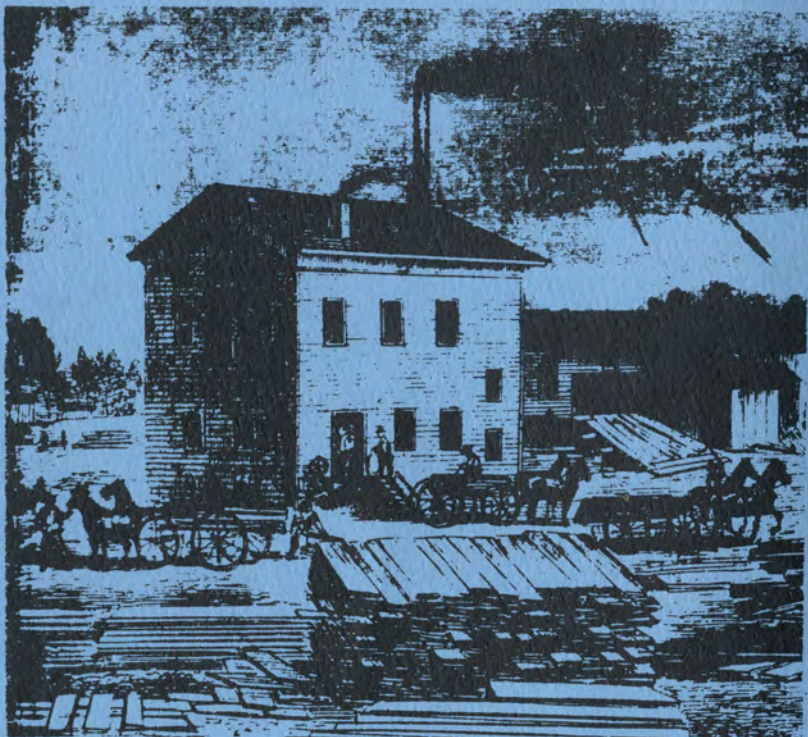


**how
okemos
began:**

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**A
SHORT
HISTORY**

**by
Ruth Stillman**



When Colonel E. Walker built this grist and saw mill on the Red Cedar in 1854, farmers no longer had to take their grain to Dexter or Howell for grinding. The mill was located at (15) on the centerfold map.

FOREWARD

History is always in the making. Since this little booklet was first issued in 1956, Okemos has grown by half again, from a village of 10,000 citizens to over 16,000. We have new housing developments, new schools, new businesses. And much of the old has gone to make way for the new.

Maybe this is why, in a period of growth, we are feeling a renewed interest in our roots. (At this writing, most of us will remember savoring a television series by this very name.) So it is a pleasure to issue the third edition of this booklet when it seems it will find an interested audience.

We have changed the name from the original: "A Short History of Okemos" to "How Okemos Began: A Short History," because we believe this to be a more accurate title for what is primarily an account of pioneering days. We are fortunate to have a new section from Mrs. Stillman, imaginatively contrasting our 1980 world with that of the pioneers, and for the first time we have included pictures with the text.

Good reading

Friends of the Hope Borbas Okemos Branch
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PREFACE

To the reader:

It is with considerable anticipation and some reluctance that one approaches the authorship of any local history, however brief it may be.

The anticipation--because the pleasant task of reviewing clippings, diaries and old books gives one glimpses of the important as well as everyday happenings in the lives of real people.

The reluctance is felt because one can never include all the interesting facts; many times cannot verify to everyone's satisfaction certain details and certainly cannot include all the individuals who helped build early Okemos.

For brevity's sake, this sketch is focused upon approximately the first fifteen years and in some areas the time is projected further ahead in order to complete a phase of endeavor, such as the "Plank Road."

The community considered is roughly that of the present school district but centered chiefly in the village.

Resource material used was principally clippings, personal diaries, Durant's History of Ingham County 1880, Ingham County Atlas 1874 and stories handed down from pioneers themselves.

The author realizes a vast amount of material is available in this community and sincerely hopes that in some way all these interesting and absorbing stories can one day be assembled and made available to all who revere and honor those hardy folks of a century ago.

R. S., 1956

Revised and re-issued in 1972 and 1980.

The figures appearing in parenthesis throughout the text, i.e., (1), (2), etc., refer to historical locations on the map found in the middle of the publication.



"FOUNDER." Pioneer Freeman Bray platted the village in 1841, giving it the name of Hamilton. Residents called it Okemos, and in 1859 the state legislature made that name official.

THE BEGINNINGS OF OKEMOS VILLAGE - 1839 -

Have you ever wondered how this place we call Okemos looked 120 years ago? Just what did Sanford Marsh foresee as he stood on the densely forested south bank of a winding, swift-flowing little river, soon to be called the Red Cedar River? As he picked the site for his new home, a log cabin, did he feel strange and lonely or did he dream of neighbors soon to settle across the stream?

Here he was, along with his family on land for which he had made a land entry six years before, May 13, 1833, and now in 1839 he was to build the first white man's home in the future village of Okemos. The present Marsh Road is named for him. His cabin (1) stood on the high bank of the river, just diagonally northwest across the road from the present Central School. He was due to take an active part in establishing a new community and after a full life he and his wife were given final resting place on another high bank of the river, their graves being marked with a slender stone monument in the old Okemos Cemetery which lies close to Grand River Avenue (2).

