

Chapter Four

The Golden Age of Homer

The Gazette will say, and say it honestly, that any man could rightfully feel proud that he was a resident of Homer.

Champaign Daily Gazette
February 2, 1891

The decade after the death of Michael D. Coffeen was one of business growth and prosperity. Smaller businesses blossomed into larger concerns hiring local men. Mortimer “Mort” Smith’s tile factory expanded as farmers began draining land in the 1880s. Homer’s largest commercial endeavor was the Comet Roller Mills. Former school teacher and attorney Michael D. Coffeen, known in Champaign County as “Little Mike” or M. D., Jr., was a man of incredible energy and ingenuity. His network of friends and relatives among Homer’s elites was second to none and he was trusted. He, like his late uncle and namesake, realized that Homer was positioned to ship grain east and west, but more important, if a finished product could be manufactured locally, the profits from that finished product would give advantages to local farmers as well as higher prices.

Oliver J. Gilman was the earliest merchant dealing in the mass storage of grain. While M. D. Coffeen and the Homer Farmer’s Association stored grain in the 1860s, it was Gilman who was credited with the first mass storage in corn cribs and bunkers. His elevator in the 1870s was leased to William W. Mudge. In the 1870s flour milling in Homer was done by J. M. Besore in a flour mill owned by Mort Smith on the west side of Ellen Street just north of the Wabash. On August 30, 1880, the flour mill burned from a defective flue. The building had no insurance and the \$6,000 loss was a large one to agricultural interests.ⁱ

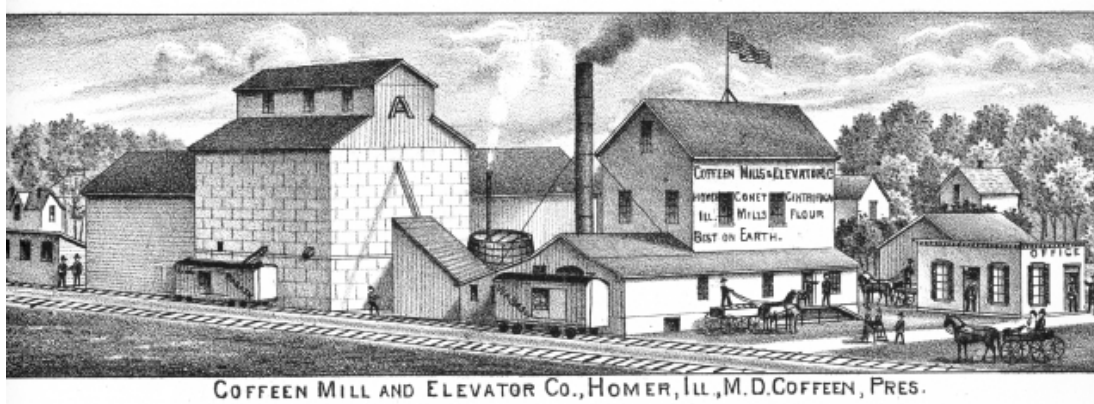
M. D. Coffeen began in the grain business by building corn dumps on the south side of his uncle’s warehouse in 1880. These four large storage areas held ear corn and small grains at the Conkey warehouse.ⁱⁱ With the assistance of John H. Caldwell, Coffeen began to store and ship grain on the Wabash in the fall of 1880.ⁱⁱⁱ

After Besore’s flour mill burned, M. D., Jr., with his small grain shipping operation, seized upon the chance to expand and began construction in 1881 of the complex of grain storage and milling facilities that would exist in some form on the south side of the railroad in the village for the next 125 years.

The milling operation was known as the Comet Roller Mills and the elevator was known as the Coffeen elevator, changed later to the Homer Elevator Company. Coffeen constructed a state-of-the-art reducing mill, using rollers, rather than the traditional mill stone. The facility was a three-story frame building with a brick “store” and a steam engine room. The efficiency of the operation was greater than anything seen before in the area and a high quality product was the result. As many as 100 barrels of flour could be

produced every 24 hours at the mill.^{iv}

M. Wicks was hired as the head miller and Coffeen set out to purchase wheat of the highest quality. Another innovation of Coffeen's was to bring flour with him to Urbana and trade with the farmers directly, seeking higher quality grain to mill, and returning with it back to Homer.



Drawing of the Comet Roller Mills complex in Homer

*From Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County, Illinois
(Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887), page 481*

The innovations and technology brought to the village by the building of the complex were many. The first electric engine in Homer was operated at this location and Homer's first electrical light bulb was inside the mill. Coffeen used a telephone to communicate with his elevator in Sidney, the first line run to Sidney. The line additionally was run to Mudge's store to what would become Homer's first telephone exchange.^v

On the afternoon of July 12, 1888, friction in the machinery caused overheating and sparked a fire. The elevator was quickly consumed and burned to the ground. The \$10,000 loss was partially covered by insurance and a new elevator was planned.^{vi} Construction began in mid-August on the new elevator.

Socially M. D., Jr., and his wife Mellie Burton Coffeen were one of Homer's social elite couples. The Coffeens were large contributors to the Christian Church. They began construction in the fall of 1888 of a large home that became one of Homer's landmarks in the northeast part of town on East First Street. Finished in April 1889, the home was the scene of events for the next four years. The Queen Anne home boasted 13 rooms, set on an entire block. It was the largest home construction to that time with an eight-foot basement. Heating was from steam pipes from the elevator. The entire project cost around \$10,000.



The Coffeen home on East First Street, constructed at a cost of \$10,000 in 1888-89, was seized by the sheriff in 1893, and sold for bad debts. The only bidder was Joseph Thomas, the man foreclosing on Coffeen.

Parish Collection, Homer Historical Society

What M. D., Jr., had in business acumen, he lacked in personal dealings and in economic forecasts. Coffeen was heavily leveraged with mortgages on land and had little or no money of his own in each of his ventures. As was seen with the Presbyterian Church debt in 1879, lumberman Joseph Thomas was not a businessman to carry large debts. Thomas was as flexible as any businessman but he could not afford to wait for payment. M. D., Jr., was indebted to Thomas for the construction of the home and was not paying on the bill. Coffeen was caught with little capital in 1890, unable to ride out a decline in the market. Coffeen's small business empire began to come apart. He had sold the elevator in February 1889 to J. H. Gunder for \$500 and began to sell off assets over the next year.

Calvin Butler, the Homer correspondent for the *Champaign County Herald*, weighed in on the developing situation in October 1890:

Our village has several scandal cases at present, but for the good of the community and the friends and relatives, we will not agitate them, but trust that justice will be dealt out to all the guilty parties.^{vii}

The scandal began with a business deal, presumably the sale of the Homer-Ogden telephone line to Thomas by Coffeen in 1891. Thomas filed against Coffeen for the

nonpayment of \$472 for lumber used in the construction of his home. Coffeen, unable to pay, lost his home to a sheriff's sale in September 1894. The buyer, adding insult to the situation, was Joseph Thomas.^{viii}

Coffeen countersued stating that the sale was illegal and that the sale of any of the lots adjoining the property would have been sufficient to pay the outstanding debt. The court found for Thomas, the sale was legal, and Coffeen's \$10,000 home was purchased for \$2660.^{ix}

The Coffeen family heirs, to whom M. D., Jr., was heavily indebted, were left holding notes that were worthless. The Homer Mill and Elevator Company reorganized and M. D., Jr., took a position as president of the Farmer's Mutual Benefit Association. He was out of town, in Chicago primarily, for weeks at a time during much of the period of the scandal trying to make a living and save what he could. The family relocated to Chicago and Mellie Coffeen returned to retrieve the home's furnishings in September 1894 as Joseph Thomas' family prepared to move in. One of the most energetic, innovative, and dynamic of Homer's business leaders was gone.^x

Disaster at the Hays Mill

Others seeing the need for grain storage and processing services began to build other facilities along railroad lines. John C. Hays, a 62 year old farmer with land south of Homer, was eager to build a mill along the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad in Broadlands. With his son Andrew, age 29, he began construction of a steam mill in late 1887 near the Broadlands railway station. Henry Butler of Homer was hired to engineer the new mill and a local farmer, George Burtner, worked on the mill as a carpenter.

John Hays was not new to milling. In the late 1860s and 1870s Hays owned the old mill on the Salt Fork but by the 1880s mechanized milling was more common. In the 1880s Hays had been a mail carrier and a farmer. The new Hays mill being built was a buhr mill with stones created from wedges of granite held together with an iron band. The buhr stones were positioned horizontally and milling was done in a centrifugal process rather than the traditional flat grinding method. Power for the mill was provided by a steam engine.

The Hays mill was under pressure to complete the mill because of the construction of another mill to the west. John Hays would have to have his mill in operation to attract customers and be ready to ship during the spring.^{xi}

On February 7, 1888, the mill began testing the machinery. All four men were present and the boiler was fired up. About five minutes after the buhr began rotating the friction heated up the iron band holding the granite wedges in place. The buhr stone was rotating at 800 revolutions per minute when the overheated iron failed. At 3:30 pm an explosion, sounding to many in the area like a cannon shot, sent the wedges and hot metal in all directions. The sides of the building were blown out and the roof collapsed. John and Andrew Hays were killed instantly. So much force was expended in the explosion that the wedges of granite were found hundreds of yards away. The engineer,

Henry Butler, was found alive but critically injured in the debris. He was taken to his home near Sidell where he died just over 24 hours later. Carpenter George Burtner was thrown through a wall and found injured in the wreckage thirty feet away. He survived.^{xii}

A coroners jury failed to fix blame in the disaster but the lack of the experience of the four men was a definite contributor in the explosion.^{xiii} The funeral for the Hays father and son was one of the largest held at that time. They were buried in the Davis Cemetery.^{xiv}

The Ned Barnes Tragedy

An event that was to have a lasting effect on Homer's history was the tragic death of one of Homer's brightest young men. There is little doubt that Ned Barnes, the son of merchant O. J. Barnes, would have become one of Homer's leaders and most probably a wealthy man. His senseless drowning sent a ripple through the village that would resurface years later.

The earliest recorded drowning near Homer in the Salt Fork was that of Peter Butler at Lander's Ford in June 1858.^{xv} The combination of a deep creek with a large population that could not swim was a fatal combination. William Etter, a farm hand of Lemuel Thompson from Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, was bathing in the Salt Fork on May 23, 1880, when he was drowned.^{xvi}

Ned O. Barnes was born in Homer April 1, 1863, to O. J. and Ellen Barnes. O. J. Barnes was known locally as someone who nearly brought a part of the brewing industry to Homer. In 1862, O. J. Barnes was working for O. M. Conkey, another New England immigrant, and because of his health needed to work outdoors. He turned to raising hops in a location known as "Gilman's Ten Acres," a tract owned by O. J. Gilman. Barnes and Gilman had been friends in the east and constructed a drying shed for the hops. The hops were shipped east but because the brewers had found substitutes for hops, the shipping of the crop to Boston became uneconomical. The drying shed stood for over 50 years after the experiment.^{xvii} O. J. Barnes died in 1866 leaving his widow Ellen to raise Ned. At 17, Ned Barnes attended Purdue University and returned to the village to begin a career in business. Ned Barnes married Lottie Jane Evans on April 9, 1883. Lottie was the daughter of George and Minerva Foreman Evans, born one month earlier than her husband.

William H. Brown and Ned Barnes opened a dry goods store in November 1884, renting a room formerly used by Sanford France. The firm was known as Barnes and Brown. Considerable renovation and papering made the store one of the neater ones on Main Street.^{xviii}

In September 1888 another of Homer's young men, John Palmer, purchased Brown's junior interest in the store, creating Barnes and Palmer.^{xix} Ned and Lottie Barnes purchased a home in March 1889 on East Street from Laura Greeley and rehabilitated the older home.^{xx}

It became an annual ritual for some of the men of Homer to take a ride down the

Salt Fork in a small wooded flat-bottomed skiff and return via the train. The ritual began in the 1870s and was indulged in by some of the merchants, done when the water was higher in the creek during late spring. Some would even construct a boat annually for the ritual.

The day chosen for the 1889 trip was June 12. Moses C. Thomas, owner of the mill; Charles Burkhardt, the paper hanger; Joseph Thomas, the lumber dealer; George Evans, Jr; Millard Radebaugh; and James Freeman were among the men who began from the mill at 9:30 that morning. In the second group Ned Barnes, Cy Upp, Frank Thomas, and W. A. Hoover, a traveling man from Chicago, set out on the creek for Danville shortly after the first group.

When the Barnes group reached a section of the creek north of Fairmount their skiff struck a downed limb capsizing the craft. Two of the men could not swim and clung to the limbs but Ned Barnes was a good swimmer and remained with the boat. Accounts differ but it seems that Barnes was either hit in the head by the boat or he tried to save his coat. There was some effort on the part of his companions to save him but he went down in the Salt Fork and did not resurface.^{xxi}

The survivors went to the farm houses south of the Salt Fork and gathered a search party to look for the body. Someone went to Fairmount and sent word to Homer via the telephone line that Ned Barnes had drowned. The search went on all evening until it was too dark to continue. The following morning at 4:00 a.m. pontoon boats were constructed and a search commenced. About 75 men were prepared to drag the river to recover the body but Sigel Summers, a painter, found the body at 8:17 a.m. about 50 yards below the accident site. Summers noted the time from Barnes' watch which was still operating.^{xxii}

Ned Barnes' funeral was the third largest since the loss of M. D. Coffeen in 1882. A crowd estimated at 3000 attended the funeral of the 26-year-old merchant held on June 16. Attending were the Odd Fellows Lodge and the Modern Woodmen with lodges from Sidell, Newman, Fairmount, Sidney, and Ogden. His wife, Lottie, presented a pillow floral arrangement with his name, Ned, in purple immortelles. His estate was settled by October; the widow purchased the lot next door and contracted with Dungan & Wallace to build a home, renting out the old house for income. She gained \$3000 from the insurance and a similar sum from the estate.^{xxiii}



In late October 1905, A. W. Rodgers took this photo of five generations of Homer. On the lower left is Mary Butler Palmer, lower right is her mother, 86-year-old Rebecca Butler. Upper left is Dollie Palmer Jurgensmeyer, Hazel Jurgensmeyer and John T. Palmer. Rebecca Butler was the widow of Thomas L. Butler, the Black Hawk War veteran.

Jurgensmeyer-Craver Collection, Homer Historical Society

The Founding of Lyons and Palmer

One of Homer's entrepreneurs and influential businessmen was John Thomas Palmer. Palmer was born February 2, 1858, on a farm north of the new village along the

Salt Fork. Palmer was born to Ellis and Mary Butler Palmer, both pioneers of Champaign County. Mary Butler was the oldest daughter of Thomas L. Butler, and this no doubt had an effect on Palmer who would have been in the company of this Black Hawk War veteran. Butler, the “red hot Republican,”^{xxiv} influenced him politically and he maintained an interest in civic affairs throughout his life. John’s father, Ellis Palmer, was part of the pioneer Palmer clan. His uncles included Aquilla, who assisted in the movement of the town, and Constable Milburn Palmer, one of Homer’s characters. Most of the Palmers of his father’s generation were farmers from the timber.

