

THE SECOND FRONT

Houston Past and Present Minstrels to Movies 1900 - 1920 (Part 1)



Life for Houston residents in the early 1900s was not easy. Travel on rural roads connecting small

communities was ventured with expectations of impediments and obstacles. People kept close within the boundaries of their everyday lives. Social gatherings were church singings, school pie suppers and neighborhood dances.

Traveling troupes of actors, musicians and performers promised to bring a fragment of the outside world to the community. A scheduled event enjoyed the support of good crowds. Entertainers were considered to be somewhat of a novelty and most likely held with an element of respect and suspect - they having seen and experienced much more of the world than many of the residents of the small community. Doubtless they appealed to the imagination and fascination of Houston residents long ago and provided an escape from the reality of everyday problems. It would be an attraction Houston would support for nearly the next century with the evolution of minstrels to movies.

1900s

Tickets for the Blind Boone musical entertainment at the hall next Monday night are on sale at the post office. General admission 25 cts.; Reserved seats, 35 cts. Dec. 1, 1898, Houston Herald

Some of the earliest shows in Houston were held in the G.A.R. Hall (Grand Army of the Republic) This hall was located on the northwest corner of Grand and Mill, the present site of Elmore's Men's and Boys' Wear. The hall was large enough for a public gathering and for several decades would house variety shows, early movies, roller skating graduations and a new type of team sport in the early 1910s called basketball.

A large and enthusiastic audience greeted Blind Boone, the great Negro musician, at the G.A.R. Hall last Monday night and everyone was well repaid for his trouble in coming out. The musical abilities of this blind Negro is something wonderful, the man being certainly entitled to all the praise that has been bestowed upon him for the great musical talent with which he is endowed....

Dec. 8, 1898, Houston Herald

1910s

*The Great Train Robbery (1903)
The Birth of a Nation (1915)
Alimony (1918)*

By 1900 movies had become a popular attraction at amusement arcades and vaudeville theaters. They were considered a novelty. The attraction was the mere miracle of moving pictures - crowds, parades, waves, anything that moved. With no plot, monotonous motion soon lost the fascination of the public. American Edwin S. Porter is credited with making the first movie to tell a story and securing the future of movies.

Electric Theatre At the Reunion

We carry our own electric power plant which insures good strong pictures and are using the same class of films we use at the opera house in Mtn. Grove, Mo. Don't miss this show while at the Reunion. Admission 10 cents.

*Geo. S. Bowers
Houston Herald, Aug. 24, 1911*

The Great Train Robbery was an 11-minute film showing a train robbery with the pursuit and capture of villains. The movie was a huge success and by 1907, 5,000 nickelodeons were established throughout the United States. A nickelodeon was

usually not more than a store, emptied of fixtures and merchandise with the addition of chairs. Price of admission was a nickel. Piano music was played fast or slow depending on the speed of the chase taking place



"Nickelodeons" were some of the first theaters, often a store emptied and chairs added. The price to see the new moving pictures was five cents, hence the name.

on the screen.

The summer and fall editions of the 1904 *Houston Herald* each week tell of Texas County residents attending the St. Louis World's Fair. It is likely the visitors were able to experience such a new invention at the World's Fair and may have wondered if and when such a miracle would come to Houston.

Early *Houston Herald* editions announced showings of picture shows at school houses, churches and the G.A.R. Hall. The rural schools did not have electricity and the first picture shows may have been run by a generator as advertised in the traveling show that was to appear at the Old Settlers Reunion in 1911.

Local Mention

The moving picture show will be at Lundy Friday night, September 24th.

Sept. 9, 1915 Houston Herald

Movies at Indian Creek

On account of the pie supper at Possum Trot, the picture show at Indian Creek last Friday night was called off, but Manager G.V. Elliott will sure be at Indian Creek School house with the Movies next Friday night, November 5th and he will show 3,000 feet of motion pictures that will make you laugh and feel good. Admission, 15 cts. and 10 cts.

Nov. 4, 1915, Houston Herald

The date of Houston's first picture show is not clear, but Gaylord Elliot, Houston's first undertaker, is given credit for also undertaking this new business venture.

It is believed the first Houston building to house a theater was a one-story building located on the northwest corner of the city block that burned in 1999. Brown's Chevrolet was later located on the lot.

"On the corner was a vacant lot on which G.V. Elliott established Houston's first picture show."

Down Memory Lane by Dan Elliott

Feb. 11, 1965 Houston Herald

Local Mention
Gaylord Elliott's movies show at the air dome was rained out again last Saturday night, but the show was put on Monday night. Gaylord is giving some good shows, including the famous Charlie Chaplin pictures.

Houston Herald, June 15, 1916

An outdoor theater is remembered and may have been an option during different time periods in Houston. Certainly, a cool summer evening breeze would have been more desirable than cramped seating in a building, the only air circulation caused by

a flurry of hand-held fans.

The theater was enclosed by a metal fence. Wooden bleachers seated patrons.

The fence provided an opportunity for a dime's worth of extra candy in the event an occasional little brother, with a name such as Bill Christie, was hoisted over the wall by an older brother and friends. A dime's worth of extra candy purchased at the general merchandise store was a considerable amount of loot - unless a posse of parents found out, which they always did.

Local Mention

The "Good-de-good" Candies that make you want for more - 15 cts. per lb., at our candy counter. - Williams

April 8, 1915 Houston Herald

The bleachers, open air and all smoking allowed was an easy opportunity for 14-year-old Don Watson to try a cigarette from smoking mentor, Jack Hucksborn.

Movies from the very beginning provided educational opportunities not limited to the screen.

Movies

The Trey of Hearts failed to arrive in time for the Saturday night show July 3, 1915, high waters being the cause of the delay. This cannot be helped and we hope to have them soon.

We expect them for the Wednesday night show of this week but do not know for sure. We will have a good show instead if they do not arrive in time for the Wednesday night show.

July 1, 1915 Houston Herald

Mail delivery in the early part of the century was more closely related to the Pony Express than the Federal Express of today. Routes were unreliable and dependent upon road conditions, whether it be snow or rain. A movie schedule was easily altered.

Local Mention

After being in darkness for the past three weeks the electric lights came on again last Saturday night. The head of water at the power plant was not enough for good lights Saturday night but by Sunday night they gave their usual brilliancy and will continue to get better. A force of men under direction of M.G. Coyle have been busily engaged in repairing the break in the dam and apparently have done a good job of it for it is believed the dam is in better shape than it ever has been. The forebay was also renewed and concreted and this together with some other repairing and improvement yet to be made will place the light plant property in better condition than heretofore. The company has met every expense and has endeavored to make the plant a convenience and a benefit to the town, although, owing to the washouts, it has not been a paying proposition.

