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DOWN IN PORRENTRUY.

A QUIANT OLD FRENCH SETTLEMENT AMONG THE INDIANA HILLS.

Half a Century Ago It Was a Community of Thrifty, Honest, Interesting and Picturesque People.

For a glimpse of a one-time French settlement in Floyd county the student of the unusual must pack imagination with his srip and staff and travel down Budd road. Budd road or, more properly, the Elizabeth pike, winds away from New Albany, with bits of houses, stables, groceries and blacksmith shops clinging desperately to its shelving edges on the left, while on the right the barren end of Silver hills rises precipitously to those high levels where lie decorative modern homes amid blooming gardens and fertile fields. Past the Corydon road, across a deep railroad cut of beautiful vista, around graceful curves, and over tree-embowered bridges, beyond a curious old red-brown house, whose front fence is frankly made of old steamboat timbers, the Elizabeth pike climbs an easy slope and enters the old "French settlement" at the foot of that heavily wooded hill, called by the young French people "Le Ballon" – the balloon.

Just beyond "Le Ballon" which was the popular rendezvous for all French boys and girls on their way to market, to church or to fetes – the real Budd road of the old time branches away to the right and enters the mile and a half of wild hills and valleys which, almost since the opening of this country, has been called "the French settlement." For its beginning the local historian must go back probably to 1812 or 1813 – one resident farmer stating that his father made a home in these hills when New Albany contained but seven log cabins, in tracing

this settlement traditions must be untangled, one story ascribing it to local importation of Swiss labor, and another to exodus from the Tarascon mills on the Kentucky shore. Among the present French residents, however, no memory of these legends abides, and the universal explanation given is that a French missionary priest, traveling in this Western wild, infused among his friends in far France a share of his enthusiasm for the beautiful low hills and sunny valleys of this new country – and to be had for a trifle, and prosperity awaiting all who came.

Thereupon came the French settlers, some by way of New Orleans, others to New York. Not only from old France they came, but from Belgium and from Switzerland. It is related that a Swiss settler, looking around over the hills and valleys of his new home, exclaimed: “Ah, Porrentruy!” and Porrentruy, the name of his old village in Canton Berne, became, by common consent, the title of the French settlement. On the books of “La Societe Francaise,” of New Albany, incorporated by Act of Assembly, in 1855, the division known as “Porrentruy” is formally entered. On French creek, a little stream running from the northeast to the southwest through the hills, many of the earliest settlers clustered their homes; and “en haut la crique,” and “a bas la crique,” or “up the creek” and “down the creek,” became the only necessary points of the local and social compass. The bed of the stream, which was very often dry, was known as “le grande rue,” or main street, this designation also covering that portion of Budd road which extended through the settlement.

EARLY DAYS

Of those earliest times in that primitive community probably no record can ever be made. When New Albany, the nearest representative of civilization, was itself but seven cabins in a clearing, the foreigner in his little cabin in the woods must have known a pathetic experience of toil and deprivation. No doubt French creek could have been kept always navigable by the tears which

were shed of the lost homes in fair France. Frederick Veron, Pierre Hublard, Jean Claude Jerden, Joseph Roger, Pierre Volzer and Jean Pierard are among the earliest names on the roll of Porrentruy. After these pioneer settlers came others, and in 1848 the French settlement was in its prime. From that date for twenty years it numbered forty families, all speaking their native tongue. From the old world these French people brought their trades and occupations, and the settlement was one of thrift. Farms and gardens were well filled; vineyards spread over the hills, and cornfields rustled in the valleys. Stone masons and carpenters built their own cozy and substantial homes and found daily employment in New Albany. Up and down the creek and on the plateaus overlooking the valleys lived the French folk, and their musical names still fall with fascinating sound on the ear – Antoine Bizot, Constant Prenat, Francois Marque, Alexis Be__chet, Louis Bee, Jean Louis Bezy, Joseph Echobert, Eugene Bruat, Clement Bruat, Joseph Flispart, Jean Baptiste Mousty, Auguste Verron, Etienne Bell, Francois Grangier, George Goniart and many others.

Pere Louis Neyron, formerly a surgeon in Napoleons's army, and who died but a few years ago at Notre Dame, South Bend _____ spiritual _____ of the settlement in charge, and Sunday mornings beheld the faithful of his flock, resting their wearied teams and plodding afoot three, four and five miles to service in New Albany. On Sunday afternoon, once a month, Pere Neyron held vesper service in Porrentruy, in one of the quaint dwellings built by Pierre Volzer – half wood, half stone, in true Swiss style. It was an honest community, too, the New Albany physician, who attended their sickbeds for forty years, affirming that in all that period he had not through them lost one dollar. Families were large in Porrentruy, and in the flower of its days nearly one hundred young men and women were present at all fetes and merry-makings.

BITS OF PERSONAL HISTORY.

Many interesting bits of life history are woven in the now dimmed and fading tapestry of that quaint hill settlement, Porrentruy. Pere Louis Neyron, the Catholic priest, left Napoleon's service for missionary work in the American wilds. He was a truly spiritual man, and toiled hand in hand with his flock.

At Mooresville, another French hill community, he taught the farmers to make brick, and with them built a church, paying bills from his own purse, and wielding the mason's trowel with the same skill with which he handled the scalpel. Pere Neyron's surgeon's reputation brought him visitors even from Louisville, and one fine day in that long ago he was plastering briskly away on the little church when a fine carriage came up the hill and a well-dressed man asked the dusty mason for Father Neyron. "Yes, I will bring him," the mason replied, and vanished behind the building to change his clothes, wash the mortar from his hands and reappear in clerical garb and mien. Many a time Pere Neyron plodded afoot down Budd road to visit the sick or comfort the dying, to hold vespers or to have a good game of picquet – dear game of his much loved France – with le bon Antoine Bizot. I like the picture of that good priest footing it down through the hills to have his game of picquet, and imagination refuses to flinch even at the glass of French settlement wine which he [end of newspaper clipping is missing]

[Source: Emma Carleton Scrapbook #4, p. 217]