

TO OBSERVE CENTENNIAL

Whitfield Township To Celebrate Its Founding

Waggoners, Whitleys, and Martins Were Its Earliest Settlers

Autobiography of A. J. Waggoner

One hundred years ago, the first permanent white settlement was made in Moultrie county. Local history generally credits Gilbert and Martha Waggoner (husband and wife) as being the first settlers. They located in the Waggoner neighborhood, five or six miles north, northeast of Windsor, probably as early as 1820-25. The Waggoners were followed quickly by the Whitleys, but some reports place the Whitleys ahead of the Waggoners. The Martins and Whitfields arrived soon thereafter.

In 1826 the first Waggoner church was built. It was located on or near the site of the present Waggoner church. It is now proposed to observe the centennial of this community with special services, to be held September 4. A program suitable to the occasion is being formed and will be made public soon. Judge W. G. Cochran is to be one of the speakers.

A PIONEER'S REMINISCENCES

Fourteen years ago, A. J. Waggoner, son of the old pioneering couple, wrote an article dealing with those early days. We take pleasure in reproducing it, but are obliged to do so in installments. This article will be followed by another, which deals with one of the pioneers of that community, John Neeley Martin. Both Mr. Waggoner and Mr. Martin have gone to their reward. It is easy to see by these

articles that they were not familiar with automobiles nor airplanes, and that bobbed hair for women was not thought of. Here is the first installment by Mr. Waggoner:

BY A. J. WAGGONER

"I Andrew J. Waggoner, was born in Moultrie county, Whitley township, Illinois, January 1, 1842.

"The house in which I was born was a little hewed log house, daubed with mud, located on the Whitfield farm. It had a puncheon floor and the old fashioned chimney made of sticks and plastered with mud, both inside and out. The backs and jambs being of mud.


"My father and mother, Gilbert and Martha Waggoner, came to this country from North and South Carolina, at an early date, when the dusky Indians lived in his rudely constructed wigwam along the banks of Whitley creek. Then the deer roamed at will through the forest and the howling of the wolves and the gobble of the wild turkey could be heard in the distance.

"I was the fifth child of a family of 10 children, and am the only one of the family now living. We lived on the Whitfield farm about 10 years, then moved from there to an other little log cabin about a quarter of a mile east of that place and lived there about one year. At that time the subject of schools was brought up and the early settlers began to see the need of schools to educate their children; so it was decided by father and mother that we should move from that cabin and it should be used for a school house. We moved to the farm which is now owned by Mr. Thomas Leggitt, and about a quarter of a mile north of where his house now stands. We lived about two years and then moved to the old home place near the

near the Waggoner church.

"The old log school house was finally abandoned and the school was changed to the old Lynn Creek church, the first Baptist church in this country, which was located on Uncle Billy Martin's place. Uncle Gideon Edwards taught the first school held there and continued teaching there until he was elected judge of Coles county. This old church was rudely built of logs, the rafters being held in place by wooden pins. It had one door and three windows. After it had been decided to hold school in this church, one log was removed from the west end of the house the entire length of the room in order to admit sufficient light for the children, muslin being tacked over the openings. A split log served as a writing desk. As to the floor, it was made of puncheons, and I now have in my possession six of the puncheons from that old floor.

"Some years after this, it was planned to erect a frame building for a church and sell the old log house. My father bought it and moved it to his farm for a barn, where it is still standing, just a few rods west of the Waggoner church at his old home place.

"The first store I ever went to was north of Gays, about one and one-half miles near where Mr. Zion Frost lives. This store was kept by Ebenezer Noyes. I rode behind my father on horse-back to the store. There were no fences on the prairie at that time anywhere except a little low fence around the store house. The prairie everywhere was covered with tall prairie grass, rosin weed and flowers. There were no railroads. We had to go to Sullivan after our mail. When we went to mill we shelled our corn the night before we went and had to take it to Shelbyville to an old water mill to get our corn ground. Usually there were so many in ahead of us when we got there that we had to stay all night and get our meal the next morning, as we had to wait until our  came. The next mill was an old horse mill at Old Nelson. A team

of horses being hitched at one end of the beam and a yoke of oxen at the other to supply power.

