

pupil himself, guided by the precept and example of the instructor.

Education was hampered, too, by the shortness of the school term. In most districts it was only four months, but in Grant district the term was six months, and Washington had five months until 1885, when the term was increased to six months.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF THE NEWSPAPER

Several counties in the new State were without newspapers early in the seventies, and among them was Pleasants. It may be added, also, that at the time very few counties were able to support a paper. The art of advertising was practically unknown and there were comparatively few reading families. Especially in a small county like this the starting of a newspaper required a wonderful hope and ambition, even though the cash outlay for the printing plant was remarkably small compared with that necessary at present.

To the Rev. F. M. Yates, then a young minister of the Methodist Protestant Church, belongs the credit of bringing the press directly into this county. He established "The Watchword" in the latter part of October, 1877, and of that paper the St. Marys Oracle is the lineal descendant, through change of owners and change of names. As the coming of a home printed newspaper may be said to mark an epoch in the history of the town and county, it may be well to take a brief survey of the community at this point.

The entire population of the county was not more than five thousand, and of the town perhaps three hundred. There were only nine postoffices—St. Marys, Grape Island, Raven Rock, Twiggs, Sugar Valley, Hebron, Union

Mills, Schultz and Willow Island. The only villages, outside of the county seat, were Hebron, Raven Rock, Jones-town and Schultz. Looking at the country from the summit of one of the hills it seemed almost like an unbroken forest, just here and there a little clearing being visible.

There were about forty-five dwellings located within the corporate limits of St. Marys, more than two-thirds of them south of George street. There were three hotels—the Cain House, the Exchange and the Commercial, but the last named was not in public use, the front section, facing Second street, being occupied by a private family, and the upper rooms on the George street side were tenanted by a few roomers or lodgers, who fitted the rooms with their own furniture, while the rear sitting room was used as the printing office of the Watchword.

The old Methodist Episcopal Church South was in too dilapidated a condition to be used for services, but the Methodist Protestant Church was open for the use of all Christian denominations. The Rev. J. L. Jackson of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Rev. F. M. Yates of the Methodist Protestant Church were the only resident ministers who were actively engaged in church work.

Creel was still the business street of the place. There were the stores of Silas Gallaher and George W. Riggs on the south side of the street, between the alley and the Cain House; A. Jackson Watson had a store on the corner of Creel and First street in the building first used by Logan Brothers; George Kelsall's store was on the northwest corner of Creel and Second street. It was originally a one-story structure, but he had added an upper story, which was used for a time as a lodge hall. Opposite to it on Creel street was the shoe shop of B. B. Timmons.

Second street abruptly ended at Creel, being blocked off by the residence of Mrs. Rachel Hall, mother of the late John S. Hall. To the east of the Hall home Parker J. Duff had a drugstore, and in the same neighborhood were two or three saloons, presumed at the time to be out of business, one called "The Indian Queen," exhibiting

Her Majesty painted on a large sign-board. The post-office was on the east side of Second street on the lot adjoining that of the late Isaac Reynolds, whose house was used as the first court house; it was the building now owned by H. C. Williams. William Carroll, who formerly had a wood yard at Vauclose, was postmaster, and kept a small general store. On the southwest corner of Second and Lafayette streets was a narrow one-story building occupied as a store by Joseph Hubbs. The Commercial Hotel mentioned above stood on the northwest corner, and directly opposite, in the house now owned by Charles F. Ingraham, a German had started a small bakery. On the other end of this square, the southeast corner of Second and George streets, Joseph Porter had a small general store, and there was a little shop of some sort just opposite where the postoffice is now.

John M. Strobel, an expert cabinet maker, had his shop on the northeast corner of Second and George streets, in which he also conducted an undertaking business, the second story being used as a lodge room by the Odd Fellows and other organizations. This building is yet in good condition. Up on Washington street, then considered far up town, Thomas Huntsman had opened a blacksmith shop; and at the west end of Washington, on the bank of the Thoroughfare, was an old steam grist mill, grinding only occasionally.

Not more than ten or twelve houses stood above Washington street, which then terminated at Third, or rather was continued as the Ellenboro Pike around the foot of the upper terrace and past the cemetery. Three houses were on the court house hill, and four on Gravel hill up to Middle Island creek. All of the upper bottom was then farm land.

Transportation was by boat, and that accounted for Creel street being the center of business, because of its terminal at the wharf. It will be recalled that mention has been made of the county road built about 1850, running down the river in front of the Cain House and through the Narrows. By 1877 this road had been entirely washed away, but there were still traces of it in the Narrows, and well up on the face of the bluff there, above the present railroad track, was the opening of a small coal

mine. In the year the Watchword was established there was still quite a large, wide lawn on the river side of the Cain House, and the Thoroughfare at the lower end of the island was not much more than half its present width, the bank from the end of Creel street then sloping gently down to the river.

