

BERRIEN & CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES
By Jeannie Watson

REVEREND ISAAC McCOY & THE CAREY MISSION

Isaac McCoy founded and ran the Carey Mission in Niles, Michigan from 1822-1832. He was a Baptist missionary and minister who served the Native American Indians. His impact on Berrien and Cass County Patawatomi Indians and pioneers was profound having both positive and negative effects. Carey Mission was the "point from which the American frontier was extended." Before Isaac McCoy arrived, Southwest Michigan was considered a savage, dangerous wilderness. He gave the Indians compassion, education and sanctuary, where fear, hatred and war had preceded. In doing so, he built a reputation that provided pioneers the confidence to move into the area. His Carey Mission became a sanctuary for all races, a way station for travelers, and a meeting place for government officials. His methods brought understanding, peace, and co-existence, until serious problems developed. Isaac played a major role in the Indian Removal Act, and was a significant figure in the complex history of Berrien and Cass County.

In 1922, the "Fort St. Joseph Chapter of the Daughters Of The American Revolution" located the site of the Carey Mission. It was located one mile west of the St. Joseph River, on what is now Niles-Buchanan Road. Carey Mission consisted of 200 acres of land in 1832, which now encompasses subdivisions, woodlands. The DAR had a large boulder placed at the corner of Niles-Buchanan Road and Philip Street, then attached a plaque, which marked the location of the main entrance to the Carey Mission. The boulder bearing the plaque was placed so that it could be viewed from the public highway, and rests on the corner of what is now private property. The site is, perhaps, one of the most significant historic locations, of the early 1800s, in Southwestern Michigan.

Isaac McCoy, of Scottish descent, was born in Uniontown, Fayette County, Pennsylvania on June 13, 1784 to William McCoy and Elizabeth Royce. His grandparents were James McCoy (born 1690) and Lila Bruce (born circa 1693). In 1700, grandfather James McCoy, came as an orphaned, ten year old boy from Scotland to Baltimore, Maryland. As a young man James migrated to Kentucky, then later moved to Pennsylvania, where he married. William, Isaac's father, was the third of six children. William McCoy grew up in Pennsylvania, married, had children, and became a Baptist minister. In 1790, the McCoy family moved to Kentucky, where William served as a pioneer preacher, and son Isaac received a religious education.

In 1803, at age 19, Isaac McCoy married Christiana Polk in Kentucky, and one year later the couple moved to Clark County, Indiana. Isaac was ordained there to preach in the local Silver Creek and Maria Creek Churches, while John McCoy, Isaac's brother, helped found Franklin College in the same time frame. While working as a junior church leader and wheelwright, to support his family, Isaac was "elected" as a member of the Baptist Missionary Society, whose mission was to aid the Native Indian Americans.

At age 26, in 1810, Isaac "was ordained a full Baptist minister." The "Baptist Board of Foreign Missions in American" sent him to serve the Miami Indians, who were living on the Wabash River, just 16 miles from Terre Haute, Indiana. There "he opened a school for the Indians, and honed the skills needed to bridge cultural chasms." The American Indians had fought a losing battle against the invasion of the white man into their

territories, were suffering as a people, and in desperate need of schooling for survival in the new social order. With the conviction of their faith, "Isaac McCoy and the Baptists sought to save the souls of the heathens," and integrate them into the white man's world, where they had been thrust with no preparation. Isaac felt the "noble calling" to help alleviate the poverty, social problems, living conditions, trauma, culture shock, and despair of the Indians, and the only way to do that was through education.

By 1818, at age 34, he was working in the Indiana wilderness with the Kickapoo, Miami and Wea Indians. The job required him to travel a lot, in order to encourage pupils to attend school, and to determine the needs of the people. Some nights during his travels, he had to sleep in the rain, and shielded himself with the bark of trees, peeled from the trunks. It took him two years to establish that mission, before it could be turned over to the teachers.

Isaac McCoy was assigned to move to Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1819, at age 36, which he did with his family. There he opened another school, and collected the needy children. Thirty-two Indian students lived with him "as members of the family." There were 42 students one year later, which included Shawnee, Miami and Potawatomi Indians.

