

**THE HISTORY OF
ST. LEON**

(1781-1967)

by

Dr. Cletus R. Bulach

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There were many other individuals who were of great assistance in writing this book. Father Lawrence Frey, who was the resident priest from 1962-1967, helped me search parish records. As I dug into the history, there were many stories about what happened in the past. The following individuals helped to verify whether the stories were factual or just rumors: Albert Schuman, Edmund Andres, my aunts Mrs. Marie Pohlman and Cornelia Bulach, My uncle Joe Bulach, my mom Bertha Kraus Bulach, Bernard McCann, William Hyland, Albert Volk, John Andres, Sister Margaret Clare, Rose Schuman, William Wuestefeld, Leonard Bischoff, Ed Frey, and John Moster.

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been very helpful. Her power point presentation on St. Leon has a lot of historical information.

Last, but not least, I want to acknowledge the sacrifices my family had to make for the many hours spent on this endeavor. The first edition took over a year to write, and the second edition, going back to St. Leon and Dearborn County getting new material for the rewrite, took another year of effort.



Dr. Cletus R. Bulach

Table of Contents

- I. Background
- II. Settlement
 - a. Early Settlers
 - b. Hunter/Farmer settlers
- III. Early Landowners
 - a. The Hunters
 - b. The Early Landowners
 - c. Permanent Settlers
 - d. Reasons for German Catholic Settlement
- IV. Livelihood
 - a. Early Farmers, Mills, and Other Support Businesses
 - b. Transportation
 - c. The Sperry Rubber Plant Strike in 1960-61
- V. Origins and Businesses
 - a. Origins
 - b. Businesses
 - c. Businesses in 1967
 - d. The Post Office and Naming of The Town
- VI. Education in St. Leon
 - a. The Early Schools
 - b. The First Catholic School
 - c. The Current Two Room School and Expansion
- VII. St. Joseph's Church History
 - a. The Log Chapel
 - b. Land Purchases for the Church
 - c. The Construction of St. Joseph's Church
 - d. The Pastors of St. Joseph's Church
 - e. The Cholera Epidemic

- f. The Bells of St. Joseph's Church
- g. Citizens Who Became Priests and Nuns
- h. The Lutheran Church
- VIII. The Military History
 - a. The War of 1812
 - b. The Civil War
 - c. WW I
 - d. WW II
 - e. The American Legion
- IX. The Political History
 - a. The Pole Raising
 - b. The Rooster Becomes a Symbol for the Democratic Party
- X. System of Town Government
 - a. Some Decisions of Town Board Meetings (1916-1963)
- XI. Important Events/Happenings
 - a. New Year's Eve
 - b. St. Joseph's Day
 - c. Easter
 - d. The Summer Kitchen
 - e. Burning the Fields
 - f. The Fourth of July and Dance Floors
 - g. The Potato Derby
 - h. The Church Picnic and Harvest
 - i. Halloween
 - j. Hunting and Trapping
 - k. Christmas Eve
 - l. Organizations of St. Leon That Bring People Together
 - m. The Fox Hunt
 - n. The Tavern, Bull Gang, and Nicknames

Foreword

The first version of the History of St. Leon was written for my Master's Thesis at Xavier University. This version was sold to Gene McCann, who was the editor of the Lawrenceburg Register at the time. He edited my work and had it typeset, but it was never published.

Sometime in the early 1990's, I asked if I could have the file he created on the history and if I could publish it. Gene gave me the file and permission to publish it. After many years of procrastinating, I have finally found time to do that. The revised version has all of the original material, but I have added personal anecdotes about memories as a child and teenager growing up in St. Leon. So the historical version now has a personal touch of what it was like to grow up there in the 1940's and 1960's.

Very little new material about St. Leon after 1967 has been added. St. Leon today has changed a great deal, and I did not want to spend the time and effort required to bring it up to date.

The history was written for the benefit of anyone who is interested in how a town such as St. Leon developed from nothing to the town it is today before the development of the freeways. It begins with a point outside of St. Leon and gradually narrows the scope until what happened in St. Leon is the focus. A brief description of Dearborn County and Kelso Township are the background. Following this, explanations are given for the early settlement; the early land owners; their means of livelihood; the educational, and the military, political, and church history. The system of town

government and some of the decisions made are examined. Throughout the history an attempt was made to show how life in the late 1800's and early to mid-1900 differs a great deal from life today.

