

Jacksonville, Illinois.

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EARLY TIMES.

Reminiscences of Judge William Thomas.

On the 20th of Sep., 1826, I started from the office of the Hon. Joseph R. Underwood, Bowling Green, Kentucky, for Peoria, Illinois, accompanied by Thomas A. Young, Esq., en route for Palmyra, Missouri. We traveled on horseback, and purposely selected a road by New Harmony, Indiana, then in possession of Mr. Owen, who was trying an experiment at the reorganization of society. His fame, and that of his society and system of government, had reached Kentucky through the newspapers, and we determined to spend sufficient time there to satisfy ourselves in regard to the condition and probable success of the experiment.

We had been educated to believe that no society or organized community could succeed in this country, whose foundation had no reference to the Bible. Neither of us were professing Christians, but our reading of law books and some history had created the ^(sic) opinion, that without the Bible no people could be qualified to organize or maintain institutions of freedom. Mr. Owen's system had been in what was called successful operation for several years, and in almost every part of the country persons were found who pointed to its success as evidences of the correctness of his theory, and of the errors of all other systems. We found the com-

munity on the wane, tending fast to demoralization and dissatisfaction. We, However, found educated and intelligent men and women persisting in the notion that our system of government, and of religious worship, were all founded on erroneous views of the position which men were designed by their creator to occupy, as well with reference to their God as to each other. Having spent about 24 hours in the village and being satisfied from what we saw, and heard that the community could not be kept together, after the adhesive power of supplies of food and raiment was exhausted, we resumed our journey. We passed through the counties of White, Edwards, Wayne and Marion to Clinton. A few miles north of Carlyle, I found an old acquaintance who constrained me to stop and spend a few days in his log cabin. I spent several days in this place, resting myself and How. Whilst here, I became satisfied, that Peoria was too far north and west, beyond the settlement of the country for the location of an attorney at law, and determined from information obtained from those who had passed through this part of the State, to make Jacksonville my place of residence. Whilst resting with my friend I visited Carlyle and found the fever and ague operating upon almost every person that I saw. Two gentlemen here, one of whom is still living, offered to give me a lot and build me an office if I would settle in the village. I respectfully declined the offer and told my friend that I would not settle in such a sickly place for all the town. I passed from this place to Bellville to deliver some letters to Gov. Edwards and obtain further information in regard to the country, and here I found the first corn bread and bacon that I had seen

since crossing the Ohio river. After spending two nights and a day here I came to Edwardsville to obtain the signature of Judge Lockwood to my law license, and here I fared sumptuously at a tavern kept by Mr. Hopkins, for it so happened that Judge Lockwood had just returned from Missouri with his lately married wife, and his friends had collected to a bridal dinner. I remained here until after dinner the next day, and then set out for Upper Alton, where I spent the night. All the information obtained at Bellville, Edwardsville and Alton corresponded with that previously obtained--that Morgan county was destined to be one of the richest and most populous counties in the state, and that Jacksonville was possessing a desirable location. From Alton I came to Carrollton, taking breakfast at John Wilkins'. From Carrollton I came to Jacksonville, taking dinner at Judge Mark's, now Manchester. I reached Jacksonville on the 12th of October, about 8 o'clock at night. I put up at David Teff's tavern, who occupied a double frame one story building on the east side of the square, where I remained about a week when, through the influence of Dr. Eno Chandler, I obtained boarding with Mr. Henry Robley, a farmer and blacksmith, over a mile east of the court house, and entirely out of town. From Carlyle to Edwardsville via Belleville, the country was beautiful, the land apparently rich, but thinly settled, with but few good houses or with improved farms. From Edwardsville to Alton the road passed over a wooden and broken country, thin land and but few farms. From Alton to Carrollton after passing

the Piasa creek, and getting on the prairie, the country was level, though sufficiently undulating for agricultural purposes. To Macoupin creek and from there to Carrollton the road passed over a timbered and poor country, with but two or three small farms and small brick houses. Between Carrollton and Apple Creek the timber undergrowth and vegetation indicated deep rich soil, equal to any that I had ever seen. At Carrollton I put up at a tavern kept by Mr. Harrison, south of the square, in a small story and a half building. I went to a grocery store to purchase some cigars, when I found twenty or thirty men, (whom, I was told, were called Macoupinites), drinking, carousing, swearing, singing obscene songs and telling stories on each other. They were enjoying themselves to the fullest. One of them, who appeared to be sober and quiet, after asking me where I was from and where I was going, said, "you are too smart looking to be in this crowd, and I advise you to leave before the boys notice you, they are a wild set." I thanked him for his advice and returned to the tavern. ~~P~~ This sober man I met some twenty years afterwards after at Springfield as a member of ^{the} legislature, suffering under a violent attack of congestive fever, of which he died. I sent after and procured a doctor for him and wrote his will.

