

History of Benton

Listed below is a selective chronological history of the Village of Benton—and to a lesser extent, the surrounding area. Credit for the research and compilation of this portion of the chronology goes to Stephen Calvert and Peg Roberts. Various historical sources, some more reliable than others, were used in the compilation. Corrections and additions to this chronology are welcome and may be submitted to info@bentonwi.us. Welcome, too, are additional photographs that give a visual history of Benton and the surrounding area.

Photographs used in the chronology came from a variety of sources, including: Swindler's Ridge Museum, the Schoolhouse Museum, Dave Driscoll, the Sinsinawa Dominican Archives, and from articles compiled by Ray Swift and published in Benton Alumni Newsletters.

1824

- The earliest known lead miners, George W. Rollins (often cited as Rawlins) and his son Ashford, from Virginia, arrived here from St. Louis, Missouri, and prospected in the area, building a cabin near the Horseshoe Bend. George lived in the Benton/New Diggings/Elk Grove areas until at least 1842, Ashford through 1847. They may have gone to California in the Gold Rush.
- The area's first mine was at Hard Scrabble (Hazel Green).

1826

- The first area post office opened at Fever River (Galena), Illinois.
- Moses Meeker visited New Diggings for the first time. Prior to coming to the area, Meeker had engaged in the smelting of white lead in Cincinnati, Ohio. After having taken out a government lease, Meeker



brought a colony of forty-five men to the area and began mining and smelting on a large scale. *(Photo by permission of Wisconsin State Historical Society)*

► The Van Matre brothers began mining in Shullsburg Township. Henry Gratiot and Jesse W. Shull also worked in the area.

► It was estimated that there were about 450 diggings/mines in the lead region of southwestern Wisconsin/northwestern Illinois.

1827

► First permanent settlers arrived: (a) Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Murphy and their five sons: Daniel, Dennis, James, Matthew, and Patrick; (b) Peter and Catherine O'Leary; (c) an adventurer named François de Lisle; and (d) Peggy, a family servant. They settled 1½ miles east of the village, near the mill dam on Highway 11, where they built a cabin and dug a mill race at Horseshoe Bend. Construction of the mill dam began in 1827 and was completed in 1829.



1828

► The first child, Mary Ann O'Leary (daughter of Peter and Catherine [Murphy] O'Leary), was born in the Benton area.

► First marriage: James Murphy to Flora Scott, of Illinois.

► First death: Mrs. Andrew Murphy (buried in Galena, Illinois).

- ▶ Charles Gear erected a cabin on the border between Benton and New Diggings Townships, near the Fever River.
 - ▶ B. R. Gillette took a claim at Buncombe.
 - ▶ Ahab Bean and his wife and three daughters came to Galena from Missouri, traveled up the Fever River to Coon Branch, and farmed and mined near where the Benton train depot was later located.
 - ▶ During the winter of 1827-28, the price of flour was \$30/barrel (a price equal to seven tons of smelted lead).
 - ▶ The price of lead fell to less than a penny a pound, leading to a depression in the lead region. The price stabilized by 1832.
 - ▶ Benton Township was organized.
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1829

- ▶ Langworthy Ridge, one of the first mining settlements, was mined by Daniel Sand, Scribe Harris, Orwin Smith, and James H., Lucius H., and Salon Langworthy, one mile south of town.
 - ▶ A mill race and a three-story mill—the first in the county—were completed by the Murphys at Mill Seat (Horseshoe) Bend.
 - ▶ The northern part of Benton Township was settled by Benjamin and Peter Carr and was called Buzzard Roost.
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1830

- ▶ Andrew Murphy died on September 23 and was buried in Galena.
- ▶ James Murphy and Moses Meeker became licensed smelters.

- ▶ Sauk and Fox Indians ceded lands in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois to the U.S. government and resettled in Iowa.
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1832

- ▶ Dennis and James Murphy, Peter O'Leary, and Peter Carr enlisted to fight in the Black Hawk War. They returned without seeing battle, however, because they disagreed with the way the commanders waged the campaign.
 - ▶ Lucius Lyon, contemporary historian of the era, noted only three area settlements: Natchez (New Diggings), Buncombe, and Murphy's Mill.
 - ▶ The Black Hawk War ended.
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1834

- ▶ The first book printed in Wisconsin Territory (at Green Bay) was Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli's Ojibway (Chippewa)-language *Almanac*.
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1835

