



Brown County Journal

February 15, 2014

Events:

Brown County Historical
Society Dinner Meeting
March 3

Brown County Genealogical
Society Annual Meeting
March 11

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Rhonda A. Dunn

Those Enterprising Young Men

Like stories out of the life of Daniel Boone early settlers and explorers did what they could to survive and flourish. Imagine in the very earliest days of our county a young family coming to Brown County to build a new life. Imagine what they saw - dense forests which could become black as night in many areas. The easiest ways to get through a countryside like this was to travel the waterways or if you were lucky you could find a buffalo trace or a deer trail to travel along. Then you had to cut a path wide enough for your wagon with your family and personal goods. Somehow with their optimism and their dreams they didn't see this as a problem.

This land, their new home, was abundant with resources and undiscovered treasures. When they had set up their homesteads, cleared their land for farming, and put up their stores for the winter what was to come next? More and more new settlers came to be their neighbors. Each one of them brought new skills that another one might not have, but they could offer something of their own to trade. They could help each other out. This one might bring a skill as a blacksmith. That one might have brought a special new type of seed to plant that resisted drought. Another one might have found something on their land that they could share or trade with their neighbors such as salt. With these needs to be shared or traded a young man found a way to start an enterprise to improve his family's welfare.

Traders and Trappers

The earliest settlers and explorers supplemented their incomes by trapping for furs and trading them. The land was abundant with wild

animals such as mink, beaver, and fox. As communities popped up it became easier to find places to trade, stores popped up, blacksmiths set up shop, gristmills were built, and trade flourished. Men came to these trade centers to get supplies for the next trip out to the wilds. While in town they might rest a spell, catch up on the news, have a drink in the local tavern, and get some of their gear repaired at the local blacksmith.

The first known settler within the county's limits was a German immigrant by the name of Johann Schoonover. He settled along a creek which was later named for him, which was shortened to Schooner Creek. He was mostly likely there as early as 1817, but he definitely was there by 1820. Johann Schoonover owned a stock of trinkets and ammunition which he kept to trade with the Indians for their furs. Little is known of his final whereabouts, he seemed to prefer the wilds of the country and most likely moved on as the county seen more and more settlers. There were many others like him that stayed a while and then moved on.

Timbering & Wood Products

The richness of the land possessed too many inviting features to be passed up by new home seekers. The hills were clothed in a natural raiment of poplar, hickory, maple, oak, walnut, and cherry timber. Timber was very essential for building homes and barns. With the increase in settlement sawmills set





Alex Mullis - splitting shakes

up business to make lumber to build their homes, stores, and businesses. Timbering also helped to sustain many men in the stave-making business. So plentiful was timber in this area that it was put to many good uses and cutting staves to make barrels and buckets was a good income-producing occupation during this time. Barrels were used in many ways in the early days since there were no other containers present to store food and other items. Food had to be stored for long periods of time in the winter so moisture and rodents couldn't ruin their food. Another craft was the basket makers who used oak to weave their baskets for sale in the nearest towns, The Bohall family became well-known for their good and sturdy baskets which were sold far and wide. They brought their family craft with them from their home in the Appalachians

Tanneries

Timber even played an important part in the tannery business. The bark from a certain tree, the chestnut oak, has a certain component called tannin that is used to tan leather. Tanning is the process of treating skins of animals to produce leather, which is more durable and less susceptible to decomposition. Tanned leather was easier to come by in the early days because of the plentiful stock of wildlife that hides could be procured from. According to the Indiana Gazetteer for 1849 there were eight tanneries in Brown county. The tanning of leather was very profitable from the 1840s to the 1880s. One of the earliest tanneries was erected in 1839 by Jacob McNeeley in 1839 around Georgetown, now called Bean Blossom. After that a man named Nordyke operated a tannery there as well. Other tannery owners were Benjamin Huntington of Washington



John Bohall - basketmaker



James Parmalee -Tanner

township who started his tannery southeast of Nashville in the early 1840s. It was passed onto another man and then to T. S. Calvin. Calvin passed it on to Shotwell & Larkin, then to Dow Head, Carter, and others. Calvin & Mann of Van Buren township operated a rather large tannery there in the 1850s. Another well known tannery was located east of Georgetown out around Fox's Corner, This one was operated by James C. Parmalee and was known to be the most successful and one of the largest tanneries in the county. (from Goodspeed's 'County of Brown' 1884)

Salt, the Mineral of Life

With this subject leads to other naturally occurring riches which were necessary for survival, salt and other minerals. In the northern regions of the county were vast deposits of minerals left behind from the glacial period. Here were the rich deposits of magnetite, quartz, jasper, and gold. Good clays for builders and potters were found. Although, in the

early days of our county finding salt licks was more important than gold because it was a life sustaining mineral for survival.

