

Ice Age scored Detroit area

By W.W. EDGAR

Ever since television saturated the country with the now famed "Roots" series that traced the background of American blacks, other people have become interested in tracing their own roots.

Where did we come from? How did we get here? And what does our family tree show?

The quest for such answers has been met with varying degrees of success.

But it remained for Le Roy Bennett, a math teacher in the Livonia schools and a trustee of Schoolcraft College who resides in Plymouth, to go one further.

Not satisfied with the family tree,

he has turned to the question of the origins of the ground on which he walks.

A STUDENT of geology, he has learned that our present earth surface dates back 14,000 to 20,000 years, when the great glacier of the ICE AGE started to recede from this region.

The receding of the ice mass left large lakes in the Livonia, Plymouth, Northville area. "That's why the ground is so flat between here and Detroit. And one can trace the shore line in the vicinity of Schoolcraft College," he said.

As he looked at the geological maps, he explained that the receding of the glaciers left what is called glacial fill to a depth of about 300 feet.

"That's why you must drill down about 300 feet to hit bed rock," Bennett continued.

In the early days the Plymouth-Livonia district was known as part of the Lake Maumee area. This is how the native Maumee is connected with the area around Toledo.

WE also were part of what was then known as Warren Lake, and it was through this area that the Rouge River cut its way.

Bennett pointed out that geological research explains the reasons for very sandy soil in the Eight Mile-Newburgh Road and Northville areas.

Geologists have found that the glaciers had their beginnings in Wisconsin and that all of the state of Michigan was covered with several thousand feet of ice. With the receding of the ice the land was covered with water and silt, the sand and gravel in our area.

PROOF of THESE views is the huge gravel pit in Northville that recently was developed into the Highland Lakes subdivision. Much the same is true in Livonia where a strata of gravel and sand runs diagonally from the southeast to the northwest.

Digging into his files Bennett found a map that revealed that the intersection of Plymouth Road and Stark Road was on the shore line of what was known as Lake Wayne. The area at the intersection of Plymouth Road and Newburgh Road was on the shore of what was Lake Warren.

When drainage was to the north around the Thumb the area between Newburgh and Haggerty Roads crossed three shores of what the map shows as Lake Arkona.

"It is here that the Rouge River cuts through this 'moraine' which was the farthest advance of the glacier in the last of four advances," Bennett pointed out.

A pamphlet of a glacial field trip by the Geological Society of America taken in 1931, shows how the Plymouth area was a focal point.

The trip, starting in Detroit, came out Joy Road and crossed the Rouge to Middle Belt Road and north to Plymouth Road. From there the geologists travelled west on Plymouth Road for two and one half miles to the prehistoric Wayne shore which at one time had a sandy beach of 665 feet, trending north and south along Stark Road.

They continued west on Plymouth Road to the junction of Haggerty Road and then north one half mile north of the Haggerty Road junction. After examining the gravel pit the trip continued west on Six Mile Road where it crossed the shoreline of Lake Maumee at 735 feet, the middle Maumee at 780 feet and the highest Maumee at 800 feet.

What does the future hold? Will the area ever change again?

Bennett replied by offering a book entitled "Waiting for the Morning Train" by Bruce Catton in which he wrote "First there was ice, two miles high, hundreds of miles wide and many centuries deep. It came down from the darkness at the top of the world and it hung over the eaves and our Michigan country lay along the line of the overhang."

To be sure all the ice was gone. It had melted, they said, 10,000 years ago, but they also pointed out that 10,000 years amounted to no more than a mere flick of the second hand on the geologic time clock.

"It was recent. This was frontier where you could stand in the present and look into the past. You got an eerie sense that the world had not yet been completed. What had been might be again. There was a hint that, at times, in the dead of winter when the wind blew at midnight, that the age of ice might return, sliding down the country like a felt eraser over a grade school blackboard, rubbing out all the sums and sentences that had been so carefully written down."

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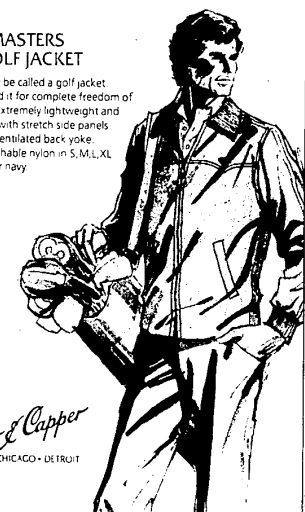
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