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# The Influence of Rivers on the History of Indiana

Ralph L. Bailey

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THE INFLUENCE OF RIVERS ON THE  
HISTORY OF INDIANA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of History and Political Science  
Butler University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Ralph L. Bailey  
July 1960

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# RIVERS OF INDIANA

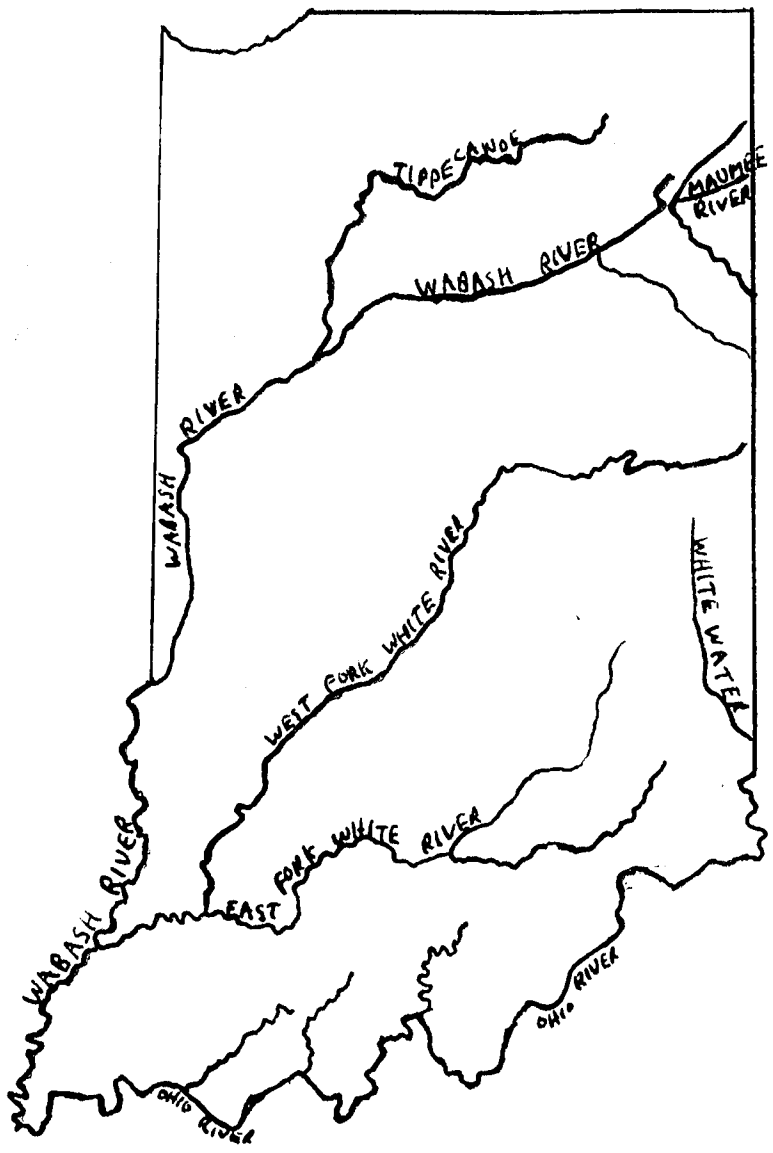


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## PREFACE

Evidences of the varying influence of bodies of water on the progress of mankind are apparent in the study of history. Our earliest civilizations developed along the banks of the Nile River and in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Nearly all of the ancient cities of any commercial importance were located on or near a body of water that could be used for transportation and communication. In ancient as well as more modern times, water has served as one of man's chief highways. In the United States rivers were especially valuable as avenues of transportation. Our early commerce moved along rivers and the movement of the settlers westward was facilitated by using the westward-flowing streams.

Man has found rivers to be useful for purposes other than as avenues of commerce. Battles were won in the past because one side was able to make use of a river and in the early days of United States history, the Indian's favorite battle-plan was to lay an ambush at a point where the trail crossed a river or stream. More civilized uses of rivers have been to mark boundaries between political units of countries, to be used for domestic purposes, to be used for industry, to furnish power, to provide sources for food and certain raw materials, and to provide means for recreation. Most of the water used for such domestic purposes as drinking, cooking, washing, bathing, or lawn and garden came from

a stream. Industry needs water to wash materials, to add to materials and goods, to flush sewage, to make steam in boilers, and to cool or air-condition equipment and buildings. Man also uses water for livestock and for irrigation. Water is also used to turn mill wheels in most of the world's inhabited regions. It is easy to see why modern man has become increasingly aware of the uses and resources furnished by the many bodies of water in the world. Last but not least, whether a seashore, a tree-lined brook or river, a small pond or large lake, water is useful to swim in, to go boating and fishing on, or just to look at.

This study deals with the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana. It is difficult for us to visualize that some of the small streams that we cross many times with hardly a glance, were once the most important link in a vast chain of commerce. The early settler depended on these streams to get his surplus products to market. A glance at a road map of Indiana will reveal the importance that the early settler assigned to rivers and streams. Can you find any city or town of any size that is not located near a stream of some kind? This study dealt with the ways in which the early settler used the rivers and how they influenced his mode of living. Some historical events involving rivers were studied in the light of their influence on the history of Indiana.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

When one studies the history of Indiana, he finds that it is rich in minor details of real interest and importance, but not in events that are exclusively its own. Along with the other states of the Old Northwest, Indiana did its share to roll back the frontier and to develop agriculture and industry where once the Indian roamed. The pioneer in Indiana successfully coped with the problems of the frontier and withstood the hardships of Indian raids and other privations. But the story was much the same in Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, and other states in that area. It would be rather difficult to develop a topic of very much breadth that could be considered as being exclusively an Indiana problem. Although this study dealt with a subject that could not be completely confined to Indiana, the emphasis was given to the Indiana aspects of the problem. This does not intend to imply that Indiana was the only state influenced by rivers in the manner described, since the story in Indiana could very well be repeated for the neighboring states.

Rivers have been influential in shaping the history of many countries. Man has always been interested in rivers and he has found them to be very useful to him in his develop-

ment of a country. Some of the earliest civilizations started along the banks of rivers. It is not difficult to visualize the methods by which these large rivers helped the ancient civilizations, but one does not seriously consider the influence of small rivers and streams in the development of a country and especially their influence on a country that is inland. In this day of fast freights, trucks, and jet aircraft, we are inclined to forget that at one time the rivers and streams were very valuable to the pioneer as highways of commerce.

The influence of the rivers was a factor that probably had as much effect on the early growth of Indiana as any other. However, when one undertakes to determine the influence of a particular factor, he finds difficulty in proving his point due to the fact that it is no easy matter to prove how and to what extent one thing is influenced by another. Therefore the word influence as used in this study is not intended to have the connotation one usually associates with it, but rather it is used to refer to a modifying effect or to a contributory factor. The purpose of this study was to show that the rivers and streams of Indiana did have some influence on the development of the state in three general areas; economical; political; sociological.

