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HISTORY IN BRIEF.

It is not the purpose of this article to trace the changing of political lines which composed the present territory of Jasper county back to the discovery of America, or even to the time that Indiana was formed into a territory, but to simply note a few facts bearing directly on the happenings in this immediate vicinity.

THE FIRST JASPER COUNTY.

The legislature of 1834-35 created a county called Jasper, which embraced the whole of Benton county and that portion of the present Jasper county now represented by the townships of Carpenter and Jordan and part of Marion and Newton townships, also four townships now forming the south portion of Newton county.

THE SECOND JASPER COUNTY.

This territory was attached to White county, but in 1838 Jasper was organized as an independent county, and Newton county attached for some purpose only. For other purposes Newton county was under the jurisdiction of White county. In 1840 Newton county was wholly incorporated with and became a part of Jasper, and the name Newton dropped as a county, but adopted as the name of the county seat which was located on the present site of Rensselaer.

COUNTY AS FINALLY ORGANIZED.

Jasper county lost the territory of Benton in 1840, but retained that of Newton for twenty years, or until 1859, when it was reduced to its present limits, though still next to the largest county in Indiana.

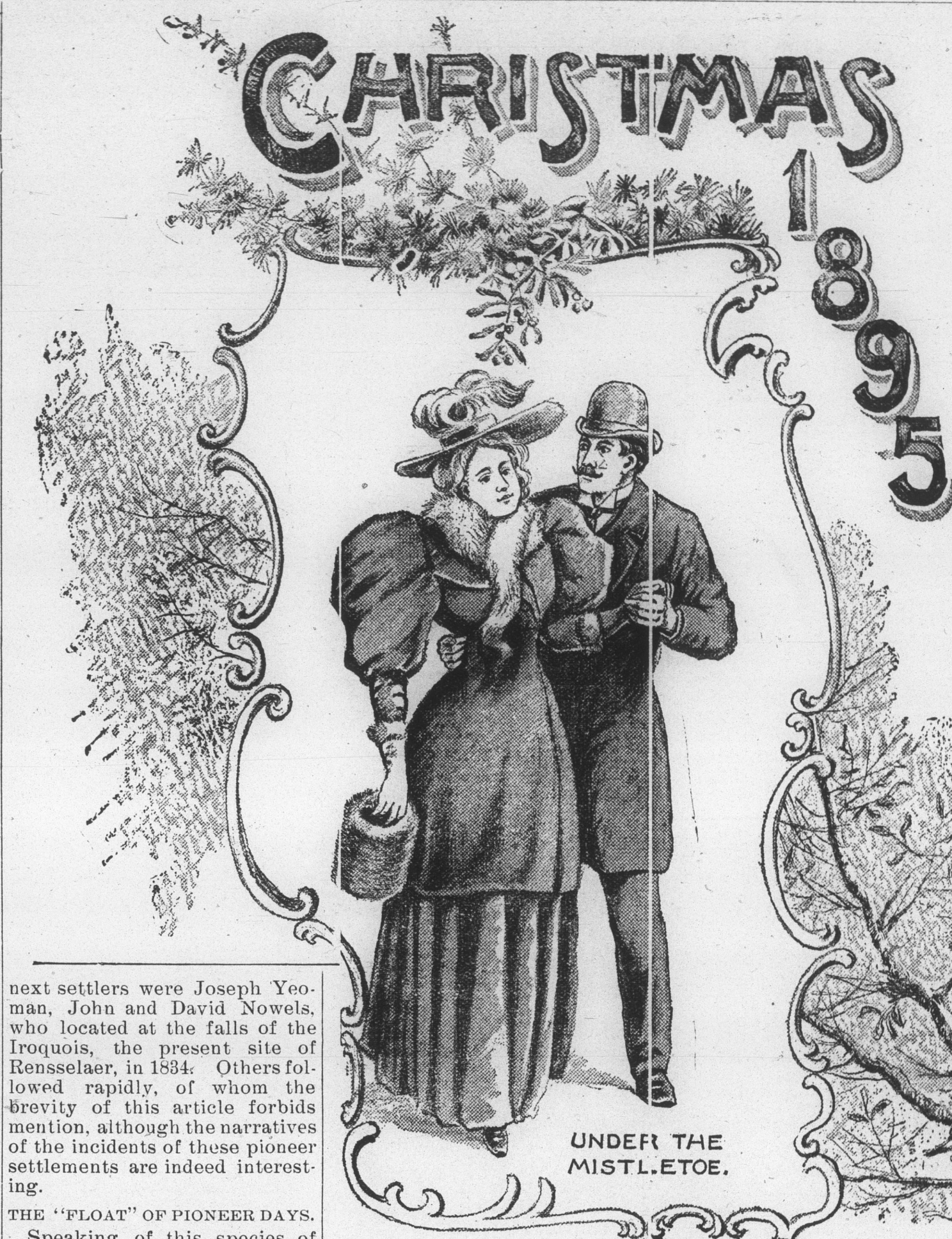
ORIGIN OF THE COUNTY NAME.

