."

Twice before, Andrews had been scheduled to die. An April 29 hanging was avoided when the state Supreme Court agreed to hear an appeal. And a Dec. 16 hanging date was delayed so that a local jury could rule on whether Andrews was sane. The 12 men ruled that he was, and the final execution date was set. He would die at sunup — 7:21 a.m. — on Dec. 23.

On the night before he died, Andrews wrote a note to the wife of Sheriff George Davis, thanking her for the last dinner she had prepared for him. "Here is thanks for your most wonderful dinner and really enjoyed it my last remarks to you and family," he wrote. "I appreciate your kindness and shall pray that we all shall meet at the table of the bride and groom in heaven because there has been a crown of life laid up in heaven for me that only God can give."

The following morning, a crowd of 200 people gathered within the 15-foot-high white pine stockade of the county jail. Two ministers were the only other black men within the walls. As one of them offered a prayer, the rest of the men in the audience removed their hats.

Then Andrews spoke. "Well folks, all I want to say to you is that I'm going to die with God in my heart. I found Jesus when I was in jail and Jesus Christ is in me now. I'm strong in the Lord; the Lord is my shepherd.

"I want you to know that I bear malice toward no one, that I have no hate in my heart. I hope that you will all be at peace with God as I am, when you go to meet him.

"I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year."

Less than 10 minutes later Herschell Andrews was dead, and Champaign County's gallows would be put away for good.

'An Awful Crash'

May 31, 1928

here were worse accidents in the history of the Illinois Traction System, but not in East Central Illinois. Seven people were killed on Thursday, May 31, 1928, and 15 more were injured when two interurban cars collided a mile west of Fithian.

The crash claimed the life of motorman Frank Craig, who was driving the westbound car. Also killed were Dr. Charles Johnson of Champaign, his son, Dr. George Johnson of Terre Haute, Ind., Fred Gulick of Danville, Dennis Pyle and Ira Clodfelter of White Heath, and E. R. Townsend of Chicago.

The Johnson deaths were particularly tragic. Charles Johnson was 85 years old and a respected physician and historian. He had been honored in Champaign-Urbana just two days earlier and had delivered a Memorial Day address on Wednesday at the Champaign High School assembly and at a dinner club. He was a former member of the state board of health, the Grand Army of the Republic organization and had written books on Illinois medical history. One of his sons was a vice president of Illinois Power and Light Co., the parent company of the Illinois Traction System.

His other son, George, had met his father in Danville for a meeting and instead of heading back to Terre Haute after the meeting decided to accompany his aged father back to Champaign. They were seated together in the smoking compartment of their westbound train — a wooden car that took the brunt of the collision with the larger, steel car — and apparently died instantly from head injuries.

Witnesses said the cars were moving fairly quickly. The westbound car was supposed to have turned off at a switch track, allowing the eastbound train to remain on the main line. But the westbound train didn't make it to the switch before it was struck by the eastbound train. The eastbound car was moving at 40 to 45 mph. The motorman of the eastbound car said that he could see the collision coming and applied the air brake, slowing the car to about 20 mph.

Farmer C. J. Smith was working near the scene of the crash and told The News-Gazette that he heard the screams of the passengers above the roar of the collision. When he looked up, the two cars had fused into one.

"There was an awful crash," Smith said, "and then everything was quiet. I ran as fast as I could to the two coaches and when I got there, people were just beginning to move. It looked like everybody that wasn't dead had been stunned."

Wreckage was strewn for 500 feet. "It was a scene one wants to forget but cannot," said P. E. Roberts of Champaign, who was driving upon the nearby state road when he

"Seat backs were ripped off to improvise stretchers for the wounded, and doctors, hastily summoned, ran back and forth. In the excitement no one had thought of opening the first aid cabinets in the cars," Roberts said.

A passenger in the eastbound car said the train's motorman, Craig, had been talking to another railroad employee, as the trains bore down on each other.

"I did not want to make a spectacle of myself by shouting a warning," said B. W. Taintor of Urbana, "but when we passed the west end of the next switch, leading to the siding which the westbound car was trying to make, I sprang to my feet shouting,

"Craig looked up and pulled the emergency. At the time we were 250 to 300 feet from the other car. The brakes held fast and we slid into the other car at a rate, I should judge, of 30 miles an hour. Our speed at the time Craig threw on the emergency was, I should guess, 45 miles an hour," Taintor said.

