CHAPTER III

PIONEER DEVELOPMENT

There are a great many people yet living who have seen all these improvements rise above the horizon of a once forlorn hope as a result of privations experienced by the pioneer citizen in the days of almost nothing so far as relates to home comfort and home life and true citizenship.

Living in the county today are some who saw the first farms opened up and the first roads built, that have since been improved from dirt road to fine gravel and macadam highways.

The first white woman to settle in Knox was Mrs. Rachel A. Lambert, who located in Knox the same year that the county was organized (1850). She died in the year of 1901, having resided in the same house all these years. She was among the first settlers to locate here and lived to see the town grow from its infancy to a town of 1600 at the time of her death.

While it is claimed that Mrs. Rachel A. Lambert was the first white woman that located in Knox, we have citizens living in Knox and some in the country that located here some six or eight years before Starke County was organized. However, I am not qualified to assert the correctness of this statement, yet some of us are personally acquainted with some yet living who claim the honor of living here since that time.

We see that there were very few people in the vicinity of Knox or where Knox is located at the time of the organization of the county, which I have said was in the year 1850.

This county was a part of Marshall County until it was established in that year. The territory embraced in the county when first organized contained twelve congressional townships, the civil and congressional township lines corresponding with each other.

But we should not overlook the fact that when Starke County was organized it measured 18 miles north and south by 24 miles east and west, but on account of the low Kankakee Valley it was thought at that time to be the best thing to annex all that part of the county west or northwest of the Kankakee River to La Porte County making the thread of the stream the county line between the two counties, hence making Starke County nine townships instead of twelve as originally established.

By this change all the civil townships in the county do not agree or follow the lines of the congressional townships. This is true of Davis, Jackson and Rail Road townships, caused by making the Kankakee River

the line of the two counties. Reference to the county map will explain that question to all who care to look it up.

North Bend Township, Washington Township, Oregon Township, California Township, Center Township and Wayne Township each maintain the original lines, making the congressional and civil townships one and the same.

Now with all the improvement in our roads and with our big steel bridges spanning the Kankakee River and all the drainage that has been done it would be an easy thing for those three lost townships to come to the county capital—which at that time looked like an impossibility.

But this is just another instance where development and advancement have shown that there is no undertaking too great to be accomplished by man. Thus the county was reduced from 420 square miles to about three hundred and twenty-one square miles of territory as it now stands.

During the last twenty years a class of Germans and Bohemians as well as Swedes have settled in the county buying up hundreds of acres of wet and overflowed lands, utilizing the fertilizer on the farm and by using other means of fertilizer they have succeeded in raising fine crops upon those lands which have been drained.

Marl is not found in any paying quantities in the county. There is some, however, found in Rail Road Township, but has never been developed. This occupied what was at one time supposed to be a shallow lake of several miles in extent but has long since faded away and left the land, where are farms of great magnitude, producing corn, hay and wheat in great abundance.

Some of our marshes were covered over from two to five feet deep, even more in places, with a black rich muck soil which is a great producer of onions and corn.

There is one thing that is quite conspicuously absent and that is the "nigger head" or boulder rock. True it is, we have in some places in the county farms which have all the rock needed for foundations for their houses and barns, but they are not very extensively found in the county.

We have, however, some fine gravel beds in the county, a gravel which is used very extensively for making roads. It was not until after gravel road building began in earnest that we knew we had the material for those roads, but by an examination and a close hunt it was found that we had some of the best gravel beds for road building or as good as any found in adjoining counties.

The Podock Gravel Pit in Rail Road Township, the Short Gravel Pit in California Township, the Groves Gravel Pit in North Bend Township, with a few more in different parts of the county, have added materially to the advantage of building our gravel roads in the county.

In building some of our roads the gravel is shipped in from Burr Oak or Walkerton, but this is not done unless the road is too far from our pits, which would make the hauling too expensive to be profitable for the contractor.

Early Schools

In 1852 there was but one schoolhouse in the county, known as the Parker School in North Bend Township, located among the oaks so common in that part of the county. With no roads except a winding track through the woods and across the almost impassable swamps and sloughs, it was no easy thing to get to school under those circumstances.

