

The Beginning of the Figueroa Ballroom 1938

Livermore, Iowa 50558

By Kirk Hundertmark



In March of 1880, "Doc" Russell constructed a 20' x 120' brick building which was the "St. James Hotel." In the late teens the "Rossing Sisters," Amalia and Kate purchased the "St. James Hotel" and along with this they added a dining room and café along the east side of the hotel which became known as the "Rossing Sisters Hotel." On October 29, 1922, the "Rossing Sisters" sold their large "Rossing Sisters Hotel" that Kate, Amelia and brother Anton Rossing had run as the "Rossing Sisters Hotel" for thirty years and they also sold the smaller hotel near the Rock Island depot to E.A. Geisel of Jackson, Minnesota and was the business was leased to Mr. Tony Mack. After a few years, the "Rossing Sisters" again took over the hotel and ran it until about 1936, they then moved to California and lived with a niece, Deodota (Rossing) Maxey. They leased the "Rossing Sisters Hotel" it to a niece, Dorothy (and Carl) Pedersen who ran and managed it until 1938. The hotel went up for tax sale and Lester R. Smith purchased the Tax Title and was waiting for the time to run out on the right of redemption.

On May 12, 1938 Lester R. Smith & Helen Smith from Waterloo, Iowa succeeded in obtaining the ownership of the old "St. James Hotel" and started his plans and preparations for the new café and amusement hall. The week of May 16, 1938 work began on tearing down the old St.

James hotel because the brick on the front to the building was fall down onto the sidewalk. Mr. Smith hired Hans Madison and his workers to start work, but shortly after Mr. Madison got slightly injured by having a radiator tip over on him. Since then he mostly bossed, leaving the heavy labor to his fellow workers.

Lester Smith applied for a building permit with the Livermore City Council on June 7th 1938, according to the June 16, 1938 Livermore Gazette paper to remodel the old bank for his café and to erect a frame building, 45 feet by 100 feet, veneered with slate shingles of fire resisting quality the old St. James Hotel site for a new amusement hall. Mr. Lester Smith was working industriously every day with helpers to get his new restaurant in to shape so that he could house his family there and open up the café business, but would be leaving the construction and remodeling of the west portion (The Old St. James Hotel /Rossing Sisters Hotel) portion of the proposed building on the corner lot to a later day, or until the best use of make of it.

June 20 1938 during the tearing down of the old St. James hotel, Mr. Smith soon found out that the upper story of the hotel for many years has been the home of a colony of bees, which have resisted all efforts to discourage them from using the building. Mr. Smith finally inserted a hose into their abiding place, connected it with an automobile and pumped exhaust gas int them until they were all gone or dead.

June 23 1938 Hans Madison and his workers commence the building of the foundation for the structure that Lester R. Smith plans to erect on the site of the old St. James Hotel.

On Sunday July 10, 1938 Lester opened "Smith's Café" with a Fried Spring Chicken Dinner. What was formerly the old "Farmers savings Bank" building located on the east side of the "St. James Hotel," and this building has undergone a great transformation. The front of the old bank was torn out and rebuilt for the cafe and Lester's family settled in the building. Mr. Smith now turned his attention to the erection of the amusement hall that he plans to build adjoining the café on the west, on the site of the old St. James hotel that will be 45 feet by 100 feet, which will afford elbow room for quite a few dancers and other acrobats, or even a movie show.

In the Thursday Livermore Gazette paper on August 4, 1938, Mr. Smith building amusement hall was started under the workmanship of Geo. Lenertz continued with his able helpers who assumed proportions that gave them an idea of the completed structure. Mr. Smith said that it would meet the requirements of almost anything from a social dance to a small circus along with out-of-door gatherings which are prevented on account of bad weather will find ample space to congregates. Mr. Smith christened the hall in advance with a fitting name "Figueroa" and the Grand Opening of the new ballroom was to follow soon!

Thursday August 11, 1938 Mr. Lenertz and his gang of carpenters started to lay the Maplewood floor in the new "Figueroa" dance hall.

Lester Smith said that he named it the "Figueroa Ball Room," after the longest street in Los Angeles, California. Figueroa Street is a major north-south street in Los Angeles County, California, spanning from the Los Angeles neighborhood of Wilmington north to Eagle Rock. The street is named for General José Figueroa (1792 – September 29, 1835), governor of Alta California from 1833 to 1835, who oversaw the secularization of the missions of California. Figueroa is a Spanish surname of Galician origin!

GRAND OPENING
OF THE NEW
Figueroa Ball Room
Thursday, Sept. 1st

The GORDON LEACH TEN PIECE BAND of Mason City, Iowa, will pay for this Opening Night. This is a well known, talented band, operating in a wide territory, and come highly recommended. A good time, with snappy music, is assured all who care to dance.

We Have Arranged Twelve Booths

So that the occupants may watch, look and listen, eat or drink, without interfering with the people who are engaged in the pleasures of the dance. We expect to hold dances each Thursday evening, with few exceptions, such as holidays. We have also engaged a Twelve Piece Band for Labor Day night, a good time is also assured for that date.

Watch your local newspaper for further details regarding bands and dates. Also, we appreciate your criticism, either favorable or unfavorable, as we sometimes have ideas that vary—so let's have it.

