

## First-hand account

# Pioneer lumberman's dream brought A.A. Dwight to Otsego County

(Editor's Note: The following article features the reminiscences of early Michigan and its developments with a first-hand account of events written by Alfred A. Dwight, early Otsego County settler and first white man to go into business here. The article is reprinted from "Lumber and Forest History of the Northwest" published in 1898. The book is one of the most extensive ever written on early days of lumbering in this country. The accompanying photo of Mr. Dwight, the only known to be in existence, also was reprinted from the book. The Herald Times thanks William Granlund, noted local historian of Gaylord, for the use of the book and many other publications and photos that have contributed to this centennial issue.)

Few men have played a more conspicuous part in the development of the State of Michigan, in its general interests and particularly its lumber interests, than the venerable Alfred A. Dwight, who at the age of nearly eighty-three years, is still an honored resident of Detroit, and whose clear mind and unimpaired faculties are well calculated to give an insight into the early history of the lumber business of the State.

Mr. Dwight was a native of Thomson Windham County, Connecticut, where he was born March 27th, 1815. He was descended from Puritan stock, John Dwight the progenitor of the numerous Dwight family of the country having emigrated from England and settled in Dedham, Massachusetts in 1636.

Alfred at the age of fourteen years, entered the employ of a mercantile firm in Worcester, Mass., where he continued for six years, when the death of his father who had removed West in 1831, made it necessary for him to visit Detroit in the interest of his widowed mother and the five younger children of the family.

In a personal letter to the historian, Mr. Dwight says:

## On the cover...

**TESTING** the Gaylord cars in Feb. of 1912 was the fun feat of a lot of men.

**CHAMPIONS** — The Otsego Baseball team of 1914 was the Michigan State champion. Top row, left to right: Grover Gillen, Francho Grundel, Arthur Loos, all-time baseball great Ty Cobb of the Detroit Tigers, who was paid \$1,000 to play with the team, Frank Bowerman, Frankie Fuller, Theodore Goulait, Star Stason, Leonard Hell, Frank Owen and Daniel Reid (Chief Rooter). Bottom row: Herbert Schocker, John Cocash, Claude Stark, H. W. Owen, Business Manager, Edw. Killian, Henry 'Tom' Stevens, Manager, Eddie Lorenze, Francis Loranger, and Don Bell.

**THE GAYLORD BAND** in 1887 consisted of (from left to right) W.H.H. Cooper, banker; Will S. Carpenter, jeweler; S.S. Humphrey, sawmill; Orin B. Bolton, hardware; Charles Carpenter; R. R. Harding, livery; George W. Smith, jeweler; John M. Doodie, blacksmith; Elmer Hale, flour miller; Sam Sellins, farmer; D. K. Mitchell, merchant; Fremman Wills, livery; Forest Humphrey, repair shop; Carl Dodges, tailor; Elmer Carpenter; Myron Fuller, druggist; S. W. Buck, grocer; D. H. Hutchins, clerk; and Elmer Humphrey, wagon shop.

**WHEN THE SNOWS** thawed, logs had to be rolled to the sawmill in the Waters area.

**EARLY SETTLERS** homesteading in the Johannesburg area in a photo taken by A. W. Brown between 1884-1896.

"I landed from the old steamboat "Henry Clay" on the 30th of October, 1833, having been seven days on the trip from Buffalo to Detroit, the weather being extremely boisterous. I found a quaint old French city of about 3,000 inhabitants, without sidewalks, paving, sewerage or any of the like modern appliances of civilization. Its water system consisted of barrels drawn by French ponies, and the water delivered at dwellings at ten cents per barrel.

"The population embraced some very enterprising men, such as "Uncle Ben" Woodworth whose hotel and stage lines were the reliance of multitudes of new comers: Judge Cauniff, Commodore Oliver Newberry, whose steamers and sail vessels at a later day enabled him to command a practical monopoly of the carrying trade of the lakes for many years; William and Benjamin Brewster, Judge Shubarl Conant; Judge James Abbott, the Messrs. F. & C. H. Buhl, who were the leading fur dealers of the days when commercial intercourse with the native Indians gave the fur traffic an importance hardly equalled in any other department of business.

