First Settler

By Bill Harshbarger

First settlers create the best prairie stories. Pushing their way into the tall grass, clearing a place for corn, and splitting the logs for their first cabins, they led the way for others and started the foundation for modern civilization.

Their hardships were more than we imagine. Their risks, greater than we would dare. Their achievements, more significant than we give credit.

Douglas County's first settler was a skilled hunter named John Andrew Richman. His name was really "Richmond"; but, the county records got it wrong and, historically, in this county, his new name stuck. He arrived in the area by 1827, but didn't start a permanent home in Douglas County until 1829.

Youth

The oldest child of William and Mary Richmond, John was born on the July 12, 1779,³ three years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and in the middle of the American Revolution where his father served in a Virginia military company organized near Lewisburg. His birth place was near Swope's Knob Mountain and the Greenbrier River of what is today Monroe County, WV.⁴ He grew up on the wild frontier of the Virginia colony.

His father, William, was a "coureur de bois" (runner of the woods), who, before the Revolution, had served as a scout under Lord Dunmore and fought the Indians led by Chief Cornstalk at the Battle of Pleasant Point. He traded independently (without a license) with frontier Indians. William taught his son woodland survival—hunting, fishing, making clothes, trading with Indians, and wrestling a living from a log-cabin landscape.

On his own, John became an expert at finding highly-prized "bee trees." His early, wild, woodland-life prepared him for striking out for a new home, surviving on the undeveloped prairie, and engaging challenges presented by migratory Indian tribes. 6

The Family

On November 10, 1795, sixteen-year-old John Richmond married Jane McCoy. She died eighteen months later. Some accounts say she had a son; but there is no record. A few years after Jane died, on his twenty-fourth birthday, July 12, 1803, John married Susannah Kaylor (listed by some as Sohannah Chaler). She was a twin to Love Chaler and a daughter of German parents who had moved to Raleigh County, WV, where Farley's Creek emptied into the New River near John's house. They had nine children. Among them was one also named John A. Richmond, sometimes referred to as "Uncle Jack." John and others in his family were somewhat wild like their environment, as revealed in an August 25, 1818 fine imposed on him and his brother William for \$4.98 each plus costs for "swearing six profane oaths." Family historians praise Susannah for her ability to mitigate John's tendency to be impatient and short-tempered.

Preparing to Move

For twenty-three years the Richmond's seemed content to live in Greenbrier County. By 1810, they had moved to Richmond Falls, VA (also called New River Falls, now Sandstone, WV) on the New River. John and Susannah owned land there, including nineteen acres which remained in their possession up to the time of their deaths in Douglas County. But, then, in 1826, at the age of forty-seven, driven by high Virginia land prices and lured by the wild game and bee trees in the west, John and Susannah sold 42 acres of land, sold their home, and prepared to move.

A large portion of the journey was by boat constructed from two large poplar trees hewn into two large canoes upon which they built a platform and a tent. They created room for supplies, oxen, household goods, one covered wagon, and children.¹²

Arriving on the Vermilion River

The trip required a great deal of frontier savvy. Details vary. One account asserts that the cattle, sheep, and horses were driven over wagon roads to their new home. Another report implies the livestock were transported by boat. The voyage down the New River and the Kanawha River could challenge even the most talented river riders. In several places rapids required that the family use staves to slow the boat. In other places they had to negotiate falls, high waves, whirlpools, and passages through steep banked gorges that permitted no landing. Eventually they arrived where the Kanawha River emptied into the Ohio River near Gallipolis. As they drifted past the old French city, they felt no special attraction for the salt works industry there. But the town did represent a major turn west. They followed the Ohio River to the Wabash River, which formed part of the border between Indiana and Illinois. They turned north and began the hard work of pushing upstream until they reached Eugene, Indiana on the Vermillion River, where they rented a farm for two years. Some estimate that the 1,050- to 1,100-mile trip may have lasted two to four months.

