



HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

8TH SUPPLEMENTAL NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2022

PILOT CENTER

By Bob Voss

Where in the world was Pilot Center? There is the Pilot Center Cemetery – was there more?

Back in the early beginnings of Pilot Township (1857), the whole township was referred to as the Town of Pilot. Even the old minutes from the Pilot Township secretaries ledger refer to the township as the Town of Pilot. The founding fathers wanted to build a Town House in the exact center of Pilot Township which now is Route 115 and 11000 W. Road. This was the area that was know as Pilot Center.

The township building (aka the Town House) was built in 1863 on the two acres of ground that was purchased from David Crum in 1862. The Town House was used as a meeting place where elections, religious gatherings, various social events, and hearings before the Justice of the Peace were held. Even prior to the construction of this building, burials were taking place on these two acres which today is the Pilot Center Cemetery.

I have found two different pictures of the Town House. They are very similar but don't help us much as to the overall appearance of the building. The Town House was located in the northeast corner of the Pilot Center Cemetery. (see attached drawing)

Picture #1 (attached) was taken from the Herscher Centennial Book. I assume we are looking at the back side (south side) of the building. There appears to be two large sliding doors that would open into some sort of storage for Township equipment?? There are trees around the building that are shown on the 1873 Pilot Township Plat Map.

Picture #2 (attached) is what I think would be the east side of the building. The man in the picture is Myron Wilcox and it gives us an idea of the height of the building (appears to be about 14' to the eave). This picture must have been taken just before its dismantlement in 1889.

Neither of these pictures gives us an indication of what the front of the building looked like nor gives a clue as to what the inside may have looked like. There must have been a raised area where the moderator, Justice of the Peace, preacher, or whoever was in charge of the gathering. There would have been benches for seating and a stove of sort for heat. Since this building was only 24' x 26' there could not be a lot of room (attached is a possible floor plan)

Going west from the Town House, there were 40 acres ($\frac{1}{4}$ mile x $\frac{1}{4}$ mile) owned by George Avery (Gery and Cathy Wright's house now sets in the NE corner of those 40 acres). West of those 40 acres were three acres of ground owned by Hiram Aldrich. In 1865 Hiram built a general store with a post office at this site. The 1873 plat map of Pilot Township, shows possibly four buildings but more likely three on those three acres which had a lot of woods. One is labeled "store" which would have been the general store/post office (building #1). This map is very blurry and it is hard to tell what are trees and what are buildings.

In 1872, Azariah Buck partnered with his brother John in buying and running the general store/post office built by Hiram Aldrich. They also ran a blacksmith shop (possibly building #2), a wagon and general repair shop (possibly building #3), and grain, livestock, coal and farm implement building (possibly building #4). Roy Wilcox even said there were a few homes out there. After the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad in 1878 and the beginnings of the town of Herscher, the Bucks moved their general store to Herscher. Other buildings were probably taken down.

There was another yet not well known building that was out there for a short time. From the Herscher Centennial book: Azariah Buck gave this interview in the January 25, 1894 Gazette "Twenty Two years ago this coming February, I bought the corner store of Hiram Aldrich at Pilot Center. Some marked changes have taken place in Pilot Township since that time. **Ed Stowits thought there was considerable money made in the grocery business in those days, so the following summer built a store nearly opposite us.** He followed the business six months and lost a good deal of money. For the last week we have been taking an inventory of our stock, and I find it takes a good deal of time to get everything in order for business. Sometimes the balance sheet shows one how much is lost as well as the slight gains in those days of close competition."

Ed Stowits owned a small farm across the road from the cemetery where Marlene Papineau now lives and must have been where the short lived grocery store was. It does not show on the 1873 plat map.

