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Village histories: A look at Sugar Grove, Elburn and Maple Park – yesterday and today

By BRYAN SALVAGE

May 16, 2017 at 9:32 am CDT

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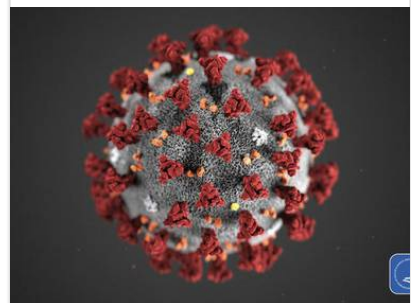
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Sugar Grove Train Depot, circa 1915. (Photo provided)

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By Kane County Chronicle •
January 03, 2021 at 3:14 pm CST

Imagine being among the first white settlers in the early 1800s in a wilderness area destined to include Sugar Grove, Elburn and Maple Park. Various nations of Native Americans back then were the only Kane County inhabitants but were already relocating west of the Mississippi River.

While all three villages still share similarities, each is on a different path to the future.

Sugar Grove

In spring 1834, Asa McDole, brothers James and Isaac Isbell, plus nephew Parmeno Isbell, James Carmen and a man named Bishop camped together while traveling west from Ohio and New York and discovered their destination was the same, reveals “Sugar Grove 150 Years Sesquicentennial,” by Ruth Frantz and Frank Damon.

On May 10, they paddled along the Fox River from Oswego, took Blackberry Creek north and initially resided in an abandoned Indian sugar camp that became the Bliss Woods area of Sugar Grove.

Other major Sugar Grove highlights include constructing the Chicago and Iowa Railroad through the village in the 1860s and opening the Sugar Grove Normal and Industrial School in 1876, said Rick Johnson, president of the Sugar Grove Historical Society.

Incorporated in 1957 when its population totaled 125, Sugar Grove remained a small farming village until the early 1960s, when

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residential development boomed. Its current population is 9,000-plus. The 50th annual Sugar Grove Corn Boil set for July 28 through 31 remains its largest event.

Elburn

In 1834, Indiana resident William Lance and his children were the first white pioneers to settle in what became Blackberry Township, chronicles "The Sidewalks of Elburn" written by Marilyn Robinson and published by the village of Elburn Board of Trustees. The book adds that Ed Taylor, who moved to the Elburn-Kaneville area in 1853, told the Elburn Herald in October 1926 that corn became the most popular crop, while sheep, hogs and cattle were raised as cash crops.

In 1853, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad laid tracks through Blackberry Township and built the Blackberry Station (Elburn's first name) train depot. People shipped animals from the rail yard in town, and small cattle drives through town on Route 47 became common. The railway stopped live animal shipments in the late 1870s, Robinson added.

In 1886, the railroad wanted the village's name changed to end postal confusion. The name of the town was reconsidered, and the name Melbourne was discussed. But the railway nixed it because other towns in Illinois already had that name.

On Jan. 16 of that year, the Village Board unanimously adopted the

name Elburn.

In 1901, Bowman Dairy built a bottling plant on Nebraska Street that closed in 1933. The first cattle slaughter at Elburn's new Dependable Meat Inc. occurred on April 8, 1935, Robinson wrote.

During the late 1990s, Elburn's evolution greatly accelerated. New business startups became more frequent. Approved in April 2000, the 625-acre Blackberry Creek subdivision added 1,250 new homes. Elburn Station, a master-planned community to surround the relatively new Metra Station south of the tracks, is going to be built in phases over the next 20-plus years by Shodeen Homes, adding 126 single-family row homes, 677 single-family lots, 660 multi-family apartments, 102 townhomes and more.

"Elburn's future is very positive in all aspects," said Dave Anderson, outgoing village president.

Elburn's population is 6,000, yet it remains a small town at heart. Elburn Days is still its largest social event held the third weekend of each August. Live music, carnival games and rides, and food and drink are offered at Lions Park after the kickoff parade through town.

Maple Park

Founded in 1854 by Andrew Pingree and Zachariah Hawthorne, the village of Maple Park's name reflects the vast number of maple trees growing in and around town. During the 1860s, Kane County was a

prominent dairy region. Bowman Dairy was located in town and was a major employer until dairy farming in Kane County slumped because of overcompetition and was replaced by crop farming around the 1940s.

During the past half-century, Maple Park's farm and agricultural acreage use has declined, while the village became more involved in agriculturally related businesses. In recent years, new restaurants and other small businesses have opened downtown.

Maple Park's population of 1,310 enjoys the annual Fun Fest each Labor Day weekend.

Village managers are happy to see the first recent housing starts since 2007, said Kathleen Curtis, village president.

"Maple Park is a community rich in heritage, poised to grow," she said. "The Village Board's working mission is to meet the village's need for conscientious growth, while at the same time preserve the small-town experience."

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