

Unit 2 – The Early Settlement of Clinton County

Objectives:

1. Students will describe the process of surveying and purchasing land.
2. Students will describe the challenges settlers experienced moving to and establishing farms Clinton County.
3. Students will describe how their town was founded and has changed.

Essential Questions:

1. How is land divided and subdivided?
2. How did settlers get to Clinton County?
3. What did settlers need to do to establish farms?
4. How was my town founded? (or town(s) within my school district)

Michigan Standards:

- 3-G1.0.2 Use thematic maps to identify and describe the physical and human characteristics of Michigan
- 3-G4.0.2 Describe diverse groups that have migrated into a region of Michigan and reasons why they came (push/pull factors)
- 3-G5.0.1 Describe how people are a part of, adapt to, use, and modify the physical environment of Michigan
- 4-G4.0.3 Describe some of the movements of resources, goods, people, and information to, from, or within the United States, and explain the reasons for the movements.

The Early Settlement of Clinton County - Teacher

Notes give additional information. Optional are extra activities you may choose to use.

Note: Clinton County and the city of DeWitt were named for [DeWitt Clinton](#).

Surveying and Buying Land

Before any land could be sold to settlers in Clinton County, it had to be surveyed. In the late 1820's surveyors divided the county into 16 townships. Each township was a 6 mile by 6 mile square. Each township was then divided into 36 sections. Each section was a 1 mile by 1 mile square or 640 acres.

Note: An acre is about the size of a football field.

SECTION LAYOUT FOR EACH TOWNSHIP

	N						
	6	5	4	3	2	1	
	7	8	9	10	11	12	
W	18	17	16	15	14	13	E
	19	20	21	22	23	24	
	30	29	28	27	26	25	
	31	32	33	34	35	36	
	S						

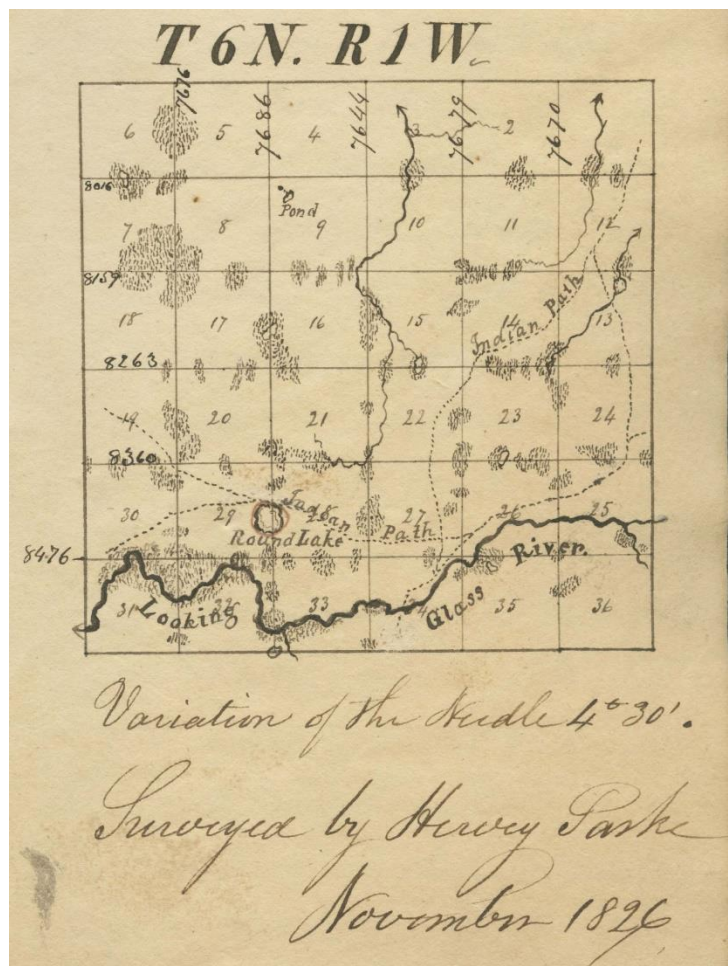
Surveyors used a compass and chain to find the borders between sections. They made maps, wrote notes, and marked the trees in some places to show where sections began and ended. Here is a surveyor's map for Victor Township from 1826. Notice it also shows Indian trails.

Note: Surveyors measured from the state's base and meridian lines.

Victor Township is the 6th township north of the base line and 1st west of the meridian line.

Note: A larger copy of the map and surveyor's notes can be found in additional resources.

