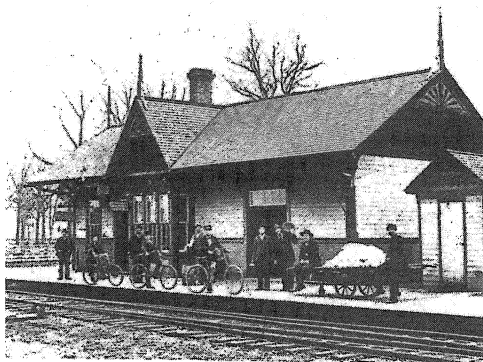


VILLA GROVE RAILROAD HISTORY

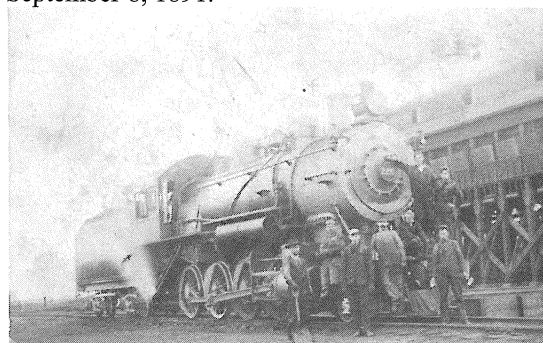
The Chicago, Danville and St. Louis Railroad incorporated on March 10, 1887, to construct a line from Sidell, Illinois, towards St. Louis, Missouri. Work began the same year. They used the grade, which had previously been constructed by the Danville, Tuscola and Western Railroad. The line was completed to Tuscola December 1887. (The Chicago, Danville and St. Louis Railroad and the Strawn and Indiana State Line Railroad consolidated November 1887 with the C&EI).



1893 Depot "Old Town"

The C&EI had been endeavoring to build into downtown Tuscola for several months but had been prevented from doing so by the Indianapolis, Springfield and Western Railroad. A large force of men worked at night and completed the line on August 12, 1888.

In 1887 track was laid from Tuscola to Sidell, completing the C&EI track to Danville. The first depot in Villa Grove was built in 1887 at the corner of Front Street and Henson Road in "old town" and burned in 1903. George and Eliza P. Henson sold land to the railroad in 1888 and lots were laid out in "old town" in 1889. Trains began running from Danville to Sullivan on September 8, 1891.



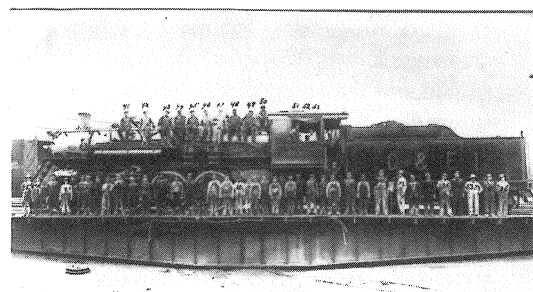
Marian Hill, Bob Conkwright, Sherman Jones, Willie Driscoll

Frisco and Rock Island Railroads, controlled by Johnson Brother and Faught (later Johnson and

Allhands) were B.F. Yoakum, wanted a short line from St. Louis to Chicago. (Frisco Railroad was the parent company of the C&EI in 1903). Johnson and Allhands were given a contract to build a cut-off northward from Villa Grove in 1903. Track would be laid from Woodland Junction to the Villa Grove line and from Findlay to Pana line, to have a direct line from Chicago to St. Louis over the Big Four. R.R. Hammond, General Manager of the C&EI selected Villa Grove as the principal division location due to the fact that it lay exactly halfway between Chicago and St. Louis.

Mr. B.F. Johnson of St. Elmo purchased the William Richman farm as the site for the roundhouse, shops, depot, etc. with the remaining acreage divided into business and residence lots and known as Johnston's Addition. Sale of these lots was to be August 18, 1903. This section is now called "new town" by old timers.

The railroad's private car, "St. Elmo," was set out on the newly-laid switch at the town-to-be on Aug. 17, 1903, (this would be the site of the Division Headquarters, shops and an 18 stall roundhouse) On August 18, there was not a building or human being in sight and nothing but the crudely-graded streets to indicate that Villa Grove would soon be a thriving city. The sale of lots was slow due to poor advertising.



