

The Legend Of House Springs

BY
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By

Della Lang

Dedicated to the children of Jefferson County, who enjoy learning about local history.

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Third Printing 1994

Revised edition 1995

Fifth Printing 1996

Sixth Printing 1998

Reformatted 2023

Art by Ella Lancaster

Foreword

In the spring of 1800, two members of the House family were killed by the Osage Indians. This is the story of a pioneer family who dared to explore the untamed land in what is now called Missouri; a family who labored to carve a settlement out of this vast wilderness only to have it taken away.

This is a tale of courage and adventure as well as happiness and heartache. The story, based on some actual events, has become a legend in Jefferson County, Missouri.

The Legend of House Springs

Adam House had been a soldier in the Revolutionary War. After the war ended, he settled in the Commonwealth of Virginia, planning to spend the rest of his life there. But when Upper Louisiana came under the control of Spain, the Spanish government began offering large land grants to anyone willing to settle the new frontier wilderness. Adam, who had an adventurous spirit, could not resist the temptation.

In 1789 the House family packed their belongings and headed northwest, toward what is now the state of Missouri. For protection they traveled in a wagon train with many other pioneer families. The pioneers were well aware of the problems they could encounter along the way. They were heading into Indian territory and it was much safer to travel in groups.

When the family arrived in New Madrid, they were forced to pledge allegiance to the King of Spain before receiving a land grant. Loyalty to the King also meant swearing allegiance to the Catholic Church. Spanish law required all newcomers who settled in the territory to profess the Catholic faith. But many of the pioneers, including Adam House, were actually Protestants who only pretended to be Catholic. The newcomers were given a simple test on Christian doctrine and declared "good Catholics."

From New Madrid, the House family traveled on to St. Ferdinand - now called Florissant - where they lived for the next six years.

Anna and the children thought they had settled in to stay, but Adam had other plans. Living in an established settlement didn't satisfy him. His dream was to open a new settlement in the wilderness. After all, that's why he had left Virginia.

One day Adam rode over to Robert Owens' place to have a new pair of shoes made for his youngest son, Jacob. Owens was a shoemaker by trade but spent most of his time farming these days.

While they were visiting, Owens told Adam about a place that had been abandoned by the owner. The land was situated in a lovely valley between two high ridges. Water was plentiful; the land had a natural spring, a creek, and a branch of the Meramec River - now called the Big River - flowing nearby. It sounded too good to be true. It was just what Adam had dreamed of owning.

But Owens warned Adam that the place was isolated. Unlike St. Ferdinand, there were no large settlements in the area and there would be no protection from the Indians.

Adam didn't take Mr. Owens' warning seriously because he had already heard the horror stories about the Hildebrand family. Adam knew that Mrs. Owen's first husband, Peter Hildebrand, had been killed by Indians at a place called Cedar Hill, on the same river. But that happened back in 1784 and this was eleven years later. Adam was sure that the Indians had become more civilized by now.

Anna and the children tried their best to talk Adam out of this move, but he was a stubborn man. The family had been perfectly content living at the settlement and Anna was not looking forward to starting over again.

Adam and Anna were the parents of seven children. Drucilla, the oldest daughter, married Hardy Ware while they were living at the settlement. Two other daughters, Margaret and Mary, who were no longer minors, chose to stay with Drucilla at St. Ferdinand. Adam was sure the Hildebrand boys had frightened the girls with their silly stories of Indians lurking behind every tree, but he accepted their decision to stay with Drucilla.

Fourteen year-old John and ten year-old Jacob, who had inherited their father's zest for adventure, were looking forward to the trip. However, fifteen year-old Betsy and eight year-old Peggy were feeling very apprehensive about the move.

Saying goodbye to their family was very difficult for the three girls who were staying behind. They wondered if they would ever see their loved ones again.



Chapter II

The House family followed an old Indian trail, which Owens had said would lead them directly to their new home.

Long before the white man arrived, this land was claimed by the Osage Indians. Although the tribe never settled permanently in what is now known as Jefferson County, they spent a lot of time hunting and fishing in the area. The Osage passed through often, camping for weeks or months on land near the river.

The Osage was one of the first Indian nations to trade with the Frenchmen at St. Louis, yet the tribe never changed their ways. They had a reputation for being more savage-like than other tribes such as the Shawnee or the Delaware, who had managed to co-exist with the white man in other parts of Louisiana. But Adam didn't believe this, or was just stubborn enough to think that nothing would happen to him.

The Osage had been killing or scaring off white settlers for many years. The Indians believed that the fields and forests were community property. They didn't understand private ownership of land and were outraged at the gradual destruction of their hunting grounds by intruders.

