

DEFIANCE 100 YEARS AGO

Coonskins Legal Tender, \$26,000 Worth
Annually; Hand to Hand Fight With
Bear; First County Officers

BY EDWIN PHELPS (1815-97)

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In my last I stated that George **Snook** had a scar on his cheek, got in a rough and tumble with a large black bear which reminds me that more ought to be written about the coon, as this country could hardly have been settled without him as early as it was. Coonskins for a great many years were a legal tender In all commercial transactions on the river at one dollar each for prime skins and current at fifty cents apiece for those not prime.

There are but few left who are familiar with the modus operandi of taking a coon. The first requisite was a good coon dog, which was more valuable and readier sale than the best cow, \$25 being frequently paid for a good dog. Three men were requisite to successful hunting, with two good sharp axes, a rifle to each man, and one good dog or more.

In the winter, the coon hibernates in some large trees with a hollow in the top. If the ground was bare, the dogs would track them to the tree, and when tracked there, two men would chop the tree down, while the other man would hold the dog until the tree struck the ground, when the dogs were loosed, they would run to the top of the tree, and if there were not too many, the dog or dogs would dispose of them before they could reach another tree. The men were generally ready with their rifles to stop any stray one that escaped the logs.

In one of these coon hunts George, John and Peter Snook cut down a large tree, supposed to be a den of coons, and George ran with the dogs to the top of the tree to assist in

dispatching the coons, when he encountered a large black bear, which had made short work of the dogs, and was soon giving George a friendly hug, which came near terminating his life, having disabled one arm, fortunately his left one, and bitten his cheek badly.

His brothers were not idle with their axes, and gave bruin a lick whenever they could without injury to their brother, but George, seeing the open mouth of the bear thrust in his right arm up to the elbow which stopped the bear's wind, so that his brothers relieved him.

They did not stay to finish the bear but took their brother home more dead than alive. The bear was found a few days after by an Indian, so disabled that he dispatched him with a tomahawk.

I have seen a large warehouse packed full of skins, and after the hunting time was over it would require several men two or three months to prepare them for shipment. I think the yearly accumulation of Defiance must have reached an average of \$25,000 worth.

I have thought this much of the early history would be interesting to show the rising generation how their grandfathers had to raise money to pay taxes and buy the necessities of life. The luxuries they did not covet, but were satisfied if they could get the necessities.

The first court was held at Defiance, April 5, 1824. Ebenezer **Lain**, was presiding judge, then living at Sandusky city, after judge of the supreme court. Robert **Shirley** then living across the Auglaize. John **Perkins**, living at Brunersburg, and Pierce **Evans** on the old farm a mile down the river, were the associate judges, who were then appointed by the legislature for seven years.

John **Evans** was appointed clerk pro tem, by the court, and on the 8th day of April, 1824, he was also appointed recorder. John **Evans** bond as clerk was for \$2,000. With Foreman **Evans**, Pierce Evans and Mose

Rice his security. There don't seem to have been any use for a prosecuting attorney at the first term, but at the October term. 1824, Charles W. **Ewing**, then residing at Fort Wayne, was appointed prosecuting attorney and the county of Williams paid him \$10 for his services.

The first grand jury were William **Hunter**, who lived a mile south of the present town of Florida, Timothy T. **Smith**, Arthur **Burroughs**, George **Lautz**, Joshua **Hilton**, Foreman **Evans**, living near Defiance, Montgomery **Evans**, Benjamin **Mulligan**, James **Shirley**, and Thomas **Warren**, then or soon after residing in Delaware Township. Thomas **Driver** lived in the west end of this township. The residence of Jonathan **Merithan**, Theophilus **Hilton**, Hugh **Evans** and Daniel **Branna**, I am not now able to locate.

William **Partee** was the first sheriff and lived in what is now East Defiance.

The first assessor was appointed by the court, March 7, 1825, and was Samuel **Vance**, who lived at what is now Damascus, twenty-five miles down the river.

The first will probated in court was that of James **Jolly**, who owned the square bounded by Clinton Street on the east, First Street on the south, Perry Street on the west and Front Street on the north.

The first marriage license was issued to Canes **Green**, who lived at Girty's Point, about twelve east of Defiance, and Mary Ann **Scribner**, who lived at Damascus, about thirteen miles below there on the river. The marriage was celebrated Dec. 24. 1824 by Charles **Green**, a Justice of the peace.

At that time what is now Putnam, Paulding, Henry, Defiance and Williams counties were all included in Williams County for Judicial purposes, and the first officers were appointed by the court. The first election held in Williams County was held on the 8th day of April, 1824, at which election there were sixty-three votes cast.

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