

May, 1859.

THE FIRE LANDS PIONEER.

37

ity. He left this place on the completion of the Cleveland & Columbus Rail Road, and settled in New London, where he died April 20, 1853.

The first school house erected was a log cabin, about sixteen by eighteen feet in size. It was placed on the spot now occupied by White & Vanvechtens store. That little cabin answered the double purpose of school and meeting house up to 1830, at which time it was purchased by M. White and occupied by him as a dwelling, until the summer of 1832. The first school was taught in that building in 1821, by Samuel Palmer. The number taught, from ten to fifteen. They consisted of the children of Runder Palmer, Abram Mead, Charles Lyon and Abijah Palmer.

From the first settlement to the present

time, forty years have elapsed, and many changes have taken place. The heavy forests have passed away, and in their stead we see the beautifully cultivated farms; the log cabins have given place to more comfortable and convenient dwellings. Cabinet furniture of modern styles have taken the place of slab tables and pole bedsteads. A supply of good school houses, and stately churches have sprung up in our midst. Plank and rail roads have been substituted for the marked trail. Many changes have taken place among the early pioneers.— Some have left and gone to share in the hardships of settling other new countries. Some still linger here, most effectually marked with old age, while many, very many, are sleeping their last sleep.

REMEMBRANCES

OF THE SKIRMISH WITH THE INDIANS ON THE PENINSULA, IN THE WAR OF 1812, BY HON. J. R. GIDDINGS.

In attempting to give you some account of the two skirmishes that have occurred on the Peninsula during the war of 1812, I shall be compelled to speak entirely from recollection. It is a somewhat singular fact that although that day witnessed the first trial of our arms, during the late war, upon the soil of our State, yet no account of the transaction has ever been published.* I was myself a lad of sixteen years of age, acting as a private soldier in the company commanded by my respected friend, Jedediah Burnham, Esq., now of Kinsman, in the

county of Trumbull. The incidents connected with those skirmishes made a strong impression upon my mind, and so far as they came under my own observation, I think I can give an accurate relation of them. But I must necessarily speak of many recurrences which transpired beyond my personal notice. Of these I can give such impressions as I then received, and which I think were very nearly correct, although I cannot vouch for their entire accuracy.

About the 20th of September, A. D. 1812, the regiment at that time commanded by the late Hon. Richard Hayes, of Hartford, in the county of Trumbull, was encamped on the high ground on the east side of Huron River, some three miles below the present village of Milan. This

*The Hon. Elisha Whittlesey, then acting as Division Inspector under Major General Wadsworth, who was encamped at the portage of Cuyahoga River, on hearing of the skirmishes, addressed a short note to a friend announcing the fact. This note was published in the "Trump of Fame," a small newspaper published at Warren, and constituted so far as the writer is informed, the only notice ever printed of the transactions of the day.

regiment was composed of men residing in Trumbull county, and in the southern tier of townships in Ashtabula county. Capt. Parker's company, from Geauga county, Capt. Doll's company, from Portage county, I think, and Capt. Clark's company, from Cuyahoga county, were attached to our regiment. I am entirely uncertain as to the residence of the two last mentioned companies. Brigadier General Simon Perkins, of Warren, in the county of Trumbull, also accompanied us to that place, and remained with us some time in actual command; but the day on which he left, or the cause of his absence, I am now unable to state.

About the 25th of September, Major Frazier, with about one hundred and fifty men, was detached with orders to proceed as far as Lower Sandusky. At that place there had been a stockade erected for the defense of those who resided there. This post was deserted upon the surrender of Gen. Hull at Detroit, and remained unoccupied until Major Frazier took possession.—The stockade was extended during the winter following, and dignified by the name of Fort Stephenson. From this point Major Frazier sent forward Capt. Parker, with about twenty volunteers, as far as the mouth of "Carrian River," now called "Portage River." After the declaration of war, and while General Hull was in possession of Detroit, provisions to a small amount had been collected at Sandusky to be forwarded on for the support of his army. These provisions had been left when the fort was abandoned, and on the 26th of September, Major Frazier loaded four small boats with pork and beef, and directed them to be taken to our encampment. The number of men accompanying these boats I am unable to state, but think it was eighteen.—They started down the Bay, intending to proceed directly to Huron, but finding the Lake so much agitated by a storm at that time prevailing, that they thought it

