

Documents

DIARIES OF JAMES D. DAVIDSON (1836) AND GREENLEE DAVIDSON (1857) DURING VISITS TO INDIANA

[Contributed by Herbert A. Kellar, Chicago]

The extracts from the voluminous Davidson diaries given below contain first hand information about conditions in Indiana and neighboring states on two occasions separated by twenty-one years. The allusion at the end of the diary of Greenlee Davidson to the alleged Indianapolis model for Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom" is the earliest version of that tradition known to the editor. The tradition is given in full in Jacob P. Dunn's, *Greater Indianapolis*, volume I, pages 242-43. The following biographical notes are supplied by Dr. Kellar.

James D. Davidson was born in Rockbridge county, Virginia, and graduated from Washington College in the year 1827-1828. He became a lawyer and was a trustee of Washington and Lee University from 1858 to 1882. He died October 14, 1882.¹ Mr. Davidson was known throughout the state as "The Country Lawyer." He was somewhat of a wit, wrote verse and other literary productions, and had much political influence. During the course of a long and active life he assembled an extensive collection of books, pamphlets, newspapers and manuscripts. Many of these have been preserved by his family and are now in the McCormick Agricultural Library, Chicago. In the fall of 1836 Mr. Davidson took a trip extending over several months, from Virginia, through the West and South, visiting practically all the states in these sections. Throughout the trip he kept a diary of his observations and experiences [Manuscript in McCormick Agricultural Library, Chicago].

¹ Catalog of Washington and Lee University, p. 81.

Greenlee Davidson, the son of James D. Davidson, was born in Lexington, Virginia, and graduated from Washington College, Lexington, Virginia, in the year 1854-1855, and from Lexington Law School in 1857. He became a practicing lawyer and was a captain of the artillery in the Confederate army. He was killed at Chancellorsville in May, 1863. In the fall of 1857 Mr. Davidson took a trip through western Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, New York and back to Lexington, keeping a diary from the time he left Virginia till he reached Buffalo [Manuscript in McCormick Agricultural Library, Chicago].

General Alexander H. Davidson, U.S.A., brother of James D. Davidson and uncle of Greenlee Davidson, was born in Rockbridge county, Virginia. He graduated from Washington College in the year 1835-1836. He was a resident of Indianapolis and died March 28, 1868.

DIARY OF JAMES D. DAVIDSON OF LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

October, 1836

[Cincinnati, Ohio]. White servants here do the work of Slaves. I have not found them as attentive servants as the blacks of Va. The Theater here is a pretty little building, in which there is tolerable acting. I witnessed the performance of the Ice Witch and Virginius There are two Museums in this City, both of which contain many rarities worth seeing. The Western Museum I think a fine one. They contain an infinite number of Indian relics. The Proprietors seem to have a great affection for Wax Figures. Indian encounters, and horrible murders, are all acted over again, in Wax. I looked with some interest but with a feeling of horror, on a representation in Wax, of the Murder of a wife and two children by John Cowan with a broad axe. His wife & one child are lying in their blood beside him, and he is grasping by the hair a little infant, on whose head is already a deadly gash, and who is imploring his father with a dying look, his little hand reposing on his father's arm, who has his bloody axe, upraised, and just ready to descend. I also saw here the identical axe, with which this murder was perpetrated, and the Bloody bonnet of Mrs. Cowan with the gash of the axe upon it. The Proprietor of this Museum has a gloomy Fancy. He has a department in it, termed the "*Infernal Regions*," filled with all the horrors, his imagination could invent. I did not visit these "*Regions*"—perhaps I may visit them soon enough. Sufficient untill, the day is the evil thereof.

There are 31 churches in this City, some of which are very handsome, particularly the Episcopal Church, which is said to be one of the finest in the United States. I attended service in it. It is indeed a beautiful Church. With the City of Cincinnati, I am much pleased. But I do not admire its people. They look like a selfish, reserved, bigotted

people. And such I am told is their character. The women are ugly, and have the appearance of being worn down with labour. It is a pity that such a beautiful City as Cincinnati, should be polluted by "*Pork*." Walk through the city, & you see at every step "*Pork House*"—"Pork House." Read their daily papers, and every column is filled with "*Pork for Sale*." 100,000 pounds of *Pork for Sale*." But it yields them money, and so does the business of the Chimney Sweep, yield him money.

