

**DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HUDSON
MRS. B. F. HUDSON
JOHN WYCLIFFE VANLANDINGHAM
AND THEIR WABASH & ERIE CANAL CONNECTIONS**
By Charles Davis

Since 1996 I have been writing stories about Parke county and its Wabash and Erie Canal connections for the Canal Society of Indiana. They have graciously published all of them. They consist of places from Lodi, at the north end of the county, to Numa, the southern terminus, and include people and their connections with the canal. The following story is from one source I have used several times about Montezuma in getting names to use for the people and their connections. It is very informative and is presented here in its entirety as interviewed by newspaper man Maurice Murphy in the *Rockville Tribune* on Tuesday, April 21, 1914:

**OLD TIMES IN MONTEZUMA,
HISTORIC NOTES ON THE TOWN THAT WAS
ONCE THE RIVER PORT OF TWO COUNTIES -
REMINISCENCES OF DR. AND MRS. B. F. HUDSON
AND WYCLIFFE VANLANDINGHAM**

First a river town, then a river and canal town - such in brief epitome is the history of Montezuma. Civilization always follows waterways, and Montezuma was the third town settled in Parke county. The high bluff on the east bank of the Wabash naturally attracted settlers, and the first sale of lots was in 1823 to Messrs. Whitlock and Majors, of Crawfordsville - four years after the settlement of Roseville, and one year before the first sale of lots in Rockville, though Rockville was settled in 1822, and one year before the settlement of Portland Mills, in 1825. The early history of Montezuma is chiefly a history of keen competition in river trade with Attica, Covington, Williamsport and other towns. Later, the Terre Haute and Lafayette turnpike was built, running east of Montezuma, and a great deal of shipping was done by wagon to Lafayette and even to Chicago.

Such were conditions in Montezuma, a river port of about two hundred people when John W. better known as "Wyck" Vanlandingham, came to the town on March 1, 1844 as a boy of eleven years. His father (Thomas) ran the ferry at Montezuma for many years, being succeeded by another son, Septimus Vanlandingham, father of Mrs. Theo. F. Gaebler, of Rockville.

"Yes, I remember when I came to Montezuma," said Uncle 'Wyck.' "Washington street, now the main street of the town, was just a path with a few houses scat-

tered along it. A few other houses were built east of that, but most of the town was built along Water street, down by the river. A few stores were built along this street, and the big warehouses of John S. Walters, Morris Hughes, and Benson and Davis (Col. Erastus M. Benson and Hon. John G. Davis). Aaron Wade and Joseph A. Wright had a big slaughtering and packing house on the river bank, but one night it and the land where it stood slid into the river. East of Water street, James Jacobs, who once was county commissioner, had a drug store."

"The Wabash and Erie Canal was being built when I came here, but it was not finished until 1848. Soon after I came they quit work on it, and did not take it up again until 1847, and finished it the next year. I remember the big river traffic. All the hardware, glassware, and the like, for Parke county and parts of Putnam, came to Montezuma by river from New York and Pittsburg. Annapolis (Indiana) was then a very important town, and more goods came to Montezuma for Annapolis than for any other place. Most of the grain was hauled in wagons to Lafayette, but a good deal of it was hauled to Chicago. Often a man would start for Chicago with a wagon load of grain and not get back for two or three weeks."

July 4, 1844, Gen. Tilghman A. Howard left home to assume the duties of minister to Texas, left forever as it later developed. Mr. Vanlandingham remembers well all the incidents of that day. General Howard made a speech to an immense concourse in the grove southeast of Montezuma, in commemoration of the nation's birthday and soon after prepared for departure. The steamer "Alpine" was tied to the locust trees along the river awaiting General Howard, and as he got on board and the boat moved southward, he sent a cheer back over the waters, the last time his eloquent voice was ever heard in the country of his adoption.

With the opening of the Wabash and Erie Canal, a new era opened in the history of Montezuma. A new life was infused into the life of Clinton, Armiesburg and Montezuma while West Union, Howard and Lodi were towns that sprang up along the canal. The river traffic was still heavy, but canal traffic was much heavier. Toledo and Evansville now became the markets for the grain, beef and pork of Parke county. James Johnston, father of John E. Johnston, of Montezuma, was one of the surveyors of the canal, and was superintendent, with headquarters at Lafayette until he ceased doing business in 1873. Mr. Johnston has preserved a large piece of iron from the aqueduct of the canal across Sugar creek. The Wabash and Erie Canal was 459 [468] miles long, said at the time of its construction to be the longest canal in the world. The cost was, as near as can be estimated, \$4,500,000. Most of which fell to the State of Indiana, as 375 miles of canal were in this state.

