

Some Gleamings From Monrovia

By BESSIE JOHNSON SHOWALTER

Monrovia is located in the northern part of Morgan County, Indiana. It is in Monroe Township which explains the origin of the name. No railroad passes through it, but it has a charm and a history which make it worthy of notice. Noah J. Major, author of *Pioneers of Morgan County*, wrote regarding his own reminiscences:

The prime object should be to pay a modest tribute of respect to the memories of the pioneers who, with brave hearts and mighty arms, built the first cabin homes in our county and blazed the way to a higher civilization.

For the same reason, I care to recall some incidents gleaned from my own associations with a people and with the scenes of a time when the pioneers were progressing from a primitive society into a new stage of living, thought and action. Personally, I was best acquainted with Monrovia in the years from 1878 to 1889. The older people that I knew were of those whose names have not found a place in recorded history. They were not history writers but makers of history.

My grandmother, Elizabeth Ann Bowman Johnson, is the heroine of my sketch. She was a descendant of English, Scotch, and Irish ancestors. My grandfather was Hezekiah Johnson. He also had Irish blood in his veins. He was tall, keen-eyed, thin-lipped and very ambitious. They came to Indiana in 1830 from North Carolina walking a great part of the way, bringing their goods in a conestoga wagon. When they arrived in Indiana, the young husband was twenty-six years of age and his sturdy, girl-wife but nineteen. Indianapolis was but a village at this time.

Pioneers felled slender, straight trees in the forests, and cutting them into logs, built their homes of these. They used clay to chink the cracks and to line the huge fire-place on one side of the single-room dwelling. My father's diary says that they "used the forks of small trees, poles and clapboards to make the rude open shed at one end of the cabin." The chim-

ney on the outside extending above the comb of the roof was constructed of properly split sticks and clay.

Among the forested hills of 1830, roamed wild beasts—deer, wolves and wildcats. There were wild turkeys in great numbers, quails and many other wild fowl. Pioneer families lived almost by the hand of Providence, in regard to meats. They did not need to fear the butcher's bill at the end of the month.

My grandfather and grandmother settled about one mile west of the spot where Monrovia was later located. The fireplace in their cabin furnished the means for all cooking as well as heating. A nearby spring supplied sufficient water for household and stock. The hickory and beech wood afforded the fuel and it was believed added a flavor to the southern corn-pones, broiled vegetables, and broiled venison. On the mantle-side hung pepper-pods and other plants saved for the seasoning of foods. Occasionally in summer there appeared on the mantle-shelf, placed there for ornamentation, a "poisonous" fruit, the tomato.

When my father was a boy, he was sometimes detailed to go, carrying a covered iron pot, to fetch hot coals from some neighbor's fireplace, often quite a distance away. Sometimes live coals could be found nearer—when the fire under the big kettle in the yard was going for the purpose of making soap; or, perchance, lye hominy was in the making or the family wash steaming.

Four children were born to Hezekiah and Elizabeth Johnson. A group who came to help and be helped in that frontier home. They were: Jessie B.; Ann E.; Benjamin Franklin; and Thomas E. (my father). My grandmother led a busy life caring for these children and managing her frontier home. Household duties were many and exacting.

Necessarily sheep were raised. The wool was made into yarn from which mittens and stockings for the entire family were knitted. Flax was produced from which linen thread was spun. Woolen goods and linsey-woolsey were woven from which many needful articles of clothing were manufactured by my versatile grandmother. Blue and white wool creations were woven on the loom—coverlets for the corded beds.

For eight years the husband and wife planned and toiled together. Then, following a short sickness, ascribed to the climate of the new country, my grandfather passed away at

the age of thirty-four. The widowed mother of four young children continued on the farm for three years, the sole manager of farm and household. A multitude of duties pertaining to pioneer farming were added to her tasks as housekeeper, but she carried her burden and kept her children together.

I have in my possession the candle-stick which my grandmother used. By the tiny flame of a candle of her own making, she plied her needle night after night through many years as did thousands of busy mothers of that interesting era. Her labors and responsibilities did not weigh her down nor quench her spirit. Years later she recorded in her memorandum book: "I knew happiness there."

Three years after the death of her first husband, Hezekiah Johnson, my grandmother married William Mull. The farm was sold and they built a large house in Monrovia. They were among the early founders of the town. "Aunt Betsy Mull," as grandmother came to be known, ministered to many in the village and countryside until her death in 1888. Her lovely home was a refuge not only for her family, but for all who were in sorrow or in need. It remained to her old age, as I remember well, likewise a rendezvous for young folks. One child was born to my grandmother after her second marriage—Lucretia Mull.

