

CHAPTER V.

FIRST SETTLEMENTS.

IMPORTANCE OF FIRST BEGINNINGS—WHEN AND WHERE COMMENCED.

Every nation does not possess an authentic account of its origin, neither do all communities have the correct data whereby it is possible to accurately predicate the condition of their first beginnings. Nevertheless, to be intensely interested in such things is characteristic of the race, and it is particularly the province of the historian to deal with first causes. Should these facts, as is often the case, be lost in the mythical traditions of the past, the chronicler invades the realm of the ideal and compels his imagination to paint the missing picture. The patriotic Roman was not content till he had found the "First Settlers," and then he was satisfied, although they were found in the very undesirable company of a wolf, and located on a drift, which the receding waters of the Tiber had permitted them to *pre-empt*.

One of the advantages pertaining to a residence in a new country and one seldom appreciated, is the fact that we can go back to the first beginnings. We are thus enabled, not only to trace results to their causes, but also to grasp the facts which have contributed to form and mold these causes. We observe that a state or county has attained a certain position, and we at once try to trace out the reasons for this position in its early settlement and surroundings, in the class of men by whom it was peopled, and in the many chances and changes which have wrought out results in all the recorded deeds of mankind. In the history of Atchison County we may trace its earlier settlers to their homes in the Eastern States and in the countries of the Old World. We may follow the course of the hardy backwoodsman of the "Buckeye" or the "Hoosier" State, or from Kentucky and Virginia on his way west "to grow up with the country," trusting only to his strong arm and his willing heart to work out his ambition of a home for himself and wife and a competence for his children. Again, we will see that others have been animated with the impulse to "move on," after making themselves a part of the community, and have sought the newer parts of the extreme west, where civilization had not penetrated, or returned to their native soil. We shall find much of that distinctive New England character which has

contributed so many men and women to other portions of our state and the west ; also, we shall find many an industrious native of Germany or the British Isles, and a few of the industrious and economical French—all of whom have contributed to modify types of men already existing here.

Those who have noted the career of the descendants of these brave, strong men, in subduing the wilds and overcoming the obstacles and withstanding the hardships of this country in early times, can but admit they are worthy sons of illustrious sires.

The first white settlement made within the limits of what is now known as Atchison County, was effected in the spring of 1839, by Hank B. Roberts and Thomas Wilson, single men. They settled on what was afterwards known as the town site of Sonora. Roberts was originally from Illinois, and Wilson was from Clay County, Missouri. Roberts had once been a soldier in the United States army, stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from whence he came to this county. In the spring of 1839, they erected a cabin and put in a small crop.

At the time of their coming, however, there were two white men named Hughes and Alley, who were already on the ground, in the capacity of Indian traders, but were not permanent settlers. Roberts and Wilson may be called, then, the pioneer settlers of Atchison County. Roberts continued to farm for a few years, when he sold and located about one mile east of Sonora, and finally removed to Nebraska, and now resides on the McKissick Island, in the Missouri River, near the town of Hamburg, Iowa.

Callaway Millsaps arrived in the county on the 11th day of November, 1839, and took up his abode also on the present town site of Sonora. He was originally from Cocke County, East Tennessee, where he was born on September 26, 1815. He emigrated to Saline County, Missouri, removed to Clay, Ray, Davis, back to Ray, where he lived until the spring of 1839, when he came here. He resided at Sonora until August, 1840, and then located two and a half miles west of the present town of Rock Port, on the Nishnebotna River, where he remained until the fall of 1881, when he became a citizen of Rock Port, where he still resides, following mercantile pursuits.

In company with Mr. Millsaps, came Charles Beauchamp and Archibald and Alexander Handley, from Clay County, all in the employ of Mr. Millsaps. Archibald is dead, Alexander lives in Brownsville, Nebraska, and Beauchamp went to Tennessee. Mr. Millsaps, in speaking of the winters of 1839 and 1840, informed the writer that they were the coldest he has ever experienced in this latitude, the snow remaining all winter from two and a-half to three feet in depth, and the ice in the Missouri River from two and a-half to three feet thick.

He says that the most cheerful sight that he saw during the spring of 1840, after passing through the long, severe winter, was a steamboat

which landed at Sonora—a large, side-wheel steamer—for the purpose of “wooding.” Hank Roberts was the proprietor of the wood yard, his being the only one between Sonora and Fort Leavenworth. Wood was sold then at five dollars per cord, taken from the bank. He says that all the inhabitants of the settlement, including his wife and children, gathered on the bank to look at the boat.

In the spring of 1840 John Mathews, an Englishman, settled at English Grove (named after him), about eight miles southeast of Rock Port. He and his wife have been dead many years, dying on the farm they first entered. He lived on the road leading from St. Joseph to Council Bluffs, and kept a house of entertainment.

In the same township and at what was afterwards called Irish Grove, settled a colony of Irishmen, among whom was Martin Murphy, Sr., and his son Martin, who now resides in San Jose, California. These men settled at Irish Grove in 1841, but went to California in 1844. The following sketch of Martin Murphy, which we copy from a California paper, will be read with interest. Mr. Murphy is one of the wealthy and influential citizens of that state.

