

County celebrates 150th birthday

Early settlers face hardships

By KENNETH COIN

When generalizing about the early settlement of south central Michigan, it is usually a statement of fact that this area including Clinton County was predominately settled by "Yankees" hailing from New York State with strong ties to the more ancient settlements of New England.

This generalization in Clinton County is evident simply by looking at the known data of the majority of its early pioneers and more obviously by looking at the manner in which the county as well as many of its early settlements and townships were named.

Clinton and DeWitt both honor former New York Governor DeWitt Clinton whose grand plans for the Erie Canal and his persistence in seeing it become a reality allowed for an economic stability in Michigan territory which encouraged settlement.

Bath, Rochester Colony, New Albany, Watertown, Eagle, Olive, Essex, Victor, and Ovid all have earlier counterparts in New York State.

However, Clinton County is possibly unique among its neighbors with its large number of pioneers who did not fit this "Yankee" stereotype.

We have the large organized settlement of early Germans in Westphalia and Dallas, the many Irish families who nestled in among the Germans along the western edge of the county, the native Americans who did not yield to the pressures of the government but instead purchased their land in Lebanon, the dash of French who remained in Essex long after the decline of the fur trade, and the several British families scattered throughout the southern tier of townships.

All had a firm foothold in Clinton at the time it became a county in 1839. All contributed to the early development of the county just as all have descendants who continue to contribute to its progress.

Much has been said and written applauding the hardships and sacrifices these sturdy pioneers endured in carving a home for themselves and their families in the harsh wilderness of Clinton County in the 1830's.

Today, we reap the benefits of their accomplishments, but there are few among us who can actually appreciate at what cost to the pioneers this wilderness was tamed.

Many early pioneers came here with little else than a knapsack of dreams. Often they left with far less.

For those who stayed, a lucky few were able to fulfill their dreams. More often the fulfillment would

not come about until the second or third generation.

And, what price was paid by the pioneers?

Life, often their own or that of their spouse or children or two out of the three or all three. Medical attention was not to be had unless they could wait a few days or a week for a doctor.

Life, however precious to mortal minds, had to be entrusted to God and forfeited to Him without question or complaint.

Friendship and family ties had to be severed for the pioneer was leaving to go into a new dimension where there was little likelihood that they would ever again see those who remained back east.

The pioneer might anguish for that letter from home received by the post office in Clinton County, but what settler here could afford the required 25 cents postage due which was the custom in those days?

New friends could be made in this new land, but who could afford that luxury? There was always too much to do just to keep body and soul together on the homestead.

Basic necessities often were quick to become unobtainable or reclassified as luxuries. A single candle was cherished. A Riley woman in 1841 confided to her daughter in New York by letter that she would gladly sell her soul for some tea.

A walk to Pontiac or Ann Arbor for provisions was not uncommon. For the settler who had neither money nor credit for provision in Michigan, stories have been told of walking back to New York to procure money for the same from friends or relations.

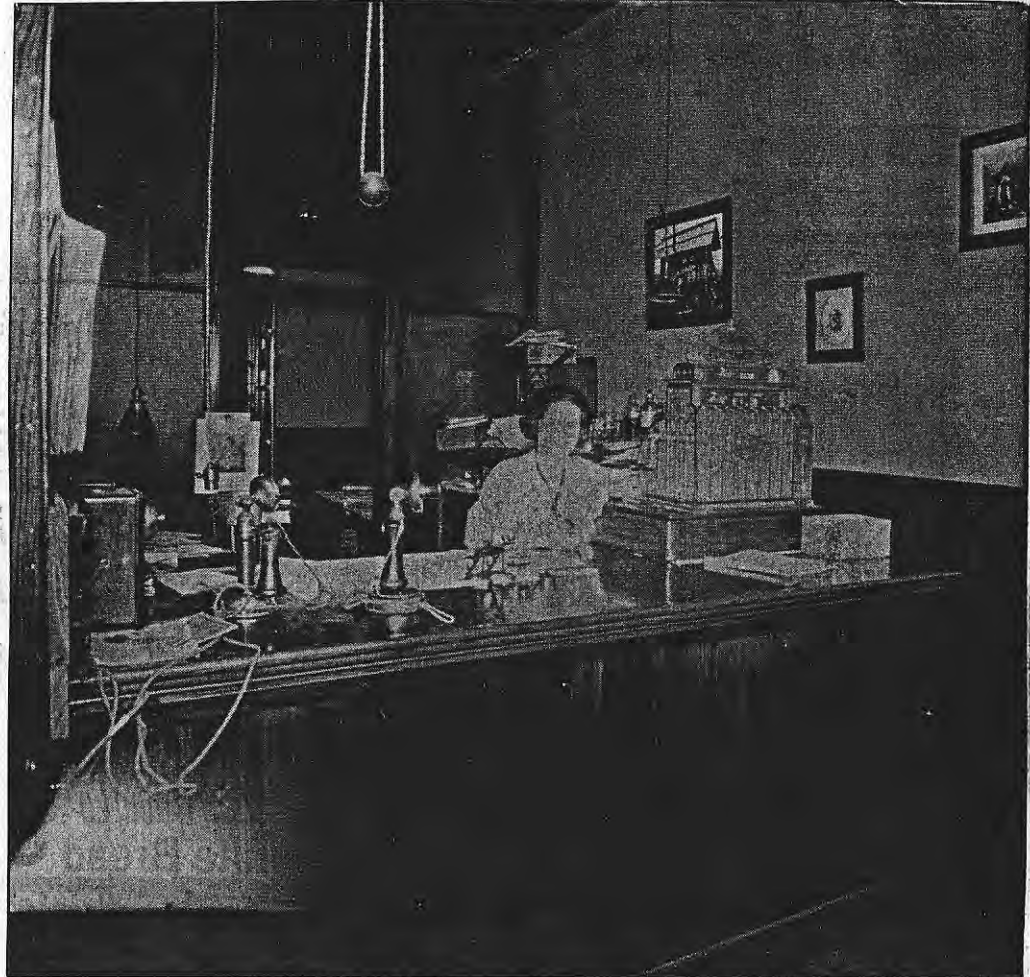
Labor, back-breaking, gut-wrenching, limb-tearing labor, uncomprehensible to most in our modern society, yet a fact of life to the pioneer continued from sunup to sundown, day after day with little end in sight.

