Peace and Prosperity

Chapter Three | Book of Beloit II

Chicago and Northwestern passenger train, arriving in Beloit on a foggy day in 1949.
Beginning the New Life

The war was finally over, and men had come home, starting families and building a new era of prosperity in Beloit. American optimism was reborn, in anticipation of better times.

As the United States prepared to welcome the 1950s, there was optimism in the air.

The war had been over for a few years. Goods were again plentiful. The economy was adjusting to increased demand for consumer consumption. Beloiters were starting businesses and pressing for progress. The "Baby Boom" was under way, and family life was thriving.

Local editorial writers joined in expressing optimism for the coming decade. They noted the coming of the 1950s as the halfway point in the century, and reflected on the immense changes in the world since 1900.

An excerpt from the Beloit Daily News, Dec 31, 1949:

"As we welcome the year of 1950, which will open the door to another half-century, we will hope that the 50 years to come will not bring two — not even one — devastating wars such as occurred in the first part of the century. We will hope that peace, prosperity and progressiveness will be the three factors acclaimed by those who write of the remaining half of this century at the dawn of the new 21st century."

"...The change in the first half of this century has been so extensive and so rapid that few will venture to prophesy what the remaining half will bring. Atomic energy may be a primary source of power. Jet or rocket planes may supplant present propeller types. A means may be found to convert sea water into fresh water economically, thereby making possible vast desert areas to bloom...."

There was a bumper baby crop on the Beloit College campus, as war veterans returned to college with their brides, and started families. This photograph was taken April 26, 1947, as veterans' wives and offspring gathered together for a big party on the Beloit College campus.

Working for a better life

While the hope for peace was marred by a conflict in Korea, increasing tension between the newly emerged powers in the East and West did not erupt into a full-scale war like the one many Beloiters had recently lived through.

During the 1950s, Beloiters joined other Americans in working to build a better life for their children, and began to enjoy the technological advances that were rapidly changing their lives.

One Beloiter, Peter Peterson, long-time teacher and principal in the city's schools reflected: "The feeling after (the war) was that my children are going to have it better than I had it. People thought, 'we've sacrificed and so on, and now that we have the wherewithal, I'm going to see that my children have a better life.'"

Soldiers returning from the war soon married, and the baby boom was under way. The number of marriage licenses in Rock County applied for in a year went from 504 in 1944 to 964 by 1946.

With industries adjusting to a peace-time economy, workers prospered, downtown businesses flourished, and the city grew. In 1950, Beloit's population was 29,590; by 1960, it had blossomed to 32,846.

They were busy years for city residents, recalls Gerald R. Goodwin. The times were not as tumultuous as they had been during the war, he said, but, "it was a period of change. Business was good... I think they were good years."

Beloit's downtown, with its anchor department stores of Chester's and McNeany's, was bustling. "With just the traffic between those two stores, it was hard to walk across the sidewalk without bumping into someone," Goodwin said.

On Friday evenings, known as "bank night," downtown stores stayed open late, there was a special price on movies, and door prizes would...
Changes were seen in Beloit, fueled by a peace economy

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"You couldn't find a parking space on a Friday night," Goodwin said.

A Beloit College alumni bulletin of May 1953, in speaking of the advantages the college enjoyed through its location, called the city, "a typical midwestern industrial community."

It continued, "Beloit has 35 manufacturing establishments in which 12,000 are employed receiving annual wages of $27 million and turning out products having a value of $92 million."

As in many other cities in the 1950s, Beloit became accustomed to a new term — suburbia. The terms Garden Village, North Park, the Converse addition, became neighborhoods during this time.

"The popularity of suburban living, and crowded conditions in and immediately around Beloit, have caused new residential developments to mushroom in nearby Beloit and Turtle townships, and in areas of Rockton and Roscoe townships adjoining South Beloit," said the Daily News in 1959.

The city annexed more than 1,000 acres and 1,100 homes were built in the decade.

The fastest growing area was the Town of Beloit, where 900 new homes were built between 1949 and 1959. In 1956, the peak building year, 167 new homes were built.

The man who guided Beloit through the 1950s was Archie D. Telfer, the community's fifth city manager.

He took over on July 1, 1936, and continued until his death in 1960.

As industries switched from defense and got back to domestic goods, "he had the ability to get people together. He had a good rapport with leaders in industry," said Goodwin. His knowledge of the community made him a respected leader.

