

# Brown County Journal

May 15, 2014

## Events:

Brown County Historical  
Society Dinner Meeting  
June 2

Brown County Genealogical  
Society - Annual Picnic  
June 10

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Rhonda A. Dunn

## New Bellsville, Home Away from Home

That's what it had become for so many Ohio immigrants. They left their home counties of Monroe and Belmont in Ohio to find a new home. They first came to Bartholomew County, but it was so different with the low wetlands that didn't help quell disease. The sandy ground was good for growing crops, but what good is that if your family members grew sick time after time. They had to move again. When they come upon Brown County it was almost as if they never left home. It had the same beautiful rolling hills and wide fertile valleys. The southern half of Brown County was where most settled and they brought with them memories of their home. So they would not forget it they also named their new home names of the places they had left behind, but loved so dearly. After the first group of Ohioans came and found Brown County they sent word back home about their new home away home. Then they started coming in droves. They named their new communities such as Belmont, Bellsville, Hamilton, and Bethany.

One such community in northeastern Van Buren Township was called New Bellsville in honor of their former home in Ohio of Bellsville. New Bellsville is located almost two miles east of Pikes Peak and two miles west of the Bartholomew County line 'as the crow flies.' It is situated at the fork of Bellsville Road and Mt. Liberty Road. First lets learn a little bit of early history of the area. The very earliest settlers in Brown County came from the southern states in the 1830s. The first land grants in the area were obtained by William Bender, Joseph Hedrick, Daniel Hedrick, Granville Hedrick, Ephraim Hurley, David Crouch, Moses Crouch, Ambrose Cobb, Walker Ping, John Ping, William Ping, Henry Bird, Daniel Harmon, and Thomas A. Brown all from either Kentucky or North Carolina.



Of the Ohio immigrants who most didn't arrive until a decade later were John English, Moses Ward, James G. Read, Martin Eickleberry, Moses Romine, Peter and Enoch Morris. New Bellsville was situated at the junction of four sections which were seven, eight, seventeen, and eighteen in Township 8N and Range 4E.

At this time New Bellsville had not even been thought of as a town yet. This didn't happen until the arrival of one more Ohio immigrant and that was Joseph Campbell. It's not to say that others had a hand in the dream, but Campbell is the one who took the first step. He laid out the town in lots about 1848 and donated some land to the Baptist Church. Joseph Campbell and his wife the former Harriet Deaver were both born in Maryland. They had set out to find new land from which to start a new life and their first home was Bellsville, Ohio. There they had six children who were James Jr., Elizabeth J., Martha Ellen, Benjamin, Mary Ann, and John T. Campbell. The Campbell family played a big

role for many years in the Harmony Baptist Church which was the recipient of Joseph Campbell's gift of land to build their church.

The Baptist Church had its beginnings in 1848 when the residents who were from Ohio brought their Baptist beliefs with them. They first started their meetings in a log schoolhouse at what was called the Allen's barnyard. When they received Joseph Campbell's gift of land they immediately started plans to build a proper church. They established their church in 1850 and gave it the name Harmony Baptist Church at which time they set forth their



**A Baptism in Salt Creek**



### **A New Bellesville store**

Ping 1900-1940, Photographer of Brown County, Indiana.” One of his sons was Bryce Dwight Ping who was quite an active citizen in his home territory and also served his country in WW2. From a story by Bryce D. Ping he relates his memories of Harmony Baptist Church. “As I grew up in the church Harriet Campbell was my Sunday school teacher. She was an old maid who taught several generations before and after me. I used to sit in Sunday school bare-footed in the summer time. Harriet had an old bachelor brother who was the community banker. He didn’t make you sign a contract. He kept your name on a tally book. Occasionally the church would meet at someone’s house and have an oyster supper or wiener roast. We had our annual Sunday school picnic the 4th Saturday in August. We would invite other churches in, have special music, and a speaker. The week before the picnic, the men and boys would gather to clean up Campbell’s woods. Usually we would fail to get rid of all the yellow jacket nests and someone would always get stung.” The local merchant, R. Z. Lutes, would want to sell cigarettes and other items at the picnic, but the church people would object to this. “The church people objected to smoking, drinking and dancing. They also objected to playing cards and working on Sunday.” (from “Memories of New Bellsville” by Bryce D. Ping)

The church in the early years of our county was always the center of the community. It was the place where neighbors came to see each other to catch up on the news. Most community events were at

convictions and set to paper their beliefs and their constitution. The church seemed to bring together both the southern immigrants and the Ohio immigrants. The first Trustees of the church were Robert Henderson, Frederick Froh, and Hancher Campbell. The Deacons were Robert Henderson, Holden Cooper, David Ping, and Cyrus Bartholomew. The Treasurer was Benjamin Clark. The Clerk was J. T. Ping and the Sexton was John Eddy. Thanks to the long association of the Campbell family through Joseph Campbell’s grandchildren, Hancher and Harriet Campbell, the church still has a strong congregation today. This is today one of the oldest surviving churches in Brown County. Some of their very early records still exist.