Bee Hunter

John Richman hunted for meat and fur; but, he also hunted for bees, sometimes called "white people's flies" by the Indians. After Richmond arrived in Eugene, IN, he and his friend, Moses Bradshaw, visited the timber that grew beside the Embarrass River (pronounced, and sometimes spelled, "Ambraw") looking for honey. In eight or ten days they gathered two or three barrels of honey, impressing him to the point that he decided to move there. Bee hunters were valuable in pioneer communities providing a sweet and spicy food source for neighbors. Summer honey produced from white clover, sweet clover and alsike clover turned into a lightly-colored, sweet, mild honey. Fall honey, under the influence of the smartweed, delivered a strong-flavored, amber-colored honey. Golden honey came from Spanish needles. Buckwheat honey had a dark purplish color and a strong flavor. 19

Early Settlers

In May of 1829, John brought his family to the banks of the Embarrass River. Like most early pioneers, the Richman family settled in the river timber which provided food, fuel, and building materials for their home and fences. Their arrival on the Embarrass River marked the first time that a white family had established a permanent home in the present limits of Douglas County. They were the first to be in Coles County north of Charleston. They lived by themselves for a year before Harrison Gill joined them. In another six months Isaac Moss settled about a mile east of the present village of Camargo. Other early pioneers in or near Camargo include: Hammet, Bragg, Watson and Murdock. 21

First Home in Douglas County

First-time prairie settlers faced special challenges. During the first summer the Richman family built a temporary camp of split logs. The men, under pressure to plant sufficient crops to feed the family, tried to turn over the thickly-matted prairie sod. They quickly discovered that they lacked enough power to "break" the prairie. They moved their planting into the timber, clearing places and planting until by the July 10th they had corn growing on fourteen acres.

Next they cut and hewed logs for a cabin. But the work was interrupted by one of the common, dreaded terrors of pioneer life—the ague. Caused by poor water conditions in lowland places, the illness created both a fever and chills. It rarely caused death, but sapped the energy of its victims. Seven of the eleven members of the family were incapacitated for weeks. This stopped the building. Winter caught them still in their temporary summer cabin. One can only imagine their hardships. In the following year, without help, the family built a cabin made from hackberry wood. The dwelling endured for many years, served as headquarters for elections and military musters, and remained as a landmark of that early time.²² It was torn down in 1885.²³

The family travelled to Eugene and Perrysville, IN to have their grain ground and to Georgetown in Vermilion County to have their plow shears sharpened.²⁴

Land Purchases

In the spring of 1831, John traveled to Palestine, Illinois where the federal land office issued land patents for the early settlers in the Coles County area. The recorder mistakenly wrote his name as "Richman." On May 11, 1831 John Richman bought 80 acres where he lived on the 3rd Meridian, Township 16 North, Range 009 East, E ½ of the NE ¼ of section 33.²⁵ Over the next several years he bought three lots of 80 acres each, two fields of 40 acres each, and may have made additional private purchases revealing that he owned 452 acres at the time of his death.²⁶

Indians

Indians came to the Richman neighborhood and continued to do so for three years. They came to hunt. Hunting season began about the first of October and closed at the beginning of May. Indians hunted on the Vermilion, Okaw (Kaskaskia), Embarrass, and Wabash rivers where they found plenty of otter, bear, mink, deer, beaver, raccoon, muskrat, and panther. In the Spring they returned to their northern locations to plant corn.²⁷ They also came to Bridgeport (now Hugo) where they traded furs at the post established by Noel Vasseur and Gordon Saltonstall Hubbard.²⁸

The mutual benefits of trade and, perhaps, a decent respect for humanity, sustained good relationships for all. John Hammet and his sons, William S. and James R., who arrived in the Camargo area in November, 1830, lived in a tent during the first winter and were visited by large numbers of Indians. The Indians built fires, sat around, talked with the Hammets, and generally conducted themselves so that the Hammets had nothing stolen and did not fear for their safety.²⁹

Eyewitness Description

There is no photograph of the first settler. But young Dr. Hiram Rutherford, the well-known pioneer doctor from Oakland, Illinois, met John Richman at a settler's sale in February, 1841 on Brushy Creek three miles southeast of Oakland and wrote a description. Among those gathered to buy and to gossip, only Captain James Bagley recognized "old John Richman," as he approached.

