

## **“The Olden Time: Scraps of Early History in What Was Once Daviness, But is Now McLean County.”**

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Issue of April 14, 1876

THE OLDEN TIME: Scraps of Early History in What Was  
Once Daviness, But is Now McLean County.  
By Chronicler

I first became acquainted in what was then the extreme southwestern part of Daviess county, but is now included in McLean, in the year 1837. It was a newly settled part of the country then, there being no palatial dwellings rising up amid a clump of forest trees, or surrounded by beautiful shrubbery, indicative of ease and comfort, if not of affluence and of wealth. The people were living in log-cabins with clapboard roofs and stick chimneys. There were not a half dozen dwellings in all that part of the country that could boast a brick or stone chimney. More frequent than otherwise, one room answered the very useful purpose of kitchen, dining-room, parlor and sleeping apartment. The people were industrious and frugal, the greater portion of them having bought their land, with the stipulation that time would be given them to make the money out of the land to pay for it. The land was fertile but heavily timbered, nevertheless, the stalwart arm and vigorous muscle of the settlers were gradually rolling back the heavy forest and opening up their farms. Wm. and Remus Griffith, two brothers, residing at the time in Daviess county, were the agents, or rightful owners, of nearly all the land in that part of the country, and it was said that one of them declared that he would indulge any one as long as he set his fence out, but when ever he set his fence in, he would sue him. Notwithstanding the people were poor, they were generous, hospitable and kind. They were always ready to assist each other whenever assistance was needed, and if a favor was wanted, it was only necessary to ask it, and it was done, if in their power to do it. There was hardly such thing known in the community as malice, envy or evil speaking; they seemed rather to vie with each other in good neighborhood deeds. The older members of society were full of cheerfulness and hope; the younger members were full of frolic and fun. I have often thought that it has never been my good fortune to live in a happier community of people. Being remote from the county seat, they knew but little of law and had but little to do with it. They seemed rather to be "a law unto themselves," or to be governed by an innate sense of what was right and wrong between man and man, or between neighbor and neighbor. Certain customs had obtained by general consent, that had all the force and effect of law. Those rules, or customs, were apparently based upon the great principle of "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you," and as they had become established by universal consent woe be to the man who disregarded them, as he was certain to bring down upon himself the displeasure of the whole community. Better by far to suffer loss in

some other way than trespass upon any of those laws. Log-rollings, house-raisings and corn-huskings (in Kentucky parlance, "corn-shuckings,") were of common occurrence, and were regarded by the youths of the neighborhood as occasions of festivity rather than of drudgery.

On these occasions, when opportunity was offered they would engage in gymnastic exercises,, such as footracing, jumping, wrestling, and various other exercises. It was not at all uncommon for heads of families to join the youths in those amusements and share largely in the sport. Occasionally, for the gratification of the young people, there was a corn-husking and quilting gotten up. These were regarded as great occasions and their coming were looked to with high hopes and bright anticipations by the youth of both sexes. After the cornhusking was over, all hands would repair to the house where a cheerful hostess, and smiling lasses were waiting to welcome them to ample refreshments. These were partaken of with a relish characteristic of those whose appetites are sharpened by daily labor. The entertainment of these occasions were not such as would suit the caprice of the fastidious epicure, or sharpen the appetite of the dainty voluptuary, nevertheless, it fully met the demands of the occasion, there being an ample supply of all the substantials. Besides, we rarely ever failed to have a dessert, and almost invariably the same dessert every time, and that dessert was pumpkin pie. True, there may have been some few whose circumstances enabled them to prepare some other rarities a little more enticing to the palate of an epicure, but these were the exceptions, not the rule. There were very few who had land enough open to spare ground for the cultivation of wheat, and what fruit trees had been planted were not old enough to be in bearing, hence the pumpkin became a valuable esculent, supplying the place of other fruits, and affording us the means of being like other civilized people in that, that we too, could have a dessert. Well, our diet was good, very good, it was wholesome and not likely to make dyspeptics of us. But we will return to the thread of our narrative. After supper, and household affairs were set to rights, the young folks were permitted to engage in whatever diversions, or amusements might best suit their fancy at the time, so that they kept within the bounds of decency and good morals. These were often occasions of great mirth and joviality. There were, however, no dissipations, no drunkenness, nor even drinking of intoxicating drinks. If they were new settlers, and did not have pumpkin pie for dessert, they had too much self-respect to permit them to engage in bacchanalian orgies. In all their gayety and fun they did not even so far violate the rules of morality as to "trip the light fantastic toe."