Palmer was educated in the rural schools of Homer and took up farming. John Palmer married Ella Brown, a neighborhood girl, in the home of her parents, John and Jane Stafford Brown, on November 5, 1882. The Palmers had two children, Lon V. and Dollie May who would each make their mark on the town. The family began life on the farm but, with the partnership with Ned Barnes, they moved to the village in October 1888. They lived in a brick home adjacent to that of John Tudor on North West Street.^{xxv}

With the death of his partner, the choice was clear – find a new senior partner to purchase Ned Barnes’ share of the store. He found that investor in Tolono, Lon Lyons. Lyons quickly settled, within a week of viewing the stock. The store of Lyons and Palmer was born the first week of August 1889.^{xxvi}

Lyons and Palmer’s store met with success, so much so that they outgrew their location within two years. The construction of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows lodge hall on the west side of Main Street during the summer of 1891 offered an opportunity for a business to have the latest storefront. The two-story brick building was typical for the Midwest with a second-story meeting room and a leased storefront downstairs. The I.O.O.F. hall was built in the old location of Coffeen and Day’s meat market and their occupancy of the new hall gave the store more space and a higher profile on Main Street. When the store moved on December 3, 1891, it reopened as the finest store in Homer.^{xxvii} When a series of fires struck downtown, Lyons and Palmer would remain unaffected and in a commanding position.

Fires on Main Street

Fire protection did not change from the 1870s, remaining nothing more than canvas buckets and ladders. As the downtown business district grew, the danger that a fire would sweep the wooden frame structures increased. More activity downtown brought the possibility of catastrophe closer.

At 4:30 a.m. on October 18, 1883, a small fire left in Brown’s cooper shop for the finishing of barrels flared up and caught the wooden frame building on fire. The cooper shop, on the west side of Main Street south of the tracks, began igniting other structures. The wagon shop of Chauncey Stearns and John Cusick’s blacksmith shop became fully involved, and fighting the fire was a useless proposition. Saving other buildings became the priority; Fred Burkhardt’s paint shop above Cusick’s wagon shop was saved but Burkhardt lost paint stored in an adjacent building. One factor in this fire was a rainstorm

that slowed the fire. There was fear that the fire would spread north to the Coffeen elevator and the depot.^{xxviii}

Just after noon on July 12, 1888, sparks from friction in the mill machinery created a blaze in the Coffeen Mill and Elevator Company. The citizens gathered ready to fight the fire but this fire was so large that all that could be done was to keep the roof of the mill building, adjacent to the elevator, wet. The bucket lines formed but it was obvious that Homer was helpless in the face of large fires. The elevator was insured for \$7,000 and M. D. Coffeen declared they would rebuild, despite the low amount of insurance. The Gilman elevator was enlisted until a new elevator could be built.^{xxix}

Just after midnight on the morning of July 17, 1890, a fire was discovered on the east side of Main Street in George Washington "Gash" Yates' dry goods store. The two-story business was a landmark on the corner of Main and Wabash, just north of the implements dealership adjacent to the Wabash railroad and west of the blacksmith shops. The fire was spreading rapidly as the bucket brigade approached. Doors flew open as stock was brought to the streets but only about \$500 worth of stock was saved before the second floor collapsed. On the corner of Main and Wabash stood the frame-structure restaurant owned by Austin Henderson which soon was in flames.

At 2 a.m. Mayor William Mudge used his telephone line to Danville to call for a fire engine, a railroad water pump engine, to be brought to Homer immediately. The engine, named the "John L. Tincher," manned by a crew of three, began immediately for Homer. A dead locomotive at Tilton delayed the engine, causing the arrival to be at 4 a.m. The engine pumped water 800 feet from the Wabash well to the fire site. Water was put on the smoldering ruins until the fire was completely out.^{xxx}

The flames moved north next to the store of John A. Tudor, a one-story brick drugstore built three years prior. The building was quickly engulfed in flames and none of the drugstore stock was saved. The alley between Tudor's drug store and the Henderson building, the next building north, enabled the fire to be stopped before the entire block was lost. The Henderson building, housing the dry goods store and Nellie Howe's millinery upstairs, was also just three years old. The building was set afire but the bucket brigade worked to prevent the building from being lost. Nellie Howe's millinery stock was thrown from the second floor, damaging her goods.^{xxxi}

The loss to the downtown was considerable. The Yates building, owned by Steven Yates, brother of George, was insured for only \$1,500. The stock was insured for \$5,000. Henderson's restaurant was insured for \$500 but the tragedy of the fire was the store of John A. Tudor. Tudor was heavily insured at \$4,800. Mrs. Howe's millinery stock was damaged at around \$100.^{xxxii}

John Tudor immediately began plans for rebuilding, but for Yates it was not as easy. Yates moved to Champaign and Henderson did not rebuild his restaurant, concentrating his business in his two-story brick building. Tudor's drugstore reopened in the second week of October 1890, an exact replica of the 1887 store.^{xxxiii}

The fires did have one unintended consequence: the rebuilding of the business structures improved what had become an eyesore. Some of the original 1855-56 crude

frame structures had lingered and were nothing more than sheds. Many were leaning and had little value but were places of manufacturing and repair.

The Great Fire of March 1892

It would be recalled for generations as the "Great Fire" and it marked a turning point socially in the history of the town. For the first time, women would rise and be recognized as equally fighting the blaze.

The Enterprise Special.

ISSUED 8 P. M.

HOMER, ILL., SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 1892.

COPIES FREE.

ANOTHER HOLOCAUST! FIRE LAYS WASTE NINE BUILDINGS IN HOMER. PROPERTY TO THE VALUE OF \$50,000 TOTALLY DESTROYED.

A BIG LOSS.

FIRST PRINTED ACCOUNT OF THE FIRE.

At about 9 o'clock this morning the alarm of fire was heard above the roaring wind, which at the time was blowing a terrific gale. All eyes were strained to learn the location and people were running in every direction eager to lend assistance in preventing destruction of property.

The location of the fire was soon learned, smoke issuing from between the Core and Hamill buildings on Main street, designated the exact position of the flames, and although a quart of water would have served to extinguish the blaze when first seen, it had caught in between two high buildings and could not be reached before the high wind had fanned it into savage and ravenous flames, which were soon be

Wenrick's meat market and Anderson's poultry house, would also be devoured by the flames, the intense heat breaking nearly all the window panes in those buildings. By heroic work of hundreds of people these buildings were saved, but not without great loss to goods that were removed to the street and badly damaged.

The fire spread to the north of Mudge & Co.'s store, and made quick work in consuming two small tenant houses belonging to O. J. Gilman. Here the flames were checked and the new brick residence of A. J. Unger was spared, thanks to the noble men and women, who worked hard and were rewarded with success.

From the rear of the brick building occupied by Hess & Whitlock, the fire licked up two or three storage and warerooms, then leaped to the large two-story frame building owned by Dr. Upp and occupied by him with a stock of furniture goods. It was destroyed with some of its contents in short order. His residence to the west of the store only a few feet was miraculously saved by nearly covering it over with salt and wet blankets, the women of town taking no small part in the work here as well as at other points on the scene.

about \$800, is a total loss with no insurance.

The Upp building was valued at about \$2,000 which is also a total loss, with no insurance. Nearly all of his goods were a total loss.

A. Sibes and family, who occupied the Core building, lost part of their goods.

The four Gilman buildings were valued at about \$8,000, with an insurance of only \$1,000.

J. M. Duvall, the photographer, lost about \$300 worth of goods.

NOTES.

The 11:35 train brought a car load of people from Fairmount and several reporters for Danville daily papers.

C. B. Butler's house caught fire six times and others had a similar experience.

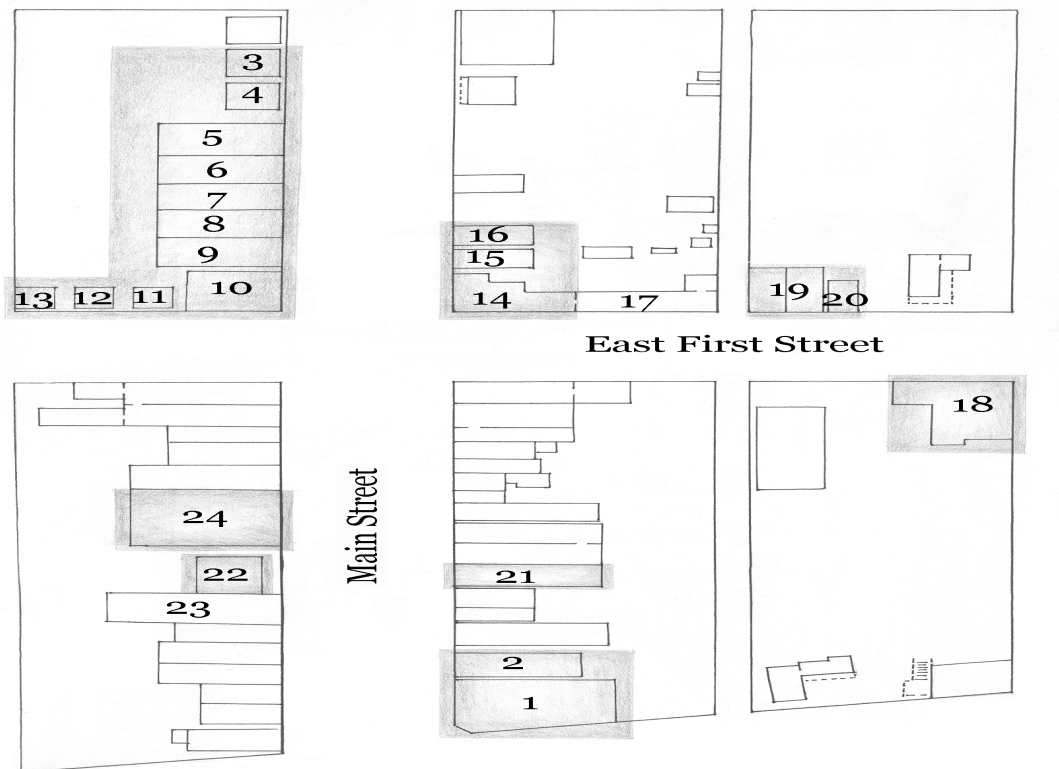
Editors A. B. Campbell, of the Toloano Herald; Alva Turner, of the Fairmount Review, and C. H. Gallion, of the Champaign News, were attracted here by the fire.

The loss is a serious one for Homer, but it will not be realized until the excitement of the fire has subsided.

Several business men and clerks are now out of work—save the task of col-

The *Enterprise* managed to print this special edition for the fire. This small one sheet was given away. Donations began to pour in to editor J. B. Martin to rebuild the newspaper.

Homer Historical Society



Homer's Business District – Major Fires

This map is based on the Sanborn Fire Map of 1893 and the map of the fire of 1892 published in the *Champaign County News* of March 26, 1892

July 17, 1890 – 1 a.m. fire began rear storage room

Yates brick – built 1870s replaced with Masonic Lodge 1892

Tudor Drug – brick built July 1887 rebuilt 1890

March 19, 1892 – 9 a.m. fire began Mrs. Hamill's Millinery

Residence Snidsman & Saulsbury

D. H. Ingraham - residence

William W. Mudge

William W. Mudge - storage

Hamill Millinery

Gus Sites Residence – owned by Core

Gilman Hall – frame and brick

Hess & Whitlock – department store

Warehouse storage

Warehouse storage

Dr. Upp's Office

September 23, 1900 – 1 p.m. defective flue in second story

18. Homer House fire – frame originally dragged from Salt Fork replaced with Stevens' auto garage

April 27, 1901 – 9:30 a.m. oil room fire in pharmacy

14. Mudge's Corner – Drug Store, early frame building (late 1850s)

15. Bob Sites Tailoring – frame

16. Enterprise Newspaper Office – frame

17. Tinkham Brick – not harmed, later torn down. Entire site was cleared for the Jurgensmeyer building in 1902.

October 22, 1905 – 1:30 a.m. rear of paint shop – replaced with Jurgensmeyer's garage

19. Charles Burkhardt's paint shop frame

20. Dr. F. C. Hill's office frame

December 26, 1910 – 2:00 a.m. Coal stove ignites acetylene gas system

21. Ashley's pool hall – brick built in 1877

December 8, 1942 – 2:30 a.m. origins unknown

22. Interurban depot – brick built 1904

23. Odd Fellows Lodge Hall severely damaged

January 14, 1975 – 2:30 a.m. arson to hotel

24. Aetna House hotel and Homer theater - brick built 1885

Saturday mornings were busy in Homer and March 19, 1892, was no exception. The wind was blowing from the southwest at what some described as gale force. At about 9 a.m. several people on Main Street noticed smoke and flames coming from a point under the eaves of Hamill's millinery store and residence on the west side of north Main Street from First Street to Second Street in the middle of the block. A spark from a flue had ignited a small fire but access to the fire was limited by the lack of equipment immediately available. The fire burst forth and began to spread both north and south.

A bucket brigade was immediately formed "...and every citizen regardless of race, color or sex turned out to carry water and to convey the merchandise from the burning buildings."^{xxxiv} It was estimated that 500 showed up for the fire. The most serious injury was to Mrs. Nichols who was knocked out by a falling 10-foot beam. She recovered from the injury.^{xxxv}

The buildings were stripped of everything valuable as the flames spread. West First Street and Main Street were filled with goods. Dishes, bedding, shoes, books, hardware, stoves, farm implements, groceries, and furniture littered the streets. One man, carrying items from Hamill's millinery, was seen to run out to a window and throw a wash bowl and pitcher smashing to the ground. He then yelled to some men to catch a mattress which he carefully lowered.

Men moving goods found Jane Benner upstairs in the millinery looking for valuable quilts. They grabbed her and began to get out via the stairway. The stairway was

blocked and they were forced to exit a window onto the roof of an adjacent building, crossing onto another roof to climb down.^{xxxvi}

Danville and Fairmount were called and Fairmount responded with 100 people carrying buckets arriving on the train. Fairmount citizens recalled Homer's response to a downtown fire threatening their village.

As Hamill's millinery burned, Gus Sites' residence to the south was next. The fire made its way to the Hess & Whitlock store on the corner of Main and First Street. The frame structures burned quickly. The historic Gilman Hall, a landmark for decades, burned to the ground. The other buildings on the block burned quickly. The intense heat of the fire broke windows on the businesses on the east side of Main Street, opposite the fire. The Enterprise printing office, Anderson's poultry house, Mudge's corner, and Wenrick's Meat Market all lost windows to the heat. It was thought at the time that these buildings would catch on fire so goods were removed from them as well. The fire raged until 12:30 p.m. Engines from as far away as Danville were brought to the fire but to little effect.