Beloiter Gerald R. Goodwin, "yet he filled a need at the time. He was able to bridge a gap over a number of years."

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Jud Allen brought big-time entertainment to Beloit

The name synonymous with entertainment in Beloit during the 1950s was that of C. Judson (Jud) Allen.

Allen became well-known for helping to arrange the Fieldhouse Series of concerts which drew names such as Duke Ellington and Bob Hope to Beloit College’s converted airplane hangar.

Allen, the son of William J. and Jessie P. Allen, both of whom were Beloit doctors, was a 1939 graduate of the college. He returned to his alma mater in 1949.

After serving in the military, he had worked as a Hollywood publicist from 1946-49. “After being in the war, going to Hollywood was like running away from more serious things,” he recalled in a telephone interview from his home in Reno, Nev., where he has lived for more than 20 years.

Skilled in promotions

“I didn’t like Hollywood. I wanted to promote, but I wanted to promote something I believed in. I believed in Beloit College.”

Using his promoting skills and his Hollywood connections, the series of concerts which drew names such as Duke Ellington and Bob Hope to Beloit College’s converted airplane hangar.

Duke Ellington and Bob Hope were well-known for their performances at the Fieldhouse. The Fieldhouse Series of concerts, which began in the 1950s, was a popular event in Beloit during that time.

New Life

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Zahn remembers Telfer as “a great guy, kind and pleasant and cooperative. It was a great loss when the city lost him. He just loved people, and you could just feel it.”

A member of the city council could expect to earn $100 a year for his efforts in 1949. By 1952, the salary had increased to $300.

The council’s objective, from 1949-59, as recalled by former council member Victor A. Emilson in the book, “Sparks in Beloit,” was to “anticipate growth in Beloit and to guide this growth to the end that a better city will result — a city with stable land values and an economical municipal operation; a spacious, pleasant, well-balanced community.”

City services dispersed

Beloit’s city government was not consolidated in one building until November 1944, when offices moved to the remodeled former high school which became the municipal center. The new high school had been completed in 1951 at a cost of $3.3 million.

Before that, as city hall reporter for the Beloit Daily News, David Mason, now executive assistant to the president of Beloit College, recalls trawling up creaky stairs of the Mortag Bakery on Grand Avenue to municipal court.

The police department, jail, assessor, clerk, city manager and treasurer’s offices were at the north end of State Street about where the First National Bank’s drive-up window is now.

Mrs. Zahn had only worked for the city of Beloit for a week when they moved into the new building, but she remembers the switch as “wonderful.”

Beloit faced a dilemma in 1953, when it was forced to consider building a sanitary landfill because the state legislature was on the verge of deeming the present collection method unsanitary. The Daily News reported.

So, he and two others who took charge of the series sold 3,000 tickets at $2 each. “We weren’t able to reach Mr. Laughton because he was driving out. So when he arrived and found out he was playing in the fieldhouse, he balked. He said he wasn’t going to play in a big barn.”

He walked in his dressing room for a while, but he finally agreed to do it.”

The response was so good, that he agreed to come back the next year with three other stars to perform “Don Juan in Hell.”

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Downtown Beloit was hectic, with the major department stores of McNeany’s and Chester’s drawing crowds regularly. McNeany’s
was at the corner of State and Grand, and Chester's was just across the river on West Grand. Arnold Lee, assistant superintendent of the Beloit School District recalls, "the downtown was fantastic. There were any number of restaurants and ice cream parlors. The grocery stores had their produce outside often. It looked like 'sidewalk days' in terms of the crowds of people... It was a thriving, bustling community. There was prosperity."

Goodwin was in the men's clothing business at George Brothers, which attracted a lot of business from Rockford, he remembers. "We had a tremendous college business. We knew what the college man was wearing."

George Brothers had two stores downtown during those days. One sold work clothes and boys clothes and the other, in the Strong building, was for gentlemen's clothes.

Downtown Beloit had several variety stores including Krege's, Woolworth's and McClellane and Walgreens drug store, kitty-corner from McNeany's, was a very active place.

Many doctors, lawyers and dentists had their offices on the second floor of downtown stores.

While production at local industries peaked during the war, the major factories still employed several thousand people among them.

Goodwin lived across the street from E.H. Neese, Sr., chairman of the board of the Beloit Corporation, and got to know him pretty well.

