

CHAPTER THREE

FIRST SETTLEMENTS

There is no way of telling just when settlements began in what is now Maries County. We know about the date of the first of these that were permanent, but there must have been a great many transient ones long prior thereto of which all trace is now lost. For instance, the southeast corner township of the county was subdivided into sections in 1833 and 1834, the township lines having been surveyed in 1816. In surveying the east line of section one the surveyor records that at a certain distance from the corner he 'entered the field of Watson,' yet the land on which this field was located was not entered for homesteading until 1838, and then by a man named Fitzgerald. Between sections eight and nine his line ran through fields of Boilstone and the Pounds, yet it was not until 1844 that Robartus E. Hutchison and

Lewis Harrison, respectively, entered the land on which these fields were located. Benton's field, at the southeast corner of section thirteen, was described, and it was entered by John S. Hibler in 1839. Land claimed by Joseph Case and in cultivation at the time of this survey in section nineteen was five years later entered by James Bailey. Sullivan's field, in section twenty-four, was entered by James G. Sweeney in 1838, and that of another Sullivan in section twenty-five by Martin Sewell in 1854; Martin Sewell was a son-in-law of John Blasingame Sullivant. Webster's field, in section thirty-two, was partly entered by Robert H. Barnwell in 1849, and a part of it included in the railroad grant of 1852. In fact, the only instance of an occupant of a field in this township at the time of the survey who can be even remotely connected with a later entrant occurs in section thirty-four where a field was described as belonging to 'Cobiet.' George H. Coppedge entered this land in 1838, and either he or some member of his family may have been referred to by the surveyor as being in possession of it in 1833, the name being misunderstood or the spelling later transposed.

No record of any more fields is found in range seven, the eastern six miles of the county, but in range eight west of Vichy other settlements were noted when the land was surveyed in 1834. In passing north between sections ten and eleven the surveyor records that he 'passed between pits where lead ore had been taken out,' The land on which these pits were situated was entered in 1839 by Antoine Buatte of Randolph County, Illinois, who first drifted to the lead mines across the Mississippi River from his home and then struck out for himself. He prospected across the Meramec watershed to near the head of Mill Creek, which flows into the Gasconade by way of Spring Creek, where he entered the above land but soon abandoned it. The 'pitts' however, had likely been made by prospectors before Buatte's entry.

Newberry's field on the line between sections seventeen

and eighteen evidently was not attractive since it was not entered until 1856 and 1857, and then by speculators from northern Illinois. Doyel's field in section sixteen was sold by the county at auction as school land long after this county was organized. Both Doyel and Newberry afterward bought land west of the river. Light's field in sections twenty-eight and twenty-nine was likely entered by its occupant at the time of the survey, or by his descendant, since Wright Light made the entry in 1839.

The land where these early fields and settlements occurred is good land to this day, well watered and, with the exception of Spanish Needle Prairie, was at that time heavily timbered along the streams but with the uplands mostly in prairie grass. It was a paradise for the hunter and trapper, the main occupations of most of the early settlers, and invited their stay until the time when the scarcity of game or too many neighbors rendered a further westward move desirable. Their locations, while decidedly out in the wilderness according to present-day standards, was not so considered by them. All of the settlements named were situated within five miles or six of the great Illinois Trace, or Indian Road, the main northeast-and-southwest highway of that time. Both branches of the road in this county were well opened and defined and the stream crossings already selected. It afforded the early settlers a better route than the ones to which they had been accustomed.

Another Indian road which ran north and south across the west end of the county, later followed in a general way by the old Dixon and Castle Rock Road, was probably responsible for the few settlements noted by the surveyors in this part of the county. This territory was sectionized in 1844 and at that time a field claimed by Cristman (Crismon?) is noted on land that was later entered by Thomas L. Wiles. Farther up the Maries the field of a man named Miller was noted on

what is now a part of the Vanderpool place. Gibson's field is now a part of the 'Black Head' Branson place, presently owned by George Vineyard. Scott's field, known to every old settler in the county as the 'Cage Williams Place,' was entered by William Scott ten years after he was recorded as having a field on the land. Palmer's field, near the Williams place, was many years later entered by Alvis Duncan. These fields, together with one other in what was the Joel Hale settlement and a part of his place recited to have been occupied by a man named Jones, are the only instances of land being cultivated in what is now Maries County at the time of, or prior to, the time it was sectionized.

In addition to the above there were many places not listed by the surveyors that must have been settled prior to the survey date. The former Ferrell place on Lanes Prairie was one of them. This land was entered from the government by Enoch Ferrell in 1848, at which time there was an orchard of considerable age on it. Thus it is likely it had been lived on at least as early as the time of the survey, which was in 1834. Land at the mouth of Cedar Creek, at or near the Gasconade, and along the Dry Fork of the Bourbeuse, is known to have surely been in cultivation prior to its survey in 1825, so it is quite probable there were many other settlements besides the ones noted. Perhaps some of the surveyors did not note the condition of the land over which their lines ran as carefully as did the others.