- ▶ A store and saloon was opened by James and Samuel Munday. Another store was run by James Faherty.
- ▶ In the first government land sale, Dennis Murphy acquired about 40 acres upon which Benton now stands. Later Murphy donated the land on which the Primitive Methodist Church, the Benton Methodist Church, and the St. Patrick Catholic Church stand.
- ▶ The first blast furnace in the area was erected by the Murphy brothers at Mill Seat Bend.
- ▶ Father Samuel Mazzuchelli arrived in the lead region and ministered to people from Dubuque to



Galena to Shullsburg. As a zealous preacher of the Gospel, he founded many Christian communities in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois and built 25 churches in the region, including those at Benton, New Diggings, Shullsburg, and Galena.

► Jacob, John, and Abraham Jenkyns arrived in the area. Jacob built a mill, and John and Abraham farmed. Jacob's home still stands in Jenkynsville, WI.

1836

► The Territory of Wisconsin was created from the Michigan Territory. The first territorial legislature met at Belmont in October, with Father Mazzuchelli being named chaplain.



► Population of Benton Township: 776; Iowa County (which included present-day Lafayette County): 5,234; Wisconsin Territory: 22,214.

► The first land grant from the federal government was given to James and Dennis Murphy.

► The first township post office opened at Mill Seat (Horseshoe) Bend, with James Murphy as postmaster. It closed in 1837.

► *The Belmont Gazette*—the fourth newspaper in Wisconsin and the first in what would become Lafayette County—began publication.

1838

► A school was built in the Fever River valley, near Horseshoe Bend, and was attended by children of the Johnson, Looney, Murphy, and Sheffer families.

1839

► The Wisconsin lead region was surveyed for the U.S. Treasury by David Dale Owen, who identified 35 diggings and 5 furnaces.

► Murphys' Mill and Furnace burned down. James and Dennis Murphy advertised their 200-acre site for sale in the *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser*.

1840

► A cooperage (cask and tub-maker shop) was built by Philo Gillette.

► In the early 1840s, lead mining began at Swindler's Ridge, as well as on the Coon Branch of the Fever River.

► The 1840 federal census showed Wisconsin Territory's population to be 30,945. It listed 67 African American slaves in the state, most of them brought from Kentucky and Missouri to work in the lead mines in Southwestern Wisconsin.

1842

► Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, Dominican priest, moved to the district and became a U.S. citizen at Des Moines, IA.

1843

► Father Mazzuchelli returned to Milan, Italy due to ill health; he returned to the Benton area in 1844.

1844

► The village was surveyed and laid out by John Burrell and Matt Murphy (*image*) on March 18 on 40 acres owned by Dennis Murphy. The first streets were Main, Bean, Catherine, and Jackson (later changed to Van Buren).



► The first post office opened with the name Cottonwood Hill, with Dennis Murphy as the first postmaster. It was located in the grocery/saloon operated by Henry Myers and Ezra B. Parish on Bean Street.

► St. Augustine Church, designed by Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli, was completed in New Diggings.



(Photo courtesy of Dave Driscoll.)

1845

- ▶ A saloon and bowling alley was built by Charles Hewitt at the corner of Main and Van Buren streets (site of Donna's Hair Trix). Owen McDonald purchased this building for a home in 1847.
 - ▶ The name of the village was changed from Cottonwood Hill to Benton, honoring Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858), famous Missouri senator.
 - ▶ A house was built on Main Street by Joseph Arnold (later owned by Matt Murphy and, until his death in 2004, James Sysko, Sr.). It is believed to be the oldest house still standing in Benton.
 - ▶ Father Mazzuchelli's nephew Francis became the first priest ordained in Wisconsin Territory.
 - ▶ It was estimated that about 25 million pounds of lead were produced in the Benton area during the year.
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1846

- ▶ The first public school classes were taught by Ira Kingsbury west of the village at Swindler's Ridge.
- ▶ The Logstone Hotel was built on a lot at the corner of Main and South Bean streets (site of the post office and the adjoining parking lot).
- ▶ The Chaperone Hotel was built on the site of the present-day Butch McCarthy home.
- ▶ The American House (hotel) was built by Dennis Murphy. It was the largest building in Southwestern Wisconsin at the time.
- ▶ The first butcher shop was opened by Malone and Griffith near St. Patrick Church.

► Benton's first physician/druggist, Dr. Philip McBrien (perhaps spelled McBrean), was located in Benton.

