

## PART II -- THE OHIO PIONEER FAMILY

### CHAPTER II

#### THE JAMES HARRIS - MARY CHERRY HOME

JAMES HARRIS and Mary Cherry were a well-mated pair. He was energetic, thrifty, but democratic and public spirited; she was the true daughter of her mother, Mary Ann Hollenback and developed into the same capable, helpful, self-reliant woman, with just enough of aristocratic feeling inherited from the Cherry ancestry and household to partly offset the democratic tendency of her husband. Though accustomed as a child to be waited on by slaves, and later to direct their labor, she herself had been well trained by her thrifty mother in all the work and conduct of a home, which in those times involved also a knowledge of spinning, weaving, knitting, and sundry other attainments. Her mother had died early and as the two older sisters of Mary had soon married, she was left in charge of her father's household for two or three years before his death.

The couple began housekeeping at Charles Town, Va., but four years later migrated to Ohio. It is not likely that James had ever seen the "Ohio Country" in person, but knew it quite well from the reports of those who had been there; for Virginia sent more pioneers to the Northwest Territory than any other state. With their two children, Mary, aged three, and Eleanor, an infant, James and his wife made the strenuous journey to Ohio in 1809. Thomas Austin and his wife came with them, all in the same covered wagon, the usual means of transportation but with a second wagon and team along. Most of their route was over the "Old Indian Trail," now in part The National Road, through Hagerstown, Cumberland, Uniontown, to Wheeling, thence through Chillicothe (or Zanesville) to Wilmington.

James Harris, Thomas Austin, and William McDaniels had bought of the Mason Heirs in Virginia a tract of 1000 acres in Clinton county. This comprised the bottom land south and the upland north of Todds Fork, about two miles east of where Clarksville was later laid out; the upland extended half a mile or more back north of the top of the slope from the valley. When the owners reached the land they found it partly occupied by half a dozen crude log cabins in which "squatters" were living. These never gave the new comers any trouble and soon moved on further west or became tenants on the land which they helped clear and cultivate. One of these latter was a family named McKinney.

James built his pioneer log cabin in the wilderness on the north site of Todds Fork, just below where Cowan's Creek empties into it. With the dense forest and long, steep slopes

lying on the north it was well protected from the winter cold; the heavy growth of vegetation made good early browsing for the well sheltered livestock. There was an abundance of all kinds of game, while the creeks, then always filled with clear water, fairly swarmed with fine fish. It required but a few minutes to catch plenty for a meal. There James and his wife made a home for themselves and two children to whom was soon added a third. This first cabin had disappeared before the writer's recollection, but was often spoken of by his older brothers and sisters. But some of the apple trees set out there were still standing in his time, great giant trees, with fine fruit. Now since the streams rise much higher a part of the early site has been obliterated and the fine bottom lands across the creek partly replaced by unsightly ridges of gravel, sand and stones. Even in his own boyhood days the bottoms were level, fertile land, never overflowing, and there was still good fishing in the creeks along which he prospected while visiting at his grandfather's old homestead.

For some time after getting well settled in his own home James continued partly in his former business of planning and erecting buildings, and often the wooden parts of many of the farm implements of the time. This seems to have been more because of the urgent demand for such than his own inclination; for at the same time he was rapidly developing his share of the land purchase, the south 400 of the original tract of 1000 acres. Here he always made his home; but as shown by various deeds he later purchased lands in Highland county. These were probably a part of the 3,000 acres awarded Captain William Cherry for his war services, and by him bequeathed to his sons. It is also very likely that these lands were bought with his wife's inheritance from her father's estate, but no mention is made of such. The Highland county land was later disposed of at a goodly profit.

Besides these lands James purchased later about 1400 acres in Warren county, the northern part of what was afterwards known as Springhill, three miles northwest of Clarksville. In both the Highland and the Warren county land purchases James certainly showed most excellent judgment. The northern part of the land at Springhill he later sold, and gave the remainder to his three married sons as told under James Harris, Jr.

There was at first no house for public worship or school in all the section, but soon a commodious hewed log structure was built for a church not far from James' home; he was in fact largely instrumental in securing its erection, almost entirely by donated labor. It was in reality "The Church in the Wildwood," and later known as the "Methodist Meeting House;" one of the many built through the untiring efforts of the disciples of John and

Charles Wesley, who had come to America over a decade before, preaching a gospel of free salvation to the southern colonies. Services were held regularly once a month by the Rev. John Collins, one of the hardy Circuit Riders of those early days. The structure was used also for a school, as arranged in its building, and became quite a center; probably that location came nearly being the seat of the village, Clarksville, which was later located further south where East Fork empties into the larger stream. For many years after the village was well started the Methodist congregation attended services at the earlier community building.

