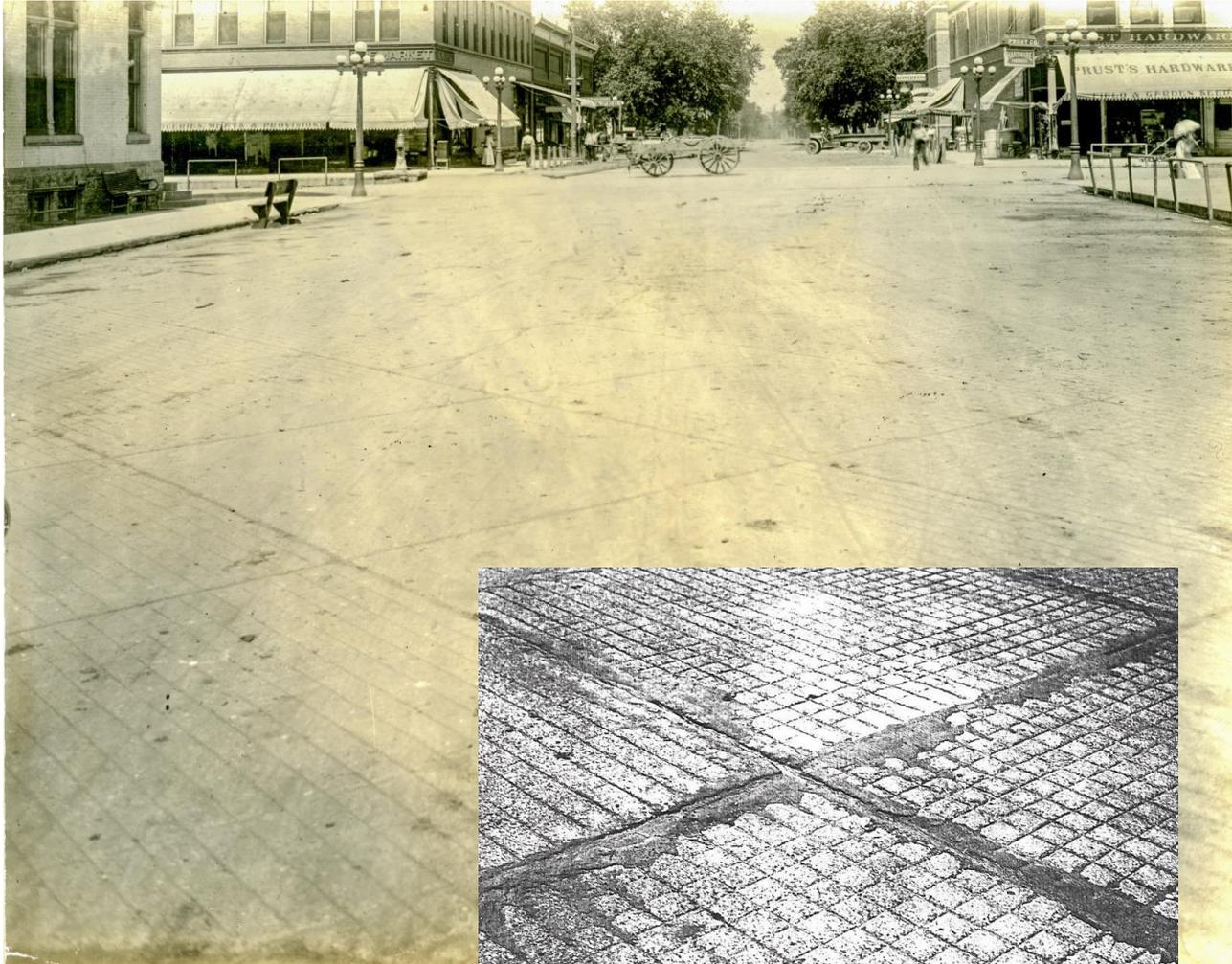


Le Mars History Tour



Please Drive Carefully. Do Not Read and Drive

We begin our history tour at the corner of Plymouth Street and 1st Avenue SW. As you drive south on 1st Avenue, under the asphalt surface is the first concrete street in Iowa (and 2nd in the United States). When you reach 1st St. turn right.



BUILT IN 1904

An artist's sketch of Eagle Street in Le Mars, Iowa, in 1904. The sketch shows a wide street with horse-drawn carriages and early automobiles. The buildings are multi-story and have a classic architectural style. The street is grooved to provide traction for horse traffic.

Artist's sketch of Eagle Street (now First Ave. SW) in Le Mars as it looked in 1904

IOWA'S FIRST CONCRETE STREET IS STILL ON THE JOB

One of the earliest concrete streets on record is a half block of pavement in Le Mars, Iowa, paved in 1904 by adjoining property owners at their own expense. Grooved to provide traction for the horse traffic of the day, this pioneer concrete street is still serving after 60 years. And today, it is carrying traffic loads and volumes far beyond the dreams of its builders.

In 1905, due to the need for hospital facilities, Mrs. Van Donselaar and daughter Lena, of Hull, Iowa, rented a large frame house near the intersection of 1st St. and 2nd Ave. SW and opened Le Mars' first hospital. The building has since been torn down so you are only able to pass by the site. The building has been memorialized as part of an alley art mural on the back wall of the Hardware Hank store. Continue driving west to 5th Ave. (Business 75).



