

ELKHORN PRAIRIE

Elkhorn P rairie was the name given to a very large prairie of unknown extent. It surely was the name given to all the land surrounding the headwaters of the Elkhorn Creek. Elkhorn Creek rises south of Oakdale in Sec.23, flows in a northerly direction where it is joined in Sec. 14 by another branch which arose in Sec. 21. Together they flow northward being joined in Sec. 11 by a branch from the northeast where it began in Sec.32 in Nashville Township. It then continues on in a westerly direction into Sec.4 when it again turns in a northerly direction into Plum Hill Twp. thence onward in a wandering manner until it enters the Kaskaskia River in Sec. 30 in Venedy Township.

Facts gleaned from Brink's History of Washington County and from other records give Elkhorn Prairie as the location of early settlers. William Rountree settled in Elkhorn Prairie, near the present site of Elkton in 1818. John Maney settled on the edge of Elkhorn Prairie in 1822 on what is known as the Thomas Klene farm. The Elkhorn Presbyterian Church (the fore-runner of the Nashville Presbyterian Church) was built on Sawyer's Point in 1822. William Ayers settled on Elkhorn Creek in what is now Oakdale in 1823. The Elkhorn Covenanter Church was built in what is now called the Oakdale Cemetery in 1835. The ground where the Venedy Mine is located was owned in 1833 by Joseph Kinyon and is spoken of as being in Elkhorn Prairie. Land owned by the Kennedy family near Lively Grove was also spoken of as being in Elkhorn Prairie. No doubt the prairie fire which overtook George McNair and Robert Kelso in Nov. 1838 as they returned to their homes between Cordes and Oakdale from Nashville was in the Elkhorn Prairie.

It is claimed that the branches of the Elkhorn Creek remind one of the branches of an elk's antlers, therefore the name Elkhorn Prairie was given to the vast prairie drained by this creek.

OLD TRAILS AND EARLY SETTLERS

Before Elkhorn Prairie was settled by the white man it was the home of an abundance of buffalo, deer, rabbits, squirrels, possums, quail, prairie chicken, wild turkey and many small animals and birds. Fish were to be had in the streams for the taking.

Large areas of the higher ground, more remote from the creeks were covered with a tall coarse grass which grew wild, as tall as a man's head. Along the creeks and their tributaries on the lower and hillier land grew a heavy stand of oak, hickory, ash, elm, locust, birch, walnut, mulberry, persimmon, wild cherry, cedar trees and many other nut or berry bearing bushes grew in abundance.

Herds of buffalo and deer made trails from feeding area to feeding area, crossing the creeks at easily accessible places which were also close to "salt licks" or places where salt had accumulated in soft sand stone.

Indian tribes roamed over the prairie hunting, but they usually camped on an elevation overlooking a stream. Such places still yield many artifacts, such as various types of arrow heads, skinners, skin scrapers, awls and axes. When the first settlers came

to Elkhorn Prairie, there were not many Indians to be found, a few of the Kaskaskia, Tamaroas and Shawnees who were not warlike and had gotten along well with the French traders at Kaskaskia. However they did not like to see the Scotch Irish come in with the intent to plow up the prairie to farm. We are told in the HISTORY of 1879 that a half dozen Shawnee Indians and David Wells, a Baptist minister helped William Rountree build his first log house near Elkton in 1818, when he was forced by sickness of his family to stop as he was on his way back to Kentucky from Clinton County where he had settled in 1816. Because so many of his family had died and he had lost his cattle with "milk sickness" from eating poisonous weeds, he started back to Kentucky but never went farther than Elkton.

Indian hunters followed the buffalo trails as they hunted or migrated from place to place. Later as scouts came through the Illinois Territory, they too followed these trails on their horses. Before the early settlers came to the prairies, the early French settlers had established trails across the land from one river settlement to another. They followed across the prairies where they could, and cut down trees where the path led through the forest areas. Soon there were trails from Kaskaskia to Vincennes, from Kaskaskia to Detroit, from Kaskaskia to St. Louis and from St. Louis to Shawneetown.

