

*(Editor's Note: The following address was given by **Nellie Dettling** on May 22, 1971, at the dedication of the new Freedom Township Hall. John Miller, father of Bob Miller, current Freedom Township Historian, was Township Supervisor at the time.)*

Word processed by Bonnie Mitchell, May 10, 2005

Mr. Miller, Honored Guests and Friends-

In giving this history, let me say at the outset, that I am much indebted to the 1874 Atlas of Washtenaw County, to Mr. Emerson Hutzel for information taken from his history of Bethel Church, to Miss Marie Schneider for her centennial book of Manchester and lastly to Mrs. Emma Alber for her history of Silver Lake school.

Looking back just as far as we can, we find the very first knowledge we have of Freedom Township is in 1831 when it is reported that a Dr. Porter from Ann Arbor went through this area and saw no inhabitants. Wouldn't all of us like to know just how and where he actually went through, where he stayed and all about it! But although he found no people in that visit, it is further reported that in the same year 1831, a James Hill followed an Indian trail from Saline and settled on a place which was later the farm of John Alber. It was later owned by Robert Schiller on Pfaus Road and at present 1971 is owned by Mrs. Hochstetler. Mr. Hill built a log cabin that same summer where the orchard now stands. He cleared enough land and sowed five acres of wheat that same fall. He raised the first barn there. Jason Jillett came that fall also and settled on the farm now occupied by the Allan Albers. It is reported that Antoinette Gilbert was the first child born in the district and that was on Nov 6, 1831. In 1833-34 George Hohenberger, Edward Polhemus came to this vicinity and George Dettling, a farmer and mason settled in 1848. More of the earliest settlers were Hugh Campbell, Robert Myers, Matt Meyers, Jacob Haas, Roswell Preston, Levi Rogers, Lyman Williams, Reuben Williams and Wm. Pfitzenmeyer. From 1834 to 1837 the immigration was so great that by the end of that time every acre was claimed. It is said that 2000 acres of wilderness were transformed by the woodman's axe into a smiling garden.

You may be interested in a few more of the first events. The first marriage license was issued to John Lewis and Sara Weller. Angeline Rouse was married in 1831. The first death was that of Jacob Haas, 20 yrs. old. He and his father were cutting logs and he was killed by a falling oak tree. Benjamin Burnett made scriptural exhortations at the home of Mr. Hill, the first house, as early as 1832, but the first ordained minister was Elder Frederick Schmid in 1835. He gave the first sermon at the residence of Wm. Schulte.

At the first election 38 votes were cast. Samuel Peckens suggested that a great deal of freedom be exercised in naming the township, so it was named Freedom, and Freedom it has always been. This first town meeting was held at the home of H. M. Griffin and he was elected supervisor. D. C. Raymond was elected town clerk. In the early days the supervisor received \$1 per day, teachers 50¢ per day, lady teachers \$1 per week, hired men 50¢ a day, hired girls 75¢ per week.

The early churches were Evangelical Lutheran built in 1840 by Rev. Frederick Schmid. This was the first Bethel church. Two other Lutheran Churches were built in 1881. The Evangelical

church which stood a mile north of the Town Hall was built in 1845 and the first minister to serve there was Geo. Kaag, according to Verna Larson. The first Catholic Church was a log one built in 1839 at the corner of Schneider and Hieber Roads. In 1858 it was replaced by a brick structure at the end of Koebbe Rd. on Bethel Church Road.

Of interest was the local Post Office, the first of which was located at the home of Wm. Pfitzenmaier who had come from Germany in 1837 and appointed PostMaster in 1873. He was the maternal grandfather of supervisor Edwin Schaible. He was succeeded by Henry Renau, and the Post Office moved to his home on Ellsworth Road. By this time it was called Fredonia. John Vogel, grandfather of Louis D. Vogel, was later post master at the office on corner of Schneider and Bethel Church Roads. These local Post Offices ceased to exist in the 1900's and Rural Free Delivery was established.

When Mr. Miller asked me to give this history, he was assuming that Freedom had been my birthplace. This however was not the case since I came here with my family from Hillsdale at the age of 10 ½ years. Many of you know my home here was at the house now occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Ray Hoener. My father had bought 120 acres in 1907 from the Adam Kress estate at a cost of \$2600. We moved there on Tuesday, March 3, 1908. The following Monday I started school in the fifth grade in the little red brick school house just across the road from here.

So this has been my feeble attempt toward giving you a history of your home town. I have spoken to you only of the past: for each of us there remains the sober appointment to contribute a satisfactory bit in making history rather than relating it. We have the goal of leaving this township and indeed the world a little better than we found it. Presenting to the public this brand new and beautiful town hall is a worthy step in the right direction, and those individuals who are responsible for bringing it into being are to be commended for a job well done. We trust we shall be able to leave to our posterity enough of Freedom to go around - freedom for all that is good: freedom from all that is bad. We realize it won't be easy but we won't be quitters: we'll keep on hoping and trying and praying for just that.