

PIONEERING

By D.B. Moon

The first log house my father's family occupied after landing in the wild woods of Michigan the year of 1854 they lived in until a new one was built. In 1861 the new house was started, and was finished and our family moved into it the year of 1861. The new house was built of logs same as the old one but larger.

Soon after we had moved into the new house, (Mother and eight children; Father had joined the Union Army.) there was a hard wind and rainstorm, a regular hurricane, and we thought our new house was doomed; but for all it shook, and trembled it stood the storm.

We had a fine young orchard that was loaded with apples, and peaches nearly ripe, and about all were blown off, and the fruit trees nearly wrecked. We also had a fine sugar bush of about 500 large sugar-maple trees, and about every tree was blown down. Some of the trees were twisted off by the wind as though they were small reed. After that storm, the land was cleared, the trees were cut into wood, and lots of it was logged up and burned.

Note, that new log house that an old time pioneer mother and her eight children moved into the year of 1862 is still about 1 and 1-2 miles South of Delta Center, Eaton County. It is owned by Wayne Lamerson, who lives there with his mother at the present time; Lamerson was one of the employees of F. N. Arbaugh store selling drygoods, a few years ago.

After my mother and her brood of children had moved into the house the fall of 1862, until I left home to learn the trade of carpenter all kinds of things, and events happened, and the main one was the Civil War: and now I am going to tell what we young Americans did to help win the war.

Paid to Enlist

Civil war days were trying times for everyone; and though I was but a young lad, I can still remember how excited the men and women were and also us youngsters; and in 1863 when Lincoln made a call for 300,000 more recruits, they were war meetings in

every school house around the country; at that time there was money raised (I believe by taxation) and new recruits were paid \$800.00 to \$1200.00.

During the Civil War I made a cannon. The barrel was about a foot long made from an oldtime rifle barrel that a blacksmith gave me, I made a two wheel cart and mounted the barrel on the cart, and when we boys could get the gunpowder we kept it hot.

That same cannon can be seen any day at my home, mounted on a pedestal in my back yard, the same old ramrod, hand made of hickory is in the barrel, and a piece of the iron chain that was used to draw it, is there still, and cut into the wood by an old time jackknife. That cannon is one of my most prized keepsakes, and every time I pass it, I can almost hear it say “Let’s Go”!

In 1863 when a war meeting was being held at a school house one mile north of Delta Center, Eaton County we youngsters drew the cannon 2 and 1-2 miles to the meeting and there in front of the school house a bunch of us young Americans kept the cannon hot until past midnight. Talk about patriots, we youngsters were the real article; boys today don’t know what real fun is, I see them many times, trying to amuse themselves by bouncing a ball against the side of a house, pitching marbles, and pennies for keeps the kind of amusement that’s learning them to gamble, while in the time of the Civil War, boys wanted excitement; and besides we never had any pennies to pitch and if I had every played marbles for keeps, Mother would have spanked me, and sent me to bed supperless.

The year of 1864 Abraham Lincoln was murdered, and when the sad news came by telegraph to Lansing, the telegraph office was run by Alfred Beamer, and my brother Andrew Moon chanced to be alone in the office with Beamer when the news came, (There were no telephones) Beamer turned to Andrew and said “Lincoln has been assassinated,” and my brother was the second person in Lansing to hear of Lincoln’s death.

Celebrating the 4th of July

During the summer of 1864 four of us young Michiganders celebrated the 4th of July in the good old time way. The city of Lansing at that time was just a spot on the map. Everyone that lived in the country was poor in cash but in ambition, good health

and honor they were rich indeed; I was living on the farm with Mother and my older brothers; it was seldom that I ever saw any money, and never had any of my own as boys do these days, but by saving every penny I could get my hands on during the forepart of the summer, I managed to have fifty cents to celebrate the fourth, and fifty cents was a lot of money for a youngster to have in those days.

The night of the July 3rd, four of us country lads slept in a barn on the hay mow and were up at one a.m. July 4th and started the celebration with the cannon that was used during the war meeting, we had plenty of gun powder, and to start things going, fired about a dozen shots in front of my home which brought Mother out and she told us to scamper away from there. Then we drew the cannon 1 and ½ miles to a blacksmith shop on Delta Center, Eaton County. The owner of the shop (Gill Quishman) had told us we could use the forge to heat an iron rod to touch off the loaded cannon, as we had no fuses and it was primed with powder. We kept the cannon hot by constant firing until daylight, then back home ate some breakfast, then footed it over the rough roads barefooted eight miles to Lansing. And there we kept busy all day; at noon we were a hungry lot of kids; and we had very little money but we had a grand feast just the same.

