

## Kewaunee County History

From "Official Directory of Kewaunee County"

Thanks to Edward J Dorner, County Clerk, for use of these pages.

### *Excerpts from Kewaunee County History*

"Missionaries visited the site of the present city in 1674 and Jacques Veau, a French trader, is said to have established a 'jack-knife' trading post at the mouth of the Kewaunee River as early as 1796, but little account was made of the place until some time in the '30's when an unknown explorer picked up something in the lowlands near the mouth of the river that he thought was gold. Further examination by impractical experts tended to confirm the rapidly spreading rumors of rich deposits of precious metal and a perfect 'gold fever' resulted with such men as John Jacob Astor, Gov. Doty, Gov. Beals, Joshua Hathaway, Gen. Ruggles, and Salmon P. Chase, ex-Chief Justice of the United States, becoming interested in property which sold as high as \$1,000 an acre. It seems odd enough at this time, but in 1836 the rivalry between Kewaunee and Chicago was very strong and speculators found it hard to decide which field was best for investment. However, the gold didn't 'pan out' and 'gold fever' soon passed into history.

"The first practical settlement at Kewaunee of which there is any knowledge, was made by Montgomery & Patterson of Chicago immediately after the government survey, which was made by Joshua Hathaway. They built a mill on the Kewaunee River about three miles from its outlet. After the mill was built, they were unable to stock it with supplies and it was deserted by workmen the following winter. The mill property reverted to the original owner of the land, Mr. Hathaway, and remained uninhabited until 1843 when it was purchased by John Volk of Illinois. The mill and the few houses surrounding it had been damaged to a considerable extent by the Indians who had made it a fishing resort in season, but it was fitted out again and a cargo of lumber was produced in 1843. The nearest neighboring towns were Two Rivers, 25 miles south, and Green Bay, 30 miles west. Freight rates were high and vessels were scarce, and it was necessary to build a boat to haul the lumber to Chicago. In 1850-1851, a pier was built into the lake. After that, there was less difficulty in shipping lumber and Mr. Volk began branching out a little, building a water mill in the river above the old one and erecting a steam mill at the lake.

When that was completed, steamboats landed at the pier and weekly and daily intercourse was had with the neighboring towns.

"From 1853 to 1858, many pioneers who were prominently identified with the early history of the community, came here and settled, and after that Kewaunee began to make visible progress. By the act of the legislature on April 16, 1852, Kewaunee County was set off from Door, but was not really organized until November 4th of that year. When the first election of officers was held, L. P. Fisher was elected county treasurer, John McNally county clerk, D. Levi Parsons register of deeds, G. W. Elliot surveyor, S. Chapel coroner, and John A. Daniels assemblyman.

"The first meeting of the County Board was held on November 11, 1856 and there were present Abner Cory of Kewaunee, John H. Scott of Sandy Bay, and J. A. Default of Wolf River. Mr. Cory was elected chairman.

"A resolution was passed organizing from and after April 1, 1857, the towns of Carlton, Frederickton, Montpelier, Coryville, Casco, Kewaunee, Wolf, and Red River. On May 10, 1859 the Town of Wolf was changed to Ahnapee.

"The first county buildings were erected soon after the county was organized and were located on Ellis Street in the City of Kewaunee in the block east of Milwaukee Street on the north side of the street. They served the purpose for which they were intended until 1873 when a new, substantial structure was built at a cost of \$12,000. In 1876, a county jail and sheriff's residence was also erected at a cost of \$6,000.

"In 1902, the county board realized the need of a more modern and larger court house to accommodate the increasing business of the county and authorized the rebuilding of the structure which was enlarged and remodeled at a cost of \$35,000. John M. Borgman was chairman of the Board at the time and Jos. F. Valecka was county clerk. In 1938 the court house was further enlarged at a total of \$68,000.

"The old life of the missions and the legends of the fur trade have thrown a fascinating glamour of mystery and adventure about the shores of Lake Michigan and legends pertaining to the early history of Kewaunee are as interesting as any. In the days when the Algonquin paddled his birch bark canoe along the lonely shores of the lake or made his way through trackless forests to the French settlement at Green Bay to the west, it was a notable Indian resort. Tradition asserts that on the lake bluffs, on the north side of the river, a fierce and bloody battle was fought in which an entire tribe was exterminated.

"Relics of some such conflict are still found there. As to the exact translation of the Indian name 'Kewaunee' authorities differ. It is said to signify 'go around' while some allege that it is the Algonquin name for 'wild duck'. The weight of authority is, however, in favor of the former definition."

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