

The Preservationist

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An Historic One-room Schoolhouse

The Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission has been working to document all the one-room schools that once existed in the county. We find that some still exist and have been converted into houses while others have totally disappeared. Mapes School in Limestone Township is one that has survived.

Built in 1842 on property owned by Henry Mapes, the school was constructed of local limestone probably secured from the mouth of Wiley Creek (see map, section 22).

In 1928, a Kankakee Chamber of Commerce booklet entitled *The Beauty of the Kankakee Country* was published. In the

booklet, author James O'Donnell Bennett wrote the following description of his drive through Limestone Township.

One of the townships is named Limestone. In many places in the

days on this countryside it was a case of a "stake and rider" fence for the farmyard and fields or a stone fence. If the farmer decided on a stone fence he and his boys became



Mapes School, Limestone Township
Photo from the book "County West" by Jim Ridings

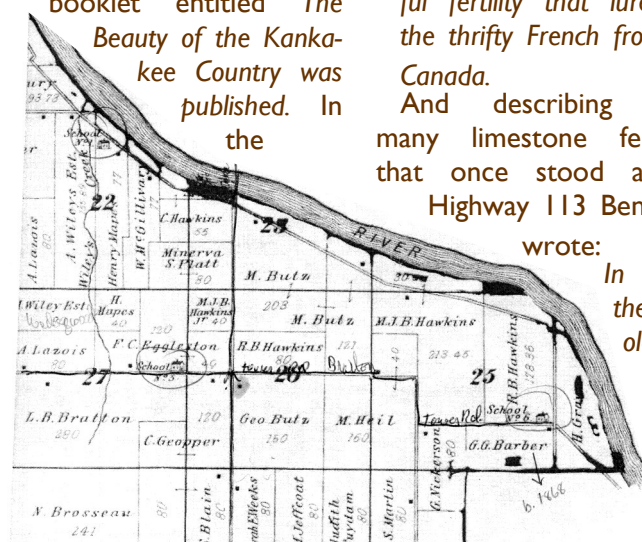
county the soil lies twelve inches above the limestone, which accounts for the wonderful fertility that lured the thrifty French from Canada.

And describing the many limestone fences that once stood along Highway 113 Bennett

wrote:
In the old

amateur quarriers and dug into the shallows of the Kankakee river for the limestone. ...to fence one field would mean, ...thousands of slabs of limestone two or three inches thick and a foot or a foot and a half long. Their work was sterling...Not alone fences, but farmhouses, outbuildings, and tiny schoolhouses were built of this material.

Limestone fences built during the 1840s & 1850s can still be seen along



An Historic One-room Schoolhouse

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Highway 113, just past Riverside Medical Center and also near Wiley Creek Farm.

It was in 1853 that quarrying of the native limestone first began. The Illinois Central Railroad was being constructed through Kankakee County. When they reached the Kankakee River, a bridge was needed to allow the railroad to continue its route south from Chicago. The contractors opened a quarry in Limestone Township at the mouth of Wiley Creek and cut limestone, used for the construction of the bridge, was hauled from the quarry into what is now the City of Kankakee, the location of the new bridge.

Mapes School became the polling place for Limestone Township in 1853 when Kankakee County was formed from Will and Iroquois counties; and again later in the year when ballots were cast and Kankakee became the county seat. For both occasions, the vote was unusually heavy because after the settlers voted they decided to walk to the



Mapes School students, c 1911-1913. L—R: Winifred McGillivary, Lillie Falter, Mary Blanchette, Eunice "Una" Falter, Harriet McGillivary, Ferd Naese, Luella Falter, Charles Naese.
Photo from the book "County West" by Jim Ridings

quarry at Wiley Creek to recruit the IC contractors to vote.

The Mapes school history also includes the future governor of Illinois, Len Small, who taught at the school for a short time. The photo above shows a class c1911 – 1913 outside of the school.

Bernice (Mrs. Henry) Davis, shown in the photo at right,

stands at the window of the schoolhouse where the settlers in 1853 cast their votes. The photo was taken years later when she owned the property. Henry (1885-1961) and Bernice (1886-1980) Davis purchased Mapes School following the 1947 consolidation of all Limestone schools. They converted the school into a house



Mrs. Henry Davis
(taken from an Oct. 24, 1976 Kankakee Daily Journal article and from the collection of Linda Willibey.)

where they lived out the remainder of their lives. The house changed ownership in 1981 after which there were additions to the building that included a garage built by local contractor, Tom Knicklebine. The property remains in the family, now owned by Mark & Linda Masserle.



Mapes School as it appears today.

Recreational Sites in Aroma Township

It is clear from the map that the Kankakee River has always been a source of recreation, not only in the summer but the winter as well.

During the 1880s at Waldron, now known as Aroma Park, there were several club houses along the river. At the time it would have been difficult to find any area in the state that would compare to the scenery along the banks of the Kankakee and Iroquois Rivers in Aroma Township. Fish such as salmon, pickerel, large & small mouth black bass, catfish, bull heads and many others were very plentiful in the bayous and creeks. Hundreds of ducks and geese stopped by during the spring and fall as they migrated north and south. Once men began to arrive from Chicago, the local fishing and hunting was soon destroyed.

South of Baker's Creek was William Gougar's amusement park. In 1883, he purchased a tract of timberland along the Kankakee River and developed the park and picnic grounds about two miles northwest of Aroma Park. He built a large dance pavilion, toboggan slide running out into the river, boat

house and several small buildings.

