

EARLY INDIANAPOLIS.

THE FLETCHER PAPERS—SECOND INSTALMENT.

The First Wedding Celebration and the First "Poem"—The First Campaign: Whitewater vs. Kentucky—Numerous Candidates—First Political Pamphlets and "Handbills"—Voting Precincts—Election and Successful Candidates—Citizens' Resolutions Against Campaign Methods.

From the Indianapolis News of April 19, 1879.

THE earliest marriage in or around Indianapolis was undoubtedly that of Jeremiah Johnson and Miss Jane Reagan, which took place early in 1821. In this case Johnson walked all the way to Connersville and back—about 120 miles—for his license, and then the lovers had to wait weary weeks before the first clergyman (Rev. Mr. McClung) came along. The second marriage has been more fully recorded. One of the early settlers here was Mr. Thomas Chinn, from Virginia, who was the first person that imported blooded stock into Indianapolis. All the old boys will recall his fine stallion, "Black Hawk," and his gigantic bull, "Walk-in-the-Water." Mr. Chinn built him a log cabin on the bank of Pogue's Run, on what was afterward called "Noble's pasture." That log cabin, with its great split puncheon floor, I remember was still standing, though uninhabited, in 1834. Now, Mr. Chinn had a smart, bright-eyed daughter, named Patsy. One of the young men who came to settle in Indianapolis was Uriah Gates. He and Miss Patsy soon found that their "hearts beat as one," and on the 22d of January, 1822, the second wedding in Indianapolis came off, Justice McIlvain tying the nuptial knot. The town was so small that everybody was invited. My mother in her journal says:

"Tuesday, January 22, 1822. Mr. Gates was to-day wedded to Miss Patsy Chinn, both of Indianapolis. I attended the wedding. It was a very disagreeable day, but notwithstanding there was a great concourse of people present. Wednesday, 23d, I attended a party at Mr. Reagan's, for Mr. R. gave the newly-

married couple an infare. We danced until ten o'clock, and then came home." This wedding was described to me by my father as a great affair. There was plenty to eat and drink, and what the French call the *piece de resistance* consisted of a good-sized porker roasted whole, mounted on the table with a large apple in its mouth.* The first copy of the *Indianapolis Gazette* appeared January 28, 1822, and contains the wedding announcement and an original poem written for the occasion. [See note at end of this instalment.]

From the News of April 26.

At the first election in Indianapolis there was an army of office-seekers. That they began skirmishing a long time in advance can be seen by the account which I gave of the Christmas of 1821, when candidates bought the only barrel of cider in town and treated the sovereigns, who afterward anchored the cider down with brandy and "bald-face." The "ball" at Wyant's (on New Year's day) was a social affair nominally, but there, too, were many of the candidates with their most affable smiles. In a recent interview with Mrs. Martin (daughter of George Smith, one of the founders of the *Indianapolis Gazette*) I ascertained that she was present on that occasion and took her part in the dance. Mrs. Martin says that she went to Wyant's in Hogden's "carriage." This last she describes as a great "lumbering thing," like the "mud wagons" employed by the old stage companies in the spring and winter. The supper prepared on this New Year's day, 1822, for the robust ancestors of many of the present Indianapolitans was also described by her. There was, she said, in the open fireplace an immense kettle or cauldron, which contained no less than sixteen gallons of coffee, and there were pans, skillets and other vessels in which were biscuits, sweet bread and that best of all cakes, the real old pound-cake. That New Year's party was composed of every grade in society, so that the candidates had an excellent opportunity to see the people, for my father told me that invitations were extended to everybody, down to the humblest inhabitant of the meanest log cabin on the donation.

On that memorable Christmas, 1821, a number of the candidates had already declared themselves, and my father records the following:

*See Nowland's "Early Reminiscences," pp. 128-130.

"I will here mention the names of some of the candidates for office in our new county. For associate judges, James McIlvain and Mr. Patterson; county clerk, James M. Ray, Milo R. Davis, J. Hawkins, et al.; for county commissioners, Messrs. Hogden, Osburn and Morrow."

In his journal for the 3d day of January, 1822, my father writes:

"Kept close in the morning and wrote letters. In the afternoon visited the river (the largest part of the population was on the east bank of the river). I find the people much agitated about the approaching election." The candidates, it seems, were not the only canvassers. The people were in that business, for my father continues: "There is much canvassing of the character of the candidates and their eligibility. There is hardly a man in town but offers himself for some office, either civil or military."

