

# Ankeny through the decades...

recalling Ankeny news from the 1940s, 1960s, 1980s\*



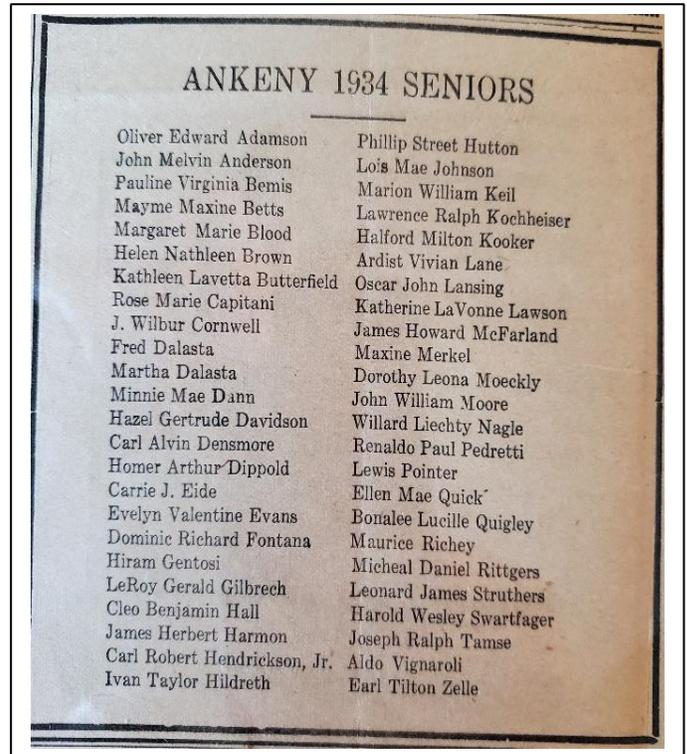
May 2020

## 1930s & 40s

**Facts About Ankeny:** Ankeny is the only town of that name in the world.

- The townsite was filed for record in Polk County on April 22, 1875 by John Fletcher Ankeny.
- John Fletcher Ankeny built the first store in the town on the site now occupied by Ankeny State Bank.
- Henry Hutton was the first storekeeper in Ankeny; L.B. Morgan, the first druggist.
- Henry Hutton was the first postmaster, also, and was followed by B.A. Lawson and George Coffin, under whose regime rural free delivery routes were established.
- The town's first school building was erected where the grade school now stands.
- The present grade building was erected in 1909.
- A consolidated school district was formed in 1919 with Ankeny as its center, and the high school building was built at that time.
- The first church in Ankeny was a Methodist Church built in 1885.

Article undated. From the Doris Bunz Scrapbook Collection



Ankeny Times, May 24, 1934

The high school graduation exercises of the high school will be held Monday evening at 8 o'clock. Forrest Ensign of Iowa State University will deliver the address. This year's class consist of 48 forty-eight boys and girls. Ankeny Times, May 24, 1934

\*Wording has been reduced to fit the space in some cases. Additional decades will be covered in future issues. Please become a member of the AAHS or send comments via email at: [history@ankenyhistorical.org](mailto:history@ankenyhistorical.org).



## Ankeny Area Historical Society

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## 1940s

### FIRE DESTROYS HALF ANKENY BUSINESS AREA

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN BATTLE BLAZE



**Estimated \$50,000 Loss to Business Firms in Ankeny**

A raging fire early Tuesday morning, destroyed half of the Ankeny business section, causing an estimated \$50,000 loss.

Five stores covering a half block area, burned to the ground during the blaze, which consisted of the following places of business: Lamberti meat market and grocery store, operated by Rix Lamberti, George Thompson harness shop and the office of Dr. Henderson, veterinarian, Wright Pharmacy, operated by Mayor F. L. Wright, Sexton Café, operated by Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Sexton, Margaret's beauty shoppe, operated by Miss Margaret Gilbert. The fire originated in the beauty shoppe where it was discovered by Wilbur Lundholm, about 3:30 A.M.