Roundhouse Turntable

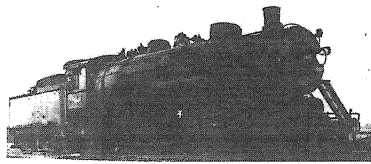
A boxcar served as the first depot in "new town" while the permanent structure was being built. That depot was torn down in 1976 against the wishes of many citizens of the area. It was replaced with the present structure, a modern facility, much needed to facilitate railroad activities, but without the history contained in the old structure.

Work began in the new shops June 17, 1904. During the month of July there was talk of getting the union in the shops. On July 31, 1904, two new trains were added, making a total of five trains going each way out of Villa Grove each day. August 26, 1904, the shops closed down but reopened October 28, 1904 and they closed again July 1, 1922 due to a strike.

The permanent railroad headquarters opened here November 11, 1904.

The line from Villa Grove to Tuscola was double track in 1906. It is single track today.

B.M. Harvey, with Engine No. 325 and Fireman O.L. Zackman shoveling coal broke the record for the fastest run from Villa Grove to St. Louis in September 1911. The fast mail train, brought to Villa Grove from Chicago by Engineer Powell was 31 minutes late, due to a hot box. The train was due out of Villa Grove depot at 10:41pm but it was 11:12 when Engineer Harvey pulled out. The train was due into St. Louis at 2:00am but came to a stop at 1:54, six minutes early, a run of 145 miles in two hours and forty-two minutes.



Old Engine No. 1921

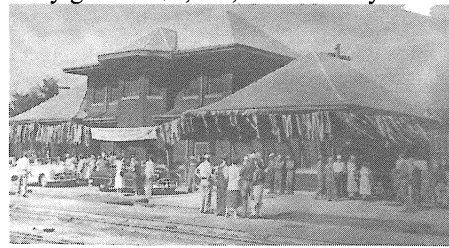
At one time there were six to eight passenger trains through Villa Grove each day. On October 7, 1946, the "Meadowlark" a streamliner, was put to service by the C&EI. As train service was declining, the people pledged \$1000 on April 6, 1949, to fight the removal of C & EI's "Cardinal" passenger train.

In June 1911, the average C & EI freight train handled 561 tons. Twenty-three percent of the main track was 85-pound rail and 30% was 80-pound and the balance was lighter. Today the rail is welded rail, which was first installed in August 1952. Presently some of the strongest used, 133-pound rail is being used through Villa Grove, from the south edge of town to Royal.

November 25, 1912, C&EI began dispatching trains between Chicago and Danville by telephone. In 1914, Automatic Train Control (Miller) was placed in service on 107 miles of the C & EI line, which was the first major installation in the United

States. It was replaced May 15, 1951, with GRS. Radio communications began in March 1955 on the C & EI.

July 1932 the first air-conditioned cars came out of the shops and in 1944 they experienced the best passenger train year in the history of the C & EI. They grossed \$8,977, 602 for the year.



Villa Grove Depot Demolished Oct 29, 1976

Piggyback freight service (truck trailers) between Chicago and St. Louis began in January 1949. That same year saw all passenger train service discontinued on the C & EI between Chicago and St. Louis. Passenger service from Chicago to southern Illinois continued until Jan. 5, 1962.

In 1967 Missouri Pacific bought out the C&EI Railroad. The Mo-Pac was the first railroad west of the Mississippi. Mo-Pac was acquired by Union Pacific on December 22, 1982 but did not formally merge Missouri Pacific out of existence until 1997.

Today the Union Pacific has 6,921 locomotives and has 36,000 miles of track. The Union Pacific now the biggest user of diesel fuel in the country, at one time was second only to the Navy.

In 1985 seeing the decline of the use of cabooses on the trains through Villa Grove. An electronic box called "end of train device" has replaced the caboose. Today dispatchers in Omaha, Nebraska handle train movements. Microwave towers allow the dispatchers to communicate with any train at any location.



