

A HISTORY OF SALINE COUNTY
and
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF HARRISBURG,
ILLINOIS, 1853-1933**



**By The Staff of The
Mitchell-Carnegie Public
Harrisburg, Illinois**



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A HISTORY OF SALINE COUNTY

By

THE STAFF OF THE

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HARRISBURG, ILLINOIS

Saline County came into being by a process of elimination, much like that of cutting an apple into sections. As a county, its history is very short. It is a part of the vast territory claimed by France through the explorations of Jolliet and Father Marquette and La Salle. These early explorers discovered the coal in Illinois. The story they told was that a tree caught fire; after it was burned, the roots continued to burn, and the coal bed beneath caught fire.

The whole territory was, of course, inhabited by Indians. The southern part of the future state of Illinois belonged to the Piankashaws and the Shawanees. The Piankashaws, a quiet, peaceful, non-resisting tribe in the southwest part, were soon driven out by the more war-like Shawanees in the southeast.

The whole section was under French rule until 1763, at the close of the French and Indian War. It is supposed that the French buffalo hunters with Sieur Charles Juchereau de St. Denis had a depot near Stonefort in 1702 or '03 – this was about the time a fort was built which was later christened Fort Massac. These hunters chose this spot for a depot so that they might use the Saline River as a highway. Their records are perhaps the earliest, and they tell of the salt springs near Equality. The treaty ending the French and Indian War ceded to England what came to be the Northwest Territory. After they had taken over the French fortified places, the English continued to occupy them as forts until 1778 when George Rogers Clark in the Western Campaign of the Revolution captured the fort at Kaskaskia for the Americans.

Clark came down the Ohio River from the east; he and his men landed at Fort Massac, and started across the wild, marshy country to Kaskaskia. They probably struck a little northwest, following a little-used trail for secrecy and not fill" old Worthen trail which ran from Golconda to Kaskaskia. Clark passed within a few miles of the spot which is Stonefort today, in the extreme southwest corner of the county.

In 1800 the Northwest Territory was divided. The region west of the present state of Ohio and north of the Ohio River was called the Indiana Territory. Nine

years Later the territory was again divided. This left what was to become the state of Illinois as a separate territory called the Illinois Territory. At this time it was divided into two counties: St. Clair and Randolph. Randolph was the southern county from which twenty-three counties, including Saline, and parts of seven others were formed later.

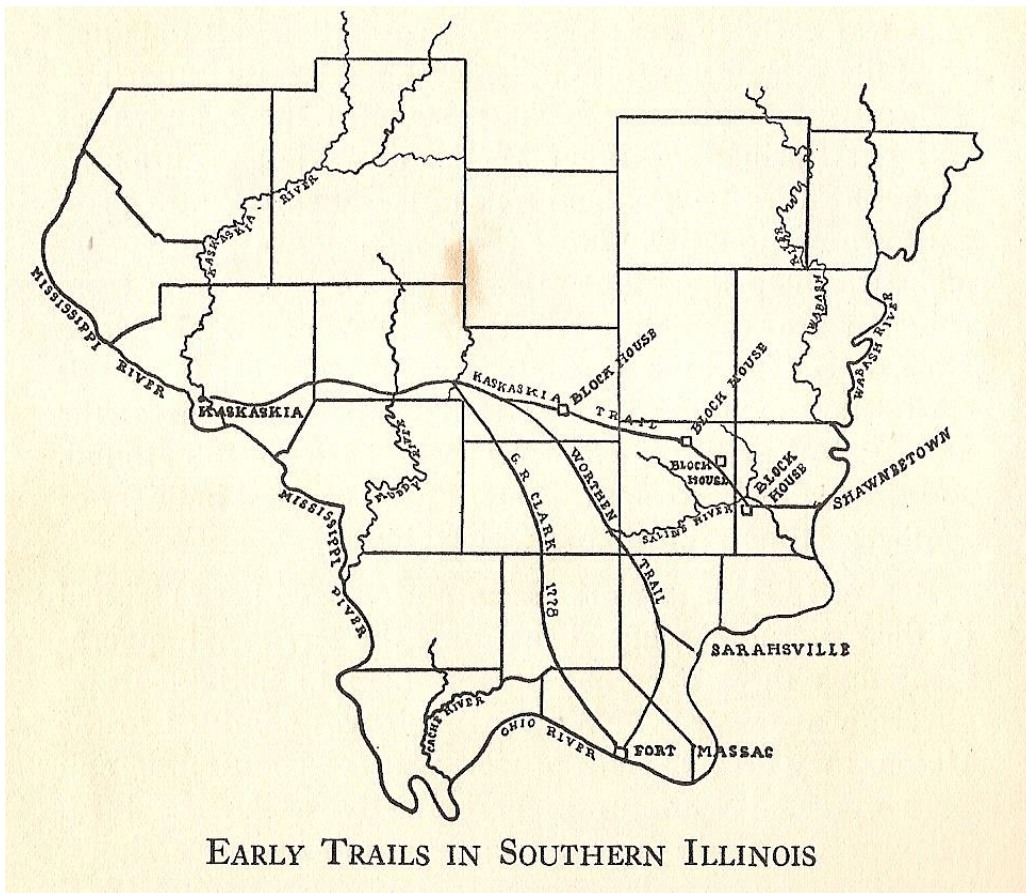
After the Revolution, immigration from the South and East was frequent. The ferries located on the Ohio had already become bustling river towns, but most of the inland territory remained wild and unsettled until after 1800. A few block houses were built in various places; Equality had a fort and block house as early as 1802. The first settlers in Equality, seven Jordan brothers and a few others, were hunters and trappers and seem not to have attempted cultivating the soil until about 1815. This is doubtless true also of the other settlements. When three of the men left the fort for fire-wood one night, they were attacked by Indians; and only one escaped. Coleman Brown built a block house near the present location of Eldorado in about 1814. The little valley between the hills from Eldorado to Raleigh was a favorite spot for movers going west and men hauling supplies from Shawneetown, to camp for the night.

It was early in the nineteenth century (sic) that salt obtained from the Equality springs became commercially important. There were two strong springs. One of them, known as "Nigger Spring," "Nigger Well," or "Nigger Furnace," is on the Saline River about four miles down from the present town of Equality. Near it are a strong sulphur spring and a fresh spring. The other salt spring, one mile from Equality near the Saline River, was known as "Half Moon Lick." As far back as there are any records, these salt springs are mentioned. The Indians made salt there; the animals had paths beaten to the springs from miles around, and the region became the center of the greatest industry of southern Illinois, until coal was exploited.

Before 1804 these works seem not to have been claimed by the government, but at that time the territorial government took them over and leased them to individuals as government property. When Illinois was admitted to the Union, they became state property by the constitution and were operated with profit, periodically, as late as 1873. They produced the best salt in the south of the territory, but the most profitable years were those from 1816 to 1843.

Shawneetown had a few log cabins in 1804. It was platted into town lots in 1810, approved as a government land office in 1812, but there were no land entries until 1814. Shawneetown became the leading settlement, the seat of the land office, and was connected with the rest of the world by the Ohio River, so that it soon became the official port of entry and the trading center. Supplies were hauled from there to all the inland villages.

Randolph County was further divided into three other counties in 1812. One of them was Gallatin, containing the land which was to be subdivided many times yet before the last subdivision would cut off Saline. Shawneetown was the county seat and was connected with Kaskaskia, seat of the territorial government, by a trail called the Shawneetown-Kaskaskia trail. It ran northwest from Shawneetown, by the block house at Equality, by the Brown block house at Eldorado, west by the range of hills north of Raleigh to the Karnes block house (near where Bethell's Creek church stands), by the Gasaway block house to Frankfort, then a little northwest to Kaskaskia. Part of this old trail, from Equality to Eldorado, is still used as State Highway No. 142. The establishment of the first mail route over this trail in 1812 was a hazardous undertaking successfully carried out.



