

# Lyndon Was First Permanent Seat Of Justice In Whiteside

## Historic Village Of Lyndon Attracted First Settlers In 1836

By BARBARA LEE  
Gazette Correspondent

Along the Rock River on Route 2 is a small but historic village, Lyndon. Its name came about when residents, in 1836, were asked to place suggestions for a name in a hat. The name Lyndon was drawn. It is believed to have been named in honor of the native town of the man who had written Lyndon for his suggestion.

Imagine, if you will, being along with the three families who left New York for a new home in the west. The three families were Adam R. Hamilton, Chauncey G. Woodruff and William D. Dudley. For 30 days each family traveled in a covered wagon pulled by oxen until arriving at the small city of Chicago. The women and children of some of the families stopped for a time in Will County while the men continued on to become the first settlers of Lyndon Township in Whiteside County.

The settlers arrived in Prophetstown after traveling 1,000 miles where they spent the night with Asa Crook, the only settler there, having come to Illinois the year before. Mr. Crook offered the hospitality of his sod home to them. After breakfast on the morning after their arrival Mr. Crook ferried them across the Rock River in a boat, half raft, half ferry and bade them Godspeed. Viewed from the low shore of the river on the south side, the bluff on this side looked promising, reminding them of their native hills.

The families settled at Hamilton Grove (Hamilton Corners) which is two miles west of Lyndon at Route 2 and 78. Through the first winter the Hamilton family lived in a house roofed with hay with no floor. In the spring a more aristocratic house was built, covered with shakes and having a puncheon (split logs) floor. A door was made of boards from packing crates with wooden hinges and a latch. The original log house still stands at Hamilton Corners and forms the interior of the present small home. One can see the heavy timbers in the basement, boards were hand cut and laid one on the other to form the walls. Thus the walls are thick but uneven.

Mae Crowell of Lyndon painted an artists conception of the original log house. Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hayner now reside in the home on the farm, owned by a great-grandson of Adam Hamilton, Mr. Sidney Smith. The Dudley family and Woodruff family also built homes. Within the first year education began for their children and religious meetings were held. School was, in the beginning, at the Hamilton home with the first school teacher being Miss Lucia B. Hamilton. The first school building was erected near the Hamilton residence in Hamilton Corners.

**First School**  
The first school erected in Lyndon in 1840 was 36' long by 24' wide and built at a cost of \$600. Lewis Jessup was the first and only teacher who taught 75 to 80 students. Lyndon had the first school above the ordinary grade established in the county. In 1851, a two story school was built and used for primary and high school. In 1851, a two story school was built and used for primary and high school. Students came from a distance to attend school in Lyndon and obtained room and board in private homes at reasonable rates.

In 1858 young people organized a literary society called "Our Society". The Lyndon School prepared students for Knox College in Galesburg and was the education center of Whiteside County. The following is an ad which appeared in the "Sterling Republican" in June 1857

"The next term will begin on Monday Students boarded in private families at \$2 per week Miss H. E. Davis, late from Vermont, is a permanent teacher in music, French, drawing and painting Terms for common branches \$4, Greek and Latin \$7, French \$5, piano \$8, water colors \$3. A daily lesson in penmanship. The school is furnished with globes, maps, skeleton, chemical apparatus. The teachers are M. R. Kelly, Miss Louisa Drue, Miss H. E. Davis. Directors R. G. Clendenin, W. Anderson, Moses Lathe."

**County Seat**  
Lyndon flourished as new settlers came west and made new homes here. When county seats were being bargained for, as the vote was taken, Lyndon was one of the first places favored as a home for the county court. This town seemed more central and there were as many influential people living here as in any other place. The town had natural resources in the primitive past and they offered promises of a growing future.

Chauncey G. Woodruff and Adam R. Hamilton were appointed under the act of the General Assembly, passed in 1839, to superintend an election to determine the selection of a county seat. There were several aspiring towns which desired to be selected also.

The election was held the first Monday in May, 1839, and Lyndon, Albany, Fulton, Prophetstown, Union Grove and Sterling were voted for, but no choice was made. The act provided that a majority of the votes cast should determine the place for the seat, and that an election should be held every month until such a majority was given. Three other elections were held, with no better result, the minority towns, however, dropping out. By the time the September election came the vote had narrowed down between Lyndon and Sterling.

The election was held, and the important issue was decided in favor of Lyndon, and the county seat was located at this place. The town agreed to give, for county purposes, the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of section 16, on condition that the county seat be located here; which was done.