When the House family finally arrived in Jefferson County, they expected to find the cabin that had been abandoned by the former owner, but instead they found a large pile of ashes and the remains of what had once been a rock fireplace.

Anna was ready to turn around immediately and go back to St. Ferdinand, but Adam quickly calmed her fears with promises of a good life and the beginning of a new settlement. He assured her that once other colonists heard of their good fortune, more families would follow their lead.

As they explored their new property, they found a lovely spring flowing out of the hillside, a grove of sugar maples, and rich virgin soil, which Adam said would certainly produce a hardy supply of crops next year. He was pleased to see that some of the land had been cleared by the previous owner.

It was too late to plant crops this year but Adam had the forethought to bring enough provisions to take them through the long winter ahead. Adam not only brought supplies, but also brought a few head of cattle and a cow to provide milk for the children.

Adam and the boys repaired the broken fences and immediately began the chore of cutting down trees and hewing logs for their cabin. The house would only have one room this year, but Adam promised to add another by next year. At the moment, it was more important to provide a shelter.

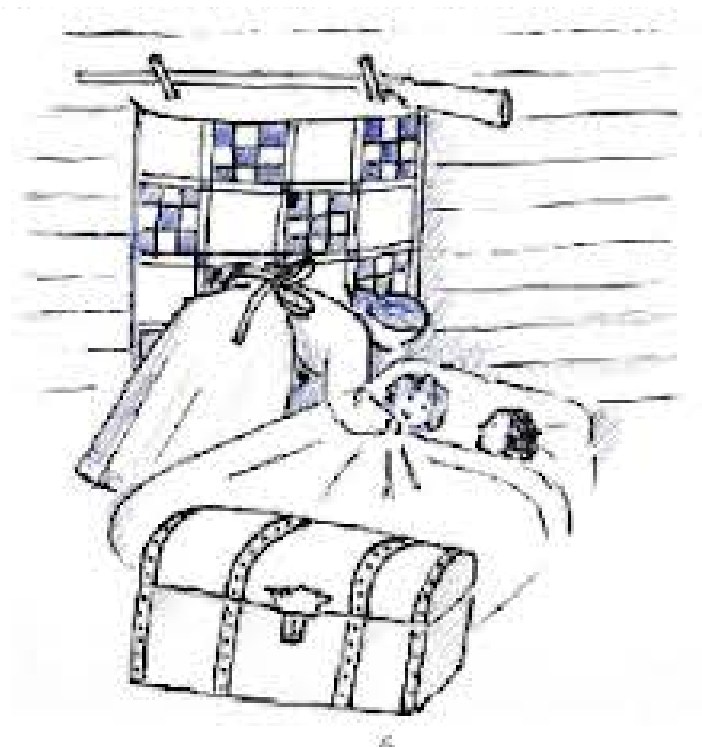
Until the cabin was ready, the family camped outdoors and Anna cooked over an open fire. The children thought it was fun, but their mother worried that the house wouldn't be ready by the time the cold weather arrived.

While Adam and his sons worked at their projects, Anna and the girls gathered stones for the fireplace and chimney. They also searched for wild berries and other edible plants to bolster their food supply. They were pleased to find that sassafras was plentiful. They could make tea from the roots.

When they weren't busy gathering rocks, Betsy and Peggy enjoyed exploring their new property. They always returned to the campsite full of excitement about the beautiful wildflowers they had seen or the wild game they had spotted. They were thrilled to see crawdads swimming in the creek and fish jumping in the river.

Hearing their stories made Adam and the boys wish they had time to go hunting and fishing, but that would have to come later. There was still much work to be done before winter. When they finished the cabin they would have to build a leanto to protect the animals from the harsh winter weather.

Three long months from the day they arrived, the House family moved into their new cabin.



Chapter III

The winter of 1798-99 was miserably cold and wet. It was nearly impossible to keep the cabin warm. When the wind blew across the valley, snow drifted through the crevices in the walls. Anna reluctantly hung her lovely patchwork quilts on the walls for insulation and secretly wished she were back in Virginia.

Christmas Eve came and went without much revelry. The next day Adam read the Christmas story from his worn bible and the family joined together to sing a few hymns. Everyone was trying hard to make it an enjoyable day. Although no one mentioned it, they missed going to Bible Meetings and visiting with friends and relatives.

But dinner was special. Anna cooked the wild turkey, which John had so proudly brought home the day before. The large fowl was stuffed full of Anna's mouth-watering johnny cake dressing.

After dinner Adam presented each member of the family with a gift. Anna received a hand-carved wooden spoon; Betsy and Peggy each got a story book, which Adam had purchased last year in St. Louis; and Jacob, the eleven year-old, received a sling shot.

