

Brown County Journal

November 15, 2012

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
December 3

Brown County Genealogical
Society meeting
December 11

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The Train Comes to Brown County

The railroad coming to Brown County helped bring us into the 20th century. The story affected many different towns, people, and had a definite impact on our culture. The Indiana Rail Road was truly remarkable. It began during a great time of post war construction and it became part of one of the most venerable names in the industry, the Illinois Central - the Main Line of Mid-America.

The stretch of line between Indianapolis and Illinois that ran over all kinds of rough country became know as the Hi-Dry. There are 140 bridges along its length which let to its nickname, the Hi-Dry. The terrain, as well as it being a narrow gauge line, "created a railway that featured beautiful scenery and tough operating challenges from steep, undulating rises and sags to flange-eating six-degree curves. There's a lot of drama packed into the railroad's 155 main line miles" according to the book, "The Indiana Rail Road Company," by Christopher Rund. In Brown County and nearby Monroe County alone there are many engineering landmarks that bear naming - the Shuffle Creek bridge, the Bear Creek trestle, the Butler Cut, and the Unionville tunnel. Yes, we have a railroad tunnel, albeit small, nonetheless a feat of modern engineering.



Looking
down the

**Railroad Construction in Jackson Township
1905, Charlie Bock - Section foreman**

track one might think, yes it's a pretty scene, but the story of the building of the railroad is laced with many stories about the people that were involved. These were for the most part ordinary people working hard to carve out a better life for themselves after the Civil War. Just a few of the names of those men that took jobs on the railroad were Dennis McGee, John Fleener, Harry Hawley, and William Poling. There were probably many others.



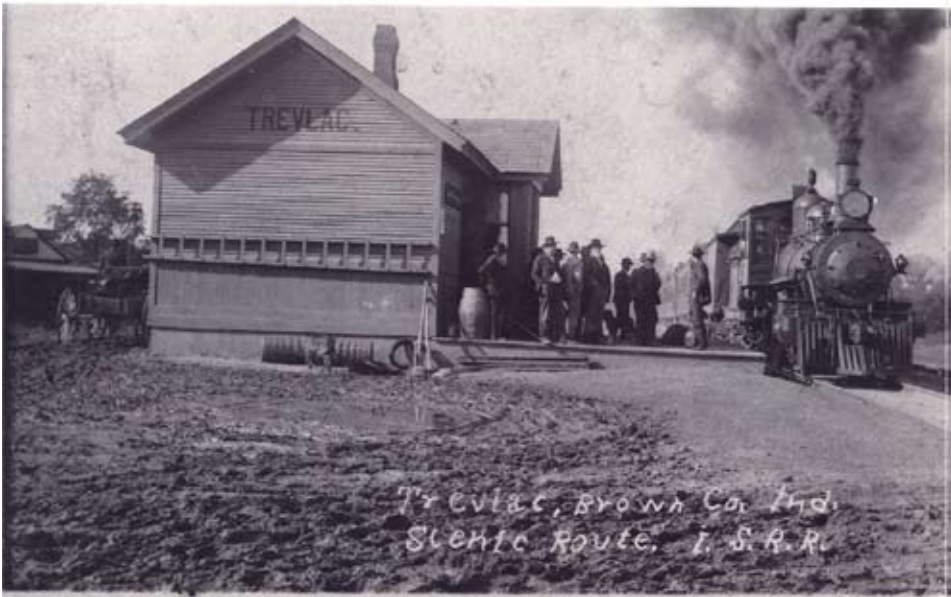
Bear Creek Trestle 1905 - road crew

Then there were the extraordinary people who were urban men of power and money. The initial impetus for running a track southwest out of Indianapolis was to make a route to ship out the great mineral reserves from that part of the state. At one time the southwestern counties were believed to hold vast reserves of limestone, coal, clay, shale, iron ore, and oil. These extraordinary men wanted a part of this.

The Illinois Central just barely nicked the northwest corner of Brown County, but those eight miles of track were the backdrop for some of the most colorful history along the railroad. Brown County had always been secluded from the rest of the bustling world. It had always attracted a hard-working, self-sufficient country folk. Most of them were farmers, orchard workers, craftsmen, and artisans. With the coming of the railroad to Brown County their attitude was not surprising and most were outwardly opposed to its coming. Not everyone, though, was so vehemently opposed to it, namely a handful of ambitious people in Jackson Township.

The Calverts and Trevlac

The building of the Illinois Central Railroad brought a much needed way of transportation, but also brought a handful of land speculators. In 1899 before the plans for a new railroad were made known, two wealthy strangers came to Jackson Township. What the locals didn't know was their quiet country lifestyle was about to be interrupted and the town of Trevlac was about to be born. These two wealthy people were Colonel Cecil Calvert and his wife, Lucinda of Cleveland, Ohio. When they first arrived they spent money like kindling. The first thing they tried to do was buy Aleck Richards farm at Richard's



Trevlac Train Station

and Lucinda Richards of the Richards Post Office. The Richards eventually lost their post office to the Calverts at Trevlac in 1907.

