

## The Kentucky Settlement in Madison County, Iowa

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Blair Chapel—Founded by Rev. John Blair  
and Rev. Richard Armstrong.

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## THE KENTUCKY SETTLEMENT IN MADISON COUNTY, IOWA

By C. C. STILES

The Kentucky settlement. This subject bears an especial interest for me from the fact that I was born and raised in this settlement and from my earliest recollections until I was grown to manhood my associates were these settlers and their descendants.

My first school-teacher in a public school that was held in an old log schoolhouse was one of these settlers, Mattie Walkup. Afterwards I had as teachers two of her sisters, Betty and Belle, and following them came Fannie Simpson as one of my teachers. Our immediate neighbors were the Blairs, Carters, Walkups, Henegars, Garmons, Simpsons, Turks, Yates, and Scrivners.

On looking over an article written for the *History of Madison County* by E. R. Zeller and on this same subject I find the following item taken from a Keokuk paper published May 27, 1860: "A procession consisting of nine wagons, one carriage, twelve yokes of oxen and several spans of horses passed up Main Street last Saturday morning bound for Madison County, Iowa. They came from Kentucky. They belong to one family, the head of which is the Rev. John Blair, who informed us that they were obliged to leave Kentucky on account of their sentiment on the slavery question." As related by the Rev. John Blair, the reason why he and his party picked upon Madison County for their future home was that a brother, Alexander Blair, had emigrated from Kentucky to Indiana in pioneer time and a few years later had settled in Madison County, Iowa, on land now known as the Mills farm at Tileville. Those composing the Blair party were Rev. John Blair, Rev. Richard Armstrong, Elza Blair, William Turk, John Blair, William Blair, John Henegar, Peter Carter, James McKinney, James Blair, William Carter, Alexander Es-

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kew, and Thomas Rhodes. In the fall of the same year another party arrived, consisting of George Breeding, Rev. Campbell Hugart, Joseph Breeding, B. F. Carter and others. In the following spring a third party located in the county, namely: J. M. Eskew, J. T. Blair, George H. Kinnaird, W. T. Jesse, Henry Monday and David Mosby.

These first settlers divided, a part settling in Scott Township and the remainder in South Township, thus forming two settlements or, in fact, only one which finally extended from the Hollowell bridge on Middle River in Scott Township east to the east boundary line of the county. Those of the earlier settlers that settled in Scott Township were the Breeding families, B. F. Carter, John Blair, the Eskews, George H. Kinnaird, and W. T. Jesse families. Afterward there settled in this vicinity the Fudge, Stith, Peak and Yates families.

Those settling in South Township consisted of the Rev. John Blair and his wife, "Aunt Martha," Elza Blair, Alexander Blair, James Blair, William Blair, Jefferson Blair, Parthenia (Blair) Carter, Sally (Blair) Turk, and the families of Peter Carter, John Henegar, Richard Armstrong, James McKinney, William Turk and Campbell Hugart. Afterward came the Walkup family, the Simpson, the Kinnaird, Scrivner, Cheek, Durham, and Garmon families, and others. Among the later arrivals were several of the Grissom family. It is told that when John (Johnnie) Grissom made the trip from Kentucky that he came by railroad, went to sleep and failed to leave the train at Des Moines but awoke in time to find the train was in Stuart. Not daunted, however, he left the train and walked the balance of the journey. Leaving Stuart in the morning, he walked all the way "toting" his luggage and reached Winterset at two o'clock in the afternoon.

The Walkup brothers, Jo and Albert, and families together with their sister and her husband, Dr. Baldock, came to the county in the spring of 1865 and located at Queens Point on Hoosier Prairie and in the fall of the same year their father, John A. Walkup, came with four daughters, Mattie, Betty, Belle, and Euphrasia. He had previously purchased a farm on Brush Ridge on which they settled. They made the journey in wagons and, using the language of Belle (Walkup) Pixler: "We only



had one vexation predicament to contend with. This happened at Vandalia, Illinois. During the night of our encampment there the horses all got loose from their halters and disappeared and when daylight came and no horses in sight we felt like we were a long ways from home and without friends, but we were very glad when we found out at that early time, Vandalia had a good vigilance organization and that they were soon in touch with the herd of nine horses. The horses guided by their animal instinct had struck an air line for the beautiful hills of the Cumberland Mountains and when the vigilantes overtook them they were running up and down the bank of the Wabash hunting for a place to cross. Late at night when the faithful vigilantes arrived with the horses there was rejoicing in the camp and the next day found the Walkups moving on to the 'land of plenty.' Only two of the Walkup family are now living, Belle (Walkup) Pixler and Euphrasia (Walkup) Maxwell.

