

WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

Series 49

JOHN M. ROBERTS REMINISCES: Thomas Orpet was another odd person. He was illiterate and superstitious. He was a great hunter and fisherman. He caught more than 1,000 wild pigeons and had them in a rail pen. Someone however tore the pen open one night and all the birds escaped. He captured the pigeons in a net he used to catch fish. There were vast flocks of wild pigeons in the Spring and the sun would be darkened by them. They would break down large trees where they roosted at night, but now there is not one to be found anywhere in the United States or the Dominion of Canada. Abraham Orpet, a son of Thomas was as superstitious and illiterate as his father. The late 'Squire A. J. Clingan of Summerford told me of an adventure he had while hunting with Abe. He and Abe had not been very successful and were returning home in the evening when the 'Squire while passing a dense thicket on the Thompson Farm, said to Abe in a joke: How easy it would be to shoot a man and hide him in the thicket, Abe said nothing but dropped back of the 'Squire and cocked his rifle and covered the 'Squire with it. He turned around and asked Abe what he meant. Abe said, "Hi god we will now see who gits frowed in th' brush." No amount of persuasion could induce Abe to lower his gun and the 'Squire marched over a mile before Abe parted with him on the National Road.

Social conditions were very different from our present-day practices. The treatment of paupers was not what it should have been. The aged and infirm who were in the township were sold or farmed out to the lowest bidder. The trustees would sell them to the person who would keep them for the least money during the year. We have seen gray-haired veterans of the War of 1812-15 who had been sold by the overseers of the poor.

There were a lot of nomads and peculiar people in the country. I remember seeing a man named Travis. He traveled over the country and I think traded horses for a living. He usually led two horses and rode on a horse. He was the dirtiest, raggedest man that ever lived. He had two dogs which he let ride on one of his horses. He would beg for milk for his dogs. He used his hat made of wool to hold the milk. After using what he wanted for himself he would let the dogs have what remained in the hat.

Another eccentric character was Dr. H. Zimmerman, he was called the "Grammar Cracker," as he taught English grammar as a specialty. He had the greatest memory of any man I ever saw. He could repeat every word in S. Kirkham's grammar. He could give the page of any quotation to be made from Kirkham's Grammar. He camped in country school houses; and had quite a library of books, some German Bibles three hundred years old.

____ March 13, 1871 - *The Madison County Democrat* – Those wishing pictures will do well to see

W. T. Fickey one door west of the Town Hall.

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____ March 18, 1871- West Jefferson now has a night watchman, Mr.Deem, at a salary of \$33.33 per month.

____ May 25, 1871 – Jerry Riordon has died. He kept a saloon and boarding house at the Railroad House