

JHA FOOTNOTES



JHA Update

Our current display theme is called "Tool Time". Not the popular TV show, but a glimpse at some of the various tools we have in the museum and how they were used. From the kitchen to the Attic come and take a look into the tools of the past.

The summer has been busy working in the museum when it wasn't too hot. We have been updating our inventory. And thinking about Christmas. We have been researching to ensure authenticity of our decorations and looking to make some changes as money and time allow.

See the Christmas and other open house schedule on the last page of this newsletter.

ISSUE 3, SEPTEMBER 2016

Liberty Tanner Beardsley	2
In the News	4
Upcoming	5
JHA Board of Directors	6
Calendar of Events	8

www.jenisonhistory.org

Fall Color tour on the Grand Lady Riverboat.

Tickets are \$10 per person and must be purchased in advance. Call Liz Timmer 616-457-3708 to purchase.

Bring your lunch (drinks must be purchased on the boat) and enjoy a relaxing cruise down the river, more information on page 5.

Liberty Tanner Beardsley 1821 - 1905

By Mary Raper (April 2016), JHA Member

Driving down a gravel road past farmer's fields and barns, with trees and streams, we get a small picture of what 12th Avenue and Port Sheldon Road looked like in the late 1800's. As we go to this area today, the paved roads and subdivision of houses is quite a different view. There is an elementary school on the northeast corner there, called Bursley School. Few know the origins of its name, or that there is quite a story behind it.

On March 13, 1821, Liberty Tanner Beardsley, Jr. was born in Richfield, New York. His mother, Catherine Williamson, had previously been married to David Yeomans, and Liberty had half-brothers, who came to the Michigan Territory in the early 1830's. Along with many other New Yorkers, they had learned of the Michigan Land and Timber Bonanza. Similar to the later California Gold Rush of 1849, the promise of improving the lives of themselves and their future children persuaded thousands to make the move. Still a territory, Michigan had applied for statehood, which wasn't granted by Congress until 1837.

In 1836, Liberty was 15 years old. He had been given the opportunity to travel to Michigan Territory with the family of Jonathan Scott, and live with his half-brother, Eli Yeomans. They came to Michigan Territory by steamer from Dunkirk, New York to Detroit. While today we would consider this an easy trip, back in the 1830s, records show several ships damaged or wrecked by gales, rocks, or collisions with other ships. Fortunately, Liberty and his fellow passengers made it safely. From Detroit, there were no stage coaches to western Michigan, only Indian trails, so Liberty and the Scotts trekked for several days through forests, getting food and shelter from settlers and Indians along the way. Liberty carried only 27 cents with him.

Eventually, the Scotts went in search of their own place, and Liberty arrived in Grandville. There were ten Native Americans to each white settler. At that time, the main form of transportation was taking a canoe down the Grand River. Often, Indians earned shillings transporting the settlers in canoes.

In the 1830's, the quest for lumber created many sawmills. One sawmill was located on land where eventually, Grandville Plaster Works once stood. This mill was run by Eli Yeomans and Isaac Allen. Liberty's first job, upon arriving in 1836, was there, as a cook. Later that year, he helped found Eastmanville, by working with three other men to build two log cabins. In the autumn, he helped his half-brother, Alonzo Yeomans, clear a farm in Lamont, then known as Steele's Landing. (In 1855, the Steele family sold the name of the town for a road scraper, at that time a valuable item, to Lamont Chubb. In 1856, the post office was renamed Lamont.)

During 1836, an attempt to build the world's largest sawmill was made on the Grand River's east banks, near Bridge Street. Huge stone walls were built, and a large group of frontiersmen stayed in the woods for months cutting timbers, as 160 saws were planned. This project failed, but the walls were used as parts of foundations for the big factories, that were built later.

West Michigan in the 1830s was a land full of all types of trees, especially tall pines. There were also lakes, streams, meadows, and swamps. In the summers, flies and mosquitos were everywhere. The mosquitoes carried diseases, such as ague (also called swamp fever), that caused illness, and sometimes, death. The winters were harsh, very snowy and cold; often, Liberty would stand on the Grand River's banks and observe hungry wolves eating a deer, which they had chased onto the ice the night before.

