

Rebecca (Barr) Marvel [61334]

Sketch of a Pioneer's Wife
The first white woman in Waynesville, Township.

{This sketch was copied from pages 17 through 20 of the M history of the Marvel Family. It was written in 1886 from information provided by her grandson William Gambrel. Names have been written in full for purposes of the index.}



The subject of this sketch is the oldest settler in this county. Rebecca Barr [6133] was born in South Carolina, April 21, 1806. Her father, John Barr, was born in Antrim county, Ireland, in 1767, emigrated to America in 1788, and settled in South Carolina. Her mother, Nancy Hamilton¹, was born in South Carolina, of Irish parents,

in 1779. John and Nancy were married in South Carolina in 1796, moved to Tennessee in 1808, when Rebecca was two years old. Two years afterwards they moved to Gibson County, Indiana, and from there to Logan County, Illinois, where both died. Rebecca was married to Prettyman Marvel, Jr. [61334] of Indiana, on the 15th day of May, 1823. He was a native of Georgia, and his parents were of English descent. Times were very hard in Indiana, and the young couple has little hopes of getting a home there, so in the fall of 1824 they loaded their furniture and wardrobe in an old cart, drawn by a yoke of oxen, and started west to find a home on the broad prairies of Illinois. They did not know where they would locate, but were determined to go until they found a place that suited them. They were accompanied by her brother, John Barr, and his wife, who were also lucky enough to possess a cart and a yoke of oxen. The two families had but \$1.50 in money to pay the expenses of their journey and to start them to housekeeping in their new home. They also had a keg of tobacco, a keg of copper distilled whiskey, one bolt of jeans and one of the linsey {linsey-woolsey a course fabric of cotton or linen woven with wool, it was a staple material of that era}, two bushels of dried apples, and one dozen pocket handkerchiefs, which they exchanged at different settlements through which they passed for the necessaries of life. The men walked and drove the oxen and the women rode on horseback and drove their few cows and sheep {ten miles of travel would have been considered a good day}. Rebecca fixed a place among the goods on the cart for her son John Shrader Marvel [613341], who was then but seven months old. Their trip across the grand prairie was very difficult. It rained and sleeted very hard, and they travel far into the night thinking they could come to a settlement and find shelter; but they finally became lost and had to sleep in their carts. When daylight came they found there was a settlement near by and they had camped just back of a man's field. They drove on to the settlement, where they were treated very kindly and given the best accommodations the small shanties would afford. They remained there four or five days and worked for provisions, and the people tried hard to induce them to locate there. Their next step was a short distance this side of Vandalia, Illinois, {it had been the capital since 1820} where they worked for a few days for a man named Sweet for more provisions and feed. When they got to Brush Creek it had turned warm and the water was so high they could not cross. Here they found fresh signs of Indians, but were compelled to camp for the night. The next morning their horses were gone, and of course their first conclusion were that the Indians had stolen them. The men went in pursuit and found the horses roaming over the prairie. The men became warm while walking after the horses and had taken off their coats, and when the women saw them returning in their shirt sleeves and bare-headed they thought they were Indians and prepared to defend themselves by getting the ax, but were happily surprised when they discovered their mistake. They came through Springfield, Illinois, where they found but two or three small shanties. They crossed the Sangamon River on New Years day, 1825, and found a small settlement about five miles this side {possibly Petersburg}. Here they rented a house from a man named Borders, and the men worked for him until spring, when they rented ground of Thomas Prim and raised a crop. They returned to Indiana on a visit in the fall of 1825, with the same oxen and cart, and their second son, James Marvel [61332], was born {October 29, 1825} on their return trip.

They were not satisfied with their location near the Sangamon River, so on their return from Indiana the men started in search of a new home. They selected a place on the sand prairie, near Pekin, Illinois, but on being told the ague {a malaria type fever} was very bad there they finally decided to locate in the big grove, in the month of February, 1826, They moved to their location within a short distance of where is now the village of Waynesville. {The first settlers to the area, which is now De Witt County, had arrived in October 1825. They had located, near where the village of Kenney came to be, some five miles from the Marvels.} They arrived at their new home at ten o'clock at night with no friends to greet them, and nothing to

