

The Death of a Legend

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A romantic story has long been associated with a granite boulder located for many years in a yard on Sixth Street in Vincennes, Indiana. According to the usually accepted version of the story, it was brought to town from a woods near the present St. Vincent School, formerly called the Highlands Orphanage. In its woodland setting it had reputedly served as a trysting-place for Jefferson Davis and Sarah Knox Taylor, daughter of Zachary, during their courtship. At the same time Jeremiah Donovan, a prominent citizen of the county, was courting Christopher Wyant's daughter Susan. The two couples, according to the story, often met at the boulder and exchanged greetings and in sentimental memory of these meetings Donovan later brought the stone to Vincennes and placed it in his yard.

It is undisputed historical truth that Zachary Taylor was stationed at Fort Knox, Vincennes, and that his daughter Sarah Knox was born during the brief time that he had his family with him at that post.¹ The earliest printed references to his period of residence in Vincennes, however, make no mention of a Jefferson Davis-Sarah Knox Taylor courtship. A historical atlas of Indiana, published in 1876, gave the following information:

"The mansion of Governor Harrison still remains, also that of Judge Parke, now owned by Mr. Wise. This house was once occupied by Captain Zachary Taylor; and his daughter, who afterwards became the wife of Jefferson Davis, was born in it."²

An atlas of Knox County, published in 1880, did not mention Taylor in any way,³ but a county history, published in 1886, included in a description of Vincennes as it appeared in 1805 this account of Taylor's residence:

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¹ Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor, Soldier of the Republic* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1941), 57.

² *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Indiana* (Baskin and Foster, Chicago, 1876), 250.

³ *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana* (D. J. Lake and Co., Philadelphia, 1880).

"Coming down St. Louis Street, upon the right hand stood the residence of Judge Benjamin Parke, a frame cottage standing near the center of the grounds of John Wise. In this Capt. Zachary Taylor lived for a time, and here a daughter was born, who afterward became the wife of Jefferson Davis, President of the Southern Confederacy. Few towns can boast of having been the home of two presidents and the birth-place of the wife of a third."⁴

In the early years of the present century three histories of the town and a historical atlas of the county were published, all written by residents. Each work made mention of Taylor. Henry S. Cauthorn, whose history appeared in 1902, expressly denied the truth of the courtship story but recorded the birth of Jessie [*sic*] Taylor.⁵ Hubbard Madison Smith in his work published the same year gave the "legend," as he called it, some prominence. He admitted that it might be fiction and cited reasons pro and con, but concluded with these words:

"Now let me ask you what object Mr. Donovan had in going to the trouble and expense of removing an unprepossessing-looking, unshapely boulder to his front yard if some romance or pleasing reminiscence was not connected with it?"⁶

The third historian, J. P. Hodge, whose work was also published in 1902, mentioned only Taylor's military service in the Territory.⁷ F. C. Hardacre, compiler of the historical atlas, recorded Taylor's brief residence in Vincennes and his daughter's marriage to Davis. He added:

"While an officer in the United States Army, Jefferson Davis was stationed at old Fort Knox for a season. Here he met and courted Miss Taylor, daughter of General Taylor, who became his first wife."⁸

In 1911 another history, the most impressive as to length and format, was published. The author, George E. Greene, told the story at some length and with no reservations, giv-

⁴ *History of Knox and Daviess Counties, Indiana* (The Goodspeed Publishing Company, Chicago, 1886), 241.

⁵ Henry S. Cauthorn, *A History of the City of Vincennes, Indiana from 1702 to 1901* (Terre Haute, Indiana, 1902), 26, 185-186.

⁶ Hubbard M. Smith, *Historical Sketches of Old Vincennes* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1902), 280-282.

⁷ J. P. Hodge, *Vincennes in Picture and Story* (n.p., 1902), 69, 83.

⁸ F. C. Hardacre (comp.), *Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana* (Vincennes, Indiana, 1903), 39.

ing Donovan himself as the source.⁹ As Donovan died in 1886 at a very advanced age and was, according to his published obituary notices, reticent, it seems doubtful that Greene heard him relate the tale.¹⁰

Variations, many contradictory, were added by word of mouth; a few that make a reasonable sequence, follow. The Wyants and Taylors were said to have been near neighbors in Vincennes, and the two mothers mutually helpful in caring for the infants Sarah and Susan. At this time the Wyants were reputedly living on Lot 9, Old Town, and the Taylors were placed in the next block, in the Parke-Wise residence. Years later, Knox or Knoxy as she was called, supposedly came to visit the Wyants and it was then that the courtship took place. Davis's presence was accounted for by crediting him with an assignment to guard stages between St. Louis and Louisville, the route of course passing through Vincennes. Each suitor was supposed to own a pair of fine riding horses and it was on these that the two couples rode out to the boulder.¹¹ The boulder itself was believed to be a meteorite.

