

These selections are from "The Autobiography or Memoirs as Written by Oscar G. Miller." The Historical Society of Decatur County in Greensburg, IN and the Greensburg Public Library each have a complete copy of the memoirs. Punctuation and spelling have been left as they are in the original copies, corrections are in brackets.

The Tourist Club

According to Merritt's Illustrated Souvenir, the Tourist Club was organized at the home of Judge F. E. Gavin, October 1, 1894. It was the only club in the city that admitted both ladies and gentlemen, and the number of each should be equal. As my girl friend, Clara Lambert, was looking for a partner, she gave me an invitation to join. I was an exceedingly eager "joiner" and I joined what proved to be one of the best and most interesting literary clubs of the city. The object was to visit all parts of the world by means of description without actually traveling to see them. Members were to prepare papers from best available sources that might be obtained. Members were permitted to touch up the highlights of their descriptions of cities, countries or prominent individuals, to make their classical compositions interesting, so long as they did not vary too much from the authenticity relating to the country or person being portrayed or described. I was much pleased with the club, as I became associated with the best educated, social and literary people of the city.

When I joined the club the following gentlemen and their wives were members of the club: B. F. Bennett, J. L. Bracken, F. M. Dowden, Cortez Ewing, Judge John D. Miller, Judge Frank E. Gavin, J. F. Goddard, Prof. W. P. Shannon, S. H. Morris, D. Silberberg, Dr. J. v. Schofield, M. F. Parsons, and Prof. George L. Roberts. This was a group of people that I very much enjoyed. Members of the club did individual work. The Tourist Club was not an "eating" club. It subsisted by devouring the fruits of its own production. No foreign talent was employed. The club depended entirely on home production.

My Law Practice and Financial Status

Of course my financial matters were nothing to brag about as I had gone into debt and strained my credit at the banks to take care of the purchase of what looked like good bargains that I had contracted to buy. My law practice was bringing a fair return, and my Vine Street properties were bringing a small income, and in the meantime I had paid off the mortgage to Mr. Tilson. The Summerville 100 acres my father had given me was not very remunerative.

The year of 1894 was a year of busy movements and brilliant prospects for me in the future. Clara and I had agreed we would be married in the spring of 1895. We were both very much interested in the things that were transpiring in the Tourist Club. She was on the program at the January, 1895 meeting to carry on the conversation on "The Southern Mountaineers." She did a fine job of telling some of her own experiences and enthused the members very much by her remarks. She handled the subject very adroitly and interestingly as she was always able to do.

I was on the March program and the subject to which I had been assigned was "New Orleans." I prepared the paper, and on March 11, 1895 Clara and I went to the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. Judge Frank E. Gavin at 446 East Main Street. On that date and at that place I read my first paper to the members of the Tourist Club. While this paper did have considerable historical significance compressed in it, still it was rather highly charged with plenty of imaginary romance. I will now insert the contents of this paper, which reads as follows:

New Orleans

"I must say that I was much pleased indeed, when the committee on assignment of subjects, in the Tourist's Club, placed in my hands a subject, with which I am perfectly familiar. And indeed I must further add that I appreciate the fact that they gave me the name of a place, the Crescent city, in which I spent the greater part of my life, by which means I am perfectly familiar and acquainted with every street and alley, together with a greater portion of the inhabitants. And I esteem it an honor, of no small consequence to know that the classic members of this club have been charitable enough to think that I could give an original account of the city in which I have so long resided, knowing as they must, that modesty and self pride, would keep me from copying extensive articles from cyclopedias guide books and other almanacs of general information, in writing a description of a place upon which me optic nerves have often tingled with delight and almost sated familiarity.

"For all intents and purposes of giving this paper an air of authenticity, I will say that I was born in the city of Bologne [in France] in the year 1666. Louis the XIV was then King of France. His reign had been marked by universal prosperity at home, and valuable conquests abroad, while and unusual interest was sought for in the fields of literature and art. But the later part of his reign was taken up in the execution of Regal whims and fogyisms and religious persecution of whole classes of the most industrious of his subjects.

"This being the case and fearing that I might be drafted into one of his numerous armies, I took a ship, in the year 1686 at the age of twenty, which stood at anchor in the harbor of Bologne. The ship sailed the next day, and in three months from the time I stepped aboard that vessel, I found myself in the town of Montreal, then a small village inhabited by French, Indians and half-breeds.

"It was a wild and perilous situation, and so intensely romantic that it filled my youthful mind with painful apprehensions as to what should come of this prodigal expedition.

