

BRUSNAHAN
MEMOIRS

HISTORY OF UNION TOWNSHIP

The following article was written by my old Schoolmaster, John E. Alter, about the year 1908, and was read many times on various occasions. It was read by Watson Humes at the Indiana Day celebration in 1916.

IN UNION

*The winter is mild,
Yet the snow is piled
And the rabbits are wild,
In Union.*

*The farmers sell old rails,
And ships his hay in bales,
While the hunter shoots the quails,
In Union.*

*Smooth gravel makes no jar,
So the people near and far,
Are hauling grain to Parr,
In Union.*

*They have miles of underdrain,
To counteract the rain,
And raise fields of golden grain,
In Union.*

*Since the great campaign is o'er,
And peace restored once more,
They seem as happy as before,
In Union.*

*They fully understand,
How to farm the low muck land,
And to utilize the sand,
In Union.*

*While the farms are good as new,
There is plenty of work to do,
So they're rushing things right thru,
In Union.*

*As to grain, stock and feed,
I really think indeed,
The farmers take the lead,
In Union.*

A COMPLETE history of Union Township would require more labor, energy, knowledge, memory and skill than is at the immediate command of he who now wields the pen. Difficult from its complicated origin as well as being one of the great battle grounds of Indians and white pioneers.

Union, as a distinct township, is the youngest of the thirteen townships of Jasper County. An unlucky number, but a lucky and prosperous township. Typical in number with the thirteen original Colonies of the United States.

Union stands peer to most of the other townships; superior to some, and inferior to none.

This township was carved from the south part of Keener and northern Marion. The best part of one and the cream of the other. Hence the name, Union. Her trustees were: Jacob Keener, Washington Casey, B. W. Harrington, I. V. Alter, William Cooper, Stephen Mack, B. D. Comer, D. H. Yeoman, Harvey Davisson, Isaac Kight, and G. H. Hamerton; Joseph L. Chamberlain was one of the first justices of the peace, followed by Clark

McColly, James Wiseman, J. E. Alter, Carmi Hayes, Thomas J. Fay, A. M. Munden and others too numerous to mention have dealt out justice fearlessly to friend and foe and taught our people by precept, example and punishment to become good citizens.

Our road supervisors have been a commendable class of officers, as the roads will show. Under an experimental law, Newman Snow, an old soldier and veteran of two wars, was elected road superintendent in 1882, but the law wore out and was pronounced unconstitutional before his term expired. Geo. W. Casey, Austin Lakin, William Cooper, Richard Mallatt, John F. McColly, Sol Norman and F. M. Goff were a few of the many assessors who looked after the taxable property that the township might pay her share of taxes to carry on town, county, state and governmental affairs.

Union contains $56\frac{1}{4}$ sections of land; 36,000 acres, every acre tillable land as soon as the Iroquois ditch construction is completed.

It is a remarkable fact that sections Number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,

17, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36 occur but once in the township.

It is seven miles wide east and west by eight miles long north and south, having over twenty miles of gravel road, and twenty public ber 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, ditches. Many old pioneer land marks existed before it was formed into a new township, such as Dunns Shanty on the present site of Fair Oaks. The Hickman houses, also an old hunter's cabin northeast of Fair Oaks, were fine examples. Also the Smith houses, a typical pioneer double log cabin, which served as hunters' retreat, newcomers' resort, trappers' abode and the squatters' delight. This cabin was on the Mulford land. Beside these, every old settler knows well the location of 'Possum Ridge, Snake Ridge, Copper's Slough, Black Marsh, the Beaver dams, Eagle's Nest Ridge, Sandy Crossing, the old Ford, Buck Ridge, Baty Marsh, Elder Island, Grape Island, Stowers mill, with nigger head burrs on Copper's Creek and Brinesholtz and Alter's mills on the Iroquois.

In 1852 A. J. Kent's plowmen took ploys

from Kentland to Blacksmith Anderson on the Garrett gravel hill near Brushwood and plowed a day with oxen to pay for the mending.

