22. Taverns of Pioneer Days

The following accounts of the early inns and taverns in Indiana and Illinois tell about taverns and inns in the northern parts of Indiana and Illinois, which leads me to believe that the Oregon Trail may have contributed to their existence. Elkhart County is near South Bend, 110 miles east of Chicago and 150 miles north of Indianapolis. Since these accounts are of early taverns and inns, in the first part of the 1800s, we can perhaps be reasonably sure that by 1854 there were more inns and taverns, particularly as the westward migration grew in numbers. The following account is *from Taverns of Pioneer Days, Elkhart County, Indiana,* Pioneer History of Elkhart County, Indiana, Goshen, Indiana 1930.

TAVERNS OF PIONEER DAYS

AMONG THE institutions, if such they may be called, which did service to the first settlers on their way to new homes and to those who were traveling farther west were the old time taverns. These were scattered along the route, some of them in the villages and others in the open country or alongside the roads which had been cut through the forests. Those in the villages and towns were often somewhat pretentious while the forest taverns were generally of a very primitive character. Some of them were only double log cabins which afforded room for two or three travelers to sleep. Others were larger and furnished fairly good accommodations for the traveling public. The bill of fare did not provide a great variety, but there was usually a goodly supply of whatever was to be had. No efforts were spared to make the stranger comfortable and to provide for his wants to the extent of the resources which were available. As many of the early travelers came on foot or horseback at first, comparatively little room either in the house or stable was needed to accommodate them. A little later after wagon roads had been cut through and movers came it became necessary to make provision for whole families, sometimes several at a time and oftentimes both tavern and stable were taxed to their utmost capacity. It also became necessary to provide pens for the stock which the travelers brought with them to their new home. It was by no means an infrequent occurrence to find all of the beds occupied before all of the guests were provided for. Then it became necessary to utilize the floor for a sleeping place. If the travelers had in their wagons any robes, blankets, quilts or anything else which could be utilized either to lie on or for covering, those articles were brought in and made to do service. The lodgers would prepare their beds as best they could and lie down with feet toward the fireplace to enjoy their night's repose. In the towns the inn keeper was frequently an important personage. When a traveler either rode or drove up, he was on hand to greet the stranger and make him feel at home. His horse was sent to the stable and he was seated by the fireplace in the bar room where he could rest from his journey. When a family or several travelers came in a wagon the same attention was shown to all of them and the team received due care. Oftentimes these hostelries were taxed to the utmost, as were the taverns along the road. In those instances utter strangers had to share the same bed and all had to be satisfied to put up with such accommodations as could be provided for them. Very often several of the villagers would drop in during the evening for a chat with the travelers and to hear whatever news they might be able to bring from their former homes.

One of the first taverns built in the county was that of Matthew Boyd, who came in 1828 and settled at Benton. He built his tavern on the south side of the river opposite the site of the present village and near the old ford which was only a few feet below the bridge. His hotel business evidently was

not as profitable as he could have wished and he devoted some of his time to farming and also operated a ferry. George Kinnison is authority for the statement that when the water in the Elkhart river was low, so that the people could use the ford, Boyd would go down the river some distance and fell trees into the stream, by this means raising the water so that travelers would be compelled to patronize his ferry. The late John W. Irwin described Boyd as a tall, well built, muscular man of rather commanding presence, one of those individuals who enjoy living at the edge of civilization. Mr. Irwin also said that he was inclined to engage in disputes with his neighbors and sometimes when he was getting the worst of it would enforce his arguments by physical force, in those instances usually coming off victorious. He lived to quite an advanced age dying in 1868.

Several miles farther northwest, on Elkhart prairie, was the Wilkinson tavern which obtained considerable notoriety in its day. Some rather gruesome tales were told concerning that hostelry, some individuals claiming that certain travelers who were supposed to have money with them were never heard of after stopping there.