Oct. 7, 1915, Houston Herald

Electricity came to Houston from the Lone Star Mill power plant in 1908. Even if the picture show, at times had its own generator, power was unpredictable. The Electric Plant would keep the turbine turning specifically for the theater until the movie was over. More than once a show had to be interrupted until the power plant operator could clear the turbine of debris and restore power.

Movie notifications are found scattered in the *Herald* in 1915. World



Charlie Chaplin and child star, Jackie Coogan in *The Kid*, one of Chaplin's most popular movies in 1920.

War I (1914-1918) had nearly shut down movie production in Europe and increased production in the United States. Movies had become so popular, real theaters were being built, many remodeled from a previous stage theater.

Movies

The Movies will be put on at the G.A.R. Hall on Friday night this week instead of Saturday night. I have invested nearly \$500 for the betterment of my Movies. I have pur-



chased a new machine, piano and lighting outfit and assure you good pictures and a warm house from now on.

G.V. Elliott

Nov. 16, 1916 Houston Herald

Theaters, including Houston's, often advertised inside climate and comfort of the movie house as a selling point. Many early businesses were heated by a solitary wood stove - not a comfort to the row of seats furthest away from the source of warmth. Shivering was preferred to be generated from the suspense of a villain's capture instead of the temperature.

Summer could cause the opposite discomfort. Society dictated Sunday best clothing, which could be warm - wool jackets and long sleeved heavy dresses.

A long fan traveling on a runner, moved manually from a crank on the wall is remembered at one of Houston's early theaters.

A dress code continued for many decades. And the Great Depression of the 1930s did not allow for much code relaxation. Houston theater patrons remember LaVonne McKnight taking tickets wearing a mink stole, high heels and silk stockings that dared not waver their seam from a straight path.

The Melba Theater, built in 1938 bragged of being "Air Conditioned Winter and Summer." The air conditioning was a large fan blowing air through a screen of running water. This system may have accounted for the musty smell remembered by later Melba patrons. The heat was two fuel oil stoves. In an industry of illusions, the theater also followed recommendations of using blue light bulbs in art deco theater lights during summer to give the illusion of coolness. Red light bulbs argued heat.

Thanksgiving Movies

We will put on an excellent program Thursday night, November 30, "Mutt and Jeff" and "Hans and Furry" will be the stars of this program, with some other good pictures. Regular admission, 10 cents to everybody.

G.V. Elliott

Nov. 30, 1916 Houston Herald



COLUMN 6

A roundup of area newspapers: Houston native Robbic Smith, who rescued a baby deer in June in flooding waters at West Plains, was pictured last week. The deer has been fed two, two-liter bottles of lamb's milk each day, along with dry dog food. The animal is slated to be returned to the wild early next year....The South Barry County Hospital's board members voted last week to affiliate the local facility with St. John's Health Systems of Springfield. The news came after Aurora decided to link with St. John's. Decreased reimbursements as a result of the Balanced Budget Act and managed health care contracts were cited.

XXX
You can purchase the *Herald* now on Wednesday afternoons from the newspaper box in front of the *Herald* office.

XXX
Holiday Season Approaches: The Salvation Army is seeking volunteers to ring bells this holiday season. There are 140 two-hour time slots in Houston, Cabool and Licking. Bell ringing starts the day after Thanksgiving and runs through Christmas Eve. Eighty-five percent of money collected remains in Texas County to assist with many needs. The Salvation Army motto is "Sharing Is Caring." Sign up by calling the Texas County Food Pantry at 417-967-4484.

XXX
Odds and ends: A trip to Columbia on Saturday shows the leaves prettier in our neck of the woods...Is gasoline going to below a dollar a gallon? Some experts think so...

XXX
Houston students organized an anti-drug special supplement in today's newspaper. We think you'll find the job they did commendable. The *Herald* printed 650 extra copies that were distributed to each high school and middle school student. Meanwhile, copies of the newspaper also are being provided to fourth and fifth graders as they participate in a weekly feature on the Pony Express that is appearing in the *Herald*.

XXX
The Missouri Veterans Commission announced last week that a statewide initiative to locate Pearl Harbor survivors is under way in the county.

"As we near the 60th anniversary of this pivotal event in our nation's history, we hope to find all remaining Missouri veterans who survived that day," said Sam McVay, executive director. McVay added, "We have had great assistance from John Baskette, 4th District director of Pearl Harbor Survivors of America." Baskette provided a list of the members of his organization to the veterans commission. It is hoped that the statewide appeal for names and addresses of survivors will locate those who are not a member of the national organization.

McVay requested that names and addresses of Pearl Harbor survivors be forwarded to Missouri Veterans Commission, 1719 Southridge, Jefferson City, Mo., 65102. "We intend to honor these great American heroes and are dedicated to assuring that their sacrifice is never forgotten," he said.

Superintendent's Corner



By Dr. Duane Widhalm, Houston Superintendent
The Houston School District has scheduled parent-teacher conferences 3:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 25, and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 26.

School will not be in session on Friday, Oct. 26. Students in grades K-12 will have schedules sent home informing their parents of the time of their conferences.

I strongly encourage parents to attend the conferences that will be scheduled for your child. This is an excellent opportunity to find out how well your child is doing in school.

We especially encourage parents of high school students to attend the conferences. We have scheduled Thursday evening to allow parents who work during the day to attend

the conferences. In addition, teachers will be available over the lunch hour on Friday if this time is more suitable for parents.

School conferences give you a chance to ask questions of your child's teacher(s). They also let you answer some questions about your child - things that the teacher can use to help your child do better in school.

Before you go to your parent-teacher conference, jot down a list of questions and answers. Take the list with you. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- What will be covered in your class this year?
- Is my child able to do the kind of work you expect? Does he or she read at the level you would expect? Does he or she have the math skills to do the

work?

- How much homework do you assign? Is my child doing the homework correctly? Has he or she turned in all assignments?
- Does my child come to school prepared for the day's work?
- Does my child follow the classroom rules?
- Are there any big projects coming up? How will you let parents know about them?
- Are there special school projects that could help my child do better? Does my child qualify for the gifted program? Could he or she have a learning disability? How can we work together to meet my child's learning needs?
- Does my child work well with other children?
- What can I do at home to help my child do better in school?