TIDBITS

- Pilot Center existed for only a short time (1864 to 1878) or just a matter of 14 years. Today, all that remains of Pilot Center is the cemetery.
- From the 1860 census: there were 448 residents in Pilot Township. Pilot Center was the only Post Office in Pilot Township.
- If you have any more information on Pilot Center, you can contact me at robertlvoss@aol.com



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Pilot

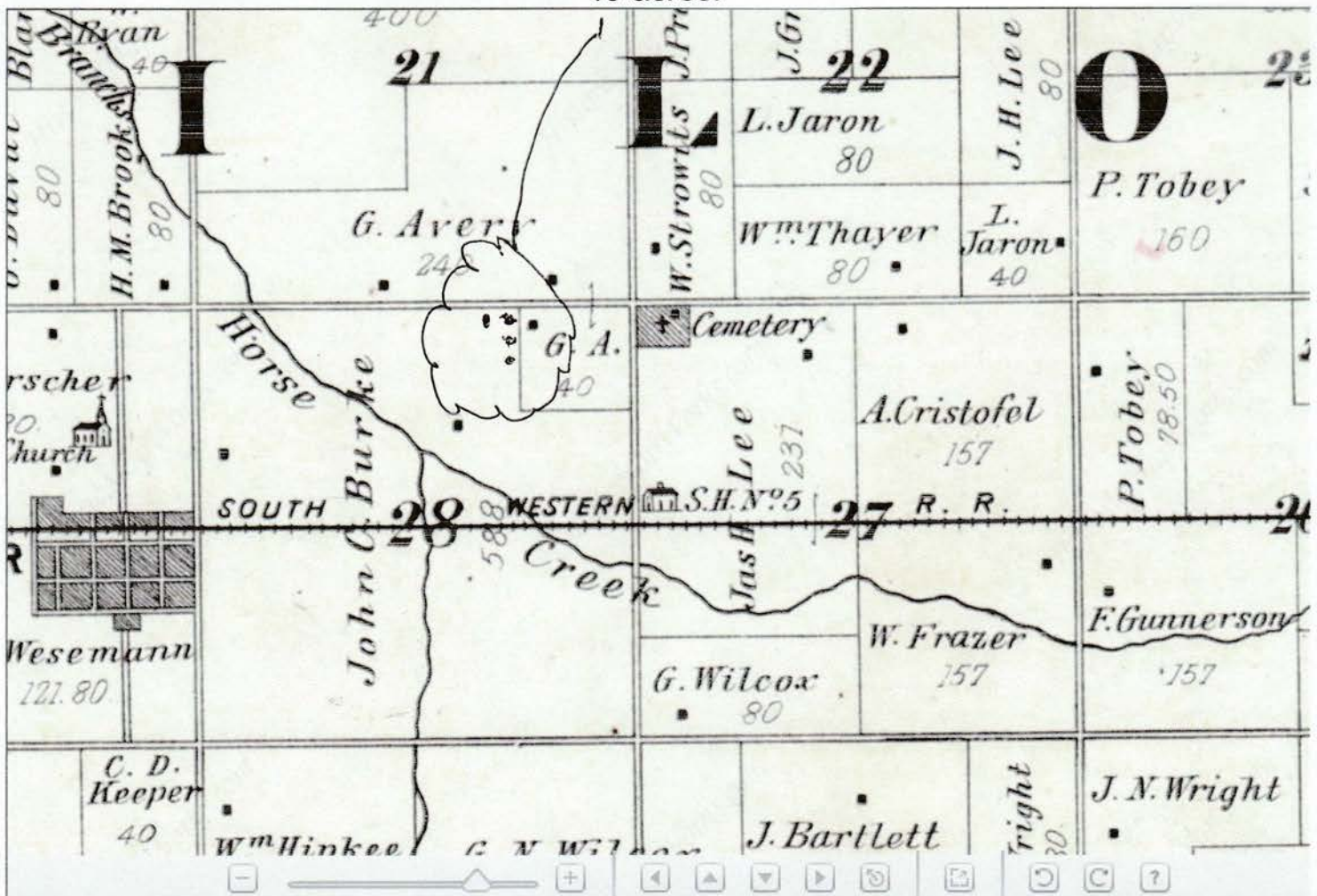
Published by J. H. Beers & Co. in 1883

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This is a portion of the 1883 Plat Map. It is similar to the 1873 Plat Map (very hard to read).