John wondered anxiously what kind of gift he would get from his father. But Adam, who loved to tease the children, abruptly announced that the gift giving had ended. The family exchanged quick glances of bewilderment as John tried to hide his disappointment. He was terribly hurt. How could his father forget him?

Adam got up from his chair and slowly crossed the room to the wall beside the fireplace. He reached up and gently removed his favorite Kentucky rifle from its prominent spot on the gun rack. Turning to face John, he said, "Merry Christmas, son," as he handed the gun to John.

John was shocked and speechless. He had never been allowed to touch the rifle. Adam had four guns but this one had always been special. It was his pride and joy.

"Sit down," said Adam, "we need to talk." John was again surprised. His father was generally a man of few words.

He pulled up a chair next to his father and seated himself, carefully laying the long muzzle loading flintlock across his lap.

"With this gun comes responsibility," Adam began. "You already know how to handle a gun, clean a gun, and you're a danged good shot. But until now it's always been just a sport with you. You're a man now," said Adam. "From now on it's up to you to put the meat on the table."

John nodded his understanding, as he jumped up and hugged his father around the neck. Adam gently pushed his son away. "None of this, John. You're a man now."

Like most frontier men, Adam had a difficult time showing emotion. To him that was a sign of weakness. Only womenfolk were allowed to express their feelings.

Chapter IV

Anna awoke with a terrible cough. She sent John to fetch a kettle of water from the spring. Betsy hung the kettle over the fire and dropped dried boneset and peppermint leaves into the water. Boneset was a wildflower used for medicinal purposes, which grew in Virginia. Anna believed so strongly in its healing powers that she carried a large bag of the dried leaves with her when the family came west.

Betsy poured the hot liquid into a cup for her mother to drink. Anna swallowed the mixture and fell asleep.

In the following days, Anna showed no improvement. This time her miracle drug wasn't working. She grew weaker each day. Adam never left her side. He gently sponged her brow with cool water when her fever soared, and offered her sips of warm sassafras tea to soothe her aching throat.

John and Jacob felt so helpless. What could they do? John finally decided the best thing they could do for the family was to go hunting.

As they left the cabin, the boys parted company - each going in opposite directions. Jacob walked toward the creek and John went to the river.

Jacob thought it was about time he tried out his Christmas present, so he filled his pockets with small rocks. He practiced aiming and shooting at a spot on the hillside. Before long he was hitting his mark at least half of the time.

Suddenly, a rabbit darted out of the weeds and stopped less than twenty feet in front of him. Without thinking, Jacob drew back the sling and took careful aim. The rock hit the animal and it fell to the ground, lifeless.

Jacob was shocked. He really hadn't expected to hit the rabbit. He had never killed an animal before and it bothered him. As he looked at his sling-shot, he realized it was no longer a toy. It was a dangerous weapon.

He picked up the rabbit and headed toward the cabin. He knew the family would be proud of him, but he certainly didn't feel like a hero.

When Jacob returned home and showed his family the rabbit, he caught a glimpse of a fainthearted smile on his mother's face. Seeing her look of approval made Jacob feel better.

Betsy decided to make rabbit stew for dinner. Mother would like that; it was one of her favorite dishes. Although Betsy and Peggy had been helping with meals as long as they could remember, this would be the first time they prepared a meal alone.

After dinner Adam complimented the girls on the fine bowl of stew, as John asked for a second helping. Betsy was pleased that they seemed to enjoy her cooking, but she had made the stew for her mother, and Anna had only taken a few bites. No one even noticed that Jacob had barely touched his dinner. Killing the rabbit had also killed his appetite.

Anna died a few days later, and was buried in a simple grave near her favorite cedar tree. There was no preacher to offer comforting words and there were no friends or relatives to offer love and compassion. The House family was completely alone in their grief.

Chapter V

The trees were budding and the ground was beginning to warm. To farmers, that meant it was time to get ready for plowing and planting. But before Adam could carry on with his regular chores, he knew he would have to make a trip to St. Ferdinand. His three older daughters had yet to learn of their mother's death. Besides, it would be good for the younger children to see their sisters.

"Children, how would you like to go visit your sisters?" Adam asked unexpectedly. As soon as he asked the question, the girls began to squeal with excitement. Betsy grabbed Peggy and swung her around and around the room. When she let go, Peggy staggered and fell to the floor giggling. Soon the boys joined their silliness by turning somersaults on the floor.

Adam couldn't keep from laughing at their antics. It was good to see them acting like children again. Living in the wilderness without the companionship of other children had made them grow up too fast. Adam was glad to see the carefree innocence of childhood surface once again.

