Pioneer Stories of the Calumet

By J. WILLIAM Lester, Historical Secretary, Lake County Old Settlers' and Historical Society

After years of neglect, the "ugly duckling" of the Calumet and Kankakee swamp region has come into its own; Lake county finally has gained a place in the foremost ranks of progressive counties of Indiana.

Over a century had elapsed since the first military stations had been established on the present sites of Vincennes and Ft. Wayne; the State Historical society, with headquarters at Indianapolis, was starting on its career; and the population of the State had reached the third-of-a-million mark, when the first permanent white settler, following the old Pottowatomie trail through the wilderness, selected a spot on the banks of Deep river for his future home.

During the following year, 1834, Solon Robinson and others settled at what is now Crown Point; and three years later, when the county was regularly organized, there were still but few inhabitants.

Now that the rivers have been dredged, the swamps drained, and the dunes converted into popular natural parks, early settlers, and they are numerous throughout the country, vie with one another in relating their experience of early days, and their observations of remarkable changes wrought within their memory. A number of their stories are given herein.

MRS. ELINOR PHILLIPS
(Recorded July, 1922)

I was born in Green county, York state, ninety years ago the 28th day of last March. My father was a carpenter and a jack of all trades, and he came west to work. I was probably about three years old when we started for Chicago. We came by boat as there were no railroads. We went from Chicago to Michigan City and were there probably two or three years. Then in 1835 or '36 we came to Lake county. We started with ox teams for Illinois, and followed the old Sauk trail, now called the Lincoln Highway, but the roads were so
bad that the oxen got mired, and we stopped at the prairie about two miles southwest of Merrillville. Then we built a log cabin up in the woods.

The first land cost ten shillings an acre. When my father made his first claim he got 150 acres; afterwards he got other claims until we got about 500 acres altogether.

We had plenty of wild berries, and we used salt meat, game and corn-bread. We used to take wheat, fan and clean it, then cook it the way you do breakfast food now, and it made a good dish. We had to do the best we could. At first we had no lights but a twisted rag that we burned in a dish of oil. I helped my mother dip candles lots of times. We would heat the tallow and put it into some water then dip the wick up and down until it got as big as we wanted it.

In them days we had a loom and would spin the wool. We had to take our wool way down to LaPorte, and they carded it at the mill, then we brought it back and wove it. I have sold more yarn than you could shake a stick at.

I have seen piles of Indians. They camped out near our home—the old log house where Rush is, on the Erie railroad. They came to the house begging for things to eat. They traded venison for pork and salt meat, and we gave them iron kettles, potatoes and meal. Sometimes we would get leggings and other things trimmed in beads. I often saw the women carrying babies on their back. We used to be afraid of them, and when they came to the house we got where mother was, but they never hurt us. We were glad when they went away.

There was lots of game, and when there was snow on the ground my brothers would go to the prairie this side of Crown Point to hunt deer. My oldest brother would put a sheet or something white over his head; the other would go up on a high hill near the prairie and make a lot of noise, then when the deer came near enough my oldest brother would shoot them. They killed lots of deer every winter.

I went to school about three different terms when I was fifteen or sixteen years old. There was a private school where the Nicholson farm is. David Fowler owned the land, and they put three log houses together and made a school house. We had no church, but I went to Sunday school at Butts’ in their log house.
There were hardly any white people around here—Balls lived about a mile and a half southwest of Merrillville, and there were a few scattered settlers. We used to get together and have husking bees. The old settlers would cut their corn and set it up, then call on their neighbors to help husk it. They would serve cider and a cup of tea, and sometimes Johnnie-cake pancakes. I tell you honestly I believe people enjoyed themselves better in them days than they do now. When the old settlers were together one was as good as the other and people took a good deal of comfort with you.

My father could make most anything. He was a builder and a shoemaker, and I was married in the shoes he made. My two sons are living here with me. Edwin, the oldest, will be 73 on October 23d. I help them to keep house, and don't get away very much, but I like to attend the old settlers' meetings. I used to go to Chicago with father when he drove over with his oxen to sell grain, but I ain't been there for a long time—not since the World's Fair.

