

## THE BRIGHTON AREA AND THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF MICHIGAN (Cont.)

A large percentage of settlers were farmers planning to use Michigan's virgin lands to make homes as good as those they left in the East. The Erie Canal leg of their journey must have been relatively easy when compared to the crossing of Lake Erie and then the worst part of all, the land passage west of Detroit to Livingston County. Then to find oneself isolated in the ill-lighted room of a floorless, windowless, mud-chinked log cabin, with the days filled with back breaking work and the nights with the howls of the wolves, fearing an Indian visitor at any time; the pioneer often wondered why one would leave the comfort, ease and companionship of friends in the East. Not until 1836 could one count on neighbors in the area.

The early settlers in this southeastern part of the county did not look to the local lumber yard for material to build that first house. (We write first because as soon as possible, houses, built of sawn logs, replaced the crude log cabin.) He began by cutting the abundant trees he found on his property. Logs were notched for walls, which were chinked with mud and chips. A roof of poles and bark or oak shakes provided some protection from the rain and snow. The stick chimney of the fireplace was lined with wet mud in an attempt at fire proofing. If there was a window, oiled paper or greased buckskin was installed instead of glass. Until logs could be split or boards sawed at a mill, a blanket covered the door opening. Furniture consisted of chests brought on the wagon, rope or strings of raw hide supported a mattress tick stuffed with dry leaves of grass, split logs served as bench seats and table tops. The childrens'sleeping quarters were in the loft.

The trees cut for the building of the cabin left spaces for the sun to reach the soil. There corn was planted since the settler could merely dig holes for the seed instead of plowing the land. Within a short span of years, wheat found room on the farmstead and after threshing could be taken to a mill for grinding. The diet of cornmeal or bread was supplemented by the rifle and fishing rod and by collecting wild nuts and berries; a vegetable garden and raising a cow, pigs and chickens. Water was brought from a nearby spring or stream until a well was dug by hand.

In 1836, the influx of settlers caused the population of the County to quadruple. Before long mills were built locally which made the 2-3 day trips to Ann Arbor or Detroit for supplies unnecessary. However lack of food did cause actual suffering. Hon. W. A. Clark spoke to the Pioneer Society in the Centennial year, 1876. "Families... lived for days...on boiled acorns, with fish cooked and eaten without salt or fat of any kind." But the bountiful harvest of 1838 caused this scarcity of food and accompanying high prices to reverse. In fact the abundance of future harvests caused a severe drop in the wheat growers' income. (To be continued. Condensed and edited from: "History of Livingston County, 1880".)

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