

# METAMORA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## NEWSLETTER

December 2019



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### Travelling the Lincoln Trail – Versailles and Bowling Green

Most history buffs know that the original county seat of Woodford County (which was named after the county in Kentucky where many original settlers migrated from) was in Versailles. According to the *1878 Woodford History*, “as will be noticed in the original act for the formation of Woodford County, the seat of justice was to remain for two years at the town of Versailles, when the final question as to the place of its location was to be submitted to a vote of the people.” The result of that vote was to move the county seat to Metamora in 1843. Before it was moved, Lincoln tried cases in Versailles.

But just where was Versailles? And where was its neighboring community of Bowling Green? Both communities prospered in the 1830’s and lay on the main road from Bloomington to Peoria.

### Versailles

From the [The Past and Present of Woodford County](#), “After the removal of the county seat to Hanover (now Metamora), and until the Court House was completed, court was held in a little house which stood at the southeast corner of the square, where Plank’s law office now stands. The September session in 1843 was the first Circuit Court held in the new metropolis.

“In those days there seems to have been no blue or red ribbon societies as now, as the records of the court for several years show that most of the indictments were for selling liquors, with a few variations occasionally, for ‘harboring slaves.’”

### Bowling Green

With the purchase of the first water powered grist mill in Woodford County growth was encouraged. J.M. and Aaron Richardson opened the first general store in 1837. The building boom increased with the addition of a hotel, a cheese factory, a hardware store, more than one blacksmith, a pork packing plant, some distilleries, and even a short-lived post office. In time the town boasted of 49 buildings and a population exceeding 300. The stagecoach line from Bloomington to Peoria passed through Bowling Green.

### An Involuntarily Pulled Tooth Causes a Huge Fracas

“In the days when Versailles was a flourishing village, there was a few miles distant, in what is now Palestine Township, a village called Bowling Green, that was quite a flourishing place, and did as good a business as the former. As is usual in such cases, there existed, of course, considerable jealousy between the two places, and neither lost an opportunity to play a prank on the other, or to indulge in any petty annoyance that might suggest itself.

“There was a doctor in Versailles at the time who was rather active in all the proceedings. One day a young man from Bowling Green was at Versailles, when several of the latter’s people caught him, and insisted that he had the toothache and that the doctor must take out the tooth. Notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary, the doctor, while the others held him, extracted the boy’s tooth.

“When this came to the ears of the Bowling Greenites, it excited their indignation to the highest pitch. They swore big oaths, and a great many of them, and that dire vengeance they would have. They came up, and a pitched battle was the result. The offending doctor was knocked down and nearly killed, but escaping from the clutches of the infuriated mob, he fled from the place and never returned.

“The fight closed with several bloody noses and broken heads, but without any very serious damage.”

From the *1878 History of Woodford County* book

### The Old 8th Judicial Circuit Today

You may be curious to know exactly where these two ancient communities actually were. Noted Bloomington Lincoln scholar Guy Fraker has written a book, *A Guide to Lincoln’s Eighth Judicial Circuit*, that traces Lincoln’s trail along the 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, which led through both villages. His book is complete with detailed directions and maps.

Tour guide and historic board member Lee Summer and your newsletter editor recently took a half day field trip and visited these sites. Some of these old roads are only paths now and where bridges weren’t available, Fraker has identified the fords where Lincoln crossed the Panther Creek and the Mackinaw River.

The fall scenery was absolutely beautiful and it was exciting to imagine Lincoln and his cohorts traveling along these old country roads. You’ll find pictures of the old sites below.

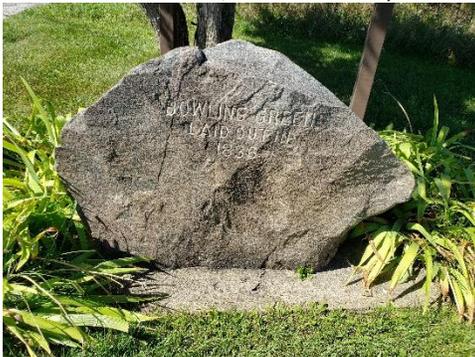


**Versailles – Original County Seat**  
 Here's the boulder that marks the site of the old village and the intersection where it sits. Lincoln practiced law briefly here before the seat was moved to Metamora in 1843. The county put the building on skids and moved it to Metamora (Hanover.) The first court sessions were held in the Plank Law Office on the southeast corner of the Square. This building was built before Hanover became a village.



**Lincoln Trail – Panther Creek ford and path**

This path off the main road leads to the ford across Panther Creek, where Lincoln would have crossed while traveling from Bowling Green to Versailles on his way to court. There was a grist mill at this spot whose mill stones lie in front of the Metamora Courthouse today. Tour guide Lee checks the depth of the ford. Looked OK, but we didn't try it...

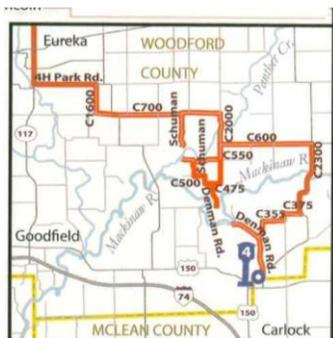


**Bowling Green**  
 Somewhere west of this boulder in this field was a tavern where Lincoln occasionally stayed. It is said that Lincoln debated Peter Cartwright here during the 1846 Congressional race. Bowling Green is located about 2 miles from Versailles on the opposite side of Panther Creek. Bowling Green faded away when the ICC Railroad bypassed it.



← **Trail from the Mackinaw River Ford**  
 This road along the ridge was used by Lincoln when he traveled through the Letcher Basin and forded the Mackinaw River at Wyatt's Ford.

**Carlock Democrat Cemetery** →  
 "Here sleeps the old Democrat, Abraham Carlock." It was intended to hold only the remains of members of his party. Lincoln would occasionally stop and visit Mr. Carlock. (The Republican Cemetery is a short distance south.)



**1949 Metamora High Basketball Team**



The second place trophy winners of the Illio Conference in 1949 included returning POW Bruce Seeber. Members of the team were: front row, from left, Seeber, Jim Zimmerman, Paul Schrock,

Marvin Smith, Gene Nauman, Jim Wiltz, and Harold Neumann; back row, Walter Laitas, coach, Jim Herron, Gene Schlabach, Gene Schaefer, Gene Fisher, John Rauh and Roy Larson, coach.

**1985 Bidy Team**

THE HERALD Thursday, February 7, 1985



Bringing home the second-place trophies on Jan. 19 from the annual 8-team Salvation Army Tournament (representing MYSA) are these fourth and fifth graders [L to R front row] Aaron Zobrist, Rob Klobnak, Brad Nauman, Kyle Carlson, Matt Reeb, Brad Thomas, [back row] Jason Zobrist, Jason Call, Chris Ahrens, Andy Shuda, Joel Hartman, Doug Garber and coaches Larry Ahrens and Jim Shuda.

**Biddy basketballers win big**

THE HERALD, Thursday, July 27, 1978

Metamora Grade School eighth grade students wore pilgrims' costumes for a Thanksgiving play in this picture from the past taken around 1910. Pictured are, front, L-R, Pauline Knoblauch (deceased), Herman Heinzman (deceased), William Heinzman (deceased), Clarence Griggs (deceased) and Delia Janssen, Morton; and back row, Alvin Willman, Ethel Murray (deceased), Carl Klump (deceased), Esther Herninge (deceased) and William Engel (deceased). This photo was loaned to the Herald for publication by Alvin Willman.



*Pictures  
from the past*

**Contact Us**

Questions, Ideas - Love to hear from you

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