

The Pioneers of Bloomfield: Building a Community from the Ground Up

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The story of Bloomfield's early days is one of resilience, determination, and teamwork. Embarking on a journey into the unknown — Pioneer families left everything behind.

Lured by the fertile soil and promise of a new beginning, they worked tirelessly to transform Bloomfield into a land of thriving farms and settlements. Essentially, this was the reality for Pioneer families who ventured to Bloomfield Hills in the early 19th century. In this Essay, I'll talk about the arduous journey of these pioneer families and how they transformed the untamed wilderness of Bloomfield Hills into the bustling community it is today.

“The Pioneer families generally arrived by a steamship route over lake Erie having first arrived in Buffalo, NY via the Erie Canal which became operable in 1821”(Bloomfield Historical Society). Setting sail from the port of Buffalo, NY, pioneers journeyed through the treacherous waters of Lake Erie, with their sights set on Bloomfield. For the vast majority of them, the Erie Canal was their gateway to the west. They traveled vast distances, going through rugged terrain and the dense forests. However, they weren't worried about the challenges that lay ahead. Upon reaching the shores of Bloomfield, pioneers were both amazed and intimidated by the landscape. The vast majority of the forest lay in front of them, making them aware of the amount of work they had to do and challenges that would come. As a result, they started their work, determined to transform this land. “Once they had found their parcel of land, they would select a spot that seemed to be the most suitable for a dwelling and quite often construct first a

temporary log structure from trees felled on their land”(Bloomfield Historical Society). Using axes, saws, and other hand tools, they began clearing the land and assembling their homes. These pioneers typically worked long hours, ranging from dawn till dusk. However, long hours didn’t mean rushed construction and substantial infrastructure; instead, it meant steady construction and phenomenal infrastructure. These pioneers dedicated their lives to this, building Bloomfield one log at a time. Log cabins soon dominated the landscape, with their frames displaying the resourcefulness of those who built them. As settlements grew, these log cabins were replaced or expanded upon with frame houses built from lumber milled at early water-powered sawmills.

“Roads were almost non-existent in the township when the first settlers arrived”(BHS). Despite the lack of rudimentary roads, pioneers in Bloomfield Township created pathways and trails to traverse their growing community. These makeshift roads traced the lines laid out by surveyors or were established by resourceful farmers seeking to connect their properties with neighboring settlements. Eventually, the pioneers built a network of roads that surrounded the landscape, helping boost trade, travel, and communication. “A few roads, however, evolved a bit differently by following a wagon path made by a farmer from his property to the nearest settlement”(Bloomfield Historical Society).

To illustrate, Vaughan Road runs on a southwest to northeast diagonal from a farm called Abraham Vaughan. This serves as proof of how certain roads formed through wagon paths set by farmers to help them get from his/her property to the closest settlement. However, these paths slowly evolved into more structured roadways as time passed. With these new structured roadways, pioneers could travel between communities much faster than before. For instance , the roads connected isolated homes and farms with town centers. Furthermore, in 1827, Bloomfield

Township reached a milestone with its official charter as one of the 25 townships comprising Oakland County. This meant it was recognized as its own place with its own rules and leaders. As a result, people in Bloomfield Township could work together more efficiently to solve problems and achieve things together. Additionally, the recognition made the community even stronger and more united. However, the work didn't stop there – The introduction of the railroad in 1838 began a new era of progress and development for Bloomfield Township. The rail service revolutionized transportation. Farmers could now transport their agricultural products to markets in nearby Detroit and Pontiac. With this new technology came tremendous economic growth resulting in more development within the township. It gave Bloomfield Township access to a network of commerce and trade. New industries were created, with each one taking advantage of the improved transportation infrastructure to improve their operations. With the railroad as a transportation center for goods and services, businesses produced more products and sold more goods. As a result, they required more workers, creating jobs for the community of Bloomfield Township. Moreover, the railroad helped bring people from diverse backgrounds together showcasing the teamwork of the Bloomfield Township. It also played an important role in the landscape of Bloomfield Township. The rail lines crossed back and forth through the township, resulting in new settlements along their routes. Likewise, the town centers expanded, and the infrastructure improved. In addition, the Pioneer families recognized the potential of the land for agriculture. Using tools like the plows, hoes, and scythes, they cleared the land of trees and prepared it for cultivation. They farmed diversified agriculture depending on the region's climate and soil conditions. Wheat, corn, oats, and potatoes were popular crops farmed by the pioneers. However, they also cultivated apples, pears, and cherries. Livestock such as cattle and pigs were

raised to provide meat, dairy products, and eggs for the pioneer families. In order to maximize their output, the pioneers utilized various farming techniques, which they learned through trial and error. For instance, they rotated crops to maintain soil fertility. Additionally, they built irrigation systems to ensure water supply for their crops.

The pioneers not only fed their own families but also helped improve the economies of other settlements. Surplus crops were traded or sold at local markets. However, life in Bloomfield was not easy for pioneers. They faced harsh winters, crop failures, and other challenges, with each one testing their resilience. However, they adapted to each challenge finding a solution to overcome it. As mentioned before, they learned how to use local waterways for immigration and transportation. They learned and developed new farming techniques to maximize their yields.

In the end, the pioneers of Bloomfield Township showed resilience, determination, and teamwork in transforming the wilderness into a thriving community. Through their hard work, they established infrastructure and cultivated the land and contributed to economic development.

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