

Nickel Hamburger

By Donald Heberly

For eight years I attended a one-room school about two miles from our home in North Central Kansas. Then, at age 13, I was ready for high school. But it was 11 miles to the nearest town, and six of those miles were sometimes very muddy. There were no school buses.

been thrown off the eastbound train. I was anxious to see if my mom had written to me on a 1-cent postcard, as she sometimes did. The postmistress, Miss Stark, was nice. She seemed to feel sorry for me if she had to report, "Nothing today."

Chuck and Lois worked late at the café, so

before school, I would go down to the café to heat myself some chili or something for breakfast. I would take in the packages of fresh buns that the bakery deliveryman had left on the front step earlier in the morning.

Sometimes I worked at the café. One day I was alone when a man stopped in with a car full of children. He came in alone, but he ordered 20 hamburgers. That kept me busy for a while. The meat had been previously formed into balls, so all I had to do was mash them out, fry them, and add pickles and other trimmings.

Chuck and Lois took me home to the farm for Thanksgiving, which was great. My folks sent back with me a bicycle that my three siblings had shared at home. I rode that bike all over the little



Hamburgers sold for 5 cents apiece at this café operated by my sister and her husband.

I had an older, married sister named Lois. She lived in Perry, Kan., on Highway 24 northeast of Topeka, near Lecompton, which was the first state capital. She and her husband, Chuck, had a small café where they served 5-cent hamburgers, among other things. They and my parents decided that I could stay with them and attend high school.

But I was lonesome for home. Each day I would go to the post office right after the mailbag had

town. My brother-in-law generously drove me to Topeka and purchased a pair of brown wing-tipped shoes for me. He liked to dress well and he thought that I would too.

I'll never forget that little 5-cent hamburger café. On a later trip, I went by the location. The building still stood there boldly, but the 5-cent hamburger was history. ❖

