

BRIEF HISTORY OF SWARTZ CREEK, MICHIGAN

Marion Miller, no date

This brief history of the Swartz Creek Area is being compiled as a reference for the local school students and others who have expressed the desire to know more about the origin and growth of the town, the Crapo Farm, and nearby areas.

Many names will appear; some well-known and influential, others, just remembered, but all with some place in the development of the little gathering of families in "Miller Settlement" as Swartz Creek was first known in the mid-1830's and for some time afterward. Many fine families must remain unmentioned because of the difficulty in obtaining any information, and because of the limits of time and space.

The history of the settlement of the area in and near the present city of Swartz Creek really began in June, 1836, with the arrival of Adam Miller from Livingston County, New York. However, a bit of preliminary scanning of the history of Gaines and Clayton Townships, relative to the occupancy of Native American tribes in this vicinity, might be in order.

After the War of 1812, which defeated Britain and her Indian allies, the warlike Chippewas seemed to retrogress in their civilization, due according to early histories, to the Indians' contact with the white man's "firewater."

The Saginaw Valley was well-populated with Indians in the early 1800's, and some were brave and outstanding men. They had countryside from the Sauks, but many Chippewas were filled with dread of imagined spirits of their slain enemies, and many fled about the area to try to escape failure in hunting and the ill-fortune that they fancied were brought upon them by the "Munesous," or Bad Spirits.

The tribes hereabout were not warlike or harmful when Adam Miller arrived in Flint. Those Indians living in the Flint River Valley were known as the Pewanigo tribe, and their trails crossed the county of Genesee, hard-packed by their ponies and their feet. The principal trail was the Saginaw Trail, from the Saginaw River to Detroit. Its rough was from Pewonigowink, in the present township of Montrose, up the river to its southern bend, then south through Grand Blanc to Detroit. The place where it crossed the Flint River was called Grand Traverse, a name given to it by French fur trader, Bolieu.

The country to the southwest of Flint was a veritable paradise of great forests, some partly-cleared Indian land, and almost unlimited space for the white man to clear and farm. The land was fertile and water was plentiful. In 1836, Flint was a flowering village, helped to increase in size by the fact that the U. S. Land Office was established there on August 23 of that year.

The treaty by which the entire southeastern part of Michigan, including nearly all of Genesee County, was ceded to the United States government, and was made in Detroit

on November 17, 1807. The government paid the sum of \$3,333.33 each to the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes, and half that amount each to the Pottawattamies and Wyandot tribes, with a perpetual annuity \$2,000.00 each to the first two tribes; half that to the others.

The plan of Indian emigration from Michigan, formed by the government and assented to by the tribes in the treaties of Detroit, Flint River, and Saginaw, was never carried out, for long before the date named for their leaving, the tribes bitterly repented of their promise to go west, and prayed the government that they might be allowed to remain on the poor remnant of their once broad hunting grounds. They were allowed to remain, but eventually the tribes became broken up and the members drifted away to the north and west where some became owners of small tracts. This course was encouraged by the government.

English names of some of the Indian families who were living in the Swartz Creek area in the mid-1800's were John and David Fisher, Charles Mene, the Chatfields, the Davises, Claude Lewis, the Peters family, the Irons and the J. G. Stevens, Lyons and Damons. Some of the members of these families are buried in the Indian burial ground on the south edge of what was later Crapo Farm.

A famous pair of Chippewa chiefs, also buried in the burial ground, are Wab-be-Ness and Wau-bin-a-to. Chief Wab-be-ness' English name was David Fisher, and he died in 1874 at 74 years of age. The mother of Frank Hatfield, a Chippewa now living near Durand, Michigan, and well-known as a builder of fences, was a daughter of Chive Wab-be-ness. Frank and his wife Minnie still make the beautiful woven reed baskets as did their forefathers.

The first settlers in Swartz Creek arrived with only a few possessions. A cook stove and some primitive wooden furniture were usually acquired in Flint or Pontiac, but usually made at home. They had a few dishes, bedding, a lone bedstead, a caldron kettle (for boiling clothes or butchering or many other uses), a brass kettle, a box of calico and flannel cloth, and a few pieces of leather for making shoes. These possessions were brought in by horse and wagon.

Some log inns were available, built as resting places along the corduroy roads. These roads were made by felling trees and laying them side by side. In the mid-1800's, Miller Settlement had a tavern, but it would be hard to recognize it now. It is the beautiful remodeled home of Phillip Walch at 8298 Miller Road. Very little was left of the original inn when Mrs. and Mrs. Walch furnished the rebuilding of the structure, which they purchased from William H. Fairchild and his wife, Elizabeth Van Vleet who had lived there for forty-four years.

Log cabins were the usual dwellings. The first frame house in Clayton Township was that of Caleb Calkins, great grandfather of Daniel Calkins Miller, built in 1843 on Calkins Road.

