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HISTORY BULLETIN



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THE HENDRICKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HENDRICKS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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H C H S

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H C H S

A Poem for Spring

Road Song of a 13th-Century Page, by William Alexander Percy

Jesu,

If Thou wilt make
Thy peach trees bloom for me,
And fringe my bridle path both sides
With tulips, red and free,
If Thou wilt make Thy skies as blue
As ours in Sicily,
And wake the little leaves that sleep
On every bending tree—
I promise not to vexen Thee
That Thou shouldst make eternally
Heaven my home;
But right contentedly,
A singing page I'll be
Here, in Thy springtime,
Jesu.

February Meeting

A good crowd...some of us anxious to escape the "cabin fever" which we had suffered through most of the winter ... but most of us attracted by the "name" program ... gathered at the Danville United Methodist Church, Sunday, February 13th. Mary Jeanette Winkleman presided and Mrs. Fred Worrell gave the devotions entitled "Praising God". Treasurer Blanche Wean reported a balance of \$1,549.76, and Dorothy Kelley gave a good progress report of the Museum. Ida Mae Miller gave a talk entitled "As It Was in the Beginning" and, as usual, delighted us with her stories and songs. Ladies of Center and Marion Townships served delicious refreshments for an enjoyable social hour. It was just another fine meeting which we are all getting to expect.

H C H S

Next Meeting ... May 1st!!!! Please note the change in date!!!

Our next meeting will be the first Sunday in May, because Mothers' Day falls on the second Sunday. We hope you will remember.

We are invited to accept the hospitality of the Stilesville Christian Church, Sunday May 1st, for our first meeting in Stilesville. (Isn't it nice to be officially invited? Usually we invite ourselves!) Ethel Brock will serve as social chairman and the ladies of Franklin, Liberty and Guilford Townships will furnish the refreshments.

Mr. John Hume, an Indianapolis attorney, but a home town Danville boy, and an excellent speaker, will furnish the program which promises to be an especially interesting one. He will give the history of the Mayflower Transit Company which was founded by his uncle, Mr. Conrad M. Gentry. It is especially appropriate that we will be meeting at Stilesville because Mr. Hume's parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Hume (he was an outstanding Danville attorney too) both were born at Stilesville, and Mr. Hume's aunt, Mrs. Jeanette Gentry was also a Stilesville girl. Of added interest is the fact that the Mayflower Company is celebrating its 50th anniversary and we are all promised some very nice souvenirs in honor of the occasion. This is a meeting you won't want to miss.

With Our V I P's

We have said it before - and it bears repeating - that our Society is blest with many outstanding members - people who have made great contributions in various ways to their communities. We are always happy to report when these fine folk are recognized for their efforts.

In our last bulletin we mentioned that Clark and Carolyn Kellum were chosen outstanding Senior Citizens at Plainfield. Now Carolyn is Hendricks County's Senior Citizen of the Year and she will represent Hendricks County in the state contest. She will be honored with a tea at the Avon United Methodist, May 5th Festivities will start at 2 PM and many Society members will want to join in paying tribute to this remarkable woman.

Another of our fine members, Zona Walker, was chosen as Citizen of the Month recently at North Salem. Zona's lively pen has filled our pages, as well as those of several county papers, with fascinating stories of the past. Her excellent memory combined with her story telling skill has given us a veritable treasure chest of memories which will be read and re-read for many years to come. Congratulations, Zona!

Then imagine our pleasure and pride when we picked up the March 24th issue of The Indianapolis News to see a picture of Ruth Pritchard, big as life (well, almost because Ruth isn't very big!). There she sat with a copy of (what else?) Hendricks County, Indiana, Election Records. And, oh, the nice things Myrtie Barker said about her. She praised her as a geneologist and historian, she told of her work on the voting records and her contributions to our Hendricks County History, and incidentally, she tossed a few boquets at our history book. And please take note: in the future when you speak to or about Ruth, she is to be Her Honor, Madame Mayor (of Belleville, that is). Ruth, you have certainly put Belleville and Hendricks County on the map and we are proud of you!

