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*Last Updated: 09/05/2024*



Boyish Reagan, 29 in 1940, portrayed Gipp. He stood six feet, weighed 180, had played guard in college.

# Dixon remembers Reagan as a good kid

DIXON, Ill. (UPI) — The future Republican candidate for president sat on top of a stoplight and gazed down at the police chief of Dixon.

"Dutch, come down," the chief said.  
 "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," Dutch answered.  
 "Just who in the hell do you think you are?"

So it was that Ronald Reagan, having struck a blow for civil disobedience, had to go to the police station and was fined the grand total of \$1 for getting mildly drunk and feeling destined to climb a stop light and sit there.

It is highly probable the police went easy on him because Dutch Reagan was known all around Dixon as a youth who just escaped the epithet of being "goody goody" because most people couldn't help liking him.

Practically everyone in Dixon and in the other towns where Reagan grew up in northern and central Illinois still like him. Particularly the many who knew him when.

Come Hollywood, California or politics, they swear, Dutch Reagan has not changed.

They recall a free-spirited puritan, a Democrat in a Republican world, a poor boy who never seemed to notice his poverty, a mother's boy who never ceased to love his rapscallion father.

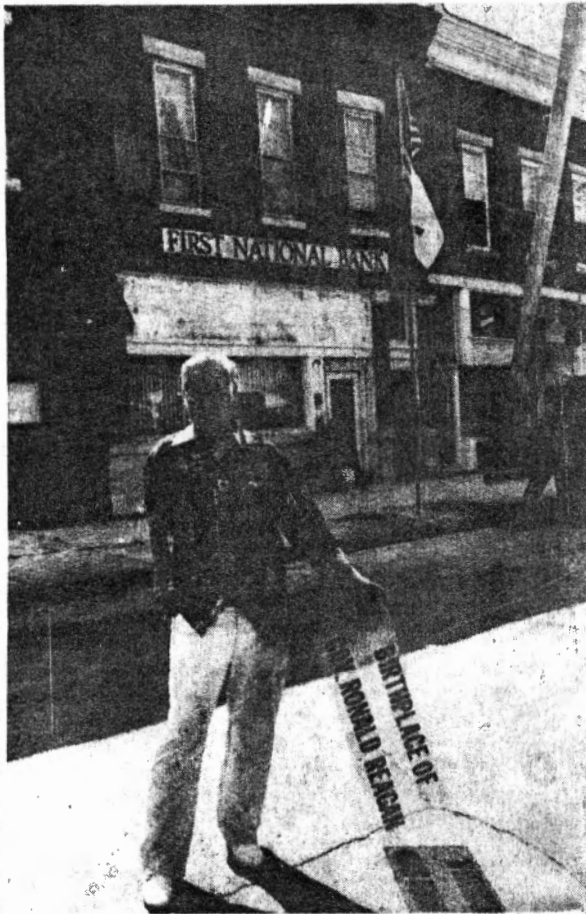
If these appear to be paradoxes, they are the reports of people who knew him through Tampico, the village where he was born; Dixon, where he grew up; and Eureka, where he worked his way through college.

They said he was a youth:

—who had an extraordinary capacity for close friendships which he has nourished ever since. The friends he made in Dixon and at Eureka College regard themselves as his intimates now, largely because Reagan has not ceased to treat them as such

—who teased a black friend in Dixon, telling him to "go down to the bakery and get me two dozen doughnut holes." But who also, when three black football teammates were turned away from a hotel in De Kalb, Ill., joined his brother in piling them into a car, driving them to Dixon, and putting them up in the Reagan home.

—who would sit beside



Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's birthplace is being spruced-up. Paul Nicley and his wife, who are the owners of the old First National Bank building on Tampico's main street, are restoring the building and the second floor apartment where Reagan was born in 1911. Nicely holds the sign marking the birthplace which was removed while the front of the building was sandblasted. (UPI photo)

where Republicanism was Gospel, and who never seemed to notice his clothes were more threadbare and his home more frequently changed than his classmates.

—whose friends wondered why such a good looking guy passed up all his chances to make an impact with the Dixon and Eureka girls and instead went more or less steady through high school and college with a minister's daughter, Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver, a "goody goody" who, eventually chose another fellow.

The story is told that once Reagan was sitting on the front porch of a cabin

ours and we taught their kids to swim. To show their appreciation — this was during Prohibition — they bought us each a bottle of wine.  
 "And we put it down and we got just a little bit tipsy, not dangerous or anything. There used to be a stop light over at the corner of Clinton and North Galena. We walked up Galena. I don't know what possessed Dutch but he climbed up on top and sat there.

"About that time the chief of police drove up in his Model T Ford with Officer Dick Conrad. They got out and said, 'Come down, Dutch, get down.' I don't know what in the hell

or politics back there in those days. He'd sit beside you on the bench out at the park and he'd put his arm across the back of your shoulder and play with your ear and talk about sports."

Crabtree considers himself a close friend of Reagan's.

Sam Harrod is possibly closer.  
 Harrod is a prospering attorney in Eureka. He was Reagan's fraternity brother in Tau Kappa Epsilon. They still see each other, either in Eureka or California, almost every year.

When Reagan's marriage to Jane Wyman was breaking up, Dutch and Sam sat for hours on a hill in Beverly Hills and hashed out their mutual distress. Harrod thought she was "a hell of a gal."

Harrod spoke with feeling of Reagan's capacity to maintain such a friendship over half a century.

"Everybody in Eureka went to college at that time. There wasn't more than a handful of cars in the place. Entertainment was what you made yourself. If you had a party or a dance you went over and danced every dance from the first to the last because that was the only show in town.

"There will never be another time like that because people got to be a

lot closer than they ever would now. I think it makes for closer friendship. When he left here, there was continual interest and concern (for Eureka).

"A lot of guys, they'd say, 'Where did you go to college?' and you'd say, 'Eureka' and they'd say, 'Jesus Christ, where's that?' He's proud of the fact and I do think that the small colleges in the 30s had an impact that you can't find today.

"He has the capacity and the ability to remember old friends, which is somewhat of a unique trait in many people. I got the opportunity to stay in contact with him. He came back to the Teke house at least twice a year, to see Moon.

"They loved to argue, just for the sheer joy of arguing. Not because they had any fixed positions, but if the opportunity came up to take the other side of the question, they'd argue to beat the band. Dutch was equally as loquacious,

equally able to hold his end of an argument."

Harrod recalled Reagan as a friend who was bound up with athletics, engaged enthusiastically in student activities, dabbled in dramatics because "it was something to do," and, while ever true to his Democratic faith, hardly ever spoke of it in the almost 100 per cent Republican town.

Ronald Wilson Reagan, by most accounts, was born on Feb. 6, 1911, in a

Continued on Page 18.

A+

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—who teased a black friend in Dixon, telling him to "go down to the bakery and get me two dozen doughnut holes." But who also, when three black football teammates were turned away from a hotel in De Kalb, Ill., joined his brother in piling them into a car, driving them to Dixon, and putting them up in the Reagan home.

—who would sit beside the pond at Lowell Park and twitch the ear lobe of his fellow lifeguard, John Crabtree, (literally — it was a habit of his at the time) while dreaming some day of becoming as great a radio sports announcer as Quinn Ryan.

—who was brought up in the Christian Church, a Disciple of Christ, while his elder brother, Neil, followed his Irish father and was raised in the Roman Catholic faith. But he pressured "Moon" Reagan to join him at the staunch Christian college of Eureka where he loved to sit and argue about anything, so long as his brother was on the other side.

—who never spoke of politics, even though his father's heritage made him a Democrat in country

birthplace which was removed while the front of the building was sandblasted. (UPI photo)

where Republicanism was Gospel, and who never seemed to notice his clothes were more threadbare and his home more frequently changed than his classmates.

—whose friends wondered why such a good looking guy passed up all his chances to make an impact with the Dixon and Eureka girls and instead went more or less steady through high school and college with a minister's daughter, Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver, a "goody goody" who, eventually chose another fellow.

The story is told that once Reagan was sitting on the front porch of a cabin overlooking the moonlit Lowell Lake with a lissome and much sought after young lady.

"Dutch," she said in an inviting southern accent, "do you know my hands are getting cold?" Reagan's stoic response was, "Have you ever tried sitting on them?"

Crabtree, retired lifeguard and Internal Revenue Service employee, sat on his front porch in Dixon and laughed almost fit to kill when he recalled those days.

"Dutch was not a goody goody but he could have been," he said. "If the situations were right, he'd take them. In fact, he got arrested."

"There was these couples out from Chicago in cottages at the park. They were real good friends of

ours and we taught their kids to swim. To show their appreciation — this was during Prohibition — they bought us each a bottle of wine.

"And we put it down and we got just a little bit tipsy, not dangerous or anything. There used to be a stop light over at the corner of Clinton and North Galena. We walked up Galena. I don't know what possessed Dutch but he climbed up on top and sat there.

"About that time the chief of police drove up in his Model T Ford with Officer Dick Conrad. They got out and said, 'Come down, Dutch, get down.' I don't know what in the hell led him to do it, but he looked down and said, 'Twinkle, twinkle little star, just who the hell do you think you are?'"

"They got him down and fined him a buck.

"He had the opportunity to sleep with the girls and more of an opportunity to overindulge. But he didn't do it. He'd quit in time. He's better than me. He was the smart guy.

"He had a rough go at school. He lived in more houses than anybody. Old Jack was not that kind of provider and the landlords even in Depression wanted the rent and if you couldn't pay the rent he'd say 'go'.

"Dutch didn't have clothes. He just didn't have it. period. I never heard him say a word about old Jack or even make any excuses for him. Old Jack was all man and a yard wide. He was a shoe salesman. He was just thirsty all the time.

"I think his mother — I think her influence was so great that it kind of kept Dutch straight. Nell Reagan was a very religious woman but not a Roman whereas Jack was. And there were two boys, Neil and Ron, and one boy was raised Catholic and the other boy was raised in the Christian Church.

"His mother was the dominating influence. She used to go up to the county jail on Sundays and sing hymns to the prisoners.

"Dutch was red hot on sports announcing. He never considered movies

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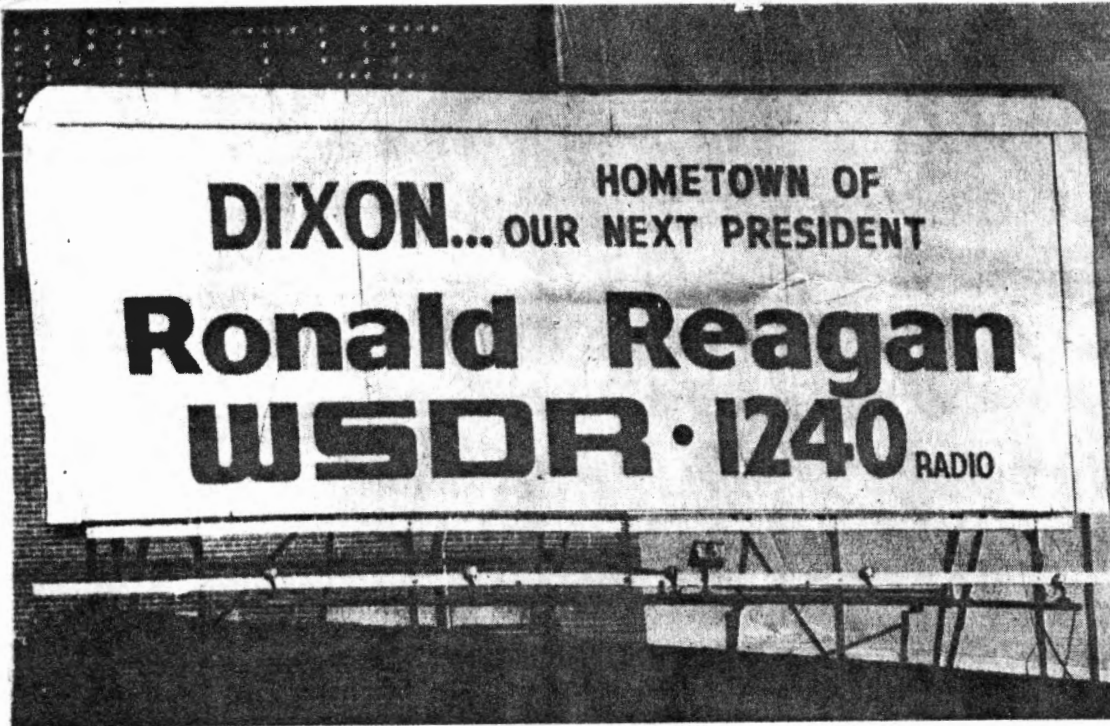


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Jumping the gun a bit, a radio station is already heralding Dixon as the "Hometown Of Our Next President, Ronald Reagan." The billboard is located atop a building on the main street of Dixon, the town where Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan grew up. Reagan was born in nearby Tampico, but moved to Dixon when he was 9 years old and lived in Dixon until he finished college. (UPI photo)

## Dixon remembers Dutch — a good kid

Continued from Page 17.

cramped apartment above a grocery store at 112 Main Street in Tampico, present population a robust 800-plus.

There is some dispute about that matter in Tampico. Proponents of at least two taverns on Main Street insist Reagan was born over their places. Others say he was born down the street. The confusion may well be because the Reagans moved around a lot.

Paul Nicely and his wife are investing \$25,000 on the proposition he and his wife own the legitimate Reagan birth site and a future national shrine. Nicely had the front of his building sand blasted last month and soon it will be tricked out with bunting and signs.

"The tavern owners are putting in claims about whether this is the right place," Nicely said. "Wouldn't you? But we have accreditations. The trouble is that the Reagans lived all around town."

Nicely has good reason to anticipate interest. On a

he sure makes a lot of noise." Nell Reagan apparently thought that was funny and spread the word around. The name stuck to Reagan all the way to Hollywood and most everybody still calls him Dutch in these parts.

The fact is that hardly anyone in Tampico remembers the Reagans now. Hard up as usual, they fled briefly to Chicago and then settled in Dixon, 30 miles up the road from Tampico, when Dutch was 9.

People in Dixon, "The Petunia City," remember him well.

There is a place called the Coachlight where older folks like to gather in the evening. At the right hour, you can hardly flip a beer cap without hitting a man who professes to be a lifelong friend of Dutch.

"He's the best man in the world!" Fritz Bindn shouted. "I'd go through hell for him! Anybody else in Dixon who doesn't vote for him is cabbage!"

There is a sign on the main stem heralding "Dixon — home town of



Union ticker.

Old friends recall he liked to hang out late at the Moonlight Inn, savoring spiked beer with news and broadcast types.

One of the girls he dated in those days fondly recalls, "He was lots of fun to date but no one got very serious because no one had any money to get married."

Stories differ on how he wound up in Hollywood. It is agreed he was in the vicinity covering the Cubs' training camp on Catalina Island. Some say a girl friend from home talked him into taking a screen test. Others maintain the catalyst was another old Dixon girl, gossip columnist Louella Parsons.

The fact is he signed for what seemed an outrageous salary to his old friends in Illinois. Reagan had bet his fraternity brothers he would make the enormous sum of \$5,000 a year within five years of graduation.

"He just made it and he sent back a telegram saying 'Pay up, you devils, I did it,'" recalled Harrod

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### Festivals

15-24 Chicago (Cook) — "Lakefront Fest." Lakeshore and Chicago River. Week-long schedule of water shows, skiing, plus the famous "Venetian Nights." Watch yachts cluster along Chicago's lakefront, each decorated with lights. Check current schedules by calling (312/744-3315 or 312/793-2094)

21-23 DeKalb (DeKalb) — Corn Festival, downtown area. Highlight boil, Aug. 23 starts at (11 a.m.) (815/756-4881)

Silvis (Rock Island) — Annual Country Music Festival, Downtown (7 p.m.) (309/762-3661)

25-31 Chicago (Cook) — Jazz Festival, Grant Park (312/744-3315)

27-31 Zion (Lake) — 1980 Jubilee Days Festival, Zion (All Day) (312/746-5500)

29-31 Park Forest (Cook/Will) — Park Forest Labor Day Festival, Central Park in Park Forest (10 a.m. - Midnight) (312/748-1112) (Through Sept. 1)

Naperville (DuPage) — "Last Fling" Labor Day Weekend Festival, Knoch Park. Parade Sept. 1 (10 a.m.) (312/355-4141)

30-31 Buffalo Grove (Cook/Lake) — Buffalo Grove Days, Village Hall Complex, 50 Raupp Boulevard (Noon) (312/459-2500)

Nauvoo (Hancock) — "Grape Festival." Nauvoo State Park. The banks of the Mississippi River are witness to the "wedding of the wine and cheese" festival, held in the once flourishing Mormon community. Homemade wine, Bleu cheese, parades and country music make it a fine opportunity to enjoy and explore restored Mormon homes (217/453-6646)

### Arts & crafts

16-30 Mt. Vernon (Jefferson) — Wildlife Artists Exhibit and Annual Mt. Vernon Art Guild Exhibit, Mitchell Museum, Tues.-Sun. (1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.) (618/242-1236) (Through September 21)

23 Elgin (Kane) — Starving American Arts and Crafts Fair, Fountain Square Plaza (9 a.m. - 6 p.m.) (312/639-5665)

26-31 Normal (McLean) First Western States Biennial, Center for the Visual Arts Gallery, Tues. (9 a.m. - 10 p.m.); Wed. (9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.); Sat.-Sun. (1:00 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.) (309/436-5487) (Through Oct. 5)

31 Chicago (Cook) — 15th annual Howard-Western Craft Fair, Howard-Western Shopping Center, 2400 W/7600 N. (10 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.) (312/674-8203) (Through Sept. 1)

### Museum exhibits

20-31 Chicago (Cook) — "The Great Bronze Age of China: An Exhibition From the People's Republic of China." Field Museum of Natural History. A comprehensive selection...106 of the most important bronzes and jades from about 1,500 B.C. to 210 B.C. as well as a group of eight larger-than-life terra cotta horses and soldiers that guarded the tomb of the Emperor Ch'in Shih Huang Ti from the third century B.C. until their excavation in 1974. Daily (9 a.m. - 9 p.m.); after Sept. 1 (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.); Fri. (9 a.m. - 9 p.m.) (312/922-9410) (Through October 29)

### Sports

22-24 Peoria (Peoria) — Professional Championship Rodeo, Exposition Gardens, Aug. 22-23 (8 p.m.); Aug. 24 (3 p.m.) (309/688-6631)

Chicago (Cook) — Chicago Cubs Baseball, Wrigley Field 1060 W Addison, Schedule and

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Nicely has good reason to anticipate interest. On a morning in late July, there were almost as many reporters on Main Street as Tampicans — one newsman from Des Moines, two from Clinton, Iowa, two from United Press International, and two from Hamburg, Germany.

One man who did not care for the hubbub at all was Bernie Staelens. Staelens, a cropheaded truck driver, lives in the old Reagan place with his wife and likes it. But Nicely has told him he has to be out by Aug. 15.

Staelens sat on a tavern stool and said he didn't want to talk about anything. But he is a gracious man and ended up doing so.

"You know what I am, don't you?" he exploded. "I'm a Democrat."

"Will you vote for Carter then?"

A long hesitation. Then, "No."

He wouldn't say why, but vowed he would be long gone from Reagan's natal home before the campaign heats up.

People started calling Reagan "Dutch" in Tampico before he was a year old.

The story is that Jack Reagan, wearied of his son's bawling, snapped "for a fat little Dutchman

now. Hard up as usual, they fled briefly to Chicago and then settled in Dixon, 30 miles up the road from Tampico, when Dutch was 9.

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There is a sign on the main stem heralding "Dixon — home town of our next president." But it could not be said that Dixon is throbbing with excitement over the Reagan candidacy.

Among some of the younger set, there appears more interest in the case of Fast Freddy, a male stripper arrested at a local tavern. His fans' enthusiasm led them to go too far with Freddy's G-string, prompting a police raid.

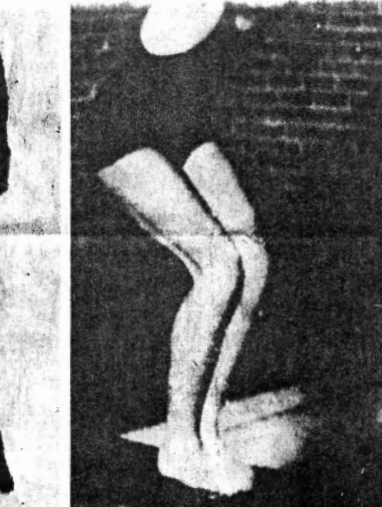
Bernard J. Frazer was Reagan's speech and English teacher at Dixon North High School and regards him as his prize pupil.

"He always thought you earn what you get," Frazer said. "As for his studies, I liked him in English. He was always asking questions. If we were reading an essay he would ask 'Why? Why did he write this? That's tonic for a teacher."

"He had the ability to put difficult ideas into fairly simple language. He made a dramatic acceptance speech (at the Republican convention). It was about your problems and mine.