In a record of his personal recollections describing the journey of his father's family from Fairfield county, Ohio, to Elkhart county, the late Aaron Work referred to both of these taverns and also to a pioneer farm house where they stayed overnight. As his account is not very lengthy it will be given in his own words:

"The evening before we arrived at our destination the wagons drove into Benton. The big wagon hauled up before Boyd's tavern, Uncle Robert on the saddle horse driving the four-horse team. Mr. Boyd came out with a chair for the ladies to step down on in alighting from the wagon. Uncle said, 'Wait a minute, I want to see how things look inside?' He came out in a minute, sprang into the saddle and drove on. The next tavern was Wilkinsons. Mr. Wilkinson came out and said to Uncle Robert, 'Drive right in, drive right in.' 'No', Uncle said, 'I want to know how much it is going to cost first.' 'Well, how many are in the company?' Uncle told the number of men, women and children, the number of horses, cattle and sheep. Mr. Wilkinson figured it up, so much. 'No sir,' Uncle said, 'We can't pay it. We'll drive on home before we'll pay a bill like that,' cracked his whip and drove on.

"The next place they stopped was Samuel Stutsman's. It was then after dark. Mr. Stutsman owned at that time the farm owned more recently by the late Levi Smith, who bought it from David Stucky and moved from near Elkhart. The farm was one of the best in the edge of Elkhart prairie. Mr. Stutsman had plenty of barn room and feed and shelter for the stock, and plenty of house room for the weary, hungry movers. He granted cordially the request for lodging and the bill the next morning was merely nominal."

Among Goshen's earliest taverns was the one which was conducted by James Cook and located on the northeast corner of Fifth and Market streets (Lincoln Avenue). That was a popular hotel in its day and was well patronized by the traveling public. There was another tavern on Main street not far from the site of the old Masonic block, but the writer has been unable to learn the name of its proprietor.

Abner Stilson conducted a tavern several years at the corner of Main street and Lincoln avenue. Here the commissioners' court held its sessions from May 1832 until August 1833, when the court house was ready for occupancy. Mr. Stilson was quite a prominent figure in the little town for a number of years. At the time of the scare over the Sauk war he was sent to Indianapolis to petition the governor to send troops for the protection of the new settlement. Afterward he located in

Elkhart where he engaged in the same business which he had followed in Goshen.

The Pierce tavern was also located on that same corner. Whether it was the same building as that used by Stilson or not, the writer does not know. At the rear end of the lot on the site of the Hawks-Kauffman hardware store was a barn which belonged to the tavern. Both buildings burned in 1854. For quite a number of years this tavern had been one of the popular hostelries of northern Indiana and had a large patronage. It was fully as much to the little town as the Alderman is to the city today. It was conducted by Henry Pierce and his wife, who after Mr. Pierce's death became Mrs. DeFreese. Dr. A. C. Jackson, who boarded there, said that no more appetizing meals were ever served than those prepared by Mrs. Pierce, who was assisted by Catharine Ferguson, afterward Mrs. Tom Miller. Writing for the Goshen Democrat in 1900 Dr. Jackson said : "Fifty years ago the elite were wont to meet in the Pierce hall and dance to the sweet music of Hull and Arnold's band, as gay and happy a set as ever tripped a toe."

About the same time that the Pierce tavern burned Major John W. Violett, who settled on Elkhart prairie in the spring of 1829 and who was in 1830 elected the first county recorder, built the Violett house on the site where the Alderman now stands. The hotel was completed in 1855 and remained unchanged until 1881 when it was bought by Gen. Milo S. Hascall, remodeled and given the name Hotel Hascall. The old Violett House was one of the noted places of the town, afterward city, during its existence under that name. Many of the country's great men were entertained there, as it was the stopping place for all of the speakers of the several political parties for many years. Among those who were entertained there may be mentioned Thomas A. Hendricks, James R. Doolittle, Lyman Trumbull, Joseph E. McDonald, Schuyler Colfax, Benjamin Harrison, George W. Julian, and David Turpie.

One block north of the Violett house on the northwest corner of Pike and Main streets was the Tremont house, afterward called the Empire house. One of its proprietors was Isaac Middlesworth, who afterward operated the old Bonneville mill. The building was a frame building and in the early eighties the several parts were converted into three dwellings. One of these is still standing on the south side of east Pike street.

