

METAMORA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

NEWSLETTER

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Old Newspapers... In December, we sent out a “Bonus Issue” that included the website for the library’s new link to recently digitized Metamora Heralds, Sentinels, Washburn Leaders, and old census reports. What a bonanza that’s been!! Included below you’ll find several assorted articles plus some related research. And you’ll find that politics in the 1900’s weren’t much different than politics today.

REAL ESTATE TAXES 1864 – STEVENSON AND LEMON (Metamora Sentinel)

A.E. Stevenson owned the west half of lot 6 in block 28. Today this is the location where Salon Seven sits on the Square. It was valued at \$400 and taxes were \$10.96. If you look at pictures of the Courthouse from that period, you’ll find that Stevenson’s property was a 2-story frame building. George Lemon, who owned the house where Stevenson lived at 104 W. Walnut, owned all six lots on behind his house on the west side of North Menard. His property was valued at \$1,200 and his taxes were \$32.26.

THE METAMORA HOUSE April 16, 1868 (Metamora Sentinel)

“As there seems to be a disposition on the part of some individuals to circulate reports to the effect that the Metamora House will shortly be closed, this is to give notice that the subscriber has no such intention; and she would respectfully inform her friends and the former patrons of the house that nothing will be left undone that may in any manner be conducive to comfort. Thankful for past patronage would respectfully solicit a continuance. Good stabling attached to the premises. Mrs. T. B. SPEIR” (*Editor’s Note: Mrs. Speir, the proprietor, placed this article in response to some negative rumors. Note the mention of a stable.*)

REAL ESTATE TAXES 1868

The real estate tax on most Metamora vacant lots in 1868 was under \$1.00.

ATTORNEYS 1872 (Metamora Sentinel)

The April 1872 Metamora Sentinel lists five attorneys practicing law in Metamora – Clark and Kettelle; Chas. Chitty (southeast corner of the Square over Page’s store); Elijah Plank; Burns, Ray, and Feilitzsch; and B.D. Meek (office in the Court House.) In addition, Adlai Stevenson had relocated to Bloomington, but was still advertising locally.

BUSINESSES AND SERVICES 1893

In 1893 there were 3 doctors offices and 4 saloons around the Square, plus the County Jail (at 314 W. Davenport) and a calaboose (close to the corner of Chatham and Menard on the west side of the 300 block of North Menard). There was also a large stock yard that covered 3 lots next to the railroad tracks on the east side of the 200 block of North Wetmore. The April edition of the Newsletter will include a plat map from 1893 that shows businesses.

OPERA HOUSE PRESENTATION – (Metamora Herald, February 22, 1900)

“The Illinois Comedy and Concert Company gave their opening performance here Tuesday night and were greeted by a packed house, standing room being at a premium. The company is composed of the very best artists and they keep the audience in an uproar of laughter from start to finish. Dr. Hudson, the proprietor of the company, has been coming here off and on for the last 20 years and his reputation and the good quality of his remedies are too well and favorably known to need any recommendation from us. Suffice it to say that all his medicines are sold under a guarantee and he will cheerfully refund your money if you are not satisfied.

“The company will be at the Opera House every night this week ‘except tonight’ and Monday and Tuesday night of next week. Go to their performances and enjoy a hearty laugh. Admission only 10 cents. Reserved seats 15 cents” (*Editor’s Note: the opera house was located in the Courthouse.*)

FRED WHITFIELD DEAD (Herald Feb 10, 1905)

“Passed Away Sunday” —News of the Week from Cazenovia

“Fred Whitfield, of Partridge, Tp., who formerly lived near here, died Sunday after an illness of several weeks, brought on by exposure one cold night driving out from Peoria. His hands were frozen so badly that amputation was necessary.

“Pneumonia and Typhoid Fever set in and all together were too much for a frame enfeebled by age, and several gun-shot wounds received in the Civil war. Mr. Whitfield has answered the last rollcall and gone to join the ranks of veterans who have crossed the river. He leaves a wife and four small children, and a son and daughter by a former wife, to mourn (*sic*) his loss. Funeral services were held Tuesday.”

