

## SIDNEY 50 YEARS AGO RECALLED BY A NATIVE (BY I. WARNER)

BELL  
306 North

A recent article in your paper of the history of Palestine awakened many memories in my mind. While the history of that village was before my time, it brought to mind some history that might interest some of your readers. I refer to the town of Sidney. This little city was founded in 1875-76, and owes its foundation to the Nickel Plate railroad.

## SAWMILL FIRST INDUSTRY

The only sign of life, before the coming of the railroad was an old log house that stood where A. B. Palmer's store now stands. Naturally, the advent of the railroad created many business opportunities; soon merchants, sawmill men and others began to locate here. The most important of these was, perhaps, McManara and Radcliffe, who handled all manner of merchandise and, quite frequently, acted as paymaster for the employees of the new railroad.

As soon as the railroad was completed and the boom suspended, the firm dissolved and moved to Pierceton. Completion of the railroad required a depot. I can still hear those old-timers arguing as to where it should be located. Finally we had a depot and two passenger trains made daily stops. This required a post office and Seymour Whitman was made postmaster. Whitman was a battle-scarred, old Civil War veteran, and at that time, Sidney's most liked citizen. The railroad required large amounts of lumber and ties, and many of Sidney's residents were engaged in this industry.

## PRODUCED BLACK WALNUT

While there was a sawmill in this vicinity, it was located on Bel River and was operated by water. It was owned by a man named Sidbotton who sawed mostly black walnut, of which there was an abundance at that time. G. B. Lesh arrived about this time, and started a small mill just north of where the school house now stands. He dealt principally in yellow poplar.

## RECALL OLD FIRE

About this time G. T. Boltz arrived and started a large sawmill just across the track from the present elevator. This proved to be the main industry, and it was a common sight to see his log teams, 10 or 12 in number, drawing away from the barn. I can still see that old mill-yard piled full of huge oak and poplar logs, some four and five, and even six feet in diameter lying in tiers, awaiting their turn to be sawed into lumber. The mill later burned to the ground in 1886 or 1887. It seemed to take the ambition out of the owner, "Gus", as we called him, and he went to Kentucky. However, his Maggie, rebuilt the mill and operated it for a long time, finally selling out to John Haines.

## HOTEL IS BUILT

But let's get back again to earlier days. As soon as the railroad depot was built and things were more certain, a large hotel was built and operated by Aaron Stumpff. He was very popular in the young community, but his reputation for his honest dealing and friendly manner won him many friends, and later, elevated him to the office of county treasurer. Stumpff and Snell's addition to the town of Sidney was, no doubt, the leading addition to the town.



## ERECT FIRST CHURCH

As soon as the town began to grow, the question of religion came up. It wasn't long, however, when such men as George McConnell, Dan Snell, Aaron Stumpff, Jacob Snell, and a host of others saw the need and a church was erected on the site of the present Christian church. About this time, Dan Snell, who had been following his trade as a carpenter, took up the study of scripture and many of us can still remember his first sermon. I still remember his text, "And behold a sower went forth to sow". Not only a prominent citizen, he became a noted Dunkard preacher.

I would be vain if I didn't mention the busiest place in town at this time, the village smithy. This blacksmith shop was operated by Sam Hartsock, (father of Warsawan, Frank Hartsock), and was indeed the busiest place with horses to shoe and tires to set, and a hundred and one other things that kept Hartsock's anvil ringing from early morning till late at night. School children on their way to and from school "looked in at the open door" and marveled at the way he fashioned shoes and wagon tires, all the while humming a tune. Some of the older boys used to fight for a chance to operate the blower to the forge. Whether it was an unruly horse to shoe or a tire to set, Sam could do it with a saile, and a tune on his lips.

Right alongside the blacksmith shop was located what might be termed, the smithy's "sister," the wagon-maker. The place was run by a man named Tom Twinening, who several times told me that he would trace his lineage to the landing of the Mayflower. Though not overly industrious, nevertheless he filled a much needed necessity at that time, and for a number of years piled his trade later disposing of it to Mr. Brandenburg.

## EDUCATION IN SIDNEY

Now, for a brief space, let's see how education of this little placed fared. The present site of Sidnye school is exactly where the old log school house stood when such men as Dan Snell, his five brothers and sisters, John Warner and many more who have passed on, sat on srraight wooden benches facing a desk fastened with wooden pins to the wall. The building was replaced by a one-room brick building and in this building ye scribe received his elementary education, said education being administered by a stern old teacher, S. S. Studebaker. How many memories I could resurrect were I to call the toll. I wonder how many who are living and read this will remember the hill in the east side of the school house? How we coasted down it and wrecked John Warner's fence time after time. Whether the town grew or whether the families grew, anyhow, a new school house was erected about 1888. It was a two-story affair and was added to the old building. A furnace was installed, which at that time was a seventh wonder. It burned four foot wood, which was furnished by some farmer for 75 cents per cord, and was carried down in the basement by the many boys in school. It was here that ye scribe finished his educational career. First and foremost, among the teachers were; S. S. Studebaker, Festus Idle, John Kort, Lillie McConnell, C. C. Miller and, finally O. P. Smith.

