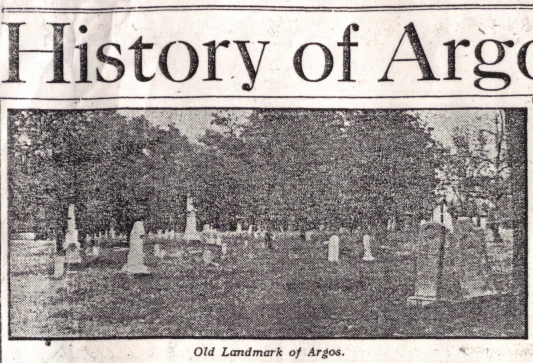
MAGAZINE SECTION

The South Bend Tribune.

MISHAWAKA NEWS

SOUTH BEND, INDIANA, SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 27, 1927.

History of Argos Reads Like Romantic Story



Old Landmark of Argos.

View of Portion of Business Section.

Eley Sawmill.

BY ESTHER KATHLEEN O'KEEFFE.

"WHERE history is properly told," said a great American writer, "there is no need for romance."

The romance that colors the naming of Argos, a progressive little city on Dixie highway, 30 miles south of South Bend, vainly awaits a pen equal to the task of telling the story of Sidney Williams, founder.

Sidney Williams came to Marshall county about 1833 and contracted to cut through the Michigan road from Rochester to South Bend. He first lived in a primitive log cabin, but soon after his arrival erected a double-hewed log tavern. As soon as the road was passable a stage line was established and the tavern became the rendezvous of newcomer home-seekers and speculators. An early settler tells us that the men who gathered around the fireplace to smoke and joke here, were genial, keen of wit and honest; that they were ingenuous in manner to a degree that shames the suave hypocrisy of a later day. The proprietor of the tavern also built a store and the settlement which developed was named Sidney in recognition of his service. The township in which the new town was located was called Walnut because of the growth of magnificent walnut trees covering the surrounding country.

Sidney Tavern Flourishes.

For 20 years Sidney grew slowly, although the tavern always was crowded to its capacity. Clearing the heavily timbered land was a slow and rigorous process, and markets for the products of farm and forest were yet to be created. The farmers of this locality brought their eggs, butter, maple sugar, wool, fur, hides and ginseng to Sidney where they bartered them for store goods. But the farmer who had a surplus of wheat or pork did not fare so well for he was compelled to "wagon" his products to the canal at Logansport or to the lake at Michigan City. A generation that is acquainted only with motor transportation has but a crude conception of the hardships endured by the "wagoner" who traveled with a feed box attached to the rear of his wagon. Extremely low prices were paid for his products, and necessity compelled him to board and lodge himself and team on the margin of the highway—not on the margin of his profits.

The people who traveled along the Michigan road in those far off 30's, 40's and 50's, had a tenacity of purpose lacking in the representatives of a machine age and they manifested a freshness of viewpoint seldom encountered to-day. They were individualists in the properly conceived sense of the word.

Pioneers Show Determined Spirit.

An appealing anecdote is told of two families who made a wearisome journey in the early 30's from Madison to the northern part of the state. Here they expected to buy Michigan road lands which were made available by the treaty of Tippecanoe, signed in 1832 by the Potawatomies.

Exhausted by the strain of the journey, the head of one family queried of his neighbor, "How much farther, John?"

"Three days more," was the laconic reply.

The first man scowled. "Let's stop here. I'm tired as a dog. What made us take this miserable road in the first place? We've had trouble enough with corduroys."

"Because this is the only road that takes us where we are goin'," replied the other. "An' good or bad its the road we're goin' to stick to till we get there. It makes no difference what road a body takes if he don't care where he's goin'."

The future resident of northern Indiana was actuated by the same spirit as led thousands of other pioneers to endure the torturous stretches of "corduroy," because of the opportunity that awaited them at their journey's end. A mental image of a home surrounded by fertile acres shortened the length of each weary mile. Theirs was the urge expressed by Joyce Kilmer in the poem "Roofs."