The following articles were run when Adlai Stevenson was running for Illinois governor in 1908. Stevenson was accused of being a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, an organization of southern sympathizers (also known as copperheads). Guess the mudslinging didn't just start...

BACKGROUND. The Knights of the Golden Circle (KGC) was a secret society in the mid-19th-century United States. The original objective of the KGC was to annex a "golden circle" of territories in Mexico, Central America, Confederate States of America, and the Caribbean as slave states, to be led by Maximilian I of Mexico.

As abolitionism in the United States increased after the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, the members proposed a separate confederation of slave states, with U.S. states south of the Mason-Dixon line to secede and to align with other slave states to be formed from the "golden circle". In either case, the goal was to increase the power of the Southern slave-holding upper class to such a degree that it could never be dislodged.

During the American Civil War, some Southern sympathizers in the Union or Northern states, such as Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa, were accused of belonging to the Knights of the Golden Circle. In some cases, they were imprisoned for their activities. Southern sympathizers were also known as "copperheads."

Metamora Herald Sept 25, 1908

"Former resident of Metamora, who has been falsely accused of having been affiliated with the Knights of Liberty (also known as the Knights of the Golden Circle), during his residence here in war times. Old residents of Metamora, who knew Mr. Stevenson's war policies and worked shoulder to shoulder with him in raising troops here, stamp the charges as utterly without foundation, and declare that no branch of such an organization ever existed here.

"Mr. Stevenson came to Metamora in 1858 and was a citizen of the town, engaged in the practice of law, until 1868. He served two terms as a member of the village board of trustees, and is the man responsible for having the village square planted with trees, he having assisted in the task with his own hands. In 1864 Mr. Stevenson was elected states attorney of this county. After removing from here to Bloomington Mr. Stevenson was twice elected to congress. It was in his campaign for this office in '74 that Bill Whiffen, editor of the old Woodford Sentinel during Mr. Stevenson's residence here, made the "copperhead" charge.

"Col. Sldwell now of Chicago, and other old time Metamorans stamped the accusation as false and Mr. Stevenson was elected to congress. In 1892 when Mr. Stevenson was elected vice president the charge was again made campaign ammunition, without avail. Here, where the true cause of Whiffen's despicable attempt to politically kill Mr. Stevenson is known, little attention is given the time worn and unproven charge."

SOME NEW EVIDENCE

Washburn Leader, October 8, 1908

Connects Mr. Stevenson with Knights of Golden Circle

In Affidavit Made by Mrs. Jennie Starkey. of Waynesville, Is Offered as Additional Proof - He Was Asked to Speak.

Springfield, Oct. 6.

"A girl's curiosity after the lapse of nearly a half a century is responsible at this late date for the unearthing of what is considered positive proof of Adlai E. Stevenson's connection with the Knights of the Golden Circle that much despised secret order that harassed the families of Union soldiers in the north in the closing year of the civil war when the veterans fought real rebels in the south leaving their homes unprotected from the nightly depredations of the members of the secret clan.

"Further proof that Stevenson was affiliated with and was considered by his war time friends and neighbors as a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle is furnished by Mrs. Jennie Starkey of Waynesville Ill.

"Mrs. Starkey makes affidavit that she was acquainted with the secrets of the famous copperhead organization, and that she has personal knowledge that Mr. Stevenson was at one time invited to deliver an address before a branch of the order of which her uncle, Andrew Hedrick, was secretary.

"Learned Clan's Secrets.

"In her affidavit, which was made Thursday Mrs. Starkey states that she has been a resident of Waynesville since 1872, and that when a girl of 18 years she learned through the exercise of womanly curiosity secrets of the Knights of the Golden Circle.

"At that time Mrs. Starkey's uncle Andrew Hedrick, a southern sympathizer, lived at her father's home near Downs, Ill., and was secretary of the local organization.

"A visit one day to her uncle's room led to a discovery that notices were in course of preparation for a meeting of the Knights of the Golden Circle and that these notices contained the information that the speakers were to be Adlai E. Stevenson and Dr. Worrell both of Bloomington. Further search revealed the passwords of the secret order. 'Do you see the star in the east?' The answer was, 'yes, do you see the tail or it?'"

