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A Pencil Sketch of the Town; Past Contrasts with Future

By Mr. McCumber

Review of Our Principle Business Interests

Half a century ago the spirit of enterprise and speculation was as active as now, but the results were not quite so rapid or abundant, owing in the main to the lack of ready modes of intercommunication between distant points. Men were very much the same then as now, and undoubtedly the pioneer was, A.D. 1825-30, animated by nearly the same motives as prompts the speculation in times of the present day, that is, the ends to accomplish are or were the same.

Fifty years ago

What is now the beautiful and enterprising village of Milford, was an unimproved waste, inhabited only by the wild beasts of the forest and wandering bands of red men. Lordly trees stood upon the sites of residences of today, and there was nothing here "per se" to create or sustain a town. The tranquil waters of the Huron and Pettibone rippled onward then as now, but no Milford was reflected in their clear depths. All was as quiet and solitary as the time when the stars of the morning first sang together. This was the picture when first white man penetrated these dark-some wilds, and which event occurred about the year 1830 [actually 1832]. Mr. Elizur Ruggles, recently deceased, being the first white settler in what is now Milford Township. Michigan was as yet a territory, and literally speaking, one vast and almost unbroken wilderness. In 1832 A.S. Arms came to this identical spot and laid out a village plat giving it the name of Milford. [Actually, the first plat was Mead's Plat of South Milford, laid out by Stratton for Jabesh Mead in 1836.] A store was soon opened by Mead & Arms, and to whom belongs the honor of inaugurating mercantile pursuit. This store was located on the south side of the river. Mr. Orrin Stephens opened a grocery a few years later, and about 1839 Messrs. Crawford & Tiller opened out their general store, and from their insignificant little establishments have sprung the 40 odd business houses today. Verily, their progeny has been prolific.

The Widow Edmonds kept the first tavern, not one of the modern concerns, however, like those of the present day, when the "blasé" guest sits down to a dozen courses, but an humble structure in which the fare was of a primitive character, where corn pones and venison formed the staple diet. Mr. Arms was the first Post master [?]. The mails were received but once a week, and were carried on horseback, from place to place, and the arrival of the postman in those times, was hailed as a gala day with the inhabitants. [I believe the first mail was brought in by the stagecoach.] Mr. Luman Fuller built the first Grist Mill, and which is still standing, although erected more than forty years ago. It is owned and operated at the present time by Jacob Peters. Another grist mill and saw mill were soon erected by Mr. Armstrong [Mr. Armstrong bought the Ruggles saw mill and built the second grist mill across the river from it.] This mill however has succumbed to the ravages of Time's destroying grasp, and is now no more. The little village grew quite rapidly for several years, until the completion of the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad, when other towns sprung up, and which attracted much of the business that was formerly wont to come to Milford. The first church organization was that of the Methodist, and these "avaunt couriers" of "the faith," were soon followed by others. Each succeeding year brought some new comers, and witnessed some new feature or improvement in the village.

It is true Milford did not escape the many annoyances and inconveniences to which all new settlements are subject. Still we cannot learn that there was any actual suffering for the necessities of life. The forests abounded in game, the streams were full of fish, and the little patches of clearing brought forth abundantly the wherewith to sustain life. And thus we go on from year to year, with the ever varying changes incidental to the onward march of time, but for many years with no substantial growth, or improvement. But a change in the affairs of the town was nevertheless awaiting us. The building of the

Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad was the herald of a new era in business matters. It was the means of a more rapid development of the surrounding country, it infused new life into the business interests of the place, and opened up new and hitherto unapproachable markets, and placed upon us the great plane of equality with other towns, and was, in fact, a consummation that had been long and devoutly wished. Better than all however was the fact that Milford and surrounding country contained within itself, sustaining force. The soil was of the richest possible character, we were possessed of a splendid water power, and the surrounding country was peopled with a hardy and industrious race of men and women, who had their competences to acquire, and whose daily labor was a labor of love.

Every tree that was felled was a step towards prosperity—every acre in cultivation was a gurdeon of success. And so these noble men and women toiled on, creating for the generation of today, an inheritance time shall not dim.

This then, in rude outline, has been the history of Milford. We have not time nor pace to give even fragments of minutiae. We must ignore date and incident, those particulars which go to make up the warp and woof of history. Nor are the columns of a newspaper the suitable place for their preservation. Our sphere of action as a journalist, is vastly different from that of the historian.