

HARVEY WELLS

The history books describe Harvey Wells as a man of iron will and great energy, a "creative genius whose career changed the history of Jackson County and whose unaccepted aims retarded the progress of Jackson for many years and created the rival town of Wellston."¹

Wells was born on May 29, 1846, in Wilkesville, Vinton County, Ohio, the son of Agrippa² and Hannah Wells. Some sources list the father as "King Agrippa Wells," but the late Willard Potter of Jackson, a nephew of Harvey Wells, once stated that the name was simply "Agrippa Wells." The "King" in the Wells name was the opinion of Wellston newspaperman John Sylvester.³ Potter was the son of Mary Wells, a sister of Harvey, and John Potter.

When Harvey was eleven years of age, he began learning carpentry and worked at that trade until 1862 when he enlisted as a messenger in the army. However, he was assigned to the harness-making department where he learned that trade, and soon he became foreman of the whole department. Later, he enlisted in the One Hundred Ninety-fourth Ohio Infantry and was mustered out in October, 1865, at Washington, D. C.⁴

He then attended high school in Gallia County, Ohio, and the Commerical College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was employed by Heseiah Sanford Bundy as bookkeeper and general manager of the Latrobe Furnace store for one year. Afterwards he attended Ohio University at Athens for two terms; and from there, he attended Ohio Wesleyan University at Delaware.⁵

In 1867, Wells published a book entitled *Well's New System of Rapid Calculation*. It proved to be in great demand, and he traveled in several states selling some 60,000 copies. He earned \$8,000 to \$10,000 from the sale of the publication.⁶

He was next employed in the real estate business for six to eight months.⁷ He first sought to develop his business ideas in Jackson; he purchased a prominent corner lot that appears to have been at the southwest corner of Pearl and Broadway streets⁸ and had

plans for a large luxury hotel. He asked a number of successful Jackson businessmen to join in the enterprise by purchasing stock, but they believed that his views were unrealistic and refused to support him. Instead of a death blow, it served as an incentive to establish his own new town. He brushed the dust of Jackson from his feet and moved to Hamden, a railroad town, where the people were friendly and encouraged his dream of creating a city of 40,000 people in five years⁹ that would become the "New Pittsburgh of the West."¹⁰

He returned to Jackson and proceeded to lay the foundations for six tenement houses on the site where he had planned to construct the hotel. The scoffing businessmen said, "We thought you were going to build a hotel. This won't do. These houses will spoil this part of town."¹¹ He then sold the property to the businessmen for a good profit and informed them about his plans:

I'm going to found a new town with two of the largest furnaces in Ohio. I'll have 40,000 to 50,000 people in 5 years because we have coal, clay, iron ore and everything to make iron and other manufactures. Then we'll come back to Jackson and move the courthouse to Wellston.¹²

Wells realized that coal, iron ore, and clay were of no value until they were out of the ground and by skilled labor converted into useful products. He was the first to realize the wastefulness of the traditional furnace company towns; the homes and businesses were constructed around the furnace; and when the furnace failed, the whole community became a ghost town. Instead, he conceived the idea of the furnaces being adjuncts to the towns, operating independently of the furnaces. If the furnaces failed, the businesses and towns would continue to function. He had even conceived the idea of building additions to Jackson and making it the county metropolis.¹³

In addition to his plans for developing a town in 1873, he was also nominated as a candidate for the Constitutional Convention and was subsequently elected by the Republican party by a majority of 472 votes.¹⁴ This was followed by securing an option for the purchase of 1,000 acres of land south of Hamden from Heseekiah Sanford Bundy

for \$100,000.¹⁵ He secured the support of a group of businessmen and farmers from Washington, C. H., Ohio. He invited them to come by train to Hamden. Wells and future brother-in-law John C. H. Cobb transported the delegation in carriages to the town site south of Hamden. Wells also had some of the Wellston coal and demonstrated how readily it burned. The oldest member of the delegation said, "Mr. Wells, you have misrepresented the property."¹⁶ There was silence for a moment with everyone thinking the plan was a failure. Then the delegate added:

You presented this property to us and we find it much better than you described. We will take it on your terms. Get your deed ready at once. We have told our attorney who is with us to apply for a charter for the Wellston Coal and Iron Company. Just complete the survey of lots, make your maps, and we will pay all the bills, and remember, call the new city Wellston.¹⁷