Note: For your information here is a [video on how land was surveyed](#). (YouTube)



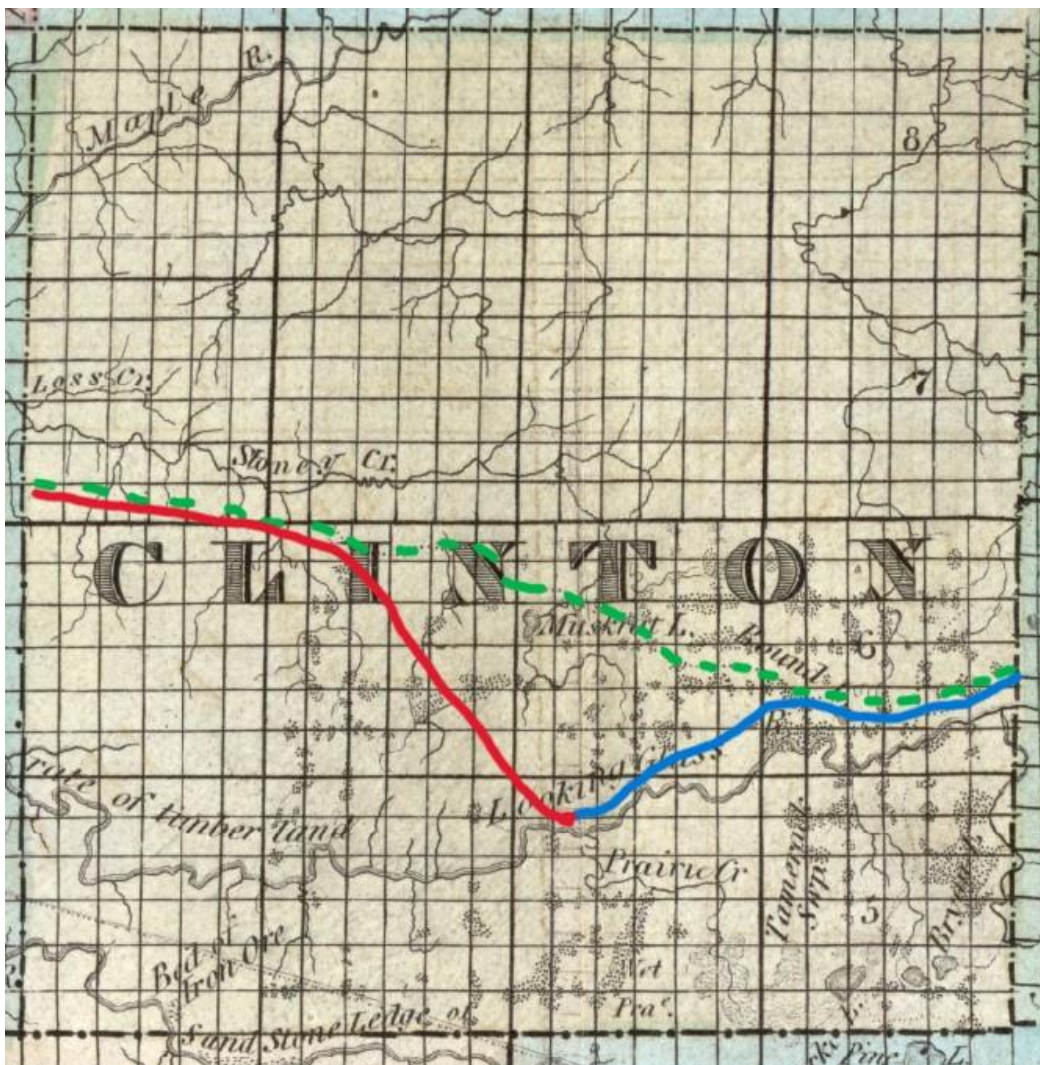
Once the land was surveyed settlers could buy it. The men would usually go ahead and check out the available land. If they liked what they saw they would travel to a land office and buy the land. The first settlers had to go 90 miles to White Pigeon until the Ionia land office opened in 1836. The land usually cost about \$1.25 an acre. For \$100 a settler could buy 80 acres.

After buying the land, the men would leave the land office, go get their families, and begin the journey to their new home.

Traveling to Clinton County

Optional: Discuss push/pull factors why people wanted to come to Clinton County (cheap farm land, a new start in a new country, make money, adventure, better life, etc.)

Getting here was not easy. Most of the first settlers came into Clinton County on the Northern Grand River Trail from Detroit. To get to Detroit most



traveled the Erie Canal to Lake Erie and then took a steamship to Detroit. Once in Detroit they would start up the muddy Northern Grand River Trail. If they were hauling any wagons the trail needed to be made wider in many places. Once in Clinton County they would follow and widen Indian trails or make a new trail to get to their new home.

Green dashes show the Northern Grand River Indian Trail. **Blue** is the Northern Grand River Trail and **Red** is the Dexter Trail, both of which settlers used.

