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SOFT DRINKS PUMPED by Bob Dole here in May 1979. Dole had worked at the Dole at Dawson Drug Store on a visit here in his high school years here.

Witty Soda Jerk Wants to Be President

By DAVID M. SHRIBMAN
The Boston Globe

People around Russell remember the young Bob Dole as the witty soda jerk over at Dawson's Drug Store — and later as the angular athlete cut down in war only to fight his way back, first struggling to walk and then running for office.

They remember the young Arlen Specter as a champion debater who worked in his father's oil field salvage yard, whose home served as a synagogue for the Jewish aviators at nearby Walker Air Base, and who later won fame as a Philadelphia prosecutor and Pennsylvania senator.

Welcome to Russell, a rural outpost of 4,800 that — in an improbable juxtaposition of chance and ambition — is home to two Republican candidates for the White House.

"It isn't something in the water," said Russell T. Townsley, the cerebral, retired publisher of The Russell Daily News and The Russell Record.

Nor did Russell have the bright lights of Wichita, or even of Salina. "We did small-town things," said Velma Beerman, a classmate of Specter's. "We walked to the movies, walked to the dances. We provided our own entertainment: Hiking, ice skating. There always seemed to be a group that was together."

Founded 123 years ago as a junction on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, Russell is the sort of rural community celebrated in American folklore.

It is a place where the newspaper used to accept chickens as payment for a subscription, where the black clouds that rolled into town in the Depression years brought dust, never rain, and where today the fields on the outskirts of town are planted with wheat — and with oil well pumpjacks.

But the town spawned an unusual record of achievers. Besides Specter and Dole, who represent Kansas in the Senate, there were Roland Rautenstrauss, a football teammate of Dole's who later became president of The University of Colorado; Marj Dusay, who played opposite Gregory Peck; and Steve Mills, a movie and television producer who oversaw such productions as "Lonesome Dove."

"In Russell," Mills said from Hollywood, "you watch haircuts on

Saturday afternoon and you drag Main Street at night."

Dole's father was a popular figure, running the White Front Cafe, taking over a cream and egg station, and finally managing a grain elevator.

Specter's father, who sold cantaloupes before opening an oil field yard, moved the family here in the autumn of 1942. Arlen was 12.

"I learned to play pool there, and the next year I joined the debating team," Specter said. "You couldn't do both."

All this probably makes Alice Mills the only woman in history ever to teach high school algebra to two contenders for the same presidential nomination.

She remembers Dole as "quiet, very quiet, and well-mannered," and remembers Specter as "very brilliant, very industrious." Today the two — relentless achievers but different in temperament — make for unusual prairie home companions.

Though Dole, 71, retains the dust of the Kansas prairie in his voice, and Specter, 65, is the very model of the modern urban lawmaker, Russell is the backdrop not only for their memories but for their formative experiences.

"If Frank Capra were creating this story, he'd invent Russell," said Richard Norton Smith, a former Dole speechwriter who now is director of the Ronald Reagan Library in California. "It is a small town with big people, a place on the prairie where people tested themselves against the elements, and where people without a lot became pretty self-reliant."

Indeed, it is the small towns of America and not its big cities that have produced most of the nation's presidents. The Independence of Harry Truman, the Abilene of Dwight Eisenhower, the Plains of Jimmy Carter, the Dixon of Ronald Reagan and the Hope of Bill Clinton — all small towns, all instrumental in the shaping of presidents, all similar in an important way to Russell.

"Out there, people do develop a sense of values," says former Gov. Mike Hayden, himself from the western Kansas town of Atwood. "There are so few people, you have to learn to depend on each other."

It was the discovery of oil on Thanksgiving Day 1923 that changed the fortunes of Russell, giving it a thin measure of prosperity when other communities suf-

fered in the Great Depression and — important in the lives of both Dole and Specter — permitting the town to outbid, sometimes by \$10 a month, nearby towns for the services of gifted teachers.

"The teachers demanded that we do our best," said Dean C. Banker, who runs the family's 113-year-old clothing store where both senators were outfitted. "You didn't dare shirk."

Besides Charlotte O'Brien, the mayor's wife, the Specters were the only Jewish people in Russell. When his sister came of marriageable age in the late 1940s, the Specters grew worried that the only Jewish boy in town was Arlen himself. They moved east, as Specter would later put it in a poignant tribute to his family on the Senate floor, so as "to provide the opportunity for Shirley to meet and marry Edwin Kety."

But Specter returns often. His sister-in-law, Joyce Specter, said he is fond "of his memories and the places where he grew up." Dole still owns the family home at 1035 N. Maple St., where an American flag flies outside.

For years the people here have regarded the presence of two of its sons in the Senate as a curiosity. Monday's daily paper has separate page-one stories on Dole's budget ideas and Specter's flat-tax proposal.

But now presidential politics has made rivals of two men whose families have known each other for more than half a century.