At this point it would be well to introduce the rivers and streams of Indiana. The Ohio River follows the southwest border of the state for three-hundred and eighty miles. White-water River rises in Randolph County, unites with the East Fork at Brookville, passes into the state of Ohio and unites with the Miami River six miles from its entrance into the Ohio River. The longest branch of White River, the West Fork, rises near the Ohio line in Randolph County, and after running southwestward for more than three-hundred miles, empties into the Wabash River one-hundred miles above its mouth. The only large tributary joining the West Fork from the west is Eel River. East Fork of White River joins with the West Fork at a point fifty miles from the Wabash River. Fall Creek, eighty miles in length, empties into the West Fork of White River at Indianapolis. The Wabash River rises in the state of Ohio, runs first north, then north-west, then west, then northwest again, then south, and then southwest, making the whole distance about six-hundred miles, of which over four-hundred and fifty have been navigated by steamboats in high water. There are numerous branches to the above named streams.<sup>1</sup>

In order to show that the rivers did have an influence on the history of Indiana, this study points out the contribu-

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<sup>1</sup>E. Chamberlain, The Indiana Gazetteer (Published by E. Chamberlain, 1850) p. 20.

tions made by the rivers to the economic, political, and sociological growth of Indiana. The study starts with the economic aspects of the contributions and points out that river systems and connecting portages enabled the early French explorers and traders to penetrate deeply into the interior of America. The French built forts at these portages; still later, thriving cities grew on the same sites. The early American settler in Indiana used the rivers quite extensively, also. He followed the streams into forests and established his settlements on or near their banks. Later, when the settlers began to produce surplus commodities, the rivers and streams became important in his export trade. In addition to contributing to the economic development of the state, the rivers also contributed to the political development of the state. Successful military activity in the state during the Revolutionary War for the purpose of reducing the menace of Indians and Tories who used the former French settlements as bases, gave the American commissioners an excellent argument to use in the phase of the peace negotiations that dealt with the establishment of the western boundary of the United States. The United States was able to get the boundary set at the Mississippi River. Several years later, due to the settlers in the Middle West being dependent upon the Mississippi River for their commerce, there was much

agitation for the United States to get control of the entire length of the river. Negotiations to solve this problem led to the purchase of the Louisiana Territory. Finally, there were sociological contributions due to the influence of the rivers. For a long time, rivers were the main method of travel for the people, and since they did have this advantage, we do not find isolated pockets in Indiana where time has passed on but left the people. Rivers were very important in determining where towns were to be laid out. And rivers have always been used for recreation. In the following chapters, an attempt is made to point out how the development of the state was affected by the rivers as indicated above.

## CHAPTER II

### ECONOMIC ASPECTS

One of the more pressing problems that confronts any new area being settled is that of transportation, how to get into the area, how to move about after arriving there, how to get supplies in and how to get surplus commodities out to an available market. Indiana had to deal with this problem from the days of the first settler and in fact, it is still somewhat of a problem in some areas today. In Indiana, the early settlers depended to a large degree upon the numerous rivers found there to afford them a means of transportation. Most of the state was densely wooded and rivers afforded a more convenient mode of travel than having to hack a trail through the wilderness. Also, a traveler was to some degree safer from the perils of hostile Indians and animals, while traveling by water.

The story of the contribution of rivers in Indiana to the history of that state could properly start with the early French settlers. (There is no doubt but what the rivers did influence to a great degree the life of the Indians in Indiana, but that phase of Indiana's history will not be taken up here). At the beginning of the Eighteenth century, the British in America were contenting themselves with consolidating their holdings along the Atlantic seaboard. However, there were

British fur traders dealing with the Indians who gathered their furs west of the Appalachian Mountains. This trading at times came into conflict with the French fur traders in that area. In order to block the English advance and to secure for the French the fur trade of the region which later became known in United States history as the Old Northwest, the French conceived the idea of building a chain of forts or posts between Quebec and New Orleans, the two most important political and commercial centers in French North America. This chain of forts were to be so located that there would be a continuous waterway from the northeastern French settlements to New Orleans. It was important that lines of communication be established between the two cities, and waterways would afford more rapid transportation and also it would reduce the danger of attack from hostile Indians. Had it not been for the fur trade and the practical water and portage route established by the French, undoubtedly the colonization of the Wabash Valley would have been delayed for many years.<sup>1</sup>

The first French fort built in what is now the state of Indiana was called Miami and was located at the head of the Maumee River which rises in what is now Allen County. The exact date of this event is not known, but the fort's

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<sup>1</sup>Elbert Jay Benton, The Wabash Trade Route in the Development of the Old Northwest (The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1903) pp 92-95

nearness to Detroit and its natural approach from that place points to the occupation of the present site of Fort Wayne before that of any other white settlement within the present limits of Indiana.<sup>2</sup>

In the year 1699, the Jesuits established themselves at Kaskaskia, in Illinois, six miles above the mouth of the Kaskaskia River. At this time there were several villages of Ouiatan Indians located in the Wabash River valley a few miles below where the city of Lafayette now stands. The Indians had found this location to be very good for trade and it was also a site that could easily defended. In 1720, the post of Fort Chartres was built several miles to the north of Kaskaskia, and in 1732-33, the post of Ouabachi (Vincennes) was established. The sites for the location of these posts and forts were chosen because they were on navigable streams and the rivers were used extensively for transportation and for commerce.

The French settlers sent their surplus food products such as flour and tobacco southward, down the river to New Orleans and they sent most of the furs gained in the fur trade by waterway to the posts on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. The "Wabash-Maumee" route became very important in this

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Roll, Indiana, One Hundred and Fifty Years of American Development Vol. I (Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago and New York, 1931) p.40.



period. The French crossed Lake Erie and paddled up the Maumee river to its source and then made a short portage to the headwaters of the Little River and continued their journey down this river to the Wabash and eventually entered the Ohio river. Since the size of the waterways differed, the French used different types of craft on this route, depending upon the size of the stream. Above Ouiatanon, where Lafayette now stands, they used light birch bark canoes, downstream from this point, where the river became larger, swifter, and the danger of snags greater, a heavier boat, made by hollowing out a log and called a piroque, was used. These boats were quite tricky and hard to handle, it being said that when using one, a person had to sit in the exact center, look neither to the right or left, and speak from the center of the mouth, else the craft would capsize. At Vincennes, the cargoes were shifted to larger boats that were collected and went in convoys down the river to New Orleans. This was necessary for protection from hostile Indians. The trips south were usually made twice a year, in the early spring and in the late summer or autumn, such times agreeing with the harvests and need for replenishing supplies after a long winter. These large boats, called bateaux, floated down the river and were rowed back upstream, each boat being rowed by eighteen or twenty men and the return trip usually took three

months to complete. The boats usually brought groceries, dry goods and liquors on the return trip.

French activities in North America had not gone unnoticed by the British and there were several indecisive contests between the two nations. Finally a decisive struggle came as the result of the French attempts to control the Ohio Valley. This struggle was called the French and Indian War, and it lasted from 1754 until 1763. At the Peace of Paris (1763) that ended this war, the British gained control of the territory from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico, with the exception of New Orleans. After the British gained control of this area, they followed a policy of excluding the American colonists from the region west of the Appalachian Mountains, and it wasn't until after the War for Independence that settlers in any great amount made the move to the new lands.