prudent to wait until the storm should abate. They therefore returned to Bull's Island, and landed on its east side. From that place they sent one of their boats with some five or six men on to the Peninsula, for the purpose of reconnoitering. Among the spies were one or two of the Ramsdells, who had resided at what then was called "The Two Harbors," on the shore of the Lake, some six or eight miles from Bull's Island. This party proceeded to the former residence of the Ramsdells, with the steady caution which the backwoodsmen of that day knew so well how to practice. They were careful to leave no track, nor to approach by any of the frequented ways leading to or from their former dwelling.—By creeping stealthily through a corn field, they obtained a view of the house, and discovered around it a number of Indians, who appeared to be feasting on roast corn and honey, which they found in abundance on the premises. They remained here until they supposed they had obtained an accurate knowledge of the number of the enemy, which they reported at forty seven.* They then returned to their comrades, on Bull's Island, and made report of their discoveries. The whole party then moved across to Cedar Point, and dispatched a messenger to Camp Avery (as our encampment was called) with the tidings.—The soldiers who brought the information arrived at camp about five o'clock P. M., on Sunday, the 28th September. The news found our little band in a most enfeebled state. The bilious fever had reduced our number of effective troops until we were able to muster but two guards, consisting of two relieves, so that each man in health was actually compelled to stand on his post one-fourth part of the time. I was on duty at

*We subsequently learned that the number of Indians was far greater than estimated by our spies. It was reported in the Spring following by the French at the mouth of the Maumee River, that more than a hundred and thirty of the enemy united in this expedition to the Peninsula.

the time the news reached the camp.— When relieved from my post at a little before sun set, I found them beating up for volunteers. I soon learned the cause, and without going to my quarters I joined the small party who were following the music in front of the line of troops. According to my recollection there were in all sixty-four, who volunteered to share the dangers of the enterprise. We were dismissed for thirty minutes to obtain an evening meal. It was between sun set and dark when we again assembled at the beating of the drum, and prepared for our departure. Daylight had fully disappeared before we shook hands with our companions in arms, and marched forth amid the silent darkness of the night. At the time now referred to, Gen. Perkins was absent from the camp. Col. Hayes was dangerously ill of fever, and Major Frazier was absent at Sandusky. I think Major Sherman, of Youngstown, Trumbull Co., was commanding officer of the forces then at Camp Avery. What orders he gave to Capt. Cotton, who commanded the expedition, or whether he gave any, I am unable to state. Captain Joshua T. Cotton, then of Austintown, was our senior officer. Lieut. Ramsay whose residence I am unable to state, and Lieut. Bartholomew, of Vienna, in the county of Trumbull, accompanied the party. The night was dark and the march was slow. It was past four o'clock in the morning when we reached our friends on "Cedar Point," who were waiting our arrival. We unloaded the boats and embarked on board of theirs, accompanied by eight of the men who had come from Lower Sandusky with the provisions, and leaving the remainder of that party on the Point. We steered for what was then called the "middle orchard," lying on the shore of the bay nearly opposite Bull's Island. Our whole number now amounted to seventy-two. We landed a little after sun rise at the "middle orchard;" here our arrangements were

made as follows: Eight men, including a corporal, were detailed as a guard to remain with the boats. They were directed to take them to a thicket of small bull-rushes, apparently half way to Bull's Island, and there to await further orders. Two flank guards of twelve men each, were also detailed, one under the command of Acting Sergeant James Root, and the other under command of Acting Sergeant Thomas Hamilton.*

