

MIAMI WAS c. 1921
BIG RIVER PORT
IN EARLY DAYS

Al Wheeler Tells Some of the Town's
Early History.—Was Great
Hemp Mart.

The Miami of today is somewhat different than the Miami that Al Wheeler knew as a boy. In those days it was one of the biggest ports on the Missouri river and the settlers for miles around hauled there the products of their farms to ship them to St. Louis. Born in 1844 Mr. Wheeler has spent the majority of his life near Miami.

His great-grandfather was an old revolutionary soldier. His grandfather served with General William H. Harrison in Michigan, and was killed there while fighting the Indians during the War of 1812. His grandfather on his mother's side came to Missouri in 1808. From St. Louis he went to St. Charles and then to Cooper's Fort. Here in 1812 his mother was born. She is said to have been the first white child that was born west of St. Charles and the second one born west of St. Louis. His father came from Kentucky in 1819.

As a boy, Mr. Wheeler said that he had seen the trees and saplings so thick that they could travel 100 to 150 yards by swinging from the top of one tree to the next. They were from fifteen to twenty feet from the ground. "We never thought of falling," he said. As the trees grew larger some of them died out and left timber thinner in these places.

Speaking of Miami as a river port, he said that he had seen in days before the Civil War hemp wagons lined up for over a quarter of a mile waiting to unload. As the wagons

unloaded others joined the waiting line keeping a continual string of them there.

Mr. Wheeler was fifteen years old before he ever saw a two-horse wagon. Oxen he said, were all the go then.

The country along the river at Miami was heavily timbered and the prairie was covered with hazel brush from ten to twelve feet high. This brush was plowed under, he said, just the same as though it were grass. A heavy yoke of oxen were used as a lead team to ride down the brush.

"The women of today don't know what hard work is," he said, when some one in the room mentioned how hard she had been working. "Why when I was a boy, a woman did four or five times as much work as they do now."

Just then someone across the street started playing a piano. He stopped to listen to the music. It was a dance piece. "Did they do any dancing in those days?" he was asked.

He then told of how his father attended his last dance. It was just after his father had been married and the dance was held in a house. The dancers danced until their feet were tired and then removed their shoes and danced in their stocking feet. His father wore out a pair of woollen socks at that dance. The only music that they had then was a banjo, fiddle and flute.

Turnips were often scraped out and filled with grease for lights. Just the rind of the vegetable was used and a wick inserted in the grease. All candles were moulded at home and it was not until after the Civil War that he saw a coal oil lamp.

Coming back to the subject of plowing the land he said that he had seen trees as big around as a man's arm plowed under by the plow. They were practically indestructible.

His brother, Harry Wheeler, is the older of the two, and the second oldest man in Miami. He is eighty-three years old.

Boys in those days were always trying to get ahead of their father. They haven't changed much according to Al Wheeler. He told how his father gave them ten cents a quart for picking hazelnuts, and how he would sneak in the house to fill up his pail from the barrel that they kept the nuts in.

Wheat threshing in those days was done by treading it out with horses. The wheat was stacked and the horses ridden around on top of it. Some one followed behind the horse stirring up the straw with a fork. As the wheat was threshed the straw was thrown outside. It got it out clean according to Mr. Wheeler.

The old timers didn't have some of the things that we have today, but he said that they were a lot happier.