



TOP Row— MRS. FRANCES MICHAEL BALL MRS. AVIS SAYLOR McQUISTON
BOTTOM Row— MRS. ELIZA SAYLOR MEYERS MRS. ELIZABETH BALES FISHER MRS. MARTHA BALES SAYLOR
READ FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

THE SAYLORS

The historian of Polk County will find, if he attempts to trace the genealogy of the pioneer settlers, that the Saylor were numerous, quite prominent, and even to-day they, or their descendants, form a large portion of the body politic. The stork was very generous toward them. They came here before the county was organized, or Des Moines had a legal existence. The first-comer was John B., who arrived in April, 1845. The county merely had a place on the maps, set forth by metes and bounds. It had no courts, no officers, no civil government. It was under the military control of a garrison of infantry and dragoons, the territory being occupied mostly by Indians, who were waiting the expiration of their title to the land they had sold to Uncle Sam.

The garrison was not self-sustaining; its source of supplies was hundreds of miles away, transportation difficult, and often impossible. Provisions were necessary for men and horses. Captain Allen, Commandant of the garrison, issued permits to those who gave satisfactory evidence of good intention, to select land for home purposes, provided they would raise hay, grain, and beef cattle for the garrison. John got a permit, went up north, at what is now a part of Saylorville, selected a fine tract, skirted with a belt of timber and a creek, built a log cabin, and, with his good wife, started the first settlement north of Des Moines. There was nothing between them and the North Pole. They entered upon their new life with courage and cheerfulness, endured its hardships and privations, buoyed with the hope of better days, and the coming of friends and neighbors. The isolation was a serious trial to the mother, for John was frequently absent on business. At one time, she was alone with her little tots six weeks, having to take care of the live-stock, bring water and fuel for the house, when Indian bands were roaming about the country, visited the cabin, and, though apparently peaceable, the

uncertainty of what they might do was a constant source of terror. Wolves were numerous, always hungry, would chase the house dogs even to the cabin door, and made night hideous with their howls and prowling about the premises. To withstand such conditions required courage. Beside that, housekeeping utensils were scarce. Boxes and stools had to be used instead of tables and chairs. For a tray in which to mix bread, one was hollowed out of a log. Bacon was the staple meat, as the Indians kept the wild game scarce. Wild crabapples were the dessert, parched corn or roasted acorns were substitutes for coffee.

From the outset, John was prominent in county affairs. At the election, April Sixth, 1846, to elect the first county officers, he was elected Judge of the Probate Court, and there is nothing of record to show that he did not hold the office until the election of Burbridge, in 1851. He was an active business man, a valuable citizen, and wise counsellor. He was a devout Methodist, meetings were held regularly in his cabin, and a Class formed long before a preacher came. He aided in building the first church in the settlement.

In April, 1846, the stork brought the first child in the settlement, to Addison Michael, who was the first Justice of the Peace in Des Moines.

In his cabin, in August, 1847, was the first wedding in Saylor Township, that of Tilman Bondurant and "Sis" Kooney, when Mrs. Saylor invited all the friends and neighbors and had a general jollification. She was a noted promoter of weddings. The second wedding was that of Benjamin Saylor and Elizabeth, a daughter of "Uncle Davy" Norris.

In 1847, the County Commissioners ordered the erection of a Court House. They had purchased a lot for ten dollars, where the Union Depot is, and the contract was let to John to build the Court House for two thousand and fifty dollars. It was to be a brick building, two stories high, with basement of stone walls. It was to be the biggest and most imposing structure in Central Iowa, and it made the taxpayers grumble at the extravagant cost of it. There was to be no jail attachment; prisoners were then taken to Oskaloosa for confinement. The building was to be completed in 1849, but material and labor were scarce. January First, 1850, John asked

to be released from his contract. It had been completed except plastering and the woodwork. He was paid five hundred and fifty dollars due for work done, and the Commissioners completed the work. The total cost was two thousand and fifteen dollars, a saving of thirty-five dollars from the contract price. When the second Court House was built, it was sold to the First Christian Church for eight hundred dollars, including the lot. The building subsequently became the passenger depot of the Wabash Road.

