

OVERFLOW FROM VOLUME 28, NUMBER 6. NOVEMBER 2023 OF THE WELLS COUNTY GENEALOGY SOCIETY'S NEWSLETTER

THE EARLY FUR TRADE

By Thomas Liby

When John Studabaker opened his store in Bluffton, he traded with the local residents, the Miami. He traded for their furs with the items he carried in trips to Cincinnati. John Jacob Astor was creating the first monopoly in America by gaining ninety percent of the fur trade with his American Fur Company and its offshoots. Studabaker shipped the furs he acquired to New York and probably through Cincinnati, where he obtained goods to restock his store. Likewise, Bowen Hale was doing the same in the area that would become Murray. He shipped furs to Dayton and Cincinnati.

Earlier, John's uncle, Peter Studabaker (15 Oct 1790 PA – 15 Jun 1840 Adams Co IN), after serving in the War of 1812 became "an agent for the John Jacob Astor Company, making trips by canoe into the Indiana Territory." [(Volume II) *The Studebaker Family in America 1736-1986*. Tipp City, Ohio: *The Studebaker Family National Association*, 1986. p. 205.]

Much has been written about Studabaker and his later life. Getting started on the Wabash where Bluffton was to be, the daily details of his life may be assumed. When he brought his new wife on horseback from his family's home in Darke County, Ohio in 1839, Bluffton had been platted with 191 lots March 23rd of 1837 and most of it thick woods.

Hale had an earlier start, but had a few more miles to go. His trading post was south of Murray, in Section 20 of Lancaster Township, from where Allen Norcross fled fearing rumors of the Black Hawk War in 1832.

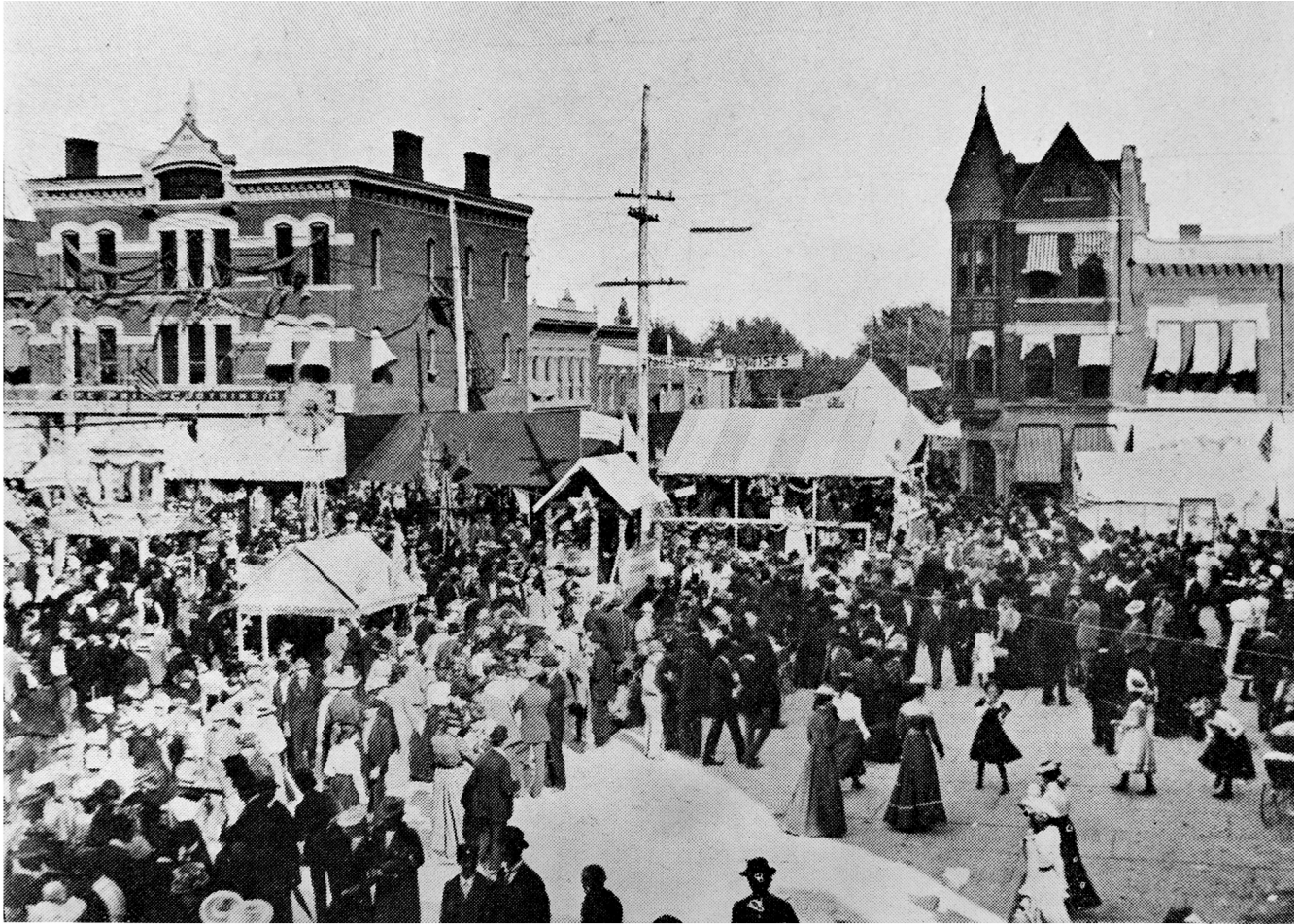
. . . Here Mr. Hale entered forty acres of land, hired a man to build him a cabin, and started to Cincinnati for a stock of goods, having resolved to start a post to trade with the Indians and the few white inhabitants in the county, there being only about twelve white families within the limits of Wells. On his return, in the spring of 1836, he found that his cabin had not been built; but he went to work, and with the assistance of Henry Miller and others, soon had a comfortable cabin, suitable for store-room and living room. His customers were mostly Indians, who were peaceable, yet like most men, red or white, were dangerous when filled with firewater. His stock of goods consisting of brass rings, whiskey and such articles of clothing as the Indians usually wore, were converted into pelts, there being but little money in the country. These pelts were conveyed usually on Henry Miller's wagon to Dayton, Ohio, or Cincinnati, and there sold. As a matter of course, he left nothing behind in his cabin, as the Indians ransacked that as soon as he was gone. The trip to Dayton and Cincinnati usually took about three weeks or longer.

