

Early History of Grattan Township, Kent County, Michigan (Directory 1870)
Source: History and Directory of Kent County, Michigan,

EARLY GRATTAN 1870

Grattan, one of the eastern tier of towns, is bounded on the north by Oakfield, on the east by Otisco, Ionia county, on the south by Vergennes and on the west by Cannon. It was originally a part of Vergennes, and was erected into a separate town in 1846. It was largely settled in its southern portion by emigrations from Erin, and in deference to them, the new town was named Grattan, in honor of the great Irish orator, at the instance, and by the influence of Hon. Volney W. Caukin, now a resident of Sparta.

Its first won meeting to perfect its organization, was held on the first Monday of April 1846, at the house of Converse Close; and the number of votes polled was twenty-three, resulting in the election of the following named gentlemen as its

FIRST OFFICERS

Supervisor -- Milton C. Watkins. Clerk -- Volney W. Caukin. Treasurer -- Erastus W. Beason. Highway Commissioners -- Thomas J. Morgan, Joshua Fish, Wm. C. Stanton. Justices of the Peace -- Samuel H. Steele, John P. Weeks, William Byrne, Luther B. Cook. School Inspectors -- Samuel H. Steele, Wm. Beurmans. Constables -- Jedediah H. Wood, Thomas J. Morgan. Overseers of Poor -- Luther B. Cook, Samuel H. Steele. Assessors -- Anthony King, Barlow Barton.

OFFICERS IN 1870

Supervisor -- Oliver J. Watkins. Treasurer -- Joseph Tower. Clerk -- George D. Wood. Justices of the Peace -- Joseph Tower, Oliver I. Watkins, Wm. Daniels. School Inspectors -- Asa W. Slayton, George C. Adams. Constable -- Thomas M. Henry. Commissioners of Highways -- Wm. C. Slayton, Thomas M. Henry.

The number of votes polled at the last town meeting was 240.

By the census returns, the town has now a population of 1,298.

Although the surface is quite broken in consequence of its extraordinary network of lakes, there are no ranges of hills, nor prominent highlands in the town, and its soil is remarkably uniform, adapting it to the mixed husbandry of the country, and especially rendering it the best wheat growing portion of the county. Its wool interests are more than average, and its production of hay, corn, oats, potatoes and neat stock are very fair.

Apples, pears, peaches, cherries, currants, and grapes, are a universal success, and much attention is being paid by some to the cultivation and improvement of choice varieties of fruits. Prominent among these stands Asa W. Slayton, and it well repays a lover of rural beauty, and horticultural enterprise, and success, to visit his pleasant and tasteful home, situated on section 22, south of the Grand rapids and Ionia road.

Formerly, considerable attention was paid to the raising of hops, and some years the returns for this crop reached as high as \$10,000, but the reduction of prices has ruined the crop interest here, as in many other places.

Mainly, this town is heavily wooded with oak and hickory, but sections 25 and 36 and a portion of section 5 and 35, are rich timber lands.

There are no less than twenty-four lakes in this town, covering an area from 36 to 300 acres each, besides a host of smaller lakes or ponds; but six demand especial notice. Nagles, or Murray's Lake, lies on section 33 and 34 in Grattan, and extending more than half across section 4 in Vergennes, is the largest of these, and is remarkable for its peculiar shape, being nearly divided in two by a long, narrow, promontory of land owned by Mr. W. Fullington.

Crooked Lake, lying on sections 20, 21 and 29, is a mile long, quite irregular in shape, and is noted for its Islands. Round Lake, a pretty sheet of water, on section 21, is one half mile long, and about the same in width, and contains about 80 acres. This lake and Crooked Lake discharge their waters through Seeley Creek into Flat River.

Slayton Lake is another small, but beautiful sheet of water, lying on section 23. It takes its name from one of the early settlers whose residence is near its shore.

MuskRat Lake, on sections 4, 5, 8, and 9, is one mile and a half long, and about one-fourth of a mile wide, on the average. It contains about 230 acres, and is beautifully stocked with fish. The kinds caught in it are black, rock and silver-bass, pickerel and muskelonge.

Pine Island Lake, lying on sections 3 and 10, one mile and a quarter long, and three eighths of a mile wide, is the most beautiful of them all. Pine Island, from which the lake takes its name, lies on its bosom like a gem on the wave. The far sweeping lake with its picturesque shores and forest crowned isle, as seen from the home of Mr. Converse Close, near it, fixes the gaze of the beholder like some enchanted scene, of which we sometimes dream.

Grattan has no water course of any note, except Seely's Creek, the outlet of nine of its principal lakes. It is an insignificant stream, averaging no more than two rods wide, yet, with its numerous, and inexhaustible fountains, supplying water power sufficient for three grist mills and one saw mill, in its short course of half a dozen miles. It takes its rise in a small lake on section 15, just north of the State Road, three fourths of a mile east of Grattan Center, running north of the State Road, three fourths of a mile east of Grattan Center, running north one and one quarter miles, through Pine Island Lake, west one and a quarter miles through Musk-Rat Lake, south-east one and one quarter miles through Wolf Lake, where it appears as a small stream running thence due east, passing within 60 rods of its source, and debouching in Flat River, at the village of Smyrna, in Ionia county. It is named after Munson Seely, a young hunter, who, in early days, camped upon its banks and pursued the chase through its adjacent forests.

