

Old Clipping Leads to Blee Manse Historic Structures Report

By Carolyn Schmidt

Being the Editor of the CSI Newsletter can be lots of fun when someone sends in a clipping. Sometimes when I check my files I find a lead that produces solid gold. CSI member Linda Murr of Winchester, Virginia recently sent in an article that was clipped by her mother from a Ft. Wayne newspaper years ago entitled "Homestead Built Before Civil War Stands As Memorial To Pioneer Blee Family." She clipped it because she remembers that Linda's great great grandfather, William Reemer, mentioned in his reminiscences that the Blees shipped ship knees on the canal boat on which he served. That article struck a bell. I knew I should find it in the collection of articles that Frank Sumner Bash wrote for the Huntington Herald Press. Eureka! There it was under the title "Blee Family History Connected With Land In Three Counties" and published on October 11, 1930. A portion of the original article was omitted when printed in Ft. Wayne. I have shown that part in a different type style from the rest of the article below.

Searching further into the file cabinet I came across an article about the Blee Manse written by John Ankenbruck. I have reworded the article to avoid copyright restrictions.

Still deeper in the files I found a letter from Kris D. Richey of Columbia City, IN, who was writing a historic structures report on the Blee Manse in 1992 and wanted any information that CSI had on the Blees, the Vermilyeas, Raccoon Village and the Wabash & Erie Canal. A quick check on the internet and I had Kris's phone number. "Yes," she said, "She completed a Historic Structures Report in 1992 at Ball State University." A few days later her report arrived in the mail. She

was kind enough to give her permission to print the material in part of this newsletter but retains all other rights for any reproduction of any portion of the report beyond this single use. Authors quoted and page numbers have been removed for ease of reading. The lengthy bibliography is on file at CSI headquarters and will not be printed here.

CSI sends special thanks to Linda Murr and Kris Richey. I hope everyone enjoys the Blee history and their relationship to the canal.

BLEE FAMILY HISTORY CONNECTED WITH LAND IN THREE COUNTIES

By Frank Sumner Bash

Beginning back some 90 years or more ago the name Blee first began inditing itself upon the scrolls of Allen, Whitley and Huntington Counties. The names of Latham, James, John and Thomas Blee represented a sturdy and efficient group of pioneers who wrought mightily in the ownership and development of 1,200 acres of primitive land adjacent to the old-time Raccoon Village, which was located near Aboite Creek and just west of what became the line separating Allen and Whitley Counties. The Blee brothers became prominent in agricultural, industrial and financiering circles, their names having borne a good rating in banks of Fort Wayne, Toledo and Cincinnati. But the ruins of time swept them away and now only a commodious old brick house they built before the Civil War still stands as a memorial to their good works and honorable deeds.

This once conspicuous mansion is deserted, untenanted and alone. Creeping ivy vines cover its walls in obedience to nature's remedy to prevent barrenness and sombre bleakness of its brick and mortar. The luxuriant and copious covering of ivy as seen in this case seems like a verification of the lines of Charles Dickens in his "Ivy Green," where he sets out that "the brave old plant in its lonely days shall fatten on the past; for the stateliest buildings man can raise is the ivy's foot at last."

According to this statement Uncle Jimmy Blee Jr., who is now in his 80s, his uncle, Latham Blee, came out from Philadelphia in 1840, making part of the journey on the Ohio River and from

Cincinnati, traveling on foot to Fort Wayne. At the Government land office in Fort Wayne he invested in the large tract of wild land located north of the Miami Indian village west of Aboite Creek. A little later Latham's brothers arrived. They were James Blee, Sr., also William, John and Thomas Blee. For several years they were intimately associated with the red men of Raccoon Village, their mingling together coming to an end when the Indian exodus to Kansas took place in 1847 (1846). After the Blee interests were well organized, Latham returned to Philadelphia, but the other brothers settled down for life on their new Indiana possessions.

Latham Names Township

On account of education and wise judgment the Blees held influential places among the early white settlers and the Indians as well showed eagerness to prove their friendship and loyalty in every way possible. The present surviving nephew, Jimmy Junior, asserts that his uncle Latham suggested the name of Jefferson when the township was organized in Whitley County where his land was located. Jimmy Sr., Tom and Billy, as they were commonly known, were unmarried and their sister, Martha, was their efficient housekeeper. It is said the wayfarer passing through was always welcome at Martha's table at mealtime.

The aged surviving nephew is living a mile south of the old Blee homestead, on a farm of his own located in the bottom lands south of the old canal channel. His wife is dead and he lives with his son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. August Stephel. When the writer called, Uncle Jimmy was found cordial and ready to spin the yarns of early recollections. He began by saying: "My father was Charles Blee. He never lived out here in Indiana, but was first to come across from Ireland. He was said to be venturesome and as a youth, started on the long voyage to America as a stowaway, then worked his passage to Philadelphia. He earned money and sent for other members of the family, one coming at a time until the brothers and sister, Martha, reached American soil. The way I came to see Indiana was like this: My uncle Jimmy came down to visit and when returning to Indiana, took my twin brother John and me back with him. At that time we were just 10 years old. In 1856, John and I did our little share as boys in helping to build the big brick house. Do you know what we did? Well, we carried all the water for slacking the



THE BLEE MANSE

lime and mixing the mortar used in the building of that big brick house. We carried the water from a spring 80 rods away. Our uncles made yokes so that both of us could carry two bucketsful which hung on wooden hooks suspended from the ends of the yoke. The yoke was hollowed out to fit over our shoulders and a semi-circle was cut to fit around the neck.

Religious Service in House.

The building has seven large rooms, it I remember correctly. In one very large room the Rev. Father Benoit, of Fort Wayne, held mass at stated times. I was one of his altar boys. And the time finally came," added Uncle Jimmy, "when Father Benoit joined Miss Catherine Smith and me as husband and wife at that very same altar. Everybody loved Father Benoit. The Indians at Raccoon Village would never allow him to ride alone if they knew it for fear something might happen to him. When the Miamis were taken to Kansas in 1847 (1846), Father Benoit went with them to see them safe through and render all the comfort he could, then returned to Fort Wayne.

"The Blee land covered all that territory along the Aboite in which Hell's Hollow (now known as Devil's Hollow) is located," explained Uncle Jimmy. "It was my Uncle Bill who gave it that name. It was a dismal, creepy place down there during wilderness times, and as it was on the Liberty Mills road, there were people

going that way who carried a good deal of money. As a result, bandits lurked in the hollow and robbed people. My Uncle Bill alluded to it as a regular Hell's Hollow and from that day forward it has gone by that name. I remember of one dark night when old Billy Kelsey was stopped there while returning from Fort Wayne. He carried no weapon but snapped the lid of his tin spectacle case, which sounded exactly like the clicking of a gun-lock. The robbers fled, no doubt believing him armed to the teeth."

