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A HISTORY OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BENZONIA
AND THE FOUNDING OF GRAND TRAVERSE COLLEGE
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The township of Benzonia originally embraced all of the territory in Benzie county east of a line two miles east of the range line between ranges fifteen and sixteen west. From this territory was afterwards organized the townships of Platte, Almira, Inland, Weldon, Joyfield and Homestead.

Benzonia proper extends five miles east and west and seven miles north and south. Quite an amount is covered by Crystal lake in the center, and by Platte lake on the north. The surface is quite rolling; this, with the influence of Lake Michigan and Crystal lake, makes it one of the best locations for fruit in the whole region. The River Aux Berries, familiarly called Betsey river, flows through the south part of the town, and the Platte river in the north, with several spring brooks in the center. The timber is mostly maple and hemlock with considerable elm, basswood, cedar, ash, birch and pine. The soil is mostly sandy, underlayed with clay, which in some places comes to the surface. The first settlers landed on the bank of Betsey river about one and one quarter miles west of the present center. The company consisted of Charles and John Bailey, Horace Burr and a Mr. Wolcot, with their families, followed in about a year by Deacon John R. Barr and Mr. Edward Neil with their families; in the spring of 1861 Deacon Lucius W. Case came with his family, and the number was frequently increased, mostly from northern Ohio. The first township election was held on the first day of January, 1860. The officers elected were: supervisor, Wm. Steele; clerk, W. S. Hubbell; treasurer, George E. Steele; justice of the peace, John Bailey. The first marriage was Mr. Hugh Marsh to Miss Emily Burr. The first child born was Anna Carver, followed by Jessie Neil, George Risley, Helen Barr, James Case, May Hubbell, Lucy Burr, Charles Marsh, John Bailey, Dwight Bailey, etc. The first death was Allan Risley.

Politically the township has always been republican, although all other parties have been represented. Eight young men went into the Union Army in the war and all returned alive. Of the five soldiers' graves in the cemetery none of them were Benzonia boys. The first church organized was Congregational; after several years, a Methodist Church was formed. The building of the Frankfort & Southeastern railroad, now a part of the Toledo & Ann Arbor railroad, and the establishment of a station at Crystal Lake, formed a nucleus of a new settlement and opening of a beautiful resort for, health and pleasure seekers, which has grown rapidly and in good taste, and promises at no distant day to join hands with her sister on the hill.

How to bring the advantages of a higher education within the reach of the poor and to establish a Christian school in a new region, and so take possession of the ground in advance of evil influences, was a question, the solution of which was the founding of Grand Traverse College and the settlement of Benzonia. This had become an absorbing idea in the mind of the projector and leader in the enterprise, Rev. Charles E. Bailey, at that time pastor of a Congregational Church at Weymouth in Medina county, Ohio. From his own experience he knew the difficulties in the way of a young person of limited means obtaining a liberal education, having worked his own way through a collegiate and theological course at Auburn, and was also acquainted in early life with the founder of

Knox College in Illinois, and with the principles on which that institution was founded, and their practical working which resulted in the endowment and equipment of that now strong and influential and practically independent institution. These principles which, planted in the rich and easily subdued prairie brought forth fruit so soon and so abundantly, although just as sound and just as sure, could not develop so fast in a region where it required almost the labor of a generation to carve out a home and a bare subsistence.

To obtain control and possession of a large tract of government land at the best advantage and to make the advance in value furnish an endowment for the school, and at the same time to remunerate the stockholders for their outlay was the plan. The articles of association were not drawn up until Mr. Bailey had removed to Ontario, near Galesburgh, Illinois. The majority of the original stockholders were members of Mr. Bailey's family, two of them by marriage, the other was a Mr. Burr from Belleview, Ohio. The articles provided that the stock should be invested in government land in the best manner possible. A plat was made covering four quarter sections with avenues 100 feet wide crossing each other in the center.

On two of these corners was situated the college campus containing fourteen acres. Lots were donated for a church, a parsonage, a district school, and four parks one quarter mile from the center containing three acres each. The remainder was divided into lots for business and residences, small at the center and increasing in size as they receded; also farther out, ten acres for a cemetery. Of these lots, the article gave the college every fourth lot, also one-fourth of all the out lands, and the stockholders were each to give an eighty acre lot (the best) for a first college building.

A company was formed to select a location. They provided themselves with a team, wagon, and camp equipage and traveled extensively in the west, but although they found some desirable locations, they found that in those states the land was withdrawn from market on account of the large grants made to the railroads, which had not been selected, and they returned without making any decision. The company consisted of the two brothers, Charles and John Bailey, and Rev. M. W. Fairfield, who represented some large capitalists who would join the association if a location was secured. Not finding a site in the prairie region, Mr. Fairfield withdrew, knowing that his employers would not invest in a timber country.

