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P. S. Robertson

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THE BURGEONING INTEREST IN LOCAL HISTORY IN FORT WAYNE 1887-1894

by Rex M. Potterf

The paucity of overt evidence of any considerable local interest in Fort Wayne's historical heritage during most of the century after General Wayne's visit here in 1794 may be traceable to the exigencies of popular concentration upon creature needs and living necessities. However, as the city's centennial year came nearer, strivings toward the exploitation of the history of Fort Wayne and the area become visible from a perusal of the local newspapers of that day.

Sometime previous to the summer of 1887 historical-minded citizens of Northwest Ohio organized the Maumee Valley Monumental Association. The stated purpose of the association was to obtain from Congress appropriations for the erection of memorial buildings or monuments at the old battle grounds and forts that formed a chain of defense along the Maumee River from Fort Wayne to Lake Erie. There was the hope that Congress, would provide for the purchase of the sites of old Indian fortifications, Fort Meigs, Defiance, Recovery, Miami and Wayne with the purpose of keeping alive for future generations the patriotism of the people. With a well-established anchor of membership at Toledo and its area,¹ the association sought to extend its influence and increase its membership by holding a meeting at Fort Wayne on September 10, 1887. Thus, with substantial membership in both

Toledo and Fort Wayne the leaders of the movement hoped to increase their weight as a pressure group and to unify sentiment in a larger interstate area whose early history was indeed closely interwoven.²

The roster of guests and members expected to be present at the Fort Wayne Meeting included Chief Justice Morrison, R. Waite, D. W. Howard, Judge Lemmon, Congressman Jacob Rotels, General John C. Lee, all of Toledo, Congressman W. W. Bootham of Bryan and Ex-President Rutherford B. Hayes. These gentlemen with others were routed into Fort Wayne on the 1:00 P.M. train on the Wabash with the exception of Congressman Bootham who was due to arrive on the afternoon express of the Lake Shore Road. A committee of the Business men's exchange accompanied by ex-Mayor F.P. Randall and other citizens of eminence was deputed to meet these visitors on their arrival. Ex-President Hayes was scheduled to preside over the deliberations of the convention.³

On their arrival the out-of-town visitors were driven to the Aveline House for dinner. Thereafter they were conducted to inspect the old fort sites, the scene of Harmar's defeat on the north side of the Maumee River opposite the foot of Harmar Street, the site of the English fort near the Henry Baker farm house, Spy Run and to other places of historical interest. The drive ended at the Randall residence where the visitors spent an hour in examining his cabinets of relics and curious artifacts of historical significance.⁴

Many of the expected visitors did not arrive. Assembling at the academy of music, the guests listened to an address by Mayor Muhler who in the absence of ex-President Hayes proposed Congressman J. B. White as president of the meeting. The latter was accordingly chosen. Captain Allan McDougal served as secretary. President White spoke briefly

and referred to the object of the meeting and appealed for a greater interest in the history of the area which he said extended back for two centuries.⁵

General Lee, a pleasing speaker, made the principal address and by his colorful recital of the old wars charmed and instructed his audience for upwards of an hour. He said that the revolutionary soldiers of Virginia were given this vast domain in which to locate their land claims, and then the Twelve Nations of Indians combined to prevent farther encroachments on their territory.

A line of forts was erected from Fort Hamilton, at Cincinnati, to Greenville, thence to the Auglaize River and to Fort Wayne, Defiance, Maumee and even to Detroit.

In 1790 President Washington dispatched General Harmar with forces to repel the incursions of the Indians but the latter inflicted on them a bloody and inglorious defeat. The scene of this defeat, a part of which lies within the corporate limits of this city, is unknown to many of the citizens. Even the site of the Old Fort is plowed through by a railroad, and the only comforting circumstance about the historic spot is that the title to a portion of it is vested in the city and it is thus likely to be preserved. General St. Clair led another expedition after that of General Harmar and like him met with defeat. President Washington then cast about for a soldier capable to leading the American arms to victory; his choice was General Anthony Wayne. This famous officer appeared in the Maumee Valley at Fort Defiance August 1794. He at once built a fort there and on its completion moved down the Maumee River in barges to a point below Napoleon, near the Fallen Timbers where on August 1794, the Indians gave him battle; they lost the day by reason of the impetuous charge of the soldiery which Wayne led in person. This noted contest occurred

near where Chief Turkey Foot was slain.