Neighbors always helped to build the houses and raise the barns. At one barn-raising, the menu consisted of fresh bread and butter, wild game, pumpkin pie sweetened with maple sugar, and sweet pickles made with maple sap vinegar. There were no dishes or silverware available, so everyone ate with their fingers out of a common container. Coffee or tea were unheard of, so water was the only beverage.

The newcomers were resourceful, making all utensils necessary for collecting and boiling maple syrup; making splint brooms, candles and all furniture not brought from their New York homes; planting orchards, raising bees, flax to make the clothing from home-spun yarns, and raising sheep for meat and the much-needed yarns.

They ate new wheat, boiled and eaten with syrup and milk; all kinds of berries, dried pumpkin pies, potatoes, green corn, garden tuck in season, corn "samp" or mush, Johnny cake and buckwheat cakes.

Baking soda was made by burning corn cobs and using the ashes. They had venison, fish, some pork fattened on acorns, squirrels, rabbits, quail and wild turkey. And all this good food was available to anyone who had the initiative to raise or hunt it.

In the first primitive schools, all books had to be brought from home, and there was usually only one of a kind. When one child had learned the lesson, the book was passed on until all were ready to recite.

The school term was three months, six days a week. The teachers were paid one dollar per week at first, but salaries were soon readied by paying a percentage according to the number of pupils, and their days of attendance.

The children had to follow a blazed trail from some of the homes that were a mile or two from the tiny log school. Small pieces of bark were cut from a side of a trees, leaving a light spot on the trail side of the trees.

The first settlers of Swartz Creek were the family of Adam and Margaret (Marshall) Miller, who arrive in 1836. Adam Miller was born February 2, 1769 and Margaret was born March 10, 1778. Adam died March 11, 1841, and his wife on November 4, 1864.

They were married in Germany, and at once set out for the United States, in 1795. Mr. Miller made a trip to Michigan to enter land in June, 1836, returning to New York for his family and bringing them back to Clayton Township the following August.

They had eleven children, namely, Margaret, born May 1, 1798; John, November 17, 1801; Charles, March 18, 1804; Daniel, June 16, 1806; Catherine, March 10, 1808; Mary "Polly", March 19, 1811; Martha "Magdalene," April 5, 1812; Peter, April 11, 1814; Joseph, July 23, 1816; David, June 19, 1818; and Enos, October 25, 1822.

The Millers erected a log shelter on Section 35, Clayton Township, about where the present Methodist church now stands on Morrish Road, and the next summer a larger log house was erected a few rods to the west.

Margaret Miller was a courageous and sympathetic pioneer wife, who was known throughout the area for her helpfulness when anyone was ill and needed help. She was an accomplished midwife, much in demand before any doctors were available, and she responded day or night to the cry for assistance. She walked many miles, carrying her basket of food and herbs through the forest to the sick and needy. She and her family saw to religious observance for themselves and others in the area, by holding church services in their home. L. D. Whitney was the first circuit-rider preacher who made the Miller home one of his regular appointments each month.

Three of the Millers' sons, Daniel, Peter and Charles, did not come to Michigan until the fall of 1837, but all located land for themselves in Gaines and Clayton Townships. Two daughters married well-known men of the area were Mary, who married John Heartsick, and Catherine, who married Rev. James C. McAllister.

To make a trail between their land and Flint, Adam, Joseph and Enos cut trees and underbrush with the help of ox teams and axes, and laid a corduroy trail. This road became a state road in 1848, and reached from Flint to Michigan Village in Ingham County. It was called Miller Road.

The new county of Genesee was chosen by settlers because many immigrants to the area from New York found it much like that state in excellent soil and wheat-producing.

David A. Miller became a Methodist minister, also farmed for some years, and then left Clayton Township for Glen Arbor in Leelanau County, Michigan, where he was sent to be a missionary. It is said that at the time of his leaving, he owned the only span of horses in the township. He purchased a large acreage near Glen Arbor, including the great hill overlooking Glen Lake and Lake Michigan, which is still used as a scenic view for the public, and is still called Miller's Hill.

Enos Miller married Martha Jane Chapman. He lived to be 98 years old. Their children were Wilbert L., John A., Clarence, Cassius, Archie T., and Clinton (who died in 1970 at the age of 55), and a daughter, Lillias, who died in 1850 at three years.

David A. Miller remained a pillar in the Methodist church, was a successful farmer, and in 1856 donated the site for the church; also supervising the building. He moved to Oregon in the late 1850's. He owned the farm later purchased by Charles Brimley at 7410 Miller Road.

Peter Miller married Julia Hartsock, who came here to claim land in 1837. They had a son, Charles, and a daughter, Emma, who married John Goodyear, and had DeMott, Arthur, Guy, and Julia Goodyear. The Peter Miller home has been remodeled several

times, and now is the home of Robert Ayers of Swartz Creek, who purchased it from Mrs. Orel Champney, wife of the late superintendent of schools here.

Marion (Steinbach) Miller was the wife of Daniel C. Miller, manager of the Crapo Farm for many years.

Transcribed by Len Thomas
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