HISTORY OF MIAMI COUNTY.

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INTRODUCTORY.

ON the 14th of December, 1815, a memorial, asking the admission of Indiana into the Union as a State, was adopted by the Territorial Legislature. On the 29th, it was presented to Congress and referred to a committee. On the 6th of January, 1816, a bill was reported to the House, to enable the people of Indiana Territory to form a constitution. The apportionment for Delegates, made by the Territorial Legislature, was approved by Congress, and the election of Delegates took place on the 13th of May, 1816. The Convention met at Corydon, Harrison County, on the 10th of June, 1816, and adjourned on the 29th of the same month, having formed a constitution. On the 7th of November, 1816, the State organization superseded that of the Territory, and the State was formally admitted into the Union under a joint resolution of Congress, which was approved on the 11th day of December of the same year.

But little over sixty years have elapsed since the area where opinionized brought our State into the Union, and, within fifty years, nearly its entire northern half was owned and occupied by various tribes of Indians. By treaties with the aboriginal owners, following each other at short intervals, large tracts of this territory were ceded to the General Government, and thrown open to the occupancy of the adventurous pioneer at an early day.

INFLUENCE OF THE WABASH.

The Wabash River had much to do in directing immigration to its fertile banks, on the same principle, perhaps, that large streams generally flow past large towns.

The Wabash is not noted, in chronicle or legend, as remarkably salubrious or eminently conducive to longevity, and, it may be set down as a fact, was never mistaken for that fountain of perpetual youth whose rejuvenating waters the early Spanish explorers endured so many hardships in seeking.

But away back in the dim past, when France held dominion from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi, it is invested with romantic interest, as being part of a great line of communication between Canada and the military posts in the Southwest, by which the hardy trader or courier, embarking in his pirogue at Quebec, made nearly the entire journey to Fort Vincennes by water. How he did it might be regarded as an affair strictly his own, but the traditions say that it was by following the streams that coursed in the desired direction, dragging his frail craft around and over falls and other obstacles, and transporting it from the headwaters of one stream to those of another, across what were called portages. So it was not so difficult, after all, when one knows just how it was done. A journal of one of these voyages would be interesting to the dwellers along the Wabash of to-day, and convince the faint hearted that the greatest difficulties may be overcome by one who sturdily paddles his own canoe.

The French explorers and missionaries of two hundred years ago spoke, in letters and journals, of the Maumee and Wabash, as a route of communication between the Lakes and the Mississippi, and from that time until the country came into the possession of the United States and was opened to white settlement, these rivers have been used for a like purpose by the traders and others having intercourse with the many Indian tribes living in their vicinity.

Among the modern explorers of the Wabash, as compared with Hennepin and LaSalle, who make the earliest mention of it, are Capt. Drust Richardville, father of John B. Richardville, who for fifty years, and up to the time of his death in 1841, was principle Chief of the Miamis; Capt. Jacko Godfroy, father of Francis Godfroy, late distinguished war chief of the same tribe, who died in this county in 1840, and whose children still live among us; Gen. Hyacinth LaSalle, the first white child born at Fort Wayne, and whose children live at Logansport; Capt. Wells, killed in the massacre of Chicago, some of whose descendants, in the Indian line, are among our oldest and most worthy citizens; and Joseph Barron, who, in 1810, was sent by Gen. Harrison from Vincennes to the Prophet, at his town near the mouth of the Tippecanoe, with a message concerning the troubles which led to the battle of Tippecanoe, who was interpreter at most of the Indian treaties for the fifty years preceding his death, and whose grand and great-grandchildren are among our citizens to-day.

These men followed in the wake of the first explorers and missionaries, and are prominent in the history of this region from about the period of the Revolutionary war to the time of their deaths, which, among the last survivors of their number, occurred some twenty-eight years ago. They were generally engaged in trade with the Indians, made their headquarters at Fort Wayne and Vincennes, and, in the requirements of their business, used the Wabash as a highway between these points.

James Aveline, of our own county, now some seventy years of age, is one of the few survivors of the time when the Indians were the sole possessors and occupants of this portion of the State. His white life, from early boyhood, has been passed among the Pottawattamies and Miamis, and in his business of buying furs and skins, and visiting the different trading posts, he has more than once made the journey between Vincennes and Fort Wayne, in those early days when the Indians were the only inhabitants of the Upper Wabash, and this stream was an important thoroughfare for travel and transportation.

Beef, whisky and other necessaries of life were brought from Lafayette to Peru by pirogues, on the Wabash, as the best means of freighting.

