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A BROWN COUNTY PIONEER

JOHN PROSSER was born in Westmoreland County, PA., on the 21st day of March, in the year 1797. His parents were Daniel and Margaret Prosser. His mother's maiden name was Mickey. They were good people, and worthy members of the Presbyterian Church. His father was a soldier of the Revolutionary war, and was afterward promoted to the rank of Captain of what was known as "The Spy Company", and was employed in fighting the Indians. The blood of at least four nationalities flows in Mr. Prosser's veins. His paternal grandfather was a native of Wales, and his paternal grandmother was a native of Germany. His maternal grandfather was a native of Ireland, and his maternal grandmother was a native of England. John was the ninth member of a family composed of thirteen children, all of whom, except himself, are dead. The oldest of these children died when a young man, eighty-three years ago. John says the event farthest back in his memory is that of seeing his mother weeping at that brother's grave.

He removed with his parents to Erie County, PA., when only about five years old. From thence, they removed to Brooke County in West Virginia, and from thence, when he was about eighteen years old, they removed to Richland County, O. The farm, on which his father now located, was in a very sparsely settled neighborhood on the borders of the wilderness. When going to help a neighbor raise a cabin, or clear a patch for corn or potatoes, they usually traveled by section lines as there were no regularly laid out roads. When going to help their more distant neighbors, they would frequently start the evening previous, camp overnight near the place of their destination, and killing an abundance of game by the way for their subsistence. Being on the borders of the tract of land occupied by the Sandusky Indians, he and others would frequently visit their villages on traveling expeditions. Once he and a cousin started on one of these expeditions, but from some cause they missed their way and were lost in the wilderness. Night was coming on and their feelings can better be imagined than described. At last, however, they struck a trail, and soon reached an Indian village on the Black River, where they were hospitably entertained. During the night a great many Indians came to the cabin where they lodged, and a lively conversation was carried on with them through an interpreter. Everything about their white guests were subjects of curiosity to the Indians. But happening to get hold of one of young Prosser's shoes, which he had drawn off, its extraordinary size attracted their attention and was an object of great wonder. They passed it from one to another of the group and several of them took a measure of its length on the handles of their pipe-tomahawks. After a night's repose on a bed of skins, they were about resuming their journey, but their kind host pressed them so earnestly to remain for breakfast that they consented, but the manner in which the squaw dressed and prepared the venison tripe for the morning meal was so much at variance with young Prosser's notions of the culinary art, that he was seized with an irresistible determination to proceed on their journey, which they did, much to the disappointment of their kind entertainers. At first, in that sparsely settled country, there were no churches or organized religious societies of any kind, and when the itinerant preacher went through the wilderness, hunting for the lost sheep, the log cabin and leafy grove afforded the only sanctuary in which to worship God. But, by and by, in the wake of the rifle and saddle bags, came a more permanent condition of society, and churches and school houses began to dot the hillsides and valleys. Among the first churches erected in that portion of the county was one composed of hewed logs and furnished

with slab seats, called the Hopewell Presbyterian Church. His parents were members of this church and he united with it while yet a young man. The pastor of this church was Rev. Wm. Matthews, who was a man of only ordinary ability; but exemplary in his life and very faithful in his work. This church was scattered over a large section of country and as the membership increased, with the increase of population, it was finally deemed necessary to divide it into four separate churches, which was accordingly done, and the subject of this sketch was ordained an Elder in one of these churches.