The Steam Train Returns to Villa Grove 1993

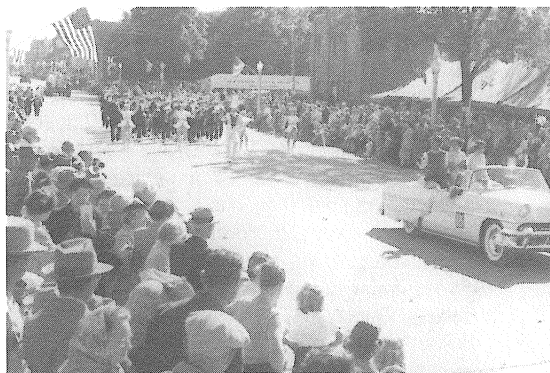
HISTORY OF VILLA GROVE PANCAKE FESTIVAL

The origination of the Pancake Festival was one of those small ideas that grew. Charles Walmann, and John Dineen, who later became the Chicago branch manager, representative of the Pillsbury Flour Co. had contacted Glen Reedy and Joe Morrison, who at that time operated the grocery stores, with the idea of serving free pancakes in their respective stores. Reedy and Morrison, thinking some idea might develop contacted George Barber, local theatre man at which time it was talked of serving free pancakes in the streets. A few days later a meeting was held with Mr. Walmann at the Villa Grove News Office at which time Mrs. Ira Beaman was editor and John Henson then Mayor of Villa Grove was drafted as General Chairman with the following Committee Chairmen: Entertainment, Dr. G.L. Kennedy, Food and Serving, Glenn Reedy and Joe Morrison; Advertising, George Barber and Finance, Ernest Soard.

And with the people of Villa Grove furnishing the help and entertainment the first Festival was held November 19, 1940.

When World War II started the Festival was used to sell War Bonds by auction.

The following companies were donators of food of the first festival: Pillsbury Flour Co., McLaughlin Coffee, Clearview Dairy and Staley's Syrup.



1953 Pancake Parade

Tuesday, November 19, dawned clear and bright and the residents of Villa Grove and surrounding territory were all ready for the big Pancake and Syrup day. The sun, however, did not continue to shine, but though cloudy, the day was very pleasant, with no precipitation and not too cold.

The Pillsbury people and the Staley syrup aggregation were on hand by Monday evening and equipment was put in shape for use early Tuesday morning.

Pancakes were fried on several gas stoves arranged along the north wall of the gym at the Community Building and also in the entrance to the former Star Theatre Building on Main Street and served on long tables in the street. The pancakes were light and tender, the syrup plentiful and delicious and golden butter and cream served with fragrant coffee made the eating fine

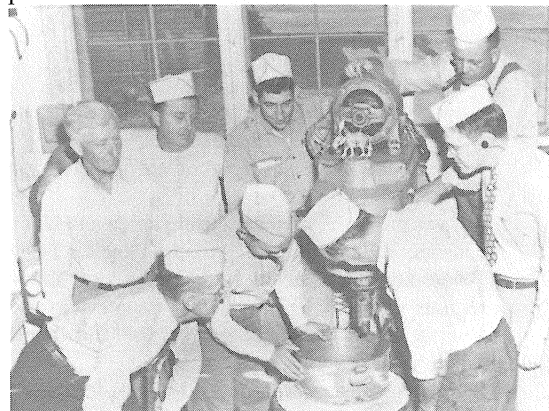
for the large crowd which was here all day. Small boys vied with each other in eating the greatest number of pancakes and older folks were often found with the second helpings, all having a good time.

The crowd was happy and good-natured, much visiting was done and in all the day was a complete success.

Villa Grove's second annual Pancake Festival held October 15, 1941, was even greater than the year before. The weather was ideal, the crowd was large and all 5500 visitors received a free box of pancake flour to take home with their well-filled stomachs.

The great day began at 10:30 am with registration at the News Office. From there they either went to the Community Building or to the former Hess Building for their pancakes. This lasted until 8:30 that evening.

The figures compiled are as follows: Packages of flour given away, 1500; Butter used, 94 lbs., Staley syrup used, 720 lbs., cups of coffee served, 7560; Cream used, 20 gallons; sugar used, 74 lbs; Skelgas used 90 lbs. Sufficient flour was used to make 42,000 pancakes.