Of the present generation, not one of these school teachers live near Sidney, and most of them have answered the final roll call.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

For just a moment, let's look into the social activities fifty years ago. Maybe towns went this way but once a week, winter and summer, the



Sidney debating society met in a hall over Reub Sisk's grocery and there with wit, humor, and philosophy, for two or three hours, argued which was first, the hen or the egg. Sometimes the negative side won, but it furnished live topic until the next meeting when another question would be thrashed out. So, good for the men, but how about the women who had not heard of "bridge" at that time? Well, Sister Simpkins had a quilt in the frame and all the ladies would take thread, thimble and needle, go over and help finish the quilt, all the time discussing the latest arrival in town or someone's family.

#### BARN RAISING BIG EVENT

While we are reminiscing back in the 30's, let us consider something else we may have forgotten. Crops were good and there were many vast farms in this locality necessitating large barns. Threshing machines were comparatively few, so farmers stored their grain in barns until such time as it could be threshed. John H. Warner was the man for this job of barn building, and eight of every ten barns within a radius of eight or ten miles of Sidney, was built by him. These were not of the plank and nail variety, but were constructed with huge timbers hew from logs in the winter. They were hauled to the barn site and put together with wooden pins, and everything was made ready for the "raisin". This was a day looked forward to, when all the men and women and their families gathered to help raise their neighbor's barn. I can still see those long pike poles with sharp spikes in the end to jam the timber into place, as they were started up, and hear John Warner or "Esap" as he was called, bellowing, "Heave ho" or "Ho heave"! The interesting joists, plates and pearlines, as they were called, go together and how accurately the pins fit. After it was all over, the women prepared a magnificent dinner and the crowing event, the raising of the barns bulder on the shoulders of other men, while he was carried around to the cheers of his friends. A jug of cold cider was brought out by the owner, and after everyone had a drink, the job was finished.

#### REMEMBER THE JUG?

The mention of this jug takes me back a few years when there was a distillery near the town of what is now Liberty Mills. It was customary at that time for everyone to have a barrel of whickey in the home. This was very simple, as all you had to do was take a load of corn to the distillery and come home with a barrel of whiskey. A jug of whiskey and a jug of water were always in evidence at all log rollings, or gatherings, at that time. The peculiar thing was, that no one ever become intoxicated. The federal tax, however, made it impossible to continue the custom, and old John Barleycorn passed on to other surroundings.

#### FIRST MEDICAL MEN

Sidney, the same as all other towns, required medical attention and the first doctor to locate here was a Dr. Lancaster. We old-timers remember him as a quiet, dignified man, who drove a fiery team of ponies, and who never failed to answer a call. Another who lived in the rural district was Dr. William Scott, a Civil War veteran. These men kept the citizens of Sidney and surrounding territory in good health, but these men finally moved to greener pastures. They were followed by Dr. Tenant, Dr. Hopin-garner and Dr. Misner. Dr. Shackelford of Warsaw was a frequent visitor.



## BUSY TIMES FOR FARMERS

Fifty years ago, at this time of the year, was a very busy time for the farmers, sugar making. Every farmer has his sugar camp open, and as the sap began to flow, these were mighty busy men. No evaporators in those days. Large iron kettles seinging between logs or hung inside a crude furnace constructed of stone and clay. The sap was boiled partly down in one or two kettles and then dipped into a finishing kettle, a process many people never saw. Go with me to the camp of George Ross, one of the early settlers, and watch him in the manufacture of maple sugar. After having boiled the sap to a syrup stage, a large kettle would be selected and placed over the fire. After it had boiled to a certain stage, he would test it by dipping a stick into the liquid, and then watch the action of the air on it after it has been withdrawn. Experience told him just when to take it from the fire, when the real work began. It was not allowed to set and cool quickly, but was constantly stirred while cooling back and forth, up and down, and finally became the nicest brown sugar you ever saw. The performance continued until a barrel is made, sometimes more.

