

**A HISTORY OF NEW BADEN, ILLINOIS**  
**1855-1955**

Clinton County was erected and organized December 27, 1824, from Washington, Bond and Fayette Counties. It was named in honor of the distinguished statesman, DeWitt Clinton, of New York. The first land entries were made in 1814. The population of the county in 1824 was about 1,000.

The land on which New Baden was founded was granted by the United States Government to Walter Sawyer on September 11, 1838. The original grant contained 155.14 acres. It is supposed that the first settlers of New Baden were probably traders and farmers of Yankee descent who were a part of the great westward movement. From the year 1840 to the time New Baden was classed as a village, most of the emigrants were from Baden, Germany. Hence, the name of our town.

Henry Pool, a German and blacksmith by trade, put up the first house here and began working at his trade. The second house was built of logs by Lawrence Spicer and the third was built of brick by August Spicer and housed his grocery store. These houses were built before the town was laid out.

From a warranty deed dated April 27, 1844, the original 155.14 acres of land and other lands currently undefined, were sold by Walter Sawyer to Frederick A. Carpenter for the consideration of \$450.00. These lands were laid out by Carpenter as the town of Baden on August 15, 1855.

Early records give interesting but sparse accounts of early settlements and developments. In 1866, a large, first-class flouring mill was built by John P. Friess, Henry Teichmann and C. Scheurer; it burned in 1869. Within the new few years, the town boasted 52 residences, a population of about 200, and the following businesses: a small grist and saw mill run by M. Miller; two stores kept by Henry Hummel and Christ Schumacher; four saloons; two shoemakers; and one tailor.

Provisions were made for organized townships in Illinois in 1875. New Baden was made part of the Lookingglass Township. The township derives its name from Looking Glass prairie, of which about twenty-five sections are within the boundaries of the township. A small portion of Shoal Creek prairie is on the west side. The township is in the extreme southwest part of the county, and contains about 48 sections, mostly fine farming land.

An election for trustees for the purpose of serving in the town seeking incorporation as the Village of New Baden was held December 16, 1882. (Up to the time of incorporation, the town was known as Baden). The village was officially incorporated in 1884 and the Village Seal and Village Law were adopted. John Weber, the first Village Clerk, who actually served before the village incorporation, was paid \$5.00 for writing ordinances for the village. The first Treasurer was Xavier Griesbaum. On April 23, 1883, Dr. William E. Kruger was paid \$1.50 for swearing in six trustees; Village Clerk, John Weber; Street Commissioner, Valentine Heinzmann, and Constable, John Harpstreith.

Village records were kept from 1883 until April 5, 1896, when no entries were made until April 27, 1897.

The Louisville, Evansville, and St. Louis Consolidated Railway purchased land in 1889 for the purpose of building a railroad which was completed about 1890. It was known as the "Air Line." Shortly thereafter the line became part of the Southern Railway Station. In 1889, the village purchased one and 25/100 acres of land for \$100.00 from William Griesbaum for the railroad depot. In the same year the village purchased land from Rudolph Hertenstein, Sr. to build Railway Avenue from the Belleville and Carlyle Road to the depot site. The sidewalk along Railway Avenue was laid in 1890. The first railway depot agent was Joseph Watschinger. J.W. Bann is the present agent and has served in this position since 1927.

The first post office was located in the Hummel building; it was a fourth class post office and the Postmaster was Laurence Geiger. The mail was brought to New Baden by horse and wagon from Trenton, Illinois. With the coming of the railroad in 1890, the mail was brought by train. At one time the Southern brought four mail exchanges a day. Train delivery continued until the Federal Government inaugurated the Highway Post Office on November 1, 1952. The route is from Louisville, Kentucky to St. Louis, Missouri. The Post Office is now third class and is located in the City Hall building. Bert Baird serves as Postmaster.

Wednesday, May 27, 1896, stands out in the memory of the elder citizens of New Baden and there are few of the younger generation who have not heard stories of the terrible cyclone which struck the village that day. There were about sixty houses, with a population of 200, in New Baden at this time and after the fury of the storm passed, thirty-one buildings were completely demolished, many were slightly wrecked, and the dead and suffering lay without shelter until help could come. The loss exceeded \$50,000.00. Neighboring towns lent a strong and willing hand and the injured were taken to the old school house, St. George's School, and Nagele's Hall.

Those killed or who died from injuries were: Peter Kraus, Mrs. Peter Kraus, Emma Kraus, Hazel Ethington, Edna Ferguson, Pius Meyer, Charles Lee, John Bassler, Hattie Bassler, Jacob Fehmel, Mrs. Bachmann, William Rust, Mrs. William Rust, Willie Rust, Adam Peter and Ida Born.

An emergency fund was set up for the cyclone victims and contributions were received from many Illinois communities and one California community. Mr. Louis Butzow was serving as president of the village at this time and a board was appointed to apportion the relief funds which amounted to \$6,836.97.

