

Documents

“The Boggstown Resolutions”

A correspondent to the *Indiana Magazine of History* recently asked about the story of a township in an Indiana county which early in 1861 declared that in the event the Union was divided and the township was required to cast its lot with one or the other portion, it chose to be attached to the Southern Confederacy. Accordingly, we are printing the account of the meeting that drew up “The Famous Boggstown Resolutions,” written by William R. Norris, secretary of the Boggstown Convention, as it appears in Brant & Fuller, *History of Shelby County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887), 322-331.

Edward H. Chadwick’s *History of Shelby County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1909), 99-103, also contains a description of the meeting, taken from this same account by William R. Norris.

A search of some contemporary newspapers does not yield any corroboration of this event. The *Indiana Magazine of History* would welcome further information about it.

The following is Norris’ account and the resolutions:

“The meeting of the citizens of Sugar Creek Township, that assembled at the school-house in Boggstown, on Saturday, the 16th day of February, 1861, was the most notable one that ever met in the history of that township. It had been well advertised throughout the township by written notices posted up in all public places the week before, and a general turnout of the citizens was secured. The school-house was full and overflowing. The evening was mild, but cloudy and threatening, somewhat in keeping with the disturbed condition of the country at that time. The meeting was promptly organized at 1 o’clock P.M., by the selection of W. C. E. Wanee for president or chairman, and Wm. R. Norris as secretary, both citizens of Shelbyville now, but who were then residents of ‘Old Sugar Creek.’ At this time Sugar Creek Township possessed more debating talent to the square inch, and a better knowledge of parliamentary rules and usages, than any other township in the United States. Debating had been assiduously cultivated at Boggstown as the central point of the township for years and years, until everybody that would talk or wanted to talk, could talk. All the questions of the day

current in debating societies had been discussed time and again by the debating society that flourished at Boggstown permanently, and it took in the entire township. The consequence was that the old farmers and their boys were all debaters, and all took a pride in extemporaneous speaking. Hence a lively time was expected, as it was anticipated that the last resolution would provoke bitter opposition from the Republicans present, and there was a general turnout of them as well as the Democrats, who were in a large majority in the township, being then about three to one.

"On motion, W. C. E. Wane, Dr. J. W. Smelser and Wm. R. Norris, were appointed a Committee on Resolutions. The committee retired behind the school-house for consultation. Dr. Smelser drew from his coat pocket the Resolutions 'cut and dried' already written out, they had been prepared by him and a cousin of his, Mr. Fullalove, of Louisville, Ky., who had been visiting his, Dr. Smelser's, family for some two or three weeks, and who was very desirous to have them adopted by the meeting, that he might take them back home with him as the popular expression of the true sentiment of the people in a township like Sugar Creek, situate in the heart of Central Indiana. The debate was opened by Dr. Smelser, who read the resolutions and supported them in a speech of probably fifteen or twenty minutes. Smelser was a good speaker, well informed and thoroughly posted on the political news of the day, and as he eloquently urged the passage of the resolutions, especially the last one, the attention of the audience was intense, you could have heard a pin drop, the silence was so complete; he was followed by Norris who advocated the resolutions likewise and urged upon the meeting the propriety of adopting them entire and especially the last one as the most important of all. Mr. Wane, the chairman of the meeting then rose, and drawing from his pocket a small book, said: 'My friends, we are all met here to-day for a common purpose, not as party men, but for the consideration of the great questions that now disturb our common country and threaten this lovely land with all the horrors of civil war. I will thereby read you some extracts from this little book I hold in my hand, which is a laconic work, on the horrors and terrors of war. I think the writer so much better expresses and describes the horrors and evils than anything that I myself could offer, that I will read it to you, his essay on war.'