Between St. Marys and Marietta a small side-wheel steamboat, the Kittie Nye, made daily trips, leaving this port in the morning and returning in the evening. Dode Berry was the captain, Selby Berry the engineer, and Brady Morgan the clerk, all residing in St. Marys. It is a curious fact that very few steamboat men made their homes on the West Virginia side of the river, while Clarington, Sardis, New Matamoras and Newport apparently thronged with them.

The mails were carried by the Wheeling & Parkersburg Transportation Company, two large side-wheel boats, the Courier and the Express, being in the trade. For some reason the general favorite was the Courier, of which Mac Gamble was clerk. The passage between the terminals of this trade required a long day. The boat from Parkersburg usually arrived at St. Marys about ten in the morning and that from Wheeling about six or seven in the evening, so there were two mails every day except Sunday, when the boats laid up. When the steamers could not navigate the mails were brought by wagon or sled in the Winter and by skiff in the Summer.

It was not an uncommon experience for a steamboat to be compelled to tie up to the shore between ports, either by reason of ice or low water, making the trip to Wheeling last several days. But during the tie-up the passengers were taken care of comfortably at the expense of the transportation company, and the time was generally employed in festivities and amusements on board. There was always a piano in the ladies cabin, so there was singing and sometimes inventive geniuses devised vaudevilles and theatricals.

The landing of a steamboat generally drew the entire population to the wharf. On the larger boats liquors were sold, and to that fact was frequently attributed the remarkable haste made by some of the citizens in getting on board, even before the huge stage-plank had been

firmly seated on the shore. At any rate the arrival of a boat was a cheerful break in the humdrum life of the village, especially when a drove of cattle was to be put on board. Sometimes the crew was compelled to go far up town to fetch the cattle, keeping the boat at the wharf for an hour or more. Or it might be that there was a consignment of new oil barrels to be shipped, and then the steamer would go up the Thoroughfare about to Lafayette street, where the barrels were stacked, and where wooden troughs or chutes extended down the bank. The barrels were sent sliding down these chutes to the steamer's decks with a great deal of hurraing on the part of the deck-hands and still more shouting, mixed with profanity on the part of the mate when a barrel bounced out or the chute become clogged. All this was interesting alike to the travelers on the boat and to the inhabitants of the town, the one group having apparently no more active life than the other.

After the departure of the mail packet came the gathering at the postoffice. The sack was usually light, and often Postmaster Carroll himself carried it from the landing to the office, his curling, snow-white hair sweeping his shoulders, a perfect image of a Revolutionary patriot, heading a straggling procession of men, boys and girls.

There were no individual boxes in the postoffice. It was the custom of Mr. Carroll to carefully empty the pouch on the counter, sort out the letters, which he could easily hold in one hand, and then call out the name of the person to whom each was addressed. It seemed that most of them were for the firm of Jones & Haines. As a name was called the recipient, if present, would respond "Here!" as if answering a roll call, and the letter would be passed to him through the crowd. If there was no response, the letter was filed away in one of the boxes. It was all as interesting as the drawing at a lottery. Mr. Carroll had the humorous habit of withholding a letter addressed to William W. Hall, the prosecuting attorney, until the last, and then would call out, "W. W. Hall, and that's all!"

Should the boat be a little late in getting down from Wheeling, the accommodating postmaster nevertheless would open the sack and distribute the mail, even as

late as nine o'clock. If the weather was warm, the notables of the town would wait outside of the postoffice for the mail to be brought up from the boat and arranged, sitting upon benches or storeboxes. In passing, it may be mentioned that on the edge of the sidewalk in front of every store in town was a long, heavy plank, usually set in between two locust trees, whereon the loiterers could lounge to their hearts' content. But the bench by the postoffice was the real town forum.

There would gather the lawyers—Colonel Robert Patterson, mighty of frame and so strong that it is reported that once he carried two barrels of flour from the steamboat landing up to the top of the bank, one resting on each hip, holding the chimes with his extended hands; in Winter he wore the huge shawl which had been in the height of fashion in the sixties; Mayor James L. Richardson, a younger brother of the late General Richardson of Marietta; John B. Townsend, who had moved to St. Marys a few years before from the central part of the State, a quaint, quiet humorist, who, it was surprising to learn, had once been a sailor and had navigated the Gulf of Mexico, bringing back cargoes of mahogany and other fine woods; he affected a coat with a clerical cut, buttoned square up to the throat; William W. Hall, prosecuting attorney, a veteran of the Civil War who, with two of his brothers, had fought on the side of the Union while three other brothers were helping in the Confederacy; he clung to the fashion of a short cape in cool weather; R. A. Gallaher, an omniverous reader and afterwards for many years editor of the Oracle; Clinton C. Davis, one of the younger members of the bar, just emerged from teaching school, and with intensely intellectual features; John L. Knight, clerk of the circuit and county courts, always on hand, and always looking as if he had just donned a new suit of clothes.