The fire department was called, but it had gained such a start before being discovered and there was a strong wind blowing, which made it very difficult to check. The only building saved, in the half block, was the frame building belonging to C. O. McLean, which is occupied by the M and E Café and Betts barber shop. Most of the town and surrounding community, who were spectators, helped carry groceries from the Lamberti store, before the flames were well under way. Mayor Wright was able to save his safe, which contained an amount of money and some valuable papers. Mr. and Mrs. Sexton who were sleeping in the rear of their café, escaped in their night clothes. They saved only a few clothes and a small amount of bedding. Nothing was saved from the beauty shoppe and only a very few tools from the harness shop.

Frank Miller who was sleeping above the Lamberti store, also escaped.

The firemen worked hard to save the frame building. Also, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bridesall and the Methodist parsonage which are just north of the burn area were saved. The row of buildings burned were owned by Al Stader of Sioux City, Iowa, and Dr. A.E. Merkel and were covered by insurance. This is the third major blaze in Ankeny within the last ten years. Two half blocks of store building were destroyed in 1932, and the Wagner Grain elevator burned to the ground several years ago.

*Ankeny Times, May 17, 1940*

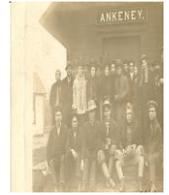
A volunteer fire force of six members fought the \$50,000 blaze which destroyed five business houses in the Ankeny business section early Tuesday morning. This was the third major fire at Ankeny in the past ten years.

**\$50,000 Loss to Business Firms in Ankeny:** A raging fire early Tuesday morning, destroyed half the Ankeny business section, causing an estimated \$50,000 loss. Five stores covering a half block area, burned to the ground during the blaze, which consisted of the following places of business: Lamberti meat market and grocery store, operated by Rix Lamberti, George Thompson harness shop and the office of Dr. Henderson, veterinarian, Wright Pharmacy, operated by Mayor F.L. Wright, Sexton Café, operated by Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Sexton, Margaret's Beauty Shoppe, operated by Miss Margaret Gilbert. The fire originated in the beauty shoppe where it was discovered by Wilbur Lundholm, about 3:30 A.M. The fire department was called, but it had gained such a start before being discovered and there was a strong wind blowing, which made it very difficult to check. The only building saved, in the half block, was the frame building belonging to C.O. McLean, which is occupied by the M and E Café and Betts Barber shop. Most of the town and surrounding community, who were spectators, helped carry groceries from the Lamberti store, before the flames were well under way. Mayor Wright was able to save his safe, which contained an amount of money and some valuable papers. Mr. and Mrs. Sexton who were sleeping in the rear of their café, escaped in their night clothes. They saved only a few clothes and a small amount of bedding. Nothing was saved from the beauty shoppe and only a very few tools from the harness shop. Frank Miller, who was sleeping above the Lamberti store, also escaped. The firemen worked hard to save the frame building. Also, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bridesall and the Methodist parsonage which are just north of the burn area were saved. The row of buildings burned were owned by Al Stader of Sioux City, Iowa, and Dr. A.E. Merkel and were covered by insurance. This is the third major blaze in Ankeny within the last ten years. Two half blocks of store building were destroyed in 1932, and the Wagner Grain elevator burned to the ground several years ago. *Ankeny Times, May 17, 1940*

