

Early History of De Kalb Junction, NY by F. F.E. Walrath Town Historian

This article contains historical notes taken from old letters and diaries written by a man who lived in De Kalb Junction from 1855 to 1910 and later went west where he died.



From this point along the Watertown and Potsdam Railroad where the Ogdensburg branch was begun, formed a Junction of the two railroads and as it happened to be located in the town of De Kalb, the name of this place was quickly given as "De Kalb Junction". At this time a heavy growth of timber was standing untouched by man west of the Ogdensburg branch in that area including Green Street.

According to brief records and a study of gradation, a low marshy swamp fed by natural drainage and springs from the more heavily timbered areas on high elevations

T. M. Craig's Store was later expanded and became Cole's Drug Store. Part of the lot was sold and two additional stores were built between it and US 11.

extended in a south westerly direction through the heart of De Kalb Junction east of the present Route 11 and then near what is today Wayne Fanning's lot [4318 US Route 11], the swamp extended to a more westerly direction which now crossed the New York Central Railroad. All along this low area bordered by

brush and trees, marshy growths and cattails grew in abundance.

Another low swampy area existed from east of the present Benson Gas Station [near current intersection of Gibbons St and US Route 11], straight west past the Stevens Abattoir [Stiles Scrap yard 11 Old State Rd] to a more southwesterly direction, this was also fed by springs; even today they are as active as ever with a few cattails remaining. In this area near the Y, was a large water hole dug by the section-men, which furnished water for the locomotives until the well by the depot was drilled.

The site for the railroad yards including the station house, freight house and sidetracks was cleared of trees and brush in the spring of 1862.

The station house, a building 30 by 60 feet was soon built. In a short time the telegraph was installed. About 10 rods east of this building along the tracks, a freight house including the

loading platform size 36 by 74 feet was built. Near by was located an engine house and a machine shop. During the early fall of this year, [1862], across the main tracks, a short distance away [where the gazebo park is today], a man by the name of Thomas M. Craig opened the first store which became a great service not only to the Jonathan Bennett family who were the only ones living in a log house near by but to several other families living farther away.

Craig's store was constructed of sawed lumber the same kind of material as all the railroad buildings. He dealt in some hardware, groceries and clothing, his prices, I thought, were quite reasonable. I remember purchasing a pair of cow-hide boots all hand made, a pair of wool socks and a long heavy wool coat, I don't believe I could have bought these in canton or Ogdensburg for less money. He sold pressed chewing tobacco which came in slabs nearly a foot long of Kentucky brand.

Israel D. [Dennis] Smith applied for the office as Postmaster and on December 1, 1863 received his appointment. At once he moved his milk house from his farm, which is today the Glen Gilbert farm [US Route 11], on skids to the corner of what is now known as Canton and Hermon Streets [US Route 11 and County Route 17]. On January 1, 1864 the post office was established and Mrs. Sarah Smith was postmaster. [Her husband Israel Smith was the official post master. Ed] Later this small building was moved to a place near N.D. Walker's Iron Clad Store [currently site of Town of De Kalb offices] on Hermon St. and in time James Spaulding purchased the building and had it moved on a lot which was owned by Harley Matteson located on Mill and Ridge St. for a dwelling in the middle 1880's. In the fall of 1903 Ira D. Walrath purchased the house and lot and demolished the building in the summer of 1916.

Ed McGraw, Thomas Newman, myself with several others had worked on the railroad as section men for some time. In the fall, of this year, 1864, I left the job, married a country girl and lived with her folks for a while, later moved in the little red house [abt. 4292 US Route 11] which stood just beyond where the Methodist Church was built a few years later. In the Spring of 1865 Patrick Green , a landowner here, built the Union Hotel beside the main line of the railroad tracks. As Green offered me more money for a days work than the railroad did I got steady employment with him for some time. I helped to do the clapboarding on the sides and ends of the building, shingled the roof with several other men. We built a regular platform or porch on the front and side facing the tracks. On each front corner of the hotel large glass enclosed lanterns were hung, to illuminate the front of the building at night. On each end of the building, a brick chimney was built for heating stoves, and one chimney on the rear

section of the hotel, used for the stove, in the large kitchen, a side stairway leading from the first floor to the second floor was built. A small space with a counter located in the corner of the lobby toward the railroad tracks was reserved for the sale of tobacco and cigars. The barn for the horses was located in the rear of the hotel. Roulston and Burlingame were managers.

Fire destroyed this building in 1888 along with the hub factory, which was located near the hotel barn.