There too would come Parker J. Duff, the wit of the town, who was ever ready with some quaint quip; John S. Hall, a younger brother of the prosecuting attorney, who had lost his sight while serving as teamster in the Union army, later distinguished as "the blind poet of Pleasants" and the first editor of the Oracle; W. G. H. Core, wearing his long black frock coat, an active busi

ness man, who had served as a member of the State constitutional convention of 1872; Captain J. R. M. Agnew, an oldtime steamboat man who had retired from the river and opened a drug store in St. Marys; Dr. P. S. Braford, a native of Rockbridge county, Virginia, a man of great size and of very genial nature, a college graduate who still liked to wrestle occasionally with Virgil and other classics, and whose "Quo he" dialect was enjoyed by all; and Richard Tewzey, in slippered feet, smilingly issuing his gentle philosophical satires.

It was a little world, but it was an epitome of the bigger world that lay around, containing all the elements which, when developed, make nations powerful and distinguished. And in all probability the actors governed themselves according to the size of the stage they trod. Life was not so strenuous then, and there was plenty of time for argument and personal anecdote.

There were no vendors of newspapers and magazines in the town, all periodicals coming through the postoffice, excepting those sold by the stewards or cabin boys of the passenger steamers. Godey's Ladies Book, Harper's Bazaar and T. S. Arthur's temperance monthly were the principal magazines, and were handed about from house to house until they fell to pieces. The only dailies received here were the Wheeling papers—the Register and the Intelligencer—just two or three copies of each. The favorite weekly was the Cincinnati Enquirer, with the Toledo Blade next in popularity. The New York Ledger, the New York Weekly and the Saturday Night were the famous papers for serial stories of the E. D. E. N. Southworth and Mary J. Holmes stripe, sentimental, but far from being vicious; in truth, of a higher literary and moral value than most of those filling the magazines of today.

Joseph Hubbs, who had been a member of the First Wheeling Convention in 1861, was somewhat celebrated for the number of magazines and papers he subscribed for, among them being Harper's Magazine, which he had taken for many years. He was considered rather eccentric. Lying on his back on the counter, his head resting comfortably on a bolt of muslin, his legs crossed easily, and with a book or paper upright on his chest, he spent

many a placid hour. It is said that if a customer asked for an article of the value of five cents, he would remark that it wasn't worth the trouble of getting up for it, and proceeded with his reading.

The thirst for newspapers gradually grew with the opportunity for obtaining them. Not many could afford to subscribe for dailies, and when the exchanges began coming in to the new local paper, that office became a popular resort for the men of the town.

In the way of clothes, every man suited his own taste. As noted above, shawls and capes were still worn by men in the Winter season. Ready-made clothes for men were known as "hand-me-downs," and were held in contempt, and if one had to wear them the creases were carefully pressed out before donning them. Men ordered their clothes from real tailors, measured and cut to taste, regardless of the alleged fashionable style, at a cost of twenty-five to thirty dollars. Most of the tailored suits were made by John Messerly of Clarington, who regularly traveled up and down the river taking orders, until he was succeeded by his son, Charles M. Messerly.

Store boots were sold, but most men preferred to have them also made to order, at a cost of nine or ten dollars. Men were then beginning to wear shoes, and could have them made, pegged, including squeaks, for four dollars, or sewed for eight dollars. One pair of shoes was usually considered enough for a year. In fact many fully grown men had the habit of still going barefoot through the Summer.

But in good truth the streets of St. Marys then favored the wearing of boots in Winter rather than shoes, for there were neither pavements nor crossings, and in wet weather the mud was ankle deep. Fortunately most of the fences were built of boards nailed lengthwise to the posts, and by wriggling one's feet along the bottom board while the hands gripped the top board it was possible to get about—a sort of reversal to the methods of our alleged remote ancestors. It may be imagined that shoe polish was not in great demand, most of the men greasing their boots with tallow to keep them soft and to prevent leaking, for rubbers were seldom seen. High topped boots continued to be worn by elderly gentlemen

until in the nineties, one of the last to use them being Governor Arthur I. Boreman. who was judge of this circuit in 1894.

What is yet known as the Strobel building, a structure made of upright boards well battened, was erected by John M. Strobel and his son, Christian. The elder Strobel was a Bavarian and had learned the business of cabinet-making in all its finest details before coming to this country. Back in the fifties he had bought the cabinet shop of George Kelsall. He was also an undertaker, making the coffins himself, frequently toiling at the work all night long.

