

## **A little history of the Franklin County Fairgrounds and County Park located at Brookville, Indiana on Blue Creek Road**

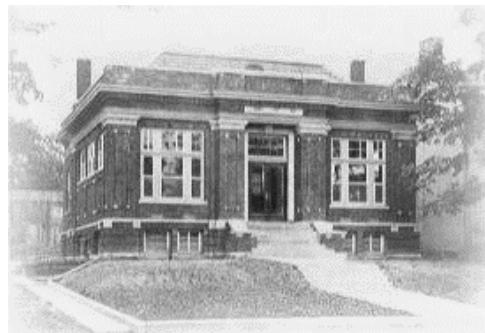
The county fairgrounds and park is a destination for thousands each year. Not only is recreation a primary draw, but so is the annual 4-H Fair, and the Franklin County Antique Machinery Show.



*Copy and information provided by the Brookville Library, July 8, 2024*

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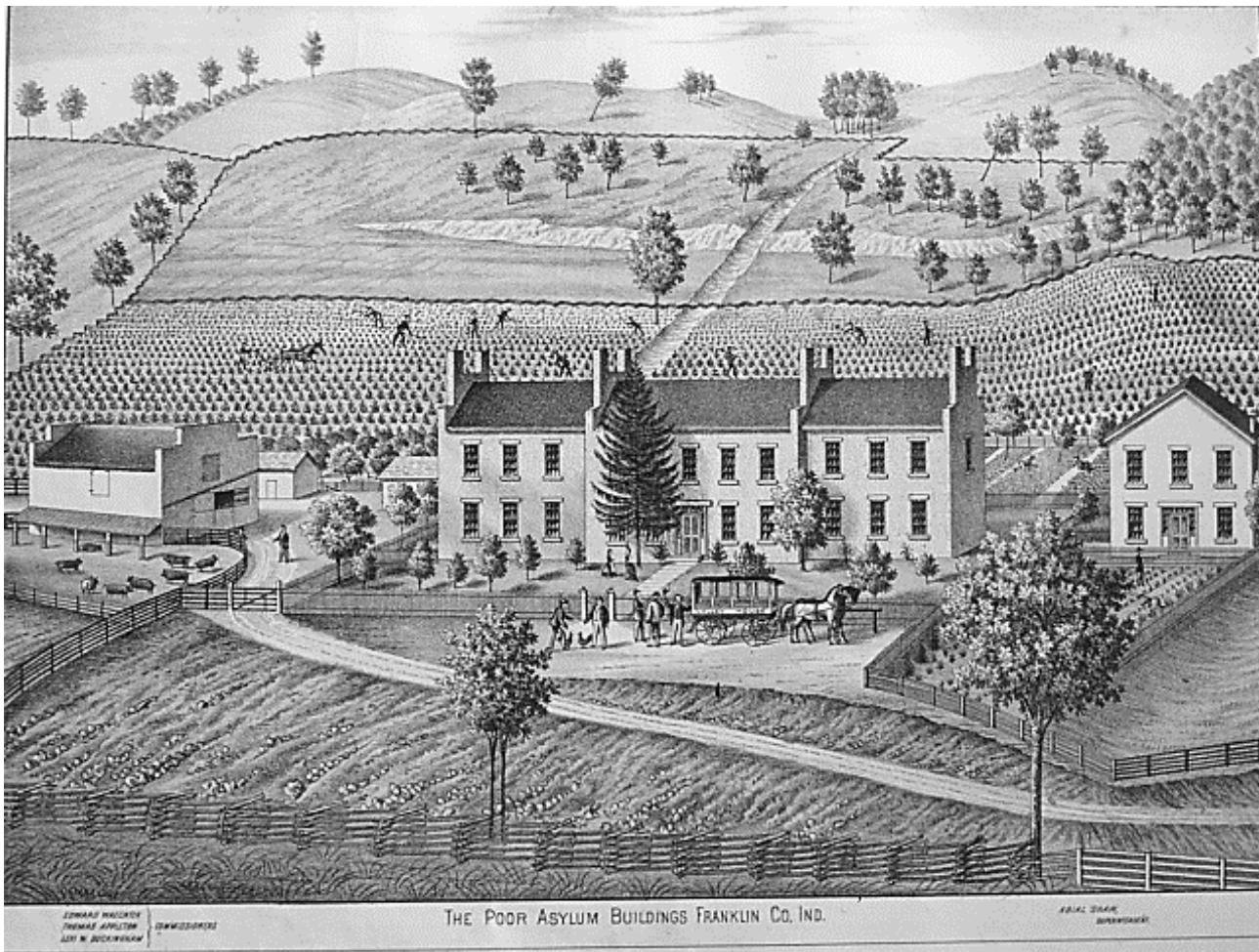
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This booklet was compiled in Spring of 2022 at the request of Violet Kelly. Information within was combined from a variety of resources by the Franklin County Public Library's Local History & Genealogy Department at the Brookville Library.

For additional information, comments, or corrections, contact or visit the library at 919 Main St. Brookville, IN 47012.  
Or call 765.647.4031, or email [julie@fclibraries.org](mailto:julie@fclibraries.org).

## What was the Franklin County Fairgrounds originally?



Did you know that the current Franklin County Fairgrounds and County Park was once the County Poor Farm?

The drawing above shows how the sprawling facility looked in 1882. Today only one original building, as seen to the left, remains standing. It is currently used as the fair office.

In 1856, the Franklin County Commissioners purchased the Stringer family farm on Blue Creek Road, located about one mile south of the county seat of Brookville. The farm was approximately 106 acres and had plenty of space for buildings that needed to be erected for the care of the poor, indigent, and feeble-minded. The county owned the Poor Farm, also called

the asylum and the infirmary, which during its existence expanded to over 200 acres, and operated it until 1958, when the county commissioners voted to permanently close the facility. At that time, the few remaining residents of the County Poor Farm were moved to the Elsie Dreyer Nursing Home, located in the old Fries home at East Third and Main streets in Brookville.

For most of its existence, the County Poor Farm was self-sufficient. There was an orchard, as well as ample room to raise livestock and vegetables. Any able-bodied inmate, as they were also referred to, was required to provide his or her services on the farm. Women were permitted to work in the kitchen and dining areas under supervision, as well as were able to wash and mend clothes. The men worked in the vegetable gardens and in the fields helping to harvest the crops.