Gallatin County became a county formally in 1812. The few inland settlements were small groups of cabins clustered around a block house or a mill, or both. The block houses were necessary for protection from the savage Shawnees and wild animals. They were large enough to house the whole settlement in time of danger, and the openings between the logs were thoroughly "chinked" to keep the Indians from firing into the building. Sometimes a fort was built by building four block houses in a square. Besides the Indians, there were bears, panthers, buffalo, deer, and ordinary game roaming the woods. The settlers kept dogs, almost as ferocious

as the wild animals themselves, to protect them from the animals and warn them of the approach of Indians. The Browns were aroused at their block house one night by the howling of the dogs. They interpreted it to mean the approach of Indians, but there was no attack, and the next morning the only signs were the foot-prints in the frost back of the block house. Another time the men of this settlement had gone to locate their strayed horses. They had gone several miles in the dense forest, when they heard shots; they were alarmed but saw no one. They built a fire, cooked and ate their supper, and concluded to camp for the night. About midnight, aroused by a sense of danger, they heard the click of gun triggers and saw Indians moving through the dark. Unable to estimate the number, they thought it better to run than to stand battle. They reached the block house safely, but with the Indians in close pursuit.

Mills to grind corn into meal and saw trees into lumber were the first marks of civilization. (Wheat was not ground into flour in this section until later when it was introduced as a local farm crop. Bread made from wheat flour was a luxury to the pioneers.) There is some dispute as to just when the first mill was built in Saline County. There were several early ones: Somerset Township, Mountain Township, Carrier Mills, Raleigh, Galatia, and Eldorado. (The last one built was at Mitchellsville in 1849.) They were operated by water power when they could be situated on a river or creek; most of the others were operated by horse power. Often there was a blade attached to saw lumber. They were very crude machines, but were important in developing villages and making pioneer life easier.

Although the government established a land office at Shawneetown in 1812, for two years no entries were made. The first men to enter land in what is now Saline County were John Wren and Hankerson Rude in 1814. Rude came from Virginia, but nothing is known of Wren. Coleman Brown entered the land which is now Eldorado in 1816. It was during the years immediately following the War of 1812, when the public land of this territory was very cheap, that the flow of immigration into Illinois increased.

In 1818 Illinois was admitted to the Union with the necessary population of 40,000. The constitution made it a free state, but the slavery issue was to grow heated more than once. The population of what is now Saline was not more than ninety families, and almost all of them lived along the Kaskaskia trail. Gallatin County claimed a population of 3,440 at that time. (This figure has been disputed by the government, and it is possible that a considerable number of emigrants on their way to Missouri were included.) The Population of Gallatin included eighty-three free Negroes and 218 indentured servants or slaves, the greatest number of either in any county in the state. When the question of amending the constitution to admit slaves into the state came up in 1824, Gallatin voted 597 for the amendment and 133 against; and although it was the greatest proslavery majority in the state, it

was insufficient to balance the rest.

The largest settlement in the southern part of the state was Shawneetown in Gallatin County which included much more territory than it does today. Much of it lay along the Ohio River, with only the river separating it from slave territory. This probably influenced the slavery issue, as well as the fact that most of the settlers had come from the South and Southeast. The salt works, however, were of far greater importance. They had always been operated by slave labor, and the constitution of 1818 provided for the maintenance of slave labor for this purpose until 1825. The people interested in the salt works used their influence in the Legislature, but defeated, and the amendment failed. The passing of slave labor crippled the salt works for a time; and many years later, other salt works produced it in such large quantities and so cheaply that these works were closed down entirely. Since 1873 this thriving, busy industry has been quiet; but for many years it was the busiest spot in southern Illinois. The salt water was boiled down; the salt put to dry, and packed in sacks. The pipes used were made of hollowed logs. The old sites can still be distinguished, but today they mean little more than reminders of past history.

In 1832 the Black Hawk War aroused the whole state, and several companies went from Gallatin County to fight the famous Indian chief who was battling for his people.

For ten or fifteen years previous to the Black Hawk War there is little to mention, but settlement went steadily on. In 1823, however, the first school was taught in the county; and in 1832 or '33 the first church was organized; civilization was advancing. The Methodist and Baptist denominations were always the favorites of the pioneers. The first one in the vicinity of Harrisburg was Baptist: Old Liberty church about three miles west. There is a church there still.

In 1838 the first railroad was surveyed. It was to have been called the Shawneetown and Alton Railroad, but it was never built. When the first railroad did come through, it did not follow this early survey.

By 1839 the negro question was flaming again. It may never have been quieted, but it became especially unmanageable then. There were a number of negroes in Gallatin County. They were the slaves or indentured servants who had been freed or had bought their freedom. Most of them were peaceful, law-abiding people; but their mere presence caused friction. Every crime committed was attributed to them. In 1840 a band of men calling themselves Regulators ranged over the whole of what is now Massac, Hardin, Saline, and Gallatin counties attempting to force all the Negroes out of the state. They kidnapped the children of these free negroes and sold them into slavery. When Benjamin Hardin was murdered, the negroes were accused. It was subsequently believed that a negro might have done it, but at a white man's request. Harmless colored people were whipped and terrified in an

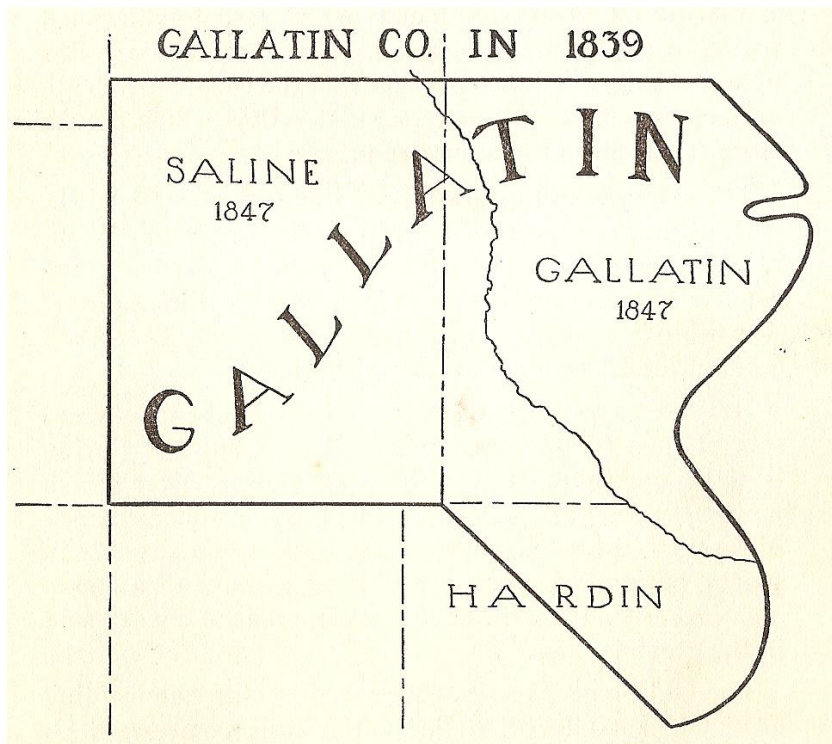
unpardonable way.