⁹ George E. Greene, *History of Old Vincennes and Knox County, Indiana* (2 vols., Chicago, 1911), I, 319.

¹⁰ Vincennes, Indiana, *Daily Sun*, January 23, 1886. "At 3 o'clock this morning, 23rd, Mr. Jeremiah Donovan passed quietly from this life at the residence of his son Ralph, near the Highlands, three miles east of the city. . . . Mr. Donovan leaves two immediate descendants, a son Ralph . . . and one daughter, Mrs. Hedekin, residing at Fort Wayne. . . . We have no data at hand showing the place or time of birth of the subject of this sketch as he was always very reticent on the question, especially as to his age. It is known, however that he had long passed the age of ninety and was probably nearing the century mark and was beyond question the oldest man in the county. He came to this place early in the present century and engaged in his trade (tanner) with John Cleves Symmes Harrison, son of President Harrison. He was a great friend of the latter and knew him personally and intimately. Mr. Donovan was city marshal of Vincennes for thirty years beginning way back under the old Borough regime. . . . His wife's father, Christopher Wyant, was the first sheriff of the county in 1785 and was a personal friend of Winthrop Sargent." *Ibid.*, January 27, 1886. "It is a matter of regret that the deceased left no record of his life which must have been an interesting and eventful one." By way of showing the unreliability of early tradition, one item in the above may be corrected. Knox County was set up June 20, 1790. John Small was appointed the first sheriff, June 22. Christopher Wyant was appointed Gentleman Coroner, July 3. He was appointed sheriff October 10, 1793, vice John Small resigned, and Wyant served until February 18, 1800. Clarence E. Carter (comp. and ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington, 1934-), III, *The Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1803*, pp. 313, 316, 414-415, 523. Donovan was, however, a tanner in his earlier days. Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, July 3, 1824.

¹¹ Much of this tradition was supplied by Mrs. Emily Adams Emerson, a resident of Vincennes, Indiana.

Spread thus by the printed word as well as by hearsay, the story became firmly fixed in the annals of the town and the boulder was marked as one of Vincennes' historic spots.

In 1933 the writer was conducting the late Louise Phelps Kellogg, eminent historian, on a tour of Vincennes. Upon reading the marker at the boulder, Miss Kellogg said that this story of Jefferson Davis and Sarah Knox Taylor was not true and that the courtship took place at Fort Crawford, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. Just at this time a new edition of the *Historic Vincennes Tourist's Guide* issued by the Fort-nightly Club was in preparation and the question naturally arose as to whether the story of the boulder should again be given a place in the booklet.

Checking of dates and correspondence with authorities on Taylor, including descendants, showed that many parts of the local legend were erroneous. Known facts were briefly as follows: Taylor was stationed at Fort Knox, Vincennes, during parts of each year from 1811 to and including 1814, the total period of his residence being about twenty months. He was in and out of Fort Knox, fighting Indians, visiting his family in Kentucky, and temporarily assuming command of the forces in Missouri Territory. He was at Fort Knox, however, longer than at any other place during the War of 1812, and therefore it may be assumed that Vincennes was his headquarters during a major part of that war.¹²

When Taylor first came to Vincennes, Fort Knox was on a bluff up the Wabash River about three miles. It had been moved from the town in 1803.¹³ Early in 1813 it was again established in the village¹⁴ in a location at present unknown, but probably not the spot occupied by the Fort Knox of 1787, the foot of Buntin Street, as houses had been built thereon.¹⁵

¹² Holman Hamilton, Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Florence G. Watts, Vincennes, Indiana, April 24, 1935.

¹³ The Secretary of War to Cornelius Lyman, August 4, 1803, in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, VII, *The Territory of Indiana* (1939), 117. Cornelius Lyman, Captain, October 1, 1804, Warrant No. 7842. For drawing the deeds of a tract of land whereon the fort, near Vincennes, is erected, \$25. *American State Papers: Military Affairs* (7 vols., Washington, 1832-1861), I, 180.

¹⁴ Logan Esarey (ed.), *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison* (2 vols., Indianapolis, Indiana, 1922), II, 309, 378, 381-382, 406-407. These volumes are VII and IX of the *Indiana Historical Collections* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1916-).