But others in the eastbound car disputed Taintor's assertion. Another passenger said he didn't see anyone talking to Craig. Others said that Craig was standing at his post the entire time. It was suggested that Craig may have suffered a heart attack or

A Vermilion County coroner's jury was unable to assign blame to anyone. "The actual cause of the disastrous wreck ... probably will always remain a mystery," The Danville Commercial-News reported on June 9.

Health District Opens

The St. James Hotel, an infamous boarding house in north Champaign, was a frequent target of public health and building code inspectors in the first half of the 20th century. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.

Jan. 3, 1938

he Champaign-Urbana Health District, funded mostly with \$11,500 in federal money, opened on Monday, Jan. 3, 1938, with a broad mission focused on controlling sickness in the community.

That meant everything from instructing and educating people on communicable diseases, establishing immunization programs, surveying sanitation in the cities, eradicating venereal diseases and improving the health of children to cooperation with physicians in distributing reports and statistical information.

"The public must realize that we are not setting ourselves up as policemen to patrol the sick," said the health district's director, Dr. G. Howard Gowen. "For their good, and for their neighbor's good, we are trying to see that the sick in the district abide by the rules and regulations of the health ordinances and laws."

In just its first few months, the department's small staff (Gowen, five nurses and two office workers) undertook a number of projects.

After displaying one milk can that contained a mouse (another had a worm), the agency proposed a fresh milk ordinance. "We don't think the milk is as good as it should be," he said, "both from our own experience and from comparisons with other cities. The milk is not handled properly from the cow to the pasteurizing plant."

The department suggested a restaurant ordinance that would require owners to serve pasteurized milk, provide sanitary lavatory facilities for patrons and employees and mandate sanitary dishwashing.

The agency aimed to stamp out diphtheria with an immunization program. It set up a prenatal clinic for the indigent, hoping to eliminate blindness in babies caused by venereal disease.

But the health district made its biggest splash with a grave report on housing and sanitation conditions in Champaign's and Urbana's primarily poor, black north-



side neighborhoods. Through the work of Karl Lohmann, a professor at the University of Illinois, and the Champaign County Tuberculosis Association, the health district found remarkably poor sanitation and housing conditions on the north side.

"Apparently the average family in these sections of town is obliged to go outside the home for its toilet and water facilities. These things seem almost unbelievable in a community like this where high standards of health and sanitation are supposed to prevail," Lohmann said.

In a survey of 80 north-side homes, he found that 68 had outdoor toilets and that most had no indoor plumbing. In some instances, two or three families were sharing the same outdoor privy. Many of the outhouses had no doors or screens and other wretched conditions. "The surprising thing is that the community has not had a great deal of typhoid fever under such conditions," said Gowen.

Housing conditions may have been even more deplorable. A family of eight in Urbana was found living in a two-room shack. In Champaign, four adults and a child occupied an abandoned streetcar. At one time, as many as nine persons, all with measles, lived in the streetcar.

Many homes had leaky roofs, missing floor boards, and were without windows or with rags or papers stuffed in openings.

Most of the north-side families were on relief and were receiving \$40 to \$60 a month, about \$10 of which went to rent.

City officials reported crime and fire prevention problems in the neighborhood. Champaign Police Chief Roy Argo said that 90 percent of the city's arrests occured in an area bounded by Neil Street, and Bradley, Wright and University Avenues.

"These things are bad for the occupants themselves. They are also bad for the community at large," Lohmann said. "Studies in other cities reveal the fact that the slums are subsidized directly by higher residential districts and by the central downtown business districts. The higher residential areas pay taxes far in excess of the cost of municipal services rendered."

Lohmann, who also was chairman of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, recommended a cleanup campaign and an effort to replace the dilapidated housing. "Let us remember," he said, "that we are supposed to be living in communities of higher ideals of community cleanliness than in days gone by and with a greater knowledge of health."

And although conditions improved somewhat in the 1930s and '40s, it wouldn't be until the 1970s and its urban renewal programs that some of the worst of the north-side housing was finally eliminated.

Examples of local substandard housing as documented in a report prepared for the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission in 1938. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.