**ALFRED ANDERSON**
(Recorded August 12, 1922)

I am the oldest living pioneer of Miller. I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on the 8th of November, 1855. I was two years old when we moved to Hobart; and we came here to Miller in the fall of 1864. We moved with an ox team and wagon, and we had all our belongings in one load. We started about ten o'clock in the forenoon and got here about sundown. There was only one bridge across the marsh between Tolleston and Baillytown and we came over at Dock Siding, which is about three miles east of here.

There wasn't a house in Miller, with the exception of a boarding house, that the Lake Shore railroad was building, and a little frame cottage a fellow by the name of Alby was building. The cottage is still standing today and it is the only one of the old buildings left. It stands east of the jail and right back of it. A fellow by the name of Green bought it and shortly after sold it to Augusta Anderson. John Long had a shanty and ran a saloon; Jim Tansy lived in a dugout in the sand hills, and Quinn lived in a box car. Both Tansy and Quinn worked on the section. John Carleston went up
and stayed in the hills. Peter Anderson came in the winter of the same year that we came.

Father was a contractor, and we moved here to take up the timber for the Lake Shore railroad, the only road that ran through here then. There were no coal-burners in them days. He took out 4,000 cars of four-foot wood. We didn't expect to stay, but just as father decided to go he noticed that there was an awful lot of long white moss growing on the marsh south of the railroad. It was used to wrap around trees for shipping. They raked it up with potato hooks and shipped some to a man named Hicks, at Dayton, Ohio, some to Bloomington, Illinois, and some as far as Florida. He must have taken up at least 500 car loads. We pressed and crated it. He got $50 a carload, $3 a crate, $2 a barrel, and 25 cents a sack for it. A crate would weigh about 175 pounds. When we got into good patches we could get a carload a day, but sometimes we could only get a carload in four or five days. Father was at that thirteen or fourteen years. The moss grew along the edge of the banks and extended out into the water. I have seen it grow ten inches long. We found it as far east as Baillytown. It takes seven years before it grows back again. You would have to hunt to find any now, but I believe I could find you some.

We had an awful lot of cattle and I have traveled as far as Pine Station to Baillytown gathering them up. I got my first gun when I was thirteen years old; my father bought me a double-barrel shot gun. I hunted, trapped and fished a good deal. There was lots of game—wolf, fox, deer, wild turkeys and pigeons. I have shot pigeons until we were sick of them. I saw flights that would last for three hours. And ducks; there was all kinds of ducks! Wolves were thick. Their runaway was along the ridge just east of there where you go under the C. I. & S. tracks. I have seen as many as twenty in a drove. They were smaller than the timber wolf but larger than the prairie wolf, and seemed to be a cross between them. When I was about fifteen years of age I was corralled by wolves between the Grand Calumet river and the lake. It was about nine o'clock in the evening. I had my hunting dog, a mixed bird and shepherd. He would round up game and bring it to me. I was in a little hollow, standing among a bunch of jack pines, and had a little squirrel
rifle. The dog tracked the wolves and brought the whole flock up to me. I was scared, but shot one, and the rest turned tail and fled. The next day I was out on the south side of the river, and about a mile north of where Aetna is, when the dog went down into a hollow and raised a wolf that had been among the vines. I shot the wolf in the hip and it jumped into the river and swam across with the dog right after him, but he didn’t get far for the dog got him as he was climbing the opposite bank. We didn’t bother with a gun to hunt rabbits, for there would be as many as three rabbits at a time in a hollow log, and all we had to do was to plug up one end of the log and take them out.

I was coming home one night with a drove of cattle and as they were walking along the edge of the slough right east of Peterson’s Crossing I saw about fifty mallards. I had a small shot gun and sneaked around and killed eight with one shot.