Uncle Jimmy says he can never forget the monster oak timber that once stood on the Blee land. He remarked that he and Charley Stephel felled white oak trees that measured as high as six feet in diameter. Ash and poplar trees were almost as large. "One day I was working with Ed McGuire and when a big oak started to fall, he ran back several rods to be out of danger from limbs that might be thrown back. I laughed at him. Then he pointed up to a big limb that had broken off and was hanging from the branch of another tree. Next day something strange happened there. While passing under that same limb, it fell and killed him."

Blees Did Canal Boating

Jimmy Blee and Charley Stephel boated together on the canal for a number of years. They transported cargoes of products from the Blee land to markets at Toledo and Cincinnati, the shipments including ship timber, logs, hoop poles,

grain and other commodities, "My uncles never floated any boats of their own," he said, "but had some leased that belonged to Lorenzo Van Becker, who owned a boat yard on his land a mile north of Roanoke. He would lease us a boat for \$1.50 a day. We used our own horses from the farm and Charley Stephele and I were the whole crew. We took turns driving and steering in daytime and tied up at night. One boat we leased was called the **R. C. Ebersole**, named after a prominent Roanoke merchant. He was once auditor of the county. You see it was customary to name a boat after anybody who would buy the big tow-rope for that boat and it was christened for him.

"One of the boats that plied the waters of the canal from end to end was 'Plow-boy,'" said Mr. Blee. "It was known along the line as the 'whisky boat.' Its only cargo was whisky to be sold at wholesale at ports along the line. Under the law the smallest amount that might be sold was a 10-gallon cask and from that up to a barrel or many barrels. The wholesale price was from 18 to 20 cents a gallon."

Here the aged man mentioned that his uncles always kept a barrel of liquor in the cellar of the big house. Bitters made from whisky and tansy cured the ague. While visiting the old ivy covered homestead the writer found that a bed of tansy was still in evidence, the plants growing vigorously and showing thrift and vigor, although doubtless having no attention or care during several past decades.

Jimmy Won Fair Bride

In touching on his courtship days, the aged Mr. Blee gave me to understand that he had to win his spurs in order to capture the beautiful girl who became his bride. He referred to rather risky times he encountered at Roanoke when rivals threatened gun play to win his betrothed Catherine.

"Everybody who knew her admitted that Catherine Smith was the handsomest girl in our entire section of the country," declared Uncle Jimmy. "During the time I courted her she was employed as a domestic in the home of your uncle, Martin Bash, at Roanoke. It was there I called to see her regularly for a long time, or until our marriage. Some of the boys in that town were crazy about her and tried to get her away from me by fair or foul means—anything to get her! One of those chaps was Bill Barrett. You remember the Barretts. Bills mother kept the hotel for many years. It was called the Eagle Home. Well, Bill was my most dangerous foe. I was told he was carrying a gun too. The boys at Roanoke would play tricks on me and try to scare me out. One night when I was calling on the girl, they stole my saddle. We couldn't find it high or low. A long time afterwards

Catherine found it in a thicket below Martin Bash's house. The grasshoppers had eaten away the skirts and pads. Perhaps mice may have done some of the damage. But I kept right on going and I didn't know but what Bill and I would meet and shoot it out sooner or later. But he never crossed my path and no duel took place. As already mentioned further back, nothing came in the way of Father Benoit making us husband and wife in the old Blee Mansion.

Pot of Gold Legend

Before the interview with the aged man closed, he mentioned a subject which borders on the mystical and legendary order, but nevertheless resting with some might upon my mind. There are others still living who find fascination in the subject. The legend is that rich treasure was buried on the land owned by Jimmy Blee where he resides at this time. Of course during recent times vast deposits of gravel have been found in the bottom lands. But Uncle Jimmy did not refer to valuable gravel nor dreamed of in the bottom lands in the old days, but what he has in mind is a potful of gold coin.

The story goes that during some of the strife between the Indians and Government troops, there were threats of an attack on the village. Some skirmishing was already taking place. The chief quietly sent his daughter with the gold to the flatlands, south of the village, giving her orders to bury it carefully near a well defined mark of some kind of her own choosing. As she was returning from her errand, a stray bullet pierced her heart and the secret hiding place of the pot of gold was never revealed. Repeated attempts were made before the departure of the Indians, but all efforts failed. Some of the Indians returned from Kansas to search for the gold but found nothing. Uncle Jimmy believes the treasure may be there on his land somewhere, but will never be found unless by accident.

Today's Catholic of September 9 199_ carried an article by John Ankenbruck about the old Blee house. In it he said that the house is still standing along County Line Road in the Aboite area southwest of Fort Wayne, Indiana. It is marked by a plaque on a brick post at its entrance that says Blee Manse.

Although Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language defines a manse as: 1. the residence of a minister, esp. a Presbyterian minister; parsonage and 2. [Archaic] a large, imposing house; mansion," the house may qualify for the description since

religious services were conducted there by Father Benoit.

Ankenbruck goes on to say that the current resident at the time of his article was R. J. Stock and that the home was built of red brick in the Pennsylvania Dutch or American Federal style. He interviewed Thomas J. Blee, a Ft. Wayne attorney, about his great grandfather Tom Blee, who came to Indiana in 1840. He said they were all born in All Saints Parish, Donegal, Ireland.

According to this article, the Blee house was originally a cabin and became the site for the Catholic Mass for the neighborhood. The brick house was built in 1856.

Ankenbruck goes on to say, "When the Blee's first came to the Aboite area, land was going for \$1 an acre through the land office at Fort Wayne. All the Blee boys bought large tracts and the family holdings were extended to 1,200 acres or more. They worked in the stone quarries near Wabash and on the canal. They raised grain and ran hogs and cattle. They planted apple orchards with seeds that the family legends say came from Johnny Appleseed who was still alive in the country at that time."

The Blee's neighbors included the Bayless and Kelsey families, some of the earliest settlers, and the Deckers and McLaughlins, who were united through marriage with the Blee family. The Jesse Vermilyea home was south of the Blee house.

