

The Pocket in Indiana History

By THOMAS JAMES DE LA HUNT

"What do you mean by 'The Pocket'?" is a question which residents of other states—or even elsewhere in our own commonwealth—frequently ask who dwell in its shelter. Be it mine, therefore, to answer this so far as possible within the time allotted me.

Were we in a geographical class-room, I should like to take a long pointer and trace upon our state map certain water-courses which form a logical natural boundary for Indiana's Pocket. Blue river, rising in Washington and Scott counties, flows into the Ohio a few miles above Leavenworth, leaving Harrison county to the east, and on its west bank let us take Crawford as the first county in The Pocket. Down the beautiful Ohio we shall go, passing in their order Perry, Spencer, Warrick, Vanderburg, until—at the extreme tip—Posey county is reached. Here, let us turn upward between the banks of the Wabash, follow it along, passing Gibson county, to the mouth of White river. Turning eastward here, coming next to Pike county, the river forks near Petersburg. Keeping with the east fork, this marks a part of Dubois county's northern line and at length we come to the lofty hills of Orange county. These constitute the natural watershed, since on their further slope the flow is toward Blue river, our point of commencement.

How many of you remember that the first battle on Indiana soil during the War Between the States occurred at the mouth of this Blue river, in Crawford county, June 19, 1863? A mere skirmish, you may say, yet out of sixty-two Confederates engaged, three were killed, two drowned, three

*This address was delivered at the conference of Indiana Pioneers and other historical societies at the Claypool Hotel, in Indianapolis, December 11, 1919. I solicited it for publication in the *Indiana Magazine of History* and I have urged its insertion over the modest demurrer of the Editor in Chief, whose name and ancestry are properly recognized in the address. The responsibility for publishing the article is mine; its merits belong to Mr. de la Hunt, to whom also should be given due honor and recognition in connection with this address for his very excellent history of Perry county, one of the best county histories produced in Indiana. That history is a worthy part of the story of the Pocket of Indiana.

JAMES A. WOODBURN

wounded, and fifty were captured by home guards under command of Captain Jesse C. Esarey of Perry county, and Major Robert E. Clendennin of Orange county. The Confederate captain, Thomas Hines, made his escape by swimming to Kentucky, where he rejoined Gen. John Morgan and, a fortnight later, participated in the Raid, (of which so much more is commonly heard,) and the Battle of Corydon.

Two days earlier, when Captain Hines had landed in Perry county, near Rome, on June 17, was the first time that any confederate troops had ever ventured to cross Mason & Dixon's line. John W. Minor, now a citizen of Indianapolis, was then a Perry county school-boy and was threatened by Hines for loyally refusing to aid in the horse-stealing plans of this daredevil expedition.

Captain Esarey's grandfather was one of Perry county's pioneers who, in 1810, had come into the state at the mouth of Little Blue river, twelve miles farther down. The family name has never died out thereabouts, though its present historical prominence attaches more to a scholarly representative in the faculty of Indiana University.

Furthermore, the solitary instance when naval cannon was discharged in defense of Indiana occurred in a Perry county harbour, July 25, 1864. The gunboat Springfield (No. 22 of the Mississippi River fleet) had been stationed at Cannelton for protection of its cotton manufactory, and twelve bombs were fired into the opposite village of Hawesville, to drive out a band of guerillas believed to be threatening an attack. The officer in command, Capt. Edmond Morgan, was an Englishman, formerly of the Royal artillery, and a cousin of Lord Lyons, then British ambassador. His widow still lives in Kokomo.

In thus dwelling on my own county I must take pains to allay with some cold drops of modesty my skipping spirit, yet Perry has no short history. Mound-builders' remains once perceptible have been obliterated by agriculture. A curious artificial formation of rock, called Troxell's Horse-Shoe, and attributed to the river-pirate Troxell, cannot now be authenticated.

