

Vermontville's Origins

Through the Treaty of Saginaw in 1819 with the Chippewas a large tract of land which included all of Eaton County was ceded to the government. Settlement came slow and in 1831 there were still very few settlements.

This looked like the "land of promise" to the Reverend Sylvester Cochran a Congregational minister who wanted to serve his Master in a western land. When he arrived, however, he found the settlers in Michigan to be scattered so that it was difficult to organize schools or churches.

Back home in East Poultney, Vermont, the reverend Mr. Cochran took his idea to families interested in moving to Michigan. Finally, on March 27, 1836, at Castleton, Vermont, rules and regulations were drawn up for what was to be called the Union Colony. (This document is unique and is on file in the office of the Eaton County Register of Deeds.) A committee of two was set up to pass on the worthiness of applicants for membership. To be accepted one had to be definitely and thoroughly opposed to the use of liquor in any form.

A committee of three was named to journey to Michigan to explore and purchase land for the colony. They were to buy three square miles or 5,760 acres and as much more as the collective funds would permit.

On April 2, 1836, S. S. Church and William G. Henry left Vermont with a cow-hide valise of the Colony's money. In western New York they were joined by Wait J. Squier. Upon reaching Detroit they waited 24 hours for the stage, an open wagon. Roads were what is called corduroy, logs crosswise and eighteen inches about the surface. Because the roads were so bad, besides paying passage, they had to help carry fence rails to pry the wagon out of the mud where the holes were deepest. Their objective point was the United States land Office at Kalamazoo.

They found the land through Col. Barnes, a surveyor. Only one other parcel had been purchased in the township. By this time Col. J. B. Scovill, the other member of the scouting party, with others of the colonists had arrived. After purchasing the land they returned to the site and laid out the village according to plan drawn up in Vermont: one mile 40 rods long east and west, and one-half mile north and south. There were 36 lots, each 20 rods in width extending 80 rods, containing 10 acres each. From the four center lots one acre was taken for the Village Square. The farm lots were located around the village.

Bellevue was the nearest place to get saleratus or green tea, also the post office and grist-mill. Most of the trading, however, was done in Marshall and at the saw mill at Kalamo. It was from the saw mill at Kalamo that Wait J. Squier drew his lumber for the first frame house in 1837.

The first school was taught in a private home in 1838. That fall a log school house was built on the northwest corner of the square.

The Congregational Church was organized in 1838, and during the first few years they spent more money on religion and education than any other town. Of the 22 heads of families all but two were members of the Congregational Church.