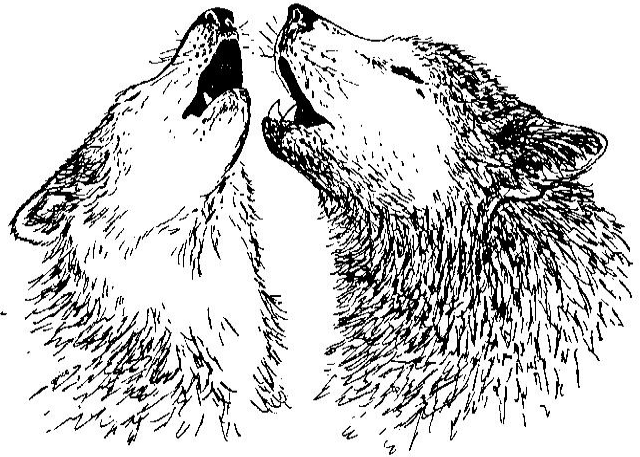


Osborne Oracle



Fall 2025

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 47 No.2

Life at the CCCB Through An Intern's Eyes by Riley Isaacs

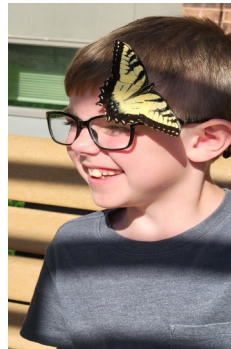
My name is Riley Isaacs and I have spent my summer as a naturalist intern with Clayton County Conservation. After this summer, I will go back to Iowa State University for my junior year studying environmental science and sustainability. I will also be working in an ISU lab using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) to digitize pre-1990's soil maps.

In my time working for Clayton County Conservation, a lot of family and visitors have asked me what I do at work. This is a difficult question to answer within a short conversation. The only concise answer I can come up with that includes everything I do is, "something different every day". This reply covers everything from educating children at libraries across Clayton County about the migration of Monarch butterflies to maintenance on trails to ensure overgrowth doesn't steer visitors away from the beautiful views of the driftless area.

In reality, there are many programs and projects that are left out of this short answer. There are also things I do almost daily such as feeding the reptiles and amphibians we have in the Nature Center at Osborne. I also spent time working on the computer making educational posters for the Nature Center and informational cards for bathrooms which we like to call "Toilet Talk".

In my time here, I have participated in multiple different programs that we bring to daycares and libraries. Firstly, we have presented a wonderful program named "Butterfly Bonanza". This is a library program where we tell children all about butterflies including host plants, anatomy, growth patterns, Monarch migration, and the population decrease of Monarchs.

Along with this program, the Osborne nature center has been hatching Swallowtail and Monarch butterflies. We raise these butterflies all the way from eggs and let them free after they hatch from their chrysalis.



Riley at Murphy Helwig Library

Murphy Helwig Library was the one lucky group that got to see two of these butterflies be released. One little boy even had his glasses used as a butterfly perch!

Our "Scaly & Slimy" program also has proven quite popular. This includes a box turtle, painted turtle, tiger salamander, tree frog, and fox snake. During this time, we like to have the children make a circle and set a turtle into the middle. This is always their favorite part of the program!

I also help out with field trips and day camps. During field trips, we take the children on a tour of our Native Wildlife Exhibit at Osborne and the Nature Center.

Continued on page 2...

Life at the CCCB...continued from page 1

We also like to do a hike, scavenger hunt, and shelter building or track making.



Riley at a daycare doing a "Scaly and Slimy:" program

Sometimes, we travel to the pond up the road from Osborne and do pond study activity. In this activity, we teach the kids about the importance of diversity in ponds and then let them use water nets to catch macroinvertebrates.

Then we look at everything they found using magnifying glasses and help identify them. Day camps are always themed whether that theme is survival or Earth's elements. We have had multiple S.T.E.A.M day camps throughout the summer as well as some through ISU Extension, and a few with summer learning centers.

The activities we do at S.T.E.A.M camps always depend on what the theme for the day is. This summer, we made water wheels, went fishing, held a paper boat floating test, played a water cycle game, and did many other activities.

