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Press Release

The French Connection

For Immediate Release

On July 18th, 2007, the city of Laurens, IA will welcome a delegation from their soon to be sister city of Laurens, France. Eleven delegates including the mayor, deputy mayor, two village council persons, the village administrative assistant, their spouses and a well-known wine consultant from the region will be arriving at the Des Moines International Airport, for what will be for most of them, their first visit to the United States.

The delegation will spend eight days visiting Iowa and participating in Laurens' 125th Anniversary weekend celebration including RAGBRAI ride through events on that following Monday. A tentative list of activities include an official welcome dinner, an outdoor Iowa barbeque and fireworks display kicking off the 125th Anniversary celebration. Other events will include a parade complete with horse drawn carriages for the delegates, a French style outdoor market featuring extensive wine tasting from the Southern region of France surrounding Laurens and 10 Iowa wineries showcasing their finest collections.

Laurens, Iowa and Laurens, France have more in common besides the spelling of their names. Each city has a population of around 1,000 people each with a rich history in agriculture, but most importantly, each community has a relationship to the movie, "The Straight Story." In 1999, a movie was filmed about a resident of Laurens, Iowa who drove his lawnmower to Wisconsin to make mends with his ill brother. The events and the people he encountered along the way captured the hearts of millions. At last, the world saw the spirit and character of people in the Midwest. The Disney movie

For Immediate Release

more

featuring Richard Farnsworth and Sissy Spacek also captured the hearts of those people in a small quaint village twenty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, half way around the world.

In 2001, the Mayor of Laurens, France sent a letter to the Mayor of Laurens, Iowa introducing his city and conveyed interest in learning more about Laurens, Iowa. Over the course of several years the mayors communicated occasionally, ever aware of the strained relations between their two countries over the Middle East conflict. With Laurens, Iowa 125th anniversary nearing, Mayor Pete Hong suggested that members of the French city should visit their town during the celebration. The idea was proposed to the French Mayor who replied with great enthusiasm, it is people who must build the bridges of international understanding and not governments.

Plans for the visit began to grow. Laurens, France visited the French Parliament for permission to seek sister city status and visited with the United States State Department for similar permissions. Next, they visited with the state Sister Cities International Representative Ann Geiger regarding the next steps they would have to take. Meanwhile, the focus for Laurens, Iowa was how to celebrate 125 years of history and at the same time bring into its family a city of people from across the Atlantic. The Laurens Sister City Commission was formed soon after the invitation was accepted and the group attended the state Sister Cities International meeting at Newton in April. There the group gained insight on procedures and guidelines on becoming a sister city.

Planning for the Sister Cities meeting has been in the works for over a year and will soon blossom into a unique weeklong experience for both communities. The French delegation, who proclaim that most of their knowledge of the United States comes from movies and novels, are curious to see it first hand. In addition to the festivities, tours of business and industry, and one-on-one meetings with the people who inspired the "straight Story", the delegation will visit the state capitol building in Des Moines. The delegation will also visit the birthplace of another favorite Iowa movie, "The Bridges of Madison County" before returning to their quiet valley they call home that is surrounded by vineyards twenty miles from the Mediterranean Sea.

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Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegates: Marie-Claire and Alain Berthézèn
Address: 5, Chemin de la Murelle, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 67 90 29 75
Home email: alain.berthezene@equipment.govv.fr
Ages: Marie Claire - 55 and Alain - 54
Occupations: Alain is the Mayor. As per Alain's email he works for the Highways Department
Languages: English
Hobbies, interests: Various sports, music, folk-dancing, hiking
Volunteer activities: This is Alain's third and final 7-year term as mayor.
Children: Two grown children.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will attend host family church.
Other: Non-smokers
Alain is very allergic to Garlic. He speaks a little but poor English.
They have never visited the US.
Home Stay Hosts: Connie Jean McAlpine and Larry Lester McAlpine