In January, 1848, a section of territory was cut off from Des Moines Township and named Saylor Township, in honor of the settlement. It embraced what it does now and the south half of Crocker Township. At the first election to elect township officers, the polls were held at John's cabin.

In 1850, John laid out and platted the town of Saylorville, and in 1855, added more to it. Churches, schools, hotels, stores and shops were built, and it was one of the most flourishing towns in the county. It had a powerful influence in political and civic affairs—in fact, was a formidable rival of The Fort for the location of the County Seat, and worried the pessimists of "Raccoon Forks" not a little. It received a stunning blow, however, when the railroad was built to Ames and passed it two miles eastward, since when it has dwindled away.

In 1850, John supplied the garrison at Fort Dodge with beef cattle.

During the Civil War, John joined the army as sutler, and died at Vicksburg, July Twenty-sixth, 1863.

Benjamin Saylor came into the county soon after John, and settled near him. He at once entered into all the activities of pioneer life. He was a home-builder, public-spirited, an enthusiastic promoter and builder of schoolhouses and churches. Like most of the pioneers, he was a Methodist.

April Sixth, 1846, at the county election, he was elected one of the three County Commissioners in whom was vested the control of all county affairs. The board held its first meeting April Thirteenth, in one of the log cabins, there being no county offices, and among the orders issued was one that the eagle side of a half-dollar should be used as the county seal.

April Sixth, 1846, had been selected by the Judges of the Territorial Supreme Court for holding the first session of the District Court in Polk County, but the government machinery had slipped a cog in some way. The county was practically without any government, civil or judicial, and when Judge Williams arrived, no preparations had been made, there was no Sheriff, no Grand Jury, no place provided for holding the court, and he was compelled to wait the result of an election being held on that day to elect officers of the county, when "Uncle Tommy" Mitchell was elected Sheriff. He was sworn into office the next day, and directed by the Judge to bring before him, at the earliest possible moment, twenty-three good men for a Grand Jury. Among those brought in was Benjamin. It was the most motley attired crowd ever corraled (sic) for a Grand Jury in the county. The Judge, who was a jolly fellow, accepted humorously the situation, delivered his charge to the jury, and sent them away on business, but there was nothing doing, whereupon they were discharged, and the court adjourned to September, at which term Benjamin was again drawn on the Grand Jury. Among the Petit Jury was John Rose, who had an action on file against William Lamb for trespass and damages, in the sum of five hundred dollars, which, after a hearing, the court dismissed and charged the cost to Rose, who soon after went up to Boone County and got elected Justice of the Peace, that county then being attached to Polk County for judicial purposes. The first case brought before him, as it appears on the record, is only one of many unique cases to be found in the records of early justices, who were selected for their good sense rather than judicial qualifications. I have made several efforts to find the record of Aaron D. Stark, who held forth out at Brooks' Lake, but it has disappeared from the county vaults in some way. It was rich with ludicrous lore of pioneer jurisprudence. The Rose case was:

"DAVID NOAH, Plaintiff,)

--- In Debt

"LEWIS RINNEY, Defendant,)

"On or near the Second day of June, 1851, I, John Rose, sent Lewis Rinney word by Adam Boies, that David Noah had left a note with me against him for collection, and said Rinney didn't come. So, on the Fourth day of

