

ALEXANDER C. BONDURANT

An early settler who made himself useful and helpful in many directions was Alexander C. Bondurant, from whom the town of Bondurant was named.

Born in Sangamon County, Illinois, September First, 1829, of Kentucky-born parents, he passed the years of his minority on the farm of his father.

During the winter months, he attended the district school. On attaining his majority, he decided to be no longer dependent on his father, and, with a younger brother, Thomas, started in business life. Casting about for a standard of right living and doing, they found the best was within the pale of the Church. They accordingly united with the Christian Church, of which their parents were active and influential members, and made a mutual compact that they would follow the occupation of farming and live according to the best standard of human excellence.

They began by breaking prairie land with ox teams, and, so soon as means sufficient were acquired, Thomas entered a quarter section of Government land in Piatt County, Illinois, and began the development of a farm, but Alexander had decided, while gathering his funds, to join the tide of emigration from Illinois to Iowa, and in 1857, came to Polk County and made a claim to three hundred and twenty acres in the southwest corner of Franklin Township. He cleared the land, turned up the virgin soil, and laid the foundation of what became the largest holdings in the county, covering an area of twenty-five hundred acres, with a beautiful home, surrounded with all the environments of luxury and comfort which wealth, good taste and refinement could suggest.

While his accumulation was the result of energy and good management, he considered it only the means whereby he could do good and be helpful to those around him by beneficent giving. Very soon after his arrival, he organized a church at a school house near where Altoona now is, and there

worshipped until the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad was built to Altoona, when a church building was erected there, and his church abandoned the schoolhouse. He gave the church society forty acres of ground, the proceeds from which provided a good fund to meet expenses of the church.

In 1892, when the Chicago Great Western Railway was built, a station was located on Bondurant's land, and named Bondurant. In 1893, it was platted, and he offered a town lot to those who would take it and build, or open a business house on it. The first one was occupied as a store in the lower story. The upper one was used for religious worship.

Mr. Bondurant was an active promoter of educational affairs, and while his church was provided with a temporary meeting-place, he must have schools, and in 1885, the first was opened, with thirty-five scholars.

In 1886, he donated the ground for a church building, and withdrew from the Altoona church and organized a new one at Bondurant, with Reverend J. B. Vawter as its first pastor. To aid the church, he offered the use of thirty acres of land, which, each Spring, was planted with corn, cultivated and gathered by members of the church. The corn gathering was followed by an old-fashioned "husking-bee," with the usual "red ear" concomitant. The event was one of pleasure, joviality, and companionship proverbial with the early settlers. The first crop yielded twelve hundred bushels, and was a substantial aid in defraying church expenses. The membership was nineteen.

In addition to the proffer to those opening business houses, he offered free sites for manufacturing industries, which resulted in the rapid growth and prosperity of the town. Churches of other denominations than the Christian, stores, shops, factories, grain elevators, hotels, a bank, and newspaper followed, and the town is now one of the best on the line of the Chicago Great Western Road in the state.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and woman's clubs, all with large membership, give variety and spice

to its social life. In fact, the town is a notable testimonial of the nobility of character of the man who founded, promoted, and fostered it.

Several years ago, the Old Settlers' Association held a levee on the magnificent and spacious grounds of Mr. Bondurant. There was a large crowd present. He made elaborate preparation for the event, a part of which was the employment of a special police officer to look after intruders upon the festivities. The day was excessively hot, and during the afternoon, Colonel Godfrey, "Dan" Finch, Colonel Merritt, and General Tuttle strayed off to a quiet corner in the shade, and settled down to a game of euchre. Soon after, along came the "cop" and arrested the whole gang. They protested; said they belonged to the crowd; were just having a little game for amusement. "That's too thin; come along," said the "cop." He marched them down to headquarters, and turned them over to Bondurant, saying he had "caught them up back there in the timber, gambling." Bondurant replied that he would take care of them, and the "cop" returned to his duties. The quartette did not hear the last of it for a long time.

Mr. Bondurant was public-spirited and a liberal supporter of all good works. He gave five hundred dollars to Drake University when it needed the money, the amount to be derived from the rental of fifty acres of land, which he set apart for that purpose. He was a generous friend of the poor and helpless. He carried out in his daily life the resolve of his early manhood, that his possession was but a trust to be used in every worthy enterprise which would advance the best interests of the community in which he lived, and it can be truly said that Polk County is better for his having lived.

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