

A Society Develops in New Albany

Victor M. Bogle*

Life in New Albany during the years it was in a transitional stage from frontier outpost to established town was not always a carefree, happy-go-lucky affair. It was marked with the usual privations and disappointments which accompany people when they leave behind the familiar to cope with the unfamiliar. Optimism and ambition drove many of the settlers to the newly founded river community, but it was soon clear that there could not be enough success to go around.

The most depressing picture of the first years comes from Isaac Reed, a Presbyterian preacher, whose personal task it was to renew the spiritual life of the discouraged settlers. Of the year 1818 he wrote: "As a place, its morals were low; its general society was rude, and much of it profane. There were some pious persons, but their number was small Numbers came there with some relics of better condition, to retrieve their fortunes. The place had a sickly character."¹

After several months of service among the people of New Albany he concluded: "The times seemed changing for the worse. Many of the society [Presbyterian] were considerably embarrassed with debts. My heart was with the people. I had thought, this is my home, and here will I build my house. I delayed with them till December; but found it necessary at that time to remove."²

The first New Albanyians were too preoccupied with the job of supplying their basic physical needs to be concerned much with their spiritual ones. A preacher asking a salary of five hundred dollars a year was a luxury they could not yet afford.³

If at first the odds appeared to be against the New Albany settlers, just as in other new places, it was not long before their efforts and simple animal endurance had more

* Victor M. Bogle is a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland. This article is a revised chapter of his Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University, 1951, written under the direction of Warren S. Tryon.

¹ Isaac Reed, *The Christian Traveler* (New York, 1828), 86-87.

² *Ibid.*, 88.

³ *Ibid.*, 86.

nearly equalized the contest. As soon as the demand and resources were sufficient to bring them about, the old institutions began to appear in the new environment. Town and county government, better dwellings, schools, courts, newspapers, taverns, recreational organizations, and the other accoutrements that mark a settled community came more into prominence as the first economic foothold was secured. Log cabins made of unseasoned timber sufficed at first; but soon milled lumber and brick were in demand. Governmental officials, as well as church groups, met wherever they could at first, but eventually they had special buildings designed for their use. Grogshops and taverns became orderly inns and hotels, while the barred shack used as a jail evolved into a secure structure of brick. Privations became less common, and the social life more complex, as each citizen gradually adapted himself to his new role in the expanding economic and social pattern of the growing community.

The early settlement attempted to care for its poor through the auspices of the county government. "Overseers of the poor" were appointed by the commissioners to administer aid to these most pressed by poverty. The overseer took the supplicant into his own home, or in some way was personally responsible for his care. The large number of appointments as overseers is evidence that there were many needy cases. They show too that the general attitude toward those in extreme poverty was reasonably benevolent. "Strangers in our midst" were not eliminated from the benefits of public charity simply because they were outsiders. The indigent ill received medical attention, and should they die, their burial was also arranged.⁴

How to handle effectively the problem of the poor was a question that remained largely unanswered throughout the century. The town's location made it particularly susceptible to poor wanderers coming and going in all directions. Hospitality sometimes wore thin, but it never vanished altogether.

The healthful site of New Albany was one of the features which the Scribners stressed in their early advertisement of

⁴ Minutes of the Commissioners of Floyd County, Indiana, February 12, 1821. "Ordered that the County Treasurer pay to Elias Ayres One Dollar & Eighty seven & one half cents for a shroud furnished for John Kelley a pauper . . . Samuel C. Miller five Dollars for making Coffin for said John Kelley." *Ibid.*, February 10, 1824.

the town. They accredited this condition to the lack of stagnant waters, to the fortunate location of the town—sufficiently below the Falls to avoid the fogs and “noxious exhalations,” and to the “purifying” winds that blew up the river in the warm season. As a matter of record, there were plenty of swamps and frog ponds in the Whitehill tract, just east of the original settlement, and New Albany was in no sense immune to malarial mosquitoes or other pests that thrive in such places. But relatively speaking New Albany was a healthy place for the times. The Louisville booster, Henry M’Murtrie, while lamenting the fact that Louisville was not a healthy town gave due credit to New Albany in this respect. He thought this was due, not to the conditions outlined by the Scribners, but to the many natural springs from which the residents obtained their water.⁵

Since there is little data on the diseases that afflicted the people in this region, the causes of these diseases cannot be ascertained. But it is probable that maladies resulting from the bites of insects, or the lack of proper sanitary precautions, were as common in New Albany as elsewhere, while those resulting from drinking impure water were somewhat rarer. That the town was by no means free of the epidemic type diseases can be verified in the writings of a few people who were there when some of them prevailed.

