

KEWANEE—1854-2004

By Larry Lock

(Editor's Note: This summary history of Kewanee appeared originally in the Henry County Genealogical Society's "Family Histories of Henry County," published in 2000. It is included here with the approval of the society. The author, who is president of the Kewanee Historical Society and curator of its Robert and Marcella Richards Museum, has made some corrections and additions to the original work.)

BEGINNING AND OVERVIEW

The founding of Kewanee in 1854 was the result of two separate developments: the establishment of the colony or village of Wethersfield some 18 years before Kewanee and the building of a railroad from Mendota to Galesburg in 1854.

Wethersfield was founded in 1836 by the Connecticut Association as part of a New England movement to encourage its Protestant peoples to populate the northern portion of Illinois ahead of Roman Catholic immigrants and Southern pro-slavery elements. The Connecticut Association was started by Rev. Caleb Jewitt Tenney, the pastor of the Wethersfield, Connecticut Congregational Church. Some 50 stockholders pooled \$25,000 and sent Rev. Ithamar Pillsbury, the founder of Henry County's first town of Andover in 1835, Col. Sylvester Blish and Elizur Goodrich to purchase land somewhere close to Andover. Some 16,000 acres in what are now Wethersfield and Kewanee Townships were purchased and a town site was selected and named Wethersfield. The first settlers arrived late in 1836, others followed to the village in the wilderness, and by the early 1850's some 500 to 1000 people occupied the village and immediate surroundings. These Wethersfielders were true pioneers. Their closest contacts with "civilization" back east were Peoria on the Illinois River or Rock Island on the Mississippi River, both about 50 miles away.

As the railroad boom was ready to move west of Chicago in the early 1850's, the owners of the Military Tract Railroad decided to extend their road from Aurora to Galesburg and then Burlington by way of Mendota, Princeton, and southeastern Henry County. The route chosen through

Henry County would bypass Wethersfield one-and-a-half miles to the north. The decision was based either on the adverse terrain immediately west of Wethersfield or the unwillingness of the village government to give land or lend money to the railroad. Regardless, the decision to build to the north prompted several Wethersfield entrepreneurs to purchase land, give right-of-way to the railroad, and when the location of a depot was determined lay out the beginnings of a city in 1854.

Before the railroad determined its route most of the land that would become Kewanee was a farm owned by brothers Matthew and John Potter. They built a house in 1850 just north of what would be the corner of Main and Second Streets, thus Kewanee's first house. (In 1903 when the owners decided the house was standing in the way of progress, the Masonic Lodge bought the house, donated it to the Daughters of the American Revolution, and moved it to its current location on Park Avenue where it is used as the DAR's chapter house.) The Potters apparently wanted to be farmers rather than land developers. They sold five acres to George Morse and Silas Willard; the acreage was located where the road to Dixon (soon to be Main Street) crossed the proposed rail line. The Potters then traded the remainder of their quarter section (155 acres) to Henry Little, Capt. Sullivan Howard, Ralph Tenney and Nelson Lay in exchange for farmland immediately southeast of Wethersfield. The land was to the west of Main Street. The above gentlemen then joined with Col. Sylvester Blish, who owned a quarter section east of Main St., in laying out a new town on May 1, 1854. Five of Kewanee's founders (Blish, Howard, Little, Morse and Tenney) were from Wethersfield and were instrumental in founding and developing that village. Silas Willard was from Galesburg and would be one of the founders of Wataga, also a town on the railroad toward Galesburg, and Nelson Lay was from Kenosha, Wisconsin. Lay apparently was looking for a financial opportunity and he moved his family to Kewanee. They arrived in October of 1854 on one of the first trains into Kewanee.

The city's founders initially named their new town Berrien, after the engineer for the railroad. When he objected and recommended another name, Kewanee became the name of Wethersfield's neighbor to the north. "Kewanee" is believed to be the word used by native Americans in the area for "prairie chicken." Berrien apparently saw many of the birds in the course of his work through this area. A post office was established in 1854 and named Kewanee. The first postmaster was Col. Blish, who also had been Wethersfield's first postmaster. The name of Kewanee, for what was

still an unincorporated village, was made official by an act of the Illinois state legislature on February 14, 1855.

Kewanee sprang up almost overnight as many Wethersfielders literally picked up their homes and businesses and moved them one to two miles north. Buildings were raised, lowered onto logs and skidded to their destination, pulled by teams of oxen. By 1860 there were about 1,500 people in Kewanee. Wethersfield's development was stunted by the loss of many of its leading citizens, including founders of the colony. Wethersfield would remain a residential area and would eventually annex itself to Kewanee. In 1921 overwhelming votes in both Wethersfield and Kewanee approved the annexation.

Kewanee grew steadily but gradually from 1860 to 1890. In 1890 the population was 4,569. Then in the 1890's the city grew considerably along with Western Tube Co. (later Walworth) and Kewanee Boiler Co. The 1900 census showed 8,382. The next major growth period, the last for Kewanee, was the decade of World War I when virtually all Kewanee factories were busy with war work. Another factor was the annexation in 1911 of a large developed area west of Grove Street. From 1910 to 1920 Kewanee increased from 9,307 to 16,026.

Kewanee's population apparently peaked at 18,000 in 1921 with the annexation of Wethersfield. The 1920 census showed almost 2,000 for Wethersfield. Added to Kewanee's 16,000 that gave the "new" Kewanee 18,000 people. After a small decline in 1930 to 17,093, Kewanee's population held steady until 1950 when the census showed 16,821 Kewaneeans.

Following the 1958 removal of most of the operations at Walworth's Kewanee Works, the population began a decline that has yet to be reversed. The 1960 and 1970 census reports each showed a loss of about 500. The 1980 decline was about 1,600 to a population of 14,500. In 1990 the drop was another 1,500 to a figure of 12,969. Indications are and the hope is that the Kewanee census for 2000 will show at least some kind of increase. (That hope was not realized as the 2000 census showed a population of 12,900—no increase, but at least no substantial decrease.)

While Kewanee as a whole has declined considerably in population since World War II, the "Wethersfield" portion of the city has actually grown, both

numerically and commercially. From the late 40's to the early 70's almost all of the new housing development was south of Division St., on both the southeast and southwest corners of the city. After a 20-year "depression" in home building, new houses are being built in the latter half of the 90's, still mostly in that portion of Kewanee that is in Wethersfield Township. The retail business center of the city has moved from downtown to the south side, a movement that began in the 60's and was especially boosted in the 1970's by converting the Main-Tenney corridor from two lanes to four lanes. The building of Midland Plaza in 1970 and Wal-Mart in 1984 were major events in the business drift to the south.

In a sense Kewanee is returning to its roots. When Wethersfield, where it all began, was annexed to Kewanee in 1921, the area south of Division St. made up 11% of Kewanee (2,000 of total population of 18,000). However, in 1990 the area south of Division contained 27% of Kewanee's population (3,536 out of 12,969).

The remainder of this story of Kewanee follows in a chronological format.

KEWANEE HISTORY TIMELINE

1854 – The **first stores** in Kewanee were built on Main Street. The Pioneer Store was built just north of the railroad track by George Morse. A similar general store was built south of the track by Nelson Lay, who has been credited with shipping the first grain from Kewanee. (See Lay and Lyman, 1885.)

1854 – Also in Kewanee's first year the town's **first hotel** was built. Known as the Kewanee House, the two-story, white frame structure was located near the southwest corner of Tremont and Third Streets. It was replaced in 1884 by a brick structure. About 1920 the name was changed to the Wilson Hotel and later became the Earle Hotel. It survived until 1958 when it was destroyed by fire and not replaced. The site today is the Peoples National Bank parking lot.

1854 – Kewanee's **first school**, a small frame building, started north of the tracks on Main Street. Moved to Third Street, it was soon abandoned in favor of "Old Brown." Built in 1858 on the Third Street site, Old Brown was officially called **East School** and served Kewanee students until 1892. Along with East School, two other schools would serve Kewanee

elementary students for most of the remaining 1800's. Both schools were built in 1867 and both received additions in subsequent years. One, known as **West Brick**, was located on the present-day site of Irving School and became known by that name in 1899. It lasted until 1931 when present-day Irving was built. The other, known as **North Brick**, was located on the site of the present-day Franklin School, which was built in 1923. Two other schools served near-Kewanee children. From 1862 to 1882 a school existed on Cambridge Road in what was then called **Coal Valley** (Baker Park vicinity) and another school was built in 1864 to also serve coal miners' sons and daughters near the north end of East Street. Known as **Maunder's School**, it operated as a rural school district until 1948 when it was absorbed by the Kewanee district. (See 1887 and 1895.)

1854 – The oldest existing church congregation in Kewanee is the **First Baptist Church**, which was organized in 1851 in Wethersfield. However, just as the founding of Kewanee caused some of Wethersfield to break away, the same happened to the First Baptist Church of Wethersfield. Before a planned church building could be completed on Tenney, many of the congregation became the First Baptist Church of Kewanee in 1854. Meetings were held in several halls until a church was erected in 1867 at the northeast corner of Main and Third. It was replaced in 1906 by the present church of Greek classical design at the northwest corner of Tremont and Central.

1855 – Two other churches share the distinction of being among the first in Kewanee. Both the **Congregational and First Methodist Churches** were organized in 1855. The Congregational Church's first meeting place was located on the northeast corner of Tremont and First in 1858. In 1893 a new church was built on the same site and in 1953 the present church at Chestnut and Prospect was completed with the help of a \$100,000 contribution from Frank and Fannie Lay. The First Methodists built a church in 1856 at Burr and Fourth on a site that eventually became part of the Walworth property. A twin-steepled church was built in 1880 on the northeast corner of Chestnut and First. The present Methodist church at Main and Central was completed in 1927.

1856 – The **Academy**, the first high school for both Kewanee and Wethersfield, was built on the west side of Chestnut, just north of Wethersfield. Built by private donations gathered mainly by R.P. Parrish, father of Randall Parrish the author, the school was intended to meet the

desire of those parents who wanted and could afford an education for their children beyond the elementary grades. The joint venture prompted Wethersfield and Kewanee school districts to unite in 1858 under one school board and the name **Union School District**. Also in 1858 the Academy was turned over to the Union District when the board agreed to assume the Academy's debts. In 1870 the Union District was dissolved (reasons not known) and Kewanee purchased Wethersfield's interest in the Academy. It then became known as **Kewanee High School**. It remained a high school until Center School was built in 1887 to house both the high school and lower grades. The Academy was a two-story brick building with two classrooms on the second floor and a meeting hall on the first level, where Horace Greeley once spoke. When the old Academy was razed in 1887, its bell was placed in the Center School tower. From there it was moved in 1937 to the current Central School.

1860 Population 1,461

1861 – The first church bell in Kewanee was rung from the belfry of **St. John's Episcopal Church**, Kewanee's oldest church building in which services are still held. The church was actually built in 1857.

