



Belle, Elizabeth and Martha.

After his discharge in New Orleans in 1865, Squire John and his family made Miller County their permanent home. Over the next

74 years, John was a prominent man in the Iberia area. For many years, he was post commander of Miles Carroll Post 111 of the Grand Army of the Republic in Iberia. He was instrumental in keeping the post in active service. He very seldom ever missed one of the encampments, both state and national, and over the years he filled most all stations in that highly honored organization. On May 16, 1928, he was elected Department Commander of the G.A.R for the State of Missouri at its 47th annual encampment held in Springfield. John was active in the religious,

political and public affairs of Miller County, and was a justice of the peace at Iberia for over fifty years.

In 1940, Iberia lost one of her most remarkable and unforgettable citizens, Captain John Ferguson, who was also called 'Squire.' He had reached his 101st year. There are many folks today who remember him so vividly and can still reminiscence of those long ago days when he could be seen on the streets of Iberia with his snow-white hair and long white beard much like a patriarch of old. There are many descendants of Squire John

Ferguson who still live in central Missouri in the counties of Miller, Pulaski and Camden, as well as those who have moved all over America.

Peggy Smith Hake has published an historical and genealogical newsletter about the Miller County area for over fifteen years. The newsletter, *Seeking 'N Searching Ancestors*, is published six months a year. Those interested in receiving it should send a membership due of \$9 annually to Peggy Smith Hake, 270 Brushy Creek Road, St. Elizabeth, MO 65075.

## WAY IT WUZ IN MILLER COUNTY

Ben Roark was a spry 90-year-old Miller County historical figure when interviewed by a St. Louis newspaper reporter in 1925. Born in Kentucky, "Uncle Ben" came to Missouri with his parents when he was 4 years old. Settling first in Cole County, the Roarks moved southward some six years later to the Eldon vicinity in newly formed Miller County.

"When I came here, there

nothing but prairie and timber with mighty few houses, and here and there a store. But for the most part, we had to walk thirty or forty miles whenever we wanted to provision up.

"I remember one day I was along the trail to Jefferson City and I saw a deer standing about seventy-five yards away. I hauled up my old gun to shoot him and

many toddies as he could hold. Fighting was the natural result, and I guess in many cases men traveled fifty miles to vote and became so engrossed in upholding the dignity of dear old Kentucky or Tennessee that they forgot to vote. We had no ballots in those days. (We) merely told the clerks and the judges what our preferences were. I don't remember that a vote was ever

challenged.

"Pretty soon the railroads came through and various towns sprang up. Tuscumbia in the old days was a mighty lively little town. The Osage River was used then for shipping, but when the railroads came, Eldon became an important commercial center, and I have seen it grow from nothing to a city of more than three thousand inhabitants."



was little else but tall grass and timber," he told a *St. Louis Globe Democrat* reporter who came to visit him in Eldon. "I have picked wild grapes and melons where the main street of Eldon now runs. I have shot deer down the slough through which that Missouri Pacific train is now passing.

"Yep, come to think of it, I guess I have had some experiences. I have hunted and fished all over this Ozark country. I've fought the Indians and traded with them. I've been chased by wolves that wanted to tear me to pieces. I have felt the pinch of hunger and know what the tribulations of the early settlers of the territory were. I walked a hundred miles through the forest to Westport Landing, four miles south of Kansas City, and signed up to drive an oxcart over the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico. I did it, too.

"Those were happy days at that. Of course, there were few villages in those days. There was

durned if the hammer wasn't busted off and I had no way to fire the cap. I wanted that deer, so I whipped out my hunting knife and held it up against the cap and struck it with a flint. I got a spark all right and the ball sped true into the deer's heart. That was some shooting and, what's more, I can prove it.

"(Election day was) just an excuse for some good old-fashioned fights. Miller County, you see, was settled almost exclusively by Kentuckians, Virginians and Tennesseans. Each man was fervently loyal to his state; and, if a Kentuckian got into a row with a Virginian, it simply meant that all the Kentuckians would line up and fight it out with the Virginians. And so it was when any of them mixed. The fights started early. Long before the balloting started, a keg of whisky and a sack of sugar were set on a box under a shade tree and every man was permitted to mix as



Postoffice workers displaying sacks of mail in front of the Iberia Postoffice. Courtesy of Sue Hansen.