¹⁵ Vincennes, Indiana, *The Western Sun*, January 4, 1817. "Public Sale. Will be sold to the highest bidder, on Saturday, the 11th inst. at the house of Mark Barnett, a number of HOUSES on the lot on which Fort Knox formerly stood."

Perhaps the return of the fort to town may have influenced Taylor to bring his family to Vincennes; living conditions there would have been easier and more pleasant than at the garrison some miles away. The Taylors were in Vincennes during the winter of 1813-1814. There their second daughter was born March 6, 1814. Her middle name was in honor of the fort.

Major Taylor left the army in 1815 and retired to his farm in Kentucky. In 1816 he rejoined the army and was sent to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where he became commandant of Fort Howard. He subsequently served in the south, at Fort Snelling in present Minnesota, and at Fort Crawford, where he was in command in 1829. He was at that post at various times until 1836.¹⁶

As Fort Knox was abandoned in 1816,¹⁷ it is obvious that he had no tour of duty there after that year; nor could Jefferson Davis have been stationed at Vincennes, as the most cursory examination of his early history shows. Born in Kentucky in 1808 and reared in Mississippi, he was graduated from West Point in 1828. His military assignments included Jefferson Barracks, Fort Crawford in 1829, (when Sarah Knox Taylor was only fifteen) Fort Winnebago and again Fort Crawford. He was in and out of that post until he was assigned to the First Regiment of Dragoons in 1833. He spent the next two years at Fort Gibson. From there his courtship of Knox, begun during his second assignment to Fort Crawford, was continued by letter.

In 1835 Lieutenant Davis resigned from the army.¹⁸ Knox Taylor, then twenty-one years old, went to Louisville where she and Davis were married at the home of her aunt

¹⁶ Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor*, Chronology, xv, xvi.

¹⁷ An approximate date for the abandonment may be deduced from notices appearing in the Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun* in 1816. From January 6 through March 30 most of the issues carried notices requesting that persons holding arms belonging to the government return them to the commanding officer at Vincennes. These were signed by John T. Chunn, Brevet Major commanding at Fort Knox. From April 30 through June 8 the notices directed that arms be delivered to William Johns in Vincennes. Major Chunn also signed these later notices but did not mention his post. He was, however, at Fort Harrison for the Fourth of July celebration (issue of August 3).

¹⁸ For facts concerning the early life of Jefferson Davis, *Jefferson Davis, a Memoir by his Wife* (New York, 1890), and Milo M. Quaife, "The Northwestern Career of Jefferson Davis," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (Springfield, Illinois, 1908-), XVI (1923), 1-19, were consulted.

on June 17. This aunt was Elizabeth, Taylor's eldest sister, who had married her second cousin, John Gibson Taylor. Hancock Taylor, Zachary's brother, gave the bride away. Present at the wedding were Dr. and Mrs. Wood, Knox's sister and brother-in-law, as well as others of the Taylor kindred.¹⁹ Although the bride's father seemed not entirely resigned to the marriage, he wrote her affectionately and supplied her with money.²⁰

Jefferson Davis and his bride went to Mississippi, where, less than three months after the marriage, she died of malaria. Davis himself was very ill with the same disease. He was long in recovering from it and even longer in recovering from his grief, for he remained more or less a recluse from society for eight years and did not marry Varina Howell until 1845.

There seemed to be one faint possibility that Davis and Knox might have seen each other in Vincennes. He was sent to Louisville shortly after March 2, 1833, on recruiting duty for the Dragoons.²¹ He might have gone overland between St. Louis and Louisville and thus have passed through Vincennes. But it is unlikely that the Taylors would have permitted their daughter to come to Vincennes without them, and they were definitely at Fort Crawford at the time.²² No record of such a visit has appeared in Vincennes.

The Davis-Taylor wedding could hardly be called an elopement, yet tales sprang up of flights from Fort Gibson, from Fort Crawford in several directions and by several methods, including another four-horse affair in which they were reputedly joined by Lieutenant George Wilson and Mary Street. St. Louis was named as the place of the wedding cere-

¹⁹ Letter from Alex B. Randall, Philadelphia, February 24, 1934, to Florence G. Watts enclosing an article from the Baltimore, Maryland, *Sun*, October 25, 1906, reprinted from the New York *Times*, October 20, 1906. This article gives an account of the marriage by Mrs. Philip Pendleton Dandridge, Knox's younger sister, Betty. Mr. Randall was a son of Mary Virginia Taylor (Mrs. Burton Randall), daughter of Mrs. John Gibson Taylor. For an account of the discovery of the marriage bond of Jefferson Davis and Sarah Knox Taylor in the Jefferson County, Kentucky, Courthouse see New York *Times*, November 12, 1933, and *Filson Club History Quarterly* (Louisville, Kentucky, 1926-), VIII (1934), 229. See also Walter C. Fleming, "Jefferson Davis' First Marriage," in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (14 vols., Oxford, Mississippi, 1894-1914), XII (1912), 21-36.

