

Memories of Kent

by John Wunderle

If you can remember any of all of the following, you were around Kent during the late 1920's and 30's when the country was in the depths of the depression. Life was simpler and almost everyone knew everyone else. Do you remember:

1. When there was a gravel bank across the street from the Mason apartments on Lake Street?
2. When The KKK was very active in Kent and burned a cross from time to time on the hill behind the gravel pit?
3. When the Stiver house at 140 Lake St. had a dug well or cistern by the front steps? It had a pump that consisted of a chain with buckets that dumped into a spout as the buckets came over the top near the crank.
4. When Musson's Blacksmith Shop was located in the building (still standing) at 118 Lake St.
5. The interurban freight station (still standing) at N. Water and Crain where an article ordered by phone from a Cleveland store would be delivered the next day?
6. The two red International Trucks that delivered groceries for Mecham and Rhodes, Kneifels and Longcoys groceries? How about the folding wooden boxes that stacked when filled with groceries but folded flat when empty? You would phone your order into the store and the delivery people would walk right into your home and unload your order on the kitchen table. They would place anything that needed kept cold in the icebox.
7. The Erie Restaurant at N. Water and Crain where the Erie callboy would start looking for crews. The callboy had a sidecar equipped motorcycle or in the winter a Model A Ford. Most people did not have telephones so the callboy had to go and find the crews. He knew where each of the hundreds of men lived, where their girlfriends lived, where they sat in the movies, where they ate their meals and which bars they liked. He had to physically find them and notify them as to which train they were called for and at what time.
8. The Interurban car from Akron arrived at 16 minutes after the hour and the one going to Akron at 3 minutes after the hour? Their stop was on Main St. between Water St. and the Erie R.R. This was all single track. The cars met and passed each other at a passing siding across from the stow airport.
9. Kladags radio shop upstairs over Kline's grocery? The entrance and steps were in the rear off Erie St. You could buy the parts for a crystal set for less than a dollar.
10. When there were two A&P stores downtown? The one at N. Water and Columbus was managed by Mr. Meeker and the one on S. Water almost to Erie St. by Mr. McIntire. A&P tried a supermarket type operation that was way ahead of its time. This was in the old shirtwaist company building on N. River St. now Gougler. Mr. McIntire was the manager. This was a store where you selected your own articles and then took them to a checkout. It did not work because people still wanted to go to a counter and have a clerk get the article for them. The store closed after a short time. This building, the old L.N. Gross building, still stands and has been returned to pristine condition.

11. When you could go right into the mill at Williams Brothers. and they would fill a paper bag with a Farina-type cereal for 15 cents? This came out of a chute with a wooden type valve to shut off the flow when the bag was full.
12. When you could take your own gallon jug to the Perfection dairy on N. River St. and get a gallon of skim milk for 25 cents? The dairy was run by Mr. Tagenhorst.
13. When the Opera House reopened with John Palfi as manager? It had a stage curtain covered with advertisements for local merchants. The building was wider than it was long since it was built for live performances before the movie era.
14. The little boxes that zipped around Gensemers dry goods carrying the bill and money to the cashier and then came back with your change?
15. The bank nights at the Kent Theater when people who could not afford to go to the movie came downtown and stood outside while the number was called?
16. The miniature golf course that stood on the hill where the telephone company parking lot is now?
17. When Dr. Krape had his office in his home at 131 Columbus St.? An office call was one dollar and this included several packets of pills dispensed from the dozens of bottles kept in a closet off his office.
18. When Doug Rupp, one of Kent's early labor movement people, lived in a house on the south side of Columbus St. His house was the one nearest to Depeyster St.
19. When Rt. 261 went down Cherry St., went left for a block, then right, crossed the tracks and went out old 261?
20. When Kent had two trash men, one named Nash and the other Luli? Luli had a Wells Fargo sign on the porch of his Cherry St. home.
21. When a man built a home made airplane on the second floor of the building still standing at the rear of the house on the N.E. corner of Vine and School Streets? I wonder if he ever got it out and did it ever fly?
22. When a man with a horse and a V shaped wooden plow cleared the snow off of all the sidewalks after each snowfall?
23. When both the Akron and Macon flew over Kent on their maiden flights?
24. When Mary Klinko was murdered while walking from Black and Decker to Crain Ave.? This area had been laid out as an allotment. Streets were roughed in and sidewalks were in place but no houses had been built. The depression stopped all activity. She was found about halfway between Steele and Doramor on what is now Dansel. Another unsolved murder on S. River St. between the American Legion and Stow St.?