1861 – The **Civil War** started and Kewanee and Wethersfield men were among the 4,708 Henry County sons to serve in the Union forces. Kewanee men served in many units, but most local soldiers served in the 42nd, 112th and 124th regiments of the Illinois Volunteer Infantry. **Judge John H. Howe** was elected first lieutenant of the 124th's "A" company and ended the war as a brigadier general, Kewanee's highest ranking officer of the war. Kewanee's post of the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) was named after First Lt. **Julius A. Pratt**, who was killed at Vicksburg. The 124th Regiment was reported to have marched 4,100 miles, engaged in fourteen skirmishes, ten battles and two sieges before mustering out of service Aug. 15, 1865.

1865 – In the 20th century Kewanee would not be fortunate enough to be the site of an automobile manufacturer, but in the 1800's there were several wagon makers. First and most prominent was **O'Brien Carriage and Wagon Works**, which moved here in 1865 from Princeville. The company employed 50 workers and produced two wagons, two carriages and 100 harrows a day. O'Brien moved to Ohio in 1884, selling his business in the 400 block of N. Main to Kewanee Wagon Co.

1867 – The Illinois General Assembly **incorporated Kewanee as a village**. Village government lasted for 30 years and consisted of a five-person board of trustees, one of which was selected as president. Commenting on Kewanee’s village status, an 1885 history of Henry County asserted that Kewanee “is modestly content to forego the more pretentious airs and expenses of becoming a city, although possessed of many more inhabitants than many other places that have long since put on the trappings of cities.” (See 1897)

1867 – **Gunther Brick Yard** was established just west of the village. Two years later Gunther moved to an area between Lake and Seventh Streets just east of East Street, where he operated his business until about 1890. Other companies that took advantage of the ample clay found in Kewanee soil for brick making were Lyle Brick Co., Potter Brick Co. and Kewanee Mining and Manufacturing Co., all started in the 1890’s. Many Kewanee businesses, homes, streets and sidewalks were constructed with “Kewanee” bricks.

1867 – The **mining of coal** was a major asset for the early economy of Kewanee. In 1867 a state geological report asserted that 53,000 tons of coal were mined in and around Kewanee; 32,000 tons of which were shipped, 14,000 tons used by the railroad and the rest used for home consumption. There were many small mines; but according to the report **Platt Coal Co.** was the largest, embracing about 1,000 acres of land, and “by some arrangement handles and markets all the coal mined in the vicinity.” The report concluded that “the revenue derived from this deposit of mineral wealth will build Kewanee into a place of consequence.”

Lathrop Coal Co., founded in 1869, was also a major producer, employing about 200 miners. There would be more than 100 mines, many of them small operations. Most mines were “drift” mines dug into the side of a hill or ravine, but some were shaft mines. Some of the other names involved in the coal business were Kirley, Bates, Price, Atkinson, Meloen, Lamb, Barlow, Fischer, Fleming, Hodgett, Lester, Ratcliffe and many more. Coal mining would continue to be an important business around Kewanee until the 1930’s. The last mine closed in 1946.

1868 – Rome was not built in a day and the same is certainly true of Kewanee’s two premier industries—the **Walworth** and the **Boiler**. Both had their origin in a small company formed in 1868 at 200 E. Fourth known

as **Anderson Feed Steamer Co.** The company originally made boilers for cooking hog feed but soon started making steam heating systems for buildings, which it called “base burners and radiators.” The first system was reportedly installed in 1871 in the Kewanee home of O.H. Loomis, company secretary. Many more were built that year, including one for William E. Haxtun, who would purchase the company in 1875 and change the name to **Haxtun Steam Heater Co.** The young company grew steadily; by 1881 a larger factory was built, the foundry expanded, and 200 men were employed. J.H. Pierce left the wholesale hardware business to join Haxtun in 1881 as a member of the board of directors; he would be instrumental in the growth of the company and would serve one term in the Illinois state Senate and one term as mayor of Kewanee (1897-1899). Emerit E. Baker (known as E.E. or “double E”), another name “always connected with the upbuilding of the manufacturing interests of Kewanee,” had already joined the company and moved onto the board of directors in 1882. In the early 80’s the company began making valves, fittings, pipes and radiators--thus producing all the main components of steam heating systems. The production of pipe resulted in a major expansion of the physical property and plants, which was accomplished by a civic fund drive to acquire and donate to the company the land between the railroad and Third Street where the Walworth would be located until its departure from Kewanee in 1978. The Haxtun Co. continued to thrive in the 1880’s, surviving a major fire in 1888, rebuilding in several months and ending the decade with a payroll of 900. In 1890 employment went over 1,000 and the first “girls” were employed outside the offices, working in the core room. More importantly, National Tube Co. of McKeesport, Pennsylvania acquired a major interest in the company and its officers filled three of seven spots on the board of directors. In March of 1891 the old name of Haxtun Steam Heater Co. was discontinued and the name **Western Tube Co.** was adopted. (See 1891 for more on Western Tube, which would become Walworth in 1917, and 1892 for more on Kewanee Boiler Co.)

1870 Population 2,000 (estimate)

1874 – A town hall, initially known as **Library Hall**, was built. It served as **City Hall** for Kewanee until 1999 when the new City Hall was completed in Veterans’ Park. Located on Third and Tremont, the town hall included the Kewanee Post Office, offices of Lathrop Coal and in 1875 the newly formed Kewanee Public Library.

1875 – Kewanee Public Library was established with the election of a board of directors and the hiring of the first librarian, John G. Blish. The initial collection contained 262 books and the library was open evenings and Sunday afternoons. The library was located in Library Hall for five years and then in the Odd Fellows building on the northwest corner of Second and Tremont from 1880 to 1908. The library became a “Carnegie Library” in 1908 after a donation of \$25,000 from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and \$30,000 from two bond issues raised enough money to build the structure that houses Kewanee Public Library today. The building has been improved through the years; one major addition was a street-level elevator in 1974. During 2000 the library underwent a major renovation financed by a \$675,000 bond issue and volunteer fundraising. Until 1989 Kewanee Public Library was a township library for Kewanee township residents. Wethersfield Township residents paid to use the library before 1959 and from 1959 to 1989 Wethersfield Township Library District levied a tax that it gave to the Kewanee district for its residents to have free library service. Then in 1989 the two township library boards voted to establish a library district with a single board of seven trustees elected from both Kewanee and Wethersfield townships.

1880 Population 2,704

1881 – Gas lights lit the night on downtown streets for the first time on October 19. Kewanee Gas Light and Coke Co., which was organized on Dec. 11, 1880, was awarded a contract by the city to furnish 36 gaslights. The lights were lit each night, first by Nat Burton and then William Calcutt, until 1890 when the Kewanee Electric Co. installed electric lights.

1883 – The first municipal water system was developed using water from a shallow well obtaining its flow from gravel beds around Crystal Lake, which was located along Madison Avenue on land that is now in Baker Park. Deep wells were drilled in 1887 at the same site and additional wells were drilled about 1913 on Tremont near the downtown water tower. In 1939-40 a well was drilled and water tower erected on W. Garfield in the “Wethersfield part” of Kewanee.

1884 – The “Great Kewanee Fair” was established by public-minded citizens and became regarded “as the outstanding agricultural exhibit in Illinois” except for the State Fair. Generous premiums paid by the Fair board brought livestock exhibitors from throughout the Midwest. Located

at the fairgrounds where Kewanee High School stands today, the fair had attendance as high as 17,000 on one “big” day in 1909. Automobile races were featured in the 1920’s with some of “America’s leading drivers.” However, cancellation of the races in 1922 because of rain and deep mud and other financial disappointments led to the closing of the Great Kewanee Fair in 1926.

1885 – Lay and Lyman, a grand department store, “palatial for those times,” was constructed on the east side of Tremont between First and Second Streets. The downtown “anchor” store stretched more than half the block and stood three stories high, carrying everything from groceries to pianos. The store’s owners, Elias Lyman and Hiram T. Lay, had become partners in 1867 in the “5 or 8” store at 216 N. Tremont, so named because it stood five doors from Third Street and eight doors from Second. Lyman had owned the old Pioneer Store from 1862 until 1866 when it burned to the ground. The Pioneer Store had been started in 1854. Ironically, Kewanee’s other “first store” had been started in 1854 by Hiram Lay’s father, Nelson Lay. It was in that store and under subsequent owners that Hiram had learned the mercantile business. The 1885 department store was described by Hiram’s son Henry as “a change so radical and costly that it taxed their ability and resources.” The store was a success, however, as it remained in business until destroyed by the Great Kewanee Fire in 1942. At that time it was called the Kewanee Dry Goods Co. and it was not rebuilt. Previously the store was known by different names, but all contained the name Lyman or Lay or both.

1887 – The old Central School, first known as Center School, was completed on Central Blvd. It would serve as the high school for Kewanee until 1905 and also housed junior high and elementary students. The building lasted 50 years until replaced in 1938 by the current Central Junior High and Elementary School.

1888 – The Kewanee YMCA was organized on April 16. After occupying rented quarters in two different downtown buildings, the first permanent home of the “Y” was built in 1907 on the southeast corner of Main and First. YMCA members were ready for a new home by 1930 and did not let the Depression stop them. With the help of a \$100,000 donation from Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lay and another \$200,000 from others in the community, the **current YMCA** was built in 1931 on W. First Street. After considering a new building in the early 1980’s, major renovations were decided upon and

accomplished with a \$500,000 fundraising effort. Then in 1995 more than \$1.5 million was raised for two major additions, both to the south side of the unique 1931 building. The **Glen Andris Tumbling/Trampoline Center** was added in 1997. The **Dean L. Bates Memorial Pool**, a 25 by 75 foot swimming pool that replaced the pool in the original building, was completed in 1998.

1890 Population 4,569

1891 – The **Western Tube Company**, known until 1891 as Haxtun Steam Heater, would grow during the 1890's from a company of 1,000 workers to 2,000 employees, even after it sold off its boiler factory to E.E. Baker and associates in 1892. This growth was directed by John Pierce as company president. (In 1898 Pierce built the magnificent home or mansion at Prospect and Chestnut that today houses Rux Funeral Home.) During a boom period of 1906-07 Western Tube actually reached employment of 4,200 working in plants, mills, foundries and offices on about 40 acres of land in downtown Kewanee. Following a business depression in 1908 the work force dropped back to 2,300. In 1908 the National Tube Co., a U.S. Steel Corporation subsidiary that had gained controlling interest of Western Tube in 1895, changed the company's name once again, this time to **Kewanee Works of National Tube Company**. Writing in 1909, the Kewanee Works president exclaimed prophetically that "on account of its isolated position, away from the base of supplies which run into large tonnages, it is not likely that the mills (where pipe was produced) of this company in Kewanee will ever operate continuously to produce as great a product as in 1906, but the other lines of goods which are manufactured, fittings, valves, and other steam and water appliances, are continually becoming in greater demand and this part of the business will undoubtedly grow to very largely increased proportions." By 1910 National Tube would discontinue the production of pipe, selling the machinery from its pipe mills. And in 1917 National Tube would sell its Kewanee Works to **Walworth Co.**, one of the nation's largest producers of valves and fittings. (See 1917 for Walworth Co., Kewanee Works.)

