

History of Thornton, Il.

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This township, situated almost in the southeast corner of the county, is bounded on the north by Hyde Park and Calumet, on the east by Lake County, Ind., on the south by Bloom Township, and on the west by the township at Bremen. It contains nearly fifty square miles and has within its limits the villages of South Lawn, Dolton, South Holland, Homewood, Thornton, Lansing, and a portion of the town of Hammond of Lake County Ind. It was organized as a township in 1850; the officers chosen at different elections held since that time and to the present are given as follows:

Supervisors - 1850-52 A. H. Dolton; 1852-53 A. G. Sweet; 1853-55 A. H. Dolton; 1855-56 S. E. Baker; 1856-64 A. H. Dolton; 1864-65 Sanford Case; 1865-70 C. H. Dolton; 1870-78 Peter Schnob; 1878-81 C. L. Vansteenbergh; 1881-84 Henry Lansing.

Assessors - 1850-53 Elisha Young; 1853-54 Stephen Crary; 1854-55 Aaron Young; 1855-56 C. L. Sweet; 1856-57 Stephen Crary; 1857-58 Sanford Case; 1858-59 Stephen Crary; 1859-60 M. Janson; 1860-62 Stephen Crary; 1862-65 C. H. Dolton; 1865-67 P. L. Vansteenbergh; 1867-69 C. H. Dolton; 1869-77 P. L. Vansteenbergh; 1877-79 Henry Guenther; 1879-81 John De Graaff; 1881-83 H. Schwantke; 1883-84 Charles Stave.

Clerks - 1850-55 Stephen Crary; 1855-56 S. Case; 1856-57 Stephen Crary; 1857-62 Henry Zimmer; 1862-64 S. Case; 1864-65 W. R. Hunt; 1865-66 S. Case; 1866-67 Stephen Crary; 1867-69 Henry Zimmer; 1869-70 Peter DeYoung; 1870-71 J. G. Forbes; 1871-77 George Leverett; 1877-78 Mr. J. Johnson 1878-84; S. A. Young.

Collectors - 1850-51 A. G. Sweet; 1851-53 Stephen Crary; 1853-55 Lott Chapman; 1855-56 A. C. Fassett; 1856-58 Henry Case; 1858-59 Lott Chapman; 1859-60 J. A. Richards; 1860-62 Charles H. Dolton; 1862-67 Henry Zimmer, Sr.; 1867-69 C. L. Vansteenbergh; 1869-70 N. Balsiger; 1870-74 Henry Guenther; 1874-75 M. L. Axtell; 1875-70 G. F. Hartford; 1876-77 Charles Stave; 1877-79 George A. Dolton; 1879-83 Henry Guenther.

Justices - 1850 Stephen Spoor and John Milsted; 1851 Elisha Young; 1852 Lott Chapman; 1854 Lott Chapman and Benjamin F. Ross; 1855 B. F. Baker; 1858 Henry Zimmer and A. C. Fassett; 1860 Lott Chapman; 1862 Alfred Robinson and Lott Chapman; 1866 James Hart and A. J. Hewes; 1870 Henry Lansing and Lott Chapman; 1873 James N. Shannon and Andrew H. Dolton; 1877 James N. Shannon and Andrew H. Dolton. The present Justices [1884] are James N. Shannon, A. H. Dolton and John M. Stewart.

THORNTON VILLAGE

Thornton is one among the oldest villages in the county, its first settlement dating back to 1834. It is situated on the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad, twenty five miles distant from the city, and in the midst of a rich agricultural district, whose thrifty inhabitants glean from its fertile soil all that honest toil

can bring. The first settler within the present limits of the village was William Woodbridge, who in 1834 located and built a house half way between Thornton and the Calumet on the east side of Thorn Creek. Not liking the spot he had chosen, Mr. Woodbridge in the following year removed to a farm of 160 acres just adjoining Thornton on the west. Subsequently he sold this farm to John Blackstone, who in later years conveyed it to Gordon S. Hubbard, by whom it is still owned [1884]. Mr. Woodbridge on quitting the farm moved into Thornton, where he built and kept the first store in the village.

