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## The Changing Built Environment of Ivesdale

A popular view of the rural Midwest is one of unchanging farmsteads and small towns. This perception is inaccurate. Small towns, like other components of the rural cultural landscape, are dynamic. The built environments of small towns change in response to changes in the underlying culture while, at the same time, continuously developing from it. Ivesdale, located in southwest Champaign County and eastern Piatt County, has and is undergoing this perpetual transformation. This article considers some of the processes which affect Ivesdale and the development of its built environment.

Ivesdale originated along the Wabash Railroad line to the south of a grove of trees known as Cherry Grove in 1855. The original town plat for Ivesdale was filed as "Norrie" on July 1, 1867 by Ephriam A. and Josephine C. Chapin. The town plat, based on the grid system with streets intersecting at right angles, imposed an indelible pattern on town morphology. Norrie was incorporated on June 12, 1871 and renamed Ivesdale in March 1872 in honor of R. H. Ives of Providence, Rhode Island, who was a major landowner in the vicinity.

William H. Johnson (1823-1898) was the first settler in the vicinity, building a home there in 1856. The Wabash Railroad was the first major employer in the region and railroad employees were responsible for establishing the first components of the built environment including a boarding house and railroad depot in the 1850s. The railroad offered access to rapidly expanding markets and facilitated Ivesdale's role as an important center of agricultural trade and services. The railroad had a profound effect on the development of the early built environment of Ivesdale and remained the town's lifeline until the early twentieth century. The diminishing role of the railroad was demonstrated by the suspen-



*A southwest view of Ivesdale with St. Joseph's Church and the grain elevator dominating the town's skyline. Photograph: Joseph J. Gallagher.*

sion of passenger services early this century and the closure, and subsequent demolition, of the railroad depot.

Many of the first settlers to arrive in Ivesdale were generational Irish and came from La Salle-Peru, Illinois where they had been working on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. (The term "generational" refers to immigrants and their descendants). Upon their arrival, the generational Irish established businesses in Ivesdale and became involved in agriculture as owner-operators, tenants, and laborers. Generational Germans began to arrive later in Ivesdale and assumed occupations similar to their generational Irish counterparts. Irish and German immigration to Ivesdale peaked in 1900 as did the total population of the town.

A church often accompanied immigrant settlement in the Midwest and served to strengthen community identity. St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, established in 1863 and centered on Ivesdale, became affectionately known as "Little Ireland" or "Little Erin" due to the large concentration of generational Irish residents. Even today, eighty-seven percent of Ivesdale residents consider Ivesdale an Irish-American town. Clues to the ethnic composition of the Ivesdale population are found among the surnames of residents,

amid the nomenclature adopted, and in cemetery inscriptions.

Even though many of the generational Irish and German residents shared European traditions, a common religion, and a similar occupational status, they were strangers drawn together. Generational Germans initially built a small Catholic church in Colfax township, north of Ivesdale, in 1879. This church was annexed to St. Joseph's Parish around 1890. However, St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Ivesdale acted as a bonding agent in uniting generational Irish and German Ivesdale residents into a closely-knit community. The link of not only a common religion but a common clergy served to unite these two ethnic communities. Activities in religious organizations centered around the church also encouraged unity. Despite the construction of a new church in Colfax township in 1912 (St. Boniface's), the 1890s proved significant in making the congregations of both St. Joseph's Church and St. Boniface's Church territorial. Endogamy appears to have been religious rather than simply ethnic. Even today, fifty-six percent of generational Irish residents identified some German ancestry while seventy-three percent of generational German residents identified some Irish lineage.

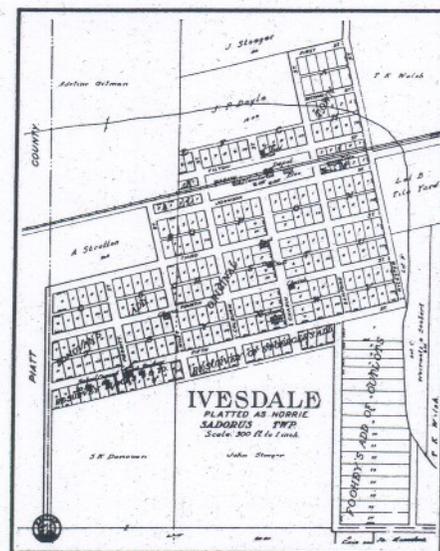
Characteristic of high Catholic concentrations in rural areas are settlement complexes including parish churches, rectories, schools, convents, and meeting halls (Sopher, 1967:28-29). All these elements of the religious settlement complex were established in Ivesdale. The first Catholic church was constructed in 1869; it was converted to a Catholic school upon the completion of the brick church building in 1893. The building has since been removed to a farm southeast of Ivesdale where it operates as a barn. St. Joseph's School, constructed in 1949 to the west of the church, served some of the educational needs of the community centered on Ivesdale and was an important generator of daily traffic. Although the school was closed in 1968 due to a lack of religious personnel, the building now operates as a community hall. A convent composed part of the religious complex earlier this century while the persistence of the religious built environment is manifest in the Ancient Order of Hibernian Hall, Knights of Columbus Hall, and parish rectory. The practice of attending daily mass established an important social and information network for the community which has been threatened since the death of the town's last resident priest in February 1989. The 1989 restoration of interior spaces of St. Joseph's Church was an attempt, in the words of one of its congregation, "to bring new life to our parish [and] to create interest in our heritage" (Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette, December 24, 1989:A-3). St. Joseph's Catholic Church was, and continues to be, an important cultural symbol to residents and visitors alike emphasizing the role of religion not only in the built environment but in the social organization of Ivesdale.