The fourth Pancake Festival was held Thursday morning September 29, 1943. The festival was a big success and the third war loan sale of bonds and stamps was even greater with \$40,000 raised.

No one had any idea how many pancakes were devoured, but those making and serving them said they were "innumerable."

Once again the wheel of time brought that gigantic, that colossal, that stupendous event, the Villa Grove Pancake Festival on Wednesday, November 29, 1944. Pancakes, sausage and coffee were served by the thousands with Gene Trimble's orchestra of Newman, furnished music during the evening "feed." The serving of food, as usual were free, after the purchase of a war saving stamp; which remained the property of the person buying them. The 6th War Loan auction that evening was truly the great thing.

The Sixth Annual Pancake Festival on November 7, 1945 was "bigger'n better than ever."

Figures showed more than 53,000 pancakes, 400 sausages, 375 bottles of Staley's syrup, 576 pounds of Pillsbury pancake flour, 45 pounds of coffee and 64 pounds of butter to have been consumed.

Villa Grove makes headlines of "Pancake Gourments Shatter Attendance, Gastronomic Record." And thus we had observed our Seventh Annual Pancake Festival on October 23, 1946 in a big way, as thousands of men, women, and children from all parts of Illinois came.

The crowd was greater than ever before and it was not until ten o'clock that the last pancake was flipped and the last person fed.

According to Glenn Reedy, co-chairman of the festival, 75,000 pancakes were served to 10,000 people. The food supply included 700 pounds of sausage, 925 pounds of pancake flour, 70 pounds of coffee, 600 bottles of syrup and 120 pounds of butter.

With the end of the 7th year of festival came the thoughts of the next year, a way of serving faster, the larger crowd anticipated.



*1950 Pancake Queen
Mary Margaret Cabelek*

As was promised by local businessmen and women, its sponsors, Villa Grove's 8th Annual Pancake Festival on Wednesday, October 29, 1947, far out shown any previous one and, in spectacular degree was the most elaborate event ever staged in the old hometown. Evelyn Stevens was named queen.

Estimated consumption of food was as follows: 87,500 pancakes, 29 cases of syrup, 175 pounds of butter, 225 gallons of coffee, 11 gallons of cream, 21 pounds of sugar, 925 pounds of sausage, 450 pounds of them roasted in the Parker Pastry shop ovens.

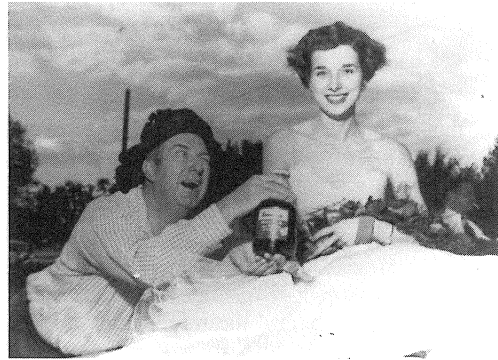
On Wednesday October 20, 1948 Villa Grove sent thousands of visitors home happy they had come, using 300 lbs. of butter and coffee and 1,000 lbs. of pancake flour consumed. It was estimated that 101,500 pancakes were served to the crowd estimated at well over 12,000. Nellie Dubson was crowned Queen of the festival.

16,000 visitors attended the 1949 Festival as Joe Morrison was named as the Pancake Flipper of the World. Mary Wingle was crowned Queen.

An estimated crowd of 20,000 ate 145,000 pancakes on September 20, 1950. 1950 Queen was Mary M. Cabelek.

October 3, 1951 proved to be the largest festival ever. It was made possible by the one hundred fifty donors whose gifts ranged from one dollar to one hundred dollars each. A souvenir program giving details of past festivals, events and history of Villa Grove was published by the editor of the Villa Grove News and sold to the visitors. The money received from this

project helped to pay expenses of the festival. Nine bands, 20 floats, cars and the Queen Chloanne Reedy drew attention for an hour.



Smiley Burnett and 1954 Pancake Queen Clarice Smith

A registration committee was set up and its records showed that thirty thousand people, representing twenty-five states had attended. The amount of food consumed was one thousand eight hundred pounds of sausage, three thousand pounds of Staley syrup, three hundred pounds of sugar, fifty gallons of cream, three hundred twenty-five pounds of butter, three hundred pounds of coffee, and more than half a ton of Pillsbury Pancake flour.