Joseph Scrivner and wife, with their three sons and four daughters were early settlers in South Township. Their farm adjoined my father's farm. The George Cheek family came to South Township in or about the year 1872.

The Elija Kinnaird family came to Madison County in 1871. The family consisted of the father, his wife, three sons—C. E., O. E., and Thomas, and seven daughters—Ann (Kinnaird) Durham, Mary E. (Kinnaird) Young, Margaret (Kinnaird) Fenton, Helen (Kinnaird) Folwell, Fannie (Kinnaird) Tripp, Susie (Kinnaird) Garmon, and Millie (Kinnaird) Carter. There are one hundred and seventy-six grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Elija Kinnaird and wife now living.

The Simpson family was part of the later arrivals. This family consisted of the mother, "Aunt Dicy," and her children, Robert, William, James, Fannie and Emily.

The Daniel Scott family, as I remember them, consisted of "Uncle Daniel," and children, William, Milton, Jane (Scott) Stith, Amanda (Scott) Blair, Lucy (Scott) Pace, and Harriet Scott. Lucy on the trip from Kentucky rode all the way on horseback. I have a remembrance of many times seeing Amanda Blair, with a large iron kettle on her head and bundles of clothes under her arms, walking to Middle River a mile away, doing the

washing for a large family and carrying it back home, this in addition to keeping up her housework.

The Kentucky settlers taken as a whole were of the type that make good pioneers. They were typical of the South, bringing with them many of the manners and customs of the Southland. Their first houses were usually built of logs and covered with clapboards. These clapboards were made of oak split to the right thickness with a frow, but later on John Marsh Carter operated a shingle machine down on Middle River. The shingles were made by sawing logs into blocks of the proper length and then removing the bark and steaming the blocks in a large vat. The blocks were then split into shingles by the machine which was operated by horses hitched to a long lever or sweep. The timber usually selected for shingles was either of walnut, linn, or cottonwood. These shingles were not always straight but they made a very good roof.

In the spring of the year when the sap began to rise they would tap the sugar maple trees. This was done by cutting a V-shaped notch in the tree and at the bottom point of the V they would bore a hole and insert what they call a spile which was usually made of elder stalks by removing the pith, leaving them hollow. The drip from these spiles was caught in small wooden troughs which they hewed out of small logs. The sap was collected from these troughs and boiled in large iron kettles to the consistency they wished for syrup or sugar.

In the late summer they would strip, top and cut their cane and haul it to the place where they made sorghum molasses. The juice was extracted from the cane by running it through the cane mill, which had upright rollers through which the stalks of cane were passed. The juice passed through a spout to a barrel which was covered with a strainer, and after it had been thoroughly strained it was carried to and placed in the evaporator. This was built as follows: A stone wall was built to the proper height with provisions for a smokestack at one end, and an opening in the other end for the admittance of fuel and the regulation of the heat as this was used as the furnace. The metal evaporator was set on top of the furnace and adjusted until it was level. The evaporator was divided into sections about ten to twelve inches apart by metal strips set upright and with an opening at

one end. But the openings reversed, i. e., the first opening on the righthand side of the pan, the second on the left, thus alternating the full length of the pan. This was for the purpose of circulation of the juice from one end of the evaporator to the other, or to any part of it by the tender who constantly kept this up by means of a wooden drag constructed the same length of the width of the sections. This was done for the purpose of keeping an even consistency of the evaporation and to prevent scorching. When the juice had arrived at the proper consistency it was drawn off into the receptacles furnished by the customers, and when cooled they had "good old sorghum molasses."

The men constructed most of the implements they used, especially those that were of wood, as sleds, looms, etc. A great many of them would raise a small patch of tobacco for their own use, and they surely had learned the art of raising and curing it for they produced an excellent article of "long green," to which this writer will attest.