25. The old Erie boarding house called Jacks that was on Orchard St. running through to Standing Rock? This was used by the Erie crews from Meadville and Marion that had to layover before being called for another run. This building had a restaurant, of sorts, and sleeping rooms. It was reached by going down over the hill behind the Erie Roundhouse, crossing the B&O and then over the swinging bridge. The bridge was hung from two cables and had a board floor. It gyrated wildly when one crossed it. The building (Jacks) is still standing and has been made into apartments.
26. The strike at Domestic Electric (later Lamb, then Black and Decker and now Ametek) when rubber workers came over from Akron and used deer rifles to shoot out all the windows and put holes in the water tank that stood on a high tower? The water tank looked like a giant fountain. A May Brothers moving van was used under police protection to remove some workers that had been inside the building.
27. When a group put on a pageant on Boetler's farm (now Oak Knolls golf course) complete with covered wagons, horses, etc.?
28. When there was only one traffic light in town? This was on a post that stood in the center of the Main and Water intersection.
29. When the entire police force was Chief St. Clair West and patrolmen Bud Barr and Firman Grubb? There were one or two more whose names I do not remember. They had one Model A Ford and you could usually find it parked on S. Water St. right beside Thompson's Drug Store.
30. The taxis that were privately owned by Miller, Wise, Gillespie and a couple of others? The fare was a dime to anywhere within the city limits. They parked their cars in spots right next to the square and spent the time between fares polishing their cars. Mr. Miller had the nicest lawn in town. He lived on N. Mantua St. just north of the building that housed Van Allen's Confectionary. A little later another taxi outfit was started by people named Smith. They had two cars which I believe were 1937 Chevrolets. Their office was in a small basement behind Standard Drug and entered from Main St. Their fare was 15 cents, anywhere in town.
31. The Comfort Station between the Erie tracks and Franklin Ave.? It had a barber shop a few steps up and men and women restrooms a few steps down.
32. The Erie watchman's shanties at Main and another at Crain? The watchman came out and stood in the street carrying a pole with a round sign with STOP imprinted. One of the signs is in our museum. At night he, also, carried a red lantern. One of the watchmen was named "Smitty".
33. When presidential candidate Hoover spoke from the back platform of a B&O train? The train stopped so that people on the Main St. Bridge and people along the rail by the Erie station could hear him.