That is Herscher at the far left. Just left of the cemetery is where Gery and Cathy Wright live except if was 40 acres owned by George Avery back then. Pilot Center was just left of those 40 acres.



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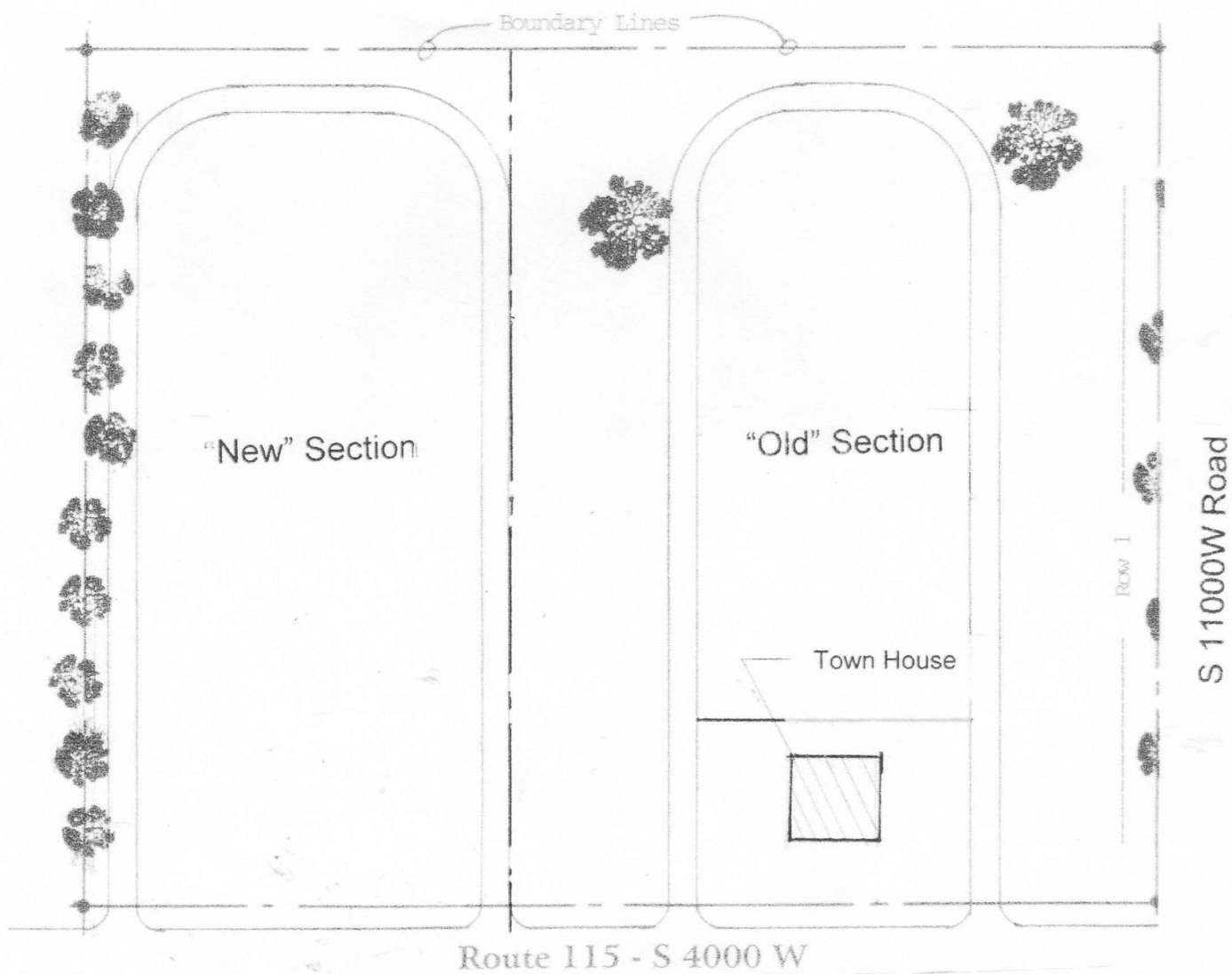
Map Information

