

HISTORY OF GERMAN TOWNSHIP

What we know today as German Township, St. Joseph County, Indiana, United States of America, through a series of events, really had its origin in an obscure little village named Schwarzenau, near the Eder River in Germany. Here it was in 1708, that a group of eight persons, seven of whom were bred Presbyterians and one of the Lutheran faith, banded together, were baptised by trine immersion, organized a church, and chose Alexander Mack as their first minister. Their church was known as the Corman Baptist, or the Church of the Brethern or the Society of Dunkards. The members of the church are most commonly called Dunkards, at least by outsiders, the name being derived from the German word meaning "to dip".

Meeting with opposition and persecution, these people emigrated to America and settled in the year 1719 at Germantown, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. From that band of eight persons have sprung all the Dunkards in America. They are mostly farmers, some mechanics and a few professional men, but a Dunkard lawyer is a rarity as the Dunkards take care of their own and settle their differences among themselves. Their religion inculcates industry and frugality and abstinence from extravagance and worldly display.

One of the most renowned ministers of this faith was Elder Jacob Miller, who was born in 1735 in Franklin County, Pennsylvania and died in 1815, near Dayton, Ohio, after having ministered to early settlers in Pennsylvania and Virginia where he preached in German, and in Ohio over a 50-year period. He and his wife, Barbara were the parents of nine sons and three daughters, all of whom were reared in the faith and two of whom, David and Aaron, became not only noted ministers of the church but were also influential in German Township in the pioneer days. About 1800, Elder Jacob Miller and most of his family emigrated to Ohio and Indiana Territory. At that

time the land was a dense forest inhabited by many Indians. Elder Jacob visited with the Indians in their wigwams, sang and prayed for them. He gained not only their respect, but promises of protection under all circumstances. They called him the "Good Man--the Great Spirit sent from the East".

The extension of the Brethern churches paralleled the development of the country from the East to the Midwest. We learn from church publications that Elder Jacob Miller and his family had much to do with this progress.

The first congregation of the Brethern in Indiana was the 4-Mile in Wayne and Union County. Elder Jacob of the Miami, Ohio Valley, did the first preaching in the State and he with John Hart organized the 4-Mile Church in 1809. The second church was organized at Nottle Creek in 1820 by Elder Jacob's sons, David and Aaron. These two churches became the mother churches for all Brethern churches in Indiana.

In the late 1820's David and Aaron Miller were sent by the church to investigate the feasibility for members of the sect for settlement in Northern Indiana. Preceding them had been a few others who had come here and appreciated what they found.

Father Marquette in 1673 passed up the Illinois and Kankakee Rivers, and across the Portage "to the St. Joseph of the Lakes". This was probably the first discovery of the St. Joseph River by any European, at least the first recorded, and if tradition be true, he reached the river at what is now Riverview Cemetery.

The mouth of the St. Joseph River was discovered by the distinguished French explorer, Robert Cavalier De LaSalle, in 1679, when he arrived in the "Griffin". He called it the River of the Miami's from the Indian Tribe living along its banks.

In 1829, the U.S. Government ordered the lands surveyed. Mail from Fort Wayne came to South Bend about once a month. Col. Taylor was appointed the Postmaster, the name of the Post Office being "South Old", Allen County. The old Post Office pigeon holes can be seen today in the Northern Indiana Historical Museum in the old Courthouse. It was in 1829 that John Smith, David and Aaron Miller settled in German Township.

In 1830, emigrants began to pour into the county in large numbers and small communities were formed within the county. Hollers and Ritters settled in German Township. It was possible by the middle of 1830 for Col. Taylor to secure 128 names to a petition to the Legislature to get the County Seat changed from St. Joseph to South Bend. This petition, presented to the Indiana Legislature in January 29, 1830, was passed as an Act forming St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties, to be effective after April 1, 1830. These counties were the only ones organized on the northern boundaries of the state. All territory west including that of the present counties of LaPorte, Porter and Lake, were attached to St. Joseph County. All to the east, including LaGrange and Steuben counties, were attached to Elkhart County. Also, the next year all unorganized territory remaining west of the range line was attached to St. Joseph County.

The original county of the state was Knox with its county seat at Vincennes, organized January 14, 1790. Northern Indiana remained within the jurisdiction of Knox County until January 10, 1818, when this part of the state was included in Randolph County, of which Winchester was the county seat, up to the formation of Allen County, December 17, 1823.

