

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Sparta, Kentucky

by

Emma K. Riley
former Sparta Postmistress

www.nkyviews.com

This history compiled by: Emma K. Riley
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S P A R T A K E N T U C K Y.

The town of Sparta was once called Brooksville, also known by the name of "Ross Mill" by those who came to have their corn ground into meal. The town itself was here long before a Railroad was built; the town was identified by the Mill which was the most important enterprise in this little town. A local farmer named "Ross" built the mill about one hundred and fifty years ago, and the spot was a most ideal one as there was very little water power in these parts to do the necessary work of a busy "Mill"; this Mill still stands at the same site, in what is now called, "Old Sparta." There was a ford at that time which crossed from the Owen County side to the Gallatin County side opposite to where the Louisville and Nashville Railroad now stands. The bridge later replaced the ford but the deeply worn banks still show where heavy oxen and horse drawn wagons had found their way for so many years across the Creek. There was also a Ferry for light loads and the ferryman gave both night and day service; his home was close by on the road. Many substantial log homes were built and were most comfortable for their dwellers but they did not realize how high the waters of Eagle Creek would raise and only one survived as the rest were moved or abandoned. Sparta also had a tobacco factory; the tobacco was stemmed by hand and made into twists which were packed into kegs and sent to the Ohio River at Warsaw, where they were shipped to Cincinnati to be sold as excellent "chewing tobacco". The town at first was all on one side of Eagle Creek, on the Owen County side with no school or church, so the children attended school at the Little Hope School, about a mile up Two Mile Creek; the children of the farmers on the Gallatin County side of the Creek attended school at the Craigmile School, which was a distance of more than two miles over the hill. About one hundred years ago there was an excellent store in Sparta, operated by Jones and Pogue, who sold fancy dress goods, fine china and other luxuries not usually found in little country stores. Over the store was the Masonic Hall; this building was destroyed by the flood of 1872, everything including stock and account books were washed away. It was in the late Sixties that rumors went around concerning the building of a Railroad that would connect Louisville and Cincinnati, Ohio. Up to this time the only means of transporting produce and other items was by means of the Ohio

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River Barge Lines, shipping point at Warsaw, Kentucky, a distance of ten miles from Sparta, and many farmers as well as business men from beyond Owen County over into the Blue Grass Section of the state would travel through Sparta with loads of produce to be shipped away on the Ohio River. When it was learned by these good citizens of Sparta, they at once offered the Right of Way through their property; they realized what it would mean to have a way of transportation to and from the big cities north and south, also a more convenient way of visiting relatives and friends in neighboring towns. The work was soon begun and with the aid of the local men, women and children, oxen and horse drawn wagons to carry the dirt to be used for fills it took a long time to build with pick and shovel, many of the mule teams and carts were owned by the Railroad Company. The laborers were mostly Irish immigrants who moved their families down here, to the little settlement on the Jamison Place, known as the Shanty towns. The contractor who first came in with his crew was called McGuirk; one of the bosses name was John O'Toole. There was a country store or Commissary at the foot of the hill, on the Norton Ribelin place or farm; this supplied flour, bacon and staple groceries, while the local farmers and townspeople sold eggs, chickens, butter and geese to these families. At last the long looked for day arrived when the first train would make the entire run from Louisville to Cincinnati, Ohio. It was not to be a passenger train so, many of the local men only gathered to meet and ride on the first trip to be made by this train. The cars were open and drawn by wood-burning engine with an immense "smoke-stack" in a funnel shape. There were huge piles of cord wood prepared and placed at given distances all along the road track; the passengers gladly jumped out and helped load the wood on to the train, to keep the "Iron Horse" going until they reached Cincinnati. A Mr. Brock and D.C. Jamison and four others ~~was~~ made this trip from Sparta. Soon afterwards came the first passenger train, and every man, woman and child was out to see it and extend their good wishes to the train crew. The first depot was built by F.A. Cox and Company of Owenton, Kentucky, and ~~it~~ rented ~~to~~ to the Railway Company; it has been disputed that the Railroad company built this first depot, and that Fox built a large barn nearby and had many wagons and teams of mules, and for years they ran a transfer ~~company~~ business from Owenton to Sparta, pioneers of the present Owenton and Sparta Transfer Company.