I have also learned how to use lots of different machines and tools. This includes a chainsaw, string trimmer, zero-turn lawn mower, Toro lawn mower, brush cutter, loppers, and hand saw.

The loppers and handsaw have been used in Osborne's new campground to remove invasive honeysuckle. Honeysuckle spreads very easily and can become large quickly which takes sunlight away from native plants closer to the ground and inhibits their growth. I use the string trimmer about once a week to trim overgrowth on trails around the county at our parks.

This includes Osborne, Motor Mill, and Bloody Run. The vegetation on these trails grows very quickly which means they need regular upkeep to not become overgrown. I have used the two lawn mowers to mow fire breaks at Motor Mill and the Becker West Wildlife Area.

The purpose of a fire break is to prevent a prescribed burn from spreading outside of the wanted area. We use prescribed burning on these areas in the hopes that it will help native prairie plants to beat trees and shrubs. Usually,

trees and shrubs shade out prairie plants and stop them from growing as much as we would like.

Every other week, I also spend a day driving around the area checking all of our bird boxes and recording their contents. If there is a nest, we record if it is a Bluebird, Wren, Chickadee, Tree Swallow, or House Sparrow nest.

We also record if there are any eggs, nestlings, or fledged birds and the quantity of each. If we find any House Sparrow nests, we remove it and take any eggs or birds back to the center with us to feed to the snakes. This is because House Sparrows are invasive to this area. They are known to kick other birds out of their nests and are often very aggressive to Bluebirds.

And that isn't even everything I have done here! I have had a great time working for Clayton County Conservation this summer. I love working somewhere where I learn something new every day. My favorite part of this job has been getting the opportunity to teach kids about the importance of respecting nature and keeping the Earth healthy. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to everyone I met while working here. Every one of you helped me have a great summer learning about my passion.



Riley using a hand saw to remove honeysuckle



Riley bucking a cedar tree with a chainsaw

Clayton County Conservation Board's

Upcoming Events & Programs

Heritage Days

Saturday & Sunday, October 11th & 12th
Osborne Park
10:00-4:00 each day

Back for it's 50th year, it's almost time for Heritage Days! This year's event will feature all the classics—pumpkin contests, pioneer church service, live music, kids' games, poop throwing—with great vendors, demonstrations, and food to enjoy during the fall leaf season.

Older, Wiser, Livelier, Souls

Thursday, October 16, 2025
Limestone Silo & Tri-County Historical Society

Explore Cascade as we first tour the Tri-County Historical Society Museum which features motion activated sounds when you enter a room, a hands on replica of a telegraph, an old jail cell, railroad room, and the sports room highlighting baseball's Red Faber. The final stop of the tour will be a visit to the Historic 1930's Limestone Silo.

The group will leave from Osborne Park at 10:00 a.m. and the tour will begin at 11:00 a.m.

Little Haunt on the Prairie

Tuesday, October 21, 2025
Osborne Pond
7:00 PM—9:00 PM
Registration Required

Get in the spirit of spooky season with this nighttime walk through the prairies of Osborne Park. Along the way, a few ghoulish encounters could be expected by spooks ready to tell Clayton County's favorite ghost stories.

Don't worry, our spooks have been told to keep things PG so bring the whole family! Afterward you can warm up by the fire and enjoy some cider and hot cocoa.

Pony Hollow Trail 5K/15K

Saturday, October 25, 2025
Elkader City Park
9:00 AM
Registration Required

Come join Clayton County Conservation for the 7th annual Pony Hollow 15k Trail Run and 3rd annual 5k run/walk! This mostly flat, lime-chipped course with scenic autumn views makes this a truly unique event.

Male and female age group winners will receive a prize. Pre-registration info can be found on our website and packet pick up will be on race day in the Elkader City Park shelter house from 7:30-8:45. Register by Oct 19th to receive race swag. Registration price will increase on race day so get those entries in soon!

