

New Chicago

H. E. Perkins

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

Perkins, H. E. "New Chicago." *The Annals of Iowa* 19 (1933), 42-54.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.5639>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

NEW CHICAGO

BY H. E. PERKINS

The first settlement in the eastern part of Ringgold County to reach the distinction of being called a town, was named Athens, the same as the township in which it was situated. It was also called Athens Center. And at some time during the life of the settlement it was nicknamed New Chicago. This name, it is said, was given to it by one of its citizens who had formerly lived near Chicago, Illinois. On January 13, 1873, the post office in the Merritt settlement which was known as Cross, was discontinued, and on July 16 of the same year it was re-established under the same name at New Chicago, with Fred A. Brown as postmaster. Certainly the place was well supplied with names, whatever else it may have lacked. In after years, the name by which it was most familiarly known was its nickname, New Chicago.

The buildings were on both sides of the road running east and west between the southeast quarter of Section 11, and the northeast quarter of Section 14, and just east of the road which ran north and south near the middle of Section 11, in Athens Township. It was a mile and a half west of the Decatur County line. There were no fences on either side of the road, and in fact, it was only occasionally that a fence was to be found anywhere in that part of the country.

The town was situated on a high, gently rolling prairie, covered with a luxuriant growth of native prairie grass and the famous blue grass of southern Iowa, while a beautiful and fertile farming region reached around it in every direction as far as the eye could see. It had its greatest growth in 1875, and was at its best from that year until 1879. During these years it was made up as follows: John Miller, farm home; F. A. Brown, post office; George I. Maxfield, farm home; C. S. Palmer, residence; Bud Noble, general store; John Hartnagle, blacksmith shop; Dr. L. P. Thayer, physician; F. S. Rhodes, general store; Mrs. Margaret Scott, residence; Capt. T. E. Scott, shoe shop; Camp Brothers, physicians and drug store. The nearest railroad

point was Leon, twenty miles to the northeast, and as there was no other town for a considerable distance in any direction, New Chicago became an excellent trading center for the rapidly increasing number of settlers who were coming in to occupy this fertile land in the eastern part of Ringgold and western part of Decatur counties. Most of the merchandise for the stores was brought overland from Leon, to which place the railroad had been built in 1871. Prior to that time the nearest railroad point was Ottumwa, and hogs and cattle were often driven to that place to market.

In the immediate vicinity of New Chicago, one of the first settlers was John Miller, who came here from Illinois in 1865, and bought 120 acres of land on the east side of Section 11. Near the southwest corner of the place was a small plank cabin into which Mr. Miller and his family moved. They began at once to improve the place, and had been doing a general farming and stock raising business for several years before anything was done toward locating a town in that vicinity. Will Hale, who was born February 1, 1875, in the old Miller home, was probably the first child born in New Chicago. He was a son of John Hale, who was Mrs. Miller's son by a former marriage.

In the fall of 1868, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick A. Brown and Mr. and Mrs. John M. Guild and their families came in covered wagons from near Atalissa, Muscatine County, Iowa. Both oxen and horses were used to haul the loads. Upon their arrival in Ringgold County they rented a place south of Lesanville where they made their home during the winter. The next few months after their arrival here were spent in looking over the land in this part of the county with a view to buying farms and making homes for themselves and their families. There were seven children in the family of Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Brown, as follows: Edward, Elizabeth (Mrs. W. M. Meroney), William K., Mary (Mrs. C. S. Palmer), Albert M., Robert Lewis, and Hattie. In the family of Mr. and Mrs. John M. Guild there were six children, as follows: S. H., David L., Charles, William, Flora, and Mary.

