

## Digitized photos recall Thanksgiving Corn Bowl

The not-for-profit McLean County Museum of History recently celebrated a remarkable milestone: The posting of the 100,000th digitized Pantagraph negative on the Illinois Digital Archives website.

Back in 2012, The Pantagraph donated to the museum an estimated 1 million photographic negatives. These negatives date from the early 1930s to December 2000, when this newspaper switched to digital photography. With the support of state and federal grants, the museum has seen to the archival digitization, cataloging, and preservation of Pantagraph negatives from the 1930s to 1951.

Taken as a whole, these now-digitized negatives offer a stunning visual record of the Twin Cities and Central Illinois during the Great Depression, World War II and the early postwar baby boom.

It's great to have historically invaluable negatives preserved—both physically and digitally. Perhaps more exciting, though, is that the digitized photos created from scanning these negatives are then uploaded onto the Illinois Digital Archives ([www.idaillinois.org](http://www.idaillinois.org)) site, where the public can search, view and download them at no charge.

Preserving pieces—or in this case, a big chunk!—of the local past is serious business, and it's a mission the history museum takes seriously.

Visitors to the Illinois Digital Archives website can search for Pantagraph photos by keyword or phrase—such as “African American” or “Miller Park.” The easiest way to access the digitized Pantagraph negatives is via the history museum's website—[www.mchistory.org](http://www.mchistory.org). Simply go to the “Research” tab and click on “Resources.” Scroll down to “Pantagraph Negative Collection” and you're on your way. There's even a tutorial to help one navigate Illinois Digital Archives (IDA) databases.

With Thanksgiving a few days away, it's a good time to check the IDA site and see how many photos there are relating to the Corn Bowl. What's that? You've never heard of the Corn Bowl?

Well, as far as we're concerned, Miami, Fla, can have its Orange Bowl, and Pasadena, Cal. can keep the “Granddaddy of Them All”—the Rose Bowl. In the spirit of hometown pride, we're embracing the curious, doomed-to-failure Corn Bowl, a college football game held Thanksgiving Day in Bloomington for a half-dozen years beginning in 1947.

And we're in luck! A search of Pantagraph negatives on the IDA site turns up nearly 150 photos relating to the Corn Bowl. There are more to come, as history museum staff are working to bring additional months and years of photos online. As mentioned above, the Illinois Digital Archives holds Pantagraph photos through 1951. The 1952 photos will be uploaded in early 2022. Subsequent years will follow, though progress is dependent on financial support from friends and members of the museum, as well as success in securing additional grants.

The first Corn Bowl, held on November 27, 1947, featured neither Ohio State nor Alabama, but rather Southern Illinois University and North Central College of Naperville. Co-sponsored by Bloomington's American Legion Post 56 and the Hybrid Seed Corn Breeders of Illinois, the “bowl” game was played not in a bowl or stadium, but at Bloomington High School's Fred Carlton Field (subsequent games were held at Illinois Wesleyan University.)

“The Greatest Thanksgiving Event in the Mid-West,” was how Corn Bowl organizers with their corn-fed midwestern optimism billed the inaugural game—this despite the less-than-marquee matchup and venue!

In its short history, the Corn Bowl was saddled with schools lacking both football tradition and fans—the 1951 game, for instance, pitted Lewis College of Romeoville, Ill. against William Jewell College of Liberty, Mo. Such lackluster matchups made it difficult to attract interest and excitement.

The lousy, late-November weather of Central Illinois also helped keep fans away. The first and fourth games in the series were played in snow and ice; the third in a cold rain; and the fifth in snow and bitter cold. “The weatherman apparently has a curse on the Thanksgiving Day classic,” grumbled *The Pantagraph* after yet another miserable—meteorologically speaking—Corn Bowl.

The 1950 Corn Bowl (pictured here) featured Missouri School of Mines (now Missouri University of Science and Technology), and Illinois State Normal University. By all accounts, it was a miserable affair for player and spectator alike, “A crowd that numbered nearly 2,500 at the start of the game dwindled to a few hundred before the final gun sounded,” noted *Pantagraph* sports reporter Ed Alsene. “The field was doubly treacherous, for underneath the hard-packed snow was a sheet of ice.”

The visiting Miners netted all of 17 yards on the slick ground, while the Redbirds mustered a mere 7. The defensive standoff ended with the visitors from Rolla eking out a 7-6 victory. The cold was such that the Wilder Field scoreboard clock froze to a standstill in the first half.

Happily, the Corn Bowl wasn't the only small-time bowl game of the 1950-51 college pigskin season. Let's not forget, then, the 1950 Burley Bowl (“burley” being a type of tobacco), held in Johnson City, Tenn., and the Refrigerator Bowl in Evansville, Ind., with Abilene Christian topping Gustavus Adolphus 14-7.