He recalls a conversation they had once when Neese wondered, "What are they saying about us downtown?"

"This man was concerned about everybody that worked there," Goodwin said. "He wanted everyone to make a good living."

Times change for industries

During the war, the corporation could not make papermaking machinery, but instead made machinery for the war effort. In fact, one piece of equipment they made went across town to Fairbanks, Morse & Co., where it was used in the engines they produced.

After the war, the corporation received many orders from factories that had not been able to obtain new machinery. "Everybody was anxious to be able to fill in with the machines they were unable to buy during the war," said E.H. Neese, Jr.

Sales were $7 million in 1946. They doubled in 1947, and tripled by 1948. Sales remained constant until 1954, when they doubled again. A workforce of about 1,000 in 1946 grew to 1,400 in 1948 and 1,600 in 1952.

At Fairbanks, which had operated round-the-clock with about 6,000 people during the war, the workday switched to a two-shift operation, recalls Kenneth Johnson, who retired as machine shop manager recently.

The diesel engines which Fairbanks had manufactured for navy vessels were used in power plants, locomotives and commercial ships, and the switch to those markets after the war was planned.

The number of employees fluctuated during the 1950s, with about 5,000 working during the Korean conflict.

While the numbers were reduced after the war, Johnson said he couldn't recall any drastic layoffs. "Many people left voluntarily and went back into other types of work."

Consumerism on upswing

People wanted to buy appliances and cars and personal luxury items which were hard to get during the war, so there was a demand for people to manufacture those things.

Other industries active in Beloit at the time were Warner Electric Brake and Clutch Co., Yates American Co., Free­man Shoe and Wisconsin Knife Works, which announced plans to construct a new plant in the Town of Beloit in 1949.

One major road project was completed in November of 1949 and Gov. Gaylord Nelson was on hand, along with several other dignitaries. The occasion was the cutting of the ribbon and dedication of a 15-mile stretch of Interstate 90 between the Illinois tollway and Janesville near Beloit.

F or a time after World War II, Americans felt secure in knowing their was the only nation on earth to possess as destructive a force as the atomic bomb which had obliterated two Japanese cities.

That security turned to worry, however, when, in the late summer of 1949, they learned the Russians had the capability too.

Scientists set to work building a super­bomb — the hydrogen bomb — and with the invasion of South Korea by a Communist North Korean force, American concerns over Communism took on.

Across the nation, with Beloit no exception, companies began selling bomb shelters for people to bury in their backyards.

Beloiters built concrete-reinforced shelters in their basements and school children went through civil defense drills with their instructions to "duck and cover."

It wasn't until the early 1960s though, that Beloit had a civil defense director, Herb Christiansen, who built a shelter in his basement. "I thought if I was supposed to be convincing people to do this, I had better build one myself," he said.

Former principal Peter Peterson recalls his family's reaction upon discovering a shelter in the basement of their new home, which they moved into in 1966.

"When we moved into the house, it was kind of a curiosity. Like, oh look, here's a bomb shelter."

The small space, surrounded by con­crete block, has no direct entrance.

"You kind of go here, you go there, and you go there," he said, gesturing.

Big, olive green cans containing food and water were common sights and many were stored in the city barns.

Later, when civil defense was re-

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One of Beloit's hottest spots during this period was the "Pop House." It featured good clean fun and a little sheer goofiness. The photo at right shows Pop House operator George Stankewitz, right, with popular singer Bobby Vinton. The pictures above and below show some of the fun associated with the Pop House "Chilli Queen" contests.

Jud Allen—Continued from page 76—

Series grew larger

Laughton overcame any bad feelings from the first year and in fact started performing in larger halls. Allen recalls Laughton greeted him the next year with a warm handshake and said, "These three (the other actors) are kind of temperamental, but if there's anything I can do to help you, let me know."

That kicked off the series which later included Hope, Ed Sullivan, Fred Waring, the Boston Pops, Henry Fonda in the "Caine Mutiny," and others.

Allen recalled the night Bob Hope arrived. "There was zero visibility. Nothing was flying. We were sure we were going to cancel. We drove to Rockford to pick him up and we heard the sound of a private plane. We couldn't believe he would risk his life to play in Beloit. But that's the kind of guy he was."

Hope, of course, was a smash. He was quoted later, joking about his fieldhouse surroundings to the audience, "Who put this tinker toy together?"