From the formation of Allen County in 1823, until that of St. Joseph and Elkhart counties in 1830, all northern Indiana was attached to Allen County; the present city of Niles, with the pioneer missionary, Issac McCoy and his wife Christiana (Polke) at the head of it. Christiana opened the school and soon had 53 Indian pupils. This was the most successful mission due to the personal efforts of the McCoy's who helped in transporting the Indians when they were forced West.

Alexis Coquillard, an agent for the American Fur Company, came to what is now South Bend in 1823. He purchased the trading post rights of Pierre Navarre, who from then until 1838 lived on the lands of his wife, Angelique, at the foot of what is now 26th Street, on the north side of the St. Joseph River between South Bend and "Thick Woods Rapids" (now Mishawaka). After establishing his Trading Post, Mr.

Coquillard returned to Fort Wayne for his bride, Frances Comparet, and came back in 1824 to establish their home. The French-Indian traders who preceded Messrs. Navarre and Coquillard, had intermarried with the Indians and instead of opening the country, had adopted the mode of life and customs of the Indians. Mr. Coquillard was, therefore, the first to commence the work of civilizing, and his name appears upon the first records of the county, land sales, etc., and his wife, Frances, the pioneer white woman of the county. Both of them are most worthily remembered for their labors among the Indians and their hospitality to the white people who came after them.

In 1826, the Wabash Treaty with the Indians was signed and the sale of lands began. In 1827, Col. Lathrop M. Taylor, Timothy S. Smith and family, and Job Brookfield settled in South Bend; Lewis San Comb in Portage Township; and William Brookfield, the government surveyor, in German Township. The first settlers came to Clay and Penn Townships the following year; Mr. Taylor was licensed as an Indian trader and the Indians ceded their lands to General Cass.

even as by Act of January 29, 1830, the territory now forming Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties was attached to St. Joseph County. The territory attached in such cases was not in fact a part of the County to which it was joined, yet for all practical purposes it was so treated. St. Joseph County was organized August 27, 1830.

The townships laid out of the Justices of the Peace, November 25, 1830, were four in number: Michigan, Deschamin, German and Portage.

- (1) Michigan Township included what is now LaPorte, Porter and Lake Counties, with the exception of 9 miles of the eastern border of LaPorte County, from the Michigan State Line south for 30 miles.
- (2) Deschamin Township (Deschamin was a corruption of the French DuChamin by which name Hudson Lake was formerly known. This lake was in the heart of the township. The name means "Of the Road" taken from the great east-west road known as the "Great Sulk Trail" now, known as the Chicago Road) began with the eastern 9 miles of LaPorte County plus 3 miles in what is now St. Joseph County with Spruce Road as the eastern boundary, extending 30 miles south from the Michigan border, including 7.5 miles into what is now Starke County.
- (3) German Township extended from Spruce Road east to Maple Road, from the Michigan border 30 miles south, including 10.5 miles into the present Marshall County. German Township was so named for the German Baptist inhabitants as David and Aaron Miller had done their work well, bringing many families of their sect from the College Corner area.
- (4) Portage Township extended from Maple Road east to Dogwood Road, the then eastern boundary of St. Joseph County, and, like German Twp., was 30 miles in length from the Michigan border south into Marshall County 10.5 miles.

Since that first layout of the townships, not only have the township boundaries been changed, even the county boundaries have been changed also through the years. German Township has mostly had the St. Joseph River as the eastern boundary. At present, German Township is bounded on the west by Pine Road, south by Edison to Maple, north to Douglas, east, then north to Cleveland, east to the river, then north to the Michigan State line.

At the time the four original townships were laid out, the citizens of these townships were to receive written notices from the Sheriff to meet December

18, 1830 to elect one Justice of the Peace, these Justices to be the Board that governed the County. For Michigan Township, which was not included within the bounds of St. Joseph County, but they extended their jurisdiction over it, the citizens were to meet at the home of Lewis Shirley; for Deschamin Twp., the house of John Druliner; for German, the house of David Miller; for Portage, unrecorded but probably the home of Alexis Coquillard.

Aaron Stanton was appointed inspector of elections in Michigan Twp.; John Egmert of Deschamin Twp.; David Miller of German Twp.; probably the sheriff would take care of Portage Township.

January 19, 1831, the General Assembly passed a law organizing the Board of County Commissioners (as we have since been governed), and abolished the Board of Justices of the Peace. On May 12, 1831, the new commissioners relocated the County Seat from St. Joseph, on William Brookfield's farm, German Township, to the village of South Bend. On the first Monday of September, 1831, said Board of Commissioners met at the home of Alexis Coquillard. David Miller and Joseph Rohrer presented certificates of election, and were sworn in. The Board adopted a seal with the insignia of an eagle and the words "St. Joseph County, Indiana" around the margin.

