

# Opinion

## Much has changed as Madison County reaches another milestone

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The year 1962 was a good one for Madison County. Business was booming. Construction was everywhere. A fledgling university was destined to have a major impact.



**Grubaugh**

I know all this because of a good friend, Curt Diel, who loaned me his copy of a sesquicentennial newspaper edition published as a joint project by the three biggest local papers of the day — The Alton Evening Telegraph, Edwardsville Intelligencer and the Granite City Press-Record.

Diel found the paper many years ago in storage at his mother's home, now his own residence. He contacted me because he knows I'm a history buff. I'm glad he did; the 56-page edition is a factfinder's dream, a snapshot of an era. Talk about an extra! This was a look at life six decades ago and a glimpse of what was to come.

Back then, knee-length skirts were coming into fashion. I know this because an enterprising photographer from The

Telegraph snapped a picture of the coeds at Monticello College in Godfrey (now Lewis and Clark Community College). In 1812, the year of its founding, Madison County was a vastly different place than it is today. For one thing, it took in the top two-thirds of the state, all the way to the Wisconsin border. There was a map of the original county territory in that 1962 edition. The county is one of the oldest jurisdictions in the state. But not the oldest: That honor lies with neighboring St. Clair County, established in 1790.

The celebratory newspaper also had its share of advertising. A big portion of one page was devoted to the Republican ballot at the time. Everett Dirksen was running for U.S. senator (and he won). The presence of many banking businesses was noted, and most of the examples are now absent from the scene. Citizens Savings, Clover Leaf, First Federal, People's — and at least a dozen others — are all gone (at least in name) today.

Pepsi-Cola, which at the time had a giant distribution center on East Broadway in Alton, took out a full-page ad. It said: "Pepsi. For those who think young." The plant closed years later.

A big spread was devoted to Southern Illinois University, which was well-established statewide but barely existed in Edwardsville, where a branch was established in 1957. The holding of the first classes on the new, 2,600-acre

campus wasn't to take place for two more years, with most activity taking place only in Alton and East St. Louis.

A half page was given over to the brand-new Tri-Cities Port District, which was operating out of the old Granite City Harbor. There was a promise that the development could become a major logistical hub, which we now know to be true. Today, America's Central Port serves as an anchor from which more than \$1 billion of freight passes through the region annually.

Major play was also given to important employers and industries of the era. Sadly, many are now gone or changed in form, identity, ownership, or location. The names included Olin Mathieson, Johns-Manville, the Granite City Army Depot, Granite City Steel, Duncan Foundry, Laclede Steel, A.O. Smith, the International Shoe Tannery, Alton Box Board, Tri-City Grocery, Standard Oil, Sinclair Refinery and Illinois Power.

I don't know if it's true, but at one time, the Alton area boasted of having more industrialist millionaires for its size than any city.

The 60-year-old special edition also focused on the interstate highway system, a product of the Eisenhower administration that was just becoming a reality for Madison County in 1962. Bridges and pavement were underway for Interstates 270 and 70. Interstate 55 was further along, and 255 was long into the future.

Yes, this was an amazing compilation of historical facts — the first post offices, the first towns, the first churches — about what you would expect for a paper devoted to 150 years of activity. There were mentions of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate, the Piasa Bird, the Wood River Massacre — local schoolchildren have learned about them all in their classrooms.

Livingston, New Douglas, Hamel, Moro, Marine, St. Jacob, Hartford, Venice — towns that barely rate a mention in today's news — all had prominent stories in the edition, along with their much larger neighbors.

What really impressed me was the fact that three, separately owned newspapers came together to produce one special section. Newspapering, then and now, is highly competitive. Reporters don't share much of anything, except the occasional elbow-bending sessions.

I've had bylines in all three of the papers at one time or another, so this project had particular interest for me.

Much has changed in Madison County during my lifetime, but I had no idea how much before reading this astounding historical reflection.

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## Reflections on trial lawyers, plum property, stupid lawsuits, etc.

By ALAN J. ORTBALS

Most months I struggle to decide between two or three topics for my editorial. This time I have no less than



**Ortbals**

seven themes demanding my attention. Rather than select one and discard the others, I'm going to address each in an abbreviated fashion. **GOP embraces trial lawyers.** After years of the GOP railing against trial attorneys as blood-sucking parasites, I find it ironic that Republican politicians are suddenly pro-lawsuit. Texas, for example, passed a law that allows anyone to sue anyone who may have played any role in an abortion. And Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida wants parents to sue school boards over mask mandates. What's next? Dogs and cats living together?

**Science, schmience.** NASA just sent a telescope a million miles into space that will be able to see light from the first stars

and galaxies 14 billion years ago. Doctors recently transplanted the heart of a pig into a man. As of this writing he is doing fine and beginning physical therapy. And last year scientists devised a Covid-19 vaccine in just a matter of months that was more than 90 percent effective. Yet only 45 percent of Republicans believe in science. Somebody's not paying attention.

**Plum Street property.** Madison County recently decided to put a 15-acre tract of land at the intersection of Plum St. and Governors' Parkway up for sale to the highest bidder. Only one bid was received. We don't know yet what will become of this "plum" property (sorry), but I know this, you sell property this way when you are only focused on how much you can get and don't give a damn about the end use. It's a shameful way for a government to act.

**USA! USA!** Like many of you, I spent a lot of time watching the Olympics last month. Like some of you, I also spent time watching the Jeopardy National College Championship. I was struck by a common chord — immigration has made America great. From Californian Chloe Kim taking gold in the women's snowboard halfpipe to Howard University's Jessika Agyepong competing in the popular trivia game show, America the Melt-

ing Pot was on display. Americans trace their ancestry to all corners of the globe. So, isn't it ironic that we have fought against immigration throughout our history? Whether they came here in shackles or were among the throngs seeking a better life, immigrants and their descendants have made America exceptional.

**Party over country.** In his farewell address to the nation, President George Washington warned against the rise of political parties. His fear was that the allegiance would be to party over country. We are now seeing Washington's warning play out in real life. Last month, the Republican National Committee voted to censure Rep. Liz Cheney and Rep. Adam Kinzinger for participating in the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol, calling the insurrection during which five people died and 140 police officers suffered injuries, "legitimate political discourse." What has happened to the Party of Lincoln?

**Sandy Hook Parents 1, Remington Arms 0.** Through sheer determination and will, the parents of murdered Sandy Hook Elementary School children were able to hold Remington Arms accountable for the role they played in the 2012 mass shooting. This was despite the unparalleled

protection the firearms industry enjoys via the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act that provides heretofore blanket immunity from litigation to the manufacturers and purveyors of guns. Now that Republicans have made nice with trial lawyers, let's repeal PLCAA and start holding the gun industry responsible for the carnage in our city's streets.

**Stupidest lawsuit ever.** St. Louisans were dancing in the streets last November when Stan Kroenke and the NFL agreed to pay the city, county, and RSA \$790 million in compensation for the dastardly way the Rams were moved to Los Angeles. In light of that historic settlement, it's particularly entertaining to go back and read media mogul Ray Hartman's 2017 op-ed on the subject, St. Louis files stupidest lawsuit ever against the NFL. Hartman predicted that St. Louis would not only, "humiliate itself with childish petulance," but also that it would blow any chance of being awarded an MLS franchise to boot. He recommended that the lawsuit be dropped before St. Louis suffered another civic embarrassment. Good thing they didn't listen.

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