

Perry County, Missouri  
History  
Submitted by Helen L. Smith Hoke

Just a little history of Perry County while I have the books, "The Settlement Patterns Of Perry County, Missouri, 1850-1900, " by Barber and "Church and Slave in Perry County, Missouri, 1818-1865, " by Poole and Slawson.

Shaped like a camel's hump, Perry Co., MO consists of 471 square miles that fit neatly into a wedge created by the confluence of Apple Creek and the Mississippi River. Topographically, it is divided into lowlands and uplands. The lowlands comprise about 1/8 of the county and lie for the most part along the river. In the Northeast corner is the Bois Brule Bottom, meaning Burnt Wood, the most extensive tract of lowland, approximately 15 miles long and 3 to 5 miles wide. Its rich soil, coupled with its size, makes it the most productive farmland in the county. Smaller in size but still important, are the Brazeau Bottom on the Mississippi River below Cape Cinque Hommes and the bottom situated near the mouth of Apple Creek.

The Uplands constitutes the largest part of the county and its topography varies greatly. The best parts of it are in the central area where the soil is generally good and the terrain nearly level or gently rolling. Rolling uplands surround this central section and are bounded by the Saline Hills to the West and the Mississippi River Hills and Buffs to the East and northeast.

In the eighteenth century the Perry County area, like the rest of the future State of Missouri, was part of Louisiana. For most of the century the region was uninhabited, even by the French of nearby St. Genevieve. The later was the first permanent white settlement in the MO area. In 1764, when the terms of the Treaty of Paris were announced in Louisiana, the French settlers found themselves transferred to an alien domination, that of Spain. In general the French were unhappy with the change of rule and the Spanish governance of the territory was an uneasy one, occasionally punctuated by armed rebellion. In the St. Genevieve area, the Spaniards, making a virtue of necessity, tended to let the French govern themselves.

The first inhabitants of what is now Perry County, were the Shawnee Indians. In the 1780s, they had crossed the Mississippi River from the East and spread throughout southeastern MO. Their largest village, a population of some 400, was located in the southern part of the county, just above Apple Creek, near present day Uniontown. Within a decade of the Indian immigration, Spanish authorities showed an interest in opening the area to colonization by Americans.

The first white settlers arrived in the region during the latter half of the 1790s and claimed rich land in Bois Brule Bottom. These Americans organized the region's original Baptist Church in 1807. In the early 1800s, a second group of American settlers crossed the Mississippi to take advantage of Spanish land offers. These were Catholics of English stock, from north-central Kentucky. They had originally come from Maryland to escape religious discrimination and prided themselves on being descendants of Lord Baltimore's original colonists. The first of these to settle permanently in the future Perry County was Isidore Moore. He arrived in 1801 and became a patriarch of the area. Others soon followed whose family names predominated the decades: Tucker, Fenwick, Cissell, Hayton, Riney, Hamilton, Layton, Manning, and Ragan. Most of these settled in the uplands around Perryville in a place called the Barrens because of its open land.

New Bourbon: 1796 Census of North America Upper Louisiana

Free Blacks and Mulatto 8 Slaves 109 Whites 256 Total 373

New Bourbon: 1797 Census of North America\* America  
\*America 07

Canada	07
Creole	16
Delaware Indian	120
Shawnee Indian	70
Total	220

\*Heads of Households only Explained in the New Bourbon Census, which was a French census and therefore different from a United States census.

When the region was transferred to American sovereignty in 1803-1804, the Barrens became part of the Louisiana Territory. Prior to the admission of MO to statehood in 1821, several new migrations altered the religious composition of the future county. In 1817, a large group of Presbyterians from North Carolina settled in the neighborhood of Brazeau, an area roughly bounded by the Mississippi River and the Cinque Hommes and Apple Creek. These settlers organized a church in 1819. They ere soon followed by Methodists from the same state whose family names live on, like Abernathy, Farrar, and Rutledge. In 1826, they built their first log meeting house, which was later replaced by York Chapel

Until 1821, the Barrens region formed the southern portion of St. Genevieve County. When MO received statehood, Perry County was organized out of the parent district. It was divided into three townships, Brazeau, Cinque Hommes, and Bois Brule. Their boundaries, following natural geographical features, were quite irregular. In 1856, the borders were made symmetrical and two new townships, St. Mary's and Saline, were added.

After 1821, the descendants of French colonial families from St. Genevieve trickled into Perry County, and in the middle of the next decade, their ranks swelled by immigrants from France itself. They settled on the lands that were near the present city of Perryville. At about the same time, a small group of Flemings settled in the northeastern part of the county, with the present town of Belgique as their center. There were also Swiss in the same area.

In the late 1830s, saw the beginnings of a heavy German immigration that would permanently alter the ethnic balance of the county. In the fall of 1838, more than 600 Saxon Lutherans, under the leadership of Pastor Martin Stephen, uprooted themselves and migrated to MO, seeking to avoid enforced religious conformity. They settled in the southeast corner of the county and moved inland through a series of towns whose names enshrined both religion and nationality: Wittenberg, Friedheim, Frohna, Dresden, Altenburg, and Paitxdorf, which was renamed Uniontown during the Civil War.

Others that settled in the area were German Catholics, mostly from Bavaris and Baden. They settled in the Barrens area. The Lutherans and Presbyterians established churches in the region bounded by the 1856 township of Brazeau. The Methodists located father west in the area that comprised the 1856 township of Cinque Hommes. There they set up two churches, the first York Chapel, near present day Longtown, abt 5 miles southeast of Perryville, and in 1836 a second in Perryville itself. Then in 1844-1845, they divided between north and south over the question of whether a bishop could own slaves. The two Methodist churches in Perry County parted company, the city congregation going with the North and the York Chapel siding with the South. The Baptists of the county tended to congregate in both Bois Brule Bottom and in the area of Saline township. In the first decades of the 1800s, they met in private homes.

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