

## Stage coach stop spurred growth in Edinburg's early history

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EDINBURG - The 1880 History of Christian County describes Edinburg as "the most thriving town between Taylorville and Springfield." The town has been known by other names since the first settlers came to this area in 1820. Blue Point and Blueville are the first names mentioned in referring to the town now known as Edinburg.

Buckhart Township, in which Edinburg is located, is in the northwest corner of Christian County and is one of the oldest sections of the county because it is here some of the earliest settlers made their home. In fact they located here very soon after the land was surveyed by the national government, long before the land was open to entry. The South Fork of the Sangamon River forms its western boundary, Mt. Auburn Township forms the northern border, Stonington Township provides the eastern border, and Taylorville Township borders it on the south.

It is this setting that Titus Gragg came to in 1820 and built a cabin. Titus Gragg was a blacksmith and did smithing for the early settlers. The whole of his family, with one exception, David B. Gragg, a grandson, died very suddenly, and it is thought, very mysteriously. They all lie side-by-side on the same farm, with no stone to mark the spot. Their memory was kept alive for many years by an overshadowing tree upon which a neighbor had carved their names.

The first tract of land entered in what now constitutes the boundaries of Christian County, was by Jacob Cagle in Buckhart Township on March 10, 1827. In 1820 Congress reduced the price of public land from \$2 to \$1.25 an acre. A land office had been set up in Springfield in 1822.

The men mentioned above and other early settlers were the ones who were here before the "deep snow" of 1830-1831. The deep snow was one of the landmarks of the early settler from which he counted in dating events, such as when he arrived or was married, etc. The snow was three feet deep across the county and roads were driven when it became hard enough over fence tops buried below. It is related by Robert Hazlett that during the winter of the deep snow, large lots of water melons, stowed away in corn shocks by the boys in the early fall, were frozen solid. In March, they were taken and thawed out by letting them down in the well, and they proved to be as sweet and fresh as when first picked from the vines.

The first schoolhouse in the area was below Campbell's Point on Joseph Matthew's land. The first day-school was taught by Robert White in 1831 -1832 and was a pay-school. In those days it was customary for school teachers to "board around" among their employers, whether as a pay school or so much a month. From \$8-10 per month, or \$1.50 a scholar per quarter, was considered a fair compensation.

While land was being settled in this area, a stagecoach stop to the south was built and was called Blue Point; it became one of the old landmarks of the county and was known to the traveling public in the 1830's. It was one of Allen and Company's Eastern Stage stands, the old Traveller's Inn. In the chain of title Abraham Lincoln was the owner of it at one time. The Blue Point Stage stand was 20 miles from Springfield. Early stories of Edinburg's history repeatedly mention that the Blue Point Stage stand was where Abraham Lincoln stopped on his travels to Taylorville and Vandalia.

Northwest of Blue Point (one-half mile away) a town was growing during the 1860's called Blueville (a post office had been established in the Blueville area in April of 1855) and according to the Taylorville Flag of August 26, 1867, it was described as the center of a considerable country trade, one little store in it having sold over \$11,000 worth of goods within a year. A Methodist church building called Gunn's Chapel was erected in 1863 in what was the west end of Blueville. The town also had a two-story brick schoolhouse that was located on the corner of Cook and Pleasant that was called the Blueville School. The first physician was H. T. Moore.

There was some rivalry between the two settlements of Blueville and Blue Point, but this was eventually settled by merging the two into one under the name Edinburg. The town was incorporated under village law in 1873.

That first year saw a grain warehouse, elevator, hotel and blacksmith shop as well as several residences built. George Wilkinson opened a Livery Stable where the Village Office is now located and G.H. Peebles built a grain elevator. The first physician, Gersham Little located there in 1870. The space between the two towns soon filled up with improvements and gave the appearance of one town. The streets were wide (from 70-100

feet) and were named Washington, Lincoln, Douglas, and Franklin. Many streets were named to honor the early settlers of the area such as Halford, Eaton, Ricks, Drennan, and Campbell. A small stream named Lick Creek passes through the middle of town. The Blueville post office was renamed Edinburg with the spelling being changed to Edinburg in 1893 and it was located in many different buildings over the years before it came to its present location on the corner of Washington and Grant in 1970.

