

HISTORY

OF

SHELBY COUNTY, MO.

CHAPTER I.

PIONEER SETTLERS AND SETTLEMENTS AND EARLY HISTORY.

The First Cabins, Norton's Hog-Keeper's, Maj. Dickerson's, and Others — The Settlers of 1833 — Surveying — Cholera — First Death in the County — First Store and Post-office — First Election — Sketch of Maj. Dickerson — Miscellaneous Historic Incidents up to 1839 — The Indians — Game and Wild Animals — Early Marriages — Pioneer Preaching and Preachers — Pioneer Life Generally.

THE FIRST CABINS.

It is not possible to state at this late date, with exactness, and without possibility of error, who was the first actual settler within the present confines of Shelby county. As long ago as 1817 a party of explorers from Kentucky, Edward Whaley, Aaron Foreman and three others entered the county from the west, having come from the Boone's Lick country, on the Missouri river, on their way to the Mississippi. Hunting for the head waters of Salt river, they struck those of North river instead, and traveled down it to its mouth. They made some exploration of the country in this quarter, but finally settled in Marion county and in Ralls. Before them trappers had ascended Salt river, then called Aubaha, or Oahaha, and hunters had visited the primeval forests here when they were peopled, if at all, by red men only.

It is reasonably certain that no permanent settlements were made here until after the year 1830. In the spring of 1831 a man named Norton came up from Monroe county and built a cabin on Black Creek, right on the bluff, a little more than half a mile from its mouth (in section 33—57—9). He brought with him a drove of hogs to feed on the wild mast, which was then so abundant

in this quarter, and he left a man in the little cabin to attend to them. The name of this swineherd can not now be learned, but he certainly had a most lonesome existence. He had a large pen close by the cabin into which he had to confine the hogs every night to keep them from the wolves, and during the day he had to watch them as well as he could. He remained here during the year. Afterward David Smallwood settled on the locality of the old "hog cabin."

In the fall of 1831 Maj. Obadiah Dickerson came up from Marion county and built a cabin on the north side of Salt river (about the center of section 17 — 57 — 10), near where the present road between Shelbina and Shelbyville crosses that stream. This cabin is now (1884) standing, although a little the worse for its 53 years of existence. It seems that the major did not bring his family with him at this time, but that they came the next fall or winter. It is probable (according to the testimony of Russell W. Moss, who came in 1832, and is positive on the point) that Maj. Dickerson was the first *bona fide* white settler in Shelby county.

John Thomas was another very early settler in the county, locating in 1831 or the spring of 1832, on a claim on Clear creek, where afterward Miller's mill was built (section 18 — 58 — 9). Old Jack Thomas used to say that he was the first settler in the county "that high up," or as far north, and that when it was built his house was the picket post of civilization in that direction. It may be that one or two old hunters followed soon after Jack Thomas, but nothing positive about the matter can now be asserted.

Russell W. Moss came to section 28 — 57 — 9, or three miles northwest of Hunnewell, and built a cabin in the fall of 1832. In the spring of 1833 he removed his family up from Monroe county, where he had first settled on coming to Missouri from Jessamine county, Ky. It is from Mr. Moss, who is still living, that the compiler has obtained much information regarding the early settlement of the county.

Henry Saunders settled on the south-east quarter of section 6 — 56 — 9, or half a mile north-east of the present site of Lakenan, in the spring of 1833, and below him — probably in Monroe county — were his brothers, Albert and Addison.

In the early spring of 1833 came Samuel Buckner to the west half of section 31 — 57 — 9, west of Salt river and a mile and a half north of Lakenan. He was a bachelor, but brought with him a number of slaves. He was a man of education and intelligence, and was well known for his generosity and hospitality, but he was loose in morals

in a certain direction. One of his female slaves he kept for a mistress, and by her had a number of children. Afterward he took her daughter and she bore him children. Mr. Buckner treated those of his slaves whom he knew to be his own offspring with great consideration. He had himself appointed their guardian — having first given them their freedom — and upon his death divided his vast property fairly and equitably among them. He belonged to the well known Buckner family of Kentucky.