The Ping family, originally Kentucky immigrants, has many descendents in Van Buren Township. One man of distinction was Otto Ping, was a photographer that captured many memories of his time in photographs. He has a book with many of his photos called “Otto





the church such as dinner gatherings, church picnics, anniversary parties, and the like. The church was the center of the community and it drew neighbors far and wide. A large Methodist church also served the community for many years just west of the village on the road towards Pike Peak. After the church closed the logs from the church were dismantled and sent to Nashville to build a home.

About 1853 Joseph Campbell also set aside a portion of land to start a cemetery for the new community, New Bellsville Cemetery. One can find the burial sites here of many of the founding families of the area. Sitting on the side of a hill east

### **Log Methodist Church - New Bellsville**

of the village it has a grand view of the valley shaded by stately red cedar trees. There is a stone wall running the length of the old section along the Bellsville Pike. You can also find many headstones carved by the famous local stonecarver, Henry Cross. With the coming of the church and all the activity naturally small stores sprang up, a post office was established, and a one room school house was built just up the road, School No. 1.

The New Bellsville Post Office was established in 1856 and ran up until 1909. The post masters of New Bellsville were Turner Haislup, Samuel C. Wilson, William B. Williams William Powell, Henry W. Cook, James L. Tilton, Jeremiah B. Cook, James B. Walker, Andrew C. Clark, William B. Campbell, and Adam Swank. After the post office closed in 1909 the mail was sent to Mt. Liberty. Oftentimes it was convenient for local store owners to also run the post office. One such of these postmasters was also a local store owner, James L. Tilton. Mr. Tilton along with his partner, Emmanuel Moore who was a Civil War veteran, who were both Ohio immigrants ran the store in New Bellsville for many years. James L. Tilton led quite an active life in the community. He was a teacher for many years, had owned several stores here and in Nashville, bought and sold lumber to make



**School No. 1  
New Bellesville**



**James L. Tilton, Judge Rufus Reddick, and Duncan Hines - Birthday celebration**

during the Civil War when John Hancher had sold a drove of livestock for \$200 from which he intended to build a house. His son, Alex who was a soldier, had also sent home \$400 bounty money. That night five armed men came to his home and robbed from him the entire amount. The second theft was in November of 1928 when four men robbed Russell. Z. Lutes, a merchant of about \$150. In both cases the bandits were captured. One of the stores in New Bellsville was run by R. Z. Lutes. He was always closed on Sunday as was the custom back then unless a hungry family needed to buy some food that day.

There were many types of industry and businesses operating here. Staves and hoop poles were manufactured and sent to market which was booming at the time. Tobacco was a good money-making crop as well as other types of farming. There was a two-story packing house and other small canning factories. About 1893 a fire destroyed about half of the town. It was quickly rebuilt and is now a pretty little country village. The village now is laid out at the intersection of Mt. Liberty Road and Bellsville Pike. It is

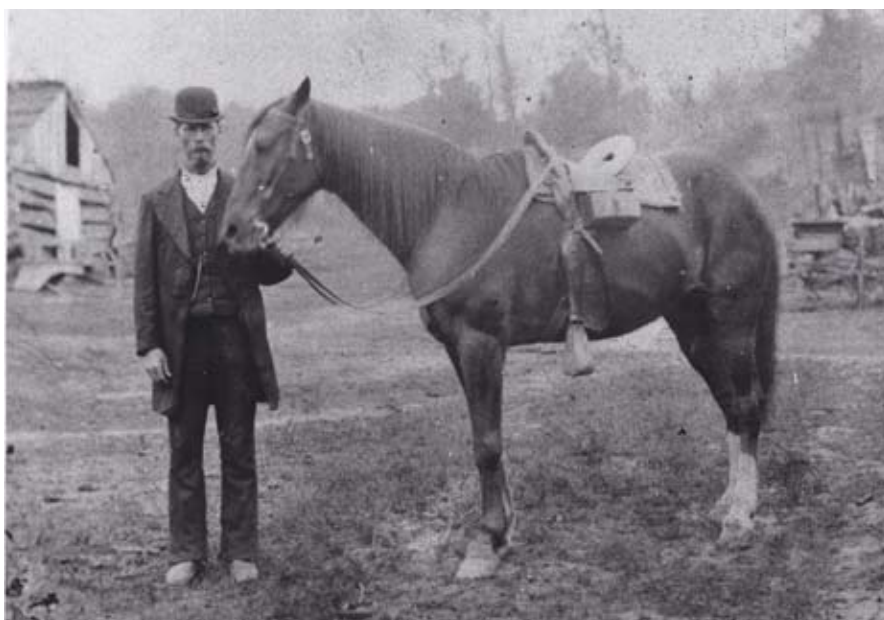
barrel staves, and also served as County Treasurer, Assessor, Treasurer, and Trustee. (from "Brown County Remembers - James L. Tilton" by Ruth Tilton)

As with any small town stories still abound of goings-on. At an early date in the area there is a story told of a panther chase. Logan Ping and William Crouch were being chased by a black panther for about a fourth of a mile. They went through what is now a fertile farm field between the village and creek. With the help of their dogs they escaped any harm. There has been only two cases of banditry in the history of the community. The first was