The absence of good roads constituted an abstacle to the rapid settlement of Indiana. Because there were no roads, the early settlers followed the streams which were the next best thing to a road. The Ohio River, tracing the whole southern boundary, the Wabash River with its tributary, the White River in the southwest, the Whitewater in the southeast, were the rivers that brought the settlers into the new

region and along which the first settlements were established.<sup>3</sup> Vincennes on the Wabash and Clarkesville on the Ohio were the only settlements of importance at the time of creating the Northwest Territory (1787). There were several routes into Indiana that the incoming settlers could follow. After crossing the mountains, the settlers would arrive at the Allegheny River, There flatboats were built and the settlers floated down the river and into the Ohio River. When they came to the mouth of the Whitewater River, they could use it a a gateway into the interior of Indiana. Many of the pioneers were induced to remain in the Whitewater country after viewing the fertile valley, tablelands and the numerous water power sites found there.<sup>4</sup> The settlers could proceed on down the Ohio River and enter Indiana by way of the Wabash River. Settlements were quickly established along this route and along the Ohio River; towns settled by 1812 were Lawrenceburg, Vevay, Madison, Jeffersonville, and Evansville.

The early settlers had several factors in mind when seeking a new homesite. In addition to looking for fertile land suitable for agriculture, they realized that in the very near future they would be faced with the problem of a suit-

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.360.

<sup>4</sup> Harry O. Garman, Whitewater Canal-Cambridge City to Ohio River. (Whitewater Canal Association of Indiana, Inc., 1944) p.5.

able outlet or route to a market for any surpluses they might have. This problem could be solved by settling not too far from a river or stream where a flatboat could be loaded with produce. The money paid by the operators of the flatboats for produce to load the boats would give the settler means to buy certain necessities that he couldn't produce himself. And there were those settlers who were on the lookout for streams with suitable mill-sites while also looking for their future homes.

Turning from the use of rivers for transportation to their use for commerce, it is noted that although their use in this capacity was but a passing phase (barring the Ohio) they were at one time of considerable importance in the export trade of this region.<sup>5</sup> The early settlers in Indiana set great store by the future use of the rivers for commerce. People who had traveled in the area and had written books concerning their travels, had stressed the number and size of the streams and their possible use for navigation and had indicated that these places were ideally located for future settlement. Various so-called immigrant guides contained this type of information and they apparently exerted quite an influence on the incoming settlers. For some years

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<sup>5</sup>George S. Cottman, River Navigation in Indiana (Max R. Hyman, Indianapolis, 1910) p.2.

after Indiana began being settled, "the strenuous insistence in considering 'navigable', streams that would seem hopelessly useless for such purposes oftentimes approached the ludicrous."<sup>6</sup> For example, for nearly two decades after its founding, Indianapolis considered White River as a highway of commerce in spite of nature and the inability of craft to get over ripples, past sandbars and drifts. As early as 1820 it was officially declared "navigable".<sup>7</sup>

But despite these and many similar absurdities, the Indiana streams were a factor, and an important one, in our earlier commerce.<sup>8</sup> Soon after Indiana became a state (1816) the state legislature began to show much interest in internal improvements to the state and this interest found a large share of its outlet in an endeavor to make the rivers and streams of Indiana into "public highways". The Legislature felt that the geographical features of the state fitted in very well with their plan to open streams for navigation. The Ohio River, the southern boundary of the state, was a navigable river from which several tributaries led into the interior of the state, and were already being used to a great extent, as previously mentioned. On the west side of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.3.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.,p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.,p. 4.

state lay the Wabash River, which formed part of the western boundary of the state and then crossed the state in a diagonal direction to the northeast, and along the way was joined by smaller streams that in turn led into nearly every county along that route. In the northeast, the Maumee River could be used for navigation as well as the St. Joseph River and Lake Michigan which were located in the northwest. The Ohio, and to a lesser degree, the Wabash River could be used with some success for navigation, just as they were, if one could choose the season of the year to use them. The Legislature had the idea that many of the smaller streams, after being cleared of snags, drifts and the worst of the sandbars, could be used in some measure for navigation by flatboats and other shallow draft vessels. In order to ensure these streams remaining in a state from which they could be developed for navigation (i.e. not being obstructed by mill-dams and bridges) the Legislature had them declared to be "Navigable streams" in accordance with provisions in the Ordinance of 1787.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>The navigable waters leading into the Mississippi River and the St. Lawrence River, and the carrying places between the same shall be common highways, and forever free, as well to the inhabitants of said territory as to the citizens of the United States, and those of any other states that may be admitted into the confederacy, without any tax, import, or duty therefore." Northwest Ordinance, 1787.

During the Fourth Session of the General Assembly at Corydon, a combination bill was approved on January 17, 1820, that declared certain sections of a large number of rivers to be "navigable."<sup>10</sup> It was interesting to note the terminus of some of these "navigable streams" and to speculate on the pressures that were exerted in order to have a terminus located at a particular spot. The Legislature continued to add to this list of navigable streams through the 1820s and 1830s until there were nearly forty such streams "open for navigation" and according to some observers, the state was rated in 1833 as having 2500 miles of navigable streams. Of course some of these streams were rather insignificant during most of the year, but it was supposed that during

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<sup>10</sup>The following streams were declared navigable in accordance with the Act of 17 January, 1820: Whitewater to the forks at Davies County; West Fork of White River to the Delaware towns near Muncie; East Fork of White River to Flat Rock in Shelby County; Muscokatuck River from its mouth to Vernon; Big Blue River to Fredericksburg near the south line of Washington County; Whitewater River from the north boundary of Fayette County to the Ohio River; Anderson Creek from its mouth at Troy to the Hurricane Fork near St. Meinrad; Poison Creek to Cumming's mill; Oil creek to Aaron Cunningham's mill; Raccoon Creek in Parke County to Brook's mill; Big Creek to Black's mill; Laughrey Creek in Ohio County up to Hartford; Patoka River to Moseby's mill; Indian Creek in Harrison County; Little Pigeon and Big Pigeon Creeks; Big Sand Creek to its forks near Scipio in Jennings County-Laws of Indiana, 1820.

high water, there would be sufficient volume of water to float flatboats because they didn't require much water. As far as the Legislature was concerned, almost every creek large enough to float a sawlog was opened, "so far as a statute without an appropriation would effect it."<sup>11</sup> While little serious effort was ever spent on any of the minor streams, greater hopes were built on the possibilities of Whitewater and the Wabash Rivers. The Wabash was being used to a large extent and most of those concerned were of the opinion that White River could also be opened to the year-round navigation of boats of fairly large sizes. (An impassioned plea concerning the use of the Wabash for navigation can be found in the appendix).

It was rather interesting and should be noted in passing, the methods by which the smaller streams were kept open to navigation. Many of the streams were divided into districts, as were the roads at a later date, and kept cleared of drifts and other obstructions by the male residents living close along the banks of the streams on either side. This compulsory service varied with the locality and ranged from one days' labor from citizens residing one, two, or three miles back from the streams. These workmen were exempt

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<sup>11</sup>Cottman, op. cit., p. 6



from road duty.

While most of these smaller streams would appear to be rather insignificant to us today, they "bore on their swollen tides at one time or another, boats laden with the produce of the country, and an examination of the various histories reveals that very many of our counties thus found, though irregularly, an important outlet for their exports."<sup>12</sup> And even after roads became more numerous, these streams were still occasionally resorted to when the roads became impassable. By a happy quirk of nature, at the season when the roads were likely to be impassable due to too much rain, the streams would be suitable for certain types of vehicular traffic, usually a boat propelled upstream by poling (A method of propulsion in which the boatman places a sharpened pole against the bottom of the streams and propels the boat ahead by pushing on the pole).