Another industry of the day which should not be overlooked was that of fishing in the Ohio river. This, of course, was indulged in by everybody as a pastime, but it was regularly carried on as a business by John and William Cooper. In the seventies no license was required and there was no restriction as to the manner of catching fish or as to the amount of the catch. All the creeks then abounded with fish, and the angler could always count on bringing home a large string of bass or wall-eyed pike. That was before fish were destroyed by the millions with salt water from the oil wells and with chemicals from the manufacturing plants about the headwaters.

Seining and fishing with trot lines were the usual methods of the Coopers, and it was most interesting to watch them making a haul with their long seines. One end was fastened securely to the shore, and as one rowed the skiff the other deftly let the seine into the water its full length. Then the boat was brought around near to the starting point and the net drawn in, usually heavy with a vast school of frightened, leaping fish. great catfish and spoonfish, sturgeon, silvery drums or white perch as they are called here, bass and herring, with occasional dogfish and other strange denizens of the waters. A favorite place to make a haul was in the little channel between Grape and Bat Islands, which went by the name of Wizard Bay because of the great quantities caught there. In one haul in the Winter of 1888 the Coopers caught 900 pounds of edible fish. The fishermen found a market either on the boats or at Wheeling.

The greatest product of the trot line was catfish, several channel cats weighing one hundred pounds and more having been caught in that manner. One of these we remember having seen borne on a pole thrust through its gills, resting on the shoulders of two men, its tail sweeping the walk.

The initial number of the Watchword was printed in the latter part of October, 1877, the work being done by a printer from Marietta. After getting out this first issue, he went down the river to spend Sunday at his home town and failed to return. Mr. Yates was not a printer, so he could do nothing himself. A week passed, and his few subscribers feared that the first number would be the last one. Then the editor went to New Martinsville and employed the writer of this book to print his paper.

The office nestled in the rear sitting room of the old Commercial Hotel, the door opening on Lafayette street. The plant consisted of a lightly built Day job press, large enough to print one page of a five-column paper. Elisha Baker, father-in-law of Mr. Yates, was the power that ran the press, turning it with one hand by means of a crank attached to the fly-wheel, while with the other hand he pulled the printed sheet off the press, the printer doing the feeding. It was a four-page paper, so it had to be run through the press four times; but as the circulation was only about two hundred the press-work was soon done. There were three cases of news type of the size called Long Primer, and four or five cases of job type. Even this primitive outfit caused considerable comment and questioning, for very few persons in the community had ever seen the interior of a printing office. Some came in, handled the type curiously, and asked the printer if he had moulded them as bullets were moulded.

It seemed an exceedingly barren field. Not a business firm in town was using its own printed stationery; the method of advertising by hand-bills or circulars was unknown, except when rewards were offered for the recovery of escaped criminals or estrayed cattle, and the legal advertising in this small county was negligible. The office had been established four months before the printer had a chance to try his hand on a job, and that was printing an envelope card for John Schauwecker, the tanner.

The Watchword was non-political; in truth, it had a strong tendency editorially towards theological disputation, although the local news columns were well maintained. It had a very slight advertising patronage, and the subscriptions were mostly paid with the products of the farm such as potatoes, apples and firewood. It struggled through the Winter, maintained mostly from the editor's salary as a minister and his receipts from bridegrooms; but in the following Spring the proprietor gave up all hope and taking in the late Rev. John J. Poynter as associate editor, the name Watchword was dropped, and that of The West Virginia Methodist Protestant substituted in an attempt to make it a church paper. But in a few weeks that failed also, and the plant was sold to Minos P. Prettyman, who restored the local paper, giving it the name of Observer.

Mr. Prettyman had been a country school teacher, but had a fancy for typography, and came to town early Friday evenings and spent his week-ends in the office learning to set type and run the press, in both of which he soon became efficient. By wonderful assiduity and close management he succeeded in keeping the paper going for a year or two, and then sold out to John S. Hall, who had aided as a writer on the Observer.

Mr. Hall assumed charge in the fall of 1881, and in December of that year changed the name to Oracle, with M. P. Prettyman as publisher. This arrangement lasted a year, when Mr. Prettyman withdrew and the writer was again called to take charge of the paper, January 1, 1883. A complete file of the Oracle has been kept bound from December, 1881, to the present. John S. Hall was owner and editor of the paper until the latter part of February, 1885, when he sold the outfit to Robt. L. Pemberton and W. S. Gallaher. For about fifteen years R. A. Gallaher was editor, then for a year or two John L. Hissom was editor and manager, and from 1902 to the present it has been under the management of the writer, who has been sole owner since 1909. In 1883 M. P. Prettyman bought another small printing outfit and began the publication of a newspaper called the Observer, which managed to exist for a few years, but finally he moved it to New Martinsville, there calling it the New Era.