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Tuesday through Friday

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7 a.m. to noon Saturday

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tuesday-Friday: \$1.00 / issue
Sauk Weekend: \$2.00 / issue
To subscribe, make a payment
or discuss your delivery, contact
Subscriber Services.

Gazette (USPS #142980) is published
Tuesday through Friday and delivered
to homes by Shaw Media,
113 S. Peoria Ave., Dixon IL 61021

Periodical postage paid at Sterling, IL
and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address
corrections to Shaw Media,
113 S. Peoria Ave., Dixon IL 61021

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The great stagecoach transfer station



**COMMUNITY
VOICES**

**Tom
Wadsworth**

I recently found three statements
about early Dixon that stunned me.

The first one appeared in the 1881
“History of Lee County.” It said Dixon
was “the great transfer station on the
stage lines that traversed the country” in
the 1830s and 1840s.

The second statement was published
in 1838 in a book titled “Illinois in 1837 &
8.” It described Dixon as the place where
the stagecoach roads from Chicago,
Naperville, Ottawa, Princeton and Peoria
converge before continuing on to Galena.

The two statements surprised me
because I never realized Dixon’s pivotal
role in the stagecoach business. That fact
led to other revelations about early
Dixon, especially about its early hotel
industry. Stay with me.

Few realize that Father John Dixon
initiated stagecoach travel through
Dixon. In 1828 and 1829, he ran ads in
Galena, promoting his “mail stage” that
carried mail and passengers from Galena
to Springfield. On April 11, 1830, he
famously moved to “Dixon” to take over
operation of Ogee’s Ferry and to occupy
a more central position for his mail con-
tract.

Traffic backup

The slow process of ferrying fre-
quently created a traffic backup, which
was noted by Lt. Jefferson Davis, the
future president of the Confederacy.
When Davis came to Dixon’s Ferry in
1831, he “found the mail coach and num-
bers of wagons with persons going to the
lead mines detained at the river.”

Davis’s testimony matches a state-

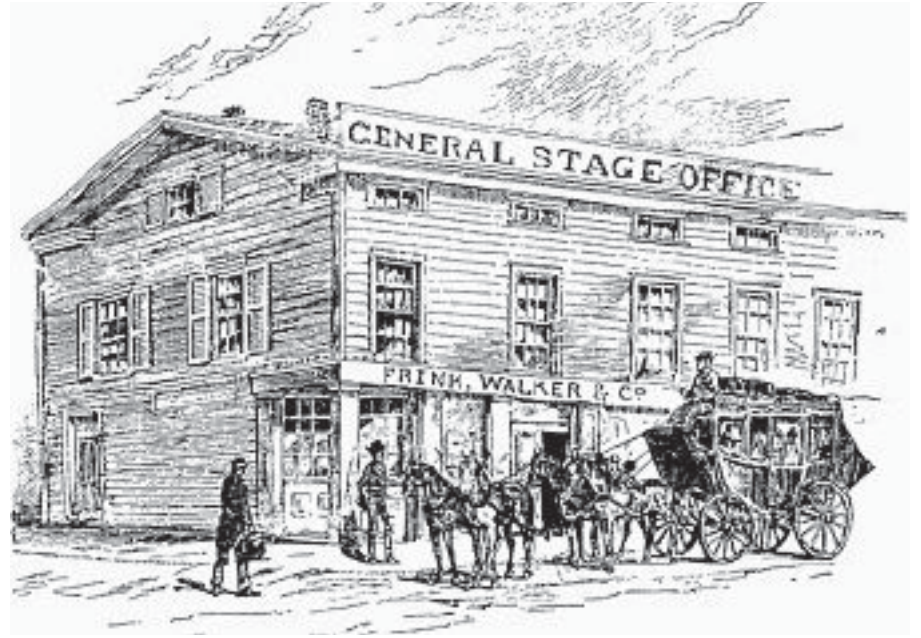


Image provided by Tom Wadsworth

An early drawing shows Frink & Walker’s stagecoach headquarters in Chicago, circa 1845.

ment in the 1880 “History of Dixon and
Palmyra,” which recalled that, from 1829
to 1835, “five to twenty teams a day”
would wait in line to utilize Dixon’s ferry
on their way to Galena in the spring and
fall.

The major stagecoach hub

Dixon soon became the hub for sev-
eral stagecoach lines that threaded
northern Illinois. Besides John Dixon,
three others operated stage lines in the
area: John D. Winters of Elizabeth, Leon-
ard Andrus of Grand Detour, and Frink
& Walker of Chicago. James P. Dixon,
Father John’s oldest son, served as an
agent for Frink & Walker, which likely
involved selling stagecoach tickets from
James’s livery stables at Dixon’s Ferry.

As all these coaches rumbled into
Dixon, they brought exhausted horses
and people. The horses would be
changed, fed and watered at the local liv-
ery. Travelers, too, would require a
respite from the bumpy ride. And that’s
where the hotel business enters our
story.

In 1835 John Dixon’s cabin was con-
verted into a tavern “for the accommo-
dation of the traveling public.” At that
time, a tavern was a small hotel offering
a meal, a bed and sometimes the sale of
“ardent spirits.” Rebecca Dixon, John’s
wife, served as the tavern hostess at that
time, but she was firmly opposed to alco-
hol.

