

SKETCHES OF HISTORY AND INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH
THE SETTLEMENT OF WAPELLO COUNTY, FROM 1843 TO
1859, INCLUSIVE.

BY G. D. R. BOYD, OTTUMWA.

(Continued from page 947.)

By way of introduction, we here insert the proceedings of a "Settlers' Meeting" held at Ottumwa on the 16th day of September, 1848:

"WHEREAS, the mutual safety of the settlers and pioneers of the West demands some measures for his security; and the hard earnings of the poor man, who has endured privations and hardships, are endangered by eastern capitalists and moneyed land-sharks; and believing the settler and the tiller of the soil should have the benefit of his hard earnings; therefore

"*Resolved*, That the unprecedented prosperity of the State of Iowa has been through the means of the claim system.

"*Resolved*, That the claim-holder is entitled to have his land at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre.

"*Resolved*, That we will mutually protect each other in the purchase of our claims at the land sales at the above price, and also protect each other's claims against speculators and claim-jumpers for two years after the sales.

"*Resolved*, That we regard any person who shall enter or jump a claim or improvement, without paying a good and sufficient consideration to the claim-holder, in no other light than a thief and a robber, and that we will deal with them accordingly.

"*Resolved*, That we will mutually defend the above principles and resolutions with our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honors.

"*Resolved*, That we as claim-holders mutually pledge ourselves to attend the land sales in October next, and not permit any person to bid on a settler's claim, except the owner, under the above penalty.

JAMES M. PECK, Chairman."

The following account of the "Dahlongega War" was prepared by L. T. STUART, Esq., an old resident of Dahlongega, and familiar with the incidents related. We regret that we were compelled to condense it to some extent, in order that our history would not prove to be of greater length than originally intended.

DAHLONEGA WAR.

In relating the little incidents that help to form our early history, we will be compelled to give the names of parties, but trust that none will be offended at the seeming liberty thus taken,—we would not willingly wound the feelings of any human being. Some things were, perhaps, better untold, yet we intend giving the darker as well as the brighter side. Many who took an active part in our little drama, are far away, busily engaged in the cares of life. Some are resting in California and Oregon from all their labor. Others have been laid to repose in a green spot not far off, while some remain on the land they once called their "claims," and often talk of the times they used to have.

Dahlongega township was settled on the first day of May 1843. Before sunset of that day, the prairie lying between Little Cedar Creek and the Des Moines River timber, was dotted with the white covers of wagons that had borne the scanty gear of our first settlers from their old and distant homes. Horses and oxen were feeding on the first sweet grass of May, while their owners were busily engaged in selecting claims. These settlers soon formed a club for mutual protection as in other localities, and enacted a code of "claim laws," with the usual provisions and penalties for "claim jumpers" and speculators.

Among the settlers were a few pretty hard cases. A big ugly fellow, with a countenance that one would think was inclined to quarrel with day-light for exposing its bad qualities, Martial must have been thinking of him when he wrote,

"With all these tokens of a knave complete,
Should'st thou be honest thou'st a devilish cheat,"

who emigrated from Georgia to this place, and who gloried

in the name of James Woody, was destined to give his neighbors a deal of trouble. His wife Betsy was also a bit of a character when the spirit of Donnybrook Fair came over her. Old Jim, as his neighbors discourteously called him, had taken a claim just east of where the village of Dahlonega was located, which he sold during the summer to Martin Koontz, Sen., for two hundred and sixteen dollars, ready money. Now, James having a notion of his own about "Squatter Sovereignty," was not long in concluding that he would relieve some of his brother squatters of their claims without being at the little inconvenience of paying them for their good will, which he frankly admitted was not over-estimated by him. He only awaited for the completion of the township survey when he intended to pre-empt eighty acres of the claim he had sold to Koontz, with the money that he had received for the aforesaid claim. He had cut and hauled a lot of house-logs upon the north part of Koontz's claim, and might have succeeded in pre-empting it if he had not overdone the thing, by making an effort to take another eighty acre tract that was claimed by Joseph Kight. Peter White was covering a house that Koontz had built upon the south part of his claim, when on looking towards Kight's claim, was astonished to see a claim house standing upon Kight's land with several men about it as if at work. Peter was not long in getting himself down and over to Kight's cabin, which stood at the south-east corner of the public square in Dohlonega. Kight on hearing that his claim was "jumped," swore vengeance against the intruders, and accompanied by a few friends started for the new claim-house, where they found old Jim Woody, Alex. Crawford, Bill Crawford, a man by the name of Brock, and others of the Woody tribe, celebrating their success at house-raising after the old fashion of having a little "sunthin to take," and perhaps were jubilating under the inspiration of "sod-corn whisky." Be that as it may, their gratulations were soon to be interrupted.