Fort Wayne was established by General Anthony Wayne in 1794. The latter named Lieutenant Hamtramck to the command. He named the fortification after General Wayne. In 1812 General W.H. Harrison, in command of the forces in the northwest advanced to the Maumee and built a fort. This he called Fort Meigs in honor of the governor of Ohio. In May 1812 the British occupied Fort Miami and laid siege to Fort Meigs with the assistance of a great host of Indians. However, General Green Clay Smith reinforced General Harrison and on July 28th, 1813 the siege was raised. Nothing now marks the spot where the heroes of these struggles fell; many facts that should be matters of accurate historical mention must ever remain shrouded in misty tradition.

In closing, General Lee outlined a plan to secure an appropriation of \$50,000 to effect the purposes of the association. However, he pointed out that the sum of \$100,000 would be more suitable.⁶

Local recruits to the membership of the Maumee Valley Monumental Association as a result of this meeting included Congressman James B. White, former Mayor F.P. Randall, Colonel David N. Foster, Lieutenant Governor R.S. Robertson, Dr. S.C. Metcalf, J.W. White, Reverend Joen F. Lang, H.C. Hanna, Frank Alderman, M. Reinhardt, G. W. Rixley, M.W. Fay, W.T. Lamb, Dr. D.D. Weissall, Charles W. Wharton, M. Cody, M. F. Barbour, A. A. Davis, Percy A. Randall, Abram Cope, Phillip Harter, Chris Piepenbrink, John Seaton, C.P. Fletcher and John A. Scott. Mayor Muhler and A.H. McDougall were old members of the association.⁷ The secretary read several letters and telegrams from guests who were unable to be present. Among these were the following communications:

Hon. C.F. Muhler:

I have had no sleep for two nights and was well tired out before I left New York and Washington. I know the movement is laudable and that ultimately it must succeed; why should not the dead of the war of the Maumee Valley have monuments erected by congress to their memory?

A.P. Edgerton

State House commissioner I.D.G. Nelson sent the following letter:

Hon. Charles Muhler, Mayor, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Dear Sir--I have just received your favor of the 5th inst., inviting me to be present at a meeting of our Fort Wayne citizens to receive members of the "Maumee Valley Monumental Society," of Ohio, on the 9th inst., to deliberate on the proper steps to be taken to secure the assistance of the government to erect monuments to mark the spots where the first forts were erected along the Maumee Valley, during the Indian wars.

I would gladly comply with your request if it were in my power to do so, but it is not, owing to other engagements. I am, however, most heartily in sympathy with the movement; if I can in any manner aid in its consumation, I shall most cheerfully do so. But I am admonished that the time for much active work with me, as with most others of my time and generation, is about over. No time should be lost. I have found in my recent researches in regard to the Indian relations of the early white settlers and settlements along the valleys of the Wabash and Maumee rivers and their tributaries (which subject is engaging some of my attention) that most of the early pioneers have gone to their rest; only a few of the succeeding generations survive. In another generation all traces

of personal history that is reliable will be wiped out and with it most of its special interest. I think it would be a most becoming act for the general government to establish these monumental landmarks on the line of the most desperate and bloody struggle known to Indian warfare. This covers a period of more than a century with varied results. I thank you for the invitation so warmly expressed. I trust that the meeting will be an enjoyable and profitable one to visitors and citizens. It may well be an advance step toward final success.

I am, with considerations or regard,

Very truly,

I.D.G. Nelson.

Letters and telegrams were also received from Hon. Jacob Romeis, congressman from the Toledo district, congressman Boothman of Bryan, Ohio, and Colonel Howard of Toledo.

Congressman Romeis uses this language: "No one can read the history of those days without coming to the conclusion that England's great aim was to seize and hold this vast territory. Had England succeeded, the Louisiana purchase would never have been made and our soldiers of the late war would have fought for only a small country. Therefore we believe that the brave and noble men, who came from Pennsylvania and Kentucky and gave their lives to their country to save this western empire deserve as much recognition from the people as do the soldiers of the late war."