He then read from the book an exceedingly well written description of the calamities caused by war. This occupied about ten minutes, as Mr. Wanee read very slowly and impressively, he being an excellent reader. Three speeches had now been made in behalf of the resolutions, and all of them by the Committee on Resolutions, and it begun to look like there would be no opposition to the passage of the resolutions, but at this juncture Dr. Wm. G. McFadden, a young physician and Republican, who then lived about two and a half miles north of Boggstown, on the old McFadden homestead, the Doctor is now and has been a well known citizen of Shelbyville for many years, arose from his seat in the audience and requested the secretary to re-read the resolutions and particularly the last one, as he thought that he had some objections to the last one. The secretary complied, reading the resolutions deliberately and the last one very slowly, word by word.

"Dr. McFadden then proceeded to state his objections to the last resolution, saying, that he thought it inexpedient in the present disturbed condition of political opinion, and in view of the heated and exasperated feelings of the southern people, especially the slave holders, to pass such a resolution, as it would in his judgment already add fuel to the flame so fiercely burning in all the states south of the Ohio River. That would encourage them and make them believe that they had abundance of sympathy and support right here in Indiana, and it might be the cause of precipitating a dissolution of the Union, they expecting in that event that Indiana and other western states would go with them, and form a new confederation that would embrace the Southern States, the Western States, New York and Pennsylvania, and would leave the Yankee or New England States out in the cold. That for his part he preferred keeping all the states together and not permitting any division of the Union, and that, if necessary to keep them in, he should be in favor of the government using coercion, much as he deprecated war, and civil war above all wars. The young Doctor's speech made a profound impression, and was received with many marks of approval by the Republicans present, whilst the Democrats looked somewhat uneasy for fear the resolution would encounter decided opposition. At this point, Secretary Norris sprang to his feet and commenced a rapid argument in favor of the resolution, enumerating the many geographical, commercial and business

advantages that would enure to our people by going with the South in case of a dissolution of the Union. He said amongst other things that the whole Mississippi valley should go together, that God Almighty and nature designed them to be one and indivisible, that as waters of our State flowed to the Mississippi, and the Mississippi to the Gulf—nature herself had pointed out our destiny—that as for his part he was born with southern blood in his veins, that he could never go back on his native State, old Kentucky, that he had lived as they were all well aware, for more than two years quite recently, in the Land of the Border Ruffians, Western Missouri, right in the hot-bed of negro slavery, where they all owned slaves—that to his certain knowledge western Missouri was a perfect nigger's paradise, that the slaves were well treated, many of them better than they deserved. That from his knowledge of southern slave holders he would much prefer going with them if they did secede and leave the Union, to allying himself to the hypocritical, cunning, crafty, foxy, blue-bellied Yankees of the New England States—and a great deal more was said by the secretary in the same vein.

“Dr. Smelser followed with an earnest appeal in behalf of the South, stating that he had been in slave states, that he knew the condition of the niggers in Kentucky was much preferable to that of many poor white men in the North, and a thousand times better than the condition of the overworked and underpaid operators in the factories of the Yankee States. That he would prefer, infinitely prefer, a union with Southern slaveholders to a union with the hypocritical Pharisees of New England, the cold-blooded calculating Yankees, whose only God was money, who first stole the niggers from Africa and sold them to the south, and who now wanted to free the niggers, so that they could get them to come North and work for them, and wait on them for little or nothing, pay them off in old clothes and cold victuals, whilst pretending to be their friends—they would rather steal a nigger from a good comfortable home where he was well treated and taken care of, than to pay some poor white man good living wages to do their drudgery. The Yankees were nearly all Abolitionists, and he hoped that Caleb Cushing, Ben Butler and all such good Democrats, who were willing to stand by the south in protecting their rights to their slave property would move out, and go to the south or west, where the people would welcome

them with warm hearts and open hands. The Doctor said much more in a similar strain, advocating the passage of the resolution with vehement eloquence. He sat down and Dr. McFadden undertook to reply, by saying that he had no love for the Yankees nor the Abolitionists, but he thought the resolution was premature and imprudent in view of the excited condition of the public mind both north and south, that it might hasten a dissolution of the Union much sooner than we anticipated, etc.