The divisions were not according to the political parties of the day. They were local, or, rather, geographical. My father informed me that the combatants were ranged under the titles of "Whitewater" and "Kentucky." The emigration from those two sections was simultaneous. The people from Whitewater were as clannish as those from Kentucky, and each wished to have the distribution of the public loaves and fishes. The Whitewater party had some advantage over Kentucky, in that it had received some accessions from people from Ohio and Pennsylvania who had resided long enough in the eastern part of the State to qualify them as voters, while many of the Kentuckians had not resided a year in the State. The Whitewater people were consummate politicians. They had been led and disciplined by such men as Jonathan Jennings, the two Nobles and Jesse B. Thomas previous to their arrival in the New Purchase. My father informed me that these were men of talent, and that greater adepts at political warfare never lived.

From the News of May 10.

The political war-horses of Whitewater and Kentucky did a great deal of vigorous pawing in February, 1822. The proprietors of the *Indiana Gazette* wisely considered that they would not be too partisan. They decided that both parties, if they wished the benefit of the art of printing, must pay the printer.

It was the fashion of the day in the east and in the newer States of the west to issue pamphlets. The first author of a pamphlet or of any other publication (except the *Gazette*) in Indianapolis was not from New England or from New York, but from Kentucky. The late Morris Morris was our first author. The greatest battle to be fought at the election of 1822 was, without doubt, to be over the clerkship for the new county. Whitewater and Kentucky chose their best men. The first selected a young man from New Jersey. He was of undoubted gifts; he had studied at Columbia College, New York; he was a fine penman, and had a neatness of dress and address not often found on the frontier. He had resided in the southern part of the State, and had been deputy clerk at Lawrenceburg and Connersville. This was James M. Ray, a quiet young man but a famous "still hunter." The Kentucky party also selected a strong man. One of nature's noblemen was Morris Morris, who came to Indianapolis from Carlisle, Kentucky, in October, 1821. It seems that the battle must have been already sharp long before Sheriff Hervey Bates issued, on the 22d of February, the proclamation for the election, for I find in my mother's journal the following entry, telling of an evening of a busy day. Under date of January 30 she says:

"Mr. Morris has written a pamphlet and had it put in print. Mr. Fletcher has just left me to write an answer to it, and I am all alone this evening." Again she writes:

"Saturday, February 2. Mrs. Buckner dined with us, and after she went away Mr. Osburn came and staid all night." The husband of Mrs. Buckner was one of the candidates for county commissioner. The Mr. Osburn mentioned was another of the candidates for commissioner. He was a merchant and quite a politician, and no doubt was at my father's that evening to consult on the reply to Morris Morris's "pamphlet." This reply appeared in the shape of a handbill, for my mother writes the next day:

"Sunday, 3d of February. The handbill came out in opposition to what Mr. Morris wrote."

While my father was never a violent partisan, he had decided opinions. In this election he was a Whitewater man, and took a deep interest in the formation of the county, but he sought

no office, and as early as November 8th, 1821, he writes: "I find there are much strife and contention amongst the citizens of this place. I sincerely hope to escape all censure by asking no favors for myself."

In those days it is evident that the Sunday was not observed as strictly as at present. On several occasions in the campaign I learn from my mother's journal that the "printing office was visited by her in company with her husband on that day." On February 15 she writes: "Mr. Morris's second handbill came out." "Handbill" can not be taken in the usual acceptation of the term. It was larger than what we as present understand as such, and is used indiscriminately with the word pamphlet. It was half the size of the *Gazette*, printed on one side, and was usually nailed up in a public place. On the same date the journal continues as follows: "I went to bed early, but Mr. F. was writing an answer to the handbill, and did not go to bed that night. Sunday Mr. F. went to bed early in the afternoon and slept till 8 P. M., when I awakened him and we both went to the printing office and staid until 2 o'clock in the morning." The dairy further reads:

"Monday, 18th February, 1822. In the morning the handbills came out, and great was the mystery. Curiosity was aroused to know who the 'Legal Voter' [doubtless the signature] alluded to when he mentioned 'Col. Puff-back, Captain Swell-back and myself.'"

Skipping over many pages which refer to long consultations and threatened suits for slander, I come to Sunday, March 31st, the day before the election, when my mother records: I spent the day very unsatisfactorily, for there were so many candidates coming in that I could neither read nor write nor do anything else."

On April 1st came the shock of battle. There were thirty-three candidates recorded in the *Gazette*, but in the journals I find there are others mentioned which would make up the number to nearly forty. In 1846 I had an interview with Mrs. Paxton on this election, and she remarked: "I wondered at that time where all the voters were to come from, for it seemed to me that almost every man in Indianapolis was a candidate for office." There were five for county clerk alone (the clerkship

was for seven years). It will be remembered that Marion county was then five times its present size, comprehending the present county, with the addition of Johnson, Hamilton, and parts of Boone, Madison and Hancock. The voting precincts were announced in the proclamation to be at Indianapolis, Finch's (near Noblesville), Page's (Strawtown), Anderson and Pendleton.