H C H S

Wedding Bells

Wedding bells will probably be much in evidence Sunday, May 15, at the Pittsboro Christian Church when Roy and Frances Fisher mark their 50th wedding anniversary. Every member of the Society will want to share in this happy occasion for it was Roy and Frances who took the lead in organizing the H C H S in 1966. We can think of no two people who have contributed so much to this organization. They are two of our most beloved members and we can wish them nothing but continued happiness in the days and years to come. Our love to you, Roy and Frances!

H C H S

Our "poet laureate" has been much too quiet recently so we asked him to jingle a few jingles for us so he came up with this eloquent (?) ode to the writers of the history book. In case you have forgotten, Gerald Jones is the guilty party!

Today dear friends I'm happy, so happy to relate
The Hendricks County History is now brought up to date.
There is no gap in knowledge about who bought a farm
Or took a trip around the world and never came to harm.

We know whose folk were famous, no words of deep remorse
For no one had a relative who ever stole a horse.
Not a felony is mentioned by a single old time male
So it makes a person wonder why they ever built a jail.

The women all were paragons, with this we must agree
Altho there are a few sad men who think that couldn't be.
And dig those middle names, alas!, some secrets now are out
And so with many of our friends there's less to guess about.

With panegyric treatment the biographers were free
As they scanned the spreading branches of every family tree.
And after all it's nice to know so many folk recall
The saying 'if you can't say good, then just don't talk at all.'

And all those dates are interesting but it's difficult to see
How a woman born in nineteen eight can now be fifty three.
To tell the truth we know it's not exactly just that way
But according to the editors that's what some women say.

Centennials are exciting, be they semi, sesqui, bi-,
But this one for a lot of folk will last them till they die.
Especially the loyal souls who worked so long and hard
In getting out the History Book; they're mostly all still tard.

But soon they'll all be rested and when life's race is run
They'll fly up to St. Peter who'll smile and say, "Well done".
And then they'll scamper thru the gate to a very special nook
Because they worked so hard and long on the Hendricks History Book.

H C H S

Weather ... weather ... weather. That is all we talked about last winter and not many of us will forget the snows of last winter and the ice storm the winter before. The first two weeks in April had thermometers hovering between 80° and 90° and we think the weather is unusual. But the weather man doesn't really have many new tricks to pull on us as the following article will prove. Written by Norma Cramer and printed in the Indianapolis Star, it was loaned by Gladys Hovermale. Thanks, Gladys.

A YEAR ... 1816 WITHOUT A SUMMER

The year 1816, when Indiana joined the union, is memorable for more than attaining statehood. The second week of June that year snowstorms of an inch to 19 inches covered 15 of the then 19 states and most of the territories. Before the hard-freezing week was over, the 40th year of American independence had been labeled the "Year Without A Summer."

One-third of Indiana was at that time populated by more than 60,000 hardy pioneers. The remaining portion of its inhabitants were Indians (Miami, Delaware, and Potawatomi). All were affected by the unusual weather. The ponds and rivers froze every month that summer and the entire year was an agricultural disaster. Pioneers and Indians, alike, depended largely upon crops. There were none.

There was also no welfare, no government storages of wheat and no foreign aid. They had only themselves to rely upon.

Twelve months earlier at least half of a dozen almanacs had forecast highly unusual weather for 1816. The Old New England Farmer's Almanack and Register, gambled its reputation by predicting snow in July. Early editions brought jeers from prominent newspapers. Other almanacs joined in forecasting mid-summer snows and frosts.

The first day of the year brought a sense of foreboding. New Year's Day from Maine (then Brunswick) to Annapolis, the 7 a.m. temperature was in the upper 40s. By 7 p.m. the mercury had dropped below zero. By morning it was 15 below zero.