"All right," said Adam still laughing. "I guess that means you want to go with me. Let's git going! We need to git some supplies packed up. We'll be leaving at daybreak."

The children were awake and ready to go by sunrise. They were all too excited to sleep much. John helped Adam hitch the team to the cart as others loaded provisions for the long trip.

The trip was like a vacation for the children. They sang songs and told stories as they traveled the narrow northern trail to St. Ferdinand. It was a long trip, but keeping their minds occupied made the time pass quickly.

As they turned into the settlement, they spotted Isaac and David Hildebrand. The boys were happy to see the House family alive and well.

Word spread fast in the settlement and soon everyone was coming outside to greet the visitors. Drucilla, Margaret and Mary ran from the cabin with their aprons flying, but stopped in their tracks when they noticed their mother was missing from the group.

Although the girls were heartbroken at the news of their mother's death, they were relieved to learn that she died a natural death - that she hadn't been killed by Indians. Adam quickly assured his daughters that they hadn't seen an Indian since they moved to Big River.

After they caught up on the latest news, Drucilla suggested they throw a small party in honor of their visitors. Adam explained that he had to return to his farm in a few days, but his daughter soon convinced him to stay on until the weekend.

For two days the girls cooked, baked bread and otherwise prepared for the party. There seemed to be a lot of whispering and giggling going on and Adam was beginning to get a little suspicious.

On Friday night, Isaac Hilderbrand came to call. He asked Adam if they could take a walk together. Adam assumed Isaac was going to start talking about the Indians again - to try to convince him to move back to the settlement. But as they walked along the edge of the woods, Isaac began to stammer and stutter. Adam realized that Isaac was making a lot of small talk about nothing in particular. Adam finally broke the ice. "Is there something you want to tell me, Isaac?"

"Well sir...uh ...no...not really tell you," he said, still stammering. "I'd like to...uh...ask you something...sir."

"Well then ask!" said Adam impatiently. "Sirrr...I'd like to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage," he finally blurted out.

"Oh!" said Adam, sounding more amused than surprised. "May I ask which daughter you plan to marry?"

"Yes sir, it's Margaret, sir," he quickly answered. Adam smiled. "You have my blessing, Isaac."

Now can we get back to the cabin? My feet are hurting!"

When they arrived back at the cabin, everyone was waiting to see Adam's reaction to the news. He gave Margaret a quick hug as everyone relaxed and applauded.

"When's the big day?" Adam asked.

"Not until next year," answered Margaret. "We won't have enough money until Isaac sells this year's crop. Besides, I need time to sew a new dress and make us some quilts. And, of course Isaac will have to build us a cabin."

"Good! That means we'll be back in time for the wedding."

It was a wonderful engagement party. Robert Owens and John Brindly played their fiddles while everyone danced in a big circle. Adam didn't join the dancers, but he tapped his foot to the music when he saw his children having a good time.

Adam was glad he decided to stay for the party. Betsy, John, Jacob and Peggy were dancing and visiting with children close to their own ages. Adam thought about Anna and how much she would-have enjoyed the party.

When they returned to Big River, the boys helped Adam in the fields, while the girls cooked and cleaned up after the menfolk. But it wasn't enough to keep Betsy's mind occupied. The house was so quiet without Mother. Betsy thought about the things they used to do together. She missed her so much.

Suddenly, Betsy remembered that her mother had been working on a quilt before she became ill. Maybe she and Peggy could finish it and give it to Margaret for a wedding present.

No one has opened Mother's trunk since she died, thought Betsy. As she lifted the heavy lid, she saw the lovely linen tablecloth they had used on Christmas Day. Grandmother Wheat had brought it with her from England. Mother only used it on special occasions. Neatly folded under the tablecloth was the quilt she had been working on. Betsy held the quilt close to her heart. For a few moments, she felt close to her mother again.

Betsy was very good with a needle. She had learned to sew at the age of six. But eight year-old Peggy was still in the process of learning. Her stitches were much too large and crooked. Betsy would pick out her stitches and do it over again when Peggy wasn't around. She knew that's what her mother had done when she was learning to sew.

Adam had no idea the girls had been working on the quilt. They only worked on it when their father was in the fields. The girls were afraid that seeing Mother's quilt would upset him.

When the quilt was all finished, they decided to show Adam their handiwork. Tears came to his eyes when he saw what the girls had done. It was the first sign of emotion their father had shown since their mother died.

Adam hugged both girls. "Your mother would be so proud of you," he said. "And so am I."



Chapter VI

Jacob came running into the house. "Father, someone's coming! I heard horses off in the distance."

"Can you tell who it is?" asked Adam.