There were quite a few Indians. They came down from Michigan and were here every fall for about four years after we came. They belonged to the same tribe as old lady Howe. They used to camp in the woods about a half mile north of Baillytown, at the south edge of the dunes. The first Indians I saw was one day when father was cutting wood in front of our log shanty. It was about a block northeast of where the Lake Shore depot is. He was chopping away when all at once four Indians came up. They were all blanket Indians. One of them wanted a chew of tobacco. In them days we had nothing but navy plug that came in long pieces. Father had taken a chew off of his plug. He handed it to the buck, and the fellow pulled out his hunting knife, cut two-thirds of the plug off, stuck it in his pocket and handed the rest back. That made the old gent mad, so he says to him: “If you are that hungry for tobacco take the other piece, but never come here again.” The buck took it and only grunted, as they always do, and then they left. The next day they came back and wanted something to eat, so mother gave them some bread, pork and two crocks of milk. They took it but never said “Thank you.” They came again the day after and wanted more to eat. Some were in the doorway and some were right inside, but she took the broom and chased them all out. She said: “Go to work! That’s the way my husband has to do.”
They never came back to the house, but we saw them often in the woods. They used to hunt as far as Whiting, and if they were overtaken at night they would strike camp anywhere. They would build a fire, roll up in their blankets and lay out in the open. They camped all along the dunes. The men used rifles and shot guns for hunting, but the young boys had bows and arrows. I remember between here and Baillytown the Lake Shore road had a siding about four miles east of Miller, and the Indian boys there would shoot the lights out of the cabooses. The Indians disappeared from here about 1869.

The only bear I ever saw was a small black one. That was when I was about fifteen. A boy by the name of Andrew Wall, of Hobart, was visiting us, and we went out to get wild grapes for wine. We were in the hills about a mile and a half west of Miller and had climbed up in a big jack pine. We heard a noise down in the hollow and then we saw him coming right towards the tree we were in. We got down in a hurry and hiked for the beach. I don't know how far he followed us, but we never saw him after that. In 1865 a half-breed, French and Indian, named Allen Dutcher shot a black bear right down close to the river, just about a half a mile from where the Grand Calumet bridge is, and on this side of the river. I have heard of wildcat, panther and lynx here but never saw any, and don't believe there were any after we came.

Our first school was in 1867, when a German by the name of Osterman came here from the head of Long lake, Porter county, and built a five-room house, with a saloon on one side and a school on the other. Mrs. Davis, from Michigan, was our first teacher. Her husband was captain of a boat on the lake. Sometimes when we were in school thirty or forty woodchoppers would come to the saloon and start a fight. We could hear them bumping against the walls, then the teacher would tell us all to get out and go home.

There was all kinds of timber and lots of big trees. I have seen pines up to 35 inches through. It was cut down and sold to the farmers or shipped out. John Charleston, Pete Peterson and a fellow named Bergstrom, were lumber contractors, and there was a big sawmill about three miles
east of here. It burned down about forty-two years ago. There was another one at Chesterton called the Blackwell mill.

I started to fish with my father when he got his first seine. It was a forty-yard seine. A fellow from Hobart had a 106-yard seine, and I saw him when he got over 6,000 pounds of white fish in one haul. He got over a hundred sturgeon, and one weighed 180 pounds. It was the largest fish I ever saw caught in the lake. The best price we could get for fish was one cent a pound, and we were glad to get rid of them for that.

Alfred Anderson, son of Magnus Anderson, is a carpenter and stationary engineer; he now builds cars for locomotives. He was married to Anna F. Norstrom, of Sweden. Their children are: Walter, Harriet, Arthur, Frances, Cora, and Florence. Mr. Anderson resides in a picturesque hollow among the dunes west of Lake avenue.

**POTTAWATOMIE TRAILS OF LAKE COUNTY**

*By Arthur E. Patterson*

During the early part of our settlement at Lake Station, a small band of Pottawatomie Indians paid semi-annual visits to their burying grounds on the old Stockwell and Buddle places, only a short distance from where now stands the East Gary town hall. I soon got to know them, especially Pokagon. I remember his telling Mrs. Evenson, Mrs. Hurley and myself of the famous Pottawatomie trail coming from the east and northeast, passing through Buchanan, Michigan, striking La porte county near New Carlisle, then running in a southwesterly direction through Laporte, Chesterton, Baillytown and Crisman to old Lake Station, a division point where there were workshops and dancing and burial grounds.

From this division, or terminal point, two trails led westerly. One crossed the Little Calumet river at Wolf's farm, passing through Aetna and Miller, until it reached the Grand Calumet, which it crossed, then ran in a westerly direction, zigzagging between the lake and the river until it reached Ft. Dearborn. The other trail proceeded through the town of Liverpool, where there was a noted dancing ground, crossed Deep river at this place and ran to Wiggins Point (now Merrillville). Two trails led from Wiggins' Point: one passed through the sites of Schererville and Dyer and crossed the state line and the other passed through Crown Point to Cedar
Lake and entered Will county, Illinois, a short distance north of the Will and Kankakee county line.

