

Milford Times: July 1, 1932

WHEN WOLVES AND INDIANS WERE HERE

Incidents of Those Days Are Here for xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

The following is an extract from a paper written by the late Mrs. Adam Diehl of her childhood experiences and was read by her daughter, Mrs. Charlotte Beatty at the pioneer banquet in 1929.

“In the spring of 1832, my father moved from the State of New York to the Territory of Michigan. Although but five years of age, the memory of those days is painfully stamped on my mind, which time can never erase. I can well remember our journey up the Erie Canal and Lake Erie, and soon on to Detroit. Detroit was then a very insignificant place to what it is at the present time. Father employed a teamster in Detroit to move us to Milford. Our journey was over a rough and muddy road; the dreariness of the journey was occasionally relieved by the appearance of a deer now and then. At night we put up at what was in those days called a Hotel, but a sorry looking place it was to what the Hotels are at the present time; the Landlord’s name was Luman Fuller.

“After a great deal of trouble, not unmixed with profane language, we arrived at Milford, and put up at a log house then owned by Aaron Phelps. Father moved into the log house with Mr. Phelps and Calvin Eaton, which made three families in one house. These things were very unpleasant to me. Mr. Eaton and father went the next day to look at the land around Milford; the next to go and buy it of Uncle Sam, who in my childish opinion was a man of great importance. Mr. Eaton then built him a house on his farm, and he and father moved both their families into it, to leave room for the immigrants which were then coming thick and fast.

“My childish troubles then came in earnest, as Mrs. Eaton and my mother kept up a continual conversation about the Indians of which there were far too many for comfort. Father and sister now left home and went to Farmington in search of work as our little stock of provisions was nearly consumed, and there must be something provided to sustain life. There was nothing growing in or around Milford that was fit for man to eat, except the deer that roamed wild through the forest, for Milford was then one vast wilderness as far as the eye could see. Mr. Eaton built him a shop situated on the Pettibone creek; he with his journey-men would leave in the morning and not return until noon, which gave the Indians plenty of time to call. Their universal errand was chushaguss (which means bread).

“Previous to this father bought a cow of Mr. Laughray and another new comer by the name of Gardner, bought one of the same man; Mr. Eaton also had a cow. Brother George and myself now received occupation, which was to watch these cows in the wood. We were always charged before we left home to look out for the Indians, or they might carry us away with them. But my brother was a courageous boy and I did not suffer as much from fear in the woods as I did at home, and we generally had a very pleasant time in the woods, spending our leisure moments looking for the young fawn, of which we supposed there must be an abundance in the woods, but were never fortunate enough to find any.

“The cows were generally tied head and foot as they called it, so they could not get away, but one day they got the start of us and ran away. George hollered at the top of his voice, mother and Mrs. Eaton headed them off on the farm now owned by Mr. Cardy, then a vast wilderness. The cows soon became accustomed to the woods and were allowed their liberty to roam as they pleased. It now became our duty to look for the cows every evening and bring them home to be milked. One night we could not find the cows as usual, so we wandered farther and farther in the woods in hopes of finding them.

“It was now sundown and we were lost; we knew that soon after dark the hungry wolf would come forth in search of his prey, which filled our young hearts with fear. George, who was always so talkative and cheerful now became moody and silent. I now began to find out that I was very tired and began to cry. George told me to stop or the Indians would hear me, for this I did not care, as I preferred the company of Indians to that of wolves. George said he had two suspenders and he would climb up into a tree and pull me up after him, then he would tie me to a limb of the tree, and he himself to me also, to

prevent us from falling while we were asleep. I did wish he would climb the tree because I was so tired, but on he went over hills and through valleys; he did not even stop to see how I could get along. When we were first bewildered we were at the Indian garden, north of Mr. Sherwood's farm, we had now gone quite a distance from the place where we were first lost, when we saw two men far ahead of us, but we thought they were Indians because they were so poorly clad, but we would hail them with joy. When we came within speaking distance we saw that they were white men, their names were Hubbard; they were two brothers and were out hunting deer. We told them our story and they pointed out to us a tall bush in the distance, which they said when we reached we could see Mr. Eaton's shop. We went as we were directed and saw the shop and then we were soon at home. We found the whole family in an uproar; father and sister had now returned from Farmington, and were out in search of us. Mother was in tears, she clasped me in her arms with joy, but little I cared for her embrace but lay myself down on an old chest that was in the room, and was soon lost in the sweet sleep of childhood.

"After harvest, mother, George and myself went out to glean wheat on the farm now owned by Mr. Willie Pearson, on the south side of the river. After we had labored a long time, we put the fruits of our labor in a small barn which stood on the place. When we returned in the morning we found that Mr. Pearson, the old gentleman, had turned a horse in during the night, and the horse had eaten and stamped the greater part under foot. When we returned home at night, which was later than usual, we heard the cry of a panther up the river. Mother said she should not glean any more wheat.

"Father commenced to build his house after harvest and finished it that autumn. About the first of autumn I saw all or nearly all of the Indians in the territory of Michigan; they were on their way to Detroit to receive their yearly payments. From early dawn of day until late at night the Indian trail was crowded with Indians and their ponies, and of all this great number there was but one that returned; he was poor and sick, he said the rest of his tribe had gone back another way. Father finished his log house before winter set in, and another family, with his own, moved into it. He was the father of the present Mrs. Lamphier. Father now bought him a yoke of oxen, so that he could go to work on his place the coming Spring. The winter passed without anything transpiring of particular note. Father was away from home the greater part of the week working for bread to keep his family from starving; often would I have been glad for another piece of corn bread; but mother said no, she must save the rest for another meal. Although often hungry my mother generally managed to have a little of something to satisfy her family of hungry children. We were never cold, because there was plenty of wood. Wolves were in abundance, but they did not trouble father much as he had nothing they could molest, but it was not so with the farmers who were wealthy enough to own sheep; beautiful flocks of sheep that were imported from New York were soon reduced to nothing. During the winter father spent all his leisure moments in clearing off a piece of land so as to have it ready for the plow in the Spring. My principal employment during the winter was to play deer, which I enjoyed as much as little girls do at the present time playing with their dolls.