"If you call a gypsy a vagabond, I think
you do him wrong,
For he never goes a-traveling but he takes
his home along.
And the only reason a road is good, as
every wanderer knows,
Is just because of the homes, the homes,
the homes to which it goes."

Aristocracy of Northwest Appears.

And here in a Hoosierland developed along several hundred miles of Michigan road a new social order that may be called the aristocracy of the northwest took root in the soil. It differed essentially from the social order of the old south where leisure gave one entree to desired circles and from that of New England where narrowness of religious and political sentiment precluded full expression of tolerance. It was inherently American in nature because it was based upon a belief in the dignity of labor. The men and women who were its representatives believed that the essence of a free civilization is the will to work—the desire to stand on one's own—the resolve to assume responsibility. They scorned a parasitical existence, and had no hesitancy in declaring that a person who failed to exercise the creative power with which nature had endowed him by furthering the great work of the world, was unworthy of notice.

Of such fiber was Sidney Williams, founder of Argos, whose later life was shadowed by a tragedy of his own making. With the completion of his contract to build 50 miles of Michigan road, he turned his attention to other enterprises. He took an active part in the organization of the county and from 1836 to 1843 served as first associate judge of the circuit court. In 1845 he sold his tavern to Marquis L. Smith, who used it as a hotel for many years, when it was razed and a modern dwelling erected on the site. On Jan. 8, 1851, the little settlement long before named for the founder was laid out as a town by John Pleak and Marquis L. Smith. Amasa W. Reed, county surveyor, platted the town which consisted of 60 lots. A short time later Sidney Williams joined a group of Marshall county men and started for California in quest of gold.

Williams Accused of Murder.

The party of gold seekers included a lad of 16 who bubbled with high spirits. He was given to playing practical jokes on other members of the party and made an especial target of Williams. The annoyance of his victim led the boy to think up more mischief and to tantalize the older man with all the diabolical ingenuity of 16. One morning when the company was about 800 miles westward the body of the boy was found lying near a covered wagon. The finger of circumstantial evidence pointed accusingly at Williams as the murderer, and he was told he could continue no further with the party. Tradition has it that he begged for mercy as the dense wilderness was uninhabited by human kind but infested wth packs of ravenous wolves.

The men of the party were obdurate in the decision they had made. A brief funeral service was held and the youth whose pranks had caused them a few hours earlier was laid in a lonely grave. His companions carried stones to the spot and erected a pyramid there, declaring that some day they would return to erect a suitable marker—a day that never arrived. With a backward glance at the pyramid of stones and a sudden tightening of the muscles of their throats they moved on and were soon swallowed up in the distance. The tragedy that had left an indelible imprint on their consciousness was a part of the toll exacted from every traveler who made a journey across the continent to the gold fields of California.

Adjoining Sidney on the east was the town of Freemont, laid out by Joseph H. Rhodes on Nov. 6, 186, and named for Col. John C. Fremont, who on that day was voted for as the republican candidate for president. On Jan. 9, 1859, a new township (Walnut) was created from territory in Green and Tippecanoe townships, and immediately afterwards the board of county commissioners were presented with a petition which read: "Whereas the town lots of Freemont and Sidney lie very near each other and the postoffic of the two places is named Argos, and believing that so many names are against the interest of citizens of said places, we petition your honorable board to change the names of the above named towns and to consolidate them into one name, Argos."

Name is Changed to Argos.

This petition, signed by 18 early residents of the county tactfully refrains from mentioning the real purpose of the move which was to revoke the name of Sidney. So outraged were the people of the community at the crime alleged to have been committed by a man whom they had so inemorably honored that they wanted to destroy every vestige of that honor.

Tradition says that Schuyler Colfax, the na member of congress, suggested the name Argos. For years the public erroneously spelled the name of the new town "Argus," the name of a giant of Greek mythology possessed of a hundred eyes, and placed by Juno to guard Io. In time the error was corrected and the name "Argos" came into general use according to the original intent. Argos was a city in Greece made famous in the "Illiad" of Homer. The ancient city is, of course, in ruins. Her temples, her costly sepulchers, her gymnasiums and her great monuments disappeared centuries ago, and to-day only a trace of her vanished glory remains in the ruins of a theater of magnificent proportions cut in the rock. The plain of ancient Argos, surrounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth side open to the sea, is of compelling beauty.

