

add to their convenience or comfort, and with light hearts procure a passage on the upper deck of a steamer, at a very cheap rate on account of the benefit of their labor in taking in wood or otherwise.

And now the vessel approaches their home. See the joyous mother and daughters as they stand on the bank! A store of vegetables lies around them, a large tub of fresh milk is at their feet, and in their hands are plates filled with rolls of butter. As the steamer stops, three broad straw hats are waved from the upper deck, and soon husband and wife, brothers and sisters, are in each other's embrace. The boat carries off the provisions for which value has been left, and as the captain issues his orders for putting on the steam, the happy family enter their humble dwelling. The husband gives his bag of dollars to the wife, while the sons present some token of affection to the sisters. Surely, at such a moment, the squatters are richly repaid for all their labors.

Every successive year has increased their savings. They now possess a large stock of horses, cows, and hogs, with abundance of provisions and domestic comfort of every kind. The daughters have been married to the sons of neighboring squatters, and have gained sisters to themselves by the marriage of their brothers. The government secures to the family the lands on which, twenty years before, they settled in poverty and sickness. Larger buildings are erected on piles, secure from inundations; where a single cabin once stood, a neat village is now to be seen; warehouses, stores, and workshops increase the importance of the place. The squatters live respected, and in due time die regretted by all who knew them.

Thus are the vast frontiers of our country peopled, and thus does cultivation, year after year, extend over the western wilds. Time will no doubt be, when the great valley of the Mississippi, still covered with primeval forest interspersed with swamps, will smile with cornfields and orchards, while crowded cities will rise at intervals along its banks, and enlightened nations will rejoice in the bounties of Providence.



Along with the letterpress of his *Ornithological Biography* Audubon included articles he called "Episodes", one following every five articles describing species of birds. The essays were not present in later printings but this one was printed in various other collections such as *Southern Life in Southern Literature*.

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Early Settlers Along the Mississippi

BY JOHN JAMES AUDUBON, 1831

Although every European traveler who has glided down the Mississippi at the rate of ten miles an hour has told his tale of the squatters, yet none has given any other account of them than that they are "a sallow, sickly-looking sort of miserable being," living in swamps and subsisting on pignuts, Indian corn, and bear's flesh. It is obvious, however, that none but a person acquainted with their history, manners, and condition can give any real information respecting them.

The individuals who become squatters choose that sort of life of their own free will. They mostly remove from other parts of the United States after finding that land has become too high in price, and they are persons who, having a family of strong and hardy children, are anxious to enable them to provide for themselves. They have heard from good authorities that the country extending along the great streams of the West is of all parts of the Union the richest in its soil, the growth of its timber, and the abundance of its game; that, besides, the Mississippi is the great road to and from all the markets in the world; and that every vessel borne by its waters affords to settlers some chance of selling their commodities, or of exchanging them for others. To these recommendations is added another, of even greater weight with persons of the above denomination, namely, the prospect of being able to settle on land, and perhaps to hold it for a number of years, without purchase, rent, or tax of any kind. How many thousands of individuals in all parts of the globe would gladly try their fortune with such prospects I leave to you, reader, to determine.

As I am not disposed too highly to color the picture which I am about to submit to your inspection, instead of pitching on individuals who have removed from our eastern boundaries, and of whom certainly there are a good number, I shall introduce to you the members of a family from Virginia, first giving you an idea of their condition in that country previous to their migration to the West. The land which they and their ancestors have possessed for a hundred years, having been constantly forced to produce crops of one kind or another, is completely worn out. It exhibits only a superficial layer of red clay, cut up by deep ravines, through which much of the soil has been conveyed to some more fortunate neighbor residing in a yet rich and beautiful valley. Their strenuous efforts to render

it productive have failed. They dispose of everything too cumbrous or expensive for them to remove, retaining only a few horses, a servant or two, and such implements of husbandry and other articles as may be necessary on their journey or useful when they arrive at the spot of their choice.

