NO. 16. THE HISTORY OF KALAMAZOO TO THE PANIC OF 1837

by

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Geologists have placed Kalamazoo county in the "Waverly group" of geologic strata, assigned by Dana and Winchell to the carboniferous period, but by others to the upper half of the Devonian. This group extended in a circular belt around the center of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, having a width of from twenty to eighty miles and covering fully one-half of this peninsula, or about twenty thousand square miles. This group is the reservoir of a vast accumulation of salt brine, which is the source of the great wealth of the salt factories.¹ The area also furnishes nearly all of the good building stone of the peninsula, being the source of the supply also of the "Huron grindstones" so familiarly known. This rock formation is thought to be the thickest, about one thousand two hundred feet, in the northern and central portions of the group.²

Three-fourths of the county was classed as "timbered lands." Numerous varieties of oak grew in these dark forests, many of giant size. Several varieties of hickory, walnut, elm, beech and maple here cast the shadow

¹Fisher and Little, Compendium of History and Biography of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, Chicago, 1906, p. 32. (Hereafter referred to as Compendium.)
²Ibid, p. 32.
of their variegated leaves in the long, dreamy days of the Indian summertime. Basswood, black cherry, tulip, sycamore, ash, pepperidge, birch, beech, and cedar gave great variety to the landscape, and, here and there, a few pines brought their solemnity to heighten the effect.\footnote{1}

Kalamazoo County is a typical county of the rich southern portion of the state. Distant from Lansing sixty miles, lying 130 miles nearly due west from Detroit, 33 miles north of Indiana and due east from Lake Michigan 44 miles, it is in the 42nd degree of north latitude and the 8th degree of longitude west of the Washington meridian. It comprises 363,680 acres of land according to the survey.\footnote{2} About ten thousand acres of Kalamazoo county are covered with water in the form of lakes and ponds.\footnote{3} These lakes abound with fish; and in some of these of only a few acres in extent, fish have been taken of forty pounds weight.\footnote{4}

The land north of the city of Kalamazoo, covered at present by celery beds, is said to have been in the days of the first settlers an impassable tamarack swamp.\footnote{5} A great deal has been said about the tremendous unhealthfulness of the site that is now Kalamazoo because of its vast expanses of marsh and bog, which the early settler

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1] Ibid, p. 32.
\item[2] Ibid, p. 32.
\item[4] Ibid, p. 309.
\item[5] Ibid, p. 309, 310.
\end{footnotes}
merely overlooked. Within this county, however, there was a great deal of excellent land that was discussed by many of the early settlers in this new territory. George N. Fuller states in his *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan* that, "the soil of this section was uniformly fertile, varying from a sandy to a clayey loam." Along the Kalamazoo River the rich alluvium of the bottom lands in some places reached from a half mile to a mile in width on each side of the river.\(^1\) In 1833 a settler on the Washtenaw Trail in Calhoun County, on being asked about the soil of his farm, characterized it as "a pretty good gravelly loam of eighteen inches" but he thought something of moving to Kalamazoo, "where they have it four feet deep and so fat that it will grease your finger."\(^2\) The clay in the soil in some parts of the section was sufficient for the manufacture of bricks.\(^3\)

The Kalamazoo River has its rise in the northwestern part of Hillsdale county, Michigan, and flows west and northwest into Lake Michigan. From the source to the city of Kalamazoo, the river makes three southward bends, but from Kalamazoo the course is generally northwest. Its whole length is about 250 miles, entering Lake Michigan at Saugatuck (earlier known as Newark.)\(^4\) The Kalamazoo River is

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1. Ibid, P. 310.
2. Ibid, p. 310.
a large and beautiful stream nine rods wide and five feet deep in the middle. Its gentle current flows at the rate of about four miles per hour.\(^1\) The river has supplied deep black alluvial soil, sometimes two miles wide, and these bottom lands have insured quick and abundant returns for a minimum expenditure of labor.\(^2\)

At the time of its first occupancy by the whites the county was a marvel of wild, untrained beauty. Its exquisite scenery rivalled the effects produced on many of the old estates of Kent and Somersetshire in England, where landscape gardeners for centuries have exhibited their skilled artistic talent.\(^3\) At this early period a luxuriant growth of forest trees of primeval date covered the greater portion of the land, and these were diversified by stretches of prairie oak-openings, marshes, bluffs and ravines, that alternated in a wild yet pleasing disorder.\(^4\) An early account given by one of the pioneers of this county indicates that this flora was something to behold. "At the new home all was virginal. Out-of-doors was beautiful, wild Michigan. Our cattle had a boundless range to feed and roam over in the oak paths and Indian trails that meandered through them. From the door of our log house we could

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\(^{1}\) Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Lansing, 1894, Vol. XXII, p. 322. (Hereafter referred to as Collections.)

\(^{2}\) Ibid, p. 322.

\(^{3}\) Ibid, p. 32.

