

Pioneer Stories of the Calumet

By J. W. LESTER, Gary

When I undertook to write the stories of Lake county pioneers, I had no thought of contributing anything to local history, for it seemed obvious that the ground had been thoroughly searched for information of historic interest. Mrs. Sheehan, Mr. Knotts, Mr. Bowers, Mr. Matthews, and our friends in Hammond, Crown Point, and other places in the county, had given the public accurate and intensely interesting reports of their findings.

But I always have enjoyed visiting strange places and meeting interesting people. I take in shorthand the exact words of those who have a story to tell. It is to me a diversion which has become a hobby. When I record a story I hold myself unaccountable for grammatical or other errors, for should any occur I can point to the other person and say, "He told it." While the one who tells the story can evade criticism by pointing to me and saying, "He wrote it." My plan lessens the responsibility of both parties.

Of the many stories I have recorded, the most interesting are of the early stage routes, the trails, and the home life of the pioneers. One tells of hunting deer and wild turkey on the banks of the Calumet; another of the taverns along the stage roads; and still others, of seeing the first steam engine; of fighting bald eagles along the beach; of visiting Indian encampments and partaking of muskrat stew; of witnessing the exodus of the Pottawatamies when they were forced by the government to leave the richest hunting grounds in America; of the battles between gamewardens and poachers among the swamps of the Little Calumet; of the first building on the present site of this city; and finally of the beginnings of Hegewisch, Tolleston, Hammond, and Gary. Among those whose stories I have recorded are: Mrs. Henrietta Gibson, Rev. Handley, Isaac Crissman, Wm. Kunert, Mrs. Vincent, Mr. Pesche, Conrad Fabian, Mr. Nimitz, Mrs. Carr, and Arthur Patterson.

Copies of these stories are to be preserved in the city library by our secretary, Mr. Baily, and they will be accessible to members of the historical society and others who might be interested.

REMINISCENCES OF MRS. HENRIETTA GIBSON (January 2, 1922)

My full name is Henrietta E. Gibson. I was born in Hamilton, Canada, September 18, 1844. My father's name was David Combs. He was born in Erie, New York, and was a manufacturer of cloth. I have one brother, Major George W.

Combs, of Glencoe, Illinois. Our family came by way of Detroit to Chicago in 1846, and to Ainsworth station, now called South Chicago, on February 27, 1850. There was only one building there. That was the depot, and a man by the name of Spears was agent. Father traded two horses and a wagon and harness for forty acres where Hegewisch is. That part of the country was called The Calumet region. It was nothing but a wilderness of swamps, and the government sold the land for a dollar and a quarter an acre. Our farm was right where the U. S. Rolling Stock company factory is located, at Hegewisch. Father bought the James H. Cassidy inn at the toll bridge, in 1850, and bought the stage house from Mr. Brumley in 1853. That was about a half-mile from the fork of the Calumet river. The driver of the stage coach always blew a horn before he came in. Stages ran on a regular schedule like the railroads, so we knew when they would come and watched for them. Father would have horses hitched at the barn, or relay station, so they could go right on to Chicago. The station was on the north side of the river at Hegewisch. George Bunt kept the toll gate there and charged three cents for each team that was driven across the river.

There were lots of Indians there. They kept their wigwams right at the forks of the Grand Calumet, about a half-mile south of our stage house. They were Pottawatamies. Chief Shaubenee often came there on business. He was very friendly. My mother often hired the squaws to work about the house, but they wouldn't take any money for it because their husbands would take it from them, so my mother gave them flour and eggs. One name was Naominequay (Na-ö mi-ne-quay'). She could talk English, and was rather nice looking. I played with the Indian children a great deal and acquired a kind of a dialect so I could talk with them. Two of the girls had English names, Mary and Elizabeth. The boys hunted with bows and arrows; the older men, with old-fashioned guns. Shaubenee was short and thick-set and had long hair. In cold weather he wore a blanket and fairly good Indian clothes, including the leggings, blanket and moccasins, and he always wore hoop earrings. His blanket was red, trimmed with a black border—most of them wore gray. He used to say, "I be Shaubenee—I own Shaubenee Grove." That

