

JUNE 1988

THE CLINTON INDEPENDENT

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SAMUEL W. DEXTER

Continuation of Troy Irrer's story.

When the Dexter group got to Buffalo, all their belongs were moved onto a steamer which was headed for Detroit. Upon arriving at Detroit, Judge Dexter purchased oxen, cows, and as much cooked provisions as he could.

On the first day, the Dexter group only traveled seven miles up to the Grand River Trail because of the mud caused by earlier rains. The rain-softened trails, the marshes, and the small streams created many problems for Dexter and the oxen pulling the wagons. The group stayed one night at Pontiac but from then on they had to camp out on the Grand River Trail.

At Shiawassee town, Dexter hired Benjamin O. Williams to guide them. Mr. Williams stopped farming, got some blankets and a small tent and was prepared to leave. Three children came down with scarlet fever, a son of Edward Guild and a son and daughter of Judge Dexter. It also began to rain very hard so the group camped in Shiawassee town.

In the morning the group was prepared to travel where no wagon had crossed, thus much of the trail had to be cut. The group continued down the seldom used Grand River Trail and passed through Indian towns such as Byron, Burns, Fremont and Laingsburg. They then entered Clinton County through DeWitt, another Indian town.

Mr. Williams had never been any farther than DeWitt, so he and Judge Dexter hired Mackatapenace (also known as Blackbird) son of Kishkawko, chief of all the Saginaws, to guide them to Muskrat Creek. This was the first

group of people who went further than DeWitt to start a colony.

The Dexter group went in a Northwesterly direction and had traveled about a quarter of a mile, when little Riley Dexter passed away from his scarlet fever. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon in May of 1833. Judge Dexter stopped the group and preparations for Riley's burial began.

A member of the party gave Judge Dexter a trunk to be used as a coffin, when asked about the day at a later date Mr. Williams recalled: At that point, Muskrat Creek, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Dexter, a child about two years, died of scarlet fever. We buried the child by torch and candle light in a box improvised by the party. Never will I forget that scene. The whole family and most if not all the others, in tears; the gray haired sire, after inviting the heads of other families to lead the exercises of the mournful occasion, with tears streaming down his cheeks, read a burial service, amid the sobs that nearly drowned his voice in the deep, dark, gloomy forest, the gloomiest spot of the whole route.

Logs were placed over the grave site to protect it from the numerous wolves in the area. In a large elm tree next to the site, the name Riley Dexter, his age and date of death were carved.

Still filled with sorrow, Mr. Williams and the Dexter group continued through the rest of Bengal township, across Dallas Township and into Ionia County, stopping in the Indian town of Ionia.

Judge Dexter then bought the land from the Indians and started the first permanent, white colony in Ionia. Some people stayed with Judge Dexter in Ionia while others went on to Grand Rapids. Judge Dexter died in Ionia in August of 1856. He was 69 years old.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 6: The Genealogists will hold their meeting at the Capitol Savings and Bank Building at 7:30 pm. Arlene Lounds will discuss Family Newsletters.

Take note that the Historical Society meeting will be the fourth Thursday in June, John Lattimore, head of the Urology Department at Columbia University will tell of his experiences at the Nuremberg trials. This will also be at the Capitol Savings and Bank Building at 7:30 pm, June 23.

Michigan puzzles are still available at the Museum. These have lots of Michigan trivia to learn and are on sale for \$7.00.

We are all saddened by the death of Don Temple who passed away this week.

ARCHIVES MOVED

The Archives in the DeWitt Charter Township hall have been moved to the North side of the building. The North hallway is to be opened in the evenings so when we get additional help, we may be able to have some evening hours open.

OLD POSTCARDS FOR SALE

Our Archives has recently been given over two dozen antique picture postcards of Clinton County scenes to be sold in order to earn some needed revenue for basic operations expenses. The cards include scenes from St. Johns, Fowler, Westphalia, Eureka, Duplain, Ovid, Maple Rapids and Bath. Prices range from one to ten dollars per card and they may be viewed and purchased at the Archives.

HOURS

The Archives are open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday each week from eight till three.

We are going to have a job training girl for typing again this summer, thanks to the Intermediate School District who places the young people in various positions.



Clinton County Historical Society

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