\(^{4}\) Ibid, p. 32.
often see long files of Indians, on foot and on ponies, wending their way along these trails that were in places worn down to a depth of two feet. There always appeared to us to be strange, romantic history connected with the lives of these wandering children of the forest. Deer also could be seen feeding at leisure, or trooping by the door in droves. Occasionally in the night we would hear the lone cry of the wolf. The weather remained remarkably fine through the fall. Such Indian summer days used once in a while to visit us in New York, but here they seemed to be 'to the manor born," and we had them by the week full."¹

¹Ibid, p. 32.
The Kalamazoo River area was roamed by three Indian groups. They were the Ottawas, who were found on the river as late as 1824, the Miamis, and the Pottawatomies.¹ Until the war of 1812, they knew little or nothing of the pale faces, except from the stories of their braves.² After this war, the British Government made annual presents to the Indians in this territory, and annually parties would set out in the Spring to visit Malden or other points in Canada to receive these gifts. This continued until 1830 — when the United States authorities discouraged and prohibited such visits. The country bordering on the river here, northward to the rapids of Grand River, was under the chieftainship of Noonday, an Indian worthy of association with the best characters in Indian history.³ Other accounts giving the types of Indians that inhabited the regions around the present site of Kalamazoo were those by the French Jesuits, who were the first to cross the new northwest.⁴ In their account they reported that "a small portion of the southern moiety of the lake State was occupied in isolated spots by bands of Miamis and other fragmentary tribes of the great Algonquin race, bearing different

²Thomas, James H., Thomas's Kalamazoo Directory and Business Advertiser for 1867 and 1868. (Hereafter referred to as Thomas's Directory.) Kalamazoo, 1867, p. 6.
³Ibid, p. 6
⁴Ibid, p. 6.
names but all having a like dialect."¹ An account of
the physical structure of the Indians is given in Thomas's
Kalamazoo Directory which shows the tragedy that under-
mined these people. "These original indians were a
haughty, powerful and warlike race. The chiefs were of
superior strength and size, and all were distinguished
for manly carriage, look and forms; but the vices of
civilization have debased and robbed them of even the
beauty and strength of the physical life. None of the
primitive Indians were guilty of lying or stealing, under
penalty of disgrace, and excommunication from their tribe,
and their females were once, it is said, models of virtue.
These good traits have all passed away; and there are
few indeed, (save) if any, worthy representatives of the
Indian race as it existed here in the West a century ago."²

The Pottawatomis, perhaps one exception to
the above description, though living so far distant from
the whites, had less of the typical characteristics
found among the Northwestern tribes. They were less war-
like, more domestic in their habits. They were very fond
of display in their dress. They took great pride in deck­
ing themselves in gay costumes and colors, and their ponies
were even arrayed with bells, ornaments and fanciful trapp­
pings. But though a domestic people, devoted to agri-

¹Ibid, P. 6.
²Ibid, p. 4.
cultural pursuits and the excitement of the chase, they were a brave people. Their territory extended from the south-west portion of Michigan into Illinois and Wisconsin. The Ottawas were an older tribe of Indians, and have a more conspicuous history. Between the Ottawas and Pottawattomis the best feeling has always existed, the latter holding the former in great respect. Pontiac was an Ottawa, and is said to have belonged to some of the tribes of Western Michigan near the lake. The territory of the two tribes joined near this place.\(^1\) The Miamis being very close kin to the Ottawas had generally the same characteristics.\(^2\)

It is very evident that Kalamazoo and vicinity was always a favorite resort for Indians to gather in, because of the excellent fishing and hunting grounds. In the spring and early summer months the large fish of the great lakes found easy outlets for spawning in those rivers not having large dams or other natural obstructions for spawning. During these seasons the Indians could catch sturgeon, northern pike and pike-perch or "wall-eyed" pike with little trouble because of their numbers. Proof that the Indians were gathered here in rather large numbers is readily shown by the three burial

\(^1\)Ibid, P. 10.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 10.
grounds that were found by settlers that arrived early in the period of the development of Kalamazoo.  

Actually, the Pottawatomis held title to the lands of Kalamazoo county until the Chicago treaty of 1821.  

In this treaty, however, they ceded to the United States all of their lands lying south of Grand River with the exceptions of five small reservations, one of them being the present site of the city of Kalamazoo.  

In September, 1827, all of the Pottawatomi reservations mentioned in the Chicago treaty were exchanged for a consolidated reservation called Nottawasepee which was located in St. Joseph county. In return for this large reservation the Indians ceded their rights to the five smaller reservations that they formerly held.  

In 1840, the Indians were removed from this State to some place beyond the Mississippi.

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1 Ibid, P. 8. (Reference is also made of these facts in the Compendium, p. 26.)
2 Compendium, p. 25.
When the first white settlers came to the Kalamazoo River area, they found the most effective means of transportation on the river to be by canoe.\(^1\) Another important way of getting to Kalamazoo was by the Indian trail which was called the Washtenaw Trail, and which was later followed by the Michigan Central Railroad.\(^2\) This was not merely a path, but was often as deep as two feet and as wide as six.\(^3\) The ultimate importance of this river was readily seen by the early explorers of this territory, and provisions that trade on the Kalamazoo was to remain free to all who desired it were included in the special instructions given Charles Langlade of Green Bay, when Louis Herbin sent him in October 1755 to take command of the whole Grand River Valley.\(^4\)

Thus, with the prospect of having a river which was renowned for its excellent fishing and for its broad, smooth surface which would afford good transportation; as well as good farm land with an excellent overland Indian trail, people soon started toward this country with more vigor.