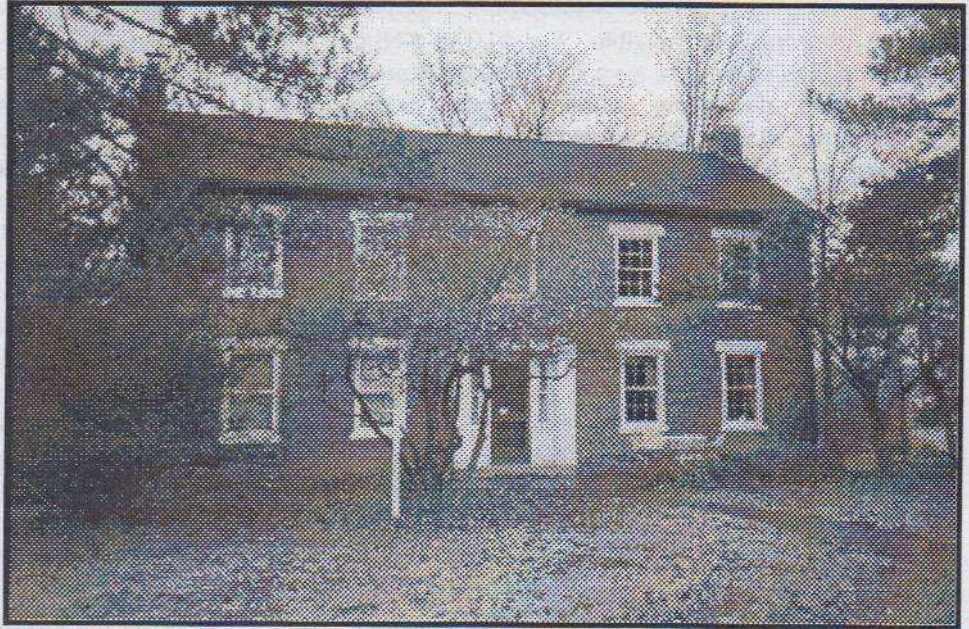
About one hundred years later Dolan Blee wrote a letter in which he stated that Uncle Jimmy Blee bought land all the way to the Canal, and north to the Fair Oaks School and Bill Robin's saw mill, both of which no longer exist. He said they bought whisky from a whisky boat run by Mike O'Brien for 16 cents per gallon. This was possibly the "Plough Boy" mentioned in the Bash article.

A Mass book, **Missale Romanum**, that is dated 1835 at Baltimore and is inscribed "Fr. Fox, Cathol. pr." and "St. Pauli, Huntington" is still in the possession of Thomas J. Blee along with the crucifix, candleholders and altar cloth used for religious services at the Blee house. Father Frederick Fuchs (Fox in English) served the SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Huntington, 1858-1863 as their second pastor. He traveled around the Huntington County area by canal boat or horse back to conduct masses as was done in the Blee house.

The article recounts the legend of

the gold. It also said that the Blee family lived in the house until "after the canal was closed down in the 1880s."

The F. S. Bash article when written said the house was abandoned. However, according to Ankenbruck, it was restored 1939 by the Robert Enoch family. More restoration was done in 1956 by Mr. and Mrs. John Lindsey. It still stands today at the end of a long drive mostly hidden from County Line Road.



The Blee Manse on March 13, 2001
Photo by Bob Schmidt

A Historic Structures Report: The Canal Era Landholdings of the Blee Family Whitley County, Indiana By Chris Cunningham & Kris Richey April 24, 1992 (Permission to publish one time)

With the creation of the Fort Wayne Indian Agency on January 1, 1802, to administer the payment of government annuities to local Native American tribes as specified by treaty, Fort Wayne became dependent upon the Indian trade. Resident Indian agent John Tipton, who later became a U.S. Senator, estimated in 1827 that of the village's 250 permanent residents, seven out of every ten families made their living through trade with the Indians.

When Tipton decided to move the agency to Logansport in 1828, Fort Wayne residents resisted, but were powerless to stop its removal. Speculation about the construction of a canal through Fort Wayne held enough promise that many remained, but the transition years between 1829 and 1832 were difficult ones.

Wabash & Erie Canal. In order to improve transportation and speed the settlement of newly-acquired lands, provisions were made by the United States in the Treaty of 1826 for canal lands, which were surveyed at President John Quincy Adams's behest. Congress appropriated public lands to be sold for funding a system of artificial inland waterways in 1828, the most promising and popular of which was the Wabash-Erie Canal.

Canal construction began on February 22, 1832, at Fort Wayne, "Summit City" of a canal route which bridged the old portage and paralleled natural waterways from Lake Erie to the Ohio River thanks in no small part to the efforts of Samuel Hanna, who convinced the Indiana Legislature to support the canal-building project. His vision changed Fort Wayne to a boom town. By 1840, Fort Wayne boasted a citizenry numbering 1,500, which tripled in the next ten years and totalled 6,500 by

1853.

Lack of a labor force to build the canal became an immediate problem, as David Burr noted during the summer of 1832. In response to the shortage, German immigrants were solicited from the Baltimore area by Fort Wayne's Henry Rudisill, an English- and German-speaking pioneer from Pennsylvania. Agents were also sent to Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York to recruit the Irish, and newspaper advertisements appeared in a number of cities, offering cash for canal labor. By 1837, German was being spoken on the streets of Fort Wayne and among its newly-formed Lutheran congregation. By 1840, there were 114 Irishmen in Allen County, with a total of 456 living in northern Indiana. While many of the canal workers were transitory, others stayed to buy land from Canal trustees eager to raise funds needed for completion of the expensive canal project.

With the canal route passing through a number of Miami reserves and settlements, intercultural contact between the workers and Native Americans was inevitable. As Catholic missionary to the French and Indians in the Fort Wayne area between 1829 and 1835, Father Stephen Badin decried the corrupting influence of the lower class Irish and Canadians upon his Indian converts, preferring instead the industrious role models of German immigrants and their counterparts from the French regions of Alsace and Lorraine.

Canal construction contracts called for 64' rights-of-way with trenches 10' deep and 16' feet wide. "Locks were constructed at numerous points along the route to correct for changes in the elevation of the land." Entrepreneurs like Jesse Vermilyea became canal contractors who supervised canal-building efforts and profited from contract awards. Working conditions of

canal laborers were horrible. For \$10 to \$15 per month, workers had to endure swarms of mosquitoes, the threat of malaria, dysentery, cholera, ague, and a host of fevers. In an attempt to ward off disease, or at least invite an attitude of nonchalance, jigger bosses patrolled the line of ditch diggers, doling out whiskey to the crew at their discretion. The medicinal value of whiskey notwithstanding, the toll of human life exacted by the Canal was overwhelming, with estimates of one Irishman's life for every six feet of canal completed.

By the summer of 1835, the Wabash & Erie Canal had been completed to the newly-organized town of Huntington, 25 miles southwest of Fort Wayne. In celebration, the canal boat "Indiana," filled with Fort Wayne revelers, rode the first canal waters to Burke Lock for an evening of entertainment by Huntington celebrants who returned to Fort Wayne on the 4th of July to observe Independence Day with a second round of festivities. Not until 1853 was Indiana's portion of the Wabash & Erie Canal completed, although Ohio's segment was finished in 1843.

While the Canal would be abandoned in 1874 with the coming of the railroads, its presence between Fort Wayne and Huntington in intervening years infused the former portage route with new vitality. The founding of new pioneer settlements in the forests of Allen County sparked the organization of Huntington County in 1837 and Whitley County in 1838. New roads were built to link outlying communities with shipping points along the Wabash & Erie Canal. Raccoon Road, for example, completed in 1843, was commissioned by the state legislature to connect Whitley County's seat, Columbia City, with Raccoon Village, its closest canal port.

Boat yards sprang up in Fort Wayne, Huntington, and Roanoke, a town laid out near the Dickey Lock. Land speculators like McCulloch and Sweetser formed partnerships to buy up undeveloped wilderness along the canal route in hopes of profiting from its sale to incoming settlers. Sawmills, butcher shops, bakeries, breweries, tanneries, foundries and blacksmith shops were built to provide locally manufactured goods for Fort Wayne's expanding population. Gunsmiths, stone masons and shoe makers found a ready market for their goods, although reliable currency was scarce during Fort Wayne's early economic development.