34. When every freight train through town had hundreds of men on board? They traveled from town to town looking for work. Looking down at a B&O train you often saw 15 or 20 men in a gondola, several men in box car doors sitting with their feet hanging out and still more riding the roof. They were not supposed to be there but most trainmen looked the other way. Those riding on the Erie had to get off at either end of the yard since the railroad police would arrest them in the yard. They all had to walk down Lake St. to get to the other end of the yard.
35. There were several "Knights Of The Road" that had semi-permanent shelters built along the canal bank behind the city dump on Brady Lake road? They dug into the bank and then roofed the space with tin from a billboard and then covered this roof with dirt. They built a fire near the open end and had a very comfortable home. Chairs and tables were easily procured from the nearby dump and one even piped a spring into the shelter to provide running water.
36. Smith's Pie Shop at the corner of Water and Portage? They had pie shells already made and would fill the shell with peach, cherry, pineapple, apple, etc. They came in 3 sizes; 5 cents, 10 cents and 25 cents for a full size pie.
37. The barber shop in the same building next to the pie shop? It had a funny sign. One side said, "E.L. Hopkins keeps this shop" and the other side said, "This shop keeps E.L. Hopkins."
38. When KSU was a Normal School with about 900 students, almost all female? They had to be in by 9:00 each night and by 1:00 am on weekends. If they were late they found the door locked and had to get the housemother to let them in. They were given a late slip.
39. When almost every house in Kent had a combination lock on the front door? This was not a padlock but was a lock that was an integral part of the plate and doorknob. They were made by the Miller Keyless Lock Co. on Lock St. Many are still in use.
40. There was another blacksmith shop on N. Water St? It was in the, still standing, building on the south side of the alley between Columbus and Portage Streets.
41. The old former livery stable behind the Opera House on Columbus where Mr. Burgner had his garage and towing service? Mr. Burgner was killed when he tried to remove a wrecked car from an energized down guy.
42. The Kent Symphony Orchestra under the direction of John Faranachi?
43. Swimming on the north shore of Brady Lake at Spellman's Beach? This was so named because it was located at the site of the large Spellman ice house that had burned some years before. It cost 5 cents to ride out from Kent on the Interurban car.
44. The large Italian picnics at Brady Lake? People came from Cleveland in chartered Interurban cars. They always had grand fireworks displays set off from a raft in the middle of the lake. Hundreds of Kent people would go out and sit on the hill to watch the fireworks.

45. When life was simple and people were honest? Mr. Towner had an Indian mound on his property and had excavated a number of artifacts. These were displayed for several years in a glass covered display case at the mound. No one ever smashed the case or tried to steal anything.
46. When people made wooden frames about 2 feet by 4 feet, covered them with hardware cloth, stood them at about a 45 degree angle and sifted dirt at the Erie yards in order to sift out the dregs of coal? They hauled it home in a box or burlap bag in a coaster wagon. They did not have the \$2.50 a ton that the coal cost. Some people rolled up newspaper to make a roll about 4 inches in diameter, soaked them in water overnight and then let them dry. The end result was supposed to burn like a piece of wood when placed in a furnace. It really did not work very well.
47. When transients would come to your door and offer to do any kind of work for a sandwich and a cup of coffee? Some were very talented people. I recall one that worked the downtown area. He carried a small curved anvil and a dinging hammer. He would offer to ding out all the dents in your car for 25 cents.
48. When there was a fireworks stand every year just beyond the "city limit" sign? This was where the Methodist Church is now.
49. When Standard Drug opened a store in the fall of 1938 on the N.E. corner of Main and Water? Kent now had five drug stores. Standard, Youngs between Standard and the Erie on Main St., Donaghy's on the S.E. corner and Thompsons on S.E. corner of Main and Water. Lee Drug was on the N.W. corner of Water and Erie.
50. When Standard had a soda fountain where soda pop and coffee were both 5 cents? An ice cream soda or sundae was 10 cents. They, also, had a full kitchen in the basement and used a dumb waiter to send the food up to a steam table. A "Blue Plate Special" was 25 cents and contained a meat, a vegetable and a potato. They, also, sold six kinds of wine for 97 cents a bottle. They were Tokay, Burgundy, Sauterne, Sherry, Port and Muscatel.
51. When the Ohio State Patrol was formed around 1936? they had a post in Kent at 937 W. Main st. The patrolmen had to be single, live in the barracks (house) and were paid around 50 dollars a month plus room and board. A 6 or 7 car garage (still standing) was built behind the house for the 1936 Ford patrol cars.
52. When John Hastings and his father ran a Sunoco station at the S.W. corner of Willow and Lake Sts.? John was the scoutmaster of troop 253 that met in the gym attached to the Congregational Church on River St. His father had worked on the building of the Panama Canal and delighted telling about it to anyone that would listen.
53. When the Kent Sanitary Ice Company was located at 425-1/2 Grant St. (building still standing)? They had home delivery and the householder put a card in the window showing how much ice was to be delivered. The card had 25, 50 and 100 at three of the four corners. Whichever number was up told the iceman how many pounds to bring to the house. Many people went to the plant to pick up their ice because you could save 5 or 10 cents. People carried ice on the back bumper if they had a car or in a coaster wagon with the ice covered with newspaper or an old blanket to prevent melting.