The Harris Cherry Virginia ancestry was largely Presbyterian, but there was no church of that denomination near and James and his wife readily gave their support to the local Methodist Church. Along with the careful training given their children in language and manners they taught them the great truths of the Christian doctrine and gave strict attention to their moral culture.

The Harris home was freely open to all Christian ministers, no matter what their creed, and became practically the headquarters of those preaching at the "Meeting House" near by. Probably because of this most of the family in later years became active members of the Methodist Church and one, Isaiah, a minister in that denomination.

James Harris was a man of exceptional business ability and prospered in spite of the depressing effects of the War of 1812. In a few years, probably '19 or '20, he laid the foundations for what was then a most commodious brick residence at the top of the hill some distance below the original log cabin. From this mansion, which is still standing, there is a splendid view for miles of the wide spreading valley and its inclosing hillsides. The house is a noted landmark, easily seen from the Three C's Highway, which passes half a mile southeast.

The fertile bottom lands, which then never overflowed, were early cleared and yielded immense crops, largely corn. Much of the timber on the hillsides and upland was sugar maple, and left standing, for sugar making was then an important industry. As late as the writer's childhood there were still hundreds of the trees and visiting at "Aunt Martha's" (Stackhouse) at "sugaring off" time was something long remembered. After the sap had been boiled down to a thick, heavy syrup, it was taken off the fire (in large iron kettles then) and allowed to cool, being kept stirred well meantime, so it would be grainy sugar instead of hard wax. The product was a luscious brown sugar, with an occasional hard

lump of wax remaining. He was allowed to pick out these hard lumps and “eat all he wanted,” which to his great disappointment was not nearly so much as he wished.

As a farmer James Harris was unusually successful, progressive, and in advance of most of his neighbors, introducing the latest improved farming tools and implements. In the early process of cleaning wheat from the chaff three men were required; one sifted the mixture, the other two holding a sheet by either end, with a crank like motion, blew the chaff from the wheat. It was hard work and they could clean but a few bushels a day.

Mr. Harris introduced the windmill with its sloping screens for separating the weed seed from the wheat, while at the same time a wooden paddle wheel with wide blades blew the chaff away. His windmill was used all through the community. Later he bought the patent on it; the article conveying it to him is in the possession of the writer.

The parents not only trained their children well in language, manners, and morals, but equally well in habits of thrift and industry, while at the same time affording them abundant opportunity for amusement and recreation. The nearness of their home to the early community church caused it to become a sort of social center, many of the congregation dropping in after services.

The girls were skilled in the varied household industries of the pioneer farm home, which then included knitting, spinning, soap-making, and preparations from medicinal herbs, etc. The boys were taught to be “jack of all trades,” to make and mend farm implements and tools, harness, etc., and the care and treatment of livestock and crops. And in this atmosphere of thrift, industry, sociality and general well-being, the parents reared their children; and from it they went, one by one, to found and conduct homes of much the same kind, but in different surroundings and times.

Each of the children was given as good an education as the times afforded and far above the average. James, and later Samuel, were sent a year each to the University of Princeton. Each was given a farm of 200 acres or its equivalent, and all were helped financially in other ways.

#### PUBLIC LIFE OF JAMES HARRIS

Along with his success as a farmer and business man James Harris served equally well his state and fellow men in public affairs. Some three years after coming to Ohio he was elected Justice of the Peace (Esquire) in Vernon Township, and this office he held for 18 years. At that time it was a very important office, requiring in addition to plenty of common sense, sound judgment, a strict sense of justice, and a fair knowledge of law. He had all

these and in addition a strong will and a kind heart, so he soon became sought as the adviser in all kinds of trouble and disagreements. As most violations of law and order also came before the justice of the peace in those days it is easy to see what a helpful influence a man of the James Harris type had upon the community in his long years of service in this office.

In 1816 he was elected a member of the General Assembly and served as such for six consecutive terms, then one year each. It was a time of severe strain, the depression following the War of 1812. The currency was unstable, state bank notes fluctuated in value, the price of labor and farm products were very low; besides these there were all kinds of vexatious problems to be settled and unsatisfactory conditions to be adjusted. During the six years James served in the Assembly these various matters were all carefully studied and mostly well settled, and plans put under way for many desirable internal improvements in the state. Concerning his service in the Assembly, a Clinton county paper had this to say at the time:

“Honorable James Harris is a worthy representative of the rights and interests of the county of Clinton. He is of fine personal appearance and excellent pleasing manners. What is more important he is a good thinker, sound reasoner, and has command of language sufficient to express his views clearly and forcibly on all important questions that come before the House.”