At the time, Richman was about 63 years old. By Rutherford's description, Richman was "six feet tall, strongly built and in vigorous health. He carried a long rifle, a deer gun, with a leather guard over the lock. His rig and costume were unique and picturesque even for that day. He wore a knitted woolen cap of white, red and green bands, with a white tassel on the top. His hunting shirt was of walnut jeans fringed along the seams and skirts, and around the neck and cape. His pants, of the same material, were held up by a drawstring and secured at the ankles by deer leather leggings bound by cross thongs fastened to his moccasins. He wore a leather belt in which was stuck a small tomahawk. To his shoulder strap was attached a pouch, a powder horn and a small butcher knife in a sheath. His moccasins had sole leather bottoms fastened by thongs. He was clean shaved, and his shirt and clothing bright and clean."³⁰

Pet Deer

Richman was on foot. He scorned horseback riding and gave little thought to a fifteen-mile walk.³¹ He was looking for a pet deer with a red flannel band on its neck and a small brass bell held by a leather strap. The old hunter had stayed the night with a friend, Andrew Gwinn, and came to the sale hoping that someone had seen it.

"If I could only hear one tinkle of that bell, I'd know it," he said. When asked how he would find it, he held up a turkey call bone and said, "Every day when I brought her feed, I called her up with that bone; if ever she hears it again she will know it and come to me. She will know me, too, and let me lead her home. If she is alive I will find her and find her down there," he said pointing to the southwest. Richman then shouldered his rifle and went on his way. Rutherford relates that Richman followed the deer to the neighborhood of St. Omar, two miles north of Ashmore, deciding that was the deer's boundary limits. He searched and called for two days. He stayed with David Golliday. It turned out that one of the Golliday boys had killed the deer and that the red band and bell were stored only feet away from the old hunter. In their presence, Richman swore that if he ever found the person who killed the

deer, he would "put a bullet through him." The Golliday's, terrified by the old man, kept the secret for several years until the ferocious, old hunter was dead.³²

Fly Killer

Dr. Rutherford said he visited the renowned hunter in the summer of 1842. Richman was living with his son David and his wife. The old man was sitting on a deerskin rug. It was tanned with the hair on. The neck, tail, and legs had been clipped off. He had fashioned a fly-swatter from a chair rung to which he had attached a piece of sole leather. With this hunting weapon he swatted every fly within reach uttering a colorful expletive with each success. He had also created a fly trap from a pair of short boards, propped on a shelf, leaning together at the top and smeared with honey. Every few minutes he would rise from the floor and bang the boards together, furiously uttering, "There, damn ye!" 33

Superstitious

In 1844 Richman came to Dr. Rutherford to have a "wen" (a cyst) the size of a turkey egg removed from his arm. Richman insisted that "it must be done today or tomorrow, because the sign today is in the legs, and tomorrow it'll be in the feet. After that it'll be in the head again, and you know it wouldn't do then at all; it'ud be dangerous."

After Rutherford removed the wen, Richman asked to have the doctor's wife stop the bleeding. He said it could be done by some kind of incantation. He could make it work on others. But he couldn't do it on himself. He said that he could "learn a woman" how to say the right words.

With the doctor's permission, he told Mrs. Rutherford to place her fingers on the cut and repeat a "pow wow" formula of words, commanding the bleeding to stop. The bleeding continued. After giving the spirits ample opportunity to work, the doctor wrapped the wound more tightly, stopping the bleeding. Richman was satisfied, however, that the "words" had worked.

