

DEFIANCE 100 YEARS AGO

Methodists Found First Church; Two
Circuit Riders for Area Ft. Wayne to
Napoleon; Meet in Schools, Barns

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When I commenced these articles, I promised Mr. Elmer that I would write a dozen, so as to have them published in the first publication of each month. When Mr. Elmer parted with the Express he told me the new management wanted I should still continue to finish them. And I am frequently interrogated on the street when they are to have another article, saying they are the first things they read. I have labored under disadvantages in reference to the earlier history, owing to the division of the counties and the records of early transactions at Defiance being at Bryan and so far, I have written from the recollection of myself and others and sometimes been a little at fault in some of my statements.

When I wrote the last article, I expected to be at Bryan before this article was due and find from the records there material out of which to continue these articles up to the organization of this county in 1845, but circumstances have prevented my being there, and consequently cannot fulfill my promise of giving an authentic account of the organization and settlement of the several townships in this county but hope to do so in my next.

I will be compelled, as heretofore, to draw from memory and will take for my subject the early history of the churches of Defiance.

Pay \$200 Year and Produce

The Methodist denomination were the pioneers in churchwork in all the new settlements and the only one having any organization in Defiance upon my arrival here. Their plan of performing the labors was very simple, cheap and apparently effective.

Two ministers were assigned to each circuit, one a married man and I the other single. To the married man they paid or promised to pay, \$200 per year and to the single one they paid \$100 per year and the rule was to stay two years on each circuit. Considerable difficulty was sometimes experienced at the end of the two years to arrange money sufficient to pay the ministers off so they could go to conference, and then sometimes some forehanded brother had to step in and advance the money and wait for the church to refund it. It was for no lack of disposition on the part of the members, but they were poor and money very scarce, and all merchandise very high, but provisions very cheap, in fact until the influx of settlers and the building of the canal, there was scarcely any sale at all for provisions, the only cash articles, for sale were furs and pelts. These allowances looked very small in these days but they lived quite comfortable on this amount.

They were simple in their habits and compelled to use the strictest economy. The married man lived in the log cabin then erected near the present brick church and his provisions, wood horse feed, etc., were mostly donated.

Swim Rivers, Often Lost

The main expense was at the start, they both were compelled to have saddle horses as there was no other way of locomotion, and these ministers were nearly all poor men and generally had to have some assistance to get their outfit. But when they once got a horse it was seldom that they got a poorer one but kept trading until they got one suited them. This circuit extended up the Maumee River to the Indiana state line, up the Auglaize River to near Delphos and down below Napoleon, which made much hard driving. The headquarters of the single man when in town was at William Seaman's and as I boarded there about two years I was pretty familiar with their trials and problems.

There were no roads or bridges and nothing but Indian trails; they sometimes had to swim their horses across the rivers and would sometimes miss their rails and get lost in the woods; but through all their difficulties and trials they performed their duties bravely; their greatest drawback was the climate. They came from older portions of the state and almost invariably had the fever and ague if not a run 'of the bilious fever.

There was not a church of any kind on the Maumee River, when I came. But they occupied the schoolhouses, log ones with slab benches without backs, and puncheon floors; and when there were no schoolhouses they occupied private houses and in the summer season frequently barns were used for churches.

Crowds At Camp Meetings

The great and crowning work of that church was their camp meetings, which were held regularly once a year, generally in August, at which the whole country for miles around would gather in and hold about a week, at which large accessions were made to their church. Each family had their tent which was arranged in the form of a crescent at the back of and near the preacher's stand and many rowdy that went there for sport was humbled and made better.

Selections for these camp grounds were made with reference to a good supply of water for cooking and drinking and shade and good dry rolling ground. For many years they were held on the bank of the Maumee River near where Messrs. **Graper, Brown,** and **Houghton** now live in this city, it being a nice sugar grove and before the erection of the dam at Independence there was a nice spring of water in the river bank. If the weather was propitious they had a glorious time and the accessions to the church large, and consequently the payments of the ministers made easier.

Beecher's First Parish

In a sermon preached last Sabbath, Rev. B. W. **Slagle** contrasted the early life of Henry Ward **Beecher** with his closing years. In his early ministry he is said to have swept the church, built the fires and lighted (not lamps) the candles but he did not say that was on the Maumee River, which was the fact, as at that time he was preaching at Fort Wayne, which was only a small village, with probably no church edifice at all, but occupying some school or courthouse, and he might probably with truth have added that the janitor of Beecher's church in Brooklyn gets three times the salary that Mr. Beecher then did at Fort Wayne, and that some members of his congregation pay more pew rent per year, than the entire church at Fort Wayne. Such has been the increase of wealth.

Presbyterians Organize

Fifty years ago, there was no Presbyterian church organization in Defiance, and not until Rev. William V. **Stow** was sent here by the Home Missionary society, in 1837, was any church organized. On the 11th day of December A. D. 1837, he organized a church here, with 19 members but very few of whom are now living.

The only place of church worship at that time was the old courthouse where Henry **Hardy** now lives. The Presbyterian Society afterwards finished off the upper story of the building between First Street and the Maumee River, which they occupied for some time. While the Rev. Mr. **Stow** was here from 1837 to 1839 about two years, some members of his family were sick nearly all the time, and he was compelled to leave on account of the ill health of his family.

The Presbyterian Society are indebted to the pluck and perseverance of Rev. E. R. **Tucker** for their present church edifice. He labored hard in gathering material for the building and paid of his own money for some portions of it, all of which was refunded in due time.

(Apparently the account of organization and settlement of the several townships in the county which he had announced for his next article never was written by Mr. Phelps, for examination of all issues of the Defiance County Express from July 9 to the end of the year reveals no further article by Mr. Phelps. The foregoing article concludes the Crescent-News republication of the Phelps series. —The Editor).

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