



*"from past generations to future generations"*

This is the Sixth Edition of our electronic publication from HAHS. IT IS NOT REPLACING OUR CURRENT QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER WHICH WILL CONTINUE TO BE SENT QUARTERLY TO OUR MEMBERS ELECTRONICALLY AS WELL AS THOSE WHO PREFER TO RECEIVE IT IN THE MAIL. IN ORDER TO SAVE THE PRINTING AND MAILING COSTS, THIS EMAIL PUBLICATION WILL BE SENT ELECTRONICALLY ONLY IN BETWEEN OUR REGULAR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTERS.

This new publication is going to focus on historical events, sites, and stories about the past of the County West area. We will feature stories, photos, and information about local events and sites such as buildings, cemeteries, and schools as well as personalities that are a part of the past of County West.

Written and edited by Ron Shank.

## Eldridgeville Cemetery



It was originally established as a part of the Eldridgeville Methodist Church which was located about 4 miles east of Cabery in the settlement of Eldridgeville which was located along side of the County Line Road (8000 South) in Section 11S in the Southeast corner of Norton Township. We do not know the exact location. The settlement was located in the vicinity of the present intersection of 15000 W and 8000S with the cemetery about ½ mile east of the settlement in Section 12S on the north side of 8000S. According to church records the church along with a nearby parsonage was built in 1867 with Rev. Collins as the first pastor. The cemetery was probably established within a year or two of that date. However an 1873 Plat Map of Norton Township does not show either one of them in that location. It is possible that the area that became the cemetery was informally used as a burying ground by local settlers and was officially taken over by the church at some point in the 1870's.

When the small settlement of Eldridgeville was by-passed by the railroad in the late 1870's, the few buildings contained in the settlement were either torn down or moved to other sites. The church building was dis-assembled and moved to Herscher. It was moved in pieces on sleds probably beginning in the winter of 1882 and it was reassembled on the corner of Main and Myrtle Streets. It was re-dedicated as a church in 1887. During those years from 1882 to 1887 the Methodist church held services in a hall above Wesemann's grocery store across Main Street until the building was rededicated in 1887. In 1899 they decided that they needed a

bigger space and a new Methodist church was constructed across Myrtle Street and dedicated in June of 1900. The old church would become the site of a number of different stores over the years until it was torn down in 1955 and a medical building was constructed there. The medical building would become the site of the Herscher Area Historical Society in the early 2000s. The location of the Methodist church would remain on Main Street until 1963 when a new Methodist church was built at the corner of Elm and Third Street. The location of the Methodist Church on Main Street then became the location of the Herscher Post Office in 1965. Since the cemetery was located in a relatively isolated rural area and the movement of the Methodist church to Herscher in 1882, it began to languish over the next few years.

On September 22, 1897 led by A. T. Anderson a meeting was organized in Herscher to take ownership of the property, form a cemetery association, and properly maintain the grounds. At this meeting George McNamee was named Chairman and J.W. Fleming, Theodore Wadleigh, C.L. Woods, Chris Christopher, and A. T. Anderson were chosen for the board. Don Bush donated the land to the group. William Grimwood donated a beautiful curved metal sign with the name of the cemetery. It was placed over the gate at some point, but the original sign was stolen in 1975. A caretaker was hired for the rate of \$1.50 per day for each day he worked. In 1900 the cemetery was enlarged. In 1902 the price to dig a grave was \$3.00. It went up to \$4.00 in 1906.

The earliest marked grave is that of James Fleming whose date of death is listed as May 10, 1863 but the 1863 is a little fuzzy on the stone. There is a Wallice Cook with an 1870 death date and twin baby girls named Martha and Mary Cook (probably Wallice's sisters) who died in 1876. There is also a Hiram Eldred who died in January of 1874. There are at least 50 marked graves that precede 1900 and there are over 20 marked graves that are listed as unknown or their stones have weathered to the point where they are no longer legible. I would also think that there are other unmarked graves in the cemetery which would be typical of a cemetery of this era.

According to the II USGenWeb File there are 373 marked graves in the cemetery as of 2010. I am certain that there have been more added since then. There is at least one Civil War veteran buried there and there are a number of WW I and WW II veterans buried there including Victor Hendrix who was killed on Okinawa in 1945. This cemetery is probably the smallest in area of the rural cemeteries in County West and is the only one I am aware of that is fenced in on all four sides. Among the most common surnames in this cemetery includes Anderson, Armitage, Blair, Bowers, Carpenter, Christopher, Clark, Clemans, Cook, Crydenwise, Farley, Fleming, Gross, Guiltner, Hall, Hawkins, Hendrix, Hosier, Johnson, Larsen, Nutt, Overright, Preston, Reed, Snyder, Tolle, Wadleigh, Watson, and Wood.

