

COUNTIES

OF

CLAY AND OWEN,

INDIANA.

HISTORIAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL.

ILLUSTRATED.

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LA FAYETTE TOWNSHIP.

BY G. N. BERRY.

AT a session of the Commissioners' Court of Owen County, held in the month of December, 1839, it was ordered that the following described territory be set apart and known as La Fayette Township, to wit: "Beginning at the southeast corner of Section 34, in Township 10 north, Range 4 west; thence north five miles; thence west six miles; thence south five miles; thence east six miles to place of beginning. And it is further ordered that the boundaries of Jefferson, Morgan and Franklin Townships be so altered as not to include any part of said township of La Fayette." No changes have been made in the above outline since the formation of the township, and La Fayette boasts of an area of thirty square miles, or 19,200 acres of land, the greater portion of which lies in Town 10 north, Range 4 west. Ten sections lie west of the range line in Township 10 north, Range 5 west. The greater part of the township is broken, and possesses a clay and gravel soil, poorly adapted to farming. Fish Creek is the principal water-course. It enters the township from the north, about a half mile from the eastern boundary, and flows in a southwesterly direction, passing in its course through Sections 10, 15, 22 and 28, and crosses the southern boundary from Section 33 of Town 10 north, Range 4 west. It receives a number of tributaries, none of which are named on the county map. The western part of the township lies in the great coal field of Indiana, and many local mines have been developed in different places, furnishing cheap fuel to the citizens. The coal deposits in La Fayette alone represent a value of untold millions, but the absence of facilities for transportation has served as an effectual barrier to men of capital engaging in the business. The entire face of the country at the time of the first settlement was covered with a dense forest growth, which from time immemorial had been the home and hiding-place of numerous wild animals, such as bears, wolves, deer, etc. Here the red man erected his rude bark wigwam, and amid the thick somber shades hunted the game and fished in the various streams by which the country is traversed. With the advent of the white settlers, the Indians removed from their ancestral hunting-grounds, and went to the far West, and their existence here is now but a remembrance. The tribes that then roamed over the lands now covered with well-tilled farms of waving grain and comfortable homes, have forever disappeared, and another race are the undisputed possessors of the soil.

THE EARLY SETTLERS.

The early history of La Fayette is similar in most respects to that of the other townships, especially in the facts that are matters of record. The pioneers who first sought homes among the hills and thick forests of this part of the county were not adventurers, but plain, matter-of-fact men, who were allured to the new country by the advantages it offered in the way of cheap lands, which could be obtained at that time for the Government price of \$2 per acre. To make a home in the woods was an undertaking attended with difficulties and hardships of which we can form but a faint conception. The absence of roads, mills, etc., and the long distances to be traversed to the nearest market places, together with general poverty of the settlements

and the immense amount of hard labor and drudgery required in order to obtain a livelihood during the first few years, were obstacles well calculated to shake the determination of the most energetic and brave hearted of the pioneers. Theirs was a hard task, and the years of constant struggle and the motives which animated and nerved them are deserving of all praise, and their examples and achievements are among the richest legacies to a grateful posterity.

The earliest recorded settlements within the present limits of La Fayette appear to have been made near the central part, not far from the village of Vandalia, as early as 1828, and in the southern part a few years later.

Among the earliest pioneers may be mentioned John Cramer, who moved here about the year 1828, and settled on land where the Widow Sells lives. About the same time, or perhaps a little later, came a man by name of Conder, and located in the southern part of the township, on the farm now owned by George Long, where he resided until the year 1863, at which time he sold out to John Hulley, and moved from the county. Jonas and James Fulke came about the year 1830, and secured homes in the southern part of the township. Henry Fiscus located in the southwest part, where his son lives, as early as 1830, and about the same time Jacob Hahn settled in the eastern part, on land where the Widow Need at present resides.

Other pioneers who came in 1830 were Thomas, John, "Shack" and — Franklin, all of whom located and secured land about three miles southwest of Vandalia.