²⁰ Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor*, 106.

²¹ Quaife, "The Northwestern Career of Jefferson Davis," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVI, 15.

²² Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor*, 106.

mony, and there was a tale of a Kentucky courtship, this time by a spring and not on a boulder.²³ Every place with which Davis had any connection from his graduation to his marriage, and even Taylor's very early Vincennes residence, served as the locale of a romantic story.

In view of the above information, it was decided to remove the boulder story from the *Tourist's Guide*, merely mentioning the fact that Sarah Knox Taylor was born in the Old Post.

A fresh impetus to further investigation came with the news that a letter from Jefferson Davis on the subject of the boulder had been found in Vincennes. It was in the possession of Mrs. Harry Beggs, a niece of historian George Greene, and was obtained from her. Davis had addressed his letter to a Mrs. Emma E. Peck, and the question at once arose as to who she was and why she was interested in the boulder. Correspondence with repositories of Davis material brought to light a letter from her to Davis. It is in the collections of the Confederate Literary Society, housed in the Confederate Museum, Richmond, Virginia. A typed copy of Mrs. Peck's letter was supplied. The letters follow.

"Vincennes, May 25th, 1886

Hon. Jefferson Davis

In the midst of the excitement and diversity of sentiment and opinion interesting the world today, in regard to yourself, I beg you will not consider my letter an intrusion or the subject of it, unworthy your notice. My family have in their possession a stone, the legend of which, is, that it came from Col. Z. Taylor's farm near Vincennes, and, that *you*, had often occupied this stone, as a seat, while on visits to his farm, particularly in conversation with Miss Taylor, be this as it may, the older members of our family, valued and cared for this stone, the younger portion, cared for, and valued it, at a time when the fact of its history would have caused the cry of 'treason' and I am positive the destruction of the stone, being connected with your honored name.

The stone is now on the ground where it has lain for forty years, a conspicuous object, and the story believed con-

²³ Kansas City, Missouri, *Star*, reprinted in the Indianapolis, Indiana, *News*, March 15, 1919.

nected with it. I have thought often of writing you in regard to this matter, hoping you might remember something of it and thus place our 'legend' on an historical base, built upon your signature as the foundation or cornerstone, thus adding another relic to the old city of Vincennes, the home of General Harrison and a host of noted pioneers.

Respectfully

Mrs. Emma E. Peck

Box 715, Vincennes, Indiana"

Endorsement on envelope: "Mrs. Emma E. Peck about a stone and Z. Taylor—Ansd. 30 May '86"

"Beauvoir Missi
May 30th 1886,

Mrs. Emma E. Peck,

Dear Madam,

I cannot give you any information in regard to the stone concerning which you inquire. I know, as a tradition that Ex President Z. Taylor—was stationed at Fort Knox at or near Vincennes, but my acquaintance with him commenced many years thereafter.

Very respectfully

yours

Jefferson Davis"²⁴

The Peck and Davis letters would seem to settle once and for all the question of Jefferson Davis, Sarah Knox Taylor and the boulder. They did not "occupy it as a seat," as Mrs. Peck delicately puts it. She herself may have lost interest in the matter as on the reverse side of the letter is written a recipe for "cucumber ragout." Is it to the recipe or to the fame of Jefferson Davis that the preservation of the letter is due?

Mrs. Peck's letter raises several questions, first of all as to her identity. She claimed kinship with the Donovan

²⁴ A photostat of the Davis letter was sent to Miss India Thomas, House Regent of the Confederate Museum, who had supplied the typed copy of Mrs. Peck's letter. She wrote in reply: "Not any of the letter you have seems to have been written by Mr. Davis. In his latter years he seemed to have depended on Mrs. Davis and Miss Winnie Davis or Mrs. Dorsey to do his writing. Mrs. Davis, as she grew older, wrote more and more like her husband, and some of her handwriting looks almost identically like his. . . . I do not think you need have any doubt about your letter being from Mr. Davis since we have the original one of which yours is the answer, and the handwriting is the same as some of the other letters from Mr. Davis in his last years."