In our first schools of the county we had a term of three months' school and the teacher would board among the scholars, staying at one place for a week and then going to another place for a week and so on during the whole term of school.

The farmers in the "deestrict" would unite in furnishing the wood for the term, hence that expense was not charged to the township.

The teacher's pay was of course very small, ranging from eighty-seven and one-half cents to one dollar and fifty cents per day, according as the patrons would agree on the worth of his or her services.

It was no uncommon thing in an early day of the county for the pupils to go four and five miles to school, as the schoolhouses were so far apart, and there not being enough pupils to afford a school close at home, as we have them today.

The schoolhouses were in most cases built of round logs cut from the forest and covered with clap boards laid on poles and weighted down to prevent them from blowing off. Instead of such conditions prevailing today, we have free school wagons traveling the county over, picking up the school children at the cross roads or at their homes, and hauling them to school and then in the evening hauling them home again. Much credit should be given to the legislatures of our state in making it possible for those privileges to exist.

Under our road laws of the state we have been able to build and keep in repair our roads, thus giving to the public a means of easy travel, which is a great improvement since the organization of Starke County. The legislatures of other states have done the same thing, permitting the improvements we enjoy in road building.

The Great Sand Lime Brick Company that established a plant for making sand lime brick near North Judson have virtually abandoned the manufacture of that article, although they did an extensive business for several years after commencing operation. At a number of other places in the county they made the old clay brick but on account of the many railroads traversing the county in all directions the manufacture of brick has been abandoned in most of the brick-yards in the county. The manufacture of cement blocks is a common thing in several places in Starke County, every little town having a small plant of this kind. The demand is quite extensive, as they are used for many purposes, for building and other uses. Cement is used in abutments for iron and steel bridges of which hundreds have been built in the last twenty years.

Mechanical Improvements

The manner of travel is so much improved over the day when the people began to settle up this county that all who witness the change almost wonder if it can be. Traveling through the county on our fast-running vestibule trains, speeding through the county in our swift-running automobiles, riding through the clouds in our air ships—all go to show that if we are getting weaker we must at least be getting wiser. All manner of improvements in machinery make it possible for man to perform as much labor as a half dozen could do in the same time in the old-fashioned way of doing things.

Some people living today can recollect when a cooking stove was unknown, lamps were a new thing, electric lights were not dreamed of, sewerage not in use, telephones not invented.

The traveling was done by ox teams, cooking was done over a fire place, harvesting was done with a sickle, our meadows were mowed with scythes, our land was broken up with oxen or dug up by hand instead of being plowed.

Now we have ranges and gas stoves to cook on, we have the railroad train and the automobile to travel with and our air ships to soar through the air, our harvesting is done by mighty machines built for that purpose, our meadows are mowed with mowing machines, our great wide prairies are plowed with steam. So as the world gets older the more improvements are coming year after year.

The farmer can now cut up his corn and tie it in bundles with machines made for that purpose. Even the manner of making butter is a great invention when instead of making it by the old stick and dash churn, we now have creameries established all over the country, where the farmers take their milk and sell it or exchange it for the butter manufactured at those creameries, a thing that the people knew nothing of years ago. Some use extractors and separators to take the cream out of the milk and sell the cream for butter or table use in the homes.

Inventive genius is reaching out in all directions, putting old things away back in the past and bringing into use many improvements and new inventions to facilitate the work of man, making it easier and swifter than "when those now old and gray were mere boys here at play."

The carpenter has it very different nowadays when, instead of dressing lumber by hand, it is all done now by mighty machinery. The carpenter of years ago even made panel doors by hand. Such ways have gone with the things long since abandoned and the inventions of today are here to stay and more to follow on as the wheels of this mighty universe roll on.

