



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

Township Gone, But Name Lives On!



TOWNSHIP PRIDE is still evident in the Buker home!

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU REMEMBER the lyrics of the John Cougar Mellencamp song *Small Town*, but I've always liked that song. I happened to hear it on the radio the other day and I was reminded about a township in Macon County that voluntarily merged with a neighboring township back in 2009.

In mid-2007, I was contacted by then-Milam Township Supervisor Rick Steele, who wanted to discuss with me about the possibility of Milam Township merging with neighboring Mt. Zion Township. The lack of people willing or able to serve in the township elected offices was the impetus because at the time, there were only 59 registered voters in the township and the current officials had all decided not to seek re-election. At the time, the township officials canvassed the residents trying to find anyone willing to serve, but to no avail. I remember meeting with the township board at the time and discussing all their options. The township board voted, with sadness, to proceed with a merger with Mt. Zion Township.

Located in the southeast corner of Macon County, Milam Township was the last township formed in the county in 1869. Ironically, it was detached from Mt. Zion Township. The Township had no village or towns, and no railroads running through it. It was named after the Milam apple, which grew abundantly in that area. In the primary election in 2008, A referendum was held on whether Milam Township should consolidate with Mt. Zion Township. The referendum passed in *both* townships (which it had to) and Milam Township ceased to exist after the April 2009 Township Election.



LITTLE MILAM happily displays his "Hello World I'm Milam" shirt for me and Grandpa Cuyler Buker.

Fast-forward now 10 years. In March 2019, a baby boy was born to Adam and Jessie Joachimsthaler of Edwardsville. That might not be unusual, but it was very special. That baby boy, Milam David Joachimsthaler, born weighing 9 pounds, 12 oz., and 21 inches long is named for the now decade-gone Milam Township. You ask why?

Well, little Milam's family roots run very deep in the old Milam Township. Not only was his mother raised there, as well as his grandmother (on Section 5, as she proudly states), his grandfather—Cuyler Buker—was a Milam Township Trustee for 24 years before the township merged, and his great grandfather, Dean Wilson, served as a Milam Township Supervisor for at least four terms.

When I recently had the opportunity to meet little Milam, his mother, grandfather, and grandmother were all more than happy to "show him off." He slept most



of the time we were together, and mother Jessie said he's been a good baby. I asked her about naming him Milam and she told me that she and her husband had been thinking about it for a while and knew that the name Milam was very special to the family and has been for a long time. His middle name of David is special too, as Jessie said she had two special uncles named David and a brother with the middle name of David. Jessie said that as a child, she remembered playing on the rock pile at the Milam Township Hall and how much fun that was.



SLEEPING MILAM with mother Jessie, Grandma Dee Buker, and Grandpa Cuyler Buker.

When I asked her if she thought Milam might be a township official someday, she didn't know, but hoped maybe he would consider being a farmer. I noticed Grandpa Buker's smile get a little bigger with that comment!

While Milam slept, we visited for a couple of hours sharing township history and our disdain for those who want to erode township government. We all agreed that the future could be scary if our local governments go "handed to a larger, more distant government." Milam's Grandpa Cuyler summed it up best when he said, "Townships take care of things in the best and most reasonable way, and we can't lose that."

Milam Township lived for 140 years, and ten years ago it returned to its roots by merging into Mt. Zion Township. Little Milam David Joachimsthaler has deep family roots in the old Milam Township, and I have a sneaking suspicion that he might just end up there when he gets a little older. Here's wishing you the best, Milam, as you grow up. You have many fine examples, both living and dead, to help guide you. Your name is Milam, and while the township may be gone, your name helps it live on!



MILAM with his parents Adam and Jessie (Buker) Joachimsthaler.