The growth of the town was helped by having the railroad run through the center of it. The first train entered Taylorville in October of 1869 and made stops in Pana, Edinburg, Sharpsburg, Owaneco and Millersville. It later became the B & O Railroad. The depot was located on what is now highway 29 north of the Village Office.

Campbellsburg was also a train stop for a few years from the time it was surveyed in 1870 when a house, a blacksmith shop, a store, a depot and freight house were built. The depot was removed by the company in 1877 since the station had been discontinued and this caused the decline in growth of the town. A new brick one-room schoolhouse was built near the old site of Campbellsburg in 1916, taking the place of the old frame building which served the people of that community so long. The Campbellsburg depot was moved to Owaneco, and in the summer of 1986 was acquired by the Christian County Historical Society and moved to their grounds for restoration.

Early developers hoped to make good use of the natural resources of the area and in August of 1873, Dr. Basil Greenwood, and John McKeman entered into a contract to sink a shaft for coal on the lands owned by William Halford. After getting through the strata and not finding coal, the shaft was abandoned for nearly three years. Again in the spring of 1879 he employed an engine, and hoisted out the water, and drilled seventy feet deeper, but found nothing to justify sinking the shaft any further, so he put the hands at work on the last 18 inch vein of coal. It proved to be a very good find. With fire clay lying immediately under the coal, the shaft could be worked profitably.

At times the mine was a busy place, especially in the early fall when the country schools began buying and hauling coal for the winter season, wagons being lined up waiting their turn. Coal was also shipped to a Chicago market after the management of the B & O Railroad consented to install a switch to the mine. Several residents remember ice skating on the pond near the mine during the winter.

The Edinburg Coal Mining Company also decided to try its hand at providing electricity for the area and after getting an electric light franchise from the town authorities and ordering their machinery and putting up their lines, on the night of March 21, 1891, the "current was turned on for the first time illuminating many residences with the electric spark" according to the Herald in 1892.

Frank T. Kauerauf came to Edinburg sensing that a growing community would need a newspaper and bought a small print shop from George Harrington, the banker who had the shop in his bank building. The Edinburg Herald, now known as The Herald-Star is the first and only newspaper printed in Edinburg and has been in continuous existence for 118 years. For 65 years the paper was printed by the Kauerauf family. In the February 7, 1883 edition, the first one, the quotation on the masthead read, "Pledged To No Party's Arbitrary Sway; We Follow Truth Wher'er She Leads The Way." This was changed many years ago to "I Cannot Tell How the Truth May Be: I Give the Story As Told To Me," which appears on the paper today. Mr. Kauerauf died in 1930 and the paper was managed by his daughter Maude until 1947 when it was purchased by Clarence O'Dell, Jr. who ran both the Herald and the Stonington Star.

In 1959 Glenn W. Luttrell of Pawnee, who had graduated from Chicago Linotype School, purchased the business. He was assisted by his mother for a short time and since then by his wife Margaret. At that time Luttrell was the youngest newspaper editor and publisher in Illinois.

From the start the churches were an important part of life for the early pioneers and so it was that shortly after the town was incorporated that the first church bell would be rung. The Methodist Chapel that had been built in Blueville, was moved into Edinburg in 1875 and on February 16, 1876, the first bell in the town was placed in the belfry and rang out its peals. The Edinburg Christian Church was organized in the 1856 by Elder A. Northcutt with a congregation of 30 members. In 1894 the Edinburg Reformed Church was organized and a building erected. The church today is known as Grace Memorial.

The Edinburg Gospel Tabernacle was established in the late 1920's after a Pentecostal revival. It cooperates with the General Council of the The Assemblies of God and is known as The Church on the Rock. The earliest record of Lutheran services in this area is a visit of Pastor L. J. Gehrman, from the Blackburn Lutheran Church in South Fork Township on July 30, 1881. Worship services (in German) were held intermittently

during the next few years in homes or in rural schools east of east of Edinburg. In 1894 a congregation was organized. The church is known as Trinity Lutheran Church today.

