

## FRENCH INFLUENCE

*Europe - after the defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 - was in a state of unrest. Political upheaval and economic troubles led many Europeans, including many French, to seek better homes in the United States. Some of these French immigrants found their way to Floyd County where they established two separate settlements and continued the traditional way of life of the French peasant until almost the beginning of the present century.*

The clatter of wooden shoes and the sounds of French folk songs echoing from the steep hillsides would have greeted a Floyd County traveler along the Budd Road a century ago. And had he traveled along Navilleton Road in Lafayette Township he would have found another small part of Old France transplanted to Floyd County. Lafayette Township was named in honor of the great French patriot who was of such great service to the American colonies during the Revolutionary War.

Why these immigrants chose to come to the hills of Floyd County can only be guessed today, but tradition says that the Budd Road settlement had its origin from a French Missionary priest who infused in his friends in France an enthusiasm for these hills and valleys. Soon they were on their way, some by way of New Orleans and up the river, others by way of New York and overland. Other settlers came from Belgium and Switzerland.

The first settlers of Porrentruy probably arrived about 1817 and by the middle 1840s the French-speaking population along Budd Road numbered nearly 300. Budd Road was called "le grande rue", or the main road, and Clear Fork was known all over Floyd County as French Creek.

Huge loaves of French bread [were] baked in big stone bake-ovens erected for the use of the whole community and old veterans of the Napoleonic wars told wide-eyed youngsters the story of their exploits. During our own Civil War many young men from Porrentruy and the settlement at St. Mary's enlisted in the Union Army and the story is told of Francoise Guilloume who was killed in battle whose young wife died of grief.

The French settlers in Lafayette Township were probably attracted to the area because of the Catholic Church there, the first in Floyd County. It was built in 1820 by Irish settlers, but soon many French moved into the area, too, and created a second French settlement. A French priest, Father Louis Neyron, ministered to the spiritual needs of the settlers and helped build a new brick church in 1837 to replace the first log structure. The new church, named St. Mary's, was built of bricks made on the site by church members and stood where the present St. Mary's Church is located.

The French settlers along Budd Road also were looked after by Father Neyron, but a church was never built in this area. Instead, the faithful trudged in a group every Sunday to New Albany to attend Mass.

The two French areas began to lose their individual character about 1880 as many of the younger people moved to New Albany or Louisville where opportunities were greater. Those who stayed no longer spoke French as their parents had, although here and there French could still be heard until about the time of the first World War.

Today only a few gravestones lettered in French and family names such as Vernia, Naville, Veron and Banet remain as tangible reminders of the French influence in Floyd County. But these are tokens of what America means to the world – freedom and a better life for people from many lands – a tradition in which Floyd County has a proud share.