Issue of April 21, 1876

We deem it proper at this point in our narrative that we notice more particularly some few of the older members of society. Of these may be named Rev. Frederick Tanner, Samuel Tanner, Nathan Benton, Wilson L. Whitaker, Aaron Atherton, and Thomas Tanner. Rev. Frederick Tanner was long a member and minister of the Baptist Church, Mr. Tanner possessed a mind of quick apprehension and of fair judgment, but the facilities at that day for improving the mind, were so few, and so little time could be spared from daily labor, that it could not be expected that he attain to very great eminence as a scholar. However, by a careful study of the Scriptures, together with what few other books he could supply himself with, he attained to a fair position as a preacher of the gospel. And, besides, he came to be a very important personage in that part of the country, as he was called upon to marry all the young people for miles around, there being no other minister of the gospel anywhere near. I said all the young people, that is, of course, all those that did marry, and by the by, that was very near, if not quite all, sure enough.

Samuel Tanner, who was an older brother of Frederick, was a favorite with all classes, old and young. He had a fine fund of anecdote which he could relate in the best manner possible to give them point. Personally, he was by no means handsome, he had a large robust frame, rather stooped, a very heavy suit of sandy hair and whiskers, and to add to his generally rough exterior, he very seldom wore a hat when he was at work on his farm, and would go from home to a log-rolling bare-headed. His hair from being scorched by the sun would stand up like bristles, and when long, and his beard well-grown, his features being burnt by the sun, he presented quite a grotesque appearance. Nevertheless, all who knew him well, knew that beneath a rough exterior there beat a warm, generous, and honest heart.

Nathan Benton was remarkable for his eccentric notions and habits. He adhered rigidly, while he lived, to the cut and style in which his clothes were made when he was a young man. Although he kept a well furnished table, he had certain vessels, or dishes from which he took his meals and would use no others, when at home. Whether at home or not, no difference how often others' plates were changed, he never allowed his plate to be changed. What we have noted is but a specimen of his singularity. Notwithstanding his very singular habits he was well respected for honesty and uprightness.

Wilson L. Whitaker was noted for his prompt, candid outspoken manners; a man of sterling integrity and moral honesty. He despised falsehood and duplicity. He was a man of industrious habits and of indomitable energy. Mr. Whitaker had but little patience with an idler. I remember on one occasion, at a log-rolling, when all hands, except a youth who was thoughtlessly standing off, were very hard pressed and overstrained to carry a very heavy log. Mr. Whitaker noticed the youth, but had no time to speak to him then, but as soon as they had reached the place for the log, and laid it down, he turned to the youth and, suiting his action to the words, said: "B— if I were you and could do nothing more, I'd point at it."

Mr. Whitaker commenced the world with little or nothing, and by habits of industry and frugality, had acquired a very good property before his death. He was well respected by his neighbors and acquaintances.

Aaron Atherton was one among the best farmers of his day; he farmed according to Dutch rule. In cutting or killing timber, in laying fence-worm or in planting grain, in a word, in attending to all work, all farm interests he had regard to the phases of the Moon. If he planted corn or potatoes in the light of the moon, it would all go to top; if he laid fence-worm in the dark of the moon, it would sink down into the ground; if he killed meat in the old of the moon, it would shrink away in cooking; if manure was spread upon the ground in the light of the moon, its substance would evaporate, if in the dark, it would be taken up by the soil. It was not to be expected that a killing frost would come in the light of the moon. If you wanted to know when winter was past, you had to watch the movements of Bruin. On the 2d day of February old Bruin awakes from his long winter nap, and walks out to reconnoitre. If he can see his shadow on that day, he returns to his den and remains forty days; if he cannot see his shadow during that day he takes up his line of march - 'winter has broke.'

