

Earliest Settlements and Settlers in Champaign County

There is no record of white occupancy until about 1794, and that meager. A Frenchman by the name of Deshicket is known to have settled on the banks of Mad River in (now) Salem Township and is the first one known to really live in the community. "Willy Owens" was undoubtedly one of the first arrivals coming from Virginia, by wagon, in 1797 to what is now Mad River Township. In consideration for having led the way into "the wilderness" the land was sold to him for \$1.00 per acre by William Ward. He picked out such a spot to stop as met his fancy also because of a spring or stream, afterwards called "Owens Creek". He concentrated on hog raising and the Indians called him Hosko Elene (hog man).

Another contender for "first" place was Pierre Dugan, a Canadian Frenchman, a hunter and trader who married a squaw and lived, prior to 1800, in land thereafter known as "Dugan's Prairie" and from which the present-day "Dugan's ditch" derived its name.

Most of the so-called "early settlers" arrived after 1800, and as there were no official records kept there have been many a name of pioneers lost to local fame who did fully as much for the new county.

About 1800 William Pickerell, William Martin, William Elder, James Merryfield, Emanuel Merryfield, and John Rogers with their families came from Virginia and effected a settlement in what is now known as Rush Township, but only Rogers remained as a permanent settler.

Joseph McLain entered lands about 1801, but after making a clearing and some

improvements he learned that it was government land and moved away. His son, James A. McLain, born July 9, 1804, was the first white child born in this section of the county (now Union Township). Joseph specialized in wild-bee honey, and with the proceeds paid for his land.

Charles Rector, Christopher Weaver, William Ross and William Weaver and wife settled in the part of Champaign County (now Clark County) around Tremont City. Henry Storm lived in the neighborhood prior to the Weavers. William Weaver moved into Mad River Township in 1806.

Thomas Kenton, nephew of Simon Kenton, settled in Mad River Valley in 1801. He was a tax collector and the first election after founding of Champaign County was held in his house (1805). Simon Kenton settled in Urbana.

Silas Johnson was the first white man to settle within the limits of present Johnson Township. He came with his two sons, James and Charles, in the spring of 1802, settled on unsurveyed land which later was found to be government land. He considered the price of \$8.00 exorbitant and moved to cheaper land and built two cabins of wood.

A man by the name of Jacob Sarver settled in Harrison Township about 1802.

Settlement in 1802-03 was commenced in Salem Township on part of "Dugan's Prairie", by the Stewarts, Powells, Woods, Jacksons, Thomases, Pettys and soon came the Parkisons, Turners, Guthridges, Barretts, William Johnson, Leonards, McAdams and Pearces.

Emanuel Pickerel built the first grist-mill on the outlet of Rush Lake in 1803.

Barton Minturn of New Jersey settled on part of Section 28, Union Township in the spring of 1803. With him came his father Jacob Minturn, Donald, Abraham and Jesse Jones, Donald Baker and John Clark. They came down the Ohio and up to this country by wagon and settled in prairie lands (now Union Township).

John Reynolds came about this time and moved into Urbana and became a public spirited citizen; through his efforts began the first attempt to drain and reclaim the swamp land at "Dugan's Ditch".

Joseph Hill was the first prominent permanent settler of Concord Township.

Jesse C. Phillips came from Virginia and purchased 50 acres in Section 25, Salem Township.

Joseph Diltz also settled in Salem.

A Mr. Cox and two sons-in-law by name of Cox and Fleming came along in 1804. They were squatters and little is known about them (in Johnson Township). They stayed about 3 years.

About 1803 a young man by the name of Fuson left Virginia on horseback. He had filled his saddlebags with white corn with which he blazed his way into the wilderness by dropping grains, and arrived in (now) Harrison Township in 1804. To him is attributed the introduction of white seed corn into western soil. The name of "Fuson Corn" became a household word.

In the same year and to the same neighborhood came John Cane, William Lemmon, Sampson Kelly, Thomas Cowie,

Thomas Grafton, Joshua Darnell, and George Wilson.

Sometime between 1800 and 1807 Francis Owens, Robert Bay, James Stover were temporary residents.

At unrecorded dates between 1801 and 1810 William Hendricks, Jesse Goddard, A. Dibert, E. Standerford, Mark and William Kenton, Elijah Harbor, Henry Ritter and Archiblad McGrew settled in Mad River Township in the neighborhood of site of Westville and Terre Haute.

The first comers, as a rule, chose the land at creek or spring locations without regard to lay of land or kind of soil. They could not well do otherwise. Water was a necessity which, for safety, must be close to home because of wild beasts and Indians. The Indians as a rule were friendly but looked with a jealous eye to this invasion of their best hunting grounds.

The name, Champaign, from a French word meaning flat open country, was chosen because of the topography of the land.

The county line was drawn seven miles south of Springfield and included (now) Clark county land east of the Big Miami and north as far as lake Erie.

In 1805 William Ward laid out a town for a county seat and called it Urbana. Immediately Joseph C. Vance and family moved in from near Clifton in Greene County and built the first cabin. ♦

A WPA Writers Project ca 1939.

Their material taken from Middleton's
History of Champaign County.