

MAY 1988

# THE CLINTON INDEPENDENT

## CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SAMUEL W. DEXTER

The following story on Samuel W. Dexter was first presented to the Clinton Co. Historical Society by Troy Irrer in February of 1987.

Samuel W. Dexter was born in Smithfield, Rhode Island, on December 15, 1787. He was one of thirteen children. His father, also named Samuel, and his mother, whose maiden name was Candace Winsor, were also born in Smithfield in 1757 and 1758, respectively.

Samuel W. Dexter, as well as his father, was involved in public affairs. Both served in various offices. Samuel W. Dexter did a lot of land speculating in Michigan before he decided to try to start colonies here. He was a man with a great deal of money who was constantly buying and selling land in Michigan.

Samuel Dexter (father) was involved in politics. He served briefly under two United States' Presidents, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Under John Adams Dexter served as the Secretary of War in 1800 and in 1801, he served as the Secretary of the Treasury. When Thomas Jefferson was elected, he chose to keep Dexter as Secretary of the Treasury. Although, later in 1801, Dexter was replaced as the Secretary of the Treasury. Thus Samuel Dexter was the third Secretary of the Treasury and the fourth Secretary of War in the history of the United States.

After Samuel W. Dexter was born, the family moved to Herkimer County in New York. There, the family lived in a huge home they had built which also served as an inn

for mail carriers.

Samuel W. Dexter married Anna Fargo, although the place and the date of the marriage could not be found. Samuel was a busy man who was a member of the New York State Legislature and he also had (and completed) a contract to construct the Erie Canal.

In 1824, Samuel came to Detroit and with thirtyone others bought 6,320 acres near the village of Tecumseh in Lenawee County.

One August 22, 1824, Samuel purchased a large piece of land in Washtenaw County. The township and the village were then named after him. Samuel spent the winter of 1824 in New York. After returning to Michigan in 1825 he discovered that Washtenaw County was totally organized. Governor Lewis Cass had appointed the county officers and Samuel was made Chief Justice of the County Court. By 1827, Judge Dexter was living in the town of Dexter and held his first court in Camp's store.

In the fall of 1832, Judge Dexter traveled north to an unsettled area called the Valley of the Grand. Dexter spent a lot of time checking the land, which proved to be the future sites of Ionia and Grand Rapids. Judge Dexter returned to New York and chose sixty-three men, women and children (ten families) to travel through the unsettled Michigan and start colonies.

On April 22, 1833, Judge Dexter, his family and the rest of the group started for Michigan. They traveled on the Erie Canal to Buffalo. The canal boat was a peculiar sight. Wagons had been disassembled and secured on by ropes and everything imaginable had been piled on the deck because there was no place in Michigan to purchase such items.

(To Be Continued)

Upcoming Meetings

May 2 The Genealogists of Clinton County will Meet May 2 at the Capitol Federal Savings Bank at 7:30 pm. The program will be on War Veterans.

May 19 The regular meeting of the Clinton County Historical Society will concentrate on Memories of The Marsh.

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1839-1989

Clinton County's "Sesquicentennial"

Organized March 12, 1839

In honor of this event, The Paine-Gillam-Scott MUSEUM of the Clinton County Historical Society has reproduced the County's flag in a 3' x 5' size. For sale, \$40.00.

The following is a history and a reprint of a page from the booklet "Condensed Historical Sketches for each of Michigan's Counties.



CLINTON COUNTY was settled comparatively late, the hostile attitude of fur traders and the high prices fixed by speculators serving to deter actual settlers from locating here. The early speculators and settlers were largely from New York, and the county was named for De Witt Clinton, father of the Erie Canal. In 1836, a group of towns was platted by New York promoters, but none materialized and the sites were all later sold by the State for unpaid taxes. The Rochester Colony was located the same year by agents who hopefully visioned a canal connecting the Maple and Shiawassee rivers, which would save "something like 1,000 miles of water carriage around the lakes." This saving, of course, was never effected. Clinton is chiefly devoted to general farming and livestock raising; corn, oats, wheat, and beans are leading crops. Saint Johns is the county seat and the principal town, the seat of iron castings, apple products, and farm implement establishments. It is also the center of Michigan's peppermint-growing industry.

MUSEUM OPEN

Paine-Gillam-Scott, West side of Courthouse Square. Open Wednesdays, 2 to 8 pm and Sundays, 1 to 5 pm. This is a 1860 House Museum with Clinton County History, Special exhibits, Memorabilia of County Normal School in Old Central, the school that trained Teachers, 1904-1938 through 6/15/88. 50th Anniversary of the last graduating class.

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Clinton County  
Historical Society

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