

INDIANA IN THE WAR OF 1812

By Joseph R. Bay

Eighty five years ago the territory of Indiana was established, and William Henry Harrison was appointed its Governor, he then being but a young man, less than 30 years of age.

During the first five years of his management of the affairs of the territory, or until the calling of the first legislature in 1805, he was popular with all classes, but especially so with Indiana.

Many were the council fires that he attended, and many were the expressions of reverence heartily given by the dusky sons of the forest to their white father holding the reins of government at Vincennes.

As far back as 1805, we find Gov. Harrison engaging in a war with a class of men that have from that day to this been a source of trouble and a disgrace to this nation - Viz: the Indian trader, speculator and land sharks. There seems to be nothing truer than that history repeats itself.

Only a few weeks ago I read a long article written for the Christian Nation, showing up in their true colors, the evils resulting from the work of these Indian Agents that have carried the fire water to their red brother in the forest. It makes one of the darkest pages in the book of our nation's history. From the language of Gov. Harrison to the authorities at Washington in 1805, we find that in the infancy of our now grand state of Indiana, these servants of the wicked ones were laying the foundation for future troubles and the dark scenes that followed in the war then brewing.

At that time he writes, "I believe there is not more than 600 warriors on the Wabash, and yet the quantity of whiskey brought here yearly, and sold to them, amounts to more than 6000 gallons!"

How many devils were in these 6000 gallons, I am not prepared to say, but we do know that they controlled the red man as easily as they did the pale faces, and that the pioneers of Indiana suffered untold miseries, caused by land sharks and rum agents.

I shall always contend that had the red man been treated as a brother, and given the credit of having an immortal as well as a physical nature, many of the scenes of carnage and butchery that followed, never would have been known.

It is certainly a little humiliating to the American people, that no murmurs were ever heard against the early French settlers in this state by the Indians who dealt with them. The French sold them no rum nor cheated them out of any of their lands.

You call us your children, said an old chief to Harrison one day - "Why do you not make us happy as our fathers, the French did? They never took our lands. - But now if we take the bark from a tree, the white man threatens to shoot us."

The murmurs increased, became louder and longer, assisted of course, by the emissaries from Canada, until 1811, when the first bold strike for independence was made.

About this time, the Flying Tiger, Tecumtha, began to appear above the horizon, and whose brother, The Prophet, was now claiming the title of Priest, Prophet and King among the Indian tribes.

The Council fires were lighted in the camps of nearly every tribe then within the boundaries of the state.

All the pretend miracles and machinations of the prophet, was by the instigation of Tecumtha, who was then planning a grand scheme of uniting all the tribes in Northwest into a Confederacy that would be irresistible in power, and with one full sweep the white man would be swept from their domains.

The eloquence of the Prophet is still remembered by a few very old men yet living. His pretended revelation was laughed at by the pioneer in his log cabin, but among the superstitious Indians, his power of eloquence had its effect. Just before the Prophet's power began to be felt Harrison had succeeded in effecting a treaty with 3 or 4 Indian tribes for 3 million acres of land along the Wabash and eastward to White river.

This sale Tecumtha denounced and threatened the life of every chief who was party to it, and Mr. Lossing says that the very tribes who received the money for these lands, afterwards raised the tomahawk against the men who bought it of them - such was the power of the Prophet over them. "Return those lands," said he, "and I will be the friend of the white man."

A great Council fire now burned at Vincennes for 3 days at which Gov. Harrison's powers in Indian tactics were wonderfully displayed. The Council broke up without accomplishing anything looking towards a peaceful settlement of the troubles, now coming on. War seemed inevitable, but it did not find the great governor unprepared.

From Vincennes, the Prophet went to Tippecanoe and began to marshal the warriors for the bold strike for liberty.

The march of Harrison with his brave defenders to the Prophet's town, when he learned of the depredation already begun, was described to me a few years ago by an old citizen of this county [Johnson], who now lies buried a few miles south of this city. The long, wearisome march through an unbroken forest, and the quick response of the militia as they shouldered the rifle, were all fresh in his mind. Said he, "Old Tippecanoe," as these soldiers sometimes call him, "knew more of Indian tactics than any man in the nation in any age. He seemed to anticipate every movement and met Indian cunning by a more than Indian bravery. No Indian ever led him into ambush, and no flag of truce ever deceived him." This in substance was given by one who for a half century was a citizen of this county, and who died two years ago at the ripe old age of 95 years.

Harrison's troops were well officered, by brave and true men. The militia were given in charge of Col. Luke Decker, and with him were the brave Captains Posey and Warrick, who both fell in the battle at Tippecanoe, and whose memory has been honored by each having a county named for them.

The particulars of the great battle of Tippecanoe I need not give, as it is well known by every reader of history, and especially by all the teachers. But I may be allowed to correct a mistake in regard to it.

We find in nearly all our school histories and geographies of the State of Indiana, that this battle was fought between Gen. Harrison and the great war chief, Tecumtha; neither of which is strictly correct. Gov. Harrison had not yet been made a general, though he was shortly afterwards and Tecumtha was not within 100 miles of the battle field. The mistake arises from the supposition that the Prophet and Tecumtha was one and the same person. Tecumtha was not yet ready for war in earnest and was then on a visit to the southern tribes perfecting his

Confederation, when his hot headed brother, the Prophet, sought to annihilate the whites as his pretended revelation seemed to tell him he could easily do.

When Tecumtha heard of the disastrous defeat of his braves, he cried in despair, "All is lost."

