



## Mile 146

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Topeka Area Historical Society

Number 1

### The Kent's of Hawpatch

The name of Orvin Kent has often been overlooked in the telling of Topeka's history. Many people recognize the names of Robert Latta and William McConnell and are aware of their contributions to the establishment and growth of Hawpatch. But Orvin Kent also played a prominent role. Details of his life and contribution are recorded in the *1882 History of LaGrange County, Indiana* that was originally published by F.A. Battey & Co. of Chicago. While the original history published in May of 1882 is no longer in print, the LaGrange County Historical Society has done a reprint and those copies are available. The 1928 history of the county also contains accounts written by Kent's granddaughter, Mrs. Alma Miller.

Born on August 10, 1808, in Stafford of Tolland County, Connecticut, Orvin Kent was the son of Elijah and Margret Kent, natives of Connecticut. Young Orvin attended school in Connecticut until the age of sixteen. He also took one term at the Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. He started teaching school at the age of sixteen and would continue in that line of work until his marriage to Grizella Tweedy (1816-1903) on December 30th of 1840 in Butler County, Ohio. Orvin's bride, mistakenly referred to as Drizella in the *1882 History*, was the first child born to Robert and Elizabeth Tweedy following their immigration to America from Ireland.



*Orvin Kent*

According to the *1882 History*, the Kents lived in Monroe Country, Ohio, for some time where Orvin was engaged in teaching. From there they moved to Eden Township and located on 200 acres of woodland on the Hawpatch which he purchased for \$1.25 per acre. The deed was signed by none other than President James K. Polk. Kent actually had two farms on the north side of Topeka directly across the township line from one another. The 1850 census lists Orvin and Grizella as living in the Hawpatch area and as having four living children at that time: Robert, Nathan, Laura, and Volney.



*Mrs. Grizella Kent*

Dr. R.H. Rerick, in his chapter on Eden Township for the *1882 History*, says that Kent visited the area in the spring of 1833 and bought lands. He was again here in 1835, but did not make his permanent residence in Hawpatch until 1847. Rerick writes that, "He then built a home upon his land in Eden, at Sycamore Corners. Mr. Kent has for a number of years lived in Clearspring, but his two places of residence are upon the town line road. Mr. Kent has always been interested in welfare of the Haw Patch, and has done much in aid of its social and material improvement.."

It is not coincidental that one of Orvin Kent's civic contributions was in the area of education. In 1849, a mere two years after moving to the area, Kent deeded a parcel of land as the site of Sycamore School house. The corner located one mile north of Topeka was known as Sycamore Corners because of a tall Sycamore tree that stood on that corner. This new school district was formed through the efforts of Kent and several others and included portions of Clearspring and Eden townships. It's not clear if Orvin taught school at Sycamore, but we know that his teaching career did span some 40 years.

Orvin Kent found more ways to get involved and serve the community. From 1865-1859, just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, Kent served as a LaGrange County Commissioner. In 1858, Kent also served as Clerk for township trustees H.I. Parks, William Walker, and Nehemiah Coldren. It is interesting to note that 1858 was the last year for there to be three trustees in each township. Since that time the office has been filled by only one person at a time. And then from 1867-1871, he was a Justice of the Peace.

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One of Orvin Kent's greatest contributions to the community came in the form of another donation of land. In 1879, he deeded another parcel of land at Sycamore Corners to the Star Literary Society.

Following the Civil War some of the people of Hawpatch formed the Star Literary Society. In 1878 the society obtained a charter and began to expand. The group hosted debates and other cultural events in the Gerber School located a mile west of Hawpatch. About 1879, S. D. Crane, the LaGrange County Superintendent of Schools forbade the use of Gerber for literary purposes. What was behind Crane's decision remains a mystery.

When the society learned that the Maple Grove Amish Mennonite church was replacing their frame building with a brick structure, J.N. Babcock, who married Laura Kent and was the teacher at Gerber School, along with Ira Ford, conceived the idea of the society securing a building of their own. Orvin Kent was approached about land at Sycamore Corners. Kent donated "the corners", Maple Groves' old building was torn down and rebuilt, and the group changed their name to the Sycamore Literary Society.

To do the work the society borrowed \$500 from the Strauss Bank in Ligonier. Much of the labor was donated by members. The debt was repaid from the proceeds of the programs. R.H. Rerick writes that, "*The building as refitted is 30 x 50 feet, and affords a good auditory for 350 persons, and contains a stage and scenery.*" When the *1882 History* was written the society had over 40 members, no doubt Kent was one of them. Sycamore Hall and the Sycamore Literary Society were a major influence in the growth and life of the community.

Orvin Kent, a freemason, was a member of Masonic Lodge 185 in Ligonier. According to Rerick's history, Kent was also a member of the Swedenborgian Church, a sect that embraced the teaching of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). One of their beliefs is that the Bible is, "a very complex compilation of books that are far too rich to be limited to literal interpretation." They also believe that "The crea-

tion story is not an historical account but a description of our own stages of spiritual growth" (The Swedenborgian Church website). Their website boasts famous members as Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) and Helen Keller (1880-1968).

