

CALVIN TOWNSHIP

Calvin Township was named for Calvin Brittan, a member of the territories legislature, and was surveyed in 1826. Calvin Township was established in 1835 from Penn and Porter Townships and the first township meeting was held in the log cabin of John Reed, who came to Cass County from Logan County Ohio in 1827 or 1828 to Youngs Prairie where he remained for awhile until he disposed of his Squatter's rights to David McIntosh for \$210.00 and in the fall of 1829 moved to Calvin Township near Diamond Lake. He was the second settler in Calvin Township.

Reed was a brother-in-law of Abner Thorp and Nathan Norton. These three men married sisters. Reed came to Cass County first, wrote back to Logan County, Ohio, to his relatives, encouraging them to come too. So four families packed covered wagons with household effects, food to last several days and also brought their live stock. It was hard traveling and they got as far as where Elkhart is now, stopped for a few days rest at a friend's cabin and in the night a marsh fire burned the cabin where the women slept. Their wagons were near the fire, but were not damaged. The live stock was scattered thru the woods and this delayed them for several days. Coming thru Edwardsburg they saw only two families.

Abner Thorp was the first to locate on land in Calvin Township (1829 Sec. 6) near the south side of Diamond Lake on what is now Brownsville Street, about a quarter of a mile west of Eagle Point Road. The Nortons settled in Jefferson Township. I had heard that a Bill Martin had lived here in later years, so asked Maurice Martin of Cassopolis, who is ninety years old, about Wm. Martin. He said he was his father and his father bought the place from Abner Thorp and Maurice lived there when small but was born in Brownsville. The first thing Mr. Thorp did after deciding to locate here was to erect some kind of shelters which was a crude affair and then to plant a crop of some kind. Corn was usually planted for food. The Thorps had eight children. A son, Labin, told of the log cabin his father built. The earth was the floor, a pile of marsh hay in a corner served as a bed for the children. For the parents, a makeshift bedstead was made by boring holes in the logs into which poles were driven supported by stakes driven in the ground. They had brought many quilts for the beds and one was usually used for a door for the three-sided cabin. For heat and cooking, huge logs were hauled into the cabin and set afire. One fire lasted several days. A cook kettle did service on many occasions. Usually two of these three sided cabins were built facing each other. Their live-stock was fed marsh hay from around Diamond Lake and was stored in rail pens. Mr. Thorp died near Brownsville in 1869.

A land office was opened in White Pigeon in 1831 for land entries (from the government). A large portion of the Township was purchased by speculators--John Reed, Geo Redfield and Imlay and Beach who asked high prices for the land, which kept it off the market for several years. Later, when placed on the market, sold for \$4 to \$5 per acre with terms of ten year credit.

In 1830 the Wm. Grubb family came from Ohio to his father's, Andrew Grubb in Sec. 8 on the corner of what is now Osborn and Eagle Point Road. Later this was the Findley Chess farm, still later the Leroy Osborn farm, where Lewis Osborn, a son, was a wormwood grower in the middle twenties. Robert Woods and the Carter brothers were also wormwood growers at that time.

Wm. East born 1773 in North Carolina came in 1833. He had a large family (were Quakers) and the East Settlement originated. Josiah Osborn came in 1835 with his son Jefferson who was twelve years old. They settled on land that is now corner of Union Road and Chain Lake Street and set out 100 apple trees also four or five

hundred seedlings of fruit trees in the woods as they had no mules or horses to help clear the land until later. Van Buren & Cass Counties are indebted to the Osbornes for their early orchards. Josiah Osborn died in 1862. Jefferson Osborn married Susanna East.

