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Ivan Baxter Memoir

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Interview and memoir

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Baxter discusses pioneer families who settled in the Sangamon Valley in Cass County, Illinois.

Interview by Majorie Taylor, 1973

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Ivan Baxter Memoir

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The First Family to Settle in Cass County	1
Mr. Baxter's Early Education	3
Early Preachers in Cass County	4
Mr. Baxter's Military Service	5

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Marjorie Taylor for the Oral History Office on February 6, 1973. Linda Jett transcribed the tape and Marjorie Taylor edited and reviewed the transcript.

Ivan Baxter has studied the Sangamon Valley and the way the pioneers came in in families. This memoir is a detailed listing of the first families to settle in Cass County.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Ivan Baxter, Cass County, February 6, 1973.

Marjorie Taylor, Interviewer.

A. Just Ivan Baxter is all. Nothing to get excited about. No, the thing that I've noted and what studies I've had, especially of the Sangamon Valley, is the way the pioneers came in in families. They didn't do like the settlements in the West started, the men only going. And probably that is why the West went wild. (laughter) And commencing at the eastern part of the county towards Menard County, they came in there largely from southern states like Kentucky and Tennessee. Largely we understand because in a country where there were slaves free labor has no chance. And they had come there just to get out of slave territory. And of course, the covered wagon that you used to hear about so much in the West, that's the way they came. And the first families right next to the county line was Lynn, William Lynn. They must have got in here in the 1830's. And as far as I can find out there were two sons that I've heard about. Timothy and a John. And there was a time that that community known as the Lynn community must have had close to a hundred inhabitants and today I don't believe--as I understand it today there's just one family there by the name of Lynn. And then on west another group came in there from the South, either Kentucky or Tennessee, the Dick family. There were five boys and I think four girls all came by covered wagon. And they settled in a row up and down the roadway there--what we know now as a road from Chandlerville to Oakford--just one right after the other. And that family there--there's very few of them left at all by that name. That's the strange thing about it how those families, the name at least, dies out. Then, of course I know the doctor, Chandler, in Chandlerville about 1836, supposed to been the time that he came up there from Beardstown. Then on farther west there was the Plaster family in the neighborhood of where Live Springs School is now. It was a Thomas Plaster and his father. His father was known as Thomas Plaster, Sr. and this Thomas Plaster, Jr. was the one that we're interested in. And he had a brother by the name of Lemon. And Lemon Plaster was the first trader of this county. This county was formed in 1837 out of Morgan County. And this Thomas Plaster, he's got some descendents today. The Lee Johnson family. You know them of course. His son, this Thomas Plaster's son was Jeptha Plaster. And one of the daughters was Mrs. Richard Johnson. I remember both--Jep Plaster and Dick Johnson. And then coming on farther west the Fielden family was coming in. A family of about, as I know, of about at least three boys and maybe three girls. And they brought their father and their grandfather with them. And the old cemetery there that used to be known as the Baxter Place, is what they call the Fielden Cemetery, Fielden Graveyard. And there's a tombstone there of a man that died, John Fielden, 1844, and he was 84 years old. He was born in 1760. A man like that would remember the American Revolution and the French Revolution and Napoleon. It's sort of

