

# THE WAR YEARS



1940 - 1950

# Happy 125th Birthday, Beecher!



*Arnold Knuth*



*David & John Knuth*



*Rodney Knuth*

For over 75 years, through three generations, from horse and carriage to railway to 747's, the Knuth Family has proudly served the fine people of the Village of Beecher. First, by the endeavors of our grandfather Arnold John Knuth, then by our parents Rodney Arnold and Jean Knuth, and currently through the commitment of the third generation of Knuths, John, Tom and David.

Now with eyes set on the 21st century, we continue to concentrate our efforts on the needs of Beecher...our community as well as yours. A place where we not only do business, but where we live and send our children to school. A place where we have been since nearly the beginning and a place where we will most certainly be for the future. We thank all of those who make the same commitment that we made some 75 years ago, that is to live and, whenever possible, do business in the place that we have all chosen to call home. Beecher, truly "a proud past", and now an even more "promising future".

Knuth's Kountry Korner  
Since 1927

## THE WAR YEARS

**T**he 1940's will always be remembered as *The War Years*.  
*Sons, husbands, and fathers went off to war. Some were injured.*  
*Others never returned.*

Those at home supported the war effort as best they could. Food, gasoline, and machinery were rationed. Many other items were in short supply or not available.

Finally, in 1945, V-E Day arrived. Shortly thereafter, the Japanese surrendered. As servicemen began to return, they tried to fit themselves into society and the business community as best they could; however, conditions had changed drastically since they left.

The United States was now a world power. Major industries that were developed for the war effort needed workers as they converted to peace-time products. Automobiles would soon be available again for people to travel away from Beecher to work.

Beecher would never be as self-reliant and close-knit as it was before World War II.

### BEECHER'S WORLD WAR II EFFORT

Beecher area residents, along with the rest of the world, listened to the radio and read about the war in Europe.

All young men in Washington Township were required to register for the draft in October 1940. There were 221 who enrolled at the Community Building and received their draft cards.

A year later on Sunday, December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Residents heard the news about noon. At first, they thought it was a rumor; but as more and more details became known, the "dastardly deed" was accepted.

The United States declared war on Japan the following day, December 8, 1941. On December 11, 1941, war was declared on Germany and Italy.

Unlike the Beecher boys' involvement in World War I, this commitment would require four years, some lost lives, and much sacrifice for those on the home front.

Before the war ended, there would be 95 local men and women who had served their country.

Beginning in 1942, farm machinery was rationed. Farmers had to apply to the Will County Farm Machinery Rationing Committee for any essential equipment. The quota for the entire farm population of Will County included: row planters — horse drawn (6), tractor drawn (5); spreaders — line (1), manure (8); plows — tractor or mounted (29); harrows — spike (14), spring tooth (3), disc (40); cultivators — horse riding (2), tractor (55); grain drills (8); tractors (39); farm wagons (17); dairy equipment: milking machines (48), cream separators (3), coolers (4).

There were only 340,000 automobiles manufactured in 1942. This was less than 10% of the previous years' production. The rationing board required proof of real need before issuing a permit for a new automobile. They advised that "many circumstances and conditions" would determine their decision.

Sugar was rationed, but special compensation was given during threshing time in July 1942.

Citizens were encouraged to buy War Bonds to "help put the final touch of victory on this war, and thus help in bringing home safe and at an early date the nine-



*BEECHER'S OWN UNCLE SAM — Harvey Heusing led the 4th of July parades in Beecher as Uncle Sam for nearly 25 years. He began in 1940.*

ty-odd local boys who are fighting on various fronts...”

The new Honor Roll Board was unveiled in June 1944 at a ceremony in front of the Community Building. It measured eight feet high and eight feet long, was painted red, white, and blue, and contained 95 names of local service men and women. The Women’s Welfare Club, the Beecher Volunteer Fire Department, and the Beecher Commercial Club sponsored the project.

