Old Landmarks of Goshen

By H. S. K. Bartholomew

The first brick house that was built in Goshen, Indiana, located at 217 North Main street, is still standing. It was built by Judge Ebenezer M. Chamberlain in 1839, eight years after the city was laid out. For more than a quarter of a century Judge Chamberlain was one of the most prominent citizens of Elkhart county. He came from Bangor, Maine, in 1833. He taught school for a year in Elkhart, which was then but a small hamlet. In 1834 he located in Goshen and began the practice of law. He planted the first shade trees in the village and induced all of the other residents to plant trees, thus beginning a movement which made Goshen one of the most attractive cities in the state. He also donated the ground upon which the Chamberlain School is located. It was three quarters of a century later that this school was named in his honor. Besides being the leading lawyer, Mr. Chamberlain served as postmaster, judge of a circuit composed of seven counties, and as a member of the lower branch of Congress (1853-1855). Until about fifteen years ago, the house which he built was used exclusively for residence purposes. It was then purchased by the late Dr. S. A. Edmands, who converted it into an office. At present it is vacant.

The building which is now used for a City Hall was built by James H. Barns, senior member of the firm of Barns and DeFrees, pioneer Goshen merchants. When it was completed, Mr. and Mrs. Barns had a house warming which was attended by all the elite of the town. There were also a number of guests from South Bend among whom was Schuyler Colfax, at that time editor of the South Bend Register and afterward vice-president of the United States. This house is located on Lincoln Avenue a little less than a block west of Main Street.

The brick residence at the northwest corner of Lincoln Avenue and Third Street was built by George P. Rowell, Sr. In an early day Mr. Rowell as engaged in the manufacturing of plows on quite an extensive scale. At one time his factory was larger than that of James Oliver in South Bend and Mr. Oliver used to come to Goshen to consult with his competitor in regard to the plow business. In fact Mr. Rowell claimed that he
helped to give Mr. Oliver a start toward building up an industry which became world famous.

Tradition has it that there is a romance connected with the building of the Rowell house. The story goes that Mr. Rowell and a young man named Dirlan were rival suitors for the hand of a young lady. Mr. Dirlan won and built the brick residence on the corner of Pike and Third streets in 1848, which is now owned and occupied by Mrs. Grace Hawks. The next year Mr. Rowell built his residence in order to let Mrs. Dirlan know that he could build a bigger house than her husband had provided for her. In 1908 the Rowell house was bought by the late Charles Kohler who was then mayor of Goshen. He occupied it until his death and it is now owned and occupied by Mrs. Kohler. The Elkhart County Historical Society has long wished to secure it for a home but has been unable to do so.

There is a palatial residence on Crescent Street at the highest point in the city which was constructed during the Civil War. Over forty years ago, it was acquired by the late J. M. Peters, at one time city judge, and it is now occupied by Miss Carrie Peters and Hal Peters, the only survivors of the Peters family. This house was built by George Manahan, a druggist, once well known in the city, but now almost forgotten. Not long after it was completed, this pretentious home was acquired by General Milo S. Hascall, who occupied it for a number of years. In an early day, the plateau on which the residence and the large grounds about it are found was expected to become the aristocratic part of the city, but, as has been the case in many other cities, the plans of pioneers failed to materialize.

What is now known as the Hotel Alderman, although twice remodeled, is one of Goshen's historic buildings. The original building was erected in 1856 by one of the county's early settlers, Major John W. Violett. He came from Clarke county, Ohio, in the spring of 1829, one year after the first permanent settlement was made in Elkhart County and one year before the County was organized. He located on the west side of Elkhart prairie just north of the old village of Waterford. He was the first county recorder, had the first nursery in the county and was for many years a prominent citizen. After the burning of the old Pierce Tavern in 1854,
Mr. Violett decided to build a hotel on quite an extensive scale to accommodate the traveling public. His hostelry was begun in 1855, completed in 1856 and christened the Violett House. For twenty-five years it stood as it was originally built. In 1881 Gen. Milo S. Hascall bought the hotel and remodeled it throughout, making it one of the finest in Indiana. It attained great popularity, particularly among traveling men, many of whom formed the habit of planning trips so that they could spend Sunday at the General's hotel. About 1890 it was bought by Former Mayor Charles B. Alderman and his son, George F. Alderman, also elected mayor in later years. At present it is conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Walter S. Hackett. Many great men of the state and nation have been entertained there. Among the hotel's guests in the past three-quarters of a century were all four of the vice-presidents furnished by Indiana, Schuyler Colfax, Thomas A. Hendricks, Charles W. Fairbanks and Thomas R. Marshall. Governors Oliver P. Morton, Isaac P. Gray, Claude Matthews, James A. Mount, and Samuel M. Ralston stopped at the place. So too did President Benjamin Harrison and Senators Joseph E. McDonald, Daniel W. Voorhees, David Turpie and Albert J. Beveridge. Others among the celebrities included, Gen. Lew Wallace, Gen. Franz Sigel, Cassius M. Clay, Gen. John B. Gordon, Henry Ward Beecher, Joseph Cook, James Whitcomb Riley and Josh Billings.

