

Documents

THE REMOVAL OF THE STATE CAPITAL TO INDIANAPOLIS

Foreword

By MILDRED C. STOLER

The author of the following account relating to the removal of the state capital from Corydon to Indianapolis was a participant in the event. At that time she was Miss Mary Catherine Anderson, of Vevay, daughter of Robert Anderson, a Revolutionary War soldier, and Catherine (Dumont) Anderson. In 1818 Samuel Merrill, a young lawyer of Vevay, had married her sister, Lydia Jane. When he was elected state treasurer he moved to Corydon and to him fell the task of moving the stout treasury box and the other goods and chattels of the government to the new capital. Mary Catherine and her brother, William Anderson, apparently decided to share their sister's fortunes in the wilderness capital and so joined the little party conducted by Mr. Merrill.

Only two years later, in 1826, Mary Catherine married Isaac Naylor, a veteran of many Indian battles including the famous action at Tippecanoe. His account of that battle was published in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, II, 163-169. His autobiography also appeared in the *Magazine*, IV, 134-140. In 1833 they moved to Crawfordsville where Mr. Naylor quickly became active in civic affairs. A few years later he began his long service as a circuit judge.

Mrs. Naylor's account is more detailed than that of Samuel Merrill, which is reprinted here from Jacob Piatt Dunn's *Greater Indianapolis* (I,75-6) for purposes of comparison. The Indiana State Library has a copy of Mrs. Naylor's narrative. The original is in the possession of her granddaughters, Miss Flora Naylor Hay and Mrs. Wirt E. Humphrey.

[MRS. NAYLOR'S ACCOUNT]

It was a bright and lovely day in October,¹ 1824, that we left Corydon for the seat of government. The party consisted of six of the Merrill family, Mr. Merrill, my sister, and their three children, my brother William and this scribbler. My sister had heard that the road most of

¹ Mr. Merrill gives the month as November in a report made in January, 1827, on the times when he had been absent from his office. *House Journal*, 11th Sess., 1826, p. 484.

the way was impassible; she insisted that Mr. Siebert,² a large man with a team of horses, none stronger in Indiana, should take us. Four of the horses were white, the fifth gray, called the lead horse. Mr. Siebert was proud of his horses, well he might be. I have, I think, never seen as grand a team. Yet I could not ride in the wagon, as it was covered, and made me sick; but my sister and her children rode all the way to Indianapolis. I walked the eleven miles of our first day's journey.

The house where we spent the first night was a good looking frame house. I think the landlord had a saw mill near. Here I must digress a little. Mr. John Douglass was State Printer at that time and they moved with us. Mrs. Douglass had three children. They rode in their wagon all the way. Mr. Douglass had a horse that he rode. They had a cow tied to the back of the wagon. When the roads became very bad, they loosed the cow, and she was sure to run to the woods. I would mount his horse and ride for the cow, and bring her back. Well, I will return to that first night.

When we entered the house, Mrs. Douglass, being very tired, from holding her babe, laid him on the bed. The woman screamed: "Take that child off my bed, for it has the itch." We all felt indignant and yet felt funny, for Mrs. Douglass always kept her little ones clean, of all skin diseases. Part of us slept on the floor.

The young lady of the house had a young man visiting her. They sat up late in the room that we were huddled in. They sat by the fire all night on opposite sides of the fireplace, never moving up. He wore a coon-skin [cap] with the tail attached, and little Jane Merrill thought he was a bear. Not a word was spoken by either of the lovers; they only gazed at each other.

We were, I think, ten days on our way.³ The treasury box was large and strong. Whether there was much money in it, I cannot say; but I think not much. This box had to have a place in this large wagon, indeed wherever we or the Merrill family went, this box was sure to go. I do not remember about stopping at night after the first night. I presume we did. I know my sister looked very tired. She had the care of the children in the wagon. The youngest one, Catharine, whenever she would see me, would put out her hands for me to take her. I would carry her awhile. She did not like the jolting, and she may have been sick. I was too sick when riding to take any care of the children; but they were as good as could be. They did not cry.

The road was laid with rails or logs for miles, then covered with water that seemed bottomless. When the horses and wagon would go down, it seemed they might have reached China. At such times, my sister would scream with fright. One day we traveled two miles and a half only. The water lay in the road too deep to venture in and trees had to be felled to make a road around. Once, Mr. Douglass's wagon stuck fast, and had to be pried out. The next morning after traveling that short distance, Mr. Merrill said when we were ready to start; looking back to

² Spelled *Seybert* in the bill for expenses of the journey presented to the legislature by Mr. Merrill. *Senate Journal*, 9th Sess., 1825, p. 7.

³ Mr. Merrill says two weeks in the account reprinted from Dunn's *Greater Indianapolis*. In the report referred to in Note 1, he states that he was absent from his office fifteen days on this occasion.

where we had started the day before: "Suppose we go back and take a fresh start." However, we journeyed forward.

