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**History Of West Indianapolis**

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**VOLUME I**

**Prepared For**

**The West Indianapolis Historical Society**

**by**

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\* *Sulgrove notations = History of Indianapolis and Marion County - 1884.*

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## PROLOGUE

Approximately two decades ago, a small group of men from an obscure place known as Frog Island met to share remembrances of the past and to renew old friendships. Frog Island was a man made concrete reef fronting on Howard Street. This reef sheltered and protected a mental and emotional lagoon for the young men and women of the region. This reef and lagoon was located 1.3 miles south, and 1.7 miles west of the center of Indianapolis. It was a world in itself. The settings and the events which took place were powerful influences in shaping the natives who grew up and who identified themselves as "Frog Island Tadpoles".

Little did the individual, who coined the title, realize just how accurately this term described the region and the individuals who lived there. The location had literally been an island in the early days with floods and freshets constantly covering the area to the north and east called the "Valley", and the area to the south and west called the "Holler". The land mass, in between, was contemptuously called the "Hill", and it did act as an island between the other two regions until levees were built to keep White River and Eagle Creek in their channels. Unfortunately, the identity of the person who so fortuitously coined the phrase "Frog Island Tadpoles" has been lost in the midst of time.

The same remarkable forces were at work when the adult group who began meeting each year, identified itself as "The West Indianapolis Historical Society". When this title to the group was conferred, no one in the group was in possession of any local history of the area and no one meant to get that formal about the whole thing. Local history buffs in the area were unaware of the general casual and carefree mentality of the group. They began to pester the members wanting copies of the history of West Indianapolis which they were sure such an august group as the "West Indianapolis Historical Society" must possess. Since the group was actually a social group and not actually an historical society, a proposal was made to change the name to "The West Indianapolis Social Club"; therefore, a history of West Indianapolis would not be necessary. Things were out of control at this point. The group had become very large and took themselves seriously. They would have nothing to do with the name change when it was put to a vote. The only thing left to do, was find someone foolish enough to say, "I'll write the history of West Indianapolis". It was agreed to in the customary fashion, with a few beers all around. That my dear friends, is how I arrived at this task. I hope you will find the historical facts both informative and entertaining.

I thank all of my fellow "Tadpoles" for the many ways they have added joy and pleasure to my life. I could not have known a better set of companions to share my lifetime with. God bless us one and all, because we need it.

JRR

## THE FRONTIER

When the state of Indiana was admitted into the union, April 19, 1816, Congress voted for a donation of four sections, four square miles, of federally held land which could be selected and used when the site for the state capitol was established. On January 20, 1820, the legislature appointed ten commissioners to select the site for the permanent capitol. Nine of the ten commissioners met at Conners Station near what is now Noblesville. After examining several sites, four of the commissioners didn't feel that any of the sites were suitable and declined to vote. Five of the remaining commissioners had examined the White River area, where Fall Creek emptied into it, and voted for that area to be the site of the future state capitol. The principal reason for their decision was that this was the spot where everyone forded White River, since there were no roads or bridges at the time, and the state capitol was supposed to be located near the central part of the state. The problem with this area, which was later to become West Indianapolis, was it was primarily located in the flood plains of both White River and Eagle Creek. The area was so wet and disease ridden that it simply wasn't suitable for human habitation. Even the Indians would not remain in the area any length of time, because to do so, was almost a certain invitation for illness, and quite commonly death.

The area that was to be West Indianapolis would remain in this condition until three miles of levees were built along the west bank of White River. In the distant future, ditches were dug to drain surplus water back into the river.

The area on the east bank of White River, at the mouth of Fall Creek, wasn't much better. It also had terrible drainage and was constantly flooded by Pogues Run and other streams. The settlers who came to the area in 1820 moved as far east of the banks of the river as they could possibly get and still survive. The surrounding forest on both sides of the river were so dense and thick, no crops could be raised in the permanent shade. The only area which had enough sunlight to grow crops was an area called the "Deadening", which was about one hundred acres near what is now I.U.P.U.I. and Veterans Hospital.

On some earlier date, an infestation of caterpillars had killed the trees in that area and there was barely enough sunshine to raise a little corn, and a few pumpkins. The natural "Deadening" was shared collectively and was known as the "Big Field" at the time. - Sulgrove pg 30 -

Even though the early settlers in 1820 carefully avoided the life threatening area west of the White River, they still became ill. Among those who became ill, one in eight died of the sickness that first spring and summer. Everyone became so sick that spring, they were unable to plant their crops. This was at a time when speculators were pouring into the area in response to the states glowing adds describing how wonderful and safe it was. A burning desire existed in many to get rich off the land around the state capitol which was going on sale October 9, 1821.

