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## Wooh!

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## “Wooh!”

It was a terrible night in the winter of '61. The winds howled without and the fine particles of snow sifted through the clap-board roof of the Michael Fix home on West branch. The war was going on and Robert was away in the army—having enlisted in an Indiana regiment, while one of the brothers was with Kit Carson, in New Mexico.

In the Fix home there was but one room below and a half story above, but the one room was 14x22—a big house in those days. There was a stove at one end and a huge fireplace at the other. In cold weather it was the custom to replenish the fire one or more times during the night and when Mother Fix awoke the smoldering embers and the chilly atmosphere suggested to her that the duty of rebuilding the fire had been too long delayed.

There was a pile of wood in the corner nearby and she would get up and throw on a few sticks. Michael was sound asleep and it would be cruel to wake him. But when that piercing “Wooh!” broke the stillness of the night Michael's snoring ceased and he sat bolt upright in bed, asking in a tone of anxiety: “What's the matter?”

But the faint, flickering light from the burning embers told the story. Prone on the floor lay a score of Indians—of all ages and both sexes. On one of these the feet of Mrs. Fix had rested in getting up to rebuild the fire. But a familiar voice answered Mr. Fix's question. “No hurtee. Indians cold. Heap storm outside.”

A band of twenty Pottawatomies had been camped down by the creek (where the mill was built in 1872) and the storm of wind and

## EARLY HISTORY OF WABAUNSEE COUNTY, KAN.

snow had driven them out of their hastily constructed wigwams. Many cold nights before they had enjoyed a good nap, wrapped in their blankets before the huge fireplace in the Fix cabin and when the storm burst upon them they didn't wait for an invitation to call again—even at an unseemly hour. There was no lock on the door and the latch-string was out—why awaken their pale-face friends from their slumber?

Thus the Indians had reasoned. They had for years looked upon the old mill-site almost as their own. With each returning winter came the same band of Indians, always camping near the spot where the mill stood later on.

The Indians had many times eaten a hearty meal in the Fix home, but they were not beggars, by any means. Many a saddle of venison had been brought to the Fix cabin to partly compensate their friends for the many kindnesses shown.

In the hills on West branch there were many deer in those days and Mr. Fix was the owner of one of the best rifles in the country—that the visiting Indians never failed to borrow on their annual return to their favorite hunting grounds. In the breech of the rifle was a compass—that greatly enhanced its value in the eyes of the Indian hunters and sometimes when the Pottawatomies would go on a raid in the Pawnee country for ponies, or on a buffalo hunt, the gun-hooks in the Fix home would be unused for months in succession. But the gun was always returned—and with it a goodly supply of buffalo meat for the owner.

That band of Pottawatomies long ago encamped for the last time on the old mill-site but the incident of that stormy night in the winter of 1861 will long be remembered by the Fix family—the time when Grosmitter said—“Wooh!”

## REPRINT

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Collected by Matt Thomson