On the 3rd day of September, 1818, he was united in marriage with Miss Sarah Scott, of Richland County, O. The fruits of this marriage union were thirteen children; six of whom are now living -- four in Illinois and two near the present home of their aged parents. Their posterity, now living, number considerably over a hundred. The marriage ceremony was performed by their Pastor, the Rev. Mr. Matthews, and was long, orthodox and impressive. Two or three minutes was not deemed a sufficient length of time, in which to tie a marriage knot, sixty years ago. Weddings in those days were regarded as very important events and were frequently attended by almost every one in the neighborhood. The groom and his company rode on horseback, in procession to the home of the bride where the nuptials were celebrated and the time, until the next morning, was spent in feasting and amusements of various kinds. Then on the second day the newly married couple and the merry company repaired to the home of the groom, where a sumptuous dinner was prepared and the evening and night were spent in merry making. Then frequently came the "housewarming", when the bride and groom were ready to set up house keeping in their own cabin. After a residence, in Richland County, O., for twenty-one years, Mr. Prosser removed, with his family, to Cass County, Michigan. He located in Geneva, a town of some thirty families, where was a foundry, which gave employment to a number of persons. There was only one family in the village, besides Mr. Prosser's, that were religious. Their name was Ash, and they had been members of the Methodist Church, in the neighborhood from which they had moved. There was no religious service of any kind held in the village, and, as a consequence, the Sabbath was almost entirely disregarded, and wickedness prevailed unrebuked. Almost every Sabbath, the ring of axes could be heard all over the village, as that was the time the people usually took for chopping their wood. One Saturday morning, James, Mr. Prosser's son, started out in the village to chop wood, so as, if possible, to stop them from chopping wood on the Sabbath. Several of the villagers gave him the job of cutting their Sunday wood; so that he earned over a dollar for his day's work, besides opening up the way for a more quiet Sabbath. Among the first families visited by young James on his wood-cutting expedition, was the Ash family. Mr. Ash was so much impressed with the subject of the boy's visit that he not only employed him to cut his Sunday wood; but, that very evening, made a visit to Mr. Prosser's house. The two good men had an earnest talk over the deplorable condition of the village. Before they separated they had appointed a prayer meeting at Mr. Prosser's house for the next day, and, the people being notified of the meeting, were many of them in attendance. That prayer meeting was succeeded by others, and soon a marked change was manifest among the people. The Sabbath became a day of rest and the people could be seen wending their way to the place, where prayer was wont to be made. Soon neighboring ministers, hearing of the wonderful change going on among the people, made appointments for preaching in the village, and, in a very short time, an entire reformation had been wrought. The ax of that brave boy, who wanted to help his parents, and, at the same time, do good for

the people, accomplished a wonderful work. "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

Mr. Prosser's rapidly failing health compelled him to leave Michigan, after a year's residence there, and seek a more healthful clime. By a strange, yet providential train of circumstances, he found his way to Brown County, Indiana, where, after a little prospecting, he determined to locate, feeling assured that he would find, what he had been so long seeking -- health for himself and family. He located in Brown County in the year 1836 -- about forty-six years ago. The entire County was then almost a wilderness. There were no regularly laid out roads, and, in coming into the County, he followed a sort of trail or blind path from Morgantown; which was a mere hamlet composed of a few primitive houses. The woods were full of game, of almost every species; but Mr. Prosser deemed the ax and the plow more valuable implements than the rifle and, consequently, spent but little time in hunting. Mr. Prosser's family, and that of his brother, who had located in the County about the same time, with himself, were the only Presbyterians in the County, and there were very few religious people of any denomination. There were a few Methodists and United Brethren scattered over the County, and occasionally a preacher with his horse and saddlebags could be seen, wending his way from one settlement to another, striving to carry out the commission of his Master. Mr. Prosser's house was the home of the itinerant preacher and not unfrequently a temporary sanctuary in which the people would assemble to sing and pray and hear the missionary expound the word of God. The majority of these traveling preachers were worthy men and did a good work, even though they had little acquaintance with books, and very frequently "murdered the King's English". There were however, some unworthy men among these ministers, as Mr. Prosser learned to his sorrow, on one occasion at least. Georgetown, near which Mr. Prosser located, was then only a miserable little hamlet; being composed of a few log cabins, strung along on both sides of a narrow muddy road -- dignified with the name of street. In this little village was a dram-shop, kept by a fellow who, like the most of his tribe, was too lazy and mean to earn his bread and meat in an honorable way. Almost the entire neighborhood were this man's patrons. He would go out in front of his doggerly, nearly every Sabbath morning, and fire several shots from an old musket. At this signal, the settlers would come flocking in from every direction, and the entire day would be spent in drunkenness and rowdyism. Mr. Prosser soon became so much disgusted and discouraged, that he would have abandoned the county; but his means were exhausted and he was compelled to remain. The first Presbyterian minister, who ever visited Brown County, was Rev. Mr. Carpenter. He was hunting a location and coming to Morgantown was told of Mr. Prosser and his brother as Presbyterians, recently located in the County. A Mr. B-----, from near Georgetown, happening to be in Morgantown, agreed to guide the preacher to Mr. Prosser's house. On their way out, Mr. B told him that, if he should make himself known as a preacher, the people would mob him. This of course did not inspire the preacher with very much confidence in the success of his mission. On the day, when he reached Mr. Prosser's house, a number of his neighbors had gathered to assist him in a log rolling. The rough appearance of these backwoodsmen did not lessen the fears of the timid preacher, but he introduced himself to Mr. Prosser, who received him kindly and invited him into his house. An appointment for Mr. Carpenter to preach, on the next day, was circulated among the men. The next day, being the Sabbath, a goodly number of persons were assembled at Mr. Prosser's house to hear the new preacher. Every thing passed off so agreeable, and the preacher was treated so kindly, that he signified his willingness to labor among the

