

Jane Hendryx (1818-1914)

Jane Hendryx rode into McLean County in October 1836, in a covered wagon. The county was only six years old, and the young village of Bloomington was home to only 450 people. When she died 78 years later, Jane had witnessed the growth of the community from a **frontier** town to a bustling **metropolis**.

Jane was born Jane Frankeberger on September 4, 1818 in Champaign County, Ohio. After her mother died when she was about eight years old, she and a sister went to live with their grandmother where they were able to attend school. Jane studied well, and by age eleven was able to read the Bible, the **Old English Reader**, and the Noah Webster Spelling Book. This was considered a fine education for a young girl in a growing agricultural society, and she left school.

In 1829, Jane's father, Jesse, moved to Illinois and settled near Old Town Timber in Padua Township (known today as Dawson Township) east of Bloomington. He worked to develop a farm and also served as a Methodist minister to the small, but growing community. The harsh winters of the Midwest were very difficult for the new settlers, and Jane remembered her father telling of the early frost of 1830 that killed the corn crop. To survive, the family had to grind frostbitten corn into cornmeal. Two years later, during another hard winter, Jane's 10-year-old brother died. He was buried on the farm in an area that later became known as Frankeberger Cemetery.

In the fall of 1836, Jesse returned to Ohio to bring his girls to Illinois. Jane, her sister, and father traveled across Ohio and Indiana to reach McLean County. The trip took nine days, which Jane recalled as "overall pleasant." However, Jane found her new living space "a very wild home." At that time, some native groups still lived near the east end of Old Town Timber. Deer and wolves were plentiful and thick prairie grasses covered much of the land. Houses were made of **hand-hewn** logs, as **saw mills** were too far away. There were no stores nearby, and settlers had to travel 30 miles or more to buy **provisions** or grind their grain. School classes and religious services were often held in homes. Food was mainly pork (pigs ran freely), ground corn called **hominy**, and wild game from hunting. Tea was made from **sassafras** or prairie roots, and clothes were **homespun**.

When she was 14-years-old and still living in Ohio, Jane had followed her father into the **Methodist** faith. Her faith was extremely important to her and became a central part of her life. After coming to Illinois, she frequently accompanied her father on his preaching "circuits" to neighboring towns. They traveled on horseback following "well-worn Indian trails."

Soon after the girls arrived in Illinois, work began on a new cabin for the family. Jane and her family were very proud of their new home. It had walls made of double-hewn logs (meaning the logs were cleaned on both sides). It had floors made of split logs, with doors and a porch. To celebrate, Jesse held a two-day Methodist meeting at their home. These events were very important to the social life of the settlers, as well as being religious gatherings. For Methodists, to be a proper meeting they needed eight members. This could be very difficult when neighbors were far and travel **strenuous**. Later meetings were held in their new log barn. Jane had fond memories of the "smell of freshly cut hay and horses on one side of the barn, and preaching and the congregation of the other side." She remembered one particular Sunday when "several children were sprinkled," referring to their baptism.

Less than a month after arriving in Illinois, Jane married Allen Hendryx. Like Jane, Allen was born in Ohio. He came to McLean County with his family when he was about 15 years old. The Hendryx family farm was located on the northeastern edge of Old Town Timber in Padua

Township. The newlyweds settled near there and also farmed. Jane later remembered that at first, they had few possessions. Her grandmother had given her a feather bed and “good bedclothes” to bring from Ohio. Jane **bartered** with a cabinet maker for furniture. In return for sewing, he made a bedstead, a corner cupboard, and a large square dining table out of black walnut timber. She also sewed an overcoat for another man that she traded for an ax—“a necessary article” found in every early settler’s home. Sewing was an extremely important skill for settlers, as all garments, bedding and table linens, were handmade.

Allen and Jane had ten children, six boys and four girls. Eventually, they had 55 grandchildren, 37 great-grandchildren, and at the time of Jane’s death, two great-great-grandchildren. According to Jane, Allen focused most of his energy on politics and community affairs, rather than agriculture. Originally a **Whig**, Allen became a staunch **Republican** after the formation of the party in Illinois in 1856. According to *The Pantagraph*, he was one of the first and strongest abolitionists. He was connected to the **Underground Railroad** and after the Civil War, greatly involved in the **Temperance Movement** to outlaw alcohol. With her strong Methodist convictions, Jane no doubt supported Allen in all of these efforts.

After over 40 years farming, in 1881, Jane and Allen sold the farm and moved to Bloomington. In 1887, they moved to 204 E. Washington Street where Allen died three years later. His funeral was held in their home and conducted by their Methodist pastor. The home was crowded with friends, many of whom had come from their old community. Allen was buried in the Frankeberger Cemetery.

Jane continued living on Washington Street until 1899. She was involved in the many activities of her large family, her church, and the affairs of the “Early Settlers” organizations. For many years, her family hosted a reunion to honor her birthday. In later years, she lived with two of her daughters at different times. Jane died at the age of 95 on March 4, 1914. Her funeral service was held in her daughter Mrs. Clara Padgett’s home at 1415 S. Main Street. Jane was laid to rest in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

In her obituary, *The Pantagraph* reported, “she was and will always be famed for her charity and kindness and her beautiful Christian character.” A girl who had ridden with her settler father into a frontier home where her nearest neighbor was eight miles away, Jane had lived to see her county and city grow into a center of culture, education, and **commerce**.

Discussion Question: Jane saw many changes in McLean County. What would you say were the best and the worst changes...and why?