Tradition says that at Stowers old mill a large coon dog, like unto "The Hound of The Baskervilles," was in the habit of standing near those old corn burrs and howling up the spout until a grain of corn was cracked and came rattling down, when he would catch the morsel in his mouth and eat it with great relish, then howl up the spout for more.

Another legend from the same source states in positive terms that the Brinesholtz dog would stand by the tail race of the old mill and when a pike would swim along, dive into the water, catch it in his mouth and bring it safely to shore. For hours would he follow this pursuit with great patience and vigilance, often making a catch of thirty large fish in one day.

In those early days the roads wound about the marshes and ponds in graceful but lengthy curves; mud holes in the road for the oxen to wallow through were plentiful. Cornbread,

sweet pumpkin, venison and wild pig comprised the staff of life and water and milk were the "soft" drinks.

How memory reverts back to those pioneer days when the rifle and the flail hung side by side, and the deer had to be scared out of the cornfield every night.

Union was the Hoosier hunting ground of the Iroquois valley. Among the hunters were Theodore Hurley, John Guss, Bill Raker, Dave Yeoman and James Burns; among the trappers were the Comers, Hurleys, Cavenders, Obenchains; Bill Remer and Isaac Alter hunted bees. Many others were experts in catching, baiting, starting, coursing, cross-coursing and hunting bees in the trees of the woods, after which the trees were cut down, queens found, swarm hived, and honey taken from the limb. All returned home after nightfall sore with mosquito bites and bee stings and tired with the day's tramp.

Trapping mink and muskrats in spring and autumn and spearing them in the houses in the wintertime was interesting sport as well as a paying business. Deer were plentiful

and many were killed for food. Hogs ran wild in the woods and became fat on acorns, hazel nuts and marsh dogfish. In late autumn each man went to the woods and with well-trained dogs or a good rifle got his number and sometimes more.

The children gathered hazel nuts after the first frost for winter. The good housewife cut the great yellow pumpkins into circular slices and hung them on sticks around the stove pipe to dry for pies. Two-thirds of the surface of the 36,000 acres in Union township was covered with water and two-thirds of the surface of all this large body of water was covered with ducks and geese. Beautiful large mallards swam the ponds, and nested on every little island in the marsh and along the border; wood ducks nested in hollow trees and carried the young to the pond by the back of the neck.

About the shore line waded thunder pumpers, herons, snipes, rails, and sand-hill cranes. But let us drop the veil of time over the scenes of the past and a new world presents itself to view. As if by magic, the

whole system of marshes extending from the Iroquois to Indian lake and from Possum lake to Nubbin Ridge, is now one vast field of waving grain in the growing season.

Those hardy old veterans, who fought with the elements and toiled with the jack oak grubs and bull-grass sod, can now sit down in an arm chair amid peace and plenty and cast a retrospective glance back over the toils, turmoils and hardships of the past. Yet as the memory of those early associations moistens his eye with a tear, he runs his trembling fingers through his silvery hair and declares, 'tis well; those days of privation and toil were my happy days, my neighbors and friends were more sociable, helpful and loving than those who surround me today.

—*John E. Alter.*

BRUSNAHAN MEMORIES

Memory of the past rising either out of solitude in a calm sea of thought, or coming as a result of contact with similar instances, surely lends something to the present, coming as it does from the inner soul of man, blending and weaving its renewed qualities into the present thought and existence.

—John S. Blue.

THINKING OF the new and undeveloped condition of the land, where my father brought his family to a log cabin home, brings forth memories unashamed of pioneer days with their hardships. But with these hardships were joys no one could fully realize unless they grew up in that kind of life.

On arriving at a little knoll on the edge of the fifty-acre marsh there was spread out the logs ready for the raising of a log palace which was to be my home for the

next thirty years. Needless to say the surrounding country was wild, lonesome and desolate, with no neighbor to the west nearer than Ransom Elijah, lying four miles distant, and Jack Reed and Robert Swaim were three miles northwest and the Alters settlement two and one-half miles east, and Frank Lakin's homestead to the north. There were no immediate neighbors except James Burnes and George Warren who had built here in 1872.