Christopher Harrison was appointed commissioner to supervise the development of the new state capitol. He was scared off by the threat of the sickness immediately. His only official act seems to have been to appoint three men to a committee to select a graveyard. That done, he departed. Daniel Shaffer was one of the three men selected. One week, after he had helped make the selection he was dead of the sickness, and was buried in the "Graveyard" which he had helped to select. - Sulgrove - pg 25

The deaths, the illness, and the shortage of food didn't scare off the land speculators. The first sale of the land, donated by Congress, was scheduled in October, 1821, but in July and August of 1821 six enterprising men had bought up a two mile stretch of land between the west bank of White River and Eagle Creek. These six men jumped the gun, by two months, and bought up all of what appeared to be virtually uninhabitable, densely forested land, laced by pools of scummy water which constituted all of what was later to become West Indianapolis. In that entire two square mile area, two tiny knobs rose above the flood plains of Eagle Creek and White River at their crest. Both of these islands, rising out of the swampy forest, were located along what we later knew as Howard Street. One of these islands, in the swampy forest, ran from what we now know as Richland Street to Miller Street. So Frog Island really did exist, so to speak, and it was exactly where the "Frog Island Tadpoles" congregated. The other Island, rising out of the forest covered swamps, was in the area of what is now Howard Street near Belmont Avenue.

So what happened to the six men who snapped up all of the drenched land around our beloved Frog Island? Joel Wright purchased 80 acres. He became Justice of the Peace in Lawrence Township and was made President of the County Board in 1824. He signed all documents as "Preasdent of the Board". I am pleased to know I had company in my poor spelling early on. JRR. On April 1, 1828, Mr. Wright accidently cut an artery on his left leg below the knee. On April 6, 1828, his left leg was amputated. Three days later Mr. Wright died.

Zodoc Smith purchased 80 acres. Mr. Smith's "claim to fame" as a charter member of West Indianapolis was a reason for a fight. Does that sound familiar fellow "Tadpoles"? Mr. Smith and Andrew Wilson, who was the owner of a grist mill located on Governors Island in the Valley, were the participants in this historical altercation. They went into the woods where the Belt Railroad now crosses over Morris Street and settled their quarrel. To this day, no one knows who was the victor. This began a tradition of fighting in that area which many West Indianapolis residents can attest to.

Our next charter member of West Indianapolis was Michael Van Blaricum, who also purchased 80 acres. Mr. Van Blaricum committed the first murder in the Indianapolis area. On May 8, 1834, he drowned William McPherson while ferrying him across White River. His motive was a contemptuous dislike for the victim, who he regarded as a "Dude". History records that Mr. Van Blaricum probably meant no worse than to duck his victim and spoil his clothes, since he committed the crime by willfully rocking the boat and upsetting it. Mr. Van Blaricum was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison. He was released in eighteen months and returned to his job transporting passengers across the river in his boat. Needless to say "Dudes" probably avoided crossing the river in his boat. Mr. Van Blaricum had instituted two West Indianapolis traditions; the general dislike for "Dudes", and a tendency toward rocking the boat.

Morris Morris became a charter member of West Indianapolis by purchasing 180 acres of land. Mr. Morris was exceptional in that he abandoned the practice of law, giving the reason that his pursuit of his profession interfered with the Christian life that he desired to lead. We find no tradition from West Indianapolis, or anywhere else, of lawyers quitting their profession because they could not remain a good Christian and practice law.

Labian Harding also purchased 180 acres of land to become a charter member of West Indianapolis. He owned five farms in Wayne Township, six miles from the city, which was four miles west of the land that he purchased in West Indianapolis. Mr. Harding had seven children.

He may have purchased the land to give to them some time in the future, when it would be safer to live and work in the area. He also may have been perceptive enough to realize that at some time, in the future, the area of West Indianapolis would become a key area in transportation leading to the state capitol.

The last purchaser of land that was to become West Indianapolis was Jacob Ogle. He may have been a farmer, a hunter, or a trapper, because after his purchase of 80 acres no further mention of him is made in the history books. This also followed in the tradition of many people who resided in West Indianapolis, who worked hard, led good lives, and passed their way without further commentary in history books.

The only recorded Indian attack on Indianapolis was launched from the area of the "Valley", in the region of the old bayou, on a bright sunny morning in March. A man named Mr. Noland and his son had taken a walk to the river. When they were about fifty yards from the cabin of John McCormick, located just below what we know as Washington Street, they heard cries of, "**Help Murder!**" coming from the cabin. Several men quickly arrived on the scene and found a Delaware Indian called "Big Bottle" with a tomahawk in his hand trying to cut through the door which Mrs. McCormick had barricaded. Big Bottle stopped attacking the cabin door, when he saw the men approaching the cabin. He said he only wanted to scare the white squaw. It seems, as the story goes, that Mrs. McCormick had seen Big Bottle on the opposite side of the stream commanding her to bring a canoe over to him. She knew that Big Bottle wanted whiskey, and knew that he was a dangerous man when he was drinking. She refused to send Big Bottle the canoe, so he sat his gun against a tree, plunged into the river, and swam to the other side. When he reached the opposite bank, he approached the cabin with his tomahawk in his hand. This is when he was stopped by the men. He was taken back to his own side of the river, and was told that if he ever tried to scare the white squaw again her husband would kill him. This irritated Big Bottle, so he flourished his scalping knife toward Mrs. McCormick and intimated, by signs from her head to his belt, that he would take her scalp. It is a later observation, more than 170 years later, that the McCormick cabin, which just happened to be the local source of whiskey in it's function as a tavern, had a considerable number of men around in that early March sunlit morning to protect the area's safety and welfare. One must speculate that some of our early settlers might have been assembled for an early morning libation and other good fellowship.

Sulgrove pg 69 -

The only other Indian incident, involving the West Indianapolis area, is more pleasant. While riding through a dense woods, where West Indianapolis now stands, a Mr. Sulgrove with his small child held in front of him on his horse, saw an Indian following him at a rapid pace as if to overtake him. Feeling a little alarmed, Mr. Sulgrove hastened his horse ahead, as did the Indian. Knowing the impossibility of escaping in the sticky mud of the river bottom, he slowed down and let the Indian catch up to him. As the Indian approached, he held out a child's shoe which had dropped from the youngster while riding on the horse. The Indian had picked up the shoe and struggled through the mud to return it. This wasn't the first, or the last time an individual in West Indianapolis experienced an act of kindness from what appeared to be a "suspicious stranger". We all can attest to that. - Sulgrove pg 69 -

It might be of some interest here to mention an important physical feature of the early West Indianapolis area which was no longer present when we grew up there. Many of us heard rumors during our youth that the river once flowed through the area that we knew as Rodius Park.

Well, it did! White River used to flow through a bayou whose high bank fronted along Belmont Avenue. When it reached Rodius Park, it dipped down to the hill behind Assumption Church before it turned to flow along Harding Street. The Bayou branch rejoined the main course of White River at about Raymond Street. The distance between Belmont Avenue and Eagle Creek, which remained above water, was exceedingly small. The area just south of Miller Street also began to descend into low lying ground beyond Minnesota Street. Thus, that area also remained flooded or muddy virtually all of the time.

Because of the conditions described above, little, if any, settlement seems to have taken place in what was to be West Indianapolis. Almost no improvements were made in the Indianapolis area until the advent of the railroads in the 1840's. No community can exist or progress beyond the subsistence level when there are no roads, no bridges, minimal medical care, sickness is rampant, and the forest is so dense it is virtually impossible to grow crops.

Things were so bad in and around the state's new capitol that by 1829 serious discussions were made to abandon Indianapolis as the state capitol. Then, when the situation was at it's gloomiest and darkest, the fire of optimism was fueled like throwing gasoline on an open fire. The chance for speculation and the opportunity to grow rich reared it's head. Forget the deprivations, the sickness, the failures of the past real estate speculations, and the fact that the state legislature had just bailed out many prominent men who could have been ruined without state financial aid on there investments. The first glimmer of hope sprang up when the proposed National Road was altered fifteen miles north of it's planned route so it could pass through the state capitol. In 1828, the contracts were given to build the road. By 1834 the area's first bridge across White River at Washington Street was completed and the road had been macadamized through town extending it three miles west to Eagle Creek. Things looked rosey, but Congress didn't approve any money for the road's completion in 1839, so the building stopped. Thus, after reaching the general area of West Indianapolis, the National Road stopped and ended up going nowhere. You can bet, the people owning land on the west side viewed a hard surfaced road leading to a bridge across White River, and therefore, leading into the city, as a real opportunity for progress. It is my guess that roads or paths connecting West Indianapolis to the National Road probably sprang up immediately, even though no mention is made of them in the history books. My guess is Kentucky Avenue, which was an old buffalo trail pounded smooth by the animals hoofs, was connected to the National Road on a line approximating Belmont Avenue. That line would have kept it's length on the east bank of Eagle Creek, and out of the water and mud. This is only an educated guess. Perhaps some other reader could find out if this is true, if they like tracing down old mysteries.