"I had been in the town but a short time, when I was rudely introduced to a notable personage, who afterwards became eminent in the historical events of America. I saw at once in his sagacious countenance the calm and determined eye of a most daring adventurer, yet the smile that played upon his rugged countenance as he spoke to me, undoubtedly contemplating and comprehending my youthful timidity, I saw the light of his eye emanated from an honest and benevolent heart. He seemed pleased and much interested in me at once, and after a brief conversation we found that we were both from neighboring cities in France, he being several

years my senior, was well acquainted with my father, who was of the same political school with himself, both being Revolutionists, and belonging to the same Jacobian Club. His name was Robert Cavalier de LaSalle. I found that he was getting up another expedition to make explorations down the Mississippi, and as I was very desirous to seeing some of the wilds of an American forest of which I had so often read, I without the least demur, joined his small body of troops, which consisted of about eighty men, armed with muskets, arquebusses [arquebuses] and cross bows. By the middle of September of the same year we were ready to start. We had ten pack saddle horses and five mustangs, which LaSalle had captured near Ft. St. Louis (Texas) on a former expedition. We made our way by land through the unbroken forests of New York until we reached the upper banks of the Niagra. Here we found a small sail vessel, which had been constructed by LaSalle, called the "Griffin."

"After making such repairs as was necessary, we loaded our plunder, horses, and mustangs and boarded the ship. In twenty days we found ourselves off the coast of Lake Michigan, at a point about half way between the present sight of Chicago and Michigan City. We have made a short portage through the wild forest to the swampy banks of the Kankakee River, and through this stream reached Illinois. I would be glad to tell of the wild life we led on our descent of the great Mississippi in the canoes made of birch, sold to us by the Indians and the rafts which we constructed out of poles and grapevines on which we placed the equestrian part of our equipment, and also about the great fishes, which we caught from the lazy and murky waters of that great river, and the bears which we fearlessly slaughtered with impunity but the length of this article will not allow the least digression. I must therefore hasten on with my narrative.

"We floated leisurely down the Mississippi passing Indian villages which today have grown into large commercial cities and even passed over the very spot where Ferdinand de Soto had been laid to rest about 150 years previous neath the waves of that mighty river that he had discovered. Several days and even weeks of river navigation and discovery passed and we came to a great bend in the river which formed a crescent shaped section of the river, widening to a great expanse, the current becoming very sluggish, and the wet cypress forest on the other bank was draped in long pendent Spanish mosses which encircled the low horizon in every direction, the gaps made in the forest by the ingress and exit of this mighty river looked like the faded needle's eye which some unfortunate camel might pass with a great deal of difficulty.

"Here in the convex of this great crescent, which looked like Mark Tapley's New England abode, amid forest trees of centuries' growth, we camped for the night near a small Indian village. Little did we dream that this wild, swampy, sandy expanse which now served as a bedroom was to be the foundation of a great commercial city. It was a dreamy night. The winds whispered queasy songs of deadly malaria through the tall cypress trees, which large vultures sat roosting very complacently. The shallow strips of water were hid by myriads of aquatic plants under which, if I am not mistaken, was a harbor of reptiles, great and small, coiling their slimy bodies about each other.

"We made several explorations about the country. To the north was a great lake, now called Pon[t]chartrain and to the east was fancied we could hear the roar of the ocean. After making explorations about the mouth of the Mississippi and many miles into the interior, which was

swampy and covered with luxuriant vegetation, with forests abounding with wild rice, alligators, snakes and ponderously large mosquitoes which seemed extremely fond of their new French cousins, LaSalle proposed that we return to Montreal. At this time were two notorious characters named Dehaut (Doho) and L'Archeveque (las-she-vake) who killed LaSalle's nephew while buffalo hunting. Wondering at the delay of his nephew's return, LaSalle went to seek him. At the brink of the river Trinity he observed eagles hovering as if over a dead body. He fired an alarm gun. Warned by the sound, Dehaut and Larcheveque crossed the river; the former skulked in the prairie grass, and of the later LaSalle asked: "Where is my nephew?" At the moment of the answer Dehaut fired, and without a word LaSalle fell dead. They despoiled his remains, which were left on the prairie, naked and without burial, to be devoured by wild beasts. Such was the end of this daring adventurer. I had learned to love him and in me he reposed the greatest confidence. For force of will and vast conceptions, for various knowledge and quick adaptation of his genius to untried circumstances, for a sublime magnanimity that resigns itself to the will of Heaven, and yet triumphs over affliction, by energy of purpose and unfaltering hope, he has no superior among his countrymen.

