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Historical Society

Of Pottawattamie County

Member Newsletter

December 1999

Quick Takes

Picnic Shelter Ready

Construction of the picnic shelter at the Depot has been completed and awaits return of the spring-like weather.

Railcar Restoration on Target

Volunteers have started cleaning and restoring the woodwork in the Club car that was recently added to the Depot railcar display. The Burlington Historical Society has expressed interest in offering assistance in the railcar restoration.

Jail Visitors

Even though the Squirrel Cage jail is officially closed for the season group tours continue with several scheduled this month.

Moving the Mail

Next month the newsletter will include a look back at some tails from the mail on rails... some of the lore from the RPO days.

Society Annual Meeting Set for January

The annual business meeting and dinner of the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County is scheduled for Sunday, January 16, 2000. The meeting will be held at the Best Western Crossroads in Council Bluffs and will start at 1:00 P.M.. The newly elected officers and board members will be installed at the meeting and take office at the close of the annual session. A dinner will be served and a presentation provided but details are not available at this time.

Plan to attend the annual session next month; all members are welcome. More details will be forthcoming as they are available.

A New Look for the New Decade

You should notice some changes in the newsletter with this issue that hopefully will lead to making the publication more readable, more interesting, and a more valuable benefit of your Society membership.

One goal is to make the layout less cluttered, more consistent, and easier to read. Advances in technology over the past decade have also made the inclusion of photographs a much less costly undertaking than in the past.

We want to recognize that "history" doesn't mean just one era; the tales of our early settlers is fascinating, but a nostalgic look back at the

city as we knew it growing up, whether it was in the twenties or the sixties, also provides interest. The objective is to provide feature articles that span these years, looking at times 150 years back, but at other times peering only a couple of decades behind.

I hope you find the changes a positive step, and suggestions are always welcome.

- Richard Warner, Editor

Pottawattamie County Trivia

Answer is on page 3



When was the old City Auditorium built, and for what purpose?

Feature Focus

The following description of the city of Council Bluffs was taken from the "Editorial Correspondence" of the Lily, a semimonthly paper published at Richmond, Indiana. It was written by a lady who came to be a permanent resident of Council Bluffs, Amelia Bloomer.

Council Bluffs City is located on the east side of the Missouri River, in Iowa, instead of on the west, or Nebraska side, as it is laid down on most maps. It lies about three miles from the river—the level lands, or "bottoms" being here about that distance in width—and then commences a chain of high hills or bluffs, which line the Missouri for thousands of miles. These bluffs are composed of immense piles of yellow marl, varying in height from fifty to two hundred and fifty feet, and thrown into every conceivable shape and form—rounded, oblong, conical and peaked. Sometimes we see them covered with trees or bushes, but most commonly with only grass and flowers. They present at this season of the year, robed in their rich carpet of green, a delightful appearance. Among these bluffs are numerous beautiful valleys, sufficient in extent for large farms and through which clear and pellucid springs of water flow gurgling down to join the mighty Missouri—forming, as they find their way across the bottoms, streams which glisten in the sun as pure as silver.

It was along one of these valleys, a fourth of a mile in width, and extending for upwards of half a mile in the bluffs, that the old town of Kanessville

was built. Here a log city was constructed, and here for several years dwelt from two to eight thousand of that singular people who have now found a home in the vicinity of the eat Salt Lake. These people, or the most of them, remained here until 1852, when they took their departure—selling out, or surrendering up their claims to the "Gentiles." Hundreds of the log cabins in which these people lived have disappeared, but many are still standing.

The Gentile's who succeeded the Mormon's, soon began to build better houses. Several good frame and brick buildings have already been constructed, including a three-story brick hotel and the land office, besides a number of stores and private residences. Others are in the process of erection, and will be carried forward as fast as materials and laborers can be obtained. The sawmills and brickyards now in operation will furnish facilities for many substantial improvements the present season.

On all sides we see the work of beautifying the town going forward. Gardens are being fenced, trees planted, streets opened and graded, and every preparation for accommodating a large population.