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegates: Geneviève and Richard Wilson
Address: La Fumade, Impasse Paulin Portal, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 67 90 12 76
Home email: lafumade@wanadoo.fr
Ages: Geneviève - 63 and Richard - 77
Occupations: Geneviève is a Deputy Mayor. Gen was a ski and tennis Pro and Richard was an Obstetrician/Gynaecologist working in International Health.
Languages: She speaks excellent English with a charming French accent as well as some Spanish. He speaks English, French and German.
Hobbies, interests: Various sports, music, folk-dancing, hiking
Volunteer activities: This is Alain's third and final 7-year term as mayor.
Children: Two grown children.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will attend host family church.
Other: Non-smokers
Gen has visited New York City and San Francisco as well as various parts of the U.S. along the(Ontario)Canadian border. Richard has visited Washington and many other U.S. cities for work and pleasure. Neither has any health problems or food allergies. Gen prefers vegetables while Richard likes meat.
Home Stay Hosts: Tjeran & Donna Jolliffe

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegates: Patricia and Philippe Roget
Address: 1 Avenue de la Gare, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 67 90 14 28
Home email: patricia.roget@c-a-m.com
Ages: Patricia - 50 and Philippe - 46
Occupations: She is a member of the village Council and Safety Coordinator at Cameron, a manufacturer (in Beziers) of safety equipment for oil platforms. He is an engineer at the same company.
Languages: Both speak good/excellent English.
Hobbies, interests: Karaté, hiking, swimming, choir and music
Volunteer activities: Various volunteer activities.
Children: Twin daughters ages 18.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will host family church.
Other: Non-smokers
Philippe has visited Texas and Oklahoma on business. No health problems or food restrictions. Per Richard Wilson, they are a pleasant and dynamic couple.

Home Stay Hosts: Nancy and Dave Woodin

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegate: Mrs. Maryse Barthes
Address: 14, Rue du Causse, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 67 90 25 56
Home email:
Age: Maryse - 64
Occupation: Maryse is a member of the village Council and a retired teacher.
Languages: She speaks very little (poor) English.
Hobbies, interests: Reading, gym, walking, music and folk-dancing; as well as a love of animals.
Volunteer activities: Various volunteer activities.
Children: No children.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will attend host family church.
Other: Non-smoker
Maryse has not visited the U.S. She has no health problems or food restrictions. Per Richard Wilson, she is an extremely "well-read" lady.
Home Stay Hosts: Verlae Nicol

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegates: Helène and René Bouisson
Address: 6 Impasse des Fleurs, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 04 67 90 24 64
Home email:
Ages: Helène - 61 and René - 65
Occupations: She was the Administrative Assistant in the town hall. She retired this past April. He is a grape-grower and member of the Laurens Wine Cooperative.
Languages: She has a little, but poor command of English. They speak fair Spanish.
Hobbies, interests: Cooking, traveling, walking and other sports.
Volunteer activities: Various volunteer activities.
Children: They have one grown daughter.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will attend host family church.
Other: Non-smokers
They have not visited the US. No health problems or food restrictions.
Home Stay Hosts: Jan and Ron Hersom

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegate: Mrs. Jacqueline Copin
Address: 4, Allés du Tilleul, 34480 Laurens
Phone: (33) 4 67 90 15 63
Home email:
Age: Jacqueline - 74
Occupation:
Languages: She speaks very little (poor) English.
Hobbies, interests: Films, reading, hiking and animals.
Volunteer activities: Various volunteer activities.
Children: She has a son (a professor in Paris) and three Grandchildren.
Religion: Roman Catholic, but will attend host family church.
Other: Non-smoker

Jacqueline is a widow who moved to Laurens from Paris with her husband (a producer of television commercials. After his death (stroke), she elected to stay in Laurens where she converted the old railway station (no more trains) into a charming home. Per Richard Wilson, she is a pleasant, well informed and vivacious lady. She has no health problems or food restrictions. She has not visited the US.