He had no more than settled his family in their new cabin in September when Joseph Kilbourne, lately of Canada, came through seeking a home site. He chose land (3) across the river and upstream

a short distance on another high bank, taking out the entry in the name of his brother-in-law, Freeman Bray. He then went to Northville to get his family and returning in December lived with the Marshes while he built a goodly sized cabin. In January his sister and her husband, the Freeman Brays and the elder Mrs. Kilbourne came to live with the young Kilbournes.

After about two years Kilbourne bought land to the east of what is now Cornell Road across from Cornell School and began to carve out of the forest a fine farm. Much of that pioneer farm is now a fine residential area (5).

During these years a United States Post Office was established and given the name, properly enough of "Sanford." For a while the post office was in the Kilbourne home as he was the postmaster. Then Mr. Bray was appointed postmaster and the office was moved to the new Bray tavern (4) or inn which accommodated overnight guests or "land-lookers." This large two-room log house was near the east end of Clinton Street close to the river. Early mail was received by or taken to the post office at irregular intervals by travelers but in a few years regular mail deliveries were made each week by horse-back from Detroit via Howell over the old Detroit road, or from Dexter, down Ann Arbor way, which was the railroad terminus, via the well-known Dexter Trail, used alike by Indian and pioneer.

A VILLAGE IS PLATTED - 1841

Freeman Bray bought a large tract of land and on part of it along the river's edge platted a village to which he gave the name "Hamilton," later to be named Okemos. The name was chosen presumably for Alexander Hamilton. Mr. Bray was for several years the proprietor of his tavern and also trader and merchant for the few residents until he moved to his farm beyond the village (now Cedar Bend Heights and part of Ottawa Hills).

Already families were arriving and settling along the Grand River Trail which closely follows the U.S.16 of today, except for the by-pass or viaduct. This trail was really the Detroit road and was well rutted by many cumbersome wagons, drawn by oxen or light spring seated wagons to which were hitched horse teams. Earlier, Indians had made the general trail as they worked their way along ridges and through valleys to reach the Grand River, which would in turn guide them to Lake Michigan.

Ed. note: The plat of Hamilton was recorded on May 29, 1851.

THE PEOPLE COME - 1842

In 1842 Mr. Bray made one of his horse and wagon trips to Detroit and brought back with him the Myron W. Barnes family. Finding a suitable location on a hill about a mile south of Marsh's home (3716 Okemos Road) (6), Mr. Barnes built a log house, the only home between Hamilton Village and the present Holt Road. It is interesting to note here that at the place which is now the intersection of Holt and Okemos roads a county poor farm had been located and in 1843 there is recorded an action to raise fifty dollars for the support of the poor and in 1844 a 22 x 18 foot addition built to house the indigent. Even at this early stage of settling a new land certain social obligations needed to be met by the public. But to return to the Barneses-- they had brought with them locust tree seeds which they planted along the trail side and which produced a row of fine trees. Some of the bushy growth of this row may still be seen as one travels along Okemos Road.

There was only a rough, stump-strewn trail through the dense woods between the Marsh and Barnes homes and wild deer, bears and wolves were a common sight by day and sound by night, oft-times a real nuisance as well. The story is told that Mrs. Barnes started out to go to the Marsh's to spend the day sewing. A short distance from their house she saw wolves slinking alongside the path behind the undergrowth. She began to run and ran all the way over the rough trail with

the wolves keeping pace with her. One can imagine her relief on reaching the neighbor's house.

Mr. Barnes was a cabinet and chair maker by trade and did custom work for the new families as well as clearing off a good sized farm. Many privations were suffered by these families as they pioneered in a new country. Food at times became very scarce and a week or more was needed to get supplies such as sugar, meal, or dried fruits from Detroit or Dexter. One mother made a soup from field corn to tide over the food shortage until her husband returned from such a trip. One family had to sleep their children in a cutter while putting up a cabin and cold weather had already come upon them.

North and east of Hamilton Village there were better defined trails along which were scattered log homes, usually built on the higher pieces of ground. Many of the family names are familiar to us at this date. Mullett and Van-Atta to the east and north are marked by well known homesteads.

As early as 1841 a road was laid out in a southerly direction, now known as Dobie Road. On or near this road are four farms which have remained in the same families since 1839-1842 and are known as Centennial Farms, namely Dobie and Stillman on Dobie Road, and Rathbun and Wilkins along Sand Hill Road. West of the village on the road that some day would lead to the future city of

Lansing and Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University) was the Chatterton and later Sturges home, the Sturges family in Okemos being descendants of those two.

These were farmers for the most part, but closer to the village were tradespeople. On the present Marsh Road between the village and the present Grand River Avenue settled Melzor Turner (7), a fine cabinet and casket maker. His account book (later owned by Jessie Turner) shows that wild cherry wood caskets, made to measurement, cost \$6.00; a new chair, 75 cents. Turner chests or tables may be found in several present day Okemos homes. Mr. Turner's family was the third to arrive and his little daughter, Mary, was the only white child at the time. Years later she was affectionately known in the village as "Aunt Mary Young" living to be ninety years old. Mr. Turner was also section-keeper on the plank road and helped to construct it.

A SCHOOL IS STARTED - 1844

About two miles east (across from the Crest Drive-In Theater) was the cooper shop (8) of Daniel Youngs where barrels were made. These were an important item in everyday use, especially for storage purposes. And it was in this same log building the first school was kept in 1844 by Miss Samantha Worden. She had five pupils and received one dollar per week salary and probably her keep. Among her pupils was the aforementioned Mary Turner and Charlotte Bray who walked the distance to and from school.

A couple of years later a small hill (9) in the village was purchased from Mr. Bray for fifteen dollars for school purposes. This knoll (the site of the Okemos Library) was used by the Indians to cache their corn which they raised on nearby ground. Mr. Bray plowed this ground for them for several years.

On this land a small one-room building was erected by the people (School District No. 2 was not to be recorded and defined until 1849). Then in 1873 a fine two-room, two story frame building, complete with belfry was built nearby at the cost, including furnishings of \$3,400.

Some time after the turn of the century the "little school" was annexed to the larger, and thus it was to remain

until torn down in 1956 to make way for a fire department and library building.

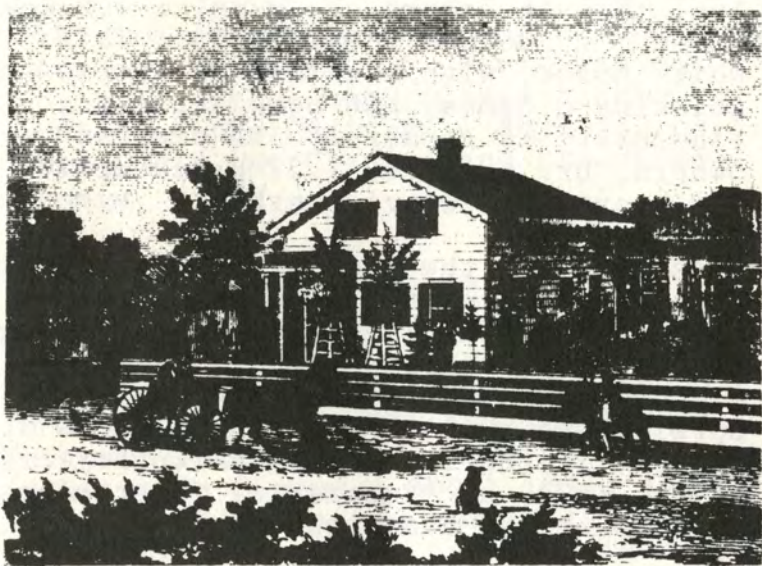
Mrs. Minnie Grettenberger, mother of Orin Grettenberger; Mildred Buxton, and Marian Musselman, were teachers in that school in 1891.

A library was an important part of this early school as books were very scarce in pioneer homes and in 1849 a record is made that on April 14 of that year the inspectors labeled books and ordered a table and bookcase, cost not to exceed \$5.00.

BUSINESS MEN APPEAR - 1850

By 1850 business ventures were being made in this community which must of necessity be self-sustaining. Mr. Bray had always traded with the Indians for their pelts and furs for the usual calico, lead, powder, trinkets, cutlery and some "fire-water." Merchandise of all sorts was at a premium as it had to be brought from Detroit by horse or ox team.

But the first regular merchant opened a store in 1853 which became known as the Walker Store, operated by Ebenezer Walker for many years. This store stood just west of the I.O.O.F. Hall (in 1980, Tiffany Travel). Mr. Walker lived in the home at 4622 Okemos Road.



This little house still stands on Okemos Road, looking much as it did when Colonel E. Walker, owner of the grist and saw mill (15 on the map) lived there. The engravings of house and saw mill are taken from an 1859 map published in Philadelphia.

In 1849 Melzor Turner built the first frame house (4662 Okemos Road). Later owners built an addition and provided a livery stable so it could be used as an inn, thus it became the popular "Okemos House" or "Barnes House" (11). This white house, with its rows of distinguishing windows, has been kept in a fine state of repair by its present owners, Dr. and Mrs. I.J. Breckenfeld, and bears an historic marker.

As this was the time of the vast immigration into central Michigan, the Detroit road passing through the village was heavily traveled and overnight accommodations were needed and so other hotels were built. The "Union House" (12) is listed in the Ingham County Atlas, 1874, as "furnishing first class accommodations and a good barn."

Union Hotel was located on the N.E. corner of the present Hamilton Road and Liverance Street. In fact, parts of the old hotel are incorporated in the present buildings at 2176 Hamilton Road. Next to it on the east was the before mentioned Walker store and the post office.

Perhaps a number of the early shops should be mentioned here. At the southeast corner of Hamilton and Ardmore was the shoe shop where J. Phillips made and repaired shoes for any member of the family. Another Phillips had a similar shop on the northwest corner of Hamilton and Marsh roads. His wife ran a millinery shop next door. This house still remains.

