

**SOURCE: HISTORY OF KENT COUNTY**  
by Ernest B. Fisher 1919

**GRATTAN TOWNSHIP**  
**CHAPTER XIX**

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES-LAKES--FIRST  
SETTLEMENT DENNIS MCCARTHY -MARRIAGE OF CONVERSE  
CLOSE JARED WATKINS-FIRST OFFICERS-CATHOLIC  
ORGANIZATION-LIST OF SUPERVISORS.

Congressional township 8 north, range 9 west, is what is known as the township of Grattan. It is bounded on the north by Oakland township, on the east by the county of Ionia, on the south by the township of Vergennes, and on the west by the township of Cannon. The surface is undulating—we might say quite broken in consequence of the extraordinary network of lakes, but there are no ranges of hills nor prominent highlands, and the soil of the township is remarkably uniform, adapting it to the mixed husbandry of Michigan, and especially rendering it the best wheat growing portion of the county. The township has no water course of any note, except Seely's Creek, the outlet of nine of its principal lakes. It is an insignificant stream, averaging no more than two rods wide, yet, with its numerous and inexhaustible fountains, it supplied water power sufficient for pioneer grist mills and saw mills. It takes its rise in a small lake on Section 15, just north of the old State road and three-fourths of a mile east of Grattan Center, running north one and one-quarter miles, through Pine Island Lake, west one and one-quarter miles, through Muskrat Lake, and thence southeast one and one-quarter miles through Wolf Lake, where it appears as a small stream and runs thence due east, passing within sixty rods of its source and debouching in Flat River, at the village of Smyrna, in Ionia county. It was named after Munson Seely, a young hunter who, in early days, camped upon its banks and pursued the chase through the adjacent forests.

There are no less than twenty-four lakes in this township, covering an area of from thirty-six to 300 acres each, besides a host of smaller lakes or ponds, but six are large enough to merit special mention. Murray Lake lies on Sections 33 and 34 in Grattan and extends a considerable distance into Section 4, in Vergennes. It is the largest of the lakes of the township and is remarkable for its peculiar shape, being nearly divided in two by a long, narrow promontory of land, owned by the Thomas Laney Estate. Crooked Lake, lying on Sections 20, 21 and 29, is one mile long, quite irregular in shape, and is noted for its islands. Round Lake, a pretty sheet of water on Section 21, is one-half mile long and about the same in width and contains about eighty acres. This lake and Crooked Lake discharge their waters through Seely Creek into Flat River. Slayton Lake is another small but beautiful sheet of water, lying on Section 23. It takes its name from one of the early settlers whose residence was near its shore. Muskrat Lake, on Sections 4, 5, 8 and 9, is one mile and a half long and about one-fourth of a mile wide, on the average. It contains about 230 acres and is bountifully stocked with fish. The kinds caught in it are black, rock and silver bass, pickerel and muskalonge. Pine Island Lake, lying on Sections 3 and 10, one mile and a quarter long and

three-eighths of a mile wide, is the most beautiful of them all. Pine Island, from which the lake takes its name, lies on its bosom like a gem on a wave. The far-sweeping lake, with its picturesque shores and forest-crowned isle, fixes the gaze of the beholder like some enchanted scene of which we sometimes dream.

Originally there was a large amount of timber distributed over the surface of this township, principally oak and hickory, but Sections 25 and 36, and a portion of Sections 5 and 35 were rich timber lands.

In 1843, the first settlement was made within the limits of the township by Dennis and John McCarthy, on Section 30, and Richard Giles, on Section 32.

Dennis McCarthy was born, Nov. 29, 1818, in County Cork, Ireland. His father, Charles McCarthy, died when Dennis was but four years of age, and in 1837 the mother came to America with her children. In 1838 they reached Detroit and proceeded to Washtenaw county. In 1842 Dennis located land in Grattan and in 1843 the family settled there. The country was a dense wilderness, Indian trails were the only routes of travel and settlers were "squatted" miles apart. The nearest human habitation was about three miles distant. Mr. McCarthy sold his first wheat crop for forty cents a bushel at Grand Rapids and took one-half in store pay. His first purchase of land was 160 acres, which he increased to 540 acres, selling a considerable portion later in life. He served at different times as township treasurer and highway commissioner and as justice of the peace eight years.