Building a Log Cabin

One of the first things settlers did was build a log cabin for their family. Log cabins needed about 50 to 60 trees. They did not have glass, so if they made a window it was covered with greased paper or a blanket. Each cabin also needed a fireplace at one end which was used for cooking and heat during the winter.



Note: While constructing a cabin settlers would stay with other nearby settlers, in Objive villages, or in temporary shelters.

Clearing the Land

Most of Clinton County was covered with trees. Before the land could be farmed trees needed to be cut down with an ax or saw and brush burned. At first crops would be planted around the tree stumps. Next stumps would be burned and removed. There was a lot of smoke in the air!

Optional: Discuss how hard this work would be and what it was like to breathe smoke filled air (What is it like around a camp fire when the smoke comes towards you?)

First Settlers

The first European in Clinton County was George Campau. He opened a trading post on the Maple River in what would be Maple Rapids in 1826.

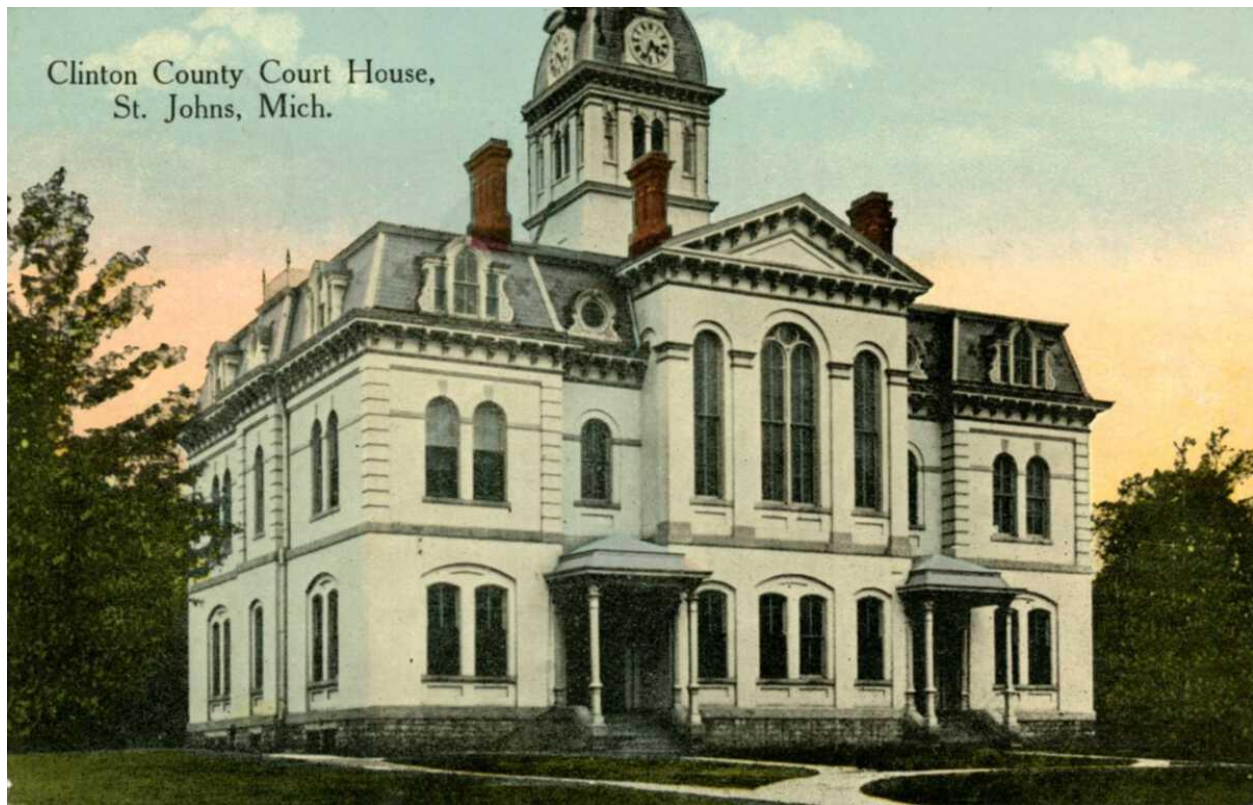
In 1833 the Dexter Party traveled through Clinton County on their way to Ionia. Once they got to where DeWitt is today, they didn't know where to go next. They hired an Ojibwe who led them through the forest down a narrow, poorly marked Indian trail. This trail became known as the Dexter Trail and was used by many other people.

When the Dexter Party got to Muskrat Creek, Samuel Dexter's young son Riley died and was buried next to the trail. He was the first settler to die in Clinton County. Riley Township is named for him.

Towns

As more people came to Clinton County, they began to create towns where they could buy and sell goods. Some were built next to rivers and streams which powered sawmills to make lumber and gristmills to grind wheat and corn. Westphalia was founded by Germans who had left their country for a new life in America. When the railroads were built in the 1850's, towns were started along railroad lines where goods could be sent and received.

