

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE EARLY AMERICAN SETTLEMENTS IN ILLINOIS, FROM 1780 TO 1800. READ BEFORE THE ILLINOIS STATE LYCEUM, AT ITS ANNIVERSARY, AUGUST 16, 1832.

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THIS period exhibited scenes of sufficient importance on these frontiers, to claim special notice in the early history of Illinois. The period to which I allude, is from 1780 to 1800. The scenes are laid principally in what is now called St. Clair and Monroe counties.

The military expedition of General George Rogers Clarke, in 1778, and the subjugation of the forts of St. Vincent, Kaskaskia, and Fort Chartres, was the occasion of making known the fertile plains of Illinois to the people of the Atlantic states, and exciting a spirit of emigration to the banks of the Mississippi. Some who accompanied him in that expedition, shortly after returned and took possession of the conquered country.

At the period of which I speak, with the exception of the old French villages of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Prairie du Rocher, Fort Chartres, Village a Cote, Prairie du Pont, and a few families scattered along the Wabash and Illinois rivers, the whole territory within the boundaries of Illinois, was the abode of the untamed savage.

This territory appears to have been claimed originally by the nation of Indians known to the early French explorers, by

the name of **ILLINI**, a word said to signify, 'a full grown man.' The ancient residence of this nation was about Green Bay, and they claimed the country west of lake Michigan, and even west of the Mississippi. Like other nations of Indians, they were divided into *tribes*. Each tribe managed its own internal affairs; but in more public matters, they met around one common council-fire. They dug up the tomahawk, to make war upon their neighbors, and smoked the calamat of peace in concert. The prairies of Illinois were the hunting grounds of this nation. Within the period of our contemplated history, the buffalo browsed upon the luxuriant range within our view; and till about 1797, they were tolerably numerous along the Kaskaskia and Illinois rivers.

The names of the tribes that unitedly formed the nation of the Illini, were the Miamies, Mascotins, Michigamies, Cahokias, Peorias, Kaskaskias, and Tamarweas. Besides these fragments of what was once the great nation of the Illini, other tribes inhabited Illinois, at the period of our history. The Kickapoos were numerous and warlike, and had their principal towns on the Illinois, and the Vermillion of the Wabash. The Piankeshaws, whom some think were originally a branch of the Illini, were in the same region. The Delawares, Shawanees, and other bands, passed over the territory, or were occasional occupants of its hunting grounds. The Potawatomes were principally north and west of the Illinois river, and laid some species of claim to the country as far south as Edwardsville; and the Sacks, Foxes or Musquakies, and others, claimed the region farther north.

Tradition tells us of many a hard-fought battle between the original owners of the country, and these intruders. *Battle-ground creek* is well known, on the road from Kaskaskia to Shawneetown, twenty-five miles from the former place, where the Kaskaskias and their allies were dreadfully slaughtered by the united forces of the Kickapoos and Potawatomes.

Of these Indians, the Kickapoos were the most formidable and dangerous neighbors to the whites, and for a number of years kept the American settlements in continual alarm. At first, they appeared friendly; but from 1786 to 1796, a period of ten years, the settlements were in a continual state of alarm and distress from these and other Indians.

The first settlement formed of emigrants from the United States, was made near Bellefontaine, Monroe county, in 1781, by James Moore, whose numerous descendants now reside in the same settlement. Mr. Moore was a native of Maryland, but came to Illinois from Western Virginia, with his family, in

company with James Garrison, Robert Kidd, Shadrach Bond, sen., and Larkin Rutherford. They passed through the wilderness to the Ohio river, where they took water, came down that river, and up the Mississippi to Kaskaskia. Mr. Moore, and a portion of his company, planted themselves on the hills near Bellefontaine, and Garrison, Bond, and the rest, settled in the American bottom, near Harrisonville. This station became afterwards known by the name of the Block-house Fort.

Nothing deserving special notice occurred amongst this little band of pioneers, till 1785, when they were joined by Joseph Ogle, Joseph Worley, and James Andrews, with large families, from Virginia. In 1786, the settlements were strengthened by the arrival of James Lemen, George Atcherson, and David Waddle, with their families, and several others. The same year, the Kickapoo Indians commenced their course of predatory warfare. A single murder, that of James Flannery, had been committed in 1783, while on a hunting excursion, but it was not regarded as an act of war.