At that time a brother, (or cousin) of Ex-Governor Bagley kept a grocery just south of where the American State Savings Bank now stands and four hungry boys stood around a barrel (for a table) and ate crackers and cheese, with a glass of lemonade to wash it down. And Bagley charged us 15c for the four meals; and there were not waiter top tip. After dinner we commenced to look for new worlds to conquer; Fred Trostle, one of Lansing's merchants, kept a fun shop nearly opposite from where the Gladmer Theatre is, and we headed for his shop; Trostle sold us powder and gun caps and loaned us an old muzzle loading pistol. To load it you turned in a charge of powder, and then plenty of paper, or rags, well pounded down, then a cap, and Bang! And we kept it hot most of the afternoon. Then before I realized what I had done, I shot a hold through a strange boys pants leg, and presto!—I had a fight on my hands. But the boys saw me through, and no one was hurt much. And after that glorious celebration we walked eight miles back home after dark. My fifty cents was all spent, and all I had to show for it was a lead pencil, a bunch of firecrackers, and a lemon. Imagine boys walking 16 miles over rough country

roads besides the energy spent in the city, and eating one meal of crackers and cheese just to celebrate the Fourth!

(The) woods were full of wild game of many kinds. The swamps were alive with muskrats, otters, beavers, ducks, geese, snakes, and mosquitoes; and in the woods there were plenty of wolves, bears, deer, turkeys, coons, squirrels, partridge, porcupines, gophers, skunks, and even wildcats.

The most remarkable thing was that when these families moved their goods out into the woods there were no houses on their farms to move into.

What Did They Do?

The farm bought by Sands Moon had a clearing of about an acre on it. The trees had been cut down and partly burned up and a small log house had been started by the recent owner. The side walls were built of logs, but there was no roof built; just the outside walls, not even openings for door and windows. But that didn't dampen the ambition of the men and their pioneer wives, not a bit; they found a way. On an adjoining piece of land there was a vacant log house about 16x20 feet in size. It had one room with two glassless windows, one door, a stone fireplace in one end of the room, and a low chamber above, with a ladder to get to it.

The three families moved into that log hut and started to keep house. (Just give that a thought.) Twenty-nine human beings, 6 grown people and twenty-three children, the oldest a boy 17 years old (Andrew W. Moon. It was the good luck of the writer of this article to be the youngest (a baby).



My father was what was known as a Pennsylvania Dutchman, and his brightest guiding star (when a young man) was a blond, blue-eyed Scotch lass by the name of Mary Wiltse, whom he married in 1835, and took to Cattaraugus County, New York to live until they came to Michigan in 1854; on the new farm the family lived and flourished.

In 1862 my father enlisted in the Union Army at the time of the Civil war and died in 1864. His widow wanted all her boys to be with her on the farm. (But I rebelled.) On that farm I had grown from a baby to a lad of 16; then I was convinced that my education was about complete of the wild woods and one day when an older brother and I were hoeing corn in a field by the side of a swamp, I said to him, "Mart, I'm done. I won't work another minute on this farm."

Liberty, or Bust

He tried to bluff me, but my mind was made up, and I wouldn't stand for any bluffs. With that old hoe I cut up two or three hills of corn, threw my hoe as far as I could into the swamp, said good-bye, and started I knew not where, but I was sure I was on my way, barefooted, a pair of old patched overalls, a cotton shirt, and a straw hat, and not a penny of money to my name.

I took a fee-line across lots to the main road and did not go to the house; I was afraid to see mother at that time as she was opposed to my leaving home. I walked about four miles, where there was a new house being built, got a job at \$15.00 a month and stuck for three summers (7 months each) with the same contractor and the same wages.

Those three summers of work were no 6 or 8 hour days of work, they were from sunrise 'till sundown, except for the time taken to eat meals. I made my home at mother's farm on Sundays and during the winters attended the country school.

And while I am attending the country school, I'll let my story rest and tell a few events that happened in those early days.

