Cousin George Loses His Head, or,
Do These Bloomers Make My Bottom Look Too Big.

Delivered by Jim Lingenfelter, March 7, 2016
Indianapolis Literary Club

Indiana is in the midst of the bicentennial celebration of the founding of the state. Two hundred years of glorious debate and noble endeavors by the citizens of our Hoosier home. Never mind that no one can definitively address what a "Hoosier" is, we stand by this moniker with pride and swell our chests at the accomplishments of our many ancestors. A Navigable river, the value of pi, Eugenics and Plump's last shot stand as magnificent moments of the past. With all of the expected hoopla associated with these birthday events I felt my own desire to understand my place in the history of this fair city. I determined to undertake an "honest" investigation of the events of that history, some celebrated others less so and to attempt to fully understand the claims made as well as lay out a true time line of our past.

I make no assertion as to unique scholarship or research. My hope is to weave these facts, stories and events together for your own assessment and more important, my own amusement at what history chooses to memorialize. Many of these will be familiar to all; they are the stuff pride and 4th grade Indiana history

is made of; others are more dust at best and family lore unsubstantiated at worst. I include them all because, isn't memory almost as important as fact?

So, 1816 becomes an obvious starting point. Except that Jonathan Jennings as a congressional representative from the Indiana territory had proposed statehood in 1811. That attempt was interrupted by the events of 1812 and went no where. Jennings again tried in 1815. A request that was tabled when it was pointed out that the population of the state was below the 60,000 citizen threshold required for statehood. After recounting and repositioning, the petition was put forward to congress in 1816 and on April 19th President Madison signed the enabling legislation granting Indiana the authority to form a state government. Other sources cite May 6th as the date Indiana is granted permission by Congress to join the with the other 18 states. An interesting fact is that at this time Congress was feeling the pressure to assure balance in states with regard to slavery. Suggesting a precursor to the Missouri Compromise Indiana's admission was to the union was accompanied by the application of Mississippi as the 20th, a slave state.

A delegation of 43 men meet in Corydon to begin the process of writing a constitution. There were representatives from 13 of the 15 counties that existed in 1816. The delegates were equipped with copies of the constitutions of Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania as templates. The summer heat often led the delegates

to meet under a large elm outside the courthouse. That tree became known as the Constitutional Elm. Today it exists as a stump with a marker, kind of like the 1816 document. The 43 delegates adopted a charter that was very similar to Kentucky's with the primary exception that slavery was prohibited. Despite being prohibited by federal statute there was discussion about including the practice in the Indiana document. Public education was included making Indiana progressive in this matter. The delegates then decided that there was no need for a public referendum and the constitution was adopted by declaration. On the first Monday of August a governor, lieutenant governor, congressman and two county officials for each were elected. By November the Congress and the governor had been sworn in and started officiating. We will refrain from inserting jokes about our current legislature at this point.

In January, 1820 the state legislature approved Indianapolis as the site of the state capital. They located the capital here being near the geographic center of the state and because of the mistaken belief that the White River was navigable and would allow for commerce and travel. Yes, the location is near the geographic center, and a steamship The General Hanna did reach Indianapolis. But after arriving to much fanfare and firing of gun salutes the craft later ran aground and eventually caught fire burning to the waterline. Another fine move by the legislature, the White River was far from being deep enough to allow for steamships to pass and apparently no other ships attempted passage.

Still in 1820 Indianapolis was identified as the state capital, but it was not a yet a legal city. Marion County was created with Indianapolis becoming the county seat In December of 1821. It was then a seat of government separate from the capital. State government functions did not begin in the city until 1825 with the first legislature meetings held in January of that year. Indianapolis was chartered as a town in 1832 governed by five trustees. It was not until 1847 that Indianapolis gained city status. Samuel Henderson served as the first mayor and governed with a seven-member city council.

Most are aware of the fact that the city was laid out in a grid with diagonals and a circle in the center. The plan was laid out by Alexander Ralston, who had been an apprentice to Pierre L'Enfant when he designed the plan of Washington D.C., the city characteristics being similar.

The center at that time was called the Governor's Circle. No monument was yet envisioned. And it was not technically at the center of the mile square but one block north of the prime on Washington Street. Initially the Governor's Circle consisted of little more than a stand of trees offering shade to residents and cover for sermons offered by local ministers. One wonders what happened to those homes (cabins) did not fit into the grid. How or even if there were any homes displaced by the platting seems to be lost to history. We know about

McCormick's cabin on the White River but it was outside the mile square and of course George Pogue who had a cabin alongside that creek but also presumably outside the gridded plat as well.