Donald Oldenburg was the sixth son of his family to enter the service when he enlisted in the Merchant Marines in April 1944. His five brothers were serving in various parts of the world.

Harry Langreder was the first Beecher boy to receive the Purple Heart. His parents received the decoration in November 1944, while their son was recuperating in a French hospital.

In February 1945, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Ohlendorf were informed that their son, Captain Norbert H. Ohlendorf had been killed in action on December 23, 1944, in the Belgian Bulge.

On April 5, 1945, Sergeant Norman Deeke, son of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Deeke was killed on the field of battle at Nuremberg, Germany.

Following the war, the Beecher veterans would name their Amvet post, Deeke-Ohlendorf Beecher Post #67 in honor of Norman Deeke and Norbert Ohlendorf.

On June 6, 1944, during the Normandy invasion, it was reported that “all day the village was unusually quiet, many local people being glued to their radios. The deep concern for Beecher boys, who are in the thick of the action, has cast a spell of anxiety over the entire community. Local churches had already made plans for a special prayer in the evening...”

A year later President Harry Truman’s announcement of complete and unconditional surrender of “the mighty forces of the German Empire at 8 p.m., May 8, 1945” brought gratitude and hope to the Beecher residents.

They realized “that V-E Day (Victory in Europe) marked one goal on the road to peace... There was a spasmodic period of noisy proclamation in which the two sirens pierced the air and church bells pealed as a signal of the momentous event, then all was quiet during the balance of the day. Many joined in thanksgiving at church services in the evening.”

It was not until August 14, 1945, that the Japanese surrendered.

Beecher residents received the news about 6 p.m. over radio networks from Washington, D.C. “The Japanese had accepted the peace terms and the war as officially over”. The news left the residents “astounded

momentarily... it was fully 15 minutes before a stir in the village was evident. Then the church bells began ringing and the sirens chimed in. Shortly after, activity became apparent on the streets and Rube Wegert assembled a band... and the fire trucks headed an impromptu parade. Business in the village was at a standstill (the following day) and in the evening, church services were held.”

The long, hard war was finally over. Everyone looked forward to the return of their loved ones.

## BUSINESS

Before America entered the war, business conditions appeared to be on the upswing.

The largest business structure to be added for many years was built by Koch & Wiggenghauser for Martin Firnhaber in 1940. It was located at 700 Dixie Highway, the site of the former Reising Chevrolet Sales Garage which burned in 1938.

The new two-story brick building was especially designed and built for two businesses: Reising Chevrolet Sales and Beecher Recreation. The Reising Chevrolet sales office and show rooms were on the first floor facing Dixie Highway. The service department was in the rear.

Martin Firnhaber’s new business, Beecher Recreation, would occupy the upper floor. Six Brunswick bowling lanes of the latest design were installed in the 125-foot room. This new bowling alley was a big improvement over the two lanes originally installed in the Washington Township Building in 1929. Beecher area residents would take full advantage of the new bowling alley.

Beecher Veterinary Clinic and Video Zone now share the first floor of the building. Beecher Fitness Center is located on the upper floor.

Beecher Produce, owned by E. C. Wehling, moved into the Hack Garage on Reed Street. The building was remodeled for handling the large produce business.

Wilke & Rehn completed their new office building in 1940. They were dealing in McCormick- Deering farm implements, International Harvester tractors and trucks, coal, and building materials. In 1943, they added a line of Firestone merchandise, including household items, auto accessories, and sporting goods.

The Frank Hunte Store on the corner of Indiana Avenue and Dixie Highway was sold in August 1943 to the Farm Bureau for a locker plant with a capacity of 400 lockers.

Two business transactions occurred in 1944. John Wehrley, the local druggist for the past 37 years sold his business in the Clark & Bank Block Building to R. B.

Stalberg of Mount Vernon, Illinois. Martin Firnhaber sold the Beecher Cash Grocery & Market to L. J. Muehler of Chicago Heights.

