

The Yankee **west**

COMMUNITY LIFE ON THE MICHIGAN FRONTIER



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tomi that "he would report them
ld receive no more presents from
ied the Potawatomi with the loss
ed by treaty.¹⁴

ns. The first is that the settlers'
ng, and the former were, in their
tlers were accustomed to paying
ly if it could be proved before a
roken into a well-fenced field.¹⁵

ogs on the settlers' hogs because
enced fields, and they may have
mpensate not only for the dead

Eldred, however, did not recog-
ims. If the Indians did not fence
deserved the damage, and in any
not own. No right of preemption
re squatting on federal land soon
Eldred saw no need to arbitrate
ni. He simply summoned the au-

ssions in western Michigan coin-
ssive land boom of the 1830s. As
made their first cession of land in
had considered how white settlers
egion. The treaty authorized the
n west from Detroit, skirting the
tlers, who had arrived at Detroit
wagons west along the road. Ap-
uth, they occupied in succession
lleys and entered the Grand River

ts twin goals quieting Indian land
the Ottawa from western Michigan
successful in the first objective but
to a brutal, military-style roundup
d to escape deportation. Only 600
in Michigan in 1837 were forcibly
f the rest, a small band of Catholic
exemption from removal under the
which a number later returned, or

moved north to live among the Ottawa, with whom they were already inter-
married. As for the Ottawa, they were assigned five tracts on which they
were to live for five years, pending removal. The Grand River Ottawa were
expected to relocate to a reserve near present-day Manistee. Few actually did
so, and there the matter rested for twenty years, the federal government
being unwilling either to prosecute its program of removal or to assign
permanent lands to the Ottawa.¹⁷

The federal government's plan to remove the Ottawa failed for a number
of reasons. In the first place, the panic of 1837-39 and the ensuing depres-
sion effectively curtailed federal land buying and reduced white settlement
to a trickle until well into the 1840s. The federal government, therefore, was
under little pressure from newly arrived migrants to decide the fate of the
Ottawa. Even in the area between the Kalamazoo and Grand Rivers, the
lands last occupied by white settlers before the panic, much of the federal
domain remained unpurchased, allowing Yankees and the Ottawa to coexist
for a number of years. Under the terms of the 1836 treaty, the Indians were
permitted to continue hunting and planting on lands not taken up by white
settlers.¹⁸

Moreover, decentralized Ottawa political organization frustrated the at-
tempts of federal negotiators to achieve agreement among the Indians on a
new location outside Michigan. The two divisions of the Ottawa, the Grand
River and the L'Arbre Croche, disagreed frequently with each other. They
were in accord only in their determination to avoid removal. Within each
division, the Ottawa lived in small, autonomous bands that seemed to white
settlers to pose little threat. Finally, the Ottawa themselves worked aggres-
sively to demonstrate their ability to live among Anglo-Americans. To this
end, they sought white allies not only among the Indian traders, who were
deeply interested in the Ottawa's annuity monies, but also among the Yan-
kee settlers.

As evangelical Protestants, many of the settlers saw assisting the Ottawa
as an exercise in benevolence, as a way of encouraging the Indians on the
path to "civilization." The Ottawa understood well the real and symbolic
value of land in fee simple in their resistance to removal. Although wards of
the federal government, as landowners, and thereby state and local taxpay-
ers, they demonstrated their adaptation to Anglo-American ways. Hence,
they enlisted the settlers' help in purchasing land with their annuity monies.
All three of the Ottawa's permanent bases between the Kalamazoo and the
Grand Rivers after the treaty of 1836 were Protestant missions, and all three
resulted from Ottawa purchases of federal land with the assistance of white
allies: the Episcopalian Griswold Mission in Allegan County, the Congrega-

tional Old Wing Colony near present-day Holland, and the Baptist Slater Mission, whose inhabitants did business in Mumford Eldred Jr.'s store and appeared before the Richland justice of the peace court.¹⁹

