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TOWNSHIP HISTORY OF ALMIRA IN BENZIE COUNTY
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This township is located on the northeast corner of the county; being T. 27 N., R. 13 W., and in extent is a full geographical township of six miles square, and is on the high lands between Grand Traverse bay on the east, and Lake Michigan on the west.

The surface is rolling; soil from light sand to gravel and clay loam, in places quite stony; limestone and boulders predominate.

The township is well watered, there being thirty-seven or thirty-eight distinct bodies of water in the form of small lakes, Pearl lake near the northwest corner, and Lake Ann near the southeast corner being the largest. The Platte river forming the outlet of the latter flows in a northwesterly direction through the southwest corner of the town. The advantages for manufacturing are consequently good.

The lakes and streams abound with fish in great variety, viz., the speckled trout, pickerel, several varieties of bass, sunfish or as some call them blue gills, perch, suckers, etc.

Fruit raising forms a feature of the farming industry, the climate being well adapted to all but the more tender varieties. Peach growing has not been a success as yet, although a few are grown.

This township was formally organized in the spring of 1864, and while the county was still attached to Grand Traverse county for judicial purposes. The first town meeting was held at the residence of Addison P. Wheelock, at which meeting Harris Abbe was elected supervisor and A. P. Wheelock town clerk and D. C. Bryan, Andrew Rosa and Hiram Bowen acted as inspectors of election. Politically the township has always been republican, in at least the ratio of two to one; the other parties have, however, for the greater part of the time at least kept up an organization. The draft of 1864 took from the town three of its citizens in the person of Zimariah Pratt, Alfred Willard and Hiram Bowen. Mr. Bowen was the only one of the three who came back; the two former dying of disease on the field, and the latter dying in a few months after his return, from disease contracted while on the field. They were all married men with families, of from one to four children each. There are several ex-soldiers at present residing in the town, and the observance of Memorial day forms a part of each year's history. The ex-soldiers have maintained for some years a G. A. R. organization; but I think the organization is at present extinct. Aside from the organization just mentioned, there was during the war period of our history, a society known as the "Union League," a branch of which was organized, and had an existence until after the close of the war. Later on other societies were formed, which are in active existence at the present time, such as the "Knights of the Maccabees," "Odd Fellows," "Ladies of the Maccabees," &c., also various literary and benevolent organizations from time to time. I recall an incident that took place on one occasion during the discussion of some (probably weighty topic) in a literary society that was organized here in a very early day. One young man arose, with earnestness and exasperation unmistakably depicted on his countenance, to refute some argument advanced by his opponent; and with all the force at his command, shouted "I deny the fact;" of course he was drowned with applause.

Evidence is not lacking that somewhere in the dim past this town was the abode of the red man, so far back as to leave no doubt that it was peopled by the race before civilization had reached this part of the continent, as numerous relics, such as stone tomahawks, flint arrow-heads, &c., are constantly being found and preserved, and several mounds have been opened in which beads and other relics were found.

A weekly mail was carried on foot by an Indian over a trail from Traverse City to Glen Arbor, a distance of about thirty-five miles, that went from east to west nearly along the section line between the first two tiers of sections in the northern part of the town; this with a few blazed trails from one part of the town to another, constituted the first roads in the township; officially laid roads, however, were the among the first acts after the organization of the town in 1864. The town was traversed by its first railroad in the year 1892, the Manistee & Northeastern being constructed through the eastern part of the town. Our only trading point for a good many years was Traverse City, distant about fourteen or more miles, according to what part of the town you were located in, the road there of course being full of roots and small stumps where it was necessary to cut timber out. There was one especially bad place on the town line east, known then and now as Cedar Run that took years to get anything like a decently passable road, it being apparently a bottomless mud hole. I recall going there (some four miles from home), every day for a week at a time, together with nearly the whole population of the town, to try and get it so it could be safely crossed, and this was purely volunteer labor, as it was before any highway labor was assessed; in fact there was no property upon which to assess any highway tax, as our homesteads were not liable to taxation until after they were proved up on, and the government patents were issued, and there wasn't personal property enough in the town, not exempt from tax, to purchase a teakettle with. I remember we cut one day the longest slim pole we could find (a tamarack), probably from 40 to 50 feet in length, with which to sound the mud hole, and let it down its full length, and then gave it a vigorous push. Down it went out of sight and remained down for some time and finally came up again. The road in the worst places was constructed by a heavy coat of brush on which a log crossing was laid and then finally covered with dirt.