Too many early Clinton County pioneer lives were truly lived on the razor's edge. Health and the earth were their greatest allies, but both without a moment's notice could easily become their mortal enemy.

But what were the rewards for those pioneers which endured and survived?

Several pioneers in later years, in retrospect, recorded that what they endured seemed even to them unendurable yet, somehow, the years of hardship were the best years of their lives.

Life was a more cherished blessing, their relationships with spouse and children, stronger; friendship and family, more precious; material wealth, less valuable; and the work, more purposeful and fulfilling.



NEWSPAPER OFFICE — This photograph of the Clinton County Republican news office, located on the corner of Walker and Spring Streets in St. Johns, was taken in 1921. Gladys Kelly Walker, office person and bookkeeper for the paper, is pictured at the desk. She donated the photograph to the museum.

Paine-Gillam-Scott Museum photograph

Celebrate Clinton County Sesqui

Capt. David Scott was early explorer, settler in DeWitt

Editor's Note: In celebration of the sesquicentennial of Clinton County, the Clinton County News in cooperation with the Clinton County Historical Society and Clinton County Archives will present weekly features about individuals and happenings in Clinton County from years ago.

Following is this week's feature, written by Ken Coin, about Captain David Scott.

By KEN COIN

Captain David Scott, the leader of the first permanent settlement in Clinton County, was born in Litchfield, Conn., on Nov. 1, 1779. According to information recorded by his sons the captain was orphaned at a young age and was forced to fend for himself. Aside from this, nothing has been learned of his early life.

He served in the 23rd regiment, U.S. Infantry during the War of 1812, and an interesting item that appears in his federal military record is a reprimand, apparently from using some of the men who served under him to work his farm during "off time." During the war he attained the rank of captain, an appellation he would retain the rest of his life. His contemporaries more often referred to him as "Capt. Scott," or simply "the Captain" than by his given name.

In the spring of 1833, Nathaniel Brown, Charles Thayer, Capt. Scott, with a surveyor named Stratton as a guide took an extensive trip on horseback through central Michigan, to view the government lands with the intention of locating some choice tracts for purchase. This party traveled north out of Ann Arbor into Shiawassee County, then west along the north bank of the Looking Glass River on the Indian trail that would soon become the Pontiac-Grand River Trail.

THEY PASSED through the Indian village of Wabwahnaseepsee (where DeWitt now stands) to the larger village of Shim-ne-con (near Portland). Here the party turned north and continued to the trading post at the mouth of the Maple River (now Lyons) then followed the Grand River to Ionia (which was settled by the Dexter party in May of 1833). Apparently the Captain failed to see any land which pleased him as well as that in the vicinity of Wabwahnaseepsee, because at Ionia he parted company with his companions and returned to the trading post of William Hunt at the mouth of the Maple River.

The Captain induced his friend Hunt to hire an Indian to guide them to the Indian village where the city of Okemos now stands. From there Scott followed

a trail to Jackson, and then to the government land office at White Pigeon near the Indiana border.

David Scott, Jr., recorded the following narrative regarding his father's journey from Jackson to White Pigeon.

"On his way down from Jackson to White Pigeon, he lost his way and stopped with some Indians all night. As they had been taking plenty of fire water they were very noisy and all but one old squaw were rather hostile towards him. She said a few words to them however, and they quieted down, and she spread a blanket for him and motioned him to lie down, which he did, but not much sleep did he get.

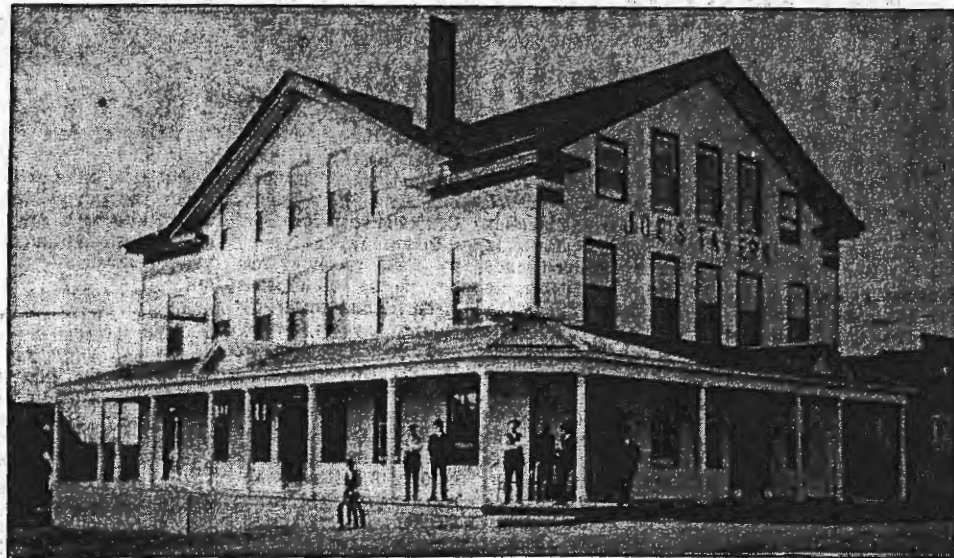
HE COULD NOT talk with the Indians and as soon as he could see in the morning he mounted his pony and started, and as he did not know where to find the trail leading to the settlement, he wandered about for some time. But finally he saw an Indian boy catching a pony and when he came up to him he said to the boy, 'Gemoça man wigwam.' He knew that meant 'white man's house.' The boy said 'Two shillings' which the Captain gave him. The boy then hopped on his pony and away they went.

