

## The Half Way House

While our little village had it's thriving Brass Tavern Stagecoach Inn along the "Ridge" for people traveling by the mode of horse in the late nineteenth century there was another mode of transportation in the works moving westward a little at a time. It was the train. Lake Michigan was another mode of transportation for moving people and products. Our village of farmers being located south of both Lake Michigan and Chicago found themselves suddenly bordered by railroads. Just to the west of what is now Calumet Avenue is a triangle of land in the midst of the criss-crossing tracks. The north-south Monon as we know it, the Grand Trunk and the Pennsylvania's Panhandle main line. This triangle of land and the railroad junction and surrounding area was known as Maynard We were referred to as Strathmore and Maynard as early as 1882, long before we used the name Munster. Strathmore being a railroad term for workers tying "one strath more". The name Maynard is still quite a mystery, which I will give my theories on another time.

This land is also known as Section 25 of Township 36, Range 10. Encompassing 542.58 acres. As early as 1869 Aaron Hart owned it all. In 1880 he still owns all of Sec.25. By 1886 his daughter Flora N. Biggs has taken ownership. By 1895 a Samuel E. Gross has ownership of 542.08 acres. He is missing a small piece. While looking at a landowner's map of 1895 I found that a Matilda McCune owns this missing piece. It is approximately 100 x 125 ft. It is located butted up on the west by the Pennsylvania and within feet of where the Pennsylvania crosses the Monon then known as the Louisville, New Albany, Chicago. Today you can locate it just south of the Town Of Munster Garage and just south of Fisher St. You can see where there had been some type of structures etc. on the lot. Why would any woman own this little piece of land? Here is my theory. I personally think she had a building on it which was being used as a railroad shop-hotel for the railroad workers. There was a switching tower south of this lot but not on it. In 1907 when Lucius Fisher protested town incorporation and Fisher St. was named for him that little unpaved piece of road starting at Calumet running west went to where and for what? Possibly to the gravel path that still exist to the south going directly to that piece of land.

There is no complete census for 1890 so establishing who lived where from 1880 to 1900 is a little vague. I find Matilda still owning it in 1903. According to a Warranty Deed dated May, 1907 we find Matilda and husband T.B. McCune conveying ownership of this property to Frederick Lange. This deed was written to correct a previous incorrect one. Now why

would Frederick Lange buy this little piece of land? Well, Fred Lange became the owner of a saloon known as “The Half Way House”. He was also the fourth ward trustee on our first Town Board of 1907. In the 1910 federal census he says he is the proprietor of a hotel located on Columbia Avenue where his wife Caroline is the cook. With them are their 3 children and 11 boarders. One being Albert McKee, the bartender in the hotel and their future son-in-law. Their daughter Emma marries “Bert” and eventually they own a saloon. Eight of the eleven boarders are referred to as brick makers. Our historical society interviewed Emma and Bert’s daughter Margaret Retzloff, and their niece Gert Sorenson Passalacqua, neither of them knew where the original saloon was located and both agreed that the quonset type building located next to their family home which was bordered by Columbia and Calumet and 45<sup>th</sup> Av. was not it. So is it possible that there was an earlier saloon-hotel on the little 100x125 ft. lot next to the Monon? And a little off the subject, but according to Lance Trusty in his book, Munster Indiana, A Centennial History” he states that in 1909 the very council that Fred Lange was sitting on refused to issue him a liquor license. They reconsidered and issued it to him with a \$50 fee for the privilege of selling, a rather high price for that time.

Matilda McCune does not show up in census records for Lake Co. Ind. but she, her husband, Thomas B. and children are in Montgomery Co. Ind. in 1880 and in Chicago, Ill. in 1900. Their son Charles is listed as a telegraph operator in the railroad office. Very curious to me. Frederick Lange is a farmer in the 1900 census, not a hotel or saloon proprietor. So we have a photo of a wooden storefront building with a sign on the side, Fred Lange Half Way House. And we have a photo of Albert McKees saloon on Columbia. My question to all of you. Where was the original “Half Way House”? And what was it half way between? And what was the mysterious little 100 x 125 ft. piece of land set aside for?

Cindy Watson,  
September 2011