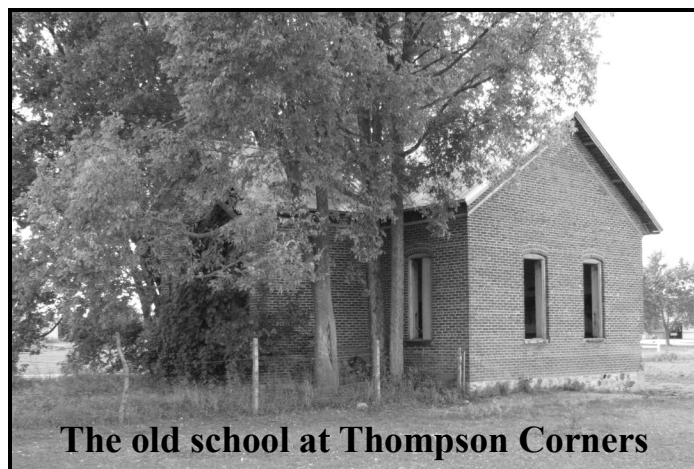




Squire Thompson: The Horseback Lawmaker

Today there is a gaping hole in the south wall of the one room school located on the corner of State Road 5 and C.R. 650 S. Relegated to a dirt floor farm storage building and partially concealed by trees, speeding motorists pass without noticing. And yet standing as it does on what was once known as Thompson Corners, the little brick structure serves as a silent reminder of the man for whom the corner was named, John Thompson. It's the same John Thompson who served as Squire and who traveled on horseback to serve in Indiana's fledgling General Assembly.

On the 1st of October 1835, John Thompson and his wife, the former Eleanor Pence, arrived from Ohio by covered wagon along with their 16 year old daughter Sarah. The Thompsons settled on land that he had purchased for \$4.37 per acre from Mark Cahoon. According to the *1882 History of LaGrange County, Indiana*, Cahoon, married to Ann Modie, a member of another family of early settlers, lived on the land long enough to make a small clearing. Thompson's purchase price for the land was a little below the going rate for land with "partial improvements". The following November the Cahoons moved west.



The old school at Thompson Corners

Soon after his arrival, Thompson was called upon to serve as Squire and administer local justice. In addition to his township responsibility, Mr. Thompson also represented LaGrange and Noble Counties in the Lower House of General Assembly in 1841 as a member of the Whig Party. Lawmakers in those days had to make the trip to Indianapolis on horseback and "undergo great tribulation on the road for the sake of legislative honors, at a salary of \$3.00 per day" (*1882 History*, page 187). Later (1856-1860), Thompson served two terms as a member of the State Senate. It is said that he played a prominent role in political affairs.

When Thompson began his career in state government, Indiana was facing monumental financial problems. Following admission to statehood in 1816, the Hoosier state government laid out an ambitious plan to transform Indiana from the frontier of the Northwest Territory into a developed, well populated, and thriving state. With an aggressive vision they initiated projects that led to the construction of roads, canals, railroads, and state-funded public schools. However, their noble aims ruined the state's credit. By 1841, a mere 25 years after being granted statehood, Indiana was near bankruptcy and forced to liquidate most of its public works. However during the 1850s, the state's fortunes turned and the population grew to more than one million people. The ambitious dreams of its founders were realized as Indiana, the 19th state in the Union, became the fourth-largest state in terms of population, as confirmed by the 1860 census. Without question John Thompson, the horseback lawmaker from Hawpatch, played a vital role in Indiana's early history.

John Thompson was also a man of faith. When Robert Latta began holding meetings in his home, John and Eleanor were among those in attendance. Together the group formed a Methodist Episcopal congregation calling it the Eden Chapel Society. Eden

Continued on page 2

In this Issue

- The Horseback Lawmaker
- Track Notes
- The Mile 146 Quiz
- Hawpatch History Detective

Chapel was the forerunner of the Topeka United Methodist Church. By 1842 the group had built a meeting-house on the parcel of ground that had previously been set aside for the burial of members of the Latta family. Today it is the site of the Eden Township Cemetery.

John and Eleanor's faith and sense of family lead them to open their home to several orphaned family members. While still living in Marion County, Ohio, they took in their nephew Joel Thompson, when he was orphaned at an "early age." According to the *1882 History* (page 309) Joel was born in Pennsylvania on February 26, 1813. He remained with them until the age of 13. In 1842, Joel followed them to LaGrange County.