Asahel Clapp wrote in 1822 of the current surge of malignant fever: “It commenced some time last June in consequence of warm weather, but subsided in July in consequence of warm weather being dry. But in August increased with great fatality and continued late in October. The disease constantly appeared of a remitting or intermittant fever, the most malignant cases were intermittant Fruit in many cases was an exciting cause of the disease, especially peaches, but muskmelons and watermelons evidently produced the disease in some cases. The first symptom of the disease was a slimy white moist tongue, little or not at all coated, a mawkish taste in the mouth and increased flow of saliva. Considerable pain in the head, some affection of the loins, increased intestinal secretion.” Clapp’s remedy was: “Bleeding . . . in the most violent cases when there was severe pain in

⁵ Henry M’Murtrie, *Sketches of Louisville and Its Environs* (Louisville, 1819), 149, 166.

the head Emetics were likewise very beneficial. Small doses of Tact. Ant. and Sal. Epsom and Saline purges combined with magnesia were of very essential service."⁶

Though the physicians of the period were often in a position of the blind leading the blind, they at least tried to cope with the complex cases with which they were daily confronted. Doctor Clapp's diary is quite detailed during his first years of practice in New Albany—he came in 1817—and it shows that the doctor must have been one of the busiest men around the town. He applied much time and care to the working out of his diagnoses, and his suggested remedies were as good as the times afforded. He performed "bleedings" to alleviate a number of varied ailments, but in this respect he but followed one of the standard practices of the day.

In 1820 there were at least three physicians in New Albany, and, in accordance with the custom, they combined their practice with other pursuits. Doctor Clapp was a druggist and geologist; Doctor David M. Hale, a tavern keeper; and Doctor Joseph Whitcomb the agent for the New Albany Cotton Manufactory.⁷ Even at this early date, however, the medical profession in this area was organized and regulated by its organization. There were the State Medical Society, of which Clapp was the first president, and the district societies whose duty it was to review candidates for the profession and issue permits to practice. Candidates acquired their training through apprenticeship to a reputable physician. William Scribner, who later became one of the town's most popular practitioners, studied under Clapp from March, 1818, to August, 1822.⁸

The persistent efforts of the officials to maintain a secure jail house suggested that in the early days there was a need of some facility for isolating members of the community who stepped over the line of the law. Seth Woodruff, who was able to cash in on about everything that happened in town, received fifty dollars for building the first county jail. This was a log structure, seven feet high, made of thick

⁶ Asahel Clapp Diary, 6.

⁷ *New Albany Chronicle*, September 15, 1821.

⁸ Oddly enough, this son of Joel Scribner went forty miles away to the town of Paoli to establish his first practice. In later years, however, he returned to the town of his father. William A. Scribner, *Early Days in New Albany*, 22.

hewed logs that were "pinned down." This structure burned down within the year, and Sheriff James Besse replaced it himself, this time at a cost of sixty dollars. This building was ill-fated too, for less than three years later it was necessary for the officials to procure the residents of the late Joseph Brindley on upper High Street for a jail. A few years later still another jail was constructed, and this one apparently managed to escape the mishaps of its predecessor till it was replaced about the middle of the century.⁹

Petty crime, and what the Reverend Isaac Reed would term "immorality," were common enough in the early days, but the publicity attached to the few recorded major crimes shows that they were infrequent enough to be regarded as sensations. One of these, the John Dahmen murder case of 1821 sheds as much light on the public thought of the town as any single event of the early days that has been recorded. The details of how the Danish immigrant, Dahmen, murdered his friend and benefactor, Frederick Nolte, at the latter's bakery shop, dumped his body in the river, mopped up the blood and then opened up the shop the next morning as his own business are grotesque enough to satisfy the cravings of the sensation seekers in any era. But the significance of the affair is how the episode affected the citizenry of the town. It was probably the first break in the monotonous routine that characterized the early years.