The Quaker line of the underground railroad was opened in 1840 and lasted until 1851. In Calvin, not like other townships, in its early days, colored people out-ranked the whites due to the Quaker friends of the unfortunate race. This was the northeastern part of the township. A Quaker preacher in 1836 brought a fugitive slave named Lawson, who was the first colored resident in the township. He raised a family here (there are numerous Lawsons here today). In 1838 a fugitive slave, a Guino Negro, Jesse Scott settled on a patch of ground and raised tobacco for a living. In the War of 1812 he was a waiter for General Pinkney. In 1845 or 46 a group of around forty colored people came from Ohio and bought small farms. A southern planter, named Sanders, died in Virginia, liberated his slaves by provisions of his will and appropriated \$15,000 with which his administrator was to purchase farms for them in some free state. From that time on, a steady stream of colored people poured in Calvin. Since 1900 they have held township offices. Ramptown was the name of a cluster of 100 cabins on the Bonine farm south of M 60 on Calvin Center Road. Many of the fugitive slaves lived here and continued to live there after the Civil War. Aunt Melissa Brown was the last survivor who was born at Ramptown in Penn Township.

The Friends Church (Quaker) was organized in 1836. Samuel Bonine was the first minister, Chain Lake Church in 1848, Mt. Zion Church 1849, Bethel African Methodist Church 1856, Brownville Church in the early 1800's and stood in Brownville a little west of the store until 1941 or 1942 when it was moved to Brownsville Street by a community club and was used until 1962 when it was destroyed by vandals. The bell to this church was sold to Matt Tagert of Diamond Lake who donated it to the Daily Church when they rebuilt after a fire.

In the Birch Lake "Friends" (Quakers) Cemetery there are many of the old Quakers buried--many of the Easts and Josiah Osborn and his descendants. In the Shaffer Cemetery in west Calvin on Lamp Road there are Shaffers, Bells, Reeds, Highleys, Fletchers and Jessups--all early settlers. In Chain Lake, Bethel, Calvin Community and Mt. Zion Cemeteries can be found the names: Curtis, Jones, Vaughn, Byrd, Dungey, Lawson, Calloway, Allen, Artis, Snelling, Brown, Anderson and Stewart. Many were descendants of the old early slave settlers. Many of the runaway slaves were fed, housed and sometimes clothed in the Quaker homes. Much of the land in Cass County was cleared by Negroes who were given five acres of land to a family.* Each had a cabin. Those who did not stay were sent on to other stations, one in Schoolcraft at the home of Stanton or S.B. Thomas.** Stanton was former grocer in Cassopolis.

* See Note 1 on P. 4 **See Note 2 on P. 4

It was on the Peter Shafer farm in the cabin kitchen, the first school was established in 1834. Schools were later established and divided into districts. Peter Shafer operated a saw mill and in 1831 sawed the lumber for the courthouse in Cassopolis. Daniel McIntosh and a partner operated a sawmill in 1832 near the Christiana Creek in Sec. 19, C.H. Bunn in Sec. 22 operated a sawmill, was the former owner of land now operated by the "Muslims." He built the large house there as well as three houses in Cassopolis and operated a saw-mill in Cassopolis when I was a kid (Mrs. Wooden). Around 1865 there was a woolen factory, later used as a planing mill near Long's Corners. In early days, Calvin had two bands; the Henderson Cornet Band and the Clipper Band led by Green Allen. Elder Adam Miller came from Ohio in 1830 by oxen in a wagon loaded with his family, bedding, and cooking equipment. He preached the first sermon in Calvin in the vicinity of Brownsville under a burr oak tree. He helped to organize several churches in Cass County, one the old Red Brich Church in Jefferson.

The Crawford Stewart farm, now a "Centennial Farm" was the first negro owned

farm in Cass County to be registered by the Commissions. The deed was recorded in 1854 to Crawford Stewart whose great grandfather, Peterson, came from King Williams domain in 1800.

Wm. Lawson operated a general store at Calvin Center in the 1920's. Post office was established here before rural delivery.. The southeast corner of Diamond Lake is in Calvin Township. Amos Northrop bought land from the government near here about 1830. Family members still own a part of the original land (1976 Irene Darylmp).

The Brownsville Store Building in west Calvin is a historic piece of property and was one of the oldest merchantile establishments in the county. It was first started by Aaron Banks in 1850, later run by Findley Chess and Pegg, Moses Cohen, Elias Dickerhoof, Mark Le Munyon, Sheriff Reagan and again Mark Le Munyon, who was Cass County Inspector, also taught school in Jones and Brownsville. He died in 1953 and his wife, Effie, continued alone when 80 years old. She died in 1968. They served the community for 60 years. The grandsons, the "Notorious Le Munyon brothers", make their home in the basement of the building now.

