

#### XXIV. EARLY ROADS IN MARSHALL COUNTY.

When the first pioneers came there was nothing here but a wilderness. Few evidences of civilization were to be seen anywhere. Telegraphing had not then been discovered, and there was not a railroad within a thousand miles in ally direction, and at that time there was not even a stage line within forty miles. With the coming of white people closely followed the "pony express" mail carrier, once a month, then weekly and tri-weekly, and so on.

Those who were here then will remember when an occasional New York, Philadelphia or Baltimore paper strayed out this way, the picture of the pony express would be looked for to see what time the mail was scheduled to leave the east for the west, and what time it would be due at Pittsburg, Cincinnati and Indianapolis, and the probable date of its arrival here. It will be remembered how fast that mail carrier seemed to be going. The pony was running at full speed; the mail carrier was bent forward at an angle of 45 degrees, and was heralding his approach by the blasts from his tin horn. But he did not make half as rapid headway as he appeared to be making. Most of the road he had to travel over was through the wilderness, and before he reached the end of his journey he met with many a mishap that delayed his arrival for hours and days.

The letters he brought were written on blue letter paper with goose quill pens, folded in the form of our present envelopes, envelopes not having .been invented then, and sealed with a red wafer or sealing wax, mucilage being a discovery of a later date. Letter postage at that time was rated according to distance, 25 cents being the rate from the eastern cities, payable in coin on

postage stamps not having been invented at that time and for years afterwards. It is easy to be seen that the number of letters that failed to reach the parties to whom they were addressed and consequently the dead letter office without the postage having been collected was immense loss to the United States.

There were no roads or bridges in those days, and the neighbors in their way to the cabins of each other followed the Indian trails, were the first roads in this part of the country. There is more method in laying out an Indian trail than may be imagined. As of all the Pottawattomie Indian trails in this county and in Indiana the writer avails himself of the following truthful and worded' description of the Pottawattomie trail as given by Charles in his admirable "Tales of Kankakee Land." The Indian trail, he says, was an Indian path with all the features that the term might indicate. It never crossed over a hill which it might go around; it crept through the hollows, avoiding, however, with greatest care, those conditions in which a moccasin could not be kept dry and clean; it clung to the shadows of the big timber belts, and when an arm of the prairie intervened sought to traverse such a place of possible danger by the route which was shortest and least exposed. At every step the ancient path tells the story of wilderness fears. Yet the travelers of this venerable avenue of the old life had also their own peculiar delights. A warm and sheltered path in the winter time; its fragrant airs were cool and soft in summer days. All the woodland flowers crowded to its margin; the blue violets and the water-cress; yellow honey-suckles; the fringed gentian; the roses, the ox-eyed daisies and where the shades were damp and dark, yellow ladies' slippers and purple ones. When the heavy foliage above parted wide to let the sunshine fall on some gentle slope, there was the strawberry bank all white with promise, or growing with the ruby red of its luscious sweets, or throwing above the tender leaves of its pink stolas to make sure the feasts of coming days. The birds loved the red man's path, stationed their homes in the thickets that bordered its course, sang their morning songs beneath those rifts where the blue sky looked down, and there, while the twilight lingered, warbled their evening hymns.

And then, to the Pottawattomie, this above all others was the ancient highway of his people. All the pageant of his life was then in the springtime and in the moon of falling leaves passing before them in living remembrance. When these scenes were over the old men loved to wander along this path and rehearse the stories of the past and tell the times when they with their people in tumultuous throng hurried home from the chase. With trembling voice and solemn gesture they pointed out the spot where a chief with warriors brave once fell victims to the deadly ambush; or this was the tree where the children had been lured to their death by the mocking wail of a panther; or, in that place the Great Spirit with a countenance of light had spoken of his children in a voice of thunder. Then on the old path they told off, as on a rosary, the sacred traditions of their people.

It was a long time after the first settlers came to the county before any roads were regularly laid out and opened for travel. Indian trails were followed wherever they led in the desired direction. Wherever it was thought that a road should be opened the route would be selected by those

interested and a man sent over the route with an ax to blaze the way. The brush and logs were cut out, and the man with the ax would cut the bark off of the trees along the line a foot or two long and about five or six feet from the roots, on both sides of the trees, that would be seen by those passing along the road going and coming. One of the first of these roads was from the region of Maxinkuckee lake by way of the Indian trail near Menominee village at Twin lakes, and so on to Plymouth. Another branch was by way of Wolf Creek and from there by the nearest route through the woods to the Michigan road, which had been cleared out and blazed so that it could be used after a fashion, and thence on to Plymouth, A road was also early cleared and blazed from Plymouth to Bourbon by way of what is now Inwood, and on to the Benak Indian village in Tippecanoe township. Short roads were opened in the same way in various parts of the county where most needed, but without any system or legal authority. The lines of these early roads were selected so as to avoid swamps and marshes, and as much as possible to avoid the building of corduroy bridges. In this way they were like the Indian trails they meandered around over the county without regard to the distance to be traveled and without any regard as to whose lands it was that the road was built upon.