"Bancroft in his valuable history of the U. S. gives an account of this same expedition, but he does not mention my name in connection therewith but I presume that it is on account of an oversight on his part, for we were all there and had seen the wild and primeval condition of the grounds which the great Crescent city was afterwards builded [built]. Disheartened and discouraged at the death of our noble leader, we soon afterwards returned to France. RRIVING in the city of Paris I found everything in a foment of excitement. Louis the XV who was but a mere child, had succeeded to the throne, and during his minority the Duke of Orleans was holding the reins of government as regent. I found that John Law, a shrewd and cunning Englishman with a Yankee mind, had by the consent of the Duke of Orleans, established his wonderful paper money bank, and by his mesmeric powers he was hypnotizing all of the financing of the French movement.

"By some extraordinary vision or phantasm he had befuddled the minds of many sagacious [sagacious] and conservative spectators. He had drawn a very beautiful plat of the great crescent city and named it after the Duke of Orleans, which he said he would found by means of the Mississippi Land Company, of which he was president. Figuratively speaking, Law's great pneumatic paper money bank rested on a foundation made of Mississippi and Louisiana crawfish chimneys. It was a stupendous swindle. He was the great financial God of Paris. Capitalists and merchants flooded his royal bank to exchange their disgusting gold and silver for his bright new paper money, which was said to be the mascot of the hour. All Paris was one human conglomeration of mercenary excitement. Of course I became excited with the rest. I called on Mr. Law at his marble palace and rang his golden door bell, and was ushered into a residence as costly and magnificent as the ancient Alhambra. Law's haughty wife turned up her nose at my shabby appearance, although I was dressed in my best. Law seemed a perfect gentleman and received me with great cordiality, although I thought I could detect some of the obsequious qualities found in real estate agents in the gas boomed towns of Indiana of the present date. He brought me to the plats of several great cities which were being founded by his great Mississippi Land Company. It all looked well on paper. We soon struck a bargain, and within three weeks I

found myself on board an immigrant ship, bound for the new El Dorado, while I walked up and down her decks with as much buoyancy as Wilkins McCawber himself. On this vessel were several historical personages, notably Saville, Bienville, Maurepas, and Count Pon[t]chartrain all men of visionary ideas and mercurial dispositions. After months of sea life we landed near the delta and afterwards took a detour over the swamps and boggy fens and foul morasses, in search of the large cities which John Law had described so beautifully to us. Only a few small settlements were found. This being the case, we determined to found a city, and ascending the river, effected a landing at the Crescent. This was in 1716, or about 15 years before the birth of George Washington.

“Owing to the annual inundations of the river, the Crescent was swampy and marshy, and cut up by a thousand ravines and pools of stagnant water, when the river was low. The Indian village which we had seen in my former voyage; was now deserted except for an old Indian woman who sang an uncouth dirge or chant, ‘The spirit tells me,’ she sang, ‘that the time will come that when between the river and the lake there will be as many dwellings for the white man as there are trees standing now. The haunts of the red man are doomed and faint recollection and traditions concerning the very existence of this race will float dimly over the memory of his successors as unsubstantial, as vague and obscure as the mist which shrouds on a winter morning the bed of the father of waters.’ This song has now become a city legend.

“For many years the town was quite an aquatic habitation and the floods were so numerous that it is said that many of the inhabitants became amphibious and web-footed in their nature; but I do not vouch for these statements, although I must say that they were usually a scaly set of individuals. In 1719 an inundation drove all of the inhabitants from the city, but in 1727 Gov. Perier built the first levee for water protection.

“But to relate my own personal experiences in the history of New Orleans, and how I saw the streets grow narrow as they receded from the river like spokes in a wagon wheel as though the hub was about half way between Lake Pon[t]chartrain and the river bank; and how the city grew in size and population composed of the refuse and motley races from every country on earth, in a perfect Babel of tongues; as the shiploads of French girls; the gatherings of men, white, red and black in buckskins and feathers of the wilderness; of the gay colors, gold braid and ruffles of royalty and uniforms; and the black nakedness of slavery, of the varying success made in 50 years of war against the Natchez, Yazoo, Choctaw and Chic[k]asaw savages, how we received with gladness three shiploads of exiles from Acadia in 1765, of which Longfellow has spoken; how our new city government and charter was constructed and adopted; how we respected the cession of Louisiana to Spain; and how Don Alexandro O’Rilley [O’Reilly] brought us under Spanish control again in 1779 by a terrific crack of his military whip; how our city was almost destroyed by fire in 1794 only to be replaced by the most artistic Spanish-American architecture; all this would be burdensome to you. But there is an incident that I must relate. ‘One morning I was sauntering leisurely down Carondelet [Carondelet] Street which crosses Salcedo near the Place d’Armes, not far from the celebrated French Market, when my attention was attracted by an excited crowd of people composed largely of Creoles and French emigrants, near a newspaper office. I purchased a paper, and to my surprise and joy read the following extracted

communication:

