

## THE NAMING OF FLOYD COUNTY

*In January 1819, a new Indiana county came into being by vote of the legislature in session at Corydon, at that time the state capital. The new county was christened Floyd, and New Albany was designated as the seat of county government. On these facts the record is clear. But the reason for the selection of the name Floyd is not so clear – in fact, there have been differences of opinion for at least a century on the origin of the name. The story of that dispute and the two theories of the naming of the county are the subject of today's program.*

For which Floyd was Floyd County named – Col. John Floyd or Major Davis Floyd? That is the essence of the dispute on the origin of the county's name. There is no doubt that it was named for one or the other, but conflicting claims have been made through the years as to which Floyd was honored when the County was named.

Col. John Floyd was a Virginian who settled near Louisville with his family and relatives in 1779. He was a friend of Daniel Boone and George Rogers Clark and his wife was a niece of Col. William Preston, a distinguished early Kentuckian. John Floyd had been in Kentucky before the Revolutionary War as a surveyor and had helped erect the pioneer fort at Boonsboro. Both a son and grandson of John Floyd later served as governors of Virginia. Floyd's Fork of Beargrass Creek takes its name from Floyd's Station, the location of the Floyd County settlement near the present site of St. Matthews.

During the American Revolution John Floyd commanded a privateer, a ship preying on British shipping in the West Indies. He had been captured and

imprisoned in England, and had managed to escape and make his way to Paris, where Benjamin Franklin, American envoy to the French Court, arranged for his return home. It was upon his return that he came to the Louisville area to settle permanently.

When Jefferson County was formed in 1780, he was appointed county lieutenant in charge of the militia and later was made colonel. When the infant town of Louisville received a Virginia charter in the same year, Floyd was named to the first board of town trustees. He participated in expeditions against the Indians in Ohio and then, ironically, met his death in an Indian ambush in Bulleitt County. Old legends say he was killed in what is now Shawnee Park across the river from New Albany, but legend, which has a way of often distorting facts, has the wrong location. Actually, he was killed near the present town of Shepardsville in Bulleitt County near the Jefferson County line. His death occurred in 1783, only four years after he settled in Kentucky and when he was about 33 years of age. He was an important early dweller in the Louisville area, but appears to have had no direct connection with affairs in Indiana.

A member of the Floyd family was killed in the Shawnee Park area, however – Isham Floyd, nephew of Col. John Floyd and brother of the other contender for the honor of the County's naming . . . Davis Floyd.

Davis Floyd, nephew of Col. John Floyd, had come to Kentucky with the rest of the Floyd clan in 1779 when he was a youngster of 10 or 11. He grew up along the banks of Floyd's Fork, probably gained his title of Major in the Kentucky militia, married a Louisville girl, and in 1891 moved to Clarksville to seek his future in the new Indiana Territory. For the next 27 years he was closely connected with affairs on the Indiana side of the river.

He was one of the founders of Jeffersonville, in 1802; made a name for himself in local politics, and when the first of many companies to build an

Indiana canal around the Falls was organized in 1805, all of the promoters except two were outsiders. Those two were George Rogers Clark and Davis Floyd.

This was an ill-fated venture for Floyd for the chief canal promoter was Aaron Burr, even then laying the groundwork for his grandiose scheme to wrest Texas from the Spanish dominions and set up a huge empire in the southwest. Soon Floyd was Burr's local agent in this scheme, collecting men and material. As part of this work he had two large flatboats built to join the Burr flotilla as it came down the Ohio. These boats were constructed on Silver Creek near the Gut Ford. When Burr's scheme collapsed, Floyd was arrested along with a number of others. But when he was found guilty in Clark Circuit court of high misdemeanor, his sentence was most unusual – three hours imprisonment and a fine of \$10. Almost immediately afterwards – in August 1807 – he was elected by the territorial Legislature at Vincennes as its Clerk. By 1814 he was private secretary to Territorial Governor John Gibson, and he was a Clark County delegate to the Indiana Constitutional Convention in 1816 – the convention that met in Corydon under the shade of a huge elm tree to frame a constitution for the new state.

He also aided in organizing at Corydon the Indiana Grand Lodge of Masons, and was grand secretary for many years.

When New Albany citizens were pressing in 1818 for the formation of a new county to be carved from Clark, Davis Floyd was with the local delegation, even though he lived in Charlestown, and when the new county was formed, he was appointed the first judge of Floyd Circuit Court. He lived here until 1828 when President Andrew Jackson named him land commissioner for the Territory of Florida, and he spent the rest of his life in the Tallahassee area.

These are the two contenders. For which Floyd was Floyd County named  
– Col. John Floyd or Major Davis Floyd?

[Vol. II, Historical Series No. 21]