The reader can form his own conclusions as to whether there be anything in these things or not, be that as it may, Mr. Atherton was not only a successful farmer, but a good neighbor and useful citizen.

Thomas Tanner being possessed of some business tact, he not only conducted well the interests of his farm, but besides this, he attended to a very important interest for the farmers of the country. At the time of which we write, no one, it is presumed, however long and pleasant may have been his visits to dreamland, ever dreamed that within less than forty years the "iron

horse" would come snorting and puffing through his part of the country, panting to bear off the produce of the land. O, no! the farmers were all prizing their own tobacco under the old wooden levers - 'beam and sweep.' After it was prized, there was no market here for it, hence a necessity for some one that was competent and trustworthy to take charge of it and carry it to market. This business was entrusted to Mr. Tanner. Flat-boats were built and the tobacco hauled to the river where it was received and receipted for, and when the cargo was all aboard and everything in readiness, the boat was loosed from the mooring and drifting before the current she started with her crew and cargo upon her long and tedious, and often hazardous journey to New Orleans.

Issue of April 28, 1876

Yes, New Orleans was the market then for the produce of the country. Corn, tobacco, hogs, cattle, pork, bacon, poultry, and various other articles of produce, were shipped on board flat-boats to the Mississippi coast, or to New Orleans, to find a market. This dangerous voyage Mr. Tanner made repeatedly. I say dangerous, because those who made it were not only liable to be wrecked by storms, or their boat be sunk by running on some fatal and unseen snag; but besides this, the change of climate, together with the exposure incident to the voyage, was liable to bring on some fatal disorder. Nevertheless, a flat-boat's crew were generally a jolly set of fellows. They responded to the music of the waves with the boatman's song, or at nightfall with the plaintive notes of the bugle. Thus cheerful amid dangers they drifted on before the current after weeks, if not months, of incessant toil and danger, they landed their craft with its valuable cargo safe in the port of New Orleans. The cargo disposed of, all hands returned home, the principal bringing with him the fruits of the labor and hard earnings of his neighbors and patrons. This was usually brought home in the shining metals, that, when paid over to the producer, made the children's eyes sparkle, not alone on account of its beauty, but because pa will now buy us those new shoes; and also the wife's heart thrills with emotions of joy, as husband will now be certain to buy that long promised dress.

The above business was conducted by Mr. Tanner to the entire satisfaction of his neighbors and patrons until, I presume, he chose to discontinue it.

All of those persons whom I have sketched have passed away, leaving as a legacy to their descendants an unblemished reputation.

#### REFLECTIONS

Those men whom we have here sketched were neither heroes nor statesmen, but they were honest men - that class of men the world needs most. They were not affected by the tinsel and gloss that guilds the temple of fame; they cared not for it; they were not ambitious to obtain distinction among their fellow-men. They were men of sound principles, virtuous actions, unassuming, upright, honest men - that class of men that do much to mould the opinions and shape the morals, of the community in which they live. The safety of the ballot, the uncorruptness of the jury, the integrity of the witness comes of their influence. Those that frame our laws, however wise they may be, or those that execute them, however virtuous, would be powerless to afford protection to citizens but for the moral support they receive from this class of men. Their modesty causes them to shrink from public gaze rather than court it, nevertheless, they are the pillars of civil society. The foundation of their virtue is found in the fact that their minds and hearts are imbued with the principles and precepts of the Bible, to "do justly, love, mercy, and walk humbly with God," is the polar star of all their actions. When they have filled

up the measure of their days and are called hence, the country is bereaved, for it has lost a valuable citizen, and society mourns, for another of its safeguards is gone.

How great the contrast between these and those of a contrary character - between an honest, upright man and a knave. The former live to purpose - a blessing to their fellow-men - and the sun of their life goes down serenely in an unclouded sky, and as it disappears throws back golden rays of light upon the world it is leaving behind. The latter corrupt in principles, malicious and revengeful in their desires, and brutal in their habits, are more dangerous to society than prowling beasts of prey. They pass through time and earth a blighting, withering curse to mankind, and at last, after having presumed long upon the mercy of God, the lamp of life goes out in the blackness of darkness forever.