The big house, locally known as the slave-house, which is visible from the state road a little east of Equality, has a third floor equipped with dilapidated bunks, two to each compartment; and there are evidences of chains in the walls. A flight of stairs to the roof provides a look-out. The building is supposed to have been the headquarters of a group who enticed runaway slaves to cross over from Kentucky, seized them and collected bounty for their return. The dates and names of the operators of this bootleg slave trade are forgotten; but judging from other events of the period, it must have been about the years the Regulators were active.

The greatest opponent of slavery in southern Illinois was Morris Birkbeck, a Quaker of Edwards County, who became famous for his anti-slavery labors.

SALINE COUNTY ORGANIZED

Saline County, named for the Saline River which was named for the salt springs, was cut from the western part of Gallatin by an act of the Legislature, February 2, 1847. It is an area of 378 square miles or 241,920 acres.



Its climate ranges from extreme cold to extreme heat. Since 1899 the highest

temperature has been 114 degrees in 1930; the coldest, twenty-two degrees below zero in 1899. The rainfall is abundant, but not always well distributed. The average by seasons is something like this: winter, 23.8 per cent; spring, 28.2 per cent; summer, 27.1 per cent; autumn, 20.9 per cent. The total for the year averages about 44.67 inches.

Only one of six ice advances reached Saline County. It came as far as the South Fork of the Saline River. South of that lie the Ozark Highlands which is the unglaciated region of the county. Loess soil, glacier residue deposited by winds, is found blown over parts of the county to a depth of one to twenty feet. The broad, flat valleys which are the more fertile and productive are preglacial.

The extremes in topography are due to the Ozark Hills.

The altitude ranges from 980 feet above sea level at Womble Mountain, to 340 feet where the Saline River leaves the county. The next highest point is Horton Hill in Somerset Township. Some other altitudes in the county are: Bald Knob, 820; Eldorado, 385; Harrisburg, 366.

Relative to the elevation and geology of the county are several spots of interest. Cave Hill near Sulphur Spring is about five hundred feet above the Saline River which flows near the base. The cave opening is a funnel-shaped pit in the hillside. Its passages are narrow and slippery in places, but several rooms are as large as those of a house. The cave is made by the action on limestone of a weak acid in the ground water.

The Old Stone Face is at the top of a cliff commanding a magnificent view of Saline valley near Somerset, with Stillhouse Hollow many feet below.

The vertical layers of rock near Horseshoe are supposed to have been raised by internal disturbances of the earth.

Geologists call this one of the most remarkable features of Illinois.

The whole county is drained by the Saline River and its tributaries. It appears to be mature drainage, and is very effective for the most part. There are areas along the streams, however, which suffer damage from overflows, but are also enriched by them.

The soils of Saline County are divided into four groups:

Upland timber soils, including all the upland areas of glacial and loessial origin, that are now, or were formerly, covered with timber: 55.28%.

Terrace soils, including bench lands, or second bottom lands, formed by deposits from overloaded streams: 5.89%.

Swamp and bottom-land soils, including the overflow land along streams, the swamps, and poorly drained lowlands: 35.46%.

Residual soils, including rock outcrops, and soils formed in place through the

weathering of rocks: 6.74%¹.

Several kinds of rocks and minerals are found. The cave rock is marked with limestone, but the stalactites and stalagmites have been broken by cave-explorers. Millstone grit, a conglomerate of reddish-brown sandstone and round pebbles of quartz, superimposed on Chester limestone, lies at the base of the productive coal measures. Such copper as has been found is drift copper, and therefore in no paying quantity. There is clay for bricks and good limestone for building.

Coal, however, is the chief mineral. There are eight or ten geological seams present, all, at least locally, of workable thickness. The older the coal the better. Age used to be indicated by the number of the seam, but to avoid confusion, the numerical designations have been largely replaced by locality names. The coal is sold as Harrisburg, Illinois Coal. All of Saline County coal and most of the important beds of the state are included in what the geologists call the Carbondale formation. Saline County is fortunate in that all the coal has a persistent black shale roof and a firm floor, but it tilts sharply to the north, and there are numerous small faults in the coal seams. All the mines are mining No.5 coal (if designated by number) and it varies in thickness from four-and-a-half to eight feet. Sahara Mine No. 12 has low ceilings due to the five-foot coal.

Saline County coal is the best, with the highest B. t. u., of any coal being produced in the state. It averages from 12,000 to 13,000 B. t. u.² It is most like that of the eastern fields. The two best workable beds were originally estimated at 2,712 million tons.

Black walnut, white oak, cypress, hickory, poplar, sweet gum, sassafras, and mulberry are among the many native trees.

The act which formed Saline County called for a special election to decide the location of the county seat. Two sites were selected to be voted upon. One was the grist mill at Raleigh; the other was Robinson's Ford on the middle fork of the Saline River near where the Big Four crosses it, or what is now Muddy. Raleigh received the majority; it was platted into lots, and they were sold at public auction, November 15, 1847. The first trial was held in a two-story log house that same year; the first jail of logs, with a dungeon beneath, was built the following year; and the first court house in 1850. Some of the people living in the south of the county had objected to the county seat being located on the north side, but by 1850 Raleigh believed that it was permanently located there, and built a two-story court house in the public square left for that purpose. Also that year the first newspaper was published in the county but survived for only a few issues. During the years 1852 and '53 agitation was renewed to move the county seat to a central location. If Robinson's Ford had been selected in the first place, the later controversies would have been avoided.

In 1852 a meeting was held at Old Liberty Church, and a committee was appointed to select a town site near the center of the county. The committee finally selected the site of the present business section of Harrisburg. It was then called "Crusoe's Island," because after heavy rains it was surrounded by water which left an island in the center. Five acres from the land of each of four men - Pankey, Yandell, Cain, and Harris - composed the twenty acres in the original plat. It was platted, and the lots sold at public auction, July, 1853. By 1854 there were several buildings around the public square. The first one was a log building used as a store which stood where the City National Bank is today. The county seat was not moved for five years; because, after Harrisburg was laid off and building had begun, a new controversy arose. Another election was called, and those favoring Harrisburg claimed a majority of fifteen votes. The case was taken into court and remained there a long time, but the court did nothing, and finally threw it out. Some have contended that the Harrisburg supporters bought it out. At any rate, in 1859 the county seat was moved to Harrisburg, and Harrisburg was incorporated as a town in 1861. Moving the county seat left the court house at Raleigh unoccupied, and it was sold to the Masonic order at a great loss.

There is a record of political factions and their skillful maneuvers in 1856. The county seat was still at Raleigh where a convention of sixteen delegates met one Saturday to nominate a candidate for the Legislature. Each side had eight members in the convention. Joe Robinson, from the south side, was the chairman.

The north side favored Major Elder; the south side desired the nomination of E. C. Ingersoll (brother of Robert G. Ingersoll). The expected dead-lock resulted. The Ingersoll men concluded that they might accomplish the nomination of their candidate by the subterfuge of a "dark horse." They nominated Dr. Jacob Smith instead of Ingersoll. Elder received eight votes and Smith, eight. The dead-lock continued until near midnight with no hope of breaking it. Joe Robinson, the chairman, voted last with the long, nasal twang characteristic of him. The two party leaders were full of convention controversy and enlivened the occasion to the delight of the spectators. As midnight drew near, some of the delegates grew restless, thinking it unseemly to be holding a political convention on Sunday. They adjourned without making any decision on the candidate or naming a date to finish the business. Ingersoll mounted the rostrum and announced his candidacy for the legislature; Elder followed with a similar announcement. At the November election, Ingersoll was elected by a small majority.