"No, they were too far away. I only know it was more than one horse."

"Don't worry, children, Injuns wouldn't be on horseback. We're getting company," he assured them. "Betsy, git the cook pot goin'; we must feed our guests."

As the riders got closer, Adam could see that it was their new friend, John Brown. The House family had stayed at the Brown homestead on the way to Big River. The two families had become friendly and promised to keep in touch.

Adam and the children went outside to greet Mr. Brown and his son, Jeremiah. John and Jacob were thrilled to see someone close to their own age. Jeremiah was thirteen. They would enjoy his visit.

Betsy and Peggy prepared the meal as the two men sat at the table catching up on the latest news. Meanwhile, the three boys were romping outside.

Sometimes Peggy wished she were a boy so she could be outside playing hoops instead of helping Betsy prepare the meals.

Hoops was a popular game among the pioneer children. All that was needed was a wooden barrel hoop and a good stick. The object of the game was to see who could keep the hoop rolling the longest, by using only the stick. No hands allowed.

Betsy hadn't meant to eavesdrop, but she couldn't help noticing the intense conversation between her father and Mr. Brown. She wondered if there was a problem.

She edged closer to the men to overhear some of their discussion, but when Adam noticed Betsy standing nearby, they quickly changed the subject.

Just then, the boys came bounding in the door. Their hoops game had given them a good appetite, so Peggy set out the dishes and Betsy carried the steaming kettle to the table.

After dinner, Betsy and Peggy washed the dishes and then shoved the table against the wall. They'd need the extra space for sleeping. They spread featherbeds on the floor for the three boys. Mr. Brown would bunk in the boys' bed.

As she put out the lanterns and got ready for bed, Betsy was saddened at the thought of the guests leaving in the morning. She wished they had more company. It would help to ease the loneliness.

In the morning Betsy cooked a hearty breakfast for their visitors. It wouldn't do to send them on the trail with empty stomachs. She grinned as she remembered those very words spoken by her mother a few years ago.

As they said farewell to their guests, Betsy noticed a worried glance between her father and Mr. Brown. Later, Betsy questioned her father about the incident, but Adam denied that there were any problems. He assured her that there was nothing to worry about and accused her of having a wild imagination. Betsy dropped the subject.

Chapter VII

It had been an unusually long winter, or so it seemed to the House family. They were all looking forward to the trip to St. Ferdinand for Margaret's wedding.

John awoke early one morning and left the cabin to go hunting. It was an especially warm day for February, so he walked nonchalantly toward the river, a good distance from the house. He was in no hurry today.

He sat on the river bank picking up rocks and skimming them across the water. He liked to watch the circles grow larger and larger and then suddenly disappear. He felt lazy today. He really didn't want to go hunting. Now that it was something he had to do, it wasn't nearly as much fun.

John was beginning to agree with Betsy. It was lonely in the wilderness with no one to talk to but the birds and animals. He sometimes wished they could move back to the settlement.

John got up and walked along the river bank toward the west. Abruptly, he stopped in his tracks. He saw smoke rising toward the sky. That could mean only one thing: Indians. Once before he had heard some Indians off in the distance, but never this close.

He quickly turned and ran back to the cabin. He had to warn his father and get prepared to defend the family. He knew they were in danger and he was frightened.

When he reached the cabin, John ran into his father who was coming out the door. John was so breathless he could barely talk. "Settle down, son. What's wrong?" asked Adam.

"In...dians...down by...the river," gasped John. "Now John, don't git so excited. They may only be passing through on their way to the village. But we'd best be prepared - just in case. We can't be too careful."

"Go to the shed and fetch the case of gun powder," ordered Adam. "I'll start loading the rifles."

Adam assigned each child to a specific job. When everything was ready, they sat quietly, waiting and watching. Although no one was ready to admit it, they were all expecting the worst.

Several hours passed before John spotted some movement in the woods beyond the house. "They're here, Father. There's two of them," he whispered nervously. "Now they're coming toward the house."

"Hold your fire!" Adam whispered, "I think they want to talk."

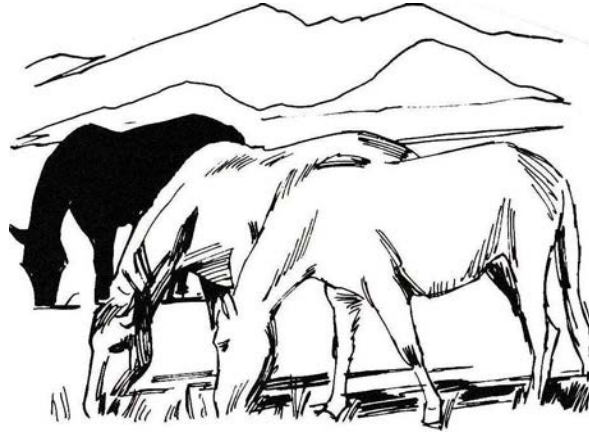
He opened the door and slowly walked toward the Indians. John and Jacob had him covered from inside the house.