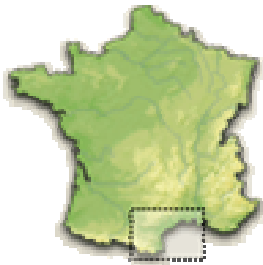
Home Stay Hosts: Jim and Kelly Van Sickle

Laurens France
Delegates



French Delegate: Mr. Jean-Luc Bonnin
Address: 7, rue Porte Olivier, Beziers France
Phone: (33) 4 67 49 04 29
Cell Phone: (33) 613 24 84 40
Email: agence.jlb@wanadoo.fr
Age: Jean-Luc - 52
Occupation: Consultant for wines from the South of France, especially the wines of Faugères.
Languages: Speaks excellent English and good Spanish
Hobbies, interests: Films/cinema, the "outdoors" in general, visiting farms and animals.
Volunteer activities: Various volunteer activities.
Children:
Religion: Does not prefer to attend.
Other: Non-smoker
He has visited the U.S. (Washington, New York) a number of times. Per Richard Wilson, he is a pleasant soft-spoken man who really knows his wines.
Home Stay Hosts: Les and Peg Milton

THE LAURENS-FRENCH CONNECTION



Our sister city, Laurens, France is located in the southernmost part of France, in the region of Languedoc. This is an agricultural area, but instead of being surrounded by corn and soybeans, there are fruits, vegetables and vineyards.

It was satisfying to learn that Laurens residents pronounce the name of their city the same way we do ours; that is, with the accent on the last syllable, albeit with a French twist. However, Laurens, France was not named after the Revolutionary War heroes, Henry and John Laurens. It was named as early as the 4th or 5th century, a few years before Laurens, Iowa!

Their population is slightly smaller than ours, numbering 1005 inhabitants. This includes farmers and their families, most of whom live in the town instead of the countryside.

Not all our visitors will speak English, and it's likely few of us are fluent in French. However, if you'd like to greet them you may say 'Bonjour,' (bohn jurh), meaning 'Good Day!'

Laurens, France is close to 2000 years old, but according to resident Richard Wilson, has never been very large or rich. The source of the name Laurens is not clear. It is perhaps derived from Laurier, its name during the Roman occupation. Many Laurier (or Laurel) trees grow in the area.

Their town, or village as they refer to it, has always been agricultural, but while crops were originally cereals, for the past 200 years wine has been their major "crop." While we bring our grain to the elevator, they transport their grapes to the Chateau, or castle, to be made into Laurens wines.

France has just elected a new President after 12 years under President Jacques Chirac. The French have a much shorter campaign season than the U.S. A decree called for an election in February, 2007 and a runoff

between the two leading candidates occurred on May 6. Nicolas Sarkozy was the winner. He will take office on May 17.

After greeting one of our visitors by saying “Bonjour!” you may ask “How are you?” by saying, “Comment allez-vous?” (Ko’ ment alley voo). This translates literally to “How do you go?” It is to be hoped you will hear in response, “Tres bien, merci.” meaning “Very well, thank you.” If things aren’t so good it could be “Pas, tres bien.” (Pah trey be an.) or “Not very well.”

Something will need to be done, in that case.

THE LAURENS-FRENCH CONNECTION



Do you remember Madeline and Babar, or Puss in Boots, Cinderella, and Beauty and the Beast? These were among the first stories we heard as children and they came from France. When we grew up we became familiar with many French names: Charles Boyer, Yves Montand, Lafayette, Leslie Caron, Maurice Chevalier, Edith Piaf, Lily Pons, Louis Pasteur, Madame Curie, and countless others; not to forget Inspector Jacques Clouseau, of Pink Panther fame! You’ll be able to think of many more.

And in turn, France has learned to love American music, movies, and blue jeans. Cultural exchanges take many forms, and this summer our town will be lucky enough to take part in a very personal cultural exchange.