These guards were directed to keep at suitable distance on each side of the road, in which the main body under the command of Capt. Cotton was to march. In the course of ten minutes from the time of landing, these orders were being put in execution. The boats were moving off, the flank guards were out of sight, and the main body was marching for the "Two Harbors." At the expiration of an hour or two, the Corporal (Coffin) who was with the boats, contrary to order, took the smallest boat, and with ten men went ashore to obtain fruit for his little party. Once on shore, they pushed their examination for fruit to the orchard lying some eighty or a hundred rods above the place of landing in the morning. While thus engaged they accidentally discovered several canoes filled with Indians making their way down the bay, covered by the island from the view of the little party who remained with the boats. Corporal Coffin with his two companies, instantly left the shore of the bay, and under cover of the woods hastened down to their boats, and with as much energy as they were able to put forth, pulled for their companions who were resting in perfect securi-

*I think neither of these gentlemen belonged to the army, but were with us as volunteers, during their own pleasure. Mr. Root resided in Connecticut and had come to Ohio on business. He now lives in East Hartford. I casually met him in Cleveland in 1836, and received from him reason to hope that he would write an account of the transactions of our party, but I fear he will omit doing it. Mr. Hamilton was a resident of some part of the Western Reserve, but whether he is now living or not I am unable to state. They both behaved gallantly amid the dangers of the day.

ty, unconscious of danger. On their arrival, the four knapsacks and blankets that were on board of the four boats were hastily thrown into the two lightest, each of these were manned by four men, the Corporal in the lightest boat, who gave directions to the men in the others to make for the shore if the enemy were likely to overtake them. The two heaviest boats were thus abandoned, and the men in the others made all efforts to place as great a distance between themselves and the enemy as was possible. They had got so far before the Indians came round the island and discovered them that they were permitted to escape without much pursuit. The other boats floated near the shore, where the Indians sunk them in the shoal water by cutting holes through their bottoms, but the water being very shallow they remained in plain view, so that on return of our men in the afternoon, they attempted to use them for the purpose of escape. The guard in the two boats made Cedar Point, where they remained until near evening, when a portion of the men on the Peninsula came down to the point and were there met by the boats and brought off, and the wounded conveyed to Huron in them.

While the enemy thus drove off the guard and scuttled two of the boats, Capt. Cotton and his party were marching for the "Two Harbors" in the full expectation of finding them there. They reached Ramsdell's plantation and saw fresh signs of the enemy. The Indians had left evident marks of having been there. Fresh beef lay on the ground, putrifying in the sun, their fires were yet burning, and every indication showed that they had recently left the premises of Ramsdell. There was some wheat in a field near the Lake, in such a situation that the owner was anxious to make it more secure. The whole force had collected in the field, and it appeared to be understood that the pursuit of the enemy was to be extended no further.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock A. M. that the return march was commenced. Mr. Hamilton, with his guard, and Captain Cotton, with the main body, were to return to Ramsdell's house. The main body were then to return along the road leading back to the Bay. Hamilton and his guard were to file off to the right and maintain their position on that flank. Root and his party were to secure the wheat, and then by a diagonal route to intercept the main body at the distance of a mile or so from Ramsdell's house. The day was clear and pleasant, and there was no difficulty in either of the guards keeping their direct course. Each party seemed to have moved with great regularity. Capt. Cotton and the main body were marching along the road in double file, Hamilton with the right flank guard was maintaining his position, and Root having secured the wheat was returning on the road on which he was directed. All had progressed perhaps three quarters of a mile, when suddenly Root and his party were fired upon by the enemy. His party were led by young Ramsdell, who acted as pilot. The ground was open timber land, with grass as high as a man's waist. The Indians rose from the grass directly in front of the party, and fired as simultaneously as a platoon of militia would have fired at the word of command. At the instant they fired they raised the war whoop, and disappeared in the grass. Young Ramsdell fell at the first fire pierced by several balls. One other man was also disabled, leaving but nine men beside their commander to return the fire of the enemy, and hold them at bay until they should be supported by their friends under Capt. Cotton. Root directed his men to shelter themselves behind trees, and by his cool and deliberate movements stimulated them to maintain their ground. Whenever an Indian showed any part of his person, he was sure to receive the salutation of our backwoodsman's rifle. The firing was kept