Figueroa Ball Room

Livermore Gazette 25 August 1938

The Grand Opening of the New "Figueroa Ball Room" was held on Thursday, September 1, 1938. The "Gordon Leach Ten Piece Band" from Mason City Iowa played, they were a well-known talented band playing snappy music. Mr. Smith said that he arranged twelve booths so that the occupants could watch, look and listen, eat or drink, without interfering with the people who were engaged in the pleasures of the dance.

Labor Day Monday, September 5, 1938 was the Old Settlers Log Cabin Picnic and, in the evening, the "Carl Nebee's Band" from St. WOI in Ames, furnished the music for the Grand Ball that was held in the New "Figueroa Ball Room" that was beautifully lighted and decorated, and

furnished with every convenience. The report was that well over 600 people attended and there was no parking space in town to be found.

Thursday, September 15, 1938 – “Byron Dunbar and his Hotel Biltmore Orchestra” played, they are an outstanding band with plenty of “Wim & Wigor”

Thursday, September 22, 1938 – “W. M. T. German Band,” meet your friends at the “Figueroa” and see the Dutchmen do their stuff.

Thursday, September 29, 1938 -- “Court Hussey” one of Iowa’s finest dance band and they have been featured on the NBC Network.

The Livermore Community Boosters will be presenting at the “Feagin-Wilson Players in person at the new “Figueroa Ballroom.” The show consisted of talented radio and stage performers, offering the latest plays and a variety of clean, wholesome vaudeville. The shows were every Saturday Night starting on Saturday, September 24, 1938 and they ran through the fall and winter season. The shows were sponsored by the merchants of Livermore and everyone was told to ask for their merchants for courtesy tickets!

Some of the following Bands and Orchestra’s played during the 1938 era were:

Thursday, October 6, 1938 – “Geo. Shuey and His Famous Dixieland Swing Band” Thursday, October 13, 1938 – Gordon Leach and His Orchestra (Mr. Leach Played during their Opening Dance). Thursday October 20, 1938 – “Evan Morgan and His Orchestra.” Tuesday, October 25, 1938 -- “Joe Fisher and His Orchestra” playing both Old and New Dance Melodies, then on Thursday October 27, 1938 the “Woody Sargo and His Orchestra” played. Thursday, November 3, 1938 – “Leo Doeges and His Orchestra.” On Tuesday, November 8, 1938 – “Earl Hunt and His Orchestra” this famous band has created “Big Noise” and on Friday, November 11, 1938 -- will be the outstanding “Don Kelley and His Very Fine Ten Piece Band.” Thursday, November 17, 1938 – “Court Hussey.” Thursday, November 24, 1938 – “Red Heggen and His Nine-Piece Swing Band.” Thursday, December 1, 1938 – “Bobby Griggs and His Popular Swing Band” Thursday, December 8, 1938 – by special request “Gordon Leach and His Very Excellent Band.” Thursday, December 15, 1938 – “Red Sievers and His Very Excellent Band” this was an outstanding twelve-piece Swing Band. Thursday, December 22, 1938 – “Al Sky and His Twelve Piece Swing Band” brand new band to this territory and they have a fine reputation. Monday, December 26, 1938 “Leo Doeges and His Very Excellent Orchestra” and on Thursday, December 29, 1938 – the “Al Menke and his famous Swing Band.” The last band of the year was a New Year’s Eve party with “Hal Carpenter and his Band” along with Balloons, Confetti and Noise-Makers.

Some of the following Bands and Orchestra's played during the 1939 era;

Thursday, January 5, 1939 – “Chase Evans and His Twelve-Piece Swing Band.” Thursday, January 12, 1938 – “Woody Sargo and His Famous Swing Band.” Thursday, March 2, 1938 – “Gordon Leach and His Celebrated Swing Band” they have also added three electric violins, five trombones, four trumpets and a wonderful singing trio, you will not want to miss. Thursday, May 18, 1939 – Maurie Sherman and His Merry Garden Ballroom Orchestra of Chicago (See Poster). The Figueroa Ballroom was equipped with a modern Cooling system for dancing comfort. On Tuesday July 4, 1939 the “Vance Dixon and His Orchestra” played, then on Thursday July 6th 1939 the “Lloyd Wells and His Popular Swing Band” played! The moto was to come and dance at the Figueroa Ball Room and stay “Cool Like an Iceberg”. The ballroom sometimes had crowds of 800 to 900 people attending. Back then the ballroom could hire a 11-piece band for around \$60 to \$75 nightly, such as “Lloyd Hanson and his orchestra”, “Don Lee Band”, the ballroom also held two “USO Shows” however Mr. Smith was never able to get the “Lawrence Welk Band.” The “Lawrence Welk Band” did play in Livermore, just across the street to the West at the “Miller Opera House” a building that held 400 people and was built in 1891 by W.F. “Editor” Miller.

On Thanksgiving night in 1940 they had one of the largest crowds ever in attendance, with 841 tickets sold.

Some of the following Bands and Orchestra's played during this era.