In December, 1869, the town of Argos was incorporated under the state laws. The first election was held Dec. 4, 1869, and resulted in election of the following officers: Trustees, Joseph R. Norton, Jonathan Pickerel and J. S. Leland; marshal, James Pickerel; clerk, George W. Krouse; treasurer, A. Seely; assessor, W. R. Cook.

Williams Returns to His Home.

The fate of Sidney Williams was a matter of conjecture for many years. Now and then word came on wings of rumor that he had found his way back to Illinois after his expulsion from the caravan of his friends. However nothing definite was heard until 1878, when he appeared in Argos, a broken and sightless old man. He attributed his loss of vision, alleges an early settler, to retribution for the deed he had committed in a fit of ungoverned temper. The burden of this deed weighed upon him heavily, but he was unable to resist the overpowering urge to visit the scenes of his youth once again. Later he returned to Illinois, and died there more than 40 years ago.

Since the nature of a community is reflected through its churches, its schools and its press, a brief resume of these three institutions in Argos is given.

Methodists Erect First Church.

In 1838, three years after the organization of the county, the first society for religious worship in the township was organized at the home of Abel C. Hickman, who in 1832 settled on the Michigan road two miles south of Argos. Rev. Mr. Owens, a Methodist Episcopal clergyman, presided, and in 1844 a Methodist church was erected on Mr. Hickman's farm. This was the second house of worship built in Marshall county as the first church was the little log chapel, ChiChipe Outepi, built in 1827 by Jesuit missionaries near Twin lakes.

In 1847 the first schoolhouse was built in Argos by Walnut township on what is now the southeast corner of the old cemetery. This schoolhouse won the distinction for miles around because of its bell, a possession beyond realization of most district schools until a much later day.

The second schoolhouse dates from the early 70's and also was built by the township. Among the teachers who taught in this building were Mattie Beame, A. C. North-Frazks and W. J. Benner. Doubtless all of these teachers followed the custom of the day by presenting meritorious pupils with "reward cards;" bits of cardboard gaily decorated, often depicting plump cupids holding wreaths of roses aloft and bearing the name of teacher and pupil. Doubtless too, these teachers experienced the thrill of being "smoked out" as described by Edward Eggleston in the "Hoosier Schoolmaster," and of contributing to "last day" treats.

Lodges Sponsor New School.

The third school building was erected in 1873, and an early newspaper clipping states that the corner stone of this building was laid on Aug. 16, of that year, under the auspices of the fraternities of Masons, Odd Fellows and Improved Order of Red Men. After the ceremonies of laying the stone addresses were delivered by Rev. J. L. Boyd, Methodist minister, of Plymouth; P. S. Hoffman, of Richmond; Hon. M. A. O. Packard, of Plymouth, and Prof M. B. Hopkins, state superintendent of public instruction. After the close of the services, continues the item, an excellent dinner was served by ladies of the place, and the occasion was in every way enjoyable. This building was of brick, 40 by 60 feet, two stories high, well finished and furnished with the latest improved furniture and fixtures.

The following principals who presided over this building will be remembered by hundreds of Marshall county residents: W. E. Ashcraft, L. Q. Martin, E. A. Powles, M. L. Teeples and M. I. Smith. Among the grade teachers were A. A. Homes-Goucher, A. C. North, Belle Richards, Nora Littleton, Lida Gordon, Mrs. George D. Stevens, Maggie Campbell, Jacob Martin, J. W. Weimer, J. D. Quivey, Etta Harris, S. N. Stevens, Louisa Humphrey, Mrs. L. Alleman, N. E. Barr, Esther Foster, R. C. O'Biennis, A. E. Wickizer and Anna Cathcart.

Universities Recognize School.

In 1892 this building burned and the fourth schoolhouse was built under direction of a board composed of Dr. D. C. Knott, A. T. Slayter and B. C. Schoolover. A modern addition has since been built and graduates of the high school, commissioned in 1904, are to-day admitted to universities of grade A.