While they were all seated within the house they had just built, Kight and his company came upon them with the

stealthiness of the panther, pulled the new and temporary roof down upon their heads, smashing their bottle and greatly endangering their persons with falling boards, weight-poles, &c. When they found that their house had been helped to tumble in upon them, they showed fight, but the attacking party having armed themselves with the hand-spikes used in raising the house, forced them to "*vamosé the ranche.*" Then tearing down and completely demolishing the house, Kight and his friends returned to Dahlonéga. The Woody faction were not satisfied to remain vanquished, and swore that they could whip their opponents. The two Crawfords and Brock threw down their gloves, which were taken up by Elias Kitterman, Joseph Kight and Peter Kitterman, who after a bloody fight convinced them that they had been reckoning without their host. Betty Woody, like Joan of Arc, was a leader in the fight. Her shrill voice could be heard high above the battle's roar, encouraging her friends, and breathing imprecations dire upon her enemies. Kight had one of the Crawfords *hors du combat*, getting home a succession of trip-hammer licks in good style, when Betsy put a period to his fun by thrusting a huge stick into the hands of old man Crawford, conjuring him to strike for the honor of the Woody cause and the salvation of his own son who was being beat to a jelly. The old man needed no further prompting but brought the stick down with a right good will. Kight threw up his arm to protect his head, but the lick came with sufficient force to fracture the bone of his arm. Just at that moment a rock thrown by some one of the belligerents fell at Kight's feet, which he laid hold of and threw, unfortunately striking his clubbed antagonist in the eye, hiding the light of this earth from the aforesaid orb forevermore.

After the fight had subsided, old Jim Woody rushed out from his cabin with a rifle in his hands, swearing that Peter White was the meanest man of the lot, and he would shoot him right then and there. Peter was marching to time called "quick-step," when Jack Woody was heard to exclaim: "D—n it Dad, that gun is'nt loaded." "Shut yer mouth, Jack, Pete

doesn't know it," was the reply. But the admonition came too late, Pete did know it, and laying hold of an axe threw it at old Jim with such accuracy that it scarcely missed his head, causing him to take shelter in his cabin. Jack snatched the gun from his father's hands and broke it to pieces,—done it we suppose, to prove his disapprobation of such conduct, and that he was of Georgia's chivalry, although his sire had shown the white feather.

The logs hauled on Koontz's claim were discovered and burnt on that or the following day. James Woody finding the force at his command insufficient to carry on the campaign successfully, concluded to try a little strategy. He went up to Esquire R. R. Jones, who meted out justice to the citizens of Dodgeville, and filed his affidavit, alleging therein that all the men in the vicinity (excepting his own friends,) had been guilty of sundry misdemeanors such as assault with intent to kill, arson, riot, &c. His idea for having them all arrested, was to prevent any of them from being witnesses. Jones issued the warrant but no constable would undertake to serve it. Wapello County being an attaché of Jefferson, the warrant was sent to Fairfield to the sheriff of that county, who sent deputy Wollard to serve it. A lawyer by the name of McKay generously volunteered his services in behalf of the defendants, and accompanied the sheriff, who on arriving at Agency City, summoned a posse to assist him in executing the warrant. On being thus reinforced they proceeded to Dahlonga. George May, William Dewy, and a lawyer by the name of Galbraith, attorneys for the plaintiff, were so sure that the game was bagged, came along to expound the intricacies of the law, and mystify the court with vivid declamations on the heinous offences lately committed by the prisoners at the bar against the person and property of their esteemed friend, James Woody, Esq. But the fates decreed that the biting jests and withering sarcasms coined by these limbs of the law as they came along, should remain a "tale untold."