I left Cincinnati, admiring the City, but not its people or their manners.

LOUISVILLE, KY., Oct. 17th.

I reached here in the Steamer, Dayton. Louisville is a much more busy place than Cincinnati, though not so beautiful. It is more like Virginia. It is not a "*Picaoon Place*" as the Southerners term Cincinnati. Business is done on a larger and more liberal scale, than in Cincinnati. In Cincinnati, there have been some universal failures, which have injured its credit—Louisville has the confidence of all the South and West.

When I arrived here, the different companies of the City, were parading, to the music of fine Bands, for the purpose of laying the Corner Stone, of the City Court House. I witnessed the ceremony, and saw the Corner Stone let down, upon the Plate, under which was deposited the Papers of the day, and some coin of different kinds.

I am now lodging in No. 37 in the Galt House: one of the finest in the U. States. It is crowded with 500 Strangers. This City is now filled with Strangers. It seems that the North is passing on South, so great is the number gliding down the Ohio.

MADISON, INDA. Oct. 20, 9 P. M.

I have just reached here, having retrograded this far up the Ohio, on my way to Greensburg in Indiana, to take the deposition of Reuben Thomas. I have a lonesome and dreary trip before me.

GREENSBURG, Oct., 21st, 7 P. M.

After a long, tedious, muddy, tiresome, desolate, cold ride of 45 miles, I have reached this little Town. My ride has been over the Michigan road, which intersects this State. This road is cut through the marshy woods, nearly in a straight line, and 100 feet wide. The land upon it is not improved. It is scarcely opened, even in a few places. Such a road is indeed tiresome. There is nothing upon it to interest you, and in many places, you can see before you 5 or 6 miles, untill the walls of trees on either side seem to close, and intercept your vision. Almost every cabin on this road is a house of "*Privete intertanement*" according to the spelling of this Country.

With the people of Greensburg, I am pleased. They are plain & kind. "*Mine Host*," is an old Virginian, and when he found out that I was a Virginian, he almost embraced me. A Virginian of the South or West, will greet with welcome, A Virginian, wherever he meets him. They seem to be proud of the name. The land here is rich, and level. The roads in wet weather, are nearly impassible. This is destined to be a rich State.

Oct. 23rd.

I have just spent a night with Mr. Rueben Thomas who emigrated from Rockbridge, Va., eight years since. He is well fixed for a new settler, in this Country. Everything about him has the appearance of comfort and neatness. His House is small and I slept soundly in the same room with his family—but his heart is large, and his welcome was full. He treated me with the utmost kindness and hospitality. The fine biscuit, hard yellow butter, and well-flavored coffee of Mrs. Thomas reminded me of Rockbridge. The plain and simple kindness of this western family, I shall not soon forget.

Oct. 24th.

It is dull and raining. The Circuit Court is now in Session. These Hoosiers, do not mind the mud. They all wear heavy boots, coming up, over their pantaloons, in which they tramp about with impunity.

Oct. 25th.

I have just taken the deposition of Mr. Thomas, and now ready, to leave the land of Hoosiers. I will say, God Preserve me, from a Free Western State! The Hoosiers, so far as I have seen, are a rough but kind people.

MADISON, IN. Oct. 25th, 10 P.M.

I have just reached here again, after as miserable a ride, as I have ever had. I have rode 45 miles, since half after 11 today, over the same dull, interminable Michigan road, in a more dreary, muddy, and lonesome day, than that of my first ride upon it. No one can form any idea of the utter desolation of such a ride, untill he tries it. The road is hemmed in on both sides, by a dense wall of trees, towering up in the swamps and bogs, except in a few precious places, where rises a new log cabin, which is announced to you, some time before you see it, either by the Sign Post, of a tavern, or the barking of a dog.