Adam didn't understand the language of the Red Man and the Indians only knew a few words of English, but Adam quickly concluded from their gestures that they wanted his horses. He kept telling them that the horses weren't for sale, but he was sure they didn't understand a word he was saying.

The two young braves turned and started walking toward the horses in the corral. Adam followed them, raising his gun and pointing it directly at their heads. That, he thought, was the only language he knew that these people could understand. Adam ordered the Indians off his land. They turned immediately and walked away, muttering what seemed to be angry words.

Adam returned to the house, glancing over his shoulder to make sure they had gone.

"We'll have to be on guard every minute," he cautioned the children. "I have a hunch they'll be back."



Chapter VIII

At dusk John heard sounds coming from the corral. By the time Adam grabbed his gun and got to the door, the Indians were heading toward the northern trail on his horses. Adam fired a few shots in their direction, but he knew he couldn't hit anything more than a hundred yards away.

Adam was angry. They had stolen his only horses. It wouldn't do any good to chase them on foot. He'd wait until daylight and trail them to St. Louis. He thought he could probably borrow a horse from one of the settlers on the Meramec.

"Betsy, pack up some grub and a blanket. I'll be gone a few days."

By sunrise, Adam was on the trail to St. Louis. He arrived at the Meramec Settlement before noon. Mr. Tyler, who ran the salt mine, was very accommodating. He not only offered Adam the use of a horse, but he suggested that Adam wait until the following day and he would accompany him to St. Louis. He explained that it would be dangerous to travel alone at this time.

Adam agreed to spend the night at the Tyler settlement, and before daybreak the two men were on their way to St. Louis.

When they arrived at the government house on the Mississippi River, they asked to see the man in charge. They would tell their story to the Lieutenant-Governor and he

would surely have the Indians arrested. After all, he was the man who made the laws of the territory. He was also the judge and jury.

But Don Carlos Delassus (De-la-su) was not as cooperative as Adam had hoped he would be. "If we lock these Indians in jail, the rest of the tribe will go on the warpath, Mr. House. We don't need any more Indian trouble. But I will get your horses and return them to you. Will that be a satisfactory solution for you?" he asked.

"No!" said Adam. "That is not satisfactory. I want these Injuns locked up until they learn to obey the laws. I've heard they are raiding settlements all over the territory. We must put an end to it," demanded Adam.

"All right, Mr. House, I will put the braves in jail but I'm warning you, it will cause you more trouble," said Delassus. "And I do not have enough soldiers to protect the entire upper territory.

Once the Indians were locked inside the government house, Adam and Tyler headed back toward the Meramec with Adam's horses. On the trail, the two men discussed the possibility of forming their own civilian militia. They needed to protect their own lives and property and that of the other nearby settlers. They could see that they would get no help from the militia at St. Louis.

The two men parted company at the river, but agreed to meet again soon to discuss this matter. Meanwhile, Tyler agreed to speak to other settlers along the Meramec.

Chapter IX

The children were relieved to see Adam coming over the hill. They ran happily to greet him. Although he had only been gone a few days, to the children it seemed a lifetime.

John and Jacob had barely slept a wink since their father left. They were worried that the Indians would return. Betsy had passed the time worrying about her father on the trail alone...and Peggy...Peggy simply worried because everyone else worried. But now Adam was home and everyone could relax.



The children were happy to see their father.

As soon as he got the opportunity, Adam pulled John aside and warned him to be extra careful. "I don't expect anymore trouble," he explained, "but you just can't trust these savages."

It was time to gather the sap from the maple trees. The children were excited about this new project and Adam was happy to have some way to keep their minds off of the Indian trouble. They tapped several trees and Jacob and Peggy stayed busy emptying the sticky sap from the troughs.

Meanwhile, John and Adam prepared the framework for the kettle. They suspended the kettle from a pole supported by forked sticks at each end. This held the kettle away from the fire so the sap wouldn't burn.

All of the children took turns stirring the sap until it cooked down to a thick dark syrup. The syrup was then poured into small crocks for storage.

Adam decided to cook the next pot longer - until it turned to sugar. The sugary substance was placed in shallow pans and left to dry. Later, it would be cut into pieces and used to sweeten their tea.