- Thursday, April 24, 1941 – Ott Menke Orchestra (See Attached Poster)
- Thursday, May 1, 1941 – Bennett Greten
- Tuesday, May 6, 1941 – Six Fat Dutchmans (Another Mixed Dance)
- Thursday, May 8, 1941 – Doc Lawson on His Hammond Electric Organ
- Thursday, May 15, 1941 – Hank winder (A Vic Schroeder Band)
- Thursday, July 3, 1941 – Dawn Dance & Floor Show Poster – Betty Mae Harris All-Iowa Revue Hawaiian Hula Dances and Lloyd Wells and his orchestra (See Attached Poster)
- Thursday April 9, 1942 – Paul Moorhead
- Thursday, July 2, 1942 – Ralph Slade and His Orchestra
- Thursday, July 9, 1942 – Gene Pieper and His Popular Orchestra
- Thursday, July 16, 1942 – Ray Alderson and His Orchestra

In 1942 the dance hall was taken over and managed by Amalia and John J. Groh, who then purchased the ballroom on November 30th 1943 after the Smith's moved to Nora, Minnesota.

Frank (Bill) E and Helen Lynn Nunamaker bought the place in November of 1945. On Thursday May 12, 1949 -- "Lee Barron" played at the Figueroa Ballroom, admission was a \$1.00 tax included. The Figueroa now served Cocoa-Cola and 7-Up in the bottle only 10 cents tax included.

On Tuesday, February 27th 1951, Bill's Café and the Figueroa Ballroom were sold to Mr. Ace C. and Irene M. Bordwell along with Ace Jr. Bordwell as first parties with F. G. Buske and Lucille Buske as Second parties. Ace Jr. Bordwell said that they took immediate possession and that after some remodeling and redecorating, they would be open for business on Monday March 5th, 1951. They will open under the name Ace's Ballroom and Ace Café, they will be serving meals as well as lunches in connection with the ballroom, with their first dance being held on March 17th, 1951 St. Patrick's Day.

On August 29, 1956 it transferred from A. C. Bordwell, Jr. and Nadine Bordwell to Ace. C. Bordwell and café.

In 1956, Leonard and Alice Roseau operated "Rosey's Café" that he purchased from Fred Buske, then converted it from a dance hall into a roller-skating rink and a bowling alley.

In 1960 Ray Van Voohris became the manager of the Livermore new bowling alley and reported that league bowling would start on September 5, 1960. Members of the new board of directors were: J.F. Hamm, Richard Sawyer, Jerry Foreman, L.N. Bormann and James Lempke. Officers were: Chet Baker, President – Don Logue, Secretary and R. Wilson, Treasurer. Mr. and Mrs. Allan Sinclair took over the bowling alley and the past four years Leonard Rosenau (Rosey) has been manager until it closed in January 1972, Mr. Rosenau had "Rosey's café" next door to the bowling alley which was managed separately and Rosey continued to operate. Rosey's plans to reopen as The Livermore Ballroom, Formerly Livermore Lanes, a 45 ft. by 120 ft building that was newly remodeled and hosted dancing again on St. Patrick's Day Friday, March 17, 1972 with the Arch Thorson's Dixieland Band from Fort Dodge, Iowa. Dancing was held for 22 years in the building before it became a bowling alley in 1960.

The "United Countrymen" one of the first in Country Western Music on Saturday night May 20, 1972.

COME DANCE IN THE NEWLY-REMODELED
LIVERMORE BALLROOM EACH SATURDAY!

DANCE TO
THE
United Countrymen
First In Country Western Music

LIVERMORE BALLROOM
SATURDAY, MAY 20

Dance from 9:00 P.M. til 1:00 A.M.
FOR RESERVATIONS CALL 379-1352

LIVERMORE BALLROOM
(FORMERLY LIVERMORE LANES)
LIVERMORE, IOWA

FISH FRY EVERY FRI. NITE
AT ROSEY'S CAFE

Rosey's Café will still hold Fish Fry every Friday night! June 1974 Rosey's Café and Livermore Ballroom started serving boasted chicken and holding dancing every Friday and Saturday Night!

Friday, January 31, 1975 – Roger Hanes and His Orchestra played and on Saturday, February 1, 1975 – Verne Claussen and His Orchestra played for Mr. and Mrs. Bob Bormann 25th Wedding Dance.

