

Eagle Township Historical Notes from 2002 Master Plan

The earliest known visitors to the Eagle Township area were Indians of the Pottowattomie Nation using trails along the Looking Glass and Grand Rivers which connected villages in Portland and areas to the east in Clinton County and Ingham County. Indians from this area are believed to be among the tribes resettled west of the Mississippi during Governor Cass' tenure as Governor of Michigan.

Land records show that the first white visitors to the area were United States surveyors for the purpose of surveying two million acres of land to be given to soldiers of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, as military tracts of one hundred sixty acres each. These surveyors reported that the "land was low, wet and marshy and covered with pine called tamarack. . .on one acre out of a thousand that would be suitable for farming." The report was proven wrong.

Anthony Niles and Stephen Groger, in 1834, and Daniel Clark, Heman Thomas and John Benson, a few years later, began settlements which led the way for a prosperous growth. In June 1831 the families of Anthony Niles and Stephen Groger left Genesee County, New York and arrived in Oakland County, Michigan. Over the next three years, Niles, Clark, Groger, and Austin Wood made trips along the Indian trails between Pontiac and Portland where they stayed in the Indian village. In 1834, Niles and Groger with their families using teams of oxen set out westward and arrived at the Scott cabin in DeWitt. After several mishaps with mud and livestock they finally selected sites in Section 23 of Eagle township as their settlement. Niles built the first house in the township and Groger the second in the spring of 1834. Susan M. Groger was the first recorded birth in Clinton County in October 1834. John Benson and Heman Thomas were the next to settle permanently in Eagle township. Edwin Benson was the second child born in the Township and the first male child born in the County.

The first frame building was a barn erected in 1836 for Jesse Monroe by Niles and his son Ezekiel. Monroe had purchased one hundred sixty acres in Section 7 which remained in the Monroe family until 1945. The first death in Eagle Township was Nehemiah Allen in January 1837. He was buried near the north bank of the Looking Glass River in Section fifteen on land owned by Joseph Eddy who also were buried there. The two cemeteries are situated in the Township. The North Eagle Cemetery is the largest and was formerly called the Simmons Cemetery because the land was given by David Simmons. It is located on the east side of Grange Road north of Eagle. The Niles Cemetery is on Niles Road. David Simmons' father, Joshua Simmons II, was the first to be buried at North Eagle, in 1840. Joshua was a Revolutionary War Soldier. The McCrumb and Babbitt families, in Eagle at the present time, are descendants of Mr. Simmons through marriages.

In the Township today is a United Methodist Church and a Four Square Church, both in the Village of Eagle. The Four Square Church, a universalist congregation, still holds services in Eagle using the mobile classroom building situated in the northwest corner of Washington and Michigan Streets

across from the Township Hall. The Eagle Methodist Church goes back to 1835 when a missionary named Muneth held services in the home of Anthony Niles. Eagle was on his circuit. Later services were held in a log schoolhouse two miles east of the present Village of Eagle. In 1839 Services were held at the Jenison School one-half mile east of Eagle. Formerly a Free Methodist Church building was located west of the Howe and Tallman roads intersection and was torn down in 1927. The original Four Square Church building, constructed of brick, is located on Michigan Street adjacent to the Eagle Township Hall and is now used as a multimedia sound studio.

Both the Looking Glass and the Grand Rivers cross Eagle Township and merge at Portland. Early settlers used them for transportation. They arrived by water, took their grain to the grist mill at Portland and brought back their supplies by canoe. Other supplies were brought down the river by boat from Captain Scotts' s store in DeWitt. There were also fish and eels in the river that supplied food. When dams were built, the rivers supplied power for mills and later for electricity. There was a saw mill on the Looking Glass, east of the present day Grange Road bridge. There was also a saw planing and molding mill combined with a feed mill at this location. There were nine bridges built in the township cross the rivers on roads later named Jones, Wright, Grange,

Howe, Bauer, Tallman, Monroe, Hinman, and State. The Howe bridge was originally called the Simmons bridge.

The first township meeting was held at Philo Doty' s home as soon as Eagle was separated from Watertown in March 1841. Fletcher Jenison was the first postmaster in Eagle, appointed in 1841. Today Eagle has a modern brick post office, built in 1960. Before the present building was constructed, the post office was in the back of Eddy Brothers Grocery (later Peake' s Grocery). Schools saw their beginning in Eagle in 1837, when Anthony Niles called a meeting at his home and it was decided to build a cabin and equip it with benches. A later school "The Red School House," so called because of the coat of red paint it received when finished, was the first frame building in the Township and perhaps in Clinton County. In 1841, districts were rearranged and eventually schools had names as well as numbers. The Brown, Monroe, Partlow, Kebler and Pennington schools were named for pioneers. There were also North Eagle and Eagle schools. Most of these old school buildings are gone. During their life they were community centers where lessons were learned, spelling bees were held, as well as box socials, Christmas programs and PTA meetings. In the 1950s and 1960s, the schools were merged into larger K-12 districts of Portland and Grand Ledge.

The Village of Eagle was founded by George McCrumb, named by David Simmons in honor of his home residence in New York, and the village plat recorded in 1873 . Once a thriving village, a hotel was built in 1879 to serve passengers on the Pere Marquette Railroad. The Pere Marquette rail line was commuter line for students going to Grand Ledge, Portland, or Lansing. The freight and passengers business dwindled and the hotel and depot (built by McCrumb) have both been removed. The rail lines are no longer in place.

The first store in Eagle was built by Loyal Hill as a general store. At one time the village boasted of a hardware store, two grocery stores, a drug store, and a blacksmith. A washing machine factory, barrel factory, apple drying factory, lumber yard and two gas stations were also one-time businesses in the Village. One unusual business located in the Township was a worm corporation which shipped worms to southern states, it is now a refrigerator business. Today there are several highway oriented businesses located at M-100 (Wright Road and Grand River Highway Intersection). Between 1900 and 1925 two physicians had offices in Eagle Village; they served the whole community of Eagle.

The foregoing historical sketch was largely compiled by Mrs. Carl G. Lietzke. It was the most complete work that the State of Michigan Library had on file and was included in the "History of Clinton County, Michigan."