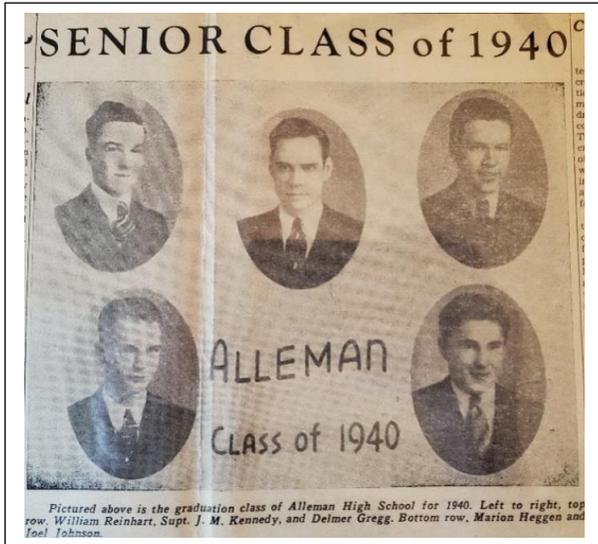
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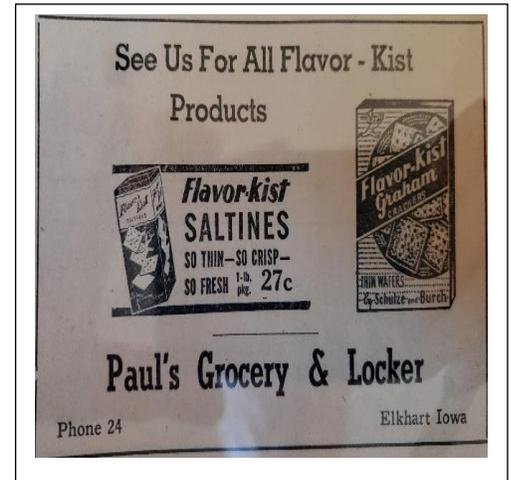
## 1940s



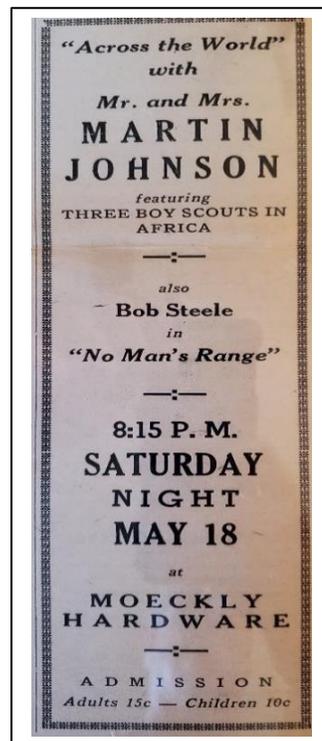
Pictured above is the graduation class of Alleman High School for 1940. Left to right, top row, William Reinhart, Supt. J. M. Kennedy, and Delmer Gregg. Bottom row, Marion Heggen and Joel Johnson.

Ankeny Times, May 17, 1940

Ankeny Times,  
May 27, 1949  
→



Ankeny Times, May 17, 1940



Ankeny Times, May 27, 1949

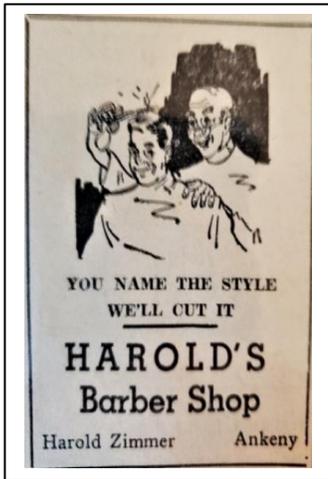
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## 1940s



Ankeny Times, May 25, 1949



## 1960s

**And Then Came the Rain.** Ground breaking ceremonies took place on Thursday, May 8<sup>th</sup> at 4 p.m. within the south city limits of Ankeny on a 240 acre site for permanent buildings to be constructed for Des Moines Area Community College. Governor Ray was on hand to give the speech. The Ankeny American Legion presented the colors and Rev. Mark Weston gave the invocation and benediction. Welcome was by Lr. Lowery and remarks were by Mr. Grefe. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 15, 1969