The city is extending out on the bottoms towards the river. The bottom lands here being high and dry, and in no danger of being overflowed the probability is that at no distant day they will be covered with dwellings, stores, and shops for at least a mile or two in extent. These lands are considered very valuable, and are held at high prices by their owners. The soil is extremely rich and productive, and finely adapted either to farming or gardening.

We have a population of two thousand people, mostly Americans; and this number will undoubtedly be largely increased the present year, as the place is attracting considerable attention in all parts of the country, and people are flocking in here to settle and to make investments in real estate.

The land office is crowded with strangers eager to secure the best chances in government land in this district, and the best sites are being rapidly taken up. There is still an abundance of good government land in Western Iowa, and will be for some months to come. The issuing of the new Land Warrants this summer will greatly reduce the size of Uncle Sam's farm in this State, as the owners of them will send or bring them here, by the hundreds, for location.

Amelia Bloomer's Council Bluffs, cont.

There are two newspapers published here, administration and Republican. We have two church edifices nearly completed, belonging to the Methodists and Congregationalists, the former of wood, the latter of brick. A public garden has been opened this Spring which will furnish a supply of fruit and ornamental trees, bushes, vines and shrubbery for the use of our citizens, and which will tend greatly to beautify our yards and gardens, as well as to put us in possession of the luscious fruits we have enjoyed in our eastern homes.

We have a regular city charter, obtained in 1853, of the legislature at which time the name of the place was changed from Kaneshville to Council Bluffs, by which it is now known over the whole country.

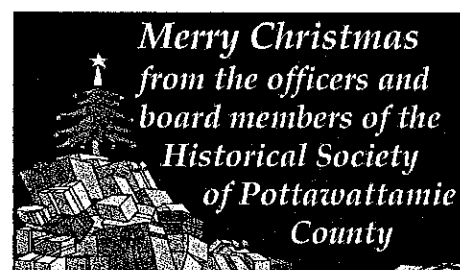
Situated as we are three hundred miles west of the railroads connecting the Mississippi with the east, we of course neither hear the shrill music of the locomotive nor see trains of cars dashing through our streets with a velocity that outstrips the speed of the light-footed deer; but we are living in full expectation of the day when these things will be as familiar to us as they are now to my eastern readers. This city will be the terminus of the first railroad across the State, and it is fondly hoped and expected that three years hence we shall be startled by the shrill whistle of the "iron horse," as he comes to bathe his heated forehead in the waters of the Missouri. And from

here, or from Omaha, directly opposite, will he set out on his long journey to the most western limit of the continent. Then Council Bluffs will no longer be "out of the world," but directly in the center of it—and many who now hesitate about making their homes here, will regret that their doubts and fears debarred them from the privilege of uniting their labors with their more enterprising countrymen, in building up a great and prosperous community in the very center of the Union.

Come then, I say to all, to Western Iowa—and to Council Bluffs. Send here your money and your Land Warrants, and secure a part of the rich prairie lands

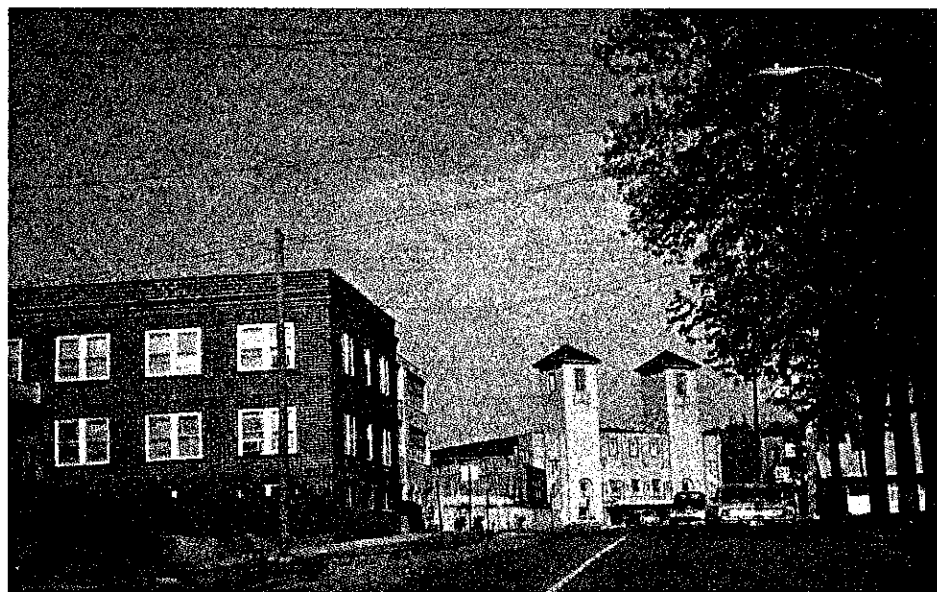
which border the Missouri, and you will secure for yourselves and families a patrimony at once ample and abundant for all your, or their wants. And come soon; the choicest lands and finest locations are being rapidly secured, and those who delay much longer will find that they have come too late.

