



Brown County Journal

Nov. 15, 2015

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Christmas Dinner
December 7

Brown County
Genealogical Society
Christmas Party
December 10

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The Making of a County Seat ~ Nashville

From the last Journal we learned how Brown County was established and the people that stood up to be counted as good and honest citizens of this newly formed county. These citizens came together the county started on the right foot. They met at James Dawson's place south of present day Nashville. The first election was held June of 1836 in which John Floyd was elected Clerk and Recorder, James Taggart and Lewis F. Raper were Judges, Daniel Hedrick, William Jackson, and James Davidson were elected County Commissioners. James Dawson was commissioned Sheriff by Governor Noah Noble. Thomas Henson was appointed Treasurer.

The Commissioners commenced to set up a working government and establish the county seat.. They had to pick from three possible new sites: Georgetown, Hedgesville, or Jacksonburg (now Nashville). The commissioners were financeering to obtain the largest donation for the new location. They soon set to work laying off the new town, Jacksonburg into lots. It is theoried that Banner Brummett's fondness for his home state of Tennessee pushed to have the name changed to Nashville.

On August 15, 1836, the commissioners appointed Banner Brummett county agent with a bond of \$4000. He was directed to lay out the town into lots to be sold at public auction. James Dawson, named county surveyor, measured the lots and streets and prepared the original plat on Nashville. Unfortunately this valuable plat was burned in the courthouse fire of 1873. The loss of the original plat has caused endless trouble in the buying and selling of lots since that time. The first auction took place in September with it being advertised in Brown, Monroe,



Bartholomew, Johnson, and Jackson counties. By January fifty lots had been sold for \$694.87.

The main road going through Nashville was an east-west road called the Columbus-Bloomington Road which is where Old State Road 46 and Main Street run now. No other navigable roads ran either north or south out of Nashville at that time.

Nashville was set in a relatively flat area between Salt Creek to the south and the rise of a hilly area to the north. Nashville was laid out with the center of town lying at the intersection of Main and Jefferson Streets. An area was laid off of this center to be the town square. An area such as this was meant to be the gathering place for the townsfolk or

for public events and rallies.

County business had originally been held at James Dawson's place. With the establishment of the county seat it was decided that a proper building should be built for county business. The county commissioners appointed a committee of F. Goss, J. Watson, and William Taggart to select two lots in Nashville for a courthouse and a jail. Lot No. 1 was chosen for the jail and No. 2 was for the courthouse. Then Banner Brummett, the County Agent, was asked to give contracts to the lowest possible bidders to build them. William Snider won the bid to build the log jail and David D. Weddle won the courthouse contract.

The courthouse was 18 x 24 ft. of hewed logs and two stories high. It had windows, two stairways, and fireplaces in every room. Good chinking was to be provided with weatherboarding inside. The roof was wood shingles, the floor was seasoned planking, and "sufficient rock" was laid down under the four corners and in the middle of each sill. Court was held downstairs which was one big room. Offices were upstairs which contained two rooms.

The two-story jail was made of three layers of hewed logs with the inside and outside layers running horizontal and the middle layer running vertical. The entrance to the prisoner's quarters was a hole cut in the floor of the second floor. The prisoners would have to climb down a ladder into the cell and the

sheriff would pull up the ladder and close a door over the hole. There was only one door to the outside at that time and that was on the second floor with a stairway. (from Brown County History and Families 1990).

The lots for the courthouse and jail were set apart from the main activity of town. Therefore, the townspeople could have the public square for public activities, such as street fairs, parades, and a central area for merchants to set up business. Most of the businesses were started around the town square and spread out east and west along Main Street. A public well was dug for the townsfolk's use on the southeast corner of the public square. Other public wells were also located at various places around town. When someone rode into town there were hitching posts and watering troughs around the town square for their horses. The town pump on the town square was said to have been a flowing artesian well which meant it never ran dry.



By 1840 there were 80 people living in Nashville in a rapidly increasing cluster of log cabins. Then it was deemed necessary to have a bridge built over Salt Creek to make it easier to travel in high water seasons. The list of merchants grew from 1840 to 1880 with over 348 people now in Nashville. During these early times Nashville was known as a wild town with bar fights, gambling, drinking, and horse racing as the principle pastimes. In fact early court cases abound with convictions on gambling. In 1872 forty residents came together and decided to have the town of Nashville incorporated. The first town trustees were Frank P. Taggart, Charles Gibson, and John Genolin.