It is thirty-three years since [in 1846] after a conversation with my father, I published in the *Indiana Journal* on account of this first election, and in that communication I used this description of the place where the election was held in Indianapolis, viz.: "The election was held in the house of General John Carr, which stands in the rear of Beck's gunsmith shop, nearly opposite the office of H. P. Coburn, Esq."* That description would not answer for the present generation, but when I state that the double hewed-log cabin of General Carr stood on Delaware street nearly opposite the west end of the court-house, all can understand.

If whisky played its part at McGeorge's, down at the river, in 1821, it performed a greater part on the 1st of April, 1822, when, it is computed, the quantities drank must be reckoned in barrels. Kentucky was not to be outdone by Whitewater in the matter of political hospitality. The political issues were entirely geographical and liquid, and Whitewater and whisky carried the day against Kentucky and whisky. The successful candidates were overwhelmingly Whitewater. James McIlvain and Eliakim Harding were chosen associate judges; James M. Ray was elected clerk; Joseph C. Reed, recorder; Messrs. Osburn, McCormick and McCartney became the first commissioners. James M. Ray received the highest vote in the wide district, viz., 217 votes out of 336. In the Indianapolis district (an area as great as the present county) the number of votes was 224, which shows that the population of what we now understand as Marion county was but little more than 1000. The party lines of Kentucky and Whitewater were kept up about three years, but were then harmoniously fused.

Among the defeated candidates for recorder was Alexander

*This reveals the authorship of an anonymous series to be found in the *Journal* of the date mentioned. See note at end of this instalment.

Ralston, to whom, more than any other person, we owe the beautiful plan of Indianapolis. While there are many of our streets bearing the names of individuals, there is not even an alley named in memory of the man who planned the city.

NOTE.—The earliest historical account of Indianapolis known to us appears as a series of unsigned articles in the *Indianapolis Journal*. These contributions, under the heading of "Indianapolis a Quarter of a Century Ago," appeared irregularly in both the weekly and the tri-weekly editions from November 4, 1846, to March 23, 1847. Sundry correspondences between that series and the one here published identifies Mr. J. C. Fletcher as the author of the earlier one. Most that is in that series is comprehended in this, but in the former are at least two items that we regard as rather a "find." The first of these, taken from the *Indiana Gazette*, is of considerable interest in connection with the strenuous Kentucky and Whitewater campaign and the accompanying candidate nuisance. It is an account of "a meeting of the inhabitants of this county, over which Dr. S. G. Mitchell presided and Dr. Coe acted as secretary." At this meeting "sunday resolutions were passed condemning the soliciting of votes of elections by the candidates for public offices, either from favor, flattery, promises, entertainments, treats or rewards, as anti-republican in its principles, injurious to the public peace, interests and morals, troublesome, degrading and corrupting to the candidate. And," concludes this presumably disgusted conclave, "we do resolve that we will withhold our support from all who in the future resort to such practices." [See tri-weekly *Journal* of November 27, 1846.]

The other historical bit is of literary interest, as it is the first "poem" written, or at least published, in Indianapolis. It celebrated the Gates-Chinn wedding described by Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Nowland, and appeared in the first number of the *Gazette*. As a literary curiosity it speaks for itself:

"Come Hymen, now, and bear thy sway
In Indianapolis,
And hasten on the wished-for day
That crowns the nuptial bliss.

May conquering love lend his aid,
And lead direct to thy altar
The sacred virgin, the experienced maid,
The trembling youth and batchelor.

But all ye powers of mortal joy,
Come bless the wedded pair;
Give them bliss without alloy,
Peace and health and pleasing care."

It may be added that the second output of the muse was also inspired by Hymen, for some months later, in connection with the wedding announcement of William C. McDougal and Cynthitha Reagan, appeared the following:

"Hail, generous youth, and hail thou lovely fair,
Love, joy and peace be now your only care.
The wished-for day hath fixed the sacred tie,
And given you mutual, full felicity.

Long may Aurora shine amid the spheres,
And see your joys increase through length of years,
When sweet reflection views the day that's past,
Be each succeeding happier than the last."

There was no relation, seemingly, between the quality of the poetry and the after happiness invoked by the poets, for though this second effusion limped much less painfully over the metrical road, Cynthitha, in due course, left McDougal's bed and board, and he advertised her, warning the public not to trust her on his account. Mr. and Mrs. Gates, on the other hand, journeyed amicably together through their lives, leaving children and their children's children, who at the present day make part of our population.

Who these first versifiers were is forever lost to history.—*Editor.*