It was, however, no easy task to come over the Indian trail. A great many hardships and privations had to be undergone in order to complete such a journey. There were no roads until after 1831 and '32, but the country was

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\(^1\) Williams, Owen, The Kalamazoo River, A manuscript in the Kalamazoo College library, Chapter 3.  
\(^2\) Compendium, p. 29.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 32.  
not impassible. It was more like traveling through a large park.¹ The annual burning of the grass by the Indians had left the forest clear of all such obstructions, and the settler was thus relieved of very heavy brush and thicket.² The "trip" from Detroit to this place was usually performed in from seven to ten days. The route was through Jackson, Battle Creek, and Gull Prairie to the Indian trading post on the east bank of the river. Most of the way the road was the Indian trail, but if any divergence was necessary, trees were "blazed."³ In the event that there were cross roads or something that would be likely to result in confusion, rude guide-boards would be present to give the traveller his directions.⁴

The impulse to move westward into Kalamazoo County appears to have been felt very early in the eastern part of Michigan. In 1826, just after the opening of the Erie Canal, there appeared in the Detroit Gazette, the report of John Mullet, United States surveyor, about the lands on "the rivers St. Joseph and Canamazoo." In this report Mullet mentions the large prairies and numerous

¹ Thomas's Directory, P. 12.
³ Ibid, p. 12. (Reference is made here to the term blazed. This was merely the way in which the early explorer and pioneers kept their trail to prevent them from becoming lost. It consists of making a mark on a tree with an axe or hachet. However, on this trail a large letter "H" was blazed to mean highway.)
⁴ Ibid, p. 12.
other advantages of soil, timber and water in what was to be Kalamazoo County. In 1827 Louis Campau, who was a famous early trader within the new territory, passed through Kalamazoo and reported that there were only two log houses there.

Life for the early pioneers in these new territories was very difficult. Generally speaking, the early cabins that the pioneers built were of light materials or poles that could be placed in position readily. As soon as the country began to be settled and sawmills were built from which boards could be obtained, the more substantial log houses were built. They were quite uniform in size, usually about eighteen by twenty-two feet, sometimes with a projection in front of ten feet, and with the roof resting on the beams that supported the chamber floor. This projection was called a "stoop", which is a good Dutch word. Under this were placed the pots, kettles, washtubs, and bowls. There were also other necessary utensils of the household, including a splint broom. In the construction of this house straight trees of uniform size were drawn to the site chosen for the "raising" and all made it a duty to attend

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1 Fuller, George N., Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, P. 313.  
2 Compendium, p. 29. 

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unalselfishly, forgetting the duties of the home. It is interesting to note also that the Indians were very helpful in the erection of these new homes.

There is much evidence, however, that the settlers did not allow aesthetic or religious sentiment, or even the proper care of health, to stand in the way of their immediate material prosperity. The writer of a letter which appeared in George N. Fuller's *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan*, speaking of the prevailing sickness in Michigan says, "as for the sickness which always prevails more or less among the new settlers, to one who is aware of their imprudences the wonder is that the majority of them escape with their lives." The settlements that were made at the boggy sites of Jackson village illustrate the preponderant weight of economic motives.

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1Ibid, P. 4C.
2Ibid, p. 41.
3Fuller, George N., *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan*, p. 309.
With these thoughts our interests should naturally turn to the prospects of business and commerce and the part that they played in the development of Kalamazoo. The first indication we have of any business activity in the area of what is now Kalamazoo is from the reports of early traders who worked in that vicinity. Sometime after 1812, probably around 1823, a trading post was erected on the banks of the Kalamazoo River across from the future site of Kalamazoo, and this post was maintained until a few years after the establishment of the village.\(^1\) When early settlers first came to the village they first obtained their supplies at this post, which was then being run by a French trader named Recollet. The early settlers fondly remembered the name of this early trader because of his fair dealings in scarce commodities.\(^2\)

During the year 1830 several other families settled at Kalamazoo, and Col. Huston, who ran a general store at nearby Prairie Ronde, built a second store at Kalamazoo, thus cutting into the business of Recollet, the French trader across the river.\(^3\) By the latter part

\(^1\) Durant, The History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, Philadelphia, Penn., 1880, P. 209.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 212.
of 1831 fifteen heads of families had settled in Kalamazoo, and Col. Huston was forced to establish a new and larger general store in order to handle the increased trade.\(^1\) V. Hascall, later editor of the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, remembered Huston's store as "the place of resort for the townsmen, who were fond of meeting there and talking over matters."\(^2\)

In 1834 the United States Land Office for the surrounding district was moved from White Pigeon to Kalamazoo, and Kalamazoo was visited from far and near by persons desiring to enter land claims. The newspaper at White Pigeon, called the *Michigan Statesman*, soon followed the Land Office to Kalamazoo, and, also, a branch of the State Bank of Detroit was set up there to facilitate exchange.\(^3\) Prior to this time bartering was about all that was used. Here is an account of an early pioneer in regard to trade:

My father had brought five hundred pounds of codfish from New York and this was exchanged for pork with our neighbors. This exchanging was called paying the 'dicker.' This 'dicker' was all the money we had and was of denomination so various that we can not name them. Each settler was a banker, and all his movable property (large and small) was his bank notes. He paid for an oxynoke by giving its equivalent in so many pounds of pork. This was the first original start or trade, giving the products of one kind of labor for those of another. 'Dicker' was all the money the

