

# Brown County Journal

September 15, 2012

## Events:

Brown County Historical  
Society meeting  
October 1

Brown County Genealogical  
Society meeting  
October 9

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## History in your Home?

Most of us live down the road from an old house, church, or cemetery. Some of you even live in an old farm house or log home. Have you ever wondered if it had a history? Brown County has over 400 structures considered to be historical sites according to the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. So how do you find out about one of these old historical buildings? There are many resources you can use. Before you begin know your property's legal description, such as section, township, & range if you live in the country; or lot number and your subdivision's name if your home is located in a city limits.

The first and probably the easiest step is to find the age of your house. The Assessor's office is the first place to go. You can pay them a visit with your property description or address and they can give you a copy of your Property card. Or if you have internet access then you can go on-line to get a copy of your Property card. Go to their website: <http://www.browncounty-in.gov/index.html> and click on GIS Map. You can do a search for your address or you can look on the map and find your property. On the map screen you will see to the left a list of items you can click on. The top one on the list is "Show Property Card." Click on this and a copy of your Property Card will open.

When researching the Francis A. Matheny family of the early 1800s I learned that his log home was still in existence. I wanted to find out who owned it now, what the address was, and how old the Property Card said the house was. The house was located on Jackson Branch Ridge Road and the owner's name and address was given. When the Property Card was pulled up on the second page it gave the date that the principal dwelling was built which was 1859. It also listed several other smaller buildings on the property, but the date was given just as "OLD."



**Francis A. Matheny house,  
Jackson Branch Ridge Road**

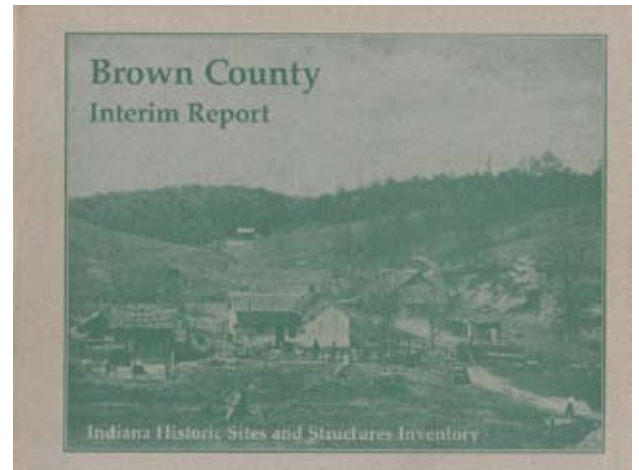
this perked my interest. So one day I sit down with the Abstract on their property and started reading. It went back years and years through subdivisions, many owners, and finally back to the very first owner that bought the 100 acre farm from whence our little acre lot was cut from. I thought, "Wow!" This piece of property that we live on has a very old history.

One thing you might do is to get a good look at your house. Determine the period or architectural style of your home; most libraries have books on this subject. Get a book on house architectural styles and take a walk around the outside of your house and make notes on similar characteristics. Compare it to your neighborhood, are there other houses in your area the same style? Odds are they were built at same time and maybe even by the same builder. If you haven't found a date for your house then this will help to narrow it down.

If you suspect your home already has been considered an historic house then the place to easily check is the booklet, "Brown County Interim Report" by the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. There are copies you can read at your local library in Indiana. If you live in another state check to see if your home state has a similar organization. This book lists all the houses, churches, schools, cemeteries, and any other structures that are considered to be of historical significance in Brown County. Each one has a short description with the house named sometimes for the original owner and the date it was built. If yours is not listed in this booklet then the Historic Landmarks Foundation can be very helpful to help you do research. They have prepared a handbook you can download from their website. They have six regional offices you can contact for help and the main office in Indianapolis has a huge reference library you can browse. If you're not living in Indiana most states will have a similar organization if you'll check. Regional offices are located in: South Bend, Jeffersonville, Cambridge City, and Terre Haute.