Older, Wiser, Livelier, Souls

Thursday, November 20, 2025
Fayette County Historical Center

Visit West Union to explore the Fayette County Historical Museum housed in a 1903 three-level brick building. Room themes include a military room, political room, agriculture, school, library and rooms for the former towns of Lima & Donnan

Motor Mill Bridge Lighting and Open House

Saturday, November 22, 2025
4:30-6:30 PM
Motor Mill Historic Site

The elves will be hard at work decorating the historic bridge at Motor Mill with lights to welcome visitors throughout the holiday season. Cookies and decorations from yesteryear will adorn the Inn. Come on down to see the fruits of their labor this fall, and don't forget to dress for the weather!

Owl Prowl

Friday, January 23, 2025
5:30-7:00 PM
Osborne Park

Come for a night hike and learn about these secretive nocturnal animals. Visitors will look for wild owls and owl pellets along the trail while we try to call owls in. This fun hike will last about an hour and a half. Remember to bring a flashlight and dress for the weather!

Ice Fishing Clinic

Saturday, February 7, 2025
10:00 AM –12:00 PM
Osborne Pond

Nothing beats a stocked pond when you're learning to fish! We will have poles, bait, and augers on hand to show you the ropes or feel free to bring your own.

Heritage Days—The Next Era by Jenna K. Van Meeteren

Osborne's Future Annual Festival

Listening & Planning Sessions
at Osborne Conservation Center

Nov. 25th – 6pm
Dec. 15th – 6pm
Jan. 15th – 6pm
Feb. 6th – 10am

Help us shape the future by joining
us for 1 of 4 upcoming sessions to
plan the future annual celebration at
Osborne.

Light refreshments to be provided.

29862 Osborne Rd. Elkader, IA 52043

563-245-1516

www.claytoncountyconservation.org

Osborne's 50th Annual Osborne Heritage Days will be held on Saturday, October 11 and Sunday, October 12 with the grounds open and full of activity from 10am to 4pm both days.

For half a century, pioneer vendors and demonstrators have brought the early 1900s to life, making Heritage Days one of Northeast Iowa's most cherished fall festivals. As we celebrate this milestone year, we also recognize how traditions evolve.

While the number of pioneer vendors has shifted over time, interest in handmade and modern goods has grown, opening the door to new possibilities for the future of this community gathering.

With that in mind, 2025 will mark the final Osborne Heritage Days as we know it. But it's not an ending...It's the beginning of something new. We want the public's voice to help shape the festival that will carry this legacy forward.

To do that, we're hosting four listening and planning sessions over the next few months. These sessions will focus on developing the vision, branding, and experiences for the next era of Osborne's fall celebration.

Your input matters, and we'd love to see you at one of these sessions. Together, we can honor 50 years of tradition while building an exciting new future.

Hardwood Harvest: Precision Matters by Kenny Slocum



2013 Timber sale at Buck Creek County Park

A youth baseball coach of mine, trying to teach us noodly-armed young ones the importance of hitting the cutoff man on a throw from the outfield, used a phrase that has stuck with me ever since.

“Distance magnifies mistakes.”

My coach wanted us to understand that a bad throw doesn't matter as much from centerfield to second base, but can prove catastrophic trying to throw to home.

I come back to this phrase time and time again. Called the Abbe error, this concept usually relates to precision measurement required for things like dead reckoning or shuttle launches.

But I often see it manifest over *time*, as well as physical distance, especially in restoration.

Hardwood Harvest, cont.

A slight miscalculation in a seed mix, or poor timing in some critical part of the establishment phase and a prairie planting goes sideways.

Perhaps nowhere does the Abbe error show up more visibly over time than in forestry.

A skilled forester can walk through the woods and tell what happened a decade ago, or even two or three harvest cycles ago. It can really ruin a nice walk in the woods, actually.

A harvest is not the end of a timber stand but the start of a new one. The mistakes happen when people base their harvest on the trees, and not their seeds.

If a harvest takes all of the white oak trees in a stand, where will the acorns come from to replace them?

If the logger this time around didn't take that sugar maple because of its poor quality, will it somehow become more valuable in a few decades when it has gotten older, more crooked, more decayed?

Meanwhile, between harvests, the maple that didn't thrive on the site dropped millions of seeds, each carrying the same genetics poorly suited to the ground below.

