

After county organized, lawyers arrived

Close on the heels of Monroe County's organization in 1818 came the gentlemen of the legal profession. Most of the lawyers who practiced in southern Indiana were either eastern imports or self-taught in the offices of already-established attorneys.

ACTUALLY THE FIRST Monroe County cases had to await the arrival of the circuit judge appointed by the governor. Judicially our county was added to a circuit that included Vigo, Clay, Putnam, Owen, Greene, Morgan, and Sullivan counties. At the beginning of the year the judge would pack his clothing and law books in a saddlebag, climb on his horse, and start making the rounds of the county seat towns in his circuit.

Since the proposed courthouse here was not

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

completed when Thomas H. Blake arrived to preside, the sessions were held in the home of newly elected Commissioner Abner Blair. Blake, a native of Washington (Ind.), had moved to Terre Haute, where the legal grass was greener. Known for his dignified behavior, his first order

of business was to read into the record his commission from the governor.

THE NEXT ORDER OF business for Blake was to hear evidence in a case of one Henry Speed versus Robert Hamilton. It seemed that the latter had dammed up Clear Creek to run a saw mill, this damaging the adjoining property of Speed, an absentee owner who lived at Middletown, Ky. (The Speed family made a considerable contribution to early Louisville history and are remembered today because of the Speed Art Museum and the Speed Scientific School of the University of Louisville.)

That case, having been continued, Judge Blake turned his attention to that of David Teague versus Leonard Nicholson for "spoken damages" in

the amount of \$1,000, a tidy sum in those days. Translated, the allegation was that Nicholson was guilty of slander, a common charge in those days. The matter was resolved when Nicholson agreed to pay the court costs in exchange for Teague dropping his claim, an early version of plea bargaining. Ironically, the attorney for Nicholson was John F. Ross, who later rode the circuit as judge from his home in Vincennes.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED here that there was seldom enough legal business in a county to support struggling young lawyers, and hence they almost literally followed the circuit judge in his rounds in order to find clients.

Moved into the new log courthouse by the time

(Page 14, col. 1, this sec.)