

The following is a story about the founding of Bondurant, Iowa by Alexander Conley Bondurant. It was written by my fraternal Uncle, Edwin J. Bailie in 1924 while he was a student at Bondurant High School. He was the Great Grandson of Alexander Conley Bondurant. This document was in the possession of Florence (Bailie) Weaver (one of Wayne Bailie's aunts) and was transcribed to a Word document by Wayne Eugene Bailie.

THE STORY OF THE HISTORY OF MY COMMUNITY

The first scene in the history drama of Bondurant began in the year 1857 when Mr. A. C. Bondurant, the honored founder of the town left his home in Sangamon County, Illinois. He was 28 years old when he joined the westward movement to our state, a straight, tall, broad-shouldered, typical pioneer with sufficient independence to dare this journey alone. He had one great ambition in his heart - that of founding a town. How his ambition was realized is narrated in the following events:

Since there were no railroads nearer than Iowa City in those days, Mr. Bondurant came to that city and there bought a horse which he rode westward to the present site of Bondurant.

Here the appearance of the land appealed to him, thus he made arrangements to buy from the government the first one hundred and sixty acres of land which has since been known as the Bondurant Homestead. He added to this year by year until he had about three thousand acres of valuable prairie land at the time of his death, Sept. 17, 1899.

When Mr. Bondurant arrived on Section 31, the farm which he bought was nothing but grass and ponds. In fact, the ponds were so numerous, that people living near called it "Bondurant's frog ponds."

Most of the other settlers had built cabins nearer the timber, but Mr. Bondurant was not willing to give up his farm. He built him a little house, the lumber of which was cut from a near-by grove and taken to the mill for sawing.

His earliest project was in raising cattle, which brought him sufficient income to enable him to meet the next problem of breaking the tillable soil. His closest market was Fort Des Moines, which was not only a selling point, but buying point for his provisions.

The distance between neighbors was great at that time, making the frequent visits of the Indians to the homes of the settlers more dreaded and the attacks of the wolves doubly fearful.

However, the few homesteads near at hand were appreciated. The owner of one of these was Eli Tullinger who had settled three miles east of the present site of Bondurant in 1846. The timber there still bears his name. Many of the social gatherings were held there in the early days.

Another man, Michael Lavish, had settled further north in 1846. That part of the community also bears the name of this early settler, being called Lavish Grove.

I.M.T. Cory built his home on the north side of Mr. Bondurant's farm, and a flourishing little settlement built up around him. This community as the other two took the name of the leading settler and has always been known as Cory Grove.

On the west, over along Four Mile Creek, there were several early settlers, among whom were Daniel Justice and C. Brazelton. On the south, was a settler by the name of Bennie Woodrow, who had settled on Mud Creek in the year 1854. It was then known as Beaver Township, but was later divided and the forty owned by Mr. Woodrow is now in what is known as Clay Township.

A fine old man, a great friend of every one, lived on the southeast. He was Thomas Mitchell. Or more familiarly known as "Uncle Tom". The town of Mitchelville was later named in honor of him.

One of the early settlers who came here about the same time as Mr. Bondurant was Hugh Conough. He had been given a deed to eighty acres of land lying about two miles north of Bondurant's Homestead. This land was so wet that Mr. Bondurant thought it was not worth farming. Thus he went further south for a time. After the community began to be settled more, he returned and hauled his lumber from Keokuk to build his house.

Altoona, the nearest town, three miles south, was laid out in 1866 and because the trading point for settlers was here.

One amusing story of a trip from Altoona is still told by Mrs. Thomas Anderson, an old resident of Bondurant.

On coming home from Altoona one evening in a buggy drawn by a team of mules, she and Mr. Anderson were compelled to alight from their vehicle because one mule lay down and refused to ford Mud Creek at the common crossing point. Their urging was of no avail and Mr. and Mrs. Anderson failed to see the humor of the situation when they had to walk three miles in the mud to their house, leading the willing "Jack" who carried the provisions tied upon his back.

In the meantime, other neighbors were settling near Mr. Bondurant. Among them were William Biddle, Fred Stool, and Mr. Monarch and B. F. Frunty.

A need of a school came with the growth of the community and Mr. Bondurant met this need by allowing school to be held in his home. There were six pupils whom Miss Sarah Sweeny taught. The pupils were Belle, Jane and Nan Monarah, Emma Bondurant and Anna Brooks, a sister of Mrs. Bondurant. There was also one boy.

For five years, the school was held during the winter months, for two years, in Mr. Bondurant's home and the three following years in a log cabin on the farm now owned by James Stougen. The warmth of the spring and summer permitted the children to attend school at an old log school house down on Mud Creek, close to Mr. Woodrow's farm. Church was also held in this cabin until the Keokuk, Des Moines Railroad went through Altoona and then Church was held in the Altoona Depot.