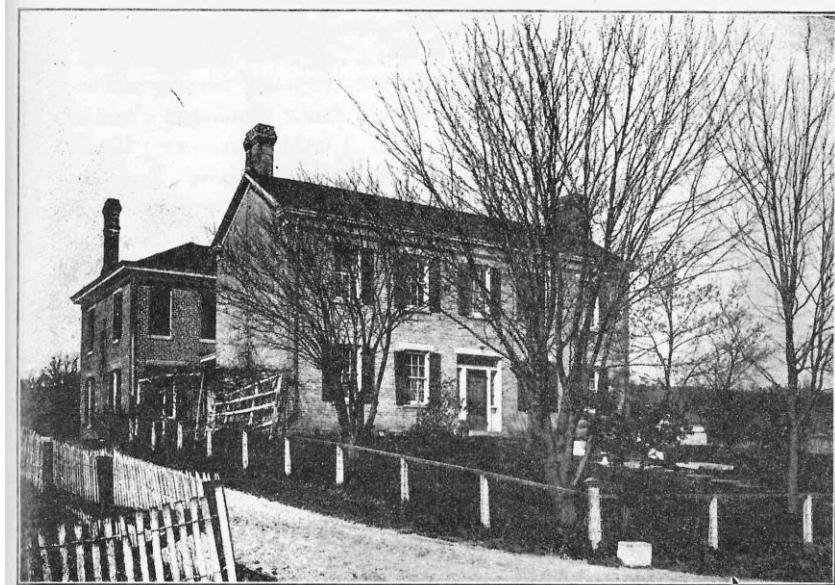
Over the years hundreds of people, coming from a variety of backgrounds and unfortunate situations, were residents at the County Poor Farm. Elderly people who were single and could not care for themselves and had no other family admitted themselves; epileptics or people with serious illnesses such as senility and lunacy that could not be cared for at home by family members were admitted. There were no special facilities to address any of these ailments or afflictions, and all of those admitted to these institutions were just housed together. Occasionally entire families who simply fell on hard times were permitted to be temporary residents of the Poor Farm as long as they were able to assist on the farm in some manner. The County Poor Farm was also known for housing incorrigibles, who were kept in a secured cell house.

In conjunction with the County Poor Farm a County Children's Home was also operated by the local government. It originally opened in 1882 and was located in Fairfield Township. By June of 1889, it had moved to the former Celia Wright home and farm which was located just south of the County Poor Farm. The Children's Home, sometimes referred to as the orphanage, closed its doors in 1937, and the few children who lived there were sent to private homes for boarding and fostering. The building once used as the County Children's Home still stands today at 7168 Blue Creek Road and is a private residence.



**Left: The Children's Home as it looked c. 1900;  
photo taken by Rollin Rockefellar.**

**From the collection of the Franklin County  
Historical Society.**



**Left: The Children's Home as it looked when  
photographed for inclusion in the 1915 *History of  
Franklin County*, edited by August Reifel.**

## **Memories of a Child Who Had Lived at the Franklin County Poor Farm**



The following information was written by and submitted by Harry Moore in 2008 for the book *Franklin County: A Glimpse of the Past*.

I moved with my parents and other members of my family from our home, where we had lived near Blooming Grove in 1930, as my father Frank Moore assumed the position of Superintendent of the Franklin County Infirmary, commonly known as the Poor Farm. My mother, Alpha Moore, became the house matron at that time. I lived there until 1937 when my dad became ill and had to give up his duties as the Home Administrator. He died later of cancer.

I remember quite vividly, although quite young at the time, many details in the layouts of the buildings on the grounds, and there were nearly a dozen of them for various purposes. I remember being taken back by the enormous size of the main buildings as compared to what I was accustomed, but I quickly found that I pretty well had the run of the facility and the immediate surroundings.

I remember the large trees growing in the yard nearby, Hackberry and Maple and others, and their locations. I remember the well house from which we drew our water for the daily use and the grape arbor leading up to it with its abundant supply of fruit. This was near the front of the house, which was huge in size and contained numerous windows facing outside. I was living with my family members at the north end of the main building on the lower level. Behind this to the south was a living area for some of the inmates and a large dining room with an attached kitchen for providing food for the inmates. This had a large wood stove for cooking. The male inmates were housed in the upper portion of the main building and in a separate building nearby called the Men's Building. The female inmates were housed in an area in the lower rear portion of the main building. Both men and women had their meals in the large dining room on the main floor.

There was hardly any food purchased from the store, as it was about all provided at the institution. We had a large herd of dairy cattle from which we had milk and cream and butter—the butter from a churn kept nearby. We had a herd of beef cattle that provided meat. We had a large number of hogs for pork products. All the butchering was done at the facility. We had a large flock of chicken for meat and eggs. We had a large vegetable garden for sacks of potatoes, beans, peas, onions, and others. We had a patch of melons and pumpkins in season.

The only thing I remember in the way of food that was not purchased, was loaves of bread, flour and bakery products, which were purchased at the Bernhart Grocery in Brookville. We had a large underground cellar on the outside in which perishable products were stored. We had lots of fruit trees, including various types of apples. I



remember having a large heavy-duty apple press, which was used to make apple cider, and the inmates stood in line to get a cup of the cider fresh off the press.

