

Journal's Pioneer Sketches
PERRY HENDERSON
Early Sheriff and Excellent Citizen
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PERRY HENDERSON

The subject of this sketch, whose portrait adorns the head of this column, has been a familiar figure in the affairs of Ingham county for more than half a century.

From 1845, the date of his settlement in the township of Leroy, Mr. Henderson has been prominently identified with the growth and development of the country. The resident taxpayers for the year 1844 is given as 32.

Ephraim Meach is credited with being the first white settler in the township, located on section 18 in the year 1837. The first office that Mr. Henderson was elected was that of township clerk, defeating Newton Muscott. Mr. Muscott was later elected to the state legislature.

Mr. Henderson was the first postmaster in the township, receiving his commission from President Martin Van Buren in 1848. His sons, Calvin and Henry, carried that mail on foot to and from the burg, Williamston. A weekly trip was made. The mail pouch furnished by Uncle Sam was too cumbersome for the boys to carry and a common grain sack was substituted. The supply of fresh reading, by having access to the printed mail matter of the neighborhood, was a real treat for the family and greatly appreciated. For the years 1850, 1851 and 1852 Mr. Henderson was supervisor for his township and he always made his journeys to the county seat on foot and for the most part through forests. He refers to the building of the plank road from Detroit to Lansing as "Ingham county's first great thoroughfare." He remembers distinctly how the news that the capital had been located at Lansing first reached Leroy. John Longyear, then a rising young attorney, came over from Lansing to try a "hog suit" before Justice Dana.¹ (Oren Dana, Justice of the Peace). Court was held in the Dana schoolhouse. Longyear made the fact known and it was an occasion of great rejoicing. Mr. Henderson recalls as one of the early social factors of his neighborhood a singing school taught by himself, when O.B. Williams (after whose family the village of Williamston was named) and Levi Rowley were among those who occupied front benches in the old log schoolhouse located in Locke, where the singing school was held.

In 1855 Mr. Henderson was elected sheriff of the county and removed his family to mason, where he has since resided. He soon after built the Phoenix, better known as Mead's mill. The mill is one of the city's landmarks. It is still standing on the banks of Sycamore and "grinding for toll." From the first flour turned out bread was made at Isaac Horton's. Mr. Horton being at the time the proprietor of the old hotel standing where the first state and savings bank is located. The event was the occasion for a jubilee. O.M. Barnes, then prosecuting attorney, was the orator, and while Mr. Henderson does not

recall the words of the speaker, he feels warranted in saying that Mr. Barnes spoke hopefully of the enterprise and pronounced the bread equal in quality to the best his mother made.

Later, Mr. Henderson served several years as supervisor of the township of Vevay, while Mason was yet a village and included in the precinct. In 1880 he was elected mayor of the city. For several years he was engaged in the hardware business with satisfactory results.

Always active in public affairs, he has left his impress, contributing liberally of his time and ability helping to blaze the way for a better and a higher civilization. Few have done more. Many have done less.

In youth, while yet in his native state of New York, he married Miss Huldah Christian, who for sixty four years shared with him the joys and sorrow of life. She died April 6, 1900. Eight children were born to them. Five grew to man and womanhood. Three are still living, a comfort to his declining years. The only daughter, Kate, who never left the parental roof, is the home keeper. His son, Judge Henry P. Henderson of Utah, has won himself an enviable reputation as a jurist and ranks among the foremost attorneys in the country.

In politics, Mr. Henderson has always been a Democrat of the Andrew Jackson stamp. His church relations are with the Baptist society, of which he has been an honored member for many years. His 86th anniversary occurred October 9, 1901. Possessed of a remarkable robust constitution, he has kept pace with the march of progress, and in touch with the spirit of the age years beyond that of most men, having but, recently relinquished his hold upon public affairs. In the possession of a comfortable competence, surrounded by life long friends, enjoying the confidence and esteem of all, and in the consciousness of work well done, he finds himself at peace with the world and in enjoyment of good hope of the life beyond.²

¹ Oren Dana, Justice of the Peace.

² Mr. Perry Henderson died in February 1904.