

**PIONEER SETTLEMENTS
AND EARLY HISTORY OF
MONEY CREEK TOWNSHIP**

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Pioneer Settlements and Early History of Money Creek Township by D. F. Trimmer

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Pioneer Settlements
of
Early History
of
Money Creek Township



By D. F. TRIMMER, of Lexington

A paper prepared for and read before the McLean County
Historical Society, December 2, 1916.

PIONEER SETTLEMENTS



EARLY HISTORY OF

Money Creek Township

McLean County, Illinois.

BY D. F. TRIMMER, OF LEXINGTON

The committee having charge, have assigned to me the agreeable task of producing some historical sketches and reminiscences of Money Creek township in the early days.

It is right that the facts and incidents connected with the reclamation of this fair land from the wilderness should be collected and preserved, and our historical societies are deserving of thanks for their work along these lines of useful endeavor. Also to those who have been born since the first settlements of the country, and to those who may have come hither from older populated sections, at a later date, the recital will display the contrast between the past and the present.

I hope to show the old times were the good times, that manly men and womanly women were the rule and not the exception; that the boys and the girls were brought up in the way they should go, and when older did not depart from it, that the religious, strenuous life lived in those days nerved and strengthened them for trials later on.

Well on to a century has passed, 91 years in fact, since John Trimmer and family of Huntington county, New Jersey, packed their belongings and started for the great West to found a home, their destination being Sangamon county, Illinois. The journey led them across the rough and rugged range of the Alleghanies, through the dense forests of Ohio, the swamps of Indiana, and across the trackless prairies of Illinois. The jaded condition of their teams compelled them

to go into camp near the claim of Louis Sowards and George Harness on the Money Creek, near where the village of Towanda now is.

In a few weeks the husband sickened, and died October 3rd, 1826, and was buried in a puncheon coffin, at what is now the Pennell cemetery. The widow and eight orphaned children were left practically alone in the midst of a wild prairie. But Mrs. Trimmer, remarkable woman that she was, rose to meet the trying conditions into which she was thrust, and with a bravery and fortitude worthy to be commemorated by her descendants, raised her children to manhood and womanhood and to be useful members of society. My father, Jesse Trimmer, was one of these children.

In the fall of 1826, Jacob Spawr arrived here, coming from Pennsylvania. Mr. Spawr not only joined and worked for the family, but he did more, he married Miss Eliza Ann, a daughter to Mrs. Trimmer. This was no private affair for the reason Mr. Spawr could get no marriage license, and he was compelled to post notices on trees and other public places.

In a few years, Uncle Jake, as he was called, moved to Lexington where he raised a large family, all girls. Two are still living here, Mrs. Noah Franklin and Mrs. Emily Shade. Mr. Spawr died at the extreme age of one hundred and one years. He had filled many positions of honor and trust, and had associated with Abraham Lincoln and many of the noted men of his time.

A good country attracts and makes good people, and the requisite thing with early settlers was wood, water, and a deep rich soil. Money Creek township has all these and more—she has for the most part a beautiful landscape.

BOUGHT LAND AT \$1.25 PER ACRE

The records show that Jesse Trimmer bought land from the government as early as 1835 at \$1.25 per acre. Daniel Trimmer, an older brother, had land that joined that of Jesse Trimmer on the south. Daniel Trimmer died by accidental

shooting while going to the election, November 4th, 1860. Mrs. Trimmer retained the farm, kept her children together, all growing to splendid manhood and womanhood. To say that the Trimmer cousins were as thick as "three in a bed" was no joke, "it was a reality and in a trundle bed at that."

Settlers were now beginning to arrive, attracted no doubt by our rich soil, cheap lands and other inducements.

The Stretch family came to McLean county in 1830, the Ogdens in 1831; the Moatses in 1832, as did William Wilcox, coming here from Ohio. James McAfferty came at this time and settled on the east of Money Creek. The Bishops came in 1836, settling on the west side near the Moats neighborhood. The Bishops were a resourceful set of people and their services were in demand. They could teach school, preach, make brick, do carpenter work, or keep a postoffice. It was Wesley Bishop who made the brick and laid them in the wall for my father's house about the year of 1850. A sad accident happened to one of the Bishop children; it wandered from the home, fell into a pit that was being used for making brick and was drowned.

The log cabins gradually gave way to bigger and better houses, this made the demand for lumber. The first saw mills were built in 1837 and 1838 by Adam Hinthorne and W. G. Bishop. George Wallace built a saw mill and a grist mill on the Mackinaw on the land now owned by Mrs. Donnelly, about the year of 1834, and they were run until 1857. Hamilton Mathias later built a mill on Money Creek and did an extensive business.

MILLS

Jonathan McAfferty run a steam saw mill on land now owned by A. A. Stewart. Here large quantities of ties, wood and bridge stuff were sawed out and delivered to Hudson for the Illinois Central Railroad that was being built about 1850. Two shifts of men were used. George P. Brown, who now lives in Lexington and is 87 years old, and Nelson Manning, now 95 years old, were head sawyers. A Mr. Daniel Streevy boarded the men and did the hauling and made enough money

to finish paying for his farm. The land is now owned by Mrs. C. J. W. McNemar.

