

Boone County Historical Society

Preserving Our Heritage

January 2019



A Brief History of Business Colleges in Lebanon

Eric Spall, Boone County Historian

Around the turn of the 20th century, Lebanon was the home of several business colleges. As businesses grew throughout the 19th century, there arose a demand for skilled stenographers, bookkeepers, and clerks. However, the skills necessary to successfully fill these positions, such as bookkeeping, penmanship, typewriting, shorthand, and rapid calculation, were generally not taught in schools. Business colleges, often established by enterprising individuals, offered to bridge this gap.

The first such school in Lebanon opened in the 1890s, but Lebanon was not stranger to the concept. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Lebanon's newspapers published advertisements for business schools around Indiana and beyond, and the social columns often noted young men and women leaving home to study at these institutes.

A Mr. Hazelit of Indianapolis founded what may have been the first business college in Lebanon in June 1893. He operated out of the Central School building on East Main Street and had enrolled as many as twenty students. This venture, though, did not last more than a month and discontinued on June 24th.

Several years later, Booneites began agitating for a local business college. Newspapers declared that such a school would have a positive impact on the community and commented on the value of business skills in the contemporary economy. Richard Harney, superintendent of Boone County schools, declared that "modern civilization demands a universal business education."

In 1898, Caleb Perry moved to satisfy this demand. He had previously operated several business schools in Indianapolis but wanted to move to a smaller town. After securing premises on South Lebanon Street, Perry opened the Lebanon Business College (aka Perry's Mercantile College) on November 18, 1898. Its first year seemed successfull, and Perry forecast that the second year would be profitable, but this success was ephemeral. The school closed in November 1899 "on the account of the lack of patronage."

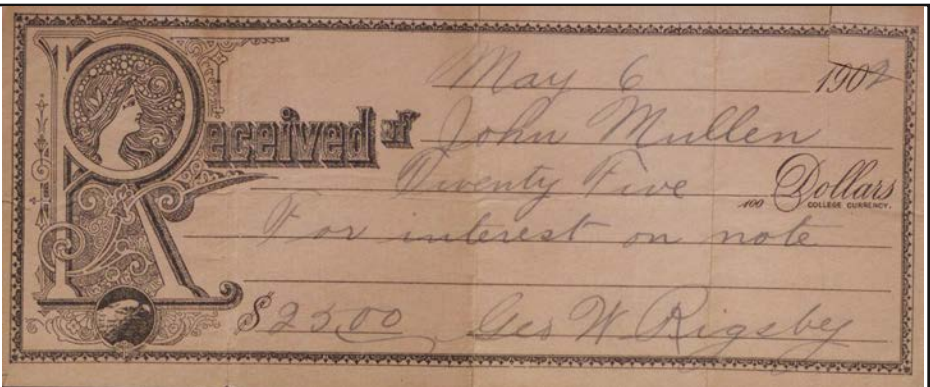
Undeterred by this setback, Mavourneen Morris, a teacher at Perry's school and the first woman admitted to the Boone County bar, established her own school, the Morris Business College, in April 1900. This school was housed in Castle Hall on the north side of the courthouse square. Though it opened with just a few students, Morris, with "great business tact and never tiring energy," ensured that her endeavor

would succeed and by 1902 the school had outgrown its Castle Hall quarters and moved to larger premises in the newly constructed Shelby Block on West Main Street.

In 1903, L. A. Martin of the Huntington Business College purchased Morris's school, renaming it Lebanon Business University. In 1904, the school moved to the second floor of the Cason-Neal block adjacent to Castle Hall. That same year, Henry Fenton Raber took over management.

Raber operated the Lebanon Business University until March 1908--when things took a decidedly odd turn. On March 19, Raber unexpectedly left Boone County. To explain his departure, he sent letters to S. L. Cason, B. F. Ratcliff, and Frank Hutchinson, notifying them that by the time they received his notice "he would be many, many miles away, and that it was not his intention to return." Raber claimed to have loaned some money to a school friend who then disappeared without repaying. The *Lebanon Pioneer* opined that Raber was fleeing his own debts and accused the "slick professor" of stealing several of the school's typewriters (these were eventually returned to the manufacturer). Meanwhile, the school's inventory was auctioned to cover outstanding expenses.