The following paragraph by the compiler of a county history seems admissible in this place:

"The name of most counties of the state are suggestive of the Revolution. The period when most of them were designated was so near to those heroic times, that no memorial to the virtues of its heroes seemed so appropriate as the political divisions which owed their existence to their achievements. The name of Jasper is a tribute to that heroic devotion which Americans are glad to honor in the subordinate as well as in the chieftain. Among the garrison of Fort Moultrie, in Charleston, S. C. Harbor on the 28th of June, 1776, was a Sergeant by the name of Jasper. It was on this day that the British fleet, which had occupied the harbor, opened the attack upon the fort with such a heavy and well-directed fire as to cause the observing patriots on the shore to tremble for the outcome of the conflict. Once during the day, as the smoke from a terrific cannonading cleared away, the flag of the fort was nowhere to be seen. The shot of the fleet had carried it away, and the anxious spectators, with sinking hearts, feared the fort had struck its flag to the foe. But the ensign had not fallen willingly nor unnoticed. In face of the storm of shot and shell that fell upon the garrison, Sergt. Jasper rescued the flag, and in a perfect hailstorm of bullets, nailed it to the broken staff. At night the fleet quietly left the harbor, with the fort unsubdued. Jasper was the hero of the occasion, the delighted citizens of Charleston uniting to do him honor. The ladies presented him with a beautiful flag, which he pledged himself to defend with his life, and true to his word he was found later in the war dead upon the field of battle, clinging to his and his country's flag. Such is the hero which this county honors."

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF JASPER.

The county was not opened to settlement as a part of the North-West Territory until 1832, and in that year William Donahue settled in Gillam township. He was attracted here by the abundance of fur-bearing game, as were most of the early settlers of Indiana. This man made a permanent home, improved his farm, and after several years died. None of his descendants remain in this locality now. The



next settlers were Joseph Yeoman, John and David Nowels, who located at the falls of the Iroquois, the present site of Rensselaer, in 1834. Others followed rapidly, of whom the brevity of this article forbids mention, although the narratives of the incidents of these pioneer settlements are indeed interesting.

THE "FLOAT" OF PIONEER DAYS.

Speaking of this species of land grant a writer says: "This was a peculiar way the General Government had of disposing of its lands, and very often worked grave injustice, as in two cases, at least, at the rapids. To discharge certain obligations, the Government granted a warrant for a certain amount to be located at the option of the holder on any land belonging to the United States. Until 1837, lands could not be bought here, and settlers made claims with the intention of perfecting their title at the first opportunity. This was sometimes neglected, and while their 'claim' was proof against any similar demand, it was powerless before a 'float.' It was such an instrument that robbed the first settlers of Rensselaer of the fruits of their first few years of pioneer toil. A 'float' in the hands of James Van Rensselaer dispossessing Joseph D. Yeoman of his home and improved farm, and another owned by W. M. Kenton easily ousted William Mallat from his claim on the west side of the Iroquois where Alfred Thompson's fine house now stands. With the loss of his land perished Mr. Yeoman's dream of plating a town, and his usurping successor accomplished that object June 12, 1839. Joseph D. Yeoman being the first purchaser of a lot, at a public sale, paying \$100 for the same.

