

Documents

EARLY CLARKSVILLE

A little corner of Indiana's history that will bear further study is Clarksville. It was founded before Marietta, Ohio, and because of the residence of George Rogers Clark it was quite well known. It belongs to those early communities that formed their own governments such as Watauga, Nashville, Transylvania, and Westsylvania. It was, however, soon overshadowed by Louisville across the Ohio, and even by neighboring towns on the Indiana shore. It apparently had a continuous organized existence through the years.

The following selections illustrate some of the early features of its history. In addition the Indiana Room of the Indiana State Library has an interesting manuscript volume, "Minute Book No 1, Board of Trustees, Town of Clarksville, Indiana, 1784-1889." It began with the second meeting of the board in 1784, no record of the first meeting having been kept. The last meeting recorded in this volume was dated October 21, 1889. William H. English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio, 1778-1783 . . .* (2 vols., Indianapolis, Indiana, 1896), II, 833, 836, quotes from another record for Clark's Grant, but the above is for Clarksville.

Additional study may not yield any startling discoveries or conclusions, for the subject is admittedly small, but it is surprising that Indiana should have neglected this earliest of American settlements in the Old Northwest. It has possibilities as a shrine to the frontier soldiers and settlers and among them was the illustrious figure of George Rogers Clark.

AN ACT PASSED FOR ESTABLISHING CLARKSVILLE, OCTOBER, 1873.

II. *And be it further enacted*, That a plat of the said one thousand acres of land laid off for a town, shall be returned by the surveyor to the court of the county of Jefferson, to be by the clerk thereof recorded, and thereupon the same shall be, and is hereby vested in William Fleming, John Edwards, John Campbell, Walker Daniel, George Rogers Clark, John Montgomery, Abraham Chaplin, John Bailey, Robert Todd, and William Clark, gentlemen, trustees, to be by them, or any five of them, laid off into lots of half an acre each, with convenient streets and public lots, which shall be and the same is hereby established a town by the name of Clarksville. That

after the said lands shall be laid off into lots and streets, the said trustees, or any five of them, shall proceed to sell the same, or so many as they shall judge expedient, at public auction, for the best price that can be had, the time and place of sale being previously advertised two months at the court-houses of the adjacent counties; the purchasers respectively to hold their said lots, subject to the condition of building on each a dwelling-house twenty feet by eighteen at least, with a brick or stone chimney, to be finished within three years from the day of sale; and the said trustees, or any five of them, are hereby empowered to convey the said lots to the purchasers thereof in fee simple, subject to the condition aforesaid; and the money arising from such sale shall be applied by the said trustees in such manner as they may judge most beneficial for the inhabitants of the said town; that the said trustees, or the major part of them, shall have power from time to time to settle and determine all disputes concerning the bounds of the said lots, and to settle such rules and orders for the regular building thereon as to them shall seem best and most convenient; and in case of the death, removal out of the county, or other legal disability, of any of the said trustees, the remaining trustees shall supply such vacancies by electing others from time to time, who shall be vested with the same powers as those particularly nominated in this act.—The purchasers of the said lots, so soon as they shall have saved the same according to their respective deeds of conveyance, shall have and enjoy all the rights, privileges, and immunities which the freeholders and inhabitants of other towns in this state, not incorporated, hold and enjoy. If the purchaser of any lot shall fail to build thereon within the time before limited, the said trustees, or a major part of them, may thereupon enter into such lot, and may either sell the same again and apply the money towards repairing the streets, or in any other way for the benefit of the said town, or appropriate such lot to the public use of the inhabitants of the said town.¹

MINUTES OF THE CLARKSVILLE CONVENTION

Resolves of a Convention, held at Clarksville on thursday the 27th day of January 1785.—

At a convention held at Clarksville on thursday the 27th of January 1785. by the Inhabitants of the Town for the purpose of forming some Laws or regulations to remedy sundry grievances which the said Inhabitants have hitherto lain under. Present: *Valentine Thomas Dalton*, *John Jackson*, *John Vaughan*, *Robert George*, *William Barget*, *Jonas Scoggin*, *John McFerson*, *Francis Holland*, *John Nelson*, *Christopher Huet*, *Mordecai Richards* & *William Clark*, being a Majority of those actually settled in the said Town of Clarksville.—

The House proceeds to the election of a Chairman when *M. Wm Clark* was elected.—

1st Resolved, that whereas the Honble the Congress of the united States have not, as yet adopted any mode or plan for the Regulation

¹ William W. Hening (ed.), *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia* (13 vols., Richmond, Virginia, 1809-1823), XI (1823), 336-337.

