

Spier Spencer - Military hero and our county's namesake



by Dean Bolin

Our county was named after Captain Spier Spencer, a true military hero. Below is a brief biography:

It is not certain when Spier Spencer was born but we do know it was in Virginia. He made the journey to Kentucky with his parents, Thomas and Jane Spencer. Though Thomas came from a slave-owning family, Spier's immediate family did not own slaves. They migrated to the Bluegrass State, eventually establishing roots in Bardstown. It would be there in 1763, Spier would marry Elizabeth Polk, the daughter of Captain Charles Polk, a renowned Indian fighter.

When Spier and his wife moved to Indiana with their family, including one son (James M.) and three daughters (Delilah, Matilda and Sarah), they settled in the territorial capital of the Indiana Territory, Vincennes. There he would become acquainted with the territorial Governor, William Henry Harrison. The acquaintance would

lead Spencer to his first appointment, that of Sheriff in Harrison County. Spencer moved his family from Vincennes to Corydon in order to take up the post. He and his wife would also operate the Green Leaf Tavern.

While at Corydon, Spencer organized a local militia, nicknamed the "Yellow Jackets." Spencer's militia would battle against the Shawnee under the leadership of Governor Harrison. The Yellow Jackets would play a pivotal role in the Battle of Tippecanoe on November 11, 1811.

Unfortunately, Spier Spencer would not live to see the outcome of the battle. As described by his commander and friend, Governor Harrison wrote to the US Secretary of War the following: "... Spencer was wounded in the head. He exhorted his men to fight valiantly. He was shot through both thighs and fell; still continuing to encourage them, he was raised up, and received a ball through his body, which put an im-

mediate end to his existence ..."

Spencer's horse and sword were eventually returned to Elizabeth, who kept operating the tavern. The Green Leaf would later have an important if not an official role to play in the creation of the state. It was said that the state legislators meeting in Corydon would often spend their evenings in the tavern. There is probably more truth than not that the tavern was the real site of where the legislators worked out the details of the state constitution than at the building designated as the governmental center and soon to be capital for the State of Indiana.

Captain Spencer's friends did not forget him. He would be memorialized in several ways. Spencer County would be named after him in 1818. Kentucky would also receive a Spencer County, also named for Spier. Furthermore, the Town of Spencer, the County Seat of Owen County, was also named for the Tippecanoe hero.

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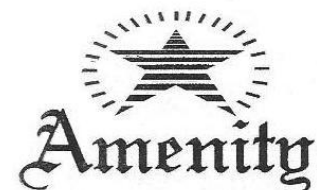


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