was the way he introduced himself. Once he brought two girls to our house. I think they were his daughters. They went to Notre Dame college and were fine girls. They dressed like Americans and played lovely on the piano. He was proud of them and wasn't satisfied to have them like the other Indian girls. When they came home they always came by stage. The Indians always went to the Straits of Mackinac in summer. They were lazy, and did nothing but hunt and fish. They were all Catholics, and we could hear them worshipping in the morning. They would kneel down to the sun and chant. I often went with my father to their wigwams. The squaws made baskets, moccasins and miniature canoes of birch bark. They ornamented the things with porcupine quills. They made flowers on the edges of the canoes and stained them with berries. Most of them left in 1862, as Tolleston was building up then and the whites were coming in fast and crowding them out. Father sold the stage house there to Doctor Egan, of Chicago.

I was married in 1860 and I only saw a few Indians after that. My husband was the first station agent at Tolleston. While we were there two boys called one day on their way home from college. They were tall, straight and nice looking. They asked if I remembered them, but I didn't; then one reminded me of something that had happened at their camp when I had visited it, and then I remembered them. His name was Antone. They were both well dressed. After we moved to Tolleston I saw an encampment in Gary, or where Gary is now. It was on the edge of the Calumet marsh right down here at Twenty-first avenue, south of the Michigan Central and just north of the Pennsylvania railroad, about a half a mile east of where Broadway is. I saw some of the Indians we knew at Hegewisch, and often saw Shaubenee out here. One day when I was there they had quartered muskrat and yellow hard corn they were cooking in a big camp kettle that looked like a soap kettle. It set out in the open, and they had sticks set up, with one across them to hang the kettle on. They dipped the stuff out and ate it with some kind of wooden spoons or gourds. They were pleased to have us come to see them, and they offered me some of the soup. I didn't want to taste it, but tried it to please them. I didn't like it, for

they didn't use any salt or other seasoning. The encampment was in a valley at the base of a large dune they called Coup-ne-con'. Con Sheffier removed the dune and he found the remains of an Indian in the sand. He gave them to the Tolleston school and I suppose they are there yet. We knew the Joe Bailly family well. I used to play with Rose and Frank. I visited them and they visited me at Grandma Gibson's. They were half or part Indian and were beautiful girls and well educated. But their grandmother was real Indian. She lived in a hut by herself, and wore a broadcloth skirt, leggings and a shawl. She was swarthy and had straight, black hair, but was rather nice looking. Most of the Indians had clear-cut features. A half breed French and Indian lived near them with the Indians. His name was Jean Baptiste Cloochie—we called him "Clookie." A man in Chicago by the name of C. D. Wicker married one of the Bailly girls and took a fancy to the half-breed. He arranged to have him stay with my mother-in-law at the Gibson Inn, a mile or two east of Tolleston, where Gary is. He lived there for twenty odd years and died when he was about ninety years old. He was buried in Tolleston. That was in 1864. He was a fine old fellow and everybody liked him. The Indians were nice to you if you were nice to them, but it didn't do to anger them.

Ernest Hohman married an Englishwoman and kept a stage where Hammond stands. It was north of the river. Gibson station, near there, was named after my father-in-law's brother. He had a farm between Gibson and Hammond.

George Tolle, a man who manufactured surgical instruments, invested a good deal in land around here, and built a house near where Lewis A. Bryan's place is. Tolleston was named after him.

My mother-in-law, Anna Maria Gibson, kept a stage house where the Froebel school building stands. It was called the Gibson Inn. She first went there in 1837, and her husband, Thomas Gibson, built the inn in 1837 or '38. He came from Columbus, Ohio, in 1835. The hotel was a good, two-story, hewn low building, which he built on the forty-acres. It faced east on the old wagon road about where Madison street is, as near as I can remember. It was a little north-east of where the school building stands. I couldn't say how many

feet from it, but it was right close by. The barns stood about where the building is. The inn was close to Gibson Run, a small creek, and there was another small stream near there. There were no other buildings nearer than at Miller's (Miller station) and Tolleston. They sold out during the stock yards' boom. The tavern was still standing in 1861 but was torn down shortly after.

