



The Mitten

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During the 1830s the population of Michigan grew quickly. In 1830, 27,000 people lived in Michigan. By 1840 more than 212,000 people lived here. Most pioneers arrived in Detroit from the East. What was life like for these early settlers as they headed into the wilderness?

Getting to the land they planned to settle was often a **challenge**. The roads were muddy, rocky trails. There were no bridges, which made crossing even the smallest creek a problem. Fallen trees, getting lost, and wild animals also caused problems.

Once the family got to their land they made a shanty to live in until their log cabin could be

Pioneer LIFE

built. The father and sons cut 50 to 60 trees and stacked them into a rectangular structure.

The gaps in the logs were filled with small strips of wood and mud, called chinking. The roof was made of shingles that were sliced from logs. The shingles were held down by smaller logs

This log cabin built in the 1830s is part of the Troy Historical Museum.

because nails were unavailable. A doorway and a window were cut. A door was made from split logs, and since glass was unavailable, greased paper covered the window.

A fireplace was also added. Since there were no matches and neighbors might live miles away, the fire was always kept burning. There were

no walls dividing the cabin, so blankets set off a bedroom. Children usually slept in the loft.

When the cabin was finished the land had to be cleared. Oxen pulled a plow to break up the land for planting. Once the grain was harvested it was hauled to a **grist mill**, which was usually miles from the cabin.

Wild animals were **nuisances**, but the worst pest was the mosquito. Since Michigan was very wet, there were lots of mosquitoes. Many pioneers suffered from the ague. It was caused by mosquito bites. Ague was rarely fatal, but it left people with a high fever and chills.

Pioneers did not spend all their time working. They played games, such as wrestling, running, horseshoes and tug-of-war.

The pioneer period did not last long. By the 1850s roads and cities were **conquering** the wilderness, and houses were replacing log cabins.



Tom Sherry

When **NECESSITY** was the MOTHER OF INVENTION

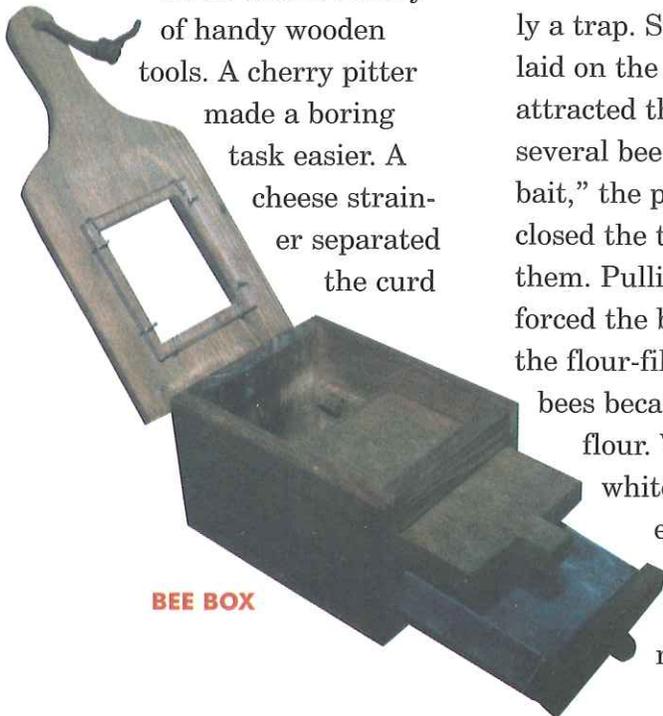
All photos Allan Malan



HAIR WREATH

Pioneer women always had plenty of work to do. To help them with their many tasks Michigan's early settlers invented **devices** that saved time and labor.

To prepare food, housewives used a variety of handy wooden tools. A cherry pitter made a boring task easier. A cheese strainer separated the curd



BEE BOX

from the whey in cheese making. Pioneers often churned their own butter and made extra butter to sell to a store.

Another cash crop was wild bee honey. Finding a bee tree was hard, so the early settlers used a homemade bee box. The box was about four inches by eight inches and had three moveable parts. A drawer, containing flour, was located in the bottom. This was covered with a pull-out shelf. The top had a window in the center and was hinged.

The box was actually a trap. Sweet bait laid on the closed shelf attracted the bee. When several bees "took the bait," the pioneer closed the top, trapping them. Pulling out the shelf forced the bees to drop into the flour-filled drawer. The bees became coated with flour. When released, the whitened bees were easy to follow back to their hive. The pioneer took most of the honey

in the hive and sold it. The settler also carved his initials on the tree to claim it as his own.

Insects and rodents plagued the settlers. A pie safe, a cabinet with doors covered with screening, protected pies and leftovers from pests. A cage-like mousetrap served two purposes: it got rid of pests and captured food for pets.



MOUSE TRAP

Besides labor-saving inventions, pioneers also created items to decorate their houses. Human hair wreathes were popular. Hair was saved from brushing and cuttings and coiled into shapes. Since photographs were rare, a hair wreath was a cherished keepsake of a loved one.

Pioneers coming to Michigan traveled along dirt roads that followed the routes of Indian trails. These roads were full of holes and often muddy. After traveling on one of these early roads, one pioneer wrote that she had been “jolted to a jelly.”

Many other pioneers, especially those coming from New York, arrived in Michigan by boat.

They started their journey on the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal looked like a small river. It was 4 feet deep and 42 feet wide, but it stretched 363 miles across New York state.

