Prairie Creek Township

This township, as originally organized, consisted of all of T 10, R 10, and all that territory east of the Wabash river in T 10, R 11, comprising in all about thirty-five square miles of territory. In the year 1856 the north tier of sections were taken and added to Prairieton Township, and what follows shall mainly refer to the township as thus formed.

The first wagon road opened in or through the township that was known as the old army road, and was opened and used for communication between Fort Knox and Fort Harrison during the War of 1812. The course of this road through the township cannot be more definitely described than to say it passed nearly north and south, on the east side of Battlerow prairie, and on much the same ground as that of the present county road in that locality. This was the only public highway in this part of the state up to the year 1823, at which date the present state road was laid out and opened.

The first house erected in the township was a small log cabin near the later residence of Mrs. Irving Thomas. This house was raised and covered by the respected and well known pioneer, Joseph Liston. In the absense of Mr. Liston, who had returned to civilization for his family, Mr. Thomas Pound, his family, and some other persons, took possession of the unfinished house, and recorded themselves as the first family passing a night as residents of Prairie Creek township. This event occurred late in the fall of 1816. As a matter of township history the names of this family are given. They were: Thomas Pound and Sarah his wife, and their children, William, Elijah, Joseph, Sarah, Rebecca, Eunice, Malissa, and Elizabeth; also their comrades, Hamilton Reed, Thomas Reed, Hugh Reed, and the late Elijah Staggs. The Sarah named as one of the children of Thomas Pound is our aged and loved neighbor Sarah Thomas, who has passed fifty-seven years of her life in this township.

Almost at the same date of this settlement, so near in fact as at one time to throw some doubts as to priority, a settlement was formed on the army road, near the Lykins cemetery, and was known as the Lykins settlement. Among the first settlers at this point were David Lykins, Josiah Wilson, father of the late John Wilson, Esq., William Armstrong, and others. Between this date and the year 1820 some twenty-five or thirty additional families settled in the township and, as a few of their names and locations will indicate, spread pretty evenly over the township. Dr. E. Shattuck, on the army road, one and a half miles north of the Lykins settlement; William Paddock, near the present residence of George Farmer; William Foster, at the residence of J.D.E. Kester; Thomas and Athol Furguson, just east of the present residence of Joseph Johnston; Armstrong McCabe, near the residence of E.T. Piety; Henry King, a quarter of a mile west of Daniel Johnson's residence; David Kelly, on the Kelly farm; James Johnston, just east, and William Thomas, just west, of the Baptist Church; William Drake, near the residence of Valentine Morgan; Isaac LeForge, at his late residence; Elijah Cayson, near the present residence of Caleb Kirkham; and Nicholas Yeager, at the present residence of Hugh Weir.

For some years Prairie creek bottom afforded the only road for communication between the early settlements and the main or army road. At that day, the bottom was very open, and teamsters had no difficulty to encounter in passing over it. This, in part, may account for the first settlements being located on the hills near the bottom, as was not only the case in this township, but higher up the creek.

The first organized association formed in the township was the First Prairie Creek Baptist Church, which was constituted May 1818, by Elder Isaac McCoy. As this association was formed with a membership of twenty persons, we have an idea with what rapidity the township was settled.

The political organization of the township seems to have been effected at about this time, as it appears that Armstrong McCabe and Nicholas Yeager, father of our respected citizen, Vincent Yeager, were elected magistrates, and Conrad Frakes, constable, and were therefore the first elected civil officers of the township. Mr. Yeager served as justice of the peace for fifteen successive years, and Conrad Frakes served as constable up to the year 1848, the date of his death. The first voting place was at the residence of William Foster, the location of which has been stated.

The first post-office was located at the Lykins settlement about the year 1817. David Lykins was appointed the first postmaster, in 1831.

The first house was erected in the township for public worship was built about the year 1819, and was located on the site of the present Baptist church. It was a hewed log structure, some thirty square feet, and was for that day a very good house. In the center of the room an opening of some eight or ten feet square was made in the floor, and the space was thus formed and filled with clay. This was the fireplace, and here roared the burning log heap that made the winter days and nights endurable. Around this fire, often in blinding smoke, those pious and hardy pioneers tendered their heart-felt thanks for blessings received, with as much if not more solemnity than is now done in upholstered pews.

