

# A Historical Sketch of Tell City, Indiana

By WILL MAURER.

During the last half of the preceding century, when immigrants from central Europe were discovering America as a land of industrial promise and political freedom, there were organized in the United States various societies which encouraged immigration and materially aided the immigrant in finding a homestead and securing a livelihood in the new country. One of the wealthiest and most influential of these organizations in the Middle West was the Swiss Colonization Society (Schweizer Ansiedlungsverein) of Cincinnati. As the name obviously implies its founders were Swiss Americans, although later the membership became largely German, who united for the purpose of encouraging and aiding the immigration of their countrymen to America.

The Swiss Colonization Society was organized on January 10, 1857. According to the terms of the constitution, membership was on the basis of shares; each fifteen dollar share entitled the holder to two city lots or one garden lot in a town, which was to be founded as soon as a suitable site could be secured. From the beginning the organization was very active in the search for a tract of land suitable for the settlement. The officers of the society carried on an extensive correspondence for this purpose and were soon in communication with the governors in most of the Middle Western States. Letters were also written to various land offices, to Swiss consuls in the United States, to the president of the Illinois Central Railroad and to prominent German Americans, such as Frederick Muench.

A Land Commission was appointed, whose duties were to be the examination of land which might prove suitable for the purposes of the Colonization Society. On May 7, 1857, a letter of instruction was sent to Mr. G. Liver, chairman of the com-

\*A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of Indiana University as a part of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts.

mission, outlining the duties of that body, and describing exactly what kind of land was desired. The communication stated that the commission was to be given free rein in the selection of lands. It was not, however, to negotiate for the purchase of lands, without the express approval of the central government of the society. Furthermore, "the commission is not to go further north than 43 latitude and is to keep in mind for purchase an area of at least 10,000 acres. The commission is to make allowance for approximately 6,000 town shares (town lots) and 1,000 garden shares (lots) ———. The commission has a cash capital of \$70,000-\$80,000 at its disposal, and the central government wishes if possible to buy farmland for \$20,000-\$30,000 on credit. The society will buy only farmland on credit ———. The commission is to make the object of its mission public, as far as possible. The commission is to tour the States, Illinois, Missouri and Iowa, as well as the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. In inspecting lands, the commission is to bear in mind the following points: healthful climate, fertile soil, good water, timber, stone, situation on a navigable river and if possible on a railroad ———. The site must have a good landing place and must adjoin the river for at least two miles. If, in regard to a river, it is a question of the eastern or western side, the latter is to be preferred ———. Mr. Liver, of Milwaukee, will act as president of the commission and Dr. Zwinger, of Pittsburg, as treasurer."

We see from the records of the society that this committee was soon making trips of inspection throughout the states of the Middle West. Regions as far west as the foot hills of the Rockies, the "Switzerland of America," were considered. Missouri seemed especially favorable and attractive to the members of the society, "though Missouri is a slave holding state, and *none* of our colony would ever forget the sacred principles of Republicanism so far as to make use of such a privilege."\*

By June, 1857, the Land Commission was ready to begin negotiations for a tract of land in Missouri, but while the organization was deliberating over the purchase of this land,

\*From a letter to the Hon. F. P. Blair, St. Louis, January 18, 1857.

there came to its notice a tract in Indiana. The following letter records the first official action in regard to that land.

CINCINNATI, June 9, 1857

A. G. SELMAN, Esq., Shelbyville, Indiana.

Dear Sir:

Your esteemed favor of the 30th ult. has been duly received and its contents have been carefully examined by the Board of Directors of the Swiss Colonization Society.

You have, however, not stated in your letter, what the price would be, and we should also like to know, *whether the landing is good*. Please give the necessary information about these two points, and we shall then see what we can do.

I should be obliged to you, if you would send us an answer by return of mail. If you have maps of the land, you may also send us one.

Very Respectfully,

JOHN EGGERS

Recording Sec. of Swiss Col. Soc.

A week later Mr. Selman was informed "that the Board of Directors of the Swiss Colonization Society passed a resolution last night (June 15) to buy a tract of land on the Missouri River which was offered some time ago." But this action on the part of the board was not final, although it would seem so, for the Missouri land was not purchased,—probably because it was not all in one piece.

About the middle of July, Messrs. Oehlmann, Rebstock and Tuffli were sent to Perry county as representatives of the society to inspect the land which Mr. Selman was offering. They returned in ten days with a favorable report, and Mr. Selman was invited to Cincinnati "in order to give further information about the land." The tract under consideration was situated two miles below the town of Cannelton and comprised 20,000 acres, 4,000 of which lay along the Ohio River. The land was reputed to be fertile and rich in minerals.\* The society wanted even more land than was offered, and on July 31 wrote to the government land office at Vincennes to find out if there was any suitable "congress land" available in Perry county.

Early in August the Swiss Colonization Society informed Selman that it was ready to close the deal with him and the

\*Letter to Mr. C. W. Lange, Lexington, Ky., June 29, 1857.