It would be well to remember, in very dry times these grist mills could not be operated and corn had to be pounded in a mortar, which was a very slow process. The settlers often took their grist to Ottawa, Bowling Green and other places. Considering that there were no roads and no bridges, it was a task we of this age know but little about.

Such simple articles as salt were a necessity and generally brought from Chicago in exchange for wheat. Wheat was generally sowed in the corn and covered with a shovel plow, cut with reap hooks or cradles and tramped with horses. I have rode and led horses around the ring often, and turned the old fan mill by the hour, have planted corn in every third furrow behind the prairie plow which made fairly good corn. I have dropped corn for days at a time on the old Brown corn-planter with wooden runners, then dropped for a neighbor and took a pig for pay, which was my very own. To watch that pig grow was a pleasure and a delight.

WILD GAME

Prairie chickens were abundant. In the springtime, wild ducks and geese, cranes, brants and wild pigeons filled the fields, earth and sky almost. Our gray hound could easily outrun a gray wolf, but to kill it was another thing. The gray hound brings up the matter of racing. My uncle, James Gilmore, in an early day, matched his sorrel stallion, named "Dangerous Billy," against George Van Dolah's little sorrel mare. My uncle's horse won out and the strides or jumps were 22 feet by actual measure; that was going some. The race was run on the Gilmore track. There was no drunkenness, no fights, simply a fair, square "hoss race." There was betting of course.

In early days the settlers depended more on their cattle, hogs and sheep for a living than they did on raising grain. Here are the quotations for the year of 1845, which seems

extremely low: Hogs, \$1.50 per hundred; cows, \$10.00 each; corn, 10 cents per bushel.

James Van Dolah, Jesse Trimmer and Peter Hefner were the principal cattle dealers and feeders. Their adjoining farms, at one time, reached almost across the township; their residences being on a straight line east and west. They would raise a few cattle each year (all cattle were Shorthorns or Durham breed). They would buy from their neighbors far and near, at so much per head, they were also experts at guessing weights, practice taught them that. The daily ration for feeding their cattle was about one-fourth bushel of shock corn in the winter season, with a little timothy hay and the run of a blue grass pasture that was never closely cropped. These cattle were kept until they were about three years old, being fat and thoroughly matured, they brought in later years close to \$100.00 per head. Of course hogs were raised and took up the litter, then fed until late in the summer, this was mostly clear gain. One great advantage was the money, all came in a bunch and would go a long way towards paying for more land. The men above mentioned never sold corn, but they bought all their neighbors had to sell. Bloomington butchers, in an early day, kept men riding the country continually to supply home trade, buying mostly dry cows and heifers.

George McNaught, who married Nancy Franklin, lived in the extreme northeast part of the township, and was not among the oldest settlers. He became quite wealthy. This was the way he acquired his wealth. The pioneer packers of Chicago, (Mr. Hough, I think) would advance all the money needed to purchase cattle with in the spring, agreeing to buy them in the fall at so much per pound, dressed. The quarters were weighed on platform scales. These cattle would be driven to Chicago. Mr. McNaught continued to drive even after the railroad came, which was about 1853. That way of doing business "sure was a sure thing." Mr. McNaught had the largest and best orchard in the county.

Mr. Noah Franklin, who is a large land owner on the eastern side of the township, commenced early to breed and feed full blood and high grade cattle, and still continues in the business.

When a mere boy, helping my father gather cattle up and down the Mackinaw, and in lower White Oak Grove, I noticed our stopping places were always at large white houses and red barns and cattle around of all kinds. I drew the conclusion they naturally went together, and that the cattle were responsible for the big houses and red barns. I know at our old home, cattle were company and a kind of an inspiration, knowing that they brought results.

The roads in early days as now were a vexed question. Timber roads were almost always bad, wet and undrained places were cut into ruts, the horses' feet would leave great holes and after freezing travel over such places can not well be described, it has to be experienced. The reason our roads are crooked and zigzag is, they follow the original Indian trails and are not on established lines, but they are gradually being straightened.

One of the old trails ran in a southwesterly direction from Indian Grove to a tall lone elm tree near Mr. Melvin Barnard's. Just to accommodate the public, Mr. Barnard drew a straight furrow from the lone elm tree into Bloomington, it passed what was known in early years as "The Delzell Farm," near where Normal now is.

I recall two people who deserve the thanks of the community. Oliver Tilbury (deceased), of Towanda, who made and sold drain tile at a reasonable price; and Nicholas Murphy of Lexington, who is still living at the age of 93 years, and who did nothing for many years but lay tile. He also helped build the C. & A. Railroad into Lexington. I remember my mother reading to me when a boy, a bit of poetry which ran like this and is applicable here: