

John Ketcham made his mark

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the Indians became hostile and started raiding the sparse settlement.

KETCHAM TOOK HIS FAMILY back to Kentucky for safekeeping and returned to Indiana himself. Not long afterward he and a companion were chased by Indians. The companion, a neighbor, was killed, but Ketcham managed to escape with a serious shoulder wound.

It was his realization that the Territory was not safe for settlers that prompted Ketcham to join the Ranger Service under the command of General William Henry Harrison. In the roster he was listed as a First Sergeant.

Apparently the Rangers were Indiana's version of the Minutemen. When settlers were killed or their horses stolen, the Rangers were obliged to assemble and pursue the offending Indians.

Ketcham built his own little fortified house on an Indian trail that cut through Jackson County, Indiana in the vicinity of two massacres that took place in 1812 and 1813. Fort Valonia, where the Rangers were headquartered, was also nearby.

HOMESTEADING, WITH ONE eye scanning the woods and a rifle near at hand, was a way of life for Ketcham and his neighbors. Some lived in fortified houses which became a place of refuge when the Indians were sighted.

In his memoirs Ketcham didn't record what lured him to Monroe County, which was then part of several other counties. However, he did purchase land here in 1816 along Clear Creek, which the Delaware Indians called Waseleu-hanne.

Apart from the practical necessity of having water for homesteading, Ketcham had another motive for buying land along the Creek. He needed water power to run the mill which he built to grind corn.

Meanwhile, Monroe County had outgrown its first crude log courthouse. In the spring of 1819 the Commissioners decided to build a bigger and more pretentious one. Ketcham's bid was \$7,065, and he was awarded the contract.

FOR UNEXPLAINED REASONS he took his time completing the work. In fact, the building wasn't done until 1826, and Ketcham didn't receive final payment until 1829. The Commissioners may have been unhappy with his time schedule, but they had paid him \$4,000 in 1821, perhaps to encourage him. By the time Ketcham was finished he was \$335 over the contract, not too far off by today's standards.

IN LATER YEARS HONORS began pouring in for the man who helped make this area safe for settlers. Governor Harrison named him an associate judge. On the bench one day he boasted of having decided three law suits in 45 minutes.

An impressed electorate sent him to the Legislature where he served several terms. At the Democratic Convention he was appointed an elector for Andrew Jackson, perhaps the honor of which he was proudest, since Jackson was also an "Indian fighter."

For his service as a Ranger he was elected a Colonel in 1822 and the title stuck with him for the rest of his life even after he retired.

In February of 1865 near the close of the Civil War, the colonel left his home for a leisurely stroll and was later found dead on his property. His grave is in the Ketcham family cemetery in the northwest corner of Clear Creek Township near Victor Pike.