Apparently John Thompson had a sister in Elkhart County by the name of Sarah who was married to an Adam Vedder. Eighteen months after their son Francis was born in 1843, Sarah died. Shortly thereafter Adam remarried and moved to Wisconsin. However, Francis was made a ward of John and Eleanor Thompson until the age of 18.

The *1882 History* (page 290-291) gives a brief synopsis of F.M Vedder's life; who it should be noted was still living at the time. On August 27, 1861, Francis joined the 30th Indiana, Company C. He saw action at Perryville, Pittsburg Landing, and all his regiment's engagements until the Battle of Stone River on December 31st, 1862. Severally wounded four times, he was left along rebel lines without food or shelter until January 2nd, when the Southerners were driven from the field. Vedder was sent to a hospital in Nashville and, "being unfit for action," he was discharged on December 12, 1863. For the next two plus years he lived with the Thompsons in Eden Township during which time he attended the Collegiate Institute at Ontario, Indiana. In the spring of 1866, Francis moved to LaGrange where He worked as Deputy Revenue Assessor and then as the Deputy Revenue Collector before becoming the Deputy County Treasurer. In November of 1869, he married Mary E. Wade with

whom he had three children.

John and Eleanor's daughter Sarah was born on July 1, 1825, in Georgetown, Ohio. It is not clear who she was named after,

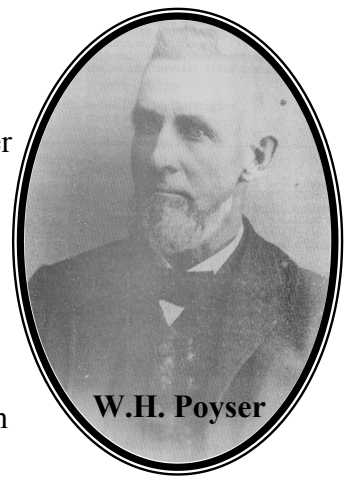
perhaps John's sister Sarah Vedder. We do know that on January 4, 1844, she married William Hunter (W.H.) Poyser (1818-1899) in LaGrange. They were married for 55 years.

William (W.H.) was around 24 years old when he came to Indiana with his mother and sister Martha from Ohio. He purchased the S.E. 1/4 of the S.W. 1/4 of section 30 in Eden township on February 25, 1842. In 1851 W.H. and Sarah purchased a farm at the edge of Hawpatch (N.E. 1/4 of section 47) which was their home until 1889, when they retired from farming and spent the remainder of their lives first in Ligonier and then in Topeka, Indiana.

The Poyers had one child, a daughter named, Clarissa. She married Amos Bowsher on February 18, 1867. Bowsher had enlisted at the age of 19 as fifer in the 48th Indiana where he rose to the rank of Sergeant. Amos was wounded at Vicksburg. His father, Boston, was a Democrat, but Amos became a Republican. No doubt marrying into the Thompson family influenced his politics. Amos was a member of the Masonic Order and the Grand Master of Topeka Lodge #760 of the Independent Odd Fellows. Amos and Clarissa had four sons and five daughters. Some Topeka folks still remember their son William "Howard" (1881-1973) and his wife Blanch.

W.H. Poyser played an important role in the development of Topeka. His name appears among the signatures of those signing the death sentence for the convicted horse thief Gregory McDougale who was hung at Diamond Lake in 1858. Poyser's name also appears on a stained glass window in the Topeka United Methodist Church.

Unfortunately we have not been able to locate any photographs of the Thompsons or their daughter Sarah. Eleanor Thompson died on April 8, 1886, at the age of 80. Her husband John, Topeka's Horseback Legislator, died on February 3, 1887, at the age of 84. Both are buried in the Eden Cemetery (Row 23, Lot 12) next to their daughter Sarah (1825-1902) and son-in-law W.H. Poyser 1818-1899).



