

Mallets / Malletts Creek Settlement and School, 1824-1853 (Pittsfield Twp, MI)

Source: The Washtenaw Post, May 29, 1924; note, Mallets Creek Settlement encompassed the area around Packard and Platt roads, which much later became East Ann Arbor, and now is part of the city of Ann Arbor.

By R. C. Campbell

The terms "settler" and "settlement" are associated with frontier conditions and pioneer days. A settlement contained within itself possibilities for expression along community lines. Some settlements developed into villages and cities while others never went beyond being rural neighborhoods. Such was the case with what was known as the Malletts Creek Settlement located in the northeastern part of the township now called Pittsfield, it remained distinctly rural.

Settlers began to come into this region in 1824.

Samuel D. McDowell was the first man to take up land in Pittsfield. He located on section 2, in April 1824, where U. G. Darling now lives (as of 1924).

In May 1824, Ezra Maynard took up land on section 3, half a mile west of Mr. McDowell. On June 5, 1824, Mr. Maynard wrote a letter to his son in Whitesboro, N. Y. which has been preserved among the Pioneer records. He says in part:

"After examining many places in the territory of Michigan, we have taken up a half section of land on the lower Huron, forty miles west of Detroit and two and one half miles south of the county seat in Washtenaw county, but not in the same town. Many locations have been made within ten days. As we are the first family that has commenced a house, we have taken the liberty to name the place Richland. There is a lack of timber generally. We have plenty of timber, water and stone, 50 acres are ready for the plow.

"Mechanics of all kinds have come to the county seat, which has been established since we came, by the government."

Mr. Maynard, or "Deacon" Maynard, as he was commonly called, was enthusiastic about the site of Ann Arbor, for he writes "It is the most delightful place for a city or village in the world. All agree in this opinion."

Some time after John Allen came to Ann Arbor, some of his people from Virginia followed him. They left their old home on the 28th of August, 1824 and arrived at Ann Arbor October 16 of the same year.

These items are gathered from a letter written by James T. Allen, brother of John Allen. Mr. Allen continues: "Deacon Maynard and his family were at Malletts Creek living in a bark shanty. He had the body of his log house up but had no roof on it. In passing through Malletts Creek with our heavy Pennsylvania wagon we stuck in the mud and the Deacon helped to pull us out with his oxen."

Perhaps it might be added that Mr. Allen did not write the whole story -- that we know -- because he afterwards became the Deacon's son-in-law.

Malletts Creek School

The year 1825 marked the real establishment of the settlement. Ezra Whitmore, who was one of the pupils in Washtenaw's first school, has written an extended account of the events of the year 1825 in the Malletts Creek Settlement.

He tells of the people who came in, gives the names of the children who gathered under a big oak in an "out of doors" school, of which Miss Elzada Fairbrother acted as teacher. Mr. Whitmore does not mention the building of the school house but we learn from other sources that it was to house this group of children that the settlers got together and put up a building. Miss Fairbrother did not stay in the settlement long, so it fell to Harriet Parsons to lead these children from the shade of the big oak through the door of Washtenaw's first school house.

The school house served as a real community center. Deacon Maynard writes in his letter of January 21, 1827, "Tonight our prayer meeting is to be held in the school house for the first time."

Horace Carpenter writes "A debating club was founded in 1827 at the above named school house." All the great questions of the day were discussed at their weekly meetings.

The Evolving Township

In 1834, the township of Pitt was organized. The old records of the township do not show that there was any formal motion made to change the name to Pittsfield, but from 1838, that is the name used in all the official records.

For a time Mr. Parsons kept a "Wayside Inn" and a post office called Pitt was a part of the establishment.

In the office of the Register of Deeds there is recorded a lease given by Alpheus Collins to the school board in 1834. It leased a plot of ground 20 rods west of Platts Corners on the south side of the road, as a site for a school house. The period the lease was five years and Mr. Collins was to be paid 5 pence.

Alpheus Collins was a member of the Constitutional convention held at Detroit in May 1835. He had been a Captain in the army in the war of 1812.

The Evolving School

At the expiration of the five year period the board rented a building of Moses Collins which was used as a school house, this was on the north side of the road. Its location is described in the old district records as being "between the creek and Mr. Collin's garden".

This building was used for a number of years but was evidently unsatisfactory.

While the people of the district desired to build a new school house, they could not agree upon a site. The people to the east finally built the Carpenter school house, but it was too far from the west side of the settlement to be in favor with the inhabitants there, so in 1853 a separate district was formed and the first Stone school house was erected, and Miss Mary Collins was installed as teacher. The paper read by this teacher at the time the old school house was abandoned, tells in an interesting story of conditions in the district in 1853.

End of the Settlement

The year 1853 may be said to mark the end of Malletts Creek settlement, as from that time on, the territory around Malletts Creek was divided into two distinct school districts.

On September 2, 1885 the Pioneers of Washtenaw county met at the home of the president H. D. Platt, in Pittsfield. It was a beautiful day and there was a large gathering of the venerable first settlers of the county. The site of the first school house was near and was visited by many. The early days of the Malletts Creek Settlement were reviewed by those who had lived then, and spoke with first-hand knowledge.

The local newspapers of the day devoted generous space to the meeting and many of the events here referred to were mentioned in the printed press.