The first school-house was erected in the fall of 1818, and was situated near the original residence already described. A few years later, perhaps in 1821, another school-house was built at the foot of the hill, east of James D. Piety's residence, and the school was removed to this point. This seems to have been done for the better accommodation of the settlement as then formed. Nicholas Yeager, most likely, taught the first school in the last named house.

Isaiah Wilson was the first blacksmith, in fact he seems to have performed all the mechanical work of the township up to the year 1818. About this date Samuel Keen established a smith shop near the present residence of Leander Wilson. Relieved, in part, of the duties required of him, Mr. Wilson now constructed a cotton-gin, a mechanical branch of industry then much needed, and which materially increased the growth of cotton. From fifteen to thirty acres of cotton were annually grown on Battlerow prairie for many years, and as late as the year 1840 patches of from one-fourth to two acres were grown in many parts of the township.

At an early day, most likely in the year 1817, was built the first grist-mill. This mill was located on the old county road, at the upper end of Battlerow, and near the northwest corner of Section 16. Here also was a distillery, but whether this, or one erected by David Kelly near his residence already described, cannot now be determined. The mill was what was known as a "horse-mill," and as it has entirely disappeared, a description of its construction,etc., may be interesting to many. It was simply a large horizontal cog-wheel, the cogs of which worked into a trundle-head that moved the upper mill-stone. The wheel was some thirty or more feet in diameter, and was elevated some six or eight feet from the ground. It was propelled by two or more horses hitched to a beam that passed

through the main shaft. Each customer was required to furnish the motive of power - a span of horses. On "milling day" the farmer harnessed two horses, loaded each with a sack of grain, placed his boy on one and he mounted on the other, then made their way to the mill. When their "turn" came, which was a very uncertain period, the horses were hitched, the boy mounted on the beam as driver. As many hours as their were bushels of grain were required to grind the grist. In the meantime the farmer and the miller would amuse themselves playing "fox and geese" on the bottom of the toll-box. At an early day the flour and bran made from wheat ground at those mills were separated at home by means of a sieve. Later, hand-bolts were found on which the customer was allowed to bolt his flour for a rental fee. Much the larger portion of the breadstuff consumed in the township up to the year 1840 was manufactured by the horse-mill. There have been three of those horse-mills in the township, located as follows: The one just named, one located one-third of a mile southwest of the residence of James W. Shattuck, and another in Middletown.

William Foster established the first tanyard in the township. It was located near his residence. It was among the earliest improvements of the township. Some years later, perhaps in the year 1825, William N. Perry opened a tanyard on the old Perry farm.

Eliphalet Shattuck was the first resident physician, he had an extensive practice up to the time of his death, which occurred in the year 1840.

In the year 1820 or 1821, a man named Angel commenced the erection of what is now known as the "Watts" mill. It was finished, however, by William Armstrong, in the year 1822, and was both a grist and saw mill. For many years this remained the best mill within a radius of twenty-five miles. In 1842 Robert Lambert commenced a mill half a mile above the Watts mill. Most if not all the timbers for a large building were framed, when he abandoned the work, and the timbers have rotted on the ground.

Up to the year 1825 the principal business center of the township was on Battlerow. There was quite a village at Lykins farm, and another in the neighborhood of the residence of Ithat Shattuck, with thick settlement along the road from the north to the south boundary of the township. Here was the grist-mill, the cotton-gin, the post-office, the doctor, the store, the attorney, the blacksmith, the wagonmaker and the undertaker of the whole township. In the year 1830 there was a considerable business point at the locality of Daniel Johnson's residence. Here Warren Harper made and repaired wagons, plows, and other farming implements, and was the principal cabinet-maker of the township. The best school-house, a hotel, and several other buildings, were clustered together at this place. Near by was Kelly's distillery, and a quarter of a mile to the southwest was Jubal Welch's smith shop. There was also quite a village just south of town, on what is now Mr. Jamison's meadow. Here was built and operated the first pottery in the township, and the place was known for miles around as Pottersville. There were doubtless other branches of mechanical industry carried on at this point.

