

Lansing As She Was

AN OLD PIONEER WRITES OF EARLY DAYS

Indians and Deer Were Plenty all Over Fine Bucks Were Killed Where the Capitol Stands

M.S.Baker, formerly of this city, now a prominent manufacture of Los Angeles, Cal., receives the Republican regularly and has read of some of Lansing's promises, and in a retrospective mood has penned the following interesting article:

Speaking of pioneering reminds the writer that he was a pioneer of that section of the country too, and can recall incidents that occurred when that region (Lansing) was an unbroken wilderness. And as he unlocks memory's storehouse and begins to search for them he finds plenty of them stored away, and perhaps a few of them might be interesting to some of your readers who are inclined to think that it is a new country, and it will carry some of the older ones back to their younger days, when the wolves held the balance of power.

The first incident I recall was accepting the hospitality of the old chief Okemos in his wigwam for a night at Okemos. My father with his men were making the first wagon track from near Howell to Delta, taking the Indian trail for a guide. At that early day it was possible to drive anywhere almost in the timber openings with a team and wagon—no underbrush in the way—where ten or fifteen years subsequently it was a mass of underbrush like a swamp. One or two miles from the lower town we could drive anywhere on the openings and where we use to pick bushels of blackberries and huckleberries. July 4, 1837, the writer was one of a very small party to celebrate that day by raising the first flag and firing the first gun on the ground that now incorporated in your city limits. It was done where years subsequently the National hotel was built, and our only audience was a few Indians across the river, just opposite the mouth of the

Cedar, where they had a planting ground and were growing a crop of corn. That and about as much more at Okemos was all the cultivated ground in the country at that time.

I never looked back and review the subsequent history of that tribe of Indians but I feel as if our government did them a great injustices. And when I recall the many happy boyhood days spent with the boys of those dusky natives I feel like making a plea for their prosperity. They were almost our only neighbors, their boys were our playfellows. If it be true that the noblest work of our creator is an honest man then that tribe could lay claim to nobility. They were honest and trusty. The use of locks and bars were unknown to them and our effects were safe anywhere. They were a happy, contented people and all attempts to civilize them made them less so. That fact that these wrongs were due to civilization does not make them right. Today our people are paying untold honors to the man who planted the first white man's foot on their soil, and if their traditions have handed down to them this incident with anything like the accuracy that our history has to us, and they know for what they are celebrating, is it any wonder the that malice and revenge rankles in their breast to goad them on their war dances? The young Indians learned us how to hunt deer on the river at night, while in return we tried to learn them how to hoe corn, but I think we were the more apt for there was more fun in hunting than hoeing, though we did have to paddle our own canoe. Yet like the boys that haul their sleds up hill, the fun came in the going down. Two was an outfit for a boat and mum was the watch word. From five to ten miles up the river would be made by daylight, and as soon as it was dark we would put our big wax candle in the jack and commence silently to float, watching for those big eyes that the reflection of our light would make look like balls of fire. On one occasion, I remember, after we had passed the mouth of the Cedar and all was still except the eternal croaking of the bullfrog, I saw a pair of those eyes and headed the boat for them. At the proper time my chum fired and we knew our game was wounded, so we hastened on shore, only to find plenty of blood but no deer. The next day, however, we found him back in the wood just about where stands your capitol building. And we then hauled him to the river, little thinking that we were marking out the main street of your beautiful city and that the spot where we found our deer marked the spot where in the future would be erected such a noble structure as now stands at the

head of Michigan avenue and the capitol of one of the wealthiest and most enterprising states of the union.

At that time the river was about the only highway, and a number of the little cities below you availed themselves of it to get their first supplies. The machinery for the first flour mill built at Grand Rapids passed through what is now your city before a tree was cut.

In the spring of 1838 the writer was captain and all hands of a scow boat, loaded with forty bushels of oats, starting from Eaton rapids (then but a small hamlet) and landing at Delta, and a boy 10 years old and his father manning a raft of lumber at the same time. We found our way to Eaton Rapids from Delta by marked trees and section lines.

The steam wagon has been taking the pioneers in palace cars and setting them down at their new homes and bring them luxuries that to the pioneer of fifty and sixty years ago were unknown. Steam power having supplanted that of the horse and ox, it made rapid strides in getting over this little continent of ours, so that the professional pioneer has not now where to set his foot, and must wait for the flying ship to take him to the moon.

M.S. Baker

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Milo S. Baker (1828-1894), moved with his parents to Michigan at age ten. Later in 1851 he traveled to California to prospect for gold, three years later he returned to Michigan. In 1861 he spent two years in Washington D.C. serving with his brother General Lafayette Curry Baker, chief of the Secret Service. Milo returned to Lansing in 1863 and established the Eureka Iron Works and was involved in the establishment of the Downey Hotel. In 1875 he moved to Los Angeles where he established the Baker Iron Works.