



PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY

Life in the West

The following are quotes from early-19th century sources about living in the West. Based on these quotes, what do you think life was like in Ohio during this time? How was it different than living in New England?

1. The next morning was the Sabbath of the Lord our God. It hardly seemed as if the same God could be invoked there as in refined and Christianized New England. The tinkling of the cow bells reminded us of the factory bells at whose ring we were accustomed to rise in Sturbridge. The Sabbath, so unlike our New England Sabbaths, were almost a burden. There were no religious meetings nearer than Brooklyn. The gatherings and much of the preaching were of the back-woods type, but better than none.
2. My father labored under many disadvantages from having had no experience previous in frontier life. Many were ready to take advantage of his inexperience. We did not find that neighborly hospitality which is proverbial to new settlements. I think this place must have been an exception to the general rule.
3. Game, especially deer, was abundant. We almost daily had the pleasure of seeing them but, not having experience in hunting, we seldom shot any. Bears and wolves were frequent visitors to the openings in the night time.
4. The people were generally rather rude in their habits and customs. Log rollings and chopping bees were somewhat frequent.
5. I have about six acres of wheat growing. I have 2 oxen, 3 cows, 6 young cattle, 6 sheep, 2 lambs, 5 hogs and 4 pigs. Lyndon has 2 four-year old oxen, While I am writing a charming shower has commenced. All nature is dressed in fresh robes of green.

6. I want you should come live with or near me in Ohio and not break your back a picking up stones as I did but lift up the logs chopping down trees.

7. My situation here is in many respects a pleasant one; on a good turnpike road leading from Cleveland to Columbus and Cincinnati. It is a market road for a larger tract of country. We have a daily stage and an almost constant passing of country teams and carriages. Probably there is more travel here in one day than there was in a year where we lived in Sturbridge. Standing in the road before our house and looking north you will see six neighbors' houses. Looking south you may count 12 or 13 dwellinghouses and one school house. Three of the above houses are taverns, one a large brick house and one a large stone house, three are log houses, the rest are frame houses.

The above houses are on both sides of a straight road extending two miles. When I look over the country here and compare it with the rocky clay and much of it barren land in the neighborhood where I formerly lived, it seems it would be discouraging to be obliged to improve such land. But the blessings of God and the untiring industry of the people of Massachusetts have made that state one of the best if not the very best state in the Union. We have kind neighbors here as we had in Sturbridge; yet they are not like those with whom I associated from my infancy. We have not so much religious, well-educated society here as we might have in Sturbridge. If we could have Massachusetts society and meetinghouses I should be willing to take with them some of its rocks, hills, mountains, and swamps.

8. Everything here is so different from New England. Instead of the crooked roads of Southbridge and Sturbridge you would see here roads on a straight line for miles. Instead of the dwarf trees of your country I could show you white oak trees five feet in diameter and hickory trees 120 feet high. I should like to show you white wood trees from which we usually cut five logs 12 feet long without a limb. I would show you some important flouring mills and sawmills far superior to any I saw in Massachusetts.

9. "As soon as he begins to clear his land...the deer, turkeys, squirrels, and raccoons help themselves to his first crops of wheat and corn. The wolves rob his sheep pasture and the opossum his hen roost."

10. Among the novel discomforts of the West, that of insects is one of no trifling character, the whole earth and air seems teeming with them, and mosquitos, gallnippers, bugs, ticks, sand-flies, houseflies, ants, cockroaches, &c, join in one continued attack against one's case

11. The soil...produces abundantly, wheat, rye, corn, hemp...It is only necessary to plant the seed, and it will grow and ripen without any care, until harvested. If we wish only for a sustenance for ourselves and families, it can be obtained here [in the west] cheaper and better than elsewhere...This land, the best in the world, can now be bought...those who remove for this place may indeed find such a paradise..."

12. In looking around in New England we find the country overflowing with every trade and profession...we are determined to look about for a place... where industry would meet with a richer reward, and talents and virtue be duly appreciated. ... A number of persons visited the State of Illinois, they report that in no part of the world is there such a field open for enterprise, for honor, for wealth and happiness.

Sources:

Freeman Family Papers, Old Sturbridge Village Research Library. Edited by Old Sturbridge Village.

"Letter to the Editor," *Farmer's Gazette*, Barre, MA. July 18, 1834.

Eight Months in Illinois: With Information to Immigrants, William Oliver, 1843.