Hon. Ballard Smith, his partner in the transaction. But a long delay ensued before the sale was consummated. There seemed to be great difficulty in clearing the titles to the land and the board of the society evidently gave up hopes of making the Perry county purchase, for in October a Land Commission was again sent to Missouri. In a letter of November 4 the Board urgently asked Mr. Selman and Judge Elisha M. Huntington, a Perry county land holder, if they could not furnish a clear title to a single tract of 4,000 acres by January 1. An early reply from Judge Huntington assured the board that such could be secured, and during the next few months the following lands were bought by the Colonization Society through its agents: Elisha M. Huntington, 398 acres, for \$15,920; Marshall Key, 302 acres for \$12,080; John James, 74 acres for \$3,750; Charles Limberick, 40 acres for \$600; Pacob Dewitt, 160 acres for \$2,500; Nimrod Latimer, 22 acres for \$264; Edwin Morris, 40 acres for \$1,000; George W. Butler, 74 acres for \$3,700; Benjamin Persinger, 200 acres for \$10,000; Abel Butler, 270 acres for \$5,500; Samuel E. Webb, 200 acres for \$3,600; Eli Thrasher, 120 acres for \$2,400; J. B. Huckaby, 40 acres for \$430; Fred H. Oelschlaeger, 212 acres for \$3,000; H. P. Brazee, 200 acres for \$5,000; John Turner, 120 acres for \$1,435; William Butler, 200 acres, for \$3,100; Ballard Smith, 480 acres for \$5,700; Homer Hull, 80 acres for \$1,000; Nancy Field, 40 acres for \$250; A. G. Selman, 800 acres for \$3,200; William Butler, 80 acres for \$1,000. In all 4,152 acres were bought costing \$85,429. The purchase of this land in Indiana was opposed by some of the branch societies of the Swiss Colonization Society and many members withdrew. This did not disconcert the remaining members, since the Perry county tract would probably not have supplied land sufficient for the original membership.

In January, 1858, Mr. Louis Frey, the agent of the Swiss Colonization Society, was sent to Cannelton to attend to the preliminary work connected with the founding of the proposed town. At the same time the county recorder was informed "of the purchase of a tract of land in your county, upon which a new town, Tell City, will soon be laid out." The board furthermore asked the advice of the recorder in the prepara-

tion of deeds, etc. A short time after this, the society's engineer, Mr. August Pfaefflin, began the work of surveying the land and laying out the town, of which 7,328 town lots and 974 garden lots were laid out.

In the official plan for colonization these lots were thus described. The size of the city lots in 200 blocks is fixed as follows:

(a) In the best located sections of the city at forty feet front and one hundred forty feet deep.

(b) In the middle section of the town at forty-eight feet front and one hundred forty feet deep.

(c) In the outlying sections of the city at sixty feet front and one hundred forty feet deep.

The corner lots of each block are only seventy feet deep. The garden lots shall be, like the city lots, divided according to their location and distance, into three classes, of which those lying nearest the town site shall be laid out at five-sixths of an acre, those more distant from the town site at one and one-ninth acres, those furthest removed at one and two-thirds acres. The lots of the last class may, if necessary, be laid out beyond the corporation line.

Mr. Pfaefflin was also instructed to prepare a map of the town, which would be necessary for the assignment of the lots. In addition to other duties, Mr. Frey and the engineer were to examine land in the vicinity, with the view of purchasing it for farmlands; since it seemed that there was a greater demand among the prospective settlers for farmland than for town lots. More land was bought, but there was a great deal of delay in negotiating the purchase, due to the failure of some of the directors, who did not reside in Cincinnati, to vote on the matter. Because of this, Mr. Frey was advised by the secretary to attend to pressing business in the future without waiting for the approval of the directors. Early in February the society already had in its possession 2,710 acres for the town site and 6,000 acres (for some of which it merely held options) of farm and garden lands.

Since town lots were to be apportioned by lot, the colonization plan provided that a number should be reserved and given to first settlers in exchange for lots which were not

suitable for building. Whether or not a lot was capable of improvement was to be determined by a committee of three, one member chosen by the lot owner, a second by the society or its representative, and the third by both parties concerned. This matter of improveable and non-improveable lots later caused a great deal of confusion and dissension. However, each shareholder was not to be permitted thus to exchange more than one lot and he must furthermore within one year of his arrival erect a brick or frame house, worth not less than \$125. The society was to provide each settler with enough building material for a one-story, two room house, the amount for it to be paid in three yearly payments. Owners of garden lots might buy an additional tract of gardenland, not to exceed three and one-third acres. The terms for the purchase of farmland were: one-third cash, one-third in three years and one-third in six years.

Lots were distributed in March, 1858, in which month the first settlers began to arrive. The society placed all vacant buildings at the disposal of the newcomers, but they came in such numbers, that many were forced to live in the open for a time while a great many had to leave for want of homes.\* In a few weeks there were one hundred families in the town.

Communications from Mr. Frey, during the month of April, present a vivid and interesting picture of that busy time. The agent lamented the fact that many settlers had no place to stay; that they must build but find that their lots were not yet surveyed. He reported that a great number of lots were so situated that during the first year no three out of ten would be suitable for building purposes, because they lay deep in the forest! In reply to questions and reproach, Mr. Frey said the work had not progressed more rapidly because of shortage of labor and building materials; furthermore, the town had been laid out "zu groszartig" and the work accomplished was hardly noticeable compared with the work to be done. By the end of April three of ten houses which the society had planned to build were completed and were occupied by six families. Twenty-one houses at that time had been started by settlers. The only passable road was the Plank road (which has been superseded by the alley between

\*From a letter by Secretary Eggers, April 14, 1858.

Main and Ninth streets) and around this crude street business was already concentrating.

During the first months Mr. Frey labored strenuously. He occupied the precarious position of buffer between the worried settlers and the impatient directors of the Colonization Society. He adjusted many matters that were but vaguely defined in the plans of the organization, and proceeded on his own initiative at times when the delay necessary for an official action of the society would have meant loss to the settlement. One such occasion arose with regard to the "reserve lots," those lots, which were given for lots not suitable for building. Frey found the two hundred reserve lots to be scattered about in almost inaccessible sections of the settlement, and turned over to settlers lots situated along the Plank road. Due in part to such actions, there developed among some of the directors a strong dislike for Frey. They maintained that he, as well as Pfaefflin, the engineer, was not discharging his duties as promptly and efficiently as he should; it seems, however, that the distant officials merely failed to comprehend the task of the man who was supervising the building of a town.