This early use of the Wabash as a highway suggested to the pioneer first settlers its improvement in that direction. Their representatives brought the subject before Congress. They claimed that a union of the Ohio River and the lake, by a navigable water course, was essential to the perpetuity of free government, being a great military necessity for the transportation of troops and munitions of war from the Ohio to the lakes, and vice versa, whenever it should be necessary to transport those elements of carnage in either direction. They demonstrated that the Wabash Valley was the natural route for this "meeting of the waters," by the alleged fact that the river was navigable as far up as Lafayette, and that it needed but a canal from that point to Lake Erie to secure to the country a water course upon which troops and munitions of war would be carried forever—free of toll! Congress was overwhelmed by the facts and arguments, and entered, we may suppose, that it had so long overlooked the strategic advantages now so apparent, hastened to strengthen the military defenses of the country by providing for the early construction of the Wabash & Erie Canal. Thus it was that the Wabash had much to do in stimulating early settlement in its vicinity.

A LIBERAL GRANT.

A grant of land (subsidy, they call it now-a-days,) of every alternate five miles on each side of the proposed canal, equaling a strip five miles wide its entire length, was made by the General Government to the State to aid in the construction of the work. Congress claimed, with some show of reason, that the United States, though securing important military facilities, might not be the sole beneficiary, and that the State, in view of possible advantages to accrue to her, should furnish whatever means the lands failed to supply. One can hardly realize, at this day, that there could have been a moment's hesitation about receiving this bounty from Congress; yet it is a fact that its reception or rejection was debated for some time. But the liberal disposition of our people finally prevailed, and, conceding any points they had deemed disadvantageous, they accepted the grant with all the conditions it imposed.

This land, after being first offered at public sale, was open to private entry, at $1.50, $2 50 and $3.50 per acre, one-fourth down, and the balance in seventeen years, with interest at six per cent., payable annually in advance.

The opportunity thus afforded of getting farms of the choicest land on easy terms, and work on the eastern division of the canal being in active progress, made the Upper Wabash attractive to persons seeking homes in a new country.

Previous to the location of the Wabash & Erie Canal, the settlements along the route were few, and mainly confined to points where trade was carried on with the Indians. One of these, in this county, was that of Chief Godfroy, on the Wabash, above the mouth of the Mississinewa. A contract, written in French, between Jean Bpt. Chevallier, of the one part, and Francis Godfroy, merchant, of the Mississinewa, of the other part, and signed for Godfroy by Lambert Conchois, for the building of a two-story house, 20x26 feet, with four twelve-light windows in each story, doors, chimneys, etc., on the Mississinewa, was made as the 18th of October, 1822. The price to be paid for the same was $200, with board, and the use of a yoke of oxen to haul the logs necessary. The building was to be completed by the 18th of June, 1823, and $100 to be paid at the finish payment of the year, and $100 at the payment of 1824. Francis Comparet, of Fort Wayne, signs the contract as a witness. Michael Comparet, father of Francis and Joseph, was killed at the raising of this building, by a log falling on him. Accounts, letters and other papers in the possession of Gabriel Godfroy, son of the Chief, running back to the building of this house, give the names of a good many white men who seem to have been employed and engaged in business there. The whites that employed and engaged in business at this place were, doubtless, the very first white settlers in the county. Among the names are: John Forsyth, a clerk, probably, of Godfroy; Thomas Forsyth, Antoine Cuzzins, J. B. Ducat, David Bourie, Robert Wilson, Joseph Comparet, Michael Comparet, Laurant Avaline, and many others.

MIAMISPORT.

By the treaty, made at the mouth of the Mississinewa, October 23, 1826, the section of land on which the original town of Peru was laid off was granted to John B. Richardville, its eastern boundary being a north and south line, which strikes the Wabash about half-a-square east of the south end of Broadway. Wm. N. Hood and Joseph Holman, then residents of Fort Wayne, purchased this section, shortly after the treaty.

On the 15th of March, 1829, they laid out the town of Miamisport on their purchase, the town being on the south bank of the Wabash, and consisting of Water, Jackson, Market and Canal streets, running east and west, and Clay, Cherry, Prudence, Main, Walnut and Richardville streets, running north and south—or, rather, this is the direction as the true course of the streets, running parallel with the river, is south, sixty-four degrees west, and the others, commencing with Clay, crossed them at right angles. There were a number of alleys and public squares, and the lots were laid out on a more liberal scale than those of Peru, being 70x132½ and 70x160 feet, and those intended for business about the public square, 55½x80. These facts are gathered from a certified copy of the original plat, obtained from the Records of Cass County, by Jas. N. Brown, of this city. The plat and survey were made by David Burr, and the plat was recorded in the Recorder's Office of Cass County, on the 15th of July, 1830.—J. B. Ducat, Recorder. The general boundaries of Miamisport, indicated by these facts, in the divisions of the present day, would be Lafayette street on the east, Main on the north, Holman on the west and the river on the south. Water street, which embraced all the ground between the southern tier of lots and the river, was the one on which nearly all the buildings in the town were erected when it was first laid out. These houses were of round, scribed and hewed logs, and fronted on Water street and the river. The subsequent location of the canal took most of this tier of lots. During its construction the houses were built along the berm, or north side of the canal, which would lead to the inference that the owners of the next tier changed front to suit the exigencies of the case.