June, I issued a summons commanding the said Rinney to appear, and on the Eleventh of June, 1851, at one o'clock p. m. of said day, to answer to plaintiff in a case of debt, which summons was returned previous to the time set for trial, but on the same day, and as soon as the summons was returned, I placed the amount on the back of the summons previous to the defendant appearing. The defendant came, and plaintiff, on the Eleventh of June, 1851, and defendant asked me if I had issued a venire for a jury and subpoenas for witnesses. I told him that I had no notice of it. So the defendant asked for a postponement of trial, also ordered me to venire a jury and witnesses, which was all done, and plaintiff and defendant amicably agreed to have the case tried on the Twenty-eighth day of June, 1851. Both parties appeared then; the defendant asked to see the summons, and objected to amount on the back, and asked for an unsuit, which I didn't grant; then he wrote an affidavit and presented it to me for a change of venue, which I also denied, but proceeded to trial, and the defendant withdrew from trial. The jury was duly erected and sworn, and brought in the following verdict of the jury:

"We, the jury, find for the plaintiff.

"The action on which suit was brought was note given by Lewis Rinney to David Noah, promissory, for fifteen dollars and fifty cents, and fifty cents interest from the time it was due until judgment was rendered, making sixteen dollars.

"Constable's fees	\$ 6.40
"Juror's fees	4.52
"Witness fees	4.42
"Justice's fees	2.43 ³ / ₄
"Total	\$17.77 ³ / ₄
"John Rose, J. P.	
"JULY TWENTY-FIRST, 1851."	

Benjamin was an active member of the Settlers' Claim Club, which was, in fact, a law and order league, and kept the county free of horse thieves and disreputable persons.

He was also a member of the Old Settlers' Association, and a very prominent and influential person in school, church and civic affairs.

In 1849, he erected a two-story frame building fronting on Third Street, at the corner of Court Avenue, where the Sherman Block is.

In the Saylor Settlement, in 1849, occurred the first murder in Polk County. For some time, a feud had existed between two men named Smith and Howard. One day Howard was hauling a load of wood along the highway, when Smith assaulted him. He turned upon his assailant and shot him, causing death within an hour. Before his death, Smith made a statement of the whole affair, and so general was the belief that the shooting was justifiable, Howard was never disturbed.

The term, "pioneer," has come to have a broad application, but as construed by the primitive members of the Old Settlers' Association, it means only those who came to Polk County prior to 1848, and they are very punctilious respecting their titular superiority and distinction. At the reunions, they don't allow any others to feast at their table, yet they fraternize joyfully with all the later comers, for pioneering extended well into the Fifties. Its trials, privations, and experiences were much the same.

In these reminiscences of early days, very little has been written respecting pioneer women. At the reunions of the Old Settlers' Association, mention is rarely made of the women—the mothers. In all the gatherings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association for twenty years, there was fulsome, mutual admiration and glorification of self—interesting and instructive, it is true—but no mention of the pioneer mothers, whose bosom pillowed their heads, who guided them to manhood, and to whom is due a tribute greater than to self.

"Their monument—where does it stand?
Their epitaph—who reads it?
No nobler dames had Sparta,
No nobler matrons Rome."

The present and future generations will never know what they owe to the pioneer women. It is true the men toiled from sunrise to sundown, but the mothers—their tasks had no beginning nor ending. They carded the wool, spun the yarn, wove the cloth, did the washing and ironing, kept the house

in order, tended the garden, dressed the turkeys, cured and dried the deer meat, prepared the fat for "dips" and cooking, gathered and preserved the wild fruit—all that they did, and to which was added the endless burden of maternity.

In the homes of the pioneers were sown the germs, which, fostered and nurtured by the mothers, Beebe, Saylor, Buzick, Barlow, Winterrowd, Canfield, Cory, and scores of others, culminated in the foundation of a good citizenship, a prosperous, happy community.

But the old Spartan mothers have gone, yet they left a heritage of daughters, who came with them as girls to the new country, and bore their part in the trials and privations common to all in making a home where their only neighbors were Indians and wild animals. As wives, they gave new courage and incentive to the young men who cleared the forest, turned up the riches of the golden soil, and constituted the strength and good citizenship of this now goodly county; as mothers, they, too, have reared children who have walked in the ways of righteousness and right-living.