The old Julian house was another frame hotel on the east side of Main street, just south of Clinton street. It was conducted for many years by Russell Morton, who was a well-known character in Goshen forty years ago but is now almost forgotten.

Patterson's tavern was one of the early day taverns and was located in York township four miles northeast of Middlebury on the Middlebury, and White Pigeon road. Sometimes it was called the half-way house because it was half way between those two towns. When the north-eastern part of the county was settled many of the settlers came from the east via Detroit and from there to White Pigeon. For those settlers who came into Elkhart county as well as for others who traveled in this direction the old half-way house proved to be a convenient stopping place. It was owned and operated by a man named Patterson, hence its name.

Jacob Ellis, father of Joel and John Ellis, who located on Two-Mile Plain in 1831, kept a tavern called the Wayside Inn for several years. His place accommodated the east and west travel for several years before Elkhart taverns began to attract patronage.

Some of the old Elkhart taverns are mentioned in the chapter on "*Early Days of Elkhart*."

Early Taverns and Inns in Illinois

By Paul Wilson Elder

"And tales were told Of Indians, bears and panthers bold,

Till on each urchin's frowsy head the bristling hair stood up with dread." John Bryant

John Dixon was a pioneer well known to the early settlers of the surrounding country. The Indians named him "Nachusa" – meaning Old Grey Head, because of his flowing white hair and smooth shaven face. Mr. Dixon was one of the earliest pioneers of what is now Bureau County coming here from Springfield in 1827 and living here until 1829 when he sold his land to Charles Boyd and went to settle on Rock River. Arriving there, he purchased the Ogee ferry, from Joseph Ogee, the son of a squaw and French trader, thereafter it was known as Dixon's ferry, and his home as "Nachusa Tavern." Here it was, that the kettle hung over the fire, and the cornmeal baked in the oven, while his friends, white man or Indian, might sit around the fire and smoke.

The old records kept by Mr. Dixon are still in existence and are very interesting. They show plain entries and prices charged his customers and give the names of many Indians to whom he gave credit. Some of these were Old Grey-Headed Pottawatomie, Old Grey Head's Fat Son, Man-with-a-Sick-Squaw, Mother Flat Face, Blinky, Limpy, and Sour Eads Ox. Food for man and horse is billed at $.25, and a bed cost a quarter. Nachusa often entertained honored guests, for all men who passed up Rock River stopped under the roof tree of that honored pioneer. Shabona once said, "Me white man's friend, but all white men not like Nachusa."

At the beginning of the Black Hawk War, when nineteen hundred volunteers answered the call, Mr. Dixon was commissioned to furnish the provisions and was called "Major of the Steer-battalion", and to feed so great a host in the wilderness was no small task. At this time among John Dixon's customers were, Abraham Lincoln, Soldier; Jefferson Davis, who is later to guide the Confederacy; Albert Sidney Johnston, who is to head Davis' armies; William S. Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton, and Zachary Taylor, who is to precede Lincoln by a few years as President of the United States. Zachary Taylor's account shows that he ran a bill of $11.50 at John Dixon's; he paid $5.00 on account and gave his note for the remaining $6.50.

Nachusa Tavern on "Galena Avenue in Dixon, now a prominent hotel, was built in 1837, later remodeled, then rebuilt, and doubtless its many patrons would be greatly interested in its history, as one of the oldest Taverns in Illinois.

The beautiful city of Dixon is a fitting monument to John Dixon's memory. He lived here until he was a very old man, surviving all his family. He accumulated much wealth at one time and was known far and wide as one of the warm-hearted and benevolent pioneers, whose enterprise, public spirit, and warm generosity, were like sweet sunshine to all about him.

"The Wolf Tavern"

On a Saturday afternoon in June of 1831, four prairie Schooners could be seen approaching Chicago, then a mere settlement and Indian Trading Post. Slowly and wearily to man and beast,

the last miles had dragged away. The last mile or two there was something like a road, but the road ended not very far from the fort, in a lane that was closed with a gate. On the right was a small graveyard, stretching at an angle to the lake shore, and on the left was a field and garden, cultivated for the soldiers at Fort Dearborn.

