

ISAAC M. SMALLEY
MERCER COUNTY PIONEER

The following article was transcribed by Lola J. Angell,
from the April, 1960, Post-Telegraph Newspaper, Mercer, MO.

"EDITOR'S NOTE: Sixty-five years ago this month--on April 25, 1895--death claimed one of Mercer County's most influential men and early settler, Capt. Isaac M. Smalley, who took an important part in the early development of Mercer County."

"Many of the facts regarding his interesting life are not generally known. Through the efforts of George W. Somerville, former resident here, now of Chillicothe, who is engaging in historical research following his retirement from business, much information about this early settler has been uncovered. Through the courtesy of Mr. Somerville this account of Captain Smalley is presented to Post-Telegraph readers. It follows:"

"By George W. Somerville, President of Grand River Historical Society and Museum"

"This is a story of a man and a woman who started their married life with the handicap of scant financial backing and with as scant equipment in the way of special skills to be offered in the market in lieu of goods and chattels."

"It is a story of struggle and sacrifice, of ambition and determination to translate ambitious dreams into the good and fundamental things of life. They were always willing to give their best to the tasks before them and to always live uprightly in the company of their fellow men. Their lives run on into infinity, being filtered through their many descendants and with those with whom they have mingled, and so on to the end of this world."

"Captain Isaac M. Smalley was born in Columbiana County, Ohio, January 26, 1811. He died in Somersett Township, Mercer County, Mo., on April 25, 1895. He is buried in the Lowry Cemetery, Mercer County, Mo."

"On November 7, 1833, he was married to Emma J. Matthews. To this union were born eight children, Elizabeth, Mary Ann, Henry, Harriett, John, Isaac, Jesse and Melissa. The family moved to Richland County, Ill., in 1840. Elizabeth married John W. Lowry, Mary Ann married Morris B. Lowry, Harriett became the wife of Dewitt Clinton Combs and Melissa married Timothy Gibson. Captain Smalley's parents came from Pennsylvania to Ohio."

"On January 28, 1848, gold was discovered in California. This caused great excitement. Months later stories of the fabulous wealth that could be obtained by a few days of work reached the eastern part of the United States. Soon thousands of people from all parts of the country were rushing to the California gold fields to try and obtain some of this easy wealth."

"Getting to California was not easy in those days. There were no railroads west of the Mississippi river and those who chose the overland route had to endure many hardships and privations in making the trip. In 1852 Isaac Smalley, leaving his family in Illinois, was one of the many thousands that made this western journey overland."

"One of the experiences that he related about this trip on his return home follows:"

'In the wagon train that I went with was a braggart who boasted that he was going to kill the first Indian that he saw. One day the wagon train came upon an Indian girl. This braggart shot her. The Indians surrounded the wagon train and demanded that the men surrender the murderer. The men debated. They had women and children with them and were outnumbered by the Indians. So in order to save the train, they surrendered the young fellow to the Indians, who disemboweled him on the spot."

"While in California, Isaac Smalley did not mine for gold but spent his time chopping in the timbers. He sent his wages home to his wife. When he returned he made the journey by ship via Cape Horn. This was in 1853."

"In 1855 Isaac Smalley moved with his family to Mercer County, Mo. The money that he made while in California was used to buy about 1000 acres of land on the prairie in Somersett Township."

"This land was located about four miles north of Ravanna. He was one of the first to settle on the prairie. Up to this time the early settlers considered the prairie lands of little value for settlement. The money that was used for the purchase of this land was carried from Illinois in an old sac, and when they camped, this was thrown around carelessly as if the old sack and its contents were of little value. When they reached their destination, they camped for a time in their covered wagons there on the prairie until they could construct the crude cabins that were to be their first homes in Missouri."

"In the years 1855 and 1865, during the time of the Kansas and Nebraska troubles, many settlers came from the Northern states and found homes in Mercer County. They were quite generally loyal to the Union cause."

"The agricultural census for 1860 listed 12 slaveholders in Mercer County owning a total of 24 slaves. When the Civil War finally came, a large majority of the Mercer Countians declared themselves for the Union. During the Civil War fewer than 20 soldiers joined up with the Confederacy, while more than 1000 men saw service on the Union side. During the election of 1864 a total of 1158 votes were cast for Abraham Lincoln and only three votes were cast for the opposition candidate."

"Soon after the fall of Fort Sumpter (sic) and after President Lincoln had issued his call for volunteers, men of Mercer County began to organize themselves into military units. Captain Isaac M. Smalley organized the first company in the County, Company C, 7th. Missouri State Militia."

"An incident of the early military activity of the County is recorded in 'Roger's History of Mercer County':"

'A very amusing incident occurred at Ravanna where a large number of men had assembled for organization. there were still many men in the county whose position was unknown and whose loyalty was questioned. A company had been organized and Isaac Smalley, a prominent farmer, had been chosen captain. This officer, who at that time did not know the difference between 'shoulder arms' and 'carry arms,' was trying to drill the men. About this time, John R. Clark, from another neighborhood, who had seen service in the war with Mexico, but whose position on the issues of the hour was unknown, came up and casually inquired what was going on. Captain Smalley, believing Clark was on the other side, answered quickly and bluntly in his sharp way: 'By gad sir, we are exercising our rights as American citizens, sir, and for our own protection, sir! Perhaps you don't like it sir?' 'That's all right' said Clark, 'and I am with you.' Before they dispersed Mr. Clark was drilling the company, much to the gratification of all."

"Captain Isaac Smalley and his sons, William Henry, John, Isaac, Jr., and Jesse and his sons-in-law, John W. Lowry, Morris B. Lowry and DeWitt Clinton Combs all served in the Union Army. Probably no family in

the State of Missouri, nor in the Nation, contributed more to the cause of the Union than did the family of Captain Isaac M. Smalley."

"According to the records on file in the office of the Adjutant General of Missouri there is ample evidence of the fine contribution made by this family who saw service under the Stars and Stripes."

"This family of Captain Isaac Smalley was very fortunate. While some of them returned impaired in health due to the rugged service they encountered, yet by the grace of God, all were returned home again and united with their families. They at once assumed their places in the community, always being on the side of right and that which was best for all. The land, east of Mercer, on which the Fairhaven Baptist Church was built, was donated by Captain Smalley."

"It would be impossible to list the many descendants of this splendid couple who came to Mercer County more that 100 years ago. They are scattered far and wide and only a few of them remain in this part of the country. They are engaged in all forms of occupations and professions, making their contribution to the betterment of our society. They are still carrying out the examples and traditions of the splendid pattern of life and living as first established by this venerable patriot. A great many of the older members of this family are resting in the Lowry Cemetery, three miles east of Mercer."

From a sign in front of the Mercer, MO firehouse, April, 1999 (current population of Mercer is 200 and change):

"The town of Marion, now Mercer, was not incorporated until 1886. But there was a Post Office established here June 7, 1855. Frederick Fry, the first Postmaster, was replaced by William Alley on June 17, 1863. A.A. Alley , the founder, laid out the town soon after the building of the railroad in 1871. The railroad had a switch here but no train stopped until O.H., H.J., and A.A. Alley, three brothers, donated the money and built a station. From the building of the depot, the town began to grow."

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