FIRST SETTLERS—CONTINUED.

The very first white settlers in the county must have been those who made their homes about Chief Godfroy's trading-post, before referred to, and from 1822 to 1827 a great many names appear as those of persons who lived and were engaged in pursuits incident to the business carried on at that place.

In February, 1827, John McGregor settled on the site of Miamisport, and was, perhaps, the first settler of those who came to make permanent homes. He was shortly after joined by others, but the date and order of their coming it is difficult to determine. About the time the town was laid off we find the names of Louis Drouillard, Benj. H. Scott, Andrew Marquiss, Isaac Marquiss, Abner Overman, Sephaniah Wade, S. W. Pomilion, Walter D. Nesbit, and Joseph Holman and Wm. N. Hood, the proprietors. Of course there were other persons who lived at this and other points in the county before its organization, who are equally entitled to share whatever fame attaches to being a first or early settler, but accident has not been so propitious in preserving their names.

Joseph Holman built a cabin on the banks of the river, below Miamisport, and there he soon built some years later, when he built the stone house standing near the corner of Main and Holman streets, and afterward, a comfortable frame dwelling on the site, on his farm proper, now occupied by the residence of Wm. N. Dukes. Andrew Marquiss first started the ferry-yard at Miamisport, G. W. Holman—who owned the original Tillett Eighty, and lived on it—becoming his successor.

G. W. Holman, recalls of the scene of the early settlers, canoed their hides and furnished their leather at this point, while John McGregor, equally thoughtful about their bodies, opened a tavern. He also looked after their letters as Postmaster, and regulated their morals by holding the scales of the blind goddess in exact equipoise, as Justice of the Peace. Capt. Louis Drouillard was one of the "merchant princes." He lived at the east end of Water street, where he had a store for trade with the Indians, and supplied the modest wants of the people at low prices, and never dreamed of being offered

"5 dollar pound
To run us o'er the ferry,"

which he kept at the point, for the price fixed by law was, for a man, six and a fourth cents, and for a man and horse, twenty-five cents.

Joseph Holman was the owner of the west, and Wm. N. Hood of the east half of the section, the division line, north and south, running about the east end of the Peru waste-weir.

In the Spring of 1828, James Oldham moved from the Salamonie on to the Louis Godfroy Reserve, five miles below Peru, on the north bank of the Wabash, and in 1829, John W. Miller moved on to the same section from Preble County, Ohio. Gen. Miller, his son, was born there in March, 1807, and is among the first white children born in the county. Joseph Oldham, son of James Oldham, and Louis A. Drouillard, son of Capt. Drouillard, are among the oldest citizens, having come with their parents in 1828.

Walter D. Nesbit came in the Spring of 1832 to Miamisport, voted there while our territory was attached to Cass, and has been a voter in the county longer than any other man in it.

Among the early settlers on Eel River, in Jefferson Township, were the Wilkinson family, consisting of the old folks and the family, the sons being Ratliff, John, Jacob, William, James, Samson and Simeon. Abraham and Woodward Beard, John, Joseph and Levi Clymer, Hamilton Duff, William Bale, Jno. Ratcliff, Moses Wagoner, Elijah Cox, Isaac Hicks, Wm. Smith, Thomas Smith, Nathan Reins, Thomas Harmon, B. L. Daniels and Gulliod Barns. Eli Cook, still living, settled on Eel River, on the farm now owned by B. W. Mathews, in 1830.

Miamisport was laid out more with the expectation that it would be made the county seat of the new county than to supply any very pressing want of the few settlers in the vicinity, but its aspirations for urban distinction were utterly crushed by subsequent events.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNTY.

By an act of the Legislature of January 2, 1834, the bounds of Miami County were established and Commissioners appointed to carry into effect its political organization. They met, shortly after the passage of the act, at Miamisport, to discharge the duties imposed upon them, and that town of great expectations not filling the requirements, they located the county seat where Peru now stands. By this decision, a bright young life, full of hope and promise, was forever blighted, and when the playful south wind of that direful day, on which the doom of Miamisport was sealed, crossed at the ferry, as was its wont, and looked in at the tavern and discovered itself in frisky gyrations through the sun-pard and found no sympathetic response to its merry gambols, it was filled with sorrow and crept away to the surrounding forest to chant the mournful monody of the stricken town:

"I have reached the highest point of all my greatness,
And, from that full meridian of my glory,
I haste now to my setting."