When the rumored details of the crime were confirmed, normal activities in the town halted, and something approaching a carnival atmosphere prevailed from time to time through the period of the dramatic trial and final execution. Dahmen's escape to Canada, his recapture and return by the New Albany sheriff did nothing to dampen the interest. People from the neighboring countryside flocked into town to see whatever there was to see. The accused obligingly made pre-execution confessions, even more sensational than his local exploits. These were written up for the purposes of public edification, not by one writer, but at least two. The public had its choice of Reuben Kidder's, *The Life and Adventures of John Dahmen*, or R. S. Strickland's *The Real Life of John*

⁹ Minutes of the Commissioners of Floyd County, May 3, 1819, November 14, 1820, May 13, 1823; Henry A. and Kate Ford, *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties* (2 vols., Cleveland, 1882), II, 90-91.

Dahman. The proceeds of this latter volume went to the murderer's "unfortunate family."¹⁰

Kidder's account was a spring board to talk about a variety of things some of them pretty far removed from his original subject. It was: "A most wonderful and interesting account . . . of a man distinguished for his natural powers of mind, & the basest & most unprincipaled ingenuity—replete with anecdote of every description, comic & tragic—the most daring crimes, the most dreadful & appalling scenes of terror & bloodshed, conflagrations of towns, including the great city of Moscow—the great battles of Smolensko, of Boridino, of Leipsic & of Waterloo—numerous . . . [?] of Bonaparte, wonderfully amusing—his order of march, manner of visiting his private soldiers in their tents, exciting their courage & securing attachment to his person—various descriptions of singular characters male & female—a vast variety of extraordinary adventures— numerous scenes, perilous, distressing, tender, pathetic, tragical, comical, some supposed supernatural, that showed Dahmen in Europe his future sufferings in America."¹¹

Accommodating but shrewd to the last, Dahmen made arrangements for the disposal of his body. At first he contracted to sell it to one of the physicians for medical dissection, but later realizing its potential worth tried to annul the contract and have it auctioned off to the highest bidder. In this venture he failed, and following the execution the body went to the original contracting physician.¹²

The climax of the drama came when Dahmen calmly stepped forth on the specially built scaffold and went through

¹⁰ *New Albany Chronicle*, May 26, 1821, September 5, 1821; Kenneth R. Shaffer, "Murder at New Albany; A Rare 1821 Imprint," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, 1905-), XLI (1945), 45-49. The details of the case are summed up nicely in a column-long account by the local editor in the May 26 issue. No other event received so much editorial attention in any of the old papers that are extant. This particular issue was delayed a day to get all the facts together, and for the period the story was a real journalistic gem. The spelling of the names of individuals involved in the story varies in the different accounts.

¹¹ *New Albany Chronicle*, July 28, 1821.

¹² *New Albany Ledger-Standard*, February 25, 1879. This part of the story may be apocryphal since it was reported more than fifty years after the event. The Minutes of the Commissioners of Floyd County, March 14 and August 13, 1821, record that the County Treasurer paid Kendall and Cox four dollars for making Dahmen a coffin. It also cost the county three dollars for the work done on the prisoner's irons.

the colorful rites administered by the hangman. Gradually the crowd melted away, and the town went back to its normal routine. But the topic of Dahmen and his exploits were material for thought and conversation among the "oldtimers" for years to come.

New Albany's taverns have been one of the features of the early town which have been particularly fascinating to the local antiquarians. Nowhere was the atmosphere that prevailed in the town during the era of its close attachment to the river better reflected than in the many hostleries where rivermen and traders gathered to negotiate their business or drown their sorrows in Kentucky whisky.

The large number of taverns supports the conclusion that the town played host to its share of the thousands who passed up and down the Ohio at a time when the river was the great highway to the West. So conspicuous were the taverns in the early landscape that an 1819 traveler, Richard Lee Mason, was prompted to record after passing through New Albany that it was "a little village inhabited by tavern-keepers and mechanics."¹³

The first tavern known to be located in what later became the town of New Albany was a simple establishment kept by a Mrs. Robinson. It served as a stopping place for mail and travelers on the road between Louisville and Vincennes. The tavern trade expanded considerably in the years immediately following the founding of the town, for in 1819 there were nine separate proprietors applying for licenses from the county commissioners.¹⁴

The early taverns abided by state as well as local regulations. The county required a twenty-dollar license fee and a five hundred-dollar bond. The county officials also set the price rates. For breakfast the taverns could charge 31¼ cents, for dinner 37½ cents, and for supper 25 cents. These rates, out of keeping with the normal pattern of living costs, indicate that either food was relatively scarce, or that the local citizens were eager to take the outsiders for all they

¹³ Harlow Lindley, *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers* (Indianapolis, 1916), 235.