RENSSELAER STAGNATED BY GREED.

Though the county seat was located here the town was backward in development through the shortsightedness of the proprietor, who came from the famous old Dutch stock of New York, and though a bankrupt, had very aristocratic ideas and an exaggerated idea of his own greatness. He refused to sell lots at a fair value and thus prevented the building of a town. He attempted to monopolize all branches of trade and discouraged competition. It took years for Rensselaer to free itself from this stagnation, but it finally began to grow and has steadily developed until now its thriving population of 2,500 is the most prosperous community of its size

in Indiana, and only modesty checks the writer in claiming more for this hustling town which will soon ask for a city charter and start on its rapid way to a city of 10,000 people.

INCORPORATION OF THE TOWN.

Rensselaer was incorporated in 1859 but the war coming on soon after enterprise seemed to lag and the charter was allowed to lapse. It was revived again in 1866 and since then the town has moved rapidly along progressive lines.

PROGRESSIVE, NOT "BOOM" GROWTH.

The town has never felt the reactionary effects of a "boom." Its growth has always been of the steady, solid sort. Improvements have always been made without using "borrowed capital." Its men of means have largely used their wealth themselves, and judiciously, in beneficial enterprises. Seldom has there been vacant dwellings or store houses, and with the beginning of 1896 not a new family could be housed in the city or another business find a room to occupy. It seems appropriate to quote here an extract from The Union of Oct. 2, 1879, as noticing even then the peculiarly solid growth of the town:

"It was said in these columns last week that no business man of Rensselaer had gone into bankruptcy since 1868 or 1869, and the fact spoke emphatically for the integrity of the people. It is also pretty good evidence that Rensselaer is a pretty good trading point. Other equally strong testimony may be adduced to sustain this proposition. Within the last two years, while people all over the United States were complaining of stringent times, the people of central Jasper county have paid out \$75,000 taxes and voluntary donations to build a railroad; within the same period those who live in Rensselaer have built dwelling houses and business blocks of the value of the entire improvements of this character in the town previous to that time—that is to say, within three years the value of

the improvements in the town of Rensselaer has been doubled. Not another town in the state of Indiana can truthfully say as much. There is no excitement, no speculation—all is legitimate and calm. The improvements spoken of are all of good, substantial character. Two and three story brick dwellings and business blocks, that no town of 1,000 or 2,000 inhabitants need be ashamed of—indeed such blocks as the Nowels' Hotel, Alfred Thompson's dwelling, and Willey & Sigler's Opera House, are not inferior to the best buildings of their character found in cities of 10,000 population."

The greatest growth and development of this county has taken place within the last ten or fifteen years. During that time immense ditches have drained thousands of acres of absolutely untillable land and by thorough system of tiling the county has been reclaimed. It has been an era of engineering and steam dredging, which is still being pushed by energetic citizens.

From a recent valuable paper by the Hon. Simon P. Thompson the following extracts are selected:

"This portion of earth's vineyard hath a great variety of soil; the gentle, rolling prairies of Jordan and Carpenter, the sandy knolls and level slashes of the north and the varied relief of the center.

"The great ice flow from the north, the slashing of the comet's tail, or the drift of the lake wavelets passed over Jasper's fair face since the upheavals of the pre-historic age.

"The newest geological rocks are on Carpenter's creek and the oldest at Rensselaer.

"The earth yields lime and sand rock fit for building or macadamizing, gravel for plastering and making roads, bog iron of fine texture, mineral waters of the most salubrious quality; also sufficient pockets of coal oil and gas to cheer our hopes of a richer find. The timber was to the early settlers a great blessing as fuel, building and fence

material, and attracted the home seekers one half century ago.