Stephen Crary, now a resident of Chicago and to whom the publisher is indebted for many of the facts pertaining to the early history of Thornton, arrived in the village in July, 1835. His father, Joseph S. Crary, also arrived in the same year and located on Section 7, in the town of Bloom, near where is now the village of Homewood. Joseph and Sanford Case settled here in the spring of 1835, and in August of that year James Farwell purchased and settled on the southeast quarter of Section 27, nearly one mile east of the village. Owing to certain reservations made in the Tippecanoe treaty of 1832, by which certain lands here and there were reserved from sale, the title to the farm purchased by Mr. Farwell was found to be defective. He sold the place, subject to this cloud, to Noah Warren, and it was many years before he succeeded in establishing a perfect title to the place. Stephen Spoor, the Berry family, Christian Randall, James Barton (who removed to Michigan in 1846), David Crandal and John Blackstone are among those not yet mentioned, who came to Thornton prior to 1836. Don Carlos Berry built and kept the first tavern here, in 1836; in the same year also a post office was established, and, Mr. Berry being appointed Postmaster, became in his dual positions a man of considerable prominence. Up to that time the people had obtained their mail either at Chicago or at a place called Hadley, near Mokena, in Will County. Joseph Case was the second Postmaster, succeeding Mr. Berry in 1837.

Joseph Milsted and James Childers settled on the north bank of the Calumet, almost opposite the mouth of Thorn Creek, in 1836, and about the same time came William and Elisha Young who built and opened a general trading store on the corner of William and Margaret streets. The Young brothers remained here until 1850, when they went to California. They had, however, previous to their removal from Thornton, built and run a vessel, a moderate sized steam barge known as the Calumet Trader and which plied between Chicago and the trading towns on the Calumet. The boiler of this vessel exploded, killing the engineer, in 1865, while it was lying in the harbor of Chicago. In this connection it may not be amiss to mention that in the early settlement of Thornton it was confidentially believed it was destined to become the "head of navigation." Mr. Crary is authority for the statement that Thorn Creek, now a stream of the most insignificant character, had then a channel, forty feet in width, in which the water ran, even at what would be called its low stages, at a depth of from four to six feet. He also says that the water power at the village was, when he first came there, valued at \$10,000. In support of this, it may be cited that as early as 1835 Messrs. Kinzie, Blackstone and Hubbard conceived the idea of building a grist mill on the banks of Thorn Creek; they employed a Mr. Sackett, a millwright, to build a saw mill but by the time that was completed so much money had been expended that the idea of erecting the grist mill was abandoned. Relative to the great changes which have taken place in the water courses of the county. Mr. Crary also says that the story told, that in 1835 Peter Barton, when he laid out the village of Blue Island, chartered a schooner, which, laden with supplies, made its way up the Calumet to the mouth of Stony Creek, up which it ascended to where now stands the village, is literally true. The Stony Creek of today would have to be widened and deepened considerably before it would float the smallest schooner on the lakes, but that it was once a stream that would easily admit the passage of a vessel drawing four feet of water, cannot in the face of the facts be doubted.

The first death in the vicinity of Thornton was that of Margaret Hampshire, a member of Mr. Blackstone's family, who died of measles in the winter of 1836. The first birth was, so far as can be ascertained that of Sarah Crandal, daughter of David Crandal, born in September, 1835. Joseph Case, who has already been mentioned as among the early settlers of Thornton, died in 1868. Lot Chapman, who came to the village in 1849, also died in 1871. Ira Gardner came in 1850, and shortly after settled on what is now the Kellogg farm [1884], one mile northeast of the village. Philip Schnob [possibly Schwab] came in 1849 and erected a dwelling on the corner of William and Julian [Juliette] streets, as shown by the Hubbard and Kinzie plat.