The canal itself was the conveyor as well as the producer of commerce, with agricultural goods freighted on slower canal boats and human cargo borne on swift packets. Flour, wheat, whiskey, flax seed, cord wood, molasses, timber, pork, beef, corn and potatoes were but a few of the local products to be found in the holds of boats plying the waters of the Wabash & Erie Canal, or waiting for shipment in the canal warehouses that lined the docks of Huntington, Roanoke, Raccoon Village and Fort Wayne.

Although many canal boats plied routes between Toledo and Lagro or Huntington, other canal shipments

headed for more distant ports, including Boston and New Orleans, according to an article published in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* on November 5, 1842:

We last week noticed the shipment of a lot of lumber for Boston. This week a flat boat left here for New Orleans, freighted with 45,000 hoop poles and 250 barrels of cranberries. At Logansport she will take in about 200 barrels more cranberries. She is owned by Messrs. B. Smith, T. J. Lewis, and N. D. Stewart. Another boat will start for New Orleans in a few days, with about 50,000 hoop poles. She is owned by some enterprising Germans whose names we have not heard. These boats will proceed down the canal to its intersection with the Wabash above Delphi, and then down that stream and the Ohio and Mississippi. If any proof were needed of the enterprise of our citizens or our advantageous location for trade, it might be found in the fact that within two weeks shipments have been made here for two most opposite and distant points—one at the extreme north eastern and the other at the extreme southwestern part of the Union.

Harriet Williams Sawyer came by canal to Huntington as a new bride in May of 1840, observing in letters to her family the rude appearance of Fort Wayne and the wilderness of northern Indiana. Wolves and ague were constant worries, with roads so poor that canal travel was the only reliable method of transportation, as distasteful as it was certain.

J. Richard Beste, A British passenger travelling with his family between Lafayette and Fort Wayne in 1851, chronicled his trip aboard the "Indiana" packet in more cheerful terms, with its "tolerable accommodations," its separate ladies' saloon, washroom, and removable shelf-beds. He marvelled at the "magnificent timber: covering the countryside through which he passed:

Great sticks of plank oak shot up straight from the bottoms without a knot or branch, until their heads spread out, some scores of feet above, like the tufted summits of the Italian pine. At times, partial clearings or little prairies opened vistas into the lands beyond, and still the same noble timber everywhere arose. On the banks of the canal, as on mounds of higher earth, the spaces between the trees were filled with wild and untrodden copses. Shrubs, with large, gorgeous leaves, shot up amid creepers of various hues, and glistened in the sun. I regretted my little knowledge of botany that prevented me from fully appreciating, as I enjoyed this magnificent vegetation.

"Tea," which comprised the evening meal, was less appreciated, consisting of an unwholesome combination of raw beef steak, heavy corn bread and a quantity of inferior tea and coffee. Even more distressing was the absence of a single chamber pot on board.

Canal boats travelling between Huntington and Fort Wayne had to pass through six locks. While packets

and freighters waited for their turn to pass through each lock, passengers had time to walk along the waterfront, to shop, replenish whiskey flasks, mail letters at the post office, visit the local tavern, or converse. Vermilyea Lock, located near Aboite Creek, was one such stop-over, and boasted the spacious, three storied brick residence of lock-tender Jesse Vermilyea, which doubled as a post office, store, tavern and boarding house for canal workers. A landing basin had been excavated along the canal channel just below the house, and Vermilyea had added a warehouse for neighbors' canal freight.

Having come to Fort Wayne in the 1820s from New York State, Vermilyea was first involved in trade with the Indians, and later built a fortune in real estate. With the coming of the Wabash & Erie Canal, he became involved in every aspect of canal life from its birth until his premature death in 1846 from cholera, the same disease that had claimed the lives of so many canal workers.

The Canal's heyday lasted from 1843 to 1854, when the Ohio and Indiana Railroad linked Fort Wayne with Pittsburgh. Competition from the Wabash Railroad between Toledo and Fort Wayne drove the packet lines out of business the following year. By 1856, when the Wabash extended its service to Lafayette, canal revenues dropped by almost 75 percent. Sections of the Canal were removed from service as early as 1860, but freight continued to be shipped from Huntington until 1874, when competition with the railroad, decaying locks, and sedimentation of the channel forced its abandonment. Its ignoble end came between 1876 and 1878, when the last working section of canal, between New Haven and Fort Wayne, was used for the transportation of firewood.

Miami removal. After the Treaty of 1826, the Miami people were scattered throughout north-central Indiana in circumscribed reserves and settlements, like those at White Loon's Village near Roanoke and Chief Raccoon's settlement near Aboite Creek. In an attempt to unify the Miami people, Richardville moved the tribal seat of government to lands at the Forks of the Wabash to isolate the Miami from unscrupulous traders and settlers. A portion of the tribe considered emigration to the West, but Tipton counseled against the move, fearful that the band would perish without assistance.

A number of significant events occurred between 1826 and 1832 that dramatically affected the future of the Miami people in the Maumee-Wabash area. The first was the survey and initial construction of the Wabash & Erie Canal, which bisected the former Miami territory and opened the region for white settlement and development. At Raccoon's Reserve, for example, the canal route ran straight through the village, necessitating the removal of the dwelling belonging to the villager's chief orator, Chapiene. There could be no isolation from Anglo-Americans for Miami whose homes were surrounded by white settlers. From 1833 onward, the Miami were in constant association with Anglo-Americans, with visitors

like White Loon making frequent stops at early stores or daring Miami riders like "Pete" Schap charging their ponies across the empty canal channel on narrow lock timbers.

The second event of significance was passage of the Federal Removal Act of 1830, which made Indian emigration an enforceable federal policy. Federal advisors disagreed on whether assimilation or isolation was the best policy for dealing with Native American tribes, and the Federal Removal Act championed the cause of those who favored the creation of geographically distinct Indian states in lands far west of those being sought for white settlement.

The final event was the Black Hawk affair. Between 1825 and 1832, combined Indian forces under Sauk Chief Black Hawk recrossed the Mississippi River and raided settlements near its banks. His recalcitrance inflamed white settlers against all Indians, and public sentiment was so strong that the federal agent at Logansport called all the Miami back to their main settlement to protect them from harm.

Settlers began clamoring for Miami removal, which finally occurred in 1846 after a series of treaties in 1834, 1838 and 1840 that left the Miami nation virtually landless. While a number of Miami were exempted from emigration, approximately half of the Miami nation were loaded onto five canal boats at Peru and Fort Wayne on October 6-7 for transportation to Kansas and resettlement in the Unorganized Indian Territory. Those who remained became "underground" Miami, blending in with the dominant culture in observable ways while maintaining a core of Native American ethnicity shared only with other tribal members.