On September 7, 1831, the Townships laid out by the Board of Justices the previous November were set aside and three new townships instated. Highland Township included the greater part of LaPorte County and all of Porter and Lake Counties. Center Township's east boundary being what is now Pine Road and the balance of the County to the east, Portage Township.

The County of LaPorte was formed by Act of the Legislature, January 9, 1832, thus doing away with our Highland and Michigan Townships and made them part of the new County of LaPorte. As if to make up for this loss in the west, the same legislature a few days afterward by an Act approved January 31, 1832, took three miles from Elkhart County and added it to St. Joseph, making our present Ash Road the St. Joseph-Elkhart boundary line. In 1835, Marshall County and Starke were organized,

taking off several miles on the south and leaving us with our present boundary. St. Joseph County is now 24 miles in length east and west measured along the Indiana-Michigan line; and 19 1/2 miles in width north and south, measured along the St. Joseph-Elkhart County line. This necessitated a third division into townships, which was accomplished May 6, 1832, by dividing the county into three townships--Penn, Portage and Olive.

- (1) Penn embraced all the territory now including Harris, Penn and Madison and also the eastern sections of Clay, Portage, Center and Union.
- (2) Portage included what is now German, besides part of Clay, Portage, Greene, Center, Liberty and Union.
- (3) Olive included the present townships of Warren, Olive and Lincoln, and parts of Greene and Liberty. The township was named for Olive Stanton Vail, wife of Charles Vail, who settled in the township in 1830.

At present, the thirteen civil townships in the County have resulted from the subdivision made in the three original townships of Penn, Portage and Olive, as ordered from time to time by the Board of County Commissioners.

German Township, the first to be carved from the original three townships, was taken almost wholly from Portage Township, only the western tier of sections coming out of Olive. The township was formed on January 6, 1834, but on November 5, 1838, Warren Township was formed and the tier of sections on the west of German was attached to Warren. May 5, 1840, Clay Township was formed and that part of German east of the river was attached to Clay.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of our country's greatest philosophers, said: "There is properly no history, only biography". Thomas Carlyle stated the maxim a bit differently: "History is the essence of innumerable biographies". I will now tell you a bit about some of the early inhabitants of the community.

Chief Leopold Pokagon, civil chief of the first rank of the Pottawatomies, as he sat on his "flaming chariot", a hay-rack type of bed, placed on hickory axles and the solid wheels, hewed, burned and scraped from white oak cross sections, painted a bright red, drawn by a horse and an oxen, was a familiar sight to the early settlers, whose children played with the Indian children. Chief Leopold drove Johnny Appleseed to the Tippecanoe River in this contrivance. A generous soul and religious, on many occasions he proved himself to be a true friend and good neighbor to the white race.

His village was located just south of the old Sauk Trail, now Bertrand Road or Chicago Road, between Portage Road and Lilac or Copp Road. Until possibly three years ago, the upright of the large cedar cross with the date 1807 carved upon it, could be seen on the knoll across the Copp Road, from the river, at _____ Landing. It marked the site of Pokagon's Indian Cemetery. As long as Mr. Copp, who owned the property in later years, lived, he regarded the spot as sacred and would not permit the land to be cultivated.

(If you think I am getting away from German Township, it is to be remembered that at one time the Michigan State Line was located 10 miles further north than it now is.)

Chief Leopold's son, Simon Pokagon, was well educated, including instruction at Notre Dame. He devoted his life to assisting the priests and acting as interpreter and mediator for his people.

Joseph Bertrand, born in 1778, at Mackinac, came to the Parc Aux Vaches (about 1803-4) or Cow Pasture, so named because great herds of buffalo came there for water from the river and to feed on the bountiful tall grasses. He succeeded Mr. Antoine LeClerc Sr. the first established trader here, a British blacksmith and gunsmith, and Mr. John Kinzie, a trader and silversmith. Mr. Bertrand married

Mouto (Madeline) daughter of Chief Topenebee, the War Chief of the Pottawatomies, whose village was three miles north of that of Chief Pokagon. It is said that Madeline preferred the Indian's way of life and spent most of her time in a tepee at the rear of Mr. Bertrand's house.

After raising several children, Madeline died at Bertrand in 1846, and is buried in the Bertrand Cemetery, the land for which was given by her husband, is the oldest cemetery in this vicinity.

