

An excerpt from
The History of Stacyville, Iowa: 1856-2006¹
By Cheryl Mullenbach, 2006

1855-1899

For anyone who grew up in or around Stacyville it's not difficult to imagine the sights, sounds and smells of a June morning in a farm field just a little north of town. It may not be as easy to imagine the same scene as it appeared on the first day of June 1855 when Stacyville's earliest settlers of European descent broke the first ground.

In May of 1855 when Nicholas Hemann and Adam Blake arrived in the area that became Stacyville, they couldn't have known the impact their move from McHenry County, Illinois would have on future generations. The two men had purchased their land from the government and their hard work would lay the foundation for a community that has survived 150 years.

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Not long after the Hemanns and Blakes arrived, H.I. (Homer) Stacy and his brother, Fitch B. Stacy, purchased 600 acres of land in the area that later bore their name. In the summer of 1855 Chicago resident Fitch B. Stacy, along with a couple of friends, had set out to purchase "wild" land in Iowa. On the way they stopped in Bureau County, Illinois, to invite Homer I. Stacy to join the group. Homer's horse became lame and he returned home while the other three continued up the Mississippi River to Dubuque where they hoped to buy land at the government land offices. When they arrived in Dubuque the offices were closed and they returned without accomplishing their task.

In December of 1855 H.I. Stacy persuaded his brother to enter into a joint effort to purchase 4,000 acres of Iowa land. The land was purchased from the government and from private individuals. Stacyville Township was formed in 1856 and at that time included part of the territory later known as Liberty and Union Townships.

In February 1856 Homer and Amelia (Donaldson) Stacy moved with their family to Mitchell County, Iowa. By June Homer had built a house and store and had platted the village of Stacyville. In August of the same year a post office and sawmill had been established. The sawmill was a joint venture by the Stacy brothers and the Rolfe brothers, Dr. B. F. Rolfe and Charles G. Rolfe. The earliest postal records identify Oran Orcutt as post master. (It's unclear if he was the first to serve in the post. It is documented that he served from July 1, 1878 to February 1882—when it appears his wife took over the position upon his death).

The 1883 *History of Mitchell County Iowa* provides a little more detail about the acquisition of land by Homer Stacy. In that account Homer came to Iowa on a "prospecting tour" and after "a careful examination of the claims in different portions of the state," he bought 600 acres on the Little Cedar River from a man named John McIntire. Homer bought the land for his brother and himself and paid \$3,000 for the tract. Mr. McIntire had purchased the land only a short time prior from the government and paid \$1.25 per acre. Homer then selected and located for himself and his brother 1,500 additional acres, including the "present site of Stacyville."

The population grew between 1855-57 with the arrival of new settlers including: G.S. Johnson, C.L. Gibeaut, J.P. Emery, Philip Blake, W.H. Dyer, Stephen Heimer, John Schumacher, Jacob Schumacher, Mathew Schumacher, Simon Wiengert (or Weingert), J.C. Pelton, E.H. Donaldson, John Parlin, Dr. B.F. Rolfe, Charles Rolfe, Charles Fitch, Marcus McCall, Daniel Hill, A.E. Donaldson, and Martin Decker. Births among the settlers also helped to increase the population of the little community. In 1856 W.H. and Catherine (Berger) Dyer became the parents of Lucy, the first white child born in Stacyville.

Those early years saw steady growth and development. In June 1856 Daniel Hill ran the first hotel in a building built by Homer Stacy. It was a stopping place for stagecoaches. Henry Scheu (Schieu) established a drug store. By fall 1857 Homer Stacy recounted in a document found among his papers that there were over 20 frame buildings in the village. There were "two surveyors—one practical engineer, eight

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carpenters and joiners, two wheelwrights, two cabinetmakers, one blacksmith and one millwright.” He wrote there was “need for a tinsmith and a harness maker.” There were no lawyers living in Stacyville in 1857, “although there is no objection to the profession.” By 1857 “seventy or eighty families settled along the banks of the river” in and near Stacyville.

By 1857 residents witnessed growth in the village in terms of square miles when 20 acres were added as “Townshley and Dyers addition.” About the same time the Stacys donated a small addition. This may be what led to the story that has been passed down about the rivalry between the Stacys and the Dyers. According to the legend, both families hoped to have the village named after them. When the Stacys donated a plot of land to be used as a park, the settlers decided to name the town after them. The accuracy of this story may be questionable; however, the 1883 *History of Mitchell County Iowa explains* that “at the earnest request of many friends,” Homer Stacy named the town after himself.