The coming of the railroads. The Ohio and Indiana Railroad linking Pittsburgh and Fort Wayne was extended in 1855 to Chicago and renamed the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Railroad. Its success was emulated by other railroad companies who soon followed suit, including the New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad in 1881, running from Fort Wayne through Whitley County to Valparaiso, and the Fort Wayne and Wabash Valley Traction Company in 1901, following the Wabash & Erie Canal tow path between Fort Wayne and Huntington.

As was true during Canal days, small villages were born at the crossroads of well-traveled roads and the rail lines. The New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad, also known as the Nickel Plate Railway, was originally built to transport freight, and boasted several villages and "whistle stops."

Raccoon Reserve. Terms of the 1826 treaty stripped Raccoon's people of their earlier function as keepers of the portage route, and made their continued presence largely symbolic. By 1833, with the canal route passing through their midst, the roles of Anglo-American and Native American had been completely reversed, and

Raccoon Reserve became an outpost of Indian civilization, surrounded by the overpowering presence of an alien race.

Miami dignity and self-esteem had been stripped away as well. Self-protection was based on the cultural values of a warrior society which no longer existed, the groundwork for male entry into positions of tribal responsibility had gone. Moral and spiritual decline followed. "Virtually every visitor to Fort Wayne at the time of the Indian payments had been disgusted by the orgies that attended them," with horse racing, gambling, drunkenness and debauchery the most common vices pursued. Corrupt traders preyed on the economically unsophisticated Miami, cheating them by charging exorbitant prices and trafficking in the illegal sale of whiskey. Even John Tipton, Indiana agent during the period and in sympathy with the Miami, was not irreproachable, as part of his rationale for moving the Indian agency from Fort Wayne to Logansport in 1828 was the profit he gained from land speculation in the Logansport area.

Chapine Reserve. By the early 1830s, the Miami were again being pressed for additional land cessions to satisfy the increasing demands of land speculators and pioneer settlers. As a result, the Miami ceded Raccoon Reserve to the U.S. government on October 23, 1834. In return, the government agreed to issue a patent title to Chapine, former Miami war chief and spokesman for tribal chief Richardville, for

...one section of land (partly in Whiteley County), to include Raccoon Village, commencing two poles west of the village, thence in an easterly direction to River Aboit, thence with said river until it strikes the reserve line, thence with said line for quantity, to include within the bounds one section of land

The northwest corner of Chapine's Reserve fell within the southeastern quarter of Section 36 and eventually became part of the Blee family landholdings.

During their early years in Whitley County, the Blee family was in close contact with the Miami of Chapine Reserve. Both shared the Catholic faith and a warm relationship with Father Julian Benoit, a French priest who had come to Fort Wayne in the fall of 1839. Willing to ride far and wide to minister to his scattered flock, Father Benoit often visited Raccoon Village and was beloved by the Miami there. He also held mass at the Blee home on a regular basis. When the Miami were removed, Father Benoit went with them to Kansas, offering them comfort and assisting them in any way he could before his return to Fort Wayne.

At some point in time prior to Miami removal, a Miami legend was shared with the Blee family that told of a lost pot of gold buried in the flat prairie of Chapine Reserve later purchased by the Blee brothers. As the story goes, threats of attack by government troops led a Miami chief to send his daughter into the wetlands south

of the village with a pot of gold. Her mission was to bury the treasure in a well-marked spot before returning.

After accomplishing her task, the Indian princess was killed by a stray bullet before she was able to reveal the buried treasure's location. The Miami made repeated attempts to find the gold before their removal to Kansas and some even returned later to search for the treasure, but found nothing. Although land speculators and prosperous farmers eagerly bought up Chapine's Reserve shortly after Miami emigration, no one ever found the legendary pot of gold, and most of Chapine's property in Whitley County was eventually consolidated into the Blee family landholdings.

Raccoon Village. The historic Miami village of Chief White Raccoon was located, in part, on Blee property in the southeast quarter of Section 36, on the valley floor at the edge of the Wabash Sluiceway. As the canal route had cut through the village as well as the reserve, the dwellings that remained were situated along the north bank of the canal bed astride the Whitley-Allen County line. Central to the village was the two-room brick house constructed, as promised by the Treaty of 1826, by government workers for Chief White Raccoon. One room of the structure stood in Whitley County, the other in Allen. A number of log cabins also built by the government, surrounded Chief Raccoon's residence and housed the members of his band. After his death, White Raccoon was buried on a hill overlooking the valley, the specific location of his grave unknown.

Through the Treaty of 1834, patent title to the village and the section of land surrounding it was granted to Chapine, the tribal orator, ostensibly after the death of Chief Raccoon. Chapine's stay in Raccoon Village after title transfer was short-lived, for by November 6, 1838, he had relocated to Ten-Mile Reserve in Allen County.

His success as spokesman for Chief Richardville in the treaty negotiations of 1834 and Chapine's need to remain closer to the aging chief may have explained his move. Just as plausible an explanation is that he was anxious to remove himself from the unwholesome presence of raucous canal workers and the many vices of canal life, including dock rats, mosquito swarms and gawking passengers. With the coming of the canal, Raccoon Village had turned from an Indian outpost into a growing port town. Even so, the Miami continued to live in Raccoon Village until their removal by canal boat in 1846.

Canal trustees during the early 1830s had decided to benefit from the additional acreage with Six Chain Reserve left over from construction of the canal bed by laying out a canal town, and their plotting of lots along the northwest side of the canal paralleled Raccoon Village, covering ground that at one time had supported Indian dwellings. Seventy-two lots of two acres each were laid out in Allen, Whitley and Huntington Counties, situated at right angles to the canal. Officials hoped to

secure more funding for canal expenses by selling the lots while promoting economic development along the canal line. Unfortunately, no plats or maps of Raccoon Village or Six Chain Reserve survive among the papers of Wabash & Erie Canal trustees housed in the Indiana State Archives.

Historical accounts disagree as to whether Jesse Vermilyea or Thomas McGlaughlin was the first white man to live in Raccoon Village, although records are consistent in reporting Vermilyea's purchase of the property prior to 1843. Research indicates that Vermilyea's brick residence in Allen County, still standing after over 150 years, began in 1833 as a large log house and was enlarged or rebuilt in 1839. His acumen as an Indian trader and land speculator was well-recognized, and the more plausible explanation is that Vermilyea bought the property from Chapine, then rented the brick house in Raccoon Village to tenants, of whom Thomas McGlaughlin was one, as suggested in Kaler and Maring's history of Whitley County and corroborated by Blee descendants.

After the opening of the canal, the landing at Raccoon Village prospered as anticipated. Not only did neighboring landowners use the quay as a shipping point, but the town also became a resort of sorts. While travelers passed through the village on their way to other ports, men and boys from Fort Wayne sought it as their destination on lazy summer Sundays. Drinking, gaming, smoking, and political discussions were popular pastimes in a pastoral setting complete with grazing deer in wet prairie to the south.