There is still standing on South Sixth Street a frame building which was erected in 1882 as a Methodist church. It was the first church structure ever built in Elkhart county, all religious services previous to that time having been held in private homes or in taverns. In an address delivered at the cornerstone laying of the present Methodist church in 1873, Hon. J. H. DeFrees thus described the old church:

The architecture of the building was rather a novelty. It was forty feet square and about twelve feet high, with a roof so steep that a raindrop, if it struck the comb, would be in danger of dividing. This building was set up from the ground about three feet, upon blocks or ends of logs set in the ground and not underpinned for a long time after its erection. In those days we had no melodions, organs or pianos, but we most generally had music made by a "pig-a-piano" that was located under the floor of the building.

The interior finish of the church was on this wise: ceiled instead of plastered; seats made out of slabs from Father Carpenter's sawmill and
four sticks stuck into the same for legs. The pulpit corresponded with the seats. Notwithstanding all the slurs and puns that were made in regard to this building, it was the largest meeting house in northern Indiana, Fort Wayne not excepted. Those of us who worshipped in that peculiar building enjoyed the pleasure and power of religious meetings as much or more than we have ever done since. The most powerful and extensive revival that ever took place in Goshen was held in that old ark in the year 1840 under the preaching of Brother George M. Boyd when some 150 or more were added to the church.

For several years previous to 1840 and before the first school house was erected, the church was also used for school purposes. After the Methodists erected their second church in 1846, the old structure was converted into a dwelling and is still so used. At present it is owned by Mrs. Mary Winterhoff.

In 1861 Fred Jackson, an early day Goshen merchant, built a large two story and basement brick house on North Fifth Street. At that time it was the largest residence in the town. After Mr. Jackson’s death it became the residence of P. C. Messick, a prominent hardware merchant, and still later it was used for several years as a boarding house. Twenty-five years ago it was converted into a hospital and since that time has been known as Goshen Hospital.

The square brick building at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Fifth Street has been pointed out for many years as one of the city’s notable landmarks. The date of its erection has not been ascertained but it was some time before the Civil War. It was built by the late Dr. M. M. Latta, one of Elkhart County’s pioneer physicians. Dr. Latta was more widely known than any other physician, probably more widely than any other man that ever lived in Elkhart County. He practiced medicine in Goshen almost sixty years, locating there in 1840 and dying on Thanksgiving day, 1899. For almost forty years of that period, he either rode horseback or drove over the County to treat his patients. At one time he could name the owner of every farm residence in a radius of twelve miles from Goshen. His name is still a household word in most of the older families.

There are several landmarks in other sections of Elkhart County which have historical significance. The first frame house ever erected in the county is still in use, although it has been twice remodeled. This is the residence on the Colonel Jackson homestead in Jackson Township, a mile west of Benton and a quarter of a mile west of the historic Jackson
Cemetery. The house was begun in 1832 and finished sometime the following year. The material for it was all hauled from Fort Wayne. Before the house was finished, it was used several times for religious services. Col. Jackson told something about these services in an article in the Goshen Democrat in 1865, in which he recorded: "The first sermon preached was by Elder Cory of the Presbyterian church. The place of preaching was the house that the writer now resides in. The frame was up and covered and weatherboarded without any floor. A few boards were laid for the preacher to stand on and the hearers sat on the sleepers. The first Methodist circuit rider that preached here was Erastus Felton." Here was also one of the first postoffices in Elkhart County and Colonel Jackson was the postmaster. However the office was not in this house but in the log cabin which preceded it. It was established some time in 1829. The farm on which this house stands was in the Jackson family ninety-five years being owned by three generations of Jacksons.

The old St. John's church, four miles west of Goshen, in Harrison township, is another landmark which is worthy of brief mention. So far as is known, it is the oldest church in the county which is still used for religious services. It was built in 1856 out of timbers that came from forests on surrounding farms. The stones for the foundation were also obtained from the vicinity. It has two doors in front, one for the use of the men and the other for the women, who sat on opposite sides of the church. It was built as a Lutheran church, but is now used by "old order" Dunkards.