Pretty soon the boy turned to one side and when he (Scott) got up to him the boy said, 'Two shillings.' The Captain gave him the amount asked again and on they went for a time, but soon the boy turned out and called for another two shillings, but as the Captain could see a rail fence not far in advance, the boy failed in his last demand and started quickly back for the Indian camp. Without further trouble, he (Scott) reached the land office at White Pigeon."

Captain Scott entered large tracts of land in Clinton County on May 14, 1833. Upon his return to his wife and family at Ann Arbor he concluded a journey of over four hundred miles.

On Oct. 4, 1833, the Scott party, consisting of the Captain, his wife Eunice, two of their youngest sons, and some hired men, arrived at the Indian village of Wabwahnaseepsee and began the laborious task involved in establishing a homestead so far in the wilderness.

THE CAPTAIN played a dominant role in the settlement of southern Clinton County and the development of the county as a whole. His initial log home, located on the Pontiac-Grand River Trail, soon became a well-known stopping over place for settlers coming into central Michigan. Many of these were induced at "Scott's" to stay and put down stakes in or near his settlement. He held many township and county offices and most early meetings of each group were held under his roof. He donated land to the county for an office building and jail, and DeWitt's



Photograph courtesy of Faye Hanson Public Library

THE CLINTON HOUSE was built in DeWitt by Capt. David Scott during 1841-1842. It was located on the southwest corner of Bridge and Main Streets.

first post office was located in his home for many years.

Following the death of his wife Eunice in 1840, he began parcelling out most of his large land holdings to his children. He platted the village of DeWitt in 1841, but much of the land was actually that of his youngest son Charles. During the same time he also began construction of a marvelous hotel, the famous Clinton House, but that too would soon be handed over to Charles.

On April 19, 1841, Captain Scott was married a second time, in Washtenaw County, to Mrs. Clarissa Stephens (or Stevens) of Lima. Some sources from the 1840s indicate that they lived in the Clinton House for a time, until it was sold out from under him in 1846.

A LETTER from the period reports: "Charles Scott has sold the Tavern to Milo Turner and the Captain is as mad as you ever see anything and swears that he will never leave the house till he is carried out." Following this, the Captain, Clarissa, and her daughter Helen, took up residence in his former hotel and store building on South Bridge Street. Here he remained until his death, May 7, 1851. He was buried in that portion of the DeWitt cemetery which had been the original Scott family burial ground.

In 1916, the Clinton County Pioneer Society placed a large boulder on which was affixed a bronze plaque which read, "Captain David Scott — Made First Permanent Settlement at DeWitt, Oct. 4, 1833. 1778-1851."



Photograph by Ken Coin

MARKER — The monument honoring Capt. David Scott was erected in DeWitt Cemetery by the Clinton County Pioneer Society in 1918.

County pioneer women endured hardships

By KEN COIN

Eunice Forbes was born on Jan. 14, 1780, in Shoreham, Vt. Accounts by her contemporaries and recent research have yielded nothing about her early life.

Even her adult life can only be examined by the circumstances which surrounded her and the hardships she endured.

In 1801, she was married to David Scott, presumably at Shoreham, for it was there that their eldest child was born in 1802.

It is not known if she shared her husband's passion for new frontiers but, nevertheless, early on their life together became one of migration.

They spent many years moving about the western portion of New York State until, in 1825, they brought their family to Ann Arbor in Michigan territory. They remained there until Sept. 28, 1833, when their last move took them to the yet unsettled Clinton County.

This party consisted of Eunice and Captain Scott, two of their sons, David and Charles, a hired man, four yoke of oxen, Brindle, Buck, Spot, and Speckle,

nine cows, young cattle, and one horse.

They also hired two additional men and wagons to assist in carrying needed supplies.

The party followed a newly cut road from Ann Arbor into Shiawassee County where it intersected the trail cut by the Dexter party several months earlier.

They brought a tent for sleeping as there were no inns along the six day journey.

On Oct. 4, they arrived at their destination, the Indian village of Wabwahnaessee on the Looking Glass River, now known as DeWitt.

Their temporary quarters in that village was an elm bark longhouse, about 15 foot square, constructed of sapplings bowed and tied at their tops and then covered with strips of elm bark.

There were bunks on two sides of the house and a fire pit in the center of the dirt floor. A hole in the middle of the roof sometimes allowed the smoke to exit.

Eunice was undoubtedly relieved, given these initial accommodations, that an immediate concern of the men was in building a more permanent home.

They had brought with them from Ann Arbor, two doors and several windows but, as the nearest

sawmill was at Pontiac or Ann Arbor, logs for the structure were felled on Oct. 5 and 6 and the flooring and shingles also had to be produced by hand.

By mid-November, the 20 to 25 feet square log house was completed and it was later recorded, "The occasion was one of great rejoicing."

All hardships considered, Eunice's life in the wilderness was probably more comfortable than many of the area's pioneer women. But her comfort, was amid isolation.

A doctor was a four day journey to and from Dexter, a preacher came only once a month, shopping was a week's trip to Pontiac, schooling was not available for her sons, Indians were her closest neighbors, and travelers her closest friends.

Eleven children are said to have been born to Eunice and Captain Scott but, to date, only six of them have been identified.

Three sons, Sylvester, David, and Charles came to their parents homestead in DeWitt, three daughters did not. Of the daughters, Susan (formerly mistaken as Ellen), the eldest child, married Col. Norman Perry in 1825 and immediately moved to Macomb County where they reared a large family.

Sarah (Sally) married a prosperous Ann Arbor miller and farmer, Rufus Knight. They had three children before dying on June 15, 1833, shortly before her parents move to Clinton County.

Another daughter, Lamira, also remained in Ann Arbor at the home of her brother-in-law, Rufus Knight, whom she eventually married in 1835. They had two children.

Although they did not make Clinton County their home, Rufus and Lamira (Scott) Knight did purchase property here, 200 acres in Olive and DeWitt Townships by 1842.

David Knight Rufus' son by Sarah Scott, came here to homestead his father's property in the early 1850's.