THE SETTLERS OF 1833.

In the year 1876, Hon. William J. Holliday, who came to Shelby county, May 7, 1833, and was nearly always thereafter prominently connected with its affairs, wrote a series of interesting and valuable historic sketches, which were published in the *Shelbyville Herald*. From these sketches much information has been obtained. To Mr. Holliday, since deceased, not only the compiler hereof, but the people of the county are under obligations for his valuable contributions, brief and incomplete as they were. His sketches only came up to about the outbreak of the Civil War.

According to Mr. Holliday — whose memory was something phenomenal, and whose mind was clear and active — there were in the spring of 1833 but 26 families in what is now Shelby county. These were mostly in the south-eastern part of the county, in the neighborhood of Oak Dale, in what is now Jackson township. Here it was where Mr. Holliday settled, on Black creek, on the south-west quarter of section 6 — 57 — 9. Prior to that time other settlements had been made as follows :

Henry Saunders had located on Salt river, north of but near the present village of Lakenan (sec. 6 — 56 — 9) and Samuel Buckner lived north-west of the same point. The majority of the settlers had located north of this, in township 57, range 9, where Thomas Holman lived on section 17, two miles south of Oak Dale; Russell W. Moss and Robert Duncan were still further south, on section 28; William B. Broughton was on section 5 and his house was called Oak Dale; George Parker was on the north-west quarter of section 8 on Douglass' branch, and near by, on the same section, was Abraham Vandiver; Thomas H. Clements had built his cabin home on the south half of section 21, near what is now Hardy's school house, four miles south-east of Oak Dale; Cyrus A. Saunders lived on section 9, nearly two miles south-east of Oak Dale. Levi Dyer lived on Congress lands west of Black creek, in this township and range.

West of Oak Dale, and more nearly south of Shelbyville, in congressional township 57, range 10, were some other settlers. Augus McDouald Holliday had located near Black creek, on section 1, two miles west of Oak Dale. Thomas H. Bounds located and built a cabin on the west bank of Salt river, at the mouth of a small branch, and near a fine spring (ne. cor. e. $\frac{1}{2}$ sec. 23), about three and a half miles north-east of where is now the town of Shelbina. Samuel Bell lived near A. McD. Holliday, in the north-east corner of section 1, five miles south-east of Shelbyville.

John Eaton and George Eaton were on section 9, north of Salt river, east of the road from Shelbina to Shelbyville, and about four miles east of south of the latter place. West of the Eatons, a mile or so, lived George and James Anderson, on section 8, north of Salt river. On the north side of Salt river, on the first farm north of the "long bridge" on the road between Shelbyville and Shelbina (section 17), lived Maj. Obadiah Dickerson in the cabin before mentioned. A little farther up the river, but on the same side, north of where is now Walkersville, were Peter Roff and Nicholas Watkins, both on section 7. South of Watkins, nearer Walkersville and on section 18, was E. K. Eaton, called King Eaton. On section 19 a little south of Eaton, lived James Blackford.

North of Oak Dale, up in township 58, range 9, on Clear creek, lived John Thomas, in section 18, on the farm where afterwards Miller's mill was built. Elijah Pepper had his home about five miles west of Shelbyville.

James Swartz lived on North river, about six miles north-east of Shelbyville, on the south-east quarter of section 12 — 58 — 10, just below where the road crosses the stream.

In 1876 six of these settlers were living, W. J. Holliday, James Anderson, James Blackford, Nicholas Watkins, George Eaton and Cyrus H. Saunders; but now (1884) all have passed away to the better land. Peace to their ashes.

SURVEYING.

In the month of August, 1833, R. T. Holliday, a deputy United States surveyor, began a survey for the government of ranges 11, 12 and 13, the territory west of where the principal settlements had been made. The survey was begun at the south-east corner of section 36 — 59 — 11. Mr. Holliday surveyed and sectionized the ranges northward about 60 miles, or to township 68, completing his work in the winter of 1834-35. Soon afterward the land in this quarter began to

settle up. Addison Lair relates that while he was assisting in surveying range 10, townships 59 and 60, the famous "star shower" of November, 1833, came off, and frightened the surveyors so that they actually abandoned their work.