A distressing shortage of funds was not the least of the problems which confronted the pioneers. At times the workmen were paid scarcely more than enough to defray necessary expenses, and in the absence of cash they were paid in orders on the grocery stores. Finally, Frey asked for authority to dismiss unmarried workmen, if the treasurer of the society were unable to raise necessary monies.\* About the middle of July, 1858, all workmen who were not actual settlers were dismissed. This action is reported as having called forth dissatisfaction. In a letter of August 9, the agent urgently requests a remittance of \$600, "since the workmen have received no pay for more than a month."

In spite of these various handicaps the building of Tell City and even the improvement of its streets progressed steadily, and the end of August found a town of 1,156 souls. The report of the president of the Swiss Colonization Society to the Convention at Tell City, in September, 1858, stated that there were in the settlement 262 dwelling houses, valued

\*Letters by Mr. Frey, June 12 and 13, 1858.

at more than \$40,000. The president found the great extent of the settlement to be a disadvantage since it was easy to see the remoter garden lots must remain for years dead capital for the owners, because they were too far away for gardens and too small for farms. He therefore recommended that they be bought back and be sold again in larger sections.

The most important action of the Convention of 1858 was that by which the government of the settlement was transferred from Cincinnati to Tell City. There were in the Swiss Colonization Society two governing bodies, a Board of Directors, and a Board of Control which attended to the details of administration, subject, however, to the Board of Directors. From September, 1858, the Board of Control, still subordinated to the Board of Directors, was situated at Tell City. The Convention further limited the expenditure of the Board of Control to \$800 per month. Although the change secured a prompter and more efficient management of the town, the two boards were at times engaged in bitter wrangles over points and policies of administration.

An official letter of the Swiss Colonization Society states: "This association is organized more for the common benefit of the poorer class of our countrymen, which consists mostly of intelligent mechanics and farmers." We infer that the "mechanic" element was rather in the majority, for in the planning and organization of the settlement more attention was given to the development and encouragement of industry than to the fostering of agricultural pursuits. The founders of Tell City fully expected it to become an important manufacturing center. It was favorably located and the neighboring lands were said to contain rich coal beds. The enormous scale upon which the town was laid out clearly showed that the village was expected to develop into a thriving metropolis. The streets cut through the tangled forests were conceived as the spacious thoroughfares of a busy city. Those running east and west were seventy feet wide, including the sidewalks, each ten feet in width; those running north and south were eighty feet wide, including sidewalks of twelve feet on each side. Tell City seems always to have taken a great pride in the improvement of its streets, for, about April, 1858,



each society share was assessed five dollars, payable in monthly payments, the revenue to be used for street and other improvements, and the early minutes of the town board, as well as those of the Society's Board of Directors show that much time and money were spent for that purpose. The wide, well-kept streets of the town at present further attest this fact. During the earlier years some of the citizens insisted, perhaps wisely, that too much money was being spent on streets; that it would be more profitable for the town and for share-holders in general to turn the money to the encouragement of industry.

Section 12 of the first colonization plan provided that the society should reserve a stretch of land which should serve as building sites for factories and other large establishments. These sites were to be sold at one dollar per foot, provided they did not exceed a front of one hundred feet. If more than one hundred feet front was desired, every front foot over the one hundred should cost three dollars. A second plan of colonization formulated in September, 1858, authorized that any manufacturing firm, employing more than ten men, should be given a lot of one hundred feet front and the full depth of the block *gratis*. Further, such establishments might borrow from the society from \$500 to \$1,000 for two years at 6 per cent. interest, with satisfactory security. But this amount was not to be paid until the buildings necessary to the undertaking were erected. Although no mention is made of it in the colonization plan, it seems the society would also loan money on the firm's guarantee to employ a certain number of men. The rate was \$500 for every twenty men employed. The society itself did not undertake any manufacturing enterprise, but merely aided and encouraged private undertakings.

From the very first, many firms encouraged by the offers of assistance and the brilliant prospects of Tell City as a future manufacturing center, sought to found establishments in the new town. The first ventures were, as we might expect, saw-mills. A letter of February 4, 1858, shows that two companies, Kraatz and Co. and Herrmann and Co. were contemplating the erection of saw-mills; in the same month

it was resolved to give Herrman and Co. all the trees cut down in the making of the streets. This company began work in May. A shingle factory, which had been granted \$300, began work about the same time. Soon after a brick-yard was opened, and a lime kiln was started about two and a half miles from the town. During the summer many petitions for assistance were laid before the directors of the society. In August Mr. Huthsteiner, one of the earliest pioneers and proprietor of the first hotel, asked to rent some land for a saw-mill. It was decided to rent him the block reserved for a park as a place to erect a portable saw-mill. In September the board sold J. Endebrock a lot of forty feet front and one hundred forty feet depth at one dollar per front foot for the erection of a sash and door factory. A firm which wished to use a lot on the river front for a lumber yard was denied the right, since the Board of Control was of the opinion that valuable lots along the river should be adorned by buildings rather than be made unsightly by yards.

The convention of September found many industrial propositions for its consideration. Messrs. Burggraf and Zins desired a lot free, that they might build a foundry, the first building to cost about \$1,500. This was granted and in addition \$1,000 was placed at the disposal of the company. Pikel and Haufbauer, who also wanted a lot and \$2,000 for the erection of a foundry, were granted their petition. Fred Zirbel was forwarded \$1,000 for the erection of a flour mill, provided he began the building of the same during the coming winter; if not, he was to receive but \$500. Peter Schreck, a brewer, was loaned \$300 at 6% for two years. Huthsteiner and Pfaefflin received \$500 at 6% for the aid of their saw-mill. Various other resolutions similar to the above were passed by the convention. A general resolution provided that all persons receiving lots for manufacturing purposes must build on the same within a half year, unless otherwise provided by contract. Furthermore, those persons receiving lots *gratis* were not to be given deeds until they had kept their concerns in operation for five years; until that time they were to receive warrant deeds.

