

An excerpt from
The History of Stacyville, Iowa: 1856-2006¹
By Cheryl Mullenbach, 2006

1911-1920

“It is now conceded that the only hope for small towns these days is a factory of some kind. Little towns the size of Stacyville do not get the larger factories. They are looking for the bigger towns and ask a big bonus for locating. If we take the little factories, we will grow and later be in a position to go after the larger ones.”

Those words appeared in a 1911 edition of *The Stacyville Monitor* but could have been written in the 21st century. The citizens of Stacyville were hopeful that a factory manufacturing silk neckties, cotton gloves and mittens would start up as soon as “20 men in Stacyville who are sufficiently interested in the welfare of the town” purchased \$25 each in stock. Total cost for the factory was \$2,500; but as soon as the town raised \$500 in stocks, machinery would be installed. The intent was that the factory would initially employ “mostly girls and women” and would eventually branch into the manufacture of “men’s overalls and cheap work shirts.” Interested parties were advised to stop by *The Monitor* office for more information.

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Stacyville never got that factory, but the local business community continued to grow and change. These businesses were flourishing in 1911: Frank Heimer & Co. Hardware; The Stacyville Bank; Kinney’s Drug Store; Weber’s Meat Market; Falk & Weber Furniture, Jewelry and Undertaking; Ben Adams Shoe Repair; Stehn’s Grocery; Stacyville Lumber Co.; Kraus Sisters general store; J.N. Wolf Clothiers; G.F. Gerk, agent for The Iowa Separator; J.B. Schmitz, realtor.

Crime was not unknown in Stacyville. Burglars occasionally struck at local businesses. *The Monitor* reported that one night in March 1911 the hardware store, the depot, and the lumber yard were all burglarized. A thief broke a window in Frank Heimer’s hardware store and took razors and “six or seven dollars from the cash register.” He used one of the new axes from a rack in the store to smash the register. He was preparing to use a brace and a drill to open the safe but left before accomplishing the task. Mrs. Andrew Weber, who lived across the street from the store, reported she saw a man moving around in the store about 1 a.m. He was “lighting matches and moved behind the counter.”

The Methodist church was still active in Stacyville during the decade. Evangelists held tent meetings in the park. Attendees were encouraged to bring their dinner in a basket and eat under the trees. The meetings ended abruptly after only three weeks because of poor attendance. The 43rd annual convention of the Mitchell County Sunday School association was held in Stacyville in September 1911. However, by 1917 the church parsonage, “consisting of three lots and barn and a good well” was for sale.

Among the 48 children receiving the their first communion at St. Mary’s Church in October 1911 were Alois Halfman, Joseph Meyerhofer, Raymond Mayer, Joseph Michels, Ben Faas, Hubert Halfman, Paul Huemann, Sylvester Isaac, Carl Theobald, Maria Bawek, Ermina Halbach, Alvina May, Anna Salz and Rosina Faas.

A new doctor came to town in 1911. Dr. Harrington rented the rooms over Heimer & Co.’s hardware store for a residence and rooms over the butcher shop for his offices. The doctor made house calls using his horse and buggy. He charged about \$28 to deliver a baby at home. Although Dr. Harrington was kept busy delivering babies, it wasn’t uncommon for midwives to take a little of his business.

In April 1912 there was talk of reviving the city band. The newspaper editor, Mr. Murphy, ran an article calling all interested parties to a meeting in the council rooms to discuss the formation of the band. It was believed that “there is considerable talent” and “a number of the old band boys” were still interested and “some young fellows willing to take hold and learn.” It was proposed that the band would be a “great advertisement for the town” and would “draw people to the town on hot summer evenings.”

In 1912 the building of a new dam was under consideration. The old dam had been washed out in 1911 and the owner of the mill property, Peter Halbach, proposed the building of a cement and stone dam that “will

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withstand any floods.” He proposed that since the dam would benefit the town as a whole, the city should consider contributing to the project. Mr. Halbach asked for teams to haul the stone—500 to 600 loads.