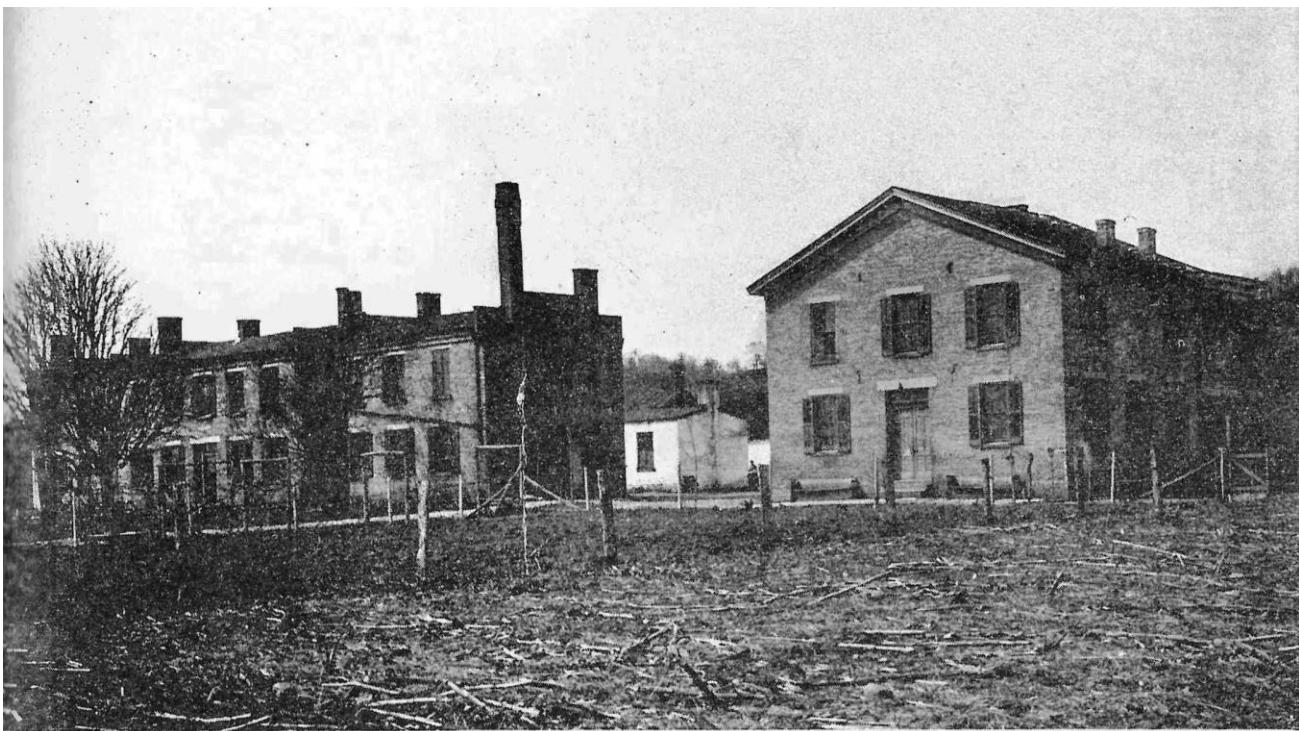
There were 25-30 inmates housed at the poor farm at a quiet time, both men and women. Able-bodied men were permitted to work outside the building in the large vegetable gardens and in the fields to help harvest the crops. All able-bodied women were permitted to work in the dining areas and in the kitchen under supervision, as well as helping to wash the clothes, which was done by hand with soap made nearby.

The poor farm consisted of 214 acres, most of which was tillable, except for the hills at the rear, which were used for grazing. Heavy-duty work was done on the farm primarily by one hired hand, who worked for a salary of one dollar a day plus his room and board. He was assisted part time by my brother, Earl (when not in school), a few years older than me. He liked to drive the old Fordson tractor, which my dad owned and kept with us when we moved in. To assist with duties inside the house, we had a hired maid, who received a minimum salary and room and board. She helped with the cooking, cleaning, and other jobs as prescribed by my mother.

The purpose of the facility was to provide a home where Franklin County residents, who were unable to provide for their own livelihood, could live in peace and comfort with a little supervision and receive three meals each day, a bed at night and be able to associate with one another. They were further provided with medical care as needed.

I do not remember having a telephone at that time, but we had a radio that I listened to frequently for Amos and Andy and Jack Armstrong.

My dad was not only the administrator but he was the keeper of the books for the concern. He had large bound ledgers, which he used to keep a running account of every inmate that came through the doors and all the information necessary on each of them, such as the medicine they might be required to take or their medical conditions while living at the location. He was a strict disciplinarian with the inmates. He was firm but fair. I remember a few times I felt the sting of his belt, when I got out of line without cause.



**The County Poor Farm from the 1915 *History of Franklin County*, edited by August Reifel.**

In January 2022, Brookville resident, Mary-Alice Helms wrote her recollections of the Poor Farm, as a child visiting there with her parents. It appeared in the January 2022 edition of *The Beacon*.

## Christmas at the Poor House

By Mary-Alice Helms

The beautiful Christmas lights and bright store windows on Main Street in Brookville faded away in the rearview mirror as my mother turned our car onto a dark road ahead. The ominous skeleton of the Poor Farm Bridge rose ahead of us in the fading evening light. I tried not to look down at the dizzying stretch of railroad tracks and the roofs of old buildings as we crossed over the West fork of the Whitewater River on the Poor Farm bridge. I hated that bridge. Worse, I dreaded the thought of where Mother and I were headed. To the Poor House! Oh, not as potential residents, fortunately. We were on our way to deliver Christmas gifts from our church to the people who lived in the scary-looking brick building which crouched on the hill beyond the bridge. Its proper name was "The Franklin County Infirmary," or "Asylum," but everyone I knew

called it "The Poor Farm".

I was excited when Mother first asked me to go with her on this errand, but then I remembered the stories the kids would tell about "asylums".

Wasn't that where they kept murderous crazy people? Mother explained that the word "asylum" meant "a place of refuge, security, and protection".

She preferred the terms "rest home" or "infirmary".

Our car climbed the long driveway up the hill, and I saw the huge brick building lying in wait for us. The many windows looked with blank eyes, dark and forbidding. The only lights appeared to be in the downstairs, in the very front. As we got out of the car, Mother nodded for me to take one wire handle of the peach basket she pulled from the back seat, and she took the other. The basket was loaded with gayly wrapped packages, donated by our church members and a bag of oranges that bounced precariously on top of everything.

It was all I could do to keep my side of the basket from toppling over as the wind whipped furiously past our ears.

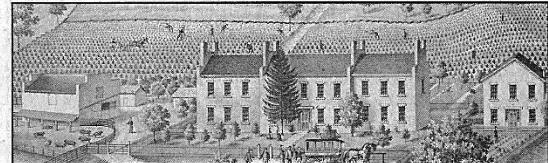
Before we reached the steps, the front door opened and a cheerful female voice called out, "Oh, my, do come in! That wind is vicious!"

The lady who held the door open for us was dressed in an unfashionably long house dress, covered by a clean white apron. Her hair was in a neat bun on top of her head, and a cheerful smile stretched across her round face.