The fall of 1836 saw the first large boat, the "Young Napoleon" go down the Grand River to Grand Haven. Propelled with long poles by six strong Frenchmen, it carried provisions and clothing for settlers along the river. Better transportation was to come the following year, with the launching of the first steamer, the 53-ton "Governor Mason", named in honor of Michigan's first governor. In 1833, Grand Rapids had begun rousing celebrations for Fourth of July. In 1837, it provided a trip to Grandville and back on the Mason's maiden voyage. Liberty walked to Grand Rapids that day, so he could ride back home on the steamer. Governor Mason presented the steamer with a stand of colors. As part of the festivities, a bugle was played and a two-hour oration was given. In Grandville, the river bank was crowded with settlers, pounding on steam pipes and old saws in welcome. Four liberty poles were raised, none of which longer stood by nightfall. One pioneer felt it was the liveliest Fourth he'd ever seen.

Earlier in the spring of 1837, Liberty went to Grand Rapids, searching for potatoes, and finding none there, headed toward Grandville, then, continued three miles south, where he stopped at a settler's cabin, and at last, found some. He paid three dollars for a canoe, filled it with the potatoes, and started the nine-mile trip home. The river still had ice floating on it, and the whole way, Liberty feared the light canoe might get crushed. At times, the canoe was

(Continued)

caught between floes of ice, and Liberty had no control over it, and had to let the current carry it. He finally reached home, relieved that both he and his potatoes made it.

Another adventure that spring occurred when a neighbor, Mr. Stoddard, had gone away, and a drunken Indian stopped at Stoddard's cabin, demanding liquor. Mrs. Stoddard became frightened, and gave him a flask of liquor. As soon as he was gone, she hurried to the Yeoman cabin, realizing the Native American might soon return with others in his tribe. Liberty and three other men went back to her cabin, where soon, seven Indian men and eight women arrived, demanding an entire barrel of "fire water". The settlers refused them, and a battle began, which the settlers finally won, with the Native Americans retreating.

In the winter of 1839, Liberty left his brother's home to visit someone who lived two miles down the river. He walked on the frozen-over river and was halfway home, when a giant timber wolf came out of the woods, onto the river, just behind Liberty, whose only weapon was a jack-knife. He knew the wolf alone would be afraid to attack him, but when the wolf started to howl for other wolves to come, Liberty began walking faster. The wolf continued to follow him, calling for his companions, without result, until Liberty finally reached his cabin. Then, the wolf disappeared into the woods.

In the early 1840s, Liberty homesteaded land on 12th Avenue and Port Sheldon. Ottawa County had only fifty families at the time. On April 5, 1846, he married a daughter of Jonathan Scott's, Maria Bathsheba Scott. Their first home was a log cabin, which they later replaced with a more modern structure. They had four children: Mary Calista, Eva Maria, Ida Eurette, and Asa A. (The 1850 Census shows a ten-year old, Emily, living with them; it is not known if she was Liberty's or daughter, sister, or other relative.) On their 80-acre farm, they had horses, cows and other cattle, sheep, and swine. They grew wheat and Indian corn.

The winter of 1843 – 44 was particularly difficult. Winter started early and there were many storms. Food for the settlers, and their animals, was difficult to come by. Families couldn't keep warm enough inside their homes, causing colds and sickness.

In 1847, the start of road connections between Grand Haven and Grand Rapids began with the State Road. However, it wasn't made much better than the logging trails in the area, and was often known as the "Mud Highway".

Liberty was the Georgetown Township supervisor in 1850. In those early years, the men each took turns being supervisor for a year. In 1855, Jonathan Scott's wife, Rachel, died, and the 1860 census shows Jonathan lived in the Beardsley home for a time, and then later, moved in with his daughter, Hannah. He died at her home in 1861. During the 1860s, area men went to do battle in the Civil War, and President Lincoln was assassinated.