Vice In The City

Feb. 16, 1939

HOT TYPE

ambling, prostitution and illegal liquor sales were as much a part of the Champaign environment as the Boneyard that overflowed its banks every spring and the soot that flew from the passing Illinois Central trains.

The proximity of railroad workers, soldiers from Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul and University of Illinois students meant that there was a strong local demand for vice. And local officials, while not endorsing it, made no effort to run it out of town. It brought money into the city and kept voters, particularly blacks on the north side of town, happy because they were allowed to run their own houses of gambling, prostitution and after-hours liquor sales without police interference.

But it was an embarrassment to local churches and to the University of Illinois. So just to make everyone happy, there were regular raids at gambling dens and brothels. There would be headlines in the papers — "Police Raid 4 Red Light Houses," for example — and the places would be shut down, usually just for the rest of the night.

The Daily Illini, the student newspaper at the UI, campaigned without success to stamp out vice with a series of articles from 1937 through 1939. It turned over evidence to city and university officials. No response. It tried the same with the state's attorney. No response.

But on Feb. 16, 1939, William Spurrier finally got some response from the city. He had to die to do it.

Spurrier, a 20-year-old sophomore engineering student from Toledo, Ohio, was part of a group of six underage students who had spent much of the evening of Feb. 15 drinking beer at The Midway, a lunch room and beer hall at 901 S. Fourth St. Looking for some more fun, the group took a cab north to Champaign's notorious red light district near the IC tracks. They went to Margaret Strothers' Pullman Hotel, a longtime brothel on North First Street. One of the boys rapped on the door; Strothers looked out the peephole and told them to go away. When one of the boys picked up a bottle and tossed it at the door, slightly cutting Strothers's face, she grabbed a gun and fired four shots at the boys. One of them struck Spurrier in the back and pierced his liver. He died the next day.

All of a sudden, there was a call for action. The News-Gazette published a front-page editorial calling for a house-cleaning in local government. University of Illinois trustees said they expected action from the Champaign city administration. The Daily Illini and The News-Gazette called for the resignation of do-nothing State's Attorney Fred Hammill, a Democrat. DI editors even testified before a grand jury about laxity in the prosecutor's office.

Local ministers joined the renewed crusade, accusing Hammill and Champaign Mayor James Flynn of ignoring the law. "For some 10 years [Champaign] has been the stronghold of prostitution and gambling," said the Rev. John O'Brien of St. John's Catholic Church. "Flagrant cases of open gambling are dismissed for lack of prosecution. Delays without number are granted, then finally the cases are dismissed. Houses of prostitution are closed in answer to a hue and cry, then when it dies down, they reopen."

Strothers was arrested, the Midway was shut down, UI students rallied against vice, and the state attorney general's office came in and conducted its own investigation. In the meantime, Champaign's city elections were just 12 days away and Mayor Flynn had six opponents.



A gambling peephole at the scene of a dice game holdup in June 1948. Photo courtesy of the Urbana Free Library Archives.

But it all seemed to be for show. Flynn still finished first in the primary runoff and eventually won reelection in the April general election.

Strothers was found not guilty of the murder of William Spurrier. The Midway reopened.

The special grand jury, organized by the attorney general's office, came in and indicted Flynn, the four other members of the Champaign City Council, Police Chief Roy Argo, State's Attorney Hamill and former Sheriff C. W. Roth. In most cases, the charge was malfeasance, a misdemeanor that carried a maximum penalty of a \$10,000 fine and removal from office.

But even that appeared to be suspiciously for show. The flawed indictments — it turned out that they didn't allege any particular violations — were tossed out by a Macon County judge in June. No one was tried, let alone convicted, for anything.

Like the floodwaters of the Boneyard and the soot of the passing IC trains, prostitution and gambling would be a part of Champaign for some time to come.

The Pullman Hotel on North Fourth Street in Champaign, scene of the notorious fatal shooting of University of Illinois student William Spurrier in 1939. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.



Mayor James Flynn casts his vote in a city election. News-Gazette photo



The Long Fight For Justice

Feb. 10, 1954

he history of race relations in Champaign-Urbana is probably no better or worse than that of other Midwestern cities of a similar size. The community was never cursed with the horrific lynchings or riots that other cities experienced around the turn of the century, but it did suffer racial unrest in the 1960s and '70s. And in the early 1960s the Illinois Human Rights Commission called Champaign-Urbana "the most segregated" community among the 15 largest in Illinois.