Colonel Calvert was the happy go lucky type and was known to tell so many stories that the residents didn't know what to believe. Mrs. Calvert on the other hand was the brains behind the money. She bought the land, planned out the town of Calvert and handled the business side. In 1901 news came of the proposed interurban line between Indianapolis and Martinsville. The Calverts wanted the line extended to Needmore. The plans never materialized, but it helped to set in motion plans for a new railroad through Brown County. The surveyor for the new railroad right of way was James Henry Cullen. When it was all planned the track was to run within 100 yards of the Calvert's home. Colonel and Mrs. Calvert sold some land dirt cheap to the railroad. They both jumped into it with many plans. They wanted a depot to be built and called Calvert. Since the name Calvert had already been taken for another depot they decided to spell it backwards and that's how Trevlac got its name.

post office. When Richards wouldn't sell they bought 350 acres along Bean Blossom Creek. In 1900, one year after they arrived, Mrs. Calvert grew tired of the quiet life and opened her home to boarders. In the 1900 census the list of occupants at that time were Benjamin, their son, Alevenia Little, the mother-in-law, Lizzie Miller, the housekeeper, Barb Miller, a servant, William Poling and Frank Yockey, boarders. The Calvert's other two children were Frank and Mattie. Frank married Clara Richards in 1905, the daughter of Willis



The Calvert Hotel



First Train in Brown County 1905

Rogers, Turner, Long, and Calvert. With the resort growing and the town of Trevlac a hit Mrs. Calvert grew tired of her latest accomplishment. They packed up almost overnight and moved back to Ohio never to be seen again. After they left in 1909 the town of Trevlac almost became a ghost town.

They spent 10 years in Brown County and when they left the lives of the local residents had changed dramatically. Their son, Frank, was left to handle their affairs. By 1916 the Calverts went bankrupt and sold their interest to J. L. Turner of Bloomington. Turner had the plat recorded so lots could be sold.

The Village of Fruitdale

On State Road 135N in northern Brown County sits the tiny village of Fruitdale. It was called Fruitdale because of all the fruit stands along the road and orchards nearby from which passersby could stop and buy fresh fruit and vegetables.

Fruitdale was originally located seven-tenths of a mile east on the Fruitdale Road closer to the railroad. There wasn't any scheduled stops at the little station unless the train was flagged down. Mail was tossed from the moving train and incoming mail was picked up as the train passed a hook with the bag hanging on it. In the early 1900s along the railroad tracks stood two grocery stores and a train depot called "Masieville." One grocery was run by Thomas Glover, a man with big dreams for a thriving town called Fruitdale. On May 29, 1911 Glover and a lawyer, George Long recorded in Nashville the plot of

the town of Fruitdale. On the east side of the tracks was to be the residential area. Six blocks were laid out containing 79 lots. The streets were Walker, Hazle, Redlick Place, Spring, and Reigela Avenue. The business district ran parallel to the railroad. Park Avenue was the main street in town.

On the west side of the railroad were the streets of West Angelo and Terrace Avenue with 23 lots for factories or businesses. Even a city park was designated in the northeast part of the town. Thomas Glover also built a pavilion for dances. A total of eight springs were located throughout the town for a water supply. Other businesses were a grocery operated by Miles Williams; there was a hotel, a brick yard, a lumber yard, a post office, and the depot. A few years later Clarence Watts bought Williams' store and built a canning factory. He also owned the nearby orchard. They had big dreams of a thriving town with the coming of the railroad. They could ship their fruit and wares on the train to other parts of the country and pick up supplies to sell to local Brown County folk.

In the 1930s the station served as a commuter platform for individuals who worked in Indianapolis during the week and returned home for the weekend. The train was signaled to stop by making a small fire in the middle of the tracks. Glover's big dreams for the town soon came to an end. W. T. Charters bought all the land in the town. In 1916, just 5 years later the vacation of the plat was recorded. No lots were ever sold. The businesses continued on for a short time longer but with the building of S.R. 135N in the 1930s came the end of the original Fruitdale. By 1936 the station was closed and the original town of Fruitdale was no more.

Helmsburg Welcomes the Railroad

One of those who donated a good portion of land for a train station was John Helms. A post office was established in 1904 in the community of Helms and by 1905 it became known as Helmsburg. In 1906 a plat of Helmsburg was filed and lots were put up for sale. A depot had been ordered for the town. The formation of Helmsburg came just prior to the completion of the railroad later that year. The railroad gave rise to a variety of businesses. There were stores,



**Photographer Frank Hohenberger,
Helmsburg Train Station**

a hardware, blacksmith, livery, restaurant, garage, flour mill, post office, doctor's office, and a sawmill all within the next 20 or so years. The Helmsburg station was served by several structures during its history. The first burned down in April 1942 from a self-igniting coal fire. A shanty was put temporarily until a larger structure could be built. It met a bad fate when it just collapsed. The final station was moved from Trevlac when that train stop was discontinued.

Helmsburg also became the jumping off point for Nashville passengers who rode into town with freight and mail on horse-drawn hacks. Train time at Helmsburg was an event. They arrived on one of four daily trains running between Indianapolis and Effingham, which became known among the travelers as the Abe Martin Special. Horses and wagons were lined up for pick-ups and activity was at an all time high. With the coming of the railroad also came a different type of people. Artists came in from the big cities seeking seclusion and inspiration for their paintings. Many who came fell in love with the countryside and decided to stay. Weekend excursions were also planned by big city residents of Indianapolis, spending the day or weekend in the beautiful countryside.



After all the spent plans to have trains stops throughout Brown County, Helmsburg trains station was the only one to survive. Most likely in part it was due to its foresighted and ambitious local folk and the fact that it was the closest station to the county seat in Nashville. You could say the railroad gave birth to the town of Helmsburg, a railroad town.

Helmsburg in 1923

*Information was taken from Brown County Democrat articles, Indianapolis Star newspaper articles, and the book "The Indiana Rail Road Company," by Christopher Rund. Photos are from the Brown County Historical Society Archives.