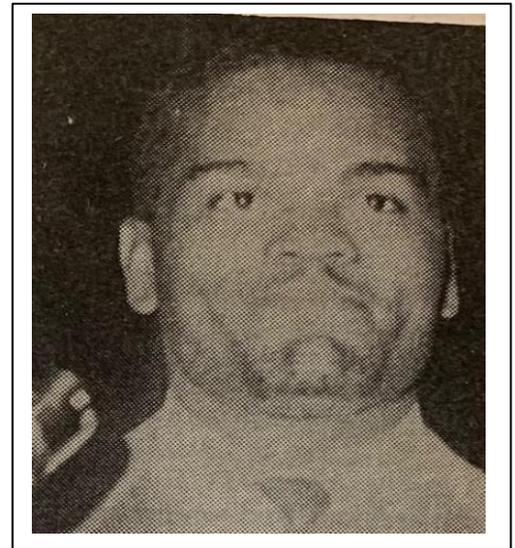
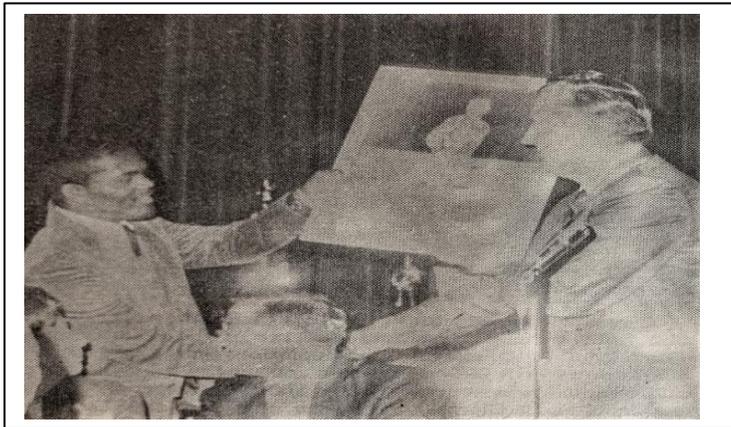
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## 1960s



**Jason Smith Honored at Athletic Banquet** – At the annual All Sports Banquet, April 30<sup>th</sup>, honoring Ankeny High School athlete, Jason Smith, National Collegiate Wrestling Champ, received awards from the school, the Chamber of Commerce, and the city of Ankeny. He received a long-standing ovation proving how proud Ankeny is of their successful alumni. Jason's Coach, Harold Nichols, of ISU was the main speaker. He gave an interesting talk about wrestling and desire. The coach of each sport at Ankeny High School introduced their squads and the parents of the athletes.

The Ankeny Jaycees, who again sponsored this event, received much help from the Jaycee-ettes and the school staff. Also deserving recognition were cooks headed by Mrs. Longnecker, Larry McAnally, Chairman, reported that over 400 meals were served. The Jaycees also would like to thank the Lions and the Kiwanis for their financial help. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 8, 1969



**The Cloud-Room at the Des Moines Airport** – was the site of this year's junior-senior prom for Ankeny High School. Enjoying the dance in photo above are, back row, left to right: Maurice Bryant, Bill Thompson and Roger Scholes. Seated are left to right Patty Ugulini, Bonnie Doughten, and Fran Rowland. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 19, 1960

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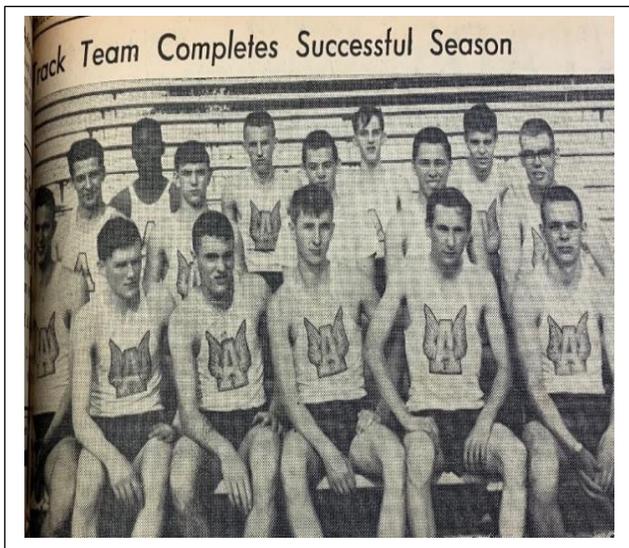
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## 1960s

**Ankeny Little League celebrates** – the opening of Bianchi Little League Fields just south of the Ankeny Airport (S.W. 1<sup>st</sup> and State Streets). Joe Bianchi donated the land and labor to get it into ball diamonds. In the photo above Joe is shown with Charles Conway, city parks commissioner. Mary Houchin and Betty Rorebeck gave gifts of appreciation to the Bianchis. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 19, 1960