\(^1\)Ibid, p. 212.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 213.
\(^3\)Troft, T., Early Commerce and Industry, A manuscript in the Kalamazoo College library, p. 4.
settlers had until real money found its way into the settlement. The pioneer did not take the poet's advice, 'neither a borrower nor a lender be.' During the first decade of his life here he 'spelled his way along' with the axe and the plow; borrowing sometimes was the very means to help him out of difficulty and set his enterprise going again.\(^1\)

With the new Land Office came many prominent men to settle at Kalamazoo and the first real year of business caused a great stimulus to the growth of the population.\(^2\) In 1834 an estimate was given to the effect that Kalamazoo had about a dozen dwellings and about a hundred permanent inhabitants.\(^3\) But after the arrival of the Land Office, the village was extremely overpopulated by "land-lookers," and numerous families lived in tents, which dotted the landscape.\(^4\) The amount of growth in population by the end of 1834 presents striking similarities and indications within the several counties in that particular part of Michigan. Kalamazoo County received its first settlers in 1828 and was organized by two years later; by the census of 1834 it lacked by a few hundred people equalling the combined population of Calhoun and Jackson counties, Kalamazoo county then having a population of 3,124 to Jackson's 1,865 and Calhoun's 1,714.\(^5\) Another reflection on the rapid growth of this new village was an account

\(^1\) Compendium, P. 39.
\(^2\) Durant, The History Of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, p. 218.
\(^4\) Fuller, George N., Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, p. 27.
\(^5\) Ibid, p. 359.
that was given by one of the many visitors that came to register his land claim, during the year of 1836. We were "glad to get away because it was like town meeting here every day (Sundays excepted.)" The growth of trade at the close of the period is only approximately indicated by the eight stores placed to its credit by Blois, which puts it somewhat below Marshall in this respect.

The Land Office increased its business enormously during the years of 1834 to 1836, due to a wild land speculation. While in 1834 only 128,000 acres of land had been sold for a total of $160,000; in 1836, 1,634,571 acres of land were sold for a total of $2,043,867.

The reason for these tremendous purchases of land, which far outran any reasonable demand, was that often the lands were bought and resold by speculators. Although there is no way of actually measuring the total amount of speculation, the national government sales of public lands rose from four million acres in 1834 to fifteen millions in 1835 and to twenty millions in 1836. It was during these years that the phrase "doing a land-office business" entered the American vernacular. In 1837 the wildcat banking failures began to occur, and trade and

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2 Ibid., p. 345.
3 Durant, The History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, p. 218.
business became paralyzed in Kalamazoo as it did in most of Michigan. Wheat moved from $1.00 to $1.50 a bushel in 1836. In 1837 it dropped to $0.37 a bushel. Real estate sales dropped and then came to an abrupt halt. The growth of the village ceased as suddenly as it had begun. G. Torrey, editor of the Kalamazoo Telegraph, which came to Kalamazoo in 1844, stated that "the excitement which had been so beneficial to the growth and development of the village passed off, and we remained in a quiescent state. If any movement was made at all, it was retrograde. Business continued dull and dubious for several years, bankruptcy and failure were the order of the day. As the panic of '37 came on, and as commerce declined, the threatened industrialization of Kalamazoo ceased as quickly as it had begun, and the people again turned to the soil for security. It was for this reason also that the Kalamazoo Gazette encouraged the use of agriculture. After the panic what little industry that did arise was a matter of necessity for the farmer's subsistence for many years: grist mills to flour the wheat, wagon factories to repair the wagons so frequently damaged by the rutted and bumpy roads, saw mills to build new homes, chair and cabinet factories to obtain furniture

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1 Michigan Statesman, April 21, 1836.
2 Durant, The History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, p. 218.
5 Troft, T., Early Commerce and Industry, A manuscript in the Kalamazoo College library, p. 8.
for the homes, and agricultural implement factories
to produce plows to till the land.

With the growth and expansion of the village, it became more and more apparent that more adequate means of transportation should be provided. People naturally looked toward the river for the outlet of their produce and medium of trade. In 1833 Nathan Harrison decided to start the business of ferrying settlers across the river. He built a large barge-type raft which was capable of carrying loaded teams and stages. The craft however, was principally operated by his wife, Nathan preferring to hunt and fish. He did a thriving business until 1835 when the first bridge was built across the river.  

As more and more people arrived to the village the value of the lots gradually increased, the range being from $1 to $50, depending on the location. The lots did not sell very fast at these prices and as a result, General Justus Burdick, from Vermont, offered to sell part of his proprietorship for $5 an acre. Judge Hinsdale, who had been offered this proposition declined the offer because he desired to own a farm near Gull Prairie.  