► It is believed that the "Murphy/ Temple" house was built in this year. Oral history indicates that there was a long lane to the house that began beyond where the United Methodist Church stands on Main Street.



► The frame St. James Catholic Church was built at the site of the present-day St. Patrick Church.

1847

► Logstone House, one of the first hotels, was destroyed by fire in March.

► The Primitive Methodist Church was organized, with Pastor Thomas Robinson in charge of services in members' homes.

► Fr. Mazzuchelli founded a teaching congregation of Dominican sisters at Sinsinawa, WI.

► Lafayette County's first judicial court was held, with one of the first cases heard being a divorce.

► In December, Benton Township's population was 1,919, and the population of Lafayette County (now separate from Iowa County) was 9,335. Shullsburg was the county seat.

1848

► Wisconsin was admitted to the Union on May 29 as the 30th state.

► The first annual County Board school appropriation, \$35.64, was made for the Benton school and \$54.34 for the New Diggings school.

► The former Baptist meeting house was remodeled into the first Methodist Episcopal



Church. The church had two doors in the front, one from which men entered, and the other from which women entered. Once inside, the men and

women sat on opposite sides of the church. This building, much changed, is now a private residence at the corner of Galena and Frontier streets. It originally stood where the present-day Methodist Church stands.

► In Lafayette County, the Democrat candidate for U.S. president, Lewis Cass, outpolled the national winner, the Whig Zachary Taylor. Locally, Thomas K. Gibson was chosen state senator for the district.

1849

► News of the discovery of gold in California caused about half of the area men to leave to find wealth in California.

► Fr. Mazzuchelli became priest exclusively to Benton and New Diggings Catholic parishes.

1850

► The 1850 census showed that there were 2,227 people in Benton Township, 11,531 in Lafayette County, 305,391 in the new state of Wisconsin

(ten times that of a decade before), and 23,191,876 in the United States.

► Gold fever reached such a feverish pitch that on a single day, 60 wagons left Mineral Point, headed for California.

► James Murphy was appointed chairman of the County Board.

► There were about 65 businesses in Benton Township.

1851

► A one-room frame school-house, 24 feet by 30 feet, was built at the site of the current Hoppenjan house on the corner of East Main and Park streets. For

several years, the teachers were Dominican sisters. The building has been preserved as the 1851 Schoolhouse Museum (*image*) and stands in the Village Park.



1852

► A frame Primitive Methodist Church was built at the site of the present church on the corner of West Main Street and County J. The church was named "Happy Jack's Church" for John Winder, minister. Fire destroyed the church in 1863.

► The Benton Female Academy was founded by Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli on February 1 and began



to teach young girls, both Catholic and Protestant. Father Mazzuchelli was a strong advocate for the education of young women. He made sure the school had the finest, most up-to-date equipment and resources. *(Photo courtesy of Sinsinawa Dominican Archives.)*

1853

► The Shullsburg newspaper, the *Pick and Gad*, was founded.

1854

► Construction of the present St. Patrick Catholic Church was completed. At that time, the stone church did not include the present entrance and belfry, which were added in 1922.



► The post office was moved to the house adjoining the United States Hotel on Main Street.

1855

► The state census recorded Lafayette County's population as 16,064. (The county's population in 2002 was only 16,263!)

1856

► Matt Murphy became the district's state assemblyman.

► James Buchanan, the Democrat candidate for U.S. President, won the national and county vote over Fremont (Republican) and Fillmore (Whig).

1859

► The first Methodist Episcopal pastor of the Benton-Providence-Mt. Pleasant-Democrat-Wesley Chapel circuit, Rev. Enoch Tasker, was appointed. The parsonage was located in Jefferson. (In 1876 it was located in Benton.)

► Matthew Murphy began his long service on the County Board, and James S. Murphy became the district's state assemblyman.

1860

► The Benton House was built.

1861

► Benton sent the first of 117 soldiers to the Civil War and contributed \$17,000 to the Union cause, as well as much of the lead used for shot by the Union Army.

1863

- ▶ The Klondike House, a saloon with apartments above, was erected at the corner of East Main and South Bean streets (current site of VFW Hall).
- ▶ The frame Primitive Methodist Church burned down. There was speculation by some that Copperheads (Southern sympathizers) were responsible for the fire.