1892 – The **first Visitation School** was erected on First Street. For three years it was leased to the bursting-at-the-seams public school district. Visitation School opened in 1895 under the guidance of Sisters of St. Dominic. A new building was occupied in 1922. While partially completed, the new building was used as a temporary church during the razing of the

old **Visitation Church** and the building of the new church, now known as **St. Mary's Church**. From 1923 to 1932 Visitation included a high school. A **new Visitation School**, including a large gymnasium, was completed in 1989 after a \$1.2 million fundraising campaign.

1892 – Kewanee Boiler Company, manufacturer of what would be worldwide known “Kewanee Boilers,” was formed. The boiler operation was part of Haxtun Steam Heater but became a separate company headed by E.E. Baker shortly after Haxtun became Western Tube in 1891. With Baker as company president, Kewanee Boiler operated for eight years in Western Tube's boiler shop on Main Street. In 1900 the Boiler moved to its present location on the west side of the city along the railroad. During a 19-month period of World War I the Boiler produced an “astounding total of 19,410 boilers, heaters and hot water storage tanks.” The post-war expansion in 1920 led to the building of a “million dollar addition,” bringing the Boiler works to 13 acres under roof on property of 33 acres. Peak employment reached 1,300 workers in the 1920's. In 1928 the company's name was changed to Kewanee Boiler Corporation when it became affiliated with the American Radiator Company. E.E. Baker, who had entered the infant boiler business in 1873 as an office boy, remained as president of the corporation until he died in 1929. He was succeeded by B.F. Baker, long-time company secretary, who had also been mayor of Kewanee from 1911 to 1919. Kewanee Boiler's war record was again outstanding during World War II as the company earned the coveted Army-Navy “E” award no less than five times in recognition of its war production. Kewanee Boiler continues to operate in Kewanee but has been owned by several different companies since American Radiator ownership. Employment was 700-800 in the 1950's but has dropped to a little over 200 in 2000. The current owner is Burnham Corporation. (See post-2000 addition.)

1893 – The Boss Manufacturing Company was incorporated. The company grew out of a small concern started in 1889 by W.H. Lyman, Judge C.C. Wilson, H.H. Perkins and H.T. Terry. They initially manufactured “Perkins Boss Husker” pins that had been patented by Perkins. During the 1890's the new company began making overalls and then canton flannel work gloves. Business thrived and Boss opened its first of many branch plants in Galesburg in 1903. The Kewanee factory operated from the company's inception until closing in 1977. Boss's national headquarters remains in Kewanee at its office building on First Street.

1893 – The **first telephone** in Kewanee was owned by Michael Quinn. It connected his home on S. East Street with his business on N. Tremont. **Central Telephone**, the first telephone company, began operations in 1895.

1895 – The **first electric light** bill was presented on Jan. 4 to the Masonic Lodge by Kewanee Electric Light and Motor Co.

1895 – The continued growth of Kewanee led to the construction of four new elementary schools near the turn of the century. On the north side of town on E. Tenth, **Bateman School** was started in 1895, becoming known as **Lyle School** in 1908. In 1898 **Washington School** was built on E. Second. It lasted until 1954. After its demolition Washington Apartments, high-rise for the elderly, was erected on the school site. **McKinley School** was built in 1903 on W. Sixth between Ross and Grove Streets. Discontinued as a school in 1948, it served during the 1950's as the district administration center. After demolition in the 1970's, the vacant site was returned to use in the 1990's when Bridgeway, Inc., provider of mental health services, built its McKinley Apartments. About 1900 **Tibbetts School** was built on Railroad Avenue in the east part of Kewanee, where it continued to operate until 1954. The building currently houses an antique business.

1897 – The General Assembly of Illinois **incorporated Kewanee as a city**. Kewanee would operate under the mayor-council form of city government with an elected mayor and 10 council members, two elected from each ward. The boundaries of the wards were established by the village board at its last official meeting. Industrialist John H. Pierce, president of Western Tube Co., was elected Kewanee's first mayor. Others elected included John P. Guest, clerk; Charles P. Remick, treasurer; William Lawson, attorney; Isaac Pyle, city magistrate; and aldermen I.C. Shipley, John Bauer, J.J. Fleming, Peter McDermott, Charles I. Pierce, S. T. Miles, H.C. Huntington, J.E. Anderson, H.T. Terry and Peter Fischer. City elections were partisan and all officials elected in 1897 were Republicans except for John Bauer, a Democrat who edged out his opponent by eight votes. (See 1911.)

1897 – **In a growing, thriving city optimism usually has no bounds.** Such seems to be the case in 1897 shortly after Kewanee had been

incorporated as a city. On October 26 the Kewanee Courier “broke” the news that Kewanee was on the verge of getting a second major railroad line, one being completed from St. Louis to Peoria to Minneapolis. “It can’t afford to miss us,” the paper’s editor proclaimed. Of course, it did miss Kewanee but the ecstatic journalist did not know that at the time and was prompted to sing the young city’s praises in the following manner: “Kewanee has grown somewhat rapidly from a small country village to a city of no mean size and no few attainments. Kewanee is one of the best business towns in the state aside from her manufacturing industries. We are situated in the center, so to speak, of a most beautiful and fertile agricultural district that is wealthy beyond compare. We have one of the richest coal fields, now only partially developed, right at our doors....Kewanee’s freight business is enormous, many cars are loaded with our products and sent all over the world every day.....This freight business is worth a great deal to the roads hauling it and this new road wants some of it. Our present railway facilities are good enough as far as they go but they don’t go far enough if we can do better. The new road being built from St. Louis via Peoria and Kewanee to Minneapolis will when completed, connect the Pacific with Atlantic, and either or both with the Great Lakes and the Gulf. In the palmy days of our new development we can take a ride without change of cars to Seattle, Portland, Philadelphia, New York or New Orleans.” Unfortunately, the newspaper’s “scoop” did not materialize.

1897 – The **Kewanee Courier** and the **Kewanee Star** merged to form the **Kewanee Star-Courier**, Kewanee’s only daily newspaper for the past 100-plus years. The Courier was the older of the two papers, having been started in 1876 by Dr. C.N. Whitney, a temperance lecturer. It had several other owners before merging with the Star, which had been started in the early 1890’s by Will Curtis and F.W. Stillwell. Before 1876 Kewaneeans found their news in the **Henry County Dial**, published in Kewanee since 1855. And in 1854 a paper called the Henry County Gazette was published on an irregular basis. The Star-Courier was printed at several locations before an impressive three-story building was constructed in 1908 by owner Xenophon Caverno on the northwest corner of First and Tremont. The paper used two stories and the third was a public hall where many community functions were held. The Star-Courier moved into its current building at Main and Central in 1957. The former plant then housed a hardware store for about 30 years and today contains offices and apartments.

1897 – The contract was let on July 20 for **paving the business district**. Tremont Street was the first to become mud-free, with brick being used for the pavement. The **first sanitary sewer lines** were laid in 1898.

1899 – **Free mail service** began in Kewanee on August 1. The first carriers were Bert M. Pyle, George Hawkes and Dudley Rule.

1900 Population 8,382

1902 – **St. Francis Hospital** was established in a two-story frame house at the northwest corner of Tremont and Central Blvd. Kewanee's first hospital was staffed by six Franciscan sisters and had 11 beds. When Elias Lyman donated \$8,000, the sisters acquired land on Elliott Street and in 1904 opened a three-story brick hospital that cost \$42,000. A School for Nurses was begun in 1906; a wing was added to the hospital in 1917 for a nurses' home. Another annex to the hospital in 1941 boosted bed capacity to 100. A new home for the nurses was built in 1945. St. Francis Hospital found it necessary to close in 1970 and the original building was demolished leaving the expansion buildings known today as Arrow Towers, which contain offices and apartments. The frame house that housed the original hospital was moved in 1905 to make way for the First Baptist Church. Its current location is 115 N. Lakeview Avenue.

1903 – **Kewanee Business College** was established. It was operated under several owners in several locations until closing in 1944. One of its homes was on the third floor of the Star Courier building at Tremont and First. When it closed, it was housed above Bondi's Store at 214 N. Tremont.

1903 – **Wethersfield's Blish School** was built on the Commons. A southside landmark through the years, the building replaced the two small structures that housed elementary students of the Wethersfield school district at that time. Part of the Blish School was also used for Wethersfield's first high school. Previously high school age students were "tuitioned" to other school districts, mainly Kewanee. The Blish campus was especially impressive, having the look of a college campus. (See 1914.)

1903 – Streetcars began running in Kewanee on August 21. The initial streetcar track ran from Terminal Park on Lake Street to downtown Kewanee. During the first two days of operation 10,000 people reportedly rode the two cars used on the line. More lines and cars were added during the next two years, including track connecting Kewanee with Galva. Initially owned by a Galesburg company, the line was sold in 1904 to Kewanee owners. Terminal Park with its ballpark was built by the streetcar company to increase business. By 1906 carbarns, a water tower, powerhouse and a lake were built on land at the west end of McClure in Wethersfield that the company named Windmont Park. This became the southwest end of the streetcar line. Despite its promising beginning the streetcar business struggled over the years. In 1923 because of continued losses due to increased use of automobiles, the bankrupt company was placed in receivership. Service was suspended, but it was resumed one year later when the business was purchased by the newly formed Kewanee Public Service Company, which also owned the gas and electric plants in Kewanee. New cars were purchased and on November 29, 1924, 10,000 riders took advantage of free service on reopening day. Although still not very profitable, the streetcar business hung on for another decade. The Galva-Kewanee interurban ceased to operate in 1932 and the streetcars in Kewanee came to a halt in 1936.

1904 – George Randall Parrish, having published his first novel in 1904, returned home to Kewanee to write another 30 books and play an active role in its civic life before his death in 1923. Born in Kewanee in 1858 the son of Kewanee pioneers Rufus P. and Frances A. Hollis Parrish, he graduated from the old Academy (Kewanee High School) in 1875. Four years and four schools later Parrish became a lawyer in Iowa. Before returning home he experienced a variety of occupations, including law, itinerant railroading, shepherding, gold mining, journalism and the ministry in several western states and Illinois. His first novel, “When Wilderness Was King,” was published in 1904 while he was working as a reporter in Chicago. Encouraged by his initial success, Randall Parrish (the name he used for his novels) came home accompanied by his second wife, Rose Tyrrell, to devote full-time to writing his stories. His books were mainly romantic novels set against historical backgrounds. He traveled the lecture circuit when not writing and during World War I spoke on behalf of Liberty Loans and the Red Cross. Until his death in 1923, he lived in the family home at 235 S. Chestnut. Kewanee Public Library and the Kewanee Historical Society have many of his works.

