

Whetzel family first Morgan County settlers

Jacob Whetzel may have been looking over his shoulder when he stumbled across the "Bluffs" on the White River in Morgan County. The year was 1818 and the "wilderness-wise" frontiersman knew better than to cross Delaware Indian tribal land without caution and a healthy respect for their fighting prowess.

Actually, Whetzel wasn't aimlessly wandering around. He had a particular project in mind and had secured permission from the Delaware chief at his camp near Anderson. Whetzel planned to cut a trace (a wide path) from the White Water River in Eastern Indiana to the White River in the area of Waverly. From that point travelers could go by boat along the White River to get to Vincennes.

Stories of the Whetzel family adventures in the wilderness that is now Morgan County can be found in the book *Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, Indiana*, published in 1884. The family is reputed to be the county's first settlers, having settled near Waverly.

After permission had been granted by the Delaware chief, Whetzel and his son, Cyrus, literally blazed the trail as he had planned. Comments the history book: "Mr. Whetzel was so pleased with the Bluffs and the surrounding country that he resolved to go no farther toward Vincennes with a



Looking back

By Rose
McIlveen

view of settlement, whereupon he selected a piece of land in the valley of White River . . ."

Whetzel and his son returned eastward along the trace that came to bear the family name and collected a supply of items needed for homesteading — seeds, farm implements and, of course, guns. Since the frontier land was basically on first-come-first serve basis, Whetzel had his choice of the land in the area. He and Cyrus put stakes around a modest 60 acres and cut down trees for a cabin.

According to the book, the 18-year-old boy was left to clear additional land while his father headed east to get the rest of the family. "The second night after the father had gone, a heavy snow fell, and Cyrus built a large fire to drive off the wolves and the cold. During the night, he felt something creep under the blanket under which he was sleeping, but was too unconcerned to make further discoveries until the next morning when he was somewhat surprised to learn that his sleeping companion was none

other than a huge Delaware Indian."

In time, corn, vegetables and wheat were planted on the ground Cyrus had cleared. The rest of the family came in 1819.

The various activities of the Whetzels naturally attracted the attention of the Delaware Indians, who still lived in the vicinity.

The book tells the story of one of the Indians, who ran afoul of his own tribal laws.

"... a big brave named "Nosey" (part of his nose had been cut off, and hence the name) bantered Cyrus to shoot at a mark. The chal-

lenge was accepted, but Cyrus proved to be the better marksman. This threw Nosey, who possessed a violent temper, into a furious rage. . . . The party (of Indians) soon left, but one of them, who dared to taunt the Indian with his defeat, was instantly killed by the still-enraged savage.

"The latter was given one year, according to custom, to redeem his life by furnishing 100 deer skins to the murdered man's relatives. This could easily have been done, but no effort was made, and Nosey was accordingly put to death by torture."