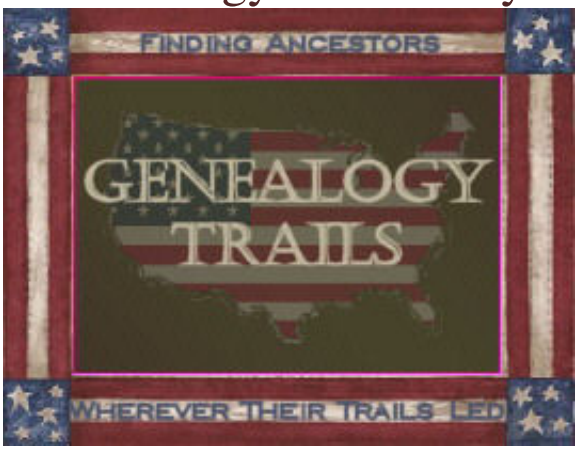

Interesting Incidents in Early Crawford County History Related by Pioneer Citizen

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The French were the first white people who possessed this country. The first regular settlements made in Crawford County were in and around Palestine. There is a tradition that the first settlers found an old Frenchman named LaMotte living near the margin of the prairie which still bears his name. But little, however, is known of him or his residence here. There is not just ground for controverting the statement that LaMotte actually lived in what is now Crawford County, especially when we consider the fact that LaMotte Prairie, LaMotte Creek and Fort LaMotte, the latter the site of Palestine, all bear his name.

It is not known with perfect certainty at the present day who were the first actual settlers from the states to locate within the present limits of the county. It is a generally accepted tradition, and is now a tradition only, that the Eatons were the first of our own kind to occupy this portion of the county, and are believed to have been here as early as 1808. The Eatons were Benjamin, Joseph, John, Stephen, Richard, Daniel, and Martha. They were genuine pioneers and frontiersmen and were in the Fort at Palestine.

The blockhouse or fort had been erected here about the commencement of the war of 1812, and in the fall of 1814, there were twenty-six families within its protecting walls and ninety rangers under command of Captain Andrews who were stationed there for the purpose of guarding these isolated settlers. The Eatons disagreed with some of the other inmates of the fort and withdrew and built another fort about one mile northwest on land now owned by Will Rousch. This fort was named Fort Foot, from the fact that the Eatons possessed extraordinaryily large feet. "The late William Eaton of northwest of Robinson was born in this fort at what date I don't know--but before 1818. He has quite a number of descendants living. Bert Hall of Robinson and Harvey Hall of Burner vicinity are grandchildren."

When the first settlements were made in this region there were still many Indians roaming through the country. They were generally friendly toward the whites except for a short period during the War of 1812 when they became somewhat excited and committed depredations upon the whites, such as stealing horses and other stock, and in a few instances murdering their pale-faced neighbors.

In the year 1818 John Eaton, wife and child moved from the fort to the farm near where Grand Prairie church now stands and built a log cabin which was yet standing until recently.

Everet Eaton, a grandson, and wife and a daughter and her husband now live on the farm. John Eaton or Uncle Johnny, as he was commonly called, told your writer that the indians would come to his cabin in bands of fifteen or twenty at a time, open the door and walk in, sit down on the floor and want something to eat and wouldn't leave until they got it.

He said that early one morning eighteen Indians came to his cabin seeking something to eat. His wife had just baked a large corn pone for breakfast and removing the lid of the old fashioned oven, he said he pointed to the pone. The Indians understood the gesture and one of their number thrust his knife into the steaming bread, took it from the oven, laid it on the table and dividing it, each took his piece and left munching the food with grunts of satisfaction, leaving the family without any bread for their breakfast.

He also related that while they were yet at the fort one night the Indians stole a number of horses from the settlers, including several of his father's horses. The next morning they organized in company with Captain Houston as their leader to go in pursuit of the Indians and to recover their horse. The said they found their trail and followed it past where the Oak Grove church now stands and on crossing Hutson Creek near the present location of Little Brick School house, and on all day then camped that night, then on all next day, and on until near sundown of the third day when they saw an Indian village of what looked like several thousand Indians about where the city of Champaign now stands. He said they decided to let them keep the horses and turned back, glad to make their escape before they were discovered.

Uncle Johnny also told of the fight with the "Redskins" at the big pond north of Palestine when a bunch of the men from the settlement went to the pond to get some timber and were ambushed and fired upon by the Indians, killing four of their men and seriously wounding two others. One of the men killed was Daniel Eaton, a brother of Uncle Johnny, and two of the others were cousins. They killed five of the Indians.

