

Peter Studebaker
THE FIRST FAMILY IN JAY COUNTY.

On the 15th day of February, 1821, Mr. Peter Studabaker and Miss Mary Simison were joined in the bonds of holy wedlock at the house of the Simison family, where Fort Recovery, now Mercer County, Ohio, now stands. The newly married pair resolved to go still farther on the frontier and hew out for themselves a home in the wilderness. So they gathered their household goods, and with several friends entered the wilds, soon striking the "Quaker Trace" leading from Richmond to Fort Wayne, which they followed until they reached the Wabash River. This spot was their destination, and upon the low bank, near the water's edge, they prepared to "camp." Cutting four forked poles, they drove one end of each into the ground, laid poles and brush across the top, and their camp was completed. A fire was kindled at one end by which the young wife cooked supper for her company — her first experience in house, or rather camp-keeping, by herself. Their simple repast was highly relished and soon dispatched, and they retired to rest, blankets spread upon the ground serving for beds. Sleep had scarcely calmed the wearied company when they were aroused by the yells of a gang of approaching wolves. Elsewhere came an answering howl, then another and another, till the forests seemed ringing with their hideous yells. The howling became so terrific, the dog sprang out and threatened to give battle, but soon came bounding back, panic stricken, and jumped upon the nuptial bed. As they lay there, so close to the bank, they could see about a dozen wolves at the water's edge on the opposite shore. Soon they heard the sharp, savage snap of wolf-teeth near their bed, and glaring eyes shone in the darkness within six feet of their camp. The men sprang from the ground in alarm, seized their rifles and fired. The howling pack fled in haste and did not return. Again the men lay down, and soon "tired nature's sweet restorer" calmed their fears, and they slept soundly till morning — perhaps dreaming of the pleasant homes and dear friends of their childhood. Thus camped and slept the first white family that ever trod the wilderness which fifteen years afterward became Jay County.

This was on the farm now owned by Samuel Hall, on the south bank of the Wabash, at New Corydon, Soon Mr. S. built a cabin, "all of the olden time," and into it they moved, with the naked earth for a floor. This cabin, the first home of that now widely known pioneer family — a rude hut twelve by sixteen, of small round logs, with clapboard roof held on by "weight poles," — was the first civilized dwelling ever erected in our county. Unbroken forests were on every hand; no house within fifteen miles — no mill or store in thirty-five. Their only companions were Indians — their only foes were wolves. These animals, always annoying by their constant howling, were often very troublesome. It was next to impossible to raise stock of any kind. Once a wolf came up to the house in open daylight, to attack a calf, when Mrs. S. appeared, and it ran off. At other times they were still bolder. One night a pack attacked the hogs. Mr. S. went out with his gun, his wife holding a torch while he shot at them five times, but without effect, and they came still nearer, snapping their teeth almost within reach. They seemed bent on an attack, and the entreaties of his wife prevailed on him to go into the house.

Mr. Studabaker obtained a livelihood in various ways — principally by hunting. His delight was- to be in the wilderness, beyond the reach of society and its innovations. He loved the quiet grandeur of the forest, and the excitement of hunting deer, squirrels, otters, wild ducks, wolves and bears, possessed to him irresistible charms. The game he killed furnished meat for his table in abundance, and of the rarest kind. But they had other sources of income. Even at that early day many travelers passed along the "Quaker Trace," and they all stopped to enjoy the hospitality of these pioneers. In fact, at that time it was rather a matter of necessity, as the distance in either direction to any other house was a day's travel. The "Quaker Trace" was so called because it was opened and traveled by the Quakers of Wayne County, on their way to Fort Wayne market.

Mr. S. sometimes traded provisions to the Indians for furs, and by selling the furs added something to his income. An incident of this kind is worth relating. In the fall of 1821, Mr. S. and Thomas Robinson, who then lived on the "Prairie," in what is now Adams County, went to Greenville and got some flour, and bringing it to the Wabash, dug out a large canoe and started down the river, to sell their flour to the Miami Indians, in a town at the mouth of the Mississippi — one hundred miles by the river route, and a few miles above Peru, Miami County, Indiana. Easily and rapidly they glided down the smooth waters of the Wabash. In the afternoon of the second day they came in sight of the town. They soon saw that the Indians were on a desperate "spree," and