On November 8, 1866, David J. Jones and wife sold the northeast quarter of Section 14-68-28 to William H. Galloway, and about a year later Mr. Galloway sold 70 acres off the west side

of the quarter to his son, William A. Galloway. The Galloway family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Galloway and their two sons, William A. and John Tilford Galloway. They built two log cabins on the north end of the farm, one of them near the northwest corner and the other one about forty rods east of it. The east building was a little larger than the west one. It had a clapboard roof and was occupied by the Galloway family. It was this farm that Mr. Brown and the Guild family decided to buy. Mr. Brown bought sixty-nine acres off the west side of the quarter on February 13, 1868. On February 25, S. H. Guild bought forty-one acres and on August 29, of the same year, John M. Guild bought fifty acres off the east side of the quarter. After selling out, Mr. Galloway moved to what was later known as the W. H. Gray farm northwest of New Chicago. Being a shoemaker, he worked at his trade as well as farmed for several years, and finally moved to Oregon. John Tilford Galloway married Sarah Merritt, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Merritt.

Mr. Guild and his family remained here until about 1872, and then returned to Muscatine County. Some time later George I. Maxfield bought several acres of land where the east log cabin stood. He was a single man when he came here, but about 1873 he married a young lady by the name of Miss Robinson, whose home was in the Happy Hollow neighborhood southeast of Tuskeego, and they began housekeeping in the log cabin which had formerly been the home of the Guild family.

In the spring of 1869, Mr. Brown and his family moved into their new, two-room log cabin, which was on the northwest corner of the farm. The unfinished attic or "loft" was used as a bedroom for the children, and as there was no stairway to the upper room as provided in the houses of the present day, access to it was gained by means of a ladder. The cabin had a clapboard roof. There was no fireplace, but stoves were used for heating and cooking purposes. In this building the Brown family spent their first years in New Chicago. Some time later a frame dwelling house was erected on the same site, taking the place of the less commodious log cabin, which had served its purpose so well as long as it was used. Soon after coming here, Mr. Brown planted a quantity of maple seed, and in a few years

had a beautiful maple grove around his house. Shortly after Mr. Brown bought the farm, he took his family down to see their new home. Their daughter Elizabeth, who was then in her "teens," was a very interested observer of everything about the place. However, she was not familiar with log cabins, especially those in an uncompleted state. So after looking around for some time and seeing the two log cabins which at that time had not been roofed, she asked her father if those buildings were corn cribs. She was somewhat surprised when informed that they were dwelling houses and that one of them would soon be her home.

In 1873, when the post office was moved over from Merritt Station, three and one-half miles to the southwest, where it had been established in 1856 with William J. Merritt as postmaster, F. A. Brown was appointed the first postmaster of the new town for the reason that there was no one else in the neighborhood who would accept the position. He did not want the job, but took it simply because he felt it to be his duty. During the summer of 1876, a Mr. Gill, who had been carrying the mail on the star route through this section of the country for two years, decided to retire from the business, and Mr. Brown's son, Lew, was appointed carrier to fill the vacancy. The route was from Mount Ayr to Decatur City, a distance of thirty miles. A one-way trip was made each day over the route, for which the carrier received a salary of \$400 per year. Going east after reaching the Decatur County line, the star route over which the mail was carried, went in a northeasterly direction, crossing Grand River about three miles west of Decatur City, at Talley's Mill, where there was a ford. This was a good crossing during the greater part of the year. But often in the spring, when all the streams became swollen due to the heavy rains, the ford could not be used, and the river was crossed at the Woodmansee bridge. This was known as the north route.

The next arrivals in the new town were C. S. Palmer, his brother Arch, and their mother. Their home originally was in Ohio. From that state they emigrated to Durant, Cedar County, Iowa, where they made their home for some time. From the latter place they came to Ringgold County about the year 1870, and decided to locate in New Chicago. A lot was secured about

fifteen rods east of the post office, where they built a frame residence and made their home. C. S. Palmer, familiarly known as Claud, soon became one of the influential men of the community. Being genial, industrious and well educated, his talents were always in demand. He farmed, clerked in the stores, and taught school, continuing in the latter profession most of the time until he was elected county recorder of Ringgold County, in 1894. A few years after coming here he married F. A. Brown's daughter, Mary. Arch Palmer, after a short stay here, returned to his old home in Cedar County. His mother continued to make her home in Ringgold County, and died about six miles south of Mount Ayr some years later.