There was a hurry and bustle when the little tired company arrived; and they with their wagons, weary horses and oxen were ferried over in the presence of all Chicago! This was the Hampshire Colony from Massachusetts, an organized Congregational Church of eighteen members, and some others who had joined the Colony. This little tired company desired a quiet, restful place, where they could "refresh themselves on the Sabbath"; and upon inquiry they learned there were three Taverns in Chicago, from which to choose. The "Sauganash" kept by Mark Beaubien, "Millers," and the Wolf kept by Elijah Wentworth. Mark Beaubien's Tavern was nearly full and was inadequate to the accommodation of the new arrivals, and Elijah Wentworth was most happy to welcome the large party to his Tavern – "The Wolf."

After supper, and at an early hour, the little colony whose migration to the prairies was another sailing of the Mayflower, was putting out, one by one, the candles that lighted the rooms and forgetting the discomforts of many days and nights of camp life, in the deepest slumber.

If the register of this old Tavern, "The Wolf," is still in existence, upon its pages will be found the names of Elijah Smith and wife, and Eli Smith and wife newlyweds, the last two named being the Great Grand Father and Great Grand Mother of the writer. So naturally to me the memory of this couple is very dear, and the "Wolf Tavern" of Chicago stands out as quite the most interesting old Tavern, in the State of Illinois.

"The Yankee Tavern"

"From the East came a man of 'Excellent pith' Whom 'Fate tried to conceal by naming him Smith',

He built a log cabin, aided by kin, Known in pioneer days as 'Smith's Yankee Inn'."

(Eli Smith).

Should you happen to be motoring along the Dixon road, approaching the old Red Covered bridge about two miles North of Princeton, the left may be seen beautiful little hills with their many trees, nestling among these trees of lovely foliage, in one's fancy can be seen, the Old "Yankee Tavern."

Yet, the scene must change, if we are to picture a log cabin Tavern standing there in the year of 1831. Elijah Smith, one of the earliest pioneers, coming here from Massachusetts with the Hampshire Colony in June of 1831, built, and was proprietor of the "Yankee Inn". His cabin was near the old stage road, over which droves of cattle, hogs, mail coaches and emigrant wagons passed. Only six cabins were built along the entire length of the road, these stood fifteen or twenty miles apart, so as to "entertain travelers." Aside from these six cabins, no mark of civilization could be seen between Peoria and Galena, as the country, through which it passes was still in the possession of the Indians.

No doubt many interesting incidents occurred in the very early history of the "Yankee Tavern." We know of a business meeting of the Hampshire Colony Congregational Church being held there in October 1831, at which *three* members were present, and prayer was offered. Mr. Smith also

served the countryside as Post Master, keeping the "Post Office" in a split bottom basket, hung in the loft of his cabin, and taught the first school west of the Illinois River, in Yankee Tavern.

The following rates were charged travelers about this time: Meals, 25 cents; lodging, 12 ½ cents; stabling and feed for horse, 12 ½ cents; we also learn from old records that the first money appropriation ever made by Bureau County was $15.00 "to procure plank with which to build bridges across the sloughs emptying into Bureau Creek, on the road to Elijah Smith's."

The old Yankee Tavern was quite popular in the days when Owen Lovejoy lived, and preached the Freedom of the Slave, as earnestly as he preached the Gospel. One long-remembered and interesting event occurred one cold December night, when a Mr. Harris arrived with two slave girls, whose feet were badly frozen. He arranged to stay overnight and planned to continue his journey with the girls to St. Louis, where he expected to be liberally rewarded for the return of these runaway girls. However, little events often change the deepest laid plans, for Mr. Smith was an ardent believer in the freedom of the slave, as were his family and guests who happened to be stopping at the Inn that night. So they framed a little scheme to outwit Mr. Harris, and it was arranged that one of the guests, a Mr. Ross, should feign illness. Later in the evening when Mr. Ross became "suddenly ill," and his case not responding to the remedies administered, but growing worse, and suffering "intense pain" he was obliged to retire for the night. But suddenly, upon reaching the top of the stairs, Mr. Ross found "his pain" had suddenly left him, and he quickly and quietly walked down another flight of stairs (this being a double cabin) out into the night, and very soon the girls were placed on his horse, hurrying away toward the Illinois river, where friends would help them on their long journey to freedom. Mr. Harris upon searching the Tavern for the girls later on, demanded that the search should be continued on the entire premises, threatening the lives of everyone in the Tavern, if they were not found. Mr. Smith, taking his lantern, very obediently and politely as a host, helped to search the barns and haystacks, but no trace of the girls could be found. Mr. Harris stayed at the Yankee Tavern for several days, hoping to locate his captives, but was obliged to return to St. Louis a disappointed and wiser man, for the girls were assisted by friends and eventually reached Canada and freedom.

