

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

## HENRY HAWKS, SR. & EARLY LOGGING

Henry Hawks migrated to Cass County, Michigan in 1829 from Juniata County, Pennsylvania. He was a lumberjack, who helped tame the mighty virgin forests of lower Michigan. Henry founded a local logging business and established a family tradition, which lasted for eight generations. Frame homes built, in these early days, to escape drafty log cabins, were constructed with timber logged by the Hawks family or those like them. Many such farm houses are still standing today. To appreciate Henry Hawks, one must understand the nature and beginnings of Southwestern Michigan's fledgeling timber industry.

Before lower Michigan was settled, the land was covered with towering pristine forests. There were occasional "oak openings," so called because the acidity of the soil was better suited to scrub vegetation, rather than trees and meadows. Those untouched trees tempted many loggers from New York's, Virginia's and Pennsylvania's logging economy. Our country's eastern states had been populated for over 200 years, by this time. Their timber lands had been used to build the homes, barns and public buildings that housed an ever growing population of people and animals. In these less advanced times, easterners had to heat their homes and cook their food with wood. Businesses used either water power, or wood, as an energy source. To make their circumstance even more envious of Michigan's forests, eastern furniture manufactures required hard woods like walnut (the most popular and expensive), cherry, and oak, all of which Michigan had in abundance.

Henry Hawks was born in 1790 in Charlemont, Franklin County, Massachusetts. He was the son of Gershom Hawks II. Their ancestor was John Hawkes, who arrived from England, with the Winthrop Fleet to settle the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, and later was a founder of Hadley, Massachusetts. Henry's mother was Hannah King, the daughter of Zadock King and Hannah Mitchell, who both resided in Deerfield, Franklin County, Massachusetts. As a young man, Henry migrated to Pennsylvania, while his siblings went to New York and Virginia seeking their fortunes. His occupation was that of a sawyer, working in the lumber and saw mills industry that provided wood to eastern furniture making concerns. He was a skilled logger, and could "fell a tree with an ax in record time." Henry was well exercised, a big muscular fellow, and made a good living for his family. However, he was ambitious, and wanted to be a logging company owner, not an employee..

Henry first came to Michigan, with friends, on a scouting expedition, in 1827, to survey Michigan's forests. He wanted to determine if the rumors about the expansive timber lands were true. It did not take the little expedition long to realize that Michigan's forests exceeded their wildest dreams. After discussing options, it was decided they had to act soon, if they were to be to successful. With no official government yet created to sell them land, they decided to become "squatters" (settle on the land without a deed or title), and do it before Michigan gained statehood or geographical definition. In 1800, the region was part of the Indiana Territory. In 1805, it was declared to be the Michigan Territory. By 1827, the current Cass County area was already being surveyed. One area, "Number Five, Range Sixteen West" (Silver Creek Township) was surveyed on March 17, 1827, by William Brookfield, Deputy Surveyor, which correlates with Henry's scouting expedition. When the predicted surveying of the region was complete in 1929, the area would be "grid locked." This meant boundary lines, townships and sections would be staked out on the land, and mapped; parcels could then be sold. After Michigan became a state, squatting would never be allowed. Unfortunately, the transitory nature of early logging, the necessity of living in mobile camps, and time consuming, rigorous work loads left no spare moments for claiming land ownership. Michigan's early logging efforts were "a grueling business."

Henry's trek was the first of three family migrations to Cass and Berrien County, with the intent to start a logging business. At age 39 years, in the early spring of 1829, Henry, with wife Jane Cole, age 32, arrived in Southwestern Michigan. They had sold all their possessions in Pennsylvania, and packed every earthly belonging left into a covered wagon, and then headed to Michigan. The trip was supposed to have been one of great "trial and difficulty because of the rains." They first settled in what would later become Mason Township. Their son Abbot was 3 years old at the time. According to family records "Henry was hired soon after arriving by county surveyors to help clear sight lines, and widen Indian Trails. Between 1833-1837, several male family members joined Henry to help with the labor of establishing the first Michigan Hawks family logging operation. A number of trips were made to New York, Chicago and southern Indiana to buy hand tools, sturdy logging wagons, and a stable full of draft horses strong enough to pull heavy loads. By 1837 Michigan became a state, and the Hawks family's logging plan had been successfully implemented, but not their dream of early land ownership. Those first timber men of Cass County would spend their lives taming Michigan's mighty forests.

Though no one today seems to realize it, the speed at which most of Cass, Berrien, and Van Buren, and Allegan County settlers improved their land, would not have occurred without logging families like the Hawks. Michigan's towering forests had never been clear cut. The trees were huge towering sentinels that defied men to fell them. Sixty foot tall hardwoods, and higher, were so large that a man could not even begin to put his arms around their trunks. Where towns, roads and farm fields now reside, the spreading branches of thick towering forests blocked out all direct sun light to the ground. The average settler cleared a spot for his log cabin, and a few fields, but many contracted with the early loggers to do part or all of the job, and then pocketed the money for their trees. Early saw mills then processed the tree trunks using the energy of running water, turning logs into usable lumber. That lumber was then sold to the settlers, who built frame houses and barns. The only lumber processing Henry did was to make hand-hewn barn beams, as he was a busy logger.

