By Charla Morris and Kim Wayman

"We had all these folks and I knew everybody in town then. It was such a popular place," recalls Mrs. Ethel Bohon about The Palace Bakery.

The Palace Bakery was owned and operated by the Bondurant family in northeast Missouri for more than 50 years. The Palace was famous for its bread, candy, cakes, cookies and ice cream, and it was a favorite place for the students in town.

In 1907, Mrs. Bohon's father and Bill Bondurant's grandfather, James D. Bondurant Sr., moved to Kirksville from Downing, Mo., where he had owned a hardware store. His children were growing up and he wanted them to be able to attend college. Upon moving to Kirksville, he purchased from Mr. Curry and Mr. Pease a business on the east side of the square and called it The Palace. For a number of years, the business was operated as a soda fountain and confectionary. The bakery then went into making cookies, bread and ice cream.

It was a family business. "My father always liked to keep the large family of us together. There were seven boys and three girls in my family. We all would work in the bakery and they would open up at about 5 o'clock in the morning.

Sometimes when there were big parties, we worked until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning," Mrs. Bohon said. She worked as a secretary for the bakery from 1907 to 1915.

"We just made some of the best ice cream that anybody ever made," she said.

"The retail bakery was quite a busy place for a long time," Mrs. Bohon said. "They made ice cream in this place and when we bought it, the bake shop was across the alley. Mack Hopewell made ice cream upstairs. Mack was such an expert at it. He made some of the best ice cream! A delicious flavor was Norwegian Lemon Ice. The Stills and the Laughlins went overseas to England and brought the recipe back with them. They liked the Norwegian Lemon Ice. It was exclusive for a while but everyone wanted it so we sold a lot of it. The ice cream was so good and different."

In the latter part of the 1920s, trucks became available. The bakery started two wholesale routes, one east of Kirksville and one west of Kirksville. As time went on and highways got better, they expanded those routes. At one time, the bakery had nine trucks running daily throughout northeast Missouri. These routes went as far north as Kahoka; as far east as Canton; south to Macon, Bucklin and Marceline; and west to Harrison, Newton, Milan and Unionville.
In 1920 Will and Jim Bondurant decided to expand the business, so land was purchased where the Commerce Bank now stands. "My father thought that was a little bit too much and it would cost a lot of money, but my two brothers decided to go ahead with the plan." The Palace, then located on the east side of the square, was moved into the new building on the corner of McPherson and Marion streets.

When the wholesale business was started, bread and ice cream was distributed throughout the northern part of the state. In the early 1920s, the merchandise was shipped by train. The ice cream was packed in wooden tubs with ice and salt to keep it cold and put on the trains to be shipped to the nearby towns for drug stores and soda fountains.

In those days the bread was not sliced; they didn't have slicing machines or wrapping machines. They had crates that would hold 20 to 25 loaves of bread. The crates were lined with paper; then the bread was put in. It was sealed and taken down and put on the train, and sent to the stores which had ordered it. It would be there the next morning.

"As things progressed, the slicing machines came into style. I can remember the first slicing machine the bakery got. The bread was run through and, of course, wrapped." Bondurant remembers.

Mrs. Bohon said, "We had a milk route and we delivered all over town. They bottled the milk and delivered it around to the towns. There were two railroads, the O.K. and the Wabash. They went through here and we had 12 or more trains in and out of Kirksville every day."

As the business expanded they purchased the Burk Brothers Packing Plant in the west part of town. It was converted into a dairy processing plant. The milk was pasteurized and the ice cream made to be kept in hardening rooms to keep the ice cream hard and the milk cold.

The bakery received milk directly from the farmers. The farmers brought the milk to the dairy to be weighed, tested and processed. At the bakery's peak, the total employment was 55 to 60 people.

As time went on, the large companies came into Kirksville from St. Louis; Kansas City; Quincy, Ill.; and Ottumwa, Iowa. The competition became stiff. The supermarket chains would contract with the larger bread and milk companies, forcing some of the small dairies and bakeries out of business.

By the early 1960s, many small groceries were going out of business; supermarkets were taking over. As a result, the bakery was closed in 1963. The building was sold to the Commerce Bank and they tore down The Palace Bakery to build a new bank building.

The Palace Bakery is missed by many people who remember it. "Even today people tell me how much they miss having the bakery in town," Mrs. Bohon said. The past owners of The Palace Bakery are still appreciated today for their loyal service to the community for more than 50 years.

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This appeared on in the 1916 Tigris, the third yearbook published by the Senior class at Kirksville High.