Leopold, near the centre of the county, is an old Belgian community, founded through Father Augustus Bessonies,

long revered as Vicar-General of the Roman Catholic diocese of Vincennes (Indianapolis). While a young seminarian at Sainte Sulpice he heard a sermon preached by Bishop de la Hailandiere, and was fired by zeal to come over and begin a mission among the "Indians" of Indiana. Siberia is a hamlet of Russian farmers and Tell City's name signifies its birth as an original colony of freedom-loving Switzers, who would not plant their proposed town in any slave-holding state.

Yet we are not a county of foreigners. Eight Revolutionary graves have been accurately located in Perry county, besides those of others who fought in the War of 1812. The county's very name is one of the earliest memorials to the fame of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, bestowed on its organization, September 7, 1814, less than a year after the victory on Lake Erie. Many Perry county names are on the roster of those who fought in Indian skirmishes or at Tippecanoe under William Henry Harrison,—the governor, the general, the president.

Like so many statesmen of his day, Harrison had an exaggerated reverence for the classics. Jacob Piatt Dunn tells us that even in his official documents: "if Leonidas, Epaminondas and Lycurgus escaped; Cincinnatus, Scipio and the Gracchi were sure to be taken in his net." Thus it is a quaint commentary on this period that Perry county's pioneer towns received the storied names of Troy and Rome.

Troy, the oldest river settlement below the Falls, yet waits a Hoosier Homer to sing its long Iliad. Founded by Virginians who landed from a flatboat—according to tradition—while an Indian hunting-feast was in progress, and decided to remain with their families and negro slaves, it was an important landing and shipping-point for many years. The first western steamboat, New Orleans, touched at Troy in 1811. Her captain, Nicholas J. Roosevelt, took on some coal for fuel and purchased a tract of some 1,000 acres of coal land later sold to Robert Fulton, the inventor, whose brother, Abraham Smythe Fulton, was accidentally killed at a log-rolling at Troy while beginning its development.

A still greater name associated with Troy, that of Abraham Lincoln, who in 1817 accompanied his father and mother to Perry county, and who during young manhood acted as

ferryman over the waters of Anderson creek. Across the Ohio river, too, as his first case in any court was pleading his own defense in the opposite Kentucky county for inadvertent violation of another's ferry license privilege, through his willingness to oblige a hurrying traveler.

Re-adjustment of boundary lines placed Thomas Lincoln's land-entry in another county within a year after he settled in Indiana, but he and his family came often to Troy, as the nearest river town, and were residents of the same neighboring countryside until their removal to Illinois in 1827.

Two years earlier, accidental circumstances brought as a guest to Perry county, on May 9, 1825, the most distinguished foreigner who ever trod the soil of Indiana, Gilbert Motier de Lafayette, in his farewell triumphal visit to America as the nation's guest, an honor without parallel in history. When en route from Nashville to Louisville, his steamer, the "Mechanic" struck upon Rock Island (then covered by high water), five miles east of Cannelton, and went to the bottom in ten minutes. Passengers and crew were saved and had to spend the remainder of the night ashore, only the general and Governor Carroll, of Tennessee, having the luxury of a bed in the cabin of a pioneer, James Cavender. It stood near a spring that spouts from a tall cliff and next morning, before resuming his journey on another boat, Lafayette here received and welcomed many Perry county farmers and their families who hastily gathered to pay their tribute of respect.

All these facts have been verified and the spring is now known as "Lafayette Spring". Its formal dedication was held on the general's 159th birthday, kept as Lafayette Day in Perry county's centennial week. Dr. Logan Esarey was orator of the day, by invitation of the Cannelton and Tobinsport club women, who had taken the spot in their charge. They are now planning its further beautification as a tiny unit in Indiana's state park system, as it lies on a fine riverside turnpike constantly visited by motor tourists. Two years later, the name "Lafayette School" was officially conferred on the district school nearby.