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The year 1837 gave birth to the town of Livermore. Livermore is situated on Green river, where Rough creek empties its turbid waters into that beautiful stream, and was formerly in Ohio county, but is now in McLean. Livermore was, and still is, the principal place of business with those residing in the district of country of which we are writing. The first settlers of the town were H. J. Belt and A. J. Rowan. Belt engaged in the mercantile business and Rowan in the saddlery business. Belt was a partner and transacted the business of the firm of Phipps, Belt & Co. Although a young man, and of but little experience in commercial affairs, he very soon developed a fine business capacity, which, when added to his agreeable manners, strict integrity, and fine social habits, soon won for him a large circle of friends and patrons. We therefore soon find him engaged in quite a lucrative business. In the course of two or three years after his location at Livermore he married, and being always polite, and having no disposition to treat with indifference the customs of the country in which he resided, he, in building a dwelling for himself, built it of hewed logs, with clapboard roof and stick chimney. By so doing, he not only showed a decent respect for the opinions and customs of those among whom he was then residing, but besides he had now fully identified himself with the people. In the course of a few years, by close attention to business and rigid economy, he had acquired a sufficient capital to engage in quite a thriving business on his own account, the partnership having been dissolved by mutual consent.

Rowan was of easier temperament and had less of push than his friend Belt; nevertheless, in the course of a few years, he had exchanged the awl for the yardstick, and his position at the bench for one behind the counter.

The old twelve months credit system was then the rule, and Rowan would not only credit almost anyone that would ask it, but besides would sell goods to customers and carelessly neglect to book them until he would quite forget it. Those of his customers who were strictly honest, when they came to a settlement, would often report articles which they had bought of him that he had not charged. When thus reported, Rowan would good-naturedly say, "That's a fact; I remember it now," and would add the amount to the customer's account. However, A. J. Rowan was universally popular; he was a good fellow, and everybody liked him. And, by the by, he enjoyed life, and had plenty to do him, as he was a bachelor and had no one to provide but himself. This latter may in some measure account for his easy, careless manner.

Issue of May 5, 1876

While memory lingers around Livermore collecting scraps and incidents, a circumstance is brought to mind that occurred there in the long ago.

A stranger from some distant part of the country, perhaps from Indiana, happened to fall in there while on his way to a famous "faith doctor," of whom he had heard much, but had never seen, and whom he had learned was performing astounding cures. Having ascertained that he would have to travel several miles further on to get to the Doctor's - that the road was bad and would be difficult to find, and besides that Rough creek would be to cross, he inquired if it would not do as well to forward to the Doctor a statement in writing of the case of his invalid friend, for whom he was seeking relief. Being informed that it would answer ever purpose just as well as for him to apply in person, he drew from his pocket a letter containing a full statement of the case, and presenting it to H. J. Belt inquired of him if he would accommodate him by forwarding the letter at an early day. Mr. Belt, always obliging, assured him that he would - that persons were passing to and from the neighborhood frequently, and that he would send the letter the first opportunity. The stranger being well satisfied with the arrangement, was soon bending his steps homeward. No more was heard from him for some time, perhaps a year or more, when the same man, now on different business, put in his appearance at Livermore. He pretty soon called on Mr. Belt, and without pausing to inquire concerning the fate of the letter left in his care, and for safe delivery, he at once communicated the very gratifying intelligence that just about the time, as was supposed, the letter was received by the doctor, the patient commenced to mend, and continued steadily to improve until good health was restored. Belt was thunder struck! The letter had never been forwarded. It was then lying in a drawer where he had deposited it for safety until he would have opportunity to forward it. In the press of business he had entirely forgotten the letter. What was he to do? Being of ready mind and seldom found wanting in an emergency, he at once determined that inasmuch as the end had been obtained - the patient had recovered - the best thing to be done under the circumstances, was to remain silent concerning the fate of the letter. Having thus determined, he congratulated the gentleman upon the happy results that had attended his good offices, gave to the conversation quite a different turn, and by this means kept undiscovered his delinquency in the affair of the letter.