up in an irregular manner, constantly interspersed with the yells of the Indians, until the little guard were reinforced from the main body. As the sound of the enemy's rifles first struck the ears of Capt. Cotton and his party, they stopped short and stood silent for a moment, when they began to lead off from the rear without orders and without regularity. Many of them raised the Indian yell as they started. As they reached the scene of action, each advanced with circumspection as the whistling of balls informed him that he had obtained the post of danger. The firing continued for some fifteen minutes after the first arrival of assistance from the main body when it appeared to subside by common consent of both parties. As the firing became less animated the yells of the savages grew faint, and the Indians were seen to drag off their dead and wounded. About the time of these manifestations of a disposition on the part of the enemy to retire from the conflict,* Capt. Cotton ordered a retreat. He retired and was followed by a large portion of his men. A few remained with Sergeants Root and Rice,† and maintained their position until the enemy apparently left the field. When the firing had entirely ceased, our intrepid sergeants held a consultation, and thought it prudent to retire to where the main body had taken up a position some sixty or eighty rods in the rear of the battle ground.‡ As soon

*It was a matter of much doubt among the officers and men, whether the Indians who attacked Root's flank guard, were the same who appeared in the bay early in the morning, and who sunk the boats left by Corporal Coffin and his guards. It has always been the opinion of the writer that it was a different party and far less in numbers.

†Mr. Rice was an Orderly Sergeant in the company to which the writer belonged. He was a man of great physical power, and while in the field exhibited such deliberate courage that he soon after received an appointment from the Brigadier General as a reward for his gallant conduct. He was also permitted to command the next expedition which visited the mouth of the bay a week subsequently.

‡Sergeant Hamilton and his guard were so far distant at the time of the attack, that they arrived in time to share only in part of the dangers of this skirmish.

as they and their companions reached the party under Capt. Cotton, that officer proposed to take up a line of march directly for the orchard at which they landed in the morning. To this proposal, Sergeant Rice would not consent, until the dead and wounded were brought off. He was then ordered to take one half of the men and bring them away. This order was promptly obeyed. The dead* and wounded were brought from the scene of action to the place where Cotton was waiting with his men. The dead were interred in as decent a manner as could be done under the circumstances, and the line of march was again resumed.‡

There was a very general expectation that the enemy would make an attempt to retrieve their evident discomfiture. They had lost some of their men, but had not taken a single scalp, which with them is regarded as disreputable, particularly when they are the aggressors, as in this instance.

The order of march was the same as it had been previously. All proceeded regularly and silently towards the place of landing. When the main body moving along the road had arrived in sight of the improvement at the middle orchard, there suddenly appeared two Indians, some thirty or forty rods in front of the foremost numbers of our party. The Indians appeared to have suddenly discovered our men and started to run from them, our men in front made pursuit, while others more cautious than their comrades, called loudly for them

*There were but two dead bodies left on the ground at the time of the retreat. Ramsdell, who fell at the first fire, and Blackman, who belonged in the Southern part of Trumbull county. James S. Bills was shot through the lungs, and after being carried back to where Cotton had made a stand, and after leaving his last request with a friend, he died before the bodies of Blackman and Ramsdell were interred, and the three bodies were buried together between two logs covered with leaves and dirt and rotten wood.

‡There was but one man so wounded as to be unable to walk. A ball had struck him in the groin, and he was carried on the back of Sergeant Rice most of the distance. Rice was a man of great determination of purpose, and refused to leave his charge during the subsequent skirmish.

to stop, assuring them there was danger near. Our friends stopped suddenly, and at that instant the whole body of Indians fired upon our line, being at farthest not more than twenty rods distant, entirely concealed behind a ledge of trees that had been prostrated by the wind. It was a most unaccountable circumstance that not a man of our party was injured at this fire. The Indians were on the right of the road, and of course between the road and bay. Our party betook themselves each to his tree, and returned the fire as they could catch sight of the enemy. The firing was irregular for some three or five minutes, when Sergeant Hamilton with the right flank guard reached the scene of action. He had unconsciously fallen somewhat behind the main body during the march. As he advanced he came directly upon the enemies left wing. His first fire put them to flight, leaving two or three of their number on the ground. As they retreated they crossed the road in front of the main body, who by this time had been joined by Sergeant Root and the left guard. Having crossed the road the Indians turned about and resumed the fire.