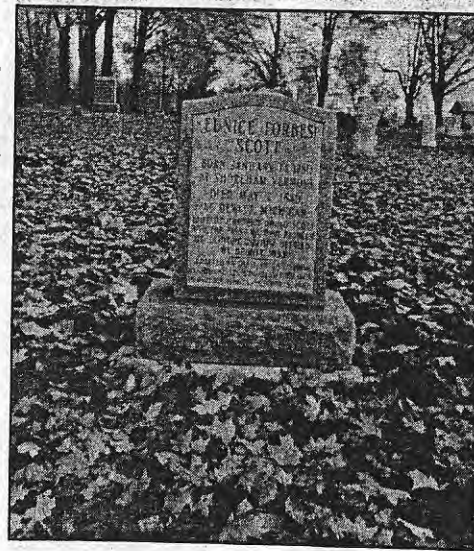
All of Eunice's three sons who came to Clinton County had moderately large families, but it is only the descendants of her grandson, David Knight, who remained in the county up to the present.

Eunice died at Scott's as DeWitt was then called, according to family sources of May 7, 1840, and was buried in the Scott family burial ground which later became the DeWitt Cemetery.

Her grave remained unmarked until 1983 when a monument was erected in her honor as an observance of DeWitt's sesquicentennial.

Besides the birth and death information it is inscribed: "Eunice (Forbes) Scott, wife of Captain David Scott and the First Woman Pioneer of Clinton County, settled at DeWitt, 1833."

It was erected by the Clinton County Historical Society, dedicated with her descendants, Oct. 8, 1983.



Courtesy photograph
EUNICE SCOTT — This monument to Eunice (Forbes) Scott was erected in the DeWitt Cemetery by the Clinton County Historical Society in 1983.

Celebrating 150 years

Clinton County Sesquicentennial

Sylvester Scott's life ends in tragic way

By KEN COIN

Sylvester Scott, Sr., the eldest known son of Capt. David and Eunice Scott, was born Aug. 29, 1806, in Genesee County, New York. He came to Michigan territory with his parents in 1825, settling in Ann Arbor where, in 1832, he married Sophronia Cooley.

Sylvester's first recorded visit to Clinton County was with his father in the summer of 1833. They

stayed for a time at the Indian village of Wab-wahnaseepee, investigating the surrounding countryside and possibly staking out the hundreds of acres which Capt. Scott had recently purchased from the government. Sylvester also purchased land here, 200 acres adjoining his father's land on the west.

They returned to Ann Arbor to make preparations for the family's move during the coming fall. Sylvester and Sophronia did not accompany the

parents to Clinton County that fall, however. The reason why was not recorded, but Sylvester did come along to his parent's settlement the following spring (1834) and remained until the fall of that year when he returned to Ann Arbor.

After packing up their belongings, the young Scott family, now including a young son of only three months (George W. Scott, born July 7, 1834), made the trek into Clinton County to establish a new home

alongside his parents.

Although the DeWitt area was not the dense forest that existed further west in Riley and Watertown, open pasture was a rarity and the cattle and oxen were turned out daily to graze where they could find food. The animals soon discovered that their range was boundless.

On one occasion the oxen wandered off to the west and Sylvester and his father's hired man set out after them on foot. They followed the tracks to the western edge of Clinton County where they crossed to the north side of the Looking Glass River. From there they proceeded to a point about four miles southwest from Shim-ne-con (near Portland) where they crossed the Grand River.

At this point, the men entered the Indian village and hired an Indian to continue the pursuit with Sylvester in order that the hired man could return to the Scott settlement. Sylvester and the Indian picked up the tracks and continued their search southward to the Thornapple River in Eaton County, then turned east and followed to a point a few miles southwest of the mouth of the Red Cedar River (now Lansing). There they finally succeeded in overtaking the oxen and began herding them back to Scotts.

During the six-day search, the men had to sleep on the ground and live on a diet of bread and raw pork.

In 1837, Hiram Wilcox erected the first sawmill in Clinton County on a piece of land in New Albany (a platted village directly south of present day DeWitt). It was completed and in working order by the spring of 1838. On a Sunday afternoon of that spring, a group of settlers assembled at Capt. Scott's home and it was decided to take a tour of the new mill.

Sylvester Scott was examining the construction and machinery when someone in the party, unaware of this fact, turned open the water gate which set the machinery in motion, instantly killing Scott.

Oral tradition, persistent in DeWitt, maintains that Sylvester Scott was decapitated by the action of the saw, and further, that it was his youngest brother, David, who unknowingly threw open the switch causing the regrettable incident which would plague him with guilt the rest of his life.

He left to mourn his loss, two small sons and a young wife, pregnant with their third child, a boy who would be named Sylvester for his late father.

His funeral was the first recorded in the county to be officiated by a minister, the Rev. Isaac Bennett.

☆: I would like it noted that this information is not given to be taken as fact, but simply as an example of information passed by word of mouth through the generations of the past 150 years since the incident took place.

Sophronia (Cooley) Scott recalls expulsion of Indian population from Clinton County

Sophronia Cooley was born in 1811 in Mass., a daughter of Aril and Sally Cooley. On Nov. 18, 1832, she was married in Washtenaw County to Sylvester Scott, a son of Capt. David and Eunice Scott.

Her young married life may have been filled with great expectations for the future, but that future would prove very different. Sylvester spent much of the following summer (1833) in Clinton County, investigating a new home site, and in travelling to White Pigeon to purchase his claim.

She was again left in Ann Arbor without him for much of 1834, being left behind, pregnant, while Sylvester helped his parents at their new settlement in Clinton County. In the fall of 1834, he returned for her and their infant son and together they made the slow trip to a new home in the wilderness.

Sophronia (often nicknamed "Fronie") was the second white woman to set up housekeeping in Clinton County. Her mother-in-law, Eunice Scott, who for a year was the only white woman in the county, was undoubtedly overjoyed at Sophronia's arrival.