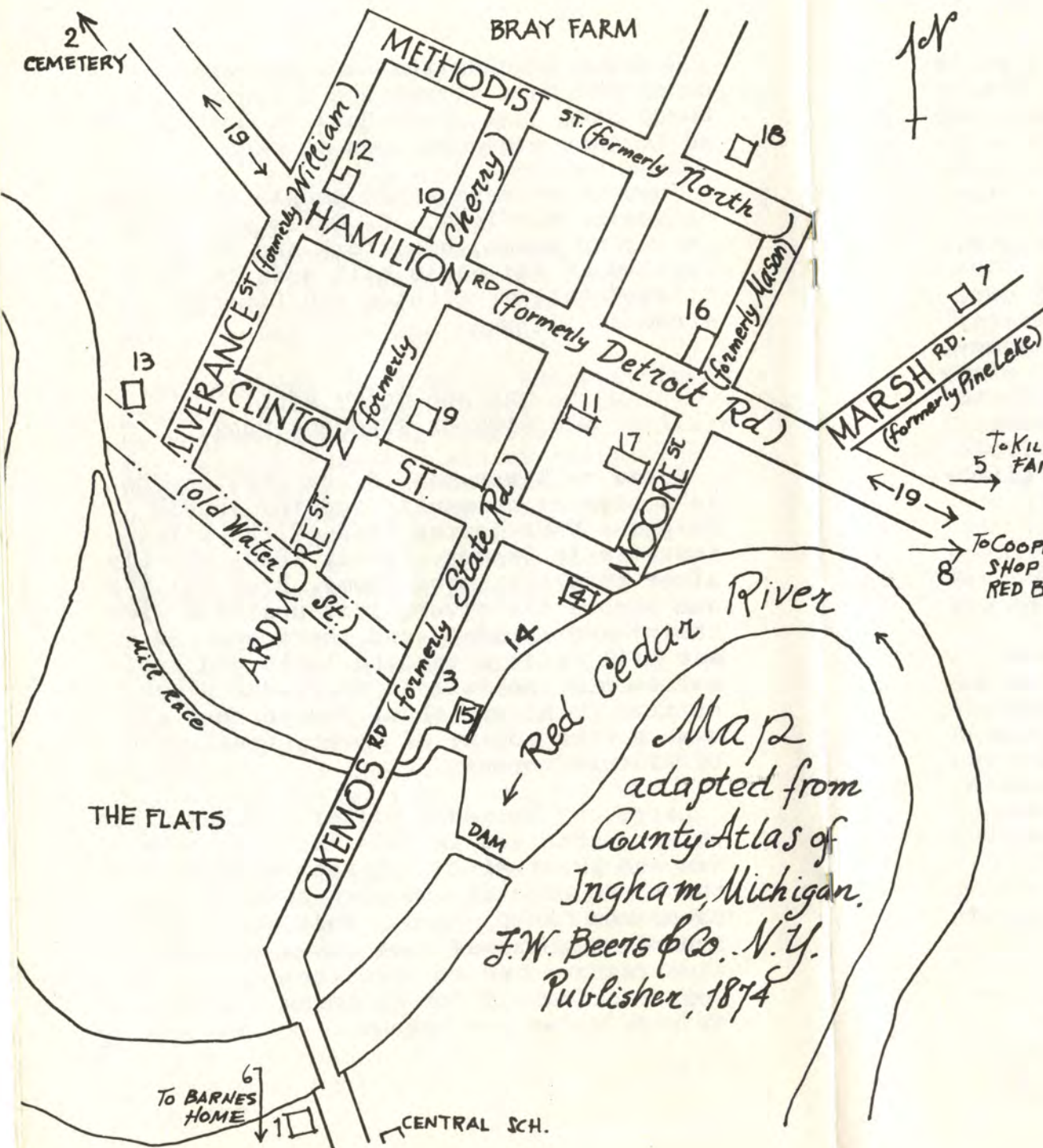
Several blacksmiths were in business along the main street and a wagon and buggy shop just up on Haslett Road painted buggies and carriages to order.

Then there were other people providing necessary services. C. Davis was manufacturing rakes, hoe, fork and broom handles at the Davis mill down on the "flats" (13) at Clinton and Liverance streets.

THE OLD GRIST MILL NOW SITE OF FERGUSON PARK

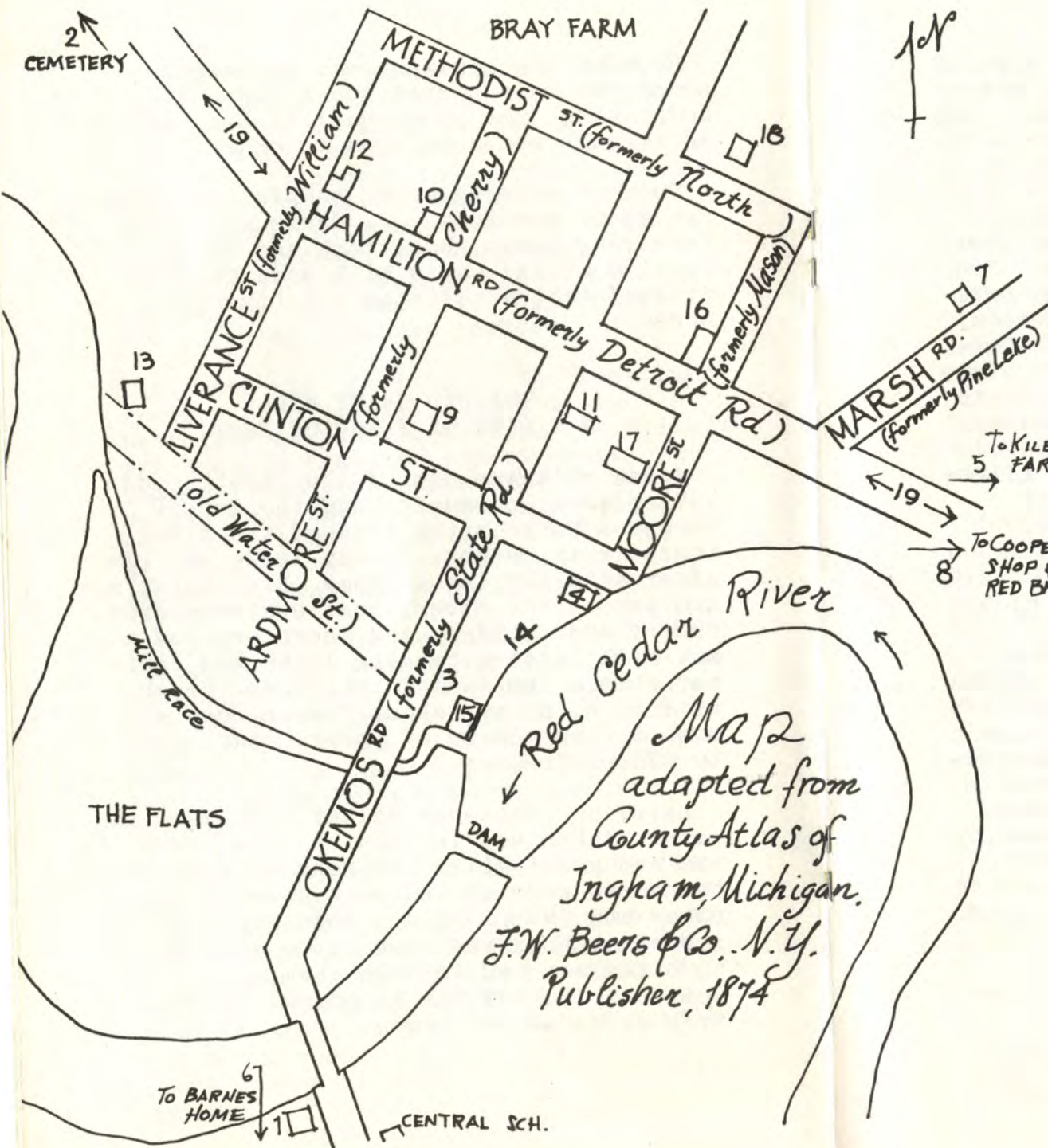
A saw mill was one of the first needs in a pioneer community and the lovely Ferguson Park is the site of the first industry in Okemos. About 1842, shortly after settling in his home, Bray built a dam across the river, just upstream from the present bridge, and there erected a saw mill, (14) a turning lathe and cabinet shop. The fall in the Cedar River at this point was about "seven feet and made a fine source of power, unaffected by winter freezes."

Later on, Ebenezer Walker purchased the water rights and in 1854 built a steam saw and grist mill (15) near what is now the north edge of the park between the river and Okemos Road. This was a very important business move as up to that time farmers had to take their grain to Dexter or Howell for grinding. A long trip by horse and wagon.



Map Legend

1. Sanford Marsh logcabin 1839
2. Old Okemos Cemetery
3. Freeman Bray & Joseph Kilbourne
4. New Bray Tavern
5. Kilbourne Farm house. 1842
6. Myron W Barnes loghouse
7. Melzer Turner home
8. Cooper Shop of Daniel Youngs
9. First one-room school bldg.
10. Walker Store - 1853
11. "Okemos House" or "Barnes House" - an inn
12. "Union House" - hotel
13. Davis Mill
14. Bray's Sawmill & Cabinet shop
15. Ebenezer Walker Saw and Grist Mill
16. Presbyterian Church
17. Baptist Church
18. Methodist Church
19. Detroit and Grand River Rd.



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Through the years several mills stood on this location, fire and flood playing havoc at times. The last one being two stories high and having three runs of stones (fine grist) is the one shown in old-time photos. The course of the mill race can still be seen running westward from Okemos Road to the river where it borders on Indian Hills. The "Old Mill" stood idle many years, mute evidence of the changes time makes in the way of living. It was razed sometime after 1915. In its decrepit state it became a favorite place in which to leave blindfolded students at hazing time at the Michigan Agricultural College and a place for adventurous climbing by small boys in the community.

THE VILLAGE HAS SOCIAL NEEDS TOO 1840 - 1870

Almost as soon as the first homes were made attention was turned toward spiritual guidance and records show that in 1840 a Methodist society was formed for religious purposes and meetings were held in the homes. Circuit riders had been visiting in Alaieton (then including Delhi, Meridian and Lansing townships) as early as 1837 and probably they were available at times for baptisms, marriages, funerals and preaching.

With the building of the schoolhouse religious services were held there. No separate houses of worship were built until the late 60's and early 70's when three denominational groups erected

churches. The first was the Presbyterian Church (16) (corner of Hamilton and Moore). Not being used as a church for very long, it became the Meridian Township Hall and housed the Okemos Library for a number of years. The site is now occupied by a bank of shops that include a beauty shop and gourmet shop.