Farming in the vicinity of Ivesdale was initially based on the concept of the family farm which espoused four principles: land ownership, adequate farm size, fair prices for produce, and family cooperation. The establishment of a grain elevator in Ivesdale in 1865, a farmer's cooperative between February 1892 and August 1893, and the current Grand Prairie Cooperative in 1901 helped foster this concept and was a testament to the importance of agriculture in the emerging community. More recently, farm consolidation and the transformation of the farm from a family affair into a business has threatened the existence of Ivesdale. The apparent lack of increase in farm holdings suggested by land atlases and plat books is contradicted when one considers that many farmers increase their farming operations by renting farmland. Vogeler (1981:252) estimated that a small

town loses one business for every six farm families that become disengaged from farming in its hinterland. Moreover, the erosion of the family farm is consistent with the development of an individualistic society characterized by more open social groups, impersonal institutions, a competing value system, and increasing mobility (Duncan, 1981:50). Indeed, Ivesdale may be experiencing the decline of cumulative towns where "individual priorities have not included social investment in community preservation" (Jakle and Wilson, 1992:219).

Ivesdale's main commercial activities were concentrated along the axes of the railroad tracks and Chapin Street—characteristic shared by many railroad towns of the Midwest (Harvey, 1983:28). Saloons, such as the Ivesdale Inn on Chapin Street, played an important socializing role in the life of Ivesdale. The alcohol license/anti-license campaigns defined political identity and fueled local politics at the turn of the century. The Ivesdale Inn continues to be an important meeting place for town residents and rural dwellers. The First National Bank of Ivesdale is located on the southwest corner of the main intersection of Third and Chapin Streets, and was considered by many residents to represent the main architecturally significant building in the town. The bank building was the highlight of commercial architecture among railroad towns and was a symbol of security, strength, and character (Harvey, 1983:30). In addition to the bank, the bank building in Ivesdale housed a variety of other functions over the years including a hardware store, post office, and Ancient Order of Hibernian hall.

Four fires destroyed nineteen buildings in Ivesdale between 1916 and 1928. Many of the business premises which were destroyed or damaged were not replaced or reopened thus proving to be significant turning points in the development of the built environment. Fires were not the only means by which Ivesdale's central place functions were lost. The adoption of the automobile provided the rural dweller with greater geographic mobility. At the turn of the century, Ivesdale was still relatively free from the influence of the automobile with only ten cars kept in the environs of Ivesdale (Green, 1969:71). Improvements to the rural infrastructure meant that roads became the new lifeblood of many small Midwestern towns and rural areas in the early twentieth century. Three gas stations existed in Ivesdale earlier this century emphasizing the increasing influence of the automobile. Although only the Hillard Oil Company gas station on the southeast



1913 town plat of Ivesdale. Source: Combined 1893, 1913 and 1929 Atlases of Champaign County, Illinois.

corner of Johnson and Chapin Streets exists to the present day, the automobile retains its importance. Ivesdale residents have an average of 1.73 automobiles and 0.80 trucks or vans per household.

Competition from surrounding commercial centers resulted in some local businesses failing to remain competitive. With the closure of business premises in Ivesdale came a reduction in the number of people frequenting the town thus threatening the survival of those remaining businesses. The meat locker located on the southeast corner of Third and Chapin Streets replaced restaurant and grocery businesses which failed to remain competitive. It could be argued that as the exchange of local services decreased so did the sense of community. The Alblinger Brothers Hardware store, established in 1919 in the bank building and moved to its current location at 210 Chapin Street in 1949, is the only private business to survive from the early twentieth century. The most frequented building is the post office where residents go to collect their mail. A post office has operated in Ivesdale since 1866.

