

Carroll's pioneers arrived in 1824

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DELPHI — Carroll County was organized in January 1828, about four years after the first settlers, families like the Robinsons, Angells, Baums and McCains, came here in late 1824.

They had purchased land from the government land office at Crawfordsville and followed the Wabash River upward to their new homes in a virgin wilderness.

Basic pioneer businesses were established soon after the arrival of the first settlers. Henry and Abner Robinson built a mill; Daniel Baums opened up a tavern and inn in his cabin; and a man named Daniel Vandeventer brought in a stock of merchandise by boat up the Wabash and Deer Creek to open the first store.

For several years, the first settlers devoted days of travel to go to Crawfordsville for basic needs and to collect mail or send letters to families back east.

The Robinson brothers hacked out the first road from the Delphi vicinity to Crawfordsville so they could travel back and forth by ox team. It was slower than a boat, but they could take and bring bigger loads of merchandise and trade goods.

The county was organized by the settlers on Jan. 7, 1828, and named after Charles Carroll of Maryland, then the only living signer of the Declaration of Independence. Carroll died in 1832, and it isn't known if he was aware of the

fact that an Indiana county carried his name.

A county, naturally, has to have a county seat, and on May 24, 1828, the newly elected county commissioners selected Delphi as the center of county government.

At the same time they named the community Delphi, after the oracle temple of ancient Greece. City fathers had discussed naming the community Carrollton, since that was the name of Charles Carroll's family estate in Maryland, but selected Delphi instead.

The Carrollton name later was picked up by a small community along the Wabash near Delphi that no longer exists. Only a bridge over the Wabash still carries the Carrollton name.

The first public building erected was a county jail. At about the same time a crude office building was constructed for the county clerk and recorder. Court sessions were conducted in a schoolhouse until the first courthouse was built several years later.

Another important piece of county business was the authorization of the first public well, which was dug 50 feet south of the center of the public square in Delphi.

Delphi was incorporated as a city in 1838 and reorganized as a corporation in 1852 under the new state constitution.

Other important events in the history of Carroll County included the launching of the Wabash-Erie Canal at Fort Wayne in 1833. The canal eventually

reached and passed Delphi. But about the time it was completed, railroads made it obsolete.

In those times the Wabash River ran deep and clear, and it was possible to get steamboats to Delphi. But in 1834 the steamboat Republican got itself stranded on a sandbar near Delphi in an attempt to reach Logansport.

In 1836, citizens completed a dam across the Wabash at the town of Pittsburg to power several mills for grain grinding and manufacturing. A new citizen, John Burr, opened up a boot and shoe factory in a small shop.

In 1837 and 1838, a seminary to offer high-school level education was authorized at Delphi by the General Assembly, and the county commissioners ordered that hitching racks for horses be constructed around the courthouse square.

In 1840, Abner Robinson, now a leading businessman, took a flatboat full of flour down to New Orleans, using the recently completed canal part of the way.

In 1835, Robert Webber and Isaac Clyer launched the community's first newspaper, "The Western Banner." The Democrat Party soon launched an opposition newspaper, "The Delphi Oracle."

Both newspapers lasted about two years. It wasn't until 1841 that the Delphi Oracle was revived under the editorship of James Coleman. Coleman gave up in 1844, and the community again was without a newspaper.

The year 1855 was an eventful one for the community, witnessing the establishment of the first Old Settlers Celebration, which may be the oldest continuous community festival in the state.

The same year saw an expose of the Know Nothing secret political party in Carroll County.

By 1888, people in Delphi felt the town was so sophisticated that it should no longer allow geese to run loose in the town, which made making walking hazardous.

Mayor Andrew Wolever rammed through an ordinance outlawing geese from the center of town and earned himself the nickname of "The Goose Mayor." The city council passed another ordinance a year later barring all animals, except horses, from city streets.

In 1891, Delphi built its first modern waterworks, piping water to town from Burt Spring to the east. In that year, the county commissioners also pulled out the hitching racks from the courthouse square and replaced them with fence. New concrete sidewalks also were constructed around the square.

The first census in Carroll County was conducted in 1830. It reported a population of 1,611 people. By 1850, the population had grown to 11,000. The population peaked at 20,021 in 1890, and then began a decline. It bottomed out at 15,049 in 1930, and began a slow increase to the 1980 census figure of 19,722.