

1837-Connecticut to Michigan

The Panic of 1837

The economic expansion from 1834 to 1836 was supported by high prices for exports, particularly cotton, and by rising prices for land sales. Great Britain invested heavily in the US, and silver was coming into US coffers from Mexico and China. In 1837 all this was reversed when British banks, followed by American banks, raised their interest rate. The price of cotton fell, and land sales almost stopped when buyers were forced to buy with silver or gold coins, something few of them had. Speculation and lending almost stopped, there was 25% unemployment, and every household in America felt the sting of a recession.¹ Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio was blamed by many in the Church of Jesus Christ when their bank failed, but he had little control over the outcome in the national financial crisis.

The Cooks were affected even before the crisis. Phineas Cook Sr. inherited the debts of his brother Amasa in addition to the family farm, and was never able to pay off either debt. He tried everything he could think of, sent his boys out to work, got a job and leased the farm to his oldest son Daniel. Finally he began to think of selling his childhood home and farm, and his Uncle Amasa was anxious to buy the prime property.

At this important time in the family's history, Lewis Cass, governor of Michigan Territory, entered into the picture. He had been governor of Michigan Territory already for 18 years when he began to write articles for Eastern newspapers to attract enough settlers for statehood.

"A bad survey report after the War of 1812 described Michigan as 'an interminable swamp.' It was widely circulated and discouraged settlement. Cass made it a personal campaign to correct the injustice. He wrote letters to Congress, editorials for East Coast newspapers, and started what we would call a marketing campaign with notices and newspaper advertisements encouraging people to move to Michigan.

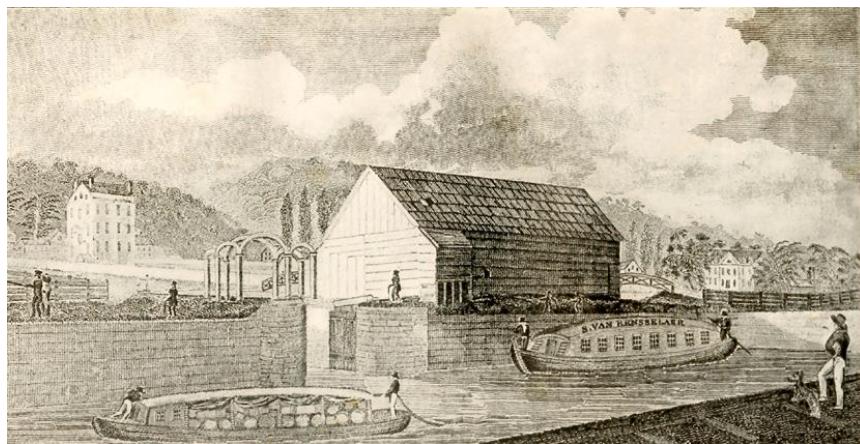
"It worked. The perception of Michigan was changed and, aided by steamboats and the new Erie Canal in 1826, settlers began streaming into the territory. Michigan (gained) statehood in 1837...."²

Phineas Cook heard the reports about Michigan Territory, weighed the impending disaster of losing his family farm, and sold out to Uncle Amasa, who happily evicted the family from the premises. Phineas and his daughter Eliza and son-in-law Salmon Hall went to Michigan in 1836. His three sons Phineas W., Darius and Daniel came in 1837, and Irene and the girls came in 1838.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1837

² <http://blogs.detroitnews.com/history/2014/06/29/lewis-cass/>

The Erie Canal



The lock at Albany, a drawing in 1823 before the canal was opened. This lock connected the Hudson River with the Erie Canal.

(Courtesy eriecanal.org)

PWC Journal: *in the fall I started with my oldest brother Daniel and his family for Michigan(.) we had a hard journey(;) it took us 7 days to cross Lake Erie in storms and gales... ”*

Phineas W. left Connecticut with his brother Daniel's family. Had they traveled by wagon on roads through New York and Ohio they would have gone straight to Toledo.