"But you can talk all over hell and when the chips are down fate or God are the ones who decide. It will be a close election."

Reagan was president of



Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan is shown in file photos made while he attended Eureka College. In his football uniform (1931) file, is at left. At right he's shown as the college's leading swimmer (1931 file). (UPI photo)

the senior class at Dixon North (now defunct) and became president of the student senate and leader of a mild campus protest at Eureka.

The college is still a very small but green and woody repose among the undulating corn and soybean fields of central Illinois.

There were only 220 students when Reagan got there in 1923, prodded by his girl friend's minister father. There are 450 now and the school remains closely linked to the Christian Church.

It was not a free ride. Some say Reagan had a football scholarship. It appears, however, that Eureka did not offer such then.

The likelihood is Reagan met the \$90-a-semester tuition by saving his \$20-or-so a week wages as a lifeguard in Dixon and making up the rest waiting on tables and washing dishes in Eureka.

Burrus Dickinson was president of Eureka after Reagan left but has come

to know him well.

He recalled Reagan as a student who managed to make B's, remained devoted to the college, served 14 years on its board of trustees even though he rarely could attend meetings, was generous in his endowments and is currently national president of the college advisory council.

"At a time when he was a movie star he stopped by here and stayed here for six hours and there was no occasion. He just came here to visit with half a dozen bodyguards and he would stop all over town in the restaurants or in the stores and shake hands.

"I've heard that when he was in the Teke House he used to sit in his room announcing up to 20 football games out of his head. That's what he wanted."

Within a year after graduating from Eureka (majors sociology and economics), Reagan achieved his ambition in the teeth of the

Depression.

He got a job announcing sports at WOC in Davenport, Iowa, on the basis of a stirring audition in which he recreated one of his old Eureka football games into a dead microphone.

Then it was on to Des Moines, where he was known at WHO for his ability to deliver exciting accounts of Chicago Cubs games with nothing to go on but a balky Western

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One of his most memorable roles was that of George Gipp, the legendary Gipper of Notre Dame. Reagan did it superbly. He had been playing football for much of his life as tackle and guard for Dixon North and Eureka.

But he was never all that good at it.

"He was good — good in the sense that he'd try like hell," Crabtree said. "But he wasn't husky either. He made it up in spirit. He really played like crazy. He really tried hard.

"I don't see how he could miss being a good president. Like playing football, he'd try like hell."

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22-24 Peoria (Peoria) — Professional Championship Rodeo, Exposition Gardens. Aug. 22-23 (8 p.m.); Aug. 24 (3 p.m.) (309/688-6631)

Chicago (Cook) — Chicago Cubs Baseball; Wrigley Field, 1060 W. Addison; Schedule and information, (312/248-7900)

Chicago (Cook) — Chicago White Sox Baseball; Comiskey Park, Dan Ryan at 35th St.; Schedule and information, (312/924-1000)

23-30 Park Forest (Cook/Will) — Labor Day Men's 16-inch Softball Tournament, Central Park and other parks throughout Park Forest. Aug. 28-29 (6:30 p.m.) Aug. 30-Sept. 1 (9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.) (312/748-1112)

Park Forest (Cook/Will) — Park Forest Girls Softball Annual Labor Day, Somonauk Park and other locations throughout Park Forest (312/748-1112) (Through Sept. 1)

23-31 Springfield (Sangamon) — Rail Chits Golf Classic, Rail Golf Club (9:00 a.m. - completion) (217/528-4653) (Through September 1)

30 Romeoville (Will) — Founder's Day 6.2 Mile Run, Rt. 53 & Marquette Dr. (McDonalds) (8:00 a.m.) (815/838-8223)

**Special events**

Chicago (Cook) — Visitor Eventline (taped info./Chicago: current entertainment; prof. theater, special events & sports) (312/922-7000)

Chicago (Cook) — Cultural Events Information, Chicago Council on Fine Arts (dial Fine Art 312/346-3278)

Shelbyville (Shelby/Moultrie) — Nature Interpretive Programs, Lake Shelbyville Recreation Area, every weekend (217/774-3951)

21-24 Rosemont (Cook) — O'Hare National Antiques Show, O'Hare Expo Center/Hyatt Regency O'Hare. Aug. 21-23 (Noon - 10 p.m.); Aug. 24 (Noon - 6 p.m.) (312/446-6736)

22-31 DuQuoin (Perry) — "DuQuoin State Fair." DuQuoin Fairgrounds. Nearly a quarter million visitors attended last year. This season's slate of music stars, special events, crafts, food, and parades should draw even more. There's plenty of camping nearby, and the Shawnee National Forest is only a 40-minute drive south. (618/542-5484) (Through September 1)

23 Chatham (Sangamon) — Fifth Annual Illinois Championship Cow Chip Throw. Chatham Town Square (1 p.m.) (217/785-2793 or 217/498-9860)

Romeoville (Will) — Outdoor Rollerskating Festival, 800 W. Romeo Road (9 a.m.) (815/838-8223)

23-31 Palestine (Crawford) — "Annual Labor Day Festival & Roundup." City Arena and Leaverton Park. Sanctioned bronc busters from all over the U.S. enter this event. Horse shows, dances, a parade, flea markets and chuckwagon breakfasts are highlighted. (All Day) (618/586-2777) (Through Sept. 1)

30 DuQuoin (Perry) — "Hambletonian Trotting Classic." DuQuoin State Fairgrounds. The richest winner's prize in the nation and a field of frisky three-year-olds qualify this annual Southern Illinois sporting event as the "Kentucky Derby of Harness Racing." This will be the last for the race in Illinois. (618/542-5484)

# Reagan's Roots Illinois Boyhood Meant Football, Swimming And Falling in Love

## Dixon's 'Traditional Values' Were Part of 'Good Life'; Reagan Family Problems 'Dutch,' 'Mugs' & Prof. Gray

By JAMES M. PERRY  
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
*"It was a good life. I have never  
asked for anything more, then or now."  
—Ronald Reagan, on growing up in  
Dixon, Ill.*

DIXON, Ill.—In August 1927, just about everyone in town turned out to watch Charles Lindbergh, flying his famous plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, circle the "wire works" and dip a wing as if to say hello, before continuing on to Peoria.

The next month, the big news was farmer Frank Apple being gored to death by what the Dixon Evening Telegraph said was an "enraged bull" and a "mad brute."

Early in October, the Dixon high-school football team played its first game of the season. Ronald Reagan says he played guard that year, his senior year at Dixon High. The local paper lists him as "Regan" and says he started at left tackle.

Dixon lost to Mendota, 24 to 0. A week later, Dixon lost to its hated rival, Sterling, 25 to 0. The Dixon paper said the boys from Sterling "romped" almost at will, making long gains "through the Dixon line." Thereafter, the Evening Telegraph drew something of a veil over the increasingly inept exploits of the home team, failing to report the outcome of the last two or three games.

But Mr. Reagan, 69 now and running better against Jimmy Carter and John Anderson than he ever did against those tough kids from Sterling High, remembers. This, he says, is where his "roots" are. This is the place that shaped him.

### Idyllic Memories

A reporter reading copies of the old newspapers, talking to the handful of old friends who remain and visiting the old haunts, is struck, first of all, by the thought that this happened a long time ago. That summer of 1927, President Coolidge visited Havana and was "wildly cheered by enthusiastic Cubans." Hamburger cost 18 cents a pound at the Buehler Bros. meat market. And the new Studebaker Erskine Six was going for \$795.

For seven years, Mr. Reagan worked as a lifeguard at Lowell Park, a summer resort on the Rock River three miles north of town. Every morning that summer, he drove an old Dodge truck out to the park loaded with ice, for the soda-pop barrels. Then he began his lifeguarding; he says he rescued 77 people over those seven summers. And he was in love. His girl, Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver, was the preacher's daughter and the smart-

est kid at Dixon High. It sounds idyllic. Mr. Reagan remembers it that way. So do others. "It was completely different then," says Dr. W.L. Stitzel, who was a class behind Mr.

### High-School Yearbook



RONALD REAGAN  
"DUTCH"

*"Life is just one grand sweet song,  
so start the music."*  
Pres. N.S. Student Body 4; Pres. 2; Play 3, 4; Dram. Club 3, 4, Pres. 4; Fresh-Soph. Drama Club 1, 2, Pres. 2; Football 3, 4; Annual Staff; Hi-Y 3, 4, Vice-Pres. 4; Art. 1, 2; Lit. Contest 2; Track 2, 3.

Reagan at school and who still practices medicine in Dixon. "We walked everywhere because we didn't have our own cars. We had more to do than kids do now. We had dances and shows, and we all loved sports. 'Dutch'—that's what we called Reagan—played on the football team, but he wasn't much good. The team was awful. He was a better swimmer. He was a powerful swimmer."

### "All Boy" or "Goody-Goody"?

Dr. Stitzel discounts stories that young Reagan was something of a "goody-goody." He was "all boy," says Dr. Stitzel, "getting into the same kind of trouble—nothing like the trouble kids get into today—as the rest of us."

But John Crabtree, retired now and getting around with the help of a walker, says young Reagan came pretty close to being a "goody-goody."

"I never heard him cuss," says Mr. Crabtree, "and the only time I knew him to take a drink was the time this family out at the park gave us each a bottle of homemade wine for helping teach their kids to swim. Well, we finished off the wine and took a stroll through town. In those days, the stop-

Please Turn to Page 27, Column 1

Continued From First Page  
ights were on top of short cement posts right in the middle of the intersections. Dutch just climbed up on one of those stoplights and sat there. The police chief came along in his Model T and asked Dutch what he was doing. "Twinkle, Twinkle, little star. What do you think you are?" said Dutch. And the chief took him in, and he was fined a buck."

In the haze of nostalgia, the problems are overlooked. But they must have been real enough. One of them was Mr. Reagan's father, known to everyone in town as "Jack." Mr. Crabtree puts the case politely when he notes that Jack Reagan had "a great thirst." On the other hand, Mrs. Reagan—Nelle—was a deeply religious woman who sang hymns and read the Bible to the prisoners down at the county jail. Neither Jack nor Nelle ever went beyond the eighth grade.

When he wasn't hitting the bottle, Jack Reagan was a shoe salesman. He and Nelle and their oldest son, Neil, were living in an apartment above a bakery in Tampico, a hamlet down the road from Dixon, when Ronald Reagan was born on Feb. 6, 1911. These days Paul and Helen Nicely are fixing up the old "birthplace" as a tourist attraction and doing their best to nail down the early Reagan history.

But it isn't easy. The family moved from place to place, as Jack moved from job to job. After Ronald was born, they all moved to Chicago. They went from Chicago to Salesburg and then to Monmouth, always renting an apartment or a house, never owning much of anything. They moved back to Tampico for the school year 1918-1919. Just where young Reagan went to school before that is still a little uncertain.

The Reagans lived at one time or another in three different places in Tampico. They moved finally to Dixon, which then had a population of about 10,000 people, compared with 18,000 today. They lived in five different places. The first house they rented in Dixon has been purchased by the town fathers and will be restored as still another tourist attraction. The town fathers are spending \$23,900 to put together a "public-relations package" that will be distributed to reporters covering the Reagan campaign. It will also be mailed to plant-relocation consultants.

Crime wasn't exactly unknown in the summer of 1927. The local paper feasted on it. It led almost every day with a banner headline about crime—"Fiendish Slayer Is Heading for Canadian Border" is a ripe example. If it wasn't a crime story, it was a disaster story, often about airplanes disappearing over the Atlantic. It may help to explain why Mr. Reagan still hates to fly.

Bank robberies were so common that Lee County, of which Dixon is the seat, organized vigilantes called "town guards." Thirty-three of them were deputized early in 1928 and armed with sawed-off shotguns and rifles with high-velocity ammunition.

State's Attorney Mark C. Keller reminded the "town guards" at a banquet at the Nachusa Tavern that justice in Lee County was nothing to fool around with. Of the 238 criminal cases developed in the county the previous year, he said, two ended in acquittals, three ended in "disagreements," and "the remainder took the count."

1082

These days, the state's attorney (he is a Democrat) investigates about 160 felony cases a year, including in recent months an unusual number of brutal homicides. Marijuana is widely used by young people, helped along by the presence on the edge of town of an old hemp plant with wild marijuana plants surrounding it. Harder stuff isn't unknown, either.

Dixon's ebullient mayor, George Lindquist, came to town in 1936, after Mr. Reagan had left to become a sports announcer on radio over in Iowa and then a movie star in Hollywood. But the mayor thinks he understands what Dixon means to Mr. Reagan (even as he supports John Anderson for President; this, after all, is Mr. Anderson's congressional district).

"It's a typical Midwestern town," says the mayor. "It's closely related to the land, and it believes in traditional American values. I think that's important. I go far enough to say the Midwest—and places like Dixon—is the balance wheel of this country, keeping both the East and the West Coast from flying apart. The two coasts represent change; we represent tradition. I think Reagan understands that."

Young Reagan and his girl friend, "Mugs," went away to the same college in the fall of 1928, to a small Christian church school called Eureka, down near Peoria. Mr. Reagan probably had some scholarship help to pay the \$90-a-semester tuition. He also worked washing dishes in the cafeteria.

Mr. Reagan, who has been active in the little college's shaky affairs for years, is more nostalgic about his years there than he is about growing up in Dixon. "I fell head over heels in love with Eureka," he says in his autobiography, "Where's the Rest of Me?" "I still think, after years of crisscrossing the United States, that it is one of the loveliest colleges in existence."

It's a little shabby, a little run-down,

### Reagan in High School: 'Life Should Be a Song'

While he was in high school, Mr. Reagan took a hand at writing poetry. This example, called "Life," may be the earliest surviving statement of a personal philosophy.

*I wonder what it's all about, and why*

*We suffer so, when little things go wrong?*

*We make our life a struggle,  
When life should be a song.*

*Our troubles break and drench us.  
Like spray on the cleaving prow  
Of some trim Gloucester schooner.  
As it dips in a graceful bow.*

*But why does sorrow drench us  
When our fellow passes on?*

*He's just exchanged life's dreary dirge  
For an eternal life of song.*

*Millions have gone before us,  
And millions will come behind,  
So why do we curse and fight  
At a fate both wise and kind?*

*We hang onto a jaded life  
A life full of sorrow and pain.  
A life that warps and breaks us,  
And we try to run through it again.*

these days, but it's still a lovely place. The school's president, Daniel Gilbert, is doing everything he can to make sure Mr. Reagan's alma mater doesn't go under. It had 50 students in Mr. Reagan's day; it has 470 now, including about 70 black kids, most of them from the Chicago inner city.

Mr. Gilbert says that when these city kids began coming to Eureka, the local townspeople had trouble adjusting to them. Eureka, he notes, was just as racist as the Southern towns he grew up in. These days,

though, he insists, things are settling down nicely.

At Eureka, Mr. Reagan majored in sociology and took a minor in economics. Some of his current economic advisers—especially the disciples of supply-side economist Arthur Laffer—think it's significant he was taught classical economics at Eureka.

His professor had to be an older gentleman named Alexander Charles Gray—because he was the college's entire economics and sociology departments. And Prof. Gray must have taught economics the classical way, because he couldn't have known much else. The professor graduated from the University of Toronto in 1896 and earned his master's degree at Hiram College in 1897, some 39 years before John Maynard Keynes wrote his principal revisionist work, "The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money." But it isn't known which courses Mr. Reagan took, because his transcript is locked away.

By most accounts, Mr. Reagan was never much of a student. He was more interested, anyway, in sports—he played two years on another losing football team—and in drama, in which he won an honorable mention at a national drama competition for his portrayal of the Greek shepherd boy in Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Aria da Capo."

He also had an interest in politics (his father was a Democrat and, for many years, so was he). And he had—he still has—a remarkable photographic memory that allowed him to glance through printed material and absorb enough to get by.

He and "Mugs" graduated in 1932. She was a magna cum laude. Mr. Reagan wasn't. By then, the romance had faded, apparently because "Mugs" didn't think "Dutch" was going to amount to much. She taught high school for a couple of years and then married a Foreign Service officer she had met in France. She returned with him to Richmond, Va., when he joined his family's staid old law firm. He's a fervent Reagan supporter. She won't say.



# A BOY from TAMPICO

Most associate Ronald Reagan with California, but he spent his formative years in the midwest. On the centennial of his birth, a handful of small Illinois towns want a share of the limelight

By Douglas Brinkley

BACK IN 1965 RONALD REAGAN published his first memoir, *Where's the Rest of Me?*, borrowing the title from a line in the 1942 Warner Brothers film *Kings Row*. In the movie—Reagan's favorite of all he starred in—he played Drake McHugh, a playboy whose legs have been removed by a sadistic surgeon. "Where's the rest of me?" Reagan famously cried out when he came to, with thespian relish worthy of an Academy Award nomination.

Up until now Reagan—like McHugh—hasn't been whole. His legacy has been too rooted in Hollywood, Culver City, Pacific Palisades, Sacramento, Beverly Hills, Simi Valley, and the Santa Ynez Mountains. On the centennial of his birth in the tiny north-

western Illinois town of Tampico, the Midwest is determined to make Reagan whole again. The Tampico prodigal has become the Land of Lincoln's new favorite son.

Grim economic times have not spared Tampico's Main Street Historic District today: home foreclosures and the decline of the family farm have shuttered many buildings and infected its residents with an omnipresent, shroud-like fear that the American dream is in permanent recession. Yet each year over the last decade, tourism has picked up as the legend of Ronald Reagan grows as wide as the Mississippi River only 50 miles away.

On February 6, 1911, our fortieth president was born in a second-floor

apartment above a brown-floorboard saloon in a hard, cold sleet that blanketed the prairie town in gray. That's right, Reagan was born above a bar. The Tampico Historical Society erroneously claims on its website that Reagan was born above a bakery, likely because it sounds more wholesome than a tavern. The first floor of the Graham Building—at 111 South Main Street—didn't become a bakery until 1915, four years after Reagan's birth and long after his family had moved to their next house on Glassburn Street.

The Reagan birthplace—a red-brick building with three second-story windows and a cornice—is a modest First National Bank museum today. What it lacks in Reagan artifacts it makes up for in modest homespunness. In his 1990 autobiography *An American Life*, Reagan repeated his one and only 111 South Main Street birth story, which he regularly recycled over the years. "He looks like a fat little Dutchman," Reagan claimed that his father, Jack, an Irish Catholic alcoholic, had said when he first saw his cute butterball son. "But who knows, he might grow up to be president someday." Historians over the years have inferred that this story is apocryphal. Yet the anecdote is pure Ronald Reagan, somehow seeming appropriate even if Jack never said it. And the nickname "Dutch" clearly stuck. At least that's the way they'll tell it at



WARNER BROS./THE MOBIL COLLECTION (LEFT); REAGAN BOYHOOD HOME PRESERVATION FOUNDATION (TOP)

AND OUR SPRING CLOTHING CARNIVAL

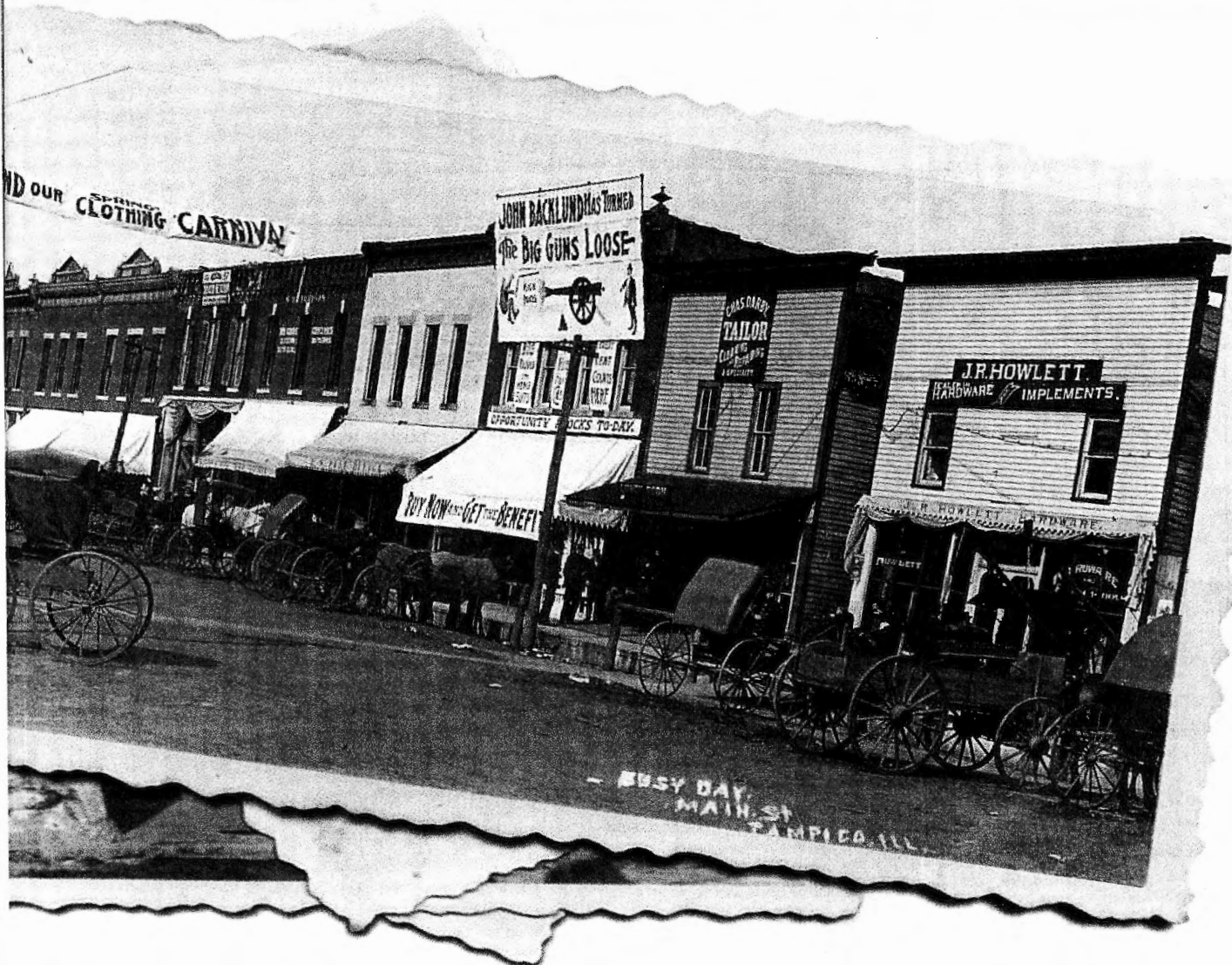
JOHN BACKLUND HAS TURNED THE BIG GUNS LOOSE

CHAS. CARP TAILOR

J.R. HOWLETT HARDWARE IMPLEMENTS

BUY NOW GET THE BENEFIT

- BUSY DAY MATH ST TAMPICO, ILL



Tampico's Dutch Diner, where they dip fried food in a special "Ronnie sauce."