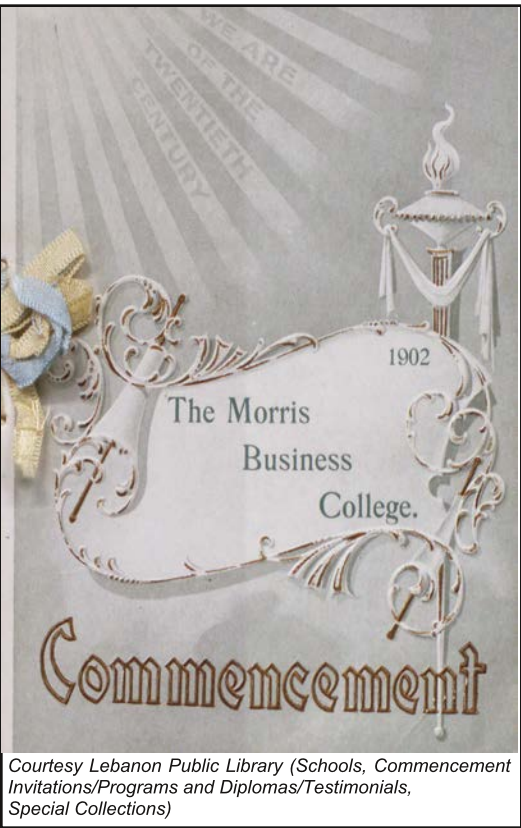
Two years later, Loto Dinkins opened the Boone County Business University. Unlike its predecessors, this operated exclusively as a night school. It ceased operation after less than two years.



Lebanon's business schools probably used special college currency notes like this to train their students. Business colleges around the United States used similar notes (some went so far as to design their own) in order to simulate a real-world office environment as closely as possible. *Courtesy Lebanon Public Library.*

In 1917, yet another business school was launched in Lebanon. Opened in Castle Hall by L. W. Stegeman on April 7, 1917, the Lebanon Commercial and Vocational College offered classes both during the day and at night. As well, it included a Conservatory of Music. Though a newspaper reported that "prospects for a big school both day and night are very encouraging," this school did not match the success of the Morris Business College and closed in the middle of August 1917. No school would rise to take its place.

The demise of the Lebanon Commercial and Vocational College did not leave local students without recourse for acquiring business skills, however. By this time, Lebanon High School had established its own commercial department, and interested individuals could sometimes find private instructors. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ivy Tech offered courses on business-related subjects. However, the Lebanon Commercial and Vocational College was the last turn-of-the-century-style business school to call Lebanon its home.



Courtesy Lebanon Public Library (Schools, Commencement Invitations/Programs and Diplomas/Testimonials, Special Collections)

Lincoln's Lebanon 2018 a Success

2018's Lincoln's Lebanon Civil War Encampment and Reenactment was a success. On September 29-30, Lebanon's Memorial Park played host to contingents of Federal and Confederate armies. The soldiers showed visitors what life was like for the boys in blue and grey during that tumultuous period of American history. A blacksmith and a potter demonstrated historical methods of metalwork and pottery. As always, the field surgeon and mortician drew large crowds. (We were pleased to welcome Craig Malone, mortician interpreter, for the first time because Jon Austin, our usual embalmer, was working with FEMA relief efforts in Puerto Rico, helping museums, libraries, and cultural institutions recover from Hurricane Maria.)

Randy Duncan once again provided an informative and compelling interpretation of Abraham Lincoln as he spoke at the site of the depot where the President-Elect gave a brief speech enroute to his inauguration in 1861 and interacted with visitors around the encampment.

New this year, the historical dress and fashion revue was well received. Put on by Teresa Downs of the Amherst Artillery, the revue showed visitors the many articles of clothing worn by women in the 1860s and modelled their appropriate usage.



Teresa Downs and assistants show visitors how to wear Civil War-era clothing at the historial fashion revue. *Photo courtesy Eric Spall.*

Less successful this year was our attempt at a Civil War-era camp dance. However, we think this event has potential to be great fun for reenactors and visitors alike, and we plan to improve it for 2019.

Lincoln's Lebanon has been the Boone County Historical Society's signature event for years, and we are pleased that it has continued to be a success. We look forward to sharing this experience with the Boone County community again!

