

Founding and Early History of Cloverdale

Most townships include an entire surveyed township. For instance, Greencastle Township consists entirely of Township 14 North, Range 4 West. Cloverdale Township, however, includes parts of Township 12 North, Range 3 West, Township 12 North, Range 4 West, Township 13 North, Range 3 West, and Township 13 North, Range 4 West. The town of Cloverdale itself is split between Range 3 West and Range 4 West in Township 12 North.

First Settlers

The area that is now Cloverdale was settled by William Hamilton and James Robinson, who built cabins after arriving together from Kentucky in the spring of 1823. Other early settlers of the Cloverdale area were Thomas James, Ambrose Bandy, John Macy and Andrew Kilgore.

Some of these men were involved in the first murder in the county, which was immediately followed by the first suicide, involving a quantity of flax. It appears that Robinson's wife had employed Mrs. Eunice Bandy, wife of Ambrose Bandy, to spin some flax.

After Mrs. Bandy returned the spun flax, Mrs. Robinson weighed it and thought the quantity returned was short of what it should have been. She shared this information with the neighbor women, who gossiped about it until it was heard of by the Bandy's. Ambrose Bandy became incensed and threatened to sue Robinson and his wife for slander. This in turn enraged Robinson, who was described as a morose, sulky and quick-tempered man.

Robinson became unfriendly with his neighbors who had talked about the flax. He was especially angered at Bandy, James, Macy and Kilgore. One day in April of 1824 the Bandy's visited the James', staying overnight. This particularly enraged Robinson.

Thomas James was living with his wife and three small children near what was known as the "Granny" Nelson spring. A few days later Robinson arose and informed his family that they would thereafter have to take care of themselves. He left his cabin with gun in hand, intent on settling the score on the matter of the flax.

Robinson first went to Bandy's, apparently intending to make Ambrose Bandy his first victim. Bandy was able to observe Robinson approaching and hid behind a tree until Robinson passed by. Robinson went to Macy's next. As Robinson approached, he saw Macy with his son James, clearing the area around their cabin. Robinson could not bring himself to harm Macy in the presence of his young son and moved on by.

He next went to where Thomas James was constructing a new cabin which is on land now occupied by the Cloverdale Cemetery.

Robinson observed James was alone in the forest, hewing puncheons for the floor of the cabin he was constructing which was about two hundred yards from his temporary dwelling. It was as Thomas James was hunched over his work that Robinson snuck from tree to tree in order to come closer without being observed. When he was at a distance of about fifty yards, Robinson fired at James. The ball entered James' left arm and passed through his torso from side to side, lodging against his skin.

Looking toward the direction the report of the gun shot, James observed Robinson in the act of lowering his gun. James at first was not mortally wounded and was able to run the two hundred yards to his temporary dwelling. The nearest doctor was Dr. Low of Greencastle. He was sent for and after examining James, removed the ball and made an effort to heal the external wounds.

James lingered twenty-eight days and died of blood poisoning, which many felt could have been avoided by a more experienced physician than the young Dr. Low.

But Robinson would know none of this. After firing what would be the fatal shot, he returned to his home which was about a half mile south of where he shot James.

His oldest child, a daughter, was caring for the family's baby, while his wife and other children were working in a clearing near the cabin. Robinson re-loaded his rifle and attached one end of a string to the trigger and the other to a peg sticking in the wall outside of the cabin. He placed the muzzle of his gun against his left breast and in drawing it toward him discharged it. The ball passed through his heart, killing him instantly. Robinson was buried on his own land, which was in Section 6, Township 12 North, Range 3 West, which is south of the Cloverdale Cemetery. No current record of the James Robinson grave site exists. Nor is the grave site of Thomas James known.

Cloverdale Platted

A land patent for the section of Cloverdale Township now known as West Cloverdale was entered with the United States Government by William Hamilton on August 13, 1823, and the part known as East Cloverdale was entered by John Macy on October 1, 1823.

By 1836, Moses Nelson (1783-1849) and his son Thomas (1811-1852) had acquired sections of these parcels and platted East Cloverdale and West Cloverdale, respectively about 1839, as recorded in Deed Book G of the Putnam County Recorder's Office. They began selling lots in 1843. Both Moses and Thomas Nelson are buried in the Cloverdale cemetery.