a remarkable thing to think that there's somebody absolutely buried in this country that could remember all that. The Fieldens that I know of at all, there was a John Fielden among the brothers, and a Robert Fielden and a James Fielden. Their father was a James Fielden, Sr. And then there were some girls. One they called Aunt Betty and I believe it was Joe Clegg's mother if I'm not mistaken. And then on farther west, the Taylors commenced to come in. And they didn't settle in a group down in the valley like the rest of them did. They were more scattered. And as I understand there were seven brothers that got here. That's what I hear. And I believe one girl. And they settled up and down here and there but not in a compact line like the rest of them did. And then Hershaw Favre Wilson's grandfather was a Jeremiah Bowen, and he settled there where Hershaw Wilson lived. He was over here very early too. He was in here--well, in the thirties I think, 1830's. And the Horrom family, they were another group that came in here and settled in rows right next to Hickory Church. It seemed that the father of the bunch was named Benjamin and he lived in the house there just east of Hickory Church, first house. And then starting there Alvey Horrom was one of the brothers. And Cyrus Horrom and Leeman Horrom and a Hiram Horrom. Hiram Horrom lived back south in the hills somewhere and Leeman Horrom lived down in the valley on what we call the North Road. And then going on west the Carr family. They came in very early. They settled up and down the valley too but they had nearly all disappeared by the time I can remember. And the Dave Carr that we knew was Dave Carr, Jr. His father, Dave Carr Sr., was one of the bunch of seven. And the remarkable thing about it is too that--the thing that we ought to take a lesson from is the circumstances they had to live when they got here. They probably had to even camp some way. They could build them some kind of a house. And it was nearly always logs. It was in a lot of places. And then what was afterwards they called shacks, known as shacks. And another family that was very remarkable in the history of that community down west of Chandlerville was the Briar family. There were five brothers and four sisters that migrated in there from somewhere, I think from Beardstown. And I believe probably came down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi and Illinois River. And they were commencing to come in there before 1840. And I remember only one of the group, as long as I can remember myself, and that was a Joe Briar. Now then the population at Beardstown is another remarkable thing. It was very largely settled by Germans. And I'm of a very good reason to think that they came to New Orleans and up the Mississippi River and Illinois. I'm pretty sure that's the way they came. I know my grandmother--she got here in 1845 with two sisters. And they were eleven weeks crossing. Sailboat. And I don't think there was any other way they could get here at all except to come up those rivers and that way. I knew a man by the name of Eichenauer. And he told me that his father came over during the Civil War and was stopped at New Orleans by the Confederates and billed in the Confederate Army. I think his name was Will Eichenauer told me that. And that would indicate how they got here. That's about the best evidence we've got. Well, I don't know, Beardstown, of course--the first man in there was a man by the name of Beard and I understand that really his name was Baird, B-A-I-R-D. He was in here around 1820. Practically a wild and absolutely uninhabited country. And he was with the Indians that lived up the river from Beardstown for a while. And then the German population

spread all over that end of the county and up the valley, I believe as far as Sudbrinks. And my own grandfather came after the Civil War up to where the Baxter family lived afterwards. You want any questions to ask?

Q. Oh, I'd like for you to tell about some of your experiences in the country schools.

A. Well, my first schooling was at Hickory. I started in 1895. I didn't start until I was seven. It was a long ways to school walking those two miles. And I didn't belong to that district. I belonged really to Live Springs but because I knew the people down there, they got permission for me to go to Hickory. And my first teacher was Ella Wilson. She's from Virginia. She taught there two years. Now then, some of the pupils--one of them was Ollie Reed. They lived across the road from where John Taylor's place is, right across the road. And farther down, Johnnie and Allie Taylor--they both went. And Harry Daily. And Bertha Horrom, Fred Horrom, and Roy Horrom--that's Alvey's boy. And Grace Horrom--that's another one--that's Alvey's daughter. And Willie Schaad, Frank Schaad. And on down west of the church Harry Carr and an Ollie Carr. I think he was a nephew of Dave Carr's. And on farther down, Crafton--Mabel Crafton. And Irv and Emma Jump. And after Hickory Church a Maude and a Claude Hunt. And an Earl down farther west, an Earl Carr who was a brother of this Ollie Carr. And Velda Kendall. Edna Kendall. And Smith, a Lois Smith and a Fannie Smith. They both went there. And I think that--Miss Ainsworth--I think she went there the first year. There were several of them that just went there one year and then they either went to Chandlerville High School or dropped out altogether or went to some college somewhere. And my second teacher was Emma Suffern. My father believed in discipline but not the kind of discipline she put across. So my father decided I could go to where I belonged. Well, I went five years to Live Springs. And I was gone seven years and when I got back Emma Suffern was still at Hickory. At Live Springs I went five years there, three to Charlie Dollow, and one to a woman by the name of Miles. I believe her name was Amelia. And my last teacher was Floyd Crawford. I took my final examinations and was supposed to be able to go to high school. And the children there beginning next to where we lived there, where Dave Fielden's place is, Henry Fielden. And then Harry Fielden and Ina, Blanche, Willy. Finally Nellie Fielden, now Nellie Kirchner. Alf Johnson, Lloyd Johnson, Roscoe Kirchner, Maggie Taylor, Mabel Taylor. And then out of the hills there were Hardins, Basts, Armstrongs--a whole bushelsack of Armstrongs. Baxter Armstrong's family and Bob Armstrong. Fred Wing and Myrtis Wing. And a woman by the name of Bevier that lived in a house across from where Lee Johnson lives now. They come from the old original James Wing family that was in there before the election of 1837. And there was three generations by the name of James. James Wing. I believe that's all I can think of now in the way of pupils that went to school there.