(Taken from "Chronotype", Wednesday, July 4, 1855; contributed by Cathy Danielson)



Trivia Question Answer

The old City Auditorium was built in 1907 to house an agricultural exhibit. Over the years it saw many other uses including high school graduation ceremonies and as the interim post office. The building was constructed in just 30 days. The photo below is as it appeared about 1971; the building was razed to create the parking garage for Midlands Mall. Photo by Robert Warner, Jr.





Fred Harvey: Feeding the Southwest

Frederick Henry Harvey left his native England at the age of fifteen for New York City and went to work in the restaurant business. It wasn't

a particularly glamorous position... a dishwasher for two dollars a week. It was a business that interested him, and with savings from that meager salary and the knowledge he acquired he arrived at a goal to open his own restaurant. It was in St. Louis that he realized his ambition and with a partner started his restaurant.

The Civil War engulfed Missouri only a year later and his partner fled to the South, where his loyalties lay, taking the restaurant assets with him. Suddenly broke Harvey worked a variety of jobs, including for a time sorting mail for the Pony Express onboard the first railway post office car which ran to St. Joseph.

The Civil War years were bad for the restaurant business but spelled great opportunity for the railroads, and Harvey moved ever westward and advanced in the railroad business, but never forgetting his love of the restaurant industry. His work for various railroads kept him travelling the lines himself and he got to experience first-hand the poor way railroad passengers were treated at meal stops on the western railroads of the 1870's.

Combining his experience with railroads and restaurants Harvey approached the Burlington Route with a plan to build a network of restaurants along the line. They turned him down but upon his arrival in Kansas in 1870 he met Charles Morse, President of the fledgling Atchison, Topeka, and Sante Fe Railway. Morse agreed to allow Harvey to open a restaurant in Topeka. The idea was a success; within a year his restaurant was serving as many as 5,000 meals a day and soon 84 Harvey Houses dotted the route of the Sante Fe and other areas of the Southwest. In addition to restaurants the company operated a handful of moderated-priced hotels west of Kansas City. When the Sante Fe began running dining cars on some of its trains Mr. Harvey won the contract to serve the onboard food.

Fred Harvey's formula for a successful eating house was to offer an above-average setting, good food, pleasant and efficient service, all at a reasonable price. Many times the Harvey restaurant would be the finest in town, and even at the most budget-conscious lunch counters flowers and linens graced every table. Menus were planned in Kansas City so that no guest along his system encountered the same selections at different stops along the way. The Sante Fe was an amicable partner, aiding his system by readily providing buildings, coal, water and ice, free transportation of equipment and furnishings, and personnel.

At a time when there were few jobs for women the Harvey Company began advertising in the East for "young women, 18 to 30 years of age, of good character, attractive, and intelligent" to staff the Harvey Houses. This was a

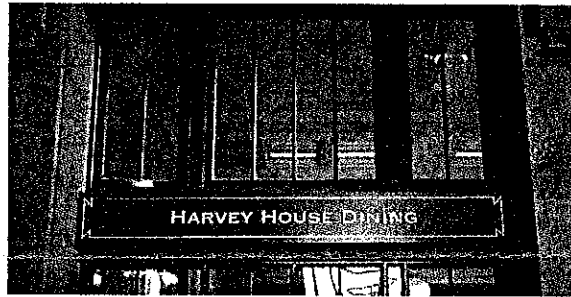
lesson by experience; Mr. Harvey found his initial employees, which were men, to be "as wild as the west was." The young women from the East proved far more reliable. The Harvey Girls were paid \$17.50 per month and were under the careful supervision of Mrs. Harvey, though its doubtful how well the 10:00 P.M. cur-

few and "no-marry" contracts worked, as an estimated 20,000 of the girls recruited did marry their customers. Humorist Will Rogers quipped that Harvey "kept the West in food and wives."

