

Along the Rails of Whiting
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Because of the Calumet Region's location at the southern tip of Lake Michigan, it was logical that the railroads, seeking the quickest route from the East to Chicago, would build their tracks across this area. As a result, interest in this area quickly grew and, an area that was once considered uninhabitable soon saw its first settlers to the territory that would become Whiting.

The first train station established in the Whiting area was named Berry Lake, which was located on the Pennsylvania Railway tracks at the east bank of Berry Lake. Fields Station was named after the head of the Knickerbocker Ice Company, which was the area's biggest business before the arrival of Standard Oil. This station, located on 119th Street, was also on the same Pennsylvania tracks as the Berry Lake Station. The railroad station that was on the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern tracks was named Whittings, and was located at the foot of 119th Street opposite the Post Office. Some time later, the Berry Lake Station was abandoned and the Fields Station was changed to Whiting by the Pennsylvania Railway Company.

Because the first locomotives burned wood, in the early 1870s the train station at Whiting was comprised of two structures: the woodhouse and the water tank. During this time, there was no regular passenger service, but most trains still were forced to stop at the Whiting station to take on wood and water. Underneath the elevated water tank, railway employees fabricated a comfortable dwelling. The large beams of the water tower were used as corner posts for a rough cottage. Even after the water tank became obsolete the building was still used as a residential dwelling for the section foreman,

Robert Klose. Then, for several years the water tank cottage was used as a freight office, where Henry Beaubien, Arthur Beaubien, Herman Richter, and William Urie spent their working hours.

The woodhouse was not usually stocked from the surrounding forests of the Whiting area. Instead, the fuel was purchased further east and brought to Whiting for use. This wood shed was the busiest and most necessary building in town at the time. The arrival of the coal burning locomotive brought on the demise of the woodhouse in Whiting. Some time later, the Whiting station gained some importance on the railroad tracks and the woodshed became a valuable structure again. Employees renovated the building and used it as a freight house.

In addition to the woodhouse and water tank, there was a third structure in the train depot's neighborhood. The building was located across from the railroad tracks and was the home of Frank Reinhart. Reinhart sold forty-rod whiskey and other items to wet the railroad employees' whistles. When railroad personnel noticed that wood from the woodhouse reserve kept disappearing, a warrant for Reinhart's arrest was issued. According to the 1911 Whiting City Almanac, "Fable has it that the sheriff duly appeared, but Frank saw him from afar and disappeared among the tangled undergrowth of the sand hills. Again, the sheriff appeared but again his man eluded him among the dunes. Both sides eventually became tired of this game of hide-and-seek." The matter was later dropped with Frank's promise to be good.

But, Frank Reinhart did not keep to his promise. He was responsible for the invention of a famous device that is said to have supplied him with a mouth-watering slice of bacon from time to time. The 1911 Whiting City Almanac retells the story of

Reinhart's hook, "The hook was a very heavy one and supplied with a stout rope. It was kept well hidden until the night freight, east bound, with car of livestock had stopped at Whiting for its regular supply of wood and water." When the crew was engaged in getting their needed supplies, Frank would attach the end of the rope to a nearby tree securing the hook to the livestock door. Once the train regained speed the door would be torn from the freight car allowing the pigs to escape. The next day Reinhart would state that he was going deer hunting. His hunt was always successful even if the venison tasted remarkably like pork.

To find out more about the advent of the railroads stop by the Local History Room.