At Napoleon, a little town on the way, I dined, or rather supped. I asked the landlady, a very neat looking Hoosier, whether or not she had any difficulty in getting servants. "Servants, Sir!" We have no servants. We call it, getting a girl—or getting help." These servant girls, are very proud and cannot brook the idea of being called servants. This Landlady told me that it was hard to keep them. They go away when they please, And never fail when they have earned money enough to buy a piece of finery, to go home to their friends, with the proceeds of their labour, upon their head and shoulders. They are on the constant lookout for husbands, and consequently do not engage to labour, for any one except by the week, or some other short period. Again I pray, may God protect me from these Free States!

Oct. 26th, 3 A.M.

I have just been wakened up, by the pounding and puffing of a Steamer, coming down the River. I hurried on my clothes, and shouldered my trunk, and went out with a candle, to make the signal, and hail the Boat. But the Boat had to land, for freight, and I got upon the Canton,

bound for Louisville. The Tavern at which I stayed during the night, is called a Watch House. It is immediately on the bank of the River, and keeps, as I had been told, a look out for Boats for Passengers. I went to it at 11 last night, and asked the Bar Keeper, if he would keep a lookout—"O, No!" he said "I set up all last night." "Well, I asked, can I stay in the Bar Room by the Stove, untill a boat comes—"No." "Can you then give me a room? He told me he could. I then took lodging and watched out for myself. After I had gone up, I found I had left my umbrella, at the first tavern, at which I had stopped. I called down to the Bar Keeper, to know if he could send for it. He put his head out of the window, & told me he could not. He in a moment popped his head out again, and "How much you give? I told him I would give a Bit. The Fellow went, but he brought the wrong umbrella, and in the morning, being in too great a hurry, to get it, I told the same fellow to get the Umbrella and keep it for his trouble. This was a Frenchman. This is a small specimen of *Tavern Accommodations*, in the West and South.

9 o'clock A.M.

I am now again on the wharf at Louisville. I have taken my passage in the Paul Jones, for Vicksburg. This day I passed through the Louisville and Portland Canal. The Boat was about 2½ hours in passing through the Canal and Locks. Over this Canal is a beautiful arched Bridge, under which the Boats pass.

DIARY OF GREENLEE DAVIDSON, LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA

Sept. 13th. 1857

Left Columbus at 1 P.M. for Indianapolis. Our rout was thro a country—far surpassing in fertility & beauty anything I ever saw.

Montgomery County is a perfect Garden spot.

Passed several towns of little importance. Noticed flags flying everywher—all I saw were for Fillmore or Buchanan with the exception of one or two. One thing I noticed which augers well—that is that the Buchanan pole was always head & shoulders above any of the rest.

Was much pleased with Wayne County, Ind. The lands are magnificent. A gentleman on the Cars told me they average 60 & 70 dollars per acre. The most fertile parts of Virginia do not compare with any of the lands between Zanesville and Indianapolis.

Reached Indianap about 9 P.M.

Sept. 14th.

Took a view of the City. Did not come up to what I had anticipated. The streets are broad—straight—and laid out regularly—but the buildings are not fine. The most of the buildings are small frame houses wh[ich] seem to have just been erected. The City seems to be growing rapidly. The State House is a dingy dilapidated looking structure, unwort[h]y of the name. Went down to Uncle Alexander's¹ in the evening.

¹ Alexander H. Davidson.

Came near getting my neck broken by the giving way of the axle. When I reached his house none of the family were at home. I strolled around the grove & as the[y] drove back from Church—I walked up to the carriage. They at first took me for Winston Noble. When Uncle recognized me, he jumped out & wanted to know where in the world I came from. I staid with him until after supper. About sundown he took me to the roof of the house—where I had the most magnificent view imaginable. The whole City lay spread out before us, whilst behind us the whole county was covered with crops—interspersed with groves of trees. The Noble Farm is a magnificent estate. It is a little over a mile from the State House—but the city has spread down along the Eastern line & in a few years will surround it entirely. It consisted originally of 200 acres—just laid off on Davidson Street—35 feet front by 150 deep wh were selling readily at 250 & 300 dollars. About 8 o'clock I walked up to my Hotel—my uncle pointed out several buildings where the German Turners were celebrating the Sabbath Day in their usual manner. They seemed to be making political speeches.

