

Pioneer Days In Adair County by Maxine Montgomery

Kirksville, Mo., Express & News, Wednesday, Sept. 12, 1979.

Raymond Walters of Novinger bought at an auction an old history of Missouri published in 1888. From it I have gleaned the following stories about the settling of our county.

In 1828 the red man and wild animals were the principal occupants of the country west of the ridge where Kirksville is now located. Buffalo and deer roamed these hills, and the nearest settlement was that of James Loe, down in what is now Macon County. The first settlement of Adair County was made in 1828 by James Myers, Isaac and Stephen Gross, Nathan Richardson, Reuben Myrtle, and a single man named Gupp. They built a block house in 1832 on the land which later became the farms of George and Philip Cain and King Collet, six miles west of Kirksville. In 1830 Andrew Bozarth and his sons, with Isaac Parton, came to this area, leaving their families in Howard County. Bozarth was killed later at the raiding of Tribute Mill in Clark County.

Shortly after the above named men came they were joined by Canady Owensby, William Taylor, David E. Sloan, William Parcels and son, J. H. Parcels, Josiah Roberts and Abe Erhart. The only veteran of the revolution who had been known to live in Adair County was John Lay. In 1832 he and his wife and son, a gray-haired, tottering old man, halted at the William Horton cabin to ask directions, and Horton asked why such an old, old man was on the road west. "I'm pretty old," said Lay, Jr., but I had to come to keep Father and Mother company. They are in the wagon."

"Well now, by thunder," said Horton, as he jumped off the fence, "Stop your team! I want to see them!"

This was done, and there were the old soldier and his wife—each full of life and delighted with the frontier. This aged woman it is said, could spin a flax a day even after she was a hundred years old.

In the early pioneer days brush fires were common, for the Indians were accustomed to encircle a large tract of country with fire to corral game. Once when a man named Nathaniel Floyd and his wife were returning from a visit to neighbors they were cut off from home by a line of fire. Their horses refused to cross the fire, so Mr. Floyd, took them a circuitous route around the fire. Mrs. Floyd, however, undertook to cross the fire on foot. Her long skirt caught fire and her dress was burned completely off her. Her husband did not find her until the next day, and her body was so severely burned she bore the deep disfiguring scars all her life.

Another story related by the pioneers is that William Floyd, who was riding through heavy prairie grass as high as a horse's back, saw a n object which seemed to leap or be tossed high above the grass about two hundred yards ahead of him. As he approached he could see it was a man. He rushed up to discover that his neighbor, Coleman Stewart, was lying on the ground beside a large buck which ad one antler torn off and its forelegs tied with Stewart's suspenders. "For God's sake, help me, will! Stewart yelled. "I'm plum wore out!" So Floyd cut the deer's throat and helped his dirt-caked, black-and-blue friend to his feet. Stewart explained that he had shot off the deer's horn, stunning the animal. And then the deer charged him, but Stewart managed to hang onto the remaining antler and pin the animal down, tying his forelegs. Then, his strength exhausted, he lay down beside his prey.

Jesse Walker and the Adkins family were here prior to 1835, but Jones and others left the wilderness with the intention of returning.

From 1835 to 1845 the Indians were regular visitors. The Keokuck's Indians were friendly, but not so their dogs. They often attacked hog pens killing all the pigs. The settlers complained angrily and sometimes violently so that the red men never visited their locality again.

In 1835 Bennett Brown and Samuel Hoy came to Adair County with their cattle. They reported black bear plentiful on Billy's Creek, panther everywhere, black wolves in small packs, and forest wolves two packs to every four square miles, otter and muskrats always ready for the hunting, and honey to supply ten-thousand tables. Macon (known as Moccasinville in pioneer days, tax collectors were paid in beeswax, wolf scalps or small furs.

The James family were early settlers of Adair County, coming in 1828. John Myers was killed in a battle with the Indians on the Chariton, that battle precipitated by his son, James. Robert Myers, another son, settled on Bear Creek in 1835, and Jesse Walker and his brother James were his neighbors.

In 1835 Edward Steward bought 160 acres in Floyd County from Nancy Floyd, paying her two-and-a-half pounds fo coffee! He brought with him two hundred hogs and realized large profits.

Stewart and Frank Adkins were hunters; at one time they had eight or ten barrels of honey and over 8 hundred bee trees standing in the woods. One day Stewart and his brother, George, tracked a bear into a thicket on Steer Creek, and surrounding the thicket.