Pictures of the church were chosen for the front and back cover of the book because of its importance for the development of St. Leon. Were it not for St. Joseph's Catholic Church, St. Leon might have been entirely different. In its heyday in the late 1800's and early 1900's, St. Leon was a very prosperous community with its mills, grocery stores, distilleries, taverns, and other stores and shops. At that time transportation was limited to travel by horse and wagon. With the coming of railroads, the automobile, electricity, and roads/highways, change came that was inevitable. I have tried to describe how this change came about. Some of the pictures in this book were taken in 2013 because the ones taken in 1967 have been lost.

Chapter I

Background

It was a summer day in August of 1781. A group of approximately 100 Revolutionary War soldiers were traveling by boat down the Ohio River. They were travel weary, poorly supplied, and hungry. They decided to set up camp on the right shore at the mouth of a large creek about 10 miles below the Great Miami River. As they set up camp and prepared to eat, they were suddenly attacked by a large band of Indians. The soldiers fought heroically while their ammunition lasted, and when this was gone they got in their boats and tried to escape down the river. They were not successful in escaping and were captured.

It was on this 25th day of August 1781 that the history of Dearborn County¹ and St. Leon began. This minor episode of the Revolutionary War went down in history as Lochry's defeat. Colonel Lochry was the leader of these soldiers. They were to rendezvous with Colonel George Rogers Clark farther down the river and help him fight the Indians who at that time were fighting for the British. Unfortunately, they were ambushed and captured before they met with Colonel Clark. Approximately 40 of the soldiers were killed, and the remainder was taken prisoner to Detroit, Michigan².

This event was important for Dearborn County and St. Leon for three reasons: 1) it was the first event of major importance in this territory; 2) the place of ambush was named Lochry's Creek after the leader of the expedition. This creek forms the southern boundary of

Dearborn County and is called Laughery's Creek today;³
3) When the war was over, some of these men returned and settled in the St. Leon and Dearborn County area. They remembered the beautiful country they had passed through on their way to and from Detroit. Two examples of this occurrence are George Mason and Valentine Lawrence. These two men were soldiers in Colonel Lochry's force. Both men returned to Dearborn County and settled in the St. Leon area. These two men will be further discussed in the next chapter⁴.

During the Revolutionary War and until 1790, the area consisting of Dearborn County and St. Leon was part of Virginia. One often hears the people of this area refer to people from Virginia as hillbillies. Now that everyone knows that this land was part of Virginia and that indirectly, they are also hillbillies, maybe they will find another name for people south of Indiana that has a different connotation.

After 1790, boundaries changed every few years. At different times, the present Dearborn County was part of three different counties. These counties were Knox County, Indiana, Clark County, Indiana, and Hamilton County, Ohio. During the years of 1790-98 this area was part of Knox County. It was during this period that General Anthony Wayne fought the Battle of Fallen Timbers against the Indians. After this battle he secured a treaty with the Indians which established the Greenville Treaty Line in 1795. According to the treaty, settlers east of the line would not be harmed. This treaty was kept until 1811, when during the War of 1812, Indians again began harassing and killing white settlers in this area.

The treaty line extended north and south from the Kentucky River through the town of Brookville (approximately) to Fort Recovery in Ohio. Today this treaty line marks the boundary between Dearborn and Ripley Counties⁵. All land east of this line was surveyed prior to 1801, and in that year this land was part of the first public sale of lands ever made in the US⁶. From 1798-1802, this land was part of Hamilton County, Ohio and the land office for sales was in Cincinnati. The first public sale of land was through the Cincinnati Land Office⁷. Residents of St. Leon can state with some pride that the lands which comprise St. Leon and the surrounding area were part of that public sale.

After 1802 and for a period of a few months, this land was a part of Clark County, Indiana. With the increase in land sales and population, William Henry Harrison created a new county. This new county was named after Major General Henry Dearborn. At that time he was the Secretary of War under President Jefferson. Dearborn County officially came into existence on March 7th, 1803⁸.

The following are some of the more important dates for those who are interested in the history of Dearborn County:

The first settlement was made in 1796 three and one half miles north of present Lawrenceburg. It was made by George Graves and Thomas Miller and their families⁹.

Joseph Hayes bought 386 acres in Section 36 Township 6 North Range 1 West in 1801.

John Brown also bought land in 1801. He bought 320 acres in Section 27 Township 4 North Range 1 West¹⁰.