1864

- ▶ The present-day brick Primitive Methodist Church was built to replace the frame church that was destroyed by fire. Father Mazzuchelli contributed \$25 toward its rebuilding. *(Picture*



shows the church after 1905 when vestibule was added.)

- ▶ Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli died on February 23.
- ▶ Wagon-making shops were opened by Moses Piquett and by Charles Savary.
- ▶ A blacksmith shop was operated by Michael Flynn.

1867

- ▶ James Kearns built a stone store, now occupied by Ye Olde Rock Inn Cafe. The interior



of the store is shown with Samuel J. Kearns in the background, son of James Kearns (*circa 1900*).

1874

► A narrow-gauge railroad was begun from Galena through Benton to Platteville, to be



completed in 1875. The Benton depot was built. In the mid-1900s, Benton was the end of the line for the train, and a large, circular turntable was used to turn the train's engine around and head it back in the opposite direction.

The picture below (*circa 1912-15*) shows girls from Benton waiting for the train to Galena. Certain



stores in Galena would purchase the return ticket for those persons spending \$10.00 in their stores. Many people from Benton, especially the women, took the train to Galena to shop.

► John Beck opened a lumberyard in this year or in 1875.

1876

► A stone grocery store was built by Thomas Beck. The store was located on the corner of what is now Main and First streets, where the telephone company station currently stands. Fire destroyed the “Rock Store” on February 19, 1970.

1879

► School Districts 1 and 7 were incorporated, the former with 151 schoolchildren and the latter with 129.

1882

► A new two-story frame public school was built for \$1,671.90 on a lot purchased from the Benton Female Academy.



1883

► The present-day United Methodist Church was built, and the Ladies Aid (later, the Women's Society for Christian Service) was organized.

1891

► Up until this time, the children of Benton were taught in two schools. One of the schools was a two-story frame school at the east end of the village near the park, and the other was at the west end of town, ¼ mile northeast of the Frontier Mine, on property currently owned by Stella McDermott. That building (*shown below*) was built in 1854. It was known officially as Benton School District #7.



In 1891 the townspeople decided to unite the two schools. They purchased land from T.K. Gibson—land that was located where the Bible School playground is located today. During the summer,



the District #7 building (*top photograph*) was dismantled, some of the rock being used for the foundation of the new school. The two-story frame school was moved to the new site, and an additional section with four rooms was constructed. The finished building—the school of 1891—is shown above. In 1894 the school was made a State Graded School. After students progressed through the grades, high school courses were developed. The first graduating high school class graduated from this building in 1900.

1892

► The Hotel Central was built by Michael Flynn, a blacksmith. The hotel stood across the street from



the current site of the Benton State Bank. The building was torn down in 2006 to make way for a bank parking lot.

► The Village of Benton was incorporated.

1894

► The first bank was established on a lot next to the present-day Jim and Myrna Sysko home on Main Street.



► The *Mining Times* began publication on December 6. (It ceased operation in December 1900.)

1896

► The Mazzuchelli Court 582 of the Catholic Order of Foresters was organized.

► James Looney built a large home at the corner of Railroad and Second Street (current site of Casey Funeral Home).

1897

► The village's First Annual Union Basket Picnic was held on Labor Day.

1898

► Having completed grade school and passed the high school entrance examination in the spring of 1898, the first group of public high school students entered high school training.

1899

► On July 14, the Village Board accepted the \$3,272 bid by Tschirgi, of Dubuque, for the construction of the waterworks plant.

1900

► The waterworks were installed, including a stone tower, wood tank, windmill, deep water



pump, water mains, and hydrants. The water tower remained in use for about 100 years and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

► The Benton Fire Department was organized, with 22 members.

► The first high school class was graduated, following a two-year course.

► Dr. F. M. Bair began his practice.

1901

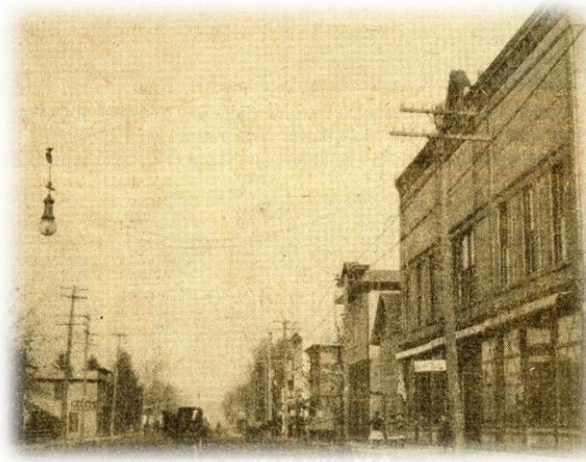
► The *Benton Advocate* began publication on December 12. It ceased publication March 27, 1959, when it merged with the Cuba City newspaper to form the *Tri-County Press*.