In a short time the dogs were heard, and then a huge panther dashed past, and in another George came rushing up, saying, "There's a dean of devils in here, and they're killing every dog we've got!" Rushing his horse through the bush Stewart saw one of his dogs with a leg broken. Dismounting he bound the wound with his shirt sleeve and then proceeded to the scene of battle where he saw a huge female panther bound into the thicket, leaving two cub panthers in the arena. The two cubs fled when they saw him. George soon arrived, and pulling one of the junior panthers from beneath a log, the combat was transferred from panthers and dogs to panthers and men. George swung the panther round and round until Ned came to his relief; the latter tried to enwrap the swinging brute in a gault, but it was torn to shreds; a large tanned deer skin was next tried, and the instant this enwrapped the animal George let go his hod, and on the ground the panther struggled for his liberty. Both men leaped on the animal, and when he worked his paws through the hide, seized and tied them. Then they placed a pole on his neck, tied his hind feet, and turned their attention to the other cub which had run up a tree. Ned climbed up and cut down the limb on which panther number four rested. No sooner than he sprang up the tree in pursuit of his tormentor. But George caught his tail and held him until Ned came down. When both captured the brute. During all this time the dogs kept the old female panther off, and she was driven up a tree. She was so furious they did not dare approach her. Ned fired twice and broke her shoulders. Still she fought, and the men dared not shoot for fear of killing a dog. George threw a hatchet at her which struck her above the eyes, but she caught the hickory handle and tore it to splinters, even leaving her teeth marks on the blade. Ultimately Ned Steward shot her through the head, and then left the field for combat, followed by the male panther to within a few rods of their home. The next day the men followed and killed him. They sold the buss in Randolph County to a showman for \$50.

When it is considered that it required five or six yoke of oxen wonder that men selected the friable soil of the valleys, however unwise sch a selection might prove. Owenby could work only in early morning or late in the afternoon, for during sunshine, myriads of green-headed flies would drive his cattle or horses wild; even the deer were driven into the woods by this horde of flies.

Robert Miller's four daughters stand as monuments of early days. These strong-limbed, shapely damsels could hew logs and raise a house or barn with their father's help.

Colonel Jesse Jones, from Mercer County, Kentucky, came to Randolph County about 1832. About 1835 he sent "Rob" and Paulina" (daughters) up to Adair, on the Chariton, west of Kirksville to run a stock ranch horses, cattle and hogs. In the spring of 1837 the Jones and Collet families came, and Jones opened a farm on Section 10, township 62, range 16, clearing heavy timber, etc. Col. Jones had about twenty slaves, one of which "Uncle Issac," lived about int the next century. He had a water mill on the Chariton at the Macon County line, but up a horse-mill at his farm, and a ferry which ferried scores of emigrant teams to the Grand River country, and also had a small store, bringing goods from Hannible via Shelbyville, following the "bee trail" part of the way. The flies were so bad he had to travel at night in summer. He whip-sawed some lumber for his buildings. He stated that there were only about six families here when he came — Bozarth's, Owensbys, J. Fulcher, and Easton lived on the upper Chariton.

Early settlers who came to the county in 1842 include David B. Rice, Nathaniel Scoville, Simeon Carson, A. T. Hite, William Roberts, Thomas Pollards, Thomas Williams, The Lesleys, Geroge Buckalew, A. S. Bryant, John R. Adkins, Auson N. Ely, John Boyle, Joseph and Horatio Deibridge, William Waggoner, Mancel Garret, John B. Earheart, Joseph Stewart, Dr. Abram Still, Leve Lanesberry, George Clevenger.

Early hunters came from all parts of the country to north Missouri prior to its organization into counties. They were selfish men and unprincipled in their dealings with the Indians. They often ordered Indians living in the hunting grounds they had chosen "to pack up their belongings and leave. Once a band of hunters, mostly settlers, chose a range, but on going there found that some Indians under Black Hawk were in possession, although the Indians were absent on a hunt at the time. The white men ordered the squaws to pack their belongings and leave, and the frightened women were gathering up their few possessions and taking down their teepees when a shot was heard in the distance. One young squaw flung down her burden and dashed into the forest shrieking. Her cries were answered by a war-whoop, and immediately Black Hawk stood before the cowering white men. One of the intruders ventured to explain, but the chief dashed his open hand against the speaker's breast, ordered him to leave, scathed the trembling whites with a flinty glare pointed imperiously toward the east. The white men sneaked quietly away.