A few days before I reached Carrollton there had been a general or regimental muster, at which all the militia of the county were required to attend for purposes of drill or training, and this had brought the ~~macoupinites~~ ^(sic) and others of the like character, many of them remained in Carrollton. During the night after the muster, and not being able or willing to procure quar-

ters in houses, spent the night in drinking carousing, singing, fighting and in mischief, they caught one man (Mike Dood,) cut off a part of one of his ears, and nailed ^(sic) on the door of the blacksmith shop where it still remained, They shaved the mane and tail of Mr. Cavarly's fine saddle horse, one of the best and nicest looking horses that I ever saw; they changed signs from house to house, removed gates, pulled down fences and removed buckets from wells. From the crossing of the Wabash all the way to Jacksonville there seemed to be prevailing an epidemic of sore eyes. Several families in Jacksonville, ^(sic) and especially that of my land lord, David Tefft's, were severely afflicted. I did not know when I reached Jacksonville; that I would find a single acquaintance in the county. I however, soon heard of the family of Mr. Thomas Galton, of North Prairie, with which I had been acquainted from my earliest recollections, who kept the post office in the neighborhood of my father's in Kentucky during the war of 1812. I also met with Rev. Reddick Howe, with whom I had had a passing acquaintance in Simpson county Kentucky, and as time passed I found a number of families with which I had been acquainted.

Whatever may have been my opinions of Jacksonville and the county of Morgan, or of the propriety of making my home there, I had traveled about as far as my money and horse would carry me. I was, however, pleased with the country and location of the town, and consented to make my home here. The population of the town consisted of the families of Dennis Rockwell, Murray ^(sic) McConnell, Thomas Carson, John Handy, David Taft, Samuel Blair,

George M. Richards, George Rearick, Joseph M. Fairfield, John Laughrey, John P. Taff, Peter or John Savage, and with men without families, George Hackett, John Turney and Benjamin Cox ^(Fair) Samuel C. Rixford, Moses Atwood, Orson Cobb, Rice Dunbar, Joseph Coddington. McConnell, Carson and David Tefft were the tavern keepers; John Handy the log house builder; Fairfield, Rearick and Atwood were merchants; Richards was deputy county surveyor; Blair and Dunbar were carpenters; Laughrey was brick maker and John P. Taff, ^(sic) brick maker and plasterer; Rockwell was clerk of the two courts, recorder, postmaster and notary public; McConnell, Turney and Cox were the attorneys at law; John Savage was a carpenter; Peter Savage followed breaking prairies and teaming generally; Cobb was a tailor; Coddington was a widower without occupation, but was subsequently engaged in dealing in horses, and afterwards became merchant; George Hackett had been a merchant and partner of Fairfield, but was then engaged in lead mines—prospecting for lead. Mr. Rockwell resided on east State street, beyond the limits of the town plat, in the only entirely finished and comfortable log cabin in town. Several frame buildings and log cabins were being raised, for the use of persons intending to occupy them. At the first election of sheriff, on the 3d Monday in November, 1823, Willie B. Green was elected; at the second, August, 1824, Joseph M. Fairfield, who was best known by the name of the "honest peddler," was elected, and in August, 1826, Green was elected again. Failing to execute a bond in the time required by law, a second election was had in December, 1826, when Green was again elected. He was an un-