The Baptist Church (17) was on Moore Street south of Hamilton and is now the Arrowhead Apartments. The Methodist Church (18) (now the Okemos Community Church) was near the northeast corner of Okemos Road and Methodist Street. Each was the happy possessor of a belfry with a bell and a reed organ.

It was at this later period that other social organizations were initiated. Masonic Lodge No. 252 in 1869; I.O.O.F. Ingham 229, 1874; Cedar Grange, 1874.

The country was considered pretty well settled in 1871 when the railroad came through and a depot for passengers and shipping center for grain, wool and lumber was built a mile south of the village. Landowners near the right-of-way subscribed financially to the building of the railroad and received free passes for a ride on the first run which terminated at Ionia, the end of the Central Line. This first train stopped at various crossings and picked up passengers for the excursion.

As we glance briefly back over the years 1840-1855 we see great changes have taken place in the heavily wooded north part of Ingham County. Vast rows

of trees were felled in windrows, tops overlapping tops and burned to clear the land quickly for farming. Early cattle were fed tree tops in lieu of hay and the first crop was often turnips, to provide winter feed for the stock.

Many acres of fine orchards were planted and many hundreds of wagon loads of apples were taken to the Genesee Fruit Company in Lansing later in the century.

Frame houses replaced log cabins; barns were raised with the proper social aspects. Singing schools and spelldowns were held at schools or in homes and especially favored were the times an orator came to town to give a lecture or politics caused the candidates to wax eloquent in their speeches. Politics in that day was real and earnest. Diaries of the 1850's mention frequently going to Mason or Okemos to a lecture in the evening.

Much still needed to be done in the home by hand, such as whittling out short lengths of logs to make troughs to catch the maple sap or the making of a wooden wash tub, an ox yoke; making soft soap, gathering herbs for medicinal uses, molding candles; dyeing, spinning, weaving of wool from the family's sheep; drying apples and pumpkin and stringing the pieces, and much more that was necessary to maintain the family.

THE FAMOUS PLANK ROAD

Real roads were being laid out by surveyors and built by landowners and road men. For instance, the trail past Marsh's home was finally laid out way to Townline in 1855 (Jolly Road). Now we call that old trail road Okemos Road.

But important above all roads was the Detroit road running through the village. It closely followed the old Grand River Indian Trail from Detroit to Lake Michigan at Muskegon and one can imagine the slow going over much of the road as swamps needed to be skirted, creeks forded and sandy hills climbed.

When the State Legislature designated the swampy junction of the Red Cedar and Grand rivers as the site of the capitol of the State of Michigan in 1847 it made the road still more important, and the result was the construction of a modern highway. The enormous undertaking was a road surfaced with two-inch thick oak planks all the way from Detroit to the capitol city, which was finished about 1860. It was wide enough to accommodate a wagon and team of horses. Drive-outs were at intervals to make possible the meeting of traffic, and in places a side dirt road was for the use of lighter loads.

Boarding the stage in Lansing and entering the Plank Road at Tollgate No. 1 (near Sheridan and Grand River Avenue) the trip to Detroit was made in about twenty-four hours for a \$3.00 fare;

comfortable all the way with an overnight stop at Howell.

The tollgate keeper collected one cent per mile per horse. One such gate was near the intersection of Dawn Avenue and Grand River Avenue, west of Park Lake Road. Mail was dropped in Okemos at the Walker store -- "East of Okemos one mile we climb hills galore and cat holes -- through a white oak woods and downhill again and come to tollgate 3 near the Red Bridge over the Cedar River. We drop mail and the driver urges his team along as we are still four miles from Williamston, the dinner stop -- left Lansing early morning."

This tollgate 3 was on the Mullett farm which skirted the west bank of the river. Miss Martha Mullett who owned the well known Forster house near the quaint St. Katherine's Chapel (built in 1887) clearly remembers interesting incidents connected with this tollgate on her father's farm. The nearby present day roadside park is said to be the site of an Indian burial place.

Other improved roads were called corduroy roads because logs were laid side by side across the road then topped with dirt.

The plank gave way to a gravel-topped road and about 1930 a heavy auto and truck traffic called for a wider road and U.S. 16 (now Grand River Avenue) was laid out, bypassing the village by cutting through the Bray farm and other properties, joining the old Grand River

road again at Park Lake Road west of the overpass of the railroad. The village section of the road was then renamed and called Hamilton Road. A far cry from the old Indian trail is Grand River Avenue of today!

THE VILLAGE IS NAMED OKEMOS - 1859

The early life of the village "Hamilton" was in many ways closely associated with the old chief, Okemos, and for that reason the residents forsook the name given by Mr. Bray in 1841 and by common consent used the name "Okemos." Early diaries in 1851 speak of the settlement by that name. And so it was that in 1859 the State Legislature made the name official and recorded it as such.

And so our village stands a living monument to an Indian chief and we hope, a credit to those early pioneers who had faith in its future over a hundred years ago.

A CHIEF OF THE OTTAWA AND CHIPPEWA INDIANS JOHN OKEMOS 1770-1858

Of course one must conclude all stories of early Okemos with some of those about the old chief himself, John Okemos.

Okemos was called both a Chippewa and an Ottawa and may have been of mixed blood but his tribe belonged to the Saginaw tribes of Chippewas and roamed the area along the Grand River from Portland to the Red Cedar in Okemos.

