

Union Colony, 1836-1870: Pattern and Process of Growth

By DOUGLAS K. MEYER

I think it useful for it learns us to write, but sometimes I think if I would select proper subjects or questions & write it would be still better for me.

You say the secret for E is in your possession. I'm sure I cannot think of any secret of my own. In truth I do not think my conscience was ever burdened with a secret

Learning is the narrow stuff we have so much of in all our wagon cushions or around them rather. Six strands are woven together & then cut apart. So my web is wider & harder to look over than the narrow lace I used to weave. I earn more; last week I made \$3.50 on two looms.

I hope you will have better success in the Harbor than I did. I never felt satisfied with that winter's work. I did not get the scholars into the right state of feeling.

I received a letter from E some two weeks ago. I expect she will thank me for answering your first. Please write soon. Tell Laura & Samuel I would like to hear from them. Yours truly

Lucy Ann

I'm anxious to know how grandmother is.

MOST early Michigan frontier settlements reflected in varying degrees a strong New England influence.¹ The enthusiasm for emigration, "Michigan fever," pervaded almost every Vermont settlement.² Out-migration increased rapidly with the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, and continued at a rapid pace until the Panic of 1837.

Among these early settlements few were more unique in origin and initial occupation imprint than Vermontville in Eaton County (Fig. 1). Vermontville exemplified the New England town.³ It was a compact settlement consisting of a formally organized colony of Vermonters with definite religious and educational purposes. This study utilizes both the historical and geographical approach to examine the initial occupation or pioneer settlement pattern of the Union Colony on the Michigan frontier.⁴

In the fall of 1835 the Rev. Sylvester Cochrane, a Congregational minister, from East Poultney, Vermont, left for Michigan hoping to find a place to settle. But since settlements were so few and settlers so widely dispersed that schools and churches were difficult to organize, Rev. Cochrane returned to Vermont and laid plans for establishing a compact colony. Several meetings were conducted that winter in various towns of Vermont with people interested in emigrating to Michigan. Finally on March 27, 1836, at Castleton, Vermont, forty-two

1. See, for example, Willis F. Dunbar, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State* (Grand Rapids, 1965); George N. Fuller, *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan* (Lansing, 1916); Harold J. Stevens, "The Influence of New England in Michigan," *Michigan History*, 19 (1935), 321-353; and Morris C. Taber, "New England Influence in South Central Michigan," *Michigan History*, 45 (1961), 305-336.

2. See, for example, Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus* (New York, 1950) and Lois Kimbal Mathews, *The Expansion of New England* (Boston, 1909).

3. Taber, 312.

4. The most important primary historical records which made this study possible were (1) *Plat Book Eaton County, Liber A of Miscellaneous* (Pages 14-19 have the original constitution of the Union Colony.), (2) *Township Plats of Eaton County* (Earliest map available of Vermontville Township which indicates the Union Colony's purchase of land and other first land owners.), and (3) *Tract Book of Eaton County* (It lists the first purchasers of the land in each township plus the legal description of the property). All three are recorded at the Register of Deeds Office of Eaton County, Charlotte, Michigan. Also, the original enumeration sheets of the U.S. Census of Population and Agriculture are available for Eaton County at the Michigan Historical Commission, Lansing, Michigan.

1930-3011
East Lansing - Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, Ill.
1930-3011
146
Douglas K. Meyer
Professor of History
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois
5-18-50
1930-3011
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