

THE INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF LAKE COUNTY IN THE LAST CENTURY.

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THE most interesting natural feature of Lake county is the Calumet river, which enters the county from Porter, two miles south of Lake Michigan, and flows westward, bearing a little south, along a marshy valley across the county. It continues on in the State of Illinois, running northeasterly until it reaches Blue Island Bluff, then turns back and flows but little south of east in a line parallel with its western flow, until it has again almost crossed the county of Lake, and enters Lake Michigan two miles west and two north of its entrance from Porter into Lake. It is said that the Indians, some ninety years ago, opened with the paddles of their canoes a new channel for this river in the marshy ground between Calumet lake, in Illinois, and Wolf lake, in Indiana and Illinois, both near Lake Michigan, and thus turned a portion of its waters into this lake by a northern course of a few miles, beginning two miles west of the State line. The Calumet has, therefore, now two mouths, some twenty miles apart. The eastward and westward flow of these northern streams is produced by the peculiar ridges of sand crossing the northern portion of the county. South of the watershed, the ridges and woodland and the prairies cause the streams to flow northward and southward.

The surface and soil of this county are quite varied. There is some low, level, marshy land, as well as low and marshy prairie, and rolling prairie with long ridges of woodland. There is rich, black soil of the prairie, and the still deeper rich soil of the high and dry marsh. Two notable ditches have been made in the southern part of the county for draining these marshes. The first one is the Singleton ditch, which begins in Eagle Creek township, flows north of Lineville, and then directly west, emptying into West creek, which flows into the Kankakee. Finding this ditch not sufficiently large to carry off the water, another—the Brown ditch—was made, starting somewhat south of the point of the beginning of the Singleton

ditch, and running along almost parallel with it, and joining it as it flows into West creek. These ditches are still found to be insufficient for the required drainage, and now there is talk of widening the Singleton ditch to one hundred feet. Over the county and above the line of the watershed, the warm vapor from the southern valleys and the slopes meets with the cooler vapor of Lake Michigan, giving to the county in ordinary seasons an abundance of moisture and causing the atmosphere to be very seldom perfectly cloudless. Since the waters of Lake Michigan become quite warm and continue so during October, and sometimes through November, the north wind, bringing that vapor and warm air over the ridges and down the southern slopes of the Kankakee, keeps off the early autumn frost, and this county is sometimes protected for weeks after the first frost appears farther west and south. Although the springs are wet and backward occasionally, the autumns are quite warm very late, and are, therefore, delightful.

The earliest knowledge concerning the Indian tribes of all this region comes from the French explorers of two hundred years ago and more, who, as early as 1679, passed in canoes down the Kankakee river, and some of whom—La Salle, with three other Frenchmen and an Indian hunter—passed on foot across our borders in the spring of 1680. After the War of the Revolution, only Indians, trappers and fur-traders were here until after the purchase of the land by the government from the Pottowatomies in 1832, when they turned it over to the whites, but the Indians were still on their hunting and trapping grounds in considerable numbers when the first settlers came in. Their favorite resorts were along the streams, around Cedar lake and at Wiggins Point. The Calumet river was especially attractive to them, since it furnished so many muskrats and mink for fur, and so many fish and water fowl for food. In this section of the country were a number of Indians' floats, which were something like a soldier's land warrant. The Indians about here lived in lodges or wigwams. The men wore a calico shirt, leggings, moccasins and a blanket. The squaws wore a broad cloth skirt and a blanket. In 1836 a large part of this tribe, numbering about five hundred, met in Chicago, and, led by their chief, "Chee-chee-bing-way," left this region for their Western reservation.

In 1833 the first cabin was built in Lake county by a white man, named Bennett, at the mouth of the Calumet river, for the entertainment of travelers going along the beach, on their way to the West. During the summer of 1834 the United States surveyors surveyed the land and settlers began to make claims. Richard Fancher selected a part of section 17 and Charles Wilson selected land near Cedar lake. In 1834 Solon Robinson, with his family, came and settled on the land now forming part of Crown Point. In October of the same year Thomas Childers and family, with a number of others, came from the Wabash, Mr. Childers settling in the southeast quarter of section 17, on the edge of School Grove, they being the first known settlers in the central part of the county. From this time settlements were continually being made. According to the claim register, six were made in 1834 and twenty-nine in 1835. The years 1836-'37 were marked by increased numbers, and in 1840 there was a population of 1,468.