Through the succeeding months many manufacturing

projects, mostly flour mills, saw-mills and wood-working industries, were organized and discussed. The most important of these was the Tell City Furniture Company, which was organized in the spring of 1859 with a capital of \$50,000. This company has developed into one of the town's most important establishments. The Fischer Chair Company which developed from the firm of Combs, Hartman and Co. (1863) is another of the pioneer industries.

An interesting organization was the Tell City Industrial Society which was founded in October, 1858, by friends of the settlement in St. Louis and Louisville, as well as by citizens of Tell City. Its purpose, as stated in the constitution, was to provide work for the citizens of Tell City and to increase the prosperity of the town and the value of the property by the founding of industrial establishments. The society proposed to found a furniture factory, a factory for wagons, plows, etc., a factory for lasts, pegs and cobblers' supplies and an extensive coopershop, since these plants could use as raw material the timber standing on the Colonization Society lands. Funds were to be raised by the sale of shares at \$10 per share. As soon as two thousand shares should be subscribed, preparation for the first establishment was to be begun. The second was to be started when three thousand shares were taken and the third when four thousand and the fourth when five thousand. Although it aroused considerable enthusiasm and was evidently organized on sound principles, the Tell City Industrial Society seemingly languished away without accomplishing much definite good for the town.

The Cannelton *Reporter* of October 2, 1858, says of its neighbor:

Tell City is a marvel. There is nothing like its history and progress, and it has no precedent. It has now over eleven miles of streets, cut seventy feet wide through the forest; it has 1,500 people and 300 huoses.

Notwithstanding this flattering report, which was, in fact true, the outlook in Tell City was not the brightest. To begin with, the town had been founded at a time when there was a general financial depression throughout the country.\*

\*From a speech by the Hon. Albert Bettinger, of Cincinnati, delivered at the Indiana Centennial Celebration at Tell City on July 20, 1916.

The letters of Mr. Frey show how difficult it was to secure funds for the execution of the society's plans. This condition hardly improved, for by the summer of 1859 the society paid out very little for the subsidy of industry and there was even difficulty in getting the directors to meet obligations already made. Of course, the individual firms as well as the Swiss Colonization Society were hard pressed, and several establishments did not survive the first difficult months. Tell City's first winter reminds one faintly of the first winter of the Plymouth colony. Prospective settlers were warned that work was scarce and money "tight." Sickness and a flooded Ohio were further discouraging factors and everybody looked forward hopefully to spring. But the hopes were realized only in part. A shoe factory and several other projects seem never to have materialized and during the summer of 1859 many families had to leave Tell City on account of lack of work.

Very little real money circulated during the first years. Each plant kept a commissary department, and the employees were paid in produce, which the factory had received from the farmers in payment for furniture, etc. The workmen were also given orders on the local stores while cash was scarce. One man states that he worked a year before he was paid his first five dollar bill in actual cash. This same man, who, like many other settlers, owned stock in an establishment, drew dividends but three times in thirty years,—and then the dividends were paid in additional stock. Contrary to the opinion of some persons interested in the early industrial organization of the Swiss Colonization Society, the firms were not co-operative, although employees often owned shares. The children of a shareholder were assured a position in the factory for life, or on good behavior. By this provision, opportunity was given boys for learning that particular trade. If necessary, men, not related to share-holders, were employed, but stock holders and their families were preferred, and were paid better wages. Wages, even if not paid in cash, were good.

The town had scarcely time to recover from the depression of the earlier years before the dark financial clouds of

the Civil war enshrouded its industries and manufactures. During these dark days employees, even men with families, received as little as fifty cents a week in cash. After the war, however, Tell City industry began to flourish and the town showed evidences of fulfilling all that the founders expected of it. In the years immediately following the war some of the strongest firms, most of which still survive, were founded. In this group are the Southwestern Furniture Co., The Chair Makers' Union, The Tell City Planing Mill and the Herrmann Bros. Wagon Co. Probably the most luckless of the Tell City enterprises was the Agricultural Machine Co. The financial tribulations of this company occupy much space in the proceedings of the Colonization Society. Its original purpose was chiefly the manufacture of hay presses. These sold to the South for cotton presses, in which capacity they did not prove very satisfactory. Later the firm manufactured stoves, which also were not successful. In 1869 the "Alligator" factory, as it was dubbed by the citizens, was bought by an Indianapolis company, which started the Cabinet Makers' Union, now one of the town's chief establishments. The youngest of the important manufactories is the Tell City Desk Co., organized in 1890.

The various furniture factories made common grades of furniture, and their large output was sold mostly to the southern negro. The following article, taken from the *Tell City Anzeiger* of March 26, 1870, presents a good summary of Tell City's furniture industry:

The furniture trade of Tell City with the South is constantly increasing. None of the steamboats plying between New Orleans, Memphis and Cincinnati passes our city without first shipping a quantity of furniture of all kinds; there is even often a lack of transportation facilities, so that the large wharfboat is constantly full to overflowing and sometimes cannot accommodate the goods awaiting shipment. At the beginning of last month the splendid sidewheeler "Indiana" was detailed here from Louisville, without cargo, in order to take a full cargo of furniture to the South. Several others have followed this boat.

The same paper on July 30, 1870, reports:

Last Sunday morning at seven o'clock Capt. J. W. Sterett with his new side-wheel steamer "Diana" arrived here from the upper Ohio and took on board furniture to the value of \$8,000, eight wagons and a large

consignment of shingles. Aside from the crew, the steamer carried only ten passengers. She lay at the landing until eleven p. m., up until which time the work of loading continued uninterruptedly. The wares were piled in cabins, state rooms, upon the decks and in fact, in any place where sufficient room could be found, and only narrow passage ways were left as a means of communication from one end of the boat to the other. The merchandise was destined for Galveston, Texas.