As a result of the fire Hess & Whitlock held a sale the following week.^{xxxvii} The opera house became a hardware and agriculture store as William W. Mudge moved his stock and began business. Hess & Whitlock moved their store into the former Lyons and Palmer location. Dr. Upp moved his belongings into the Homer House and was back in business.^{xxxviii} If Homer had learned anything from the previous two fires it was to insure their businesses. The losses from this fire were much less due to insurance. Mrs. Hamill had \$850 insured from her \$2500 loss, and Hess and Whitlock had \$4000 but they were estimated to lose an additional \$2000. J. M. Duvall, the photographer, lost \$300 in goods and the Gilman buildings lost were insured for only \$1000.^{xxxix}

The Building Boom of the 1890s

As a result of the Great Fire of March 19 the Masons of Homer met on March 22, 1892, to discuss the situation. The result of the fire was a need for business space on Main Street and the Masonic Lodge of Homer was the first to act.

One of the jewels of Homer's Main Street is the Masonic building at the corner of Main and Railroad on the east side of Main. The imposing 51 x 100-foot brick two-story building was constructed by the Homer Masonic Lodge. The construction of the building was begun in June 1892 at a cost of \$10,000 by a building committee consisting of William W. Mudge, Jacob Tindall, and Henry C. White. The intention was to have commercial space on the ground floor and a lodge hall above. The commercial space was to be divided into one large commercial area and small offices on the Railroad Street side.

The April 20, 1893, dedication of the building was expected to draw thousands but the weather was some of the worst seen, with rain falling all night and into the morning. The large crowd expected never materialized but the banquet was well attended. Grand Master Crawford of Jonesboro, assisted by W. R. Jewell of Danville, dedicated the

crowded hall. Grand Master handed the keys over to the officers of the lodge and those in attendance celebrated with a banquet in the opera house, serenaded by the University of Illinois Mandolin and Guitar club. The storm continued and only three of the Champaign-Urbana members of the Masonic order were present for the evening.^{xl}

Conkey Brothers Hardware was founded in April 1892 by Bruce and Carl Conkey from the hardware stock of Mudge and company.^{#SYMBOL 42 \f "Symbol" \s 12#} One of the enduring institutions of Homer, the Citizens Bank, opened its doors on April 17, 1893, in its new location as the anchor of the Masonic building.^{xli}

Banking in Homer

On June 2, 1883, the First National Bank was organized and it opened its doors on June 12. Solomon Plaut was president, Henry J. Wiggins, vice president, and Emanuel I. Fisher, cashier. Fisher's brothers, Max. B. Fisher and Samuel S. Fisher, were named directors. The bank was capitalized in stock for \$50,000.^{xlii} The bank thrived for four years until June 29, 1887, when Solomon Plaut sold the bank to Henry Wiggins. It reopened on Thursday, June 30, as the Citizen's Bank with Wiggins, president, and Emanuel Fisher as cashier.^{xliii}

Henry J. Wiggins' Citizens Bank was not the only player in town. In March 1893 Eugene Raynor and Charles Babb, both former residents of Homer with considerable capital, decided to open a bank on Main Street.^{xliv} The Raynor and Babb Bank opened in a temporary location in April, moving in September to the east side of Main Street. They purchased a 7000 lb. fireproof safe in May which was relocated to their new site in September.^{xlv} The Raynor and Babb Bank was actually a real estate and small loan office and did not conduct regular banking until March 1900.^{xlvi}

[#] SYMBOL 42 \f "Symbol" \s 10# A hardware store remained in this location from 1893 until December 2004.



Charles D. Babb at this desk at the Raynor & Babb Bank, 1900
Babb Collection, Homer Historical Society

Women in Homer

The Champaign County Women's Suffrage Association, with a name change in April 1871 advocated women receiving the right to vote but there is no evidence that the women from Homer participated.^{xlvi}

Women first appeared in politics in Homer in a most unusual way. On the 18th of April 1882, the village election was held, without the benefit of women, as prohibited by the village ordinances. What was unusual was that in the race for village trustee Harriet Coffeen, wife of Benjamin, received two votes. Maria Custer received one vote and "Mrs. Rogers" received one vote. Ellen Zorns received one vote for clerk, but in the race for police magistrate Mrs. M. A. F. Bryant won the contest against Ezra Burdick, Silas Ball, Charles Core, and William Elliott. What would have been a victory for women's suffrage was quickly dashed.

[It appears] from the canvas of the returns of the election that Mrs. M. A. F. Bryant had received the highest number of votes cast for Police Magistrate and she being ineligible to the said office, said election as to her is declared void and the office of Police Magistrate declared vacant.^{xlvi}

A woman who was highly regarded in the village and really one of Homer's most brilliant people was Harriet Smythe Coffeen, the wife of Benjamin Coffeen. She was not a member of any club but the clubs sought her out to help in their writings. Coffeen was a

notable in Homer's history as being the first woman postmaster in the town, a move that was not without controversy.



A part of Homer High School's third graduating class and the first male graduate. Left to right are Lydia (Dude) White, Charles Coffeen, Ola Shepherd, Nellie Smith (seated) and Carrie Berg (standing). The 1887 class also included Carrie Burkhardt, Fred Gray, and Homer High School's first African American graduate, Mary Morgan.

Canaday-Melton Collection, Homer Historical Society

The coveted position of postmaster was an important one in every town. These positions were political appointments, depending on the party of the president of the United States. When Democrat Grover Cleveland became President, Charles Tinkham became postmaster. Harriet Coffeen served as assistant postmaster during the second Cleveland administration under postmaster Charles Core. There was considerable controversy in 1889 when 27 candidates for postmaster announced and discussion of an election occurred.^{xlix} Charles Core prevailed over James G. White, the assistant postmaster, in lobbying for the position, and it was Core who held sway with the Republican Party. When Charles Core resigned, there was intensive lobbying by Bert Hamill, George Yount, and other Democrats to appoint someone other than Harriet Coffeen as postmaster. The Democratic delegation to Springfield failed to change the

decision and Harriet Coffeen was sworn in on February 29, 1896.¹ Her husband assisted at the post office until his death on December 28, 1897. Coffeen would remain in the post until Moses C. Thomas took over the post in February 1900.^{li}

Education was one area in which women were ahead. Indeed, the first class of graduates from Homer High School in 1885 included the Long sisters and Mary Smith. The second class in 1886 consisted of five students, again all women. This second class included Alta Woody, future founder of the Tuesday Club. The class of 1887 had eight graduates, including the first men. Charles Coffeen and Fred Gray were the first males to graduate from Homer High School. Charles was the son of M. D., Jr. In the first 20 years only 36% of the graduates were male.^{lii}

The Hotels

A hotel, an important landmark in any town, was in operation in the village from the move in 1855, and would be in operation for the remainder of the century. The Homer House on East First Street provided room and board for visitors exclusively until the building of the Aetna House in 1885. Both hotels had one thing in common, a lack of patrons. Each would change ownership often because of unprofitability.

The Homer House was an institution from Old Homer that was dragged into place in March 1855, on the south side of the first block of East First Street. The original small frame structure was expanded upon. Typical for most hotels, it had a second-floor balcony and an attached privy in the rear. Guests included those arriving at the village for business, events, veterans' reunions, and, most important, the players in the opera house. Persons displaced in a house fire were boarders and some bachelors and older men occasioned the Homer House. Food was served, depending on who was managing the establishment. Boarding rates in the early 1870s were \$3.50 per week but quite a disturbance was created when the rate was raised to \$5.00 per week under new management. "... a number of the former patrons of the house are now gradually starving to death at other hasheries at the usual rate, \$3.50."^{liii}



The Homer House hotel on East First Street. The opera house is on the right.
Homer Historical Society

The Homer House did enjoy somewhat of an unsavory reputation depending on who was operating the hotel. In August 1875 a midnight party was enjoyed by young people until some uninvited “roughs” tried to break it up. The management restored order and the party went on.^{liv} Occasionally a snake oil salesman would work from the hotel, as well as dentists, specialized physicians, or fortune tellers. Fortune teller Madame Lewis charged 50 cents in 1878 and the young people flocked to the hotel for a reading.^{lv}

By the time the frontier was tamed in the 1880s the Homer House had gone through a phase of improvement and offered fine dining. Oysters were served every Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, rivaling the finest eating establishments in the county.

The frequency of management changes accelerated until the Homer Building and Loan Association foreclosed on the property.^{lvi} Emerging from bankruptcy, the Homer House, owned by Chicago resident Miss Rose McBee, was rented to Arnold W. McKinley. He immediately began renovating the old structure. A new coat of paint and a new name adorned the building – Hotel McKinley. The name was an interesting choice as McKinley was a first cousin of President William McKinley and a native of Ohio.^{lvii} As much as McKinley worked on the hotel, it was not to last. At 1:30 p.m. on September 23, 1900, a fire was discovered in the attic storage area of the historic structure. The

opera house to the west was saved by the bucket brigade but the underinsured hotel building was not rebuilt.^{lviii}



A crowd gathers as the Homer House burns on the afternoon of September 23, 1900.
Homer Historical Society Postcard

The Homer House was not the only lodging in town. Several boarding houses were in operation in Homer over the years. The Hummer and Johns house, later run by Mrs. Hummer alone, was in operation in the late 1870s.^{lix} Across the street from the Homer House to the east was a boarding house, known later as Mrs. Cooper's boarding house. The boarding house was a long-term residence with rooms.

Deaths on the Wabash

Railway accidents in the United States became a common occurrence after the invention of railway transportation. Homer was no exception. Passengers, bystanders and employees were all victims in Homer and elsewhere. The mayhem railways created would not be equaled until the coming of the automobile.

In one incident, George Hamilton, a Wabash brakeman, was cut to pieces on September 24, 1886, when he slipped and fell beneath a train at Homer. He was a Decatur resident, married with children and was remembered as one of the best railroad men in the country.^{lx}

One of the worst incidents occurred at 11 minutes past midnight on August 6, 1891, when a mail train, traveling at a high rate of speed, plowed through the rear of a

freight train moving too slowly toward a siding one-half mile west of Homer. The mail train tore into the freight causing the tender to fly over the engine, landing ahead of the wreck. A man riding on the platform of the car behind the tender was killed instantly. The engineer, Frank P. Carter of Springfield, was burned severely and lived less than 24 hours after being taken to a hospital. The men in the mail car suffered a variety of injuries, the most severe being A. J. Mourning, a postal clerk. He was pinned in the wreckage and suffered head injuries. His small son had joined him on the trip and was shaken up. He said, "Pa, I've fallen out of my bed."^{lxi} When the boy realized what had happened he began screaming for help. Mourning asked the doctor arriving on the scene if he was fatally injured, as he wanted to attend to some business before his death. The physician told him he should do so immediately. A porter leaning against a door was thrown through a plate glass window and was found on the platform of the next car. He was badly cut in the arm. Coal oil was found to be dripping near a lit lamp and the rescuers were amazed that the entire wreck did not catch fire.

Despite the tragedy two amusing incidents of the wreck were told, one being of a traveling corpse being shipped to Boston. The casket was buried among the debris but suffered no damage and the corpse suffered no injuries. The corpse was "...totally oblivious to all surroundings."^{lxii}

The other incident related to one of the mail clerks who just happened to be from Homer. He escaped injury, found out where he was, and immediately ran home to tell his wife that he was safe. It was speculated by one paper that she "...no doubt refused to let him return to the wreck."^{lxiii}

Homer's most prominent surviving pioneer in the 1890s was Thomas L. Butler. He was the last surviving veteran of the Black Hawk War and had seen the Salt Fork grow from a few cabins to a vibrant economic community. On April 19, 1894, he was killed instantly by a fast Wabash freight. Initial reports were that he was crossing the tracks when hit but after an investigation Coroner Sims concluded that he was on the platform and staggered backwards. Butler was 87 when he was killed.^{lxiv}

Construction of the Aetna House

In September 1885, the new brick hotel was constructed on the west side of Main Street by Gillespie & Co. of Danville. By December 16, 1885, the hotel, named the Stearns House, was ready for occupancy. The hotel opened to the public the first week of May 1886.^{lxv} J. A. Walker and his wife from Robinson, Illinois, rented the hotel and would be the first managers.

The hotel also provided space for two businesses. Liberty Lee Hamill rented a space in June 1887 and manufactured furniture in the room. The year 1887 brought the renaming of the Stearns House to the Aetna Hotel, a name that would stick to the building until the late 1930s. The year 1887 also marked the year that the hotel began a long series of managers.



The Aetna House on Main Street in Homer in 1896
Homer Historical Society

The Construction of the Opera House

The aging Gilman Hall did not have the capacity to attract the players and performances that were befitting a town of Homer's stature. A project first proposed back in the 1870s was a "town hall" for performances and meetings. While initially called the "town hall," it soon became known as the "opera house" because of the frequent use for performances. Indeed, the term "opera house" was first used in October of 1883, three months after dedication.^{lxvi}

The "Homer Town Hall Association" was formed February 22, 1883, for the purpose of building a town hall. The directors were Solomon Plaut, Moses C. Thomas, Ancil C. Woody, S. B. Ball, and R. S. Hopkins. Henry J. Wiggins was appointed treasurer and William W. Mudge secretary.^{lxvii} At this meeting it was decided to build a two-story frame structure 36 x 90 feet in the lot immediately west of the Homer House. The town hall lot was purchased from Mrs. Holmes for \$300 in March.^{lxviii}

Construction began immediately and by April 25 the town hall was ready for plastering. By May 3 the town hall painting began, and the following week the adjacent Homer House was painted.^{lxix} On the night of May 18 a storm blew through Homer and damaged the town hall. The hall was finally completed in mid-July but Secretary Mudge of the Town Hall Association had to make an announcement to their stock holders to pay up.^{lxx}



