

Remembering Avoca, Iowa

© 2016 by Robert A. "Bob" Christiansen. Updated by RAC 2 May '16.

I prepared the nucleus of this remembrance in April 2016 using some of the materials handed out at the 60th and last reunion of the Avoca High School class of 1954, on July 26th 2014. Bill LeRette and I co-chaired this final reunion.

-- Bob Christiansen



Downtown Avoca Today (courtesy of cityofavoca.com)

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Avoca, Iowa Class of 1954 & Former Classmates (updated 19 Apr '16)

† *Levi D. Ackart* (1936-2015) – † Ruby A. Johnson (1934 – 1996)
Patricia "Pat" Allen – Robert "Bob" Rodenburg
Donald Bornholdt – Gilma Olson
Robert "Bob" Christiansen – Martha Dennis
E. Richard "Dick" Coe – Irmgard "Inga" Straubinger
† Rose Davis (1936 – 1991) – Duane "Dewey" Campbell
Valeria Gerlt – Richard Solberg
Barbara Hansen – Robert "Bob" Brown
Margie Harris – † Charles Eugene Prior (1929 – 1992)
† Eugene Haworth (1936 – 1998) – Judith Larkin
† Lynn Hickman (1937 – 1951)
† Douglas Holtz (1936 – 2002) – Iva Marie Anderson
Hugh Huntley + Margaret
† Virgil Jacobsen (1935 – 1979) – Rosemary Matheissen
† Beverly Jensen (1936 – 2008) – Ronald Olsen
† Ellen Elizabeth Jensen (1936 – 1967) – Howard James Kjeldgaard
Bernard Jones – Bernie Platten
† Clarice Jones (1934 – 1996) – † Alfred A. Weinbrandt (1927 – 2009)
† Conrad Jones (1933 – 2009)
† Wayne Jones (1934 – 1992) – Waneta North
† Donald "Bud" Krohn (1936 – 2010) – *Rose Miller*
William C. "Bill" LeRette – David McCain
Marlene Leslie – † Donald "Andy" Renfeld (1934 – 1994)
Edwin L. "Ed" Mills – † Gloria Andersen (1937 – 2010)
Jeanette Morris – † Arlen "Rudy" Reuter (1932 – 2005)
† Donald Nelson (1933 – 1989)
Laverne Nelson – Judy Booth
† Roger Allen Nelson (1937 – 2003)
Francis "Fran" Nieman – Beverly Druse
† Ronald Petersen (1934 – 2011) – *Martha Lynn Arnold*
† Claude "Tuffy" Pope (1934 – 2013) – Karen Schuning
Sandra Randall
† Clarence "Smitty" Renfeld (1936 – 2013) – Gloria Ann Bentley
† Patricia Rock (1936 – 1993) – James L. Goss (divorced)
Carol Russmann – † Robert Hobus (1931 – 1975) & † Orville Young (1923 – 2012)
Marvin Schroder – *Carole Lebeck*
Peggy Schueman + Kent Cvejdlík
Pauline Schuemann – † Melvin Boecklen (1930 – 2011)
Laverne "John" Schuning – † Doris May Niklasen (1938 – 2008)
Frank Torres
† Jack W. Turner (1933 – 1994) – Marilyn Joan Putnam
Eleanor Young – Donald Begley (divorced)
† Robert Wendt (1936 – 2008) – Helen A. Hansen
Charles Yeager – † Sondra Lee Smith (1937 – 2011)

Recollections of Avoca, Iowa, at Mid-Century

(Compiled by Robert "Bob" Christiansen, begun Jan 2014)

Recollections contributed in chronological order by:

- + Robert "Bob" Christiansen, *Downtown Avoca at Mid-century*
- + Pat (Allen) Rodenburg, *Memories*
- + Jeanette (Morris) Reuter, *Remembering Avoca*



Avoca School around the 1940s

courtesy of Barbara Haller Butcher, from *Schools in Avoca, Iowa*
(At this time the southside elementary school might still have been open.)

Bob Christiansen Remembers downtown Avoca at mid-century:

My family moved to a farm west of Avoca, Iowa in 1948. In the summer of 1951 I had just completed my freshman year at Avoca High School.

In 1951 the world my classmates and I knew did not yet contain television, home air conditioning, I 80, or distant shopping malls. Soon all of the above would change forever the social and business life in our small town. Also in 1951 most of us weren't very mobile. I didn't know of any classmates, except for former classmate Conrad Jones, with driver's licenses.

With little incentive to remain home on hot sticky summer evenings and less opportunity to leave town, we were attracted to downtown Avoca, especially on Wednesday and Saturday nights when the stores were open until ten p.m. On those nights downtown Avoca seemed to a country boy to be a vibrant venue.