Many were the hardships our fore-fathers endured to make this great country of ours what it is today."

The first and second and third year after we came here to our old home place we raised wheat. Our wheat field consisted of about 10 acres of wheat each year. We cut our wheat with the old fashioned reap hook. Usually about five of our neighbors came and brought reap hooks and helped us until we would get it cut. We would cut this wheat and lay it in little bunches, then when we got to the end of the field we would hang the reap hook over our shoulder and turn back to the other end of the field, each man binding the row of bunches he had cut.

The day before we threshed our wheat we cleared off a circular plot of ground about 40 feet in diameter. If the ground was very dry we dampened it good the night before so it would pack down good and not be dusty. The next morning we hauled in our wheat. We placed the bundles so as to overlap something like the shingles of a roof. Then the boys rode the horses over the wheat, one followed the other until the grain was well trampled out. We kept this up until our entire crop of wheat was trampled out.

After the grain was tramped out we gathered it up and on a windy day poured it from buckets, held up in the air so as the wind would blow the chaff away. This was the way we cleaned our wheat for three years.

In those days when the good old mothers went to church, they always wore beautiful sunbonnets, and looked so nice, now when the women go to church they wear hats so large that they can scarcely get through the church door.

To me those good old days were the best days of our lives.

Our farming implements consisted principally of a wooden mold board plow and a hoe. Ten acres was considered on an average enough farm land for a farmer to till. We broke the prairie, which was covered with wild prairie grass, with our wooden mold board plow. We marked our corn fields off with a single shovel plow, plowing three times in the same middle. While the men were busy working with these rudely constructed farm implements, the good mothers of the homes were performing their household duties under just such difficulties. The hum of the old fashioned spinning wheel could be heard in every home. What happy homes they were too! We planted and raised our own flax, cleaned and hackled it. Then mother would spin it into thread and from this and the wool she made all our clothing. I well remember when mother used to make the wool out into little rolls called cards, and hang them on the head of the wheel -- then she would begin spinning these little rolls into yarn.

The old fire place was mother's cooking stove. For baking bread she used the "old skillet and lid." The skillet had legs about an inch and a half or two inches long. The lid was a heavy lid having about an inch rim around it on top. While mother was mixing her bread she usually had the old skillet and lid on the fire getting hot. When all was prepared she would shovel the coals out in front of the fire, put the skillet with the bread in it, on these coals, cover it up with the hot lid and then cover the lid with fire and then leave it to bake. All the cooking was done by the fire place. Labor was very cheap. The first year I worked out I worked for \$6 per month.

When I was twenty-one years old I joined the Illinois 126th regiment enlisting at Fuller's Point, to go to the Civil War. In a short time we were transferred to 130th Illinois, two companies and remained in the army until I was discharged. When discharged I

returned to my father's home. A few years later I was united in marriage to Lucinda Ann Cox, from near Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Cox family moved from Tennessee to Illinois and then to Missouri where we were married forty-two years ago the 19th of February. We returned to my father's home the 20th of February and lived with my parents until fall. In the fall I built a log hut, covered it with clap boards, and we moved to it. We lived very happy in our little cabin until I could build a better house. I have lived at the same place for forty-two years. Through the different scenes of life I have witnessed many different changes, some for better and some for worse. Many were the difficulties and hardships that the early pioneers had to endure, yet they were happy and contented with their lot and I think:

"How dear to my heart
Are the scenes of my childhood,
When fond recollections
Present them to view."

A. J. Waggoner

Written in 1912 by one of Whitley's Early Citizens.

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Submitted by Seneca Fleener Daily

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