Mr. Eaton told of the Hutson massacres south of where Hutsonville now stands. Isaac Hutson was a native of Ohio but had been living in what is now Turman Township, Sullivan County, Indiana. Hutson, one day crossed the river and visited the section now known as LaMotte Prairie. Being attracted by its beauty and fertility, he resolved to move hither. Accordingly, in the latter part of the winter of 1812, he built a cabin at the north end of the Prairie near where Henry Mehler now lives on land now owned by Charley McCoy, to which he moved his family in the spring. A man named Dixon settled nearby about the same time.

Hutson's family consisted of a wife and six children, the oldest a girl of sixteen. One day Hutson went to Palestine to mill and did not get started for home until nearly night. When about half way to his cabin he noticed an unusual light in the direction of it. Fearing the worst, he urged his horse at full speed. Upon nearing his house his worst fears were realized. His entire family had been murdered by a band of Indians and his house burned. A few rods from the fire lay the body of Dixon mutilated almost beyond recognition. His breast had been cut open and his heart taken out and placed upon a pole which was planted in the ground nearby. Satisfying himself that the havoc was complete and having lost all for which he cared to live, he swore revenge and to this end joined the army at Fort Harrison near where Terre Haute now stands. Shortly after he joined the army, he was killed in a fight with the Indians about a half mile south of the fort. "Pet," a friendly Indian told Mr. Eaton that Mrs. Hutson was boiling a kettle of soap and had her babe in her arms when the Indians made the attack. He took the babe and threw it in the kettle of boiling soap and then killed the rest of the family.

John W. Barlow came from Kentucky and stopped two years in Indiana and in the spring of 1816 came to LaMotte Prairie. He settled on the place where the Hutson family were massacred. Hutson's cabin had been burned by the Indians but there was an old stable, yet standing. In this Mr. Barlow sheltered his family while preparing his cabin and while they still occupied it a child was born to them. Literally it was "born in a manger" and was doubtless the first birth in the county. There is a cedar tree yet standing on the site of the Hutson cabin and massacre.

The Indian tribes that were here were the Delawares, Kickapoos, Shawanees, Kaskaskias and Plankeshaws with many fragmentary bands of other tribes.

Of these the Delawares were the most powerful tribe. The best title had

belonged to the Kaskaskias and it was of them the Government acquired its title. But all, Indian-like, were roving hunters, nomadic in all their habits. The Indian and his cogeners, the wolf and the green head fly, the bear and the deer, and the panther have gone and one has left like the other, nothing but a memory.

The following familiies so far as we can learn, were among the first settlers: Woods, Kitchells, Colloms, Woodworths, Hutsons, Lagoes, Brimberrys, Wilsons, Waldrops, Piersons, Kennedys, Houstons, Dr. Hill, Eatons and the Newlins. They came in the years 1808, 1809, 1810, 1811, and 1812. They were in the Fort.

The pioneer cabins were built of small logs and covered with clapboards, upon which were placed weight poles to keep them in place, nails being out of the question. The chimney which occupied a large portion of one end of the house, was built on the outside, of stick and clay and they had dirt floors. The size of the cabins can be determined from the fact that four bear skins cut square covered the floor and made a luxurious carpet. Window glass was unknown in the early cabins. A hole in the wall was left for light. social life at first was confined to house raising and weddings. That is, these succeeded the days of "forting." The fun at these was boisterous and rough, but innocent as the day was long. Somewhere in about these days a great drink called "metheglin" was here. This was made in every household when they took their winter's honey crop and was simply the water of the waste honey made very sweet by putting it in a place with exactly the proper temperature where a slight fermentation took place. It was then ready to drink. But the good old methaglin days and times are gone.

Then the weddings. That was the great affair of the day. At the house of the bride was commotion and a gathering of the neighbors' girls for days before the great event. Pumpkin pies, apple pies, bride's cake, sweet cake, and cakes, raisin cakes, float, chicken and hams boiled by the cauldron and kettleful and still more hams and cake and pie and float.

The morning of the great day came, and the watchman from the house of the bride cried out "behold the bridegroom cometh." Then there was swift mounting of all about the premises who rushed out to meet the groom and his party and put forth their swiftest horses and safest rider in the "race for the bottle." The party with the groom accepted the challenge and sent forth their best horse and rider. A straight stretch of road about a half mile usually, was selected, judges posted, the riders mounted and the race run. The winner then was handed the bottle and all its fluttering ribbons and the cavalcade rode to the house of the bride in great glee. But the "race for the bottle" has passed away and there are people here now who never heard of this innocent pastime.

