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The Pioneer Settlement of Ohio

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THE PIONEER SETTLEMENT OF OHIO.

LIPPITT PRIZE ESSAY.

ROENA HOXSIE STERE, 1901.

The Pioneer Settlement of Ohio.

The close of the Revolutionary war found many who had risked their all in sustaining the government, penniless, the paper currency in which they had been paid having so depreciated as to be almost worthless. This poverty was, in a great measure, the cause of a settlement made at the junction of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers April 7th, 1788 by a company composed mostly of Revolutionary soldiers and officers who hoped by seeking new homes in what was then the far west to regain a small part of what they had lost, and secure a living for themselves and families.

This settlement should be the more interesting to us because at least six of these pioneers were from our own state: General James Mitchel Varnum, who was one of the directors; Colonel Ebenezer Sproat, surveyor and agent; Colonel Archibald Grary, agent; Commodore Abraham Whipple; Captain Simeon Martin and William T. Miller.

We have every reason to be proud of them. Colonel Grary was an energetic and most successful military officer. Colonel Sproat, the son-in-law of Commodore Whipple, had served throughout the war, and had been at Trenton, Princeton and Monmouth. He was a noted disciplinarian, and it is interesting to know that on account of his height, which was 6 ft. 4 in. and his

commanding person, he received from the Indians the name of Big Buckeye--the origin of the term now applied to Ohio. General Varnum was not only a soldier but an orator. Thomas Paine, no mean judge of his kind who had listened to the greatest English orators, declared him to be the most eloquent man he ever heard speak. The Hon. George F. Hoar says of Commodore Whipple--"A gallant seaman as ever trod a deck,- a man whom Farragut or Nelson would have loved as a brother; first of the glorious procession of American navel heroes; first to fire an American gun at the flag of England on the sea; first to unfurl the flag of his own country on the Thames; first pioneer of the river commerce of the Ohio to the gulf."

"I know them all," cried La Fayette, when the list of nearly fifty military officers, who were among the pioneers, was read to him in Marietta, in 1825. "I know them all. I saw them at Brandywine, Yorktown, and Rhode Island. They were the bravest of the brave."

These men were of that company of resolute, fearless, pioneers, who founded what is now the beautiful city, Marietta, from which, in large measure, have proceeded the civilization, growth, prosperity, and influence of the "Great Northwest."

You will find by looking back, that until 1740 the coun-

try on the Ohio was but little known to the English; but at this time expeditions were made by both French and English. However no permanent settlements of any size were effected until 1765. After the treaty with the Indians, in this year, the country on the Monongahela and Ohio rivers, some distance below, began to be occupied, as it enjoyed comparative security from Indian depredations. In 1767, a settlement at Red Stone, Old Fort, was begun; in 1770, Wheeling was laid out and soon after, towns sprang up on Buffalo and Short Creek.

This state of quiet continued, with little or no interruption on the part of the Indians, until 1774. A free and social intercourse was kept up between the red men and the white and their feelings toward each other were most friendly. These pleasant feelings would probably have continued for some time longer but for depredations committed by the whites on the Indians. Throughout the war of the Revolution the settlers were continually troubled by their savage neighbors. Congress did everything in its power to persuade them to remain neutral during the unequal contest between the mother country and the colonies and not take part in a war in which they had no concern. The British government, however, pursued a very differ-

ent course, and urged them on all occasions to side with England and assist her. For this purpose, they supplied them with arms and ammunition, and paid them a bounty on scalps; one of the most cruel and inhuman kinds of traffic ever entered into by a civilized people. The very accurate estimate made by Colonel Morgan of the strength of these Indians tells us that more than 10,000 warriors could at any time within a few weeks be assembled to fall upon the frontiers. This shows how important it was for the colonies to keep on friendly terms with these savages.

On the first day of March, 1784, the state of Virginia, by deed, ceded to the United States her right and title to the territory north-west of the river Ohio. The twentieth day of May, 1785, Congress passed an ordinance for the survey and disposition of that portion of the territory which had been obtained by treaty from the Indian inhabitants. On the twenty-seventh of May, 1785, Congress proceeded to the election of surveyors, and chose one for each state. Caleb Harris, who was chosen for Rhode Island, resigned and Colonel Ebenezer Sproat was appointed in his place.

The twenty-fifth day of January, 1786, the following statement, signed by Generals Putnam and Tupper of the late American army, appeared in the newspapers.

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"Information."

