

This story were taken from the *Centennial History of Missouri* published in 1921 and was contributed by Stephen Williams

Booneville's "Last Day"

Millerites had obtained quite a following in Missouri as early as 1844. They predicted the "last day" of the world with confident definiteness. A comet of that year was interpreted as heralding the end of the world. Captain F.M. Posegate told in the St. Joseph News-Press some years ago his recollections, as a boy in Booneville, of the deep impression made upon the people when the last day fixed by the Millerites came: One man concluded he would make an effort to forestall the flying chariot in which the elect were to ascend to the presence of the Judge by using a flying machine, or bird machine as he styled it. He worked faithfully for weeks upon the contrivance and only a few days before the all-absorbing event was expected to materialize hauled it out onto a platform on top of his barn to give it a trial. At the first flop the machine fell to the ground, resulting in a broken neck for the man. To him the end of the world had come, the consolation to his relatives and friends being that he had at least escaped any possible suffering that the flames might inflict. At last the day upon which the prophesy was expected to culminate dawned—clear, soft, beautiful—typical of a old fashioned Missouri "Indian summer" day. (We do not seem to have such days now.) 'Old Sol' manifested no desire to hurry matters—the hours dragged slowly—the usual activities of everyday life seemed almost paralyzed, while a nervous uneasiness involving the entire community was apparent. As the sun, seemingly a glowing, flashing ball of fire, sank below the horizon and twilight began to shadow the earth, the suspense became almost unbearable and it would be idle to say that a feeling of doubt, of uncertainty, of unspeakable awe did not pervade the whole community. The head of the comet soon made its appearance and before its fleecy tail disappeared behind the western horizon, the moon, nearly at its full, was shedding its soft, silvery, steady light, rendering all things visible for miles around. Only one hour—sixty short minutes—remained during which the prophesy must materialize, if at all. The main street of the village was thronged with humanity—the believer, the unbeliever, the doubter and the scoffer. The elect, and there were many of them, arrayed in their ascension robes, stood joyously together all in readiness to be taken up. Suddenly, from out in the direction of Gibson's hill, a spear of light harsher than that emitted by the moon sprang up. As it grew, spread, flared, no mortal pen could have given a fair idea of the silence that prevailed. No mortal artist could have painted the various expressions shown upon the

countenances of individuals. Just at the moment when hope, joy, doubt, and fear were most strongly depicted a mounted messenger came clattering down Gibson hill. As he passed the Wyan residence, hat in hand, he yelled: 'It is only an old haystack in Gibson's outfield that is burning.' All along the main street, from the brick house in which Todd and Loomis afterwards taught school to the Powel residence, overlooking the Missouri river, he proclaimed the message. With its close and the exhaustion of the fire from the haystack, the suspense ended; seemingly an audible sigh of relief rose from the souls of the overstrained throng of people who had so feverishly awaited the denouement. In the shortest time possible the streets were deserted and the little city was wrapped in a silence so profound as to be almost startling. It is a satisfaction to me now that I cannot recall a single instance where some thoughtless individual twitted a Millerite with the saying, old at that time, 'I told you so.' Neither do I remember to have heard any Millerite express any regret at the nonfulfillment of the prophesy.