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The Yankee West

COMMUNITY LIFE ON THE MICHIGAN FRONTIER

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a temporary distortion of normal business relations. A man of the future, the editor had a short historical memory. Still, he recognized the magnitude of the change: the settlers were no longer suspended between two economic worlds.⁵⁸

By the early 1850s, too, the sustained interaction between Yankee settlers and Indians in western Michigan was drawing to a close. The flow of white settlement had resumed, and the countryside in which the Indians hunted was being carved into fenced farmsteads. A few weeks after his pronouncement on the improved climate for business in Kalamazoo, the editor of the *Gazette* commented inadvertently on what the change would mean for the Indians who had played such a large role in the dicker traffic. Great quantities of venison were available for sale that winter. One man reported that he had killed sixty deer in a little over a month. This crucial element in the Indians' economy had been under assault for some years. In the 1840s, for example, a glove factory operating near the Slater Mission was supplied by settlers who ruthlessly killed deer for their hides and abandoned the carcasses. But the editor did not remark on the passage of a way of life; he mourned for the deer. "Such wholesale slaughter," he intoned, "must soon depopulate our forest of this noble animal."⁵⁹

Faced with such pressures, the Indians finally abandoned the Kalamazoo and Grand River valleys. The Old Wing Mission had already moved north to Grand Traverse Bay in 1848; the Slater Mission closed in 1852. Three years later, the federal government set aside a tract of land considerably north of the valley for the Grand River Ottawa, allocating in anticipation of the Dawes Act eighty-acre parcels for heads of household and forty-acre portions for individuals. The emigration of the Ottawa began in 1857.

The order of white settlement, economic circumstances, the vagaries of federal Indian policy, and mutually congruent if ultimately dissimilar understandings of the value of economic exchanges had kept native peoples and Yankee settlers in close contact for a generation. The Ottawa had managed to avoid removal west of the Mississippi, to postpone any relocation for nearly thirty years, and to give the lie to the proposition that, at least under certain circumstances, white and Indian societies were incompatible. As for the Yankee settlers, the interaction had clearly been beneficial. They could afford to wax nostalgic in their reminiscences. The continuing presence of Indians in western Michigan had subsidized white settlement. In the meantime, the settlers would implement their own conception of familial relations in the townships, predicated not on local exchange but on family farming.

Spoiling the Whole

FAMILIES AND FARMING

The Barretts of Richland Township

In 1831, Hildah Barrett and his family left the state of New York for Michigan Territory and settled in Jackson, the second county to the east of Kalamazoo.¹ In 1833, Barrett bought twenty acres of land in section 28 of Richland Township from a settler. When he brought his family to the tract the following year, he was fifty years old and his second wife, Elizabeth, was thirty. His three children by his first wife ranged in age from Merritt, who was twenty-two, to fifteen-year-old Marvin. The middle child appears in the township record only as a member of his father's household in 1841. After her marriage to Hildah, Elizabeth Barrett had borne at least three children in less than five years: Eliza, John M., Wright L., and possibly another. Seven years separated Marvin and his half-sister, Eliza, born in 1838. The youngest child, Wright L., was four years old when the Barretts settled in Richland.

As sparse as these details of the family are, they make clear that the purchase of land in section 28 capped a period of considerable displacement for the Barretts. In less than a decade, Hildah had acquired a new wife