MEET YOUR FRIENDS AT THE
LIVERMORE BALLROOM
LIVERMORE, IOWA

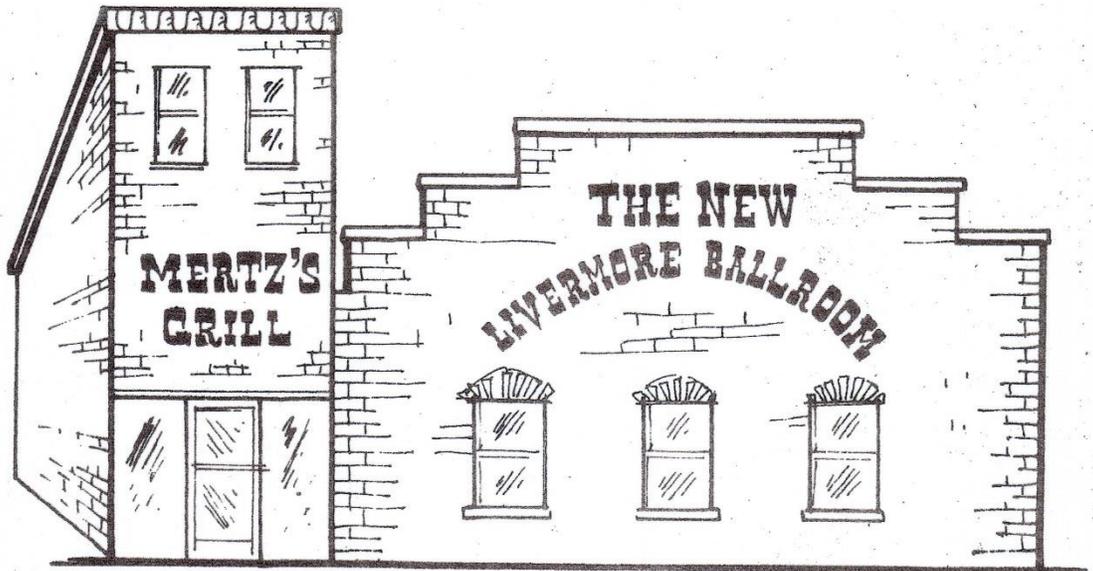
March 25, 1976

Friday, March 26
Dance To
**ERV REUTZEL AND THE
HOOLIE BOHEMIANS**
playing all your favorite
waltzes, polkas and fox trots
Admission \$2.25

Saturday, March 27
Free Wedding Dance
Curran and Vinsand
Dance To
**KEN FEUTO AND
THE SHOWMEN**
Public Invited



Reservations – Call 379-1352



Livermore, Iowa

IN THE TRADITION
OF "RURAL"

THE NEW LIVERMORE BALLROOM BRINGS
THE BEST COUNTRY ROCK, BLUE
GRASS PACKAGE THIS SIDE OF
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE !

FRI. AND SAT., APRIL 23, 24

1976

DON'T MISS . . .

LONGSHOT

ABSOLUTELY
DYNAMITE !

DOORS OPEN 6 SHOWS 9 TO 1 A.M.
ADMISSION \$2.00 BEER 25c GLASS

PLEASE, YOU MUST SHOW I.D.

Then in March of 1976, Leonard A. "Rosey" Rosenau and Irene A. Roseau sold it to Melvin Mertz of Algona, Iowa. Mr. Mertz said the ballroom would be closed until April and that he intends to continue to book the Polka and big-band-sound groups that have frequented Livermore in the recent years, however he really would like to bring in entertainers from the rock, county western and bluegrass fields of music. Mr. Mertz said that he also plans to continue to operate the Livermore Cafe with much of the same personnel, but will make a name change to "Mertz's Grill", he will also be looking at expanding the operations to be open on Sundays. The "Blueblazes" played on Saturday, June 5, 1976.

Early Friday morning June 22, 1979 the Livermore Ballroom building where good times prevailed for two to three generations burned down to the ground, thus ending the history of a nearly 100-year-old building. Mr. Tom Mulso who had leased the ballroom for only six months from Mel Mertz of Algona, was going to give up his lease that expired July 14, 1979, said that he doubted that a new one would be built for there was no insurance! The Livermore Ballroom was fully stocked for that Friday night dance with band "Shatter" and on Saturday night would have been "Judd". The Livermore ballroom kept the City of Livermore, Iowa swinging for many years!

Thursday, April 24, 1941 – Ott Menke Orchestra Poster

FIGUEROA BALLROOM
LIVERMORE
THURSDAY, APRIL 24

COMING
Thurs. May 1, Bennett Grahn
Thurs. May 8, No. 1 Dutchman
Thurs. May 15, The Lowest
Thurs. May 22, Hank Winder
A 10. Orchestra Band

**OTT
MENKE**
and his
ORCHESTRA
"The Band You Have Been Waiting For!"

Thursday, July 3, 1941 – Dawn Dance & Floor Show Poster

**DAWN DANCE
& FLOOR SHOW**

FIGUEROA BALLROOM

LIVERMORE, THURSDAY, JULY 3RD

Betty Mae Harris
and Her All-Iowa Revue
featuring the authentic
HAWAIIAN HULA DANCES
Spend a Night in Hawaii . . . You'll Love It!

Dancing from 11 P.M. to 3 A.M. to the Music of

**Lloyd Wells**
and his Orchestra



Tom Waller Photo

Say Wiring Caused Ballroom Blaze

An overload in the wiring caused the fire which destroyed the **Livermore Ballroom** Friday, June 22, according to State Fire Marshal Jerry Corbett of Spencer, who was called to investigate the 3:30 a.m. fire. He said it probably started in the ceiling of the building. Fire chief Everett Andersen said the ceiling had been leaking water and it may have gotten into the wiring and caused the fire, because water would have overloaded the wiring, shorting it out. Above, **Livermore** fireman Ron Hamilton [foreground] and Lyle Nelson [behind Hamilton] and others remove hose from ballroom debris the morning of the fire.

By RUTH HALL
Staff writer

LIVERMORE — The Livermore Ballroom, a landmark which drew crowds of 250 to 300 persons to listen to rock and bluegrass bands every weekend here, was destroyed by fire early Friday morning.

The two-story wood frame structure was built in the 1930s and had been used as a dance hall, bowling alley and roller skating rink. Melvin Mertz, Algona, bought the building about 3½ years ago and since that time the ballroom had featured bands from all over the midwest on Friday and Saturday nights.

Mrs. Margaret Frideres, who lives across the alley south of the ballroom, turned in the alarm summoning the Livermore Fire Department after she woke up and smelled smoke at about 3:30 a.m. Friday.