54. When a man walked all over town selling a tabloid-type newspaper called Grit?
55. The smoke shop on N. Water St. where the paper boys picked up all of the out of town newspapers for their delivery routes?
56. Hahns bakery on S. Water St. had a franchise for Isaly daily products and introduced the “skyscraper” cone formed with a spade-like device instead of a scoop?
57. When gasoline was 17.9 cents a gallon and, some, like the station at Rt. 261, Britain-Eastland-Eastwood Avenues sold it at 7 gallons for a dollar?
58. When Bisslers had a furniture store and a funeral parlor in their building at the N.E. corner of Main and River? The funeral parlor was a relatively new concept because it had been customary to layout the body in the parlor of your home. A black wreath was hung on the door to let passers by know that there had been a death in the family.
59. When the post office was next to the alley on S. Water St. and Skormans store was on the south side of the same alley?
60. When the bowling alley was just north of the Williams Bros. Mill? It was in the basement and used pin boys who were paid 10 cents a line to set pins.
61. The big fire that destroyed almost the entire block where Kneifel grocery and Goetz hardware were located?
62. The wonderful musicals that were put on each year by the students from Roosevelt High? They were directed by Mildred Bumphy (Elgin) with the assistance of her sister Alice. “Harmony Hall” was an operetta, “Sonia-The Girl From Russia” was a musical comedy and “A Nautical Knot” was an operetta with a cast of almost 300. The costumes were almost all made by the mothers of the students.
63. When the scout troops were able to buy surplus zeppelin cloth from Goodyear and the mothers sewed the cloth into sleeping bags complete with a little awning-like affair to keep the rain off of your face?
64. When there were two clothing stores on N. Water St.? Coe Livingston and D.H. Green both sold all sorts of men's wear. Fred Bechtle's store across the alley from Longcoys on S. Water St. catered mostly to the working man. He had overalls, work shirts and traditional railroaders clothing. He also had a cigar store Indian that was rolled out onto the sidewalk every morning.
65. When the Kent Schools had only one school bus? Everybody walked to school except the high school students from Brady Lake. Brady Lake had its own grade school but the high school students were bussed to Roosevelt.

66. When Kent had two high schools? KSU had a training school with grades 1 through 12 which gave the college students training to be teachers a chance for hands on training. Students at the training school were chosen first from the faculty and employees of KSU. Next chosen were the students that lived in the original Davey Development Company houses in Twin Lakes and then the remainder were children that lived in the vicinity of KSU. The Twin Lakes situation was, somewhat, unusual. All of the children from that area were picked up by a township bus. Grade school students were dropped off at Franklin Township school and high school students were taken to Roosevelt. The Davey investment children, both grade school and high school were taken on to the KSU school. The Original training school was on Lincoln in the building now known as Franklin Hall. Later it was moved to a new building on Morris Road.
67. When Kent had three New York-Chicago trains each way on the Erie? Going West, the Erie Limited at 12:37 AM, the Midlander at 11:10 AM and the Pacific Express at 4:48 PM. The latter was known in, this railroad town as Number 7. The B&O had 6 trains each way between Washington and Chicago but only 3 each way stopped in Kent. The Columbian, an all coach train, came through about 11:30 at night followed in 5 minutes by the Capital Limited, an all Pullman train. When the then new diesels were first put on, people used to come down just to watch these two trains come through. The Erie limited was still going about 70 mph past Crain Ave. and then you could see smoke from the brakes as it slowed down for the Kent station.
68. When the Erie had "Excursion Rates" to Chicago or New York for 5 dollars a round trip? The Wheeling had round trip fares to Cleveland for one dollar a round trip. The Wheeling train left Kent at 5:48 PM and arrived at 93rd street in Cleveland at 6:30 PM. Try making that trip in 42 minutes today.
69. When the Soap Box Derby was held each year on the hill near the B&O underpass on Rt. 59?
70. The Memorial Day parades with the school bands, the scouts and the fire truck with all the firemen riding on it? The parade started at Lincoln and Main. It stopped on the bridge so a gun salute could be fired, followed by Frank Amodio playing taps. The parade then continued on to the cemetery where a brief ceremony was held.
71. The American Legion drum and bugle corps? They had orange and black uniforms and were known throughout the area.
72. When the Western Union office was on Water St. just south of the flour mill? The manager was named Miller.
73. Dr. Eichenlaub was a chiropractor and had his home and office on the south side of Columbus St. in the first house off of Water? Visits were one dollar.
74. When there was a diner on Main St. next to the theater?
75. The big dock on the sidewalk in front of Mr. Elgin's jewelry shop in the basement of the hotel?

