

Lansing Pioneers

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Steuben county, New York, is a good old Dutch county and one of its natives for many years a resident of Lansing boasts a given name which also has the good old Knickerbocker flavor.

Van Rensselaer W. Tooker was born in a village of that county, March 16, 1828. His father was one of interior Michigan's earliest settlers, coming to Ann Arbor when the country of the great lakes was a wild western frontier. This was in 1835, nearly two years before the admission of Michigan into the Union.

In Ann Arbor the subject of this sketch attended district school until 1840, when that family moved to Woodhull, Shiawassee county.

March 16, 1847, his 19th birthday, younger Tooker with his brother Smith who died here in 1889 — drove with two horses and a wagon to Lansing.



Smith Tooker

They were unable to find lodging at North Lansing, and small wonder, for the only buildings there were a log house, a frame barn and a sawmill. Here they found a man

named page, who lived in the house, kept his horses in the barn, and earned his living with the sawmill. A slab school stood on the present site of the Cedar st school. The Tooker boys finally found accommodation with the Delano family, who occupied a farm at the “deep cut,” three miles northeastward. They soon drove back to Woodhull for a load of cedar lumber, with which they returned to build a shanty in the woods on the present location of G.W. Spoor’s residence, 114 Wall st.

Van Rensselaer’s father now hired him out” at \$10 a month, for the summer, to a man who worked the Pine Lake farm. After earning his father \$50 he returned to his brother’s house and entered school. In his class were Mrs. D.L. Case, Mrs. Delia Waldo, both of whom are now dead, and Nathaniel Glassbrook, who lives in Tennessee. In January, 1848 he left school to become porter at the Seymour — now Franklin House. This hotel was the winter home of the legislators, some of whom walked to and from the old capitol on the ice of the river, while some rode in Ingersoll’s mud wagon*

One December morning during the early days of Lansing, Mr. Tooker started upon a hunting expedition. Near the pond back of the Industrial School for Boys he shot a fine doe, and after hanging her up, started for home near the Cedar st school. Heavy woods grew between pond and river then, the air was thick with snow, and soon Mr. Tooker was completely turned around, and began to consider himself lost. This was during the building of the Seymour House, and he was finally guided to the right direction by the hammering of carpenters engaged upon the hotel.

As assistant to William Upton, lawyer and surveyor, Mr. Tooker helped to cut Michigan ave east through the forest to the old Grand river turnpike. He was on of the party who found the curious rock split by a wild cherry tree, which stands by the roadside today.

Mr. Tooker sailed the great lakes for five years, returning to Lansing in 1855. Until 1862 he worked in various hotels, and was employed at the M.A.C. during the first years of its existence. With J.E. Warner he traveled with the old time Dan Rice circus, and was

* Mud wagons were lighter and faster than stage coaches.

employed by a number of circus companies. He took the first circus through Missouri after the war, in 1865. Leaving the "show business" Mr. Tooker for a time lived upon a farm near Pine Lake. When D.L. Buck opened the opera house in 1872 he entered his employ, where he remained a portion of the time in company of C.J. Whitney of Detroit, until 1890. Since then Mr. Tooker has served in various capacities, spending from choice, a portion of these later years in quietness and leisure.