

Robert Lemen article on Pioneer Times in Illinois, from *The Pioneer*, published by Mr. Green at Rock Spring, Ill., January 8, 1830, included in the *History of the Lemen Family ...*, by Frank Begole Lemen.

"Ridge Prairie, St. Clair County,
"January 1, 1830.

"Mr. Green:

"Being confined to the house for several days in consequence of a wound I received by the fall of a tree, and finding it disagreeable to my feelings to be entire unemployed, it may be of interest to your readers to be made acquainted with some incidents which occurred after I came to this country, it being forty-three years and six months since. My father, with a few others, perhaps not exceeding twelve families, were under the necessity of collecting in a small fort called Piggott's Fort, about nine miles below Cahokia, at the foot of the bluff adjoining the Mississippi Bottom, as a safeguard against the hostility of the Indian tribes, whose murderous arms were uplifted against us. The heads of families were chiefly farmers, who were delighted with the beauties which the prairies seemed to present in their black rich soil, the yellow flowers and the song of the lark. 'I wept,' said one, 'when I beheld the sight, to think there were so few in this country to praise God.' The prairie sod has since closed over his remains. But to proceed: notwithstanding all the caution and pains that were taken, we were from time to time visited in a most solemn and distressing manner.

"As a young man about nineteen years of age was driving his team with a load of hay, a ball from the gun of an Indian broke his right arm and entered his body, and seeing another gun presented at him, being active on foot, he made an attempt to spring from his horse, but failing, the horses were alarmed, and running with speed an escape was made. The solemn tidings immediately reached his father, who, when beholding his son, embraced him in his arms and cried, 'O Benjamin¹, my son, my son, would to God I had died in thy stead.' But to the inexpressible joy of his father, after suffering a long time he recovered from his wound.²

"Another remarkable circumstance: 'A certain woman, after having four husbands killed by the Indians, lastly was killed herself.'³ The tomahawk and scalping knife were our common dread. To use the words of the prophet Jeremiah: 'We got our bread by the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness.' Thus it was with the greatest difficulty we procured the necessaries of life, laboring with one hand while in the other we held a weapon of defense; our food and raiment being of the coarsest kind and scanty withal. No coffee nor whiskey, without which numbers think they cannot live in these days of plenty. In a manner we had all things in common; in one field we raised our grain, and a kind of kindred feeling possessed each breast, uniting us as brethren of one family. Among these who were then heads of families there are but four remaining, one male and three females.

"Our currency consisted of deer skins, three pounds being equal to one dollar in silver, and it was a lawful tender. Our amusements were the contemplation of better days. We had no minister of the gospel; our manner of worship was to assemble together on the Sabbath, read the Scriptures and sing a few Psalms or spiritual songs. In these times of distress we were visited by a Baptist minister from Kentucky by the name of James Smith. Being a man of talent and warm in the cause of religion, great power attended his preaching. Under his ministry several professed a hope; but as it is often the case with preachers of the gospel it was his lot to forego difficulties; being in company one day with three others, intending to go to Prairie du Rocher, at the road near Bellefontaine,⁴ now Waterloo, at an unexpected moment two were killed, one escaped and Smith was taken prisoner by the Indians. This was solemn news, and particularly so, the two that were killed being the wife and daughter of one of our neighbors, who in company with others hastened to the spot, beheld, wept over and committed to earth

¹ The wounded man was Benjamin Ogle, son of Capt. Joseph Ogle and his first wife, Prudence Drusilla Biggs.

² Benjamin carried the ball from the Indian's gun for the rest of his life.

³ This is John Moredock's mother.

⁴ Bellefontaine is the name given to a spring that was a stopping off point between Cahokia and Kaskaskia, so named by the early French settlers. It means beautiful spring. The spring and adjoining property, including the only piece of the Kaskaskia still in existence, is owned and maintained by the Monroe County Historical Society.

all that was near and dear unto him. Pursuit was made after the murderers, but slowly and with caution, not wishing, however, to overtake, but to ascertain whether they had killed or saved the prisoner alive. At length discovering the track of his shoes to continue for some considerable distance they returned. Some months after news came that for a certain sum Smith would be brought back. No questions were asked if less would suffice, the ransom was paid down and language fails to describe the joy that was felt at Smith's return.

"We afterwards moved back to New Design, to a place selected by Captain Joseph Ogle⁵ and others, suitable for that purpose, being surrounded by excellent timber and good water. After our removal to that place the most distressing circumstance which occurred was the murder of the wife and four children of the family of Robert W. Mahon;⁶ himself and oldest daughter being taken prisoners by the Indians; and such was the unfeeling conduct of these barbarous sons of the forest that when camping at night they placed before the fire, for the purpose of drying, the scalps taken from the heads of his wife and children. Mahon made his escape, but the weather being cold and somewhat mistaking his course, he had liked to have perished in the snow. After returning he immediately visited the solemn place where his wife and children were all interred in one grave, and falling prostrate on the yellow pile, he uttered these words; 'They were lovely in their lives and in their deaths they were not divided.'⁷

"Although since the occurrence of those scenes years have passed away, yet while I am pursuing the subject I now and then feel a tear kindling in the eyes that once beheld them. Sometime after moving to New Design we experienced a great revival of religion, both Baptists and Methodists aiding in the work. It was then that I for the first time beheld the ordinance of baptism by immersion administered. It was in Fountain Creek, by Rev. Josiah Dodge, a Baptist preacher from the State of Kentucky. Although young I shall never forget the solemn impression of mind. Four persons were baptized, James Lemen and Catharine, his wife (my parents), being the first two, and they were the first persons baptized by immersion in Illinois.⁸ He who administered the ordinance and those who were baptized are all sleeping in the dust with the exception of one. Thus I have seen Illinois in a state of infancy, have beheld her growth, have been jealous for her character, which she has preserved unsullied; have seen her form a healthy constitution, and strangers beholding her have been made to say, 'half was never told us;' and I have no doubt but that in a few years she will be able to vie with the tallest of her sisters, and it will no doubt be said of her: 'Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.' I can now sing these beautiful lines from Dr. Watts:

"Happy the country where the sheep;
Cattle and corn have large increase;
Where men securely work or sleep,
Nor sons of plunder break their peace.'

"An old settler in Illinois.

R. L."

⁵ Captain Ogle was James Lemen Sr.'s father in law.

⁶ I believe his full surname may have been McMahan. I find it both ways in old records.

⁷ For more detail on this and other Indian atrocities in the New Design settlement, see *Arrowheads to Aerojets*, a history of Monroe County published by the Monroe County Historical Society.

⁸ Note that this immersion took place in February and the ice had to be chipped away from Fountain Creek in order to do the immersing.