"At a local social function, hearing one gentleman ask another 'Do you see the star in the east,' she responded surprised them greatly by giving the answer: 'yes, the one with the tail to it' and that both of them begged earnestly to know how she became possessed of the secret of the order, and further that she was offered \$50 for the information and was told that the person who revealed the secrets of the Knights of the Golden Circle was liable to be hung. Mrs. Starkey further says that one of the gentlemen in whom she occasioned surprise by her knowledge of the correct answer is at this time a resident of LeRoy. This society was generally known in the vicinity of Downs as the Knights of the Golden Circle and Mrs. Starkey states that there is no question whatever about Stevenson's connection with it."

DOES NOT KNOW HER

So says Mr. Stevenson of Mrs. Jennie Starkey Here Are Some Facts That Should Remind Him as to the Identity of This Lady—Widow of His Friend

Washburn Leader, October 8, 1908

"Springfield, O ct. 7.—Adlai Stevenson says that he does not know Mrs. Jennie Starkey of Waynesville, who has made an affidavit that he was one of the speakers invited to a meeting of the Knights of the Golden Circle during the civil war. Mrs. Starkey is the widow of Dr. Starkey of Waynesville, who was a personal friend of Mr. Stevenson, and Mrs. Starkey says that Mr. Stevenson frequently was a guest at the house.

"Perhaps Mr. Stevenson may be reminded as to the identity of Mrs. Starkey. He now owns a farm near Downs, which Uriah Washburn, father of Mrs. Starkey, left to her and his children when he died at Heyworth, in Randolph Township, May 17, 1883.

"The records of the Bloomington courts show that prior to Mr. Washburn's death, Stevenson and Ewing had been his attorneys. When the estate was filed for probate, they presented a claim against it for \$188 for attorneys' fees, which they claimed to be due from seven suits they had handled from 1881 to 1883 for Mr. Washburn.

"The following paper also appears in the records for the appointment of an administrator:

"Hon. R. H. Benjamin —Sir: The appointment of W. H. Whitehead administrator In the Washburn estate will be satisfactory to our side. POLLOCK"

"Also to the heirs. A.E. STEVENSON"

"Mr. Whitehead, who was a brother-in-law of Adlai Stevenson, was appointed administrator. His bond, dated July 19, 1883, was signed by A.E. Stevenson and James E. Ewing.

"The names of the Stevensons, Adlai E., James B. and John C., appear all through the records in this case. In a partition suit filed on behalf of James Washburn vs. Elizabeth Washburn, widow of Uriah Washburn, Stevenson and Ewing were the attorneys and received for their services \$300. John and Joseph Washburn, two of the heirs, conveyed their share, one-eighth each of the estate, to John B. Stevenson, brother of Adlai. The records show that on September 6, 1884, part of the land was ordered sold at two-thirds of the valuation placed by the commissioners. On September 6, 1884, it was sold by Master In Chancery John McNulta to James B. Stevenson for \$8,660.96. The deed also takes in John C. Stevenson.

"James B. Stevenson sold his half to John B. Stevenson for \$6,000, June 8, 1888. John C. Stevenson, on July 21, 1888, conveyed his land to Letty G. Stevenson, wife of A. E. Stevenson, for \$17,000, \$5,000 of which represented a mortgage given in 1886, due in five years, which the purchaser agreed to pay.

"The records show that Adlai Stevenson still owns this land. According to the assessor's books he has 470 acres in sections 18 and 19.

"During the probating of the property a suit was filed by John Smith against the estate. Judgment for \$455.35 was obtained. The judgment was bought by John C. Stevenson, and was allowed according to the record, November 9, 1885. Mrs. Starkey filed a claim for witness fees for traveling 40 miles to attend the trial of the John Smith suit. Now Adlai Stevenson, in a formal statement, denies that he knows Mrs. Jennie Starkey at all, notwithstanding the records in the courthouse at Bloomington. Many of the files in the case were lost in the fire."

REPUDIATE OLD CHARGE

Metamora Herald Sept 25, 1908

"Notwithstanding that citizens of Metamora and Woodford County, who were fellow townsmen of Adlai Stevenson when he was a resident of this village have repeatedly refuted the false story that he was a member of an anti-war society called the Sons of Liberty, republican campaign managers are continuing to harp upon this threadbare charge.