According to the most reliable information obtainable at the present time, it seems that the first business house to be erected in the new town, was a one-story frame store building about 16x24 feet in size. It was built in the fall of 1875 by Bud Noble, who had just arrived with his son James. The building was located on the north side of the road, about two rods west of John Miller's farm home. As soon as it was completed, Mr. Noble put in a stock of goods and at once engaged in the mercantile business. While the stock of goods was not large, it was soon found to be a great convenience to the people of the neighborhood, who up to that time were obliged to go many miles over the hilly roads to do their trading. The store had a good patronage from the very beginning, some of the customers coming many miles to trade here; and farmers coming to get their mail could exchange their butter, eggs, poultry, etc., for supplies at the store. Mr. Noble continued in business here until the fall of 1879.

In the fall of 1875, soon after Bud Noble's building was put up, John Hartnagle came from Naperville, near Chicago, Illinois, and built a blacksmith shop a few rods west of the Noble store. Having come from near Chicago, he is credited with having given the town its nickname, New Chicago. Mr. Hartnagle boarded at the home of John Miller while engaged in business here. The shop was sixteen feet wide, twenty-five feet long, and was equipped for doing a general blacksmith and woodworking business. In 1878 J. F. Scott went into the shop to learn the trade and continued working for the proprietor as long as he remained in New Chicago, and for about three years after the

shop was moved to Kellerton. John Burgess also worked here. In the fall of 1879, the shop was moved to Kellerton and placed on Lot 17, Block 17, just west of the alley. Some time later J. F. Scott became the owner of the building, which he was still using as a blacksmith shop in 1931. Mr. Hartnagle continued in the blacksmithing business in Kellerton for a number of years, and finally moved to Decatur County. He was married to Miss Lois Green, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Miles Green. They were the parents of four children: Ruth, who married L. G. Clum of Lamoni, and had one daughter; Tena, who married Dr. E. Shaffer of Delta, Colorado, and had one daughter; Addie H., who died about the first of May, 1905, at the age of twelve years; and Chester H., who was born in Kellerton in 1893, married Miss Elsie Ferrand of Des Moines, and since 1919 has been manager of the Chamberlain Hotel in Des Moines. John Hartnagle, who had been living in Decatur County for a number of years, died the last of April, 1905, at Leon, Iowa, and was buried in the Catholic Cemetery at Woodland.

Dr. L. P. Thayer was the first physician to come to New Chicago, and immediately showed his faith in the new town by erecting a store building. It was located just east of George Maxfield's residence on the south side of the road, and in it the doctor had his office. The building was a story and a half high and had a square front similar to most of the business houses of that day. A window over the front door admitted light to the room upstairs. When F. S. Rhodes came about 1875, he rented the store building of the doctor and put in a stock of goods. He had been a captain in the Confederate Army and came from some place in the South, bringing with him what he called a bankrupt stock of goods, and began selling them at auction. Business proved to be good and Mr. Rhodes added more goods to his stock from time to time, and continued in the mercantile business here until the fall of 1879. His stock consisted of dry goods, groceries, hardware, and in fact everything usually kept in a general country store of that day.

The Thayer building was moved to Kellerton in 1879 or 1880 and placed on Lot 8, Block 14, facing Decatur Street. It was later sold to Joe Euritt, who used it as a residence. In 1901 it was moved away to make room for the Ringgold County Savings

Bank. The *Kellerton Globe* of April 25, 1901, says: "The workmen began digging the drain and excavating for the foundation of the new bank building the first of the week. Joe Euritt moved his building into the street several days ago, and yesterday Shaner & Davenport hitched their engine to part of it and hauled it across the track, which attracted considerable attention." Mr. Rhodes built the first store in Kellerton, in 1879. It was a large, two-story building twenty feet wide and one hundred feet long, at the corner of Decatur and Fifth streets, where he continued in business for several years. He went from here to Argona, Kansas, then to Little Rock, Arkansas, and finally to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He married Capt. T. E. Scott's daughter, Mrs. Al Cole. While Mr. Rhodes was running the store at New Chicago he lost a \$20 gold piece in the yard. Although a thorough search was made he was unable to find it. In 1920 it was plowed up by Ivan Daniels, who was farming the land that year.