Liberty Lee Hamill in the door of his furniture shop in the late 1880s

Lee Somers Photo Collection

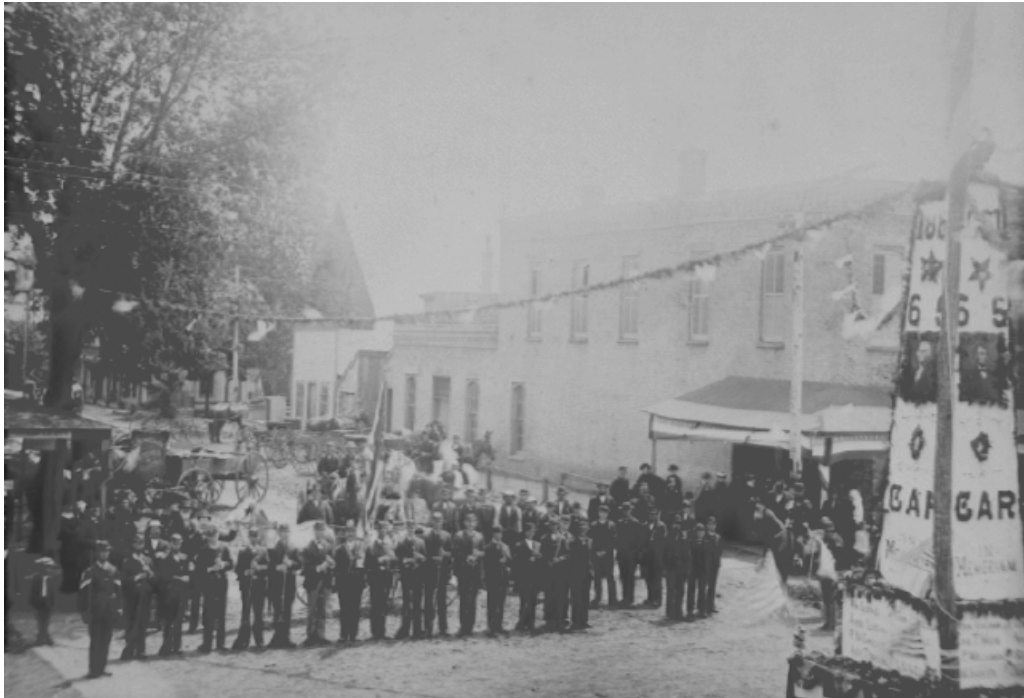
Three hundred invitations were issued for the grand opening of the new building in mid-July for an evening grand ball.^{lxxi} On August 23 the opening concert was given by the Demorest-Heath concert company. An activity that the town hall became well known for was roller skating. William W. Mudge opened the hall Wednesday and Saturday evenings.^{lxxii}

The Grand Army of the Republic

An organization to represent the interest of veterans was founded in Decatur in 1866, but in Homer the Grand Army of the Republic was organized as a post in the spring of 1875. The first post, Post 16, did not last very long but was reconstituted eight years later.^{lxxiii} That reconstructed post of the G.A.R. was formed on May 29, 1883, in the office of Isaiah Humrichouser. A muster was held at the Odd Fellows meeting hall on June 1 with 43 former soldiers present. Henry J. Wiggins was elected post commander; Officers William Custer and Edward Hall and Quartermaster A. C. Woody were also elected. Among the founders of the post were George W. Wilson, Gus Sites, Austin Henderson, Sol Carrell, Aubert Conkey, Charles Harden, and Pat Judge.^{lxxiv} In order to join the veteran must have been honorably discharged and must not have taken up arms against the Union.

The 1883 Soldier's Reunion was a large affair held at the farm of James Yeazel during August of that year. Townspeople donated food to the soldiers, 450 of whom

registered for the two days of festivities, and the overall attendance was estimated at 3000. Most came from Champaign and Vermilion counties but some from other Illinois counties. General John Charles Black was unable to attend but the other entertainment made up for the loss. A dress parade was held at the close and the battery fired twenty-eight rounds.



Pickerill's photograph taken on Friday, May 30, 1884, at Main and First Street looking east. Butler's Hardware building (right) and the new opera house (center) are visible, with Mudge's corner to the left. The monument was built on the town well for the occasion.

Homer Historical Society

The event went off as planned but there were some minor incidents. Someone brought a barrel of whiskey but it was quickly confiscated by those charged with preventing liquor from being sold. A band of 24 roving prostitutes was driven off by the police into the timber. There were only two arrests during the event.^{lxxv}

One of the earliest projects undertaken by the G.A.R. post was Homer's first large Decoration Day celebration. Traditionally in Homer, Decoration Day was a day to travel to the cemeteries, place flowers on the graves, and have a picnic near the graves of fallen soldiers of loved ones. The first large organized celebration was held on May 30, 1884. A 16-foot monument of white muslin, adorned with red, white, and blue, was constructed at the center of Main and First Streets. Floral arrangements were affixed to the monument; on the sides of the base, surrounded by evergreen trim, were the names of the fallen soldiers from Homer and Champaign County. Portraits of presidents Washington,

Lincoln, and Garfield adorned the monument, with an American eagle on the top. Henry J. Wiggins presided over the event, with a crowd estimated at 1500 attending. Ran Wright gave a patriotic memorial address.

The clubs of Homer, the Cornet band, and the G.A.R. Post assembled on Main Street for a program, later parading double file north to the Old Homer cemetery. The band played a funeral dirge as the procession moved north. At the cemetery the Sons of Veterans, another smaller group honoring veterans, fired a salute and the children spread flowers on the graves of the veterans. Seventeen new headstones had been ordered by the post for the soldiers buried in area cemeteries and seven were in position for the ceremony at the Old Homer cemetery.^{lxxvi}

The *Champaign County Herald* observed:

The whole presented a beautiful scene and well worthy the admiration of any people, - reflecting credit upon all those who assisted in its construction, and upon the G.A.R. and the city of Homer, who love liberty and freedom and honor the nation's dead.^{lxxvii}

The largest gathering of people in Homer, estimated between 10,000 and 12,000, once again came to the Yeazel farm two years later for what was billed as the second Soldier's Reunion. The farm was renamed "Camp Yeazel" and, despite the follies occurring during the event, it was proclaimed a success.

The event was set for August 11–13, 1885, for a statewide reunion of Civil War soldiers. Thousands poured into the site from special trains that stopped west of the village to allow people to walk north to the site. Tents were set up for the veterans, along with 60-70 refreshment stands, candy stands, shooting galleries, gambling tents, auctioneers, and other attractions were featured.^{lxxviii}

Great weather greeted the arriving soldiers as the first day was devoted to assigning quarters to the veterans. Dinner was served of pork and beans, something with which the soldiers were familiar. Music was provided by the cornet band and the welcome address was given eloquently by Ran Wright. The event closed with an accident. The evening salute was to be fired from a cannon. When the load was being rammed down, it exploded prematurely. Lt. Park McCowan was injured in the explosion when his right thumb was torn off and his arm broken. Drs. Shaw and Lawson attended the Lieutenant at the Homer House. There were no hard feelings against the artillery men.

The next day, Wednesday, brought the sound of the bugle and the sound of arriving pedestrians, horsemen, and an assortment of wagons and buggies. The Wabash stopped just west of town to discharge passengers into the fields.

...the broad highway leading from the village to the grounds was literally lined with conveyances loaded with rosy-cheeked maidens, robust youths, maned and silver-haired veterans, citizens, and happy matrons, all eager for a glance at the beautiful Camp Yeazel.^{lxxix}

A Chicago correspondent estimated the crowd at 15,000. Governor Hamilton addressed the soldiers who found his address on the causes of war and the duty of citizens worthy of attention. He stayed and ate beans by the campfire instead of having a good dinner in the village. He refused numerous invitations in the area. Other lectures and songs were sung that day. Campfires were lit, and songs, dance and music were carried on into the night.

On Thursday, the scene was repeated. As the day wore on, the soldiers began to depart. Among the groups eating hardtack, beans, and coffee, there were some amusing incidents. Joseph Thomas of Homer was brought before the Provost Marshal for being found in the timber in “Bad company.” Freem Spencer was quoted as saying, “Schtand up! Schtand up! I shay! If you don't schtand up I'd let you fall, sure as (hic) 'ell.”^{lxxx}

The Grand Army of the Republic post in Homer, while holding meetings, lobbying for veteran's benefits, and preserving the legacy of those who fought for the Union, could muster support or opposition to any issue on short notice. The G.A.R. was one of the sources of real power in the village. A war widow in trouble was immediately assisted by the members. The G.A.R. held the respect of the community and veterans were honored at almost every public gathering.

The other centers of power in the village were the Methodist Church and the Republican Party – all containing many of the same members. Virtually all of the G.A.R. members were Republicans, and the leadership of each organization, the church, the party, and the G.A.R., had members drawn from each group. Henry J. Wiggins was not only post commander and on the Methodist Church board but also president of the Citizen's bank. Political leaders were most often veterans. A common view of what Homer should be was held by these groups, additionally supported by the other churches and social groups. Opposition to these groups was unorganized and ineffective. Real divisions in the town would arise over other issues such as taxation.

The Homer Fair

The Homer Fair, a long-remembered event of fall, was built on the success of the Live Stock and Agriculture Association, an annual fall event of livestock in the late 1870s, and the success of the Soldier's Reunions of 1883 and 1885, with the idea that if Homer could provide an event, the people would come.

The Homer Live Stock and Agriculture Association was a two-day event held in October beginning in 1878, drawing farmers from Homer and the surrounding towns to display stock and agriculture products. The events were held in the pasture west of the Homer Seminary building. These events drew large crowds and breeders of sheep, chickens, cattle, and birds. It was known locally as the “Homer Fair” and lasted until 1885. The last event featured horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep. Horses in Homer were of particular interest, having a very good reputation in central Illinois. Those involved in the early Homer Live Stock and Agriculture Association included Charles H. Wallace, Frank

Carter, William Jurgensmeyer, and E. R. Michener. These events rivaled the Champaign County Fair and drew thousands of spectators.

THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL
HOMER FAIR
AUGUST 19 TO 22, 1902,
Is the great coming event of importance to all the
people within a radius of 20 miles of Homer.

Greater Attractions!
More Fast Racing!

Advertising emphasized the racing at the fair
Homer Historical Society

The success of the Homer Live Stock and Agriculture Association made the need for a permanent site obvious to the fair organizers. William W. Mudge received a license to sell stock in the "Homer Fair Association" for the price of \$20. The shares went on sale in late April 1889 and within ten days the stock was nearly all sold.^{lxxxix} William W. Mudge and Joseph Thomas traveled to Chicago to arrange the purchase of construction materials in mid-June as 3-12 men worked to remove the stumps and trim the trees on the site of the grounds south of the covered bridge.^{lxxxii}

The construction of the fairgrounds was a major undertaking. Over \$6,000 were expended on the fairgrounds. A one-half-mile horse racing track, an exhibition hall, a poultry house, wells, stalls for stock, grandstands, and 1,680 fence posts were all part of the fairground construction. The floral hall was a frame building 32 x 120, built by Lafe McWhorter. A dining hall, 82 x 24, was built, and the covered stock stalls, 175 x 30, could accommodate 402 exhibits. The 150-foot-long grandstand, or amphitheater, was built by Dungan & Wallace with a contract to build the viewing stand in 30 days.^{lxxxiii} Joe Bennett, secretary of the association, set the first fair at the new fairgrounds for August 20-23. Secretary Bennett's premium list amounted to \$4,000 in premiums to be awarded.

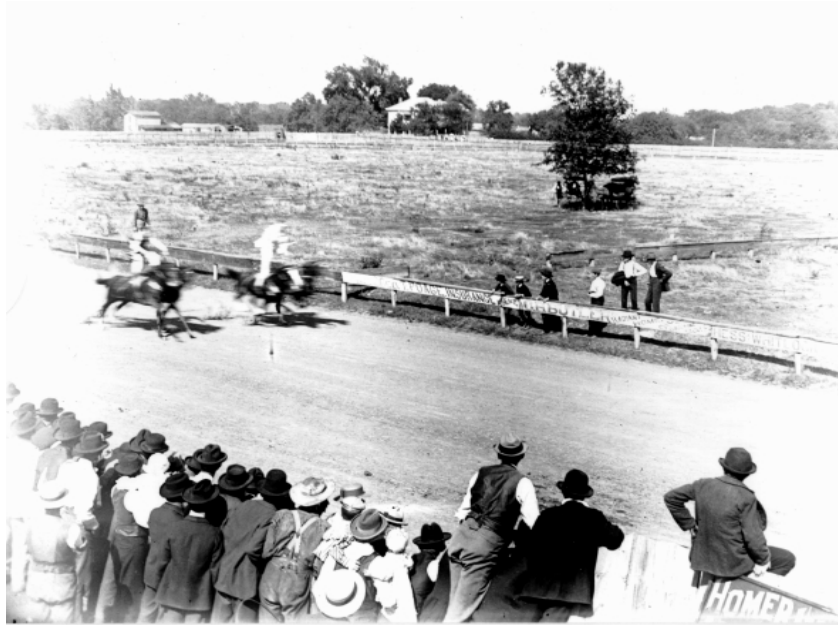


The Homer Fair. The Christian Church dining hall is seen in the center.
Parish Collection, Homer Historical Society

The fairgrounds dedication was held on August 4, 1889. The C and R band was at the grounds and a day of horse racing was featured. Opening day at the first Homer Fair was August 20 and clear skies greeted the crowds. “Homer was never known to do anything by halves,” the *Champaign County Gazette* observed, “and her first fair is no exception to the rule.”^{lxxxiv} Indeed, every aspect of the fair was considered. Moses C. Thomas and John Smoot ran a feed stable across the Homer-Ogden road at the latter’s home, charging 20 cents for oats and hay, and 10 cents for a horse without feed. Roads were sprinkled with water each night of the fair to keep the dust down. The 200-seat dining hall was run by Frank Hays and Ollie Strayhorn. Even the village was cleaned and windows were washed.^{lxxxv}

The large fair was not without mishaps. On Thursday of the fair, Wade Young, a boy, was run over by a pony but was unhurt, save for a disfigured lip. Friday, August 23, 1889, featured more horse racing. Many local men raced horses in the events, including 26-year-old “Banty” Swearingen. In the novelty race Swearingen was riding a horse named “Alice Moore.” The horse was hard to control and from the start “Alice Moore” was dropping back. When at about 75 yards from the start Swearingen and the horse fell. The horse rolled over him in a cloud of dust. The riderless horse ran wildly around the track as men ran to Swearingen’s aid. A crowd gathered around the unconscious rider who was bleeding from his mouth, nose, and ears. Drs. Lawson and McCance were called

but Swearingen died about thirty minutes later. He was buried in the Old Homer cemetery that Sunday.^{lxxxvi}



Horse racing at the Homer Fair was one of the most popular attractions. Races were also held on the 4th of July at the racetrack.
Parish Collection, Homer Historical Society

The fairgrounds would also be used for other events, and the first such event held there was a camp meeting of African-Americans organized by Joe Cherry of Danville and Wiley Jones of Homer.^{lxxxvii}

Homer Schools – The New Village School

To the children of the village, Homer's most memorable landmark was the village school constructed in the summer of 1890. The school, built as a replacement for the 1857 Homer seminary, was both beloved and cursed by those who spent time enduring lectures and readings, occasionally broken by recess, holidays, and the freedom of summer.

The seminary became impossible to maintain as plaster was falling and annually the teachers were repainting and papering the rooms. The deterioration of the building finally was recognized and a bond issue for a new village school was submitted to the voters in the April 1890 election and passed 114 to 75.^{lxxxviii} The process was completed with a second, special election held on Saturday, June 14. This ratified the April result by a majority of 53 votes and a plan was approved for a two-story, eight-schoolroom frame

building with separate basement playrooms for boys and girls.