Functional decline need not necessarily imply population decline. Areas of population growth appear to be congruent with areas of greatest urban influence while proximity to large urban centers simultaneously encourages functional decline. Despite an initial decline early this century, the population of Ivesdale has since remained remarkably stable from 386 in 1930, to 360 in 1960, and 339 in 1990. However, one need only compare the business district of Ivesdale (bounded by Johnson Street to the north, Fourth Street to the south, Colburn Street to the west, and Sanford Street to the east)

in 1900 with its thirty-two business and service premises (Green, 1969:54) to 1990 with its ten business and service premises to demonstrate the functional decline which has taken place. Most of those remaining businesses in Ivesdale have reported a declining number of patrons in recent years.

The era of most house construction was 1890-1919 and continued to a lesser degree in the interwar years (1920-1944). Few houses were built between 1945 and 1969—a characteristic shared by many Midwestern small towns where stagnant economies, the loss of central place functions, and rural depopulation led to a dearth in house construction. The revitalization of house construction appears to represent the introduction of a non-farming population into the rural community. Only twenty percent of Ivesdale residents owned a farm in 1990 while only nine percent of them gave farming as their principal occupation. The continued existence of Ivesdale is becoming increasingly explained by its function as a "bedroom community" for Champaign-Urbana. Ivesdale's role as a "dormitory suburb" is further emphasized by the average single journey distance of 25.68 miles travelled to the work place by residents not engaged in farming activities. The single journey distance from Ivesdale to Champaign-Urbana is approximately twenty-four miles. Small towns, such as Ivesdale, provide a middleground between rural and urban areas and are becoming highly desirable built environments for would-be urban dwellers.

The utilitarian nature of Ivesdale's built environment did not result in architecturally elaborate buildings and, consequently, has not encouraged the preservation of its historic buildings. Nevertheless, the past and present built environment of Ivesdale communicates much information about the community and its history. Processes related to the railroad, the church, farming, and the automobile are just some of the processes changing the morphology of Ivesdale. The abandonment and dereliction of commercial buildings has destroyed the contiguous nature of Ivesdale's core built environment. As functional and material decline continues, so too does the desire, especially among younger members of the population, not to remain part of a declining community. Fundamental to reversing Ivesdale's perceived decline is an understanding and appreciation of its cultural landscape and a commitment to conserve its built environment.

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*This article was written by Joseph J. Gallagher, a Cultural Geographer with The URBANA Group. It is based on research conducted for his 1991 Master's thesis entitled "Irish Immigrant Cultural Transition in the Built Environment of Ivesdale, Illinois: 1870-1990."*

## President Signs Preservation Law Amendments

President Bush has signed the National Historic Preservation Amendments of 1992, more popularly known as the "Fowler Bill" after Senator Wycle Fowler, Jr. [D-Ga.], the bill's principal sponsor in the Senate. The law is the first significant change to the National Preservation Act since 1980.

The new law does several things to reinforce historic preservation activity. The legislation authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to delegate greater responsibilities to the State Historic Preservation Offices. The law includes provisions that strengthen the requirements of Section 106, the federal review process for considering adverse impacts of federal projects on historic resources. For example, it includes a new provision that penalizes the intentional demolition of historic properties to avoid review prior to federal involvement. Other enhancements to the federal preservation program in the new law include the establishment of a National Center for Preservation Technology and Training and a new historic preservation education and training program within the National

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Park Service. The law also clarifies that preservation grant funds may be used to help preserve National Register-listed religious properties so long as that aid is secular and does not promote religion.

Enactment of the amendments culminates several years of negotiation and work by the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and numerous other preservation groups. Details on various elements of the new law are available from the *Preservation Law Reporter*, November 9, 1992.

### Save These Dates!

#### **PACA Annual Membership Meeting**

Sunday, February 21  
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
C-U Station

#### **Kid's Building Fair**

Historic Preservation Week  
Saturday, May 15  
11:00 - 4:00

#### **Statewide Preservation Conference**

June 3-5  
Galena, IL

#### **PACA Newsletter**

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## Statewide Preservation Awards Nominations Needed

The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois is seeking nominations for its 1993 Preservation Awards. The awards honor individuals and organizations whose works demonstrate a commitment to excellence in historic preservation. LPCI will present the awards during the statewide Preservation Conference in Galena, Illinois, June 4, 1993. Last year, the Leal School architectural tour books were awarded the Educational Program Award.

Award categories include the following:

- Preservation Project of the Year
- Preservationist of the Year
- Distinguished Illinois Preservationist
- Bricks and Mortar
- Educational Program
- Publication
- Preservation Advocacy
- Community Revitalization
- Media Coverage
- Government Leadership
- Business Leadership
- Special Recognition

If you wish to nominate a local or state preservation project contact either PACA or LPCI for a nomination form. Complete submissions must be postmarked by February 22.

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