

LOCAL REMINISCENCES

Defiance and Vicinity as they were in 1834—
Floods, Sickness and Destitution—Potatoes Three
Shillings per Dozen.

BY EDWIN PHELPS

In writing a description of places and scenes occurring more than fifty years ago it would be almost miraculous if some mistakes did not occur, and as there are some yet living who were actors and witnesses with me in the principal events which I shall describe. I shall be happy to have any errors I may make corrected.

In presenting to your readers, a series of articles upon the early history of Defiance, I propose in the first instance to describe as nearly as I can recollect the condition of Defiance and surrounding country as I found it on my arrival here on the 20th day of August, A. D., 1834.

The time of my arrival was perhaps the gloomiest period the Maumee Valley has ever known. About a month or perhaps a little more previous to my arrival there had been a great flood in the Maumee, Auglaize Rivers and Blanchard fork of the Auglaize, which had swept everything in the shape of crops on the Maumee from Fort Wayne to Maumee City, and on the Auglaize from St. Marys to Defiance, and from Findlay to the Auglaize on Blanchard fork. At that time there were no farms except along the streams, and these few and far between; and a loss of crops at that time meant suffering, if not starvation. As an evidence of the almost complete destruction of crops I will only mention one item, that of potatoes, which in the spring of 1835 at Fort Wayne, the only place where any were to be had, sold at 37 ½ cents per dozen, and small ones at that; and it was two or three years before the farmers obtained enough seed to be able to plant what they deemed necessary for domestic use.

The crop of corn was in about the same condition, with this advantage, that there was some old corn on hand, but there was great

difficulty in procuring seed the following spring. Of wheat there was very little if any raised, as the ground was then considered too rich to produce wheat, and there were no mills in the country to grind it, the principal food being literally hog and hominy. The corn was mostly pounded in mortars made by burning holes in the top of a hard wood stump.

In this connection I will relate a small incident personal to myself. In June, 1835, William A. **Brown** came from St. Lawrence County, N. Y., to Defiance, and an aunt of mine and his put five potatoes in his trunk for me. He arrived here just as I was recovering from an attack of billious fever. I cut the eyes from the potatoes and planted them in the garden and ate the balance. By careful attention I raised about half a bushel of nice potatoes, every one of which was kept for seed the following spring.

But worse than the loss of crops the high water had covered the banks of the streams with a slimy mud and followed by the hot sun of July and August nearly every family in the whole region of the Maumee and Auglaize valleys was prostrated by sickness, either billious fever or fever and ague, and to make the matter still worse nearly all of the doctors were also sick and unable to attend to their patients.

Defiance at that time was comprised of 150 lots, and today the Auditor's duplicate shows 2463 lots entered for taxation.

The town was laid out by Horatio G. **Phillips** and Benjamin **Levell**. The former resided at Dayton, and the latter was a resident of Piqua, Miami county, although he resided here a part of the time.

It was surveyed in November, 1822, but not acknowledged until the 18th day of April, A. D., 1823, and recorded in the records of Wood county on the 23rd day of April, A. D., 1823. The then county of Williams, together with Putnam, Paulding, Henry and the territory now comprising the counties of

Fulton and Lucas, were attached to Wood county for judicial purposes.

In laying out the town the square bounded by Wayne and Clinton and First and Second streets was marked A on the map, and was "Reserved by the proprietors to be hereafter divided into lots and sold unless the town should become and forever continue to be a county seat, in which case it is to become to the public a common to be applied solely to the location of public buildings and never to be sold by the Co." "B" was the old Fort ground to be a common with the privilege of the proprietors fencing it for a pasture until the village is incorporated. Lot 126, a small triangular piece between Front and First streets and west of Perry street, was donated for a school lot, and when I first saw it, it had an old log school house thereon. It is the property now occupied by **Kuhn** Bros, for a saw mill and other machinery.

A good general idea of the appearance of the town of Defiance fifty years ago can be had by reflecting that the whole town, with a very few exceptions, was covered with a thick undergrowth of bushes south of Second street and west of the canal.

The canal was not then built, but the ground occupied by it was a ravine or small run covered with a dense growth of thorn apple and crab apple trees and sumach.

The only persons living south of Second street and west of this side of the present canal were Robert **Waasen**, who lived in a log house on First street near Jackson, and Amos S. **Evans**, living at the corner of Second street and Clinton, Alfred **Purcell**, at the corner of Third and Clinton, Jacob **Kniss** on Jefferson street on the north end of Mrs. **Carter's** present residence, Peter **Bridenbaugh**, who lived nearly opposite Walter **Davis'**, had a log house and log cooper shop near the corner of Third and Washington streets.

There was also a log cabin just south of where the Methodist church now stands, which was

occupied as a parsonage and church by the Methodist church when they were so fortunate as to have a minister, and which I think was occupied by Harry O. **Shelden** fifty years ago this summer. When there were too many for their accommodation at the parsonage services were held in the old court house now occupied as a residence by Henry **Hardy**.

The streets in the town were not even chopped out, with the exception of Front and First streets from Jefferson to Clinton. Jefferson street was underbrushed wide enough for a road from the Maumee to the Auglaize River, where there was a ford across the river, which the settlers used who came to town from the south side of the Auglaize on horse-back. There was a road also underbrushed out leading from Jefferson street, commencing at its intersection with First, running diagonally across the town, passing near where the Soldier's Monument now stands to near the present B & O depot, where it forked, the left branch going to Piqua, Miami Co., and the other to Ft. Wayne. Neither of these roads was in condition to travel by wagons but were trails upon which the mails were carried on horseback, one route being from Maumee City to Fort Wayne, which was carried weekly, the distance being about ninety-five miles each.

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