I don't know what I had expected to see when I came into the house. There were no bodies wrapped in rags, no shaking creatures creeping into the shadows. There were just a number of ordinary-looking ladies in shapeless housedresses and big aprons. I saw only one man, asleep in a rocking chair, and two others who were deep in conversation, each trying to make the other hear. All three were dressed in plaid flannel shirts and faded blue overalls.

"The other men are out doing the evening chores", our hostess explained as she hurried to bring us chairs. I didn't want to sit down; I didn't want to stay; I didn't belong here!

In all of my eight years, I had never been in a place like this. It felt...old! The room was spotlessly clean, but with no ornaments or pictures to relieve its orderliness. It was sparsely furnished, with just a few wooden chairs, a prickly-looking sofa, and a few rocking chairs. The yellowing wallpaper might once have



An illustration of the Franklin County Asylum from the 1882 Atlas of Franklin County. (Courtesy of the Franklin County Libraries)

been beautiful.

"People have been most kind, this year", the matronly lady explained. "The town's organizations, the churches, some lovely individuals...so many have remembered us with gifts," she said, pointing to the stack under the tree. "We will have a wonderful Christmas, won't we Stella?"

This last was directed to a tiny little woman who had just entered the room.

"Yes, we will!" she agreed. "But the men will soon be coming in from the fields, and supper is nearly ready."

Will our guests join us? We're having chicken and dumplings..."

"And mashed potatoes!" someone chimed in.

"You are most welcome to stay", the matron laughed. "We have our own dairy cattle, grow our own vegetables, chickens, and cows. Our little orchard gives us a lot of fruit every year. We are truly blessed!"

My mouth was beginning to water. I wished Mother would agree to stay for dinner, but she explained that we had to get home to my little sister and our dad.

I did a lot of thinking as we rumbled back down the road into town. Why was this place called "The Poor Farm?"

True, the people here were dependent on the county to care for them, but they didn't seem to mind. They had their own beds, clothing, good food. Yes, they worked for their living, but they worked together, didn't they? I hadn't seen any homeless people as we drove back through town; the county had a place for them to go. There were no beggars on the street corners with signs asking for money.

And family? They were their own family. I had noticed how the two men in the room had laughed together; how a woman about the age of my mother had brought in a warm sweater and wrapped it gently around the shoulders of one of the older ladies in a rocking chair. I wondered what had brought them to the point where they had to live there. Had they been victims of the Great Depression? Were they widowed at an early age?

I felt so grateful for everything that I had at home... my family and friends, pretty decorations around the house, the knowledge that there would be many gifts from Santa later that week. Yet all these years later, I think about that visit we made to a place of refuge, and how I truly found Christmas at the Poor House.

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The Poor Farm as it looked circa 1900.

## The Poor Farm - Stringer Family Cemetery

There are misconceptions about the burial ground at the County Poor Farm. It is commonly called the Poor Farm Cemetery or Infirmary Cemetery, and is also referred to as the Stringer Cemetery. The reason for this is as follows. In 1856, the former Franklin, Fayette and Union counties combined asylum was disbanded. In June of 1856 the Franklin County commissioners met to find a location for a new asylum in our county. The land they purchased was owned by William and Anna Stringer. This property already had a family burying ground on it, established about 1815, which was located along the Whitewater River. It was referred to as the Stringer Cemetery. After the Franklin County Poor Farm was in use and inmates started to die, the area around the old Stringer Cemetery was utilized by the institution and paupers and orphaned children were buried there.

In 2010, the cemetery was restored by the Franklin County Cemetery Commission. Today approximately 8 grave stones are visible and are all that remain of the original Stringer Cemetery.

More than likely the burials for the inmates of the Poor Farm and the Children's Home did not have formal grave markers. It's possible that their graves had wooden crosses or perhaps just small pieces of fieldstones indicating the burial locations. It's also possible that burials were simply documented on a sheet of paper kept by the superintendent, and holes were dug in a systematic order.

Official records for the residents or inmates of the Franklin County Poor Farm are practically non-existent, so Brookville Library staff and the Franklin County Cemetery Commission members attempted to recreate an inmate and burial listing for the facility. The County Children's Home which was located just south of the Poor Farm, and anything found regarding it and the children there, were also included in this master listing which can be found at the Brookville Library's Local History & Genealogy Department.

The library's inmate listing was originally compiled to get an idea of how many burials are possibly located at the Poor Farm Cemetery. Where 8 stones are visible in the original part of the cemetery, our research indicates that there are probably at least 170 burials there (if not more), that are not marked. In the Fall of 2019, Rich Green from Historical Archaeological Research in Brownstown, Indiana conducted a ground penetrating radar project at the Poor Farm Cemetery. His research seems to indicate that there are numerous probable human burials located between the old Poor Farm-Stringer Cemetery and the Conservation Club building.





**Above:** Examples of the gravestones in the Poor Farm – Stringer Cemetery. All stones appear to have been early ones from the time of the Stringer's using it. When the cemetery was restored in 2010 many of the stones had fallen over, were broken, or had been removed from their bases. They were placed in a single row when the cemetery was restored.

**Below:** Looking towards the fairgrounds from the cemetery. This is also part of the area thought to have unmarked graves.



## **The Franklin County Park Board**

The following information was submitted by Jeff Jones for the 2008 publication *Franklin County: A Glimpse of the Past*.

On June 19, 1856 the commissioners of Franklin County met for the purpose of locating and purchasing a site for a poor asylum. They met for four days and reported they had selected a site. It was located in Brookville Township, about one mile southwest of the county seat, and contained a little over 160 acres. The land was owned by William and Anna Stringer and was purchased for \$5,500. On February 5, 1889 the commissioners bought an additional 32 acres adjoining the poor asylum grounds on the south, for \$5,000. After many years of use, this land was no longer needed for a county asylum, and alternate uses for it were discussed.

The Franklin County Park was established by the Board of County Commissioners on October 3, 1960. They appointed three members, Donald Williams, Paul Swartz, and Joseph Stein. The three members, along with Arthur K. Wissman and Marcus Esarey, held their first meeting on October 17, 1960.