There seems to be some question as to who was the first settler or settlers in Almira, as at least two or three have laid claim to the honor; but from the best obtainable evidence to the writer, two brothers, named respectively John and Alec Heather, some time in the year 1862, and previous to the homestead law taking effect, each entered a quarter section of land on section three in the township under the pre-emption laws, which they subsequently re-entered under the homestead act. They came to Traverse City from Canada in a small boat, bringing their effects with them, which presumably were not great. It seems they loaded their whole belongings on an old wagon and with a yoke of oxen started for their future home, some fourteen or fifteen miles into the then unbroken wilderness, parting company with any of the signs of civilization about three and a half miles after leaving Traverse City, at what was then known as the "old Scotchman's place;" (their names were Gilmour), cutting their road as they went, and "camping out" whenever and wherever night overtook them. Somewhere between two and three weeks were consumed in their march before they reached what to them was the land of promise. About the same time, in fact so nearly so that he set up his claim of being "The first settler" and argued it with such force as to apparently convince some at least that his claim was good, and (as it seems to the writer sometimes) to almost make

himself believe it, came A. P. Wheelock and settled on the beautiful shore of Lake Ann, the lake being named for his most estimable wife.

The village of Lake Ann now occupies the premises originally owned by Mr. Wheelock, or at least a portion of it.

Early in the spring of 1863 the tide of immigration commenced to pour into this general region, and the township of Almira received a liberal share. Quite a large colony of people from Steuben county, state of New York, settled in this town, among whom I recall A. J. Burrell and family (the town was named after his wife), Wm. Roor and Andrew Roor and their families, James B. Manwarring and family, Harris Abbe and family, George Ayres and family (a large one), D. C. Bryan and family, Calvin Linkletter and family, all of whom I think came in the spring and summer of 1863. Later others from the same neighborhood in Steuben came with their families; we mention Perry Graves, Newman Harding, Wm. R. Brownell, Isaac Chapman and others. About the same time also a large colony from St. Lawrence county, New York, settled here. Their names as far as can be recalled were George Fuller, A. C. Gray, Elijah Pratt, Stephen Pratt (a brother), quite old people; Uncle Steve as he was familiarly called died soon after he came. These two were patriarchs and had quite large families, grown to manhood and womanhood. Uncle Steve's family consisted of Stephen Pratt, Jr., A. J. Pratt and Horace Pratt; Uncle Lige's of Zimariah, Lafayette and Linden; he also had several daughters, some with families when they came, and others who married here. There was also the Mansfield family, consisting of Uncle Amasa, his wife, his son Amasa, and several married daughters, among whom were Mrs. Geo. Fuller, Mrs. Phebe Pettis (a widow with quite a large family), and Mrs. James Fuller, more commonly known as "Aunt Sally Fuller," with several children; also Amasa and Daniel Mansfield, nephews. There were also others from St. Lawrence county, the Hoxies and Conklins, and probably others not now remembered. Among those who figured as pioneers that came from various other states (some known to the writer, and others not), were E. A. Hathaway from Vermont, Addison White, who was I think from the same state, Hiram Bowen, Sylvester Cole (from Steuben county), Morton D. Campbell, Denison F. Holden (who owns and resides on the original Morton D. Campbell place), Phylander Palmer, Hart and Joseph Marden, brothers, who were St. Lawrence county people, Hiram Hallett, a New York man, and many others could be mentioned, but for the most part their stay was short; and perhaps last, but not least, was Ned Farr, who was a great character, to say the least. He came to the town in an early day and presented the appearance of a man in early middle life—quite stylish, and rather good looking. Among his striking characteristics, he was a great wag, and the most inveterate stutterer that I have ever known; this impediment was, however, no apparent embarrassment to him; he seemed rather to take pride in the fact that he was notorious in this respect. He had a very beautiful head of hair that he seemed to take great pride in, always having it arranged very nicely. He was a great favorite at gatherings of people—of which there were a great many in those days, as house and barn raising was a matter of almost daily occurrence, and it was on one of those occasions that he very greatly surprised and amused the people, when in the course of telling one of his funny stories, of which he seemed to possess an inexhaustible fund he removed his hat, by way of giving point, and at the same time removed his wig, and exposed a head as innocent of hair as an ostrich's egg. But perhaps the most remarkable incident, of his history while he lived here was his courtship and marriage, for he was a bachelor. With him to think was