The Michigan road has an interesting history. Several years ago the writer of this history made as thorough investigation of this subject as possible, procuring the data for such investigation from the Interior Department at Washington. The following is the result of that investigation :

Prior to 1826 numerous treaties had been made with the Pottawattomie Indians, the owners and inhabitants of the country embraced in Indiana, southern Michigan and northern Illinois, by which they were to give up most of their lands and hunting grounds to the United States for the benefit of the white population. After these treaties were proclaimed, gangs of government surveyors were sent out to survey and plat the land, which was done, and the land opened to entry at \$1.25 an acre. Through these government surveyors, ax men and chainmen it soon became noised about that a most delightful and productive country had been found, with beautiful lakes and watercourses, and every kind of fish and wild game, wild fruits, etc., in abundance. Many of these surveyors, with Indian traders, land speculators and government agents, entered into a scheme to persuade the Pottawattomie Indians to make a treaty giving to the government a strip of land 100 feet wide through the entire state from Lake Michigan to the Ohio river, with a contiguous section of land through which the road should run which should belong to the state of Indiana and by it be given to those who should be awarded the contracts to build the road. It was to be a great national thoroughfare, the northern terminus of which was the mouth of Trail creek at Michigan City, and the southern at Madison, Ind. After the treaty was made the Indiana legislature took the matter up, and among other things named it the "Michigan road." The treaty by which the Pottawattomies granted the land for this road was article 3 of the treaty made October 16, 1826, concluded near the mouth of the Mississinewa, on the Wabash, Indiana, between Lewis Cass of Michigan and James B. Ray and John Tipton of Indiana, commissioners on the part of the United States, and the chiefs and warriors of the Pottawattomie tribe of Indians. This article of the treaty is as follows :

" Article 3. As an evidence of the attachment, which the Pottawattomie tribe feel towards the American people, and, particularly to the south of Indiana, and with a view to demonstrate their liberality and benefit themselves by creating facilities; for traveling and increasing the value of their remaining country, the said tribe do, hereby cede to the United States a strip, of land commencing at Lake Michigan and running thence to the Wabash River, 100 feet wide, for a road, and also one section of good land contiguous to the said road for each mile of the same, and also for each mile of a road from the termination thereof through Indianapolis to the Ohio river for the purpose of making a road aforesaid from Lake Michigan by way of Indianapolis to some convenient point on the Ohio river. And the general assembly shall have a right to locate the said road and to apply the said sections or the proceeds thereof to the making of the same, or any part thereof, and the said grant shall be at their sole disposal,

As I view it, the wording of the treaty was a cunningly devised arrangement to swindle the Indians out of an immense amount of the best lands belonging to them in the state, The words "good land" enabled the legislature to zigzag the road so as to avoid all the bad land and run around through all the "contiguous good land" through the entire state. By referring to the map of Marshall county it will be seen that from the time the road enters the county on the south until it reaches the northern boundary, the Michigan road sections are so disjointed on the map that they have the appearance of a great big stairway, From Argos north the line of the road angles off to the west before it reaches Plymouth, about two miles and a half, The object of this "wobbling" was to avoid low or swamp lands and get over onto a better quality. Near Benoni Jordan's old farm, now owned by D. E. Snyder, four miles south of Plymouth, the angle is so abrupt that the sections are barely "contiguous." From La Paz the road zigzags about until it reaches South Bend, where it turns abruptly and runs directly west through some of the best prairie lands in the state, or anywhere else for that matter , and then turns north and finally finds its way into the mouth of Trail creek at Michigan City.

The disjointed manner in which these Michigan road sections appear on the map of Indiana is a perpetual verdict against the conspirators who defrauded the Indians out of their rights; and like the blood on the hands of Lady McBeth, "the d-----d spot will not out."

