

PATRICK HENRY SHIELDS

A FLOYD COUNTY PIONEER

Georgetown this week observed the 150th anniversary of the arrival, in what was then an almost unbroken wilderness, of George Waltz, the man for whom Georgetown was named. But he was not the first to settle on the site of what is now Georgetown. Two years earlier, in 1805, Patrick Henry Shields built his cabin there on a hillside near the creek. The story of this pioneer is the subject of today's program . . .

In the summer of 1804 the Federal Government signed a treaty with a number of Indian tribes – a treaty that could be called the most important document in Floyd County history.

That treaty opened to white settlement for the first time the whole area of Southern Indiana along the Ohio River from Silver Creek to the Wabash, including what is now Floyd County. Previously, settlement had been permitted only in the Clark Grant and around Vincennes.

Thus it was that in the spring of 1805 Patrick Henry Shields, his wife, and a Negro slave picked their way on horseback up the steep Knobs and through the dense forest to what is now Georgetown and settled down to a new life in a new land. In all of Floyd County there were only three or four other families – all newly arrived.

Shields was a native of York County, Virginia . . . born in 1773 during the troubled years of the Revolutionary War. He was named Patrick Henry in honor of the great Virginia patriot, a friend and neighbor of the Shields family. In

accordance with his father's wish, Shields was educated for the legal profession at William and Mary College and at Hampdon-Sydney College.

Later he inherited a large tract of land near Lexington, Kentucky and moved there in 1801. But, as happened so often in early Kentucky history, Shields' title to the land was defective. And like many other Kentucky pioneers who found themselves without land, Shields looked longingly across the Ohio River to the new, unsettled territory of Indiana.

Though he was not the first settler in Floyd County, Shields had the honor of being the first settler in what is now Georgetown Township. Tradition gives to his wife a special honor, also. She is said to have been the first white woman ever to cross the Knobs.

His wife, whom he married in Virginia, was Mary Nance, a daughter of Clement Nance, also one of the very first settlers of Floyd County. In her old age Mrs. Shields delighted in telling her grandchildren that she was an F.F.V. – one of the First Families of Virginia.

When Shields first settled on the site of Georgetown the area was part of Clark County. In 1808 Harrison County was formed and included the Shields' land. At this point Patrick Henry Shields' legal training proved its value, for he was named first judge of the new county . . . possibly through the influence of William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana territory, who had been a college classmate of Shields in Virginia.

During the War of 1812 Shields fought under William Henry Harrison at the Battle of Tippecanoe, the battle that banished at last the constant dread of Indian raids on the Hoosier frontier. And when Indiana became a state in 1816, Patrick Henry Shields was among the group which gathered in the cool shade of the famous Elm tree in Corydon to draw up the constitution of the new government. In 1825 Shields was a member of the official delegation to

welcome LaFayette when he visited Jeffersonville during his triumphal tour of the United States.

In 1819 Floyd County had been formed and the Georgetown area was included in the territory of the new county. The wilderness that Patrick Henry Shields had found when he arrived only 14 years earlier was now dotted with farms, and the Georgetown area was beginning to take on the aspects of a village.

During the last years of his life the old pioneer lived in New Albany where he died June 6, 1848. The two-story cabin of blue ash logs which Shields built in those far-away days stood in Georgetown until recent years. And though it is now gone, the doorstep of the cabin is still in use at the front door of the Scribner House in New Albany – a link tying together the pioneer settlers of city and county.

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