

Kay Briggs Traces Township History

By KATHRYN BRIGGS

By the early 1820s, Detroit had become a frontier town of considerable importance but the surrounding countryside remained thickly wooded and uninhabited.

At this time in New York, land prices were climbing. In the fall of 1823, Arthur Power, a Quaker from Farmington, N.Y., and a small company of men came to Detroit to look over the government land in the area.

THIS LAND WAS offered for sale at a low price for anyone interested in pioneering and developing the settlement.

While looking, he came across the area of which is now 11 Mile and Power Rds., and liked it. On Feb. 1, 1824, Power set out from New York with two of his older sons, John and Jared, and two hired men, David Smith and Daniel Rush, to purchase land in Michigan and make it their home.

The travelers crossed the Niagara River into Canada and came by horse and sleigh to Windsor. They arrived in Detroit on Feb. 15, 1824. After purchasing the land and supplies, they started on their journey to their new land.

They traveled out of Detroit on the Saginaw-Detroit trail which is now known as Woodward Ave. They reached Hamlet, today's Birmingham, and found four families there. The party stayed the night and then worked its way southward, passing through settlements of Jenks, Sly, Durkee and Baker.

On March 8, 1824, they reached their destination and before the night, they had cut the first of the giant trees that stood there. Before the season was over, the log house was complete, nine acres of land was cleared and put into wheat

and another six had been put into corn.

(Some present-day descendants of Arthur Power, among many others, are Eugen Power, formerly a regent of the University of Michigan, and his son Philip Power, publisher of the Farmington Enterprise Observer.)

FURTHER EVENTS regarding some of these first five are interesting. Daniel Rush, whom Mr. Power had employed in New York to come with him to Michigan, had been seized with violent homesickness immediately on his arrival, and after enduring the pangs of the terrible malady for nearly three weeks, and seeing no prospect of alleviation, had started on foot for Detroit, intending to return there to his eastern home, which probably he reached in safety.

David Smith, the other man hired in New York, completed

his year's service, for which he received \$120. He purchased land in section 23 and in 1877 was living there, at the age of 80, just 1 1/4 miles from where "his axe first tried the quality of Michigan timber more than a half century" earlier.

John Power died four years after arriving in Farmington, and Arthur Power, after a good and fruitful life, died in September of 1863.

Other immigrants followed soon after. Seven weeks after the Power group, George Collins and his wife, Cynthia, came. Mrs. Collins was the first white woman in the township, and on Sept. 26, 1824, she gave birth to John W. Collins, the first white child born in Farmington.

George Collins located upon a tract of land that was also entirely unbroken and unclaimed. He built a log house and improved the land but afterward moved to Farmington village where he opened a general store. He died in 1865, but

his widow, Cynthia, lived to the age of 93 years in the house which still stands on Farmington Rd. just south of Shawwasee. John Collins married in 1841 and had five children of whom he could be proud, among them were Henrietta, "head typewriter in Charles Wright's Medicine Co. in Detroit, and is considered one of the best in Michigan; and William E., who graduated at the head of the Class of '90 in the pharmaceutical department of the university at Ann Arbor.

Mr. Collins was postmaster for 25 years in addition to carrying on the general store. He was also township treasurer for many years.

Dr. Ezekiel Webb, who had been a neighbor and a friend of Mr. Power in New York, and who was also a Quaker, arrived in 1824. He was the first and last physician in Farmington in 1828 on 12 Mile Rd. near Middle Belt.

He built a large double log house where the "Cynthia Collins" house now is, but after a few years he sold out his holdings, gave up his practice of medicine, and left the community.

Among others who came in 1824 were Solomon Walker, George Tibbets, and Robert Wixom Sr.

On the same day, Sept. 25, 1824, that the first white child, John Collins, was born, the first burial took place. Mrs. Sanford Utley died from the effects of a fall from a wagon two months earlier as they were approaching the end of their long journey and came in sight of the spot which was to be their home.

Many more settlers came in 1825. Among them were: Holland Mason, a Quaker; brothers George Thayer and Rufus Thayer, Jr.; Timothy Tolman, who built the first frame dwelling in Farmington in 1828 on 12 Mile Rd. near Middle Belt.

Log houses today have a romantic appeal but the early settlers built them only because of necessity. After sawmills were operating, settlers were glad to abandon log cabins for the kind of house they had been accustomed to in the East.

The first wedding took place between Nathaniel Tolman, Timothy's cousin, and Mary Lewis in 1826.

P. DEAN WARNER came with his family, the Seth Warners, in 1825 when he was three years old. He left home at the age of 14 and worked as a clerk, but was able to attend school part of the winter months.

He resided in Detroit until 1845 when he returned to Farmington and engaged in merchandising until 1863 when he retired from business. He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives, where he was chosen speaker.

He had married Rhoda Botsford, and as they had no children of their own, they adopted a son and a daughter. It is interesting to note that in 1878, in company with his son, he visited the Paris Exposition and took quite an extended trip through various portions of Europe.

This son, Fred M. Warner, later became a state representative, the Secretary of State of Michigan, and in 1906 was elected governor, being the first to hold that office for three consecutive terms.

Forty years after his first settlement, Township 1 of Range 9 was included in Bloomfield which included the

two Southern tiers of townships in the county. In the spring of 1827, several new townships were formed—among them, Farmington, and according to the act of the legislative council of April 12, 1827, the first township meeting was to be at the home of Robert Wixom.