It was in 1832-3 that this end of the road was ordered to be "cut" and "opened" and these are the directions prescribed by the legislature of 1832 (see pages 124-5, acts of that session) :

"Cut and clear off said part of said road all logs, timber and under-brush, leaving no stump more than one foot above the level of the earth, and grub thirty feet wide in the center of said road." Polk, Blair and Seering were the contractors through this part of the state, and the late Robert Schroeder of North township was one of the bosses that superintended the job. He told me many times before his death the manner in which this great thoroughfare was opened up, and according to history, the truth of which cannot be doubted, the work was the merest pretext toward complying with the intent of the law. The road was practically impassable for much of the way through this part of the state; the

mud holes, which were numerous, were bridged over with poles and logs placed on cross logs without any particular system, the brush cut off and piled up by the side of the road, and some of the knobs and high places cut down, and that was about all that was done to make it the great thoroughfare that the Indians had been made to believe was to be built for their especial benefit. Within five or six years after this road was declared open, the various small reservations still held by the Pottawattomies were secured from them by treaty, and those who refused to leave the country were driven away, starting from Twin lakes September 4, 1838, in charge of a company of soldiers under command of Gen. John Tipton, one of the commissioners who secured the making of the treaty. Thus was completed one of the darkest pages in the history of Indiana.

LaPorte and Plymouth Mail Route. Next in importance to the Michigan road was what was called the LaPorte road. In the beginning it was little more than an Indian trail and was established more as a post road between Plymouth and LaPorte than for purposes of travel. At first the mail was carried once a week between the two places; later it was increased to three times a week, and finally to a two horse wagon daily, which also carried passengers back and forth. In examining some ancient documents over in La Porte county not long ago a student of local history came across a contract written by J. H. Bradley with a quill pen on an old-fashioned unruled legal folio sheet, which, though the paper is yellowed with age and stained by exposure to the weather, is as clear and legible as on the day it was written. Following is the wording of the contract, as nearly as it can be reproduced in print:

Memorandum of an agreement:

Made this sixth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-seven, between John H. Bradley, Mail Contractor, for carrying the United States Mail from LaPorte, by Plymouth to Chippewa, once a week and back, of the one part, and Erastus Ingersol, of Marshall county, Indiana, of the other part, as follows, to-wit, the said Ingersol, agrees and hereby binds himself to carry or have carried, the said United States Mail on the said Route from LaPorte by Plymouth to Chippewa, according to the terms, times and manner prescribed by the post office department, and in all things to comply, with the directions, and requisitions of the law, and the Post Office Department in carrying guarding and delivery of the same, for and during the full terms and time of said contract, to commence on the ninth day of May, A. D., 1837, and continue until the said contract be ended, for the sum price and consideration of three hundred and fifty dollars per annum and at and for that rate and proportion to be paid by the said John H. Bradley in the manner herein after mentioned and also the said Erastus Ingersol agrees and binds himself to pay and satisfy all fines, forfeitures, penalties and amercements, imposed or exacted by the said post office department, for or on account of any and all failures or delinquencies, about the performance of the said contract, while in his hand, or while he is carrying the same, and to allow the said John H. Bradley to deduct the same from the amount to be paid to the said Ingersol, for his services aforesaid.

In consideration whereof, the said John H. Bradley agrees and binds himself to pay to the said Erastus Ingersol the said sum of money aforesaid, or the rateable proportion thereof, as soon as the money shall be received from the department, and at no other times or manner whatever, deducting there from any and all fines and exactions for delinquencies aforesaid and making from the money due July 1st, 1837, the further deduction of seventy-five dollars, the amount of a note held by the said John H. Bradley on the said Ingersol the price of a mare sold to him.

To the true performance of all which covenants and agreements the said parties bind themselves the one to the other in the sum of three hundred dollars. Witness our hands and seals May 6th, A. D., 1837.

JOHN H. BRADLEY, (Seal) .

ERASTUS INGERSOLL, (Seal) .

Sealed and delivered in the presence of J. C. HOWELL.

This document is a reminder of the days when things at LaPorte were in their beginnings. In May, 1837, the village was hardly more than four years old, Plymouth and Rochester had not yet been laid out a year, the Yellow river road from LaPorte to Plymouth was little better than a blazed trail through the woods and marshes, and the Michigan road, though opened three and a half years earlier, was very, very far from being usable as a race course. Notwithstanding the fact that Daniel Webster broke dirt in LaPorte county July 4, 1837, for a railroad, no such commercial artery was actually in operation in this section until fifteen years passed by. LaPorte had a post office in 1833, Plymouth not until 1837. Mail routes were just being opened up in northwestern Indiana.

