

Early Day Hardships of a Pioneer Family of the Area

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The following article was first printed in the Whitehall Forum – Thursday, September 12, 1907 – Vol. XV. No. 42 under the column heading “MARRIED 60 YEARS”. It was then reprinted in The Whitehall Forum in two parts. The first part appeared on Thursday, September 12, 1957, New Series, Vol. XXII, No.28 under the column heading “Interesting tale of early day travel...” and the second part on Thursday, September 19, 1957, under the column heading “Three weeks by boat to Milwaukee...” Here is their story:

It is seldom that two people live together as man and wife for a period of three score years and very few cases are heard of in these parts, but two of our popular residents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hobler, are blessing God’s kind providence in allowing them to be well and happy and free from care and sorrow on this the twelfth day of September, and the sixtieth anniversary of their marriage. To fill the cup of happiness to the brim is the reminder that of the five children born to them every one are still alive, successful, prosperous, and a credit to their parents. Both Mr. and Mrs. Hobler are hale and hearty, have never been invalids and are as spry and active as many people twenty years younger. Mr. Hobler boasts of a well spent life of 84 years and proves that he can do as large a day’s work as most any man as he trimmed a twenty acre peach orchard this spring, planted the trees two years ago and has given them constant care since. He is a fine type of the early pioneer and is truly as “tough as a pine knot.” The wife is a few years younger than her husband but now has to admit to 76 years, which have been spent as a faithful wife, a true and loving mother, and a good neighbor; she has surely done her best to fulfill her mission in life.

Besides the five children, Mr. and Mrs. Hobler are the proud possessors of many grand children.

There was no family gathering or reunion to celebrate the anniversary, but the old people are spending it quietly in their home, receiving the congratulations and greetings of their many friends and the kind remembrances from their children and grand children.

Mr. Hobler is a Frenchman by birth having been born in Alsace-Lorraine, France in 1824. As playmates his parents provided him with five sisters. The father was a soldier in Napoleon Bonaparte’s army before Mr. Hobler’s birth. In 1828 the family, fired by the glowing tales of the new country, left their fatherland and embarked for New York. York state claimed Mr. Hobler as a resident from that time until he was seventeen years of age. When of course he felt a man in every fiber and left the paternal roof and struck out for the West to earn his livelihood. He journeyed as far as Milwaukee and after a few years on September 12, 1847, he was united in marriage to Ruth Bliss, in Sullivan, Waukesha County, Wis.

Mrs. Hobler was born in August, 1831, in Erie, Pa., and when three years of age her parents moved to Ohio, and from there to Wisconsin in about 1845. She had two sisters and one brother, but only the latter, Ariel Bliss of this township, is living.

They heard great tales of the wealth to be had logging in Michigan and concluded to try their luck in the Michigan wilderness and their success and adventures here are well told as follows by Mrs. Hobler:

"In the year 1850 my husband, myself and baby, with a girl for help, started from Milwaukee in a lumber vessel for the wild pine forests at Michigan.

After two days and one night of rough weather and sea sickness, we anchored at the mouth of White River and came ashore in the vessel's yawl. It was all two strong sailors could do to keep the yawl alongside of the vessel until the passengers could be let down into it. Among six or eight shanties there was one somewhat larger than the rest, dignified by the name of "Hotel", and to this we were directed. Once inside we were not only sea sick but homesick. We were shown to a large room roughly boarded up containing six beds, the one we were to occupy having a small curtain to draw in front of it. Upon examination we found the mattress and pillows to be made of marsh hay with bed-bugs, fleas and mosquitoes for company, and quarreling, drunken Indians outside, making the night hideous. Sleep was impossible. This was our first experience with the dusky red man and I was naturally very much frightened; but, worst of all, about one o'clock ten men came tumbling in and took possession of the other five beds. In the morning on going down to breakfast, we found they were all negro lumber rafters who had just come down with their rafts from a watermill about five miles up the lake. This was of course years before the colored people were freed. The breakfast consisted of black coffee, with maple sugar of the Indians' make, and no milk; some fat salt pork and cold beans poorly cooked; some bread without butter, and black molasses.

Our household goods had been brought ashore during the night on a scow which was used in carrying lumber to the vessel. To load in those early days it was necessary to anchor the vessel about a quarter of a mile out, from where a line was stretched to a post on shore and in this way the scow was propelled by the sailors. I tried to make ourselves comfortable for the next night by furnishing a room in the other end of the hotel with our own bedding. Our attempts to sleep were baffled inasmuch as the fleas and other insects were quite as numerous and troublesome as on the preceding night. You will see that for a hotel this was a very poor excuse. The landlady claimed to be in poor health, induced I think, by her dislike to work, her help being a German woman just over who knew nothing of our way of cooking.

In a few days my husband and another man went out to select a place to build a shanty and succeeded in finding the body of an old log house. They secured the only team which was at the mouth of the river and there were oxen there being no horses here then that we knew of. He hauled lumber for the floor and split some shakes to cover the roof, we had brought some windows with us and the next day we moved in and put up our beds with only half a roof over us; but we had our first square meal and a clean one too. The mosquitoes bit some but the bugs and fleas we left at the hotel. We lived here one year and it was nine months before I saw a woman, and this was Mrs. Harvey Tower; she and Mr. Tower came one Sunday on a sled drawn by an ox team and stayed all day.

"In those days the timber was all on "Uncle Sam's" land and no one thought of buying any, but this could not always last. Some one made a complaint to the Government, the U. S. Marshall came on and seized lumber and shingles all around the lake and compelled the people to pay for the timber, so it was late in the Fall before shipments could be made, and supplies purchased."