"I got out of bed and looked out the window, and I thought it was foggy out," Mrs. Frideres said. "Then I went in our back room and I thought our house was on fire — the room was full of smoke."

Mrs. Frideres said she woke her husband and they opened the back doors and then saw that the smoke was coming from the ballroom. She

said she called the fire department, and by the time the trucks arrived the front part of the ballroom was in flames.

The area where the fire apparently started at the north end of the building contained bars, pinball machines and pool tables.

Firemen from Bode and Lu Verne were called to assist the Livermore department, and Mrs. Frideres estimated that about 50 firemen were at the scene. The roof of the ballroom caved in at about 4 a.m., and Mrs. Frideres said electricity to their house and the neighborhood was knocked out by the fire

Mrs. Frideres said the wind was blowing from the north, and firemen stayed on the roof of their house putting out sparks from the fire. Firemen also wet down a large propane tank in the alley between

the dance hall and the Frideres house, she said.

"It's a good thing I woke up when I did, or our house would have been gone, too" she said. She said she and her husband dressed their two sons and took them to a friend's house, and by the time they returned their roof was covered with hot cinders.

Although the blaze was under

control by about 5 a.m. the rubble continued to smolder Friday morning. An apartment located above the ballroom was damaged by a fire about two years ago, and had been vacant since that time.

Mrs. Frideres said as far as she knew the last time anyone was in the building was Tuesday night. Mertz said the ballroom was only open on weekends, unless there was a special party. Mertz operated the ballroom until last January, when he leased the business to Tom Mulso.

Mertz said Friday morning he had not been able to talk to fire officials and did not know the cause of the blaze. The building contained about 6,000 square feet of space, and was insured for \$60,000, Mertz said.

New bars were added and the interior of the structure was remodeled after Mertz bought the ballroom, but he said no major changes had been made since that time. Although he said he was not sure how many people the ballroom would hold, Mertz said there had been as many as 800 persons there at times.

The Livermore Ballroom, where good times prevailed for two to three generations, burned to the ground early Friday morning, and Tom Mulso, the man who leased the building from owner Mel Mertz of Algona, said he doubted a new one would be built.

Neither firemen nor Mulso cared to speculate on how or where the fire may have started.

MULSO SAID he hoped Mertz had insurance on the building and that it would cover the inventory, because he (Mulso) had approximately \$3,000 invested in inventory and did not have insurance for it. Mulso said he didn't know how to get in touch with Mertz to find out.

Nothing was saved from the building after the fire was discovered about 3:45 a.m. Mulso said business records were not kept in the building.

FIREMEN FROM Livermore, LuVerne and Bode kept heat and hot cinders from the fire from starting other buildings on fire. A vacant lot separates the ballroom from a grocery store, and an alley is between the building and the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Frideres and their two young children.

Mrs. Frideres said she awoke about 3:40 a.m. and smelled smoke. She awakened her husband and said she thought the house might be on fire. They looked outside and saw billows of smoke rolling from the back of the ballroom.

"MY GOD, it's the dance hall," Bill told his wife. She called the fire department and the Frideres took the kids to

a friends house. Mrs. Frideres said clocks at her house stopped at 3:59 a.m., indicating the loss of electricity due to the fire, and she said by the time firemen arrived flames were through the roof of the ballroom and were also coming out the front.

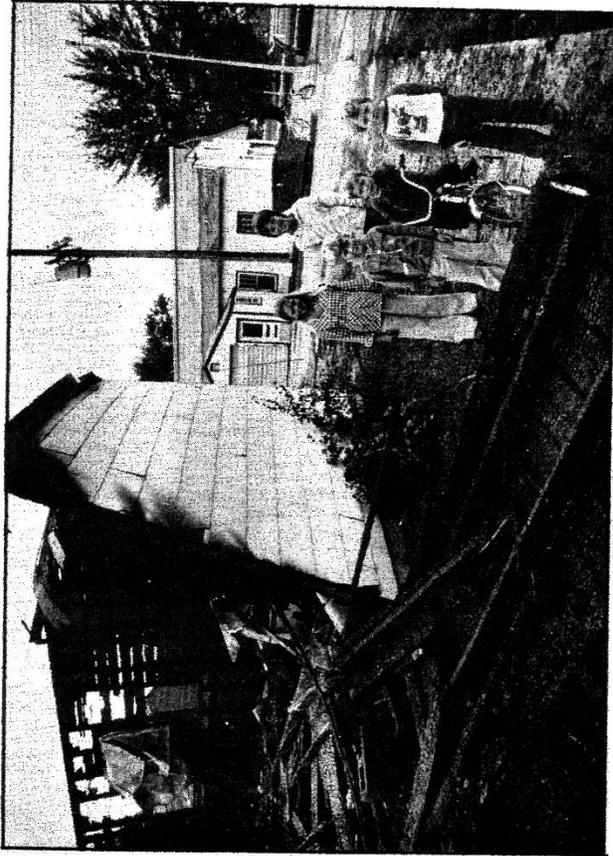
"There were hot coals on our roof, and the house was so filled with smoke that you couldn't breathe," Mrs. Frideres said. "I thought our place would go too. I still think it would have if I hadn't woke up."