Lumbering was a very early industry on the river because of the excellent supply of hardwoods and the need of the early settlers for lumber. The river offering

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1 Thomas's Directory, P. 23.
2 Ibid, p. 23.
excellent possibilities for the transportation of logs caused Oka Town and Abijah Chinchester to run a raft containing 30,000 feet of lumber from Pine Creek to the mouth of the Kalamazoo.\footnote{Collections, vol. XXII, p. 291.}

In 1836 a group of seven Kalamazoo men made a huge barge and sent it down the river loaded with flour. It made one complete cycle, but on the second trip it ventured into Lake Michigan and was caught in a storm and wrecked.\footnote{Durant, The History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, p. 168.}

Several articles in the newspapers relate the possibility of improving the river so that trade could be made easier. \textit{The Michigan Statesman}\footnote{"The most noted event in 1835 was the establishment of a newspaper. In October the Michigan Statesman before published at white Pigeon, was removed to Bronson and published by Messrs. Gilbert and Chandler, who soon after changed its name to the Kalamazoo Gazette." Ibid, p. 219.} wrote that "the Kalamazoo River will shortly be so improved as to afford easy navigation to Battle Creek, some twenty miles above this, from which place we can receive at a cheap rate unlimited supplies of lime and building stone of first quality.\footnote{The Michigan Statesman, April 2, 1836.}"

\textit{The Kalamazoo Gazette} carried this article a few months later: "The mouth of the river, with little improvement at small expense, may be made as good as any harbor on Lake Michigan. No doubt that Congress at their next session, being duly informed of these feats, knowing already the
great want of good harbors on that lake, will grant necessary appropriations for the improvement of this harbor.\textsuperscript{1}

The first flatboat on the river was called the "Pioneer" which was built by Joseph Bush of Allegan for Milo Winslow. It is believed to have been in operation during the spring of 1836. The vessel carried one thousand barrels of flour; twelve men were necessary to pole it up and down the river.\textsuperscript{2} Although shipbuilding was a major industry along the river for several years, the navigation that was maintained on the river gradually died out because of better methods of commercial travel.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1}The Kalamazoo Gazette, February 18, 1837.
\textsuperscript{2}Williams, Owen, a manuscript in the Kalamazoo College library, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p. 13.
In the sectioning of the country that was later to become a part of the great Northwest Territory the builders of the nation realized that some provision should be made so that a proper educational program would be provided. In the ordinance of 1787 passed by Congress for the government of the Northwestern Territory, it was stated that "Schools and means of education shall forever be encouraged." Later Congress stipulated that section #16 of each township should be given for education. When Michigan was admitted into the Union, on January 26, 1837, it was specifically stated that section #16 should be granted to the State for the use of school and educational facilities.

It was before this time, however, that the territory realized the need for education. The first law that was passed by the Territorial Legislature regarding schools was in 1827. This law stated that any township which had fifty householders was required to provide itself with a school teacher, of good moral character, in order that the students might learn to read and write. It went on to stipulate that any township having two hundred householders was required to have a

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teacher capable of teaching Latin, French and English. In order that the law would not be overlooked by certain townships a penalty of $50 to $100 was provided for neglect on the part of a township, to enforce them to comply with the law.\(^1\) When Michigan became a state in 1837 it divided the entire state into districts in order more adequately to provide for education.\(^2\)

Preparation for a school in the township of Arcadia began as early as 1832, when five school districts, including Bronson, Cooper, Oshtemo, Alamo, and Richland were set apart for this purpose. In the spring of 1833 Commissioners of Common Schools were appointed for the township of Arcadia. This first school committee was made up of the founders of the village, namely Titus Bronson, Cyrus Lovell and Cyren Burdick. The village of Bronson was designated as District No. 1 and a temporary school building was constructed.\(^3\) From all indications the first school building was a very crudely constructed affair, being built of large slabs of wood that were rather poorly put together.\(^4\) It was located on the south side of South Street, between Burdick and Henrietta Streets on a plot of ground that had been set apart by Bronson and Richardson as a burial place.

\(^1\)Ibid, p. 2.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 3.
\(^3\)Ibid, p. 4.
\(^4\)Ibid, p. 6.
but which had never been used for that purpose.¹

This structure, however, not being adequate for the purpose, was superceded by a more permanent building that was introduced in the winter of 1834 and 1835. This building was used for winter schools for the children.² During this time attendance was quoted as including about a dozen pupils.³ The buildings, however, were not merely used for the conducting of school classes, but served a host of purposes. The Kalamazoo Gazette mentions the fact that it was the only public meeting place aside from the "taverns." Because of this, the school house was used for church services, for housing for those who had not yet had time to build, for circuit court, for lyceums, and in 1837 it was used for a meeting of the mechanics of Kalamazoo so that a complaint could be made against the manufactures that were being produced within the prisons.⁴

The village of Bronson was perhaps not a leader in regard to its primary and grammar schools, but in regard to colleges it has a distinction worthy of such a small community. Thomas Ward Merrill, a young man of only 27 years who was one of the early pioneers of this territory, went to Ann Arbor, filled with an ambition to

¹Ibid, p. 6.
³Ibid, p. 5.
⁴Kalamazoo Gazette, February 18, 1837, passim. Reference is also made in Thomas's Directory, p. 21.
establish a school that would be academic as well as theological and would follow along Baptist lines. On November 23rd, 1829, he petitioned the territorial legislature to permit him to found a school to be named the "Michigan and Huron Institute," with a function of higher learning. Thomas Merrill, not realizing the great amount of factionalism and strife within the legislature, soon found that his proposal was not willingly accepted. After some time his plan was returned with a suggestion that he change his method of trusteeship; he objected and decided to go elsewhere with his plans.\footnote{Fuller, Historic Michigan, vol. II, p. 794.}