educated, vicious back-woodsman, with no qualifications for that or any other office. Not being able to obtain other employment, out of which to pay for board, ~~and~~ being out of funds, I engaged to teach school for three months, ^(sic) upon the old plan of obtaining subscribers for scholars. A log building had been erected to be used for a school house, in the south part of town, having no floor, chimney, doors, windows or loft, which I was to occupy. In the month of November the house was finished, with an unjointed floor and loft, a sod and stick chimney, one window in the east and two in the north, with slabs for seats and wide plank for writing tables, and on the first Monday in December my school was opened in due form. About 25 scholars had been subscribed, with the understanding that each subscriber might send all the children that he could spare from service at home. I agreed to teach reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic. I had scholars to learn A, B, C's, spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic, and two only to study English grammar. I attended punctually every morning by 7 o'clock, made a fire and had the room warm by the time the children arrived. Very soon I found that the Kentucky lawyer was giving general satisfaction, and the house was filled with children from the town and neighborhood, several families sending their ^(sic) children in the winter. I was to receive my pay in cash or produce, or pork, cattle or hogs at cash prices. I bargained with Mr. Robley with whom I boarded to receive the ~~copy~~ from my subscribers for my board, and my three months school enabled

me to pay for a year's board, besides furnishing money to pay postage and immediate expenses. My board cost me only \$1.00 per week, including washing, ^[sic] full and lights. Mr. Robley had two log ^bcabins, one was given up to Dr. Chandler and myself, and the other was occupied by his family. The winter was cold, in the east rain, but more snow than has been usual since. I often had as many as fifty children in the school, and scarce ever less than thirty. It required ~~about~~ ten hours every day to hear the routine of lessons and frequently twelve.

The fever and ague had prevailed that fall in every neighborhood in the county, and especially on the river and margins of small streams. It had then been only about six and a half years since the first settlement in the county, and at the election in August previous, over one thousand votes had been taken, and a great majority of the ^[sic]inhabitants were from the south and west—the minority from the north and east, and old England. Places of residence were generally situated in the outskirts of timber adjoining the prairies, but few persons had consented to build as far as half a mile from timber, with few exceptions! These families resided in log cabbins, covered with clapboards, chimneys made of sticks and mud, the floors of puncheon, fireplaces of sod. The only brick yards that I noticed were near Jacksonville, one owned by Garrison W. Berry, on the land of Henry Robley, east of town, and one by John Laughrey, north of town.

In November, 1825, I first saw the Illinois river. The

stage of the water was too low for the navigation of loaded flat boats. Grass had grown up from the bottom so thick and strong that ferry boats could not be used without mowing the grass and opening the way. Except in the channel, occupying a narrow space, I could not discover any current. A short time after I reached Jacksonville I heard of the time of the sales of the personal property of Rev. Mr. ^B Gyrg, who had died in the January previous. I went to that sale expecting to meet some acquaintances from Kentucky. I met Mr. Thomas Gatten and went home with him, and by him I was introduced to most of the settlers in that prairie. The log buildings and unfinished frames were at that day used as houses of worship few and far between. I am confident that during the winter of 1826-7 there was not a comfortable meeting house in the county. Religious meetings were held in log and unpiastered frames, school houses and private dwellings. In warm weather such meetings were often held in barns and under arbours in the woods. The first sermon that I ever heard in Jacksonville was in the fall of 1826 in the frame court house (subsequently burnt), preached by a Baptist minister named Kenner, prepared for mothers, when the only female in attendance was Mrs. Joseph Fairfield, who had no child. During the winter of 1826-7 and previous, as well as subsequently to that time, the meetings of the Methodist Society were held at Mr. John Jourdan's, who was well know as Father Jourdan. He occupied a double log cabin east of town, where now stands the building formerly called "Berian College." During the service the females occupied one room and the males the other,

the beds being used for seats. During that winter the society of Presbyterians, with Rev. John Brick, their minister, met in the log school house occupied by me during the week in the south side of town. I acted as sexton sweeping the house in the morning and building fires.

Father Brick, as ^[sic] he was called, though a bachelor, was an educated Englishman, but like many others, was never able to make his learning avail him much as a public speaker, but he was a devoted Christian.

Among the improvements in the county designed for public benefit and convenience, was the grist and saw mill at Exeter, owned by Enoch C. March; a band horse mill for grinding corn, owned by Capt John Wayatt; also one owned by Mr. Reeder, and one tread wheel mill, owned by James Deaton, Esq.; a grist and saw mill on Indian creek, a saw mill, owned by Mr. James McGill, on the

Mauvaisterre—Mr. Abraham Johnson owned a cotton gin west of town.

