

HISTORY OF RILEY TOWNSHIP

The following information was condensed from "As a Brief Reminder of Riley Center" by Anna Cawthorne. Annie Cawthorne was Riley Township's most revered native, if you don't count the the late Chief Riley, or Dwayne X. Riley, a television newscaster who adopted the Township because he liked it's name.¹ Anna Cawthorne was born January 18, 1875 in a log cabin six miles north of Memphis. When she was very young her father bought a farm near Riley Center, where she lived and worked until she moved to Medi-Lodge. Anna Cawthorne credits farm living for her longevity. "On a farm, you could go out in the fields. You could go out in the woods. You could see the crops growing. And there was good, fresh air."² The remainder of the information came from either "Combination Atlas Map of St. Clair County, Michigan" by Everts & Stewart, Philadelphia 1876, The Review, Times Herald, or from the John Frederick Felker & Mary Bentley family history.

Riley Township was originally settled by the Otchipwes of the Riley band of Indians. In 1836 the American land buyers flocked to purchase the United States lands then brought under notice. In 1835, the Wells, Mansfields and others located on the southern limits of the town and must be considered the pioneers of Riley.³

The older settlers were at a standstill to know what to call the little place, and one of the older men, David Sanderson, spoke up and said, "Why not call it Riley after an Indian chief by the name of Chief Riley?" And he said it is in the center of the Township one way; we will call it Riley Center. At that time there was a tribe of Indians who lived on the bank of Belle River and for many years it went by the name of the old Indian farm.⁴

Anna Cawthorne was born on the old homestead in a log house on Masters Road, one mile west of Riley Center. Her family had taken land up from the government. She recalled receiving mail once a week when she was a girl.⁵ Anna also remembered the Indians traveling by her farm with the men riding the horses and the women carrying the burdens walking behind.

Benjamin Felker chose the Riley Township portion of the Belle River, because the many curves gave him much more footage for erecting sawmills. Benjamin's eldest daughter Elnora (Nora) married Henry E. Dysinger, son of Daniel and Cordelia who had migrated to Riley Center from Royalton, Niagara County, N.Y. in Sept. 1854. The Dysinger homestead is now the

¹ The Review

² Times Herald

³ Combination Atlas Map

⁴ Brief Reminder of Riley Center by Anna Cawthorne

⁵ Brief Reminder of Riley Center by Anna Cawthorne

Clubhouse for Belle River Golf Course. Daniel Dysinger was a Supervisor of Riley Township and platted the land known as the Dan Dysinger subdivision, the plat of Riley Center. ⁶

⁶ John Frederick Felker & Mary Bentley Family History Compiled by Ida Florence Wright-Crozier, U.E.