

TWO CHAPTERS OF EARLY JEFFERSON COUNTY HISTORY

The following sketch of his early life in Jefferson county, by Mr. O. Van Hosford long-time farmer and one-time treasurer of the county, was read at the 1931 old settlers reunion in Oskaloosa. It is followed by a communication from him giving a chapter on Stonehouse and Wildhorse.

I was born in Ohio in 1848, but the family moved from there to Iowa during the fall of 1852. After living there for three years, we came on to Kansas, arriving in August, 1855. The trip from Iowa to Kansas was made in a spring wagon with a team of horses, in which the family rode, and another drawn by an ox team. A cow was tied to the rear of this wagon.

We arrived at what is known as Round Grove in October of 1855, and as soon as Father could get men to work cutting the logs, we started to build a cabin. This was built and covered about the time winter set in, but it was not chinked and daubed, so that fall the family filled the cracks with hay. Mother had some rag carpets, a tent, and a wagon sheet, and we lined the inside of the cabin with these. The cabin had no floors, but at least the cold wind could not blow up through the cracks. There were holes cut for a window and a door, but we had neither window panes nor a door. Mother used a piece of carpet for the door, and a blanket to cover the window. You must remember that the winter of '55 and '56 was one of the most severe known in Kansas, but we had no fireplace; The only thing we had to keep us warm was a cooking stove. Many times when we rose we found the floor (or ground) covered with snow, and we had to sweep a path to the stove before we built the fire.

It was in the fall of 1855 that the border ruffians had planned the sack of Lawrence. About the first of November of that year, one Captain Harvey of Kickapoo, with a company of about sixty Kickapoo Rangers, started for Lawrence to do the job. They were armed with long, muzzle-loading, squirrel rifles, and they had with them two brass cannon, one called the "Old Kickapoo," and another. The former is now in the capital at Topeka. The outfit claimed that they had with them more whiskey than ammunition, and, judging by their achievements, I think this was quite probably true. Butternut trousers and coats, with red flannel shirts, made up their uniform.

The first night out of Kickapoo, the Rangers camped on a claim adjoining that of my father; and the next morning they went out on the prairie to fight a sham battle. Afterward they continued on toward Lawrence, camping north of the river. Then there blew up a cold November storm, and as they had no camp equipment, and the whiskey was getting low, they were whipped without so much as a shot from the Yankees. A few days later we saw them straggling back. All of this first winter we had to go to Missouri for all of our supplies. There was no bridge, and the only way of crossing was by ferry, but often in the winter this was useless, because of the ice, which was, however, not strong enough to bear a team.

We went through many hardships in those early days, and, although I never had a swarm of wild hogs chase me up a tree as did some of our settlers who came to Kansas a little later, I could tell a long, long story of the privation we endured. However, I shall call this a start, and quit.

O. Hosford.

The Independent:

You published a short time back how that Stone House Creek got its name from a stone house built on its bank near Williamstown. The date you gave when it was built was radically wrong. It was an old dilapidated house when we came to Kansas in 1855. It was built by the Boones for the Indians in 1825. The Boones were the offspring of Daniel Boone and the government sent them out from Boonville, Mo., to build that stone house and some others for the Indians and to teach them farming. The Indians would neither farm nor live in the houses. They tore up the floors and built their fires in the middle of the buildings the same as the did in their tepees. The Boones brought horses with them from Missouri and it is supposed that the band of wild horses that used to range along Buck Creek and Wildhorse Creek were horses that strayed away from the Boones during the time they were trying to teach the Indians how to farm. These horses were not of the wild western type of horses. They appeared to be a well bred strain of horses. There were about 40 of them in the band headed by two stallions, one a bay and the other a black. The bay ranged on Buck Creek and on west, the black ranged on Wild Horse Creek and on east. The black stallion was a pacer and was coal black. He had the heaviest mane and tail that I ever saw. When he was pacing toward the wind his mane waved like a flag. It sure took a good saddle horse to get him out of a pace.

I think it was in the winter of 1862 that the settlers in our neighborhood organized a posse to run down and capture these horses. Father had on his farm a large corral built for Major A. Russell to corral their work cattle. It would hold about 1000 steers. This posse built wings out from this corral and thought they could run those horses down and drive them into the corral. They established a camp on Wild Horse Creek and planned to run them down and tire them out by relays. One bunch would chase them until their horses tired and then another bunch would take up the chase. They kept this up for three days, but the wild horses would not leave the timber and bluffs along the creeks and the nearest they got that band of horses to that corral was three miles. They gave it up for a bad job and quit.

That band of horses got to be a nuisance in the country. The domestic horses would stray away and get with them and in a short time they would be as wild as the wild horses. There were some men from St. Louis who offered five hundred dollars for the capture of that black stallion alive. Some experts came into the country and undertook the job but instead of capturing him alive they killed him and that broke up the band.

O. Hosford.
Lawrence, Sept. 6, 1931.