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The Great Hinckley Hunt of 1818

The Great Hinckley Hunt

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Almost one decade before Hinckley Township was organized, a great hunt took place in the Hinckley hills and valleys on December 24, 1818, nearly 200 years ago.

It was claimed that several of the participating hunters were veterans of the American Revolution and of the war of 1812 which will account for the near military plans made and followed throughout the adventure.

Judges Samuel Hinckley of Massachusetts, who owned the land now comprising the township named after him, had made little or no effort to dispose of his acreage, because it wasn't considered suitable for agricultural purposes and was over-run with wild animals.

In the meantime, or by around 1818, townships adjoining Hinckley had gained a considerable number of settlers who cleared numerous tracts of land of large trees and prepared the land for cultivation to provide food and fodder for their oxen and horses, and herds of sheep and cattle.

Hinckley, in 1818, was still an unbroken forest of big trees and, in addition, was a haven for wolves and bears and smaller game which continuously raided and devastated surrounding settlements. It was not usual for a settler (outside of Hinckley) to lose his entire flock of sheep in a single night - even when penned up within sight of his farm buildings.

Late in the Fall of 1818, a number of meetings were held by settlers surrounding the Hinckley Forests, to arrange for a "war of extermination" upon wolves and bears, to take place not later than December 24.

Four captains were appointed - one of them to have supreme command of the battalion. Surveyors blazed a line of trees upon a circle a half-mile around the center of what is now Hinckley Township.

Arrangements were made for able-bodied men and large boys to assemble-- those from Cleveland, Newburgh, Royalton, etc., on the north line of Hinckley; those from Brecksville, Richfield, etc., on the east line; those from Bath, Granger, etc., on the south line; and those from Medina, Brunswick, Liverpool, etc., on the west line.

All were instructed to assemble at sunrise, armed with whatever weapons they possessed. As the supply of suitable weapons was inadequate, many of the hunters were armed with bayonets mounted on poles, and axes, hatchets and butcher knives!

About 600 men and boys were on the north, east, south and west lines at sunrise, December 24, and were eager to "get going" after the bears and wolves.

Soon after sunrise the commanding officer gave the "all ready" signal, which was repeated around the lines to the right and around to the starting point in just 40 seconds!

The captains kept their lines properly spaced, like skirmishers. Soon deer began to show themselves; many escaped, but about 100 were killed before the one-half mile limit was reached; also a few wild turkeys.

The men were continually cautioned to fire only toward the half-mile circle, and as they approached the circular line of blazed trees a halt was made.

Finally, the previously selected and most experience hunters advanced towards the center with orders to kill the bears and wolves if they could without endangering each other or those on the lines. Only two hunters suffered minor flesh wounds from buckshot.

The game collected or killed within the circle totaled 17 wolves, 21 bears, and 300 hundred deer. However, this count did not include several turkeys and deer that had been taken home by those hunters who had been delegated to do the "chores;" neither were a few foxes and coons included.

The hunting party (now reduced to about 400, because 200 had to return home to do the "chores") proceeded to scalp the dead wolves for bounty and a large bear was barbecued. A messenger was dispatched to Richfield for sundry supplies. His horse-drawn sled was loaded with refreshments - including "honest" whiskey. The fortunate "400" feasted on Christmas Eve on bear, deer meat and savory wild turkey, liberally bolstered with cake and bread - and whiskey. But nary a nimrod became intoxicated (it was claimed), even though the jamboree continued until early Christmas Morn.

On Christmas Day, 1818, the Hunters' Camp was visited by numerous and miscellaneous parties from the surrounding townships and from adjacent territories as far away as twenty miles. 'T'was a Happy and Merry Christmas for all.

All narrators of this famous hunt agree that the "final kill" was on land in the center of the township. Today this spot may be roughly located somewhere north and south of Route 303, and west of the East Branch of Rocky River, and, probably, several rods west of Alva G. Donkin's home on Route 303.

Readers should bear in mind that the old so-called "center" of Hinckley, that is, the land donated to the township by Judge Samuel Hinckley, was in the exact center of the township, whereas today's Hinckley Center is a fraction of a mile west of the geographic center.

Although this web site is the official site for Hinckley Township, it is for informational purposes only. It is not the official record of Hinckley Township; the official records are maintained at the Administration Building.

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