

"1850s Town Had Many Businesses." *Lockport Free Press*. "Old Canal Days" Special, 15 June 1978.

### 1850s town had many businesses

*This is the latest of a series of articles on Lockport history by John Lamb. Lamb, a Lockport resident, is president of the Illinois Canal Society. A professor of history at Lewis University, Lamb is active in the Will County Historical Society and the Lockport Historical Preservation Council. This week's article deals with Lockport in the 1850s.*

By 1859, Lockport was a well established town, but in many respects was still a frontier settlement. Even though the Illinois and Michigan Canal was important to the town, Lockport was almost self-sufficient; the town produced most of what it consumed.

The town was not incorporated as a village until 1853. Later in the decade the railroad would come to the town, and by the end of the 1850s the town found itself tied closer to outside manufacturers and the national economy.

Lockport had a variety of occupations that could be considered unusual in a town of about 1000. During those years, the blacksmith doubled as a maker of farm implements. Shoes were made on demand. The town had a brick maker, cabinet maker, harness maker, and several barrel makers, or coopers. There were also wagon makers, basket makers, carpenters, stone masons, lawyers, and doctors.

The State Street area was then, as now, the commercial center of

the town. Located along the streets were several stores, blacksmith shops, offices for doctors and lawyers, as well as canal warehouses.

Merchants in 1850 were willing to take locally produced goods in exchange for their sale items.

Christian Baldy's store was located just south of the present Canal Museum. Baldy claimed to be well-stocked in dry goods, groceries, boots and shoes, hardware, crockery, glassware, drugs and medicine, liquors, dyes and lamp oils. He would take all kinds of produce in exchange for his merchandise. Prices were not fixed, and haggling was a common practice.

One forward-looking merchant, T. C. Haywood, opened his store under the banner of "the price ready pay system." There were no arguments over price in Haywood's store. In the hustling days of 1850, Haywood pointed out that "time is money" and that one price would be strictly maintained.

Miss Ayers' millinery store was next to Haywood's establishment. Millinery was the only occupation for women in 1850, and it was confined to unmarried women or widows.

Although store owners such as Baldy sold groceries as well as hardware, there were also stores that sold nothing but clothing and hardware.

Other stores advertised that

they would buy meat and other commodities, as well as skins and furs.

The largest store was probably Norton's. When the canal opened, it announced the arrival of a wide variety of goods brought in via the waterway. It seemed everything was available: "Palm hats, wall paper, black foxed hip gaiters, men's hip and goat boots, hip and coarse brogans, fine calf and seal pumps."

For the medicinal intellectual needs of the community, there was S. Merrill and Sons Book and Drugstore on State Street between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets. Books were available on arithmetic, grammar, philosophy, mathematics, history, chemistry, reading and spelling. All the latest novels were available, as were the popular periodicals of the day, like "Harper's," "Graham's," "International," "Putnam's," and "Goday's."

There were five tailor shops in Lockport, one owned by a man with the appropriate name of G. A. Suits.

There were two hotels in town. The largest, the Morse Hotel, was located on the east side of State Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Lockport had only two lawyers but had eight doctors. One of the doctors was editor of the Lockport Telegraph newspaper. Because of the I & M Canal offices, there were four engineers in Lockport.

Two storage and forwarding

agents had warehouses on the canal. G. B. Martin was located at 8<sup>th</sup> and Commerce; another was located at 12<sup>th</sup> Street on the hydraulic basin.

Lockport's daguerreotypist was G. A. Parks. His emporium was located on State Street. If not satisfied with the finished product, it was not necessary to pay the 75 cent fee for portraits.

A furniture factory was run by S.S. Chamberlain. The factory produced chairs, bed posts and high-quality coffins. Chamberlain also sold imported furniture. Wood used in Chamberlain's operation was cherry, mahogany, and walnut. The furniture factory was located on Commerce Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>; its power came from steam.

One of the more interesting local enterprises was the distillery operated by John Fiddymment. His advertisement indicates that his was a hospitable place where the spirits were available and friendly: "Wanted at Lockport Distillery: 20,000 bushels of corn in the ear, for which the highest price will be paid.

"I have one of Mr. Hatch's Corn Shellers in use, and can shell corn as fast as any two men can load it. I can shell from 120 to 160 bushels per hour with ease. You can have your corn shelled as quick as you can unload it. Take a warm by the fire and drink of good brown whiskey. Return home with your cash with pleasure."

Fiddymment also did coopering, for he needed barrels in which to ship out his product. There were a total of five coopers in Lockport; the largest number worked for a firm that built barrels for flour shipments from Norton's mill.

Hiram Norton's flour mill and grain warehouse was the largest single factory in Lockport in 1850. The operation was located on the canal at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and on the hydraulic basin at 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

The mill was operated by water power from the canal; it had a capital investment of \$10,000 and was one of the biggest factories in the county. It had stones for grinding wheat and corn and exported flour reputed to be the best in the northern part of the state. Four millers were employed at the mill.

John Lane Jr. in partnership with other blacksmiths, manufactured plows and cultivators. His machinery was steam driven, making him unique among the nine blacksmiths in Lockport.

Lane would make on demand his patented corn planter, as well as plows for breaking up the virgin prairie. That type of plow had been invented by Lane's father, who was also making plows on request at his smithy in Homer Township, just outside Lockport.

Phillips and Waterman at 12<sup>th</sup> and Commerce manufactured carriages. The shop was steam operated, and the carriage makers

promised to make "all kinds of wagons, carriages and buggies."

Three harness makers and a tanner were also located in town. The tanner used canal waterpower to produce 2500 sides of leather and 300 calf skins for local use and export.

There were two butchers employing five men in Lockport in 1850. The largest was James Wright's, which in that year slaughtered 45 tons of beef, 45 tons of pork, and four tons of mutton.

Stone quarries were a very large industry in 1850. The Sanger-Casey quarry was the largest in the area. It employed 100 men. This was seasonal work, as the quarries closed down during the four winter months. George Gaylord's quarry employed 30 men. A lime-burning enterprise produced 4500 bushels of lime annually. The lime was used for mortar in the building trade.

Lastly, there were the occupations directly related to the canal. Engineers were employed at the canal offices. Three locktenders managed the four locks in Lockport. A boatyard was located at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the canal. The enterprise employed four boat builders and several carpenters. In 1855, the boatyard was building 15 canal boats a year. Three canal boat captains and ten canal boat hands lived in town.