Eleven residents of Laurens France will be visiting us for a week in July. Our guests will be curious about us, and this will be a wonderful opportunity for us to learn about them. Their visit is part of an international program called Sister Cities, International. Begun in 1956 with President

Eisenhower's People to People program, it has grown to reflect the complex changing world and to engage in a vast array of mutually beneficial projects.

There will be five men in the party and six women. Salutations Mr., Mrs. and Miss are as follows: Monsieur (M- seur'), Madame (Ma- dahm'), ,and Mademoiselle (Mahd-mwa-zel.) There may or may not be any Mademoiselles in the group, but some may well be found among the interpreters.

The Laurens-French Connection



Vineyards are not the only things in the surroundings of our sister city, Laurens, France. Less than a kilometer away, (1 kilometer = .62 of a mile), is a recreational park called l'Oliveraie, which means 'The Olive Grove.' Located on 15 acres of land, it offers 116 campsites with tents, bungalows, and mobile homes available for rent.

Many activities are offered including a swimming pool, hikes, mountain biking, horseback riding, kids' club, mini-golf, tennis, basketball, and volleyball courts, as well as paint ball, archery, and a game room. There is evening entertainment, a restaurant, bar, pizzeria grill and grocery store. It sounds like a lot of fun!

A featured game at the park is 'Pétanque.' Pétanque is played by all ages and all around the world, but is generally associated with southern [France](#), where it originated. The casual form of the game is played by about 17 million people in France, mostly during their summer vacations. Distantly related to horseshoes, the game is played on a hard dirt or gravel surface. The goal of the game is to throw metal balls as close as possible to a small wooden ball called a *cochonnet* (jack), while the feet stay in one place. The name, Pétanque, sounds like Pay-tonk,

THE LAURENS-FRENCH CONNECTION



France is about 4/5 the size of Texas and is divided into 26 regions, which correspond in some ways to our states. The national flag of France is the red, white and blue tricolor. As do our states, each region in France also has a flag. The flag of Languedoc-Roussillon, where Laurens is located, is orange with a yellow and white star design.

Close to Laurens there is a marble quarry. The large machines needed to quarry stone can be seen from the village. Marble quarries are common in the foothills in the south of France. Marble is limestone in disguise, hardened by heat and pressure, but still alkaline. Anything acid, such as vinegar will pit it. France is noted for a red marble called 'Rouge' and for black, known as 'Noir.' The Laurens marble is called 'Noir St. Laurent.' It is dark gray to black with scattered white and reddish gold veins. This type of marble is used to surface pieces of furniture such as tables and fireplaces.

Elementary students at Laurens-Marathon were trying out some French words last week. They quickly picked up 'Bonjour,' (boh-n joor) meaning Good day, 'Pardon' (Par-dohn) meaning Excuse me, and 'Merci' (mair-see) to say thank you, all useful words when meeting new friends.



A request was sent to Laurens, France for some history of their village. Richard Wilson replied with what he calls “a brief and unofficial account;” parts of which are excerpted here, interspersed with equally brief data about the area where Laurens, Iowa now stands, and corresponding to the same time periods. The Iowa information is taken from the article in the Laurens Centennial book by Ron Harms.

France: “About 3000 years ago, the site of Laurens, France was inhabited by a tribe of Celts. And following the conquest of the Mediterranean Coast by the Romans about 2000 years ago, the land around the village was given to veterans of the Roman Legions which had fought in Roman Provinces in what is today Hungary. Roman relics (pottery, coins, statuettes etc.) are still frequently found today in the grape plots around the village. The Romans built their homes in what is best described as fortified farms, on the land around Laurens.”

Iowa: From 1000 B.C. to 1200 A.D. the Woodland Indians made small settlements of from 1 to 4 acres in the area of what is now Laurens, Iowa. They survived primarily by hunting and gathering, and possibly some early agriculture. Some fragments of pottery are to be found on these sites, as well as projectile points and stone knives. These artifacts were not only functional, but were the earliest art forms of the area.