My father attended the "loud" Quaker school in a cabin. The pupils sat on long benches and studied their lessons aloud. My grandfather was a Quaker or Friend. A church sprang up in that wild forested country in 1832. The building was near the site of Monrovia, and the Friends still maintain a church there.

In the early eighteen forties, a Methodist church was built and dedicated in Monrovia. Grandmother wore the Quaker garb of gray cloth, with full-skirted dress and poke-bonnet. Years after she had joined the "noisy" Methodist church with its new manner of worship, she used the speech of a Quaker matron. Fifty-eight years after she had accompanied her first husband, Hezekiah, to Indiana she was buried in the little churchyard belonging to those of the Quaker faith. The only difference that I ever noticed between her as a member of the Methodist church and those who were Quaker matrons was that she could not keep still in meeting. She sang well,

liked music in the service, prayed loud and fervently and led in "class-meetin'." She also read much.

In 1885, grandmother and her husband took me with them to the Methodist church. We all walked together to the building, where we separated. Grandmother and I went in at one door and Mr. Mull at the other. Yes, there were two entrances, one for women and one for men. Mr. Mull took his official place in the "Amen corner". Grandmother and I sat in the opposite front corner on the "facin' bench". The people in the general congregation were likewise separated, the men occupying one-half and the women the other half of the seats in the main portion of the "meetin' house".

Sometimes near the close of a meeting, it was not unusual for grandmother, in an unassuming manner, as though "moved by the spirit", to break forth in song. Perhaps it would be in the words of the old tune:

Come ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish,
Come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel:
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth hath no sorrows that Heaven cannot heal.

Often many would come and kneel at the mourners' bench in front of the pulpit.

Grandmother had a deep, spiritual insight into the natural harmonies of this work-a-day world. When days were dark her "faith looked up", and the light burned so strong on her altar of hope that others caught her vision and high idealism. She lies, as I have said above, asleep in the little Quaker graveyard near Monrovia beside the "meetin' house" which was her first place of worship. Her quest for truth became a reality. Her creed found expression in her daily doings. Her inner spirit unfolded. She was a pioneer in home making, in social life and also in her church activities.

In those days, much of the social life of the pioneers centered in barn-raising, log-rollings, corn-huskings, apple-peelings and other coöperative methods of performing frontier labor. Often a dance occurred on the floor of the new barn—a sort of dedication of the completed structure. There were "quiltin' bees" at which the women wielded their needles with skill and rapidity and talked the town news at the same rate and with equal interest. There was a great deal of all-day visiting. There was always "helping out" in sickness.

There were "yearly meetin's" and "quart'ly meetin's". Young people met at ice-cream socials or parties. Those who had horses and wagons would often haul those who were less fortunate. A popular song that went the rounds, "Get into the wagon, and we'll all take a ride", was applicable to the situation.

Many a young man rode horseback over a mud road, or perchance it was a corduroy road, to see his sweetheart. Round, slender logs were often placed on a road, each log close to the next to form a continuous covering like the floor of a bridge. This famous corduroy might extend but a few feet eliminating a mud-hole, or it might extend a number of rods making a road passable through a low or swampy area, or such a surfacing might cover a road-way for a long distance. In dry weather when well covered with soil, such a road might be smooth and pleasant to drive over. When not well covered with dirt or when the wheel tracks reached down to the timbers, a corduroy road was a rough line over which to travel in any kind of conveyance with wheels.

Pioneer Monrovia was not much behind Indianapolis in those days, the State's capital being a small place, with no railroad train entering the city until 1847. The streets were dirty and rough and even some of the main roads leading to the capital were very primitive and often almost impassable. In 1858, my father, Thomas E. Johnson, then a college youth, made a trip to Keokuk, Iowa, to visit an older brother. While there he worked for a time on a boat that plied up and down the Mississippi from New Orleans to Keokuk. He then kept a diary for a short period. On one of the pages, I find this entry: "Shipped 75 barrels of whiskey to New Orleans today. Am thinking of returning [home] and going to Asbury College [DePauw]."

His reflections bore fruit for he returned to Indiana, went to Greencastle in the fall of 1858 and re-entered college. He graduated from the Law School of old Asbury in 1860. The commencement exercises for the law-class of four were held on Tuesday evening, March 27. The class-mates of my father were: John T. Smith of Worthington, Indiana, S. F. Gilmore of Greencastle, and A. G. Baber, of Fillmore, Indiana. Each graduate gave an address, as was then the custom. The printed program indicates that T. E. Johnson's subject was "Civil

Jurisprudence". In addition to the four class orations, there was a debate between two citizens of Greencastle [possibly they were both law students], the question being, "Are lawyers proper persons to be intrusted with political power?" There was an address by W. Watson of Greencastle on "The Legal Profession", and another by A. W. Beasley of West Urbana, Illinois, on "The American Lawyer". The last number on the program was an "Address to the Graduates" by the Rev. Tho's Bowman, D.D., after which the degrees were conferred. This widely known churchman and educator, later a Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, was at the time the President of Asbury College. Young Johnson's mother was a cousin of President Bowman.