Blee "canal lands." In 1827, approval was given for the granting of certain Indian lands situated in The Great Miami Reserve and Raccoon Reserve to the State of Indiana by the federal government "for the purpose of aiding said State in opening a Canal to connect the waters of the Wabash River with those of Lake Erie (Deed Book 50:367)." Although a government map was drawn to illustrate the specific land grants transferred to Wabash & Erie Canal trustees, it no longer survives. Written records, however, reflect that among the tracts granted were Sections 25 and 36 of Jefferson Township, as well as lots within the 6 Chain Strip of Raccoon Reserve.

A generous payment schedule was in place by the time land sales began in 1830: a 25% cash down-payment with balance due in 17 years at 6% interest. Land offices opened at Lafayette, Logansport, Peru and Fort Wayne, where Latham Blee "invested in a large tract of wild land located north of the Miami Indian village west of Aboite Creek in 1840.

A native of All Saints Parish in County Donegal, Ireland, Latham Blee had immigrated to Philadelphia in 1833 with other family members, including brothers James, John, and William. The eldest brother, Charles, had earlier emigrated from Ireland and had worked to pay passage for his family. Like many other Irishmen during

the period. Latham Blee came to Fort Wayne to buy land upon which to settle. The trip from Philadelphia to Fort Wayne in 1840 took him down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and on to Fort Wayne by foot. His initial investment of canal lands included 80 acres of wilderness contained in the eastern half of the southeast quarter of Section 25, which became the core of family activity and the center of family enterprise. The first

tract to be bought, it would be the last to be sold.

The following year, Latham's brother James arrived in Fort Wayne with his partner and fellow Irishman, James Gage. Leaving Philadelphia for Pittsburgh, the two had purchased a barge of coal, navigating the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi River to New Orleans, where the load was sold. Retracing their route to Cincinnati, they trailed Latham's footsteps to Fort Wayne, then followed the canal to Raccoon Village, buying their first canal lands at the land office in Peru sometime after 1842. Their purchase included the remaining 240 acres in the southern half of Section 25, upon which they erected a cabin, discovering later that it had been built on property agreed upon as Gage's.

The first tax duplicates for Whitley County reveal that no improvements had yet been made on Latham Blee's property in 1842, although they do show William Blee's presence in Whitley County by that time. Another brother, John, came in 1843, soon followed by Thomas, who arrived sometime before 1845. The family grew to include five brothers and a sister with Martha's arrival by 1850. During this early period, the Blee family built a large cabin to the east of the present barn, on high ground to the south of Little Indian Creek. The house was well-supplied with water from a nearby spring, and the Blee brothers lost no time in clearing a tract of land to plant an orchard from seedlings that family members speculate came from Johnny Appleseed.

The clearing of land, especially in the heavily-wooded area where the Blee family settled, was no easy task. Low ground in Jefferson Township was covered with swamp; thickly timbered high ground was massed with the same vegetation at which packet passengers marvelled. It was the clearing of these self-same forests by the industry of the Blee brothers that filled Lorenzo Van Becker's canal boats with timber and led to the



This plaque located on one of the white painted brick posts at the entrance of the Blee Manse gives the date the property was purchased rather than the date the brick home was constructed.

Photo by Bob Schmidt Mar. 2001

success of their business.

Once Latham had succeeded in getting the family settled, he returned to Philadelphia. Although no transfers of title were recorded, James assumed ownership of the family landholdings and the mantle of family leadership. Not until his first purchase was paid in full would he begin in earnest the task of expanding the homestead.

Prosperity and expansion. Jesse Vermilyea's unexpected death in 1846 necessitated the disposal of certain tracts by his administrators in 1848, providing James Blee the opportunity to acquire a contiguous parcel of acreage in Section 36 at a reduced price. In return for his payment of the unpaid balance due to the Commissioner of the Wabash & Erie Canal by Vermilyea's estate, Blee received title to a 74.45-acre tract lying between the Blee homestead and Reserve lines in 1853, a move which gave the Blee family greater accessibility to the canal port at Racoon Village.

During the intervening period, Blee and Gage paid off their own certificate for land in Section 25 in advance of its due date. Their patent deed for the property was issued at Logansport on July 4, 1851.

In 1854, the partnership dissolved. James Gage had by then relocated to the Cincinnati area and married but did not want to relinquish title to his land in Whitley County, so the partners quit-claimed their jointly-held property into two equal portions. Twenty years later, after his old partner's death, James would repurchase the lost property from the County Auditor.

The Blee homestead was the scene of bustling activity, with William shepherding herds of cattle and hogs through the big woods, John tending the garden and flailing wheat, Martha in charge of housekeeping, and James supervising the sale and purchase of livestock. During the winter months, the Blee brothers cut timber, stacking their logs by the canal bank for spring transport. Tree tops were cut into cord wood, and harvested small hickory trees fashioned into hoop poles to be freighted by canal to buyers in Toledo.

By 1856, James Blee had returned from Philadelphia with twin nephews James and John, who at ten years of age became the youngest members of the Blee clan in Indiana. The boys quickly adapted to the new way of life, helping their uncles build the big brick house in 1856, as Jimmy Blee later recalled:

In 1856 John and I did our little share as boys in helping to build the big brick house. Do you know what we did? Well, we carried all the water for slaking the lime and mixing the mortar used in the building of that big brick house. We carried the water from a spring eighty rods away. Our uncles made yokes for us so each of us could carry two bucketsful of water at a time, which hung on wooden hooks suspended from the ends of the yoke. The yoke was hollowed out to fit over our shoulders and a semi-circle was cut to fit around the neck.

Their experience as quarrymen probably aided James William and John in building the house, which featured cut stone lintels above the windows and doors of the front facade. The native brick was fired in the bottom-land north of the creek, and a homemade dry kiln built to cure the walnut lumber sawed by Kelsey neighbors at their water-powered mill along Indian Creek in Section 26.

Latham Blee returned to Indiana in May of 1858 to pay off the balance of the certificate due Canal trustees that had been negotiated by him 17 years before. Title to the property upon which the new brick house stood was secure, and would remain in the possession of Blee descendants until its transfer to Simon and Mary Freistroffer in 1904.

A few short months before, James Blee had begun the process of further expanding family landholdings. On December 1, 1857, he bought 80 acres of unimproved ground in the northeast quarter of Section 35 from Robert Gage, and continued his acquisitions with the purchase of four tracts lying in Section 36 north of Reserve lines between 1859 and 1863. Three of the parcels had originally been acquired by land speculators, among them Scotch-Irishman John McTagertt, and the partnership of Hugh McCulloch and James Sweetser. In addition, James bought two lots in Six Chain Reserve along a canal route that had by then become strictly a shipping lane for cargo. His final purchase, of property in Section 28, was from his nephew Jimmy in 1874, when title transfers among Blee family members began, a practice that continued until the homestead was sold in 1904.

