

A Short History of Knox

By

Mrs. George Talbert – April 1916

The following brief history of Knox was written by Mrs. George Talbert and read before the members of the Women's Club of Knox at their regular meeting held at the home of Mrs. Roy Wyman, Wednesday afternoon:

Since I have been looking up dates and facts concerning the history of Knox, I have come to the conclusion that the pioneer settlers of Knox should go down in history as heroes and heroines and that we should be very proud of our beautiful little city which has developed from such crude conditions and the hardships with which the first people had to contend.

Knox was surveyed and laid out in 1851 and secured the first railroad in 1882. All the surrounding towns, North Judson, Hamlet, Grovertown and San Pierre had railroads and some of them two before that time.

I have talked to Mr. And Mrs. Hepner, who I think are the oldest residents of the town and they told me of some of the conditions that existed from 1851 until after the war. The high sandy land was all that was tillable. All the low land that composes the beautiful farms around here now was then under water the greater part of the year.

They could buy no bread stuff of any kind and the nearest grist mill was Zeighner's up in Marshall County. A trip to the mill with a load of corn and wheat meant a 5 days journey, owing to the conditions of the roads and the time it took to get the grinding done.

They always kept a coarse grater, made out of a piece of tin, for the purpose in case they should get out of bread stuff. They could not buy any lard or meat, and fruit only when wild berries could be picked and sold. I suspect if some of us were placed in the same circumstances today we would be in danger of starving.

It is not to be wondered at that the population of Knox grew at a rate of only 15 per year for the first 31 years of its existence. Knox is now one of the leading little cities of northern Indiana.

The first store, a little grocery and dry goods store combined, stood on the corner just south of Grandma Larrew's residence and was under the supervision of Jacob Bozarth Sr.

The first post office stood on the corner just north of the Fay Hotel and was built of clap boards.

The first court house stood where our jail now stands and consisted of two rooms, one for the purpose of holding court, and the other in which the county officers transacted their business. The next court house, what is now called the old court house was begun in 1858 or 9 on the site our present court house now stands, but was not completed until near the close of the war. They had to build just as they could secure the money, and their resources were very limited. Our present court house was built in 1898 and 99 and will compare favorably with most any in the state.

The first church was a Methodist church and was built on the site now occupied by Geibel's bakery. It seems as though the church was not strong enough to support itself and it was sold and used for other purposes.

The next church was a Methodist organization, and was practically the foundation of our beautiful modern church we have today.

Then came the Free Methodist church in 1880 and the first Christian church in about 1890. Then the Lutheran denomination built, what is now the Catholic church, they having purchased it from that organization.

They had no school house for the first three years and Willoughby McCormick Sr., taught a subscription school in the court house, that being the only public building. In 1854 they built a log school house on the site now occupied by the residence of Charles Windisch.

The schools that were taught there were also subscription schools, as there was no public money for school purposes. The next school building was on the site where our present modern school structure now stands.

Knox was incorporated in 1871, just 20 years after it was surveyed and laid out and its officers have kept the wheels of business revolving until we have at this time all the modern improvements.

In 1898 the corporate limits were extended taking in all that part of section 22 and 23 not already incorporated, making the corporation contain 2 square miles, one mile north and south, and two east and west. This increased our population and gave us more revenue for taxes to keep up our school expenses.

No place in the county could have been chosen by those commissioners appointed in those cold, bleak of perpetual hardships, in the year 1850, better adapted to the purpose than the present site of the county seat. It is nearly centrally located in the county and extending to the south from the Yellow river, along the banks of which are beautiful groves.

We have in Knox some very fine dwellings. Fine brick houses, hotels and business places dot the town all over, and more being built each year. The Fitz hotel was opened in 1895 by Joseph Fitz. It has all the modern conveniences that will be found in any city hotel, and the present proprietors Messrs. Bogan and Andres run it on the principle of a first class hotel, and it is patronized to its full capacity. The Fay Hotel was also built in 1895 by Jack Stevens, who was proprietor for several years.

The first newspaper ever published in the county was in 1861, Joseph A. Berry, editor. It was called the Press. After passing through several hands it is now owned and published by H.F. Schricker under the name of the Starke County Democrat.

The earliest history I can find of the Starke County Republican owned and published by John L. Moorman was in 1871 or 2 and was known as the Enterprise.

I will now give you a few dates as to the progress of our city. Nickel Plate railroad in 1882, which we may note as the beginning of our progress. First telegraph in 1882. First brick paving in 1892 when a couple of blocks on Main street were paved. We have kept gradually adding a little more from time to time until now we have over 2 miles of beautiful paved streets and more in contemplation.

Electric lighting system in 1895. Water system in 1909. Sewer system in 1913 and last but not least in the history of Knox we have the distinction of having for a resident the smallest man in the world, Mr. Che Mah.

We have a State Militia organized of some of the finest men and boys in the county waiting for the call to go and serve our country.

I will state again that I think we have to be proud of it if it has taken Knox 65 years to grow to a population of 2000, and I think the crowning event in the history of Knox is the organization of the "Knox Women's Club". May we so conduct this organization that each one of us may in some way be benefited by it and that we may be deserving of mention in the future history of Knox as having assisted to overcome crime and lawlessness, and have done all in our power for the uplifting of society and for a better, cleaner Knox.

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Notes:

Zeighner's – was probably Zehner's Mill, which was located in the Twin Lakes area southwest of Plymouth.

Grandma Larrew's residence – thought to be on North Main Street immediately west of the courthouse.

First Post Office – northeast corner of Lake & Pearl Streets.

Geibel's Bakery – 6 North Main Street (other information places that first Methodist Church in Lot 59, which is the next lot to the north).

Fay Hotel – southeast corner Washington & Pearl Streets.

Charles Windisch residence – southeast corner of Heaton & John Streets.

Who was Mrs. George Talbert? Research shows a George and Ida Talbert living in Knox on the 1900 and 1910 Federal Censuses. George's occupation was listed as Railroad Section Foreman. The Talbert family may have moved to Knox in the 1880's along with the building of either the Nickel Plate RR or the 3-I RR. Mr. and Mrs. Talbert are buried in Crown Hill Cemetery. George died in 1918 and Ida in 1942.

Marvin Allen, Starke County Historian