Another valuable resource could be right in your own home. If you own your own house the best place to start is with your Abstract. You should have received one of these when you bought your home. If not you can get one from a local title company for a fee. These are amazing documents especially if yours is several pages thick. That means it goes back years and years over the history of your property. When I was a young girl still living at home with my parents I remember the day when they finally paid off their mortgage on our house. It was a day for celebration. Witnessing all

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana  
340 W. Michigan St., Indianapolis, IN 46202  
Phone 800-450-4534 or 317-639-4534  
**website at: [www.historiclandmarks.org](http://www.historiclandmarks.org)**



Another avenue you can check in your search are the Deed Records in the Recorder's office; many times the dwelling is mentioned in the deed. If it doesn't say how old the house is then you can often figure it out by going back through all the deeds that pertain to your property. You can also try checking in the old Tax Books; they often mention the value of the property that tax is figured on. If there is a dwelling on the property there will be an entry in the column "Improvements." This is especially helpful if your house is very old and you haven't been able to find anything from the previous resources. To round out your home's history other areas you can check are city directories, census data, and city or county maps that detail land plats and city layouts. You can find city layouts or plats at the County Auditor or Surveyor's office. Another little known public record you can check are building permits, although they only go back so far.

House history research is now such a popular hobby. New homeowners are regular visitors to our Archives. Their interest is often sparked by a story that was passed on from the previous owner. Sometimes it's just the aura of an old log cabin – how old is it? Is there an interesting story about its original inhabitants – is this really a site of an Indian settlement? Is there an unusual event associated with this property – did the bears really wallow in the mud here? Research the previous owners. They may have information or old photos they would be willing share. Also old newspapers may contain news of the area or newsworthy events of the previous owners' lives, or even news of the neighborhood.

A gentleman paid a visit to our Archives earlier this year to get some documented history about his house. He was doing the research to see if he could apply for a grant to get his old home restored. Unfortunately grants are not usually handed out for this purpose. The one exception to this would be if your house was historically significant to Indiana history. This gentleman came in with a story he had heard about his house when he had bought it. He said he had been told that the house was very old and had been originally sitting in another part of town. The house moving event was documented in a local author's book. Also the house had been home to some of the artists when the Art Colony had started in Brown County at the turn of the century.

Checking on his story we finally found the reference to his house in the little book, "Brown County's Art Colony, The Early Years" by Barbara Judd. The paragraph was in the chapter on Cheerful Hill. The



**T. D. Calvin Cabin.  
North Jefferson Street**

of advice all along the road and not a few took a hand in manipulating the maul or keeping the horse moving in a circle.” The house was moved up on Cheerful Hill on N. Jefferson Street in Nashville.

So if there is a story to your house or if you want to find its story now is the time to start looking. You may not always be so lucky to find a written story of your home, but it doesn't hurt to try. You have most of the tools within your reach. If you have a particularly interesting story about your house or property we would certainly like to hear about it. Pay us a visit at the Archives or drop us a line. We just love stories! You can read the full story about Cheerful Hill in the following article.

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## Cheerful Hill ca. 1923

Almost every little town sooner or later falls heir to some catchy names labeling certain areas within the corporate limits. Nashville has had its Blood Alley, Angel Avenue, and Cheerful Hill since who knows when. Cheerful Hill is a triangular area north of the Courthouse, between Van Buren and Jefferson Streets, beginning at Mound Street, running east and west, and continuing for about two city blocks to where the two streets come to a point. On its east side state Road 135 makes its way to Bean Blossom and other points. An old atlas of 1876 refers to the land as the Barnes Addition and Barnes' Outlots. This tract has been owned by numerous individuals, including J. H. Reed, Gus Baumann, Adolph Shulz, the Calvin Brothers, and the Snodgrass family, the latter having purchased the entire acreage a few years back. Jim Allison, former hauler of freight, odd chores man, and transporter of passengers to wherever it was possible to take them, is said to have given the place a name.

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About 38 years ago, the house formerly occupied by the T. D. Calvin family, was moved from the site of the present Calvin palatial home by Ben Hobbs and Bummer Mobley. A sort of nailed-down derrick powered by one horse, was used to move the structure along Van Buren Street, and Bummer's job was to look after the rope. Every 200 yards the apparatus had to be dislodged and replanted for another pull. The building was a sort of two-room-with-porch affair. In those days moving house was a small job – there was plenty of advice all along the road and not a few took a hand in manipulating the maul or keeping the horse moving in a circle.