DeWitt was the first large town and was made the county seat in 1839. In 1853 St. Johns began next to the new railroad line. It became the county seat in 1857 and the county offices moved there from DeWitt.



Clinton County Courthouse, St. Johns

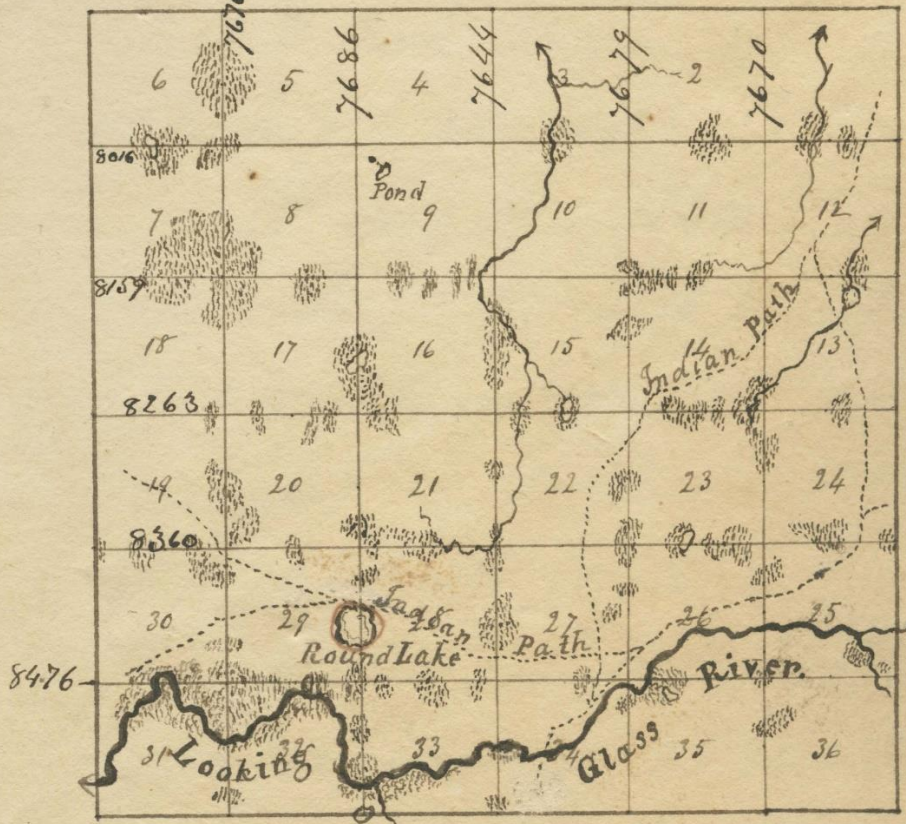
Optional: We have prepared a series of school district specific lessons which you may choose to use which give historical information and photos for towns in that district downloadable from our website.

- 1. Bath – Bath**
- 2. DeWitt – DeWitt**
- 3. Fowler - Fowler**
- 4. Others – Eagle, Maple Rapids, and Wacousta**
- 5. Ovid-Elsie – Duplain, Elsie, Ovid, and Shepardsville**
- 6. Pewamo-Westphalia – Matherton, Pewamo, and Westphalia**
- 7. St. Johns – Eureka and St. Johns.**

Additional Resources

(732)

T 6 N. R 1 W



Variation of the Needle $4^{\circ} 30'$.

Surveyed by Hervey Parke
November 1826

Town 6 North

East Between 1 & 12 on random

28.00 Enter marsh

32.10 Stream 12 North

35.00 left ~~left~~ swamp

40.00 Set trap $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec post

43.00 Enter Town swamp

48.50 left left do

54.71 Indian path N. N. E

80.08 Intersect Meridian 2.06 N

Form Sec

West Corred W. between 1. 12

29.33 Q. Oak 10 in

40.06 Set $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec post on true line

Q. Oak 7 N 87 E 1.15

Burr Oak 10 S 88 $\frac{1}{2}$ W 1.29

57.96 W. Oak 20 in

80.08 Sec Cor

Range 1 West.

North Between Sec 1 & 2.

18.41 W. Oak 8 in

40.00 Set $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec post

Elm 14 S $53\frac{1}{2}$ W .30

W. Oak 14 East .18

63.66 ~~W. Oak~~ Hickory 6 in

76.70 Intersected Town line at Post

Land 2nd rate. gently rolling
1st $\frac{1}{2}$ mile thicket timber
Oak & hickory.

2nd $\frac{1}{2}$ mile thickly timber
Oak, ash, lynn, elm, hickory &

Wood #
Scum