Standard History of Adams and Wells Counties Indiana. Chicago and New York: *The Lewis Publishing Company*, 1918. p. 293.

The indigenous Myaamia occupied all of Indiana, western Ohio and southeast Michigan for two centuries until Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 formalized the relocation of most native groups within the next decade.

A HISTORY OF THE WELLS COUNTY COURTHOUSE PLAZA

The southwest corner of South Main Street and West Market Street has had a variety of landmarks throughout the years since the construction of the present Courthouse in 1889. Sometimes there was nothing but paving stones such as shown in a Street Fair photograph.



Main Street at Market Street During The Bluffton Free Street Fair
In 1900

This was probably similar to a view of the courthouse from 1894. Other than the fire hydrant on the curb, the notable items are the arc light hanging over the intersection (arc lights were a transition between the gas lights on poles to the incandescent bulbs in a variety of pole arrangements) and the dirt streets, which required sprinkling in dry, dusty conditions but were mud after heavy rains. It's not conclusive that at the bottom of the steps may have been a drinking fountain.



The 100 Block of West Market Street in Bluffton, Indiana
in 1894.

The following image reprinted from the newsletter may be enlarged to show more detail of the partially explained electrical cannon fountain that was installed in May 1906 near the end of Mayor John Mock's first non-consecutive term in office.



Another Street Fair photo shows a group of men clustered around the cannon fountain in 1908



The 1908 Bluffton Free Street Fair.
This is a view of West Market Street from South Main Street.
This was the tenth year for the fair and it was well attended.

