

Northern Kentucky
Views Presents:

When Falmouth Was a Babe in Swaddling Clothes

By DR. H. C. CLARK
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WHEN FALMOUTH WAS A BABE IN SWADDLING CLOTHES

By Dr. H.C. Clark

The writer remembers distinctly conditions as they existed in Falmouth before there was a bridge in Pendleton County. The railroad bridge was completed in the year 1854 and the suspension bridge over Main Licking River was opened a month later. This was the year of the great flood on the Licking when the water reached its highest mark. Rowboats passed through the Oldham house, now occupied by our townsman, J.V. Oldham. His father T.J. Oldham, refused to leave this home, and occupied the upper story of the house until the water receded.

The new bridge was threatened by the accumulation of driftwood against the pier. The town of Falmouth was composed at that time only of what is now the central section of our city. There were only four dwellings in East Falmouth - the stone house known as the Casey house; the Woodworth house which stood on the lot where now stands the residence of George B. Held; the Bruce Hudnall house and the Atmore house. The latter was a log home and was the birthplace of Charles Atmore, who was at one time treasurer of the L. & N. Railroad.

There were but three houses west of the railroad - the Hoy house; the Riggs home and the William Johnson house which was situated on the site now occupied by the stable of the Falmouth Fair grounds.

TOWN HAD BUT ONE CHURCH

There was but one church in town, located on second Street. There was a lane running east from Main street, terminating at a cornfield fence which is now the west side of Broad Street.

The city's one church stood open for anyone who cared to enter and preach any Saturday or Sunday night. During the remainder of the week it was occupied by Lunenburg Abernathy (who lived in the stone house across the creek) as a schoolhouse.

The court house was a stone structure, and the jail built of logs, stood back of the brick building now occupied by J.M. Mason.

The first mill was owned by Augustus Robbins and was located at the foot of Chapel Street. It was operated by water power, and used as both a flour mill and saw mill. The dam ran diagonally across the river from a point near the north abutment of the railroad bridge.

There was a pork-packing house, built of logs, running east and west along the south side of the courthouse. The product of this industry was shipped by flat boat to New Orleans. This business was owned by A. Robbins. There was a tannery at the corner of Fourth street and Maple Avenue. Harmon Deglow was the proprietor. Hides were tanned. The tanbark was stripped from oak trees and brought to town by the county folk and sold to the tanner, or traded to him for leather. In those days, nearly every article of produce was legal tender at the stores and business houses, and not much money changed hands in the various transactions between business people and the citizens of the county. Augustus Robbins conducted a store in a frame building

with a lean-to, at the site of the brick building on Main Street now occupied by the Farmers Union Supply Co. This building was erected by T. J. Oldham in 1859. William German also ran a store in the room now occupied by J.A. Woodhead.

NO STREETS; NO SIDEWALKS

The road from the ferry ran up the branch from the present south landing of the ferry to Main Cross Street (now Shelby St.) This was many years before the Little Iron bridge was built.

The population of Falmouth at that time was about the same as that of East Falmouth today. There were no sidewalks, except in spots and these were made of planks. There was not a foot of improved street or macadamized road in Falmouth or Pendleton County in the 1850's. Many times I have seen wagons stuck in the mud on the streets, which was up to the wagon hub.

There were two practicing physicians in Falmouth in that early day - Dr. Dan Barbour and Dr. James Wilson, grandfather of our esteemed Mayor Dr. J.E. Wilson. There had been a Dr. Monroe here many years before this date. He came here in 1792 and was the first practicing physician known. At that time he had two brothers who resided here - one a surveyor and the other a Baptist preacher. Doubtless these pioneers were related to our own beloved Capt. H.F. Monroe.

Henry Gordon was the one shoemaker of the town. He came here as a tramp, was taken in and provided for by Capt. J.T. Clark, where he remained until the outbreak of the Civil war. He was, I believe, at one time Worshipful Master of Orion Lodge of Masons.

