

FIERS, JAMES WALTER

James Walter FIERS. The FIERS family was of English descent and became early settlers of Virginia. Thomas L. FIERS was born in Essex county, Virginia, August 30, 1798. At the age of about six years he came with his parents to Greene county, Ohio, where he grew to manhood. He served in the War of 1812 under General Harrison. After the war he married Anna LEWIS and brought up a family of twelve children. The family moved to Delaware county, Indiana, in the early '40s. Two sons, John and George, came to Richland township, Jay county, in 1855, and purchased a saw mill on the present site of REDKEY, and engaged in the timber business. There they lived the remainder of their lives. George FIERS was brought up as a cooper. He afterward engaged in farming, became a dealer in timber, and two or three times in life he was engaged in the mercantile business. He married Mary Jane REDKEY, the daughter of James REDKEY, the "father of the town." To this union there were born five children, J. Walter, Ella, William T., Laura M. and Henry O. The REDKEY family was of German extraction. Adam REDKEY was born in Pennsylvania in 1763. He served sometime in the War of the Revolution under Washington. He married Mary, the daughter of Capt. Joshua DAVIS, who also served under Washington. He settled in Highland county, Ohio, in 1808, and in 1810 he started back to Pennsylvania to secure money to make a payment on his farm, but he contracted typhus fever and died, leaving his wife and six children among strangers. They early became members of the Methodist Episcopal church, and nearly all the REDKEY descendants have been of that faith. Joshua REDKEY, one of the sons of this family, married Mary E. WEYER. He served as a soldier in the War of 1812, leaving his young wife to endure the hardships of pioneer life, she being much annoyed by thieving bands of roving Indians during her husband's absence. To this union there were born seven children. James, the eldest son, married Elvira HARTMAN. Their children were Mary Jane, Martin, Nancy, Drusilla, John W., and Nathan. James REDKEY became a Methodist preacher, farmer and business man. In 1856 he bought of the first settler the land on which the town of REDKEY was afterward built, the town being named in his honor. J. Walter FIERS, the subject of this sketch, was born on February 27, 1860. His parents then lived in the hewed log house built by the Wade family, who were the first settlers on the site of the town of REDKEY. He was brought up amid what he calls secondary pioneer surroundings, but he early developed a liking for school and school work, and since he was old enough to attend school, with the exception of two years, he has spent all the winters of his life, and several summers in the school room either as student or teacher. He completed the work of the common schools and has spent some four years at Valparaiso University and the University of Wisconsin. However, he regards as the best and most practical part of his education that which he has acquired by home study. All his teaching has been done in his own home community. For a number of years he taught in the district schools and in the grades, but for many years he has been teaching in the REDKEY high school. One summer he went into the banking work, but did not like it, and when fall came he left the bank and returned to the school room with the purpose of devoting his life to the work of education. During his life Mr. FIERS has gained knowledge of many kinds of business. In the long vacations between schools, as a boy, he worked on the farm, clerked in a store, helped build the L. E. & W. railroad, made and burned drain tile, and as he always had access to a shop filled with tools, he became skillful in various kinds of mechanical work. He gained a good working knowledge of the different building trades, studied architecture and has for many years devoted his vacations between schools to architectural work. In his youth Mr. FIERS was very fond of hunting and trapping, and spent much time in the great primeval forests, which he greatly loved. He regards the education which he received from this contact with nature as one of his most valuable acquisitions. In his work and in his sports he often carried a book in his pocket, which

he studied at convenient times. One of his delights during the many long nights while alone burning tile was to lie on top of the kiln studying the stars. Throughout his life he has been interested in local history, and now has a large manuscript volume of the history of the towns and townships of his own locality. In 1884 J. Walter FIERS married Mary J. McKINTY, a prominent school teacher of the county. She was a granddaughter of Judge George C. WHITEMAN, who was born near Winchester, Va., and reared in Greene county, Ohio. George C. WHITEMAN settled in Greene township, Jay county, in 1837, organized and named the township, and became prominently identified with the early history of the county. He was a local Methodist preacher and is said to have married and to have buried more people up to the time of his death than any other man in the county. He served as probate judge from 1838 to 1852. In 1858 he was elected as representative to the legislature and served during the fortieth session. Mrs. FIERS died on March 18, 1908. She was the mother of three children, two of whom died in infancy. One son, Forest L. FIERS, grew to manhood, was graduated from the high school, and attended DePauw and Butler universities, served on the Mexican border and in the United States army from August 13, 1914, to February 15, 1919. He married Elma WILKINSON, of Meridian, Miss. Both he and she had grandparents in whose honor towns were named. They now have two children, Mary Jane and James Henry. Forest L. FIERS is now employed in the post-office in Indianapolis [Marion Co.]. In his youth J. Walter FIERS united with the Methodist Episcopal church. He has served for more than twenty-one years as Sunday school superintendent. For many years he has been a teacher in the Sunday school. He is a very strong believer in the efficacy of prayer, and has prepared a booklet on that subject, in which he tells of many very direct and remarkable answers to prayer. For nearly forty years Mr. FIERS has been an ardent prohibitionist, and he now rejoices that he has lived to see the principles for which he so long worked embodied in the Constitution as a part of the organic law of the land.

SOURCE: Milton T. Jay, M.D., History of Jay County Indiana, Historical Publishing Co., Indpls. 1922, Vol. II, pp.362-364. Transcribed by Eloine Chesnut.