In Argos at the present time are two school teachers whose stock of reminiscences will guarantee an hour of genuine pleasure to anyone so fortunate as to share them. They are Jacob Martin and W. J. Benner. For many years Mr. Martin guided the destinies of occupants of old "B" from in Plymouth and to Mr. Benner belongs the distinction of being the oldest schoolmaster in Marshall county. In 1860 he taught his first term near Argos. He then lived in Ohio but was so impressed with Argos that a few years later he returned to become a permanent resident.

And now a word as to the fourth estate. In 1867 the Argos Globe made its first appearance with Charles Riddle as editor. It continued as a semi-monthly until 1876. In 1876 A. C. Firestone established the Argos Reflector which has been owned continuously by members of the Wickizer family since 1904. At the present time John Wickizer is the able editor of the weekly Reflector. Of this paper it may truthfully be said that through all the years of its existence the editorial policy has been consistent with principles expressed in a motto adopted in 1902 by the Salem Register.

"Here shall the press the people's right maintain,
Unawed by influence and unbribed by gain.
Here patriot truth her glorious precepts draw,
Pledged to religion, liberty and law."

Medical Society Organized.

On May 13, 1878, the Marshall County Medical society was organized at Argos for the purpose of advancing medical science and lifting professional standards. The charter members were Drs. Samuel W. Gould, Reason B. Eaton, J. H. Wilson, F. Stevens and J. T. Doke.

A few incidents as related to the lives of early residents of Argos may be of interest to members of the younger generation.

One of the most picturesque figures that ever lived in Argos was the late James Miller, who wrote many entertaining articles for newspapers in northern Indiana, under the pen name, "Frank Sundown." Once, when asked for an explanation of his choice of a pseudonym he replied: "When I was a young man I went to singing and spelling schools with a crowd of young people. The merriest person in our merry crowd was a girl named Frances. She was the delight of all who knew her. She usually wore one of the broad rimmed hats then called 'sundowns' and we nicknamed her 'Frank Sundown.' She died very early in life and after I commenced to write I decided to adopt her name as mine, a compliment I had once hoped might be reversed."

Smith Purchases Tavern.

Marquis L. Smith who bought the famous Sidney Williams tavern in 1845 and who was one of the two men who laid out the town in 1851 was a Kentuckian, born in 1817. His father was a soldier in the American revolution under the command of Gen. George Washington. For 45 years he was a Methodist minister and died in Marion county, Indiana, in 1824.

Daniel Pocock, grandfather of Dr. Elias H Pocock, was born in England in 1718 and came to America in 1734. At Baltimore he heard of an English girl, Eleanor Pocock, who was of no kin. Two years later they were married and he became a wealthy planter and slave-holder. His son, Elijah Pocock, became a devout Quaker and on the death of his father liberated the slaves. His first presidential vote was cast for George Washington and his last for Abraham Lincoln. His son, Dr. Elias Pocock, came to Marshall county in 1872.

The grandfather of James M. Davis, an early settler in Walnut township, was a soldier in the war of 1812 and served under Gen. William Henry Harrison. At the battle of the Thames he witnessed the death of the great Indian chieftain, Tecumseh, who was shot in the left breast as he arose from behind a thistle patch. He was dressed in a crude leather suit, from which the dust flew when struck by the bullet.

Corey Family Highly Respected.

Since 1836 the name of the Corey family has been associated with every worth-while civic enterprise of Argos. Barney Corey, born in 1809, came here when the county was organized and was founder of the Jordan Baptist church. His mother was the first white person baptized by immersion in Marshall county. The memory of a descendant, James Lowell Corey, is cherished throughout the county as he was the first Argos boy to fall in action in the world war.

Among the names of other pioneers familiar to many are: Nathan Chapman, Lewis Boggs, Charles Brown, William Cox, John Crow, Asa Forsythe, Dr. Samuel W. Gould, Elias Hess, Jonathan S. Hussey, James Lowry, Chasteen Pickerl, William Railsback, Jacob Shafer, T. O. Taber, Asa St. John, J. M. Wickizer, Josiah Jones and Jesse R. Moore.