"The subscribers take this method to inform all officers and soldiers, who have served in the late war, and who are by an ordinance of the honorable Congress to receive certain tracts of land in the Ohio country, and also all other good citizens who wish to become adventurers in that delightful region; from personal inspection together with other incontestible evidences they are fully satisfied that the lands in that quarter are of a much better quality than any other known to New England people."

Then the good qualities of the country are set forth, a proposition to form a Ohio Company is made, and the places and date are named for persons interested to meet.

In consequence of all this and after several meetings of delegates and committees, the Ohio Company was formed and directors appointed among whom was General James M. Varnum of Rhode Island.

On April 7th, 1788, forty-eight pioneers under the command of General Putnam of Massachusetts, who was aided by Colonel Ebenezer Sproat of Rhode Island, landed at the mouth of the Muskingum river. It is interesting to know that the vessel in which they sailed was called the Mayflower, and that the forty-one men who landed from the Mayflower at Plymouth and the

forty-eight men who came down the Ohio to Marietta were of the same race and the same faith.

They were graciously received by the Indians and nature also kindly welcomed them, for in striking contrast to the snow-patched region which they had left a few days before, they saw rich pastures, green trees, and heard the song of birds. Everything seemed delightful and the people were greatly charmed with their new home. On May 18th one of the pioneers writes of the settlement to a friend in Massachusetts as follows.

"This country, for fertility of soil and pleasantness of situation, not only exceeds my expectations, but exceeds any part of America or Europe, I ever was in. The climate is exceedingly healthy; not a man sick since we have been here. We have started twenty buffaloes in a drove. Deer are plenty as sheep with you. Beaver and otter are abundant. I have known one man to catch twenty or thirty of them in two or three nights. Turkeys are innumerable; they come within a few rods of us in the fields. We have already planted a field of one hundred and fifty acres in corn." Another writer of July 9th says. "The corn has grown nine inches in twenty-four hours, for two or three days past."

The new city was duly laid out and was called "Adelphi" but at the first meeting of the directors and agents, which was held west of the mountains, July 2nd, 1788, the name was changed to Marietta. This is an abbreviation of Marie Antoinette a reminder of the fair queen of France, who had done more to propitiate and enlist the feelings of the king in favor of the Americans, than any other person, not excepting even La Fayette.

The Fourth of July, 1788 was celebrated on the bank of the Muskingum by the firing of thirteen cannon from Fort Harmer, in the morning and evening. A sumptuous dinner was provided and General Varnum from this state delivered an oration which was the first political address ever made in what is now the state of Ohio.

The progress of the colony during the summer of 1788 was very great. More lots were laid out; bridges were built across the smaller streams, which rendered the intercourse between the different portions of the city easy and pleasant; a road was cut through the forest from the mouth of the Muskingum up to the spot selected for the site of Campus Martius, their stockade; the ground was cleared and prepared for planting, and at the end of the summer in spite of some misfortunes their crops were very large. However, before the winter was over,

the people were hard pressed for provisions because of the blocking of the Ohio with ice; and before the river opened, many of the settlers lived for weeks without bread, eating boiled corn, or coarse meal ground in the hand-mill, with little or no meat of any kind.

In January of 1788 a treaty was made with the Indians, although very reluctantly entered into on their part.

January 10th, the very day before the treaty, the death of General Varnum occurred. General Varnum was a native of Rhode Island who had served most faithfully throughout the Revolution and had been one of the most active workers in the Ohio Company. He was only about forty years of age and his untimely death was deeply and sincerely regretted by the inhabitants of Marietta.

Nothing of great importance occurred the following year. The first marriage took place on the 6th of February 1789, between the Hon. Winthrop Sargent, secretary of the Northwest territory, and Miss Rowena Tupper, daughter of General B. Tupper, provisions for building mills were made, the Indians caused some trouble and killed several men, an early frost destroyed the corn and finally the measles broke out among

the settlers. The addition to the number of inhabitants this year was one hundred and fifty-two men and fifty-seven families.

In this way one might follow through the years those brave, pioneer, heroes and describe their trials and sacrifices, their proud patriotism, and their lofty purposes. One might tell the thrilling story of how the wilderness has been transformed into a garden, how farms and cities have succeeded forests and savages, how manufactures, commerce, art, science, education and literature have here flourished, but the recital would take too long.

Some one has said that there was nothing in his country's history that would so stir his heart as the sight of two fading and time-soiled papers, whose characters were traced by the hands of the fathers a hundred years ago. They are original records of the acts which devoted this nation forever, to equality, to education, to religion, and to liberty. One is the Declaration of Independence, and the other, the Ordinance of 1787.