## **Name That Village!**

In this article I am going to deal with the history of the names of the villages both past and present in the County West area. Before I get to the names of the specific villages I want to deal with a small part of the back story of the settlement of the County West area.

The first white settlers did not arrive in the County West area until the 1840's. The population was small, but continued to grow during the 1850s. According to the census numbers in 1860 there were 251 settlers in Norton Township, 454 in Pilot Township, and 599 in Salina Township. Most of these settlers lived in scattered group of houses which sometimes consisted of a post office/store, a blacksmith shop, and sometimes a church with a few homes in the area. Most of these settlers were farmers who raised grain and livestock. The raising of grain crops had been greatly accelerated by the invention of the self scouring steel plows which now made it possible to turn over the fertile but tough top layer of sod that covered the Grand Prairie. It was invented by John Deere in 1837.

During the 1870s the population continued to grow. There had been a boom in westward migration after the Civil War from the eastern US as well as the arrival of a large number of immigrants to the area from France, Germany, Ireland, England, and Norway. According to the 1880 census there were well over 1,000 settlers each in Norton and Pilot Townships and almost 1,000 in Salina Township. A fairly significant number of these settlers were either immigrants or first generation Americans. That pattern would continue into the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The other major problem for famers in the area was the lack of transportation in order to get farm crops to market. The only thing available was the limited system of dirt roads. They were not suitable for heavy farm crops of grain and were not usable at all times of the year. Market towns were far away and it was a slow, difficult process to get the crop to market so they were limited to growing only what crops could be used on the farm or consumed locally.

But by the late 1870s a solution to this problem appeared on the horizon – the railroad. The first railroad constructed in the area was the Construction of the Illinois Central Railroad south from Chicago which reached what would be the city

of Kankakee in 1854. But it did not come directly through the County West area. But as more people began to settle in the County West area, railroads began to see this area as full of untapped potential for the shipment of farm products out of the area and the shipment into the area of all sorts of manufactured goods to the farmers, carrying the mail, and providing passenger service for travel in the area.

By the late 1870s four railroads were constructed through the County West area. They were:

1. The Wabash Railroad – It was built from Chicago to St. Louis and beyond. Essex and Reddick would become villages along this line.
2. The Kankakee and Southwestern Railroad – It would become a part of the Illinois Central system. It would branch off the main line at Otto a few miles south of Kankakee and would create the villages of Irwin, Herscher, Buckingham and Cabery as well as short lived stops at Carrow (Old Lehigh) and Dickeys Siding.
3. The Three I (Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa) Railroad was built from Momence to Streator. This railroad changed names several times and it basically today runs parallel to Illinois Route 17. In the County West area the villages of Goodrich, and Union Hill were created. It also ran just north of Reddick where it crossed the Wabash Railroad. At one point Reddick had two depots – one for each line.
4. Kankakee and Seneca Railroad. It ran from Kankakee to Seneca on the Illinois River where it connected with the Rock Island line. It created the village of Bonfield as well as running through Essex. There was also the short lived village of Frieling which was between Bonfield and Essex. There were several other lines proposed at various times across County West, but were not built for a variety of reasons.

The pattern of settlement was quite similar for most of these villages. A depot would be constructed (most of which looked quite similar to each other). There would be a post office established often times in a general store. There would be a grain elevator and often times a blacksmith shop. As the village grew churches would be established and all sorts of other businesses such as hotels, banks, doctors, restaurants, and saloons would open up. Schools were established. If the village continued to grow there would be other businesses added to meet the needs of the people in the surrounding area. At times there would be several

businesses of the same type competing with each other. In most cases the railroads tried to place their stops about six to eight miles apart which made them fairly close to most farms so grain could be hauled to the elevators fairly easily. In some cases the name was first applied to the post office and the same name was then adopted for the town.

The railroads often used the business strategy of bypassing existing settlements and creating new villages in order to make more money selling town lots.

Examples of this in County West included Pilot Center, Eldridgeville, and Pogsonville. There were also a few places on the railroad such as Frieling and Dickeys Siding that did not grow and prosper and gradually faded away.

### **Origins of the Names of County West Villages**

1. Buckingham – It is probably named for Ebenezer Buckingham. This is a little fuzzy but his family was in the grain business and had some connection with railroad coming into the area. The family did not live there and there is no evidence that he even visited the village. It is the same Buckingham family that the Buckingham Fountain in Chicago was named for him by his sister.

2. Bonfield – It is named for Thomas Bonfield who was in charge of locating depots on the Kankakee and Seneca Railroad. The Salina Township village of Verkler wanted the depot. A delegation of local residents went to Mr. Bonfield and asked for the depot to be located there. Mr. Bonfield told them that in order for that to happen, a \$2,000 “fee” must be paid to him. It must be paid in cash. The money was raised and construction of the depot began. At some point in the construction a wooden sign arrived with the name Bonfield on it and was placed on the depot. The town then became known as Bonfield and in 1888 the name of the village was officially named Bonfield. Mr. Bonfield never lived there at any point in his life.

