

“As It Was Told To Me”

“My mother’s maiden name was Rebecca Atkin and her parents with their two children, John, seven years of age, and my mother, three, came to Michigan from New York State in 1835 and settled in a log house on a little clearing on the county line between Oakland and Livingston Counties and the townline between Milford and Brighton Townships [the northeast corner of Buno and Labadie Roads].

“My grandfather bought the homestead with the house on it from some people named Fisher [Fishbeck].

“Although only three years old, my mother had distinct recollection of the journey from Albany, New York, to Michigan.

“They came from Detroit in a wagon drawn by oxen. There was no road through the forest, just a trail, and they had to stop occasionally and chop down a tree or some brush in order to get through.

“They stopped overnight at Walled Lake and stayed in a primitive hotel kept by the “Tuttles.”

“Of course there were many privations in the new country, but my grandparents had been living in New York State four years [before?] they came to this country from Lincolnshire, England. So they brought a little supply of clothing, dried fruit, etc., which helped them at first.

“It took time for orchards to grow and bear fruit and great was the excitement over the first home-grown apples. There was some wild fruit and the wild plums made very good preserves.

“They had no good way of keeping a supply of food for a length of time; that is, no way to keep it from freezing in winter or spoiling in summer, so that even the pork barrel was usually empty early in summer. However, they did not do without meat in harvest, which was a strenuous time. A good sized hog was killed at sunset and salted as soon as the heat was out of it and it would last a few weeks.

“They had one delicacy sometimes which we are not accustomed to—roast pig, not roast pork. Little pigs about six weeks old were often killed, dressed and roasted whole. The reason for this seemingly heartless slaughter of innocent creatures was that there was no market for pork so it was not advisable to raise more hogs than could be used for home consumption.

“The cows usually went dry in the fall and a supply of butter was packed for winter use but sometimes it gave out before fresh butter was made.

“Indians and wolves were the chief dangers of the new country. Indians were seldom seen and did not molest the settlers in that neighborhood.

“The wolves were a real menace. Sheep had to be shut in a high fence or pen every night. Cattle roamed the unfenced forest for pasture and every family knew the sound of their own cow bell.

“Several of the neighborhood boys would go together at night for the cows. Sometimes they had to go a mile or more and sometimes they could not find them. One night my mother’s brother started alone for the cows. He had to go farther than he expected to and suddenly he heard a pack of wolves howling in the distance. They came rapidly nearer and swept past while he stood behind a large tree. Needless to say he did not go alone again very soon.

“The pioneers worked hard, both men and women, and the children too as soon as they were able.

“My mother began to spin when she was eleven years old. I think she spun a good deal and later in life she did not seem to have any special affection for “the old spinning wheel.”

Of course they had to have some recreation, that is the women and young people did. I don’t remember hearing the men had any.

“The women sometimes made each other an afternoon visit and they did not go just at meal time as we often do. If they were going to stay for supper, they went early and ‘spent the afternoon,’ and it was wise to do so for considerable preparations usually had to be made after guests arrived. Often a cake was made and sometimes the hostess churned to get butter for supper, while the children took the steel knives and forks outdoors and scoured them in the sand. Once in a while there was a quilting bee.

“The young people had parties occasionally and there were singing schools and spelling schools. The spelling schools figured largely in the social life of the community and there were some good spellers in those days. Sometimes one school would visit another and they would spell down and it was considered quite an achievement to spell down the school or schools. On one occasion the whole class went down on one word—Egypt. There was a reason for the sweeping failure. A visitor was giving out words and evidently he was not as familiar with Egypt as we are in Milford for he pronounced it Egg-wipe-it. [The children in Milford were familiar with the word Egypt because a whole section of the village north of the river and east of First Street was once called Egypt.]

“After the school house, now called the Bird School house [on the southwest corner of Buno Road and Hickory Ridge Trail], was built it was used for a place of worship on Sundays and for religious and educational gatherings at any time.

“Nearly everyone went to ‘meeting’ in those days. One reason might be there was no other place to go, However, I believe the religious life of the pioneers was deep, sincere and earnest and I think the majority of the young people in that neighborhood built their characters upon the Rock and so were able to withstand the storms of life.

“There was true friendship and genuine hospitality in the new country life and of course some pleasures, but in my mother’s thinking, the hardships outweighed the joys, so that when my father’s matrimonial proposal was accompanied by the suggestion that they should live on a homestead which he had bought in Tuscola County, then new, my mother remarked that she had seen about all the new country life she cared for. So the property in Tuscola was soon sold and they began housekeeping in a little home in Commerce Township, Oakland County, and I am glad they did.”