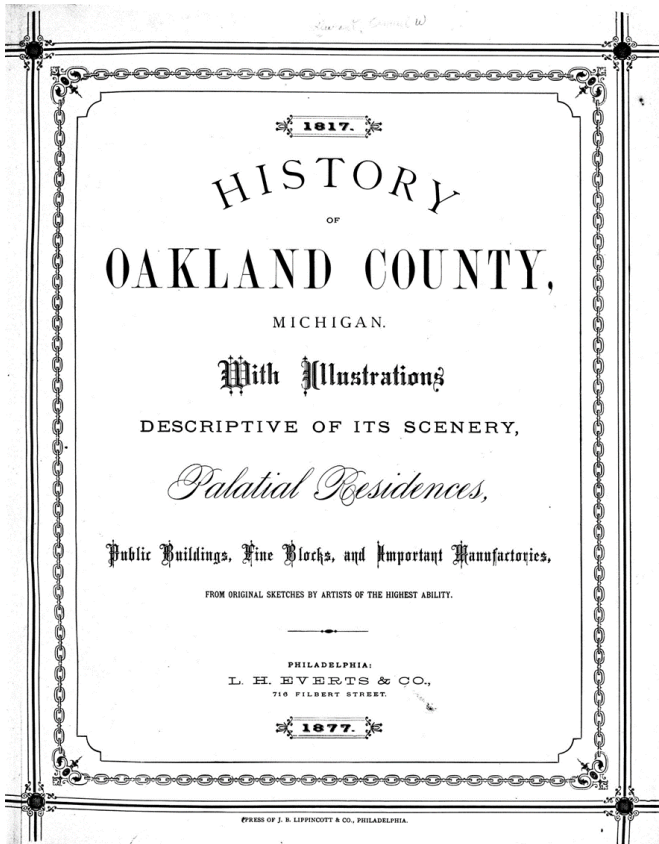


**Oakland County's First History:  
Written in Honor of the Early Settlers**

***THE HISTORY OF OAKLAND COUNTY***

Published by LH Everts of Philadelphia in 1877

Principal Author: Samuel W. Durant





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2021

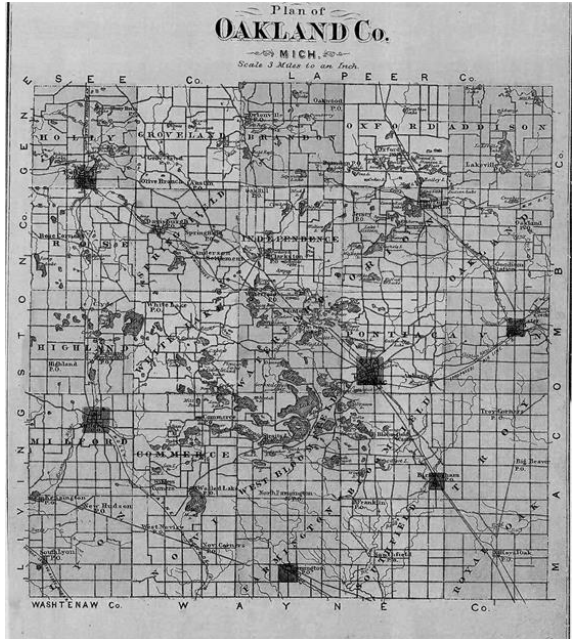




## INTRODUCTION

Oakland County was established on March 28, 1820. The bicentennial celebration commemorating that event was obviously disrupted as a consequence of the Covid outbreak. Nonetheless, one of the activities sponsored by the Oakland County Historical Commission did go forward.

In 1877, L.H. Everts Publishing of Philadelphia produced the first history of Oakland County. It is a fascinating book. As it turns out, the Historical Commission found itself in the position to rebind an original copy of the book. It was donated by the Hovey family of Independence Township and had been in their possession since 1877.



Oakland County with township boundaries  
from: *1872 Atlas of Oakland County*, F. W.  
Beers, Publisher

The book is now part of a display outside the Oakland County Board of Commissioners meeting chamber.

In addition to rebinding an original book, the Historical Commission arranged for the distribution of reprints of the *History of Oakland County* to 29 public libraries and 10 local historical societies with research facilities. The Commission also conducted 24 lectures on 19<sup>th</sup> century life in Oakland County as reflected in the *History*.

This booklet is a primer for that *History of Oakland County* and has two main purposes. The first is to provide a sampling of its contents to encourage people to explore this captivating description of the first sixty years of the county's existence.

The second is to provide background to help readers better understand the content. The essential problem for modern readers is that the book was written nearly 150 years ago for a contemporary audience. This is unfamiliar ground for most modern Americans. The goal is to place *some* of the references in the proper context in order to both further the readers' understanding as well as encourage readers to do further exploration on their own.

For example, contemporaries knew the significance of Civil War bounties. They knew what a path master was and how much one could (or could not) do to improve road conditions. They were intimately aware of the role their evangelical Protestant faith played in the daily life of society and how the doctrines of predestination, Millennialism and perfectionism sparked conflicts within and between the various denominations. They knew the significance of the Grange and that the "store" inside the Ortonville Grange Hall was a part of the cooperative movement aimed at protecting farmers from rapacious middlemen.

