

# **Georgina Trotter**

## **Classroom Resource Packet**

1. Student Biography of Georgina Trotter
2. Vocabulary List
  - a. Vocabulary words are pulled from the student biography, the actors' scripts, and the Character Information portion of our Guide Script. Words are organized alphabetically.
3. Supplemental Resources (pulled from The Pantagraph)
  - i. "Trotter a savvy businesswoman, bettered Bloomington schools, community" by Candace Summers (March 17, 2024)
  - ii. "Irish 'Forty Acres' speaks to city's railroad past" by Bill Kemp (September 18, 2011)

## Georgina Trotter (1836-1904)

Georgina Trotter was born on August 15, 1836 in Drogheda, Louth County, Ireland. She was one of six children born to John and Ann (Kelley) Trotter. The Trotter family was Irish Protestant and Georgina's father, John, engaged in **agriculture** and was a **prominent architect**.

In 1849, Trotter's father, a sister, and a brother came to the United States and settled in Chicago, Illinois. Trotter, her mother, and the rest of her siblings arrived in the U.S. the following year. Although the Trotter family was wealthy, they too were affected by the **famine** which plagued the whole of Ireland.

In 1840 almost 2.5 million Irish people relied on potatoes for profit, **nourishment**, and their **livelihood**. The English landowners of Ireland rented out pieces of their land to poor Irish Catholics. The Irish would work these lands to produce a profit for the landowner and enough potatoes were grown on land to provide enough food for the tenant families to survive as well. In 1845 a plant **pathogenic fungus** ruined the potato crop. By 1847 (known as Black '47) the entire crop of potatoes was wiped out, leaving a full-**fledged** famine in its wake. The fungus continued to wipe out crops annually until 1852. Although there were **relief efforts**, an estimated one million people died due to **starvation** or related diseases due to the famine by 1851. **Migration** became the only solution for millions of Irish people. By 1851 over two million people had **emigrated** from Ireland, with around 740,216 Irish **immigrating** to the United States by 1855.

Prior to Trotter's arrival in the U.S., her father died of cholera in 1849. This left Georgina's older brother, John Trotter, Jr., to be the one responsible for supporting the family. Eventually the family moved on to Bloomington by 1855, settling at a home located at the corner of Main and North Grove Streets, and then at a home at the corner of Allen and Market Streets by 1866.

On April 14, 1861, the United States **Civil War** began. Trotter answered the **call of duty** by **enlisting** as a nurse in the Union Army. She served at various posts during the war, including the U.S.A. Post Hospital in Jefferson City, Missouri (November 1, 1861 through February 1862) where she **escorted** wounded Union soldiers from the South to the North on riverboats as part of her duties as a nurse. It was said that she was one of the most trusted nurses on the hospital boats that ran up and down the Mississippi River.

By January 1863, Trotter was stationed at Union Hotel U.S.A. General Hospital in Georgetown, located outside of Washington, D.C. She worked there for several months. Nurses like her were responsible not only for washing, feeding, giving medicine, and preparing the wounded for surgery, but also reading to soldiers aloud, writing letters, and entertaining them day and night.

By May 1863, Trotter was transferred to the U.S.A Hospital in New Haven, Connecticut where she continued to treat the soldiers who were wounded in battle. She worked at this hospital through the month of October that year. Following this posting, she was transferred to a hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana. Trotter was put in charge of securing supplies for the hospital. Prior to this, it had been very difficult to "secure the necessary supplies, medicines, etc... from the store houses of the various wards" at the hospital. She complained to Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler about the "annoying army **red tape**, stating that many soldiers were dying for lack of such medicine which was but a short distance away, but which was kept from use by red tape until too late." Butler asked her what she would do about this problem. She replied that she "would **lop** the ears off a dozen or two of the **idlers** about here if they did not wake up and obey orders." To which Butler replied, "Go ahead and do it. I appoint you in charge

of the hospital **stores.**” After her appointment, there was no future trouble in securing the proper supplies to care for the sick and wounded Union soldiers.

After the war ended on April 9, 1865, Trotter returned home and joined her brother John in his lumber, grain, and coal business, which he opened in 1866. Their lumber and coal yard, *J.W. & G. Trotter Lumber & Grain Merchants*, was first located at 1302 West Market Street. Trotter had a **shrewd** talent for business and proved a very successful **asset** for the company, so much so that by 1876, Georgina and her brother, John, were ready to expand their company and purchased twelve **lots** of land and moved the business to 1111 West Market Street. In 1885, they expanded the company again by purchasing additional lots of land.