Certain phases of the economic development of the South coincided quite well with the development of the old Northwest and enabled the latter area to develop an important commercial relationship with the South. Prior to 1820, the South was very much like the Old Northwest in certain respects (i.e. they were very much alike in agricultural practices). But after 1820, the South was transformed, economically speak-

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

ing. The wealthy planters began to absorb the smaller farms that had been used for diversified farming and more and more sections in the South began to concentrate on the production of a single staple crop, cotton. Thus they began to need the agricultural products that could be supplied by the Old North west. The Appalachian Mountains were a barrier between the East and the West and since there were no mountains between the Northwest and the South, the food products of the Northwest found their way to the markets in the south on the southward flowing rivers.

During the earlier period of navigation on Indiana streams, most of the down river trade was carried on flatboats. These flatboats were long and narrow craft, sometimes sixty or more feet in length and from ten to twenty feet in width. They have been described as resembling a "mixture of log cabin, fort, floating barnyard, and country grocery".<sup>13</sup> It was said of the Indiana boats that "in making headway downstream, they contrive to keep up with the current. They drew about as much water as a sap trough. When they got stuck on a sandbar, all hands will jump out and push them off".<sup>14</sup> It was rather interesting to observe the way in which the boats were constructed. The materials used in

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<sup>13</sup>Seymour Dunbar, A History of Travel in America, Vol. I, (Bobbs Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1918) p. 117

<sup>14</sup>Cottman, Op.Cit., p. 7.

construction was from the green native timber found at hand. The boats were built bottom side up, launched in this position, and then brought to an upright position by weighting down one side of the boat while hauling up the other side by means of a line attached to the boat and leading to a pair of stout oxen by way of a fork in a convenient tree. The boats required from thirty to forty days to descend the rivers to New Orleans and about ninety days to ascend. Since the upstream trip was scarcely worthwhile, the boat was usually sold after being unloaded, generally bringing fifty dollars. After disposing of their cargo and craft, the boatmen would return home on horseback or afoot. After 1820, they could return a portion of the way by steamboat.

Some of the shippers were affluent enough to have their own flatboats, but for the smaller shipper, a system was followed in which he sold his surplus products to someone who was "making up a load" for the southern market. Sometimes a group would go in together on a flatboat to send their goods to market. Due to the unsettled conditions of the country at that time, river pirates "infested" the banks of the lower Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and it was customary for the flatboats to travel in convoys for protection. Due to this condition, plus other risks of navigation and the uncertainty of the market in New Orleans, trading companies

were formed. One such company, the Miami Exporting Company of Cincinnati, served the farmers of the Ohio Valley by buying their surplus products. The products generally carried by the boats were pork, bacon, lard, beef, cheese, butter, flour, corn, hay, tobacco, and whiskey. There was a ready market for pork in the South as it was widely used as food for slaves. While the cargo could and often was, sold to the plantations and towns along the way, New Orleans was the great market of the Old Northwest. The value of the produce received at this port in 1830 was twenty six millions dollars.<sup>15</sup> It is impossible to tell how much of this produce originated in Indiana but a great deal of it did ( as will be shown later). The streams and rivers of Indiana were filled with flatboats in the early spring in those days. It was said that 152 passed Vincennes in the spring of 1826, loaded with goods destined for New Orleans. One John Mathews reported, "In the spring of 1829, I was standing on the levee at New Orleans, amid the crowded hundreds who throng that place every day at that season of the year. I marked the astonishment of the numerous persons at the amazing quantity of flatboats from Indiana, and amongst others, two foreign gentlemen whose conversation I chanced to overhear. One of them said to the

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F.J.Turner, The Rise of the New West, (Harpers and Brothers, New York, 1906) p/225.

other, 'Indiana must be a very large state, or she could never send so many boats'. Little did they think that all those boats were sent from a very small portion, perhaps less than a tenth part of the state. The great number of Indiana boats was the common topic of the boatmen as well as of strangers. All seemed to agree that one-half of the boats then at New Orleans were from Indiana".<sup>16</sup>

In the year 1831, during the period 5 March to 16 April, it was estimated that at least one thousand flatboats entered the Ohio River from the Wabash.<sup>17</sup> This showing of that many boats in less than a month and a half was quite considerable, and would indicate that the rivers were very valuable in the early stages of Indiana's commerce. The value of produce sent annually to market from just the valley of the Wabash was estimated to be around one million dollars.<sup>18</sup>

Before the coming of the steamboat, the trade of the Indiana Territory took somewhat of a triangular course. Heavy and bulk products such as grain, tobacco, hemp, and meat were sent by flatboat down the streams and rivers to New Orleans where they were exchanged for money. Since it was extremely

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<sup>16</sup>Thornbrough and Riker, Readings in Indiana History (Indiana Historical Bureau, Indianapolis, 1956) pp.234-35

<sup>17</sup>Cottman, op.cit., p. 7.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p.8.

difficult and largely impossible to freight goods up the rivers by flatboat, most of the imports into Indiana Territory came from Philadelphia by way of Pittsburgh. The goods were carried by wagon to Pittsburgh and then were sent down the Ohio river to the settlers in Indiana. The third leg of the triangle was furnished by the settlers exchanging the money received for their goods for the goods shipped in from Philadelphia. Since the only goods that would pay for the cost of transportation across the mountains were either light in weight, small in bulk, or high in value, only a few necessities such as gunpowder and some iron manufactures could be purchased by the settlers with the proceeds of their own sales. An interesting comparison can be drawn here relative to the influence of transportation on the cost of goods. Since it was relatively easy to get their own products to market, the prices received were very low, but they had to pay high prices for their imports, partly as a consequence of the difficulties involved in getting them in to the interior. While corn and oats brought eight to twelve cents a bushel and beef brought two dollars per hundred-weight, coffee and tea cost the settler in Indiana fifty cents and eighty cents a pound respectively. In 1810, costs of transporting goods overland were ten dollars per ton, per hundred miles. For this reason, grain and flour could

not bear transportation by wagon for more than one hundred and fifty miles, in that distance they would have accumulated a freight bill equal to their value.<sup>19</sup> In 1816, transportation charges from Pittsburgh to Vincennes by water were one dollar per hundred-weight. Upstream the cost was three dollars per hundred-weight. Needless to say, the almost prohibitive cost of shipping articles into their country caused the settlers to early develop the genius for manufacturing useful products which persists to this day.