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F. A. Cox of Owenton was in charge of the Depot, also manager of the store and Post-Office which were in the same building; this depot was the first building in Sparta, on the Gallatin county side of Eagle Creek, it was built on the farm owned by the heirs of Robert Bond. A hotel was soon built to care for the travelling public, this was built and operated by Parnell and Willhoite, then several other houses were erected ^{facing} ~~at~~ the Railroad and this first street was named Railroad Street. Another larger building was erected farther on up from the Creek, and just across from it a large dwelling house was built, on the site where the Clover Farm Store now stands.

In 1873 a Covered Bridge was built across Eagle Creek by a man named George A. Wigal, and this stood as a landmark until it was destroyed by fire in the late 1930's; a new metal bridge has replaced the old covered one but it was built on the same rock pillars that the old bridge stood on.

After the building of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Sparta began to expand rapidly, it was a very important shipping point for this Railroad; people coming from great distances to make use of this modern facility in shipping their produce and receiving freight from the larger cities. A school district was mapped out to care for both sides of Eagle Creek and a large schoolhouse was erected to be called the Old Red School House; the land used for this purpose was donated by Mr. A. D. Mason; this was surrounded by a sort of park for the children; trees were planted for shade and ^{it was} a gathering place for Community picnics; this work was donated by the Samuels Boys. This school building was also used by the Baptist and Christian Churches which were organized about this time, until they could erect their own Churches

~~At~~ A stage coach was operated from Owenton to Sparta; the little woodburner of the construction train was gone, they now had real engines in 1870 and one of the earliest engineers was Berry Devise. Many times a through passenger train has stopped in Sparta to ~~pick~~ for some sick or injured person who was being rushed to a city Hospital or returning from a hospital, This Railroad became a sentimental part of our little community and it was a real thrill and looked-for-pleasure to hear the whistle of an approaching train and to meet it, if at all possible. Sparta on the Gallatin ~~continued~~ ^{expanded} to expand and it was now running out the ~~War-~~ ^{and two livery stables, one of which later be-} ~~came~~ ^{came} the Sparta Garage; a meat-curing plant was also built by Dr. J. B. Grant, which supplied the

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people of this community with fresh meat during the cool and cold weather but was forced to
due to the loss of so much spoiled meat. Sparta has had many good general stores, hardware stores
and groceries, also a lumber yard. Before the First World War two very fine nurseries were
started, bringing new interest, employment and business; the Donaldson Nursery located on the
Owen County side and the Willadoon Nursery on the Gallatin County side of Eagle Creek, both
on the edge of town. Sparta has suffered from several destructive fires and floods but in
spite of all this it is still a thriving and happy little town and community, with the fine
railroad passing through on its regular trips, bringing everything to these people to enjoy
as their city cousins do.

After Mr. Luke Cox of Owenton, the next Depot Agent was Mr. J. E. Buntjoy, of War
saw, Kentucky; the first Telegraph Operator was Letch Allcup, then Jerry Constantine and Ben
Wigginton; there was only one operator then, as the Office closed at night, later followed as
operators Walter Records, and Frank Jacobs who were also Agents; Mr. Jimmie Samuel worked at
this work but later became owner and manager of his general store. The names of some of the
train crew who ran through Sparta during these early years were, a Mr. Utterbeck, Mr. McAbb,
and two of Sparta's own sons, Edgar Williams and John Gullion, later a Mr. Furman William
everything that it could do to improve ~~the~~ service, also advertised the scenic places to visit
it and had excursions at regular intervals to give everyone a chance to travel the Rail-
road. During the First World War and later during World War II many ~~and~~ interesting
sights were given the townspeople through the passing of the Railroad cars carrying our boys,
girls and men to and from the Service of our Country; many postal cards have been picked up
by our local people to be mailed at the local Post Office to their loved ones in near and far
off places. Many times have these good townspeople handed on candy or other snacks to these
service men on troop trains, before it was restricted to keep these trains private from pub-
lic eyes and contact.