to act; so one Sunday morning he started out with visions of matrimony coursing through his aforesaid head, so devoid of natural adornment, and hied himself to the place of abode of a comely widow, living some seven or eight miles distant, a lady with whom he had had no previous acquaintance, or at least only a speaking acquaintance, as she had only been in the country a few months, having lost her husband after coming to this town went through the gamut of courtship, - proposed, - and was accepted took his lady by the hand and led her back to the residence of Mr. Bowen, where Mr. Crumb, a Congregational minister of Traverse City was holding forth, and blandly inquired of the good man if he could be engaged to marry a couple. The reverend gentleman replied that he supposed he could, at the same time inquiring with some surprise who wished his services in that direction; to which the man of the shining head and percussion qualities as a swain replied, - his impediment of speech being demonstrated to an unusual degree, that he-e-e sup-p-pposed he-e-e-e was one of the vic-c-tims; it is only just however to say, that notwithstanding the abruptness of the transaction the union proved to be in every respect agreeable and satisfactory.

But I have rather wandered from my theme. Besides those already mentioned and among those who are entitled to be classed as pioneers were L. A. Jenne, George Valleau, Fitch Brooks and Azelius Mattice, residents of the northeastern part of the town, William Beswick who built the first sawmill on what was afterwards known as the Ransome Mill creek, the Ransome Bros. who rebuilt the sawmill, in nearly the same place, and also a gristmill, and Gardner Severence and son Charles. There were also Samuel Ward, and the Hooker family, consisting of an old lady and her two sons, John and William, a son-in-law by the name of Robertson, and two daughters who afterward became Mrs. William Fowle, of Traverse City, and Mrs. Samuel Ward, respectively. Then in the northwestern part of the town were the Brooks family, John Kenion, Mr. Stone, Mr. Davis, the Mowers family, Mr. Stata and Morris D. Spaford. I have unintentionally omitted to mention Mr. Samuel Burnett and family, which consisted, besides himself and wife, of his two sons - Mathew and Samuel, or as he was familiarly called S. S., and three daughters, the youngest dying in early womanhood, the other two becoming in time Mrs. Elihu Linkletter and Mrs. M. E. Thurston, of the township of Platte.

The inhabitants recognizing the importance of religious and educational privileges, took early measures to set up and establish institutions of this character, the history of which I will treat separately.

There is some uncertainty in my mind as to who was the first to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation to the people here, but I think it was the Rev. George Thompson, a person who needs no introduction to the people of the Grand Traverse region. Through his efforts a little church was formed in the year 1864, composed of Christians of several denominations which was practically Congregational in character, although it did not assume that name at its organization, if in fact it were christened at all. I have forgotten its name, but it seems to me it was simply called the First Church of Almira. I think it was instituted with nine members. Their names as I remember them were Mr. and Mrs. James B. Manwarring, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Fuller, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Linkletter, Mr. Bushnell and wife, and Elijah Pratt. A little later the Methodist Episcopalians began work, and subsequently organized a class, a part of those who joined the first organization leaving it and joining the Methodists. Some years later the First Church reorganized as a Congregational Church, and Elihu Linkletter was ordained and installed