Thus far the problem of transportation in Indiana has been dealt with as it applied to the state as a whole. In order to see how this problem affected people in a specific area, the activities of the farmers and merchants in a particular county were examined. The county chosen was Morgan, located in the south central section of the state and served by the West Fork of White River and its tributaries. From 1835 to about 1850, Martinsville, the county seat of Morgan County did a large business in shipping pork and grain to New Orleans and other southern points. It is stated that during some seasons in the forties, not less than 9,000 hogs were slaughtered at Martinsville, and shipped by boat down the river. The stock was purchased over a large section

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<sup>19</sup>F.W.VanMeter, Outlines of Development of Internal Commerce of the U.S., 1913 p. 214.

of country and driven to the slaughter houses, where they were killed and packed for shipment. This extensive business called into existence many coopers to make barrels, and brought to town many men of means who were attracted by the activity and extent of commercial transactions. The pork trade alone did much to build up the county seat. In addition to shipping pork, as high as fifteen thousand bushels of corn and oats were shipped some seasons. The same conditions could be found at Mooresville (in the northern part of the county). They also shipped large quantities of flour, cornmeal, wheat and corn down the creeks to the river and so on to the southern markets. They also engaged in the pork-packing business. These same conditions found in Morgan County could be found in any other county in Indiana that was served by a stream of any size. Grist mills were found near every town, using water power furnished by the streams that were to be found near every town in the state.<sup>20</sup> These grist mills usually had a saw-mill as a side line.

The coming of the steamboat to Indiana rivers did not alter the pattern of the down-river traffic to any great degree, for it was still cheaper to ship heavy articles of trade by flatboat. But the settlers began to have access to

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Blanchard, Editor, Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, F.A. Battey & Co., Chicago, 1884 p. 85.



more imported goods. As transportation by steamboat improved, flour became the chief article of trade. The products were traded at New Orleans for such luxuries as coffee, wine, mahogany, sugar, and rice. Steamboats reduced the freight rates along the river to one-third their former price. The great impetus to agriculture created a surplus which developed the interior of the country and attracted so many settlers, that by 1835, the exports had helped to accomplish the economic independence of the United States.<sup>21</sup>

The first steamboat appeared on the Ohio River as early as 1811, but it was not until Captain Henry M. Shreve introduced his ideas of steamboat construction in the steamer Washington, that river navigation became practical on the western waters. Shreve departed from the conventional shipbuilding ideas of his day and built a ship to sail on the water rather than in it. He did away with the cargo holds and substituted in their place an upper deck which contained all the functions that were formerly to be found below decks. Shreve's new design was an instant success and was copied widely. In two decades steamers built on his model outweighed in tonnage all the ships of the Atlantic seaboard and Great Lakes combined. Immediately the Ohio became in effect the western extension of the great national highway and opened an easy pathway for

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<sup>21</sup> Julia Levering, Historic Indiana, (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1910) p.457.

for immigration to the eastern as well as the western lands of the Mississippi Basin".<sup>22</sup>

In 1817, Captain Shreve's Washington made the round trip from Louisville to New Orleans in forty-one days, proving "that steam was the master of the mighty river". In 1823 the first steamboat appeared on the Wabash River. There was much competition among the towns along rivers to get a steamboat up to their towns so that they would be able to say that their town was served by river steamers. Prizes were offered to the steamboat captain who would be the first to make the trip and several attempts were made to reach places that would have better been left for flatboat trade. On April 11, 1831, the river steamer Robert Hanna appeared on the White River at Indianapolis. However, it went aground a short distance from Indianapolis when it attempted the trip downstream, and this marked the ends of attempts to make Indianapolis accessible by steamboat. In 1833, the Matilda Barney steamed down the St. Joseph River to South Bend on her way to Elkhart and Goshen. She had on board one hundred passengers and ten tons of freight. Everybody within reach rushed to the banks to see the ship go by, and land values along the river rose

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<sup>22</sup>Archer B. Hulbert, The Paths of Inland Commerce (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1921) pp. 174-176.

overnight from five dollars an acre to ten dollars an acre.<sup>23</sup>

Despite a few ill-fated attempts to do the impossible, considerable river-boat commerce developed on the Wabash and Ohio Rivers. The steamer America, James L. Wilson, Master, was making regular trips from Louisville and Terre Haute in 1827. The steamer Philadelphia made the run from New Orleans to Cincinnati in nine days in 1831. In 1834, from 14 April to 27 April, forty-one boats loaded at Terre Haute for New Orleans. There was at least one boat a day at the Vincennes wharf. In 1829 the annual trade on the Wabash amounted to the following items: 7,000 barrels of salt; 3,000 barrels of whiskey (these two items from Terre Haute alone); 3,000 barrels of pork from Terre Haute and 10,000 barrels from the Wabash Valley; and 450 tons of dry goods.<sup>24</sup> One can see that the river trade was considerable for that period of history.

The river trade reached its peak in the years from 1840 to 1860, the two decades prior to the Civil War. After the war, railroads began to parallel the rivers and took away a large share of their trade. But river trade at its zenith was a time that saw the rise of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Arkansas, and which also saw the spread

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<sup>23</sup> Logan Esarey, Internal Improvements in Early Indiana, (Indiana Historical Society Publication, Vol. V, No. 2, 1912) p. 17

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

of the cotton kingdom into the Southwest.<sup>25</sup>

In order to supply the large numbers of steamers needed for the river traffic, great shipyards grew up along the rivers. Because of the proximity of suitable timber, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Louisville became busy shipyards. The steamboat tonnage of the Mississippi Valley (exclusive of New Orleans) in the hustling forties exceeded that of the Atlantic ports (exclusive of New York City) by 15,000 tons. The steamboat tonnage of New Orleans alone in 1843 was more than double that of New York City.<sup>26</sup>

Just what was the effect of the river trade on the towns along the major rivers? The town of Madison would be a good example. In 1840 the population of this town was 3,798 and by 1850, had increased to 8,012. It was the second largest city in the state in 1850. At one time it ranked third in pork-packing among the pork-packing centers west of the Appalachians. One only has to look at population figures for Madison today (7,506) to see that a large share of its former prosperity and size was largely due to the river traffic.

It was generally conceded by 1850 that Indiana was one of the leading states in the Union. Sanford Cox, writing in

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<sup>25</sup> Hulbert, Op.Cit., p. 180.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

1850, had this to say about the situation in Indiana:

How vast the change which a few years have made in the appearance, condition, and prospects of Indiana! Where but lately the Indian held their war dances, and in frightful pantomime celebrated the heroic deeds of their forefathers. . . is now the site of a populous town, containing all the elements of wealth, comfort, and prosperity. . . Our rivers which had long remained undisturbed save by the Frenchman's piroque or the Indian's birch bark canoe have since become the crowded channels of a vast and increasing commerce.<sup>27</sup>

In the towns located on the Ohio and Wabash Rivers served by steamboats, great warehouses were built, which were generally owned by the leading capitalists of the town. These warehouses were built for the storage of river trade, and every kind of merchandise imaginable could be found in them. They had their part in the commerce of the Indiana rivers, carried on in the packet and steamboat, before the days of railroads.

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<sup>27</sup> Sanford Cox, Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley, (Courier Steam Book and Job Printing House, Lafayette, Ind., 1860) p. 91.

## CHAPTER III

### POLITICAL ASPECTS

When considering the political aspects of the contributions or influence of the rivers on the history of Indiana, one should have in mind the topography of the state and the appearance of its physical features at the time the first settlers ventured into the land. At that time, Indiana was largely a wilderness and the only convenient mode of transportation was by way of the rivers and streams. It was through the use of rivers for transportation and for commerce that political considerations enter the picture. The fact that the rivers did afford the best means of travel and communication at the time of their coming to the area led the French to establish a measure of control over them and the surrounding territory. The British and the French came into conflict over this control, with the British winning the argument. Next to enter the picture were the Americans who wanted control over the area to keep down Indian attacks. Later the Americans used the river extensively for commerce and thus desired to control the entire length of the river. Rivers were also considered in many instances when boundary lines were being set up. And the "natural boundary" concept had a place in the reasons for the United States going to war

with Britain in 1812. And one could consider as political aspects the fact that rivers played a large part in the various wars fought in the area.