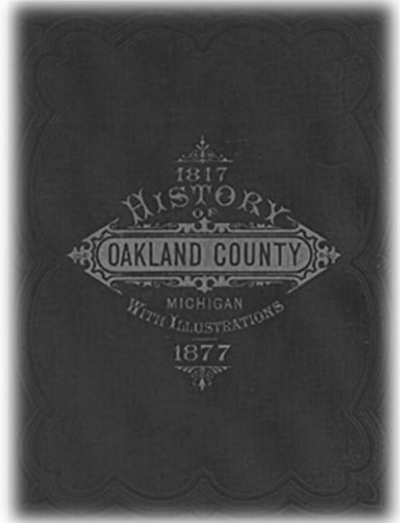
Furthermore, they didn't need to be told that life was precarious. High infant mortality, fever and ague (i.e., malaria), cholera, death in childbirth, consumption (i.e. tuberculosis) and so forth were a part of life and were taken for granted. These things show up in the Everts book, but only as casual asides. In reading this book it is easy to overlook how tenuous life really was 150 years ago.

The modern reader, living in a very different world, has no such frame of reference and could easily miss the full meaning of many sections in the book. This booklet is an attempt to provide some of the context necessary to better understand the book's narrative.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE EVERTS BOOK

According to P. William Filby, a chronicler of county histories in the United States, as of 1988 there had been approximately 5000 county histories published in the U.S. Of those, roughly 1500 were produced between 1875 and 1884. In Michigan, 40 of the 110 county histories recorded by Filby were published in this period, including Everts' *History of Oakland County* which was published in 1877.

There seems to be two primary catalysts for this activity. First, 1876 was the centennial year of the founding of the United States. Local communities frequently mark such events by commemorating their own past and these histories are an example of that practice. In fact, President Ulysses Grant issued a proclamation on May 25, 1876 encouraging local communities to undertake such projects.



The second reason for this flurry of publishing is that the states who were most prolific were those west of the Appalachians and settled after 1800 - primarily after the War of 1812. The pioneers responsible for that early settlement were very rapidly disappearing and their children, who were now reaping the material benefits of their ancestors' hard work. Simply put, they wished to capture that history before the memory was completely lost. This sentiment is frequently expressed in the *History of Oakland County*:

*"In recalling these instances of pioneer days, a great many of which have passed from my mind, I seem as it were to be living*

*them over again, and I rejoice to know that steps are being taken to preserve a record of them, which if not done, will soon be among the things of the past and be forgotten forever.” - John Jones, Age 71, Bloomfield, page 329*

As the centennial approached, a handful of companies began canvassing communities across the country to solicit interest in county histories. Essentially, if enough residents subscribed to the book, the company would begin its work. On April 25, 1877, it was announced in a Pontiac newspaper that:

*Messrs. L.H. Everts & Co., the enterprising publishers, whose canvassers have been industriously at work for the past few months taking subscriptions for the contemplated History of Oakland County, are now in the field with a thoroughly organized and able corp of artists and historians for the purpose of completing what has been so well begun. - Pontiac Weekly Bill Poster, April 25, 1877*

These books generally ran 400 to 500 pages and included several hundred lithographs (pictures). And it was a business. The publishers simply could not afford to dawdle in the production of books that were going to be of interest to very small segments of the population. To be profitable, short cuts needed to be taken.

The basic approach was to call on residents to contribute information:

1. Questionnaires designed to collect specific and consistent information about Oakland County communities were circulated via newspapers.
2. Prominent people (teachers, doctors, ministers, community leaders, etc.) were encouraged to submit information about their areas of expertise.
3. Residents were encouraged to produce short biographies of themselves, their ancestors or community figures of note.



The primary work of the Everts team was to edit this material to create the book. They simply didn't have the time to do much more.

Essentially, these books were a collection of oral histories arranged to tell a compelling story. They were not, however, comprehensive histories. There does not appear to have been any serious effort to correct inconsistencies, errors or fill in gaps in the story. The Everts team edited what was contributed. If, for example, Farmington's Methodist minister sent in a history of his church and congregation but the Baptist minister did not, well, the reader would not know there was a Baptist church in town.

—L. H. Everts & Co., who are preparing a history of Oakland County, are gathering material of every nature from which to make up the records, and Mr. Samuel W. Durant, a business and genial gentleman, and who is the chief historical writer for the work, is now in this city looking after material in this locality. Mr. Durant is stopping at the Hodges House, and those who are in possession of facts connected with the personal or material history of the county, should put him in possession of the m.

- Pontiac Gazette, May 4, 1877

Using this method, the Oakland County book was completed and available for sale by September, 1877 – less than six months from the time serious work on the writing had begun!

## CONTENT

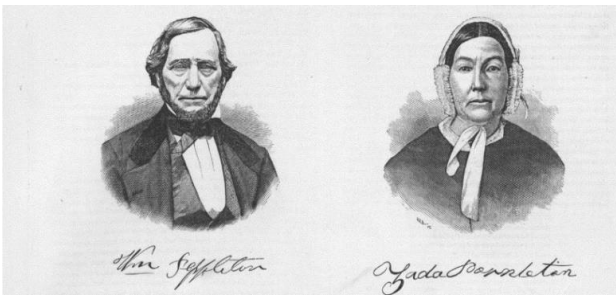
The *History of Oakland County* is broken into three sections. The first 67 pages are a general recounting of the geography and history of Michigan and Oakland County. This was original work prepared by the author Samuel W. Durant and his co-author Henry Peirce.