I soon found two classes in society. Those from the north and east were called "yankees," and those from the south and west "white people." The political division was between the supporters of John Quincy Adams and General Andrew Jackson, the yankees supporting Adams and the white people, Jackson. Most of those who had voted for Mr. Clay supported Mr. Adams. The election of August, 1826, had been warmly contested between Gov. Edwards and Mr. Sloo for governor, and Daniel P. Cook and Joseph Duncan for Congress. Edwards and Duncan were elected by a small majority, though differing in politics. Duncan was one of the few public men who never had credit for what he was worth.

owned by William Harrison and James Hinndie; a horse mill,
owned by Mr. A. Hall, near the head of Indian creek;

¶ In the summer of 1826, a young man named Carson, had been employed to teach school in the court house, but not meeting with such encouragement as thought would pay, he abandoned his employers and left the neighborhood.

In the spring of 1827 I attended all the courts in the first Illinois circuit, Greene, Sangamon, Peoria, Fulton, Schuyler, Adams, Pike and Calhoun. I road a filley, and John Turney a young stallion, loaned to us by Mr. Joseph Klien, for the purpose of having them broke to the saddle. This was my first appearance at the courts I had no right to expect to make more than traveling expenses. In Greene and Sangamon I paid my tavern bills by assisting the clerks by making up their records. In Peoria I was appointed state's attorney, the attorney general not being in attendance, and here I made and collected ten silver dollars for fees allowed for the convictions upon indictments for affrays-- besides, the clerk paid my tavern bill for making up the records. In Fulton John Turney was appointed to represent the attorney general but I made \$5 for attending to an appeal case. In Schuyler Mr. Pugh was appointed to represent the attorney general. We found but two families living at Rushville, the county seat, Hart Fellows, clerk of the ten courts, probate judge and post master, and Mr. Terry recorder. At Lewiston the Judge and attorneys were entertained by Judge Phelps, who refused to receive pay. At Rushville they were entertrined by the clerk and Braden without charge, though we paid a farmer named White for keeping our horses. I made nothing at Rushville. At Quincy, in Pike county,

we met the attorney general. Here the Judge and bar were entertained sumptuously by Captain Leonard Ross, recorder. who not only refused compensation, but expressed regret that he could not entertain us longer. At Gilland, in Calhoun county, there was one small tavern house with a grocery in one room, but the Judge and attorneys obtained entertainment in private houses where we had small bills to pay. Here, I was employed to defend a doctor, a poor man, in poor health, indicted for murder. The evidence showed the prosecution to have originated in ignorance and malice, and the verdict of the jury was "not guilty"--for this the doctor paid me \$10, all that he was able to pay. I had no idea of ever seeing him again, as he seemed to be in the last stages of consumption, but some time afterwards I met him in the Legislature: he recognized me, but I did not him.

In July 1827 Gov. Edwards received information on which he relied and acted, that the Indians in north west, led by the Winnebago's intended to make war upon our settlers and miners in the vicinity of Galena. He therefore authorized Col. Thomas Neal, of Springfield, to accept of the services of any number of mounted volunteers, not exceeding six hundred, who would equip themselves and find their own substance and continue in service thirty days, unless sooner discharged. Upon this call upwards of three hundred volunteers were obtained in the counties of Sangamon and Morgan, among whom I was one. When the volunteers from Morgan reached Peoria, the place of rendezvous, I was appointed quarter master sergeant. I accompanied the regiment to White Oak Springs, some

ten or twelve miles from Galena, where it remained several days, when the Colonel being satisfied that the further service of the regiment was not required, ordered the return home. While the regiment remained I purchased and had delivered the provisions required for returning home. I had sold my horse, saddle and bridle, intending to return home by the river. The morning on which the regiment left for home, I was taken with the flux so as to be unable to travel. I got quarters in a grocery tavern kept by a man named Krabb, on the road from Gartiot's Grove. The next day I came to Exeter. Here I to Galena, and within one hundred yards of White Oak Springs, I sent to Galena for medicine to cure the flux. The doctor sent me a prescription with what he supposed would afford relief, but it failed after three or four days' trial. I became worse and believe I should have died but for an accident. I say accident. I did not then think of anything providential. Isaac Plasters, a volunteer from Morgan county, who had made my acquaintance on the campaign, instead of returning home with the regiment, remained to earn some money by working a month or two in the mines. Passing by the house where I was confined, and hearing that there was a sick soldier up stairs, made his way to my room in the roof of the log cabin. Seeing my situation he agreed to stay with and nurse me. I had eat nothing for two days except a little poor soup. Plasters had me removed to a room on the first floor. In the afternoon he saw Doctor Hill passing on the road and called him in to see me. The doctor was a gentleman, a good physician and though worn down in the service, because flux was

prevailing to an alarming extent in that neighborhood, he gave me some medicine, took a short nap and left, promising to return the next day and to continue his visits daily until I recovered. Plasters, with his rifle, killed birds every day and fed me on soup. I began to mend as soon as the medicines supplied by Doctor Hill operated. Plasters remained with me and the Doctor called daily for ten days, during which time the disease was entirely checked and I became able to travel to Galena and obtain passage on a boat to Quincy. I paid the Doctor a small bill for his services but Plasters refused to receive pay.