The new village school, which replaced the Homer Seminary building in November 1890, was continuously beset by heating problems.

Homer Historical Society

Bids were received by five firms, three from Danville, one from Attica, and Lafe McWhorter in Homer. The lowest bid was from Steube & Schultz from Danville for a completed building at \$7,267. Work was to be commenced at once and completed by October 1.^{lxxxix}

The new schoolhouse was built immediately north of the old seminary and a few feet farther east. The old seminary was torn down and the lumber, windows, and doors were sold at the school grounds on June 28, bringing \$167.^{xc}

The task of the brick foundation was given to E. W. Burdick, and the foundation was completed by the last week of July. The work crews of Steube & Schultz, ranging from 10-15 men, began the roof of the schoolhouse in mid-August.^{xcⁱ} School did not begin in the village in the fall of 1890, awaiting the completion of the schoolhouse. The old schoolhouse seats were discarded and 335 new seats were purchased in September for the pupils. Ed Mudge supplied the curtains. As the October deadline neared, Steube & Schultz put more men into the project but delays in the arrival of the doors and windows held up the project.^{xcⁱⁱ}

The delays of the new schoolhouse caused Steube & Schultz to pay \$300 to the board of education in January 1891 due to the breach of contract.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} All was not well

with the new school. The furnace, that first year, was either overheating or not functioning at all. The system required a complete rebuild the following year.^{xciv}

The completion of what was to be called the “grade school” generated hope in the form of an idea to have a “high school,” and in February 1891, petitions were circulated for a separate high school building.^{xcv} This would be the beginning of a long fight, one most of the 1890s generation would not live to see resolved.

Homer’s Jewish Families

One of Homer’s greatest citizens arrived as a merchant from Milford, Illinois, seeking opportunities in a larger town in 1866. Solomon Plaut immigrated to the United States from Germany at the age of 15 in 1853, following his sisters to the new world. Plaut worked in the butcher’s trade in Indiana, failing until finding success as a merchant. In the clothing business Plaut began to find success at Oxford, Indiana, and moved to the larger village of Milford. He remained there three years until in 1866 he sold the business to move to an even larger village, Homer.

In Homer, Solomon Plaut opened a store rivaling the Coffeen warehouse, capitalizing on the village’s post-Civil War boom. Plaut was married to Sarah Solomon in 1862 in the Lafayette, Indiana, synagogue, and they had three sons and four daughters. The Solomon family was prominent in early Fithian. Moses and Samuel managed a store in Fithian before moving to Rensselaer, Indiana.^{xcvi} The Plaut family formed the core of Homer’s Jewish community.

Plaut was an immediate success in business and in the village. His achievements in the mercantile arena led to the establishment of a private bank in 1875. Plaut made loans on real estate and when the collapse of the Homer Bank occurred in January 1878, Plaut immediately rented the former home of the Homer Bank. He moved his safes and funds and began a small public banking business.^{xcvii} By 1880, he was doing business as the “Citizen’s Bank,” later forming the “First National Bank,” being the only banker for miles.

His success extended to the public arena as well. From the earliest days of village government, Solomon Plaut served in some capacity, as treasurer from 1876 and as village trustee. Solomon Plaut brought into his employ another man who would have a lasting legacy on the village, Emanuel Isaac Fisher.

Emanuel Fisher, the cashier at Plaut’s bank, was born in 1854 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the second child of German Jewish immigrants. Fisher attended Bryant & Stratton Business College in Ft. Wayne, graduating in 1875, and arriving in Homer in 1879. He married Clara Bernstein in October 1886 in Napoleon, Ohio. When the bank was formed in 1883, Fisher became the cashier, an important position in the administration of early banks. Like Plaut, he was elected as village treasurer and managed the Homer Opera House Association.^{xcviii}



**A meeting of the Ladies Literature Circle in 1886 at the home of Emanuel Fisher (standing left).
This Jewish women's group was primarily from Champaign-Urbana.**

Cohen Papers, Illinois Historical Survey, University of Illinois

The importance of the Plauts and Fishers cannot be understated. Homer's music culture prior to the arrival of the Plauts consisted of small groups playing popular tunes of the time. What began to happen as the more sophisticated outsiders arrived was the need for more formal musical instruction and for concerts. Emanuel Fisher was one who made sure the opera house had quality classical musical entertainment. The schools likewise followed with classical musical instruction, and weddings and social events of the 1880s began to feature string quartets. The Plaut and Fisher homes would hold musical entertainment featuring artists and their children as performers. The Fishers and Plauts were invited to all the social events and likewise they invited others to theirs. Emanuel Fisher was a member of the Masonic order in Homer. The Plaut children attended the village school but moved to Danville before graduation. Adolph (Ad) and Mike Plaut became important members of Danville's business community and were highly regarded in Homer.

Solomon Plaut moved to Danville in 1888 after the sale of the First National Bank in Homer to Henry J. Wiggins and Emanuel Fisher. Plaut continued in banking and the brokerage business and in January 1891 was elected president of the state bank in Danville. The Plauts returned to Homer for social events as did their children for years after.



Solomon Plaut's children with Emanuel Fisher (center back row) in the mid-1880s. Samuel, Adolph, and Michael Plaut with sisters Miriam, Adeline, Emma, and Carrie
Babb Collection, Homer Historical Society

The last grand event of Homer's Jewish community was on April 15, 1898, when 60 friends were summoned to the Fisher home for a *Musical*, an evening of music. Solomon Cohen sang and the Fishers' daughter, Florence, danced for the guests. Susie Woody played the violin and her sister Alta sang for the crowd.^{xcix} This event ended a nearly two-decade run of events at the Plauts' and Fishers' homes.

Emanuel Fisher left Homer in October 1898 for Indianapolis, and the Homer correspondent for the *Champaign County News* summed up Fisher's relationship with the community: "As a member of the city council and board of education Mr. Fisher had proved himself an earnest and efficient worker."^c Fisher's brother Moses was president of Capital Paper Company of Indianapolis and Emanuel became treasurer for Capital Paper.

Solomon Plaut died on January 23, 1910, of a heart attack. In addition to his banking, he owned farmland at the time of his death. His net worth at the time of his death was just under \$1,000,000.^{ci} Emanuel Fisher died in Indianapolis on October 25, 1913, at the age of 59. Fisher was ill and took a drug to relieve the symptoms. The coroner found that his death was due to accidental poisoning from the drug. At the time of his death he was not only treasurer of the Capital Paper Company, but also of the Frank Bird Transfer Company and director of the Indiana National Bank.^{cii} His wife

Clara Bernstein Fisher followed in death April 1918.^{ciii}

The Creation of the G. A. R. Cemetery

The Grand Army of the Republic Post 263's greatest initiative was the creation of a cemetery to honor the dead of the conflict of 1861-65 and to bury the families of the soldiers. The cemetery was to become the primary burial ground for the village.

In July 1886, five acres of land were purchased from George Eggleston on the eastern part of town for a cemetery. The plan was to prepare the ground by August 15 for burials.^{civ} The cemetery was not completed by that time and in March 1887 an eight-inch tile was installed from the cemetery to the Custer branch and another tile along East First Street 200 yards to the west. The following month maple trees were planted in rows around the cemetery. A driveway was created and maples were planted along each side of the drive.^{cv}

While there are people who died as early as the 1850s buried in the cemetery, these were removed from other burial sites and moved to family plots. The earliest burials were the children from the diphtheria epidemic of 1886-87. In the fall of 1886 a diphtheria outbreak struck the children of Homer. Woodroe Michener was the first victim, dying in the second week of November.^{cvi} The Wideawake rural school was closed during the epidemic. Ned and Lottie Barnes' daughter Ethel, three years old, succumbed on November 14.^{cvi} Harvey Hall's youngest girl died on January 8 and his eldest contracted the disease the following week.^{cvi}

Jacob H. Benjamin of the 25th Illinois Infantry was the first soldier buried in the Soldier's Circle of the cemetery. He was buried on June 21, 1889, by the G.A.R. post.^{cix} The most significant monument in the cemetery is the "Soldier's Monument" in the center of the soldier's circle. The monument, made of dark Barre, Vermont, granite, was purchased for \$900 by Mattie Butler, chairman of the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), the Grand Army of the Republic's women's auxiliary organization, and Henry J. Wiggins, chairman of the monument committee of the G.A.R. The monument was purchased from Clark Monument Company in Champaign and was unveiled at a ceremony on August 20, 1901. Mattie Butler gave a history of the monument but the featured speaker that day was *Enterprise* editor J. P. Martin's wife Addie Martin. Reverend Poe gave the prayer and Henry J. Wiggins addressed the crowd.^{cx}

Another notable monument in the cemetery is the Custer monument, erected by Martin B. Custer in honor of his first wife and himself. On the shaft of the metallic monument are portraits of Custer and his wife. Materials cost \$1,250 and the sculptured faces cost \$350. The monument was erected in the Davis cemetery in 1884 but in September 1907 the monument was removed to the G.A.R. cemetery by Clark and Company of Urbana, and the remains of Custer's second wife were buried there.^{cx}

The Soldier's Widows Home

One of the most remarkable efforts during the latter 1890s was the lobbying to locate the Soldier's Widows Home in Homer. The Women's Relief Corps became an important part of remembering the veterans and supporting their medical and housing needs. There were 215 chapters in Illinois in 1893.

Col. Tinkham's wife, Caroline Coffeen Tinkham, was the chairman of the committee searching for the location of the home and a state leader of the work of the WRC. She was interviewed in March 1892 about the work, specifically the proposal to build a home for the veteran's widows. "We feel sure that we will have a Home before long for the dependent widows, daughters and mothers of Illinois soldiers," Tinkham explained. She was asked if she had an idea of where the home would be located. "Not yet. Of course it will have to go to the town offering the largest bonus. We have one place in view of 20 acres, on which there is a ten-room house, and that would answer the purpose for the present. This property could be purchased for \$5000." She also explained about the prospects for Homer. "We have a site in view here in Homer. One gentleman here agreed to give two acres of ground, and sell as much more as is needed at a reasonable price."^{cxii}

Fundraising in Homer was begun and meetings were held in May 1892 for fundraising. The women enlisted Rep. Joseph Cannon of Danville in their effort. He spoke at a meeting for fundraising and influencing the decision for the home.^{cxiii} By late June nearly \$5000 had been raised and the *Herald* correspondent stated that it "...is pretty sure to be located here."^{cxiv}

The *Champaign County Gazette* assured readers in January 1893 that the location of the home was "...an assured fact."^{cxv} While they admitted that there were differences of opinion between the locating committee and the citizen's committee, the belief was that it was just which home to use.



The Tinkham home on south Ellen Street was proposed to be the Soldier's Widows Home. Built during the summer of 1886 just south of the Wabash tracks, the home burned on April 9, 1918.

Tudor Collection, Homer Historical Society

It would be another year until the decision was made and in July 1893 the Women's Relief Corps decided to award the home to Wilmington, Illinois. The home was named "Oak View" and Homer was outdistanced by another town.^{cxvi}

The Coming of the Bicycle

Bicycles were a form of transportation to make their appearance in Homer in the late 1880s as they became popular nationwide. James G. White paid \$75 for his new bicycle in May 1888.^{cxvii} The earliest recorded road trip by Homer's young cyclists was August 18, 1889, when James White, Joseph Yount, and Pearl Wiggins took their bicycles to Sidney, St. Joseph, and Ogden on a Sunday. James White did take a tumble when they tried out their bicycles on the fairgrounds race track.^{cxviii}

Women also began to purchase bicycles. In March of 1893 Effie Smith, Bertha Shepherd, and Ella Thomas purchased new bicycles.^{cxix} Frank Conkey purchased his bicycle in August 1892 but one event would insure the popularity of the bicycle for years to come – a bicycle race.^{cxx}

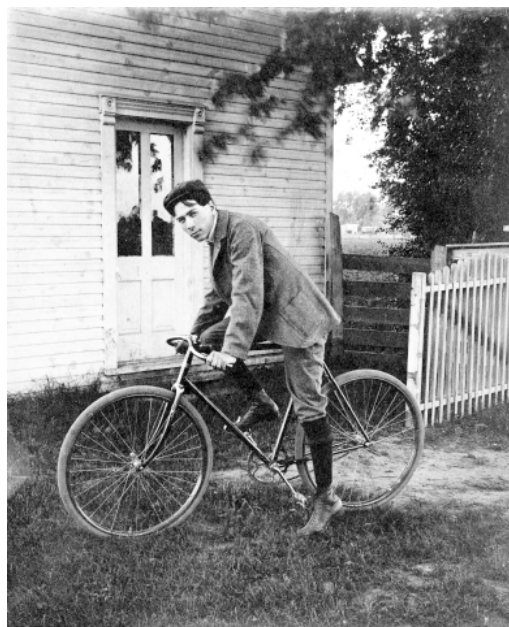
The county's first bicycle race was sponsored by Zi Riley's Jewelry and Bicycle shop in Champaign. Billed as "The Riley Road Race," it brought out a large crowd. On Tuesday, May 3, 1893, the cyclists assembled at 11:00 a.m. for a group photograph in front of Riley's Jewelry store, then boarded the train for Homer. Cycles were loaded but it was not until after 1 o'clock when the train unloaded in Homer. A large crowd greeted the entourage and the festivities were compared to circus day. Homer's entry into the race was James Farlee, Jr., the son of Kentucky-born James Farlee. Farlee was given a three-minute handicap.