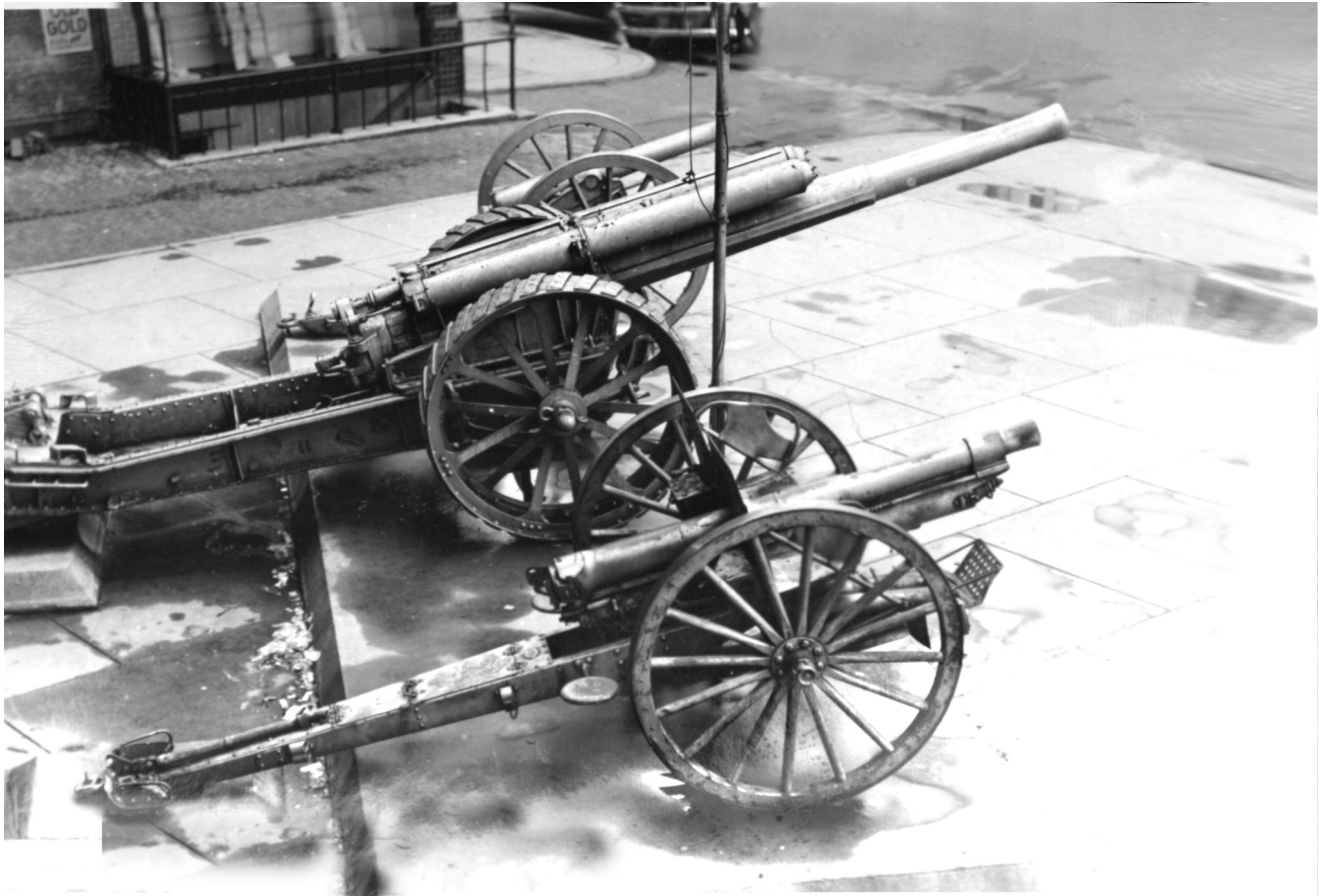
After the cannon fountain was removed, it was noted in the newsletter that in the colorized image of the courthouse shows the flagpole installed by Kerfoot in 1911. Also note the variation in the street light with the multiple globes, later photos will show poles with two globes and then with one, similar to the present display.