Although perhaps not as blatant as in some areas, there is no doubt that there was segregation of and discrimination against African-Americans until well into the 1970s

And although there was no single turning point in the lonely battle for racial justice, there were several small fights that ultimately led to a larger victory for the community's black residents. One of those fights began on Feb. 10, 1954, at a Campustown barber shop.

John's Barbershop at 506 E. Green St., C, closed that morning after University of Illinois senior Don Stokes walked into the shop and sat down on a bench.

"Sorry, fellow, we're closed," said John Barthelemy, the owner of the shop. When Stokes asked why, Barthelemy said, "We have to go to a funeral. We're closed the rest of the day."

A second black man tried to get a haircut the next day. "We're closed," Barthelemy told him.

Within weeks, UI students, most of them women who were members of the Student-Community Human Relations Council, began picketing a number of Campustown barber shops that refused to serve blacks. The demonstrations went on throughout the spring semester and resumed in the fall, finally concluding in November when the chairman of the human relations council announced that Negro students were now welcome at all campus barber shops.

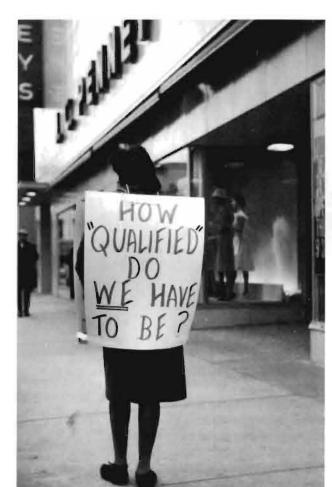
That was just one of the small advances made in arduous struggle for racial equality. As early as 1927, a black UI law student brought suit against a Campustown diner that refused to serve him. An all-white jury quickly found the restaurant owner not guilty and ordered the student to pay court costs.

In 1935 the 90 black students at the UI could eat only in the university's home economics cafeteria or at Boyd's Confectionary on South Wright Street. When Boyd's closed, the black students' choices were further limited. No other lunch rooms or restaurants would serve them. After a year a group of campus organizations, community religious leaders and UI faculty members set up a non-profit cooperative lunch room with a non-discrimination policy.

The broader community finally began to move toward some form of racial equality in the years after World War II. In 1946, five campus restaurants, threatened with court action,

agreed to stop discriminating. In 1947, the swimming pool at Crystal Lake Park in Urbana was finally integrated. And in 1948, the feisty ladies of the League of Women Voters issued the first in a series of reports on the humiliations that faced many African-Americans in Champaign-Urbana.

Titled "The Status of the Negro in Champaign County," it uncovered widespread segregation policies in everything from housing and jobs to education and entertainment. The study charged, for example, that blacks could not be members of the McKinley YMCA, could not take classes at the three private business colleges, and were barred from most bowling alleys, skating rinks and dance halls. Most movie



A picket protests the lack of black employees at the downtown Champaign J.C. Penney store in 1961. News-Gazette photo.



A Champaign woman and her four children inside one of the dilapidated homes that was finally cleared by urban renewal in the early 1970s. Photo courtesy of Urbana Free Library Archives.

theaters required blacks to sit in certain areas, such as back rows or balconies. And although most doctors and dentists accepted black patients, they often required them to come in after hours, when white patients weren't there.

In 1948, the League study said, two local grade schools, Lawhead and Willard, were 100 percent black, two (Marquette crowded and worst-kept school in the community was Willard. It had 37 students in its third grade class, while the racially The League School had 21 students and the all-white Gregory School had 14 students.

The League of Women Voters produced at least eight separate reports on racial discrimination between 1948 and of Segregation and Financing Practices to Minority Housing Problems in Champaign-Urbana."

The prodding by the League helped lead to the adoption of open housing ordinances in both cities. And picketing was used again in 1961 when it was disclosed that the J.C. Penney store in downtown Champaign had no black employees. Store

Violence and racial unrest flared up in Champaign-Urbana's north end a number of times in the 1960s and early 1970s, with several shootings. Many of the disturbances were a result of charges of unfair police practices. But others were tied to poor job opportunities, inadequate city services and substandard housing in the black neighborhoods.