

Bondurant

Two of the resources I used in writing this story were "Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa" published 1908 and "Portrait and Biographical Album of Polk County, Iowa" published 1890. Also the story on his death ran in the Des Moines Leader on Tues. Sept. 19, 1899.

600 block of Grant Street South in Bondurant

By RENDA LUTZ REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Alexander Conley Bondurant's decision to join the pioneers moving west from Illinois to Iowa in 1857, continues to influence the growing eastern suburb bearing his name. Alexander was born Sept. 1, 1829 in Sangamon County, Ill. To Kentucky-born parents, Joseph and Martha (Tharp) Bondurant. He was one of 11 children. His upbringing on his parents farm influenced many of his life choices. Alexander was a devoted member of the Christian Church and a staunch supporter of the temperance movement and the Republican party. He began his early adult years, with his brother Thomas by his side. The two took many contracts for breaking the prairie land of Illinois. When they had earned enough to purchase government land they went their separate ways. Thomas settled in Piatt County, Ill. and Alexander came to Polk County, purchasing 320 acres in the southwest corner of what was known as Franklin Township.

Teams of oxen hauled lumber from Iowa Center to build Alexander's home. The house was sided in black walnut. According to Bondurant historians, the home, pictured at top, was moved several times. Initially built on the south edge of the present town, the house was later moved a mile into the country and then later moved to what is now known as the 600 block of Grant Street.

Margaret M. Brooks wed Alexander on Oct. 27, 1861. She was the daughter of Polk County pioneer, Stephen Brooks. Margaret and Alexander had eight children. Their last child living in Iowa, Florence Bondurant Lingenfelter, died in 1956. She was survived by two brothers who resided in California and Montana.

Alexander paid \$1.25 per acre for his initial land purchase. He eventually became one of the wealthiest men in the county and the largest land owner. When he died in Sept. 18, 1899, his holdings totaled nearly 3,000 acres. His accumulation of land was the result of his work ethic and management skills and he considered his wealth only the means to help others. Alexander's generosity helped many organizations and led to the founding of the town.

Soon after his arrival in Polk County, Alexander helped organize a church at a schoolhouse near Altoona. The church later constructed its own building in Altoona with Alexander donating 40 acres of farm land to the church to help meet its monetary needs. He withdrew from the Altoona church in 1886, when he donated some of his farm land to build a new church. He also offered the use of 30 acres of farm land to this church. Each spring the acres were planted with corn, cultivated and gathered by the members of the church. The members then came together for an old fashioned "husking bee." The first crop yielded 12 bushels for the 19-member congregation.

Educational endeavors were also important to Alexander. He started a school on his land in 1885 with 35 students. He also was a supporter of Drake University and set aside 56 acres to benefit the school that was founded by the Christian Church, also known as Disciples of Christ. Drake Bible College students frequently served their internships at the Bondurant church.

The founding of the town of Bondurant was based on Alexander's generous donations of land. He donated land in 1892 to the Chicago Great Western Railway. The railroad company built a station on the land, naming the station Bondurant. The following year, Alexander platted more than 44 acres of land and offered a town lot to those who would build a business on the land. With free land near the railway, Alexander had numerous takers and a town sprang up. The town of Bondurant was incorporated on Dec. 23, 1897, 40 years after Alexander's arrival in Polk County. A few legends and myths about Alexander and his town remain.

Alexander supposedly left a few stipulations on the land he so willingly gave away. His temperance beliefs led him to declare that there be no establishments selling intoxicating beverages. If his wishes were not met, the land would revert to his living heirs. The first grocery store to sell beer in Bondurant opened in the 1960s. The first bar in town didn't open until at least a decade later. Another legend is that Alexander also forbade the building of a Catholic church. One mystery is how the year 1984 became the centennial year for the town of Bondurant. A book on the town's history places the railroad and the platting of the land a decade earlier than other books written in Alexander's day. Another mystery seems to be where the rumor of Alexander having changed his name originated. It has been misreported that Alexander's surname was at one time Bandrum or Banderam. Alexander's home reportedly burned down in 1917. The Polk County Assessor's office still refers to much of the land near Alexander's former home as Bondurant Farms. A portion of this land is currently being developed for a new elementary school in the community. An idea Alexander Bondurant surely would have supported.

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