Henry, and early Cass, Berrien and Van Buren County men like him, were an unusual lot, because their occupation was dangerous, and required a great deal of travel. It, also, demanded extreme physical fitness and a good business sense. Lumbermen would climb log jams on the St. Joseph River, and balance precariously while trying to dislodge obstructions. If a logger fell and hit his head, he could drown before a rescuer arrived. Later in history (after dynamite was invented in 1863 and available) the use of blasting methods, to break up deadlocks, was a precariously hazardous business. An explosion could as just as easily blow off a man's arm or kill him instantly. Michigan rattle snakes, angry bee hives, swarms of mosquitoes, and blood sucking wood ticks, were a continuous irritation. Michigan's "widow maker trees," with their sprawling branches, made felling directions unpredictable. Loggers yelled "timber" for a reason when a tree started to fall, as it meant a sudden crushing death if you were in the way.

Back then there were only a few limited ways to deal with cut logs. Loggers could float them down river to a saw mill that used water power, use horses with pulleys and winches to lift logs onto wagons, or hand-hew logs on the cutting site.. In Henry's case, he used rivers and draft horses. According to Hawks family lore Berrien Springs, Niles, Buchanan, and South Bend, eventually, had saw mills because they were on the St. Joseph River. James B. Larve had a saw Mill on Pipestone Creek in Sodus, Michigan. When logging around Dowagiac, draft horses and wagons had to be used, because the Dowagiac Creek was too shallow to float logs.

Although, Henry had no permanent home in Cass County, as his business required lots of travel. A logger's family would live for months at a time in logging camps with him, using tents (some quite large and comfortable) while the company owner and his crew, cut the timber. Damaged equipment (especially axes and cross cut saws) continually had to be sharpened, repaired or replaced, which sometimes meant trips to Indiana or Chicago. They used a grinding wheel, that spun around while the edge of an ax was held against it for sharpening and required a foot pumping action to keep it rotating. Whenever a family trip out the area occurred, Henry always brought along a wagon load of hardwoods. Walnut would bring a "nice sum of dough" (money) to pay for the trip and more. Travel and shipping were easier after the railroad came through Dowagiac and Niles, Michigan. The Hawks traveled a lot more to New York state, than most, due to family concerns there.

Henry Hawks, and early logging pioneers like him, were not farmers. Loggers fed their families and crew by bringing in covered wagons loaded with supplies, local hunting, fishing and bartering. Federal Census and military records illustrate both Henry's business mobility and permanency in Cass County. The 1850 Federal Census for Vernon, Crawford County, Pennsylvania caught the family on a trip to visit relatives. Civil War records show that Henry, Jr. (son of Henry, Sr.) was living in Mason Township, Cass County, Michigan and enlisted in the militia on January 11, 1864. On June 1, 1865, he was transferred to Company C's Heavy Artillery Division.

Henry Hawks and Jane Cole had five children: Abbot (8/4/1826-10/5/1900), Thomas (who became a Covert, Michigan postmaster on 3/24/1868), Henry Jr. (1880 & 1900 Porter Twp. Census), Charles (died very young) and Lydia (died in infancy). Abbot Hawks and John Wesley Hawks (a nephew) formed a logging partnership that was based in Niles, Michigan. Their enterprise merged with the Lambert family's logging business. The Hawks-Lambert Lumber Company was moved to Covert, Van Buren County, Michigan in 1866. This Hawks and Lambert enterprise is part of Covert's founding history, and was later sold by its founders, who started another logging businesses.

Son Abbot Hawks married Polly Stoney (9/6/1837-10/17/1907). Abbot is on the 1850 Federal Census for Vernon, Crawford County, Pennsylvania (family visit and walnut selling trip), and the 1880 and 1900 Porter Township Census. Abbot and Polly had six children: William (10/8/1857-12/9/1938), Aurella Jane, known as "Jennie" (1875- ), Mary E. (1860- ), Charles (1868-1868), Lucy (12/15/1868-12/25/1868), and Bertha (1/5/1879-3/30/1879). Abbot's son William H. (10/8/1857-12/9/1938) married Kittie B. (10/4/1867-4/19/1945) and they had several children, one being Jesse D. Hawks (1/31/1888-11/4/1951). Abbot worked with cousin John Wesley Hawks (New York & Silver Creek Twp. resident) in the logging business, based in Cass, Berrien, Van Buren and Allegan County, Michigan.

Henry Hawks died on 12/6/1867 in Porter Township, thirty-eight years after he "settled" in Cass. His wife Jane (1797-1839) passed away seven years later. Original pioneers Henry and Jane, second generation Abbot and Polly, third generation William, Lucy and Bertha, and fourth generation Jesse are all buried in Oak Grove Cemetery, Porter Township, Cass County, Michigan. Henry's and Jane's tombstones are unreadable (freeze-thaw damage). Michigan's winters, lost records, and time slowly erode the artifacts of old pioneers.

In conclusion, Henry Hawks was the first Hawks family settler to come to Southwestern Michigan, and he started a family logging tradition that lasted for eight generations. Throughout his entire life, Henry was a man of great stamina, strength, action, and physical fitness. He was a lumberjack, logger, pioneer, and timber entrepreneur. Henry helped tame the mighty virgin forests of Cass, Berrien, Van Buren and Allegan County, Michigan.

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## RESEARCH

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