

METAMORA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NEWSLETTER

April 2018



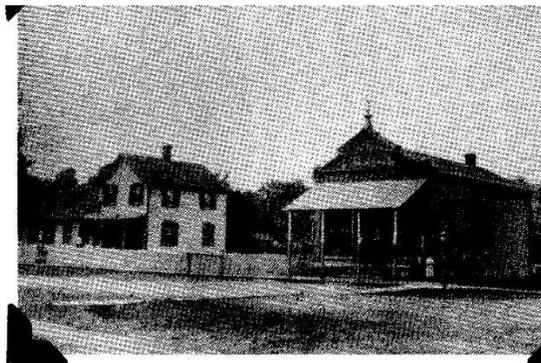
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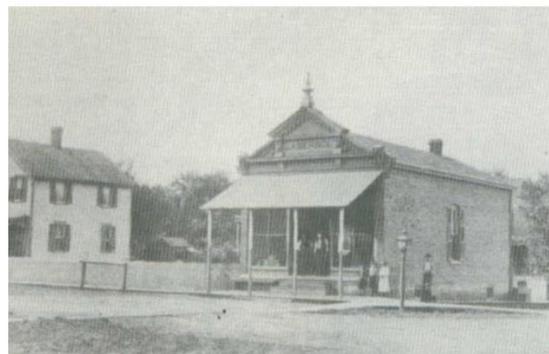
The Old Gun Shop



The northwest corner of the Square has a most interesting – and lengthy – history.



John A. Abersol built this grocery store in 1880. It was called Abersol's Corners. (It is the east half of the present Isch store.)



Did you know that the old frame house next to the modern-day Eli's Coffee House started out on Eli's corner in what is believed to be the 1830's? Because records of the original owner have been either lost in time or maybe never existed and permits were not required in the 1830s, the exact age is unknown.

The home served as a gunsmith's shop and was moved – rolled - to its current location. Cedar logs – bark and all - that were used to move it are still being used today as floor joists.

William Delph, an engineer and gunsmith, was likely the second owner. Mr. Delph was born in Virginia in 1799, lived in Lexington, Kentucky prior to his arrival in Jacksonville, IL in 1830. In 1839 Delph was one of the first engineers on Illinois' first railroad that ran from Jacksonville to Meredosia.

Another early gunsmith, Verin Daniels, also served as an engineer on this line. It is possible that these two were connected in the gunsmith business.

Delph moved to Metamora in about 1840 and worked as a gunsmith, machinist and civil engineer. He was the engineer in charge when a 500-yard levee was built at Spring Bay in 1851-52.

Delph was appointed Postmaster of Metamora by Abraham Lincoln and held the office until the inauguration of Rutherford B. Hayes, when he resigned.

John Abersol bought the home in 1871 and later sold it to John and Mary (Abersol) Isch in 1901. Old timers will remember Wilma and Madeline, who grew up in this home.

Betha Snyder's Wedding Dress

The Metamora Association for Historic Preservation is very fortunate to have recently been given Bertha Snyder's 1900 wedding dress. A special thanks to Murlene Kramer and the Woodford County Historical Society for your generous gift.

The dress is currently being prepared for display at the Stevenson House.



WEDDING OF S.M. SNYDER AND BERTHA ISCH - June 27, 1900

Wedding guests gathered on the lawn of the bride's home (the Stevenson House) are

Standing left to right: John L. McGuire, Earl Mason, Mrs. John McGuire, Lloyd Engel, Minnie Fairchild, Theresa Sommers, Carrie Theena, Mrs. & Dr. Jim Whitmire, Mrs. Jake Reeder, J.M. Nichols, Mrs. Katherine Ioege, Julia Wagner, Alex Mason, Jos. R. Wagner, Mr. Faucett (visiting from England) Fred Isch, Mrs. Joe I. Knoblauch, Cass Irving holding Dorothy Kern, Mrs. Fred Isch, Dr. Joe I. Knoblauch, his mother-in-law Mrs. Green, Mrs. Cass Irving, Jake Reeder, Frank Giehl, William Briggs, Mrs. Frank Giehl, Rev. Edwin Palmer, Mrs. Jacquin, Myra McGuire, Alice Briggs, Elizabeth Stried, Margaret Smith, Mrs. Jake Schrepfer, Blanche Conrad, Mrs. Chas. Day, Mrs. D.M. Owen, Bess Reeder, D.M. Owen, Anita West, Nellie Briggs, Jack Schrepfer, Celia Theena. Seated (back row) Mrs. John F. Isch, J.F. Isch, Aunt Julia Baker, Owen Kern, Susan Kern, Grandmother Snyder, S.M. Snyder, Bertha Isch Snyder, Mrs. John A. Isch, & Mr. John A. Isch, Mrs. Arthur Veux (Mrs. S.M. aunt), Mrs. J.C. Snyder, J.C. Snyder. Front Row: Ruth Nichols Giehl, Myrtle Schertz, Lucia Isch, Jeanette Isch, Ida Isch, Florence Kern, Amelia Isch, Florence Nichols, John Kern, George Isch, Henry Isch, Walter Mason and Lee Schrepfer.