“ MARTIN MURPHY

was born in County Wexford, Ireland, on the 9th day of November, 1807. His family was one of the oldest in Ireland, and belonged to that class which has made the Green Isle so famous in history. His father was a well-to-do farmer, but of a rather adventurous disposition, and, in 1828, when the subject of this sketch was twenty-one years of age, he resolved to try the New World, and emigrated to Canada, settling at the Township of Frampton, about thirty miles south of the City of Quebec. When he came to America, Martin, Sr., brought with him his family, excepting Martin Jr., his oldest son, and one daughter, Mrs. Miller, now residing at San Rafael. At that time his family consisted of seven children, to wit: Martin, James, Bernard, John, Daniel, Ellen (now Mrs. Weber, of Stockton), and Mrs. James Miller. Martin, Jr., was left behind in Ireland when his father came to America. From a boy he had displayed thrifty habits, and at the time his father emigrated he was the owner of a small farm, which circumstance speaks louder than words for his business capacity. Land in the old country is not to be had so easily as land in America, and Martin's ownership of a few acres on Irish soil at the age of twenty-one years was an indication of the talent, industry and ability which in future years was to raise him to the position of one of the wealthiest men and largest land owners in the United States. Eight years after his father left Ireland, Martin concluded to follow him, and, having an opportunity to sell his Irish farm to advantage, he parted with it and he and his sister came to America. He settled in Quebec, where he engaged in business and remained for three years. But his mind was of an agricultural turn, and he soon became tired of city life. On the 18th day of July, 1831, Martin Murphy was united in the holy bonds of matrimony to Miss Mary Bulger, the ceremony being performed by Rev. Father McMahon, in the Que-

bec Cathedral. Miss Bulger was an Irish girl, born in County Wexford of an old and highly respected family. Martin had known her in Ireland and knew her worth. Fifty years has changed her appearance from the laughing girl of twenty to the sober matron, the tender mother of a large family, but it has not changed her loving heart nor dimmed those virtues which then made her the favorite of all who knew her. Immediately after their marriage the young couple moved to Frampton, the township in which Mr. Murphy's father had settled, and, having purchased a piece of timber land, set about clearing it and founding a home. He lived at Frampton about ten years and during this time four sons were born, to wit: James, Martin, Patrick W. and Bernard D., the last named two are still living and are well known to our readers, in fact they have a state wide reputation.

About this time stories began to be circulated in their neighborhood of the wonderful fertility of the soil in the far west and these reports were specially growing in regard to the territory of Missouri. Martin Murphy, Sr., did not exactly like the British style of government in the provinces, and determined to "go west" into the frontiers of the young republic. He sold out his property and taking his family went by way of the St. Lawrence to Cleveland, Ohio, thence by canal to Portsmouth, Ohio, thence down the Ohio to where Cairo now stands, thence up the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers to near the present site of St. Joseph. At that time there was no sign of the present bustling city; nothing marked it as different from a thousand other places except a mill seat where corn was ground for the settlers. But Mr. Murphy was not looking for cities. He had procured a tract of land on what was known as the Platte Purchase, in Holt County, now Atchison County, and thither he conveyed his family, traveling in wagons after leaving the river. He was soon followed (in 1842) by Martin and his family, who also located on the "Purchase." It was on the Platte Purchase that their first daughter, Ann Elizabeth, was born. Here they found land in abundance and a fertile soil, but the prevalence of malarial fevers rendered it undesirable as a place of residence. Added to this was the absence of educational facilities, which rendered the location to a man ambitious of giving his family every advantage, especially undesirable as a residence. While they were looking about for a country where they could find the advantages which Missouri did not at that time afford, they were visited by Rev. Father Hookins, a Catholic priest who for years had been engaged in missionary work among the Indians, his field extending even as far as the Pacific. He told them of California, of its beautiful valleys, its genial sunshine, its fertile soil and health-giving climate. Martin, Sr. did not long hesitate. He was a man of great energy and undaunted courage and the magnitude of a journey of thousands of miles across plains, mountains and rivers, through an unknown country did not give him a moment's uneasiness. This was long before the discovery of gold and the energy of the Murphys will be better appreciated when it is understood that it was not wealth, but health, they were seeking. Having made up his mind to come to California, Mr. Murphy did not take a long time in preparing for his journey. They sold their land, made up a party and started. Going to an agricultural country for purposes of agriculture, they took what stock they could with them. Their rendezvous was Council Bluffs, and here

the expedition was organized. It consisted of twenty-six persons, all told. Martin Murphy, Sr., was the commander and head of the expedition, and Captain Stevens was pilot. There was no road, trail or track by which the emigrants could find their way, but they were men of intelligence and determination and they made their journey in spite of all obstacles.