President White announced that the next meeting of the⁸ association would be in Fort Wayne on a date to be selected later.⁹

In the absence of evidence to the contrary and in the light of subsequent events we must deduce that the meeting of the Maumee Valley Monumental Association at the Academy of Music September 10, 1887

gave spark to substantial interest in local history. Some citizens of Fort Wayne now had much to say in tones of regret that this community had neglected a noble heritage. They deplored that the old stockade of Anthony Wayne was permitted to fall into decay and destruction. They paid tardy tribute to a doughty general from Pennsylvania whose troops and strategy had converted this area into a domain of civilized people. They had much to say of the strategic importance of the confluence of St. Joseph and Maumee rivers.¹⁰

In 1888 the annual Maumee Valley Monumental Association held its annual meeting in Fort Wayne. Former President Rutherford B. Hayes headed a delegation of distinguished citizens from Ohio who participated in the event. A notable parade marked the occasion. Thereafter an audience assembled in the then "Mad Anthony Wayne Park" now known as Lakeside. Addresses were made by Mr. Hayes, Colonel R.S. Robertson, Judge Joseph Cox, Stephen T. Johnson and James McGrew. Former Chief Justice Waite of the United States Supreme Court was the retiring president of the association. A miniature reproduction of the old fort was displayed in the old fort park.¹¹

On the morning of October 22, 1794, Fort Wayne had been fully completed and ready for occupancy. The formal dedication to the god of war proceeded with the usual ceremonies. General Wayne then invested Lieutenant Colonel John F. Hamtramck with the command of the post. The garrison was completely officered. A final salute of fifteen rounds of artillery was fired and the Stars and Stripes were flung to the breeze, thereafter to float over the ramparts.

By 1804 the size and strength of this fort had proved insufficient for the purpose contemplated in its original construction. It was then demolished and another larger, and better adapted to the needs of the

time, erected on nearly the same site, which is now lot No. 40 in Taber's addition to Fort Wayne. The original fort was on lots 11, 12, and 13 in the same addition. The new fort was built under the supervision of Colonel Hunt, then commander. When this fort proved insufficient in 1815, it likewise was taken down and another which was more substantial erected in its place. From the best information available, "it enclosed an area of about one hundred and fifty feet square, in pickets ten feet high and set in the ground, with a block house at the southeast and southwest corners, two stories high and rising above the second floor, which projected and formed a bastion in each, when the guns were rigged, that on the southeast commanding the north and east sides of the fort and that on the northwest, the north and west sides. The officers quarters, commissary department, and other buildings, located on the different sides, formed a part of the walls and in the center stood the liberty pole, on which was placed a metal American eagle, and over that floated the stars and stripes of the United States. The plaza in the enclosure was smooth and gravelly. The roofs of houses all inclined within the enclosure after the shed fashion, and to prevent the enemy from setting it on fire, and if fired, to protect the men in putting it out, and the water which fell within was led, in nicely made wooden troughs, just below the surface of the ground, to the flag-staff, and thence by a sluice way, to the Maumee."

It is definitely known that the southwest corner of the new fort was exactly at the southwest corner of lot 40, the pickets running south of east towards John Brown's blacksmith shop and near where the shop now stands, and where was one of the corners: the east side ran to a point on the north bank of the old Wabash and Erie canal, now occupied by the tracks of the N. Y. C. & St. L. R. R. the west to the second fort or

corner, and thence to the place of beginning.¹²

At the close of the struggle of 1814, soon after the arrival of Major Whistler to assume command, it was feared that the Indians might again make an effort to capture the post. Since it was much out of repair, and most uncomfortable for the garrison in many respects, Major Whistler applied to the War Department for permission to rebuild it. General Armstrong granted permission and the main structure was then replaced by new pickets and other necessary timber for the rebuilding of the officers' and other quarters within the enclosure.¹³

Attached to the Fort and extending west of it to about the northeast corner of Main and Lafayette streets, and embracing about one acre of land, was a well-cultivated garden belonging to the commanding officers. In season it produced the choicest vegetables. West of this was the company's garden, extending approximately to the site of the Hedekin House on Barr Street. This was also tilled, affording suitable labor for the soldiers, when military discipline slacked. The main thoroughfares, in those days, extended westward from the fort, along what was afterwards the canal, and now the Nickel Plate railroad right of way.