Mystery shrouds the birth date of this well known Indian but as he took part in a battle against General St. Clair at Miami River in 1791 he must have been born prior to 1770. His birth place was near the Shiawassee River but he did not live in that area long.

When the first settlers came to Okemos village this tribe of Indians had a rather permanent camp along the Cedar River with corn fields on the low level ground between the river and the ridge. A burial ground was also at this place where the women visited annually to leave food for the departed. The tribe spent time also down stream on the Grand River near Portland, and it is there that the chief was buried on December 6, 1858.

Chief Okemos is described as not being very tall, about 5 feet 6 inches in his prime, but he carried himself very proudly never forgetting the dignity of his position. The position and title were accorded to him not by birth but earned through battles he fought with the British against the United States. He was a nephew of the great Pontiac and an ally of Tecumseh. He fought for his race and their rights as he saw them and bore lifetime scars received in a battle at Sandusky in which he was left on the field as dead.

Many stories are told concerning his part in the strife for the control of this territory but in 1814 he went with Colonel Godfrey to sign a peace treaty with General Lewis Cass at Detroit at

which time he said "Che-mo-ke-man (white man) too much for Indian! Now I make peace and fight no more; me fight plenty enough." The treaty was concluded in the name of the tribe and was never violated.

Shortly after the white man came to this vicinity the United States transported many Indians to a reservation near St. Joseph, Missouri, but many evaded the authorities and continued to live on their home hunting ground. Such was the band which followed Chief Okemos about 1845-46.

On one occasion a band of some 500 encamped near the Bray farm, among them a number of sick. While this encampment was there a couple of Indians came from the south. They borrowed a few pounds of nails from Bray. The next day all 500 had disappeared. It appeared they had made litters to transport the sick and aged and on the report of the newcomers who were fugitives from the U.S. Army that the troops were coming to remove them to a reservation, they simply left. Not again was there any large camp made.

Okemos loved to travel by canoe with his relatives and he paddled the Grand, Cedar, Huron and Maumee rivers frequently. When his daughter died her body was placed in a canoe off shore on the Cedar River about where Shaw Hall, at M.S.U. is located. Then the band of Indians took to canoes and the procession floated to the burial ground near Portland.

Okemos was friendly to the white settlers but easily offended if treated condescendingly, and on one occasion a friendship of many years was thus lost when the wife of a white friend asked Okemos to sleep in the barn as her husband was gone from home.

Pioneer homes were often suddenly invaded by the entrance of a blanket-wrapped Indian who wanted to sleep overnight by the fireplace or who wanted some of the white man's food.

But there were those who said Okemos in his rare talkative moods told how as a youth he ambushed travelers between Detroit and Toledo, even to stopping stage coaches and taking his share of scalps.

He remained a pagan throughout his lifetime, but believing in a Great Spirit. The bear was his totem and he was buried with his implements of war and chase beside him.

Near Portland is a grave marked by the D.A.R. bearing the simple inscription:

GRAVE OF OKEMOS

NOTED CHIPPEWA CHIEF

1858

1856.

1856.

DETROIT AND LANSING



STAGE

Passengers going North and North-West from Detroit, will find Stages leaving Detroit for

**HOWELL, LANSING, LYONS,
AND IONIA,**

By Plank Road Morning and Evening, at 8 A. M. and 3 P. M. Time to Lansing Twelve Hours.

**STAGES FOR
MT. CLEMENS, ROMEO, AND ALMONT,
LEAVE DETROIT AT 8 A. M.**

**PASSENGERS FOR
FLINT, SAGINAW & TUSCOLA,**

Will leave Detroit Morning and Evening by Detroit & Milwaukee Railway to Pontonville from thence by Stage to all Ports of North-Western Michigan. Time from Detroit to Saginaw 10 Hours

OFFICE, NEXT DOOR TO R. R. HOTEL, DETROIT.

Just as in the old Wild West of the movies, early Michigan settlers depended on a stage coach to carry mail and passengers from one place to another.

LOOKING BACK

As there is an interval of over 100 years between today and the events that have been recorded in this little history, it may be interesting to compare or contrast some of those with the Okemos of today.

For instance, the schools: the two-room white frame school and the nearby elementary "little school" are a far cry from today's four modern elementary buildings, the high school, and middle school. In 1979 there were 3,356 students and 182 teachers, whose salaries range from \$11,300 to \$23,100. In 1851, Sarah Chatterton writes in a letter to a friend that she is getting ten shillings a week!

In 1979 there was not only a large administrative staff, but 40 secretaries, 34 custodians, 15 bus drivers and a hot lunch program employing 22 people. A far cry from the lunch pail!!

* * *

The present extracurricular activities include strong departments of voice, band and orchestra; sports include tennis, skiing, swimming, field and track, basketball, baseball, football, and wrestling. A popular community feature relating to but not a part of the school is the OAKS athletic program, with over 1,200 children involved each year. These activities require baseball fields, tennis courts, football fields, swimming

pools, auditoriums, gymnasiums--all unthought of by the boys and girls playing on some small patch of ground or in an adjoining field, with some brave youngster assigned to retrieve the ball that went out of bounds in a neighbor's garden!

* * *

Back then, lunches were carried in little round tin lard pails; the common dipper hung by the water pail, and there were outdoor facilities, one for boys and one for girls. No strict health regulations then!

