

Remember the ladies

More than 50 Illinois towns honor remarkable—and mostly forgotten—women

By Cinda Ackerman Klickna

In each issue of the next several issues of *Illinois Heritage*, we will explore the origins of Illinois town names. Some remember females: wives or daughters of a founding settler; some honor the men who settled or founded an area or served in a prominent role. There are towns named after Indians, European origins, flora or fauna, people or character traits. Some are clever or humorous; others tragic or sad.

Women remembered

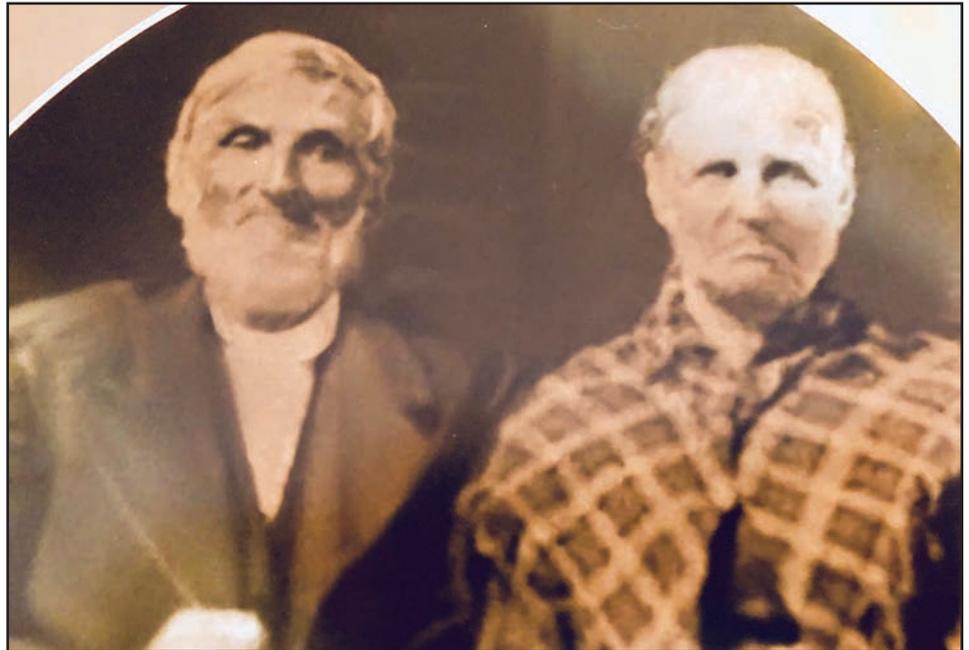
There are quite a few towns whose name might be considered a female name, but only fifty one towns in Illinois are actually named after a woman according to the book *Place Names of Illinois* by Edward Callary. Some were wives or daughters of men who founded an area, owned businesses, or were prominent in the town.

Many of these towns today have very few residents.

Bearing the name of the wife of a



The Village of Laura has a post office and a World War II memorial stone, but the town's namesake is a mystery.



John and Jane Price Furry, for whom the town of Janesville, Coles County, was named.
Photo courtesy Elsie Furry Carter, Mattoon.

prominent citizen are such places as: Addieville (Adele, the wife of the founder), Anna (wife of Winstead Davie), Elvira (wife of Governor Ninian Edwards), Henrietta (wife of Washington Hesing, the newspaper publisher), Janesville (Jane, the wife of John Furry), Monee (Marie LeFevre, the wife of a French trader), Sabina (wife of grain elevator owner),

Some towns bear the last names of women: Gartside (Mary Gartside was the postmaster) and even a combination of names such as Joetta (for Joel and Mariette Booz), Marcellene (for sisters Martha and Celeste), Renshaw (Rachel and Elmer Renshaw founders), and Saidora (Sadie and Dora – last names unknown),

Some remember a daughter of a prominent citizen: Elva (her father invented barbed wire), Gibson City (named after Margaret Gibson Lott), Laura (the daughter of the Santa Fe Railroad contractor), and Sarahville (her father, John T. Davis, served as an Illinois State representative in the 1840s).

Then there are specific stories that help explain a town's name. In far northern Illinois sits Elizabeth, and in

far southern Illinois lies Elizabethtown. Both have origins from a woman (or women) named Elizabeth.

There are several possible stories for the name of Elizabeth in Jo Daviess County, close to Galena. One claims that Sauk warriors during the Black Hawk War threatened the fort, and a Mrs. Elizabeth Armstrong gathered the women since the men were out hunting. The Indians withdrew after the women persisted in a strong defense of the fort. Another story says there were three women named Elizabeth who defended the fort so all were honored with the town's name. But, still another story claims it was John Winters who named the town in 1839 after his wife, Elizabeth. Whether she may have been one of the Elizabeths who defended the fort is unknown.

Elizabethtown in Hardin County close to Kentucky gets its name from the tavern and ferry boat owner James McFarland whose wife was Elizabeth.

Then there are the towns named for women that have a more unique reason. Olga was the favorite customer of storekeeper Napoleon Vaughn and he honored her by naming the town after her.

Mrs. Corydon Weed named her town Shirley, for the heroine of the 1849 novel she was reading by English novelist Currer Bell (Charlotte Bronte).

Royalty has played a role in the names of several towns: Victoria was named in honor of Queen Victoria, while Xenia was named after Princess Xenia of Greece. Savoy got its name after a visit in 1861 from Princess Clotilde of Alpine Duchy, house of Savoy, and her husband, Prince Napoleon.

These are just a few of the many towns in Illinois with unique beginnings – all named for women. 

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The Rose Hotel in Elizabethtown dates back to early days of Hardin County and ferry operator James McFarland, whose wife's name was Elizabeth.

Photo by William Furry.

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