Liberty's wife, Maria, died in March of 1872. That October, he married Huldah (Van Tassell) Wetherwax, and in 1873, they had a son, Ernest.

By the 1870s, more people settled in the area. A hotel, blast-furnace, sawmill, grist mill, grocery store, saloon, blacksmith shop, post office, and railroad formed a town, then called Jenisonville, named after the Jenison family. Around the town, as axes felled more trees, more farms appeared. Lumbering was being replaced by farming as the main occupation. In 1872, Georgetown Township was threatened with a smallpox epidemic.

On July 24, 1883, a tornado hit the Ottawa county area. Huldah died in 1884, and in 1889, Liberty married Minnie (Sinclair) Rhines. The 1900 census shows him a widower, once again. His son Asa and family lived with him at the farm. Liberty's memory was still sharp when he reached age 80. He often related stories of his early days as a pioneer, and in 1901, gave an interview that is the basis for much of this biography (<http://www.migenweb.net/ottawa/genealogies/settlers/AB/beardsleylt.html>).

When Liberty first arrived in 1836, there was a school in a log cabin on 8th Avenue. In 1837, a one-room frame schoolhouse was built, where Bursley School stands today. (Besides the picture accompanying this biography, other pictures of it can be seen in the attic of the Jenison Museum.) The land for the school had been donated by the Jenison family. Since they already had a school named after them, the district chose the name of their neighbors, the Beardsley's. So, how did Beardsley become Bursley? Bursley is the pronunciation used by Liberty, and his father before him, Liberty Tanner Beardsley, Sr. Michigan land and census records show Liberty's last name spelled "Bursley". Hiram Jenison's wife was Mary Beardsley, but whether she was related at

all to Liberty is a mystery. An internet search for the Beardsley name in 1840 finds many in Michigan who came from the eastern states, so it is possible they were not related. Only a DNA of Bursley and Jenison descendants could possibly give an answer.

During his long life, Liberty had many experiences. The land of great forests changed to farmland. In 1887, Jenisonville became Jenison, and in 1898, a great fire swept the area. In 1904, Jenison experienced a flood so severe, train service was suspended. Liberty died on January 10, 1905, on the farm he settled. He was the only surviving pioneer of the early days of Georgetown Township. He is buried in Georgetown Township Cemetery. Left behind to carry on his name were many descendants and a school.

Sources

<http://www.migenweb.net/ottawa/genealogies/settlers/AB/beardsleylt.html>),

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Michigan_history

http://geo.msu.edu/extra/geogmich/michigan_fever2.htm

<http://www.migenweb.net/ottawa/ottawa/earlyhistory.html>

<http://www.mfhn.com/glsdb/rivers/grandriver.html#steamers>

<http://images.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/50895/data>

<http://www.migenweb.net/kent/etten1926/rivertransport.html>

Bend in the River, ed. By John W. McGee

<http://www.historygrandrapids.org/audio/4239/pioneers-fourth>

JHA Newsletter July 2013

Federal Censuses 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900

Agricultural Censuses 1860, 1870

Gene Kort, interview Apr. 9, 2016

<http://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Beardsley-2661>

In the News

From Ronnie Aungst, JHA member

“Steamer Grand Island Sold - Grand Rapids Herald, September 26, 1893, page 5

Luman Jennison has purchased the river steamer Grand Island that has plied between North Park and Grand Island for excursion parties during the last few seasons and the little vessel will be taken to Holland. Mr. Jennison is extensively interested in the Black lake resort and the Grand Island will be used there next season. It will be repainted, repaired and put in good condition at the dock here before it is moved down the river. The purchase price of the boat is said to have been \$2,000.”

“LOST HIS POCKETBOOK” - Grand Rapids Herald, June 30, 1893, page 5

Michael Mulholland, residing in Georgetown, Ottawa county, complained to the sheriff that he had been robbed of his pocketbook containing a note for \$125 and \$25 in cash in an Ellsworth avenue dive. Under-Sheriff Davis investigated the case and found the pocketbook and the note, but could not find the cash. The inmates of the house denied seeing any money, and Mr. Mulholland could not swear positively to the amount of money he had in the pocketbook when it was stolen. No complaint was made.”