The remaining portion of that month and the next were mostly mild and spring-like in Indiana. The temperature was often so moderate that the warmth of fires was almost needless.

The first half of March was cold and blustery. Hoosiers, however, felt an upward turn for the last part. The mild weather continued into April and with it the normal beginning of plant growth. When ice and snow hit toward the end of the month, everything growing was brought to a frosty halt.

As the weather warmed slightly, farmers wearing their overcoats planted more spring crops. The thermometer plunged and the seedlings never had a chance to grow. In May Indiana had snow or sleet a total of 17 days.

When the June snow hit, it finished off the budding crops, left the remaining trees with blackened leaves and froze to death a great number of livestock.

One of the stories is about a farmer who went out to the hills to look after his sheep. It was June 17. As he left he shouted back to his wife to call out the neighbors because "I may get lost in the snow."

He was joking but it was 1816 and the weather wasn't. One hour later there was a terrific blizzard and on the third day the neighbors found the farmer - alive, but with both feet frozen.

The whole world was affected by the intemperate weather. In the states there were only 10 "weather observatories" but they were beginning to be relied upon more and more. According to the observatory records still available, the first four months of 1816 featured abrupt cold waves interspersed with unseasonable warm spells.

No crops grew north of the Ohio and Potomac rivers and but scanty returns occurred much farther south.

In Indiana fruit trees were destroyed. Corn was killed and the fields replanted until it was deemed too late. In the spring of 1817, the corn Indiana farmers had kept over from 1815 sold for from \$5-\$10 a bushel for seed only.

July's weather was more of the same. The Hoosier 4th of July celebration was held in bitter weather. During the first week, the upper 1,000 miles of the nation had below freezing temperatures.

August was even worse - more snow, frosts and blizzards. Ice formed a half-inch thick over much of the United States.

A result of the monstrous problem was rampant inflation.

By late summer: Cheese, the main protein food of the nation had soared from 7 cents to 15 cents a pound; oats from 12 cents to 92 cents; wheat from an almost traditional 50 cents to \$2.50 a bushel. Wages had shrunk. Able workers were delighted to labor three or four days for a bushel of wheat. Livestock prices fell from \$8 a hundred-weight to \$3 and \$4.

Fishing and hunting were thought to be the last hope. Raccoon and groundhogs became acceptable meat. Easily trapped passenger pigeons were eaten in place of poultry. Inasmuch as many wild plants were more hardy than cultivated crops, some survived the cold and were eagerly gathered. Wild sweet potatoes, jack-in-the-pulpit bulbs and wild onions were at least something edible.

Why was 1816 so abnormal? This period belongs to that famous group of six years, 1812 to 1817, which were cold all over the world. There were, besides temperature variations, extreme dust storms, wind shifts, a reddish aura around the sun and sunspots.

One theory is that volcanic eruptions, which had put dust into the upper atmosphere. There was an eruption of Soufriere, St. Vincent, April 30, 1812, one in Mayon, Luzon, 1814, and an extremely devastating expulsion in Tamboro, Sumbawa, April 7 to 12, 1815.

This great eruption was estimated to have put 37 to 100 cubic miles of dust, ashes and cinders into the atmosphere. Some 60,000 people lost their lives. For three days it was dark for a distance of 300 miles and the explosions were heard at a distance of nearly a 1,000 miles.

For whatever reason, this period in our history was a trying time for our ancestors. It was the year Americans would not flee, panic or be trampled under; a year they would not give in, the "Year Without a Summer."

H C H S

The following are articles which, unfortunately, did not make it in the Hendricks County History. These, and many others, are on file at the Museum.

BITS OF INTEREST

Osage Fence

The osage - orange tree or shrub once widely planted makes cattle - tight fences and was widely used until barbed wire supplanted this hedge as a fencing material. One hedge fence in that capacity is yet on the Lewis and Alva Owen farm which is nearly a hundred years old.