"At this stage of the discussion, Homer Palmeter, an old man, and a Jackson Democrat, who read the *New York Day Book*, an ultra fire-eating, Democratic paper, morning, noon and night, took the floor. He was an old man whose soul absorbing passion was politics, and who kept posted on its every kaleidoscopic phase. He said amongst other things, 'Mr. President, we hear much said about coishun (coercion) in the papers, they're full of it, both Dimekratic and Rippublican. I say Mr. President, let's bring it right home to ourselves. How would you, Mr. President, like to be coished (coerced, he meant). I know you wouldn't. We all know you wouldn't. Now if it isn't right to coish (coerce) a man, it ain't right to coish (coerce) a State. What's right between man and man is right between States and States. "Do as you would be done by," is the golden rule of Holy Writ, laid down by Christ himself, and don't undertake to coish (coerce) our Southern brithrin.' He then launched into a philippic against the Abolitionists for agitating the slavery question and disturbing the harmony of the people and the States.

"Speeches were also made by many others, as the Secretary persisted in calling on every one present for an expression of opinion. The two brothers, Washington and John McConnell, made temperate and logical speeches in favor of the resolutions. Young Robert McConnell, eldest son of John McConnell, warmly endorsed the resolutions. Armstrong Gibson advocated them in an impulsive manner. David Smith earnestly favored their adoption and thought it was high time to cut loose from the meddlesome and accursed Abolitionists of the Yankee States. He was followed by Adam Smith, his brother, who has distinguished himself of late years in advocating the theory that the earth stands still and the 'sun do move' around it, in numerous debates with some of the scientific men of the age. Uncle Adam said: 'Gentlemen, I have

been much interested in the discussion of the resolutions, and I for one, am emphatically in favor of their adoption. If it comes to a sepperation of the States I prefer to go with the Southern nigger drivers all the time to agoin' with the Blue-Bellied Yanks. By Griddy them's my sentiments, gentlemen.'

"A number of other short speeches were made, by Chairman Wanee, Secretary Norris, Dr. Smelser, Homer Palmerton and others. The large and influential relationship of the Johnstons and Carsons, who comprised the bulk of the Republican voters of the township, were out in full force, and they at first supported Dr. McFadden, the Union-at-all-hazards champion, in his determined opposition; but they were gradually won over to the affirmative by the continued argument and persuasion of the Democrats, until finally Dr. McFadden was left solitary and alone in his opposition. As a last despairing effort, he said: 'Gentlemen, the people of New England are not all Abolitionists, and they are not as bad as has been represented. The Yankees were good soldiers in the War of the Revolution, they helped us mightily to achieve our independence. The Revolution, you remember, began at Lexington and Bunker Hill. I for one am not willing to give up "Yankee Doodle, Lexington and Bunker Hill." At this point the secretary, who was familiarly known as Dick Norris, called upon his fast friend and bosom crony, Ben Farmbrough, the great trading man of the township, for an expression of his sentiments. Ben, surnamed 'Old Sly,' slowly rose to his feet, and in his peculiarly quaint and comical tone, said: 'Gentlemen, you all know I'm not speech maker; but at sich a time as this I thinks it stands every man in hand to impress his sentiments. I know the Southerners well; I hev traded in Old Kaintuck; I hev bot stock thar, and I hev sold stock thar. Whatever a Kaintuckian tells you, you can depend on; he's fair and squar; his word's as good as his bond. I speak what I know; I hav et at thar tables, staid at their houses of nights, and had lots o' deelins with 'em, and thars not a more cleverer or a more honorabler set of people on the face of the urth than they ar. As for the blue-belli'd Yanks, I've hed deelins with them too; an you've got to watch 'em all the time, watch 'em as well as pray, for prayin wont do no good; they'll cheet you enny how if they git the least chance, an if they don't they make a chance. I tel you the Devil will never git

his own until he gits the Yanks, and he'll be mighty loth to claim 'em for he knows 'em too well; he knows they wouldn't be in hell six months before they cheet him out of his kingdom and set up a government of their own. No, he'll not take 'em in if he can help it, he'll just shut the door in their faces and tel 'em thro' the keyhole that he don't want em, for 'em to go on still lower down, and set up a kingdom of their own, and cheet it out among themselves. If we had the few good Dimekrats out o' New England, I would say, go to thunder, we don't want to be associated with you dead-beets and everlastin cheets no longer. I fer one am fer the south. Them's my sentiments.'