At this time Captain Cotton began to retire towards a log building standing within the cleared land. The retreat was very irregular, some of the men remaining on the ground and keeping up an animated fire upon the enemy until Cotton, and those who started with him, had nearly reached the house in which they took shelter. Those in the rear at last commenced a hasty retreat also, and were pursued by the Indians until they came within range of the rifles of those who had found shelter in the house.* Captain Cotton, with about twenty men, entered this building, and very handsomely covered the retreat of those who remained longest on the field. There were about

*The Indians commenced a fire upon those in the house, and kept it up a short time, keeping themselves concealed behind the brush and small timber.

thirty* of those who passed by the house and proceeded to the place where we had landed in the morning, expecting to find the boats in which they might escape across the Bay. But the guard and two of the boats were gone. The other two boats were then scuttled. They dare not venture to the house, naturally supposing that it was surrounded by the enemy. Some of them pulled off their clothes and attempted to stop the holes in one of the boats, so as to enable them to cross the Bay in it.—Others fled at once down the shore of the Bay, in order to get as far from the enemy as they could, entertaining a hope that some means would offer by which they might cross over to Cedar Point. Others followed, and before sunset all those who had not sought shelter in the house were on the eastern point of the Peninsula, with their six wounded comrades. The firing was distinctly heard on Cedar Point by Corporal Coffin and his guard of seven men, who under a state of extreme anxiety for the fate of their companions, put off from the Point, and lay as near the Peninsula as they thought safe from the rifles of the enemy, should there be any there.

They rejoiced to see their friends coming down the Point, bringing their wounded, wet with perspiration, many of them stained with blood, and all appearing ready to sink under the fatigues and excitement of nearly twenty-four hours unmitigated effort.

The boats were small, and one of them was loaded at once and crossed to Cedar Point, and returned with the assistance of the other, took in all that remained on the point of the Peninsula, and crossed over.—All were now collected on the beach at Cedar Point. Sergeant Wright was the highest officer in command. Eight men were

*There were six wounded men brought away that evening, making, with the guard left in the boat, thirty-seven. These were joined by those who had remained on Cedar Point from the time they left Bull's Island on their way from Lower Sandusky, so that the whole party who reached Huron that night were between forty and fifty.

detailed as oarsmen, and ordered to take in the six wounded men, and move directly for the mouth of Huron River. I do not recollect the number of men placed in the other boat, but believe it was eight. The remainder took up their march for Huron by land. It was my lot to act as one of the oarsmen on board the boat on which the wounded were placed. Daylight was fast fading away when we put out from Cedar Point into the mouth of the Bay.— Here we stopped some little time and listened in the silence of the evening for any noise that might come from the house in which our companions were left. Hearing nothing from that distance, we started for the mouth of Huron river. We entered the river and arrived at a place then called "Sprague's Landing," about a mile above the mouth, about one or two o'clock on the morning of the 30th September. An advance post was kept at that point, and we fortunately found one of the Assistant Surgeons belonging to the service, at that place. We soon started a fire in a vacant cabin, and placed the wounded in it, and delivered them over to the care of the medical officer to whom I have alluded, but whose name I am now unable to recollect. Having accomplished this, our Sergeant Rice proposed going to head quarters that night, provided a small party would volunteer to accompany him. Anxious that the earliest possible information of the situation of Captain Cotton and his party on the Peninsula should be communicated, some eight or ten of us volunteered to accompany our determined and persevering Sergeant. In the darkness of the night we mistook the road, and finding ourselves on a branch leading south, and which left Camp Avery on the right perhaps a mile and a half, we attempted to wend our way through the forest.— We soon lost our course, but wandered among the openings and woods until daylight enabled us to direct our course with some degree of correctness. We struck the

