The Disappearance of New London

By MILDRED HOLSAPPLE

In an old book now filed in the Jefferson County recorder's office at Madison, Indiana, may be found the plat for a town called New London "as lain out within the county of Jefferson, upon the N. E. Quarter of section No. 6 of Town [ship] No. 2 Range No. 10 and on a fraction joining in the Jeffersonville district."¹ On the fifth day of August, 1815, this plat was exhibited in the recorder's office and recorded on the eighth day of the same month. The town was thus laid out before Indiana became a state. The site described is in what is now Saluda Township in the southern part of the County.

The name of Samuel Alexander, as Justice of Peace, is signed in the plat book to the following statement:

State of Indiana
Jefferson County—Be it remembered that on the fourth day of August, 1815, personally appeared the within named Benjamin W. Hurst and made oath that this was the original plat of the town of New London or a true copy of the same and complied with all the requirements of the Law done before me, a justice of peace, in and for the county aforesaid the day aforesaid.

Hurst was the surveyor and the plat was recorded by Colonel John Paul, the first recorder of Jefferson County, commissioned December 18, 1810. Colonel Paul came to this district in 1809. After buying the site of Madison at a public lands sale held in Jeffersonville, he, with the help of Lewis Davis and Jonathan Lyons, laid out the town of Madison. Colonel Paul was one of the soldiers who helped Colonel George Rogers Clark capture Kaskaskia and Vincennes. In Madison he gained the distinction of being the first proprietor by the establishment of a saw mill in Canaan Valley at the edge of the town. He also assisted in the organization of the Bank of Madison which was chartered by the Territorial Legislature in 1814.²

New London was located on the Ohio River, approximately three and a half miles below the site of Hanover College. It was built on the river bank and five streets were laid

¹ Plat Book, No. 1, Jefferson County, Indiana.
out parallel to the river with three long and two shorter ones crossing the five at right angles. Thus the town plan was in the shape of the letter L reversed. First Street ran next to the river and was paralleled by Second, Third, Fourth, and Market Streets. The cross streets, with the exception of Main Street, were not named in the plat.

The town plan provided for a public square with each side 280 feet long. Market and Main Streets were to be eighty feet wide, while each of the others was to be sixty. A strip ten feet in width was allowed for each alley while the lots were to be forty-five by one hundred and fifty feet. The plat included one hundred eighty four lots. All that now remains of New London is the top of a cistern. The very land on which the village was located has been carried away by the Ohio on its course down stream.

As local historians and villagers have it, the town once rivaled Madison in population and prosperity. A road leading south from Hanover towards Charlestown is yet referred to at times as the New London road, though few people know why it is so called. The persons seemingly best acquainted with the story are Mr. and Mrs. Dave Baylor, who live in Saluda Township at the head of Hearts Falls. The Falls, which overlook the valley where New London once stood, have an Indian lore of their own. Mr. Baylor, now an old man and in ill health as a result of a stroke of paralysis, was able to furnish several items concerning the town from actual memory of the place and from stories told to him by others. Mrs. Baylor's information came from an older sister.

The first and most numerous inhabitants of New London were members of the Hale family. Superintendent Emery O. Muncie, of the City Schools of Madison in his "History of Jefferson County," mentions an Abel B. Hale of Hanover, whose license to sell groceries and distilled spirits was rescinded. The name is not prominent in the vicinity now.

In an atlas of the state of Indiana, published as late as 1876, the name New London appears on a map of Jefferson County. The symbols show that there was a school in the village, but no church is indicated. It would probably be safe to guess that what religious element there was in the neigh-

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*Plat Book, No. 1.

*Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana (Chicago, 1876).
borhood, if any, was Baptist, since that was the most prominent sect during the early period and the church nearest the site at the present is of the Baptist denomination.

At some time, presumably after 1876, the remaining New Londoners seem to have moved away from the town. There are two legends which developed through attempts to explain this desertion of the village. A romantic and highly fantastic tradition is that river pirates made it unsafe for habitation. It is true that previous to the Civil War points along the Ohio were the scenes of pirate activities, but there is no evidence to prove that New London was disturbed by such outlaws. Captain Leander Gordon, now living in Hanover, who was a pilot on the Ohio River for sixty-five years, has a slight remembrance of the town. He recalls the fact that his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Dean Gordon, were married in New London, but he thinks that they did not live there after marriage.

The other tradition, the one which Mr. Baylor felt very sure about, was that New London was the seat of one of a chain of counterfeiting gangs with the main branch at Saint Louis. It was not far from, possibly on, the "Old National Road," as it was called by the villagers, which ran through Jeffersonville, Vincennes, and Saint Louis. It is thought that government officials broke up this gang or that the members scattered to avoid arrest.

A different reason for the depopulation of the settlement was offered by Captain Gordon. His explanation seems more credible than the two presented above. High waters, a prelude to the final destruction, flooded the town at various times. The natural result was that the people moved out from time to time to protect themselves and their personal property. After one of these floods, it was found that the land on which the vacated town had been located had been literally washed away. Mrs. Baylor remembered hearing her sister tell of seeing some undermined houses fall into the river. Professor Grant T. Wickwire, head of the department of Geology at Hanover College, agrees that such a thing as that described by Captain Gordon could easily have happened, since New London was situated in a curve of the Ohio where the full force of the current attacked the fertile and fairly loose soil.

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6 Madison (pamphlet).
New London is no longer on the map of Jefferson County. It is now only another of Southern Indiana's "ghost towns." When traveling over the picturesque country along the Ohio one may see several communities that were once thriving centers, but which are now only little clusters of homesteads. New London, however, seems to be the only one that was destroyed by the Ohio, which river has since the beginning of mid-western settlement had much to do with the development of Indiana's political and economic history.