Bethel Baptist, four miles southeast of Edinburg, was started in August of 1862. Services were held in the Clear Creek Schoolhouse, until a church building was erected in 1865, in the middle of Bethel Cemetery. It was replaced by a new building in 1902 which was destroyed by fire in 1939 and was rebuilt immediately. Because they had no house of worship in the 1890's, some of the Baptists in Edinburg began to unite with other denominations. A building committee bought the Christian Union Church building for \$25 and moved it to the corner of Campbell and Lincoln. For the last twenty years the church has had a Southern Baptist affiliation.

Since education was a high priority in the new town, George W. Price, a progressive businessman and landowner, worked hard to get a petition to build a new grade school building. Landowners complained how much a new school would make their taxes go up, but after a long struggle, the school was built on Douglass Street (west of the present Methodist church) in 1886. This new building was on land which at one time belonged to Abraham Lincoln; Lincoln having acquired it in the settlement of a law suit. On January 21, 1887, 224 students from the old Blueville and Edinburg (Blue Point) schools moved their books and school possessions into the new imposing one.

In 1888, Districts 7 and 8 were combined and designated as District No. 7 and it was voted to establish a two-year Township High School in the new building. From time to time no high school classes were held in the building on Douglas Street. Certain factions of the town wanted a township high school built in a central location and for a few years Edinburg students went to Taylorville for high school or held class in the old Opera House in the early 1900's. Some students graduated with a three-year program while others went through a four-year high school program. Anna Schweitzka was hired in 1924 and through her efforts Edinburg regained its standing as an accredited four-year school.

High school athletics were limited in the early years because there was no gymnasium. As early as 1913 the school had a football and baseball team. Later basketball was played in the old Opera House. In 1918 a girls basketball team was organized. The school entered track and field events for the first time in 1931. A school band (junior and senior high) was organized in 1934. The first gymnasium was built in 1936 followed by the present high school building and ag shop in 1938. In 1947 the thirteen country school districts of Buckhart Township were consolidated with the Edinburg districted becoming District 191 and known as Edinburg Community Consolidated Schools. In 1948 the name of ECUSD No. 4 was created and bus routes were established to bring students into town.

A growing and thriving town needed a place to hold community gatherings and in 1882, local businessman and financier, George Harrington, had the Opera House built on the south side of Washington Street in the main business area. It bears the inscription Edinburg Hall and the date. The hall was big by the standards of those days and it took up the second floor of two store buildings.

Edinburg has only three buildings on Main (Washington) Street left from the 1880's. These three brick buildings were built for George Harrington, a banker. Two of them house the Opera House and the third is the Ross or Blaney building (it was a dry goods building) south of the bank. According to an Edinburg Herald article in March of 1892, George Harrington arrived in Edinburg in 1877 and set out to improve it. He erected over 25 business and dwelling houses, and gave material aid to many who were unable to build as they desired. B.A. Turner was Harrington's cashier and later became the owner of the bank. During the Great Depression both the Turner Bank and the Citizens Bank closed its doors. Later the Edinburg State Bank took over assets for these two banks. For several years Edinburg was without a bank until a group of local businessmen in the late 1960's started the process of organizing the Citizen's Bank of Edinburg which opened in 1971.

West of the Opera House in the area that burned in the early 1900's was the site of week long street carnivals with merry-go-rounds, Ferris wheels, and a few side shows. For many years Charlie Worthans tent show appeared with a performance every night for a week.

Edinburg also provided its citizens with musical entertainment through its municipal band in the late 1800's. During the summer they played concerts weekly on the main street, and also at picnics in the surrounding area, chautauquas, and political rallies. Many residents remember the band concerts held in the band shell on Main Street when farmers would come to town to buy groceries and would stay to enjoy good music.