Two of the biggest problems the Indians faced, in this era, besides cultural shock, was alcoholism and exploitation. Isaac and his associates, organized a Temperance Society, and a Fort Wayne Church. He worked as a surveyor, teacher, and government commissioner, beside running the school and preaching in the church. It was at this time that he took the first of many journeys to Washington, D.C. (called Washington City at the time). He had grave concerns about dishonest white men who were robbing the Indians of possessions, coveting their government stipends, swindling them of their gold, and selling them whiskey. Isaac and other Baptists, urged Congress to provide safe areas, away from the corrupting influence of unscrupulous white traders, and whiskey bootleggers. With the approval of the government and the Baptist Missionary Board, Isaac gathered his flock and headed north to Michigan.

Southwest Michigan, according to author Ralph Ballard, before the 1820s, had the reputation for being populated by "savages who had received British gold at Malden, in Canada," as payment for murdering Americans during the Revolutionary War. The British/Canadian attempted coup following that war was a last ditch attempt to turn the loss into a win. The British, at that time, were paying a gold bounty for American scalps, which the Indians were collecting. The Potawatomi, also, "hardly ten years before, had taken part against our country in the bloody battle of Tippecanoe and Brownstown." However, the memories most damning for the Potawatomi were their roles in the Massacre of Chicago (withdrawing whites were ambushed and slaughtered), and the Battle of Fort Dearborn. As a result, white settlers feared entering the region of Southwest Michigan. Isaac McCoy's bold move into the "heart of Indian country," and his successful alliance with the Potawatomi changed the locale's reputation.

The Carey Mission was named after William Carey (1761-1834), the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society, and was funded partially by the government. The Mission was founded in 1822 in Southwest Michigan to work for the physical & spiritual welfare of the American Indian. Besides the gold, the Indians had been paid for their land, the federal government was providing stipends to buy food and necessities, and help build the facilities. The goal was to assist the Indians in adjusting to their new lifestyle. The plan was to educate them to make their livings as farmers (even though the Indian culture labeled farming as "women's work."). The transition from a hunter-gatherer society, to a full farming culture, was not easy.

Isaac McCoy located the Carey Mission where he did, because of its isolation deep within hostile Indian territory, which he thought would keep unscrupulous white men at bay. He did not want his Indians exposed to self-serving, manipulative whites, who were after the Indian's government stipends and gold. Isaac was trying to protect the Potawatomi from the kinds of destructive influences that occurred at his mission in Indiana.

Carey Mission School started with 30 pupils, and 3 teachers in January 1823. It grew to forty, and then sixty students, and finally increased to almost one hundred. The children were Indians, and "French-Indian half-breeds." Adult Potawatomi were hired as labor to clear the land, farm, and run the mission. In 1823 they brought in 900 bushels of corn." Letters were exchanged between Michigan Territorial Governor Lewis Cass and Isaac, which still exist today, commenting on the progress. Isaac made several trips back east to solicit more aid for the mission, because they had gone into debt, and had need of supplies they could not produce themselves. The Carey Mission School taught reading, writing, arithmetic, religion, farming, and craftsmen skills. All pupils were taught a means to make a living in the white man's world. Adult Indians often joined the classes to learn to read and write English.

Isaac McCoy's missionary strategy for reaching the minds, and souls of the Potawatomi, was the same as it had been in Indiana, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. He followed his humanitarian convictions and Baptist tenets. He met the Indian's hate and anger, with kindness and patience. Ignorance was always countered with education. Compassion and brotherhood was given when suspicion and distrust presented itself. Hunger was always handled with generosity. Challenge was met with confidence and concern for the best interests of his flock. His approach was one of problem solving. He had a tendency to shelter and over-protect. He was an "isolationist," one who felt separation from the cause of a problem was the best solution. Slowly Isaac McCoy and his missionaries won over the Potawatomi people of Southwestern Michigan, and his reputation spread among the Native Americans. He and his missionaries could travel anywhere in Southwest Michigan, and even the renegade Indians trusted them. In essence, he and his contingent Baptists accomplished what the army could not do by force, they gained the cooperation and allegiance of the Southwest Michigan Indians. His methods of dealing with the Native American Indians, at that specific time, won him their respect and gratitude.