In view of these events, one could say that the presence of rivers in Indiana contributed to the following conditions: (1) French attempts to control the fur trade in the area by building a chain of posts on the navigable waters led to a conflict with the British over control of the area; (2) George Rogers Clark's activities in this area gave the United States a good claim to the Mississippi river as a boundary at the treaty conference ending the War for Independence; since they used the rivers as avenues for commerce, the inhabitants of the West developed an intense interest in the control of the Mississippi river and in New Orleans, such interest having a great deal to do with the purchase of the Louisiana Territory; and finally (4) commerce between the Old Northwest and the South led to a loose political alliance between these two sections during the period of the Early Republic. All these conditions were influenced in some measure by the presence of the rivers. How, then, did these conditions affect the history of Indiana?

As mentioned in Chapter two, the French built a chain of posts from New Orleans to Quebec in order to secure for themselves the fur trade of the interior. There had been

rivalry between the French and the British over this trade for some time and several contests had been waged between these two opposing factions with no decisive results. Finally in 1749, the Ohio Land Company was formed for the purpose of establishing a settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. This type of project alarmed the French and they began to take steps to counteract it. Relationships between the two governments deteriorated and eventually led to the French and Indian War, which the British won. In accordance with the treaty ending this war, France was forced to give up Canada and all her possessions east of the Mississippi. Thus the area that is now Indiana passed from the hands of the French into the hands of the British.

The British government, after gaining this new territory, did not permit the colonists to settle beyond the Appalachian Mountains, largely because they wanted to placate the Indians and continue the lucrative fur trade. Therefore the only towns in this area were the former French posts that had been established on the river routes to facilitate the fur trade. During the Revolutionary War, the former French posts of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes became important centers from which bands of Tories and Indians laid waste the northwestern frontier.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hicks and Mowry, Short History of American Democracy, (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1956) p. 84.



It was to stop this activity that George Rogers Clark, a young Kentucky land speculator, asked permission of Patrick Henry, the governor of Virginia, to organize a group to proceed against these posts. Clark planned to capture them and if possible, also capture the British post at Detroit. In the summer of 1778, after organizing a group of militia, he set out down the Ohio River and soon afterwards, captured the posts of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes without too much difficulty. But the British commander in the area succeeded in retaking Vincennes; however, Clark was able to recapture it in February, 1779. Clark was never able to capture Detroit, but his activities were successful in greatly reducing the frontier difficulties with the British and Indians, and probably saved the Kentucky settlements.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the war, Clark occupied a strategic position at Fort Nelson (Jeffersonville, Ind.) at the Falls of the Ohio. This situation proved to be very advantageous for the Americans when the treaty negotiations were in progress. Clark's position enabled him to dominate militarily a larger area in the Northwest than was actually in his possession and this furnished a good argument for the Americans when the question of western boundaries came up for discussion. Of

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

course there are two sides to this particular aspect of history and one of them is the one advanced by Doctor Logan Esarey, late professor of Western History at Indiana University. Professor Esarey said:

The treaty was finally signed September 3, 1783. The boundary laid down was through the middle of Lake Erie, through the Detroit River, Lake Superior, Long Lake, Lake of the Woods, thence due west to the Mississippi River and down the middle of that stream to the 31st degree of latitude. Thanks to the peace commissioners, the work of the Virginia pioneer had not been in vain. They had added to the United States a territory nearly as large as the original colonies. Much has been said concerning what might have happened but for Clark's conquest. The territory north of the Ohio at the beginning of the war was a part of Canada by the Quebec Act, and had the British armies held it at the close of the war, it would no doubt have remained a part of that province. It was not a defense by the Virginians of their own territory, but was essentially a foreign conquest. Since 1783 England had yielded very little territory to any power and it is all but certain she would never have ceded this to the United States.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned before, Doctor Esarey's point is debatable. The Congress had instructed the peace commissioners to work for the Mississippi River boundary rather than demand it. Whether the commissioners did as Esarey maintained and used good arguments to convince the British commissioners that the American claim was a valid one, or as some historians have maintained, the Americans succeeded in playing

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<sup>3</sup>Logan Esarey, History of Indiana, (Dayton Historical Publishing Company, Dayton Ohio, 1924) p.99.

the French and British interests off against each other and in that way were able to get certain concessions, can still be argued. But in any case, Clark's conquest entered into the considerations to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the stand one takes. And since his activities were directed against a condition that had developed due to the influence of the rivers, then it can be said that to the extent that the rivers influenced the conditions that Clark moved against, then to the same extent they influenced the history of Indiana.

The third situation that reveals the political aspects of the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana had its roots in trade and commerce. As the West grew in population, the uncertainty of trade down the Mississippi became more a problem. The Spanish apparently were not willing to open the river freely to trade from the United States. In addition to this problem, the English did not vacate their forts south of the Great Lakes as had been agreed upon in a treaty, but continued to use them. Canadian fur traders gave aid and encouragement to the Indian tribes of the Old Northwest, who occasionally went on the warpath against the American settlers. Faced with these conditions, the people in the Northwest entertained all types of ideas and schemes that would free them from these vexing conditions. These schemes ranged all the way from setting up their own country to forming an alliance with

Spain. The government at Washington realized that they must do something to ease the problems of the Northwest if it was to remain loyal.

The Indian problem was solved at the Battle of Fallen Timbers on August 20, 1794, and in the same year as a result of Jay's treaty with the British, the military posts south of the Great Lakes were evacuated by the British. But the problem of Spanish control of the Mississippi River and New Orleans remained to plague them, and President Jefferson was quite anxious to solve this particular problem since it would keep the farmers of the Northwest loyal to the Union.<sup>4</sup> France acquired title to Louisiana in 1800 by the Treaty of San Ildefonso, and in 1802 Bonaparte suspended the "right of deposit" at New Orleans. Since most western products were brought down the Mississippi River in small boats, the denial of deposit, or the right to land goods for transfer to ocean-going ships was just the same as closing the river as far as the Americans were concerned. This cut their life-line to the sea and Jefferson well knew they were capable of taking drastic action to open the river. They might consider trying to remove the French from the mouth of the river on their own initiative, or they could even consider leaving the Union

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<sup>4</sup>Hicks and Mowry, op.cit., p. 146

and help with the setting up of a New France in America. Any of these activities would prove embarrassing to the United States government.

In order to avert these possibilities, Jefferson decided to attempt the purchase of the Isle of Orleans, and sent a commission to France to accomplish this. For various reasons, Bonaparte was ready to sell the entire Louisiana Territory and the surprised commission quickly recovered their composure and bought it, thus adding an immense amount of territory to the United States.

There were many factors involved in the circumstances that led to the final purchase, but the fact that the Western settlers were using rivers for transportation and for commerce and felt a profound need to control the entire length of this system in order to prevent any disruption to their commerce, certainly must have occupied a prominent place in the peculiar set of conditions that led up to the purchase.

