

When we wanted to have fun...

In the early days of Arthur, fun often centered around church and other Sunday activities. There were suppers, picnics, sleigh rides and parties for the adults to socialize and the young people to intermingle.

Town Bands

Early on, if your town was going to amount to anything, it had to have a band of its own, and the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker were all members. Arthur's first band was organized in 1877 and called the "Vonlanken's Band." Later it became known as the "Arthur Merchant's Band."

By 1910, concern was expressed in the Arthur Graphic that the town no longer had a band to play for such occasions as Decoration Day, Fourth of July, and other important occasions.

But by the 1920s, when all high schools were required to have a band, Arthur had a good one, winning state and national prizes. In 1928, under the direction of the school's science teacher, Harland Darling, the high school performed 32 concerts over a period of two years, many of these during the summer in the park.

The Opera House

In 1897, the frame building at the southwest corner of Vine and Railroad (now Progress) streets was torn down and the Reeves and Fleming

Opera House was built. This was a large, two-story brick building where entertainment took place in the second story.

The Opera House was dedicated on December 23, 1897, by the Hoyt Comedy Company, which performed the play entitled "A Texas Steer." This play, which opened in New York in 1894, was a political satire by Charles H. Hoyt that was later made into a silent movie starring Will Rogers in 1927.

The Opera House remained popular for many years and was the scene of other professional theater productions, hometown plays, lectures by eminent speakers, and interesting shows such as Blind Boone, who was a famous blind pianist. By 1910, the competition from moving picture shows was too much for the Opera House, and it closed.

Horse Racing and Baseball

The Arthur Driving Club was organized in 1902 at which time the group had leased 20 acres of land from Peter Jurgens at the northeast edge of town at approximately the 500 Block of North Vine Street.

The club built barns, a grandstand, and what was reported to be the fastest half-mile racetrack in the state. Each year, one or more matinee horse races were held in the fall, and it was a major attraction for many miles around Arthur.



WILLIAM H. BENNETT family on porch listening to a Victrola circa 1900.

The Club also built ball grounds in the middle of the track. Adult baseball had already gotten big as a spectator sport in Arthur and brought serious competition between towns. In July of 1887, Arthur defeated Lovington 41-19 and the rhetoric between the two teams to intimidate their opponent was reported to be unfit to print. Teams even went so far as to hire out-of-town pitchers to ensure an edge.

Simple Fun

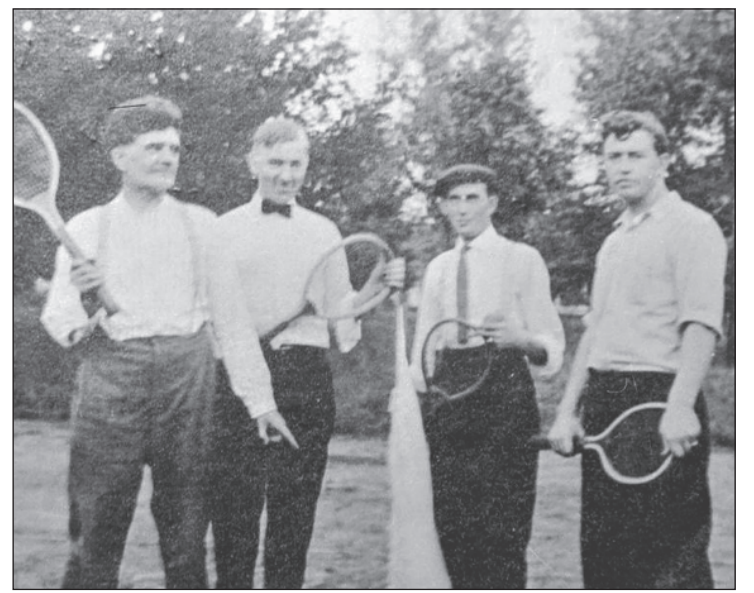
Even by the early 1900s, parties and picnics were still popular with young people. Church was still the main social center and a young man might drop a note to a young lady he liked to ask if he could accompany her to church or to a party that evening. Games played at parties at that time were called Thimble, Boston Casino, or Charades.

A 1905 entry in 18-year-old Augusta Brown's diary talked about attending a basket supper at Dry Ridge School House where these prizes were given: a rooster for the

most popular young lady won by Cora Grant, box candy for the handsomest man won by Tom Ecret, and cake soap for the dirtiest young man won by Clyde Wood.

The Arthur Graphic reported in January of 1910 that several Arthur people were wintering in Florida. They went to Pensacola in those days as Miami was still a swamp town of just a few thousand residents.

The card game of Bridge became extremely popular across the nation in the 1920s, and by 1946, there were as many as six Bridge parties going on in Arthur homes per week.