On November 6, 1824, Isaac baptized the Missions first two white converts in Lake Michigan. He baptized a number of Indians several months later. Many more converts followed. They did struggle, however. Several times provisions ran low, and boiled corn was the only food available,

By 1826, "an agent for Lewis Cass, second governor of the Michigan Territory," declared that the Carey Mission was "a colony firmly settled, numerous, civilized, and happy." Five years after its commencement (1827), Carey Mission consisted of two hundred acres of land, fifty-eight of which were farm fields. There were more than twenty log buildings, that consisted of "dwellings, a school house, chapel, barns, workshops, stables, sheds, and a grist mill" (used to grind grain and make flour). There were shallow wells, where drinking water was extracted by means of buckets on a rope. The grist mill was powered by oxen, who were harnessed to wooden extension arms, that were attached to the gear mechanism of the grinding stone. As the oxen walked around the circle, the rotational energy was converted to movement of the top grinding stone, which was constantly fed grain. The entire complex was surrounded by a fence, with three access gates. The main entrance was on what is now Nile-Buchanan Road, one mile west of the St. Joseph River. It was supported partially by Baptist Missionary Ministry funds, and government stipends, but for the most part Carey Mission finally became self-sufficient.

"Carey Mission was widely known throughout the region, at the time, because it and "Pogwatigue" (Indian name for the Niles, Michigan settlement) were the most important points between Chicago and Detroit." They were only 1 mile apart. Surrounding them was a wilderness of huge trees laced with Indian Trails, "oak openings" (prairie patches), and wild animals. A main crude Indian pathway, the Saulk Trail, from Chicago, ran south of the Mission, through what is now Berrien County, over to what is now Cass County, and then headed northeast to Detroit. Isaac McCoy had cut a one hundred mile long north-south track from central Indiana to the Mission on his way there, with his wagon train of missionaries. So, the Mission had three main routes of access, plus smaller Indian Trails.

Thanks to the charity and kindness of the missionaries at Carey Mission travelers were never turned

away. It was a safe haven in a sea of uncivilized dangers, where one could find safety, shelter, a bed for the night, food and clean water, and directions. With the chance to refresh themselves, those who sojourned continued on their way, taking with them "good tidings" about the Carey Mission. As the fine reputation of the Mission increased, so did the number of visitors. Eventually, the very negative circumstances Isaac sought to prevent though isolation, came to his very doorstep. Ironically, it was the route that Isaac McCoy, himself created from central Indiana that brought the first Ohio and Indiana settlers to Southwestern Michigan.

Still Carey Mission was a humanitarian haven for the Indians, and a safe oasis for the white pioneers. The institution served as the ambassador of good will to all, and as an intermediary between the Indians and the white man. It was the first educational institution in the region, and was "the location of this area's first government headquarters," besides Niles. Carey Mission was the focal point around which all Indians of Berrien and Cass County rotated until other settlements developed. He gave the pioneers confidence to move into an area feared for its "savage Indians," and had even created the trail that lead from central Indiana to the Southwest Michigan on his way there.

Isaac McCoy continued to improve the conditions of the Mission. He brought in live stock. According to his journals, they had 200 head of cattle, 300 sheep, and "an immense herd of swine," which existed on "nuts and roots they found in the woods." More teachers were added to the school. Spinning, weaving, and knitting were taught to the girls. School looms were turning out hundreds of yards of cloth. Improvements to the now improved horse powered grist mill made it one of a kind for hundred miles surrounding the Mission, and was bringing in revenue for grinding pioneer's grain as well as their own. A blacksmith shop was added. Storage facilities were added to retain harvests for winter consumption. Pastures were expanded, numerous Indian families from Berrien and Cass County built log cabins on the Mission grounds, and outside it fences, abandoning their encampments. Peach and apple orchards were planted. White settlers joined the Mission, and lived along side the Potawatomi..

Carey Mission, at its largest, and Pogwatigue, was the central hub, around which small farms and civilization spread for three miles in all directions. It consisted of a "melting pot" of Potawatomi, white settlers, Baptist clergy, educators, and numerous industries that created a self-sufficient community. The central fenced Mission compound, itself, had grown to 27 expanded buildings, and numerous craftsman industries.

