

AN EARLY INDIANA SURVEYOR—LAZARUS B. WILSON

By ALMA WINSTON WILSON (his tenth child)

The families of Wilson, Jennings and Tomlinson crossed the Atlantic with the colony following William Penn about the year 1685. All were from England, and being of the same "Meeting" of Quakers, were all Friends, and relatives. They settled first in the vicinity of Philadelphia, and from there moved to different parts of the adjacent country.

Thomas Wilson, my grandfather, was born January 13, 1753, and died at Sprigs Mill, Washington County, Maryland—five miles north of Hagerstown—December 14, 1798. He lived in Bucks County at the time of his enlistment in the Revolutionary Army, as lieutenant, in Captain Joseph Tomlinson's company, and later, left his company for three days—to be married to his captain's sister, Miss Sarah Tomlinson, May 20, 1778. Returning to the scene of war, he served faithfully to the end, assisting in receiving the standards from Cornwallis' army when he surrendered at Yorktown.

In a book entitled *The Boys of '76*, the author, Charles Carleton Coffin, makes mention of that event; although he makes a mistake in stating the age of the young sergeant to be eighteen instead of twenty-eight.

At the close of the war Thomas Wilson, with his young family, moved to Franklin county, Pennsylvania, where, on March 2, 1795, his seventh child, Lazarus Brown Wilson, was born. But before this seventh child had reached his seventh year, he was bereft of both parents, and was taken to Hagerstown, Maryland, to live with older members of the family. It was there he grew into boyhood, and from boyhood to manhood; and when in 1812 the call was made to "beat your plowshares into swords," this tall, stalwart boy bid good-bye to his loved ones and marched with his comrades to Baltimore, where he was mustered in Captain Thomas Quantrill's Company of Fowler's 39th Regiment, Maryland Militia, and was at the battles of Fort McHenry and North Point.

As a girl of fourteen years, studying United States history, it was my habit to commit my lesson to memory after supper, and recite it to my father before he retired. Well do I remember the night when, as he sat on one side of the table and I on the other, in the sitting-room of the old homestead, I handed him the history, saying, "I'm ready." As he slowly arranged his spectacles he asked, "Daughter, what is your lesson about tonight?" "Fort McHenry and North Point," I replied. And as he took the history he closed it, and laying it on the table, said: "Well, daughter, I can tell you more about those battles than your book can." "How so?" said I. "Because I was there," he replied.

And then he began the story of how his regiment—and history tells us that there were four hundred and fifty picked men of Fowler's 39th Regiment who with other detachments formed the garrison,—marched all day in a cold September rain, to Baltimore, and at nightfall he and his comrades were too exhausted to eat their rations, and, spreading their blankets on the wet ground, each man rolled himself up as a bundle and lay all night with the rain falling upon him.

You know the rest—how the British regulars fired and fled; how the British ships poured shot and shell into Fort McHenry from sunrise, September 13th, to sunrise, September 14, 1814; and while my father was one, who was giving shot for shot and was defending the flag behind the fort, Francis Scott Key, held as a prisoner on a British war ship in the harbor, watched through the port-hole

The rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,

* * *

And the Star Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

For this service my father received the land warrant ordered by Congress, March 3, 1855, numbered 56,941. The war over, he left home, as many a youth has done, to carve his own name on the pages of history, and with one companion, went, in a canoe, down the river from Pittsburgh to Natchez, and there began the active pursuit of fortune. His retentive mind, love of nature and books, and a thirst for knowledge, must have enabled him to gather up the elements of a higher education by the way, for in 1822 he was engaged as a surveyor and civil engineer in Missouri, in which employment he

became identified with the surveys and public works all over this western wilderness.

He then came to Indiana, making a temporary stop at Paoli, in Orange County, reaching Indianapolis for permanent residence about 1825. Here he was a companion and co-laborer of that class of first citizens upon whom rested the growth and development of the town which they had founded. He secured valuable property, much of which was afterward sunk in his excessive zeal for railroad improvement, for the generation of restless travelers was not yet born, and the immigrant had not yet found "The Promised Land." In 1828 he was employed by the State as engineer in the system of Internal Improvements, the chief of which was the Wabash and Erie Canal. He was civil engineer on the "National Road" from Pittsburgh to St. Louis in 1832 to 1838, but when word reached the little town of Indianapolis, in June, 1832, that Black Hawk, chief of the Sac Indians, was on his way to scalp the pioneers of Indiana, there was a call for volunteers, and again his patriotic zeal asserted itself, and with a company, organized by Captain Drake, armed with rifles, tomahawks and knives, he marched to Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) under command of Colonel Russell, where the brave volunteers, ready to protect their families and homes at any cost, found that Indiana was not invaded, and the troops she raised were not needed; but there was every reason for the terror of the settlers and their prompt response, as Black Hawk was known to be a cunning and skillful leader. On their return home the company was christened and heralded as the Bloody Three Hundred, a name by which it is known in history to this day.

The next important event in the life of Lazarus B. Wilson may be introduced by a letter he wrote to Mary Todd Barbee, of Paris, Kentucky, a beautiful girl of nineteen, who was visiting her aunt, Mrs. John G. Brown, in the homestead which stood fronting Meridian street on ground now covered by the Federal Building. It is as follows:

Fort Wayne, April 6th, 1833.

