

OUR HOMETOWN: PAXTON, ILLINOIS

Memories of Ford County for the Sesquicentennial Celebration of Ford County, 2009 - I thought a little history of Paxton might be interesting to add as all of us were born and raised in Paxton, a small rural farming community and considered Small Town America.

1800's.

Paxton offered a large Swedish influence as a large portion of residents were of Swedish immigrants. In the **1850's**, Paxton was a large area of wetlands and marshes bordered by groves of trees and founded when the railroad began to cross the state. Paxton was laid out by land developers who found out that the sale of lots was much more profitable than investing in farmland that required much labor and capital to develop. So, William Pells laid out Prospect City, later to be called Paxton in **1856**. In **1864**, N.E. Stevens moved to Paxton and founded the Prospect City Press and renamed the paper to the Paxton Record. One article Mr. Stevens wrote was about the need for sidewalks to prevent pigs, cows and other animals from running loose in town. Notices were frequent in the newspaper and one included "Caution, my wife Susan left my bed and board without any cause or provocation and this is to forbid all persons from harboring her or trusting her on my account, as I shall pay no debts of her contracting". Mr. Lars Johnson, born in Sweden, emigrated to Paxton in **1869** and changed his name to Johnson Laurence and founded the dry goods and clothing store. To show his appreciation for all the patronage he donated the Seth Thomas clock atop Paxton's City Hall (currently the Ford County Historical Museum).

1900's.

The famous railroad cut came in the early **1920's** which was necessary for the railroad engines to get past the rise in elevation in Paxton which created a need for the original 5 bridges connecting the west side of town to the east. In **1925**, the Paxton H.S. was built and the East Lawn School became a Junior High. Then in **1965**, a new high school was built on the west side of town, and the old East Lawn school was demolished. Paxton H.S. became an elementary school, and high school became PBL (Paxton Buckley Loda) High School. Gone were those "Fighting Mustangs"! And now even the old high school building is gone, demolished in 2019. Vacant lots where two wonderful old buildings once stood. The tradition in Paxton was the community Christmas tree which started in the **1930's** by the Kiwanis Club and was erected in the middle of the Market and State Street intersection. They used this particular location because there was a big manhole cover there. They would take off the cover and set the tree in the hole -- a little Paxton ingenuity! Bud Larson was one of the originators of the tree tradition and encouraged the club to continue on. During **1945** and **1946**, Glen Magnuson hired German prisoners of war to snap sweet corn for the canning company. The going price for corn at that time was \$35 a ton.

1964 and 1966

Two great CLASSES graduated from Paxton High School!!!!!!