

County's First Quaker Church Still Standing, Now Oldest

By Jean Wallis

This week in Guidepost, we return to the bits and pieces through the years on the early history of Highland County.

There are 17 townships in Highland County: Brushcreek, Clay, Concord, Dodson, Fairfield, Hamer, Jackson, Liberty, Madison, Marshall, New Market, Paint, Penn, Salem, Union, Washington and White Oak. When Highland was formed in 1805, the county was divided into four townships: Brushcreek, Liberty, Fairfield and New Market. Paint, established in 1809, was the first township formed in Highland County while Penn was the last township formed in 1852.

Hamer Township, established in 1849, was named in honor of General Thomas L. Hamer of Brown County, a teacher and lawyer who rose to the rank of Brigadier General during the Mexican War and died while serving his country. Hamer was the person who obtained the commission for Ulysses S. Grant to attend West Point.

The first commissioners of Highland County were Joseph Swearingen, George Richards and Nathaniel Pope. Dan Evans was appointed the first sheriff and Anthony Franklin was the first elected sheriff of Highland County.

In 1807, a census was taken and there were 776 male inhabitants in Highland County over the age of 21 years old.

Hillsborough was platted in the fall of 1807 by David Hays on 200 acres of land purchased from Benjamin Ellicott of Baltimore, MD. The town was to be the permanent set of justice for Highland County as passed by an act of the state legislature. Lots were sold in early October at public auction and brought from \$20 to \$150 each.

The first court was held in Hillsborough on Nov. 9, 1807 in Joseph Knox's log tavern located on W. Main St., the present day site of the Parker House.

The first courthouse was built on the public square in Hillsborough and served the citizens of Highland County for 25 years.

The first divorce case in Highland County was filed by Simon Shoemaker against his wife Elizabeth. Shoemaker married Elizabeth Metsker in 1807. The cause assigned was "the willful absence from the bed and board of the plaintiff by elopement a short time after marriage."

The first estate filed in the county was Oct. 19, 1805 of Alexander Sanderson. He had the misfortune of dying shortly after his arrival in the county. A number of his descendents have been inducted into First Families of Highland County including Alexander.

The first church building in Hillsborough was the Methodist and was located on the northeast corner of the alley running from present day Governor Trimble Place and W. Beech St. The church was a small frame building erected in 1810.

The first Friends meeting house was located on the site of the small brick building at the corner of old US 62 and Bridges Rd. south of Leesburg now being restored. This small brick building is the oldest church in Highland County.

The boundaries of Highland County were established then changed twice – in 1810, when Clinton and Fayette counties were established, and in 1813 when a portion of Highland County was used to square up the boundary of Clinton County. When the county was established in 1805, it took a small part of Clermont and Adams counties and a big chunk of Ross County. Many Highland County records can be found in the Ross County Courthouse.