

THE EARLY SCHOOLS OF INDIANA.

FROM THE PAPERS OF D. D. BANTA.

[The most ambitious and best known work on education in Indiana is that by Prof. Richard G. Boone, which appeared in 1892. The same year, but prior to the printing of Mr. Boone's book, Judge D. D. Banta, then of the Indiana University Law School, an old-time resident of Johnson county, and author of a history of that county, published in *The Indianapolis News* a series of papers on this important subject. Judge Banta's style of treatment and the ground he covers are so widely different from those of Professor Boone that it is so much new matter to one familiar with Boone. The articles, largely anecdotal and revealing an intimate knowledge of pioneer life and early happenings, give a graphic view of conditions not to be gleaned from a more formal work based wholly upon scholarship. They have a value all their own, and should be of interest to all educators. The series contains too much matter to be reprinted entire in this magazine, but I have taken the liberty to preserve the substance of them and those parts that seem to me most valuable as real contributions to our school history. By the references given the reader who wishes can consult the original, to be found in files in either the State Library or the City Library in Indianapolis. There are ten of the articles, which appear in *The News* of 1892, under date of January 6, 13, 20, 27; February 3, 10, 17, 24; March 16, 23. The articles will run in these pages throughout the year.—*Editor.*]

Educational Status of the Pioneers—First Schools in the State—Distances to the School—Private Houses, Barns, Mills, etc., as School-houses—Rudeness of the First Houses Built—Curious Styles of Building.

THERE is a class which entertains the belief that the early settlers of Indiana were not as well educated as were the early settlers of her sister States. I think this belief was quite generally entertained a half century ago, and, perhaps, even later by the people of these sister States. I do not know why this belief should be held by any one to-day. I know of no reason why the Indiana pioneers should not be considered as the equals in every respect of the pioneer settlers of any of the other States at that period.

It is stated by Gilmore, in "The Advance Guard of Western Civilization," that of the 256 settlers who moved in 1779-'80 to the after site of Nashville, all but one could write his name. Of thirty-six settlers on the north side of the Ohio, within the present boundaries of the State of Ohio, who signed the petition directed to Lieutenant-Colonel Harmer, in 1765, one only signed by his mark. Mr. Roosevelt, in writing "The Winning of the West," had occasion to examine a great many documents written and signed by the pioneer Tennesseans and Kentuckians, and he gives testimony as following:

"In examining original drafts of petitions and the like, signed by the hundreds of original settlers of Tennessee and Kentucky, I have been struck by the small proportion—not much over three or four per cent. at the outside—of men who made their mark instead of signing."

I have no doubt that the same fact would appear from an examination on as large a scale of original documents signed by the Indiana pioneers. I have done a little of that kind of work myself and have found the same result that Mr. Roosevelt did.

Of course, all the schools of the pioneering period were inferior to the schools of to-day. In methods and appliances the schools of the two periods were as wide asunder as the poles, but in results, take it school for school and month for month, I am inclined to think the difference was not so very marked. Dr. Boone, in his "History of Education in Indiana,"* does not, as I remember, discuss this question, but if he did he would hardly agree with me. Nevertheless, the evidence is abundant that the pioneer schoolmasters were, in general, fairly efficient workers in the schoolroom.

However much or little of school training the Indiana pioneers had, of two facts, I think, we may be assured: 1. They differed, as a class, in no respect as to their education, from the pioneer settlers of any other State of that period. 2. The sentiment quite generally prevailed among them, as it did with the people of all other States, of an earnest desire that their children should enjoy far more excellent educational privileges than

*This allusion is to Dr. Boone's MS.

had fallen to their own lot. Or, in other words, they entertained, in common with all the United States people of their day, the American idea of the great value of school training. Of the truth of these two propositions I think there can be no doubt. Dr. Boone, in his history, makes it quite plain that later on in Indiana there came a time when there was a seeming indifference in educational affairs that was not at all creditable to the people of the State, but that charge can not in justice be laid to the door of the first comers. The truth is, that long before any steps had been taken in Massachusetts or New York, or anywhere else in the western world, looking to a free-school system to be supported by the State, Indiana, in her organic law, had made provision for a system of free education, commencing in the township schools and ending in the State University, and but for the great poverty of the people, which rendered the scheme absolutely impracticable, there can be no doubt that there would have been a free-school system in active operation in this State twenty years or more before the first blundering steps were taken toward it in any other State.

