

Riverside City

By: Chris Flook

After voting in a special election on Monday, May 18, 1903, the residents of the posh Riverside neighborhood just northwest of Muncie voted to become an independent community. The final vote was 94 in favor of incorporation and 60 against. The vote was contentious, with both sides accusing the other of fraud. Voting took place at only one location, the barn of Adam Hoover on the corner of Pauline and Sutton (now Ashland) streets.

For several months prior to the vote, a group of Riverside residents grumbled about their center township taxes not going toward much needed street and sewer improvements. These residents formed the Riverside City Improvement Club in the spring of 1903, which began work to install sidewalks, electric street lighting, and sewers. The RCIC also petitioned the Union Traction Company to extend an electric streetcar line across the river into the neighborhood.

Within a few weeks, the RCIC began canvassing the neighborhood, drumming up support for incorporation, a move which would allow Riverside to operate as an independent community. Coupled with the anger over what was felt as misuse of center township taxes, many Riverside residents feared eventual annexation from either Muncie across the river to the south, or by the new Normal City to their west.

The Riverside area at the time of the vote was a relatively new neighborhood, but considered a northwest suburb of the 'old' city of Muncie. In 1887, the area was mostly farmed by the following families: J.H. Marsh, M. E. Burson, D. R. Pershing, Alice Condit, Stephen Hathaway, and Sarah Calvert. The first residential housing began appearing in the 1880s and 1890s.

The original boundaries were the Hathaway Woods on the west (approximately where the Hazelwood Christian Church and Alva Kitselman house sit today); Riverside Avenue to the North, Wheeling Avenue to the east, and the White River to the south. After incorporation, Riverside expanded in 1906 and again in 1913.

The push for incorporation leading up to the May 18 vote wasn't universally supported by all Riversidonians. Opponents of the measure did not wish to see their taxes increased, as they owned unplatted, technically county land. Once incorporated, the new community would raise property taxes to support the the new government, planned infrastructure, and streets.

There were approximately 580 residents living in the Riverside suburb when the vote was taken, 170 were eligible to vote in the election. 154 showing up at Hoover's barn to cast their votes - the measure passed with almost two-thirds of residents in favor of incorporation.

The Indiana General Assembly approved the measure during the next legislative session in 1905. With Governor Hanly's signature that spring, Riverside became a full, independent, and distinct community. However, several other Riversides existed in Indiana (one each in Fountain, LaPorte, and Wells counties).

The post office general discouraged communities of the same name to exist inside the same state, so the official name for the new community was Riverside City...although most residents just kept referring to the community as Riverside.

After the May 1903 vote, Riverside City established a town council and divided the city into five wards, each with a trustee. William James was voted in as ward 1 trustee, Thomas Koontz for ward 2, W. P. Stevens in ward 3, Corydon Crandall in ward 4, and Adam Hoppes in ward 5. Frances Williams was voted in as Riverside City clerk and treasurer and Isaac Pidgeon served as town marshal.

It seems that the Riverside City Improvement Club continued infrastructure and commercial improvements in the years immediately following incorporation. A few electric lights street lights were erected, a sewer was installed in 1905, and a business block was added by James Corin on Meeks Avenue. Riverside City trustees also passed a measure to fine individuals \$10 a day for loose chickens, which seemed to be an ongoing problem.

Riverside City didn't last long. Over the next decade, Muncie expanded rapidly in all directions. On March 21, 1919, the Muncie City Council voted to annex both Riverside City and Normal City. A 1905 Indiana Law allowed for cities to annex neighboring incorporated communities on condition that 75% of proposed annexed residents offer no opposition. 110 Riversidonians signed and filed a remonstrance against annexation, but it wasn't enough and Riverside City was officially annexed into the city of Muncie in June of 1919.

Today, Riverside (they dropped the City) is an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places, having been added in 1999. The district features approximately 75 homes of historical significance including Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Bungalow/Craftsman, and American Foursquare architectural styles.