What historians do know about February 6, 1911, is that William Howard Taft was president (but struggling), crew members were prepping the RMS *Titanic* for its inaugural Atlantic voyage, and Mexico stirred with talk of revolution. The future president's mother Nelle, an ardent Disciples of Christ churchgoer, had planned to call her baby Donald, but because her quick-draw sister had beat her to it, the infant won the consolation prize of being named Ronald. And no biography disputes that Nelle had an extremely difficult time delivering him in that drafty Tampico flat. She had given birth to Ron's brother Neil (nicknamed "Moon") two years earlier, and she was weak, frail, and cold. "My mother was informed that she shouldn't have any more children," Reagan recalled.

Tampico's claim to fame in 1911 was an irrigation ditch success story and a gnarly tornado that had destroyed nearly 30 structures. Most of its 820 residents wanted to leave—except the Glassman family, who fancied themselves local kingpins. But being born above a tavern in a West Illinois hamlet with some businesses posting signs that read "NO DOGS OR IRISHMEN ALLOWED" was an auspicious start in life for Reagan.

"I think growing up in a small town is a good foundation for anyone who decides to enter politics," he reflected after being president. "You get to know people as individuals, not as blocs or members of special-interest groups. You discover that, despite their differences, most people have a lot in common."

When Reagan was born, Illinois was already associated with two presidents: Abraham Lincoln, who lived primarily in the Springfield area from 1830 to

*One hundred years ago, Ronald Reagan was born above a saloon in the small town of Tampico, Illinois, pictured above in a 1904 postcard, to working-class parents Jack and Nelle, opposite above, who had one other son, Neil. Reagan's arguably most compelling work on the silver screen, the 1942 Warner Brothers' film, Kings Row, opposite below, centered on the challenges of small town life, a storyline he knew well.*

1861, and Ulysses S. Grant, who worked in his family's leather shop in Galena from 1860 to 1868. Yet of all the four U.S. presidential claimants (which now includes Barack Obama, who adopted Chicago as his home in 1985), only Reagan was actually born there; this gives his statewide legacy a special bragging right.

The Reagans were decidedly nomadic. When Ronald was four years

old, they moved to Chicago, where his father worked at the Fair Department Store. When that didn't work out, they moved to Galesburg and then Monmouth before returning to Tampico. In Galesburg there are two residences with indisputable Gipper lineage: a dwelling where his family lived at 1260 North Kellogg Street and a home at 1219 North Kellogg. The Reagans rented so many homes and apartments between 1911 and the Great Depression that even the postal service must have found it difficult keeping track of them.

This future president's troubled home life has proved to be a genuine boon to the commercial business in these economically stressed towns, which never imagined that Reaganism might

*Reagan grew up in a small frame house in Dixon, Illinois, below. He showed an aptitude for the stage in 1927, starring in North Dixon High School's production of You and I, a Philip Barry play in which he shared a sofa with his real-life sweetheart Margaret Cleaver, above. An article in the June 1937 Dixon Telegraph, right, proudly announced that the local boy had landed a Hollywood contract.*



become as big as Elvisism in the tourism department. Eureka College, located halfway between Peoria and Bloomington, where Reagan graduated in 1932, now houses more than 2,000 items in its archive pertaining to the Gipper. "Everything good that happened to me," Reagan once said, "started here on

this campus." That wasn't hyperbole. Reagan's loyalty to Eureka—where he majored in economics, graduating with a C average, and served as student body president—was intense. He served three six-year terms on the board of trustees and visited campus a dozen times after graduating.

If no single Illinois town can fully claim Reagan as its own, the state proudly can. It seems as if every grain elevator, lumber yard, feed mill, and egg house has Reagan lore associated with it. Reagan's boyhood home in Dixon, into which he moved as a nine-year-old, is the most worthwhile pilgrimage place. It was there that Reagan graduated from high school and worked as a lifeguard, saving 77 people from

### Gets Movie Job

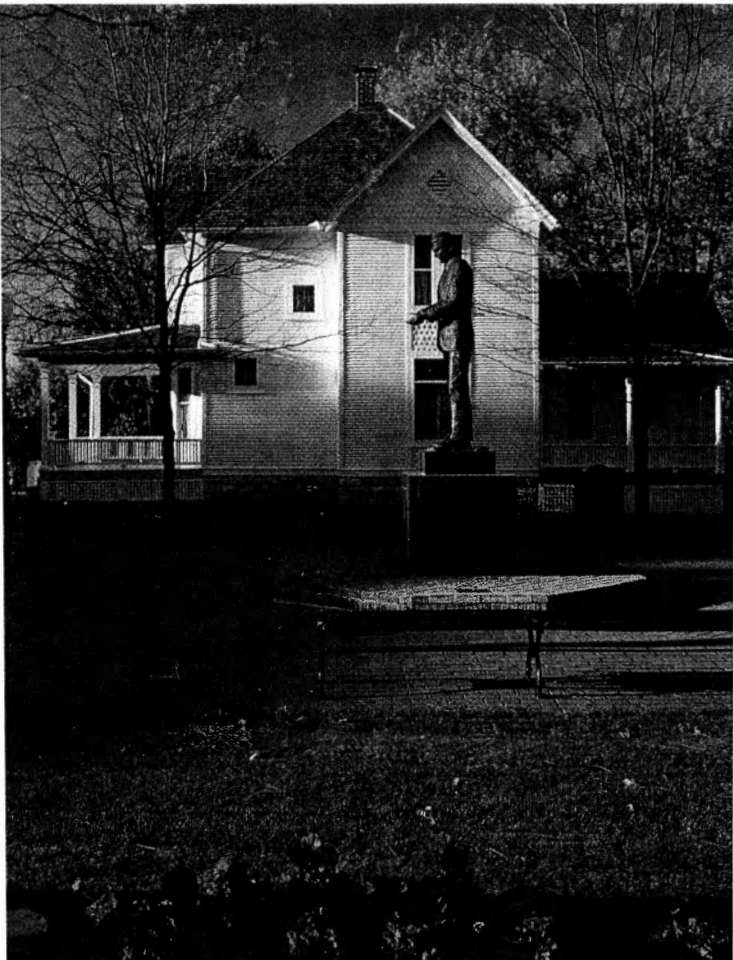


Ronald "Dutch" Reagan, (above) son of Mr. and Mrs. John Reagan, 107 Monroe Avenue, Dixon, has signed a six-months' contract with the Warner Brothers motion picture studio, according to word received by his parents yesterday. A 7-year option clause is included in the contract. While a life guard at Lowell park beach at Dixon, Reagan saved 77 lives in six seasons.

Reagan, a Dixon high school and Eureka college graduate, left Dixon about three years ago, and has been employed as a sports announcer at a Des Moines, Ia., radio station. He took a successful screen test while in California covering spring training activities of the Chicago Cubs.

drowning in the treacherous Rock River (dubbed "the Hudson of the West"). That herculean feat alone was far more of a genuine accomplishment than most of us will ever have. It might surprise people who remember Reagan as being an antienvironmentalist that growing up he proclaimed himself as a "great naturalist" of the Rock River Valley. William Ruckelshaus, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, recently told a story about flying with the president from Washington, D.C., to Seattle on Air Force One

RONALD REAGAN BOYHOOD HOME PRESERVATION FOUNDATION (TOP); DIXON TELEGRAPH; GENE AHRENS ALAMY (LEFT)



Reagan made an exuberant visit to his Tampico birthplace in February 1976, right, while stumping for the Republican presidential nomination. He would lose that contest but go on to take the nomination in 1980 and win the presidency. The route that Reagan hitchhiked between college in Eureka and his home in Dixon is now enshrined as an Illinois state historic trail, bottom right.



in the mid-1980s. "Reagan ordered the pilot to swoop down low when we got to the Rock River," he said, "and tip a wing in homage."

But Tampico, Galesburg, Dixon, and Eureka College aren't alone in clinging to the Reagan centennial kite tail. In Ohio, Illinois, a village of 550 situated along Route 26, visitors are told that Reagan used to thumb through town with a beaming salesman's smile, commuting back and forth from Dixon to Peoria. In Walnut (population 1,400) the visitor learns that young Reagan used to pile into a road-worn gray Buick clunker (bought for \$10) with his buddies to catch sporting events in Peoria and Normal. Princeton, Illinois, is promoting Reagan's admiration of their New England-like architecture, while the town of Henry boasts an Illinois River Bridge that Reagan *surely* drove across dozens of times on his way to Eureka College. In Chillicothe, apparently, Reagan used to visit his fraternity brother George Taylor, while in Fulton locals will point out the gravesite of Reagan's maternal grandmother, Mary Anne Wilson.

All this is part of the Ronald Reagan Trail—the ex-president's fabled hitchhiking route—which was officially created in May 1999 to promote his Midwest legacy. What only a dozen years ago seemed like an Illinois stretch is now attracting scores of visitors who see Reagan as a giant, the man British prime minister Margaret Thatcher said won the Cold War without firing a single shot. (London is planning to unveil its first Reagan statue to coincide with the centennial.) If Lincoln's bicentennial in 2008 could boost tourism

upward in Illinois like a jet-propulsion rocket, there is no reason that Reagan's centennial can't too, or so says the state's chamber of commerce.

Not that California is giving up on its Reagan franchise. The Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena will have a dominating Reagan-themed float on January 1; USC's Annenberg School of Journalism is throwing a huge conference hosted by Tom Brokaw; and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley will open a completely renovated museum display (plus ribbon cuttings, military flyovers, and a star-studded celebrity concert). Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared a permanent Reagan Day holiday in California. While there are currently no plans to add Reagan's face to Mount Rushmore, it looks like a major Nevada peak will soon be named in his honor.

But it's Illinois that has best prepared to bask in Gipper glory in 2011. The entire heartland now belongs to the boy from Tampico. It makes you believe in the luck of the Irish and the resilience that comes from growing up in the Midwest. 🐾



U.S. Life Saving

# DUTCH REAGAN THE LIFEGUARD

by Jim Dubois

Bernard J. Frazier, his Dixon High School drama teacher, remembered the President as a "rangy kid named Ronald Reagan who wore glasses because he was very nearsighted and was forever asking questions." However, most people in Dixon, Illinois knew him only as "Dutch Reagan the lifeguard," a warm likeable young man.

Dutch was his nickname from birth. He was born in Tampico, Illinois on February 6, 1911. When he came howling into the world with a towhead and fat round cheeks, his father, a second generation Irishman, declared, "For such a fat little dutchman he sure makes a lot of noise."

Dutch like most lifeguards took to the water at an early age. He started out at the local swimming hole but soon graduated to the treacherous Hannepin Canal. "I can recall," writes Reagan in his autobiography, "the hushed mood of the town when they brought a small covered burden from the canal."

His family moved from Tampico and after two years on Chicago's south side, settled on the Rock River in Dixon. "There," says Reagan, "was the life that shaped my body and mind for the years to come."

*Special thanks to Suzanne Hanney, Dixon Evening Telegraph, and Byron E. Wear, Executive Director, United States Lifesaving Association for research assistance on this story.*

He was nine, and it didn't take him long to find the water. He became active in the Dixon YMCA: played in the Y-band and spent long hours in the 17 by 16 foot YMCA pool. He excelled through the swimming program and by the age of fifteen felt confident enough to apply for a job as lifeguard at Lowell Park.

According to Suzanne Hanney, local historian and reporter for the Dixon Evening Telegraph, "Everybody in Dixon remembers Lowell Park." The park consists of 205 acres of natural woodland located on the Rock River three miles north of Dixon. It was deeded to the city by Carlla Lowell who stipulated that no liquor be allowed and that the natural areas of the park be left untouched. A lodge was built from local quarry stone and sand was trucked in to form a beach over the mud bottom river and soon Lowell was, not only one of the "natural beauty spots of the state", but a major recreation area.

Reagan applied for his lifeguard job in the spring of 1926. At the time Lowell was over-seen by a park board which in turn leased out several concessions in the park to the Graybill family. Ruth and Ed Graybill had the food and bathhouse concession which included looking after the beach and hiring a lifeguard.

When the future president first approached Ed Graybill about the job, Mr. Graybill wasn't too sure. "Well, you're pretty young, my lad," he said, "but I'll go talk to your father." Jack

Reagan told Graybill to "give the boy a chance". Despite his age and near-sightedness a demonstration of Dutch's water prowess, along with his eagerness to work, won him the job. As fellow lifeguard John Crabtree put it, "... he'd try like hell."

The official bathing season began on Memorial Day, but if the weather was warm the Graybills had Dutch up early to cover the water on the week ends. According to Katy Boyd who as a child was rescued by Dutch four times and who later became a lifeguard at Lowell, "In the spring the water was high and the river swift. That's when we'd pull them out like flies." In addition to performing rescues, one of the major spring time chores was to help clear the bathing area of debris and hazards. Each spring they'd drag the river for water soaked logs which drifted in and hung just below the surface.

Dutch began his days in the Graybill's Dodge truck loading up supplies for the park which included hamburger, buns, soda pop and two to three hundred pounds of ice. When the supplies were loaded he would get Mrs. Graybill and they'd head for the park.

"As you enter," says Ruth Graybill, "there's a slope just covered with beautiful bluebells and ferns." In the spring, according to Katy Boyd, the entire park would be covered in wildflowers and the oak, hemlock and other deciduous trees would be vibrant with new green foliage.



*Dutch would usually station himself on the diving pier elevated about five feet above the water. Here he is pictured leaning against the slide watching and safeguarding bathers. Photo Courtesy of Dixon Evening Telegraph Files*

*"There," says Reagan, "was the life that shaped my body and mind for the years to come."*

When they reached the bathhouse, Dutch would unload the ice, help Mrs. Graybill with the other supplies and then head for the beach.

"There'd be an occasional morning mist or steam fog rolling along the surface of the river," says Ms. Boyd. The water temperature would be "spotty because the river was spring fed" and upstream was one of the larger of these tributaries, the "seven mile branch".

But, as late spring progressed into the hot, muggy, mid-western summer, "They'd come in droves," says Ruth Graybill. She estimates that Dutch had as many as 500 people to keep an eye on—no small task in a river whose current could run four to seven miles per hour.

As Reagan recalls in his autobiography, *Where's the Rest of Me?*:

... the water in the Rock River off Lowell Park was a fairly difficult spot to swim. There was a dam downstream which, when the sluices were opened, gave the ordinarily slow current a quicker tempo and deeper thrust. The bottom sloped swiftly into deep water not far from the edge. An additional hazard was the other bank about six hundred feet away; swimming across was a challenge—only once started you had to go all the way or else.

A raft anchored offshore gave Katy Boyd trouble on at least two occasions. As a small girl of eight or nine, just learning to swim, she would struggle toward the raft and then falter. "My parents were always so worried until you brought me in," she said in a 1940's game show in which Ronald Reagan had to guess what part of his life she was from. Her next hint worried the moderator, Bill Cullen. "Every time I met you, you left me breathless." But when Reagan innocently blurted out, "Are you one of the notches on the log?", Cullen nearly took them off the air. "The log", Cullen discovered, was Reagan's means of keeping rescue statistics. All totaled he cut seventy-seven notches in seven summers.

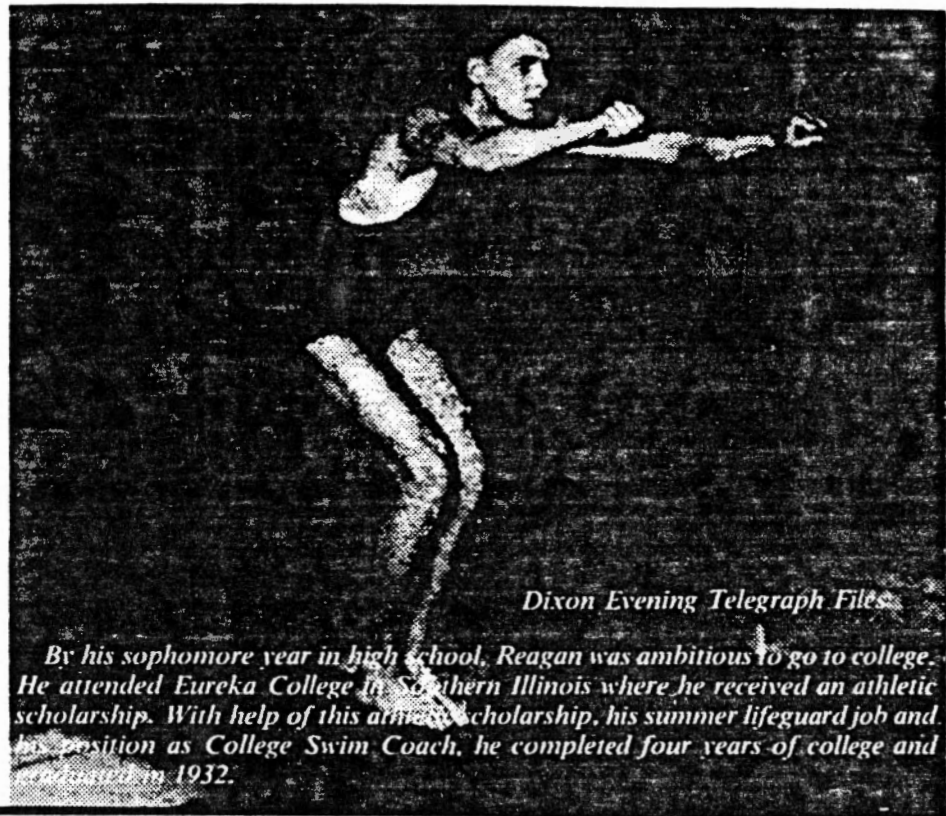
As a former lifeguard, Ms. Boyd can testify that Lowell was no easy place to guard. She recalls yearning for a pool assignment as she "watched five big, strapping farm boys start for the raft." They would miss, end-up downstream, then turn and swim against the current. In her time, they often used a "doubled ended suriboard" for rescues. Reagan, she remembers, had a ring bouy and rowboat at his disposal but mainly used the "swim and go get 'em method." According to Dixon YMCA Director, Harry Hanson, the lifesaving techniques at the time would have included the cross chest carry,

*"I learned quickly the lesson that all lifeguards teach themselves . . . to watch for the unexpected but to keep my eye mainly on the two or three places where trouble would begin . . ."*

tired swimmers carry and chin pull.

Fred Moore who later took swimming lessons from Reagan was ten years old when he tried to dog paddle to the raft. When he was sure he had arrived, he reached to grasp the edge, caught only air and sank. "Everything was peaceful," recalls Moore. Then Dutch "pulled me out, rolled me over a barrel and pumped the water out of me." Two weeks later Moore witnessed Reagan's rescue of a girl of about thirteen.

