

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**Early Roads in Genoa Township — Chilson Road**

In the 1850s, travelers from Howell to Ann Arbor would have been able to follow, from Grand River, a trail through Genoa Township. The 1859 plat map indicates such a trail was in place, beginning just east of Howell. A rider could travel through the woods, around hills and swamps, ford streams all the way south through Hamburg Township to Eight Mile Road, a distance of 12 miles, traversing the two townships, and into Washtenaw County.

In 1859 there is no indication of a commercial settlement where the trail crosses Brighton Road.

Landowner records indicate August 21, 1854, a Nathaniel Chilson bought 80 acres in Putnam Township, Section 23, five miles west of the trail, which he sold in 1855. There is no indication a Chilson had ever resided in either township or acquired more land before 1870.

July 16, 1864, records indicate Samuel Carpenter, who came to the area in 1848, has purchased 40 acres each side of Brighton Road, Genoa Sections 28 and 33, which includes the intersection.

When the Toledo, Ann Arbor and Northern Michigan Railroad formed about 1878, it placed track north closely paralleling the early trail. A water tank, reputed to be the largest water tank on the T&AA Railroad, making use of the water from the nearby Crooked Lake was constructed. A train station was also built at the crossroads. The railroad bought to this "...area the advantage of an enormous shipping business with its huge gravel pits southeast of the station, which were active until about 1930." A dam placed in the stream flowing from Crooked Lake provided power for the "Chilson and Joslyn" flour mill and saw

mill. Not long after, Avery J. Chilson is noted as Chilson's first postmaster. A small settlement soon developed.

By 1897 Laughlin and Henderson operated a thriving store at Chilson in a large structure. Later Albert Smith bought the business and delivered groceries, etc., to local farmers. When Joe Brady and Paul Brogan bought the business they continued using the delivery wagon for a time.

The later development of Crooked Lake with cottages, campers and resorters found the station handy for transportation, and the store for supplies. By 1903, it was becoming a popular spot for building a cottage to rent to parties of young people from nearby cities, including Ann Arbor and Detroit, to spend a week or so "camping". "...duly chaperoned, of course, by their elders."

In 1927, the Burroughs Adding Machine Company acquired nearly 500 acres on the lake which greatly increased the volume of business transacted at the Chilson Store. It is very logical that Detroit Edison might apply the name Chilson Road to the old trail through Genoa Township.

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: Michigan Place Names; Early Land Owners by Milton Charboneau; Crooked Lake: A History by Willis Lyons; Census Records; Writings of William Pless. Additions/corrections requested 810-229-6402.)