The fourth political aspect of the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana involves the loose political alliance between the Northwest and the South during the period when commerce joined the two sections. After the trans-Appalachian frontier was well on the way to becoming settled, there were three sections in the United States, the industrialized Northeast, the cotton-growing South, and the farming West; and

since each of these sections would be interested in obtaining national legislation beneficial to their own section, there was bound to be some conflicts. It would be relatively difficult for one section to control the political strength necessary to gain laws favorable to their section, so it would become necessary for two of these sections to unite so that both sections might be able to gain some measures of legislation desired by them. Both the Northeast and the South attempted to get the support of the West.

It was fortunate for the South at this time that the steamboat came into wide usage on the rivers and helped to build up a very large trade between the two sections. This trade bound the South and the West together economically and politically.<sup>5</sup> This condition lasted until the coming of the railroad.

There were other minor political aspects of the influence of the rivers on the history of Indiana. After the War of 1812, there was a widespread demand for internal improvements in the United States at federal expense. The rise of a political party favoring this policy began at the same time Indiana was admitted into the Union as a state. This party found its strength among the farmers and was

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<sup>5</sup>Esarey, History of Indiana, op.cit., p.299.

was based on a legitimate economic need.<sup>6</sup> This party was able to exert considerable influence on the early state government.

Another political aspect of the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana can be found in their use as natural boundaries, especially in the laying-off of counties. Posey, Gibson, Pike, Davies, Knox, and Sullivan Counties all have rivers as part of their boundaries. As mentioned earlier, the "natural boundary" concept was advanced as one of the reasons for going to war with England in 1812. This was part of the idea of manifest destiny in which a natural boundary to the north was desired by Northwestern States because it would secure the St. Lawrence River as an outlet to the ocean for their commerce. According to a Representative Johnson from the West, "The waters of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi interlock in a number of places, and the Great Disposer of Human Events intended those two rivers should belong to the same people."<sup>7</sup>

Thus we have seen that the presence of rivers in Indiana and the use to which they were put led to circumstances that affected the political future of the state.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 345,399.

<sup>7</sup>Albert K. Weinberg, Manifest Destiny. (The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1935) p. 53

During these periods the state passed from French hands into British hands and then into American hands. Largely through the agitations of the settlers in the area and others faced with the same conditions, the United States felt duty bound to acquire the Louisiana Territory. And finally, the use of the river led to a combination between sections of the country that helped influence the national growth and policy of the United States for a considerable number of years.



## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

It is rather difficult to distinguish between the sociological aspects of the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana and the economic aspects, since the early settlers tended to follow a subsistence type of existence and in many instances what is a sociological aspect also has economic aspects. For instance when one studies the reasons behind a settler choosing a particular location for his future home, one finds both sociological and economic considerations involved. Therefore in this chapter, although the purpose is to point out the sociological aspects of the influence of rivers, it cannot be assumed that the reasons pertain only to those aspects, but that there will be economic and even political aspects involved, too.

Since the French were the first white settlers in this region, they will be dealt with first. The French were not in the territory as permanent settlers, but were here for the purpose of trading with the Indians for furs. They had established their posts on the rivers to facilitate their trading. At this period in the history of the state, all travel, both by red and white men was done largely on the rivers and streams. Most of the inhabitants of the French

settlements were voyageurs and coureurs de bois, who gained their livelihood plying the rivers and streams.

After the War for American Independence, the region known as the Old Northwest began to be occupied by American settlers. Especially following the second war with England, there was a great rush of emigrants into the western and southwestern territories of the United States. Most of the settlers in Indiana came up the southward flowing streams by way of the Ohio. The newcomer on the frontier was likely to find his new home some distance from a settlement or even from friends and neighbors. Usually the family, with its meager equipment, pushed into the wilderness to find their new life. "The facility with which this could be done depended upon the equipment possessed, location with respect to established trails and streams, and above all, upon the experience and ability of the settler and his wife, who constitutes the economic and social unit which conquered the frontier.<sup>1</sup> Quite naturally, since this was a strange land to the incoming settlers, they would feel a need for some advance information on the geographical aspects of their future place of abode. Foreseeing this need, several men had made trips around the state, taken notes and then had used the informa-

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<sup>1</sup>R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest Pioneer Period, 1815-1840, (Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1950) p. 141.

tion gained to write "emigrant guide books", which were accompanied by maps showing all the available roads, stream, and route to be followed by the emigrants. These guide books contained glowing accounts of the possibilities of the new territory and there was a lot of space devoted to the rivers and their possible uses. When one studies the pattern of settlement of the state, the influence wielded by the emigrant guides can be noted.

The guide books had one stock of information that was common to all, and that was that all the towns located in the area were situated on or very near a stream or river. An excerpt from Mr. E. Dana's Guide published in 1819 contains this information:

Vincennes, upon the left bank of the Wabash is the oldest and largest town in the state; Brookville, the county seat of Franklin, stands upon a narrow elevated plain, in the forks of Whitewater; Lawrenceburg, the seat of justice for the County of Dearborn, stands on the west bank of the Ohio; New London, ten miles below Madison, on the Ohio; Jeffersonville stands just above the Falls, on the west bank of the Ohio, New Albany, on the banks of the Ohio, on an extensive plain of rich bottom land; Corydon lays between the forks of Indian Creek at their junction; Salem stands on a small branch of Blue River; Brownstown is situated near the eastern branch of Whitewater; Evansville stands on a bend in the Ohio, at the mouth of Big Pigeon Creek; Harmonie stands on the banks of the Wabash, one hundred and six miles above the mouth of that stream.<sup>2</sup>

These towns were located on the rivers and streams

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<sup>2</sup>E. Dana, Geographical Sketches on the Western Country Designed for Emigrants and Settlers, (1819) p.209/

for several reasons. The main occupation was farming and the uplands were not too well suited for agriculture. The soil was found to be much richer in the river valleys and along the smaller streams. The streams could afford a means of transportation and also furnished mill sites. Since the settlers would be choosing homes in this type of location, it was only natural that the towns would grow there for much the same reasons. It is interesting to note the growth of these early towns and see the importance attached to them by the early settlers. With the coming of the railroads, which freed the people from their dependence upon river transportation, some of these old towns lost their importance and through the years have dwindled in size and in some instances have completely disappeared. For example, in 1850 Madison had a population of 8,130, but today, in spite of the normal increase of most cities, the population of Madison is only 7,506. Salem, on Blue River was at one time the largest town in that area, but today it is all but gone. However, some of the cities on the Ohio, and still available to the river trade, have continued to grow; Evansville in 1850 had a population of only 3,235 and today has 128,636.

On more than one occasion, the rivers and streams formed part of a setting that appealed to the aesthetic nature of the settlers and caused them to settle in the

place they did. The town of Vevay was founded as a result of this type of influence. In 1802, John James Dufor, from France, applied to Congress for a grant of land in Indiana. He had tried without success to establish a business venture in Kentucky, based on the production of wine. A special act of Congress of May, 1802 gave him the right to select 2,500 acres for himself and his association. The land was selected on the north bank of the Ohio River in what later became Switzerland County. Here some of the colonists came in 1802 and Vevay was laid out in 1803. Lindley had this to say:

The beauty of hilltop and river appealed to these weary wanderers far from home, and inspired them with new hope and courage. The Ohio River with its picturesque banks and musical ripple of waters, the song of the wild birds, the many hued flowers of the woods offered<sup>3</sup> a warm welcome to these tired home-seeking people.

