

The “Lime City”
Huntington County
35.1979.2

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Marker Text

Huntington, The “Lime City,” so named for its many limestone quarries and kilns, the first kiln being built in this vicinity by Michael Houseman in 1843 or 1844. By 1885 there were 31 kilns in operation; eight were perpetual kilns, the others were occasional kilns. The lime was of such high quality it was shipped out of the state as well as being used locally. [Illustration]

Report

This marker contains one obvious error and some claims that cannot be verified with primary sources. However, much of the information has been verified with primary and secondary sources.

According to Frank Sumner Bash’s *History of Huntington County Indiana: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests, Vol. I* (1914), “Huntington rejoices in the sobriquet of ‘The Lime City.’ About 1843 or 1844 Michael Houseman built a small lime kiln, upon the site later occupied by the Hawley Brothers, and burned a small quantity of lime for local use.” This supports the marker text, but it is unclear where Bash collected this information because the book contained no citations. Little primary documentation has been found. Two Huntington County land deeds, both recorded on January 24, 1843, involve Houseman, but neither deed notes how the land would be utilized. The deeds only show a transfer of land between John and Elizabeth Houseman to Michael Houseman. After a brief search, Houseman could not be located in the county deed index for 1844. Also, Housemen does not appear in the Huntington County census until 1860. By then his noted occupation was “farmer.” Ten years later, in the 1870 census, he claimed he was a “gunsmith.” Without further evidence, this claim cannot be verified.

Also, the marker implies that Huntington is commonly and widely known as “Lime City.” However, the only located document calling Huntington County “Lime City” is Bash’s county history. This term cannot be located in other histories of the County or the State of Indiana including Donald F. Carmony’s *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (1998), and Clifton J. Phillips’ *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth 1880-1920* (1968).

Much of the marker’s text is based on primary documentation from the Indiana Department of Geology and Natural History’s *Seventh Annual Report* (1875). The report states, “Thirty one kilns were in active operation making caustic lime at the time of my visit. Eight of the number are perpetual kilns, the remainder are occasional kilns...” The report continues, “This lime is held in high estimation and meets with a ready market not only in Indiana, but in Ohio and Illinois, as well.”

While the report confirms the number of kilns and that the lime was of high quality, the report was published in 1875, while the marker text claims these statistical figures existed in 1885. Frank Sumner Bash’s *History of Huntington County Indiana: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests, Vol. I* (1914), also notes the 1875 geological survey. This history reports that “When Professor Cox made his geological survey of the county in 1875, he found thirty-one kilns in operation.” This county history correctly interprets the *Seventh Annual Report*, but does not provide any information about the limestone industry during the 1880s. By 1885, the Indiana Department of Geology and Natural History published reports sporadically. No such report was created in 1885, and neither the *Fourteenth Annual Report* (1884) nor the *Fifteenth Annual Report* (1886) reported on Huntington County limestone. The last mention of limestone in Huntington County, during this timeframe, is in the *Twelfth Annual Report* (1882) claiming the stone to be a “very superior quality.” No facts or figures are provided by the report, because an in-depth feature on the county already existed in the 1875 publication. Without performing an exhaustive search of land records and Huntington County newspapers; the year, number, and types of kilns provided on the marker cannot be verified. However, it seems unlikely the number of kilns in 1885 Huntington County would mirror the marker’s claim. The *Seventh Annual Report’s* geology survey stated, in 1875, 617,000 bushels of lime left the County.

According to Bash, by 1880 “over three hundred and twenty-five thousand bushels of lime were shipped from Huntington.” With nearly a 300,000 bushel difference between the two figures, it is likely the number of kilns in use was reduced by the 1880s.

With the located primary sources, the information presented on the marker is correct for the year 1875. However, primary evidence cannot be found to substantiate the marker’s date of 1885.