So back to the circle and the grove of trees. Ernestine Rose notes in her book The Circle a story told by the preacher Henry Ward Beecher about them. "A large circle of nearly four acres was reserved in the center of the town and the native trees, sugar maples, left standing upon it, under these trees, before churches were built religious meetings were held in the summer, and the prospect was that our town would have an adornment of this little grove which no architect can bestow. One morning, he goes on to note, I was attracted thither by the sound of an axe, and found one of the leading lawyers exercising himself, as a preparation for breakfast, by felling one of the largest trees. It was too far cut to be saved. As so good an example could not be lost upon others. One by one those magnificent trees disappeared". Yet another stump in the path of history.

In 1831 a transaction was completed by William H (Uncle Billy) Lingenfelter to acquire lot 11, square 36, the southeast corner of the Circle and Market Streets. The total cost at the time was about $100. The family kept residence as shown in city directories until sometime in the 1880's. Real estate records note that they sold the property in 1873. Thus begins a family relationship with the Circle and Indianapolis. I have found very little about the boarding house that is said to have been operated by the family at this site. It seems to have evaded Christian

Schrader's pencil and the only image in Rose's book is from the back. This leads me to believe that it may have been less than stately.

A year after that transaction, Indianapolis emerges as a town. A short 4 years later and were arrive at 1836. This auspicious date, same as chosen by our friends at Connor Prairie to exhibit frontier Hoosier living as Prarietown. There, they strive to show habits of early citizens. But do they really show the everyday of the capital in that year?

Conner Prairie certainly evokes a nostalgic past and a picturesque view of life along the banks of the White River. There you can watch the blacksmith make a nail, a wife bake a pie, you can visit a schoolhouse and recreate the games children played such as hoop and stick, ninepin, and stilt-walking. They even over a chance to take a turn at being a criminal for the day. For those who are so inclined you can try your hand at being a healer, a merchant or a farmhand. All viewed from the safe distance of almost 200 years in the future. Witness the bucolic. peaceful place portrayed by re-enactors employed there. If you remove the lens of marketability is this the Indiana we would see if we were able to jump back to Indianapolis in 1836? Would circumstances be different if we were able to go back to that time?

Probably not. For one thing Connor Prairie has nice, neat hard packed or paved paths, lots of grass and indoor plumbing at rest stops.

In her book, Henry Ward Beecher, The Indiana Years Jane Shaffer Elsmere notes that the reverend frequently mounted the pulpit wearing muddy clothes from his walk to church. Often the streets were impassable because of the depth of the muck. One wag stating that there was no way a certain person could have walked across town as he surely would have been swallowed up by the mess. Beecher had come to Indianapolis in 1839 at the request of Samuel Merrill and others to be considered for the post of preacher at the newly established Second Presbyterian Church. Having separated from First Pres over the debate of Old School verses New School with Second following the New School practices. There is much to discuss on these points – much more than we have time for tonight but I will note that I grew up in the First Pres church family. After meeting with members of the young congregation Beecher was offered the position with the church. Beecher then had to convince his wife that Indianapolis was a desirable place to live. He did this by assuring her that Indianapolis was free of the effects of the "chills" the common name for malaria. He told her that the climate of the city was unusually healthy. Mr. and Mrs. Beecher spent their first days boarding with Mr. and Mrs. Merrill, the latter sick in bed with chills and fever. Another truth of Indianapolis exposed as different from the promoted image.

The town of Henry Ward Beecher's day was made up of men whose names we now more often associate with streets: Merrill, Morris, Hoyt, Fletcher, Alvord among others. Beecher's early observation of the town was that "it consisted of forest extending for forty miles in all direction with but two roads to connect to the Ohio River. One could choose the Brookville or Madison Road but either would be a road in name only. They were nothing more than a trace cut from the forest, a single lane with the trees and stumps purty well cut out but little gradin' done. Swampy areas were corduroyed over with trees rolled into place until the bogs were crossed which caused the stages to "thump, thump, thump" shaking the daylights out of you when going over them".

The state capital was a town of a little over 4,000 residents (only slightly larger than Lawrenceburg on the Ohio where Beecher had come from). Washington Street was and remains a part of the National Road but only it and two or three other streets were free of stumps. There were no sidewalks according to Beecher's remembrances. Pigs and other domestic animals roamed freely, the town was not yet served by a railroad and livestock sent to market were driven overland to Lawrenceburg to be sent up or down river.