Herman Bockelman sold his implement business and real estate on South Gould street to Walter and George Wiechen in November 1945. The new owners would handle Case farm machinery. The other occupants of the building, Walt's Garage, Herman's Tavern, and the A&P Store would remain. Mr. Bockelman had been in business for the past 33 years.

In March 1946, the A&P Store was closed, but manager Arnold Knuth reopened a month later as the Midwest Store. The building was completely refurbished with fixtures and shelving.

There were changes at Farmers State Bank also. H. H. Ehlers, who had just been discharged from the Navy, was elected cashier. Mrs. Gertrude Hack resigned as assistant cashier. She was replaced by Byron Hunte, who also had returned from service. Miss Garneta Ehlers held the position of teller.

In May 1946, Walter Hoppensteadt announced the opening of "Hopper's Nip & Sip" at 751 Penfield Street. It was located in the former office building of Dr. Homer Hiatt. The space was remodeled to accommodate six booths, a long counter and a soda fountain. The menu included "delicious fresh homemade" ice cream, sandwiches, coffee, and soft drinks. Nip & Sip would become a favorite gathering place for Beecher people.

Mercury Cleaners opened in the summer of 1946 in a new building at 642 Dixie Highway. Owners were Don Reising and Rex Peterson. They set up service routes to the rural areas. Two years later, Wayne Reichers began working while attending a two-year course offered to WWII veterans. He became owner-operator in 1956, and continues to operate Mercury Cleaners.

Walter and Dorothy Clausing leased Beecher Grain Company on the southeast corner of Gould and Hodges Streets from John C. Werner in September 1946. They purchased the elevator and all the buildings in 1960 from Antoinette Werner. The business was sold to Farmers Grain Company on April 1, 1978, and eventually the buildings removed.

The last major business transaction of the decade occurred in August 1947 when the Princess Cafe was sold to Gustav Reiman and Mr. and Mrs. Ed Reiman. They purchased it from Joe Pelligreno, who had operated the business for the past two years.

Mr. Pelligreno had bought the property in July 1945 from Joe Serdoz, owner and operator during the previous 19 years. It was Mr. Serdoz who named the establishment "The Princess Cafe".

Ed Reiman remarked about the business in 1947: "Route 1 was an important highway then and most of our patrons were travelers. Gradually we built up a reputation and we had diners returning repeatedly. Business really started picking up when we added 'Steak for Two' in 1952. Prior to that our most popular item was chicken."

Gustav Reiman retired in 1956. Ed and Jean Reiman sold the Princess Cafe to Dino and Alex Dousias in November 1977. They con-

tinue to operate it, 122 years after it first opened as the Old Stage Tavern on Vincennes Trail in 1873.



*NIP & SIP — A local teenager, Bobby Williamson, leans against a tree in front of Hopper's Nip & Sip on Penfield Street in 1947.*

## BEECHER'S SECOND DOCTOR HIATT

Dr. Richard Hiatt joined the practice of his father, Dr. Homer Hiatt and Dr. Carl Klein in August 1948. He was a graduate of Onarga Military Academy, Knox College, and Chicago Medical School.

During 1956 to 1958, Dr. Richard served the medical corps at Camp Chaffee, Missouri. During that time, he was promoted to major.

Upon his discharge, he returned to Beecher and continued to practice medicine. He was elected president of the medical staff at South Suburban Hospital in 1965. However, he is proudest of having delivered over 3,000 Beecher babies during his practice.

Dr. Richard Hiatt continues to care for patients in the Hiatt Clinic, 605 Reed Street. His and his father's careers have spanned 75 years of service to the Beecher community.

# VILLAGE AND TOWNSHIP



Washington Township, according to the 1940 official census, now had 1,663 residents. Population within the Beecher village limits was 742.