Later came a man by name of Bivens—a Baptist preacher—and settled in the western part, where he lived until about the year 1850. Jacob Hicks settled not far from Vandalia some time prior to 1834. He was a native of North Carolina, and a man of splendid business qualifications. John Nation, Aaron Branham and John Mayer became residents as early as 1836, the former settling near the central part of the township, where he earned the reputation of being a rough character, and the latter locating near the place where he erected one of the first mills in the country. Other settlers who came in an early day and participated in the privations of pioneer life, were David Fender, who located in the northeastern part where his son William lives; David Fulkner, who settled not far from the same place; William Kerr, Henry Smock, John Taylor, all of whom secured land in the eastern part of the township. The following settlers secured lands and became residents of the township prior to the year 1840, viz., Matthew Cummings, J. P. Doyle, Jacob Hauser, John S. Hauser, James and Reuben Stevens, William Mears, James Jones, Israel Mears, W. W. Wright, Samuel Philips, Nimrod Fender, Samuel Mears, Martin Philips, Nathan Troth, Richmond Randleman, Daniel Elliott, Thomas Elliott, Zenos Walgamott, G. W. C. Jones, Joseph Gregory, Solomon Alley, Joseph Witham, John Ridgely, Jonathan Bevins, J. R. McKee, Isaac Brown, Jacob Abrell, Peter Clinger, G. W. Willard, John Sapp, Frederick Sapp, Enoch Sapp, Daniel Price, Eli Toliver, Samuel Bench, Jacob Humble, David Phipps, John F. Branham, Job Chambers, James Jeffries, P. Sullivan, Levi Toliver, John Rawley, Andrew Fry, Jacob Griffin, Frederick Fiscus, Elijah Rawley, and others whose names were not learned. The following non-residents secured lands in the township by entry prior to 1840, to wit: Jesse Maddox, T. C. Anthony, Joel Pierce, S. Sutton, John McIndoo, Joseph Cochran, William Randleman, Robert W. Wooden, Stephen Barnes, James Maners, Lawrence Adams, J. M. H. Allison, Amos Harris, Samuel H. Harris, Benjamin Swagerty, Lindsey Medaris, E. Medaris, Alexander Brown, P. B. Brown, Jonathan Bauman, J. T. Mason, Timothy Erasmus, Jacob Hauser, John Donham, Jesse Starr, William Huschner, John Fay, John Rawley and M. Westfall.

MILLS, ETC.

The first mill in the township was erected prior to the year 1840, by Jacob Conder, and stood about four miles southwest of the village of Vandalia. It was a rude affair, with a single run of stone, and was operated by horse-power. It did a good business for a mill of its capacity, having been well patronized by the early settlers of this and adjoining townships, and was in operation about fifteen years.

William King constructed a small mill in an early day on the farm now owned by William Philips, a couple of miles from Vandalia. It was a horse mill also, and constructed upon the simplest imaginable plan, the machinery being held together by strong hickory withes, and the whole covered by a rough shed resting upon four forks driven in the ground. It was operated with fair success until about the year 1843.

The first water mill in the township was erected by William Mears in the year 1840, and stood a short distance east of Vandalia, on Fish Creek. The mill building was constructed of unhewn logs, and the machinery consisted of one run of corn buhrs, operated by a rude water-wheel.

It was afterward remodeled, and machinery added for the manufacture of flour; but so slowly did it grind that it was not very extensively patronized.

Henry Fulke erected a small water mill on the west prong of Fish Creek, in the southern part of the township, about the year 1846, and ran it very successfully for about ten years later. This mill was a log structure also, but a great improvement on the ones described.

In the year 1850, or near that time, John McKelvy built a good frame flouring-mill on the east prong of Fish Creek, in the eastern part of the township.

It did a good business, and was in operation about ten years, at the end of which time it was allowed to fall into decay on account of the dam washing out during a large freshet. An early mill stood in the western part of the township, on one of the branches of Fish Creek, from which it received its motive power. It was built by David Miller as early as 1846, and operated about two years later, when it was abandoned on account of its small capacity.

