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PIONEER HISTORY OF BLAINE TOWNSHIP.

By Mary Marshall

The history of this township, as far as the personal observations of the writer extend) must commence with the 9th day of May, 1854, at which date he was put ashore from a small schooner at the outlet of lower Herring lake.

At that time the inhabitants of the township consisted of Mr. Harrison Averill and family, consisting of a wife and six children—three boys and three girls. Mr. Averill was engaged in the manufacture of pine lumber, having a small saw mill located on the creek about sixty or seventy rods from the east shore of lower Herring lake.

There were also in the employ of Mr. Averill some twelve or fourteen men beside the writer, who was only a beardless youth in his eighteenth year. The labor connected with the business consisted of rafting the logs down the creek, sawing them into lumber which was again rafted and run across the little lake to its outlet into Lake Michigan. Then when the weather was favorable and a channel could be opened into Lake Michigan, a small schooner would come to anchor off-shore and the task of hauling the rafts out to the vessel by a line attached to her timber head would begin. When a raft arrived at the vessel it was made fast and the men would commence to shove the drifting lumber aboard. It was a long, tedious job, sometimes requiring twenty-five or thirty hours' hard labor without rest or sleep and with very little to eat, and wet to the skin the whole time. It was a labor from which your historian has reaped an abundant harvest in the later years of his life, but for which he received small compensation in those long past days.

The mill and appurtenances were owned by Loyed & Thommas of Chicago, who received all the lumber made except what was shipwrecked on the passage across the lake, or an occasional portion of a raft that failed to get aboard the vessel. Mr. Averill had been shipping pine lumber to them for two or three years previous to '54 and continued the business for about ten years.

The first marriage in the township occurred at the residence of Mr. Averill, I think, in the spring of 1857, the contracting parties being Miss Sarah Averill, his daughter, and Mr. Sutherland, a blacksmith, who had been in the employ of Mr. Averill for some months.

The first death which occurred in the township was the above mentioned Mrs. Sutherland, who died within a year of her marriage, leaving an infant only a few days old, which survived its mother but a few months. Mrs. Sutherland and babe were buried in a pleasant spot at the north end of Herring lake, about half a mile from the old mill site.

The first settlement for the purpose of clearing land for farming was made by Hiram Gage and wife on land now owned by Mr. A. Hollowood, but they soon gave it up and abandoned their claim and went to parts unknown. The next settler who made any attempt at agriculture was a man by the name of Alden Bryant, who came to Herring Creek about the year 1859 and settled down on land lying north of the present school house site in district No.4. The family of Mr. Bryant consisted of his wife, one daughter and two sons. The daughter afterward became the wife of Levi Averill, youngest son of Harrison Averill. Mr. Bryant enlisted in 1864 and his family soon after moved away. About the same time, 1858, or soon after, came a family by the name of Pierce and another by the name of Dayly, who lived

for a year or two on the east side of Herring lake. They were for some time in the employ of Mr. Averill. Later they settled at Portage Lake.

The old mill dam has been swept away by high water, which lowered upper Herring lake about three feet or more, draining several hundred acres of land which had been overflowed by the damming of the creek.

About September, 1863, Mr. John Burdick came and took up his residence in the old house formerly occupied by the Averills, and lived there alone two or three years. He had obtained tax titles on the land and attempted to rebuild the dam and improve the property in the hope of selling it to some one at a profit, but a forest fire in the fall of 1867 swept over the place, licking up everything of a combustible nature, denuding the old site of all its former appurtenances. Mr. Burdick soon went away, I think, to Manistee. In the fall of 1863 Mr. John Hunt and family came and settled on the property still owned by him near lower Herring lake. Mr. Frank Martin and Mr. John Babinaw were the first parties to build houses on homestead claims and Wm. Martin, son of Frank Martin, was the first child born to a homesteader in Blaine township.

BLAINE TOWNSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

The territory which now comprises the township of Blaine was originally organized as a portion of Gilmore in 1867, the first election being held at the house of Rufus Putney, which resulted in the following board of officers:

Supervisor, John Hunt; Clerk, Geo. B. Farley; Treasurer, Jesse Bunker.