Sept. 15th.

Went over in the morning to see the curiosities in the State House. The Trophies deposited in the Library Rooms by members of the Indiana Regiment were very interesting. I saw any quantity of old Mexican guns, swords, pistols, lances, &c. There were a lot of breast and back plates, wh an ordinary man could not walk under. The Colours of the 2 & 3d Regiments were literally torn into fragments—scarcely a shred of the silk remained untorn.

At 40 past 11 A.M. took the train for Chicago. The bustle & crowd at the Indianapolis Depot exceeds anything I ever heard of. About 6 or 7 long trains were just on the eve of leaving—whilst I suppose full 10,000 people were hurrying & rushing about.

The New York Depots are not to be compared with it. We had a long train—just crammed with passengers. The appearance of the country for about 100 miles was not very striking—after leaving Lafayette however, I never saw anything to surpass the beauty of the Country. The Prairies in several places spread out before us for miles—just as far as the eye c[oul]d reach in every direction. We passed immense fields of magnificent Corn reaching sometimes for miles. I am perfectly delighted with the Country between Lafayette and Michigan City it is a perfect Paradise.

We saw a mammoth pile of corn out in the open air just beside the road which I was told had been there, for nearly a year & was still as sound as ever. The climate I infer from this, must be very dry. I was told that the farmers make a regular practice of leaving ththeir corn out during the winter.

7 miles above Lafayette we passed directly over the Tipacanoe battle ground. The scence of the battl is an elevated woody plain with a morass bordering it on the East & a low bushy plain on the West. Harrison had his men on the high ground. The Indians crept through the morass slipped along the river bank and a portion of them took possession of the low grounds to the West. They then had Harrison between

two fires. The battle ground is a beautiful place still covered with trees of a primitive growth—all of which are more or less scared with bullet marks.

At Lafayette a pretty Yankee girl took a portion of my seat. I struck up a chat with her—found her both intelligent & agreeable. When she got off at Westville she invited me to call & see her if I ever visited La porte, Indiana.

On the same train met several farmers from Loudon who wer going out to Iowa.

A young fellow a member of the Beta Theta Pi¹ came very near taking me for a member of his Society. Reached Michigan City about 8 P.M.—so dark could not see it. It seems however to be nothing more than a sand bank. The country between M. City & this place² by moonlight seemed to be mostly hilly & barren—very different from the rich level country we traveled over in the early part of the evening. About 9 the cool sharp wind proclaimed our proximity to the Lake. About half an hour afterwards the cars were running on the causeway which is built out in the Lake for some distance. We soon reached the Depot—the most magnificent & imposing building of the kind I heave ever seen. It is constructed of splendidly dressed white stone—with the ceiling sloping somewhat in the curve of a semi Elipse.

Inside the building is splendidly finished off—having room for '4 different roads—each with a double track.

Beside there is a Baggage Depot—Telegraph Room & Land Office in the building.

Stopeped at the Tremont House—where I made a hearty supper off prairie chicken &c.

[Notes in back of diary of Greenlee Davidson, September 14-15, 1857.]

INTERESTING GLEANINGS. 1857

Walking through the suburbs of Indianapolis with my Uncle³—on an open corner lot—without enclosure of any kind—he pointed out a rude log cabin—wh seemed to have stood the blasts of many winters. The cabin stood in the centre of the lot—was constructed of unhewn logs dabbled with mud & closely resembled the log cabins of the negroes in old Va.

My Uncle informed me that in that cabin was an old negro—now 108 years old who was a slave of his father in law & is yet a slave—having refused to acknowledge his freedom. His name is Tom. To him & his humble cabin the world is indebted for the name of that most infamous—yet most able work Uncle Tom's Cabin. Henry Ward Beecher knew Uncle Tom when preeching in Indianap & suggested the name to his Sister.

¹ Greenlee Davidson was a member of Phi Kappa Psi at Washington College, Lexington, Virginia.

² Chicago.

³ Alexander H. Davidson.