The women were tireless workers and spent the most of their spare time from their other duties in weaving and knitting. They did their weaving on looms that were home-made. They wove cloth for the most of their clothing, for the men it was jeans, for the women linsey or linsey-woolsey. In my recollection the most of the weaving they did was carpets, the material being used was rags, sewed in strips. Their dyes were of simplest kinds such as analine, logwood and the outer hulls covering black walnuts and butternuts.

They would knit hundreds of *real wool socks and mittens*, and after supplying their own needs would take the remainder to Fort Des Moines and sell or trade them for the goods that the family needed. In addition to socks and mittens they would knit scarfs which they called "comforts," hoods, wristlets, garters, and suspenders which they called "galluses."

Whenever they went visiting they would take their knitting along and sometimes, when the men folks could spare the time, they would all go together, the men taking their rifles and amusing themselves in hunting or a shooting match while the women visited and knit. Many a shooting match have I attended where the prizes were turkeys.

True to the southern type these settlers were frugal, indus-



trious and saving, loyal, sociable, generous, hospitable, and above all they were honest. Always close in a trade and yet if they owed you a penny they would pay it, and if you owed them a penny they wanted it.

Led by the Rev. John Blair and the Rev. Richard Armstrong the earlier settlers organized a church society of the United Brethren belief. They built a church, which was named "Blair Chapel." It was located on the ridge between Middle River and Clanton Creek. It was a quiet, secluded spot almost surrounded by trees. Here it was they worshiped and the younger genera-



A part of Blair Chapel Cemetery.

tion received their early religious training in the church and Sunday school. Many memories rush through my mind as I think of old Blair Chapel, the crowds that attended the services. They would come on foot, on horseback and in lumber wagons, and the excitement during the revivals when there would be so many in attendance that the church and the yard surrounding it were full. And the religious excitement was so great that everything gave way to it, even the schools would at times be



closed. As a boy I attended this church and the Sunday school, the singing school, taught by "Uncle Ben" Carter, and here in this beautiful cemetery adjacent to the church my father, mother, three brothers and other relatives lie resting in their last sleep. The old church around which so many memories are clustered burned down and a new Blair Chapel was built, more beautiful, 'tis true, than the old, but the memories of the old did not perish with it. In the cemetery adjacent to the church practically all of the older generation and scores of the younger generations lie sleeping in their last long sleep, while the new Blair Chapel stands as a monument to their endeavors. And, like a sentinel keeping watch, it casts its shadows over them while they lie sleeping.

#### BLAIR CHAPEL

BY M. G. PATRICK

Blair Chapel stands on wooded hill,  
 A pleasant sight to see,  
 As it has stood for many years,  
 Midst oak and hickory tree  
 With its steeple pointing skyward,  
 Silent messenger of God,  
 Guardian of the graves of loved ones  
 Resting there beneath the sod.  
 Here the people meet together,  
 As they have for many years,  
 Many times in joy and gladness,  
 Other times with bitter tears  
 For the passing of some loved one,  
 Laid beside the others there.  
 Many pioneers are resting  
 In this little plot so fair.

If the walls could tell their story,  
 What a record that would be  
 Of the ones who heard the message,  
 That from sin had set them free.  
 Many men have filled the pulpit  
 In this little church at Blair,  
 Men whose faith and courage  
 Left a shining record there.

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In this quiet little chapel  
No one has a thought to shirk,  
For these people are united  
And they have a mind to work.  
Oh, happy are the people,  
In this countryside so fair,  
Who worship in this little church  
In the neighborhood of Blair.

We envy you this quiet spot,  
Where country folks can meet  
To hear a man like Maxwell preach,  
It is indeed a treat.  
John Maxwell is a Scotchman true  
Who loves his fellow-man,  
And he will fight for what is right  
To help them all he can.  
He does not wear a high silk hat,  
Or put on fancy airs,  
Nor use big words he cannot spell,  
Nor bore with lengthy prayers,  
But he can preach the gospel  
In a plain and common way  
That common folks can understand,  
That's what folks need today.

God give us more such churches  
As this one on the hill,  
With leaders like John Maxwell  
With minds to do Thy will.  
In country and in city  
There is need of valiant men,  
To take the message to the world,  
By voice and ready pen.  
'Tis not the church of marble front,  
With fixtures rich and rare,  
That have the most of Jesus' love  
They have the same at Blair.

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