

An old hoot-owl away off started with a "who whoo- oa". A Another from the other side answered him. We listened in silence as they got closer and closer as the cold chills ran up and down out backs. They were joined by others until there was a chorus. We tried to say something funny as we listened, in an effort to keep up our courage.

Then there was sort of lull in the hooting for a moment when all of a sudden from the top of a tall hickory tree overhead there was a blood-curdling shrill scream! A bolt of lightning could not have frightened us more. It was one of the owls playing, what to us was a new roll. We soon knew what it was though, for he followed it with a couple of short "ho ho's". Nevertheless we called it a day and all climbed in the wagon and covered up for the night.

In this new job I would be assisting in the survey of the free Government lands of the west which were being opened for settlement by homesteaders and miners. This would naturally take us into frontier land.

This idea of becoming a surveyor of this kind called to mind the historical accounts of George Washington's younger days when he as a land surveyor made expeditions into the Ohio frontier to mark out the boundaries of the newly acquired lands of his employers. To some extent we too were likewise to be frontier's men assisting in pushing settlement westward. Another appealing argument for one who loves the out doors.

This was at the turn of the century when the attention of the nation was becoming more and more focused on the great undeveloped areas of the West. The rapidly growing population of the eastern and mid-sections of the country was forcing the more venturesome to seek greater opportunities in the sparsely settled arid districts.

Government officials and other public spirited citizens were busy making extensive plans for the orderly development of the natural resources of the arid and semi-arid lands. The reclamation era was just getting started. Vast irrigation projects were visionized with the promise of providing new homes for the people of the more crowded East.

One of the requisites for such settlement is an adequate land survey on which to base land descriptions and titles. This called for the extension of the rectangular system of land surveys on which all land titles west of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers are based, with minor exceptions. This system is generally recognized as the best public land survey plan ever devised.

Thomas Jefferson is given general credit for devising and the adoption of this system of surveys, and it was first employed to survey the newly acquired lands west of the Ohio river. By this method the lands are divided into townships, ranges and sections whereby any parcel of land may be described definitely without any chance of duplication.

It was in connection with the execution of this great survey program that I left my Missouri home and travelled west.