road near what was then called "About's Landing," and reached camp a little after sunrise. Arrived at head quarters, both officers and men were soon made acquainted with the situation of our friends, who yet remained on the Peninsula. But in the enfeebled state of our skeleton army, it was difficult to obtain a sufficient force to send out to relieve them. During the forenoon Lieut. Allen (of the company to which I belonged,) succeeded in raising some thirty volunteers, and started to the Peninsula in order to bring home those we had left there. The necessity of this movement will be understood when the reader is informed that Capt. Cotton and his men were destitute of all means of crossing the Bay.— Lieut. Allen, however, met with difficulty in obtaining boats to convey his men across the Bay, and did not reach Captain Cotton and his party until the morning of the first of October. They then found our friends in the house, but the enemy were not to be seen.

Soon after Capt. Cotton and his men commenced firing upon them from the house they retired out of danger. They seemed not to have noticed those who passed by the house in order to find the boats, and who then passed down the Bay to the point of the Peninsula, on Monday, during the skirmish. Had they discovered those men they would doubtless have pursued and massacred them all. Being unconscious of this, and there being no prospect of effecting any injury to those in the house, they retired to the scene of action, and stripped and scalped two of our dead whom we left on the field. They mutilated the body of Simons, who fell during the skirmish. His right hand was cut off, and the scalping knife of a chief named Omick was left plunged to the hilt in his breast. This Indian had previously resided at a small village on the east bank of the Parmatoony Creek, in the Township of Wayne, in the county of Ashtabula. I had been well-ac-

quainted with him for several years, and so had many others who were engaged in the combat of that day, some of whom declared that they recognized him during the skirmish. It is also supposed that he must have recognized some of his old acquaintances, and left his knife in the body of Simons as a token of triumph. The knife was recognized by some of the soldiers from its peculiar handle of carved ivory.— The Indians took away and secreted their own dead. There were three of our men killed during this latter skirmish. Mason lived on Huron River, and cultivated the farm on which we were encamped. He came into camp on the 28th, about sunset, volunteered for the expedition, and accompanied us on our march. He was shot through the lower region of the breast, the ball evidently having passed through some portion of the lungs, as the blood flowed from his mouth and nose. A friend took him upon his shoulder, and attempted to bring him off the field, but as the enemy pressed hard upon them, Mason requested his friend to set him beside of a tree, and give him his gun, and leave him to his fate. His friend knowing that at best he could only prolong his life a few moments, sat him down as requested, and left him. He was seen some moments subsequently by those who passed him in haste, flying before the pursuing enemy. They reported him as still sitting up beside the tree, and the blood flowing from his mouth and nose.

They also stated that they heard the report of his musket soon after they passed him, and the report of several rifles instantly followed. On examining the body it was found that several balls had passed through his breast, and it was generally supposed that he fired upon the enemy as they approached him, and that in return several Indians fired at him. His body was stripped of its clothing, and he was scalped.

On the arrival of Lieut. Allen and his party at the house, Capt. Cotton joined him, and they proceeded to bury the bodies of those two men. Mingus* was also killed during this skirmish, his brother saw him fall and immediately seized the body, and raising it upon his shoulder proceeded to the house with it. After the Indians had retired out of sight and left our friends somewhat at leisure, they proceeded to raise a portion of the floor composed of planks split from large timber. They then dug a sort of grave, and burying the body replaced the floor, leaving no signs of the body being deposited there. Capt. Cotton and Lieut. Allen and his party, then re-crossed the bay and returned to camp on the evening of the first of October. The next morning we again mustered, the roll of volunteers was called. The names of the killed and wounded being noted we were dismissed, and each returned to his own company.

*I may have forgotten the name of this man, but I think such was the name.