Richard Giles was born in County Waterford, Ireland, Dec. 2, 1799. He came to America in 1834 and lived one year in Madison county, New York, then moved to Grass Lake, Jackson county, Michigan, where he worked on the railroad for seven years, and then settled in Grattan, being among the first pioneers of the township, in 1843, preceded a few *days only* by Dennis and John McCarthy. Mr. Giles took up 320 acres of Government land at \$1.25 per acre. It was a wilderness, with no roads, and supplies had to be brought from Gull Prairie. Mr. Giles died in Grattan, July 16, 1877.

In 1844, Luther B. Cook built the first house north of Seely's Creek, on Section 12. The same year William Smith also settled on Section 12, Converse Close on Section 11, Jared Watkins on Section 13, Henry Green on Section 13, Anthony King and Alanson King on Section 1, Volney W. Caukin on Section 9, Michael Kennedy on Section 19, and William McCarthy on Section 30.

Converse Close was born in Saratoga county, New York, in 1822. His parents died when he was but a lad and he was "bound out" under the provisions usual in such cases—three months of school yearly until twenty-one and at that period \$100 and two suits of clothes. But the condition of schooling being unfulfilled, Mr. Close considered himself liberated, and at the end of seven years took his fate into his own hands. He went to Canada and hired for ten dollars a month, making the best possible disposal of his odd moments to obtain an education, and at twenty-one he was competent to teach. At that time he came into possession of \$800, and in 1843 bought 240 acres of land in Grattan township. He was married the following year to Mary B. Potter. The township was in its earliest days, the

dense forest was still intact and dividing lines indefinite and little known. The young people were resolved to be married in Grattan and they decided the location by "blazed" trees. They stood on one side of the line in Kent county and "Squire" Cook, who performed the ceremony, stood on the other, in Ionia county, under the huge trees and the canopy of heaven. Mr. Close taught the first school in Grattan, the sessions being held in the upper part of his log house, which was also the scene of the first town meeting. He was the first mover in the organization of the Pioneer Society of Grattan. He was a farmer for thirty-five years and then, having accumulated a competence, he retired from active life and spent the remainder of his days in Grattan village.

Jared Watkins was born in Massachusetts, about 1792, and was a lad of fourteen years when taken by his parents to the State of New York, where he was reared to hard toil on a farm and received a limited education. He served as a soldier in the War of 1812, and after its close was engaged in farming in the State of New York until 1844, when he decided to come west and carve out a new home. He started with his family in a wagon from Yates county for Wayneport, Wayne county, New York, on the old Erie canal, thence went to Buffalo by canal boat, and thence by steamboat to Chicago, and by a sailing vessel to Grand Haven, and thence via Grand River to Grand Rapids by steamboat, and from that then trading post came to Grattan township by ox-team, and took up 240 acres of Government land in Sections 13 and 14, the deeds being signed by President John Tyler. The land was all oak openings, and their first habitation here was a little log cabin, 14x20 feet, and there were but few other settlers in the township. The red men of the forest were quite numerous and oftentimes came to the cabin door of the Watkins family and partook of their hospitality. There was not a school-house nor a church in all of Grattan township, and when Mr. Watkins settled here he was compelled to go to Ionia with his wheat, as Lowell and Greenville were mere hamlets. Mr. Watkins did his full share of the noble pioneer work and passed away in 1872, honored by all who knew him.

Henry Green was born in Williamstown, Berkshire county, Massachusetts, in 1820. His father died when Henry was eight years old, and soon afterward his mother, with himself and four younger children, went to Bergen, Genesee county, New York, and in July, 1833, settled near Ann Arbor, Mich. In 1837 Mr. Green purchased a tract of wild land in Marion, Livingston county, and this he cleared and improved for the use of his mother and the family. He worked in a mill three years and then made his first trip to Kent county, but returned because the country was "too new." In 1844 he located the farm which he afterward occupied and upon it he expended the best energies of his life. He sold his first wheat crop in Grand Rapids at 44 cents a bushel, and when flour was \$3 a barrel nails were a shilling a pound. He built the first frame house and the second frame barn in the township.

