

## **A Brief Clay County History**

Located in the West Central part of the state of Indiana, Clay County is truly the Crossroads of America with major roadways, such as United States 40 (the Historic National Road), Interstate 70 and State Road 59 providing area residents easy access to many major cities.

The original borderlines of the predominantly rural Clay County contained 360 square miles, which was formed from parts of Vigo, Owen, Sullivan and Putnam counties, and have never been altered. The county measures 30 miles in length from north to south, 16 miles east to west in the middle and only 10 miles wide at each end.

The "Father of Clay County," Daniel Harris, was instrumental in the organization of the founding of the county in 1825. The county was named after American statesman Henry Clay.

Clay was known as the "Great Composer" and is most famous for the "Compromise of 1850," which delayed the Civil War.

The original county seat was Bowling Green, with the first county courthouse constructed in 1828. Bowling Green was the county seat in Clay County for 50 years.

However, the courthouse burned and all records were lost. Residents then began a fight over selecting a new location. for the county seat.

By the 1860s, with the construction of the National Road (the old Cumberland Road and currently US 40) and the addition of various railroads, the City of Brazil became a far more important and prosperous town. Efforts to relocate the county seat to Brazil began in 1871 and after heated debates, the relocation was granted in 1876.

A new courthouse was erected in Brazil and the fifth county courthouse was completed in 1914 and still serves county residents to this day. Rich in clay minerals and the ensuing industrial development, the area was originally tagged the "Clay Center of the World."

However, coal led to the establishment of iron and steel mills that originally caused the area to boom in the 1870s and 1880s. It was many years before the development of the clay industry filled the vacancy in the city's economic structure left by the loss of the iron industry when the mills were moved to East Chicago in the late 1890s.

The coalmines and brick factories of the past have now been replaced by industrial leaders, such as Great Dane Trailers, Hancore Inc., and Indiana Oxide.

A recent census stated there were 26,556 residents in the county, 10,216 households and 7,437 families residing in the county. The population density was 74 people per square mile.

The county population age-wise is spread out, with 26.1 percent under the age of 18, 8.6 percent from 18-24, 27.8 percent from 25-44, 22.5 percent from 45-64 and 15.1 percent 65-older. The median age is 37-years-old.

Clay County has much to offer the population, which has continued to slowly grow during the last several decades.

The Brazil Concert Band, organized in 1858, is one of the nation's longest continuing bands. It still performs "Concerts Under the Stars," during the summer months in the open band shell, located in Forest Park in Brazil.

Forest Park is a hub of fun activities for the county.

Local residents celebrate each July 4 at the annual Brazil Rotary Celebration and one of Clay County's favorite sons, Orville Redenbacher, is honored each year during the annual Popcorn Festival, which takes place in the first weekend of October, and also enjoy the lighted decorations at the Christmas In The Park celebration in December.

Still In production after more than 100 years, the Clay City Pottery is the state's oldest working pottery. The large apple orchards near Cory, which were started from seeds brought to the area by "Johnny Appleseed" Chapman, created the annual Cory Apple Festival in September to honor the event.

Incorporated towns of Clay County include Brazil, Carbon, Center Point, Clay City, Harmony, Knightsville and Staunton. Unincorporated towns include Art, Ashboro, Asherville, Bee Ridge, Benwood, Billtown, Billville, Bowling Green, Cardonia, Cloverland, Coalmont, Cory, Hoosierville, Howesville, Perth, Poland, Pontiac, Saline City, Stearleyville, Turner and Twin Beach.

Extinct towns include Calcutta, Donaldsonville, Prairie City, Prattsville, Mechanicsburg and Wickville. Townships include Brazil, Cass, Dick Johnson, Harrison, Jackson, Lewis, Perry, Posey, Sugar Ridge, Van Buren and Washington.

Surrounded by six colleges and universities within driving distance, education is important to Clay County.

Within a 20-mile radius are Depauw University, St. Mary of-the-Woods College, RoseHulman Institute of Technology, Indiana State University, Ivy Tech State College and the Indiana Business College.

Young students in Clay County attend seven public and two private elementary schools, one middle school, one Jr.ISr. high school and one four-year senior high school. Both high schools have been repeat Indiana State Band contest winners.

Numerous physicians and healthcare providers call Clay County home and meet the needs of the Clay County residents. St. Vincent Clay Hospital, Brazil, boasts some of the newest technology.

The spiritual need of the community is also met by nearly 50 various denominations of churches, helping make Clay County a great place to raise a family.