The stage route ran from Detroit to Michigan City, from Michigan City to Gary, or where Gary is now, and from here to Chicago. The drivers would come from Michigan City to "Mother" Gibson's inn—we called mother-in-law, "Mother." They generally got their dinner there, then came to our place at Hegewisch for supper, then went to the Five-Mile house, near Douglas monument; that was called Chicago then. The stage crossed the Michigan Central about where Madison street is in Gary and then ran to Hammond. They kept four and sometimes six horses on the stage.

When I picked huckleberries around here there were no houses except the Gibson inn. We lived in a two-story house where the Tolleston station stands. My husband got fifty dollars a month, wood for heating, light and rent, as station agent for the Pennsylvania and Michigan Central railroads. Lewis Kanothe came out in 1858 or '59 and started a little grocery at Tolleston; then Charles Kunert and George Wendt came. Mr. Kunert bought and sold huckleberries and made a lot of money on them. I have caught pickerel and black bass right where the Gary hotel stands. There was a slough, or swamp, there that was fed by a stream from Long lake, near Miller. It didn't cost much to live them; we had fresh milk, butter and cream, cranberries, honey from wild bees, mallards and other game.

In the early part of 1865 I had company at Tolleston and had cooked potatoes for dinner. I put the parings in a pail and set them on a bench back of the house. Pretty soon we heard some bumping and knocking against the side of the house and I went out to see what the matter was. A deer had been attracted to the salt in the potatoes and put his head in the bucket to get at them. His horns had got fast against the bale and he couldn't get out. He shook his head, then started to run with the pail still sticking. He jumped the

high board fence and the pail came off. He ran for the woods, but my husband started after him with a gun and soon brought the deer back. As late as in 1865 he took a vacation from the railroad and hunted deer from September to April. He shot eighteen, and they were all killed around here and where Gary stands. He showed me where he killed one right where the Lake Shore station was built. He killed his last in 1880 on this side of Michigan City. It happened to be on Thanksgiving day, and it seemed that every one wanted to see the deer. He sold it to Mr. Brinkman, a market man, and he gave it to the state. The head is mounted at Indianapolis and there is a plate under it which tells when and where it was killed.

I don't think there is a foot of ground around here that I haven't tramped over to pick huckleberries, and little did I think then that such a fine city as Gary would ever be built on those hills and swamps.

MRS. HENRIETTA E. GIBSON

MRS. MARY VINCENT, PIONEER OF LAKE COUNTY
(December 31, 1921)

I was born at Deep river and have lived in Lake county all my life—eighty-two years. My father, John Wood, was born in 1800 and died at Deep river in 1883. He came from Salem, Massachusetts, in 1835, to Wood's mills, three miles west of Ainsworth, Lake county. He had a saw mill and a grist mill; that is why they called the place Wood's mills. He built a log cabin in 1835 and went back to Massachusetts and brought the family out. The family came by way of Detroit, and from there to Michigan City by stage. Friends brought them to Deep river, a distance of twenty-five miles, and it took them two days. Daniel and Nathan Lowe lived at Michigan City; they were nephews of my father.

Michigan City was then the city of the west, and they expected it to be the greatest. They also expected Liverpool to be a great city, and my grandfather, Pattee, and my father bought lots there for \$250 each. They didn't think much of Chicago then. On the way from Michigan City to Deep river we stayed over night with a family by the name of Wolff.

The roads were bad and we had to cross a bridge about a mile long, south of Baillytown. Father and mother knew the Joseph Bailly family well and often stopped there. There was another family by the name of Dillingham that they knew.

There was only Indians around Deep river, and we had no near white neighbors. It was all hazel brush around Valparaiso, and but one man lived there. He was a sort of hermit. Solon Robinson was at Crown Point. There was a tavern four miles west of us, south of Lake station (now known as East Gary) and between Wood's mills and Centerville (now Merrillville). It was kept by Mr. Pierce. The Gibson house is the only building I remember of being where Gary is now. It was along the stage line.

