

INDEPENDENCE
of
Gillam Township
Jasper County
Indiana

Jasper county was one of several formed by the 1834-5 Indiana Legislature. The name of the county honors a Revolutionary War hero. During the battle at Charleston, S.C. on 28th June, 1776, a Sgt. Jasper restored the fallen American flag amidst a hail of bullets. The ladies of Charleston presented him with a beautiful flag which he pledged himself to defend with his life. True to his word, he was later found dead upon the field of battle, clinging to his beloved flag. The very first white settler in Jasper county was said to have been a William Donahue, who settled in 1832 in what was to become Gillam township. Others came by 1834.

There are no towns as such in the township, though there were two or three early settlements. Saltillo was in Sec. 10, where the Pinkamink flows from the township into the Iroquois river. A bridge at that point served an early Post road which ran from Winamac to White Post (an early Post Office and stage stop) and to Rensselaer, Williamsport and Bunkum, on the state line. Josiah Walden served as a carrier on this early post road. Native of Dearborn county, he brought his family to Pulaski county, and purchased land from the Wabash and Erie Canal Company, on the present site of Medaryville. He later moved on to Kansas, leaving his wife, Sarah (Bare) and daughter Mariah, buried in the old Medaryville Cemetery.

Davissonville was platted by Moses & Lewis Davisson in 1850. Located on the Pinkamink in Section 33, a mill was erected here and a small village laid out. Then a Mr. Haddox operated a distillery and it was sometimes called Haddoxtown. Sometime, it acquired another name, Tailholt. Tradition has it that a horse fell through the bridge, and a group of men gathered to extricate the animal. Some of the men were instructed to take a "tail holt" and heave! Thus the horse was freed and the town acquired another name. One wonders if James Whitcomb Riley knew of this incident and was inspired to write the poem: "The Little Town of Tailholt." (History of Francesville-Bechdolt)

In more recent time, there was the beginning of a town, Asphaltum, which came about when oil was struck on or near the William Hershman farm in 1901. This was in Sec. 28, about 6 miles west of Medaryville. In the excitement, there quickly sprang up a hotel, a few stores, and a refinery was started. Then the bubble burst. It was found that the oil was not in sufficient quantity to warrant continued operations. Thus died another town, and another dream.

It is likely that the early settlers of Gillam township descended from early immigrants who fled Europe to escape religious persecution. Religion was very much a part of their lives, and a source of strength in surmounting the great difficulties of pioneer life in a wild, rugged land.

At that time, early preachers were, of necessity, circuit riders, who came riding through-the forest and over the prairie. The Catholic priest was an early comer, but the Methodists seemed to have a firm grip in this section. When one of these preachers came riding in, people gathered for services, in homes at first, then in early log school houses until regular church buildings could be erected.

The Independence church was organized in 1836 in the log cabin of John Gillam. Records of the Methodist church reveal that a Rev. Hackaleih Vrendenburgh had been assigned to serve in this area, riding a circuit out of Monticello. Some historian gave his name as H. Brandenburgh, which we find in a history of Jasper county, the Battey 1883 book. One can readily see how the name could be misspelled. That pioneer church was very active in its day. There was a large Sunday School, an active Ladies Aid, and a major part of the church was its

annual Homecoming. It was an all day affair, usually held on a Sunday in August. Former preachers would be asked to return for preaching, people who had moved away were invited to join in the fellowship, and a bountiful basket dinner.

We could mention any number of outstanding persons in connection with this church. It would be hard to select the most outstanding, for fear of missing someone. We will take the liberty of giving one example of an outstanding Sunday School teacher. "Aunt" Lizzie Faris was an unmarried lady who taught school for seventeen years, giving it up on the death of her sister, Mrs. Elmer Pullins, to raise the young Pullins children. Aunt Lizzie was known as a stern disciplinarian. For many years she taught a large Sunday School class of boys or young men at Independence. When she detected their youthful "sins," she would line up the offenders and lecture them so severely that the tears would run! She was but one whose stern lessons, administered with love, stayed with those young men as they grew up and left home to make their way in the world.

The church building was remodeled and modernized in 1948. A basement was added, with kitchen, rest rooms, and dining room. The upstairs was given new furniture, carpeting and new hymnals. A dedication was held in honor of all this at the annual Homecoming, 28th. August, 1949. Rev. Gilbert Biker was the minister in charge, serving out of the Medaryville church; also present was Claude Young, the District Supt. Elmer Pullins was chairman of the meeting.

By 1976 there were but a few families left in the congregation; They made the difficult decision to close their beloved church, feeling that they could be of better service by joining with other church groups. The building stood empty for a time, until 1977, the Medaryville church made the decision to attempt to have the building declared a Historic Landmark. A committee was appointed with Nelson Coburn as chairman. The Annual Homecomings were revived and well attended. Money was raised for repair and maintenance of the building.

Such was the religious fervency of this old pioneer church that eighteen (18) young men were said to have become ministers from this church, and the Gillam church (1900-1930). For many years a plaque hung in the sanctuary of the Independence church with the names of those eighteen ministers. The plaque disappeared for a time, but has now been recovered and restored to like-new condition. The men listed:

Guild, George, and his sons Thomas and Daniel Guild.
Sebring, John
Paris, Charles
Culp, Everett
Mason, George, Thomas and Ed or Edward Mason.
Hart, Sylvester
Rogers, David A.
Markin, Thomas
Campbell, William and his sons Horace, Frank (Francis) and Charles.
Postill, Charles
Rockwell, Cyril

A great effort has been made to obtain a biography of each of these men. It was an easy task for those who served in the northern part of Indiana. Some left the state, and it has been more difficult in such case, some have proved impossible.

But what a glorious heritage for one small pioneer church!