

EARLY HISTORY OF GILLMORE AND SOUTH FRANKFORT
BY JOHN S. PERRY

The first reliable information that we have of any white settlers at this place is in the spring of 1854 when Joseph Oliver landed here from a small sail boat with his Indian wife. He was looking for a place to make a home and was so well satisfied with the country that this has been his abiding place for most of the time since. His son, known as little Joe, was the first white child born in this county; he now lives at Ludington and is a captain on the lakes. In the spring of 1855, John Greenwood and Frank Martin located homes here. In the fall of the same year Joseph Robar and John B. Dory came here, and Mr. Robar located the place on which most of South Frankfort stands now. Mr. Robar built the first frame house in this county. It stood on the bank of Lake Betsey, in front of where August Coddens' store now stands. In this house was celebrated the first wedding in this county, the contracting parties being Miss Philis Robar and Mr. George Greenwood. Mr. John B. Dory still lives here.

In 1857 Mrs. Hiram Gage settled on the place now owned by A. S. Dow. In 1858 John Hadsel located on the place where Mr. Crispen now lives. In 1860 B. W. Perry came and shortly after built a small distillery for the distillation of balsam, cedar, hemlock, wintergreen and juniper oils. He also taught the first school. Some of his scholars were Amy Morgan now Mrs. A. L. White, Alice Morgan now Mrs. Marshall Wiltse, Jane Robar now Mrs. Buchanan, Matilda and Mary Dory, Fannie Ball, Egbert Morgan, George and Eugene Greenwood. The school was taught in a cedar log house which stood on the ground now occupied by the American House. He was the first supervisor of the township and in 1867 helped to build a small steamboat named the Russian Domain, at A. S. Dow's shipyard.

One of the early settlers of this town was Mr. Isaac Carver who has also lived in Benzonia but now resides here. Mr. Carver has started more homes than any other man in Benzie county. He lost his oldest son in the War of the Rebellion.

In the year 1866 congress appropriated \$90,000 for the new piers, and the next year Messrs. Hubbel and Whitwood commenced the construction of them. Shortly after the light house was built and about this time population began to increase rapidly.

In the spring of 1867 George A. Douglas built the first store and in it he kept the first postoffice. In February of the same year a town plat was recorded of the village of Frankfort City on the south shore of Betsey lake by George M. Cartwright and subsequent additions by Henry Day of New York, and E. G. Chambers of Bucyrus, Ohio. The postoffice was named South Frankfort.

In 1869 the Frankfort Furnace Company was organized, under the management of Albert Ives, president; Silas Fuller, secretary and treasurer; T. E. Anderson, superintendent, and John Desmond, ironmaster, who secured spacious grounds and dockage and erected the works at a cost of nearly \$200,000. The furnace commenced operations in July, 1870. It was supposed to turn out forty tons of iron every twenty-four hours and burn 15,000 cords of wood yearly, causing a disbursement of \$45,000 annually. Mr. Crispen furnished the first wood. It run in good order until Mr. Fuller died when, under new management, it soon played out and was closed. The property has since passed into the hands of the Toledo & Ann Arbor railroad company and the old furnace

building is used for a round house and machine shop, and the grounds for switches and a depot.

In 1870 the schoolhouse was built in which the ward school is now taught.

In 1871 a machine shop was built on the ground where the Eagle Hotel now stands; Robert Blacklock was master mechanic. It burned down a few years afterwards. In the same year John Bates built the store which, when he died, changed into the hands of the Furnace Company and then into the possession of the Frankfort Lumber Company. It has since been torn down to make way for the railroad.

In 1872, Frank Wright built the Frankfort House, which was burned down about four years afterwards. It stood back of where Glarum & Closson's store now stands.

In 1873 S. E. Crandall came to Frankfort from his homestead near Herring lake and built a meat market, which was afterwards changed into a general store by his son Almeron.

In 1873 E. B. Fletcher erected a general merchandise store, which has since passed into the hands of August Coddens, who added to it a pool and billiard room and saloon.

In the spring of 1884 James Gillmore established the South Frankfort Times, which he controlled about three months and then sold to Mr. Kern, of Frankfort. The Methodist church was built in 1884. Two other churches have been built in the east part of the township.

Some of the early settlers are still with us, among whom are Mr. Hollywood, Peter Mattison, Charles Kibby and Mr. Ehman.

One of the drawbacks which the first settlers had to contend with from this place to Saginaw was the thieving depredations of the Mormons who were situated on the Beaver Islands, under the leadership of Strang. They used to go out on their raids and steal everything they could get hold of that belonged to Gentiles. They would coast along the shore in their boats until they came to some fishermen's shanties where there was a lot of fish put up in barrels, steal the fish and all the nets they could get hold of, and sometimes their boats, then burn the fish houses and depart for new fields of plunder. Gillmore's early settlers had a taste of them also. The first man who felt their gentle presence was Mr. Joseph Robar. He was coming from Manistee along the beach of Lake Michigan with a yoke of oxen and four cows; he also had three young men with him. When opposite Herring lake they saw a Mackinaw sail boat pass out about one mile and disappear to the north, as they supposed, around Point Betsie. They got to Frankfort with the cattle a little before noon and let them feed in the woods around their shanty while the men ate their dinner. After dinner Mr. Robar told one of the men he had better go out and look after the cattle and see that they did not stray away too far. He soon reported that one of the oxen and one of the cows were gone. They immediately began search and found they had gone north through the woods. They followed them about two miles north of Frankfort when the trail turned towards the beach of Lake Michigan again. As they neared the beach they came upon the ox's head, and when they got in sight of the water an interesting scene burst upon their view. The boat that passed them proved to be a Mormon boat. They had gone ashore north of Frankfort, and some of the men had come back through the woods, and while Robar was at dinner stole the ox and cow, drove them off, killed the ox and carried the meat and hide aboard the boat. But the cow was a good one and was giving a nice mess of milk and they thought how good some of it would go

in Beaver Island coffee, so they tied her feet together, put some plank from the beach to the edge of their boat, and when Robar and his men appeared in sight of the beach they were just rolling her aboard of the boat. They made a rush for them but there was a fair land breeze and they shoved off and left without calling on the custom house officer for clearance papers. The cow was identified on Beaver Island afterwards but Mr. Robar never put in his claim to King Strang for her, so I suppose she lived and died an Island cow.