Wells engaged Richard Craig of McArthur, Vinton County Surveyor, to plot 1,000 town lots from 270 acres of his 1,000-acre Bundy farm during the summer and fall of 1873. By December of that year, some 800 lots had been platted, Wells retaining 200 of them for himself, and the town site had been recorded.¹⁸ The capital stock of the Wellston Coal and Iron Company was \$500,000, and the security was the Bundy lands that were underlaid with mineral resources. There were 18 initial shares of \$8,000 each for a total of \$140,000. While all of these transactions were occurring in December of 1873, Jay Cooke, Wall Street banker and the largest financier in America, had failed in September of that year. The Wells supporters who had endorsed the notes were suddenly short of cash, and the creditors began foreclosure proceedings. The 200 town lots retained by Wells that were valued at \$200 each were sold by the sheriff for \$20 each. The Bundy House, the three-story hotel with 70 guest rooms on West Broadway, was almost completed but without funds; it became a partially occupied boardinghouse.¹⁹

Through all of the bankruptcies and foreclosures, Harvey Wells did not become discouraged. He continued to think of ways to keep the town that bore his name growing and to bring prosperity to its people.²⁰ Ophir Furnace, northwest of Jackson and west of

Coalton, had failed. It was purchased for \$10,000 on credit and moved to Wellston in 1877. The Eliza Coal and Furnace Company was organized by Wells, and Eliza Furnace was constructed in 1878 on the east side of Wellston. Both the company and the furnace were named for Eliza Bundy Wells.²¹ Wells had married Eliza Bundy, the youngest daughter of Heseiah Sanford and Caroline Paine Bundy, on June 22, 1875. She was graduated in 1872 from Young Ladies Seminary (later Ohio Wesleyan University) in Delaware.²²

After operating about nine months, Eliza Furnace was engulfed by the panic, but Wells never forgot the issue of keeping Wellston growing by getting more industry to keep his citizens busy and prosperous. Horace L. Chapman of Jackson, John Cobb, Allen Austin, and he went to Dayton to talk with the board of trade of that city. Dayton was interested in the coal from Jackson County. The Dayton and Southeastern Railroad was incorporated to build a narrow gauge railroad from Dayton. The original plan was to extend the railroad into Meigs County, but it only reached the county line in Milton Township. The delegation then proceeded to Springfield, and the Springfield, Jackson, and Pomeroy Railroad was chartered. It never reached Pomeroy, but it was built to Jackson, up to Wellston, and south to Ironton on the Ohio River.²³ Someone once said of Harvey Wells:

I wish Harvey would make a million dollars for himself sometime. Why then he would spend the whole million trying to make Wellston a bigger and better city.²⁴

Although Wells seemed to be blocked in every move during 1878 and 1879 and the creditors had taken his town lots and his twin furnaces, he made the following announcement:

Everything is all right now. I've got Eliza Furnace. I've got my town lots back. I'm going to rebuild Eliza into a bigger furnace. I'll sell my town lots for small cash payments and let the buyers work out the balance at my furnace.

Sure we are hard up, he told the skeptics. But look at

Cincinnati with 20,000 men idle and their families hungry. Sure we have a few empty houses in Wellston, and the new Bundy Hotel is deserted before it's finished.²⁵

In the early 1880s, Wells sought an ample water supply for his city; the first water mains were laid; and the first standpipe was constructed. He also sought to provide electricity at a time when it was not known outside large cities. At the same time, Eliza and Milton furnaces were shut down because the price of pig iron had declined.²⁶

In 1883, he constructed a home on the edge of Wellston with a commanding view of the town and valley below. Facing New Jersey Avenue to the west, the home was a unique example of fine Victorian Italianate architecture. It was a two-story wood frame house with a shallow hip roof built over a partial basement.²⁷

After five years of marriage, Harvey and Eliza Wells were divorced;²⁸ and on July 1, 1885, Harvey Wells married Laura Bundy, the daughter of William Sanford Bundy, niece of Eliza Bundy Wells, and granddaughter of Heseekiah Sanford Bundy. To this union were born two daughters, Anita and Laura.²⁹

Wells continued to think of ways to develop his new town. On December 12, 1885, The Wellston Steel and Nail Mill Company was organized. Soon a complex of buildings on the south end of town near the fairgrounds was filled with nail cutting machines, and there was an influx of nail-makers from Ashland, Kentucky. Wells, however, had not foreseen the coming of the first wire nails.³⁰ The complex remained vacant until 1899 when it became the site of the Alma Cement Company established by C. K. Davis.³¹

In 1886, Wells obtained an option on 200 acres of additional land and mapped it out into 16,000 lots. He had secured prospects of attracting large investors from Chicago, and they were scheduled to tour Wellston. Then another crisis occurred; the old dependable water wells had gone dry. The Wellston No. 2 mine came to the rescue; it was suddenly flooded with what appeared to be an underground lake. A special pump had to be rushed from Cincinnati, and the water mains and the standpipe were filled.

