

Memoir of David Hoover 1857

I think it is Lawrence Sterne who says that – among other things which he mentions – every person should write a book; and as I have not yet done that, I am now going to write one. As it has always been interesting to me to read biographical sketches, and historical reminiscences of bygone days, I have concluded that some information concerning myself and family might, perhaps, amuse some of my descendants, at least. The name is pretty extensively scattered throughout this country; such information may therefore be of some interest to them, as it may enable them to trace back their genealogy to the original stock.

I was born on a small water-course, called Huwaree, a branch of the Yadkin river, in Randolph county, North Carolina, on the 14th day of April, 1781; and am now ¹ in the seventy-third year of my age. It is customary, in personal sketches of this kind, to say something of one's parents and education. I can only say, that my parents were always considered very exemplary in all their walk through life. As to education, my opportunities were exceedingly limited; and had it not been for my inclination and perseverance, I should, in all probability, at this day be numbered among those who can scarcely write their names, or perhaps should only be able to make a "X" in placing my signature to a written instrument. In order to show the state of society in my early youth, as an evidence of the intelligence of the circle in which I was raised, I can say of a truth, that I never had an opportunity of reading a newspaper, nor did I ever see a bank-note, until after I was a man grown.

As to my ancestors, I know but little. If my information is correct, my grandfather, Andrew Hoover, left Germany when a boy; married Margaret Fouts, in Pennsylvania; and settled on Pipe creek in Maryland. There my father was born; and from thence, now about one hundred years ago, he removed to North Carolina, then a new country. He left eight sons and five daughters, all of whom had large families. Their descendants are mostly scattered through what we call the Western country. Rudolph Waymire, my grandfather on my mother's side, emigrated from Hanover in Germany, after he had several children. He used to brag that he was a soldier under His Britannic Majesty, and that he was at the

¹ This appears to have been written in 1854.

head of the battle of Dettingen in 1743.² He left one son and seven daughters by his first wife. Their descendants are also mostly to be found in this country.

My father had a family of ten children, four sons and six daughters. In order to better our circumstances, he came to the conclusion of moving to a new country, and sold his possessions accordingly. He was then worth rising of two thousand dollars; which at that time, and in that country, was considered very considerably over an average in point of wealth. On the 19th of September, 1802, we loaded our wagon, and wended our way toward that portion of what was then called the Northwestern Territory which constitutes the present state of Ohio.

Here permit me to make a passing remark. I was then in the twenty-second year of my age. I had formed an acquaintance and brought myself into notice perhaps rather more extensively than falls to the lot of most country boys. Did language afford terms adequate to describe my sensations on shaking hands with my youthful compeers, and giving them a final farewell, I would gladly do so. Suffice it to say, that those only who have been placed in like circumstances, can appreciate my feelings on that occasion. And although I have lived to be an old man, and experienced the various vicissitudes attendant on a journey through life thus far, I yet look back to that time as the most interesting scene through which I have passed. My mind at this day is carried back to my early associations and school-boy days, to my native hills and pine forests; and I can say that there is a kind of indescribable charm in the very name of my natal spot, very different from aught that pertains to any other place on the globe.

After about five weeks' journeying, we crossed the Ohio river at Cincinnati, then a mere village, composed mostly of log houses. I think it was the day after an election had been held at that place for delegates to the convention to form a Constitution; at any rate a Constitution was formed the following winter, which was amended only within the last few years. After crossing the river, we pushed on to Stillwater, about twelve miles north of Dayton, in what is now the county of Montgomery. A number of our acquaintances had located themselves there the previous spring. There we encamped in the woods the first winter. The place had proved so unhealthy that we felt discouraged and much dissatisfied, and concluded not to locate there. My father then purchased two hundred acres of

² He also, it is said, served under Frederick the Great, of Prussia, in a certain company into which no man was admitted, who was not some seven feet in height.

land, not far from Lebanon, in Warren county, as a home, until we could make further examinations. John Smith, afterward one of the proprietors of Richmond, purchased one hundred acres in the same neighborhood, with similar views. Our object was to find a suitable place for making a settlement, and where but few or no entries had been made. But a small portion of the land lying west of the great Miami, or east of the Little Miami, was settled at that time. We were hard to please. We Carolinians would scarcely look at the best land where spring water was lacking. Among other considerations, we wished to get further south. We examined divers [sic] sections of the unsettled parts of Ohio, without finding any location that would please us. John Smith, Robert Hill and myself partially examined the country between the Falls of the Ohio and Vincennes, before there was a line run in that part of the Territory; and returned much discouraged, as we found nothing inviting in that quarter.