"This timber was mostly oak of many kinds. The white and burr oak would last for rails and posts while the black jack, yellow and swamp oak was only fit for fuel and lumber unexposed to the weather.

"What appeared a decade ago to be level expanse of wet prairie is now a rolling area of thirty farms. The wild grass then grew so large on the mucky swamp that it would hide a man on horseback. Now these swamps are yielding maize from 12 to 15 feet in height and sixty bushels to the acre. In the early days the timber was mostly large, forming open oak parks. The thick young growth is all of modern origin, not over fifty years old.

"The prairie fires in those early days were the rule in Autumn and more to be dreaded than all else. The intense excitement of the terribly irresistible approach, the suffocation and heat of its passage and the contemplation of the fiery foe, burned itself into the life of the

beautiful meadows and fields of yellow grain have now come to stay in that north central township. While the Hanging Grove of the days of 1834 is gone, the name of the township carries us back to the time when the Indians deposited their dead in the trees.

"The genuine lover of his country, one who honors the loyal blue, must glory in Union, that northwestern giant.

"From the warriors and not the statesman we have the names Marion, Jasper and Newton to commemorate the gaining of our independence. In 1861 the life of the nation was trembling in the balance, when our own Grey Eagle won the distinction of naming Milroy.

"About the time settlement began in Jasper county, the Black Hawk war was raging, but the brave Methodist heart of John Gillam carried him into what is now Gillam township. Henry Barkley followed the Culps, Randles and Parkinsons into the Forks' settlement, and that important township bears his name. Perhaps the earliest white visitor to our county, and the first one to die and be buried in her soil, was James Carpenter whose grave is on the banks of the creek and near the center of the township bearing his name.

"The Jordans scattered much and Jordan is still suggestive of 'hard to travel.' It boasts of more religious and political opinions than any of its brethren.

"Walker, the largest of all, was named after Landie B. Walker, one of its foremost residents.

"Jacob Keener, who of all these pioneers is with us in the flesh to this day, was emigrating to Iowa, but stopped short in north-west Jasper. He is like his contemporaries, alike ready to give and partake of old-fashioned hospitality.

"All these names and distinctions are worthy of mention. Several of the earliest comers are with us yet, and it is a source of pleasure to hear them tell the incidents of their daily walk.

"Benjamin Hinkle, whom many of us knew, was a member of the legislature of 1834; that created our county. In the year 1857, on July 4th, he made a speech on the subject of Jasper's early history, which was published in the Rensselaer Gazette.

"Our court house was burned January 18, 1865, which mutilated the official history of our county prior to that time.

"In 1840 the entire taxable valuation of property in what is now Newton, Benton and Jasper was \$20,340. A single citizen who is not now assessed more than this in either of the three counties is not considered at all wealthy.

"The court first tried to assemble in an old blacksmith shop in what is now Rensselaer. The occupants, however, would not obey Judge Naylor and the little bugs held possession, while the court, lawyers and the county officer—for the court house ring was then one person—went to said officer's home, near where the Catholic college now is, and held the first session of court. George W. Spittler was that county officer. Joseph A. Wright, afterwards noted as governor and foreign minister, was prosecuting attorney.

"Prior to 1840 there were settlements at Blue Grass, Wall Street, Carpenter's Creek, Gillam, Crockett's Graveyard and a few scattering houses throughout the county.

"Dr. Clark, our first physician, came with his quinine in 1837. The preachers came about as early. The school-teacher was abroad on Wall Street in the person of Mr. Webster; at Blue Grass, Elizabeth Price; in Rensselaer, that same county officer, George W. Spittler.

"In 1843 we had a 4th of July celebration, with a two story quilting, the reading of the declaration, and a sermon under an old oak standing in what is now Washington street.

"Thomas J. Yeoman, son of Joseph Yeoman and brother of our David H., was the first born son of Jasper.

"In 1841 our town changed its name from Newton to Rensselaer after him who is buried near the site of the new Presbyterian