¹⁴ Ford, *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties*, II, 150; Minutes of the Commissioners of Floyd County for 1819 and 1820. There was apparently much fluctuation in the early tavern business. Except for one person, recipients of the licenses to keep taverns in 1819 were entirely different from the recipients in 1820.

could get. But the traveler made up for these prices by paying only 12½ cents for his night's lodging and 12½ cents for his half pint of whisky. He could stable his horses and furnish it with a night's supply of hay for 37½ cents.¹⁵

That the taverns were not required to be very elaborate is obvious from the Indiana state regulation that each applicant for a license must have "at least two good beds and furniture, in addition to the quantity necessary for the use of the family . . . also a good stable well furnished with suitable stalls for at least four horses." The selling of liquor was an important feature of the taverns and no doubt some of the proprietors were in the business more for this purpose than any other. This state regulation helped to make the "tavern" business very prosperous: "The said circuit courts shall not grant any licence or permit to any person to vend spiritous or strong liquors in any county within this state unless such person applying therefor shall produce the certificate of twelve respectable freeholders, that the person so applying is of good moral character, and that it would be for the benefit and convenience of travellers for such person to be licenced."¹⁶

Some of the early inns grew larger, more respectable and dignified, while others, especially those along the river front, became little more than places of rendezvous for the rough element of the town and the transient river laborers. Hale's Tavern, later known as the High Street House, was the center of many of the town's recreational activities, as well as the haven sought by the more distinguished travelers.¹⁷ A sojourn at Hale's in 1821 inspired this bit of criticism on American frontier customs by the Englishman Adlard Welby: "We found a very comfortable reception at the excellent family tavern kept by Dr. Hale, a physician. We had hitherto been frequently received by Representatives, Colonels, Majors, Squires, and Captains; these now sometimes give place to the medical profession. An American may be proud of his liberty, but the pride of a gentleman never stands in the way of a profitable speculation; idleness only is here a disgrace, and if a man of liberal education finds that his profession will

¹⁵ Minutes of the Commissioners of Floyd County, February 10, 1819.

¹⁶ *Laws of Indiana*, 1820-1821, pp. 92-93.

¹⁷ *New Albany Chronicle*, June 20, 1821. Plans for a Fourth of July celebration to be held at Hale's were reported in this issue.

not sufficiently remunerate him it is thought right that he should seek profit in trade."¹⁸

Dr. Hale was a model landlord, and as the town grew his tavern became one of the best in Indiana. Hale was a Massachusetts man who had come to New Albany following his service in the War of 1812. "He was an elegant gentleman, of the old school; wearing ruffles in his shirt front, and bearing himself with the dignified and courteous deportment of the ruffle and shirt-front period." His tavern had only a narrow frontage on High Street, but it ran back in the form of two "L's" toward the river. In the inclosure was a stable for the travelers' horses and a yard for livestock. He also maintained a garden and a small farm from which he procured his necessary fruits and vegetables.¹⁹

Fifty years after its founding, boosters of New Albany pointed with pride to the town's many attractive church edifices and the high moral quality of the town which they symbolized. But organized religion was slow in making headway in the early settlement.²⁰ Unlike the many towns on the eastern seaboard, this new community did not form around a church building, or borrow its government from a familiar church organization. The Scribners themselves were "pious Presbyterians," accustomed to the discipline and regularity in church attendance characterized by this denomination, but the frontier conditions necessitated a temporary modification of old habits and customs.

A large majority of the Protestant settlers were either Presbyterians or Methodists, and the establishment of church bodies adhering to the principles of these two faiths laid the foundations for their supremacy in New Albany for the remainder of the century. There is no record of controversy between the two groups even in the early days. The Scribners reserved land for a prospective Methodist church, just as they reserved land for a church of their own denomination.²¹

¹⁸ Adlard Welby, *A Visit to North America . . .* (London, 1821), 80.