The book concludes with a 40-page appendix on the military history of the county. It refers to the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and a few minor military events like the Toledo War and the 1837 Canadian Rebellion. Primarily, though, this section consists of unit histories of Michigan regiments that had taken part in the recently ended Civil War and appears to have been drawn from other sources

The middle section is the most important part of the book. It consists of separate chapters covering the 25 townships in the county plus the city of Pontiac. The layout of each chapter is largely based on responses to the questionnaire referred to above and is supplemented by whatever additional material was submitted by local residents.

That additional material includes biographies of 130 residents as well as 160 images of farmsteads, homes and a few places of business and public buildings.

Residents paid for the privilege of having their biography, picture or lithograph of their residence included. They were not included because of some objective measure of importance to the community; they were included because they paid the necessary fee. It is another example of the book being anecdotal rather than comprehensive history. Still, the biographies and images contain a wealth of information about life in Oakland County as the following biography of William and Linda Poppleton demonstrates.



*“In 1823 he visited Michigan. then almost a wilderness, and located from the government the west half of the southeast quarter and the east half of the southwest quarter of section 20 of the township of Troy...and two years later, with his little family...he took final leave of western New York. In December 1825, after 32 days of toilsome journey through Canada in a covered emigrant-wagon...he arrived safely at his homestead...”*

Note:

1. It was “almost a wilderness.”

2. The reference to the land is by township and section. This mechanism was the survey method laid out in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.
3. Poppleton selected his land as a result of a visit two years prior to actual migration.
4. Unlike most migrants, the Poppletons came across Ontario by wagon. Steamships were still uncommon on Lake Erie.

*“In 1856 he moved upon one of his farms adjoining the village of Birmingham, and abandoned almost entirely all personal connection with farming. Here in his pleasant village retreat, with his faithful partner in life he enjoyed a well-earned repose, until her death in 1862 [after which] he seemed to lose much of the vigor of constitution.*

Note:

1. This reference to retiring into a nearby village occurs several times in the book. Still, most older people would have remained on their farm where they would have been cared for by their children who would have inherited that farm.

*“To him the present excellent and superior condition of the public highways of the township are due...he was always an unflinching and uncompromising Democrat, true to his party when in the right... Mr. Poppleton was the father of seven children, two of whom died in infancy, two in ripe womanhood [i.e., giving birth.]”*  
- Troy, p. 297

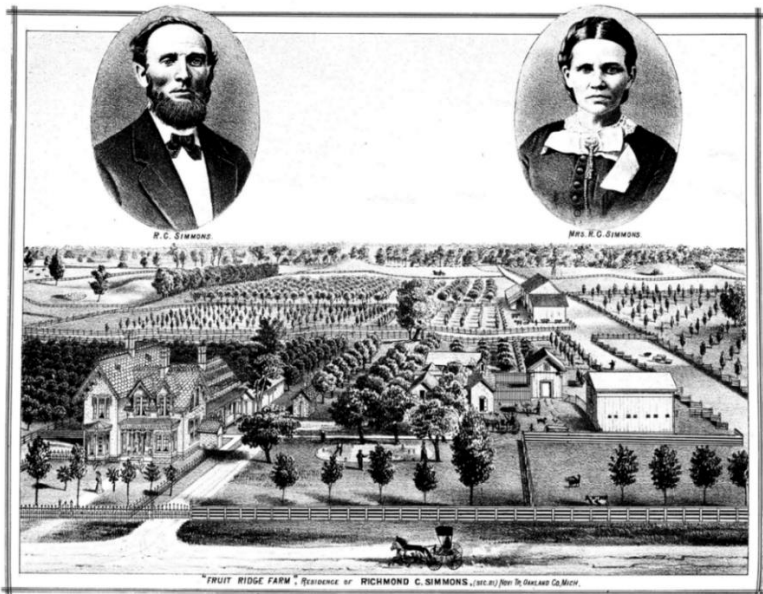
Note:

1. Infant mortality was very high as was the possibility of mothers dying in childbirth. In 1870, infant mortality was 160 deaths per 1000 births while approximately six mothers died for each 1000 births.
2. To contemporaries, Poppleton may have done an admirable job as road supervisor in Troy township. Those roads, however, were not in “excellent and superior condition” by our standards. Roads in the United States were generally abysmal. Troy would not have been an exception. Still, it is all relative and it is certainly *possible* Troy roads were in better condition than those in neighboring townships.

## “ILLUSTRATIONS OF PALATIAL HOMES, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, FINE BLOCKS AND MANUFACTURIES”

The “Palatial Homes” phrase from the book’s title misrepresents both the contents of the book and the wealth of Oakland County. While prosperous, Oakland County did not have many “palatial homes.” Most were very ordinary, commonly of a basic upright and wing design. Palatial or not, the images of those farmsteads are a valuable part of the book and offer a useful glimpse of Oakland County in the 1870s. The following lithographs from the book provide a few examples of what careful viewers might learn about life on a mid-western American farm 150 years ago.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Richmond C. Simmons of Novi is undoubtedly one of those “palatial homes.” Certainly, it is lovely. In reality, however, it is the residence of a successful farmer and not the “palatial” estate of a wealthy tycoon or large land owner.

