

## **Letter to the Editor – Star Courier**

### **By Larry Lock**

For more than 30 years I have lived in Kewanee and been interested in the history of Kewanee. During that time I have seen in print many times that Wethersfield was annexed to Kewanee in 1924, but also many times that it was in 1921. I have often “threatened” to look it up in the issues of the Star Courier, but just never got around to it. Having been recruited to write a brief history of Kewanee for the family history book to be published by the Henry County Genealogical Society, I finally looked it up.

The year is 1921. On June 30, 1921 the people of Kewanee (at that time north of Division St.) voted 831-200 to allow the annexation of the municipality of Wethersfield to the municipality of Kewanee. In a matter-of-fact front-page article, but with a full-page headline “Kewanee Votes for Annexation,” the Star Courier reported that the proposition carried in all five precincts in what was a “good sized vote for a special election.”

The article reported that the new population of Kewanee would be about 18,000 since the 1920 census showed 16,026 for Kewanee and 1,960 for Wethersfield (a total of 17,986).

The annexation vote did not seem to generate much excitement in Kewanee or the former Wethersfield, perhaps because it was something that was in the making for some time and was considered almost inevitable.

In an editorial the day after the vote, entitled “One City,” the editor wrote that those who opposed came out for the vote while those favoring “did not go out, knowing the proposition was certain to carry and thinking their vote would not be needed.”

The editorial continued: “Thus ends the long agitation for the union of the two municipalities, an agitation that runs back almost fifty years. The plan to unite has flared up from time to time, with long periods of quiet between. Annexation was inevitable with so many good reasons behind it, but the day and date were uncertain, until this spring when sentiment in Wethersfield crystalized very rapidly in favor of the movement.”

“Kewanee and Wethersfield both expect benefits from the annexation. There is no reason why either should be disappointed,” the editor concluded.

The day before the special election, the Star Courier previewed the voting with a headline of “Wethersfield to Become Part of Kewanee City.” It was reported that the citizens of Wethersfield voted “some time ago” and that the issue “carried by a large majority.” The main concern of Wethersfield “seems to have been fire protection and extension of water and sewer lines,” the Star Courier stated in the article, which also included comments by several prominent citizens favorable to annexation.

The “some time ago” vote in Wethersfield had taken place on June 2 and was reported in the Star Courier on June 3 in a very brief front-page article with a two-column headline. The vote was 468 to 101 in favor in an election where “unusual interest” was shown. “The annexation plan,” the Star Courier reported, “was started at the village election at which time a party favoring union with Kewanee was chosen by the voters.”

Certainly some, if not many, Wethersfielders were reluctant to see Wethersfield as a village come to an end after nearly 100 years. One such citizen was the author of the daily column in the Star Courier entitled “Full Report of News of Today in Wethersfield: Items Gathered from Village and Vicinity of Interest to All.”

Nestled in the middle of the July 1 column between items about the Frazers returning from a wedding trip to the Tri-Cities and the Hellers from Peoria visiting in the home of the Ebels on Tenney Street, the author expressed the following:

“By the election held in the City yesterday we become a part of the Good and Great with all its advantages and privileges. Wethersfield only in name, a name held in reverence by the older residents. We hope before another year shall have passed, we shall see the many advantages by the change and the most skeptical will see that it was for the betterment of both Kewanee and Wethersfield.”

In conclusion, let me put in a plug for the family history project of the Henry County Genealogical Society. A book including hundreds of family histories submitted by the families themselves will be published toward the end of

this year. The book also will include histories submitted by churches, schools, clubs and businesses and historical sketches of the county, cities and townships. The deadline for submitting family histories is June 15. If interested in submitting a family or corporate history, see the display in the genealogy section on the main floor of the Kewanee Public Library.