The Twelfth Festival was publicized all over the world. Arthur Godfrey mentioned the coming event on the Pillsbury portion of his program.

The Thirteenth Annual Festival came on an overcast day, October 1, 1952, but the rain didn't come and the largest crowd to ever attend a Pancake Festival came and consumed a ton of pancake flour. Miss Joan Wegeng reigned over the Pancake Festival that year.

The 1953 Festival was held on October 7 in connection with the celebration of Villa Grove's 50th anniversary. Miss Kathleen Curry was named Queen. Crowds were estimated over 30,000 people.

There were over 25 committees with hundreds of citizens volunteering hours of their time to make the 1954 festival a success. Miss Clarice Smith was chosen as festival Queen.

Jackie Wade reigned as Queen over a rainy Pancake Festival in 1955.



John Leon and Oren Cook

A tired citizenry was recovering the day after 10,000 visitors attended the 17th Annual Festival. Miss Lorraine Talkington reigned as Homecoming Queen for the school and Pancake Festival.

Thousands came to Villa Grove to see the Annual Festival including the parade. Kathy Dickason served as Homecoming Queen and Pancake Queen.

On Friday July 25, 1958 14 Pancake Festival Committee Chairmen met to discuss the 1958 Festival. After two hours of discussing cost-cutting methods for the cost mounting expenses, a vote was taken and the decision was made to not hold the pancake festival that year. There were no more Pancake Festivals in Villa Grove. In attendance at the last meeting were: Chairman Glenn Fulton, P.O. Fogerson, G.G. Gaines, William Hancock, Ralph Cullum, Joe Morrison, Glenn Reedy, Richard Elder, George Nussell, Jr., Leon Matteson, Ernest Combs, Don McQueen, Rosie Cler and Jack Holmes.

VILLA GROVE AG DAYS

The first Villa Grove Ag Days was Saturday July 29, 1978 sponsored by the Villa Grove Junior Chamber of Commerce. Its events were agri-business displays, petting zoo, hobby show, sidewalk sales, gong show, pull. Community Theater and an antique tractor pull.



Riding the train at Ag Days

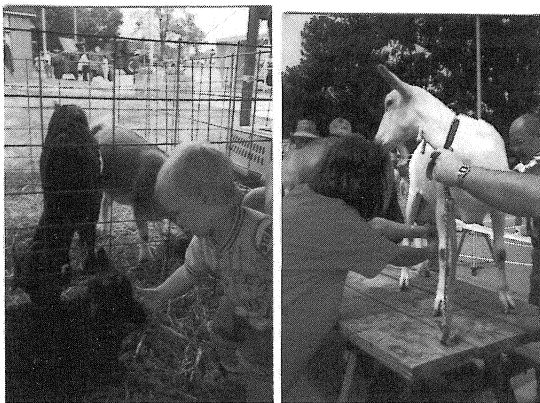
The Villa Grove Chamber of Commerce sponsored the 1985 Ag Day. The Masonic Lodge sponsored the 1994 and 1995 Ag Days, and a committee of Ag Day members took over the 1996 Ag Day Celebration.

Through the years new interesting events have taken place such as Fighting Illini Autographs, Civil War demonstration VFW Pancake and Sausage Breakfast, live entertainment, Decatur Park Singers, model airplane flying demonstration, free sweet corn, firemen water ball fights, goat milking contest, horseshoe pitching contests, cooking contest, toilet races,

2002 marked the 25th anniversary of the Villa Grove Ag Days with a carnival, 5K Walk Run, 3 on 3 Basketball, Car, Truck, and Motorcycle Show, Antique Tractors, Kiddie Tractor Pull, Kiddie Straw Pile, Petting Zoo, 50/50 Bingo, Terry Harvey Gospel Concert, Grand Parade, Amateur Talent Show, Mark Foutch Brass Band, Beer Garden Dance, Poker Run, ATV Mud Bogg.



Mr. and Mrs. Bill Harrison wedding at 1914 Celebration



Two favorites at Ag Days is the petting zoo and the goat milking contest



Looking for money in the "Straw Pile" Ag Days