3. Cabery – This village is also named for a person who never lived in the village. A traveling salesman named John Caberry visited the area often in the 1870s and made a good impression on the local residents. A Masonic Lodge was formed there and Mr. Caberry donated \$200.00 worth of furniture to the lodge. They wanted to name the lodge for him, but under Masonic rules a lodge could not be named for a living person. The postmaster then decided to name the post office

Caberry and the village adopted the name. It was later shortened to Cabery. Earlier the settlement had been called Four Corners and also Paradais after a family that had settled just to the west of the settlement.

4. Essex – This is probably the easiest and has the shortest history of any of the of the villages when it comes to the name. It was named by Gardner Royce an early settler from Essex Township in New York where some of the settlers had previously lived. The settlement had earlier been called Jackson.

5. Goodrich – It was named for J. L. Goodrich who donated the land for the railroad right of way. A depot, a church, and a grain elevator were built there but not much more. It did not grow and prosper as much as the other depots on the line.

6. Herscher – It was named for John Herscher who had some influence in bringing the railroad through the area. He purchased land on both sides of the right of way. He laid out the village and helped incorporate it. He established a grain elevator and a number of other businesses. He died in 1885 but his brother Frederick and other family members helped the village to grow and prosper. It became the largest of the villages established along the railroads.

7. Irwin – It was named for George Irwin who was one of the earliest settlers in the area. It was originally suggested that it be called Connorsville in honor of all the Connor and O'Connor families that lived in the area. I cannot document this story and it may be a local legend, but several years ago I was told by a descendent of the Jackson family that lived in the area that it was supposed to be named Jackson, but the family did not have the funds to file the official papers with the county. Mr. Irwin did have the money and the village was named for him.

8. Lehigh- Old Lehigh-Carrow – It was originally named for Joseph Carrow who lived in the area. A depot was built there, but not much else. High quality stone was discovered there and a quarry was dug and expanded to produce high quality stone for building construction as well as other purposes which was then shipped by railroad. There was never really a village there, but there was a church at one point. I was not able to discover the source of the name of Lehigh for the area. The quarry is still in production today.

9. Reddick – The origin of the name of this village is by far the most obscure of any of them. In my research I was not able to find an answer that could be

documented for the theories that I explored. The first and most commonly named source was that the name Reddick came from a Three-I railroad construction worker by the name of Dick who had bright red hair. This story was taught in local schools for years. He was very popular with locals during his time in the village. But the 3-I construction crew did not reach the Reddick area until 1882 and the village already was using that name by then. It also seems unlikely they would name their village for a stranger who was just passing through. The second possibility is that it was named for William Reddick of Ottawa who was serving in the state legislature. But he had no known connection to the area and there is no proof that he even visited the village prior to its naming in 1880. So I was not able to come up with a definitive answer for the source of the name. Earlier proposed names for the village included Fellerville and Shellyville. Henry Shelly platted the town but was a modest man and did not want the village named for him. At one period for a short amount of time it was actually known as Ben Moe.

10. Union Hill – the settlement was founded by John Schobey who was the postmaster and he wanted the word union in the name for the post office. He felt the word union would help reunite the country after the Civil War. He originally wanted the name to be Union Grove but was told they could not have that name because there was already a village by that name in Illinois. Even though there was no real hill there, he chose Union Hill for the post office and the village adopted the name.

All of these early villages can trace their existence as a village to the railroad. But their decline is parallel to the decline of the railroad in its importance to transportation in the area. The growing use of the automobile and the building of hard roads both contributed to the decline of the railroads. Illinois Route 17 was made a hard road in 1918 and Illinois 115 in 1924. A number of the county roads and township roads then became what were known as slab roads and later hard roads as we know them today. By the 1940s there was no passenger service on any of these local railroads. More and more grain and farm products began to be hauled by truck. Today only one of the four railroads (The BNSF) follows the route of the original 3-I route across the county. The Illinois Central route only goes as



far west as Herscher. The Wabash and the Kankakee and Seneca rail lines are long gone with little evidence remaining of them in County West.

The 10 villages along the routes have gone into decline also. In most cases the population has decreased and there are few jobs and little economic activities in these villages with the exception of grain elevators in some cases. Some of these villages had 20 to 30 businesses or more in their prime. Today very few of them remain. Just as the automobile and hard roads hastened the end of the railroads, today businesses such as Wal Mart and other large chains have severely hurt most of the mom and pop businesses that once prospered in these small towns. In recent years the coming of Amazon and similar companies has added to the difficulties of small town businesses.

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