CHOLERA.

The year 1833 was long known by the settlers in this quarter of the State as the "cholera year," because of the prevalence of that dread malady and its destructive character. June 3, it broke out in Palmyra, then a town of 600 inhabitants, and before it disappeared 105 persons had died. Many fled to this county for safety.

A young man named William P. Matson, a step-son of Maj. Obadiah Dickerson, was in Palmyra when the cholera broke out. In a day or two he started for his home in this county, and came to the house of A. McD. Holliday, on Black creek, which stream was so swollen at the time as to be past fording. He concluded to remain until the next day to allow the water to subside, but during the night was attacked with cholera and died next morning in great agony.

At the burial of young Matson, his host, Mr. Holliday, was seized with the dread contagion and died the next day. There was great alarm and uneasiness among the settlers for some weeks. Numbers of fugitives from the infected district were in the country, and our people made no attempt at quarantining against those who might come or expelling those who were here. Fortunately there were no other deaths, and by the middle of July the disease had entirely disappeared.

being forwarded to Washington was graciously received by the Post-office Department and its prayer granted. The office was established at Broughton's residence and called Oak Dale, the name it has borne ever since. Mr. Broughton was the first postmaster and this was the first post-office in the county. Mails came in from Palmyra once a week.

FIRST ELECTION IN BLACK CREEK TOWNSHIP.

In May, 1834, what is now Shelby county, and indeed, some additional territory, was formed by the county court of Marion (to which it then belonged) into Black Creek township, as noted elsewhere. At the ensuing August election Maj. Obadiah Dickerson and S. W. B. Carnegy were elected to the Legislature from Marion county, defeating John McAfee and John Anderson. It was quite a compliment to the "back township" of the county to send one of its citizens to the Legislature, but Maj. Dickerson was well qualified and well known to many people in the county. He was one of the founders of Palmyra — indeed, he was the real founder of that town — the first postmaster, county seat commissioner, etc.

MAJ. OBADIAH DICKERSON AS POSTMASTER.

Speaking of Maj. Dickerson, the History of Marion County (p. 829), describing the early settlement and history of Palmyra, says: —

The town grew rather rapidly, and in 1820 had 150 inhabitants. Those interested made efforts to increase the number of settlers, and in 1821 the first post-office was established, the mail coming, when it did come, from St. Louis on horseback by way of New London.

Maj. Obadiah Dickerson was the first postmaster. He kept the office in his hat a great portion of the time. Being frequently absent from home, in the woods hunting, or attending some public gathering of the settlers, the few letters constituting "the mail" were deposited under the lining of his huge bell-crown hat, often made a receptacle for papers, documents, handkerchiefs, etc., by gentlemen of the olden time. Asked why he carried the office about with him in this way, the old major replied: "So that if I meet a man who has a letter belonging to him I can give it to him, sir! I meet more men when I travel about than come to the office when I stay at home."

On one occasion a man from a frontier settlement came to Palmyra for the mail for himself and neighbors. Both post-office and postmaster were away from home. Going in pursuit, as it were, he found them over on North river. Maj. Dickerson looked over the contents of his office, selected half a dozen letters for the settler and his neighbors, and then handing him two more said: "Take these along with you, and see if they belong to any one out in your settlement. They have been here two weeks and no owner has called for them yet. I

don't know any such men, and I don't want to be bothered with them any longer."

As the mail at the Palmyra office increased, the major petitioned the department for a new and a larger hat! In 1829, on the accession of Gen. Jackson to the Presidency, Maj. Dickerson, who was an Adams man, was removed, and Gen. Benjamin Means was appointed postmaster at Palmyra.

MISCELLANEOUS.

In January, 1835, Shelby county was organized, the territory having previously been divided into two townships, North River and Black Creek (see official history).

