



150 Years of Alpine Township History

by
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mill on the site, and for many years it turned out shingles, lumber, and lath. R. Goodsell was also operating a mill in 1850 and was cutting 400,000 feet of lumber valued at \$2,000. Goodsell owned the 80 acres east of present Alpine Ave. and 4 Mile Road, and his mill may have been located on York Creek. He had \$500 invested in the water powered mill and had 400,000 feet of logs worth one thousand dollars. He employed three workers at his mill at a cost of \$60 per month.

The Industrial Census of 1860 listed two additional milling operations. Myron Buck was operating a sawmill worth \$3,000 and cutting 700,000 feet of pine per year. Buck's mill was powered by steam, and he had four laborers who earned \$100 per month. Buck listed the value of his yearly product as \$3,500. Hannah Thayer operated a water powered sawmill and was cutting 200,000 feet of pine per year at a value of \$1,000. Thayer had \$2,000 invested in the mill.

In 1868 a small industry was operating in Alpine. The Wolverine Pump Works was built by S. N. Edie in Section 36 one half mile north of the Mill Creek post office. Dillenback and Leavitt's *History and Directory of Kent County, Michigan* claimed:

It is located on a small branch of Mill Creek, whose waters give it motive power. The shop is furnished with facilities for manufacturing five thousand pumps per annum.

From 1860 to 1876 there was a good market for wooden pumps; F. B. Day and S. N. Edie were the principle pump manufacturers in the Grand Rapids area, sending pumps out in peddling wagons to the farms in the surrounding counties.

The forests not only furnished the natural resource needed for the development of the mills and other industries but also provided the area with its name. Franklin Everett, an early Grand Rapids historian, explained how Alpine Township got its name in 1847 after separating from Walker Township:

The name was singularly chosen, and is not the most appropriate. Every town is apt to have a dictorial voice; and the north half of Walker had its man who must dictate. He decided that the pine trees in the east part of

the township should furnish the name; and his poetic genius conceived and brought forth the name — "All Pine." In the name of the whole, he decided that the infant town should be so baptized. Mrs. Hills, seeing that "All Pine" was destined to be the name, suggested that one "l" should be dropped, and the two words condensed into one, which would still preserve the "pine," and be more musical. A sly twinkle was in her eye, as dictator said, "That's jist the thing."

The Mrs. Hills in the Everett quotation was the wife of Turner Hills who settled 40 acres in 1840 where the Alpine Golf Club is located today. John Ball visited the Hills and remembered the encounter in later life:

I went out by the east part of Alpine, and there found Mr. Hills, three miles in the woods, making shingles; and his accomplished wife got us dinner. Hills soon after died. His sons were then young, and probably did not expect all the good fortune they have since realized.

Turner died in 1842, leaving a wife, sometimes affectionately referred to as Mother Hills by early residents, and four sons and a daughter. Everett failed to identify the Mr. Hills who named Alpine, and one must assume one of Turner's sons played that role. Aaron Hubbell Hills purchased the 80 acres of land on the south west corner of present Alpine Ave. and 7 Mile Road, and he married Ann Colton in 1852. Charles T. Hills was active in local politics at that time and most likely the dictator in Everett's story. Charles T. served as Clerk for the first township meeting at the home of Abram Konkle when the township was named. He was elected Justice of the Peace in 1848 and 1851 and served as Supervisor in 1852.

The Hills were well known for their hospitality. When Lyman S. Ballard arrived in Grand Rapids with his family in 1850, they secured the services of Aaron Hills to take them to their land on the north Alpine town line. Lucina Ballard, the wife of Lyman S. Ballard, left this written account of the Hills:

He [Aaron] stowed us and our luggage into a lumber wagon where each of us was obliged to carry a small child on our laps. I was ill but

as there was no other way I kept up the best I could. Sherre and Charlie were perched on the load somewhere. The city looked like a straggling village with a few stores on Monroe Street which were one and one-half stories with square board fronts. On leaving the city we soon entered the woods and went part of the way through oak openings without a clearing, to about eight miles north to the

home of Mrs. Hills, Aaron Hills' mother. She gave me a bed and took us all in, weary, travel worn and dusty. There were fourteen of us, including two babies. The next day (Sunday) Mrs. Hills cooked a turkey for dinner. I had rested and refreshed myself with clean clothes and ate dinner, my first meal since Friday night previous.

Early Settlers of Alpine

Solomon Wright II - First Settler

The family of Solomon Wright II from Wayne County, New York, were the first settlers of what is now Alpine Township. In 1836 Solomon Wright and his sons, Benjamin and Solomon Jr., left the rest of their family in Jackson, Michigan, and ventured west in search of land for establishing a home. When the Wrights arrived in Grand Rapids, they explored the lands north of the rapids on Indian Mill Creek and pre-empted 80 acres for their home (occupied Indian land before the government offered it for sale). That summer they cleared enough land to build a crude log cabin that was to serve as the Wright's first house. Later Solomon and the boys returned to Jackson to get the rest of the family and their household furnishings. In the fall of 1837 Solomon and Mary Wright and their five sons, Benjamin, Solomon III, Noadiah, Andrew, and Jeremiah, loaded their household furnishings and a quantity of potatoes on a river scow and floated down the Grand River, a common mode of transportation for many of the early pioneers. When the Wrights reached the rapids in the Grand River, they transported their goods overland to their homestead. The Wrights took their goods up the old Muskego Indian Trail to their new farm in North Walker, where Gracewil Golf Course is located today. Solomon purchased 80 acres of property on August 3, 1839, for \$100. Benjamin Wright, the oldest

son, purchased 160 acres west of his father on July 29, 1839 for \$200. Franklin Everett wrote in his *Memorials of the Grand River Valley*:

The Wrights found no settlers in the west part of the town, or in the north part of Walker. There were in the town three Frenchmen named Peter Labelle, Joseph Genie and another, name forgotten. These Frenchmen put up a mill on government land; stayed two or three years, and went away. Further is not known that there were any residents in town when the Wright family came in the fall of 1837.

When Enoch Hammill conducted the census in the summer of 1838, there were two 10 acre parcels of land that had been improved, but there was no one living on the property. E. B. Curtis had cut the trees in the SW 1/4 on Section 29 and E. Jewells had a 10 acre field of oats on the section line between Sections 31 and 32. Solomon Wright's house was located on Hammill's survey map on the north side of the town line on the Moskego Trail and it was the only structure located on the map.

Little is known of the efforts of the Wrights to settle in Alpine. Solomon Wright II was a scholarly man. He was educated at Williams College in Massachusetts and followed academic interests rather than business. He was active in the political development of North Walker and School District #3. In April 1838 Wright was appointed Direc-