**Ankeny Track Team** – Coach Bob VanderLinden and his track team have just completed a very successful season. Above are members of the group who last week finished second in the state meet at Iowa City. Front row: Mike Justice, Dennis DenAdel, Mike Cherry, Gary Lamb, Duane Bateman, and Jim Gorham. Second row: Steve Harkin, Jim Logan, John Davis, Dave Coy, and Dan Bengs. Third row: Ray Brown, Tom Clark, Curt LeBond, and Dave Thompson. Also members of the squad, but not pictured, were Arnie Fischer, Dave Sargent, and Doug Thorson. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 31, 1962

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## 1960s

**1,200 at Baptist Bible College Ground-Breaking** – This is part of the crowd at Sunday's ground-breaking ceremonies for the new Baptist Bible College. The Ankeny airport and John Deere are in the background.

The college, now located in Omaha, hopes to be in operation here by the fall of 1967. Pastor Richard Mohr of Des Moines has charge of the program. Pastor John Polson of the Ankeny Baptist Church gave the greeting and invocation. Mayor Norris Adams and the Ankeny City Council for their help getting the college land annexed, streets, sewers, etc. installed. Mayor Adams, in welcoming the college to Ankeny, announced that Comstock Avenue, which leads to the 30-acre college site from First Street, will henceforth be called College Ave. Several light planes landed at the nearby airport during the services. They contained students now attending the Bible College in Omaha.



Taking part in the ground-breaking was Dr. Patton, former president of the college, Floyd Davis, Chairman of the Board of the College, and the Rev. David Nettleton, president of the college. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 26, 1966

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## 1960s

- Seven trees are planted on the south side of Parkview School by students in observance of Arbor Day. Many of those trees still stand.
- After five years of research, the new Princess phones are ready and available from Northwestern Bell. The phones are one-third the size of regular phones, have lighted dials, and come in five decorator colors.
- Ankeny High School's marching band wins top honors in the Drake Relays parade despite 33-degrees and a blanket of snow covering the ground Saturday.
- A record 212 children register for next fall's kindergarten classes in Ankeny.

*Ankeny Press Citizen – May 4, 1960*

- ..Borgy Borgstrand advertises for help on his garbage truck at \$2 per hour.
- ..Nu-Way Car Wash o Ordnance Road advertises car washes for 25 cents.
- ..Ballard's 66 advertises Tandem Bikes (built for two) for rent at 75 cents.
- *Ankeny Press Citizen – May 4, 1965*
- .Herb Zunkel of Ankeny has been named Iowa Power and Light's Ankeny service man. He s a 15-year employee of IPALCO.
- Cindy Lammert qualified for the state golf meet b shooting an 89 at Woodside.
- Ankeny's Chamber of Commerce is hosting a Kid's Fish Day at a pond yet to be announced. Prizes of bikes, camera, and fishing gear will be awarded for most fish caught and biggest fish caught.

*Ankeny Press Citizen – May 12, 1965*

- Globetrotting Al Bell, complete with 50-inch round elephant foot, speaks to children at Ankeny schools about his latest trip to Kenya, Africa.
- Individual state athletic champions Eric Norris, Lee Schreurs and Jerry Heston are honored at the annual Athletic Banquet.

*Ankeny Press Citizen – May 4, 1970*

- Plans are set for a May 16<sup>th</sup> box social to continue the celebration of Ankeny's Centennial celebration.