It wasn't easy for farm kids such as me to get downtown. There were transportation issues and sometimes farm work would occupy us until sunset. However, on the occasions when we did go to Avoca with our parents, here are some memories:

Downtown in Avoca was centered on Main Street, officially known as Elm Street. Most of Avoca's retail stores were located on two blocks of Elm Street, one block north and one block south of the highway. The highway ran west along High Street across the West Nishnabotna River to Council Bluffs, passing through the even smaller towns of Minden, Neola, Underwood and Weston.

For our family on trips to Avoca the main shopping destination would generally be a grocery store. Back in the early 50s I remember four groceries:

- ☛ John Pittmann's grocery on the east side of Elm Street north of the highway.
- ☛ Ted Harris's grocery on the southeast corner of Elm Street and High Street.
- ☛ Bill Hinz's grocery on the east side of Elm Street south of High Street.
- ☛ Meyer Ruback's grocery on the south side of Lyon Street east of Elm Street.

Avoca also had two meat markets.

- ☛ Derby's meat market was next door to John Pittmann's grocery. Our classmate, Bill LeRette, worked at Derby's. However, we rarely patronized Derby's, since we our meat was kept frozen at the locker plant down the street.
- ☛ Shilling's locker plant at the southwest corner of Elm Street and Lyon Street had an associated meat market. I remember being impressed with the gentleman who worked at the locker plant, because in addition to butchering he also drove a truck that picked up dead animals, sometimes a bit on the ripe side, from area farms.

On summer Wednesday nights the High School band often played on the courthouse lawn. Dick, Valeria, Bill and perhaps others of my classmates played in the band, and other classmates would be hanging out on the fringes of the crowd. This might be the only opportunity I had to see some classmates until school resumed.

Pat (Allen) Rodenburg - *Memories*

Memories of growing up on the farm where I was born and going to country school until 8th grade. At that point I came to town and became acquainted with some new classmates. Having an older brother who was active in sports and going to his events, I met some of the high school students.

This transition was quite different than the one room country school and being the lone student in my grade. No baseball games at noon or "andy-andy-over" the schoolhouse.

I also remember the Wednesday and Saturday night trips to town. Seems like we always parked in front of Ruback's grocery store where we would meet some friends and walk up and down Main Street to see who else was in town and what they were doing. Usually not much; but we'd have a couple of dimes so we could get an ice cream cone or a cherry coke at Grulke's drug store. That was the "Hot Spot" after the Saturday night movie.

During the summer, several of the high schoolers signed up to detassel corn, which was about the only way to earn money for the girls. The boys could also hire out as farm hands. Once in a while a babysitting job came along. That wasn't the best paying job!!

The girls in the Home-Ec class fixed hot lunch for a short time during the school year. We only fixed one item. I don't remember anyone getting sick, but there were a few burnt pans.

Girls' basketball was the only sport for girls. We shared the bus with the boy's teams for the away games. Home football games usually meant that we'd go up-town for a hamburger after the game.

Senior skip day was a bus trip, if I remember right to a dance hall in Storm Lake.

Graduation was a happy event, but also sad, knowing that we wouldn't be seeing everyone real often anymore.

Now to drive by the vacant lot where AHS once stood brings back a lot of great memories.