¹⁹ Emma Carlton, Indianapolis, *Indiana Journal*, November 2, 1901.

²⁰ Ford, *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties*, II, 186-211. Evidently the people of Louisville were not much concerned with the establishment of churches at this time either. According to one writer, the people there built a theater several years before they got around to preparing a church edifice. Benjamin Casseday, *The History of Louisville from Its Early Years till the Year 1852* (Louisville, 1852), 126.

²¹ Mary S. D. Collins, "New Albany, With a Short Sketch of the Scribner Family," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVII (1921), 223.

The Methodist church was the first officially organized in New Albany. Its origin is based in a pleasant little anecdote which, true or not, probably typifies life in frontier New Albany. According to the legend, Elam Genung, a lonely *settler from back East*, walked in the woods one night. His nocturnal meditations were interrupted by the "sweet voice" of a lady singing a familiar hymn. He discovered that the singing came from the humble cabin of Hannah Ruff, a widow woman who earned her livelihood by dispensing spruce beer and ginger cakes to neighbors in the settlement. Elam spontaneously joined in the singing of the hymn, and upon its close he asked the lady if she were a church member. When she informed him she had been a Methodist back in the East, Elam replied, "I, too, was a Methodist before I came here. Let us pray." A dozen or so other settlers had been attracted to the cabin by the singing, which "touched every heart with its sweet tenderness, waking memories of homes far away in the East," and they joined in holding the town's first prayer meeting.²²

The prayer meetings were a weekly habit by the time the Reverend John Shrader formally organized a Methodist church in the town in 1817. The early congregation met at the cabin-tavern of Hannah Ruff until they completed the first church building in the town, described by Isaac Reed as "a little frame covered in."²³

The Presbyterians were not far behind the Methodists once the church organizing business got under way. But as seen from the related experiences of the Reverend Isaac Reed, the new society was feeble during its first few years. In 1816 the Scribners had shared in the organization by the Reverend James McGready of a church at Jeffersonville. There were but ten persons in the congregation, four of them members of the Scribner family. This "union" church was dissolved after all the Jeffersonville members gradually dropped out, and in December, 1817, it was reformed to be the First Presbyterian Church of New Albany. The first meetings were held in the parlor and back room of Grandma Phoebe Scribner. The following year the society engaged the

²² C. W. Cottom, *New Albany, Indiana*, . . . (New Albany, 1873), 55-56.

²³ Reed, *The Christian Traveler*, 86.

pastoral services of Isaac Reed, and during his stay the first Presbyterian church building was constructed. It was a structure 40 by 30 feet, with rough floor, seats, and pulpit.²⁴

Of this early New Albany charge Reed wrote: "In this review after eight years of absence, I am rather surprised that I succeeded so well, and did so much, than that I did not succeed better and do more. It was a strained effort on the part of the society, which was made to obtain me. One man subscribed \$75, another \$60, another \$30. The church had been but lately formed, and had three elders, neither of them experienced respecting their office With this people . . . I commenced single handed. There was not an installed minister of the Presbyterian church in the state; and, by God's blessing, I kept the ground, defended and fortified the post, and won some from without, to come into the garrison. This year was one of the most unremitted, intense and painful watchfulness of any year of my life."²⁵

Reed opened a one-man campaign against sin in the town. He succeeded in getting the grogshops to remain closed on the Sabbath and in converting several young people who "became deeply and anxiously impressed with a concern for their salvation."²⁶ Whether he proved to be a bit too zealous for the town, or whether it was simply the salary that was the issue, he remained in New Albany for just one year.

The Presbyterians established a Sunday School in connection with their church, from which "instruction" was dispensed to about sixty "scholars." In 1826, New Albany shared in the organization of the Indiana Sunday School Union, whose purpose was to promote Bible study among children. This was a branch of the American Sabbath School Union which supplied religious tracts to be distributed from the key towns of New Albany, Madison, and Indianapolis.²⁷

The Baptists were not far behind the Methodists and Presbyterians in getting their congregation organized. Seth Woodruff did most of the preaching, and his early monopoly on the pulpit was one of the reasons the Baptist organization

²⁴ *New Albany Ledger-Standard*, November 7, 1877; Scribner, *Early Days in New Albany*, 26; Collins, "New Albany, With a Short Sketch of the Scribner Family," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVII, 224.

