

RIVER NAVIGATION IN INDIANA.

THE story of transportation in Indiana properly begins with a consideration of the rivers, for though their uses in this connection was but a passing phase (barring the Ohio), and "navigation in Indiana" now sounds oddly to us, they were at one time of considerable importance in our export trade. They certainly occupied a large space in the hopes of the pioneer fathers. Prospectors who traversed and reported upon the country before the coming of the settler dwelt upon the question of the streams and their navigability as a very important factor in the coming occupancy; and for some years after the occupancy the strenuous insistence in considering "navigable" streams that would seem hopelessly useless for such purpose oftentimes approached the ludicrous. For example, Indianapolis for nearly two decades after its founding, would have White river a highway of commerce in spite of nature and the inability of craft to get over ripples, sandbars and drifts. As early as 1820 it was officially declared "navigable;" in 1825 Alexander Ralston, the surveyor, was appointed to make a thorough inspection of the river and to report in detail at the next session of the legislature. The sanguine hopes that were nourished at the young capital are evidenced by existing records. An editorial in the *Indiana Journal* of March 26, 1831, says:

"For three or four years past efforts have been made by Noah Noble to induce steamboats to ascend the river, and * * * very liberal offers have been made by that gentleman to the first steamboat captain who would ascend the river as far as this place. * * * As early as February, 1827, he offered the Kanawha Salt Company \$150 as an inducement to send a load of salt, agreeing to sell the salt without charge."

In 1830 Noble offered a Capt. Stephen Butler \$200 to come to Indianapolis, and \$100 in addition if Noblesville and Anderson were reached, though what efforts were made to earn these bonuses is not known. From time to time the newspapers made

mention of boats which, according to rumor, got "almost" to the capital, and eventually one made for itself a historic reputation by performing the much-desired feat. This one was the "General Hanna," a craft which Robert Hanna, a well-known character in early politics, had purchased for the purpose of bringing stones up the river for the old National road bridge. The Hanna, which in addition to its own loading, towed up a heavily-laden keel-boat, arrived April 11, 1831, and, according to a contemporary chronicle, "every man, woman and child who could possibly leave home availed themselves of this opportunity of gratifying a laudable curiosity to see a steamboat. * * * On Monday evening and during the most of the succeeding day the river bank was filled with delighted spectators." Captain Blythe and the artillery company marched down and fired salutes. The leading citizens and the boat's crew peppered each other with elegant, formal compliments, and the former, in approved parliamentary style, "Resolved, That the arrival at Indianapolis of the steamboat General Hanna, from Cincinnati, should be viewed by the citizens of the White river country and of our State at large, as a proud triumph, and as a fair and unanswerable demonstration of the fact that our beautiful river is susceptible of safe navigation."

A public banquet in honor of the occasion was arranged, and the visiting navigators invited to attend, but they were in haste to get out of the woods while the water might permit, and so declined with regrets. Legend has it that the boat ran aground on an island a short distance down river, and lay there ignominiously for six weeks, and that was the last of the "proud triumph" and White river "navigation."

Many are familiar, through Maurice Thompson's "Stories of Indiana," with the Wabash river craft that attempted to establish a "head of navigation" above Lafayette, and, after heroic strugglings, was finally hauled ingloriously up to Logansport by a hawser and a dozen yoke of oxen.* In a book descriptive of the West, written by Jacob Ferris, as late as 1856, is the following account: "The river navigation of Indiana is rendered difficult by frequent shallows. The boats are of light draft, flat-bottomed, with paddles placed across the

*For original account see Cox's "Recollections of the Wabash Valley."

stern. * * * It has been said of the Indiana boats that, in making headway down stream, they contrive to keep up with the current. They draw about as much water as a sap trough. When they get stuck in the sand all hands will jump out and push them off. It is related of an exasperated Hoosier, who had refused to pay his fare till there should be some prospect of getting somewhere or other, that, being ordered ashore from the middle of the river, he stepped into the water, seized the craft by the bows, and gave it a shove down stream, stern foremost. When it worked back to the point he held it there, puffing and fluttering, the captain 'cussing,' till a compromise was effected, and the Hoosier hired for the rest of the trip to help the engineer."