(Turn to page 7, this section)



The Texas County Memorial Hospital Auxiliary moved into its new gift shop space last week. Here, Mary Kirkman, left; and Madge Elmore, price items. The new quarters were created by a remodeling and expansion at the hospital.

THE SECOND FRONT

Houston Past and Present Movies, Movies 1920 - 1937 (Part 2)



Rudolph Valentino

Movies enjoyed increasing popularity in the 1920s and '30s. Despite war, difficulty of travel, drought and a long enduring depression, movies proved their mettle, they were here to stay. People needed dreams as much as they needed food and air. Movies provided dreams of escape, adventure, love and laughter.

Houston residents' needs were no different. Theater locations and owners changed, technology improved and popularity increased as the movie theater became an important part of Houston's social history.

1920s

The Sheik (1921)
Wings (1928)

The Broadway Melody (1929)

The first 11-minute movie to tell a story was a Western, *The Great Train Robbery*. Westerns appealed to a wide audience and have enjoyed success throughout the history of movies.

But one audience segment in particular voices unity in recalling youthful movie memories. Generations of young boys anxiously awaited the announcement of the weekly Western. It would take a week to save the money but the investment return was a week of reenactment with friends—joining posses, rescuing the weak, recovering the loot or battling with wild Indians.

In the 1920s a dime lasted all week and by the 1960s it was a quarter. Many villains were caught; many good guys successful—all for less than two bits.

Local Mention

The materials used at our fountain are the finest that money can buy. We do not believe in serving only fairly good Soda. We use nothing but Pure Fruit Juices for flavoring and also served Crushed Fruit with our Sodas.

Blankenships
June 27, 1918, *Houston Herald*

Picture Show

This week the Lyric Theatre is being torn out and the room will be converted into an addition to the Houston Garage. Saturday night was the last show in the Lyric Theatre and we see it out with regret, for the building was a fine gathering place for many public meetings.

The Lyric Theatre seats and equipment have been moved into the Dooley hall upstairs just south of Odd Fellows Hall and Albert Howell will continue the Lyric moving picture show in this hall. He will give the first show Saturday night, June 2 and will start off with Peck's Bad Boy, one of Charley Chaplin's specialties. Mr. Howell will continue the picture show regularly if it is well patronized.

May 24, 1923 *Houston Herald*

Houston's "moving picture shows" were shown in the G.A.R. Hall, the school gym, churches, an airdome and a one level building on Grand. Sometime before 1920 the Houston theater had a name, the Lyric Theatre, and a location, "first door left of Texas County Bank" (northwest corner of Grand and Pine).

The *Herald* announces in 1923 movies were to be shown upstairs from the long narrow stairwell to the Odd Fellows hall. (105 Grand) The room is remembered as small. To attend a movie in this hall cost a dime. A piano sat beside the screen to be played for sound effects.

Silent movies flourished through the late 1920s. Frequently a pianist accompanied the movie but used no words. Conversation lines or action descriptions called "titles" were printed and inserted on file frames between appropriate scenes.

One projector was used. Each film was "several reels." This meant the movie came to a complete stop each time a new reel had to be threaded or repaired.

A good pianist could help distract the waiting viewers.

Local Happenings in and About Town

Shaw in Town Every Night this week at the Dooley Hall, the old K. of P. Hall room.
April 7, 1927 *Houston Herald*

1930s

All Quiet on the Western Front (1930)



Gaylord Elliott is credited with running Houston's first moving picture show. Elliott was an innovative businessman and involved in first time ventures, including being Houston's first undertaker.

Ada Cox Smith, recently featured in the *Herald*, passed away at her home Oct. 21. Mrs. Smith, one of Texas County's oldest residents at the age of 107, was buried Wednesday at the Antioch Cemetery in Hartshorn. The *Herald* staff extends condolences to the Smith family.

MPs Remain at Fort

The two military police companies mobilized for training at Fort Leonard Wood will remain there to support force protection operations.

The 1138th MP Company (National Guard) from West Plains and Springfield and the 447th MP Company (Army Reserve) from Akron, Ohio, were mobilized to nearby Fort Leonard Wood during recent weeks for force protection training.

"I'm glad to have both the 1138th MP Company and 447th Military Police Company here as part of our team. The Law Enforcement Command is dedicated to the safety and security of Fort Leonard Wood, our resources and our people. The installation mission of training leaders is vital to our nation," said Lt. Col. Christy Samuels, commander of Law Enforcement Command.

"I am confident that we will en-

hance installation security quite well, together. These new units are both ready and disciplined. I know they've received outstanding refinement training here as well," she added.

Samuels said the families can also relax a little knowing at least where their spouses, mothers and fathers will be, although the mission here will be challenging nonetheless.

The families will receive briefings from the Maneuver Support Center command and staff in the coming weeks, including medical, financial, administration and other support information. Those briefings are scheduled in the coming weeks, and families with soldiers activated at the fort should contact their family readiness group representative or spouse for the date, time and place.

The Mummy (1932)
Cimarron (1932)
Mutiny on the Bounty (1935)

The first "talkie," or movie to have sound was *The Jazz Singer* in 1927. Talking movies enthralled crowds. By 1930 movie attendance in the U.S. doubled. It took time for talking pictures to reach Houston and residents recall silent movies shown into the 1930s. One Houston resident attended a "talkie show" in Springfield. When the actor on screen said, "Stand up!"—he did.

Talking movies were originally stiff, formal and actors said complete lines without interruption—unlike real life conversations. Some of the actors had heavy accents and voices not suited for films. Greta Garbo, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy were some who successfully switched to talking films.

Not only did the actors need time to adjust, the theatres needed time and money to update the equipment. In the late 1920s Houston's theater was owned by Orville (Shorty) Gentry. He remodeled the lower level of the old post office (111 Grand) into Houston's first theater with actual sloping floors to the west. Movie chairs were present and so was a screen with a curtain. A piano used for many of the silent movies still shown doubled in duty when the theater was also used for piano recitals. And there were two projectors—movie showings could be continuous.

Misses Norene Leavitt and Alberta Harris.....were pictured recently on the stage of the New Lyric theatre in a fancy dancing specialty.
May 1929, *Houston Herald*

Houston was proud of its theater and attendance was good. These were Depression years and movies provided a welcome escape from the grim and gritty reality of life.