Eldorado, settled near where the old Brown block house had stood, was platted in 1858 and incorporated in 1870. It was named for the two men who laid it out: William Elder and William Reed, and was originally spelled "Eldoredo."

DESERTED VILLAGES

Scattered over the county there are several spots, most of them near mills, which once looked to a future. They became extinct, usually, because the railroads failed to pass through them; and the people moved to be near rail transportation facilities.

Whitesville on the Saline, once a prosperous village, is now deserted. It was named for Benjamin White, who owned and operated the mill located there. Robert Mick, afterwards a wealthy Harrisburg merchant and founder of the First National Bank, laid the foundation of his fortune in Whitesville. His flatboats loaded with freight were floated down the Saline, the Ohio, and the Mississippi to New Orleans. Water transportation was replaced by railroads, and there is little to mark this spot today.

Garris Ridge is another "deserted village" about a mile northeast of Stonefort. It has rather hopelessly claimed the distinction of being the first settlement in what is now Saline County. Sykes Garris and his young bride came through from Kentucky on their way west a few months before Illinois became a state. They camped for the night beside the Saline River. The next day they decided that they had found the spot they were looking for, and started to build a cabin for a home. About 1830 he built a mill. A few other settlers were attracted by the mill, and a small village arose. In 1840 a steam mill was built, and the competition ruined both mills. Steam was a more expensive means of operation, and the owner of the steam mill, looking for a way to improve his own business, learned that the old measure Garris used, made from a block of sycamore wood, was slightly over-weight. He went to Shawneetown for legal advice where he was told that the law viewed over-weight and under-weight as the same offense. A law-suit was started which dragged on for many years. The final verdict was in favor of the complainant; and Garris said, "My day in the sun is over;" but the steam mill may have continued to operate until after the Civil War. Some of the stones and old timbers of the water mill may still be found in the river.

SALINE COUNTY AND THE CIVIL WAR

There were people in all parts of southern Illinois who sympathized with the South. It is not surprising since so much of it borders slave territory, and many of the people came from the South. Williamson County, west of Saline, exhibited its feeling by formally demanding, after the fall of Fort Sumter, the division of the state and the attachment of the southern part to the South. Saline County did not declare for secession; but the Knights of the Golden Circle, a semi-military organization which favored the Southern cause, were well organized and active.

Their methods were similar to those used later by the Ku Klux Klan; they tried by anonymous letters and secret meetings to frighten the Union soldiers and negroes. Dr. Mitchell (the philanthropist who gave the ground for the Mitchell-Carnegie Public Library at Harrisburg) had brought two families of negroes into the county and put them to work on his farm near Independence. He violated the constitution in doing it; and the Democrats, as a political measure, warned him to remove them. He ignored the warning, and the Knights of the Golden Circle did not dare to approach him and enforce it.

Notwithstanding the Southern sympathizers in the county, Saline sent 1,280 men to the Union Army out of her quota of 1,285, and the draft was never necessary. Seven companies of infantry and one of cavalry were almost wholly recruited from Saline. General John A. Logan was in command of one, and they were all in the brigade of General John A. McClernand. Some of the Saline County men were with Sherman on his famous march "from Atlanta to the sea."

AFTER THE WAR

The county, like the state and nation, settled down to recuperation after the close of the war. In the two elections previous to 1868, Saline County had voted Democratic, but it supported Grant three to two. The election returns³ from the presidential elections from 1860 to 1872 might be of interest:

1860	Lincoln—100	1868	Grant—2,835
	Douglas—1,338		Seymour—1,913
1864	Lincoln—765	1872	Grant—2,905
	McClellan—818		Greeley—1,827

By these statistics it is obvious that Lincoln was not a favorite in Saline County.

The years immediately preceding the panic of 1873 were similar to those preceding 1929. Everything was overdone over-enthusiastically. It was at this time that the railroad boom was at its height, and Saline County shared in it. The St. Louis and Southeastern Railroad was finished to Eldorado, February 28, 1871, at the time the road was extended from McLeansboro to Equality. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad acquired this road in 1880. The Cairo and Vincennes (later Big Four) came through Eldorado, Harrisburg, and Stonefort in 1872. (General A. E. Burnside, noted Civil War commander, was one of the early presidents of the Cairo and Vincennes Railroad.) This road did not follow the old survey made years before, and many little villages collapsed; Old Stonefort moved, literally, to its

present location. The Belleville and Eldorado Railroad from DuQuoin to Eldorado was built in 1880 in the interest of the St. Louis, Alton, and Terre Haute Railroad Company and was acquired by the Illinois Central System on October 1, 1895. The completion of this last railroad into Edorado made it the intersection of three railroads; Harrisburg had only one.

The little village of Bolton had been settled in 1847 wholly in Williamson County. The old village of Stonefort had been settled in 1858. One log cabin, built on Joe Robinson's land in 1831 and still standing, was the nucleus of Old Stonefort. In 1872 when the Cairo and Vincennes Railroad came through and did not follow the proposed route, but passed about two miles west of Old Stonefort, the town moved. The buildings were moved to the railroad, across the county line from Bolton. The town is now known as Stonefort and lies in the two counties.

Stonefort gets its name from the historic relic near by, called the Old Stone Fort, on the highest point of a hill overlooking the south branch of the Saline River a mile or so east of Stonefort. Whether it was ever used as an actual fort is unknown, but tradition claims it. It is semicircular in form, enclosing about three or four acres. The walls appear to have been about six feet thick and six high. In lieu of a wall, the back is protected by a steep cliff which drops sixty feet. Within the enclosure is a pile of rocks that may have been used as weapons to throw over the cliff. The trees growing in the wall are as large as those in the surrounding woods indicating that if it were ever used, it was many, many years ago. The survey in 1807 is the first dated record. Its construction has been variously attributed to the Spaniards, the Indians and others; but there are no verifications of any of the suppositions.

Before the railroads came, all the inland counties were slow in developing. The railroads helped, but unless the soil was conducive to the growing of a special crop for shipping, there was little to speed development. Saline County raised tobacco as one of its export crops, and at one time great quantities were raised and sold. Galatia was the tobacco center of the county. During and for a few years after the Civil War, cotton was the chief export. Saline remained, nevertheless, a backward region until the mine boom came.

Coal outcrops near Equality, Stonefort, and in other places. The first mine was a slope mine near Ingram Hill in 1854. The old Temple and Castle mine in Gallatin County near Equality was operating as early as 1875 and perhaps earlier. The first shaft sunk in Saline County was at the old Newcastle mine, about half way between Stonefort and Carrier Mills, in 1883 or '84. Black Hawk and Q'Gara's old No.9, both just south of Harrisburg, were the first mines sunk near it. All three of these early mines were sunk to No.6 coal. It was only thirty feet below the surface where Black Hawk and No. 9 were. These three mines have all been abandoned; there is a small pond where Black Hawk used to be. The old Ledford shaft was the

first in the county to mine No.5 coal which is now mined by all the shaft mines in the county.

These mines and others were operating, but there are no statistical records of the individual mines prior to 1904. The reports to 1903 were all grouped together making a total output of 2,045,135 tons produced before 1903. The next two years brought the coal mining boom. The Big Four carried Saline County coal in 1902, but the tracks were not planned for such heavy traffic, and the bridges were all of wood. In 1905 the road was rebuilt to carry the coal traffic, and has carried 9.01 % of the coal produced by the state. That same year thirteen shafts were sunk, but many of them have been abandoned. There are twentyone operable mines in the county today, owned by ten corporations. All Saline County shaft mines are removing No. 5, but there are some drift mines that are removing No. 6, one No.2, and another, NO.3. Saline rose from Thirty-first place in 1902 to fifth place in 1930, with an average of eighth place for the period from 1882-1930.