They used to run a stage from LaPorte to Chicago. Our place was on what is now known as the Lincoln highway—the state road running to Joliet. We always took the stage to Chicago. There was a corduroy road that crossed a marsh at Westville, nine miles east of Valparaiso. They paid toll to travel from Michigan City to Westville. In about 1851 we all went down to Lake station to see the first train come in. It was on the Michigan Central, and people came from miles to see it. I remember it well, for I was ten years old at the time. There was a small hotel there then, and I believe it is still standing.

There was a tribe of Indians at Michigan City and they often came out to Deep river to hunt and trap. In about 1841 or '42 about five hundred came through Deep river. They were Pottawatamies. They were moved out west and they stopped near us for two days to rest and to let the squaws do their washing. There were several guards with them. One of the officers stayed with us while they camped there.

When California was opened up there were lines and lines of covered wagons passing our place from early morning until late at night. They came from Michigan and different states. Many of the travelers stopped and camped near us, and would come to the house to get water and supplies.

My grandfather, Moses Wood, of Andover, Massachusetts, fought in the Revolution, and was at the Battle of Lexington. My ancestor, John Wood, came from England, and settled in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1629.

MRS. MARY VINCENT

EARLY DAYS IN LAKE COUNTY

(January 18, 1922)

My father, Charles Kunert, was born in Prussia in 1829, and came here from Spring Valley, Illinois, in about 1856. He was the first postmaster in Tolleston.

He used to walk to Chicago and exchange blueberries for groceries. He was married to Augusta Aurich and there were ten children: Emily was the oldest, then Ernest, William C., Carolyn, Mary, George, Henrietta, Louise, Clara, Arthur, Walter and Charles. There are nine living. I was born the third of January, 1864, here at the corner of Taft and Ninth avenue.

The Gibson tavern was at Fourteenth and Madison. Crone had a tavern a mile east of Gibson station; the next was Hohman's, at Hammond; the next Reese's, at Hegewisch, at what they called the Indian ridge. They said there was quite an Indian reservation on the ridge years ago. There were swamps and forests all the way from Hegewisch to South Chicago. The Gibson tavern was just about on the southeast corner of what is now Madison street and Fourteenth avenue. I remember real well of the old tavern. It was a plain building, and, if I remember correctly, the bottom was made of logs and the top was frame. It faced east, to the best of my recollection. It stood about three hundred feet west of Gibson run, and was torn down in about 1869 or '70. The run was just about where Jefferson street is. It got its water from the sloughs and run northwest and emptied into the Calumet. The other branch they called Gibson run came through Tolleston between Garfield and Grant street, and it run from Eleventh avenue to Roosevelt and Seventeenth.

From 1876 to 1884 I did most of my hunting in what is now the first and second subdivision of Gary, or, rather, east of Broadway. In them days I used to hunt for market, and my main stands were just east of the Gary hotel, about where Broadway is, where the Delaware hotel stands, and about where the Emerson school is. The ponds, there is where I did most of my hunting. It was all hunting with muzzle-loaders. When I got thirty ducks a day father came after me with a wagon and got me. I used to sell the mallards in Chicago for ninety cents to a dollar and fifteen cents a dozen. I

averaged easily thirty-six a day; I know days that I got seventy. The upper end of the slough where the Gary hotel is was the best place for hunting. There was about eight to ten feet of water, and on both sides of the slough there was a bed of rice about thirty feet wide, and the rest was smart weed—that was great feed for the ducks. At the other places there was rice and smart weed, and a good many oak trees, and the ducks fed on the acorns. I killed forty-eight in one day in 1906 at about Sixth and Virginia streets. I went out in the forenoon and killed the limit and then I went out again in the afternoon. I have seen deer here. They used to tell about a big oak tree at Gibson's place at Ninth and Cleveland where they could see three or four deer hanging most any day. Gibson shot lots of them around here.