Besides the two brave Captains already mentioned, that have counties named in honor of their memory, there were 5 others in the regular troops likewise honored, who fell in that battle. They were Cols. Daviess and Owen, and Captains Spencer and Randolph, and I believe Col. White and Bartholomew that fell in that battle were the ones for whom these two counties were named, though I am not sure of it.

When you stand on the battle field of Tippecanoe, the deeds of the pioneer defenders of our great state, though in memory, and the scenes enacted in that fearful night when surprised in their tents by a treacherous foe came in a panorama before you.

The pretended revelations of the prophecy, that not one of his braves should fall before the pale faces was now seen in its true light and from that time onward the spell was broken, and several tribes began to sue for peace. The rest broke up into marauding hands and then began the butcheries, the horrors of which were told around the cabin firesides for two generations afterwards.

The chiefs of 5 tribes called a council at Fort Wayne, and denounced the prophet; and we find them soon after begging for bread. But can't always put confidence in what they said. Harrison was unable to supply them, and in fact he did not deem them worthy to receive it, and the sequel showed him to be correct, as they soon began the border warfare that has always made the Indian a foe to be feared.

The first victims that fell by their treachery was a company of militia under the brave Captain Wells who fell into ambush while on his march to relieve Fort Dearborn. These helpless victims were butchered in the most horrible manner conceivable. Only five or six were captured and marched off reserved for torture. Among this number was my grandfather. They were marched all night through the swamps and tangled thickets, and with but little rest during the day until they halted near a lake on the second night.

A few years before this, an Indian had come to Grandfather's cabin far away on the banks of the Kentucky River and was sheltered during a stormy night and fed from his table and sent on his way rejoicing. This Indian was now one of the braves in the band that blotted out of existence Capt. Well's brave company. The white man was recognized but the Indian was not. Next morning when the preparation for torture was to begin one of their prisoners was gone, and was far on his way toward the white settlements; but there was one Indian in that band that knew how he escaped - and he was the one who had remembered that face and that pone of corn bread way back yonder on the banks of the Kentucky River.

War with Great Britain had now been declared. Harrison vacated the governor's chair and took the field against the British and his Indian allies. The noble, sacrificing spirit, the courage and ability of the great warrior made for him a name, though not recognized for 30 years afterwards, will live as long as the nation has a history.

It was at this time (September 1812) that another of the future presidents first appeared above the horizon on Indiana soil. This was Captain Taylor, the brave defender of Ft. Harrison (now Terre Haute) who with a handful of men held the fort against a swarming multitude of red devils who were eager to get inside to begin their fiendish work of dashing out the brains of innocent children and tearing off the scalps of their weeping mothers. But this they never accomplished.

Here Captain Taylor laid the formation for the future general, which led him afterwards to the highest seat in the nation.

In the same week in which Capt. Taylor so bravely repulsed the warriors at Ft. Harrison, was enacted another scene in a different part of the state, the horrors of which is sickning beyond description, and the memory of which lived as long as the soldiers of that war lived to tell it - This was the massacre at Pigeon roost in Scott County.

This settlement was at the outskirts of the advance of civilization northward from the Ohio river. I need not describe to you, all who are acquainted with history have these scenes before them. A savage yell, ringing out on the midnight air, fire brands sweeping everywhere, shrieks of the dying as the deadly tomahawk descended buried in the brain, and all was over. Only two lived to tell the tale. The son of the lady who escaped (then a little boy), I believe once resided in this county for a few years, or near the county line in Bartholomew county.

These were times that tried men's souls. In the writings of Zebulon Collins, who was a pioneer of Clark County at that time, I find these words: "On all occasions when I went out to work, I carried my rifle, tomahawk, pistol and knife with me. I had two good dogs. I took one of them into the house every night, leaving the other out. The one out was expected to give the alarm which would cause the one inside to awaken the family. I always kept my arms by my side, ready for any emergency. I never knew when I went away from home, if I would ever return."

Old father Collins' experience can be truly said was the experience of the pioneers of this state everywhere during the years of 1812 and 1813.

The experiences I have given you could be multiplied. But as a complete history of this war has never been written for Indiana before the old soldier passed away, I am afraid it never will be. Many of the trying scenes of these times only live in the memory of the children and grandchildren of our forefathers in this war.

There are left on the shores of time only a few to tell the story, and I presume in another decade, the last one will have passed over.

Such was the activity of the men in the field and their determined effort to drive these murders from our borders, that by the close of 1813, what had not been driven out of the state, were ready to throw down their arms. And at Greenville, Ohio in September of that year all the tribes signed the papers that gave our state peace for many years.

At the breaking out of this war, there were lots of towns on the Ohio river. These were Jeffersonville, a small village, New Albany then a growing town, but was killed until after the war by the Embargo Act, it being devoted entirely to ship building. Some of their handy workmen shouldered the musket to drive the invaders from the land, and in battles on the lakes and other memorable battle fields some of these early settlers of New Albany, Jeffersonville found their grave. The third and last town was that of Corydon where the Capitol of the territory was several years, and of the state at its organization in 1816.

These three towns with the old capitol at Vincennes were the only towns on the rivers. There were a few villages or hamlet inland, with strongly built block houses, the largest of these was Brookville, which was afterwards the capitol for a few years. The remains of the old Indian fort was still standing while I was attending school there 15 years ago.

One by one the brave defenders are passing away. Let us make an effort, as teachers to get from their lips the story of those hardships of 3 score and ten years ago, that in the future, the now unwritten record of Indiana in the war of 1812 may be written and preserved in the archives

for future generation, that they may pay homage to those who laid the foundation for a great state of which we are proud today.

{signed} J. R. Bay

written approx. 1885

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