JENISON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION IS HOSTING

**HISTORIC
RIVERBOAT TOUR
ON THE GRAND LADY**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2016
12-2 PM
775 TAYLOR ST * JENISON, MI
\$10 PER PERSON * UNDER 2 YRS - FREE**

BRING A LUNCH BUT DRINKS MUST BE PURCHASED ON THE BOAT



**SEND REQUESTS FOR TICKETS TO
LIZ TIMMER
7665 THOMAS AVE * JENISON, MI 49428
616-457-3708**

INCLUDE A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO JENISON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
WITH THE NUMBER OF TICKETS YOU NEED.
ALL ORDERS SHOULD INCLUDE AN EMAIL ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER FOR TICKET ORDER CONFIRMATION.
ALL TICKETS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED THE DAY OF THE TOUR AT THE RIVERBOAT LANDING.
ORDERS NEED TO BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2016.
TICKETS ARE NON-REFUNDABLE.
TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED IN ADVANCE.
NO TICKET SALES WILL BE AVAILABLE THE DAY OF THE TOUR

COME VISIT THE TIFFANY HOUSE MUSEUM AFTER THE BOAT TOUR FROM 2:30 TO 4 PM

Museum Antic's



*Gene Kort and Ken Williams
showing off a new acquisition? Or
is this how week keep memebers?*

Upcoming Open Houses

Upcoming Events

“Tool Time”

Sept 6, 2016 – 10 to Noon AM

Sept 17, 2016 – 2 to 4 PM

Oct 4, 2016 – 10 to Noon AM

Riverboat Event

Oct 15, 2016 – Noon to 2 PM

(Tickets Required see page 5)

Jenison Museum Souvenir’s

Our newest souvenir in the Gift Shop is still available for sale. This year we are highlighting the Jenison Mill. We also have a few of our previous design from 2012 highlighting the Jenison Museum



Prices: \$15 each or two for \$25

Find us on Facebook at Jenison History Association and become a friend.

JHA Trustee’s

Chair

Liz Timmer (2016)
457-3708

Vice Chair/Curator/Tours

Ken Williams (2017)
772.6523

Treasurer/Editor

Ruth Lowing (2017)
540-4709

Social Secretary

Nellie DeLaat (2016)
457-1193

Recording Secretary

Linda Droog (2018)
457-3016

Archivist

Barb Semeyn (2017)
457-9343

Maintenance/Historian

Mike Timmer (2016)
531-1218

Trustee

Yvonne Williams (2017)
772-6523

Gene Kort (2016)
534-6769

Township Rep

Ron Villerius

(####) = year of term expiration

Contact Information: Members may contact the board at the above phone numbers or leave a message at 457-4398 or info@jenisonhistory.org

Organization Membership in the Historical Association of Michigan

Find us on the registry of the Historical Society of Michigan

www.hsmichigan.org

2016 Association Schedule

Museum Open House Schedule

Open House schedule

Sept 6, 2016 - 10-12 AM - "Tool Time"
Sept 17, 2016 - 2-4 PM - "Tool Time"
Oct 4, 2016 - 10-12 AM - "Tool Time"
Oct 15, 2016 - 12 noon - Riverboat Ride
Nov 1, 2016 - 10-12 AM
Dec 3, 2016 - 1-4 PM - Christmas
Dec 6, 2016 - 10-12 AM - Christmas
Jan 7, 2017 - 2-4 PM - Christmas

Meeting Schedule

Meetings are all open to the public and held on the **3rd Thursday** of the month at 6:45 PM at the Georgetown Library, unless noted. No meeting in December.

Thursday, June 16 (Georgetown Senior Center)

Thursday, July 21

Thursday, August 18

Thursday, September 15

Thursday, October 20

Thursday, November 17

> > No meeting in December

All meetings begin at 6:45 PM unless noted

www.jenisonhistory.org

JENISON HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

PO Box 664
Jenison, MI 49428