Thus time passed on until the spring of 1806, when myself and four others, rather accidentally, took a section line some eight or ten miles north of Dayton, and traced it a distance of more than thirty miles, through an unbroken forest, to where I am now writing. It was the last of February, or the first of March, when I first saw Whitewater. On my return to my father's, I informed him that I thought I had found the country we had been in search of. Spring water, timber, and building rock appeared to be abundant, and the face of the country looked delightful. In about three weeks after this, my father, with several others, accompanied me to this "land of promise." As a military man would say, we made a *reconnaissance*, but returned rather discouraged, as it appeared at that time too far from home. Were it necessary, I might here state some of our views at that time, which would show up our extreme ignorance of what has since taken place. On returning from this trip, we saw stakes sticking among the beech trees where Eaton now stands, which was among the nearest approaches of the white man to this place. With the exception of George Holman and a few others, who settled some miles south of this, in the spring of 1805, there were but few families within twenty miles of this place.

It was not until the last of May or the first of June that the first entries were made. John Smith then entered south of Main street, where Richmond now stands, and several other tracts. My father entered the land upon which I now live, I having selected it on my first trip, and several other quarter sections. About harvest of this same year, Jeremiah Cox reached here from good old North Carolina, and purchased where the north port of Richmond now stands. If I

mistake not, it had been previously entered by John Meek, the father of Jesse Meek, and had been transferred to Joseph Woodkirk, of whom J. Cox made the purchase. Said Cox also entered several other tracts. Jeremiah Cox, John Smith, and my father, were then looked upon as rather leaders in the Society of Friends. Their location here had a tendency of drawing others, and soon caused a great rush to Whitewater; and land that I thought would never be settled was rapidly taken up and improved. Had I a little more vanity, I might almost claim the credit (if credit it be) of having been the pioneer of the great body of Friends now to be found in this region; as I think it very doubtful whether three Yearly Meetings would convene in this county, had I not traced the line before mentioned.

I was now in the twenty-fifth year of my age, and thus far had been rather a wayfaring disciple, not doing much for myself or any other person. Having now selected a spot for a home, I thought the time had come to be up and doing. I therefore married a girl named Catharine Yount, near the Great Miami; and on the last day of March, 1807, reached with our little plunder the hill where I am now living. It may not be uninteresting here to name some of the first settlers in the different neighborhoods. On the East Fork were the Flemings, Irelands, Hills, Wassons, Maxwells, etc. At the mouth of Elkhorn were the Hunts, Whiteheads and Endsleys. In this neighborhood were the Smiths, Coxes, Wrights and Hoovers, several of whom commenced operations in the woods in the spring and summer of 1806. This may emphatically be said to have been the day of "log-cabins" and log-rollings; and, although we were in an unbroken forest, without even a blazed pathway from one settlement to another, we yet enjoyed a friendship, and a neighborly interchange of kind offices, which are unknown at this time. Although we had to step on puncheon floors, and eat our corn-bread and venison, or turkey, off of broad pieces of split timber, and drive forks in one corner of our cabins, with cross timbers driven into the walls, for bedsteads, there was no grumbling or complaining of low markets and hard times. The questions of Tariff and National Bank were truly "obsolete ideas" in those days. It was the first week in April before some of us commenced operations in the woods; but we mostly raised corn enough to do us. There was, however, no mill to grind it, and for some weeks we grated all the meal we made use of. About Christmas, Charles Hunt started a mill, on a cheap scale, near the mouth of Elkhorn, which did our grinding until J. Cox established one near to where Richmond now stands, and which now belongs to Basil Brightwell.