"At this time the territory was simply a wilderness of timber lands, with a few highways penetrating the interior from Detroit to certain objective points, and known as Military roads, having been constructed by the government for the general purpose of the more readily reaching such points as might be the object of attack in case of trouble with the Indians. These included one from Detroit to Port Huron and Port Gratiot; one from Detroit to Saginaw; and with twenty miles cut out from Detroit to Farmington the projected road to Grand River was abandoned in 1834, in consequence of a decision of the United States Supreme Court that the government was not authorized by the Constitution to build military roads in time of peace.

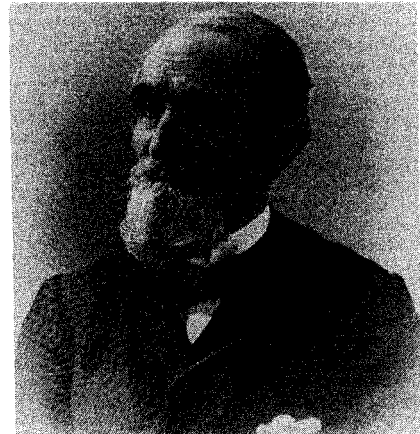
"The abandonment of this road was a great disappointment to such as had selected homes or projected villages on the surveyed line. It was to be to them what the Erie Canal was to the people of New York, a great thoroughfare to the vast region beyond, and of the highest importance to all who sought homes in Michigan or upon the prairies of the West.

"**THE VALUE OF** the vast forests which since that day have contributed more than one hundred and fifty billions of feet of the finest building material for the use of the nation was just beginning to dawn upon the capitalists in the East, and to a limited extent was appreciated by the settlers of Michigan, but without roads to reach them could be of little value to anyone. At best, these roads were but rough trails cut out of the forest, winding among stumps and through quagmires and marshes, but they would lead to a haven in which hope painted bright pictures of prosperity.

"Who can fathom the enterprise, the push and grit of the hardy settlers, who, in spite of obstacles pressed through the forest in which roads were denied them by the highest court in the land, and have transformed the wilderness and the prairie into a garden, teeming with the food products of a suffering world, while the village of Detroit has become a noble and beautiful city, and Michigan takes rank among the richest and most prosperous states of the Union.

"Who can adequately measure the struggle with poverty, the hardships and privations of the early settlers through which the great transformation has been accomplished, or the indomitable energy and perseverance of the people who never yielded to misfortune, although the wolf of hunger oft times laid at their doors.

"Denied the aid of the government, these hardy settlers opened highways, constructed ditches, laid out villages and organized townships, built schoolhouses and churches, cleared farms and organized govern-



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ments, and out of these incipient stages of pioneer experience, have raised up a great State, adorned with matchless cities, universities and colleges, and from its forests have sent billions of feet of lumber, and its millions of bushels of grain to house and feed the starving population of other nations while contributing to the abnormal development of the grandest nation upon which God's sun is permitted to shine."

**MR. DWIGHT** was from the earliest, one of the most active of the pioneers of the young State. He was essentially a "man of affairs," a pioneer whose active business enterprises have not been confined to any one city or county of the State. During his mercantile life in Detroit, the firm with which he was connected purchased and shipped one hundred thousand pounds of the first wool which was exported from the State, thus giving encouragement to the new settlers in the development of sheep raising.

They were among the earlier pioneers in the development of the lumber business of Huron county, the seat of the first commercial development of this vast industry, purchasing large tracts of timber lands, and constructing and operating saw mills; they were the inceptors of the industry at, and founded the flourishing village of Port Austin at which place they constructed the second gang mill in the State, at an expense (so great for that day) of \$50,000.

While for more than fifty years a citizen of Detroit, Mr. Dwight's enterprises have extended through the counties of Lapeer, St. Clair, Huron, Sanilac, Ingham, Mecosta, Otsego and other counties of the State. He, with his associates, was a pioneer in selecting and locating lands in Otsego County, and the first white settler to undertake a business in the development of that, then far northern wilderness, clearing up a farm of more than one hundred acres, laying out and constructing a State road from Torch Lake near Traverse Bay in Antrim County to Otsego Lake in Otsego County, to which he introduced the first of its settlers, and caused the organization for judicial purposes of the first three townships of the County, and subsequently, through his efforts, of the passage by the legislature in 1868-9 of an act incorporating the County, embodying in the Act provisions enabling him, with his business associates, to open up this vast region rich with timber, which was hitherto unapproachable, through the construction of thirty miles of slack water navigation in the North branch of the AuSable River, by the erection of dams for the creation of a water reserve for the flooding of logs, thus overcoming the shallow

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