The last great Indian hunt in this part of Missouri was in the fall of 1837. About two hundred Sacs, Foxes, and Iowas, came down the Chariton and camped at Collet's spring for some weeks, hunting through the county; they had dances at the springs, and settlers went to see their games.

The first Indian troubles in the country took place in July, 1829, caused by James Meyers, and resulting in the death of several man who came to aid him and his fellow pioneers.

The first death was that of Lovern Eveans. His coffin was made of puncheons, hewed from a tree with an ax. The first marriage was that of Missouri Evans to Levan Dean, celebrated at John Cain's house. The first birth in the county was that of James M. Bozarth, born December 14, 1831. George Cain and Julia Floyd were early children. Bear Creek church, built by Missionary Baptists, was the first house of worship. The lin Grove Meeting House followed in November, 1842, to Jesse S. Jones for ferry on the Kirksville and Trenton trail over the Chariton. Th rates were fifty cents for a four-horse wagon, thirty-seven and a half cents for a two horse wagon, twenty-five cents for a one-horse wagon, twelve-and-a-half cents for a horse and man, six and-a-fourth cents for a person on foot.

Jesse Kirk kept the first tavern at Kirksville. He also was the first postmaster there and served as first treasurer of Adair County.

In 1838 the first crop of timothy grass was sown by William Collett; Mr Hulsey was the first visiting preacher. He came here after the Reverend Doctor Abram Sill and Rev. James A Radcliff settled with in the county. Then Ned and George Stewart presented the hides of two panthers of which Dr. Still made a coat. Bright G. Barrow was the first resident lawyer of Adair County. Otho H. Beeman erected the first brick house at Kirksville. Judge Beeman made the first iron mod-board plow in Adair County, W. H. Parcels built the first plank fence in the county. He owned the first cook stove ever brought into the county, too. The first piano bought hither was the property of W. H. Parcels. The first courthouse was built by John B. Earheart, of brick. John D. Callison was the carpenter, David James furnished chairs benches and window shutters, George Horton made the furniture for the circuit and county clerks' offices, and Caleb Barrett was superintendent of the Commissioner. This building was completed, and the first county court held there in July 3, 1843. The cost was about a thousand dollars.

Indians from the area were imprisoned finally in Fort Des Moines. Following is School craft's poem about the wretchedness of the Indians who lived at the military trading post and who lived around it for almost three years in abject misery: " I will go to my tent and lie down in despair I will paint me with black and will sever my hair; I will sit on the shore where the hurricane blows And reveal to the God of the Tempest my woes. I will sweep for a season on bitterness fed, For my kindred are gone to the hills of the dead; But they died not of hunger of lingering decay - The hand of the white man hath swept them away." The first ordinance passed in the town of Kirksville was giving the clerk fifteen cents for every hundred words written. During that year an ordinance to passed granting license to saloons. James Barnes, R. Bell, J. Miller, and S. T. Magnos were granted licenses, the total amount of money collected for licenses being \$235.

In March, 1867, R. M. Powers and Henry Eckert contracted to build wooden street crossings. John H. Reed, L. Wayland, and Dilon & Burton were authorized to erect and maintain stock and hay scales on Washington Street. In April, 1867, five trustees were elected: Lewis W. Link, James Brewington, Peter J. Brown, N. M. Powers, and J. G. Jamison.

Sketch of Adair County, Missouri - 1876 - By A. H. John, M. D.

Included in the 1876 Adair County Atlas is "A Sketch of Adair County" by Dr. A. H. John, which gives a concise overview of the county at that time.

Dr. A. H. John was a medical doctor. He was born in Ohio and came to Adair County in 1863. Dr. John owned a farm of 520 acres on Hog Creek, 10 miles south west of Kirksville, Section 5, Township 6, Range 16 (1876 Atlas). The August 8, 1871 Kirksville Democrat lists Dr. John as a Marshall in the laying of the cornerstone for the First District Normal School in Kirksville. The September 2, 1886 Kirksville Democrat mentions Dr. John as publisher of the Kirksville Democrat in 1871 and 1872. Violette's History of Adair County, p. 31 states: Data concerning the birth and death of A. H. John is lacking. —For years he was a prominent character, especially in politics. He was much of an agitator and not only spoke, but wrote several books on various economic questions.