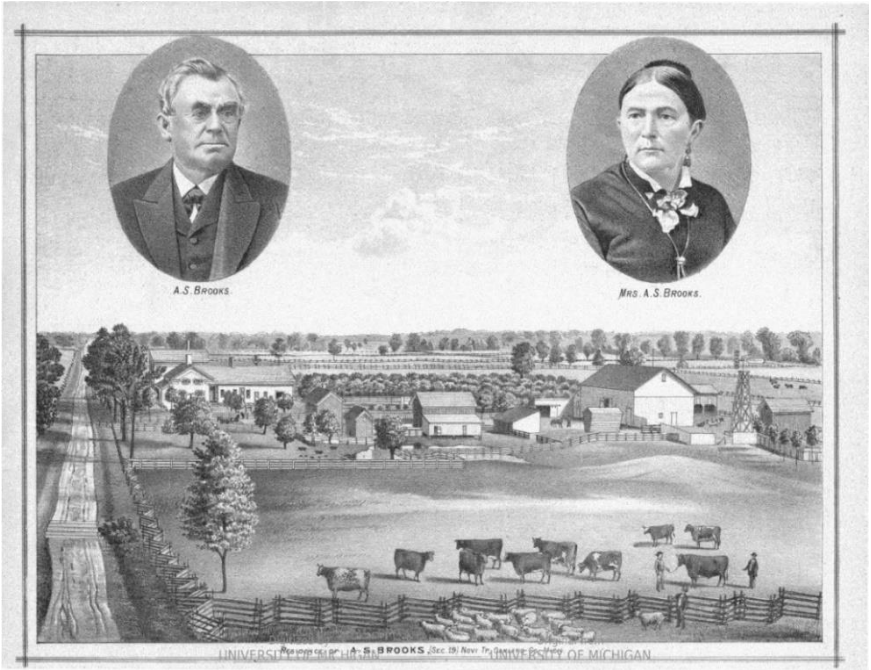


*Note:*

1. *The orchards - Oakland County was a major fruit (primarily apples) producing region of Michigan and even the United States.*

2. *The large number of outbuildings.*
3. *The croquet game in process. There are many images in the book with croquet games underway. They were probably included to highlight that a certain level of gentility and prosperity had been achieved.*
4. *Palatial or not, remember that all of these homes lacked what we would consider basic elements of comfort: indoor plumbing, central heating, electricity and telephones.*

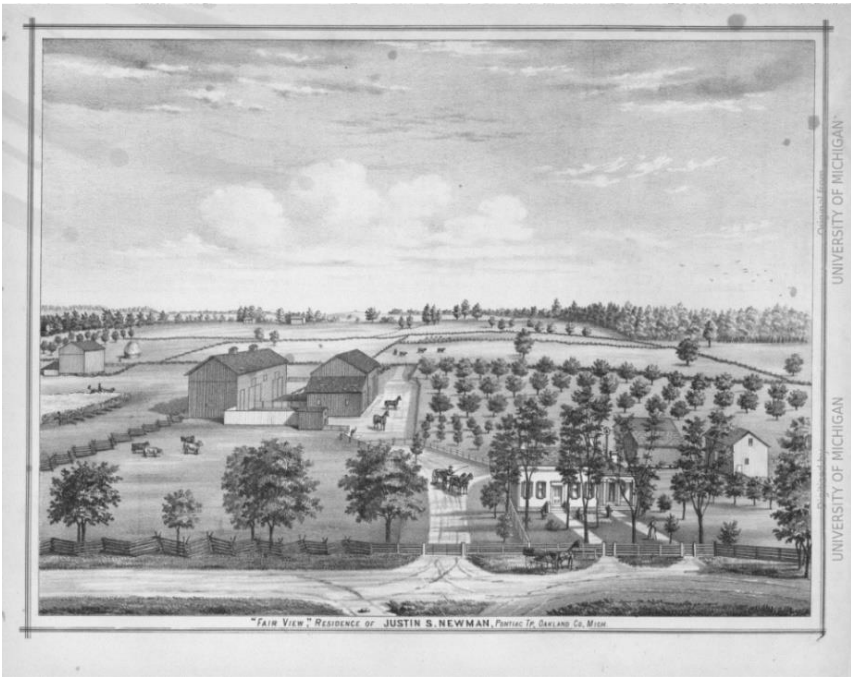
A more typical farmhouse is that of Mr. and Mrs. A.S. Brooks. It is fairly large in this 1877 image, but has undoubtedly grown in stages.



*Note:*

1. *Michigan was the country's 4<sup>th</sup> leading producer of sheep and wool in this period. Sheep abound in the lithographs of farms in the book.*
2. *How would you characterize the condition of the road?*
3. *What was the purpose of the windmill?*

Below is the more modest home of Justin S. Newman.