To make a trip to Chicago years ago would stun the heart of the stoutest man, with no roads and only an ox team and cart as the only means of travel. But with our fast steam railroads it is an easy matter to make two or three round trips in a day, and it is counted a small matter to run to Chicago in the forenoon and return in the afternoon of the same day with our wonderful automobiles. An air ship will make

the trip to Knox and return to Chicago in a few hours. It sets the people to thinking, wondering what will be the condition of things in another fifty years to come.

When some of us were mere boys the wells consisted of open, dug wells, but now we have driven wells and we also have water brought into our homes by the great water system, conveying the water through pipes and supplying washstands and sinks without even having to carry the water by hand as we used to do. The farmer can do his own ditching by machinery, which is now being done in this county as well as in other counties, a thing very much to the advantage of the farmer who had to perform all this labor by the old and slow process of digging by hand. It is wonderful to look back into the dim ages of the past and compare the way of the world as it was then with the manner of performing things today.

Pioneer Institutions and Customs

The old schoolhouse built of round logs with clapboard roof has gone and neat new brick schoolhouses take the place of the old schoolhouse with its slab seats, and desks made by boring holes in the walls and pins driven to place a plank or a slab made from a puncheon split out of a log and hewn with an ax, which would be placed in such a way as to form a writing desk. Some of the first schoolhouses had fire places made of sticks and mud laid up in such a way as to make a chimney. The children would sit upon those puncheon seats, sometimes with their backs toward the fire, just as it suited them. There were just four subjects taught in the schools in those days—"readin'," " 'ritin'," " 'rithmetic," and "spellin'." One of the very essential things taught in the schools was spelling. The pupil had to learn to spell well before he was allowed to begin to read. This was a rule well kept by the parents as well as the teacher. Some schools used the Testament, and in fact it was about the only "readin' " book they used in the schools at that time. It would be a comical thing to see the big boys roll in a big back log and place it in the fire place, when they would then resume their places and studies once more.

No one not living in those days can form a close opinion of the way things were done. Some of the older people had a slight introduction to those things but the most of it would date farther back than we perhaps could recollect. The improvements made over those conditions are remarkable. Our school advantages have improved just as our farm machinery has taken the place of the old "mattock" used in ancient times. Those people in the pioneer days of their existence lived and many died never to know the advantages ahead of them. It only remains for their children and their children's children to enjoy the things brought about by the ever onward progress of civilization.

If those people could rise from their graves and appear upon this mundane sphere, what would be the thought, what would be the conclusion, what would be the first question asked? "From whence came those things?"

I suppose that new inventions, new and universal progress will walk hand in hand and continue to be so until time shall be no more.

The hardships and privations experienced by the pioneers did, however, meet with some enjoyment after all. They were the first to enjoy nature's boundless grandeur. Spread out before them was the forest with all the beauteous fields of flower gardens wafting their sweet scented perfume over the hills for miles around. They too saw the lakes and rivers lined with herds of wild buffalo, the wolf, the fox and millions of the feathered tribes singing from the tree tops high above their heads—beholding the beauties of nature's richest scenes, undisturbed among the rustic shores of a new country.

You and only you who have had the experience of diving into the unbroken forest of an unknown country can tell the tale of the hardships and privations that those people experienced in establishing a home among themselves, inhaling the sweet odors of the wild blossoms from those wild prairies which seemed to give them an assurance of better days to come.

Much praise should be given those pioneers who braved the storm of the savages' contempt, those men with courageous hearts and willing hands who have hewn a road to success, that have made it possible for us to behold the things surrounding us today. The schools, the church, the farms, the magnificent structures, the wonderful towns and villages that have sprung up on the once sad and sorrowful lands—all were made possible by the brave and undaunted white man who banished the Indian from the shores of the Yellow River and the Kankakee Valley prairies.

The brave Hoosier with his hand
Has opened up the way so grand,
And made it clear for you and I
To live beneath the fair blue sky.

Where we can dwell in peace alone,
A place we can call our home,
Amid great nature's lovely flowers,
Upon those plains, we can call ours.

No Indian savage to cross our path,
No wild beast to raise our wrath,
But nestled down so calm and fine
A place we can call "all mine."