DESCRIPTION: The large and handsome County of Adair is situated in the north-eastern part of the State of Missouri, and is bounded on the north by Schyler and Putnam, on the east by Knox, on the south by Macon and on the west by Sullivan Counties. The general surface of the County is undulating, presenting a very favorable view to the beholder, and an especially inviting one to the husbandman. About one-half of the County is prairie and the balance is covered with a luxuriant growth of timber of the best quality, Oak, Walnut, Hickory, Linn, Sugar tree and Cottonwood, besides other valuable varieties. Chariton River runs from north to south through the west half of the County and Salt River in the eastern part; and better valley lands are not to be found in any part of the west; the greater portion of the soil being alluvial and containing an extraordinary amount of organic matter. On these lands are raised Corn, Wheat, Rye, Oats and Timothy in great abundance. The prairie lands produce, exceedingly well, all of the above cereals except wheat, which does best in the timber lands; but they are so easily cultivated that it makes them very desirable and inviting. In fact the farmer or artisan need go no further to better his condition, for the fertility of the soil, and the general thrift and enterprise of the inhabitants, as well as their agreeable and social qualities, cannot fail to produce a favorable opinion, and attract those who are seeking and desirable location.

HISTORY: The first attempt at a settlement was made in 1828 by several families from Howard and Randolph Counties, but owing to difficulties with the Indians, they were compelled to abandon the enterprise. In 1831-2 Kentucky, as usual, in early times, sent out her pioneers, among whom were John Stewart, Andrew Thompson, John Cain, Jesse Jones, R. W. and Frazil Myers, the father of John Collett, James Adkins, Washington and Lewis Conner. These were soon followed by Kennedy Ownby, D. E. Sloan, the father of Wm. and Ed. Parcels, the Linders, the Ives, and others. Adair County became organized January 29th, 1841, and the County-seat was located by Commissioners within two and one-half miles of the present position. The first Magistrate in the County was John Michael. James A. Clark was the first Circuit Judge. The first Clerk was David James, and Isaac N. Eby the first Sheriff. MINERALS, &c. The entire County is underlaid with Coal of the very best quality. Sandstone and Limestone for building purposes are in super abundance on all the Creeks.

RAILROADS: The St. Louis, Kansas City and Northern Railroad running directly through the County from north to south, and the Quincy, Missouri and Pacific Railroad from the east, ending for the present at Kirksville, afford excellent traveling facilities as well as furnishing a means of export and import.

WEALTH: The valuation was \$10,202,000 in 1870, as stated by the census, but at present it would probably double that amount, owing to the rapid increase of immigration and general improvements.

EDUCATION: By far the most important feature connected with the best interests of the County is its educational facilities, for the citizens pride themselves on a thorough scholastic acquaintance. There are eighty Public School houses where instruction is given, besides several private schools. The general attendance of pupils is about 5,000. The North Missouri State Normal School is located here. This institution grew out of a similar school originally established at Kirksville by Prof. Joseph Baldwin on his own account, and through his energy and perseverance, well educated teachers are now sent forth to the world at the rate of five or six hundred annually. The school was first opened in 1867 and has grown to magnificent proportions and become a great importance. Too much praise cannot be said in favor of the liberal support of the State or the citizens of the County, as well as the deep interest manifested by all classes in the cause of education. No better institution exists.

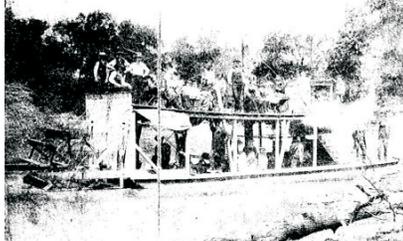
KIRKSVILLE: The affable and agreeable disposition of its citizens has attracted the attention of those seeking a new location, until Kirksville has doubled its population within three or four years. It is situated on the St. Louis, Kansas City and Northern Railroad, 203 miles from St. Louis, and 70 miles west of Quincy, on the Quincy, Missouri and Pacific Railroad, being on the grand divide between the waters of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, where the best of water for family purposes can be obtained at a depth of from 15 to 20 feet. The town was laid out in 1842, and named in honor of Jesse Kirk. It became incorporated in 1857. Wm. Lough, John Thomas, M. P. Hannah, O. H. Beeman, J. C. Thatcher, John D. Foster an E. W. Parcels, who are now living, were the first Board of Trustees. The citizens are noted for their morality and intelligence, and a more orderly town cannot be found.