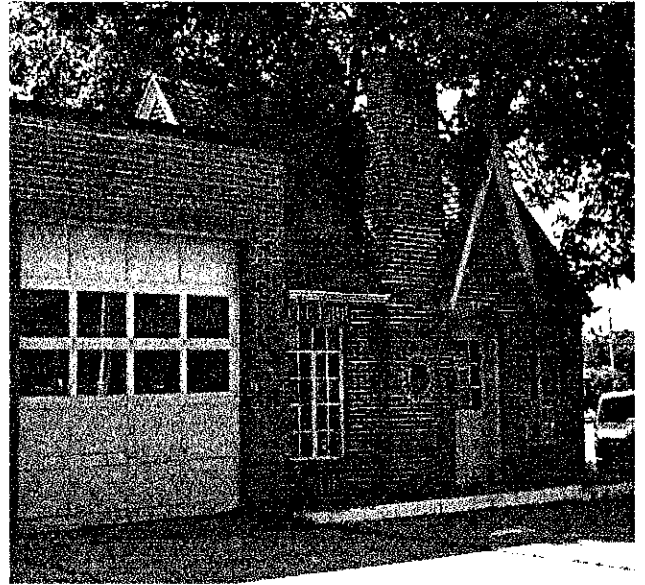
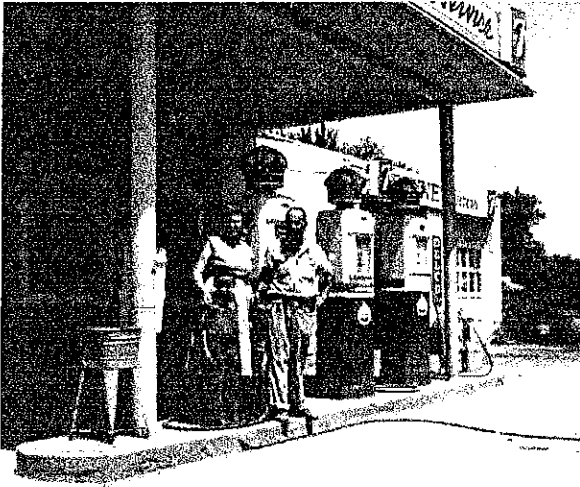
The Harvey company continued to expand beyond restaurants and hotels; at one time the biggest toy store, biggest bookstore, biggest drug store, and finest specialty grocer in Kansas City were all operated out of Union Station by Fred Harvey.

With the decline of passenger railroads in the 1950's and 1960's the Fred Harvey Company shifted its operations to resorts and national parks. In 1968 the company was purchased by Amfac Corporation, which operated hotel and resort properties around the world.

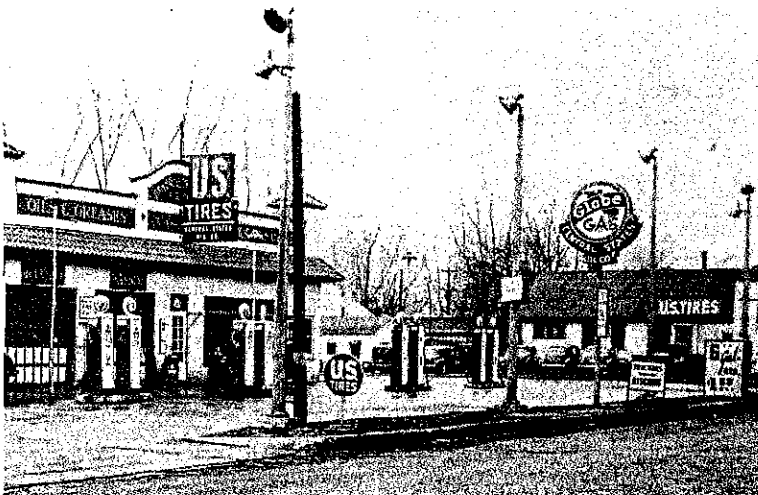
Written by the editor; sources: "Dining By Rail", James Porterfield (contributed by Marcia Hastings), "Harvey House Home Page" internet site, and literature from Kansas City Museum; photos: Mr. Harvey - from Harvey home page; restaurant sign - Barbara Warner