With the pioneers, civilized life had begun. Logs for their cabins were hauled by oxen. There were no rafters nor shingles, but instead of shingles, shakes (clapboards) two feet long, rived out of a white oak log. Poles were put on these shakes to keep them in place; no nails were necessary. The door was hung with wooden hinges. The chimney was of sticks, laid up square and split out as nearly like laths as possible. Clay mortar was laid on with each lath, the whole was carried up above the roof, and the inside and the hearth were all clay, kept in place by logs outside. All was plastered inside and out with clay mortar. Furniture was scarce. There were no fastenings of any kind to the door except a wooden latch, with a string attached, by which the door was fastened, and in speaking of the hospitality of the pioneers, it is said that "the latchstring was always out." The man was rich who owned a breaking team. Tools were very primitive. Harrows were home-made, with wooden teeth. The only tool that has held its own is the American ax.

Pioneers came into the country from the southward—descendants of those who settled in Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. Families also came from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and the New England States, bringing their intelligence, their enterprise and their untiring energy. Settlers also came from the banks of the Rhine and from many of the kingdoms of Germany, with their in-

dustiness and sturdiness; from Scotland and Sweden, from Denmark and the villages and fields of Holland.

The Squatters' Union, which was organized in 1836 for the better security of the pioneers upon the public lands, ceased after the land sale of 1839, and improvements were continually being made, societies formed and clubs organized.

Among the social orders was one known as the "Patrons of Husbandry." The individual organizations were called Granges. This was organized in Washington City, August, 1867, and now comprises a National Grange, State Grange and subordinate granges. It was designed for the pecuniary, social, intellectual and moral improvement of the agricultural community. A number of these granges are in the county at present.

At the first Masonic lodge of the county there were but six members; now there are numerous, prosperous and influential lodges in the county.

One of the most prosperous and interesting social organizations is that of the Old Settlers' Meeting, which was organized July 24, 1875. Their first meeting was September 25, 1875, since which time they have held one meeting a year.

The Tolleston Club, in the northern part of the county, is of great interest. During the spring of 1871 some of the sportsmen of Chicago formed an association, which they designated "Tolleston Club of Chicago." In 1881 they purchased and fenced in two thousand acres of marsh, which they held exclusively for their own shooting purposes, by stationing guards about the boundaries. There is a natural dam in the river near there, which causes the water to flow over the land, keeping it wet and damp at all times, to which the wild game naturally flocks. The club still exists and protects its game and property with great success.

Another institution, well known outside the county, was "The Roby Race Track," which first originated about 1892-'93, with the Columbian Athletic Association, Dominic O'Malley being president. A large arena was built, which held about ten thousand people, just within the county limits. During the World's Fair a number of prize-fighting contests were held. This was during Governor Matthews's administration. The promoters defied all local authority;

the sheriff was unable to control them, and they even defied the Governor, but were finally controlled by the militia, which he sent, and at last the Columbian Athletic Association was broken up. Then John Condon, one of the most noted gamblers in Chicago, secured the tract of ground near the arena, and started the Roby track, in company with others of his class. At first there was only one track there—the Roby track—but owing to the State law which was passed permitting only fifteen days' continuous racing on one track at a time, and requiring thirty days to intervene between the meetings on the same track, the company built two other tracks, called the "Lakeside" and "Sheffield." By holding their meeting of fifteen days first at Roby, then at Lakeside, and next at Sheffield, they were enabled lawfully to have racing the year round.

There is a lodge in the southern part of the county called the Cumberland Lodge, which was organized about 1873 by two English gentlemen, who were interested in hunting, and invested quite a sum of money in lands on School Grove Islands and adjoining the marshes. The improvements which the Englishmen made bear the name of "Cumberland Lodge," and at the time its formation was one of the most important events of the county, although at present little is heard of it.