For three and a half years, Sophronia assisted her husband in carving out a homestead in this wild land when suddenly, on a bright Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1838, her world surely was shattered by the tragic death of her spouse at the new sawmill in New Albany. Again, she was left on her own — this time forever.

Apparently a woman of great courage, Sophronia

remained on her homestead for over 60 years, and without the assistance of a spouse, saw to its improvement and eventual operation as a productive farm. She raised her three sons there, the youngest of whom was born shortly after the death of his father.

One of the most dynamic (and in retrospect, pathetic) events of the early Scott settlement, was the removal of the Potawatomi Indians by federal troops in 1840. Sophronia Scott witnessed this sad and frightening event and gave a vivid recollection of it in 1877. It was recorded by Oliva (Stowell) Baker for a speech presented to the Clinton County Pioneer Society in August of that year, from which the following is an excerpt:

"The next topic was the report that General (Hugh) Brady, with his troops, was coming to drive the Indians to the Western Reserve. This was unpleasant news to the dusky sons of the forest, for they loved these beautiful hunting grounds and, determined not to be driven to the unknown lands of the west...they began to collect their thin and scattered bands, choosing rather than being driven west, to flee to Canada.

"...At one time a body of 500 or thereabouts, came through the little village (DeWitt), stopping to beg and clamor for whiskey. Captain Scott was a man of iron will and, perhaps feeling that the safety of his household as well as the homes of his neighbors lay in

hazardous means, he thrust forcibly and not very tenderly, the most troublesome Indian out of his house. Thereupon war seemed inevitable.

"One Indian, bolder than the rest, picked up a stone and twirling it about his head, rushed toward the Captain making terrible threats. Mrs. Scott (Sophronia) says that she will never forget the terror-stricken faces of the women in the house at that time. Mrs. Grilley, an old lady and sister to the Captain, said if it were not for her invalid husband, she should go out into the wheat field for the night hiding herself in the tall grain, feeling that it would be the safest place.

"The fear soon subsided for in a little time all were pacified and the Indians moved quietly up the river a little way...where they camped for the night, and in the morning, taking up their march, leaving home behind them with all its pleasant memories and their buried dead. They had been gone a little while when General Brady and his soldiers came after them, the General and his staff dining at the house (Scotts) while the soldiers camped out."

Sophronia Scott died in DeWitt on June 3, 1896, at a ripe, old age. At the time of her death if she could have viewed the face of the landscape of Clinton County, many were the changes she could have recalled and many were the personal heartaches she could have recounted in her personal struggle for their achievement.

Clinton County Sesquicentennial

Atwell Simmons first settler in Riley Township

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Following is this week's feature, written by Ken Coin, about Atwell and Lovina (Knapp) Simmons.

By KEN COIN

The first settlement in what would become Riley Township began in the summer of 1836 when Atwell Simmons made a trip from his home in Salem, Washtenaw County to the Scott settlement on the Looking Glass River.

He made the trip with the intentions of surveying the surrounding country side in hopes of locating some favorable governmental land.

His wife had given him explicit instructions that any land he considered for a new home should contain a good sugarbush and be in close proximity to a lake, a throw back to her girlhood days spent near Honeoye Lake in Ontario County, New York.

ATWELL WAS impressed with the land near the "Scotts." The parcels he noted and eventually purchased from the government land office at Kalamazoo on July 30, 1836, lay in Riley and Olive townships.

He was also able to oblige his wife's requirements as Muskrat Lake was but a short distance off and the sugarbush which was on the tract would later gain a reputation as one of the best in southern Clinton County.

Atwell Simmons was born in Bristol, Ontario County, New York on Sept. 26, 1806, the son of Ephriam and Lydia (Bowen) Simmons.

His entire youth was spent in that region and in November of 1830 he was married to Lovina Knapp.

She was born on May 22, 1805, at Nassau, Rensselaer County, New York, the daughter of Samuel and Polly (Hines) Knapp. As a young girl, her parents had moved to Ontario where the remainder of her youth was spent.

IN 1832, Atwell and Lovina moved to Michigan territory, settling in Salem Township. Here, two children were born to them, George Riley and Amina Louisa.

In November of 1836, after proper preparations, the Simmons family set out in a wagon, drawn by oxen, with one cow tied to the rear of the wagon box. Regarding their early life in Riley Township, the following was written early in this century by their great-granddaughter, Agnes (Pike) Steinhardt.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH of the descendants of Atwell and Lovina (Knapp) Simmons was taken in Riley Township in 1900. Standing (left to right): Jerome Cutler, Estella (Cook) Dills, George R. Simmons, Elizabeth (Tucker) Simmons, Edna (Randall) Pike, Agnes (Pike) Steinhardt, unknown, unknown, Marc. D. L.

Photograph courtesy Faye Hansen Public Library
Cutler, Maud (Randall) Cutler. Seated (left to right): Amori B. Cook, David Scott Pike, Viola (Cook) Pike, Ella (Simmons) Pike, Ida (Cook) Randall, Amina (Simmons) Cook, unknown, Millard Filmore Pike.

Times were hazardous for early pioneer settlers and their children in wilderness of Clinton County

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By KEN COIN

Charles Scott, youngest and perhaps least remembered son of Capt. David and Eunice Scott, was born in Genesee County, New

York, on Dec. 16, 1819, and accompanied his parents to Ann Arbor in 1825.

He was only a young boy of 13 when he came with them to Clinton County in 1833, settling at the Indian village of Wabwah-naseep (now DeWitt).

If he was filled with the same thirst for adventure, typical in most boys, his teenage years surely must have offered wonder and excitement.

There would have been little enough time for fun, however, as hard work even for boys was always the agenda for the day.

Yet, loneliness, too must have entered his youth as his brother, David, and perhaps a few Indian

lads were the only youths in the area close to his age.

FOLLOWING THEIR arrival to Clinton County, as winter set in, it was a constant concern to keep the precious livestock fed on what could be obtained by cutting down trees in order that the animals could feed from the tender ends of the branches.