Dutch Reagan's day officially began at ten a.m. and could last as late as ten p.m. when the water was cleared and the bathhouse closed. He worked seven days a week and was on his own except on busy weekends and holidays when the Graybills staffed the beach with extra guards. Reagan's salary was \$15 a week and all the ten cent hamburgers and nickel root beers he could hold. "It was great," says Reagan. "There was no place to spend money. I could save . . . and, of course, they fed me." According to biographer Bill



*Dixon Evening Telegraph Files*

*By his sophomore year in high school, Reagan was ambitious to go to college. He attended Eureka College in Southern Illinois where he received an athletic scholarship. With help of this athletic scholarship, his summer lifeguard job and his position as College Swim Coach, he completed four years of college and graduated in 1932.*

*"Lifeguarding provides one of the best vantage points in the world to learn about people."*

*"He'd take a broomstick for a microphone and pretend he was broadcasting the Northwestern-Notre Dame games. We'd all laugh and even form cheering sections."*

Boyarsky. "The hours were so long that he didn't have time for girls . . ." which in those pre-liberation days of dating, undoubtedly meant an additional savings.

By his sophomore year in high school, Dutch Reagan was ambitious to go to college and he knew the only way he'd get there was by working and saving for it. His father was a shoe salesman and although they were not poor, the Reagans never owned their own home.

Aside from providing young people with money for college, lifeguarding presents them with the difficult and important challenges of accepting responsibility and making decisions under stress. Dutch, like all successful lifeguards, developed the master chess players ability to concentrate, to anticipate the next move and to quickly sift through all the possibilities. In his case there were as many as five hundred pieces all being pushed around by a river—a checkmate for him meant a life saved. "I learned quickly the lesson

that all lifeguards teach themselves," says Reagan, "to watch for the unexpected but to keep my eye mainly on the two or three places where trouble would begin: downstream from the dock and between the dock and the raft."

He also learned as biographer, L. Edmond Leipold, Phd. put it, "that people have a penchant for getting themselves involved in precarious situations. This was true in ordinary circumstances but especially true when they were immersed in water."

Dutch would usually station himself on the diving pier elevated about five feet above the water or on the bench located in the middle of the beach. Katy Boyd remembers that "he wore a cutout at the arms swimming suit with a little Red Cross patch sewn on it." The bib style trunks were the fashion, but they itched terribly after they got wet. As Reagan recalls, ". . . no lifeguard gets wet without good reason. In my case it really took an emergency because my job was seven days a week,

and from morning until they got tired of swimming at night. A wet suit was a real hardship and I was too money conscious to have a spare."

He constantly wore his glasses and often had them handed back by bystanders who retrieved them following a rescue.

In addition to his other lifeguard paraphenalia, Dutch carried with him the proverbial lifeguard whistle. He blew it with a vengeance whenever a lightning storm threatened the area. The bathers, Ms. Boyd said, would usually take their time coming to shore which "used to make Dutch so mad."

According to Boyd, "There was a whole crew of us that practically lived at Lowell" and when things got slow Reagan would entertain them by practicing his sportscasting. All through high school and college Reagan had football fever and "Oh, he wanted to be a sportscaster so bad," says Ms. Boyd. "He'd take a broomstick for a microphone and pretend he was broadcasting the Northwestern-Notre Dame games. We'd all laugh and even form cheering sections."

Slow periods in the mornings were taken up by swimming lessons. "As a swimming teacher," says Fred Moore, "he was sort of quiet, easy to get along with and easy to know. He wouldn't get upset about anything but stayed right with you two or three times, until

*Dutch was in her father's congregation, but he admits, "I used to look at her more than I listened to the sermons."*

you got on to it." Over the years Dutch Reagan's reputation as a swimming instructor grew among the families that stayed at the Lowell Lodge. "Most of them," writes Reagan, "were from Chicago and many of them were

second generation lodge patrons—some had even met there mates and fallen in love on these year-after-year vacations." The children of these patrons would show up each morning for swimming lessons.



*"As a swimming teacher he was sort of quiet, easy to get along with and easy to know. He wouldn't get upset about anything but stayed right with you two or three times, until you got on to it." In this 1938 publicity shot, Reagan is shown giving a swimming lesson to the late actress Susan Hayward. (UPI)*

Reagan often turned to the parents of these children for advice. In 1932, after working through four years at Eureka College, Reagan contemplated selling shoes with his father. Bernard J. Frazier, his teacher, visited him on the beach that summer and advised him to seek a career in communications before settling for shoe sales. However, it was Sid Altschuler the husband of a former Dixon girl, who buoyed his hopes. Sid assured the young lifeguard that the depression would not last forever. When Reagan told him of his show business dreams, Altschuler's optimism remained unscathed. "You picked a sound industry and one that should have hundreds of undreamed of directions you can follow to a great future . . . so start knocking on doors . . . take any kind of job, even sweeping floors, just get in." This was just the sort of talk a normally determined Ronald Reagan needed. He completed his final summer as a lifeguard and after several failed attempts in Chicago finally landed a sportscasters job in Davenport, Illinois.

Aside from these counseling sessions, Dutch Reagan was amiable to just about any conversation. "If somebody came along he'd sit there on the beach and talk to them," says Ruth Graybill. He and Ed Graybill liked talking politics. "My husband was a republican and he, as a lad, like to take up being a democrat."

Although he was friendly and many a Dixon woman remembers him as the handsome lifeguard, "Dutch was very business-like" says Katy Boyd. "The girls were always sitting around mooning at him but it was not a two-way street." This was due in part to his long hours. In addition, he, like many lifeguards, was already in love. Throughout high school and college he was smitten by "Margaret Cleaver, a sparkling brunette, the daughter of the minister of the Christian Church." Margaret, as far as can be determined, never came to Lowell Park. Dutch was in her father's congregation, but he admits, "I used to look at her more than I listened to the sermons." She dropped him later for a foreign service officer she met while vacationing in Europe.



*Dutch Reagan had a secret weapon for clearing stragglers from the bathing area.*

Despite distractions, lifeguarding instills most young people with the values of work and independence, and more importantly it gives them a chance to learn about human nature. "Lifeguarding," writes Reagan, "provides one of the best vantage points in the world to learn about people." Lifeguards observe people in two extreme and opposite states: at leisure, carefree and relaxed or threatened by injury or death.

One of the hardest lessons Dutch Reagan was to learn was the one of ingratitude. Of the seventy-seven people he rescued:

"... not many thanked me, much less gave me a reward, and being a little money-hungry, I'd done a little daydreaming about this. They felt insulted. The only money I ever got was ten dollars for diving for an old man's upper plate that he lost going down our slide." Ronald Reagan, *Where's the Rest of Me?*

He learned that people hated admitting to themselves or anyone else that they needed saving. Many people, once they'd gotten their breath and had overcome their fear would renounce him. "I would have been fine if you'd let me alone" was their theme. They would contend, writes Reagan, that he had made a hero of himself at their expense.

Although Dutch spent most of his hours conscientiously, he was not adverse to occasional tomfoolery. According to Mr. Frazier, Dutch Reagan had a secret weapon for clearing stragglers from the bathing area.

He'd skip a pebble across the river. When a bather came asking "What was that?" he would casually reply, "Oh, nothing, just an old river rat". Now, river rats are known to grow as big as alley cats and according to one source have been known to drop from overhanging tree limbs onto catfish twice their size. The most skeptical swimmers could not overcome the image of that "old river rat", and soon the stragglers came ashore.

Mrs. Graybill doesn't remember anything about an "old river rat", but she does remember Reagan entertaining her. "In the evenings," says Ruth Graybill, "when he'd be feeling pretty

jolly he'd come up pretending he was an ape."

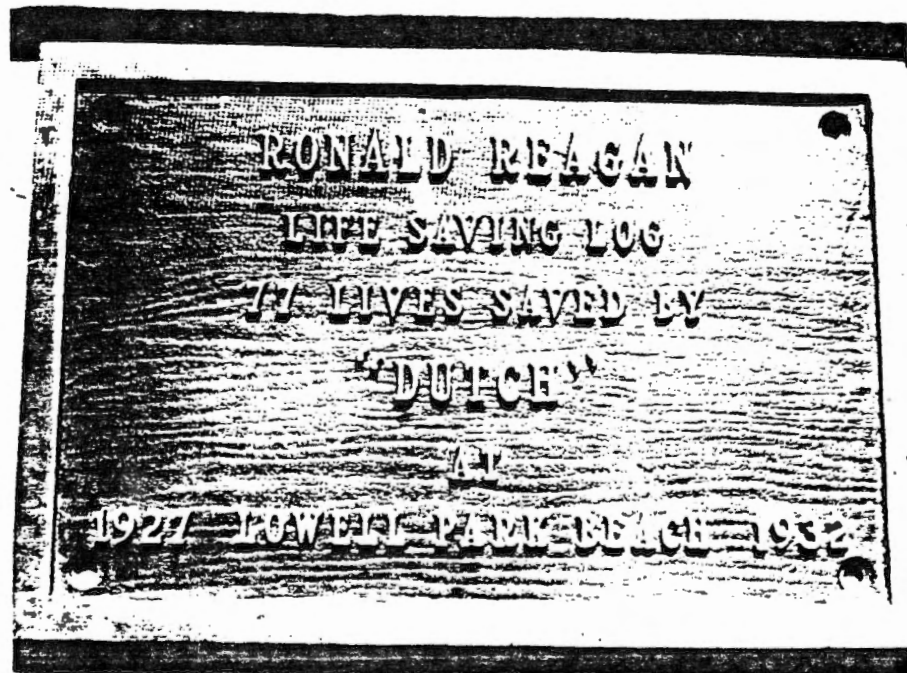
The Graybills and Dutch Reagan had an excellent working relationship. "He always knew his duties and he did them well," and says Mrs. Graybill, "He was such a likeable young man."

One incident which stands out in Ruth Graybill's mind involved a man who came through the bathhouse. "He didn't look quite right, like he wasn't getting enough oxygen." Ed alerted Dutch saying, "Ruth says that man's off-color. Keep an eye on him." Reagan did and before the day was out rescued the man.

Mrs. Graybill remembers that before she and Ed had the concession "there was a party that went up to Lowell." It was during high school graduation week. "They went up after midnight and a boy drowned," she says. According to Hary Hanson, "Someone drowns every year on the river."

At the end of each day, sometimes late at night when the flood lights shown from the bathhouse down to the beach, Dutch would help Ruth load up the truck. Ed Graybill came up to get her with the car, but before she left she and Dutch would check the clothing baskets. The park board prohibited changing in the cars which forced bathers to check their clothing through the bathhouse. "A full basket," says Mrs. Graybill, "meant someone was in the river." While Dutch Reagan was lifeguard, "we never had one."

President Reagan's experience typifies that of most lifeguards. He conducted himself as a true lifesaving professional and enjoyed the people and environment around him. Dutch, like most young lifeguards, learned some invaluable lessons about responsibility, decisions and human nature. While he learned, he contributed. He safeguarded the citizens of Dixon and for that they remember him as "Dutch Reagan the lifeguard."



*The original log was carried away in a spring flood. But this plaque has been placed in the Loveland Community House to commemorate President Reagan's services as a lifeguard.*

# A Letter from Lee County



Phone 349

**F. E. MOREY**  
 Barber 816 Ken  
 Dixon Ill.  
 Minonk Ill. Nov. 21, 1922

Agent for Fitcher Laundry

Eds. Note— we tried to follow the form of Ronald Reagan's letter, preserving both the spelling and punctuation of the original.

816 Ken. Ave.  
 Dixon, Ill.  
 Nov. 21, 1922

To My Lady Fair and her Sister

I have been writing this letter since you sent yours. I have been trying to get those percentage problems. Dixon High School has played 10 games won 3 tied 1 and lost 1 they tied Sterling. They can't have the Thanksgiving game because of the small pox in Sterling. I play quarterback on the S.S. team Sat we were going to play the N.S. team but there (sic) captain got yellow and he wouldn't play. Our class at Seb has got the janitors job at the church and we get \$25.00 a month and were plastering our class room and were going to have scouts and our class took the banners for attendance and collection.

Sat. Dixon went to Rochelle and beat them 27 to 6 the game we lost was with DeKalb. (sic) They beat us 6 to 0. Dont laugh at the paper I am using.

(Page 2)

Because a kid gave it to me to use for spelling and I ran out of another kind of paper I had. I am writing it in school. Monday we has a hygiene test, Monday mama got a letter from Mrs Wagner and she said Garland has made the team at Eureka they played Illinois last week. Oh the little kids are having recess now and theres a fight. Well its 5 min. later and the fights over.

Here's my picture  
 Arent He  
 Darling:

(Page 3)

We had a parade Sat. before last.  
 Well I will have to close.  
 now Ronald Reagan  
 PS. Smell that meat  
 Aint it good.

To my Lady Fair and her Sister  
 I have been writing this letter since you sent yours. I have been trying to get those percentage problems. Dixon High School has played 10 games won 3 tied 1 and lost 1 they tied Sterling. They can't have the Thanksgiving game because of the small pox in Sterling. I play quarterback on the S.S. team Sat we were going to play the N.S. team but there (sic) captain got yellow and he wouldn't play. Our class at Seb has got the janitors job at the church and we get \$25.00 a month and were plastering our class room and were going to have scouts and our class took the banners for attendance and collection.

above letter and Gladys Shippert was a Senior in high school.

They had met at South Central School which at that time housed both the Elementary and High School. The friendship was re-inforced by their membership in the First Christian Church, Dixon.

One of the memories Mrs. Kaecker keeps in her memory place is of a lively, talkative boy who, although considerably younger, used to accompany the group who went to Howard Hall's house to listen to the radio.

The friends would all arrive at the Hall's. Howard would turn on the radio he had built himself and together they listened patiently for the chimes from WOC.

"In those days," explained Mrs. Kaecker, "radio stations were not on all day. You had to turn on the radio and then wait. When the station went on the air they played chimes so you would know they were on.

Ronald was the youngest and the noisiest. We had to put a pillow over his head so we could hear the chimes. Later he became an announcer on that very station."

The years brought moves from Dixon where her father had invented a milking machine. First to Chicago where manufacture know-how changed the Shippert Milking Machine to the Page Milking Machine. But the patent was running out and again the Shipperts were moved to Milwaukee. It was the reputation of the schools of Whitewater, Wisconsin, and especially the laboratory school of what was to become University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, that attracted the Shipperts and it was in Whitewater at 300 Summit Street that the lively letters came, usually accompanied by self portraits ("once he drew

himself as the Sheik of Araby" Mrs. Kaecker reports).

Gladys Shippert did return to Dixon after her first year of college. From there she went to DeKalb for about a half-year and then she became Mrs. Clarence Kaecker.

Over the years she followed the radio, movie and political careers of the friend of her youth.

When asked if she had seen Ronald Reagan over the years, she replied, "Yes, in parades, when he returned to Dixon with his mother and finally at the all class reunion a few years ago." See him, yes, but always from a far.

"I've seen him, but not to talk to," she confided.

Why would anyone keep a letter from an eleven year old boy? The fact is Reagan was a

Because a kid gave it to me to use for spelling and I ran out of another kind of paper I had. I am writing it in school. Monday we has a hygiene test, Monday mama got a letter from Mrs Wagner and she said Garland has made the team at Eureka they played Illinois last week. Oh the little kids are having recess now and theres a fight. Well its 5 min. later and the fights over.

likeable boy. In Mrs. Kaecker's own words, "We loved him." The letter was kept with her pictures and even lost for a while. However the were more than a few. Perhaps someday others will be recovered.

Ronald Reagan, "Dutch" to most folks hereabouts, has always kept his roots. Now most people regard him as Lee County's first citizen.

I asked Mrs. Kaecker this question, "If you had only one wish granted to you, what would it be?" She looked at the floor of the Gazette office and then through the tear that kept returning as she talked and answered, "To shake hands with President Ronald Reagan at his Inauguration."

Gladys Shippert Kaecker may well get her wish. Through the instrumentality of the Dixon

# Lee County's First Citizen

Phone 349

Agent for Fitches Laundry


Agent for Fitches Lau.  
**OREY** 816 Ken.  
 ber Dixon Ill.  
 Nov. 21, 192.

**F. E. MOREY**  
 Barber  
 Minonk Ill.

and her sister  
 this letter since  
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Because a kid gave it to me to use for address  
 and it ran out of another kind of paper  
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 we had a bygone test. Monday manager  
 a letter from me to your name it's a s. s.  
 Garland has and the team at Eisenhower  
 played Illinois next week. Oh the little kid  
 are being recess you and there a first of  
 will have to see and see to fight well  
 cts 5 min. later and to sign over.  
 Work me for this

Orent F. E.  
 Darling:



El have 12 rabbits and el. and going to sell some  
 int them. Tuesday we had a Geography test and  
 oh say what are the college colors there.  
 We have an athletic and playing on our  
 high school team in name is cowboy warrior  
 El am drum major of the boys band here  
 We had a parade Sat. before last.  
 will el will have to close.  
 our Ronald Reagan

P.S.  
 S. all that meat  
 A. felt good.

himself as the Sheik of Araby" Mrs. Kaecker reports). Gladys Shippert did return to Dixon after her first year of college. From there she went to DeKalb for about a half-year and then she became Mrs. Clarence Kaecker. Over the years she followed the radio, movie and political careers of the friend of her youth. When asked if she had seen Ronald Reagan over the years, she replied, "Yes, in parades, when he returned to Dixon with his mother and finally at the all class reunion a few years ago." See him, yes, but always from a far. "I've seen him, but not to talk to," she confided. Why would anyone keep a letter from an eleven year old boy? The fact is Reagan was a

likeable boy. In Mrs. Kaecker's own words, "We loved him." The letter was kept with her pictures and even lost for a while. However the were more than a few. Perhaps someday others will be recovered. Ronald Reagan, "Dutch" to most folks hereabouts, has always kept his roots. Now most people regard him as Lee County's first citizen. I asked Mrs. Kaecker this question, "If you had only one wish granted to you, what would it be?" She looked at the floor of the Gazette office and then through the tear that kept returning as she talked and answered, "To shake hands with President Ronald Reagan at his Inauguration." Gladys Shippert Kaecker may well get her wish. Through the instrumentality of the Dixon

Evening Telegraph and a certain Mrs. Redabaugh she received word from Springfield last Saturday that she and her husband would be receiving an invitation to the Inauguration of the 40th President of the United States. There is a note of sadness in her joy for her one time friend, and that is, her lifelong partner may not be able to attend with her. Clarence, as we all know, has had a hard year. But she was quick to add, "But Don will be with me, though." Mrs. Kaecker it is our sincere desire, as I'm sure it will be of everyone in the Village of Ashton, that you get your one wish. We are sure, the bouncy, fun loving, talkative boy you have been kind enough to show us through the generous sharing of your letter would go out of his way to say Hi. Let us hope the

man he has become will find a way to grant his Fair Lady of so long ago this very personal gift.

**Thank You**

I wish to thank publicly the kindness of Mrs. Clarence Kaecker in allowing the Ashton Gazette to use her letter and for her gracious consent for the interview reported in the pages of our little paper.

J.E.D.

**President-Elect Ronald Reagan**



St. Louis Globe-Democrat  
Feb. 21-22, 1981

# A walk down Reagan's memory lane

By KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The hottest-selling souvenir at President Reagan's birthplace in rural Tampico, Ill., is a red stocking cap with lettering that reads "Reagan Country."

The citizens of Tampico and nearby Dixon, Ill., where the president spent his boyhood, are understandably proud of a small-town boy who made good, but while the cap calls attention to the area's presidential roots, it serves a practical purpose as well. In February Reagan country is cold country.

It was bitterly cold the day Reagan was born, 70 years ago on Feb. 6. A snowstorm had swept across northern Illinois the night before, burying fields and farms and cutting off tiny Tampico from the rest of the world. On Main Street a lamp burned in an apartment above the First National Bank. Later that day Mrs. Reagan gave birth to her second child, another boy.

PAUL NICELY AND HIS wife, Helen, (whose father bought the old bank building) are refurbishing the apartment in 1911 decor, and they hope to open it to visitors this spring at a modest admission charge. Visitors now are admitted to a room on the ground floor of the building, the walls of which are lined with news clippings and photographs of Reagan, including one taken when the movie star returned to Tampico to ride in a 1940 homecoming parade.

A variety of souvenirs is offered for sale, from post cards and coffee mugs to T-shirts and a wraparound skirt depicting Reagan in cowboy garb. In March the Nicelys will move the souvenirs next door and devote the ground floor of the birthplace entirely

to exhibits of Tampico history and Reagan memorabilia.

Through interviews with people who knew the Reagan family and examination of back issues of the local newspaper, The Tampico Tornado, and other publications, Nicely pieced together the story of the president's birth and learned something of the Reagans' life in Tampico.

Mrs. Reagan, of Scottish and English descent, was a genteel woman who gave readings of inspirational literature. Jack Reagan, a burly Irishman, was a clerk at the H.C. Pitney General Store at the time of Ronald's birth.

THE APARTMENT WAS heated by a pot-belly stove in the parlor and a cookstove in the kitchen. There was no indoor plumbing.

Tampico (pop. 838) is well off the beaten path, a good four miles from a principal highway. Main Street consists of two taverns, a bank, a funeral chapel, a supermarket, a gas station and not much more. A restaurant will be opening soon. The birthplace is open every day from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Dixon (16,000) is 28 miles northeast of Tampico and is the community Reagan remembers as his boyhood home. "All of us have a place to go back to; Dixon is that place for me," Reagan wrote in his autobiography.