When the canal was being built, Montezuma was filled with foreigners of almost every nationality.

The most exciting event of those days was a horse-race and its aftermath. A colored man from Tennessee "struck" the town one day, bringing with him a fine horse which he said could beat any horse in that vicinity in a race. Now it happened that a certain Irishman employed on the canal owned a very fleet-footed horse, of which he was duly proud, and a race was arranged on the old track east of Montezuma, now a part of the gravel road. The Irishman's steed was an easy winner, but feeling ran so high over the race, that a fight followed which made a strike riot look like a Sunday-school picnic. Never, from that day to this, has a colored person been allowed to live in Montezuma. However, the same taboo was not existing against the Indian, and Christmas Dazney, the last of his tribe, lived many years on a farm adjoining the town to the east, and died worth a great deal of property in 1848.

The old state-coach, driven by genial Caleb Richards was a familiar sight in those days, and even during the canal days. The road to Rockville then was the "strawberry road" as far as where John Elliott lives, then across the hills emerging into the present Rockville and Montezuma road just east of Wildman's hollow. (Wildman's hollow is where J. Charles Davis, live in 2012.)

The first man to drive a canal boat into Montezuma was James Mushett, who afterward settled there, and whose widow resides there yet.

Dr. and Mrs. Hudson's memories of Montezuma begin with the canal days. Mrs. Hudson's father was J. F. Stacey, who came to Montezuma to superintend the construction of the old I. D. & S. railroad, and who afterward became a prominent lumber and grain merchant there. "When we left New York to come west in 1854," said Mrs. Hudson, "we thought of Indiana as a wilderness and fever abounded. We almost thought that we were going out of the world." They arrived at their new home on a canal boat.

Mrs. Hudson's education had been progressing very satisfactorily in New York but schools were very poor in Montezuma in those days, and after going a year she knew about as much as the teacher, and though a mere girl, she was asked to become assistant teacher, and accepted. Only two churches were in Montezuma at the time, the Methodist church, founded at an early day, and the Presbyterian church, which had just been founded by Rev. John Hawks.

Dr. Hudson, after graduating from the Miami Medical college, then one of the best in the west, almost

immediately settled in Montezuma, in 1857. Though he recently celebrated his 88th birthday, he is still in the active practice of medicine, and until last winter kept up as extensive a country practice as any youthful doctor. He is a skillful doctor and a gentleman of the old school, and no man in Montezuma is held in higher esteem than he. He and Mrs. Hudson were married on December 29, 1858, and have spent all of their long wedded life in Montezuma.

In the practice of his profession, Dr. Hudson traveled on the canal more than the ordinary citizen, and remembers the system used in transportation. Passenger boats were run by two horses in a trot, while stables were kept along the canal, so that fresh horses could be supplied before the others gave out. Freight boats were pulled by mules at a walk, a very slow means of transportation. Pork-packing was one of the chief industries, and hogs were in great abundance in the halls of the Montezumas. Pork was shipped by canal to Evansville or by flat-boat to New Orleans. With the building of railroads, the canal's business gradually went down, and it ceased to do business in 1873, the year the C. H. & D. railroad was built. Canal travel, and especially canal hauling, was too slow. As Dr. Hudson said, "People like to get their grain or pork into market the next day after they shipped it, and get the next day's prices, so they would not have to take their chances on prices the next week. Besides, when the river and canal were frozen, which meant nearly all winter, no shipping could be done, and this was not to the liking of the farmers and merchants." Mail was carried by canal, but of course it was transferred to the railroad as soon as practicable.

Perhaps Dr. Hudson's most interesting reminiscences were his experiences as a physician in the early days. Montezuma was an ideal place for a young doctor to locate, for sickness abounded. "There were four doctors here besides myself," said Dr. Hudson, "Drs. Bushnell, Tolbert, Cannon and McCurdy, and all of us were busy all the time from July until October. We had chiefly to contend with various forms of summer complaint and chills and fever. In those days a man wasn't a good citizen unless he had chills and fever."



Dr. Benjamin F. Hudson

Whole families would suffer from chills and fever one day, feel well the next and on the third be "down" again. Men used to be seized with a chill while plowing, be in the sun while the chill ran its course, lie in the shade of a tree when the fever seized them, and when it passed, resume plowing. Dr. Hudson frequently came home late at night after being busy all day attending patients with the chills and fever, only to find his wife and daughter afflicted with the same ailment.