shelter them but the wide canopy of heaven. The snow was a foot deep, but they scratched enough away from a log to enable them to build a fire, and then got the first supper that was ever cooked by a white woman in the big grove. They constructed a residence the next day by setting four forked posts in the ground, putting poles across it with slabs. One end was left open and they built their fire outside. They afterwards built an addition to their dwelling in the same manner, except they left all the sides open and this was their sitting room. John Barr and his family arrived about a week later and stopped with them. They came on Sunday and as Marvel thought it was Saturday he was busy getting out logs to build a house. They did not have enough room for all their things and built a pen of poles to put them in. Wolves were plenty and very tame, and would come right up to the door. They had a few sheep and had to put them under their cart bed at night to keep the wolves from getting them. The men went back near Sangamon River after corn and the women stayed alone during their absence. It turned warm and rained while the men were gone and took the snow off. The shanty was built in a low place, and when the women awoke one morning they found the water running through the house about a foot deep. They left the children in bed and Rebecca dragged up dry rotten logs while Mrs. Barr mashed them with an ax, and by putting this about a foot deep over the floor they soon had the water turned around their house. They had to cover their fire very carefully to keep it from being put out with the rain as they had no matches in those days {they were invented in 1829} and had to start a fire with the flint {being able to keep a fire was long a criterion for being a good wife}. They built a log cabin that spring about 12 by 16 in size, covered by split staves, and the ground for a floor. They fixed a place for their bed by driving forked sticks in the ground, putting poles across through the cracks between the logs and putting clapboards on these. The shelves for dishes were fixed the same way. The table was a small chest her grandfather had brought from Ireland and presented to her. They thought they were well fixed in their new home and enjoyed themselves very much. They plowed up a hazel thicket and planted their first potato patch, and raised a very large crop; they also broke up some sod and put in a small crop of corn. A few other families located near them in the spring and they asked for a preacher. Peter Cartwright was the presiding elder at this time, and sent a man by the name of Wm. Sea, who gave very good satisfaction. The meetings were held on week days, as the preacher had to go elsewhere on Sunday and they would all quit work and attend church without going to the trouble of putting on a dress suit. Church was held at the Marvel's home for a long time, and although it was very small it was large enough for the congregation at that time. The Kickapoo Indians were very numerous here then and would often fill her house so full she would have to quit work until they would leave. They bothered a great deal but never did any harm, and would never take anything without asking for it. The Indians were always wanting to trade something and as they were fond of Pumpkins they were around frequently to "swap" venison for them. They lived on their land two or three years before entering it, as they did not have enough money to pay for the entry. They found out another man was going to enter it and Marvel had a race to Danville and just got there in time to save his land. He borrowed the money of a man named Hall to make the entry, and paid him fifty per cent interest. They had to go to Springfield for their mail and also for a doctor when any one was sick.

During the winter of the deep snow Marvel caught thirty deer. He would run them down with a horse and then drag them home tied to the horse's tail. They raised a good crop of corn that year, and many went to them from Salt Creek to get corn. Several men would start with teams and shovels and shovel out a road as far as they could and go back home for the night, and sometimes when they returned in the morning the road would be filled up again, and it often took them several days to make the trip. After they had got all the corn there was gathered they went into the fields and gathered all the corn that there was above snow. The people were very accommodating

and would divide anything they had with their neighbors without fear they would lose it, for they always returned it or paid for it in money or work. They finally accumulated a little over half a section of land and built a comfortable house. They had eleven children and raised all of them to be grown except one. They had two pairs of twins, making four children in two years and three months. Seven of the children are still living. Mrs. Gambrel has eight-nine grand children and fifty-nine great grandchildren. Her husband {Prettyman Marvel, Jr. [61334]} died {of yellow fever} during the summer of 1842 {July 23}. Grandmother Gambrel married Thompson P. Gambrel in 1847. He was a native of Kentucky, emigrating to Indiana and from there to Illinois in 1847 and died in 1877. There were no children by the last marriage. She professed religion in 1820 and joined the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. After her marriage to Marvel he experienced religion and they both joined the M. E. church. During the late war {Civil War} she joined the M. E. South, to which she still belongs. She has always been a devoted Christian and still takes a great deal of interest in religious matters. She is not only a Christian on Sunday, but every day of the week, and her large circle of acquaintances know her to be the same honest, plain-spoken woman every day of the year. She has great confidence in the future that is in store for her in the world beyond, and undoubtedly deserves a rich reward for her long and untiring work in the cause of Christianity. Although she is now entering her eighty-first year she is in excellent health and can hitch up her horse to the buggy and visit her friends in the country without an escort.

On the 21st. day of April, seven years ago, her relatives gathered in with their baskets well filled and surprised her with a birthday dinner. They have repeated the same thing every year since, and although they are no longer surprise dinners they are none the less enjoyable to her. She is very fond of company, and her friends always find the latch-string out and a hearty welcome when they call upon her. She has always been a very strong democrat, politically, and whoever inquires into the politics of her eleven children, her eighty-nine grand children and fifty-nine great grand children will not think her teachings have been in vain.