My mother's maiden name was Rachel R. Marker. My parents were married in 1861. My maternal grandfather was Curtis Marker, who moved to Monrovia with his family from Bellville soon after the marriage of his daughter Rachel. His wife, my grandmother Marker, died when my mother was a small child. Having acquired an education in the law and a wife, my father settled in "the city" as Indianapolis was termed in those days. Here he practiced law for forty years. He was a Republican till the rise of the Liberal Republican movement when Grant was President. In 1872, he made speeches for Greeley. From that campaign to his death, Thomas E. Johnson was a Democrat and a staunch supporter of the principles of that party.

George W. Julian, who was a friend of my father said of him: "He was honest, very methodical and a deep thinker, made many friends, but was not fully appreciated". As I remember him and came to understand him through many years, I would say that he was keen and far-sighted in his analysis of problems pertaining to political economy and international relationships. His views on problems of government and religion were sometimes regarded as extreme. For example, he antagonized those who believe in Hell as a place of eternal torment. He declared that such a notion was contrary to the Pauline doctrine, and that it was impossible for his mind to conjure up a punishment more terrible than banishment from God forever.

He believed that the proper way to carry the Christian religion to the natives of non-Christian lands was to bring

persons from those countries to the United States, or other Christian nations, educate them in the ways of a Christian people, and then send them back home to do missionary work.

He believed in "woman suffrage" and advocated giving the franchise to women when it was unpopular to uphold that cause. He believed that Cuba should be independent long before she was freed from Spanish domination. After the Philippines were acquired, he wanted them to be given their independence.

My father was intolerant of fiction, save as it might portray historic truth. Novels were not seen among the books of his large library in our home. Late in life, *David Copperfield* by Dickens and a few of the classics did creep upon his bookshelves. Biography, science, philosophy, the plays of Shakespeare—these we might say comprised his favorite kinds of literature. He always read late into the night, and had the habit of writing out his thoughts and opinions, but not for publication. He often made political speeches in campaign years.

My father lived until 1912, but my mother died in 1884. After her death, I went back to Monrovia to live with my grandmother for two years. During this period in the quiet village, I knew the Bundys, the parents of the famous Indiana artist John Bundy. It was here that this gifted painter learned to appreciate the beauty of beech trees. His father and mother came in a covered wagon from North Carolina shortly after 1850 when John was about six or seven years of age and settled on land near Monrovia where beeches were plentiful. During my period in Monrovia, the artist was doing much portrait work. A very fine portrait of my step-grandfather, William Mull, is his masterpiece in this field of work. This picture will soon hang as an exhibit in the Art Institute at Indianapolis. Mr. Bundy also painted a portrait of my grandmother, at whose home he was not a stranger.

After my two years in Monrovia I returned to my father's home in Indianapolis, but in the winter of 1887, I went back to the home of my grandmother for a visit, the last before her death, which occurred in the summer of 1888. Let me describe the trip of 1887 and record some of the things which were then stamped on my mind as a child. Monrovia was then as now untouched by commercial enterprise. Going by rail from Indianapolis to Mooresville, I alighted from the train at

4:30 one evening and soon found a seat in "Old Joe's hack". This ancient conveyance had been driven over the road from Monrovia to Mooresville for many years by Joe Allison, who hauled people back and forth and carried the mail. I recall that he also took back with him a bundle containing several copies of the *Indianapolis News*. We drove about seven miles southwest over a winding and somewhat rough and hilly road. It was bordered by rail fences, not all of which have as yet disappeared.

On the way we passed *Gasburg*, where once a planing-mill stood upon a hill. This place was named after my uncle—a talker in his day. He afterwards owned a lumber yard in Indianapolis and later the largest excelsior factory in the city. East of Monrovia we passed the little Quaker church, which still stands, and beside it the little "city of the dead" with their low-marked resting places. A little farther along we passed the old grist mill on the bank of the creek. Forty years ago that mill was a busy place, and the creek too seemed very active. With the decadence of the mill, the creek likewise lost its importance—even the sources of its water supply seem to have diminished. In a little while, the faithful horses turned into the curving thoroughfare called "Main Street". There was a second street in the village known as "Back Street".