The patient and his friends, to this day no doubt, attribute his recovery to the skill and wonder-working power of the "faith doctor."

Livermore soon became quite a flourishing business point, all the surplus produce of the country for miles around being hauled there for shipment. It was not long until steamboats were seen ploughing up and down the Green river, making weekly trips the year round. The old flatboat, with the merry laugh and bugle notes of the happy oarsmen, had given place to the proud steamer, with her shrill whistle, as she triumphantly rode the waves. The more rapid transportation and quick returns of these gave more general satisfaction than did the slow and tedious mode of the old flatboat system. The trade and commercial interests of the country assumed a more lively and business-like aspect. And it is proper to say that to the indomitable energy and enterprise of H. J. Belt the country was largely indebted for bringing about so desirable an improvement. So favorable a state of trade stimulated the growth and developed the resources of the country. Farms spread out more rapidly, and in the course of a few years waving fields of ripening wheat, and fields of corn and tobacco of luxuriant growth, might be seen on every hand. The old log cabin of the country had given place to the more comfortable, and, often handsome, farm residence, thus affording to farm life increased attractions.

It is rather a lamentable fact that in reference to schools, school houses and churches, the improvement had not fully kept pace with the improvement that was made in other respects. It is, however, a gratifying reflection that at the present time the country is well supplied with good

substantial churches, an ornament to the community in which they stand, and a credit to those who put them there.

In reference to educational interests the country has not been without improvement. The round pole school house of the olden time, sometimes with six corners, making the whole end of the building a fire-place, has passed away and given place to a more comfortable school house. Seats made of small trees split it two pieces, and legs put in with auger and axe on the bark side, leaving the flat side for a seat, have disappeared and their places supplied with easier and more comfortable seats. Nevertheless, there is still need for improvement in this important interest of the country.

Issue of May 12, 1876

It soon came to be that the people found themselves too far from the center of business - the county seat. A portion of Ohio and Muhlenburg counties lying adjacent to this community, which was part of Daviess county, all being alike situated - that is, all remote from their respective county seats, they conceived the idea of forming a new county, to be composed of parts of the above named counties. Accordingly the State Legislature was petitioned to pass an act authorizing the formation of a new county. The petitioners were at first unsuccessful, but after-repeated efforts the act was obtained authorizing the people, in the above named territory, to form the new county. The boundary lines were surveyed, and the town of Calhoon obtained the honor of being made the county seat.

At the next regular election for the State, which occurred in May, 1854, there were elected a full board of county officers. Hon. Sanders Eaves was elected County Court Judge; Hon. A. C. Tanner, County Court Clerk, and Hon. H. Griffith, Sheriff of the county. The first county court for the new county was held in Jas. Lanehum's tavern. The new county was now fully organized, but as it was still in its infancy it was not thought advisable to allow it at once a representative in the councils of the State Legislature, as by so doing it might become puffed up, since it is known that by "a little brief authority" one is sometimes made vain. The citizens of the new county, therefore, continued to vote as before, with the counties to which they had formerly belonged. In the year 1861 it was thought safe to confer upon the new county all the rights and privileges of a full grown county of mature age. Accordingly, at the regular State election for that year, a representative was chosen by the citizens of McLean county to represent them in the State Legislature. This honor was conferred upon the Hon. Henry Griffith, who is now resting upon his well earned laurels at his quiet and pleasant home in the town of Calhoon.

Since the date (1837) referred to at the head of these articles, great changes have occurred all around us. Then there was no such place known as Calhoon. The place where it is now situated was then known as Vianna, and was nothing more than an old waste farm, having some old dilapidated buildings on it, called Dicken's cabins, and standing some where near the sight of the old court house. The town of Calhoon has since grown up, become a county seat, and has a weekly paper.

Owensboro was then a common county town, doing business in the old routine way, and having but little signs of life about it. It then had no newspaper to chronicle the events of the times, or to enlighten the public as to current news. It has since grown to be a city, is doing a brisk and lively business, and has three weekly newspapers. The youngest of these is the Examiner, a live paper, fully abreast of the times, and is rapidly gaining favor with the people.

THE END