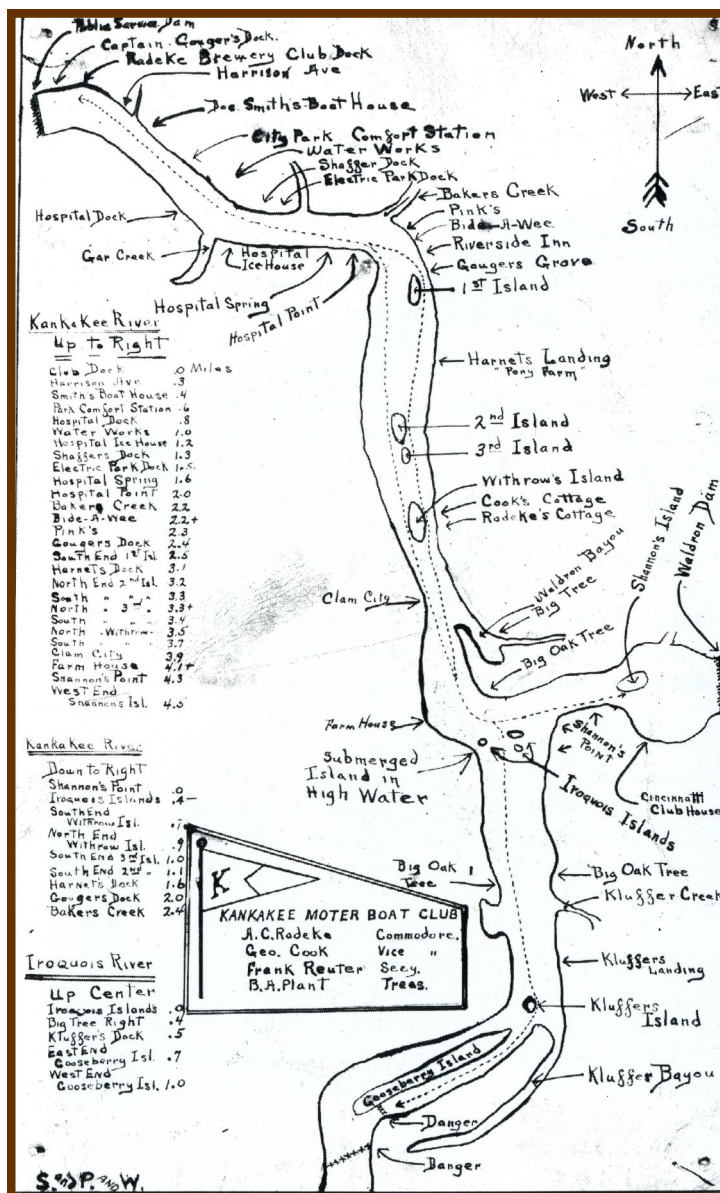
He also built a large double deck steam boat propelled by a steam engine and a large paddle wheel boat that would carry approximately 100 people. His first boat the *Starry Queen*, later

renamed the *Minnie Lillie*, carried passengers from Shek-ey's Landing in Kankakee to Gougar's Grove. Up until 1900, picnickers came from Chicago by train and joined the local people. It was a thriving business that was well known throughout the Midwest. The *Minnie Lillie* was followed by other boats: the *Margerette*, the *Shabbona* and the *Modoc*.

Harnit's Pony Farm, established in 1900 by Sam Harnit, was located south of Gougar's Grove and offered pony rides, boating, croquet and tennis.

In the winter, ice skaters would have large bonfires along the Kankakee River shoreline and use almost the entire frozen river from Kankakee to (Waldron) Aroma Park.

Today the area is still a popular spot that is used for boating, fishing, swimming and, when the weather permits, skating and snowmobiling.



This map was from the collection of the late Lorraine Schneider



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Kankakee County's Historic Preservation Plan

The Preservation Commission has been working this past year to: accumulate the historic context of the county; hold public forums; document historic structures and sites; and photograph as many of those structures and sites as possible. That work was completed at the end of September and sent to our consultant, Kenneth Itle of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. He then compiled

the information and sent the completed Preservation Plan to the State Preservation Agency for approval.

Mr. Itle will meet with us in December to present us with the document. If approved and adopted by the Preservation Commission, it will then go to the Kankakee County Planning & Zoning Department followed by the Kankakee County Board for adoption.

The purpose of the Preservation Plan is to

guide the Commission in prioritizing their future goals and activities for the coming months and years.

The work of preparing a Preservation Plan for Kankakee County, by the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission, is made possible through a CLG grant received from the Illinois State Historic Preservation Agency and a grant from the Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley.

What is a Certified Local Government?

In 1966, a historic preservation program was created by Congress for the United States. The program was a partnership between the federal and state governments. In 1980, the program was expanded to include local governments that are now able to participate in what we call the Certified Local Government (CLG) program.

To qualify as a CLG, a municipality or county must have the following:

- A historic preservation ordinance;

- A preservation commission;
- A survey program;
- Provisions for public participation.

After becoming a CLG government it will be able to establish a local historic preservation program and will play an active role in protecting locally designated properties with landmark status. It may also participate in the nominating process of the National Register of Historic Places.

The CLG program is managed by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA). All CLGs

are eligible for grants to execute local preservation programs through IHPA. The CLG is required to apply for the matching grants that fund preservation activities such as: survey work, educational programs, publications, preservation plans, and rehabilitation projects to name a few.

In order to educate the CLG Commission, the IHPA offers workshops, informational materials and training throughout the year. IHPA is always available for consultation and will provide educational workshops for the public.