Therefore, on the last Monday in May, May 28, 1827, the first meeting was held there. Previous to this time, all the township officers were appointed by the governor.

But Gov. Cass disliked this system, and preferred that the people choose their own officers, so, at his request, Congress passed an act in 1825 which gave the people of a township the privilege of electing all the local officers except judges, clerks and sheriffs.

But even this was not enough for Cass, so he had the people vote for men to fill these positions, and then he made his appointments according to the vote of the people.

BECAUSE OF the new law, Farmington was one of the first townships which was able to elect its own choice of town officers by ballot.

Amos Mead was elected the first supervisor while Robert Wixom was elected township clerk. William Yerkes, Philip Marlett, and Samuel Mead were elected assessors; Warham Lee, John Gould, and John Power were elected to be commissioners of the highways.

Benjamin Wixom, Samuel Mead, Samuel Mansfield and Wardell Green became postmasters; while Samuel Mead, Samuel Mansfield, Wardell Green and George Tibbets became fence-viewers.

Since then many changes have taken place. In the early days, these jobs were on a part-time basis; today, the duties of the supervisor, Curtis Hall, the clerk, Floyd Cairns, and the treasurer, Elise-Avery, require full-time responsibilities.

The trustees, Frederick Lichtman, Thomas Nolan, Earl Oppenheuser and Margaret Schaeffer, attend to their duties part-time. In addition, there are many hired and appointed people carrying on township business: the new township hall on 11 Mile Rd. at Orchard Lake Rd.

AFTER THE Civil War, the people living in a square mile of territory around what is



MUSIC -- When she sits down to play her antique rosewood piano, Mrs. Robert (Kay) Briggs of Farmington can harmonize her music to the tinkling tunes of the music boxes she has collected from all over the world. (Event photo)

Lady With Long Local Heritage

By ELIZABETH WISSMAN

Although she lives in Farmington Township, Mrs. Robert (Kay) Briggs was a logical choice for the City of Farmington's Preservation Commission.

Not only was she president of the Farmington Historical Society for two years, but Mrs. Briggs has roots in Farmington that go to the last century.

The home she has lived in since her marriage at 21615 Oxford is on a land that was once part of her grandfather's farm. Her mother moved to the end of the street that is now Oxford when she was three months old.

MRS. BRIGGS' grandmother graduated with two other students from Farmington High School in the class of 1893.

This was called the "war class" because of the Spanish-American War going on at the time. John Lapham, whose descendants, Byron and Harry, work for National Bank of Detroit in Farmington, was one of the three members of that class.

Kay Briggs smiles when she recalls her own days at Farmington High. "We walked to Grand River and took the Detroit-Union Railway into town. Botsford Inn was right on the highway then. This was before Henry Ford bought the Inn and moved it back."

The commission member is looking forward to the Pioneers Festival because the group has arranged for walking tours during the festival of the Old Village of Farmington.

Pamphlets describing the homes to be seen and the route of the tour may be picked up at the Ebenezer Shoppe in the Downtown Center.

IN REFERENCE to preserving the city's heritage homes, Mrs. Briggs says: "I feel they definitely should

be preserved, especially those that are attractive and have examples of things like Victorian gingerbread on them. We have some marvelous examples of that here in the city."

"Of course, preservation of such homes can't be legislated -- it has to be voluntary. I'm so glad our 100-year-old Community House has been preserved."

"Then too, there is such an interest in antiques now that we have people who want to keep their homes in a state of preservation."

MRS. ROBERT BRIGGS, the Historical Commission member, is not as well known in town as Kay Briggs, the special education teacher.

"Kay Briggs has uniquely taught more handicapped children than anybody in the school system."

Happensense took her into special education. One day the special ed room at Eagle School became overcrowded and the sight-saving room was moved to Middlebelt School where Mrs. Briggs was teaching.

When the special ed teacher left to have a baby, Mrs. Briggs took over this room after taking special ed classes during the summer.

Later she taught in a resource room for the hard of hearing children and cerebral palsy cases.

This led to her taking a master's degree in special education at Wayne State University, or as she says, "The College of the City of Detroit, in those days."

THE teacher-commission member feels her most important job as a special education teacher is "interpreting the handicapped child's strengths and weaknesses to his classroom teacher."

"It gives you a wonderful feeling that you can help such

children," she says. "Years ago, these children would not have been educated. It gives a sense of accomplishment and pride to help ease their paths."

"Yet these children are just like all children. I remember that our handicapped children were the first that Harley Haperton ever took through the Proud Lake Recreation Area."

"When he took them to where they could find fossils; the blind children were just as thrilled as any child when they found some, even though they had to peer at them so closely to see them."

"With polio conquered, Mrs. Briggs says that the biggest incidence of handicapped youngsters today is from German measles defectiveness."

BUT SHE NOTES: "The trend seems to be more and more toward neurological disorders and emotional problems."

"We're getting a lot of hyperkinetic youngsters. I could say that in special ed right now, our greatest field will be neurological disorders."

"When she isn't teaching or serving on commission duties, Mrs. Briggs and her husband spend their time traveling. This year they plan to go to the Baltic countries. They have been to South America, New Zealand, Tahiti, Fiji and Europe three times.

"Where she will put memories of her Baltic trip when she gets home will be a problem. Mrs. Briggs home already looks like a travel agency's dream world. It is so full of curios, including the top of an antique rosewood piano that is jammed corner to corner with a beautiful collection of music boxes.

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