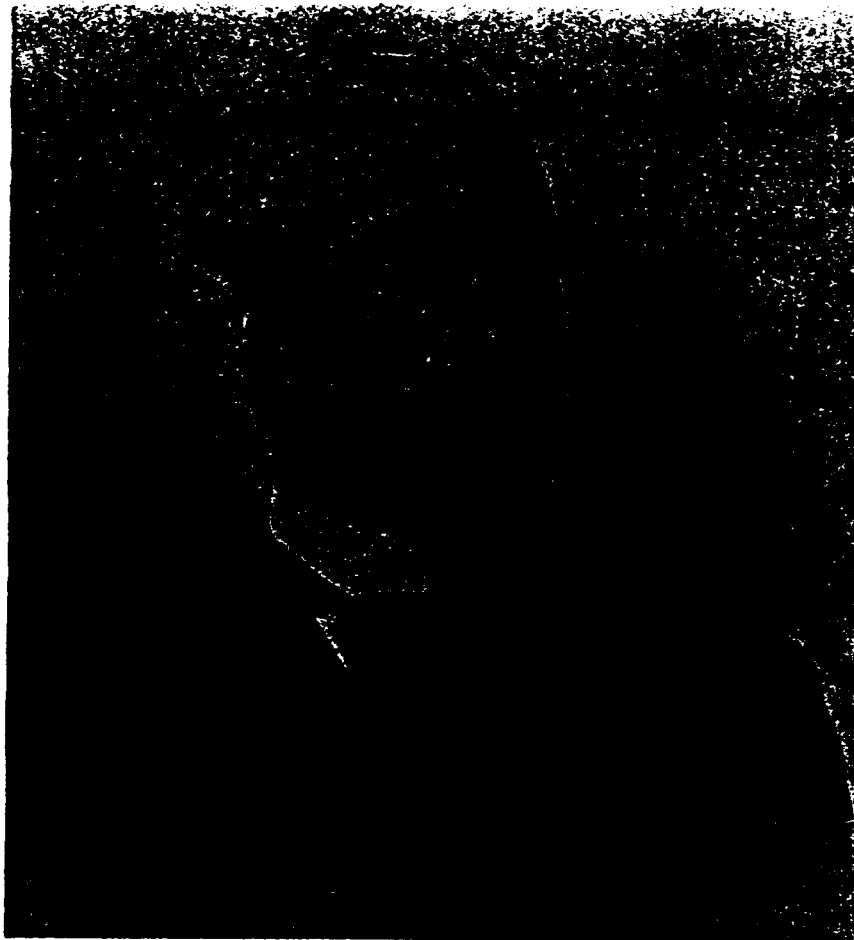


Hicks
Lake
Named

1866



D. A. BLODGETT

In February, 1866, another pioneer, P. S. Holdridge and wife and sixteen year old son, U. S. Holdridge, arrived in Grand Rapids with two very large dry goods boxes with household effects, no furniture except a cook stove, (in one of the boxes) and three trunks. The next day they found a man who had a partial load to take to Cedar Springs who would take their boxes and trunks, and on to Big Rapids the following day. They sent the load and took the stage.

At Plainfield the stage broke down but finally arrived at Cedar Springs just at the "lighting of the lamps."

U. S. Holdridge writes that he did not recall seeing a house until they were in sight of the oil lamps of Big Rapids, "with exception of an old lumber shanty where the stage stopped, after driving off the road, and had a very poor dinner." Roads were fine but crooked and just brushed out—in places four rods wide—there you could see a long way ahead. Timber was beautiful pine, and it was almost like driving through a gorge to go through

the large tall trees. They crossed the Muskegon River near the present Rogers Dam, over some sort of pole bridge.

The family stayed at John Darling Hotel (the only one in Big Rapids) and the only place for the men to stay coming out of camp. That evening they heard a racket down stairs, and boy fashion U. S. ran down as far as the office and saw bottles flying, the stove pipe falling down in the commotion. Soon a Doctor was sent for to do up several men's heads. Big Rapids appeared to the sixteen year old boy a "rough and profane town."

The boy and a friend of his father went fishing at Town Line Lake and he caught his first fish - eighteen pounds.

Eventually the Senior Holdridge located in Hersey Township. On April 28, 1866, young Holdridge and a Mr. Bass started for the homestead, with provisions and tools to work with. Two **land lookers** went along. They followed the roads that lumbermen had cut out to draw marsh hay over, until they reached an old lumber shack on Section 22, Hersey (later owned by Don Thiel) and camped for the night.

The next day they found Sec. 26 and left the team and followed section lines half way around to find Holdridge Sr's name on a post. Then they ran by compass a half mile west and measured with tape line to get their location. Then they **fired a gun** and teamster answered them. Getting location from sound of gun they started cutting a road. By shooting guns they kept their directions until they got to the team.

They lived in a wigwam and when Holdridge, Sr. arrived, chose a site and they began erecting a log house. They cut the logs, hewed one side, and notched them. One night two men arrived (trappers). Their names were Hicks, after whom Hicks Lake was named. A man at a house where they had stopped said, "There is a man who wants to raise a house up yonder. We are going tomorrow to help raise it." Four men and a boy did arrive the next morning and they raised a log house 16x24. They split shakes of pine for roofing and cut flooring 6 ft. long. After cutting a road that could be used to bring a load in, their possessions were brought to the cabin. The mother walked from Blodgett's farm six miles, afterwards getting supper for herself and four men.

This gives an idea of how pioneer settlers of this county lived: their experiences not unlike others. Mr. Holdridge, who later lived in Evart, wrote that most of the pioneers had one qualification as desirable now as then, the qualification of absolute **Honesty**.

There were pioneers settling Orient, Sylvan, Evart and Osceola townships by 1866-68. These pioneers came in from Big Rapids, or Ionia way.

According to Vera Gitchell Neuman many of these early pioneers "were young farmers and soldiers just returning from the Civil War looking for a place to make their homes. Why would they choose this cold, wild territory so far from their family homes? There were no roads, no town north of Big Rapids, a small lumbering town. There were no people save a few Indians and trappers. The woods were full of wild animals, bear, wolves, and wildcats.

The Governor of Michigan had ceded this northern part of the state as homestead territory. They came from different parts of the country but mostly from Southern Michigan and bordering states.