

History Tells How Washington Township

The following information pertinent to the settlement of Avon is contained in the History of Hendricks County, edited by Hon. John V. Hadley in 1914, courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Nolan Smith.

"The first general election in Washington Township was held August 7, 1826, at the home of Daniel C. Hulis, and 11 persons voted. In its political history Washington Township was at first Whig, and after the death of that party, followed the fortunes of the Republican organization.

"Avon, the capital of Washington Township, is at a point very near the center of the township. The first settlement of the neighborhood was about the year 1830. Among the first settlers were the Hurons, Rosses, Cozzetts, McCains, Jenkluses, Abram Harding, Absalom Payne, Dr. Malone, R. J. Barker, G. W. Merritt, and James Sligursont. It was dense forest everywhere; deer and wolves were a common sight; but in small clearings little cabins of round logs sprang up and in a very short time, this became a 'neighborhood'.

"In 1833 Absalom Payne was commissioned postmaster of Hampton post office, with a weekly mail carried on horseback from the east to the west, but no one remembers where from or where to. In a few years Hampton died.

"In 1852 O. J. Huron was persuaded to accept a commission as postmaster, naming the office White Lick. Three months later White Lick died and was laid away in memory, besides Hampton.

"About 1858 a pack-peddler named John Smoot leased ground and built a small room in the corner of J. H. Ross's yard, and this was the beginning of the town. But Mr. Ross was a strong Republican and Mr. Smoot an ardent Democrat, and it was not long until Smoot moved his store to Democratic ground, across the road, on the land of John Dickerson. Mr. Dickerson not being willing to sell a lot to Mr. Smoot, the latter sought one elsewhere and in 1862, R. R. Barker deeded Smoot a half acre a mile farther west. The following winter Smoot moved his store on a couple of lots to his own lot; this was the third town-site.

"Mr. Smoot prospered and enlarged his store and added more lots, and in 1867 he headed a petition to Washington for a post-office, and for R. M. Bartley to be made postmaster; no name was suggested for the new office, and the authorities used the first name in the petition. When Mr. Bartley's commission, dated April 28, reached him, it gave the picturesque name, Smootsdel, located it in Smoot's land and gave us two mails a week, horseback from Plainfield to St. Barker.

"By 1893 Avon had three stores at one time. From the very first there was a rivalry among the people as to the location of the postoffice and the future town; the east side wanted it and the west side wanted it more.

"The Big Four railroad station was at first a half mile west of the plainfield road, then on the road, then three-fourths of a mile east. In 1894 the railroad company, with generous help of east side citizens, erected a neat three room building as their station.

"In 1900 the first rural free delivery in the county, and among the first in the state, was established in Danville, route no. 1, and its first delivery was made April 2nd of that year. This crippled the Avon postoffice, reducing the salary from \$35 to \$6 per quarter, and when, on Nov. 1, 1902, the first Plainfield route was opened and passed the Avon postoffice door, the office was discontinued."

"Later a surveyor for the L. & St. L. railroad artistically pencilled 'New Philadelphia' on a stake and drove it down. When the road was completed the company drove another stake, with 'Avon' painted on it. The people liked the name and petitioned to have the postoffice name changed to Avon. This was done and Smootsdel was laid away beside Hampton and White-Lick.

Glimpses Of Avon In 19th Century

The following are excerpts of Avon news items written by S. T. Huron in 1870's for The Danville Republican. The news articles were furnished by Mrs. C. W. Smith and Mr. and Mrs. Nolan Smith.

April 6, 1876 - We need the Rockville Road graveled from the Marion County line westward.

Jan. 5, 1877 - Fat hogs about all sold at from \$5 to \$5.30. Stock hogs scarce and selling at six cents a pound.

May 10, 1877 - This community has never seen a time since the bloody days of the war, if then, when there was so much back-biting and face-praising as at present. Persons will meet, ask after the health of each other and families, talk friendly, then pass on and tell miraculous tales of what they know of each other's depravity. Only a few affected persons are left, and when they are taken we will have a delightfully unpleasant place to live in, and invite immigration.

Aug. 16, 1877 - Work on our gravel road progresses, and soon we expect a pike from Danville to here.

Sep. 13, 1877 - A tramp rendezvous has been established at the 'walnut trees,' one-half mile east of Avon, where may be seen articles of cast-off apparel. The stock is full and complete, and when a tramp comes along and finds a bedewed shirt cleaner than the one he wears, he exchanges.

Oct. 18, 1877 - Mr. Waters' singing class is organized, with over thirty members.

"Avon is situated on the Indianapolis and St. Louis R.R. It would be difficult to tell the size of this burg, for all claim to be in town, even from Barker's saw-mill on the west, to Shipman's wagon shop on the east; and from Merritt's nursery on the north to Caywood the carpenter on the south. So the population would doubtless be somewhere between 5 and 5,000."

"We have two stores, the one kept by R. M. Bartley and the other by Barker & Bro. The former has the P. O., the latter the telegraph office. At both stores they keep almost everything from a two-cent piece down to a sack of coffee."

"We have a beautiful stream south of town, (some thoughtless persons call it a branch); it has running or standing water at least 1/4 of the year, (if the season is not too dry.)"

"Most of the citizens are as yet farmers, though we have two loaders, two bummers and a run-about. All Avon needs to bring it to a level with other places is a lawyer and a doctor, though at present they could enjoy the rest they so much need."