Trotter seemed to never tire; “she was a veritable **steam engine** of energy, and nothing could tire or **affright** her in the way of bodily **exertions** in the **pursuit** of many plans for the good of the city.” In fact, when her brother John passed away in February 1892, he left the entire business to Georgina over their brother James. Under her leadership the company continued to thrive. Georgina’s talents for business were sought out by other local businessmen who came to her for advice, establishing her ability as a woman **capable** of running a profitable company on her own.

On April 6, 1874, she became involved in the educational matters of Bloomington as the first woman elected to the Bloomington Board of Education even though, as a woman, she did not have the right to vote. She was also one of the first women in the United States to serve on a school board. According to *The Pantagraph*, “no election for members of the Board of Education that has ever been held in Bloomington has excited so much interest...the cause of this was doubtless not that issues more important than common involved or that party or **clique** had entered into the struggle, but that a woman, Miss Georgina Trotter, had entered the lists as a candidate.” In the days leading up the election, *The Pantagraph* reported that the time had come “when public opinion recognizes the fitness of woman to occupy positions of trust and responsibility, especially in the education of youth.”

Though she did not have a desire to be in public service, she could not refuse the position on the Board of Education. Trotter said in her letter of **acceptance** that a “**conviction** of duty and a high appreciation of your **substantial** and practical **recognition** of the rights of women **compel** me to accept the invitation which you have generously extended.” She served on the board for fifteen years (five consecutive terms), right alongside Sarah Raymond, a close friend who was appointed the Superintendent of Public Schools in Bloomington that same year.

Trotter, and her friend Sarah Raymond, had an uphill battle to prove they were worthy of these positions to members of the community. Some individuals were opposed to women (childless women for that matter), running the schools, when these offices had traditionally been held by men.

As a member of the school board, Trotter implemented many changes that improved the education of the children of Bloomington. In March 1875, she suggested the idea of shortening the course of high school “from six to three years, or at least to a shorter time than six years.” Trotter claimed that the course, as it was then, “was too complete—far beyond that **contemplated** by the law.” She stated that very few students who entered high school completed the necessary course. Trotter also noted that the incoming class of high school students for the 1874-75 school year was 75 students, but only 7 students would be graduating. She felt that if some of the course work was moved to the **ward schools** that it would reduce pressure on the high school, encouraging more students to graduate and reducing expenses too.

Trotter and the rest of the board wasted no time in **implementing** this change. The proposal was given to the high school committee to study this matter. The following month, the committee reported back, stating that state law only required “a good **practical** business education at public expense,” and that the course work created by their **predecessors** included “many branches of science that are far above the requirements of our practical business men.” It was their **recommendation** that students who wished to take classes above and beyond what the state required, should do so at their own expense. After several meetings throughout the summer, by the July meeting, the board and Superintendent Raymond had **solidified** a plan to cut the high school curriculum from six years down to three years.

In October 1876, Trotter made a motion that the committee on school examiners be instructed to inquire into the possibility of opening an evening school, which would benefit those individuals who are “compelled to labor during the day.” Her fellow board members **wholeheartedly endorsed** this idea and instructed the school examiners committee to look into the **feasibility** of putting the plan into action by November 1.

During her second term, in addition to being the head of the Janitors and Supplies Committee, she was also appointed to the School Buildings and Grounds committee and the Finance and Auditing Committee. Right before the beginning of the 1879-1880 school year, as the head of the Janitors and Supplies Committee, Trotter had the important task to have the furnaces at all of the schools evaluated. The report she presented to the full board found that the furnaces at five of the school buildings needed to be **overhauled** or completely replaced. Her committee’s findings brought about much discussion and **debate** from her fellow (male) board members as to if all of this **expenditure** would be necessary. Trotter did not back down and eventually the rest of the board members fell in line and voted to **authorize** her committee to seek **bids** for the project to be completed.

Trotter and Sarah Raymond did much to improve the schools. Their efforts added more classrooms and almost completely **eliminated corporal punishment** (a form punishment in which a rod, cane, or paddle was used to hit a student). And by 1881, the school district’s debt was completely gone. Trotter’s **keen** business sense helped keep the school district out of debt during her **tenure** in office and saved the school district a “good deal of money.” Overall, she witnessed 1,637 graduates and 40,000 pupils during her 15 years on the school board. Trotter retired from office in 1889 due to ill health.