Professor Jewell Alexander, music director and pupils of Houston music department, who won six trophy cups at recent contest.....were honored by citizens of Houston at various parties and treats...after which the whole group was treated to the movie at the Lyric Theatre by the proprietor, O.L. Gentry.
May 1929, *Houston Herald*

Four-year-old Jesse McNew traveled to town from the Ozark community by wagon and attended her first movie with older brother, Ralph. Gangster movies were popular in early talking films and blood shown in black and white was still disturbing. Jesse ended up sharing Ralph's seat and she recalled a sleepless night

Houston Police Busy with Calls

Houston police handled several accident investigations during the last week.

Officers:

—Investigated an Oct. 18 accident that police said occurred when a vehicle driven by Kathleen B. Richardson, 59, of Houston, proceeded from the Main and Second streets intersection and struck a county patrol car driven by Sheriff Dean Belshe, 63, of Houston. Richardson told officers her foot must have slipped off the brake.

—Referred a 14-year-old Yukon boy to juvenile authorities after he was found taking some CD computer programs at the Houston Schools on Oct. 17.

—Investigated an Oct. 16 accident that police said occurred when a vehicle driven by Tammy R. Cantrell, 41, of Houston, pulled from her driveway and struck a parked van owned by KC Contracting—Kent Watkins, West Plains.

—Investigated an Oct. 17 accident that occurred when a vehicle driven by Tammy L. Miller, 17, of Houston, struck in the rear a car operated by Traci J. Buchholz, 17, of Raymondville. The mishap oc-

curred near Houston High School.

—Investigated an Oct. 15-16 break-in at Price and Associates, 219 S. Grand Ave., where glass was broken in a rear entry door. A television, which didn't work, was taken.

—Cited Dawn L. Carbajal, 38, of Houston, with stealing less than \$750 at Houston Town and Country. Taken were two pumpkins. Upon arrival by officers at her residence, Carbajal asked, "Are they magic pumpkins? Because I don't see them here."

—Investigated an Oct. 14 accident that police said occurred when a vehicle driven by David W. Ceplina, 18, of Raymondville, topped a hillcrest and became airborne. The vehicle landed on the roadway. The right front axle broke. The auto skidded downhill for about 184 feet. The side of vehicle struck a stop sign. It came to rest with its rear on Main Street and the front end down an embankment.

—Investigated property damage Oct. 15-16 at White Electronics, where a window was broken. A rock caused the damage.

—Investigated an Oct. 16 acci-

dent that police said occurred when a vehicle driven by Elsa C. Richardson, 89, of Summersville, pulled from a Grand Avenue parking space and struck a car operated by Linda M. Lewis, 47, of Licking.

—Arrested Benjamin A. Estep, 24, of Cabool, on an outstanding probation and parole warrant on Oct. 17.

—Cited Donald L. Topping, 28, of Houston, with peace disturbance on Oct. 14.

—Investigated an Oct. 20 accident that police said occurred when a vehicle driven by Tammy Hill, 40, of Raymondville, was pulling from a parking spot at the fairgrounds and struck a parked sheriff's department vehicle.

—Arrested investigating the theft of two dolls worth about \$380 from Little Darlins, 403 W. Highway 17, Oct. 18.

—Investigated a scratch to a car belonging to Curt Cichon, 331 Oak Hill. It was reported Oct. 17.

—Arrested James DeJager, 42, of Houston, on three felony warrants charging him with sale of a controlled substance. Bond was set at \$20,000 on each count on Oct. 19.

—No shows at the Melba Theatre this week, moving into the new theatre building and getting ready for the Grand Opening next Sunday.
Feb. 17, 1938 *Houston Herald*

—Warren McKnight announces this week he will install new equipment in his already modern theatre here.
April, 1936, *Houston Herald*

In 1935, McKnight hired a young Marshall Mires to keep the furnace stoked. It would be his only responsibility and netted him \$1 each week with the opportunity to watch all movies for free.

This was a dream job for a young boy during the Depression. There were three different shows each week and all the popcorn you could eat. For others popcorn was five cents per bag—but only popcorn, other treats could be purchased down the street at Herron's Drug Store.

Films and posters were delivered to the theater each week. Posters were displayed in a case outside the building.

THU, THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 1937

MELBA THEATRE

Wednesday, Thursday, January 8 and 9—Will Rogers, in "STATE FAIR." Plus Comedy and News.

Friday, January 8 Signalese Night. \$80.00 Pre. Gaily Fillets and Robt. Armstrong in "WITHOUT ORDERS." Plus Comedy.

Saturday, January 9—"HOPALONG CASSIDY RETURNS." Wm. Boyd Geo. Hayes, and Gail Sheridan. Plus Chapter 6—"Darkest Africa."

Sunday, Monday, January 10 and 11—Lo. Young, Kent Taylor, Don Amershe, Paulius Frederick in "RAMONA."—All in Technicolor. Plus News Cartoon.

Coming!—Wednesday, Thursday, January 13 and 14—Max West in "GO WEST YOUNG MAN"

Westerns were popular features at Houston's theater throughout the decades. Above is a 1937 *Houston Herald* ad for the Melba when it was at 111 Grand (across from present Casebeers Jewelry).

THE HOUSTON HERALD, HOUSTON, MISSOURI, THURSDAY, JULY 31, 1936

AT THE LYRIC

SATURDAY NIGHT, JULY 31

"THE GYPSY TRAIL"

This is a PARAMOUNT-ARTCRAFT production, and PARAMOUNT pictures are known everywhere as the best. Each Saturday night we will offer for your entertainment a PARAMOUNT production.....

At an early date we will install a ventilating system for your comfort.

Doors will be open at 7:00 and show will begin at 7:30 prompt—Only one show.

Admission--Adults 20c, Children 11c

LYRIC THEATRE

FIRST DOOR WEST OF TEXAS COUNTY BANK

The Lyric in 1920 advertised the coming of a new "ventilating system for your comfort." A fan is remembered in one of Houston's early theaters on a long runner, moved by a crank handle and gear shift on the wall. Theaters advertised comfort as a selling point to their movie goers.

COLUMN 6

Sen. Sarah Steelman, R-Rolla, visited last Tuesday at Houston City Hall. She joined Houston Area Chamber of Commerce members for lunch. A judicial panel is drawing up lines for state Senate and House districts. It's unclear whether Texas County will remain in the 16th Senate District, which runs from Fulton to Texas County....Houston Head Start children recently visited the pumpkin patch at the Blackwell farm east of Licking on Highway CC....



Quote seen in the newspapers: "We're selling more Cipro in a day than we used to in a month. It's more popular than Viagra."
—Alex Orergerl, a pharmacist in Tijuana, Mexico.

Odd's and ends: Reyno Feltner of Plato won \$1,348 recently in a Missouri Lottery game.