PIONEER LAWYERS

The legal calling was likewise represented in our citizenship. S.F. Swoope and Samuel T. Hauser were our lawyers. Both came here from North Carolina and I might remark here that, by a strange coincidence, one of our most promising young attorneys, H.B. Best, also came here from that state. A few years later J.E. Record came here from New Jersey. He came to Falmouth as an ox driver in a wagon which was pulled over the hundreds of miles of mud roads between here and New Jersey by a team of oxen. How long it must have taken him to reach the promised land! Lawyer Record was a self-educated man and became a lawyer of note. Still later, a Mr. Fitzpatrick came and practiced law at the Pendleton County Bar.

Ancel Johnson was the village blacksmith. He conducted his shop at the corner of Fourth and Main Streets. Mr. Johnson was a man of powerful build and of great physical strength, a typical product of the hard life of the pioneer. He had in his employ a Negro boy named Jeff, who helped him shoe oxen and do other work that came to this shop. The shoeing of the oxen was done on the street corner, in full view of all who cared to witness the performance.

We had but one tailor, Jacob Schinlock. His shop was located next door to the Kennett Tavern. I almost forgot to mention another merchant John Bird. He died here and was buried in the cemetery with Masonic honors, as I remember.

There was a stave and barrel-heading mill at the mouth of Lick Branch, but this industry did not operate for a very long period of time. It was owned by Semor Frieburg, grandfather of Sig Frieburg of Cincinnati.

Falmouth presented a typical picture of a straggling Kentucky town in that early day. There was much space between the buildings. There were no street lights. We used a greasy rag in a mussel-shell for a tallow dip to give light inside the house.

Outside, we used a tin lantern. I remember well when coal-oil lamps were first introduced. This was a great relief to me, as I detested the regular job of stringing up the candle molds every week. The coal-oil at that time was of a reddish color, resembling our Ethyl gasoline today, and cost of precious fluid was 50 cents a gallon.

Stock ran at large in the county, as well as in town. Hoop-poles and barrel-staves were legal tender at the stores. They were taken in trade by the merchants, for linsey for women's petticoats and blue jeans for men's trousers, groceries, calico, powder and shot, also whiskey at 50 cents a gallon.

Frying chickens brought \$1 a dozen; eggs 5 cents a dozen; butter 10 cents a pound. There was no market for milk.

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WHEN FALMOUTH WAS A BABE IN SWADDLING

CLOTHES

by Dr. H. C. Clark, date unknown
(continued)

COFFINS MADE-TO-MEASURE

Robert Lee and James Murphy made all the coffins. When a person died, his measurements were taken by the neighbors, who cut notches in a pole indicating the length and width of the body, and turned the specifications over to the coffin-makers, who made up the box to order. It didn't cost much to die in those days.

Major Wheeler conducted a carding factory on Chapel Street, at the rear of the old stone house which stood on the site of J.J. Austin's garage. The machinery of the factory was propelled by horsepower. I. Hudnall conducted a hattery in a two story log building at the rear of the present store of Sol Greenberg, facing the public square. The hatter conducted business until 1850, when he was elected County Judge.

SCARCITY OF MONEY

The nearest bank was the Northern Bank of Covington. But that didn't worry anybody to a great extent. There wasn't much money in circulation, and people carried their money in their pockets or hid it in their homes. It all seems strange, when compared to our present mode of living. Then, money was loaned freely among neighbors. I never heard of security being asked. Neither did I hear of anyone being robbed. Were people more honest that they are today? I think so. There were few lawsuits growing out of petty disputes between families or neighbors.

There were just seven dwellings, including the Kennett Tavern and the Lightfoot Hotel, on the east side of Main Street, and five on the west side of Main Street from Shelby to the river.

On the north side of Shelby Street to the depot, there were but three buildings; there were but three on the south side.

There was not a place for public gatherings in the city of Falmouth at that time, except the church. There were but three roads leading into the city - the Cynthiana road, the Wagner's Ferry road, or by the Oldham Ferry. This was before the Kentucky Central Railroad was built.

FALMOUTH SETTLED SOON AFTER REVOLUTION

The City of Falmouth was settled soon after the Revolutionary War, and became a town in 1792. Pendleton County was formed from portions of Campbell and Bracken Counties. Falmouth is older than the city of Cincinnati.