John H. Bradley was one of LaPorte's greatest lawyers, his admission to the bar being dated October 12, 1835. He was aggressive in politics on the Whig side and served repeatedly in the state legislature, besides being defeated nearly as often. He was a great orator and a profound student, and in his early life as a pioneer in this region he was glad to reach aside from the practice of his profession and take a contract to haul the mail, not to perform that arduous labor himself but to sublet it at a small profit.

Erastus Ingersoll, the subcontractor and actual post-rider, belongs to the history of Marshall county, in which his appearance is very obscure. On horseback with his sacks of mail, in all sorts of weather, he followed roads that would now be thought impassable, covering the distance in two days, or four days for the round trip. About that same time a regular stage line was operated from LaPorte to Plymouth, connecting there with the Concord coaches plying up and down the Michigan road between South Bend and Indianapolis, at which latter point connection was made with the lines east and west on the National road. J. C. Howell, the witness to the contract, was a LaPorte merchant. The Chippewa named as one of the terminals of the route-called Chippe-wa-qua in some of the old records would be difficult to find now save with help from some curious antiquary, but then it was an important and a hopeful settlement, well known to every traveler on the Michigan road. It was a formidable rival of Rochester for selection as the county seat, and even now one can hardly see why it was not chosen because of the beauty, healthfulness and availability of its site near the intersection of the great northern highway and the Tippecanoe river (then more important than now) unless it was too far from the county's center.

William Polke, Michigan road commissioner, entered the land at that place built his log cabin there in 1832, the first house on the road north of the Wabash, moved his family to it from the southern end of the state and established there his official headquarters. It was a home of great hospitality. The tourist for pleasure, the traveler for business, the Catholic missionary priest, the Protestant preacher, the state or government official, the teamster and road laborer, the vagrant Indian for all these the door of that small cabin in the woods was opened. Gen. John Tipton, Col. Abel C. Pepper and

other important functionaries were often there and under the trees close by several Indian treaties were concluded. There in 1834 was celebrated the marriage of Mary, daughter of William Polke, with John B. Niles, then a young lawyer whose brilliant future was but faintly indicated. William Niles, born of that union September 27, 1835, is now the oldest living white person who was born in La Porte. He and Mrs. Emmet H. Scott are the present owners of the long-forgotten Chippewa, the terminal point of La Porte's earliest southern mail routes and designed to be one of the chief cities along the historic Michigan road. The original cabin is still in existence and is occupied, as is also the frame house on the adjoining farm, which was also built by William Polke and was the first frame house north of the Wabash on the Michigan road. The Yellow River Road. This road was the same as the La Porte and Plymouth mail route above referred to. The board of commissioners of Marshall county early took steps to open the road and put it in condition for the increasing travel over that line to La Porte, and especially to Michigan City, where shipments of grain and other produce was made, and where all kinds of merchandise was received by lake from New York and Chicago, and hauled overland to Plymouth and farther south to Rochester .

At a special session of the board held in the early part of July (no date is given on the record) the following order appears on Order Book A, page 17, in reference to this road :

The board of commissioners for the county of Marshall, July special session, 1836.  
 Ordered, That Stephen Marsters, commissioner of the three per cent (3) fund for said county, is ordered to layout five hundred dollars ( \$500) on the road leading from Plymouth, in the said county of Marshall, to La Porte, commonly called the "Yellow River road," which sum shall be expended on that part of said road which is within the bounds of the said county of Marshall, and the said commissioner aforesaid shall proceed to layoff the said road in lots of quarter sections as near as may be and expend the aforesaid appropriation in the places mostly needing the same. The said commissioner shall cause the said road to be cross [word indistinct] with good lasting timber, to be eighteen feet in length, in those parts of said road wherein he may deem it necessary, and cause the same to be covered with clay, sand or gravel five or six inches in depth; and also cause culverts to be put in said road and said road to be ditched so as to cause the water to drain from the same wherein his judgment may deem it necessary; and said commissioner shall proceed to sell the same to the lowest bidder at public auction in the town of Plymouth, in said county, after having advertised the same ten days previous to the day of sale by posting up written advertisements at several of the most public places in said county. Contractors to give bond with security to be approved by the said commissioner in double the sum of their contracts

for their faithful performance of said work; said road to be completed by the fifteenth (15th) day of November, 1836. Said commissioners to pay one-fourth of the money when contractors have their contracts half completed and no more.

Ordered, That said board adjourn until tomorrow morning, 9 o 'clock A. M. And said board adjourned.

ROBERT BLAIR,  
 ABRAHAM JOHNSON,  
 CHABLES OSTERHAUTE,  
 Commissioners.