However, we know they

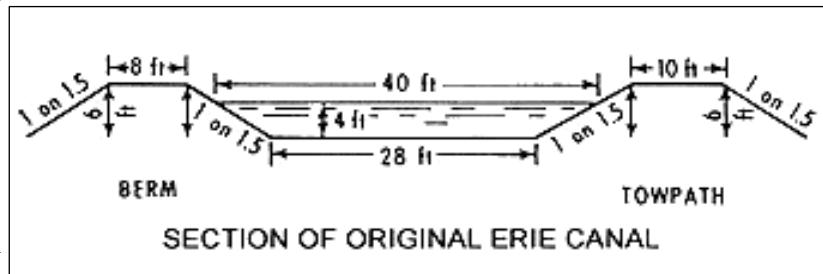
went north up the Hudson River to the Erie Canal because they ended up so far north they had to take the Lake Erie steamship from Buffalo all the way down the lake, which Phineas W. said took seven days.

“In order to open the country west of the Appalachian Mountains to settlers and to offer a cheap and safe way to carry produce to a market, the construction of a canal was proposed as early as 1768.

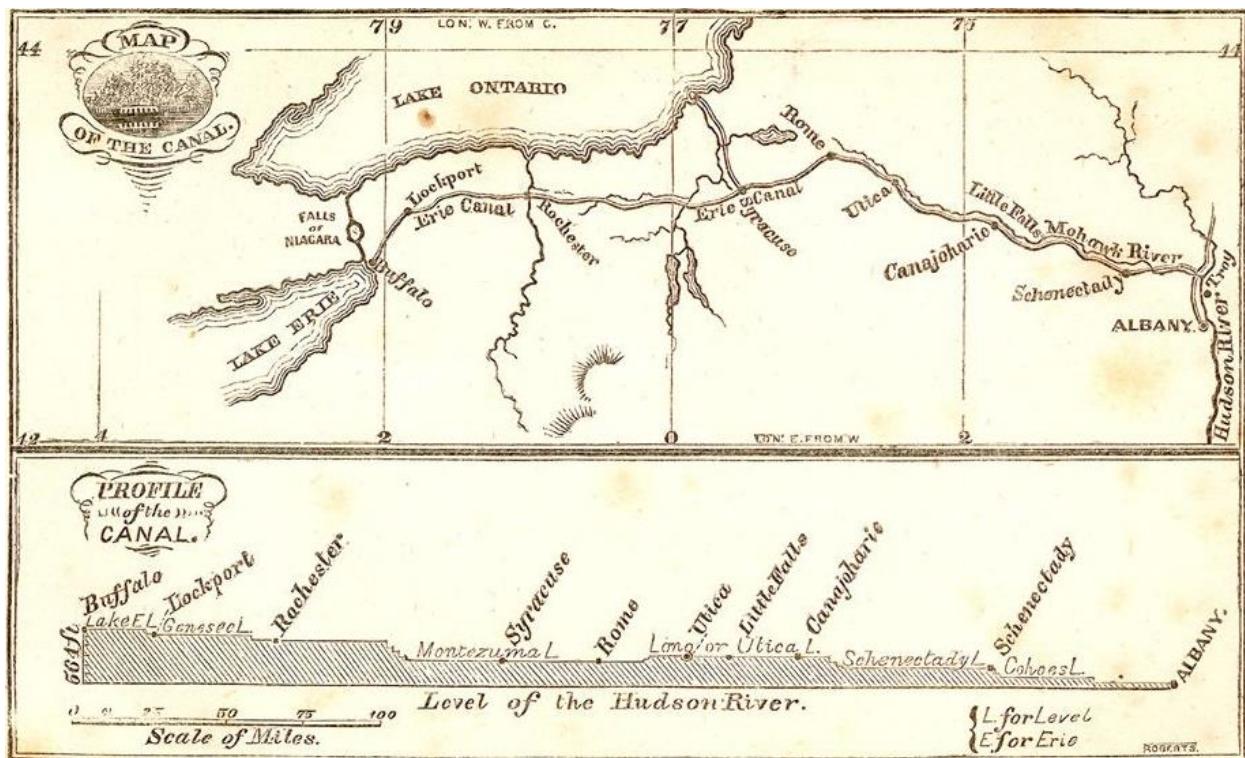
“On July 4th, 1817, ground was broken for the Erie Canal at Rome, N.Y. Two hundred years later, in 2017, we celebrate the bicentennial of this historic event. Proposed in 1808 and completed in 1825, the canal links the waters of