The second, and more enthusiastically received scheme for growing rich, came with the passage of the "Internal Improvements Bill" in the state legislature January 26, 1836, which extended assistance to several railroads, turnpikes, and a canal project. The most notable of these were the Central Canal and the Madison Railroad. The Central Canal was to be the link which would connect Indianapolis, by horsedrawn boats, to all of the rest of the markets and cities in the United States. It was one of those "sure things" that you always here about. The state issued ten million dollars in bonds, and everybody jumped on the band wagon. The next year, 1837, the music stopped and the "thing" went bust. For six years the taxpayers were burdened with the debt, and for twenty years, the state could not borrow money from any reliable source. Even local real estate was affected. Land was abundant both in the town and the country, but unavailable, because it could not bring in cash, and could not be used to pay debts. Because the

states financial problems were so wretched, most of the people going west would not consider settling here.

The National Road should have been a chance of a lifetime for the men who had purchased the two square mile area in West Indianapolis in the 1820's. West Washington Street's junction with Rockville Road and Eagle Creek is where most of the wagon trains passed through our community in a steady stream day after day. They would stop and graze their horses and cattle, replenish their water supply, and continue on through the state of Indiana. The bond failure of the state, which rendered the real estate virtually useless, had a profound effect on how West Indianapolis failed to be settled at an earlier date. The changes that the National Road had on the community were still profound, and permanently changed the character of West Indianapolis forever. Commerce had come to this area, and the "winds of change" began to blow on the West Indianapolis area.

Prior to the building of the National Road, the two main enterprises in West Indianapolis were the Grist Mill and the Saw Mill combined. They were located along the slew at the head of the bayou where Governor's Island began which is near the present West Washington Street bridge. The additional commercial enterprise was the distillery, located slightly east of the Grist Mill. The distillery produced the local whiskey called "Bayou Blue". After the National Road was built, industrial enterprises began to move into the area in spite of the flooding problems. Some of the flooding may have been eliminated by building a levee on the west side of the river to protect the pier on the west end of the bridge.

It might be of some interest to note that virtually no money was to be had locally until 1838, when the National Road was built. The old copper cent, as big as a half dollar, was the only coin circulated to any degree. The rest of the coinage was primarily Spanish or Mexican. The "Picayune" was a Spanish coin rated at six and one fourth cents, or one sixteenth of a dollar. The next coin was a Spanish "Bit" worth two of the above, from which sprang the term "two bits." The Spanish coin called the "Pistareen" was worth twenty cents. The dollar coin was Mexican, and finally, there was the French five franc coin. All of this coinage was traceable to the movement of products produced in the area and carried down to New Orleans by flat boat. This was the kind of money that was used to purchase the two square mile area which was later constituted as West Indianapolis. New Orleans is where this money came from in exchange for corn, smoked pork, lumber, whiskey, and gentsing. The flat boats were loaded up during flooding, and "shot" down White River to the Wabash, proceeding on to the Ohio, then to the Mississippi, and finally arriving in New Orleans which was known as the Crescent City. After you traded your goods for the Spanish and French money, you had to take the Natchez Trace to return to this area. There were many robbers and villains waiting to steal your money. This was one of the reasons why this was a very dangerous trip. I forgot to mention that you also had to get by the very real and dangerous pirates on the lower reaches of the Ohio River on your way down to New Orleans. When you had completed your journey to New Orleans, and returned to Indianapolis, you had truly earned the money and whatever it would buy. Now you know the real price the men who bought the area had to pay for what was to become West Indianapolis. They deserve every ounce of respect we can give them.