**The Champaign County News ran this drawing of the Homer -
to-Champaign race held May 3, 1893.**

University of Illinois Newspaper Library

The race began at 1:44 p.m. with staggered starts, two cyclists at a time. B. F. Lansaw and Jensen began, followed by C. Riley and W. H. Riley one minute later. There were 28 entrants but only 15 started. The crowds along the road were large and when the cyclists came to Sidney the entire town was lined with well-wishers. Lansaw was the winner with Frank Sperry closely following Lansaw 50 seconds later. Homer's Farlee came in fourth place with a time of 1:42:30. Eleven of the 15 finished the race and the winner was given a gold medal. Sperry, the runner up, was awarded a gold watch. Jesse Nicolet, came in third and there were no serious accidents.^{cxxi} After the success of the Riley race, the Homer Fairgrounds were the site of the next races on July 4, 1893. Several heats were run that year.^{cxxii}



**Homer's bicycle shop (left) was located on East First Street across from the Homer House.
Wilbur Tudor (right) on his bicycle about 1898**

Parish Collection, Homer Historical Society, Phil Smith photograph

The spring of the following year brought out the cyclists once again. Barton Parish and Frank Carroll made a trip to Danville in May 1894. Parish, in March 1897, would resign his position at the depot and rent B. F. Waugh's bicycle repair shop.^{cxxiii} By 1898 bicycles were a common sight. Cliff McWhorter and Miss Thompson took a bicycle trip to Champaign on a Sunday in July 1898 as others rode to Danville that Saturday.^{cxxiv} Bicycle racks became a part of Main Street in August of that year when Van Natta and Smoot had a rack with their advertising painted on it.^{cxxv} That year Wilbur Tudor set off for Purdue University and one of his passions was cycling. He rode much of Indiana on a bicycle during his college years.^{cxxvi}

At 9 a.m. on April 17, 1896, two men came to Homer and stole Fred Hamill's bicycle. Hamill, a young attorney, did not know about the theft until 11 a.m. when he found it missing. Barton Parish, an avid cyclist, jumped on his bicycle and headed north toward Ogden. A farmer told him that he had seen two men with a bicycle heading toward Ogden. Parish continued to Ogden where he was told they headed east. He followed the men to a point just outside Batestown where he found them. He was riding toward the pair when he called out, asking the distance to Danville. He rode up to the wheelman and pulled a revolver, shoving it into his face. Parish demanded they hand over the bicycle. They admitted the cycle was from Homer but denied the theft. The men were released and fled for the woods. Parish brought the cycle back to Homer and reported the

matter to the police. Hamill was reported as overjoyed.^{cxxvii}

There were those not amused by the bicycle and the village was forced to take action against cyclists riding on the sidewalks. Evening walks were common in good weather and cyclists, avoiding muddy streets, became a nuisance. On June 2, 1896, the village board adopted an ordinance making a misdemeanor of riding on the sidewalk. Fines were assessed at from \$3 to \$25.^{cxxviii}

Morality during Homer's Golden Age

During the years from 1882 to 1898 morality and sobriety were not ignored. The *Champaign County Gazette* reporter from Homer was bragging in March 1883 when he declared:

Homer citizens can boast of no saloons and no man mean enough to violate the law by selling on the sly. Every druggist is a member of some church, and our people are enthusiastic over the prospect of a quiet and happy future. Indeed, Homer is ranking among the best towns in central Illinois for order and sobriety.^{cxxix}

When attorney Cassius "Cash" Elder became justice of the peace in 1883, the former temperance speaker went to work handing stiff fines to offenders.^{cxxx} Just how far the crackdown on liquor would go was demonstrated with the arrests of Homer's two druggists: John A. Tudor and Edward Mudge. Pharmacies were allowed to dispense alcohol but Mudge's store, formerly the location of a bar, was distributing alcohol. Families would purchase alcohol for medicinal use but sales were going beyond what was legally permissible. In the summer of 1883 both pharmacists were charged in the Champaign County courts and plead guilty. They were fined \$20.^{cxxxi} Tudor and Mudge were not alone.



Edward Mudge (left) and John A. Tudor (right) were both arrested for selling alcohol from their pharmacies during the crack down of 1883.

Coffeen Collection, Homer Historical Society and Philip Smith photo

The case of George Veach in July 1883 for selling “sweet cider” was tried before Justice Elder. Despite excellent legal assistance from two attorneys, the witnesses swore that they became intoxicated after drinking two glasses of Veach’s cider. Veach plead guilty and was fined \$53.^{cxxxii} The trial of Elias Gibson for two counts of selling “sweet cider” followed the next week. Gibson was fined \$40 and costs.^{cxxxiii} It was observed that Gibson had left Homer for a warmer climate.^{cxxxiv}

William Robinson, a farmer from the Lost Grove-Sidney area, had a serious dilemma after taking up the temperance cause. Robinson had manufactured wine for years in the 1870s and had a good supply in his cellar. Churches would come to him for sacramental wine but he believed colored water would work just as well and in 1886 he no longer even gave it to churches. The license to sell the wine was too much money and it was illegal to give it away. The supply of wine was just sitting there but on occasion Robinson would show a sympathetic friend the dilemma and the pile would get just a bit smaller.^{cxxxv}

Sexual immorality continued to be a concern. In the Poage neighborhood one of the men was keeping a prostitute near his residence and was allegedly beating his wife. In June 1884 the *Enterprise* warned that if another disturbance takes place, “...a coat of tar and feathers will be served up in good shape.”^{cxxxvi}

The death of Hellen Lyons Coffeen on October 24, 1885, was marked with a large funeral. Her son William was arrested November 2 in Champaign at Kate Mullin’s house, a regularly raided house of ill-repute. After the police arrested Coffeen he was fined \$25. A friend came to give him the money for the fine but he ran away with the money.^{cxxxvii}

Perhaps the most discussed gambling raid in Homer’s history took place on August 27, 1897, at the Homer House. Four Homer men were playing cards when constable Sites and several deputized men burst into the room. A bucketful of cards and poker chips were seized. The men were fined \$25 each but Mayor Ran Wright intervened. At the trial Wright made a motion to dismiss the matter. Public anger at Wright for allowing the men to go free was sharp. Ran Wright would be replaced by Joseph Bennett in the April election.^{cxxxviii}

Crime and Punishment

In 1889 two men, Jasper Penny and an associate named Kissinger lived in a cabin north of the village in the timber. Jasper was born in Homer in 1854, the son of Courtney Penny. Penny and Kissinger had lived in Homer several years, occasionally taking odd jobs as laborers. The two began to manufacture silver dollars and passed the counterfeits in the village. They had been successful for almost a year, as merchants, the victims, did

not notice these counterfeits. Success became too much for the pair and they became bolder. On the evening of September 12, 1889, the two went in to Nichols' butcher shop and paid for groceries with one of their dollars. Penny took the groceries and headed for the timber but Kissinger was questioned by Nichols on the origins of the dollar. Nichols called for the constable and Kissinger was arrested. A posse quickly formed and captured Penny before he returned to the timber.^{cxix} By January 1890 the trio were given one year each.^{cxl}

Two crimes that took place in the townships surrounding Homer had an effect on the village and were viewed at the time as some of the worst crimes in the county's history. The rape of an Ogden girl in 1896 and the murder of a transient in Sidney in August 1898 caused outrage in Homer and among the families involved living in Homer.

Vigilante justice in Homer was rare but certain issues could cause an angry crowd to gather at a moment's notice in any town. One such case was in June 1896 when Gertrude Parish, a girl of 16 working as a domestic, was allegedly raped northwest of Ogden by three young men aged 20 to 21.

On the evening of June 11, 1896, Charles Wiley of Ogden rode out to the home where the girl was working and told her that her mother was seriously ill and that she should come immediately. Wiley produced a revolver and was joined by acquaintances Arthur Thompson and Thomas Hixenbaugh in another wagon. The trio allegedly took her to a wooded area for the rest of the night. She begged for her life and promised not to tell anyone.^{cxli}

Parish was violently ill for several days and was taken by her employer to a physician. They urged her to tell her parents, which she did. The case was taken to Homer by her parents and was heard before Justice Carroll and a warrant was issued for the three suspects. The story was on the streets of Ogden and Homer and crowds began to gather. The *Danville Weekly News* observed, "The commission of the crime is the topic of conversation and there is fear that if the authorities do not take extra precaution the citizens may consult Judge Lynch."^{cxlii} The men were detained in Ogden first but moved to Homer where an angry mob met them. Constable Sites and Marshal Peyton were forced to move people back from the calaboose as the prisoners were taunted by the angry crowd. For the safety of the prisoners the men were moved to Urbana, arriving at 4 a.m. The men were given bond of \$600 each and tried in September 1897. Charles Wiley was additionally tried for a charge of carrying a concealed weapon. The three were found not guilty of the crime.^{cxliii}

Another case that inflamed the public was the murder of Charles Freebryant in Sidney. On Saturday morning, September 3, 1898, a farmer traveling to Sidney discovered some rubbish and chicken coops by the side of the road southeast of Sidney. He examined the debris and discovered blood on a board. Looking farther he found a body lying near a hedge fence. He went to Sidney and told the authorities there. The coroner was called and the body was that of Charles Freebryant, a chicken thief living in the area.^{cxliv} It was determined that he was probably killed by his fellow thieves known to be in the area.

Two men emerged as suspects: John and Richard Collier. The Danville brothers were part of a large family familiar to law enforcement circles. The brothers were known as habitual lawbreakers, mostly petty crimes of theft. The men were arrested and John immediately pointed to his older brother Richard as the shooter. Richard was not as intelligent as John, John stating, “Well, Dick’s a little off.”^{cxlv} It was Richard that would pay the price for the crime. Both were tried and convicted, Richard’s defense being self-defense. John received a long sentence in the penitentiary and Richard was sentenced to hang.

No one disputed that Richard Collier was somewhat retarded but that was not seen as a reason to excuse the crime. In his final statement he said, “I lived a good moral life until I was 21 years of age, when I fell in with bad company and began to drink.” Collier was executed in Urbana on December 13, 1898.^{cxlvi}

The Colliers were known in Homer, some members of the family living in the township. A dozen people from Homer attended the hanging, leaving at 1 a.m. the morning before.^{cxlvii} Homer’s Robert Tracy, Collier’s brother-in-law, took charge of the body; Collier was buried in Danville.

The Most Beautiful Woman in Homer

Reputed to be the most beautiful woman in Homer, Pearl Summers left a string of scandals and a reputation that would span the entire decade of the 1880s. The daughter of war veteran Captain Charles A. and wife Anna Summers, Pearl married Jack Umbanhowar in Danville in December 1882. Umbanhowar was a Wabash Railroad employee. After the wedding they returned to live in Homer.^{cxlviii} Within months, Jack became ill with tuberculosis and moved back in with his mother during the illness. When he died in May 1883 Pearl went back to using her maiden name.

This young widow of incredible beauty began to cut quite a path in the village. In mid-1886 Pearl caught the eye of Elmer Hollensbe, a young traveling salesman for the Charles Hamlin Company of Lafayette, Indiana, and a frequent visitor to Homer. Hollensbe was married but Pearl’s charm was such that he began to lavish Pearl with gifts, embezzling money from the company. His embezzlement was tallied at \$2000.

Hollensbe was forced to flee to Canada when the embezzlement was discovered but he was located 65 miles from Detroit by detective Mat Pinkerton. Pinkerton used a female decoy to lure Hollensbe back to the United States for prosecution. As part of the investigation Pinkerton returned to Homer with Hollensbe but this turned out to be unnecessary. Hollensbe was willing to tell his story to all who would listen. He willingly went to the Indiana penitentiary pleading guilty to the crime.^{cxlix} The Homer correspondent to the *Champaign County Herald* stated that Hollensbe was knitting stockings in the Indiana pen. “I wonder if he won’t send us a new pair for a Christmas present with ‘pearl’ lining.”^{cl}

Pearl Summer’s final conquest came in the form of a prominent married grocer, Ed Stokes. Stokes lived with his elderly mother, wife and children and was an important

village businessman. Stokes was planning to make Homer his permanent home. A native of England, Ed Stokes was renovating his grocery store in February 1885.^{cli} The rumors began when the Stokes' family suddenly moved back to England in the spring of 1887. Ed Stokes and Pearl Summers were missing and presumed eloped.^{clii} M. L. Hollis took Stokes' grocery and Stokes never returned. Pearl, however, did return to Homer. Ironically she lived with her mother and she too succumbed to the same disease that killed her former husband Jack – tuberculosis. She died September 22, 1889 at her mother's home. A terse funeral service was held at the house and her body taken to the family plot in Old Homer cemetery.^{cliii}

The Homer Follies

Like any other town Homer had its share of strange stories and tales. Some of the more interesting ones were handed down, and some stories from the era remained buried for over a century.

The Cash Divorce – Joe Cash and his wife decided to divorce in March 1884 but the couple was forced by circumstances to forge a compromise. They decided to raise a crop and she would leave if given \$200. They cohabitated until the crop was harvested.^{cliv}

Henry Depue's Aerial Propeller – Of the many inventors and eccentrics of Homer was Michael Henry Depue. Born in Texas in 1860, Depue's mother died just after giving birth to him. He moved with his father who was a carpenter and spent his childhood with an unrelated family. His father eventually married a member of the family. Henry became a carpenter but had a unique gift to create interesting designs and inventions.

The invention that caught the attention of the public was his "Aerial Propeller" patented on June 3, 1884. Control of lighter-than-air craft was a problem that, if solved, could usher in an era of air travel. Featured in the August 30, 1884, *Scientific American*, Henry Depue's propeller was envisioned to be used in a horizontal orientation to pull a craft forward. Patent 299,762 was entitled a "feathering paddle wheel" and was for use in air or water, adaptable to water wheels, windmills, or for "flying-machines." "The invention is intended, primarily, as a propeller for a flying-machine; but the same principle may be readily adapted to boar propulsion; or it may be adapted to windmills and to current-water wheels."^{clv} Not as significant as Dr. Mosier's patented corn plow, the aerial propeller did attract attention. In January 1885 Depue went to Springfield to organize a stock company to "build and operate flying machines." His effort was unsuccessful.^{clvi}

Carrie Plaut's Pet – Carrie Plaut, Solomon Plaut's daughter, accompanied her grandmother, Mrs. Solomon, on a one year trip to Colorado. She returned in June 1885 bringing with her a mountain antelope. The Carrie's pet became quite a hit in the town as people came to the Plaut home to see it and feed the friendly antelope. The antelope met an untimely death when it became entangled in the hammock in the yard and strangled to death. The children in the area were upset by the loss of the pet.^{clvii}

A Contest in Homer – A contest was held in March 1886 where votes were cast

for the stingiest man and the most popular lady. In the results of the fund raiser, J. M. Ocheltree was voted the stingiest man but George Eggleston was a close second. Two Homer High School seniors, Alta Woody with 1220 votes and Nora Ewin with 1167 votes, vied for most popular.^{clviii}

The Wandering Cows – The problem of wandering animals was a chronic one for the village as residents erected fences to keep cattle from their yards and gardens. Cornfields were fenced to protect them from wandering cattle but many farmers believed they had a right to allow their animals to roam at large. The February 1882 ordinance provided for an animal to be impounded and animals redeemed or sold after two days. David Michener did not agree.*

The Michener family was one of the Ohio settlers who pioneered the prairie lands of Homer. Some of his cows were seeing the sights in the village in May 1886 and were sent to the pound. Several nights later eight of the village cows came wandering down the road to his farm so he impounded them and demanded \$2 each for the cows. Some of the villagers actually paid the “fine” but 12 more of Michener’s cattle were found wandering the village and were impounded. The fines amounted to \$6 and he was forced to promise not to impound any more village cows.^{clix} Lemuel Thompson was another man who wanted his cows to run free and was charged in November 1889 with the crime. He was hauled before Justice of the Peace Sol Carroll and the case was decided in favor of the prosecution.^{clx}

An Angry Complaint about Homer – An itinerant performer, one E. R. Warren from Decatur, who contracted to entertain at the opera house in February 1886, left a bill of \$45 for rent of the hall, angry that his audience went to “...an idiotic church meeting.”^{clxi} Warren vented his opinion of Homer in a letter he left with the editor of the *Enterprise*.