Peter White was the first prisoner taken; he resisted the

sheriff, when he was thrown down by the posse. One of the Crawfords could not withstand the force of habit, and thought to console himself for the thrashing he had received a few days before, by gouging White to his heart's content, while he thought the chances were all in his favor. But instead of his favorite place, the eye, he found his thumb in White's mouth, between none of your gold-plated, patent artificial teeth, but a pair of old-fashioned grinders, that had cracked hickory-nuts without any inconvenience or detriment—a regular snapping-turtle's jaws, with ivory additions. Poor Crawford soon discovered that a natural affinity existed between those grinders and the bone of his thumb. The sheriff threatened to shoot White if he did not give up, who not fancying a bullet-hole through his jacket, concluded to yield the point. He was marched off to a cabin owned by Berry Woody, brother of the aforesaid James, standing on the east side of the public square, in Dahlonéga. The prisoners as fast as taken were put into this house for safe-keeping. It had but one door, which was duly locked and guarded without. Old father Koontz was brought in a prisoner, having but one leg, he came on horseback. His horse was hitched just back of the cabin. Peter White made his egress through the generous throated chimney, mounted the horse and started off at full speed. But Dr. Weir gave chase, and being better mounted, overtook and *persuaded* him to return, so Peter says. Toward night the sheriff had succeeded in capturing ten or a dozen souls, who proved that they were yet in the flesh by clamorously demanding something to eat. Betty Woody, we say peace to her ashes for such an act—having a woman's heart within the folds of her rude cotton dress, ran home and baked a huge basketfull of corn-dodgers—just such corn cakes as old “Uncle Neddy” couldn't eat, brought them to the cabin and offered to *feed her enemies*. Any one who had heard her horrid oaths during the fight a few days before, would have thought that her soul was an interminable desert, but here was an oasis watered by a spring that flows only from a woman's heart—looking greener and brighter like the

oasis in the midst of the vast sand plains, because of the contrast to her other actions.

The prisoners, like barbarians, dashed her bread against the rough logs of their cabin jail, swearing that it was execrable, that their dogs should not eat such vile stuff. Poor Betty, her labor seemed to have been in vain, yet we hope her's will prove "bread cast upon the waters that will return again after many days." She was the first of this community that "slept the sleep that knows no waking" in this world. The first grave in our little cemetery was for her; not even a rude stone marks her resting place, yet the old settlers know where the remains of poor old Betty repose, who with all her faults left one kind act to recommend her to the children of those she would have fed; of whom some one may some day plant a rose over her neglected grave.

When night set in the prisoners declared that they would go to their homes to eat and sleep. The sheriff thinking that he would not be able to keep them, let them go on parole until morning. The sheriff went home with Peter White to stay over night, and also to keep an eye on Peter, who he thought was a ringleader in all the troubles that had occurred. About midnight he was aroused from his sleep by loud yells of "bring out the sheriff." The house was evidently surrounded by a mob. A succession of sharp clicks greeted his ears, as the hammers of their guns came back. Joseph Kight as spokesman, informed the sheriff that they had come to escort him a short distance of the way towards Fairfield, where they hoped he would be more kindly entertained than if he remained here. He replied that if they would let him stay until morning, he would certainly go. As he had let the prisoners out on parole, the crowd concluded to let him stay until morning, and adjourned to Berry Woody's for the purpose of initiating the lawyers into the mystery of "riding on a rail." George May was summoned to come out and partake of this little luxury. Joseph Kight and Peter White had a suitable rail on their shoulders, but George being averse to the ride, asked to be heard before they condemned him, and

proceeded to inform them that a lawyer's vocation was a peculiarly trying one, often compelling him to be on the wrong side. The client, generally excited and prejudiced on going to law, represented his side in a more favorable light than facts would warrant. This was the case on the present occasion. He would try in future to avoid such cases. He would rather go briefless all his life than to take the ride they had talked of giving him. He would rather they would take an axe and cut his head off, as he preferred death to dishonor. George being an eloquent speaker easily convinced his jury that he was not guilty, beside establishing a reputation as a speaker that gave him business in after years.

Having thus fully accomplished all they wished, the settlers withdrew and rendezvoused at Riley Koontz's residence, where at sunrise next morning they numbered sixty-two strong, commanded by Col. John Moore, on horseback, carrying a huge knife in lieu of a sword. The *corps de armie* looked like a band of Texas rangers, going to make a dash at the Mexicans or Camanches. Sheriff Wollard and lawyer McKay came down to bid them good-bye, telling them they made quite a military appearance. Elias Kitterman handed McKay five dollars for the good-will he had shown in coming up, although they had not needed his services. The sheriff started for Fairfield and Col. Moore marched his troops to Dahlongega, where they were disbanded in due form, to be ready however to fall into ranks in case of another emergency. Thus ended the long-to-be-remembered Dahlongega war.

We have conversed with many who were eye witnesses and some who were participants in the foregoing incidents, and their interest is much enhanced by being strictly true. The "Dahlongega War" as it is familiarly called, is the theme of many a fireside talk during our long winter evenings, and it will, as the writer says, be remembered long.

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