as its pastor, which relation existed for several years. Religious meetings were held in private houses, at various places in the town, notably for the First Church at J. B. Manwarring's and Calvin Linkletter's and for the Methodists at George Fuller's. I think V. F. Thurston, a local preacher from the town of Platte was the first emissary of the Methodist people, and following him was Rev. Charles Williams, residing in the town of Kasson. Rev. Williams endeared himself to the whole population and his name is held in grateful remembrance still by all -those who had the privilege of his acquaintance. The First Church was ministered to at different times by Rev. Geo. Thompson, Rev. E. E. Kirkland and others; Rev. Kirkland, without doubt being held in most kindly esteem, especially by those who were the young folks of that period. He, with the aid of a few, organized a singing school which he maintained throughout his whole pastorate of two years, which had the effect of greatly improving the society among the young people, although the parents with marriageable daughters looked upon it as a well contrived scheme to deprive them of the aforesaid daughters; and as a matter of fact, it undoubtedly had that effect in a great number of cases. With the exception of the Seventh Day Adventists, who effected an organization about six or seven years ago, the Congregationalists and Methodists have occupied the ground religiously. The old First Congregational Church is, however, at present defunct, having merged itself into the First Congregational Church of Lake Ann.

Mrs. Elihu Linkletter (nee Burnett), taught the first term of school, which was held in the bachelor's hall of the writer, a log house about 12x16 feet inside. The furniture being very primitive, a writing desk was constructed by boring holes into the side of the house and inserting a couple of long pins, finishing by putting a wide board on top. This was in front of the one window, and the scholars were allowed to take turns in writing. The present Rev. E--- was one of her scholars. I think the district organization had been formed, and the schoolhouse was in process of construction while the aforesaid term of school was in session. This was school district "No. 1, and was popularly known as the Hathaway or the Black school district. Other district organizations followed rapidly, as nearly all parts of the township were settled by thrifty and intelligent citizens. The township was quite early laid out into school districts by the proper authorities. There have been five organized school districts, in each of which have been maintained, for a period of twenty or twenty-five years, regular terms of school, no district since its organization having failed to keep the statutory amount of school in each year, thus keeping themselves entitled to the benefits of public funds. There are at present five school districts which own six school buildings, worth in the aggregate including grounds, \$7,000 or \$8,000, to which should be added at least \$1,000 more for apparatus in the way of aids to instruction, such as globes, dictionaries, geographical and physiological charts, etc. School District No. 1 is operated as a graded school, and employs four teachers in its several departments and owns one of the best, if not the best, common school buildings in the county, it being a four room, two-story building finished in an elegant manner, and furnished with the best of modern furniture. When we consider the provision for education made during the first few years of the history of this township, we honor the fathers for their faith, their patriotism, their courage, and liberality, even more than for the largeness of their views and the sagacity of their plans.

The history of the early settlement of this town would compare, no doubt, similarly to that of other places in this general region and to those that remain who took

active part in the trials and hardships of those times very little need be said, except by way of comparing notes, and keeping alive in memory some of the incidents that were either amusing or taught useful lessons of fortitude, etc., but a few scenes and incidents may not be out of place. The society of the place was of a very cordial, and for the most part at least, of a very jolly character. Social gatherings of various kinds were a matter of frequent occurrence; sometimes it was a logging bee, or raising (for the people both old and young were inclined to combine pleasure with business), which usually ended with a dance or an old-fashioned play party, or it may have been a watermelon party when, as was sometimes the case, some settler (mossback) had an abundance of that luscious fruit, but if my memory serves me right, most of the watermelon parties were of a very select character, composed of a few graceless scamps who would attend on their own invitation, and preferred that the host should be absent or safely locked in the arms of Morpheus, when they would proceed to ravish the patch, and were not content until they had (in the vernacular of the times) "stacked the old d-l's vines," one apparently very high-toned thief on one occasion having the cheek to leave his card in the patch (probably an accident). Spelling schools and singing schools were also very popular. One very amusing incident occurred once in a party of young people going home from one of these gatherings. The school ma'am of the district school where the entertainment had been held, was a general favorite with the young men, and was very impartial in bestowing her favors upon them, so it turned out that the fellow that succeeded in asking for her company first was generally the favored one, for that evening at least. It happened on this occasion that one who had never been known to wait on her before secured the privilege, and after seeing them fairly started for her boarding place the young people of the home and several others who were visiting there walked on ahead and arrived home before the aforesaid couple put in their appearance; when they did come it seemed as though that the folks had retired, which made the situation a little embarrassing. They held a whispered consultation, of which only a part could be heard by those in "waiting," but they heard the young man say, "it was a half mile north and a half mile east," which they understood to mean an invitation for her to accompany him home, as that was the direction to his house. After a short delay, however, she seemed to decide on a plan of action, which she put into effect by sitting down and removing her shoes, and then very carefully opening the door and walking toward her bed room when, presto! a light was suddenly struck, and there sat a roomful of young people. The expression "a half mile north and a half mile east" was frequently quoted for their benefit and it would provoke an audible smile in which they in time were forced to join. The gentleman, a very young man then, a grandfather now, will blush like a school girl yet, if he hears it quoted.