were dancing, singing, yelling and fighting. They wisely concluded it would not be safe to visit the town that night; so they rowed up the river a short distance, anchored their canoe, went ashore and camped for the night. The next day they went down towards the town. Robinson staid (sic) with the canoe, while Studabaker went to negotiate a sale of the flour. The first Indian he met was a squaw, named "Big Knife," with whom he was well acquainted. She told him they had had a terrible time the night before, and that in the fighting several Indians had been killed, and that they were then all in their huts, sleeping off the effects of their revelry. He inquired if any of the men were sober. She replied that one was, and offered to conduct him to the hut where that Indian slept. On their way through the village, which seemed almost deserted, they passed by a young Indian who was lying with his stomach ripped open, and part of his entrails lying upon the ground, but still alive. They went and aroused the sober Indian, who, after much painting and ornamenting, went with Mr. Studabaker to the canoe. On their way they passed the wounded Indian. A squaw was sitting by his side, weeping, replacing the entrails, and with an awl and deer's sinew was sewing up the horrible wound. The Indian looked at the flour, and pointing to the sun and the western sky, said that when the sun reached such a place the Indians would get hungry and come and buy. At the appointed time this sober Indian came down to the canoe, followed by the others, each of whom purchased a small quantity of flour. Our adventurers then returned, occupying about three days in their slip-stream rowing. Thus the family endured very many severe hardships during their stay at this point on the Wabash.

So the first families who settled in each section of the county endured privations and trials which would have overwhelmed others less patient, energetic and travel. To the comfortably situated residents at the present time these trials seem almost incredible. Here is a leaf from the life of Mary Studabaker:

Late in the autumn of 1822, the Indians, as they were sometimes in the habit of doing, stole two colts — one from Mr. Studabaker, and one from his brother-in-law, John Simison. In the early part of winter Simison came to Studabaker's, and the two men set out for Wapakoneta, Ohio, in search of the colts among the Indians of that country. Before leaving, Mr. Studabaker hired a boy from the settlement to stay with his wife, who then had a babe only three months old, to cut the wood and build fires. The men had been gone scarcely an hour when this boy proved treacherous, and left Mrs. Studabaker and her child entirely alone. This placed her in an alarming situation. Her husband expected to be absent nearly a week; the weather was very cold, and she had no wood and but little strength. She was fifteen miles from any neighbors, in a wilderness full of roving gangs of Indians and wolves. The prospect was a dreary one. She saw her dangerous situation, and with heroic fortitude resolved to do her utmost to save herself and child. She devoted herself assiduously to chopping wood and building fires. Quite naturally she sought the kinds of wood which would chop the easiest, and sometimes cut "buckeye," the poorest of all wood. This made it difficult to keep good fires; but she managed to get along without suffering much, except from loneliness, until the fifth day, when the weather turned extremely cold. All this time had passed, and she had not seen a human being. Even the sight of an Indian would have gladdened her heart. This day she built a fire, but it would not burn. She chopped more wood and piled the great fire-place full; but all in vain. To use her own words, "it seemed to be, as it is said to be in Greenland sometimes, too cold for the fire to burn." Disheartened and despairing, as her last hope, she took her babe and went to bed. Here they must lie until assistance came, or freeze to death! But the kind care of an ever-watchful Father in Heaven was upon her. In about two hours Mr. Studabaker came home, bringing the stolen colt. He soon built a large, comfortable, crackling fire. How great was her joy at this very opportune rescue!

Mrs. Studabaker gives the following account of the survey of this part of Indiana by the government surveyors. In the winter of 1821 and 1822 James Worthington, of Columbus, Ohio, son of Governor Worthington, accompanied by nine assistants, came to Mr. Studabaker's, and made their home with him during the three months occupied in making the survey. Having two sets of instruments, they operated in two distinct companies, and surveyed the territory now making the counties of Jay, Adams and ___. They gave Mr. Studabaker a plat of their survey, which was very useful to the early settlers for many years. About forty rods below Hall & Arnett's mill, at New Corydon, is a tree on which many dates have been cut, and among others the figures "1822." They are now grown up, so as to be barely visible, and have every appearance of having been put there at that time. It is quite likely the work of the government surveyors.

The first person born in Jay County was Abram Studabaker. He was born in the little cabin on the Wabash, September 29th, 1822, a child of the wilderness — the first born of the family and of the county. His life was but a blossom, having died March nth, 1824, at Fort Recovery. Another son was afterward given the same name.