"People said it was the canal that caused all the chills and fever, but they continued until long after the canal stopped business in 1873." Dr. Hudson then proceeded to a discussion of the real cause of the form of sickness. "When I first came to Montezuma," he said, "it was a little town with a few scattered houses, except along Water street, which contained most of the stores and warehouses, and had a brick pavement and brick sidewalks. At the north and south ends of the town were ponds surrounded by turtle-brush on which wild ducks swam nearly all spring and summer. Swamps surrounded the town, and many fine tracts of farm land east of town were entirely under water. There was a plum thicket east of town in this swampy land, and good plums it yielded, too. Not till these swamps and ponds were drained did the chills and fever subside."

Dr Hudson's daughter, Miss Ada Hudson, married the late Frank S. Cumberland, funeral director, one of Montezuma's most prosperous citizens. When he first came to Montezuma, his friends told him not to go there, because there was so much sickness in that vicinity, and it surely was an unhealthy place. He merely replied that such a place was "a good place for an undertaker to be." Dr. Hudson was always proud of his son-in-law's success, but he boasts that "Frank Cumberland never got rich off my practice."

Few people, except the older residents of the county, know that Montezuma had at one time a very prosperous fair as "Uncle Wyck" Vanlandingham said, "In the days before the war, we had the biggest fair in Indiana, except the State fair." People came from many counties round, and entered stock and farm products. Many notable races occurred in those early days, and in one of them, "Red Buck," the famous sorrel pacer of the ante-bellum days, made his best time. 2:14 - a time which ranked with that made by "Lady Suffolk," "Goldsmith Maid," "Flora Temple," "Dexter," and other early monarchs of the turf. In those days tracks were only a third of a mile long, and race-horses did not have the opportunities for training that we have today. "Red Buck" was owned by Fred Garner of Russellville, and Shelby C. Puett declares that in all his long and vast experience with and his study of horses, he never saw a pacer the equal of old "Red Buck." "I think he was the greatest pacer ever on a track," say Mr. Puett, "and if he

had the care and training that pacers have today, I believe he could beat any horse now living."

The memorable race in which "Red Buck" made his best time, at the old Montezuma fair, is remembered well by Mr. Vandlandingham. Many horses from far and near were entered, notable some Terre Haute horses of which their owners were proud. "Red Buck's" speed was not so well known then as it was later, and so his easy winning of the race was a severe blow to the others who had horses in the race, especially the Terre Haute people. A man named Yates rode him. For he was never broken to a sulky.

"Before 'Red Buck' had gone very far," says Mr. Vanlandingham, "his tail was floating straight back, and Yates had lost his cap and his hair was standing up behind. So fast did that horse go that he looked like a brown string around the track. By the time he had made the three times around, all the other horses were far behind. Their owners were about the maddest men I ever saw, and even the Terre Haute women were wrought up over the race. That day saw the largest crowd ever at the Montezuma fair, and it is said that on that day alone 5,000 tickets were sold "Red Buck" appeared many other times on the Montezuma track, but he never made such a race as that."

It is not generally known that the Wabash Valley furnished the blue grass for the famous bluegrass region of Kentucky. J. W. Vanlandingham's maternal grandfather, Capt. Hamilton, was stationed at Fort Harrison during the Battle of Tippecanoe, and helped carry blue-grass from the Wabash valley back to Kentucky. The family came to Montezuma from Kentucky, but Thomas Vanlandingham, father of Wycliffe, was a Virginian by birth and a soldier in the War of 1812.

The building of C. H. & D. (then I.D. & W.) railroad through Montezuma in 1873 will never be forgotten by those who lived there in those days. Ordinary houses rented for \$12.00 a month, and then there was a large demand for them. When the road was completed from Tuscola to Montezuma, a large part of Tuscola's people came over to spend the day in Montezuma, and the latter town turned out almost en masse to greet them. "I remember the occasion as a child," says Mrs. Cumberland, Mrs. Hudson's daughter, "but mother didn't go, because she had the measles." A few years later the railroad was built to Bloomington and the event was celebrated by a big picnic of Montezuma people at Bloomington. A free ride was given to all desiring it from Bloomington to Decatur, on coal cars with improvised seats. Later the railroad was built to Guion, and finally to Indianapolis, but for a number of years trains went as far as Guion then backed clear to Montezuma,

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where the turn-table was located.

Such are a few of the many circumstances and events which have given the history of Montezuma a decidedly romantic touch. If space permitted, we might give many more, notably of Montezuma's glorious record in the War of the Rebellion. Unlike many river and canal towns, Montezuma has continued its prosperity to the present day. It has a population of about 1500 people, and besides a

number of industries and a great many mercantile establishments, it has one hotel, two banks and *The Enterprise*, a weekly newspaper. The town has a thorough system of graded schools including a commissioned high school, and has six churches, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Christian, Holiness League, and Catholic. Long may it continue its prosperity, "on the banks of the Wabash, far away."

MAURICE MURPHY