New Accessions

In December, the Society received a copy of *Sports Illustrated*, February 14, 1966 (the Rick Mount cover issue), signed by Rick Mount, and a copy of *The Pennant* (Lebanon High School's student newspaper), Vol. 49, No. 11 (March 11, 1966).

At present, the Boone County Historical Society has very little it can budget towards the acquisition of items for its collection. Consequently, we rely on donations to add to our holdings of papers and artifacts related to the history of Boone County. If you have an item you would like to donate, please contact us. Due to limitations of space and resources, we may not be able to add every item offered, but we are always happy to consider donations.

New at the Ralph W. Stark Heritage Center, Lebanon Public Library

Received November-December 2018: *Bethel/Clarkston Cemetery, Eagle Township, Boone Co., Indiana: Cemetery Restoration Project 2003; Eagle Village, Eagle Township, Boone Co. IN: Cemetery Restoration Project 2003-2005; Zionsville High School The Aerie, 1970, 1971, 1979, 1980, 2014; genealogical research material for Aldrich, Davis, Powell, and Warren families; Ancestors and Descendants of James Ira Jones and Minnie Rozella Sparrow, 2nd ed. (Jerry Lynn Ross and Karen Sue Pearson Ross).*

Scout Project Benefits Cragun House

To achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America, a Scout must demonstrate leadership and service by organizing and completing a project that benefits the community. Alexander Granat of Troop 359 in Lebanon chose to help the Historical Society by making improvements to the Cragun House grounds. He relined the flower beds around the House with brick pavers. In improving the look of this historical house, Granat also repurposed some historical masonry: he salvaged many of the bricks he used from the detritus unearthed as part of the City of Lebanon's renovation of Meridian Street at the courthouse square. Additionally, Granat and his team cleaned up the Cragun House's attic.



Alexander Granat (left) and fellow Scouts after cleaning up the Cragun House's attic, November 2018. *Photo courtesy Jennifer Spall.*

The new landscaping has improved the look of the house's exterior. With the attic cleaned up, the Society can explore how to better utilize this space. With some work, it could be transformed into a storage area or perhaps even a new exhibit space. Thank you, Alexander, for your contribution to the Boone County Historical Society!



The attic in the Cragun House is now much cleaner!



Bricks from Meridian Street line the flower beds around the house.

Share your history with us!

Have an idea for an article you'd like to see in the Boone County Historical Society Newsletter? Or maybe a topic you would like us to cover at a presentation to the public? Contact us at : cragunhouse@mymetronet.net or write to us at PO Box 141, Lebanon, Indiana 46052!

Tour the Cragun House

Take a step back to the late 19th century with a tour of the Cragun House. Built in 1893 by newspaper publisher and Lebanon school superintendent Strange Cragun, the home was gifted to the Historical Society by the Cragun family in 1988.

Call 765-483-9414 or email us at cragunhouse@mymetronet.net to request a tour time.



Time to Renew Your Membership

Please consider renewing your membership to the Society today.

Perhaps include a separate donation to help us maintain the Cragun House or to add to our general fund. This will ensure that our programs will continue our preservation of local history.

Volunteer--We are always happy to have help at our events. May we add your email address to our volunteer contact list? No obligation--just an occasional email asking if you are available.

Contact us if you have any questions regarding the Boone County Historical Society. We are always glad to hear from our members. To renew your membership, please tear off the bottom section of this form, complete it, and return with your membership dues.

Name(s): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Type of Membership: _____ Single (\$20) _____ Family _____ (\$35)

_____ Lifetime (\$110) _____ Business--30 Employees or less (\$50)

_____ Corporate--31 Employees or more (\$100)

In addition to our membership, please accept this donation to the General Fund: \$ _____

In addition to our membership, please accept this donation to the Cragun House Fund: \$ _____

May we list your name on our website as a "Friend of the Society"? ____ Yes ____ No

____ I/we are interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities.

Find us on Facebook at: Boone County Historical Society Indiana

Email: cragunhouse@mymetronet.net

Visit our website for upcoming events: boonecountyhistorical.org

Call Out to Our Members

The board of the Boone County Historical Society would like to remind our members that the Society's board meetings are open to members. Meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM at the Cragun House (404 West Main Street, Lebanon). The board encourages members to attend and participate in the administration of the Society.