One of the earliest industries of the township, was a small distillery, operated by Jacob Conder. He did a remunerative business, and supplied the settlers, in a large scope of country, with their favorite beverage, exchanging it for corn, at the rate of twenty and twenty-five cents per gallon. Mr. Conder conducted the distillery about twelve years, and had the reputation of making a fine article of whisky and brandy.

The earliest frame dwellings in the township, were erected by Matthew Cummings, James Robinson, John Long and Israel Sells.

VOTING PLACES.

At the organization of the township, it was ordered that the place of holding elections be at the residence of George Elliott, who lived in the eastern part. His house was used as a voting place until 1852, at which time the polls were moved to the village of Vandalia, where elections have since been held.

Among early Justices of the Peace were John Long, William Philips, James Robinson, William Kerr, Jordan Doyle and Jacob Abrell. The present Justices are William Philips, who has held the office for about thirty years, and George Binawell. The last Board of Trustees was composed of the following gentlemen, to wit: Eli Toliver, Nathan Troth and Tunis

Everly. The single Trustees have been Nathan Troth, Britton Troth, Eli Toliver, William Troth, Jacob Wright, Emanuel Fulke, James Beatty, William Foreman, William McClery, O. Scott, and John McAuley, the present incumbent.

VANDALIA.

The neat little village of Vandalia is situated in the northeastern part of the township, and embraces a part of the southwest quarter of Section 9, in Township 10 north, Range 4 west. It was laid off into lots in the month of February, 1839, by Joseph Cochran and Jacob Hicks, and early achieved the reputation of a stirring business place. Among the first settlers in the town were John Hoagland and Washington Walgamott. The first store was kept by James Black, who sold goods for about three years, and did a large business. Other early merchants were James Allender, Edward Maxey, William Davis, Jacob Everly, Lorenzo Coats, George Troth, Jacob Oberholser. An early hotel was kept by James Davis, who was also the first postmaster.

The village has lost during the last dozen years much of its former business standing, and at the present time is a small hamlet of about fifty or seventy-five inhabitants. There is one good general store, a large blacksmith shop, a schoolhouse and three churches, the history of which will be found further on.

CEMETERIES.

One of the first burial places in the township was laid out by Michael Mishler, on the farm owned at the present time by John Long. The first burial in this cemetery was the wife of Michael Mishler, whose death occurred in a very early day, the date of which was not learned.

An early burial ground was laid out on Shadrach Franklin's place in the western part of the township about the year 1838. The first interments therein were members of the different Franklin families.

The principal burial place for many years was the graveyard in Section 19, southwest of Vandalia, on land owned by William King. Among first burials here were Mrs. William Randleman, Nicholas Criss, Sr., Nicholas Criss, Jr., and Mrs. Criss.

The Vandalia burying ground was set apart for the purpose in 1851, and is the principal place of interment at the present time. Henry Newport was the first person laid to rest in this city of the dead. Mrs. James Davis and James Martin were buried here soon after the ground was laid out.

A small graveyard in the central part of the township was laid out a number of years ago, by George Ritter, on land that had been previously owned by William McCrary.

The first burials were two sons of Mr. Ritter, who had been dead and buried a number of years, but were taken up and brought here for interment, when the family moved to the township.

CHURCH HISTORY.

The early history of Christianity in La Fayette Township is not very well known, and many facts and incidents connected with the first preachers and their work have been forgotten. The first meetings appear to have been held from house to house, by pioneer missionaries of the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches, and seem to have been well attended. The oldest organization at the present time is the Presbyterian Church of Vandalia, which dates its origin from the year 1848, at which time it was founded by Revs. Cozad and Ferguson, at the residence of Anthony Eick. About twenty-one members went into the organization, among whom were

Anthony Eick and wife, Peter Eick and wife, Henry Johnson and wife, William Davis and wife, James Martin and wife, James Davis and wife, John Smith and wife, with the younger members of their respective families. For one year, services were held at the dwellings of different members, and later at the village schoolhouse. A frame house of worship was erected in the year 1849, near the western limits of the town, and cost the sum of \$500. It is still standing, but is in a rather dilapidated condition at the present time. The following pastors have ministered to the congregation at different times, viz. : Revs. Peck, Milligan, Ferguson, Cole, Ward, Booth, Fox, Omelvena and Sammis. The society has but few members at the present time, and no preaching is sustained.