Wells was enthusiastic and urged everyone with a steam engine to "Whoop 'er up next Tuesday and give it all you got. My people are coming Tuesday, make it look busy. I've got a deal on, bigger than all the others put together."³²

The delegation of investors from Chicago came to Wellston. They were impressed and stated that the town would hear from them, but it was the spring of 1887 before their response arrived. Circulars were distributed about Wellston as follows:

Harvey Wells' Big Deal Goes Through. Public Meeting on Broadway Tonight. Everybody Come.³³

Francis Hinckley, a Chicago capitalist, had gained a fortune by selling a broken-down traction car line to the Rock Island Railroad who wanted it for entry into Chicago. Will A. Hutchins of Portsmouth, a former congressman, announced that \$350,000 in new money would be coming to Wellston. As a result of the announcement, speculators, promoters, and brokers flocked into Wellston, and the Bundy House had difficulty finding space for them. The *New York Evening Telegram* of July 16, 1887 carried the following headline:

Wellston Capital of Ohio's Great Iron Center - Coal, Iron and Limestone in Abundance - Immense Capital behind the Deal.³⁴

The *New York Evening Telegram* announced that Wells had paid \$300,000 for 300 acres surrounding Wellston and that he had proposed platting the acreage into 13,000 lots. He planned to offer 3,000 of these lots for sale at \$200 each to be paid for when his proposed 18 industrial plants had been established. Lot-buyers were to be protected by a committee of their own that would select the 3,000 lots of its choosing. The remaining 10,000 lots would be held by a company that was to be organized and then sold later for other developments.³⁵

Wells also organized the Consolidated Coal and Iron Company with an authorized capital of \$4,000,000, a sizable figure for that time. Half of the stock was purchased by ten Wellston men who were supporters of Wells. They were H. S. Willard, T. J. Morgan,

Theodore Fluhart, George O. Richardson, Rodney W. Goddard, Joseph Gooding, D. Edwards, J. B. Boyd, Thomas F. McClure, and Wells. The average subscription was \$20,000. The *New York Evening Telegram* said, "These are the best and most enterprising men in Wellston. They have made fortunes already in ten years by developing the minerals under the ground around this young city." At that time, Theodore Fluhart was worth \$300,000 and died later in Dayton a millionaire.³⁶

By the fall and winter of 1887, some \$400,000 worth of town lots had been sold; but by the time deeds, mortgages, and subscriptions had been delivered in New York City to secure a loan of \$600,000, another uncertainty occurred on Wall Street. Another dream of Harvey Wells failed, but his town had gained nationwide publicity.³⁷

One of the last projects of Wells was influencing capitalists in establishing the Wellston & Jackson Belt Railway. He had had dreams of a traction line running into Wellston, south to Jackson, and north to McArthur. A new corporation was chartered, the Wellson & Jackson Belt Railway Company with himself as president. Someone asked him why he wanted to do anything for Jackson. He answered, "I believe in returning good for evil." When his surveyors began laying out the proposed route parallel to the Hocking Valley Railroad route, the railroad officials became concerned about competition. They sent him an annual pass and invited him to a meeting in Columbus. He informed the officials that he had been in negotiations in New York and Chicago, but everything was still open. The officials agreed to finance the project, placed him on the payroll at a salary of \$50 per month, and permitted him to remain as president of the traction line. The first car arrived in Jackson on February 27, 1896.³⁸

During the summer and early fall of 1896, Wells was confined to his home under the care of a physician and a nurse. Sometime during Monday night, October 19, 1896, Wells jumped through the window of his second story bedroom and fell 18 feet to the ground, breaking both legs and fracturing one arm, in addition to incurring internal injuries. He died on October 22, 1896.³⁹

The headline in the newspaper read:

HARVEY WELLS DEAD.

