

Elsie ... A Century Ago

By Dr. B. L. Bates

Dear Mr. Editor:*

Is it of interest to readers of the Sun to learn something of what the present village of Elsie looked like 100 years ago, Oct. 12? It was on that date in 1855 that my father, LaMott G. Bates, his sister Lizzie (later Mrs. Chas. Clement) and their parents, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Bates drove into the four log house settlement which eventually became Elsie. Perhaps it might be well first to write something of the father's life and why he came to Michigan.

Grandfather had had a rough life as a child.. There seemed special significance to the name of the settlement, Hardscrabble, Ohio, where he lived when his father died. They were very poor and being one of the younger of six children, [Actually, he was the fourth of seven] he was taken to live with a childless couple, Rev. and Mrs. Shaler. The husband was good to little George, but the wife showed in every way that he was not wanted. A year later, when the man returned from a day's trip he learned that the nine year-old, being unable to stand the cruel treatment longer, had run away. He immediately remounted his horse and overtook the child sitting on a stone, crying. George was seated on the horse, back of the saddle and taken fifteen miles to West Richfield where he was placed in the hands of a couple who loved him as their own. This was his home until he was 22. During this time he learned the harness

maker's trade and years later had the first shop in Elsie.

In Richfield he was married to Emily Robinson. LaMott was born here and Lizzie was born in Oberlin, Ohio.

In the meantime, the widow had married a Mr. Andrew Linman and moved to a farm one mile north and a half mile east of what is today Elsie. (Mr. Steve Hanacek now owns this property.) To this union were born Andrew, Albert and Alfred, the latter becoming the grandparent of Bion Clement and Majel Schwanbeck.

It was natural that Mrs. Linman wished to have her first children near her and kept writing them of the wonders of this new Michigan territory with the result that George came up to investigate. He traveled by boat to Detroit and perhaps by train as far as the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee railroad (now the Grand Trunk) had been constructed, walking the balance of the way.

He must have been impressed by the surroundings as he took from the government 80 acres, one half mile east and a half mile north of the Linman's which was only partially cleared — the balance virgin pine.

Upon his return he walked the entire distance to Detroit! Sometime later they moved. Their goods were carted to Cleveland, boated to Detroit and carried on the D.G.H. and M. railroad to Linden which was as far as the road was finished. Here they stored their goods and hired a man with a tram to drive them the balance

* - Apparently published in *The Elsie Sun*, October 20, 1955.

of the journey which was mostly by trails through the woods.

Ovid was not started at that time but the trail came through that way. The pine area started about three miles south of Elsie and father related that it looked like a black cloud as they approached it.

Now about Elsie. At that time there were only four log houses, one where Dr. Slagh now lives and in which Mrs. B. M. Wooley was born, a second on the corner, the present location on the bank. This belonged to Job D. Sickels, my mother's father. Mother was born here in 1852 and it was when she was three that she and bashful little LaMott first met.

The location of the other two log houses, I do not remember though Father spoke of them often.

The question has been asked why the old cemetery lies so close to the village. At the time it was dedicated, it appeared that a village might start by the river. But soon after J. D. Sickels opened a small store about where the theatre now stands, the community began to grow and later he and his brother Aaron surveyed and laid the village.

Neighbors were few and far between in 1855. The most exciting and welcome news was that another settler was moving in, thus adding to their security. There were no churches or schools. Rochester colony had a water-powered saw and grist mill. It was necessary that wool be taken to Corunna for carding so that it might be spun and woven into clothing. This was an all day trip with oxen and required another day for returning.

Much unwritten and interesting history might be told of the staunch, god-fearing and liberty-loving pioneers of Elsie and vicinity who endured many privations and hardships to establish the village and make productive the surrounding farm lands.

My story deals only with the early beginnings of the town itself in the year 1855, one hundred years ago, and something of the life of one of its earliest settlers