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**"The Scene (about 1880)" from Chronicles of Early Huntington ...  
by Saggiarius**

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## CHRONICLES OF EARLY HUNTINGTON

The Scene (about 1880)

by Sagittarius

In the early days the city had the same wide streets and avenues that it now has. In Summer they were hot and dusty thoroughfares. In the business section the dust was partially laid by the operation of the "street sprinkler". This was a square box-like tank of wood, mounted on four wheels, and drawn by a team of horses. It had a <sup>spout</sup> ~~spout~~ or pipe across the rear end punctured with many holes, and through this the water, controlled by a valve from the driver's seat, flowed onto the dusty street. The operation of the "sprinkler" was supported by the merchants in the two or three blocks of the business section at so much per week or month for each. Until the coming of the water-works the "sprinkler" had to be driven to the river's edge for filling; and the whole affair had to be driven into the water until almost entirely submerged in order to fill the tank with the least labor. In the Winter the streets were a sea of mud, and if a pedestrian missed his footing in stepping from stone to stone at a street intersection it was possible for him to sink in over his shoe tops. Low shoes were unknown, and button shoes, Congress gaiters and boots were the usual foot-wear. Horses and wagons were frequently stalled in one to two or three feet of mire on the main business street.

There were a few homes, but not many, south of Fourth Avenue. Most of the homes and business houses as well, were of frame construction. At one time the only brick building on the south side of Third Avenue between Ninth and Tenth Streets was Sam Gideon's clothing store. All the remainder of the block was fully occupied with one and two story frame buildings with stores on the first floor and dwellings on the second floor. The opposite side of the street was also occupied by a solid block of frame buildings with the exception of the Harvey Opera House and

the T. S. Garland building. This type of construction gave rise to frequent and disastrous fires, and the clang of the fire bell was the signal for the entire community to turn out to assist in fighting the flames or to observe the progress of the fire. Pieces of burning wood and shingles were carried by the heated air for blocks, and a fire meant danger for the whole community. The fire engine company and the hook and ladder company were volunteer organizations, and most of the leading citizens belonged to one or the other.

Eighth Street was a hot and dusty country road with only a few houses south of the railroad, and with corn fields on each side. It was the route the boys took to the swimming hole on Four Pole, and to the hills for berries, paw-paws and nuts. There were only a few houses on Third Avenue above Thirteenth Street, and the Avenue was not opened above Twenty-fourth Street until about 1838.

The side walks were almost all of wood planks or "carlin points", and many of them floated away in the flood of 1884.

The population was a composite one drawn from several states, but mostly from Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New England. Memories of the Civil War had not been forgotten. When the Democrats were in power the Chief of Police wore a grey uniform, and when the Republicans got in power (not until 1886) the Chief of Police wore a blue uniform.

Marshall College had less than one hundred students, and there were only two school buildings, one on the north side of Fourth Avenue between Seventh and Eight Streets, and the other on the corner of Third Avenue and Twenty-second Street. Opposite the Fourth Avenue building was an apple orchard (the present Court House Square). This same orchard extended along the north side of Fifth Avenue from Seventh to Tenth Streets, and parts of it were used for pasturing horses and cows. The Congregational Church stood in lonely grandeur on the south-east corner of Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street. The little Presbyterian Chapel was almost as

lonely on the south side of Fifth Avenue, well back from the front of the lot on which the present Church stands.

The block in which the Government Buildings stands was the favorite side for John Robinson's and other circuses. Just below the present Prichard Hotel on Sixth Avenue was the "Round Pond". This was a circular body of water about one hundred and fifty feet across, and five or six feet deep at the deepest point. It was supposed to be fed by a spring. In Summer mud cat fish could be caught there, and there were usually two or three old "john boats" tied to the bank. In Winter it was the favorite place for ice skating, and many were the "didos" cut there by Walter Jarvis, Steve Shifflette and other fancy skaters.

There were two or three town pumps where man and beast could quench their thirst. One of them was on the corner of Third Avenue and Tenth Street, the present Bradshaw-Diehl corner.

Before the coming of the water works water for fire protection was supplied by a number of large cisterns, and pumped on the flames by a pumper engine operated by hand power. When the water in the cistern near the fire was exhausted the flames had full sway.

There were only two or three private conveyances, and the livery stables furnished the "rigs" for the young men of the day to take their "girls" for a ride.

Theatrical entertainment was furnished on the third floor of the Harvey Opera House, and there the ten, twenty and thirty cents shows made frequent appearances. Nellie Free was probably the most popular actress of the day. And there too occasional amateur performances were produced, such as the "Court of Belshazzar" and others. Other entertainment was furnished by the occasional visits of the medicine wagons with their nostrums "good for man or beast", their tooth pulling in full view of the audience, and their troops of vaudeville players, Indians and acrobats.

Harry McDonald (Tom Jobe) gave occasional tight rope performances on a rope stretched across Third Avenue from the tops of the highest buildings. Later he organized a company and toured in a number of foreign countries.

*Clippers and*

The Acme Baseball Club met all corners and Charles McKelvey, Robert

*John and Louis Woodrum,*

and George Poage, John R. Gibson, Ralph Eiting, William Wollerton, 'Pot' Reiman,

*Levi Crider and*

Lewis Dick, a famous battery Jones and Keenan won base ball fame.

Boys' sports and games included "rounders", "shimmy", marbles, top spinning, kite flying, foot ball (the kicking game only), coasting and skating. A favorite coasting place was at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street, and the boy who could make his sled go from the top of the hill (Fifth Avenue) down and across the alley and against the fence on the opposite side of the alley had to have a good sled and be a good performer on it.

There were no daily newspapers, and the morning Cincinnati and Louisville papers arrived about eight o'clock in the evening. Most of the enterprising boys of the community were news boys, and when the evening train arrived there was a great scramble for each boy to get on the street with his bundle of papers and his cry of "Cincinnati Enquirer, Commercial-Gazette and Louisville Courier-Journal".

Elections were fiercely fought, and in National campaigns there were enormous torchlight processions of men and boys.

Society events were confined largely to Church suppers, lawn fetes, and balls at so much per couple. Even then there were a few card-players, and euchre and whist were the favorite games. It was whispered too that "poker joints" could be found if one had the desire.

From the early days Huntington, altho' it had its ups and downs, was regarded as a "good town". The railroad, the railroad shops and the "Ensign" brought to the infant city a host of good people, and many of their descendants may be found among the leaders of the city's life at

this day.

The panic of 1873 was enough to discourage and dismay the most stout hearted, but those "early settlers" never lost sight of the vision of a great city extending from the Guyandotte to the Big Sandy.

The population of the city in 1880 was less than two thousand.