Zona Walker

Politics in North Salem

Citizens of this little town have always shown a great interest in politics. Before and after the Civil War they were union sympathizers for the most part and were well represented in the ranks of the township quoto.

A few so called rebels have lived here at one time or another. Following the return of veterans, suitable recognition was given on Memorial Day and graves of the departed dead were decorated.

Election day sees all the country side represented at the poles and "friendship ceased for the day", to be resumed as usual after the returns are reported and the country is "saved" until another election.

During heated campaigns in years past such activities as flag-pole raising, bonfires, torch light parades, horse back riders with red shirts and wide hats, and other spectacular enthusiasm was in evidence.

Zona Walker

"Tiny Mite"

Mouth Piece of Pittsboro

The town of Pittsboro owes much of its "popularity and prestige" to a little lady whose pen name was "Tiny Mite", due to her diminutive size. In reality she was Eva Schenck Waters, wife of Carl Waters of the Phillip Waters family and mother of Mary Ollah Waters Reynolds.

Eva was a member of a pioneer family and was steeped in the lore of the good old days. She had a quick and clever pen, had a most unusual talent for seeing the

picturesque in the plain, and making simple history into an fascinating record. Whenever anything of import was going to happen, Tiny Mite was called upon to write it up in glowing terms. She never failed. Pittsboro was written up in the Indianapolis papers; both Star and News carried her feature articles, to say nothing of her columns which appeared in the Hendricks County papers and the Brownsburg Recorder.

She has been gone to her great reward for many years, but the words which she left, are still a source of enjoyment and interest.

There is, for instance, the account of the "Plank Road Unearthed: Evacuation of Wooden Highway in Hendricks County, Indiana, recalls Pioneer Hardships."

Parts of a plank road built in 1851 were unearthed near Pittsboro, in the construction of Highway 34, now #136. The excavation of old oaken planks, many of which are still in good condition, stirred the memories of the older people and helped the younger ones to visualize the hardships endured by the early settlers.

It was said that two settlers in this township, Joseph Wells, ancestor of many descendants still living in this community, among them Mrs. Ed Winkleman, and Mrs. Robert Gregory, together with Samuel Hill, whose granddaughter married E.W. Sawyer, merchant and banker, contracted to build several miles of the plank highway.

The planks were sawed on the William Tout farm. They were of solid oak, 3 inches thick, and 10 feet long. Oak trees could be bought at from 50¢ to \$1.00 each, according to size. The road was begun and later laid all the way to "Emrichsville", near Indianapolis.

There was an unwritten traffic law which came into existence with the old plank road. Men on their way to market had the right of way; those returning had to pull off the road and get back the best way they could., as the road was too narrow to permit passing. One man remembers riding on the plank when the water would splash in his face and it was necessary to replace boards frequently as they had floated away.

The best roads were of logs and rails laid in the mud and known as corduroy roads. A ride in a jolly wagon over corduroy roads made the way of the pioneer one of ups and downs. There would never be any temptation for joy riding.

These early roads, poor as they were, were necessary as settlers had to drive their stock to Indianapolis markets, the journey often requiring as much as 4 or 5 days. They had to go to Madison for salt and later many farmers hauled their surplus potatoes into town for distribution among customers. One man described the mud on West Washington Street near the old Star Store as being up to his horses shoulders.

Today over this same highway, modern cars glide along with never a jolt. Who ever gives a thought to the courageous ones who first paved the way through muck and mire and forest?

Frances Fisher

"TECO RETANICO"

On the east side of the Zimmerman Cemetery located one mile west of North Salem on the Roachdale road stands a modest little monument bearing the following inscription:

TECO RETANICO
Son of
John and Nancy Zimmerman
Died, Feb. 11, 1844
Age 19 years, 5 months, 4 days

The father, John Zimmerman, was born in North Carolina in 1786, and with his family migrated in 1831 to Indiana, settling one mile west of the site on which North Salem was later built.