"In the Spring brother George, who was now nine years of age, hired out to Mr. Duncan McCall to drive breaking up team as it was called; sometimes he would come home and tell about a poor starved ox that had fallen down in the furrow and died; and then they would hitch the rest of the oxen to it and drag it away for the Indians and wolves to devour. Father and Mr. Marvin Ladd. (lately deceased) went in partnership, each had an ox team, and they would break up each other's land together. They worked in this way for many years, for the early pioneers were very kind to each other.

"In the Spring of 1835 things began to look more like living. People began to build in Milford on the south side of the river, first Mr. Ansley Arms put up a dry good store. Mother would send George and myself to the store to buy some articles which she needed in her domestic duties. We used to cross the Huron River on an old log. For this was the Indian trail; this log had been at some time previous to this a very tall tree, and when it fell, it fell across the river. In times of high water the log was nearly covered with water, and at such times our footing was rather dangerous, then we would take a pole in our hands and cross very cautiously; we generally succeeded well for such small children, but hardships made us wise. Sister Nancy worked for Mr. Arms, that made it more pleasant for us. In the Autumn there had been a shoe shop put up on the south side of the river kept by Mr. Abraham Seaman. The settlers now had worn out their stock of boots and shoes and consequently there was a great call for them by all. Father

employed him to make boots and shoes for his family, but he delayed making them from time to time, and when it became late in the Autumn the ground frozen I used to go every evening barefoot across the river after my shoes, the answer invariably received was "your shoes are not done, come tomorrow night." This went on until my parents became tired and disgusted with his falsehoods and would not send me any more, but occasionally father would go and see if the shoes were finished but would always receive the same answer; we went all winter without shoes. George made a hand sled, and we used to ride down hill bare foot, we would remain out doors as long as possible, then run into the house and stamp on the warm hearth until our feet would smart and burn, then run out doors again and repeat the process. We would play in this way sometimes a whole evening. We toughened our feet so that we have never suffered from chilblains. Thus was spent the second winter of my life in Michigan. They had now built a school house in Milford, and I was sent to school; I had made some progress in the Elementary Spelling book before my parents left for New York, but now I did not know a single letter. My teacher's name was Elizabeth Ladd, she is the present Mrs. F. Hopkins, she punished me every day that I went to school, and also complained to my parents about my bad behavior. I think I must have been part wild something like the Indians that roamed through the forests, I had to be civilized, I did not like the teacher and consequently did not learn. My second teacher's name was Bassett, he was kinder to me, and I commenced to learn. This winter the surveyors came to Milford and pitched their tents where Mr. Lovejoy's saloon now stands. They remained three weeks.

"Things now began to look better at home. Father had now raised produce enough so that he could sell a load, but in order to do this he must go to Detroit. The settlers now began to raise more than they consumed, but Detroit was all the market in those days. The farmers had to draw all their surplus produce to Detroit with an ox team, for oxen were all the farmers could keep when the country was new. Which made the journey slow and tedious. It generally took them a week, for the roads were very bad, very frequently they were obliged to let one wagon stand still while they doubled teams to draw another wagon through the mud. The market in Detroit was poor, wheat was fifty cts. per bushel and other produce in proportion.

"The Indians and wolves now became less troublesome, it was only now and then a few Indians would call, generally to borrow a pail, tin cup, or coffee pot, which they always returned, but not always to the right owners, but those mistakes were of little account to the ladies as they considered their vessels of little use after the Indians had used them.

"Now we began to see the affect of ardent spirits. When the Indians returned from Milford they were generally drunk. This made them rough and boisterous, and at such times I would run and call father, which had the desired effect, as they would leave as soon as they saw a white man. But their poor squaws would come out of the woods to look for them, and on finding that their husbands and fathers were drunk they would hang their heads like doomed culprits and return into the woods.

"The settlers cut down the forests and the Indians soon disappeared from the stage of action, at least as far as the settlers were concerned. In 1837 Michigan was annexed as a State. I was sent to school summers and winters until I was twelve years old. I was then considered large enough to help mother during the summer. My life now was nothing more or less than falls to the lot of common mortals."

This personal account written by Mary Openo Diehl is kept in the archives of the Milford Historical Museum, Milford, Michigan 48381. Mary was born on July 29, 1829, on an ocean vessel in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Her father and mother were on their way to America, having left their native Germany weeks before. The family lived in Brighton and Henrietta, New York, before coming to Milford in 1834. Mary had one older brother George and an older sister Nancy. Her brother Joseph was born in 1834 in New York, and her sister Mary was born in 1840 in Milford. Mary was about five years old when she came to Milford. In 1849 Mary married Adam Diehl and the couple had eight children. In her story she speaks of her father buying a cow from the Loughrays. These are the parents of little Willie Loughray whose blond hair attracted so much attention from the Indians. She also speaks of the Indian gardens. These gardens were located in the area where the road Indian Garden Lane is today, and it is believed that the early pioneers like Mary and her family could identify this area as an actual Indian

garden, Whether or not it was one of the elevated gardens of the ancient Indian tribes is not known.