Their first meeting was about how to proceed and develop the old County Farm for park and recreational purposes. In November of 1961, the Board of County Commissioners relinquished any and all rights for the control, management, and development of the County Farm to the Franklin County Park Board.

Today, the Franklin County Park offers camping facilities and five shelters that can be rented. Three types of camping are available: primitive, modern with electricity, and modern with electricity and water. There are three shower buildings with restrooms accessible to disabled persons and available to campers. Restrooms are easily accessible to visitors near picnic areas and to the people that like to walk in the park.

## Franklin County Park history from its inception through 1963



The new 4-H Fair County Park as photographed by Art Wissman.  
Image courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer.

*The following information about the park's history was compiled by John Estridge.*

It was the 4-H Fair which gave impetus to the county park.

Up to that time, the fair had been held at the Brookville Ball Park near the intersection of Ninth and Mill streets. The fair had greatly outgrown that location.

According to Ray Everett's Brookville *Sidelights* column in the *Brookville Democrat* in the August 1, 1957 issue: "That the Franklin County 4-H Fair is becoming too big, for the local ball park was ably demonstrated, this week when record breaking numbers of exhibitors entered record breaking numbers of exhibits in the 1957 Fair. Workers worked until the wee hours of the morning Wednesday morning building necessary pens to house livestock exhibits that were due to arrive later that morning. There has been some talk of a campaign to have the County Commissioners establish a permanent Fairgrounds at the site of the present County Home. This year's fair will probably give added impetus to this movement."

According to the January 23, 1958 *Brookville Democrat*, the Franklin County Commissioners and Franklin County Council, in a joint meeting, unanimously voted to close the County Farm.

A group of Franklin County residents were apparently against the County Farm closure as they attempted to present a petition to the combined bodies of the county government. However, there must have been a problem with the petition, as it was only mentioned in the same week's issue.

"The petitioners who objected ... failed to come up with a new petition and reasons for their action at the meeting held on Monday ..."

According to the news article, Carl Becker, a county councilman, "made a motion that the County Farm in part be discontinued, and that an attempt be made by the County Commissioners to lease such buildings as may be necessary to care for the inmates. Or upon any other reasonable terms elsewhere in said county as may be agreed upon by the Commissioners and agreed upon by the County Council. Also, to arrange to lease the remainder of the farm or putting same in the Soil Bank."

Everett, in his column, said the closing was due to the "first of the Welfare Laws were passed nearly 25 years ago."

While the county council and county commissioners were talking leasing the building and the acreage, town leaders were already thinking county park.

Everett was a member of both the Brookville Kiwanis and Brookville Chamber of Commerce. Each of the organizations, during their meetings immediately after the closing, were talking park. In the Sept. 11, 1958 Brookville *Sidelights*, Everett talked about a recent Kiwanis meeting where the subject was front and center.

"The Brookville Kiwanis Club members have spent some time in discussing the disposition of the County Home property," Everett said in his column. "Most members favored the turning of the property into a County Park and the establishment of a County Park Board to develop the site. Among the suggestions put forth was that part of same be set aside for a permanent home for the 4-H Fair; another was the establishment of a public swimming pool; some favored a picnic grounds; there were proponents for a golf course; and a suggestion for a trailer park for visitors to this community. All were in agreement in that the grounds should be retained and that the development of same would necessarily take a number of years."

In fact, Everett had mentioned the County Home as an ideal location for the 4-H Fair in a July 11, 1957 column. "...with the 4-H Fair becoming bigger and better each year there is some talk of establishing a permanent fair grounds in the county ... a number of persons favor the site of the present County Home as an ideal spot."

As was stated earlier, the chamber membership was also behind this plan.

In a Sept. 4, 1958 article about the chamber meeting it stated: "Meeting to discuss possible use of the land owned by the county and formerly operated as the county poor farm has been scheduled for September 15, when the board of directors will meet with the county commissioners."

When that group, probably both Kiwanis and Chamber members – Everett called them a "civic minded group" – went to the county commissioners' meeting, the county commissioners put it back into that civic-minded group's lap saying the civic-minded group should form a committee and "work out a definite plan regarding a park and then present their plan to the commissioners."

Apparently, it was a slow process concerning the committee as Indiana Code had to be met in order to make the park a reality.

The next mention in the paper was in the February 18, 1960 issue. An article headlined "Park Committee Will Meet Next Tuesday Evening," talked about where the committee was at that point. There was a need for a Park Board to be formed and to do that required a petition with the signatures of 10 percent of the real estate owners within the county. The "petition must request that a county park and recreation board be established by the county board of commissioners. "Once formed the Park Board would be given the legal authority to develop the park facilities according to the wishes of the citizens of the county," the article continued.

Larry Hannebaum, who was a Franklin County National Bank officer and also a chamber member, was the committee chairman.

In the March 31, 1960 Brookville *Sidelights* column, Everett updated the petition drive. Hannebaum reported to Everett "securing of signatures of residents of the various taxing units has almost been completed." Once the petition was completed, Hannebaum planned to turn the petitions over to the county auditor at that time, Clifford Bischoff. Bischoff's job was to authenticate the signatures.

One week later there was an article in the April 7, 1960 issue concerning a chamber meeting. In that meeting, Hannebaum reported he expected to be done with the petition process on April 18, and then turn the petition over to the county commissioners.

In another article about a chamber meeting, May 12, 1960, Hannebaum told the chamber members the petitions had been turned over for verification, which was done and at that time, the commissioners were in possession of the petitions.

Commissioners then ran a legal notice concerning the park in the next three issues of the Brookville Democrat. The legal notice states the relevant Indiana Code and acknowledges the petitions have been authenticated and turned over to the commissioners. Then, it announced the commissioners would hold a public hearing on the matter at 1 p.m., Monday, August 1, 1960, in the commissioners' room at the courthouse.

The meeting almost coincided with the Fairgrounds Dedication ceremony. It was reported in the July 28, 1960 *Brookville Democrat*, Dr. Earl L. Butz, dean of the Purdue School of Agriculture, would speak at the dedication ceremony to be held at 8 p.m., Monday, August 1, at the new fairgrounds.