Q. Do you remember back to singing schools?

A. What?

Q. Singing schools.

A. Well . . .

Q. Your father had one.

A. Oh yes. Well, at Hickory Church my father had a singing school there. Now he was a man who had never studied any music at all, that is in any kind of schooling. A born musician. A good many of the older people up in their twenties and thirties that sang there when I first went there had been taught by him. They learned to sing from his teaching.

Q. Now can you think of anything else you ought to put in? Do you remember some of the preachers?

A. Oh yes. The first preacher was a John Waggoner. There was a Cumberland Presbyterian Church there. He's the first one I remember. And he had one boy, Andrew Bell. And I know I was in the front seat there, front pew, and he got mad at me about something. Must have slapped me in the face with his hat. And his father came down and stopped him. And then the next one was a man by the name of Ziegler. I don't know how long he was there. And then a family by the name of Wilson.

Q. Where did this Mr. Ziegler come from?

A. I don't know. He was a single man. Now another thing I forgot about the teachers. Now the teachers that were at the school there while I was there boarded at that parsonage. And Wilson's family was the last--no, the Shaeffers were in afterwards. A man by the name of Shaeffer was there when we left this country in 1904.

Q. Now tell about your own educational background. I want you to tell that. Make the record complete.

A. Well . . .

Q. Don't be modest about it now.

A. I went for nine years to those two schools, and in 1904 when I was sixteen my father had lung trouble and had been told that it was TB. And so he had determined on my going to some southern school. And we were going to someplace first in Tennessee. And then when he had this TB thought we could go to Texas. He knew of Baylor University. Well, we moved down there and I had to start out in what is the same as a high school course. In Texas the high school was only three years. Well, I took those three years in two years by going to two summer schools. And then in college the regular four years. Of course, an odd specialty of mine, I don't know why I got along in mathematics and sciences fairly well. But the strangest thing that anybody could say they got along better in was Greek and Latin languages. Seems odd to most people. I don't know why. I just took to them. And always had the better grades in them than anything else. And then after I graduated from there, I had a scholarship to Brown University. It was not by competition. Anybody

that wanted to go could put in their name and the faculty would decide on who could go and I happened to be the one. Well, I went there in 1910 and 1911. One year and had a degree from there.

Q. Then you taught.

A. Well, I taught a couple of years and found out I wasn't cut out for it. And they pay a teacher about eight or nine hundred dollars a year and expect them to go to school every other year somewhere. And I found out that teenagers weren't in my line. So I just quit. (laughter) I forgot to mention those families that were in the north and east end of the county. One of them was a man by the name of Hash. The man that I knew--I knew him around 1900--was close to ninety years old and he lived there where Lee Johnson does now. And he had come from the east end of the county and his father was a Phillip Hash. Had a boy, he played with Indian boys in that part of the county. And he lived up at the east end of the county and finally where I knew him as a very old man. And his daughter married Ben Bowman. And Earl Briar's grandfather was Ben Bowman. So you see these Briars are descended from the old Zachariah Hash was his name. They called him Zach. And he was a sample of a genuine pioneer if the county ever had one. Of course, as far as that's concerned I consider them more or less heroes because of the way they had to live when they got here. And the circumstances they were up against. No transportation at all except by waterway. That's why Beardstown became a city for a while larger than Chicago. They had a packing house there and had a distillery there. The boats, the river, of course, was the transportation. And now you take the railway question, the first one ever in the county at all was the one that ran through Chandlerville and Virginia to Jacksonville from Mason County. They called it the Illinois River Railroad. And it was started in 1858 and apparently was not done in time to get the soldiers in the Civil War up to Virginia to go over to Camp Butler. Because they went otherwise according to what I read in some articles. And the B&O, it didn't come through until in the seventies. So that meant they had to march to Springfield to Camp Butler. And we were talking about the Plasters. Thomas Plaster--I found a paper that showed that he was one time a treasurer of that railroad. Seemed a little strange that a farmer should be, as an active farmer, should be a treasurer of a railroad. Of course, a railroad was something they were very anxious to have. And usually the property for it, the right-of-way, was given to the railroad with the understanding that if the railroad didn't go or quit it would go back to the land. Of course, that was--in my memory for a long time--was one of the busy railroads we had. They had one time even kind of a flier on it. I was at a commencement held in Chandlerville one time as a boy and it was held in some kind of a building right by the railroad and there was a train came through there northbound at night. Had a night train. The way things ran then for a long time there was a passenger train two ways each day. And always a big freight service, simply because everything that left the town and came into the town practically everything had to come by rail. And all the goods that came in of course. And of course farmers might bring in some produce but it didn't amount to anything like what the railroad could do. Of course that shows why, with the automobile and the truck coming along, that's why the railroads, a lot of them just simply died. There was no other explanation about it.