Three of these old French Trails crossed the area which later became Elkhorn Precinct. The Kaskaskia-Detroit Trail passed through Tilden in a northeast direction passing through the Frances Karg farm in Lively Grove Township, passing on in a northeast direction through the John Reinhardt farm in the Elkton area, then on through Danville, Illinois and on to Detroit. The Kaskaskia-Vincennes Trail passed through Sparta, leaving Randolph County just south of Coulterville, crossed the northwest corner of Perry County, crossed Mud Creek almost where the blacktop road crosses today, going on in a northeast direction through the farm of Lawrence Hood, entering the village of Oakdale beside Leo Stearn's home and on down the cut in the hill to the famous "Meadow-in-the-Hole" of French times, up the east side of the former Decker Shop, passed north of Mrs. McLean's barn which contains the old store built by Oakdale's first resident, William Ayers. The trail led on past the old log post office which stood where John Brammeier's red granary and shed now stand, and on northeast, crossing Locust Creek near the Locust Creek Cemetery and on through Nashville.

The Shawneetown-St. Louis Trail has three routes given, one passing through Tilden, Coulterville and Pinckneyville. Another is through Lively Grove, Elkton and coming into Oakdale about where Ray Kirkpatrick's home stands, joining the Kaskaskia-Vincennes Trail just northeast of Leo Stearn's home. It followed the other trail until it passed the old post office, then turned southeast along the old road between the elevator and the railroad station when it was used as a station. It continued eastward over the Pilot Knob Hill just a little south of the blacktop road, then on to Pinckneyville.

When Col. George Rogers Clark was sent to capture Kaskaskia and Vincennes in 1779, he followed this old trail because it followed mostly on high ground and avoided the branches and rivers

where they were deepest and most treacherous.

Archer Hubert, who studied BOWMAN'S JOURNAL concludes that on "eighth day of February 1779 enroute from Kaskaskia to Vincennes, Clark and his men were out of Randolph County, through the northwest corner of Perry County and finally gained the prairie south of Oakdale, Washington County, at which point Elkhorn Creek was crossed at the famous 'Meadow-in-the-Hole' of old French days. This region was also known as Corne-de-Cerf, Elkhorn Prairie, Elkhorn Point, and Ayers Point. Prairie, forest, and bottom land were not far apart here. The 'Meadow-in-the-Hole' was a singular little meadow, fifty or sixty yards wide, located on a 'dry branch' of the Elkhorn and thirty feet lower than the surrounding forests at what is now Oakdale,"¹

No doubt all the early settlers mentioned later, came along this trail. Since Mr. Ayers was situated on two trails, he carried on a trading post as well as farming. Seemingly he prospered for soon he built for himself a finer house and used the original log-cabin as a trading post where travelers were fed and lodged.

The St. Louis Trail was often used by people hauling produce or provisions to and from St. Louis. Elkton also was well situated for growth in the early days. It lay along the St. Louis-Shawneetown Trail, about half way between two port towns. Farmers who drove their cattle to the St. Louis market, found it necessary to stop over night to feed and rest their cattle. Pens and shelters were built to care for the cattle and the farmers found food and lodging in the hotel kept by Henry Schaefer. I found in an old 'Scrap Book' kept by Mr. John Piper that Mr. Schaefer was the first person to drive across the Fayetteville Bridge when it replaced the Ferry. (This was from a paper issued June 6, 1883.)

The following items taken from various parts of the HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, ILLINOIS by Brink, McDonough & Co. 1879. (I find that it depends on which part of the book you read just when things happened.)

As already stated William Rountree, Sr. after losing part of his family and much of his cattle in Clinton County, started back to Kentucky, but because of family sickness was forced to remain in Elkton, settled there in 1818.

"Rev. David Wells and William Rountree were ministers of the Baptist faith and they preached to the settlers previous to 1820. At that time an organization was formed at the Rountree's". p.18

"A post office was established by Thomas Hird in 1850 at Ayers Point, now Oakdale. The first postmaster of Elkhorn Post Office was Isaac Perlie."

1. Archer, Hubert, HISTORIC HIGHWAYS OF AMERICA, VOL. 8 MILITARY ROADS OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY, THE CONQUEST OF THE NORTH WEST

"In May 1830, Archibald and John Hood, James and Thomas McClurkin and James Kirkpatrick from South Carolina settled in the precinct. They located in and around Ayers Point. In 1833 they were followed by John and David McClurkin and John Donnelly. They were followed in after years by several families of the same faith."