Mrs. Margaret Scott, daughter of Captain and Mrs. T. E. Scott came here in 1876, and built a two-room dwelling 14x22 feet in size about five rods west of John Hartnagle's blacksmith shop, the lumber having been hauled from Leon. With Mrs. Scott were her five children: Jack F., Andrew, Roberta (Mrs. R. L. Brown), Harry, and Joe, all of whom made their home with her until the fall of 1879, when the house was moved to Kellerton and placed on Lot 3, Block 16, on the west side of Ringgold Street. Mrs. Scott was born February 10, 1837, at Clarksville, Ohio, and died at her home in Kellerton, May 8, 1910. At the time this was written in 1931, the original building was still being used as the residence of her son, Joe Scott. The old building even at this time was in a good state of repair and appeared to be good for many more years of use.

Among the early residents of Athens Township were Captain and Mrs. Thomas E. Scott and their four married children: Joseph L., John A., Margaret (Mrs. James Scott), and Ruth (Mrs. Al Cole, who was later married to F. S. Rhodes). James Scott, who married Margaret, was not related to the other Scotts. Captain Scott and his wife at one time lived in Ohio and Indiana, going from there to Miami County, Kansas, before locating in Iowa. During the Civil War he was a member of Co. A, 116th

Indiana Volunteers. He was a member of William McDonald Post, No. 435, G. A. R., at Kellerton. In the spring of 1875, Mrs. Scott and her son John A. Scott, arrived from Kansas and stopped at the home of M. V. Davis, with whom they were acquainted, on the southwest quarter of Section 20, Athens Township. In July of the same year Captain Scott arrived, accompanied by the other three children and their families. Shortly after his arrival here, Captain Scott and his wife moved to a farm in Sections 21 and 28, which belonged to their daughter, Mrs. Al Cole. Mr. Cole was a railroad man and had been investing his money in Ringgold County farm land.

In 1877, Captain Scott built a shop about 12x16 feet in size on the north side of the road about fifteen rods east of the corner in New Chicago, where he worked at his trade of making and repairing boots and shoes, and did a flourishing business as long as the town remained. While Captain Scott's family continued to live on the farm after he built his shop in New Chicago, he was prepared to "keep bach" at his shop, and often did so for several days at a time rather than make the trip from the farm to the shop every day.

In the fall of 1879, Captain Scott moved to Kellerton, where he built a small, two-room frame house one story high on the east side of Ringgold Street, Lot 16, Block 17. Here he continued to make and repair boots and shoes as he had been doing in New Chicago for several years. He was the first mayor of Kellerton, having been appointed to that office at the time the town was incorporated in January, 1882, and served until the first regular election, which was held the following March. He also held the office of justice of the peace for many years. Being a strong advocate of temperance and a man of deep religious convictions, he gave freely of his time and talent to these causes, and cheerfully responded whenever called upon to deliver a temperance lecture or preach a sermon, not only in Kellerton but in the country school houses for miles around. For many years he was a member of the Methodist church, but in later life became a Universalist. During the latter part of June, 1894, he became too feeble to live alone, and was taken to the home of his son, J. L. Scott, on the opposite side of the street, where his long and active life came to a close July 12, 1894. The building which

had been his home, office and shop since 1879, and is well remembered by many of the older citizens on account of its having been painted red, was entirely destroyed by fire on April 1, 1904, as was also the livery barn just north of it. Mrs. Scott died May 1, 1879, while they were making their home on the farm south of town. Both are buried in Egly Cemetery.