The livestock became so accustomed to this that merely the sound of an axe would bring them running.

When spring came, it was equally important to keep the livestock out of the low greening marshes, lest they become mired in the mud.

One set of oxen was lost in this manner. If this were not enough to

keep young boys busy, the livestock, apparently not as dumb as they looked, soon realized two things.

First, their range was for all practical purposes endless and secondly, the feed had been better back in Ann Arbor and there was nothing stopping them from returning there.

On one occasion, the oxen set off to the west and it took Charles' older brother, Sylvester, the hired man, and a hired Indian six days on foot to chase them down.

AT THE SAME time, as if preplanned, the cattle started home to Ann Arbor. Charles and his brother, David, were dispatched after them.

The boys followed the cattle into Shiawassee County where they were able to over take and herd them back all in one day, walking about 54 miles to accomplish this feat.

As an adult, Charles was closely associated with the business dealings of his father. He became the actual owner of DeWitt's famous Clinton House and much of the lands and plotted lots in and about the village.

He was the owner, in fact, of so much village land during the 1840s, the tax assessment records of the period reveal that the tax collectors found it easier to list under his

(Continued on page 10A)

Charles Scott was son of early pioneer family in Clinton County

(Continued from page 1A)

name the lots which he did not own, rather than those which he did.

He apparently profited well from his business transactions for the home he built on his farm west of town in the mid-1840s (still standing at 1300 Schavey Road) was for its time and location, a marvel of Greek revival architecture, both inside and out.

On July 6, 1843, Charles was married to Julia Terry, a native of New York. They settled on a 200 acre farm, west of DeWitt and bounded on the west by the Looking Glass River.

It had previously been the homestead of Franklin and Jerusa Oliver. The following information regarding the homestead was recorded by J. Esther (Webb) Williams, a granddaughter of Charles and Julia Scott.

"My grandfather built a log house ... near the mill (one built by Franklin Oliver which never operated correctly) had stood near a spring. The spring water was as clear as crystal and was used for drinking and cooking. Later, a large sturdy house was built about half a mile to the east where a road had been cut through (Schavey Road).

"In my grandmother's day the wool needed was spun and carded and put in skeins on swifts and reels. The wood ashes were put in barrels standing on slanting platforms and each day a bucket of water was poured in each one and the lye ladled off into a

bucket to make soft soap from fat trimmings from pork butchered in the fall.

"In the fall, about six hogs were butchered and the hams and shoulders cured and smoked. Side pork was put in strong brine and spare ribs, a great treat, could be kept for some time as some rooms in the house were closed off and sometimes froze."

Charles and Julia had four daughters which they reared on this farm. All married local men and three of them married Webb boys from a nearby farm.

Although many descendants live in central Michigan, none are known to still live in the DeWitt area.

On May 21, 1861, Charles died at the young age of 41, from undetermined causes. Julia remained on the homestead for many years, eventually retiring to the village of DeWitt to live her remaining days with her daughters. She died there in 1906.



PIONEER HOME — The home of Charles and Julia (Terry) Scott was built in the early 1840s. It is located at 1300 Schavey Road, DeWitt.

Courtesy photograph

County's Sesqui Celebrate Clinton

DeWitt Hotel is survivor of past era in Clinton County history

By KEN COIN

The face of the land has changed much since Clinton County's organization in 1839. The pioneers saw to it that the forests were cleared, streams diverted, and marshes eliminated.

In turn, the forces of nature have returned those pioneers to the earth along with their log buildings and split-rail fences. It's a constant battle — man builds up and nature reclaims.

Unique amongst the small list of survivors from 1839 is an imposing, yet unpretentious structure on the south side of the Looking Glass River, now called DeWitt.

The old "DeWitt Hotel" of New Albany Village, smothered in early county history, predates most any building in central Michigan and is unquestionably the oldest structure in Clinton County which can be documented with any amount of certainty.

THE OPENING of the interior of Michigan territory in the 1820's and early 30's was accompanied by countless quick wealth speculations, originating mostly from the drawing rooms and drafting tables of well-to-do New York entrepreneurs.

Clinton County received its ample share of these schemes in the forms of preplanned settlements, paper villages, canal works, plank roads, industrial complexes, and even an university.

The Clinton Salt Works (Lebanon), Rochester Colony (Duplain), Waterloo Joint Stock Company (Wacousta), New Albany (DeWitt), Middleton (DeWitt), "Old DeWitt" (DeWitt), and Grand River City (Delta Mills-Watertown) were all planned with the intent of lining someone's pockets with western gold. Of these, most have evolved in one form or another to the present day, but with each there is little or nothing remaining from the 1830's, none that is, except at New Albany.

THE INTERESTING history of New Albany's

"DeWitt Hotel" reaches back a few years prior to its actual construction date of Oct. 21, 1833, when Hiram Sheldon, then of Cleveland, Ohio, purchased 107 acres of government land in section No. 8 of DeWitt Township.

This land, on the south bank of the Looking Glass River, was nearly opposite the village of DeWitt which would be platted several years later by Captain David Scott on the north.

It is not known if Sheldon ever recorded his plat for the village of New Albany. Researchers have been trying to locate its existence for over 100 years. All that can be learned of how it was laid out must be pieced together from clues found in the land descriptions of deeds and early tax assessments.

HOWEVER, IT is known that the village was laid in a common grid with streets running north and south, east and west. Several current streets are known to have originated from this plat — Bridge Street (not by the name) and Webb Drive (still known as Rochester Street, well into modern times).

By 1836, the village had remained undeveloped and on Oct. 1 of that year, Hiram Sheldon sold his "village" to George T. Clark of Albany, N.Y. He sold it "lock, stock, and barrel" so to speak, and reserved for himself only 18 random lots which he later disposed of.

In 1838, Clark took the first steps towards developing his village by hiring a resident agent, Milo H. Turner of Rochester, N.Y., who then came to New Albany with a large stock of merchandise and opened the first store.