Test: JEREMIAH MUNCY, Clerk. At the September term, 1837, Stephen Marsters, the commissioner of the 3 per cent fund, reported that he had expended on the Yellow River road

A total of \$1,107.41, to the contractors – Sidney Williams, Williamson Owens, Thomas Singleton and Gustavus A. Cone. For many years afterward much work was done on the road before it became fairly passable.

#### PLANK ROADS.

During the year of 1851 the question of how to obtain good roads was the all-absorbing topic of conversation and discussion among the people of Marshall County. At that time there were very few regularly established wagon roads in the country. The Michigan Road, extending through the county from south to north, had been opened after a fashion, as had also the road between Plymouth and LaPorte. Roads leading in other directions mostly followed the Indian trails, the brush and logs being cleared out and the trees blazed so that those passing along would not get lost. The ponds and sink holes, which were numerous, were bridged over with logs and poles and covered with a light coating of loose dirt. Roads ran whenever it was most convenient, without regard to section lines, as there was little cleared land then to be interfered with. In the spring and fall of the year, known as the “rainy seasons”, the roads became almost impassable. Ox teams were mostly used then, and it was about all a single yoke of oxen could do to haul even an empty wagon any considerable distance. The Michigan and LaPorte roads were traveled more than any others in the county, but the more they were traveled the worse they got. The sub-soil, sand and mud holes were numerous, and teaming was the most difficult thing the farmers and business men had to do. Naturally enough this deplorable condition of the roads led to an effort to improve them, resulting in the attempt to build plank roads over the main lines of travel.

The Plymouth Pilot, which was the only paper in the country at that time, took up the discussion of the advisability of building plank roads and pursued it with vigor for some time, although it does not appear that it resulted in accomplishing much toward the final completion of the roads then being built in this direction. Among other things the editor said:

“Here we have a county containing a population of 8000. We have but one town in the county, and no other town within twenty miles of us and no good market under forty miles. In order to get to that market we have to pass over some most execrable roads at all seasons of the year, which are easily bettered and which we fail to make any effort in, while our neighbors around us are all awake to their own welfare and offering every assistance to us that we can ask, and that needs only the taking advantage of to bring a market to our own door.”

After enumerating the advantages to be derived from plank roads, the editor went on to say:

“The interests of Michigan City and LaPorte are identical, and we should care nothing for their bickering. South Bend, twenty-four miles north, is on the St. Joseph River, with the Southern railroad through it and the Central ten miles distant, and the warehouse of the Central at Mishawaka, twenty four miles from here, prepared to receive produce at Niles without additional charge. Boats are running on the river carrying produce to St. Joseph to be shipped on the lake. Rochester is twenty miles south; Logansport forty-three miles south on the canal and will probably soon

have a railroad and depot. Now here we have a diagram of our means of outlet, and now comes the value of plank roads. Logansport is building to Rochester and has completed about fifteen miles. South Bend has built about ten miles toward us. La 'Forte has built about twelve miles toward us, and it remains with us whether it comes here or goes through North Liberty to South Bend."

After showing the great advantages to be derived from the building of the proposed roads, the editor concluded as follows :

"Lay down your plank one foot wide, nine feet long, and full two and one-half inches thick, and it will stay there. With railroads all around us and thoroughfares opening in every direction, we are 'stoning the squirrel while the dog is robbing our dinner basket !' Wake up, then, and show us the man that says he won't take a share in it and push it through, and we will show you the man that goes to mill with the wheat in one end of the bag and a stone in the other, 'because his father did.' "

The road from LaPorte, if memory is not at fault, was only completed to the Kankakee river, where it connected with a toll bridge across that stream known as "Lemon's bridge." Until the completion of the LaPorte & Plymouth railroad in 1855, "Lemon's bridge" was a popular stopping place. Horses were watered and fed there, meals served, and a little something for the stomach's sake could be had upon a pinch. Frequently teams loaded with wheat for the "port at Michigan City" camped out there over night during the summer, starting early the next morning and arriving at Michigan City by sundown.

The plank road was completed most of the way to Plymouth during the year 1852. It never paid the expense of construction, and after a few years was abandoned. The boards soon began to warp at the ends and as no repairs were made the road became almost impassable. The planks were finally taken up and piled at the side of the road and finally rotted or were burned up. It was many years before the Michigan road to South Bend was fairly passable, and even to this day it might be a good deal better than it is. Before the war all the plank roads that had been built were abandoned, and that great improvement scheme that promised so much in the beginning came to an inglorious end.