One more instance will perhaps sufficiently illustrate the rollicking and somewhat lawless fun that was engaged in, in those days. A young married man was employed as laborer in the lumbering business: by a gentleman, and as it was near the winter holidays, he took it into his head to get up a grand dinner on Christmas, and invited his employer and the neighbors generally to partake of his hospitality on that occasion, adding that they expected to have roast goose as the principal table attraction. In due time the guests assembled and were invited to "sit by;" at the same time the host expressing regret that they had nothing better than chicken, and giving as the reason (and here he addressed himself particularly to his aforesaid employer), that every time, just about as he was going to grab a goose, some of them would come to the door and spoil his fun, so he had

finally to give up the goose, and take chickens instead. As a matter of fact, both the goose and the chickens were the property of the employer.

The guests all entered into the joke with great zest, and none more so than the victim, as such escapades were looked upon as rich, and excusable amusements, and were always accepted with the best of grace, this being only one of several similar incidents.

Probably a majority of the men that came to this region brought some kind of firearms, quite naturally supposing that game of the larger kinds would be very abundant, but unlike any other wild country that I ever knew of, game was found to be conspicuous mainly by its absence, except perhaps, ruffed grouse or partridge, which were quite plentiful. Fish, however, were very plentiful and easily caught, and furnished both a luxury and quite an important article of food, that and "boughten" pork being the principal flesh foods for the settlers. There were, however, an occasional deer and bear to be seen, and a few of the former were killed,- one man distinguishing himself by killing one with a revolver while hunting cattle.

I do not remember that a bear has ever been killed in the town; two or three general bear hunts have been had; the bear in each case making his escape, so far at least as is known to the writer. A very sad accident happened on one of these occasions; one of the hunters mistaking one of the others for the bear, shot with fatal results, the man living long enough however to exonerate the man who did the act from blame. The above accident happened, I think, in the month of February, 1866 or 1.867. The name of the man who was killed was Schell. During the thirty years that I have lived here I have seen only six of the animals, and but three of them in my own town; the larger kinds of game have become more abundant as the country has improved.

It was not an uncommon thing here, when the country was very new, for people to get lost; indeed it seems very wonderful that there were not more, as the whole country for miles in every direction was an unbroken wilderness with only here and there the small clearings of the settlers. A young lady, on one occasion, in attempting to go from where the family were living with a neighbor's family, to where her father had taken up a place, got lost, and though a searching party was got up in short order and in fact she was found within three or four hours from the time she was lost, she was so nearly crazed from fright that when the rescuers came in sight of her she attempted to run away from them. The writer himself once spent a long and chilly night in the wilds of the township; having to admit to himself that if he was not lost, at least his shanty was. It was deemed advisable then to institute some systematic course to pursue on such occasions, and the plan adopted was, that if anyone's friends were lost, it should be reported at once at Mr. Burrell's place, he having a very large conch-shell of peculiar sound and great power, and that a certain number of blasts from that was to be the signal for a general gathering to search for the lost one. (The place referred to is now owned and occupied by C. F. Sauercunk, Esq.)