On either side of "Main Street", there were remaining sentinels of the primeval forest that once covered the landscape. Their branches arched the street and intermingled. Smoke issued from the side chimneys of the strange low houses. This is an out-standing picture in my mind, stamped indelibly on my memory as we rumbled over the well-beaten, rocky street to my grandmother's home. This was a long, two-story, white house. A light held at the curtained window beckoned me to come in. Opening the big front-door, I stepped into the hall where the great clock stood towering above me on the landing of the walnut stairway. Grandmother's beaming face overshadowed by her white hair told me more than her words, "Glad to see thee", could convey. Her home breathed hospitality. The huge Franklin stove in which burned the crackling hickory wood would put to shame any "Japanese incense burner" of today. On top of the stove was a thick soapstone which was being heated to make my bed comfortable. In the parlor I espied the new four-legged piano

which had replaced the "melodeon", recently relegated to an upstairs room.

My bed was of the spindle, corded type, single, with a feather-mattress, and covered with an attractive, homespun coverlet of blue. I tried one musical instrument and then another, and, like Goldilocks in the story of the "three bears", one bed and then another. I turned the hands of the big clock back so that bed-time would not come so fast. By this, I failed to stay the march of time, for grandmother had another clock—a small one—which I had forgotten. This little clock, I have now. Her table—we would call it a gate-leg now-a-days—was covered with white linen and set with heavy iron-stone china in embossed designs. Her silver was sterling and hand-made.

The use of glass-jars for canning purposes had become common some years earlier, and grandmother had an ample supply of canned fruits. There was a supply of dried corn in addition to the stock that was sealed-up. Pumpkin, formerly cut in strips, then dried and hung, was now stewed and stored in jars with a covering of sorghum at the top of each container. Honey was packed in six-gallon stone jars, while grapes were kept in sugar in jars of the same kind. Supplies like these were found in the homes of all thrifty women, and they represented forethought and labor during many weeks of every year. Indeed, the activities of pioneer women were numberless. They were always busy. There was no season when they were free from outdoor and indoor tasks. When there was nothing else to do, they sewed rags for carpets, pieced quilt-blocks, knitted lace bedspreads, and performed many other tasks against future needs, seemingly considering such voluntary activities as furnishing needed recreation.

Perhaps before closing, I should mention some of my summer time experiences in Monrovia, and incidentally other people of the village. One day, when I slipped through the garden and found my way to the other street, "Back Street", a goat took after me but I fled unharmed to the humble home of my grandfather Marker. He had come to Indiana from Delaware. He was Scotch-Irish and Irish—more Irish than Scotch-Irish. He gave me a handsome fork of those days—with a round wooden handle and two prongs. In his home, we dined off of pewter plates. He was strict beyond measure in

the enforcement of religious discipline. He was not even as lenient as grandmother Mull [Johnson]. Grandfather Marker was the father of eighteen children. He had to enforce rules of conduct. By trade, he was a cabinetmaker. A grandson of his was the late Dr. Albert Shelton, medical missionary in Thibet for thirty-five years.

The surroundings at my grandmother's home left a deep impression on me. There was a roomy, latticed porch, the shaded coolness of which was always welcome in summer. There was a deep well under this porch and a pump which had supplanted the windlass and "old oaken bucket" of earlier days. The gourd likewise gave way to the tin-cup, only to be replaced by the glass mug in time. Beside the porch entrance a bell was suspended from which hung a rope. At meal time, grandmother would ring this bell. Years before, when on the farm, she had given the dinner call by means of blasts on a steer's horn fashioned for the purpose.

Overhanging the path to the garden were tall pine trees, under which the ground was covered with pine needles and strewn with brown cones. The pathway in the midst of the garden was bordered with tall sweet smelling phlox, wherein its tiny lavender blossoms were hidden. On one side of the garden were variegated hollyhocks, that invited me to pluck their flowers turn them inside out and tie their petals down to form skirts for what then became queer, little yellow-headed dolls. There were also rows of hardy blue larkspur, English columbines, marigolds, and zinnias of bright hues. Close by, scenting the air, grew the sweet marjoram, spice-bush, peppermint and pennyroyal. Climbing along and far above the white paling fence was a deep-red, rambler rose that gave off an exquisite perfume.

The garden served more practical purposes, supplying a variety of foods for the table in season. There were trenches of celery, a tree of waxy pears, one of black juicy cherries, and raspberry bushes. It was a child's play-garden for me, such as was in the mind of Robert Louis Stevenson. I would that every city child of the present might have the rich experience of lone hours in the garden as I had in Monrovia. As Stevenson revealed in verse, the imagination could find full play:

Up in the air and over the wall
Till I can see so wide—
Rivers and trees and and cattle, and all
Over the country side—

Time has taught me the deeper meaning of things. The hum of the bees in and about their hives and over the blossoms, the calls and songs of the bluebird, the oriole, the meadow-lark and other familiar bird friends, the sound of the blacksmith's hammer on the anvil—all have resolved themselves into one grand symphony which my ear will never cease to hear, and whose spell will always influence me to seek haunts of nature remote from the city.