

Bigger's Trading Post among early county businesses

In the Indiana room of the Monroe County Public Library there is a map which shows the Indian names of rivers and creeks and some historic events in Indiana. In the southwestern part of the county is an "X" that marks the place where Bigger's Trading Post once was.

Actually it was situated near the source of Clear Creek and, appropriately, at the end of Bigger's Trace. Members of that family were among the 1816 land buyers in this area while it was still part of Orange County.

The Biggers knew what they were buying because they were very familiar with the territory. Col. John Ketcham, part of whose memoirs appear in Pop Hall's book, *Historic Treasures*, wrote that a couple of the Bigger boys were members of



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

the federal mounted rangers operating out of Fort Valonia.

Explained Ketcham, "Captain (James) Bigger's company was principally made up of citizens of Clark County, 10 or 12 of whom had been shut up in forts and blockhouses in the Forks, for more than a year, making nothing.

"They concluded to join the company (the federal mounted rangers) and make a business of hunting Indians and guarding their own frontier; as in doing so, they would get

some pay for their services —otherwise they would not."

Ketcham explained that Bigger and others who were responsible for protecting white settlers on the Indiana frontier, were paid a dollar a day. They were obliged to provide their own horses, guns, ammunition and provisions.

Exactly when the Bigger family began its trading post in the southern part of what was to become Monroe County is not known. A few scattered references to members in local records seem to indicate that the Biggers had come to the county to stay.

There is an interesting reference to their trading post in a book called *Spring Mill* by Norman C. Evans. He wrote that an early settler by the name of Joseph Rawlins was describing the area for some

visitors and pointed to Salt Creek. "He (Joseph) told of the Indian trail leading northward to a Government Supply Store operated by a man named Bigger, and called Bigger's Trace."

Capt. James Bigger was Monroe County's first assessor, having been appointed in 1818 and bonded at \$1,500. John Bigger bought land in what was to become Bean Blossom Township, and Stephen S. Bigger was listed in Hall's book as one of Bloomington's earliest resident.

There is another reference to the trading post in the Evans book. He first describes a hunter by the name of Gray and then relates a story told by the man. "Gray told of a large band on Indians coming to his cabin one day the previous year and saying they were on their way north to meet their companions and wanted

him to show them the way to Bigger's Trading Post.

"He (Gray) started out with them but they wandered off in another direction, refusing to follow him, so he hastily made his way back home. Thinking over their strange behavior, he again followed and overtaking them he followed them for some distance and seeing them go peacefully on their way he returned home."

For some reason, the Bigger clan chose to move away. The history of Morgan County contains a reference to James Bigger. He was appointed the county's first sheriff in 1822, which meant that he had to be a resident.

What happened to Bigger's Trading Post? It is conspicuously absent from the two Monroe County histories.