

Fifty-Two Years Ago.

New Albany Had No Telegraph, Telephone and but 18 Miles of Railroad.

The Court House Was a Squat Yellow Brick Building
of Scant Proportions.

Reminiscences and Various Comments.

Fifty-two years ago, say January 1, 1850, New Albany was, for the period, a very prosperous but very quaint little city. It was then about as large as Indianapolis, and considerably larger than Evansville, Terre Haute or Fort Wayne. But it did not have a telegraph line until a year later, and no telephone or electric car line, or electric lighting plant, or water works, indeed no public utility except a very small gas plant. Electric power and electrically operated utilities did not then exist in any part of the United States, for electricity in its application to machinery had not been discovered, and was not discovered until many years later.

Fifty-two years ago New Albany had two Daily Newspapers – The Daily LEDGER, democratic, and the Daily Bulletin, Whig in position. Both these papers were worked off on a hand press, for while the steam press had been discovered it was so expensive that only the very largest and oldest and wealthiest newspapers in the big cities could afford to purchase a steam press. The first steam press used in New Albany was by the Daily LEDGER in 1857. It was a marvel in its curious construction and the small size of its cylinder. Its speed was about 1,000 papers per hour, but this was wonderfully rapid printing as compared with the old-fashioned hand press, the greatest speed of which was about 200 an hour.

Fifty-two years ago New Albany's chief industries were two hemp factories where rope of all sizes was made, two large foundries and machine shops for the production of steamboat and other machinery, and five shipyards in which steamboats were built. In September, 1850, fifteen large and first class steamboats were in course of construction here, and nearly as many more were undergoing repair. There was then an extensive marine railway between State and West Second street, upon which boats were built or upon which boats were hauled up out of the river by steam power for repair.

Fifty-two years ago New Albany had but 18 miles of railroad – the New Albany and Salem Railroad, which reached Providence – now Borden – in the fall of 1850, and was completed to Salem late in the fall of 1851. The rails were flat bar iron, very primitive in appearance, but very expensive, as they were brought from England and cost \$125 a ton. Just think of that, with the finest steel rails now at \$28 a ton! There was a plank road laid down a few years later between New Albany and Jeffersonville, and another between New Albany and Corydon, the latter since converted into a turnpike. The first turnpike built in Southern Indiana was the New Albany and Vincennes pike, which was not completed farther than Paoli. It is still, after more than fifty-five years of use, an excellent road.

In 1850-51 the men and boys used to go hunting for squirrels in the forest of big trees that stood where DePauw College, the Culbertson residence and other residences now stand on the South side of Main street, running back to the river. It was fine sport, for large fox squirrels were abundant. In the same year a rail fence extended across Market street, at East Ninth, and north of that was the Conner farm and woods, the latter covering the present site of the residence between East Eight and Tenth streets. The county of Floyd later purchased the west half of the block between Spring and Elm, from Spring to the alley, with the view of erecting a court house and county offices upon it when New Albany expanded eastward “into a great city.” The existing court house then was a low, squat brick building which occupied the site of the present fine court

house. The county sold the lots and they are now covered by the Third Presbyterian church and two fine residences. St. Mary's and Holy Trinity Catholic churches were not then thought of. Father Neyron was the only Catholic priest then in New Albany, and he held religious services on Market street, near the site of the present Holy Trinity church.

Wesley Chapel, the Mother Church of Methodism in the city and the first religious society organized here, stood at the southeast corner of Market and West First streets, and Centenary, the only other Methodist church here then, occupied its present site. The Episcopalian church was where the new Chapel of the German Evangelical church stands, and was a frame building. The historic old church was after the war purchased by the late W. C. DePauw, moved to the present site of Jennie DePauw Memorial church, and destroyed later by fire.

To-day, New Albany has all the public utilities of a first class city. Electric and gas lighting, electric street cars – the first electric line built in Indiana – telephones, telegraphs, splendid water works, but, with the exception of the brick and asphalt streets, the poorest streets of any city of equal pretensions in Indiana. And this, too, while the city has risen to the first importance as a manufacturing center. But with a City Council whose highest ambition is to turn out of positions its subordinate officers every time one or another “caucus faction” is in dominance, this condition of the streets is not at all to be wondered at.

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