

THE FREMONT COUNTY HERALD - January 10, 1910
"Autobiography of Henry Keyser"

In writing this biographical (sic) sketch of the late Henry Keyser of Fremont county, I wish to say, that it is done for the enlightenment of his many grandchildren and friends who have never been acquainted with him, or his past life as I have known it.

Henry Keyser was born early in the nineteenth century, in the Old Dominion, on January 13, 1813, a short distance from the hot Sulphur Springs, Bath County, Virginia. His father's name was Christopher Keyser, the oldest son of William Keyser, who was said to be of Scotch Irish descent. Christopher Keyser, the father of Henry, married Frances Jones of Bath County, Virginia, and in a short time after Henry was born they moved from Virginia to Greenup county, Kentucky, and settled in the Big Sandy valley. Henry was 8 months old when they came to the new country and they lived there till Henry was about 12 years old, when his mother died leaving him alone with his father, who took him to Cabell County, Virginia, where he married the second time to Peggy Bloss.

They lived at this time on a stream of water called Twelve Pole or one of its tributaries. Here he assisted his father on the farm on Beech Fork in various ways, in cutting away the timber and in rolling logs into heaps and burning them, until he became almost a young man.

During this time his father sent him to school to a man whose name was Tommy Knapper who proved to be so cross and ugly to him that he could not learn anything. This so-called instructor gave him a terrible whipping because he did not bow down to some girls who came to visit his school. So he learned nothing at Knapper's school.

When about 10 years old he was sent to another teacher by the name of Blankenship who was about as cross as Knapper, but he could get along with him better. He spent a little while when about 14 in a school taught by Sammy Clark, which was his last school days. The schoolhouse stood near where Lavalette is situated on Twelve Pole, Wayne County, West Virginia.

What a meager chance a poor boy had in those days to obtain an education! The stories of ghosts and witches told to the younger people were calculated to make cowards of them, rather than to enlighten them, and they could not hope even for better training under such blighting circumstances.

About the time he was 16 he hired to some men by the name of Koontz, who were running a forge, to chop wood. This forge was at the mouth of Buffalo creek some miles from his home. His wages were \$8 per month. After he had finished his wood chopping he returned to his father on Beech Fork with the intention of helping his father on the farm. His hopes were blasted however as his life was not pleasant because of the treatment [he] received from his step-mother.

He concluded to look for a wife and so on February 18 at Louis Batcher's wedding he began a courtship with Abigail Clark. He was 17 years old at this time. His courtship was after the manner of courtships in that day and was brought to a close July 1, 1830 by a marriage. He and his little wife Abigail (for she was a very small woman) rented a home upon which they lived until 1834 when they bought a small farm on the east fork of Camp creek from Isaac Hatfield at which place they lived until 1845 when they sold their land to John Bailey. In 1846 near the close of the year, they with their six sons, moved to Andrew County Missouri, another new county.

We now call the attention of our readers to the wisdom manifested by this couple while yet in their teens. Let it be understood that neither the husband or wife could read, but they believed the gospel and in the same year they were married in 1830 they became Christians and united with the Methodist Episcopal Church and both of them remained true to their convictions as long as they lived.

In the new home in Andrew County, Missouri, on February 23, 1847, their only daughter was born. Selling their 80 acre farm in Andrew County, they moved in March 1850, with their six sons and daughter to Fremont County, Iowa. Here they lived and saw the county settled and here they enjoyed the friendship of many friends. Henry Keyser had the misfortune to lose his faithful companion on January 22, 1889, after which he tried life alone but being of a turn of mind that was not easily controlled he married the second time [and on] January 2, 1891 Mrs. Martha Alexander became his second wife.

Old age had crept on him and after living together a number of years their friends thought it best they should not try to keep house any longer so broke up housekeeping. She went to California and he remained among his children and grandchildren which numbered at his death near 250 living souls.

Since coming to the State of Iowa he has made four trips to West Virginia and one to California. He plowed the first furrow in the city of Tabor and has seen 96 years 11 months and 6 days pass by as a weaver's shuttle. The children of his youth have become old men. A son and the daughter have been borne to the tomb. He has seen the changes that have taken place during the nineteenth century in the various modes of agriculture. He has had an opportunity of voting for the chief magistrate of the United States 17 times and enjoyed the privilege of voting to the last.

He was a noble man. No man perhaps loved his country more than he but his stay is over. He seemed anxious to go. He bore his sufferings with fortitude and died at his oldest granddaughter's [home] on the morning of December 22, 1909. He was borne to the tomb from the home of S.S. Orr and wife where the body of Henry Keyser will rest with his beloved wife till the morning of the resurrection when they will rise to praise the Father God who gave them their eternal being in His great universe.

S.S. Orr.