In the care of the poor an important change has taken place. Until 1854 the poor were taken care of in the townships in which they reside, but in March of that year the necessity of an almshouse was plainly seen. Accordingly, land was procured and a house erected, which was used for this purpose until December 11, 1869, when it was declared that a tract of land containing in all 280 acres should be the poor farm. This was increased, and now consists of four hundred acres owned by the county.

In the early days there were no churches, but there were always some whose love for men and reverence for religious teachings prompted them to keep open house for every preacher who came that way. In 1836 a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church was sent in by the presiding elder, and preached in a cabin of Thomas Reed and at other places every six weeks. After six months' labor the first Methodist class was organized at Pleasant Grove, at the residence of E. W. Bryant. In 1838 the first quarterly

meeting in the county was held at the home of William Payne. Bishop Roberts conducted the meeting. In 1845 a great revival commenced, and this class was divided under two leaders, and the work prospered in different parts of the county. Church buildings were erected and successful work was carried on. In 1853 the county was divided into two circuits—the Crown Point circuit and the Lowell circuit. There are four German Methodist churches in the county, the oldest and largest one being the Cedar Lake Church, organized in 1853.

The Evangelical Association commenced missionary work at Cedar Lake in 1855, and a church was organized and a building erected. One was also erected at Crown Point in 1867.

Rev. R. C. Brown, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Valparaiso, visited Crown Point in 1840, and conducted union services in the log court-house. Early in 1844 Lake Presbytery authorized him to organize a church. A building was completed in 1847. Numerous other churches were organized throughout the county, which maintained Sunday-schools, and a few have Christian Endeavor societies.

Three families from Massachusetts and two from New York, on June 17, 1838, formed themselves into a Baptist organization, and on May 19, 1838, fifteen in number, they were publicly recognized as a Baptist Church of Christ by a council of six brethren. On that same Sunday the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was for the first time observed by the Baptists of Lake county.

In the summer of 1876 a number of evangelists began to hold religious meetings at different places in the central part of the county. After these meetings closed, the leaders were obliged to change their plans, so they formed local bands into church organizations, called the "Union Mission Church." As the result of this band movement there is left in the county the church at Ross, with a good brick building, some few members at Hobart, with a wooden building, and the Free Methodist Church, at Crown Point, with a small brick building, keeping up regular services each week.

The first Catholic settler in the county was John Hack, who settled near St. Johns in 1837. Soon other families came and each large settlement required a church building and resident pastor or priest. The first chapel was built at St. Johns in 1843.

There are at least two varieties of Lutherans. The Evangelical Lutherans first established a church in 1857.

The Hollanders have one church in the county, which was commenced about 1855 by Dingeman Jabaay.

The exact date of the organization of the first Sunday-school is not known. Mrs. Russell Eddy, having come from Michigan City as a member of the Baptist Church, about 1837, gathered at her home a few children on Sunday afternoon and instructed them in the Scriptures. On account of the prejudices or indisposition to religion of her neighbors, this gathering was not called a Sunday-school.

The Baptists who settled at Cedar Lake and formed themselves into a church, commenced a Sunday-school in 1839. Rev. Mr. Brown, from Valparaiso, in connection with the Baptist pastor from Cedar Lake, held regular meetings at Crown Point about 1839, and organized a union Sunday-school, which was carried on by the Baptists, Presbyterians and Methodists after 1843. This school was removed to the Presbyterian Church and dropped the name of Union, and, about 1856, it became the Presbyterian school.

A few superintendents, teachers and friends of Sunday-schools in Lake county, met at Crown Point, September 6, 1865, for the purpose of forming a convention, which meets once a year in August, generally at the county fair grounds.

