

THE LOSS OF HENRY SHRYOCK IN THE YEAR 1818.*

We shall now notice an extraordinary incident which at the time of its occurrence, excited the deepest interest in the community.

The reader no doubt remembers that in a preceding chapter the name of Henry Shryock was mentioned in connection with the first improvements of the site whereon the borough of Indiana is now built, and that he stood conspicuous among the enterprising men of that period. Upon the organization of the county and location of the seat of justice, emigration was attracted hither from the more populous communities of the State, and during the ensuing ten or twelve years quite a number of improvements were made at different points in the new county.

But eastward from the county town, the settlers were "few and far between," and beyond them lay an unbroken forest, extending to the banks of the Susquehanna, into which only the most fearless and experienced hunters would occasionally penetrate, when in quest of valuable game, such as elk, deer, bears and panthers. The less experienced and persons unused to the woods, seldom ventured away from the few paths and streams with which they were familiar, and then only when two or more went out together.

On the 27th of June 1818, Henry Shryock and Joseph Parker started from Indiana to the Susquehanna river, on a hunting excursion, and were joined on their way by Peter Gordon, who resided in what is now Cherryhill township. After the party had reached the hunting grounds near the river, they erected a camp, and then Parker and Gordon started for a lick to watch for deer, leaving Shryock at the encampment, to take care of the horses and prepare breakfast the next morning, after which he was to follow them to the lick, when they would determine upon their movements for the ensuing day.

Shryock, in pursuance of this arrangement, left the camp in the morning and proceeded in the direction of the lick. In crossing a small ravine, the horse on which he rode made a leap, by which a blanket which had been placed on the saddle was thrown off without being noticed at the time. Discovering the loss of the blanket after having proceeded some distance from the ravine, Shryock tied his horses by their bridles and started back on foot in search of the missing article. The path by which he had come not being very distinct, he lost it, but soon found it again as he supposed.

After walking a considerable distance he discovered that he was in a wrong path, and in trying to regain the one from which he had diverged, he came to a large fallen tree elevated several feet from the ground. Being considerably excited and anxious to make up for lost time, he pressed forward in great haste, without regard to obstacles that came in his way. In crossing the fallen tree, he found himself suddenly among a number of rattle-snakes that were lying on a broken-off limb, one of which hissed so near his ear that he thought at first it had bitten him. By the time he had recovered from the alarm caused by the rattle-snakes, Shryock was completely bewildered, and instead of taking the direction he should have done, unfortunately took a course that led him still farther from the path he was trying to regain.

Parker and Gordon waited at the lick a long time, and then started toward the camp to see what was detaining their comrade. Coming to where the horses were tied, and discovering that a blanket was missing, they conjectured at once that Shryock had turned back in search of it. Following his trail until they came upon the rattlesnakes, several of which they shot, and perceiving from the trail through the grass and weeds that Shryock was still pursuing a wrong course, Parker and Gordon followed after until they came to the river, where they lost all trace of him.

After searching two or three days without success, they returned to Indiana with the intelligence that Shryock had lost himself in the woods. This intelligence spread rapidly through the town and country, and a large number of the citizens immediately turned out in search of the missing man. After scouring the woods for nine days without success, a consultation was had, at which it was determined to form the men into two companies, who were to go in different directions.

It was agreed that if either party came up with Shryock they should signal to the others by discharging their rifles in rapid succession. Captain Meek Kelly and John Evans, Esq., however, separated from the rest, thinking they might make more progress in that way. The several parties prosecuted the search during the day without making any discoveries until toward evening, when Kelly and Evans came upon a trail that had been made through the weeds, but whether it was the trail of a man or some wild beast they could not tell. Following it, however, they at length espied the lost man, who was moving slowly, having a staff in each hand.

They stepped behind a tree so as not to alarm him by their sudden appearance, but he saw them, and called on them to come to him. They promptly advanced to his assistance, and after exchanging a few words, one of the them commenced firing his gun in pursuance of the agreement entered into with the other

parties in the morning, while the other agreed in building a fire. On hearing the signal, the other parties all came in that evening. Shryock, after being rested a little, and having taken some nourishment, recognized all the men, naming each one as he came up. They spot where he was first discovered by Kelly and Evans was near a small stream that enters the Susquehanna, some distance below the cherry Tree, In Montgomery township, which is still known as "Shryock's run."

In crossing a run on the morning of the day on which he was found, Shryock fell and broke two of his ribs, which caused him great pain. His shoes had been worn out, and in his feet were a number of thorns, the points of some coming out on the upper side. He stated that some of the dogs belonging to the companies in search, had come to him several times, but always left again, though he tried to retain them; and at another time he heard the dogs not far off, and thought they were wolves. One day he came across a mare and foal, and tried to catch the mare, but the foal being very wild, both ran away. In pursuing them he took of his coat and hung it up at a hunter's camp, but was unable to find it again. The day after Shryock was found, the company took him to Robert McKissick's, about ten miles from here, and supplied him with clothing; and in the course of the afternoon he reached his home, on horseback,** one of the party having furnished a horse for him to ride.

From a paper called the *American*, published in this borough, by James McCahan, we copy the following paragraph under date of July 13th, 1818:

"THE LOST MAN FOUND. – We have great pleasure in announcing that Mr. Henry Shryock was found, alive, on Thursday evening last, about four miles from the Cherry Tree. His appearance, when found, was wretched and frightful in the extreme; he was crawling along, with a stick in each hand, in a state of mental derangement, his body and limbs entirely destitute of clothing, except a small remnant of his shirt, which hung around his shoulders, and had neither hat, shoes or stockings on; his feet and legs were dreadfully lacerated and swollen.

"From his great debility of body, having been in the wilderness eleven days and eleven nights, without any sustenance but that obtained from berries, he could not have survived much longer. He reached his own house, in this borough, on Friday evening, perfectly sane in mind and in good spirits, and we have no doubt that in a few days he will be entirely recovered.

"Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon the citizens of this borough generally, and on Captain Meek Kelly and John Evans, Esq., for the lively interest which they took in the fate of this man, and the great bodily fatigue they underwent in their endeavors to find him, many of them being out five, six, seven and nine days, and as many nights, in that inhospitable country."

Notwithstanding his great sufferings in his wanderings and his exhausted condition when he was found, Shryock soon recovered his wonted health and activity, and lived to the age of seventy. He died January 30th, 1836.

Though sixty-two years have elapsed since that remarkable occurrence, there are still living many individuals who then resided in this borough or vicinity.

* Jonathan Row, Indiana Register, January 24th, 1860.

** They improvised a flag out of blankest, &c., on this occasion.