Richman stayed two days with Rutherford's family and told "a hundred" hunting, mining, and ghost stories. Rutherford called him a "natural man," and "brim full of superstitions." He could not read a word, however, and was almost devoid of moral and religious training.³⁴

Camargo, By Other Names

Richman's neighborhood developed into the first town of Douglas County, pre-dating the town of Bourbon by seventeen years.³⁵ In November, 1836, Isaac Moss with Joseph Fowler, surveyor, laid off the town and named it New Salem. In 1840 Moss made another addition and changed the village name to New Albany. The voting precinct was known simply as Albany. Then, following the Mexican-American War, upon the suggestion of J. B. McCown, the name of the precinct was changed to Camargo. It was the name of a Mexican town occupied by Zachery Taylor's troops in 1846.³⁶

When the legislature divided Coles County in 1859, local residents lobbied to name the new county "Richman." Some wanted it named "Watson," after their representative; but, the legislature chose "Douglas," after the well-known Illinois senator, Stephen A. Douglas.³⁷

Camargo citizens struggled to establish their town as the county seat. One of the county's larger towns, increasing to 2,089 citizens by the 1880 census,³⁸ Camargo lacked the railroad advantages of Arcola and Tuscola. Before Tuscola won the county-seat in a highly controversial election, however, Camargo served as the temporary court house, with Judge James Ewing of Arcola presiding, holding a special term in 1859 over Coleman Bright's store.³⁹

Death

John A. Richman (Richmond) died six years after Susannah on December 24, 1847, sixty-eight years old. His last will of May 4, 1847, lists his sons: William, John, James, Lewis, and David; names his daughter: Christina Frazier; and lists his grandson, John Bradshaw, and granddaughters, Susannah and Christina Bradshaw.⁴⁰ His personal property inventory was appraised at \$508.86; the 452 acres of real estate were valued at \$2,432, in sections 28, 33, and 34 of Camargo Township. His personal property included three rifles, nine bee stands, and two log chains, as well as many tools, household items and some livestock.⁴¹

He is buried in the Oak Ridge Cemetery just west of Camargo on the bank of the Embarrass River near his home of eighteen years.

For his pioneer spirit, he should be admired. For his woodsman and survival skills, he should be respected. For his legacy to our county and history, he should be honored. We might share Dr. Hiram Rutherford's first impression: "I had heard of Mr. Richman before and now realized that there stood before me a type of a mountain hunter, more perfect perhaps than any that fiction had ever made."⁴²

¹ Geni website, http://www.geni.com/people/John-Richmond/6000000001900773154, including MyHeritage Family Trees, for John A. Richmond; also website Ancestry.com, http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/h/a/t/Jeffrey-Allan-Hattersley-El-Dorado-Hills/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0583.html#" "William Richmond;" See also Warnock, John E. and Mary R. Warnock, *History of John A. Richmond/Richman*, Paper in the Camargo Township Library Genealogy Files, Villa Grove, IL, , 2004, Warnock says that Virginia records are almost exclusively "Richmond," but Douglas County records are split about evenly.

² Access Genealogy, "History of Douglas County," Ancestery.com http://www.accessgenealogy.com/illinois/history-of-douglas-county-illinois.htm, Gresham, John. Historical and Biographical Record of Douglas County, Illinois. Logansport, IN: Wilson, Humphreys & Co., 1900, p. 12-13; Bateman, Newton, Paul Selby, eds., Illinois Historical: Douglas County Biographical, Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1910, p. 625.

³ Geni webstie, "John A. Richmond," http://www.geni.com/people/John-Richmond/600000001900773154, including MyHeritage Family Trees, for John A. Richmond; also website Ancestry.com; <a href="https://open.com

⁴ Op. Cit, Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 1. For documentation relating to William's Revolutionary War Service, see Warnock, John E. and Mary R. Warnock, *History of William Richmond*, Paper in the Camargo Township Library Genealogy Files, Villa Grove, IL, , 2004, pp 1-4; Land Grant of 100 acres to William Richmond from the Commonwealth of Virginia on November 25, 1796, Treasury Warrant Number 21,943, December 14, 1783, and Survey, February 7, 1794, for land on south side of Swope's Knob.