Notes:

- {The following is a greatly truncated version of the Hamilton lineage beginning on page 120 of the M history. As the reader will notice there are some incongruities with other accounts.}

{Nancy Agnes Hamilton} came of distinguished lineage, as {her father} William Hamilton was a descendant of the Cambuskeith branch of the great Scottish House of Hamilton which is allied with many royal lines. ... {She, a} twin to William Hamilton, Jr., was born in Chester County, South Carolina, April 9, 1779; suffering from the loss of both parents in early life, she spent an unhappy childhood in the home of an uncongenial relative, where she was under the protecting care of an old negro "mammy". When that faithful black servitor, her days of usefulness passing, was put on the block to be sold, she forgot her own sorrows and thought only of her beloved protegee,—wringing her hands she cried, "O, what will poor Nancy do now!"

Nancy Agnes Hamilton married John Barr in 1796 and became the mother of eleven children, nine of whom lived to maturity as follows:

- William Barr married Rachel Benson and had eight children;
- John Barr married Comfort Marvel [61333] and had nine children;
- Mary "Polly" Barr married John Marvel [61331] and had three children;
- Rebecca Barr married Prettyman Marvel, Jr. [61334] and had eleven children;
- Cynthia Barr married Arnett Allman and had four children;
- James Barr married Margaret Houchens and had five children;
- Thomas Barr married Elise Watt and had eleven children;

Andrew Jackson Barr married Nancy Knowles and had six children
Louis Barr married Martha Montgomery and had six children.

Although a pioneer's wife in Indiana and later in Illinois, Nancy Agnes Hamilton found happiness in rearing and serving her family. She was a woman of keen mind, a good conversationalist and a great reader until she lost her eyesight several years previous to her death. After the death of her husband, March 8, 1849, she was cared for in the home of her youngest son, Louis Barr, where she died September 8, 1870, and was buried besides her husband in the Union Cemetery at Waynesville, Illinois. She was own cousin to the brilliant American statesman, Alexander Hamilton, who was Secretary of the Treasury under the administration of George Washington and served his country continually in many affairs of state, until the time of his death in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804.

Nancy Agnes Hamilton was the fourth daughter of William Hamilton, who was born in 1742 at Hamilton Grange Scotland; as was the custom of younger sons of Scottish families, when he came to the years of young manhood, went out into the world to seek his fortune; accordingly, he immigrated to South Carolina where he found many relatives; for sixty years or more in the pre-Revolutionary days, there was a peaceful invasion of Scotch and Scotch-Irish in to South Carolina. Among these were many of the scions of various of the various branches of the Scottish House of Hamilton; chiefly younger sons, who settled in the different districts being colonized at the time of their coming. It is thought that William Hamilton on his arrival in America lived for a few years in South Carolina in the neighborhood of Williamsburg which was one of the older settled districts and many Hamiltons were located there. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, we find him living in the Camden District in the locality that afterwards became known as Chester County. He married Mary Margaret (), and as far as known five children were born to them as follows: Mollie Hamilton, born in 1767, who married a McCrea; Margaret "Peggy" Hamilton, born in 1770, who married a Heffler; Elizabeth Hamilton who married a McKinney, and the twins Nancy Agnes Hamilton and William Hamilton, Jr., born April 19, 1779. {The remainder of this account was taken from the B history page 28. This account was written after Mildred (Marvel) Burwell [61334(10)32] and done further research and had entered the DAR via William Hamilton. The information was augmented by further research by Smith.} William Hamilton served as a private in Mill's troop H, Hampton's Regiment, Sumpter's Brigade in the American Revolution. While on military duty, he received word that twins had arrived at his home. He obtained a leave of absence from his military duties that he might go home to see the twins. A short time after his arrival, he was seated on the floor with the twins in his arms, when his daughter, Molly, standing on guard, cried "Tory." Escaping by the back door he reached safety in the canebrakes along the creek. This was the last visit of William Hamilton as he was killed in the battle of Cowpens, South Carolina, January 17, 1781. This battle was one of the few patriot victories over the British. Patriot Brigadier General Morgan, one of the best Patriot generals, with 800 plus men met the highly respected British Tarleton (known as the butcher) with 1200 men. The battle resulted in British casualties of 100 killed, 229 wounded and 600 captured. The Patriot losses were 12 killed and 60 wounded. Mary Hamilton, died in 1791 and the children were reared by relatives.