Their attention having been attracted by some articles in the New York Tribune, to the Grand Traverse region, they examined the country about Traverse Bay and west to Lake Michigan, finally stopping at Glen Arbor. Here some purchases were made and some houses built, and here one of the brothers, Horace Bailey, who had been suffering with consumption for some time, died. About this time an accident occurred which came near putting an end to the project. Mr. Burr with his two sons and a Mr. Wolcot who had purchased a part of Mr. Burr's interest, and John Bailey, Charles Bailey and his wife and little son, were in Chicago en route for Glen Arbor. The steamer Galena was one of two boats that would land passengers on this shore. The party had engaged their passage, and with the exception of Mr. Bailey's family were on board. The boat starting a little before her time found Mr. Bailey and family on the swing bridge and the bridge open. He hailed the captain, who stopped at a dock lower down, outside of three other boats. Hurrying across with a heavy satchel in each hand, in the darkness Mr. Bailey stepped into an open hatch and fell to the bottom of the hold striking on a heap of stove coal, which would

have killed him if the satchels had not been under him; although severely injured he succeeded in getting up and assisted his family to the boat, and then sank away helpless.

After reaching Glen Arbor it was decided to look farther, and the party shouldered their knapsacks and with the section lines and their compass for their guide they traveled through the forest (Mr. Bailey being obliged to walk with two canes). After a long tramp they fixed upon a location about one mile south and two miles east of the present site; here they made a camp and cut a few trees. The party then returned to Glen Arbor. On a subsequent visit, the two brothers coming in from the lake shore by the Crystal lake, on the way to the camping place, they came to the place where the village now stands; the beauty of the spot with the proximity to Crystal lake decided the location. While looking up the lands an incident occurred which showed the firmness of principle of these men. Brother John, as he was familiarly called, found himself on Saturday too far from Glen Arbor to reach home without traveling on the Sabbath, so he spent Sunday all alone in the snow rather than break the Sabbath by going to see his family. For firmness, perseverance, mechanical genius and skill he had few superiors; these traits combined made him equal to almost any emergency.

At one time when the two brothers and the writer were coming up the river with a boat load of goods, the brothers poling and the writer at the helm, as we were coming round a sharp bend where the water was very deep and the current very strong, suddenly Brother John disappeared; he had set his pole on a slippery log in the bottom; it slipped off and let him in; he remained under water, as it seemed to us, a long time, and we were consulting what to do when he came up all right, puffing and blowing, and said, "my pole got fast down there and I did not want to lose it so I stayed down to get it loose.

On one occasion it seemed necessary for Brother Charles to go to Lansing to attend the land sales. He took a small sail vessel at Frankfort for Grand Haven; the wind was light and contrary, and at that rate of progress Mr. Bailey found that he would be too late for the sale, so he persuaded the captain to run as near land as he dared, when Mr. Bailey jumped overboard and swam ashore, and, making the best use of his strength and time, he reached Lansing in season.

We had in our colony quite a number of ministers, good men who were not afraid to take off the broadcloth and put on the denim. A party of these gentlemen were bringing up a load on the boat and enlivening their toil with joke and story when good Brother Thompson opened his mouth for a good hearty laugh and lost his teeth in the river.

The bears sometimes came rather too near for pleasure; one day a good brother came to the writer in great haste for his rifle; he had just seen three bears and wanted to get them; there was a little snow and he took their track and followed in the wrong direction; as you may suppose the bears were safe and so was he. These and many other incidents were interesting to us, but perhaps out of place here.

On the twenty-eighth day of October, 1858, the first party of settlers landed on the bank of the river about one and one-quarter miles west of the present center. The party consisted of Rev. Charles E. Bailey, his wife, Mrs. L. A. C. Bailey, and Charles C., their son, John Bailey, Mrs. Emily S. Bailey, their children, James S. and Clara Bailey, Horace Burr, Mrs. Betty Burr, and Mr. Wolcot and his wife. They built some cabins on the bank of the river, but so small that the men were obliged to go out to let the ladies retire and then blow out the lights and go to bed in the dark.

The lumber for the first houses was brought mostly from Glen Arbor to Frankfort and then up the river in the boat. About this time the Frankfort Land Company under the management of George S. Frost of Detroit, built some piers at the old river bed; these were made by driving piles and filling between with logs; this was short lived, for in a few years the sea washed them all out, but they built a good sawmill which was a great benefit to the whole region.

