

WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

Series 19

J.M. ROBERTS REMINISCENCES: “The cutting down of Markley Hill on the National Road was quite a task and attracted quite a number of unique characters to that locality. The chief contractors were named Duffey, two brothers. The older one was named Felix. My father resided on the hill for a short time and the stone masons who built the bridges and culverts then boarded at our home. Two of the chief architects and boss masons were named James Vanderlyne and son, Daniel. They were boarding at our house in October of 1836. The masons who built the bridges were French and German. Hugh McGloughlin and mother boarded hands that worked on the Pike.”

The advent of the broad highway into Madison County in 1836 like all other places along the line, was hailed with joyful delight as it gave employment to hundreds of contractors and thousands of laborers whose services are well worthy of their vast efforts, and the work, so well done, stands today as a lasting monument to their skill.” With the coming of the automobile in the first part of the 20th century and with the beginning of much long-distance travel in the late 1920s and early 30s, the highway again gained the status it had in prior years. (John Roberts was a school teacher born in 1833 and died in 1914. His father, Charles, built the Roberts Mill on Little Darby)

ANIMALS: In the pioneer days of Madison County it was a vast hunting ground. The elk had become extinct prior to the coming of the whites, but a great number of horns were found everywhere on top of the ground and partly and wholly buried beneath the soil.

Bears were not very numerous, but enough were left to remind the settler that when bruin made a raid upon the pigsty, his assured rights were to be respected. They were not considered dangerous animals except when they suffered from hunger or their cubs were in danger. In the fall and winter, they were hunted for their meat and skins. Their flesh was rich and savory, while their skins were tanned and used for robes and bed coverings in the winter.

The wolf was the pioneer’s dreaded enemy and were of two kinds, black and gray. The first settlers suffered more from the actions of these animals than all others and often great numbers would congregate under cover of night and attack individuals who happened to be out. The wolf had a peculiar and instinctive howl which was quickly taken up by others and in an incredibly short space of time the bark could be heard in every direction. Around 1835, the wolf, disappeared from this region, although an odd one was seen and killed at intervals.

The beautiful red deer was a Godsend to the pioneers. Deer were very numerous and more than fifty in one flock have been seen grazing. Not only did they provide food but the hide when tanned was made into vests and breeches. Untanned it was cut into strips, twisted, then dried after which it served the purpose of tugs, or chains for the harnesses, bridles, mittens, moccasins, and other items.