Lake county began its political existence in March, 1835, when the commissioners of Laporte county, to which both Lake and Porter were attached, ordered that all the territory of Lake, and as far east in Porter as the center of range six west, should constitute a township, to be known as Ross. On the 28th of January, 1836, the Governor approved the special enactment creating the counties of Lake and Porter, and by an act of the Legislature, approved January 18, 1837, it was declared that Lake should be an independent county after February 15, 1837. In the spring of 1836 the commissioners divided the territory of Lake into three townships—North, Center and South—and ordered an election for a justice of the peace in each township, which was the first election held in Lake county, the date being March 28, 1837. At that time there were

only three voting precincts, and the total number of votes cast was seventy-eight.

In response to an entreaty from Lake county, the State Legislature in February, 1839, appointed five locating commissioners to proceed to Lake county and locate a county seat; whereupon, an action was taken locating it at Liverpool, which was very unsatisfactory to all the citizens in the central and southern portions of the county. Consequently, the county officers were publicly urged not to go to that town until the State Legislature had been petitioned for a re-location. At the session of 1839-'40, the Legislature received information of this dissatisfaction existing in the county, and a re-location was ordered, and it was unanimously decided to fix the seat of justice on Section 8, near where the present court-house is situated. Mr. Robinson furnished a court-house for the county which was constructed of logs, and which was used until 1850. A frame court-house was then erected at the cost of \$10,000. In 1879 a brick building was completed, the corner-stone being laid in September, 1878. There has been some trouble between Hammond and Crown Point over the county-seat, beginning about twenty years ago, when an attempt was made to pass a bill giving permission to move the county-seat. An amendment was added to the bill by Senator Youche, that the said county-seat must not be within four miles of the county line, which was a blow to Hammond, as it is almost on the State line. Nevertheless, the superior court was finally located at Hammond early in the nineties, at which time the jurisdiction was limited, but since then its power has increased until now it has concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit court. This is said to be one of a few counties where the seat of justice is divided between two places.

The first county jail building was erected in 1851, just north of the old frame court-house building, and was used for this purpose until 1880, when it was decided that a more secure confinement for criminals was necessary; accordingly, a large two-story brick building was constructed at the total cost of \$23,367, being completed in 1882. It stands on Main street, directly north of the Methodist Episcopal church.

The first circuit court of the county was held in October, 1837,

which session was quiet and peaceful, there being at that time no drinking places.

The mail service in the early days was very limited. In 1837, Congress established some mail routes through the county, which had before only been crossed by the Detroit and Fort Dearborn mail, carried in coaches along the Michigan beach. The first route was from Laporte to Joliet. This was the principal mail line of the county until the railroad era commenced. The second was from Michigan City to Peoria. Later, other routes were established; and as the railroads came in, the mail service increased.

In the early days, until 1850, agriculture was the main dependence of the county, but after the railroads came a new element of growth and progress was formed in Lake county. The first railroad was the Michigan Central, making its way from Detroit; it was completed in 1850. A station was located at Deep River, named Lake. This was the beginning of a new era, for up to this time every bushel of grain, and pound of cheese, butter and pork, as well as all the produce of every kind, must reach the Chicago market by the slow transportation of ox and horse teams. By this means also, all the lumber, nails and every article of merchandise purchased was imported. At this time there was very little profit in farming. The second railroad was the Michigan Southern. The Joliet cut-off was built in 1854, when the stations of Dyer and Ross were started, Dyer becoming immediately the most important shipping point in the county. The Ft. Wayne road was completed in 1858, and as time went on, other railroads were extended across the county.

Farming, stock-raising and dairy products now began to be profitable; hay became a very valuable article of export. Although this is largely an agricultural and stock-raising community, still other interests sprang up in this railroad period.

Two brothers, Thomas and William Fisher, in 1850, started at South East Grove a broom factory, where work was carried on until 1859, when they removed the factory to a farm south of Crown Point, where Thomas Fisher still continues the business, which has proved very profitable.

The year 1832 marked the beginning of bridge building in the

county. Two northeast of town were built at an expense of \$500. The bridge across West creek cost \$400. Other valuable bridges were built. Were it not for these, we would not have our long highways—three of which are worthy of mention. The north and south road from near Hickory Top through Winfield, on a section line one mile west of Porter county, is straight for about eight miles. The north and south road east from Crown Point is straight for more than ten miles. The east and west road in this county is straight for eight miles. During the winter and damp seasons, the roads were almost impassable, especially with heavy loads, but the county has made great improvements in that line by building miles of macadamized roads between the most important places of the county in every township, thus improving all the important highways.

