

GEORGETOWN

When the three Scribner brothers founded New Albany in 1813 most of what is now Floyd County was an unsettled wilderness . . . but even at that early day a village of sorts had already developed in the area – a loose collection of cabins, a saw mill and several stills – a community that then had no name but which can lay claim to being Floyd County's oldest town – the village that was later christened Georgetown.

Georgetown will have a birthday next year – its 150th. It was in 1807 that George Waltz, the man for whom Georgetown was named, settled on the site. Just as New Albany computes its date of founding from the year the Scribners arrived, so Georgetown may claim 1807 as the year of its beginning . . . although George Waltz had no thought of founding a town when he first arrived with his family from Pennsylvania.

And although the town was named for Waltz, Patrick Shields may claim an equal share of credit for its development. Shields, who came from Virginia bringing a Negro slave with him, arrived in 1805 – the first settler in what is now Georgetown. It was Shields who built a water-powered saw mill and gave the infant village its start. Soon other settlers moved into the area, since the land is some of the finest in Floyd County. By the time the Scribner brothers were advertising their town of New Albany, George Waltz was setting up two blacksmiths in business to serve the growing population in that part of the county. And by that time the name of the stream through the village had been changed from Burton's Branch to Whiskey Run because of the large number of stills erected along its banks by pioneers who found that was the easiest way to

transform their crops into a commodity that could be easily transported to market. Even as late as the 1880s Georgetown applejack was well-known in New Albany and Louisville.

About 1820 a general store was in operation and the community began to take on the aspects of a town. Finally, George Waltz was persuaded to lay out part of his land in lots along State Road 64, then called Whiskey Run Road. It was only natural that the community should be called Georgetown. Waltz owned land on the north side of the road. The land on the south side was owned by John Evans who had purchased it from Patrick Shields. Evans wasn't at all convinced Georgetown had a chance, so for some years the village was on the north side of the road only. Not until 1833 did Evans decide to subdivide his side of the road, but from that year on, Georgetown began to assume its present limits.

Georgetown's first hotel was opened about 1835 and was an important stopping place for the stage that operated through this part of Southern Indiana until the railroad was built in the early 1880s. With its wooden sign creaking on iron hinges, the hotel was more a tavern, and in fact, was called a tavern long after the term "hotel" became fashionable.

Since its earliest days, Georgetown has remained a quiet, country village. Spectacular growth has never been a part of its story. In 1880 the population was about 300. Today it is about 500 – a town that retains much of the quaint charm of its early days. Until a few years ago the cabin erected by Patrick Shields in 1805 was still standing – a two-story structure built of blue ash logs. Today some of the logs still are doing duty as part of a farm structure. The cabin, if still standing, would be by far the oldest building in Floyd County.

South of Georgetown the Waltz Road is a reminder of the family which played such an important part in the founding of the community. And as 1957

approaches, Georgetown may look back with a quiet pride at its 150 year history that makes it the oldest town in Floyd County.

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