In the fall of this year, 1875, Eli Blue built a log cabin on a forty-acre tract of land lying a quarter of a mile to the east on what is known as the John Carlin farm.

This family consisted of five boys and two girls. The boys' names were: Clark, Dee, Sig, James, and David. The girls' names were: Barbara and Emma. We were great neighbors and enjoyed many fine times together. I recall how my father went over to Blue's pole log house in the evening for a visit. He stayed rather late and when he started home through the woods, it was so dark that he returned for a light. Procuring

a light pine stick he again started out but was soon wandering in a circle. From our hewn log house we watched with amusement the circling flame. We shouted loudly until finally his attention was attracted and he was then able to find his way home.

In the fall of 1877 the Blue family started in their loaded wagon for Kansas, and as they were the only neighbors we had at the time there was a great many tears shed at their departure. In that day neighbors were few and friendships were strong.

Three years later we had a new pioneer in William and Jenny Blankenbaker, who built their house on their farm one-half mile west from our log cabin home. This was in the year 1880. The main event following the building of our log home was a log rolling and plowing bee which was participated in by our former neighbors on the prairie four miles south. Those volunteering to help clear the first piece of land for cultivation were: William Kenton, George Hoyes, G. H. Thornton, John Clements, Jake Barley, Thomas Murphy, and Richard Grow.

After the combined efforts of these men we had eight acres plowed and ready for crop. Corn was spaded in and it was to be our first harvest.

The first beasts of burden that my father owned was a yoke of oxen which he purchased of William Parkinson, Sr., one of the first pioneers of Barkley township. My father dug an open ditch through the Parkinson land in payment for the oxen. This was the first yoke of oxen used to farm with in Barkley township.

The old frame schoolhouse where I first attended school was Union schoolhouse in Marion township. The next one was Bowling Green in Marion, in 1870. In 1874 I went to Rosebud school which is still standing. It was used for educational purposes until 1931, when it was made into a residence by the present owner, Amos H. Alter, who, by the way, was one of the pioneer children and owner of part of the land originally occupied by Alter's Mill.

The winter school term at that time was four months in length with one month summer term by subscription.

Speaking of log schoolhouses, recalls to mind the first school that I ever visited. It was the Sandridge school, and was being taught by the late Henry Smith, an old pump maker from Rensselaer. I can remember Uncle Henry Hinkle as saying, ". . . You may be a good carpenter, blacksmith, or brick mason, but you can't make pumps like Henry Smith." This was the same Henry Smith who was frequently seen leading the Democratic parade, playing the fife. Occasionally, when offered some stimulant, he would play the fife and lead the Republican parade also.

This same school was later taught, for a number of years, by Mrs. John Switzer, a sister of the late Ezra Clark, who you all know and remember so well for the reason of pleasantly meeting him at the Rensselaer Courthouse in some official capacity for a period of forty years.

This log schoolhouse was built by Blackford Hurley, Norman Snow, and Shelby Daniels. The school was one-half mile north of Blackford's store, which was an old landmark and trading point for more than seventy years.

Nothing remains of the old building. The Blackford school is all that remains of the old heart of Nubbin Ridge, where Blackford and Theodore Hurley conducted a store for many years. It was here that rabbits and muskrat hides were legal tender.

Blackford was the home of the Hurleys, Snows, Caseys, DeWitts, Lakins, Handys, Sheas, Rileys, Stowers, Gilmores, Prices, McGinnises, Braddocks, McCollys, Wolfs, Brusnahans, Brugets, Comers, and Braskets. Now only a few of these old-time families remain.

The winters were very cold and we had not begun to wear scanty clothing, but clung to the felt boots, flannel underwear, blue-jean trousers, and a fur cap, nor had we begun to diet. Our meals consisted of sorghum molasses, corn bread, and white bread if we had company.

These were the days when a load of wood or rails was legal tender; and many was the old-timer that cut his load and hauled it to Rensselaer, where he received one dollar, a sack of flour or some other form of merchandise. The rails brought one dollar per hundred between the years of 1865 and 1880.