But in 1786, they attacked the settlement, killed James Andrews, his wife and daughter, James White, and Samuel McClure, and took two girls, daughters of Andrews, prisoners. One of these died with the Indians, the other was ransomed by the French traders. She is now alive, the mother of a large family, and resides in St. Clair county. The Indians had previously threatened the settlement, and the people had built and entered a block-house; but this family was out and defenceless.

1787. Early in this year, five families near Bellefontaine, united and built a block-house, surrounded it with palisades, in which their families resided. While laboring in the corn-field, they were obliged to carry their rifles, and often at night had to keep guard. Under these embarrassments, and in daily alarm, they cultivated their corn-fields.

1788. This year, the war assumed a more threatening aspect. Early in the spring, William Biggs was taken prisoner. While himself, John Vallis, and Joseph and Benjamin Ogle, were passing from the station on the hills to the Block-house Fort in the bottom, they were attacked by the Indians. Biggs and Vallis were a few rods in advance of the party. Vallis was killed, and Biggs taken prisoner. The others escaped unhurt. Biggs was taken through the prairies to the Kickapoo towns on the Wabash, from whence he was finally liberated, by means of the French traders. The Indians treated him well, offered him the daughter of a brave for a wife, and proposed to adopt him into their tribe. He afterwards became a resident of St. Clair county, was a member of the territorial

legislature, judge of the county court, and wrote and published a narrative of his captivity among the Indians.

On the the 10th of December in the same year, James Garrison and Benjamin Ogle, while hauling hay from the bottom, were attacked by two Indians; Ogle was shot in the shoulder, where the ball remains; Garrison sprang from the load and escaped into the woods. The horses taking fright, carried Ogle safe to the settlement. In stacking the same hay, Samuel Garrison and a Mr. Riddick were killed and scalped.

1789. This was a period of considerable mischief. Three boys were attacked by six Indians, a few yards from the block-house, one of which, Davis Waddle, was struck with the tomahawk in three places, scalped, and yet recovered; the others escaped unhurt. A short time previous, James Turner, a young man, was killed on the American bottom. Two men were afterwards killed and scalped while on their way to St. Louis. In another instance, two men were attacked on a load of hay; one was killed outright, the other was scalped, but recovered. The same year, John Ferrel was killed, and John Dempsey was scalped and made his escape. The Indians frequently stole the horses and killed the cattle of the settlers.

1790. The embarrassments of these frontier people greatly increased, and they lived in continual alarm. In the winter, a party of Osage Indians, who had not molested them hitherto, came across the Mississippi, stole a number of horses, and attempted to recross the river. The Americans followed and fired upon them. James Worley, an old settler, having gotten in advance of his party, was shot, scalped, and his head cut off and left on the sand-bar. The same year, James Smith, a Baptist preacher from Kentucky, while on a visit to these frontiers, was taken prisoner by a party of Kickapoos. On the 19th of May, in company with Mrs. Hough and a Frenchman, he was proceeding from the Block-house to a settlement then known by the name of Little Village. The Kickapoos fired upon them from an ambuscade near Bellefontaine, killed the Frenchman's horse, sprang upon the woman and her child, whom they despatched with the tomahawk, and took Smith. His horse being shot, he attempted to flee on foot; and having some valuable papers in his saddle-bags, he threw them into a thicket, where they were found next day by his friends. Having retreated a few yards down the hill, he fell on his knees in prayer for the poor woman they were butchering, and who had been seriously impressed, for some days, about religion. The Frenchman escaped on foot in the thickets. The Indians soon had possession of Smith, loaded him with packs of plunder

which they had collected, and took up their line of march through the prairies. Smith was a large, heavy man, and soon became tired under his heavy load, and with the hot sun. Several consultations were held by the Indians, how to dispose of their prisoner. Some were for despatching him outright, being fearful the whites would follow them from the settlement, and frequently pointed their guns at his breast. Knowing well the Indian character, he would bare his breast as if in defiance, and point upward to signify the Great Spirit was his protector. Seeing him in the attitude of prayer, and hearing him sing hymns on his march, which he did to relieve his own mind from despondency, they came to the conclusion that he was a 'great medicine,' holding daily intercourse with the Good Spirit, and must not be put to death. After this, they took off his burdens and treated him kindly. They took him to the Kickapoo towns on the Wabash, from whence, in a few months, he obtained his deliverance, the inhabitants of New Design paying one hundred and seventy dollars for his ransom.