A branch of the Carey Mission was established in LaPorte County, Indiana at Lac du Chemin Lake (now called Hudson Lake). The Baptist Mission there consisted of a church and school. Other missions were organized in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Barry County.

Indian scholars who graduated from the Carey Mission School were sent back east for more education. The most ambitious students earned college degrees, and came back to the Mission or the area, to work among their people. Two of Isaac's son, who were educated there, were sent to become doctors in Lexington, Kenturcky. The missionaries, Indians, and whites lived in peace and prosperity among themselves, within the Mission's influence, but all was not well. Attempts to solve problems led to the ultimate end of the Mission.

The Native American Indians had many challenges, and local leaders looked to the mission for solutions. Despite Isaac McCoy's energy and honorable humanitarian efforts, other factors were working against the missionaries. The "root of this evil was the white man's greed." Isaac McCoy's own success in establishing the Mission, changed Michigan's reputation, and lured hardworking settlers, as well as "unscrupulous bounders," to his doorstep.

There were four main immediate challenges to the Indians, that Isaac McCoy and his missionaries dealt with daily. They went beyond the basics of a general education, physical well being, and religious instruction. The solutions to those four challenging problems were elusive.

The first challenge, was "the white man's ENVY of Indian gold." Large sums of money had been paid to them for their land. They were given farm property allotments which had value, and monthly government stipends for food provided them with money to spend. Envy tempted and drew unsavory swindlers eager to take advantage of those "naive to the ways of the white man's economic system." By culture and tradition, the Indians did not place the same value on gold coins, as did the white man. Their society bartered, traded, hunted, foraged, and even stole to get what they needed, but they did not use gold. The same value was not placed on its worth, as a society, until it was too late and "poverty had them in its grasp." Envy is almost impossible to block.

To add to the complex problems, the second challenge was the fact that the adult Indian was not experienced, or sophisticated, in the "ARITHMETICALLY BASED ECONOMIC WORLD." Dickering to obtain the lowest gold prices, comparison shopping, and saving gold to meet long term needs instead of splurging for immediate wants are learned skills. "Cost analysis" (determining if the value of an item was worth the gold being asked for it), and mercantilism (understanding that wealth and security required the accumulation of gold,) were not values their culture taught. Safe guarding one's gold, was far different than deciding what object one was willing to trade for other objections desired. The mathematics of money, its short term advantages, and "long term accumulation for delayed future gratification," was taken for granted in the white world, where every child grew up with the concepts. Coming from a bartering, hunter-gather society, thrust into a math based economic system, the Indians were unprepared to deal with white swindlers. The Native Americans were taken advantage of, and left in poverty. The only solution to that problem was education, and it took one whole generation to fully ingrain arithmetic based economic concepts into the Indian culture. Much of the money the government paid the Potawatomi, and almost every other Native American Tribe, ended up in the hands of unscrupulous white men. They lacked experience and understanding. Without the skills and strategies needed to survive in a gold based economy, poverty was sure to follow.

A third challenge, the Carey Mission struggled with, was Indian ALCOHOLISM. It was a major vexation for the missionaries. The Baptist clergy opposed the selling of alcohol to the Indians, forbade its use on mission grounds, and continuously preached against it. Author Alfred Matthews stated, that the Potawatomi "did not seek it, but it was brought to them . . . nor could they possibly forebear from drinking it when it was in their reach." The Native American constitution had evolved over the eons without ever having to adapt to the use of liquor. It quickly became their addiction, and a destructive force within the Native American family. It caused spousal abuse, child neglect, poverty, and a disintegration of the family unit. Indian gold, needed to feed Indian families, was spent to buy whiskey. Judge Lieb, a government agent assigned to the Mission, and Isaac McCoy, fought a continuous battle against the whiskey peddlers who operated covertly, and got rich on the misery of the Indians.