Passengers traveled on flatboats—large wooden boats that looked like a box. These flatboats were pulled by horses that walked along the edge of the canal.

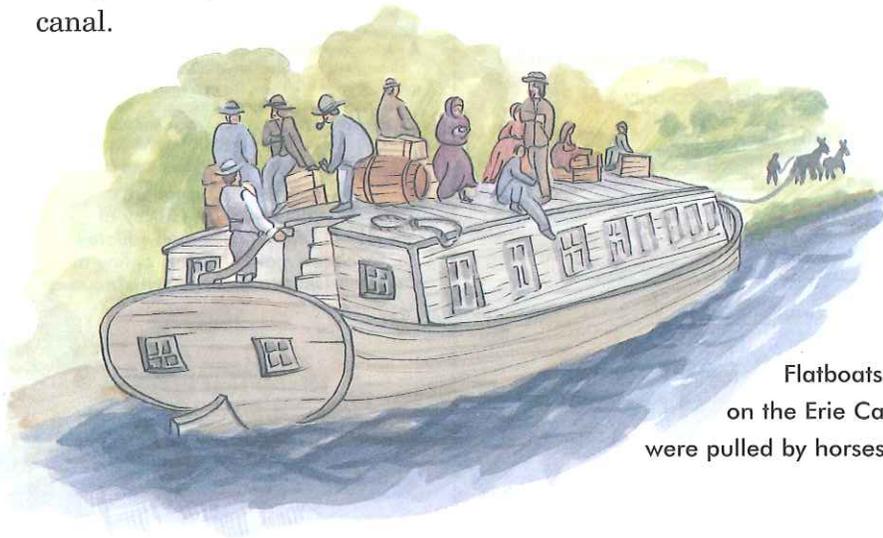
During the day, passengers remained on the boat’s deck. They sang or talked with the other passengers. At night, travelers slept in the cabin. It was not a pleasant place to sleep. The straw-padded bunks were often dirty and smelled. The cabin’s door and windows

THE ERIE CANAL How They Got Here

were closed to keep out the mosquitoes and the bad smells of the canal. This left the

cabin hot and stuffy.

Erie Canal flatboats traveled about 2 miles per hour and cost the passengers about half a penny a mile. When flatboats reached Buffalo, New York, passengers boarded steamboats for the three-day journey through Lake Erie to Detroit. Once in Detroit, the pioneer families headed inland to settle the Michigan wilderness.



Flatboats on the Erie Canal were pulled by horses.

Where to Take Your Family

Walker Tavern

From 1836 through 1855—when a stagecoach ride from Detroit to Chicago was a five-day trip—a favorite stopping place to change horses, relax, enjoy a meal, or spend the night was Walker Tavern. Today, exhibits at Walker Tavern in Cambridge Junction include an 1840s parlor, bar-room, dining room, kitchen, and barn. The historic site is open Memorial Day through Labor Day and the remainder of the year by special appointment.



Telephone (517) 467-4401 or contact the Michigan Historical Museum. Visit online at www.michigan.gov/walkertavern.

The Michigan Historical Museum

Visitors can experience what it was like to ride on a plank road in the Statehood and Settlement gallery at the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing. Also, the Michigan Historical Center’s Web site offers lesson plans and activities relating to Michigan’s pioneer era. Telephone (517) 373-3559, TDD: (800) 827-7007. Visit online at www.michiganhistory.org.

What Did You Learn?

ACROSS

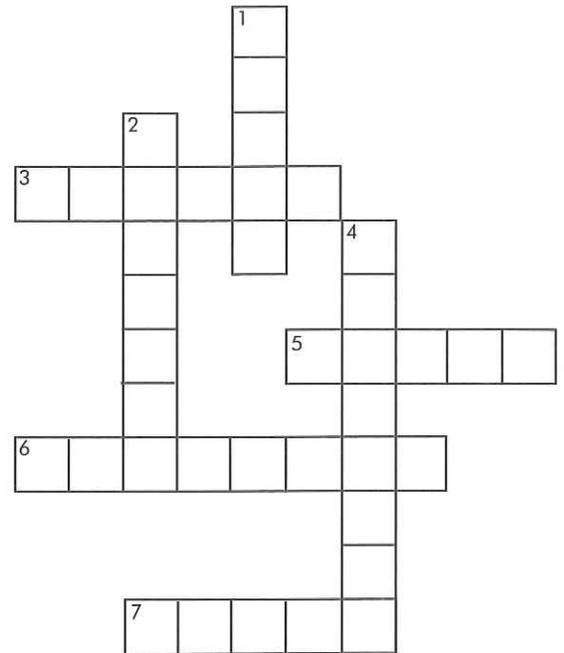
- Flatboats on the Erie Canal were pulled by _____.
- Many pioneers suffered from mosquito bites that caused high _____ and chills.
- One of the worst pests for the pioneers was the _____.
- Since the pioneers did not have _____, the shingles on their homes were held down by smaller logs.

DOWN

- There was no glass available for windows, so pioneers used greased _____.
- Crossing even small creeks was a problem for the pioneers since there were no _____.
- Pioneers saved human hair and used it to make _____ to decorate their homes.

Word List (in random order)

BRIDGES
PAPER
HORSES
FEVER
WREATHES
MOSQUITO
NAILS



Vocabulary

Challenge: something that takes a lot of effort to accomplish.

Conquering: taking over.

Devices: objects made to do a specific function.

Grist mill: a grinding mill.

Nuisance: something that is bothersome or annoying.