It is little wonder that under the conditions described that the early settlers might have slapped back a little whiskey. It seems whiskey and gunpowder were the chief articles imported into the region for a good while. - Sulgrove pg 92 - In 1830 two hundred and thirteen barrels of whiskey



were imported, and this was in addition to the seventy-one barrels of "Bayou Blue" which was produced in the "Valley" area of West Indianapolis. That's ten thousand gallons of whiskey. The census shows the population of the area in 1830 was one thousand and ninety-four. Two-thirds of these people were women and children. That means three hundred and sixty-four adult men were present. As was the custom in those days, at least one fourth of these males belonged to the temperance groups. That left two hundred and seventy-three men to consume ten thousand gallons of whiskey. Needless to say, some drank more than others, so we had some really "heavy hitters" in the whiskey department among our forefathers. This may explain why grace over meals was common, and, "prayers were said when the hog was butchered". With that said, the meal then proceeded with all due speed. - Sulgrove pg 109 -

The tremendous whiskey consumption may explain how the Van Blaricum family, who operated the ferry boat across White River, cornered the market on being elected law officers. You may recall, Michael Van Blaricum committed the area's first murder when he rocked the boat and killed the "Dude". Well Jessie and James, no pun intended, Van Blaricum were elected to enforce the law in the area as the Town Marshal, and Chief of Police. - Sulgrove pg 487 -

Only adult men could vote and a decided majority of them liked their whiskey. This is pure conjecture, but because of the ferry landing's closeness to the McCormick tavern on the east bank and the ferry landing's closeness to the still on the west bank, where the "Bayou Blue" whiskey was produced, along with the family's ready cash flow from the ferry boat enterprise, made it very easy to buy votes with whiskey. This was a common practice at the time. The myths of time have covered the facts, so we will never know exactly how James was elected to Town Marshal, and Jessie to Chief of Police. I am certain both were worthy men and served well.

There are always local military heroes and this tale is about "men in the ranks". It seems a promising young man, named Lewis, had been appointed a Major to lead a group of local militia. On his first exposure, he gave the command, "Officers to your places, marshal your men into companies, separating the barefooted from those with shoes or moccasins, placing the guns, sticks and cornstalks into separate platoons, and then form a line ready to receive the Major". The order was quickly obeyed, and Major Lewis approached them with his horse rearing and plunging. The Major reorganized himself and took a position on a rising point of ground where he started to shout the command, "Attention!" Sadly his voice broke and his command sounded more like a whistle and a fife than a command. At that point, a voice from "within the ranks", and as shrill as the Major's, cried out, "Children, come out of the swamp, you'll get snake bit!" Cries then began to break out in the ranks, "You'll get snake bit!" The Major was so embarrassed, he removed his hat, drew his sword, and threw it on the ground. He tore his commission to pieces and resigned on the spot. Because of the heroic act of the "voice from within the ranks", no one knows how many lives may have been saved. from a totally inept leader. So the "men in the ranks" were truly heroes. - Sulgrove pg 78 -

Following the above incident, a little more formality was introduced into the local military structure. Thus, on June 3, 1832, when the news of the Sac and Fox Indians' breakout, under the leadership of Blackhawk, reached the area, the citizens' responded. In great haste, the Fortieth Regiment assembled here on June 9th. Each man was mounted and armed with a rifle, a knife, a tomahawk, and a supply of powder for the campaign. The troops assembled near the West Washington bridge, and the civilians were entertained by some serious bullet molding and

tomahawk throwing. Thus prepared, they mounted their steeds and rode off to defend Chicago, which was called Ft. Dearborn at the time. The Fortieth found the war virtually over when they reached the Fort. They then rode around the base of Lake Michigan to South Bend. The editor of the local newspaper in South Bend labeled the group with the title, "*The Bloody Three Hundred*" and it stuck. That should have a familiar ring to the "*Deadly Dozen*", which was formed by a group of "Frog Island Tadpoles".

The only other warlike incident of the campaign was when a picket on night duty fired upon a vagrant cow. Sadly, one casualty was suffered. It happened after their return. On July 3rd, the Fortieth decided to treat the local people to a display of their might. A Major named Larned William Warren had his hands blown off when he was helping to prepare a canon to fire a salute.

- Sulgrove pgs 109 and 110 -

So much for the heroes, what about the villains harbored in every community in the past as well as now? The deed most foul committed in this area involved the region along Morris Street near the Eagle Creek Bridge. This crime was committed by William Merrick and was as cruel and disgusting as anything we have now, including the woman who recently drove her two children into a lake while they were strapped into the car. William Merrick had courted a school teacher who had saved a considerable sum of money. He borrowed all of her money, seduced her, made her pregnant, and only married her after much solicitation. Within a day or two of her confinement to deliver the baby, he took his wife out riding after dusk. While in a small woods near the Morris Street Bridge, Merrick gave his wife a glass of beer laced with strychnine. The agony of death was horrible, and it forced the premature birth of the child who also died. He then drove the bodies to the bridge over Eagle Creek and buried them in the embankment in a shallow grave which he covered with logs. Merrick then returned to the stable, where he worked, and burned his dead wife's clothes. After several days, a boy going along Eagle Creek, found the bodies. Authorities were able to identify the body as Merrick's wife, and they arrested him. The community was outraged at the cruelty of the crime and that so many murders had been committed without punishment. It looked as if there might be a lynching. The authorities became so alarmed, they executed Merrick and another murderer being held for killing his wife. They were hung simultaneously on a scaffold built for two. This was a very singular event in our community, and it might be used to some advantage today with the types of crime which are being committed.

