

SETTLEMENT OF NOBLESVILLE, HAMILTON COUNTY.

BY J. G. FINCH.

[The following narrative in typewritten form was given to the State Library of Indiana by W. W. Woollen, of Indianapolis. It is the recollection by J. G. Finch in 1893 of the settlement in which he took part as a boy of nine or ten years. Parts of the manuscript are omitted below. The narrative is interesting not only as describing the settlement of an important part of the State, but as showing conditions of travel and settlement everywhere.—EDITOR.]

IN THE spring of 1819 a company was formed in Connersville, Fayette county, for the purpose of making a settlement on the horseshoe prairie, which lies just below Noblesville; a large scope of territory had been purchased of the Indians the winter before and they were anxious to have the first choice of land. That company was composed of the following persons: Solomon Finch and family, Israel Finch, William Bush and two sons, and James Willison. Israel Finch, Bush and Willison were going to put in a crop and return for their families some time during the summer. Besides these there were Aaron Finch and Amasa Chapman, son and stepson of John Finch, who, himself, expected to follow towards fall. There were three wagons in the company, Solomon Finch's family in one, Bush in another, and Willison in another. They left Connersville on the first day of April, as near as I can recollect. I was between nine and ten years old at the time and can only recollect such things as would come under the notice of a child of that age.

The first incident of the journey I recollect was that they had me on an old gray horse they had with them. It was snowing hard and they making their way along very slowly with their ox-team, driving some stock and cutting the road as they went. I got to crying and they came to see what was the matter. I told them I was so cold that my back was cracked. They found I was in pretty bad condition, so chilled that I could hardly sit on the horse. Israel Finch carried a kettle of coals so that they would not be detained so long by having to make a fire by the slow process of flint and steel. They took me and the fire and

went on ahead to where was an old Indian camp called Sage Green's camp, where they expected to stay all night, and by the time the team came up he had me pretty well warmed up.

The next event of any note was when we reached Blue river, where Newcastle now is. That stream was very high and no chance to cross it except by bridging it, so they pitched their tents and prepared for the work. That night it rained so hard that everything in the wagons and tents were thoroughly wet through and through. As soon as they could they went to work at the bridge. The river there seemed to be a mere ditch, winding along between the tall trees in the bottom, and it was but little trouble for them to find trees long enough to reach across the stream, so they felled two of them and got the trunks together, cut other trees and made puncheons of them by splitting them as thin as they could and covered the logs already prepared for them so that the wagons passed over them in safety. George Shirts and Charles Lacey had preceded this company a few days on pack horses, following the same Indian trail we were on. Lacey was going on to put in a crop and return for his family. Shirts had his family and was going to work for Bill Conner, who was then an Indian trader and living with an Indian wife about two miles below where we were going to settle. We would frequently see where they had camped for the night.*

Our trail led us past Andersontown, now Anderson, which was then nothing but an Indian town. We reached the river [White river] just at the mouth of Stony creek. The river was very high and locked [backed] Stony creek up so that it looked more like a lake than a creek. Whilst we were waiting for the men to get a canoe four or five little Indians came to us with bows and arrows. They stood around for some time looking at us in perfect silence; then each one shot an arrow at a beech tree some distance off and they disappeared in the forest.

As soon as they got everything across the river they started up where the dam used to be and then crossed the prairie to the ridge where the old mill-race turns south. There they unloaded and pitched their tents and went to work with a will. Bush lo-

*The trail this party followed from Connersville via Newcastle and Anderson was practically the railroad route of to-day.—*Editor*.

cated a little south of the Finches and Willison was to have settled still south of him along the ridge, but he changed his mind before his family came and built on the bluff at the mouth of Stony creek. Some went to cutting logs for the cabin, some to hauling and others to making clapboards to cover the house with. They had all their effects in the tent, dishes piled on the table, and one day the wind was blowing, a limb fell from a tree on the dishes and broke nearly all they had. Lacey one day shot a fine deer, of which they all got a part. As soon as the cabin was fit to shelter them they all went to work to put in a crop of corn. Indians visited us almost daily, and with one of the parties that called on us was a fine young darkey, always with the same family. In the spring of 1820 this darkey went to work for Conner and that fall a Kentuckian was through looking at the country, saw the darkey, went home, got a posse of men and came and took him, claiming he was his slave, but the negro went off declaring he had never been a slave.

All the playmates I had from April until July were little Indians. My favorite was one with a red head. I used to go with him hunting with bow and arrows for ground squirrels and birds or to the river for fish. One day he commenced singing some Indian song which scared me, so I started for home. That still sounds in my ears; it was, "Yoh an awa gow haw." That was just repeated over and over. I was so scared that I struck across the prairie for home, though he begged me to go on. I thought my time had come and that was my scalp song.

About the first of July Israel Finch, Bush and Willison went back for their families and soon after they got there we began to get sick. Uncle John came in some time in August and we had to give up that cabin to him, as he had furnished most of the labor, and my father built a little cabin about 100 or 150 yards southwest. In September sickness set in in earnest; nearly every one would be down at the same time, not one to help another when the ague was on. Our provisions gave out and sixty or seventy miles to the settlement. Conner had a little corn, which he sold them at a dollar a bushel. This they had to pound in a mortar, sift out the finest of it for bread and boil the coarser of it and eat it with milk. They called it samp. O, how tired I

got of such fare! but no help for it. They would pound the corn after the ague went off and the fever subsided a little.