1791. In the spring of this year, the Indians again commenced their depredations by stealing horses. In May, John Dempsey was attacked, but made his escape. A party of eight men followed. The Indians were just double their number. A severe running-fight was kept up for several hours, and conducted with great prudence and bravery on the part of the whites. Each party kept the trees for shelter; the Indians retreating and the Americans pursuing, from tree to tree, till night put an end to the conflict. Five Indians were killed without the loss of a man or a drop of blood on the other side. This party consisted of Captain N. Hull, who commanded, Joseph Ogle, sen., Benjamin Ogle, James Lemen, sen., J. Ryan, William Bryson, John Porter, and D. Raper.

1792. This was a season of comparative quietness. No Indian fighting; and the only depredations committed, were in stealing a few horses.

1793. This was a period of contention and alarm. The little settlements were strengthened this year by the addition of a band of emigrants from Kentucky; amongst which, was the family of Whiteside.

In February, an Indian in ambuscade, wounded Joel Whiteside, and was followed by John Moore, Andrew Kinney, Thos. Todd, and others, killed and scalped. Soon after, a party of Kickapoos, supposed to have been headed by the celebrated war-chief, Old Pecan, made a predatory excursion into the American bottom, near the present residence of S. W. Miles, in Monroe county, and stole nine horses from the citizens. A

number of citizens rallied and commenced pursuit; but many having started without preparing for long absence, and being apprehensive that an expedition into the Indian country would be attended with much danger, all returned but eight men. This little band consisted of Samuel Judy, John Whiteside, William L. Whiteside, Uel Whiteside, William Harrington, John Dempsey, and John Porter, with William Whiteside, a man of great prudence and unquestioned bravery in Indian warfare, whom they chose commander.

They passed on the trail near the present site of Belleville, towards the Indian camps on Shoal creek, where they found three of the stolen horses grazing, which they secured. The party then, small as it was, divided into two parts of four men each, and approached the Indian camps from opposite sides. The signal for attack was the discharge of the captain's gun. One Indian, a son of Old Pecan, was killed, another mortally, and others slightly wounded, and the Indians fled, leaving their guns. Such a display of courage by the whites, and being attacked on two sides at once, made the Indians believe there was a large force, and the old chief approached the party and begged for quarter. But when he discovered his foes to be an insignificant number, and his own party numerous, he called aloud to his braves to return and retrieve their honor. His own gun he had surrendered to the whites, but now he seized the gun of the captain, and exerted all his force to wrest it from him. Captain Whiteside was a powerful man, and a stranger to fear; but he compelled the Indian to retire, deeming it dishonorable to destroy an unarmed man, who had previously surrendered.

This intrepid band was now in the heart of the Indian country, where hundreds of warriors could be rallied in a few hours' time. In this critical situation, Captain Whiteside, not less distinguished for prudence than bravery, did not long hesitate. With the horses they had recovered, they immediately started for home, without loss of time in hunting the remainder. They travelled night and day, without eating or sleeping, till they reached in safety Whiteside's station, in Monroe county. On the same night, Old Pecan, with seventy warriors, arrived in the vicinity of Cahokia. From that time, the very *name* of Whiteside struck terror amongst the Kickapoos.

Hazardous and daring as this expedition was, it met with great disapprobation from many of the settlers. Some alleged, that Old Pecan was decidedly friendly to the whites; that another party had stolen the horses; that the attack upon his camp was clandestine and wanton; and that it was the cause of

much subsequent mischief. These nice points of casuistry are difficult to be settled at this period. It has long been known, that one portion of a nation or tribe will be on the war-path, while another party will pretend to be peaceable. Hence it has been found necessary to hold the tribe responsible for the conduct of its parts.

1794. The Indians, in revenge for the attack just narrated, shot Thomas Whiteside, a young man, near the 'station,' tomahawked a son of William Whiteside, so that he died, and wounded another son that lived, all in revenge for the death of Old Pecan's son. In February, of the same year, the Indians killed Mr. Hough, one of the early settlers, while on his way to Kaskaskia.