*Note:*

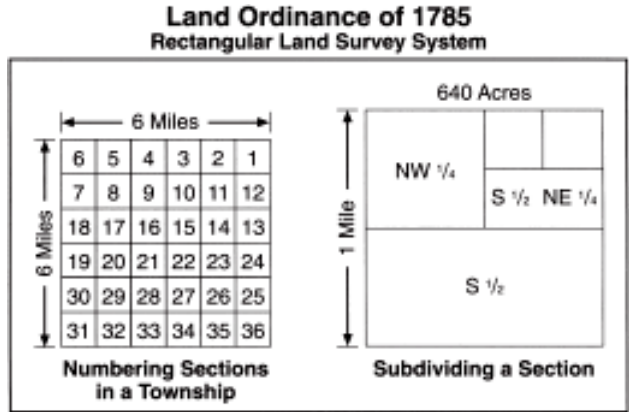
1. *There is indication of the diversified farming that dominated Oakland County: dairy cattle, an orchard, a hay stack and grain being harvested using a mechanical reaper.*
2. *Can you find evidence of a visitor at the Newman home?*
3. *What do you think of these road conditions?*

## **ANTE BELLUM SETTLEMENT OF OAKLAND COUNTY**

As with every other part of the United States, when Americans and recently arrived immigrants came to Oakland County it was already occupied by Native Americans. It was not densely populated but it was populated. While there may have been some amicable acquisition of land, generally Native Americans signed treaties with

Europeans and later the United States only after they had been defeated or awed by military force.

Once land title was acquired from the Native Americans, it was necessary to survey it before it could be sold to settlers. This was done in accordance with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.



Source: Edgar B. Wesley, *Our United States: Its History in Maps*. Denoyer-Geppert (adapted)

In Michigan, however, two factors delayed settlement. First, until after the War of 1812, Native Americans, with British backing, were reasonably successful in delaying American movement west. Secondly, was the belief that Michigan was unsuitable for settlement. This rather gloomy sentiment was clearly expressed in the following:

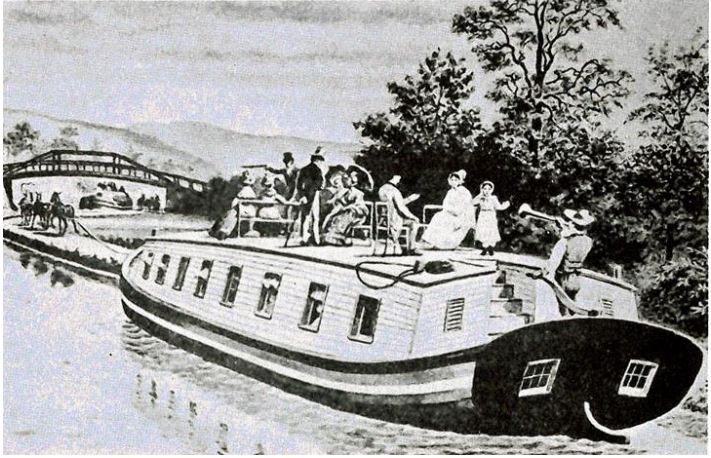
*“There would not be one acre out of a hundred [in the Michigan Territory]...that would in any case admit of cultivation.”*  
– Edward Tiffin, Surveyor General Northwest Territory, 1815

Tiffin and others seem to have focused on the Great Black Swamp that dominated much of northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan. The sparse knowledge they had of Michigan led them to assume that the entire state was made up of these marshy conditions.

This perception had changed by the mid-1820s as settlers gradually moved out from Detroit and began to publicize that Michigan was not all swamp and that it, in fact, contained vast amounts of quality farmland. At this point, the settlement of Michigan really began.

## THE MIGRATION WEST

The typical settler coming to Oakland County came from western New York and was frequently of Puritan New England descent.



**An Erie Canal Packet Boat**

<https://ppaccone.medium.com/the-erie-canal-c1d4a8e7c5c6>

They generally traveled to Buffalo along the Erie Canal and took a steamship to Detroit where they probably hired a drayman or bought a team of oxen and a wagon to haul their goods to their land in Oakland County.

The next leg of the journey was usually north along what would become Woodward Avenue. It was often a miserable journey...at least until they got to Royal Oak and cleared the muddiest part of the trek. A typical story is that of Jonathan Pixley of Avon. Read this carefully and use your imagination to fill in the blanks. It is a remarkable story and one that is retold many times in the *History of Oakland* with only minor variation.

*“I lived there [Tioga County, New York] until March, 1823 when, with my family, I moved to Monroe County, western New York. I lived there eight years, when, in company with my late brother David, I emigrated to Michigan. We started from Brockton on the Erie Canal [on Thursday, May 12, 1831] and*



*arrived in Buffalo on the Saturday following...Monday morning we shipped on board the steamer 'William Penn.' After a rough journey we arrived in Detroit on the 20<sup>th</sup>. [That night his family seems to slept higgledy-piggledy in the Old Yankee Boarding House.]*

*"After breakfast I put out to find a yoke of oxen. I soon found some for sixty-five dollars. Went to a shop and bought a yoke for them, and driving down to the dock hitched them to my wagon...put my family on board, and started for Oakland.*

*"The mud was hub deep...we came to what is called 'Four-Mile House' ...we stayed here all night but little sleep did we get, for the mosquitoes were determined to have [one's] fill.*

*[After passing through Royal Oak and Troy, the Pixleys arrived at] our present home on the northeast quarter of section 23 [in the township of] Avon on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of May. Nothing occurred during the summer worthy of note until the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, when all but myself were taken sick with typhoid fever. This was a great drawback for us, but I had good and kind neighbors, for which I shall always be thankful...*

*"In conclusion I would say, besides being very homesick the first season I had to work out by day for bread for myself and family of eight. My exertions to get out of debt were in vain, for at the end of the first year I was fifty dollars in debt. This debt I contrived to pay the following year. Now I have a good farm of one hundred and fifty acres, free from debt." - Jonathan Pixley, of Avon, pp 133-134*

## **NATIVE AMERICANS**

When Pixley and his contemporaries came to this area it had been occupied by Native Americans for thousands of years. What was to become Oakland County was acquired from Native Americans by the 1809 Treaty of Detroit. By that treaty, Native Americans could remain until the land was required for White settlement. Thus, when

the first wave of settlers arrived in the 1820s and early 1830s there was a reasonable Native American presence.



