

History of Downing – Part 5 Organizations, Future

The End—May Just Be the Beginning

By Judy Sharp

Downing Organizations Activity

In the 1960s, the City Merchants Committee started Downing Appreciation Days with John Cook, making the suggestion. And today, the event is still celebrated each September with parades, food, games, and lots of fun. Other events bring out local folks to Appreciation Days Park, like celebrating July 4th, with the town's volunteer firemen setting off an amazing fireworks show. Frequent bingo games are played in the Park's Bingo Room. At other times, various groups hold tractor pulls, and the Coffey Ropers stir up the dust in their arena with many rodeo events throughout the year. The Downing Depot Museum hosts their annual Smorgasbord fundraiser in June. And once again, Downing is a hub of activities for the surrounding citizens.

As traveling became more affordable, accessible, comfortable, and reliable, Downing residents ventured further afield for daily transportation, for transfer to new jobs and new living locations, for learning opportunities, and for vacations.

Large farm implement companies and grain suppliers became profitable and therefore, more willing to pay for advertising and niceties for customers and people in positions to assist them in their business ventures.

Individuals watched TV, read newspapers, and listened to radio agriculture updates and world news. They realized how the world happenings affected them and how they could work to expand their opportunities.

Ponder This

This Downing history review is done, but not complete. There continues to be more that can be covered—names, dates, and events that were left out—but Downing's history is still in the making. Along the way, researching this or that, I found others who've contributed to telling the history of Schuyler and Scotland counties with a bit of Downing, of our collective past, in each one. They were hand written, typed, or posted online. Like this review, each of them shares a portion of our past, our family's lives.

As of 2020, narrow dirt roads are graveled and have doubled in size for the new power structures being installed. The bridges that were needed are being repaired or rebuilt larger, making them strong enough for tractor-trailers with heavy loads.

Farming is still a mainstay, a common occupation, but instead of just working 40 acres of land we may have

to have more land and two jobs to make a go of it. Or it might be thousands of acres we farm for an absentee owner.

Instead of herding a few steers to Downing's stockyard for shipment on the railroad, livestock is now herded with four-wheelers to the stock trailer. The livestock is then hauled to the auctioneer at Memphis, Bloomfield, or Keosakua. Or the corporate opossum-bottom trailers haul growing pigs off to the processor.

What once was new is now old, antique. We find family memories at auctions, estate sales, and antique stores, where treasured items may go for pennies or fortunes.

The Christian, Methodist, and Baptist churches established for the growing communities are slowly closing down for lack of attendance.

Small rural schools were merged and consolidated to one school per county. Attendance is down, as those schools struggle to make ends meet. Some families home-school their children to give them an education the family doesn't see available in public schools.

Groceries, clothes, gifts, and computer supplies are bought in larger towns, or online. Folks only stop for last-minute items at local convenience stores, the few grocery stores that are left, or the new general stores the Mennonites are opening.

As we watch one lifestyle disappear—the one our families became accustomed to—we see signs that a new one is starting. History does repeat itself, peels like an onion, a layer is removed, and we get down to familiar situations, but it looks different, a bit of déjà vu. New generations, new genealogy, new people, the same, but somehow just different. People yearning for a better life in a new environment. That's where we came from and that's where this land is going.

So, we again see the building of small rural schools and large community buildings and large churches added to the landscape by the Mennonite pioneers, our new neighbors, following their families and friends to their "new land" and their "American Dream."

Each person, family, or event—each challenge our predecessors faced—each one just as important as the other. They all affect the future by touching something or someone in the next generation, or the next, or the next. We don't live in a vacuum. What affects us, affects others. You may have thought history was the past, but you are making it daily.

Downing, Schuyler County, Missouri, U.S.A., began,

not in 1835 or 1872, no, long before that. It began in someone's heart, someone's mind, someone's desire for new, for better, for different, for healthier, for their family, for a new start, for leaving -X- behind. It started in England, in Virginia, and Kentucky, Ohio, California, all the states, the countries, and all the continents—the ships sailing the seas and the wagon trains fording the rivers.

It happened long before Downing's pioneers took their first step, before they packed their bags and bought their tickets. And it evolved in the letters home, the family reunions, the daily or annual events and actions.

Change happens; progress happens; from hand picking cotton to the garden push plow, the team of mules, the first Ford tractor, the massive John Deere combine, to the high tech GPS equipment dotting the country side. Change happens in individuals, gatherings, from drag day in 1910 to MoDOT in 2020, to MDC rules for hunters, to voting on community water or sewage projects. In casting our one vote for the candidate to represent us to the larger community, to the state, to the country.

To boil it down - it = change, progress, history, life - it happens in our souls, in our values, our beliefs, our faith, in each of us and all of us. AND there is no "right" answer to get the "right" outcome. Could we have predicted Downing, and how life played out here over 150 years ago?

We are making future history, now, today, tomorrow. Next week. Next month.

The world is reducing in size. In the time it took our ancestors to travel from Europe, we can now ship our finished crops overseas to new markets. And in the same time we have a multitude of choices for food, appliances, books, TV programs that our ancestors never imagined. What will this area be like in another 150 years? Who will tell our story?

You may have thought history was in the past, but we are making it every day. Enjoy the process as you enjoy the memories, for we don't know when our personal history will be laid to rest.

Though small in population and business opportunities, Downing continues to stay alive and carry on its presence in northeast Missouri. It is a good place to live. If community spirit and cooperation are any indicator for the future, Downing will continue to make history!

Charter for Downing's Ariel Rebekah Lodge in 1921 Church and social organization activities added to the cultural life and enjoyment of the people of Downing and the surrounding area. Over the years, residents of Downing were members of many societies included the Downing Commercial Club that sponsored the annual Road Drag Day in the early 1900s, Rescue Unit, Red Hats in recent years, Ladies Aid that met weekly in two churches, and Triple Alliance. This is the charter given to Downing's Ariel Rebekah Lodge in 1921. The Rebekahs are related to the Odd Fellows, or I.O.O.F. Lodge. Donated by Lena Gallagher

DOWNING ORGANIZATIONS

Most social organizations had meeting rooms above one or another of the Prime Street's businesses. Some, like the Masons, had rooms above several businesses. Over the years many organizations came and went, some staying longer than others. Here's a sampling.

1. 4-H clubs—Downing 4-H, North Downing 4-H, and South Downing 4-H; in 1971, Downing's 4-H clubs had around 60 members.
2. Birthday Club
3. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts were organized in the late 1960s
4. Chit Chat Club
5. City Merchants Committee
6. Commercial Club
7. Downing Band
8. Downing Orchestra
9. Garden Club
10. Happy Homemakers Civic Club, carried out improvement projects for Downing
11. Junior Achievement (JA)
12. Ladies Aid quilted many quilts during weekly meetings at two churches: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) & Methodist Church
13. Lions Clubs International was active for about 25 years
14. Masons, Freemasonry
15. Modern Miss
16. Modern Woodmen of America
17. National Farmers Organization (NFO)
18. Odd Fellows, Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF)
19. Opportunity Extension Club
20. Order of the Eastern Star (associated with Masons)
21. Philanthropic Educational Organization (PEO)
22. Rebekah (associated with Odd Fellows)
23. Rotary International
24. Royal Neighbors of America, associated to Modern Woodmen of America
25. Saddle Club, first started in 1949, was re-organized in 1964, when it participated in horse shows, parades, and fund raising events. There were approximately 46 members in the early 1970s. In Downing in 1977, horses could still be seen tied in front of some downtown businesses.