1904 – A new **Kewanee High School** was completed on the south side of the block that included Central School, leaving the latter to house junior and elementary students only. The project completed 10 years of school construction for the growing, thriving community of Kewanee. Four elementary buildings were constructed between 1895 and 1903. In the 1906 financial statement the district superintendent reported a bonded indebtedness of \$74,900 for the five buildings, including \$40,000 for the high school, which was built at a cost of \$114,000. The new high school had a little over 300 students in its first year, equally divided between boys and girls. For comparison purposes Kewanee school district today has about the same population as in 1905, but the high school now has over 600 students. The high school would be used just over 50 years, its last graduating class being in 1956. The impressive three-story building was razed about 10 years later to make way for the Adela Wesebaum Addition to Central School, which currently houses the school district's administrative offices.

1906 – **Billy Sunday** came to Kewanee “To Fight Sin” the Star-Courier told its readers in bold headlines in its October 29 issue. The nationally-known evangelist needed 38 days of meetings at the Armory on Central Blvd. just west of Central School to complete his attack and the Star-Courier gave front page coverage each day. Most of the sermons were reprinted under such headlines as “Salvation Comes To Over Three Hundred.” The amount of money collected and the number of baptisms were reported each day. And eventually the newspaper began to list the names of all those who were baptized. At the end of the campaign the total results reported by the Star-Courier were 3,018 “conversions,” 200,000 total attendance, \$5,400 offering for “Mr. Sunday,” \$4,060.72 raised for “current expenses” and 82 meetings in the 38-day revival.

1907 – **St. Stanislaus School** opened on Tenth and N. Main in a newly constructed four-classroom building. Except for several years in the early 1930's (the Great Depression) the school remained open until 1970. Attendance was around 125 during the last few years.

1907 – **Windmont Park**, “Kewanee's new summer resort,” opened on June 6. Owned by the streetcar company, the park featured a large lake and a \$5,000 pavilion surrounded by a promenade. On opening night over 1,000 people attended a vaudeville performance and a “fine musical

performance” by Kewanee’s 32-piece Redman band. The many lights placed throughout the park especially impressed the Star-Courier reporter who claimed the “resort is made nearly as light as day.” In fact, everything about opening night impressed the reporter, including the “very satisfactory manner” in which the streetcar company handled the crowd. Six cars were used at 10-minute intervals to transport the throng “out to” Windmont. At the end of the century (the 1990’s) a different kind of light show appears in the park at each Christmas season as volunteers decorate with thousands and **thousands of Christmas lights**. Each year the display has been made more elaborate and is viewed by thousands from the Kewanee area.

1908 – While the first automobile hit the road in Kewanee before 1908, the **first automobile dealer** in the city was A.C. Taylor, who sold a one-cycle Glyde in that year at his wagon and buggy business in the 100 block of W. Church in what was then Wethersfield. The buggy business, including farm implements and hardware, was begun in 1889. In 1916 Taylor began to sell Hudsons, which later became American Motors, a line that his descendants continue to sell today. In 1929 the business was moved to the southwest corner of Tenney and Church, where four generations of Taylors continued to serve the motoring needs of Kewanee.

1908 – Professional baseball was played in Kewanee for six seasons. The Kewanee Boilermakers competed in the Central Association, a Class D minor league. Games were played at Terminal Park at the east end of Lake Street against teams from cities including Quincy, Muscatine and Galesburg. After a long hiatus Kewanee would again have a minor league team in 1948 and 1949. The Kewanee Athletics, a “farm club” of the Philadelphia Athletics, finished in third place in 1949, the best finish of Kewanee’s minor league entries.

1908 – Billy Papke, a Kewanee **boxer**, won the world’s middleweight boxing title. He moved to Kewanee from Spring Valley shortly before gaining the title to take advantage of training facilities. He won the title from Stanley Ketchel and then lost it back to three months later. He remained here until 1919 when he moved to California. He died there in 1936 after tragically killing his wife and himself.

1910 Population 9,307

1910 – Kewanee became a first class **post office** when annual receipts reached over \$40,000 annually. The first class status was accompanied by the completion of a new post office building on the southwest corner of First and Chestnut at a cost of \$65,000. The substantial building functioned as a post office until 1963, when the current post office was built on Tremont next to the Library. Since then the old post office building has housed several businesses. In the latter 1990's it was considered by the City Council for renovation into a new City Hall. After some controversy, the older structure was rejected in favor a brand new building that was completed in 1999.

1911 – Kewanee voters adopted the **commission form of city government** after just 14 years of mayor-council or aldermanic government. The issue passed decisively--1,115 to 581. The movement toward what its proponents considered a more progressive and business-like form of municipal government began in the fall of 1910 under the leadership of the Commercial Club and was championed by the Star Courier. The proposal carried overwhelmingly in the two southern wards (roughly between Division and Central), but passed by just 35 votes in the three northern wards. The wards would cease to exist since the city council, consisting of a mayor and four commissioners, would be elected at-large on a non-partisan basis for four-year terms under the commission form. The city council would have both legislative and executive powers; the council would pass ordinances including taxing and spending and each of the five commissioners (including mayor) would be in charge of administering one or two city departments. B.F. Baker, Kewanee Boiler executive, had the distinction of being the first mayor under the commission form. He was mayor for two terms, 1911-1919. The commission form remained until 1986 when the council-manager form was adopted. (See 1986.)

1912 – **Kewanee Machinery and Conveyor** was established by Wallace Glidden and B.F. Baker to produce seed corn hangers. Glidden, Baker's secretary at Kewanee Boiler, interested him in the idea of forming the partnership that was known originally as the Kewanee Corn Hanger Co. The company produced farm implements at several sites before building a large factory on the west edge of the city along the railroad in 1926; an addition in 1946 doubled its floor space. Like other Kewanee plants, Machinery and Conveyor received the Army Ordnance's "E" award for World War II production -- "over a million 37mm high explosive projectiles"

were produced. The company's business boomed in the 1950's with the production of the first wheel mounted disks. In 1968 the company built a second plant in Kirksville, Missouri. Then in 1972 the company was sold to Chromalloy American Corporation and became known in 1975 as the Kewanee Machinery Division. In 1983 Allied Products of Chicago bought the local plant and continued to make farm implements until the early 1990's when the plant was converted to a warehouse for Allied's White-New Idea division. In 1994 the warehouse was closed and the building was put up for sale.

1914 – Wethersfield Township High School district was created, and a new Wethersfield High School was built in time for the 1915 school year. Located on McClure St. north of the Blish School, the building would serve as the high school until 1952 when today's high school was built on Willard Street. The old high school building then served as a junior high until it burned in 1965. At that time today's Elementary School was constructed adjacent to the high school. The Blish building then became the junior high school and also housed the district's administration offices. In 1949 prior to these developments Wethersfield's two school districts, one elementary and one high school, were merged into a single district, No. 230, with one board of education.

1917 – The United States entered **World War I** on April 6, but for many Kewanee area men and their families the war began on March 26 when Kewanee's Company K of the Illinois National Guard was called for federal service. The company, led by Capt. Ernest E. Stull, went first to Springfield and then in September to Camp Logan in Texas for training. The company was combined with others to form Battery E of the 123rd Field Artillery Regiment of the 33rd Division (Illinois National Guardsmen). When Capt. Stull was assigned to Fort Sill, Capt. Harold D. Swain, a Kewanee dentist, was placed in command of the battery. Battery E arrived in France in June of 1918 and saw action in the major offensives which led to the surrender of Germany—St. Mihiel, Verdun and Meuse-Argonne. Two members of the unit, Lt. William Euard and Pvt. Lloyd Elliott, were among the 20 Kewaneeans killed in the war. While the Star-Courier and its readers were able to give special attention to Battery E, it is obvious from the fatality figures that Kewanee area residents served in many units of the American armed services in the “war over there.”

1917 – In the midst of World War I the massive Kewanee Works of National Tube Co. became **Kewanee Works of Walworth Manufacturing Co.** Walworth was founded in Boston in 1842 and by 1917 its headquarters was in New York. The Kewanee plant became the largest of its six facilities. Factory floor space in the several buildings exceeded 800,000 square feet. They were located on 40 acres of land that also included two miles of railroad track. The Kewanee plant produced brass, iron and steel valves and fittings on a “high tonnage basis,” ranging in size from three ounces to three tons. “A city within a city,” Kewanee Works had its own water system, police department, fire department, medical staff and more. From 1917 until after World War II employment was usually a little over 2,000. One of Walworth’s outstanding events was on May 29, 1942 when the governor of Illinois, the president of the company and many other military, political and business dignitaries came to Kewanee for a ceremony and celebration marking both the receipt of the Kewanee’s Works first of several “E” awards for military production and the 100th anniversary of Walworth’s founding. During World War II a “shell plant” was constructed for the production of casings for large artillery shells. For more than half a century, Walworth was to Kewanee what Caterpillar is to Peoria. There were troubled times, business recessions and lay-offs and several labor-management disputes resulting in strikes, but on the whole Walworth for many years was good for Kewanee. But “all good things come to an end” and that is what happened to Walworth in Kewanee during the generation after World War II. (See 1958 and 1978.)

1918 – The news that an **armistice** had been signed, ending the “war to end all wars,” touched off the “wildest, most delirious and prolonged celebration Kewanee has ever experienced—or probably will experience,” according to the Star-Courier. The news reached the Star-Courier minutes after 3 a.m. on November 11. The Star-Courier informed Mayor H.F. Baker and together they spread the news to police, firemen, factories and churches. Bells and sirens roused everyone from their sleep and by 4 a.m. downtown Kewanee “was packed with thousands of celebrants who shouted, sang and wept in exultation and relief.” A universal holiday was assumed as few, if any, showed up for work. Impromptu parades filled the day and a quickly-organized official parade was the highlight of the day. Led by Mayor Baker, the afternoon parade included many uniformed soldiers and veterans, representatives of many civic, religious and business organizations and numerous bands. The parade concluded with patriotic speeches, including one by author Randall Parrish.

1919 – Kewanee Public Hospital opened for business on April 17 some 18 years after the Kewanee Hospital Association was formed in 1901 for the purpose of raising funds to build a hospital. The association was composed of women from the city's various women's societies who believed a hospital was especially needed for the many single men who worked in the factories and lived in boarding houses. A site for a hospital (the present site of Kewanee Hospital) was purchased by the Association, but fund drives in 1902 and 1907 failed to achieve the desired amount. The women kept the society alive and in 1917 a fund drive headed by P.A. Waller surpassed the goal of \$60,000 in three weeks and the construction of a second hospital for Kewanee was underway. A nursing school was started also in 1919 and the Ruby Leora Waller Nurses Home was built in 1929. The school, however, was discontinued in 1943. Growth of the hospital has been continuous with major expansions in 1957, 1967, 1983 and 1987. New technology and programs have accompanied the physical expansion of the hospital. In 1989 a reorganization resulted in a name change to simply Kewanee Hospital. The parent organization is Kewanee Care Corporation, a not-for-profit corporation. Included in the organization are Kewanee Hospital Foundation, dedicated to fund development, and Kewanee Hospital Association, responsible for medical services and programs. Medical treatment and Kewanee Hospital have grown together during the second half of the 20th century and today the hospital is clearly one of the leading business enterprises in Kewanee, employing about 450 people.

