

The Early Town of Shelbina

Background: The building of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad determined the location and founding of Shelbina. The first step toward building the railroad was taken in Hannibal, Mo., at a meeting in the office of John M. Clemmens, father of Mark Twain, in the spring of 1846, when an association was formed with the Hon. Z. G. Draper as president and R. F. Lakenan as secretary.

The first shovel full of earth was moved on November 3, 1851 by R. M. Stewart, who later became Governor of Missouri. The railroad was originally planned to run through Shelbyville, but the level prairie country farther south greatly reduced construction costs and decided the final location. The railroad, however, encountered many problems in construction and finance, and did not reach the site of Shelbina until the fall of 1857.

The city was laid out on August 11, 1857 by Josiah Hunt, acting as attorney for William Osborne of Waterville, N. Y. Major Hunt was the land commissioner for the new railroad, and the town was located on the crest of rolling prairie land owned by the railroad, centrally established between Shelbyville, Walkersville, Oak Dale, Paris and Old Clinton, none of the communities having railroad facilities.

The Name: as told elsewhere, was "coined" by a minister who wished to honor his daughter "Vina," combining her name with that of the county, Shelby, by dropping the "y" in it and the "V" in Vina, to make "Shelb-ina."

The Boundaries: The original city limits of Shelbina comprised an area ½ mile north and south and 1 mile east and west. The boundary established by the county court on March 5, 1867 was: Beginning at the present boundary line west of town at College Ave., thence north ½ mile, thence east 1 mile, thence south ½ mile, thence west 1 mile along College Avenue to point of beginning.

The county court, on petition of the trustees of the town of Shelbina, and by order dated July 24, 1867, established the present city limits, extending the boundary ½ mile north, ½ mile east and ½ mile south, thus creating the present city limits of 1½ miles square.

Incorporation: The town of Shelbina was incorporated on petition of W. W. Weatherby, et al, by order of the county court on March 5, 1867, the order of incorporation being signed by Wm. J. Holliday, clerk of the county court. The first Board of Trustees of the town, created by the county court on March 5, 1867, was: W. W. Weatherby, Daniel Taylor, Simeon Downing, John W. Miller and John W. Shafer.

City of the Fourth Class: A city election was held on February 25, 1878, to vote on the proposition of organizing the town as a city of the fourth class and to select temporary officers to effect such organization. The notice of election was signed by J. W. Ford, chairman of the Board of Trustees, and by Wm. A. Reid, city clerk pro tem.

The election was held on April 2, 1878, and the vote being favorable for reorganization, W. T. Dean was elected mayor and ordered the first regular city election as a city of the fourth class to be held on April 9, 1878, at which time the following officers were elected: J. Wm. Towson, mayor; J. J. Foster, marshal; aldermen 1st ward, J. W. Ford and W. H. Warren; 2nd ward, G. A. Jenks and Charles Miller.

In 1879, two new aldermen were elected with James Hawley in the 1st ward and B. F. Monson in the 2nd.

First Settlers: The first dwelling places in the town were said to be two shanties on the north side. George Sparks claimed to have hauled the first load of poles with which the first shanty was built. In the fall of 1857 a few medium size

frame houses were built, and saloons to accomodate the rough railroad workers soon followed. Kemper Bros. started the first store located on the north side of the tracks opposite the old depot. Martin P. Thomas built the Thomas Hotel, a large frame building that later burned, which he erected in the late fall of 1857. His daughter is said to have been the first child born in Shelbina, although Wm. Morgan, son of David Morgan, who was born January 23, 1861, is probably the first native born whose name and date of birth are known.

Growth: The central location of the new town for older communities in both Shelby and Monroe counties, the names of which having been previously mentioned, made Shelbina immediately the shipping point for both counties. The growth was therefore rapid and by the year 1861 the population was about 500 people. In 1870 the population was 1146, in 1880 it was 1289, in 1900 it had grown to 1733, and by 1910 the population was 2174.

Since 1910 the population has increased very little, but the town is one of few of its size in the state that has maintained its population through drouths, panics, depressions, wars, and the widespread drift of population from country to city. Through most of the last half century the town has been without major industries and payrolls, and many of its young people have been forced to leave in order to find satisfactory employment.

Shelbina, in a setting of old maple and elm trees, on fertile rolling prairie land, within the northern boundary of that section of Missouri known as "Little Dixie" which was settled a hundred years ago by pioneers coming mostly from Virginia and Kentucky, is now a prosperous and progressive small city of nice homes and fine people, and ranks among the best towns of its size in Missouri.

Mayors of Shelbina

1867-1878	Trustees: W. W. Weatherford, Daniel Taylor, Simeon Downing, John W. Miller, John W. Shafer.
1878	W. T. Dean, mayor for 1 week for organization
1878	J. Wm. Towson, mayor; J. J. Foster, marshal; aldermen 1st ward—J. W. Ford, W. H. Warren; 2nd ward—G. A. Jenks, Charles Miller
1880-1884	W. T. Dean
1884-1886	John J. Foster
1886-1888	Dr. J. W. Ford
1888-1890	J. D. Jordan
1890-1894	J. S. Preston
1894-1898	J. J. Riley
1898-1900	J. J. Bragg
1900-1902	W. S. Bryan
1902-1904	Geo. W. Humphrey
1904-1906	Charles B. Ford
1906-1907	Thos. L. Puckett
1907-1914	James F. Allgaier
1914-1916	Robert L. Thomas
1916-1924	James F. Allgaier
1924-1932	Frank Dimmitt
1932-1937	Lane B. Henderson
1937-1938	Charles B. Ford
1938-1940	E. W. Jewett
1940-1941	Chas B. Ford (died in office)
1941-1946	William J. Dungan
1946-1954	Pollard Adams
1954-	Herbert Gilbert