



Corning High School
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Curry & Mack Hardware... "not just a hardware store, but a place to shop"

...By Phil Gauthier CHS '45

The era of the pot-bellied stove and cracker barrel had passed, but from its inception there was always a friendly, country store atmosphere at the Curry & Mack Hardware Store in Corning.

For 53 years the business played an important role in the economic and civic growth of Corning and Adams County. Many couples will remember for example, how the folks at Curry & Mack helped them get started in housekeeping, enabling them to purchase the necessary appliances and other items on convenient terms - a hallmark of its owners' interest in people and the community.

They operated by the slogan noted above. The store's inventory was above average, presented in an inviting manner, designed to provide customers, young and old, a pleasant shopping experience. Even today, references to Maytag, Frigidaire, Hoover, Sylvania, Winchester, Remington, and G.E. bring to mind memories of Curry & Mack Hardware. The store was the distributor for Maytag in Southwest Iowa. C&M sold many, many hundreds of new and used Maytag and Frigidaire appliances in its history. The heavily patronized Frigidaire water cooler made the store a popular place to "shop".



(Belle) Curry. They were married in 1920.

Lewis and Belle had five children, one son dying in infancy. All the children, along with their mother, worked in the hardware store over the years. Except for Francis (Frannie), they each attained success in careers

Statistical details of the store's history are noted in a "timeline". The personal touches provided by the Leo Curry and Lewis Mack families who nurtured the business, are the strength of this testimonial.

Leo married Loretta Hughes, of Griswold, in 1919 only months after becoming a Corning businessman. In 1929, the couple adopted their niece, Theresa, after her mother died in childbirth. They also raised Marie Neeley, a niece, from an early age. Theresa is married to John (Jack) Cruise and the couple lives in the home where she was raised at 600 Grove Avenue. Marie is married to Forrest (Bud) Ekdahl and lives in Corning.

In a 1954 *Free Press* interview, Leo said he went into the hardware business for "something to do." Lewis professed he was looking for a job that would assure him a high enough income to marry Leo's sister, Isabel

outside of the family business. The eldest, Robert, operated a successful trucking business in Southwest Iowa. Illness claimed his life at age 84 on December 17, 2005. His wife, the former Patricia Johns, died June 28, 2005, at age 74, after a long illness.

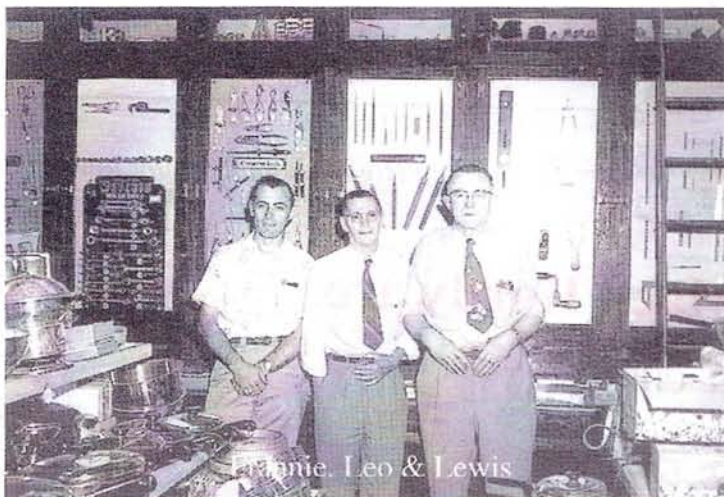
Frannie was the lone sibling to follow in the hardware business. Since selling the store in 1972, he has continued to be active in Corning affairs, pursuing many interests in "retirement" including employment with the National Farmers Organization and Standard Register. In 1950 Frannie and Cliff Bradley built Corning's first modern day motel, the M-B Motel, in West Corning. Later, as sole owner, Frannie sold the business 1958. His longtime life and business partner, the former Phyllis Watts, whom he married in 1943, died unexpectedly at age 83, March 26, 2006, following surgery.

Frannie's many years on Main Street as a business man and observer of local history and personages, make him an excellent resource for "remembering when" sessions for the community's young and old alike -- a treasured "institutional memory" indeed.

Frannie recalls having just about the best employees possible: Frank Johnson, Tom Hughes, Helen Gaskill, Mary Cullen Lynam, Glen Cooper, Don Cooper, Frank and Ruby Keefe, Jack Cruise, Carl Lawrence, Stan Peterson, Chuck Semik, Mick Templeton, and J.R.(Hap) Emerson.

The lone daughter of the family, Mary Margaret, and her husband, John Lenz, now live in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, moving there in 1999. The two met while they were members of the Corning High School faculty. John was an English, Speech and Drama teacher and Mary, a junior high teacher and school librarian. They served for many years. In retirement, they have continued an active interest and business in antiques. They also frequently worked at the hardware store.

Raphael, the youngest of the family, was one of Corning's entrepreneurial icons. He founded the Red Bull Tavern in Corning, promoted town team baseball and basketball and any other project for the betterment of the community. He and his wife Joan and family, later operated The Ozark Bar-B-Que, marina, boutique and grocery in Sunrise Beach, Missouri. The couple retired to Mission, Texas in 2002. Ray died October 28, 2002, at age 72, following a long illness.



The Mack tradition of love of music was handed down by their father. From 1918-21 Lewis headed one of the "hottest jazz bands in Southwest Iowa." Known as the "*Mack Jazz Band*" the group, with Lewis at the piano, was strong competition to similar musical groups from Omaha and Des Moines. Lewis wrote two songs, "Mr. Moon Man" and "Angel in White" which were copyrighted but never published. Lewis died on May 13, 1963.

The Mack children won many musical honors in high school when Corning's music programs soared under the tutelage of Carole Morgan. Bob and Francis were also members of *The Owls* dance band that included the Scott, Lyons and Marlatt brothers. Francis continues to play taps for American Legion military funerals and Veteran's Day observances.

Theresa Cruise has also maintained a similarly strong musical interest. She has conducted private piano lessons in her home for many years and serves as musical director at St. Patrick Catholic Church. Jack has been active in Corning civic activities, including serving as City Clerk for many years, succeeding

Lewis Mack's brother, Vince, in that post.

By owning land south of town, Leo maintained his love of farming. He also devoted much of his time to one civic project--Rosary Hospital. He

served as treasurer of the hospital from its start in 1944. He died August 3, 1970. In later years Mary Lenz volunteered twenty plus years on the hospital board.

Lewis was active in the Knights of Columbus, the Chamber of Commerce, served as treasurer of the town baseball team, a member of the Adams County Fair Board, and the Corning City Council. During his tenure on the city council and after much controversy the Corning Municipal Electric plant became a reality. Many years later Frannie served as a member of the Municipal Utilities Board. Frannie and Ray also served on the city council and Bob on the Fair Board.

Devotion to family, their church and faith has been a cornerstone of both the Curry and Mack households, creating a close-knit family that has included nine grandchildren and six great grandchildren for the Curry's and 12 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren for the Mack's.