A sense of civic pride is evinced by the many beautiful homes in Argos. The city has a reputation of having the best kept lawns of any community in Marshall county. The Methodist Episcopal, the Christian and the Church of God all number a large membership. Two railroads and Indiana Motor Bus service connect with other points.

Banks Have Wide Clientele.

The First Trust & Savings company, president, L. M. Shafer; and the Citizens State bank, president, O. L. Grossman, are financial institutions of sound methods and wide clientele. The Ely sawmill and Chicago Garment factory are the leading industries. The Kelly hospital offers facilities for the care of both medical and surgical cases.

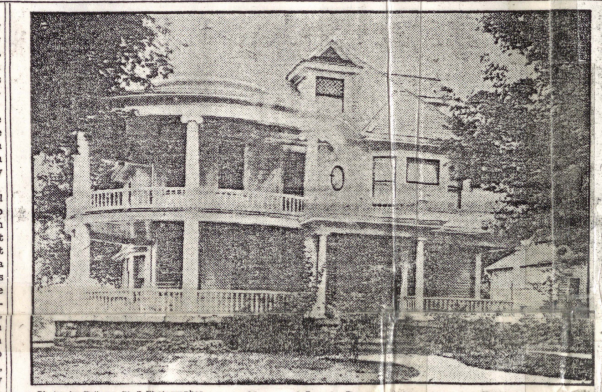
The social life is carried on by members of the Masonic, Eastern Star, K. of P., and Macabee lodges. H. H. Hoffman is president of the Commercial club which features bi-monthly luncheons and programs. In the realm of feminine activity the Monday club the Economics club and the Junior club sponsored by the two former organizations, all develop the cultural life of the community.

The Monday club has adopted the following motto for the season 1927-28: "From the Mayflower there has gone forth a progress so steady, a growth so wonderful, a reality so important, a promise yet to be fulfilled so glorious."

Mrs. Eugene Debolt is president of this organization and the following women have served in that capacity since its found: Mesdames S. R. Miles, T. O. Taber, T. A. Kuhn, Belle Alleman Spayde, J. W. Slayter, H. A. Kosanke, Cora Wickizer.

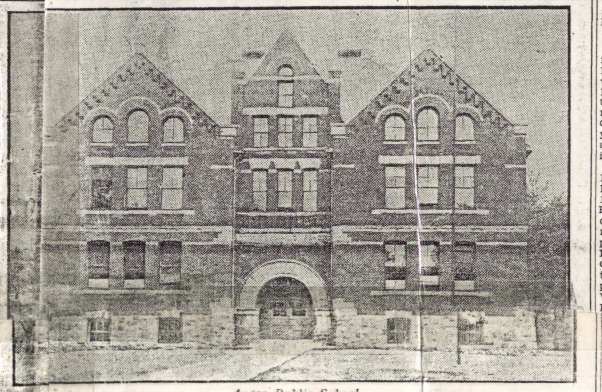
In 1923-24, during the incumbency of Mrs. Belle Alleman Spayde, the Monday club was presented with a banner by the federated clubs of the 13th district in recognition of the most outstanding achievement of any club in the district.

Mrs. Lloyd McGriff is president of the Economics club which has a membership of 41. This organization very successfully seeks to develop contact between women of Argos and women of the rural districts. The Junior club functions under the direction of Miss Marguerite Walker, president, and offers many pleasing programs of a literary and musical nature. Argos reflects, through the work of her organizations, ideals in keeping with those of the ancient city whose name she bears.



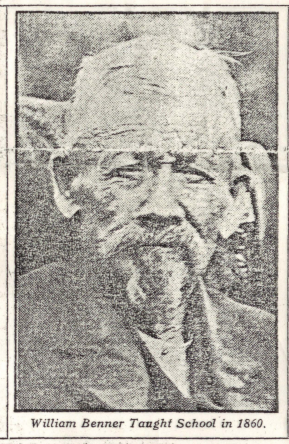
—Photos by Tribune Staff Photographer.

Home of Lewis Bose.



Argos Public School.

John Wickezer, Editor of Argos Reflector and Assistants.



William Benner Taught School in 1860.