A river town, Dixon is the sort of place Mark Twain might have described in his "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Victorian frame houses sit on tree-lined streets. Downtown Dixon is noted for its picturesque courthouse and pre-Civil War hotel. The biggest event of the year is the Petunia Festival held over the



Christian Science Monitor photo  
One of five homes President Reagan lived in when he was growing up in Dixon, Ill.

Fourth of July weekend.

RONALD REAGAN, OR "Dutch," as he was called, attended old South Central School, played on the high school football team (he was an offensive guard) and is credited with saving 77 lives as a lifeguard on the Rock River. He once retrieved a set of dentures from the river for an elderly swimmer and received a reward of \$5.

While in Dixon, the Reagans lived in five homes, one of which has been torn down to make way for a McDonald's restaurant. The home where Reagan lived from 1920 to 1924 has been purchased by a local preservation group that is soliciting donations to pay

the mortgage and to restore the home to the Reagan era.

Though open to visitors on weekends free of charge, the Reagan home is in deplorable condition, having been partitioned into two apartments during its recent history.

The townspeople of Dixon honored Reagan in 1978 by naming a bridge across the Rock River after him. Another bridge, just a few blocks away, is named for Abraham Lincoln, who fought the only battle of his military career here during the Blackhawk War.

In addition to Reagan, Dixon was the home of Louella Parsons, the Hollywood columnist, and John Deere, the farm equipment industrialist.

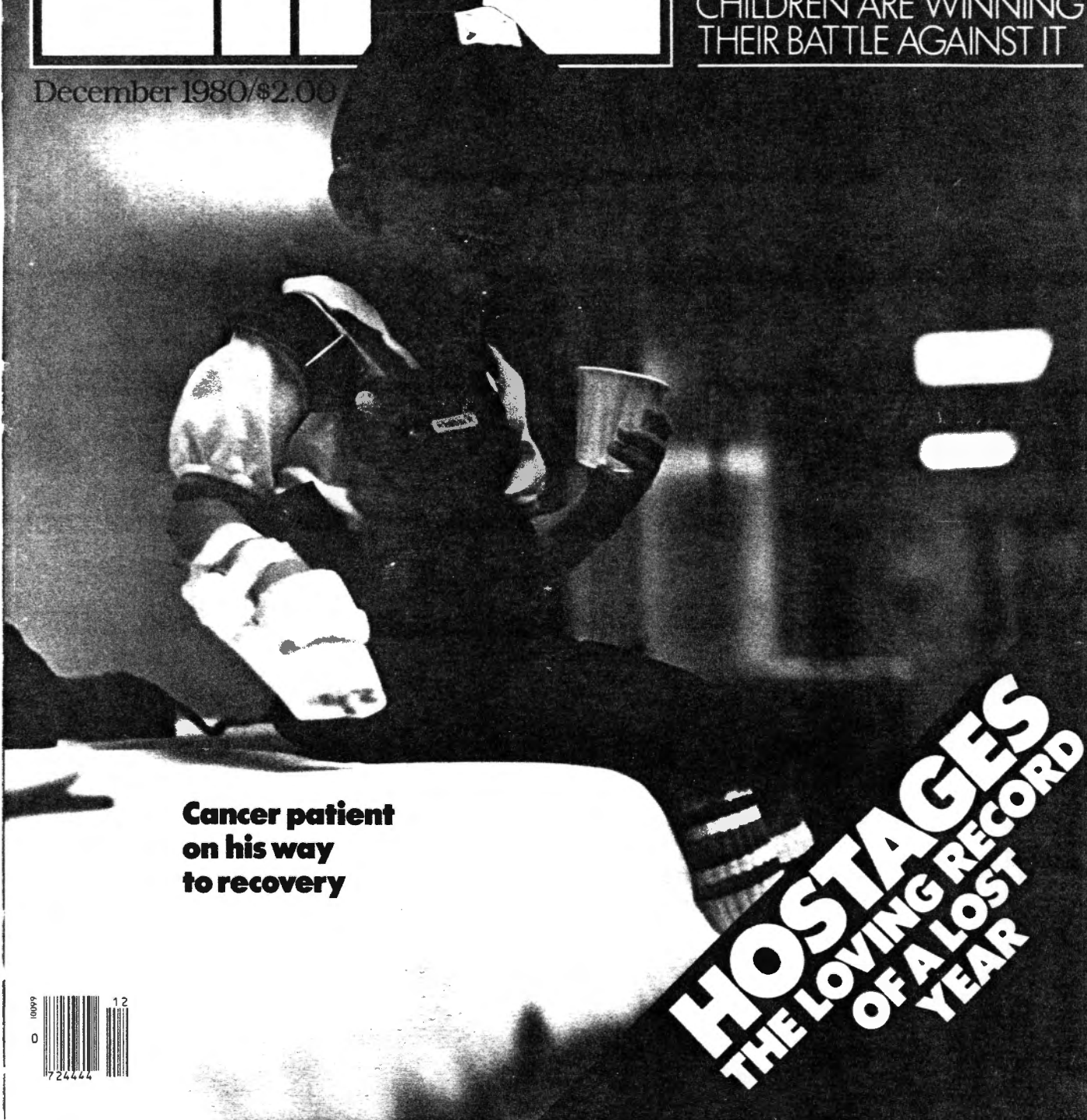
Globe-Democrat-Christian Science Monitor News Service

# LIFE

**REAGAN**  
HIS SMALL-TOWN  
ROOTS

**CANCER**  
CHILDREN ARE WINNING  
THEIR BATTLE AGAINST IT

December 1980/\$2.00



**Cancer patient  
on his way  
to recovery**

**HOSTAGES**  
THE LOVING RECORD  
OF A LOST  
YEAR



AP



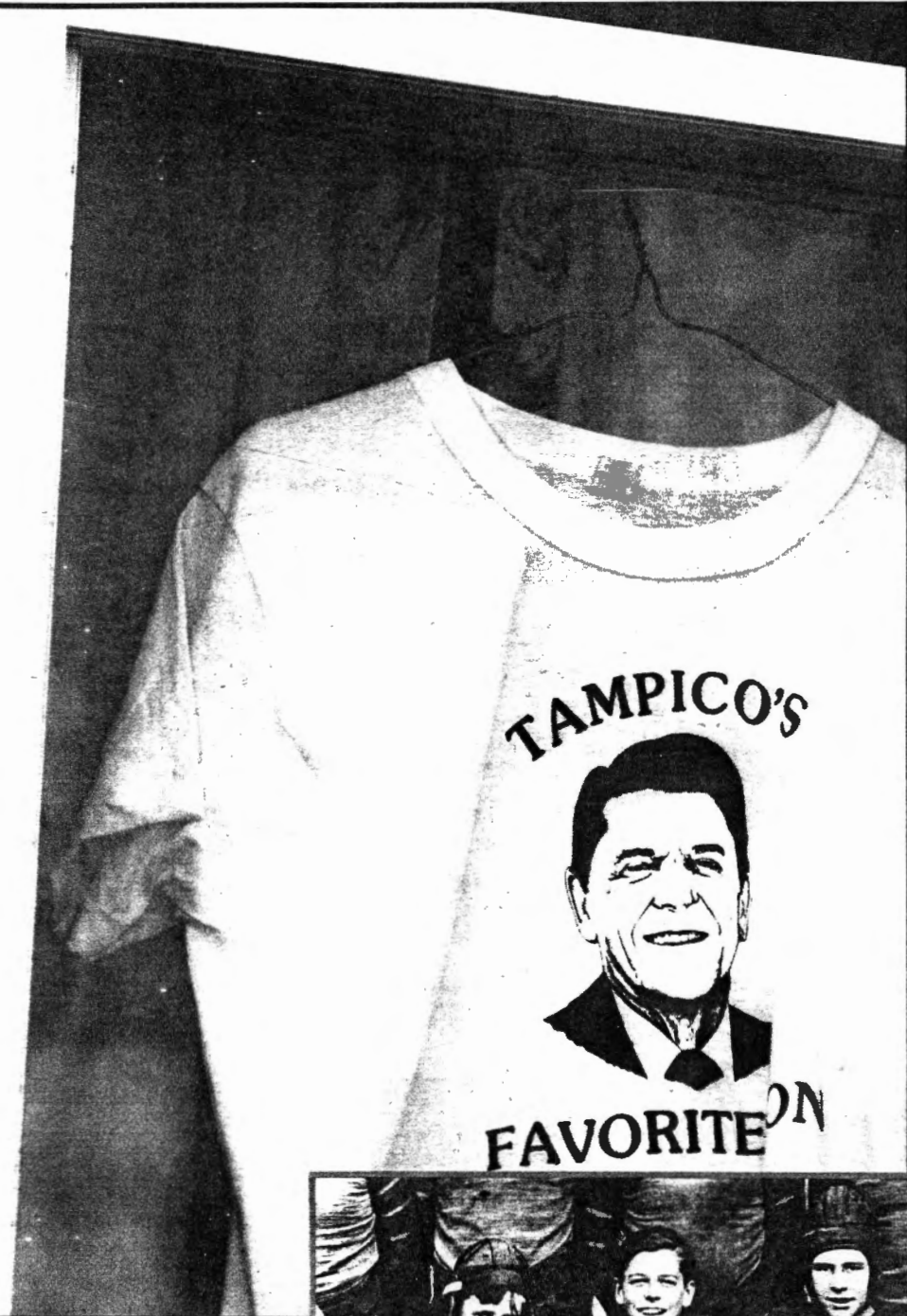
# Ronald Reagan's Small-Town Roots



Eisenhower's Abilene. Jimmy Carter's Plains. Small towns are the traditional starting places of American Presidents. Now a road leads to the White House from Tampico, Ill. (pop. 954), where Ronald Reagan was born. As much as Hollywood, northwestern Illinois forged the President-elect's character. The store below the Reagans' apartment was a bakery when their second son arrived in 1911. Later it became a bank. Now Paul and Helen Nicely, a local couple who own the building, are restoring the place as a mini-museum. Tampico is not the only town with a claim on the native son everybody called Dutch. On the following pages are more reflections of an extraordinary politician's thoroughly normal roots.

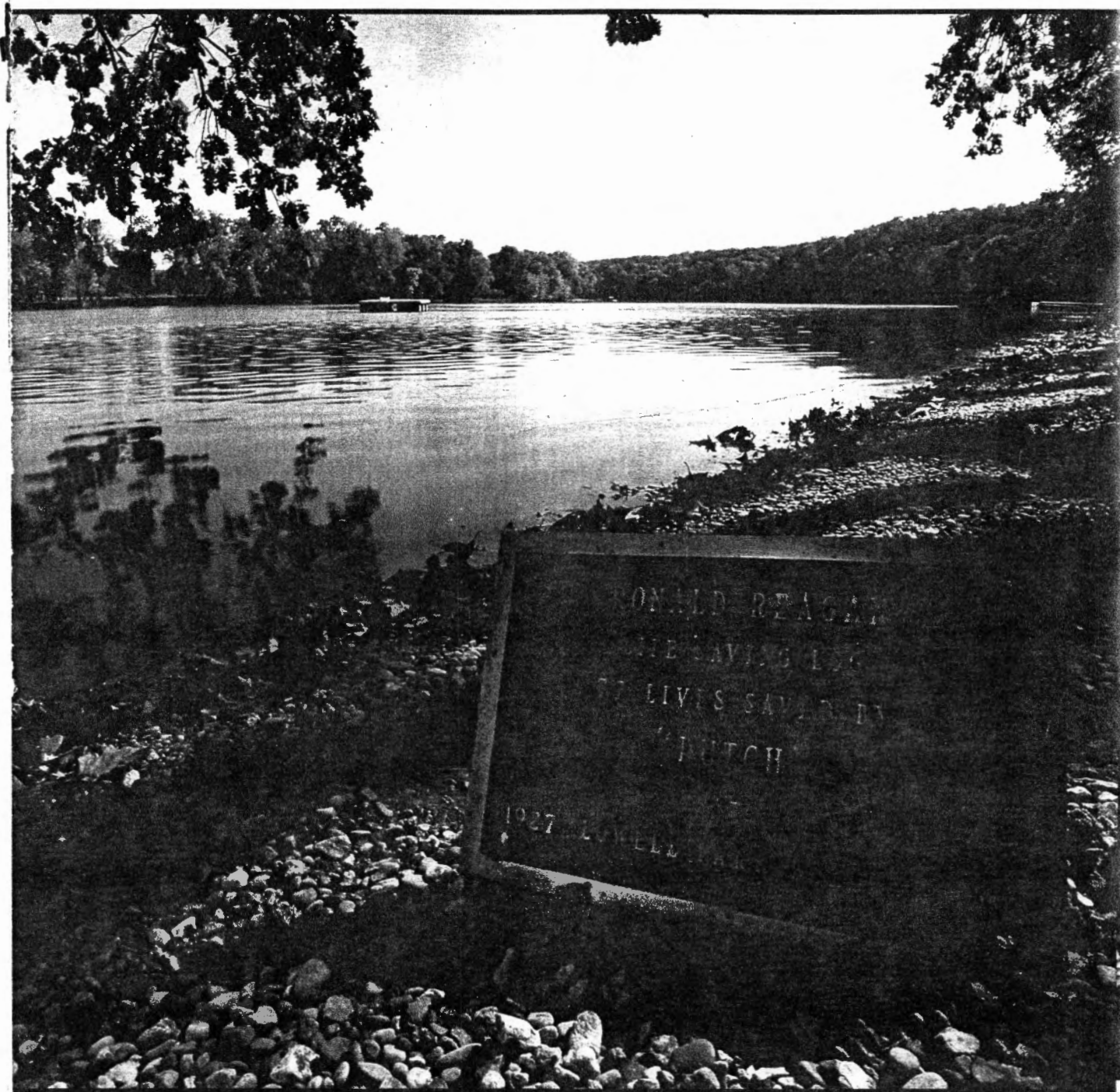


*The birthplace of future President Ronald Reagan (left) is on this business block in Tampico, Ill. Local resident Helen Nicely calls to her husband from the room where Reagan was born.*



*Tampico's pride in its native son is matched by that of Dixon, Ill., where Reagan spent most of his boyhood. Poor eyesight limited him to lineman on the Dixon football team (second from left). Summers he was a lifeguard at the local swimming hole (opposite).*



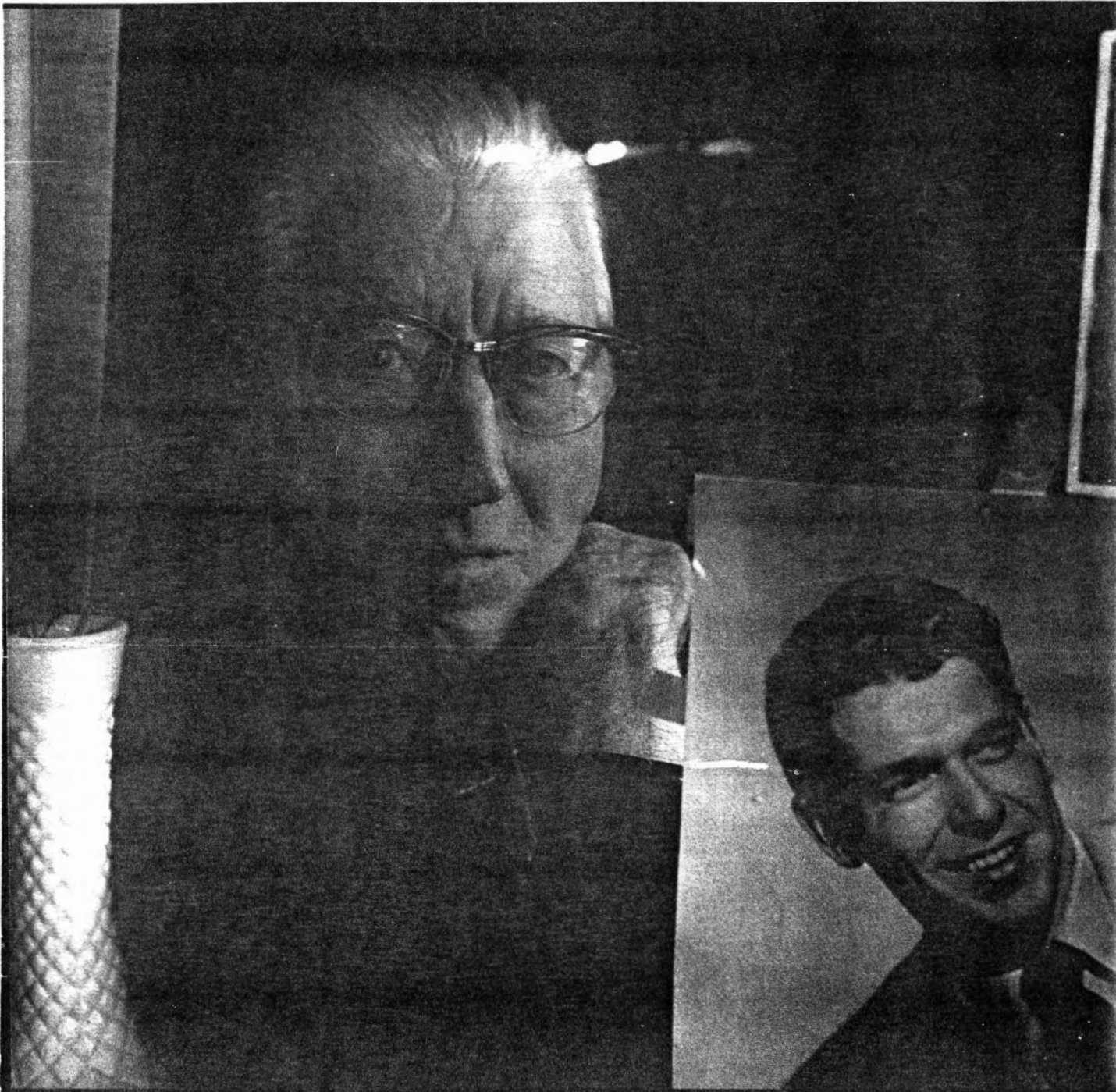


## **A Lowly Lineman on the Field, a Hero at the Town Beach**

"I've got two hometowns," Reagan explained in a victory speech that saluted both. The family moved from Tampico to Dixon, the Lee county seat, as he turned nine. He graduated from Dixon's North High School as president of the student body and showed traits that would serve him in careers ahead. His high school drama instructor, B. J. Fraser, says, "He had a basic quality that any good actor—or politician—must have: an interest in people." Fraser also recalls that as the perennial lifeguard at Dixon's public beach on the Rock River (*above*), Dutch Reagan sometimes resorted to special effects. When he was anxious to end his day's duty, he succeeded in getting swimmers out of the water by tossing a pebble and suggesting the splash was made by a river rat.

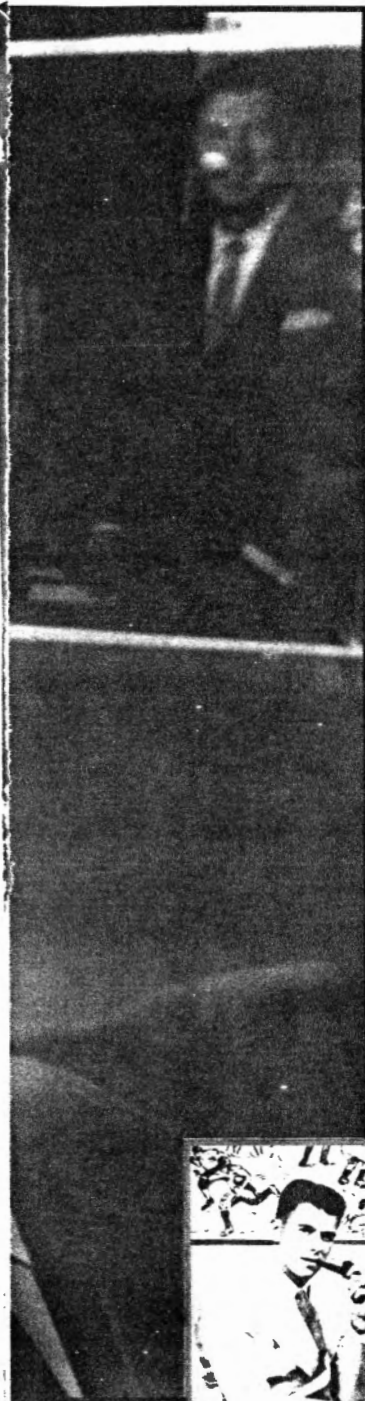
**Photography: Co Rentmeester**





## **For a Broomstick Broadcaster, Advice from an Old Drama Coach**

In 1928 Reagan followed his Dixon high school sweetheart Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver to Eureka College in Illinois (enrollment 220), where he participated in a student strike protesting college budget cutbacks. He did manage to win his varsity E, but football coach Ralph "Little Mac" McKinzie remembers Reagan's sideline performances best: "He'd pick up a broomstick and pretend to broadcast the game." After graduation it was B. J. Fraser, his former high school teacher and principal at Dixon (*above*), who urged Reagan to take seriously his yen for work in the fast-growing world of radio. After meeting rebuff at the hands of NBC in Chicago, Dutch landed a job as a sportscaster in Davenport and soon moved up to station WHO, Des Moines.



