

Saga of Pioneering Spirits, Who Aided Valley's Growth, Told

Brothers Rode Flatboat to Ohio,
Built Dam and "Old Manse"

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We were driving past the old courthouse and Martha looked up at the columns rather wonderingly, and being something of a southerner; she asked me the plain, straight old question, flat out:

"How come, daddy?"

"How come—what, darling?"

"How does it happen to be there, the old courthouse?"

"Well, they just built it, that's all."

"I know. But Cousin Mab and Cousin Lucie and Worthington were here last month, and they've traveled a whole lot; and they said that was one of the finest buildings in America and in the world. I've never seen any prettier ones, have you, Daddy?"

Back to a Man

"No. And it goes back to a man—to a couple or three men, good men, too. Oh—"

Of course, the description of the old courthouse has been given so often and so well that a repetition didn't appeal to me. But the story behind the story, that little yarn beginning in an old farm home in Suffield, Connecticut, and ending here in the valley—I thought I might have something in that.

So I kept the old bus headed south to the West Carrollton home of that old Yankee from Connecticut, and tried to piece out the story.

"Eat your supper light, my boy. Drink your mug of milk," said the mother to her son, Horace Pease, in that old Connecticut farmhouse. It was the spring of 1816.

"Yes, mother."

"For you're riding early in the morning."

"Yes, mother."

Ride to the Miami Lands

"Before the mist has cleared the valley, you'll be far beyond the hills."

Horace Pease jumped to his feet. "Yes, mother. For the Ohio country! For the Miami Lands!"

"Oh, Horace!"

"What, mother?"

"Oh, you're such a boy, barely of age!"

"I'm twenty-three, mother."

"And you talk of getting Perry to come along after you! Perry's but a child, Horace!"

"Perry's seventeen," said Horace Pease. "And a good surveyor. He'll make his way in the new country."

"And George and Edward—you'll be taking them too?"

"They may come in good time, if it's a good country."

The mother cried a little.

Don't Cry, Mother!

"Yes. But the Indians. Did you ever hear a war whoop?"

vapor" or steam as some people called it; and a boat actually came down from Pittsburgh propelled by it. Men talked of a great future, and of the possibilities of a canal up through the Miami valley as far as Dayton.

Horace wrote back to his brother Perry, the surveyor and engineer. At long last the answer came. Perry would come west in the spring. By this time the canal seemed to be certain, and Horace Pease moved up to Hole's station where he found some families named Gebhart, Van Ausdale, Grimes, Lamme, Adams, Stettler and the famous Colonel William Dodds of the Revolution.

Horace Builds Distillery

Horace settled down, and knowing the distillery business, built the first distillery at "the Station." He made peach and apple brandy, and everybody said he knew his business.

Perry arrived from Connecticut at the time when the canal was formally decided upon, and got work as an engineer, eventually engineering the route from Dayton to the "Station." The latter town became too large for its name, and Alexander Grimes and Horatio Gates Phillips and Emanuel Gebhart and some others got together and changed the name of the place to Miamisburg. Edward and George Pease, the younger brothers, arrived the next year.

The engineering of the canal was something of a feat. Because of different levels, there had to be five locks between Dayton and West Carrollton and one in West Carrollton itself. And there had to be a feeder brought in from the river right there.

"Listen," said Perry to Horace one day. "That feeder means a dam in the river, and that means water power. The state will give us the right to dam the river and use the water power in return for bringing in the feeder. Here's where the dam ought to be built." And he indicated a place on his maps. "Let's build it."

Brothers Build Dam

So the two brothers, surveyors and builders always, built the dam and led in the feeder and sold the

Perry had five children now, and owned much land and property.

"Perry," said Horace, "about this courthouse business, it seems to me that your home and John Dickinson's are successful from the architectural point of view. Why couldn't we carry this classic idea one step further, and build the courthouse on these lines?"

"It's a good idea," agreed Perry.

Grecian Temple Model

"I was looking through some books the other night," said Horace. "And I found a picture of the old temple of Theseus at Athens. Why couldn't we build a courthouse along the lines of that temple?"

"Don't know," said Perry. "I may be an engineer, but I'm no more than a jack-leg architect, except when it comes to building my own house. I guess we'd better go see Howard Daniels in Cincinnati about that."

"They did so."

Daniels was enthusiastic, but recommended some changes from the Theseum on account of the difference in use and function.

The Civil war came on, and Walter Pease, son of Horace, proudly led out the Dayton Guards from the old armory on Third street—the first troops from the valley to answer Lincoln's first call, and that within 18 hours of the call. The war continued, and Perry's two sons went, William as captain of the First Ohio heavy artillery, for it takes an engineer to be an artillery man, and Joseph to the Ninety-third O. V. I. Catherine Evans Pease had died, and Perry was lonely in the old big home with his boys away—

Drive to Old Manse

I was thinking of this old story as Martha and I drove on down the Cincinnati pike to West Carrollton, she looking at the trees and the fields, and me just driving and thinking.

We drove into town and went to the old Pease manse, studied its beautiful exterior lines, its wonderful hanging stairway and its fine woodwork, still well preserved, though the house is somewhat in ruin. We drove out to the old dam built by Perry and Horace Pease in the late 1820's, and still standing, though now covered with concrete.

We went back and met the postmaster, C. R. Treon, and his assistant, Maurice Gaugh, who very kindly, lent us some old photographs taken 40 years ago and collected by his father, W. L. Gaugh. We talked with C. H. Blose of the Community center, who told us something of the great boys' organization of the Black Knights, which, under the sponsorship of