

PIKE IN EARLY TIMES.

PAPER BY COL. JOHN A. CODDING.

PIKE derives its name from Gen. Zebulon Pike, who was killed in our war with Great Britain, 1812-15. It is located on the extreme East line of Bradford county, adjoining Susquehanna. It is about ten miles long from north to south and five miles wide from east to west, containing 43 square miles.

Prior to its organization as a township the same territory was a part of Orwell and Rush. Soon after the organization of the county of Bradford the Court appointed a commission, to wit: Jonathan Stevens, Lemuel Streator and Reuben Hale, to lay out four townships from the north-east corner of the new county. The commissioners laid out the towns of Pike, Orwell, Warren and Windham. Their report was confirmed by the court in August 1813. The first assessment was made for Pike in 1814. The very first permanent settlers of the town date back twenty years earlier in the 1790's.

It may be interesting to notice the central location of Pike township in the great curvature of the Susquehanna river on its way from Otsego Lake to Chesapeake Bay. From the Borough of Susquehanna past Great Bend, Binghamton, Owego, Sayre, Athens, Towanda, Wyalusing, Laceyville, Meshoppen and Tunkhannock, over 140 miles, Pike is so central that we go twenty miles north to the river at Owego, twenty miles west to the river at Towanda, and about twenty mile south to the same

river. The town has no large streams or navigable waters. It is certainly an inland town.

In the early settlement of this country the movement of settlers was from east to west. Pike was settled by Yankees from New England, so it has often been repeated that in ancient times the "wise men came from the East."

We may be pardoned if we pause here to relate an anecdote of the late Colonel Pomeroy. He came across the country going west to find a home. He stayed over night at Towanda and went out in the morning to view the country with the object of selecting a home. The morning was bright, the birds were singing, while the Colonel listened, it seemed to him very plain, "Cheat and lie, cheat and lie, cheat and lie." He pursued his journey through the wilderness to Troy, where he stopped and made it his home. One who tells the story asked him if he could understand what the birds said at Troy, "Oh, yes," said the Colonel, "they said very plain, 'work or die.'"

The early settlers, as a class, were the right sort of men to subdue the forests, to build a home, to raise a family and to add strength to the State and wealth to the government. The pioneer and his wife were wedded together firmly not only by love and affection but by the strong law of necessity. If they were to succeed in making a living out of the forest they must "work or die." A valuable lesson might be learned by many of our good young people who marry and start together on the journey of life with (apparently) a large stock of love and affection, but who are deficient in the "work or die" quality. They commence with better furniture and household paraphernalia than their parents ever had,

and after a few years of unhappiness we see their names in the papers working up a divorce. In this latter class of persons who are seeking happiness in their home if they do not take with them the sterner quality, industry, sobriety, honesty and resolution to "work or die," they will fail to keep up with those who make truth and sincerity, industry, integrity, kindness and charity the rule of life as did those old New England Yankees who first settled in the wilderness.

The Yankee has long been known as having his peculiar characteristic, his inquisitiveness, especially his asking questions. An old poet says of a Yankee :

"He would kiss the Queen till he raised a blister,
With his arm round her neck with his old felt hat on,
He would address the King by the title of mister
And ask him the price of the throne that he sat on."

The great majority of the first settlers of Pike were direct from New England. They brought with them their manners, customs, language and religion, ministers and teachers. As a historian of these settlers I here assert that they were in the very front rank of the very best men and women in the country. They were moral, industrious, sober, honest and intelligent. Even one hundred years ago it was seldom that a man or woman could be found who could not write his name; none were in jail nor in the penitentiary, and for years a sheriff was not seen in the township. They paid their debts and the constable was compelled to earn his living in some other employment than serving summons and executions in Pike. Here in the early settlement there was a sort of neighborly friendship and helpfulness, uncommon in older settled communities. A well authenticated case of neighborly kindness occurred in the cen-

tral part of the town some sixty years ago. A neighbor was butchering three or four hogs and the wife said to her husband, "our next neighbor has got no pork, let us send him one of ours, we have all we want." So it was agreed and they sent a dressed hog to the neighbor. The destitute neighbor a few days later sent a nice hive of bees full of honey. So both parties had pork and honey. Begging nor borrowing did not enter into the transaction. They were neighbors. Both were pioneers of the township, and were personal friends of the writer, and have long since entered into rest.