In the August 4, 1960 issue, Butz's speech was paraphrased. It was titled 4-H Today – Leaders Tomorrow. In that same issue, Everett in his column, said most people enjoyed the new fairgrounds except for the dirt road from Blue Creek Road to the fairgrounds. He said "Dust from the new road at the fairgrounds was quite heavy on Monday night."

He said some people liked the new fairgrounds and some people did not. "... but most agreed that this is a good site with plenty of room for expansion."

County council put some money where their mouths were in appropriating \$1,000 for the 1961 Budget to "put the remaining land not leased to the Fair Board in a county park."

One thousand dollars in 1960 is worth more than \$9,200 in 2021.

On October 20, 1960, an article on the formation of the park board was printed. The actual formation occurred on October 3, 1960. In it, Don Williams was named the initial chairman of Franklin County Board of Parks and Recreation. Other members of that initial board were: Paul Swartz, vice chairman; Joe Stein, treasurer; A.K. Wissman, secretary; and Marcus Esarey, county superintendent of schools. All but Wissman and Esarey were appointed by the commissioners. Wissman was named part of the board because he was the county extension agent and Esarey was superintendent of the county schools.

Williams suggested an advisory committee be formed with members from the various interested organizations within the county. It was also planned to have a development of a master plan for a county park and recreation area. Eventually, there were 28 members on the advisory committee, and that committee did much more than advise. Almost all the work on the county park was through volunteers.

But, initially, the advisory committee advised. A Purdue landscape architect, Norman Marty, toured the proposed park area in November 1960 and then gave his report that was paraphrased in the March 16, 1961 Brookville Democrat. The initial recommendations were: "... access drives along with adequate parking in all sections of the area. One large recreation area with shelter house, another picnic area suitable for reunions, two softball diamonds and several smaller 'rest and picnic' spots."

Since the park board was operating with limited funds, they decided they would scale back the plans, at least initially. The plans for that first year included: "... seeding all areas to stop further erosion. Next will be construction of a drive so that at least one and possible two picnic sites can be readied for use this year."

Then, there were the volunteers.

"As a result of the generous offers of volunteer labor and gifts of picnic tables and equipment by several organizations, the Park Board may be able to include other drives and picnic areas in its 1961 development plans." There were also some suggestions at that meeting for future projects. They included facilities for overnight camping and a golf driving range.

The Chamber again discussed the park and that discussion was reported in the May 4, 1961 issue. The discussion was a broader discussion titled Brookville Problems and the Future Outlook of Brookville. With regard to the county park, the chamber said the county leaders needed to appropriate more money for its development.

Wissman, the county extension agent and a member of the park board, spoke at another chamber meeting, which was reported in the June 8, 1961 issue. He told the chamber members they were largely responsible for the county park formation. He then updated the members on what development was currently taking place at the county park. He told them a drive would be completed to the orchard area and a shelter house and picnic area would also soon be completed.

While the fairgrounds were being improved and the county park developed, a photo and cutline in the July 13, 1961 issue, showed Edward Rosenberger of 805 East Seventh Street, Brookville, with his tobacco crop, which was grown next to the "Old County Home." Rosenberger said he had been planting tobacco at that spot for seven years, and the 1961 crop was his best.

One week later, in the July 20, 1961 issue, there was an article giving a further update on the park progress. It said the initial shelter house in the orchard area was 30 x 45. County-owned equipment was used to build the drives to the new facilities in the park. "Outdoor furnaces" were on order. And toilet facilities' construction was scheduled to be completed by the weekend.

Board members asked for more volunteers and for equipment such as dump trucks to help with the drives. Another article in the same issue talked about improvements at the fairgrounds, which was readying for its second fair. The biggest news in that department was the construction of a 40 x 72 commercial building, which was earmarked for exhibiting projects. And due to the increased participation and larger crowds at the new site, the fair board also added an extra day to the fair.

Everett, in his August 3, 1961 column, talked about how the crowds have grown at the new location. He said there would have been no way to get all the cars parked at its old location. What had initially been used as a parking lot at the Brookville ball field site, was first used to house some of the cattle and then it was made the site for the Heap Memorial Pool.

Everett complained again about the dust and mud, but he said these were wrinkles to be ironed out. "... the fair had outgrown the ball park where it would be impossible to house all of the livestock and other exhibits of this year's Fair."

County council cleaved the 1962 budget by \$2,000; however, the September 14, 1961 article does not say how much the initial request was or how much was left after the \$2,000 was cut.

While county council cut the park budget for 1962, the county commissioners officially assigned all of the Franklin County Farm, not otherwise leased, to the Franklin County Park and Recreation Board on November 6, 1961.

No matter of the budgetary cuts for 1962, the park board still had plans for improvements. These included graveled drives, water lines to the picnic area as well as additional picnic tables and furnaces. Another item being considered was the installation of several "Food and Wildlife" areas to be completed with the assistance of the Indiana Department of Conservation. A representative of that department was making a study of the park to prepare plans for further consideration.

While this was going on, the same organizations which clamored for the park, now wanted a golf course situated at the park; however, it was discovered Indiana Code would not allow a golf course or a swimming pool on the county park property. That was reported by Everett in his column on June 14, 1962.

Also, in that same issue it was reported although the fair opened in 1960 and the park started to be used for picnic and other purposes in 1961, the park's dedication was held Sunday, June 17, 1962.

Judge George L. Bridenhager was the featured speaker at the event. At the end of his speech, Bridenhager said: "I now dedicate this park for all future time, for the use and benefit of all people, but specifically and especially for the benefit of the citizens of this county. May the present and future generations of this county enjoy and use this park for all time to come."

In September 1962, county council again cut the proposed park budget by \$1,000. That left \$3,650 for use in 1963. That is \$32,700 in 2021.

However, the park board once again soldiered on.

According to an article published in the November 29, 1962 *Brookville Democrat*, in 1963, the plan was to make a scenic drive up to the top of the county park. And at the top, the park would have a large open area. In the future, the plan was to have a circle scenic drive with picnic and recreation areas suitable for reunions and similar gatherings at the park's top level.

Besides the scenic drive and work at the park's top level, a crushed-rock floor was scheduled to be installed in the orchard shelter and a water line run to the shelter. Also, there was a plan for more picnic tables to be purchased along with outdoor grills. Also, there was the ongoing work of cutting grass and brush removal.

Park drives were planned to be extended, signs purchased and installed and preliminary work completed for a playground area.