When I left home at 16 years, I got my first job working on a house that was being built on a farm owned by a family named Eicher. The farm is in Delta township, Eaton County, about four miles west of Lansing on St. Joseph. Eicher was a carpenter by trade; when the first brick building was built at the southwest corner of Washington and

Michigan Avenues, (where the J.C. Penney store is now) Eicher was employed there during the construction.

Scene of Tragedy

When the scaffolds were being taken down, he fell and was killed. His widow and children remained on the farm. One of her children was a fine little girl named Dora; that girl, Dora is living today not far from my home on South Logan street. (Mrs. Dora Bailey.)

The merchant we all know by the name of O.H. Bailey, doing business on west Ionia street, is her son. And I still remember how the little lad used to dig, grate, and peddle horseradish around the western part of Lansing to get the first real dollars to build the fine brick stores he is proud to do business in today. O.H. Bailey was not the kind of lad that drowned himself in booze, and wrecked cemeteries; he is self-made and has done a fine job. There were many of the same brand back in those days; they had the will-power, the ambition, and, as Teddy Roosevelt would say, “the guts to buck against the whole world, and win.”

Now I will go back to the time I was getting my education in the country school, that I have mentioned.

First Contract

After I had worked three seasons to learn the business of building, I was 19. By that time I had decided to be a building contractor, and the summer I was 20 years old, took the job to do all the carpenter work, to build and complete a large frame house for Henry E. Porter of Eaton County. I did all the carpenter work myself without any help, and it took me six months, from April to October, and I worked every day except Sunday during that time, from daylight ‘till dark, except for the time I took to eat. When the job was done I was paid in full for my six months work.

\$300.00, I had not spent a dollar; I had worked every day except Sunday and did not have any time to spend money. When did the country boy do with his \$300.00? In these times of leisure, and spending of money, the first thought would be an automobile, and time spent joy riding, or perhaps start a beer garden, and try to earn a lot of easy money, and there are many other things in this age that would soon absorb that hard earned cash.

But what I did was to buy what clothes I needed and then loan \$200.00 to a farmer at seven per cent interest; then I came to Lansing and bought a scholarship in H.P. Bartlet's commercial college, good for two winters of 5 months each. The country school was all the schooling I ever had, except two winters in Bartlet's College later, the winters of 1871 and 1872.

While attending the college I rented a room on the third floor of the Beck building (since burned, and rebuilt); the Louis Beck clothing store now. The room was at the rear of the third floor, and as there was no heat furnished, I bought an old cookstove, and wood from the country, heated the room a little morning and night, when I was not in school and cooking my own meals, (two each day) and there I lived for 5 months each winter from November 1st until April 1st. The room I furnished myself, with an old couch, a table of my own making, a chair, and a lamp that burned kerosene. The other things I were not china, cut glass, or silver plated, but just the same, I lived and flourished. There was no city water at that time, and the water I needed I drew from a well near by, by tying a pail on a rope and letting it down to the water. Many times the water in the pail would be frozen over with about an inch of solid ice; I never drank anything but cold water during the two winters of rooming there. (And I have never drunk tea at any time in my life.

About the time I was 16 years old, I read the story of how Abe Lincoln strived to get an education; I wanted a fair one myself and made up my mind if Lincoln could, I could. My mother and brothers were not wealthy, and could not help me. I could see it was up to me to do what I wanted and I never was sorry for doing what I did. That is the way the country boy worked to get what little education he had. I have always been a booklover and have more than 1,000 volumes of books in my home; I have read most of them.

There were many young men back 50 or 60 years ago, to show how many boys, deep in the wild woods of Michigan, did not have the chance in life, but struck out for themselves, while in this age they are pampered, and petted from the time they are born. The mothers will insist that Georgie never had the chance. Why in the name of common sense, didn't he go after the chance?

Many of the girls, and boys when they have graduated from our city schools cant write a readable letter or work an example in common fractions; they haven't learned the things that are really necessary. I know for I have a granddaughter that tells me her teacher gives her an example to take home at night and tells her to bring the answer to school the next day. Now ain't that a helluvway to teach a 12-year-old girl arithmetic?

When I was in school, I was required to go to the blackboard work out my example, take a teacher's pointer, and explain in detail to the rest of the class how and why I had done it. In that way the solution of an example was stamped on my mind in a way I never forgot. Perhaps minds were different back in the seventies. Who knows?