How Kent came to be a member of this non-traditional group or if his family was part of a local church is still a mystery lost in history. Since he would have been living at the time of the writing of *1882 History*, we would assume that it was Kent himself who supplied the information to Rerick. However, there is no record of the group having a church in Topeka.

Listed in the *1882 History* are several of the Kent children: Robert (married, living in Clearspring township), Nathan (married, living in Eden township), Laura (married, living in Clearspring), Volney (married, living in Iowa), Alvin (deceased), twins Alice (married, living in Grand Rapids, MI) and Elvira (deceased.)

Orvin Kent died on June 1, 1892, at the age of 83. He was buried in Eden Cemetery west of Topeka (Row 26, Lot 3). Grizella Kent died on May 29, 1903, at the age of 84. She is buried alongside her husband.

Orvin Kent's contribution to the community in the cannot be overstated. He was instrumental in bringing education and culture to the Hawpatch. Without his leadership and generosity Topeka might not be what it is today.

Orvin's great grandson, Kelsey Kent (1912-1990), was the owner of Kent Refrigeration Service in Topeka which he sold in 1975. He lived in Topeka most of his life. His widow, Lena Kent, still lives in Goshen..

HG

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This 1944 photo shows Wilbur Christner in front of Topeka Town Hall with three foxes from the day's hunt. Organized fox hunts were a regular Saturday occurrence.

Wilbur and his brother Freeman owned and operated the Honeyville Feed Mill for many years.

## TAHS Quiz

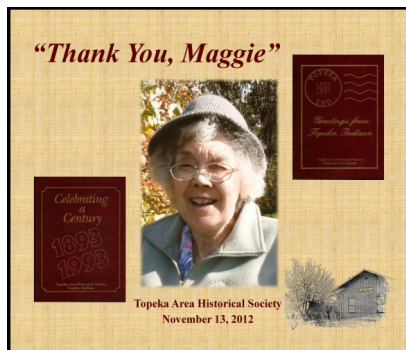
1. At what age did Orvin Kent start teaching school?
2. Where did Grizella Kent's parents immigrate from?
3. What is Wilbur Christner's brother's name?
4. Who published the *1882 History of LaGrange County*?
5. Who was the Vice President for the 30th Indiana reunion held in Topeka in 1904?

## Track Talk



### ***"Thank you, Maggie"***

Maggie Glick, a charter members of the Topeka Area Historical Society, was honored for her dedication and



service at the TAHA annual dinner meeting on November 13, 2012. As a memento of the occasion, Glick was presented with commemorative blanket.

It was Maggie who compiled and edited *Celebrating a Century*

*1893-1993*, and *Greetings from Topeka, Indiana* which is a collection of pictures and postcards.

### **Ezra Miller Named County Historian**

The Indiana Historical Society announced in early December that newly elected Topeka Area Historical Society board member Ezra Miller has been reappointed to serve another term as the LaGrange County historian.

Ezra is one of the most knowledgeable people in the county and we are delighted to have him as a member of our local board.

## ***Your \$10.00 Membership Matters !***

### **With Membership you will:**

- ✓ Receive meeting notification
- ✓ Receive the quarterly newsletter
- ✓ Provide each 3rd grader at Topeka Elementary a quarterly newsletter
- ✓ Help us to maintain and preserve Topeka's rich heritage for future generations



**"You NEED to Join !"**



## **Schedule of Events:**

**January 15, 2013**

***"The Clearspring and Eden Detective Police"***  
Topeka Branch Library (6:30 pm)

**March 19, 2013**

***"Tales of the Outhouse"***  
Topeka Branch Library (6:30 pm)

The Topeka Area Historical Society and the Topeka High School Alumni Association lost a good friend early in the year of 2012 with the passing of **Ann Colby Woodworth** after a courageous battle with cancer.

Ann was a member of the THS Class of 1959. She put together several THS Alumni Directories and seemed to know something about what was happening in the lives every living alumni. Whenever there was a question we all said, "Let's ask Ann, she'll know" and she generally did. Ann is greatly missed.



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### **Topeka Area Historical Society**

P.O. Box 33  
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[www.topekahistoricalsociety.com](http://www.topekahistoricalsociety.com)

### **2013 Board of Directors**

Harold D. Gingerich, President  
Doris Haggard, Vice President  
Cathy Strawser, Secretary  
Janice Gingerich, Treasurer  
Keith Bobeck, Director  
Ezra Miller, Director  
Michael Zehr, Director

### **Museum Curator**

Susie Parker

Answers:

- 1) Sixteen
- 2) Ireland
- 3) Freeman
- 4) F. A. Battey & Co. of Chicago
- 5) Robert Kent





# Hawpatch History Detectives Investigative Report

Our thanks goes out to **Mike Vandermark** for his recent donation of this 30th Indiana reunion announcement from 1904. Mike purchased the invitation at a

garage sale several years ago.