Lake Erie in the west to the Hudson River in the east. An engineering marvel when it was built, some called it the Eighth Wonder of the World.

“It included 18 aqueducts to carry the canal over ravines and rivers, and 83 locks, with a rise of 568 feet from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. It was 4 feet deep and 40 feet wide, and floated boats carrying 30 tons of freight. A ten foot wide towpath was built along the bank of the canal for the horses and/or mules which pulled the boats and their driver, often a young boy (sometimes referred to by later writers as a "hoggee").



A cross section of the canal, including the towpath for horses to pull the barges. It was later widened and deepened. (www.eriecanal.org)



Map and Profile of the canal, from Marco Paul's voyages & Travels, Erie Canal/ by Jacob Abbott. (Harper & Brothers, New York, c1852 (Reprinted in eriecanal.org)

"In order to keep pace with the growing demands of traffic, the Erie Canal was enlarged between 1836 and 1862. The "Enlarged Erie Canal" was 70 feet wide and 7 feet deep, and could handle boats carrying 240 tons. The number of locks was reduced to 72. Most of the remaining traces of the Old Erie Canal are from the Enlarged Erie era."³

When the Cooks traveled to Buffalo, the canal would have been the old shallow canal before it had been updated. Fares were published in the newspaper in 1846, probably about the same as the fare in 1837 when Phineas W. and Daniel Cook came through. From the starting point at Albany to Buffalo it was 364 miles. The published price was stated: "Passengers by the canal will reach Buffalo from Albany or Albany from Buffalo, if traveling by line boat, in six days. The usual rate of fare is one cent per mile without, or 1½ cents with board."⁴ (I assume that means room and board when the boat stopped for the night.) Since Phineas stated he borrowed money from his mother for his fares, obviously he knew ahead of time what the trip would cost him.

³ Official Erie Canal Website: www.eriecanal.org

⁴ Official Erie Canal Website: www.eriecanal.org



A drawing of a section of the Erie Canal shortly after it opened in the fall of 1825 by Episcopalian minister John Henry Hopkins

(at the William L. Clements Library, via A.P.)



One of the old locks raising the level of the water. The difference in elevation is 568 feet as it travels west. (Wikipedia)

Lake Erie Steamship

PWC Journal: “*it took us 7 days to cross Lake Erie in storms and gales which seemed at times to threaten us with destruction but the Lord brought us to land in the town of Toledo(.) that night for the first time I had the ague and fever(.)*

“The first steamboat on the upper Great Lakes was built in 1818 to navigate Lake Erie. It was a success and more vessels like it followed. Steamboats on the lakes grew in size and number, and additional decks were built on the superstructure to allow more capacity. This inexpensive method of adding capacity was adapted from river steamboats and successfully applied to lake-going craft. The Erie Canal opened in 1825, allowing settlers from New England and New York to reach Michigan by water through Albany and Buffalo.”⁵

“U.S. Historians generally refer to the side-wheeler Walk-In-The-Water, launched from Buffalo New York in 1818, as the boat that ushered in Great Lakes navigation. This first steamboat on Lake Erie was both a passenger and freight carrier. This was merely nine years after the steamboat itself was developed as a transportation vehicle. During this very same year the Great lakes received its first lighthouse at Erie Pennsylvania. In fact, steamboats are credited with developing much of the midwest and Great Lakes region for half a century during the 1800’s.



