

## Popcorn

Submitted by Carolyn Jons, daughter of Alan Vest

For years Sac County could properly be described as the "Popcorn Capital of the World." The land and climate lent itself extraordinarily well to cultivation of this crop. Storage and processing facilities had been established in Odebolt by American Popcorn Company and Crackerjack, in Lake View by Manley and Company and Quinn Popcorn Company, in Carnarvon by Ronald Meyer, and in Schaller by Central Popcorn Company. At one time there were seven different popcorn processing plants in the county, each marketing its product under separate labels, such as Bang-O, Jolly-Time, Poppin' Good and Crackerjack, among others.

When World War II came and food was rationed, sugar was almost impossible to get which meant that candy supplies were reduced to zilch. The movie theaters of America had come to rely on their confection sales, more than admission tickets, for a lion's share of their profits. With candy unavailable, popcorn became their life preserver. The Office of Price Administration put a limit of \$3.68 per cwt. that processors could pay farmers for popcorn. Enter the Black Market! Processors were desperate to obtain supplies to fulfill their contracts with the theater people, who now would pay any price. In Kentucky, where Central Popcorn had a large popcorn acreage contracted, farmers flatly refused to deliver their corn at the contracted price. Alan Vest of Sac City went to Murray, Kentucky with Len Blewitt of Schaller to try to work the matter out. All of the other processors also descended on Murray because it appeared this was where the bulk of the year's popcorn crop was located. Disregarding contracts, processors began a wild bidding war, and in a matter of days, the market price for popcorn rose from \$3.68 to \$25.00 and \$30.00 per cwt. In the end Central's contracts were renegotiated with the theater owners, who simply raised their price to the moviegoers. Nudged by the national theater chains, the Office of Price Administration recognized the facts of life and looked the other way.

Alan Vest also became involved in Noble Popcorn Company, an offshoot of Noble Manufacturing Company, which had a facility in Sac City. Ray Noble had invented and patented a pull type tubular steel drawbar that hitched farm equipment to tractors. They developed a manufacturing facility in Sac City and were quite successful.

Later Ray Noble and John Schulte, an attorney in Sac City, used part of the farm equipment manufacturing facility for processing popcorn, which they marketed primarily through fund-raising organizations in various parts of the United States. Unfortunately, Mr. Noble was killed in an accident and Mr. Schulte asked Alan Vest, whose law office represented a number of the processors, to take over the Noble Popcorn Company portion of the business.

Subsequently, Noble introduced popcorn as a snack in such far-off places as Rome and Tokyo. Then, having an interest in politics, it seemed a natural sequence to fashion a plastic elephant, and fill it with popcorn. Barry Goldwater supporters used these in almost every city and county in the country, although it did not insure Mr. Goldwater's success, as history records.