The poor-quality maple seedlings, now released by the removal of the canopy, can quickly overwhelm any of the acorns that shook loose from the healthy white or red oak harvested.

That all depends, of course, on the harvest even taking place during a good acorn crop year. The 2-3 year cycling of red oak, and the 3-5 year cycling on white oak, makes the timing critical since even in a boom year, an acorn faces long odds to become a mature tree.

All of this speaks to the thought a forester puts into marking a sale, and the importance of a landowner communicating their goal and vision for the future of their forest.



"Reserve" tree meant to remain after the sale

Likewise, landowners need to understand the forester's thought process—ask questions about why they may have marked this tree and not that one.

After the harvest comes the chance to clean up any mistakes. Remember, that an Abbe error grows exponentially, across both distance and time.

If the logger did not want a "cull" (forestry speak for a tree of little or no value that should come down anyway), make sure you address that tree quickly, lest it become a source of seed, shade, or both in the stand to come next.

If a year or two after the harvest you do not see the types of species regenerating that you'd hoped, it's time to plant. The longer you wait, the more difficulty your seedlings will have keeping up with the existing understory.

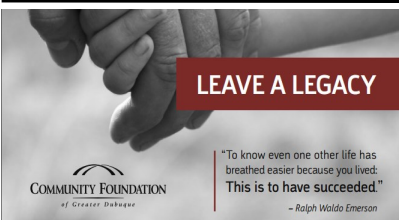
Here in Iowa, our most commercially valuable timber comes from white oak and black walnut, followed by hard maple and red oak.

That might change in 20 years; in the early 2000's red oak held much more value than white oak. Without knowing what the future holds, the best forest management would suggest making sure to have a little bit of everything.

That means not only species diversity but also diverse age classes. A harvest might include some gaps of complete canopy removal, called "femelschlags," to create patches of young forest, a crucial habitat structure for all manner of fauna as well as more sun-loving tree species like oak and walnut.

It should be clear by now that a good, sustainable harvest requires a *lot* of consideration to a wide array of variables, including some that are completely unknowable. It can become overwhelming, and since forestry is both an art and a science, there's rarely a clear single "best" choice.

Don't let that be a source of paralysis. Instead, think of it as an opportunity. Most "mistakes" can be fixed—as long as you don't let too much time pass.

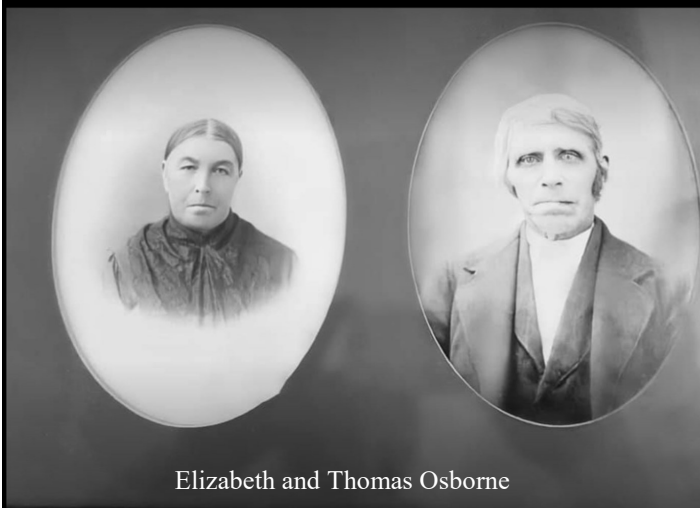
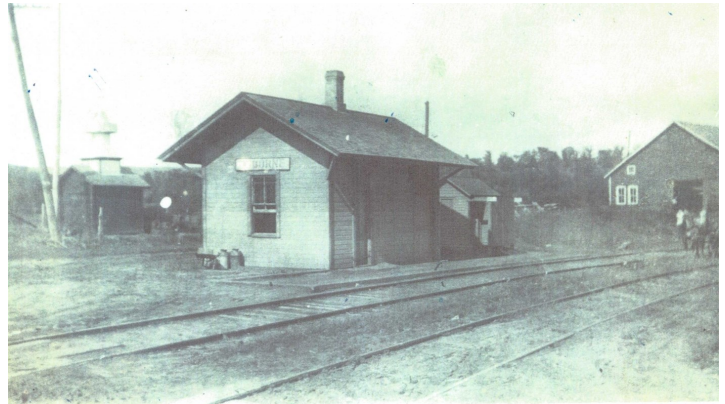