Book Review

Eric Spall, Boone County Historian

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the reviewer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Boone County Historical Society.

In 1984, the Boone County Historical Society published History of Boone County, Indiana, a massive tome that addresses many aspects of Boone's history. However, it may have been more appropriate to call it an encyclopedia of county history. The editors intended it "to be an addition to the recorded history of Boone County," covering as much as possible. Eschewing the narrative approach to history, the book is topical, presenting short articles on myriad subjects.

The book is divided into two parts. The first contains a chapter on Boone County in general and chapters on each township. The second part contains histories of a multitude of Boone County families. Both sections include numerous black-and-white photographs.

The book's editors did not write the entire text. Instead they accepted solicitations of articles. These solicitations largely determined the book's contents. The diversity of the subjects along with the discrete nature of each article contributes to the feeling that the book is more an encyclopedia than a history. The editors appear to have published the submissions practically verbatim, leaving a wide range of writing styles and varying levels of historical detail. Some of the articles are extremely limited. For example, the entry for the C. C. Club Organization in Jackson Township (p. 125) consists of only three sentences which just provide the year it was organized and note that it still existed--but no description of what the club actually did.

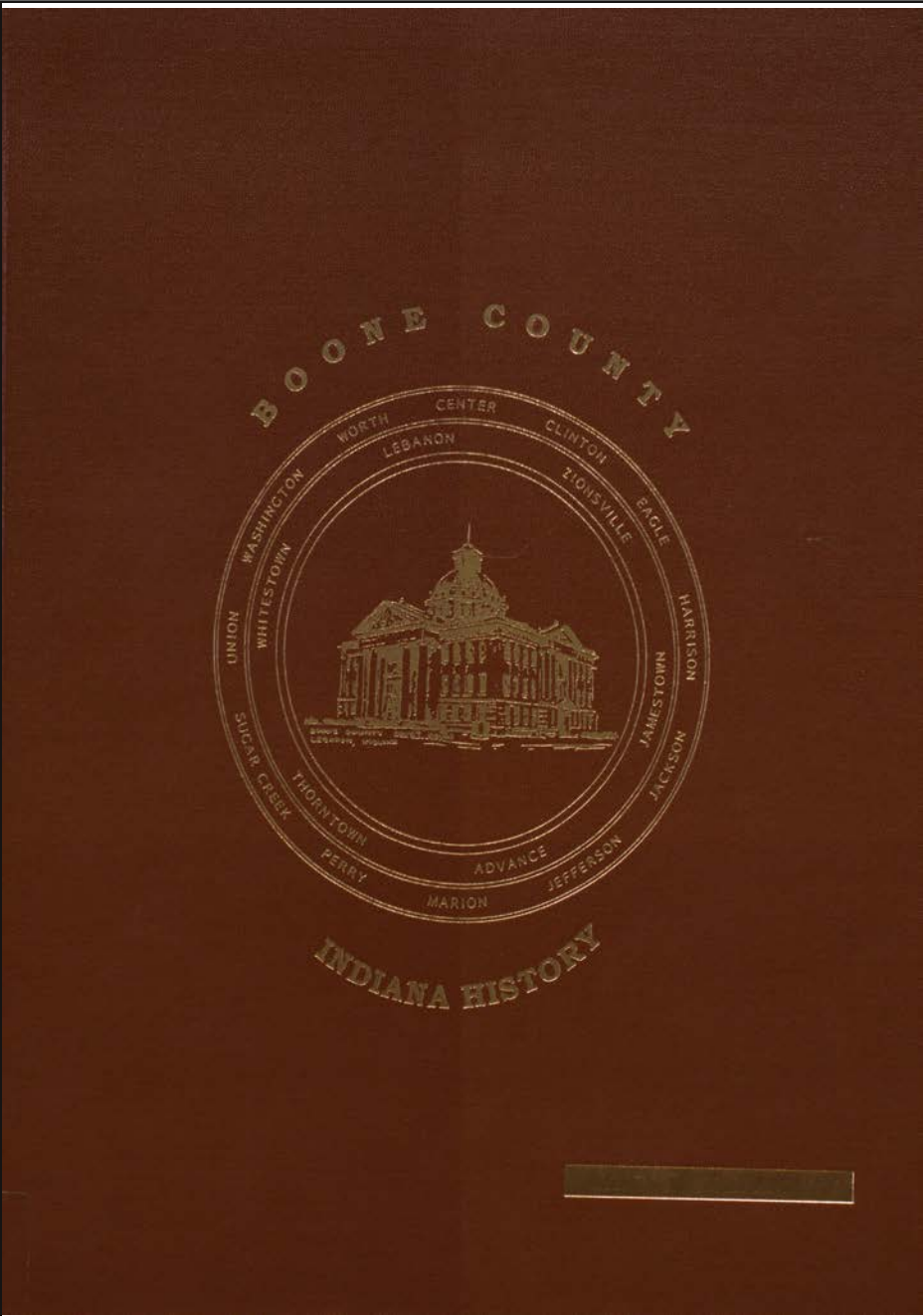
Though it is called a history of Boone County, only the about the first 173 of its 512 pages are devoted to Boone's history. The rest of the book contains a multitude of family sketches (along with a few advertisements from the book's sponsors and the index). Some of these sketches pertain to families with roots going back to Boone's pioneer era, while others are about families who had only recently moved in. All of these sketches were submitted entries, so, like the articles in the first section, the quality of the writing and the level of detail vary from sketch to sketch. This also means that the content of the section is the product of self-selection--a family is represented here because a member of the family was motivated to write and submit an article. Thus, the presence or absence of a family is not a reflection of that family's importance in Boone's history.