Probably the most important development in the rebuilding and growth of the community was the opening of a coal mine in 1897. The mine was known as the Muren Mine and employed several hundred men. Coal was hoisted from the air shaft until a main shaft was sunk. The name was changed to the Southern Coal and Mining Co. in 1906; to Southern Coal, Coke and Mining Co. in 1913. Mining operations continued until 1936 and the mine was officially closed April 9, 1938.

Prior to the opening of the mine, the village income had been obtained mainly from tavern licenses which cost \$25.00 to \$37.50, bridge and road tax, and rent for the village hall. With the new industry and increased population new sources of income became available. Many fines were collected, apparently on pay days when people celebrated a little too much; liquor licenses were increased; dog tax was assessed; picnic tax was charged; village tax was recorded; and all merchants and peddlers bought village licenses. There was, however, a need for the extra funds. Street lamps were installed and a lamp-lighter was employed. A fire engine was purchased for the city for the sum of \$535.00. Jail cells were purchased which cost \$140.00, and \$25.55 was expended for ball and chains. Prior to the 1920's, the most frequent village expense was for blacksmith work.

Around the year 1900 the daily wage for farm labor was 75 cents a day from "sun up to sun down." Farm hands were paid \$10.00 to \$15.00 a month and board. Corn sold at about 11 cents a bushel. On salaried jobs, you could pay room and board and have about 70% of your salary left. The average salary for a coal miner in New Baden around 1900 was \$1.00 a day for bottom men and \$2.00 for top men.

The following were Village Appropriations for 1904-1905:

Streets and Grades: \$1,000.00

Bridges, Culverts, and Gutters: \$500.00

Lighting: \$500.00

Fire Apparatus Fund: \$50.00

Sidewalks: \$2,000.00

By the year 1905 the oil lights of the village were replaced by gas lights and payments are recorded to the Vapor Light Co. The old lights were sold by the village to Shiloh. In 1912 the New Baden Light and Power Co. came into being. It was built at a cost of \$13,500.00. Mr. Fred J. Koch was the organizer of the plant and power was first generated on November 28, 1912. There were forty street lights controlled from the main office which was located immediately west of the mill near the Southern Rail Line. There are those who remember when there was power service from daylight to 11:00 a.m. on Monday and Tuesday, because house-wives washed and ironed on those days. The power was usually off until the evening hours, beginning at dusk and would again be turned off at 11:00 p.m. until the next morning. A company was organized to erect the plant and it was then leased to the city for a period of ten years, after which time it was to become the property of the city as a municipal plant. The street lights were of the Tungsten variety. The officers of the company were: Fred J. Koch, president; F.A. Billhartz, secretary; John F. Engelke, treasurer. The directors were: L.A. Schumacher, William Linck,

and the officers. The company discontinued operation in 1923. The Southern Illinois Power Company obtained the franchise to supply power at this time—this company became the Illinois Power Company which serves the community at the present.

A commercial history on Clinton County was compiled and published in 1913. A glowing and thorough account of New Baden was presented. The population was approximately 1,400 and great strides had been made in the advancement of the community.

The City Administration of 1913 was as follows: George J. Monken, mayor; William Georger, city clerk; A. F. Ackerman, city treasurer; Patrick J. Bann, city marshall; Peter Mauk, superintendent of streets and alleys; Dr. E. G. Schmitt, police magistrate; Wm. Stoeckel, J.W. Duffner, Henry Peter, Adam Vick, Joe Poelker, and Wm. Beine, aldermen.

The following businesses were listed at this time: one mill, one mine, one bank, four general stores, three groceries, one bakery, eight saloons, three gents' furnishing shops, two barber shops, one lumber yard, one hardware concern, one tin shop, one saddlery shop, one hotel, one undertaker, one livery stable, one implement house, one drug store, one picture show, one real estate firm, one confectionary, one jeweler, two butchers, one restaurant, two doctors, one dentist, one veterinary surgeon, and several smaller places of business.

This was one of the most progressive eras in New Baden's history. The coal mine had brought a new economic growth to the town which promoted prosperity in all phases of business. Some of the highlights in the businesses and in the lives of the residents are listed below:

The Hertenstein Mercantile Co. did an average business of over \$50,000.00 a year.

Fred J. Koch of the Koch Lumber Co. was serving his second term in the State Legislature.

There were eight passenger trains daily through New Baden. An average of 12,000 cars a year were sent from New Baden and about four-fifths were coal, the rest being produce, grain, and merchandise.

One of the first things to meet a person's gaze when he stepped from the train in New Baden was the tall and stately figure of Mr. Patrick Bann, village marshall, in a full policeman's uniform. He was the first marshall to wear a full policeman's uniform in the city.

Martin Rensing operated two saloons and served as agent for the Star Brewery.

William Stoeckel operated the livery stable, conducted a sales stable and had an automobile for the use of traveling men who wished to make fast drives when the roads were in good condition.

Charles Woerner ran a saloon and a bowling alley. The bowling alley was well known all over the Southern tournaments.