Then after the wedding dinner came the dance, and they literally danced at the weddings, fiddle or no fiddle. They commenced early in the afternoon of

the day of the wedding and danced until breakfast next morning. Then they caught their horses and in pairs rode to the grooms's father's residence and as soon as a great "infair" dinner was over, resumed the dance, and all night until a late breakfast again the next day. "Infair" day sometimes extended over two or three days and the whole thing was dancing, dancing, with only cessation for eating. And what dancing! Not your dreamy waltz, nor gentle walk, but a genuine walk-talk, ginger blue, breakneck race and jig, that filled their innocent hearts with gladness but their legs with soreness and pain.

Among the diversions of the early times were shooting matches for beef, turkey, whiskey, and sometimes for wagers of money. When beef was shot for it was divided into five quarters, the hide and tallow being the fifth and considered the best. The women frequently attended these shooting matches with a neat clean keg of methaglin to sell. It is a pleasant drink and has no power to intoxicate.

In the early days horse racing was a kind of mania with almost all people and almost all indulged in it either by being spectators or engaged in them.

When the first settlers came here, wild game of all kinds was plentiful with the exception of buffalo and elk, they having drifted west to the Mississippi and beyond. This country was once the regular ranging place of the buffalo and a fact not known to many people in that with the disappearance of the buffalo disappears invariably the buffalo grass. Hence this particular grass must have at one time prevailed all over these prairies and as the buffalo crossed the Mississippi not to return, his grass seems to have followed him.

Deer, wild turkey, prairie chicken and all smaller game were here in abundance. Bear meat was plentiful, some of the settlers killing four or five a week. Venison was not a rarity in a household where the head of the family has been known to kill 19 deer before breakfast. A saddle of venison (both hind quarters of a deer not cut apart) was worth 25 cents, but not much sale for it at that. Wolves, bear, panthers, and wild cats were here in great numbers.

The commerical poverty of the country in its first settlement is shown by the fact that the smokers made their own clay pipes when they became too aristocratic to use a corn cob pipe. Such a thing as a cigar was unheard of. Tallow candles made by dippping in melted tallow were first used for illumination. When the iron lamp was introduced with its hook to hang on a nail and its sharp point to stick in the crack in the logs, it was deemed a great invention. When filled with coon or bear's oil, it made a splendid light.

Men and women both wore buckskin clothing. The young ladies of the period wore deerskin dresses. The hair was removed and the skins dressed with deer's brains so as to be soft and pliable, and when colored yellow with hickory bark and alum, or red with sassafras, made rather a stylish looking outfit. The number of "breadth in the skirt," were about as few as in the tight,

fitting figure displaying costume of the super-fashionable belles of the present day. The men wore buckskin breeches and jackets. The daily food of the pioneers was cornbread, hominy, bear meat, venison, honey and sassafras tea. The corn meal was made by pounding corn in a stump mortar. A stump mortar was made by cutting off a tree about three feet from the ground and burning or digging a hole a foot in diameter in top of the stump. Into this the corn was placed and a hard hickory pestle or an iron wedge attached to a spring pole was used to pound it fine, and was then sifted through a homemade sieve made by stretching a deer skin tanned with ashes over a hoop. The holes in the sieve were made with a small iron instrument heated hot. The smaller the iron the finer the meal. That portion which went through the sieve was called meal, that which remained was used as hominy. As civilization advanced homemade horse hair sieves came in fashion. The bread stuff for each day was pounded up before breakfast.

Bears were so bold they have been known to come within twenty steps of the house and carry off pigs. Their skins were very useful for making moccasins. Bear skin moccasins were made with the hair on (turned inside) and for men, cut about as high as socks, for women, about the length of stockings.

A few years later shoes and stockings became fashionable, but they were too highly valued for wearing even a whole Sunday. The girls would carry them tied up in their handkerchiefs until near the church or farmhouse where church was held. They would then take a seat on a log, don their shoes and stockings and go in to the house with as much of a dressed up feeling as a city belle of today alights from her car to enter the opera.

The first wagons of the pioneers were called "truck wagons." The wheels were sawed out of a large log and were a solid piece of wood with a hole in the center for the axel. Soft soap was the only grease ever used for them, and when a little dry of soap with their "hullabaloo" could be heard for miles as they passed along the road.