"It is needless to remark that Ben's speech brought down the house, and that a motion was thereupon made to vote for the resolutions. The chairman put the question, shall the resolutions pass, it was answered from all parts of the room as well as out doors by a stentorian yes. He then said, are there any opposed to the resolution. Dr. McFadden rose and said, I vote no against the last resolution; he was feebly seconded by two others, whose names I have forgotten, and one young man, Washington Andrews, refused to vote either way. The chairman declared the resolutions passed by a large majority, nearly unanimous—he regretted that it wasn't entirely unanimous, but the minority, no matter how small their numbers, were entitled to vote their sentiments.

"The resolutions as passed by the meeting were taken to Louisville, Ky., the next Monday by Mr. Fullalove, Dr. Smelser's cousin, and by him furnished to the Louisville papers, with a report of the meeting. The resolutions were published in the papers of that city, with glowing comments by the editors, who represented that this was a true exponent of the sentiments of the Western States, and that Sugar Creek Township had simply taken the initiative in giving voice to their sentiments. That Sugar Creek Township was situated in Shelby County, the home of the distinguished Democratic politician the Hon. Thomas A. Hendricks, and that no doubt these resolutions were a true reflex of the sentiments prevailing not only in Indiana, but in all the Western States. They were published all over the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Lakes to the Gulf, and were circulated broadcast over the entire South. There is no doubt that they proved an important factor in stimulating the spirit of secession and hastening the advent of the inevitable conflict.'

"The *Volunteer* of March 7, 1861, contained this article: 'The following are the resolutions passed by the Sugar Creek union meeting on the 16th. The first and second resolutions were passed unanimously, and the third by three or four dissenting voices. The meeting was about equally composed of Democrats and Republicans.'

"'WHEREAS, We do acknowledge, and are proud to confess the services of our Congressmen, who are stirring and using their united efforts to promote the best interests and safety of the Union, and

"'WHEREAS, We do fully endorse the Crittenden resolutions or any fair and honorable adjustment, that will answer as a basis for the settlement of our national affairs, that will be honorable and fair to the interests of all portions of our nation. Therefore,

"'Resolved, That we, the citizens of Sugar Creek Township, do most earnestly recommend and request the General Assembly of this State, now in session, to make application to Congress to call a convention as soon as possible for the purpose of proposing amendments to the constitution of the United States, based on the Crittenden resolutions, or any other fair and honorable policy, that will amicably and forever settle the slavery question between the North and the South.

"'Resolved, That while we deprecate the precipitate action of the Southern States, we are opposed to the general government using any means of forcible coercion, but believe if proper concessions and compromises are offered by the Northern States with adequate constitutional guarantees, that all these seceding States will readily come back, and a reunion of our glorious Union will be the result.

"'Resolved, That if, after all peaceable efforts have been made to keep the several States united in one grand confederacy, they must divide, and we must be cast with one or the other portion, we do of choice prefer to be attached to the Southern Confederacy.'

"There were no further attempts to hold Union meetings in Shelby County for some time, and things drifted along in this manner until the firing on Fort Sumter brought about the crisis. Nothing can well exceed the excitement occasioned by that first act of the rebellion. Public meetings were held in most of the villages and hamlets throughout the North, at which speeches were made and resolutions passed, denouncing the secession movement in unmeasured terms. The President's call for 75,000 volunteers was responded to with alacrity. No portion of the country was more prompt in stepping forward in defense of the Union than was Shelby County."