France: “In the ‘Middle Ages’ a fortress was built, for defensive purposes, on the hill between the junction of two rivers. This is the site of Laurens as it is today. The peasants around the area built their houses at the foot of the Castle for protection. And the village of Laurens was born. At the end of the 12th century the castle was converted from a fortress into the residence for the “Seigneurs” of Laurens. They came from the family of neighboring nobility in Fouzilhon. And they stayed for a few centuries.”

Iowa: About 1300 A.D. or around the end of the 12th century, a spectacular cultural development occurred to which the term Oneota was given. Long houses, more advanced pottery, and more advanced agriculture characterized this time. The Oneota Indians were the people present at the beginning of written historic time in the Laurens area.

Succeeding historical periods of the two Laurens will be noted next time.



More history of two towns named Laurens....in a nutshell.

France: In 1789 the castle in Laurens was partially destroyed during the French Revolution. The peasants used the stones to build and repair their houses.

Iowa: In 1788, Julien Dubuque became the first white settler in Iowa. He and other French from Canada lived in Eastern Iowa, under an agreement with the Mesquakies. Iowa was under Spanish colonial control at that time, then belonged again to France until Iowa was acquired by the U.S. with the Louisiana Purchase. Northwest Iowa was still unpopulated, except for wandering groups of Indians.

France: The castle was restored in the 19th century during the time of Napoleon's "Empire" though it lost most of the characteristics of a fortress. The village around the castle continued to expand, as growing grapes for wine became the major crop and source of income for the farmers. However, Laurens and its people never profited as much as the wine-makers of the plains as it was too hilly and it was difficult to produce massive quantities of grapes in the hills.

Iowa: In the 19th century Iowa's population moved westward with the northwestern part of the state being the last to be settled, due to the marshy land. The first pioneers reached the Laurens area about 1869. Laurens became a village in 1881, 125 years ago, when it was surveyed and platted. and the population grew as the land was drained and the railroad arrived.

France: Laurens remained much as it had been since the French Revolution until after the second World War. New houses began to be built on the outskirts and gradual growth has continued. Now Laurens has a number of new sub-divisions inhabited both by grape-growers and young families who work in the cities. The older homes in Laurens are being bought and restored by new “invaders” from the north who use them as summer homes and then as places of retirement. They have the benefits of sunshine, sea, countryside, and excellent food and wine.

Iowa: Pictures of Laurens sent to our sister city prompted the comment that our town seems so new and modern compared to their centuries old community. Over the last 125 years we have grown from a prairie settlement to a still small but busy place. Once primarily a center for supplies and services for surrounding farm families, Laurens has added an industrial base to its activities. Our town continues to work to adapt to meet the demographic changes in the state and nation.



As residents of Laurens, Iowa, we all know our town was named for Revolutionary patriots Henry and John Laurens. But did you know that Henry Laurens also had a connection to French wine making? We remember him as one of the founders of our nation, serving in the Continental Congress and engaging in high level diplomacy for the U.S. However, he was also a merchant in Charleston, South Carolina where he imported and sold a wide selection of wines from France and actively encouraged South Carolinians to grow vineyards and produce wine.

Of French Huguenot extraction, Laurens took a

special interest in the Huguenot community of New Bordeaux, South Carolina. where he invested in their vineyards. He said that all that was needed was "time enough for experiments and perseverance . . .I am quite sure that good Grapes may be produced and kept up even in the Lower parts of Carolina." He had a vine in his own Charleston backyard which he said yielded from three to four hundred pounds of grapes each year.

On a canal boat trip through France in 1772, Laurens floated through the vineyards of Bordeaux and dreamed of a time when his grandchildren would be able to drink and export wines made in his home state.