As our point of focus narrows, the next logical point is the township in which St. Leon is located. It may be of some interest to know that the division of land called “township” originated in England and was first used in the New England states during the 17th and 18th centuries. It proved a very satisfactory system of dividing territory and for this reason it was used to divide what was then known as the western lands.

Kelso was the name given to the township where St. Leon is located. It was named after John Kelso, an Irishman who settled near Dover in 1813. It is of interest to note that St. Leon also had a settler by that name. His name was Seth Kelso, and he settled on the southeast quarter of section 5 in 1819¹¹. Whether these men were related or not is unknown.

Kelso Township was one of the original townships formed in Dearborn County. It originally included Jackson and parts of Manchester and York townships. It wasn't until 1841 that it was reduced to its present size¹².

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Chapter II

Settlement

The above provides the background for the history of St. Leon and now we can focus more on the origins of St. Leon. Three questions come to mind when one considers the origins of St. Leon:

- How and why did the area of St. Leon come to be settled?
- What prompted early settlers to locate St. Leon at its present location?
- What kind of people were the early settlers?

To understand the answer to the first question one has to visualize the topography of the land. To the east lies the Whitewater River. To the west lies the east fork of Tanner's Creek.

A strip of land approximately nine miles wide lies between these two water courses. It is a well-established fact that early settlements tend to occur on water courses. The first settlements extended up the Whitewater River and Tanners Creek with a gradual convergence on the land lying between these two valleys. Settlements were made in 1800 and 1801 on these two water courses with the first land being bought and settled in the St. Leon area in 1815.

Another factor which caused an even settlement of this area and created the town of St Leon is Logan Creek. Logan Creek is a tributary of the Whitewater River. Early settlers came up this creek and settled along its banks. Evidence of the old road that early settlers used to go to

Harrison and Cincinnati can still be found on the east side of Logan Creek. St. Leon is the source of Logan Creek. The Jerry Bulach family farm has three creeks which feed into this creek.

The referral to an even settlement of this area in the last paragraph means that settlement of this area started in the eastern part about the same time as the western part causing an even settlement of the area. For example, the Lawrence families came up the east fork of Tanners Creek in 1817 and bought 1000 acres of land. Some of this land was in Sections 1, 2,10,11,12, and 15¹. At that time, they owned the land where the present town of St. Leon is located. Many of the other settlers came up Logan Creek and purchased land about the same time. Some of the Lawrence settlers went west and settled near the present town of Lawrenceville. Supposedly, that is the reason for the name of the town, but I was unable to verify that.

There is still another reason for the settlement of this upland area. Looking at the area today, one might wonder why anyone would want to settle these thin clay soils and rocky slopes when bottomland along the river was available. The early settlers considered this land to be better than the river bottomlands. It was well drained and had an abundance of springs. Also, decayed forest materials had added a coat of humus to soil making it very fertile.

The woods also supplied game and forage for stock. The small valleys had more than enough acreage for hand cultivation. The uplands were freer of mosquitoes and the water was purer than in the bottom areas. Travel in these upland areas, in spite of the

roughness of the territory, was easier than in the low marshy areas². Consequently, St. Leon was settled because it lay between the Whitewater River and Tanners Creek and because Logan Creek made it easily accessible to a more desirable upland area. These are the reasons why the St. Leon area was settled, but does not explain why the town is at its present location.

Most towns are located at a crossroad and this true of St. Leon, Dover, and New Alsace. Why the roads tend to cross at a certain place is another story. Could they have crossed 1000 yards further north or south? The answer is no because of the survey lines that were laid out before the town was settled. Roads have a tendency to follow section lines. A check of the map of Kelso Township shows that the road running east and west follows the section line separating Sections 1 to 4 and Sections 9 to 12. In the early days, almost all roads followed section lines because people bought land by section number or parcels within sections.

A town developed at the crossroads because this location was where the four sections of land came together. A section of land consists of 640 acres. A purchase of a quarter of a section was 160 acres. During the early sale of land, people tended to buy a quarter section of land, and they usually located their house in one corner of the quarter section. The corner chosen was usually that corner nearest the road and nearest the closest neighbor. This resulted in four houses being built where these four quarter sections of land met and where the roads crossed. With four houses in close proximity a small village was formed. Eventually, an inn or tavern for

travelers was opened, then a store, and as the village grew, other businesses.