After his initial attempt and defeat he seriously considered just what his next move should be and in 1830 he traveled westward, believing that his chances for success would be better there. In his travels westward he came upon the small village of Bronson. According to the accounts he came to this town when all that there was to be seen "was the smoke curling up from the chimney of a single log cabin."\footnote{Ibid, p. 795.} It was in this small village that he met a certain Caleb Eldred and with the support of this man, who was apparently more familiar with the legislative procedure of the day, he again petitioned for a charter for a school. This time however, under the
guidance of Mr. Eldred, he omitted from his petition any mention of denominational control and merely suggested the names of the petitioners and others as trustees. His trustees, however, were Baptists, because it was his desire that they should have the control of the college. After considerable delay, the petition was signed by the governor on April, 22, 1833. This was the beginning of Kalamazoo College, thus giving it the credit of being the "oldest college in the state."¹

For two years the location was uncertain, but in 1835 the rapidly growing village of Kalamazoo (still called Bronson)² obtained for it a locality, pledging the sum of $2,500 for land and the erection of a suitable building. Reasons given for this generous pledging was that the Baptists appear to have been the most numerous and active, and literally controlled the village of Bronson.³ After the money was received, a two-story frame building was erected somewhere in the vicinity of Walnut Street and Westnedge Avenue, this work being completed in 1836. It was during this time that the state gave some pecuniary aid, but in 1845 the state withdrew all financial aid and the institution came wholly under the control of the trustees.⁴

¹Ibid, p. 796.
²Fuller, George N., Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, p. 345.
³Ibid, p. 345.
Actually Kalamazoo College is a product of two forces: the conception of the need of education in a democracy, as was manifested in the famous Jeffersonian clause in the Ordinance of 1787, and the intense missionary spirit and zeal that prevailed in these new western territories under the Protestant denominations of the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Kalamazoo College enjoys the distinction of being one of the first co-educational colleges in America.¹

¹Compendium, p. 102. (For more informative, complete and detailed history the author would suggest Goodsell & Dunbar, History of Kalamazoo College.)
The political formation and growth of the village which ultimately became Kalamazoo, although not unique, furnishes us with many interesting facts. Upon the sound political foundation there was built the successful industrial, social, and economic advances to which the city today has a rightful claim. The task of politically changing a wilderness into a village and henceforth into a city was initiated by a man whose name is still recognized in the Kalamazoo area. The name of this man was Titus Bronson.

Mr. Bronson was the first settler on the soil that is now the city of Kalamazoo. In June of 1829 he came from Ann Arbor, following the great St. Joseph trail and fording the river at the trading station, continuing along the trail until he reached the mound now conspicuous on the grounds of Bronson Park, where he camped for the night, placing a pine torch in the ground before the door of his little tent to keep away the wolves. During the season he erected a rude cabin and entered the land. On the 30th of July,

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1 Compendium, p. 67.
2 Ibid, p. 67. (It is interesting to note that wolves were apparent even in 1834 when $100 was voted for the destruction of wolves @ $4 a head until the money was used. Thomas's Directory, p. 24.)
1830, the County of Kalamazoo was organized by the legislative council of the Territory of Michigan, and the unorganized counties of Calhoun, Eaton, and Barry; and all the county north of these attached to the same for judicial purposes. On April 2, 1831, Governor Cass approved the choice of Kalamazoo as a county seat, which made the village a point of trade, and soon after this the population of the settlement began to increase rapidly. One month later Messrs. Bronson and Richardson put upon record the first plat of the village. The plat was drawn by Phineas Hunt who was a mathematician.

The village thus laid out and named, with streets and squares surveyed, and a school lot and cemetery given for the use of the citizens. The village began to assume some shape and importance and to accommodate the rapid influx of people Mr. Harrison, who lived at the river, kept his house open for all who desired a nights lodging. Mr. Bronson turned his house into a kind of a hotel. His house also was used for all types of town meetings and public functions because no adequate civic building had as yet been constructed. The following extract relates the formation of the village of Bronson.

TERRITORY OF MICHIGAN
KALAMAZOO COUNTY

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3 Thomas's, op. cit, p. 14.
5 Ibid, p. 15.
6 Ibid, p. 15.
Personally came before me the subscribers, Titus Bronson and Stephen H. Richardson, and acknowledged the above plat to me a true survey of the within named town: that the squares and streets are truly laid down, the lots in squares to be forever hereafter known by the numbers designated, and to be good in law to pass the same by deed or otherwise. Done before me,

WM DUNCAN,
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

In 1832 the tide of immigration set in at a greater pace, and Cyren Burdick, who had arrived in the fall of 1831, constructed the Kalamazoo House. From that time forth this house became the center of most of the activity that took place in Kalamazoo. The house was put into immediate use and yet it was not sufficient to meet the demands on many occasions, according to the following account.

Many a time has its outer walls been besieged with a throng of settlers; who were refused lodgement, only because there was not another inch of floor unoccupied, and the tired and belated traveler was fain to take lodgings on the 'cold, cold ground' with no other comforter than the promise of a breakfast in the morning. From this point land lookers, after a short rest, would set out in every direction to hunt up claims and locations, and many a bubble, in which the projector saw his many-hued fortune beaming up bright in the future, here had birth.