& Government of this our infant Settlement, and it is become necessary to form certain Regulations for the better security of our Lives & property; The Inhabitants of this Town have a right to assemble from time to time & enact suitable Laws to maintain peace & tranquillity among the People; and which may not be, in comptable with the Constitution of the united States, or the Resolutions of Congress.—

2d Resolved that some Tribunal be established, with power to summon parties, & hear & Determine all matters of Controversy & award punishment; and whose judgment shall be final.—

3d. Resolved that whereas this Convention, for want of time & the Assistance of able men, cannot at present form such & somany Laws as may be necessary to direct the Tribunal to be established by this Convention, in their proceedings in every particular; The said Tribunal so established shall in giving Judgment, govern themselves, as near as circumstances will admit, by the Laws of Virginia though they shall not be obliged to empanel Juries & regulate their proceedings by the sundry forms there laid down which would be attended with difficulty & trouble, but shall proceed & determine Controversies, and regulate their proceedings in such manner, as to them shall seem best and most likely to maintain peace & good order among the Inhabitants & the number of people going to & from this place, other than in such cases where a Convention of the Inhabitants shall make particular provision.—

4th Resolved that *William Clark, Robert George, John McFerson, & Valentine Thomas Dalton* be appointed to exercise the Judiciary authority, shall take an oath of Office to do equal right & Justice to all Men without favour, affection or partiality to the best of their Judgment, & to be styled Magistrates; and they, or any three of them shall constitute a Court, with power to Summon parties, & hear & determine all matters of Controversy whatsoever.—

5th Resolved that on Complaint made to any one of the Magistrates, he shall direct the Sheriff, to be appointed by this Convention, to summon the Defendant to appear at a certain time & place to be appointed to answer the Complaint: and if the Complaint shall be for debt, & above the sum of twenty Shillings or the value, the Sheriff shall also by the direction of the Magistrate, summon the other members to attend & constitute a Court to determine the Controversy & give Judgment, which shall be executed by the Sheriff as they may direct.— And in case the complaint shall not be for more than twenty Shillings, any one Magistrate may summon the defendant as aforesaid & hear & determine the matter, & give Judgment accordingly—

6th Resolved that when Judgment shall be given, against any person for money, the Sheriff shall by Warrant from the Court take somuch of the Goods & Chattels of the Delinquent as will be sufficient to satisfy the same, and after giving Eight days public notice shall sell such Goods at public auction to satisfy the Judgment.—

7th Resolved that John Jackson be appointed Sheriff who shall take an Oath of Office, & have power to call on persons to assist him in the execution of his duty in cases of necessity.—

By order of the House
W. Clark Chn.

At a Convention held at Clarksville on monday the 12th of November 1787 present *Robert George John Jackson Buckner Pittman John Martin, William Thompson, John Reagh, William Thompson jr John Cleghorn & William Clark*, being a majority of the Inhabitants of the Town aforesaid.—

1st Resolved that whereas the Sixth Resolution of a Convention held in the Town the 27th of January 1785, directing the Goods of A Debter to be sold. at a Short period. after Judgment obtained against them, is found to be oppressive, the same is hereby repealed and made void.²

Clarksville, (Indiana), 1788

J'ai été de là à Carleville. L'on a bien dit la beauté de la jolie ville. Il n'y a à présent que sept ou huit maisons ce qui est surprenant. L'air y est plus sec qu'à Louisville. L'on m'a assuré que l'on y est exempt de fièvres. Le situation est agréable et il y a quatre ans que la première maison fut bâtie. Les terres y sont délicieuses et même surprenantes pour la bonté, mais personne n'y vient; je ne saurais en donner d'autre raison si ce n'est que les hommes veulent aller où il y a des hommes.³

I went from there to Clarksville (Carlqueville). Much has been said of the beauty of the little town. There are at present only seven or eight houses, which is surprising. The air is drier there than at Louisville. They assure me they are free from fevers. The situation is fine and it is only four years since the first house was built. The lands there are splendid and even amazing in goodness, but no one goes there. I can give no other reason for this unless it be that men wish to go where there are men.⁴

Clarksville, 1805.

At the lower end of the falls is the deserted village of Clarksburgh, in which General Clark himself resides. I had the pleasure of seeing this celebrated warrior, at his lonely cottage seated on Clark's point, This point is situated at the upper end of the village and opposite the lower rapid, commanding a full and delightful view of the falls, particularly the *zigzag* channel which is only navigated at low water. The General has not taken much pains to improve this commanding and beautiful spot, having only raised a small cabin, but it is capable of being made one of the handsomest seats in the world.⁵

² Draper MSS 1M103-105. Permission to publish this document was given by the Wisconsin State Historical Society. The document is in the Library of this Society.

³ H. Fouré Selter, *L'Odysée Américaine d'une Famille Française Le Docteur Antoine Saugrain* (Baltimore, Maryland, 1936), 51-52.

⁴ Eugene F. Bliss, "Dr. Saugrain's Note-Books, 1788," in the *Proceedings* of the American Antiquarian Society, new series (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1882-), XIX (1909), 225.

⁵ "Memorandums of a Tour made by Josiah Espy in the States of Ohio and Kentucky and Indiana Territory in 1805," in the *Ohio Valley Historical Series* (7 vols., Cincinnati, Ohio, 1868-1871), VII (1871), pp. 13-14.