²⁵ Reed, *The Christian Traveler*, 87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

did not prosper as the others.²⁸ Throughout the century the Baptist church was marked with more dissension than the others, and it was not firmly entrenched in New Albany until far along in the century.

The Catholics did not have a church in New Albany until 1837, by which time the large addition of Irish and Germans prompted the formation of one. As early as 1820, however, Bishop Joseph Flaget consecrated a small Catholic church in the "Knobs," outside of the town in Lafayette Township, called the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary. It was but a log structure, but it served the few Catholics of New Albany and the surrounding countryside for several years.²⁹

The only known record of Quaker activities in the area during the early years is this note of July 7, 1819, from the British traveler William Cobbett: "Resting at New Albany. We were amused by hearing a Quaker-lady preach to the natives. Her first words were '*all the nations of the earth are of one blood. . .*' She proceeded to vent her rage with great vehemence against hireling priests and the trade of preaching in general, and closed with dealing out large portions of brimstone to the drunkard and still larger and hotter to those who gave the bottle to drink."³⁰

There was at least one unorthodox brand of religion on the New Albany frontier; it was that of Epapharas Jones, the Scribner rival who owned that part of later New Albany known at the time as Providence—thus named because the owner was "providentially" placed there. Jones, according to the tales related by some of the old settlers who remembered him, considered the Indians to be the "lost tribes" of Israel. He held them in the highest respect and regarded them in many ways far in advance of the white man. Jones' religion, as his town and other cherished enterprises, failed to make much of an impression on his neighbors. But it no doubt added color to the neighborhood and gave his economic rivals another excuse for attacking him.³¹

²⁸ Ford, *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties*, II, 202.

²⁹ *New Albany Ledger*, August 28, 1889.

³⁰ William Cobbett, *A Year's Residence in the United States of America* (London, 1819), 491-92.

³¹ Ford, *History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties*, II, 155. The earliest written account of Jones' various eccentricities are in this volume. These writers do not state specifically where they got their information. Due allowance must be made for occasional exaggeration.

M'Murtrie noted that the citizens of "commercial cities of all newly settled countries" were far too busy adding dollar to dollar" to bother much with literary and cultural pursuits. Yet in Louisville, he found a few sufficiently touched by wealth and urbanity to devote some time to literature and the cultivation of the mind. He would have found proportionately fewer across the river in New Albany, but even here there were some so entrenched in the literary traditions they had earlier known to read an occasional book for pleasure, or even collect a few for a personal library. Doctor Clapp enjoyed Mackenzies' *Man of Feeling*, "a very pathetic and interesting book," and somebody evidently enjoyed Shakespeare, for William Hurst was forced to advertise for his missing volume two. Others spent their leisure in improving their minds in a more pragmatic way by reading *The Justice's Clerk*, *Farmer's Souvenir* and *Agricultural Prescriptor*, or *A General Instructor of the Office, Duty, & Authority of Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Cornors, Constables, and Jury Men*.³²

As late as 1830 the federal census listed only ten public libraries, with volumes totaling thirty-nine hundred, for the whole state of Indiana. None of these was in New Albany. In 1823, during the county seat controversy, the state reserved ten per cent of all land or other donations accruing from the campaign to establish the seat of Floyd County for the purpose of establishing a county library.³³ But there is no record that this library ever became a reality. A township and eventually a city library did evolve, but at a much later date.

The opportunity of obtaining reading matter was not altogether absent. There were some private concerns which attempted to circulate reading material to the general public. Here is the 1827 advertisement of the Auxiliary Tract Society: "The Auxiliary Tract Society of NA, which was founded April last, have on hand, at the Depository, Tracts, to dispose of very low. Any person can be a member of said Society, by paying twenty five cents annually, which entitles them to receive 225 pages of Tracts, well printed on good paper.

³² M'Murtrie, *Sketches of Louisville*, 118-19; Clapp Diary, 9; New Albany Recorder, October 13, 1827; New Albany Chronicle, May 12 and 21, 1821. The first of these two books was printed at Jeffersonville.

³³ *Fifth United States Census, 1830; Laws of Indiana, 1822-1823*, p. 104.