Brownsville was never plotted. The outlet of Diamond Lake runs thru Brownsville and drains into Chritiana Creek. A grist mill was built here by Pleasant Grubb in 1875. He later sold the mill to David and Wm. Brown (brothers) for whom Brownsville was named. There was a population at this time of 150. A post office was established here. Also there was a tannery, 2 blacksmith shops, a cooper shop, a shoe shop, a pump factory, a harness shop and a milleners shop operated by Mrs. Jonathan Breed. There were two doctors, Dr. Phineas Gregg and Dr. J.M. Wright. Dr. Otis Newsome had an office in his home at Calvin Center in the later years.

There was a murder in Brownsville in 1922 when "Sudie" Shaw, a cripple who sold groceries and gas, was robbed and murdered in the night.

The Brownsville School still stands but Brownsville School District annexed to Cassopolis School District 1956 and was the first District to annex to Cassopolis. James Shephard of Dowagiac (a member of the historical society) told me his grandfather, James M. Shephard taught the Brownsville School in his early years. He also has a history of the Brownsville School.

In 1967 the "Witness Tree", a burr oak stood at the corner of Brownsville St. and Eagle Point Road. It was the last known Witness Tree and marked the corner of Sections 5,6,7, and 8. The original stake was in the center of the 4 corners. It was blazed in 1828 by the original government sveyors. The original stake was about 40 feet south east of the tree.

• Isaac Hull, born in Pennsylvania 1807, married Mariah Grubb, daughter of Andrew and Martha Grubb of Calvin Township. They bought land north of Brownsville in Calvin Township in 1828. In the fall of 1837 they located on it into a log house, but in time, around 1866 built the present house where we live (Mrs. Treva Wooden.) Henry Clay Walker married one of the Hull daughters who lived here for some time then the farm was passed on to their son, T. Mack Walker from whom we first rented in 1929. After a few years the Walkers exchanged land with Dell Adamson, a bachelor, who had land on the south side of Diamond Lake. We rented from Mr. Adamson until his death, then the farm passed into hand of a brother, Ross Adamson. We lived here twenty years and had three land lords and finally bought the land May 27, 1955.

Zachas Wooden was the first white man to come to Calvin Township where he trapped furs, along the outlet of Diamond Lake for John Jacob Astor in the winter of 1813 and 1814. His home was in Saratoga County, New York. He did not settle here at the

time, but his headquarters were in Elkhart, Indiana. In 1843 he returned to Michigan and bought land on the township line of Calvin and Mason Townships on what now is Calvin Center Road. He made his home in Elkhart where his wife, Amy Teachout Wooden, died in 1876. His son Hiram, my husband's grandfather, came from New York in 1846 with his bride. They built a log cabin at first and later a good sized dwelling in Mason Township where Zachas died in 1881 and Hiram and Martha lived there until their deaths. Mr. Wooden and I went to housekeeping there in 1916 and my daughter, Virginia Springsteen, was born there. We lived there 4 1/2 years before moving to the Bonine farm in Penn Township where Richard and Warren were born. Loren Eugene Wooden, grandson of Zachas Wooden and son of Hiram Wooden, was born in Calvin Township. He had five children, four girls and one son, R. Jay Wooden.

*R. J. Wooden was husband of the late
Trena Wooden. This was written by
Trena Wooden.*

URSCC Note 1: While there were cabins around all the Quaker farms in Calvin, Porter and Penn Townships, freedom seekers generally did not stay in them long term. They worked for a time, then went on to Canada. "Ramptown" on James E. Bonine property was different and unique. Bonine invited freedom seekers to live on his property and in exchange for clearing the land, they had the use of 5-10 acres, built a cabin, sent their children to school, went to church, and were able to earn their own money. When the arrangement was over, many purchased their own land and became prosperous farmers and important members of the community.

URSCC Note 2: Freedom seekers were taken from Vandalia to the home of Dr. Nathan and Pamela Thomas in Schoolcraft. William Wheeler in Flowerfield was another UGRR station in the area. S.C. Thomas is unknown to URSCC