For a long time the year 1835 was remembered by the settlers of Shelby county as "the cold year." The winter of 1834-35 was uncommonly severe. The memorable "cold Friday" was in February of the latter year. The following spring was very late and cold. On the night of the 12th (or 13th) of May there was a heavy frost and indeed a severe freeze. The ground was frozen to the depth of two inches in some places. Everything liable to be affected by the frost that was exposed was killed. The buds were well expanded on the bushes and shrubbery, and it is said that even many hickory and oak saplings and trees were killed.

The fall of the year was unusually cold. On the night of the 16th of September there was another heavy freeze, and a killing frost, which did great damage, especially to the corn, so much of which was very late, by reason of the previous backward spring. There was much sickness this fall and taking it all in all, the lot of the people was by no means a happy one.

In the summer of 1835 cholera again broke out in Palmyra, and in the panic that ensued, dozens of families fled to this county and elsewhere for safety. Some persons built pole cabins along the streams or near the springs, and camped out until the danger was over. There were no cases in this county.

Crops were very excellent during the early days. Wheat was a certain crop, and Mr. Holliday says, would yield sometimes 50 bushels per acre. Corn and oats did well, while hemp was also a good and valuable crop. No insect pests disturbed the grain until after 1840. Stock flourished well on the prairies from early spring until June, at which time the settlers would burn off a large tract of ground partially covered with dry grass, and then the cattle for miles around would congregate and feed on the young and tender grass that sprang up. It was a common saying, that "a late burn was better to keep the cattle

together than a fence with stakes and riders." A great many cattle died with bloody murrain.

Mr. Holliday says that in early days there were no poke-weeds, Jamestown ("jimson") weeds or pursley, and no clover, blue grass or timothy in this county. Neither were there any fruit trees or locust trees, but nearly every immigrant brought a supply with him.

On the 4th of July, 1836, there was a celebration at the spring on Clear creek, five miles a little north of east of Shelbyville, (section 18 — 58 — 9) where Miller's mill was built — in the south-western portion of Tiger Fork township. A grand barbecue and free dinner were given. About 200 persons were present, and the day was spent pleasantly.

The next year (1837), the "glorious fourth" was celebrated on the banks of the Black creek, south of Shelbyville, at Carnegy's spring. A large crowd assembled, and a number drank too freely at the groceries in Shelbyville, and a general row was imminent. Only by extra and prompt exertions on the part of the peace officers was a big free fight and a disgraceful scene prevented.

In the fall of 1838 an agricultural fair was instituted in Shelbyville, and a number of farmers contested for the premiums offered. Col. William B. Lewis, Judge William Gooch and Charles H. Smith were contestants for the premium to be awarded the person raising the largest quantity of corn on an acre of ground. Each of them claimed to have gathered over 95 bushels, but it is not remembered who claimed the prize. Other farmers proved that they had raised more than 50 bushels of wheat on an acre of ground. The next year there was so much dissatisfaction over the awards of premiums that soon after the fairs were discontinued.

In January, 1838, the first school township in the county was organized, and preparations were begun for a public school. The inhabitants of Congressional township 58, range 11, Mr. John Dunn at their head, petitioned the county court to organize their township, under the name of Van Buren, and this was done.

THE INDIANS.

Only upon the very first settlement of the county were there any Indians here. They soon left the country, and their stay here thereafter was only transient. Occasionally hunting parties passed through. They belonged to the Sac, Fox and Pottawatomie and Iowa tribes — chiefly to the first three named. In 1839 a band of Pottawatomies

came into the county, and camped not far from Hager's Grove for a few days. These were about the last Indians seen in the county.

GAME AND WILD ANIMALS.

Upon the first settlement of Shelby county the woods were full of game of all kinds and the county was a paradise for hunters. Bears, panthers and wolves abounded. In the western and north-western portions of the county they were quite numerous in early days. Bears were plenty in the north-eastern portion of the county in 1835 and 1836. Many were killed along Tiger fork. The fierce panther made its home here. Many an early settler, as he sat by his fireside, felt his blood chill as the piercing scream of a prowling panther was borne to his lonely cabin on the night wind. They were frequently encountered, and many of them killed by the pioneer hunters. Wild cats or catamounts were quite numerous.