At a reorganization meeting on January 11, 1963, the same board members were in power. Also, the board members voted to put Esarey in charge of the playground area. Other plans for 1963 included: "maintenance of park and picnic areas, removal of internal fences, weed control, further work on Hilltop and other drives, and the placing of signs." The board met again on January 23 to open bids for a tractor and a mower, making the first equipment purchased solely for use for the park. Also, a joint meeting with the advisory board was set for March.

Results from the March meeting were printed in the March 21, 1963 issue.

Among the plans for the future and the accomplishments of the past vocalized at the March meeting included: "The completing of the drive to the top of the hill will make a large area accessible for picnics, nature hikes and a place to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Whitewater Valley.

"Other plans for 1963 call for the development of a softball diamond for use by any groups interested in this activity.

"Twenty-two tables and fourteen charcoal grills will be in place at the opening of the season.

"Mowing equipment has been purchased and arrangements are being completed for maintaining the picnic areas for the season. This will include regular mowing, weed control, grading of drives, and similar 'park keeping' jobs."

Also, reported in the same article was the resignation of Stein as a member. Commissioners appointed Bernard H. Mohr to take Stein's place on the park board.

One week later, in the March 28, 1963 issue, the paper reported on a new reservation policy for the county park. This shows the popularity of the park at that early time. To make a reservation, one had to call the Extension Service Office at the courthouse.

Less than two months later, on May 16, 1963, the paper ran an article talking about how the county park should be ready for those seeking outside entertainment during Memorial Day weekend.

Among the items ready for visitors was the playground. Installed at that point were swings and a kiddie slide. The regulation-size softball diamond was also ready for use. It was located "south and west of the grain bins."

However, the drive to the park's top level was not ready at that time. The article asked for volunteers to help with the grading for the drive's side ditches, placement of several culverts and to work on a scenic overlook.

Reservations had been flooding in, and a phone number was given for anyone wanting to make a reservation. Also, the Whitewater Saddle Horse Association was given approval "to develop a training track in the park adjacent to the 4-H fairgrounds near the new livestock building."

The article ended with the general invitation "to visit their county park often this year to watch the development of one of the finest park sites in southeastern Indiana."

Just a few weeks later, the June 6, 1963 issue, Everett – in his column – stated the park was so popular that the three picnic sites had already been reserved for most of the Sundays left in the summer.

In the July 25, 1963 issue, an article about a recent park board meeting revealed the park board had to revise its reservation policy. From that point on, groups could not reserve the picnic areas. Only the shelter house could be reserved. The same article commended local contractor and excavator Carol Stewart who completed the drive to the overlook and the overlook itself. A sign at the park's entrance was put in place and another by the grain bins to designate the delineation between the fairgrounds and the park.

Planned improvements in 1964 included: "more picnic tables, a shelter house at the top of the hill and beginning the development of the west drive, which will lead from the top of the hill to the extreme south end of the park."

The last article of 1963 concerning the park was published in the September 19, 1963 issue. It said work would begin on October 1, for the west drive. Also, the county commissioners had ordered the north drive to be graveled. Traveling up the hill to see the overlook had become very popular.

One major addition to the park came in 1979-80 when the youth baseball diamonds were constructed. Before that time, the ballfields were on the north side of the Whitewater River's east fork below the dam.

Franklin County Commissioner Bob Brack was the person who led the drive to build the baseball fields in the county park. Since that time, the number of baseball fields has been increased.



**Left:** Construction of one of the new fairgrounds' buildings.

**Right:** A group of girls at the fairground with the old Poor Farm building still standing in the background.

Both images courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer, the granddaughter of Art Wissman.

## Fairgrounds of Years Past



The Mustangers at the 4-H fairground on Blue Creek Rd., circa 1962.  
Image courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer, granddaughter of Art Wissman.

Prior to meeting at the current fairground on Blue Creek Road, some may remember when the county fair was held on the east side of Brookville at what we know as the grandstands and town ballpark. Even earlier, before the houses were built on Division Street, the fairground was located at Division and Fairfield Avenue. According to Ernest Showalter in a news column he wrote in January of 1953, this section of land was also used by the earliest town ball team, as well as served as a circus ground for some of the smaller shows.



The 4-H Fair when it was at the Brookville ballpark.  
Image originally belonged to Bob Bunz.

The earliest county fairs here started in the 1850s. At this time, the county supported what was known as the Franklin County Agricultural Society Fair. These were held each year on the site that is now Maple Grove Cemetery. County fairs were also reported to have been held in the open fields that now make up what we know as Cliff Street in Brookville.

The old 4-H building that stood in the town ballpark, that many fondly remember, was a landmark in Brookville for many years and marked the beginning of the modern Franklin

County 4-H Fair, as we know it. The 4-H building was built in 1938, and funded by contributions and private donations.



**The 4-H building at the old Brookville ballpark as it looked in the 1950s.**

**Photo courtesy of Maggie Fain.**

The impetus for a permanent 4-H building came from the fact that there was a need to house club exhibits for a longer duration of time. Rationale stated that such a building would enable the club organization to conduct a four-day exhibit and would draw larger crowds of people and would interest more merchants because of its longer duration and larger number in attendance. In addition, it was advertised that the proposed building could be used for many projects of a community-nature other than just 4-H.

The September 1937 newspapers discussed the future building and said, "It was to be of cement, wood and sheet metal construction, much on the type of a bank barn. The proposed location is on the ledge between the high and lower ground of the baseball park about two hundred yards from Fairfield Avenue." This style and set up allowed for the

livestock to be in the lower section while the spacious upper section that was on the level with the baseball diamond, could house the exhibits.

According to the April 7, 1938 *Democrat*, work had started on the 4-H Club and community building and the labor was provided by the Works Progress Administration. The completed structure was 60x90 feet and two stories high. The building served its purpose well until the location of the fair was moved to the county park in 1960.

For many years, the landmark served its purpose as a 4-H exhibit barn, as well as a place residents could use for reunions, meetings, and a wide variety of public gatherings. Some may also remember that the basement of the building was used by the Franklin County Jaycees for their haunted house during Halloween.

