

## NEW MADRID EARTHQUAKE.

### ACCOUNT OF COL. JOHN SHAW.

The "Personal Narrative of Col. John Shaw, of Marquette county, Wisconsin," contained in the second annual report and collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for the year 1855, gives an account of the New Madrid earthquake of 1811 and 1812.

As might be expected the accounts of the earthquake by persons who were in that region of country at the time are not numerous, and as this statement of Col. Shaw's is not accessible to many, it is here reprinted:

"While lodging about thirty miles north of New Madrid, on the 14th of December, 1811, about 2 o'clock in the morning, occurred a heavy shock of an earthquake. The house, where I was stopping, was partly of wood and partly of brick structure; the brick portion all fell, but I and the family all fortunately escaped unhurt. At the still greater shock, about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 7th of February, 1812, I was in New Madrid, when nearly two thousand people of all ages, fled in terror from their falling dwellings, in that place and the surrounding country, and directed their course north about thirty miles to Tywappety Hill, on the western bank of the Mississippi, and about seven miles back from the river. This was the first high ground above New Madrid, and here the fugitives formed an encampment. It was proposed that all should kneel, and engage in supplicating God's mercy, and all simultaneously, Catholics and Protestants, knelt and offered solemn prayer to their Creator.

About twelve miles back towards New Madrid, a young woman about seventeen years of age, named Betsey Masters, had been left by her parents and family, her leg having been broken below the knee by the falling of one of the weight-poles of the roof of the cabin; and, though a total stranger, I was the only person who would consent to return and see whether

she still survived. Receiving a description of the locality of the place, I started, and found the poor girl upon a bed, as she had been left, with some water and corn bread within her reach. I cooked up some food for her, and made her condition as comfortable as circumstances would allow, and returned the same day to the grand encampment. Miss Masters eventually recovered.

In abandoning their homes, on this emergency, the people only stopped long enough to get their teams, and hurry in their families and some provisions. It was a matter of doubt among them, whether water or fire would be most likely to burst forth, and cover all the country. The timber land around New Madrid sunk five or six feet, so that the lakes and lagoons, which seemed to have their beds pushed up, discharged their waters over the sunken lands. Through the fissures caused by the earthquake, were forced up vast quantities of a hard, jet black substance, which appeared very smooth, as though worn by friction. It seemed a very different substance from either anthracite or bituminous coal.

This *hegira*, with all its attendant appalling circumstances, was a most heart-rending scene, and had the effect to constrain the most wicked and profane, earnestly to plead to God in prayer for mercy. In less than three months, most of these people returned to their homes, and though the earthquakes continued occasionally with less destructive effects, they became so accustomed to the recurring vibrations, that they paid little or no regard to them, not even interrupting or checking their dances, frolics and vices.