Among those who came in 1832 with their families was General Justus Burdick. Mr. Bronson, who had pur-

1Ibid, p. 15.
2Ibid, p. 16.
3Ibid, p. 16.
chased from Richardson his interest in the village of Bronson, became the sole proprietor. General Burdick, who was interested in acquiring part of the new village purchased through his agent, Cyren Burdick, one-half of Bronson's interest and thus he became a joint proprietor. A short time later Burdick sold part of his property to Thomas C. Sheldon and Lucious Lyon, but Bronson still held his half, which consisted of 80 acres.

It was through this three way partnership, however, that Portage Street was added to the map of Kalamazoo because Lyon added this land to the joint holdings and this greatly increased the size of the area.

The first meeting of the electors or voters of the township of Arcadia was held after an order was sent from the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan. The order read, "that said meeting should be held at the house of 'Titus Brown' the first Monday in April, 1831, but because there was no person of that name within the village the half-dozen voters met at the house of Titus Bronson, everyone feeling that this was the place that was intended. Oddly enough, there wasn't a single legal voter in the group, because none of them, as yet, had resided there a sufficient length of time, nor had they

\[1\text{Ibid, p. 16.}\]
\[2\text{Ibid, p. 16. (This partnership included Sheldon, Lyon and Burdick.)}\]
\[3\text{Ibid, p. 16.}\]
paid the required tax.\(^1\) They proceeded to vote, however, and some time later the Legislative Council legalized their act.\(^2\)

The first public record of a township meeting in the township of Arcadia was on April 3, 1832 and this meeting, too, was held in the house of Titus Bronson. It was during this meeting that the local officers were chosen as well as the boundaries of the town selected. It was during this meeting that the name Bronson was given to the village; this greatly pleased Mr. Bronson.\(^3\)

The method in which these various communiques arrived from the Legislative Council is interesting because this was actually the beginning of the Kalamazoo Post Office. From the month of May, 1830, and for three years following this time, the Post Office Department supplied mail westward from Detroit, the delivery being once a week. The mail went by means of a coach or wagon of some description from Detroit to Jackson. From here it went west through Marshall, Battle Creek, Gull Prairie and Schoolcraft to White Pigeon. Generally the man carried the mail on horseback or on foot, particularly in the spring and fall when the roads were bad and the streams

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 18.
\(^2\) Ibid, p. 18.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 19.
were high.\(^1\) Throughout this time and until July of 1832, there was no Post Office in the present city of Kalamazoo,\(^2\) and the few settlers here were all personally known to the postmasters at Gull Prairie and Schoolcraft and received their mail by special arrangement with the carrier who passed through on his way to other points. Postage costs at this time were twenty five cents for a single letter or more depending on distance and weight. Because money was very scarce and the settlements were small the mails were very light.\(^3\) Many times the mailman was able to carry all of the mail in his hatband.\(^4\)

On the 14th of July in 1832 a post office was established here by order of Amos Kendall, who was at this time the postmaster general. Dr. Jonathan G. Abbott was appointed the first postmaster.\(^5\) This commission bears the signature of Andrew Jackson, at that time President of the United States.\(^6\) The Post Office took the name of Bronson and was so known for four years.\(^7\)

The Post Office was first located by Dr. Abbott on the northeast corner of Main and Rose Streets in a

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 19. ("The first roads recorded are as follows, from Bronson to Genesee Prairie, Oct. 24, 1832; Bronson to Gull Prairie, October 25, 1832. Oct. 26th a road was surveyed from Gull Prairie to Indian Fields; January 29 and Jan. 31, 1833 road from Gull Prairie to Grand River.")
\(^2\) Ibid, p. VII.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. VII.
\(^4\) Ibid, p. VII.
\(^5\) Ibid, p. VII.
\(^6\) Ibid, p. VIII.
\(^7\) Ibid, p. VIII.
wooden building; this was his residence as well as his professional office.¹ In as much as there were a great many trees and stumps, and as Main Street west was very full of trees so that the traveller had little more than a path or trail to guide him, this part of the town was considered the "rural district."² As the town grew in proportions the business of the post office increased accordingly. A few years after the appointment of Dr. Abbott a full time postmaster was employed, being stationed in the center of the village.³

¹Ibid, p. VIII.
²Ibid, p. VIII.
³Ibid, p. VIII.
As the village of Bronson gained in population and industry and in education and political advancement, many more people became interested in controlling the community. As was shown previously, in the latter part of 1831, General Justus Brudick, purchased a portion of Mr. Bronson's village property. In 1836 other parties acquired a controlling interest and the name of the village was changed from Bronson to Kalamazoo.¹ The reasons why Mr. Bronson sold out and the name of the village was changed are rather vague. George N. Fuller remarks that "A new impulse came to the village in 1836 when Titus Bronson sold out to a company of men among whom was the enterprising surveyor, speculator and politician, Lucious Lyon."² Perhaps the main reason why the name of the village was changed was due to the fact that a much more populous township in Branch county was named Bronson.³

The name that was selected, namely Kalamazoo, was offered to the Territorial Government. In 1836 was passed an "Act to alter the names of the township of Arcadia and the village of Bronson -- Sec. #1."