At the end of six years he gladly retired from what had been the rather strenuous work in the General Assembly to devote his time and influence to many county questions. Among these was the proper provision for those unable to support themselves. The frequent sufferings of the poor had enlisted his sympathy and very largely as the result of his efforts and influence an infirmary or “County Poor Farm” was established near Wilmington. It was one of the first in the state; he served several years as one of its directors, and was often called into conference by other counties that had in mind the same problem of taking care of their indigent people.

At that time all able-bodied men between certain ages were required to meet in each township once a month for military drill. James Harris served first as captain of this militia and later as colonel of the Clinton county division. His captain’s commission, now in possession of the writer, was issued May 21, 1814, that of colonel about two years later. He took an active part in these monthly drills, believing them to be a fine thing for the men

and a protection to the country. He was also active in seeking better roads and bridges for the township, both of which were badly needed in those early days and was always ready to give liberally of both his time and money to further local progress along all lines.

It is not of record that Mr. Harris took so much part in partisan politics till the historic campaign of 1840, when as an influential supporter of William Henry Harrison he took an active and prominent part in the local campaign in opposition to the reelection of Martin Van Buren.

At the age of 54 James Harris retired from active public life and from the more arduous work of the farm, which however he continued to look after as diligently as ever; for he considered the cultivation of the soil the noblest of all work. The Harris Homestead was widely known for its abundant hospitality, good cheer, and wholesome atmosphere. From the first the master looked well after the fixtures and conveniences of the home. He devoted his leisure time to the reading of the best newspapers and books; of these latter he probably had more than all the remainder of the community. It was a home where people liked to visit and the master and mistress to entertain. Ministers and professional men were frequent callers and always welcome.

Though a man of wealth and prominence James Harris was thoroughly democratic. On the other hand his wife, both by nature and early training was of an aristocratic make-up, though always pleasant and courteous. She liked fine clothes, jewelry, silverware, china, etc., as was evidenced by such in her home, and never seemed to forget that she was the daughter of Captain William Cherry and the descendant of noble ancestry. But she was a real helpmate for her husband in their pioneer life, active, diligent, and never shrinking from the arduous labors of those early days. With all her love for finery, and the hospitality with which they entertained, nothing was allowed to go to waste, and she trained her daughters to the same habits of industry and saving. She seems to have been ambitious for her children to wed landed proprietors and we suspect something of a matchmaker for her daughters! Of the ten children to whom she had given birth, she lived to see the eight who had lived to maturity all settled comfortably in homes of their own; she had been a real mother through all the years.

In his mansion overlooking the beautiful valley, amidst the best comforts of the farm life of that period, James Harris lived to the age of 69, enjoying in those last years the "fruits of his labors," the reflections of a well spent life and the frequent visits of friends and relatives, particularly the families of his own children. And there he passed away, November 21, 1845, and was buried in the graveyard he himself had early laid out, on one

of the green, grass covered hills of his beloved farm, overlooking the valley he had loved so well.

The great esteem in which he was held was evidenced by the immense attendance at the funeral, and the many eulogies, sketches, etc., delivered from pulpits in surrounding churches, or published in the papers. One of these, by Dr. A. Jones of Wilmington, was the most complete. Harvey's Poems, a work published in the county a little later contains the following tribute:

TO THE MEMORY OF HON. JAMES HARRIS, OF CLARKSVILLE, OHIO

Another of the former pioneers  
 Who cleared the forests of the mighty West  
 Is gone, in full maturity of years,  
 Forevermore, from all his works to rest.  
 He reached the term of three score years and ten,  
 An age that now can be by few attained;  
 And through that time, among his fellow men,  
 Due honor for his moral virtues gained.

Long tried in offices of public trust,  
 The principles that governed him were wise,  
 And his decisions all so fair and just,  
 No controversy out of them could rise.  
 As husband, father, and the poor man's friend,  
 The tears of sorrow to his memory shed,  
 Attest much better than the notice penned,  
 The living virtues of the honored dead.

His will, a copy of which we have, shows with what painstaking care he had provided for his "beloved wife, Mary," and then for his children in the disposition of his remaining estate. The widow resided at the old homestead with her two younger children, Martha C. Stackhouse, and George, till her death, August 18, 1860.

The children of James and Mary Cherry Harris were:

|                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mary, Sept. 18, 1806           | Samuel Loudon, December 28, 1815 |
| Eleanor Jane, July 9, 1808     | Susanna, June 4, 1810            |
| Isaiah Morris, April 2, 1819   | Martha C., January 22, 1821      |
| Susan Ninette, January 3, 1812 | George, February 12, 1826        |
| James Edward, August 9, 1813   | Henry, May 20, 1828              |

Susanna died June 29, 1811. Henry was accidentally drowned, May 28, 1829. The history of the others is given in Part III.

