

## **Otter Creek Township**

This township occupies the middle of the northern tier of townships of the county, and is bounded west, east and south by the townships of Fayette, Nevins, Lost Creek and Harrison, and by Parke county on the north. From Fayette township it is separated by the Wabash, which washes the whole western side. The township is further watered by Otter creek (from which the township takes its name), which flows from the east to the west side in an irregular though generally westerly direction. This creek, and Sugar, in the northern part of the township, furnish the water for stock and afford good drainage for the sections through which they flow. In former times Otter creek afforded water-power sufficient to run a mill and distillery of considerable dimensions. The distillery, in the early days, was considered almost as essential to the comfort of the community as the mill. Indeed, the pioneer in some instances felt that while the hominy block and the rifle might supply him with eatables, the more complex contrivances of the distillery were necessary to supply him with the cheerful beverage essential to the keeping away of ague and the counteracting of the bites of rattlesnakes.

Some of the finest land in the state is to be found in this township. The Wabash bottoms, which include a large part of the western portion, are celebrated for their richness, while a wide strip of prairie occupying the middle of the township and joining the bottoms on the east, is not excelled anywhere for fine productive farms. The eastern portion is rather flat for successful cultivation every year, much of which is in the condition that nature left it. The big ditch in the western part of the township is the former Wabash and Erie canal. The railroad has long since superseded its use and it has now fallen into decay. The Eastern Illinois railroad enters the township near the northwest corner and in its course to Terre Haute divides it in two nearly equal sections. Of the Terre Haute & Logansport railroad, which enters the township at its northeast corner, the same may be said. The Indianapolis & St. Louis railroad passes through the southeast corner. These roads, with their stations of Atherton, Otter Creek, Ellsworth, Markle and Grant, afford good markets and outlets for the products of this section.

The old Lafayette and Terre Haute wagon and pack-horse road, which was one of the first opened in western Indiana, passes through the township from north to south in a direct line. Along this road many of the early settlements were made. Indeed, it may be said that what the railroad of to-day is in its attractiveness to settlement, this wagon-road was in its time. Among the first, and possibly the very first, settlers of the township, were the Balding's from New York, and Jacob and David Lyon from Ohio. These men opened farms in 1816, their location being in the central part of what is now Otter Creek township, but what was then Knox county, and a year later Sullivan. In 1817 Joseph Evans located in the eastern part of the township and built a cabin. In the southeastern part of the township, as early as 1816 or 1817, Mr. Briggs was the first settler. In 1819 William Watkins settled at Markle's Mills, on Sec. 36. Gershom Tuttle came as early as 1818. William Denny, David Lyon, A.M. Ostrander, William Johnson, Thomas White, Anthony Creal, Isaac and Jacob Balding, and Abraham Markle were prominent among the early settlers. The last named built the first mill on Otter creek, and a son of his, N.B. Markle, was the first white child born in the township. The mill built by Markle, though not a very extensive affair as compared with some of the modern establishments of to-day, was in those times an institution. It had one run of burrs for wheat and one for corn. To this mill the early settlers came to have their grists ground for a distance of many miles around.

The roads were very bad in the early days, and it was common in those times for the patron of the mill to wait a day or two for his turn at the mill.

Mr. Tuttle was the builder and proprietor of a distillery in the early times. It is said that good whisky was made at this factory and sold at reasonable prices. A bushel of corn was considered an equivalent for a gallon of its essence after paying the manufacturer his profits, and the pioneers interchanged the one for the other. Though whiskey was cheap, and everybody drank it, they do claim that the evil effects of drinking were not so great as with the higher priced but much doctored product of later times. The distillery was run for about fifteen years and then fell into decay. Afterward Clark Tuttle improved and ran the distillery as a mill for a short time. About the time of the completion of the railroad Clark Tuttle built the steam-mill of which he has since been proprietor. The second mill, now known as Creal's mill, was built by Ormsby Green, about 1828-30.

The first school-house built in the township was near Markle's Mill, in about 1820. It was, like most other of the improvements of its time, a simple affair, being constructed of logs and the cracks daubed with clay. Dr. Hotchkiss, it is claimed, was the first teacher. The present state law was not then, nor until many years later, in force, and the only provision for the instruction of the youth was voluntary contribution, both for building and teaching. The people of the neighborhood met together, bringing whatever implements they possessed in the way of axes, saws and augers, and in a short time cut the logs, raised and covered the building that was to be the center of scientific, moral and religious instruction, as well as a point for political gatherings, for such it proved to be. Not a dollar of money was expended in the construction of the pioneer school-houses. The trees furnished all of the materials, and the pioneers were both architects and builders. The course of instruction was limited as to extent and length of time required to pass, it being a little spelling, reading and writing for about three months in the year. Dr. Hotchkiss received his pay from those who patronized the school, at so much per scholar sent. There are now six schools in the township, all in a prosperous condition. The old-time log school-houses have given place to comfortable frame and brick buildings.

The first church building in the township was the Union church, on the La Fayette road, about a quarter of a mile north of Otter creek. It was built about 1840, by a union of all persons interested in propagating Christianity, and remains such to this time. It was dedicated by Rev. Mr. Jewet. Prior to this the township was not without religious meetings and instruction. At nearly the very earliest date of settlement preaching was had, and continued at regular intervals in the groves, in private houses, and in school-houses, by several denominations, especially by the Methodists and Baptists. In 1867 the Methodists built on the LaFayette road, near the Parke county line, a very neat and substantial church. It is of brick. The membership of the church is about forty. Another Methodist house of worship is the Rose Hill church, situated on the range line road, a mile and a quarter north of Otter creek. This is a fine building, 42x60 feet in size, and cost \$6,400. It was built in 1869, and dedicated in 1870 by the presiding elder, Rev. John L. Smith.

Source:

*History of Parke and Vigo Counties*

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by H.W.Beckwith

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