people statedly, if they desired him to do so. The people, being well pleased with the preacher, were anxious to secure his services and at once began to circulate a subscription, to remunerate him for his time and labor. This was probably the first salary ever raised for a minister in Brown County. The amount secured was satisfactory; but Mr. Carpenter, having failed to make similar arrangements at other points was soon compelled to seek another field of labor. This was in the Spring or Summer of 1837. The next Presbyterian minister who visited the County was Rev. Mr. Sickles. His first visit was made in the year 1840. He was then supplying the Hopewell Church in Johnson County. Mr. Prosser and McElhany, a member of the Presbyterian Church who had previously located in the County, had gone to Franklin to secure, if possible, a supply of the means of grace, from a minister of their own denomination. The result was the visit of Rev. Mr. Sickles, who opened the way for the permanent establishment of Presbyterianism in the County. Rev. Mr. Smock was the next Presbyterian preacher to labor in the County. He came sometime during the year 1842. About this time also, Rev. B. F. Woods visited this County, and, in connection with Rev. Mr. Smock, supplied the people with preaching until a church was organized. Mr. Woods has done more for presbyterianism, in Brown County, than any other minister in the presbyterian Church. Mr. Prosser and a number of others petitioned the Presbytery for the organization of a Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery appointed a committee, consisting of Rev. D. V. Smock and Rev. B. F. Woods, and Elder David Demaree, to effect the organization. The Church was accordingly organized in a log school-house in Georgetown October 25th, 1845. Mr. Prosser, his wife, and five other persons -- seven in all -- entered into the organization. Mr. Prosser and Mr. Robert McElhany were chosen ruling Elders of the little Church. The Church was no sooner organized than its members and friends determined to build a house of worship, which, by the blessing of God, they were soon able to accomplish. It was a prodigious task for a handful of men and women to perform; but they had a mind to work and success crowned their earnest effort. The building is a commodious frame edifice and was probably the first Church erected in the county. It is the building in which the Georgetown Presbyterian Church now worships. It stands today as an evidence of what faith and self-sacrifice can accomplish. Mr. Prosser, being a carpenter, did a good share of the work. The first Communion was held in a cabin, occupied by Mr. Geo. Bergen, and was a very tender and interesting occasion. Rev. D. V. Smock administered and Mr. Prosser assisted in the distribution of the elements. Some time previous to the organization of the Church a Sabbath School was organized, probably the first in the County. It was conducted by Mr. Prosser, Mr. George Bergen and Mr. Robert McElhany. This school was held in cold weather at Mr. Bergen's house, and in warm weather in the log school-house in Georgetown. When the new Church was completed it was moved there where it has been held summer and winter, ever since, with the exception of a few months, during the closing part of the war. For a period of over thirty-seven years this school has been opening its portals for the instruction of old and young. Though Mr. Prosser on account of age had not been permitted to attend the Sabbath School and Church regularly for a number of years yet his heart is in the work as much as ever. Though he and his aged companion are devotedly attached to the Church of their early choice, yet they have a broad Catholic spirit, and rejoice in the prosperity of all God's people.

At the last meeting of the Old Settlers' Association of Brown County, Mr. Prosser and his aged companion received a nice family bible as a prize for having lived together as husband and wife during a longer period than any other couple in the County. They

have been walking hand in hand for sixty-four years! Mrs. Prosser is a little dull of hearing, on account of age; but she is still active, both in mind and body and keeps their home tidy and comfortable. The writer of this imperfect sketch has enjoyed the hospitality of this patriarchal pair, more than once, and can, therefore, bear testimony, from his own experience, to the active hands and warm, generous heart of this mother in Israel. Mr. Prosser and the wife of his youth are spending the closing hours of their life in comfort and great peace, with a sweet and unfaltering trust in God, and looking forward to the everlasting youth of heaven.

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