1902

► P.H. Whaley built the Whaley Block, including an opera house and a general store. The Whaley Block was located where the firehouse and neighboring building are currently located. Shown below is a photograph of the building's blueprint



(on display at Swindler's Ridge Museum); below that is the actual building. The Whaley Block burned down on March 19, 1920, taking one residence with it and damaging another.



The Whaley Building is on the right. (An electric streetlight hangs in the middle of the street.)

1903

- ▶ The electric-light system was installed.
- ▶ The first concrete sidewalks were laid, replacing boardwalks.
- ▶ The Martha Washington Society of the Primitive Methodist Church was organized, with Carrie Shattuck as the first president.
- ▶ Matt Murphy died November 7. He bequeathed \$129,000 to Lafayette County to build a courthouse, the only one built entirely with private funds in the United States.

1904

- ▶ Claude M. Vail became the publisher of the *Benton Advocate*.

1905

- ▶ The first Benton resident dentist, Dr. T. N. Shattuck, opened an office upstairs in what was most recently the Teen Center.
- ▶ The four-year high school was organized.

► A billiard hall opened in the Kearns Building (Ye Olde Rock Inn), with "a choice line of candies, cigars, and temperance drinks."

1907

- Attorney Belle Quinlan moved to Benton.
 - Long-distance telephone connections were installed for the Benton telephone exchange.
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1908

- A glove and mitten factory—owned by J. V. Swift, S. J. Kearns, and John Timmins—opened in the Kearns Building.
- Dr. James Beck, Benton's second dentist, opened for business, continuing until 1912.
- A new brick and stone school was built at the west end of the village. The previous frame school can be seen to the right. It was purchased by W. R. Buchan and moved to J. E. Temple's farm.



► The Benton State Bank moved to its present location.



1909

► An explosion at the Ollie Bell Mine killed E. J. Sullivan, Tom Clegg, Charles Morton, and John Olburg.

1910

► The West Side Literary Club was organized, with 11 members.

1911

► A library was opened in the Methodist Church parlor, three nights a week.

1912

► A Boy Scout troop was organized by Rev. W. J. James, with 12 members.

► A fire at the Vinegar Hill boarding house killed three "Bulgarians."

1913

► St. Mary's Court 991 of the WCOF was organized, with 29 women as members.

► The Yeoman Lodge was formed.

► The N.G.S. Orchestra was formed, with 16 members (violins, mandolins, clarinet, pianos), directed by Gert (Mrs. Claude) Vail.

► Alonzo Harker was killed at the Baxter Mine.

1914

► A new state road (Hwy. 11) was completed as far as George Thomas (Tom) Calvert's farm in August.

► Chester Peacock opened a drugstore on West Main Street, with an ice cream parlor added in the following year.



1915

► An ice cream parlor opened at Peacock's Drugstore.

► The Chicago & Northwestern depot was destroyed by fire. The depot was located at the bottom of Railroad Avenue near the football field parking lot.



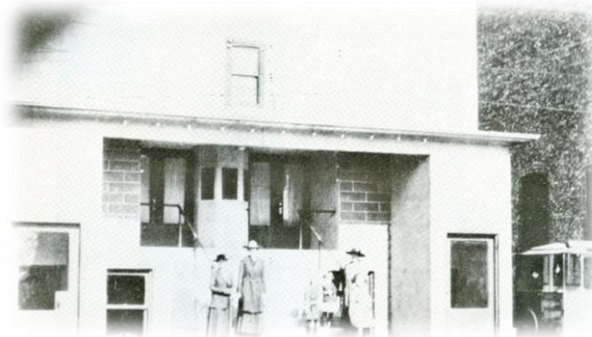
► Construction on a new road from Benton to New Diggings was begun.

► In April, the *Benton Advocate* reported: "A new bank is currently being organized for Benton by local and outside capitalists. They have purchased the Buxton Building occupied by F. Meloy."

1916

► The Municipal Building was erected.

► The Blende Theatre, built by Claude "Pop" Vail, opened for business in September, showing "The Disciple."