However, he was much more than a merchant. His main purpose was to promote and develop the town and sell village lots on Clark's behalf.

DURING HIS first year at New Albany, Turner leased the newly completed saw mill on Prairie Creek from Hiram Wilcox and began construction of the "DeWitt Hotel." Turner was soon joined by his

brother, Jesse Foote Turner, and together they completed the building of the hotel at what is now the southeast corner of Bridge and Webb.

When finished, the hotel was a monstrous accomplishment for its time and place. Its main two-story portion measures 40 by 32 feet and has a large one-story ell to the rear. The framing is said to be of post and beam construction, much like the common method used for building barns.

Its simple floor plan features a central hall with several rooms leading off from one side and the tavern room or "assembly room" from the other. Upstairs, beside the hall, there were at least six bedrooms for lodgers.

THE HOTEL'S exterior was finished with clapboard siding with only one architectural element, a finely crafted sidelighted doorway with reeded pilasters, capped by a segmented lintel of Greek-key panels.

Although the hotel would soon be superseded by gander and more "refined" area structures to the pioneers then traveling along the Pontiac-Grand River Trail, the hotel at New Albany must have appeared as a palace in the wilderness when they emerged from the surrounding forests.

In 1839, the country went into a devastating economic depression due largely to the results of the "wild-cat" banking practices and overspeculation by eastern investors. Many areas of Clinton County felt the effects of this. George T. Clark was an apparent casualty of this depression for in 1840 he lost much of his New Albany investments.

THE FIRST to go were the undeveloped village lots. Many of these as well as many which he had

sold to other investors were lost for unpaid taxes.

The sale of these New Albany lots and many other affected "paper villages," remained on the county tax records until the late 1840's.

During this period, Clark also lost or sold his interest in the mill complex along Prairie Creek to the Turner brothers. The complex at that time included not only the grist mill and mill pond, but also two known saw mills and numerous carpenter and cabinet shops.

However, Clark was able to retain some of his Clinton County investments. He kept the grist mill and general store at Mapleton (Rochester Colony in Duplain) and the general store and hotel at New Albany.

BY 1847, for reasons unknown, Clark came to Clinton County bringing with him his wife, Jane, and two young children. They took up residence in the hotel, but whether or not the building continued to function as a hotel is not known. No surviving records from the period indicate that he was an innkeeper, but several references state that he was a "merchant."

In May of 1849, both George and Jane Clarke died within days of one another, George on the 23rd at the age of 43, and Jane on the 29th, at 33. By this time, he had evidently managed to amass or recoup a considerable fortune.

The settling of the Clark estate was by far the largest and most complex undertaking the Probate Court had yet faced. Appraised, the estate was estimated at excess of \$10,000 (those were 1850 dollars).

"The roads were in a terrible condition and the oxen were often mired. After a six day journey they arrived in DeWitt. Leaving his family with William Webb and his wife who lived about a mile west of the Scott settlement, Atwell went on to cut a road through the forest and to build a log cabin for a home.

THIS CABIN was 14 by 16 feet, built without boards or nails. Logs were fastened together with wooden pins. A shake roof was bound on with poles. A puncheon floor of split logs with a space in front of a large fireplace, filled with clay for a hearth and with a quilt hung in place for a door, Atwell brought his family home.

The time required to build this crude cabin was less than two weeks. Later, a door was made of the dry goods box in which their goods were packed while moving.

Here, in an unbroken wilderness, with many wild animals about and only Indians for callers, Atwell began clearing the land. Water was obtained from a spring a short distance west of the cabin.

One day the little boy, George, was sent to the spring with a small pail for water. He soon ran back to the cabin exclaiming, "I found a little doggie but it ran away and wouldn't play with me."

THE PARENTS soon learned that it was a wolf instead of a dog.

With no fences, the cattle often strayed some

distance from the cabin. One night, Lovina went in search of the cow and became lost in the woods. She found a tree which had fallen and become lodged in another. Climbing this tree she waited the coming of day break. Towards morning she was startled by the sound of a gun. Fearing Indians, she remained quiet until the lights came near. Then, she was overjoyed to find that her husband and another pioneer were searching for her."

Atwell held many positions in local affairs, especially the schools of which he was a generous benefactor. Lovina is credited with giving Riley Township its name. She used the same as a middle name for her son, George Riley Simmons.

Atwell died in Riley Township on Oct. 27, 1881, and Lovina remained there until the time of her death on April 30, 1891.

GEORGE R. SIMMONS who had come to Clinton County with his parents at the age of four, married his former school teacher, Elizabeth Tucker on Dec. 21, 1853.

She had come to the area in 1850 with her parents, Hiram and Lucy (Smith) Tucker. Following their marriage, George and Elizabeth took over part of his parents' homestead, the portion which lay in Olive Township and remained there first in a small abandoned log cabin and later in a fine frame house until

1882 when they retired to DeWitt.

They had two children who lived to maturity, Hiram Atwell Simmons and Ella (Mrs. Millard Filmore Pike).

Amina Louisa Simmons, a mere infant of four months when her parents brought her to Clinton County, married a young man from an adjoining homestead, Amori B. Cook on Sept. 20, 1853.

He had come with his parents, Joseph and Charlotte (Herrick) Cook to Riley in 1840.

His father had, however, made an earlier appearance in 1838 at which time he purchased the land and built a log house. Following their marriage, Amori and Amina occupied a log cabin on the Cook homestead.

Their homes improved with time and they remained on this homestead until their deaths. They had three daughters who grew to adulthood, E. Estella (Mrs. Jerome Dills), Ida O. (Mrs. William Randall), and Viola H. (Mrs. David Scott Pike).

Atwell and Lovina (Knapp) Simmons were both members of a large complex family network which extended back to Puritan New England (perhaps earlier).

INTERMARRIAGE WITHIN the extended family, typical of many early American families, was commonplace: Atwell's father wed, for a second mar-

riage, Lovina's aunt and Lovina's cousin married Atwell's sister.