The articles provided for the restraint of the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors and tobacco, except for medicinal or mechanical purposes, first by a clause in the deeds forbidding, afterwards by a clause making it a forfeiture. For the sake of the reputation of some members of the colony, it is to be hoped that the contention growing out of this subject will forever remain an unwritten history.

Late in the spring of 1868, the Steamer Rocket, Captain Gaylord, landed at Frankfort a large number of passengers. She had been chartered by Rev. J. B. Walker, who had been chosen president; he had become a stockholder by purchasing the stock of Mr. Wolcot, and also by making investments of his own capital. Of this number those who settled at that time in Benzonia were Rev. J. B. Walker, Rev. Reuben Hatch, Rev. J. R. Wright, Deacon Henry Chapin, Mr. Frank Child, Col. Horace Johnson with their families; the balance of the number, fifty-five in all, had come, some to take advantage of the new homestead law, and who settled in the vicinity; others on a tour of investigation.

The college school, during the summer was under the charge of Rev. Reuben Hatch, who was also pastor of the church, and whose memory will long be cherished by the people. On the seventh of September following, the Steamer Buffalo landed another goodly number (78), some of whom were returning from a visit to their old homes, others to settle about in the country, quite a number of new settlers for Benzonia; these were: Mr. Silas F. Judson, Mr. Lyman P. Judson, Mr. W. A. Betts and their families, Mr. W. S. Hubbell, who had been here before and built a small log gristmill; he had left his two sons, L. C. Hubbell, late of Traverse City, now of Springfield, Mo., and J. J. Hubbell, now chief engineer of the Manistee & Northeastern railroad, while he went for the rest of his family, and returned on the Buffalo. Many of the other passengers although not living in, were identified in feeling and interest with Benzonia. Some time previous to the trip of the Rocket a company arrived from Sandusky City, Ohio, who had been landed at Glen Arbor, and came in a sail boat and were capsized at the mouth of the river, at the entrance of the harbor, and their goods and themselves thrown into the water. They had a supply of groceries as well as other goods, and they made a cup of tea, not very strong, and sweetened it, not very sweet, in Betsey lake. Some of their goods were saved in a damaged condition by the French people there who wanted more for salvage than the first cost. This company consisted of Mr. John R. Barr and family, one of the first deacons of the church and who has held his place ever since; (may his shadow never grow less and his term of office cease only with his life); Mr. Edward Neil and family, most beloved by those who knew them best. Other additions were made from time to time, among whom were Deacon L. W. Case and family; Rev. Alonzo Barnard, a retired Indian missionary, and family; Arthur T. Case, since a member of the house of representatives; his brother Morris, afterwards sheriff of Benzie county; H. E. Steward, to whom more than any other one man the county is indebted for opening the roads in all directions; many others whose influence, if not their names, will go down to posterity as having contributed toward

founding a model community for intelligence as well as integrity. A gentleman from Sandusky City, Ohio, who was present writes to a Chicago paper as follows:

"In company with a small party of friends from Ohio we recently visited Benzonia and were present at the dedication of the church and college grounds. On Sabbath the third of July, 1859, the families on the ground, with their friends from Ohio, proceeded to dedicate the church and college grounds, yet an unbroken forest. The company formed a procession on the road near the elevation chosen for the church building. Preceded by Mr. Bailey, singing the 122d psalm to the tune of Old Dalston, they reached the ground designated as the church site. The day was pleasant and amidst the tall old forest trees a jural staff was detached from the compass and set in the ground surmounted by a board for a pulpit. Rev. C. E. Bailey read the scriptures, Rev. A. D. Barber preached the sermon and Rev. C. E. Bailey in behalf of the company and the future colonists, dedicated the grounds to God as the site of a Congregational Church.

"In the afternoon the company proceeded to the site designated for college buildings. After prayer and singing, Rev. J. B. Walker gave his views of the aims and principles which should actuate the founders of a Christian colony and college, and the benefits which such an institution, rightly managed, would be to the west. After the discourse, Mr. Walker offered a dedicatory prayer, and the services in the forest were closed by singing the following original hymn, which indicates the animus of the discourse and the aim of the projectors of the institution.

Almighty God in Christ revealed
As Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Whose love to erring man was sealed
By blood and suffering for the lost.

Beneath this blue o'er-arching sky,
Amid this tall extending grove,
We consecrate these grounds to thee
For moral culture-light and love.

Here may sweet charity control
In every effort-every plan,
Until the heart sense of each soul
Resists whatever injures man.

