

# Americans Move West, 1800 - 1850: New York to Oakland County

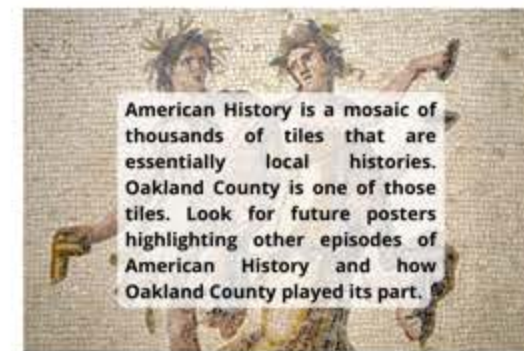


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The territory acquired by the United States following the American Revolution as well as by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 stimulated a massive westward movement of settlers from the former colonies. By 1850, over half of all Americans lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. This migration brought new people and ideas to Oakland County.



To get to the rich trans-Appalachian farmland from 1790 to 1850, settlers had limited routes to take through the mountains. They included the Erie Canal and the National Road.

For Native Americans who already lived on these lands, the results of this westward migration were often tragic. Treaties gave ownership of Native lands to the U.S. Government. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced all Native Americans to move west of the Mississippi.



The Erie Canal - The path to Oakland County  
<https://www.eriecanal.org/history.html>

The National Road - The path to the Ohio River Valley  
<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-nationalroad/>

*"There would not be one acre out of a hundred [in Michigan]...that would in any case admit of cultivation."*

-Edward Tiffin, Surveyor General, Northwest Territory, 1816

Tiffin's unfavorable report delayed settlement of Michigan and Oakland County. While this misconception was corrected by the mid-1820s, the big push to Michigan didn't occur for another decade.

The 1818 expedition led by Gov. Lewis Cass helped offset impressions of poor farmland in Michigan. The expedition was commemorated in a mural (at right) painted during the New Deal. It hangs in the auditorium of Royal Oak Middle School.

[https://www.royaloakschools.org/district/about\\_us/history/the\\_murals](https://www.royaloakschools.org/district/about_us/history/the_murals)



By 1840, perhaps 60-70% of Oakland County adults were from western New York's Burned-over District. This name came from the area's intense religious and social reform activity that was part of a major spiritual revival known as the Second Great Awakening.

Settlers who came to Michigan from New York between 1825 and 1850 had experienced this phenomenon. Although not all were favorably disposed, the religious and reform zeal that spread from the Burned-over District significantly affected life in 19th Century America as well as Oakland County.

## Camp Meetings, Itinerant Preachers and Missionaries spread the Second Great Awakening

*"They come from fifty miles around... A pulpit of badly squared logs, great trees felled for seats, such are the ornaments of this rustic temple. The pioneers and their families camp in the surrounding woods. It's there that, during three days and three nights, the crowd gives itself over to almost uninterrupted religious exercises. You must see with what ardor these men surrender themselves to prayer...It's in the wilderness that people show themselves almost starved for religion."*

- As told to Alexis de Tocqueville by Amasa Bagley of Pontiac, MI

At right: <https://b-womeninamericanhistory19.blogspot.com/2020/08/1830s-camp-meeting-or-religious-revival.html>



## Reform issues of the era were all manifested in Oakland County and included:

- Temperance - Michigan was a dry state (1855-1875)
- Anti-Slavery - Underground Railroad
- Women's Rights - Property rights in the 1850 Constitution
- Healthy Eating - Think Kellogg
- Prison Reform - Jackson Prison
- Treatment of Mental Patients - Eastern Michigan Asylum, Pontiac
- Public Education - Michigan Constitution (1837)

Eastern Michigan Asylum, Pontiac

[https://asylumprojects.org/index.php/Pontiac\\_State\\_Hospital](https://asylumprojects.org/index.php/Pontiac_State_Hospital)