As late as 1841 two large black bears passed Dunn's school house, on Black creek, west of Shelbyville, going westward. Twelve miles westward, and near Vienna, in Macon county, these animals were quite numerous at that time. A large bear was killed near Stice's mill (Bethel) in 1840.

In 1841, south-west of Shelbyville, John B. Lewis was frightened half out of his senses by a panther, whose cry he mistook for that of a person in distress until he came near to the animal. Kindred Feltz and some others killed a panther up in the northern part of the county in 1840. The animal measured nine feet.

In the winter of 1835 one John Winnegan, a small man in stature, but big as a hunter, who lived near where the road from Bethel to Newark crosses Tiger fork, killed two panthers of enormous size near his house. The neighbors called them *tigers*, and named the stream on which they were killed the *Tiger fork* of North river.

As to wolves, the country was infested with them. There seems to have been three varieties, the large black, the gray and the *coyote* or prairie wolf. The first two varieties made many a foray on the settlers' flocks and herds, and sometimes it was a difficult matter to raise sheep and pigs on account of the depredations of these marauders. The sheep had to be penned every night and the hogs carefully looked after. The latter ran in the woods, and pigs were in great danger. Many a little porker was snapped up by the wolves and carried away. In time as the hogs continued to run in the woods and feed on the "mast," they grew wild and vicious, and often, when attacked by wolves, would turn and fight and drive off their assailants.

In the year 1845, after the county had been pretty well settled, Robert McAfee was attacked by a pack of grey wolves while riding through the timber west of Shelbyville. The animals chased him, snapped at and cut his legs, and injured his horse considerably. In 1855 a wolf formed an intimacy with Frank Dunn's dogs, near Shelbyville, and slept and ran with them for some days until Dunn killed it.

Deer were very plentiful. They could be found on every section. A settler could kill a deer almost anywhere and almost any time — before breakfast, if he wanted to — and the juicy venison steaks of the old time were long remembered. Wild turkeys, squirrels and other edible game were so numerous and so easily obtained as scarcely to be worthy of consideration. Rabbits, pheasants and quails were scarce.

Numerous hunting stories, narratives of adventures with wild beasts of the forest, and exploits in the chase might here be printed if there was room, and if they were deemed of sufficient historic interest and importance. These tales are best when told in the graphic style of the old hunters themselves, by a winter's fire, or under favorable circumstances of some other character. They somehow lose much of their interest when given in print, unless they are colored and exaggerated.

EARLY MARRIAGES.

Doubtless the first marriage in Shelby county — certainly the first after its organization — was that of Bradford Hunsucker and Miss Dicy Stice. The ceremony was performed by Esq. Abraham Vandiver, at the residence of Peter Stice, the father of the bride, near the present town site of Bethel. The date of this marriage, as duly recorded, is April 30, 1835.

The next was that of William S. Townsend and Edena A. Mills, May 10, 1835. Esq. William J. Holliday performed the ceremony.

Gilbert Edmonds and Minerva J. Vandiver, and Tandy Gooch and Susan Duncan, were married November 12, 1835, the same day. Both marriages were solemnized by Rev. Richard Sharp.

Charles Kilgore and Catherine Cochrane were married by Esq. Abraham Vandiver, February 18, 1836.

Samuel S. Matson and Mary Creel, by Rev. Richard Sharp, February 28, 1836.

William Holliday and Elizabeth Vandiver, by Rev. Sharp, March 31, 1836.

Fantley (Fauntleroy?) Rhodes and Sarah Stice, by Rev. Sharp, April 7, 1836.

James Shaw and Eliza Beavens, by A. E. Wood; judge of the county court, May 24, 1836.

Benjamin F. Firman and Sarah Rookwood, by Rev. Henry Louthan, October 20, 1836.

Baptist Hardy and Martha Davidson, by Rev. Richard Sharp, November 17, 1836.

James Rhodes and Mary Musgrove, by Rev. Sharp, December 1, 1836.