First Hospital, 1st St. and 2nd Ave. SW



Mrs. Van Donselaar tending to a patient

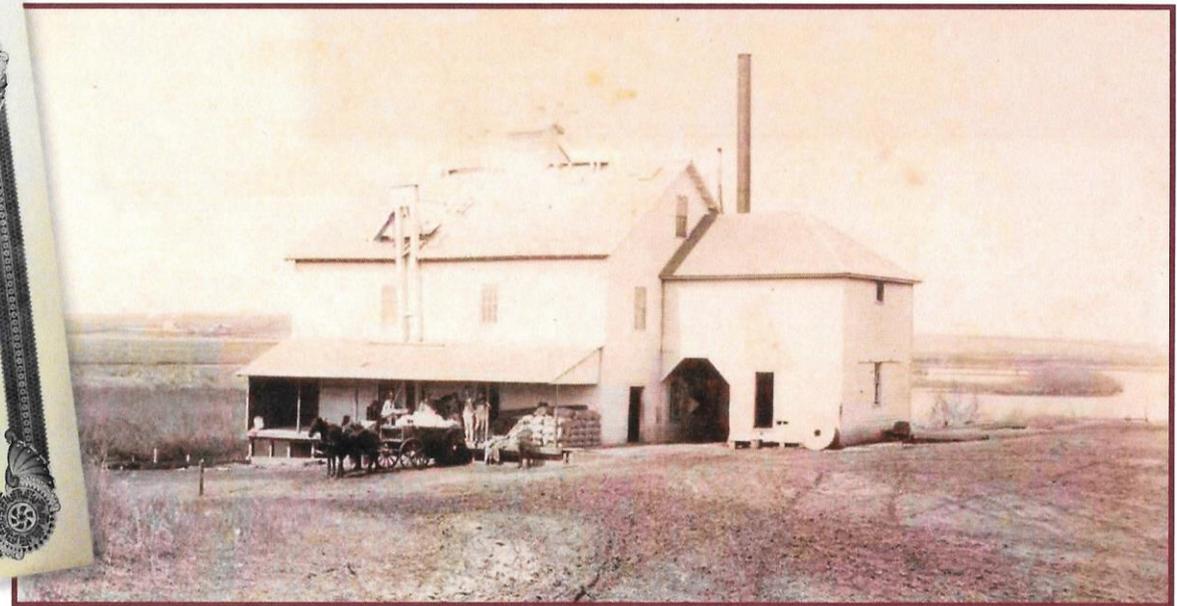
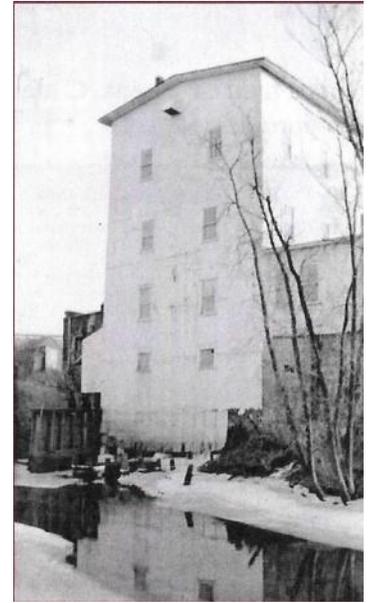


Miller's Lunch
Near 5th Ave and 6th St NW

Driving north on 5th Ave. when you reach 6th St. NW you will see what remains of the Dutch Mill service station (NW Iowa Auto Center). To the left of the station was Miller's Lunch, a mainstay of Le Mars' dining experience during the 1950's, 60's and '70. The lunch counter and a few booths were moved to the Plymouth County Museum where you can still enjoy a root beer float. Continue north, crossing the Floyd River.



To your far right, as you cross the Floyd River is the location of the Gehlen Mill, constructed by Peter Gehlen in 1870. A dam was built in May, 1870, to provide power to drive the mill stones. Capacity was 50 barrels of flour per day and 600 bushels of feed. Product was shipped to Wisconsin, Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, New Orleans and Chicago. Turn the page for golf.



Looking further to the right, nestled in a bend in the river was an early Le Mars' golf course. Continue north on Business 75 to 170th St. Turn left and proceed to Lake Ave. (You will be on gravel.)