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By 1875, just 20 years after the Blakes and Hemanns arrived in Stacyville, the community was well established and populated by a group of enterprising pioneers. The 1875 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* listed these “patrons” of Stacyville Township: J.R. Delaney, farmer; Sanford Fuller, farmer; Emery Fuller, farmer; James M. Fonda, farmer; Geo. M Johnson, civil engineer; Dexter Kelley, hotel; H.F. Mackey, carpenter; D.H. Phillips, farmer; John Penney, merchant; H.C. Parlin, farmer; Jennie Rands, teacher; H.I. Stacy, farmer; Fitch B. Stacy, farmer and fine stock breeder; Conrad Springman, farmer; H. Scheu & Bro., real estate & insurance; Ira Wheelock, tinsmith; Wm. Warner, mason.

A man named J.H.C. Huxhold operated a brewery in Stacyville between 1878 and 1882. Along with the brewery he had a saloon for at least one year in 1881. The state of Iowa was ahead of the rest of the country when the legislature passed a strict prohibition law in 1882. (National Prohibition began in 1919). That’s likely why any evidence of Mr. Huxhold’s brewery and saloon disappeared in 1882. But not all towns and cities enforced the law. Maybe Stacyville did.

By 1883 Stacyville boasted 400 inhabitants and these businesses: “A large roller flouring mill run by water power, one hotel, one drug store, two general stores, two hardware stores, a tin shop, a harness and shoe shop and a millinery store.” Three churches continued to flourish: Congregational, Methodist and Catholic.

In 1890 the population had hit 480, and there was plenty of activity in town. During the 1890s the first creamery, privately owned by George Westlake, was in operation along the river. It stood on the southeast corner of School and Water Streets. Joseph Bawek started his harness shop on Broad Street in 1890. The Stacyville Opera House, an early community center, was built in 1898 on Broad Street. The Opera House was to play a prominent role in the community for a number of years. In 1899 one of Stacyville’s oldest organizations, the Catholic Order of Foresters, was formed.

A man by the name of Fred E. Zwickey published the first issue of a weekly newspaper called the *Stacyville Sentinel* on November 18, 1897. The following businesses advertised in that issue: L.W. Baldwin, groceries; Weyland & Falk, general merchandise; H.W. Schultz, furniture and jewelry; Fischer & Gerbig, hardware; C.B. Smith, general merchandise; C.R. Potter, meats and groceries; Burnham & Frudden, lumber and coal; Otto Felder, meat market; John Halbach, photo gallery; Warren G. Brown, physician and surgeon; Frank Small, barber; George Wall, Stacyville roller mill; Paul P. French, physician and surgeon; Joseph Heimer, billiard hall; Joseph Hoerter, blacksmith; S.B. French, hotel; J.S. Detwiler, real estate.

Stage coach lines had operated between the towns of Mitchell County beginning in 1854, but in 1858 the Cedar Falls and Minnesota Railroad (C.F. & M.) had been incorporated to construct a line from Cedar Falls

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to the Minnesota state line. In 1867 the C.F. & M. was leased to the Dubuque & Sioux City Railroad. On May 1, 1870, the C.F. & M. was opened from St. Ansgar to the Minnesota state line.

Because the railroad didn't run through Stacyville, the stage coach line continued to run between Osage and Stacyville via Brownville and Burr Oak. However, on October 14, 1897 the Stacyville Railroad, running between Stacyville Junction and Stacyville (7.93 miles) was incorporated. (Stacyville Junction was the point on the map where the main rail line intersected with the new line going to Stacyville). Construction of the Stacyville Railroad was started in the fall of 1897. On November 28, 1897 the Stacyville Railroad was leased to the Illinois Central Railroad (I.C.R.R.). The road was opened for operation November 29, 1897. Cost to build the Stacyville line was \$66,500. In 1897-98 all the outstanding stock and all the bonds of the Stacyville Railroad were purchased in the interest of the I.C.R.R. (On April 6, 1903 the Stacyville Railroad was sold to the Dubuque & Sioux City Railroad).

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Stacyville has earned a place in the history books for events that occurred during the latter part of the 19th century. In 1869 a Stacyville resident, Julia C. Addington, became the first woman in the United States to be elected to the post of county superintendent of schools. She held the office of Superintendent of Schools in Mitchell County from 1870-71.

Most residents of 19th-century Stacyville were simply hard-working, ordinary people who built houses, operated businesses, tilled the soil, attended church and socialized with family and neighbors. By 1900 Stacyville's founder, Homer I. Stacy had died,** and Fitch B. Stacy had moved to Washington State. But the work begun by this pioneer family, along with the determination and dedication of other early Stacyville families, set the stage for the next 100 years.

**Homer died March 1, 1887. He and Amelia had spent the winter with their son, Fitch, who was a businessman in Chamberlain, South Dakota. When Homer got sick, he and Amelia started for home. When they got as far as Lyle, Minnesota, Homer became very ill and they didn't think he would live to see Stacyville. He did make it to Stacyville, where he died three weeks later. Amelia moved with her daughters, Delia and Frances to Osage.

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