1919 – A United States government **freighter named “Kewanee”** was launched on June 7 at Elizabeth, N.J. with a delegation from Kewanee invited to attend. Miss Clara Dossche, a 19-year-old employee in the molding room at Walworth Kewanee Works, was chosen to christen the ship since many Walworth products were used in the ship. P.A. Waller, Boss Co. president, spoke on behalf of Kewanee. When Miss Dossche returned to Kewanee, she entered nurse's training and then became a nurse at Walworth. The USS Kewanee was taken out of service shortly after the end of World War II.

1919 – The armistice celebration was repeated on June 18 when 25,000 people (according to newspaper estimate) jammed the downtown streets and honored 700 uniformed service men and women as they marched by in a **“Welcome Home” victory parade**. The celebration was organized after Kewanee's Battery E arrived home on June 7.

1919 – In the summer following the Great War one of the major improvements in the life of the city took place with the formation of **Kewanee Park District** under the leadership and beneficence of E. E. Baker, president of Kewanee Boiler. On July 2 Baker offered at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce to donate \$50,000 for purchasing and improving parks. The offer came with the proviso that a park district be formed, a similar sum of money be raised by bond issue and sufficient tax levied to retire the bonds and maintain the parks. The people of Kewanee promptly voted to create a park district that would operate as a separate unit of local government, much like a school district, and elected Baker as its first president. Baker's generosity was continued in 1925 with the creation of a \$400,000 trust fund known as Emerit E. Baker, Inc. The fund continues to provide revenue for park district programs. One of the two premier parks of the district was begun immediately in 1919 with the acquisition of the former Kewanee Mining Company's deserted brickyards and coal mine in the northeast part of the city. The 18 acres became known as **Northeast Park** and housed baseball diamonds, playgrounds, and a large swimming pool. (See 1931.) **Baker Park**, the other premier park and named after "you guessed it," was purchased in 1925. Its 100 acres of former coal mines and woods became the site of a nine-hole golf course, scenic drive, lagoons and gun club. In 1939 the golf course was extended to 18 holes when land was purchased east of Cambridge Road that included Crystal Lake recreational area. Other parks include **Chatauqua Park**, the former Blish Woods, which was acquired in 1922; **Liberty Park**, originally located in 1919 near Kewanee Boiler's front entrance but later moved to the north end of the city's West Park; and **Windmont Park**, acquired in 1937, a year after the closing of the streetcar company that had owned the park. Improvements to the parks have been continuous since the district's beginning. (See 1931 and 1999.)

1919 – **Kewanee Manufacturing Company** was established and like many previously established Kewanee industries, it was "home made." Royal Hayward, William Lyman and J.H. Baethke started the company with two employees at Tremont and Fourth to produce coal chutes. Success and expansion at the original site led to the construction of a modern plant in 1929 in the industrial area on the west side of Kewanee along the railroad. During World War II the company earned its "E" award for production that included bomb fins and anti-tank mines. While producing several items fabricated from metal, the company came to specialize in steel and

aluminum window frames and doors. In 1982 the company became **Kewanee Corporation** when it was purchased by Fred Pipin of Chicago. The business continues today with about 130 employees.

1920 Population 16,026

1921 – Wethersfield was annexed to Kewanee on June 30 when Kewanee voters approved the issue 831 to 200 in a special election. Wethersfield voters had approved the measure a month earlier by an equally lopsided margin of 468 to 101. In an editorial entitled “One City,” the Star-Courier said “the long agitation for the union of the two municipalities thus ends, an agitation that runs back almost fifty years.” Wethersfield’s approximately 2,000 (1,960 in the 1920 census) residents apparently felt the need for water and sewer service and better police and fire protection. But whatever the reasons, there was now one city where once there had been two. Two political units called Wethersfield, however, would remain. There would still be Wethersfield Township, and Wethersfield school district would remain separate from Kewanee’s. During the rest of the 20th century there would be discussion, consideration and maybe even “agitation” at several times about uniting the two school districts, but today there are still two separate districts.

1924 – A record vote in a city election occurred at a special election on June 7, 1924 when 8,021 went to the polls. The issue was **municipal ownership of an electric plant** just completed by the city under the leadership of Mayor James H. Andrews. When B.F. Lyons of Beloit, Wisconsin offered to buy the plant for \$120,000 and give the city efficient streetcar service (the previous company had bankrupted) and electricity and gas at “reasonable” rates, the Greater Kewanee League was organized by supporters of the Lyons Plan. The League gathered over 4,000 signatures and petitioned the city council to hold a special election to decide the issue. The council conceded and after the “most intensive house-to-house campaign in Kewanee history,” a decisive majority of the 8,021 voters adopted the Lyons Plan, thus rejecting municipal ownership of the power plant. The defeat for Mayor Andrews, who was in the midst of his second term, did not prevent him from being re-elected two more times. In all he served from 1919-1935. Andrews, an attorney by profession, achieved prominence outside Kewanee as well. He was twice elected president of the Illinois Municipal League and President Roosevelt appointed him to the state committee of the Public Works Administration,

which allocated funds for construction of public works in the state during the Depression. The issue of a municipal power plant was revisited in 1945 when the city council led by Mayor Dan Bates called for a special election on Dec. 12 to approve building a city-owned plant. The proposal was defeated convincingly, 1535 yes votes to 3495 against.

1926 – The **first “hard” road** to enter Kewanee was Route 34 from the east. Later in the year Route 78 was completed through Kewanee and in 1927 Route 81 between Kewanee and Cambridge was completed. The improvements flowed from the passage in 1924 of a statewide bond referendum for \$100 million for road improvements.

1926 -- The **“Cooper Hoax”** was the top news story for “sustaining interest” during Kewanee’s first century according to Chris Ketrledge, long-time editor of the Star Courier. Ketrledge relates the story of John Cooper in the 1954 Centennial edition of the Star Courier. Cooper was a Kewanee boilermaker with a wife and four children who in December of 1925 announced that he had inherited \$1.4 million (later becoming \$5.6 million) and a large estate from his great-grandmother in Roanoke, Virginia. He was to receive the inheritance when he became 33 in September. Cooper soon promised \$250,000 to rebuild his church, \$100,000 for Kewanee Public Hospital and other “generous” donations. Ketrledge writes that a “large segment of the city’s population accepted the story as the gospel truth;” but not Philip Adler, the new editor and publisher of the Star-Courier. When nothing happened relative to the inheritance claim and the promised donations, the Star-Courier interviewed Cooper for a story on August 7, 1926. Still skeptical, an intensive investigation was begun by the newspaper. In an Extra on September 27 the Star-Courier was ready to proclaim: “Cooper’s Story of Millions Big Hoax, Deposits \$75,000 in Worthless Checks.” Cooper and family “conveniently disappeared,” but only after his hallucinations had “cost a number of unsuspecting citizens several thousand dollars” and betrayed the faith that many had placed in his “generosity.” Cooper’s story proved to be a complete fabrication.

1926 – **Fred Francis**, who was born near Kewanee and lived most of his life near Kewanee, became a full-fledged Kewaneean in death. When he died in 1926, his home, **“Woodland Palace,”** and the 40 acres on which it stood four miles east of Kewanee just north of Route 34, were left in his will to the city of Kewanee on the condition the property be maintained and opened to the public. Fred Francis, a graduate of the University of Illinois in

1878, was a mechanical genius who gave up a career with the Elgin Watch Co. after 11 years of employment and receipt of considerable royalties for his inventions because he had “more money than anyone needed.” He rejected job offers from business and academia and bought 40 acres near Kewanee on which to build a unique home, filled with innovations ahead of their time. They included a type of baseboard heating and air conditioning, both accomplished with wind power. After his wife Jenny contracted tuberculosis, he built a solarium in which the air changed every 60 seconds. His home included an automatic door and combination screens and storm windows and many more innovations. Francis was an unusual, but familiar, sight around Kewanee. He rode to town on his bicycle to get supplies, almost always was barefoot, and never cut his hair or beard. Since his death in 1926, Francis Park has been open to the public. In 1967 some interested citizens led by Rosemary Kuster formed the **Francis Park Foundation** in an effort to rejuvenate the home of Fred Francis. They raised funds for that purpose and in cooperation with the city managed to have Woodland Palace declared a State Historic Site in 1974 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. Proud of their achievement, the foundation, with city approval, decided to sponsor a Bicentennial Festival in 1976 on the Fourth of July. The one-day event proved so popular that it has been continued to the present. Today Woodland Palace and the park are open from mid-April to mid-October for both day tourists and overnight campers.

1927 – Kewaneeans received a taste of the Great Depression several years before its “official” beginning when on September 16 the **Savings Bank of Kewanee went into bankruptcy**, wiping out the savings, at least temporarily of 100’s of Kewaneeans. The losses proved temporary as six months later the Peoples State Bank (today Peoples National Bank) was organized under the leadership of Charles D. Terry. The new bank assumed the assets and debits of the Savings Bank and restored the accounts of some 400 depositors. Meanwhile, two owners of the Savings Bank were indicted for fraud. The Savings Bank was one of four banks that served Kewanee during its economic heyday of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. All were located on Tremont Street and included the First National Bank of Kewanee, established in 1871; the Union National Bank, 1881 and the Kewanee National Bank, 1893. The failed Savings Bank was started in 1902 and was known as the “white bank” (The white building at Tremont and Second is today occupied by T’Quila’s Restaurant.) The three older banks joined the Savings Bank in nonexistence when they were closed in

March 1933 during the bank holiday ordered by President Roosevelt and not allowed to reopen. The only Kewanee bank with assets deemed strong enough to reopen was recently-established Peoples State Bank.

1930 Population 17,093

1930 – Kewanee joined the “air age” as 10,000 people attended an air show held in conjunction with the dedication of **Kewanee Airport**. Located just south of Kewanee on the east side of Route 34/78, the \$60,000 airport was built by Kewanee Airports, Inc., a corporation made up of public-spirited citizens who bought stock at \$100 a share. The air show was a sensation and 1,243 people managed to get a ride on a commercial passenger airplane for “one and a half cents per pound.” In time this airport would prove inadequate, but in the pre-World War II years it was satisfactory. (See 1963.)

1931 – Kewanee Park District completed two projects that proved immensely popular during the **Great Depression** of the 1930’s. One was the **lighting of Northeast Park baseball diamond**, making it the first lighted public recreation ball field in the country. At an organizational meeting of the new Sunset League for men, chairman John Kemp prophetically asserted, “we can now make baseball the grand old sport it used to be in Kewanee 30 years ago.” Over 5,000 fans attended the first game under the lights on June 2. Eight nights of the Sunset League attracted an estimated 37,500 fans during that first season. In 1932 an estimated 111,000 reportedly enjoyed 20 nights of baseball. The other project was the completion of a **new concrete swimming pool** to replace the unfiltered pool of the 1920’s and a **bathhouse** of “particularly attractive architectural design.” A gala grand opening was held on July 30 with a dedication program, free swimming and night baseball. During 1932 over 60,000 “bathers” used the pool with a one-day record of 2,209 at the “peer of all swimming facilities in central Illinois.” (See 1999.) More, indeed much more, about the Great Depression, the light side as well as the more serious side, can be found in “**The Depression Years: 1930-1941,**” by **Robert C. Richards, Sr.** The local historian, founder of the Kewanee Historical Society, used daily newspapers and personal experience to give a day-by-day description of the depression years.

1933 – Just a sampling of the more serious side of the **Great Depression** in Kewanee from Bob Richards’ book. Kewanee teachers received full pay

for the previous four months on June 1, after receiving partial pay and vouchers. The Kewanee Emergency Relief Committee worked to find food, clothing and fuel for families in great need. In August the committee reported that 500 families were on relief, a considerable improvement from the peak of 950 families at the beginning of the year--but not of course for the 500 still in need. The “alphabet programs” of the government became well known. Hundreds of Kewanee boys left home to work on conservation projects all over the country with the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC). Many unemployed men received jobs with local governments from funds provided by the Civil Works Administration (CWA) or Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Cooperative Garden project was organized, providing space for hundreds to grow some of their own food and supplies and a location to can that food for winter. And so it went until, ironically, the tragedy of World War II provided economic relief and brought an end to the period known as the Great Depression.

1938 – Despite the Depression, or perhaps because of it, **school construction** took place. The Public Works Administration (PWA), one of many New Deal initiatives to help the economy, provided 45% of the funding for two projects completed in 1938. The current **Central School** was built during 1937 in time for students to occupy its classrooms in January 1938. The old Central School was razed. The high school gymnasium, which had been built in 1923 east of and attached to old Central School, was enlarged to provide a full-size basketball court with seating for 1,500. When the old high school was closed and then removed, the gym would still remain as part of Central School. Previous to the new gym the basketball Boilermakers played home games at the old Armory just west of Central School. The football teams also received a new home as the old fairgrounds was purchased by the school district. The first game in front of the old fairgrounds stands was in 1936 and by 1938 the present-day **Kewanee High School Stadium** was built. Before 1936 the football teams played on the school district’s Leggett Field, where the current National Guard Armory is located.

1939 – Federally-subsidized housing, another product of the Great Depression and the New Deal, came to Kewanee with the formation of the **Housing Authority of Henry County**, which operates under the auspices of the Henry County Board but with federal funds. The first project would be **Fairview Apartments** on Third Street in across from Kewanee High School Stadium, which had been the fairgrounds. Built in 1940, Fairview

contained 125 units in multiple buildings with another 50 apartments added in 1952, all available for families. In subsequent years Kewanee would receive four other projects: **Knox Homes** for families, built in 1952 with 12 units; **Washington Apartments** for the elderly, 1972, 74 units; **Hollis House** for the elderly, 1984, 50 units; and **Lakeland Terrace** for families, 1984, 44 units. Galva (51 units in 1970) and Geneseo (63 units in 1973) would also receive Housing Authority projects. Since 1974 a Section 8 program has provided rental subsidy in private housing with approximately 175 families receiving rental assistance in 2000.

1940 Population 16,901

1941 – The attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces on December 7 marked the beginning of nearly four years that tested the courage and perseverance of all Americans like no other time in American history, except for the Civil War. The story of Kewaneeans in **World War II**, service men and women and civilians, merits a book to tell their story—one like Tom Brokaw’s “Greatest Generation.” Fortunately, there is a publication that makes a significant step in that direction, a 72-page volume published by the Star-Courier in 1995, entitled “World War II: The Kewanee Influence.” The book is an effort to honor all that served and suffered in that great conflict by telling the “stories” of some. It contains articles on about 20 veterans and pictures of many more. This writer fully concurs with the editors of “The Kewanee Influence” when they state: “We hope someone will undertake a more thorough treatment of local participation in World War II soon, while veterans of that war are still plentiful and vigorous. For nothing written later, without their contribution of living memory, can be true in the same down-to-earth way.”

1942 – The **Great Kewanee Fire** devastated downtown Kewanee in the early morning hours of April 13. While the city slept a fire broke out about 1:30 a.m. in the Kewanee Dry Goods Store (formerly Lyman and Lay) on the east side of Tremont between First and Second. After burning other buildings on the same side of the street, the blaze “jumped” across Tremont and then spread to buildings on the south side of Second Street between Tremont and Chestnut. By 4:30 a.m. the Kewanee Fire Dept. with help from many area departments had brought the conflagration under control, but not before 20 buildings and some 50 offices and stores on three blocks were burned out. Kewanee service men stationed in England were reminded of the bombed out cities of England upon receiving pictures

of the devastation from home. Major buildings nearby that were saved from destruction by “heroic firemen” included the Star-Courier at First and Tremont, City Furniture next-door on Tremont, the Parkside Hotel (now Hotel Kewanee) and Peerless Theatre just south of the hotel. The reconstruction began immediately as Mayor Mark Saunders contacted state and federal officials to help Kewanee receive “priorities” from the War Production Board. Within less than a year, according to the Star-Courier, the downtown business district had a new face, “far better than previous to the fire.”

1943 – In the midst of World War II the Star-Courier was prompted to tell of the contributions of Kewanee to **the war effort**, both at the war front and home front. Written by C.O. Schlaver and Frank P. Johnson (later a member of the state legislature from Kewanee) in the September 1 issue, the article was a response to the “thoughtless remark” of Eastern newspapers that “the middlewest doesn’t know we are in a war.” An estimated 2,000 from Kewanee and Wethersfield townships were in uniform, they reported. Already nine had been killed. (The number would go much higher as the death toll reached 88 by war’s end.) Kewanee factories were turning out war materials—shells at the Walworth, mines at the Boiler, small shells at Machinery and Conveyor, bomb fins at Kewanee Manufacturing and trailers at Martin Company. Walworth and Boiler had already received the Army-Navy “E” Award for war production. (Others would also before war’s end.) Women, of course, were taking up the slack in the factories as male workers left for the service. The county and city had exceeded their quota in the first two war bond drives. Rationing began in the spring of 1942 with sugar and had been expanded to include many other staples. Hundreds of women volunteered to help the Red Cross knit and sew surgical dressings, sweaters, mittens, gloves, pajamas, bathrobes, etc. The Civil Defense was organized under the leadership of Dr. Harold Swain of World War I renown. Salvage campaigns for iron and other metals, silk and nylon hose, fats and greases were conducted. Schools conducted programs to involve the children, such as collecting articles for hospitalized soldiers and saving pennies to eventually purchase savings war bonds. There was something for everyone to do.

1943 – Strange as it seems today, “**Smokes for Servicemen,**” was an important civic project during the war. The Star Courier and the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary promoted the drive, which netted one carton of cigarettes for every Kewanee man in the armed forces.

1945 – The **end of World War II** did not come as suddenly as the armistice ending World War I; thus the celebrations were much more subdued. When Germany surrendered on May 7, Japan was still fighting to the end. No official celebration was held; schools and businesses closed and churches held services as Kewaneeans prayed for a quick end to war against Japan. But none was in sight until the two atomic bombs were exploded on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August. Again the celebrating was subdued, according to the Star Courier. “Kewaneeans greeted the news with solemn thankfulness,” as they remembered those who had suffered so much.

1945 – Perhaps a **fitting tribute** to all of the families that sacrificed to preserve freedom would be to recognize two families, that of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Van Coutren and Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Peterson. The Van Coutrens flew 12 service flags as three daughters and nine sons served their country in uniform. The Van Coutrens were living in St. Louis in 1945 but were born, raised and married in Kewanee. She was the former Emma McGuire and both worked at Lyman and Lay. Before the Van Coutrens moved to St. Louis, three of their children were born in Kewanee. Mrs. Van Coutren was honored in 1944 as the national “mother of the year” by the Mothers’ Day Commemorative League of America. Reportedly no other family in America had as many as 12 children serve in the armed forces. The Petersons sent seven sons into the service and had the great misfortune of losing one of them. Leslie Peterson was among the **88 Kewanee area residents killed in World War II**.

1945 – In September several Kewanee leaders, with the memory of unity to win the war fresh in their minds, decided it was a good time to complete the “unification” of Kewanee by **joining the two school districts**, Kewanee and Wethersfield, into one district. On September 13 the Star-Courier reported that a meeting was held at Midland Country Club to discuss the “much-needed postwar project.” The meeting was called by R. B. Dickson, chairman of the wartime civilian defense committee, and was attended by community leaders including most of the members of the Kewanee school board and Wethersfield’s two school boards, one for the elementary school and one for the high school. Mayor Dan Bates said that he thought the school boards “should be able to work out something very beneficial to both communities.” In response to comments about increasing population, especially in Wethersfield where 25 new houses had been started for

returning veterans and ensuing families, Attorney L.D. Quinn, president of the Wethersfield high school district, said he believed the Wethersfield districts would be able “to take care of present demands.” Frank Lake, president of the Wethersfield elementary school board, questioned the problem of Kewanee indebtedness while neither Wethersfield district had any. Dr. L.L. Spanabel, president of the Kewanee board, said the Kewanee indebtedness would be paid off in a year or two and offered to step down to “give the new arrangement (merger) a new set-up.” A postwar planning committee was set up, but the effort did not get much further than the initial meeting.

1947 – A **need for housing** at the end of World War II led to the development of Eastlawn and Westlawn subdivisions in the southeast corner of Kewanee. The development was undertaken by community leaders who formed the not-for-profit Kewanee Homes Inc. even before the war was over. With assistance from state funds through the Henry County Housing Authority the construction of 72 two-bedroom homes costing \$7,000 to \$8,000 was begun in August. By the end of 1948 all were completed and sold. This was just the beginning of considerable housing development after the war, almost all of it south of Division Street in the “Wethersfield portion” of Kewanee. In the 1940’s and 1950’s more homes were built in the southeast area. In the area around Windmont Park large subdivisions were developed in the 1960’s and early 1970’s directly south of the park and northwest of the park along Page Street and several blocks north of Page. The only major development north of Division was Edgewood Drive subdivision, developed in the 1960’s adjacent to the city on the east side of East Street. Edgewood was annexed to the city in 1998. Very little residential construction took place during the 1980’s and early 1990’s; however, in the last few years new homes are emerging here and there in Kewanee.

1948 – Kewanee “officially” became the **Hog Capital of the World** and the celebration known as “**Hog Days**” was on its way to becoming the biggest holiday of the year in Kewanee, except for Christmas. Early in 1948 State Rep. Frank P. Johnson, also Star-Courier reporter, persuaded the Illinois General Assembly to pass a resolution recognizing Henry County as the country’s top hog producing county and proclaiming the county’s largest city, Kewanee, the Hog Capital of the World. While the first Hog Days were held in 1947 and on an irregular basis for several years, the committee of volunteers that puts on the annual extravaganza regards the 1954 free pork

chop barbecue held in conjunction with the Kewanee centennial as the first annual Hog Days. Held over the Labor Day weekend, the event brings thousands of former Kewaneeans and their families back to visit relatives and friends. And thousands of locals and area residents make their way downtown for the world's "largest pork chop barbecue," free entertainment, parade, carnival, talent show, flea market and more. With the development of large-scale hog confinement facilities in several states, Henry County has lost the distinction of being No. 1 in hog production, but today Kewanee still answers to the name of "Hog Capital of the World." And the annual festival is as popular as ever.

1950 Population 16,821

1951 – The **National Guard Armory**, built on the site of old Leggett Field on East Street, was dedicated on November 8 by Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson in a ceremony at the Armory attended by over 1,000 persons. The completion of a new Armory took nine years since the razing in 1942 of the old Armory at Central and Burr. The old Armory, which had been a community center as well as a military installation, was demolished when it was found to be structurally unsound. The new armory was completed through the efforts of many at a cost of \$550,000. The major credit, however, belonged to Dr. Harold D. Swain, a World War I veteran and chairman of the committee to secure the new Armory, according to the Star-Courier. Also singled out were Capt. Gust Lundberg, World War II veteran, National Guard officer and assistant chairman of the committee, and the E.E. Baker Trust and Frank M. Lay for major monetary contributions.

1952 – The **Korean War**, which began in 1950, required the Kewanee National Guard unit to be activated for duty. Company K, an ambulance company in the 44th Division, was activated for federal service on February 15, 1952. After training the unit was broken up, with some members serving in Korea, but others going to Germany, Japan or Alaska. The Korea-bound members joined many other Kewanee men and women who served in Korea. Nine Kewaneeans were killed during the conflict, six in Korea and three in training in the United States. Thus, the Korean and Vietnam Wars combined were as deadly for Kewaneeans as World War I. **Nine died in the Korean War and 11 in the Vietnam War**, while 20 were killed in World War I. (See 1999, Vietnam Moving Wall.)

1952 – **WKEI**, Kewanee’s first radio station, went on the air on September 11. It took over three years for the Kee Broadcasting Co. of Kewanee, consisting of 17 stockholders, to begin broadcast operations, having first applied for a license on June 20, 1949. Currently owned by Virden Broadcasting Corporation, WKEI and its sister stations have been an important part of the Kewanee area, with its many “voices” over the years becoming well-known media personalities.

1954 – Kewanee celebrated its **100th birthday** in a really big way. A four-day festival was held from July 15 to 18. It began on Thursday noon with the arrival of C B and Q’s historic locomotive No. 35, signifying the main reason for the birth of Kewanee, and ended on Sunday with the city’s largest parade to date and a drum and bugle corps contest featuring the state champion and the state runner-up Kewanee Black Knights. In between there was a queen (Mary Ann Anderson), a king with the best beard (William “Bill” Welch), the world’s “largest free pork barbecue,” an “old settlers” day, a 12-county music festival, ballgames, dances, a carnival and the Centennial Ball, featuring soon-to-be TV star comedian George Gobel, singer Buddy Moreno and the Lew Diamond orchestra. To a fan of history the best part had to be the 144-page Centennial Edition of the Star-Courier, jam-packed with articles on all aspects of Kewanee's first 100 years and the 30 years when there was only the village of Wethersfield.

1957 – The current **Kewanee High School** was completed on the old Kewanee Fairgrounds. The high school would have a peak enrollment of about 1,000 students in the early 1970’s. By the 1990’s enrollment would decline to the low 600’s. **Belle Alexander School** on Lake Sreet opened a year earlier, replacing Washington and Tibbetts Schools. These would be the last building projects for Kewanee school district in the 20th century, except for the replacement of **Lyle School** in 1979 after an explosion caused by leaking natural gas.

1958 – **Sandy’s**, a nationwide chain of fast-food restaurants, was founded by three Kewanee businessmen, Gust E. Lundberg, Bob Wenger and Paul White. In 1956 the three had secured a franchise from Ray Kroc for a McDonald’s in Champaign-Urbana, one of the chain’s first stores outside of California. When Kroc changed franchise terms, the three Kewanee entrepreneurs struck out on their own. They organized Sandy’s and built their first store in Peoria in 1958. Other Kewaneeans acquired franchises and built stores throughout the Midwest. A corporate headquarters was

built on Route 78 south of Kewanee. The corporation grew dramatically and by 1972 there were 240 Sandy's stores. In that year corporate owners merged with Hardee's and since that time their fortunes have risen with one of McDonald's main competitors. The Sandy's office in Kewanee was used as Hardee's Midwest Regional Office until 1978.

1958 – Hyster Company purchased the Martin Machine Co., a well-established firm that made “lowboy” trailers for hauling heavy equipment. Located in the 800 block of N. East Street, the new Hyster operation retained the 90 employees of Martin. The Kewanee facility produced parts for Hyster products from other plants, as well as trailers. In 1966 Hyster moved into a large new facility (220,000 sq. ft.) on Kentville Road on the east edge of Kewanee (the property was annexed into the city). The new plant allowed for the production of trailers, compactors and lift trucks by about 500 employees working in three shifts. In 1990 Hyster sold one of its Kewanee plants to Pines Trailer Corp. and then in 1991 Hyster was purchased by United Dominion Industries, an international corporation headquartered in Canada. The Kewanee plant of UDI officially became **Compaction America** and would manufacture compaction equipment with the brand names of HYPAC and BOMAG. The former is a combination of Hyster and compaction (the purchase agreement allowed UDI to continue use of the Hyster name) and the latter is a German corporation owned by UDI. BOMAG's American administrative offices were established in Kewanee. Compaction America in 2000 had about 300 employees in Kewanee.

1958 – For 500-600 **Walworth** employees, and the city of Kewanee as a whole, Christmas of 1958 was more like Halloween (the trick side rather than the treat) as Walworth announced on December 16 that it was transferring most of its Kewanee Works operations to its East St. Louis plant. The foundry would remain in Kewanee as long as it showed a profit, company officials said. That would be 20 years, as the foundry was closed in 1978, completely ending Walworth in Kewanee. The partial closure in 1958 reduced the work force from about 1200 to 600-700, but subsequent reductions soon resulted in a workforce of about 200. The 1958 reduction came on the heels of an extended strike by Walworth unions, prompting considerable criticism in some quarters of union officials and members. To set the record straight local union representatives traveled to New York to meet with company officials. Union officials said they were willing to correct any “barriers” to continued operations in Kewanee, but they were

assured by the company that the reduction was necessitated by a decline in business and had been under consideration for about a year. A delegation of business representatives headed by Mayor Campbell Andrews also made the trip to New York and met with the company's president, not so much to plead a lost cause, but to assure Walworth officials that Kewanee wanted Walworth to stay in Kewanee to whatever extent possible. Ironically, the same Star-Courier edition that announced the bad news also carried an Associated Press national story on page 14 with the headline: "Economically, Things Should Be Better in 1959."

1959 – The city **primary election** in late February was noteworthy for two reasons. One, it marked the ascendancy of Emerit F. Lindbeck in Kewanee politics. A city council member and employee of Walworth, Lindbeck led the voting in a three-way race for mayor over incumbent J. Campbell Andrews and Walter Schmidt. He went on to win the mayor's job in the regular election in April. Lindbeck would be elected mayor three more times and share the record of 16 years as mayor of Kewanee with J. Campbell's father, James H. Andrews, who served from 1919 to 1935. Also, a record number competed for the four positions of commissioner on the city council. No less than 26 managed to get their names on the ballot. The large number possibly had something to do with the recent loss of jobs at the Walworth.

1960 Population 16,324

1963 – The **Kewanee Airport Authority** was created by a vote of the people at a special election on Nov. 26, 1963, three days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The vote authorized the formation of a five-member board of commissioners, three appointed by the mayor of Kewanee and two by a county judge. Federal and state grants would help build a new airport to replace the 1930 airport south of Kewanee, which community advocates of the referendum deemed inadequate for expansion. To maintain the airport the board would have the power to levy a tax on property up to 7.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation. Land was purchased southwest of Kewanee on Midland Road and in 1966 Kewanee had a new airport—**Kewanee Municipal Airport**.

1967 – **Black Hawk East College**, a two-year community college, opened in September after overwhelming passage of a referendum in May. Two previous referendums had failed before the perseverance of interested

citizens headed by Sandy's founder Gust E. Lundberg succeeded. Classes were held at the National Guard Armory and at Kewanee High School (evening classes) until the completion of four temporary buildings on the campus five miles south of Kewanee near the junction of Routes 78 and 34. In 1978 the campus saw the construction of a 63,000 square foot permanent building at a cost of \$3.6 million. Permanent student housing was added to the campus in 1999 with the completion of 24 two-bedroom apartments known as Prairie Pointe. From an enrollment of 85 full-time and 140 part-time students in 1967, BHE had progressed to 750 students in the spring of 2000.

1970 Population 15,762

1970 – Pines Trailer Corp. of Chicago, one of the leading manufacturers of truck trailers, purchased some of the old Walworth property for an assembly plant. In 1990 Pines undertook a major expansion with the purchase of a 76,000 sq. ft. plant from Hyster on Kentville Road, doubling employment from about 200 to 400. The new plant enabled Pines to manufacture 53-foot trailers and new domestic containers (containers which can be clamped to a truck trailer or a railroad car). During the 1990's the company continued to grow and by 2000 had become Kewanee's largest employer with a workforce of about 800.

1970 – The construction of **Midland Plaza** was completed southwest of the junction of South Street and Tenney (also Routes 34/78). The shopping center would be a major factor, if not the most important one, in the movement of the retail business center of Kewanee from the downtown business district to the south side of Kewanee. The two anchor stores of the center were Kroger supermarket, which opened in 1971, and W.T. Grant, a chain department store, which opened in 1972. Kroger's, which came to Kewanee originally in 1930, remains in 2000; while the Grant store has been followed by K-Mart and currently Menards, a Midwest building supply chain. The movement of the business center of Kewanee to the south can be characterized as Kewanee returning to its roots—Wethersfield. And there is some irony in the fact that Lou Little, the owner of the Midland Plaza land and part owner of the buildings, is a descendant of some of the founders of Wethersfield. (See post-2000 addition.)

1974 –The **Kewanee Senior Citizens Center** opened in a restaurant on N. Tremont. A year later Virginia Nelson became the group's first coordinator

and continues in that capacity today. Founded initially under the auspices of Black Hawk College, the group incorporated in 1977 under the name Henry County Senior Citizens, Inc. and opened its current center at 219 W. Second. The center serves meals, including to homebound, and provides recreational activities. A source of income is provided by its A-Z Resale Shop and coffee shop opened in 1987.

1976 – The **Kewanee Historical Society** was established and 25 years later 91-year-old Robert Richards Sr. remained the organization's only president. (Bob and his wife Marcella both died in November 2003.) Bob and Marcella were instrumental in forming the society and in purchasing the Butterwick Building in the 200 block of N. Chestnut in 1977 to be the society's museum. Their enthusiasm and hard work, along with other volunteers and donors, resulted in a museum with a huge collection of local history documents, pictures and artifacts. One of the unique features of the museum is the **Cornhusker Hall of Fame** featuring Bill Rose of Kewanee, a county and state cornhusking champion during the 1930's. The agricultural exhibit seems appropriate for a city that claims the title of "Hog Capital of the World."

