

Clinton County Trails

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SMITH AND DAVIS PARKS PIONEERS OF DALLAS TWP.

This essay on the Parks families has been edited from a manuscript written in 1952 by Eva (Shafley) Craun. It was included in the genealogy material acquired by Marvel J. (Schriber) Lippert, a copy of which she has lately given to the archives. Eva Craun wrote extensively on the Parke/Parks lineage. See Lippert's 5-generation chart on another page.

Davis Parks was one of the nine children of **Smith and Mary (Lord) Parke**. Somewhere between Canaan, New York, where Davis was born (October 16, 1792), and his home as a man in Dallas, Michigan, his name became changed from "**Parke**" to "**Parks**."

Davis lived in Canaan, Columbia County, New York, until after his marriage in the autumn of 1811, at nineteen years of age, to **Catherine Coons** at Albany County, New York. Soon after marriage they moved to Madison County, New York. Here their first child was born in 1812. The second child was born in Genesee County, New York, in 1816. In 1821 they moved to Allegheny County, New York, and from there to Sandusky County, Ohio. They then settled in Novi Township, Oakland County, Michigan, in 1833, and finally located in Dallas Township, Clinton County, Michigan, in 1837.

There were several factors entering into this migration. In the first place there had been a leveling off of classes following the Revolution. These peoples were of European heritage where those with privilege were those with land. Speculators took advantage of the trend and circulated by the thousands glowing praises of the land just beyond.

In the second place, military pay was largely by land bounties. Nearly every man was a member of his state militia in order to protect himself and family during Indian uprisings and the numerous conflicts with the various nations claiming territory in America. Of necessity, the land bounties each time were

farther afield.

Another predominating factor in this migratory movement was the discovery of steam as a power. In 1825 the Erie Canal was completed, and a flood of travelers began pouring westward by means of water routes. By 1834 over 200 steamers were plying westward waters. Railway trains soon followed in the use of steam power. The first railway train into Michigan reached Adrian from Toledo November 2, 1836.

By this date it will be seen that the **Parks** families arrived before the railway train, and most likely came the whole distance from Canaan, New York, very near the Massachusetts border, to Clinton County, Michigan, by wagon train.

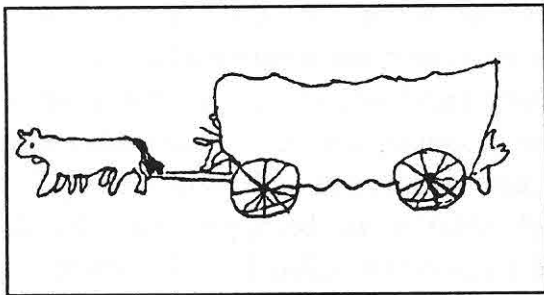


Illustration by Eva (Shafley) Craun

Smith III, an older brother of **Davis's**, came to Oakland County in 1827 and settled two miles south, and three-fourths mile east of the present village of Novi. **Davis** settled there in 1833.

John, another brother, probably came with one or the other. He was an early settler there, and records show an active interest in its development. He was one of the organizers of the Universalist Church of

South Lyons and at one time donated land for a graveyard. There were about one hundred burials. He died July 26, 1867, aged 78 years. His gravestone stands in a discarded cemetery, one mile south of South Lyons not far from Novi where the **Parks** settled.

These brothers, **Smith III**, **John**, and **Davis**, with large families of children, were the living representation of the **Parke** family again identified with the building of a new country and the history of its progress, for these families were among the first white settlers in Michigan. Even though the New England and other seaboard settlements were now 200 and more years old, it was not until after 1820 that Michigan began receiving her share of settlement as a territory and state. She had been explored and first owned by the French and was a part of Canada, surrendered by them to the English in 1759. She was not evacuated by the British until the U.S. Army took over. On July 11, 1796 at the foot of what is now Griswold Street in Detroit, the American flag was displayed for the first time in the Great Lakes area.

Until the treaty of 1807 the land belonged to the Indians. Even now it was of little benefit to the settlers as there were no roads except Indian trails; the Indians were hostile; and the territory was substantially a virgin wilderness. The few French settlers along the shorelines were occupied with the fur trade and the maintenance of army posts.

Until the War of 1812, Michigan had not been used for bounty lands. At that time an Act of Congress provided for the

designating, surveying, and granting of two million acres. Surveyors were sent out, and they reported:

"It is with the utmost difficulty that a place can be found over which horses can be conveyed. Taking the country altogether, it is so bad that no more than one acre out of one hundred, if there be more than one acre out of one thousand, that would in any case admit of cultivation." So the fame of the "great dismal swamp" went abroad and turned aside the tide of immigration.

From 1799 Detroit was head-quarters of the western Army of U.S., and several passable roads had been constructed for military use. Many thousand soldiers had viewed the beautiful rivers with sites for flour and saw mills, had seen the deep, wooded interior with its numerous oak openings, the lush-appearing prairie lands, and the now productive farms of the French settlers along the shores. As a consequence in 1818 the country had been toured again and all parts reported as suitable for agriculture. A land office was opened in Detroit. The entire state was surveyed and each section of 640 acres given a number in order that each settler's land could be specifically located. In 1820 an Act of Congress provided that parcels as small as eighty acres could be bought if desired, and all government land to be sold at \$1.25 per acre. When the government began offering these cheap, fertile lands, building roads, providing local governments, establishing post offices, and protecting her frontiers, the influx of permanent settlers began and among them were the **Parks** brothers and

their families.

It is understandable that these early settlers to Michigan should come from New England and New York. Migration in general moves forward in the same parallel as that from which it comes--on the one hand, compelled by economic changes which effected their old homes, and on the other, quickened by the circulated tales of a Michigan paradise.

Their first choice of location is explained by the fact that Oakland was the first inland county to be settled. It lay near the land office in Detroit and had the consequent priority in the survey of land; it had the natural resources of abundant and excellent timber and the water power sites for mills. Another characteristic was its oak openings which covered wide stretches of land free of underbrush, and in which trees were far enough apart to permit ox teams to go for miles without the need of chopping; the soil was fertile, and the openings insured quick cultivation and harvest and easy transportation.

Some of the **Parks** men were millwrights, and some had other occupations, but all were farmers.

According to Oakland County records, **Smith Parks** built mills at Northville, Pontiac, and Southfield. One of these still stands. A written account states: "The Rodgers Mill of Southfield Center was built by **David Goss** and **Smith Parks** in 1835."

The **Parks** brothers, **Smith** and **Davis**, with their large families of children (many of them married by now) lived in Oakland County until 1837 when they left there and settled in Clinton County. As the **Parks**