This colony went on to become a very important wine producing center.

Some of the early town sites were laid out with not much regard for the location of the nearest river. These towns did not fare too well in their early stages. One such town in this category was the capital of the state, Indianapolis. The site selected for Indianapolis was heavily wooded wilderness, sixty miles from the nearest civilization, and at that time, most inconveniently inland, so far as real navigation was to be had, and this remained a handicap for Indianapolis for a decade. "Indian trails were the

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<sup>3</sup>Levering, op.cit. p. 253.

only paths to the place, and there were no accommodations upon arrival. There were few people in the village, and settlers were so slow to choose it as a place to live, that at the time named when the Legislature should actually sit in the new capital, it had only one thousand population".<sup>4</sup>

It would be quite natural for people living in a relatively unsettled area and away from the rest of the country to get an occasional desire to see what the rest of the world looked like. The new railroads and the palatial steamboats offered the means, and returns from good crops and profitable commerce furnished the necessary funds. Cincinnati and New Orleans were the attractive western cities. It was counted the treat of a lifetime to make the trip to New Orleans on such a steamer as the Shotwell, Antelope or the Eclipse. More than a score of elegant sidewheelers plied between Louisville, New Albany and New Orleans. The elite of southern Indiana met the barons of the Blue Grass in the cabins of the steamers on equal terms. Nowhere in the west was greater elegance displayed. In the evenings after the ladies had tired of music and dancing, the gentlemen so inclined retired to the bar-room to spend a large part of the night at poker. Liquor flowed freely and stakes ran high. "No river bore such sumptuous crafts as did the

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<sup>4</sup>Levering, op.cit., p. 328.

Ohio in the fifties and the competition between these river racers was furious".<sup>5</sup>

Another social aspect of the influence of rivers on the history of Indiana was that the rivers and streams helped to adapt the country for the wide and rapid spread of knowledge. By our standards today, the facilities for communications were rather limited in the early days in Indiana, but they were still good enough to aid the introduction and circulation of useful facts and information from other sections of the country and this was very helpful in the development of the state.

It can be seen from the information presented in this chapter that the rivers and streams in Indiana did have a fair amount of influence on the sociological aspects of the development of the state. Since they formed almost the only means of transportation for a long time, they were the only method of intercourse between sections of the state. They were quite influential in the selection of a site for a city. And the fact that they were a means of communication, helped lead to the spread of knowledge in the state and permitted it to develop with no isolated sections cut off from the rest of the state.

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<sup>5</sup>Esarey, History of Indiana, op.cit., p. 328.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to point out some of the ways in which the rivers of Indiana played their part in influencing the history of the state. The French, during the time they held the country, used the rivers for transportation and developed a very profitable fur trade. They also used the rivers as lines of communication between their chain of posts that extended from New Orleans in the south to Quebec in the north. The aims of the French were in conflict with those of the British, which resulted in a war being fought between the two powers for control of the Ohio Valley. The British gained control of the Northwest Territory at the Peace of Paris, 1763, but excluded settlers from it. After the War for American Independence, the Americans gained control of the region and rapidly settled it.

The fact that George Rogers Clark had captured and was holding the former French settlements in the Ohio Valley at the close of the war probably had some influence on the decision to locate the western boundary of the United States at the Mississippi River.

The American settler depended upon the rivers for transportation and later the rivers were used extensively



for commerce. The early Hoosier faced many economic problems, the most basic of which was probably transportation. The Hoosier settler used the rivers and streams to solve this problem. Before the coming of the steamboat, he used the native materials to build flatboats with which he transported his surplus goods to market. With the coming of the steamboat, the Hoosier could also import goods and thus was able to help raise his living standards.

The rivers and streams were very influential in deciding where cities and towns were to be laid out. Even today, nearly every town of any size is located on or near some kind of a stream.

A greater or lesser significance can be attached to the influence that the desire to control the entire length of the Mississippi River by the settlers of the Old Northwest had on the eventual purchase of the Louisiana Territory. However, if the rivers had not been located where they were, there wouldn't have been a move toward acquiring the territory for some time and perhaps in the future, fate might have decreed that the area would have passed into other hands. As stated earlier, when one deals with influence, one must consider a lot of ifs.

It is very likely that the settlement of the Old Northwest would have been held up for a number of years had the streams been situated differently. (They could have led off into the wilderness or to some other barren and inhospitable area. The rivers furnished the best and safest way to get into the region and furnished the only way to get products out to a market. With the coming of the steamboat, the Ohio became in effect the western extension of the great national highways and opened an easy pathway for immigration to the eastern as well as the western lands of the Mississippi Basin.<sup>1</sup>

The steamboat and the Mississippi River system bound the Old Northwest and the South together in an economic tie that later developed into a political tie as well. This relationship helped to influence some of the legislation during the early days of the United States.

As with any region, the geography of the area governs to a great degree the use to which the land is put. Indiana was fortunate in being well-watered and also by being connected with other well established areas by a convenient avenue of transportation. This avenue didn't need much work to make it ready for use and the vehicle needed could be constructed from a plentiful supply of materials. The many

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<sup>1</sup>Hulbert, op.cit., pp. 174-76.

streams also enabled the state to become settled rapidly, and as a means of communication, they enabled new ideas to be carried more rapidly to the settlers in Indiana.

The conclusions reached in this study were that the rivers very definitely had an influence on the history of Indiana. They were used by the settlers to get into the region, to get about after they had arrived, and later they were used to get the settler's surplus goods to market. There is no doubt but that the settlement of Indiana would have been delayed for several years had the rivers been situated differently. And it is possible that the history of Indiana would have developed differently had its settlement come at a later date.

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APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A

### FIRST ANNUAL REPORT-WABASH NAVIGATION COMPANY

The following is a portion of the report given by Sylvanus Lothrop, Esq., Engineer to the President and Directors of the Wabash Navigation Company to the stockholders of that company, in 1848, at the first annual meeting:

In order to afford to the stockholders and friends of this great public work . . . a detailed statement of all the operations up to the present time.

This work is not a mere local improvement, limited in its influence only to the region of its route, or to the population of the district which it penetrates. The river itself is the common avenue of two states, while its tributaries traverse the rich interior valleys of each, and contribute not only to swell the volume of the central stream, but also to collect the extensive commerce which is destined to float upon it. Even the General Government as the largest land holder in this section of country will receive in the ready sale and enhanced value of its domain, immense advantages from the construction of this improvement. Nor is the conception of this undertaking complete until we trace it to its extremities and show its connexions in the North and South with those great highways of nature, which open an inland navigation of more than 30,000 miles in extent within the bosom of a great continent-far removed from the estuaries and inlets of the Ocean, and already giving active employment to more than half the tonnage of this commercial union.

The Wabash River in its natural condition is favorably designed for the purpose of Steam-boat navigation. It is the most important tributary of the Ohio, contains a supply of water so unusually abundant as to render it proof against the extremest drought and has but little fall with a gentle current, good bottom and tollerably well defined banks..it penetrates and traverses for its whole distance, one of the most productive and fertile agricultural regions on the face of the globe.