Along with church doings and visits to the Opera House, early residents of Edinburg had the opportunity to enjoy the music, lectures, magic, cartoonists, readers, and opera companies provided by both local and outside talent in the form of the Sharpsburg-Edinburg Chautauqua during the summers. What started as a half day Sunday school picnic in 1900 to instill the ideas of temperance in children on the S. M. Sheldon farm near Sharpsburg, grew to be a six day event over the next few years. At first it was known as the Prohibition Chautauqua, but it grew to include popular music, story-telling, and lecturers from all over the country. William Jennings Bryan, Strickland Gillian, and Carrie Nation were a few of the performers.

Along with many profitable businesses, Edinburg also had many fine doctors throughout its history. The office of Dr. Milligan and Dr. Stokes is still standing in Edinburg on Washington Street next to the Ross building on the corner of Eaton Street. The horse barn in the back was used as a stable for their horses and rigs before the advent of the automobile. Twelve horses were kept in the stable and for many years Jim Nicholls stayed in a small room at the barn to be ready in any emergency to harness the horses and drive the doctors to the homes of their patients.

At the turn of the century, feeling the need of a system of communication, Drs. Milligan and Stokes set up a telephone company which they called the Independent Telephone Company. The small room on the right of the office housed the hand operated switchboard and lines were run out in several directions from Edinburg on poles made from trees. When calling the operator, one turned the crank for one long ring. As a courtesy to others on the party line, when the conversation ended, you gave the crank a short yank to indicate the line was free. The Christian County Telephone Company bought the doctors system and moved it to the present site. The Illinois Consolidated Telephone Company purchased the system in 1928 and still provides the town with telephone service.

Dr. Schott was the last physician to serve the Edinburg community. He came in 1925 and was a practicing physician until his death in 1963.

For a town that boasted 1200 people during its boom years, a form of government was needed to run the community. The Village Board has met that need and met for many years on the second floor of the Village Hall located on Grant Street and built in 1902. The lower part of the building was used by the Fire Department. In 1960 the board purchased the building on Washington Street and made it the Village Office after considerable remodeling. The bottom part of the old Village Hall was used as a jail and some remember the Calaboose (a small block building on the edge of the creek on Grant Street south of Washington) being used as a jail as well. Story has it that a prisoner removed some of the blocks in one corner and escaped from the building.

Edinburg has had a lot of service organizations over the years devote much time and energy into making life easier and more beautiful for the community. The Lions and Lionesses (and now a student service unit for high school students called the Leo Club) have been providing services to the community. The Masons have been a part of Edinburg's history since they started meeting in 1870; the Blueville Lodge (on the corner of Martin and Eaton) was built in 1925 and is still used as a meeting place. The Odd Fellows, Rebekah Lodge, and Eastern Star no longer have chapters in Edinburg. The Edinburg Economic Development Committee (EEDC) was organized a few years ago and its purpose is to promote the community spirit and economic development of the town. Edinburg has a Ministerial Association that works together to help churches work together to build faith in the community and it also provides a high school scholarship and helps with providing school supplies for students and keeps the food pantry stocked.

To feel a sense of the history of Edinburg it is helpful to visit its cemeteries. Seeing the graves of those early pioneers and town developers gives us another perspective on their lives. One of the prettiest cemeteries is the Blueville Cemetery, located one half block east of Highway 29 on Masonic Street. It takes its name from the town of Blueville. It is also referred to as the Halford Cemetery. Bernard O'Hara, a Civil War soldier, is buried there under a tree in the northeast corner of the cemetery. Little is known about him except that he was just passing through the area when he died.

The Edinburg Cemetery is located on the west edge of Edinburg on Masonic Street. It covers about 18 acres and is a beautiful cemetery with curving drives and a chapel that was given for the free use of the public for funerals and memorial services. Buried there are several Civil War, Spanish American War, World War I and 11 veterans, John Poor, the first United States soldier to be a casualty of WWI is buried there.

A place where townspeople get together in Edinburg today is the Community Building. The building was constructed by the American Legion John Poor Post #717. John William Poor of Edinburg was the first US soldier to sacrifice his life for his country a short time before the US entered into World War I. In 1956 the

American Legion invited businesses and organizations to help in building a 40x88 foot community building at Veterans Memorial Park south of Masonic Street. The Veteran's Memorial Park Board is responsible for the keeping the park up and handles the annual Labor Day celebration .

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