A wine making industry in South Carolina did not materialize in spite of his hopes. However, the influence of German, Italian and French immigrants was important in the development of the healthy U.S. wine industry that exists today and continues to grow.



The principal industries in Laurens, France are grape growing and wine making. And Laurens makes wines that are special. There are five wineries in Laurens and they all produce AOC rated wines. AOC stands for “Controlled Appellation of Origin” which is the French system for ensuring quality wine. To achieve this rating the wine must meet seven requirements: 1. The land must be approved according to soil, configuration and altitude. 2. The grape varieties are limited to those which do well on the terrain. 3. Viticulture practices must be approved, which include such things as pruning, fertilization, and number of vines per hectare 3. Grapes must reach a certain ripeness which ensures flavor. 5. Yields are limited to ensure the quality of the grapes. 6. The wine must be made according to established practices. 7. Finally, an official tasting board must sample all the wines that apply for the AOC rating.

Whew! That’s a lot of requirements. To have five wineries receive this superior rating for their wines is an impressive achievement.

Laurens is in the Faugeres area wine country and the grape varieties used are Carignan, Syrah, Mourvedre and Grenache. No others. All AOC wine must also have at least 2 of the four permitted grape varieties included.

Since agriculture is important to Laurens, France, our guests are interested in seeing examples of Iowa agriculture. And they are excited to see our community and meet the people of Laurens, Iowa!



Why have a sister city? Can exchanging messages, photos, and visits be beneficial for Laurens, Iowa and also for Laurens, France? Is it even possible that what we do can have a broader effect on our nation and our world, as well as on our towns?

President Dwight D. Eisenhower believed this can happen. He said, "If only people will get together, then so eventually will nations." His People to People program assumed that ordinary citizens could practice diplomacy in an effective way by sharing ideas and promoting tolerance and understanding. As individuals get to know each other in a personal way, they can never again hold stereotyped opinions of the people and the nation they each represent.

Sister city programs happen in small towns, big cities, and all sizes in between. There are approximately 700 cities in the U.S. that have sister cities. Some have more than one, as there are almost 2000 partnerships.

Different types of programs grow from sister city relationships. Student and teacher exchanges offer educational opportunities. Sharing speakers, business and commercial interests, music, film, art, and cultural traditions are common. Some sister cities hold festivals featuring the customs of their counterpart. Expertise unique to one community can be of great value to the other. Sister cities give information and aid to each other in many different ways.

We have an excellent start on establishing a meaningful bond between Laurens, France and Laurens, Iowa. As we learn to share much more than our name, who knows what new possibilities may result?



The Cities of
Laurens, Iowa
+
Laurens, France

Request the honor of your presence at a dinner

On Thursday, the Nineteenth of July
Two thousand seven.

Social Hour 6:00 P.M.

Dinner 7:00 P.M.

\$37.50 each

Dows Conference Center
Buena Vista University
Storm Lake, Iowa

Attire - Coat & Tie

Historic Overview

Laurens was a product of the Western Town Lot Company, a subsidiary of the Northwestern Railroad. It was platted in November of 1881 and dedicated December 24, 1881, according to Pocahontas County records. The original plat contained blocks 1 to 12 south of the depot and include the present business section of town. According to word of mouth, the town was named for Henry and John Laurens, two Revolutionary War patriots who served their country with distinction and honor.

The first residents were Mr. and Mrs. (George and Nina) Leverich, storekeeper and first postmaster, Mr. and Mrs. (Benton and Ida) Steele, who set up the first blacksmith shop in town, Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Harold and family and Mrs. and Mrs. Will Clanton. There was just one building in Laurens for a time and all four families lived in it until further dwellings could be provided.

In May 1882, the first depot was built. The first freight unloaded was that of W.F. Atkinson of the Swan Lake area. Mr. S.R. Overton was the first railroad and express agent.

During the winter of 1882-1883 a school was started in the second story of Shoemaker's store and the first teacher was L.M. Starr.