In fact, the enormous boat loads of Tell City furniture, which passed down the river in the days before the railroad, have become almost traditional along the Ohio. During periods when the river was low, the Tell City mills were forced to store their product until the river became navigable again, and this, of course, caused a tremendous export in the favorable seasons. Frequently, too, the furniture would be towed on barges to Evansville, Indiana, or Henderson, Kentucky, and there loaded on trains. Tell City was indeed (and still is) an important furniture manufacturing center. But that was not Tell City's only product as the following list of exports during two weeks in 1866 shows:

300,000 pounds of castings, exclusive of kettles, etc., from Kimbel and Zins' foundry; several hundred bedsteads, bureaus, tables, wardrobes, etc., from the Tell City Furniture Factory; 400 dozen chairs from the chair factories; 20 cotton presses and 2 hay presses from the Agricultural Machine Co.; 100 sacks of carded wool and cloth from Hanser, Becker and Spoerri's woolen factory; 200 barrels of flour from Steinauer and Co.'s mill; 50 half barrels of beer from F. Voelkers and C. Becker's breweries; 20,000 feet of flooring, doors, windows, etc., from M. Deckert's and J. Schoettlin and Co.'s Planing Mills; 500 new kegs; 20 fine marble grave-stones from H. Ludwig; 25 pairs of bellows; 4 wagons; 12 spinning wheels; 2 spring wagons.

In 1866 Tell City had approximately 2,600 inhabitants, mostly Swiss and German, more factories than any city of its size on the Ohio south of Louisville, good schools, and no jail.

One of the chief concerns of this growing industrial community was the securing of a railroad. The first project which affected Tell City was the so-called Anderson Valley railroad. A notice in the *Tell City Anzeiger*, March, 1867, informs us:

The citizens of Dubois county are willing to build a good road, if

possible a railroad, from Jasper to the Ohio river, and for this purpose have invited the citizens of Troy, Cannelton and Tell City to participate in the matter.

Local citizens are invited to assemble at the marketplace Sunday morning at ten o'clock for a discussion.

Nothing definite ever came from this proposal, as far as Tell City was concerned, although much enthusiasm was aroused and some negotiations were entered into. Again in 1871 there was a railroad agitation; the line, known as the Ohio River railroad, was to run through Newburg, Rockport, Grandview, Troy, Tell City, Cannelton and Leopold and connect with the Air Line near Hartford, Crawford county, or else run into New Albany on an independent line.\*

It was not until some years later that Tell City was linked to the rest of the country by rail. The Huntingburg, Tell City and Cannelton railroad, a part of the Air Line system (now the Southern) was organized about 1886. By August of the same year the citizens of Tell City had subscribed \$5,000 for the proposed line, and in September they held a railroad election which was to determine whether the city should levy a two per cent. tax for that purpose. By a vote of 455 to 15 it was determined to levy the tax.\*\* On May 4, 1887, the city council passed an ordinance granting a right of way to the railroad company. On the thirty-first of December, 1887, amid the rejoicings of Tell City's inhabitants, the first railroad train came through the town.

As early as March, 1859, steps had been taken relative to the incorporation of Tell City as a town. This action had been resolved upon by the convention of 1858. In April the agent was ordered to make a census of the town and compile a report of the society property. In July Tell City was incorporated, the first election occurring on Monday, July 25, 1859. The trustees elected were, Henry Brehmer, Joseph Einsiedler, Charles Reiff, Chris Nebelmesser, J. M. Rauscher, Fred Rank and William Leopold. The other officials were J. C. Schening, clerk; Fred Steiner, marshal; William Leopold, assessor; John

\*De la Hunt: *Perry County. A History.* W. K. Stewart Co., Indianapolis 1916, page 312.

\*\*Tell City *Anzeiger*, September 18, 1886.

Wegman, treasurer; Rauscher, Anders and Reiff, school trustees.

On March 3, 1860, a committee, which had been appointed for that purpose, was urged to secure a town seal, representing William Tell as a symbol of the town, as quickly as possible.

It was intended to dissolve the Swiss Colonization Society as soon as the incorporation was effected. A newspaper account says the society was declared dissolved in the convention of 1860, and the following disposal made of its property:

The property of the Society is to be divided into three equal parts: one-third shall be turned over to the Tell City free schools immediately, one third shall be used for improvements in the settlement and one-third for the benefit of manufacturing companies.

As long as Tell City was not incorporated as a city the administration of the property of the dissolved society was to be in the hands of a board of seven members, called a liquidation committee, which should be elected annually by the citizens of Tell City. At this time the value of the Swiss Colonization Society property was something over \$50,000. On February 24, 1877, a meeting of the citizens of the town was called to discuss the transfer of the business of the Swiss Colonization Society (meaning doubtless, only the liquidation committee) to the town of Tell City. Nothing definite in regard to the matter was done until the next year, on September 12, 1878, the board of the Society resolved to appoint a committee to examine the society records and turn the valuable records over to the city. Then, on March 20, 1879, the committee for the cession of the society property reported that all lots and lands which the society still owned should be transferred to the Tell City school, for the benefit of the special school fund. Some time later it was resolved that the money remaining (\$133.13) be given to the city to buy a small fire-engine for the Little Active Fire Company. And on the same day, April 17, 1879, a motion was made that it be published in the paper three times that the society board from this day be completely dissolved, for which Editor Bott shall receive two dollars. It was passed. Hereupon the society board adjourned forever.