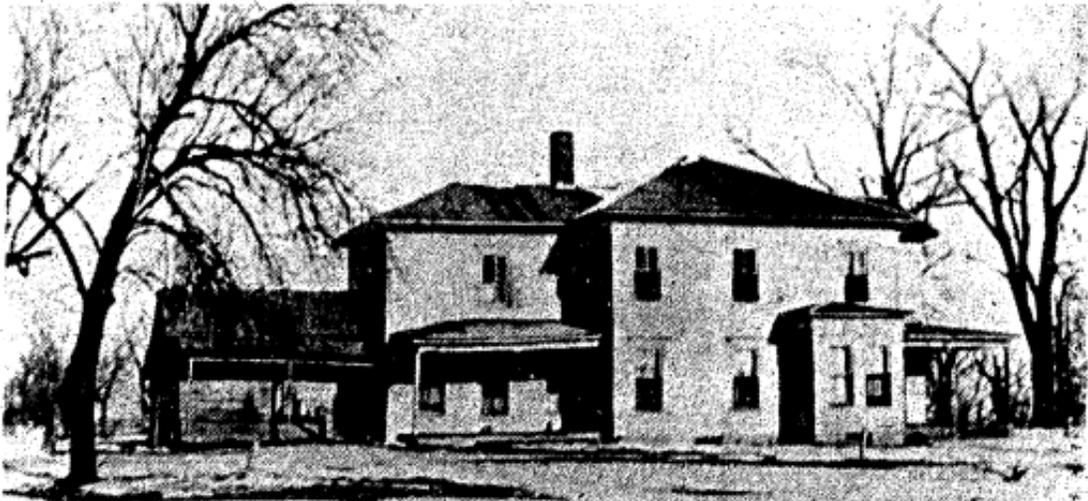


Early Le Mars Golf Links



When you reach Lake Ave., turn right and take a close look at the old 2-story house on the farm on your left. It is all that remains of the Dromore Farm and the Moreton mansion. Capt. Reynolds Moreton, a retired British sea captain, built the farm you see pictured here. The 2nd and 3rd-born sons of English land owners were sent to Dromore Farm to learn the art of farming and, hopefully, settle in the area. Moreton's pupils, or "pups" as they were called brought with them much of their English culture. Moreton enjoyed friendly competition with the local farmers over who had the best crops or livestock. The friendly competition eventually grew into the Plymouth County Fair. Another first for the Captain and his "pups" was the installation of the first telephone line in Plymouth County. It ran from the Moreton mansion to the House of Lords – an English pub in downtown Le Mars.

Turn around and go south on Lake Ave. to Hwy 3. Turn right and read the next page before you reach Hwy 75.



Moreton mansion



D. O. Kime was President of Western Union College from 1930 to 1956. Under his guidance the College undertook some creative ways to raise money. In 1940 a contract was signed with the Civil Aeronautics Administration for Civilian Pilot Training even though there was no airport in the area. A farm field west of Key Ave. (first street west of Hwy 75) and south of Hwy 3, was enlisted into service. Feel free to drive to Key Ave., turn around, return to Hwy 75 and take the exit south.



The drive south on Hwy 75 to the 24th St. SW exit may take a while. To pass the time, here is the “Le Mars Song” for your enjoyment. Feel free to sing out with your windows rolled down so passing cars may enjoy also.

LE MARS SONG

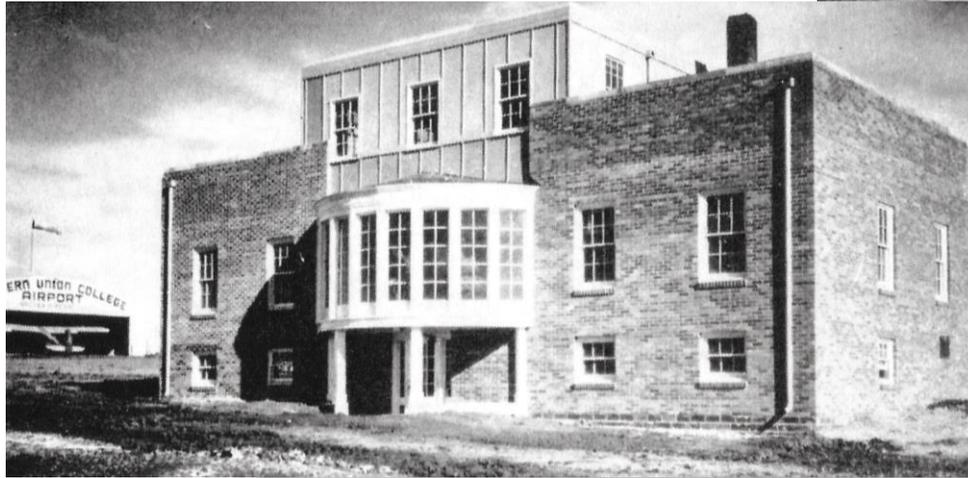
Words & Music
by B.H.Teves

Moderato

Come to Le Mars where the tall corn grows; Come to the ci-ty where good
fel-low-ship flows. Here's to Le Mars with its folks true and kind;
Here's where a hap-py, true sweet home you find. Join all with me in the
old me-lo-dy, Lift up your voice with a great ju-bi- lee. There's just one
place, Just one home in the West, Dear old Le Mars for I love you best.

Published by B.H.Teves.St.Helena,Neb.
PRICE 15¢

Exit on 24th St. SW and follow the signs to the airport on the left. Turn in, go about a block, make a U-turn so you can see buildings looking like the picture.