The railroad which was built through this part of the county in 1883 added to the growth. The road was called at the time the Wisconsin, Iowa and Nebraska Railway, but finally it became the Chicago Great Western.

Mr. Bondurant gave the right of way for two miles of track and territory for the yards. In the settlement for this favor and in honor of Mr. Bondurant, the Railway Company gave the station his name, although there had been some thought of calling it "Florenceville" (who married James Valentine Lingenfelter) for a daughter of Mr. Bondurant who was much admired in the community.

The laying out of the town brought more people. A store was built which was a two-story frame building. The main floor was used for store purposes but, unlike most stores, the upper floor was used for school, Church and lodge meetings. This building is still in use and is occupied at the present time by the Bondurant Hardware Company.

The first dwelling in the town itself was moved in from old Elkhart and remodeled by a man named Kennedy.

Every town must have its blacksmith. Bondurant's first smith was known as Mr. Rooks and a wagon maker, named Boyd, was a valuable member of the community.

The first grain dealer was H.P. Brown. The company which he represented bought and sold grain. Later, a firm by the name of Bowen and Reger bought for several years, then

S.E. Squires and Son and at the present time, Clarke Brown is the dealer. He has two prosperous elevators. No Iowa town is complete without shade trees. Once more Mr. Bondurant saw the need and supplied it by planting trees along all the streets, as he had around his own home.

In 1888, an old settlers' picnic was held in the Bondurant Grove. The settlers, staunch admirers of "Uncle Tom" Mitchell, erected a log cabin in the grove in his honor and placed a sign across the front, bearing the name "Mitchell's Tavern". An old well sweep was placed on the grounds and many other reminders of early days were present. The crowd is said to have exceeded all other gatherings in the history of the town.

By this time, the population of the town had increased decidedly. The Bondurant Church of Christ had been built and dedicated. Mr. Bondurant had given a plot of land, east of town as a cemetery. The first person to be buried there was the son of Thomas Anderson.

In 1895, Mr. Bondurant again came to the front and gave the site for the Congregational Church. The Reverend Joseph Steele who was pastor at Berwick and Linn Grove was instrumental in the establishing of this Church. There were fifteen charter members.

An event long to be remembered in the history of the community came on May 24, 1896 when a terrible storm which caused much destruction of property and loss of four lives threw the town into a panic. Most of the people of the community were on their way to church when they noticed a cloud rising in the west. It was not so very large at first, but the lighting was continuous and very bright. About nine o'clock, there was heard a roaring sound in the west like a great train thundering down a mountain. This lasted about thirty minutes and when the cloud had passed over and could be viewed from the east, it was a very beautiful sight, but the suffering and devastation which was left behind was not beautiful. It had covered an area of the country one-half mile wide and ten miles long. The first homes that were damaged to any great extent were two and a half miles northwest of Bondurant. A home directly north of the town was blown to pieces. The storm seemed to do most all of its damage two miles east of town. The home of Robert Bailie (Edwin Bailies' Grandfather - In parentheses added by Wayne Bailie) was completely destroyed. Four of the family were killed and four were injured. The dead included the mother, a daughter, a son and a nephew. The cows, horses, hogs and chickens were all killed. One old hen was found next day without a feather on her body. The trees were stripped of their limbs and bark and nothing but the bare stumps were left standing.

The living and the dead were plastered with mud that could hardly be washed off. The injured were taken to a neighbor's home and medical aid summoned. The storm went on

in its journey for several miles. In the vicinity of Valeria, a town north east, other serious damage was done and some lives were lost.

In 1901, the Farmers Mutual Telephone service added comfort and convenience to the lives of the community.

In 1906, the county widened Mud Creek, making an open drainage ditch which has proved a great help in carrying the surplus water, which the old ditch could not handle in the spring of the year.

A fire which destroyed the old store and restaurant building proved itself an advantage when in 1906, the Bank Company purchased the site and erected a two-story brick building, part of which is used by the Bondurant State Bank. The upper floor is the lodge room and Opera House.

Since 1915, the Interurban, running through Altoona, has supplied the town and surrounding community with electricity for lights.

One object of pride in the community is its Consolidated School. Three elections were necessary before the boosters for Consolidation realized their dream of a consolidated school.

While the new building was being erected in 1919, the old building, not being large enough to accommodate the pupils, three of the rural school houses were moved in and used until 1921 when the new building was completed. There are seven motor busses that bring the rural children in every morning and come after them at night.

The year of 1922 saw the formation of a Farmers' Shipping Association to better facilitate in the marketing of stock. The community feeds and ships stock to market very extensively.

True to Iowa's reputation, corn flourishes here as in no other state, although wheat and oats come in for a share of the praise.

Bondurant is proud of a history that is centered around rugged earnest, enterprising pioneers who were eager for the best there was to be had for this town on the rolling prairies of Iowa.