The minutes of the town board during these years show that it was busied with the usual affairs which come before such bodies,—street improvements, market ordinances, etc. The records were kept in both German and English and in 1878 the town clerk was given a special allowance of \$20 for writing the minutes in the two languages. The town ordinances, it seems, were drawn up in English, and in order that members of the town board might use them intelligently for reference, they had to be translated into German. Still, by 1870 the occasional use of an English word for its German equivalent, and a poorer quality of German script show a decline of the German. The minutes of the board of trustees and later of the city council, were written in German until as late as 1894. On April 16, 1865, a special session of the board was called to pass resolutions on the death of Abraham Lincoln. In 1867 an ordinance was passed licensing saloons. The minutes reveal that there were several competing volunteer fire companies, and the trustees had to exercise tact to escape the charge of partiality in assisting the different companies. In 1868 a fire department was established. A committee to consider the diminishing of the corporation limits was appointed in 1869. This matter came up again in 1877, but nothing was done.

In 1871 the building of a jail was proposed. The privilege of erecting telegraph poles was granted in 1878, and similar action with regard to the telephone was passed in 1882.

On January 6, 1886, a petition from over 200 voters was presented, asking the incorporation of Tell City as a city. Consequently, the town clerk was directed to publish a notice that on the first day of March, 1886, a poll would be taken at the market house to determine whether the town should be incorporated as a city. A large majority favored incorporation and a record of proceedings was filed in the circuit court of Perry county in March, 1886. The city was divided into three wards, the first extending from the southern boundary of Tell City to Humboldt street, the second comprising the territory between Humboldt and Jefferson streets, and the third bounded by Jefferson street and the northern corporation line.

The first meeting of the common council was held on March 31, 1886. The officials were August Schreiber, mayor; Anton Moraweck and John C. Harrer, councilman from the first ward; Valentine Ress and John Hess, from the second ward; Henry Bader and Joseph Adam from the third ward; Frederick Kaelin, city clerk; William Schroeder, marshal; Alexander Gasser, Sr., treasurer, and Charles Gramberg, assessor.

Having now traced a rough outline of the historical development of Tell City, and having observed and followed out the industrial plans of the Swiss Colonization Society, we will doubtless find it of interest to retrace our steps and notice those phases of the community life which differentiated Tell City from other settlements of the time and gave it its distinctive character as a unique Swiss American settlement. We find among the members of the Swiss Colonization Society a strong interest in education. Some of the more eager settlers tried as early as February, 1858, to secure a vacant house for a school house. This was objected to, because it was felt that it was more necessary to provide shelter for the coming settlers than to have a school house. In June a committee which had been appointed to attend to the matter of erecting a school house reported that there were then in Tell City fifty children of school age, and that in a short time the number would probably be doubled. As the financial condition of the society would not permit its appropriating much money for school purposes, for the time being only one school building could be erected. In the same month it was decided to construct a building, about 30 by 40 feet in dimensions, two-storied, with a large school room and a residence for the teacher in each story. The first school, under the direction of Albert Oestreicher, was opened within four months of the founding of the settlement, though not in the building proposed, for a year later the society was still unable to build a school house. Citizens at that time were asked to contribute to the salary of a second teacher.

For the first few years the struggle to keep the schools going was a difficult one. The administration of school affairs was a matter of general community interest and mass meeting of the citizens for the discussion of school matters were

frequently held. Fortunately, the proceedings of these meetings from 1861-68 have been preserved. On July 14, 1861, it was resolved that two German-English free schools should be established in Tell City and as soon as the means permitted a third school, a high school, should be founded. The curriculum was to include reading and writing in German and English, arithmetic, history, geography, singing and drawing. (No mention is made of yodeling, but the good Swiss did at one time teach it in their schools.) There were to be thirty hours of instruction a week and advanced pupils were to be given work to do over Saturday and Sunday. A six weeks' vacation was to be allowed in the summer, and during that time the teachers were to receive half pay. The salary of the teachers was set at thirty dollars per month, with residence and one cord of stove-wood a year free. Before the election of teachers in 1861 a meeting was held so that all citizens might inform themselves concerning the fitness of the applicants. A committee of ten citizens was to co-operate with the school board in choosing teachers.

In 1862 a fire destroyed one of the school buildings and the funds for building a new school were made up largely by private subscription and the contribution of the Colonization Society. This school was known as the South school. By 1865, however, the new school was so crowded that plans for another building were inaugurated. The same year the funds available were not sufficient to keep the schools going the full term as free schools and during the month of December a tuition fee of one dollar per pupil was charged. By 1866 the public schools accommodated four hundred pupils, who were taught by five teachers. The teachers at that time were Mr. Debus, Mr. Huthsteiner, Mr. Baumgaertner, Mrs. Ellen Largent and Miss Hedwig Knecht. That year it was definitely decided to build a two-story brick school house with four rooms, on Tenth street, between Jefferson and Tell. The funds for this building were also in part provided by private contributions.

Money for the schools was often raised by fairs, picnics and exhibitions, which were always well patronized. One picnic netted a sum of \$131.90. The property which the

Swiss Colonization Society ceded the schools was also of great assistance. Besides the public schools there were various private night schools in which mathematics, bookkeeping and especially English were taught. The citizens of Tell City, though they cherished lovingly the memories and the traditions of their native Switzerland, were striving industriously to acquaint themselves with the customs and language of the adopted fatherland. Tell City, like all German Hoosier communities, was deeply interested in the struggle for the legal recognition of German instruction in the public schools of Indiana. This matter was decided by an act of the General Assembly of 1869, which sanctioned the use of the German language in the public schools.

Nothing presents clearer the intellectual attainment and cultural standing of the founders of Tell City than the names which they gave their streets. It is a delightful surprise to find in this little city streets named Mozart, Schiller and Rubens. The street names Franklin, Fulton, Gutenberg, Watt and Payne show a recognition of the leaders in various fields of knowledge and achievement. Humboldt, Jefferson, Washington, Blum, Steuben and DeKalb testify to an admiration of all champions of liberty, and Tell, Pestalozzi and Winkelried proclaim a reverence for the heroes of Switzerland.