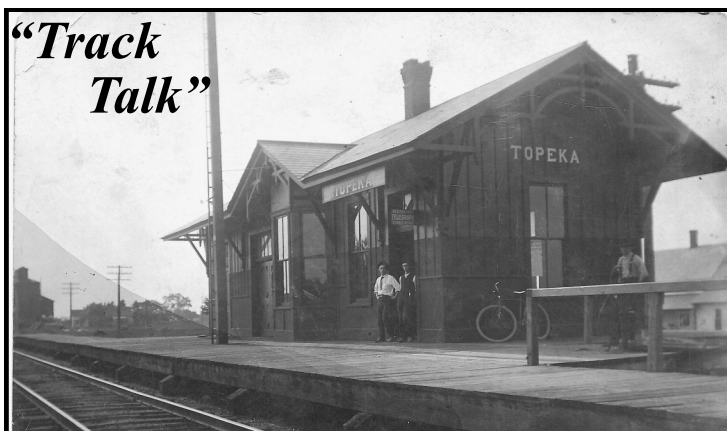
W.H. Poyser



Answers:

- 1) October 1, 1835
- 2) \$3.00 a day
- 3) Gregory McDougale
- 4) 1923; \$18,946.40
- 5) Auburn "Red" Haggard

“Track Talk”



McConnell Descendants Make A Visit



Four of William McConnell’s descendants (L to R: Judy Hostetler, Bonnie Clark Pierce, Sharon McConnell Brady, Sandy Hood) spent a day renewing memories by visiting the family farm in Emma, stopping at cemeteries, and having lunch at the Emma Café.

The public access site at Emma Lake could easily be called “McConnell’s Landing” since it sits on land donated to the state by Charles McConnell. Charles also donated the land and the lumber to build the Church of God in Emma.



Ezra Miller, TAHS Board Member, talks with Topeka 3rd graders about Wabash Railroad history.

Coming Events:



November 18, 2014

Annual Dinner Meeting
with Civil War Historian Dennis Kutzner

January 20, 2015

TBA
Topeka Branch Library

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

“Your Membership Matters!”

Your \$10.00 annual membership enables us to continue to preserve Topeka’s rich heritage.



Renew your 2015 membership.... TODAY

The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. When did John Thompson come to Hawpatch?
2. How much was John Thompson paid to represent this area at General Assembly?
3. Whose death sentence did W.H. Poyser sign?
4. In what year was Main Street cemented and how much did it cost?
5. Who is the boy in the 1942 photo on page four?



Topeka Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 33

Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

2014 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

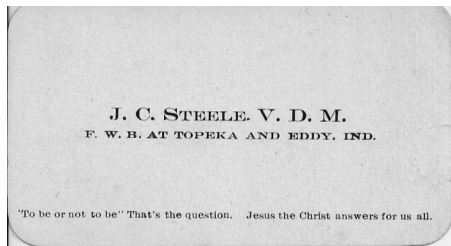
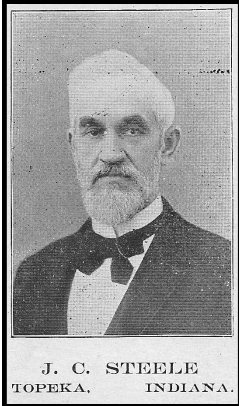


The Hawpatch History Detectives

Who was J.C. Steele?

We are looking for information on Dr. J.C. Steele. We know that he had a veterinary practice in Topeka and Eddy. But we have no idea when he came to the area or for how long he lived here.

This is all the information we have. Any help you can provide us will be greatly appreciated.



Do You Know Who This Is ? We Do.....!

This school photo was taken in 1942. This young man grew up and served the Town of Topeka in many ways following his graduation in 1948. He even has an award named after him.



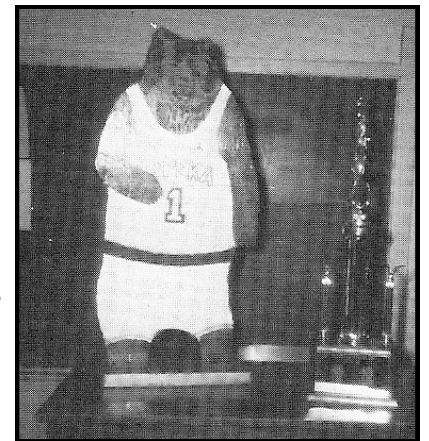
This postcard photo predates the cementing of Main Street. Main Street was cemented in 1923, at a cost of \$18, 946.40.

Our Topeka Bear Is Missing

Whatever happened to the T.H.S. Bear? Inquiring minds want to know. This photo appears on page 94 of the 1965 edition of the Topeka High School's yearbook "The Growl".

Not only do we not know what happened to the bear, we don't know who made it to begin with or when. Was it a project of one of the shop classes? That would be interesting to know.

If anyone has any information on the mascot's origins, whereabouts, or its demise please share it. **HG**



www.topekahistoricalociety.com



Topeka Area Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571