After the fair moved to its new location, during the 1970-80s the old building and ballpark were leased by the Franklin County Community School Corporation and used for storing old school desks no longer being used by Brookville School, obsolete shop equipment, football bleachers, etc. The ballpark was used by the school for physical education classes in the spring and fall, track and field events, football practices, band rehearsals, as well as a variety of other school-related functions that needed a large space.



**The 4-H building on fire in 1981.**

**Photo courtesy of Greg Pflum.**

The local newspapers of November 11, 1981 reported that the old 4-H building was completely destroyed by fire on Sunday November 8. The Brookville fire department aided by the Cedar Grove Fire Dept. responded to the call about 2:30pm. Despite heavy winds, the fire department managed to save the small football storage building and log cabin located nearby. The 4-H building and all its contents were destroyed in the blaze. The fire department remained on site until 8pm as the fire smoldered for several hours. A heavy black smoke hovered over the town of Brookville for several hours. While the building itself was insured by the town of Brookville, unfortunately, the school corporation's contents were not.

Sadly, it was later discovered that the old landmark was set ablaze by four juveniles, ages 7, 8, 10, and 11, who admitted to the crime. They were "playing with matches that were allegedly found in the building." Little could people have realized that the next old landmark in the ballpark, the grandstands, would be purposefully destroyed by arsonists slightly over two decades later.



Blue ribbon winners at the Franklin County 4-H Fair, circa 1962.  
Left to right: Becky Bruns Lanning, Mary Cleaver, Debbie Baker, Dee Willhite Harding,  
Dee or Delores Smith (twins), and unknown.  
Image courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer.

So why was the 4-H Fair moved to the county park? Simply because it was growing in popularity. As the end of the 1950s approached, the realization that an overall larger land mass on which to have the fair, and additional facilities, were needed. In the summer of 1960, the new 4-H fairground was dedicated at the location currently used off Blue Creek Road.

At the 1960 dedication ceremony of the new fairground, it was stated, "The 4-H Club program in Indiana is a powerful force in developing trained leadership and responsible citizenship among young people."

Speakers and leaders at that dedication boasted, that in recent years Franklin County had been averaging about 600 4-H Club members annually, with just over a 90 per-cent completion rate in projects.



**Blue ribbon winners at the Franklin County 4-H Fair, circa 1962.**

**Left to right: unknown, unknown, unknown, Roger Boomer,  
and Deanna Miles.**

**Image courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer.**

Maybe you, or your parents, or grandparents are pictured in some of the accompanying 4-H photos. A large collection of negatives was loaned to the library district's Local History Dept. by Tami Wissman Hofer, whose grandfather Art Wissman was a longtime county extension agent. If anyone in these images looks familiar perhaps you would like to help the library staff make positive identifications on the rest of the negatives. Give Julie a call at the library 765.647.4031, to see how you can help.



**Blue ribbon winners at the Franklin County 4-H Fair, circa 1962.**

**Image courtesy of Tami Wissman Hofer.**



**The Red Exhibit Barn**

According to information from Tony Pflum, found on a painting of the barn done by Bill Johnson, lumber for the barn is mostly beech and was sawed and framed in the woods of Charles Petersen. Fred Gesell hauled it all to the County Poor Farm with horses. Ezra Beckman (b. 1907-d. 1988) and Edgar Beckmann worked on the barn along with a lot of other men. The barn is all pegged. Ezra Beckmann told Johnson in 1982 that he remembered working on the barn

Additional information will be researched to determine if any more facts can be found.

## Miscellaneous

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On Wednesday, July 8, approximately 50 persons aided in razing the 4-H building at the Franklin County Park which was destroyed by fire June 23.

The building was used for the hog and sheep barn and show arena at the Franklin County 4-H Fair.

In addition to tearing down the destroyed building, several new herders to be used for hog and sheep pens were also made that day. Approximately 100 five foot gates, 25 ten foot gates and 25 twelve foot gates were constructed. The fire also destroyed several gates, etc. that were stored in the building.

Work on the new building was started Monday, July 13, and is scheduled to be completed for the 1970 fair. The new structure, to be located on the same site and identical to the building destroyed, is being built by Franklin County Farm Bureau Co-op.

The Franklin County 4-H Agricultural Association extends a sincere thanks to each one who in any way aided with the July 8th project.

## The Franklin County Antique Machinery Show

The following information about the Antique Machinery Show was taken from their website. Please visit it for more details and current events. <https://www.fcamc.org/club-history>

The Great Franklin County Antique Machinery Show began forming in July of 1994 at the Franklin County 4-H Fair, where exhibitors got together and recognized a huge interest shown in their antique machinery. The seed was planted.

Shortly thereafter in the fall of 1994, a group got together in Dan Dorrel's kitchen and decided to form their own organization to be named, 'The Franklin County Antique Machinery Club.'

We decided to advertise for fellow antique machinery enthusiasts. Tremendous numbers of people responded. The date was chosen to be the last weekend in September for the three-day event. September 29, 30 and October 1, 1995 was the date of our first annual show.

The first year, we came with over 200 tractors and 75 hit & miss engines, four steam engines and 26 miscellaneous demonstrations. The turnout was an enormous success with new membership over 300.

Since then, the club has grown to almost 800 members. But including a family membership, of a husband, wife and children under 16 years of age, we estimate close to 1,600 people participate at only \$10 per membership per year.

Many new things were added, and the show advanced to a four-day event. People began coming from all over the United States. Students and public alike could see working demonstrations such as rural electric generators, broom making, soap making, horses, mules, ponies, petting zoo, steam engines, hit and miss engines, antique tractors, trucks and automobiles as well as numerous other items, each reflecting a unique historical perspective.

In 1998, an old-time kitchen was added, showing how people cooked on wood stoves with a live demonstration. A horse pull was added to Saturday's event schedule. School Day was created with children from local schools admitted free for the day. All were served homemade ice cream and cookies. Over 300 children participated. The success of that first School Day grew to 1,000 the next year. A larger old-time kitchen was added to showcase how potatoes were grown. The potatoes were dug up using a horse-drawn potato plow - the children were allowed to pick the spuds. Many were amazed to learn potatoes grew in the ground. (Some thought they came from McDonald's.)

We hope you enjoy our show and our community. You have touched our hearts by allowing us to share our history, knowledge and education with you. Thank you for your support!