Crossing Anderson creek into Spencer county, the pervasive memory of Lincoln asserts itself in the village of Lincoln city, near the center of the county, where the martyred

president spent ten years of boyhood. Nancy Hanks Lincoln Memorial Park is a charming tract of woodland surrounding the long-unmarked grave of Abraham's "angel mother." It has a large pavilion-like auditorium of permanent construction, where public assemblies are often held. The suggestion has been made that Spencer county should hold here at stated intervals a Lincoln Pageant, that the rising generations might see again some episodes of the great man's story. The magnificent county pageant at Rockport in 1916, written by a daughter of Spencer county, the brilliant Kate Milner Rabb, now of Indianapolis, had Lincoln scenes well worthy frequent reproduction.

In Little Pigeon cemetery, a mile or two away, lies the grave of Abraham's only sister, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, with a tombstone erected in 1916, and the site of Thomas Lincoln's cabin—now in the village schoolyard—is indicated by an inscribed marker of marble.

Chief credit for this is due the late Helen Morgan Baumgaertner, probably the one person who knew the most concerning the history of her native county. A Daughter of the American Revolution, she was a lineal descendant of Captain Spier Spencer, who laid down his life in command of his "Yellow Jackets" at Tippecanoe, and the county commemorating his name was dear to his great-granddaughter. Mrs. Baumgaertner had accumulated much valuable material toward writing a history of Spencer county and the interruption of this purpose is one of the deplorable circumstances of her untimely death.

Hastening on; the next county's name, Warrick, is a further reminder of Tippecanoe and another captain who was killed there, Jacob Warrick. Organized in 1813, this county was originally "The Pocket" itself, extending from Harrison to Gibson, and thus has a claim on events now classified under other heads. Evansville was the first county seat, later changed to Darlington but in a few years removed to Boonville, named for the pioneer, Ratliff Boon (not Daniel Boone), who was afterward lieutenant-governor. Boonville was a station on the mail route established in 1812 between New Harmony and Louisville, and it is recorded that the first carrier, John Williams, required two weeks to make the round

trip on horseback. Often horse and rider had to swim creeks or ponds they could not go around, and the mail-bags with their contents were so completely watersoaked that much time and care were required to dry them out.

Henry Vanderburg, a captain in the American Revolution, a member of the legislative council of the Northwest territory; a judge of the first court formed in Indiana territory, is honored in the name of the Pocket's wealthiest, most populous county.

In 1812 one Colonel Hugh McGary crossed from Kentucky and landing, tied his canoe to an historic elm-tree near the foot of what is now Division street in Evansville. An Indian village of Shawnees then lay between him and Pigeon creek, we are told, but was not dangerously troublesome.

McGary laid out some few lots, but the real beginning of the city was made by Gen. Robert M. Evans' purchase and survey of a town-site in 1816-17. Evansville's early years show comparatively little of romance. Its growth has been steady, however, toward marked commercial prosperity as Indiana's natural gateway to the south. To the state as governor Evansville gave Conrad Baker; to international diplomacy, John W. Foster and Charles Denby; to American literature, the gifted sisters, Annie Fellows Johnston and Albion Fellows Bacon.

Posey county, named on organization in 1814 for Gen. Thomas Posey, is beyond doubt the most universally known of all the Pocket counties, through the prominence of New Harmony. So much has been written in detail touching this absolutely unique village, that it is needless to repeat facts that are familiar to everyone in Indiana. The Rappite colonists; the Owen community; the Fauntleroy home, birthplace of the renowned "Minerva," September 20, 1859, and a Mecca for all American club women; each offers a theme on which countless pens have dwelt. "Of making many books there is no end"—on New Harmony. It is a shrine too sacred for desultory handling near the close of a paper already long.

It can only be noted further that Posey county furnished one of Indiana's most important governors, Alvin P. Hovey, a native of Mount Vernon, who had previously been a jurist, a dashing brigadier-general, a polished envoy-extraordinary.

Gibson county is a reminder of Gen. John Gibson. In his youth he had been captured and held by the Indians, so could speak their language fluently and to him was addressed that celebrated speech of the Mingo chief, "Logan," so long a classic in schoolroom readers of past generations. A fierce massacre in 1815, between Princeton and the Wabash River, cost the lives of nine white settlers and was a stirring early event. Along more peaceful lines, Princeton claims the first regular Sunday school in the Pocket, organized in 1820 by the Covenanters (now United Presbyterians).