But despite these and many similar absurdities, the Indiana streams were a factor, and an important one, in our earlier commerce. The number of rivers and creeks that have been declared "public highways" by our legislators is a matter for surprise. An examination of the statutes through the twenties and thirties discloses from thirty to forty. According to Timothy Flint, who wrote in 1833, the navigable waters of the State had been rated at 2500 miles, and this estimate he thought moderate. These streams ranged in size from the Wabash to insignificant hill drains that run down the short water-shed into the Ohio, some of which, at the present day at least, would scarce float a plank. Such streams were, however, supposed to have sufficient volume during high water to float flatboats, and the purpose of the legislation was to interdict impeding of the waterway by dams or otherwise, and the clearing of the channel was under State law. To this end many of these streams were divided into districts, as were the roads, and "worked"—i. e., cleared of drifts and other obstructions by the male residents living adjacent to either shore. This service varied with various localities and ranged from one to three days' labor a year from citizens residing one, two and three miles back. These workmen were exempt from road duty. By an act of January 4, 1828, \$1,000 was appropriated for the improvement of the two forks of White river, and they were to be "worked" by the various counties through which they ran. Boards of justices were to appoint supervisors and establish districts, and citizens within two miles on either side were to work the rivers three days in each year.

It is probable that most of those declared navigable bore on their swollen tides at one time or another boats laden with the produce of the country, and an examination of the various histories reveals that very many of our counties thus found, though irregularly, an important outlet for their exports.

The "Emigrant's and Traveler's Guide" a book published in 1832, gives some information on this point. "Hundreds of flatboats," we are told, "annually descended the Wabash and White rivers. * * * The trade of this river (the Wabash) is becoming immense. In 1831, during the period which elapsed from the 5th of March to the 16th of April, fifty-four steamboats arrived and departed at and from Vincennes alone. It is also estimated that at least 1000 flatboats entered the Ohio from the Wabash in the same time. * * * In February, March and April of this year there were sixty arrivals of steamboats at Lafayette."

This showing of a thousand flatboats in less than a month and a half, is no mean one, and shows conclusively the value of the rivers in the early stages of our commerce. Not less interesting is the glimpse which this writer gives us of the character of the commerce. One-tenth of the flatboats, he tells us, was estimated to be "loaded with pork at the rate of 300 barrels to the boat." Another tenth is said to have been loaded with lard, cattle, horses, oats, cornmeal, etc., and the remainder, making by far the largest export, with corn in the ear. Sometimes we hear of more curious cargoes. The inhabitants of Posey county seem to have had a reputation among the facetious river men for "hoop-poles and punkins," and in the history of Jackson county we learn that the first flatboat cargo from Medora, in that county, was hickory-nuts, walnuts and venison hams. The value of produce and stock sent annually to market from the valley of the Wabash by flatboats was estimated by Ferris at nearly \$1,000,000.

While there were other kinds of boats, the flatboat was by far the best craft for the Indiana rivers, by reason of its light draft, its carrying capacity and its cheapness of construction. The huge tulip poplars that abounded in our forests, easily worked with the ax, afforded slabs long and broad enough for the sides, and the simple attaching of planks to these for the

bottom, ends and deck could be readily accomplished by the pioneer with such tools as were at his command. When finished, it was a mere float, or lighter, flat-bottomed and strong enough to stand any amount of ordinary thumping as it drifted down with the current.

An individual, or often several individuals, would knock together one of these, load it with the surplus produce of a neighborhood, and ride down with the freshets. The port was usually far-away New Orleans, from whence the boat was not supposed to return. After the disposal of its cargo it was sold for whatever it might bring, and the merchant returned by steamboat, usually to the Ohio river port nearest his home, thence across country. Sometimes, however, boats came up our rivers laden with imports. These seem mostly to have been keel-boats, a long, narrow craft with a keel, much lighter than the flatboat. The ascent, a most arduous and snail-like task, was effected by poling, where the current permitted, and by "cordelling" where it was swift, the latter process being a towing by hand, one end of the hawser being secured to a tree, to make sure of the distance gained. Two or three of these keel boats are recorded as finding their way to Indianapolis soon after its founding, the principal part of the cargoes being salt and whisky—two very precious articles.

The late Mr. Alexander Conduitt, of Indianapolis, who as a young man was a "sailor" on White river, has described to the writer the flatboats common on that stream. They were about fifteen feet wide; those built at and below Spencer were eighty feet long, and those for the river above Spencer were sixty feet long. A sixty-foot boat would carry 500 dressed hogs.