family in her letter, but she was not the child of Jeremiah and Susan Wyant Donovan, nor the sister of either. They were married October 19, 1823.²⁵ Mrs. Peck died in St. Louis April 1, 1902, at the age of eighty-three years.²⁶ This places her birth date in the year 1819, some years previous to their marriage. Her name does not appear in the recorded baptisms of their children.²⁷ An Emma E. Newel [*sic*] was married to Horace E. Peck, February 29, 1842.²⁸ He died June 4, 1864. Mrs. Peck, as evidenced by her letter, was living in Vincennes in 1886, and she was listed in the city directory of 1888-1889. The only other Newell appearing in any available records is William, a witness to the probating of Horace Peck's will.²⁹ Mrs. Peck's obituary notices make no mention of her parentage but both refer to her husband Horace, a former druggist. No printed obituary is available for him. Mrs. Peck's one surviving neighbor, Miss Ellen Piel, could shed no light on her ancestry, recalling that she lived very quietly with her son and four grandsons. There must have been some fairly close connection with the Donovans as Mrs. Peck was one of the witnesses to the codicil to Susan Donovan's will,³⁰ but what that connection was remains an unsolved problem.

Comparison of the marriage dates of Jeremiah Donovan and Susan Wyant and of Jefferson Davis and Sarah Knox Taylor refutes beyond all doubt the story of a simultaneous courtship of the two couples. Nor were Susan and Sarah

²⁵ Photostatic copy of Knox County Marriage Records, Book 2. The original has disappeared.

²⁶ Vincennes, Indiana, *Capital*, April 3, 1902, and Vincennes, Indiana, *The Daily Sun*, April 3, 1902.

²⁷ The baptisms of the following children of Jerry Meyer [*sic*] Donovan and Susan Wiant [*sic*] his wife, are in the records of St. Francis Xavier Parish, Vincennes, Indiana, VI, 650-651:

Lawrence	born	Oct. 8, 1827	baptized	July 2, 1837
Catherine Eleanor	"	July 27, 1824	"	Sept. 10, 1837
Mary Catherine	"	Jan. 1, 1826	"	" " "
James Barry	"	Dec. 6, 1829	"	" " "
Ralph Hugh	"	Nov. 6, 1831	"	" " "
Susan Mary	no birth date		"	Jan. 28, 1838

²⁸ Knox County, Indiana, Marriage Records, Book 4, p. 139.

²⁹ Knox County, Indiana, Wills, B, 149. Tradition has it that the Pecks built the house, later occupied by the Bayard family, on the east corner of Sixth and Seminary Streets. This seems to be true, as Horace Peck willed to his wife, along with other real estate, lot 269, on which the house in question stands.

³⁰ Knox County, Indiana, Wills, B, 415.

contemporaneous infants unless Susan was married at the age of nine.

Mrs. Peck's letter draws attention to another question: the place of residence of the Taylors in Vincennes. She gave the Taylor farm near Vincennes as the domicile of the family and the reputed location of the courtship. Search of early records has failed to produce a reference to Taylor as a land-owner in Knox County.³¹ It cannot categorically be said that he never owned land in the county, but at the time he was in and out of Vincennes he had a farm in Kentucky to which he returned from time to time. If his name had appeared in the chain of title to any property, it would undoubtedly have caught the attention of those doing research, and the fact of his ownership would have thus come to light. "Zachary" is an unusual name and in connection with "Taylor" would scarcely have escaped notice.

All printed references, as well as tradition, (with the exception of the "legend" current in Mrs. Peck's family) have given property owned by Judge Benjamin Parke as the residence of the Taylor family while in Vincennes. As examination of the real estate ownership of the Judge sheds light upon the question.

The so-called "Parke-Wise" mansion, often designated as the Taylor residence, was on land that was until 1816 a part of Harrison's estate of Grouseland and outside the limits of the borough. Parke acquired title to this property by deed from Harrison March 9, 1816.³² The latter was then in Vincennes.³³ At this time Harrison's Addition was platted and his estate thereby made smaller.³⁴ Parke's newly acquired property was listed as Parke Place, Parke Lot, or Parke Reserve, and the deed was recorded July 9, 1816. This is not

³¹ Mr. Allan Hogue, Mrs. W. H. DeBolt, and Miss Alice Ostendorf, formerly of the Knox County Abstract Company, were consulted. The deed index lists a transfer to a Margaret M. Taylor, but references to the deed itself showed the name to be Mary Magdalen Taylor, not Margaret Mackall (Smith) Taylor, Zachary's wife. The date was December 22, 1814, and the property a lot in town, not a farm.

³² Knox County, Indiana, Deeds, Book A, 93.

