

Time Tracs

By Jim Ingram

This is the first in a two part series on the first settlers of Orion Township -- where they came from -- How they got here -- Their life experiences.

The early settlers came from New England, New Jersey and New York. They were named Munson, Carpenter, Decker, Bigler, Shadbolt, Pinckney, Simmons, McVean, Bagg and McAlvey.

These families arrived in 1825-26. In June 1831 came Elizah Clark of Pennsylvania and he was followed within a few months by Asa Own from the same place. That same year Welch and Carpenter of New York came.

Then came a lull in the tide of immigration of several years. But in 1835-37 it followed with renewed vigor, bringing more Carpenters (Charles, Ezra and Daniel); also Christopher Cole, Asar Brown, Solomon Buchner and Philip Hibler.

Others followed so rapidly that it would be a

difficult task to classify all who deserve this distinction. During the years 1834-38, we find in the foremost ranks of settlers, Close, Merchant, Seeley, Bagg, Rudd, Parkhurst, Bradford, Young, Kiles, Perry, Eaton, McVean, Sutton, Andrews, Good, Gates, Osmund and Voorheis.

The usual means of transportation from the east to southeast Michigan at that time was by boat down the Erie Canal. It was completed in 1825 and connected the Hudson River with Lake Erie. The settlers then took a steamship from Buffalo across Lake Erie to Detroit.

Some would obtain a wagon pulled by oxen to transport a few household things, tools and supplies north through several swamps to Pontiac.

Other settlers couldn't even get an ox team, but were obliged to draw their loads by hand, wading through knee-deep mud and passing on trails through the forest to get to their new home in the wilderness.

The journey would take from four days to over a week, depending on circumstances.

Orion is one of the great lake townships of Oakland County. Approximately 1,700 hundred acres are covered by them.

When you add seven or eight hundred acres of low or marsh land, it's evident that considerable of the surface is untillable.

Among the well known lakes are Judah, Voorheis, Mill, Sixteen, Square, Long, Buckhorn and the chain of six lakes, with Paint Creek running through them, that would later become Lake Orion.

The land surface of Orion Township was originally covered with timber, principally oak. This was quite heavy along the water courses and lighter on the more elevated grounds, often terminating in openings. Quite an area was also covered with pine.

Generally speaking, the surface is broken by hills. A spur of Bald Mountain projects in the southeastern part of the township and has an elevation of several hundred feet.

Mt. Judah is in the southwestern part near Judah Lake. Both of these were named after Judah Church, one of the first settlers in that part of the township.

The first settlers endured many hardships, clearing the land for cultivating crops and using the logs to build their cabins and barns. The first thing they built after the log house was a sawmill for there was plenty of timber to be sawed.

The early settlers all worked together in the construction of the first school houses, mills and churches.

Two incidents related by early historians will illustrate the difficulties these pioneers endured.

Due to the immense immigration in 1838, all the produce in the county was consumed. Flour couldn't be had for love nor money.

In this hour of need, a Dr. Williams of Pontiac appeared as the deliverer to the starving settlers. He brought a quantity of flour and corn from Ohio and delivered it among the rich as well as the poor -- four pounds of flour and a peck of corn to each person.

Thus their wants were relieved until additional aid was brought.

The means of communication, due to poor roads and lack of horses, was limited. In the winter of 1838, Charles Carpenter and his brother made a trip from their home in Orion to Lapeer in a day, drawing a hand-sled, loaded with their tools and provisions, about 300 pounds.

Others went on foot 20 miles to get a peck of flour and a few pounds of coffee. These items, instead of being regarded as necessities, were often looked upon as positive luxuries.



The Decker Settlement