When the pioneer arrived in the woods with his white top wagon he started a fire and as the blue smoke rose above the trees the news spread that a new settler had arrived, and for several miles around the men came to help roll up a log house for the new comer. The trees were cut down. A man was placed on each corner with a sharp axe, logs were hauled to every side; several strong men rolled the logs up where the men on the corners fitted and notched the end of each log so they were held together without nail or bolt and were more solid than the finest frame. When they got seven or eight logs high they put on a roof with boards and shingles. The floors were made of rough boards; a hole was left in the roof for the smoke to escape. The door was of rough or unplanned boards, hung on wooden hinges. Through a gimlet hole in the door passed a string which was attached to the wooden latch on the inside. The latch was raised and the door opened by pulling the string which hung outside. A long board, laid on pins driven into a log on the side of the room, formed the table on which the family placed their roasted potatoes, corn bread (Johnny cake) and mush and

milk. Seated upon blocks of wood for chairs they ate their frugal meal after a hard day's work. They read a chapter in the old family bible, said their prayers and then laid down on their bed of straw.

The chopping and clearing land is an interesting chapter in the first settlers' experience. The trees are felled in June when the leaves are at full size. About August in the fallow of 20 acres, fire is set to the dry material, and all leaves, small limbs and much of the useless and decayed material is consumed. Now follows the clearing and preparing the land for the first crop. The whole outfit is a yoke of oxen with yoke and chain, a driver with whip and two good men each with a handspike. The entire machinery costing less than three dollars, is the ox-yoke and chain, being all the tools necessary. The logs are piled in heaps in long rows and set on fire. The husband and wife are out picking up and burning in the evening, presenting a show that would make a circus performance look small and cheap. The burning of such quantities of excellent wood appears to us now as wasteful and poor economy, but it was a case of necessity. The farmer must have bread and the cow and the team must be fed. Wheat and corn and grass would not grow in the woods.

To get settled in a log house and to clear off land enough to raise wheat, corn and potatoes to feed the family and hay and fodder for the cows and team, was the first and important chapter in pioneer life.

I must not forget the soldiers of the Revolution who were scattered through the different settlements. Stephen Gregory, a native of Fairfield, Conn., was one and a pensioner. The writer has often heard him tell that he was very near to the brave General Wooster when he

was shot from his horse at Danbury, Conn. Ralph, Jesse and Samuel Gregory, were his sons. Mrs. Samuel Beecher, Mrs. Lebbeus Smith, Mrs. Abram Taylor, Mrs. John Keeler and Mrs. Gurdon Williams were his daughters. All are dead.

Consider Wood served three years in the Continental army under Col. Rufus Putnam. He was in the sanguinary battles of Bemis Heights, Saratoga, Crown Point and the defeat and surrender of Burgoyne. In his old age he was given a service pension of \$8.00 per month. He married Mary Adams and emigrated from Dutchess county, N. Y., to Pike about the year 1815. He had a reputation for being able to make and mend his harness with hickory withes. He called it Continental harness. His sons were Josiah, Aaron, David, Abner and Platt Wood—all farmers. His daughters were Susanna Wood Coddling, Polly Wood McAlpin, Abigail Wood Adams, Lucy Wood Very, Deborah Wood and Rebecca Wood. Mr. Wood died in 1822, aged 62 years. Both he and his wife are buried in the LeRaysville cemetery.

Another Revolutionary soldier was Isaac Ford, a pensioner. He had a miserable log house on the ground where Platt Wood built a stone dwelling in 1842. Ford spent most of the time in his old age wandering about the town. He carried an old musket and pretended to hunt. The following is a specimen of the stories the writer often heard him relate:

“When I lived on Shongum mountain I took my gun and went into the woods a hunting, and when I was in the dark forest I saw a great black animal coming toward me and I thought it was the devil. I let the thing get pretty near me and fired away and the critter fell. I went home for help and told the neighbors I had killed

the devil. Some men accompanied me to the place, and come to come to it 'twas a great bull moose. The critter had such large horns that I could stick the points in the ground and walk standing straight under the horns and not touch my head."

That old soldier always got happy when he drew his pension ; he lived in a time when whisky was cheap and very plenty.

IN MY BOYHOOD.

The forest was hemlock and maple and birch,
The houses were logs for school house and church.
The red deer went bounding with beauty and pride,
The spotted fawn following close by her side.
The black bear looked out from his hole in the rocks,
While wild geese and pigeons flew over in flocks ;
And as the good farmer was resting in sleep,
The wolf and the panther were killing his sheep.
The poultry was stolen by Reynard the thief,
Till the trap caught the rascal and brought him to
grief.

The speckled trout played in the water so clear,
And the robin and blue bird came singing each year.
We hunted the coon and the woodchuck with glee,
And the hawk built her nest in the tall hemlock tree ;
While rabbits and squirrels and pheasants galore,
Were seen from the front of the old log house door.

J. A. C.

