

HISTORY OF CORDOVA AND HER CITIZENS FROM 1836-1936

A review of the founding and development of the town. (By Gladys Sidlinger)
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In the fall of 1836, Amiziah Rathburn who lived in McDonough County, Illinois, traveled on horse back to the home of Dr. Thomas Baker on Green River, not far from Geneseo. Mr. Rathburn was looking for land and he persuaded Dr. Baker to join him in search of new unsettled country.

The two men on horse back, crossed Rock River at Crandall Ferry and proceeded to the Archibald Allen Post on the Mississippi, located north of what is now the village of Port Byron. After spending the night there, they went on north until they came to a turn in the river. It was there that they saw the beautiful country with gentle sloping hills on the banks of the Father of Waters. The men were so taken with the beauty of the place that at once they decided to stay. There were large tracts of timber which would permit building of their homes.

A large black house which had been erected by soldiers from Fort Armstrong stood on the site where the barn on the Rathburn homestead now stands, and a trading post operated by Charles Eads were the only marks of civilization here at that time. John and Theodore Butcher, hunters and trappers, also were in the vicinity. Dr. Baker and Mr. Rathburn decided they would take claims side by side and proceeded to the place of entry at Prophetstown where the necessary papers were signed. The next spring two families came. In the Baker family were Volney, Rodolphus, Thomas, Henry, Maria Elizabeth and a baby 4 months old.

The Rathburn family consisted of Mr. Rathburn, his wife Sarah, James and Lorenza Dow, Sarah, Filena and a baby. Later a daughter Fidelia and two sons, Guy and William came in March 17, 1937.

The first white children born here was Charles Oakley Baker and Josephine Rathburn.

John Marshall of Hopeswell, New Jersey, who had visited in the home of Dr. Baker on Green River, went back to New Jersey and persuaded his relatives, including William Marshall and the Cools to come west and settle here, which they did.

Among the first pioneers were Herdman East, Nelson and Chauncey Tupp, William Kelly, Dudy Buck, Peter Beardsley, Abram Adams, William Armstrong, Jeremiah Rice Robert, William Jenks, John Marshall, Benoni Hoskins, A. Whiting, Jerry I. Cool, J.S. Phillips.

While a number of the pioneers came here with their families some of them were unmarried and naturally they sought wives among the girls whose fathers had brought them to a new home along the Mississippi River.

Nathaniel Belcher and Joseph Mills belong to this class of bachelors who married sisters from the Jenks family and these are the first recorded weddings of Cordova.

The first person that is recorded to have died here was Benoni Hoskins in 1838 and his remains were laid to rest on a hill over-looking the Village. The second to die was Hugh Dailey who passed away in 1839.

Dr. Baker gave every tenth lot to anyone who settled in the Village.

In 1838 Dr. Baker built a new home with lumber shipped here from St. Louis on a steamboat.

School and church was held in Dr. Baker's home as he was a very learned man and could teach the children. He also started a night school for the benefit of adults who had suffered a lack of education. Fidelia Rathburn was later hired to teach.

Cordova at this time became a large shipping point between Moline and Savannah. A large warehouse, known

as Diamond Joe was built at the extreme west of the village on the banks of the river. The farmers brought their produce here where it was taken by boat to various places. The Diamond Joe was an old landmark here for many years. After the coming of the railroad, river traffic ceased to be the main means of transportation and the warehouse was used as a button factory by B'egle Bros. of Muscatine; later a Dan Pinneo ran a canning factory there. This building was built of huge stones was torn down 16 years ago by Frank Naftzer and moved to Albany, Illinois, where it was made into a barn. At a general meeting of the towns people it was generally conceded to name the Village, Cordova after that beautiful city in Spain.

In 1839 the government established a post office here, with John Marshall as postmaster. The post office was kept in the Marshall home which was also used as a hotel, the first in the township.

A Ferry crossing the Mississippi was established; it being one of the old fashioned kind propelled by hand power. John Walker later established a steam ferry.

While farming was the principle industry the lime-kilns which was operated by Wynkoop & Webster furnished employment; also Wesley Black and Wilbur Bruner, both deceased, were the last two men to draw lime from the kiln.

Fishing and claming were also engaged in extensively up until the last five years but on account of so many dams being built in the river that occupation has died out to a great extent.

After the east end of the village began to be built up, a bridge was built connecting the two parts of the village. Up to this time if one had to go to the other side they crossed in boats. Most of the east part of town was built by a man named Brigham and this section is known as Brighams Addition. Also the part of town known as Jersey Row was built by a man from New Jersey.

In 1853 Brigham and Marshall erected a grist mill and for many years ground all the grain for farmers in this community. In 1869 a brick yard was started by a family named Kincaid. The yard was located on the W. O. Hunt property in the southwest part of town and the place can still be seen where the clay was dug for the bricks. The old Methodist Church known as the Union Gospel Tabernacle was built from these bricks also one room of the Hunt house and the house owned by Mr. and Mrs. Gus Norlin.