From the Archives



*Motoring
Memories...*



Wabash- The Heart of America Line

The territory of the Wabash was the heart of America. The railroad never reached either coast, instead serving eight states and Canada with 2,500 miles of track stretching from Buffalo on the east to Omaha and Kansas City on the West.

The Wabash flag symbol was registered at the United States Patent Office in 1884.

The emblem gained significant recognition in the 1930's when it flashed on the big screen of Midwestern movie houses as a part of an advertising campaign for Niagara Falls excursion trains.

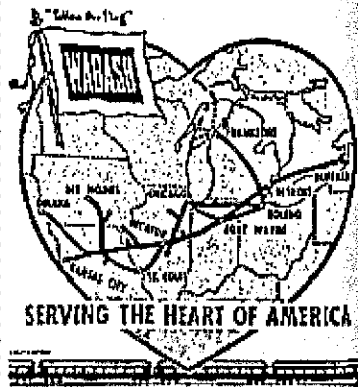


Much growth occurred in the late 1800's under Wabash president, Jay Gould. Gould, who has been described as "the most notorious individual in railroad history" and "schemer and opportunist extraordinary", was a prominent figure in railroading at the time. As a director of the Erie Railroad he and partners issued illegal stock, bribed state legislators, and amassed a fortune in the process. He went on to become involved with the Wabash and also the Texas and Pacific, Missouri Pacific, and Union Pacific Railroads.

In 1884 the Wabash (then known as the Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific) found itself unable to meet expenses, due to Gould's overexpansion, overcapitalization, and juggling of assets to pay dividends. The Wabash route across Iowa cut the distance between Omaha and Chicago by 100 miles but was never brought up to mainline standards, making it difficult to compete with other lines. The Wabash gave up control of ten leased lines they had been operating. As finances improved the railroad reunified many of the routes over the next 20 years.

The decade after World War I saw Wabash introduce their Red Ball fast freight. The fast freight service was to characterize the Wabash for years, with freight speeds of up to seventy miles per hour.

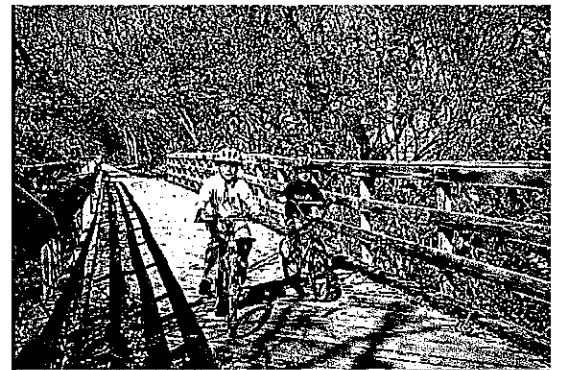
While Wabash passenger traffic suffered along with that of other railroads following World War II the company never downgraded its service or discouraged passengers, attempting to maintain a first class service until the end.



Negotiations to merge with the Norfolk and Western began in 1958; in 1964 the merger took place. The expanded line retained the name Norfolk and Western, with the "Wabash" name

vanishing from railroading after 109 years of use.

The portion of the line that extended into Council Bluffs was originally part of the Council Bluffs and St. Louis Railway and was built in 1878. It was acquired by the Wabash, who operated it for most of its existence. Prior to being deactivated the line was operated by the Iowa Southern Railway. The Wabash depot was located at 3rd street in Council Bluffs.