The lack of transportation options and the success of the Wabash and Erie canal prompted the state legislature to pass the Internal Improvement Act of 1836. The act mandated a comprehensive transportation infrastructure, including the

Whitewater Canal in southeastern Indiana, and the Central Canal through Indianapolis. Construction hinged on a loan of ten million dollars. However, the rise of more efficient railroads and the national economic panic of 1837 brought the plan crashing down. Projected to span 296 miles, the Central Canal never went further than eight miles through Indianapolis. Floods, vandalism and the rise of train travel, along with the changes wrought by the Civil War, ultimately sounded the death knell for the canals. One of the last barges to make its way down the Wabash and Erie Canal was destroyed–and its crew drowned–when a decrepit aqueduct collapsed under it in 1874. Railroads soon bought the canal rights of way and the legacy of the canal era was in the permanent past.

By 1851 the Circle had become a bit forlorn. As noted in the Rose book, the Indianapolis *Daily Journal* wrote that "they deplored the sad state into which the center of the city had fallen. The Governors Circle, in its present and shabby condition is an eyesore to our city instead of the beauty spot as it should be. On passing it this morning we observed that the grass was trodden, the fence rickety and the trees ragged, the ground covered with ugly shrubbery, sticks, stones, old shoes.. We hope at no distant day to see the present dilapidated building superseded by a magnificent structure… "

1851 was a year for revision. The failure of the canals led to the state declaring bankruptcy and this led to a a call for a revised state constitution. In that year

150 delegates met to rewrite the document of 1816. Unlike the previous constitution, the 1851 participants used documents from Illinois and Wisconsin for their reference. The state representatives to the constitutional convention were made up of Whigs and Democrats with the document taking on a Jacksonian feel, expanding democratic principles. Unlike the previous document, the 1851 version was subjected to popular vote, succeeding by count of 81,500 for and 57,418 against.

The 1851 constitution contained many updates to things like elections and prohibition of local rules to create a more uniform government. The document also adopted Indiana University as the state seminary guaranteeing state funding. One very onerous thing it contained was to deny persons of color permission to immigrate into the state.

The state was also stained by the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Another onerous piece of legislation that gave slave owners the right to retrieve "property". The 1850 act put control of this process in the hands of federal commissioners who were paid for their ruling and they were paid more to return the fugitive than for freeing the person. John Freeman was a free person of color who owned a restaurant in Indianapolis. He had arrived in Indiana around 1844 and by 1853 owned and operated a successful business. However, in June of 1853 one Reverend Pleasant Ellington swore an affidavit the John was "Sam" his

runaway property. Federal Marshalls arrested John Freeman and placed him in jail. Because of Freeman's standing in the community several citizens came to his defense. This support and the fact that Freeman had money to pay for a defense caused the magistrate to give defense 60 days to gather evidence of his status. The magistrate would not allow him to be released on bond. Jacob Dunn writes about this case in his History of Greater Indianapolis in which he describes Freeman's ordeal in jail, falsely accused and having to pay for the "privilege" of incarceration. During this time Dunn notes, one George Lingenfelter was arrested and jailed on charges of public intoxication. Still under the influence, George fell through a trap door which closed on him crushing his skull and killing him. As if John Freeman was not suffering enough as he sat in jail considering his fate he witnessed this event. George, according to the family tree is my great-great-grandfather's cousin.

Around this time another Lingenfelter appears in Calvin Fletcher's diaries. Archibald is listed as a good German, a plasterer, but having a problem with drink. Remember Uncle Archie?

We can now sum up early Indiana history but I will leave it to you to judge whether or not Connor Prairie, the State Museum and the fuss surrounding 200 years of statehood have sufficiently described the colorful past. As noted, many of the early families are now remembered as street names. Henry Ward Beecher

went on to head a noted church in Brooklyn NY and preached to presidents and economic giants, so much so that a recent biography about him is modestly titled The Most Famous Man in America.

And too, I will take this opportunity to remind everyone of the oft told tale about the Governor's Circle. With great expenditure and fanfare the proud state legislature built a home for the governor at the center of the city, only to be told by the Governor's wife that she would never live there. Her reason: her Monday wash would be on display for everyone to see. No Governor ever lived there. Unlike Mrs. Ray I have decided to air my wash along with that of the city in hope that these tales help explore and define my lineage and yes, perhaps understand the word "hoosier". So I ask, do these bloomers, eh, stories, make my butt look too big?

In summation I invoke my earlier statement: isn't memory as important as fact? I wish, for the deed to the property on the Circle indicates that the property is assigned to heirs and successors forever. A fact that could be important If I could just find a lawyer willing to assert my claim.

Thank you all for listening.