

THE BRIGHTON AREA AND THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF MICHIGAN (Contd.)

We are reminded that early settlers of the area were, for the most part, mature people from the Eastern States. Many remembered when George Washington was elected president, and not a few had fought in the Revolutionary War. The War of 1812 was certainly raw in the memory of most of them. Early arrivals also included those who had come fresh from the "old country" where they had been ruled by monarchs who did not always have their subjects' welfare in mind. Famine and plagues prompted many to try their fortune in the New World.

While survival was an important factor in the decision to move to Michigan, freedom and liberty for themselves and their families had high priority ratings also. Electing public officials from among themselves they brooked no dictatorial behavior. Zoning laws, building codes, and ordinances relative to their property and/or business were nonexistent. (The number of laws is in direct relationship to the number of people in a community.)

A once a week trip to town was sufficient. (It's a lot of work to hitch up a horse and buggy; and there was little protection against the weather.) Hitching posts were provided, and since the ladies wore long skirts, merchants kept the floors in their establishments clean. The farmer's wife often brought produce, etc. in exchange for the items on her shopping list. Instead of pushing a cart and roaming long aisles with a variety to boggle the mind, milady sat on a stool and made her selections from items brought to her.

National booms and busts were felt by the settlers. Locally, the opening of the Grand River Plank Road from Detroit to Lansing brought increased prosperity for a time. The Civil War and postbellum depression were difficult times for all, even if no battles were fought on Michigan ground. The coming of the railroad in 1871 encouraged a short lived boom. The panic of 1893, the Spanish-American War, World War I, and the great depression of the 1930's all contributed to the lack of jobs in the area, affecting its economy and growth. Many young people had to move to urban areas to find employment.

Other than farming, local jobs were limited to store clerks; telephone and telegraph operators; workers on the railroad; carpenters, etc.; filling the ice house at Worden Lake; bean sorters (women); and working at the grain elevator. The area did produce many professional people and factory workers in the urban areas when industry recognized the people as good employees. (To be continued. Condensed and edited from: "A Scrapbook of Michigan Memorabilia" by William Pless.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116

Printed courtesy:
OLD KENT BANK
300 W. North Street
Brighton, MI 48116