DOXOLOGY

To God the Father, God the Son
And God the Spirit-three in one,
Revealed in Christ-be glory given
By souls on earth made meet for heaven.

"We returned from Benzonia with a hopeful impression of its future growth and usefulness."

About the twenty-fifth of November, 1863, the ground was broken for the first college building with appropriate religious services, Mr. Charles E. Bailey breaking the ground. The work of building progressed slowly, but everything was done in the best manner and with the best materials that could be obtained. The building was 44x64 feet with a tower and spire on the southeast corner, the lower story was ten feet high with hall, stairways, and library and recitation rooms. The upper room was eighteen feet high and finished for an audience room. The college got the house enclosed and a portion of the lower part finished when the people finished the upper room for a church. Thus the people and the college were well fixed, but in an evil hour and in an unaccountable way it took fire and was destroyed with all its contents. Measures were immediately taken to rebuild, and a good quantity of brick were made, but for reasons not necessary to give it was not then accomplished. In this extremity Mr. Bailey came to the rescue; he purchased a building well situated and well suited to the purpose for about four thousand dollars, donating one-half to the college, and with the other paying a debt due the college. Thus the college was accommodated without the expense of building. The school has been in operation, excepting two years, with as good success as could be expected from the number and the means of the community with which it is surrounded. Its alumni will compare favorably with any institution of its age and means and surroundings. Among them may be found three foreign missionaries, several preachers, one ex-circuit judge, many teachers who have stood high in their profession, others filling different positions in life with credit to themselves, their friends and the institution.

When the first party of settlers landed at Frankfort they found the river very much obstructed by fallen timber and trees that were leaning over the river so that the limbs almost touched the water, and these obstructions must be removed, at least in part, before the river could be used. The company then procured two schooner's yawls that would carry about two tons; one was named Benzonia, used on Crystal lake, the other, Fremont, on the river. The Fremont not being large enough for the business, John Bailey (the man for any emergency) built a large skiff of about the same tonnage; this proving a dull sailor was named the Old Tub. These boats answered the purpose for several years, until they were used up, then Mr. Bailey built a scow boat just adapted to the river, forty-two feet long, about nine feet wide, with good walks on each side and about six feet deck at each end. This was just the thing; two or three on each side to pole and one to steer made a crew.

The first trip she made, the Frankfort boys named her the Hallelujah. It came pretty near infant baptism and it stuck just as well-the first trip was made late in the fall. We were belated in the morning which made us late in getting loaded, and as we had to go along the shore of the lake to be in shallow water, it took us until dark to get around to the mouth of the river. It was so dark we could not find the opening; having failed a good many times, Mr. Bailey divested himself of his pantaloons and jumped into the water to try by wading, but in this he failed, so we were obliged to go back to the only house on that side, and it was full of men who had come to work on the new piers so we had to pass about the most uncomfortable night we ever saw, in the barn. The next morning found our boat and cargo covered with snow. The reader may imagine what a nice time Mr. Bailey had wading around to find the river.

All of the goods, lumber, lime, and most of the people were obliged to come into the settlement by means of these boats, and the early settlers spent a great many days on

the river, helping each other and their friends who had come to settle or to look. This state of things continued until roads were made and the lumber business monopolized the river.

The first public building erected was a house for meetings and a district school. It was neatly built of hewn pine logs, was 14x24, and was used until it would no longer contain the congregation. It was enlarged by sawing it in two perpendicularly from the peak of the roof and sliding it apart fourteen feet, and building up the space, making a room 24x28 feet; the roof was extended to meet in the center. It was afterward plastered; the lath was split from hemlock, and the lime was burned some limestone picked up from the land on a large log heap. The Rocket brought in a bell donated by the Congregational Church of Mansfield, Ohio, as a testimonial to the Rev. J. B. Walker, a former pastor. It was a carving bell from Seneca Falls, New York, and weighed about 400 pounds; it was placed upon the little church, but when it was enlarged the roof was not substantial enough to sustain it, so it was placed upon a large hemlock stump, where it obtained an almost national reputation as the bell on the stump. It had a bad habit of ringing sometimes in the night and other uncanny hours. The college built a small rough building near the southwest corner of the east lot which was used for school until the new building was ready; it was afterward moved near the new building and burned with it. "When the spire of the new house was ready to receive it, a new bell weighing 900 pounds was presented by the Blymer Bell Co., of Cincinnati, Mr. Blymer having been a former member of the Mansfield church and a warm friend of Mr. Walker. This bell was ruined in the fire, the first bell was cracked and both were sold towards the present college bell.