Cloverdale acquired a post office on February 11, 1836, with the appointment of William S. Hart as postmaster. The post office name was noted as "Clover Dale" in early postal records but began to be referred to as "Cloverdale" with the appointment of Solomon Akers as postmaster on October 10, 1855.

In 1849, the Indiana General Assembly passed legislation to incorporate the Town of Cloverdale.

Cloverdale Seminary

The first physician in Cloverdale was Hiram G. Dyer. A native of Virginia, Dr. Dyer married Rhoda McGinnis of Owen County in 1845, then began the practice of medicine in Cloverdale. Dyer was instrumental in establishing the Cloverdale Seminary, created to train teachers, which was incorporated and approved by the Indiana General Assembly in 1850. The school was located west of Columbus Street and Main Street.

Dyer, Andrew T. McCoy and John Sandy were the largest stockholders. Professor William C. Bray was the school's instructor.

An article in the Greencastle Democrat published on November 19, 1892, contains a reminiscence from the Putnam County Sentinel, dated May 22, 1851, of the Cloverdale Seminary's first commencement:

Talks were given by the graduating class. Beauties of Spring, A Poem - Mary A. Hart; A Dialogue on Flowers – Virginia McDowell and Sarah E. Hughes; Liberty – Melissa Draper; Female Rights – Margaret Burroughs; Beauties of Nature – Mary A. C. Martin; True Greatness – Joseph McGinnis; Female Education – Jane B. Stockman; Benefits of Industry – Margaretta McCoy; Slavery – H. B. Martin; Greatness of Our Country – J. H. Martin.

According to the newspaper accounts, the speeches delivered were original and of the highest order and did great honor to the speakers and instructor, Prof. W. C. Bray. Of those who stood upon the platform that afternoon, animated with bright hopes and full of aspiration, but few remained by 1892. The 1892 article also noted the fate of the students in 1892, 41 years after their graduation.

The school was discontinued in 1853, because a majority of the stockholders refused to be taxed for its support.

Newspapers

In January 1877, W. B. Harris established the first newspaper in Cloverdale, called The Bee, which folded after one year. On April 12, 1878, Lyman Naugle began publishing the Local Item, which survived for several years. The Cloverdale Graphic was also first printed in 1878. On May 4, 1939, it was renamed the Putnam County Daily Graphic and its offices moved to Greencastle, with George Robert Arendt as publisher. In 1950 the Putnam County Graphic merged with a Roachdale publication, the Putnam Times-News. After a fire destroyed the Putnam County Daily Graphic building in 1969, the newspaper merged with the Putnam County Banner to form the Banner-Graphic. Other newspapers published in Cloverdale in the 19th century included the Cloverdale Gazette, Cloverdale Courier, and Cloverdale Herald. In 1976, a free weekly newspaper called the Hoosier Topics, serving Putnam and parts of neighboring counties, began publication in Cloverdale.

Monon Railroad

The railroad commonly referred to as the Monon runs north and south through the county. It began in southern Indiana in 1847 as the New Albany and Salem Railroad Company, with James Brooks as president. Industrialist Washington C. DePauw of Salem, Indiana, was another founder. His name should sound familiar to Putnam County residents. The New Albany and Southern Railroad acquired existing rail lines in northern Indiana in the early 1850s with the intent of connecting New Albany to Michigan City. The northern section was completed from Michigan City south to Bainbridge by the end of 1853, then to Greencastle by March 17, 1854.

The southern section was extended north from Salem through Bloomington and Gosport, and the last ten miles of track were completed in southern Putnam County soon after. The last spike completing the north line and south line was driven at 4 P.M. June 24, 1854, at Connection Bridge, which was a small structure spanning Limestone Creek, about a mile southeast of Putnamville and a few miles northwest of Cloverdale.



Connection bridge where the southern part of the Monon connected the northern part

The entire length of the line from New Albany to Michigan City was formally dedicated in a grand ceremony at New Albany on July 4, 1854, officially linking the Great Lakes to the Ohio River.

New Albany and Salem Railroad (The Monon)



Location: Corner of Bank Street and Culbertson Avenue, New Albany (Floyd County, Indiana)



Cloverdale Main Street 1908, Courtesy Putnam County Museum Archives



Main Street Looking South c. 1910, Courtesy Putnam County Museum Archives



Cloverdale depot, not dated. Courtesy Putnam County Museum Archives