In 1876 the present township of Blaine was set off from Gilmore, an election being held June 28, at which John Hunt was again elected as Supervisor, H. P. Owens as Clerk, James M. Goodrich, Treasurer; Justices, Frank R. Axtell, Oliver .Johnson, .Jas. M. Goodrich; Supt. of Schools, Wm. McKinstrey; School Inspector, Orlo E. Putney; Com. of Highways, Wm. G. Vorhies; Constables, Wm. H. Stubbs, Peter Matherson, Orin Blood and Ira W. Mead.

The first school house was built by volunteer labor in the summer of 1866 on land now owned by Anderson Miles, in what is now District No. 1. It was a rough log structure with a roof and floor of rough pine lumber. A few coarse benches served as seats for the ragged urchins whose crude ideas were being trained to shoot by A. P. Bonman, who taught the first school, supported by volunteer subscriptions.

The first death which occurred in the family of any homesteader was that of Agnes May Hunt, second daughter of John and Thessa Hunt, who died September 8, 1865, and was buried on Mr. Hunt's homestead but a short distance from the log cabin in which the family lived.

PIONEER HISTORY OF BLAINE TOWNSHIP INDUSTRIES

Several industries have been carried on in this township aside from the general one of farming during its settlement and history. The first lumbering industry was that conducted by Harrison Averill. Some of the finest white pine lumber that ever was placed on the market of Chicago was shipped from Herring Creek during those early days; a large part of it was purloined from government land, the writer having assisted in the sawing and shipping of several hundred thousand feet of such lumber. The United States marshals of those days were not noted for being very keen of scent in detecting trespassers upon the public domain.

The next party to undertake a business of this kind was O. E. Putney, who, in the fall of 1884, erected a small mill on land leased from Willis Osgood, and commenced the manufacture of hard wood lumber, obtaining a large quantity of logs from the farmers in the vicinity, who would rather dispose of their timber at a small profit than burn it to clear their land. Mr. Putney continued the industry for about three years, making a very fine class of lumber which was mostly hauled overland by teams to Frankfort and there shipped to western markets. The cost of hauling the lumber was so great that the business did not prove to be a very great financial success.

Another business enterprise with the manufacture of lumber as a component part was established in the summer of 1892 at the south end of lower Herring lake, by Leo Y. Hale, formerly of Bear Lake, Manistee county, who built a saw mill, shingle mill, a store for general merchandise, a large boarding house and several fine dwelling houses. He also put out a large, well constructed pier into Lake Michigan for the purpose of shipping lumber, cord wood, tan bark, shingles and other commodities. He also constructed a railroad about five miles into the timber country for the hauling of logs for the mill and other material. Mr. Hale was a gentleman of large business ability, but he was caught by the financial stringency of 1893, 4, 5, and was forced to abandon his vast enterprise.

Quite extensive fishing establishments were erected. Among those to engage in that business was John Babinaw, one of the earliest homesteaders, who for several years operated a fishery about half a mile south of the lower lake, shipping many tons of whitefish, trout and herring to Chicago or Milwaukee, besides supplying settlers with an occasional fry from his nets. Mr. J. B. Dory also shares in the credit of the fishing industry. Mr. Dory was a fisherman of large experience, having been engaged in the business for several years, both at Point Betsey and Frankfort, before settling at Herring lake. Many a boat load of fish from his nets found their way to western markets. He was one of the early pioneers of the town.

Agriculture and horticulture are at present the main industries of the township, it being one of the best in the county for fruit growing, several large and productive orchards of apples, peaches, plums and cherries being cultivated.

Among the names of the early settlers who took advantage of the homestead law of 1862 might be added Mr. Kellm, Benjamin Hopkins, Benjamin Farley, S. S., E. H. and S. H. Gilbert, Levi Smith, G. M. Vanloon, Cassius Judson, John Crawford, Geo. Forester, Wm. G. Vorhies and a few others, who, with those before mentioned, were truly pioneers of the township.

CHURCHES

Ministers of the gospel did, from time to time, dispense the words of truth in the school houses and from an early date Sunday schools were sustained in nearly all the school houses in the township. Two churches have been built, the first a Methodist church, erected in 1880 or '81, with Rev. Charles Powers as its first pastor, a man of great earnestness and zeal. In 1890 the Disciple Church was organized with nineteen charter members and was incorporated in 1892, and Geo. H. Wilson was chosen elder. In 1894 a letter was granted to twenty-five members to organize a church at Putney's Corners, and a suitable building will be erected the coming autumn.