To summarize, because roads tend to follow section lines, a crossroads developed at this spot. The merging of the four quarter sections of land enabled early landowners to build their homes in close proximity at the crossroads for security and convenience. This location was easily accessible from four directions, had small stores and catered to travelers. As more houses were built this place continued to grow and eventually became St. Leon. How this place got its name will be presented in Chapter 5.

Early Settlers

The early settlers/landowners of St. Leon can be classified into three types. These three types are: the hunter, the hunter/farmer, and the permanent settler¹. The first type, the hunter, usually had a small garden and the barest essentials. They were expert with the rifle and knife and were usually at odds with the Indians. The hunter was a settler who seldom bought land because, if the hunting became poor, he would have to move to another location². St. Leon probably had settlers of this type shortly after 1800. It has been said that a settler of this type did come to this area in the year 1804. His name was George Mason. He eventually did buy land in 1819.

The source for the information about George Mason as a hunter settler was made by a relative in a letter to a former school teacher at St. Leon. His name was Bill Hyland. In the letter she wrote that George had

settled northeast of Tanners Creek and that enroute to this place he had described his trip. It was described as a long and lonely one with no houses being seen on the east fork of Tanners Creek. I was unable to verify the name of the relative or see a copy of the letter. At the time of this writing, Mr. Hyland was very old and recalled this information from memory. We had a long discussion about his teaching in a one room school down the road from the current East Central High School. This will be further described in Chapter 6.

Although there is no definitive proof that he was an early hunter settler, there is a logical explanation that it could have happened. First, he was a member of Colonel Lochry's force during the Revolutionary War. He was one of the prisoners who were taken to Detroit³ and put in prison by the British. When he was released, many of them walked back to their families/home. They made several trips through the area later known as Kelso Township, once as a prisoner and once as a free man returning home. The Revolutionary War ended in 1783. We have no idea what he did until the 1804, but supposedly he was back in the area in the early 1800's. He may have come to like this area. He definitely was good with a gun or he would not have been a soldier. He also was listed as a soldier of Dearborn County in the War of 1812.

There are also two other Masons listed as soldiers of Dearborn County in the War of 1812. They are Philip and Daniel⁴. It is thought that these men are George Mason's sons. If this is true, then there is little doubt that George Mason was in this area in the early 1800's. We also know that he bought land in 1819⁵. Based on the

above information; I will classify him as the first type of settler who was a hunter and did not buy land. That is why we have no official record of him until the War of 1812 and the land purchase in 1819. There are certain to be many others of this type in the early settlement of this area, but we have no knowledge of who they were?

Valentine Lawrence was also another settler of this type. He was a member of Colonel Lochry's Expedition⁶ and was a Dearborn County soldier in the War of 1812⁷. He was captured in 1781 and released in 1783. We have no idea what he did in the intervening years between 1783 and 1812. He could have returned to the area as a hunter settler? He did buy land in 1817. He was also very influential in causing many other members of his family to buy land in this area.

In 1817, seven Lawrence family members migrated from Pennsylvania to this area. The heads of these families were Isaac, James, Abraham, Daniel, David, John, and Valentine⁸. With the purchase of land, the Lawrence families became the second type of settler: the hunter/ farmer settler.

Hunter/Farmer Settlers

The hunter/farmer settlers owned their own land and possessed more of the essentials for a civilized life. They were a transition class². All of the early land owners of St. Leon probably fell into this category. Usually, these settlers came from the east and south and tended to have an English or Anglo Saxon heritage. Within one generation, however, almost all the lands of

St. Leon had changed hands, and the original owners had moved farther west to new lands⁸.

The next type of settler was the permanent settler and they usually came from western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee⁹. They probably consisted of Germans and Irish who worked in these states in order to obtain enough money to buy their own farms. As soon as they had the needed money, they bought their farm further west in Indiana.

Exceptions to this rule were the Irish and Germans who had money and immigrated to this area straight from Europe. The majority of these people migrated between 1830 and 1870. Several examples would be Joseph Bulach who came here in 1857. He eventually bought a farm from Michael Newman in 1870. He paid \$5400.00 for 108 acres located in the NW quarter of Section 11. This farm is currently owned by my brother Jerry Bulach. Joe Bulach's nephew Hieronymus Bulach came in 1875 and bought a farm just west of Tanners Creek. The Joe Bulach families in Lawrenceville are descendants of this man.

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