THE FIREMEN watered down the grocery store east of the building and the Frideres residence south of it. They also watered down the Frideres propane tank, which was a great cause of concern in Mrs. Frideres' mind.

Mulso said he received a telephone call at his rural Thor home about 7 a.m. from a Ft. Dodge radio station inquiring about the fire. He said it was he was in the building the afternoon before and "everything was normal."

Mulso, 28, is a native of Sherburn, Minn. where he played on a state championship basketball team. He graduated from Augustana College in Sioux Falls and later became associated with a talent booking agency in Minneapolis. He said he leased the ballroom in Livermore from Mertz for a period of six months and had informed Mertz he didn't intend to renew the lease when it expired July 14.

"WE HAD BAD weather (affecting ballroom attendance) five of the first 12



Tom Waller Photos

Close Call For Frideres Family

The Bill Frideres home [background, above] was dangerously close to the blaze at the Livermore Ballroom, which was destroyed Friday. Mrs. Frideres smelled smoke and firemen arrived in time to keep hot coals from starting the Frideres roof on fire. Pictured by the ballroom rubble are (from left) Laura Landerman, 8, Jim Landolt, 6, Scott Frideres, 3, Stephani Landerman, 10, and Jarret Frideres, 5.

weekends I was here," he said. "We even had one night when fog kept people away."

Mulso said crowds were good for well-known bands, but so-so for lesser known groups. He said he put some picnic tables in the building, did some remodeling, and, not long ago, had some re-wiring done.

Stocking of beer and liquor had just taken place, he said, in preparation for the weekend

dances--"Shatter" on Friday night and "Judd" on Saturday night. He said the groups would not have to be paid for the cancelled appearance because the fire was "an act of God" provision in the contracts with the groups.

MRS. FRIDERES said she and her husband just put a new roof on their residence three weeks ago and intends to reside and remodel it. Damage

was minor. Looking on the positive side, she said at least they will be able to park near their residence on Friday nights for a change and their sidewalk won't be used for a "chopper racetrack," anymore.

"This (loss of the ballroom) will hurt some of the businesses in town," she said.

Fire Destroys Landmark Livermore Ballroom Frida y early morning June 22 1979

Fire destroys landmark Livermore Ballroom



Livermore Ballroom, in ruins after fire in June of 1979.

The Party's Over, But Not Forgotten

Livermore was a lively spot since it began 100 years ago. Saloons and watering holes were plentiful in the early days, as they are now, but the residents were enthusiastic about other forms of entertainment, too.

In 1891, W.F. Miller, editor of the Livermore Gazette (see related story in this issue) built an opera house measuring 70' x25'. It would hold up to 400 people and was named simply the "Miller Opera House."

It had a fancy interior with real opera seats, a fine stage and elaborate decor. Well-known operas treated the Livermore residents to wonderful performances.

Sometime around 1920 Frank Collins purchased the opera house and changed the entertainment to dances, stage shows and silent movies. Later in the decade, Bert Sheppard took over the building, enlarged it and made it into a roller-skating rink. As the skating interest subsided, it became a repair shop and later a factory in which to make cement blocks. Iner Fredricksen finally tore it down.

ANOTHER PROMINENT fixture on the Livermore social scene was the St. James Hotel, built in March of 1880 by a

"Doc" Russell. It was 20'x120' and made of brick. The Rossing sisters, Kate and Amalia, purchased it prior to 1920 along with the dining room and cafe.

The St. James Hotel changed hands a few times over the years. For a portion of those years, it was called the "Figueroa", named after a Los Angeles street meaning "plenty space."

The largest crowd for the Figueroa was Thanksgiving of 1940 when 841 tickets were sold. In 1945, Bill and Helen Nunamaker bought the hall. They sold it to Ace and Irene Bordwell in 1951 and they in turn sold it in 1956 to Leonard and Alice Rosenau.

THE ROSENAUS tried it as a roller rink and bowling alley and then turned it back to a dance hall. In March of 1976, they sold it to Mel Mertz, who drew large crowds with his rock 'n roll and country western attractions.

A spectacular blaze ended the 100-year history of the St. James Hotel when, under the "Livermore Ballroom" label, it burned to the ground in June of 1979. It would have been a grand old place in which to celebrate this weekend's Centennial.

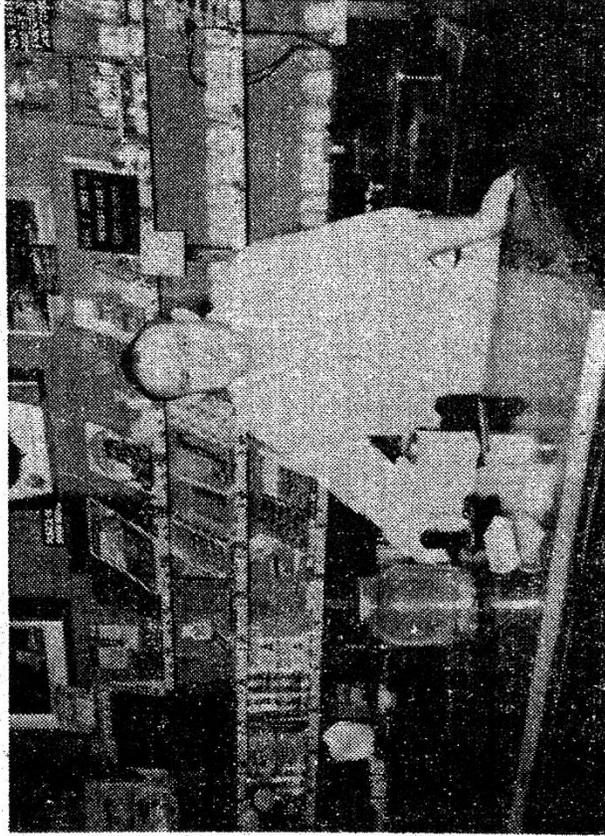
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 1959

