

PAGES FROM THE PAST ● By Frank J. Gilroy

Indianola's Blind Grocer (Father's Day)

Born in Ohio on December 11, 1838, Levi Gilroy came with his parents to Indianola in 1845. He was only a child 7 years old and of a family that grew to the number of nine, the last two being born after the arrival in Illinois.

We know little of their early life here. The eldest son married Elizabeth Baird of Indianola, but only lived a short time thereafter. He passed away in 1857 and is buried in the old Weaver Cemetery. A short time after his death the family, with itching feet for the west, moved on into Iowa, settling near Jefferson. None of the family ever returned to Illinois except Levi, who soon returned to "the girl he left behind him," and married Lucretia Perkins. Early in life he entered the mercantile business, which he followed most of his life. The marriage union was blessed with five children, four of whom died in infancy. The only one growing to maturity was Orton M. Gilroy, who lived in Indianola until after the death of his father (1891) when he also went to Iowa.

Sometime in the 70's, Levi Gilroy developed an eye infection and was being treated by an eye specialist in Danville, who at a single treatment used such strong chemicals that his sight was completely destroyed. Being now blind, he continued with his grocery store, which was then located in a frame building south of the E. B. Willison store. Later he erected two frame buildings on the west side of the square and moved his store into them. The larger one was used in later years as a barber shop. Both were destroyed by fire Mar. 6, 1931.

Adding to his troubles, Levi's wife died in 1884, leaving him and the teenage son alone. Fortunately, before his

helper was taken, he had developed a system by which he could operate the store with little help. He learned to identify coins by the sense of touch and kept his own day book of accounts by using books 4x6 inches, and writing a single account on a page. When he had used the first page, he tore off the top corner, and when he used and turned the second page, he tore off the bottom corner, thus he could discern the next clean page.

We still possess one of these account books of 1889. Familiar names appearing there are: McMillan, Moreland, Butler, Mosier, Bradfield, Donovan, Worthington, etc. Like all other blind people, paper money to him was indiscernible. A few people would try to pass \$1 bills for \$5 bills. If he was suspicious, he placed it in a separate till and showed it to the first friend who came into the store for confirmation.

In 1885 Levi married a second wife in the person of Mary A. Fox, who had recently moved from Tennessee to Illinois. To this union was born three children—Jennie M., deceased 1925; Lavina B. of Danville, and Frank J. of Sidell. This union was also destined to be short, for in the flu epidemic of 1890-91, Levi contracted the disease and lived only a few days, passing away April 22, 1891 at the age of 52.

He was a devout man, an active member of the Indianola Baptist church, having joined that body in February, 1862. In the business life of the community, he was contemporary with J. J. Healy, E. B. Willison, Michael Fisher, Dr. Worthington, and others in his later years. After his death, the store was closed out and the buildings rented for other purposes. He is buried in Woodlawn cemetery.