The first attempt to publish a newspaper in the county was some time prior to 1840. A small press and a small amount of type was procured, by which hand bills, land transfers, extras on agriculture and poems on local subjects of special interest were printed.

From an industrial standpoint, the northern part of our county is the most interesting and contains the greater wealth. The principal industry in the southern part of the county is agriculture, hay-raising and the like. Dairying is one of the leading industries of this vicinity. Some attention has been given to horse-raising, the third Tuesday of every month being known as horse-sale day in Crown Point.

The first meeting to organize an agricultural society in Lake county was held in Crown Point, August 27, 1851. William Clark was chairman. The next meeting was August 30, when the constitution was adopted and it was agreed to hold the first fair on October 28, 1852, the sum of \$100 being appropriated for premiums. The total number of premiums awarded was forty-three. At this fair there was no racing, and it lasted only one day. At present, the fairs are continued four or five days, and both horse and wheel racing are considered part of the main features. The fair grounds are owned by the county and have natural advantages. The half-mile race track surrounds a natural lake, fed by springs, and being built around the lake as it is causes the track to give, which renders

it especially adapted for breaking in young horses, which can be trotted as fast as desired without injury.

The first school of the county was taught by Mrs. Harriet Holton, in 1835-'36, in a private house. The number of scholars was three. The second school was commenced in the fall of 1837, in Pleasant Grove, and was taught in a part of the log cabin of Samuel Bryant by a Mr. Collins. The first schoolhouse in the county was the little black log cabin which came into use about 1838, and was used until 1842, when a frame structure was erected and as many as fifty scholars were in attendance. This building was used until 1859. The next schoolhouse was built at Cedar Lake in 1838. After this period, as the settlements increased, schools were started in different parts of the county. A schoolhouse in the southern part of the county was built of unhewn logs, chinked with pieces of wood, and plastered on the outside with mortar made of clay. The roof was made of long shingles or clap-boards supported by logs and held in position by poles laid across each tier. No nails were used in the roof. The floor was made of puncheons. The seats were of slabs with the level surface upward, supported with wooden legs and without backs.

Up to the year 1857 there were but few schoolhouses in the county. The greater number were temporary. Since that year the school buildings have been increasing, both as to number and quality; every year frame and brick houses are rapidly being constructed for the accommodation of Lake county's children. One reason for so marked a change in the improvements of the public schools is due to the influence arising from the county institutes which are held in different parts of the county, the teachers being required to attend in order to compare views upon the different methods of teaching, each being benefited by the views and suggestions of the others. The first institute, opening November 1, 1866, was held in the Presbyterian church at Crown Point, and was conducted by W. W. Cheshire. The third institute, held in 1868, was conducted by James H. Ball. They have continued to meet once a year ever since.

The first normal school instruction given in this county was by T. H. Ball, who opened the school August 19, 1872. The session

continued thirteen weeks. The next normal was held by the county superintendents July 17, 1876, and continued six weeks, the rate of tuition being \$1 per week, and the number enrolled being fifty-six. These normal schools have been continued and are being held every year for six weeks during the summer vacation—the rate of tuition being \$5 for the term.

The present teachers' association of Lake county was organized at Crown Point, November 2, 1883, with twenty-five members. The second meeting was held at Hammond, and it has since continued to meet at different places in the county and is always well attended.

At one time there was an academic school, started at Crown Point in 1856 by a Miss Parsons. She taught a subscription school and continued the same until her death in 1860.

There are several literary societies in the county at different places. The Cedar Lake Lyceum was organized in 1846 for boys, but is no longer in existence. The Cedar Lake Belles Letters Society, including girls among its members, was organized in 1847, meeting only once each month, with its chief attention being given to writing. There were several organizations of this society, which were designed to be a Lake county literary society; but, from lack of literary spirit, they did not continue long.