See WADSWORTH, page 5

LOTTERY

ILLINOIS LOTTERY

Midday Pick 3: 1-0-0 (4)
Midday Pick 4: 9-5-3-4 (2)
Lucky Day Lotto Midday:
16-18-27-28-32
Lotto jackpot: \$5.45 million

MEGA MILLIONS

Est. jackpot: \$267 million

POWERBALL

Est. jackpot: \$280 million

INDIANA LOTTERY

Daily 3 Midday: 3-8-5 (2)
Daily 4 Midday: 4-0-2-7 (2)
Est. Lotto jackpot: \$43 million

WISCONSIN LOTTERY

Pick 3 Midday: 0-0-2
Pick 4 Midday: 0-1-4-1

Some numbers were not
available at press time.

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ON THE COVER

**Shandra Strow celebrates a bingo win Thursday, kicking off
the Hometown Holidays festivities in Rock Falls.**

See more photos on page 3.

Photo by Alex T. Paschal

CORRECTIONS

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• WADSWORTH

Continued from page 2

The third statement

That brings us to the third statement, published in the 1880 "History of Dixon and Palmyra." It said that Dixon had grown to 13 families in 1837, and the town had three hotels: Dixon's tavern, the Western Hotel and the Rock River House.

How could a town of 13 families maintain three hotels?

These hotels were certainly small and probably needed a staff of only a husband and wife. But the important point is that Dixon's ferry and its extensive stagecoach traffic gave birth to a thriving hotel industry.

Years later, when the first issue of the Dixon Telegraph came off the presses in 1851, the editor touted Dixon's good rope ferry, "stages [that] meet here from almost every direction," and three hotels, which would include the famous Nachusa House in 1853.

The end of the stagecoach

In 1855, stagecoach traffic came quickly to an end when the speed, comfort and convenience of the railroad came to Dixon, along with a railroad bridge. Fortunately, Dixon was the recipient of not one, but two railroad lines: the Illinois Central serving north-south travelers, and the Galena and Chicago Union serving east-west travelers.

But with the advent of the railroad and reliable bridges, travelers no longer needed to stop in Dixon. In order to get people to stop in town, the residents needed to rely on its natural charm and beauty, which was there all along.



Photo provided by Tom Wadsworth

This 1842 painting of Dixon by Henry F. Ainslie, held by the Chicago Historical Society, is the earliest known view of the Rock River and its ferry from the bluffs of south Dixon.

'Almost a paradise'

Longtime Dixon resident J. T. Little (1817-1902) described its beauty in the 1893 "Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County" as he told the story of his first visit to Dixon from Maine. He first stopped in Oregon then came down the river from Grand Detour in the stagecoach with Leonard Andrus.

As the horses emerged over the high bluff, probably near today's KSB Hospital, Little said that he would "never forget the beautiful vision of his first glimpse of Dixon."

"There never was a prettier place for a town and within two years it will be almost a paradise."

While other area towns can boast a beautiful view of the Rock River, Dixon's gradual slope to the river provides a stunning vista that is unparalleled along its 300-mile journey.

So, for many early stagecoach passengers, the Rock River ferry forced them to stay for the night. But for others, the beauty of Dixon's unique perch above the river would inspire them to stay for a lifetime.

• A Dixon native, Tom Wadsworth is a writer, speaker and occasional historian. He holds a Ph.D. in New Testament.

What is a Seamless Roofing System?

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Roofing plays a critical role in the overall integrity of a structure; it protects interiors from the elements, ensures energy efficiency, and provides aesthetic appeal. Among the many options available in the roofing industry today, the seamless roofing system has risen in popularity due to its unique advantages, particularly for flat or low-sloping roofs.

At its core, a seamless roofing system is a continuous, uninterrupted surface that lacks seams or joints. Traditional roofing systems often use overlapping materials, which can create potential weak points susceptible to leaks, moisture infiltration, and wear. A seamless system is designed to prevent such vulnerabilities through a heat-welding process.

Another advantage of the seamless roofing system is its flexibility and adaptability. Whether the roof has an unusual shape, protrusions, or equipment installations, the seamless material can be applied uniformly, ensuring complete coverage. This adaptability extends to repairs as well. If damage occurs, the affected area can be resealed without necessarily replacing the entire roof.

Because of the absence of joints

or seams, maintenance is less complicated. There are fewer potential points of failure, leading to a longer lifespan and reduced maintenance costs over time.

With its ability to provide a continuous, leak-proof surface, coupled with energy efficiency and adaptability, it's no wonder that more and more residential and commercial property owners are gravitating towards this innovative roofing choice. Whether constructing a new building or refurbishing an old one, a seamless roofing system may be your best option.

Northern Illinois Seamless Roofing has been providing commercial seamless roofing systems since 1985. The team uses Duro-Last materials, which are precision-fabricated to fit your building's low-sloped or flat roof. The materials are resistant to fire, chemicals, grease, high winds, punctures, and extreme temperatures. Customers also benefit from a 15- or 20-year full, non-prorated warranty.

For more information about seamless roofing systems, or to set up a free consultation, please contact:

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