³³ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, March 2, 1816. A dinner in honor of Harrison is recorded.

³⁴ Robert Buntin, Surveyor, A Plan of the Borough of Vincennes in the Indiana Territory as Established by an Ordinance of the Trustees of Said Borough on the 18th November, 1816. The original is in the Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

indicated as a re-recording, as is the case with many deed records.³⁵

The deed is for "That certain lot and parcel of land whereon Benjamin Parke hath erected a house and made other improvements situated and lying and being in the county of Knox in the said Territory and adjoining the village of Vincennes. Beginning at the termination of St. Louis St. thence north 55 degrees east 135 ft. 3 in. thence north 33 degrees w. to the River Wabash, thence down said river 135 ft/3 in. to a street at a place called the stone landing thence with and along said street to the place of beginning the said lot and parcel of land estimated to contain one acre and 7/10th of an acre, be the same more or less." This deed was acknowledged by Harrison before William Polke.

In 1902, the Parke-Wise property was purchased for a lumber yard and the *Daily Sun* carried an article on the history of the property.³⁶ The house was described as a landmark older by one year than the State of Indiana, as Judge Parke bought the land from Harrison in 1815. The writer based his article on the deed record given above but did not indicate why he placed the purchase in the year 1815 instead of 1816, the year of the deed. No mention was made of occupancy by Taylor and his family.

At first glance it seems strange that Parke should have built his house before obtaining title to the land. On March 18, 1815, however, he was given Power of Attorney by Harrison to buy and sell land.³⁷ He and Harrison were the best of friends and they probably arranged the purchase by letter, agreeing that the deed be executed upon Harrison's next coming to Vincennes. The house was presumably not ready for occupancy even after the land was made over to Parke, as in July of 1816 he was living in the Harrison Mansion itself.³⁸

The history of this Parke property effectively disposes of it as a place of residence for the Taylors. It did not exist in 1814.

³⁵ The original records were destroyed when the house and store of the Recorder, John D. Hay, burned on January 21, 1814. Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, January 29, 1814.

³⁶ Vincennes, Indiana, *The Daily Sun*, January 3, 1903.

³⁷ Knox County, Indiana, Deeds, Book B, 2.

³⁸ Harlow Lindley (ed.), *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, in *Indiana Historical Collections*, III (1916), 86.

But Parke, previous to that year, had a residence in that neighborhood. In 1812, one Joshua Bond announced the opening of a house of public entertainment in the town of Vincennes at the upper end of Water Street, near the Hon. Benjamin Parke's.³⁹ Buntin's plat of Vincennes, dated 1816, places what looks like the name "Parke" (it is slightly blotted) on Lot 9 on the west corner of First and Stout Streets. "St. Louis" and "Water" were both early names of the present First Street, parallel to the river. Stout Street, then at the village limit, was the present Hart Street, at right angles to First.⁴⁰

It is possible that the Parkes were living in the Harrison Mansion in 1814, thus leaving the Parke "Cottage" on Lot 9 available for the Taylors.⁴¹ It is reasonable to suppose that the Parkes required at that time an imposing residence. He was a federal judge and was engaged in various business enterprises as well. In 1817⁴² he was one of the organizers of the Bank of Vincennes, the failure of which in 1821 plunged him into the debt he so honorably discharged.⁴³ He transferred title to his "Mansion" to Hiram Decker, *et al.*, March 22, 1822, probably as a step toward meeting his obligations.⁴⁴

³⁹ Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, September 1, 1812.

⁴⁰ Vincennes streets do not follow the cardinal points of the compass but lie about half way between, so the street corners themselves may be designated as north, south, east, or west.

⁴¹ The statement made by Cauthorn, *A History of Vincennes*, 27, and repeated by Greene, *History of Old Vincennes*, I, 287, that General Harrison, on leaving Vincennes in 1811, installed his son John Cleves Symmes Harrison in the Harrison Mansion is obviously untrue as Cleves was only thirteen years old at the time. He came to Vincennes in 1819 as Receiver of Public Money for the United States. Josiah Meigs to J. C. S. Harrison, Receiver, Vincennes, November 2, 1819, General Land Office Papers, National Archives. His actual appointment was dated Monday, January 3, 1820, and was confirmed by the Senate the following Monday. *The Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States from the Commencement of the First to the Termination of the Nineteenth Congress* (3 vols., Washington, 1828), III, 186, 188, 357, 362, 585. He was removed from office by President Andrew Jackson in 1828. William Henry Harrison deeded Grouseland to Cleves on June 22, 1821, two years before Cleves' marriage to Clarissa Pike.