A. S. Dow is the veteran mill-wright of Gillmore and of this part of the country. He had charge of the building of the first sawmill on Lake Betsie, which was built on the north side of the lake. Mr. Dow lately told the writer that although he came here in 1859 and had been through the woods about as much as any man in the country he had never seen a live bear in the woods; but his wife had a different experience. In 1863 she went out to hunt the cows and as she was going through the woods she climbed upon a large log and a huge bear jumped up on the other side of the log and stood looking at her. It was hard to tell which was more surprised, Mrs. Dow or the bear, but she thought that distance between her and the bear was of more interest to her than hunting; she turned and fled through the woods at a rapid rate until she came to a clearing where a Mr. Pearse lived, and he took his gun and they went to the place where the surprise happened, and bruin's life was the forfeit he paid for interrupting Mrs. Dow's cow hunt; history does not say if she ever found the cows or not.

We have a large number of foreign-born people in Gillmore; but unlike many other towns which claim to have had trouble with their foreign element, we have always got along well with them. As a rule they are honest, hard working, industrious people, who pay their debts and taxes. Prominent among them is Neils Glarum, who came to this country in 1872, commencing his career here as a wood chopper; then several years at jobbing and shanty life; then master of the Furnace Company wood yards until a few years ago, when he went into the mercantile business, in which he has been successful. Mr. Glarum is a man of strong convictions, who believes in America and American institutions and American protection, and takes a strong interest in all educational matters, and there is no better firm in Benzie county than Mr. Glarum and his gentlemanly co-partner, Mr. Classons.

Another unique character among us is in the person of Edward Goethals, more commonly known as Kaiser, who came to this country in 1869 and commenced working at the Furnace. He carried the first piece of pig iron that was taken from the Furnace to the dock. He says that working at the Furnace in those days was like working on the tower of Babel, as there were people from thirteen different nations at work there; and that he remembers working one day with seven men who were all of different nationalities and could not understand a word that each other said, but worked by signs. Mr. Goethals has filled various positions of trust in town, such as constable, township treasurer, district treasurer, overseer of highways, clerk for August Coddens, the Frankfort Lumber Company and Crane Lumber Company.

The children of the foreign element are among our best scholars, and some of them have developed into good school teachers.

The veteran lumberman of this country is L. W. Crane. He has been connected with the lumber interests of this county most of the time since he was a boy. He has seen more of the surface of Benzie county than any other living man excepting Joseph Oliver.

He can look clear through a saw log without any X-rays and tell you what there is in it. In 1872 Mr. Crane built a sawmill in Gillmore of 90,000 feet capacity; he ran it about fifteen years and then built the present mill, which is owned by the Crane Lumber Company, of which L. W. Crane is president. This mill is styled a double mill and has a capacity of 125,000 feet.

John B. Dory was the first man to establish a transportation route by land between Frankfort and Manistee. This he did by the use of a dog train. He had a rig made like a toboggan fourteen feet long and eighteen inches wide and he drove three dogs on it in tandem. In the winter time he used to go to Manistee, a distance of thirty miles, in one day, put on a load of ten hundred, and return the next day. There was no road at that time and he had to go on the beach of Lake Michigan over ice banks and snow drifts, and he used to have some pretty hard times to make his trips, but he always got through all right. It is very interesting to hear Mr. Dory tell about those times and how well he had his dogs trained.

The first supervisor was B. W. Perry; the present supervisor is John Lyberg. The village of South Frankfort was incorporated March 17, 1894, on the south shore of Lake Betsie, with the following officers: A. L. White, president; A. L. Edenburn, John Westburg, F. O. Smith, L. P. Classons, George Edwards, Charles Luxford, councilmen; W. R. Thomas, clerk.

The present officers, 1896, are as follows: J. S. Perry, president; L. P. Classons, Charles Luxford, F. O. Smith, John Guedimoos, George McMannus, A. R. Lowder, councilmen; W. R. Thomas, clerk.

The business houses of Gillmore and South Frankfort are as follows: Glarum & Classons, general merchandise; L. E. Griser, general merchandise; W. R. Thomas, groceries, hardware and furniture; T. O. Smith, family supplies; August Coddens, general merchandise, pool room and saloon; F. C. Vilas, drug store, also physician; George McMannus, hotel, American House; Joseph Trumbley, hotel, Eagle House; E. Tall, barber; A. Rust, barber; Charles Luxford, saloon; William Walker, blacksmith shop; J. B. Dory, shoe shop.

As to the geographical surface of Gillmore, we have hills and valleys, sand and water. The high lands are well adapted to fruit raising, and there are some fine peach orchards in town. Our means of transportation are very good, we being able to ship both by rail and boat. Gillmore has arrived at her present history without anything very exciting ever happening within her borders. We never sent anyone to congress. We tried to send a man to the legislature once and got beat so we stepped out of politics. We have a good graded school, with a corps of four efficient teachers, and two district schools. We have a good and well conducted Sabbath school. We also have in town two saloons and three churches, which I think goes to show that the Lord has got the start of the Devil a little in Gillmore.