By 1885, Laurens was sufficiently established to be listed as a village in the state records. One hundred people lived here with blacksmiths, two lumber and coal yards, a meat market, two hardware stores, two groceries, a general store, clothing store, hotel, elevator, a doctor, a druggist, and the Methodist church. There were no banks till September of 1885.

Many houses were being built at this time, but most people lived meagerly. At this time there was a real dilemma evolving between the Western Town Lot Company commissioned by the railroad to sell land to Laurens, and two land speculators, G.A. Garlock and W.A. McEwen, who undertook to start a north Laurens from Section Line Road. Their area included the schoolhouse and many of the finest homes in Laurens. The real barrier came when Western Town Lot Co. refused to sell lots between the depot and Section Line Road. This created a vacant strip where no one lived. Villagers called this "The Commons." The school kids called the "The Cherokee Strip" and they recall the tall grasses and board walks as they braved the wind on their way to school.

In 1886, some significant events happened: the starting of the first Lyceum, the organizing of the Cornet Band, first use of the Town Race Track and the first ice house was built.

By 1889, Laurens had a population of 350 people. On June 12, 1890, Laurens was incorporated. E.E. Allen was elected mayor; W.A. McNee recorder; G.T. Johnson, treasurer; and M. Hakes, J.P. Shoemaker, R.C. Hall, G. H. Bunton and D. J. Allen were councilmen. Immediate measures were then enacted to protect the townspeople from fire, health hazards and criminal acts. Community improvements followed in construction of roads, digging wells, obtaining drainage, improving water, a sewer system, a water tower, hitching posts and a new cemetery.

More interest grew in setting up stores south of Main Street. Great concern arose to improve the four roads leading into Laurens. In fact, on August 6, 1891, the first "gravel day" was declared. Citizens were urged to contribute twenty-five dollar donations each to this project. This "Gravel Day" idea was repeated many times in later years.

The first telephone instrument was located in Caswell's store in 1886. The first month

there were one hundred sixty messages recorded and 1893 the Bell Line formed a second system into the town and the office was located in Dr. Carroll's Drug Store. This was later to be known as the Independent Telephone Exchange of Laurens and by the fall of 1897 boasted patronage of thirty phones. By then it had become property of C.G. Reed. In 1902 the first steps were taken to install rural lines.

Many of the early residents were people who loved the land and they were finding it impossible to improve the farm land without expert help in drainage. In 1893, George Strickland came here from Indiana. He was an inventor and manufacturer of ditching machines which would help to solve most of the drainage difficulties. However, in a few years, this method proved inadequate because there was still too much water and silt filling the trough or ditch, made in the soil. Large barges were then contracted and shipped in by train. When they were finally put into operation the drainage problem began to be solved permanently.

In 1898, Laurens suffered its worst catastrophe: a fire destroyed all but two buildings on the west side of the north block of Third Street or the business district. This was a severe set back but the residences joined together to keep the business community going until rebuilding could be done. Solid brick block replaced the wood in rebuilding and these buildings still stand today.

In 1889, Dr. John Hovenden came to town and started his career as a doctor. He later bequeathed his residence to Laurens, which became the Hovenden Good Samaritan Home. (This home was later torn down to make way for new construction to the Samaritan home.)

At the turn of the century, one thousand people lived in Laurens. There were now two railroad lines, the Rock Island coming through in 1900, there were four churches, and the school included three hundred students.

The new Sunny Side Race Track was built by August 8, 1901. Ladies of the town began campaigning for a city park. Furthermore, they dreamed of a public library to put in the park, and they openly declared they needed clean sidewalks where they could walk without being spat on by the bench warmers along the street.

New opportunities for business and commerce were opening everywhere. The first automobiles were making their appearance. Electricity came to town as well as the first paved road 1917.

In 1919, a tornado struck south of town and scattered buildings over many miles. The two year old home of Anna Larson was leveled.