If one would take the time for it he might secure quite a varied and extensive assortment of "first schools" in the State. Mr. Randall Yarbrow, who came to Clark county in 1810, said: "What was probably the first school in Indiana was opened in 1811 in Jeffersonville, near the river bank." From a work entitled "Indiana Methodism" I quote: "The first school of any kind in the territory of Indiana was taught one and a half miles south of Charlestown, in 1803." In the summer of 1796 Volney visited Vincennes, and declared that nobody ever opened a school among the French there till it was done by the Abbe R. [Rivet], a missionary banished hither by the French Revolution; and he adds the further statement that "out of nine of the French scarcely six could read or write, whereas nine-tenths of the American emigrants from the east could do both." From the testimony of John Tipton, a capital-site commissioner, we are warranted in believing that a Frenchman taught school in an Indian village, situated on what is now the northwest corner of Johnson county, before M. Rivet's day.*

*For what Tipton says, see Vol. I, No. 1, p. 13, of this magazine.

The first school within the present borders of the State was a French school, probably at Vincennes, and the first Anglo-American school was taught in Clarksville, whose settlement was begun not later than 1785, and probably two or three years before that. At any rate, the place was a "small town" in 1789, and although it was never a place of more than a few log houses, we might safely assume that schools of some sort were provided for the children of the settlement, for this would accord with what I believe to have been the unvarying American practice. After the peace of Greenville, in 1795, the Clark's Grant settlement naturally grew faster than it did before, and in 1800 its population numbered 929. Surely there must have been schools maintained by this time. But we are not left to conjecture merely. From the old records of Clarksville, kept from the first, there are frequent entries relating to the schoolhouses and schoolmasters almost from the very first.

The presumption is next to conclusive that a school was opened in Dearborn county prior to 1802. In the spring of 1796 sixteen families moved across the Big Miami and became the first settlers of Dearborn county. They had settled on the Ohio side of the Miami three years before, and during their three years' sojourn there they organized a school and brought in the first schoolmaster known to that part of the country, one Isaac Polk, who "was known far and near as Master Polk." What these sixteen families who moved on southeastern Indiana soil in the spring of 1796, and who were joined by four or five of the families of the Ohio neighborhood the same year, did in the matter of schools, the muse of history, unfortunately, has not seen fit to say. We are left to conjecture, but with the record made during the three years of their residence in Ohio, we may feel very confident that the year of their moving, or at farthest the following one, marked the advent of the schoolhouse in southern Indiana.

From The News of January 20, 1892.

Without further discussion, we may accept that in general, whenever and wherever a neighborhood contained enough children to warrant the enterprise, a schoolmaster was secured and a school was opened. But it must be remembered that neighbor-

hoods in the early days covered far wider reaches of country than is generally the case now. To that schoolhouse south of Charlestown referred to in the "History of Methodism in Indiana," D. W. Daily, of Clark county, went when a small boy, walking a distance of three miles through the woods. Young Daily's school path, like thousands of others, was not very plain, and was sometimes crossed by wild and savage beasts. His devoted mother, realizing the dangers that beset her boy, went with him part of the way every morning, carrying her youngest born in her arms, and every evening she met him on the way as he returned to his home. One of the first schools taught in Spencer county drew children to it from a distance of four miles in every direction; and it was by no means uncommon for school children to trudge, morning and evening, three and four and even more miles to attend their schools.

In the beginning, houses were not built exclusively for school uses, if an unoccupied cabin or other place was found available for the purpose. The first school taught in Martinsville, certain chroniclers say, was a summer school on a gentleman's porch, by Dr. John Morrison. There are others, however, who insist that the first school was taught in a barn by James Conway. Barns were not infrequently turned into summer schoolhouses during the pioneer educational period. The first school taught in Newburg, Warrick county, was in John Sprinkle's barn, and many other barns were given up during part of the temperate season to the pedagogue and his pupils. Mills were also utilized on occasions. The first school ever taught in the English language in the town of Vevay was by John Wilson, a Baptist minister, in a horse mill. An early school in Waynesville, Bartholomew county, was taught by a retired distiller in a blacksmith shop, which school, for reasons not stated, was attended by young men and boys only. In Spencer county a deserted tannery was utilized. In Knox, in Jackson, and perhaps elsewhere, the old forts, after the close of the Indian wars, were turned into schoolhouses. In the towns of Franklin, Brownstown, and some others, the log court-houses were occupied between courts. In Dubois county Simon Morgan, the county recorder, kept school for many years in the recorder's office. John Godlove,

of Delaware county, taught one of the first schools in the precincts of his own kitchen, while in every county south of the Wabash, and, doubtless, north of it also, abandoned cabins of one kind or another, were quite frequently used for school purposes.*