Trotter and Raymond “worked side by side to improve the lives of others in the community through their social and professional lives.” Their hard work is evident as they worked together to develop Bloomington’s public library—Withers Public Library. Not only did Trotter **contribute** funds to help construct the building, but she helped gather donations from other members of the community to raise the necessary funds to construct the library. She also **lent** her business sense to the administration of the library. Today, there is a fountain dedicated to the Trotter Family in Withers Park, next to the site of Withers Library.

Georgina Trotter died in her cottage on North Mason Street on February 6, 1904 after a brief illness brought on by a **stroke**. Although her death seemed **imminent**, residents of Bloomington were still shocked and saddened. Her funeral was held at the family home and St. Matthew’s Church in Bloomington. *The Pantagraph* called her “one of the most remarkable women Bloomington has ever claimed as a citizen.” Trotter was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.

## Vocabulary

**Abolitionist (noun):** a person who wants to stop or abolish slavery, in particular of black slavery within the United States: an advocate of abolition.

**Acceptance (noun):** the quality or state of being accepted or acceptable

**Affright (verb):** frighten, alarm

**Agriculture (noun):** the science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products

**Asset (noun):** an item of value owned

**Authorize (verb):** to endorse, empower, justify, or permit by or as if by some recognized or proper authority

**Bids (noun):** an attempt or effort to win, achieve, or attract

**Call of duty (noun):** the feeling or belief that one must do or accomplish something

**Capable (adjective):** having attributes (such as physical or mental power) required for performance or accomplishment

**Civil War (Historical Event):** Civil War n., “The Civil War in the United States began in 1861, after decades of simmering tensions between northern and southern states over slavery, states’ rights, and westward expansion. The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 caused seven southern states to secede and form the Confederate States of America; four more states soon joined them. The War Between the States, as the Civil War was also known, ended in Confederate surrender in 1865. The conflict was the costliest and deadliest war ever fought on American soil, with some 620,000 of 2.4 million soldiers killed, millions more injured and much of the South left in ruin.”

**Clique (noun):** a narrow exclusive circle or group of persons

**Compel (verb):** formal acknowledgment of the political existence of a government or nation

**Contemplated (verb):** to view or consider with continued attention: meditate on

**Contribute (verb):** to give or supply (something, such as money or time) as a part or share

**Conviction (noun):** a strong persuasion or belief

**Corporal punishment (noun):** physical punishment that is intended to cause pain to a person, such as caning, flogging, spanking, beating, etc...

**Curriculum (noun):** the courses offered by an educational institution; a set of courses constituting an area of specialization.

**Debate (noun):** a contention by words or arguments

**Dynamic (adjective):** marked by usually continuous and productive activity or change; energetic, forceful.

**Eliminated (verb):** to put an end to or get rid of; remove.

**Emigrated (verb):** to leave one's place of residence or country to live elsewhere

**Endorsed (verb):** to approve opening; to express support or approval publicly and definitely.

**Enlisting (verb):** to enroll oneself in the armed forces

**Escorted (verb):** to accompany

**Exertions (noun):** the act or an instance of exerting *especially*: a laborious or perceptible effort

**Expenditure (noun):** the act or process of expending

**Famine (noun):** an extreme scarcity of food

**Fledged (adjective):** having attained complete status

**Feasibility (noun):** capable of being done or carried out

**Idlers (noun):** one who spends time idly: an idle, inactive, or lazy person

**Illinois State Normal University (noun):** Founded in 1857, the State of Illinois' first public university, which was established to prepare teachers and "Normal" meant "teaching." In 1964, the name was changed Illinois State University when the university expanded to become a liberal arts college, which it remains today.

**Immigrating (verb):** to come into a country of which one is not a native for permanent residence

**Imminent (adjective):** ready to take place: happening soon

**Implementing (verb):** to give practical effect to and ensure of actual fulfillment by concrete measures

**Irish Potato Famine (noun):** Between 1845-52 Ireland suffered a period of starvation, disease and emigration that became known as the Great Famine. The potato crop, upon which a third of Ireland's population was dependent for food, was infected by a disease destroying the crop. There had been crop failures before but during the famine it failed across the whole country, and reoccurred over several years.

