

Early Cass County Town Histories

VIRGINIA 1866 - The Cass County Historian, March 2000, source - Weekly Virginia Courier, July 21, 1866 - Submitted by Marcia Cox

Since we have established our editorial self at this place, we have been looking around and we will tell of our observances.

Virginia is situated on a high gently rolling prairie in the center of Cass County. It is surrounded by as fine a farming country as can be found. Within the past two or three years, it seemed to have received an infusion of energy which shows itself in material improvements, values of property and increase in business. One great advantage of our town can be appreciated by those with families to rear, is its healthy situation. There are no banyons with stagnated waters, no swamps which abound about the river towns sending forth their vapors, laden with disease and death. The summer breezes come with unimpeded sweep over the cultivated fields.

About a mile from town is a belt of timber stretching for many miles to the east and west supplying an abundance of firewood.

When people are moral and intelligent, no fear need be entertained of their success in business and perhaps there is not better test of a people than the attention they give to their churches and schools. There are four churches in town, three of them new. There is the Old School Presbyterian Church with its lofty spire, reminding the observer of the old time churches that followed KNOX in the cradle of Presbyterianism in Scotland. It recently was painted outside and enclosed with a fence while inside the walls have been papered, the woodwork painted and the aisles carpeted. The whole building speaks volumes for the congregation that meet to worship there.

The Methodist Episcopal Church is a new building. It has been enclosed with a fence and lately repainted and otherwise improved. Earnest Christians have an interest there whose whole energies are not devoted to laying up treasures.

The Christian Church (Campbellites, so called) is a new building and also assisted by the painters brush. This congregation from deaths, removals, etc. has been much reduced members.

The Cumberland Presbyterian meeting house is the oldest in town. It is kept in repair credible to the people to whom it belongs.

Virginia has been blessed with good educational privileges. There is always room for criticism but it seems the school has been generally managed to not only receive those from the district but others as well. Usually there are one or two private schools, there is a seminary of high school under the auspices of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Medicine is ably represented by Drs. TATE, GOODSPEED and SNYDER. These gentlemen have the confidence of the large circle on which they practice.

Dr. Harvey TATE is the oldest physician here, both in age and residence. He has helped to enter into the world and afterwards guarded the life and health of many.

Dr. GOODSPEED came here about eight years old, long enough to test his capabilities as a physician.

Dr. SNYDER came about two years ago. In that short time he has worked himself into a good practice.

A year ago a bank was established under the name The Farmers National Bank. It is doing a healthy business. It is located in a fine brick building on the south side of Washington Square. It has a substantial fire proof vault. The Peoria, Pekin and Jacksonville railroad is in operation to this place. When it is completed we will have communication to many places except Beardstown. Large droves of cattle and hogs are shipped by this road for the Chicago and New York markets. Three lines of stages connect here with the railroads. A railroad is contemplated from Springfield via this place to Beardstown and westward. There is also a possibility for a road to pass through Arenzville connecting to the Great Western near Concord.

The two oldest merchants are C.H. OLIVER and N.B. THOMPSON. For some years they have been "monarches of all they surveyed" for those unable to go to Beardstown or Jacksonville. Those days have gone and they had to adjust.

Dr. L.S. ALLARD for some years has dispensed drugs, build houses, grumbling at the lack of trade but making money faster and faster.

PAYNE and CRANDALL, OLIVER and SON, EASLEY and BERGEN have fine stocks of dry goods.

J.G. CAMPBELL has a fine stock of hardware and staples of groceries.

SPARKS and ALWARD and MIDDLETON keep fine stocks of groceries.

Mr. Sam POOLEY is doing all sorts of business with boots, shoes, dry goods, patent rights, etc.

Mr. J.W. McDONALD has supplied what we much needed tin goods and stoves.

On the east of town is the mill owned by A. DWELLE, the quality of flour he turns out is second to none.

North of town is a new mill run by HILL BROTHERS and doing a good business.

We have three brick yards, Jonathan LOOKER, Eli DALE and TAYLOR and FERRIGO.

Mr. R. CHITTICK, Thomas TURNER and STEWART and KING have paying businesses in the blacksmith line while Mr. CHERRYHOLMES and Mr. BECHLEHYMER do justice to the subject of wagons and buggies.

Mr. STOPLER has a harness shop on the square. We have three shoe shops, John MENZIES, Casper MAGEL and Ira JACOBS.

Mr. J.M. BARNARD has a tailor shop over the OLIVER's store, giving his customers good fits.

The VIRGINIA HOUSE has a large well fitted building and a large transient business.

RANDALL and BARDEN have a lumber business.

Charles HASKELL has an ice cream salon over ALLARD's drugstore and James REEDER has one over PAYEN and CRANDALL's dry goods.

The mainstay of Virginia seems to be the enterprising farming population in the vicinity. They know their land is good and they are determined it shall bring forth abundance.

We have heard the story how James THOMPSON and John ELLIOTT came here with scarcely clothes on their backs, working until they could possess land and cattle and from log cabins, handsome dwellings.