We regret that our space will not permit us to give a detailed account of the adventures of this little band of pioneers. Peculiar interest attaches to it from the fact that it was the first party that crossed the mountains into California with wagons and that introduced American cattle on this coast. They followed substantially the route over which the Union and Central Pacific Railroads are built. They came north of Salt Lake, stopping at the sink of the Humboldt. They had no trouble with the Indians, nor did they suffer for want of food. They were caught in the mountains by the snow, but having made all preparations they were comparatively comfortable. On the other side they fell in with an Indian named Truckee, who, by signs, informed them that over the mountains was level land and horned cattle. They named the Truckee lake and river for this Indian. It has been customary to confound the Murphy party with the Donner party. The Murphy party crossed the mountains in 1844, the Donners came about the same route but not until two years after. A shed that Shallenberger built in 1844 served as a shelter to a portion of the Donner party in 1846.

The Indian, Truckee, guided the party safely down the Truckee River. There was no road or trail or bridges of any kind, but difficult as the route was, they managed to get through without serious loss. On this side they came down the Yuba River and went into winter quarters. Here a daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. Murphy. This daughter was the first American child born in California. She was afterwards married to William P. Taaffe, a prosperous San Francisco merchant. Leaving the party on the Yuba, Martin and several other of the men came down to Sutter's Fort, at New Helvetia, now Sacramento, for the purpose of prospecting the county, with a view to locating. They got down into the country just in the heat of the Micheltorena rebellion, and were pressed into the army. They went with the troops as far south as Soledad, and here Martin represented that their families were in the mountains and probably destitute and suffering, and thus obtained a permit to return with supplies. When he got back on the Yuba he found that his people were not in very great want—they had plenty of cattle and flour and other provisions. Martin brought his family down into the valley and purchased four leagues of land from a German named Rufus. It was situated on the Cosumnes River, near Stockton. Here he settled and remained until '49. When gold was discovered he went to the mines, but made no success and soon returned to his ranch. Here he entered into the business of cattle raising, and conducted a successful business, selling stock to the miners. While living on the Cosumnes two daughters were born, Mary Ann, now Mrs. Richard T. Carrol, and Ellen, now Mrs. J. A. Arques, of Lawrence Station. In 1849 he removed to this county, having purchased from the Castros the Rancho Pastoria de las Borregas, containing 5,000 acres. Here James T., the youngest son, was born in 1852. Since he has been in California, Mr. Murphy has devoted his attention mostly to cattle raising, and has been eminently successful.

He has added rancho after rancho to his landed possessions, and his immense herds cover the hills of Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. He also owns large quantities of valuable property in the cities of San Francisco and San Jose. Notwithstanding their great wealth, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy could never be induced to reside elsewhere than in their country home. Here he presides over his household like one of the olden patriarchs, superintending his flocks and dispensing a generous hospitality to all who come within the shadow of his gates. Their hands are always open to the poor and their bounty is gratefully remembered by thousands.

Of their children it is scarcely necessary for us to speak. The boys are worthy sons of such an honorable sire, and the daughters inherit all the virtues of their most estimable mother. The sons have all won places of distinction in the history of the state, and the daughters are examples of the highest type of true womanhood."

John Bender came from Platte County, Missouri, in the fall of 1842, and located on the east bank of the Missouri, about one mile above where the town of Brownville, Nebraska, now stands. Like thousands of others, he became smitten with the gold mania, which prevailed so universally over this country in 1849, and went to California. He was a German.

In the fall of 1842, one month after the arrival of John Bender, came George Harmon, from Illinois, and settled at Sonora. After remaining here a few months, he removed to a place opposite Brownville, Nebraska, where he lived until the fall of 1881, when he located in Tecumseh, Nebraska, where he now resides.

Late in the fall of 1842, E. D. Scammon, from Lafayette County, Missouri, located about two miles southwest of Rock Port, where he still lives.

About the same time came William Hunter, from Clinton County, Missouri, and located about three miles southwest of Rock Port, on Rock Creek, at a place since known as "Hunter's Bridge," where he now resides at the advanced age of about eighty years. Mr. Hunter has been one of the prominent men of the county, having served the people of Atchison County in many ways, and was one of the county court justices from 1858 to 1865.

Elijah S. Needles immigrated from Indiana, in 1843, and settled the adjoining farm to William Hunter, and then moved about a mile southwest and located on the Nishnebotna, at a place now known as "Needles Bridge." Like Mr. Hunter, he has been a useful and influential citizen of the county. He was appointed justice of the county court in 1845, by the governor of the state, and has filled the same position at different periods since.

Among other settlers was Richard Rupe, from Lafayette County, Missouri, who was also a judge of the county court, and with him came Samuel Rennick, a stock trader, who is now dead. Mr. Rupe settled

what is called "Rupe's Grove," about six miles southeast of Rock Port, where he still lives.

About 1845 Nathan Meek commenced the building of a grist mill on the present town site of Rock Port, on Rock Creek, and about the same time, or during 1843, John Fowler erected a saw mill, also on Rock Creek, two and a half miles south of Rock Port. These were the first mills erected in the county.

One of the earliest settlers in the county was, perhaps, Joseph Bernard, of whom we will speak more fully in our history of Buchanan Township. Other settlers coming soon after, and at a later period, will be mentioned more fully in the succeeding chapters of this work—in our history of the different townships.

