

**WHEN LANSING WAS “BIDDLE” CITY**  
**Town Lots at the Junction of the Two Rivers Sold at High Prices to Strangers.**

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Everyone in this city, it is likely, is more or less familiar with stories that have been current from time to time of frauds practiced in connection with the opening up and settlement of the lands of the great west. Not many, however, who have listened to or read such stories, are aware that there is in their own city's history as pretty a tale of deception as adorns the annals of any town or country. The pioneers of Lansing were familiar with the story, and from one of them, Hon. D.W. Buck, whose relatives were actors in the little comedy to be set down in the facts in the brief history of Biddle City were obtained.

In the winter of 1836 two young men traveled through the town of Lansing, Tompkins county, New York, selling to the farmers lots in Biddle City, which they represented as already well started in the new state, and which was located, they said at the junction of the Grand and Cedar rivers in Central Michigan. They told of the great forests surrounding the village that needed only to be removed to uncover the richest farming country in the world., and they assured the men of New York who had sons old enough to start for themselves that they need but to send the young men to Biddle City where fortunes in timber and fortunes in land found for all.

The Tompkins county farmers became greatly interested: meetings were held – many of them at the home of Daniel Buck, father of D.W. Buck and finally a stock company was formed out of which sixteen men were chosen to go west and make secure the purchase of the rest.

The long trip down was made in the usual way, down the canal, across Lake Huron and so to Detroit, but when the party reached Detroit, however, and inquired the way to Biddle City, no one was found who had heard of such a place. The rivers were known of course, but all the country through which they flowed it was said to be wilderness. Biddle City didn't exist.

Failing of any information at Detroit the party traveled to Pontiac. There was the same ignorance of Biddle City and the same story of the wilderness told. The men became discouraged: three or four abandoned their comrades and the search: they bought land in Pontiac and their descendants are there to this day.

The remainder of the travelers determined to push on, however, until the rivers on which their town was said to be built were found, so they hired guides and slowly made their way south and west into Clinton county, and finally when near where DeWitt now stands they found one settler named Scot, who gave them the first news they had obtained of the place they sought. He had heard of Biddle City vaguely but he told them that west of him there was a home of a settler named William Gilkey who lived near the place where the

Cedar empties into the Grand river and he could tell them all there was to tell about Biddle City. Starting once more they traveled to the log cabin of William Gilkey, who was the only settler in all the country round: he lived on what is now known as Stambaugh place, north of Lansing. He told them what they wished to know.

During the preceding winter, he said, two young men from their own state had stayed with him while on a hunting trip in Michigan. At his house they made their plans to have a town of their own; they platted the ground, staked the lots, named the streets and made ready to sell the town, so beautifully done on paper, to the people whom they expected to be interested at home.

Mr. Gilkey promised to show the purchasers of those lots the place they were in search of and he did so, taking them through the woods to the point where the R.E. Olds residence now stands, he pointed across the Cedar to where on the opposite side of the river the low land was lying under water, and he said:

“There gentlemen is Biddle City.”

The travelers had not even the satisfaction of feeling that the uncleared land was theirs, for they were told that the site of the city was a part of the princely tract owned by William H. Townsend of New York.

Mr. Gilkey endeavored to prove to them that they need not be cast down even if the town of their hopes had vanished.

“He told them that they saw the greatest country God ever made,” said Mr. Buck in telling the story. He said “land could be bought at ten shillings an acre: and the timber was of the finest quality in the world; in the end two of them were comforted: Joseph E North and Daniel Buck elected to invest their money since they had come west for that purpose. Each of the gentlemen bought large tracts of lands south of the city; that purchase by Mr. North being known as the ‘North settlement’ at the present time.

The hopes of the others of the party were too badly blighted to allow them to remain on the scene of their disappointment. A Mr. Atwood went to what is now Dansville, while Messrs. Townley, Ludlow and others went to Jackson county and the town of Parma and Tompkin Center bear record in their names that their founders did not forget the home from which they came.

At that time neither Jackson nor Ingham counties were divided into townships, and when the divisions were finally made the settlers named their township “Tompkins” after their home county as the men who elected to remain near Biddle City called theirs “Lansing,” which eventually gave the name to the city itself.

Biddle City, as platted by the hunters, extended from the junction of the two rivers beyond where the Hugh Lyons factory is now situated. The old Christiancy estate, now owned by Judge R.H. Person, was part of it and the deeds that passed with that place and others in that vicinity constituted almost the only record of that long vanished paper city.

After making the purchase of their lands Messrs Buck and North returned to New York: in 1839 the latter sold his eastern home and came west with his family, eight sons and two daughters. Mr. Buck did not return himself but sent his son Levi, two nephews, Able Miller and Peter Clark, and another young man, Monroe Packard. The tree settled upon the lands Mr. Buck had purchased, but Clark was a cabinet maker and could not resist the charms of the magnificent timber: he went to Ionia to settle and practice his trade and his grandchildren still live in that locality.

The immense tracts of land north and south of what is now the city of Lansing were owned by James and Horatio Seymour and William H. Townsend, and the names of Townsend and Seymour streets recall that fact to memory. But with the visit of the purchasers of lots in Biddle City ends the romance connected with the time, and the history of the location of the capitol and gradual setting up of the country round is familiar to all and needs not to be rehearsed.