From what is now Surrey, to a point north now known as Fair Oaks, was in that day an alternating land of timber and swamp, with no fences or roads. Here and there, perhaps, some pioneer had made a rough house, fenced in a small tract of ground and breaking the tough sod had spaded in a meager field of corn. No attempt was made to grow wheat or oats. In 1878 my father passed a petition over the entire township asking the voters (at that time about 60) to allow the hogs to run at large. This was presented to the board of commissioners with the majority of voters in favor of it, and the wish of the petitioners was granted. Isaac V. Alter was at that time trustee of Union township.

This was the day when the entire river from Alter's Mill dam to the source of the Iroquois had no bridge crossing. There were certain familiar crossings along the course, however, where the river could be forded, except during high water. The first crossing west of Alter's Mill was Sandy Crossing. Two miles farther was another and with it is attached a story as to how it got its name.

On the north bank of the Iroquois river stood an enormous tree that towered far above the tops of the nearby trees. It was huge, straight, and its limbs did not reach out until many feet above the ground. The top of the tree verged outward into three forks. It was exactly suitable for the nest of an eagle, and here one came to build its nest, year after year. Many men sighted this huge tree but none dared cut it down. This giant eagle was a rare bird. The tree was the sentinel of the ridge, and the eagle was a perfect symbol of the wildness of the surrounding country! Pioneers called the crossing "Eagle's Nest."

One mile west of Eagle's Nest Crossing, was Brush Crossing, this land being of a soft nature and covered with thick, small brush. Just north of this crossing on what is known as one of the Thompson farms stood a large corral. A man by the name of John Bulick had built this corral and also the crossing, for he was pasturing five hundred cattle on land rented of Simon Thompson for one dollar and a half per head for a season of five months.

One of the most important and likewise historic places of the early days was Alter's Mill on the Iroquois River. Originally the mill was owned by Briniskolse, then Bull, and later a man by the name of Chestnut. The mill was purchased in the year 1863 by Isaac V. Alter, who installed steam power. Prior to this time the only power used was that of water. When steam power was supplied by I. V. Alter a flouring mill was run day and night, this being the only mill then operating, as the mill, down the river, at Rensselaer, was out.

Parts of the Alter's mill dam can still be seen just north of Rosebud school house, across the river, just to the west of the Walter Harrington house, and extending across the valley to the hill where David Alter's house now stands. This dam was about 15 feet high and 1500 feet long and backed the water for miles north and west up the valley of the present Iroquois river. Many thousands of acres now under cultivation, including a large part of the Thompson land were then under water.

The natural valley flooded by this water

contained a great deal of desirable land for cultivation. The result of a growing desire for this land among the neighboring farmers was that one night the dam was blown out with dynamite while the crowd of men gave vent to their feelings.

Isaac V. Alter in 1872 had the first store and blacksmith shop at Alter's Mill. Following that John Humes, August Preen, Taylor Brown, and Tom Fay ran shops at one time or another.

Lacy Chamberlain, who was a wood worker and handy man, did a very large business in those days. Chamberlain and August Preen manufactured wagons complete and they bore the proud label "J. C. Chamberlain, Alterville, Indiana."

There were only three families living in this part of Union township in the year 1874. They were the Brusnahan, the Burns and the Widow Warne families.

The town of Surrey was originally started by G. M. Wilcox in 1882, and about 1898 he also started a general store at Parr. The building for the Parr store was built for Henry

Barron of Chicago by James McColly. Mr. Wilcox operated this store, being aided by his three sons, Trevor, Jay and Louie, (Trevor Wilcox is at present in the monument business in Springfield, Ohio, and Jay is located in Hammond, Ind.)

The Surrey store was sold in 1909 to G. L. Thornton, who operated it until 1915. M. O. Gant bought the Parr store in the same year and continued to conduct this business until 1915 when he moved to Attica, Ind., and is now pursuing the same business there.

The town plot of Parr was recorded in April, 1895, and Abe Warne built the first building in the town, on lot 5 in block one, and conducted a general store. W. L. Wood's general store, which will be remembered by the younger generation, was located in the same spot. A number of buildings in this location were burned down and in 1908 a two-story concrete block building was erected by Mr. Wood. The structure still stands as a landmark to what used to be a prosperous little town.