The fine historical writings of Colonel Cockrum, of Oakland City, give a detailed account of the "Underground Railway," a movement perhaps peculiar to Gibson among the Pocket counties, as a pro-slavery sentiment was distinctly evident among some of the river counties during the first six decades of the last century, especially among the Scotch Covenanters, most of whom had come from the south.

Pike county, rich in underlying minerals and once heavily timbered, has much fertile acreage and its history appears for the most part a placid chronicle, though "forts" were built for protection against the red men and one of the last remaining "block-houses" was torn down only a short time ago. It is interesting to recall that cotton was once grown in the sheltered Patoka valleys and the pioneer industry had reached such proportions by 1818 that James McEwen erected a commercial cotton-gin, which took its place among primitive distilleries, grist and saw mills.

Dubois county history has had a capable historian in the person of a native of Perry county, George Robert Wilson, of Jasper and Indianapolis. His published volume gives a comprehensive resumé of what transpired in his adopted county from its settlement by the McDonalds in 1801 down to 1904 when the book appeared. One of its most valuable chapters is the biography of Toussaint Dubois, for whom the county was named, one of Harrison's spies and guides at Tippecanoe. The varied foreign elements making up the county's population afford interesting material which Mr. Wilson has ably handled. Several of the more important spots have been suitably marked through his generous enthusiasm and the co-operation of Miss Genevieve MacDonald Williams, of

Huntingburg, the county centennial chairman, and the author and director of the fine pageants presented at Huntingburg in 1916.

Though cotton once flourished in Pike and Dubois counties, it is not claimed that oranges ever grew among the hills of Orange county, unless in modern hotel corridors of French Lick or West Baden. The name was chosen to commemorate Orange county, North Carolina, whence came many of its early settlers, members of the society of friends. Among pioneer names handed down are Clendennin, Lindley, Trueblood, Braxton, Chambers and Darroch; this last that of the earliest teacher (Duncan Darroch), who taught in 1812. A year before this, the first church edifice had been built by the Quakers.

To southern blood and affiliations such as existed nearer the Ohio may be traced the Confederate sympathy that was outspoken among some Orange county residents, and was secretly fostered by the Knights of the Golden Circle, known to have their headquarters at Paoli. Dr. W. A. Bowles, who had been twice a member of the legislature and a colonel in the Mexican war, was an unquestioned leader in this movement. Before a military court in Indianapolis he was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death in 1864, a penalty, however, which was reversed by the supreme court, releasing him.

Yet Orange county was not disloyal; was not the hot-bed of Butternuts and Copperheads as a whole. It was Paoli's sixty armed minute-men, under a Clendennin, who marched to join an Esarey at Blue river for the repulse of Hines at Blue river.

In a word, as Maurice Thompson, of southern lineage and Confederate service, has written, "Indiana men might wrangle and squabble among themselves; might call each other hard names in the heat of local politics; yet when it came to choosing between the Union and Secession, all stood together for the old Flag and the Constitution."

My pocketful of Indiana history is thus emptied near the place of its beginning. In conclusion I would turn it inside out to show once more its silver lining the Ohio river, that marvelous Course of Empire, a stream of matchless beauty.

with a history of imperishable significance. Beauty is its own excuse for being and it is the "Beautiful River" that we love best in the Pocket; we whose ancestors traversed its long shining aisle through a fair green world, under the sun and stars of a century and a quarter ago.

Reaching high into the foothills of the Alleghenies and the Cumberlands; beckoning to the intrepid colonists of Virginia and the Carolinas, with outspread arms reaching as far as the sources of the Allegheny at the north and those of the Tennessee at the south; the Beautiful river called through the forest stillness with musical voice, then heard by the pioneers of the Pocket and yet echoing in the hearts of their sons and daughters.

Men may come, and men may go, still the Beautiful river listens to the story of to-day that shall some time be the history of yesterday.