

HISTORY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF PLATTE BY M. E. THURSTON

The township of Platte, in Benzie county, Michigan, was first settled in the year 1864. In the month of March of that year, my father, V. F. Thurston, with Le Roy Morgan and Jonas E. Helmer came to Traverse City, and thence to what is now the township of Platte, in search of government land for the purpose of taking homesteads. On the fifth of April they returned to the land office, - then in Traverse City - and selected lands for homes, and then returned to their places of residence for their families, V. F. Thurston to Wisconsin, Le Roy Morgan to Illinois and J. E. Helmer to the south part of this State.

Mr. Thurston returned with his family in April, to begin the building of a home, Mr. Morgan and Mr. Helmer returning with their families in September or October of the same year, living for a time in cabins constructed of brush, bark, and a few pieces of lumber picked up on the beach of Lake Michigan, until more substantial homes could be built of logs, using bark for a roof. In the fall of the same year Calvin Peck removed with his family from Illinois to the township, and in the summer of 1865 several other families came.

For the first two years the settlers labored under the disadvantage of lack of roads, making use of the beach of Lake Michigan as a thoroughfare and using skills and yawl boats as a means of conveying their household goods and supplies to the nearest point on the shore, and packing them from there to their homes.

In the year 1866 or 1867, a road was opened to Glen Haven, also one via Almira to Traverse City.

About this time other settlers came into the new settlement, and in 1867, the township of Platte was organized, from territory formerly belonging to the township of Crystal Lake, and the first township meeting was held in April of that year; V. F. Thurston was elected supervisor, F. B. Van Patten clerk, L. R. Morgan was elected chairman of the board of highway commissioners, and justice of the peace, which latter office lie continued to hold for many years.

In the spring of 1867, the first school district was organized, and school was held in one room of Mr. Thurston's house, with Miss Emma E. B. Carrier as teacher. In the spring of 1868 a log schoolhouse was built in district No. 1, by voluntary contribution of labor and material by the inhabitants of the district, and Miss Jennie M. Burnette now Mrs. M. E. Thurston, was employed to instruct the young pioneers.

In the year 1868, the Manistee and Leland state road was surveyed from Manistee to Leland, via Frankfort, Platte, Empire and Glen Haven by the local state road commissioner, V. F. Thurston, and in the summers of 1869 and 1870 the road was completed, thereby opening a good thoroughfare through the township, and affording the people a means of (egress and ingress to and from various trading points along the shore.

The Platte postoffice was established about 1868 or 1869, and Abel Briggs was appointed postmaster. Mr. Briggs held the office about one year, when lie resigned in favor of John Griffin, where the office remained but a few months, when L. R. Morgan was appointed postmaster, a position which he has held continuously to the present time

(except a part of each of the two administrations of President Cleveland), each time receiving a reappointment soon after a change in the administration.

There are now two postoffices in the township, Platte and Osborn, the former being now a money order office.

For several years the settlers suffered many hardships, but always with much cheerfulness and fortitude, happy in the thought that in a few years the land once covered by an unbroken forest would be dotted with comfortable homes, fine farms, good roads, commodious schoolhouses, and in the place of forest trees, others laden with the choicest kinds of fruits. All this has come to pass, and well may the people of this township look with pride upon what has been accomplished toward making this the banner town of the county.

While many of the old pioneers have removed to other homes, and some have laid down the burden of life, and passed to the beautiful home prepared for them by their heavenly Father, still some remain to enjoy the blessings derived from their many days of toil and hardships.

Of these who first came to the township there remain Mr. and Mrs. L. Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Peck, Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Thurston, and a number who came to the township a little later, while it is with sorrow we have to record the loss of Mrs. Olive Thurston, wife of V. F. Thurston, who died July 1, 1874; also Mrs. Sophia Helmer, wife of J. E. Helmer, who passed away a few years later, and recently the decease of Mr. J. E. Helmer.

Those that were among our youthful pioneers who have passed away, are Mrs. Mary Culver, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Helmer, Mrs. Mary Goffarr, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Peck and Mrs. Ida M. McCormick, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. L. R. Morgan.

Mr. V. F. Thurston, now a man of nearly four score years, resides with a widowed daughter in Charlevoix.

As we look at the fine farms upon which herds of sleek horses and cattle feed, the handsome dwellings and commodious barns, orchards with their delicious fruits, fine roads, neat frame schoolhouses, and the many changes that have been wrought upon the ground which was covered with an unbroken forest in the spring of 1864, we are led to exclaim: what a wonderful change has man wrought by his untiring efforts, and what a monument stands before the rising generation to teach them what may be accomplished through industry, perseverance and courage to meet and overcome difficulties, such as were confronted by the pioneers and first settlers of our beautiful township.

Many incidents of interest relative to the first settlement of the township of Platte, of hardships endured, and obstacles overcome by the first settlers while struggling to build themselves homes, and at the same time keep the wolf from the door by chopping cordwood and engaging in various other occupations to earn an honest dollar with which to pay for the necessaries of life, might be related, but the shortness of time before the annual meeting of the pioneers of Benzie county, August 14, 1901, prevents.