**Keen (adjective):** intellectually alert: having or characteristic of a quick penetrating mind

**Livelihood (noun):** means of support or subsistence

**Lop (verb):** to eliminate as unnecessary or undesirable

**Lot (noun):** a measured parcel of land having fixed boundaries and designated on a plot or survey

**Migration (verb):** the act, process, or an instance of migrating

**Nourishment (noun):** food, nutriment

**Overhauled (adjective):** to renovate, remake, revise, or renew thoroughly

**Pathogenic fungus (noun):** fungi that cause disease in humans or other organisms

**Practical (adjective):** concerned with voluntary action and ethical decisions

**Predecessors (noun):** a person who has previously occupied a position or office to which another has succeeded

**Privileges (noun):** a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor.

**Prominent architect (noun):** popular/well-known person who designs buildings and advises in their construction

**Pursuit (noun):** an activity that one engages in as a vocation, profession, or avocation

**Recognition (verb):** formal acknowledgment of the political existence of a government or nation

**Recommendation (noun):** the act of recommending

**Red tape (noun):** excessive bureaucracy or adherence to rules and formalities, especially in public business.

**Relief efforts (noun):** humanitarian aid or assistance given to people in distress by individuals, organizations, or governments to prevent and relieve human suffering

**Shrewd (adjective):** given to wily and artful ways or dealing

**Solidified (verb):** to make secure, substantial, or firmly fixed

**Starvation (verb):** the act or an instance of starving

**Staunch (adjective):** steadfast in loyalty or principle.

**Steam engine (adjective):** as if driven by an engine

**Stores (noun):** to place or leave in a location (such as a warehouse, library, or computer memory) for preservation or later use or disposal

**Stroke (noun):** sudden impairment or loss of consciousness, sensation, and voluntary motion that is caused by rupture or obstruction (as by a clot) of a blood vessel supplying the brain, and is accompanied by permanent damage of brain tissue

**Substantial (adjective):** considerable in quantity: significantly great

**Tenure (noun):** the act, right, manner, or term of holding something (such as a landed property, a position, or an office)

**Union Army (noun):** The largest organizational group of soldiers, made up of one or more corps made up of men from northern states. The Union, also called the North or the United States, the Union was the portion of the country that remained loyal to the Federal government during the

Civil War. Union states were: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

**Ward schools (noun):** a common school that is managed by a city ward

**Wholeheartedly (adverb):** to approve openly



Trotter a savvy businesswoman, bettered Bloomington schools,  
community

Candace Summers, March 17, 2024



*Georgina Trotter (1836-1904)*

At a time when women had few rights and privileges (like voting, property ownership, and the ability to choose their own work) one Bloomington woman stands out as an example of a strong individual who did not let society dictate her role based on accepted gender norms. That woman was Georgina Trotter.

Georgina was a dynamo of energy and a force to be reckoned with. She was a shrewd businesswoman and her talents and expertise were sought out by other local businessmen who came to her for advice. She not only ran a successful business on her own (J.W. & G Trotter Lumber & Grain Merchants), but she put those talents to good use during her 15 years as a member of the Bloomington Board of Education, during which time she improved the quality of education the children in Bloomington received.

Georgina was born on August 13, 1836 in Drogheda, Ireland to John and Ann Trotter. The Trotter family was Irish Protestant and belonged to an “aristocratic clan of agriculturists.” In 1850 Georgina, her mother, and the rest of her siblings then came to America where her father and two siblings had already settled the year before.

Although the Trotter family was well off, they too were affected by the Irish Potato Famine which plagued the whole of Ireland. As their tenants starved and their crops failed, the Trotter family packed up and moved to the United States for better economic opportunities. The family first settled outside Kappa in 1850, but eventually moved to Bloomington by 1855 because the “country was quite wild and rough.”

Before joining her brothers in their lumber business, Georgina enlisted as a nurse in the Union Army upon the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. As a nurse, Georgina escorted wounded Union soldiers from the South to the North on riverboats up and down the Mississippi River. After the war ended in 1865, she returned home and joined her brother John in his lumber, grain, and coal business, which he opened in 1866. Their lumber and coal yard, J.W. & G. Trotter Lumber & Grain Merchants, was located at 1302 West Market Street.