Cheerful Hill at one time was a cornfield. Jimmy Whitaker, the tombstone man, at one time made a deal to set out a potato patch near the point and after he had it planted, he learned that most of it was out in the big highway, but he was permitted to reap the harvest without any hindrance - vehicles merely made what we now call detours.

When Gus Baumann bought four lots in the area, he made a bet with Lucy Hartraith, Chicago painter, that there were trees on his purchase at least 30 feet high. A tube of cobalt blue was as stake and Adolph Shulz presided as referee. Baumann was backed up against a tree which he vowed would come within the requirements and Shulz began to measure off by saying, 'One Baumann, two Baumanns, etc. and he decided in favor of Miss Hartraith. Today there are hundreds of trees more than that height all over the place - oaks, hickories, wild cherries, and maples leading the parade.

The little house served as a domicile for a number of families until it was permitted to take on an angular slant. The little home has since been remodeled into an attractive cottage.

Possibly the most prominent resident of Cheerful Hill in 1909 was John Hafen of Salt Lake City. Mr. Hafen was commissioned by the elders of the Mormon Temple in his home city to decorate the interior of the magnificent structure. Mr. Hafen was a very jovial personage -

always seeing the funny side of a joke that might be played on him. Will Vawter showed up at Hafen's one night with a flashlight, which was a novelty in 1909, and by throwing the half-shielded light on himself, took on a grotesque look. When Hafen opened the door, long after dark he was startled, but soon figured out what Vawter was trying to do. At another time, while Hafen was on a sketching trip,



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his co-workers made up a realistic dummy and placed it in his bed. He would not disturb it until his son, Virgil, surveyed it, and he always said it was the work of Shulz and Vawter.

(By Frank Hohenberger as published in "Brown County's Art Colony, The Early Years.")



**Nashville looking North from Town Hill 1934**

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## Blood Alley

There are at least two versions explaining the name Blood Alley in Nashville. In the early years of our county the leather tannery business was a major money-making industry. There were eight tanneries in Brown County in the 1840s with an annual income of \$50,000 and they employed 25 people. In Nashville Benjamin Huntington opened a tannery southeast of town with four vats and later with eight vats. It stayed in business until the beginning of the Civil War. Another one was T. S. Calvin who started a tannery in 1851 with eight vats. It was later bought out by Shotwell & Larkin followed by Dow Head. The business had increased by ten vats.

The tanning process required 5000 cords of tanbark from the chestnut oak tree every year. Every spring a group of men were hired to camp out for several weeks and worked at peeling the bark from

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**Decoration Day in Nashville, ca. 1900**  
**Looking west down Main Street**

the trees. Some of the animal hides were procured from local people, but many were shipped to the tanneries from other states. The hides were then hauled to and from the railroad depots by wagon.

The tanneries in Nashville operated steadily for many, many years. The runoffs from the process of the

tanning of the hides consisted of water turned blood red by the color of the chestnut bark. There being no septic or sewer systems back then the runoff water was allowed to drain into the creeks. Thus the drainage ditches running along beside the tannery resulted in the area being named Blood Alley. (History & Families, Brown County, Indiana 1836-1990 by the Brown County Historical Society)

Another version to the story is that in the southwestern section of Nashville there was a notorious part of town where there were a lot of fights, and trouble that happened all too often. It's not clear exactly where Blood Alley was located, but it is talked about to this day. The Blood Alley designation was more likely used to identify the general area in the southwest poor part of town where drunks and fights were frequent, rather than a particular alley or street.

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## October Events

The October meeting of the Historical Society will feature a program by the **Genealogical Society** about the no longer existent, **Johnson Township**. Come to the Historical Society building on S.R. 135N for the pitch-in dinner meeting to start at 6:30 p.m. on October 1.

The Genealogical Society meeting will be on October 9. We will meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Brown County Library. Brent Abercrombie will talk about **The Leiber Family** and their connection to Brown County. They played a major role in starting our State Parks.

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