

Starke County tidbit 33 --- **Change** ----

Over the past couple of years, we have heard the word "change" used a lot.

During existence of mankind, we have seen and recorded many changes. Mankind learned the various necessities of life down through the generations. So was it with Starke County since its beginnings in 1850 when Starke County was organized.

Starke County has always been a rural or agricultural county. But really, in 1850, it was mostly a hunting and fishing existence for those who had come to our area up to that time. Shortly thereafter, timber harvesting was a big item in the county. A few water- powered saw mills came into existence. Railroads were being built over much of Indiana, and they needed railroad ties. Farmers were starting to come into Starke County from the east and south, and they needed to clear the land for farming. They grew a few meager crops on the sand knolls (remember, the vast majority of the county was flooded much of the year). Some drainage was being done here and there, but the real thrust of the draining of Starke County came around the turn of the century - 1890-1920.

That time period in Starke County was also the time of the biggest two changes in mankind around the western hemisphere ---- the **automobile** and the **telephone**. These two items probably changed the nature of rural America more than any other inventions. The automobile came first for rural Starke County. Starke County Sheriff Sindy Uncapher had the first automobile in 1903, then Doctor Parker bought a car for his visits in the county, maybe a merchant or two, and then, finally, some farmers. I know that by 1908, Sam Craigmile, farmer near Bass Lake, had a Curved Dash Oldsmobile. By 1910, some farmers even had tractors.

My granddad Shilling homesteaded on an "island" near the La Porte County line around 1890. He and my dad would get to Hamlet once in awhile by using the "pole" boat through the marsh land. Grandma maybe got to town once or twice a year. She didn't like that very much, and finally convinced granddad to move to town. He sold the land for about \$1/acre (that was double what he paid for it) and bought some land close to Knox.

I don't know when granddad purchased an automobile - he died a month before I was born. I never really knew him. I only have a few stories about him. Attached is a photo of Grandpa with his horse and buggy (notice the tall wheels - made it easier to go through the mud or sand). Now, think about the automobile. We get in the driver's seat, start the engine, put it in gear and we are off. Granddad had to not only feed and water the horse, but also get the bridle and horse harness on the animal, hook him to the buggy or wagon, then proceed to town - and not at 55 mph, either. Well, at least he didn't have to worry about a seat belt.

With the county slowly being drained, roads were being developed also. A big factor in establishing roads in the county was the **rural mail delivery**. Even though the mail delivery was done with horse and mail wagon at first, the Unites States Post Office wanted better roads for their carriers. Then those who had purchased automobiles wanted better roads. It was a lot easier and faster for people to get to their destination, whether it be a Starke County town, Chicago or some other distant place. In the 1910s, the Yellowstone Trail and the Lincoln Highway were being conceived, and by the 1920s were major factors in the national transportation system for the rural areas of America, including Starke County. Both roads would eventually run through Hamlet, Indiana.

Telephone ----- Wow! what an invention. I can push a few buttons and a bell rings in someone's house. Not only that, but I can talk to them, even though we are miles and miles apart. What would my grandma, stuck out on that lonely sand island, have given for that opportunity!

I remember our wall-mounted phone in the kitchen by the pantry. It had a ring-crank magneto and two No. 6 1-1/2 volt batteries inside the case. We were on a "party-line" like most everyone else, with 10-12 "parties" on each line. You would pick up the receiver and hold it up to your ear. If nobody was talking on the line, you would ring the ringer, like one short and two longs, that would ring all 10-12 other phones. But that one short and two longs was a special number for one of those neighbors. The neighbor would answer and you would carry on your conversation. Now, since everyone else on your party line heard you ring one short and two longs, they knew which neighbor you were calling. Everybody knew everyone else's rings. Soon, you would hear several other receivers being picked-up just to listen! Conversations were not private.

If you wanted to call someone else in town or another area in the telephone exchange, you would have to ring a long ring. That would signal "Central" (a telephone operator) to connect to your line. You would tell her (it was always a female) the number, or the persons name, and she would plug your line into their line and ring that number, such as a long, a short and a long. However, if the other party's line was busy, she could hear that and inform you to wait for a little bit. Then she would try again for you. If it were an emergency, she would tell the party using the second line, and they were supposed to hang-up. However, when you did get through to your party for this "emergency", you could bet there would be a lot of neighbors picking up their receivers to see what was the great "emergency".

It was an interesting time. "Central" knew everyone in town and everyone knew "Central". She knew your voice and could often tell who you wanted to call, depending upon what time of day it was. As more numbers and lines came into being, there were more "Centrals". As the phone company grew, you might not recognize your Central anymore, but you could still count on that great American service

of the telephone exchange. You can see a 1911 phone book and other old phone books at http://www.scpl.lib.in.us/historical/scpl_files/Page926.htm This is part of the Historical Society's pictorial history with the Public Library. You will see some early numbers, like R D Peters - phone 8 or W P McCormick - phone 3 or Dr. Brown - phone 9.

The automobile and the telephone - the two great inventions that made major changes to the world.

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