Houston Postmaster Mike Beasley is serving as a trouble-shooter for the U.S. Post Office. He's in Portland, Ore., this week....

A flurry of activity could be found in front of the Houston Primary School and its fourth- and fifth-grade elementary wing Saturday. Volunteers landscaped the front of the building with shrubbery and planted dogwood trees. An open house for the public is expected next month. A special section also will appear in the newspaper highlighting the structure.

Remember when dogs were the worst thing a mail carrier had to worry about?

A former Texas County prosecutor, Brad Ellsworth, said he had been asked recently by some Republican Party officials about his interest in seeking the GOP nomination next year for prosecutor. He indicated he was leaning against such a move. Ellsworth served May 1989 to December 1994.

Businesses To Provide Equipment

Three local businesses have teamed to provide a downtown revitalization group with needed computer equipment.

Elaine Campbell will use the items in conjunction with her job as development director for Downtown Houston Inc., which is working toward a multi-year project to spruce up the downtown area with the cooperation of the City of Houston and the Houston Area Chamber of Commerce. Campbell is working toward securing funding. A Springfield architectural firm is working on plans.

Assisting in the purchases were First National Bank of Houston, White Electronics and Texas County Veterinary Clinic, Dr. and Mrs. I.C. Keeney.

A computer is equipped to allow visual presentations to groups. "We're really pleased with the cooperation received when the call goes out for help," said Kathy Richardson, vice president of Downtown Houston.

Grants Okayed For Projects At Building

The Texas County Historical and Military Museum in Houston will be closed Thursday (today) for replacement of the building's heating and cooling system.

A grant received from the Missouri Veterans Commission made the work possible, said County Clerk Don Troutman.

The county also received a grant for a ramp to assist those with disabilities. It is situated on the south side of the building on Grand Avenue.

THE SECOND FRONT

Houston Past and Present

The Melba, Magic and Memories (part 3)

Opening of the New Melba Theatre Last Sunday Was a Gala Occasion, Mark of Progress For Houston

First, let it be known that Mr. and Mrs. McKnight, Melba Theatre proprietors, did not select Sunday for the Grand Opening of the New Melba Theatre because it was Sunday, but other days they preferred to select had something to interfere and they could not get the picture they wished for the opening. It was a Grand Opening really, for the large audience of the New Melba was well filled at both afternoon matinee and at the evening hours, and people were attracted from all points of Texas County and other nearby towns.

At the beginning of the night show, Manager McKnight introduced Mayor L. B. Womack who spoke in praise of Mrs. Bessie Womack, the builder of such a beautiful show house, and of Mr. and Mrs. McKnight, who have persevered in building up one of the best, high class show places in this part of the state.

Entering the roomy foyer, one was greeted by beautiful flowers, tastefully arranged. You passed into the auditorium and came to handsome draperies to screen the view from the outside. Passing down the aisles you walked on soft, pretty carpets and were seated on new, leather cushioned seats and gazed about at soft-toned lights and handsomely finished walls. In fact, to attend the new Melba made one feel like they were in the large city, for this show place would do credit to any city much larger than Houston. Congratulations to Mrs. Womack, the builder, and to Mr. and Mrs. McKnight, who by good shows and courteous treatment have made the Melba a very popular show place.

Feb. 24, 1938 Houston Herald



"Handsome draperies" — red velvet with gold cord, screened Melba movie goes from the front foyer. A large curtain opened and closed over the screen at the beginning and end of each movie.

1938 Houston now had its first official movie house. It was built solely for showing the latest movies in the greatest of comfort. The Melba Theatre's red velvet curtain opened for the first time Feb. 20, 1938. The theater was the finest in the area and a huge success.

Business woman Bessie Kelly Womack had built it to seat several hundred people, the floor sloping to a tall screen. Cushioned seats were off pathways of carpeted runners. Red neon outlined the marquee and MELBA called its name to nighttime movie goers — and there were many.

A miniature golf course on the lot south of the theater is recalled. It was lighted for evening entertainment while the movie was in operation. Merchants stayed open nights to accommodate late show goers and parking became a problem.

An oak ticket booth with a glass window took 20 cents for adults. Children under 12 pushed 10 cents through the opening. Outside, metal frames held photos of movie scenes and a large poster of the movie — future features on the right.



Chair parts found in the Melba give a glimpse of early seating.

now showing on the left. The frames would change often. During peak years, the Melba would have as many as four different movies each week.



Bessie Kelly

Nine-year-old Jessie knew she would die if she was not allowed to go see *Gone With the Wind*. It was 1941 and she would be the only remaining soul in the world not to have seen the epic movie showing at the Melba.

Though it had been released in 1939, it was just now coming to Houston. Some adults had made an earlier journey when *Gone With the Wind* came to Rolla. Women had worn white gloves, hats — it was "like going to the opera in St. Louis."

Jessie would wear her "school clothes" not her "home clothes." She would go with her older, 12-year-old sister, who was in love with Clark Gable, and her friend.

The older girls had permission to attend either the early or late showing, but Jessie could only go to the early. It would be close, the movie started around 6 p.m.

After school, the three girls walked up the dirt road (later known as Oak Hill) to the very end. The friend had to cook dinner for her widowed father and

brother. Eggs and girls both scrambled quickly and they raced back to Jessie's house. By this time Jessie's mother objected to the late hours involved on a school night and told Jessie she could not go see *Gone With the Wind* at the Melba.

Fearing ruin of life as she knew it, Jessie called upon 9-year-old defenses necessary in such a dramatic, traumatic moment — she threw a tantrum.

The wailing and despair resulted in a happy ending. Given the go-ahead, the three girls zoomed to Grand Avenue as fast as their legs could carry them. A line had already formed for the first showing of *Gone With the Wind*. The girls joined the line's end in front of Leavitt's Department Store, praying they would not be cut off from the first show.

Prayers were answered, memories made and the late night walk home ended with a 10:30 p.m. bedtime. School would be great tomorrow and Jessie was one with the world.

1940s Citizen Kane (1941) Mrs. Miniver (1942) Casa Blanca (1943)

The success of the Melba brought many movies and many people. The movie business was booming across the United States and instead of a straight rental fee, theaters were now charging a percentage of attendance.

Elmer Romines recalled being a "checker" hired by the movie distributor. His job was to personally count the number of persons attending the movie. Ticket sales and his numbers were supposed to match. Both were high, attendance was good, especially children.