The principal entrance to the last of the forts was at a point on the south side of East Berry Street, opposite Mr. Fred Beach's residence. The heavy brown oaken posts remained standing, long after the fort disappeared. One corner of the stockade was destroyed by fire, another was torn down, a third was cut off and razed by the construction of the Wabash and Erie Canal, and the last corner, having become a rendezvous for dissolute characters was pulled down in the middle 1850's by Hon. F.P. Randall and other citizens.¹⁴

The Old Fort site, or that much of it on which

buildings had not been erected had occupied a triangular parcel of ground at the northwest corner of East Main and Clay streets. For years it had been encumbered with broken water pipes and unsightly rubbish but Mr. Henry Williams had caused this debris to be removed, the land graded and an iron fence erected about it.¹⁵

The widespread discussion of these long-gone events created an acute interest in past history and influenced local citizenry to pay suitable and due respect to what now seemed to many to be a noble and heroic past. Plans rapidly proliferated for a suitable commemoration of the origin of the old fort. The ninety-first anniversary of the completion of the fort October 22, 1887 was also the anniversary of the defeat of General Harmar by the Indians at a point on the Maumee River a mile below where the fort was later erected. Plans included the erection of a liberty pole nearly seventy-five feet in length in the center of the iron-fenced enclosure. The pole bore two cross-arms painted white. From a pulley on top a halyard depended for the raising of a beautiful flag. It was originally intended that the ceremonies of the day be conducted by the Maumee Valley Monumental Association. Later this proved impracticable and the events of the day were celebrated by prominent local citizens.¹⁶

Notices carried in the local press stimulated the attendance of a larger number of people at the ceremonies. The day was the best that October had to offer. The tall pine liberty pole was impressive. The last touch was added by the hoisting of a beautiful small silk bunting banner, held in the form of a ball by a cord, which depended by the side of the halyard.

At 11:00 P.M. the City band played a patriotic air, and Captain Allan H. Dougall, the master of ceremonies presented Mayor Muhler chairman of the

meeting. The Mayor mounted the caisson of a piece of ordinance which stood at no great distance. He introduced Rev. J.P. Loyd who invoked the divine blessing.

Mr. Dougall then read a deed of conveyance to the city of Fort Wayne of the flag-staff, flag and the near iron fence, which surrounds the grounds, from Mr. Henry M. Williams, who had caused these improvements to be made. Mayor Muhler formally accepted the patriotic gift on the part of the city. He then introduced Hon. Franklin R. Randall, who delivered an interesting and instructive address on the early history of the region, told of the fort and recited many incidents of great historical interest, which he had learned from Chief Richardville nearly three score of years previously. Mr. Randall emphasized the strategic importance of the fort, commanding the confluence of the St. Mary's and St. Joseph rivers.

Address of Colonel R.S. Robertson

Mayor Muhler introduced Lieutenant Governor R.S. Robertson, attorney, Civil War veteran and historian who spoke substantially as follows:

"MY FELLOW CITIZENS:--To my mind, the purpose for which we have met to-day is one of no ordinary import to a citizen of our good city of Fort Wayne. The fact that on the ninety-third anniversary of the completion of the United States fort upon this spot and the christening of it by the name of the victorious commander, Anthony Wayne, the flag our great nation is again unfurled to the breezes of heaven, not to herald the approach of war, nor as a defiance of some enemy, but because of the impulse of patriotism in the breast of one of our citizens, himself a gallant and wounded officer of the Civil War. This

has caused him to commemorate the day by enclosing what is left of the site of the old fort, and erecting a flag staff from which is designed to float hereafter our national emblem. This is a fact that proves the fire of true patriotism, true loyalty and patriotism is burning in our midst with a flame as fervent as that which animated the heroes of the revolution and of the days of 1794.

"You have just heard the history of the campaigns which concluded with the erection of this fort, graphically told. Well was it said that the site upon which we stand was historic ground. Also it was a spot of great strategic importance for the advancing footsteps of the new civilization born to the world from the American revolution.

