

Southern Migration to Northern Indiana Before 1850

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It has been the general consensus of opinion among a number of historians that southerners did not penetrate into the wilderness north of the National Road during the first part of the nineteenth century. According to Frederick J. Turner, "The Old National road was built piecemeal, and too late, as a whole, to make a great artery of trade throughout the Middle West . . .; but it marked the northern borders of the Southern stream of population, running, as this did, through Columbus, Indianapolis, and Vandalia."¹ Lois K. Mathews held a similar view, stating that the settlement of Illinois and Indiana was "the history of a frontier pushed north by Southerners, and of settlement by Puritan stock working down from the North toward the centre, where both met and strove for supremacy in state councils."² When Henry M. Flint traveled from Philadelphia to St. Louis in 1837, he related that southerners had located in the lower half of Illinois and Indiana.³

Upon consulting statistics compiled from the Original Census Returns, these views do not appear valid. Although records giving nativity before 1850 are few and incomplete, with what information was available it was discovered that at least 167 southerners had settled north of the Wabash River in Indiana between 1820 and 1830. In the next decade this number had increased to 5,296. By 1850, however, 11,920 Kentuckians, North Carolinians, Virginians, Marylanders, and others from the South had chosen the northern Indiana wilderness.⁴

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¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 136.

² Lois K. Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909), 197.

³ Henry M. Flint, *The Railroads of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1868), 240.

⁴ For the data here submitted a card was made out for every name in the 1830 and 1840 Census as well as for every settler before 1841 mentioned in the county histories, which in some instances contained biographical sketches. These names were then checked against the 1850

Hence, this region of the Middle West had not been avoided by the southerners. Because of soil exhaustion Virginians may have left their native state in "utter hopelessness of bettering their condition" for new and strange homes in "the far West." By 1836 the epidemic of emigration had spread with such rapidity as to threaten the "entire depopulation of extensive neighborhoods, once the garden spots of Virginia." One exaggerated account referred to this emigration as a pestilence which emptied the towns, villages, and country at large "not only of those who might justly be called the warts and cancerous ulcers of the body politic," but of thousands of the best and most valuable citizens.⁵

The Old Dominion, however, had a partner in this predicament, for a similar situation prevailed in the adjoining state of Maryland. An account in the *Wheeling Gazette* stated that in 1836-1837, over a period of eighteen months, nearly one and one-half million dollars were carried out of Charles and St. Marys counties. Marylanders began to blaze trails in the northern part of the Hoosier State before 1830, and on September 24, 1833, a colony of about thirty arrived from Maryland to begin anew in Allen County. These pioneers chose an area in Aboite Township which was known as the Maryland settlement.⁶ One may assume that some other Marylanders who left their native surroundings in 1836-1837 probably located in northern Indiana, especially since a settlement had already been founded there, bearing the name of the state from which they had removed.

While some sought new homes because of soil exhaustion, the Quakers and Moravians took to the road because of their dislike for slavery. Since this institution had "enervating and paralyzing effects" upon the white population, many crossed the Ohio River. In a number of counties in Maryland where there was a decided increase of slaves, the white population

Census which records nativity. This method has flaws because it does not include every resident of northern Indiana before 1841 since some individuals moved away or died. All statistics in this study have been compiled from the 1850 Original Census Returns.

⁵ *Farmers Register* (10 vols., Shellbank, Petersburg, Virginia, 1833-1842), III (1836), 620-624.

⁶ Avery O. Craven, "Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1806-1860," *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* (Urbana, 1912-), XIII (1925), 123; Kingman Brothers, *History of Allen County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1880), 145.

showed a comparable decrease.⁷ There was the hope among some who did not emigrate that the large estates would be divided into small farms and every mother's son, as in New England, would put his own hand to the axe and the plow, every mother's daughter would give up her silks and her satins and "betake herself to the churn and wheel," and when every man, as in New England, would make his own cheese and drink his own cider.⁸

Finances or loyalty to native soil prevented some from migrating. Numerous and various reasons as well as destinations might be cited for those who sought new homes. On the other hand, there were those who had no destination in mind but just moved along with their earthly possessions until favorably impressed with an area to locate. A North Carolinian traveling toward the West in 1835, when asked where he was going, answered, "No where in pertick'lar. Me and my wife thought we'd hunt a place to settle. We've no money, nor no plunder—nothin' but just ourselves and this nag—we thought we'd try our luck in a new country."⁹ Some who chose northern Indiana may have been of the same mind as the man from North Carolina.

