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NOAH J. MAJOR & LOGAN ESAREY

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NUMBER 3

THE PIONEERS OF MORGAN
COUNTY

MEMOIRS OF NOAH J. MAJOR

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

These Memoirs were written during the decade preceding 1908. The writer was a man of wide acquaintance and keen discernment. The breadth of his sympathies and interests is abundantly shown throughout the sketches. He was, above all, a pioneer, but not one of that class that soured on the world when it realized the "good old times" were gone forever. For this reason his comments on pioneer conditions are all the more valuable. Few men have had better opportunities for observation than the writer. In 1823, the year of his birth, the New Purchase, of which Morgan county is a part, was on the very frontier. Whitzel's Trace was cut in 1818, but wild Indians roamed over the whole wilderness of what is now Morgan till after 1820. In 1832, at the age of nine, young Major came with his father to the neighborhood of Martinsville and there on a farm he continued to live till 1911, a period of eighty years. He saw the county grow, helped in its development, walking shoulder to shoulder with the four generations of men and women who transformed it from a wilderness to one of the most beautiful valleys of the State. The writer occasionally refreshed his memory by a reference to the records, but in the main he relied on his memory, which was marvelously clear. His wife did the writing, or, as she modestly puts it, the copying. She occasionally visited the State Library to verify certain facts or dates. It would be interesting to know how much of the fine literary style that runs evenly through the sketches is due to Mrs. Major's copying. The work furnished employment through many a long winter evening, and there is ample honor for two. So far as the editor knows, it is the finest tribute in existence to the Hoosier pioneers. No other county has so good an account of its settlers. When after the centuries every material vestige of their existence shall have disappeared, their descendants will be grateful for this, their most enduring monument.

L. E.

Indiana University, September 30, 1913.

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THE PIONEERS OF MORGAN COUNTY

L.

THE FIRST SETTLERS.

§1. EARLY TIMES AND EARLY SETTLERS.

When the geographical lines were run and the descriptions given, it was found that Morgan county contained about 480 square miles, or 288,000 acres, which, if parceled out equally, would have given 3,600 families an 80-acre farm each.

Statesmen ought to have known that homes rooted in the ground of a republican form of government gave the best assurance of its permanent existence. This they did not know, or knowing did not care, or caring could not help; for, instead of discouraging land speculation, they have greatly promoted it from the start to finish by Congressional enactments.

In 1788, Congress sold in the Northwest Territory six million acres of land to speculators, for a price not exceeding $66 \frac{2}{3}$ cents per acre. In the case of John Clevcs Symmes, the real cost was not more than 10 cents per acre; while at the same time, Congress would not sell to an actual settler less than 640 acres at \$2 per acre. The above transactions consisted of one and one-half million acres to the "Ohio Company," three and one-half million acres to the "Scioto Company," and one million acres to John Clevcs Symmes. This sale was in the State of Ohio and included the ground on which Cincinnati now stands and was then nowhere surpassed in value as wild land.

We have called attention to the above business transaction of Congress to show that from the beginning that

august body has often been "sidetracked" by the leader and seemed to have forgotten the borrower of money. It is interesting to study the arguments of the average Congressman for the wholesale squandering of the public domain and playing it into the jaws of "land sharks." They said: "Small buyers are poor men, and poor men want credit. If we sell to them, in place of revenue, we will, by such a system, gain debtors. Men who can make cash payments must be rich, or, at least, 'well-to-do.' For the 'well-to-do' a section is none too large. For the rich a township (twenty-three thousand and forty acres) is none too much." Poor men, it was argued, "cannot expect to buy of the government; they must have credit and must go to the speculator. Poor men, if allowed, will pick the best tracts here and there and will deprive the speculator from locating his land all together."

We cannot pursue this line of argument without experiencing supreme contempt for the men who made it. It was as yet but five years since the close of the war for independence, in which war, as is always the case, there were fifty poor men to one rich man, and tens of thousands of them to one millionaire. Poor men who marched and countermarched, weary and footsore, half naked and half fed; men whose wives and children were left under the providence of God to eke out a bare, hard living; poor men who stood like a stone wall between the rich in property and British confiscation, and between their necks and a British halter. The poor man was most certainly entitled to an opportunity to secure a little home in the public domain he had helped to win from the British crown.

But Congress was slow to recognize his rights in the matter, and not until William Henry Harrison was sent as a delegate from the Northwest Territory to Congress was he placed on anything like an equal footing with the "land-

grabbers." Mr. Harrison showed the injustice to the real settler by such enactments and secured such amendments to the law as would enable the settler to purchase from the government one-half section. The law was finally so amended as to allow the purchase of forty acres.

The love of speculation seems inherent in the minds of men, and there has been no greater field for its operation than land sales in new districts and in and about towns and cities. As the lands of a new country were first offered to the highest bidder at the land office of a given district, commonly called the land sales, there was often lively bidding. Here again the man of small means was at a disadvantage. After all his trouble and privation in building his cabin, clearing his ground, and moving to his intended new home, he might lose it on the day of sale for lack of a few dollars, for the speculator was there in person or by proxy, and did not scruple to turn down and out any "campdown" who stood in the way of his plans.

Father James Parks, the well-remembered centenarian, so often seen in Martinsville near the close of his life, related an instance that happened in Lawrence county, where a "shark" named Bullait [Bullait] attended the sales and, having plenty of money, over-reached a whole settlement, bought all the land and compelled the settlers to move on, which they did, Mr. Parks being among the number. Coming to Monroe county, they again began the arduous task of building other cabins and clearing other grounds, which they were more fortunate in retaining as permanent homes.

Fortunately, our county was never "exploited" by land speculators. It appears that from 80 to 160 acres was as much as most men were able to buy at the start, though many men added several more acres to their farms before they "went the way of all the earth."

It appears that the Cutler Brothers once owned a large

tract of land at Martinsville and north of it, running as far up the river as Cox's High Rock Mills.

The first suit in the Morgan Circuit Court, 1822, was Cutler vs. Cox, in chancery. This probably grew out of a land transaction. Whether they bought at the land sales or of private parties, or entered at government prices, is not known to the writer. They were men of more than ordinary enterprise. They bought at Martinsville the largest assortment of goods (value \$1,000) that appeared at any one time before the year 1825. They donated forty acres of land for the county seat, and were largely instrumental in establishing it on the present site. They helped in the county organization and were among the first county officers. The first court was held in Jacob Cutler's house in Martinsville on the 25th day of March, 1822.

William Fair, himself a very early settler and who was well acquainted with the Cutlers, told the writer that they were about to get into serious trouble, the nature of which he did not reveal, and they quietly closed up their business affairs, disposed of all their lands and moved away.

The next owners of these lands were Sammy Elliott and his son, Jacob Elliott, Larkin Reynolds, Thomas and James Clark, Thomas Hendricks (father of the late Thompson Hendricks), and the two brothers, Joel and William Wilson. In 1832 these men owned the land between the town border north, and the south line of Sec. 16, T. 12, R. 1 E. The above named Clarks must not be confounded with the name of John Clark, who bought the Tommy Clark farm and moved to it in 1836.