Cooking the syrup and smelling the sweet aroma gave everyone a good appetite. The children couldn't keep their fingers out of the pans, so Betsy made a large skillet of johnny cake to go with the maple syrup.

The children had so much fun making and eating the sticky syrup that they completely forgot about the Indian trouble.



Peggy gathered sap from the Maple trees.

Chapter X

The following day, John and Adam began plowing the field and preparing the spot for the vegetable garden. Soon it would be time to plant. Spring had arrived early this year.

Adam got into the habit of looking over his shoulder quite often. He hadn't forgotten about the Indians. He didn't trust them at all. Tyler had warned him that the Osages might seek revenge for having their braves arrested. Adam had a bad feeling that something was going to happen.

For several weeks Adam had kept the children close by at all times. John was no longer allowed to go hunting, and Adam made lame excuses to keep the youngsters busy inside or near the cabin.

One day Adam gave John permission to go to the spring to get some water. As John was filling the pail, an unusual sound caught his attention. He had keen ears. Hunting had trained him to become attuned to the slightest sound. Instinctively, he knew it was the sound of Indians coming from the direction of the river. He ran back to the cabin, spilling the water along the way.

"Father, the Indians are coming. And I'm afraid there's a lot more of them this time," he said breathlessly.

Adam knew they wouldn't stand a chance against a large number of Indians - not unless they had help.

"John, I want you to go to the Meramec Settlement to get some help. Don't take a horse; they could trail you. Go on foot and take Jacob with you."

"I want you girls to head north as fast as you can. Go toward St. Ferdinand. There are other settlements along the way. Send someone back to help me. I'll hold the Indians off."

"Jacob will only slow me down, Father. Let me go alone," John begged. "Besides, you need someone to help you load the rifles."

There was no time to argue. "All right!" yelled Adam. "Just go! But stay in the woods - off the regular trail."

John took his rifle and a small amount of ammunition. The girls grabbed some food and wrapped it in a blanket. They would be on the trail longer than John.

Adam knew that John would reach a settlement long before the girls, but he wanted to make sure the girls were safe. He felt sure they would be safe on the northern trail. They would not be safe at home.

Chapter XI

Betsy warned her sister not to make a sound until they were far away from the cabin. Peggy nodded obediently as tears of terror streamed down her chubby cheeks.

Adam had taught the girls how to tell direction by the sun and the stars, so Betsy wasn't concerned about getting lost. She was sure they'd find a settlement and get some help.

Betsy knew her biggest challenge would be to keep Peggy moving, so she held her hand tightly and pulled her along the narrow path.

They had been on the trail for several hours before Peggy began to stumble and fall. The child was exhausted. Betsy decided it would be safe to stop and rest for a while.

She spread the blanket under a tree and told Peggy to lie down and rest. Betsy held her little sister, stroking her hair until she fell asleep.

Betsy was also tired, but she couldn't rest. She had too much on her mind. She was worried about her brothers and her father. She wondered if John had reached the settlement for help.

Suddenly, she became angry. She blamed her father for their problems. "If he hadn't brought us to this God-forsaken wilderness, we wouldn't be in this predicament right now!" she said aloud.

Betsy got up and wandered around the woods. She had walked several hundred yards when she heard some unusual sounds from the valley below. Slowly, she edged her way to the side of the hill and peered around a vantage point behind a large rock. She was horrified to see two Indians walking below her.

Her eyes quickly scanned the surrounding valley, but she saw nothing else. Slowly and quietly, she backed away from the rock and hurried to her sister's side. She didn't want to frighten her but she had to make sure that Peggy didn't make a sound.

Betsy placed her hand tightly over her sister's mouth as she motioned toward the hill. Peggy understood that they were in danger. Betsy picked up their belongings and scattered fresh leaves on top of the flattened leaves under the tree. They had to cover their tracks because they had heard that the Indians were very clever.

The girls moved away from the path, deep into the woods. Betsy warned Peggy not to make a sound. They sat quietly for over an hour before they heard the sounds of dried leaves crunching underfoot. The girls were afraid to breathe until the Indians were completely out of sight.

Just when they thought it was safe to move on, they heard the sound of rustling leaves once again. "The Indians must have spotted us and doubled back," whispered Betsy.

Once again the girls sat quietly...waiting...and watching. The sounds were coming closer and closer. Betsy knew they were about to be captured. She held her sister close as they waited for the Indians to appear.

Suddenly, a deer leaped out from behind a bush and crossed directly in front of them. Betsy and Peggy began to laugh and cry at the same time.

Chapter XII

John was making good time. He had already crossed two creeks and was now following the Saline Creek. According to his father's directions, this creek should take him directly to the Tyler settlement. He'd be there soon.