The Indian who visited Lake Station, and from whom the writer received the information concerning the trails, was Simon Pokagon, chief of the tribe which long occupied the region around the southern and eastern shores of Lake Michigan. At the age of fourteen he began the study of English, which he successfully mastered. Possibly no full blooded Indian ever acquired a more thorough knowledge of the English language. It seems proper at this moment to mention that in 1897 he wrote an article for a New York magazine on The Future of the Red Man, in which he said:

Oft in the stillness of the night, when all Nature seems asleep about me, there comes a gentle rapping at the door of my heart. I open it, and a voice inquires, 'Pokagon, what of your people? What will be their future?' My answer is, 'Mortal man has not the power to draw aside the veil of unborn time to tell the future of his race. That gift belongs to the Divine alone. But it is given to him to closely judge the future by the present and the past.'

During his visit to Lake Station in 1873 Pokagon spoke of the practice of the palefaces in plowing over and digging up the remains of his people and scattering their bones as they would those of dogs. That practice, he said, had caused him to decide never to return to the desecrated burial ground of his ancestors. That promise was kept, and he never was seen at Lake Station thereafter. He died on January 28, 1899, at his home in Allegan county, Michigan, at the age of seventy, and was buried in Graceland cemetery, Chicago.

JOHN BROWN, SOLDIER, RANCHMAN, BANKER
Crown Point, Indiana
(October 14, 1922)

I was born in a log cabin at Southeast Grove, on the 7th of October, 1840. My father, Alexander F. Brown, was of Scotch ancestry and was a native of New York state. He came to Eagle Creek township in 1837, and was killed in a runaway twelve years later, leaving a family of five children, of which I was the oldest.

As the country was new, I got very little education; in fact I attended school but three months a year. My first
teacher was Miss Cynthia Wallace. The school was conducted in a log building at Southeast Grove. The rough walls, pun- cheon floor and plain oak benches looked quite different from the schools of today. There were wide cracks in the floor, and I often saw bull snakes three to five feet long crawl through them and up and down the inside of the walls. As the door sill was on a level with the ground, frogs and toads would hop into the room. One day I saw a toad under my bench. I took my quill pen and gave him a little tap and he made a squeaking noise. The teacher caught me at it, took me up to the middle of the floor and gave me a trouncing.

There were a great many massassauga rattlers on the prairies. They were small, generally a foot or two long, but were very poisonous. I often ran across them but was never bitten. My mother used to tell about my brother, Barringer, crawling about in the yard and getting near a rattler. She was badly frightened but managed to gather him up before the snake had a chance to strike.

Game was plentiful; there were ducks, geese, sand hill cranes and deer. The deer kept together in the winter, and I have seen as many as forty in a herd. I killed a few, but I generally hunted wild fowl. I used to keep the game and cattle out of the wheat fields for father, and for that he would take me to Chicago where he sold his grain. I considered it a great treat to go there. It took us four days to make the trip; two going and two returning. We generally stopped at the Halfway-House on Ridge road, near Ross. Chicago didn’t seem much larger than Crown Point does now.

In the summer I worked on the neighbor’s farms, helped William and Thomas Fisher to gather broom corn, and drove oxen. The first man I worked for was my uncle, William Brown. I drove oxen for him at twenty-five cents a day, the regular wages for boys at that time. We broke the oxen by hitching a well-trained team in the front, a fairly well-trained team in the rear and the unbroken teams in the middle. It was a lively job but we managed it all right.