MY DEAR MARY:

You gave me permission to write *one* letter to you and that one, I will give now. As I am extremely anxious to hear from you; and I cannot reasonably anticipate a letter until after I shall have written. The time appears long—very long, my dear Mary, since I left you: and yet it is as nothing, compared with

that which must yet elapse before I shall enjoy the pleasure of seeing you again.

But the promise of Mary to make me the happiest man in Indiana, when I return, affords me the most pleasing anticipations of future bliss; and my heart assures me that there is an "eye will mark my coming, and look brighter when I come." Does it deceive me, my dear Mary? Does it flatter me, when it would persuade me, that in Mary, I meet with a corresponding feeling of affection? I hope it does not—for it is so sweet a thing to love—to know that the object of our love, is worthy of all our affections: And to feel that we are beloved by that being whom we adore—nay—almost worship—constitutes so happy a state of feeling—so much of heaven on earth, that I would not forego it—even if it were ideal, only. But I must change the topic.

I arrived here on the evening of the fourth day—I found the road much better than I had expected—and the weather pleasant—tho' cold.

Fort Wayne is a larger place than I had expected to find. And it is handsomely situated, on the south bank of the St. Mary's river—down which it extends eastward, to the old Fort, which is at the junction of the last mentioned stream with the St. Joseph's—here they form the Maumee river. I am thus minute; as this may become your place of residence. In regard to the inhabitants I can say but little; as I have become acquainted with but few—and with none of your sex. Mr. William's Lady,¹ is at this time in Chillicothe at her father's;²—but she will meet him in Piqua about the 20th of next month to return to this place (which will be about the 24th.) I will then immediately start to Indianapolis, to bring my dear lovely Mary; but before that day arrives, I shall expect to receive several letters from her. And upon the receipt of the first one, I promise to give her one thrice the length of this, in answer. In conclusion, my dear Mary, let me urge you to give me an early answer—I hope you will be able to inform me that your dear Aunt has regained her health. I shall ever esteem her very highly, for telling me that Mary was a good girl—Give me what news you have from Kentucky—And all the news in Indianapolis.

The mails are so irregular between this place and Indianapolis; that if you should defer writing for one week, after you receive this—your answer may not reach me before this time next month: Direct to Fort Wayne.

We meet with the natives every day. Men, squaws and papoos. And I have no doubt, but that, I could have a very neat pair of moccasins made, if I only knew the length, in inches and parts of an inch, of a certain little foot. Perhaps you may say, that I have

¹ Mr. Jesse L. Williams.

² Judge Creighton.

seen it, often enough to retain a recollection of its length; this may be true; but to look well. it should fit very neatly.

This is a lovely night—the moon has risen from her watery bed, and seems to weep, because the dense atmosphere which hangs like a murky curtain along the eastern horizon, clouds or obscures the lusture of her borrowed beams. The clouds have disappeared, and the winds have crept into their caves; all is silent and calm, save a single voice, and that is the voice of a woman—lovely woman, and altho' two tenements off—I can distinguish the words of "home sweet home". Oh! this is a sweet song to a stranger. It calls him back to the society of friends most dear to him; to scenes most lovely and sacred—to acts of kindness—and words of love: It wakes a recollection, which is pleasing—because it is mournful, and mournful, because it portrays scenes of "joy departed, never to return."

Remember me with much kindness to your Aunt and Uncle and, to the "Forest Bride," and believe me to remain, ever my dear Mary,

Yours

L. B. WILSON.

Their marriage was celebrated at noon, June 18, 1833, the bridal couple leaving immediately in the stage coach for Fort Wayne, where my father was then engaged in the Government survey. Fifty-six descendants have loved their name and honored their memory.

The old covered bridge across White river at Washington street, removed a few years ago was built from plans furnished by him, the work being completed in 1834. As civil engineer, he surveyed, located, and superintended the construction of the railroad from New Albany to Michigan City, from the time of its beginning to its completion, and was then offered its superintendence, which he declined. He was among the first and most zealous advocates of railroads. Indeed, it was said of him, that on that subject he was a quarter of a century in advance of his times, contributing largely to their success, though losing money in so doing. As a prophet of the railroad, he lived to see the fulfillment of his predictions, which were considered visionary when they were made.

In 1844 and '45 he was president of the common council. In 1848 he visited Philadelphia, New York and Boston on business connected with the Internal Improvements. During the sixties, when age forbade active participation in the Civil War, it was his eldest son, Oliver,³ who gave expression to the patriotic zeal of his father,

³ Major Oliver M. Wilson.

and marched away to southern battlefields as captain in the 54th Indiana Volunteers. From that time on, my father lived a life of retirement, and my mind recalls the time when a large circle gathered on Sabbath evenings around the open fireplace in the old homestead, and at twilight, his strong voice was heard with others, in singing, the old familiar hymns, "Safely through another week," "There is a land of pure delight," and many more of precious memory. But the voices of that hearth are still and the circle that gathered on Sabbath evening is broken, and only a memory.

For forty-two years he shared with his beloved Mary, the same joys and sorrows which fall to the lot of many of God's children, and on April 10, 1875, after all Life's battles had been fought, "Death came as the benediction, that follows after Prayer."

"But to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."

His body was interred in Crown Hill cemetery, Indianapolis, where, surrounded by those he loved in life, he rests, "Until the day-break and the shadows flee away."