The first church in the community was established by Catholics. Two lots on the west side of Eighth street, between Jefferson and Fulton, were sold the congregation in 1859, but the cornerstone for the building was not laid until July 10, 1870. Two lots were sold to a German Evangelical congregation in 1861, and a church was erected in 1863. At present there are in Tell City, besides the churches named, a German Methodist church, founded during the '80's, an English Methodist, established some ten years later, and a Lutheran congregation which was founded in 1900.

The early Tell City newspapers contributed considerably to the community life. The first newspaper was the *Helvetia: Organ fuer Fortschritt, Freiheit und Vaterland*. It was not originally a Tell City paper, but first appeared in Cincinnati in 1857, under the editorship of J. H. Walser. It was widely read by Swiss all over the country and devoted most of its

space to news from Switzerland and to the activities of Swiss settlements in the United States. It was closely identified with the Swiss Colonization Society and became virtually its official organ. Like all German newspapers it contained a *Feuillton*, or literary section; the selections published were often really good literature. The management of the *Helvetia* was transferred to Tell City in 1859, from which time it was known as the *Helvetia, Tell City Volksblatt*. Dr. N. Sorg became editor of the paper in November, 1859.

The *Helvetia* was followed by the *Tell City Anzeiger*, which was published by M. Schmid and F. J. Widmer and first appeared on September 1, 1866. It was to be "not a so-called political, but a local paper." After the first year it was published by Martin Schmid and Son, and in the third year passed into the hands of H. G. Bott and M. Schmid, Jr. The *Anzeiger* remained in the hands of the Bott family until 1912, when it was bought by the *Evansville Demokrat*, a German newspaper published in Evansville, Indiana. The *Feuillton* of the *Anzeiger* offered its readers many interesting bits of literature. Some American impressions of the German author and traveler Gerstaecker were reprinted in the *Anzeiger*, and occasionally we find selections from eminent German American writers. Frequently there were copied from larger German American papers verses in which the transplanted German expressed his impressions of America. There were frequent satirical thrusts at the Prohibitionists; sketches and poems in the Swiss dialect were always popular with the readers of the *Anzeiger*.

The early records of the Swiss Colonization Society expressed the hatred that its members felt toward slavery and emphasized their love of republican principles and liberty equality and justice. In this respect the people of Tell City were but typical of all German Americans, although the fact that many of the townspeople were Swiss intensified their love of freedom and democratic government. They were always actively interested in the political questions of the country. By 1860 Tell City was able to assert itself as a political factor. The town was Republican in politics and its citizens were enthusiastic, loyal champions of Abraham

Lincoln. At the first presidential election in which Tell city participated all but three of the votes cast were for the Rail Splitter. Their zeal for Lincoln and the Union assumed a more concrete form than mere noisy cheering and ostentatious flag waving. The first company to leave Perry county for enlistment in the Civil war was a Tell City company captained by Louis Frey. This company left on May 17, 1861. Again in November the town sent more volunteers, a company of ninety, the largest single body of men that came from the county during the war. The officers were Theodore Pleisch, captain; Nicholas Steinauer, first lieutenant, and Ernst Kipp, second lieutenant.\* Thus did Tell City make its contribution to one of the most glorious pages in the history of Indiana.

In July, 1862, a homeguard was organized. Every man who did guard duty one full night, from eight p. m. until 4 a. m., was to receive a certificate good for a credit of forty cents on his taxes. Four companies of artillery were also formed. The chief duties of these organizations was to keep watch along the Ohio. They drilled every afternoon in an open space where the Southwestern Furniture Company now stands, and whenever an alarm was sounded from the market house, now replaced by the city hall, they were to assemble there immediately. The homeguards were called out twice, once when it was reported that Morgan the Raider was approaching the town, and again when rebels were said to be threatening Troy, a small town a few miles down the river from Tell City.

The town again showed its patriotism in 1916. Of the national guard companies mustered in for border duty in July, the Tell City company of 119 men was the largest company in its regiment.

After the war the political mind of Tell City found much to take up its time. There was a bitter contempt for President Johnson and his policies, and correlative with that a strong feeling against the negro. It was very humiliating to the people of Tell City to see the negro receive the full rights of citizenship, while everywhere Know-nothing was disparaging

\*De la Hunt, *Perry County a History*, 216.

the German element. In those days the German American element in Indiana, more solid than it now is, was an important, as well as an uncertain factor with which to reckon in State politics. The voters of Tell City, like the majority of German Americans throughout the land, recognized Carl Schurz as their political guide and leader.

During the '90's Tell City and its neighbor, Cannelton, were engaged in a bitter struggle for the location of the county courthouse. Tell City, finding it necessary at that time to build a city building, the present city hall, planned the structure so that it could be used as a courthouse, should the city win the fight. But in 1896 Cannelton came out victorious, having subscribed \$30,000 for the county building. It is said that Tell City earlier had the chance of locating the courthouse, but refused because the settlers did not want any loafers hanging around.

No German American settlement in the last decades of the preceding century would have been complete without its Turnverein, or gymnastic society. So, also, the Turnverein in Tell City was influential in the life of the community. Although the early inhabitants were industrious and thrifty, as they had to be to withstand the hard times through which they lived, they were also a people who greatly loved recreation and social intercourse, and the social life of the town centered largely around the Turnverein. The entertainments, which were frequent, varied from mere informal gatherings to gorgeous masque balls. In May, 1859, the Swiss Colonization Society gave the Turnverein a ninety-nine year lease for a lot, the rent to be one dollar a year. The chief purpose of a Turnverein is the physical training of youth, the development of a "sound body in a sound mind." Classes for the training of children in the gymnastic arts were held twice each week, and to insure general participation, the dues at one time were as low as ten cents a month for each pupil. A big gymnastic exhibition was held in Tell City as early as 1859, and even Turners from Cincinnati participated.