The Churches are the M. E. Church and the M. E. Church South, Presbyterian, Cumberland Presbyterian, Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Christian, Episcopal and Colored Baptist. Beside these there are also societies of Universalists and Spiritualists, all of which taken together, evinces a strong desire to elevate man. There are two Newspapers, the "REGISTER," W. C. B. Gillespie, Publisher, and the "JOURNAL," S. M. Picken, Publisher, besides a Job Office; two Banking Houses; fourteen Dry Goods Stores; four Clothing Stores; two Book Stores; nine Grocery Stores; two Furniture Stores; five Drug Stores; two Jewelry Stores; three Hardware Stores; two Saddle and Harness Shops; three Lumber Yards; no Wagon Shops; four Hotels; two Hide, Fur and Wool purchasing Stores; two Brick Yards, (near town,) two Marble Shops; three Grain Warehouses and two Hay Establishments.

There are also two Grist Mills; one Woolen Mill; one Plow Factory; one Hub and Spoke Factory; one Cheese Factory; one Planing Mill and Furniture Factory. Water, Wood and Coal being of easy access recommends this town as a very desirable place for manufacturing purposes. Population 4,000.

VILLAGES AND POST OFFICES: **BRASHEARS**, (Paulville), on the Q.M.&P.R.R., twelve miles east of Kirksville, contains about six stores, a Saw and Grist Mill, a Grain Warehouse, Hay Press, School House, and United Brethren Church. It is the heaviest Shipping Point in the County, except Kirksville; being surrounded by a good producing District. Population 200. **MILIARD** is a thriving Village on the St. L., K.C.&N.R.R., seven miles south of Kirksville, containing three Stores, Warehouse, Hay Press, School House, Church &c. Population 120. **NINEVEH** is a German Town, owned by a Society after the manner of the Fourierites, located about eight and a half miles (air line) N. W. of Kirksville, on the Chariton River, which is bridged at this point. It contains a Church, School House, two Stores, Saw and Grist Mill, and a Tannery. Population 100.

SUBLETTE, on the St. L., K.C. & N.R.R., seven miles north of Kirksville, contains two Stores, a Grain Warehouse and Hay Press, and does a large Shipping Business. **TROY MILLS**, four miles south of Kirksville, contains a large Woolen Mill. **WILMATHVILLE**, thirteen miles N.E. of Kirksville, contains two Stores, a Church and School House. Population 75. **WILSON**, sixteen miles S. E. of Kirksville, contains two Stores, Church, School House, &c. Population 50. **SHIBLEY'S POINT**, seventeen miles north-west of Kirksville, contains one Store. **RINGO'S POINT**, eighteen miles south-west of Kirksville, contains one Store. **FLOYD'S CREEK**, is a Post Office eight miles north-east of Kirksville. **LINDERVILLE** and **ZIG** are Post Offices, respectively eleven and thirteen miles south-west from Kirksville, and **PRAIRIE BIRD** Post Office is situated ten miles south-east. Adair County is possessed of many natural advantages, and a few points furnish peculiar inducements in regard to location; among them Hog Creek stands preeminent. It is so named in consequence of the outrange for Hogs being unsurpassed. In fact, all the tributaries of the Chariton hold out great inducements to the new comer. In conclusion it is not too much to say that, in addition to her natural advantages, Adair County is peopled by a class of Citizens unequalled in geniality and hospitality, and a war welcome is extended to all who are seeking a home.



The Chariton River Steam Boat "Mayflower" which operated on the Chariton River about 1896 to the early 1900's made trips between Sloan's Point, near Novinger, and Yarrow, MO. This boat had a capacity of about 50 passengers. These trips were quite popular and of much interest for passengers of all ages about the turn of the century.

Adair County The Early Years



Bear Creek Church located on Route B, was the first church in Adair County. It was organized in 1838-39 by the Rev. Talbot High. Charter members included the: Asher, Barnes, Collett, Conner, Hibbard, Hudson, Lloyd, Myers, and Willis families. It was erected by business women's circle of Woman's Missionary Society, First Baptist Church of Kirksville, Missouri.



Adair County Historical Society
211 South Elson St.
Kirksville, Missouri 63501
660-665-6502

Hours: 1:00-4:00 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
<http://www.adairchs.org>

Copyright © 2010
Adair County Historical Society; all rights reserved.