"The first church built in the precinct was on Sec. 21 in 1835. by the Covenanters, and was the first brick church in the county. Near this church was located the first cemetery, and the first burial in the cemetery was that of a child of A. McClurkin."

A school house was built on the farm of John Hood, Sec. 28, about 1834 or 35. It was a small log building, and J. J. McClurkin was the first teacher.

"The first steam-mill was put up by James and A. McClurkin about the year 1836. It was a flouring and saw-mill. It burned down in 1842, and was not rebuilt. The first plows and iron mold-boards used in the precinct were made of the old boiler and iron from this mill by William Morrison and William Ardrey."

Of Elkton, the history reports:

"The first mill was owned by Greenville Rountree, which was a saw and grist mill combined, and was on the Elkhorn Creek and operated by water power."

"The first blacksmith was Linville Rountree."

"The first school house was located where Elkton now is, about two years before Elkton was laid out, and George Talbot was the first teacher."

"The first store was opened and carried on in the residence of William Rountree by H. H. Talbot in 1835."

"Elkton was laid out by Henry H. Talbot and James Steel, Jr., in 1837 on Sec. 5-Township 3 Range 4 West. There are now three general stores, kept by J. Blum, August Fisher, and Henry Dunkhorst. The latter is also postmaster. There is one harness shop, two blacksmith shops, a hotel kept by Henry Schaefer.

The physicians are Dr. R. E. Vernor and Dr. S. F. Wehr.

There are two churches, the Lutheran and Union Church."

"ELKTON LODGE NO. 453 I.O.O.F.

was organized on the 10th day of October 1871. The charter members were: M. Fox, R. B. Klane, H. F. Dahncke, Henry Bollmeier, E. Hulseman, and H. Hahne. The hall was built in 1873, and is owned by the lodge. The present officers are: David Luke, N.G.; John Miller, V.G. 1 George Hendricks, R. Sec.; Aug. Fisher, F. Sec.; Trustees: Dr. S. F. Wehr, L. Hansotte, A. S. Muller, J. T. Laney and William Laney."

About Oakdale, the history said:

"This town is located on Section 14, Twp. 3, Range 4. It was laid out in 1867 by David McClay, James B. McClurkin, John McAfee, and S.D. McClurkin under the name of James McClurkin & Company. The company owned a store and carried on merchandising for one year in the old Ayers building. In the latter part of 1867, Steel and McCleish opened a general store. They were followed in 1868 by Gormley & Co., and a drug store by J.R. Morrison & Co."

(Ray Kirkpatrick tells us that Gormely & Co. bought out the McCleish Store and that Ardrey bought out Gormley some time before 1877 when we find that Mr. R.G. Ardrey owned the store and was operating the post office which had been reopened.)

"There are also two blacksmith and wagon shops, and one shoe maker."

"The physicians are Dr. A.D. Leavens, Dr. J.R. Keady and Dr. Arnett."

"In 1867, James McAfee & Co. built a brick flouring mill, and it is now operated by J. Burns and R. Guthrie. The mill does a large custom business."

"There are two churches in the place. The first was built in 1867 by the Covenanters. The second was built in 1878 by the United Presbyterian Congregation."

With these facts from THE HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, from clippings carefully kept in old "Scrap Books", from family history and traditions as well as articles written by former residents and published in either Nashville or Coulterville papers, from Abstract of Titles, from interviews with present or former residents of the Oakdale Township, we have attempted to assemble a short history of our township.

We have had access to Scrap books kept by Mrs. Rebecca Hood, Mrs. Robert Smith, Mrs. Thomas McLean, Mrs. Anna Boyd, The Murray Family, Mr. John Piper and Book of Genealogical Research kept by members of the Will Auld Family. We have also had access to a Research Paper by Mrs. Nelda Robb. We have been given access to old school records and Washington County Blue Books by Mr. Kenneth Frieman, Co. Supt. of Schools, also by Mr. Thomas Dahncke, Principal of Oakdale School. Mrs. Molly Kinyon Rezba and her husband Charles have been helpful in furnishing early Elkton history as well as information about the cemetery. Stuart Carson also helped us locate the McLean School and gave other information about the cemetery. Mrs. Dalton Rohde, Sr. and her daughter Elizabeth gave us valuable information about the Elkton Churches. Lawrence Hood had a wealth of material which he had been accumulating by research and interviews over the past ten years. Mrs. Harold Auld also furnished information about various organizations in the community.