A race track was formerly located about a

quarter of a mile north of this store which was the scene of many entertaining races. The track record was held by "King Cotton," one of the many horses belonging to "Jap" and Randolph Wright of Mt. Ayr.

Many of the best blacksmiths of that time located their shops in Parr. Shoeing of race-horses was quite an art and many of them made wide reputations doing this. Among the best were Edward Moon, George Smith, and Leo Francher.

Spelling Bees were quite an attraction and many of the neighbors were among the enthusiasts of this entertainment. Those who took part would always include: "Winnie" Greenfield, "Sime" Rowen, William Warne, G. L. Thornton, "Ferd" and Frank Warne, "Sip" Guss, Jay Hopkins, "Sam" Crickpond, Millard English, "Skinny" Humes, "Neddy" Barkley, Amos, Dave, and George Alter, Barney and "Steve" Comer, "Dave" and "Morg" Shields, Jack Hoyes, Merrill Tyler, George and "Jim" Antrim, Walter Harrington, "Ben" and Charley McColly, John, Joe, and Will Paxton, John, Milt and Sant Makeever.

After the Monon railroad was built north of Rensselaer to Chicago the farmers near the present site of Parr decided to build a shipping platform. In 1893 the Alter boys, the Brusnahan boys and John Carlin built a platform at the first crossing south of Parr. This was called Carlin's crossing and they loaded their milk there to be shipped into Chicago.

Before the town of Parr was platted the Monon railroad had a switch about a mile north of the present site, and only agreed to move the switch to the present site of Parr under the condition that the landowners build the grade for the sidetrack gratis. This was done by the Alters, Brusnahans and Stephensons, and at its completion the Alters boys furnished the music for an entertainment.

The first Fourth of July celebration in the town of Parr was held about 1900 in a grove near the W. L. Wood store. Judge Simon Parr Thompson was speaker of the day and took as his subject a quotation from the Bible, "Dig this Valley Full of Ditches."

The subject of this speaker, whom the town was named after, was carried out in all its

reality in actual life as he drained his thirty-two hundred acre farm with tile and open ditches before dividing it into smaller farms.

When we celebrated Indiana Day in 1916, I was on the Entertainment Committee, and my old schoolmaster, John E. Alter, who died November 12, 1934, author of "The Hoosier Hunting Grounds," called upon me to bound Nubbin Ridge. Far famed as the place might have been, few knew the boundary lines, which were: On the west, Ben Martin's hill, on the north, Copper's Creek and Davy Daniels farm, on the east by Tailholt Bridge over the Pink-a-mink and Haddocks Mill Pond, once known as Davissonville, all land lying north of Charles Pullin's farm and Sol McCurtain's farm, on the south. The name Nubbin Ridge originated from the small nubbin-like corn growing on the Ben Martin ridge. This land was owned at that time by John Stowers who received patent from the government in 1860.

One's life is comparatively short with the years fast flying, but not so short that we feel the change and the distinct phases of it.

It is a strange fact at this date that none, save only two, of the old settlers who occupied and owned farm homes in the neighborhood from Parr to Rensselaer, in the year of 1874, are now living thereon. The two remaining are Sherman Thornton, and John Murphy; yet scattered and gone are the following once familiar names: Burk, Hoyes, Nowels, Kenton, Grow, Hopkins, Warren, Greenfield, Barley, Makeever, Paxton, Porter, Churchill, Rowen, and Baker. All of these old and honored citizens owned good, well improved farms when I left the prairie and moved to the frontier near Parr. Also the old rural schools where I once attended; namely, Union, Bowling Green, Sorghum Valley, Rosebud, Slip Up, are all abandoned and almost forgotten.

I can truthfully say that it has been a satisfaction to have lived in a portion of this country—wild, sparsely settled, being distantly separated from a near section by the lack of facilities in transportation and communication. And then to view again that same country cleared, drained, interspersed with roads, and