FIRST COMMISSIONERS' COURT.

The first meeting of the first Board of County Commissioners was held on the 3d of June, 1834, at the house of John McGregor, in Miamisport. Alexander Jameson, John W. Miller and John Cruikson were the Commissioners, by appointment, as no election had yet been held. John McGregor was appointed Sheriff by Benjamin H. Scott, Clerk pro tem. At this meeting, Wm. N. Reyburn was appointed County Agent and the county divided into two townships—Peru and Jefferson. An election of Justice of the Peace of Jefferson was ordered to be held at the house of the widow Wilkinson, on the 21st of June, and William Bain was appointed Inspector; John Plaster was appointed Constable of Jefferson, and Isaac Perkins, of Peru. At a special meeting of the Commissioners, at the same place, on the 9th of June, 1834, by authority of law and in pursuance of notice given by Sheriff McGregor, the necessary arrangements were made for holding the first State and county election on the first Monday of August ensuing. The Clerk was ordered to procure poll-books, and Wm. N. Reyburn was appointed Inspector. Among other business transacted at this term was granting a license to Louis Drouillard for a ferry across the Wabash, at Miamisport, for the sum of five dollars per annum, and fixing the following rates to be charged: Each person, 6¼ cents; each person and horse, 25 cents; each two horses and wagon, 50 cents; each head of cattle, 6¼ cents; each head of hogs and sheep, 3 cents; and each yoke of cattle, 25 cents; children under twelve years of age, of a family, to cross free.

On the 17th of June, there was another meeting of the Commissioners, at which Grand and Petit Juries were drawn for the first term of the first Circuit Court. The names of these jurymen will give an idea of who were citizens of the county at that time. Grand Jury—Sephaniah Wade, Geo. W. Holman, Jacob Linzee, Abner Overman, Wm. Conn, John Hoover, Joseph Chamberlain, Aaron Rinenberger, Ira Evans, John Plaster, John M. Jackson, Wm. N. Hood. Petit Jury—Geo. Townsend, John Wiseman, Jas. T. Linton, Wm. M. Reyburn, Robert Wade, Richard Beauford, Isaac Marquiss, Isaac Stewart, John Ray, Wm. Wilkinson, John Smith, Joseph C. Taylor, Wm. Cannon, Stewart Fogy, Alexander Jameson, Joseph B. Campbell, Walter D. Nesbit, Ratliff Wilkinson, John Saunders, Nathaniel Nicholas, Isaac Wilkinson. Of this list, Walter D. Nesbit is the only survivor living in the county at this time.

FIRST ELECTION.

The first election under the act organizing the County of Miami was held at Miamisport on the first Monday of August, 1834, at the house of Captain Drouillard.

Benjamin H. Scott was elected Clerk; Jacob Linzee, Sheriff; John W. Miller, Alexander Jameson and John Cruikson, County Commissioners; Jacob Wilkinson and Stephen G. Shanks, Associate Judges; Abner Overman, Treasurer; D. R. Beane was appointed School Commissioner; and Joseph Holman, Probate Judge. At this election but sixty votes were cast.

When the county was first organized, and for some years afterward, there was a county officer known by the title of School Commissioner, who had charge of the school fund. John Plaster, Eli Cook and N. Mendenhall successively held this office by election until it was abolished.

The Clerk of the Circuit Court was, also, Clerk of the Probate and Commissioners' Courts, and discharged all the duties now devolving on the Auditor and Recorder.

For several years after the organization, the taxes were collected by the Sheriff, and by him paid over to the Treasurer.

TOWNSHIP ORGANIZATION.

At the first meeting of the County Commissioners, held June 3, 1834, Peru and Jefferson Townships embraced all the territory of the county lying north of the Wabash; that south of the Wabash being owned by the Miamis. Perry Township was organized February 27, and Union and Richland, November 6, 1837; Erie, first called Blackbrook, August 27, 1839. About this time there was a township called Isaba, lying on the northeast corner of the county, which remained a part of the county until about 1844 or 1845, when it was attached to Fulton County by an act of the Legislature. The territory south of the Wabash, having been acquired by the treaty of 1840, was organized into townships as follows: Butler, September 1, 1841; Washington, June 6, 1845; Deer Creek, September 1, 1845; Clay, March 3, 1845; Harrison, September 8, 1846; Jackson, about the same time. And Allen, by dividing Union, September 6, 1839. All of the boundaries of the original townships were changed as new townships were created.