Condition of the Town Square in the early 1900s - looking north up Jefferson Street. Frank P. Taggart House on the left and the Tilton house is on the right.

By 1880 Nashville turned into a town of neat white houses with their own barns for their horses and fences to keep out wandering livestock. The courthouse also had an iron fence constructed to keep wandering livestock from destroying the courthouse lawn. There were three schools and three churches in town. The streets were full of wagons with oxen teams hauling tan bark or hoop poles. Drummers, traveling salesmen, would travel the roads to sell their wares. The hills were being clear-cut of timber and loads passed through town on the way to markets elsewhere. Town was booming at this time. (from Brown County History & Families 1990)

Traffic flow through town was centered at the Town Square. Jefferson Street ran south to a bridge that crossed Salt Creek and



A load of tanbark - 1900 on Main Street



Odd Fellows building - also the Studio of artist Henshaw and photographer Hohenberger

until this time. From recorded minutes in 1881 the Town Board met to look into grading, fencing, and setting trees in the Public Square. On into the 1880s and 1890s farm animals that had run loose in town had been deemed a problem. It was at this time that the Town Board established an Ordinance to keep swine out of the Public Square. From 1911 to 1921 the Town Board passed new Ordinances for the town and set about to clean up the Public Square. They contracted out to build sidewalks, refit the public wells for better water production for the public and for fire protection. They also passed an Ordinance to turn the Public Square into a park, hauling in more dirt, putting up posts, and planting trees.

In 1917 Frank M. Hohenberger moved to Nashville and took residence in the Odd Fellows building which formerly sat on the northwest corner beside the Public Square. He took an interest in making

let to the southwest part of the county. Traffic going north out of Nashville most likely ran up the valley where Jackson Branch Road runs now. Van Buren Street which ran along the west side of the courthouse was mostly businesses. It was a dead on the north side up to Mound Street where the Hopper sawmill was located. To the south it ran down to a field which was used for playing baseball, circuses, or other large events such as the State Fox Hunters Association gathering in 1926.

The Town Square

The Town Square was not maintained and was barren of trees and grass up



Boys Shooting Marbles on the Town Square



**Prominent Men of Nashville -
James L. Tilton, Rufus Reddick,
Simon Neidigh, W.W. Spencer,
Columbus W. Duncan**

the area a better place. He prohibited activity there and established a good lawn that he kept mowed. Hohenberger also took charge of the town pump area. He kept it clean and in good repair. This was essential for him because he needed the water to develop his film. Walter Mathis was contracted to plant trees in the public square. The lot adjacent to the Methodist Church received some attention and became a recreational place for horseshoe games. Lights were also rigged up for late night games. The lot where the town pump was located got most of the use by the townspeople. The boys used it to play marbles and mumblety-peg. The northeast corner of the public square was used for bigger games such as stickball. (from a story by Fred King 1992)

Growth & Changing Attitudes

With the arrival of the Art Colony in the early 1900s travel to and from Nashville increased. The main thoroughfare up until this time was the east-west road from Helmsburg which just so happened to be where the train stopped in Brown County. This road got most of the traffic during this time period and had to be kept in constant repair. It was so much better to take this

road for those coming from Bean Blossom than the one running up Jackson Branch Road. Beginning in the early 1930s talk began of creating a road north out of Nashville running to Bean Blossom. It would run across the ridge top coming through Covered Bridge Road on the north end from Bean Blossom and end up coming out on Van Buren Street alongside the Courthouse. By 1934 the State of Indiana took over and had State Road 135 finished and ready to be used.

With the change of the main thoroughfare to State Road 135 that also started a shift in the business district. With most traffic now going north and south through Nashville businesses started growing up along this new route. The business district still is centered along Main Street, but now it was beginning to extend more up and down Van Buren with the opening up of this new corridor.

(Photos from the Brown County Historical Society Archives and Lilly Library's Hohenberger collection)