

CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE SETTLEMENT

The first recorded appearance of anything connected with Maries County occurs about the year 1720 in the form of a map of the territory on which John Law's Mississippi Bubble was founded. Mister Law, after the fashion of most promoters, claimed everything in sight, and in order to have something to show his investors caused a map to be made of the country, in which he proposed to make settlements, dig gold, and carry on other profitable operations. The mapmaker knew of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, of course, so he put them on the map. Father Marquette had described a river flowing into the Mississippi from the west below the mouth of the Missouri, which we know as the Meramec, so he put that on, too. He must have been told, or else imagined, that there might be other tributaries to a stream the size of the Missouri, so he let his hand wander

over the paper until it was some distance above the mouth of the Missouri, and sketched in another river-- a wide-mouthed, stub-tailed stream emptying into it at approximately the right place; there was the Gasconade River for the first time on any map. Only it wasn't the Gasconade; it was the "Riviere a 'Fourche" on Law's map, a name applied to at least one more river and several bayous in Arkansas and farther down the river.

The name 'Gasconade' appears on a map not much later than 1720, however; a name perhaps bestowed by Etienne V. deBourgmont, a French officer in Canada, who deserted after 'sassing' his superior officer, the Sieur de Cadillac. DeBourgmont fled to Missouri where he lived something like twenty years until a change in officials permitted him to go back to Canada. Cadillac was a Gascon of changeable temperament, and deBourgmont professed to see a likeness between his late boss and the changeable river--hence Gasconade.

Mister Law and his Bubble both 'busted,' the little French settlements of Kaskaskia and Cahokia on the east side of the Mississippi were strictly occupied with their own affairs, or at least were not interested in anything very far over on the west side, and while it is likely that some of the fur traders from both places crossed this territory, nothing is now known of it if they did. Our hills and streams were undisturbed until some forty years after Law put us on the map. Messrs. Laclede, Chouteau, and others founded the village St. Louis on the west bank of the Mississippi, and immediately things began to happen--'immediately' being used in the sense of a hundred and fifty years ago.

The settlers on the east bank of the river were farmers first and traders second, but the gentry who founded St. Louis were traders first, last, and all the time--mostly traders in furs. Once their rude houses were up and a place of worship built, they left any cultivating to their womenfolk and took to the brush after

furs. The Chouteaus, include Laclede, being among the higher ups and regarding a boat almost as a Texan does a horse, went wherever they could be rowed--up the Missouri and the Osage. The Gasconade was not a favored stream with them, being swift and unruly and just as apt to spill a Chouteau into its icy waters as it was to spill common people; so they usually left it alone. Whatever trapping was done along it was done by the Abadies, Desnoyers, Courtois, Moreaus, Poilevres, Fortins, and the other lesser fry; but the Chouteaus profited from it after all. They bought and sold at a handsome profit most of the furs trapped and gathered here by others.

Its proximity to St. Louis and the fact that travelers went over it mostly on foot did one thing for the later Maries County, however--people came to know it more accurately. A map of about 1775 located the Gasconade just about where it ought to be, the Bourbeuse was shown very correctly and the Big and Little Maries and the Tavern were placed about where they belong. The lesser creeks, of course, were not shown at all. The Gasconade also appeared under its present name, Riviere a Fourche having disappeared from the map.

By this time Messrs. Abadie, Desnoyers, and others had fairly regular 'beats' established, especially up to certain points, most of them being former Indian trails. Their trail, or 'trace' to the heads of the Pineys ran from St. Louis to the north of the Meramec, thence southeasterly, crossing the Nine Mile Bourbeuse, then called Lanes Fork, close to the present east line of Maries County, thence across Spanish Needle Prairie and on into Phelps County. One to the Osage Fork and the other heads of the Gasconade parted company with the Piney Trace about the east county line, running across the north side of Lanes Prairie and crossing the Gasconade somewhat above the old Bloomgarden Ford, reaching the divide between the Gasconade and the Osage several miles west of there. This latter trace was

many years later substantially followed by the Old Springfield Road. Both were known as the Illinois Trace, and the first settlements in Maries County, both transient and permanent, were made along or near them; but none were made within the present limits of the county until after the Louisiana Purchase.

It is rather evident that President Jefferson and his advisers had very little idea of what they were going to do with most of the Louisiana Territory, even after they had bought it. They were really buying New Orleans, which controlled the Mississippi River, and considered that part to be worth what they were paying for all of it. The small settlements of St. Louis, St. Charles, Ste. Genevieve, Cape Girardeau, and New Madrid likely were known to them as names on the map, but that was all. Hundreds of millions of acres of land were known to be included in the sale, but hardly anything was known even of its location, let alone its quality. If any use for it had been figured in advance, that fact does not appear in any available record.

We find scattered hints here and there in the annals of that time, and shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, that the vast tracts west of the Mississippi might be used for a new home for the southern Indians who were numerous and unfriendly, so much so that there never really was peace with them. Whether these suggestions included the Indians north of the Ohio we do not know, but within a year after the purchase the proposal to move the southern Indians west of the Mississippi was widely supported.

Having once closed the deal, however, the government decided to see what it had bought, and several exploring expeditions were sent out. The one headed by Lewis and Clark and another by Lieutenant Pike are best known. The former reached the Pacific by way of the Missouri and Columbia rivers, and the latter explored and mapped the Arkansas River and its headwaters, discovered and named Pikes Peak, and made the

first accurate map of the east slope of the Rocky Mountains south of the present location of Denver. The United States officials who governed at St. Louis were soon in touch with the fur traders who had made many trips over this part of the state. Their reports, with those of the expeditions above named, soon squelched the move to settle the Indians here. In the language of the day, this was 'white man's country;' meaning in blunt English that it was too good for the Indians.