By the 1850s steamboats dominated river and lake transportation. As you can imagine, the history of the Great Lakes also includes some very tragic shipping disasters.”⁶

A steamship with a side wheel to propel it through the water was introduced on Lake Erie in 1818 . Many more were built exactly like it.

(<http://tripsintohistory.com>)

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes_passenger_steamers

⁶ <http://tripsintohistory.com/2013/02/09/the-palace-steamers-of-the-great-lakes/>

"The shallowest section of Lake Erie is the western basin where depths average only 25 to 30 feet (7.6 to 9.1 m); as a result, "the slightest breeze can kick up lively waves," according to a *New York Times* reporter in 2004.^[17] The "waves build very quickly", according to other accounts.^{[18][19]} Sometimes fierce waves springing up unexpectedly have led to dramatic rescues..."

"Short-term level changes are often caused by seiches (a standing wave in an enclosed or partly enclosed body of water, the result of two waves traveling in opposite directions which continue the wave action indefinitely) that are particularly high when southwesterly winds blow across the length of the lake during storms. These cause water to pile up at the eastern end of the lake. Storm-driven seiches can cause damage onshore. During one storm in November 2003, the water level at Buffalo rose by 7 feet (2.1 m) with waves of 10–15 feet (3.0–4.6 metres) for a rise of 22 feet (6.7 m).^[26] Meanwhile, at the western end of the lake, Toledo experienced a similar drop in water level."⁷

The city at the western and southern edge of Lake Erie is Toledo, Ohio. All travelers headed for Michigan had to go through Toledo on their way west.



With the lake in the background and the Maumee River on the right, there is no shortage of water in Toledo. Hence, Phineas' malaria attack (ague and fever) there. (videoblocks.com)

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Erie

Ague (ā'gyoo) and Fever

Phineas, in his six days on the Erie Canal and his seven days on Lake Erie was bitten by a malarial mosquito, and suffered for years. Thousands of settlers on land opening up in the west suffered with him. Malaria was the cause of much sickness and even death in early Michigan. The medical dictionary states Ague is “A condition in which there are alternating periods of chills, fever, and sweating. Used chiefly in reference to the fevers associated with malaria.”⁸

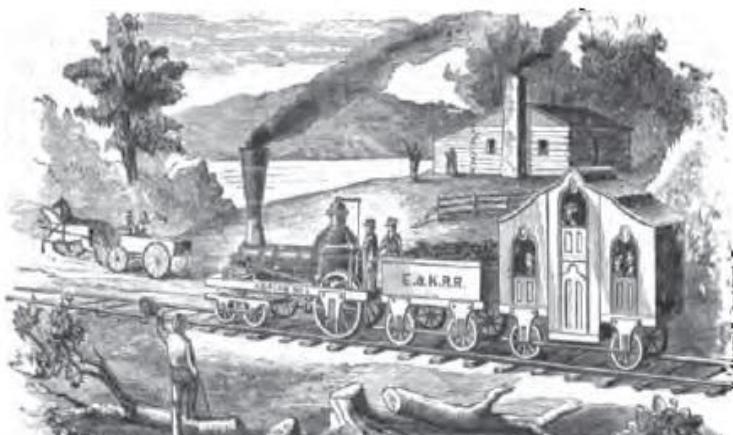
“Ague, a malarial disease transmitted by mosquito bites and characterized by intermittent fevers and chills, was a leading cause of chronic illness across America from the colonial period until 1900. While malaria is most often found in tropical and subtropical climates, American settlers were plagued by ague near wetlands, even in the temperate north. Because the disease originated in Europe and Africa, its effects on Native American populations were often devastating. By 1900, draining wetlands for agriculture and development led to a dramatic decline in malarial disease in all regions but the South; there, eradication required extensive public health campaigns during the first half of the Twentieth Century.”⁹