In the western part of the county are salt springs which were famous 'licks' where herds came in large numbers to get salt from the earth. The most well known enterprise was that of a salt lick at Jackson Salt Works in the 1820s. It is believed to have been located somewhere below the Yellowwood Lake dam. The presence of salt was discovered by hunters and trappers even before this time. A man named Jackson came to this area to open up the industry of procuring the salt. He employed some six or eight men



Load of Tan Bark, ca. 1900

to help with the new enterprise. A well was sunk where a fair quantity of brine was secured and boiled down in iron kettles until a hard cake of salt was the residue. This was then pulverized and rendered fit for trade. Many came from as far as forty or fifty miles to trade for the salt. Another salt spring was also put into production to render down the salt. This one was located north of the Yellowwood Lake area and probably closer to Needmore. This one was called Howe's Salt Lick. Another salt lick was also utilized in an area somewhat closer to Nashville, just a little northeast of town. (from Goodspeed's 'County of Brown' 1884)

Land Speculators

With the new territory opening up and with prodding from the government some investors saw a way to make some money. Why not buy up some of this new land then turn around and sell it with a profit. These investors were called land speculators. There is evidence of this by comparing new land grants with the current residents. Oftentimes a land speculator only shows up in a county long enough to purchase a land grant and afterwards there is no other trace of him. He has moved in, made his investment, and turned it around to make a profit. Then he is off to the new county or territory to do it again. Some speculators had more lofty goals in mind though. They foresaw the building of a great community. Let's buy up some land and start our own little community where if we're lucky an even greater town or city might one day flourish. We'll attract business folk, store owners, blacksmith shops, liveries, and a fair amount of trade. That's what appeared to happen when Jacksonburg, now Nashville, was founded. Banner Brummet got a land grant for all of the Northwest quarter of Section 19, the whole area which is now Nashville. The town was laid out in August of 1836 and a town was founded by Banner Brummet. He immediately started selling lots for the new future town.

Grist and Sawmills

The earliest Brown County pioneers in the 1820s cut down trees to build their log cabins of necessity since there were no sawmills at that time and lumber was unobtainable. The lack of gristmills forced them to take their grain to mills in neighboring



Enoch Kennedy at McDonald's Flour Mill



Sorghum Mill

that ground grain into meal or flour. Later gristmills gradually became water driven and eventually steam-driven. (from Dorothy Bailey's research, Brown Co. Historical Society Archives).

The streams in Brown County were slow-flowing and had no significant drops in elevation so gristmills here had to be built for these conditions. Wheels were placed over a stream and were called undershot mills. The water flowed under the mill providing the power needed to make the big wheel turn. Most mills were probably pretty crude in the beginning, some just had sheds over them. Later some of the better millstones were shipped from France. Usually a dam was constructed to hold back the stream and gates were made to hold back the water for a time, The gates were then opened up to let the water come gushing through when the extra power was needed to turn the wheel and the burr stones. After the water dropped sufficiently then the gates were closed up to fill up the pond again. Some time could be spent while waiting on your grain to be ground, so one could catch up on the local news or you could spend a little time fishing to pass the day. (from Brown Co. Democrat, "Water Mills Spark Study" research by Sam Johnson, May 18, 1988)

Jonathan Fox had one of the first horse-powered mills in Washington township in 1828 as did George Grove



Boiling Down Sorghum

in Jackson township in 1835. The first water-powered mill was built in Hamblen township in 1827, the name of the owner not now known. Also in Hamblen was Eliakim Hamblen's mill built in 1838 and later William P. Taggart in 1879. Edward David ran a combined gristmill and sawmill on Salt Creek in 1830 and Benjamin Cox ran a gristmill on Greasy Creek in 1835. Other water-powered gristmills in Jackson township were Thomas Waltman, William Taylor, and Christopher Stump which ran up until the 1840s. In Van Buren township the Goss Mill was patronized in the 1830s and William Crouch's in the 1840s. One of the best functioning water mill operators was Adolph Schweitzer, a German immigrant who built one of the first near Nashville in 1857. Afterwards came Nick Petro, John Hoover, and Adam McDaniel. James Gray and James Yoder ran one as partners all in Washington township. Others that came later



Nicholas Petro Mill

It was operated by W. H. Turner and it cleaned and separated wool to spin into yarn. In 1847 it was moved to Nashville. Others who ran it were J. Phipps and Jimmy Huff. One of the best flour mills in later days was run by the Taylor family south of Nashville - John and son, Ed, Taylor.

Various other enterprises sprang up of which there were too many to mention. Several men ran flatboats down the river to transport Brown County goods to New Orleans. A family by the name of Staples brought an eyeglass making factory to Bean Blossom. America was founded on entrepreneurship. When Indiana was opened up for settlement here they came, a new land with fruit ripe for the picking. With just a little hard work and a dream these men, young and young at heart, came seeking their American dream. Brown County was no exception. We had our share of enterprising young men and women even before we officially became a county.

were Wesley Kirts, Samuel and Marion Kent, Benjamin Clark, and William Geary all operated in the 1880s Others which came later in Van Buren township near Stonehead were run by Henry St. Johns, then Charles Saffel, the Swain & Hendricks mill, and Elihu Reeves had one also. Stephen Richards' mill in Jackson township was operated later in the 1870s.

The only known carding mil in Brown County was built in the 1840s by John Hight. It was located on the west side of Salt Creek south of Nashville and was operated by a