For one quarter, children under 12 could buy the ten-cent movie ticket, a five-cent "good size" sack of popcorn, watch the movie and on the way home swing by Herron's or Blankenship's Rexall for a 5-cent double ice cream cone and a 5-cent soda with cherry or vanilla. If you wanted to blow it all, a malt or milkshake was 15 cents — a whole afternoon of entertainment for 25 cents. It was a popular investment for many a Houston parent.

Of course, if a kid got to watch all movies for free it was a considered a "big deal." A deal like this happened for young Roger Kirkman, Bill Gladden, Harry Kelly and Les Florida in the early 1940s.

The Melba had a wide drawing area and Hugh Huston, manager at the time, advertised coming feature attractions with small individual flyers.

Huston would drive his young messengers to Summersville and Licking. The boys would head down the main street of Licking and put flyers in each business. Houston town residents found flyers stuck in their screen doors.

It is remembered Huston on an occasion stopped at the Big Creek bridge near Summersville. Swimming is recalled and "noodling" — catching bass and goggle-eye with bare hands.

Also remembered are "Gold Bricks" — a 5-cent, inch and a half chunk of solid

Grand Opening Of The
NEW MELBA THEATRE
Sunday, February 20, 1938

Matinee 2:30 p. m. Doors Open 1:30 p. m.
Nights 7:30-9:39. Doors Open 6:45 p. m.

Same Picture Shown Monday, February 21

The Most Modern Theatre in the Territory
Air Conditioned Water and Sound. E. C. A. Sound Equipment. Unobstructed Seats.
East Range. Complete Comfort.
FIRE PROOF BUILDING

PLAYERS — Free Complete Show, in Each Night. Matinee Every Week.

ADMISSION PRICES — Sunday Mat. 5c, 10c and 15c; nights 10c and 15c. Thursday and Friday, 10c and 15c. Saturday, 10c and 15c.

'VIVA' BRUISING STAR RIDES AGAIN!
A great action picture from France, a real "Gone with the Wind" picture. It's a full length picture, and it's a real "Gone with the Wind" picture. It's a real "Gone with the Wind" picture. It's a real "Gone with the Wind" picture.

THE BAD MAN OF BRIMSTONE
WALLACE BEERY
with Virginia Bruce, Dennis O'Keefe, Guy Kibbee, Lewis Stone, Guy Lombardo, and other screen celebrities.

—We have under contract and will play all of the latest and best pictures. You can be assured of your money's worth in entertainment value any time you see our show.

COMING ATTRACTIONS
WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY, FEB. 23-24 — "FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE," with Johnnie Walker and his Legion, a great attraction. Picture: "March of Time."
THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, FEB. 24-25 — "ROAD STREET" with Jack Hatter and Pat Peterson. A special show that has everything. Picture: "Comedy and Song."
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26 — "DEAR CREAN ON BROADWAY." Picture: "Comedy and Song."
SUNDAY AND MONDAY, FEB. 27-28 — "WAGG WAGG" and "See Service to 'LOVE AND RIDGE'."

CLAY'S BARBER SHOP
Clay's Barber Shop
Clay's Barber Shop

CLAY'S BEAUTY SHOP
Clay's Beauty Shop
Clay's Beauty Shop

CLAY'S BEAUTY SALON
Clay's Beauty Salon
Clay's Beauty Salon

CLAY'S BEAUTY SALON
Clay's Beauty Salon
Clay's Beauty Salon

Grand Opening of New Melba Theatre
Next Sunday the doors of the New Melba Theatre will be thrown open to the public in a Grand Opening as shown by full page announcement in this issue of the Herald. The opening picture will be one of Wallace Beery's master-pieces, "The Bad Man of Brimstone" with Virginia Bruce, Dennis O'Keefe, Lewis Stone, Guy Kibbee and a number of other screen celebrities. The opening of the New Melba Theatre is an event in Houston's progress, a handsome addition to our little city's business street, erected by Mrs. Bessie Womack. New seats are now installed and hundreds of people can be comfortably accommodated in the commodious auditorium.
Houston Herald Feb. 17, 1938

chocolate Huston loved to eat. The thought of the free Saturday movie was far removed while sitting close to the smell of unavailable chocolate and crumpled gold wrappers.

December 7, 1941 three Ross' girls, Helen, Jeanne, and Mary Kate attended the Sunday matinee at the Melba Theatre. As was the custom following the movie, young folks congregated at Rexall to visit and call parents. The girls were met on the sidewalk in front of the drugstore by friend Bill McCaskill. Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

The movie was soon forgotten but the feeling of fear remembered. It was not long before young men of Houston began leaving to join the fight in World War II.

Melba Theatre Sells \$1750 Bonds Free Night
Melba Theatre held its first Bond Sale last Thursday night with Free Show Admittance to each purchaser of a bond of any denomination that night.

\$1750 was the total amount of bond sales that night. Thursday night, July 6, the Melba will have another FREE SHOW night and every purchaser of a Bond in any amount in the Theatre lobby that night will be admitted Free. Buy Bonds. Back the Attack.
June 29, 1944 Houston Herald

Everyone helped with the World War II effort, including the Melba Theatre. Besides raising bond money, the Melba played newsreels informing people about the war. TVs were not common and the scenes helped people to see some of the armed forces in action.

As the Melba enjoyed continued popularity during periods of war and economic stress, a relatively new invention called television was coming into focus. Television would affect the movie industry and its viewers.

MELBA THEATRE
HOUSTON, MO.

SHOWING NEXT WEEK:
THE MELBA, THE FINAL CURTAIN

Superintendent's Corner



By Duane Widhalm, Superintendent

The Houston School District mission statement indicates students will promote the values of democracy and citizenship. There is no better way to highlight these values than to honor the veterans who have preserved the values of freedom and independence throughout the years.

Each day that we live in a free society is testimony to the sacrifice of veterans who have fought and died for our country. Because of their sacrifice, we have the good fortune to live in the greatest and most powerful country in the world.

Each of us has a duty to honor these brave men and women by remembering their service to our

country. Houston students are taught, through these celebrations, to respect the work of our nation's armed forces.

Once again, the staff, faculty and students will be celebrating Veterans Day on Nov. 13 at Hiatt Gymnasium. We invite all veterans to attend the program which begins at 2 p.m. and will end at 3 p.m.

Students, faculty and the public are invited to the school district to honor veterans on 2-3 p.m. Nov. 13

The program will be followed by a reception in the high school cafeteria from 3 to 4 p.m. Houston high school students will also be attending the program. Certainly, the invitation to attend the program is open to everyone in the community, and I encourage you to attend.