The first church established was known as the Advent church and later purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Pinneo as a home in which they lived for many years but later burned down.

East of Cordova was a swamp called the Meredocia. This place abounded with fish and fowl and was the hunters paradise. It was also used as a grazing ground for farmers cattle which were branded and turned out in the summer. In 1896 a dyke was built near Albany which drains the land of the Meredocia making it a valuable piece of farm land.

A petition was filed for the incorporation of the village in 1867, the question being however, voted down at the following election. In 1877 the question was again submitted and successfully carried. The first board of trustees was elected in April of that same year. The board consisted of the following members:

President-Daniel Zimmerman

Clerk- Theodore Abbott

Trustees- Thomas Karr, J. B. Vanderburgh, W. D. Webster, A. Bolinger and F. A. Hall.

The upper end of Cordova township is rich with gravel beds and is used for road construction and other purposes.

Civil War veterans from this town were comprised of the following men: Joseph T . Cooper, George Cox, Walter Dauber, James Darrah, John Discer, Daniel Dutcher, Henry Fisher, Henry Marshall, James Quick,

Charles Ryan, Jasper Rathburn, John Sa~le, Robert Secord, Aaron Smith, Daniel B. Stout, Simon Trent, John Woodheater, Samuel Welch, Solomon Ziegler, William Brown, Henri Reynolds, Goldburn Way, Medad Ma~ Joseph Johnson, John Hopper, Lord M. Rathburn, Jesse Maxwell, Henry McClure, Henry W. Rathburn, Colley Knight, Fred Owens, Philip Schneider, Peter Vanderburg, Samuel Wait, Henry Whiting, Levi Grey, John Larue, Christ Patten, John Wilsonholm, Elijah Brigham, Eugene Bigelow, William C. Zimmerman, J.C. Burton, Roderick Bates, Thomas Moody, Thomas Owens, John Reeves, Paris Whiting, Joseph Yearn, Columbus Wilson, Edward H Daily, Jerrod Marshall, James Benjamin, John Craig, George Kerck, Samuel Smith, De~sey Matthew, Rufus Dailey, Jacob Drennen, Isaac Abbott, David Phillips, Myron Pratt, William Folsom, George Rathburn, Gabriel Armstrong, Leonard Stockwell, Daniel Davis, William Leady, John Sills, Marcus Bridge, Samuel Benjamin, G. W. Brink, Thomas Crandall, Sanford Cox, John Drennen. Black Hawk mound in the village, located behind the Baptist church received its name because Chief Black Hawk used the mound for a look-out and from this point of vantage one can see for miles up the river. It is said that many Indians were buried on this ground.

The first school house was located west of the Charles Tomer residence and was built sometime in the '50. This was a private school and a second school was built near the site of the present Cordova High School. A new four room stone schoolhouse was built in 1863 which is known now as the Cordova Grade School The two upstairs rooms were used as a high school The first teacher was a professor Dickey; a Miss Burbank taught the Intermediate room and Miss Nellie Warren was a Primary teacher. The two down stairs rooms are still used as Cordova Grade school In the fall of 1920, the High School was held in the Methodist Church building for two years until 1922 when the Cordova Community High School was erected. This school offers a four year course and is an accredited high school Among the record of high school teachers after Professor Dickey are: William Hyatt, Prof Long, M. Corbett, Mary Carmthers, Mr. Huey, Mary Abbey, J. F. Lavender, W.J Johnson, Harry Van Dusen, O. J. Additon, W.H Plymire, William Peterson, Mr. Lawrence, P. A. Vedder, Mr. Hancock, Mr. Rishel, George Mienchenecht, M. A. Gill, Arthur Moore, Mabel Pierce, Mable Walker, Mabel Tony, Harry Genung, Mr. Boswell, Mr. Pyle, John Layman, Mr. Wickert, and James Graham Other teachers who deserve honorable mention are Amy Robinson Miller, who taught Cordova primary room for ten years and Mrs. Eva Tew, who taught 25 years in Cordova and in the surrounding community.

At present time there is a population of 300 people in Cordova. There are three general stores, two garages, a post office, drug store, library, restaurant, bank, barbershop, depot, telephone exchange, two filing stations, two schools, two churches. In Cordova township there are four schools; they are Riverside school, Williams school, Hoke school, Pre-Eminent school. The board of supervisors had a representation from Cordova township from 1857-1836 as follows: George Marshall, Jacob Hoke, James Cowl, J. 1 Wynkoop, J. L. Perkins, James E. Abbott, R. M. Grinnell, Jonathan Cool Jr., Daniel Zimmerman, Charles B. Fisk, Homer Metzgar, Eugene B. Hoke, Jasper Forsythe, Charles George, Edward Cool, Charles Opdyke, Gus Sandholm, Gunnard Sandholm, Frank Woodhull and Dr. Ira Humphrey.