In 1813, Mr. Bertrand moved his trading post from the west side of the river to the east side, at the present site of Bertrand, so named in 1814 for him. He was in the employ of William Burnett and acted as agent for him for a time. In 1821 and 1822, he was listed as an employee of the American Fur Company.

The little settlement of Bertrand was on the old Sauk Trail, the main stage route between Detroit and Chicago. The Higbee Tavern, still standing, was a stopping place for man and beast so Mr. Bertrand became acquainted with many men of importance in his day. Among his white neighbors he was always referred to as "the Injun' who murders the English language". About 1858, he moved to Kansas where he died September 8, 1865, at St. Mary's.

We learned previously that David and Aaron Miller, brothers, were active in the early history of German Township and aided in organizing the County. David served on the first board of the County Commissioners while Aaron served as the second County Treasurer from 1831-32. Both were noted ministers of their church yet they found time and energy to serve their neighbors in a public way as well. Aaron was frequently called upon to help establish the new County roads.

David was born in Franklin County, Virginia, in 1788. He married Sarah Hardman and fathered five sons and eight daughters. All married and had large families. Eight of them, as well as their parents, are buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery which is on the David Miller farm and was deeded to the Mount Pleasant Cemetery Association by the heirs, February 28, 1876. David and Sarah's son, Aaron, married Elizabeth Smith. Daniel Miller married May Price and both are buried at the

City Cemetery in South Bend. The other three sons moved to Iowa and Kansas. The daughters all married and remained in the community. Elizabeth became Mrs. Jacob Ritter; Catherine, Mrs. James Good; Anna, Mrs. Robert Cissne; Sarah, Mrs. George Witter; Mary, Mrs. Isaac Marble; Susan, Mrs. Phillip Boone; and Phoebe, Mrs. Joseph Cissne.

David Miller became the first Elder of the Portage Prairie congregation. He was a man universally loved because of his piety and generosity, and respected for his consistent Christian life. When there was a scarcity of corn, he would sell to the poor and needy for half of the market price.

The first church erected in German Township was a brick building built in 1851 by the Dunkards and is still standing at the corner of Adams and Orange Roads, but is now known as the Carriage House. Church services were held at a much earlier date than 1851, however, as Elder David Miller organized a Dunkard congregation in 1831, with meetings being held in the homes of the members until the new church building was completed in 1851. A granddaughter, Dora Miller Hamilton, was instrumental in preserving the church building. Charter members included in this church were Elder David Miller and wife; Benjamin Hardman and wife; Christian Holler and wife; John Ritter and wife; Samuel Jones and wife; Joshua Hardman and wife; and Samuel McMullen and wife.

Elder David died at 52 years of age. His son, Aaron Miller, Jr. followed him in the ministry and died at 80 years. Aaron Jr.'s son, Thurston Miller, who married Harriett Huston, was for many years a minister at LaPorte.

Some nephews of David and Aaron were also wellknown ministers of the Dunkard Church. Sons of their sister Mary, Mrs. Samuel Darst, Isaac and John Darst, served more than 50 years in the ministry. Isaac Miller, the son of Tobias and Sarah (Henderson) Miller, was blind but was minister of the Portage Church at LaPorte. Two other brothers, sons of Abraham and Nancy (Huston) Miller, Jacob Miller, Jr., who married Sarah Backus, and James H. Miller who married Mary Huston, worked closely

together and were instrumental in having the Portage Church built where Jacob Jr. preached for 20 years. Jacob Jr. lived just across the road from the Portage Prairie Cemetery, where he was buried after his death in 1871. The twelve children of Jacob Jr. and Sarah Miller married into the Whitmer, Ritter, Zigler, Ullery, Earley, Warner and Hallowell families. When Jacob Jr.'s will was probated, it was found he left \$1,000.00 to the original Portage Church, which included the congregations of Portage, Pokagon, Berrien and LaPorte. He left this money in gratitude for what the church had done for him as a young man and had continued to do and would do in the future.

James H. and Mary (Huston) Miller were parents of ten children, five of whom married and lived in German Township with their families. Phoebe Miller married David Whitmer; Jacob, Matilda Locke; Sylvester, Louisa Smith; Madison, Addie Broadhurst; and Fannie, John Cissne. During James H. Miller's ministry, he did a great deal of traveling through Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Michigan, during which time he baptised over 2,000 persons, conducted innumerable funeral services, and united many couples. His religious labors, according to the customs of the church, were without remuneration.