Then too, this was the day of the one leg bedstead. To many folks of today this will seem strange and impossible. All or nearly all, of the pioneer log cabins were furnished with a one leg bedstead. To start with you must have an unplastered log house, then a post and two bedrails. Each rail is fastened in an auger hole in the wall. The sides of the house wall formed the end of one side of the bed, and thus a one legged bedstead is complete. Cross pieces are laid across the bedrails. The bedtick is filled with leaves or grass and the bed is finished. And here has been found as refreshing rest and as sweet dreams as ever came to royal palaces.

Another thing about the one legged bedstead was the fact that this bed was not rolled about the floor so they could sweep, but was stationary. And one of the earliest purchases of the family was a few yards of bright callico (and only the wealthiest could afford it) to make a valance to run around the bed from wall to wall. In those days flooring was either hewn from the puncheons or

plank from the whip saw, and therefore, the space under the bed being hidden from sight was left without any floor at all. But the one legged bedstead passed away. No one can tell exactly when or how but not one has been in this county for years and years. It was in some way succeeded by the trundle bed, the bed of nearly all our ancestors here. It was simply a bed under a regular bed. The result of a happy combination was such that every bed in the county might be said to be a two story one.

The trundle bed, too, has come and gone. It served its time and purpose especially where house room was scarce and children aplenty. But its days were numbered and now for years it is only a memory among older people and in a short time the coming generation will read this and conclude that we are only romancing.

A kind of sympathy or brotherhood existed among the pioneers which has almost faded away with other landmarks of the early period. When a covered wagon was spied coming over the prairie or through the forest, the cry would be, "There comes another settler," and all would start to meet the newcomer and give him a hearty welcome. They would take axes and help cut out a trail to his land and aid him in selecting a site for his cabin. In two or three days sufficient logs would be cut and his cabin erected, a hole cut in the side for a door and the family housed in their new home. This was pioneer friendship and hospitality and far more sincere than it is at the present day.

After the settlers got established in their new home, they would take the ax, the maul, and wedge and go to the timber, cut some trees that will split and make rails enough to fence six or eight acres 7 rails high.

Then they would commence on their clearing, cutting down trees and piling the brush from morning until night, day after day until they got the trees and piling the brush from morning until night, day after day until they got the trees all cut down and the brush piled on the amount of ground they intended to clear.

Then they would cut the trees into lengths so they could be handled. Then before time to commence plowing they would invite their neighbors and some of them lived 10 or 15 miles away, to come at a specified time and they would pile the logs. That was called a log rolling.

Then after they got the log heaps burned and the brush piles (they usually burned the brush piles after night) they would plow the new or stump ground. If the person who did the plowing had any "cuss words" laid back and hidden away they would surely come out when his plow hits a stump or gets fastened under a root, and his horses don't stop quick enough and a trace chain or a singletree or the doubletree or perhaps the plow beam breaks, then is when the cuss words get used. All of the settlers who selected homes in the timber had to go through all of this hard work and a lot more before they got their farms cleared and fenced.

After the plowing was done, they harrowed the ground with the harrow. When the ground was ready to plant, they would make the furrows for planting with a one horse single shovel plow and drop the corn by hand and cover with a hoe. Then when the corn was ready to cultivate, they would plow with a single or double shovel plow with one horse. It wasn't an easy job plowing corn among stumps, the plow getting fast on stumps or roots and jerking the plow over or around the stumps. I know, for I have worked in stumpy ground. They would have to go over the field about two times during the season with an ax or a spouting hoe and cut sprouts off the stumps. I wonder what the young farmers today would do if they had to go into a 5 or 10 acres field of corn among stumps to cultivate? They should be thankful that the pioneers and their forefathers got the ground cleared so they can farm the easy way, all riding tools, and no horses to bother with.

At about this time, or after the days of buckskin clothing that everybody wore homespun clothing. The girls like the boys, had no idle hours for there was the carding of wool by hand into rolls, spinning them on a large wheel, walking to and fro through the long and weary days, turning the wheel with one hand and holding the thread with the other. Then the yarn was reeled into skeins, dyed and washed, then put upon the warping bars and then into the loom. Each thread of the warp must be through the "gears," and through the "reed," then the shuttle was thrown backward and forward and the thread beaten in with the "late."

There was the weaving of linen for sheets, pillowcases, towels, tableclothes and underclothing or tow and wool, the making of "linsey-woolsey" for gowns or of all-wool cloth for men's garments. From early morning till the fire burned low on the hearth at night mother and daughter were at work wielding the hand-cards, throwing the shuttle, or whirling the wheel.

When the carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving are done, there was still more to do--the making of quilts, coverlets, and sheets, for no girl could think of being married till she had a bountiful supply of these things.

BACK -- **HOME**