John hoped and prayed that his sisters were safe. He worried about them being on the trail alone, but he knew his father was right to send them away.

John's legs were getting tired. He hadn't stopped to rest since he left home. His leg muscles began to cramp and his wet shoes felt as though they were made of lead, but he knew he had to keep going. He had to get help for his father.

Suddenly he tripped on a vine and went crashing to the ground. The rifle slipped from his hand and struck a rock. The rifle fired, hitting John in the upper arm.

For a few moments, John was so stunned that he didn't realize that he'd been shot. When he saw the blood, he got angry at himself. How could he be so careless when his father was depending on him?

John knew it was only a flesh wound but he had to stop the bleeding. Loss of blood could make him too weak to finish his journey. He quickly ripped a strip off the bottom of his shirt and tied it around his upper arm above the wound. He hoped that would work until he got to the settlement.

He got up from the ground and started to run. He had wasted far too much time. He had to hurry. His father and brother were counting on him. Hurry... Hurry....



John stumbled and dropped his gun.

Chapter XIII

He slowly opened his eyes and saw a strange woman standing over him. He was in a bed in an unfamiliar room. "Where am I? How did I get here?" he asked.

"Now you just rest, young man. You've done enough walking and talking for today," she scolded. The well-meaning woman was carefully wrapping John's arm. "What happened to my arm? Why are you wrapping it?" he asked, sounding confused.

"I'm Mrs. Tyler, John. You had an accident not far from here."

Suddenly it all came back. "Father...Jacob... the girls! I must get up. They need help!"

The lady gently pushed him back into bed. "John House, you stay put in that bed. You lost a lot of blood. You need to rest."

"But I must get back to the cabin. My family needs help," he argued.

"Help is on the way, John," she said tenderly. "My husband and some neighbors are on the way to Big River to help your father. They should be there by now. You collapsed in the field, but not before you told the whole story to Mr. Tyler," she continued. "One of our boys has gone to Carondelet to alert the militia. They should be passing by soon."

The news made John feel better, so he settled back and relaxed. He accepted a bowl of warm soup from the kind lady and fell asleep.

He awoke at the sound of voices outside the door. Mr. Tyler had returned. John climbed out of bed and made his way to the door. He was still shaky.

"Sit down, John," said Mr. Tyler. John could tell by the look on the man's face that he had bad news.

"It was too late by the time we got to the cabin, son. Both your father and your brother were killed by the Indians. They must have attacked soon after you left. They were gone by the time we arrived. There was nothing we could do. I'm so sorry, John." John started to cry. He knew men were not supposed to cry, but he couldn't hold back the flood of tears. He cried for his family and he cried for himself. Losing Mother last year had been very hard on the children, but this was devastating.

Mr. Tyler explained that the militia was on its way to the cabin. "They will see to it that Jacob and your father have a proper burial."

"You are more than welcome to stay with us as long as you'd like, John," said Mrs. Tyler.

"Thank you, ma' am. That's very kind of you, but I must be on my way to find my sisters," he answered.

"Mr. Tyler, did the Indians take our horses? What happened to the other animals?"

"They stole the horses, son, and they killed the other animals."

"Those savages!" John cried in anger. "My father was right. They are nothing but savages!"

After reconsidering, John decided to spend a few days with the Tylers before heading north in search of his sisters. He was certain they had found a family to stay with. And he knew he needed more rest.

Chapter XIV

A few days later, on March 25, 1800, Ensign Pascal Cerre' and some of his men stopped at the Tyler settlement on the way to Big River. They had been sent by Lieutenant-Governor Delassus to investigate the murders of Adam House and his son.

The Ensign questioned John and Mr. Tyler. They told him all they knew about the Indian attack.

John asked the officer for permission to ride out to the cabin with him. The Ensign agreed that it might be a good idea for John to accompany them to his homestead.

When they reached the cabin, John recognized some familiar faces. Robert Owens and his step-son, Isaac, were there. "John," they shouted. "We've been looking everywhere for you. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Mr. Owens," answered John, "but Father and Jacob are dead."

"I know, John. We saw the graves. But your sisters are safe," he continued. "They've been staying with us. We want you to come and live with us, too."

When the Ensign realized that the House children had no one to take care of them, he agreed to appoint Robert Owens as their legal guardian.

John was sullen as he went about the final chore of packing up the few remaining personal items that had not been destroyed by the Indians.

Then he climbed aboard the wagon with Isaac and Mr. Owens. They turned the team around and headed for the northern trail.

John turned his head and glanced over his shoulder for one last look at the bubbling spring that his father had loved so much.

"Don't look back, John," said Mr. Owens. "It never does any good to look back."

