

Chapter 18

Illinois Grove

In Liberty Township, Section 7 is the location of the pioneer settlement of Illinois Grove. An Abbott family came to the wooded area in the 1850's. Other pioneer families were Lockhart, Cox, Clark, Frayer and McCurdy.

The Illinois Grove Post Office was established on September 14, 1857. Israel Lockwood was the first postmaster. The post office was closed in the early 1880's. Albert Squires was the last postmaster. Because the grove was on the route road that ran from Iowa Falls to State Center, mail was delivered twice a week.

The town had two general stores, hotel, livery barn, drug store, blacksmith shop, and saloon. William Haslett owned a general store during this era.

A new school house was built in 1874 on the site of the small brick school house to take care of the increased population. It is supposed the first school was built in the 1850's or 60's to provide for the pioneer children.

Clay Reed wrote in a history that he can remember when you could not tell where Illinois Grove ended and Bevins Grove began. The groves were very important to the early settlers; for fuel, shelter, and building materials.

The church at Illinois Grove was founded on May 1, 1894. The school house held the first church services. In 1898, the church was built. The Illinois Grove Friends Church was closed in August 1955 and was torn down in November 1956.

Taken from *Community History*, Zeoring, Iowa
Donald Gimm

ILLINOIS GROVE CEMETERY

The Illinois Grove Cemetery is another of pioneer cemeteries that is continuing to be used today. The earliest record of the cemetery's existence is a deed from A. M. Roberts to Trustees of Illinois Grove Burying Grounds, dated in April 1860 for the following described land.

"Commencing at a stake on Section line 43 rods south of the Northeast Corner of the Southeast Quarter of Section 7-85-20 running thence south 16 rods, thence west 12 rods, thence north 16 rods, thence east 12 rods."



Illinois Grove Church

The trustees were S. W. Thomas, Augustus M. Roberts, Alansen Slebbens, I. H. Lockwoods and Elijah Cox.

The cemetery also contains the grave of one of the few veterans of the Mexican War buried in Iowa, John S. Reed. He served about two years in Co. H, 5th Indiana Infantry during the war. Mr. Reed was one of the early settlers in the Illinois Grove area.

C. R. Bartine, who was born in 1880, in Section 18, Liberty Township on the Story-Marshall County line used to recount early days in Illinois Grove in the 1890's to 1900. At that time boxing was illegal in Marshall County. He used to tell about a group of men from Marshalltown and Marshall County who would take the Story City Branch train to the Marshall-Story County line where they would get off and walk north to Illinois Grove.

There they would set up a boxing ring and hold boxing matches. Other groups would also play poker, spreading their money out in the grass. It was a pretty boisterous and rowdy group and they would carry on until time to catch the train back to Marshalltown. Prohibition was also in effect in Marshall County at this time, as the county had voted in prohibition which lasted until July 1, 1911, so the area just across the county line had many attractions.

ILLINOIS GROVE COAL MINE

Coal was discovered in Liberty Township in 1872. Although no records can be found, Donald Grimm's book, "Community History - Zearing, Iowa" contains an article by Clay Reed, an early Illinois Grove settler indicating a cooperative mining company, with some shareholders listed: Abe Smith, William Holcomb, McCurdy, Henry Farber, James Tight, Elijah Cox, John Frayer, and John S. Reed.

According to that account the mine was operated until about 1876 when it was abandoned. Some old accounts say that the mine flooded and could not be pumped out. The above referred to account says the mine shaft was 150 feet deep and the coal vein was four feet thick.

The remnants of the old coal mine could still be seen until the last few years as a pile of coal slack on the north side of the road just east of Minerva Creek about three quarters of a mile west of the Old Liberty School Building (SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 9-85-20).

Various accounts of this mine have been received from many people in the area. Although it did not materialize, in early days there were high hopes of a developing coal industry in Liberty Township. This is the only mine known to exist and the coal apparently was of poor quality. Old maps mark "coal" in the area. Also, the Farmers Union Railroad, when formed, listed a place of its office as Coal City, Liberty Township, but to the best of anyone's recollections there never was any town in the area by that name.