

# WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

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**Life in Pioneer Day, Cont'd:** Pioneer food was simply cooked and served, but it was of the best and most wholesome kind. The hunter kept the larder supplied with venison, bear meat, squirrels, wild turkeys and the many varieties of smaller game. Plain corn bread, baked in a kettle, in the ashes, or upon a board in front of the great open fire place. The corn was among the earlier pioneers, pounded or grated, there being no mills for grinding it for some time, and then only small ones at a considerable distance away.

Wild fruits, in their season, were made use of and afforded a pleasant variety. Sometimes a special effort was made to prepare a delicacy when a woman experimented in mince pies by pounding wheat for the flour to make the crust and used crab apples for fruit. Usually found was a collection of articles that made up the pioneer's medicine. Herb medicines and spices, catnip, sage, fennel, pennyroyal and wormwood, each gathered in its season. There was also a store of nuts and strings of dried pumpkin with bags of berries and fruits.

In the some of the cabins were usually a few books such as the Bible, hymn book, Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe. The long winter nights were spent in poring over a few well-thumbed volumes by the light of the great log fire while also knitting, mending, curing furs, etc.

It is a well authenticated fact that a great portion on Madison County originally was covered with water most of the year. The first settlers called these lands "barrens" and looked upon them as utterly unfit for farming. The pioneers located upon the streams, where the land was elevated and dry and the best of timber grew in abundance. The land speculators cared little for the prairie lands, therefore all the first warrants were laid upon the land next to the streams.

The prairies consisted of level stretches of country covered with sedge grass, and dotted here and there with patches of scrubby burr oak growing upon the highest points of land. The sedge grass grew to an enormous height, sometimes sufficient to hide man and horse riding through it. Every autumn prairie fires swept over the county. An early pioneer Dr. J. Converse says, "It was majestically grand to see these prairies on fire. The blaze of the burning grass seemed to reach the very clouds, or when driven by the wind would leap forty or fifty feet into the air" This whole county was a sea of wild grass and flowering herbs. Add to this was a line of devouring element three miles in length, mounting upward and leaping madly forward with a lapping tongue, as it were trying to devour the very earth, and you have a faint idea of some of the scenes that were witnessed by the early settlers of this county.

In the early days, Madison County was one vast hunting ground. The elk had become extinct prior to the occupancy of this county by the whites, but that there was evidence of there being large herds here by the evidence of the large number of horns that were found on top of the ground and also beneath the soil.