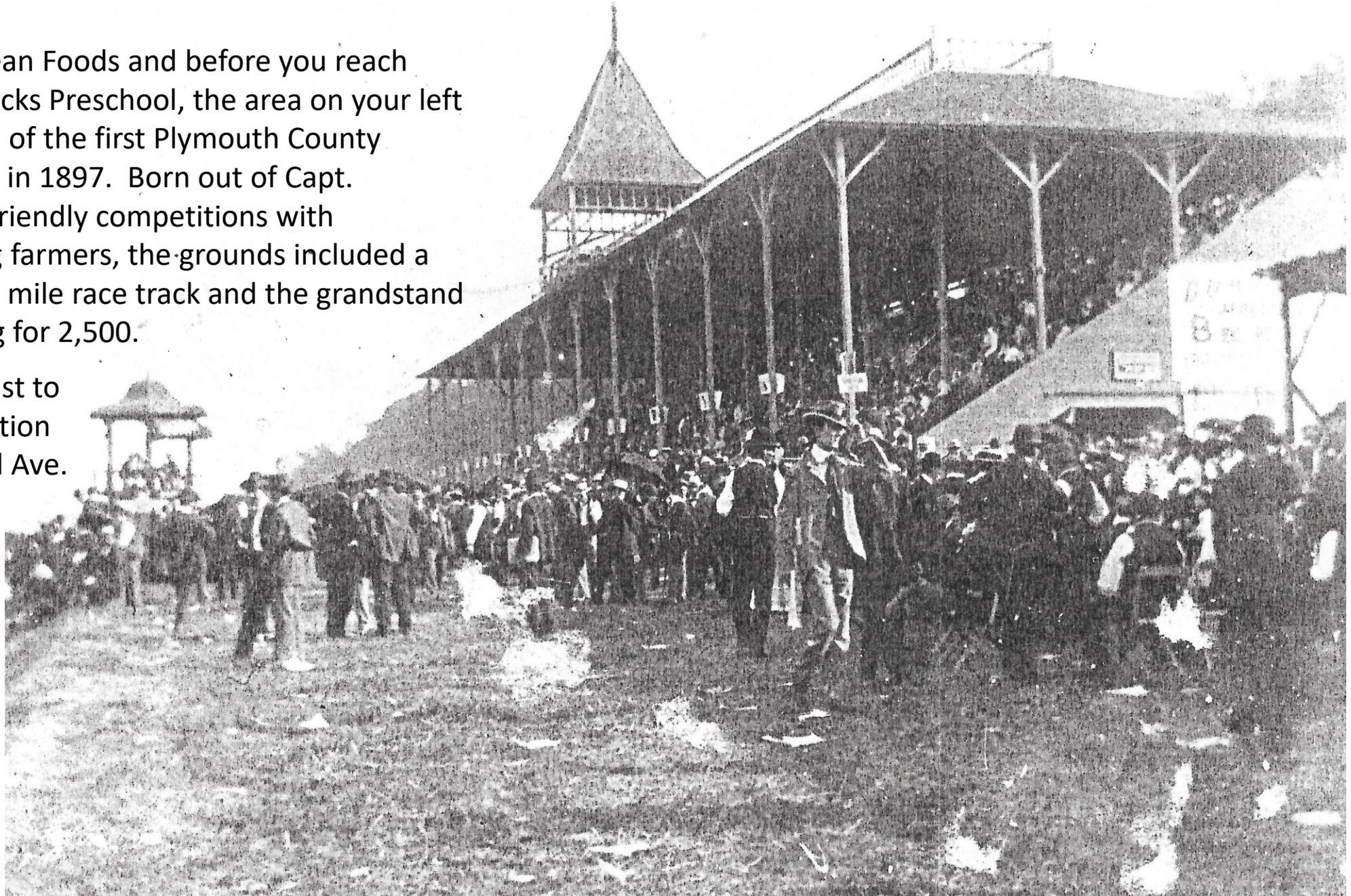
In 1941, farmland was obtained one mile west of the Western Union College campus. After Pearl Harbor the immediate need for pilots led to a contract to provide flight training for Naval Aviation Cadets. Additional hangars were constructed and more than 50 training airplanes were stationed here.



Go back to Hawkeye Ave. (Business 75), go left to 12th St. and turn right.

Just past Dean Foods and before you reach Building Blocks Preschool, the area on your left was the site of the first Plymouth County Fairgrounds in 1897. Born out of Capt. Moreton's friendly competitions with neighboring farmers, the grounds included a polo field, a mile race track and the grandstand with seating for 2,500.