► The site of the Female Academy was purchased to become the village park.

1917

► The Strawbridge Tunnel opened, and railroad tracks were laid to the Skinner Roaster.

► Dutch and Bubbins Vaughn purchased the J. L. Swift Barber Shop. (*Picture circa 1950s. Bubbins, left, Dutch right.*)



► The PTA was organized, with E. R. Shorey as president. (It later became inactive and was reorganized in 1949.)

► A bandstand was erected in the Village Park.

► The Chicago & Northwestern Railroad began surveying for a spur from Strawbridge to New Diggings.



1918

► The National and Skinner roasters were built to produce sulfuric acid, at a cost of \$750,000 and \$500,000, respectively.

► A chapter of the Camp Fire Girls was organized, with ten members and with Xenna P. Bent as president. The group became the Home Economics Club in 1924.

► The county sheriff and the district attorney raided and confiscated three slot machines in Benton.

► The construction of curbs and gutters on Main Street was begun by R. Conlon.

► Village Marshall J. E. Elliott was shot and seriously wounded in April.

1919

► O. W. ("Tut") Horsley purchased the Redfearn Building to open a grocery.

► Dr. Lyle Victor ("Doc") French opened a dental practice.

► The first talking picture—*The Donovan Affair*—was shown in June at the Blende Theatre.

► The price of a haircut was raised to 40 cents.

1920

► A fire resulting in \$100,000 damage destroyed the Whaley Block—which included the Denton General Store, the Stadel & Ebert General Store, Cottingham Brothers Clothing Store, the Gray



Millinery, and McCarthy's Pool Hall. Also destroyed in the fire was the Stella Hicks residence. The picture above shows the fire's ruins. The house with extensive damage to its roof and east wall is that of Jim and Myrna Sysko's present home. The water tower is visible in the background.

► The Fortnightly Club was organized, with 12 members.

► An electric fire siren was installed.

► Bernard Murray, Leo Kuhns, and Del Rogers were killed at the Jefferson Mine in June.

1921

► The main part of the reservoir was completed.

► The Benton Roaster was destroyed by fire.

► Federal Prohibition Officer Kantcheff made a raid near New Diggings and confiscated a still and some alcohol.

► A new bridge was completed at the foot of Gunn's Hill, west of Benton.

► The Palace Garage was built on East Main Street.

1922

► James L. Bowman purchased the Stadel interest of the Stadel-Ebert ("Rock") Store.

► The Ladies Auxiliary of the American Legion was formed in April.

► Through a contribution by George Grotkin, the entrance and belfry of St. Patrick Catholic Church was added.

► A water fountain was installed in front of the Municipal Building.



► A chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was organized at the P.M. Church, with 23 members and Bernice Cardin as president.

► A Boy Scouts Troop was reorganized under the leadership of Rev. Conklin.

1923

► The Benton Library Association was formed by the Fortnightly Club and the Camp Fire Girls. The Benton Public Library opened shortly thereafter on the second floor of the Municipal Building. The first librarians were Cora Rockwell and Mrs. Nicolay, followed by Jennie Gray and Margaret Carter.

► A new steel tank was added to the water tower.

1924

► The Home Economics Club was formed from the Camp Fire Girls.

► According to the *Benton Advocate* in January, "The appearance of a flaming cross on a bluff east of Boscobel created considerable excitement and indicated [Ku Klux Klan] activities in that locality."

► The centennial of Benton's first settlers was celebrated on July 31, with a parade, a balloon ascension, a water fight, a dance, and speeches by Governor Blaine, Benton Mayor J. G. Beck, and others.

1925

► The Standard Oil Station was built on Main Street. It was built on part of the land occupied by the Whaley Building—a



building that burned to the ground in 1920. The Benton Fire Department is currently located on part of the same site.

- ▶ The Birkett Mine shaft was begun.
 - ▶ The Thomas Harker Pop Factory was opened in the spring. The pop factory was located by the stone water tower. The building, which still exists, currently houses apartment rentals.
 - ▶ A pipe organ was installed in St. Patrick's Church.
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1927

- ▶ The Benton Public Schools opened in September with their highest enrollment in history: 275 in the grade school and 86 in the high school.
- ▶ Main Street was paved from the Palace Garage to the New Diggings' corner, now Cty. J South. (The picture below is later and shows preparation for further paving on Main Street.)