In the fore part of October Amasa Chapman died and also George Finch. Some time during the summer George Shirts' wife died. She was buried down on the Conner farm.

As soon as the corn was hard enough to grate they made a grater of tin, something after the fashion of a nutmeg grater. It made much better meal than when pounded. Some time during the fall or winter Bush made a little hand mill, the burrs as large as a good-sized grindstone. He drilled a hole near the edge of the top burr, drove a peg in it by which it could be turned after the fashion of a millstone. During the winter they built a horse mill. People began to settle in the spring of 1820 where Indianapolis now is, and they came up there to do their grinding on the horse mill. A part of the Indians came and camped on Cicero creek about two hundred yards from the mouth. They had some whisky, got drunk, used their knives freely on each other. I don't recollect the number of deaths, but one of them lay all winter so bad they were expecting him to die.

The nettles grew very plentiful in Cicero bottoms, and during the winter it was found they had as good a lint as flax or hemp, and in the spring they were in good condition for working up. We all had shirts, pants, towels, sheets and under bed ticks made of these nettles. They seemed to be something to us about like the manna was to the children of Israel. One little fellow was going to gather nettles enough to make him a pair of leather pants.

Baxter came in the spring of 1820 or the fall of 1819. In the spring of 1820 the settlers thought the bald eagles, of which there were a great many along the river, were catching their lambs. They shot some of the eagles, but I have always thought the lambs were caught by wildcats. This spring [1820] a man named Jacob Andrick came to the prairie and bought Bush's improvements and Bush moved down by Conner's. Andrick had no family [children], but his brother-in-law, Judah, was with him. Andrick built a new and much better house than Bush had; the logs were hewn and two rooms to it, with a porch between. Some time during the summer Mrs. Andrick died and later on her

brother Judah died. Then we moved into the Andrick house. Andrick had expected to buy the prairie land and had agreed to pay the settlers for their improvements, but Conner outbid him at the sales and never paid them a cent for their improvements, claiming that the improvements he was going to make in the country would more than pay them. He was going to put up a saw mill, a grist mill, a carding machine and a distillery, which he did in the summer of 1823.

In the summer of 1820 Sarah Finch taught a school there in the little cabin where Israel Finch had lived. I think there were but seven scholars—Rebecca Finch, F. M. Finch, Angeline Finch, Marcella Finch, William Finch, Almine Finch and J. G. Finch. A few days before the Fourth of July Curtis Mallery came to the prairie. I think he came from Massachusetts or Vermont. The settlers thought they must have a Fourth of July celebration this year, and about the time Mallery came they were making preparations. They drove forks in the ground, laid poles on them and then covered it with brush with the leaves on. Under this shade they ate their dinners and drank their toasts with great glee and hilarity. At night they had a dance. There was no such thing as a fiddle in fifty miles of them, so they had to depend entirely on vocal music.

About the first of September sickness set in again, but it was not so bad on those that were there the year before. Mallery's family were all down and two of them died. In November my little brother Augustus got so badly scalded by upsetting a kettle of boiling water on himself that he died in about twelve hours. Thaddeus Owens died this fall, I think.

In the spring of 1821 my father moved down to Conner's to help Shirts raise a crop of corn for him. That spring a keel-boat came up from Indianapolis and took off the corn the darkey had raised for Conner the year before. A great many Indians left that year and went down the river in canoes. Amongst the number was one of John Conner's children. John had also been a trader and had a squaw for a wife, but had kept the lad with him when he settled at Connersville. But when the Indians were

leaving he sent him, now a young man, to his brother's to be ready to leave with the other Indians.*

The land came into market and Conner, having bought the settlers' improvements, came on to carry out his plans for his improvements. [It was quite a common thing for settlers to locate before land was officially surveyed and thrown open to entry and purchase by settlers. The universal custom prevailed that the "squatters" should either be allowed to enter their land themselves or be paid for their improvements by those who did enter it.—Editor.] My father and George Shirts took the contract for digging the mill-race, broke up and got nothing for their work except what they took up for hired help and other expenses. Conner finished it himself. Between the river and the ridge where the race turns south they found a bed of broken crockery ware. It had apparently been dried in the sun as the Mexicans dry their idols.

After the sale of the lands Uncle John settled upon Little Stony creek. Bush bought the land where the carbon works now [1893] are and sold it to Ridgeway. Willison bought all the land south of Bush to the mouth of Stony creek, sold it to Potter, and Potter to Frybarger. Mr. Baxter bought up joining Conner's land, including a small piece of the prairie, and built another cabin on the ridge northwest of where the first cabin was built. Lacy bought up the land on the west side of the river down by Conner's. Solomon Finch settled about a mile southeast of the Sohl farm, which Judge John Finch bought of Congress. He gave Israel Finch some land adjoining his. Aaron settled on Stony creek down toward Hall's mill. There was a school taught in 1823 just across that little branch north of the Indian graveyard.

I believe this ends the story of the settlement. I am sorry I could not put it in better shape, but I am no writer.

*The Indians left the various tracts of land purchased from them by the United States government, moving to tracts not yet sold.—*Editor*.