**The various treaties by which the United States acquired land from Native Americans**

<https://michiganology.org/stories/a-short-history-of-treaties/>

There is every indication in the *History of Oakland County* that relationships between the Native Americans and Whites were amicable and although ingrained prejudices can be seen, the perception of the Native Americans by the settlers was generally positive. Below are some representative comments:

*“The Indians were usually very quiet and peaceable and for a number of years after the first settlements were made hunted and*

*fished around the beautiful lake. Undoubtedly they were much grieved when the time came for them to be removed from its locality.” - White Lake, p. 187*

*“A rich alluvial soil, fine hunting and fishing, had ever made the banks of this beautiful sheet of watering a great resort for the children of the forest. In fact, a limited number made it their permanent abiding place ... As neighbors [Cornelius Austin] affirms none could have been better. They were inoffensive, respectful of the rights of whites, and uniformly kept and redeemed their word.”*

– Commerce, p. 160

*“When the first settlers came to Brandon there were a great many Indians within its bounds. With few exceptions these were orderly and peaceable, although naturally inclined to pilfer.”<sup>1</sup>– Brandon, p.153*

This positive view of White/Native American relationships, however, carries an important caveat. In 1830, the United States Government passed the Indian Removal Act which required all Native Americans east of the Mississippi to relocate west of the Mississippi. This led to such infamous acts as the Cherokee Trail of Tears. It had little impact on Oakland County as Native Americans were already in the process of moving out of the county by 1830. Still, there are several veiled references to the Indian Removal Act in the narrative.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The negative comments about Native Americans revolved around three issues: 1) Petty thievery. This seems to have resulted from a very different attitude towards rights to food. A hungry Native American would not have considered it inappropriate to help themselves to a slice of bread left on the table of an open cabin. Whites saw it as theft. 2) Alcohol. The “firewater” issue must be put in context. Temperance was a major issue in the era. Alcohol was seen by many settlers a threat to an ordered society - White OR Native American. The central issue was the consumption of alcohol whether by Whites or Native Americans. 3) Indolence. It is important to appreciate that Native Americans lived at one with nature. White society was at war with nature. Native Americans didn’t spend their days chopping down trees. Whites did. Native Americans weren’t indolent, they simply spent their time differently.

<sup>2</sup> There was a forced migration of some 400 Potawatomie from a reservation near Kalamazoo. It appears, however, that the other 7-8000 Michigan Native Americans

## TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT

Each chapter includes coverage of the first township government. While this may initially seem to be a dull topic, it can tell us much about rural life in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America.

First, there is indication of just how democratic American society was at this stage of development. Population was small and many people participated in local government. In Holly, for example, there were initially 43 voters and 16 people elected to office!

The offices themselves are instructive. While one might expect Supervisors, Town Clerks, Constables and Justices of the Peace, there were also:

- Directors of the Poor (townships were initially responsible for care of their own needy)
- School Commissioners and Inspectors of Schools (this reflects the importance Michigan's transplanted Yankees placed on education and helps explain the early role Michigan played in creating a modern system of public education)
- Highway Commissioners (township level) and Path Masters (road district level)<sup>3</sup>

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affected by the Indian Removal Act avoided forced emigration by moving to northern Michigan, the Upper Peninsula or west into Wisconsin or Minnesota. Essentially, they got out of the way of White migration in the southern part of the state, went North and were largely ignored. After 1854, when the provisions of the Removal Act were suspended, many returned to Michigan. The net result is that, unlike most states east of the Mississippi, Michigan's Native America population in 1860 was approximately what it had been in 1830.

<sup>3</sup> By law, each section line was deemed a public highway. Theoretically, it was the responsibility of the townships to actually accomplish this ambitious feat. In the territorial period it was expected that Federal and state funds would be made available for construction of major throughways. By 1840, however, states rights battles and the depression following the Panic of 1837 caused states, including Michigan to abandon internal improvements of all sorts. This left total responsibility for Michigan roads in the hands of township supervisors and, eventually, some 25,000 road district path masters!

- Pound Masters (controlling stray animals, chiefly hogs)
- Fence Viewers (making sure fences were in good order to prevent strays)

Interestingly, many of these early town meetings passed bounties on wolves, typically \$5 per scalp. This, combined with the frequent stories about wolves terrorizing early settlers, demonstrates how threatening wolf packs were perceived to be.

## COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

### Schools

As mentioned, the early migrants to Michigan were generally of old Puritan stock. Education was important to them, particularly so children could learn to read the Bible. The consequence was that schools, though of a primitive nature, began to appear almost immediately. Virtually every township has a story similar to this:

*“The first school taught was in the loft of Major Williams’ sheep house, in the fall of 1821. The teacher was a man named Brett. The first school house was built in the Williams settlement in 1822. School was taught by Miss Stevens with 12 pupils. The house was built of logs.”* - Waterford, p 309

This was, of course, just the beginning. What was left unsaid was that Michigan was at the forefront in the creation of the modern public school system in the United States. Michigan’s first constitution (1837) included important education provisions. Lack of funding hampered the systems early growth, but the commitment to education was clear.