"The old affidavit Bill Whiffen, editor of the old-time Woodford Sentinel published here, launched with malicious intent in 1874, in which the accusation was made against Mr. Stevenson, is being published by many republican newspapers, while statements of facts in the matter by republic men who were living in this county in war times have been ignored.

"Whiffen the man who originated the charge is well remembered by the old residents of Metamora. He came here in 1861 and purchased the Woodford Sentinel, which he edited until 1866. While here he was elected county treasurer. It is said he was a reckless fellow and managed to have a defalcation of about \$1400 in his office. Mr. Stevenson was states attorney at the time and it was his duty to prosecute the matter against Whiffen.

"He did so, with the result that the latter's bondsmen had to make good the deficit. Whiffen then sold out the Sentinel to Power and Harl, accepting notes, which was turned over to the bondsmen.

"He vowed that he would get even with Stevenson at some time, and being a crafty politician, he saw his chance when Mr. Stevenson was running for Congress in 1874 and launched the 'copperhead' story.

"The story was denounced as false by many of Mr. Stevenson's former friends here who knew him intimately during war times, and he was elected to Congress.

"Again when Mr. Stevenson was a candidate for vice president both in 1892 and 1900 the old charge was revived, and was again refuted.

"Here, where the motive for perpetrating some kind of a story that would be damaging to Stevenson, by the vindictive Whiffen, was known, little attention was paid to the matter.

"A number of the older residents of Metamora have been interviewed by the Herald and all pronounce the 'copperhead' story as a base falsehood. Numerous incidents are recalled that prove beyond a doubt that Mr. Stevenson was not affiliated with any secret anti-war party during his ten years' residence here.

"The whole truth of the matter is that a branch of the society named never existed in Metamora. As charged by Whiffen. Henry Martin, who is an old soldier residing here, has given out a sworn statement that he has known Mr. Stevenson since 1852 and is a personal friend of the general, and that he knew him to have been a faithful supporter of the Union and a zealous worker in inducing men to enlist in the army.

"John L. McGuire, who is also an old soldier, declares in a sworn statement that he knew Mr. Stevenson before and after the war and that his knowledge of him was only as a loyal citizen and man above reproach.

"J. O. Irving, who was too young to enlist, but who well remembers the stirring times in Metamora at the outbreak and during the war, has prepared a detailed statement, telling of Mr. Stevenson's part in the celebration of the victory at Vicksburg. After stating that he is 57 years old and has known Mr. Stevenson nearly all his life, Mr. Irving states:

"I well recall the night of the celebration of the surrender of Vicksburg. There were no trees on the public park at that date. (Mr. Stevenson being a member of the village council a few years later was one of the prime movers in planting the beautiful grove that now adorns that park.) The entire population of the village turned out to celebrate that victory. We burned about everything in the village that could be loaded onto wheels that night.

"During the illumination and general rejoicing speeches were being made from the top of the old public scales that stood on the east side of the park, and I remember stopping for a moment to look at and hear Mr. Stevenson while he was addressing the crowd. I was too deeply engaged in helping to keep up the fire, and too young to note his remarks but that they were in accord with the sentiment of the whole people who celebrated that night. I am well satisfied, from the cheering and general good feeling that prevailed.

"I never heard of any such charges until long after Mr. Stevenson had removed to Bloomington, and had become a candidate for Congress. When such rumor did come to my ears I investigated among his many friends here and one and all denied the charge, and branded it as spite work by a man who had been a public officer of Woodford County and had defaulted, and who became sore at Mr. Stevenson, who was prosecuting attorney for this district at the time of that default, and who as such attorney was called on to recover for the court the amount of the default, which he did - did his duty as an honest and fearless public official. That Mr. Stevenson enjoyed the full confidence of the residents of Metamora - and does to this day - in his official and social life during his residence here, is a fact that cannot successfully be denied.

"One and all pronounce that story false. Had there been any truth in it I was in a position to have heard or known of it and I am free to say that I am fully convinced that is a malicious falsehood, and not founded on any fact."

Contact Us

Questions, Ideas - Love to hear from you

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