

BILLTOWN—BRYAN—BRIANT—BRYANT

Past and Present

By

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Bryant is located in the very center of Section 17 of Bearcreek Township, Jay County, Indiana. Its beginning came in 1871 with the construction of the Cincinnati, Richmond and Fort Wayne Railroad, later known as Grand Rapids and Indiana Railway Company.

The town was first referred to as BILLTOWN because of the cornering of land at a center point, by four men named Bill-William Kerr Sanders at the northwest, William Carson at the northeast, William D. McClellan at the southeast, and William Riley Gillum at the southwest. The town was plotted on December 8, 1871 by Alex W. Pingry, Deputy Surveyor of Jay County.

The original plot showed approximately 20 blocks, and split rather diagonally by a railway. The plot was acknowledged on December 28, 1871 by the four landowners and named BRYAN, after the Irishman who worked as construction foreman on the railroad. The name BRYAN was recorded on January 5, 1872 at 2:00 a.m. by F. M. McLaughlin, Recorder of Jay County, Indiana. However, the railroad company did not favor the name and instead placed the name BRIANT on the station. When a post office was established, the U.S. Government changed the name to BRYANT, but for sometime the neighborhood, with regard for the four Williams, called their town "Billtown."

North Briant was laid out on October 6, 1873 by Ezekiel Rowlett but was referred to as "Rowley Town." Bryant and North Briant were incorporated as BRYANT in December 1897.

The house located at 208 N. Malin (Malire), Block 2—Lot 1 is possibly the oldest house in Bryant. It is presently owned by Leon and Donna Garlinger and is being restored by them. The site of this home is part of 40 acres sold by U.S. of America to Daniel Carr of Coschocton County, Ohio. Daniel Carr sold to William Carson, owner of the northeast part of Bryant when the town was plotted in 1871.

The population in 1887 was about 300. By 1907 it had increased to 414 with 22 businesses. This growth started with a discovery of gas and oil in the area. The businesses included the following: Farmers and Merchants Banks; Barbers-Bailey and Bone; Edward Slentz; Blacksmiths — Daniel Brown, Elmer Lantz; Buggies and Harness — W.H. Elberson; China Store — Abraham Solhana; Drug Store — G.E. Shull; Elevator — Holmes Brothers; Furniture — A. Haffner; General Stores — H.W. Huckriede, George Montgomery and Sons, Nichols and Crowell; Hardware — W.H. Elberson, L. King; Hotel — Hotel Merchants; Implements — W.H. Elberson; Livery — Montgomery and Sons; Meat Market — Hoeheimer and Siberry; Newspaper — Bryant Independent; Restaurant — A.W. Watkins; Saloons — Edward Bonifas, Harry Hunt. By 1910 the population had increased to 465 with 32 businesses. New businesses were: Attorney — G.S. Mills; Bakery — James Treece; Drug Store — G.E. Shull, Leonard Sisk; Elevator — Bryant Grain Co.; Furniture Store — Metzner and Metzner; Hardware — Black and Glanding; Harness Store — W.H. Elberson; Physicians — Dr. C.H. Bockoven and Dr. Susan Bockoven, Dr. M.A. Glentzer; Racket Store — Elwood Logan; Tonic Shop — Frank Landess.

The rapid growth of Bryant followed along with the oil boom which began about 1888 and lasted to about 1912. One of the earliest leases was in the northeast Carson area, on the south 40 acres now owned by Leo and Gladys Ketchum. This land was leased by William Carson to H.O. Patch and Company on May 29, 1888 but no record could be found of drilling on the land. A report states that oil in the Bryant area was pumped through pipe lines to a refinery in Lima, Ohio. Gerald Knoelke, now living east of Bryant still operates some of the original leases and trucks the oil to Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

In 1904 The Farmers and Merchants Bank organized and located at 121 E. Main Street where the old post office now stands. Later a two-story brick building was constructed at 119 East Main. The bank started with a capital of \$25,000.00 and by 1922 it reported a capital of \$246,160.00.

The economy declined in 1929 and on June 21, 1930 the bank was declared insolvent. On June 26, 1930 a receiver was appointed to dispose of the assets. Since 1930 the town has been without local bank services.

The first Bryant U.S. Post Office was established August 23, 1882 in a very small building across the east alley from the site of the present post office. The first postmaster was James C. Jay employed with a salary of one dollar per month. The present fine stone structure was dedicated on July 10, 1966 while Joseph Cline Huey served as postmaster. Phyllis Hoehammer has served since July 26, 1980.

Records show the Lutheran Church as the first organized church in Bryant. Its beginning dates back to the fall of 1874 when the number of Lutheran families held services in several different places, including a saw mill in the north east part of town. The first church was built and dedicated on May 10, 1878 with John W. Miller as pastor. It was located at the intersection of Elm and Malin (Malire) and has maintained this site, with several improvements during years to follow. Over the past the church has used several names: The Evangelical Lutheran Church and Faith Lutheran Church, Faith being most common.