To a place on the old Kankakee,
A place that's good enough for me,
Where I can dwell forevermore,
Until I'm called to the other shore.

You braved the storm and undertook
To make a home for us—but look,
The debt we cannot pay, you see,
But "never mind we giveth thee."

Complete a home for you yourself,
We want no honor nor of wealth,
It was our duty, brave and true,
To hew the road to success for you.

You who have felled the mighty forest, you who have opened up great corn fields, you who have attended the "house raisin's," you who have broken the sod of our endless prairies, you who have drunk from the bitter cup of a new camp life, you perhaps are in a better position to sympathize with those people who settled in the "wilderness" long before the robins chirped from your door, long before you saw the blue smoke curl from the mighty smoke stack of those wonderful machine shops, long before the advent of things modern. You perhaps can give a better description of the early life in this country, you who beheld the beauties of a home hewn out of those difficulties and conditions can give to us a history far beyond the average thought of him who located here in the pioneer days of the first settlement of Starke County.

Looking back to the time when privation and hardships were converted into a life of civilization, those were the days that tried the heart strings of the bravest man, yet through it all they cleared the forest and built, and plowed, and cultivated the soil and rose above discouragements, and many lived to enjoy some of the things they so patiently longed to see. Lived to see the first little log schoolhouse built in the neighborhood, giving some idea of things to come, giving a taste of mighty and wonderful improvements that would supplant the vague and almost unknown things of the years gone by.

Many very peculiar things, or things that would look peculiar to the most of us today, happened in the early settlement of Starke County. Meeting would be held in some farm house or cabin containing only one room. On one occasion, where the preacher was reminded by the lady of the house that it was about time for her to begin her dinner, he very politely and kindly called upon the congregation to sing "Alas and did my Savior bleed," etc. Then he dismissed the congregation by announcing that there would be "meetin' " as soon as Sister Samantha would have dinner over, which he thought would be about 2.30 P. M.

Another instance concerns a man in the neighborhood about three miles east of Knox. Having about the only horse team in the country, he hitched up and drove several miles to bring a number of ditchers home. He had to pass a little log schoolhouse on his return trip, and on reaching there found a meeting going on. He stopped his team and all the ditchers went in dressed in their ditching clothes with their big heavy rubber boots and mud and dirt all over their faces. The driver (and by the way I will just say right here that it was Mr. Horace Stow, who

was well known by some living in the county today) acted as usher and seated the whole gang on a bench or a slab-bench up near the preacher. No one thought it wrong, and all were welcome to the meeting as much so as if they had been dressed up.

It used to be a common thing to see a preacher standing in the pulpit (a stool was usually used for a pulpit) when preaching in the little log schoolhouse or in some farmer's home cabin, usually in his shirt sleeves, dressed only in his shirt and trousers, and barefooted. No one thought any less of him for it.

Foxes, wolves, the wild deer and innumerable flocks of prairie chickens, ducks, quail and pheasants were in great numbers in the pioneer days of the county. The wolves and foxes were a great menace to the farmers, as those animals would catch, destroy and eat up the fowls on the farm unless the farmer would provide good close houses for the protection of them, sometimes incidentally housing them in one end of his dwelling or letting them roost in the garret.

One great feature of the early life was the old fashioned dance held at some farm cottage where the "fiddler" would sit in one end of the room and play "Old Dan Tucker," "Zippy Coon" or the "Devil's Wash Woman," and it certainly was very interesting to those in attendance. Some came for miles with their partners, on foot or sometimes with an ox cart, but at any rate all enjoyed themselves and would "dance all night till broad daylight and go home with the 'gals' in the morning."

James Whitcomb Riley wrote something like this as near as I can recollect it:

"My playin's kinder middlin'—
Tunes picked up when a boy,
The kindo-sorto-fiddlin'
That the folks calls cordoroy;
The old Fat Gal, Zippy Coon
And My Sailor's on the Sea
Is the old cowtillions I saw
When the ch'ice is left to me."