⁵ "Bee Trees" in Illinois in the 1820s housed honey bees that produced a large quantities of honey with varying flavors depending on the season and the plants growing in the area. They added a much needed flavor and sweetness to pioneer food. It took considerable skill to locate these trees. A bee tree expert could make a good living. "Genealogy for Gary Wood and Shirley Hollopeter families," Our Family Genealogy, "John A. Richman, Bold Pioneer," once published on the internet, but no longer available. I have a copy; see also Gresham, John. Historical and Biographical Record of Douglas County, Illinois. Logansport, IN: Wilson, Humphreys & Co., 1900, p. 12-13. Rutherford, Hiram, "John Richman, A Typical Backwoodsman," Part IV—Contributions to the State History, Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1907, Springfield, Illinois: Phillips Bros., State Printers, 1907, p. 296.

⁶ <u>Ibid</u>. Wood and Hollopeter.

⁷ See genealogy records: http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/h/a/t/Jeffrey-Allan-Hattersley-El-Dorado-Hills/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0561.html, and also ibid. Wood and Hollopeter, and Illinois Marriages, 1831-1850, Coles Co.: John Richman to Margaret J. Clayton, June 12, 1836; Warnock, John E. and Mary R. Warnock, *History of Susannah Kaylor Richman*, Paper in the Camargo Township Library Genealogy Files, Villa Grove, IL, , 2004, p. 1.

⁸ Ancestry.com "Roots Web," ID I318, John A. Richmond, http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgibin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=jimjessee&id=I318.

⁹ <u>Op. Cit</u> Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman", p. 3, cites Greenbrier County (West) Virginia" records transcribed by Larry G. Shuck, Vol. I, August 1818 Court Term, p. 262.

¹⁰ Op. Cit., Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p.2; Warnock cites, "Illinois Historical Douglas County," edited by John W. King, 1910, pp. 645-649.

¹¹ Op. Cit, Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 2. Warnock notes that this land clearly connects John Richman (in Illinois) to the families in West Virginia.

¹² <u>Op. Cit.</u>, Ancestry.com, "Roots Web.,"; <u>Op. Cit.</u> Wood and Hollopeter. Rutherford, Hiram, "John Richman, A Typical Backwoodsman," Part IV—Contributions to the State History, Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1907, Springfield, Illinois: Phillips Bros., State Printers, 1907, p. 294; <u>Op. Cit.</u> Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 4.

¹³ Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 4; Op. Cit., Gresham, *Historical and Biographical Record,"* p. 69 and 192-194.

¹⁴ <u>Op. Cit.</u>, Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," citing an 1879 obituary for John "Uncle Jackie" Richman published in an unnamed newspaper. He died August 3, 1879, in Douglas County, Illinois.

¹⁵ Op. Cit., Wood and Hollopeter. Bateman, Newton, Paul Selby, eds.," *Illinois Historical Douglas County Biographical*, Chicago:Munsell Publishers Co., 1910; see also Rutherford, Hiram, MD., *On the Illinois Frontier*, ed. By Willene Hendrick and George Hendrick, Cardondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1981, p. 118. Warnock, "History of John A. Richmond/Richman, p. 4, asserts they stayed on the Vermillion River in Illinois in what was to become Vermillion County and later Champaign County. This conflicts with other accounts putting the family in Eugene, IN.

¹⁶ <u>Ibid.</u> Wood and Hollopeter, <u>Op. Cit.</u> Rutherford, Hiram, "Backwoodsman," 296; Gresham, John, *Historical and Biographical Record of Douglas County, IL* Logansport, IN: Wilson, Humphreys and Company, 1900, p. 12-13.

¹⁷ Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," pp. 4-5

¹⁸ <u>Op. Cit.,</u> Gresham, p. 12; Bateman, Newton, Paul Selby, eds., *Illinois Historical Douglas County Biographical*, Chicago: Munsell Publishers Co., 1910. Ancestry.com: http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=jimjessee&id=I318.

¹⁹Op. Cit, Wood and Hollopeter.