Those who had a definite goal possibly chose the shortest route. In all likelihood others just started out in the hope that they might meet someone else who could recommend a fertile area in the new country. Among the ways to the West from the South was a road from Baltimore to Harper's Ferry which followed between the walls of the Appalachian and Blue Ridge mountains to Fort Chissel, where it united with a highway from Richmond. At the blockhouse in the Holston Valley near Abingdon, Virginia, it joined the Wilderness Road and proceeded westwardly to Cumberland Gap. At this point it changed its course to the northwest toward the Falls of the Ohio, from whence the traveler could pass through Indiana to Vincennes. The latter part of the route was known as

⁷ Turner, *Frontier in American History*, 224; *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore, Maryland, 1811-1837), XXI (October 27, 1821), 132; *ibid.*, XLIV (August 17, 1833), 411; Logan Esarey, "Internal Improvements in Early Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* (Indianapolis, 1895-), V (1915), 51.

⁸ *American Farmer* (15 vols., Baltimore, Washington, 1819-1834), VIII (February 2, 1827), 360.

⁹ William V. Pooley, "The Settlement of Illinois from 1830 to 1850," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, History Series* (4 vols., Madison, 1908-1918), I, 353.

Buffalo Trace.¹⁰ From Vincennes to Fort Wayne, Thorntown Trace served as a connecting link between southern and northern Indiana.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that the National Road was not only a popular highway for immigrants from Pennsylvania, but also for southerners. The largest percentage of children born to parents who were natives of the South and who settled in northern Indiana made their entrance into the world in the Buckeye State.¹¹ One may, therefore, assume that the National Road was an important thoroughfare for southerners who chose the area beyond the Wabash River in the Hoosier State.

On the basis of the 1850 Original Census Returns, it is possible to determine through which states pioneers traveled by the birthplace of children born during the trek to the new land. Many made their entrance to the Hoosier State through Ohio. Several families living in Peru, Miami County, followed this path. In the case of one family the parents were born in Virginia; three children, nine, eight, and three, in Ohio; and the youngest of four months, in Indiana. The parents of another family, also natives of Virginia, had four children: twelve, ten, nine, and five, born in Ohio; and three children: four, two, and two months, born in Indiana. As for a third family, it is not so easy to determine just when they arrived, as the parents and oldest child sixteen years of age were born in Virginia and three who were thirteen, eleven, and six years of age were born in Ohio.

One farmer and his wife from Kentucky came by way of Ohio to Jackson Township, Cass County. Three children, twenty-three, twenty-two, and nineteen, were born in Ohio; and a set of twins, seventeen, and a twelve-year-old, in Indiana.

Likewise, a farmer from North Carolina chose a wife from Tennessee and they became the parents of four children born in Ohio; but their fifth, eleven years of age,

¹⁰ Archer B. Hulbert, *Historic Highways of America* (16 vols., Cleveland, Ohio, 1902-1905), VI (1903); William A. Pusey, *The Wilderness Road to Kentucky* (New York, 1921); Thomas Speed, *The Wilderness Road* (Louisville, Kentucky, 1886); George R. Wilson and Gayle Thornbrough, "The Buffalo Trace," in *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, XV (1946), 173-279.

¹¹ Original Returns of the Seventh United States Census, 1850, Indiana. A copy of this census on microfilm is on file in the Documents Division, Indiana University Library, Bloomington.

began life in Indiana. Another farmer, fifty years of age, from the Tarheel State, and his wife, forty-four years of age, born in Maryland, were the parents of four children, twenty-one, sixteen, fourteen, and seven, born in Ohio; but in 1850 they were living in Adams Township, Cass County, Indiana.