—
**The Founder of Wellston, the Builder of
 Eliza Furnace, the Promoter of the
 Wellston & Jackson Belt Railway,
 and the Projector of the Jackson
 & Hillsboro Railroad, passes
 away October 22, 1896.³⁹**

His funeral was under the auspices of the G. A. R. Post of Wellston. The pastors of the four churches in Wellston offered appropriate remarks, and orations were delivered by A. E. Jacobs of Wellston and Judge J. W. Laird of Jackson. Burial was in Ridgewood Cemetery.⁴⁰

The *Jackson Standard-Journal* said of him:

It is not necessary to speak of Mr. Wells as a citizen and a man, for all knew him, and no one was his enemy. It is well however to call attention to one of his characteristics, a rare one among men, viz, the fact, that he was always in a state of mental exaltation. His mental sight, insight men call it, was developed more than in the average or even superior men. It was this characteristic that reminded all who came in contact with him of a magnificent engine under a full head of steam. This was greatness. Many of his neighbors and acquaintances perhaps never realized this fact, but Wells, mentally, was one of the greatest men of this period. Circumstance alone, prevented him from becoming noted as such, but as it was, he made a name that will live, when more noted men will be forgotten.⁴¹

The following poem was written by A. B. Roberts:

Death of Hon. Harvey Wells

The night was calm with frost and chill,
 And the moonbeams searched both
 vale and hill,
 The stars looked down from their lofty

height

And added splendor to the night.
 The city slumbered on serene--
 Tired eyes were closed to this beau-
 teous scene;
 The rush and roar of the busy street
 Had sought repose in the home retreat;
 The rich, the poor, the low, the meek
 All courted well the goddess sleep.
 But hark! a sound breaks on the air!
 It cuts the stillness deep and clear;
 The slumberer starts from his broken
 dream--
 This doleful sound; what can it mean?
 The birds spring from the high church
 tower.
 On wing of flight this unseemly hour
 The mournful sound of a tolling bell,
 Breaks on our ear as a funeral knell;
 There creep to our hearts a death like
 chill,
 This dirge-like sound on a night so
 still.
 The morning sun with rays so bright
 Reveals the scenes of the preceding
 night;
 It casts a ray so soft and warm
 Upon a cold and lifeless form;
 A harp with strings all rent in twain,
 From which shall come no sound
 again.
 The forest oak that bent beneath
 The King of time whose name is
 death.
 Let no idle slur be cast upon
 The name of him who now is gone;
 But let us write on memory's wall,
 That Harvey Wells was a friend to all.⁴²

John C. H. Cobb concluded his reminiscences of Harvey Wells with the following poem:

With gentle hand he was borne

to the cemetery
 Slowly and sadly we laid him
 down
 From the field of his fame fresh
 and gory,
 We carved not a line and we
 raised not a stone
 But we left him alone with his
 glory.⁴³

Some years later, in 1912, *The Semi-Weekly Sun* of Jackson published a piece from *The Portsmouth (Ohio) Times* concerning Harvey Wells as follows:

Harvey Wells was one of the most picturesque characters ever produced in Southern Ohio, or anywhere else for that matter. In the first place, he was a lightning calculator of almost marvelous powers, and that gave him his first claim to fame. Then, he took it into his head to build a city out of nothing, and that he succeeded, Wellston stands today to testify. Harvey had faith, oceans of it, and followed up his faith with works, and that combination seldom fails.⁴⁴

In addition to his two young daughters, Anita and Laura Wells, ages 8 and 6, he was survived by his son, Harry Wells, and his sister, Mary Wells Potter.⁴⁵

His second wife, Laura Bundy Wells, the mother of the two young daughters, died on September 5, 1893 at age 29.⁴⁶

The Soldiers' Monument in Wellston was constructed in 1904 and 1905 by the C. C. Bode Granite Company of Portsmouth, Ohio.⁴⁷ The monument was erected in memory of all the soldiers and sailors of Wellston and its founder, Harvey Wells. In April, 1905, a bronze bust of Wells was placed in a niche of the monument.⁴⁸ The monument was dedicated in the fall of 1905, and thirteen-year-old Laura Wells, the younger daughter of Harvey and Laura Wells, pulled the cord that unveiled the monument. She later became Laura Wells Lego. She also became the mother of a son, William Lego.⁴⁹

Harry B. Wells was born to Harvey and Eliza Bundy Wells on May 30, 1877.⁵¹ He inherited the talents of his parents and was a student and thinker. In his early years, he was a socialist and a leader in that political party. He then turned to the ministry and became a minister in the Methodist Church. He became known as "a pulpit orator and a pastor of exceptional ability."⁵² After first serving in the Ohio conference, he moved to Crawfordsville, Indiana; and from there, he moved to McClave, Colorado.⁵³ He died there at age 47 on December 3, 1924.⁵⁴ His memorial service was held on Monday, December 8, 1924 at the Methodist Church in Wellston followed by burial in Ridgewood Cemetery.⁵⁵