Despite the settlers' support of the Ottawa's efforts to avoid removal, however, Yankee and Indian views of the role of the missions differed. Yankees saw the missions as an opportunity for the Ottawa to obtain the rudiments of white civilization: Protestant Christianity, reading and writing in English, male techniques of settled agriculture, and female domestic skills. The Reverend George N. Smith proudly concluded when the Ottawa band at Old Wing bid successfully on a county road contract that the band was striving to act like a "company of white men."²⁰ But the Ottawa were far less interested in becoming like a company of white men than in learning to live as Indians in the midst of white settlement. For them, the missions were less cradles of civilization than bases from which to pursue a seasonally migratory economy.

The Indian economy of western Michigan combined horticulture—the cultivation of corn, beans, and squash—with hunting, fishing, and collecting wild plant foods. Villages attained their largest populations during the planting and harvesting seasons, then split up for winter hunting, followed by visits to maple groves for sugar making, to rapids for spring fish runs, and to trading posts. Contact with whites, beginning in western Michigan in the latter half of the eighteenth century, introduced new technology, such as guns and traps, and new domestic plants and animals but did not fundamentally alter the subsistence economy. The Ottawa, for example, acquired seeds from the French for apple and peach orchards, and the Grand River valley became a provisioning ground for traders and military personnel at the Mackinac Straits.²¹ The record of the Ottawa at Old Wing shows the continuing adaptation of white ways to the seasonally migratory economy. The Indians may have owned private property, with fenced fields worked by oxen and plows, but they refused to live on their farms year-round. The missionary Smith's efforts to preach and teach were regularly interrupted when the band left Old Wing to hunt, fish, gather cranberries, or carry their harvest to Kalamazoo, Saint Joseph, or Chicago to exchange it for such Anglo-American provisions as white flour.²²

Thus, the Ottawa clung stubbornly to a way of life that in the eyes of their white allies marked them as uncivilized. It is therefore deeply ironic that the Indians' seasonally migratory economy complemented and, indeed, supported the settlers' frontier economy. The settlers lived in a world in which long-distance trade was tenuous, and local exchanges were transacted with little cash. To survive, they were forced to adapt to a complex, multifaceted

trade in which the Potawatomi and adept. First, in the absence of a mo poled their produce down the Sain for transshipment around the lake trade, they followed the course of t Michigan since 1806, when the pre fur gathering. The American Fur intensified the fur trade in 1821 by posts as far south as the Kalamazoo settlement advanced into western M Company had nearly passed. In company; two years later, the Grand the outfit, Rix Robinson, receiving ington, which he had helped to ne

The fur trade continued into t skins such as muskrat, deer, and ra tive private individuals formerly co As the travels of the Ottawa band were not the Indians' only mercha trade. Barrels of cranberries and h Lake Michigan ports at the mout Grand Rivers. Maple sugar, cons York, was "packed in 'mokirks' (or boxes . . . weighing from one t often elaborately decorated by sc also a small trade in beaded mocc

Yankee merchants entered rea maple sugar and into competition only with Indians. Disgruntled, monopolize their clientele by stc white customers.²⁵ Yankee merch Indians themselves were uninterc modities soon took their place alo flatboats. Unlike many whites, n Indian customers could pay cash, is, of course, well known that directly to Indian traders, squan debts for goods.²⁶ But not all of t manner, as the case against Par peace court attests.²⁷

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 moved to Richland Township and settled in Jackson, the town. In 1833, Barrett bought twenty Township from a settler. When he bought the township, he was fifty years old and had three children by his first wife. His three children by his first wife were twenty-two, to fifteen-year-old Martha. His township record only as a member of her marriage to Hildah, Elizabeth Barrett, less than five years: Eliza, John M. Seven years separated Marvin and youngest child, Wright L., was for Richland.

As sparse as these details of the purchase of land in section 28 cap for the Barretts. In less than a decade