The dirt roads, dusty in summer, deep with mud in the spring, or drifted high with snow in winter now are covered with hard surfaces. Then, light wagons and winter sleighs were a fine means of transportation--otherwise one walked or rode a horse. Today, there is plenty of horseback riding, but for pleasure in an arena or corral--as the automobile, now a necessity, has the right-of-way on the road. In this particular year of 1980, a nationwide gasoline shortage has given the bicycle a place in transportation.

* * *

Almost unbelievable is the change in business places: take a look at the accompanying map of 1874 and compare it with today's businesses. Gone are the saw mills, grist mill, the rake handle factory and the cheese factory. And whoever needed a park back then?? Plenty of empty spaces everywhere.

The Okemos pioneer might have seen some use for one of today's banks (had he money to put in one); he certainly needed a blacksmith. But what on earth, he might have thought, is a gas station? A shopping mall? Surely he could get all his needs at Walker's store: sugar, coffee, tea, yard goods, hardware, tin ware and crocks.

Pizza, hot dogs, hamburgers--what, he might ask, are they? Travelers could stay at the Barnes House or Union Hotel; otherwise folks ate at home, but did without oranges or ice cream. Lettuce in the winter? Food in cans? Unheard of. Dried apples, pumpkin, berries, meat salted in brine, so good in the wintertime with maple sugar--or that ultimate of luxuries, white sugar.

As for dress shops, didn't every girl learn to sew? Shoe stores? Mr. Phillips made shoes to order. And as for an electrical appliance store, the beginnings of Okemos were still the time of kerosene lamps, new and prized even if the chimney did get smoked up every night. Housewives thought the reflector oven baked bread nicely. And then there were the new-fangled iron stoves to replace the fireplace for cooking and warming the house.

* * *

Undreamed of were air conditioners, smoke alarms, refrigerators, electric blankets, and burglar alarms. The latch string was pulled in at night and the

kids slept in the loft, sometimes with snow on the comforters in the morning if the family lived in the old log cabin. But most folks lived in frame houses, once siding became available in the early 1850's! The settler cut his logs and hauled them to the mill to be planed.

Look in vain on the early map for a movie house, and wonder at the lack of phones, radios, or our wonder of wonders TV! Entertainment was mostly homemade, with special treats being a lecture series, or a geography class where a traveler would tell of far-away places or important issues facing the President and Congress. People in Okemos were lucky to be so close to the state capitol and frequently went there to learn first-hand what our State of Michigan was doing. Election day was almost a holiday--for the voting menfolk, at least. (Those Bloomer girls were talking about women voting, of all things: but the women did put on good election day meals.)

* * *

In 1860, a burning question was being faced. Should religious societies be allowed to hold Sunday School and preach services in the school building? A record of the school board dated December 3, 1860, is quoted:

"Certain persons have deemed it Proper, Prudent and necessary that the said school house should be closed to religious meetings, lectures, Singing Schools and Debating Schools."

Then it goes on to say, "We, as good Peaceable, quiet, morally inoffensive and Religiously inclined citizens, as yet too Poor to build churches or Halls calculated to elevate the Minds, Morals, or Social qualities of this community, therefore, Resolve that this school house shall be open for such purposes and that such shall not interfere with the school program except for funeral occasions, signed, Sanford Marsh, moderator."

After a time the community saw two churches built, and the early Okemos youngster could go to Sunday School with the Baptists or the Methodists. Now, of course, a family can worship with any one of a number of denominations and will find the former Methodist church incorporated as an interdenominational body under the name of the Okemos Community Church.

* * *

So, from the vantage point of today we look back a hundred years or more to imagine how the pioneers lived and how they might see us. And what of 100 years from now, how will we look to future inhabitants of Okemos? We leave it to your imaginations to guess, and only hope that this little excursion into the past will provide one small stepping stone to the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Biebesheimer Stillman was born at the turn of the century in a farmhouse off Hagadorn Road: A 12-story MSU dormitory stands there now. Off to learn her ABC's, the small girl walked up the road to Marble School, then a part of Meridian Township. But there were too few children to keep Marble open long--Ruth remembers having, at most, eight schoolmates. She was sent into East Lansing to finish the first part of her education and went on to graduate from what was then Michigan Agricultural College. In 1923 she married Ralph Stillman and moved to the Stillman farm on Dobie Road, where she has lived ever since. Mr. Stillman's great grandfather, Daniel Stillman, had established the farm in 1841, and Mrs. Stillman attributes her interest in history to the many tales of early Okemos she heard from her husband's family.

Among those assisting in the publication of this booklet have been:

(1956 edition) Mrs. Donald Marshall, chairman, Committee on Okemos History, and Mrs. Clarence Vinge, president of the Friends.

(1972 edition) Miss Jessie Turner, Mrs. Julius Hanslovsky, Mrs. Hoyt Coe Reed, Mrs. Charles Lemow, Mrs. Adrian Jaffee, and Lois Heerdt, president of the Friends.

(1980 edition) Elaine Davis (for the Friends of Historic Meridian), Denise Elliott, Elizabeth Halsted, Betty Gingas, and Barb Brown, president of the Friends.

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CHIEF OKEMOS. This is said to be the only photograph ever taken of the old chief, made, it is said, for the promise of a pair of shoes and taken the year before he died.