There was a Theater-Sektion of the Turnverein which deserves especial mention. The group of amateur actors comprising the "Sektion" presented frequent plays, and

seemed to be most active between 1860 and 1870. Some of the prominent actors were Peter Herrmann, Mrs. Wagner, Mr. and Mrs. Dreyling, Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Keck, Mrs. Bauer, Mrs. Kepp, and Mr. Nebelmesser as prompter. The pieces presented were usually some of the farces with which German literature abounds. Benedix was a favorite author; plays by Holtei, Gutzkow, Kotzebue and Koerner were also presented. But dramatic efforts in Tell City were not limited to comedy and farce, for at one time Koerner's *Hedwig, Die Banditenbraut*, a "heavy" drama in verse was given. Perhaps the most notable offering was Schiller's *The Robbers*. The fact that plays were often repeated shows that they were really appreciated. We see that in this little German American settlement, long before the Little Theatre movement became a popular fad, there existed a true people's theatre, which was backed by an enthusiastic patronage. At times Tell City would also be visited by professional companies of both English and German actors. One such company presented *Faust and Gretchen* and *William Tell*. The inhabitants of the town were such enthusiastic theatre goers that sometimes there would be more than one company playing on the same night.

The good people of Tell City delighted fully as much in music as they did in drama. A Maennerchor (men's chorus) was organized in January, 1859, with twelve members. This soon became an important organization. A brass band was organized soon after the Maennerchor and when the weather was favorable a concert was given every Sunday by one or the other of these musical groups, or sometimes by both together. In May, 1860, the Schillersaengerbund on the Ohio, a union of singing societies from Evansville, Henderson, Kentucky, Tell City and Cannelton, held its first song festival at Tell City. The Tell City Maennerchor participated in several large singing tournaments, not only in Indiana, but also in other States.

The *Helvetia* doubtless expressed the sentiment of the town, when it said:

We are glad to have here a Maennerchor which has often shown us the power of song, and which is a great credit, not only to our settlement but to all Germans. May the members of the same continue to contribute to the intellectual and cultural advancement of our colony.



Though the Maennerchor outlived its contemporary, the Theater-Sektion, it is no longer a potent influence. Tell City, however, has always supported several musical organizations,

The national sport of Switzerland has long been rifle shooting. The Swiss founders of Tell City brought with them a love for their native pass time. The plan of colonization provided that a certain hill, which was called the Rigi, in honor of the Swiss mountain, should be set aside as a rifle range. A Schuetzen-verein was soon organized and frequent shooting matches were held, in which there was manifested much interest. The club also maintained a library. Representatives from Tell City participated in many shooting matches in this country and in Switzerland. In 1868 the club was presented with a beautiful flag from the Schuetzen-verein of Einsiedeln, Switzerland. Tell City marksmen captured prizes at Schwyz in 1867, at Zug, in 1869, and at Uster in 1900. At the national shooting match at Highland, Illinois, in 1872, Mr. G. Fahrin won two cups and other prizes (excluding the cups) to the value of \$100. The Tell City Schuetzen-verein no longer exists.

Other essentially German organizations in Tell City are the William Tell Grove, Order of Druids, organized 1864, and the Gruetliverein, organized in 1859. Besides these organizations Tell City supports chapters of many of the most prominent American orders.

Reviewing the activities which gave to early Tell City such an interesting and varied community life, we are almost forced to agree with one of the early settlers who maintained, "There is more life among the Germans than among the 'Yankees!'" But, as the younger generation grew up, the town became more and more Americanized, interest in those things which were typically Swiss became weaker and weaker, until, in the words of the aforesaid pioneer, "There is no enjoyment but the picture show."

Still, Tell City is conscious of, and takes pride in the rich background of its early history. Nor has it altogether lost the character of a Swiss settlement. The German language frequently tinged with a strong Swiss accent is often heard on the streets of the town and there is everywhere an

atmosphere of thrift and industry. A home-coming week, June 28 to July 4, 1908, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the town, brightened Tell City's recollections of the early pioneers and their activities. The unique history of the town and its Swiss character were also brought out in its Indiana Centennial Celebration of July 20 to 22, 1916. Frequently the Swiss flag was displayed with our own emblem and floats representing incidents in the early life of the town as well as tableaux illustrating the Tell tradition made valuable historical contributions.

A comparison of the plans of the Swiss Colonization Society with the town of Tell City as it is today shows that the town never fulfilled the expectations of its founders. A prominent citizen, who has been acquainted with Tell City's industrial history from earliest times has analyzed the situation thus: first, the founders expected altogether too much. Then, the town has always been a purely manufacturing town. It received no support from the surrounding territory, because the soil was so poor that agriculture did not flourish. To remedy this, the Colonization Society tried to buy land at Rome, Indiana, but found the price too exorbitant. Similar efforts at Grandview failed. Finally, Tell City was unfortunately planned to be a strictly Swiss settlement. No Americans were encouraged and no outside capital was accepted.

Tell City now numbers between four and five thousand inhabitants. It would indeed be difficult to find anywhere a busier manufacturing center. Some of the early industries still thrive. As we have seen, Tell City's chief product is furniture. Whereas in earlier days the furniture was a cheap grade destined for the South, now much of the product, which is of the finest grade, finds a market in the East.\*

\*The material for this thesis has been gathered from (1) letter files and other records of the Swiss Colonization Society; (2) early files of the Tell City *Anzeiger*; (3) isolated numbers of the *Helvetia*; (4) Thomas James de la Hunt, *Perry County A History*.