"For many years this had been the gateway by which passed the savage tribes upon their errands of war or cruelty towards the outlying settlements, lying to the east, and for the movements of traders and explorers towards the west. The great chief, Little Turtle called it, 'The glorious gate.' This was a name fraught with significance, not only to the savage tribes who guarded and kept it so long, as the key to their defences, but to us. It has become the first wave of civilization which has filled the great country to the west of us with a population that has made the wilderness blossom. It has built an empire which is to-day one of the grandest on God's green earth, because it is a republic, free in thought, free in action, free in everything. It is a republic greater and grander than any in all history, and the one from which a people take their pattern when they seek to build new republics upon the ruins of despotisms.

* * * * *

"At last came Wayne, and it is worthy of remarks that the great commander who opened the path-

way to the great west, like the great commander who opened a pathway from Atlanta to the sea, was called 'crazy,' by those who could not distinguish genius from insanity. You have just heard the story of his triumphal march. It was but a small army he led, but every man a patriot. They deserve our praise, for there warfare was not like that of our day. They not only marched many weary miles into a wilderness at constant risk to their lives but they knew from the fate of Crawford and many other comrades, that which could be in store for them if captured by their crafty foe. The most terrible death in battle was far preferable. Knowing this, these brave men marched and fought that we might enjoy the fruits of their sacrifice and devotion.

* * * * *

"And thus was laid the foundation stone upon which our beautiful city has been built. How great the change. Yet, in the spirit of loyalty and patriotism there has been no change. Here at my left side sits one born in the old fort, his father one of the carriers who carried dispatches from here to Detroit. His brother was in the war with Mexico. Another brother and a son served their country faithfully and well in the late Civil War, proof that patriotism and loyalty as well as other traits can be inherited.

"The emblem we have flung out to the breeze to-day replaces that other which gladdened the eyes of Wayne's starving patriots that October morning ninety-three years ago. There were then but thirteen stars upon its azure field. To-day there are thirty-eight. That flag had just passed through the fiery and bloody baptism of the revolution; it represented a confederation of thirteen puny states along the seaboard which had just succeeded to the amazement of all, in casting off its bonds which chained it to the then greatest

power of the civilized world; it was trying out the new idea of self government. Now, that which now floats represents one of the great and powerful nations of earth. It has grown more beautiful as it has been proudly born upon land and sea during the century which has intervened. Its sheeny folds have grown brighter as it has been borne on the battle fields of the second war with Great Britain, on the plains and heights of Mexico, and on the fields of a bloody war between the states. It now floats grandly in the free air, with-out a single stain to sully its radiant far-flung folds.

"It represents all we hold good, great and sacred in our government. I have seen men die to save it from falling into an enemy's hands. I have seen men fight for the honor of carrying it like a sunburst of glory into the jaws of death. I have seen a color bearer with both arms shot off seize the staff between his bleeding stumps and carry it forward till he fell.

"Men do not do this for a tattered, blood-stained, bullet torn rag, they do it for that deepest and best sentiment of humanity, that sentiment which is the sequence of Republic's loyalty. What is loyalty? It is merely that sentiment which erects the hearth-stone and gathers loved ones about it; it says this little spot is the best, the dearest spot under God's bright sun on the face of God's green earth.

"As we grow in thought we widen the spheres to the city, the county, the state; loyalty proclaims it the best and freest municipality or state in all the galaxy of states.

"By and by, as we spread in thought, the sentiment expands into that grand, enobling expression of worth which knows no north, no south, no east and no west, but one grand commonwealth of republics, forming the great union we love--which those heroes of the beginning of the century gave to us, and which we have

protected and will protect against all assailants." ¹⁷

Preparations for the Centennial Celebration

These events in the late summer and fall of 1887 were the prelude to widespread interest in preserving that heritage which is so much in evidence eighty years later in 1967. The more immediate effort was the arousal of a widespread determination to formulate substantial plans for a suitable centennial celebration of Old Fort day in 1894. ¹⁸ This permitted, fortuitously a seven-year period during which the forthcoming event could and should be properly launched. The census of 1880 showed a population of 54,763 in Allen County and 26,880 in Fort Wayne. The census of 1890 credited Allen County with a population of 66,689 and Fort Wayne with 35,363. Thus the combined population of this increasingly urbanized community was well beyond 100,000 in 1894. ¹⁹ Another great public celebration in Fort Wayne was that on the occasion of the dedication of the Wabash-Erie Canal fifty-one years earlier when the flourishing village of Fort Wayne, Indiana had scarcely 1500 inhabitants. ²⁰