Another incident, less morbid, happened around the region where Morris Street crosses Eagle Creek. In the early days, Morris Street was a toll road. The toll dug deeply into the pockets of the farmers who used it to bring their products to the city for marketing. The toll gate for Morris Street was located about a quarter of a mile west of the Town of Belmont and controlled all of the traffic over both the Cemetery Bridge, now known as the Kentucky Avenue Bridge, and the Morris Street Bridge over White River. The farmers discovered a wagon track leading north just across the iron bridge over Eagle Creek. This track turned into the woods and was no longer being used as a lane to a house which had been abandoned. The farmers used the lane, to continue northward along a steep ugly bluff, through bushes and weeds, and leading to the west end of Oliver Avenue. This is where they crossed the Vandilia Railroad. Oliver Avenue was all bushy and stumpy at that point, but passable. Thus, it could be followed east to the Martinsville Pike where they crossed over Cemetery Bridge into the city. By this fashion, the dragon at the toll bridge could be cheated of his prey. This bypass, along Oliver Avenue, quickly became a busy road with a continuous procession of wagons to the river. A roving reporter for the News

heard a fellow on a corn wagon "holler" to another on a load of hay, "This saves a heap of toll don't it?" The reply was, "You bet!" This should remind you of some of the adventures, we of the "Tadpole" lineage, used to beat the dragon in our day. We were unaware that we were carrying on an old tradition of "beating the toll" in our own way. Some of those adventures will be discussed later. - Indianapolis Daily News August 13, 1877. -

From the above article in the news, a determination was made where the Town of Belmont, population 500, was located. This is the town that changed its name to West Indianapolis. The seed kernel of West Indianapolis was located at Morris Street and the Kentucky Avenue intersection. This location was difficult to find. While reading and searching through volumes of books, the one and only hint about the Town of Belmont was buried in an article about beating the toll. Searching for items in history is a detective story, and it becomes habit forming.

Sometime during the states economic crisis, Nicholas McCarty ended up owning virtually all of the part of West Indianapolis called the "Valley". He was wealthy because he had been a first rate store owner. He was also smart, and generous. Nicholas McCarty bought the whole bayou, which was all the way back from the river to Belmont Avenue and south along Harding Street to below Minnesota Street to the river. He bought the land primarily for his rope factory. Yes, he was smart to grow hemp as a crop which was extremely hard to kill. He needed the standing pools of water, south of the city, to soak the stems so they would decompose and free the strands of fiber which were used in his ropewalk on the east side of the river. This valuable product was made from weeds and waste land. The plan was brilliant. Sadly, during the states economic failure, he had to surrender a large portion of his holdings so that all creditors could be fully paid. The rope factory went under.

Nicholas McCarty's workers had to saw down numerous huge sycamore trees to make the land usable on the bayou farm. He was smart enough to have the logs sawed into lumber. He then used the lumber to build houses for his workers. McCarty applied the workers' rent toward ownership of their houses. Thus, even unskilled laborers working for Nicholas McCarty could own their own homes. That was unheard of in that time. Nearly everything Nicholas McCarty touched seemed to turn to gold. Just as it appeared the bayou farm might be a questionable investment, the railroads moved into Indianapolis. The railroads had to build bridges over White River. In order to do that, they had to build levees to protect their bridges. The same levees converted his bayou farm into valuable land for industrial expansion. He used part of his profits to improve the streets, which were among the best surfaced streets in the city. To make the neighborhood more livable and less barren, trees were planted at twenty foot intervals along the streets. The man was amazing. He helped the poor, particularly the orphans. They say that what goes around comes around, and with Nicholas McCarty that seemed to be exactly the case.

Prosperity was coming to West Indianapolis. For an area which didn't have a currency, had been bypassed by the Indians, and was considered almost uninhabitable at one point, it was amazingly becoming the fastest growing economic and residential area in the entire state. This process was really accelerated by the building of the Belt Railroad and the Union Stockyards.