I think I see them harnessing their horses and attaching them to their wagons, which are already filled with bedding, provisions, and the younger children; while on their outside are fastened spinning wheels and looms, and a bucket filled with tar and tallow swings betwixt the hind wheels. Several axes are secured to the bolster, and the feeding-trough of the horses contains pots, kettles, and pans. The servant now becomes a driver, riding the near saddled horse; the wife is mounted on another; the worthy husband shoulders his gun; and his sons, clad in plain, substantial homespun, drive the cattle ahead and lead the procession, followed by the hounds and other dogs. Their day's journey is short and not agreeable. The cattle, stubborn or wild, frequently leave the road for the woods, giving the travelers much trouble; the harness of the horses here and there gives way, and immediate repair is needed. A basket which has accidentally dropped must be gone after, for nothing that they have can be spared. The roads are bad, and now and then all hands are called to push on the wagon or prevent it from upsetting. Yet by sunset they have proceeded perhaps twenty miles. Fatigued, all assemble around the fire which has been lighted; supper is prepared, and camp being run up, there they pass the night.

Days and weeks, nay months, of unremitting toil pass before they gain the end of the journey. They have crossed both the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama. They have been traveling from the beginning of May to that of September, and with heavy hearts they traverse the neighborhood of the Mississippi. But now, arrived on the banks of the broad stream, they gaze in amazement on the dark, deep woods around them. Boats of various kinds they see gliding downward with the current, while others slowly ascend against it. A few inquiries are made at the nearest dwelling, and assisted by the inhabitants with their boats and canoes, they at once cross the river and select their place of habitation.

The exhalations rising from the swamps and morasses around them have a powerful effect on these new settlers, but all are intent on preparing for the winter. A small patch of ground is cleared by the ax and fire, a temporary cabin is erected; to each of the cattle is attached a bell before it is let loose into the neighboring canebroke, and the horses remain about the house, where they find sufficient food at that season. The first trading boat that stops at their landing enables them to provide themselves with

some flour, fishhooks, and ammunition, as well as other commodities. The looms are mounted, the spinning wheels soon furnish yarn, and in a few weeks the family throw off their ragged clothes and array themselves in suits adapted to the climate. The father and sons meanwhile have sown turnips and other vegetables, and from some Kentucky flatboat a supply of live poultry has been purchased.

October tinges the leaves of the forest; the morning dews are heavy, the days hot and the nights chill; and the unacclimatized family in a few days are attacked with ague. The lingering disease almost prostrates their whole faculties. Fortunately the unhealthy season soon passes over, and the hoarfrosts make their appearance. Gradually each individual recovers strength. The largest ash trees are felled, their trunks are cut, split, and corded in front of the building; a large fire is lighted at night on the edge of the water; and soon a steamer calls to purchase the wood and thus add to their comforts during the winter. This first fruit of their industry imparts new courage to them; their exertions multiply; and when spring returns the place has a cheerful look. Venison, bear's flesh, and turkeys, ducks, and geese, with now and then some fish, have served to keep up their strength, and now their enlarged field is planted with corn, potatoes, and pumpkins. Their stock of cattle too has augmented; the steamer which now stops there, as if by preference, buys a calf or pig together with their wood. Their store of provisions is renewed, and brighter rays of hope enliven their spirits.

Who is he of the settlers on the Mississippi that cannot realize some profit? Truly none who is industrious. When the autumnal months return, all are better prepared to encounter the ague which then prevails. Substantial food, suitable clothing, and abundant firing repel its attacks; and before another twelvemonth has elapsed the family is naturalized. The sons have by this time discovered a swamp covered with excellent timber, and as they have seen many great rafts of saw logs, bound for the mills of New Orleans, floating past their dwelling, they resolve to try the success of a little enterprise. Their industry and prudence have already enhanced their credit. A few cross-saws are purchased, and some broad-wheeled "carry-logs" are made by themselves. Log after log is hauled to the bank of the river, and in a short time their first raft is made on the shore and loaded with cordwood. When the next freshet sets it afloat, it is secured by long grapevines or cables until, the proper time being arrived, the husband and sons embark on it and float down the mighty stream.

After encountering many difficulties they arrive in safety at New Orleans, where they dispose of their stock, the money obtained for which may be said to be all profit, supply themselves with such articles as may