¹Compendium, p. 68.
²Fuller, op. cit. p. 345.
³Thomas's, op. cit. p. 27.
Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Represen-
tives of the State of Michigan, That from and after
the 31st day of March inst., the name of the township
of Arcadia be changed and altered to that of Kalamazoo,
and also the name of the village of Bronson shall be
changed and hereafter known and called Kalamazoo.¹

The name that was selected was of Indian origin.²

Schoolcraft and other authorities say it etymology is
"Kih-Kalamazoo"³ which means "it boils like a pot," or
the "boiling pot," receiving this appellation from the
numerous small boiling-like eddies on the surface of the
river which bears its name.³ Since these eddies do not
appear all over the river, another account which comes
from Indian lore may perhaps be more correct. It would
explain the reason for the naming of the entire river
instead of limiting the name to a restricted area. This
Indian tradition is as follows: "Many moons ago, Tolland
Prairie was the site of a small Indian village. One
pleasant day a wager was made that an Indian could not
run to a certain point on the river and return ere the
water then boiling in a little pot on the fire should have
boiled out. The race was made, and thus the beautiful
river received its name of Kalamazoo, or 'where the water
boils in the pot,' and which name has been applied to the
whole stream."⁴

¹Ibid, p. 27.
²Ibid, p. 32. (Kee-Kalamazoo is given as another spelling.)
³Compendium, p. 32.
⁴Thomas's, op. cit. p. 9.
"It matters not his rank or name, or whence his baptism came, While thy swift waters lave their banks, shall live thine Indian name."¹

As the village advanced according to the census reports, so did it advance in economic and political liberality and in the use of the new inventions. The railroad project was a proposal that was very early discussed in the new village of Kalamazoo, and as early as March 28, 1836 an act was passed in the Legislature to incorporate the Kalamazoo and Lake Michigan Railroad Company. Epaphroditus Ransom, Charles E. Stuart, E. H. Lothrop, H. H. Comstock, and Isaac W. Willard, were appointed commissioners to receive capital stock, etc. Said "Company shall have power to construct a railroad, with a single or double track, from the mouth of the South Black River, in the County of Van Buren to the county of Kalamazoo."² For many years, however, Kalamazoo was to be without a railroad.

The movement for the abolition of slaves received its start in the eastern part of the United States in 1831.³ In order to oppose this moral wrong the "underground railroad" was rapidly formed and some prominent citizens of Kalamazoo aided in this movement. Dr. Nathan

¹Ibid, p.9.
²Ibid, p.27.
M. Thomas, the first regular physician in this county, located at Prairie Ronde in June, 1830. By heredity and by education he was a strong anti-slavery man at a time when it required a strong man to proclaim that doctrine. In 1837 Dr. Thomas, with four hundred and twenty-two other voters of the vicinity, sent a petition to congress asking its opposition to the admission of Texas, a slave-holding republic, as one of the States within the United States. This was the first memorial that was sent from Michigan on the subject. With the introduction of this phase of political and social thought, a new phase was gradually being introduced within the country which was destined to be one of the most critical of all previous or later phases.

In the building of the site that was later to be known as Kalamazoo, a great deal of credit must go to Titus Bronson. In Mr. Van Buren's sketch of Bronson he says that Bronson's practical discernment recognized not only the beauty but the utility of the location, saying to himself, "This will be a county seat." On the site he chose for his home he built a hut of tamarack poles, which he brought from the neighboring swamp and covered with grass. He passed

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1 Compendium, p. 47.
2 Ibid., p. 47.
3 Ibid., p. 47.
the winter of 1829 and 1830 at Prairie Ronde, in 1830 going to Ohio for his family. With his wife and eldest daughter, he came to Kalamazoo with a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen. Anxious hours, weary days and shelterless nights were spent upon their journey to this country that he had previously visited.¹

Early in the spring of 1831 Mr. Bronson erected a log house on the northwest corner of the present Church and Main Streets. In June, 1831, he entered the east half of the southeast quarter of section 15 in his wife's name, Mr. Richardson (a brother of Mrs. Bronson) at the same time entering the west half of the same section. Mr. Bronson also entered land in other parts of this country. During this time he had laid out the village of Bronson and secured the location of the county seat at Kalamazoo. He very generously contributed to the public the land extending from the corner of Rose and Burdick streets west to Park Street and south to South Street, including one square of sixteen rods as a court house site, and one square of sixteen rods as a site for a jail, one square of sixteen rods for an academy, one square of eight rods for a common-school building, also four squares of eight rods each to be given to the first four religious denominations that

¹Ibid, p. 67.
were incorporated in the village. These tracts include what is now Bronson Park. To all of these gifts he added a lot for the building of a cemetery, consisting of two acres. ¹

As has been stated, in 1836 other parties acquired a controlling interest and the name of the village was changed from Bronson to Kalamazoo. He soon sold all of his interests and travelled to Davenport, Iowa. He later moved to Henry, Illinois, and then finally in 1852 he made his last journey when he moved to Connecticut, where he died a poor and forgotten man in January of 1853. ²

And so ends the story of a man and begins the story of a village that gradually grows into a town and then a city, many thousand strong, with stories of other men who helped in the progress of this city, Kalamazoo.

¹Ibid, p. 67.
²Ibid, p. 68.
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