First Michigan Railroad

PWC Journal: “*the next day we took the cars and came to Adrian(.)*”

In March of 1836, prompted by unprecedented immigration into the area, the Territorial Legislature authorized the building of several railroads in Michigan. The first completed was the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad, operating from Port Lawrence (now Toledo, Ohio) to Adrian, Michigan, a distance of 33 miles. It began operating on November 2, 1836, pulled by horses, the first railroad west of the Alleghenies.¹⁰

On July 4, 1837, five months before Phineas W. Cook rode on it with Daniel’s family, the Toledo to Adrian line received a locomotive to power it. It would be six years before another railroad was completed in Michigan.



The Cooks rode the first railroad in Michigan
(Michigan State University Library)

⁸ <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/ague>

⁹ Dictionary of American History, The Gale Group Inc. (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/ague>)

¹⁰ Michigan’s Railroad History, 1825-2014,
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/Michigan_Railroad_History_506899_7.pdf

“The Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad put the first locomotive ever to run on Michigan tracks into service on their 33-mile Adrian-to-Toledo route. Prior to the locomotive's arrival, horses had pulled the railroad cars along the tracks.”¹¹

Daniel’s brother-in-law lived somewhere near Tecumseh, and he got off the train early in an effort to get a wagon to haul their luggage. Daniel’s family would be staying with her brother’s family, and he apparently had agreed to pick them up at the train. Phineas and Daniel’s family



stayed with the train because their luggage was buried under everyone else’s. After the train reached Adrian and reversed direction, it came back to the place where Daniel had left, and Phineas directed the engineer to stop and unload their goods at the side of the track.

Phineas and Daniel’s family waited, but became fearful that Daniel had lost his way, so Phineas took off in the direction Daniel had gone to see if he could find him before dark. Following the unfinished railroad tracks in the direction of Tecumseh, he encountered one of the “interminable swamps” for which Michigan had been famous.

PWC Journal: *“the next day we took the cars and came to Adrian(.) our things were left about 5 miles from that place on the side of the way by the return cars(.) my brother stopt at the same place when the cars ware going out and went to his brother in laws for a team while I went on with the cars to take care of our things(,) it being inconvenient to unload at that place on account of other baggage in the car and on the top of ours(.)*

“when I returned Daniel had not come with the team and it was nearly sundown, and I began to think that he had lost his way(.) the country was new and nearly all swamp(.) at length I started after him leaving his wife with the things(.) I took the rail road track leading to Tecumseh(,) it being the course in which he lived(.) it was a fine road to travel on foot on, the flat rills (rails) being laid down for about 2 miles(.)

“then I came to a swamp and ownly logs roaled into the water so that I was sometimes in the water and sometimes on the logs(,) and I began to wish myself out(.) in this way I went on for 2 miles more(.) at last I got through(.) I saw a light and by inquiring I found I was 1 mile yet from the place(,) and being directed I traveled on and arrived at the house at 10 o'clock(,) being

¹¹ Michigan State University Library (<https://blogpublic.lib.msu.edu/red-tape/2018/jan/january-20-1837-first-locomotive-powered-train-michigan/>)

about 2-1/2 hours going 5 miles(.) I found that Daniel had been thare and gone with a team after his wife and goods(.)