The Osborne Partners for Education Endowment Fund was started by Susi Nehls and Roy Blair in memory of Susi's father, Dr. Joe Hickey. Dr. Hickey's research led to the legislation that protected birds of prey like the bald eagle. Dr. Hickey's passion for teaching others about the natural world was sparked early by adults who introduced him to the wonders of nature.

<https://www.dbqfoundation.org/donors/giving-center/osborne-partners-education-endowment>

Park Spotlight: The Town of Osborne - by Abbey Harkrader

Osborne Park gets its name from the tiny little town that once was here. Some people still remember shopping at the old Osborne Store, one of the few remaining structures that still survives from the original town. It is situated on the old main street that runs in front of the store, where old Highway 13 used to pass through the town.



Elizabeth and Thomas Osborne

Other structures that survive are the old town pump and the Osborne Depot, though these were moved from their original locations.

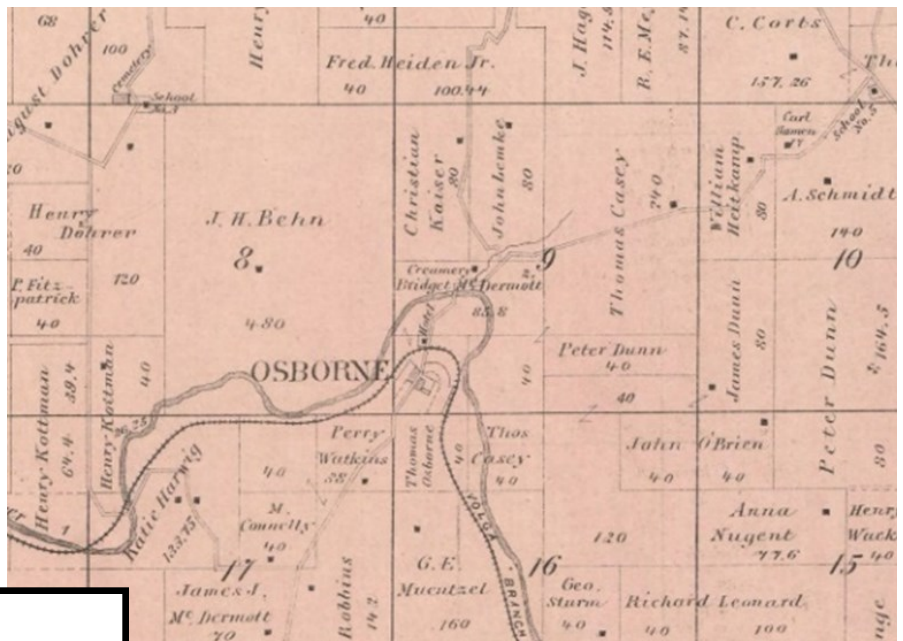
This little town was the dream of Thomas Osborne who was one of the first to settle and build his 80 acre farmstead in this beautiful valley along the Volga River in 1865. He and his wife Elizabeth raised their 9 children here, Jane Shafer; Martha Ann Robbins Debes; John; Eliza; Thomas; William; Robert; Susan Sturm and Elizabeth Cochrane.

In 1872 the Volga Branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad was completed, and ran from Turkey River Junction at the Mississippi to Wadena. Thomas Osborne decided the railroad gave him an opportunity, and he began dreaming of a way to take advantage by dividing up

his property and building a town. He began selling off lots and by 1878 several new businesses were up and running.

Osborne Station was an important stop along the Volga Branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad. The first depot burned in 1880, so in 1882 they built a new depot, elevator, and stockyards. One of the most important things being shipped from Osborne by train was livestock.

There were vast stockyards by the river where the buffalo pens used to be. These stockyards were shipping livestock from Osborne Station weekly.



