

Life in 19th Century Rural Indiana
Lucy Jane Blasdel Richmond, 1864 - 1903
by Ruth Richmond

Grandmother **Lucy Jane Blasdel**'s family was among the early settlers in the Ohio Valley. I recall a story that Daddy, **Oscar Richmond**, heard his grandmother, **Eliza (Hampson) Blasdel**, tell of one cold winter day when his father, **William Alexander Richmond**, was out hunting. He came across an Indian camp. Thinking to warm up to the fire, he stopped in, but found only one very old woman there.

Befriending Indian Neighbors

The rest of the Indians had gone hunting and were delayed returning, and she had run out of firewood. She was too old and feeble to get more, and was nearly frozen.

He got more wood, built her a fire, and had the old woman comfortable by the time the rest of the Indians got back.

They were so thankful that he had saved the old woman's life (likely their grandmother) that nothing would do but that he must stay until they could cook some of the game they'd killed; he must eat with them.

A Panther Came a Calling

Grandmother Lucy Jane (Blasdel) Richmond told this tale of her mother in Indiana. The young folks of the neighborhood had gathered at a house for an evening of fun, games and visiting. The home was a log cabin with only a woven rug carpet hung in the doorway to keep out the cold.

As the young people visited out in the yard after dark, they heard a panther scream out in the woods. One of the young fellows boasted that he could imitate the creature, which he did. He and the panther kept calling back and forth, answering each other, and the animal kept sounding closer until presently it leaped upon the rail fence around the yard and let out a yell.

The whole group piled back into the house and kept very quiet until the panther went away. I'll bet that rag carpet door looked awfully thin just then!

Hard Times in the 1890s

Daddy [Oscar Richmond] Aunt **Sarah**, and their brothers and sisters, **Thomas Edwin Richmond**, **Gladie Grace Richmond**, **Walter Alexander Richmond**, **Annie Ruth Richmond** and **Mae Richmond**, grew up during a spell of hard times that made the Great Depression look like a picnic. This period was known as "The Panic of 1893." There was no Federal, State or County welfare.

When no wages were coming in, and there was no other means of keeping food in the children's mouths, someone had to go see a member of the town board, and Daddy [Oscar] was sent by Grandmother Lucy Jane Blasdel.

He had to stand and answer questions about the family while the man looked at him as if he were something that shouldn't have crawled out from under the carpet. Then the man made out an order for \$5 for a month's groceries, not \$5 per person, but \$5 per family. There were eventually nine children, eight of whom lived to grow up. One wonders, "How did they manage?"

Surviving on Very Little

But grandmother, Lucy Jane Blasdel, managed the best she could. She raised a garden and chickens to help out when she was where she could. Their Christmas trees were cut from a bush that had little red berries on it, so they needed little trimming, and if grandfather, William Alexander Richmond, was working, there might be a little candy for the children.

Daddy said she always managed to put something on the table for them every day, though sometimes there was little more than a pancake apiece, or a little bread with salted lard for butter. Many a day Oscar sat in school with his mind on his stomach instead of his lessons.

Working From Kin See to Can't See

A day's wages, when work was to be had, was from 50 cents to 75 cents, sometimes \$1.00 during harvest time. Grandfather William Alexander Richmond often walked 4 or 5 miles to and from work, and 10 or 12 hour days were usual. In piece work, like cutting wood for a certain price per cord, he'd be on the job as early as he could see to work, and worked as long as he could see. As they say down here, "From kin see to can't see."

The older boys had to quit school early and help when there was work that they could do. Oscar Richmond was 12 when he quit to help Grandfather and Tom, 18 and the oldest son, cut cord wood.

Cutting Cord Wood

Oscar couldn't stand the long hours of chopping and sawing and splitting like a man, but he could pile brush, which had to be burned before full pay was collected, thereby leaving Grandfather and Tom free to cut more cord wood, so that the three of them could take more money home than two alone, even though the third one was only a boy.

Daddy said that his father moved "every change of the moon." Being a day laborer, he naturally moved when and where he heard of work. And no matter what grade you told your new teacher you were in, you were automatically set back one grade, so it was hard to get ahead, even if your mind was more on

lessons than an empty stomach. Daddy got to only about third or fourth grade by the time he had to quit.

Planting Corn by Hand

I don't know how far Aunt Sarah got. The girls may have been able to go farther, for there wasn't much work a girl could get. One job Dad mentioned by which Aunt Grace was able to earn a few cents – for cloth for a dress – was planting corn.

The corn planter (if you could call it that!) was a machine pulled behind a team of horses, which had runners like sleds to leave tracks at the proper width apart for corn rows. The farmer drove back and forth across his field until it was all marked for rows.

Then he drove across it in the opposite direction, and as it crossed the previous tracks, at each intersection someone riding on it dropped the proper number of kernels of corn. Grace was good at the job and was in demand at corn planting time in the neighborhood.

Ruth Richmond *From: Oscar Riturn Richmond, Lucy Jane (Blasdel) Richmond, Reuben Sutton Blasdel, Isaac Newton Blasdel, Enoch Blasdel – (6.228)*