A family living in La Porte pursued a slightly different course. The father began life in Maryland; the mother in Virginia; the first child, twenty-four, in Kentucky; and the youngest, nineteen, in Indiana.

In New Durham Township, La Porte County, lived a family who followed a more roundabout way from North Carolina. The first child, nineteen, was born in North Carolina; the next two, seventeen and sixteen, in Ohio; the third, fourteen, in Michigan; and the four youngest, eleven, ten, seven, and four, in Indiana.

An unusual route of a southern family who settled in Concord Township, Elkhart County, is worth relating. The father was born in South Carolina; the mother in Virginia; the oldest child, sixteen, in Wisconsin; the next two, fourteen and thirteen, in Illinois; and the fourth, ten, in Indiana.

Some families apparently had not planned to settle in Indiana, since they by-passed this state for Illinois and lived there from five to ten years before removing to the Hoosier State. A southern family living in Michigan City first chose Illinois. The father was born in Virginia, the mother in Kentucky, four children ranging from seventeen to six in Illinois, and one, four, in Indiana.

A United Brethren minister either suffered from the *Wanderlust* or felt the Lord was calling him to a new field of labor from time to time. He was a native of Maryland, chose a wife from Pennsylvania, then went to Ohio, where he stayed for a year or more, then crossed the line into Indiana. After five years among the Hoosiers he must have felt that Michigan might have more fertile fields. In only a short time, however, he discovered that it would be better to return to Indiana, and so settled in Middlebury Township, Elkhart County.

The distribution of southerners in counties north of the Wabash River is worth noting. Probably because of its location and accessibility from the South, Wabash County had the largest number of southerners in northern Indiana—1,490, out of a possible 11,920. Southern states well repre-

sented in this county were: Virginia with 640, Kentucky with 361, North Carolina with 238, and Maryland with 160.

Two other counties, Miami and Cass, just west of Wabash, numbered over a thousand southerners among their population. Miami also became the choice of many from Kentucky, North Carolina, and Maryland, while Cass fostered a generous sprinkling of natives from Kentucky and Maryland. No doubt the Michigan Road made these three counties easily accessible to immigrants from the South.

Strangely enough, LaPorte ranked fourth with 924, of which over 62 per cent were from Virginia. This is worthy of observation, since this county also had the largest number of New Englanders and inhabitants from New York. Apparently the Virginian or Kentuckian in this county did not confuse the Yankee peddler of cheap merchandise with the substantial New England farmer or businessman.

The southerners in Kosciusko, St. Joseph, Elkhart, Whitely, Noble, LaGrange, De Kalb, Allen, and Steuben were mostly natives of Virginia and Maryland. One might, therefore, assume that entrance into these counties was made by some route from central or northern Ohio. It is likely that the National Road was used by a large number and then some trail followed which intersected with the great highway. In Indiana the Quaker Trace connected with the National Road at Richmond and went in a northwardly direction to Allen County. No doubt, Wayne's Trace from Ohio into this county was also used. The Maumee and St. Marys rivers in all likelihood were the choice of those who made part of the trek by water. If the immigrant proceeded as far north as the present site of Toledo, he may have continued his journey into Indiana on the Vistula Road. Moreover, if the newcomer had a definite place of settlement in mind, such as St. Joseph County which was traversed by the Michigan Road, he probably went as far west as Indianapolis on the National Road.

On the other hand, the southerners in Fulton, White, Jasper, Marshall, and Pulaski counties were mostly from Virginia and Kentucky. This would seem to indicate that highways which led from Kentucky into the Hoosier State were used. In the case of Fulton and Marshall counties, the Michigan Road perhaps was the popular route. A water route of which the Ohio, Wabash, and Tippecanoe rivers were the main arteries may have been preferred means of transportation for some who settled in White and Pulaski counties.

Then, too, there were traces which linked with more important trails.

Both Lake and Starke counties had fewer than a hundred from the South. Since Lake had a large New England population, it is possible that it was not sought by southerners. The ague-infested swamps in Starke County, no doubt, served to turn the eyes of the southern immigrant to other regions.