The illustration presented herewith is of five of the pioneer "girls," who represent the highest type of the old-fashioned mothers. With forty-three children to their credit, they have done well in carrying out Roosevelt's idea of the race question. Reading from right to left, top row, Mrs. Frances Michael Ball, Mrs. Avis Saylor McQuiston; bottom row, Mrs. Eliza Saylor Myers, Mrs. Elizabeth Bales Fisher, Mrs. Martha Bales Saylor.

Mrs. Martha Bales Saylor, daughter of Sarah and Solomon Bales, was born March Fourth, 1830, in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, on a farm six miles west of La Fayette, near the Wabash River, in a genuine Quaker settlement.

Her father, through his good faith in humanity, had signed bonds for forty thousand dollars for a friend, who proved deceitful and treacherous, necessitating the surrender of his farm. He therefore decided to come West, and get Government land. In company with his sister and her husband, Eli Keeler, he came to Polk County in February, 1846, and located a claim near the claim of John B. Saylor. During the Summer, they built cabins and began preparations for a home. Later, her father returned to Indiana, and early in

September, gathered together his family and household goods to go to a new country and begin life over again. The family consisted of her father and mother, her father's mother, her mother's father, Abram Haines, seventy-five years old, nine children, and a hired man. The outfit was composed of a large prairie schooner loaded heavily with household goods, a new plow swung beneath, drawn by four yokes of oxen, driven by the hired man; another big farm wagon loaded with household goods, drawn by two fine, black horses, driven by the father; next, a wagon filled with bedding, cradles, useful articles, and children, drawn by two fine, large, sorrel horses, driven by the mother; another wagon loaded with odds and ends, grain, etc., driven by Grandfather Haines. Following were thirty-five cattle and thirty sheep, driven by Martha, sixteen years old, on horseback.

On a beautiful day, early in September, Martha gave a lingering farewell gaze upon the big brick house in the center of a large grass plat dotted with fruit trees and blooming shrubbery, nearby groves of Oaks, Hickory, Cherry and Crabapples, a little stream of bubbling spring water winding and shimmering through a pasture where she had passed many happy hours gamboling with pet lambs, colts and calves; the big, red barns, the orchards of apples, peaches and berries; the old sugar camp, where gay frolics were had, the barrel of syrup for buckwheat cakes, the barrel of sugar for gingerbread, doughnuts and pumpkin pies, which made a home of luxury and childhood's happiness, then, with throbbing heart, mounted her horse and turned her face to follow the wagons; the sheep trailed the cows with little trouble or mishap. Sometimes, a young sheep or lamb would get under the wagon and be crushed by the wheels, when, with a cry of alarm, there was a leap from the saddle, the victim dragged to the wayside, its innocent face and silky ears caressed amid sobs and sighs, a breath of benediction, and a hustle to overtake the procession.

Stops were made where good camping grounds and grazing for the stock could be found. With a big fire, long-handled frying-pans, skillets and kettles, corn meal and bacon and plenty of milk, generous and appetizing meals were prepared, and after the long day's ride, the shake-down bed in the wagon gave rest and refreshing sleep. There was very little variation in

the daily movement. Sometimes, a sudden storm would terrorize the live-stock, and hurried measures were necessary to get them sheltered and quieted. Sometimes swollen, unbridged streams were reached, and in crossing, the household goods were watersoaked, causing delay in unloading and drying them. The cattle could swim, but not the sheep, so ropes were put around their necks and a man on horseback drew them across.