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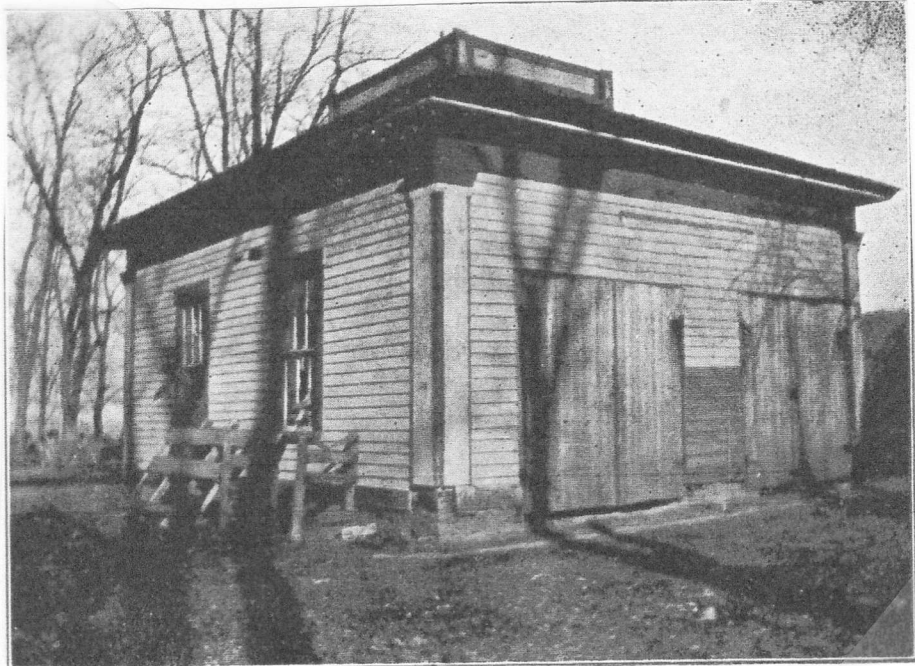
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State: Illinois