**Dr. Alfred J. Ralph**





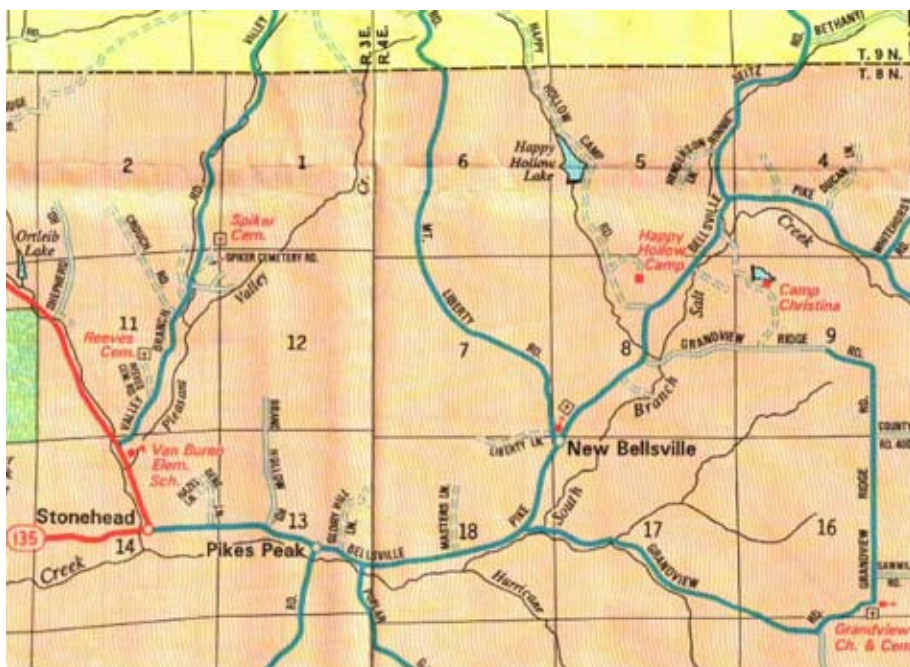
### Dr. Ralphy and his horse

to have a large collection of mounted birds and insects in his office. The office has since been moved into Nashville and is now a part of the Pioneer Village with Dr. Ralphy's instruments, books, and bird. Dr. Ralphy served all the south side of the county for many years. His family and the Campbells were very close with some marriages between them.

Going west past a few more houses on Bellsville Pike and after the demise of the Methodist Church the rise of the local Red Men's Lodge began in 1904. It was a two story building of sycamore timbers and served also as a store front and post office at times.

There used to be a grand old tree that sit right next to it that many residents recalled. The Red Men's Lodge served for many years as a gathering place for the locals. The Lodge, Horicon Tribe No. 457, was founded on December 27, 1907 with 50 members which soon grew to hundreds. Their organization not only served as a meeting place

situated on a hillside which is only slightly higher than the surrounding valley. Heading west from the cemetery the Baptist Church lies directly west and is facing Mt. Liberty Road. Many of the stores and businesses were across from the church along Mt. Liberty Road. Some were located on the south side of the intersection along Bellsville Pike. The first house on the south side belonged to the local doctor, Alfred J. Ralphy. Also there was a small building in which he would see his patients. Doctor Ralphy was fond of taxidermy and nature. He was said



for the local men, but whole families were celebrated. They hosted birthday parties monthly for all the residents, honored the passing of military veterans, honored the passing of members' family members, and held large cook-outs. Every year they held a big Rabbit Feast on Thanksgiving Day for the whole village. The building survived up until the 1970s when it caught fire and burned down.

From a reminiscence by Bryce D. Ping he relates his memories of the Red Mans Lodge. "The lady members of the Red Man Lodge were called Pocahontas. They had a piano player in Hall, which I enjoyed listening to. It my youth it seemed like a huge place. We had monthly community meetings and pitch-in suppers. Since the church did not have a kitchen we used to meet on the lawn of the Red Man Hall for pitch-in dinners. There was a huge American Elm tree there that at the time was officially the largest American Elm in Indiana. In the late 1920s or early 1930s the KKK also met at the Red Man Hall. The KKK at Brown County didn't object so much to Catholics and Negroes, as they did to bootlegging and wife beating. One of the highlights of the year was Memorial Day. We would have a pitch-in dinner, special music and speakers. After dinner we would all gather and march to the cemetery. This march was led by a drum and bugle corps. After we arrived at the cemetery the graves were decorated, then we marched back to the Hall." (from "Memories of New Bellsville" by Bryce D. Ping)



**Red Man's Lodge - New Bellesville**

Most towns and place names are named for historic figures and citizens of distinction. When these Ohioans came to Brown County the love of their former home came with them. This new home became New Bellsville. They brought their families, dreams, and an idea of how they wanted their new home to be. These were generous and god-loving people. They even welcomed all their current neighbors and especially the southern contingent quickly were incorporated into their new home community. All of native southern Brown Countians has some ancestry going back to these early Ohio immigrants. These people made a great and lasting impact on Brown County.

**(Photos used may have come from the Hohenberger Collection at the Lilly Library, the Brown Co. Historical Society, Gladys Ralph, and Otto Ping.)**