The Tracts are very interesting & instructive. The Depository is kept at Pettet & Downey's Drug Store."³⁴

One of the first buildings constructed in the town was a schoolhouse. It was located on one of the four squares donated by the Scribners for public purposes. Not only did the founders give the land, but they set aside five thousand dollars from the sale of the first lots to serve as a perpetual operating fund for the proposed school system. In addition to these local resources, the state provided the customary section of the township lands for public schools, and from the sale of this the New Albany township received \$1,280. As early as 1821 there was enough concern over public education for mass meetings to be held to decide school issues.³⁵

But in spite of the plans and resources, the early school did not get off to a successful start. The pressure of the normal labor shortage played some part in this, for even the smaller children were not exempt from performing their "chores." Too, there was the natural difficulty of promoting such an institution in a frontier environment where contacts with established places and practices were daily diminishing.

In 1822 a full-time teacher was hired by the town at a salary of two hundred dollars a year, but his school was not strickly a "public" one; each scholar paid one dollar per quarter to attend.³⁶ It was not until well past this period that the facilities and organization of the New Albany public school system made a measureable improvement. In the meantime, there were several private schools in operation, even in the 1820's. The private school continued to be an important feature of the local educational picture until about the Civil War period.

New Albany existed its first six years without a newspaper. The establishment of the weekly *Chronicle* in 1820 was an event which gave the town a sense of dignity and permanence that it could scarcely have had before.³⁷ There

³⁴ New Albany *Recorder*, October 13, 1827.

³⁵ Scribner, *Early Days in New Albany*, 18-19; M'Murtrie, *Sketches of Louisville*, 168; Logan Esarey, *History of Indiana* (2d ed.; 2 vols., Indianapolis, 1918), I, 328; New Albany *Chronicle*, February 3, 1821.

³⁶ This data was obtained from the Emma Carlton Scrapbook on New Albany History in the Floyd County Historical Society Collection.

³⁷ Casseday, in discussing the early Louisville newspapers, observed that "in America, the presence of the newspaper is ever the mark of peace, and quiet, and comfort." *History of Louisville*, 115-16.

were already papers at Louisville, Corydon, Jeffersonville, and Charlestown which were available to New Albany settlers, but the *Chronicle* served primarily as a local organ that gave the home advertisers a chance to reach their patrons and the townspeople a chance to share the town gossip. The *Chronicle* was not brimming with original articles, but from it the inquisitive reader could cull out many timely details. If he did not know it before, he could learn that Archibald Boman accused John Kernes of stealing his saddlebags; that Abner Scribner was suing Wendelin Wiestenfeld; that Sheriff James Besse was auctioning off the property of Mordecai Childs at the courthouse door; or that Pettet and Downey had received new stock on the steamboat "Franklin." And there was always plenty of copied material from the larger western papers, or from such eastern publications as *Niles' Register*, for those whose interests ranged beyond the confines of the town and the river.

The editors of the *Chronicle*, Matthew Patrick and Mason C. Fitch, boasted four hundred and fifty subscribers and the best advertising custom in the state. The price of the *Chronicle* was \$2.50 a year, paid in advance. An extra twenty-five cents was charged for each month's delay in payment. Advertisements cost one dollar per square of fourteen lines for a three-weeks run, and twenty-five and one-half cents for each subsequent insertion. Most of the advertisers paid for the "subsequent" insertions, for the advertisements changed little in the course of several weeks. The *Chronicle* also did a "liberal share" of job work and sold receipt books, pencils, ink powder, and blank paper "for cash or clean linen and cotton rags."³⁸

The *Chronicle* was established in November, 1820, and the notice of its being offered for sale appeared in the last extant issue, July 28, 1821. Thus the newspaper business followed the same unstable pattern as the other early enterprises. Had it not been for the preservation of a few copies by interested antiquarians, the *Chronicle*, with all of its important sidelights on the New Albany of 1820-1821, would have been completely forgotten.

³⁸ New Albany *Chronicle*, May 5 and July 28, 1821. The price of rags was four cents per pound in payment of debts, and three cents for cash.