The first term of the circuit court held in Lyndon and the first in the county was in April, 1840, in a partially finished house, which was owned by T. C. Gould Honorable Daniel Stone presided. R. K. Willson was clerk, and J. W. McLemore, acting sheriff

Three terms of court were held here, when the county seat, by order of the county commissioners, was removed to Sterling, and the circuit court and commissioners' court was ordered to be held there. A recount of the vote taken for the removal of the county seat, upon application, was granted by the county commissioners' court. Upon an examination of the poll books it was found that the vote of Sterling precinct had been rejected, and with this vote the election would place the county seat at Sterling; and this was the reason given by the county commissioners for their action. Another vote was taken at a later time and on May 3, 1858, the records of the county seat were moved to Morrison where it is still located today.

**Platted**  
The old part of Lyndon was platted in 1836, on the fractional 40 acres of the northeast quarter of section 21. It was laid out by Mr. Rood, a surveyor. William D. Dudley, A. R. Hamilton, C. G. Woodruff, Dr. Augustus Smith and Mr. Lusk were the projectors. An addition, called "Sperry's,"

was laid out on section 16, south-east quarter, in 1848. The next was the railroad addition, laid out when the railroad came through, in 1869. The "Mill" addition, which was platted in 1872, was the next. This was followed by "Fitch and Wilkins'" addition.

The Indians were quite numerous around and about Lyndon during the first years of its settlement. Having large camps across the river toward Prophetstown, they would come over in squads, begging and picking up what they could. They were not troublesome, however.

In April, 1872, the citizens met to organize into a village corporation, under the organization act. The election for selecting village officials was held that month, at the town hall, and the following citizens were chosen: trustees—John W. Hazard, A. M. McKery, C. C. Sweeney, Leander Church and J. L. Bates. The village board, composed of these gentlemen, met May 2, at the residence of Dr. A. P. Holt, to complete their village organization. J. W. Hazard was chosen president, E. W. Hazard, clerk and William M. Burkitt, treasurer.

**Water Power**  
During this year the Lyndon Hydraulic Manufacturing Company was organized, with a capital stock of \$60,000. Its object was to furnish water power for manufacturing purposes. They constructed a dam across Rock River, a short distance above the town, with a head of about eight feet, and giving a large water-power.

A large flouring mill was also erected by this company called the Lyndon Mills. The following year a paper mill was completed near the dam. It was an extensive establishment and should have been a success. It had a capacity of manufacturing 2,000 tons of paper per year. Following this, and located near, was another flouring mill which was erected by Putman and Willson.

In 1875 the Farmers' Co-operative Manufacturing Company was organized. These establishment was completed in 1876. They built a large brick building and had in it a full set of machinery for manufacturing agricultural implements.

It seems the dam was poorly constructed and inadequate to resist for any length of time the power behind it. A break was made and was not mended. The dam went down the river and with it the hopes of Lyndon.

There were many places of business when Lyndon was being settled. By 1865 there was a general store, coal yard, harness shop, millinery and dress shop, restaurant, shoe shop, meat market, livery stable, hotel, a lawyer and two physicians. In July 1883 a newspaper "The Lyndon Advocate" was published.

**Snakes**  
It seems at one time Lyndon Township produced a great abundance of snakes. Mr. G. R. Hamilton had an old well which was dug at the "bluffs" in 1835. For many years it had been dry, and had been taken possession of by snakes.

Early in the spring of 1882, a neighbor asked Mr. Hamilton if he knew his old well had become a den for snakes; but he thought it was a joke his friend was playing upon him. Upon examination, however, he said he did find a few. Legend has it he procured a hook and took out 131 snakes from two to seven feet in length; in 1883 he took out 160; in 1884 he took out 111 and in 1885 he took out 89, making in all 491 snakes mostly the horned adder, some blue racers, a few water-snakes and one small rattlesnake.

Camera men came for pictures, people came from everywhere to see the old snake well which had been the winter home of these reptiles for more years, no doubt, than anyone could remember.

How did it happen that they crawled in to the well for their winter quarters? It was accounted for in this way: Hundreds of acres of swamp land lying under the bluff was fit for little more than slough grass and the swamp was the home of the creepy reptiles that have been disappearing rapidly since the land has been drained and placed under cultivation. Men who viewed the site in the late eighties believed that subterranean passage led from the slough area to the old well. They further believed that a cave-in, far below, had obstructed the exit, or that it had been dammed up in some other way. At any rate the snakes that went into the well afterward were believed to have crawled into it from the top, for they gradually grew fewer in numbers until, the old well curb was removed and the well was filled up to the surface.

**Bridge**  
The old Lyndon bridge was nearly not built as there was some controversy over who was going to pay for the bridge being built. There are few records of the history, such as the correct date when it was built and the company that was given the contract to build the original section of the bridge.