You can see at the bottom left of the invitation that **Robert Kent** (Orvin Kent's son) was the Vice President of the event. Orvin's son-in-law, J. Norman Babcock gave the Welcome Address.

## INVITATION

COMRADES: Topeka cordially invites you to meet your comrades in your Twenty-first Annual Reunion here, Thursday, September 8th, 1904. We promise you a hearty welcome and entertainment.

## WELCOME COMRADES

Welcome to all who here congregate,  
This welcome's yours, be ye humble or great;  
For we know the honors you all have won,  
Whether belted with sword or carrying gun.  
To you we give honor, to you we give praise  
For the heroic work did in those faraway days.

Welcome is proffered your noble band,  
For when Liberty faltered you gave your hand  
To steady the pulse of our God—Queen,

While she held aloft with majestic mien,  
Hope to the fallen, oppressed and sad,  
And freedom to those in slavery's garb clad.

Welcome to ye men of the regiment,  
The latch-string's out—fact—it is a tent.  
Our town is sited to its limits with cheer

For you who here meet once again—one more year  
To clasp hand in hand in comradeship's true grasp  
For perhaps the last time! Aye mayhap it's the last.

TOPEKA.

## PROGRAMME

### BUSINESS SESSION

2:30 p. m. Assembly Call, President A. H. Poyser in chair.  
"Star Spangled Banner" Welcome..... By Children  
Invocation..... Rev. Wm. H. Brightmire  
Welcome Address..... Hon. J. Norman Babcock  
Music  
Response to Welcome Address..... Comrade H. D. Fulton Chicago, Ill.  
Report of Committee,—Shall we hold another reunion? Where?  
Election of Officers  
Memorial Services conducted by Comrade Geo. Musson assisted by  
Rev. J. M. Steele  
Adjourn

### CAMPFIRE SESSION 7:30 p. m. (No Program)

### OFFICERS

A. T. POYSER, President, Topeka, Indiana.  
ROBERT KENT, Vice President, Topeka, Indiana.  
J. N. OLDWINE, Secretary, Cromwell, Indiana

## REUNION ORDER No. 21

HEADQUARTERS, 30TH INDIANA REGIMENT VETERANS' ASSOCIATION  
August, 18, 1904  
COMRADES:—Topeka sends to you her greeting and invites you to be their guests Thursday, September 8th, 1904 upon the occasion of the reunion of the survivors of 30th Indiana Regiment Veterans' Association.

At the same time cordial invitation is extended to comrade associates of other regiments. All are invited to come and be active participants in this reunion of veterans.

This one may be the last reunion of the 30th Indiana Regiment, so do not fail to be present.

Topeka is in Lagrange County, Indiana, on the line of the Wabash Railway. See time table.

### EAST BOUND

No. 12, Arrives 2:30 a. m. connects at Wakarusa, Lakeville, North Liberty and Westville  
No. 14, Arrives 3:30 p. m.  
No. 8, Arrives 6:20 p. m. stops at all stations.

### WEST BOUND

No. 5, Arrives 2:12 a. m. Stops at Wolcottville, Ashley, Montpelier.  
No. 9, Arrives 5:30 a. m. Stops at all stations.  
No. 1, Arrives 11:40 a. m. Makes all stops.

We are not able to procure encampment rates on railroads. Where possible you should make up excursion parties and thereby secure special rate of fare.

The following named comrades are detailed for special service—spies and engineers—whose duty it shall be to study the Geography, chorography and topography of Hoosierdom and select a place to hold next encampment and reunion of this regiment if any more are to be held.

TOM B. TOOMEY, BELA BROUGHTON, J. S. TILBERRY,  
ISAAC SCOTT, JAMES ORN, ALBERT PRISTON,  
H. L. SHOFF, LASSIE FISHER, L. N. KIDSON,  
GEO. W. FAGER



30TH INDIANA REGIMENT  
VETERANS' ASSOCIATION

## REUNION

TO BE HELD AT

TOPEKA, INDIANA

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1904

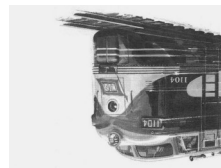
LaGrange Standard headline of September 15, 1904 read:

## A Generous Welcome The Loyal Hawpatch Entertains Gen. Lawson's Regiment

*Patriotic, generous, rich Hawpatch! Such a big hearted welcome as the people of that vicinity gave the survivors of the 30<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry at Topeka last Thursday has not been excelled, if equaled, by any town, large or small, since reunions have been held. Every house in town seemed to be decorated with "old glory", and the streets at a number of crossings were arched with evergreens, flowers and the national colors, and the glad hand of welcome and the smile of delight greeted the visitors everywhere.*

*Secretary Oldwine of the 30<sup>th</sup> regiment was at the headquarters, happy as ever, and registered 113 of his regimental comrades and 126 soldiers of other regiments. The attendance was estimated at 3,000. The ladies served dinner to 1,200, and supper to as many more, making 2,400 meals furnished by the generous people.*

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