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Part 2

This continues the account of pioneer conditions in the White Lake area in 1850 as told by Mrs. Peter Hobler.

The "Twin Brothers" was the only boat which went between White Lake and Milwaukee. The weather being very rough it took three weeks to make the trip, consequently our provisions were well nigh exhausted before she arrived. One provident individual living north of us raised some potatoes, and we were fortunate enough to secure a bag of them which was brought home on two poles. Our bill of fare for one week consisted of potatoes and flour gravy, and, by way of variety, flour gravy and potatoes. This was pioneer life in earnest, but we were young and not easily daunted.

At the end of a year we moved down to the mouth of White River and in August returned to Palmyra, Wis., a place forty miles west of Milwaukee, for a visit, and remained two months.

It may be interesting to know the different ways we traveled in coming back to White Lake. We came six miles to Palmyra with a team, then took the stage to Waukesha, from there by rail to Milwaukee. By the way, this was my first ride on the cars, it being the only railroad then in Wisconsin and but sixteen miles long. On arriving in Milwaukee we found the Twin Brothers had sailed the day before, and upon inquiry found a small steamboat on which we could go to Grand Haven the next day.

Remaining in Grand Haven over night, next morning we engaged a man to take us to White Lake in a small sail boat. We had only gone four miles when we had to put in at Black Creek on account of the strong north wind, and were wind-bound three days with a family that kept the ferry. They lived in a board shanty but were very comfortable, having enough to eat and good places to sleep. Then we boarded the boat and with a fair wind went as far as Duck Lake; and, as it was getting very rough and dark, we concluded to remain here over night.

The next morning the wind was fair for the captain of our boat to go back to Grand Haven, so my husband paid him, and we concluded to walk the beach the rest of the way. Each taking a child in arms we started, leaving our trunk to be sent later. After going about two miles we came to a steep bank washed by the water. If I went past it meant wet feet, so my husband took both the children and waded around the bank where he put them on the sand, then came back and carried me around. We reached home at noon, having been on the road five days and a half and five nights going a distance of one hundred twenty-five miles. Such were the conveniences (?) of travel in the early days.

In those early days Grand Haven was the mail distributing point. It was before the time when the government controlled the postal service, and a letter cost twenty-five cents as pay for delivery from Grand Haven as the mail-carrier had to walk all the way on the beach.

Supplies for the whole winter were laid in stock in the fall and were brought from across the lake. In 1850, Ferry's built the first at White Haven, which at that time claimed 50 residents.

In 1853, Mr. Hobler was elected treasurer of the township which was then a part of Ottawa county and his territory was as far as Ryerson Creek on the Muskegon River. He had to tramp thru an unbroken wilderness most of the way to collect taxes which amounted to \$1000. It was paid all in gold and Mr. Hobler walked on the beach to Grand Haven to make returns. There was but little recompense in the

office as only four percent was allowed for collecting. Noah Ferry, who was afterwards killed at Gettysburg, was Hr. Hobler's bondsmen.

In 1854 and '55, when the government began to look after the timber thieves, Mr. Hobler had some of the most exciting times of his life as he was appointed Deputy Marshall. Every lumberman had stolen timber in his possession and Mr. Hobler seized the logs, shingles, bolts and lumber and they were held by the government until paid in full for the timber. Charles Mears then operated a mill at Pentwater and promptly settled when his timber was seized, as likewise did I. E. Carlton, who had a mill on Carlton Creek and Dalton Bros. who were operating a mill on Silver Creek.

But the scary times came when Mr. Hobler and the U. S. Marshall, Isaac W. Willard, of Paw Paw, went to Manistee to seize stolen timber and lumber in the name of the government. The lumbermen defied the officers to take them and told them their lives were in danger if they remained in Manistee. The hotelkeepers were forbidden to give Mr. Hobler and companion a night's lodging, but at last they secured lodging with a widow and during the night their bed clothing was set on fire and they were in danger of being mobbed. It was necessary to have a revenue cutter from Detroit steam into the Manistee harbor before the timber thieves submitted. Some were then arrested and all were made to pay for all timber stolen and even made to buy the land they had stripped.

From 1861 to '64 Mr. and Mrs. Hobler kept the Union Hotel which was located where C. C. Johnson's residence now stands. This hostelry was made a home for anyone. No unfortunate or a soldier home on a furlough ever paid a cent for food or lodging. At that time Mr. Hobler owned the whole block and had a large stable where now is M. S. Green & Co's block. He operated a stage between here and Muskegon, which was then a city of 1200 inhabitants.

It was in the year 1863 that the government channel into White Lake was made and the first boats entered White Lake.

(Fact – not part of the original article - Work on the government channel actually began in 1867 and it was completed in 1871.)

After retiring from the hotel business Mr. Hobler worked as a lumber scaler and took lumbering jobs along White River. About twenty years ago he and wife moved onto a farm near White Cloud, where they lived for many years. Mrs. Hobler tired of farming ten years ago and returned to this village for residence but Mr. Hobler remained on the farm for about five years longer.

They are now living a quiet life of ease at their home in this village and are surrounded by everything to make life comfortable and pleasant: Their daughter, Mrs. Emma Baker, lives with them. The other children are: Mesdames L. T. Covell and T. E. Phelan, of this village; Mrs. L. B. Parsons, of Anniston, Ala., and Geo. Hobler, of Petoskey, Mich.

May this couple live in health to celebrate many more anniversaries is the hope of their many warm friends in this village.

Footnote: Mrs. Peter (Ruth) Hobler died on 15 July 1909 followed by Peter P. Hobler on 5 December 1909. They are both buried in Oakhurst Cemetery in Whitehall.