This part of the state did not have then, and probably never had, either a very large or a very permanent Indian population. It was well within the borders of the Osage tribes, but their main towns were something like a hundred and fifty miles west of here. One was on the Marmaton River in present Bates County and another on the Missouri above Lexington. They hunted here, and even had some small towns, but these were mostly campsites on which temporary shelters were built from time to time in the hunting seasons. The only one of these certainly identified in this county was at the mouth of Indian Creek at the Indian Ford bridge on the Gasconade, which was occupied when the Johnsons came here. It seems to have had at least a few residents the year round. There is some evidence that either the Osages or some other tribe at one time had a considerable settlement in the Gasconade bottom about half a mile below the Indian Ford bridge, on the farms now owned by Peter Wansing and Anthony Buschmann, but it had been abandoned before white men came.

The government, however, still acting on the original plan of moving the southern Indians west of the Mississippi River, began negotiations with the Osages to give up their lands, theoretically to make room for the others. These 'negotiations' began in 1808 by means of much fire-water, and were finally concluded in 1810. When the chiefs sobered up they found they had given the Great White Father all their lands between the Missouri and Arkansas rivers, nearly to the western boundary

of the present state, and had agreed to move to the present Kansas and Oklahoma. All they had to show for it was a record-breaking headache. The whole tribe protested the treaty to no avail, and it was enforced as rapidly as the Indians would allow; but in spite of the pressure they were not finally cleared out of their former homes for almost forty years after the 'big drunk' which cost them their homelands.

By the time the government got 'round to carrying out its removal plans, however, it was too late; the white man was already here. Boone's Lick was settled; white men were on the Piney and the Gasconade, white men had settled far up the Meramec. George Snodgrass and the Johnsons were on the river here and the Lanes and Pinnells on Lanes Prairie; James Helton was near Mt. Sterling; the Eads and Simpson families were soon on hand, too. About 1818 the Virginia Colony settled around old Van Buren and Richfountain, and the prophesy that this was a 'white man's country' was fulfilled.

During the eighteenth century many events in England, Ireland, and Scotland contributed to the increase in population of the American colonies, mostly those along the south Atlantic seaboard. The countries were impoverished by almost continual war with one country after another and many personal fortunes were swallowed up in them. Manufacturing and farming were both at a low ebb. Religious persecutions were continuous, first one side and then the other applying the noose and torch with equal fervor. In addition, if none of the above causes disrupted a neighborhood, a private war was usually going on which answered the purpose of killing off the inhabitants as well as a national one.

The English immigrants settled mostly in Virginia not far from the coast. Those who landed farther south also remained along the coast and on the rivers near it. The Scotch and Irish mostly settled in North and South Carolina, and almost uniformly located far back from the coast in the mountains, Scotland being mountainous

and Ireland at least hilly. They endeavored to make their new homes as much like the old as possible, and a second and deeper reason was that no Scot or Irishman ever saw an Englishman that he really liked; their associations at home having led to almost constant war. They were of one mind about giving the English as wide a berth as they possibly could.

The English, then, were settled along the coastal plain, and the Scotch and Irish farther south and west in the mountains. Except for the one trait common to all three nations, here in a new land they might have stayed in such peace with each other as the distance between them permitted. This common trait was to see what was on the other side of the next hill, and no sooner had the English made eastern Virginia as nearly like England, and the Scotch and Irish turned the Carolina mountains into a fair semblance to their mother countries, than a fair part of them began to move farther west.

These exploring streams were widely separated at first, the English moving up the Potomac, across to the Ohio and down to Kentucky. The Carolina voyagers came west through the Great Smoky Mountains to east Tennessee where part of them remained for a time. The remainder turned northwesterly through Cumberland Gap into Kentucky, where for the first time the two streams began to fuse together in the common hardships there equally shared.

For nearly fifty years the westward trend of this emigration was halted at the Mississippi River. West of it lay, first, France, then Spain, and later France again. The difference in the people and their laws and customs was so vast that only an occasional adventurer made even a temporary home west of the river. Nor did the cession of Louisiana Territory make any great change for at least a decade, except around the settlements already made when the territory was under

French rule.

The beginning of the immigration that was to swell to a tidal wave later began shortly after the close of the War of 1812, although there had been a small dribble of settlers even before that time. The only real American land victory, fought after the peace had been made, was Battle of New Orleans. It was won by Kentucky and Tennessee riflemen, sons of the men from Virginia and the Carolinas who had wrested that country from the red man in the eighteenth century. The close of this war, as has the close of every other war, left the newly discharged soldiers restless and dissatisfied with their previous surroundings.

The tide naturally turned westward, especially since all Kentucky and Tennessee had heard descriptions of the fertile land across the Mississippi, which not a few had seen. But even after a hundred years or more of residence in the new country the racial descent of the new hordes was plainly evidenced by the character of the country they chose for their new homes. The Virginians settled in the rich country near the settlements already made, only occasionally moving far back from the settlements. The Scotch and Irish--and some Welsh--from Tennessee, once they dislodged themselves from the mountains there, made a beeline for the Ozarks, the next mountains across their paths.

Virginia gave Maries County many of her early families, but the bulk of the early immigration was from east Tennessee. In fact, so nearly were all the older families from Tennessee that a north Missouri stock buyer some forty years ago made the remark that every man in Maries County over fifty years old was born in forty miles of Greeneville, Tennessee. While this was an exaggeration, it goes to show that Tennessee furnished nine-tenths of the early settlers here. This condition applied to all the other Ozark counties, as well as to Maries.