PREHISTORIC RELICS - When the first settlers arrived at Thornton, they found the ruins of what had once evidently been Indian fortifications, occupying the site of the present town. The ruins consisted of outer ditches or trenches, and inside of these were the works or fortifications proper. On the banks of these, trees, apparently not less than one hundred years old, were growing, which only furnished abundant proofs of the indisputable antiquity of the ruins. When Joseph Case arrived here he used frequently to talk with the Indians about the origin of the remains, but could only learn that with them it was supposed they were built by the French explorers many, many years before. In 1871 Ira Gardner dug up a number of skeletons in the neighborhood of the fort, which he states were in his opinion those of white men, rather than of Indians. He also, in the same year, dug up in his garden, specimens of pottery, flint arrow heads, a stone chisel and a pair of stone bullet molds. It is claimed by some that these relics belonged to the southern Indians, who at one time, before they were driven still farther south by the more warlike tribes of the North, had possession of this portion of the Country.

Thorn Creek, already mentioned, runs through the village, and is a beautiful stream; its waters clear its crystal flow over a smooth bed of lime rock, and are fed the year through by almost innumerable and unfailling springs, which are distributed along its banks from its source to its mouth. Limestone of the finest quality also abounds in the vicinity, most of which is easily worked. In an early day the first quarry was opened by, or rather for, Gurdon S. Hubbard, but owing to the large size of the stone, and its depth under the surface, operations further north and nearer the outcrop of the rocks were found more profitable. In 1850 Mr. Stephen Crary, opened a quarry, which was situated on the upland, near where Peter Upton now lives. Since then various quarries have been opened, from which immense quantities of building stone have been taken. The largest one now in operation is worked by Roland Flanagan. From this quarry there were taken in 1882 over eight hundred cords of stone.

The first school house in the village was built in 1836, from sawed lumber, prepared at the Hubbard and Kinzie saw mill, and stood just northwest of the present railroad depot. James Barton and Caleb T. Sweet were among the first teachers. In 1857 a building was erected for the double purpose of a town hall and school; this building, which is still in existence [1884], was used for school purposes until 1872, when the new school house was built at a cost of \$6,000.

In the early days of the settlement it could boast of no organized church of any denomination. Itinerant ministers of various creeds visited the village and dispensed the gospel, most generally at the school house, but sometimes at the house of a farmer in the vicinity. Mr. Crary says the first sermon he remembers to have heard preached in the village was by Marcellus McGowan, a Mormon missionary, who stopped in Thornton over Sunday on his way from the State of Missouri to the East; this was in 1836; the sermon, which was an impassioned harangue in support of the pernicious doctrine of

polygamy, was listened to by a large audience, attracted out of mere idle curiosity to hear what the "long haired apostle" had to say. The first house of worship, now the Methodist Church, was erected originally for the Society of Good Templars, but was purchased by the first named body in 1876.

The oldest house now standing in the village was built in 1837, for a man named Barrett, by the Case brothers and John B. Toban. It stands on William Street near the residence of Peter Upston, and as it is now in an advanced state of decay, the chances are that this land mark of early days will soon have gone the way of all the earth.

Thornton village was platted in September, 1835, by John H. Kinzie, who had already purchased the land hereabouts from the Indians. He soon after conveyed a one third interest to Messrs. Hubbard and Blackstone. The first plat thus made was one mile square, beginning at the forks of Thorn Creek, and running one mile north, one mile west, and one south and east to the point of beginning. The first physician in the village was Dr. Benjamin Baker, who located there in 1850. In 1870 the village population was 301; in 1880, 401 present estimated population, 500. The business interests of the place may be summed up briefly as follows; two grocery stores, three general stores, two saloons, one brewery and two stone quarries. The village was named Thornton in honor of Colonel [General] W. F. Thornton, of Illinois, who was one among the first Canal Commissioners in the State.