

History of Lafayette County.

PIONEER EVENTS.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE COUNTY.

The first election held in the territory of Missouri was in October, 1812, and it was then divided into five voting or representative precincts; but just how and when this sub-division originated, history does not relate. The district of St. Charles embraced all north of the Missouri river; the district of St. Louis embraced all south of the Missouri river, except the old settlements of St. Genevieve, Cape Girardeau and New Madrid, on the Mississippi river; and therefore the territory now constituting Lafayette county, was at that time a part of what was called St. Louis parish or district. However, in governor Howard's proclamation, dated October 1, 1812, calling this first election, the five civil districts are for the first time officially called counties.

January 23, 1816, all that part of the state lying north and west of the Osage river on the south side of the Missouri, and west of Cedar creek, (opposite Jefferson City), and west of the dividing ridge between the streams that flow eastward into the Mississippi and those which flow southward into the Missouri, on the north side of that river, was organized under the name of Howard county. It was so named in honor of Gen. Benj. Howard, of Kentucky, who was appointed governor of this Territory in 1810. The county seat was first located at Cole's Fort, just below the present site of Boonville; but in 1816 it was removed to old Franklin, opposite Boonville.

In 1818, all that part of Howard county lying south of the Missouri river, and north and west of the Osage, was erected into a new county called Cooper, in honor of Capt. Sarshall Cooper, who, with ten others of the same name, his sons or relatives, were early settlers and Indian fighters in the "Boone's Lick country." (Capt. Cooper was killed in 1814.) The county seat was at Boonville.

On November 16, 1820, the legislature again created a lot of new counties; and all that portion of Cooper county lying west of the present eastern boundary of Lafayette county, and between the Missouri river on the north and the Osage river on the south, was named Lillard county, after

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James Lillard, who was the first member of the legislature from this locality, and introduced the bill to make the new counties. The county seat was fixed at Mount Vernon, a small settlement near the mouth of Tabo creek, about eight miles east of Lexington. Mr. Lillard subsequently abandoned the new county which had received his name, and went back to his old home in Tennessee. The pioneer settlers were displeased with this move, which seemed to cast some discredit on their chosen and favorite country.

In April, 1825, Gen. Lafayette and his son George Washington Lafayette, visited St. Louis, the General being then sixty-eight years old, and were received with a magnificent ovation. The legislature of 1824-5 was still in session, and it signalized the great event by changing the name of Lillard county to that of Lafayette, in honor of the distinguished Frenchman who had so nobly aided our country in the revolutionary war. His name and great services to our national cause were fresh in the minds of the people; and the naming of this county after him was designed as a perpetual memorial of their reverence and gratitude. In February, 1823, the county seat of Lillard county had been moved from Mount Vernon to Lexington, so that when the name Lillard was dropped, and Lafayette substituted, Lexington was already the county seat, and has remained so ever since.

In 1826, December 15, Jackson county was organized, and its eastern boundary was the present west line of Lafayette county. And on December 13, 1834, Johnson county was laid off by act of legislature, its northern line being the same as the south line of Lafayette county. This completed the different steps and stages successively by which Lafayette county went through the process of political incubation and was hatched out into her present goodly plumage and fair proportions.

At the present time the county is divided into eight civil townships, to-wit: Clay, Davis, Dover, Freedom, Lexington, Middleton, Sniabar and Washington. But during its various stages of development it has had Blackwater, Blue, Caw, Clearfork, Fort Osage, Springfield, and Tabo townships, which do not now exist within her borders.

FIRST CIRCUIT COURT IN LILLARD COUNTY.

The first court held in Lillard county was at Mount Vernon, February 12, 1821. The county of Lillard was established by an act of the Legislature passed November 16, 1820, and was included in the first judicial district. Gov. McNair appointed David Todd to be judge of this circuit, and hence it was Judge Todd who held the first court at Mount Vernon, as above mentioned. The act creating Lillard county had designated Mount Vernon to be the county seat until the people of the county should be able to suit themselves better. The governor had likewise