

EARLY INDIANAPOLIS.

THE FLETCHER PAPERS—THIRD INSTALMENT.

Character of the Early Settlers; High Standard of Intelligence—Mutual Helpfulness—Intellectual and Social Culture—Hunting Incident; George Smith's White Swan—Sugar-Making—Daniel Yandes's Big Log Contract.

From the Indianapolis News of June 2, 1879.

WHAT society was in Indianapolis in 1822-'23 I might illustrate very fully from the letters and journals of my parents. In a letter written to a lady in Virginia under date of January 17, 1822, my father defends Indianapolis from the exaggerated reports of a few disappointed ones—reports which for many a day gave a bad name to Indianapolis—and he afterwards speaks of the character of the early settlers. "You have been informed," he writes, "that we have a large swamp in the rear of our town. I am happy to inform you that this is not exact information. Our town, like all newly-settled places, requires seasoning before a person can be strictly healthy. I am much pleased with the inhabitants of this new purchase. As I told you in one of my letters, we have none here but independent free-holders, and a much more enlightened set of people than any other I have seen in the western country. We have all the emancipators from Kentucky, who are of the sober class. We have likewise the industry of the State, such as never owned slaves, either from poverty or conscientious scruples, and we have the thrift of Ohio. Our laws and constitution are truly Republican. Debts are easily collected; all fines on military delinquents and for misdemeanors are appropriated to the use of the county seminaries in this State."

My father's judgment of the class of people who first settled here was an intelligent one, for he was well acquainted with new towns in Virginia, some of the old towns in Pennsylvania, and with the people of Ohio in such places as Urbana, Columbus, Dayton and Bellefontaine. He therefore, when he wrote, had in mind a comparison between the inhabitants of the above-named towns in Ohio, and the early Indianapolitans when he

places the latter as "a much more enlightened set of people than any other I have seen in the west." There must have been a certain intellectual activity and a moral bent at the very outset which manifested itself not merely in political meetings but in town meetings for the promotion of civil affairs; in debating clubs for exercising, if I may so say, in mental gymnastics; in religious meetings, and in a class for the study of the Bible before a regular minister settled down to parish duties. These things make up the staple of my mother's journal. Already I have recorded the inauguration of the new year (1822) by the party at Wyant's. Now we are told how, on January 26, "Mrs. Henry Bradley came and staid with me until eleven o'clock, while Mr. Bradley and Mr. Fletcher went to the debating society." Again: "On Tuesday, the 29th of January, I attended a quilting party at Mr. Buckner's, and there met a number of ladies who were formerly from Kentucky." Individual neighborly help, as well as combined aid, was the order of the day, as we may see from the entry of January 20, viz: "Arranged some candle wick for Mrs. Foote," and, at a later date: "Had Mr. Blake get me some bean poles."

Not only were there practical mutual aid societies, but mutual improvement societies. February 18, 1822, my mother writes: "I went to Mrs. Buckner's and assisted her in finishing her quilt;" and, on Saturday, 9th of February, "Went to the singing school." The debating club is mentioned again. Then the social visits: "Monday, February 11. Took tea at Mr. Steven's, who will move to-morrow two miles into the country." "Tuesday, 12. I have had a very pressing invitation to-day to go a-visiting with Mrs. Nowland and Mrs. Bradley to Mrs. Yandes's; but I do not feel well enough to go." "Wednesday, the 13th of February. Mr. and Mrs. Paxton came and took tea with us, and then Mr. P. and Mr. F. went out hunting, returning at ten o'clock."

I suppose from the hour these pioneers went out hunting and from the shortness of their stay that they must have gone coon hunting. Coons could then be "treed" at a good many places within the limits of our solid blocks on Washington, Market, Maryland, Missouri and Meridian streets.

Among the curious hunting incidents of those days was the shooting of a swan by George Smith (our first printer). One

morning in the spring of 1822 he started for the wild woods in the vicinity of the present Kingan's pork-house, and following down the left bank of the river he saw in the water a flock of white swans. Mr. Smith succeeded in bagging the largest of the flock. My father informed me that this magnificent bird was of the most beautiful plumage and of wonderful size. This is the only visit of swans to Indianapolis that I ever heard of.

Among other of the earlier recreations must be counted the fishing excursions in the springtime, rambles after raspberries in the summer, and gathering of wild grapes in autumn. More like work were sugar-making, gardening, and the drying of pumpkins. My mother writes:

"Monday, March 10, 1822. I began sugar-making."

This was in the vicinity of Missouri street and south of Washington. Some at that time tapped the maple trees in the very heart of our present city, and others went into the dense woods north, east and south. "March 24, 1822," is the date recorded by my mother when she "walked more than a mile to a sugar-camp." This probably refers to a sugar-camp in the vicinity of Fletcher Place Church, on Virginia avenue. Here it was, according to Mr. John H. B. Nowland, that his father first "made sugar at an old Indian sugar-camp," in the spring of the previous year. In 1846 I took notes of my father in regard to the spring of 1822, and he informed me that the fine sugar grove that occupied in and around what is now known as the Governor's Circle was, in 1822, used as a sugar camp, and that the trees were tapped some five or six feet from the ground, and the troughs for catching the sugar water were scaffolded up by poles to keep the hogs from drinking nature's nectar. Mrs. Paxton, he said, made sugar from the primeval forest trees that occupied the site of our State House and contiguous portions of Washington street, while Mr. Nowland's camp was further out in the country, and they were busily engaged in boiling the water down to syrup in a grove not far from where Judge Stevens at present resides.*

Sugar-making and gardening did not prevent social visiting, which seemed to be going on every day, in the forenoon as well as the afternoon and evening. Everybody at that time called the whole of the afternoon evening.

*This probably means the old Stevens residence on New Jersey street below South.—*Editor.*

On the 13th of April my mother writes: "The waters are very high at this time, and have been for a week back. Mr. Levington and many other men have been ten miles up the river, on the public lands, cutting saw-logs for several weeks. They made a contract with Daniel Yandes to deliver him 2,000 logs at one dollar per piece, and since the rain the saw-logs are coming down the river." This, I presume, was the biggest contract up to that time made in Indianapolis. The logs were doubtless for the most part poplar and walnut.

The waters continued high for a week or more, for on the first of April it is written that "Mrs. Wick and Miss Carter went with me to the river. We had the pleasure of riding up to the mouth of Fall creek and back again to the ford on a flatboat." The "ford" was not far from the Vincennes railroad bridge.* The flatboat was the largest vessel seen on our river at this point. I can remember the flatboats that went from here with produce to "Orleans." The last that I can recall was navigated to the mouth of the Mississippi by "old Van Blaricum," the father of "Mike" and "Bill." When he returned he brought with him the first oranges and cocoanuts that ever came to Indianapolis. Old V. B. was a kind man to little children, and on his return from "Orleans" he took delight in inviting them to his house to show them his stock of tropical fruits and to gladden their child-hearts with presents.

*Berry Sulgrove speaks of this ford and also of one where the Lafayette road crosses the river (see *History of Marion County*, p. 13). J. H. B. Nowland (see "Prominent Citizens," p. 10) says that the mouth of Fall creek was the crossing-place of White river, long used by the Indians, and he has described to me personally a bar at the mouth of the creek at which various Indian trails converged. From this convergence one might reasonably infer that the Fall creek bar was the only fordable spot in this locality, at a day when the river flowed much more water than at present, but the using of others by our first-comers somewhat negatives this theory. Which illustrates the difficulty of getting at historical "facts."—*Editor*.

[*To be continued.*]