²⁰ Op. Cit., Gresham, p. 13; Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John Richmond/Richman," p. 5.

²¹ <u>Ibid.</u> Gresham, p. 16.

²² <u>Ibid.</u> Gresham, p. 13. Gresham, p. 69, asserts it was used for elections and military musters. See also, Warnock, "A History of John Richmond/Richman," p. 5.

²³ Op. Cit, Bateman.

²⁴ Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 5.

25 Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records,

 $http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default_pf.aspx?accession=IL0360_.329\&docClass=STA$

²⁶ Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 10.

²⁷ Op. Cit., Gresham, p. 13. Beckwith, H. W., History of Iroquois County With Historic Notes of the Old Northwest, Chicago, H. H. Hill and Company, Publishers, 1880, pp. 335-336.

²⁸ <u>Ibid.</u> Gresham, p. 69, <u>Ibid.</u> Beckwith, pp. 335-336; Hubbard, Gurdon Saltonstall, *Autobiography of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard, Pa-Pa-Ma-Ta-Be "Swift Walker", introduction by Caroline M. McILvaine*, Chicago: The Lakeside Press,R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, Christmas, 1909, see note on p. 154.

²⁹ <u>Ibid.</u> Gresham, p. 69. <u>Op. Cit.</u>, Warnock, "A History of John Richmond/Richman," p. 5.

³⁰ Rutherford, Hiram, "John Richman, A Typical Backwodsman," Part IV—Contributions to the State History, Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1907, Springfield, Illinois: Phillips Bros., State Printers, 1907, pp. 293-297. Ritherford, Hiram, MD., *On the Illinois Frontier*, Willene Hendrick and George Hendrick, eds., Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1981, p 114. Ancestry.com, "John Richman genealogy," http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=jimjessee&id=I318

³¹ Op. Cit., Gresham, p. 69.

³² Op. Cit., Dr. H. Rutherford, p. 294-295.

³³ Ibid. Dr. H. Rutherford, 295.

³⁴ <u>Ibid.</u> Dr. H. Rutherford, 295-296.

³⁵ Niles, Henry C., *History of Douglas County Illinois*, Tuscola, IL: Converse & Parks, Printers, 1876. (Centennial edition), p. 65, Bourbon was laid out in 1853.

³⁶ Op. Cit Gresham, pp, 70, 72; Op. Cit Bateman, p. 626; Niles, H. C., *History of Douglas County, IL, "Comargo Township"*, F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1884, Reproduced from the originals and contributed to Illinois Genealogy Trails by Larry M. Burmeister, 2004, p. 287; Wikipedia, "Camargo," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camargo_Municipality,_Tamaulipas.

³⁷ Op. Cit Gresham, p. 27; Niles, Henry C., History of Douglas County Illinois, for the Centennial Anniversary of American Independence, July 4, 1776. Tuscola, IL: Converse & Parks, Printers, 1776, p. 8-10. Op. Cit., Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 12, points out that the name "Douglas" was odious to most Republicans and caused some controversy.

³⁸ Niles, Henry C., *History of Douglas County Illinois*, for the Centennial Anniversary of American Independence, July 4, 1776. Tuscola, IL: Converse & Parks, Printers, 1776, p. 26; Niles, H. C., *History of Douglas County, IL, "Comargo Township*", F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1884, Reproduced from the originals and contributed to Illinois Genealogy Trails by Larry M. Burmeister, 2004, p. 296.

³⁹ Op. Cit., Gresham, p. 70; Op. Cit Bateman, p. 626; Op. Cit, Niles, History of Douglas County, Camargo, p. 292-293.

⁴⁰ Coles County Illinois Will Book B, p. 190-191, John A Richman's Will.

⁴¹ <u>Op. Cit.</u>, Warnock, "A History of John A. Richmond/Richman," p. 11; <u>Op. Cit.</u>, Warnock, "History of Susannah Kaylor Richmond," p. 1

⁴² Op. Cit., Rutherford, Hiram, MD., On the Illinois Frontier, p. 115.