The practice perpetuated onto Atwell and Lovina's descendants as their grandson, Hiram Simmons, married Atwell's brother's step-daughter, Carrie Swift; their granddaughter, Viola Cook married her own second cousin (and a foster son of her father's sister) David Scott Pike, also a granddaughter of Atwell and Lovina and the practice, perhaps, concluded in the Dec. 13, 1905, marriage of the Simmons' great-grandson, George S. Pike, to another great-grandchild, Edna Randall.

Now, while all of this may sound like a genealogist's nightmare, it is presented here as an example of normal family ties in 19th century Clinton County.

Equally, it is an important concept to remember when researching any aspect of early Clinton County history. The main reason, however, is that people came to this county or relocated within it because of family connections, often hidden by the passing of generations.

Atwell and Lovina Simmons were also important pioneers within their own extended family as the first to come to Clinton County. Many other close and distant branches of the Simmons and Knapp families would follow their lead.



Louina (Knapp) Simmons



Metropolitan Art Gallery
Dian W. Smith Lansing, Mich.

Clinton County Sesquicentennial

Clark's real estate story tells how others operated his local business

By KEN COIN

Editor's Note: The following article written by Ken Coin is the second part of a two-part story about the DeWitt Hotel and New Albany Store which prospered from the beginnings of Clinton County.

HE HELD mortgages and promissory notes for nearly half that amount. Rare indeed was the county resident who was not somehow economically affected by Clark's death.

The Clark children, Sarah and Roswell, returned to New York to live with an older brother, Joseph Clark of Albany. And again, Milo H. Turner was left with the power of attorney to act as the agent for the Clark family in sorting everything out.

An inventory of the hotel, taken shortly after the Clarks' deaths gave an interesting look at how the former hotel must have been furnished during and before the Clarks' residency.

Among the outstanding features of the inventory are 45 chairs, seven looking glasses, six beds, and a surprising amount of carpeting.

The auctioning of Clark's real estate began on Jan. 22, 1850, at the courthouse steps on East Main Street in DeWitt. The Mapleton property including the mill and store was let to Benjamin Shepard as the highest bidder, on behalf of his brother, William.

Milo H. Turner bought much of the property adjacent to the mill complex on Prairie Creek and Caroline Turner (Milo's wife) was the highest bidder for the hotel, some village lots in New Albany and some acreage to the south.

The prices fetched at the scale were low, even by the standards of those days. Caroline Turner was able to make her purchase for a mere \$194.

Although the Turner families purchased much of the estate to add to their already substantial land holdings and business enterprises, they had by this date, all but left the area for larger fields of investment.

BY THE late 1840's, Milo and Jesse are recorded as operating the "Seymour House," a hotel in north Lansing which had been built and owned by Horation and James Seymour.

In the early 1850's, the Turners began disposing of their investments in Michigan and submitted to the beckoning call of the California gold fields where they eventually became permanent settlers.

In April of 1851, Caroline Turner then living in Monroe County, N.Y., sold the hotel and surrounding land to Rowland VanScoy of DeWitt. She realized a hefty profit on the transaction for after retaining the property for only one year she sold it for \$900.



THE NEW ALBANY STORE was a busy meeting place for Clinton County residents during the early years of the county's history. Courtesy photograph

VanScoy, a native of Kent, Putnam County, N.Y., had first come to Clinton County on April of 1839, purchasing 160 acres of land in southern DeWitt Township. He eventually acquired a substantial amount of land in the DeWitt area.

HIS MOVE to the hotel was his last in the DeWitt area and he remained there only a short time. On April 24, 1854, he moved his family to Essex Township to a newly acquired farm in section no. 9. He continually upgraded his land holdings both in Essex and DeWitt and at the time of his death in 1890, was one of the wealthiest men in central Michigan and owner of well over 1,900 acres in Clinton County alone.

Some of the land which VanScoy did not choose to keep at the time of his departure from Essex Township included a farm in southern DeWitt Township, the hotel, and lands at New Albany. These he sold on March 22, 1854, to his former neighbor, Henry Moon.

Moon, a native of England, had come to America in 1826 and to Michigan in 1833 where he settled near Ann Arbor. There in 1835, he married Susan (Frazy) Place, the widow of David T. Place. Two years later, Moon brought his young family to the wilderness of Clinton County where he purchased 160 acres in section no. 29 of DeWitt Township.

IN 1850, Moon, like many area men, made the hazardous trip to the west seeking his fortune in the tempting gold fields of California. He remained there for three years, returning to his wife and children in 1853 with as his obituary put it, "a snug fortune." He was one of the lucky few, not that he returned with wealth necessarily, but that he was able to return at all.

His riches were invested in land, in particular, the old hotel, then owned by VanScoy. This commodious building was just what Moon needed for his equally large family. He had at the time, six children plus four children of his wife's from her previous marriage.

He acquired more acreage in the vicinity of the house, built barns, planted orchards, and eventually improved it into one of the showplace farms of Clinton County.

IN 1875, faced with ill health, Henry Moon retired from farming and moved into the village of DeWitt, selling his former home and much of his acreage to his son, Sylvester Moon.

Sylvester and his new bride of two months, the former Jennie Harper (an adopted daughter of

George and Margaret Allen of DeWitt), moved into the house and continued to make it their farm home for over 30 years.

In 1908, after returning from an extended vacation in California, Sylvester and Jennie decided to sell the farm and return to California, permanently.

THE PURCHASERS of the farm were Frank and Pauline "Polly" (Yanz) Klever (now spelled "Klaver"). The historic old home has remained in the Klaver family since that time, eventually passing into the ownership of the Klavers' son, Charles, and his wife, Mable.

The name of New Albany is now but an unique oddity. The names of its streets have been changed, the mill complex, long vanished. Even the surrounding land is quickly succumbing to the machines of modern development.

Of New Albany of DeWitt in 1839, and perhaps all of Clinton County, only the DeWitt Hotel, a chance survivor of progress and nature, remains as a silent monument and sole witness to the past 150 years of Clinton County heritage.