It is to the thickness and very good quality of the coal, that, Saline County owes its position as chief competitor of Williamson and Franklin counties. Since 1925 the coal users have turned to southern Illinois, and these three counties have been producing 41 % of the state's output.

Coal mining and agriculture are the chief industries.

The soil is not particularly fertile, and general grain farming-, with corn, wheat, and oats leading, has been the system generally practiced; but one third of the whole acreage is not suited to it. Some farms have been abandoned and others will be unless some specialized crops are introduced. As late as 1890 Saline County and those surrounding it were working oxen and were the poorest in farm machinery in the state.

Poultry and dairy businesses are today rapidly becoming important industries.

Nineteen-thirteen was the year of the last and worst flood.

Continued spring rains are common, and the banks of the streams are low, so that overflows in varying degrees occur almost every spring. In that year the Ohio and all its tributaries overflowed. The water backed up until Harrisburg was completely surrounded.

SALINE COUNTY AND THE WORLD WAR

The United States entered the World War in 1917. (The last deep snow of this region came in the winter of 1917-18.)

Saline County had a total of 1,604 men in the service; 900 of them were drafted, and 704 enlisted. Twenty-six of them died, some of disease in camp, others killed in action. Besides these casualties, there were fifty-five Saline County soldiers wounded in action.

The women of the whole county, and the children too, were organized into Red Cross and Junior Red Cross. They made hospital garments and surgical dressings in special work rooms. Everyone knitted socks, wristlets, mufflers, sweaters. The little girls learned by knitting wash cloths which were shipped with the other supplies; and at Christmas, a package was sent to each Saline County soldier in France.

All food consumption was controlled by the Federal Government, and prices were exorbitant. Sugar rose to thirty-five cents a pound, and a purchase was limited to two pounds. Conservation of coal and other resources was stressed similarly: tags were distributed to the school children to take home to tie on the handle of the coal shovel as a reminder of fuel economy.

The winter of 1918-19 the flu epidemic raged. All schools, churches, and theatres were closed; and the Baptist church at Harrisburg was converted into an emergency hospital.

The years after the war are not distinguished for anything in particular except the building of the hard roads and the Illinois Central cut-off. Saline County shared the hectic prosperity of the twenties and the tragic collapse of 1929. Nineteen-thirty is still remembered as the hot, dry year; it was 114 degrees one day, probably the all-time record for the county. (The University of Illinois reports in 1926 that the record was 110 degrees in 1918.)

The state highways, with the intersection of routes 1, 13, 34, and 143 at Harrisburg, have made many people conscious of Saline County who had never heard of it before.

Like most of southern Illinois, Saline is slowly shrinking in population. The 1930 census with a total of 37,100 shows a decline of 3.3 per cent since 1920. According to the same census, there are 34,523 native whites, 1,045 foreign-born and 1,542 negroes.

No special distinction, either good or bad, sets Saline County apart; it had no vendetta like Williamson, no visits from celebrities like Gallatin and Massac; it was explored, settled, and developed quietly and unassumingly.⁴

Footnotes

¹"Saline County Soils," (*University of Illinois Agriculture Experiment Station Soil Report No. 33*; June, 1926).

²Bement, "Illinois Coal" (*Illinois State Geological Survey Bulletin No. 56*).

³*History of Gallatin, Saline, Hamilton, Franklin, and Williamson Counties* 1887, p. 164.

⁴The mine riot of October 5, 1933, which resulted in summoning the state militia to Harrisburg and the subsequent disturbances, had not occurred when this was written.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF HARRISBURG, ILLINOIS, 1853- 1933

By
THE STAFF OF THE
MITCHELL-CARNEGIE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Harrisburg did not grow up naturally around a mill or a mine as most towns do; it was artificially created. The county seat was originally located at Raleigh which is only six miles from the north boundary of the county. The dissatisfaction this caused among the people in the southern part of the county brought about the birth of Harrisburg, a child of controversy.

Raleigh was selected as the county seat in the year Saline became a separate county (1847). It was not long until agitation to move the county seat to a central location was begun. The site which is Muddy today had been suggested when Raleigh was decided upon, and if the Muddy site had been chosen, Harrisburg never would have existed. In 1852, however, a meeting was called at Old Liberty Church to discuss a new town site; and a committee was appointed to buy the land which is now the public square and its immediate surroundings. The committee bought five acres from each of four men: Pankey, Yandell, Cain, and Harris. The original plat extended from Cherry Street on the east to Jackson on the west, and from Elm on the north to Church on the south.

It was platted into lots and sold at public auction July, 1853. There were no houses or families living on this particular twenty acres; although it, together with some surrounding acres, was called "Crusoe's Island" because it was often isolated by water, and there were a few families living on other parts of the "Island." Building around the square began immediately, and there were several buildings finished by 1854, including a house of logs used as a store which stood where the City National Bank is today. By that time too, it had become a recognized government post office, and people were impatient to get the county seat moved; but Raleigh had a new court house and gave up the prestige reluctantly. The case was taken to court, but nothing was done, and the Harrisburg supporters have been accused of "buying off" the court and "fixing" the election which gave Harrisburg the majority of fifteen votes.

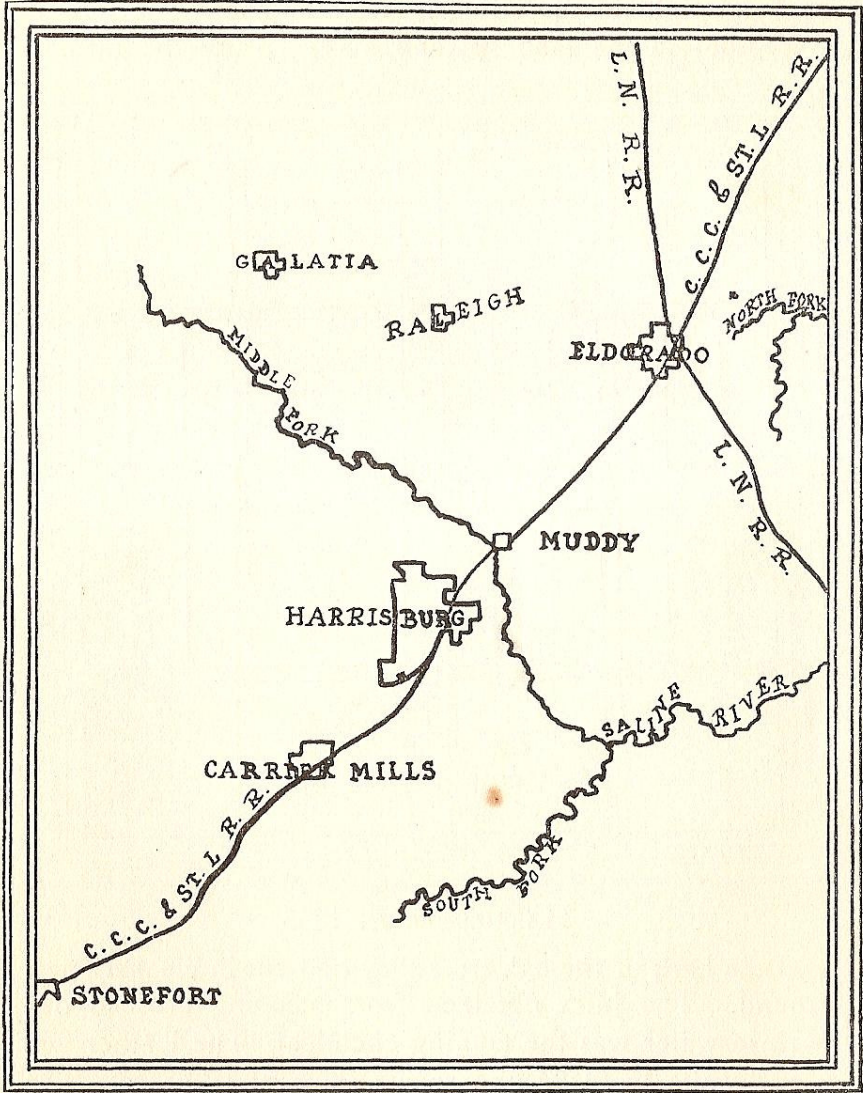
From before the creation of Harrisburg, the Gaskinses, Feazels, Sloans, and Dorrises were important land owners. Their names are preserved, not only in their descendants, but in the streets and subdivisions of the town.