## INDUSTRY, HOMES, and TRANSPORTATION

The factor which "kick started" the expansion of both Indianapolis and West Indianapolis was the advent of the railroads. From out of the ashes of the states financial failure in canal building, one burning coal emerged which made all of the losses and suffering worthwhile. That burning coal was the Madison Railroad which had been included as one of the improvements to be paid for out of the states ill fated bond issue. The state sold the Madison Railroad to a private company in 1843 after the canal failure. Little, or nothing, could be done with it at that time because no financing was available.

The Madison Railroad was built by fits and starts, but by the summer of 1847 it had reached Greenwood, ten miles south of the city. People became excited, money was obtained, and ten miles of additional track was put down. At nine o'clock in the morning of October 1, 1847, the last spike was driven. Two excursion trains arrived with much shouting, shooting, and spouting. The impact was beyond belief. Within two months, the price of corn and wheat had doubled, while the price of imported goods dropped like a rock. The means for commerce and trade had arrived. - Sulgrove pg. 135 -

In 1847, there were 228 miles of railroad track in Indiana. Three years later, in 1850, there were 2,163 miles of track. This was a ten fold increase in three years. By 1860, Indiana ranked fifth in the nation in the size of it's rail network. People knew a good thing when they saw it, and they knew railroads would improve their lives.

With every improvement there is a cost. No one could perceive at that time that massive modern wars could not be conducted without the railroads to haul and move huge numbers of troops, their supplies and munitions, and to feed the armaments industry. Five years later, 1865, the Civil War began with killing and destruction on a scale man had never seen before. The Civil War also brought prosperity to almost all industries, but Indianapolis boomed economically.

By this time, there were several railroads coming into Indianapolis. One was the Indianapolis and Vincennes line which followed Kentucky Avenue. Another railroad was the Vandailia Railroad whose main route through West Indianapolis was along Oliver Avenue. The Indianapolis and St. Louis line basically ran parallel with Washington Street. The building of three railroad bridges over White River was instrumental in making most of this possible. It was necessary to build levees on the west bank of the river to protect the piers of the bridges at their west ends. The area, which was to become West Indianapolis, suddenly found itself protected from the ravages of constant flooding of the river. The levee protection became complete when the bridge for the Belt Railroad near Harding Street was completed around 1877. This is also when the Union Stockyards was completed. This was the time jobs became available and people began pouring into the area which emerged as West Indianapolis.

By 1882, the village of Belmont, population 471, was incorporated as the Town of West Indianapolis. The date was April 4, 1882. After West Indianapolis was incorporated, it became necessary to hold an election to select town officials. Elected as Town Trustees were ; David Johnson, Joseph McClain, and George Jenks. Clerk; Charles F. Risner, Treasurer; Charles Shell Marshal. - The Indianapolis Times - February 18, 1962. -

Miss Zimmerman, a long time teacher at school 49, says she can remember when the streets of West Indianapolis were just cowpaths leading to the stockyards where most of the early residents

were employed. West Indianapolis grew rapidly and by the 1890 census it had outstripped all other suburbs in growth having a population of 3,527. The area had expanded its population sevenfold in eight years. That is a rate of growth which rivals anything, but a gold mining town. It is a rate of growth just slightly less than a hundred percent increase each year for eight years. West Indianapolis had become a very hot item, very hot.

In 1894, the town was incorporated as a city, and an election had to be held. There were nearly seven candidates for Mayor, and nearly that number for the remaining offices. There were three Wards. The Second Ward was the area constituting the "Hill". That meant the First Ward constituted the "Valley", and the Third Ward the "Holler". It should come as no surprise that there was a disposition of the First and Third Wards not to nominate anyone from the Second Ward, the "Hill". Less than three weeks before the election for Mayor, Abbert of the First Ward was in the lead, Tolin of the Third Ward was second, and Williamson of the Second Ward was third with a fighting chance.

Michael Maholm, who was Marshal, was seeking a third term, but many of his fellow Republicans were opposed to giving it to him. They felt because of the perversity of gambling dens in the city, in spite of his failure to clean them up in two terms, he might not bring to much strength to the ticket. Still, there was much "influence" behind him. One of the persons, who was interested in the job of Marshal, said it would be worth fifty to one hundred dollars a week in addition to his salary to be the Marshal who would permit a "wide open policy". Coming from more than one hundred years in the past, bribing still takes place.

