

A Step Back In Time

Bowensburg

February 13, 1942

The town of Bowensburg was surveyed November 1, 1836, by A.B. Goodwin, Surveyor, for Ebenezer Bowen of Monroe County, New York, and James Bowen of Washington County, Ohio, and by them dedicated as a town November 7, 1836.

Bowensburg was located in the northwest quarter of section 21, Clear Lake Township, the northwest corner of the section. The town was located across the road south from the present Clear Lake Baptist Church building, and the present cemetery occupies the northwest part of the plat. To further locate this old town, it can be found by going easterly on the black top road from the Hazenhurst Hotel about 5/8 of a mile, and the plat extended east to within a few rods of the corner known as McCombs Corners. The southeast corner of the plat is shown bordering on Neptune Lake has since been named Mirror Lake.

The town was built around a large public square about the size of the Square in Angola and the lots were 66x132 feet in dimension. The streets named from north to south were North Street, Martha Street, Mary Street, and Toledo Street. The present black top highway runs on what was formerly North Street, and Toledo Street was near Neptune Lake. The north and south streets were West Street, Wayne Street, Catherine Street, and Lake Street, Martha Street evidently was named for Martha Bowen, wife of Ebenezer Bowen; Catherine Street for Catherine Bowen, wife of James Bowen.

At the time the town was surveyed the Bowens did not have a deed for the premises, the land having been entered from the Government by John Russell, March 7, 1836, and was deeded by John Russell to the Bowens October 26, 1837, just a week before the plat was dedicated.

There is no record of any lots having been sold or mortgaged in this plat and the Bowens after deeding the land back and forth between the two families, sold all the large farm including the Plat of Bowensburg, December 8, 1853, to Benjamin McLouth, many of whose descendants still live in this county. The land included in the plat of the town, except the cemetery, is now owned by William Crall of Clear Lake Township who probably does not know that he is the owner of the fifth town to be surveyed and platted in Steuben County, so completely has all trace of this town vanished.

From the public square in Bowensburg can be seen the site of the grave of Erastus Brown, who died about 1847, whose will is of record in this county and contains the following interesting item: "With regard to my son George W. Brown, who was very low in health by fever and ague, unexpectedly left home the 30th day of September, 1845, and diligent search having been made to find him, to no purpose, it is thought probable he died in the wilderness the first night under the operation of his ague, I therefore make no provision for him."

This grave has been opened within recent years by vandals but the monument still stands to mark the spot. On the plat of Bowensburg is shown a lake just outside the plat to the south called Middle Lake; this lake was known for many years and is shown in some maps of Clear Lake Township as Burying Ground Lake, getting its name from the burial place of Erastus Brown. Some years ago Thomas P. Riddle dug a canal from Clear Lake to this lake and changed the name to Lake Ann, naming the lake after his daughter, Ann Riddle. Mr. Riddle, without doubt, thought that lots advertised for sale on beautiful Lake Ann would sell better and sound better than on Burying Ground Lake.

The site of Bowensburg evidently was quite a little community at one time, it being located on a gateway between Clear Lake and Long Lake and between smaller lakes to the north and south. The road running along the north side of Clear Lake and through the old town was one of the earliest roads cut through in the county. An Indian trail, later widened into a road, ran along the east side of Bowensburg and the chief north and south thoroughfare, and is the location of the present road through the east part of Clear Lake Township. This trail entered the county southwest of Hamilton near the Worden Fee farm, ran northerly along the west side of Fish (Hamilton) Lake across Road No. 1 near Otsego Center where a large Indian village was located, then ran northeast to Williams Corners one and one-fourth miles west of Metz, thence in a northeasterly direction, through York and Clear Lake Townships, to the State Line.

Look over the site of Old Bowensburg, the town that vanished long ago, the next time you drive along those roads.

*Received from
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