76. The Western Auto store on the corner of Columbus and N. Water St.? It was in the space formerly occupied by the A&P. It was run by Mr. Patterson.
77. When the downtown stores in Cleveland had their own newspaper called the "Shopping News"? It was delivered free to every house on Wednesday and Saturday. It contained nothing but advertisements for stores like May Co., Higbees, Halles, Newman Steam, Baileys, Sterling and Welch, Bonds, Richmond's clothing stores, Adam Hats, numerous shoe stores, dress shops and many, many more shops in the downtown area.
78. When there were many gravel roads in town? Morris Rd. from Summit to its end. North River Rd. across Fishcreek and then a 90 degree turn to the left and up a very steep hill to a 90 degree turn to the right at the top. It was sort of a contest to see if your car could make it up this hill.
79. When Twin Coach tried to get into the streetcar market by placing a bus body on streetcar trucks? They tested the cars on the interurban line between Kent and Ravenna. They only sold a couple of them and they were not successful.
80. When you could purchase a brand new Goodyear tire for less than ten dollars? I seem to remember one big sale when they were advertised for \$6.66.
81. When the Akron newspapers were 18 cents a week and 20 cents if you included the Sunday paper? Even at that price, many people did not have the money and did not pay the paperboy.
82. When a Ford Tri-Motor airplane would stop at Stow field? Rides were 25 cents from 11:00 until 12:00, 35 cents from 12:00 until 3:00 and 50 cents after 3:00.
83. The Dime stores where you could buy things for a dime? McCrorys, Murphys, Woolworths where the side entrance went down hill to Water St. near City Bank.
84. The still well defined mill race from the west side of the dam down the west bank of the river?
85. The telephone operators who were on the second floor of the building on Water St. between the National Bank and the alley.
86. The old St. Patrick Church where the bell in the tower rang the angelus at 6:00 AM, noon and 6:00 PM?
87. The students from Davey Tree Institute that lived in the barracks on River St. behind Bissler's store? They were seen all over town swinging on ropes and practicing tree surgery on any tree that looked like it needed help.
88. Sledding at Kent State on the bill in front of the Administration Building?
89. Caddying at Twin Lakes Country Club at \$1.75 for 9 holes and \$2.50 for 18 holes? If you got out in the morning and afternoon you could make \$5.00 plus tip.

90. A man named John Grate from Atwater was the last Portage County Civil War veteran and he was in all the parades. The big Elks Club home on E. Main between Depeyster and Willow Sts.? This had been the T.G. Parson home.
91. The Kent Bearcats Football Team?
92. The Kent Library where a lady named Schuman was the head librarian?
93. When young people roller skated all over town? The hill between the Kent Theater and the Kent National bank was a favorite.
94. When roller skates clamped onto your shoes? There was a leather strap over your instep and the front of the skate clamped on to your shoe sole. The shoe sole had to be leather and a skate key was helpful.
95. When Dan's Shoe Repair was on N. Water St.? Leather soles were \$1.00 and rubber heels were 50 cents.

If you can remember any or all of this, you are right on the verge of being what is sometimes called an “old timer”. But it's not all bad... you saw some things and experienced some happenings that will never occur again. Some of these things we are better off without, others will never happen again without drastic changes in the world as we know it today.