

(from *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections* Volume 31 (1901) pages 130-133)

A BIRDSEYE HISTORY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF HOMESTEAD PREPARED BY CAMDEN JOHNSON

The first location of lands in the township for actual settlement was made in 1862, by E. E. Kirkland, who immediately commenced erecting a house and making improvements.

In 1863, quite a number, principally from Benzonia, located homesteads: Wm. Steele, D. Piper, Wm. Weston, D. Spencer, A. T. and Morris Case, H. Averill, Hugh Marsh, Daniel Carter, Geo. St. Clair and perhaps some others, all of whom moved into town, built houses, and commenced making improvements. In 1864 the writer remembers his entrance into the place. Influenced by the glowing description of the beauties and richness of the Grand Traverse region, we left our home in old Ashtabula county, Ohio, about the first of June, 1864. We had a very pleasant and uneventful journey until we arrived at Traverse City. We found that our only way to get to Benzonia was the primitive one of walking.

We started early on the morning of the 9th of June, a hot sultry morning. Nearly all the way was through a dense wilderness with but a simple trail, and even now it makes me shudder to think of the myriads of mosquitoes that constantly swarmed around us. All things have an end, and about nine p. m. we came to an opening and saw a house, which was a glad sight. It was the residence of H. Averill. They kindly took us in and a sorrier and more forlorn fellow you never saw; my feet were blistered badly, but I survived all the discomforts and the next day I made my way to where our old neighbor, Deacon Steele, and Geo. E. Steele were at work upon their homestead, building a house. We were greatly pleased with the general appearance of the country. The next day I went with them to Benzonia, where we found several of our old acquaintances. I commenced almost immediately to work on the sawmill south of town.

I will only take the time to relate an incident or two that will illustrate some of the discomforts of the first settlers of the country.

The only way to obtain any lumber in this whole country was to pole it up on a boat from Frankfort. In the course of the summer I helped Mr. Steele run some logs down to Frankfort. The river being so crooked and full of snags, only a small raft could be run. The Deacon, G. E. and myself started out, and for quite a distance we ran with our three rafts fastened together, but soon we came to a bad bend and had to detach them and each took a piece. The deacon was ahead, and we each guided our rafts as we could with our poles; soon we saw that the deacon was having trouble in getting around a snag; he was pushing with all his might, and when he went to take in his pole it was stuck in the mud and would not come. I saw that if he held on to it, he would surely fall into the river, and I told him to let go as I could easily get it for him, but he was bound to hold on, and in a twinkling he was in the river; when he got righted up the water came up to his chin. In less time than it takes me to tell it we came along side of him and helped him on board my raft, and as it was a warm day he suffered no particular inconvenience. The people that now come into this county but little realize what the first settlers had to endure.

During the summer of 1864 a township organization was effected, embracing the territory now known as Homestead, Inland, Weldon and Colfax. The first supervisor elected was Wm. Steele; clerk, D. B. Spencer; treasurer, G. H. Smith; school inspectors,

E. E. Kirkland and A. T. Case. In 1866 the township of Inland was organized, and during the next year Colfax and Weldon were organized, leaving the township of Homestead as it now is.

In the matter of highways the township of Homestead stands second to none in the county. The first settlers went at it with a will laid out a system of roads as required for the public good, and then opened them up. The people of the present day who grumble and find fault with the high highway taxes, but little realize the burdens of the first settlers; we not only levied all the taxes the law allowed us and worked them out, but donated twice the amount.

The first year of the township organization a school district was organized, and in the spring of 1865 a schoolhouse was built. The patrons of the school turned out and split out pine "shakes," erected a frame out of poles, and covered the walls and roof with the "shakes." Elm bark was peeled and used for the floor, and a few boards and slabs were wrought into desks and seats. The structure answered quite well for a summer school, but it was found to be impossible to make it comfortable for winter. The house was used for three years, having spring summer and fall terms. Meantime settlers continued to arrive, new district were organized, until now we have three full, and three fractional districts, and five fair schoolhouses in town.

At the time of the organization the township was solidly republican. "Very soon, however, people of different political' affiliations came in and the various political parties have had their ups and downs. In our township matters for the first twelve or fifteen years party politics were unknown. Since then it has been a kind of see-saw, first one party then the other gaining the ascendancy.

In 1864 some of the first settlers met at the residence of Rev. E. E. Kirkland and formed a Congregational Church, and chose Mr. Kirkland as pastor. Services were held at the residence of the pastor every Lord's day for some years. A Sunday school was at once organized and has been maintained up to this time. It was found to be very inconvenient to hold meetings at private houses and Pastor Kirkland, Deacon Steele and the writer, concluded to build a house that would answer the purpose. The little church on the corner was erected and was used for church meetings; also for township meetings, until the present church was built.

The Methodist Episcopalians have a church in the north part of town and quite a nice, place of worship. In 1896 a Congregational Church was organized at Honor, with some, twenty members. There are now three pretty well sustained Sunday schools in the township.

The township of Homestead is admirably adapted for farming purposes, being mostly hardwood land. The Platte river runs through the town from east to west. At an early day D. C. and S. K. Carter built a sawmill upon the Carter creek, that greatly helped in building up the town. Although the town has not been settled as rapidly as some of our western towns, yet the increase of settlers has been steady, and how the entire township is pretty well settled. One great drawback in the development of the town has been the location of so much land by speculators and lumbermen; large tracts have been stripped of all valuable timber and left to grow up to bushes; true, the business has brought a good deal of money into the town.

In 1895 a large manufacturing plant was started on the Platte river, some two miles west of the state road.