The prominence that the Blee family enjoyed in the agricultural, industrial and financial circles of Fort Wayne, Toledo and Cincinnati resulted from the success of family enterprises and their access to the Wabash & Erie Canal, which transported

...cargoes of products from the Blee lands to markets at Toledo and Cincinnati, the shipments including ship timber, logs, hoop poles, grain and other commodities. "My uncles never floated any boats of their own," [Jimmy Blee Jr.] said, "but had some leased that belonged to Lorenzo Van Becker, who owned a boat yard on his land a mile north of Roanoke. He would lease us a boat for \$1.50 a day. We used our own horses from the farm and Charley Stephel and I were the whole crew. We took turns driving and steering in daytime and tied up at night. One boat we leased was called the R. C. Ebersole, named after a prominent Roanoke merchant. He was once auditor of the county. You see, it was customary to name a boat after anybody who would buy the big tow-rope. Ebersole furnished the rope for that boat and it was christened for him.

While James Blee, Sr. was the principal land agent for the family, William took on ancillary responsibility for land acquisition after 1870. His purchases over the next ten years included a 40-acre

parcel within Chapine Reserve to the south of the canal bed and several lots within Six Chain Reserve.

Blee landholdings in Whitley County were most substantial in 1874, the same year that James transferred the James Gage farm into John's name. Subsequent land transfers to extended family members diminished the size of the farm, and in 1880 all property within Section 28 was sold to Peter Box & Lumber Company. In 1884, shortly before his death, James Blee transferred title to all remaining Blee property to William. John and William in turn sold off all acreage in Sections 25 and 36 to Giddings, Knowlton & Bond in 1887-88 except Latham's original tract and a contiguous 40-acre strip purchased by James in 1841.

The land upon which the brick house stood was transferred from William to Thomas in 1890. Thomas died intestate in 1895, precipitating a series of legal transfers among his children that splintered the property. Title was again consolidated in 1900, and finally passed from the Blee family to real estate agent Simon Freistroffer in 1904.

Bull Town. The quartet of businessmen who bought the lion's portion of Blee land in Sections 25 and 36 were in the lumber trade. Frederick Giddings and William Knowlton had been in partnership before, running a sawmill in St. Joseph Township, Allen County, for the purpose of processing that township's remaining stands of timber into lumber. Once the timber was gone, the mill was dismantled, and the process begun again on former Blee property. This time, the firm expanded to include Albert Knowlton and Stephen B. Bond, an influential Fort Wayne figure who rose to become president of both Old National Bank and Fort Wayne Organ Company by the turn of the century. Bond's wife, Jessie, daughter of Jesse Vermilyea, was already well-acquainted with the property.

In 1884, the large mill was reconstructed near the intersection of County Road 700 East along Fenian Road, which separated Sections 25 and 36 and has since been abandoned. A village soon surrounded the mill and became quite a hub of activity. At its florescence, Bull Town's businesses included the sawmill, a handle factory, a grocery store, and a blacksmith shop. Large numbers of men were employed there many of whom lived in a shabby row of plank houses aptly named "Bedbug Row," situated along Fenian Road near its junction with the County Line Road.

The place took its name as a term of derision, since the logging on the mill yards and in the heavy timber of the woods was handled almost exclusively by many yokes of big bulls noted for strength and endurance. When the supply of timber gave out, residents of the village moved out and houses were deserted. In the course of time fire broke out and swept most of the little burg out of existence.

Although Bull Town's life as a village had ended,

its usefulness had not, and it became a large cattle and hog farm, with tenant farm families living in its spacious Victorian house. As a small child, Blanch Worrick Mantle lived at Bull Town Farm with her family. She recalled the presence of two big barns, one on either side of Little Indian Creek, that owner Henry Barnes used to house feeder cattle and hogs, which were fed salted hay just before being driving to Dunfee for railroad transport to the stockyards of Chicago. The decaying buildings which still stand are successors to an original house and barn that burned after being struck by lightning.

Blee Manse. Simon and Mary Freistroffer's were first to purchase the Blee house and its surrounding 123.93 acres. The present owner, Robert J. Stock, bought the Blee Manse from Mrs. Cronin in 1967, adding a second-floor addition above the kitchen wing in 1981. With the exception of additional acreage transferred to the Tucker families, the property's configuration has remained unchanged since Mrs. Linsey's ownership [date not given].



The Blee Manse had rooms added above the kitchen wing in 1981 by Robert Stock. The back of the house appears as above.

Photo by Bob Schmidt March 2001

History of the Structure Construction sequence.

First plans. No known architectural plans exist which specifically relate to construction of the Blee Manse, although a number of indirect references relate to the rationale that the Blee brothers may have used in choosing the Federal style. Geographic, economic and social influences contributed to decisions leading to the home's design.

County Donegal in Ireland's extreme north-western corner was home to the Blee family before their emigration to America. Its contiguous border with Northern Ireland was a filter that only partially screened the cultural differences of the two nations. With the pre-eminence of the Adam style in Great Britain during the last half of the 18th century, it seems likely that its popularity may have been felt in County Donegal as well and that it might have been familiar to the Blee family.

The Blee's port-of-call in America was Philadelphia, the center of Adamesque eclat in Pennsylvania from 1780-1820. For eight to fifteen years, the Blee siblings made Philadelphia their home, and absorbed its culture before moving west. Their association with the city lasted long after their migration to northeastern Indiana, as Latham's reestablishment in Philadelphia precipitated their periodic return to renew family ties and conduct family business. If, as they became successful, they wanted to emulate the architectural design of prominent Eastern homes, the Adam style might have been a choice of preference.

Another successful businessman was closer to home, and framing design of the Blee house's windows and front door shared some elements with the Vermilyea house, including lintel and sill placement, and 6 over 6 windowpanes. The positioning of side lights and plain lintel above the door on the canal side of Vermilyea's home closely approximate what was probably the original design of the Blee Manse entry.

The Federal style has often been called America's first national style, reflective of the ancient republican ideals of political and economic freedom sought by the merchant class. Its choice by the Blee family was an accurate reflection of their views and practices as conservative entrepreneurs.

Construction. According to a personal interview that historian Frank Sumner Bash had with "Uncle Jimmy" Blee in 1930, Jimmy and twin brother helped to build the brick house in 1856. The date is corroborated by a later history of the Blee family written by Dolan Blee.

Original Owners

The Blee Family. Blee brothers and sisters who lived on the Blee homestead in Indiana included Latham, James, William, John, Thomas and Martha. All had been born in Ireland, as family records indicate, and all had emigrated from All Saints' Parish in County Donegal during the early 1830s. "Uncle Jimmy's" recollection tells the story of the family's arrival in America.

"My father was Charles Blee. He never lived out her in Indiana, but was first to come across from Ireland. He was said to be venturesome and as a youth, started on the long voyage to America as a stowaway, then worked his passage to Philidelphia. He earned money and sent for other members of the family, one coming at a time until the brothers and sister, Martha, reached American soil.

Like many Irish of the era, the Blee family left Ireland at a time of great political and religious unrest. Great Britain had officially annexed Northern Ireland in 1801, and County Donegal's geographic position almost isolated it completely from the rest of the Irish state. Civil war appeared imminent, and in 1829, Andrew Hamilton wrote to brother Allen that there was "'not a worse country in the world than Ireland at the present.'"