Allen left the college in 1953 to direct the Beloit Association of Commerce, a post which he held for three years. After a stint in Redwood, Calif., he moved to Reno in 1959 to become director of that chamber of commerce. He recently retired.
Lloyd Page led drive against McCarthy

Lloyd Page was "relatively unknown in the community and very idealistic," he recalls, when he was asked to pass petitions calling for the removal of U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy.

He was contacted by the editor of the Sauk City, Wis., newspaper, LaRoy Gore, who had started a recall campaign.

Gore had decided, remembers Page, "that McCarthy posed a significant enough danger to civil liberties in the country that he should be recalled as a senator."

Anti-McCarthy campaign

Page, a graduate of the liberal University of Wisconsin-Madison, who had been teaching at Beloit High School just a couple of years, agreed to do it.

"We had a social concerns committee at our church, and they wanted a program on McCarthy. So I took one side and a local attorney took the other side. We really had a hot and heavy debate and I had a real feel for the split there was in the community and the strong feeling there was... There was a strong anti-Communist view."

"I went to a local savings and loan because there was a sign on the door that said 'notary public.' So this woman was there and I asked if I could have it notarized. She looked at what I had, and I can just see the expression on her face."

"We were uncovering a considerable network of spies. We had felt secure that losing China to the Communists. That would mean the two most populous nations in the world were going to be Communist, no small threat to the security of the nation that thought itself the protector of democracy and democratic institutions, and had just finished a very costly war to try to protect those kinds of institutions.

"So there were a lot of people who thought, if McCarthy is willing to take this job on, and if he's doing the job of rooting out Communists in this country, well we ought to give him every bit of support that we could."

"It took precedence, in their thinking, over what was happening to the individual's rights, because he was in the process, destroying the reputations and careers of some very, very fine people."

It was so remarkable. But anyway she did do it.

"I said, 'What's the charge for this?' And she said, 'Well, normally we do this service for nothing, but that'll be... I forget what it was. 82 or something. So she made her position pretty clear."

Mixed reactions

He remembers similar reactions, and his work did "leave an impression among some people in the community that is still present. That is, that I was a Communist. My wife ran into that, nobody told me that, you know."

"She would be at meetings and run into people that would say 'Your husband is kind of a Communist isn't he?'"

However, he remembers no real Continued on page 82.

New Life

Continued from page 77.

Page, a graduate of the liberal University of Wisconsin-Madison, who had been teaching at Beloit High School just a couple of years, agreed to do it.

"Many, many people, once they saw your license plate or found out where you were from, they would immediately bring up the subject of McCarthy, and I had a real feel for the split there was in the community and the strong feeling there was... There was a strong anti-Communist view."

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Church leaders were uncommonly concerned about the issue, Page recalls. "I think it was partly that. They felt the way be did."

"It's true that we were on the verge of losing China to the Communists. That would mean the two most populous nations in the world were going to be Communist, no small threat to the security of the nation that thought itself the protector of democracy and democratic institutions, and had just finished a very costly war to try to protect those kinds of institutions."

The fear of Communism was real enough for some to take steps which they felt would save them from radiation poisoning.

"I think it was a matter of patriotism too," said Peterson. "We wanted to do the right thing. We'd been through the war. I think it was partly that. They were willing to do that for the effort..."

The concern with Communism manifested itself in another way -- in the fiery harangues of Republican Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin.

There was a strong feeling about McCarthy all over the country. Former Beloit High School history teacher Lloyd Page recalls he was in Colorado studying for his master's degree at one point in the McCarthy days.

Communism was feared

The school is open to all students of all faiths.

Beloit College was almost entirely a women's campus during the war, except for an Air Force and a Naval contingent which trained on campus, recalls vice president David Mason.

Mason, who grew up in Beloit and attended Beloit College after he returned from his military service, recalls: "I can just see the expression on her face."

"I can find relatively little to justify McCarthy but I can better understand the people who supported him and who felt the way he did."

"There were a lot of things happening, historically speaking, that people who were only casually informed would become very, very disturbed by, that would indicate a danger to our nation, to our country, to our security."

We were uncovering a considerable network of spies. We had felt secure that we had a monopoly on the atomic bomb. It's true that we were on the verge of losing China to the Communists. That would mean the two most populous nations in the world were going to be Communist, no small threat to the security of the nation that thought itself the protector of democracy and democratic institutions, and had just finished a very costly war to try to protect those kinds of institutions.