We wish to give a sampling of life as it was lived, to show some of the hardships, with some of the good times these people had. Assembled and typed by Claudine Coulter.

POST-RIDERS

From a Research Paper prepared by Mrs. Nelda Robb on the Oakdale Community, we have this information of early days:

"An early development which was established during the period of territorial government in Illinois, dated by Boggess from 1809-1818, was a kind of "pony express" mail system similar in many respects to the celebrated one across the Mississippi in the "Old West". In the beginning the post rider traveled the well known trails and left mail, if there was any, at certain designated spots, such as hollow trees or rocky crevices along the way. In Washington County there were no rocky out-croppings to speak of and hollow trees were not always convenient. Thus, it became the practice of the settlers, possibly on agreement with proper authorities in Kaskaskia, to establish a regular place for such mail deposit. If there was no convenient tree, one was cut and set into the ground as a post, and a hole was hollowed out about the right height for a man on horseback to reach. Into this hollow the "Post rider" as he became known placed an earthen jug or leather pouch containing any mail for any pioneer that lived in the area of the post. The settlers came at their convenience and looked through the mail, seeking any that might be for them. If there was a newspaper of any kind which probably came from the East, at least in the earliest post period, it was read and carefully folded and replaced in the pouch for the next visitor to the post to learn the news.

Mrs. Lavina Anderson Sterrett who writes of the Oakdale of her early life, states: "In southern Washington County, Illinois, there were posts at Lively Grove, Elkton, Ayers Point, Mud Creek, Pilot Knob and Three Mile...early settlers received mail as soon as possible, by these faithful post riders, who braved many hardships in order to fulfill their obligations to their government and to its people."

Mrs. Sterrett also gives some explanation for some of the movement of pioneers into the vicinity of Oakdale.

"Among the earliest settlers in the immediate vicinity of Oakdale were many Scotch Irish who migrated from South Carolina. Probably chief among the reasons for migrating from South Carolina was the increase of slavery, with the resulting change in industrial and social conditions. These changes meant that in order to survive and prosper it was necessary to change from the small family farm to the large plantation type farm and society. People of the stricter Presbyterian faith could not change without the necessity of owning slaves and in 1829 the church demanded of all her members that they free their slaves if they owned any. There was also another motive prompting migration. Not all Scotch Irish had prospered and they felt some disgrace because of their poverty when they compared themselves with their neighbors. Here then was an opportunity for them to sell their holdings to the land hungry planter for a good price and move with others to Illinois where land could be purchased in smaller acreages at a most reasonable price.

The Act (that of April 24, 1820) provided that after July 1, 1820, no credit whatever should be given to the purchasers of public lands; that land might be sold in either sections, half-sections, quarter-sections, or eighth-sections; that the minimum price should be reduced from two dollars to one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre; and that reverted lands should be offered at auction before being offered at private sale. 1

In 1817 the Rev. Samuel Wylie, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and of the Philadelphia Seminary and a licensed minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church came west to investigate the possibility of finding a desirable place for members of his faith to settle in slave free territory. All summer he toured Southern Illinois, on up to St. Louis from Kaskaskia, then through Southern Missouri and back through Southern Illinois in the fall, to Kentucky and Tennessee where there were settlements of Covenanters and thence back to Chester County in South Carolina. He apparently took back a favorable report because shortly after this migration to Illinois through Tennessee increased rapidly and Rev. Wylie was sent to Southern Illinois to minister to his people there.

These people in South Carolina understood that Edward Cole, the second governor of Illinois had put down all forces which had attempted to amend the state's new constitution so that slavery might be legal. Mr. Cole was a well educated man, a Virginian, a former secretary to President Madison and a man who could not respect himself until he had freed his own slaves.

