

Leaves From St. Joseph County's First Book of History

Orange Blossoms and Strains of Mendelssohn Were Lacking but Romance Thrived in the Early Days, the Record Shows

By C. J. Cooper.

Wafted from a vanished century comes the fragrance of orange blossoms. The musty odor of the aged record book gives way to one of lavender and old lace, and the yellowed pages with their ancient writing melt into visions of the long ago.

There may not have been any orange blossoms there, and there may have been an absence of real lavender and old lace, but you know as you read the words on the yellowed pages that there was that something for which orange blossoms and lavender and old lace are always the symbol.

Even the accumulated dust of years you blow from the worn covers of the book is not unpleasant, for it reminds you that you are about to delve into the romantic past.

The well worn, aged volume County Clerk Wilbur M. Warner hands you contains the record of the first marriage in St. Joseph county wherein the contracting parties were white persons, and as you open its covers and read the record on its first page, you know that even 90 years ago there was romance in St. Joseph county.

You are carried back to the time when Adam Keith courted Hannah Harris, and finally led her to the matrimonial altar in the office of Squire Adam Smith.

NO CHURCH FOR CEREMONY.

Undoubtedly Adam Keith would have liked to have led his bride to an altar in a church, and would have liked to have marched proudly down the aisle to the strain of the Mendelssohn wedding march, but there were no churches in St. Joseph county in 1830, and Adam Keith was forced to lead his bride to the office of a justice of the peace.

It was on the 11th of November, 90 years ago, that Adam procured the marriage license. Hannah's father was willing that his daughter should become a bride, for he was with his prospective son-in-law at the office of County Clerk Lathrop M. Taylor when the license was issued.

How old Hannah was when Adam Keith asked her to link her future with his does not appear, but you know that she must have been very young because County Clerk Taylor before issuing the license to Adam to wed Hannah insisted that Agnew Harris give his consent to the marriage of his daughter.

It was just one week after the license was issued that Adam and Hannah went to the office of Squire Smith. If you had been there you probably would have seen Hannah's father and mother and her sister, Sally, there. And you would probably have shed tears of joy or sorrow, as the case might have been, along with the rest of the company that witnessed the first marriage to be held in the little village of South Bend. And you would have noticed that Sally Harris watched

the ceremony performed by Squire Smith with a great deal of interest, and you might have wondered why. But maybe if you had been there then you might have been in Sally Harris' confidence, and she might have confided to you that within a few weeks she too would be standing before Squire Smith in exactly the same position. Hannah Harris was standing on that 11th day of November, 1830.

And you might have been asked by Sally Harris to accompany her and Samuel H. Bell to the office of County Clerk Taylor on the 7th day of December to get their license to wed, and Sally might have invited you to attend the wedding two days later.

SALLY FINDS A MINISTER.

But if Sally Harris had told you that she was to be married by Squire Smith, she would have been mistaken. The wedding took place two days after the license had been issued, but Sally and Samuel found a minister of the gospel at just the right time. Not having been there, you do not know under what circumstances the Rev. David Miller happened to be in South Bend at just the right moment. He may have just arrived on missionary work among the Indians, and Sally and Samuel availed themselves of the opportunity to have the ceremony performed by a minister.

Both Hannah Keith and Sally Bell must have made a happy choice in husbands, or at least they have left no record to the contrary. You may search through all the divorce records of the St. Joseph circuit court and you will not find any record that Hannah and Sally either left their husbands, or were left by them.

BOSTON OVERROCKER IN DIFFICULTIES.

And the happiness of the county's first two brides did not depend upon so much as happiness does today. Ninety years ago there was much more to think about than the high cost of living, although if you had been there you might have found out that even in the long ago, persons were not inclined to give away things to eat and wear, and that even then rents were charged to newlyweds who were not fortunate enough to own their own homes.

NOT EVEN COUNTY SEAT.

South Bend was a very little place 90 years ago, you would have found if you had been there. You would have soon learned that it was not even the county seat, and that a little more than 100 persons formed the entire community. You, along with Hannah and Sally and Adam and Samuel, would have come in daily contact with Indians you might have traded with the red men as undoubtedly Adam and Samuel did.

