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TRUE TALES about OHIO
 BY HARRY L. HALE

Editor's Note—This is one of a series of articles to appear in the Bluffton News dealing with early Ohio history. Others will appear in forthcoming issues.

Enoch Carson's Harvest Home

"In as much as it is incumbent on all men to acknowledge with gratitude the infinite obligation to Almighty God for benefits received," droned the Reverend John Clark to the little gathering of men and women in buckskin and home-spun on the close-cropped bear-grass in Enoch Carson's beech woods.

It was 143 years ago and Clark, first Methodist preacher in Green township, Hamilton County, began his long-winded, rambling speech with the lifted opening quotation from Arthur St. Clair's 1790 Thanksgiving proclamation. It sounded well and was an appropriate beginning.

It was late harvest, 1806, and Carson's beech grove now is in the heart of Cheviot, 10,000 populated municipality completely surrounded by Cincinnati—steadfastly refusing to be annexed to the larger city. The occasion was the first "Harvest Home Festival," enduring with only a break

or two in wartime, annually up to this day. The 143rd of the miniature fairs is being held this September, two days and nights.

Settled in 1805

It is a pretty story and true. Enoch Carson was one of the easterners impoverished by the post-war depression which followed the Revolution. Almost penniless, he came by flat-boat to Cincinnati and with his sons, cut and sold firewood at "a bit a load" until he got enough money to buy a little wilderness farm in Green township. That was in 1805.

Twenty acres of mixed crops, grown among girdled trees too big to fell and drag away—a little plot of corn, turnips, cabbages and pumpkins, planted broadcast among the potatoes and tomatoes, all came up well and the harvest was a bountiful one.

The big Carson family would not go hungry during the coming winter and they were thankful. The tomatoes were planted there by Achsah, Carson's wife, because they were beautiful in the green. "Love Apples" the pioneers called them, believing they were poisonous and not good to eat.

Only a few families besides the Carsons were yet in the township—perhaps a dozen.

So Enoch and Achsah Carson were thankful. So were their brood of eight smaller Carsons, including Enoch Jr., 3 months, who cooed contentedly. The neighboring settlers had as good luck, though their clearings were not so large.

Thanksgiving Service

The Carsons passed the word around asking the neighbors to gather in the beech woods for a day of celebration and thanksgiving. And the neighbors came. So began Green township's nearly century and a half of Harvest Home Festivals.

There was "community singing" of the old English folk songs; much laughter and chatter, and long before sunset the big hampers and baskets were emptied and the "vittels" spread on bed sheets and table covers over the stubby grass. It was a bounteous feast.

Everybody made stammering speeches, the one by Preacher Clark being the longest and most flowery. Clark had been in the woods only a few months and had walked all the way from Muddy creek to the Carson clearing for the occasion.

Pioneer Dance

After the big spread, the covers were taken up and there was dancing under the trees far into the night, to the strains of a cracked fiddle and a "big bass viol"—simulated by a man rubbing his thumb across a hickory stick and making the sounds with his mouth.

By the time the moon was high the little gathering broke up and faded into the forest on the way to their various cabin homes—all vowing to come back next year and do it all over again.

They did come back. And so, with organization whatever, the Green Township Harvest Home Festivals went on until 1854, when an attempt at organization was made. The only skips were two years during the War of 1812.

Organize Society

October 4, 1854, the Green Township Agricultural Society was organized. The first society festival was a picnic at Miami town, on the Great Miami River, May 17, 1855. "Everybody gathered at Bethel Church at 6 o'clock in the morning and went in a body to the picnic grounds." Annual memberships were sold at 50 cents each and next year the festival was resumed at the same Carson's beech grove.

The annual Agricultural Society Harvest Home celebrations went on until the Green Township Harvest Home Association was organized seven years later to supersede it. Memberships still cost 50 cents apiece and there were 80 members at that time.

The first Association festival was held in "Carson's Grove," Cheviot, Friday, August 17, 1860. From the original minute book, in beautiful handwriting and faded lamp-black ink, closed for nearly 90 years, the writer is copying:

"The Harvest Home Association of Green Township celebrated their annual festival yesterday in Carson's beautiful grove just north of Cheviot. The day was a magnificent one, the cool weather of the past week being just sufficiently tempered by the ardors of the sun to be comfortable.

3,000 Attend Festival

"There must have been nearly 3,000 people on the grounds. They came on horseback; in wagons, buggies, rockaways, barouches, omnibuses and a-foot, all dressed in their Sunday's best and bent on pleasure, though with a frugal mind, for the full stores of home-made lunch constituted the whole expense of the entertainment." And there was much more of the account.

First premiums for best exhibits were from \$1 down to 25 cents. And farmers and farmers' wives competed in great number. William Lingo took the 60 cents first prize for best apples and J. Hildreth, first prize, also 60 cents, for best wheat. Sallie Hannaford got 50 cents first prize for her sampler mat; and Elizabeth Hannaford, 60 cents for her peach preserves.

There were the usual dancing, singing and many "long and tiring addresses—mostly by politicians."

And on through the Civil War until today the association functioned. Its festival this year was held September 11 and 12 at "Carson's grove—now Harvest Home Park, Cheviot. The City of Cheviot bought the four-acre tract long ago and besides the yearly festivals, a playground, athletic field, dancing pavilion and other park features are there. It took a \$30,000 bond issue to do it.

Green township residents declare with pride that many of the great beeches still stand and the second-growth now are tall.

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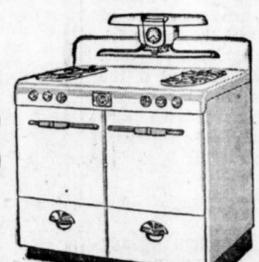
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