

Pierson Township

This township is situated in the southeast corner of the county, and is bounded in the north by Riley township, on the south by Sullivan county, on the east by Clay county, and by Linton township on the west. It comprises a splendid body of farming land, and produces large quantities of wheat, while stock raising is carried on to a considerable extent.

The first settlement was made in 1820 by Moses Evans and William Welch, who came from Ohio, and in 1821 Nathan Piner, the Walker's, the Brock's, and Charles Johnson located here, the latter being the first school teacher in the township. In 1824 Joseph Liston, one of the earliest settlers of the state, came here from Prairieton township, having come to Knox county, Indiana, in 1808, and in 1811 to Harrison prairie, where he plowed the first furrow turned in the county, and planted seventy-five acres of corn. He was, however, scared off by the Indians. The corn was gathered in the fall and sold to the garrison at Fort Harrison at fifty cents per bushel. The township was named after Willis Pierson, who, along with his brother Moses, came from Kentucky in 1820, both being Baptist preachers.

In 1822 they organized the Union Baptist church, which was the first church in the township and second in the county; Willis was minister for four years, at the end of which time he returned to Kentucky on a visit, and there died. A log church was built in 1826, which was used until 1829, when the congregation erected a brick building, 30x50, southeast of the old site, finally, in May 1851, putting up the frame church now in use on the site of the brick one which had decayed. This congregation organized with 16 members, and now has a list of 114, is in a prosperous condition, and has been one of the leading churches of the denomination in the county, having aided in ordaining ten ministers for other churches, in constituting five churches, and in the formation of Curry's Prairie Baptist Association. Old Joseph Liston served as clerk from 1824 to 1855, since which time the office has been held by J.M. Sanford.

Mount Olive Christian church, which stands on the Swinford farm, on Sec. 31, was built in 1869 at the cost of about \$1,000. It is a frame building, 32x40. The first preacher was Leonard Shoemaker. The church originated from the union prayer meetings, which were held by Benjamin ALL and others in the school-house during the war. The organization took place in 1868, with about 40 members, and now numbers over 100, is in good condition, with great interest manifested at the meetings, which are held once a month, the present pastor being Rev. L.W. Bannon, of Parke county. There is a lively Sunday-school in connection with the church, which meets during the summer months, the average attendance being 50, with George Peters as superintendent.

The Methodist Episcopal congregation worship in a handsome frame building 30x40, commonly known as Fletcher's chapel, situated on the town line, on Sec. 30, which they erected in 1871. The building cost about \$1,500. They formerly met in a log house which was built in 1855. The Rev. St. Clair is now in charge of the congregation, which numbers about 100 members. There is a Sunday-school in connection with the church, the average attendance being 45.

The Pleasant Grove Centenary church, of the United Brethren denomination, is located

on the land of Abraham Larew, on Sec. 15. The organization took place in 1860, and in 1864 a log church was built which they occupied until 1876, when the present building, 30x40 feet, was put up, costing \$1,600. The trustees are C.L. Edmonston, Allen Harris, P.K. Welch, and Abraham Larew. The church was dedicated by Rev. Mr. Hersung, and the congregation now numbers over forty members.

The first marriage occurring in the township was that of Jesse Kester and Sally Johnson; the first death being that of old Mrs. Johnson.

The only village in the township is Centreville, which is situated in the southeast corner, on the S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 36. The town was laid out in 1837, on land owned by Addison Williams, in regular shape, each block containing eight lots, 60x120 feet, streets sixty feet wide. The first tradesman to locate was Joseph Stutman, who put up a tanyard and conducted it successfully for several years, his successors in that business being Cummings, Chris, Akers and Thomas Ransford. In 1842 Charles W. Stewart built a log house, which was the second one put up in the town, and there opened a boot and shoe shop. Peter Y. Buskirk and his brother arrived the year following and began business as cabinet-makers. John B. Smith, who came with them, opened a blacksmith shop. They each received a lot from the proprietor on condition that they erect a house and carry on a trade in the town. The third house was erected by Mr. Smith, and Mr. Buskirk's residence, which followed, was the first frame building. Up to this time there was no store in the village, the nearest trading point being Terre Haute. Money was rarely seen, and, in fact, of little use, the only necessity for it being to pay taxes and buy salt; the general trading being carried on by means of a system of notes, of which there were two kinds in circulation,—those calling for trade at trade rates, and the other for trade at cash rates. The latter were held to be payable in wheat at $37\frac{1}{2}$ to 40 cents per bushel, or in young cattle, at what Squire Pierson valued them, the prices generally being as follows: Spring calves at weaning time, delivered at his pasture, \$1.50; yearlings, \$3 to \$5, none over that age being legal tender without a special contract. Mr. Buskirk has in his possession one of these notes, which reads as follows: "Twelve months after date I promise to pay John Pierson or bearer the just and full sum of five dollars, on traid at traid raits, this Aprile 15, 1846. (Signed) Simeon Edwards."

The first physician to locate here (1843) was John E. Lloyd, of Middletown, in what was known as the white house, it being the only building which had received a daub of paint. The next was Dr. Tichenor, who came in 1855, from Kentucky, and resided in town until 1862, when he died.

The first school-house was erected by subscription on Lot No. 12; was a log building, furnished in the usual primitive fashion, and served for many years as school-house, meeting-house, for political gatherings, and later was used as court-house and public hall. The old house is still standing. Among the early preachers were Father Simons (still living at the age of eighty-nine), I.W. Allen, John Neal, and John Hedges. On one occasion, when old Father Hedges was preaching in the old meeting-house, a young lady who was dressed in what was then the height of fashion, having skirts distended in a single hoop, this being the first dawning of the crinoline in the backwoods, entered the church door, stepping carefully over a dog which was taking a nap in the hall. Unfortunately the hoop caught around his neck and frightened him so that he yelled and howled dismally, frightening the lady nearly out of her wits. Old Father Pickard, a severe old disciplinarian, who always sat in meeting with his hat on and cane in hand, advanced to the rescue with

cane uplifted. This, however, did not appear to please "Spot," who made an attack on the old gentleman, who retreated in disorder. The preacher, seeing the state of affairs, left the stand and arrested "Spot" by the neck and tail and ejected him from the building, returning up the aisle singing "I am a soldier of the cross," amid the laughter of the congregation.