So the proprietor of Yankee Tavern, this little unassuming man, truly "lived in the house by the side of the road, and was a friend to man."

"Princeton Hotel"

Nearly one hundred years ago Princeton was only a little settlement whose business and public buildings consisted of one small church, one general store, a blacksmith shop, and one hotel called the "Princeton Hotel." This hotel was built by Stephen Triplett in 1834 and consisted of a one-story frame building 16 x 18 feet, with an earthen fire place and a stick chimney. It was located on the east side of Main Street on, or near the lot occupied by the building recently vacated by the John Coddington Agency and was very popular. In the year 1836 a Christmas dance was held here, at which time some of the guests were: Mrs. Benjamin Smith, Mother of Shelby Smith; Mrs. Swanzy, wife of De. Swanzy; and a Miss Langworthy – who, it is said, was the "belle of the ball."

"The Weaver Hotel"

The Weaver Hotel was one of Princeton's earliest hotels and was quite popular in its day. It was erected in 1844 by Obidiah Weaver, and stood just north of Hotel Clark, and opposite Apollo Hall. The red brick building with frame addition is still standing, and this hotel in its day was the home of the prominent lawyers of Princeton. Among them were Judge Stipp, Milton Peters, J.C. Taylor and Milo Kendall.

Many parties and dances were held in the frame addition in the rear of the hotel, and it is most interesting to note that Mr. Parker Newell, distinguished as being the first white child born in Princeton, attended one of these parties and his first dance was with Miss Hannah Weaver, (afterwards the wife of Judge Knox).

Note: The writer is indebted to Lester B. Colby, A. H. Knox, Andrew Swanzy, and Eli Smith for material concerning these old Taverns.

These accounts of early pioneer taverns and inns reinforce our assurances that by the time Heinrich and Maria made their trip in 1854 there would be many more lodging accommodations available. Let's review again the reality of the migration travel to Iowa already cited about the years 1854 and 1855.

"The immigration into Iowa the present season is astonishing and unprecedented", writes Mr. Clark quoting from an account published in an eastern journal in June 1854. "For miles and miles, day after day, the prairies of Illinois are lined with cattle and wagons, pushing on toward this prosperous State. At a point beyond Peoria, during a single month, seventeen hundred and forty-three wagons had passed, and all for Iowa. Allowing five persons to a wagon, which is a fair average, would give 8715 souls to the population." "Commenting on this statement," continues Mr. Clark, "an Iowa City editor added: 'This being but the immigration of the month, and upon one route out of many, it would not be an unreasonable assertion to say that 50,000 men, women, and children will have come into this State by the first of December, reckoning from the 1st of September.'"

During the fall and early winter of 1854 there was an almost uninterrupted procession of immigrants crossing the ferries at Prairie du Chien, McGregor, Dubuque, Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk. Sometimes they had to wait in camp two or three days for their turn to cross. It was estimated that twenty thousand people crossed the ferry at Burlington in thirty days, and at the end of that period the number increased to six or seven hundred a day. About one wagon in a hundred was marked Nebraska, the others were to halt in Iowa. And even at Keokuk such large numbers of settlers came in by boat that a journalist was led to say that "by the side of this exodus, that of the Israelites becomes an insignificant item, and the greater migrations of later times are scarcely to be mentioned." It was said that one thousand people from Richland County, Ohio, alone, came to Iowa that fall; while long double-header trains brought into Chicago thousands of homeseekers every week.