Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The History of Grant County

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Grant County, which for many years has been conceded at home and abroad to be one of the best counties in Kentucky, held its 150th centennial celebration August 23 through August 29, 1970. It has now had 152 years of interesting and colorful history.

Grant County has been a part of several different counties. Before statehood this entire area was known as Kentucky County, and Grant was a part of that county. After Kentucky was admitted into the Union as a state, Grant County became a voting precinct in the new county of Scott. In 1794 Grant became a part of Bracken. In 1796 Grant was made a part of Campell County. The next session of the Legislature in 1798 created Pendleton County and Grant was joined to her. Thus matters rested for twenty-two years.

All of the time the county was slowly increasing in population and wealth. As the inconvenience to her people of attending courts and transacting their business at the far away county seat on the banks of the Licking River became more and more apparent, the necessity for a new county was evident to the people, and they went to work with a will to get it. The establishment of a new county became a vital issue in the election of a Representative in 1819. The mother county, Pendleton, was reluctant to give up so much of her virgin territory. Those favoring the new county brought out their candidate Mr. William Littell. After a heated and bitter campaign, he successfully won over his two opponents by a bare plurality of forty votes.

He had promised his people, if elected, that he would secure for them a new county, and never did a more faithful public servant set to work with more zeal and determination to accomplish this end than did this farmer, schoolteacher and representative. He introduced his bill to create the new county on the first day of the legislative session in 1820; and daily and hourly he hammered it into his fellow members that he had come to the legislature as the representative of his people for the sole and exclusive purpose of having the new county created. His persistence won in the end, and on the twelfth day of February, 1820, he had the pleasure of witnessing as the Governor signed the bill creating the new county of Grant, the sixty-seventh county formed in our Commonwealth.

Just why the county was called Grant is not definitely settled by the historians. Some say that it was because of the presistency with which Legislator Littell asked the assembly to "Grant" him a hearing on his bill to establish a new county, and that in a spirit of fun when the bill was finally passed, some waggish member had the name Grant inserted as the name of the new county as a testimonial to the doggish persistency of the representative who had secured its creation. Another and perhaps a better founded theory is that the county was named for General Squire Grant who had been a lifelong friend of Mr. Littell.

At the time of its creation, the territory included was almost a trackless forest. Its hills and valleys were covered with fine hardwood timber. Game of all varieties abounded. Its people were few and scattered, living in log cabins. Yet Grant County, even in the beginning, was a beautiful spot; and its people, although few and poor, were honest and loyal to the flag. They had suffered untold hardships and dangers to reap the harvest of riches and good government the pioneers had sown.

The first court held in Grant County convened at the residence of a member of the court. A committee was named to locate the county seat of Grant County. Land was donated for the erection of a courthouse by Mr. William Arnold. The county seat was named Philadelphia

but this name was of short duration. At the end of a month it was discovered there was another town in the state of the same name. Then, in honor of Mr. Arnold who had done much to give the new county seat a start in life, they christened the new town Williamstown. The county seat of Grant County today is still Williamstown.

An object of interest in the early days was "the poison springs," situated just north of the village of Sherman. The family living at the farm used the water out of the spring. All became sick and died from some cause unknown to them, but supposed by us to have been "milk sickness." Many believed that it was the water from the spring that killed them, and hence it took the name of the "poison spring."

One of the most historic events of the early days was the passing through the county of General Marquis de Lafayette. He made a tour of the United States in 1824 and came to Kentucky. He remained in Williamstown overnight, the guest of Mr. William Arnold. Mr. Arnold had been a captain in the Revolutionary War and had been wounded at the Battle of Yorktown. The old friends wept at their meeting. As the distinguished Frenchman passed through the county, the people came from all directions to meet him.

Twice in her history, in 1832 and in 1853, Grant County has been visited by the Bubonic plague, and twice her homes have been desolated and her people made to weep for loved ones lost.

Since the organization of Grant County there have been five persons in the county who have met their death by hanging. Three of these suffered the death penalty at the hands of a mob and two were legally executed according to law. All of those hanged by mob law were white men, while those who suffered death by legal methods were negroes.

Grant has furnished many soldiers to every war since the War of 1812. Her sons have left a trail of blood on many battlefields.

There has been very little immigration to Grant County since the Civil War. A few Germans and a few Irish have made up most of the immigrants. Ninety percent of all the people who live in Grant County today were born within the confines of the county.

Grant County has continued to grow in wealth and population during all of her history. The population of Grant County today is 9,999. The largest city is Williamstown with a population of 2,063.

Grant County is located in northern Kentucky and is typically a part of the outer bluegrass district. Eagle Creek, an important tributary of the Kentucky River drains the western part of the county while the eastern portion is drained by the tributaries of the Licking River. It covers an area of 268 square miles.

The Grant County of today is a purely agricultural county. It is made up of lovely hills and valleys. Almost every acre of the county has been brought under cultivation. The county contains within its limits almost two hundred thousand acres of land. It is all of limestone foundation with clay formation and a deep loam covering the clay.

The greatest revenue product in Grant County is the tobacco crop. Corn, hay, vegetables and fruits all are grown in abundance. Cattle and sheep, the breeding of good horses and the raising of hogs for market, constitute the principal stock industries of the county. The major products manufactured in the county are polyethylene film and bags.

From the rude log cabins in which the pioneers found their homes and raised their families Grant County has progressed to comfortable and well built homes in every part of her territory. Grant County can be justly proud of her new Grant County Hospital, Grant County High School, Williamstown High School, several elementary schools, doctors, attorneys, funeral directors, factories, business establishments and many other assets to their county.

Grant Countians and hundreds of visitors attended the Grant County Sesqui-Centennial in 1970. Some of the major highlights were the Coronation of Sesqui-centennial Queen, Judging of Beards, Oldtime Fiddlers Contest, Old Fashioned Square Dance, Old Time Cafe, All Day Court Day, Antique Auto Show, Sesqui-centennial Parade, and the Marigold Festival. The marigold is the flower of Grant County.

This is GRANT COUNTY. May she continue to prosper as she has in the past 152 years.

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