The Mississippi was crossed at Burlington, on a ferry, thence the route was to Oskaloosa, where a short halt was made, thence via "Uncle Tommy" Mitchell's tavern—the gateway to Polk County—thence through Skunk Bottoms, where the teams had to be doubled up, thence to the new home, arriving October Sixteenth, 1846, where was greeting them a log cabin, with one room, one door, with clapboard shutter, two small windows without glass, a clapboard roof, no fireplace or stove, to be the domicile of fourteen persons. Beds were made on the floor for some, others slept in wagons, others on the grass, with the dogs on guard, for snakes, skunks, and wolves were numerous. A larger and more comfortable cabin was soon completed, however. During the Summer, Keeler had cleared and planted two acres of corn and vegetables, and raised the tallest corn, and finest pumpkins, they had ever seen. But sometimes the corn meal and flour got short, and a trip to Oskaloosa was necessary for supplies. Severe wintry storms, and waiting at the mill, delayed the return of the father many days, when a tin bucket was broken up, flattened out, holes punched in it with a nail, then nailed to a smooth, flat board, and corn grated for meal and mush, satisfying to hungry stomachs, until the return of the big wagon from Oskaloosa.

Sometimes, wolves harried the live-stock, stole the chickens, killed the calves; prairie fires menaced the cabins, requiring vigorous and hard fighting to save the home. One evening, soon after Martha's arrival, while sitting near the cabin, thinking of the old home, a most unearthly scream rent the air from the nearby timber. The thought of Indians and massacre terrorized her, and she was only quieted when assured that it was only the wail of a panther, which the dogs had stirred up, while hunting the cows. Soon after, seven or eight Indians came galloping up to the door of her sister's cabin,

and began talking to her, making vigorous gestures, and signs, which so terrorized her that she began to cry, and nearly swooned, whereupon Martha rushed out into the woods, through fallen tree tops, over stumps, through brush and briers, to the nearest cabin, half a mile away, falling exhausted through the door, whispering that the Indians were at her home and carrying everything away, only to be greeted with laughter and assured that the Indians would do no harm, which they did not, and afterward said to the neighbors: "The new white squaw no brave."

A few years wrought wondrous changes in the new home, and its environments. Increasing wealth, contentment and happiness came as recompense for the sacrifice of 1846, on the banks of the Wabash.

Mrs. Saylor acquired a primary education at home, later taking higher degrees in the public schools of Des Moines.

In November, 1848, she was united in marriage with Jehu P. Saylor, and, though not the first bride, she claims she is the first bridesmaid in the county, having served in combing and braiding the hair and dressing three young brides, and in one case, arranging and fixing the necktie of one of the grooms, John Myers, while the Esquire waited on the porch. Ben. Bryant's bride had no maid.

Immediately on her marriage, she went to housekeeping. Wardrobes, bureaus, and closets were scarce in pioneer cabins, so the wedding suits of herself and husband were nicely folded and laid away in a new flour barrel.

In the Spring of 1849, she dropped and covered with a hoe seven acres of corn. In the Fall of 1850, she planted the first Currant, Rose, Peach, and Concord grape in Polk County, north of Des Moines.

In September, 1853, a prairie fire came sweeping along. Hastily placing her two little tots with the faithful dog, Buster, on a blanket in a plat of plowed ground, and while others were fighting fire in other directions, she fought its destruction of a rail fence for more than half a mile, until midnight, when she forged ahead of it, tore away a section of fence, dug up the earth with her hands and sticks, which stopped its advance. Meanwhile, the babies and dog, with apparent glee, watched the moving panorama.

Six children have been born to her, four of whom are now living. Though past seventy-six years, she is active, has good health, enjoys life, the society of friends, especially the early settlers of Polk County, and is quietly waiting the passing days, conscious that she has done what she could for the betterment of others.

On the arrival of the family, October Sixteenth, an election was going on, and the men all went to the polls and voted, as was the custom in that day, and no questions asked.

Mrs. Frances Michael Ball is a daughter of Addison and Mary J. Michael. She was born October Twentieth, 1844, and is the first white child born in Polk County. At the age of five years, she was left motherless; then made her home with her grandmother, Mrs. John B. Saylor, until 1864. Mrs. Saylor was the proverbial godmother to all new-comers. She promoted weddings, comforted the discouraged, helped the sick, and did her whole duty as a noble, Christian woman in fulfilling her divine mission to everybody within her reach. In 1866, Frances was united by marriage with W. G. Ball, and is now a resident of Des Moines. She has six children.