One consequence of the early public school laws was that school districts, which were built around the famous one room school

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It was an amazingly inefficient, underfunded and decentralized system led by individuals with minimal road building knowledge. The results, predictably, were terrible roads. Often they were unpassable for several months of the year due to mud.

house, were encouraged to “consolidate” with neighboring districts to form “union’ or “graded” schools. These consisted of at least three grades: elementary, grammar and high school. By 1875 there were 12 such union schools in the county.

## Churches

In many townships, the churches make up a very significant part of the narrative. This is to be expected as one of the great

*“The settler had hardly pitched his camp before the evangelist followed in his wake proclaiming the gospel.”*

– Oxford p 244

events of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the Second Great Awakening. This was extremely important. It created the American Protestantism as it is generally thought of today. It was Protestantism that was very different from the strong Calvinist flavor of colonial religion. It was also a far more grass-roots, optimistic and emotional brand of religion. Revivals and camp meetings were a regular feature of the religious landscape in this frontier environment.

One consequence of the beliefs and methods of the movement was the rapid growth of Methodists and Baptists who, more often than not, established the first congregations in most communities.

*“In the year 1837 a remarkable series of protracted meetings was held in the new church, under the leadership of Reverends Barrett and E. Wever, and so great was the awakening at that time - that the membership of the church was increased to more than 100.”*  
Farmington, p 172

The grass roots character of the Second Great Awakening also resulted in establishment of several new denominations: Disciples of Christ, the Christian Church, Mormons and Adventists/Millerites all of which have mention in the Everts book.

The largest denominations in colonial America, Presbyterians and Congregationalists (i.e., Puritans), struggled with some of ideas of



**A Frontier Camp Meeting/Revival**

<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/constitution/Pages/before-missionaries.aspx>

the Second Great Awakening. Most significant was a view of salvation very different from the concept of predestination central to the belief system of these denominations. Later, “Oberlin Perfectionism” further fractured the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. These controversies are quite evident.

*It is at this period [1845] that there was so much diversity of opinion concerning the orthodoxy of the “Oberlin profession” and other creeds which were thought to be at variance with...Westminster Catechism. The discussion of these questions induced the withdrawal of Rev. Hornell, with a portion of the members. - Independence, p. 210*

Another feature of the Second Great Awakening was the lack of trained ministers sufficient to meet

the growing demand. The Home Missionary Society funded many ministers who came to Michigan.



Circuit Riders covered hundreds of miles each year on foot and horse back to carry their message to settlers.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/complete-answers-to-the-united-methodist-circuit-rider->

Methodists particularly relied on circuit riders. They would travel a large region holding “classes” in communities on a rotating basis. Baptists frequently employed part-time, self-taught ministers, for example:

*“Elder [Elijah] Miller did not have the advantages of liberal education to aid in fitting him for ministerial work. His transfer from plow to the pulpit was quickly accomplished. God called him to preach the gospel. And he felt that he must do it to the best of his ability.”* – Walled Lake, p. 162

Throughout the book you will also find mention of non-mainstream denominations: Mormons, Millerites and Universalists. In Troy, for example, we find reference to the Millerite movement, which evolved into the Seventh Day Adventists, and was based on the expectation that the Second Coming of Christ would occur on October 22, 1844. For example:

*“About this time the doctrine of ‘Millerism’ made its appearance in the church and the community, producing much excitement. More than a majority were carried away with it.”* - Troy, p 292



## FRATERNAL ORDERS

### Masons

In the mid-1820s in Western New York, the Masonic order came under attack. Following the kidnapping and presumed murder of William Morgan, a disgruntled former member, the Masons of western New York conspired to obscure their involvement in the affair. Widespread opposition to the conspiracy resulted in the Anti-Masonic Movement targeting the irreligious, secretive, undemocratic, and elitist character ascribed to the Masons by their opponents. One consequence was that for 15-20 years Masonic lodges closed or went underground in much of the country.

As the settlers to Michigan were largely from Western New York the Anti-Masonic movement came with them. Of course, there were many of these settlers who remained loyal to the Masons and by the 1840s lodges began to reappear. By the 1870s the Masons were in full bloom and are well represented in the *History of Oakland County*. In fact, you will find that most townships boasted 2-3 Masonic lodges, plus other fraternal organizations such as the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF).

### **The Grange** (International Order of the Patrons of Husbandry)

Founded by Oliver Kelley in 1868, the Grange was intended to promote the interests of American farmers. It was an era in which farmers felt they were losing prestige as well as political and economic power. They felt increasingly at the financial mercy of the growing urban/industrial elite. The Grange provided farmers opportunities to socialize, mitigating the isolation associated with farm life, as well as protect their interests.

By the mid-1870s the Grange had over 850,000 members, nearly half of whom were women with important leadership positions. Most of the 26 Granges in Oakland County are described in the Everts book.

While there are many ways in which the Grange worked on behalf of farmers, the Everts book avoided politics and the only real issue alluded to is the cooperative movement. This was one way the Grange

*"It meets in a handsomely furnished hall, 24 x 70 feet, part of which is a store-room for the sale of supplies, purchased at wholesale, and sold at a slight advance."*

– Brandon, P 157

attempted to undercut middlemen who farmers blamed for high prices of retail goods and lower process for agricultural products.<sup>4</sup> The “store-room” described in the Ortonville (Brandon) Grange was one such co-op.