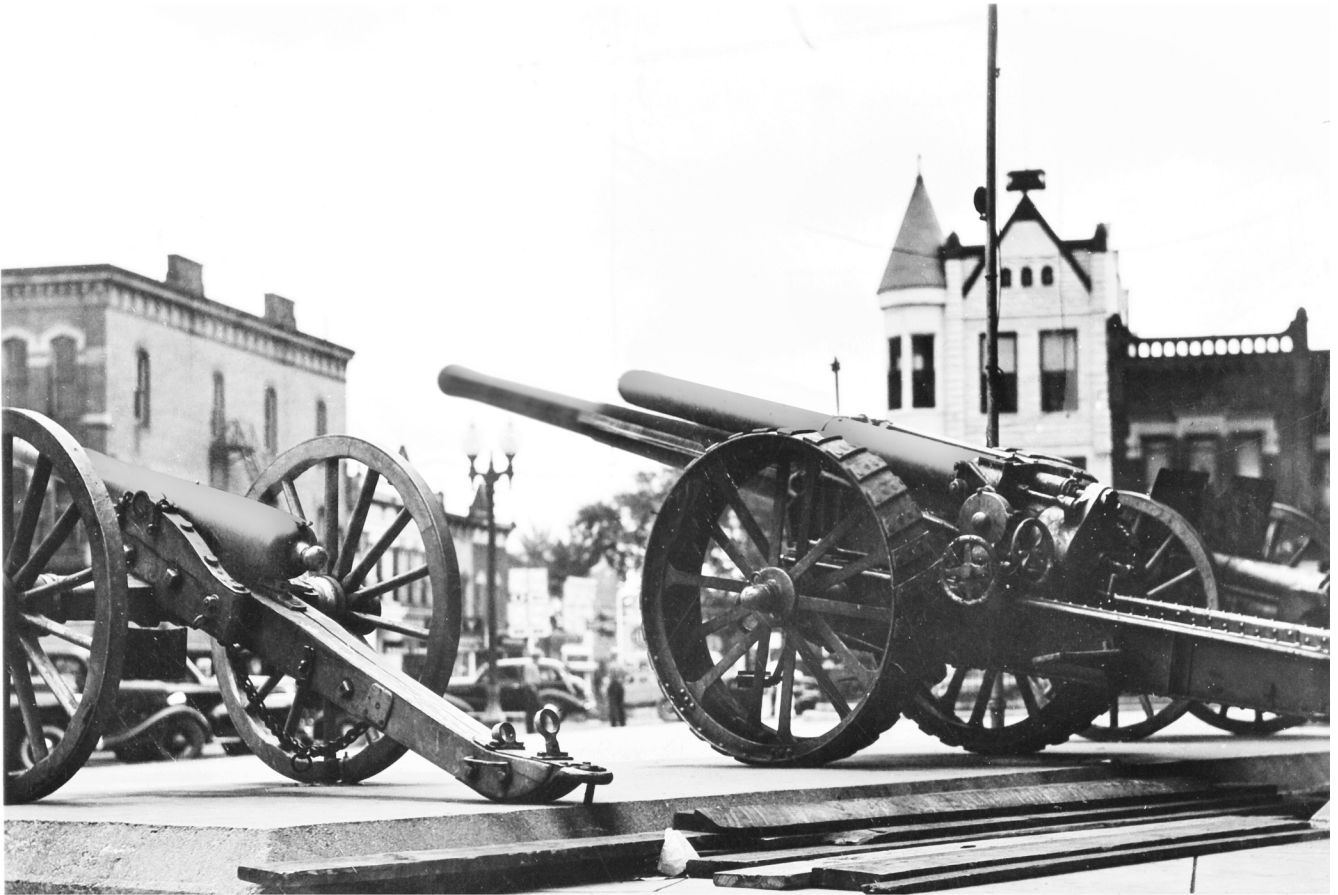
Wells County Courthouse.

Circa 1918.

The next series of pictures are about the three cannons that occupied the west side until the removal of two of them after a ceremony in 1942.



The three cannons on the Wells County Courthouse circa 1930. The near gun appears to me a 3 inch M 1902 Field Canon. The middle gun appears to be a British BL 60 Mark VI. The end cannon is a Civil War cannon currently housed at the Wells County Historical Museum.



THREE CANNONS ON THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE

The cannon at camera left is housed at the Wells County Historical Museum. The other two were "sent off to war" in 1942.



Cannons Consigned to the US Army for the War Effort
Mayor Franklin Buckner, Civil Defense Director Elmore Sturgis, members of the American Legion
and soldiers from the Spanish American War and World War One were on hand to present two of the
three cannons placed on the courthouse square to US Army representatives from Baer Field.

1942



September 30, 1942
Wells County Sends Off Two Cannons for the War Effort.



This was one of the three cannons that was on the Wells County Courthouse square prior to World War Two.

It appears to be a British BL 60 Mk VI Gun.

This cannon, and what appears to be a 3 inch M1902 US Field Gun were “sent to World War Two.”

The third cannon, a Civil War gun is housed at the Wells County Historical Museum. 1942.

Only at the edge of the picture can be seen the fence around the fish pond.



West Market Street in Bluffton, Indiana.

Circa 1951.

More pictures need to be included in these series of photographs of the courthouse plaza with better views of the fishpond and flower garden. Note, however, in the photo below the two globe street lights and the design of the stop lights on the corner.

Of special note is the Bluffton Lions Club stand where the blind man sold newspapers. Some will remember his name. He was able to distinguish between coins by their size and the reeded edges.



West Market Street from Main Street
1956.

ABSTRACTS AT THE WCPL

The Indiana Room of the Wells County Public Library has received a large number of abstracts for Wells County from the Bank of Berne. They include abstracts from Jefferson, Lancaster Harrison and Nottingham Townships as well as some from Bluffton. As you know, abstracts are an invaluable source for genealogical research. They can list the previous owners of property from the original land patents. Transfers of ownership often will give family connections as the land is passed to the next generation.

A rough count of manilla envelopes show: four for Rockcreek Township, three for Liberty Township, twenty-six for Nottingham Township, eight for Harrison Township including Vera Cruz, 1 for Bluffton, and fourteen for Lancaster Township including some from Kirkland Township in Adams County.