

MAJOR WILLIAM RADCLIFFE

Compiled by Paul W. Urbahns

The question of the week is it Radcliffe or Radcliff?

If you are talking about Major William Radcliffe then it's with the "e", if you are talking about the town then it has been both ways.

The town was named after the Commander of the Army Quartermaster Corps at Camp Knox. Major Radcliffe was born on August 15, 1879, in Springfield, IL, to James and Burnette Radcliffe. Attended Springfield High School and served as class president. Radcliffe graduated from the University of Illinois, class of 1901, with an engineering degree. Upon graduation he found employment with the American Bridge Company and played a part in the bridge construction along the Mississippi River.

During World War I, Radcliffe served in the Quartermaster Corps and came to Stithton, Kentucky in July, 1918. It has been written the Major Radcliffe was good friends with Horace McCullum. This is very likely as by all reports Horace McCullum was a very likable guy. Major Radcliffe was living in Elizabethtown during most of his time at Camp Knox, and Elizabethtown was the main area having some commercial connections.

Radcliffe does not appear to have stayed in the area long. He did, however, attain the rank of Colonel prior to separation from the Army. By 1925, he had accepted a job with the Veterans Administration as supervising the superintendent of construction, supply and real estate on the west coast.

In all Radcliffe spent 16 years with American Bridge, just over five in the Army and 25 years with the Veterans Administration as supervising superintendent of construction, supply and real estate on the west coast.

The town of Radcliff officially dropped the "e" in 1956 when it was incorporated by the Hardin County Court. The most often reason given is that the move was a way for the town to show its independence. Good story, however, there were probably other more concrete reasons. One of these was probably because the name was being spelled both ways.

As far as we now know, both the original town survey by J. T. McNary and

McCullum's Elizabethtown News advertisement spelled the name without the "e". County maps as early as 1924 list the town as Radcliff. The deeds on file at the courthouse for that period generally included the "e". Besides a traveler new to the area would have probably called the town "Rad-cliff-ee."

Emotions in the area favored keeping the "e". As one resident stated, "They named the town after the man, they should have left it alone."

Interestingly enough is the fact that none of the biographical information on file at the Radcliff Chamber of Commerce office about Major Radcliffe lists a town being named after him! In fact, one of the last forms that Radcliffe personally completed was a questionnaire for the University of Illinois Alumni Records Division. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 50 entries of which Major Radcliffe only completed 16.

Apparently Major Radcliffe was a very private person.