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Beloit Catholic High School is a four year college-preparatory school located between Rockford, Illinois and Madison, Wisconsin. It is the only Catholic High School between these two cities. The school is open to all students of all faiths.
Big things were developing for Beloit College campus

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Mason remembers it as a happy time in both the community and college. People were “coming out of the big war, and feeling that the main problems in the world were settled. It was a good time for higher education, with more and more students. It was a time colleges could do things — expand their faculty and do things for students.”

The college started featuring big-name entertainers in what came to be known as the Fieldhouse Series. They were the brainchild of Jud Allen, a native Beloit and 1938 graduate of the college.

“Because the fieldhouse was the only large arena in the area, for years it hosted major stars and events, and they attracted capacity audiences,” remembers Mason.

When the first one — a dramatic reading by Charles Laughton — attracted 3,000 persons and brought in nearly $6,000 after Lawton was paid his $50 fee, it was “a revelation,” for Allen, he said in a telephone interview from his home in Reno, Nev., where he has lived for 20 some years.

“It showed me there was a great need for this ... We were pioneers. Colleges at the time were not doing that sort of thing. No one was playing big auditoriums. Later, other colleges started doing it.”

Allen recalls spending days in Rockford and Janesville selling tickets. He was assisted by the manager of the book store and the manager of the fieldhouse. “We would take out a big ad, and then set up a place to sell the tickets. There was always a line for them.”

Remembered for lifetime

The three worked with an agency in Chicago which gave them a list of potential acts. They would select four, one of which was considered the “loss leader,” or the one most likely to draw the big crowd. Then three others would be picked to complete the series.

People often bought season tickets just so they would be sure to see the big show, Allen said.

There were never any flops, although Allen remembered, “We brought the opera, Carmen, and carpenters came out between acts to change sets. So for ten minutes between acts people had to watch carpenters building the sets.”

College officials never hesitated about putting on the shows. Allen said, “There was no thought of losing money.”

They paid $10,000 for Bob Hope and the same amount for Ed Sullivan.

Allen put on three full seasons and the series continued for two or three years after that, under Mason’s direction.

“With the coming of television and other things, the emphasis waned a little and prices went up in terms of entertainers,” Mason said. But while they lasted, they brought Beloiters and many surrounding area residents shows to remember for a lifetime.

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hard-driving rhythms of Bill Haley and the Comets, and Elvis Presley. A movie called "Blackboard Jungle," with a soundtrack by Bill Haley and the Comets, attracted many young viewers in Beloit.

"Now that was a real departure from Roy Rogers," recalls Gerry White, a graduate of the Memorial High School Class of 1960. "That was the beginning of the dynasty. You weren't supposed to see 'Blackboard Jungle.'"

"Hangout" was the Pop House

Rock and roll quickly developed a mystical quality, said White, and the place to explore the mysticism became the Pop House. "The Pop House was the mainstay," said White.

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The hangout, at the corner of Portland Avenue and Fifth Street, with an entrance that for many years didn't have a sign at all, and later just small letters on the door, became a "real bridge between the college and the townspeople," said White.

Owner George Stankewitz had converted his father's grocery store to a teen gathering spot — a place where they could go to have a pop and talk, hence the name — before the war.

After he returned from the service, he reopened it and kids were soon flocking there. Apparently blessed with the ability to know how to keep kids happy, he served the food they wanted to eat, had a disc jockey play the records they wanted to hear, and brought in the latest bands.

The menu became classic with the "Blast" — "brewed 43 times and laughingly called coffee," it said, and the "Lugie" for Lithuanian burger.

One customer, Donald Lyons, won a Blast-drinking contest by downing 24 cups in a half-hour, Stankewitz recalled with a chuckle.

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The "Hollywood" was a cheeseburger with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise. French fries came in three colors — sunset red, desert tan and golden brown.

There was also the "12/01," a fried egg, lettuce and tomato. "You familiar with a Catholic religion?" Stankewitz asks when pushed to explain how that one got its name. Catholics were required to give up meat every Friday during Lent.

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Stankevitz says his hamburgers went up to 20 cents by the Korean War; before that they were 15 cents. "I used to say, where else could you get two hamburgers, fries and a soft drink or milk for 46 cents?"

He often would have a record jam on Friday nights after a game. He was well aware of sports schedules so he wouldn't create any conflicts.