Once the Blee brothers arrive in Philadelphia, they found work in a stone quarry, where Charles became a marble polisher. William's unfortunate quarry accident left him with only one eye, and his subsequent use of an eye-patch earned him the moniker "Patch-eye Blee." John became a cab driver, and everyone saved more money to send for other family members who were still in Ireland. Eventually they were able to bring their parents across the Atlantic, but family records are unclear as to how many others chose to remain behind. Those brothers and sisters who emigrated included Charles, Edward, John, James, William, Latham, Thomas, Martha, Jane Blee Maguire, Catherine Blee Gallagher, and Mary Blee McLaughlin.

In 1840, Latham arrived in Fort Wayne to begin land acquisition for a family homestead on the frontier. James arrived the following year. By 1850, census records reveal that James, John, William, Thomas and Martha were all residing together on the Blee farm in Jefferson Township. Latham, in the meantime, had returned to Philadelphia. Of those staying in Indiana, Thomas eventually married and moved to Aboite Township in Allen County. The others remained single and continued to live together after the big brick house was built.

During their early years on the farm, James and Thomas secured summer jobs at a stone quarry in Wabash. They walked back to the farm on weekends, staying near the quarry during the week. William and John stayed on the farm with Martha, keeping track of the livestock, tending the garden and tilling the fields. On Easter Day in 1856, James arrived at the homestead with his brother Charles's twin sons. The boys, then ten years of age, were raised by their Indiana uncles to adulthood.

The Blee's way of life was a reflection of their Irish heritage. The culture of County Donegal was influenced by its rural landscape and the relative absence of towns or villages. Most Irishmen living in western Ireland were tenants who practiced a generalized subsistence economy which was kinship-based and generally carried out on farms of 30 acres or less. Almost all small farm families worked exclusively within the boundaries of the family farm, identified in the community strictly through its association with the farm family who lived there.

The farm itself was usually a continuous unit, with the farmhouse an integral part of the holding. Gardening was an important activity, providing most of the family's food.

Labor was divided according to sex and age and was set within a framework of reciprocal responsibilities that usually existed between husband and wife. A family patriarch assumed "natural" authority within the family unit to whom all other family members demurred. He alone controlled the income.

To the women fell all household tasks: cooking,

cleaning, laundering, milking, sewing, and knitting, among other. The men, led by the powerful patriarch, took charge of field work and related farm activities. Their duties included planting, weeding, harvesting, livestock raising, haymaking, cattle selling, tool maintenance and repair, fence building, seed preparation, and building construction.

Farm hierarchy was family hierarchy in the kinship-based subsistence economy. The kinship system provided more than sporadic help to kindred in need or well-defined roles within particular family units. The extended kinship network of the Irish peasantry also delineated the body of one's "friends," reckoned through the generational sharing of descent, providing both a vertical (parent child) and horizontal (generational) frame of reference which was often figured to the fifth generation.

"Cooring," reciprocal cooperation of a non-monetary nature, took place among "friends," and was practiced by the Blee family network in Jefferson Township. Cooperative "cooring" efforts included loaning tools and labor for agricultural or household needs, gifts of cattle or food for a household in distress, communal harvesting, and communal food preparation.

The Blee family's way of life in Indiana was not so different from the way of life they had grown to accept before their emigration from Ireland. Irish land reforms had not yet transferred ownership from wealthy landlords to tenant farmers when the Blee family fled, and their idea of family tenancy was based upon the concept of community that had been operational within Ireland for many years, with all members possessing family property in common. An understanding of their cultural template clarifies the family's later propensity to transfer title of various tracts within their Indiana landholdings back and forth among various family members. That practice became more fully developed near the end of James Blee's lifetime, and can perhaps be best explained in cultural terms.

In surviving documents, James Blee is always recognized as the patriarchal figure. His reluctance to part with family landholdings until shortly before his death follows the ethnographic pattern that has been documented in western Ireland. The Blee family's open-handed generosity to other family members is also a part of that same pattern.

Through the years, beginning with their twin nephews arrival in 1856, the Blee family took in a number of close relatives. Their parents, James and Margaret Blee, came to live at the Blee homestead after 1860 and stayed until their deaths. Another relative who lived with them was the wife of a favorite nephew who was killed in a lumbering accident. The McLaughlin and McGuire families, who lived on neighboring farms, were also part of the Blee kinship network.

The rewards of reciprocal sharing were felt by the Blee brothers as well. Until nephew Ed McGuire's

arrival, they had lost money in a number of business deals, for none of them could read or write. Ed's advent marked the end of their business losses, as he put a set of books in order which kept track of their business dealings.

As was true of most Irish countrymen, members of the Blee family were devout Roman Catholics. Father Julian Benoit and his successors held chapel services and read Mass in the south parlor of the Blee house after its 1856 construction. Weddings were also solemnized in the spacious room, as evidenced by "Uncle Jimmy's" marriage there to Catherine Smith. Tom Blee, a descendant of Thomas Blee and a practicing Fort Wayne Attorney, still possesses the crucifix, altar cloth and candleholders used by visiting priests at the Blee Manse.

Sometime after 1856 and prior to 1860, Martha Blee moved from the Blee homestead. Federal census records in 1860 show that Thomas had also left, leaving his twin nephews in the care of brothers James, William and John. Once their twin nephews had grown up and married, and their parents had passed away, the three brothers lived alone in the brick house.

James's death in 1884 was followed by a series of changed living arrangements. Thomas and his family returned to the Blee homestead in 1890, while John moved to property on West Main Street in Fort Wayne that he had purchased in concert with McGuire kin. Thomas died five years later, and William followed in 1898. John, the last surviving Blee brother in Indiana, finally succumbed in 1903 at the age of 92.

Thomas died intestate, and his three surviving sons were granted undivided 1/3 interests in the Blee homestead in

February of 1896. John L., Joseph, and Charles A. shared the property for less than six months. In July, John transferred his interest to his brothers and headed further west. Joseph and Charles continued their partnership, but were unable to extract a living for their two families on the 123.93-acre farm. After Charles's death in 1900, his undivided half interest was transferred to his widow, Mary. She and Joseph shared ownership of the property until 1904, when the Blee farm was sold to Simon and Mary Freistroffer.

Editors note: The names and history of the future owners of the Blee house were not sent to CSI by Kris Richey since they did not pertain to the canal era, the Bleees, or the Native Americans at Raccoon's Village. Although she has documented the Vermilyea Lock mentioned in this report, CSI as in the past feels there was never a Vermilyea Lock but a Vermilyea dock. Old handwritten records read by the authors she used probably mistook the letter D for an L. CSI has found no mention of a Vermilyea lock in the 1847 Engineer's Report. Noting that the Aboite Creek aqueduct is mentioned in the Engineer's Report, the lock would have been just before it. This is not how canals were built. The lock came after the aqueduct, which carried the water over the stream at the high level, and then the lock lowered canal boats to the lower level. This was done at Silver and Burnetts Creek. Also let it be noted that only in specific places did an Irishman die for every 6 feet of canal built.