



Sigsbee Post Office and Bevill Store

Stars Over Tiger Fork by Dr. Jim Foster

“We still have the pretty snow. I feel sure it is staying for me to get a sleigh ride, but I have not even been out for a walk. I well remember the cold sleigh ride I took 55 years ago and got stuck in a drift. We started to Will Glasscocks. How foolish to start out on a night like that.”
Sigsbee News by Belle Pugh, Shelby County Herald newspaper February 3, 1960

On a warm spring day in 1994, Charlie Turpin served as my guide under a canopy of trees as we hiked over land through growing mayapples. We were in search of Charlie’s black angus calf who needed what I was carrying in my loaded syringe to treat the infection that we veterinarians call “pinkeye.” Upon finding the small calf with its mother, I threw a lasso around the cow’s neck and secured her to a tree. Charlie held the young calf in his arms while I carefully injected the necessary antibiotic into its neck muscle. On our trip back to Charlie’s home across the road from the field we passed by gravestones. Charlie gave me a brief history on this sacred site known as the “Looney Cemetery” located in the township known as Tiger Fork. We were near the branch of the North River called Looney Creek in northeastern Shelby County, Missouri.

In the winter of 1833-34, John Winnegan was one of the most skilled hunters in Missouri who near his home on the North River in northeastern Shelby County shot and killed two large panthers that locals in that untamed area referred to as “tiger cats.” Winnegan was given the notoriety as Tiger Fork became the official name of the township located northeast of the

capitol city known as Shelbyville and east of what would become the German Communal Colony of Bethel. Tiger Fork Township became the home of future settlements called Burksville, Elgin, Pansy, Carlisle, West Springfield, and Sigsbee.

The early settlers arriving in 1833 besides Winnegan were Meshack Vanlandingham, Stephen Gupton, Cooper Kincaid at the mouth of Tiger Fork. At the southwest part of the township were the early pioneers, Elisha Baldin, Solomon Miller, and George Gentry. James Turner was noted as having built one of the first cabins. By the fall of that year Robert Joyner arrived as did the widow Caroline Looney who arrived with her seven children. Joyner was the first to kill a bear in this heavily wooded area of Shelby County.

Caroline Looney opened her cabin to the first church services in 1834 to a growing population mostly made up of Baptists that came to hear the first preacher, Reverend William Fuqua. Three years later, on land donated by Caroline, a little log church was built and named Looney Creek Church which was the first church to be built in the county. In the years that followed there were differing ideas in the congregation that led to a division and another church was built using brick under the congregation led by Reverend Henry Louthan.

William Moffett arrived and settled near the brick church known today as the Mount Zion Church. He was the schoolteacher, clerk, lawyer, religious leader and local doctor.

Poore's Mill became the center of trade and the local polling place where voters cast their votes and paid their taxes to tax collector Reason Baker in 1894 as the population of Tiger Fork had grown to nearly 1,500 citizens of all ages. In that same year, John Tompkins was a candidate for county assessor who sent his campaign cards to Tiger Fork. A card was sent back to him with the message, "Compliments of the old maids of Tiger Fork!" In 1898, Dan Beville erected a large storeroom at Poore's Mill which served as the post office. Farming was the main industry and in 1891 A.G. Culbertson established a wooden hoop manufacturing business utilizing hickory and oak poles. The following year saw a growth in this industry as twenty-seven hoop shops went into business.

By 1923, Tiger Fork township sponsored the big Shelby County spelling bee inviting the students of the Shelby County School district to compete. The children of Tiger Fork were a fierce bunch of knowledgeable spellers who were tough to beat and many times they were the shining stars.

Caroline Looney along with her sons William and Peter shared the story that traveled through the decades from a special event that they witnessed on the evening of November 13th, 1833. Their world was ablaze with light as the night sky was illuminated by the falling of 72,000 meteors. It was known as the Leonids meteor shower and by some accounts it was so bright that people believed their homes were on fire.

“After getting my mail from Philadelphia, Mo for 47 years, it now comes from Bethel. The mail comes in and goes out of both towns on time. The Bethel carrier, Laurel Swisher, always does his duty and more. Our carrier, Tom Bleigh, from Philadelphia does the same. But I feel in a different place since the change. I feel it is my duty to go out of my way to help our mail carrier, preacher, schoolteacher and merchant for they mean so much to everyone.” Phone Your News to Mrs. Belle Pugh, Sigsbee December, 1959