In 1850, Edward Bellamy and Nathan Holmes, brothers-in-law, formed a partnership, and erected a grist mill upon the stream, near its embouchure from Wolf Lake, on section 16. This was the nucleus of Grattan Center. The mill is now owned by J. A. Adams & Bros. This place is the only business center in the town. It has twelve or fourteen dwellings, one hotel, one cabinet shop, one wagon shop, one cooper shop, two blacksmith shops, one paint shop, one drug store, two dry goods stores, and a fine new church. (Baptist, C. C. Miller, Pastor.) It was erected in 1868. It is built of wood, painted white, costing \$5,400.

The Grattan Union School House, a white, two story, frame building, with two departments, is located here, on a beautiful eminence just east of the village. The Metropolitan Cheese Factory, is located just west of here, and its enterprising proprietor, Capt. B. Madison, is opening up an apparently prosperous business for himself and the farmers for miles around, by this new branch of industry. Grattan Center is situated in a fine rural district, and its proprietors are wide-awake and enterprising, but altogether too far away from railroads for their own convenience or comfort. Within the past year, the place has suffered a severe loss in the sudden death of its esteemed citizen W. L. Atkins, a long time merchant, and efficient business man of the town.

As early as 1848 the Catholics erected a small church in their cemetery, on section 32, dedicated to St. Patrick. In ten years their congregation had become much too large for the seating capacity of the house, and it was moved upon section 31, and converted into a school house, and a new and commodious edifice erected on an eminence one fourth of a mile west of the old site. This building, while undergoing repairs, was accidentally burned in 1868. Immediately, scores of teams were put upon the roads hauling lumber preparatory to the building of new church, which is now in the process of erection, and when completed will be an honor to its builders, and an ornament to the town. It is 136 by 50 feet in size; has a tower 168 feet high, and is lighted with massive windows of stained glass, which show the pleasing effect. The congregation is very large, and their annual picnic for the benefit of the church has become an institution of Grattan. It is noted for its tastefully arranged, and bountifully supplied tables, and the hosts that congregate. Father Rivers is closely identified with the early history and prosperity of this people, but J. P. McMannus is now the resident priest. Besides the Union School, Grattan has but four district school houses, but, as it would at first seem, its education interests are not neglected, as it is completely surrounded by fractional districts.

In 1843, the first settlement was made within the limits of the town, by Dennis and John McCarthy, on section 30, and Richard Giles, on section 32. In 1844, Luther B. Cook built the first house north of Seely's Creek, on section 12. The same year, William Smith, also settled on section 12. Converse Close, on section 11; Jared Watkins, on section 13; Henry Green, on section 13; Anthony King, Alonson King, on section 1; Volney W. Caukin, on section 9; Michael Kennedy, on section 19; and William McCarthy, on section 30. Prominent among the settlers of 1845, we may mention John P. Weeks, located on section 25; Orson Nicholson, on section 2; William Byrnes, on section 27, and Anson Green, on section 14. In 1846 Russel Slayton, located on section 14, and Dudley Newton, on section 17. Among the settlers of 1847, we find Martin Mason, located on section 23.

Of these old settlers, most reside where they first located, but Anthony King, Russel Slayton and Orson Nicholson, are dead. Marshal King, son of Alanson King, born December 1844, is supposed to be the first white child born in the town. The first death occurred in the fall of 1846, in the family of Mr. Springer, then living on section 15. Isaac Springer, an interesting little boy of five years, was the first victim, but in less than 18 months, five of the family were laid side by side, and now sleep on the very spot where the Union School House stands. There are many interesting personal experiences incident to the early settlement of a new county, which the limits of this work will not permit us to record, but the circumstances attending the first wedding in this town are so peculiar, we may not omit to mention it here. A widely known, and highly esteemed couple, still residents of the town, wished to get married, but there was no functionary in that part of Kent, vested with the authority to perform the ceremony. A well known Justice of Ionia County, chanced to be visiting at the house where the parties were, and their dilemmas was made known to him. Of course he had no jurisdiction in Kent, but the county line was only half a mile away, and a walk through the forest, was proposed and agreed to. The Justice took his stand in Ionia county, and the bride and bridegroom, protesting they would not leave the town to be married, joined hand just over the line, and in the presence of a few friends, gathered beneath the grand old oaks, on the pleasant afternoon of July 28, 1844, the twain were made one to their own gratification and the gratification and amusement of their friends here, as elsewhere.

In those early days, the settler, with his axe, cut the way for his future home, and in the absence of stores, grist mills and saw mills, supplied, by his own ingenuity, the actual necessities of himself and family. Today, all the conveniences of civilized life are at his hand, and the well cultivated farms, and the more than ordinary wealth displayed in dwellings and out buildings, are highly significant of the sobriety, enterprise, and consequent prosperity of the people.

Grattan has not only maintained an honorable position in the county, but has also made its record among the ignitaries of the State. Of its first set of officers, Hon. Volney W. Caukin has once represented the Twenty-Ninth District, at Lansing, and Hon. Milton C. Watkins, its first Supervisor, has been Representative, also Senator in the State Legislature, and now holds an appointment under the United States Government.