Stankevitz is proud of his entertainment promoting prowess. "I had 24 national acts here," he says.

Among them, the Castaways, the Kingsmen, the Steve Miller band, Conway Twitty, Bobbi Vinton, Bobby Goldsboro, Tommy Roe and Freddie Cannon. In order to keep his establishment orderly, Stankewitz issued membership cards which stated "the member was entitled to the full privileges of the Pop House, and was subject to revocation."

There were grillmen's cards (no girl chefs were allowed), regular cards and alumni cards.

Around the end of November, Stankevitz would cook up the season's first batch of chili. The event took on such significance that soon an annual ritual — the picking of the chili queen — accompanied it.

The lucky girl picked chili queen by the members of the club got the first bowl of chili, not to mention a ride through downtown on top of a flashy car.

Stankewitz even has a picture of a police officer guarding a pot of chili to make sure no one sneaked a bowl before the queen got hers.

He shares the credit for the Pop House legacy. "Everyone contributed to the success of the Pop House. The kids worked hard for this... If the kids had been unappreciative or belligerent, I'd have closed the door.

"No other city had a Pop House. What Lloyd Page

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other city had a teen center so successful for so many years? You can’t explain the Pop House to anyone, you gotta see it.

Clean fun was the key
Part of the success, he believes, is his philosophy of keeping order. “You never lie to parents, or to police officers. If you do that, you’re sunk.”
The motto on his menu — laborare, youth and ludere; la r, youth and play — pretty well summed up his philosophy. Stankewitz was a big athletic booster and came up with as many ideas for teams and competition as a dog has fleas.
Softball was almost as popular as the chili, and the Pop House boasted many winning teams over the years.
As if organized sports weren’t enough, there was plenty of makeshift entertainment, including water fights.
Dave Mason, a reporter at the Beloit Daily News in 1953, wrote an account of a gigantic water fight in May of that year that was only quelled by a police tear gas bomb.

W hen they weren’t busy with their jobs or raising families in the 1950s, Beloiters spent their leisure time in some of the same ways they do now — going to movies or dancing, attending shows, or simply getting together at each other’s houses.
The kinds of movies they attended were, naturally, quite a bit different from those of the 1980s.
Beloit had three downtown theaters during the 1950s. They were: The Rex, at 614 Fourth St., later remodeled and renamed the Ellis; the State, in the 100 block of State St.; and the Majestic, at 416 Broad St.
The three were owned by Standard Theaters of Milwaukee, which purchased them in 1947 from local owner Milt Ellis. John Falco became the manager. He later took on responsibility for managing all their area theaters.

The Majestic was top-line
The Majestic was the showcase theater which seated about 1,000 people and showed first-rate, first-run movies.
The Rex showed Westerns and serials, such as Buck Rogers and the Lone Ranger.
The State showed first-run movies too, but of a lesser quality than those at the Majestic.
Falco remembers the films of the 50s as “family-oriented. There was no particular problem with morality. The dialogue was unquestionable.”
As Arnold Lee, assistant superintendent of Beloit schools put it, “You weren’t embarrassed to go to the movies.”
“People liked the ‘Blondie’ films and a lot of Westerns,” Falco said. He remembers “Shaggy Dog” from Walt Disney, and “Ben Hur,” as popular films of the day.
He remembers when “Rock around the Clock,” came to town. “It disturbed them at first, but I got used to it, and eventually thought it was a fine picture.”

B usy Friday evenings downtown were highlighted by a cash giveaway known as the ‘Goodall Gusher.’
“Never advertised it,” Falco said. “Because it was illegal.” The theater would add money to a jackpot each night, and all people had to do was sign up and put their name in.
“The pots used to get up between $1,700 and $1,800,” Falco said. They would make a recording and play it at all three theaters announcing the week’s winner.
The theaters staged Halloween costume shows, pet shows, crazy auctions, and all kinds of gimmicks, “to attract customers, Falco said.
He remembers one year when the Rock River went over its banks and the State theater flooded, but they kept it open. “The first 10-15 rows were under water. We had a red light on and told people don’t go any further because there’s water down there,” he said with a laugh.