Apparently, there was some disagreement about the new idea of "Daylight Savings Time". In their March 1941 meeting, the village officials passed ordinance No. 282 stating that the question of "Daylight Savings Time" be placed on the April ballot. In this manner, "the voters of the village will have an opportunity to settle this question once and for all!". Citizens chose "Daylight Savings Time" by a vote of 143 to 72.

In another sign of the times, the village board passed another ordinance which provided for a license fee of \$10 on "coin music machines" (juke boxes) and regulated their operation in the village.

After a number of years of discussion between the rural residents and the Volunteer Firemen concerning rural fire protection outside the village limits, the issue was finally resolved in June 1941. The Beecher Volunteer Fire Department announced that an extra fire truck was available in case of rural fires.

It was provided at the firemen's "own expense in order to solve this problem of fire protection for the farmers". The firemen assured the farmers that "they were ready to go when called upon".

An important announcement was made in July 1948, when the Washington Township officials announced that the Community Building was paid off. The \$35,000 worth of bonds and interest were paid promptly during the past twenty years.

## SCHOOL

The proposal for a Community High School passed by almost a three to one margin in April 1940. Beecher students could now attend all four years of high school in Beecher.

A school bus was provided for the high school students. It was announced also that "any youth who did not graduate from high school or who had to drop out because of transportation is invited to enter high school now". It was expected that over 40 pupils would ride the bus to high school.

Eight years later in 1948, with the threat of a consolidated district with Crete and Monee, Beecher citizens voted almost unanimously to create a separate 200-U School District. They were adamant about control of their own schools.

With the creation of the school district, the six rural school buildings were sold at auction on September 15, 1949. Raymond Lange was the auctioneer. Prices ranged from \$175 to \$305. The little school houses had to be removed from the premises within 60 days, unless other arrangement were made. The land reverted to the original owners.

The rural children would now ride the school buses into Beecher to attend the Beecher Public School.



*THREE CHEERS FOR BEECHER —  
Drum majorettes and cheerleaders strike a pose in front of the school in 1942.  
They are front row, left to right: Marilyn Meier (Krueger), Betty Jean Hack (Ohlendorf), Lila Marrell (Bruno). Back Row: Ardith Wehling (Aldrich) and Donna Schmitt (Williamson).*



*BEECHER SCHOOL IN 1949 — Drivers stand in front of their school buses.  
They are, left to right: Wayne Fick, Norman Holdt, Wayne Crawford, and Fred Bushong.  
Fred Heldt, janitor, stands in the middle. The addition to the original building was added in the 1930's.*

## ORGANIZATIONS

Twenty-five World War II veterans met on April 22, 1946, and voted to join Amvets (American Veterans of World War II). Byron Hunte was temporary chairman of the first meeting.

Howard Wehmhoefer was elected first Commander of the Beecher Post at the next meeting, held a week later at the Princess Cafe. Members voted unanimously to name their organization the Deeke-Ohlendorf Beecher Post #67 in honor of Norman Deeke and Norbert Ohlendorf, who were killed in the war.

Their slogan was "We fought together in war, we will band together in peace".

In August 1956, the Amvets purchased the George Weichen building, the former Bockelman property, at 532 Gould Street. Remodeling was begun in 1962 and

continued in 1967 and 1968. The building continues to serve Post #67. It is also used by other civic groups.

The Amvet Auxiliary was organized in August 1948, with Pearl Kuhlman as the first president. There were 47 charter members. Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of Amvets are eligible to join. Recently, granddaughters became eligible.

The Beecher Sportsmen's Club held its first meeting in June 1944, with 26 people present. At the end of the year, there were 134 members. The new club was a chapter of Will County Sportsmen's Association and the Illinois Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.

The first major event was a fox hunt on February 4, 1945. The first fish fry was held in September 1958. Over the years, donations have been made for street signs in Beecher, high school band uniforms and athletic programs.

The Eagle Lake property was purchased in May 1958. The clubhouse and beach facility was built in 1961. There are now 155 members.