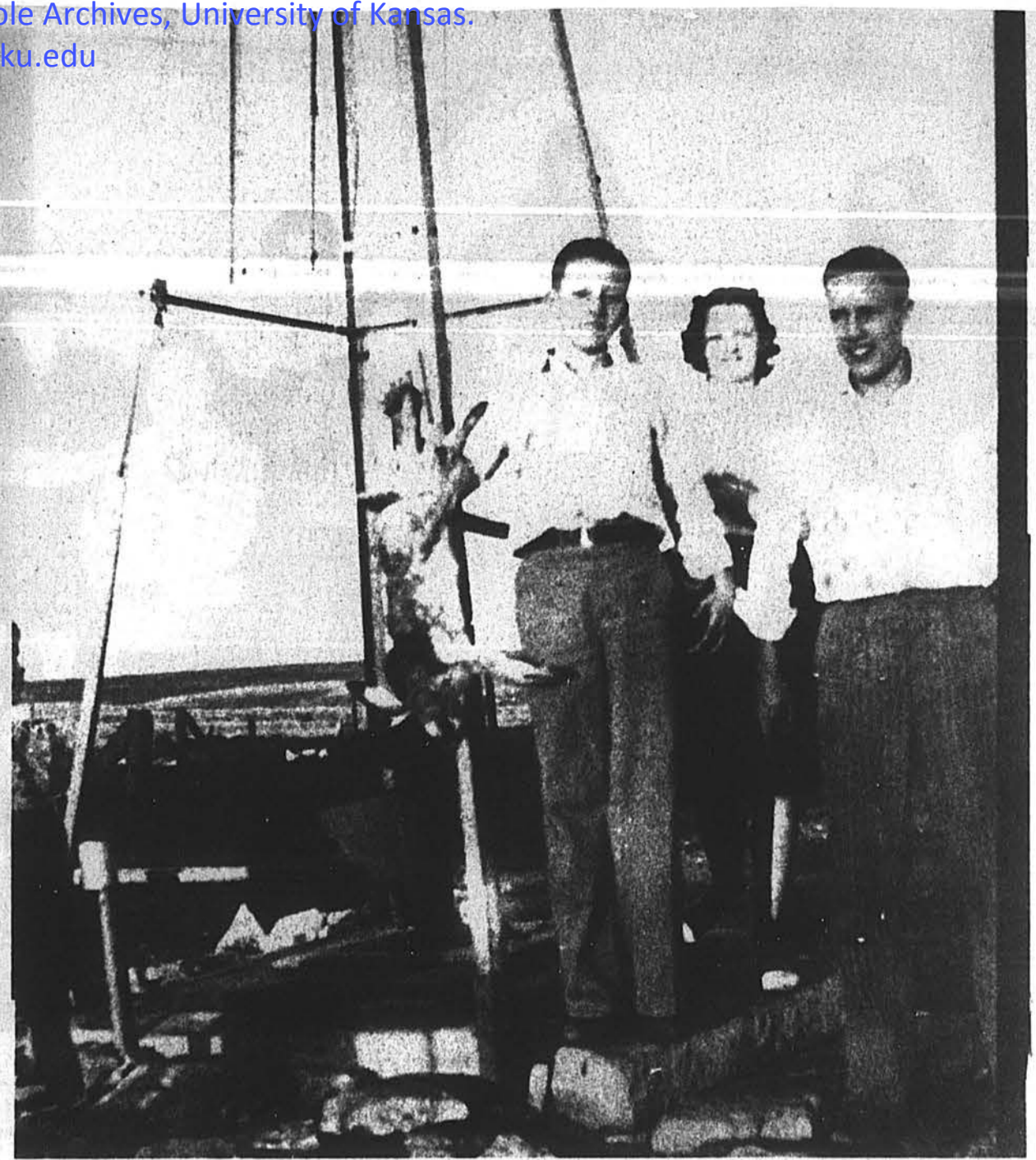
"We all like Arlen," said Norma Jean Steele, Dole's younger sister. "But we like Bob better."

That's a matter of some awkwardness in a town that has "Bob Dole Country" painted on a grain elevator and on highway signs.

"We have to be real careful when we are in a group," said Margaret "Barney" Roberts, a longtime friend of Dole's. "We just don't talk about politics."

Joyce Specter is well-liked in town. Just the other night, G. B. Dawson, probably Dole's best friend in town, went out to dinner with his wife, and, as they've been doing for years, with Joyce Specter.

"We're not going to let this hurt anyone," said Gloria Dole Nelson, the oldest sister of the Senate majority leader.



KENNY DOLE, left, Norma Jean and Bob enjoy a day at one of their grandfather's farms near Russell. Kenny, evidently, has landed a jackrabbit. Note the native sandstone surrounding the well.



PLAY TIME — Bob, Kenny, Norma Jean and Gloria enjoyed playing together in the yard near their home here. The Dole siblings were always close and remain so today. Norma Jean (Dole) Steele and Gloria (Dole) Nelson both live in Russell. Kenny Dole died in March, 1993.



THESE FOUR RUSSELL STUDENTS are on the front porch of the Dole home here. The picture was taken in 1941, the year Bob Dole was graduated from Rus-

sell High School. From left, are: Pi Leon Mai, Bob Dole, Eddie Manweiler and Harold Bangerter.



DORAN R. DOLE, the father of Sen. Robert J. Dole, is in his creamery in this picture taken inside the new building, about 1935. Dole supported his family of a

wife and four children from the creamery and as the manager of Norris Grain Company. The creamery and the grain company were located on the same ground.