

DEFIANCE 100 YEARS AGO

Except Along Rivers, No Inhabitants but
Indians; Only Three Roads Laid Out
Through Forest, Water Knee Deep

By EDWIN PHELPS (1815-97)

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I have traced as far as my own recollection serves me, and as far as I can learn from the few old settlers left, the settlement of Defiance County up to my arrival here in 1834, describing briefly the first settlement on the three rivers centering at Defiance.

It is almost impossible for the mind to take in the condition of the country here, even when I came. The settlements being all upon the streams, it left the balance of the territory entirely uninhabited except by Indians, and they were roving about and you never knew where to find them.

50 Miles, No Whites

A person at that time starting from Brunersburg with his compass and running due north would find no inhabitants until he got into Michigan.

Leaving the Maumee River at Delaware Bend he would travel over 50 miles without seeing a white person. Not a white person living in Paulding County, except on the Maumee and Auglaize Rivers.

There were but three regularly laid out roads in Williams County as it then was.

Three First Roads

The road from Maumee City to Fort Wayne. A road from Bellefontaine to the Indiana state line, being the road substantially as now traveled from Defiance through Brunersburg. Georgetown, Williams Center and Denmark. Turning south from here it followed up on the west side of the Auglaize about 27 miles where it crosses to the east side and follows up Big Creek to Lima, the distance being about 50 miles. Now the new route for the Columbus, Lima and Defiance railroad starting on the east side of the

Auglaize and running an air line to Lima, crosses the line of Putnam County about nine miles east of where the old wagon road runs and making the distance only 41 miles to Lima and continuing on to Columbus the distance only 41 miles to Lima and continuing on to Columbus, the distance is only 115 miles instead of 150 by the old traveled road.

Owing to the level surface of the country they were compelled to follow the stream where the drainage was good to avoid a continuous mud hole, as it was in this country in early times from Lyman **Langdon's** to Williams Center.

The other road was from here to Tiffin in Seneca County which was laid out in 1834, and while out with the surveying party while the B. & O. Railroad was being surveyed, I met one of the commissioners who laid out the road and he told me that they found but two houses on the line of the road from Tiffin to Defiance. 80 miles, which is shortened five miles by the B. & O. Railroad. He also informed me that they were over two weeks in surveying it and had to camp out at night except two nights, when they found the houses, and that when they returned home they went down the river by Perrysburg and Fremont, then Lower Sandusky, and from there to Tiffin. Such are some of the changes wrought in 50 years, the time reduced from two weeks to two hours.

Thriving Town Disappears

While on the subject of roads I will say, that while Paulding County was attached to Williams County for judicial purposes a state road was surveyed from Greenville in Drake county to New Rochester in Paulding County, a town that then boasted of two hotels, three stores and three groceries, but in which not a vestige of a house or building of any kind now remains. I recorded the survey of that road in Auditor's Record of Williams County, and recollect a note made by the surveyor like this:

"Knee deep in wafer, timber so tall" that you cannot, see the top and so "thick that the sun never shines; when will this road be traveled?" That was somewhere near the center of Paulding County.

When I came here there was not a settler in Hicksville, Milford, Farmer, Mark, Washington, Highland or Adams Townships, with the exception of Enoch **Farmer** in Farmer Township, who had been there about six months.

Canal Land Speculation

The grant of land by Congress to the State of Indiana for the purpose of building a canal from Evansville in Indiana, to Lake Erie, was for each alternate section in a strip ten miles wide, five on each side of the line of said canal and so much of said grant as lay in Ohio, was transferred to her, and Ohio was to select outside of the boundary an amount of land equal to one half of the land sold by the general Government without that boundary, and all the land in the immediate vicinity of that boundary was withdrawn from the market until the line of the canal was located, and the lands selected in consequence of which we were passed by. but in 1836 a public sale of land was held at Defiance, and the tide was turned and the country began to settle up.

At that land sale there was great excitement and land sold for prices from which the purchasers never realized the interest on the prices paid, losing the principal entirely. These were the sections of land belonging to the United States, and offered to the highest bidders. The state lands were afterwards sold at \$250 per acre, but the highest price at which the speculators had purchased their lands precluded their selling them at remunerative prices, which retarded the settlement very much.

In my next I will endeavor to give a sketch of the first settlement of the seven townships heretofore named or having no settlers, a portion of which must be got from the record

of Williams County before the organization of this county.

In doing so I will make personal examination of the records and endeavor to have it accurate, so that it will be valuable for future reference.

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