At Galena I found an old Kentucky acquaintance by the name of Rountree, proposing to take deck passage with a mess on a steam boat for St. Louis. A cabin passage could not be procured. I joined the mess. The boat towed two lead boats on which the deck passengers had to ride, furnishing their own supplies. We laid in our provisions and with loose plank furnished by the boat, made ourselves comfortable quarters, much more so than had any cabin passengers. We fared sumptuously on the trip down. On this boat, Black Hawk and Keo Kuk, with some eight or ten other leading Indians, passed down to Flint Hill, now Burlington. I left the boat at Quincy, where I purchased a horse, saddle and bridle for \$40. From Quincy I went down to Atlas--then there was no settlement between Quincy and Illinois river, nor no road on which could travel. I rested one day at Atlas was taken sick again, took a large dose of calomel and had to remain two days before proceeding further. I finally reached home, very

much worsted in flesh and strength, but without disease. In a few days the fall terms of the courts commenced. I was able to ride and attend court in Green, where I spent a week at ^a good hotel, kept by Mr. Reno. I was scarcely able to attend to business in court, but for assisting Gen. Turryton, I made enough to pay my tavern bill, but my health improved. I gained strength and by the next week I was able to attend to business in Morgan. I next attended the court in Springfield, and then all the other courts in the circuit. On this circuit we found but little business in any of the counties--parties, jurymen and witnesses were reported in all the counties after Peoria, as being absent bee and deer hunting-- a business that was then profitable, as well as necessary to the sustenance of families during the winter. In December 1827 I attended the supreme court at Vandalia, where I had a case dismissed because the appellant had not filed a copy of the bond within the time required by law.

Mr. Rockwell being agent for the owners of several hundred tracts of Military land, employed me to pay the taxes, for which he paid my traveling expenses and provided for my board at the house of W. H. Brown, Esq.

During my absence at Vandalia on this trip, the court house was burned. It might have taken fire on the public square by accident, but I have always believed, and so did Mr. McConnell, that it was set on fire by Greene, the sheriff. By this fire I lost a small box of clothing and my Bible, the only book I brought from Kentucky. The clerk's office of circuit and county clerk was kept in a small up-stairs room. All the books and papers of the office were burned, except the ~~keed~~ book, which Mr. Rockwell had taken to his dwelling to record

some deeds in the night time.

The circuit court was held in Jacksonville in November 1826, John Y. Savage, circuit judge, presiding. There was about forty cases on the docket, all told. The attorneys present were James Turny, attorney general of the state, and Alfred W. Cav-
erly, of Carrollton, Thomas A. Neely, Isaac W. Steele and Jonathan H. Pugh, of Springfield. John Reynolds, of Kankakee, William H. Brown, Benjamin Mills and George Farqueir, of Vandalia; Mur-
ray McConnell, John Turney, Benjamin Cox and myself, of Jack-
sonville-- of whom Mr. Crawley and myself are the only sur-
vivors, this 12th of October 1874; he eighty-one years old, and I
near seventy-tow^u. Court was continued one week, and the next
week was held in Springfield.

I attended this court in company with all the attorneys in attendance in Morgan except McConnell and Case. Here I met with Colonel James Adams, probate judge, William S. Hamilton (?) and Thos. Noffit^{of} Springfield, David Prickett, of Edward-
sville, and John B. Bogardus, of Peoria, of whom Mr. Moffitt^{is} is the only survivor. I was the guest of Mr. Neal during the week, with whom I was acquainted in Kentucky, and here I met with Carlton B. Gatton, a Kentucky acquaintance, by whom I was introduced to the family of Mr. P. P. Enos, receiver of the public monies at the land office in Springfield. During the week a Mr. Vannay was hung in Springfield for the murder of his wife, This was the first and last case of execution that I have ever seen.