These early settlers migrated from South Carolina in groups of the same family or of friends or relatives. At one time there were two groups of these settlers started to Illinois about the same time. Each wanted to get to Illinois first to get the pick of the land. The wagon train in which two Hood families traveled rested and probably held services among themselves on the Sabbath. The other train traveled every day during the week. It got to be a sort of game. While the Sabbath keeping group camped the other group passed them, but later in the week the train the Hoods traveled with overtook and passed the competing group. This happened week after week but each time the Sabbath keeping group passed the other train earlier in the week until no train passed them on their day of rest and they won by gaining Illinois first.

1. Arthur C. Bogess, THE SETTLEMENT OF ILLINOIS, 1778-1830, Chicago Historical Society's Collection, Vol. V Chicago 1908 p.136

Of these two wagon trains, most families settled around Sparta, Eden, Coulterville or Mariassa. But five families pressed further on. These were Archibald Hood, and his wife and child, his widowed brother John and two children, the James McClurkin family, the Thomas McClurkin family and the James Kirkpatrick family. These people arrived on the west edge of Elkhorn Prairie just a few miles from Ayers Point and made their final camp in May 1830 after six weeks journey from South Carolina. Here they decided to make their new homes close to the Kaskaskia-Vincennes Trail. In 1833 they were followed by the John and David McClurkin and John Donnelly families. As their custom had long been they banded into a praying society which met in their homes as they read their Bibles and sang psalms. The Rev. Samuel Wylie who now lived where Eden is today, found time to go among these people to lead them in their worship and to encourage them.

This migration continued to Illinois and to Washington County particularly around Ayers Point settlement throughout the eighteen thirties and into the forties. These early settlers first built log cabins, quickly constructed from the readily available logs, in which they could also hold worship services until they could build a church, then they soon built a log school house. The first school in the Oakdale area was built on the farm of John Hood in Section 28, about 1834 or 1835.

Lavina Anderson Sterrett contributed the following in the Nashville Journal some years ago concerning Ayers Point.

"Thrifty Germans came filtering from Chicago and St. Louis. East of Ayers Point land was settled by Carsons, McClays, McCloys, Torrens, Bealls, Luneys, Boyds, Baileys and others. Billy Auld chose Pilot Knob for his first location.

Southward were Wylies, McClurkins, Adams, Klenes, Swanwicks and Edgars. Westward were the Kemps, Ramsey, Beattys, Hoods, Hibbards, McAfees, Pipers, etc. James Auld found a hill that suited him where he stayed to raise his family. His brother Billy, left Pilot Knob and moved to join farms with James.

James and John McAfee found the clay made fine brick so they built brick houses for themselves and for the Elkhorn Covenant Church. They also made brick for use in many buildings in the Elkton village."

"After the war some army pals started a store near Ayers Point. They were: David Wylie, Archibald Hood, Thomas P. Anderson and David McClurkin. They nicknamed their place Stag Town. When they went West, Mr. Steele and Mr. McCleish had stores. Later Mr. Steele started a store in Evans, Colorado. James Torrens went there to clerk for him.

PRAIRIE FIRES

The following was copied from the HISTORY OF WASHINGTON CO. printed in 1879. Brink, McConough & Co. p.18

"A peculiar characteristic of the early settlers all over Southern Illinois as well as Washington County was to settle in or near timber. One very obvious reason for this was that the country and especially the prairies at that time were so badly infested with the "greenhead fly" that it was impossible for stock at some seasons of the year, to live at any distance from the shade. Instances of the death of horses, from the annoyance of these pest, are by no means rare.

Another consideration, was to get out of reach of the prairie fires, that were of common occurrence in the autumn. The prairies were covered with tall pampas or prairie grass, often of sufficient height to completely hide from view horses and cows. When the grass became dry, in the fall of the year, and by accident got fired, the devouring element swept everything before it. The prairie fire, when the wind is blowing a gale presents a scene peculiarly fascinating, and terrifically sublime.

