

HISTORY OF CHERRY VALLEY
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HISTORY OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY ILLINOIS 1877

The township of Cherry Valley was first known on the records of the county as Butler Precinct. The name was changed to Cherry Valley upon the adoption of the township organization law. Its' settlement commenced in 1836, Joseph P. Griggs being the first settler of whom direct trace can be found. Embracing a good deal of timber, it attracted a liberal share of immigration. It is a fact that all the pioneers sought the timber districts in which to locate their claims, believing that it would be easier to make farms by grubbing and clearing the lands, than it would be to reduce the prairie land to farm tillage and remunerative returns.

But as time advanced, and the later settlers were forced out onto the prairies and began to experiment upon them, the first settlers were made to realize that they had made a somewhat costly mistake by selecting timbered claims. They had been pitching brawn and muscle against nature, for all that the prairies needed was to be tickled with the plow to make them yield living crops the first year, and heavy and remunerative returns the second.

Where the Chicago & Northwestern Railway crosses the Kishwaukee River, there is a beautiful little valley--a picturesque and romantic basin of a mile in width, extending up and down the river. In its' natural condition, it must have been an attractive resort for the red men whose homes were along the banks of that easy and gracefully-curving stream. Even now, when dotted over with fields, houses, barns, and lowing herds, its' stillness broken by the hum of mill machinery, and by the rumbling of long, heavily-laden trains of steam-drawn cars, one cannot help but admire its' rare beauty, and almost sigh that the work of natures floraculturalist should have been swept down before the march of the pale faces. In this little basin cozily nestles:

The Village of Cherry Valley, with its' eight hundred men, women, and children; three church edifices, a graceful and elegant graded school building, about twenty stores and trading places, and numerous shops of industry of local merit. Joseph Griggs, the father of Calvin, Lendon, and Horace Griggs, settled on the hill overlooking the village in 1835. The site upon which his cabin was erected was not far removed from the ground now occupied by the Universalist Church building. His domicile was built from poles and thatched with straw or prairie grass. A. C. Gleason, came soon after Mr. Griggs and in 1836 Mr. Gleason was joined on the Kishwaukee by his brother, Mr. W. Gleason. In 1837, S. W. Gleason, a third brother, and the present Post Master, also put in an appearance and claimed a home "in this new country". Densley Kizer came in 1836 or 1837, making five claimants to homes in this valley at the date of Mr. Kizer's coming.

The first school houses were built about 1848-9. About this time the building of the railroad from Galena to Chicago began to be agitated and the settlers or citizens were urged to take stock in the contemplated railroad, either by subscribing individually as they were able, or by voting a tax. In 1851 a railroad meeting of the citizens was held in one of these school houses to take counsel together and to hear the conditions upon which the embryo railroad company would make Cherry Valley a point. This meeting resolved that no aid would be rendered the undertaking unless upon the express condition that it should cross the Kishwaukee at this point. The conditions were not agreed to by the representatives of the company, while the citizens remained equally firm in their conclusions. But the road was built and Cherry Valley made a station "all the same". In August, 1852, the road was completed from Chicago to the east side of Rock River, and on the second day of that month the first passenger train from Chicago to Rockford passed over the road.

As a local trade centre, Cherry Valley is an important point, and a station from which a large quantity of grain, etc. is annually shipped to Chicago and other markets. The country around is naturally rich, and under thorough and scientific cultivation, is very productive and largely remunerative. The people, farmers and villagers, are intelligent, refined and eminently social and hospitable.

The growing of broom corn is an important industry among the farmers. During the present season of 1877, Messrs Hugh Mackey and John Brown cultivated about three hundred acres each of this important material, in the care and cultivation of which they gave employment to from twenty-five to thirty men each. Two broom manufactories are in successful operation.

The Cherry Valley Mills of John Fischer (for which the Kishwaukee furnishes the power) do a large custom work, besides manufacturing largely for merchant interest.

Two large elevators, of large capacity and ample facilities, handle and ship large quantities of grain.

The best index to the character of any people is in the architecture and finish of their church and school buildings. In Cherry Valley there are three of the former, which are neat and elegant, while their graded school house--presenting more the outside appearance of a college than a people's school house-- is one of the best in Northern Illinois outside of the larger towns. It is a brick structure, was built in 1869, at a cost of \$18,000. Of this building, not only the people by whom it was built, but the people of the entire country may justly be proud. School is sustained about nine months of the year, and the system of teaching is of the most thorough and practical order.

Present Corp of Teachers--A. Andrew, principal; Miss Mary A. Earl, first assistant, Grammar Department. Miss Josephine Hale, Intermediate. Mrs. Wm. Craig, Primary Department. There is an average daily attendance of 220 pupils.

Churches--The M. E. Church was organized by Rev. H. L. Martin, in 1854. The same season, their church edifice was built, the builder being Mr. --- Powell. The society now numbers 108 members. The Sabbath school is the care and pride of the church. Fifty-two scholars are regular attendants. D. J. Hussey is the superintendent.

The Universalist Church edifice was built in 1854, under the ministerial supervision of Rev. Simon Park. After a few years of prosperity, by reason of removals from time to time, and a combination of other unfavorable causes, the society became too weak to support a pastor, and as a church organization, was finally abandoned. The building is now occupied by a Swedish religious organization, that has preaching at stated intervals.

The Free Will Baptist Church was built in 1874, at a cost of \$3,500. It has a membership of sixty to seventy. Rev. H. S. Cross is the pastor. Their Sabbath-school numbers about sixty scholars. David Case is the superintendent.