Dr. Matt (Americus) Camp came here and erected a two-story frame building on the south side of the road opposite John Miller's house, in 1875. A short time later he was joined by his brother, Dr. Marsh (Marshall) Camp. Their former home had been in Wayne County, Iowa. They attended the State University at Iowa City, and both graduated from the Medical Department of that institution before locating in New Chicago. A stock of drugs was put in and they did a thriving business, as there was no other drug store in this part of the country, and the two brothers were associated together in business for a number of years. While in New Chicago they were joined by their sisters, Carrie, Laura (Mrs. R. Emerson), Delia, Ida, and Flora (Mrs. John Manning). Camp Brothers not only built up a good business in the drug line, but by their pleasant and accommodating manner as well as skill in the practice of their profession, soon had a lucrative practice. They remained here until 1880, when the store building was removed to Kellerton and placed on the northeast corner of Block 17, and facing Decatur Street. Some years later it was moved farther south in the same block to make room for another building, and was later destroyed by fire. Dr. Marsh Camp was born December 28, 1835, and married Miss Arabella Hays, May 23, 1880. They were the parents of two children, Cora and Carroll. Mrs. Camp died March 9, 1897. On September 5, 1898, he married Miss Harriet A. Shields, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Shields, of Decatur County, Iowa. He died at his home in Decatur City, Iowa, August 14, 1914. Dr. A. Camp was born January 4, 1850, in Pike County, Illinois, and came to Iowa when quite young. He was killed in an automobile accident three or four miles northeast of Kellerton, December 17, 1916. He was not married. Doctors Marsh and Matt Camp are both buried in Kellerton Cemetery.

In the early days of New Chicago and for some time before the settlement was started, there was no schoolhouse in that

part of the county. But that did not cause the pioneers to neglect the education of their children, and for several years school was held in the home in John Scott, one mile east of the corner, and later at the home of Frederick Beck, a half mile south of Mr. Scott's.

In August, 1870, lumber was hauled from Leon and a small, one-room schoolhouse about 20x24 feet in size was built three-quarters of a mile east of the corner on the south side of the road, and was called the Scott schoolhouse. The seats were of the homemade variety, having been constructed by the carpenter who built the schoolhouse. There was a row of seats next to the walls, while others were arranged back of the stove, which was near the center of the room. There were usually about thirty pupils in the school. The building was about twenty rods west of the creek. In this building the people of the community gathered for preaching services, Sunday school, spelling school, literary society, and all kinds of public meetings. It was a busy place during the life of New Chicago.

Among the teachers who presided over the school up to 1879, were the following: Miss Harriet Tipton, whose home was southwest of Tuskeego, and who taught about 1866; Mrs. Lizzie Faulkner, of the Wions neighborhood; Miss Lucinda Scott, a sister of John Scott; Miss Flora Guild, a daughter of John M. Guild; Albert Beard, Arthur L. Lesan, and George M. Lesan, of Lesanville; Miss Tina Moffitt, who later married Rev. Charles Watson; Miss Estella Hatch; Miss Laura Camp, who married Richard Emerson; John Drake and Ed French. In 1876 the Scott schoolhouse was moved to the present site of the school known as Cornstalk College, in District No. 6.

During the summer months, Sunday school was held in the schoolhouse. It was usually well attended, not only by the residents of the community, but also by some who came from a considerable distance. John M. Guild and John Scott were the superintendents. The former was an exhorter and often expounded the scripture to the people on Sundays when there was no other preaching service. While the preaching services were not regular, the Rev. Charles Watson, of Decatur City, came occasionally and preached to the people, and now and then an itinerant preacher would occupy the pulpit. The services were gener-

ally well attended. Rev. Charles Watson married Miss Tina Moffitt, one of New Chicago's school teachers, and it is reported that he died in Missouri about 1896. Occasionally some of the boys failed to go into the schoolhouse when Sunday school was called and a special program would be given out doors, which was not altogether appropriate for Sunday and had no connection with the lesson of the day. On one occasion a McDowell boy accused Bill Brown of having said something derogatory to his, McDowell's, character. Brown denied the accusation, and immediately an attempt was made to settle the question with their fists. As soon as the fight got well under way, John Higgins jumped into the ring to help McDowell. This angered Ed Brown, who immediately took part in the fracas by pounding Higgins in order to help his brother, Bill Brown. A furious fight ensued, and the longer they fought the farther away seemed the settlement. Finally, when Bill Foster, a powerful, raw-boned six footer, weighing about 200 pounds, thinking the fight had gone far enough, stepped into the ring and stopped the battle. The next morning the sheriff came over and arrested the boys and took them to Mount Ayr, where they were tried and fined \$20 each. The strange part of it was that Bill Foster, the peacemaker, who risked getting beat up himself by going in and stopping the fight, was fined \$20, the same as the boys who did the fighting.

