Celina History
Rickenbaugh House and Post Office

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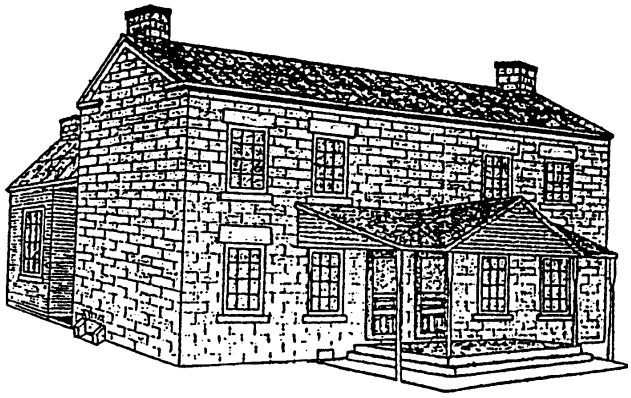
The view from the old rock house on the banks of Celina Lake is much different than in 1854 when Jacob Rickenbaugh, who later built this house, first came to the area. Rickenbaugh, who was born in 1822, acquired 320 acres of land here that year. He had selected the land for its abundance of fine old white oak and chestnut trees. As a tanner of hides, he needed a substance called 'tannin' from the bark of these trees to use in the tanning process. The site also had springs and fresh water which was another requirement of the tanning business.

He brought with him his new bride, Elizabeth Kerr from Ohio. They moved into a log cabin which had come with the property. The large sturdy cabin was located where the parking lot for the boat ramp is today and served as the family's home for 19 years. There were several buildings and vats built near the springs and Jacob operated a very successful tanning business. His customers came from as far away as Chicago, Illinois and Williamsport, PA.

As he prospered, Rickenbaugh began to think about building a larger home. In 1874 he hired three Belgium stone masons to build his family a stone house. Rickenbaugh paid $3/day for the stone work and the construction took approximately one year. These masons, the George brothers, also built the stone church in Leopold and the second church of the Abbey at St. Meinrad.

The house was built out of sandstone blocks cut from rock outcrops near the house. The massive blocks were moved into place using oxen and ramps. Floor joists were made from hand-hewn beams.

The house was built in Late Greek Revival style. It was constructed in the shape of a "T" with the extension in back over a full basement. There were sandstone chimneys at each of the three



ends. There were three bedrooms upstairs and two parlors downstairs in the main house, with a kitchen in the rear extension. The kitchen fireplace which is 5½ feet high has a 6 foot long oven built into the rear of it. From the back of the house the oven looks like another small stone room.

The building is constructed entirely of local materials: sandstone, oak, poplar and walnut. All windows and doors are exactly 1 meter in width. Unlike other stone buildings in the area which have a double wall (a stone block exterior and crushed stone inner wall) the Rickenbaugh house and the St. Meinrad Abbey have single 3' thick stone blocks that serve as exterior and interior walls. The interior walls are covered with lath and plaster.

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The Rickenbaugh's descendents remember the house being sparsely furnished. Built-in walnut cupboards were used for storage space (the house has no closets). In each room (except the back bedroom) there are two cupboards - one had shelves and walnut doors, the other had hand carved peg boards, used for hanging clothes.

Besides serving as a dwelling place for the Rickenbaugh family the house also served as a Post Office. The Post Office occupied three shelves in one of the large cupboards from 1880 until 1951. The position of postmaster was held by various women in the family. The parlor also served as a meeting place for worship services until a church could be constructed at the nearby town of Winding Branch.

The town of Winding Branch where the school was located, was about 1½ miles from the Rickenbaugh's house (where the Celina Dam is now located). A blacksmith shop was also built not far from the Rickenbaugh house. During the early 1900's the nearest store was in St. Croix, about three miles away, and the closest doctor was seven miles away in Bristow. Jacob Rickenbaugh's daughter Ella, was the local midwife and helped care for the sick.

Tanning was a hard, laborious occupation, as hides had to be turned continuously and lifted from one vat to another. As he got older, Rickenbaugh gave up his tannery business and devoted more of his time to farming and the old tannery fell to ruin.

Elizabeth Rickenbaugh died in 1899, at the age of 66. Jacob Rickenbaugh lived to be 88 years old and died in 1910. Both are buried in the family cemetery located about 100 yards west of the house. The house stayed in the family through four generations before it was sold to the Forest Service in 1968. It is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Forest Service has rehabilitated the property.

Celina Post Office History

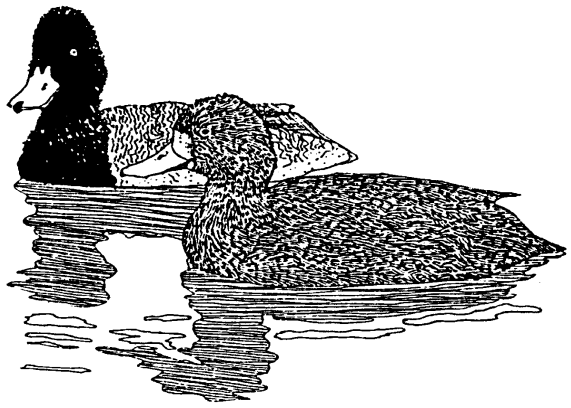
Ella Rickenbaugh was appointed to the office of postmistress in 1880. She was only 19 at the time, and since not of legal age, an exception had to be made by the postal authorities. The exception was made since she was known to be "dependable and trustworthy." She served as postmaster until November 21, 1895 when she married William Edwards and left home. A neighbor, Sarah Carmickle took over for ten years.

In 1905, after the death of her husband, Ella moved back home and again took over as postmaster. She remained the Celina postmaster until 1940. In 1940, Ella's daughter, Mrs. Nola Blunk, who was then living in the Rickenbaugh house became postmaster. Nola was the Celina Postmaster until August 1951, when, due to declining populations in the area, the Post Office closed.

Celina Lake

The 156-acre lake which now stretches out below the Rickenbaugh house was constructed in 1968. Celina Lake, largest of the four lakes in the Middle Forks Lake Complex, was originally constructed for flood control but is now a popular recreational destination.

The lake includes two campground loops with showers and electrical hookups, an interpretive trail, a 15½ mile hiking trail, a fully-accessible fishing pier, and a boat ramp with parking area.



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