⁴² Parke resigned his position as judge in this year, Vincennes, Indiana, *Western Sun*, February 2, 1817, perhaps because of his connection with the bank.

⁴³ William Wesley Woollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1883), 388.

⁴⁴ Knox County, Indiana, Deeds, Book C, 100.

The house did not come into possession of John Wise until May 30, 1833.⁴⁵

Whether the Wyants, parents of Susan, lived in town near enough to the Taylors to have formed the friendship implied in one version of the legend is not capable of proof, and the slight evidence available would seem to point to the contrary. The only city property the Wyants are on record as owning was at a distance of several squares from Lot 9.⁴⁶ The record of Lot 9 does not go back far enough to yield any information and the Buntin plat points to Parke as owner.

In the *History of Knox and Daviess Counties* occur these statements: "Jeremiah Donovan resides on the donation drawn by Antoine Drouet, called Richardville. On this lived Christopher Wyant, an early sheriff of the county."⁴⁷ There is an

⁴⁵ Knox County, Indiana, Deeds, Book 21, 98. The Wise family previously resided on Main Street, near Second. Information from an address by John Lagow, Esq., at the Old Settlers' Reunion at Vincennes, May 30, 1878. This was printed in the Vincennes, Indiana, *Times*, of about that date, only the one undated sheet containing the address being available. Indiana Division, Indiana State Library. The question as to the identity of the house was renewed in 1941 when the Old Post Association of Vincennes acquired the property bounded by Parke, Hickam, First, and Scott streets. It was rumored that two small houses at the corner of First and Scott streets were part of the Parke-Wise house and should be preserved as part of the Taylor residence in 1814. These houses were identified as parts of the Slinkard home, formerly opposite the Harrison Mansion on Parke Street, and as such having no historic importance. They were, therefore, sold for salvage when the property was cleared for park purposes.

⁴⁶ Knox County, Indiana, Deeds, Book A, 99-100. Antoine Gamelin and his wife Magdalene granted to Wyant, February 28, 1791, "All a certain Lott of ground formerly belonging to the Church and Parish of the town aforesaid fronting on St. Honore Street and running back to the river beach, E. by a lott belonging to the United States on one side and on the west to a street leading to the river together with improvements. . . ." According to the Baird plat of Vincennes, dated June 10, 1792, St. Honore Street (vacated before 1816) was between St. Louis and St. John (present First and Second) streets. The streets off the lower side of Chapel (now Church) Street are not named, but if the one nearest the river was the continuation of St. Honore, the lot was probably along the Fort Sackville site. If it had been on the upper side of Chapel, the lot could not have run to the "river beach" without jumping over St. Louis Street. The plat does not extend beyond Calvary (now Busseron) Street. The deed was recorded in 1815, so the Wyants probably still owned the property. The Baird plat is found in two versions: the original, "Plat of the Village of Vincennes on the Ouabache in the County of Knox Territory North West of Ohio June 10th, 1792. Sam Baird," and "Plat of the Town of Vincennes in 1792 as correctly taken from the general plat and private surveys of Samuel Baird, government surveyor [manuscript torn] in the spring of 1792, and now being in the Vincennes District Land Office. Charles B. Lasselle, Vincennes, April 11th, 1853." The originals of both versions are in the Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.

⁴⁷ *History of Knox and Daviess Counties*, 70.

error in that quotation, as this was not the donation drawn by Richardville.⁴⁸ It was, however, the Wyant "home tract."⁴⁹ In 1886 it belonged to Donovan's daughter, Mrs. Helen Hekekin,⁵⁰ baptized as Catherine Eleanor Donovan and married as Ellen C. Donovan to Michael Hedekin.⁵¹ She obtained this property by deeds from several persons, some of them obviously Wyant heirs.⁵² Since this was Christopher Wyant's home, the possibility of a Wyant-Taylor neighborhood friendship is further refuted.

A footnote of acknowledgements to Chapter I of the above-mentioned history gives credit to Ralph H. Donovan and Mrs. Helen Hediker [*sic*] of Fort Wayne, among others, for furnishing access to valuable records and documents used in the preparation of the work. As previously indicated, this history makes no mention of the courtship story. Why Mrs. Peck did not consult Susan Donovan, who died in 1872, or Jeremiah before his death in 1886, is indeed a puzzle. Ralph Donovan and Ellen Donovan Hedekin, presumably the "younger" members of the family she claimed as hers, should have been able to enlighten her. They all lived in Vincennes for years and there could have been no lack of opportunity

⁴⁸ Richardville's donation was No. 156, on the West Fork of White River, in Steen Township. *American State Papers: Public Lands* (8 vols., Washington, 1832-1861), I, 291. Wyant owned this donation, as there is a plat of it in the papers covering the settlement of his estate, and it was divided among his heirs. Files of Knox County, Indiana, Courthouse. He did not live on it.