The Cordova Post Office was established here in 1830. The first office was in the home of John Marshall who was also the postmaster. Since that time it has been in different locations, the present post office being located on Main Street in the lower business district. Mrs. Eva Tew is the present postmistress and Mrs. Mary Bryan is assistant. They have held that position for many years and hold the distinction of being the only women since 1839 to have that position. Other postmasters were Frank Zimmerman, Frank Cool, Jaspser Forsythe, Charles Marshall, John Vanderberg, Will Forsythe. Earl F. Bruner is the rural mail carrier and has served in that capacity for twenty years.

The Cordova Library was established as a public library itself being founded in 1878 when taxes were voted and levied for that purpose. The first trustees were Rev. E.N. Elton, Isaac Cool, Thomas Karr, Dr. J. Hoke, Pratt Deyoe and Robert Johnson. The first librarian was Mrs. G. W. Dean, Mrs. Matilda Mullery was librarian for 30 years and the present librarian is Mrs. Millie Guinn. The library occupied rented rooms until 1914 when the board purchased a building of its own which has since been remodeled into a modern structure holding a total of 7,453 books and is classed as one of the finest libraries in the state.

The B.Y.P.U. was organized in 1887. First officers were President, J. M. Ege; Vice President, George Tew; Secretary- Treasurer, Harriet Comstock. Charter members were Ruth Phillips, Mary Ege, Kittie Phillips, Jennie Humphrey, George Curtiss, Jennie Tew, Ernest Williams, Bessie Marshall, Electa Hull, Cora Ege, Eva Naylor, Emma Grinnell, Bell Rathbum, William Gilpin, Gertie Rathbum, Ota Ethell. The object of this was to promote an earnest christian life among the members. The present officers are president, Jeanette Gosnell; vice president, Margaret George and secretary, Jean Reynolds. The Baptist Guild Society was organized in 1906. First officers were: president, Mrs. Edgar H~hrey; vice president, Mrs. Mahala Zimmerman; Missionary vice, Josephine Cool; 3rd vice, Mrs. Charles Opdyke; secretary, Mrs. C.D. Smith Butzer, treasurer, Miss Anna Cooper. At present time there are over 80 members of this organization and the purpose is to give financial aid to the church. Present officers are, president, Mrs. Laura Forsythe; vice president, Mrs. Gladys Sidlinger; Missionary vice, Mrs. C.K Dean; 3rd vice, Mrs. Mae Reynolds; secretary, Mrs. Hattie Hansen; treasurer, Mrs. Goldie Armstrong.

Cordova 4 H club was organized the year of 1926. Leaders were Mrs. Eva Bryan and Miss Lois Tew. There were 16 members. Officers were the following: president, Marie Woodward; vice president, Mary Forsythe; secretary, Helen Maxwell; treasurer, Helen Johnsen; yell leader, Bertha Allen. Since that time there has been an active 4 H Club and this year a Foods Club has been added, the leader being Mrs. Anna Boardman and Mrs. Ruth Williams. There are ten members in each club.

Masonic Lodge No.543 was organized in Cordova October 1, 1867. Later the lodge was moved to Port Byron. There were 24 members. Riverside Lodge No.1429 Knights of Pythias was organized February 23, 1886. The last few years this lodge has not been active.

The first hotel was located in the home of John Marshall. Later hotels were the Mandel hotel located on what is known as the Ed Rathbum property, and a later hotel was located in a three story brick structure east of the Freek property, owned by the Hofer Brothers. The large home now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. John Will Sexton was also a hotel known as the Marshall House.

The present railroad was built through here in 1870. The first steady depot agent to be employed was a man by the name of Cole. In 1875 George B. Spoor became depot agent and served in that capacity for 49 years. He retired February 4, 1925 on account of failing health and has since passed away. Mr. Spoor was a grandfather to Judge John Heberling of this county. At present George McNeal is station agent. Mr. Spoor was married to Julia Elizabeth Norris. They had three children; Millard of Libertyville, Illinois; Harley of Chicago; Mrs. Ora Heberling of Port Byron.

In 1854 a railroad grade was being built across the Meredocia from Erie to Cordova. After the grade was finished bridges built and ties laid no money was forthcoming for the rails. Steel or iron rails were not made in this country at that time. It had to be brought from England. All farmers around here were asked to buy stock and a great many did. At first it was known as Worsaw and Rockford and they were selling subscriptions for that in 1854 but later it was known as the Sterling, Rock Island Railroad Company. When the railroad fell through with the farmers refused to pay the notes and suit was brought against them Others who did not :fight it and had no money had to turn over their hogs to meet the payments. The old grade runs through Cordova and can be seen to this day.