While I do not think that the hardships endured among the pioneers of this country would compare with those of the colonists that first settled the continent, still that they were very great cannot be gainsaid. Some idea may be gained of the situation when it is known that it was in war times, when commodities of all kinds were very high in price, as for instance,- flour.14 to \$15 per barrel, pork \$50, common prints twenty-five cents per yard, and other things accordingly. Then again it was from twelve to eighteen miles from Traverse City to different points in our town, and everything had to be

brought from that point, either on foot or by wagon road, and that in places almost impassable. Instances are plenty where men, after working through the week at Traverse City and sometimes farther yet, have loaded themselves up with from fifty to one hundred pounds and carried it home on their backs that distance. One case in particular that I have in mind was that of a man who was too penurious to pay fifty cents per hundred for hauling (the regular price), who has been known repeatedly to carry a hundred pound bag of flour from town to his home, a distance of at least eighteen miles. Ladies have even been known to travel the distance on foot; and one in particular is deserving of special mention. The lady in question carried a load that would have put many a man to his mettle to have accomplished; it consisted of somewhere from forty to fifty pounds and was carried the whole distance of at least thirteen or fourteen miles, making the trip in less than a day. The same lady is still alive, and is the wife of one of the prominent citizens of Traverse City. But I think the greatest feat I have ever known to be accomplished was performed by Hart Marden (before referred to as among the first settlers). He started from Glen Haven in the morning at the same time that the men employed started out to begin the day's work; walked to Traverse City, a distance of over thirty miles, in the month of February or March, 1864, when the snow was over four feet deep, and no other road from this town to Glen Haven than that made by the mail carrier, who made his trips once each week, on snow shoes. He did his business there, which consisted, in part at least, of purchasing his load to take back (of over fifty pounds) and got to the place from where he started before nine o'clock in the evening of the same day, and he was then very far from being used up, for as he bounded into the room where his companions were seated, he threw his pack from his shoulders and jumping into the air, cracked his feet together twice, very distinctly, before striking the floor. I am well aware that the above incident will be likely to tax human credulity severely, but I am willing to stake my reputation as a man on the facts as stated, and there is at least one resident still living here besides myself, that can bear testimony to the same. The fact was, we could hardly believe that he had been to Traverse City ourselves; and but for the fact of our knowing that he could not have procured the articles he brought back anywhere else, it is very doubtful if he could have convinced even us. Such feats as those above related abundantly prove that the material from which true pioneers are made was not all exhausted when our forefathers first settled the new world.

It would probably be too much to say that the hopes and anticipations of the first settlers have been fully realized in the matter of the development of the country and the acquisition of wealth; but, when we take a retrospective view of all the circumstances, I think we may well congratulate ourselves upon the success attained. Then an unbroken and heavily timbered wilderness challenged the would-be settlers to many months, nay years of hard toil before it held out promise of any material returns. Now we see on every hand broad fields of waving grain, valuable buildings scattered all over the land or grouped into flourishing and busy cities and villages, where the hum of machinery and the steam whistle are heard instead of the dismal hooting of the owl, and the weird scream of the loon.

Then the principal method of locomotion and transit was on foot or with ox teams; now the inhabitants are riding either in railway trains or in their own carriages after well bred horses.

Then the dwellers were content to live in rudely constructed hovels, in many instances covered with the bark stripped from the trees; now the landscape is adorned with many costly and finely finished dwellings, comfortably, if not elegantly furnished. Then the pioneer's children attended school in log school houses or the abandoned home of some weak-kneed settler, - on seats split, or hewn, from a friendly log; now they seek the road to future usefulness and fame in well built, well painted and elegantly furnished school houses, under the instruction of well trained and highly educated teachers. Then the community attended public worship in the rude homes, or log school houses of the country; now we may worship God in the stately church edifices builded and dedicated expressly for that purpose. Then only the primeval forest met the eye on every hand; now the apple, the peach, the plum, the pear, and fruitful vine reward the husbandman for his years of toil and labor. Surely our lines have been cast in pleasant places.