However, while the reader should keep in mind that the family history section does not necessarily provide a representative sample, the sheer number of submissions indicates broad participation in the project. Ultimately, the self-selection here is a mild limitation. In fact, it adds a layer of interest to the book. The section granted many people the opportunity to present their family history in their own words (perhaps we may call this the democratization of history) and thereby provides historiographers with insight into late-20th century perceptions of family history itself. This section is also, of course, of much value to genealogists.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by several significant problems. The self-selection in the family history section is not a severe issue, but it is a considerable one in the first part. The coverage of historical topics is very uneven. For example, the book contains 28 entries for various extension homemaker clubs throughout the county but very little information about homefront life during World Wars I and II. The book also foregoes the use of source citations

(except for noting the authors of some of the submissions). This is problematic because it makes it difficult to independently confirm facts or identify sources for more information. It also limits the work's reliability. Perhaps the book's biggest shortcoming, though, is its index. While the index is extensive, it is strictly limited to personal names--it contains no entries for businesses, places, institutions, events, or concepts. To find information on Terhune, for instance, a reader would first need to know that the community is located in Marion Township. As well, the book includes two articles on the 1965 Palm Sunday Tornado. Instead of combining these into a single entry and putting it in the chapter on Boone in general (since the tornado crossed township lines), they are printed in their respective township chapters (Harrison and Jefferson). There is nothing in the table of contents or index to indicate that the tornado is treated in two different chapters. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that, though the book is encyclopedic in nature, the entries in the first section are not organized alphabetically, so even if readers knew in which township an entity was located, they would have to skim through that township's chapter to learn if the chosen subject is even in the book.

The Boone County Historical Society set out in 1984 to produce a new history of Boone County. In the end, it produced a compendium of miscellaneous topics related to Boone's history, loosely organized by geography, and an extensive collection of family history sketches. Though it is limited by several significant shortcomings (the self-selection of articles may leave a reader wondering why certain topics were included and others neglected, the lack of source citations makes it difficult to evaluate the reliability of the information provided, and the index, while excellent for accessing personal names, provides almost no help in locating other topics), the book remains a staple for any Boone County reference collection. It should be noted, though, that the book was not compiled to meet the rigorous standards of scholarly history; rather, it was the product of a community engagement project that speaks well of Booneites' concern in 1984 for their county's history. From that perspective, the book is an important artifact. And, despite its limitations, it is still a good starting point for research into numerous topics in Boone County history.



Boone County Historical Society and Friends. *History of Boone County, Indiana*. Indiana: 1984. Published in hardback, the book has a strong cover and is printed on quality paper.

Editor's Note: Copies of *History of Boone County, Indiana* are available for purchase from the Boone County Historical Society.