In the presidential election of 1912 Stacyville voters favored Woodrow Wilson with 157 votes; Teddy Roosevelt, 34; William Howard Taft, 17; and the Prohibition candidate, Eugene Wilder Chafin, 4 votes. In 1912 women’s suffrage was a hot political topic throughout the country. Stacyville was no exception. An article in *The Stacyville Monitor* asked women to hold a primary to express their wishes regarding the issue. *The Monitor* offered to print and furnish all the ballots free of charge.

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The fact that Stacyville did not have an organized fire department or equipment to fight fires was a constant source of concern for the residents and businesspeople. Businesses paid higher insurance premiums as a result of the lack of fire protection, at an annual rate of \$2 per \$100 of coverage. According to the newspaper, this was about 80 cents higher than it would be if the town had fire protection. In August 1913 a fire caused minor damage to the Heimer & May hardware store when some oily rags combusted. The fire renewed discussion about a fire department.

Prior to 1915 the street lights in Stacyville were kerosene lamps which had to be lit each night. The street lighter-- sometimes the town marshal-- lit the lights and hung them from a hook on the light pole. Every morning he gathered all the lights up. The matter of electric lights for Stacyville was under discussion in 1915. It must have been a memorable day when a “dynamo” was installed at the rendering works and the current wired over the river to the town.

For the most part, at least two generations of Stacyville residents lived their lives isolated from the outside world—as did most residents of small Midwestern towns at the time. But that changed dramatically when the United States entered World War I. The war hit home in Stacyville when in May 1917 men between the ages of 21 and 30 were reminded in a front-page headline in *The Monitor* that they must register with the United States government for military service. Ninety-six Stacyville men complied.

By August 1917 many Stacyville men had been called up for military service: Henry Adams, C.F. Sobolik, E.W. Dumire, John A. Frein, Wm. J. Wolf, Matt Durben, Joseph W. Bawek, Anton J. Hemann, Joseph J. Mayer, Philip Merten, Fred E. Hartnell, Michael M. Mayer, Lewis A. May, Arthur Mayer, George Junger, Frederick M. Steiger, Hubert Miller, Aloysious May, Ralph A. Decker, and Conrad Isaac.

While the prospects for world peace seemed unlikely in 1917, there was the promise of good fishing for Stacyville’s residents. In November a special car was hauled into town by the Illinois Central *Clipper*. The car held fish from the state fish hatchery at Spirit Lake. The fish were placed in the river just east of the depot, and it was expected that within a few years the people of Stacyville would enjoy good fishing.

The women of Stacyville did their share for the war effort. A War-Savings Society was organized and the first meeting held at the Methodist Church. The group was called “The War-Savings Society of Stacyville” and was affiliated with the National War-Savings Committee. There were 11 charter members. Children could also join as “active members.” Adult members were known as “associate members.” The purpose of the organization was “to unify and clarify the patriotic ideals of the people of our Great American Democracy and foster habits of Thrift among them.”

On November 14, 1918 *The Stacyville Monitor* carried two war stories on the front page. One headline read “Hale Fuller Dead; Died in France.” The other: “War Over. Big Time Here All Day Monday.” It must have been a bittersweet day for the citizens of Stacyville as they cheered the end of the war and mourned for their “Stacyville boy” who “made the Supreme Sacrifice for his Country.”

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On November 11, when news reached Stacyville that the war was over, the town went “wild with joy.” All day long citizens celebrated. Early in the morning flags and banners were “hoisted about the streets.” The newspaper stated that the “youngsters kept the town red hot during the day.” That night a big bon fire was started on the street near the hotel. According to the paper, “It was a grand and glorious celebration.”

The years between 1911 and 1920 were eventful times for Stacyville. The first generation of residents was now elderly; many were gone. The next generation had stepped up to run businesses, work farms, manage the city government, raise children, support the churches and schools, build bridges and roads, and continue traditions. But world events intruded on the lives of the residents of Stacyville in 1917, and for the first time in the town’s history, events far removed from Stacyville left a mark on the community. By 1920 life had returned to normal with weekly band concerts, performances at the Opera House, ice cream socials, school commencements, fishing and baseball.

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