1795. Two men at one time, and some French negroes at another time, were killed on the American bottom, and some prisoners were taken. The same year, the family of Mr. McMahan was killed and himself and daughter taken prisoners. This man lived in the outskirts of the settlement. Four Indians attacked his house in daylight, killed his wife and four children before his eyes, laid their bodies in a row on the floor of the cabin, took him and his daughter, and marched for their towns. On the second night, Mr. McMahan, finding the Indians asleep, put on their moccasins and made his escape. He arrived in the settlement, just after his neighbors had buried his family. They had enclosed their bodies in rude coffins, and covered them with earth as he came in sight. He looked upon the newly formed hillock, and raising his eyes to heaven, in pious resignation, said, 'They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.' His daughter, now Mrs. Gaskill, of Ridge prairie, was afterwards ransomed by the charitable contributions of the people.

Not far from this period, the Whitesides and others, to the number of fourteen persons, made an attack upon an encampment of Indians, of superior force, at the foot of the bluffs west of Belleville. Only one Indian ever returned to his nation to tell the story of their defeat. The graves of the rest are now to be seen, in the border of a thicket on the battle-ground. In this skirmish, Captain William Whiteside was wounded; as he thought, mortally, having received a shot in his side. As he fell, he exhorted his sons to fight valiantly, not to yield an inch of ground, nor let the Indians touch his body. Uel Whiteside, who was shot in the arm, and disabled from using the rifle, examined the wound, and found the ball had glanced along the ribs and lodged against the spine. With that presence of mind, which is sometimes characteristic of our backwoods hunters,

he whipped out his knife, gashed the skin, extracted the ball, and holding it up, exultingly exclaimed, 'Father, you are not dead!' The old man instantly jumped on his feet, and renewed the fight, exclaiming, 'Come on, boys, I can fight them yet!' Such instances of desperate intrepidity and martial energy of character, distinguished the men who defended the frontiers of Illinois in those days of peril.

The subjugation of the Indians in the Miami country, by General Wayne, in 1794, and the treaty that grew out of it the following year, brought peace to the borders of Illinois, and the settlers remained unmolested from these daily alarms. A few horses were stolen from time to time, and in 1802, Joseph Vanmeter and Alexander Dennis were killed on the American bottom, but no attack was made upon the settlements. Families again took up their abodes in the borders of the prairies; emigrants from the states clustered around them, and the cultivation of the soil was pursued without fear or interruption.

During most of the period we have gone over, these people lived under the jurisdiction of the Northwestern Territory. The administration of civil government was conducted in its most simple form; the morals of the people were pure, and much of rural simplicity and hospitality was enjoyed.

There was something peculiarly interesting in this primitive society. The grosser vices were unknown. There was but very little use for the administration of either civil or criminal laws. Ardent spirit, that outrage upon morals, social order, and religion, had been introduced but in small quantities; thefts and other crimes were extremely rare, and fraud and dishonesty in dealings, but seldom practised. The Moores, Ogles, Lemens, and other families, were of unblemished morals, and were impelled by a love of freedom to leave the banks of the Potomac, in Virginia, for a residence on the prairies of Illinois. They were opposed to slavery, and took up their long line of march for these wild regions, that they and their posterity might enjoy uninterrupted, the advantages of a country unembarrassed with slavery.

For the first eight or ten years of the period I have glanced over, the only professor of religion in the colony was a female, who had been a member of the Presbyterian church; yet the Sabbath was observed with religious consecration: The people were accustomed to assemble, sing hymns, and read a portion of scripture or a sermon. No one ventured to offer a prayer.

In 1778, James Smith, a Baptist preacher from Kentucky, whose captivity with the Indians has been narrated, visited the settlement and preached to the people. The influence of

the divine Spirit descended, and some were converted. This was the first protestant preaching, and these were the first converts, and this the first revival of religion, ever known on the banks of the 'father of waters.'

In 1790, Smith made his third visit to the country, preached several times, and other persons became anxious about their souls, amongst whom was the woman who was murdered, when he was captured. Owing to the unsettled state of the country, it was not deemed expedient to organize a church. Amongst the converts made under the preaching of Smith, were Joseph Ogle and some of his children, James Lemen, sen., their wives, and others.