1976 – **Kewanee Township** moved into a **new township hall** at 105 S. Burr Street in April. The \$100,500 building, which contains offices and a large meeting room, was financed with federal revenue sharing money. Robert L. Hepner was township supervisor and has the distinction of serving in that office longer than anyone else, from 1970 to 2000.

1976 – **Wethersfield Township** moved into a **new township hall** in October on the site of the Frank Craig home (northeast corner of Tenney and McClure), which had been given to the township in 1944. The home had served as the township offices since 1944. Township supervisor Roland Craig reported that most of the \$63,000 construction cost came from federal revenue sharing funds, but that volunteers contributed much to the finished project.

1976 – **K-Mart** moved into the former W.T. Grant building in Midland Shopping Center, continuing the movement of retail business to the south side of the city. The Wal-Mart competitor closed in 1990, six years after Wal-Mart opened its store, also on the south side. Employees of K-Mart and local consumers were unhappy; workers for obvious reasons and

shoppers because they believed competition between the “big two” would be good for them.

1976 – Joint effort between the city and the Kewanee Community Development Corp. was begun to **revitalize downtown**. Curb extensions, midblock crossings, pedestrian ramps and tree plantings were among the improvements. Founded in the early 1970’s, the purpose of KCDC is to help business and industry retain jobs and bring new economic enterprises to Kewanee. It is funded one-third by the city and two-thirds by the private sector. In 1991 the organization’s name was changed to Kewanee Economic Development Corp.

1978 – **Walworth Co.** closed its one remaining foundry, completing its removal from Kewanee that began in 1958. Part of its massive property and buildings had been sold to Pines Trailer in 1970, but most of the land would remain an eyesore for the rest of the century. In 2000 the property, having been previously acquired by the city, was being cleared and prepared for other uses, including a park-like area across from the new City Hall.

1980 Population 14,500

1981 – **Sears, Roebuck and Co.** closed its downtown store after 51 years in Kewanee, furthering the demise of downtown Kewanee as the major retail center for the area for the previous 100 years. Sears, which came to Kewanee in 1930, also closed a number of other stores in small Midwest communities. Four years later **Carson, Pirie, Scott** closed its large department store on Tremont. Other department stores and men’s and women’s clothing stores also closed in the 80’s and early 90’s. **Penney’s** remained until 1996, closing 71 years after coming to Kewanee in 1925.

1982 – The **unemployment rate** in Kewanee was reported to be “nearly 20%, the highest since the Great Depression.” Every major employer in the city reportedly had laid off workers.

1983 – Dorothy Coretto became the **first woman** elected to the Kewanee City Council. Since then three other women have served on the council.

1984 – Kewanee voters agreed by a 6-1 margin to borrow \$2.4 million to be combined with \$6 million from the state and federal governments for a **new**

sewage treatment plant, the “largest-ever public works effort” in Kewanee. The project was completed in 1988.

1984 – Wal-Mart came to Kewanee, opening a 64,800 square-foot store along Route 34/78 on the south edge of the city. The event virtually sealed the doom for downtown Kewanee but further accelerated the commercial development on the south side of Kewanee. In 1996 Wal-Mart built a Superstore on property directly east of the original store, which was then demolished.

1986 – The council-manager system of city government was adopted by a vote of 2,420 to 1,854, ending 75 years under the commission form. The issue of whether or not to have a city manager dominated city politics in the 1980’s and would carry over into the 90’s. The successful referendum followed two failures, one in 1980 and the other in 1983. And the controversy did not go away after 1986 as those opposed to city manager government successfully petitioned to require referendums in 1993 and 1998. The defeats in the 80’s were by narrow margins of 200 votes in 1980 and 400 votes in 1983. The vote to retain council-manager government was 2,214 to 1,686 in 1993 and an overwhelming 2,586 to 1,611 in 1998. The change to council-manager meant that a professional city manager hired by the city council would be in charge of the day-to-day administration of the city government. Under the commission form the city council members were individually in charge of the various city departments. Under both systems the city council collectively has the final authority for making policy, levying taxes and determining spending. The proponents of the city manager system argued during the two decades that the system provided for more efficient and effective government and potentially more economic development. Opponents of council-manager argued that it was less democratic than other forms of city government and that the expense of a city manager was an unnecessary one.

1989 -- Good’s Skywalk appeared over Main Street. The structure, which connects the old **Good’s Furniture Store** on the east side of Main with expansion buildings on the west side, instantly became a landmark in Kewanee and a symbol for the transformation of Good’s Furniture from a very good local furniture store into a regional tourist attraction and super furniture store. The makeover into what a Chicago Tribune reporter in 1991 called “the world’s most ambitious small-town store” began in the 1970’s under the direction of Phil Good, grandson of E.S. Good who started

the business in 1895. By 2000 the store had over 100,000 square feet of showrooms, along with the skywalk, glass elevator, park-like atrium, rathskellar restaurant and three bed-and-breakfast type rooms for overnight stays. All of these have been made known within a 150-mile radius of Kewanee by extensive television advertising which features Mary Heberer Good, Phil's wife since 1985 and a store employee since high school graduation in 1971. The advertising campaign, which began in 1977 and continues today, has made Mary Good as well known as any television personality in the Peoria, Davenport and Rockford television market areas. Day-trippers, including those on tourist buses, flock to the "new" Good's to see Mary, the skywalk, glass elevator, etc. and of course, the furniture.

1990 Population 12,969

1997 – Gov. James Edgar came to Kewanee on August 17 to announce that Kewanee had been chosen as the site for one of two prisons approved that year. The news was greeted with guarded optimism as people were not sure they wanted Kewanee to be a "prison city," but they were sure that the prison would be a definite economic benefit to the community. The Kewanee "prison" would be a **juvenile detention center**, the first of its kind in the state. The 400-bed facility was expected to cost \$45 million to build and would employ 280 persons with an estimated \$11-12 million payroll. No less than 19 cities had applied for the two prisons. Kewanee's successful bid, led by Mayor Jim Burns and City Manager Tim Hacker, came on only its second attempt to secure a state prison (unfortunately a growth industry in Illinois in the 1990's). Located on Kentville Road across from Compaction America, the detention center was begun in 1998 and completed in 2000.

1999 – **Roy Pettit**, age 105, one of 300 American surviving veterans at the time of World War I, received **France's National Order of the Legion of Honor**. A French diplomat came to Kewanee on March 4 to bestow France's highest civilian award. Pettit's wife of 71 years, Leona, witnessed the ceremony, along with Bob Richards, president of the Kewanee Historical Society, who helped arrange the ceremony. Pettit was a member of a "Last Man's Club" formed after the war by members of Kewanee's Battery E. As the last surviving member, Pettit was to have opened a 70-year-old bottle of cognac several years ago to toast his fallen comrades. However, the cognac had solidified and was donated by Pettit to the Kewanee Historical Society, where it is on display.

1999 – A **family aquatic center** was completed in Northeast Park by the Park District. The \$1.3 million pool replaced the old pool built in 1931 that had been unused since the 1995 swim season. The old pool had been deemed too costly to repair. A \$1 million bond referendum was passed in 1997 to partially fund the pool and restore the 1931 bathhouse.

1999 – The **Vietnam Moving Wall**, a replica of the Vietnam Wall in Washington D.C., was brought to Kewanee during Hog Days by the Kewanee Veterans Council. Located on the front lawn of the Armory, the Wall proved to be a moving experience for the many thousands who viewed it. The “Wall That Heals” offered area residents the opportunity to pay their respects to all those who served in the Vietnam War, and especially to those whose names are enshrined on the Wall. Kewanee men who made the supreme sacrifice in Vietnam include Donald Jones, James VerHelst, James Werderman, Dan Bryan, Martin Rapczak, Warren Orr, Allan Benson, Charles Mitchell, Rodney Rogers, Alan DeCraene and William Price, listed in the order of their deaths.

1999 – The municipal government would begin the new century in a new city hall as the **Kewanee Municipal Building** was completed late in 1999. An open house was held on January 30, 2000 to show off the \$4.2 million home for Kewanee’s administrative offices, police department, fire department and city council chamber, which also serves as a courtroom for Henry County Circuit Court as it had in the old city hall. Replacing the 125-year-old city hall on Tremont was long overdue for many Kewaneeans, but it was not accomplished without considerable controversy, in the 1990’s as well as in previous years. During the 1930’s (the Depression) the City Council had considered requesting federal funds for a new city hall but opted for applying for money for other projects. In the late 1970’s Dr. Edward Goetzman, mayor from 1975 to 1979, had proposed building a city hall in West Park, but opposition to using park land frustrated that effort. Finally, in the 1990’s time had come for action, but where to build was the question. When the old post office building on First St. was donated to the city, Mayor Dewey Colter (1991-95) and the city council initiated plans to renovate the building into a city hall. Opposition slowed down the process and after the election of Jim Burns as mayor in 1995 and two council members in 1997 opposed to the old post office, the decision was made to construct a new building—but where? When the Veterans’ Council of Kewanee (representatives of various service organizations) said they were

not opposed to using the northern half of Veterans' Park, the city council decided in 1998 to proceed, despite the fact that some citizens were opposed to using park land and some were opposed to using a park dedicated to veterans. In the end, many felt that a public building in Veterans' Park would bring more recognition to memorials in the park and those who viewed the new city hall on January 30, 2000 had to be impressed.

2000 – The opening of the new City Hall in January at the beginning of a new century, indeed a new millenium, seems an appropriate place to end this chronological summary of the history of Kewanee.

Added since 2000 – The 2000 census showed that Kewanee's population had stabilized. The total for **Kewanee was 12,900**, a decline of less than 100. An unfortunate economic development, both in real terms and symbolic, was the decision in 2002 of Burnham Corporation, the owners of **Kewanee Boiler**, to close the historic industry that more than anything else made Kewanee known nationwide, if not worldwide. Another disappointing economic development was the closing of two supermarkets—**Kroger's and Eagle**. On the positive side, a major step forward was taken in 2003 when the City Council voted to replace the south side (Wethersfield) **water tower** and to adapt a **reverse osmosis system** to the city's water supply. Both projects were virtually complete by June of 2004 at a total cost of \$8.5 million.

Bibliographical Note. This historical survey was researched primarily from three major sources: "The Kewanee Story," published in 1954 in conjunction with Kewanee's bicentennial under the leadership of C.C. Pryor; the 1954 bicentennial edition of the Kewanee Star-Courier; and the extensive local history files of Bob Richards and the Kewanee Historical Society. Also important were various issues of Kewanee newspapers; especially the Star-Courier, on microfilm at Kewanee Public Library; the library's local history files; the 1877, 1885, 1910, and 1968 histories of Henry County and the local history collection of the late Jerry Sarff.