## TEMPERANCE

The temperance movement was especially strong in Western New York and was directly linked to the Second Great Awakening. While drinking had been a feature of American life for a long time, overindulging was generally viewed as bad manners. By the mid-1820s, evangelical Protestants began to see drinking as a sin and by the mid-1830s the temperance movement began to move from “moderation” towards complete “abstinence”, i.e., prohibition.

*The temperance movement seems to have been lively in Auburn in January, 1831. A great meeting was held at Hascall's assembly room on the 31<sup>st</sup> of that month, at which a township temperance society was formed. - Pontiac Township, p 122*

This movement led to the Prohibition Amendment in 1919. What is less well known is that Michigan was a dry state between 1854 and 1872.

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<sup>4</sup> Montgomery Ward's catalog business was initially established to support the Grange and this cooperative movement.

Temperance is not a topic that appears in each township chapter. Nonetheless, it is frequently mentioned in the narratives of churches, the Grange, temperance societies (The Good Templars, for example) and in the biographies.



**The Drunkards Progress** charted the inevitable fate of a person seduced by demon rum...from the polite drink to suicide.  
<https://www.redriverradio.org/post/history-matters-prohibition>

### THE MILLS

Of critical importance to the economic life of Oakland County was the establishment of mills. They converted trees to lumber, seed crops to grain, apples to cider and wool to yarn. They were established very early and, with few exceptions, were the catalyst for the founding of early villages such as Pontiac, Rochester, Milford, Birmingham, Lake Orion, and Ortonville.

A byproduct of the mills was the mill pond. The mill pond is pictured as a romantic part of American life. Contemporaries, however, often associated “fever and ague” (malaria) with the millponds. While they didn’t connect the disease with the mosquitoes who bred in the stagnant waters of these ponds, they certainly recognized mill ponds as health hazards.

*“When they built the dam and raised the pond much sickness resulted, and people died rapidly.” - Waterford, p 309*

It is a sign of an increasingly mechanized world that communities without waterpower had an option...steam. Royal Oak seems to have had the first mill powered by a steam engine in 1836. In time, they became more widely used. They offered a more reliable (though more dangerous – fires are mentioned regularly) source of energy, especially during dry season. By 1870, one third of the mills in the county were powered by steam.



The Erastus Hopkins saw and grist mill, White Lake Township, est. 1833.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset, the *History of Oakland County* is essentially an oral history. Oral histories, by their very nature are narrow in scope, lack context and suffer from poor or selective memory. Reading a single oral history of an event or time frame can lead to faulty conclusions.

The *History of Oakland County*, however, is not the oral history of a single person. It is the recollection of hundreds of people focused on life in Oakland County between 1818 and 1877. It is *the number* of these memories which is the saving grace of the book. While not quite a primary source, it is close. And while individual recollections may be misleading, the sheer volume of accounts allows the reader to come away with a compelling, though not complete, picture of Oakland County in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

That said, the more one understands the background in which these stories are set, the more meaningful they become. While an attempt has been made to provide some of that context in this booklet, it will fall to the reader to do their own research to fully appreciate the value of the *History of Oakland County* and draw maximum knowledge of the period of history it covers.

## In Commemoration of the Bicentennial

March 28, 2020, marked the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of Oakland County. In commemoration of the bicentennial, the Oakland County Historical Commission donated reprint editions of the *History of Oakland County* to the county libraries and historical societies listed below. While several libraries have original copies of the book, they are generally fragile and must be handled with special care. The reprints, in sturdy library binding, can withstand normal library usage and, unlike the originals, can be replaced.

For those who would like to review electronic versions of the Everts book, there are several sites which provide access. One such site is:

[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6922636M/History\\_of\\_Oakland\\_County\\_Michigan](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6922636M/History_of_Oakland_County_Michigan).

### Public Libraries

Addison Township Public Library  
Auburn Hills Public Library  
Baldwin Public Library  
Berkley Public Library  
Blair Memorial Library  
Bloomfield Township Public Library  
Brandon Township Public Library  
Commerce Township Community Library  
Ferndale Public Library  
Franklin Public Library  
Highland Township Public Library  
Holly Township Library  
Independence Township Library  
Lyon Township Public Library  
Madison Heights Public Library  
Milford Public Library  
Novi Public Library  
Orion Township Public Library  
Oxford Public Library  
Pontiac Public Library

Rochester Hills Public Library  
Royal Oak Public Library  
Southfield Public Library  
Springfield Township Library  
Troy Public Library  
Walled Lake City Library  
West Bloomfield Public Library  
White Lake Township Library  
Wixom Public Library

### Museums and Historical Societies

Auburn Hills Historical Society  
Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society  
Jewish Historical Society  
Northeast Oakland Historical Society/Museum  
Oakland County Pioneer Historical Society  
Oakland Township Historical Society  
Ortonville Community Historical Society  
Rose Township Heritage Committee  
Royal Oak Historical Museum  
Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm





The rebound copy of the *History of Oakland County* donated by the Hovey family is on display outside the Oakland County Board of Commissioners auditorium at the Oakland County Government Complex in Pontiac Michigan. (1200 North Telegraph Road, Pontiac, MI 48341)