There are some early records in the office of the Pendleton County Clerk, at the time James G. Garrard was Governor of the Commonwealth. The Magistrates were appointed by the Governor, as was also the Sheriff. There were no county buildings at the time these records were written. Peace officers,

commissioners or magistrates met by appointment in the home of one William Mountjoy, great-grandfather of Mrs. Basil Browning on the 4th day of July 1799, and they proceeded to elect a county clerk, as the law provided. William Mountjoy was elected. James Groves presented his commission and appointment from the Governor as Sheriff. The bonds of the two officers were made and accepted by the Commissioners of the Peace. It seems a little queer that Falmouth was chartered seven years before the County of Pendleton was formed, but it is true, never the less.

MEN WORE HIGH-HEEL BOOTS

The men of the time wore high-heeled boots, almost as high as those used on women's shoes today. The shoes had stump toes. Breeches for men were made with flap pockets and straps under the instep to hold them down. Men wore a black stock around the neck that went on with a steel band, which snapped in place, forcing him to hold his head up and causing his Van Dyke whiskers to dance up and down as he chewed his Virginia plug. The women wore caps, often of beautiful lace. Their everyday dresses were of homespun. Broad striped gingham was the favorite dress for Saturday, the day after the baking was done, and church day for the Baptists. These were good times in which to live. We were not concerned about the price of gasoline, nor did we have trouble with inner tubes.

FIRST AGENT OF K. C. RAILROAD

The first agent of the Covington and Lexington Railroad at this point was Ralph Tomlinson. He lived in a one-room house where Frank Puthoff has his shop at the present time. The next house going south on Main Street was that of Dr. James Wilson. Next to the doctor, in building was the residence of Enos Daniels; next the Lightfoot Hotel; next a theatre built of logs and called "The Falmouth Playhouse" or "Thespian" inspired by John Hilsey who came here from Philadelphia; next was Jake Shilock's Tavern; the next house was the Clark House, where the Phoenix Hotel now stands; then the Harmon House, afterward the Murphy and William Wilson house. The next and last house on that side of the street was the old home of Ansel Johnson, where bees made honey for the family in the attic, and where a slot cut to give the bees passage way is still visible from the street.

On the west side of Main Street, going north was the S.F. Swoope home; next was the present home of Dr. J.E. Wilson; the next house was S.T. Hauser's home and is at present used as a lunchroom. Then, across the alley, still standing and occupied by J.U. Riggle, was the home of Reuben McCarty, former County Clerk. Captain McCarty was a famous Indian fighter, and was one of the few survivors of the battle of the River Raisin. He also served in the Mexican War and was wounded in the conflict. The last house on the west side of Main Street is the brick, formerly occupied by Dan Daugherty and wife, just south of the old fort where the J.J. Austin residence now stands and is owned by James Coleman. In 1826, this house was owned by Mrs. Johnson Colvin, mother of the late Mrs. J.E. Hobday. Her husband, Mr. Colvin, lived but one year after their marriage. She afterwards married William Monroe. She was the mother of Capt. H.F. Monroe, and he a half-brother to Mrs. J.J. Hobday.

FEW HOUSES ON SHELBY STREET

There were but three houses then standing on Shelby Street between Main Street and the railroad, on the south side. The McMurchy house stood where my residence now stands; the

Rule house stood where the Dudley family lived so many years, and the brick house now owned and occupied by Mrs. Frances Childers.

On Shelby Street, coming east, on the north side, there were but two houses standing in 1854. The house where Rule & Boggess now conduct their store was the home of Dr. Monroe in 1792. At least a part of the walls are still standing. The next house was a two-story log structure which stood back from the street. The room is now occupied by _____ Shop, and at that time was the Hattery.

There was but one building on the south side of Fourth Street. It stood where Mrs. Eckler's house now stands. It was a log house and was the home of William Nailor. Harmon Deglow, the tanner, was located at the corner of Fourth and Maple. There were only a few buildings on the side streets. The log house covered with weather boarding, just south of J.J. Austin's home on Chapel Street, was the home of William Art. Thomas Best managed the Robbins Mill for many years, then it fell into the hands of a man of the name of Turner. Later, Casper Sharpe was the owner of the mill. He was killed while loading some logs. The mill then passed into the hands of George Goulding. After that, J. Woodhead purchased the site and built the Woolen Mill, which was operated by his sons, John and Joseph, for many years. There remains today a part of the dam by the mill site, but no mill by a dam site.