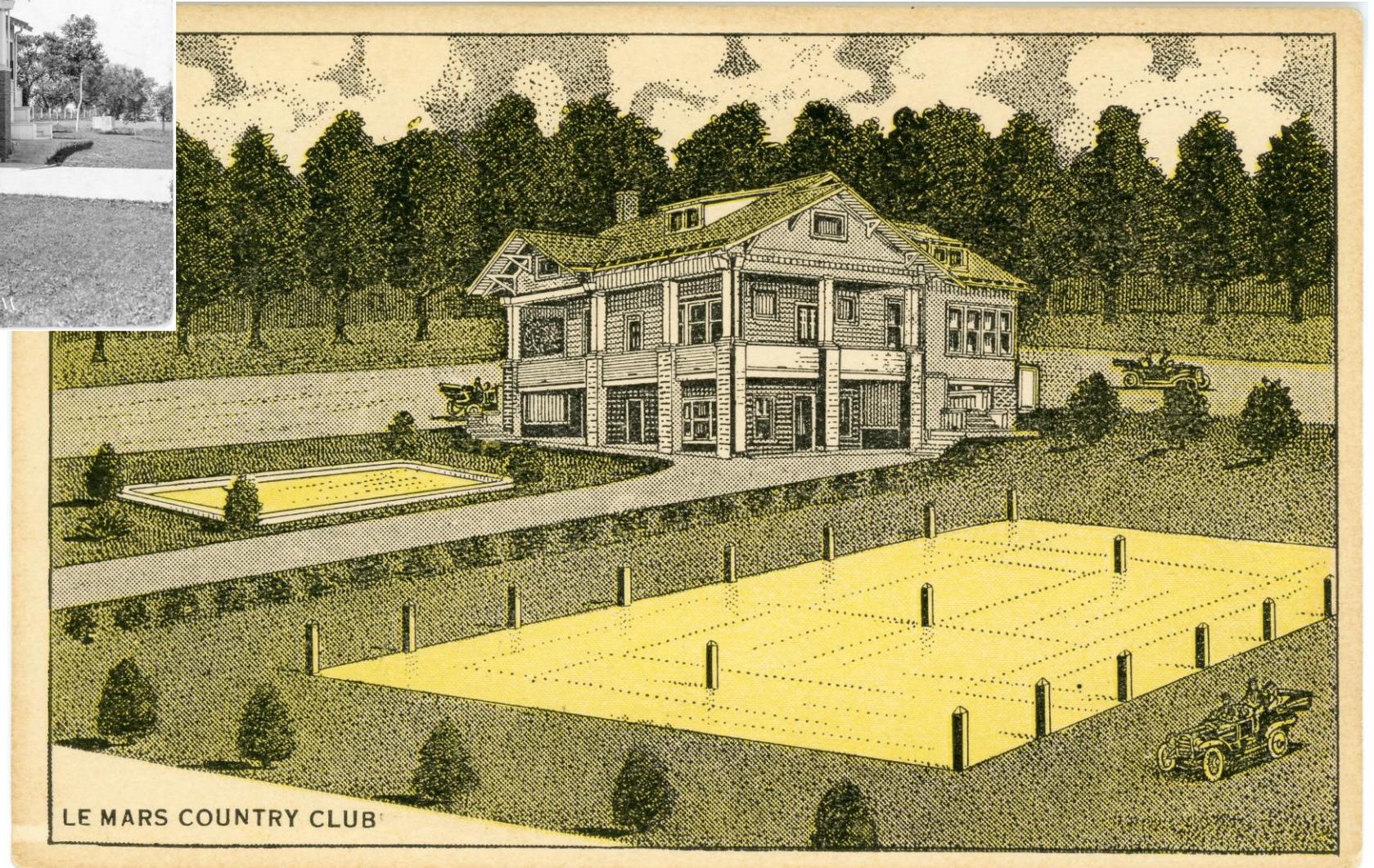
Continue east to the intersection with Central Ave.



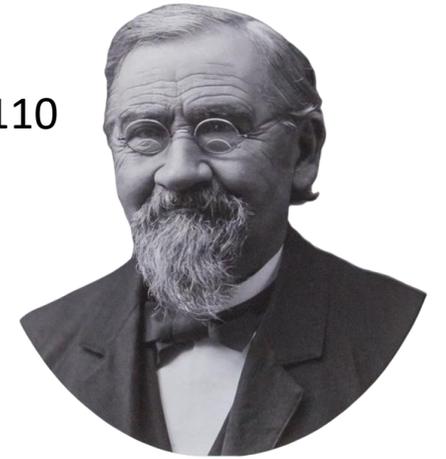


When you arrive at the intersection with Central Ave., to your left you will see the structure that once was the Le Mars Country Club, built in 1913. The 10 acre tract included a golf course, tennis and croquet. Its proximity to the downtown business district made it a beautiful spot for rest and healthy recreation and for lovers of outdoor exercises.

Turn left on Central Ave. to 10th St.



Turn right onto 10th St. and you will come to Westmar Park. In 1887 Prof. Jacob Wernli established the Northwestern Normal School and Business College at this location, initiating 110 years of higher education in Le Mars. It 1892 it became the Le Mars Normal School, then Western Union College in 1900, then Westmar College in 1948 and finally closing in 1997.



If you need a break, stop to see Veteran's Park, if not, return to Central Ave., turn right, and go to Foster Park.



Le Mars Normal School



City Park, later called Foster Park, was created in 1902 from land donated by the Foster family. It quickly became an important social gathering spot. The Le Mars Municipal Band has performed summer concerts here for over 100 years. Pictured is an early bandstand.

Continue ahead (north) on Central Ave. to 3rd St., turn right and proceed to 112 3rd St. SE.



DAUGHTER CONTESTS FATHER'S DONATING WOMANLESS LIBRARY

Townsend M. Zink, a well-known Le Mars attorney, died in 1930. His funeral was held on the lawn of his home at 112 3rd St. SE. He left \$10 to his wife and \$10 to his daughter. He allowed his wife to remain in their home for \$40 per month. The bulk of his estate, valued at \$100,000, he left to the City of Le Mars to be invested for 75 years. At the end of the 75 years, in 2005, the money was to be spent building a new library that could not have any women involved in its construction, nor any books, magazines, works of art or other materials written by or featuring women. Over each entrance were to be signs that read “No Women Admitted”. When the probate was filed in the Court House the “womanless library” story spread around the world to Australia, Asia, Europe and Russia. The will was contested and subsequently voided. The estate, greatly diminished by the Great Depression, ended up going to a woman, his daughter.