Historic accounts tell us of a fourth challenge. Isaac McCoy, and his missionaries, worked tirelessly to give the Potawatomi a sense of SELF-WORTH, self-respect, confidence, and independence. The effects of the Native American's circumstances kept many enslaved by their own feeling of worthlessness. Isaac described the quandary in his journals. As a people, the Indians, after losing the war and being reduced to poverty, felt inferior to the white man, as a race. Success had to be measured in individual victories. The children were the easiest to teach and build confidence. They learned their lessons, developed craftsmen skills, did chores, and took pride in their contributions to the overall Mission. But still their shame remained. The squaws (women) were taught to spin wool, weave, do needlework, cook, launder, garden, and perform a variety of domestic tasks, which gave them a small measure of confidence. But their self-value remained low. However, the Indian males were a different story. In the Indian culture, a "man was not a man unless he was a warrior and hunter." The women did the farming, and that "women's work" was considered to be beneath a proud warrior's efforts. While some men learned to be farmers, blacksmith, leather workers, others felt these tasks stripped them of their manhood. When the man in a family, regardless of his race, no longer has pride in himself as a provider, the consequences to the nuclear family is devastating. Without the Native American male's self-worth, the entire family suffered. Feelings of worthlessness led to abuse, neglect, domestic violence, and reinforced alcoholism as an escape.

The Patawatomi saw themselves as a "degraded and disgraced race." One Chief described his people's way of thinking by commenting that, "they now looked upon the whites as so much their superiors that they would not attempt to resist anything they did or should do." They were convinced they were helpless, with one stating "we can do nothing ourselves." With all of the before mentioned challenges contributing to their poverty, Isaac wrote, "the Indians are so exceedingly pinched with hunger at this season of the year that swarms of them linger about us in hopes of getting a few crumbs or bones. We are continually grieved at witnessing their distresses; we can not feed them all." One missionary was quoted as saying, I "could find no apology for my government in not devising means to restrain these licentious traders, high and low individuals and companies, who, by every means, open and covert, are conveying to the Indian the poison of his life and hopes" (whiskey). With their confidences destroyed, their gold stipends continually be taken by the whites,, and alcoholism controlling their lives, many fell into a cycle of begging and shame.

Isaac McCoy was convinced, during his sojourn at the Carey Mission, that the only way to help his Potawatomi Indians was to remove them from the clutches, and influences of evil, self-serving whites. He was an isolationist at heart, and could think of no other way to save these people. He made a series of trips east, wrote letters to the U.S. Secretary of War, and had talks with the leaders in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He, and others who felt the same, lobbied Congress to provide the Indians with land west of the Mississippi River, far away from the influence of the evil whites. There is no doubt that the self-serving, who envied Indian land, jumped on this band wagon in the guise of trying to help. Isaac, in the company of a delegation of Indians, made a trip to the Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma Territory. He submitted a report on the trip to the U.S. Secretary of War in January of 1829. The result of the lobbyists' efforts, and that report, was the Indian Removal Act.

Few Berrien and Cass County residents realize the significant part that the Carey Mission and Isaac McCoy, played in the the creation of the Indian Removal Act. Nor do most understand that it was fashioned to protect, and save the Native American Indians from exploitation by lawless whites, alcoholism, poverty, and the Indian's own lack of confidence. He did not feel that the Indians would recover as a nation, until they were forced to stand on their own two feet, away from the evils of the white race.

Isaac McCoy made several trips to Kansas. He was employed by the federal government to survey, select reservation locations, set up schools, establish missions, and make the arrangements for the Potawatomi in Kansas. The average Potawatomi in Southwest Michigan did not realize that Isaac McCoy, and some of their own people were involved in the planning. Their treatment by the U.S. Army, who forced their departure, was deplorable, but Isaac had no part in that journey. He was busy trying to set up a safe environment for them in Kansas.

In 1832, the Carey Mission was abandoned. The 27 buildings were torn down, and the effort to save a conquered people was moved to Kansas. Isaac McCoy took his family to Kansas, and was joined by missionaries Robert Simerwell, Jothan Meeker, Johnston Lykins, and their wives. Isaac spent 10 years establishing schools, missions, and communities for Native American Indians west of the Mississippi River.

