

WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

Series 20

WILD HOGS: Wild hogs were more dreaded perhaps than any other wild beasts. The genuine wild boar was the most terrible game in the forest and the hunt was exciting and dangerous. His attack was too sudden and headlong to be easily turned aside and the snap of his tusks, as he sharpened them in his furry, was not pleasant music to the timed hunter. His tusks are known to have measured over a foot in length, and many desperate fights and hair-breadth escapes are recounted. The wild hog was not valued for its flesh but was regarded simply as a dangerous pest.

Also residing in the county were, the panther, lynx, native wild cat, and porcupine. Reptiles included racers, copper heads, and prairie rattlesnakes. The latter were very numerous as well as dangerous. The antidote for their bite, however, grew upon the prairie and was a kind of herb called by the Indians, "rattlesnake weed." the person bitten, by immediately chewing a considerable quantity of the stalk, and binding the pulpy chewings upon the bitten part, prevented all ill effects that would otherwise result from the bite.

One of the earliest incidents which have been recorded is a bear chase by Reason Francis which must have taken place as early as 1805. Reason Francis lived along Little Darby Creek on the east bank south of what is now Route 40. One day he was winding his way homeward on horseback through the dense forest when he discovered a large bear which he decided to give chase. The thought was executed by putting his horse under a good speed, but after a long and continuous chase, and his horse being almost exhausted, the bear struck on a trail which led by the pursuer's house on the east bank of the creek. Down the path the chase continued and, when passing by his house, he succeeded in getting his dog to pursue the animal which soon resulted in treeing the bruin near the creek. The dog was very vicious and, when the bear ascended the tree, he fastened his teeth so firmly in the bear's ham that the bear carried him up the tree. Upon reaching the first limb, which chanced to be partly decayed, the bear hoped to rest and free himself from his enemy, but alas the limb broke, and down came dog and bear, the latter seizing the dog in his paws and making him howl terrifically, when Francis, with his tomahawk, came up and buried it in the skull of his victim, releasing his faithful dog. The horse had been so completely exhausted that he soon afterward died from the effects.