

## THE RESERVOIR WAR IN CLAY COUNTY.

[The following chapter in our canal history is taken from the *Brazil Daily Times*, of June 21, 1907.

**B**IRCH Creek reservoir, which covered an area of a section and a half, practically a thousand acres, lying immediately west of the present town of Saline, was constructed in the year 1853, and filled in the early part of the following year, at a cost of \$30,000 to the canal company. The embankment which confined this body of water is now the graded wagon road leading westward across the creek bottom from the C. & E. I. railroad station.

Citizens objected to the maintenance of this body of water without first removing the timber on the ground, for the reason that it would prove deleterious and threatening to the public health.

On the 22d of February, 1854, a public meeting was held at the residence of George Moss, Sr., the two-story, hewn-log house then standing on the bluff half-way between the site now occupied by the town of Ashboro and Birch Creek, Sugar Ridge (then Washington) township, to take counsel on the public interests involved. This meeting was addressed by Daniel Dunlavy, of Dick Johnson township, who was then the county's representative in the State Legislature, when it was declared by resolution that there should be no let up in hostilities against the company until the demand of the public for the removal of the timber should be conceded and carried out. Notwithstanding this decisive action of the meeting, the company ignored the public grievance and proceeded to fill up the feeder.

The first overt act on the part of the people expressive of their disapproval and resentment of the course pursued by the company was a slight cut in the embankment at some time in the month of May, inflicting but little damage, which was soon repaired. But on the night of the 22d day of June following a gap of a hundred feet was cut, through which flowed out practically

the whole basin of water, in effect suspending navigation on the Crosscut (that section of the canal between the Wabash, at Terre Haute, and Newberry, on White river) for the period of three months.

James M. Hanna, of Bowling Green, State's attorney for Clay county, then issued a call for a meeting to be held at the feeder dam, July 28th, to consider means of pacification, which was largely attended, there being representatives of the canal company present, when it was agreed that the timber should be cut and removed. To carry out this agreement a contract was at once let to William K. Houston, of Bowling Green, and the work completed before the close of the year, costing about \$10,000.

While this work was in progress, on the 9th day of September, the breastwork of the feeder dam was fired and burned to the water's edge.

Succeeding this, on the 19th day of October, Governor Wright issued his proclamation offering a reward of \$500 for the "apprehension, arrest and lodgment in custody of the offenders or any of them," announcement of which was made by posters in bold type, prominently displayed about the reservoir.

As the darkest cloud is said to have its silver lining, even so are the most pathetic aspects of life and affairs mellowed by the tinge of humor. These posters, it is said, were taken down by night and written ones substituted offering a reward of the same amount for the "apprehension and delivery in good condition of 'Old Joe Wright' on the banks of Birch Creek reservoir."

Though succeeded by a temporary lull, this procedure on the part of the Governor, coupled with the company's acceding to the terms of pacification demanded, did not fully assuage the grievances of the public. The "nuisance," as the reservoir had been pronounced, was still there, and the fires of animosity engendered still smoldering. Several months later, navigation and traffic having resumed their usual sway, on the 10th day of May, 1855, at the hour of noon, there marched upon the embankment of the feeder, in regular file, a body of one hundred men, who drove away the guard, then proceeded summarily to discharge all the accumulated water. One account of this assault made

upon the company's works says that there were in the party one hundred and fifty-four men, half of whom were armed with rifles and most of the others with spades and shovels, all having blacked faces. Then it was, on the urgent solicitation of the trustees of the canal company, that the Governor called out the militia to suppress the violence being done to the company's property, which gave rise to the so-called "Reservoir War" in our local history.

The proclamation of the Governor calling out the military brought Clay county to the notice of the outside world. In the *Cincinnati Commercial* of corresponding date appeared the following exhaustive paragraph from the vocabulary of causticity in the characterization of Clay county and its people:

"We were yesterday surprised to receive a paper from Clay county, Indiana. We did not suppose that the people read the papers in that swampy, sloppy, soggy, sticky, stinking, stifling, stubborn, starving, subsidiary, slaving, slavish, swinish, sheepish, sorrowfully dark, desolate, direful, devilish, dim, doleful, downcast, dirty, despairing, deluded, degenerate, dismal, dreary, driveling, demoniac, dilapidated locality, where public works are destroyed, and the officers whose duty it is to defend the laws, with blacked faces trample them under foot. On first opening this paper we felt hopeful, thinking there would be light shining in the midst of darkness, but instead we found that the *Clay County Citizen* only makes darkness visible, as it is the organ of the canal cutters."

To ask who cut the reservoir embankment is but to paraphrase "Who struck Billy Patterson?" If any of them be yet living they are known only to themselves. The writer never learned to know but three of the whole number, and they passed away some years ago.

M. ARTZ.