History
A small group banded together in 1942 to form an evangelical independent church. They met in Grinnell Hall and called Rev. Wendell Boyer as pastor. He and his wife started the church together for forty-one years until retirement. During those years the church grew from a Sunday morning service of thirty-five to two services of seven hundred, and undertook four building programs, delaying the first building to help erect a church in Cuba. A strong missionary outreach has always been evident. Within the first year Rev. and Mrs. Mitt Dresselhaus left the congregation as the first missionaries. Since then twelve more of our own young people have gone to the field and others are preparing to go. Organizations and activities have been added to keep pace with the needs of the growing congregation. Our second and present pastor, Rev. John Billow, began his ministry with us in July, 1984. With God’s blessing the church continues to grow.

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The very first 3-D film was a ten-minute piece done in blue and red, Falco said, called “Audioscopics.”

“It was done to introduce 3-D. There was a mouse at the end of a stick and paddleballs,” Falco said, called “Audioscopics.”

“You people could buy, ‘Not too many people bought them,’” he recalled.

Showing the films required that an extra motor be placed on each projector in order to synchronize the 3-D sequences.

The Majestic also showed “House of Wax” in May 1953, a 3-D film with Vincent Price, the first such movie in stereophonic sound, which was quite a treat.

There was no mistaking that the advertisement was designed to excite the audience with new thrills. It read: “Beauty and terror meet in your seat as every thrill of its story comes right off the screen, right at you in Natural Vision 3 Dimension.”

Competing with the 3-D features that week was “Woman They Almost Lynched” at the Rex, and “The Iron Mistress” and “The Crimson Pirate” with Burt Lancaster at the Mid-City and “The Titanic” with Barbara Stanwyck at the State.

“Now ya gonna keep them down on the farm once they seen Parade (Paris),” Falco said.

After that, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis in “The Stooge” was arriving.

The Mid-City Outdoor theater opened in the spring of 1950, and Falco managed that, too. “The drive-in was extremely popular at first ... We had many fine years at the outdoor,” he said.

The drive-in soon became known as a place where young people did more than watch movies. “They were called passion pits,” Falco said. “It did afford young people an element of privacy that they didn’t have. You couldn’t go to a motel and sign up for a room, like they can now.”

The drive-in showed second-run pictures for 75 cents. “Buck night,” when a carload of people could get in for a dollar was very popular.

T he 1950s led Americans and Beloiters down a path filled with technological advances.

By 1957, Russia had launched its first Sputnik satellite, and the U.S. followed in 1958 with its satellite Explorer I.

Testing of nuclear weapons went on and the Cold War began.

Downtown Beloit had boomed, but by the end of the decade there was talk of building a shopping plaza on what had been a golf course near Fairbanks, Morse & Co.

The concept of locally owned businesses and industry was being revised as department store chains moved in and plants were taken over by larger corporations.

Television came into more and more homes and movie attendance waned a bit.

People moved to places called suburbs and had babies in record numbers.

“Everybody tried so hard to keep up with the Joneses that the Joneses couldn’t stand the pace and moved to a cheaper suburb,” national columnist Hal Boyle stated.

The barbeque grill was invented: “Man learned to copy his caveman ancestors and began cooking his meals in the backyard over a fire,” said Boyle.

“The movies went outdoors and the drive-in theaters became the country’s best known romance pits,” Boyle added.

It was a relatively secure time, however. Beloit had one city manager and the country had one president much of the time.

Korea was a source of dismay. Beloiters remember increasing dis-

sension among people over that conflict. “It was a limited police action, and we weren’t winning,” recalls George Stankewitz.

The beginning of space exploration launched new interest in science and math courses in local schools. “It was a golden age for education,” said Arnold Lee.

Fads such as 3-D glasses and Davy Crockett coonskin caps had come and gone. While “Goodnight Irene” by the Weavers was at the top of the charts in 1950, by 1964, “Don’t Be Cruel” by Elvis Presley occupied that space.

Bohemian poets known as the Beat Generation made their way across the country, spreading their street-wise jargon, influencing the young, preparing the way for the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Beloit was not without racial discrimination in the 1950s and reform in race relations was to take on more importance in the upcoming decade. Former principal Peter Peterson recalls taking a junior high basketball team into a restaurant which refused to serve a black player on the team. “I told him (the restaurant owner) if you’re not going to serve him, you’re not going to serve any of us.”

They have been called the “frantic 50s,” as well as the “fabulous 50s.” They probably were a little of both in Beloit, as they were elsewhere. But no doubt the events that took place and the decisions people made during those years paved the way for the decade of change that lay ahead.

— Anne Colden