Early in the history of the settlement, a literary society was organized, and meetings were held at the schoolhouse every Thursday evening during the winter. The country being sparsely settled, and gatherings of this kind where the people could get together for social and intellectual improvement being few and far between, the meetings of the literary society drew the people from the surrounding country for miles around. Neither the raging storms which often covered the ground with snow to a depth of several feet, nor the icy winds which swept with terrific force across the bleak prairies of southern Iowa, seemed to be able to chill the enthusiasm of the members of the society or their guests, and it was very seldom that the house was not filled to capacity on the nights when the meetings were held. The debates waxed warm at times and many questions were discussed and settled during the years that the settlement

flourished. In after years, many of those who took part in these discussions were called to fill positions of honor and distinction in business and professional life in widely separated sections of our country.

While New Chicago was not large, there were a good many young people of both sexes living here or within a short distance of the settlement. The principal sport of the boys was playing baseball, their diamond being located a few rods northwest of John Hartnagle's blacksmith shop. Naturally, a great deal of time was spent in playing, as there was very little else to do in the way of sport. The boys were husky young pioneers. They were full of life, and since there were few other amusements to occupy their time they became very proficient in their favorite game, and during the season a great many match games were played on the home field as well as in the surrounding country. The name of the team was the Chicago White Sox. Among those who played in the team were the following: Bill Brown, Barney Stingley, Frank Higgins, Jack Scott, Andy Scott, Lew Brown, Lyman Stingley, Tom Higgins, Truman Green, Perry Davenport, and several others whose names could not be recalled. On one occasion the Chicago White Sox challenged the Rough and Readys, whose home field was about six miles southwest of New Chicago, and the game was played on neutral ground near the home of the latter nine. The weight of the White Sox boys ranged from 115 to 135 pounds, while that of the Rough and Readys was from 175 to 190 pounds. Soon after the game was called a drizzling rain set in and continued all afternoon. Needless to say, the game also continued—for three hours or more. At the end of the ninth inning the score stood 42 to 41 in favor of the Rough and Readys, according to the report of the scorekeeper. Of course the White Sox felt somewhat disheartened when notified of their defeat. But a little later when they figured up the score themselves and found that the scorekeeper had made a mistake and that in reality it had been a tie game, 42 to 42, their spirits improved and it was a very cheerful bunch of boys by the time they reached New Chicago that night.

New Chicago, with its post office, stores, blacksmith shop, etc., was a convenient meeting place for the settlers in this part of

the country, and judging from the amount of business done here, it was thoroughly appreciated by all. For several years it was the center of business and social life for this locality—a place where the incoming settlers from various parts of the country could meet, become acquainted, and discuss the questions of the day. As there were no telegraph and telephone lines at this time and newspapers were not very plentiful, about the only way the people had of spreading the news was to meet in town and swap stories. The preaching services, spelling schools, husking bees, quilting parties, literaries, and other similar events, were welcome occasions, and the bonds of friendship drew the people of the neighborhood closer together each year. But when the railroad was extended from Leon to Mount Ayr in the fall of 1879, and the new town of Kellerton was laid out one mile to the north with the railroad running through the center of it from east to west, there was no further use for the post office at New Chicago, and both the Cross post office and star route were immediately discontinued. Some of the buildings were moved bodily while others were torn down and rebuilt in Kellerton. F. A. Brown and his family were among the first to move, and he was appointed the first postmaster of Kellerton on November 24, 1879, his commission being signed by D. M. Key, Postmaster General.

ANOTHER SUN

The Iowa Sun and Davenport and Rock Island News is the name of a new paper published on Iowa Territory. Boy, put the Iowa Sun down on our exchange list. We exchange with all the Suns—The New York Sun, the Baltimore Sun, the Cincinnati Sun, the Iowa Sun, and the London Sun; and all these Suns exchange with the New Orleans Sun, which is our Sun, and which, like all other Suns is a good son. Success to you all, my sons.—[Davenport] *Iowa Sun*. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.