Aaron Miller, Elder David's brother, was born in 1785, in Franklin County, Virginia. He married Elizabeth Herdman when he was 20 years old. They were the parents of seven sons and four daughters. Their son, David Miller, Jr., was a minister in Portage Church. Solomon Miller married Elizabeth Hardman and was St. Joseph County Treasurer from 1856-60. Their five-legged table and family bible can be seen at the Historical Society Museum. Josus D. Miller married Lydia Ann Good. The other sons and daughters married but emigrated to other states. Aaron died in 1839 and Elizabeth in 1846 and both are buried in the Witter Cemetery on Cleveland Road.

Godlove S. Orth, a lawyer from eastern Pennsylvania, kept a record of his "Voyage in the West, 1839". I quote from him after his arrival in South Bend: "I am pleased with South Bend. It is quite a neat, little village, situated on the

St. Joseph River. It may contain 1,200 inhabitants and is surrounded by very fertile country. The location is beautiful indeed and the citizens are perhaps more refined than in other portions of the West. They are enterprising, industrious and some of them wealthy. The court having adjourned about noon on Saturday, I determined to take a ride into the country. I hired a carriage and one of my new friends (for you must know acquaintances are soon made out here) and myself went down the St. Joseph River to the Michigan line. The roads in Northern Indiana are the best I ever travelled. You don't find a single stone, they are small gravel and as level as a floor, and a carriage runs on them as a road car on a railroad and our Indian ponies spin it off in fine style. We had not proceeded far before we ascertained that there would be a funeral in the vicinity that afternoon. Being determined to see human nature under all possible circumstances in every section of the county, I persuaded my friend to stop at the house where the corpse lay. By the vast concourse of people assembled, we thought it must be the funeral of some magnate of the country and soon ascertained that he was a kind of priest among the Mennonites, a sect of Christians quite numerous in Northern Indiana. He was not only beloved by his own people but universally esteemed and respected. I estimated the number of people at from 300 to 400. The procession moved to the burial ground and we followed in the train. As he and a surviving brother were the only persons that officiated in a clerical capacity, we of course had no preaching as is customary on such occasions.

However, as the last clod was put on the grave, the surviving brother raised his hands aloft, tears were trickling down his cheeks, a long and flowing beard sivered down over his breast, and he gave utterance to the following: "Dear People, by this dispensation of Providence, St. Joseph County has lost one of its best citizens, our sect of the Church of Christ one of its main pillars of support, and I, a brother!" These words, coming upon me so unexpectedly had such a peculiar effect on me at the time that they are still ringing in my ears." Unquote.

Other settlers and their families who came to German Township in the early days, many of whom were the German Baptists from the Proble, Darke, and Butler counties in Ohio, and the neighboring Wayne, Fayette, Union and Franklin counties of Indiana, included John Smith, Christian Holler, Daniel Wagner, Abram and Jonathon Smith, John and Jacob Ritter, Samuel Witter, who gave the land from his farm to the Witter Cemetery; Samuel Keltner, David Hoover, Reuben Dunn, Reseau Brown, who sold his farm for the County Home; J.M. Whitmer, Nathan Hatfield, James J. Frame, Walter Fields, whose son Stephen married Priscilla Buckles, who signed this deed in 1850; Benjamin, Joshua and Jonathen Hardman; Samuel Zigler; James and Calvin Myler; William W. Brick, whose son Abraham Lincoln Brick was Congressman from this District and the family for whom Brick Road is named; Michael Augustine, Freegift Chamberlain, the Revolutionary soldier buried at Mt. Pleasant Cemetery; Elias Fisher, John Kingery, Marry Buckles, Jesse Frame and his several sons, Samuel Good, James Huston, who with his wife Margaret McMullen bought a farm at what is now 24338 Cleveland Road where they lived for 42 years before selling to their son, Isaac Newton Huston in 1881, who lived there for 20 years, John Huston, who with his brother James and their families are buried at the Portage Prairie Cemetery, and many more unrecorded.

German Township is by nature one of the most favored townships in the County, and the locality is undoubtedly the most famous in our early history. Portage Prairie covers the greater part of the township and is one of the best of farming districts, the township being an agricultural one.

Historically, the township is most interesting. The famous portage between the St. Joseph and Kankakee crosses this and Portage Township. Over this portage the commerce between the lakes and the Mississippi passed for ages. Over this went Marquette, LaSalle, Charlevoix, Tonti and Hennepin. Here, the spot yet known as Mount Pleasant was the great Miami Village, where in 1681, LaSalle made his

celebrated treaty with the Miami tribe, under the famed Council Oak. Indeed,
German Township has a rich heritage to hand down to its inhabitants.

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