AP

*Years For Kentucky Winners and Kentucky Club  
Dutch Reagan*

*Above, Eureka's 1980 football squad gathers to honor two college legends. That's Little Mac McKinzie, now an advisory coach at 86, to the right of Reagan's portrait. A nonsmoker himself, Reagan used the postcard at left to promote his sports program—and a sponsor's tobacco.*



## From Adonis to Star

While covering the Chicago Cubs 1937 spring training camp at Catalina Island off the West Coast, sportscaster Reagan was persuaded to take a screen test—without his glasses. He had already returned to the microphone at WHO in Des Moines when Warner Bros. wired offering him a seven-year contract at an astonishing \$200 a week. In a series of articles he wrote from Hollywood for the *Des Moines Register*, the exhilarated fledgling likened himself to a “male Alice in Wonderland.” ♦



*After Reagan's film appearance as Notre Dame's legendary George Glipp in Knute Rockne, All American (1940), USC art students named him a "20th Century Adonis" and asked him to pose for a sculpture class. In 1960 Reagan won his star spot (above) on the sidewalk of Hollywood Boulevard.*

THE LOU VALENTINO COLLECTION

■ FOR A man who could be the next President of the United States, surprisingly little seems to be known about the early life and background of Ronald Wilson Reagan.

Apart from the candidate himself, only one person really knows the full and true story of Ronald Reagan from the good years to the bad, from poverty to affluence, from life in a small Illinois village to fame as a Hollywood movie star to power in the Governor's Mansion at Sacramento.

That man is Reagan's older and only brother Neil, who at 72 lives a very active retirement despite throat cancer, open-heart surgery and three bypass operations.

To discover what forces and attitudes helped to shape and mold the character of the man who now aspires to the White House, CHRISTINA KIRK visited the Illinois village of Tampico where Reagan was born on February 6, 1911, and the nearby town of Dixon where he grew up and spoke to old-time residents who recall Reagan as a boy, while JOHN LATTA talked to brother Neil in his neat Rancho Santa Fe home in Southern California as he remembered Ronald Reagan's roots.

Here is their portrait of a potential President.

LOOKING out at his trim garden with its sweeping views over a nearby golf course, Neil Reagan recalled the harshness of his early childhood with brother Ronald.

"As a family, the Reagans had no money," he said. "We were poor folk. I'll tell you just how 'rich' we were. We had gas pipes sticking out of the walls with a little tap on them, and we lit them for light. Sometimes we even had a bulb over the flame.

"Every Saturday, my mother would give me a dime and I would go to the butcher's shop where I'd buy a 10-cent soup bone and asked the butcher for the calves' liver they used to throw away in those days before they found its value.

"I told him it was for our cat but, of course, we didn't have a cat. So every Saturday night we'd eat calves' liver and onions and soup. The soup was good that night, but we lived off it for a week.

"My mother would put more vegetables in every day, and after a few days the meat would be gone. By the end of the week the bone wouldn't even add any flavor

# RONALD



Chris Kirk



John Latta

## Brother and former years that shaped

Street, one of a dwindling row of two-story brick buildings erected between 1895 and 1900.

The first floor of the building was occupied by a restaurant when the Reagans rented the apartment above it. Later, the downstairs housed the First National Bank.

Helen Nicely, whose father started the First National Bank and whose husband Paul now owns the building, said the apartment which she hopes one day will become a national landmark consists of a living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bath.

"I suspect the bathroom was originally a small bedroom. There was no indoor plumbing at the time," she explained.

The possibility that they were providing the birthplace of a

John Edward Reagan (pronounced Ray-gan) had come to Tampico with his wife Nelle because he had been offered a job as a clerk in the H.C. Pitney general store.

At birth, while he was still howling from the doctor's spanking, Ronald received the nickname that was to follow him through life.

"For such a little bit of a fat Dutchman, he makes a hell of a lot of noise, doesn't he?" said his father. And he was "Dutch" from then on.

Actually, Ronald Reagan's ancestry is a blend of his father's Irish-Catholicism and his mother's Scottish-English Protestantism.

In Dixon, the young Reagan boys grew up while their father

# REAGAN'S ROOTS

PORTRAIT OF  
A POTENTIAL  
PRESIDENT



Bernard Frazer: "A feeling for people."



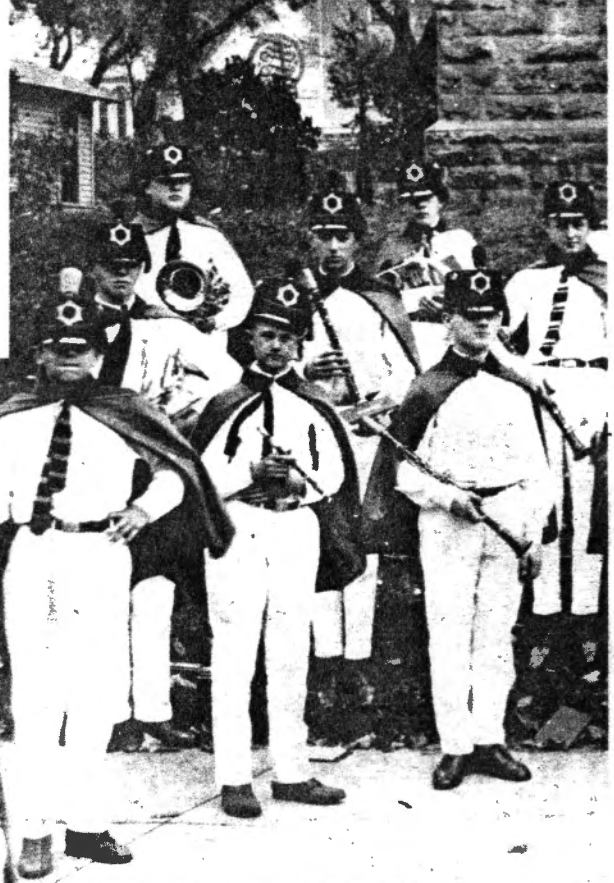
Helen Lawton: "He started with nothing."



Ken Detweiler: "A definite standout."



Brother Neil Reagan: "I hit him with an ax in a rage."



Young Ronald (holding baton) was drum major of the local YMCA band in Dixon. He also taught Sunday school, but brother Neil says Ronald was never greatly religious.

## school friends recall his life

Chicago to use an X-ray machine to show people how their feet fitted into shoes, until it was found to be harmful to both the wearer and the operator," brother Neil recalled with a chuckle.

"Reagan (as Neil mostly calls his brother these days) and I got into trouble and fought like all kids. We were normal boys. We had a vacant lot next to the house where we dug a deep hole and covered it with wood and timber and called it our cave.

"I was trying to cut wood with an ax, but the sticks kept flying into the air. I got Ronald to hold the other end and swung at it, but every time he would pull his hands away at the last minute.

"I got so mad I hit him in the head with the ax and split his head open. There was blood all over him, but he didn't feel anything and didn't cry.

"I took him to the house and when my mother opened the door and saw him she screamed and he started to cry as hard as he could."

Although the boys began to drift apart, they still had their interests together like playing football. While Ronald was interested in his birds' eggs and butterfly collection, Neil raised pigeons and rabbits in the family barn and sold them on weekends.

When Jack and Nelle shifted from south Dixon across the Rock River to the north of town, Neil stayed in the high school in the south, not wanting to go to the "sissy" high school Ronald went to.

Recalled Neil: "Reagan was a very serious boy and very quiet. He got good grades, but he was not a good student. As I remember, he never brought many books home with him."

It was Nelle Reagan who brought up the boys, while her husband pursued his business and followed his wanderlust.

Said Neil: "My dad was his own worst enemy. He talked or worked himself out of nearly every job he had, and he had a drinking problem. When he came out to join Reagan in California he had already had three heart attacks and no money left.

"He spent it as fast as he made it. He was quite a gambler and he liked the bottle."

Hope Hinds, who was two years behind Ronald Reagan at Dixon High School, said: "Everyone knew Jack Reagan was a gentleman alcoholic. But Dutch never mentioned his father's drinking. You would have thought



The Reagan family: Father Jack, mother Nelle, brother Neil and little Ronald.

that he had an ideal family life."

To all outward appearances, Ronald Reagan was the epitome of the all-American boy next door he later played on the screen.

Although he was small as a boy, he played baseball and football and learned to swim expertly.

While in high school, he worked as a lifeguard at Lowell Park where he put 77 notches in a tree to record the number of swimmers he saved from drowning.

And all this was achieved despite the handicap of being extremely nearsighted.

Said Neil: "He can't see the end of his nose without glasses or lenses.

"Before lenses, if he didn't

have his glasses, he would hold his hand in front of his face and look through the slit between two fingers to see. That way his fingers acted like glasses.

"When he played basketball in college, he played with a mask over his face to protect his eyes."

While still in Dixon grade school, Ronald became drum major of the local YMCA band. Later, he was an active member of the First Christian Church youth groups and taught Sunday school classes.

"But," Neil said, "Reagan isn't a greatly religious man. He never was, but he couldn't be a son of his mother without having deep religious convictions.



The house where Ronald Reagan was born in Tampico.



Young Ronald as a high school football star.

The two main interests of Ronald Reagan's later life — acting and politics — were evident by the time he was in high school. He was elected president of the student body and starred in both his junior and senior class plays.

As befitted the most popular boy in the 1928 graduating class, Reagan had a high school sweetheart who was his equal in every accomplishment.

Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver was the daughter of the minister of Reagan's church and his co-star in two high school productions. They dated all through college, but when graduation came they went their separate ways.

Former classmates, teachers and neighbors still treasure memories of the Dutch Reagan they knew when he was Dixon's fair-haired boy.

Ken Detweiler, now a successful insurance agent, said: "There was something special about him even then. He was a definite standout."

Bernard J. Frazer, 84, retired principal of Dixon High School, was Reagan's English teacher and drama coach from 1924 to 1928.

"He was always well-prepared," he recalled. "He never forgot his lines. When he wanted something, he worked for it. People like that normally succeed, but you also need a little luck along the way.

"Dutch was fortunate. He had a real feeling for people and he could communicate it."

Helen Lawton, a neighbor of the Reagans and a fan of Dutch's since

high school days, said: "I just explode when someone says, 'What does Ronald Reagan know about being poor?'"

"If ever anyone knew what it was like to be poor, it was Dutch."

Reagan worked his way through high school and college with pick and shovel construction jobs, life-guarding and dishwashing. Neil worked for two years in a cement plant before he could afford college.

Dutch Reagan was graduated from Eureka College in 1932, the depths of the Depression.

After Bernard Frazer advised him to find a job in the field of communications, he became a sports announcer on a radio station in Davenport, Iowa, and later in Des Moines, where his job included broadcasting the Chicago Cubs baseball games and accompanying the team to spring training on Catalina Island.

While in California, he looked up Joy Hodges, a band singer he had worked with in Des Moines. She knew an agent who got Reagan a screen test. The test was successful and he was signed to a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers.

The year was 1937. And Ronald Reagan has been Dixon's biggest celebrity ever since.

Said Helen Lawton: "There may be one or two people in town who are still irked by some dumb little thing that happened in high school, but most of us think he's pretty wonderful and we think he would work for the people of our country."

## \$18 a week lifeguard job for young Ronald

Ronald Reagan "thought he was a Democrat" when he came to work as a lifeguard for Edward and Ruth Graybill at Lowell Park.

But over six summers from 1926 through 1931, Graybill—a second father to Reagan—provided his first introduction to Republicanism. (A seventh summer at Lowell Park was spent working for concessionaire Mary Stevens.)

A well-known swimmer at the Dixon YMCA, Reagan came to the Graybills in spring 1926, at the end of his sophomore year in high school. Mr. Graybill initially greeted him with "you're pretty young."

But Jack Reagan urged

the Lowell Park concessionaire to hire his son, saying "he can do it; give the boy a chance," recalled Mrs. Graybill.

Within a short time on the job, however, "he liked it and we liked him," she noted.

Testifying to his effectiveness as a lifeguard, Mrs. Graybill said that swimmers checked their clothes in baskets before entering the water. "There was never a basket left at closing time. That meant we had a good lifeguard; there were no bodies at the bottom," she said emphatically.

Noting that "when he went after them, he went

after them because they needed help," Mrs. Graybill said that the lifesaving log originated when too many people shook off the young guard with the admonition, "Oh, I could have made it alright." At Jack Reagan's suggestion, Ronald notched a long piece of driftwood each time he dragged in a faltering swimmer. The plaque crediting him with saving 77 lives came later, Mrs. Graybill said.

He was rewarded only the time he retrieved the dental plate of a man who hit the water too hard coming down the slide. Gus Whiffleberg paid Reagan \$10 for his efforts, Mrs. Graybill said.

"He liked it and we liked him. He was real pleasant to everybody and treated everybody the same. In the morning if he had time, he would give small children swimming lessons," Mrs. Graybill added.

Working for \$18 a week and all the nickel root beers and 10-cent hamburgers he could eat ("everybody piled all the onion, pickle and relish on, so they really got their money's worth") Reagan was on duty as long as 12 hours a day. At 10 a.m., he picked Mrs. Graybill up at their home kitty-cornered from South Central School, and helped her gather the day's food before they drove out to the Park in her truck.

On very hot days, people might stay in the water until 10 p.m. (Extra lifeguards were put on for holidays like Memorial Day.) However, Reagan had ways of getting off early if he wanted to eat and see a show. Skipping a pebble into the water, he waited to see the lagging swimmers' startled expressions.

"Oh, that's just an old river rat," Reagan would say drily as the swimming area emptied.

But the park held diversions for him. Flying squirrels came out each night at 8 p.m. Businessmen from Chicago and their families stayed in the nearby lodge during the



Standing next to the slide on the Lowell Park pier, lifeguard Ronald Reagan watches swimmers in the shallow section in front of the floating oil drums. Occasionally Reagan would miss the dock as he

swept off his eyeglasses; they would float in the water.

**PRESTO  
FUN!**

**A Dix  
Of Con**

# Week lifeguard job young Ronald

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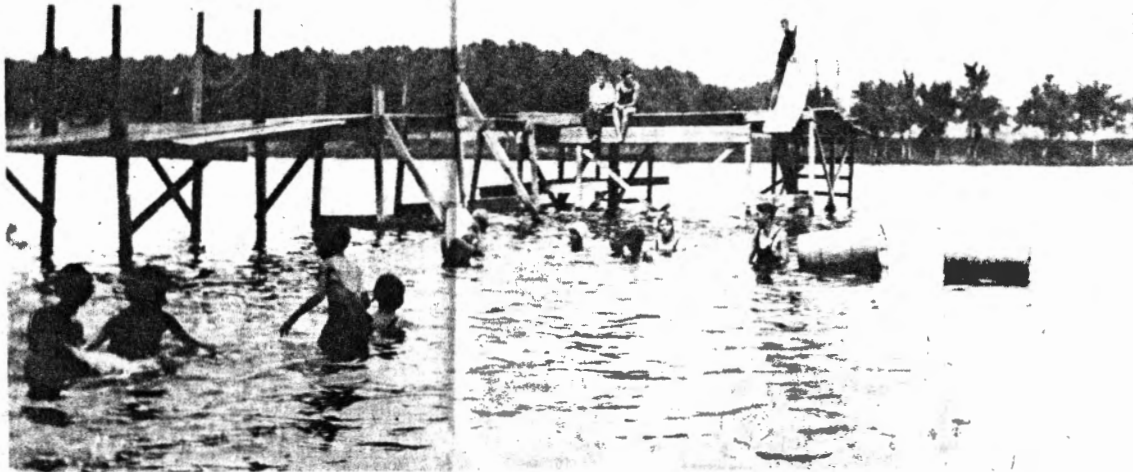
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But the park held diversions for him. Flying squirrels came out each night at 8 p.m. Businessmen from Chicago and their families stayed in the nearby lodge during the summer and came in the fall to gather hickory nuts and berries. Some offered advice to the young lifeguard as he prepared to enter the full-time working world.

"He was an all-around good young man. Different because he was interested in education—the best he could get so he could get to the top," Mrs. Graybill said. "We knew he was going to leave Dixon because he went to Eureka and then on to WOC at Davenport. There really wasn't any incentive to stay here if he was trying to get to the top."



Standing next to the slide on the Lowell Park pier, lifeguard Ronald Reagan watches swimmers in the shallow section in front of the floating oil drums. Occasionally Reagan would miss the dock as he

swept off his eyeglasses; they would have to be retrieved from the water.

## PRESTO FUN!

# A Dix Of Con For Over



F E G U A R D

pers, or what have you! beach guard something to

and some firewater tanked



Wearing a beanie with Borden's Milk Factory pennies around its edges, Ronald Reagan is squinting at far left in this August 1921 photo of the caddies and players of the Women's Section, Northern Illinois

Golf Tournament at the Dixon Country Club. Dwight "Light" Thompson is peeking out fourth from left and Neil Reagan is at center of the photo—a golf bag on his knee and another bag at his feet.



Two years later, Ronald Reagan is again caught in a pensive pose in caddy photo taken of Northern Illinois Golf Tournament, July 17, 1923.



# YMCA Boys' Band—right out o

What does the YMCA mean to Dixon? ...Very briefly, it is the place where future Americans receive training, morally, mentally, physically. The future of the country rests with the boys of today. They will be the men of tomorrow.

—“Notes from Dixon YMCA” column, Dixon Evening Telegraph, Nov. 10, 1922.

Ten years later, Ronald Reagan would be a disc

jockey at WOC Radio in Davenport. But as a member of the Dixon YMCA boys' band, there had been no room for him in the station's broadcasting booth.

Dressed in white shirts and trousers, blue capes lined in red and plumed hats that made them look seven or eight inches taller, they were the Rock River city's pride, like a scene from a Broadway play.

“It was a time when very

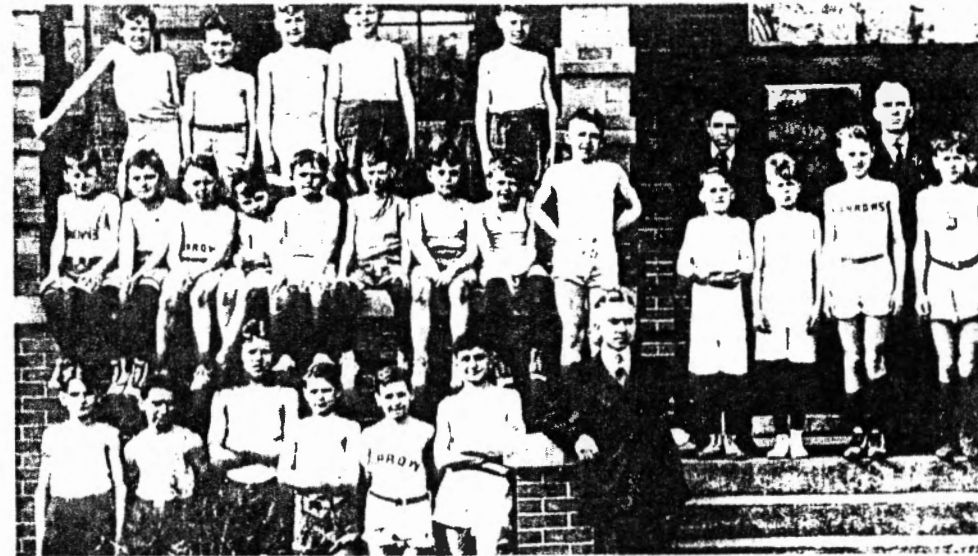
few towns had bands; it was unique that Dixon had a band and other towns didn't,” notes Dean Hey, who joined the band in 1924. “Today, kids start playing an instrument in fourth grade or sooner, but in those days, you didn't play until you were older,” Hey added.

At Fourth of July and Memorial Day parades in Dixon and at the Lee County Fair, they played patriotic music like “Under the Double Eagle,” “Stars and Stripes Forever” and “Semper Fidelis” or popular selections such as “Moonlight on the Nile.” They practiced every Monday night and occasionally split a token fee.

But a charity performance provided Ronald Reagan his debut in the dramatics field.


“On Thursday evening, Prof. H.P. Stearns and members of the boys' band, Mr. and Mrs. Al Derr, Mrs. J.E. Reagan and son, Ronald went to the Dixon State Colony (now the Dixon Developmental Center) and

(Continued on following page)



This photo first appeared in the Nov. 7, 1921 Dixon Evening Telegraph for a story on YMCA recruitment. Taken sometime the previous summer, the photo shows 10-year-old Ronald Reagan in black stockings second row on right, second row on the left hand porch. Others, identified in a six-month period in which the photo has hung in a Dixon restaurant, include top row, left side, Oliver Rogers, Ed Worley, Carl Buchner Jr. and Ray Wilson from left; Reagan's row, from left, Robert Wilson, second; Barry Lennon, fifth, and Fonda Peters, eighth. Those identified in the bottom row, left side, include Walter Krug, second from left, Harold Rodasch, third, Richard Lenz, fourth, and Harry Wienman, sixth. Elmer Rice is the gentleman standing near the post. On the right side

## FOOD WORLD



IGA





The above plaque was originally attached to a log in Lowell Park where "Dutch" would notch his saves. The log is long since gone. The plaque is now in the Loveland museum. Another remainder of Reagan's years as a lifesaver is the following article which he penned for his senior yearbook.

