

# Brown County Journal

June 15, 2015

## Events:

Brown County Historical  
Society Dinner  
June 1

Brown County  
Genealogical Society  
July 8

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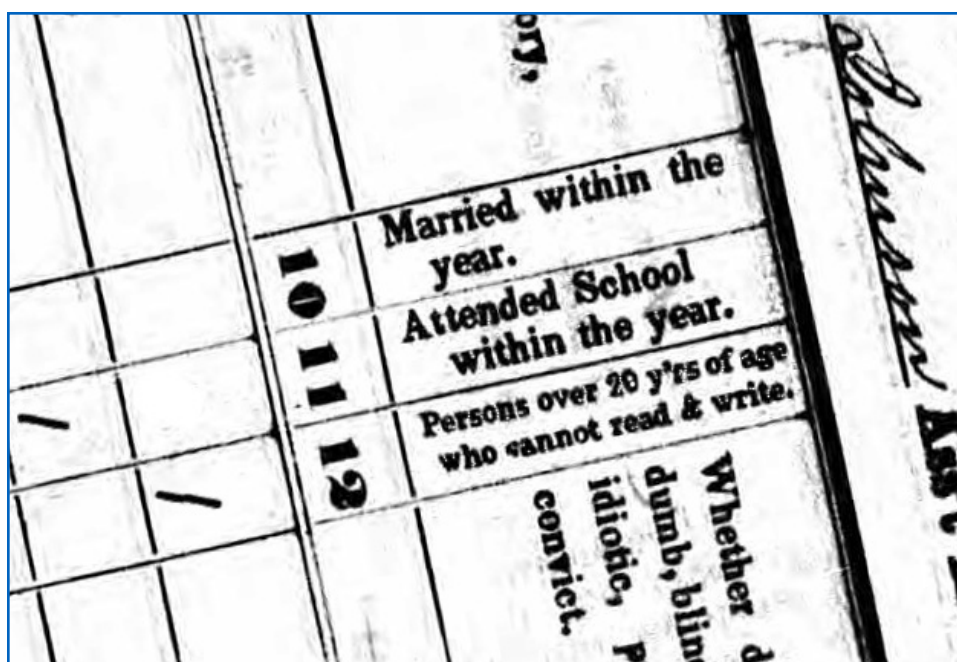
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Rhonda A. Dunn

## Can You Read or Write?

If you have ever looked at census records as many of our genealogists do every day you've seen this question on the oldest census records. At the early beginnings of our state every ten years the federal government called for a census of the population. The questions over the years have changed a few times, but this question, "Can You Read or Write," was very important. If you follow the census down every decade you can see how education advanced by the change in the answers to this question. An educated citizenry is required for the advancement of our country. Every individual has the right to have a good education.

As the early pioneers came here there were no schools and many people could not read, and some could barely sign their name.



Questions on 1850 Census



**Deadfall School 1913 - George Howard, teacher**

school was nowhere near. When the federal government surveyed land to move in new settlers it set aside certain areas that could be used to build schools. After local government entities were formed they saw a need to educate their young, also. The county administration assigned the task of building schools and hiring teachers to township trustees at that time.

In the early 1800s a Christian organization was formed called the American Sunday School Union. Its purpose being to locate and help maintain Sunday Schools in communities where there were none and to provide literature for these schools. A number of missionaries were sent out with Christian literature, published lessons, and story books for the children. The Union was non-denominational. After the school was established the residents were left to choose their own denomination. The Union published story books for children to help them develop good life values and morals. Often children in disadvantaged areas of the country first learned to read

One can find many instances in the county records where individuals could only sign a document with an "X" and they would have to have a witness to verify he was the person that was signing that document.

At an early time in our county many community forces set to work to build schools, train teachers, and even to home school their children if a



**Jenny Allison**

from these books. It was advantageous for the early settlers to send their children to these Sunday schools in areas without regular schools because they learned to read and write. One of our own local missionaries was Warren C. Chafin. (story by Evelyn Gladding, 2007)

As more one-room schools were established books became more readily available. In the early 1900s the state government offered to send 30 books for all aged children to each school. Everyone was excited about this news. The parents thought the best way to raise the money for the books was to have box suppers. These suppers were auctioned off and whoever bought the box supper ate it with the person who made it. Every year the books were bought and the parents came to get the books to read. After the school system was consolidated and the arrival of busing these shipments of books stopped. (from Brown County Remembers, Sophia Lucas Vossmeier's story)



**The First Temporary Home for the Public Library  
1920 - T. D. Calvin Building**

## A Library for All Citizens

The first public library was established shortly after the village of Nashville was plotted. Lots were sold at public auction with ten percent of the proceeds going to the establishment and maintaining of a public library. By 1840 the library fund carried a large sum for that early time of \$177.60. Soon after, books were purchased for the first Brown County Public Library.

