

LIFE OF THE PIONEER FARMER.*

BY W. S. FULTZ.

My residence in Muscatine county dates back to the 14th of April, 1850. At that time the prairies in many places were covered with wild flowers of every hue. No grander sight ever met the eye of man or woman than the almost endless display of flowers, planted by the hand of Nature. But the plow of the old settler has changed all this. The fields of corn, oats, rye, barley and wheat, show the great change wrought by the hand of toil. Fifty years ago there was no blue grass or white clover. The Indian called these grasses the white man's foot, because they sprung up under the tread of his foot, and now our pastures which fifty years ago were all wild grass, are thickly set with those nutritious grasses, and the bloom of the white clover is a fair rival to the more gaudy wild prairie flowers of the pioneer settlers' period. Fifty years ago the prairies were destitute of trees; now, if you take your stand on the more elevated ground and cast your eye over the landscape, many groves are seen that have been planted by the hand of man. Orchards have sprung up as if by magic on every hand. The commodious farm houses with their beautiful surroundings have taken the place of the squatter's log cabin that for many years sheltered the hardy pioneer farmers of this county.

Fifty years ago the timbered portions of the country were an almost impenetrable jungle. Where the underbrush did not grow thickly, the weeds had taken possession, and during the fall and winter the pioneer hunter was almost sure to have his clothes filled with "beggar-lice" and "Spanish needles." The beautiful blue grass sod that we now find almost everywhere in the woods was then wholly unknown.

*This paper was read at the Old Settlers' Reunion, at Muscatine, Iowa, August 30, 1898.

This thick, almost impenetrable, condition of the timber made good shelter for game of all kinds, which was plenty, and the pioneer's larder was generally well supplied with the best meat, and sometimes that constituted about all of the supply of food.

The first settlements were made near the timber and along the streams of running water. The pioneer farmers of this county were of a social nature and for this reason they made their settlements as nearly contiguous as circumstances would admit. Add to this their firm belief that the timber land would sooner or later become very valuable, and their reason for settling near the timber is easily understood. This idea that timber land was destined to become very valuable was but natural to the original settlers. They knew nothing of the immense wealth of coal that lay beneath the surface of thousands of acres of Iowa soil, and they little dreamed that in less than half a century coal would be mined in Iowa to such an extent as to depreciate the price of wood and consequently of timber land. They knew little or nothing of the immense pine forests of Wisconsin that were destined to furnish so large a supply of lumber at less rates than it was possible to take it from the hard-wood timber growing near home.

In looking back over the almost forty-nine years of my residence in this county the changes that have taken place are truly wonderful. The then almost boundless prairies are now all fertile fields. The busy hands of the hardy pioneer farmers who settled here have made these great changes.

During my boyhood days it was a common sight to see the beautiful deer grazing or bounding through the tall rank grass; it is now more than thirty-five years since I have seen a wild deer.

One evening during the fall of 1851, while looking for cattle along the west bank of Sugar creek, in the north part of the county, I stood in the edge of a hazel thicket and watched a deer killing a large blacksnake. The snake was

in low, marshy ground and the deer would go several rods away on higher ground, and run and jump upon the snake, and immediately spring away and return to the higher ground and repeat his running and jumping. This he kept up for several minutes, when my boyish curiosity prompted me to see what he was at. At sight of me the deer bounded away across the prairie and I found the snake trampled into the mud in such a manner as to hold it tight. I procured a club and killed it.

Up to the winter of 1855 wild turkeys were plenty and turkey roasts were quite frequent during the winters in the old settlers' cabins, but our turkey dinners of the present time are supplied from the flock that has been raised by the "women folks" of the farm.

And right here I wish to refer to the pioneer women of Muscatine county. At our reunions we hear much of the hardships of pioneer life as endured by the men, but there is seldom any reference made to the hardships of the domestic life of the pioneer woman. When we look back to the old settlers' period and see the lady of the house rising at 4 o'clock in the morning to begin her daily toil; when we consider the primitive means of cooking a meal at the open fireplace and the limited supply then found in her larder, we wonder how it was that such a generous meal could be supplied from means so limited. The pioneer woman knew the use of the spinning wheel. It was she that helped shear the sheep and in many instances carded the rolls, and it was her deft hands that spun the yarn for the family, and it was she that often wove the cloth and then cut out the clothing for the entire family, and patiently sat and sewed until late bedtime, so that her family could be comfortably clothed. Sewing machines were unknown, and all such work had to be done by hand. The present and future generations will never know all that they owe to the pioneer women of this county. It was their aid that enabled the men to build the log cabin and the miles of fence, and to break the thousands

of acres, and to make the miles of road that traverse the country in all directions. It was by their aid that the wilderness was changed to a highly cultivated country. All hail to the pioneer women of Muscatine county!

NEW PAPERS IN IOWA.—The increase in newspapers is an evidence of the growing prosperity of a country. There are already six weekly publications in this (Iowa) Territory. Two years ago there were but two. "*Bloomington Herald*" is the title of a new paper just established at the flourishing town of Bloomington (Muscatine), sixty miles north of us—published by Mr. Thomas Hughes, and edited by Messrs. John B. Russell and Thomas Hughes. It is a handsomely printed imperial sheet filled with useful and interesting matter, and of a decided democratic cast. The number before us bears evidence of ability that must be felt and acknowledged in the dissemination and triumph of democratic principles. It is located in a flourishing section of the country where democracy predominates, and is established under the most favorable auspices for usefulness and permanency. We predict for it every success, and welcome its editors into the editorial world. "*The Iowa Standard*" is the title of another paper just started in the same place by Messrs. Crum & Bailey. It is of super-royal size, and neatly printed. Its politics are thus defined by its editors: "The political complexion of *The Standard* will be the advocacy of the Whig principles in its most *effulgent* character."—*Burlington Gazette*, October 30, 1840.

GAME OF EVERY KIND, deer, squirrels, turkeys, geese, ducks, quail, pheasants, pigeons, etc., etc., abound plentifully in this neighborhood the present season.—*Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Oct. 24, 1840.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.