The second newspaper venture in New Albany is really more a part of Louisville's newspaper history. This was the *Microscope and General Advertiser*, an eight-page pamphlet size paper published by "T. H. Roberts, M.D." Roberts was a Louisville resident who became so embroiled in political affairs that he had to escape across the river to Indiana to preserve his paper as well as his own skin. For his day, Roberts was a practiced writer of newspaper satire, and though he clothed his writing in ironical garb, his victims did not fail to see at whom his jests were pointed. This excerpt illustrates the vigor with which he wrote: "Dear Tim—The Legislature of Kentucky have resolved to give the Governor unlimited scope in the treasury for the purpose of inviting General La Fayette to pay us a visit. Pray Gentlemen, what will he see, should he visit us?—An Empty Treasury—An insolvent Community—A penitentiary [*sic*] full of starving convicts, and a contentious & factious Legislature, who spent their time & the people's money, in bombastic nonsense—sacrificing public good at the shrine of private sentiment! The 'Nation's Guest' would weep to see, Such *mockery* and such *vanity*. Simon Twist."³⁰

"Tim" was the pseudonym of Roberts, and in the style of Addison and Steele, he had such "correspondents" as "Plain Dealings," "Jehu's doux yeus," "Casetera Desunt," and "Titus Tadpole." Unlike the *Chronicle*, the contents of the *Microscope* were not mostly copied from other papers. There was relatively little advertising, suggesting that its revenue came from other sources.

Something more nearly approaching the standard newspaper of the day was the next journal; it was called the *Indiana Recorder and Public Advertiser*. Its first issue came out about November, 1825, shortly after the demise of the *Microscope*. It was published by, Roberts and Campbell, the former probably T. H. Roberts, of the *Microscope*, and leaned toward the Whig party in its political sentiments. It is notable for the number of Louisville concerns that used its pages for advertising. This reveals that the revenue from local advertisements alone was not sufficient to maintain profitably a paper in New Albany; also that Louisville traders

³⁰ New Albany *Microscope*, December 25, 1824.

were out to gather in as much of the Indiana trade as they could.

After two years the *Recorder and Advertiser* was enlarged into a semiweekly and became the *Indiana Commercial Recorder*. Its columns were to be devoted to politics, agriculture, internal improvements, and general literature.⁴⁰ Since no copies of this semiweekly are known to exist, there is no record of how well it lived up to its prospectus.

The last newspaper to be established before the end of the decade was the *Cresset*. This small four-page sheet first came out on March 8, 1828, and it also had Whig leanings. The prevalence of Whig papers at this time indicates how the town stood in politics. If this paper received financial support from the party, it was not enough to maintain itself. One extant issue of the *Cresset* is the only known record that this little paper ever existed.

There might have been other papers whose careers were encompassed in the 1820 to 1830 period, but no trace of them now remains. A survival of a stray issue here, or a stray issue there, may throw valuable light on these crucial years when the pioneer settlement was consolidating its position and bidding to become Indiana's most important point on the Ohio River.

By the year 1830 the tiny river bank settlement, established just seventeen years earlier, had become not only Indiana's most important point on the Ohio River but its most populous town as well. For thirty years the prestige that comes with being the state's "biggest" and "most important" town was to be New Albany's.

But Louisville was right across the river, and Louisville already had the "jump" on its neighbor. It reaped not only the benefits that came to it from its being an older town; but it had gotten the canal on its side of the river, and it was working to make its western suburbs part of one unified urban pattern so that as a commercial and shipping center it could no longer be threatened. As New Albany's population increased by hundreds, Louisville's grew by five hundreds. The four or five to one ratio of 1820 was to remain until Louisville pulled away to become undisputably a great city,

⁴⁰ New Albany *Recorder*, November 13, 1827.

while New Albany in comparison was still just a middle-sized town.⁴¹ Yet, the view of the Scribners, that New Albany was the "only eligible situation" for a great river depot, was the theme most manifest in the history of the town for another half century. The imponderables still ruled, and New Albany's citizens ever awaited that one big chance to prove how great their town really was.

In the meantime, life went along about the same as in hundreds of other western towns. The equipage of older ideas, traditions, and customs was squared to fit the new environment, and a characteristic—yet unique—place called New Albany earned its right to a coveted dot on the map of Indiana and the midwest.

⁴¹	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850
Louisville	1,000	4,012	10,352	21,210	43,194
New Albany	—	1,000	2,080	4,226	8,181

These figures were taken from the United States Census Reports. New Albany's 1820 population is an estimate of M'Murtrie, *Sketches of Louisville*, 167.