In 1846, William Ganla was appointed the first librarian. Royal P. Manville served as the organization's treasurer. Only six years after the first books were bought, the new library boasted several hundred volumes that Brown County citizens had free access to. Because money accumulated slowly in the fund, the library remained fairly small compared to the surrounding counties. More books were





**Helen Allison, Librarian**

purchased in the 1850s with the help of a bequest by a man named McClure. Interest in the public library began to slowly wane throughout the 1870s. Especially in the 1880s newspapers and inexpensive books were more easily obtained either through peddlers or the local general stores. (from Brown County Democrat, Jan. 17, 2001, by Steve Arnold)

Early records do not tell of the demise of this library, but somewhere between 1884 and 1919 it appears to have perished. By 1920 concerned citizens petitioned the town of Nashville to establish a new library.

Interested citizens met at the Methodist parsonage of Reverend John Ragle and the first meeting of the new library board met in December of 1919. A room in the parsonage was used for a short while to keep their small collection of books. The first entry in their Book of Minutes read: "Members of the Nashville Library Board appointed as follows: Mrs. Ola Genolin (Sec. & Treas.) and Mrs. Ada Shulz - county government members; John T. Bond and William J. Vawter (Vice President) - town board members; William Coffey and Rev. John

Ragle (President) - school board members. The Board met Monday, Dec. 22, 1919 to perfect the organization. Mr. Coffey, Mr. Bond, and Mrs. Shulz were appointed a committee to secure a suitable place for the opening of the library." They began a search to find the first real home for a new public library.

In the January 5, 1920 minutes they recorded, "The committee selected to find a room in which to place the library - reported favorable to the brick building owned by T. D. Calvin and were ordered to secure this room." In the Feb. 2, 1920 minutes they were ready to move into their new library room with rent of \$8 per month. The first library was housed upstairs in Calvin Hardware across from the Courthouse on Main Street. In March they met to appoint their first librarian, Mrs. George Allison. In the July 26, 1920 minutes they recorded this statement: "Resolved: That the Board of Trustees of the Nashville Public Library does hereby express its wish and consent to make said public library free and open to all the people of brown County on condition of the said county contributing to the support of said library as provided for in an Act of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana, 1917."

As the library collection grew, the availability of books to the rural folk didn't seem to improve. The



### **The Second Home for the Public Library - Masonic Lodge Building 1921**

It remained here for about 27 years. All during this time the library board was still in search for a permanent location for a brand new building to be built for the public library.

In 1947 the library board voted to change the name of their library, Nashville, Brown County Public Library, and drop the Nashville. By 1949 they had set in motion to build a new building of their own to house the public library. They decided on the lot just west of the Masonic Hall which they were renting at the time. They made an agreement with the County Commissioners to restrict this corner of the public square against overuse by vehicles. They planned to make it a more hospitable environment with landscaping, improvements for foot traffic, and make it more attractive for the whole community. The Library Board made arrangements to build a small rustic well house around the water pump so it could be used by the public. Ralph Burkholder was selected to begin work on the new building. In the 1957 minutes of the library they reported that they leased all four corners of the town square "to maintain and beautify as long as the Brown Co. Library remains at its present location." (from the Library Board Minutes in the Historical Society Archives)

board decided to establish out-stations in homes in the various townships. Grover Brown offered to donate his car and time to take books to the following places: Hamblen township - Mrs. Wilkerson, Jackson township - Mr. S. Barnes, Van Buren - Mr. C. Phillips, and Johnson - A. E. Deckard. Other locations came later, such as Harve and Mary Neal's in Helmsburg and Sarah Tracey Moore's in Spearsville.

A year later they were ready to relocate the new public library again, they needed a bigger space. The Masonic Banquet Hall on West Main Street seemed to be the best place. Many volunteered to help redecorate and set up in the new location. This is now called the Village Green building.

Many of the long-time residents of the county will always think of Mrs. Helen Allison when the old library is mentioned. This quiet, pleasant-mannered lady served as librarian for 34 years. When she began her duties the library contained but a few hundred volumes. Her salary was two dollars a week with the library being open two afternoons and two evenings a week. She loyally followed the slow growth of the library through the years until her retirement in 1952. (Brown County Democrat article of March 24, 1955)

Mrs. Edna Frazier after first serving as President of the library board took over as librarian after Helen Allison retired. She expanded on the work done by Mrs. Allison particularly in the services to schools. Summer reading programs were started. At the start of each school year Mrs. Frazier sent to each teacher in the county schools books from the library for school use and distribution. By 1954 the library had a circulation increase of a little over 9000 in 1954. Each and every succeeding librarian had envisioned a plan for the use of their library, everything from rural book deliveries to summer reading programs to education programs.

Mrs. Frazier served as Librarian until 1982. The following year the library moved into a new home on East Main Street in which it operated until 2001. Charr Skirvin succeeded Mrs. Frazier and served as Librarian until 1989. In 1989 a new Librarian was appointed in a young man named Ian Engle. He served until 1992. In this year Yvonne Olinger was appointed Librarian and she served up until a few years ago. In 2001 Yvonne got to oversee the building of our grand new library that we have now. The last in this line of public servants is Stori Snyder who inherited this historic legacy, a grand building to take care of, and a public to serve.



**(Photos from the Lilly Library Hohenberger Collection, Brown County Historical Society Archives, and Rhonda Dunn)**