

JUNE, 1989

THE CLINTON INDEPENDENT

CLINTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

'GERMAN SYPHER'

New York to Michigan by covered Wagon

In 1872 German Sypher and his wife Mary Elizabeth, headed for Bath, Michigan in a covered wagon drawn by oxen. German had been a prosperous farmer in Dutchess Co. near Poughkeepie, New York and had amassed a small amount of wealth consisting of two team of oxen, two horses and his covered wagon full of worldly possessions. Things that would not fit on the wagon were sold at a garage sale to give them traveling money.

They knew that the hardships would be many but there was always something unexpected happening. German was a man that tended to every small detail but before leaving he forgot to inspect the brakes on the wagon. Upon reaching the Catskill Mountains he discovered the brakes wouldn't hold going down the far side. He did find a Midas shop but at that time they only did mufflers and had not yet begun to do brakes. But with the help of the Midas-man he did find a brake shop and the problem was corrected.

Their next problem came in the form of missing a turn. If they had turned onto the expressway their voyage would have been shortened many miles by tunnels through the mountains. As it was they added two days to their trip just going up and down.

As the Syphers traveled through one small hamlet after another the townspeople would come to the edge of the street to watch their little parade pass by. The onlookers would laugh and return to their homes with smiles on their faces. I think that it may have been the banner on the side of the wagon that read "Bath or bust."

Again trouble hit as they reached the foothills of the Allegany mountains. One

of the wheels on the wagon broke and in this wild country it took Triple A three days to get there with help. German vowed that when he reached Clinton County that he would switch to State Farm insurance.

By the time they reached Ohio they were disappointed by not finding a McDonalds. The golden arches had not yet come to this part of the country. When they reached the shores of Lake Erie the beauty was almost overcoming. To their dismay the film for the Kodak Brownie was used up and not one of the stores or souvenir shops in the area had film of the right size.

Another three day delay occurred in Cleveland. As you know no one likes to be stranded in Cleveland. The city had just installed traffic lights at the main intersections and they were not yet working properly. German stopped for one of the red lights and it stuck. He had to camp for three days before the city could get the light to turn green and allow him to pass.

After traveling the Ohio Turnpike for many miles the Syphers were very distraught over the conditions. The rest areas were not very well lit, the restrooms were dirty, and there was never any toilet paper. The motel accommodations were less than adequate and filled with mule skinnners traveling the road with large teams of jackasses.

Upon arriving in Michigan, German and Mary Elizabeth were so happy to see the sign with the Robin and the 'Welcome to Michigan'. They knew their journey was nearing it's end. At that time the travel information center was staffed by an Indian who could not speak English so it was impossible to get any good information.

Their final long delay was near Ann Arbor. It seems that there was a Michigan-Michigan State game that day, and you know what that does to traffic. In the confusion and excitement of the

MEETINGS

The regular meeting of the Clinton County Historical Society will be June 8, 1989, in the Capitol Federal Savings and Bank building. The meeting is planned one week early to accommodate Dr. Lattimore who will speak on the Green Mountain Boys.

Sypher Trip Continued

day, one of the oxen appears to have gotten riled up and went into heat. As everyone knows you can't travel with an oxen in heat.

When they finally hit the old Grand River Trail (then the main road between Detroit and Grand Rapids) the Syphers realized their voyage was nearing it's end. Making a left turn onto the highway, their celebration began. It lasted all the way to Laingsburg before their realization that this was it. The whole journey and this was what they had spent weeks on the road for: Laingsburg. No, they had another ten miles to go to their promised land. They did stop at Brown's

Tavern for a hamburger and a beer before those ten miles.

After settling in the homestead site just north of the Looking Glass River, they headed for Bath. They had heard so much about the quaint little town, that was such a buzzing center of activities for southern Clinton County, that their whole bodies were tingling in anticipation. What great disappointment they found in learning there was no bridge across the Looking Glass River. Chief Okemos and a small band of Indians were camped along the river bank. They asked German, "Where are you going?" To which he replied, "To Bath." The chief and all the indians began laughing and laughing, holding their sides and laughing some more. German said, "What's so funny?" To which the Chief replied, "You can't get there from here."

Thus ends the Saga of German and Mary Elizabeth's travel from Dutchess County, New York almost to Bath, Michigan. I know that most of these details are true because German Sypher was my Great Great Grandfather. (P.S. Some lines were added in the interest of showmanship.)

Gene Wilkins



Clinton County Historical Society

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