A pioneer wedding in Shelby county in early days would not compare, in point of elegance and finish, with one in these days. For there were lacking the paraphernalia of display and the pomp and circumstance attendant in this age upon affairs of that character. In those days few people wore "store goods." Their apparel was for the most part of home-spun. A "Sunday suit" resembled an "every day" suit so far as general appearances went. The material of which the clothing was made was principally cotton or flax and wool. The men wore buckskin, jeans, cotton and linsey; the women wore linsey, cotton and buckskin.

A bridal toilet, therefore, was not expensive; neither was it elaborate, fanciful or very showy; neither was it extensive. But it was sensible, for it was sufficient, and it was appropriate to the times, the manners and the circumstances. Yet she was as well dressed as the groom — with his 'coonskin cap, his jeans coat, his linsey or cotton shirt, his jeans or coarse linen trowsers, his feet in home-tanned shoes, and without a glove to his hand or his name.

But for all this, and for all of many other discomforts and disadvantages, the marriages were as fortunate and felicitous, and the weddings themselves as joyous as any of those of modern times. It is not a matter of silk and satin, this affair of a happy marriage. The wedding was seldom or never a private one. The entire settlement was invited, and uniformly accepted the invitation. To neglect to send an invitation was to give offense; to refuse was to give an insult. There were all sorts of merry-making and diversion during the day. A shooting match was quite common. There were foot races, wrestling matches, and other athletic sports — sometimes a pugilistic encounter. At night a dance was had, in which there was general participation. Many of the dancers were barefoot, it is true, and the ball room floor was composed of split puncheons, from which the splinters had not all been removed, but the soles of the feet were covered with a coating impenetrable almost as a coat of armor, and bade defiance to any fair-sized splinter. Indeed, one old pioneer says

that a real merry dance always resulted in smoothing a puncheon floor, as if it had been gone over with four and twenty jack-planes!

The wedding feast was always worthy of the name. The cake was corn-pone; the champagne and claret consisted of good old Kentucky and Missouri whisky, clear and pure as mountain dew, unadulterated by mercenary "rectifiers" and untouched and untaxed by gauger and government. The latter article was usually imported for the occasion. Then there were venison steaks and roasts, turkey, grouse, nectar-like maple syrup and other edibles toothsome and elegant, the bare mention of which is sufficient to make an old pioneer's mouth water in these days.

There were no newspapers then to chronicle all the details of a wedding in consideration of some of the cake, and print a list of alleged "presents" including plated tea spoons, fifteen-cent napkins, and ten-cent salt cellars, *ad nauseam*, and that was one point in favor of the pioneers.

But some of the early weddings in this county were not such rude affairs, for the parents were fairly well-to-do, and were able to provide the contracting parties with suitable outfits, and have everything done decently and in order.

When babies came, as they did come — and as they always will come into every orderly and well-regulated settlement, heaven bless them! — they were quite often rocked and lulled to sleep in cradles fashioned by the hand of the fond father, with seasoned hickory bows attached to them for rockers. Within this little trough there were placed a few folds of flannel or linsey or some other kind of cloth — sometimes a pillow — sometimes soft "hatcheled" but unspun tow or flax, and into these nests there were snuggled the innocent, cunning little darlings.

PIONEER PREACHERS.

Following close upon the footsteps of the first settlers came the ministers. Sometimes they were the first settlers themselves. They labored without money and without price. They did not make merchandise of their mission. Freely had they received and freely they gave. They gained their substance as did their neighbors, by the rifle, and by their daily toil in the clearings and corn fields. Nearly every pioneer preacher was as expert in the use of the rifle as any of the laity.

Services were usually held in a neighbor's cabin. Notices of the "meeting" were promptly and generally circulated, and the people

generally attended, uniformly bringing their rifles, to procure game going and coming. The assertion of scripture that he who will not provide for his own, "and especially for those of his own household, is worse than an infidel," found credence with the pioneers. The practice of carrying fire-arms was not abandoned even on the Sabbath.