The Day a Famous Gangster Stopped in Metamora

Ever Hear This Old Story...?



Bob Remmert, our favorite local historian and artist, recalls a story told to him by his mother.

During the early 30s – in the midst of Prohibition, Bob's mother, Katherine Dubois, a young, unmarried lady, worked as a waitress at Theobald's Restaurant. Old timers may recall that this cafe was located at southwest corner of the intersection of Routes 89 and 116, facing Mt. Vernon.

One day a "good looking" stranger on his way down from Chicago stopped for a bite to eat. Apparently, the service was extraordinary and something that pleased him very much. When he left, he shocked Katherine and the other waitress on duty, leaving them the unheard tip of \$50! (Remember this is the early 30s during the Depression! That was a LOT of money!)

So, who was that "good-looking" stranger? Maybe you already guessed it, but it was none other than notorious gangster, John Dillinger.

Post script: After being betrayed by the "Woman in Red," Dillinger was shot and killed at the Biograph Theater in Chicago on July 22, 1934, at the age of 31. This was only a couple of months after the deaths of Bonnie and Clyde.

MORSETOWN SCHOOL.

In 1957, Morsetown School celebrated its 100th anniversary. The following article commemorates the event. Captain Parker Morse came to Woodford county from Vermont, in 1835. He came with his family in a wagon pulled by horses. The journey took six weeks to reach Chicago and then three weeks more downstate to what is now Woodford county. This school according to early histories of Woodford county was the first free school in Woodford county, and by some authorities, the first free school in the state of Illinois.

THE HERALD, Thursday, February 9, 1978

Letter to the Editor

Morsetown photo brings memories

Dear Editor:

I was especially interested in the Herald of January 19, showing a picture taken on the steps of Morsetown School during the school year 1902-03. Enclosed is a picture taken on these same steps in 1890.

Included in this picture are five Ranney's: Joel, Washington, Ill.; Willard, Knoxville, Tenn.; Leland, Decatur, Ill. (father of Burton and Rodney in the January 19 picture); Ralph, CrossPoint Woods, Mich.; and Edna, Baroka, Ill. All five of us attended the Morsetown school together for one year, 1905-10, ranging from the first to eighth grades.

You might be interested to know that about a half-mile from the Morsetown School is the well-kept small Morsetown Cemetery, adjacent to the farmstead of John

Volker. In this cemetery are buried our ancestors back to our great-grandparents, the latter having migrated in 1638. Also, there are other early families, including several of the Morse family, who came from New England in the early 1800s. Several of the Morse families had homes just across the highway from the cemetery.

These Morse families and some relatives later moved to Grand Junction, Colorado, where they became operators of fruit farms. Some of the Morses entered professions: a professor, an engineer, and Dr. Kilza Morse, one of the early women physicians.

My grandfather was seven-years-old when he came to the Morsetown

Community by foot alongside a team and wagon loaded with furniture. Coming through New York State he saw a train for the first time. Before he died, he looked up to see his grandson in an airplane. He taught us how to cradle and bind grain bundles.

About a mile west of the Morsetown Community was the original trail from St. Louis to Chicago areas. It followed the borderlines between timber and prairie regions. My grandfather related the following incident: Captain Parker Morse, who built an early home in the community, also built and operated a Tavern alongside the trail just south of Loopport. Three men on horseback traveling the trail, stopped at the Tavern for overnight. At dinner one of the men remarked that a couple of miles back on the trail they had noticed a house built "assy out" on the prairie. He asked, "What fool built that house out there?" Parker Morse replied, "I am that fool and I expect to live to see the prairie entirely settled."

There have been many improvements made in Metamora, its schools, and in its Herald. Best wishes for your future.

Sincerely,
Willard P. Ranney
Professor Emeritus
University of Tennessee

1857-1957

One hundred years mattered little to the deep ageless prairie sod or to the sky above, dark or bright, burning hot or freezing cold through endless seasons; but to the people of Moorestown School there is interest and wonderful pride in the record of aims, trials and accomplishments in their district during the 100 years beginning in that far away 1857. "Little of all we value here, Awake on the morn of its hundredth year, without both looking and feeling queer." Oliver Wendell Holmes used those lines in his fanciful story of "The One Hoss Shay" which was built in such a perfect way that it lasted 100 years to a day and then collapsed into dust.