In 1793, Joseph Lillard, a Methodist preacher, made a visit to the country, and attended several meetings. Some of the families embraced Methodist principles. The succeeding year, Josiah Dodge, a regular Baptist preacher, originally from Connecticut, but then from Kentucky, visited Illinois, and preached the gospel with some success. The next year he returned and baptized James Lemen, sen. and wife, John Gibbons, and Isaac Enochs. This was the first instance of the ordinance of baptism being administered by a protestant in these ends of the earth. During the same year, 1796, elder David Badgley, from Virginia, visited Illinois, and organized the Baptist church at New Design, which was the first regularly organized protestant community.

It is worthy of note, that the descendants of those early settlers whose attention was turned to religion, and for whom the Lord spread a table in the wilderness, are now worthy and respectable members of christian churches. A large majority of the Moores, Lemens, and Ogles are of this description.

In a few years, preachers of the gospel were raised up in the country, many of whom are now alive; and, notwithstanding the difficulties they had to surmount, and the privations to endure, they have been instrumental in doing much good. In those days, that minister's library was thought to be well supplied, that contained a complete copy of the Holy Scriptures, a copy of Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and Russell's Seven Sermons. There were preachers then, who taught the people in the best manner they were able, without possessing, and without the power of obtaining a *whole copy* of the word of God.

The opportunity for these pioneers to educate their children was extremely small. If the mother could read, while the father was in the corn-field, or with his rifle upon the range, she would barricade the door to keep off the Indians, gather her little ones around her, and by the light that came in from

the crevices in the roof and sides of the cabin, she would teach them the rudiments of spelling from the fragments of some old book. After schools were taught, the price of a rough and antiquated copy of Dilworth's spelling book was *one dollar*, and that dollar equal in value to *five* now!

The first school ever taught for the American settlers, was by Samuel Seely, in 1783. Francis Clark, an intemperate man, came next. This was near Bellefontaine, in 1785. After this, an inoffensive Irishman of small attainments, by the name of Halfpenny, was employed by the people for several quarters. Spelling, reading, writing, and the elements of arithmetic, were all the branches attempted to be taught, and these in a very imperfect manner.

The year 1797, was distinguished for a mortal sickness that prevailed in the settlement of New Design. A colony of one hundred and twenty-six persons, left the south branch of the Potomac, in Virginia, early in the spring, descended the Ohio by water, landed at Fort Massac, bringing their horses and wagons, with which they crossed the wilderness to New Design. The season proved uncommonly rainy; the mud was excessively deep, and frequently for miles in extent, they were obliged to wade through sheets of water. They were twenty-one days in traversing this wilderness, which is mostly a timbered region. The old settlers had been so long harassed with Indian warfare, that agriculture had been neglected, their cattle were few in number, and their stock of provisions very scanty. Their cabins usually consisted of a single room, for all domestic purposes; and though hospitality to strangers is a universal trait in frontier character, it was utterly beyond the power of the inhabitants to provide accommodations in provisions or shelter to these new comers, who arrived in a famishing, deplorable, and sickly condition. They did the best they could; a single cabin frequently containing three or four families. Their rifles could procure venison from the prairies; but the extreme rains were followed with unusual heat; they had no salt, and their meat was often in 'spoiling order,' before they could pack it from the hunting grounds to the settlement. Medical aid was procured with the greatest difficulty, and that but seldom. Under such circumstances, need it surprise the reader, that of the one hundred and twenty-six emigrants who left Virginia in the spring, only sixty-three remained at the close of summer. A little bluff had been entirely covered with newly-formed graves! They were swept off by a putrid fever, uncommonly malignant, and which sometimes did its work in a few hours. The inhabitants were healthy as usual.

The settlers inform me, that no disease like it ever appeared in the country before or since. Intelligence of this fatal sickness reached the Atlantic states, found its way into the periodical journals, and more than all other events, has produced an impression abroad, that Illinois is a sickly country; an impression wholly incorrect. Illinois, unquestionably, is as healthy a region as any western state.

In 1798, Turkey Hill settlement, in St. Clair county, was made by William Scott. His descendants are numerous and respectable in that county.

Many other interesting facts of this early period may yet be gleaned. The facts I have narrated, are of unquestionable authority, having been obtained from those who were actors in the scenes. The whole was then read at a meeting in Monroe county, to about twenty persons, whose personal knowledge embraced nearly the whole period, and such corrections made as to accord with their accounts.