In the fall of 1837 there was not a church or a school house in the county. The Methodists held a camp meeting that season at a spring (nw. 32-58-9) about a mile north of Oak Dale. A circuit had been established, of which the south-eastern portion of the county was made a part. Rev. Richard Sharp, a local preacher, who lived at Sharpsburg, Marion county, frequently preached in this county. Rev. Henry Louthan, a Baptist, settled in this county at an early day and labored at his calling. Rev. Jeremiah Taylor, another Baptist, who lived in Marion, preached in this county prior to 1840. For the names of other pioneer preachers see the township histories.

PIONEERS AND PIONEER LIFE.

It is customary to indulge in a great deal of gush and extravagant adulation in speaking of the first settlers of a country. Their virtues are extolled immoderately, their weaknesses — it is never admitted that they had any vices — are seldom ever hinted at. The true hearted pioneers of Shelby county would not wish to be written of other than fairly. Our first settlers were mere men and women, with all of the virtues and graces, and all of the vices and frailties of that number of people taken at random from rural communities. They were neither any worse nor any better than their descendants.

The pioneers were hospitable and generous as a rule; so are their posterities and successors. Some of them would get drunk and fight; so will some of their successors. There was the doing of good works, the rendering of generous deeds, and there was cheating also in early days. There was industry and there was laziness; there were thrift and penury, misery and happiness, good men and bad men, and after all, in very many respects, Shelby county people in 1834 were about like Shelby county people in 1884.

The life of the early settlers of Shelby county was that of the pioneers of the West generally, which has been written of and described so frequently that it need not be detailed here. The people, while they dwelt in log cabins and were plainly appareled and fed on humble fare, lived comfortably, happily and well. It can not well be said

that they suffered hardships, since the deprivation of certain modern luxuries and conveniences was well sustained by ample substitutes.

There was a scarcity of purple and fine linen, but there was an abundance of comfortable and durable linsey and jeans and homespun cotton, much better suited to the rough and tumble life. Fine clothes and gay raiment would have been as much out of place in the primitive log cabins and among the clearings of early days, as would 'coon-skin caps and buckskin breeches in the parlors and drawing-rooms of the baronial residences that stand upon the well improved manor lands of the county to-day. In that day as now, people dressed and lived according to their circumstances.

In their somewhat isolated positions the settlers were dependent upon one another for many things. Men were willing to help a neighbor because they felt that they might at some time need help themselves. A house-raising would start all the settlers for ten miles around. A new settler was always gladly received. He first selected his claim, cut his house logs and hauled them to the spot he had chosen for his home, and then announced his "raising." It did not take long to put up the cabin. The neighbors came from far and near, and whoever refused to attend a raising, that could do so, and had heard of it, was guilty of a serious offense. The work of raising a cabin was often facilitated by a jug full of whisky, plenty and cheap in those days, and when the work was all done there were those not too tired to indulge in a scuffle or other rough sport, and sometimes there was a fisticuff.

The first farms were opened up in timber. The timber was all cut down. That which would make rails or fencing was so utilized. The rest was piled and rolled together and burned. The stumps of the saplings were grubbed up, and then the land was plowed. The plow used was a very simple affair, with sometimes an iron point, and sometimes without, and always a wooden mold-board. It is said that some farmers used a plow made from the fork of a tree. The soil in the bottoms was like an ash heap for mellowness, and almost anything in the shape of a plow would serve to fit it for the reception of the seed corn. There was, of course, the usual difficulty in plowing regarding the stumps, and as the most of the pioneers were not profane men, their sufferings at times were intense!

Up to 1835 not much farming had been done in the county, and indeed not a great deal attempted. Every settler had his "truck patch," wherein grew potatoes, a little corn, a few vegetables, etc.;

and he had also a corn field corresponding in extent to the length of time he had been in the county, his means or his desires.

Corn was the principal crop, and if enough of this was raised to supply the family with pone, Johnny cake and honey, the settler was satisfied. There was no wheat raised of any consequence.

Flax was among the first crops raised. The seed was rarely sold, and the crop was cultivated for the bark, of which linen and linsey were made. Nearly every family had a flax patch and a flock of sheep — the dependence for clothing supplies. To be a good flax-breaker was at one time considered a great accomplishment among the men, and the woman who was a good flax or wool spinner and weaver was the envy of many of her sisters.

The dress of the pioneers comported well with their style of living. The women usually went barefoot in summer, and in inclement weather wore on their feet shoes made of home-tanned leather. When they could procure enough calico to make for themselves caps for their heads they were happy, and the woman who could wear a dress made entirely of store goods was the envy of dozens of the less favored of her sex. It is said that when the pioneer woman first came in possession of a pair of calf-skin shoes they were very careful of them, and wore them only on important occasions. They would walk barefoot and carry their shoes until within a short distance of the meeting or wedding, or whatever they were attending, and then stop and clothe their feet. This, however, is a story told of all pioneer women, and may or may not be true.

Old pioneers say that buckskin makes a very fair article of pantaloons, but when it is wet it shrinks or contracts. Quite often a pioneer came home after wading through streams and wet grass with the bottoms of his pantaloons nearly up to his knees. In such a case, early the next morning he had to slip out of doors with his trowsers, tie one end to the logs of the cabin or to a sapling, take hold of the other end, and stretch them out again to a proper length.

The early settlers of this county raised almost everything they ate, and manufactured nearly everything they wore. Their smoke houses were always well supplied with meats of various kinds, and honey of the finest flavor. After the first year or two there was plenty of meal in the chest and butter and milk in the cellar. Very little coffee and sugar were used and tea was almost unknown. The family that had coffee two or three times a week were considered "high livers." Often it was only used once a week — Sunday morning for breakfast.

The hogs and cattle of the settlers increased very rapidly and throve abundantly — living almost exclusively on the wild “mast” then to be found everywhere. Bacon and lard were plenty — beyond the wants of the owners, but there was no market at home for them.

In the early history of the settlements mechanical conveniences were few and of an inferior character. Few of the settlers had been regularly trained to the use of tools, and in consequence, every man became his own mechanic. Vessels and articles required for household use were hewn out of blocks and logs of wood. Although these articles presented a rough and uncouth appearance, they answered every purpose, and the families were as happy in their use as are the most favored people of later generations with the multiplied devices of modern invention.

Notwithstanding the fact that the pioneers of this county were without very many of the modern conveniences and luxuries of life, they lived happily. The necessaries of life were cheap, and they had little to complain of in that regard. People who have plenty of venison, wild turkeys, bacon and corn bread are in no danger of starvation, even if their corn must be brayed in a mortar to produce the meal.

Sugar, coffee and tea were expensive, it is true, and produce and labor were cheap, but then not much sugar, coffee and tea were used. Sometimes a cow was worth but \$10; a horse \$25; a good hog only \$1.25 or \$1.50; wheat (when the country began to produce wheat) 35 cents a bushel, while honey was but 20 cents a gallon and fine venison hams 25 cents each.

It was customary in these days for the settlers to help each other, and of their sons to work in the harvest field or help to do the logging to prepare for a new seeding. This was a source of wealth to the early settler and to his rising family. They raked in from twenty-five to fifty cents a day and board. That was wealth. It was the foundation of their future prosperity. It was the first egg laid to hatch them a farm, and it was guarded with scrupulous care. Economy was often whittled down to a very fine point before they could be induced to take or touch that nest egg, the incipient acre of the first farm. And then again, a week's work meant something besides getting on the shady side of a tree and three hours for nooning. It meant labor in all its length, breadth, and thickness, from holding the breaking-plow behind two yoke of oxen, to mauling rails. Rails were made at twenty-five cents a hundred. Just think of splitting rails at twenty-five cents a hundred! It is enough to take the breath away from every effeminate counter-jumper in the State.

History of Monroe and Shelby Counties, Missouri - Link Page

[PREVIOUS...MONROE BIOGRAPHICAL: ADDENDA.....620](#)

[NEXT.....SHELBY II: EARLY OFFICIAL HISTORY.....641](#)

[GO BACK TO THE ELECTRONIC INDEX PAGE...](#)