The appropriating of the mills and the forts, of the barns and old cabins for schools was, however, the exception and not the rule. The rule was that if a house of some kind was not found ready-made when the time for organizing a school came around, those expecting to be its patrons usually made short work of building one. The first were the plainest and cheapest form of log cabin. The neighbors of the Stotts settlement on White river, in Morgan county, began and finished ready for occupancy their schoolhouse in one day. Of course, it was the rudest of log cabins, but it may well be supposed that there were hundreds of not much if any better in Indiana from first to last. I have been told of one such that was built and occupied in White River township, in Jackson county, at a very early day. It was a pole cabin without window, floor or chimney. The fire was kindled on a raised clay platform or hearth in the center, and the sparks and smoke escaped through a large opening in the roof. The children sat on benches next the walls, facing the center, and studied their lessons by the light that came whence the smoke escaped. The house was modeled, evidently, after a hunters' camp. In another part of the same county, a first temple of learning was erected and finished without windows or openings for the light to come in save at the door and the wide throat of the enormous chimney. A similar one was a schoolhouse in Nashville, this State. We usually associate with the primitive schoolhouses the "greased paper windows," but the truth is, "paper glass" marked a step in the process of the evolution of these structures. In the history of Spencer county the statement is made that the first schoolhouses had uncovered openings through which the light entered. There were first schoolhouses elsewhere in the State that were without windows. The paper covering, made translucent by a free use of hog's lard or bear's

*Apropos, it may be mentioned that Hanover College had its beginning in the little three-room residence of Dr. John Finley Crowe. When Mrs. Crowe's domestic duties made it necessary, the class of six boys repaired to the loom-house, a log structure of one room devoted to the family weaving.—*Editor*.

oil, had not yet been thought of, but was to come as an improvement and mark an era in the improvement of schoolhouse architecture. The settlement of Spencer county was begun as early as about 1812, and the statement may well be true, for its earliest-built schoolhouse belonged to the first of the Territory. In Blue River township, Hancock county, the first one was built of logs and had five corners. It was not chinked and daubed, had no windows, and but one door. This must have been as late as 1830. The uncovered openings of the Spencer county houses are suggestive of the portholes in the blockhouses built during the early days as a protection against the Indians. It is a well-known fact that after the final cessation of Indian hostilities the old forts were in some instances converted into schoolhouses, and I find it recorded that a school was taught in 1808 in the dwelling house of John Widner, "which house was almost a fort," having been constructed with special reference to making resistance against attacks of Indians. Indeed, there is direct authority for the statement that schoolhouses were constructed in Washington county with portholes for shooting at the Indians, and if in Washington county, we have good reason to suppose that they were likewise so constructed elsewhere at the same time. I have not come across any record or tradition to show that a cabin full of school children was ever beleaguered in Indiana, or even that the schoolmasters of the State ever at any time carried rifles to their schools with which to defend their scholars in case of attack; but when we remember how very few of the specific acts of a man or of men, which belong to every-day life and are not required by some law to be entered of record, find their way into history books, we can see that schoolmasters may have gone armed to their schools here in Indiana, and the fact remain unknown; and I have no doubt they did.

While the old schoolhouses were, whatever their dimensions, generally rectangular in shape, this was not always true. I find an account of two in Orange county, in Northwest and Southeast townships respectively, that seem to have been five-sided, one end being built "in the shape of a fence corner for a fireplace." This unique style of architecture may have been practiced elsewhere. In fact, a five-cornered schoolhouse was erected in Hancock county as late as 1830.

Can those who attended the old cabin schoolhouses ever forget the total want of everything connected with them that was calculated to cheer and comfort the youngster in his ascent of the hill of knowledge? No attempt, whatever, was ever made by the men who constructed these houses toward beautifying them in any degree, and, judged by the standards of to-day, not much was done with a view to securing the comfort of the children.

The following description of an old time schoolhouse and its furnishings is taken from "Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley," by Sanford C. Cox:

"The schoolhouse was generally a log cabin with puncheon floor, 'cat and clay' chimney, and a part of two logs chopped away on each side of the house for windows, over which greased newspapers or foolscap was pasted to admit the light and keep out the cold. The house was generally furnished with a split [splint] bottom chair for the teacher, and rude benches made out of slabs or puncheons for the children to sit upon, so arranged as to get the benefit of the huge log fire in the winter time, and the light from the windows. To these add a broom, a water-bucket, and a tin cup or gourd, and the furniture list will be complete."

The writer omits one important adjunct, viz., the writing-table or bench, as it was in some schoolhouses not inappropriately called. This usually consisted of a broad board, sawed or sometimes rived, nailed to stout pins driven into holes bored in the logs at a proper slant upward beneath the long window. In the absence of a suitable board, a puncheon hewn to a smooth face, or even a half-log so hewn and mounted upon pins driven into the wall or upon stakes driven into the earth, was made to serve the purpose of a lighter writing table.

It would be a waste of words to point out the squalor and discomfort of the old cabin schoolhouses. Most of us, however, who caught glimpses of learning within their portals in our younger days, think we treasure very tender recollections of them, but I suspect the tender recollections are of the youthful friendships we then formed, and of the surrounding woods and streams that witnessed indulgence in all manner of lawful sports, without a shadow of fear of trespassing on the rights of others.

[*To be continued.*]