I walked all the way, only when we came near Columbus, as it was raining; which it did after the first day almost every day. When near Columbus, Mr. Merrill insisted on my riding in the wagon; the first thing I knew he lifted me into the wagon. I sat there until we reached the hotel, which looked fine with a handsome sign. We had a tolerable supper. Mr. Siebert declared the tea was made of the water that eggs had been cooked in.

I do not remember how we were dressed. I know we were quite decent looking when we reached Indianapolis.

Mr. Siebert had a fashion of putting bells on his horses whenever we came near a town. We begged him to leave them off when he drove into Indianapolis; but he wouldn't consent. So we went into the seat of government with fine, large, strong horses strung with bells, all ringing. The sound brought the good people out to stare at us. I was glad to be in a covered wagon at that time. We all stopped at Blake & Henderson's Hotel, where we had an excellent supper; and we certainly did justice to it. We went that night to a room (frame) without lathing or plastering. The weather had become cold, so that it was not easy to keep warm although we had a rousing fire.

Mr. Merrill had rented a cottage on West Washington street, but Mr. Calvin Fletcher was living in it, and couldn't move out for some time; for he could not find an empty house. So he offered us a room, there being but two rooms in the house. We took the one farthest from a summer kitchen. For us to get into this kitchen we had to go out of the front door, and then either climb a rail fence or pass through Mrs. Fletcher's room. In our room we had the treasury box. One morning my sister took up the ashes from the fireplace in the kitchen, putting them in a barrel, embers being in the ashes, burning slowly all day. In the night, I awoke from the light shining on me, and the kitchen burned with its contents. Everything was carried out of the house into the middle of Washington street with a clean deep snow to rest on while the fire was put out. However, in a few weeks, Mr. Fletcher moved out, and we felt as if we were living in a mansion. I think we were as happy with our surroundings as we are now.

Crawfordsville, August 24, 1888.

Mary Catherine Naylor

[THE ACCOUNT OF SAMUEL MERRILL]

The journey of about one hundred and sixty miles occupied two weeks. The best day's travel was eleven miles. One day the wagons accomplished but two miles, passages through the woods having to be cut on account of the impassable character of the road. Four four-horse wagons and one or two saddle horses formed the means of conveyance for the two families, consisting of about a dozen persons, and for a printing press and the state treasury of silver in strong wooden boxes. The gentlemen slept in the wagons or on the ground to protect the silver. The families found shelter at night in log cabins which stood along the road at rare though not inconvenient intervals. The country people

were, many of them, as rude as their dwellings, which usually consisted of but one room, serving for all the purposes of domestic life,—cooking, eating, sleeping, spinning and weaving, and the entertainment of company. At one place a young man, who perhaps had come miles to visit his sweetheart, sat up with her all night on the only vacant space in the room, the hearth of the big fireplace. He kept on his cap, which was of coonskin, the tail hanging down behind, and gave the children the impression that he was a bear.⁴

LETTERS OF PRIVATES COOK AND BALL

Introduction¹

The writer of the letters here printed, Charles N. Cook, was born and reared in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where his father was a shoemaker and a small farmer. In the spring of 1853, when twenty-three years of age, he set out for California with the hope of making his fortune. An older brother, Edward Cook, who lived in the new state, made that distant frontier seem less remote. The young adventurer, instead of making the trip by land, chose the water route by way of the Isthmus of Panama, at that time very widely advertised, although the isthmian railroad had not yet been built.

No record of the trip remains save that his brother met him at San Francisco and together they went to Stockton where the older brother had staked out a claim. Evidently the gold did not "pan out" very well for the young fortune hunter. A letter written to his father and mother on October 28, 1853, shows him somewhat disillusioned and homesick but still hopeful of making his "pile".² He then expected to remain from two to five years, but he was back in his Berkshire Hills by the return of cold weather in the fall of 1854. Sixteen months of California was enough. Like many another ambitious youth of his generation he left more gold in California than he took away.

Two years later the wanderlust seized him and again he went West but to a more settled country this time. His oldest

⁴ Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, I, 75-76.

¹ The original copies of many letters written by Privates Charles N. Cook and Lafayette Ball during the Civil War are in the possession of Mrs. John Hodge of Oxford, Ohio, a daughter of the former. Most of the letters in the collection were written to Margaret Ball by Private Cook while in the army. A few months after Appomattox, the returned veteran married Miss Ball. The Rev. H. A. Smith, a graduate-instructor at Miami University during 1930-1931, caused copies of the correspondence to be prepared which he carefully checked. Credit for the introduction and other explanatory matter also belongs to Mr. Smith, the *Editor* having made only such modifications and added such comment as was rendered necessary by the omission of various letters or parts of letters.

² Charles N. Cook to his father and mother, Nicholas (California), Oct. 28, 1853.