In August, 1831, the north half of the town of Middletown was laid out, containing thirty-two lots, and extending from the Baptist church to the street south of the old hotel building. The late Elijah Thomas and James D. Piety were the proprietors. Warren Harper was the principal engineer. A grapevine answered the purpose of a surveyor's chain, but what substitute they had for a compass does not appear. Two or three years later the proprietors laid out the south addition, comprising thirty-two lots, making a total of sixty-four, the present number of lots in the town. This was the first, and is the only platted

town ever formed in the township. The old log-house, now standing south of Reynerson's drug-store, was the first building erected in the town. Daniel McDonald was the proprietor, and in it he opened the first hotel. Joseph P. Lykins built the second house, and in it opened the first store. The first mill in or near the town was a horse-mill, situated on the site now occupied by Dr. Lane's barn. Jonas P. Lykins was the first postmaster, Warren Harper the first resident justice of the peace, and William Reed the first physician. The first frame building was most likely built by James Copeland, on the site of Z.J. Hunt's residence. He occupied it as a hotel. The old hotel building, now fast passing away, was built in the year 1836. For many years this building was a stage stand; here the horses were changed and the passengers refreshed; here twice a day congregated the idle villagers to stare at the passengers and hear the news.

In the year 1840 the present Baptist church was built, but not, however, fully completed. The first trustees were Conrad Frakes, Henry Reynerson, George Turnham, Isaac LeForge, and Joseph Kester. Josiah Tate was the contractor and builder. At about this date Elder Asa Frakes was called to the pastorate of the church, and continued its pastor until bodily infirmities prevented him reaching the house, and extending through a period of thirty-three years.

In 1842 the first frame school-house built in the township was erected east of the Baptist church, and just outside the cemetery. Vincent Yeager was the contractor and builder.
In the year 1847 Hiram Hight built the first steam-mill in the town. It was erected just west of Mr. Gobin's new brick residence. For a time corn was ground there, and there was also a carding machine attached to the mill.

The first brick house built in the town or township, was built by Jacob Ernest, in 1849. Preston Armstrong was contractor for the brick work, Hiram Hight, John Reed, and James Cayton doing the carpenter work.

The Christian church was built by Vincent Yeager, in the year 1854. James D. Piety, Valentine Morgan, and John Pogue the first trustees.

There have been three fires in this town worthy of note. A log residence occupied by Joseph Liston Jr. burned with all its contents in 1847. This house was located on the southwest corner of the lot since occupied by C.T. Ash. A frame dwelling, occupied by W.S. Bentley, burned with most of its contents in 1853. A store-room, occupied by Asa Frakes and Henry Anderson, burned with the whole stock of goods in 1856.

In 1857 James W. Nebergall and Bethuel Johnson Sr. erected a stream saw-mill just east of town. Mr. Nebergall built our present steam flouring-mill in 1861. In 1840 there was one church building, the present Baptist church. There were three school-houses. The best one, and perhaps the third one erected in the township, stood near Daniel Johnson's smith shop, as already stated. Another stood one mile east of the Johnson hill, and the third one on the county road, near the southeast corner of Sec. 29, not far from school No. 8. There were three grist-mills, already located; three distilleries, already located. The third, and the most extensive one ever built in the township, was located near the present residence George Farmer. It was built by Vond Smith. There were tanyards, three dry-good stores, two smith shops, one saddle and harness shop, conducted by J.W. Smith, two wagon shops, two potteries, three hotels, one cabinet shop, one boot and shoe shop, two tailor shops, four physicians, three groceries, and a daily mail.

There is a sad reminder connected with this brief sketch. While man was busied himself in civilizing the country and in building up this prosperous and happy community, death and time have not been idle.

The old water-mill, that more than any one thing aided in the early settlement of the township, is now the abode of owls and bats.

History of Parke and Vigo Counties
1880
by H.W.Beckwith