Mr. Studabaker moved to the Wabash with the intention of making that his permanent home ; but the frequent overflows of the river at that time discouraged him, and finally led him to move away. One evening in the spring of 1822 several travelers stopped to stay all night. The Wabash was quite high, but not unusually so. Mrs. Studabaker made a bed on the floor, in which the travelers retired to rest. In the night, one of them thought he felt rather "moist," and on turning over found the puncheons were floating. They got up; one went up in the "loft," and the other concluded to nap the rest of the night away on the logs of wood by the fire place. But the family, being more fortunate, were on a bedstead, and slept there until morning, when they found all the puncheons except the two on which the bedposts rested, floating about the room. Mr. Studabaker waded out and brought his canoe into the house, and took his family to dry land in the woods, where they camped until the water went down, which was in four or five days. In this way the Wabash overflowed the land about his cabin, and he moved back to Fort Recovery, having lived in Jay County about two years.

Mary Studabaker has been a pioneer all her life. She was born March 16th, 1796, in Sherman Valley, Penn. At the age of two years her father, John Simison, moved to Kentucky and settled within six miles of Lexington. Residing there six years, they moved to Warren County, Ohio. After living there ten or twelve years, they moved to Greenville, and from there, in the spring of 1817, to Fort Recovery. There was not a single family living in the region of the Upper Wabash. They were the first pioneers of Fort Recovery — that place so celebrated in history as the scene of St. Clair's defeat, and Mary was afterward of Jay, and still later of the south part of Adams County. There was a trading house then at Fort Recovery, built by David Connor. It was about twelve feet square, and surrounded by pickets — logs set in the ground reaching about eight feet high — as a protection against the Indians. Into this house John Simison and family moved. Mr. Simison farmed the ground upon which the town is now built, while his boys did the hunting. He raised most of the living for the family, but had to go to Greenville to find a store and mill. He had a hand mill, and sometimes ground on that.

It was while living here that the Treaty was made with the Indians, October 6th, 1818. Dr. Perrinie, of Greenville, attended that meeting. Starting in the morning, on foot, he expected to reach Simison's that evening; but night overtook him while he was in what is now Madison Township. Finding he must camp out, he was much alarmed lest the wolves should devour him. Coming upon a much broken tree-top, he set about building a camp that would protect him. Out of the broken limbs he built a very small, oval-shaped pen, leaving a hole at the bottom. Into this he crept, and drew a stick, prepared for the purpose, into the hole after him, thus effectually blocking all entrance. Curling up there, he slept soundly. Sometime after this Thomas Robinson settled beside Mr. Simison — then soon moved to Adams County. But sorrow was in store for this family. Mrs. Simison died in September, 1820, and on the last day of that ever-memorable year, she was followed by her husband. His burial took place on New Year's day, 1821. Thomas Robinson and Peter Studabaker happened to be there at the time of his death, and making a rough box which had to answer for a coffin, they buried their pioneer friend. But for the fortunate presence of these men, none beside the mourning orphans would have been there to perform the last sad offices for the lamented dead.

In a few weeks Mary was married, and entered upon her brief life of trials in Jay County. After moving back to Fort Re- ...about twelve years, when he moved to Adams County, where he died June 15th, 1840. He was born in 1790, in Moreland County, Pennsylvania. Mary now lives with her son Abram, in Adams County, Indiana, in a log house, with one of those great old-fashioned cabin fire places, which so abundantly dispense warmth and cheerfulness to the inmates. It is about sixty feet from the river, upon the banks of which she has lived since her childhood days, nearly half a century. By the side of its quiet waters she was wooed and won, and has devotedly braved many dangers, reared a large family, and followed her husband and several children to the silent tomb. She is now seventy-four years of age, and though in feeble health, her mind still retains its original vigor. Strong common sense, quick perception and good judgment are her characteristics. Indeed, without these Equalities,

she could not have passed through so rugged and eventful a life. Her son, Hon. David Studabaker, has resided for many years in Decatur, Indiana, where he has been, and still is, I a prominent attorney. He has represented that county in the I Legislature of the State, and was for four years the State Senator I from that district composed of the counties of Jay, Adams and Wells, in which position he sustained himself with credit.

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