Please call Rose Hall at 967-3024, Ext. 303, to tell her you will be attending so we can plan for seating and the reception following.

In addition to speaker Rep. Mark Hampton and memorabilia exhibited in the gym, the Fort Leonard Wood Army Brass Quintet and singer Letha Ivy-Bryant will perform at the event.

Please mark this date on your calendar. I think you will enjoy the program!



Several Texas County schools participated Thursday in an educational field trip for fourth grade classes. Wellspring Christian School, Licking, Raymondville, Plato and Success students participated in the event, which was at Slabtown River Access on the Big Piney River. The overall theme was wise stewardship of resources. Personnel from the Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Forest Service coordinated the activity. Twelve educational topics were discussed. Each lasted 15 minutes. Here, Plato students at an archaeology station.

COLUMN 6

Is a pet theft ring operating in the county? Some residents think so. A woman came into the newspaper office last week to report that five German Shepherd puppies were snatched east of Houston. They were last seen on Brushy Creek Road. Another owner reported their pet cut from its leash and sold. It was later recovered. The woman, who asked not to be identified, suggested that persons who lose their pets call the sheriff's department.

News from the war front: The grandson of Verlene Swearingin is aboard the USS Peleliu somewhere in the Indian Ocean. Jonathan Michael Swearingin is based normally at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base in San Diego. He is a lance corporal and a specialist in biological and chemical warfare. His father is Scott Swearingin, who is a veteran.

Attorney General Jay Nixon says today is the last day to sign up for his office's "No Call" list that takes effect Jan. 1. More than 827,000 phone numbers — representing an estimated 2.1 million Missourians — are on the list. It is updated quarterly. Sign up at moago.ag or 866-662-2551.

Members of Downtown Houston Inc. met last week to make decisions needed by a Springfield architectural firm that is preparing a master plan for downtown improvements.

The group is working on a revitalization effort that will result in a facelift for the downtown over a period of several years.

Members discussed lighting, plantings, crosswalks, sidewalks, benches, trash receptacles and focal points for special treatments, among other topics, using feedback from the public and information obtained at public meetings.

In other matters, members: —Expressed their support of a Texas County Library plan to acquire property at Walnut and First streets.

—Discussed conducting a possible survey of the community's walking needs. Creation of a walking trail is under consideration in the master plan.

—Heard that Elaine Campbell, the group's development director, was in Jefferson City last Wednesday attending a workshop of grants.

Speaking of downtown, a new sign will soon go up on North U.S. 63 promoting downtown. Participants are: Savannah's Teahouse, Grand Avenue Antique Mall, Forbes Drug and Brown's Family Shoes.

The annual holiday drive that helps Texas County's needy children is set to begin.

The event, in its 17th year, is sponsored by Texas County Division of Family Services and the Houston Herald. DFS identifies individual cases, while the newspaper provides publicity.

Pat Miller, coordinator, said she will begin taking applications Monday, Nov. 5. Hours at DFS are 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The deadline to seek assistance is Nov. 30. Cases will be profiled in the Herald beginning Nov. 22.

Two persons tied to the local sports scene are gone. Harvey Carter died last week after a long illness. Mr. Carter, who is recognized with a baseball field named in his honor, was instrumental for years in promoting the Little League program. He also was an avid bowler.

Former Houston educator, Paul Cheek, also died last week. He was the driving force in the establishment of a tennis program here. He also announced at local basketball games.

Mark your calendar: Houston will hold its annual Christmas parade on Dec. 8.

A reminder: Letters to the editor must be signed. Send them to P.O. Box 170.

THE SECOND FRONT

Houston Past and Present

The Melba, The Final Curtain (Part 4)



To live in Houston during the 1950s, 60s and 70s meant many Melba memories. The Melba was an important and active participant in the economic and social being of Houston.

Alumni recall the last day of school movies shown to entire classes; the popularity of working at the Melba; the thrill of seeing big screen heartthrobs; the real-life relationships and friendships evolving at the Melba. Merchants remember movies geared to occupy kids while parents shopped and *Herald* newspaper clippings tell of educational reels sponsored by business interests.

The Melba enjoyed a peak of popularity spanning several decades. But as every business in Houston before and every one after, the Melba and movie business would have to respond to change...

1950s

- From Here to Eternity* (1953)
- The Greatest Show on Earth* (1952)
- Gigi* (1958)
- Ben-Hur* (1959)
- Love Me Tender* (1956)

Television is here: First TV in Houston - Alvin Beale takes a chance and finds it works, sees programs over St. Louis KSD-TV station.

March 17, 1949 *Houston Herald*

Television was to bring a change to movie theaters. In order to entice people away from their TV sets, movies became bigger, larger productions. Movies began to include subjects taboo for TV such as the new rock and roll sensation who could only be seen on TV's *Ed Sullivan Show* (1956) from the waist up - Elvis Presley.

Little brothers remember with dismay being dragged as an excuse to go to the Melba, bribed with the promise of popcorn, to see an Elvis Presley movie. Houston High School girls, pony tails bobbing, swooned at the larger than life Elvis. Ushers with flashlights had to search for empty seats.

Thank goodness for the Westerns that still played every week - Roy Rogers, Grizzly Adams, McHale's Navy. Boys of later generations were now able to buy cap guns and still continue to round up the bad guys.

Houston merchants gave out free matinee coupons to children and parents would shop Grand Avenue stress-free every Saturday for the length of a double feature.

Downtown Houston was thriving and so were the kids who could attain a master sugar buzz every Saturday at 10 a.m. Elsie Sillyman, Melba ticketmaster, growled but gave in each time and let kids zoom down to Forbes Rexall for a "truck load of candy." The Melba still carried only popcorn in its concessions and seemed to be missing a big commercial opportunity. But just given a minute, a future Houston dentist and friend could run to Rexall on the corner and return loaded with a 5-cent Hershey Bar, 5-cent Junior Mints, 5-cent caramel Valomills and a large 10-cent phosphate; creme soda or cherry coke. The floor of the Melba was becoming sticky with years of refresh-



Houston's Melba Theatre in the 1950s.

ments they didn't sell.

Packed down in the comfy seats with enough candy for the coming winter, it never ceased to be a thrill as the red velvet curtain parted for the cartoon opener. Too soon the blue neon Brooks Potato Chip clock agreed the double features were over.

Oh well, it was time to go get the bad guys... and besides the stomach needed a little fresh air.

regular activity with Houston High Schoolers and a rite of passage of age. Young children with adults sat down the right aisle. Courting couples who didn't always watch the movie sat on the left. Boys with the intent of other activities sat against the middle wall - it is easier there not to be seen by Hugh Huston who ran the Melba for many years and would part the back curtain to hiss specific directions without any attempt to censor or rate language according to ages present.