...I got stuck on your blamed old town. I never saw such an ignorant set, devoid of every thing that gives tone to a town. There is not enough intelligence in Homer to carry guts to a Montana bear. This is not meant to be personal, for you treated me all right, but I must say that the dudes of Homer does not rate very high.^{clxii}

He added a post script, “I will go to some town where there are not so many dudes.”

The Lost Treasure of the Salt Fork – In areas where there is widespread poverty tales of buried treasure from the formerly prosperous people abound. Homer has one such story that spanned from the 1860s into the 1960s when Will Yount told the same story to the press in honor of his 92nd birthday.

Sarah Yount, wife of settler Joseph Yount, supposedly buried money on their

* Cattle were typically branded to identify the owners. Elijah Morrison used “33” to brand his wandering cattle. Willard Morrison donated the brands to the Homer Historical Society in 2005.

farm east of the Old Homer village. “It was a common sight to see her hobbling with her crutch and spade to some part of the farm, to hide money she had hoarded,”^{clxiii} the story went. One man, George Myers, purchased 21 acres of timber on the old Yount farm in February 1886 – to continue his 20-year search digging for the treasure. Treasure hunts continued and the treasure, if there ever was one, was never found.^{clxiv}

The Case of the Lost Hogs – In the spring of 1892 a farmer in Homer had a large stack of hay fall over on two hogs. The hay mound was so large the farmer did not bother digging them out. In the fall when he was moving the mound he discovered the hogs were still alive. They were in poor condition but the farmer nursed them back to health. The following spring, he sold them for \$96.30. DCOM March 30, 1893 page 3.

Sidney vs. Homer – In the spring of 1896 another episode in the feud between Sidney and Homer was played out. A change in the Wabash timecard showed that trains that at one time stopped at Homer would no longer stop but would stop at Sidney. Some Sidney citizens decided to have some fun and began to send large amounts of postcards to Homer merchants informing them that the Wabash was bypassing Homer. The fact was that Sidney was finally going to be served, but the train would only stop when the flag was out to notify the engineer that a passenger was waiting.^{clxv}

The next week postcards were sent by Sidney people inviting Homer to move their town to “get all the benefits of a first-class town.” Hundreds of postcards were exchanged but there was no evidence that Homer considered the offer.^{clxvi}

The Spanish American War



Homer boys in the Spanish-American War: third from left, George Hodgson; seventh, Ira Jamison; ninth, Herbert Lacey
Homer Historical Society

The Spanish-American war in Homer did not excite the same passions as the Civil War but Homer did send their boys to war. Theodore Robinson of Homer was a captain

in the U. S. Navy at the outbreak of the war and served as a gunnery officer. Before battle the men he commanded were on half rations for a week due to poor supplies off the Cuban coast. Supplies were so short the sailors were known to swim to shore nightly for food. When the engagements of July occurred, Robinson manned a Hotchkiss gun and was complimented for making the best shots against the Tallabacoa block house.^{clxvii}

Herbert Lacey, son of Garrett and Nancy Stites Lacey, joined the army on June 30, 1898,^{#SYMBOL 42 \f "Symbol" \s 12#} with Thomas Cusick, Bert Railsback, Oliver Anderson, Ira Jamison, and Leon Gray in Mattoon.^{clxviii} They were assigned to Company M, Fourth Regiment of the Illinois National Guard, and left for Jacksonville, Florida, for training. Abe Umbanhowar, Milton Yeazel, Boone Garwood, and Edward Hall enlisted with Battery A and were assigned to Danville. George Hodgson was accepted for service and left for Washington, D.C., for training. By June 23, 12 of Homer's sons were in the service.^{clxix} The boys leaving to fight Spain were given a send-off at the Wabash Depot and, while the Fourth of July was not celebrated in Homer, Admiral William T. Sampson's destruction of the Spanish fleet on July 3 at Santiago, Cuba, was celebrated. A band appeared on the street on July 4 and people gathered to celebrate. "Loud and prolonged Hurrahs for Sampson and his brave men were heard..."^{clxx} and fireworks were used that evening.

While the war did not last as long as America's other conflicts, the Homer recruits of Company M were deployed in the occupation of Cuba. They remained in Jacksonville, Florida, and while the food and accommodations were good, as the fighting concluded, the company believed they were to be sent home. Ira Jamison wrote home that no one was informed as to their future.^{clxxi} The company was moved to Savannah, Georgia, in November 1898, and Herbert Lacey wrote to his brother of his observations:

Well I don't know when we are to start for Cuba not for a month or two yet I don't think. We have been having a devil of a time here. There have been several holdups here in the city and nearly all of us provost guards have bought revolvers, I got a dandy for five dollars of course we have to carry them hid.

We had a review of the 4th army corps yesterday it was a fine sight to see about thirteen thousand men lined up.^{clxxii}

The first volunteering Homer resident to make it to Cuba was Albert Ashley of Company H of the Second Regiment of the U.S. Volunteer Infantry. He wrote to his brother Robert, the local barber, and his letter was published in the *Homer Pilot*:

A soldier's life is not always sunshine. I have went through more hardships in the last three months than I ever went through in all my life before.

We have been on short rations several times and have had lots of hard work to do,

[#] SYMBOL 42 \f "Symbol" \s 10# Herbert V. Lacey's uniform from the Spanish-American War is on display at the Homer Historical Society.

but no fighting, yet we can't tell how soon we may have. We expect to have trouble with the Cubans before long. I have not had much time to go around and see the sights. I have seen Moro Castle and two of the ships that were sunk before we came. I would like to go to the battle field. It is about three miles from our camp. We were on the water a week without seeing land. Had splendid weather and would have had a delightful trip had we not been so crowded.^{clxxiii}



Herbert Lacey in camp
Betty Sanford Lacey Photograph

There was not a grand homecoming for the returning Spanish-American War veterans but they were always highly regarded in the years after the war and their service was always mentioned when featured in the newspapers.

Gold Fever – Homer on the Klondike

Word reached Homer of the gold on the Klondike in 1897 and plans to seek gold were discussed among men in the meeting places of the village. During late November and December, Charles Wiggins, James Taylor, and C. D. Taylor could be seen training two- and four-dog teams. It was observed that no breed of dog suitable for pulling was available in eastern Champaign County.

In addition to the dogs being trained, Robert Sites and Ernest Lux opened the

“Klondike Shooting Gallery” on the east side of Main Street. Perhaps a bad omen of things to come, a week after the gallery opened, a ball ricocheting off a target struck a gas tank. The gas leaked onto a pilot light and quickly spread to the entire building. The fire was put out, but only through efforts described as “heroic” was the entire eastern block saved.^{clxxiv}

The first two weeks of January 1898 were filled with activity as the Homer Klondikers purchased supplies and made preparations. Representatives from the railroads met with the group to arrange passage of men and equipment. James Craven resigned his job and sent his wife and live-in niece to Indianapolis to live for the duration of his absence. A. E. Brown sold his personal property at auction to make the journey.^{clxxv} C. D. Taylor, a rather large man, began a physical training program to lose weight and toughen himself for the trip and the anticipated hardship.^{clxxvi} Cy Upp, one who was planning to go north, decided to join the group in Tacoma later in January.

In what can only be described as a send-off worthy of departing warriors, 400 people gathered at the Wabash Depot on January 17, 1898, to witness the departure of Homer’s delegation to the Klondike. James H. Cravens, A. E. Brown, C. D. Taylor, Charles Wiggins, and George Kenna loaded their dogs, Newfoundlands and St. Bernards, for the trip north. A special car was rented and men, 48 dogs, and provisions for one year departed. The *Danville Weekly News* observed, “All the men are well-known, responsible married citizens.”^{clxxvii} The group traveled to St. Paul, Minnesota, and boarded a Northern Pacific train for the trek to Tacoma, Washington.

The grand adventure began well with the usual photo sessions of the group encamped at Tacoma before departing north. What proved to be a miscalculation on the part of the gold seekers was the timing of their arrival. The party reached Lake Bennett but was unable to continue into the gold fields. Had they delayed their departure they would have been able to push on but they were forced to wait, eating provisions and feeding the dogs. It could have been worse. A. E. Brown injured his back climbing Chilkoot Pass. The group was camping at “Sheep’s Camp” and expected to build boats to push on to the gold fields. Brown was more fortunate; even with his affliction, he was hired to work on the Chilkoot Railway Company and was paid \$5 to \$7.50 per day and would have stayed if his back problem had not interfered. Brown’s back problems necessitated his April 4 return from the Yukon. Brown was determined to make the trip back north as soon as he was healed.^{clxxviii} Contrary to Brown’s opinion, Cy Upp returned from the fields believing prospects for gold seekers were poor due to the large number of men in the fields. He returned April 20.^{clxxix}

The party reached White Horse Rapids on June 7. It was mid-June before the Homer party reached Dawson City in the Yukon. In Homer a rumor spread that Charles Wiggins had drowned. No word was received from him and, due to the treacherous spring conditions of the rivers navigated, when Wiggins was missing it was assumed he had drowned. It was over a week before word was received by a Danville party that Wiggins was safe.

When the Homer party arrived in Dawson, they determined that it would be

impossible to stake a claim and then mine to any degree of effectiveness. The party found different ways home, not traveling together. They left the Yukon in July. Taylor and Kenna started the trip south together but their boat became stranded on a sand bar. Taylor stayed on the boat while Kenna hailed another boat and was charged \$35 for a trip down the river. The stranded boat waited four days, yet Taylor beat Kenna home.

George Kenna's return to Homer was not as glorious as that of others in his party. In Seattle, Kenna contracted typhoid, preventing him from traveling home. His wife went to Seattle to accompany him home in November. He returned to Homer, being supported on the platform by his two sons. Kenna's trip was not in vain; he had \$500 in gold dust and contracted jeweler B. W. McDonald to make rings for his three sons from Klondike gold nuggets.^{clxxx} Charles Wiggins' return in late July was low profile and without the riches expected.

In a strange way the Homer effort on the Klondike was a great success and the parties did, indeed, make money on the venture. While they brought back little gold, they did make money selling their supplies to others at greatly inflated prices. As the *Homer Enterprise* observed, "The Alaska gold question is a farce so far as ordinary mortals are concerned."^{clxxxi}

The gold rush of 1898 ended for most but a few did stay on. Harvey Allison managed the claims of the Adams Creek Company near Dawson City, Alaska, in 1902-03. Will Hays accompanied Allison during the 1903 season on the Klondike.^{clxxxii}

Endnotes

Those who assisted in researching this chapter include Betty Sanford Lacey, John Hoffman, and Bruce Vetter. Christine Cunningham assisted in the writing of this chapter.

ⁱ *Champaign County Herald*, August 4, 1880, page 5.

ⁱⁱ *Champaign County Herald*, September 29, 1880, page 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Champaign County Herald*, October 13, 1880, page 7. A Granger's scale was installed in November for the operation.

^{iv} *Champaign County Herald*, November 15, 1882, page 5.

^v See *Champaign County Herald*, January 12, 1887, page 5; November 20, 1889, page 9. Milmine and Bodman elevator had a telephone line run to Ogden at this time.

vi *Champaign County Gazette*, July 18, 1888, page 1.

vii *Champaign County Herald*, October 8, 1890, page 7.

viii See Champaign County Chancery Court Cases 2147&48, 1894, Joseph Thomas vs. Coffeen Mill and Elevator Company, Urbana Archives. The lumber debt had been deferred two years at 5% interest but after two years the debt remained unpaid.

ix Champaign County Chancery Court Case 2459, 1894, Michael and Mellie Coffeen vs. Joseph Thomas, Urbana Archives. Joseph Thomas and his family inhabited the Coffeen home from 1894 to 1917 when George and Francis Porter purchased the home. They too would find the home difficult to manage and nearly lost the home to a sheriff's sale in 1937. After George Porter's death, Francis Porter lost the home in 1946 to back taxes.

x M. D. Coffeen, Jr. did have a lasting legacy, surprisingly a positive one. For years after, an occasional article would appear on what M. D., the former teacher and businessman, was doing. His son Charles would marry Mort Smith's daughter.

xi *Fairmount Veto*, March 15, 1888, page 1, *Daily Inter-Ocean*, February 8, 1888, page 2, *Champaign County Gazette*, February 8, 1888, page 1.

xii *Daily Commercial*, February 10, 1888, page 4.

xiii *Champaign Daily Gazette*, February 11, 1888, page 4.

xiv John Hays other son, James, was employed in the stockyards of Chicago. In a rail accident James Hays became wedged in the railroad cars and the only way to extricate James was by using an axe to cut him loose. The brakeman cut him loose and he was taken to the Cook County Hospital where he died at the age of 24. He had been married three months before and his wife arrived at the hospital to minutes after his death. See John C. Hays biography in the Chapman Brothers "Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County, Illinois," Chicago, 1887

xv *Vermilion County, Press* June 9, 1858, page 3.

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- xvi *Champaign County Herald*, July 1, 1896, page 9.
- xvii *Danville Press-Democrat*, March 6, 1910, page 1.
- xviii *Champaign County Herald*, November 5, 1884, page 5; December 16, 1885, page 3.
- xix *Champaign County Herald*, September 12, 1888, page 7.
- xx *Champaign County Gazette*, March 13, 1889, page 5; *Champaign County Herald*, March 13, 1889, page 7.
- xxi *Champaign County Herald*, June 19, 1889, page 9; *The Daily Commercial*, June 13, 1889, page 4.
- xxii *Champaign County Herald*, June 19, 1889, page 9.
- xxiii See Ned Barnes Estate file, Champaign County Chancery Court records, Urbana Archives. *Champaign County Herald*, June 19, 1889, page 9; October 9, 1889, page 9; October 30, 1889, page 1. Barnes lies with his daughter and his wife's other husband George Ahles in section five of the G.A.R. cemetery.
- xxiv Milton W. Mathews and Lewis A. McLean, *Early History and Pioneers of Champaign County* (Urbana, IL: Champaign County Herald, 1886), page 29. This is Thomas L. Butler's biography.
- xxv *Champaign County Gazette*, October 10, 1888, page 5; *Champaign News-Gazette*, November 7, 1937.
- xxvi *Champaign County Herald*, July 24, 1889, page 7; July 31, 1889, page 7.
- xxvii *Champaign County Herald*, June 17, 1891, page 9; September 16, 1891, page 11; *Daily*

Commercial, July 14, 1891, page 3; *Champaign County Gazette*, December 9, 1891, page 5. The crack in the sill plate was caused by settling in the spring (March). The records of the I.O.O.F. lodge burned in the fire of 1942.

xxviii *Danville Commercial-News*, October 19, 1883, page 3; *Champaign County Gazette*, October 24, 1883, page 1; October 31, 1883, page 8.

xxix *Champaign County Gazette*, July 18, 1888, page 1.

xxx *Danville Commercial*, July 17, 1890, page 4.

xxxii *Champaign County Herald*, July 23, 1890, page 1.

xxxiii *Champaign County Gazette*, July 23, 1890, page 3; *Champaign County Herald*, July 23, 1890, page 1.

xxxiv *Champaign County Herald*, September 3, 1890, page 1; October 1, 1890, page 7; October 8, 1890, page 7. This drugstore would remain a pharmacy until 2004 when owner Doug Driscoll closed it. Later in the year Sandy Hire opened Homer Games which also sold school supplies, something that John A. Tudor sold in the 1890s.

xxxv *Champaign County News*, March 26, 1892, page 1.

xxxvi *Champaign County Gazette*, March 23, 1892, page 11.

xxxvii *Champaign County News*, March 26, 1892, page 1; *Danville Daily News*, March 20, 1892, page 1.

xxxviii *Champaign County Gazette*, March 30, 1892, page 5.

xxxix *Danville Daily News*, March 20, 1892, page 1.

