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WHY DID THE PIONEERS COME TO MICHIGAN?

1787 saw the enactment of legislation by the new U.S. government, which formed the Northwest Territory. (States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.)

By 1805 the Territory of Michigan was separated from the Northwest Territory as Ohio, Indiana and Illinois had been at earlier dates.

When General Lewis Cass became governor of the Michigan Territory he resolved to disprove the reports that the land was all swamp and sterile sand, with malaria, ague, chills and fever awaiting the first settlers. He was successful in his endeavor and soon hordes of eager and determined people from the New England and other Eastern states made their way into the area we know as Livingston County.

Surprisingly very few of the original pioneer purchasers of newly surveyed government land, only recently opened for homesteading, had any previous experience as farmers. Besides those wanting to acquire virgin land for homesteading, there were many land speculators. Groups of artisans and guilds of various professions pooled finances and sent representatives to purchase thousands of acres to be divided when they would arrive in the early 1830s. One such representative was Richard Lyon who came to Brighton Township.

One of the major forces driving them west was the attempt to escape a cholera epidemic raging in the Eastern states. As settlers arrived at New World ports in the early 1830s they were appalled to find men, with cloth covered faces, driving wagons through the city streets each day shouting, "Bring out your dead." Mass burials were the order of the day in an attempt to remove the many corpses.

Traveling in Flat boats by way of the Erie Canal, over land by wagon train, on horseback and on foot many were anxious to leave the plague behind. Soon the residents of Detroit and South Eastern Michigan were in the grip of the epidemic also as it spread from the east and out the Grand River Indian Trail with the settlers.

Besides those newly arrived from the Old World, there were among the settlers, those whose ancestors had been in the New World before the American Revolution. Some were descendants of passengers on the Mayflower, landing in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. Those who originally helped build New Amsterdam (New York City) also had descendants involved in the migration to the Michigan Territory. Included in the trek were professionals, skilled tradesmen, artisans, business men, the clergy; bringing civilization and Christianity to the wilderness. Making a home for their families, land was cleared and fenced, roads and bridges built, schools and churches erected, pain and sorrow endured, separation borne and joys shared. Many present residents of Livingston County are descendants of these brave, resourceful, hardworking, eager, determined (stubborn?) pioneers of the area. (Edited and compiled from writings by William Pless; a descendant of these early pioneers.)

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