

Bits and Pieces of History....by Mary Jo Adams

Have you ever wondered about strange things that happen to you, and why? I have that feeling regarding a “find” that I discovered recently. I was trying to finish up my Christmas shopping this past holiday season, when I suddenly decided to investigate a used bookstore. I wasn’t looking for anything in particular, I just wandered about. Just as I was getting ready to walk out the door, I noticed a section marked “Illinois History” on the shelves to my left. For some reason, I felt pulled over to the section, even though history isn’t a big interest of mine. Once there, I pulled out a slender, black volume, which only had a name stamped on the front cover. The name was William B. Carlock. Now I was really intrigued. You see, the nearest town to where I live is called Carlock. And guess who founded this town? William B. Carlock. Looking inside the cover, it stated that this was “A Compilation of the Historical and Biographical Writings of William B. Carlock.” I scanned the pages quickly, and found several references to the Mackinaw River, and the Lincoln Trail Marker, which is on the McLean-Woodford County line, and something that I drive past every day. Well, needless to say, I had to have this book!

Reading through the book that evening, I was fascinated by Mr. Carlock’s writing, and the descriptions he gave about the area near where I live. Here are some bits and pieces of this book, which I hope you will find as interesting as I did.

In speaking about his father, Abraham W. Carlock, William B. writes that “in 1831 the family moved to White Oak Grove, located in Woodford County. At the time Mr. Carlock located in White Oak Grove, there were quite a number of Indians camped on the north side of the Mackinaw River, a few miles directly north of his residence. These were principally of the Kickapoo tribe....The burial mounds of the Kicapooos may yet be found in the territory of the Mackinaw. These Indians gradually disappeared like the Arab of the desert....and the settlers did not know where they went.”

About the river, it reads that “The Mackinaw River was the fishing ground for the early settlers of that community, and the savory Red Horse Fish was quite abundant. He told (Abraham Carlock) of how in the winter of 1840 he killed one cold morning....over one hundred fish with an axe. He had gone in search of some lost stock and in crossing the river at “Wyatt’s Ford” (this is very near where I live) discovered that the fish were wedged tightly under the ice at the seep holes in the shallows at the crossing.”

The book describes the wet spring of 1844, “which was known as the wet season....it commenced to rain about the middle of April and kept it up until August. The creeks and river were all overflowed and the level lands all under water. Crops were almost ruined by the excessive rains; stock became diseased by reason thereof and died....he also spoke of the fearful wet season of 1858, and that he (Abraham Carlock) did not finish planting corn that year until the fourth day of July”.

William B. Carlock also wrote that “In the early forties, Abraham Lincoln made my father’s home a stopping place for rest and refreshment in his travels to and from Versailles (the first county seat of Woodford Co.) and Metamora, to attend the courts. Frequently they exchanged anecdotes and stories, and they talked on politics. Although they did not always harmonize on the political questions of the day, they were close friends.” The marker that is placed on the McLean County and Woodford County

boundary was placed there not only to honor Abraham Lincoln, but also to mark the place where Lincoln crossed the line between the two counties when traveling the old Eighth Judicial Circuit. "In going and coming, Lincoln and his party usually crossed the Mackinaw river at Wyatt's Ford, but when the waters were high, they were ferried over at Slabtown or Faneysville."

So, some things change and some don't. The residents of the Mackinaw River come and go, but I can see from my house where the Indian village must have been located, and I camp in an area where they perhaps did also. The fish are still in the river, although perhaps less in numbers and variety. The rain and flooding seems to be an age old problem, seemingly becoming more frequent. And although there is no longer an open road down at Wyatt's Ford, you can still see evidence of the ford, and it would still be possible to ride a horse across it just as Lincoln did long ago.