Eliza Bundy Wells had a career as a clerk in the Federal Bureau of Public Roads in Washington, D. C. Following retirement, she returned to Wellston and resided with Laura Braley on South Indiana Avenue. Her interests were poetry and spiritualism. An ardent spiritualist, believing in occult revelations, she had acquired a considerable library about spiritualism.⁵⁶ The late Gordon Morrow described her as "a dowager type lady" who attempted to convert him to spritualism.⁵⁷ She died in Wellston on December 4, 1933.⁵⁸

In a letter to *The Wellston Telegram* on September 6, 1950, former pioneer Wellston resident Mason Pugh stated that everyone was always interested in Harvey Wells' carriage horse Nell. When Harvey made a business stop, he never tied her to the hitching rail. No matter how long he lingered inside, she would stand in place; but when the noon whistle blew, she was off to the barn, and he had to go on foot.⁵⁹

Today, on October 5, 2004, William Lego resides in Columbus, Indiana, and he is 87 years of age. He is the father of one daughter and and one son. On Thursday, September 16, 2004, I received the telephone number of William Lego through the telephone information service. Upon dialing the number, I received a recording asking for a message. On Wednesday, September 22, 2004, Tom Lego, the son of William

1. *Wellston Sentry*, July 3, 1978.
2. Frank C. Morrow, *A History of Industry in Jackson County, Ohio*, p. 51.
3. Gordon Morrow, *Wellston Sentry*, July 6, 1978.
4. *History of Lower Scioto Valley* (1884), p. 634.
5. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
6. *The Wellston Telegram*, July 26, 1973.
7. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
8. William Baker to Harvey Wells, April 22, 1872, Deed Book 5, p. 77.
9. John C. H. Cobb, "How Did Wellston Get Its Start?," *The Wellston Telegram*, August 2, 1973.
10. Cobb, "The Making of a City," p. 4,
<http://www.wellstonohio.com/cityinfo/hist/making4.html>
11. Cobb, *The Wellston Telegram*, August 2, 1973.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Wellston Sentry*, July 3, 1978.
14. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
15. *History of Lower Scioto Valley*, p. 634.
16. *The Wellston Telegram*, August 2, 1973.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Cobb, *The Wellston Telegram*, August 9, 1973.
19. Cobb, "Making of a City," p. 4,
<http://www.wellstonohio.com/cityinfo/history/making4.html>
20. Cobb, "The Making of a City," p. 4,
<http://www.wellstonohio.com/cityinfo/history/making4.html>
21. Morrow, p. 53.
22. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
23. Cobb, "The Making of a City," p. 4,
<http://www.wellstonohio.com/cityinfo/history/making4.html>
24. *Ibid.*
25. Cobb, "How Wellston Was Started," *The Wellston Telegram*, August 23, 1973.
26. *Ibid.*, *The Wellston Telegram*, August 30, 1973.
27. Harvey Wells House Restoration Preservation Architecture Service Team, Cincinnati, November 21, 2001.
28. *Wellston Telegram*, December 7, 1933.

29. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, September 13, 1893.
30. Frank Morrow, *A History of Industry in Jackson County, Ohio*, pp. 252-253.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-144.
32. Cobb, "How Wellston Was Started," *The Wellston Telegram*, August 30, 1973.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, *The Wellston Telegram*, September 6, 1973.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896, and Cobb, "How Wellston Was Started," *The Wellston Telegram*, September 13, 1973.
39. *The Wellston Sentinel*, October 24, 1896.
40. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
41. *The Wellston Sentinel*, October 24, 1896.
42. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, October 28, 1896.
43. *The Wellston Sentinel*, October 24, 1896.
44. Cobb, "How Wellston Was Started," *The Wellston Telegram*, September 13, 1973.
45. *The Semi-Weekly Sun* (Jackson), April 29, 1912.
46. *The Wellston Telegram*, September 13, 1973.
47. *Jackson Standard-Journal*, September 13, 1893.
48. *The Daily Sentinel* (Wellston), November 4, 1904.
49. *Ibid.*, April 17, 1905.
50. *The Wellston Telegram*, September 19, 1905, and August 23, 1973.
51. *The Jackson Herald*, December 6, 1924.
52. *The Wellston Telegram*, December 5, 1924.
53. *Ibid.*, December 12, 1924.
54. *The Jackson Herald*, December 6, 1924.
55. *The Wellston Telegram*, December 12, 1924.
56. *Wellston Telegram*, December 7, 1933.
57. *Wellston Sentry*, July 6, 1978.
58. *Wellston Telegram*, December 7, 1933.
59. *Ibid.*, September 7, 1950.
60. Telephone message and telephone interview with Tom Lego of Columbus, Indiana.
61. *Ibid.*