Other farmers we hope to know some day are HALL's, EPLER's, PETEFISH, Levi SPRINGER, John WEAR, Harvey BATES, Milton TROTTER, and a host of others. The latter and John FIELDING are building a fine brick on the East Square. It will have three store rooms and more. It will be a credit to the town.

EARLY HISTORY OF BEARDSTOWN - The Cass County Historian, March 2001, source - Beardstown Morning Enterprise, September 22 and 24, 1912, written by G.W. Brown, Bluff Springs, Illinois

I will tell what people did to make a living in and around Beardstown, fifty years or more ago, as I remember them. when I was a boy it was thought the ROCKFORD-ROCK ISLAND would run across the river to the west part of town but for some reason it fell through and was abandoned and the first railroad was after the war (Civil). It was called the ROCKFORD, ROCK ISLAND and ST. LOUIS but later the C.B. and Q. bought it out and in 1871 the SPRINGFIELD SOUTHEASTER was put through, now its the B(altime) and O(hio). Before the railroads the only way to get goods out of Beardstown was by wagons and boats. There were a lot of boats up the river, there were warehouses all along the river. One flour mill, one distillery and two port packing houses down near the "mounds" in the west part of town. The old mill on east Main is now owned by SCHULTZ-BAJAUN and COMPANY. There was the old foundry at about where the Electric Light plant is now and there was the sawmill up near the Bay. The surplus corn and wheat was put in the warehouses and afterwards loaded on boats and barges and shipped. There was lots of work in the warehouses and lots of work boarding and unloading. The steamboats that I remember are the OCEAN SPRAY, OCEAN WAVES, and BIG MARTHA, LITTLE MARTHA (owned by Capt. EBAUGH), Beardstown man. There was a large boat, the FARAGRIT that done service in the war around Vicksburg. I saw that boat when it came up to Beardstown. Its cabin was pierced with bullets. There were smaller boats. One was owned by the son of Ira CROW who used to be constable, we called him PAP CROW. This boat was a daisy, it could go up across the river run by tread power, afterwards made into a steam ferry.

The OCEAN WAVE ran a race with the OCEAN SPRAY and the OCEAN SPRAY burned. Mr. WHIPP and his daughter was on the boat when it caught fire but were saved. They had been away buying goods. Mr. WHIPP ran a drug store on Main St. and his daughter, Sarah ran a millinery store. The packing business belonged to NOLTE and McCLURE, did a large business in two or three winter months and employed several hundred men.

Hogs were driven into Beardstown by the thousands from all adjoining counties. There were lots where they were kept and watchmen, day and night, looked after them.

In those days it was the custom to kill hogs one day and cut them up the next. When they had to wait for hogs, people liked to work at the pork houses and got tolerably good wages, farmers would come for miles to work. You could get spareribs and pig feet for the asking.

They were marked when they were small and let run at large until about two years old when they were pretty good size.

There were good many cooper shops in town in those days where most of the pork and lard barrels were made by hand.

Large quantities of split staves and broad logs were hauled from Schuyler and Brown counties and the hoop poles came mostly from Bluff Springs and Virginia and were of hickory and white oak.

The lard was rendered in large tanks by steam and drawn off to cool, then run off in barrels, weighed and rolled down the river bank. The pork was salted and processed same as the lard. Watchmen guarded the barrels until the river opened in the spring where it was shipped by boat.

My father and John (?) ran the engine tanks, working twelve hour days. I used to take my father's supper. I and another boy took the supper one cold night. Mr. EWING, who branded the barrels must have weighed 300 to 400 pounds. He had a stick through the spareribs of one hog roasting it before the furnace. His face was covered with black grease and perspiration. He was a jovial fella and the other boy and I had a good laugh. I told him to look in the glass and when he did he laughed and then invited us to help him eat the spareribs, which was accepted.

Messrs FISH and HOUGHTON owned and ran the flour mill on East Main. FISH was the brother of Edgar FISH and used to work at the mill. They afterwards ran a mill in Industry, Ill.

There was work for the women too. Horace BILLINGS has a barn down near the "mounds", he cured and packed hams. The women were engaged in sewing the (?) around the barrels. The men did the hanging and smoking of hams.

The farmers used to haul prairie hay to town. No timothy or clover hay then and fine straight wood, maple, ash, pecan and birch. Many homes had fireplaces and the winters were cold and it took a lot of wood.

Perhaps people do not know what an unhealthy place Beardstown was years ago. The land was not drained and there was a lot of malaria. People used to shake with the ague, spring and summer was the worst. They would make a tea for the child and take quinine all year round. I used to shake with ague every other day. People had fleas to content with, so many hogs around and at night swarms of mosquitoes.

It is a pleasure to live in Beardstown now and I am glad the people do not have to go through disagreeable experiences we went through years ago.

My father worked two seasons for Dr. TURPIN in Chicago a few years before the Chicago fire. Dr. TURPIN used to be in business in Beardstown.

When a boy I knew what was going on in Beardstown, I knew most of the men working in the warehouses and packing houses but there are not many old timers left. There is Peter FLANNERY, Charles McCARTY and a few others.

Perhaps I may tell you sometime how we passed away our time and what we did during the dark days of the Civil War.

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