The Fort Wayne Gazette made a strong appeal for a rousing celebration of the founding of Fort Wayne. A public meeting to promote the celebration authorized and formed a committee of twenty-five "public-spirited and well-known citizens to devise plans to carry out the work." The committee held its first meeting in the parlors of the Aveline House. Colonel R.S. Robertson seems to have been the moving spirit in promoting the projected celebration. He addressed a public meeting and in flamboyant and moving oratory, in terms appealing to the pride and self interest of the citizens. He cited centennials in other less-wealthy and less-fortunate cities which

were outstandingly successful. He felt Fort Wayne could do no less. Not content with ideological reasons for historical interest such as patriotism and love of country, men saw a financial interest in attracting "thousands of visitors to the city, many from places quite far distant." Not only would visitors be reasonably expected to spend their money in Fort Wayne but they would be impressed with local business opportunities and home-building, free schools, and the enterprise of Fort Wayne's merchants.²¹

Despite the long period of seven years allowed for preparing the centennial event, October 1894, found Fort Wayne so engrossed in other matters that the actual celebration was of necessity postponed until October 1895. Perry A. Randall worked unceasingly with untiring zeal to promote the event and made considerable personal sacrifices. To him is due much credit for the ultimate success of the undertaking. On October 22, 1894 a committee composed of Mayor Chaucey Oakely, Colonel R. S. Robertson, Charles McCulloch, Captain James B. White, J. F. W. Meyer and Charles F. Muhler met and formulated an appeal to the Indiana legislature for funds. On the basis of the request by the committee the Indiana general assembly authorized Allen County to appropriate \$2000 to defray the costs of the celebration. The city of Fort Wayne later added \$3000 from public funds to the county appropriation.

On the morning of October 16, 1895 the celebration opened with the firing of one hundred guns by the Zollinger battery. A week of gay festivities ensued. Decorative embellishments for the occasion included several arches spanning the principal downtown thoroughfares. An impressive main arch extended across Calhoun Street at Wayne Street. It was supplemented by an arch formed by gaspipes with several burners which furnished brilliant nocturnal illumina-

tion. Thousands who assembled crowded the Princess rink to hear addresses by Colonel R.S. Robertson and others relating to the early history of Fort Wayne. A huge campfire marked the occasion. A mammoth parade, five miles in length required one hour and fifteen minutes to pass the reviewing stand.

Military companies from other cities competed at Driving Park. Governor Claude Mathews and his military staff honored the occasion with their presence to witness part of the program. Other features included a bicycle parade and a band contest.

Sham battles, a simulated attack by Indians on a stage coach, a mock attack of savages on a cabin, attempted burnings at a stake and other pioneer scenes consumed ammunition valued at \$1500.

Historic mementos and dioramas included General Wayne's camp bed and a model of the old fort.

A brilliant display of fireworks terminated this notable event. The "set" pieces included "Fort Wayne Welcomes All," "George Washington," "General Anthony Wayne," "The Old Fort," "P. A. Randall," "Spirit of 76," "The Bicycle Rider," "Niagara Falls," and "Good Night."²²

It should be noted that public appropriations aggregating \$5000 were not available at the time of the celebration. To assure success eleven citizens stepped into the breach and guaranteed the necessary funds by signing notes which totalled \$5000. The signers were, R.R. Bell, R. S. Robertson, Charles McCulloch, John Mohr, Jr., G.W. Pixley, D.N. Foster, Henry C. Paul, Charles Muhler, John W. White, J. F. W. Meyer, M. Frank.²³

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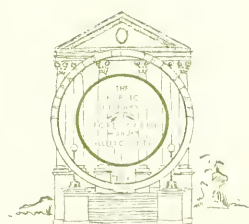
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