*Ankeny Press Citizen – May 4, 1975*

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## 1960s



**Elwell's Food Market Opens** - In the photograph above are the operators of the newly opened Elwell's Food Market at First and Highway 69 in Ankeny. Left to right: Jim Elwell, owner of the store; Denny Elwell, who will work in the produce department, Paul and Doyle Elwell, who will work in the meat department, and Jim Schuessler, son-in-law of the owner, who will be in the grocery department. *Ankeny Press Citizen* – May 12, 1960

## 1980s

**Council OKs \$5 million sale of bonds.** The Ankeny City Council finalized the sale of \$1.5 million in general obligation bonds and nearly \$3.5 million in sewer revenue bonds at a special meeting Monday night. The bond sales will force increases in Ankeny's property tax and sewer rates. City Manager Carl Metzger said the general obligation bond sale won't affect city property taxes until after July 1987. But homeowners may see a 10 percent increase in their sewer bills by next September because of the sewer bond sale. The probable sewer rate increase marks the third in as many years. Rates were increased 15 percent in November 1984 and 30 percent in April 1985. A 10 percent increase would add \$1.13 to an average \$11.33 monthly sewer bill for a four-member Ankeny household. The sewer bonds will pay for the past and current sewer projects. The general obligation bonds will refinance Otter Creek Golf Course's \$505,000 debt, pay for irrigation system improvements at the golf course, and cover a \$525,000 loan from the water department. *DM Register*, May 14, 1986

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**Developer Don Hick helped build Ankeny beyond a “hick” town.** When Don Hick came to Ankeny in 1946, it had a population of 786 and no industry. Today, Ankeny has more than 10,000 residents and an industrial park that stretches for miles – partly because of Hick. As an early developer of Ankeny real estate, Hick had a lot of ground to work with. He started with Ankeny’s first subdivision, Southlawn, and continued through 500 acres of residential and commercial development. “I’ve seen this town grow,” Hick said. “I’ve been involved in a lot of things over the last 40 years, but there were a lot of people with me who worked on these things too.” Much of Hick’s work in Ankeny has been “behind the scenes” work. As a member of the Ankeny Chamber of Commerce for 30 years and the Ankeny Planning and Zoning Commission for 15 years, Hick has helped promote such Ankeny projects as the Des Moines Area Community College and the John Deere factory. The project Hicks is most proud of is the industrial park. In 1967, Hick and other Ankeny businessmen formed the Ankeny Industrial Development Corporation to purchase land and build the park. Although the park has secured several tenants including the Iowa Liquor Commission, Younkers, and Payless Cashways, it is a continuous project. As long as land is available, the industrial park will continue to grow, changing Ankeny’s image. “Ankeny has everything going for it,” Hick said. “We’re not just a bedroom town. We have a lot of industry. I can see even in this present economy, we’ve had quite a bit of new business. I’d like to see our growth balanced between industry and housing. If we can create more jobs, then we’ll get more people living here. I think we’ve got a good future ahead of us.” At 75, Hick said he plans to reduce his participation in local affairs. Although Hick’s plans include golf and fishing, he’s not ready to release the reins completely. “I wanted to sell the ground that I have but instead I decided to come out of retirement a little bit and do some developing,” Hick said. “It would give this town a shot in the arm.” *DM Register, April 2, 1986*



## 1980s

### **Ankeny’s Hawk Helpers aid students.**

More than half of the student population at Ankeny High School next school year will be new, and that concerns counselors there. To alleviate the problem of 600 freshmen and sophomores becoming lost or forgetting their locker combinations, the high school counselors have begun Hawk Helper, a program which students help each other. “The new kids will be terrified,” says high school counselor Kaye Bair. “They’re afraid of being lost, making mistakes and having the older kids laugh at them.” Hawk Helpers, about 40 juniors- and seniors-to-be who volunteered for the job, will help ease those fears,” says Bair. Last week the Helpers gave freshmen- and sophomores-to-be tours of the high school, showing them the restrooms, nurse’s office, library, lunchroom and study halls. In the fall, the Helpers will assist new students with their schedules, show them where their classes are and answer their questions. *DM Register, May 28, 1986*