Far different is the story of Morsetown School. It was not perfectly built to last unchanged for 100 years. It was built by these early serious people doing the best they could then, but in the hope and determination to provide year by year the best place for learning within their vision. And so, decade by decade, with changes to meet the needs of its children in a changing world, the school has come up to 1957, stronger than ever, sturdy, wide awake, in a quiet spot, but in touch with all the world, serving so well the needs of its pupils.

Let us now consider briefly the land, the people and how they lived. The land itself was a part of the vast 1,000 years old Illinois Prairie with deep black soil covered with heavy tough sod. In summer the land was covered by tall, rough prairie or marsh grass and countless weeds and flowers. There were not many large wild animals but of birds, snakes, flies and mosquitos, there were millions.

The first white people to come to this land to make their homes and grow up with the country were called settlers. You know there were no trains, automobiles, buses, so settlers came by covered wagon, powered by oxen and plodding horses. The first houses were a long way from being modern.

These early settlers came mostly from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Vermont. They came to get away from poor farm land or other unliked conditions, but the big reason was to get into the wide-open spaces of cheap public land with deep soil, often called 'black gold', here to live and prosper. They became hardy farmers on the soil that was to produce for 100 years the wealth that has made the progress and prosperity of our present day Morsetown. But farming back then, was a hard life. First the heavy tough sod had to be broken up with poor wooden plows, pulled by oxen or horses, plagued by swarms of flies and mosquitos.

Seed corn was planted by hand and seed wheat was thrown or broadcast by hand. Harvesting was mostly hand work. There were no corn pickers, no combines. Food became plentiful but of the heavier dirt kind. The bread was corn bread, white flour was scarce and biscuit and tea was a luxury. Hogs were butchered by hand and the meat smoked or pickled for storage. Too much pork gave an unbalanced diet, and it is no wonder that pimples, boils and carbuncles were so common. Milk there was, but hard to keep sweet. Some fruits were dried in the sun. In all the food problems there were no refrigerators, deep freezes or supermarkets.

And farm mothers those days had to be durable, with care of children, cooking by fireplace or cheap wood burning stoves, washing with hard water, poor soap, in the house or outside, by the big iron kettle, Mother and wash board. But no matter how hard was the work of father and mother, it was outweighed by the constant worry over the many forms of sickness that might seize the family and the children especially.

Doctors were few, medicine was not modern. There was malaria or ague, small pox, typhoid, diphtheria, and croup. Croup might strike suddenly, even in the night with alarming effect. Without help, a child could choke to death. In such a case, through the night on horseback rode father or big brother to summon the nearest doctor, while the mother fought for time with all known remedies.

Those hardships are here recounted, that we might appreciate the courage, industry and hardy character of those who lived here so many years ago, breaking the sod, making the roads, starting the school, in short, building the bridges from the past to our own generation.

These first half century people were religious, high minded, with social aptitude for knowing and helping neighbors. They were patriotic and loyal to the Union. They were active in politics and elections. There were apple, husking and quilting bees. A barn raising was a notable event and the young of marriageable age arranged many parties. There were camp meetings and political meetings.

Many people saw Lincoln in the flesh as he came to the old Metamora Court House.

Many heard the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858. Many voted for or against Lincoln in 1860 and many young men were soldiers in Lincoln's union armies in the great Civil War 1861- 65, led by General Sherman and General Grant. Some of these Civil War soldiers are interred on the Voelker farm.

Among the settlers was the Morse family from Vermont, a large family with some education and considerable means. Their settlement soon became known as Morsetown. All these early settlers had a deep respect for education and soon a public free school was organized under the laws of that day. The Ranney family and the Wilson family were people of education and influence. So for a period of twenty years or more, the directors were Levi Morse, J. A. Ranney, and N. D. Wilson....By H. L. Dyer

Contact Us

Questions, ideas - Love to hear from you

Laure Adams, President, 369-2353 or jrfarmer@mtco.com; Dave Pohlman, Vice President 369-3290; pohlman46@yahoo.com 367-4426; Jim Efaw, Secretary, 367-6099 or jimefaw-mahp@eggroll.com; Jack Weddle, Treasurer, 645-0963, jweddle@mtco.com; Board members: Lee Summer, 367-4059, 635-0259, lsummer@mtco.com Mary Curry, 367-2185, curry@mtco.com; Rick Lotz, 648-2010, lots@mtco.com