Mrs. Ball relates many pranks of the Indians with the settlers when she was a young tot, which sometimes frightened her nearly out of her wits. The howling of wolves at night around the cabin was also a cause of great terror.

Her father came to Fort Des Moines about the first of May, 1844, and was associated with John B. Saylor in furnishing hay and grain for the dragoons at The Fort. He was the first Justice of the Peace in Polk County, and as such, officiated, in June, 1846, at the first marriage of white people in the county—Benjamin Bryant and Elvira Birge. The Esquire was not very well posted in the legal formalities respecting marriages—in fact, justices in those days were selected for their good sense and judgment rather than legal acquirements, and, as the marrying business was mostly done by the circuit preachers, the justices gave it little attention. But the preachers were scarce, Ben. was in a hurry, and he called the Esquire. The Esquire got A. D. Jones, a jovial young lawyer, and omnivorous functionary in town, to coach him and post him up. The joining was done at the cabin of Perry Crossman, the

County Clerk, and there was a full house. The Esquire got on very well until he reached the climax, when his memory forsook him, he halted and hesitated, whereupon Jones, from the rear of the room, sang out, "By authority vested in me, I pronounce you husband and wife," which the Esquire repeated, and sat down, dripping with perspiration. The couple then went to the Birge cabin, where a merry dance was had and a banquet spread. Enough flour and sugar had been scraped together in the settlement to make the "bride cake," and all was lovely. To escape an evening musical entertainment which "the boys" had fixed up for them, Ben. and his bride mounted horses and went to "Uncle Tommy" Mitchell's tavern at Apple Grove, where they were properly corralled against further intrusion.

Mr. Michael was the first grocer in Des Moines. He was granted a license April Seventh, 1846, to keep a "grocery," for three months, on payment of a fee of six dollars and a quarter. A "grocery" in that day, under the prohibitory law then in force, was presumed to sell "wet goods," or *spiritous frumenti*.

He enlisted in Company A, Seventh Iowa Cavalry, February Twenty-fourth, 1863, and served until May Seventeenth, 1866, the regiment having taken part in every expedition against the Indians in the departments of Missouri, Kansas, and the Northwest, fighting and chasing them through a wild, unsettled country by companies—in fact, the regiment was never together as a whole, finally becoming so decimated as to lose its regimental organization entirely, and was disbanded in detachments. It did its duty so well as to receive the title from the Cheyennes of the "Hiowa 'ell 'ounds."

Mrs. Eliza Saylor Myers was born in Indiana, in 1834, and came with her parents to Polk County in 1845. In 1848, she was united by marriage with John Myers. To them, sixteen children were born, twelve of whom are now living—six sons and six daughters. She resided in Iowa until 1903. She is now living at Chanute, Kansas, in the enjoyment of excellent health and the consciousness of duty faithfully done as wife and mother.

Mrs. Elizabeth Bales Fisher was born in Indiana in 1834, and came to Polk County with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Bales, in 1846. In 1854, she

was united in marriage with William S. Fisher. Four children were born of that union. Mrs. Fisher still owns a portion of the land entered by her father, October Thirtieth, 1848. She is vigorous, active, and has good health.

Mrs. Avis Saylor McQuiston was born in Van Buren County, August Twenty-seventh, 1837, and when eight years old, in 1845, moved to Polk County, at a point north of Fort Des Moines, later known as Saylorville, named from her father, John B. Saylor. In 1858, she joined by marriage D. S. McQuiston, and the twain are joyfully looking ahead to the celebration of their golden wedding anniversary in 1908. The stork has brought them eleven "little chips of the old block," seven of whom passed away in infancy.

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