The first church was the Methodist, organized in 1856.

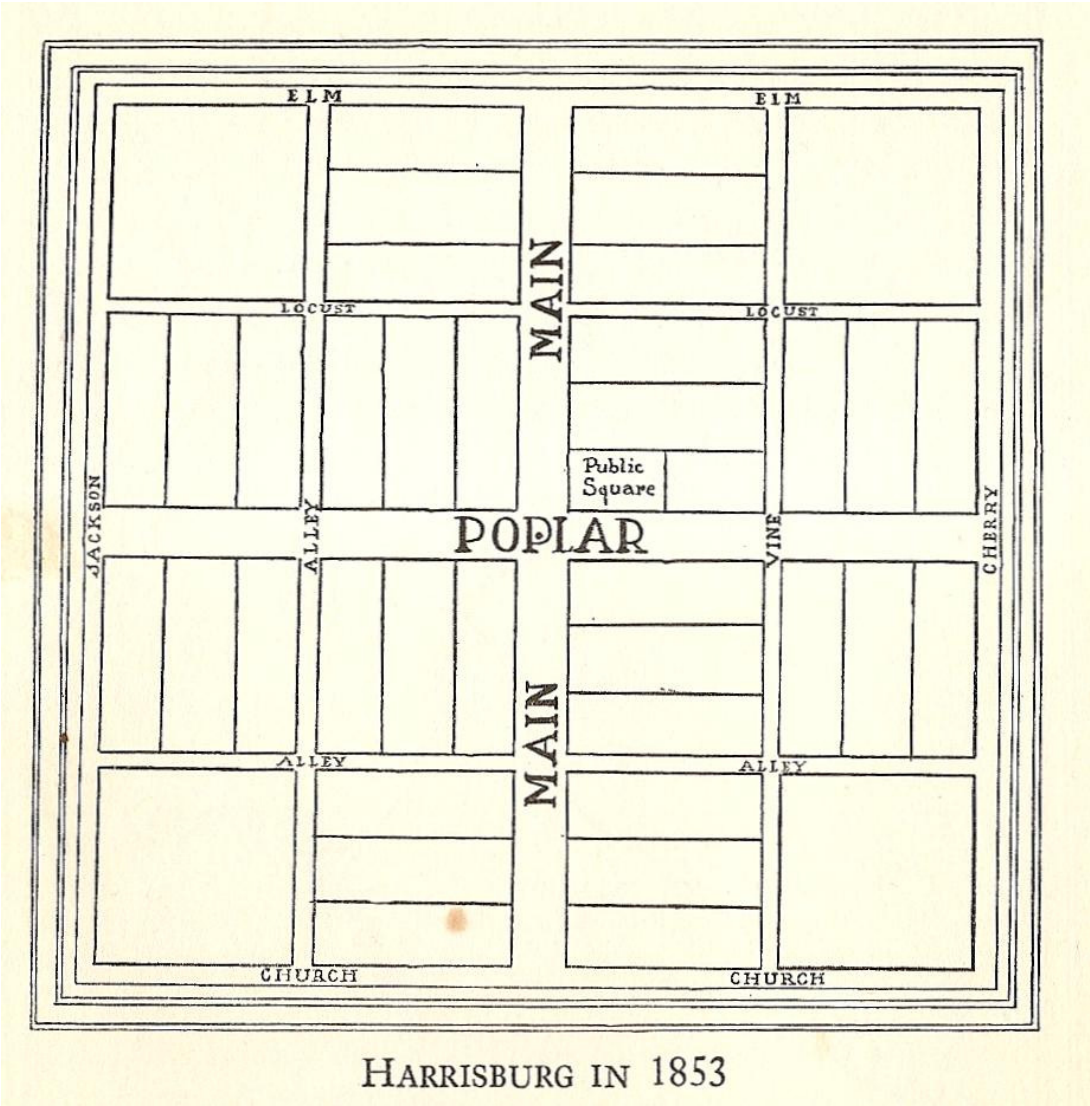
At first it was included in the Raleigh circuit, but a Harrisburg circuit was soon formed, and the first church building was used as a union community church.

One year before the county seat was moved, the first schoolhouse was built (1858). It was a small frame building on the corner of Vine and Church streets, just in front of where the public library is today. The next year Harrisburg had by hook or crook achieved the majority and became the county seat (1859). Then development began in earnest. A newspaper, the *Chronicle*, one of the only two successful papers, was started; and Lodge No. 325 of F. & A. M. was organized. After the county seat was moved from Raleigh to Harrisburg, the doctors and lawyers who had established their practices in the other town moved with the county seat.

SALINE COUNTY 1933



About 1860 the first business in the nature of a factory was started; it was a tannery and stood where the traction depot is. In those days the families were almost self sufficient and the little else they needed was done largely by hand right in the village. After butchering, the hides were sold to the tannery; and every spring the farmers sold the bark of the oak trees they had cut in clearing new ground. The juice obtained from steeping crushed oak bark in water was the tanning chemical. The leather was used locally to make and repair shoes and harness. The water for the tannery was supplied by a permanent well on the ground now covered by the Hubbard Apartments on West Logan Street. The well was never known to be pumped dry, and in dry years, supplied half the town with water.



The year of the outbreak of the Civil War was the year Harrisburg was incorporated as a town. The first imposing building was built that year; it was the first court house, made of very beautiful white stone with Greek columns.

For the next four years building and development were probably at a standstill because most of the men were in the Civil War; but in 1865, after the close of the war, things began again. The first fair association was formed; the first hotel was built where the Gregg and Barter Drug Store is; and the old opera house which has served so long in so many capacities. The Elks remodeled it a few years ago and use it for their hall. The Baptist and Presbyterian churches were both organized in 1868, and used the community church building located on the corner of Main and Church streets in union with the Methodist which was already twelve years old. The next year the Arrow Lodge No. 386 of I. O. O. F. was organized, just ten years after the F. & A. M.; and the *Register* was started, ten years after the *Chronicle*.

The first flour and planing mill was moved to Harrisburg from Galatia soon after the town was started and was located on East Walnut Street where the R. C. Davenport home is. Across the street was a little shed which housed a carding mill, and all around and beyond it were open fields for many years..

The owner of the carding mill had been induced to move his mill from Marion to Harrisburg. If he would come over, he could have ten acres of land free. He came! He came during the battle at Fort Donelson. On their way over, he and his family could hear the guns.