With a companion named Bales, John was captured by the Indians, and the chief decreed that they should burn at the stake. Hearing this edict the white men became fool-hardy. Strong and muscular, they entertained themselves by knocking down any and all Indians who came within reach. This great strength and daring won the admiration of the chief, named Teco Retanico, who offered to give them membership in his tribe. This honor they refused. He then gave them their freedom.

By way of expressing his gratitude for this favor, John Zimmerman promised to name his first baby boy "Teco Retanico" in honor of the chief who had spared their lives.

A son was born June 9, 1824, and although the mother strenuously objected, the father insisted upon naming him "Teco Retanico", thereby keeping his promise to the chief. This son died in early manhood, and was buried on a knoll near the cabin home of his parents. This was the first grave in the old Zimmerman Cemetery, which is well fenced and in a fair condition as country cemeteries go, and the stone may be seen through the briars and long grass.

The family of John Zimmerman was among the first to settle in this part of the township, and they were among the charter members of the Christian Church, organized in 1836. Many descendants of this pioneer couple still reside in the vicinity but none of them ever followed the custom of naming their sons "Teco Retanico".

(George Zimmerman, still living, (1937) is a grandson).

Katherine Hamilton
North Salem

Recollections

A Scout Trip to remember --
as remembered by Roy Fisher, Ralph Graham, Clarence Ratliff,
Floyd Davis and Oscar Swain.

In the summer of 1914, a group of twenty five boy scouts from Lizton and Pittsboro area, started on a walking tour from Lizton to Monon, a distance of almost one hundred miles. Their Scout Master, Roy Hicks, was a young minister of the Pittsboro and Lizton Methodist Episcopal churches. The assistant leader was Horace Overstreet of Lizton.

A wagon and one horse were furnished by the Ratliff family and the Bennetts furnished the other horse. The wagon carried the tents, bedrolls and cooking utensils. Each boy had his own kitchen equipment and did his own cooking. Bacon and eggs was a favorite breakfast, supplemented by cereal and items of food, picked up from stores on the road. (They had some money, each boy putting \$5.00 in the fund.)

On the first night they camped at Mace. They had pup-tents that they put up that first night, which were flat the next morning. The perpetrators said the horses drug them down. They visited the Lew Wallace Museum in Crawfordsville the next day. They made it to Linden the following day where they gave a play that they had to present at various small towns on the way. They had made arrangements with the Methodist churches to sell tickets for their show. They needed more money for their expenses.

On the fourth day, the boys marched into Lafayette where their picture was taken with the wagon at the main entrance to Purdue. One of the most enjoyable features was a swim in the Purdue pool in their gymnasium. Ernest (Turk) Wheat met the boys there and bought watermelons for the bunch.

During the first few days, there were many footsore boys, with real blisters, but soon they were toughened and could march army style, walk fifty steps, then trot fifty steps. It was quite a thrill to march into town in formation, as they had both a bass and a snare drum, and of course Ralph Graham and Roy Fisher were good drummers.

Going up what is now State Road #43, they reached Monon on schedule and camped there for a few days. One boy left the troop there to go home to get some of his mother's angel food cake, to which he was accustomed. The wagon and horses were left at the home of Mr. Hick's parents. They took the train from Monon to Michigan City where they visited the State Penitentiary. Scout Master Roy Hicks had a permit from Governor Ralston for the boys to tour the Penitentiary. Each boy was locked in a cell so he could boast that he had once been in the "Pen". The inmates at the penitentiary had a baseball game going which they watched a little while. They figured the inmates should be good at 'stealing' bases.

Afterward the boys took a trip on Lake Michigan on the "Theodore Roosevelt" which was a good sized ship. They were almost out of sight of land. They also had a swim in the lake.