The Indian boundary was at this time about three miles west of us. The Indians lived on White river, and were frequently among us. They at one time packed off 400 bushels of shelled corn, which they purchased of John Smith. In 1809 a purchase was made, called the "Twelve Mile Purchase," and a goodly number settled on it before it was surveyed; but the war of 1812 coming on, the settlers mostly left their locations, and removed to places of more security. Those who remained built forts and "block houses." The settlers in this neighborhood mostly stood their ground, but suffered considerably with fear. George Shugart then lived where Newport now stands, some miles from any other inhabitant. In the language of the Friends, he "did not feel clear" in leaving his home, and he manfully stood his ground unmolested, except by those whom we then styled the "Rangers," from whom he received some abuse for his boldness. The Indians took three scalps out of this county, and stole a number of horses. Candor, however, compels me to say that, as is usually the case, we Christians were the aggressors. After peace was made, in 1814, the Twelve Mile Purchase settled very rapidly.

It will not be amiss, at this stage of our narrative, to state that when we first settled here, the now State of Indiana was called Indiana Territory, and we belonged to Dearborn county, which embraced all the territory purchased from the Indians at the treaty of Greenville, extending from the mouth of the Kentucky river to Fort Recovery. The counties of Wayne and Franklin were afterwards formed out of the northern part of this territory.³ Although Governor Harrison had the appointing power, he gave the people the privilege of choosing their own officers. An election was accordingly held, when it was found that Peter Fleming, Jeremiah Meek and Aaron Martin were elected Judges, George Hunt, Clerk, and John Turner, Sheriff. County courts were then held by three associate judges, and county business was done before them. One of the first courts⁴ held in this county, under the Territorial government, convened under the shade of a tree, on the premises then belonging to Richard Rue, Esq., Judge Park presiding and James Noble prosecutor. In order to show the legal knowledge we backwoodsmen were then in possession of, I will relate the following case. A boy was indicted for stealing a knife, a traverse jury was empaneled, and took their seats upon a

³ Wayne county was organized in November, 1810.

⁴ The first Court held in Wayne county, as appears from the records, met at the house of Richard Rue, February, 1811.

log. The indictment was read, and, as usual, set out that the offender, with *force and arms*, did feloniously steal, take, and carry away, etc. After hearing the case, the jury retired to another log to make up their verdict. Jeremiah Cox, one of the jurors, and afterwards a member of the convention to frame a Constitution, and of the Legislature, concluded they must find the defendant guilty, but he thought the indictment "was rather too bad for so small an offense." I suppose he thought the words "with force and arms" uncalled for, and thought rightly enough, too.

Some further illustration of our legal knowledge and the spirit of our legislation at this time may be interesting. Although the Friends constituted a large portion of the inhabitants in this quarter, there were in other parts of the county men in whose craniums the military spirit was pretty strongly developed, before the war of 1812 was declared. When that came on, this spirit manifested itself in all its rigor. The Friends were much harassed on account of their refusal to do military duty. Some were drafted, and had their property sacrificed, and at the next call were again drafted, and fined. Four young men were thrown into the county jail during the most inclement cold weather; fire was denied them until they should comply; and had it not been for the humane feeling of David F. Sackett, who handed them hot bricks through the grates, they must have suffered severely. Suits were subsequently brought against the officers for false imprisonment. The trials were had at Brookville, in Franklin county. They all recovered damages, but I have every reason to believe that the whole of the damages and costs was paid out of the moneys extorted from others of the Friends. To cap the climax of absurdity and outrage, the gentlemen officers arrested an old man named Jacob Elliott, and sentenced him to be shot! But gave him a chance to run away in the dark, they firing off their guns at the same time. It would fill a considerable volume to give a detailed history of the *noble patriots* of those days, and of their wisdom and valorous exploits; but this must suffice.

Connected with this subject, permit me a word respecting my own course. I think it is well known that from first to last I stood by the Friends like a brother (as I would again do under similar circumstances), and used my influence in their favor; yet from some cause, best known to themselves, I have apparently

lost the confidence and friendship of a good number of them. The most serious charge which has yet reached me, is that I have not got "the true faith," and not that I have done anything wrong. Of this I do not complain; but must be permitted to say that their course towards me was rather gratuitous. I feel confident that they can not in truth say that they have at any time received aught but disinterested friendship from me; and if some of them can reconcile their course toward me with a sense of duty, and of doing by me as I have at all times done by them, I shall therewith be content.

