

Life in early Somerset, Ohio

“Villages like Somerset, from 1830 to 1866, possessed an almost ideal democracy. During all the busy formative years, both settler and Sisters found plenty for willing hands to do. Both lay and religious communities were trying to establish themselves and were putting down deep roots into Perry County’s heart. When the Sisters, shortly after their coming, needed a clearing made in part of their forest or the immediate raising of a barn, stables, and washhouse, the able-bodied men of the parish assembled for this ‘community work.’ They brought their wives and daughters to help the Sisters cook the ‘sumptuous meals needed,’ and the boys also to run errands for both workmen and cooks.

“One of the first practical considerations of the Sisters on entering their new home was the construction of at least four beds on which to rest their weary bodies. This project had top priority, for bedsteads could not be bought. Who designed the first ‘wilderness bed’ or when is not known, but the idea of this quickly and easily constructed piece of furniture was communicated to every newcomer. This was the method: *Four holes a foot apart were made in the wall at the desired location for the foot of the bed. Four poles seven feet long were inserted therein. The projecting ends were then fastened to suitable uprights by means of withes made out of flexible willow branches. Cross poles were laid from side to side and fastened down in the same manner.*

“Ticks of straw were laid over this frame and the ordinary frontier bedclothes – bear, elk, or deer skins – completed the wilderness bed. In very cold weather, the skins of animals which were cheap and abundant were used. Such were the beds of the first Ohio Dominican Community.”

Excerpted from: IN THE GREENWOOD: SOMERSET (“Jollifications and Work-Events”)

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