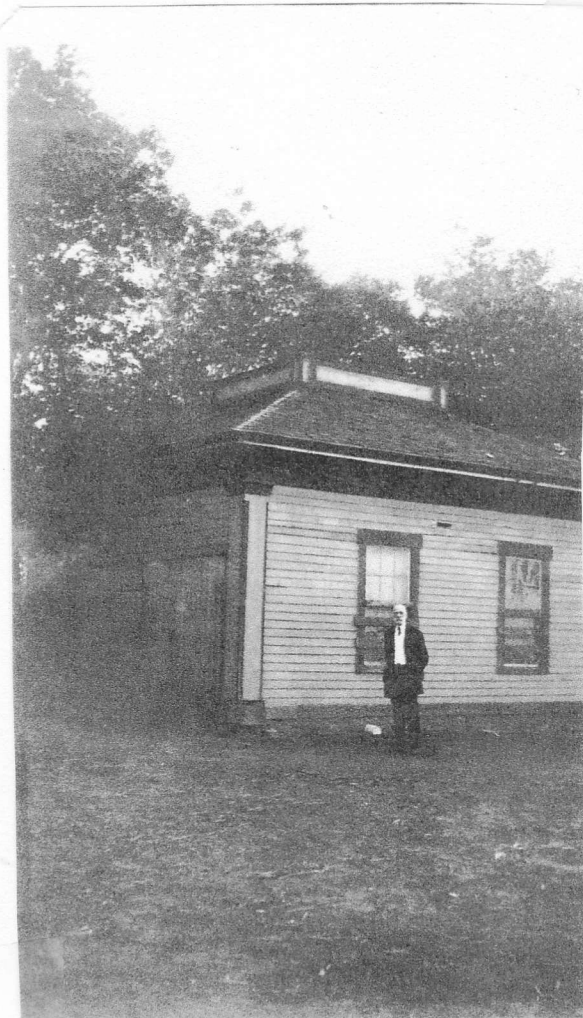
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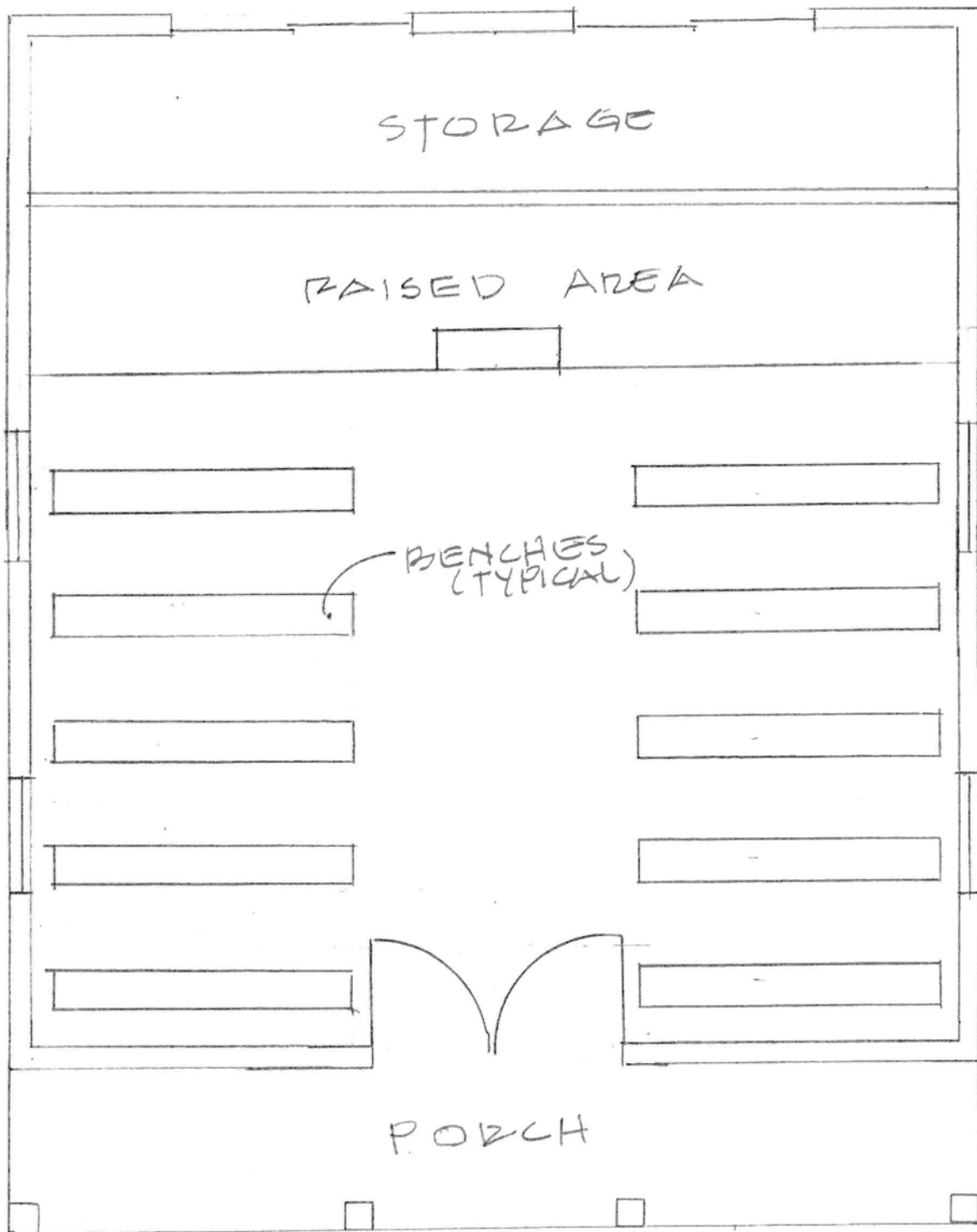
PILOT CENTER CEMETERY



PICTURE 1



PICTURE 2



FLOOR PLAN