The carding-mill was important for cotton as well as wool. During the Civil War and for a few years after, while southern cotton was unavailable, all southern Illinois raised cotton as an export crop. Business came from miles. People from Hardin and Pope counties brought their cotton to Harrisburg to be carded. Enterprising business men knew the importance of the carding mill and the advantage of having one in Harrisburg.

In 1870 the flour mill, part of which is still used as a warehouse for Woolcott's mill, was built by Dr. J. W. Mitchell.

The town was growing during the boom years succeeding the war, and in 1871, a new brick schoolhouse was built where the Logan School is; and the Methodists built a church of their own. The next year Harrisburg's only railroad, then the Cairo and Vincennes, was built through Saline County. The arrival of the first complete train was a great occasion. It was an excursion train from Vincennes to Cairo. Everyone went down to the depot to see it come in, and also went to Cairo on it. That year (1872) is still remembered as the dry year; for four months there was no rain at all; and two wells, the one near the tannery and one in "Happy Hollow" (the slight depression terminating in the intersection of Mill and South streets) supplied the whole town with water.

The first bank, originally called the Saline County Bank, but now the First National, was organized in 1876. It is still in business and is twenty-two years older than the next oldest, the City National, which bought the Baker Bank and was chartered in 1898.

By the end of the seventies the introduction of new chemicals made the old tannery unprofitable and it was discontinued; however, the new decade brought a brighter outlook for everything else. Coal was being considered commercially; and a stave factory, using the timber south 10 Pope County, was manufacturing staves for the Standard Oil Company, doing a total business of about \$8,000 per month. The Black Hawk mine was sunk in 1885 near where Ford's brick kiln is now, and only a few years earlier two mines had been sunk near Ledford. Baker, Walford & Co., started the second bank which was later called the Bank of Harrisburg. A woolen mill was built in 1884, and stood where C. V. Parker's Oil House is .. A very small part of the old building is still standing and is used as an oil warehouse. The mill manufactured some blankets and other cloth and also had a set of custom cards to card wool for those who wanted to spin and weave at home.

Up to this time tobacco had been of some importance; and, although Galatia was the tobacco center of the county, Harrisburg had two huge tobacco barns where the buying and selling was done. One was on East Poplar Street where the Harrisburg Garage is, and the other on North Main Street where the Saline Hotel is, across from the Baptist Church. Tobacco rapidly drains the soil of its substance, so that it requires new ground; and after two or three crops of tobacco the farmers planted their ground in something else. Too, the stiff black "gumbo" around Harrisburg raised a rank, coarse tobacco which did not sell well, and the last tobacco transaction was about 1886.

The local post of the now rapidly dwindling G.A.R. was organized in 1884, the same year the Presbyterians built their first church where the Orpheum Theatre is now. Two years later the Baptists built in their present location, but the building has been altered and enlarged several times since.

In October, 1882, the town experienced its first sweeping fire. All the buildings on the east side of the square were frame, some rather ramshackle like some of the others around the square; and about eleven o'clock one night, fire broke out in the center of the block. Of course the whole block went because bucket brigades using water from the court house lawn were helpless to check it.

The winter of 1883-84 is still referred to as the "year of the high water," although that which came in 1913 rose much higher and caused more damage and suffering.

Vine Street between Poplar and Church streets was called "Whiskey Chute" because saloons lined it on both sides. In March, 1888, a fire broke out in one of

the saloons between the alley and Poplar Street. Both sides of Vine Street to the alley and all the south side of the square burned. There were only two brick buildings in the block, the Bank of Harrisburg on the west corner and the second building from the east corner; but their walls and the vault of the bank were all that were left.

Three weeks after the south side burned, the west side burned. "Grandma" Pearce left too big a fire under her Sunday dinner while she went to church; the fire started in the back of the Pierce Hotel on the corner where Gregg's Drug Store is and traveled north to the end of the block. Flying sparks settled, burning an occasional building out to the edge of town at Logan Street. There were no brick buildings at all through the entire length of the street, and wherever a spark fell, the building burned. After all these losses, the council decreed that henceforth, any new building around the square or within one block of the square should be built of brick or stone.

The town was incorporated as a "city" under aldermanic form of government in 1889. The whole town was divided into wards; two aldermen elected from each ward, and a mayor comprised the governing board. At this time the population was probably 1,500, the town limits had extended north from Elm to Logan Street; but the corner of Webster and Walnut was still "away out." The old brick house which is still standing on that corner was built by a man who wanted to get away from the town! South, Main Street went only as far as Gaskins Street. Because of the railroad, the town had built eastward along Poplar and Locust streets, but it was still a tiny town when it was incorporated as a city.

The high school which has played such an important part in the life of the community was started as a department of the city school system in the upstairs of the old East Side School in 1890 with only a two-year course at first. Mr. Harry Taylor came to teach in the high school in 1896 and succeeded to the superintendency in 1898. When the high school was separated and became a township school, he became its first principal and has been with it ever since.

Several things happened in the next two years. The first electric street lights were turned on with much ceremony on June 14, 1892. The Mayor, Charles P. Skaggs, made a speech and his daughter, Mrs. Harry Woolcott, then a little girl four years old, turned the lights on. The old building which housed the first mill held this early light plant, and the power was generated by the mill machinery. The building now occupied by the City National Bank was built by the Bank of Harrisburg in 1893 to replace the one destroyed by fire when the whole block had burned a few years before; the first brick sidewalks were built the same year, and saloons were voted out to stay out for ten years, as it proved. Saloons are the pegs many people hang their memories on, "Let me see, I know we had saloons then, because ... "

In 1897 the men who organized the City National Bank bought the Bank of Harrisburg, or Baker's bank as it was commonly called. This bank was the third one organized, but it is the second oldest doing business today.

Coal was metaphorically, and almost literally, looming on the horizon at the beginning of the new century. Very little had been shipped before 1902 because the Big Four tracks were not constructed to stand the strain, but the railroad company was considering laying new tracks. In 1901 the Harrisburg Water, Light and Power Co. bought the little local plant which had been operating rather inefficiently and got a thirty-five year franchise from the city. (The Central Illinois Public Service Company bought this franchise in 1912 and is operating under it today.) The first separate high school building was built in 1902, and in 1903 it was separated from the city system. Saloons were voted in for 1903-04, then out again and have been out ever since. The present court house was built in 1904 to replace the old one, a much lovelier building but no longer safe.

The Big Four laid new tracks in 1904, and the mine boom was on. Thirteen shafts were sunk in the county in 1905 and miners, operators, and engineers poured into the sleepy little town of about 2,500 people. There were no paved streets, and few sidewalks; horses hitched in front of the court house mired in the mud; a wagon needed four horses to pull it through the mud around the square. The sidewalks in many places were planks on a scaffold above a muddy trench. After coal became definitely established as the principal business of the town, all this changed. Harrisburg became a prosperous, charming little city. Paving the streets began with the square and Poplar to the depot in 1908.

The volume of business was so increased that two new banks were organized in 1905: the Harrisburg State Savings Bank and the Saline Trust and Savings Bank, since merged into the First Trust and Savings Bank.

Drainage and sanitation problems occupied the attention of the city board in the early 1900's and for several years following. Among other problems was draining the square. Poplar Street rose to a hill where it crossed Main, and since water does not run uphill, it was necessary to level this hill down to drain the square. It was cut down and the water drained off back of Gregg's Drug Store.

Mining continued to develop and the town with it. A fire department was organized and an engine purchased; another telephone company came in; sewer bonds were floated at intervals; the Methodists and Presbyterians built their present churches; the Catholic church was organized with a resident priest for this parish; the nucleus of the present public library was begun. All this happened within a very few years.