First Businesses

Postmaster - J. J. McDermott
Valley Hotel - William & Bridget Carter
General Store- Alfred & Mary Albrecht
Wagon-shop - William Knospe
Blacksmith-- Peter Schmitz
Saloon - A.C. Carpenter
Depot - burned in 1880.

source: History of Clayton County, Iowa, 1882

1880 Plat Map—Note the dots in section 9 above and below Bridget, now McDermott, that mark the Creamery and Hotel

According to the Elkader Register on Dec. 26 1882
“Business is quite good at this point at present. Twenty-one car loads of Hogs have been shipped from here since November 15th” (About 1500 hogs.)

Another important business shipping goods from Osborne

Park Spotlight: The Town of Osborne ...continued

was the Twin Springs Creamery that opened in 1879. Owned by James Byrnes and William Carter, they were processing 1600 lbs of milk daily and shipping 900-1000lbs of butter a week.

William and Bridget Carter also owned the Valley Motel near the bridge. One of the first businesses to open in Osborne, the motel was an impressive hotel and community center that often hosted town picnics and celebrations. Unfortunately, the hotel burned down in the 1920's and was not rebuilt..

Perhaps the most memorable icon of the town was the Osborne Store. There were a number of store keepers at Osborne over the years, but George Feller and Carrie (Heiden) Feller were the ones who lasted.

George and Carrie worked at the original Osborne Store for C.J. Cords who owned it then. Working together naturally brought them together and the young couple eventually got married and bought the store from Cords.

An acetylene light exploded in 1913 and burned the 1st store down forcing the Fellers to build the larger Osborne Store that still survives today at the park. Here the Fellers ran a very successful business and were loved by the community. It is said that Mrs. Feller could often be found serving coffee to neighbors in her kitchen just off the store as everyone gossiped about the weather and more.

The little town of Osborne never reached the size of nearby towns and boasted about 50 people at its heyday.

Struggles began early and the town shrank over the years.

In 1884, letter from Thomas Osborne told of low food prices affecting business. "Wheat dropped to a low of 60 cents a bushel, corn dipped to 30 cents and pork, \$3.50 per hundred. The 'best' sugar was just one dollar."



Several businesses changed hands over this period and others closed for good. Other blows to the town were the various fires documented: The depot in 1880, the store in 1913, and the hotel in the 1920's.

When the railroad ceased in 1937, it marked the end for the town. The only businesses left were a repair shop and the Osborne Store which finally closed in 1952 when the Fellers closed their shop and lived out their retirement in the attached house.

Today you can look at the old Osborne Store and Depot to remember the quaint little village that used to be here.

Walk the trails and you can follow the old railroad bed along the Volga river and look out over the flats where the depot and stockyards used to be, full of livestock ready for market.

Today it is a beautiful 300 acre park with lots to do and see. Hike a trail, visit the nature center and Native Wildlife Exhibit, Kayak the Volga River or grab a pole and try your luck in the river or at the Osborne Pond.



Left: Osborne Park, circa 2024

Right: Osborne town site, 1930's.

Note the railroad arching around the north end of town.

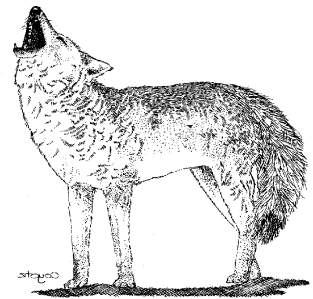
This route originally connected to the main line just east of Millville.

Nature has reclaimed most of the route.



Clayton County Conservation
Osborne Conservation Center
29862 Osborne Rd, Elkader, IA 52043
(563) 245-1516

Osborne Public Programs
listed inside!



The Clayton County Conservation Board does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clayton County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

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Osborne Nature Center & Gift shop Hours

Monday-Friday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Weekend Hours

Saturday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Sunday

Noon-4:00pm

Closed on Weekends Nov. 1 through Apr. 1



Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public. See website for details, locations, and past meeting minutes.

The mission of the Clayton County Conservation Board is to promote the health and general welfare of the people and to model and encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.