There being no physician in Benzonia, the people were obliged to depend upon their own good common sense and skill as nurses, and were wonderfully successful; but in severe cases, and cases of surgery, help was called from Manistee or Traverse City. Mrs. Neil had prepared herself by some instruction in obstetrics before leaving Sandusky, so she was a great boon to her sisters in their peculiar troubles, and was universally successful. Samuel Metcalf, a young man from Illinois, who was here at school, one day while at work contracted a severe hernia which immediately became strangulated, and no one in the colony was able to reduce it. Dr. Ellis of Manistee was called who at length supposed he had succeeded, but after he left it was discovered that he was mistaken. He was recalled, also Dr. Ashton of Traverse City; an operation was decided on; during the operation the intestine was either cut or ruptured; the orifice being on the outside, the natural discharges were through it. Everyone supposed it must be fatal and we watched him day and night to see him die, but one night nature demonstrated that she was equal to the emergency, and proclaimed that she had effected a cure, by the movements becoming natural, to the wonderful surprise and joy of the whole community.

The early history of Benzonia would not be complete without a chapter about the recreations and amusements. A community of people who would leave their homes in an old settled country, with its privileges and pleasures, and go into a dense wilderness to establish an educational institution, would of course carry with them their intellectual tastes, as well as their habits of industry and economy and thrift. As a consequence they very soon established a farmer's club where were discussed the best crops to raise in this untried soil and climate, the best way to clear the land, the best way to make maple sugar, the fruits best adapted to the climate. One of these meetings was called to discuss the question of raising wheat. The first few crops of wheat were so filled with smut as to be

almost useless for flour and worthless as a crop. Mr. Hubbell, our miller, as well as others made every effort to find a remedy for the evil. An old gentleman, a surveyor from Traverse county, took part in the discussion and got the laugh on himself by saying that where he came from they had the same trouble, but since he came away they had no more smut, leaving the people to draw their own inference; a remedy was found and the evil disappeared.

As would naturally be supposed, after the Rocket and the Buffalo had left their reinforcements of settlers and cargoes, the next year the people must have a fair, and a stranger would have been surprised to see the amount and variety on exhibition, a beet weighing twenty-four pounds, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, beans, peas, bread, butter, pies, cakes, canned berries, maple sugar and syrup, a large plant of purslane that would have covered a large table, a stalk of elder about ten feet long and about five inches in diameter, a pair of antlers found in Crystal lake that had belonged to an elk; at one fair Mr. Barnard brought five squashes grown from one seed, the largest weighing 116 pounds, the others over 100 each. There were no gate fees and, of course, the premiums were honorary; this was kept up till the county agricultural society was formed and incorporated according to law.

As the evenings began to lengthen the question came up of something for amusement and was finally settled by the organization of a literary society. Mr. Hatch, the pastor and teacher, was the prime mover, and at his suggestion the constitution was made as short and simple as possible, the officers being elected at every meeting—a chairman, a committee on program and one on music. The exercises were a lecture and a paper; two editors were chosen, a lady and a gentleman, by the meeting. We had a number of ministers in the settlement, Mr. Walker and Mr. Hatch who were always loaded; Mr. Bailey, Mr. Wright, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Barnard, Mr. Kirkland, who only required a little time to load just as heavy and shoot just as surely as the others; then in Joyfield was Mr. Joy, and in Pleasanton were Mr. Austin, Mr. Millard and Mr. Pierce, Mr. Leach in Traverse City who were all laid under contribution; and once as there was an inveterate story teller in the place he was pressed into service, his efforts not coming in competition with the old lecturers pleased the youngsters, while the old ones had to grin and bear it. We had a good many musicians who would have been appreciated anywhere and who made the meetings of the society very pleasant; there were also a few older singers who remembered and loved the old fashioned tunes of our fathers, and for variety they were sometimes invited to furnish the music, and the grand and harmonious chords of Old Sherberne, and Bristol, and Lenox, and Majesty, and New Jerusalem, and Easter Anthem sounded out loud and full, and the different parts chased each other to the edification of the old and the amusement of the young. One good sister said that she could think of nothing but playing "snap and catch 'em." The meetings were always held on the Friday evening nearest to the full moon, and many have noticed that in the three or four years the society lived we had not more than one or two stormy evenings. The society was known far and near and many came from other towns, sometimes ten or fifteen miles to attend the meetings.

We had also a little choir of five little girls eight or ten years old, with a little girl organist to match, of whom their leader was justly very proud. The words and music were adapted to their age and capacity and the occasion, and their sweet voices and bright

faces and ladylike manners added greatly to the interest and pleasure of any gathering where their services were desired.