‘Paris, France, April 20th, 1803

‘Livingston and Monroe , who represent the U. S. Republic as ministers in this country, after several days of consultation and negotiations with our minister, Tallyrand, have finally agreed to pay the French Government the sum of fifteen millions of dollars, for which consideration France agrees to cede the large province of Louisiana to the U. S. Napoleon Bonaparte, when informed yesterday of the conclusion of the treaty, seemed to be well pleased to get rid of his mastodon at so good a price, and he was heard to remark to one of his reporters that ‘this accession of territory strengthens forever the power of the U.S, and,’ said he, ‘I have given England a maritime rival that will, sooner or later humble her pride.’

“The news of this treaty was received with indifference, enthusiasm or sadness according to the various nationalities of this of the city.

“Jefferson was then president of the U. S. and appointed Charles Claybourn [Claiborne] as governor of the now province of Louisiana. Claybourn [Claiborne] in his inaugural address assured them that the U. S. received them as brothers and would hasten to extend to them a participation in the invaluable rights forming the basis of their own unexampled prosperity, and that their political existences was no longer left open to the caprices of chance. These words of the gifted Clayborn were re-echoed about 15 years later in the magnificent victory achieved by Gen. Andrew Jackson and his American army who so nobly protected our city from British invasion. As yet I have said nothing of the social conditions of the city.

“Society is very largely on the John Law order, and I say with shame that it is the vilest and most unchristian city of the Union, not even excepting Chicago. The police force is a farce and a joke. Debauchery and crime are encouraged and protected by police authority in some parts of the city. In the upper class of society more enlightened manners and customs are found. Many of the women are pure Caucasian blondes. Their fascinating manners, their sparkling vivacity, their chaste and pretty wit, their taste and elegance in dress, show the very highest degree of womanly refinements. As a whole the people of New Orleans are very fond of amusement and spend much of their time in pleasure seeking and social gaieties.

“But I cannot describe all the characteristics of the quasi-Anglo-Latin-American city with which, by means of my assumed gift of longevity I am so well acquainted.

“I would be glad to tell you how Gov. Ben Butler ruled us with military tyranny for almost two years; how he took possession of our city by means of one of the greatest naval battles history knows; how he cleaned the filthy streets of our city and the stench from the French fish market, and hung every man that dared to touch the American flag with malicious intent. I would be glad if I had the time to show you the city as it stands today, the picturesque gardens and fountains of Jackson Square with the equestrian statue of Gen. Jackson, of whom I have spoken; the beautiful hotels of the city with French and Spanish styles of cooking; the French opera house made of iron and brick, the most imposing structure of the city; the Grand Opera House; the Academy of

Music; the Odd Fellows Hall; the archbishop's residence; and one of the largest convents in America; the Olympic Club House where John L. Sullivan, the great American Spartians who for twelve long years met upon that bloody arena every shape of man or beast the broad empire of the world could furnish until Chas. Corbett knocked him over the ropes, where he lay – a bunch of ungainly disgusting egotism; the young men's gymnastic club on the Esplanade; St. Vincent's Infant's Asylum; the St. Elizabeth Asylum; the Canal Bank, with \$1,000,000.00 stock; the cabilido [Cabildo] and court buildings; the old St. Louis cemetery where all the vaults are built above the ground on account of the sandy and wet nature of the ground; also the city hall and the Pickwick building; the Cotton Exchange at the corner of Carondolet [Carondelet] and Gravier streets, which is built of cream colored stone, highly sculptured with bas reliefs and other ornaments, the interior being one handsome apartment of graceful proportions, supported by carintian [Corinthian] columns, the ceilings frescoed and in the center is a painting set in a handsome panel, representing my old friend Cavalier de LaSalle, who took possession of Louisiana in the name of the king of France almost 200 years ago. I would also be glad to tell you all about the nefarious Louisiana Lottery which has long existed with the city, and which is said to be operated by even shrewder men than John Law himself; and it had been intimated by some of the superstitious inhabitants that Law's ghost usually held the luckiest tickets. I have told you nothing of the Haunted House or the fire department; but I will content myself by closing the paper by a newspaper clipping concerning the Mardi Gras, which is an annual festival. The lines are not very elegant, but are intensely poetic and look like they might have been written by some Smiths Crossing journalist.”

To say the least, I was highly pleased at the reception of the reading of this paper, which was my first effort before this literary club. I think that the membership gave me more praise than I could possibly think that the paper really deserved. But it did seem to strike a very happy vein of response from the members of the club, which, of course, I more than appreciated.