The Wabash route from Council Bluffs today serves as a bike and hiking trail. Photo: Barb Warner

Hunting in Pottawattamie County in Pioneer Days

Some buffalo, herds of elk and countless droves of deer, roaming almost unmolested over the prairies and the bottom lands of the Missouri river valley in 1860 made Pottawattamie County and the territory surrounding the little village of Kanesville a veritable hunter's paradise. Raccoon and 'possum thronged the valley, and every available hollow tress was the home of a thriving and prosperous family. Squirrels were so numerous that they were passed by as utterly insignificant and not even worth the expenditure of a shot, and the wailing cry of the wolf and the coyote over the desolate prairie filled the nights and tired the nerves of the men and women whose only homes and shelter were prairie schooners.

'Sportsman' was a term almost unknown in those early days... all men were hunters

Sportsman was a term almost unknown in those early days and one that was never used. All men were hunters, and hunting was as much a part of the business of the first settlers of the county as feeding of cattle and his to the farmer of the present day. There were no packing plants and butcher shops, no counters where the hungry man might plank down his money and receive something in return to drive away his hunger. As a matter of fact, the early settler was to have meat to eat he got it by going out upon the prairies or down on the bottom lands and making practical use of his prowess with the gun to get it.

Trapping the Only Business

Trapping for fur animals along the river and the creeks furnished the means of livelihood for all the settlers during the first third of the century. The Indians, too, after they learned from the white men, who invaded the territory, that the skins from these animals could be traded for the white men's blankets, whisky and hunters' supplies.

Buffaloes Crossed River Early

During the early years and even up until the time of the Mormon emigration, many buffalo were on the east side of the river. Soon after this, however, they disappeared almost entirely from the Iowa side. Elk, while never very plentiful in this immediate vicinity, made their chief camping ground to the north in Harrison county. Small herds, however, from time to time, were met with and elk meat and skins, next to those of the deer, formed the chief trophies of the hunter's skill and supplied his table with the choicest meats.

Thrived and Multiplied

Deer, on up until the severe winter of 1856-57, roamed the prairies in countless herds. Until this fatal winter, no inroads made by the Indians of white hunters seemed to have any effect toward decreasing their numbers

and they thrived and multiplied on the rich Iowa prairies, as their native stamping and breeding grounds. Though all the years when the great trains of immigrants and gold seekers were making their way westward, deer formed the chief food supply. When camp was struck for noonday or for the resting place over night the first duty was to go in search of the fresh meat and this was almost invariably deer.

Flint Lock the Only Gun

In the days of the great deer herds, the magazine rifle was unknown. Only the primitive flintlock with its clumsy powder pan and its awkward and uncertain flint were known to the earliest of the trappers that came into the territory. On shot into a herd was frequently all that was possible and as the guns were short in range and somewhat uncertain in accuracy, the most skilled hunter could not be very destructive. Percussion caps came next and took the place of the flint and powder pan. These were a wonderful advance but still one shot at a frightened animal was all that was afforded.

Prairie chickens covered the prairies in those days by the millions. They were so plentiful that little attention was given them. They were counted scarcely worth the powder and lead in the shot it took to kill them. When the hunter was in hard luck or needed something in a hurry, he turned to the prairie chicken as a never failing source.

(contributed by Darlene Vergamini)

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The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County is dedicated to the preservation of books, letters, sites, records, artifacts and buildings of historical significance in the county. The Society operates and is restoring the Historic Squirrel Cage Jail, Rock Island Depot, involved in the efforts to create a local museum, and is active in promoting historical and genealogical research.

Requests for information about Society projects, membership, and volunteer work are welcomed. Write the Historical Society of Pottawattamie County, Post Office Box 2, Council Bluffs, IA, 51502.

The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County Member Newsletter is printed eleven times a year and mailed to all members. The membership mailing list is maintained by the Society Secretary, Robert Hastings. Please direct any address corrections to Mr. Hastings at 322-0612 or to the Society post office box listed above.

Members are always welcome to attend a Board Meeting. Anyone desiring to speak at the meeting should send a letter or call either the Secretary or President to be placed on the agenda.

**Historical
Society**
Of Pottawattamie County
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