—HOWARD WEHMHOFER—

*After serving in the Army Air Force during World War II, Howard Wehmhoefer was elected as the first Commander of Deeke-Ohlendorf Amvet Post #67.*



*LADIES BOWLING LEAGUE EARLY 1940'S — Enjoying the new bowling lanes in the Beecher Recreation facility are front row, left to right: Geraldine Hack Imholz, Garneta Ehlers, Helen Scheiwe Petersen, Audrey Selk Beseke, Lilly Batterman, Edna Firnhaber, Lillian Bernhard Serensen, Marcella Hameister, Leyla Cann Wehling, Shirley Wehling Wille.*

*Second row, left to right: Dorothy Bachert Behrens, Betty Bachert Teseke, Violet Langreder Teske, Dorothy Bruns Buchmeier, Sylvia Wehling, Lydia Wehling, Lila Marrell Bruns, Lucille Guritz, unknown, Gertrude Loitz, unknown, unknown, unknown, Clara Schultz, Marlene Boecker Gtersonke, Irene Schultz, unknown.*



*ST. PAUL'S DART TEAM — Dart games among church groups were a favorite pastime. Walter Eckhoff (left) takes his turn while other members watch. They are seated, left to right: Ralph Lindemann, Clarence Miller, Willard Meyer, Lester Siefker, Henry Schmeckpeper, and William Siefker.*

# 1995 Beecher Chamber of Commerce

Jeffrey A. Brink, President  
708-946-9600

P.O. Box 292  
Beecher, IL 60401

Advance Bank 708-474-1600	Farmers State Bank of Beecher 708-946-2246	Princess Cafe 708-946-3141
American National Bank 708-672-7000	Gas City, Ltd. 708-946-6882	RE/MAX '77, Barbara Brink 708-403-6000
Ameritech Anchorage of Beecher 708-946-2600	H&R Industries 708-946-3244	Red Barn Feed and Supply 708-946-3135
B & C Electric 708-946-9104	Hack Funeral Home PC 708-946-2161	Rest Haven Village Woods 708-672-6111
Bahlman Oil Co. 708-946-9770	Henderson Plumbing 708-946-9439	R.L. Reising Sales, Inc. 708-946-2233
Beecher Ace Hardware 708-946-2906	Dr. Richard Hiatt, M.D. 708-946-2211	Robinson Engineering 708-331-6700
Beecher Car Wash 708-946-9274	Edward D. Jones & Co., Scott Hannagan 708-258-3881	Russell Publications 708-258-3473
Beecher Community School Dist. 200 708-946-2266	K's Split Second Shell 708-946-3363	Shady Lawn Golf Course 708-946-2800
Beecher Police Department 708-946-2341	Ronald Kiedaisch, Attorney 708-946-2901	St. James Medical Center 708-946-9330
Beecher Post Office 708-946-2550	Knuth's Kountry Korner Grocery 708-946-2543	Michael Stanula, Architect 708-946-0949
Beecher Village Hall 708-946-2261	Koenning Insurance 708-946-2362	Star Publication 708-755-6161
Bernard Division 708-946-2281	L&H Services 708-946-2526	Union Electronics 708-946-9500
J. Brink Construction 708-946-9600	Mercury Cleaners 708-946-2551	Warren Insurance Agency 708-755-1925
Century 21 Dabs and Associates, Conrad Sweet 708-798-6500	Meyer Electric 708-946-2490	Washington Township, Martin Schmidt Jr. 708-946-2246
Commonwealth Edison	Modern Gutters 708-946-6396	Wehling Insurance Agency 708-946-6650
Dave's Auto Body 708-946-3350	Northern Illinois Gas	Wehling Lawn Care 708-946-2257
Decke-Ohlendorf Amvets 708-946-2440	Paintin' Place Auto Body 708-946-3145	World Book Encyclopedia, Arlene Graham 708-946-6226
	Piepho's Fairway Lanes 708-946-3221	

*Congratulations on your Quas year, Beecher!*