Without the old fashioned dance it would have been a lonesome time for those pioneers, but with the country "fandango" all enjoyed themselves even though they had to dance upon a puncheon floor, as most of the cabins had floors made of timber split and hewed from the trees, there being no sawmills in those days to saw the timber into lumber. But with all those disadvantages surrounding them they enjoyed themselves far beyond what we could today if we were reduced to such conditions as they were in so long ago.

The sparsely settled country seemed to have a tendency to welcome visitors and form acquaintance with each other, which is almost universally the case in all new countries. All lived upon an even plane, no "big I's" or "little U's" among them, sharing each other's hospitality in all things and on all occasions. Those were times that all were

generous and without pay or remuneration, willing to help each other. It was a great custom for the settler to go to church on horseback, taking his wife, the hired girl or his sweetheart upon the same horse, where she would ride behind him, a thing almost unknown among us today.

This was not in the earliest settlement of the county, for in the old pioneer days of the county, oxen and only oxen were used for hauling, plowing, teaming of all kinds, including going to "meetin'." Going bare-footed and only wearing such clothes as they could procure marked the way they dressed in those days. Many commenced housekeeping without funds, depending upon their strength for working out the problem of a life that seemed like an almost impossibility. Those who saw the old log house raisings, those who leveled the forest, those who dug from the soil, those who braved the storm of endless hardships, those and those alone are only qualified to read to you from their haggard and life-ridden countenances the joys and hardships that they endured. But things have changed. Instead of seeing the smoke curling from the wigwam or log hut of the Indian or of the old pioneers you can now view with pride the spires that mark the way to homes magnificent in their appearance and wonderful in their construction. None but the brave and strong were able to undergo the task of penetrating the wild forests, as they were infested with wild animals of all kinds and the Indian was a prominent figure wherever they went, many never reaching their destination. Many sad and sorrowful meetings were held by those people when taking their departure for a country of which they knew so little about. The ways of the world are made up of those conditions. Pains, heartaches, sorrow, grief, pleasure, comfort and joy make up our lives and at the end we shall have given all up to "Him who hath done all things well."

Trading posts were established at different places over the country, where the fur and other peltries were bought and a general dickering trade was carried on, there being no money; the transaction was bartering or trading one article for another just as you seemed to desire. This trading was carried on quite extensively at their "meetin's" and on court days, exchanging articles with one another. As said before, there seemed to exist a feeling for those in need and a spirit of charity rose high, and in sickness the women were ready and willing to give all the help that they could to assist those unfortunate and restore them to health once more. A great degree of Christian charity marked the lives of those pioneer citizens, doing good to all who were needy and in distress.

Sometimes we wonder and sometimes we stop to think of the conditions of men, some struggling for a living, some living in luxury with all the comforts that can be bestowed upon man, yet we must reconcile ourselves and submit calmly and peaceably to the end. The laborious tasks performed by the father, the husband or son, the heartaches and the tears of the mother or the widow, the anxiety of the daughter cannot compensate for the privation, the misery, the suffering and hardship that those people witnessed in their new homes, but the changes

that time has brought must partially at least offset the past and furnish a balm that shall heal our wounds for all times.

In speaking of the old-fashioned dances in an early day, there soon followed the spelling "bee" held at some "deestrict" schoolhouse where the scholars would all stand up in a circle and next to the wall of the school room and "spell down," as they would call it. Great excitement would prevail and many watch with interest to see who would stand up the longest.

The music teacher too would hold his singing school, using the old kind of note-book not in use now, the little schoolhouse being full and running over on many occasions. Many parties were held at the farmers' homes, log rollings, wood choppings, corn "shuckin's," house raisings, and many more "bees" for the men folk, and perhaps on the same day the women would have a quilting bee, apple cutting or something of the kind, and after the day was over they would clear the room of every piece of furniture that could be moved and all engage in dancing, tripping the light, fantastic toe until the sun would begin to show her light in the eastern horizon.

Sometimes instead of dancing, especially among the more solemn-like, they would engage in some play as "Oh, Sister Phebe, how merry were we the night we sat under the Juniper tree," "Old Dusty Miller," and other plays, singing airs to suit each play.