The Democrats were slow in getting candidates to run for office. Homer Shake and John Loshare were two candidates for City Clerk; John Vandiver and J.T. Elloit ran for councilman of the First Ward. - The Indianapolis News April 7, 1894. The election for West Indianapolis' first Mayor was held. According to J.P. Dunn's reliable history, "Greater Indianapolis", it was claimed by both sides that "Boodle" was freely used. It was not recorded that anybody required proof of who voted, or how many times. This doesn't say much for the honesty of the first city fathers of West Indianapolis and its first election.

Apparently, A.B. Tolin of the Third Ward seemed the most suitable for those with the most boodle, because he was elected Mayor of the City of West Indianapolis. Mayor Tolin was a senior member of a livestock commission firm operating out of the stockyards. This could be a reason why he won the election.

Michael Maholm lost his bid for a third term, and probably went to work for the "bad guys" as a consultant or something of that nature, as is done in our times. Thomas Perry was elected Marshal, and it became his duty to fight sin and temptation, and other deviations from the straight and narrow. The other officials were O.E. Williamson, Clerk, and Walter S. Hoss, Treasurer.

The life of West Indianapolis, as a independent city, did not last long. West Indianapolis was annexed to the city of Indianapolis on March 15, 1887, just three short years after it's birth as a city. The annexation was more like an abortion than anything else. When West Indianapolis was annexed, it had a debt of seventy nine thousand dollars which was much larger than any other community annexed to the city. Indianapolis was glad to pay the seventy nine thousand dollars, and probably a lot more. It was the best seventy nine thousand dollars Indianapolis ever spent. The West Indianapolis community, with it's huge tax base, ended up having to pay for the improvements and good life style of many a community which felt itself far more exclusive. They were sheltered from the stigma of industrial and commercial development in their exclusively residential communities, but they couldn't support themselves with the taxes they raised. Of course, none of the communities would admit this.

The annexation of the City of West Indianapolis into the City of Indianapolis so quickly after it had been formed as a city, was no accident. Under the surface of the annexation, which was rammed through the town council in four days, Friday through Monday, was a battle involving two financial giants trying to gain control of massive amounts of income and revenue. The Citizens' Street Railway System and the Indianapolis Street Railway Company were locked in a titanic struggle which closely parallels the struggle now going on between T.V. Cable Companies, A.T.& T., and other rivals over control of the communication highways. It seems the city of Indianapolis had granted "rights of way" to one of these groups, and the City of West Indianapolis had granted "rights of way" to the other company. The company from West Indianapolis was trying to get it's foot in the door and compete with the company in Indianapolis. This was not looked on favorably by many powerful individuals who were trying to prevent it. This is the first stage in which political elimination of the public body of the City of West Indianapolis was going to be eliminated. The murder was not held in the woods near the banks of Eagle Creek., but was held in the City Hall.

Very suddenly, and without warning, the solution to the struggle between the public railway companies seemed to be to eliminate West Indianapolis as a independent city. It was done with great dispatch, seldom witnessed in the political arena, except when they are up to no good and have to act before the deed can be prevented. Whatever the enticements were, the political leaders in West Indianapolis agreed to let their political existence cease to exist without a sound of protest. The Indianapolis City Council had drawn up their plans for annexation without the knowledge of the officials of West Indianapolis. At least, that is what was written in the Indianapolis News on Friday, March 12, 1897. The plan was submitted to the Indianapolis City Council on Thursday evening March 11, 1897. The city attorney said he was not prepared to decide all of the complicated legal factors involved, street car complications, gas company contracts, etc. He prepared the annexation ordinance before determining the legality of the action. The city attorney stated that many legal questions were being bypassed temporarily so they wouldn't interfere with the preliminary steps of the annexation. He then said, he would devote Saturday, Sunday, and the daylight hours on Monday to determining the legal ramifications involved before the City Boards meeting to ratify the annexation. On Monday night, the city attorney said there were no legal reasons to prevent the annexation of the City of West Indianapolis. Therefore, the annexation was ratified in two days..

The City of West Indianapolis existed less than three years. The truth of how the City of West Indianapolis was annexed is not known, but historians say it was done so quickly and secretly that nothing could be done to prevent it. The citizens of the City of West Indianapolis had no

choice but to become a part of the capitol of Indiana, Indianapolis. If they had their choice, at that time, they would have remained the City of West Indianapolis.

**THIS IS INSTALLMENT ONE OF THE WEST INDIANAPOLIS HISTORICAL SOCIETIES HISTORY OF WEST INDIANAPOLIS.**

*If you like it and want me to continue call me at 317-823-6008, or drop me a line with some little story or other information that you have that I might be able to use in future installments.*

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