The Vandalia Methodist Episcopal Church is an old organization, and has been one of the aggressive societies of the county. At one time it boasted of a large congregation, and the good it has accomplished in the community cannot be told in words. Like many other churches, its membership is much smaller than formerly, owing to deaths and removals. Although it has always maintained its identity and sustained regular preaching. The house of worship is a commodious frame building, with a seating capacity of about 250 persons.

Palestine Christian Church, near Vandalia, was organized in the year 1863, by Elder James Blankenship, with about twenty members. The first meeting was held in a large barn belonging to John Jarvis. Services were afterward conducted at the village schoolhouse, which served as a meeting place until 1873, at which time the present neat frame edifice was erected. This building has a very commodious audience room, and cost the sum of \$1,000. Since its organization, the society has been served by the following ministers, viz. : W. B. F. Treat, — Brown, Joel Dillon, — Berry, Harrison Hight, Charles Caton, Mr. Castle, Isaac Walton, William Littell and Harris Gaston.

The present membership is about thirty. The church officials are Andrew and Asbury Jarvis, Elders ; David Keyfobber and John Jarvis, Deacons.

In about the year 1862 or 1863, an organization known as the Church of the Saints sprang into existence near the southeastern part of the township, under the preaching of one George Duncan, whose eloquence and untiring zeal soon attracted a large number of adherents. Mr. Duncan had previously belonged to the Mormons, and the doctrine he preached was a mild type of the faith advocated by the Latter-Day Saints. The society increased in numbers very rapidly, and it soon gained sufficient strength to erect a house of worship, which was built on the farm of David A. Criss. While Duncan lived the organization flourished, but after his death, seven or eight years later, it was abandoned, there being no one to take his place.

The church property fell into the hands of Mr. Criss, who afterward sold it to the Methodists, by whom it is still used, under the title of the Pleasant Hill Methodist Episcopal Church. The Pleasant Hill organization was founded about the year 1875, by Rev. — Bell, with twenty-five constitutional members. The second pastor was Rev. Mr. Canady, after whom came in regular succession Revs. Cooper, Johnson and Spear. The organization is in good condition at the present time, and numbers about forty members in good standing. The officers are : James Beatty, Class Leader ; Tunis Everly and Levi Day, Stewards ; William S. McCrary, Armstrong Kerr, Daniel Johnson, William Need and Edward Willy, Trustees ; Robert Biddle, Sunday School Superintendent.

SCHOOLS.

It is not known who taught the first school in La Fayette, nor where the first house erected for school purposes stood. One of the first houses stood in the western part of the township, on Jonas Fulke's farm, and was used in an early day by James McKee, Emanuel Fulke, William Morris and Adam Cinder. A small log cabin was built about the year 1839 or 1840, and stood three miles east of Vandalia. Among the first teachers in this house was William Philips. A hewed-log schoolhouse was built a short distance north of the last one mentioned, on land owned by James Grimes; it was erected about the year 1847. Another early house stood north of Vandalia on the Jacob Hicks land. The old buildings all disappeared about the year 1855, at which time the township was divided into districts and supplied with good frame houses.

At the present time there are nine districts in the township, with as many frame buildings. The amount paid for tuition during the school year of 1882-83 was \$1,497.74. The teachers for that year were Maggie Wisely, — Hendershot, Jacob Travis, Samuel McCaren, D. S. Toliver, John H. Chilson, John H. Knox, Nathan McCrary and Peter Miller.