Kids began movie attendance being dropped off by parents in front of the Melba. As independence increased bikes were ridden, then walking was the travel of choice and finally driving - even if it was a just a few blocks.

1970s

- Patton* (1970)
- The Sting* (1973)
- The Godfather part II* (1974)
- The Deer Hunter* (1978)

Homer "Popcorn" Wyatt was the final manager of the Melba Theater. He liked the kids that came to the theater but they came less and less despite the still low prices. And the crowd could be rowdy.

A stowaway chicken attended one of the movies and caused its own scene-stealing appearance as it was reluctantly ejected.

A cat, sneaked-in under a shirt, ripped more than fabric as it clawed to freedom.

And concessions were known to become airborne during intermissions.

The sticky floor was now from the Melba's own concessions. Coke was sold, no diet; popcorn was 25 cents a bag, 75 cents per box. Candy was limited - Reese's Cups, Snickers.

Teenagers had access to cars and the roads were good. Springfield was no longer the several day trip it once was and it was the "in thing" to drive to the new Battlefield Mall and attend the new multi-cinemaplex.

Houston's Grand Avenue was not the strip of activity it once was.

Businesses moved out on U.S. 63. Downtown parking was no longer a problem. The Melba neon faded to light pink; the heavy curtain still deep maroon but the carpet gray with wear.

When an increase in rent was proposed, the Melba closed its curtain for the final time February 1980. The last movie ad for the Melba, found in the *Herald*, Feb. 21, 1980, advertized *The Fish That Saved Pittsburgh*.

The new *Century I Theatre* by the *Sunset Drive-In* opened the next week.

The Final Curtain

The Melba closed leaving behind countless hours of entertainment and innumerable memories - memories intertwined with the experience and closeness of growing up in a small town and the connection it provided to the world outside.

Once considered a grand and modern facility, it stands empty - the seats gone, storage items piled high; the fixtures, only shadows of paint on the wall. Layers of colors represent generations of Houston the Melba served and entertained; the kids who got to play the part of the good guy, the young adults who found romance and the rest who got a moment's reprieve from daily life by enjoying a good story.

Only ghosts remain, shadows on the walls flashing like the images once upon a screen. Will the memories, the history, be lost like old reels stuck into forgotten corners? Or will they be dusted off, brought back for viewing? Could new memories be made?

The 1984 movie *Ghostbusters* comes to mind...

Whoyagonnacall?
We await the sequel.

Vernon and MaryAnn Davidson, featured in the May 3 Herald, presently run Houston's Showtime Cinema on Highway 11.

Thank you to the many who contributed stories and history for this series on Houston's movie memories. Information also taken from World Book. - Kathy L. Richardson



Movies and concessions mingle in memories, chocolate being a timeless favorite. This Hershey 5-cent chocolate bar wrapper was recently discovered during the destruction of an old home in Raymondville by Tom Ford. It is shown actual size.



Flyers such as these encouraged movie attendance from surrounding areas. They were delivered to businesses and homes in Licking, Summersville and Houston by enterprising young boys who got to watch the movies for free.

(Flyer courtesy of Bill and Vera Gladden)



Authorities reported fewer trick or treaters last week in Houston. Here, costumed goblins at a downtown Houston event sponsored by Houston Community Betterment Inc.

COLUMN 6

Odds and ends: Progressive Ozark Bank, which has facilities in Houston, Salem and Hartsville, has opened a branch in the Wal-Mart Supercenter at Mountain Grove... State and federal officials are breathing a sign of relief after wrapping up the latest gypsy moth survey, an annual trapping effort to keep the pesky insect out of Missouri... The ones closest to Texas County were at Stone County... Sugar Maple Estates on Holder Drive is the site where more construction is under way. An open house was there recently...

The Greyhound bus station has relocated to St. Robert, Fort Leonard Wood officials say. All scheduled arrivals and departures will use the new location.

Emmett Kelly Jr. is featured in the November issue of *Arizona Highways*. Emmett Kelly Jr. Days are held each November in Tombstone, Kelly's hometown since 1980. It is celebrated the weekend closest to his Nov. 13 birthday. Kelly turns 77 this year. A dinner during the festival raises funds for two \$1,000 scholarships awarded to students at Tombstone High School.

Kelly "retired" the frayed plaid tie that he had worn for 26 years as part of his Willie costume. The successful bidder paid \$5,000 for the dusty neckwear. At the same dinner, a woman paid \$79 for Kelly's dinner plate, complete with half a roll and other leftovers on it. Kelly autographed the plate, and the lady took it home, had it framed and bronzed the roll.

The number of trick or treaters was dramatically down across town, police and homeowners reported.



This photograph won first place recently in the first annual International Association of Chiefs of Police torch run photo contest. Pictured is Sgt. Marty Elmore, a Houston native, who is based from Troop G of the Missouri State Highway Patrol in Willow Springs. The photo won first in the law enforcement in support of the Special Olympics athletes themselves category.

Under the headline, "65565 The Middle of America," an unflattering picture of Steelville appears in the November issue of *National Geographic*. Among photos included with the story is a photograph at the Saddle Tramps Motorcycle Club.

The northern lights are making an appearance this week. The display is sparked by a solar flare that spewed extra charged particles into the Earth's magnetic field, experts say.

Persons should face north and look halfway up from the horizon; rural areas are best. Viewing time is 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. Most likely, Thursday night (tonight) will be the last chance for a viewing.

The last showing was 15 years ago.

Public Meeting On Highway Work

A public meeting to discuss improvements to South Sam Houston Blvd. and Holder Drive is set for next Wednesday at Houston City Hall. Officials are proposing installation of two small medians and traffic signal, along with some improvements to entrances.

The work is in conjunction with plans to build a Wal-Mart Supercenter in the community.

The meeting, which is 4 - 6 p.m., will be conducted by the City of Houston, Missouri Department of Transportation and Wal-Mart.

Area businesses and the public are invited.

The timetable calls for highway bid specifications to be generated by early December for a bid opening in January. Construction would be in conjunction with Wal-Mart's own plans, which call for dirtwork launching in February, according to the city.

City Administrator Bill Bates said Monday that it is believed by Wal-Mart including the highway work in the overall package, that cost savings will emerge.

BRIEFLY...

Firefighters and officials with the U.S. Forest Service were among

those called to fight a fire in the Boiling Springs area last week.