

Fond memories of a childhood in Carroll County – July 14, 2024

For fifteen weeks during 1910 the Union Bridge Pilot newspaper published a series of “Reminiscences” written by James Lebbius Switzer. James was born there in 1837 and his family was related to almost everyone in the village. He was about 20 when the family moved to Iowa. Writing from his home in Missouri more than 50 years later, he shared vivid memories of his Carroll County childhood. Enjoy this reminiscence from the May 6, 1910 paper.

“Backward, turn backward, old time,
in your flight,
Make me a child again, just for tonight.
Oft in the stilly night,
E’re slumbers chains have bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

“The earache, the legache, the toothache, the terrible backache, that terminated in a spell of fever that kept me many days out of school when Amanda Creager was our school mistress at the old Quaker Hill school house. The old spiceapple orchard, and the mill that stood by it. The old log house; the Virginia creeper that covered it; the humming birds that drew nectar from its petals; the old saw-mill that went up in the forenoon and came down in the afternoon, giving me time to practice my music lessons on the fife and piccolo while it waded through the log; the eels and the catfish, fished from the fish-basket after the freshet and the delightful feasts they afforded; all these scenes and many more come looming up like ghosts, or dreams, or spectres when fond memory brings the light of a childhood’s years before me. What a miracle is memory. How grand. How solemn. How sad! There I am, stretched in the cradle my father made, and my mother singing the lullaby song. I hear that song yet. Mother has come back from ‘the echoless shade’ and is ‘singing them over again to me’ those ‘wonderful words of life.’

“When I awake, there is grandmother and aunt Margaret visiting us. Joel Farquhar is at the mill with his team unloading grain. Abraham Hiteshew follows with his team. William Haines, Davis Lightner, Joseph Moore, are at the mill that day, and Henry Fetterling takes away his sackful-grist, astride of the old bald-faced mare.

“Then, I have to go to Dave Stem’s spring for a bucket-full of fresh water for our old pump in the well by the house has sprung a leak and fails to respond to the pail that hangs under its nose. On the way Sam Middlemore goes with me and as he is a cousin just recently from Baltimore and is curious to know what a bumblebee’s-nest is, we stir up one under the roots of the big poplar tree that stands by the roadside. Samuel stands by the bank peering at the musical swarm when one of the bees desires to seek a more intimate acquaintance with him, which he declines and we both make a blue streak down the road toward Cherry branch, Samuel’s coat tails seemingly having a hard tug to keep up with the rest of his attire. Alas! just as Samuel jumps over the branch the bee is avenged and Samuel’s curiosity is satisfied. We hurry toward home then I have some arnica rubbed on the side of his neck just under his left ear. In the evening

Samuel goes home with grandmother Wolfe a sadder, a fleshier and a wiser boy. Being reminded of the water to be brought from the spring (for it is forgotten in our flight) I heaped anathemas on that defaulting, shiftless old pump that was put in years ago by uncle Israel Switzer, and call vividly up against its hollow pretensions, how, just a few mornings ago, its great iron handle came near depriving me of my little sister Sarah.

“Uncle Ephraim Repp had gone there with a bucket to try to coax a few drops from its obstinate interior, and Sarah had toddled up behind him, and when he lifted the handle, that had a great iron knob on its end, it struck Sarah in the forehead and layed her out. It happened, however, to be only a glancing lick and she soon recovered and was able to attend the funeral of my beautiful little spotted puppy that the old dog, Lion, killed just because it wanted to get a little piece of meat from old Lion’s bountiful share. At one instant, wrathful snap that wicked old dog killed my pup; and because we all were broken-hearted uncle Ephraim Repp improvised a box coffin and we followed him as he solemnly bore the remains away to the south side of the old grave yard and deposited them there in the grave he had dug – ashes to ashes and dust to dust.”

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Image 1: Submitted photo Caption: Shown here in an old photograph is McKinstry’s Mill built in 1847 on Sam’s Creek. In James L. Switzer’s childhood there were many mills in Carroll County including one belonging to the Switzers.

Image 2: Courtesy of Elizabeth Scott Stone Caption: James Lebbius Switzer as he appeared in 1895 when he lived in Kansas.