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- xxxix *Homer Enterprise* (Special Edition), March 19, 1892, page 1.
- xl *Champaign County Gazette*, April 26, 1893.
- xli *Champaign County Gazette*, April 19, 1893, page 5.
- xlii *Champaign County News*, July 11, 1883, page 4. The First National Bank of Homer had “national” currency notes printed with the bank’s name issued in the third week of August 1883.
- xliii *Champaign County Herald*, July 6, 1887, page 9.
- xliv *Champaign County Gazette*, March 22, 1893, page 5.
- xlv *Champaign County Gazette*, May 3, 1893, page 5; September 13, 1893, page 8.
- xlvi *Champaign County News*, March 10, 1900, page 4.
- xlvii *Champaign County Gazette*, April 12, 1871, page 6.
- xlviii Original Organization of the Village of Homer Book, 1872-1883, Village of Homer, page 289.
- xliv *Fairmount Veto*, March 8, 1889, page 2.
- ¹ *Champaign County Herald*, December 25, 1895, page 13; *Champaign County Herald*, January 29, 1896, page 9; February 26, 1896, page 4.

li Harriet Coffeen was born, raised, and married on the Smythe family farm in Greencastle, Indiana. She died near Greencastle, Indiana, February 2, 1917, and was buried in the G.A.R. cemetery next to her husband. She was remembered long after her husband, having a reputation of being one of Homer's most intellectual minds. Grace Butler filled in during 1912 after Mose Thomas died. Edna Lewis was the "officer-in-charge" at the post office serving, from 1969 to 1971. Marian Edwards was also an officer-in-charge in 1982, followed that year by JoAnn Rosenbaum Melton. Melton became postmaster in September 1982, serving for the next 9 years. She was replaced by Winifred J. Quick in 1991 and the following year by Bonnie L. Elson.

lii See Homer High School *Homerian*. Issues in later years give lists of graduates.

liii *Champaign County Gazette*, April 5, 1876, page 4.

liv *Champaign County Gazette*, September 1, 1875, page 4.

lv *Danville Commercial*, February 7, 1878, page 8.

lvi *Homer Enterprise*, April 13, 1899, page 3.

lvii *Champaign County News*, June 20, 1900, page 5.

lviii *Champaign County Gazette*, September 26, 1900, page 1; *Danville Weekly News*, September 27, 1900, page 7; *Champaign County News*, September 26, 1900, page 4; *Danville Daily News*, September 26, 1900, page 7.

lix *Champaign Times*, August 9, 1879, page 3.

lx *Danville Weekly News*, September 24, 1886, page 1.

lxi *Danville Commercial*, August 8, 1891, page 1.

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- lxii Ibid.
- lxiii Ibid. Also see *Champaign County Herald*, August 12, 1891, page 9.
- lxiv *Champaign County Gazette*, April 25, 1894, pages 3 & 5; *Champaign County Herald*, April 25, 1894.
- lxv *Champaign County Herald*, April 28, 1886, page 13; *Champaign County Herald*, May 5, 1886, page 13.
- lxvi *Champaign County Herald*, October 17, 1883, page 1.
- lxvii *Champaign County Gazette*, February 28, 1883, page 4.
- lxviii *Champaign County Gazette*, March 7, 1883, page 6.
- lxix *Champaign County Gazette*, April 25, 1883, page 6; May 16, 1883, page 4.
- lxx *Champaign County Gazette*, July 18, 1883, page 4.
- lxxi Ibid.
- lxxii *Champaign County Gazette*, August 29, 1883, page 4.
- lxxiii *The Commercial*, April 15, 1875, page 3.
- lxxiv Record of Homer Post 263, June 1, 1883, page 3. Homer Historical Society.

lxxv *Champaign County Gazette*, August 15, 1883, page 4; *Danville Weekly News*, August 17, 1883, page 2.

lxxvi *Fairmount Veto*, April 14, 1884, page 3; *Champaign County Gazette*, June 4, 1884, page 4. There were a total of 32 graves of veterans at Homer and Insley cemeteries in June 1884.

lxxvii *Champaign County Herald*, June 4, 1884, page 5.

lxxviii *Champaign County Gazette*, August 20, 1885, page 1.

lxxix *Homer Enterprise*, August 20, 1885, page 1.

lxxx *Ibid.*

lxxxi *Champaign County Herald*, May 8, 1889, page 1.

lxxxii *Champaign County Herald*, June 19, 1889, page 9.

lxxxiii *Champaign County Herald*, July 3, 1889, page 1; *Danville Weekly News*, August 30, 1889, page 8.

lxxxiv *Champaign County Gazette*, August 21, 1889, page 6.

lxxxv *Champaign County Herald*, August 21, 1889, page 1.

lxxxvi *Danville Weekly News*, August 30, 1889, page 8.

lxxxvii *Champaign County Herald*, August 7, 1889, page 7.

lxxxviii *Champaign County Herald*, April 23, 1890, page 9.

lxxxix *Champaign County Herald*, June 18, 1890, page 9.

xc *Champaign County Herald*, June 25 1890, page 1; *Champaign County Herald*, July 2, 1890, page 9.

xc i *Danville Commercial*, July 22, 1890, page 3; August 5, 1890, page 3; August 19, 1890, page 3.

xc ii *Champaign County Herald*, September 24, 1890, page 7; October 8, 1890, page 7.

xc iii *Danville Commercial*, January 20, 1891, page 3.

xc iv *Champaign County Herald*, August 20, 1891, page 13.

xc v *Champaign County Herald*, February 18, 1891, page 5.

xc vi *Danville Press-Democrat*, November 5, 1911, page 12.

xc vii *Champaign County Gazette*, February 13, 1878, page 4; *Danville Commercial*, February 7, 1878, page 8.

xc viii Chapman Brothers, *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers Publishers, 1887), page 526.

xc ix *Champaign County Herald*, April 20, 1898, page 9.

c *Champaign County News*, October 5, 1898, page 5.

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- ci *Danville Press-Democrat*, January 25, 1910.
- cii *Danville Commercial-News*, October 28, 1913, page 12.
- ciii *Danville Morning Press*, April 13, 1918, page 7.
- civ *Champaign County Herald*, July 28, 1886, page 4.
- cv *Champaign County Herald*, March 16, 1887, page 1; April 6, 1887.
- cvi *Champaign County Herald*, November 17, 1886, page 5.
- cvii *Sidney By-Way*, December 3, 1886, page 4.
- cviii *Sidney By-Way*, January 14, 1887, page 1. Diphtheria would return in January 1907, closing schools and churches and resulting in at least one death. See *Danville Daily Democrat*, January 12, 1907.
- cix *Champaign County Herald*, June 26, 1889. Jacob Benjamin was the person who dug the well for Moses Hays in 1856 causing his death.
- cx See “Unveiling Exercises of the Soldier’s Monument,” August 21, 1901, Homer Historical Society.
- cxii *Champaign County News*, September 14, 1907, page 5; *Fairmount Local*, March 31, 1884, page 4. Martin Custer had another distinction: his driving horse “Old Jim” was given an obituary in the *Danville Commercial-News*, on March 13, 1913, on page 13. Old Jim was 32 years old.
- cxiii *Champaign County Gazette*, March 16, 1892, page 11.

cxiii *Evening Commercial*, May 9, 1892, page 1.

cxiv *Champaign County Herald*, June 29 1892, page 1.

cxv *Champaign County Gazette*, January 11, 1893, page 5.

cxvi *Danville Weekly News*, July 27, 1893, page 3. Something to consider is that when the soldier's home was built in Danville and occupied in the early 1900s, the crime and reputation for alcohol ruined the reputation of the home and to a degree the town. Something similar could have happened to Homer.

cxvii *Fairmount Veto*, May 17, 1888, page 3.

cxviii *Champaign County Herald*, August 21, 1889, page 1.

cxix *Champaign County Gazette*, March 15, 1893, page 5.

cxx *Champaign County Herald*, August 24, 1892, page 7.

cxxi *Champaign County News*, June 3, 1893, page 1.

cxix *Champaign County News*, June 17, 1893, page 8.

cxix *Danville Weekly News*, May 17, 1894, page 6; March 4, 1897, page 2.

cxix *Homer Pilot*, July 6, 1898.

cxix *Champaign County News*, August 31, 1898, page 5.

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- cxxvi Interview with Philip Smith, grandson of Wilbur Tudor, 2002.
- cxxvii *Danville Weekly News*, April 23, 1896, page 9.
- cxxviii Ordinance #34, June 2, 1896, page 145, Village Ordinances, Book One, Village of Homer.
- cxxix *Champaign Count Gazette*, March 14, 1883, page 4.
- cxxx Cash Elder would be justice of the peace in Homer into the twentieth century. C.M.C. "Cash" Elder died August 30, 1912. *Champaign County News*, September 4, 1912, page 6.
- cxxxi Champaign County Criminal Court Docket book, page 202. Urbana Archives.
- cxxxii *Champaign County Gazette*, August 1, 1883, page 4. It is not clear if George Veach was related to Jesse Veach of Oakwood who was producing whiskey for years during and after the Civil War. Jesse was known as a rebel sympathizer. He died in Clark County in June 1913. See *Danville Press-Democrat*, June 22, 1913, page 1.
- cxxxiii *Champaign County Herald*, August 8, 1883, page 5.
- cxxxiv *Champaign County Gazette*, August 15, 1883, page 4.
- cxxxv *Fairmount Veto*, August 23, 1886, page 3. Robinson was later killed in a tragic accident.
- cxxxvi *Fairmount Veto*, June 16, 1884, page 4.
- cxxxvii *Champaign County Gazette*, November 10, 1885, page 1. William Coffeen turned up in Ordway Colorado in 1911 with the Homer Colony.

cxxxviii *Champaign County Herald*, September 1, 1897, page 7.

cxxxix *Daily Commercial*, September 12, 1889, page 4; *Champaign County Gazette*, September 18, 1889, page 6.

cxli *Champaign County Gazette*, February 5, 1890, page 5.

cxlii *Danville Weekly News*, June 24, 1896, page 8; *Champaign County News*, June 20, 1896, page 6; *Champaign County News*, June 24, 1896, page 1.

cxliii *Ibid.*

cxliiii See Criminal Court Case 3194, 1891, Champaign County Court Records. It is interesting to note that Chauncey Stearns was accused of assault and attempted rape in the September 1891 session of the court. The case was not tried. See case 2439.

cxliv *Danville Daily News*, September 5, 1898, page 1; *St. Joseph Record*, September 10, 1898, page 1.

cxlv *Champaign Daily Gazette*, October 1, 1898, page 2.

cxlvi *Urbana Courier-Herald*, December 14, 1898, page 4.

cxlvii *Champaign County News*, December 21, 1898, page 5.

cxlviii *Champaign County Gazette*, December 13, 1882, page 4.

cxlix *Fairmount Veto*, November 16, 1886, page 2.

cl *Champaign County Herald*, December 1, 1886, page 1. Elmer Hollensbe was running a bakery in 1900 at 1526 Main Street in Lafayette, Indiana.

cli *Champaign County Herald*, February 11, 1885, page 5.

clii *Sidney By-Way*, May 6, 1887, page 1.

cliii *Champaign County Herald*, September 25, 1889, page 9; *Champaign Daily Gazette*, September 25, 1889, page 9. Pearl Summers is buried under her maiden name in the Summers family plot.

cliv *Fairmount Local*, March 17, 1884, page 3.

clv Patent 299,752, U. S. Patent office, page 1 line 15.

clvi *Champaign County Herald*, January 14, 1885, page 5.

clvii *Champaign County Herald*, June 10, 1885, page 13; *Danville Weekly News*, October 2, 1885, page 4.

clviii *Fairmount Veto*, March 30, 1886, page 3.

clix *Fairmount Veto*, May 24, 1886.

clx *Champaign County Gazette*, November 27, 1889, page 4.

clxi *Champaign County Herald*, February 10, 1886, page 5.

clxii *Ibid.*

clxiii *Homer Enterprise*, April 6, 1956, page 1; *Champaign News Gazette*, April 17, 1963.

clxiv *Champaign County Herald*, February 17, 1886, page 5; James Smith farms the land and is familiar with the legend. He has never found anything on the ground.

clxv *Champaign County Gazette*, May 20, 1896, page 5.

clxvi *Champaign County Gazette*, June 3, 1896, page 1.

clxvii *Danville Daily News*, August 8, 1898, page 3.

clxviii *Champaign County News*, June 22, 1898, page 9.

clxix *Homer Enterprise*, June 23, 1898, page 1; *Danville Commercial-News*, April 24, 1914, page 2.

clxx *Homer Pilot*, July 6, 1898, page 1.

clxxi *Homer Enterprise*, September 8, 1898, page 4.

clxxii Letter from Herbert Lacey to his brother, November 13, 1898, Homer Historical Society.

clxxiii *Danville Daily News*, October 10, 1898, page 9. They printed Ashley's letter originally published in the *Pilot*.

clxxiv *Champaign County News*, December 15, 1897, page 5.

clxxv *Champaign County News*, January 5, 1898, page 4.

clxxvi *Champaign County News*, December 22, 1897, page 5.

clxxvii *Danville Weekly News*, January 18, 1898, page 1.

clxxviii *Danville Weekly News*, April 14, 1898, page 7.

clxxix *Danville Weekly News*, April 28, 1898, page 8.

clxxx *Champaign County News*, November 2, 1898, page 5; November 26, 1898, page 5. George and Elizabeth Kenna moved to Champaign after his return from Alaska. George died in 1920 and Elizabeth in 1937.

clxxxii *Homer Enterprise*, September 8, 1898.

clxxxiii *Champaign County News*, May 3, 1902, page 6; *Danville Weekly News*, January 22, 1903, page 4; March 5, 1903, page 3. Also see J. R. Stewart, *Standard History of Champaign County, Illinois*, Vol. II (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), page 1022. Oral tradition in Homer tells of Harvey Allison's mother being angry at her son's leaving the farm for the Klondike and possibly being one of the reasons she would not pay his debts when Allison was bankrupt in the depression.

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