The first store was opened in 1844 by Dodson & Jenkins, the next by Wright & Kemble, in Charlie Stewart's building, and were succeeded by Martin Hale, who was followed by Samuel Stores in 1847. About this time the Wabash and Erie canal was under construction, and a lively trade was done at this point during 1847, 1848 and 1849. In 1850 the canal was finished, the water let in, and navigation opened, when a daily packet ran to Worthington. Squire Taylor opened a store with a large stock of goods in 1854, and in the following year Squire Stout and Jesse Boston also began business. The trade territory extended over twelve miles in each direction. Another blacksmith shop and plow factory was located here in 1855, by Abbott & Optimus, who made the first steel mold-board plows used in this part of the country, which were a great improvement over the old wooden mold-boards. P. Bledsoe opened another blacksmith shop in 1858, and several dwellings were erected at the same time, but the panic, which occurred about that time, put a stop to the prosperity.

In 1854 a man named Samuel Cunningham made affidavit that three men, named respectively James, Charles and Wesley Norris, had set fire to and burned down an oat-stack belonging to Widow Donham, a relative of Senator Isaiah Donham. They were arrested and brought before Peter Y. Buskirk, justice of the peace, in the old school-house, Isaiah Donham appearing for the prosecution and J.W. Buskirk for the defense. Between forty and fifty witnesses were examined, but no evidence sufficient to send the case to the grand jury was tendered, so they were discharged. Public excitement, however, was high, and a meeting was held next day in the Twin Grove, near Isaiah Donham's residence, at which there was a large attendance. The firing of an anvil was the signal for the commencement of business; speeches of a threatening character were made, and the meeting wound up with a resolution that if the suspected parties did not leave the state inside of ten days they would be hung. The Norrises accordingly left for Illinois. Shortly afterward, however, it leaked out that Cunningham, the party who had made the charge, was really the guilty one, and he left in a hurry.

Toward the end of the war a murder of the most cold-blooded character was committed in this township, a young man who ran a saloon in Centreville, and also owned a farm near town, being the victim. He had agreed to sell his farm to a man in the neighborhood, and drew up the deed and had it signed by his wife, arranging to go with the intending purchaser to Terre Haute to hand over the deed and draw the money. He was slightly under the influence of liquor when he started in the afternoon with the parties, who stopped at their residence and had their victim eat supper with them, and then started at dark for Terre Haute. The unfortunate man was never seen alive again, having been shot, his body put in a coffee-sack and thrown into the creek. The murderers, on their return with the deed, took possession of the property, circulating the story that the missing man had run off. Suspicion was, however, aroused, and all the creeks and ponds dragged, resulting, some weeks afterward, in finding the body in a drift. The parties were arrested and brought to trial, one of them being sentenced to imprisonment, while the actual murderer escaped on a technicality, and fled to Missouri.

The "Rural Hawkeye," a local journal, was started by I.H. Payne, his sister, Miss Alice Payne, a talented young lady, acting as assistant, in January 1879, and run about a year, the composing, printing and publishing being done by the editorial staff. During his career many articles of superior merit appeared in its columns, contributed by local talent.

The town is growing rapidly, and a better class of buildings are being put up, greatly enhancing its appearance. The Methodist Episcopal church, commonly known as Harbin's chapel, having been named after the Rev. Mr. Harbin, who dedicated it in June 1879, is a handsome frame building, 36x46 feet, which was erected in 1878, and cost \$800. Dr. F.M. Pickins is superintendent of the Sabbath-school, in which he takes great interest, and has labored to bring it up to its present high standard. The average attendance is sixty, and it meets the year round. The church was built through the efforts of F.M. Pickins, G.C. Ruggles, J.O. Beckwith, Jacob Scaminghorn, and Wm. Payne. There are now in town two physicians, two blacksmith shops, two drug stores, one dry-goods and grocery store, two general stores, and other places of business common to villages of this size.

The successor of the old log school-house is a handsome frame structure, 35x50 feet, which cost \$1,400, and is fitted up with all the latest improvements in school furniture. There are ninety scholars in the district, with an average attendance of sixty.

The Masonic fraternity have a large and flourishing society here, known as Vigo lodge, No. 29. It was organized in June 1870, the charter members being Jesse S. Herrold, W.T. Payne, A.J. Purcell, John Harris, J.R. Bledsoe, F.M. Garrett, John Zink, T.J. Scott, J.F. Thomas, J.T. Foreman, and K.W. Self. The first officers were: W.M., W.T. Payne; S.W., Jesse Herrold; J.W., J.T. Foreman; Sec., K.W. Self; and Treas., John Harris. The lodge now has a membership of forty-eight, is in splendid working order, and ranks high among the lodges of the state. Since organization one member has been expelled, and three deaths have occurred in the same time. Messrs. Herrold, Payne, Purcell, and Garrett were the parties instrumental in starting the organization. The present officers are: W.M., T.J. Scott; S.W., J.R.P. Stevens; J.W., J.R. Bledsoe; Sec., R.P. Irwin; and Treas., Henry Harmon.

There are eight school districts in the township, with a large and handsome school-house in each, the present trustee being Taylor Pierson.

History of Parke and Vigo Counties

1880

by H.W.Beckwith

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