Drive ahead to the end of the block and turn left onto 2nd Ave. SE.
234 2nd Ave. SE will be on the right.

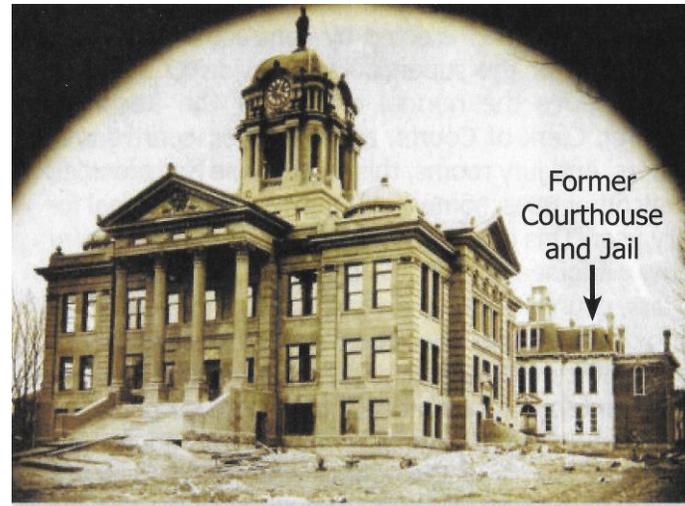
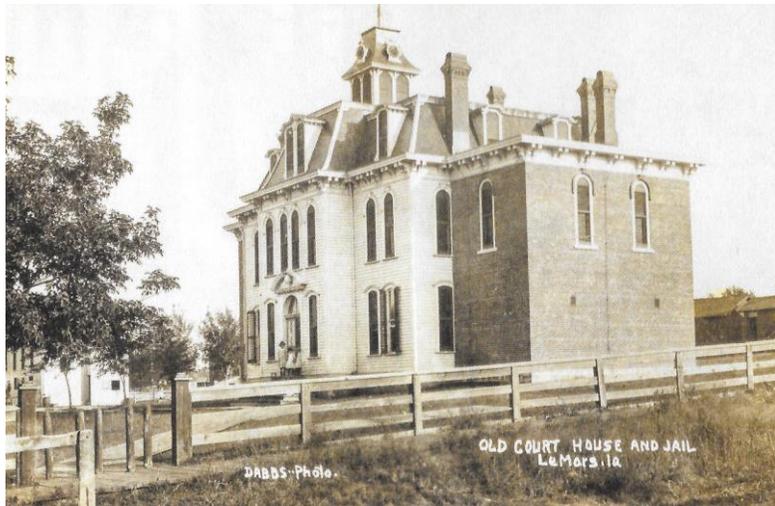


This structure at 234 2nd Ave. SE, built in 1870, was the first public school building in Le Mars. Over the years it has been a church, parsonage and now a private residence.

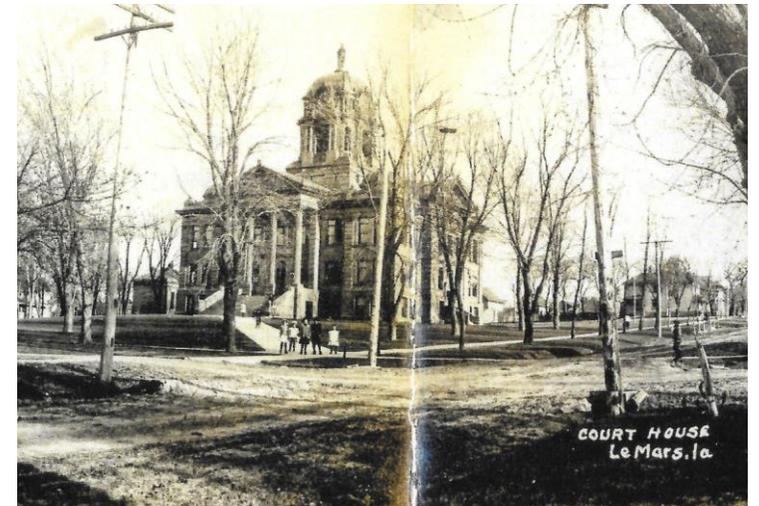


Continue to the end of this block, turn right on 2nd St. SE and stop at the Court House.