In 1816 we elected delegates to the convention which formed our late Constitution, and named the State Indiana. On the third day of February following, I was elected Clerk of Wayne Circuit Court, and by favor of the voters of the county, held the office nearly fourteen years. I was prevented from serving out my full constitutional term of office, by a deceptive ruling of the Court, which I have no fears will ever be hunted up as a precedent in a similar or any other case.

I was almost the first man who set foot in this part of Wayne county, and have been an actor in it for more than forty years. It may not be out of place here for me to say, that I feel conscious I often erred through ignorance, and perhaps through willfulness. Yet (and with gratitude be it spoken), it has fallen to the lot of few men to retain so long the standing which I think I still have among all classes of my fellow citizens. I believe it is a privilege conceded to old men to boast of what they have been, and what they have done. I shall therefore take the liberty of saying, that I have now seven commissions by me, for offices which I have held, besides having had a seat in the Senate of this State for six years.

I will add, that in the employ and under the direction of John Smith and Jeremiah Cox, I laid off the city of Richmond, did all their clerking, wrote their deeds, etc. If I recollect rightly, it was first named Smithville, after one of the proprietors; but that name did not give general satisfaction. Thomas Robbards, James Pegg, and myself, were then chosen to select a name for the place. Robbards proposed Waterford, Pegg, Plainfield, and I made choice of Richmond, which latter name received the preference of the lot-holders.

I have some fears that the preceding remarks may be looked upon as betraying the vanity of an old man; but I wish it distinctly understood, that I ascribe the little favors which I have received, more to surrounding circumstances, and the partiality of my friends, than to any qualification or merits in myself.

There are several other subjects connected with the early history of Wayne county, on which I could dwell at some length. I could refer to the first dominant party, their arbitrary proceeding in fixing the county seat at Salisbury, the seven years' war and contention which followed, ending with the final location of the shiretown at Centreville.⁵ But as the rival parties in that contest have mostly left the stage, and the subject is almost forgotten, I think it unnecessary to disturb it.

A lengthy chapter might be written on the improvements which have been made within the last fifty years in Wayne county (to say nothing of the rest of the world), in the arts and sciences generally, but as I do not feel myself competent to the task, I shall not attempt it.

And now, in bringing this crude and undigested account of my experience to a close, short as it is, it gives rise to many serious reflections. When I look back upon the number of those who set out in life with me, full of hope, and who have fallen by the way, and gone to that bourne from whence there is no returning, with not even a rude stone to mark the spot where their mortal remains are deposited, language fails me, and indeed there is no language adequate to the expression of my feelings. I shall therefore drop the subject, leaving the reader to fill up the blank in his own way.

In conclusion, let me say a word about my politics and religion. In politics, I profess to belong to the Jeffersonian school. I view Thomas Jefferson as decidedly the greatest statesman that America has yet produced. He was the chief apostle of both Political and Religious Liberty. My motto is taken from his first Inaugural: "Equal and exact justice to all men" – and I will add – without calling in question their political or religious faith, country, or color.

⁵ The county seat was finally established at Centreville in April, 1820.

And here I wish it distinctly understood, and remembered, that I stood almost alone in this section of the State, in opposition to our ruinous system of internal improvements, concocted and brought about at the sessions of the Legislature in the years 1835 to 1836; which resulted in the creation of a State debt which the present generation will not see paid; and which has verified the text in the old Book to the very letter, which says that the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon their children to the third and fourth generations.

As to religion:

Happy is he, the only happy man,
Who, from *choice*, does all the good he can.

“The world is my country, and my religion is to do right.” I am a firm believer in the Christian religion, though not as lived up to by most of its professors of the present day. In the language of Jefferson, I look upon the “Christian philosophy as the most sublime and benevolent, but most perverted system that ever shone on man.” I have no use for the priesthood, nor can I abide the shackles of sectarian dogmas. I see no necessity for confessions of faith, creeds, forms and ceremonies. In the most comprehensive sense of the word, I am opposed to all wars, and to slavery; and trust the time is not far distant when they will be numbered among the things that were, and viewed as we now look back upon some of the doings of what we are pleased to style the dark ages. In the language of Burns:

Then let us pray that come it may –
As come it will for a’ that –
That sense and worth, o’er a’ the earth,
May bear the gree, and a’ that.
For a’ that, and a’ that,
It’s coming yet, for a’ that,
That man to man, the world o’er,
Shall brothers be for a’ that.