On Sundays, before my father’s death, the whole family went regularly to the Presbyterian church at Indian Town, now Hebron. We would take our luncheon along and eat it in the wagon. Reverend Blaine, our pastor, went to California about the time gold was discovered there.
Among the old settlers that I knew were: Solon Robinson, John G. Earle, Ely and Dan Sigler, Maria Gibson and Reverend Timothy Ball. I often saw Robinson, but wasn’t well acquainted with him. About 1834 he built a log cabin near the place where the courthouse now stands. His cabin is supposed to have been the first one built on the site of Crown Point. The Earles were pioneers of Liverpool and Hobart. I knew George Earle well, as I did a good deal of business with him. In 1902 he gave me a gold watch which I am still carrying. We went through the Knight Templar lodge together. He was a tall man, had lots of force and acquired considerable property around Liverpool and Hobart. Ely and Dan Sigler kept a store at Hebron at a very early date. I knew Mrs. Maria Gibson and often stopped at her tavern, which was built on the present site of Gary. She was a fine lady. The Ball family were early settlers of Cedar lake. Timothy Ball was a preacher and writer. He wrote a History of Lake County, The Lake of the Red Cedars and other books. He preached at a church in Shelby, and I often saw him walking there from Crown Point, a distance of sixteen or seventeen miles.

When the Civil war broke out I enlisted in company I, Fifth Indiana cavalry, and served under General Stoneman. I was captured and imprisoned at Andersonville. There were thirty-six thousand prisoners there at one time and thirteen thousand seven hundred and nineteen were buried there. It was seven months before we were liberated by General Stoneman’s command, and I was without a change of clothing during that entire time. After three years at the front, during which time I marched with Sherman to the sea and took part in several battles, I returned to Crown Point.

Before the war our family had no buggies or carriages. I worked for low wages and got but little schooling. What education I now have I got since I grew to manhood. Soon after my return from the South, I was nominated for county treasurer. I ran against Honorable B. Woods, for the nomination, and against J. S. Holton, for the election. I won by ninety votes over Holton, who was my daughter-in-law’s father. There was little opposition the second term and I was re-elected without difficulty. When I first took the office I could hardly write a tax receipt, but after serving two terms...
as county treasurer, I served for the same length of time as auditor.

In 1874 some strangers came in from New Castle, Indiana, and started The First National bank of Crown Point, which was the first bank started in Lake county. But they soon got into financial difficulties and sold out to a number of stockholders, including myself, at sixty cents on the dollar. The first president was Judge David Turner. He held the office for two or three years. Then I was elected and have been president ever since. I frequently go to Gary, as I am president of the Commercial Securities company which has its offices there. My son Neil looks after my interests in the bank here at Crown Point and I spend a great deal of time on my ranch near Shelby. I have 6,000 acres along the Kankakee river. It was nearly all under water until about twenty years ago when it was dredged. I paid a fair price for a part of it, but some I got for almost nothing. The land is now worth from a hundred to a hundred and fifty dollars an acre. I use it mostly for grazing purposes and my son and I have eight hundred and fifty head of cattle on it now, but I get good crops of corn, oats and rye. I have tried several kinds of hay but find that blue grass grows best.

Scattered about on the ranch there are a few sand hills and wooded elevations known as “islands.” A few rods east of my home is what is called Curve island, and on this island is the Indian Battle Ground. Until recently there were marks of a very old fortification. It was circular in form and covered three or four acres. There were what appeared to be pits, trenches and embankments. The trenches, when I first saw them, were about one and a half feet deep. There must have been many battles fought there for the surface is littered with flint chips and clam shells, and when I was a boy my boy friends and I would dig into the sand mounds and find skeletons. We unearthed about a half dozen, all of which had been buried in an erect position. They had their knees drawn up under their chin and their hands back of their head. There were numerous arrow heads and stone hatchets in the sand, but none with the skeletons. Last week while excavating for the foundation of a cattle shed on the island one of the workmen turned up a stone hatchet which had been lying about two feet under the surface. It must have lain there a long
time. I have talked with some of our oldest pioneers and none knows anything about the origin of the old fortification.

Note. That Mr. Brown has foresight, is evidenced by an article he contributed thirty-eight years ago, for a book entitled, Lake County, 1884. Under the caption, The Kankakee River, its Peculiarities, Marsh Lands, and Islands, he wrote: "It is only a question of time when these lands will all be drained, as the Kankakee valley has a mean elevation of ninety feet above Lake Michigan and 160 feet above the waters of the Wabash river; and lying as they do at the very doors of Chicago, the greatest stock and grain market in the world, it would be strange if they long remain in their present almost worthless condition." J. W. L.