

Time Tracs --- by Jim Ingram ---

(Second in a series of Orion history from 1800 through the 1920s)

The first sawmill in Orion Township was built by Samuel Munson in 1825 near the Decker Settlement. It later was owned by Jesse Decker.

A few months later Joseph Jackson built a small sawmill on Paint Creek near East Clarkston Road. Powell Carpenter bought this property in 1835, turning it into a gristmill.

It later became known as Rudd's mill and was still operating in 1877. The remnants of the dam for this mill can still be seen just off East Clarkston Road, west of Kern Road.

Needham Hemingway, Decker and Philip Bigler built a sawmill on Bigler's land, just below the present dam in Lake Orion in 1829. The dam that they constructed across Paint Creek turned the six small lakes to the west into one irregularly shaped lake. This was the beginning of what is now Lake Orion.

They also built a log house for the sawyer which afterwards was used as a tavern by Aber-

nathy.

The mill was burned in 1832 by some Indians because the proprietor would not furnish them whisky. It was soon rebuilt by Hemingway, who had become sole owner.

About 1835, Thomas Drake built a steam sawmill in the "Pinery" near Mill Lake on Baldwin Road in order to harvest a large stand of pine in that area. Robert Merrick and his son Fred acquired the mill and moved it a short distance to establish Mahopac about 1844.

They continued to operate the mill into the mid 1850s. It was Orion's only steam operated mill.

Hemingway built a large flouring-mill at the Village of Orion below the sawmill. In order to get sufficient power, the dam across Paint Creek was raised to the height of 12 feet. This further enlarged Lake Orion to the size we know today.

These two mills and a tavern were about all that comprised the Village of Orion in the mid 1830s. Then in 1836 James Stillson, a traveling auctioneer bought 40 acres of land on the site of the

present village and divided it into lots.

Stillson, known for his "paper cities" schemes prepared a highly colored and elaborate prospectus showing steamboats and wharves on the lake, stores, roads and buildings and a busy community life.

He circulated the prospectus about the eastern US, where he sold lots at exorbitant prices. He then came to Detroit where he peddled the remainder at six cents each.

Canandaigua City was the name he bestowed upon his mythical metropolis and the lake was called Lake Canandaigua. The eastern parties, finding their lots covered with marsh and brush, departed in disgust.

Curiously, New Canandaigua, as it came to be called, survived when the bulk of the "paper cities" died before they were born. In fact, when the plat for the Village of Orion was filed at Lansing by Hemingway in 1838, New Canandaigua and Orion Village were rivals, within 500 feet of each other.