### MEDITATIONS OF A LIFEGUARD

On they come, hoards of swimmers, bathers, sleepers, or what have you! A mob of water seeking humans intent on giving the beach guard something to worry about.

A big hippopotamus with a sandwich in each hand, and some firewater tanked away, in his business man's addition. He'll need watching.

A "frail and forty" maiden out to enjoy the rippling waves, and to cling tightly to the lifeline, as she squeals and giggles in a vague fit of bygone girlishness.

Ah! An answer to loves sweet young dream—a proud little sweetheart dragging her manly catch down to the river's edge, expecting him to exhibit a "Gertrude Ederle", type of navigation. He'll hug the shore in a truly loving manner, assuring his anxious half that the temperature is really all that could be desired, and that the water is merely "aqua pura" and is not composed of slimy fingers seeking to pull the unwary natatorial addict beneath the sparkling surface.

"On Stanley On!" "Charge boys, give them cold steel." Ranging from the ages of devilmot to more devilmot, a Sunday School class, from the picnic up in the park swarms over the lifeboats, raft, and keeps on swarming as long as anything remains to be swarmed over. Ducking themselves, each other, and the big porpoise who has just imbibed the last sandwich; and then splashing that frail "somebody's aunt" until she squeals in mortal terror, hopping up and down like a ruffled bantam. Like a low accompaniment to their shrieks and howls, the life guard paints the ether a hazy blue, by the use of lurid, vivid, flaming adjectives; adjectives that sear, and burn; words and phrases relating, and describing their ancestors; brains, lack of brains, and every personal defect from flat feet to big ears.

Just in time to prevent wholesale slaughter, a new arrival comes to cheer the guardians drooping spirits. Some fond papa out for a day of rest and, relaxation, is followed respectively, and respectfully by Mama, Willy and "Oh! What's the use?" Papa's going to show off, Willy who can really swim loses himself in the crowd at the dock, and Mama scans her splashing pond with a wary eye. Suddenly Willy's absence is realized, and pandemonium ensues. Mama is sure his dear dead body is resting on the cruel river bed, until Willy inquires what the excitement is all about, then pandemonium descends on Willy in the form of a spanking.

Now in this motley crew there must be one ray of hope. There is, she's walking onto the dock now. She trips gracefully over to the edge of the crowded pier, and settles like a butterfly. The life guard strolls by, turns and strolls by again. Then he settles in the immediate region of the cause of all this sudden awakening. He assumes a manly worried expression, designed to touch the heart of any blonde, brunette, or unclassified female. He has done all that is necessary. She speaks and the sound of her voice is like balm to a wounded soul, the worried expression fades in the glow of a joyous realization, the birdies strike up in chorus, and somewhere celestial music plays the haunting strains recognizable as "The End of A Perfect Day".

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R.R. '28  
 x Ronald Reagan  
 COPY of ORIGINAL  
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# Katy accounts for 4 of the 77 life-

On network television, Katy Boyd clued Ronald Reagan that "My parents were always so worried until you brought me in,"

and "everytime I met you, you left me breathless." But it was when movie star Reagan asked Mrs. Boyd "are you one of the

notches on the log?" that "Place the Face" host Bill Cullen nearly stopped the mid-40s game show which polled celebrities about incidents in their lives.

Now living near Atlanta, Ga., Mrs. Boyd was indeed four of the 77 notches running down the side of the lifesaving log at Lowell Park.

But the lady who eventually became head of the Lee County Water Safety program, swimming instructor at Memorial Pool and a leader of a Mariner Scout troop bristled when she heard CBS newsmen Charles Koural's joke that

"Anytime you started out for the raft, he watched out for you, because if you wore yourself out and went down, you were in trouble," Mrs. Boyd said. "You had to start above it, not even with it," because the river's current either carried the swimmer, or worked against him, she said.

For were Reagan's rescues mere attempts to get close to cute girls, she said.

"Dutch was very businesslike. The girls were sitting around mooning after him, but it was not a two-way street." Eight years younger than Reagan, Mrs. Boyd, now 62, she recalls girls her age were attracted to Reagan's good looks, his seriousness about the job and his sense of humor.

"We used to sit on the dock and listen to him try to broadcast the Northwestern-Notre Dame game. He'd set up a bunch of

**"Anytime you started out for the raft he watched you, because if you wore yourself out and went down you were in trouble."**

running plays and gee, it'd get exciting." Simultaneously, the river's current dragged down as many men as women swimmers, she said.

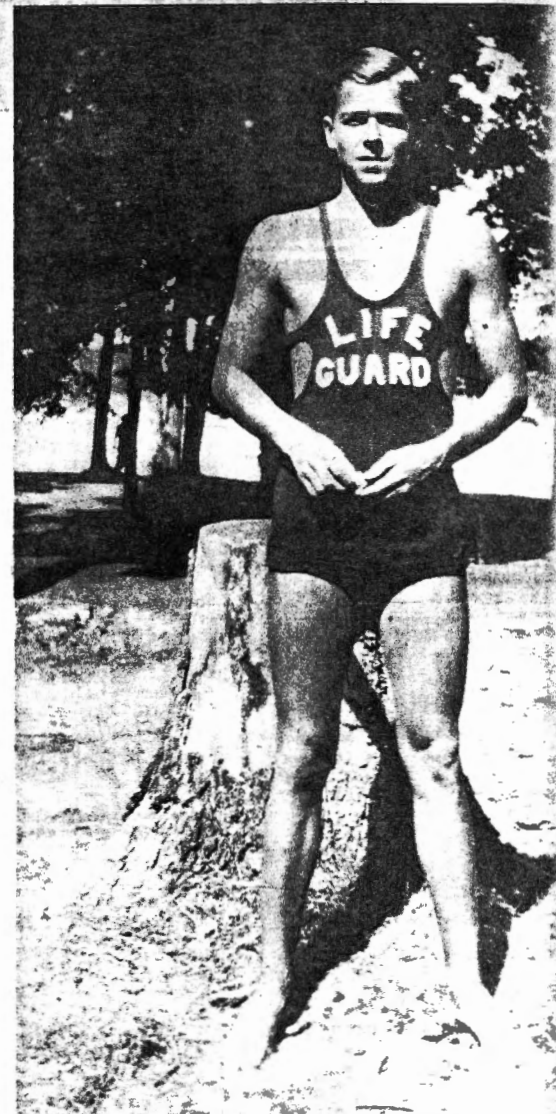
A lifeguard herself several years later, (in five years at Memorial Pool she saved 60 people) Mrs. Boyd recalled "five heavy farm boys" dive into the river and head for the raft. "I thought to myself, 'which one am I going to have to save?' " although as it turned out, only one needed her help. Most of the time, people she had saved did not realize

they had been saved. "The huffy, alt ego gone down times." A graduate School, K. flying at 1964. After pilot's course and instructor becoming multiengineer went on to freight Midway A. When she aviation used the

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Tanned and muscled, friendly and efficient is the way people remember Reagan as a lifeguard at Lowell Park. A strong swimmer since grade school, at the YMCA, Reagan worked at the park for seven years following his sophomore year through the year after college.

# accounts for 4 of the 77 life-saving notches

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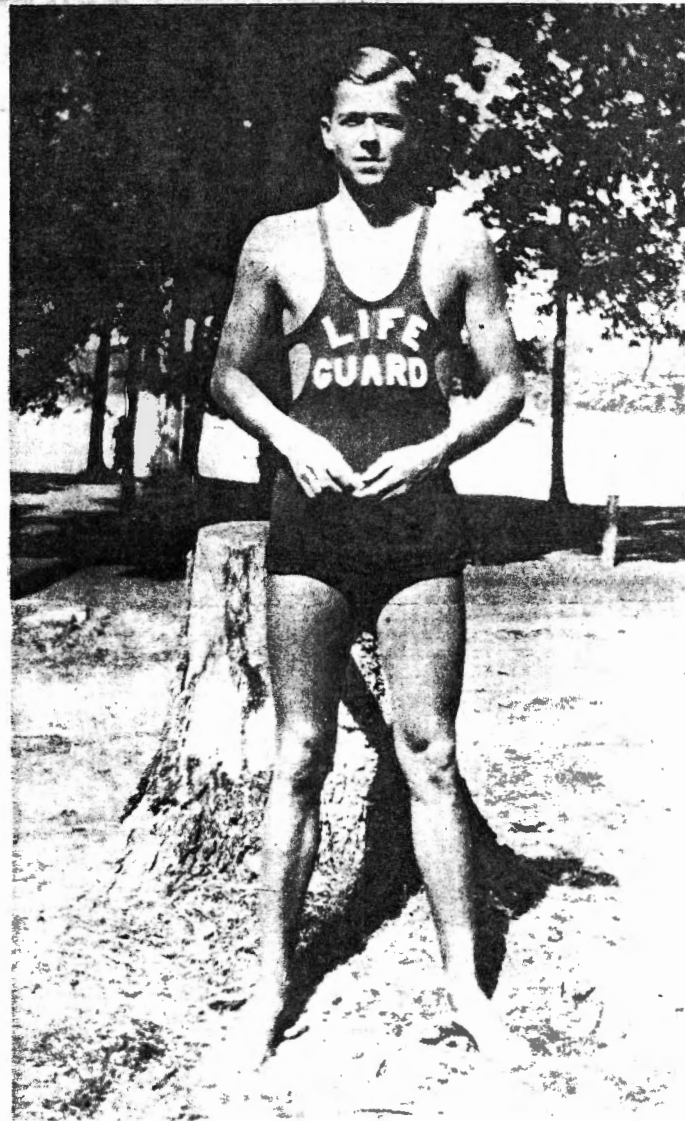
A graduate of Dixon High School, Katy Boyd started flying at Walgreen Field in 1964. After securing her pilot's commercial license and instrument rating and becoming qualified in multiengine airplanes, she went on to fly passenger and freight charter out of Midway Airport in Chicago.

When she wrote her first aviation text in 1969, she used the initials "K.T."

Boyd" since women were just beginning to gain acceptance as pilots. Currently director of education for Accelerated Ground Schools in Atlanta, Not, won an award from which provides private instruction for instrument Writers Association.

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Plaque on display in the Loveland Community House Museum formerly marked log notched by Ronald Reagan each time he saved a life on Lowell Park beach. Reagan saved 77 lives in seven summers from 1926 through 1932.

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## DIXONIAN

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*First Row—*HOOVER, BARTHELMESS, KING, MARKS, REAGAN, CREWS, SPROUL, FRAZER.  
*Second Row—*SELANDER, MORRIS, BUCKALOO, HOFMANN, WALLACE, CLEAVER, HARMS, PETERSEN,  
 REES, PRESCOTT, BOVEY, ANDERSON, ORTGIESEN, CRAWFORD, SCHMIDT, NELSON.

### DRAMATIC CLUB

The Dramatic Club was reorganized for the year 1927-28, several weeks after the opening of school. An initiation committee was appointed and at the second meeting, the new members were initiated.

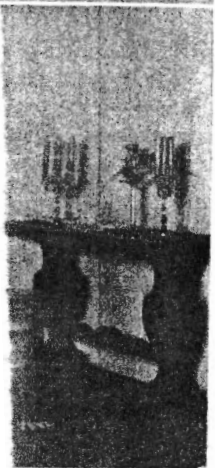
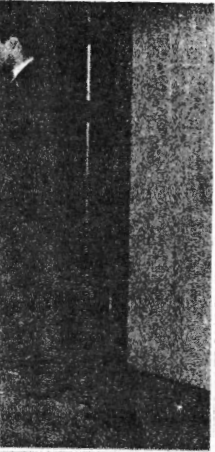
The following officers were elected:

RONALD REAGAN	<i>President</i>
MAX ENO	<i>Vice-President</i>
MARGARET REES	<i>Secretary-Treasurer</i>
B. J. FRAZER	<i>Faculty Advisor</i>
M. C. SELANDER	<i>Assistant Advisor</i>

A constitution was drawn up and several new provisions were made.

It was decided to open the meetings to the public and by so doing encourage interest in the dramatic side of school life. This plan has proved very satisfactory as there has been a large attendance at several clever and interesting plays presented by the Club.

**At far right in the front row of this 1928 yearbook photo is Bernard J. Frazer, while Ronald Reagan is seen fifth from left in the same row. New to the instruction of drama, Frazer instilled "method" acting in his students, forcing them to actually "become" the character. Reagan was head and shoulders above his peers at this type of acting, Frazer said.**



bended knee,  
 photo taken from

## DIXONIAN



High school sweethearts in real life, their roles came naturally to Reagan and Margaret "Mugs" Cleaver in their junior class play, "You and I." Seated on a couch together in photo above, left, Margaret played

a girl who broke their engagement. On bended knee, Reagan serenades her in bottom photo taken from yearbook.



First Row—HOOVER, BARTHELMESS, KING, MARKS, REAGAN, CREWS, SPROUL, FRAZER.  
Second Row—SELANDER, MORRIS, BUCKALOO, HOFMANN, WALLACE, CLEAVER, HARMIS, PETERSEN, REES, PRESCOTT, BOVEY, ANDERSON, ORTGIESEN, CRAWFORD, SCHMIDT, NELSON.

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# Dixon, Illinois

## Reagan Hometown Sees Ex-Lifeguard as Saviour

By Mindy Fetterman  
Special to The Washington Post

The hopes and schemes of every small town that ever fostered an American hero are riding on what is known in Dixon, Ill., as "the Reagan thing."

As the boyhood home from 1920 to 1932 of then-swimming star Ronald (Dutch) Reagan, this mid-western hamlet in cornfield country is gearing up to cash in.

"None of us have any real concept, any idea of what will happen," said Dean Harrison, Dixon's Chevrolet dealer and a member of the Reagan Hometown Committee, formed to orchestrate the jump into the history books.

"In Plains the first year they had 200,000 to 300,000 people," he said of former president Carter's Georgia birthplace. "We could have five, 50 or 50,000 people here this summer. We just don't know."

Total numbers may be unclear, but Dixon's cash registers are ready.

While insisting "we don't want to be another Plains," Dixon has embarked on an organized plan to lure tourists, and some hope industry, to the farming community and Lee County seat.

A souvenir shop has sprung up, and pins, buttons, banners and T-shirts are on sale at two nearby shops. An information center, selling its own souvenirs, is nearly complete, and one of four houses in which Reagan lived is being restored to its 1930s middle-class splendor.

The recent attempt on his life has helped make Reagan, credited with saving 77 swimmers while a lifeguard, even larger than life. The image of a virile, 70-year-old Reagan walking wounded and joking into the hospital emergency room is the stuff of which legends, and tourist attractions, are made.

Some talk of boat excursions on the Rock River, past the park where Reagan was a lifeguard, and bus tours of the town. "Dutch" chocolate ice cream has upstaged strawberry as the third best seller (after vanilla and plain chocolate) for the local Hey Brothers ice cream company, and Jim's Place Cafe features "Bonzo tea from the Reagan Bush."

But the glory of Dixon's new fame is to be the "Reagan Manor," a \$5 million, 100-unit motel designed as a replica of his new home, the White House.

"Some would say we're capitalizing on it, and if you want to be crass, it's true," said Mayor George Lindquist. "But we like to think of ourselves as a progressive community."

Some kind of economic boost, even one based on tourism, is needed. The recession has been tough here.

Nearly 2,000 residents have left Dixon since 1975, reducing the population to 16,000. The dusty gray downtown is pockmarked with empty storefronts, and federal budget cuts may cost 450 jobs at the Dixon Developmental Center for the Handicapped, the town's largest employer.

"People are frightened. A lot of them depend on that center for some kind of a job," said Gloria Boos, a local cafe waitress. "The center keeps this town going."

Most see "the Reagan thing" as a dam to stop the flow of young people from the city, and a way to bring new jobs and new money in.

But behind the grandiose plan, and the collective shudder over the tackiness of tourism, lurks politics.

Those who want tourism argue with old home-steaders who want nothing to change. Republicans are pouting over Democratic "opportunists," two Northern Illinois University students who started the town's only souvenir shop while everyone else watched election returns. And others grumble that a federal grant to build sewers and roads to "Reagan Manor" should not be used for a private venture.

Even the committee renovating Reagan's former home is split between businessmen who want industry in Dixon and citizens interested in a well-preserved history.

Reagan's three-bedroom former home was secured when mailman Len Knights saw that it was for sale soon after the newspaper identified local points of interest for Reagan-watchers.

"I get a lot of time to think when I'm out walking, and I said, 'Hey, someone's going to turn this into a cheap hamburger stand,'" Knights said.

He almost ran to the bank to put \$250 he'd saved for personal bills down on the \$31,000 home barely one day before a Las Vegas speculator offered \$10,000.

Now the hard feelings, simmering for months over doing the renovation locally or hiring a Chicago architect and turning it over to the National Park System, are coming to a head.

"Some people," said Chevy dealer Harrison without mentioning names, "want to be personally involved, they want to do everything. But we're amateurs. We need to get a real architect to tell us how to do this right."

A Chicago architect has plans for a \$500,000 renovation of the home, "on the wrong side of town" when Reagan lived there. Knights said he can do it with volunteers and donations for a fraction of that cost.

"I'm just a mailman, and I've had the Republican Party say they had a plan to turn the house into their headquarters. They are very jealous of me and mad that I did it first."

Unfortunately, tourists lured by Dixon's plans are looking for more than they can find right now, for the town's plans are still just that — plans.

Drywall is being put up in the unopened information center, and the only real progress at the Reagan home is a new sign out front. Fake brick siding has been peeled off, and the inside is a mess of dropcloths, ladders, peeling paint and, of course, a few souvenirs.

"We had a busload in from Wisconsin the other day, and I felt sorry for them," said waitress Boos. "They came all that way just to see Reagan's home, and have you been over there? It's nothing but an old empty house. They said they'd never come back here, and I don't blame them. We should have held off on the publicity 'til we were ready."

Dixon hopes to be more prepared by the summer vacation season, but even Harrison admits it may be tough.

"I mean, as far as the Reagan thing, there's only a little bit here. A house, the church he went to, his school. But there really isn't anything else for tourists to do. I mean, what the hell are you going to do in Dixon, Illinois?"



Richmond Times  
July 19, 1981

RICHMOND TIMES - DISPATCH  
July 19, 1981

### **Reagan Home Restoration Set**

DIXON, III. (AP) — Restoration work has begun on one of President Ronald Reagan's boyhood homes.

Lynn Knights, president of the Home Restoration Association, a non-profit group, said it has decided to restore the home through local volunteers rather than seek a federal grant.

"We're going by President Reagan's philosophy," Knights said.

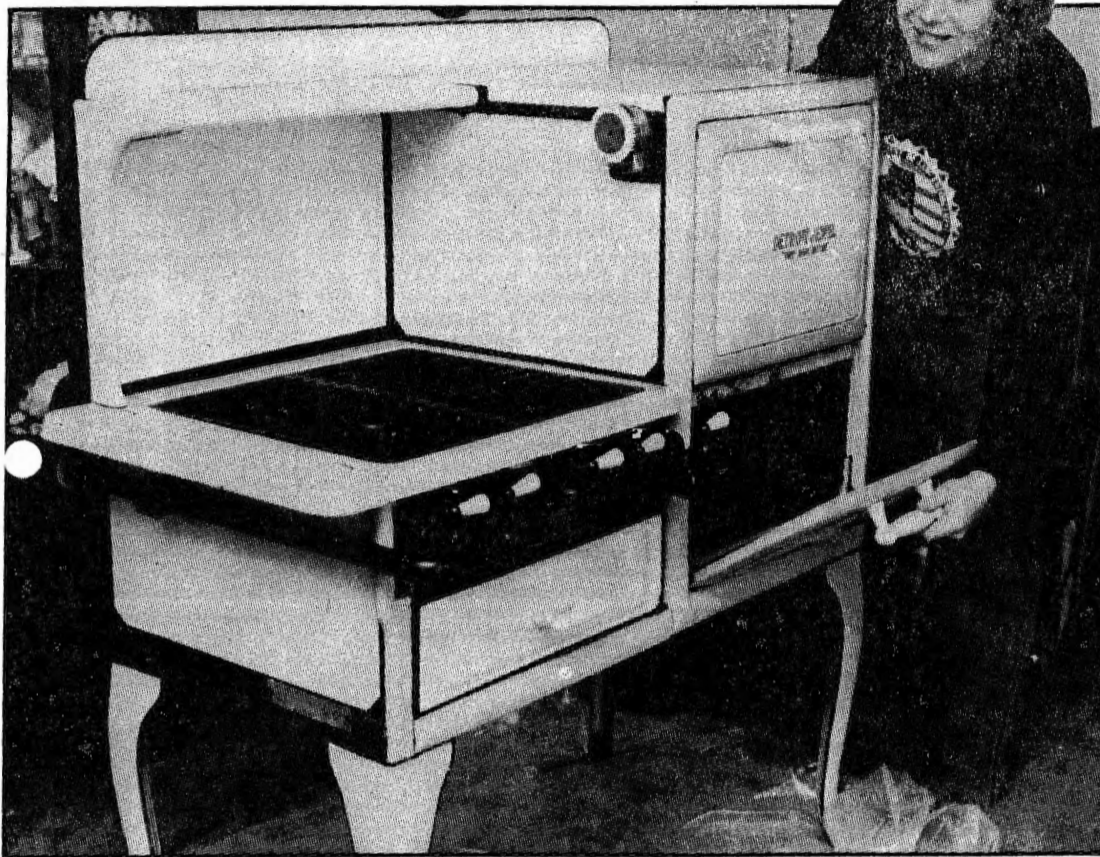
The Reagan family occupied the home at 816 S. Hennepin Ave. from 1920 to 1924.

