

NEWS FROM THE DEPOT

<photo>

Boston-Saranac Historical Society

SETTLERS CAME to Michigan as part of the "Westward Expansion (1801-1861)." Guess that about sums it all up, or maybe it is just glossing over a lot of the behind-the-scenes events.

There was little immigration to Michigan in the first quarter of the 19th century, from when Michigan Territory was formed (June 30, 1805), and before it was admitted as the 26th state to the Union (January 26, 1837). Why?

Before private individuals could buy land, the federal "General Land Office - GLO (est. 1785)" had to complete surveys and by 1821 more than 2.25 million acres of Michigan had been surveyed. However, within the surveyors' report there was a *caveat* - the U.S. surveyor general said the Michigan Territory was mostly swamp and colonization was "dangerous and unnecessary." Harsh, but effective as a deterrent to anyone wishing to move to newly available land, sight unseen.

Following this negative review, the Governor of the Michigan Territory, Lewis Cass, petitioned for new surveys stating that the initial set "grossly misrepresented the land." US Congress agreed, and new surveys were started.

As these surveys were completed, parcels were sold off to land speculators, and private individuals. Judge Jefferson Morrison of Grand Rapids purchased a large parcel of land in 1836 from the general government, in the hopes of developing mills along Lake Creek, with the help of two others, Dwight & Hutchinson of Detroit, and platted out their dream for Saranac. "Cheap land," the promise of the American Dream that the anyone can become rich and successful through hard work and determination, coupled with the lure of existing communities of other settlers like themselves? Who could resist? – south of the Grand River. What about north of the Grand? Keene Township.

It too had a river, the Flat River, but no mill power potential as it was deemed sluggish, and best used as transportation for saw-logs. Land did not come up for sale for another three (3) years (August 5, 1839). Of course, that did not stop settlers from occupying "their" land, setting forth to clear and improve the lands. They had come to stay, and were settlers just as much as though they had owned the lands, but technically they were "squatters" with only the "morale" right to keep the land that they had worked so hard on. "Legally" these original occupants could find themselves pushed off "their" lands, and others could reap the benefit of any improvements made.

These early settlers of Keene Township decided to protect themselves, formed an association for their mutual protection, and appointed a representative. They

made it understood that, "...it would not be very healthy for any speculator, or anybody else, to turn his energies towards depriving the actual possessors of the land they had already selected and commenced to improve." (source: "Saranac - History and Directory (1941)) The result? When the land came on the market in 1839, there was no attempt made to disturb Keene settlers.

What is that old expression? "Possession is 9/10ths of the law."

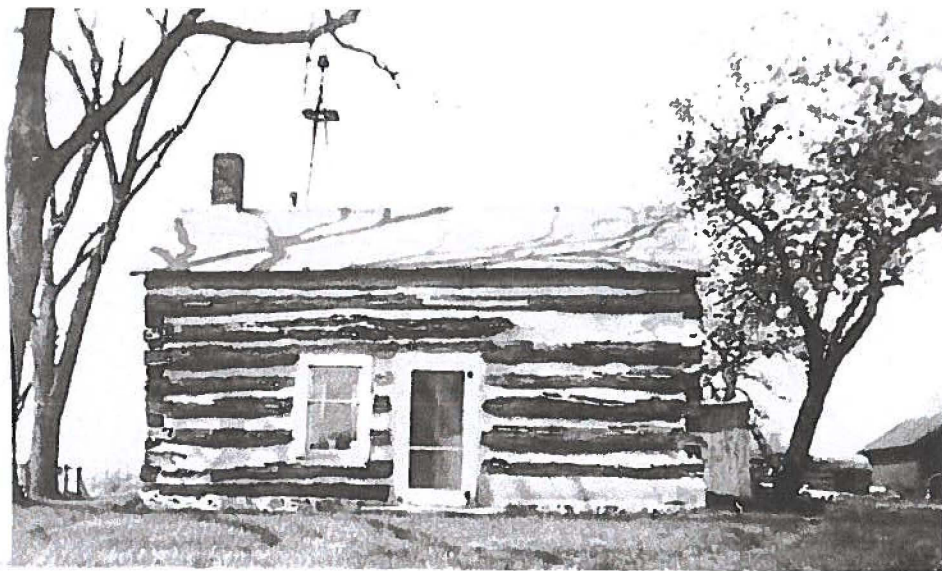
NOTE: this might sound familiar, this "squatting" or "homesteading" but the official Homestead Act did not come into formal existence until 1862.

Follow us on Facebook [™] [/Saranac Depot](#) or visit the website, [/Saranac Area Past & Present \(Michigan\)](#).

----- END -----

PHOTO CAPTION:

Alfred J. Hunter log house - Pinckney at Centerline Rds. Keene Twp. (built 1851/
since replaced)



Top: This is one of the last standing log cabins in Ionia County. Edwin B. Potter demolished his log cabin on the NW corner of Pinckney and Centerline Road in Keene Township in the 1950s and replaced it with a more modern home.