Chris Meinkoth operated the only restaurant in the city and the Francis Hotel was one of the finest hotel buildings in the county.

The cigar factory was owned by Mr. Charles Kassebaum and their output was 14,000 cigars a month.

J.W. Duffner ran a large and well-equipped meat market. He did his own killing and manufactured sausages of all kinds.

Mr. F.H. Stroot had the only undertaking establishment in the city. He was a licensed embalmer and carried a full line of caskets and shrouds, artificial flowers, also dealt in monuments and supplied wagonettes and surreys for weddings.

The mill was rated as one of the largest of its kind in Southern Illinois. Its capacity was 450 barrels of grist and meal per day. The company manufactured two well-known brands of meal and grist—"Imperial Grits" and "Imperial Meal."

William Georger was a manufacturer of cement blocks and the contractor who laid the greater part of the city's streets and sidewalks.

Mr. Henry Schumacher manufactured hand-made shoes and did all kinds of shoe repair.

F. A. Billhartz ran the Gents' Emporium. He had also been tax collector for the district for fifteen years.

So New Baden lived and grew through the early 1900's and moved into World War I. Many of her sons saw military service and some never returned. Jobs were plentiful and she had her fling in the

“roaring twenties.” This was the era of prohibition when “moonshine” and “home brew” appeared in most communities; New Baden was non exception.

After the depression which lasted through the early 1930’s, New Baden was synonymous with the nation and experienced a stabilizing period which lasted until economic aid was provided by the Federal Government, notably in New Baden through the WPA. There was a WPA Library and a WPA Recreation Center. Laboring wages for WPA workers ranged from \$38 to \$56 per month. Surplus government food was given out in ratio to family size in 1 to 3 months periods. Occasionally clothing was also given.

Another important aid in the growth of New Baden was the construction of State Highway 161 through the community. This project was begun in 1935 and completed in 1936. That wages were still low and prices cheap at this time is evidenced by the fact that plate lunches sold in a local restaurant for 25 cents.

Lack of employment remained a problem due to the slowed down operation and eventual closing of the mine in 1938. However, with the expansion of nearby Scott Air Force Base (nine miles west of New Baden on Highway 161), the local employment problem was somewhat alleviated. In 1938, the field became General Headquarters of the Air Force of the United States Army. In 1939, it became an Army Air Corps Technical School. It was during this period that New Baden people found new employment, for with the stepped-up program at the Air Base, there was a need for civilian personnel in many areas. The Air Base has been steadily growing—building programs having been carried on in 1938, 1941, 1952, and 1955. So it continues to be a source of employment for New Baden as well as much of its surrounding area.

The period of World War II again brought prosperity to the nation and locally with the defense program. New Baden men were drafted into military service and served in many battle areas and the Korean conflict.

The present population of New Baden exceeds 1,600. Its growth may be said to have been moderate, but steady. To indicate the growth, the numerous new residences that have been built in the 1950 period can be cited. The town’s only supermarket was built in 1951. A drive-in dessert stand was also built. A new parochial school, modern in every respect was completed in 1953. A fine new addition to the public school is near completion. In 1954 the old crank-type telephone, in use for over 40 years, was replaced with the dial system. New Baden is served by Lookingglass Prairie Telephone Co. A Legion Home was built in 1954.

The newest community project is a Community Park, initiated in 1953 by the Lions’ Club, and carried on by the civic organizations of New Baden.

The increasing population brought a water shortage to New Baden, so, the evolution of the water system from private wells to city wells, and finally to the present system. It was completed in 1952 and brings water to the community from a deep well located near Highway 15, about 7 miles southeast of New Baden, near the Kaskaskia River.

On December 14, 1954, the citizens of New Baden voted a Sanitary District for the community, thus paving the way for a sewage system. The bond issue for this new system was voted and passed at this election.

At the present time, construction is underway for the Capitol Highway, that part which extends from New Baden to Trenton, over the old Trenton Road. It is with pleasure that this can be included in the first 100 years of New Baden’s history, for the realization of the project is the culmination of 30 years’ effort to secure the highway. The entire Capitol Highway will extend from Litchfield to Coulterville.

New Baden is an alert and fast growing community, active in county and state government, having a county judge and a state representative. New Baden is the largest town in the township and is represented by the following officials: Road Commissioner Raymond Reinhardt who succeeds Frank Zirkel, who served in this position for 31 years, Supervisor August Zimmerman who has served since 1941; Clerk Arthur E. Billhartz who succeeds the late Fred H. Billhartz; Tax Assessor Harold Rensing, and Justices of the Peace Fred Toennies and August Krausz.

In its first 100 years New Baden may be said to have its “growing pains.” The history recorded is evidence that these “pains” have not all disappeared, nor will they ever disappear if there is to be continued growth. New Baden can look back with pride on its first century. Let us hope that we may in the time allotted to us on this earth, do as much to further the growth and encourage the goodness of the home, the church, the schools, business, and the social and cultural heritage which is ours.

New Baden Centennial Book, 1855-1955, pages 8-14