

Some Vandalia, Indiana History

LAFAYETTE TOWNSHIP was set apart in December 1839 by the Commissioners' Court of Owen County. Created on lands taken from Morgan, Jefferson and Franklin Townships, it was named for General La Fayette. As early as 1828 settlements had been recorded near the center of the designated township area.

Vandalia, the only significant town in this township, was platted and layed off into lots in February of 1839. By 1884, according to recorded history, it had a **schoolhouse**, 3 **churches**, a large blacksmith shop, and a general store. An early hotel was run by James Davis. John Schmalz, an immigrant from Germany, ran a shoemaker's shop in Vandalia before moving on to Patricksburg. Jacob W. Smith was the first Vandalia postmaster (the post office was established on July 6, 1846 and closed on September 30, 1927). In 1853 Edward Maxey, a storeowner, was also the postmaster. Some other postmasters were John W. Grimes, 1857, Oliver Scott, 1861, and Harper Davis, 1873. Besides Edward Maxey, Jacob Oberholser, George Troth, Jacob Everly, Lorenzo Coats, James Alexander, and James Black were also early Vandalia merchants.

By 1890 Mrs. S. W. Gudgen had assumed the job of postmaster, and there were a few businesses. The general store was run by W. R. Wisley; a local physician was W. B. S. Maddox; Harper Davis was a jeweler; and John Jarvis and G.W. Newport were blacksmiths. The population in 1890 was 50.

There was only one store in 1911, which was owned by G. W. Troth, the postmaster. The one-room school continued to operate and the Methodist Church, which dates back to the beginning of Owen County, was still thriving in Vandalia; a Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union Hall and the winter headquarters for the "Famous Newport Shows" were located there.

Records also indicate that Laura and Albert Freeman were the store operators in 1920, and that, in 1934, Carr Wells, an unemployed schoolteacher, operated the store for a year or so.

On record is an April 3, 1852 meeting of Methodist Church members at Elijah Powell's. The cabin, which housed initial services burned, and a church house was built. Then later, as the congregation grew, the present **Vandalia Chapel** building was erected (in 1895) on the site of the old church, incorporating some materials from the original structure into the new one. The *Owen County History* volume found in the Owen County Public Library indicates: "Practically all the labor was donated by members and others in the neighborhood. Chief carpenters were Ed Ward and Ben Staley, and the architect was R. A. Gillis. Ed Joslin, tinsmith of Spencer, did the tin work on the tower. John Freeman donated the finial, which he bought in Bloomington. It was a very cold day when the bell came. It was hauled on a sled pulled by a team of horses (a smoother ride than by wagon) to keep it from cracking."

Lafayette Township was divided into districts (about 1855) and the District # 2 **Vandalia School** building, for which the land was donated on July 25, 1863, was finished by 1868. It operated as a school until 1951 and remains a historic landmark there today (2021).