The public library, started by the Woman's Club, was struggling for existence; it consisted of a few donated books housed in a room in the old city hall. The

library board applied to the Carnegie Corporation and were told that the Corporation would give a building if the town would give a site, and agree to support it by a sufficient annual appropriation. The board and a committee from the Woman's Club worked hard with no success. Discouraged, the board met one night with no hope or news. Suddenly one of them thought of Doctor Mitchell. He was a wealthy man; he might! A committee went to call on him immediately and put the proposition before him. He did! He gave the location, and when he saw from the blue print that the building was being crowded, he gave six feet more on the east side. The building was started in 1908 and formally opened, dedicated and presented to the public on January 21, 1909. It is named for Doctor Mitchell who gave the lot and for Andrew Carnegie whose money built the building.

Coal brought prosperity, but before safety became a scicllce it also brought many accidents and sorrow. "On February 13, 1911, four men were killed in Saline County Coal Company's NO.3. It was caused by the sinking bucket coming loose from the hook and dropping eighty feet with three men in it and striking one already down. In October of the same year, eight men were killed in O'Gara Coal Company's No.9. Mines NO.4 and No.9 were connected at the face of the main north entry of NO.9. Number 4 had been closed for repairs in the main shaft, and it seems that the section of this mine nearest No.9 had not been sufficiently ventilated. These men were working near the connection of the mines when an explosion occurred which blew the door down between the two mines and the after-damp rushed in."¹

In 1913 the interurban traction line from Eldorado to Carrier Mills was built; the city government was changed from aldermanic to commission form; the present white stone post office was built; and the whole town was distressed by the worst flood in local history. The water backed up until Harrisburg was completely surrounded. The houses in O'Gara No. 3 Patch were flooded to the roof; people, forced to abandon their homes, lived in tents on the dry land; a boat could go from the Big Four tracks on East Poplar Street to Kentucky. Harrisburg proved to be the "Crusoe's Island" of its early days. Gaskins City and Dorrisville are both sufficiently elevated that they were above the water, but boats had to be used between them and Harrisburg. The water poured in the old mine shaft on the southwest corner of Equality compressing the air in the mine so that the reaction forced the water out in a geyserlike manner. The O'Gara mines in the flooded district were in danger of a similar disaster, but sand-bags were stacked around them to protect them.

The tragedy became history and attention was again turned to the future, and an addition was built to the high school the next year.

¹Compilation of the Reports of the Mining Industry of Illinois from the Earliest Records.

Everything went well for a few years; the mines were running steadily. Then the European War reached the ignition point. The whole town joined in a feverish activity of war work, and when the flu epidemic came that winter (1918-19), the energy already generated by the war was sufficient to handle the situation easily and efficiently. Schools, churches, theatres and public gatherings of all kinds were suspended for a time; and the Baptist church was converted into an emergency hospital to care for the sick.

The Rotary Club was organized during this period of activity and organization in general.

Of the twenty-six Saline county boys who died in the service, thirteen were from Harrisburg, and three of them were killed in action; fifteen of the county's total fifty-five wounded were from Harrisburg.

The fever did not abate until the business decline of 1921.

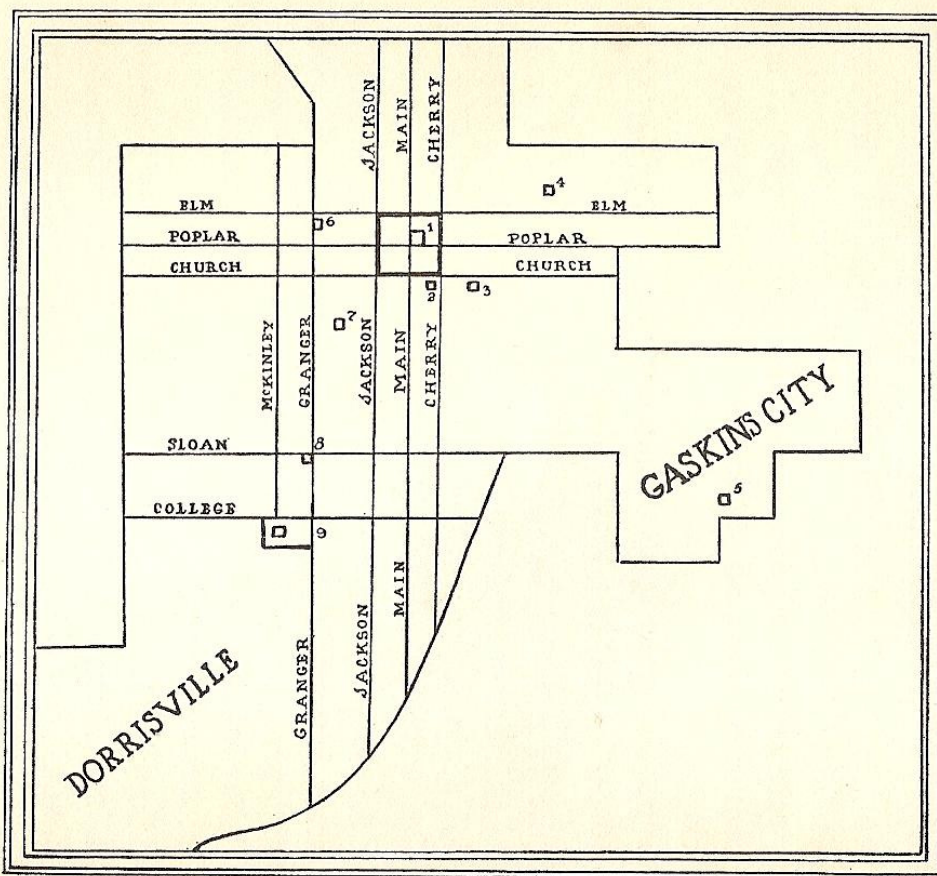
The years immediately following the war, 1918-20, were the most prosperous Harrisburg mining has ever experienced; but in 1921 coal was affected by the general slump and has never revived.

On August 31, 1921, the worst accident in the history of the Saline County mines occurred at Harco when a gas explosion killed twelve men. Such occasions always disturb the whole community, and this was the worst the county has ever known.

The school system expanded very rapidly after 1905.

Logan, the oldest school building in use, was built in 1905 to replace the old East Side, which was torn down; the Junior High, the newest in the city school system, was built in 1921; and the new building was added to the high school in 1922. The next year the largest single annexation to the city took place when Dorrisville and Gaskins City and some additional tracts were annexed. These additions made a total of eight political wards, twice as many as there were in 1902. The Gaskins City school was already in the Harrisburg district, but the Dorrisville school has never been voted in. It was supported by taxes from Mine NO.9 when that mine was running, but today the district is hard pressed to pay for the school.

The population of Harrisburg by the 1930 census is 11,625; of this total, 10,672 are native white, 421 are foreign born, and 532 are negroes. The area included in the city corporate limits is much greater than that included in the 1920 census report. That census reports the Harrisburg population to be 7,125. Considering these figures without the annexations to the city, it appears that Harrisburg has grown rapidly, but in reality the whole county is slowly decreasing in population. The reason is obvious; the mine boom is over.



LEGEND

1. COURT HOUSE
2. PUBLIC LIBRARY
3. LOGAN SCHOOL
4. LINCOLN SCHOOL
5. BAYLISS SCHOOL
6. HORACE MANN SCHOOL
7. JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
8. MCKINLEY SCHOOL
9. HIGH SCHOOL

HARRISBURG IN 1933

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