

History of the City of Greencastle, Indiana

It is through the generosity of two individuals, Ephraim Duke and John Wesley Clark, that the foundation was set for the area now designated as the City of Greencastle, Indiana. The area set aside as Putnam County was organized and officially recognized in 1822. The following year, Ephraim Duke, who had recorded his land in 1821, deeded part of his land to the County to be used as the county seat. His son-in-law, John Wesley Clark, followed Duke's magnanimous action and proceeded to deed additional lands in 1825. These two grants totaled approximately 160 acres and are the foundation of what is now the City of Greencastle.

The name "Greencastle" was bestowed on these 160 acres by Ephraim Duke. Most likely the name was derived from Duke's former hometown of Greencastle Pennsylvania. A hill in the town seemed an ideal location for the courthouse and with the Big Walnut River roaring nearby, the newborn city maintained a source of water and potential commerce.

The early years of the City of Greencastle were similar to other pioneer communities. Cabins complete with spider skillet, three-handled brass cake-turners, hickory bottom chairs, and even steel knives and forks dotted the area. Commerce by way of the Big Walnut River meandered through the town. In 1849 the City of Greencastle was incorporated and as early as 1850, the population of the young community had risen to 2589. Shops, small stores and even mills developed around the courthouse square as traders and townspeople continued to intermingle in the fledgling community.

These early years saw the growth of businesses built on local resources: i.e., hogs, wood, corn, sheep and cattle. One of the largest manufacturers of iron nails was located in Greencastle in 1870. Similar products manufactured in this location were carriages, kegs, furniture, spokes, handles, pumps, lightning rods, cigars and clothing. In the twentieth century, use of the crushed limestone prompted the development of cement manufacturers.

In 1852 the city was oriented north and west. The Indianapolis and Terre Haute Railroad a.k.a. the Vandalia, and later the Pennsylvania, encouraged development more to the south and east where subsequent annexations were completed. At one time two different railroads, the Monon which ran north-south and whose depot was located on the north side of town; and the Vandalia Depot on the south side of town, were serviced by a horse-drawn street railway system between the two depots.

In the area of education, the City of Greencastle was an early participant. In 1837, the Methodist Church in Indiana selected the City of Greecastle as its location for a college preparatory school. Initially named Indiana Asbury, this institution for higher education evolved into the college now known as DePauw University. In 1873 Franklin Perry and his wife, Eliza Jean Brannan, built a home which was sold to DePauw University in 1900. This beautiful brick and stone home, complete with balconies, towers and black walnut woodwork became the residence of the next three presidents of DePauw University.

Suffering two major fires in the downtown area during the 1870's, Greencastle continued to rebound and renew itself. Similarly the present day industries, and educational institutions continue to thrive in the nurturing atmosphere harkening to its pioneer days. Greencastle, with a population of 8,984 continues to build on its foundation of hardwork, perserverance and pride in its accomplishments.