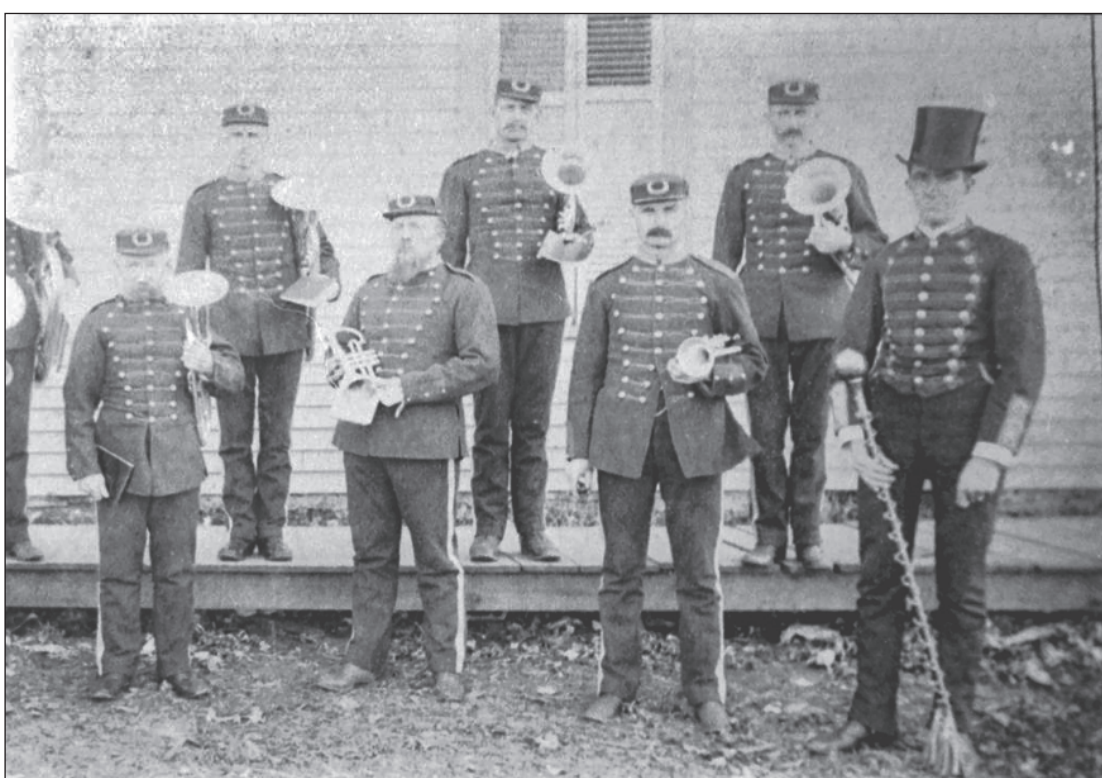
DICK WARREN, Ed Meinzer, Frank Fleming, and Willard Howison playing tennis on grass circa 1900.



AUNT SARAH PALMER HALL with a popcorn machine in front of the wooden frame building that was used as a Post Office on North West corner of Vine and Progress.



THE EBERHARDT FAMILY eating watermelon on their front porch circa 1900.



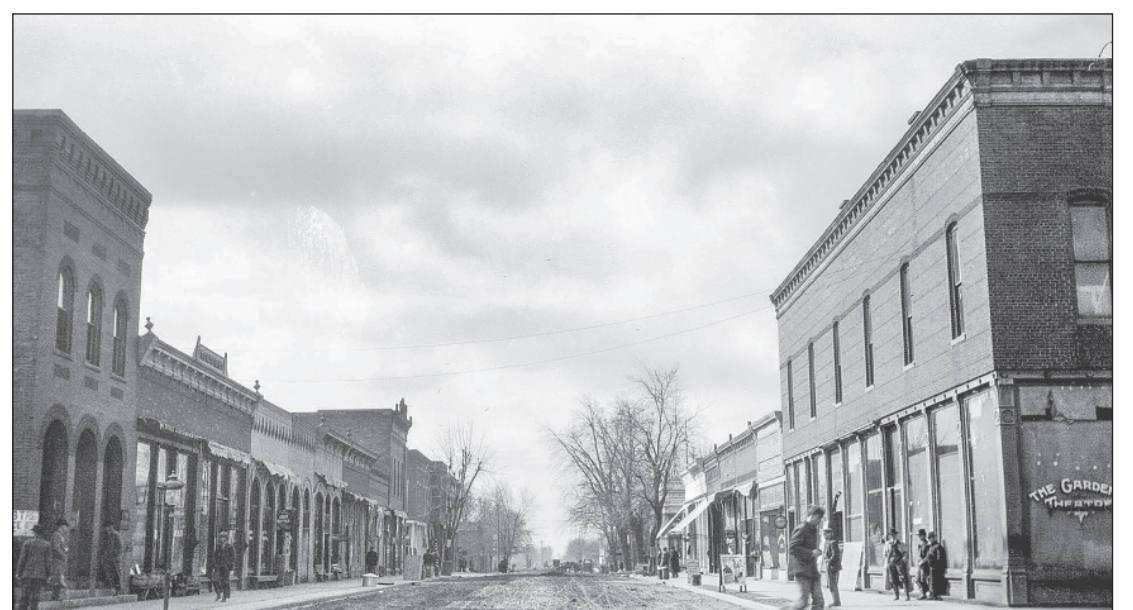
GEORGE VONLANKEN'S Cornet Band, in uniform getting ready for a parade circa 1880.



FIDDLER ON THE STREET in downtown Arthur playing for a crowd circa 1900.



IN 1911 ARTHUR RESIDENTS saw their first airplane flight as a man from Terre Haute brought his "new invention" to the Village during a homecoming event. The plane came in by rail and was set up in a pasture southwest of Arthur overnight. In the morning the pilot went out to check the plane before his flight and found that a cow had grazed on it, eating part of a wing. The wing was quickly repaired and two flights were made that day. One of the largest crowds in Arthur's history witnessed this first airplane flight in the area.



THE LARGE TWO-STORY BUILDING on the right was originally the Opera House. Later the Garden Theater was located there.