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## 1980s

**Popular Dominic's Place closes doors after 25 years.** Dominic's Place restaurant in Enterprise, about three miles east of Ankeny, closed its doors at midnight last Saturday and ended a 25-year-old institution in northern Polk County. Its owners, Dominic and Helen Fontana, have decided to retire and sell the business they started in 1960. The couple invited 200 of their closest friends to a private party there last weekend to say goodbye. Dominic's was open only on Friday and Saturday nights – and always to packed houses, said Dominic Fontana, adding that he and his wife just can't handle the crowds anymore. He's 70 and she's 65, and both suffer from arthritis. "We really want to thank our customers," he said. "They were a lot of help to Mom and me." It wasn't unusual for customers to go behind the restaurant's bar and help themselves, or to help serve orders or bus tables, said Fontana, who was born in the coal mining community of Enterprise in 1915 and graduated from high school in 1934 when it was housed in the present Neveln Junior High School. Fontana said his restaurant drew doctors and lawyers, football coaches from Drake University, Iowa State University, and the University of Iowa, bowling leagues from Mitchellville and Urbandale, and just plain folks from Ankeny, Bondurant, Des Moines, Ames, Elkhart, and Newton. Dominic's had a limited menu – pan-fried chicken, spaghetti with meatballs and grilled round steak – all homemade by Helen. "We didn't serve anything that came from a can," said Fontana, who added that Dominic's also served no dessert – not even ice cream – or coffee with meals. Dominic's was located in a coal-mine company store building that Fontana's father, Louis, built in 1920 when Enterprise was a bustling mining community. At one time, Fontana said, Enterprise had a livery stable where people could get rides into Des Moines, a hotel, a drug store, a doctor's office, a pool hall and several general stores. Today, the unincorporated community has four houses, one of which is owned by the Fontanas, and a grain elevator operated by Fontana's brother, Pat. His other brothers, Rex of rural Ankeny, and Joe, who lives in Virginia, are retired, and the Fontana's three sons – Pet, Richard and Dominic, Jr. – all live in Ankeny. The Fontana family is well known in Ankeny because of its athletic prowess. Dominic was quarterback on an Ankeny High School football team that was undefeated from 1932 to 1936. Fontana said he and Helen plan to plant a big garden, fish and hunt. Dominic also plans to spend more time with this citizens band radio and scanner, and Helen plans to spend more time crocheting. *(from Mrs. Virginia Linticum collection, Des Moines Register, 1985 – no month given)*

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**1983 ... As Years Go, It was Pretty Good !** (May excerpts from the article)

## 1980s

May 1983:

- Ankeny summer celebration gets new name, Ankeny Summer Fest.
- Ankeny Dental Hygienists 2-mile Tooth-a-thon winners are Stan Smith, Lois Sieman, Craig Hjelmeng and John Weigel.
- Walnut Street Gallery opened at corner of SW Third by Max Brewbaker.
- Ankeny Youth Sports Complex at DMACC is dedicated.
- Ammonia emergencies training completed by Ankeny Fire Department volunteers.
- Reserve police force being formed here.
- Retirement coffee honors Ruth Bond after 40 years of teaching.
- Chamber to sponsor first Ankeny Chamber Open golf tourney.
- 71-year-old Lawrence Howard pedals from California, via Arkansas, to visit Ankeny area relatives.
- Optimist Club "Respect for Law" awards to APD Sgt. Merlin Christians and former State Sen. Gary Baugher.
- Ankeny Area Artists in Action disbanded; proceeds given to Ankeny Arts Council for continuance of sponsored art shows.
- Extra-curricular school activities, eligibility and sponsors discussed by the school board.

(from Mrs. Linticum collection, DM Register, December 1983)



**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.** The children of Wilbur and Mary Conkel invite you to celebrate their parents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, June 2, 1985, between the hours of 2:00 -4:00 p.m. at Hall's Pond Vu at Hwy 415 across from Prairie Flower campgrounds between Ankeny and Polk City. We request your presence, but please, no presents. Mrs. Doris Bunz collection, Ankeny Press-Citizen, May 28, 1985

**Leah Campbell 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Open House.** The daughter, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of Leah Campbell will be hosts at an Open House on Sunday, June 2, 1985, on the occasion of her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Friends and relatives are invited to join them at the Ankeny Church of the Brethren, 417 S.E. Grant St. in Ankeny from 2:00 to 4:00 that afternoon. Mrs. Campbell has been a member of this church for over 50 years and a resident of the Ankeny area since 1932. It is requested no gifts be brought. Mrs. Doris Bunz collection, Ankeny Press-Citizen, May 28, 1985