A special election was held in Lyndon, Jan. 4, 1892 to appropriate \$10,000 to build, construct and maintain a bridge across the Rock River. There were 181 votes for the construction and 45 votes against. Then on August 20, 1892 Prophetstown rejected a referendum to join Lyndon and help pay for the bridge. On March 23, 1904 more money was voted on to construct the bridge when finally sometime at the turn of the century the bridge was built.

### Last Beaver Caught in 1871 At Beaver Dam

The early settlers in the Lyndon area found game in abundance as did the earlier Sac and Fox Indians. Both deer and prairie chicken were among the most common hunted.

Beaver Dam was located west of Lyndon in Penton township and was discovered by the first settlers of the two towns.

The dam was built upon Rock Creek and in the early days of the settlements, trappers caught a number of the animals for their fur, at that time considered valuable for hats and caps, muffs and neck pieces.

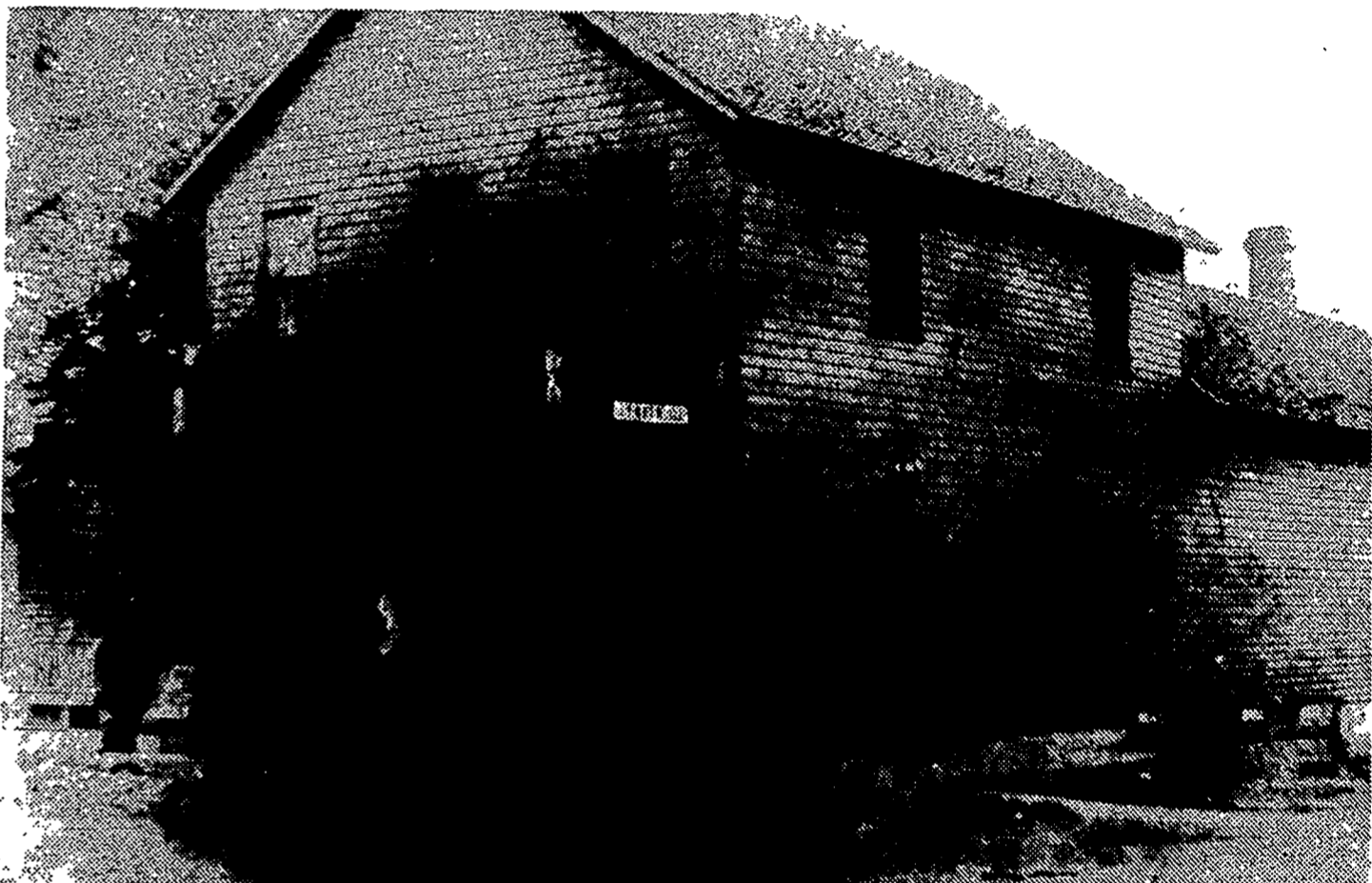
Calvin Scott, a farmer of Lyndon, was fond of hunting and fishing and used to walk to beaver dam, "run" his traps and return to his home at Lyndon in time for breakfast. In 1871, he caught the last beaver. The animals had been quite scarce for some time, but that winter he had seen signs of its work, so he was not surprised when it was the last beaver caught in Whiteside County. Elery Shepard of Lyndon lived for many years near beaver dam.