Remembering Avoca

By: Jeanette (Morris) Reuter

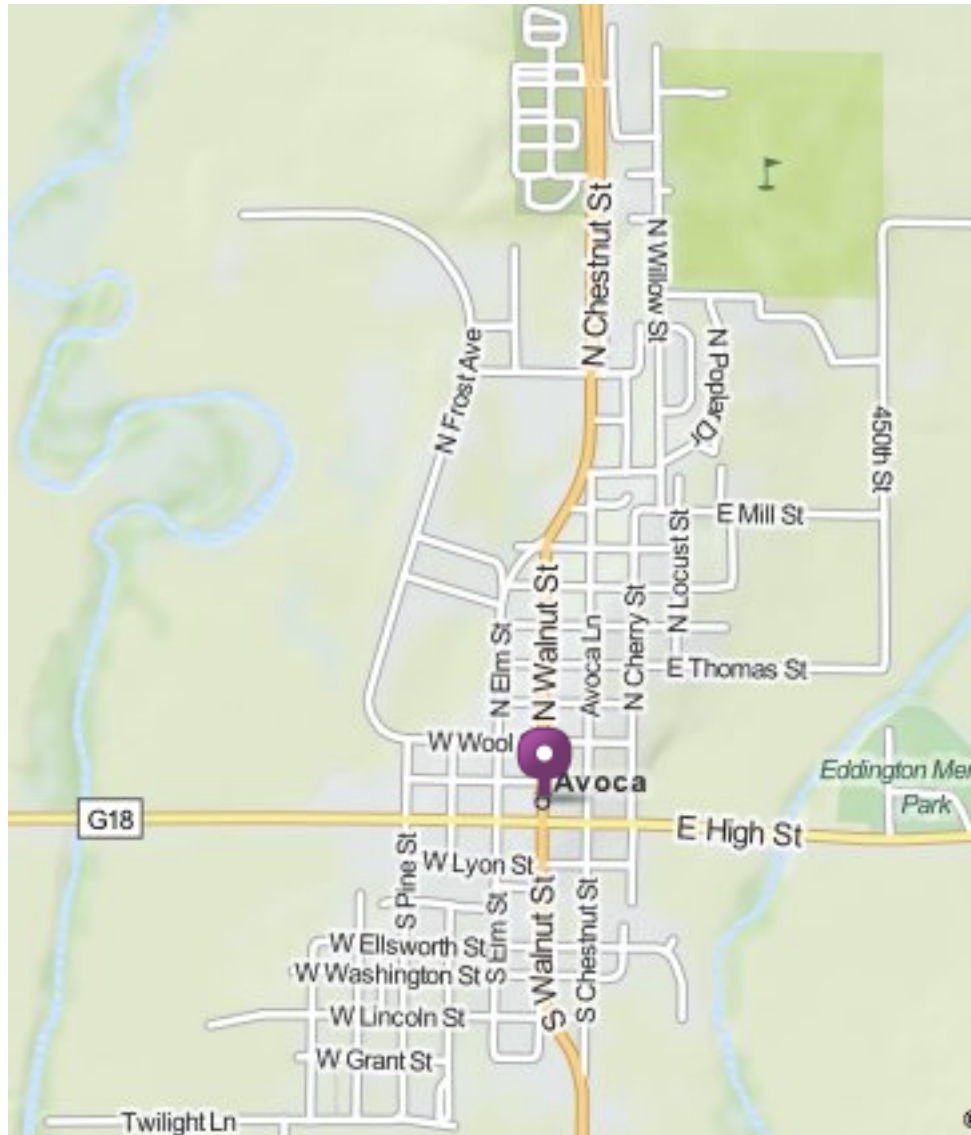
Ever since graduation day, May 20, 1954, I have mostly been gone from Avoca. We graduated on a Thursday, my sister, Nancy, married Jack Macklin on the following Sunday, and I went to work for Northwestern Bell Telephone in Omaha the next day. Although I did commute for a few weeks, I then moved into an apartment with three girls from West Point, Nebraska, and never lived in Avoca after that. I married my husband, Arlen Reuter from Lake View, Iowa, in November of 1955 and since he was in the Air Force, we were on the move for the next several years. As we prepare for our 60th class reunion, it's a great time to look back, reflect and remember Avoca.

My family moved to Avoca sometime during my 4th grade year. I thought Avoca was such a big town; at least it seemed like it after previously living in Carson and Oakland. We lived on the south side of town, which was separated from the north side by the main line of the Rock Island Railroad. There was also a residential area known as the Flat and at the center of everything was the downtown area. At school, we had classmates from each section of town along with the "country" kids who came into town usually when they completed 8th grade at their country schools.

I have fond memories of the Wednesday and Saturday night movies at the theater on what I will always call Main Street. There were dances at the Avoca ballroom located on the east side of the fairgrounds. And speaking of the fairgrounds, that first week in August when Avoca hosted the Pottawattamie County Fair was exciting beyond words. The only time I was ever cautioned about staying safe and being careful was when the carnival people were in town. I also remember the terrible stench of the alfalfa plant in the heat of the summer. Of course, we didn't have any air conditioning, so the windows were open and there was no escaping that smell. However, it didn't last all that long and I guess we just got used to it. It seems to me that Avoca was a safe place in which to grow up. I don't recall that many bad things happened there outside of accidents now and then. What we called the "German" Lutheran Church was very active and provided many opportunities for teens to gather socially. I know my sister and I spent a great deal of time involved with church activities. Who can forget the Chatterbox Café and the drug store where we would hang out after school – so many good times.

In 2008, I was in Ireland and our tour drove the Ring of Kerry and one of our stops was the Avoca Woolen Mill Store at Moll's Gap. What a beautiful place and yes, there are a hundred shades of green in Ireland. Our Avoca is also a beautiful place. It was a great place to grow up and go to school. One nice thing about our school, even though it was small, it needed everyone for the glee club, mixed chorus, bands, and sports teams. Those Friday night basketball games were big "town events". Everyone supported the teams. We all had the opportunity to participate and we did.

Many things have changed in Avoca (and the world) since we were in high school, and I'm sure my perception of Avoca after all these years is different from those who continued to live there. Even though I was not born in Avoca, I will always call it my hometown.



Avoca, Iowa - Map Courtesy of MapQuest