Q. Well, let's hear about your military service.

A. Well, that was only a very short affair. Went to camp the first of May 1918. And got over into England in August and then over into France. And we were in France in September because my birthday is the middle of September. And trained as fast as we could. That was the great trouble with that war--there wasn't time enough for the boys to really train. And finally landed over--before the war was over we were way over in eastern France not far from the Swiss border. My company saw some trench warfare. I didn't myself because I'd been sent back in interior on detached services they called it. And they went into the trenches while I was there and my first captain was killed in a little old affair that didn't amount to very much. And of course the thing that no World War I veteran will ever forget is the fact that we had to stay over there all winter with no hint at all as to when we were expected to come home. And a constant every day eight-hour drill of some description or other. Well, luck was with me again because there was a bulletin board--on our bulletin board one night there was an announcement that if any of us thought we could qualify to go to British universities to hand our qualifications in to the top sergeant. Well, I did that and on the 22nd day of February, why I was notified I was going to England. Well, we got into England about the last of February. And of course, I myself had been out of school for about eight years, close to it. I didn't care where I went. So they sent me to a university on the western coast of Wales. The name of the town, _____ . Of course that means the mouth of the East _____ River. That's what the word _____ means in Welsh. It was a good school there. And I took a few subjects--we weren't there but three months--that's all we were there. And boarded us with private families. No drilling. Saw your officer, of course, you saluted your officers--that was all right as long as they didn't say anything to us. And I got home then--my company had--the invasion had left there in May and got home. Of course, with us it made no difference because we wasn't having a hard life anyway. We got back in August 1919. Not quite all told one year so-called service.

A little further about Baylor University. I got down there in 1904. And the whole time I was there there were only four buildings on the campus. And near a town there were two buildings that they had for dormitories for men. And at that time--there's one thing we've got to remember that Texas owes a whole lot of what's happened down there to the oil. The only oil that was down there when I was there was at Beaumont. And after that, as we know, it's spread pretty near over the whole state. And that must be the source of all that's happened--a lot has happened since. Anyway about six or eight years ago I got a little curious and I wrote a letter and sent it to the registrar of the university. And I got an answer back from the only faculty member that was alive. The rest of them of course gone. And he sent me a catalog and an aerial view of the campus. Now then, instead of the four buildings there are more than thirty. And at the time I was there, Texas was a kind of a--I'll call it a harsh land. An awful drought-hit country, and cotton and cattle were just about their resources. And people would come there out of that cotton country and maybe even work for their board. I knew two or three that carried laundry for a laundry there. And other jobs that they could

get. Matter of fact one of my very best friends that I had down there--he's a preacher now--he carried clothes for his board. And there was another preacher there that was 36 and I was 18 and we studied Greek together. And he had a couple of small churches, and there were several other men who were preachers going to school there. And a lot of them had churches somewhere. The whole thing, of course, just goes to show how things can continue in spite of all sorts of handicaps. They always had a hard time to keep it going with less than a thousand students when I was there. And it's a good sample of what can be done even when people are poor and having a hard time to get along--sometimes I wonder if they don't make better when they have it that way than like we have it now. Their football team has been now and then fairly famous. In those days it wasn't. And of course the whole time was a very fruitful time as far as I was concerned.

Q. Tell about May and what she studied.

A. Sister May, she was never in very good health even there and she was mainly a musician. She got to be quite a musician and that was just about all she took.

Q. Didn't she want to take art and your father thought no woman should study art? Wasn't there a story about that?

A. No, no. No, she had no desire for that.

Q. Oh. I don't know where I got that idea. That was wrong then.

A. No, no, she didn't have any desire for that at all.

Q. Give the name of your street address in Baylor--at Waco.

A. Seventeen eighteen South 7th.

Q. That's just off of John?

A. What?

Q. That's just off that John Street Baptist Church, isn't it?

A. Yes. The church was 7th and James.

Q. Oh, James. I got the wrong apostle that time.

A. Seventh and James is what they called the church. It was just a little old frame affair when I got there and inside of about five years they built a pretty good-looking church. I lived down there, a professor of mathematics--a Ph.D. now--on one side and the other side the preacher. And this mathematics . . .

End of Tape One