Corduroy Roads

Phineas stated he came to a road in the swamp made of “ownly logs roaled into the water.” While the road obviously was not adequate for traveling, it was better than nothing. It was “a road created by logs laid across a swampy, low-lying area, placed together or ‘ribbed’ like corduroy cloth.”¹² “Sand covered timbers known as corduroy roads served as the primary routes into Kalamazoo, but these roads required constant maintenance and were hazardous to horse and wagon traffic.” Eventually some of the major Corduroy Roads were improved: “Planks from two to four inches in thickness were laid upon timbers placed horizontally with a graded roadway.”¹³

Across Michigan to Richland

PWC Journal: *we staid there 5 days to rest and then he and I left on foot for Kalamazoo where Father was 100 miles distant(.) we traveled 3-1/2 days and arrived safe(,) ownly our feet were blistered from heel to toe(.) this was the 17th day of October 1837(.)*



Maps: Courtesy MapQuest

¹² Stagecoach Terms and Slang, <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-stagecoachterms/>

¹³ Clarence L. Miller Local History Room, Kalamazoo Public Library, <http://www.kpl.gov/local-history/transportation/plankroads.aspx>

PWC Journal: *This was a hard and toilsome journey but we were thankful when we came to the end of it(.) We found father sick with the Ague and fever and also all the rest(.) we found them on Gull prarie town of Richland about 10 miles north from Kalamazoo(.)*

I stayed with them a few weeks when I went to Gull Mills and hired to a man by the name of William Toles for \$10 a month makeing bedsteads (.) I here found an opertunity of making furniture to pay Mother for the money she loaned me to come west with which ammountded to \$36. 00(.) I made a bureau a round stand one square table full leaf one square stand one bedstead(,) all together worth about \$45. 00

Richland, Michigan

“Richland is located in the middle of what was once the Gull Prairie, an upland area relatively free of trees and maintained by natural and man-made fires. The area had a few Pottawattamie villages, one was located on the west side of nearby Gull Lake. Fish and game were plentiful, and the land was very fertile. Since there were few trees to clear, the prairie was among the first areas of Kalamazoo County to be settled. By the 1830s, the Native Americans had been moved west, and Richland was a thriving frontier village. The village even contended with Prairie Ronde for the county seat, but the centrally-located village of Bronson (now Kalamazoo) was ultimately chosen.”¹⁴

“As is true of many towns in the southern Michigan counties, Richland’s settlement began in earnest in 1830. Colonel Isaac Barnes traveled through the area in 1827 looking for habitable sites and returned to his home in Medina, Ohio, with a very favorable report on Gull Prairie, as Richland was originally known. Henry Little, a 19th century historian, claims that Barnes’ tales of his exploration inspired Titus Bronson, Kalamazoo’s founder, to undertake his own travels in 1829.

“In the spring of 1830, Colonel Barnes and David Dillie, along with their families, arrived at Gull Prairie and constructed shelters, with more than 50 people settled by the end of the year. More arrived the following spring in preparation for June 18, 1831, when lands in the eastern part of Kalamazoo County were to be put up for sale. By the end of that day, all the available land on Gull Prairie, indeed in the county, had been purchased by settlers and speculators — for \$1.25 an acre.”¹⁵

“The Indians, who had traversed the area long before the white settlers arrived, had established well-known trails across Gull Prairie. It was only natural to establish commercial development at the intersection of two of those trails. In 1833, a “diagonal road was built from Bronson (now Kalamazoo) to Gull Prairie, ending just a short distance west of that intersection. Today Richland’s only traffic light identifies the place where the present-day village had its beginnings.