1928

- ▶ New streetlights were installed.
- ▶ The 4H Club was organized.
- ▶ Marathon dances were all the rage in the area.

► Benton High School Alumni Association was organized, with a banquet at the Methodist Episcopal Church and a dance at the Blende Theatre on December 26. The first president was Mrs. J. W. Grotkin.

► J. R. Kearns purchased the Palace Garage from T. J. McCarthy. The picture below shows Kearns Motors, *circa 1944*.



1929

► A tornado struck three miles north of Benton in April, destroying farm buildings on the Frank Staver and Joseph Coulthard farms, with damage totaling about \$20,000.

1930

► Population: Benton: 869; Benton Township: 760; Lafayette County: 18,649; Wisconsin: 2,939,006; U.S.A.: 123,202,624.

► Moffett's Miniature Golf Course was constructed in July at the corner of West Main Street and Temple Avenue.

► The Dickeyville Grotto was dedicated.

1931

- ▶ The Benton State Bank was robbed of \$3,000 in May, while A. F. Whaley was on duty.
 - ▶ The Brownie Golf Course was built.
-

1932

- ▶ The Martin Swimming Pool was built.
 - ▶ Caroline Leitzell, daughter of Dr. Leitzell, was selected the most beautiful girl in the junior class of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.
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1933

- ▶ Ed Field received the first federal liquor license in Benton following the repeal of Prohibition.
 - ▶ The Benton Cheese Factory was built by W. C. Haese.
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1935

- ▶ The Phillips 66 Oil Station was built by Tim Cottingham at the corner of West Main Street and Temple Avenue. *(Photo circa 1944. The man on the left is Pat Perkins.)*



1936

- ▶ The Klondike Tavern was destroyed by fire.
- ▶ Benton was snowbound for more than three weeks in February, in one of the worst winters in the twentieth century.
- ▶ State Highway 11 was under construction east of Benton, with work begun in March on the bridge east of the Hardman Mill.
- ▶ The viaduct was built at the west end of town at the foot of what was once known as Gunn's Hill. It was dismantled in 1979.



1937

- ▶ A Girl Scouts troop was organized by Pearl Esler, with nine members. Alma Latham and Mildred Winskell were other leaders.
- ▶ Under the auspices of President Roosevelt's 1935 Works Progress Administration (WPA), a gymnasium and two additional classrooms were built across the street from the three-



story 1908 brick school that housed Benton's elementary and high school students. The building is now the Benton Bible Church.

1938

► The Vinegar Hill Zinc Co. closed all its properties in the tri-state district on March 31—



including the sulfuric-acid plant and the Winskell and Mullen mines—throwing 200 men out of work. The picture above is of the Winskell Mine.

- The first junior prom was held in the new gymnasium.
 - The Benton Lions Club was organized.
 - Six-man football started at Benton High School.
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1939

► The Boy Scouts were reorganized by the Lions Club, with Wilbur ("Hooker") Eckstein as scoutmaster.

1940

► Population: Benton: 835; Benton Township: 646; Lafayette County: 18,695; Wisconsin: 3,137,587; U.S.A.: 132,264,569.

► A Dubuque couple was killed in an airplane crash on the Silas Field farm southeast of New Diggings.

1941

► The Rock Store was reopened as a grocery and feed store under the management of Jim Bowman.

► Automobiles crossing the Dubuque Bridge were stopped and searched due to war panic.

► Construction was begun on the Julian Dubuque Bridge from East Dubuque, Ill. The bridge was completed in August 1943.

1944

► A hemp plant opened north of Benton.

► Tin cans were picked up by the American Legion to help in the war effort.

► A June tornado killed six people in Belmont and destroyed 14 dwellings, the Lutheran Church, and two gasoline stations.

► Capt. Allan Vail—son of the editor of the *Benton Advocate*, "Pop" Vail—was killed in action in Anzio, Italy.

1947

► Louis Runde bought the Randecker Hardware Store.

► Richard McRae, 26, died instantly in the eighth inning of a baseball game between Benton and Truman on the local ball diamond. McRae had just pitched a ball when he fell over and passed away before a large crowd.

1949

► The PTA, originally organized in 1917, was reorganized.

1950

► Population: Benton: 842; Benton Township: 697; Lafayette County: 18,137; Wisconsin: 3,434,575; U.S.A.: 150,697,361.

1951--Present

Additional chronological history will be added at a later date.