

How it all began for Otsego County

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Prelude: — History is the mirror of the world.

In it we behold the origin and progress of society, the rise and fall of empires, we become acquainted with the institutions, manners, laws and customs of different nations, trace the course and witness the progress of that silent but mighty current that is continually bearing men and all their works into the gulf of oblivion, and see as in a moving picture the generations of our race, as they have risen into being, acted their respective parts on the stage of life and passed in quick succession with the years beyond the flood.

Such scenes, contemplated in the light of authentic history, are replete with the most interesting and profitable lessons. Especially are they so when they are connected with the history of our own country. And with the history of our own country every American citizen ought to be familiar. It is the history of a new world, of a new stage of society, established for new purposes developing new views of the character and destiny of men, and marked in every stage of its progress with the most signal interpositions of a gracious and all-pervading providence. Why no history on earth is more interesting and instructive than that of the United States. The heart of man and the hand of God are visible in every part of it and every person come to years of maturity, ought to be acquainted with it. Whence we sprung, from what race, at what time and by what means has the country to which we belong, risen to its present glory and happiness, are inquiries most deeply interesting in themselves and to which every son and daughter of Gaylord, Otsego county, and Michigan ought to give a clear and rational answer.

History is the Mirror of the World - Previous to or before the spring of 1868, Otsego county was an untrodden wilderness and the permanent home of wild beasts, and the temporary home of a few hardy and venturesome trappers who found mink, otter, beaver and other small furbearing animals plentiful on the headwaters of the Manistee and AuSable rivers, which have their rise in this county.

IN APRIL, 1868 A. A. Dwight, the pioneer lumberman of this county, fitted out a small expedition in Almont, Lapeer County, consisting of six men and a foreman, and one yoke of oxen. This crew literally hewed their way to the borders of what is now known as Crooked Lake, along a hunter's trail, and commenced to open up the forest, building log cabins, and barn and lean-tos for shelter and protection against the elements and depredations of numerous bears, lynx and wild-cats that were plentiful in those days.

It does not appear from all accounts that a great deal was done in the way of farming that first season, for as a matter of fact, an early frost cut short their expectations of much in that line, and they were obliged to travel 40 miles as the road ran to a base of supplies at Spencer Creek on Torch Lake, and much of the toting was done on the back of an ox. The difficulties they had to overcome were many and great, with little or nothing to do with, but they were brave and courageous, but even at that, they could not cope successfully with the disadvantages that kept bobbing up, and sometime along towards winter they gave up the struggle in disgust and folded their tents like Arabs and silently stole away back to civilization and more congenial surroundings.

In the following spring — 1869, Charles S. Brink arrived with a crew of fourteen picked men, from Lapeer County, and that summer, although the

wettest summer for many years, there was accomplished the cleaning of 25 acres in the vicinity of Crooked Lake, all of which was put into crops, but early frosts ruined much of it. In September that fall, 1869, the Torch Lake and Alpena state road was surveyed and extended from the farm to the center of sections 25, 29, and 3, where a camp was established and operations conducted for clearing the north branch of the AuSable River for log driving in the spring. The difficulties of this undertaking can be better understood when you are informed that snow began to fall on the 11th day of October and not only stayed on the ground but continued to increase in depth every few days.

A dam was built at the outlet of Chubb Lake and went out again with the first free head of water. Towards the close of 1869 the snow was nearly three feet deep on the level and by the middle of March it measured fifty-two inches in the woods and lumbering was seriously embarrassed. The supply of the camp was another great task, the new state road being under construction during the end of

the year and in 1870, and was very rough and with the snow continually falling, teams were hardly able to keep the camp supplied.

About the middle of November, 1869, Mrs. Brink arrived at the camp, on Chubb Creek, after a most tedious journey along the old hunter's trail in a rickety sleigh, and all the way through a driving snow storm. The team gave out about dark, and the party were obliged to seek shelter from the fierce storm, in a little bark wigwam near a small lake, there to wait until relieved by a team sent from the camp about midnight.

She was the first white woman to enter the county and cast her lot with her husband and the rough but hardy woodsmen, who treated her with the utmost respect, and who vied with each other in doing her service. In May, 1870, the first log drive started, but as the dam was inadequate, it only reached a point 8 or 9 miles below by the road where the building of another dam was commenced, called dam No. 2.

The drive was there abandoned and the crew adjourned till the first of September following,

leaving the mosquitoes and pesky flies in peaceable possession. In the fall of 1870, No. 2 dam was strengthened and Nos. 3 and 4 built, and the river cleaned for driving to the big forks of the main stream of the AuSable.

DURING THE FOLLOWING winter another stock of logs was added to those already in the river, and in the spring the whole drive was successfully carried thru to the mouth of the AuSable. Lumbering was again carried on the following winter, 1871, the farm at Crooked Lake at the time furnishing a part of the camp supplies.

The following year, 1872, the village of Otsego Lake was established, the Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw railroad being at the same time under construction, and reached the Lake. Buildings were erected and invitations extended to men with families, under promise of the choice of a building lot, to remove to Otsego Lake and erect dwelling houses or rather cabins. Several parties availed themselves of the offer and proceeded to build cabins to-wit: George A. Finch, Adam Assal and Blackford Smalley.

The winter of 1872-3 was unusually severe, and great hardships were endured by reason of the hasty erection of the cabins and the sub-zero weather that prevailed for a number of weeks. The company's boarding house was that winter managed by J. M. Groat and family, where many single men took up their lodging.

On the 2nd day of February, 1873, an accident which might have resulted fatally, but miraculously did not, happened by two of the woodsmen letting a large tree fall across the cabin of Adam Assal, flattening the roof, the tree breaking and two of the pieces landing in the center of the table, which was at the time being set for dinner. The family escaped with a few slight bruises, but most of the crockery on the table was broken in the terrific smash and up-set.

Lumbering was carried on that winter at Otsego Lake by Alfred Stewart and at Chubb Creek by C. S. Brink. About this time the railroad was pushed on and completed as far as tracklaying concerned, to the north line of town 29-3 just to the south side of the sink hole some four miles (Cont'd on P. 12)



A VIEW of Gaylord from the east looking north along Otsego Avenue.