And if you had wanted to get married during your stay in South Bend 90 years ago, you would have been compelled to do just as Adam and Samuel were forced to do when they wanted to get a marriage license. You would have gone to St. Joseph, which was the

county seat, and asked County Clerk Taylor to give you a license to wed the one of your choice, and if that one was not too young, or you had the consent of those who had in charge the immediate future of the one you desired to make life's journey with. County Clerk Taylor undoubtedly would have been persuaded to give you the necessary license.

Then you would have been compelled to return to South Bend, and if you were not fortunate enough to find a visiting minister of the gospel in the community, you would have been compelled to lead the one of your choice to the altar in the office of Squire Smith.

That is what Adam Keith did, and that is what Alfred Stanton did when he wanted to marry Phoeby Fall. Alfred chose the 9th day of December on which to make his visit to the office of County Clerk Taylor at St. Joseph to procure the license. He was accompanied to St. Joseph by Phoeby's father, Phoeby apparently being too young for County Clerk Taylor to issue a license without first being satisfied that her father was willing.

The license issued to Alfred Stanton was the last to be given out by County Clerk Taylor during 1830. Alfred and Phoeby waited until the ninth day of the new year to have the ceremony performed, and you will not find any record anywhere that Alfred and Phoeby were not as happy during their married life as were Adam and Hannah and Samuel and Sally.

And although you were not sure but that seeing so many persons embark on a matrimonial venture caused Boston to take a chance himself, you were not altogether surprised as you turned the yellowed pages of the ancient record book to find that Boston had asked County Clerk Taylor for a marriage license, but you were surprised to learn that although he had testified to the legal age of many others desiring to get married, he was not able to satisfy the county clerk as to his own age, or that of his prospective bride.

Boston wanted to marry Sarah Martindale, and on the 5th day of November, 1831, he made his wants known to the country clerk. Apparently the county clerk was dubious regarding the age of Sarah, and

And if you had been there you would probably have seen tears in the eyes of Hannah and Sally and Phoeby and Sarah and Adam and Samuel and Alfred and Boston marched away behind County Clerk Taylor to the west bank of the St. Joseph river to protect their homes against the expected invasion of the Blackhawk Indians, and you would have probably cried with them as their young husbands came home again with the news that the Indians had decided not to include the little village in their battle line, although this time you would have cried with them for joy that Adam and Samuel and Alfred and Boston were home again and that all was safe.

WHICH IS WORSE. DO YOU THINK?

And as you look through the musty pages of the aged record book, you are not sure which is worse, fighting Indians or the high cost of living, although it might occur to you that you might stand a better chance against the Indians than you do against the high cost of living, and it might also occur to you that while being scalped is not the most pleasant experience that might befall you, there would be the compensation that the struggle would be ended for you, at least, to say nothing of the pleasure of having been able to put up a fight against the enemy be-

fore he succeeded in hanging a portion of your top hair to his belt.

As you continue to turn the yellowed pages of the musty record book, you find that Squire Adam Smith did not have a monopoly in the marriage business, that his office was not the only Gretna Green in St. Joseph county 90 years ago, and that there were other squires who were favored by the presence of and fees of persons who wanted to be married.

E. R. Tutt, who with County Clerk Taylor, led the men of South Bend to the banks of the St. Joseph river to repel the invading Blackhawks, and who came out of the town's defense as a Lieutenant colonel, married many a couple after Rev. Griffith had founded his church. But you will refrain from blaming Lieut. Col. Tutt from becoming a marrying justice when you remember that he lost his position as town clerk, owing to the decision of the inhabitants of the community that a town government was not particularly needed.

FIRST CHURCH IS BUILT.

It was not until after Adam Keith and Hannah Harris, Samuel Bell and Sally Harris, Alfred Stanton and Phoeby Fall, and even Boston Overrocker and Sarah Martindale, were married that a church was built in South Bend and a regular minister of the gospel took up his residence in the little village, affording an opportunity to bridal couples to enter the matrimonial state with a parson officiating.

The first church was built in 1835, and Rev. N. B. Griffith, a Methodist minister, was the first to hold religious services in the community. From that time on those who were married by a justice of the peace did so because they wanted to be, not because of the same reason that compelled Adam Keith and Hannah Harris to select Squire Smith to perform their ceremony.

But even if Hannah and Sally and Phoeby and Sarah had to get along without being permitted to start their married life in step with the strains of the Mendelssohn, albeit these same strains have been known to lead some into unhappy and thorn-strewn paths, they were probably just as happy as those who marched down the aisle of Rev. Griffith's church to the accompaniment of the little church organ.

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