⁴⁹ The Wyant estate was partitioned in 1821, and the partition recorded in Knox County, Indiana, Order Book C, page 67. A large tract of land was divided in seven parcels, six going to four sons and two daughters of Wyant, and the "Home tract" to his widow. It is not possible to determine too easily from the plat of this area just where it is, but in the abstract of the Knox County Poor Asylum property, this plat has been reproduced and Survey 35, the Hedekin property, shown to be the "Home tract" partitioned to the widow of Christopher. Entries in the abstract show that Christopher Wyant is on record as owning several tracts, two as assignee of French grants, and one as a donation for his militia service. Survey 35 is recorded in *American State Papers* as his in right of Jean Bte. Beino, and this was confirmed by a land grant from William Henry Harrison, dated August 29, 1813, and recorded September 29, 1835, Knox County, Indiana, Deed Record, G2 page 226. Abstract furnished by courtesy of L. Fay Hedden.

⁵⁰ *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Knox County, Indiana*, 29. Plat of Vincennes Township.

⁵¹ Knox County, Indiana, Marriage Records, F, 356.

⁵² William Jones to Helen C. Donovan, November 28, 1863; John McCormick, *et al.*, to Helen C. Donovan, December 29, 1862; W. H. Wyant to Helen C. Donovan, February 20, 1863; Louis Wyant to Helen C. Hedekin, April 28, 1866. Knox County, Indiana, Deed Book, E-2, p. 257, 260, 492.

for questions. Perhaps Mrs. Peck hoped for definite information from the reticent Jeremiah, and with the ending of that hope, decided to consult the one living principal of the legend.

The boulder itself is something of a rarity in Knox County. One other, of comparable size, which was found deep in a gravel pit about forty years ago, has been moved three times as its owner has changed his residence.⁵³ Several persons have offered to buy it, testimony to its status as a "curiosity." The owner estimates its weight at six or seven hundred pounds. When it was found, gravel was shoveled out by hand. With present methods of obtaining gravel, boulders, if present, would sink unseen to the bottom of the water in the pits. The writer, in many journeyings about the county, has never seen stray boulders such as sometimes occur in considerable numbers farther north in the state. The Donovan boulder may be one of the so-called "erratics," such as are sometimes found as far south as Kentucky. It is impossible to determine its place of origin in the county, and the legend in its several versions varies, giving Taylor's non-existent farm, the woods in the neighborhood of the Highlands, or merely an inviting woods.

A specimen chipped from the boulder was sent to the Department of Geology of Indiana University for expert identification. The reply gave the expected verdict: a granite boulder of glacial origin.⁵⁴ The stone has weathered slightly on the top, but, barring accidents, is due for a long life in its present location. Souvenir hunters have left it intact; after all, the average tourist does not carry a geological hammer in his hand.

The lot where the boulder now rests was not the property of Donovan but of his wife. She acquired it by deed in 1851⁵⁵ and bequeathed it to her daughter Ellen with the proviso that her husband Jeremiah use and occupy said lot during his natural life.⁵⁶

The history of the Davis letter cannot be traced very far. It was found in an old book belonging to the family of

⁵³ The owner is Maurice O'Donnell, whose family has been in the gravel business for many years.

⁵⁴ Identification by Dr. Carlton J. Leith, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

⁵⁵ John W. Maddox to Susan Donovan, September 30, 1851. Knox County, Indiana, Deed, Book R, 850.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, B 415.

George Greene. Charles Greene, brother of George, was the last survivor of his generation and the book was among his effects. He spent much of his mature life in Kansas City and did not return to Vincennes until long after the death of George in 1917. The Greene family had many books, some of them doubtless coming into Charles' possession on his return to Vincennes.⁵⁷ It seems probable that George acquired the letter, due to his interest in history, but whether before or after he wrote his work cannot now be determined. Local pride may have been the deciding factor rather than knowledge of the truth.

Jefferson Davis's letter reduces by one the number of famous folk who have visited or lived in the Old Post. Many, however, remain firmly fixed in the annals of Vincennes, and their well-authenticated associations will continue to make the town a favorite place of pilgrimage for those interested in the history of early days.

⁵⁷ Information from Mrs. Harry Beggs of Vincennes, Indiana.