

## PROLOGUE - 1834

They left Pennsylvania for Illinois, where they intended to settle, as early in the spring of 1834 as the ground conditions would permit, with their wagon loaded with food, seeds, a few farm tools, some household furniture and kitchen utensils, a cask for water to use between streams and other necessary items. It made a heavy load for the oxen, but they knew full well they must have these things at hand until some village sprung up where they would eventually stake out their claim.

It had been a long, tiresome day and the stranger was very weary as he plodded along by the side of the determined ox team, which pulled the covered wagon, carrying his wife and little boy and girl.

It was now late in September and they knew that they must make their choice of a location soon so that they might have ample time to build a log cabin and shelter for the oxen before cold weather and snow caught them unprepared. They endeavored to travel an average of six or seven miles per day on the long trip, which was all they could expect of the slow oxen. Also they were aware that they could not travel every day. Storms, heavy rains which would raise the streams and make the ground too soft, break downs of the wagon that would make repairs necessary, and other delays that would happen now and then, for other reasons, causing much delay. Even if they could maintain that average, it would take at least five months to reach Illinois; so they pushed on ever westward as fast as the oxen could endure the strain. Now, as evening was coming on, they halted to look about the surrounding country, for something had told them, all that day, that they were nearing the place where they wanted to drive their stakes. As they came from the east, along the ridge running northeast and southwest, they could see to the north a beautiful valley, yes, two valleys. It was an inspiring view.

They did not know the names of the streams, if they had any, but we know them now as Swab Run and French Creek. They knew the streams were there, however, because of the fringe of timber along each of them. While they did not see any cattle, hogs, or sheep, they saw a few deer, some buffalo, a small bear, some prairie chickens, wild turkeys and rabbits in abundance, all of which would furnish meat for the family. They wondered if the streams were fed by springs, as they knew they must settle close to a stream with an unfailling supply of water for themselves and oxen, winter and summer.

As they looked they saw a high point about one and one-half miles to the west; they knew they were in a valley between the east and west high ground. Looking south, they saw that the

ground declined gradually to another stream, now Kickapoo, where there was plenty of timber again. It dawned on them right there where they stood was an ideal place for a village to be built and they wondered how many years it might be before someone else caught the same inspiration and had the energy, courage and means to lay out a village, and build a store, to give them and others, who would be coming here to settle, a supply point for the necessities of life.

With these thoughts in mind and, in addition, thinking that in the morning he would investigate the streams for springs, the stranger unhooked his oxen and camped for the night on the spot, which, in later years when surveyors came with their instruments, became the center of Section Eleven, Township Nine North, Range Four East of the Fourth Principal Meridian, in Knox County, Illinois. This is today the intersection of Main and Union streets in the Village of Yates City.

The following morning dawned clear and warm; so our stranger, after a breakfast of corn bread, fresh rabbit, killed the evening before, a few apples gathered from a tree that had grown from seed planted, perhaps, by "Johnny Appleseed," (John Chapman), and a cup of coffee, hitched the oxen to the wagon and drove north to check the first stream (now Swab Run). Much to his pleasure and satisfaction, he found that it, indeed, was well fed by springs of clear, cool water, and so without further delay or investigation, they decided to set their stakes for their claim near the south side of that stream.

We will leave them now to build their log cabin and stable. This would be hard work, but they were made of sturdy stuff and had known hard work all their young lives, so they were undaunted as all pioneers must always be. They went at it with the determination to be prepared for winter as soon as possible, as it was rapidly approaching, and with that accomplished, when spring came, they would be ready to break the sod, sow the oats and wheat and plant the corn and garden seeds in order to raise their first crop on the rich soil of their claim.

Soon afterwards, other settlers began to come in and take up claims in the neighborhood. Some brought cows, hogs and chickens. From these our first settlers were able to get a start in live-stock and poultry by trading the grain they had raised for a sow and pigs, or a cow and calf, or a few chickens. In spite of many hardships—storms, floods, Indians, disease among the live-stock and illness among the people, the country steadily expanded, and finally, as we shall now relate, Yates City came into existence in 1857, thus creating what our strangers had looked forward to for more than twenty years.

—A. J. Lawrence