

OAKLANDON CELEBRATES 150

Community takes different direction

The community of Oaklandon is celebrating its 150th birthday in 1999.

Oaklandon was platted just months after Lawrence, but the community took a different direction, possibly due to its location, an additional 4 miles from Indianapolis.

John Emery platted the village first called Oakland, a name suggested by a man identified only as "Dr. Moore," according to Indianapolis and Marion County Historian B.R. Sulgrove.

As in Lawrence, it was the post office that led to the final naming of the community. Oaklandon Historian Steven Hamilton noted that when the post office was moved from Germantown to Oakland in 1870, the name Oaklandon was selected. Eventually, the mail address determined the community's name.

Sulgrove painted an unflattering portrait of the community in his 1884 volume. He wrote that "the streets have never been improved and many of the houses are in a dilapidated condition, and the village presents the appearance of age and decay."

Paul Hamilton replied to Sulgrove's assessment in a history of Oaklandon published in 1972. Hamilton wrote, "Even though the historian B.R.S. (Sulgrove) referred to the dilapidated condition of many houses in 1884, some senior citizens of today recall that there were many attractive houses and home sites in Oaklandon during their growing up years,"

Had Sulgrove spent time in the community and met some of the residents, he might have gained a very different perspective.

Accounts of Oaklandon highlight strong churches and fraternal organizations, its doctors, the bankers, the undertaker and the proprietors of the various general stores. Even the undertaker is remembered.

For its small size, Paul Hamilton reported, the village was scarcely without a town band, orchestra or both in the years leading to school-sponsored music organizations. A bandstand - two stories high - was located prior to 1916 at the site of the Oaklandon State Bank, at 63rd Street and Oaklandon Road.

A second ground level, open bandstand stood until the late 1920s further south on Oaklandon Road.

Lifelong resident Victor Harris noted that Oaklandon contributed mightily to an area wide Odd Fellows Lodge band that used to play annually at the Indianapolis 500 Mile Race.

A description of the community from the 1914 Oaklandon High School annual had this to say: "The village contains a few streets and about 75 houses. An excellent feature of the town is that no one is crowded for room. Every family has plenty of room for gardens and truck patches. The town affords three large lodge halls and more stores in general than are needed, yet they furnish plenty of good loafing places for a number of Oaklandon citizens. Besides these, there are four barbershops, a livery barn, a bakery and two general repair shops. Unfortunately, the town possesses neither saloons nor gambling rooms. However, in nice weather some of the most prominent men convene on the south bank of the railroad behind a large signboard to have a nice quiet game of poker. When they need something to quench their thirst, they can board an interurban car at any hour during the day bound for the city."

A 1927 feature story in The Indianapolis News explains why there were no saloons in Oaklandon. About 1887, the women of Oaklandon apparently organized a branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, an organization that included a campaign against alcohol. Their target was the lone saloon in Oaklandon.

Adeline Apple, 83, was interviewed. The feature story said, "Mrs. Apple, with a twinkle in her eye, tells how she and the other women went into the saloon unannounced one night and sat down, much to the consternation of the men who soon took to their heels. The second night, she said, the saloonkeeper had hoped to prevent their staying by having all the chairs taken out. The women, undaunted, stood around the stove.

"The nightly visitations of the feminine contingent destroyed business and the saloon soon disappeared according to Mrs. Apple,"

The feature story further described the community: "Oaklandon has no industry and no motion picture show. But it has two churches, two groceries, a garage, a funeral director, a bank, an elevator, a feed store, and a restaurant. Barbershop and two filling stations in the town. There are four additional filling stations on Road 67 (Pendleton Pike) that sidestepped Oaklandon when it graduated into the three-lane class."

"Two new houses are being built by residents, who hope to rent the property they will leave. Houses are scarce, and some of the Army officers recently transferred to Fort Benjamin Harrison have rented stone or log cabins at the Paradise tourist camp, just north of town, on the main road. "

"Unemployment is at a minimum, also thanks to the war. For many residents of Oaklandon are employed at the Allison division of General Motors Corp., and the International Harvester Co. in Indianapolis, or at Delco-Remy and Guide Lamp at Anderson."

Referring to the interurban line, as well as Road 67 leading straight to Indianapolis or Anderson, the feature story ended, "Commuting is easy."

The News also describes a blackboard on a wall of the Oaklandon State Bank - the only

bank for many years in Lawrence Township -, which "served as a classified advertising medium at no cost to anyone."

Ads on the blackboard included:

- Wanted - Young girl for housework. Mrs. Cooley. Wayside Gardens.
- Fresh Guernsey cow. Five years old, Good flow milk. Ed Brooks.
- Four-burner gas stove. Edna Glossbrenner.

Unlike Lawrence, Oaklandon never aspired to be an incorporated town. There was never a town board or a police marshal. The community formed a volunteer fire department only after names destroyed several important buildings, including the Universalist Church, the livery stable, the Red Men's Hall, McCord's Restaurant and a confectionary.

While fund raising for the volunteer fire department was a never-ending endeavor, Paul Hamilton reported contributions of time, money and materials resulted in a sidewalk along Oaklandon Road in 1910, shortly after the high school was constructed. "It provided a fine walkway for thousands of schoolchildren's feet and a base for hundreds of miles of roller-skating," he wrote.

Maintenance of the Pendleton Road - today called Pendleton Pike - was often a bother in Oaklandon's young days. Hamilton reported that when directors of the Indianapolis and Oakland Gravel Road Co. met in December 1872, they reported an income of \$54 from the tollgate located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Pendleton Pike and Oaklandon Road. Hamilton said this about the 1920s paving efforts: "The Oaklandon community certainly deserved a good break sometime from the highway builders because the community suffered greatly from the paving of Road 67.

"Before paving, the road rounded the corner in front of the Legion Hall and then turned back northeast at the Oaklandon Telephone Building. Somehow, the engineers did not properly plan the drainage, and then the state and county road men never corrected the matter; and the present 'Canal Street' resulted."

Today, that street is known as Broadway.

The first interurban service to Indianapolis came in 1900 from the Union Traction Co. Later, the Indiana Railroad Co. ran it until the last car was run in January 1941, according to Hamilton. He said, "When one speaks of the last car, senior citizens are apt to think that means the one leaving Indianapolis Interurban Station at 11:30 p.m. and arriving at Oaklandon at 12: 14 a.m. Can't you hear the trainmaster calling: Lawrence, Oaklandon, McCordsville, Fortville, Ingalls... with Oaklandon having the accent on 'land' and not 'Oak' as the bus men later did it?"

Residents of Oaklandon never wanted to be part of Indianapolis, let alone Lawrence. When Lawrence initiated annexation proceedings about 1968, Oaklandon residents objected. After many years in court, Oaklandon became part of Lawrence in 1976. The Indianapolis Star reported nearly half of Oaklandon and Indian Lake residents would

have rather been part of Indianapolis. Another story quoted Oaklandon residents as vowing to seek disannexation, but the action has stood.

Lawrence has allowed Oaklandon to maintain its identity. The water tower with the name Oaklandon rises out of Play Park, erupting in bright colors like a hot-air balloon. At the northwest corner of Oaklandon Road and Pendleton Pike is a brick monument honoring in its inscription all the village desired to be: Oaklandon Community.