# George Washington Coats and the community of Coats Grove

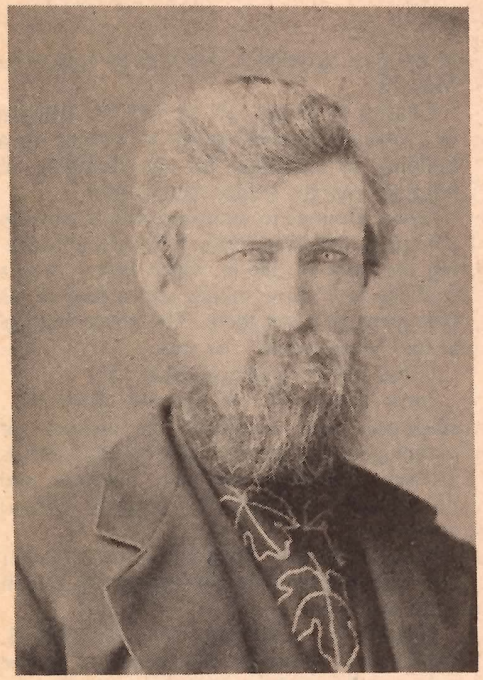
By Catherine Lucas

Woodland will be celebrating its Sesquicentennial on Aug. 14-16. The entire area of Woodland Township, including the very farthest corners, will take part in this celebration.

The settlement of Coats Grove sits at the crossroads separating four Barry County townships - Woodland, Castleton, Hastings and Carlton. This settlement was busiest from the 1880s to the 1920s having during that time a post office, a railroad station, an elevator, a general store and several other businesses.

In 1865, George Washington Coats was discharged from the Union Army after the Civil War and returned to his wife, Abby, in Ottawa County. In 1876, with five children, the Coats family moved to the southwest corner of Woodland Township, where they bought 50 acres and a house from Oscar Munion. The trees were so thick in the grove around the house and the limbs so low they had to be lifted out of the way to get to the house. In November, 1879, Coats, a builder by trade, began to haul brick from Hastings for a new house. The family lived in the granary while the old house was torn down and the new one built.

The area at the crossroads of the four townships was growing fast and soon needed a post office. A name was necessary and it was called Coats Grove. Coats was appointed postmaster, and on Sept. 19, 1879, he set bonds for the post office. The first mail by carrier was brought in on March 16, 1880. A building was put next to the road and for many years it was the post office and general store. Coats also built a shop near the corners, and there he built such miscellaneous items as privys, bobsleds, hay racks, wagon boxes, wagon wheels, clothes bars, wheel barrows, a small coffin and setting wagon and buggy tires.



George Washington Coats, 1835-1897, founded the community which sits at the crossroads of four county townships.

This brick home in Coats Grove was built by George Washington Coats in 1879-80. The home, designated as a Centennial Farm, is owned by Ron Coats, of 5101 Coats Grove Road.

Descendants going through his diaries have found that in addition to his own house, barn, granary, carriage house, shop and store, he built at least 15 other houses in the neighborhood and helped on many others including roofing the Davenport house (see Banner article on March 29).

He built at least 17 barns and countles other smaller farm buildings. In the summers in addition to running the store, shop and post office, he helped his son, George Edwin Coats (referred to in the diaries as "Eddie") with the farming. They grew 15 varieties of apples, and they also grew hay and grain.

His daughters wrote in a diary of "drawing" apples, hay and wheat in Hastings until the C.K. and S. railroad went through Coats Grove in 1888. During winters, he cut and "drew" firewood to Hastings.

Coats helped build the church now known as Woodgrove Christian/Brethren Parish, which was built to be a community church in 1878, but was later dedicated to the Disciples of Christ sect. After the dedication, people of other faiths were not allowed to worship there, and for a number of years, each Sunday a Church of God social meeting and Bible study meeting were held at the Coats home. Once a month, a preaching and communion service were held at the schoolhouse. Later these services were also moved into the Coats home.

In the last years of G.W. Coats' life, people of his faith were allowed to use the church once a month and even held occasional evangelistic meetings there.

On Dec. 20, 1897, the entries in George Washington Coats' diary ceased when he had a stroke and died. He was buried in Fuller Cemetery in Carlton Township. Through the years, he and his descendents eventually increased the size of the farm to 500 acres.

He was the father-in-law of Eugene Davenport, the grandfather of Lawrence Chase, the great-grandfather of Max and Kendall Coats and Doris Coats Niethamer, and the great-great-grandfather of Ronald Coats who is the current owner of the brick home on Coats Grove Road shown above. The home has a historical marker. Ron is the fire chief of Woodland Township. His daughter, Ronda, married Rick Benner, and their son, Justin, is the seventh generation of the Coats family to live on the centennial farm.