### 200 YEARS AGO

John Adams writes, "We are in the very midst of a revolution, the most complete, unexpected and remarkable of any in the history of nations."



**TOWN HALL AND METHODIST CHURCH**—Shown is an early photo of the Lyndon Town Hall and the Lyndon United Methodist Church. The First Methodist Church in Lyndon was organized in 1841 and their first church building was destroyed in a fire in 1882. Two years later a new building, at a cost of \$2,500 was built.



**LYNDON POST OFFICE**—The Lyndon post office was located in the building shown. The four men standing in front are left to right William Shaw, Mike Greenlee, William Shaw Sr., and John Shepard.



**LYNDON HYDRAULIC FACTORY**—Workmen are shown at the Lyndon Hydraulic Manufacturing Company which was organized in 1872 with a capital stock of \$60,000 for the purpose of furnishing water power for manufacturing purposes. The company constructed a dam across the Rock River a short distance upstream from Lyndon.

## American Revolution-Complexity, Meaning Of 1776

By JON BUTLER

The Revolution of 1776 reflected more than the commitment of patriotic men and women to dynamic political ideals and battles well fought. It was a complex human event that by different people living in regionally separate societies. It was fought through the course of a decade in which commitments to independence often changed as fast as military circumstances. Sometimes in celebrating the Revolution we forget just how complex it really was. Time alone takes its toll. Events are forgotten because nobody wrote about them 200 years ago. Unpleasant occurrences often are laid aside. The greatest Revolutionary happenings—the Boston Tea Party, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Washington's crossing the Delaware and his victory at Yorktown—overshadow other characteristics. Most important, broad and difficult issues not captured in a single event fade away

because it is difficult to discuss them briefly.

Yet the complexity of the Revolution carries important lessons for modern Americans. Independence never was backed by all colonists. It led to unanticipated social and economic changes. It thrust Americans into a world of international politics they found difficult to comprehend.

In fact, the complexity of the Revolution not only gave Americans their independence, it made the Revolution a window on the American future. It forced many settlers to realize that theirs was a multifaceted, often divided nation. Patriots discovered that geography, local politics, religion, economic interest, ethnic background and race produced divisions in their ranks. It opened difficult issues to public discussion. How, for example, would states and local communities implement the doctrine of political equality espoused by the Declaration of Independence?

This series of articles written by members of the history faculty at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, is designed to help Bicentennial celebrants understand the complexity of the Revolution and its significance for the later development of American society. It will explore many facets of the Revolution—the role of women and blacks, early American capitalism, religion,

the Revolutionary background of the Constitution—to see how appreciating the breadth and occasionally the perplexing character of the Revolution adds to understanding its best known feature.

(Jon Butler is a specialist in colonial American history at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle.)

## Lyndon Antique Owners In 1929

In the Diamond Jubilee edition of The Daily Gazette in 1929, Mrs. J. E. Crowell, the Gazette's correspondent listed a number of genuine antiques owned by Lyndon residents.

Included in the number were Mrs. Mary Kniskern, old melodeon, spinning wheel, books and letters.

Mrs. Olive Olson, old bureau Mr. and Mrs. George Murphy bureau, stand and documents.

Mrs. Alice Murdock, old Clock, Pennsylvania shaker settee, bureau and shawl.

Miss Cora Patterson, whale-oil lamp, dishes, glasses and furniture.

Mrs. W. H. Shaw, an old flag carried through 35 battles, a tea pot 200 years-old, silver spoons and linens.

Mrs. Sophie Scott, old brass powder horn, guns.

Mrs. S. W. Teach, Chairs, quilts and documents.



**LYNDON BRIDGE**—The Lyndon bridge which spans the Rock River is shown nearing completion at the turn of the century. Lyndon residents approved the expenditure of \$10,000 during a special election Jan. 4, 1892 to build and maintain the bridge. On March 20, 1904, more funds were appropriated to complete the structure.