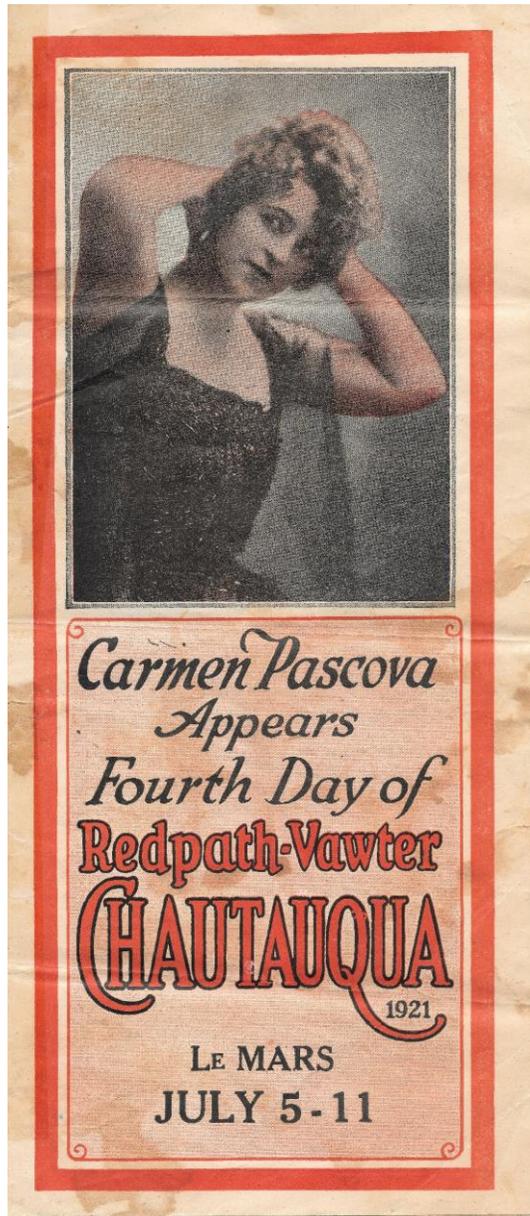
After moving the County Seat from Melbourne to Le Mars, two downtown locations were used for trials while the Court House and jail were built in 1874 on the SW corner of this block with \$3,000 from the Swamp Fund. The current structure was built in 1902. The cupola was removed in 1932 for structural safety concerns. Newsworthy trials held here included many farm foreclosures in the 1930's under Judge Bradley that led to an uprising by the Farmer's Holiday movement, the contesting of the Townsend M. Zink will and its "Womanless Library" stipulation, and the Maybelle Trow Knox fraud case.



Plymouth County Courthouse under construction



Continue straight ahead on 2nd St. to 6th Ave. SE. Bolser Park and Cleveland Park will be on the right.



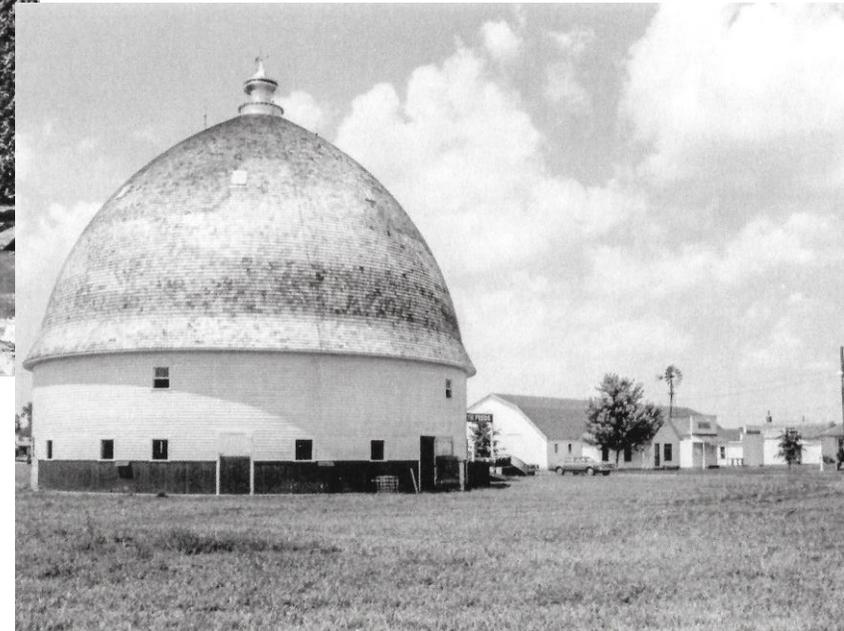
Cleveland Park was established in the 1870's and quickly became the site of frequent Chautauqua events. There was a reflecting pond in the SW corner, a permanent base for the main Chautauqua tent, and a horse race track.



Continue ahead to 8th Ave. SE.
Turn left and go two blocks to
Plymouth St. Turn left again to
Hwy 3. Turn right and head out
of town.

As you drive out of town on Hwy 3, keep an eye open for the round barn on the left at the Plymouth County Fairgrounds. This unique barn was originally on a farm just west of Le Mars on Hwy 3. In 1981 it was moved to the fairgrounds, where it is the anchor building in Pioneer Village.

Continue out of town on Hwy 3 to Park Lane – the Willow Creek Golf Course entrance – for a drive through the park.



In the 1930's, as a result of the Great Depression, the Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created to provide work relief projects employing local labor. The Le Mars Municipal Park and Golf Course, constructed in 1935-1939 covers over 121 acres along Willow Creek. 100 men began the work by expanding the north pond of the Dalton sand pit for a swimming hole, digging by hand. The bath house was the first building in the park.



