

John M. Brown: History of Early Crawford County and Robinson, Illinois

John M. Brown was born within the bounds of the city of Robinson, Illinois prior to it's location for the county seat. He was born on a farm in 1836 in a log house which stood at 311 N. Eagleton St. When the town of Robinson was located it's bounds as surveyed and platted were on the east Lincoln Street on the north Cherry Street, on the west Howard Street, and on the south Chestnut Street.

John M. Brown was the son of Francis ^{Menifield} ~~Marion~~ Brown and his wife Martha. The former born in North Carolina in 1790 and the latter in Kentucky. Francis Brown's parents emigrated to Kansas when he was quite young and were pioneers of that state. There Francis grew to manhood and was married after which he moved to Indiana where he resided a few years. Then emigrated to Illinois, locating the land which he made into a farm in 1832. He had hard work, and with his wife and children, endured man privations. Neighbors were far apart, those within a mile or two were considered neighbors.

When the elder Brown came to Crawford County there was much vacant land not yet taken up, and the country was very much in a wild state notwithstanding that the county was one of the oldest, organized in 1815, preceding the state into the Union by four years. There were no Indians in the county, but there were occasional visits of some tribes, who were formerly located there. At times these Indians camped in the county for weeks. There was a visit of a tribe not long after his location that camped about a mile southeast of where Robinson is located, and as their stay was rather longer than was desirable they were visited by Mr. Brown and others, and were plainly told it was time to terminate their visit. They quietly took their departure in a day or two, and it was their last visit of a full tribe to the county.

The first court house for the county in Robinson was a small one story frame, and one room of this was rented to the school district for the use as a public school, and it was here that John got the first rudiments of his education. A year or two later a school building was erected on East Locust Street, which some years later was transformed into a dwelling. Here young Brown went to school, receiving such education as was to be had in those days when "three R's" were taught in their rudiments rather than in their full parts.

The elder Brown (Francis) was counted a thrifty farmer, raising what was necessary for his own family, with a surplus to sell to his neighbors, as there was no market here for any of the farm products, or stock that had been raised on the farm. There was, however, an occasional demand for surplus cattle which was bought up by some enterprising person and driven to Chicago. William (brother of John) had a horse, bridle, and saddle of his own, which was regarded as quite a possession for a young man at the time, was hired by one of the cattle buyers to assist in driving a herd to Chicago. When the herd was sold and he received his pay he was offered a good price for his horse and outfit. He closed with the offer, and started on his return journey on foot. This he accomplished inside of two weeks, very tired and footsore. Produce consistin partly of apples, both dried and green, and vegetables were hauled to Chicago by wagon, and on the return these were with salt and other necessities.

Mr. Brown spoke of the wild game which was so plentiful not only when his father located here, but also in his own time. Deer, turkeys, prairie chickens, and pigeons were abundant. The latter had a roost in their season a couple of miles south of the Brown farm. They were so abundant as to break down many limbs of the trees on which they gathered for roosting. Men and boys of the surrounding country gathered at the roost and with clubs killed large amounts of them at night. In addition to wild game there were wild animals that could not be utilized for food. Wolves were so plentiful that at one time in broad daylight a pack of three or four came on the farm and killed four or five head of sheep. Fox, 'coon, and 'possum were determined to the rearing chickens and turkeys.

Fifty years ago and more, Sugar Creek, which passed just north of the Brown home was a stream in which was plenty of water the year round and in some places a depth of four to six feet even in dry weather. It afforded good fishing sport for the boys of residents of Robinson and in the vicinity of the stream to it's confluence with "the big pond" on the eastern side of Lamotte Prairie. The stream had another attraction for the boys besides the "good fishing" it afforded. This was it's "old swimming holes". The beach at Hutsonville has no greater attraction for the youngsters of the present day than did Sugar Creek at the time. There was no call for dressing booths, nor was such a thing as a bathing suit thought of.

The old saying that "every rose has it's thorn", was fully exemplified along this stream. In the ignorance as to the real cause, the stream was condemned by some for the "milk sick" that was prevalent among the stock and the people who lived and had stock running at large along the stream. The real cause for this disease, which disappeared with the settlement cleaning up and cultivation of the land where it was known to be has never been satisfactorily explained. There were several deaths among the people attributed to it, while others recovering were effected by it for quite a time after the apperent recovery. The losses of stock was considerable. In his younger day John had a severe case of it and it was quite a time before he fully recovered.

The elder Brown died in 1868, leaving surviving him four sons, all residents of the vicinity, and excepting William, engaged in farming. These sons were Nichols S., William, and John M. Nicols (or Smith as he was generally known) had left the farm, moved to town, died a few years later.

John M. Brown was married in 1859 to Martha A. York, who were among the early pioneers of the county, locating women six miles northwest of Robinson. To this union were born twelve children, six sons and one daughter reaching adulthood. The wife died in 1877. Six years later he married Mary Ann Bishop, a widow with two daughters (Lizzie Mitchell and Mertie Zellers) Before the marriage to Mr. Bishop her name was Ferguson, the parents coming from Scotland. She was born in the state of New Jersey, the first child born to the Ferguson's in this country. In 1887 they sold the farm and moved to Licking Township. Shortly after the discovery of gas and oil in that part of the country, about 1906, they leased their farm for drilling. The result was a good production of both oil and gas. They have an abundant supply of gas for heating their home in cold weather, for cooking and for lighting their home. At the age of 83 Mr. Brown's weight was only 96, but he was quite active and raised a garden and truck patch, looked after his horse and cow, doing the necessary chores about his home with apparent ease.

 **Date:** 1929

 **Place:** Robinson, Crawford County, Illinois, USA

 **Description:** Article as told by John M. Brown at the age of 83 in 1929 to the Argus Newspaper of Robinson, Illinois