

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON
AND HARRISON COUNTY

Harrison County next year will reach a milestone in its history . . . its 150th birthday. It was on October 11, 1808 that the Indiana Territorial Legislature, meeting at Vincennes, created a new county and named it Harrison in honor of Governor William Henry Harrison, a man who had much to do with the county in its early days . . .

Harrison County in its name perpetuates the name of the first man who came in 1800 to the newly-created Indiana Territory to guide its destinies for some 12 years. And it is fitting, since the county is named for him, that William Henry Harrison should have picked the name of the county seat, Corydon, founded in 1807 . . . a year before the county itself was established.

Governor Harrison was only 27 years of age when he was appointed governor of the Indiana Territory by President John Adams. He was a native of Virginia, born at famous Berkeley Plantation on the eve of the Revolutionary War. He had distinguished himself during his Army service in campaigns against the Indians in Ohio and in 1799 had been elected the delegate to Congress from the vast Northwest Territory.

In a very real sense, Indiana history may be said to begin with Harrison's term in Congress, for he sponsored the act to separate Indiana from the Northwest Territory. It was natural that he should be named governor of the new territory.

Vincennes was selected as the capital, and it was to that old French community that Harrison journeyed when he arrived in Indiana. But his official duties required many trips between Vincennes and the settlements at the Falls of the Ohio. Tradition says that Harrison's favorite route through what is now Harrison County was south of the usual route along the Buffalo trace. He preferred to travel along Little Indian Creek to the point where Corydon now stands, and then northwestward to the Trace.

The Governor liked the Harrison County area . . . liked it so well he purchased two different tracts of land. One site of 207 acres became the site of Corydon, but not until after Harrison had sold the land to Harvey Heth, who established the town. The other tract, 820 acres, was along Blue River at the point where State Road 62 today crosses that stream. Even today the area north of Road 62 along Blue River often is called Harrison's Valley, and Wilson's Spring in the valley often is called Harrison's Spring.

The Governor erected a grist mill on Blue River about 1808, and a residence, too. Probably he often came here to this pleasant retreat to rest from the cares of state. As late as 1880 some old Harrison County residents recalled coming to the mill in childhood days with sacks of grain which Harrison himself would take and carry to the hopper to be ground. Traces of the orchard planted by Harrison still were visible in the early years of this century. Old records show Harrison planned a boatyard along Blue River to construct flatboats for the New Orleans trade, but this project never was carried out.

Further indications of Harrison's interest in the area is provided by an old record of the ferry which he established across the Ohio River in 1807 at Eight Mile Creek.

The name of Corydon is said to have been inspired by the Governor's favorite song, a now long-forgotten piece of music about a shepherd named

Corydon. When in 1809 the future states of Illinois and Wisconsin were cut off from the Indiana Territory, a move was started to move the capital from Vincennes to a more central point in the new and smaller Indiana Territory. By the time the move to Corydon was made in 1813, Harrison no longer was governor, but many Harrison County men had served under him at the famous battle with the Indians at Tippecanoe in 1811. Harrison entered the Army again after war broke out between England and the United States. He never returned to Indiana and in 1817 he sold his mill and property in Harrison County, but residents of the county must have felt a glow of pride when the man for whom the county was named became president of the United States in 1841.

And as Harrison County approaches its 150th anniversary, today's citizens can look back with pride at the man who had much to do with the area's early history . . . William Henry Harrison, "Old Tippecanoe."

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