In the month of November 1838, George McNair and Robert Kelso, two farmers residing about eight miles south-west of Nashville, came to Nashville to the mill in a wagon made of wood alone, drawn by oxen. On their way home that evening they traveled by the Sparta Road, either side of which was skirted by a prairie covered by tall prairie grass, very thick upon the ground. They drove along chatting gaily, totally unconscious of the terrible danger that threatened them, and that was fast closing in upon them. Hearing an unusual noise, they turned in the direction from which it came, and behold what appeared to be a vast ocean of fire, whose red billows, were leaping high in the heavens, sweeping irresistibly onward in its course.

McNair, who was a native of the Emerald Isle, with that poetic nature peculiar to his nationality, stood for a few moments gazing admiringly wrapped with astonishment and awe at the grandeur and sublimity of the scene, but he was soon brought to a consciousness of the danger that threatened him and his companion. His first impulse was to run to a creek about half a mile distant, whither he started, with a swiftness urged on by the hope of life, or fear of death. He had proceeded but about one hundred yards when the fire overtook him. He had a heavy wool hat and woollen clothing. He pulled the hat over his eyes, and attempted to run through the fire. He said that he did not know where to run to. His hat protected his face and eyes, but his hands were so badly burned that he could not feed himself for several weeks. It left its traces on him by drawing his hands out of shape, leaving ugly scars.

Kelso protected himself by the wagon, and escaped any dangerous injuries."

Note on the above story by Lawrence Hood: George McNair lived about a mile north-east of Oakdale on what was later known as the Coulter farm and Robert Kelso lived on the farm

known as the John Wisely farm beside the railroad lake. Robert Kelso entered the SW NW & NW SW Sec. 7 T. 3 S. - R. 3 W. on Oct. 10, 1837. This land was held in the Kelso family until about 1908. George McNair entered NW NE Sec. 13, T. 3 S. - R. 4 W. on May 16, 1838. In July 4, 1840 he entered NE NE Sec. 13 T. 3 S. - R. 4 W. He sold to his son David in February 1862. It was sold to S. L. Coulter Sept. 6, 1870. It is still held by the Coulter family.

These men are buried in the north-west corner of the Oakdale Cemetery about 20 feet apart. George McNair died July 30, 1862 and Robert Kelso died March 1872 at the age of 72 years.

WASHINGTON COUNTY MEN IN THE BLACK-HAWK WAR

The Washington County History by Brink, relates that a group of 50 men from Washington County fought in the Black-Hawk War of 1832. Among these were Lawrence Hood's Great-grand-father, John Hood and John Wood of Oakdale, Lorenzo D. Livesay, Smauel K. Anderson and Robert Burns of Nashville and M. G. Faulkner of Irvington.

They were all mounted, each man furnishing his own horse, gun, ammunition, clothing, etc. and their provisions until they arrived at Beardstown, Ill., the place of rendezvous, where they joined the Brigade commanded by the gallant General Henry.

John D. Wood was elected Orderly Sergeant, subsequently appointed Adjutant and afterwards elected Major of the Regiment.

CHOLERA - SPOTTED FEVER

As far as I can find out there was only one death from cholera in the Oakdale community. She was Mrs. Elizabeth McClelland, wife of James McClelland. They had returned from a trip to St. Louis the day before she died, which was on August 28, 1852. She was 41 years old.

Her husband had to bury her himself. Neighbors would bring pots of coffee to the lane but all were afraid of the cholera. Besides her husband she left two daughters, Martha age 11 years and Elizabeth age 9 years. Martha later married Robert Smith, one of the early blacksmiths of Oakdale. Elizabeth married Eugene Wilson, who was killed when the Oakdale Mill blew up on August 21, 1883.

At the time of Mrs. McClelland's death, the family lived on what was later known as the Hy. Lubberstadt farm, located about one half mile southeast of the Oakdale Cemetery. Stuart Carson now owns the farm.

The plague also struck hard in Elkton and was called Spotted Fever. Rhoda Rountree died here on April 8, 1862 leaving a small baby. In later years Phillip Reuter lost five children, two dying in one day. A son, Gustav, survived but was stricken with blindness. The mother was thought to be dead and was being prepared for burial when a faint pulse was noticed. She recovered and lived to care for her blinded baby and four other children were born to this couple, Henry, Walter, Waltena and Edward.

Mrs. Reuter lived about forty years after this sickness, death came in 1915.