

THE STORY OF THE NORTHERN APPROACH TO THE KENTUCKY AND INDIANA BRIDGE.

That small portion of New Albany, Indiana, which includes the approach to the Kentucky and Indiana Bridge is rich in historic lore. As part of a densely wooded tract, through which passed an old Indian trail, this bit of land played its part in the great drama of life ages before the coming of the white man.

Of the several buffalo trails crossing Indiana in pre-historic times, the best defined led from the salt licks of central Kentucky to the Falls. Crossing here, the trail divided into two parts, one, the wet-weather trail, following the east bank of Silver Creek to the first sharp bend, known as the Gut Ford, then across the township towards Spickert Knob, and over the Knobs in a northwesterly direction. The dry-weather trail followed the bank of the river west, passing the bridge site, over Dewey Heights, then following the ridge, now known as Main, to the foot of the Knobs, where the trail turned north and became the line of the Old Vincennes Road. Just beyond Floyd Knobs or Mooresville the two trails united, and proceeded northwest across Indiana to Vincennes, thence across to the prairies of Illinois.

John Filson in his work "The Discovery and Settlement of Kentucky" says, "To these salt-licks the cattle or buffaloes resort in droves of thousands, and reduce the hills rather to valleys than plains. The herds of buffaloes which resort hither, by their size and number fill the traveler with amazement. They made prodigious roads from all quarters as if leading to some populous city. The vast space around these springs was deleted as if by a ravaging enemy. All trees and bushes were trampled down."

Over this trail, in many places wide enough for a wagon road, came the buffalo and Indian centuries before the white man. Then came the hunters and trappers, the missionaries and lastly the pioneers. The old trails followed the most eligible routes, and greatly assisted the early settlers.

The first white man to pass this location was supposed to have been Robert LaSalle, the French adventurer, who with his followers, descended the Ohio in 1669, and took possession of the land in the name of France, whereby the entire Northwest territory became a French possession. From this event in 1669 until 1819 this small tract of land fronting the Ohio, in the east end of New Albany, has belonged in succession to France, England and America. It has been a part of the Province of Quebec, Virginia, County of Illinois, Territory of Indiana, County of Knox, County of Clark, (then almost all of southern Indiana), and the smaller divisions of Clark and Harrison Counties, from which was cut off, in 1819, the present county of Floyd, the second smallest county in the state.

These vast political changes, while of great importance to the world meant but little to the few individuals passing along the old trail on the northern bank of the Ohio. They went their way unmolested, and were mostly a law unto themselves. After the settlement of Bardstown, Kentucky, and the erection of a Catholic Church there, travel increased over the old buffalo trail for there was constant communication between the Bishop, who lived at Vincennes and the church at Bardstown. Soon after, mail was sent at regular intervals on horseback along the trail.

In 1778 George Rogers Clark set out from Corn Island, on the opposite side of the river, on his remarkable conquest, that of driving the British out of the Northwest Territory by the capture of Vincennes. His return to Corn Island was over the old trail. After the close of the Revolutionary War, in 1783, Virginia ceded 150,000 acres of land, at the Falls, to Clark and his men for valiant

service. This tract included most of Clark and parts of Scott and Floyd Counties, and extending as far down as East Ninth Street in New Albany.

One of Clark's men, Epaphras Jones, received 100 acres of this land for chivalrous conduct during the march to Vincennes. The tract occupied what is now Dewey Heights, including the approach to the K and I Bridge, and extending north as far as Market Street, and west to about Thirteenth street. It was heavily wooded, many of the trees measuring from five to seven feet in diameter. The Jones cabin was erected at the highest point of this tract where it had a commanding view, and afterwards became the site of the old Hedden home, now owned by R. S. Cade.

Epaphras Jones, or Pappy Jones, as he was called, had been a drummer boy in Washington's army. He was well educated, had traveled extensively, was a fine conversationalist, but very eccentric in many ways. His ambition was to build a town in opposition to the village of New Albany. He platted his town, sold a few lots, established a ferry, which never got beyond a mere skiff for transporting passengers. He built a warehouse, and persuaded someone to erect a mill, but both failed. He called his town Providence, for he felt he was so lucky to have come this way. He also conceived the idea of a road leading north to join the dry weather Indian trail, and he actually had a road chopped through the forest for about a mile. This road afterwards became the line of Vincennes street. At the foot of this road he placed his ferry. The Jones scheme failed for several reasons - lack of funds, and business sense and the enterprise of the Scribners, proprietors of New Albany a mile further down the river. It is said that Pappy Jones took a walk every morning from his home on Dewey Heights down through the woods (Main Street) to see how much the Scribners' village had grown over night.

Later in life Pappy Jones attempted to raise silk worms, but died before he could accomplish much. He was buried in the Jones Cemetery, near the east end of Market Street.

From that time, about 1820, romance deserted the northern approach to the K and I Bridge. It belongs to the Jones estate, was sold and subdivided several times, and became a part of New Albany known as Dewey Heights, being named for Judge Charles Dewey, a Judge of the Supreme Court of Indiana, who lived at Charlestown and was said to have been a relative of Epaphras Jones.

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(Prior to 1950)