The Indians of Southwest Michigan saw their removal to the west as a betrayal by Isaac McCoy and the Carey Mission. The Indian Removal Act was a "bitter pill for the Potawatomi to swallow." They did not want to leave the Southwest Michigan lands of their ancestors. The U.S. Army's forced removal was an exercise in "strong armed bullying, misery, and hostile resistance. Despite the Indians protests, the Army followed their orders, the new law, and the president's instructions. Many Indian children died on the forced marches out west. Isaac McCoy and his missionaries were waiting for the Indians, with the same kindness and caring, when they arrived in Kansas, but their faith in him has been destroyed.

The western reservations did shield the Natives American Indians from some of the exploitations they experienced in Southwest Michigan. However, other problems resulted. Corrupt Indian Agents replaced

peddlers, bootleg whiskey still found its way on the reservations, and the Indians, despite government stipends, were still living in poverty. Isaac was kept busy settling new arrivals, surveying, selecting living sites, and maintaining a support system for the Indians.

At age 58, in 1842, Isaac McCoy "moved to Louisville, Kentucky, with his family, to direct the American Indian Mission Association. It was a society, Isaac organized himself to serve the Native American Indians. He devoted the rest of his life working for this organization.

Isaac McCoy died on June 30, 1846 in Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky. His wife survived him by 4 years. He is buried in the Western Cemetery, Jefferson St. (between 15th and 18th St.), Louisville, Kentucky. His tombstone was lost, but the record of his resting place still remains. His private papers, numbering 2,500 items in 38 volumes, on July 9, 1879, were given to the Kansas State Historical Society. The files consist of the following: his correspondence letters, education materials, legislation reports, mission work, religious sermons, government funding papers, Removal Act data, missionary board journals, business activities edgers, his autobiography, accounts, survey notes, maps, lecture notes, his poetry, authored hymns, and the manuscript of his book "History of the Baptist Indian Missions." The original papers show the effects of insects, fire, age, and water damage, but most has been microfilmed. These items document Isaac McCoy's sincere effort to help the Indians, the problems involved, and his isolationist solutions.

Historically, the Indian Removal Act was a classic example of "unintended consequences." There were just too many variables to predict all the outcomes. The dramas of history are rarely simple, and hindsight allows historians to examine the complex interplay of serious circumstances of the past. Whether the Potawatami would have been better off left to "the mercy of uncontrollable white men" in Michigan, or isolated in Kansas is a matter of opinion. A culture in defeat, does not recover, until its people become educated, learn to "stand on their own two feet," and adapt to change in a new environment. Confidence to resist potential oppressors, and refusal to play the role of victims is earned, not given. Isaac McCoy took on a task so daunting, with so many road blocks, a lesser man would have crumbled under the load. There is no doubt he was trying to protect and follow the tenets of his faith. The real villains in this scenario were those who sought economic gain, by exploiting their fellow human beings.

As always, two points surface, when the lives of those long ago are examined. First is the fact that if we do not study the past, no matter how complex, and learn from it, we are doomed to repeat its errors. Second, the alternative solutions to problems of the past are limited. Before judging too harshly, one must ask - what would you have done if you had walked in Isaac McCoy's shoes?

In conclusion, Reverend Isaac McCoy was the founder of the Carey Mission in Niles, Berrien County Michigan. He served the Potawatomi Native American Indians from Berrien and Cass County as a Baptist minister and missionary. Isaac arrived in Southwestern Michigan in 1822, when it was unsettled, isolated, and dangerous. His successful Indian school and mission gave settlers the courage to follow him into what was considered forbidden territory. For several years after its establishment, the Carey Mission was the only midpoint oasis for travelers, between Chicago and Detroit, and a place where he welcomed all travelers to its sanctuary. He championed the Potawatomi, offered them an education, and sought to help them adjust to the ways of the white man, so they could survive. When uncontrollable problems arose, he lobbied Congress for western reservations that would separate the Indians from lawless whiskey peddlers, manipulators who robbed them of their governments stipends, and swindlers who bilked them of the gold the government paid for their land. He found ways through unexplored territories, where alternatives were limited. Despite opposing opinions on the Indian Removal Act, Isaac McCoy, was a pathfinder and part of Southwest Michigan's saga. Isaac McCoy has earned his place in local history.

RESEARCH

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