Can Ann Landers help  
rekindle our old flame?

— INSIDE

QUAD-CITY TIMES Monday, Jan. 16, 1984

# YOU



Cheryl Michel, Rock Island, didn't think anyone would want this 1920s-era stove. But, thanks to her and her husband, Jim, it'll have a place in President Reagan's boyhood home. (Times photo)

*Times story prompts donation*

## RI stove's a part of history

By Jim Arpy  
QUAD-CITY TIMES

Should President Reagan care to brew a pot of coffee during his Feb. 6 visit to his boyhood home in Dixon, Ill., it'll be no problem, thanks to Jim and Cheryl Michel.

The Rock Island couple donated the 1920s-era Detroit Jewel gas stove that will be installed in the restored Reagan home.

"It still works just fine, too," Mrs. Michel says.

Michel wrote to William Thompson, a member of the Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home Foundation, after reading in the Quad-City Times that Thompson, of Dixon, was going to visit the Quad-Cities in a search for period pieces that would be ap-

propriate for the home.

"I honestly didn't think they'd want our stove when my husband told me he'd written to Mr. Thompson, but in about five days we had a letter back saying they'd really like to have it," Mrs. Michel says.

Thompson said the stove has been authenticated by a state curator in Springfield, who said it was the type of inexpensive article that would have been in the home at the time Reagan lived there.

"We really don't know where it came from. It was left in the basement of the last house we lived in. When we asked the people who had moved out where it had come from they said that they didn't know — it had been in the house when they moved in, too."

The stove was hooked up and still

worked. The Michels took it with them when they moved to another house.

"We'd grown fond of it and it was just too good to leave behind, though we didn't know just what we'd do with it," Mrs. Michel says.

The stove is white with rather spindly legs resting on claw feet. The oven is on the side and there are four small burners. The stove would be dwarfed by today's larger, more substantial models.

The Michels say they'd like to go to Dixon to see their stove in the Reagan kitchen, but they don't know whether they'll be there when the President visits.

"We've been told we'll get some kind of recognition, maybe a plaque or something saying we donated the stove. We're just glad we could do it," Mrs. Michel says.



# A LOOK BACK

50 yrs. ago

A bit of history is revealed in the photo taken 50 years ago this month at the dedication of the Maytag Park pool. Ronald "Dutch" Reagan addresses the attending audience which contained a number of well-known Newton businessmen. Thought to be seated at the extreme left and to his left are Newton grocer A.M. Hough and his wife. Standing behind Mrs. Hough is E.L. Nelson and to his left, P.J. Jepsen, a druggist on the north side of the square. Second from his left, is F.L. Maytag.

Newton Daily News 9-24-85

The Outlook  
Sept. 15, 1990

### **Reagan helps renovate his hometown theater**

Ronald Reagan has donated \$1,000 toward the \$4.1 million renovation of the Dixon Theater in the Illinois town where he spent his childhood.

The donation arrived Monday, Mayor James Dixon said.

A fund drive has raised just over \$300,000 to renovate the landmark theater built in the 1920s, said the drive's president, Linda Brantley.

The theater, once a popular vaudeville house, will be used for community dance, opera and theater productions when it reopens, she said.

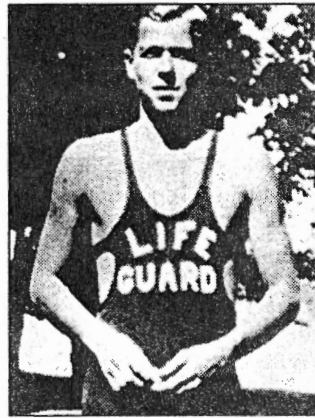
Outlook 9/15/90

COMPILED BY BOB EATON

## *Reagan site threatened*

The dilapidated bathhouse and snack stand in Dixon, Ill., that served as lifeguard headquarters for a young **Ronald Reagan** needs a quick cash infusion to avoid demolition.

Starting in 1926, the future president worked seven summers at Lowell Park, where the Rock River flowed by a once-popular beach.



**REAGAN**

"Dutch" Reagan cut a notch in an old log for each rescue, and says the tally reached 77.

That log is gone, while the bathhouse is still there. The park uses it for storage, but the roof is crumbling and officials have given restoration supporters two

weeks to raise \$10,000 needed for repairs.

"It's really kind of a snapshot of history. That's what we're trying to preserve," said John Thompson of the local Chamber of Commerce.

"We think, ultimately, because of the important role it played in the former president's early career, that it will be interesting for people to see."

Thompson, who expects to raise the money easily, wants to erect a display explaining Reagan's work there and possibly open a new concession stand.

Reagan speaks fondly of his boyhood home and his lifeguard work — "one of the best jobs I ever had," he wrote in his autobiography.

The Register-Mail, Galesburg, Ill.  
Saturday, October 16, 2004

# Days in Galesburg recalled

## Local historian provides color for 'Dutch Treat Luncheon'

By JOHN R. PULLIAM  
of The Register-Mail

GALESBURG — Diners at Friday's "Dutch Treat Luncheon" under the big tent as Silas Willard Elementary School officially celebrated

the addition of Galesburg and Monmouth to the Ronald Reagan Trail. Miniature white cowboy hats with a band marking the event and the date were at each place setting, while everyone received a commemorative bag of Jelly



Reagan

Belly jelly beans, President Reagan's favorite snack.

Galesburg City Treasurer Tom Wilson, a local historian, told the audience a little about Ronald Reagan and Nancy Davis Reagan's days in Galesburg.

Wilson said the Reagans traveled from Chicago by train when Ronald's father, Jack, got a job in the shoe department of Galesburg's O.T. Johnson department store. According to Wilson, it appears they may

See Galesburg, Page A-10 ■

## Galesburg

■ From Page A-1

have gotten off the train in Oneida and a relative may have brought them to Galesburg by horse and buggy.

Who was the relative responsible for the Reagans' moving to Galesburg? Wilson said it may have been Frank Regan, even though the spelling of the last name is different. Reagan was a sign painter.

"His sign shop was right across from the O.T. Johnson store," Wilson said.

The U.S. involvement in World War I began while the Reagans lived here. Wilson said Ronald's mother took her children to the train depot often to see the soldiers pass through.

"Nell would give some money to the boys and they would go up and give them some money and wish them luck," he said.

There were 15 students in Ronald's first-grade class; Fremont Street was then a dirt road.

Wilson said there were 11

grade schools in Galesburg at the time.

"There is only one of those 11 that remains today," he said, that, of course, being Reagan's school, Silas Willard.

Galesburg had two daily newspapers, no Bondi Building; Lincoln Park had opened, but Lake Storey had not yet come into being. Street cars took passengers to Monmouth, Knoxville and Abingdon, a handy thing for the Reagans.

"The Reagans didn't have motorized transportation," Wilson said. "The best they had was the father's bike."

The population was 24,000, leading Wilson to joke, "so for those who say we don't grow, we did grow."

Nancy Davis, the future first lady, came here in 1930. Her stepfather was Dr. Loyal Davis, who lived on Walnut Avenue.

"We know that Bucky Swise used to play with Nancy Davis," Wilson said. She apparently also knew former NFL referee and motivational speaker, Art Holst.

"He lived over on North Street and Nancy Davis was at

his house constantly," Wilson said.

Much of her time, he said, was spent at the former Nelson's Confectionery, where she would sit on the counter and beg for candy.

It was during this time, Wilson said, that Galesburg's downtown boomed. The Bondi Building went up in 1928, Sears, J.C. Penney and other department stores opened in Galesburg.

"We started paving roads in Galesburg," Wilson said. "I think it was Bob Sheehan's fault there was such a delay."

The mayor laughed, one of a number of people sitting at the head table that Wilson kidded during his presentation.

There were only three stores in the now crowded Main to Henderson Street business area during that era.

Wilson had to get in a barb at former Secretary of Agriculture John "Jack" Block, after first noting how proud everyone was of Block when he was named "Outstanding Young Farmer in the United States," after being nominated by the

combined Galesburg/Knoxville Jaycees.

Block often came back for Railroad Days, Wilson said, and brought security people as Block ran in the Railroad Days run.

"Is there anything special you had to do?" Wilson said he asked one of the security men.

"Yeah, we had to finish behind him," Wilson said the man told him.

Following Wilson's program, Carol Wadsworth of Dixon and Jim Fyke of Eureka, the chairman and vice chairman of the Ronald Reagan Trail Association, presented a large blue and white banner to Galesburg Convention and Visitor's Bureau Executive Director Diane Bruening. The banner is similar to the Reagan Trail signs, but is blue and white, rather than brown and white. Both the signs and the banner have a profile of Reagan at the top with the words "Ronald Reagan Trail," at the bottom.

Contact John R. Pulliam  
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jpulliam@register-mail.com.

The Register-Mail, Galesburg, Ill.  
Saturday, October 16, 2004

# Monmouth jelly bean connection

## Students remember famous 3rd-grader

By CAROL CLARK  
of The Register-Mail

MONMOUTH — The city of Monmouth honored one of its own Friday morning by becoming the western terminus of the Ronald Reagan Trail Association, a group of central Illinois cities and towns that in one way or another influenced the life of President Ronald Reagan.

Reagan was in the third grade when he lived in Monmouth, so trail orga-

nizers asked Monmouth's third-grade students from Harding and Willits primary schools to participate in the dedication of Monmouth's entry into the RRTA.

The students sang several patriotic songs and lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance, but more importantly, the students got to hear about Reagan from a Monmouth man who not only has his own roots in Monmouth but served with the president during his time at the White House.

Bruce Chapman, Reagan's assistant chief of planning and evaluation, told the students when he learned he was

to be part of the dedication service he wanted to contribute something special to the memorial to be housed in the Maple City Candy Company.

What he gave was a candy jar full of jelly beans. Chapman said President Reagan loved jelly beans when he was in the third grade in Monmouth and that love of the candy continued throughout his life. The president had jelly beans in the dining room in the White House, in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room.

Chapman received the candy jar when he left the White House to become the U.S. Ambassador to the  
**See Monmouth, Page A-10**

## Monmouth

■ From Page A-1

United Nations in Vienna, Austria, 19 years ago. The candy jar, bearing the president's name and seal, was still in its original package when Chapman arrived at the dedication.

"What I am afraid of is the candy jar is full of 19-year-old jelly beans," Chapman said.

And, sure enough, the jar was full of jelly beans.

Chapman brought individually wrapped jelly beans to give each of the third-grade students as they left the dedication.

"I think that jelly bean connection is fitting for Monmouth," Chapman said.

Chapman told the students President Reagan had a great sense of God and compassion and was considerate of others.

Third-graders Max O'Riley and Corbin Bethel told a story about Reagan finding four baby birds on the ground and an empty bird nest. Reagan gathered up the birds, put them

in the nest and shinnied up the tree to put the nest in the crook of the tree. Reagan had told that story to Chapman, who had related it to those gathered at a memorial service for the president on the Monmouth College campus following his death.

Jeff Rankin, director of communications at Monmouth College, said the only time the President recalled he was "really scared" happened in Monmouth when he was chased home from school by a bunch of class bullies. It was his mother, Rankin said, who met the bullies on the front porch and sent them home. Reagan only returned to Monmouth once after moving away with his family. That was during a presidential campaign when Reagan made a political stop in town.

Contact Carol Clark at (309) 734-4721, or [cclark@register-mail.com](mailto:cclark@register-mail.com).



Register-Mail photo by Carol Clark

Mike Lewis, left, president and CEO of Warren Achievement Industries, presents Bruce Chapman, a member of President Reagan's Cabinet, a bust of the president made at Warren Achievement Industries.

## Reagan ceremony at his old school

By JOHN R. PULLIAM  
of The Register-Mail

GALESBURG — Once upon a time, many years ago, a little boy who would become president walked the hallways of Silas Willard Elementary School. A celebration of that little boy, Ronald Reagan, who became the leader of the free world, was the reason for Friday's Galesburg Ronald Reagan Sign Dedication Program at the school where President Reagan attended first grade and part of second.

Some of the most fascinating stories about the former president, not surprisingly, came from those who knew him best, those who actually worked with him. John "Jack" Block, who served as Reagan's Secretary of Agriculture from 1981 to 1985, painted a mind's-eye picture of how he became a member of Reagan's cabinet and what it was like to serve in that position.

Speaking from the stage in the Silas Willard gymnasium — red, white and blue balloons on each side of the stage and near the microphone, and patriotic bunting on the front of the stage — Block said, "To this day, I marvel at the way it developed."

He was the state director of agriculture and read a story in the Wall Street Journal listing about 10 candidates for the position. His name was on the list. Then-Sen. Bob Dole was in his corner, pushing for a "hands-on farmer" for the cabinet post.

"I was dumbfounded because I didn't know Sen. Dole," Block said.

Block said as Reagan began to choose his cabinet, all of the choices were from the East Coast and the West Coast; only two secretary positions remained, labor and agriculture.

Dole lobbied for a cabinet member from the Midwest and said to Reagan, "I hope you will consider my hands-on farmer candidate," Block said.

The Gilson farmer flew to Cal-

ifornia and went to the Reagans' home. He knocked on the door. Nancy Reagan opened it, Block saw the president-elect and a few trusted advisers.

"I had a great advantage in that discussion," Block said, "because I was the only one in the room that knew anything about agriculture."

Block returned to his Los Angeles hotel room to find the phone ringing. He answered it and Reagan was on the phone, asking him to be the Secretary of Agriculture.

Block said Reagan had cabinet meetings about once a week, using them somewhat like a board meeting.

In those years with Reagan on farms across the nation, flying with him on Air Force One and in helicopters, Block said one thing was apparent.

"He was always so at home with people in rural America and small-town America, and when you think about it, that's where his roots were," Block said.

Another person who had a chance to get close to Reagan was state Sen. Dan Rutherford, R-Pontiac, who at the age of 24 was named Reagan's campaign coordinator in Illinois.

Rutherford said the Reagan campaign headquarters were in Schaumburg. Occasionally the campaign members were told surrogates were coming to campaign, news usually met with disdain. One time, Rutherford recalled, they were told "we're going to have George Bush's sons come in."

At the time, meeting Jeb and George W. Bush didn't impress Rutherford.

He recalled one instance when Reagan was in Chicago and was heading for a campaign stop in St. Louis. The campaign decided it wanted to make a stop in central Illinois.

"Where do we take Gov. Reagan to get the most exposure?" Rutherford asked.

Rutherford remembered it

See Reagan, Page A-10 ■



## Reagan

■ From Page A-1

was Illinois State's homecoming and called the president of ISU.

"How would you like to have the future president of the United States in your homecoming parade?" he asked.

Needless to say, Ronald and Nancy Reagan were honorary Redbirds that day, causing quite a stir on the campus in Normal.

Friday's program included participation by Silas Willard students. There were only four classrooms when Ronald started school there in 1917.

"Ronald Reagan, president of the United States, walked the

halls of this building," Galesburg Mayor Bob Sheehan said. "It's pretty neat."

State Rep. Don Moffitt, R-Gilson, told the crowd that Reagan "made us proud to be Americans" and 18th District Congressman Ray LaHood, R-Peoria, noted that "Ronald Reagan had a very, very large footprint in this part of central Illinois."

Block may have had the most telling comment of the day after the Silas Willard second-graders sang "I Love My Country."

"We don't know, there might be another president singing to us today," Block said.

Contact John R. Pulliam  
at 343-7181, Ext. 215, or  
jpulliam@register-mail.com.



John Block, Secretary of Agriculture from 1981-85 during President Reagan's term, speaks about his experiences at the Reagan Trail Dedication.



# The Register-Mail

Volume 135 - No. 286

Saturday, Oct. 16, 2004 • Galesburg, Illinois

A COPLEY NEWSPAPER



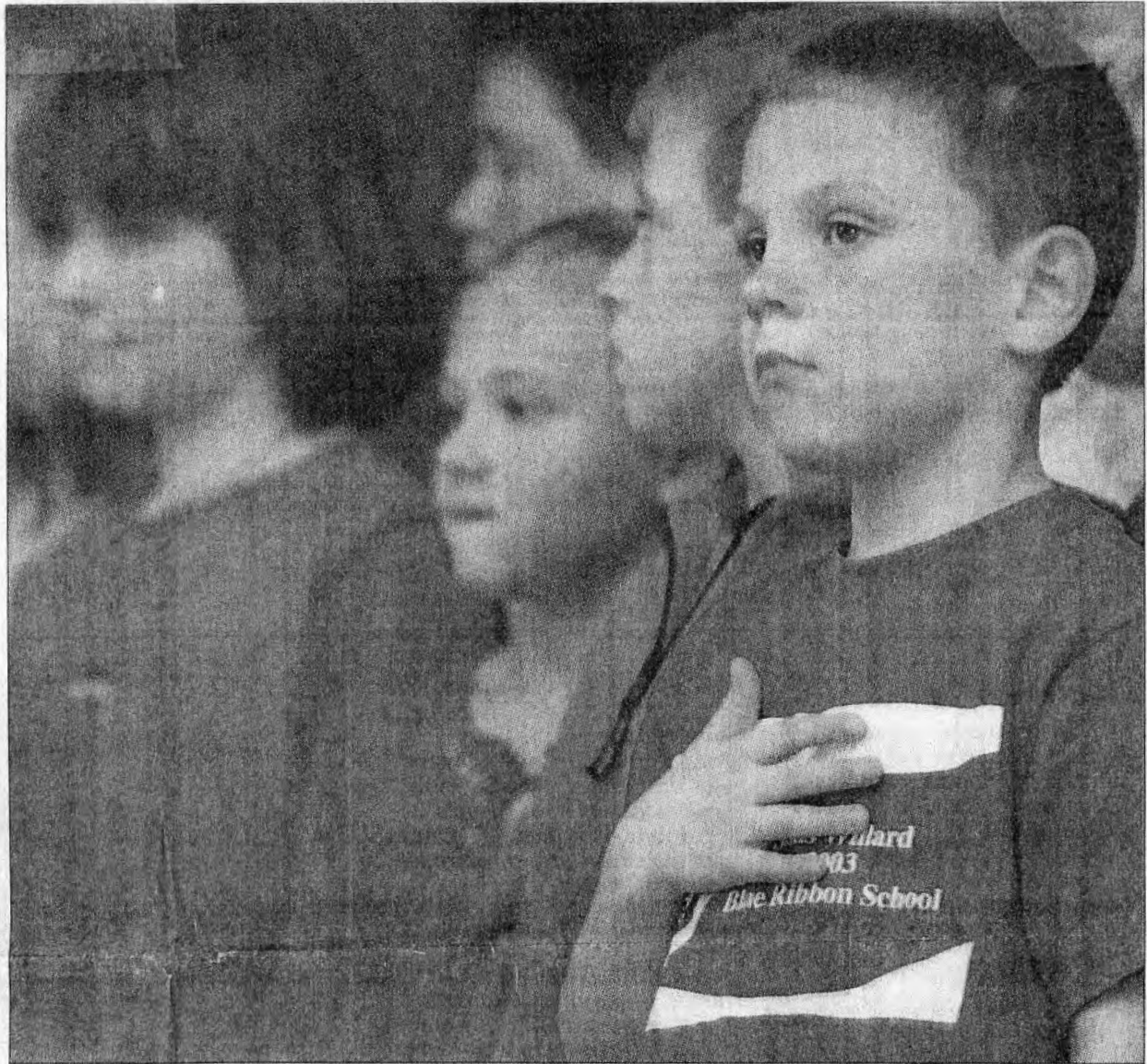
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## REAGAN TRAIL DEDICATION

*"He was always so at home with people in rural America ... and when you think about it, that's where his roots were."*

*— John Block, Secretary of Agriculture in President Reagan's Cabinet*

# Small-town roots celebrated



Register-Mail photos by Jenna Price

**Members of the Silas Wilard Student Council prepare to recite the Pledge of Allegiance during the Ronald Reagan Trial Sign Dedication Program Friday morning at Silas Willard Elementary School.**