During the 1920s, the town enjoyed the services of two railroads, four churches, a public school a public library, water works, a movie theater, three banks, and a weekly newspaper. The town was known for the progressive farmers and businesses. The local newspaper was a constructive influence on the town and the fact that there were always Doctors and medical aid, plus strong legal advisors and attorneys, gave stability to the growing community.

The farming community had hardly finished the tiling and the reclamation of their acres when they began suffering the woes of low farm prices caused by post-war (WWI) inflation. Prices soared during the war and many farmers bought more land by using their homesteads for down payments on new farms. The entire economic picture worsened by drought and dust storms until recession went to depression. In December of 1932, the headlines in the local paper read "The Farmers Bank Fails to Open ". This was a surprise to

the business people along the street. Action was taken by the bank to protect the depositors as much as possible. The following week the headline read "Laurens Is Now Without a Banking Institution".

Cattle farmers were also hit hard during the Depression because of anti-market activity on the part of gangsters, some misinformed farmers, and hoodlums in general. Truckers, who customarily hauled cattle and hogs to market, began facing a major threat in the form of hi-jacking the livestock being sent to market.

As the entire nation worked through the thirties the Laurens government was progressive. They contracted for a new well and began to discuss the visibility of owning their own light system. They applied for a grant to construct an addition to the sewage plant. They cooperated with the school to maintain a band for the community. A new town addition (Smith) was opened for building permits for new homes.

Just as the community met the struggles of Depression years, it soon found itself thrown into the anguish of WWII. Every citizen was touched by the experience. Each person was issued ration stamps and no sugar. Canned goods, gasoline coffee, tobacco, and other necessities could be purchased without giving up enough stamps to show you were within your ration.

Important to the history of Laurens was the Hersom construction company. They began 1935, but by 1947 the economic upswing after the war, they had employed many people. In 1947 and in 1948, the Hakes plant suffered major loss in a fire. Many people were hired by this wholesale grocery and it was sad to see a company older than the incorporation of the town have such serious trouble.

During the next decade Laurens experienced: a robbery of the bank, the services of the R.E.C. were interchanged with the Laurens Municipal Light and Power Plant, dial phone service started in 1953, and the post office began daily delivery with two routes. In 1954, the swimming pool was opened after Earl Mackie left Laurens enough money to build it.

Once more Laurens was moving ahead. Business was good and in the early sixties thirty-nine building permits were issued for businesses and new homes. In 1962, the Laurens high school boy's basketball team was state runners-up. The team was coached by Floyd Winter.

At the end of the 1975-76 term, the Laurens School System disappeared. The Laurens Board of education officially talked to the Marathon Board of Education about merging the two systems into one. After much discussion and several elections the two schools formally merged on July 1, 1976 to become The Laurens-Marathon School System.

1981 to present

The observance of the Centennial of Laurens (1881) was determined from the original platting of the town, November 1881. The celebration lasted the year and throughout each event that was planned by the community, it was hoped that the homespun product was acceptable.

During the 1980's the Catholics razed their old structure and built a new brick edifice. Also during this time the Hakes family sold their grocery wholesale business to Scrivner and company another grocery wholesaler. Scrivner then sold the business to Fleming also a grocery wholesaler.

In the 1990's change continued on the main street. Old familiar businesses sold out to new owners or just closed. The United Methodist Church razed their old brick building and constructed a new one on the same location. This was in 1994. Then in 1999 Fleming grocery wholesale closed its building. That left over one hundred people without jobs.

Today the Fleming building is no longer vacant. During the year of 2005, the building was purchased by Jack Links, a beef jerky distribution center. It was remolded and now employs over one hundred fifty.

During the summer of 2006, the Union Pacific railroad upgraded their route through Havelock, Laurens, Marathon and Albert City. This will allow the trains to increase their speed and carry heavier loads. The increase is due to November opening of the ethanol plant at Albert City which uses shelled corn to make ethanol.