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richland,_Michigan

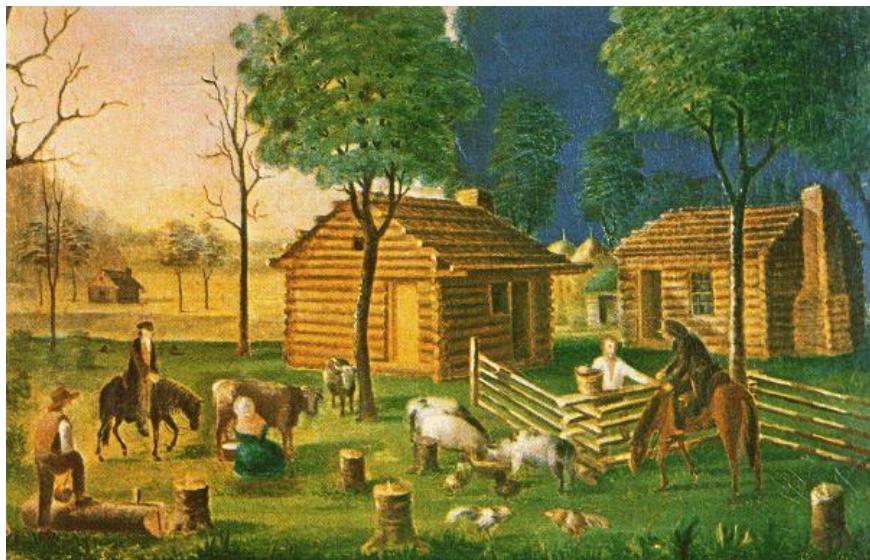
¹⁵ Sharon Ferraro, “A short history of Richland, Michigan,” https://www.mlive.com/living/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2010/09/post_8.html

“A hotel was built on the northeast corner in 1833, and two years later, a store opened on the southwest corner. Soon other businesses were established and in 1837, a church was built along the village square. The four corners became known as Gull Corners or Richland Center.”¹⁶

Phineas Cook Sr. came to Michigan in 1836 with his daughter Eliza and her husband Salmon C. Hall and their two children. Salmon C. Hall, apparently acting for Phineas, filed for one of the original land entries in Kalamazoo Section 2 in February, 1837.¹⁷ Phineas thereafter appeared as the taxpayer in 1839.¹⁸ The first deed in the name of Phineas Cook was dated February 19, 1839.¹⁹

In the 1837 Michigan State Census “Solomon C. Hall” and Phineas Cook appeared in the 1837 list of residents of Richland. In the 1838 Richland tax Phineas Cook and Salmon C. Hall appear. Phineas Cook is listed with 65 acres (value \$270) real estate in section 2; Salmon with

none.²⁰ Both were enumerated in the Ross Township tax payers list of 1839.²¹



Postcard (Kalamazoo Public Museum), an 1850 painting by Anthony Cooley showing a scene in early Kalamazoo County.

Letters written home informed the family where to come to their new home. As can be seen by the poor health of Phineas when his sons Phineas Jr. and Daniel found him in a little cabin at the edge of the prairie, the land welcomed them with plenty of prairie grass and malarial mosquitoes. Some hard years were ahead for them.

¹⁶ Ed Schaadt, “Creating the Village of Richland,” <http://www.villageofrichland.org/historyoverview.asp>

¹⁷ First Land Owners of Kalamazoo County,” Kalamazoo Public Library, “Salmon C. Hall, residence Kalamazoo Co, purchased 40 acres in Richland Twp, SE ¼ SW ¼ of Section 2, date of Patent 2-20-1837.” Salmon was not on the taxpayer list for that property. In the index to Deeds, Kalamazoo County, Michigan, 1831-1862, Phineas Cook not listed, but he paid taxes on property in Section 11, which is next to Section 2.

¹⁸ Samuel W. Durant , *History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan: with illustrations and biographical sketches of its prominent men and pioneers*, pp. 462-463. (Philadelphia: Everts and Abbott, 1880, Family History Library book 977.417 H2d, p. 466) Phineas Cook is recorded as a taxpayer on Section 11 in 1839.

¹⁹ Kalamazoo County, Michigan Deeds, Vol. E, p. 212 (Family History Library film 983,358, item 1.) “Beginning at the S.E. corner of the west half of the section No. two, Town One South, Range ten west...”

²⁰ 1838 Richland tax list (Family History Library film 932,044, item 2).

²¹ (Ruth Robbins Monteith, comp., Michigan State Census of Kalamazoo County, 1837, Richland Township, heads of families, Vol. III, No. 3, p. 146, Family History Library book 977.417 X2p 1837). Both Phineas and Salmon were listed.