They returned home by a different route going through Delphi, Frankfort and Lebanon. No tents went up after the first night except for rain, but some found that a concrete slab was no mattress one night at a church near Chalmers. Camping usually on school grounds which were convenient for water, they continued to give their playlet. Adjacent cornfields often offered tasty roasting ears for their evening meals. More than once, when marching into small towns, they were rocked by small town boys. Memories seem to differ on this, one said the Scout Master gave this order - "Break Ranks and run boys" another remembers the order as "You can take them boys".

When they came home the folks in Lizton gave them a real feed in front of the school building. One remembers distinctly of eating seven pieces of fried chicken. That was all sixty two years ago, and memories of the experiences are still vivid with those who are still living.

We are rather sure that ten of the group completed college and think four others had some training beyond high school. For that 'point of time' it would seem to be a credit to the group and sponsors. Three of these boys became well known Methodist Church Ministers, Richmond Blake, Orville Davis and Ralph Graham. Sport Jones, as he was called while living with the Jones' near Lizton, was really Homer (Slim) Miller, who was well known at WLS and WLW and later as a comedian and fiddler at Renfro Valley.

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Did you ever hear the story about a Lizton girl going to Europe? She did not need any address on her luggage except, Ruth Dowden, Lizton, U.S.A. The others in group from Indianapolis, had to have name, street address, Indianapolis, Indiana U.S.A. Lizton is the only town by that name in the United States.

Ruth Hall
Lizton

ODD CHARACTER

George Blanton, known as "Sassafras George", was a homeless, wandering vagabond who claimed North Salem as his home, but he was known all over the county, during the period following the Civil War until his death in 1920.

He made his living by digging and selling sassafras, whence came the name of "Sassafras."

Many are the stories connected with uninvited visits at farm and village homes. Grotesque in appearance, he was harmless, although mentally deficient, and was tolerated by many kindhearted residents until taken to the County Home (Boone County Farm).

No fair or horse show was complete without "Old George", dressed up like a monkey in a discarded old band uniform. He gave an amateur dance or jig whenever the band played, and was usually led away by the arm of the law before the occasion terminated.

He did not work, neither did he beg or steal. When spring opened up, he dug roots and sold his wares. He was the first and truest harbinger of spring.

THE OLD TRAIN WRECK

(A historical poem written by Roscoe L. Edwards, deceased, depicting the wreck of a train on the Vandalia railroad January 18, 1918, when cars of a train split a switch and five cars of crude oil and ten cars of gasoline were consumed by fire.)

One cold evening in the winter
When the snow was on the ground
And the clouds were thick and heavy
With the snowflakes flying round
In the good old town of Amo
With the railroad running through
There came a heavy freight train
Carrying oil tanks not a few.
There was something wrong that evening;
Some say it was the switch
For before that train had halted
Eight tank cars were in the ditch.
Then a wild bareheaded brakeman
Came running up the street
Warning folks to flee to safety
If they thought this life was sweet.
He had no time to argue,
He didn't even have to shout
For the folks began to migrate
As the news was whispered out.
Now they went in groups and bunches
Everyone in deep suspense
Expecting every minute
Great explosions to commence.
Leaving homes and dear possessions
Not a tie would seem to check
When life seemed to be in danger
And our homes seemed doomed to wreck.
Silently they marched out northward,
Big and little, young and old;
Some too small to walk were carried
By the young men strong and bold.
Some of the more sane and cautious
Far into the country went
And with some dear friend or neighbor
The evening and night was spent.
One old lady who went farthest
Said she didn't run at all,
But passed several of her neighbors
Their names she did not recall.
But afternoon the next day,
With everyone back at home,
A heavenly peace and happiness
Seemed to our town to come.
For we had a scare for nothing;
Not a rumble, not a jar;
That oil went up in flame and smoke
And left us without a scar.
And we surely get a lesson
As these facts we ponder o'er
How we huddle up together
When distress comes to our door.

Submitted by Irene Lee Edwards White - grand daughter of Roscoe L. Edwards.