I was out in 1870 with Mr. August Elser. He killed one north of Aetna on the Grand Calumet river and another about where the Coke plant is, in Gary. I have the heads of both of these mounted. There was John Becker, August Keck, Ernest Harms and Herman Kirchoff in the hunting party. There was one more killed after this in the pineries near Pine station, by John Becker—that was in 1872 or '73. There were plenty of quail and partridges.

I was superintendent of the Tolleston club of Chicago from 1889 to 1897. There was a hunting club along the Little Calumet river that started with the following members: August Elser, John Becker, George Stolley, James Ewen and Dan Owsley. The men who came from Chicago came out to these men's places to hunt, and in 1868, I think it was, they started the Tolleston club of Chicago. The first superintendent was Daniel Hall, of Chicago, then Alexander McDougal, Edward Savage, James French, Willard West, myself, Frank Sommers, Ed. Brennan and George Haecker.

The grounds were practically owned by the club. In the first place they bought forty acres, then they got in a man by the name of Alexander, who owned the ground surrounding the tract. They had his consent to dig the canal. After his death they got possession of his farm of 320 acres. Their holdings extended from what is now Chase street west to Clark, north to Twenty-fifth and south to the meander line. There was a meander line on the north side and one on the

south side of the river. The government laid that out as swamp lands, and it couldn't be sold for any other purpose. Some people's land extended beyond the meander line; and the club bought that from the owners and some they took by squatters' rights. Quite a little of this land went into litigation, for instance sections nineteen and twenty, with John Cluff, father of John Burns, which suit they lost to Cluff; section twenty-one, with John Gunzenhouser, which was won by the club. Several other adjoining property owners had suits with the club, but the club won on all of them.

I took charge of the club on the first day of January, and at about that time there were several big battles between poachers and watchmen. In 1893 James Conroy, head gamekeeper, and John Cleary were killed by Al Looker at John Hargen's saloon. In 1894 Dick Stone, one of the guards, was killed on the marsh. In 1896, when John Cluff won the suit, a battle raged between the farmer boys south of the river in which Theodore Prott had his knee cap shot off and Frank Kostic, a farmer boy, was shot through the lungs. Lawrence Traeger, a watchman for Frank Whitlock, was shot, but Dr. Senn, Dr. Miller and Dr. Reynolds happened to be out from Chicago and they attended to him right there in the swamps, and he got all right. Barney Whitlock and Charles Blackburn, guards, were sent to prison. Barney got six months and a five-hundred-dollar fine, and Charley went to Jeffersonville for two to fourteen years, but was out in fourteen or fifteen months.

Frank Whitlock was head gamekeeper of the marsh and I was superintendent of the house—they always had two superintendents. There was lots of small skirmishes that were never recorded. I know of a number of instances. The Nimitz brothers, John and Henry, were the most persistent of all the poachers.

In 1894 was one of the greatest years for duck hunting that there was on the marsh, according to the reports from all the members who had been going there since 1896. In the 70's there was a good many canvasback and redhead; and in the 80's and 90's there was more mallard, pintail and bluing teal; there were also bluebill, spoonbill, gadwall, widgeon, green widgeon and green-wing teal. I knew of one swan and

one pelican killed in 1885 or '86. They were killed by the club members.

On the 27th day of October, 1894, F. A. Howe, president of the club, killed 143 ducks, mostly mallards; J. M. Glispie killed 117, R. M. Fair, a partner of Marshall Fields, killed 75 green head mallards in the morning and took the 11 o'clock train back to Chicago with his ducks. I went out all day and killed 198 ducks and two geese.

Some might think this a fish story but the facts are right on record at the club house. I resigned from the Tolleston club in January, 1908, and went into business in the general store here in Tolleston. I sold out in the fall of 1899 and went to work as game warden, in 1901. I was put in as traveling deputy commissioner on fish and game for the state by Z. T. Sweeney, state commissioner. I resigned in February, 1905, to fill the unexpired term of August Conrod, as township trustee of Calumet township. The term expired January 1, 1908. Then I went into the real estate business and stayed in that three years. I am now employed with the United States Steel company.

WILLIAM KUNERT,
Former Supt. Tolleston Gun Club.