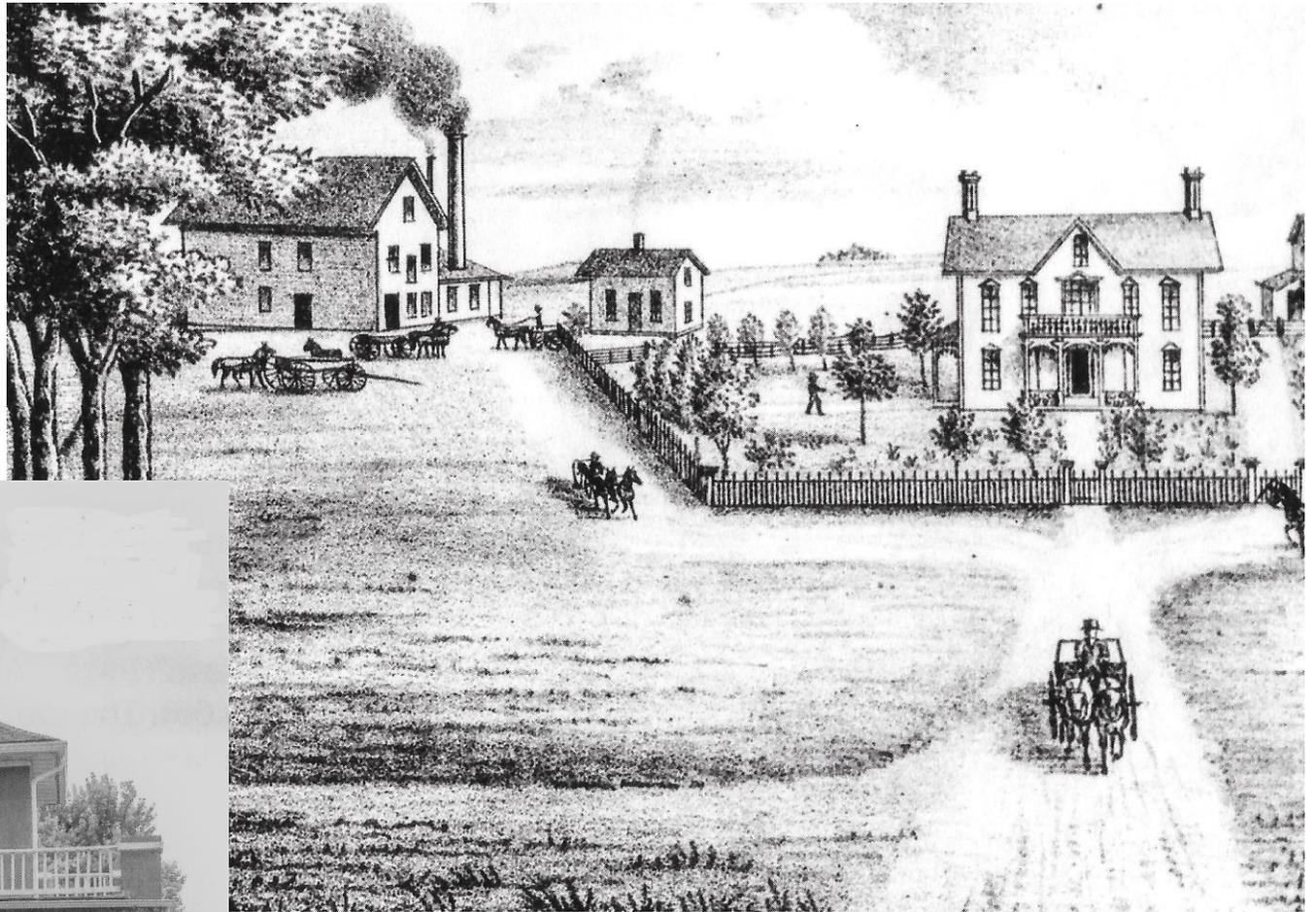
50-60 men worked after that on the park. Twenty-five buildings and a nine-hole golf course were constructed during that 5-year period. The original golf course club house, pictured here, is now the pro shop with a new club house expansion added.

For more detailed information about all the WPA buildings in the park, there is a brochure available at the park office, City Hall, Visitor's Bureau and Chamber of Commerce.

Drive through the park, turn left on 4th Ave. then right on 6th St. NE.



Peter and Catherine Gehlen settled in Le Mars in 1870. Their home still stands at 33 6th St. NE. The first Catholic Mass was celebrated in their home. The Gehlen Mills, viewed earlier, sat behind the house on the Floyd River.



Proceed to Central Ave., turn left and watch for the two-story white brick building that sits at the north edge of downtown Le Mars.

This was a popular stop for many travelers. The White House Bathing Palace had a 30,000 gallon swimming pool in the basement level. The first floor was open to the pool below, with a grand stairway leading to the second floor. The second floor contained a steam room, showering and cooling rooms, several restrooms and a Turkish bath furnished with slabs of white Italian marble. It opened in 1907 as “One of the Swellest Baths in Iowa.” It closed a year later when other hotels and businesses added indoor plumbing. It was then converted to the Le Mars Hospital.



Thank you for taking this driving tour. If this introduction to several places, people and events in Le Mars’s history has sparked a desire to learn more, a comprehensive collection of Le Mars’ history can be found at the Public Library in the book, “Le Mars, Iowa, A Pictorial History, 1869-2019”. Now if some refreshment is in order, please proceed to one more historic site, the Wells Visitor’s Center and Ice Cream Parlor, 115 Central Ave. NW.