A second church in Bryant was started in October 1884. Following a tent meeting, a group of six charter members organized under the direction of Rev. R.M.S. Hutchens. They named their church the Bryant Wesleyan Methodist Church. A frame school house was purchased at the west edge of Bryant, and used until 1895 when a new frame church was built on Hendricks Street (Hwy. 27 and 67) at the south edge of town. Their congregation grew and a need developed for better facilities. A new stone sanctuary joining the old building was dedicated November 8, 1974 Rev. Harry Moeller moved to Bryant to serve as pastor. Discussions for a new parsonage led to the construction of a new home located south of the church. It was ready for occupancy in April 1975. The church is presently known as The Bryant Wesleyan Church.

The early history of the Bryant United Methodist Church has been lost but it is known that the first Sunday School classes were held in a blacksmith shop on Main Street with Rev. A.R. Corn serving as the minister. The congregation moved to the second story of the new bank building and plans were made to build a church on a site near the south end of Meridian Street. The basement was dug in the fall of 1913 and dedication of the church took place during the summer of 1914. Rev. S.T. Sturgeon was assigned to assist with the project. For twenty-five years this church was known as the Bryant Methodist Protestant Church, and then mergers took place leading to the name Bryant United Methodist Church. Membership decreased and it closed June 1980.

The first school built in the town of Bryant was a brick two-story structure located near the south end of Malin (Malire) Street. It contained four rooms, a library, and an office for the principal. It opened for use on October 29, 1900 under the leadership of Mr. J.C.L. Whiteman as principal and teacher. Two years of high school were offered. Two rooms on the first floor were used for grades one through six, and the two upstairs rooms were used for the seventh and eighth and the high school. The addition dedicated in 1913 consisted of two rooms on the first floor, assembly room and a stage on the second floor, and a room for Home Economics in the basement. Two of the original basement rooms were arranged for Shop and Agriculture.

In 1947 plans were made for a cafeteria that provided a hot lunch for students and teachers, and in 1950 construction of the Bryant Gymnasium was started. By 1969 students in kindergarten through sixth grade were transferred to the new Bloomfield Grade School south of Bryant.

The class of 1975 was the last graduating class from the Bryant School.

The Bryant Independent Newspaper came into existence before 1907. It was delivered every Saturday at a subscription rate of 50¢ per year. George Mills was the publisher.

Although Bryant has been without a local doctor for nearly sixty years, there are several physicians whose names could be recalled, namely: Dr. J.T. Mills, Dr. O.S. Abel, Dr. James G. Wicks, Dr. James C. Jay who practiced 1844-1881, Dr. J.L. Munsell, Dr. T.G. McDonald, Dr. Samuel Poling, Dr. Joseph Adams, Dr. C.H. Bockoven and Dr. Susan Bockoven, Dr. Cova

Graham, Dr. Grover Smith, Dr. M.A. Glentzer whose daughter Sarah Etta (Glentzer) Flauding is a long-time resident of Bryant. Dr. Glentzer entered the practice of medicine in 1865 in an office on East Main near the railroad area. In 1867 he moved his office east to the back part of the home now owned and occupied by Sarah Flauding, 306 East Main. Dr. Glentzer also served as a minister of the Church of Christ and was one of the organizers of the church in Bearcreek Township.

Beck's Hall was built by Aaron Beck on the site where the U.S. Post Office now stands. The second story was used for school plays and served as a town gymnasium. Several businesses occupied the lower area. A stairway in the center area permitted one to enter the large auditorium, with the roof supported by four huge posts. Imagine, playing basketball around four huge pillars. A devastating fire destroyed the structure on August 20, 1924 with an estimated loss of \$20,000.00.

The Bryant Conservation Club was organized to help preserve wild life and to learn the game laws of Indiana. One of the earliest events was the Big Wolf Hunt on March 6, 1924.

The club owns the Conservation Hall at 109 East Main Street.

The present officers are: Duane Craig, President; Art Huey Jr., Vice President; Herbert Derickson, Secretary and Treasurer.

The Senior Citizens organization meets regularly in the Redeemer Lutheran Church. There are presently 50-60 members from Bryant and the surrounding area.

The three SENIORS presently living in Bryant are: Nora Grogg born April 9, 1891; Lela Loy born September 14, 1896 and Sarah Flauding born December 26, 1896.

The year 1975 was chosen to observe the Bryant Area Centennial, on September 5, 6, 7.

The Bryant Days festival has become a yearly event. In 1985 the name Bryant Loblolly was chosen for the September celebration.

The 1986 Bryant Volunteer Fire Department consists of 21 volunteers. The equipment consists of five trucks, 21 pagers plus 2-way radios for each truck.