Georgina had a sharp aptitude for business and proved a very successful asset for the company. She seemed to never tire; “she was a veritable steam engine of energy, and nothing could tire or affright her in the way of bodily exertions in the pursuit of many plans for the good of the city.” In fact, when her brother John passed away in February 1892, he left the entire business to Georgina over their brother James. Under her leadership, the company continued to thrive. Georgina’s talents for business were sought out by other local businessmen who came to her for advice, establishing her ability as a woman capable of running a profitable company on her own

In April 1874, Georgina became the first woman elected to the Bloomington Board of Education even though, as a woman, she did not have the right to vote. According to *The Pantagraph*, “no election for members of the Board of Education that has ever been held in Bloomington has excited so much interest...the cause of this was doubtless not that issues more important than common involved or that party or clique had entered into the struggle, but that a woman, Miss Georgina Trotter, had entered the lists as a candidate.”

Though she did not have a desire to be in public service, she could not refuse the position on the Board of Education. Georgina said in her letter of acceptance that a “conviction of duty and a high appreciation of your substantial and practical recognition of the rights of women compel me to accept the invitation which you have generously extended.” She served on the board for 15 years, right alongside Sarah Raymond, a close friend who was the Superintendent of Public Schools in Bloomington.

As a member of the school board, Georgina implemented many changes that improved the education of the children of Bloomington. During her time on the board, more classrooms were added, the course of study in high school was shortened, and more courses were assigned to the earlier grades. Corporal punishment (a form of punishment in which a rod, cane, or paddle was used to hit a student) was also eliminated. Overall, “Miss Trotter” witnessed 1,637 graduates and 40,000 pupils during her 15 years on the school board. She also saved the school district a “good deal of money” in the construction of new buildings and the renovation of others due to her business savvy. Her business sense helped keep the school district out of debt during her tenure in office. She retired from office in 1889 due to ill health.

Georgina and Sarah “worked side by side to improve the lives of others in the community through their social and professional lives.” One way they helped better the community was by helping develop Bloomington’s public library, known as Wither’s Public Library (named after Sarah Withers who donated the land on which the library was situated). Georgina contributed funds to help construct the building and lent her business sense to the administration of the library. The library opened in 1887 on the corner of East and Washington Streets and remained there for 89 years. In 1977 a new public library opened on Olive Street in Bloomington. Today, there is a fountain dedicated to the Trotter Family next to the Wither’s Library site.

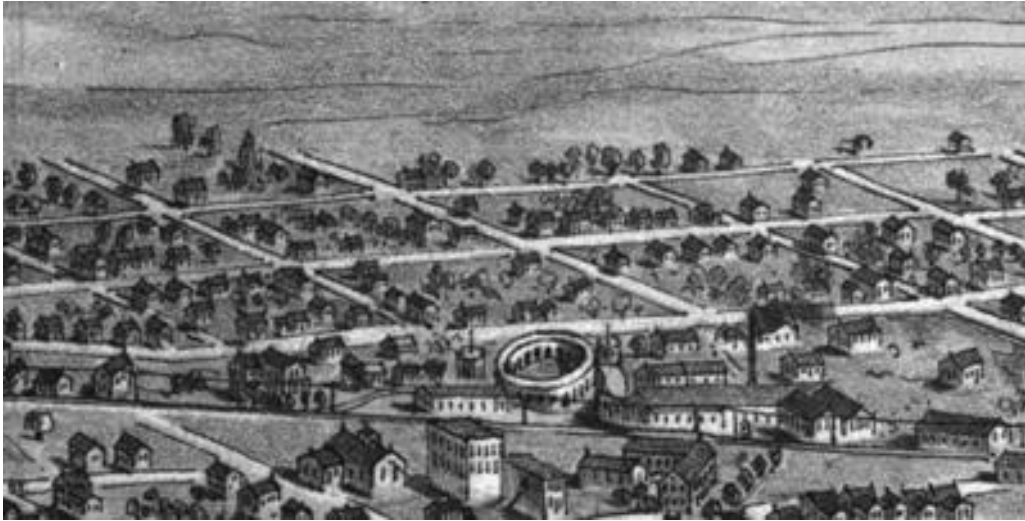
Additionally, Georgina helped organize the Bloomington Benevolent Association (BBA) in 1884. The BBA formed to call upon “benevolent” members of the community to “contribute either money, clothing, fuel, or provisions” to help the “poor and destitute of the community.” Georgina once again lent her business savvy and served as treasurer of the organization that first year. Meetings were sometimes held in the offices of her friend and colleague, Sarah Raymond.

After she retired from the School Board, Georgina devoted her attention to her lumber and coal business. Upon her death in 1904, the Pantagraph called her “one of the most remarkable women Bloomington has ever claimed as a citizen.”