Roseys-Good Food & Service

Leonard Rosenau, genial owner and operator of Rosey's Cafe is a comparative newcomer to Livermore, having bought out his present business in August, 1955, coming here from Fort Dodge.

In the past year he has inaugurated a weekly fish supper every Friday night, which has grown increasingly popular with the local residents. His wife, Alice, assists in the cafe. Just recently the family moved into the Roy Brown home in the south part of town. They have three sons, Mike, Chris and Gary.

"Rosey" served in the Field Artillery after World War II, spending some time in Korea. He is a member of the local Lions Club & the Livermore Boosters and thinks Livermore is a fine town in which to do business.



Pictured here is "Rosey" behind the counter of his Cafe. He and his wife provide excellent food and fine service.

'I Thought The Roof Would Fall In From The Vibration'

Re-Opening Of Livermore Ballroom

March 20, 1972

LIVERMORE (Special) - "This should change things around Livermore," a 21 year-old from Livermore was saying. "People are looking forward to it . . ."

"It" is the 45' x 120' Livermore Lanes building which has been converted into a ballroom, the Livermore Ballroom. Leonard "Rosey" Rosenau's remodeled place opened for dancing last Friday, St. Patrick's Day, with Arch Thorson's Dixieland Band from Ft. Dodge providing the sounds.

The opening was really a re-opening, since dancing took place in the building for 22 years before it became a bowling alley in 1960. And how!

One of the visitors to the "new" ballroom Friday was 76 year-old Lester Smith of Livermore, the man who bought the St. James Hotel and changed it into the original ballroom--the Figueroa Ballroom back in 1938. "We opened on Labor Day," Smith recalled. "I didn't know anything about dance halls then but I found out soon enough. Named it Figueroa after some street in California. I wrote for a history of the name, but I don't remember now what it meant."

WILD DAYS

The days of the Figueroa Ballroom were wild days. According to one resident who had just taken his first look at the new Livermore Ballroom, "the war years were the wildest. They'd close at 2 a.m., and they'd be knocking on the door at 6 a.m. for more beer . . . sometimes had five or six fights a night."

Smith said he had tried to prepare for that kind of thing. "I had three cops hired for that first night. Boy did we have crowds. . . sometime 800 to 900 people . . . I thought the roof would fall in from the vibration . . . I'd end up with two bushel baskets full of busted whiskey bottles . . . The only way to get them out at night was to turn off the lights."



Talking About Dance Hall Business

Lester Smith (left) and 'Rosey' Rosenau inside the new Livermore Ballroom, formerly the Figueroa Ballroom. Livermore is 15 miles south of Algona. (Algona Newspapers photo)

Wild as it was at times, those times are apparently remembered more out of nostalgia than out of fear or regret. The town even acquired a new nickname, Liquormore.

But there are other memories too. . . like the two USO dances for which Smith charged 25 cents and a pack of cigarettes for admission. He said he shipped the "two or three" cases of cigarettes to the USO.

The St. Joe Parish Hall nearby was also the scene of wedding dances. Smith said that although the dances were competition, he decided to help if he could, arranging for bands to play at the hall. "Before too long that whole St. Joe group was showing up here (Figueroa)."

Smith said he sometimes had bands booked a full year ahead, and he has the contracts to prove it. The contracts also said something about inflation. For example, an 11-piece band could be hired for \$60 to \$75 nightly back in 1939, but today such a group would cost \$400 to \$500 "We never got Lawrence Welk," Smith said, "but we did get some name bands." He remembered Lloyd Hanson and his orchestra in 1939 (11 men for \$75 a night), the Don Lee Band in 1939 (9 men, 1 leader and a girl singer for \$60 a night), and a "colored band from Omaha" that got snowed in along with the customers during a blizzard.

Asked whether they had chorus girls back then, Smith said, "Why we didn't know what go-go girls were then. We charged 60 cents for men and 40 cents for women. . . get more women there that way." And of course, it takes women at a dance to attract the men.

HELL BROKE LOOSE

The Figueroa held its public dances on Thursday nights and held wedding dances between. The wedding dances left a lasting impression on Smith: "The dance would be pretty calm until the bride and groom danced. . . then all hell broke loose. I can remember pouring nine half-barrels of beer," he said, going through the motions of holding an open spigot while moving cups under it.

PEOPLE, TIMES CHANGE

Smith must have had a knack for attracting the crowds, even if the dancers were not seasoned drinkers. For example, he spoke of a three-day Labor Day promotion and a battle of (two) bands on the same stage both the kind of thing you might expect in the 1960s rather than in the late 30s.

Rosenau and his wife, who works with him in the cafe next to the ballroom, don't expect to have the same kind of ballroom as years before because people have changed with the times. They "change dance night, for example, to Saturday nights from now on. And they don't expect a recurrence of the violence.