THE WABASH RIVER.

Such part as was played in Indiana's commercial development by the steamboat was confined virtually to the Wabash and Ohio rivers. This at one time was of considerable importance to the northern and western portions of the State. Lafayette was practically the head of navigation on the Wabash; and, prior to the construction to that point, in 1843, of the Wabash and Erie Canal, it depended much upon the river for an outlet. The "Traveler's Guide," quoted above, speaks of sixty arrivals of

steam craft there within three months in the year 1832, and one writer tells us of sixteen steamboats lying at the wharves there at one time.

With the opening of the Wabash Canal, however, the trade of the valley was diverted eastward and the importance of the river waned. Neither then nor thereafter, however, even to the present day, has the agitation for its improvement ceased. In a report on the subject in the *Documentary Journal* of 1837 mention is made of the loss annually suffered on the river. During the preceding season, it is stated that not less than fourteen flatboats with valuable cargoes had been wrecked by snags, and because of the damages the high rate of insurance and of pilotage was a heavy tax. The impediment known as the "Grand Rapids," above the mouth of White River was, in particular, a menace to navigation. For the improvement of these rapids Indiana and Illinois have legislated conjointly, and of appropriations, both State and Federal, many thousands of dollars have been expended upon the river. Since 1872 more than \$800,000 has been appropriated and more than \$200,000 expended upon the locks at Mt. Carmel. In 1890 an examination of the channel between Lafayette and Terre Haute, with a view to reestablishing navigation, was made under direction of the United States Engineer's office, but it was found that part of the stream was "not worthy of improvement, as at low water navigation was impracticable;" at high water the numerous low bridges were "complete obstructions to any navigation," and the probable benefits to commerce were "too slight to be worthy of consideration."

NOTE.—Appended is a list (probably only partial), compiled from our statutes, of streams that have, at one time or another, been declared navigable by the Indiana legislature:

White river from its mouth to the main forks; the west fork to the Delaware towns (Muncie); the east fork to the main fork above the mouth of Flatrock.

Muscatatuck, from the mouth to main forks; the north fork to Vernon, and the south fork to the mouth of Graham's fork.

Big Blue river from mouth to Fredericksburg.

Whitewater, from State line, and the west fork to northern boundary of Fayette county.

Loughery creek, from mouth to Hartford.

Anderson creek, from mouth to forks.
 Poison creek, from mouth to Cummin's mills.
 Oil creek, from mouth to Aaron Cunningham's mills.
 Raccoon creek, from the Wabash to the mills of Brooks, Robbins and Rose.
 Big creek, from mouth to Black's mill.
 Patoka river, from mouth to Moseley's mill.
 Indian creek, from mouth to Dickerson's mill.
 Indian Kentucky creek, from mouth to Brooks's mill.
 Little Pigeon creek to Barker's mill.
 Big Pigeon creek to Fairchild's mill.
 Big Sand Creek, from the Driftwood to forks.
 Sugar creek, from Blue river to Hough's mill.
 Busseron creek to Eaton's mills.
 Lick creek to Lost river, and Lost river to Sherley's mill.
 Mississinewa river to Lewallen's mill, in Randolph county.
 All of Blue river in Shelby county. Sugar Creek, in Shelby county. Brushy Fork, of the Muscatatuck. Eel river to Gray's mill in Putnam county. Fourteen Mile creek, Black, Beanblossom, Twin, Clifty, Salt, Log Lick, Plum and Big Indian creeks.
 Anyone erecting dams or otherwise impeding navigation on these streams was subject to a fine from \$10 to \$500.
 The locations of the mills named being in large part lost to memory, the actual mileage declared navigable is now past determining.
 G. S. C.

THE FIRST STEAMBOAT ON WHITE RIVER.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF AN OLD PILOT.

AN old pilot's journal written in the seventies by John Scott Elder, an Ohio river pilot who was born in Lexington, Ky., in 1802, gives the following interesting account of the first steamboat trip made on the waters of White river:

"In 1829, I continued on the steamboat 'Victory,' running up and down the Ohio river until near the last of August; then the 'Victory' laid up to repair. I then went aboard of the steamboat 'Traveler,' William Sanders, master, bound for New Orleans.