## OLD TIMER'S SPORT

Sports, there was only one for these old timers, and that was shooting. Lets go back to an open spot in the woods and the date, Thanks giving Day, 1882. The event, a shooting match, and who's there? John Allen Bisk, J. M. Wine, "Big Jim" McPherson and a lot of others, each eager to prove that he was the best shot in the county. The grand prize this day was a big turkey valued at \$1.00. So when 40 or 50 men went to a shooting match, it required a second prize, which was usually eight or ten dollars? A misplaced shot would get nothing. It really required a good marksman to get far enough away to miss the turkey and still hit the jackpot. The guns were all muzzle-loaders, and just as now, were of some special make. However, the bitter rivalry, which existed prior to the match, was all forgotten after it was over, and some of the unluckier ones were given a share by those more fortunate.

## THE BARBECUE

Another important meeting, which cannot be forgotten, was the annual harvest meeting at Dodgertown, a church about two miles east of Sidney, and now called Spring Creek. Each year at the end of the season, usually about the last of September, everyone for miles around converged on this church by wagon, buggies, and other modes of travel. Everyone brought something to eat and some member would kill a beef, which was roasted over an open fire at the meeting. It was served with delicious broth and home-baked bread in large bowls in tin cups to everyone regardless of creed or rank. After this, everyone went to church, where prayers were offered and thanks was given. The Lords Supper and Communion Service followed with the members taking part to conclude the event.



## VILLAGE RHYMSTER

Perhaps at this point it might be well to inject a little comedy into this life of 50 years ago. I wonder who of the old-timers remember Henry Heckman, a rather quaint old man who was noted for his rhymes? Should you ask him a question, you could expect an answer in rhyme. As for instance, "Good morning, Henry-kins of blustery this morning". His answer, "Yep, it sometimes rains and it sometimes snows, it sometimes hails and it sometimes blows". Just one of the many sayings of this village rhymster. He also owned a vineyard and grew some of the finest grapes ever grown in this country. Adjoining his farm was an industry, long since forgotten. This was a cheese factory owned and operated by Mr. Shriver and his family. The quality of his cheese was unexcelled, and the proof of it was the eating thereof.

## SELLER'S TITLE MILL

North of Sidney, on the site now occupied by the Monroe Township consolidated school, stood another important industry. This was a tile mill owned and operated by Perry Sellers and many of the first drainage ditches in the county were constructed of tile made here. The tile was hauled to all the surrounding territories, and the hill at the school house at present is caused by the removal of clay from which Perry Sellers constructed many miles of tile while the mill was in operation.

As we look back fifty years, or more, on this little town surrounded by forests and all manner of industries of that time, which now all are gone and forgotten, we think as the poet who wrote:

"I've wandered to the village, Tom I've sat beneath the tree. Upon the village playground that sheltered you and me. But none were there to greet me, Tom, and few were left to know. That played with us upon the green some fifty years ago".



## TOWN OF SIDNEY PLATTED IN THE FALL OF 1881

Sidney is located in the northern part of Jackson Township, and was surveyed and platted by Daniel Snell, John Mowan, and Aaron Stumpff, in the autumn of 1881.

Gustavus A. Biltz purchased the first lot, and erected a residence and saw mill in December, 1881. A farm house stood upon the present site of Sidney, in which resided Henry Goodyear and family.

Daniel Snell erected the first business house in 1881, into which Radcliff, McNamara and Company opened a stock of general merchandise.

Frank B. Moe opened a hardware store in 1882, and William Klingel a harness shop the same year. The first blacksmith was Samuel Hartzog, the first wagonmaker T. J. Twini.

In 1883, Seymour Whitman erected a hotel, and operated it until the autumn of 1886, when William Klinger took possession.

In 1882, Dr. T. A. Lancaster located in the village. He left in 1886, and his place filled by Doctors S. C. Loring and G. B. Hoopengartner. The latter opened the first stock of drugs in the new town.

Washington Messimore erected a warehouse and began dealing in grain in 1883.

Daniel Snell, who had been for many years, a large contractor and builder erected a large two story building in 1884, and put in a large stock of furniture.

In 1890 there were three stores that dealt in general merchandise; two grocery stores and such other establishments that made Sidney a popular trading point.

The grain and lumber interests were large, and much money was received and paid out in those departments.

District No. 2 School was standing inside the village limits when the town was surveyed. There were two teachers employed in 1890 and 100 scholars in attendance.

The post office was established by 1882, with E. M. Radcliff, postmaster. He resigned in 1884, and was succeeded by Daniel Snell, who in 1885, gave way to the democratic appointee, F. B. Moe.

There was only one church in Sidney in 1890, but it was used in common by the Christians, to whom the church belonged, the Methodists, German Baptists and Progressive Brethern. The church was erected in 1884. The Christian society was organized in November, 1886, the Methodist society in August, 1886, and the Brethern in September of that year.

This article was loaned out by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Walgamuth, Sidney, Indiana.