Despite the fact that Virginians constituted more than half of the southern population for the area under consideration, in De Kalb and LaGrange counties natives from Maryland surpassed the number from Virginia. The latter, indeed, was represented in all counties. On the other hand, there were also numerous inhabitants from Maryland in Allen, Cass, Miami, and Wabash counties. Likewise, North Carolinians made an impression by their numbers in Miami and Wabash counties. But Kentucky ranked next to Virginia and her immigrants were prevalent in Cass, Fulton, Marshall, Miami, Wabash, and White counties.

Because of inadequate records, the complete story of just when and in what numbers southerners began to locate in northern Indiana may never be told. Since national and local conditions stimulated or retarded emigration, it would be erroneous to conclude that many people emigrated when the business cycle was at its lowest ebb. In a number of cases, it was necessary to save some money before the journey to a new settlement could be undertaken. Moreover, the land sales may serve somewhat as a measuring stick for emigration. In 1818 a high mark was recorded for the country as a whole, but by 1819 there was a noticeable reduction. Obviously, the panic of that year in its early stages must have effected this decline. Emigration in the thirties increased and northern Indiana became more popular. Likewise, by 1836 the land sales had reached a peak. The following year, however, another panic made its inroads, and for the next five years a sharp decrease in land sales was noted.¹² After the country had recuperated from this hardship, many again sought new areas in the hope that such an event might be averted in the future.

Young and old became victims of the "migrant fever."

¹² *Senate Documents*, 27 Cong., 3 Sess., No. 246 (serial no. 416), 5, 7. See also, George R. Taylor, "Agrarian Discontent in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812," *The Journal of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1893-), XXXIX (1931), 471-505; "Prices in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812," *Journal of Economic and Business History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1928-), III (1930-1931), 148-163.

An investigation of the ages of southerners in northern Indiana revealed that 86 per cent were above the age of twenty. The largest number, 9,279, were between twenty and sixty years of age, in the most productive period of their lives.

These energetic southerners engaged in numerous occupations, but the majority were farmers. Many took an interest in civic affairs and a number were active in state government. From 1825 to 1850 thirty-two southerners were in the Indiana house of representatives and nine in the state senate. In the lower house fifteen were natives of Kentucky; ten, of Virginia; four, of Tennessee; and one each, of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and North Carolina. Four in the upper house were from Kentucky; two from North Carolina; and one each from Maryland, Tennessee, and Virginia. Among the representatives thirteen were farmers; seven, lawyers; five, merchants; three, physicians; one, an innkeeper; one, a minister; one, a tanner; and one did not list an occupation. Of the nine senators, three were lawyers; two, farmers; two, merchants; one, a minister; and one failed to give his occupation.¹³

When the constitutional convention of 1850 met, seven southerners from northern Indiana held seats in this body. No two men were of the same age, and they represented seven different occupations. Four were Virginians; one, a Marylander; one, a North Carolinian; and one, a Tennessean. One of these men had been in the state twenty-seven years; three, sixteen; one, fifteen; one, eleven; and another, only four.¹⁴ James W. Borden, Daniel Crumbacker, and Edmund D. Taylor took an active part in debates while Samuel J. Anthony, John A. Graham, Jonathan Harbolt, and Hugh Miller only submitted resolutions and made motions.

Southerners of northern Indiana were active in the political life of the state, represented numerous occupations, followed different routes into the Hoosier State, and had settled in this region of the Middle West before 1830.

¹³ This information was obtained from the House of Representatives and Senate lists in the Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis; 1850 Original Census Returns, Indiana; and county histories.

¹⁴ These Democrats were: Samuel J. Anthony, James W. Borden, Daniel Crumbacker, John A. Graham, Jonathan Harbolt, Hugh Miller, and Edmund D. Taylor. Baker & McFarland, "Members of the Convention to Amend the Constitution of the State of Indiana, Assembled at Indianapolis, October, 1850, Giving Name, Age, Post Office, County Represented, Nativity, Years in State, Boarding House, Occupation, Politics, Married or Single, and Remarks." A broadside.