In honor of Women’s History Month, the Museum is highlighting the stories of 30 influential women from McLean County’s past (including Trotter’s). Spanning multiple generations and hailing from various backgrounds, these women have transformed our community, leaving an indelible mark on our history. Visit the Museum to see this awe-inspiring display and visit [mchistory.org](http://mchistory.org) to read more about the stories of Trotter and the other women featured in the display.

## Irish ‘Forty Acres’ speaks to city’s railroading past

Bill Kemp, September 18, 2011



*The Forty Acres is seen here in this partial of an 1867 “bird’s eye” view of Bloomington, published by the Chicago Lithographing Co. The view is looking west, and the C&A Shops, including an early roundhouse, can be seen in the foreground.*

Bloomington’s old west side is inextricably linked with the Chicago & Alton Railroad and the Irish immigrants that came along for the ride, so to speak, to lay its rails, drive its locomotives and repair its rolling stock. And no neighborhood tells this story better than “Forty Acres,” once a cluster of Irish shanties that became a solid working-class corner of the city.

Yet fair or not, it earned the reputation as one of the city’s roughest. “There was a time, in its earlier history, when the Forty Acres carried with its name an impression of lawlessness and, to put it mildly, toughness,” noted *The Pantagraph* more than a century ago.

The neighborhood is bound (roughly speaking) by Forrest, Morris, Empire and Cottage streets, though it also includes the east side of Morris and the southern half of the blocks north of Forrest. Yet city residents often employed the term Forty Acres to encompass a wider residential section running south to Locust or even Market streets.

the first rude habitations, the area was described as “a tract of underbrush and stubby growth timber,” with a creek on the north end doubling as an open sewer. Carlton H. Perry owned the parcel, and in October 1855 surveyor Peter Folsom laid out Perry’s Addition, though it soon became known as “Perry’s Forty Acres” or simply “Forty Acres.”

Despite the supposed poor quality of the land, the fact that the new neighborhood was situated immediately west of the sprawling Chicago & Alton Railroad Shops made it

attractive to Irish immigrants. The “squatter town shanties” of Forty Acres stood on long east-west lots that usually included a garden and backyard pigsty. Most of the men earned a hard living at the Shops, a city unto itself which at its peak featured 2,000 or more unionized workers maintaining and repairing steam locomotives and constructing and refurbishing railcars, all amid a discordant symphony of hissing steam and screeching, clanging metal.

Initially, Forty Acres lay outside the city limits, and talk of annexation, according to The Pantagraph, was met with laughter among “people who were known as conservative and steady.” Despite such derision, annexation did come, as the city improved its streets and residents replaced shanties with solidly built workmen’s homes.

In 1870, according to the U.S. Census, Forty Acres was home to 304 residents, with 128 of the 130 adults born in a foreign country (and 108 of those from Ireland). The most common occupation was the generic category of laborer, though others included locomotive builder, boilermaker, carpenter, painter, watchman, railroad fireman and “tinner,” with most or all of these jobs coming from the C&A Shops.

In 1892 Fr. James Burke organized St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, which though located south of the defined limits of Forty Acres, provided a social anchor for many of its residents. Martin J. Hoeniges recalled that if a parishioner began favoring the bottle over the welfare his family, Fr. Burke “would show up at local west side taverns and have a word with the fallen-away soul.”

Around this same time Forty Acres was becoming increasingly diverse, though there were still plenty of Irish residents. By the turn of the last century, recalled longtime westsider Paul J. Abraham, Forty Acres and its environs included Hungarians, Austrians, Czechs and Poles, as well as a “few” Italians, Mexicans and African Americans.

Despite the changes (or perhaps because of them) Forty Acres remained a term of disparagement, and for a boy to accuse another of living there (whether true or not) was an invitation to fisticuffs. “By 1900 thru 1910,” Abraham said, “most of the families were united and living in peace ... being slurred and cursed by most of the people in Bloomington. They called us hunkies, wops, spicks, greebers, polocks, and when they did not know our nationality they called us hunkies from the Forty Acres.”

In 1920, the 3½ blocks of Western Avenue running through the neighborhood included Irish surnames such as Caughlin, Dooley, Flannery and Maloney, though now joined by the likes of Hauptmann, Rebmann and Szabados. What had not changed was the neighborhood’s dependence on the Shops, as 28 of the 35 households were headed by someone working for the C&A.

The Shops are long gone but Forty Acres survives, intact and (relatively speaking) unchanged, a visible reminder of the central roles both immigrants and railroads played in shaping local history.