Rosey said he'd police the place himself, adding: "People argue now, not fight. One's scared, and the other's damned glad of it!"

March 1, 2000
By Marie Wilson
SERVICES HELD

Funeral services were held for Leonard "Rosey" Rosenau last week, on Monday, March 6, at the Presbyterian Church in Onida, SD, with the Rev. Rolly Kemink officiating. Interment was at the Union Cemetery in Livermore, where friends paid their respects to "Rosey" and to his family at graveside services conducted by his son, the Rev. Garry Rosenau of Faribault, MN, on Wednesday morning, March 8.

The family greeted friends at the cemetery following the service, and at the Senior Center in Livermore, where they gathered for lunch, prepared and served by Marge Wilson, Marvell Barton, Arlene Schultz, Viola Morey, and Marie Wilson. Both occasions were well attended.

"Rosey" was born on May 8, 1926, at Ree Heights, SD. He was one of 14 children born to Christian and Katherine (Mueller) Rosenau, who all preceded him in death. Following his education in Ree Heights, he served in the U.S. Army in Korea, from 1947-1948.

After his discharge, he moved to Fort Dodge, where he married Irene (Alice) Harrison in 1950. He worked for Union Freightways from 1949-1956. He and his family moved to Livermore in 1956 and operated Rosey's Cafe and the Livermore Ballroom until 1976, when they moved four miles north of Rolfe, where they bought the vacated Des Moines Township School and converted it to the popular DMT Ballroom and Cafe.

Alice died in 1977 after a lengthy illness. With Rosey's accommodating reputation, many area families followed him to the DMT for their wedding receptions, anniversaries and other special occasions.

The DMT was also the location for Cyclone sports banquets, attended by Iowa State coaches and area alumni and fans.

Rosey married Carla Davis Jones in 1978, a teacher of English, art and the drama coach in the

Gilmore City-Bradgate High School. They moved to Gilmore City following his retirement from the DMT in 1989.

Carla retired from her teaching career in 1999. They moved to Onida, SD, that fall, in November. A niece, Cindy Davis Menedez of Omaha, NE, had made her home with Rosey and Carla.

During his 20 years in business in Livermore, it was always known that "Rosey" had a "wooden leg" as the result of a trucking accident when he was 28-years-old. Though on his feet regularly in his work, it was also known that he suffered in silence with his prosthesis, making frequent trips to Minneapolis for adjustments, but always determined to overcome any adversity, including the effects of a stroke five years ago.

Rosey was an innovator -- if one idea became stale, he would be a convincing voice in the promotion of another. Thus, the Livermore Bowling Lanes was born. \$100 shares were sold in 1960-61 in the community and volunteers installed the lanes and pin-setting equipment.

"Rosey" operated his cafe, the bowling lanes were operated independently by managers hired by the corporation, and the old and young, male and female, in the area became league bowlers.

Eventually, its management reverted to "Rosey." When this venture became unprofitable, the lanes were removed and once again Livermore had a ballroom. The shares became collector's items, but considered as an investment in main street.

"Rosey" sold the business in 1976 and it continued as a ballroom until 1979, when it was destroyed by fire. "Rosey" is fondly remembered for his never-failing enthusiasm and main street promotions.

He was Livermore's "great communicator." What greater legacy than to be remembered for all of the good times, good food, and where good friends met at "Rosey" -- immortal in memory.

And the bonding was mutual, with his decision a couple of years ago to make arrangements for his final return to Livermore. "Rosey's" sudden death from a massive heart attack occurred in St. Mary's Hospital in Pierre, SD, where he was recovering as a surgical patient. He was 73-years-old.

He is survived by his wife, Carla; sons, Garry of Faribault, MN, and Christian (Chris) of Fort Dodge and their spouses; five grandchildren; and one great-grandson. He was also preceded in death by one son, Michael.

The Harris Funeral Home of Livermore was in charge of the local arrangements.

May 2, 1961

MEET YOUR MERCHANT

No. 16 in a series on Livermore Businessmen



MR. AND MRS. LEONARD Rosenau have operated "Rosey's Cafe" since August, 1956. For the seven years preceding that, "Rosey" was employed by the Union Freightways at Fort Dodge and in Austin, Minn.

Leonard was born and raised at Ree Heights, S. D. His wife, Alice, grew up at Fort Dodge and the couple met there while Leonard was employed there by Union Freightways. They moved to Austin and then back again to Fort Dodge in 1955, where Leonard was employed in the office after losing a leg in an accident at Nevada, Iowa in 1954.

They purchased the cafe from Fred Buske and have several innovations including a Friday night Fish Fry every week. If your tastes don't turn to fish, then steaks, chicken and chops are also on the menu.

The Rosenaus have three children -- all boys: Mike, 10; Chris, 8; and Garry, 6. The latter is shown pictured with his parents -- giving out with a birthday smile because he was six years old the day this picture was taken.

Despite the loss of a leg, Leonard is an ardent bowler and just a month ago appeared on Jackpot Bowling over KQTV after qualifying high in Livermore.

"I still tell the boys I'm the only one to win \$5 on a gutter ball," Leonard recalls. "You get \$5 for appearing on the program and my first ball was a gutter ball."