William McCarthy was born, in 1813, in County Cork, Ireland. He came to America in 1837, with his mother and brothers, and in 1838 to Michigan. In the fall of 1843 they located in Grattan township, being among the first settlers, as already stated, and the following year William joined them. He

"took up" 120 acres of land and afterward added sixty acres more. He improved 110 acres of wild forest land by his own unaided efforts.

Prominent among the settlers of 1845 we may mention John P. Weeks, located on Section 25; Orson Nicholson on Section 2, William Byrne on Section 27, and Anson Green on Section 14.

John P. Weeks was born in Dutchess county, New York, in 1807. His parents were of Quaker origin, and about the year 1812 they went to Vermont, where the father engaged in the manufacture of woolen goods, and there the son acquired his education and prepared for the pursuits of life. He started for Michigan in 1832 and had General Scott for a fellow passenger from Buffalo to Detroit. He went to Washtenaw county and, after some time spent in prospecting, purchased a farm near Chelsea. He sold it in 1844 and purchased 240 acres in Grattan.

William Byrne was born in County Carlow, or Kildare, Ireland. He married Ann Moran, later came to America and for some years lived in Canada. He came to Michigan in 1845 to work on the Michigan Central railroad. Later he arrived in Kent county and in course of time, through industry, and frugality, he secured a large farm east of Round Lake, where he made some changes on the farm that had first been improved by his son Michael. He was one of the thirty persons to organize St. Patrick's church and retained his membership in the congregation throughout life. He died Nov. 22, 1882, aged 72 years.

In 1846 Russell Slayton located on Section 14 and Dudley Newton on Section 17. Russell Slayton was born in Worcester, Mass., and in early life removed to Rochester, N. Y. He came thence to Grattan township, the journey consuming forty-six days. He was among the earliest residents and landholders of the township. Among the settlers of 1847 we find Martin Mason, located on Section 23.

The township of Grattan was organized at a meeting held the first Monday in April, 1846, at the house of Converse Close, and the following gentlemen were honored by being elected to office: Supervisor, Milton C. Watkins; clerk, Volney W. Caukin; treasurer, Erastus W. Beasom; highway commissioners, Thomas J. Morgan, Joshua Fish. and William C. Stanton; justices of the peace, Samuel H. Steele, John P. Weeks, William Byrne. and Luther B. Cook; school inspectors, Samuel H. Steele and William Beuermann; constables, Jedidiah H. Wood and Thomas J. Morgan; overseers of poor, Luther B. Cook and Samuel H. Steele; assessors, Anthon<sup>y</sup> King and Barlow Barto.

Samuel H. Steele was a native of Ontario County, New York. He moved to Kent County in 1844, about the date of the survey of the State Road, and "took up" 400 acres of land. He was a prominent and active citizen, filled most of the different township offices, and was foremost in all religious movements.

As early as 1848 the Catholics erected a small church in their cemetery on Section 32, and the same was dedicated to St. Patrick. In ten years the congregation had become much too large for the seating capacity of the house, and it was moved upon Section 31, converted into a school house, and a new and commodious edifice was erected on an eminence one-fourth of a mile west of the old site.

This building, while undergoing repairs, was accidentally burned in 1868, but a new one was erected immediately thereafter. The church organization there is a very active one.

In 1850 Edward Bellamy and Nathan Holmes, brothers-in-law, formed a partnership and erected a grist mill on Seely's Creek, near its source in Wolf Lake, on Section 16. This was the nucleus of Grattan Center, the only business center in the township. It has perhaps a dozen dwellings, two general stores and a flour mill.

The following is a list of the supervisors of Grattan township from its organization to the present time: 1846, Milton C. Watkins; 1847, John P. Weeks; 1849, Milton C. Watkins; 1851, Frederick C. Patterson; 1852, Milton C. Watkins; 1854, Converse Close; 1855, Luther K. Madison; 1856, Converse Close; 1857, Milton C. Watkins; 1858, Converse Close and Dudley Newton; 1859, George D. Wood; 1861, Theodore N. Chapin; 1862, B. W. B. Madison; 1863, Salsbury Mason; 1865, George D. Wood; 1866, Volney W. Caukin; 1867, George D. Wood; 1868, Oliver I. Watkins; 1871, Jerome A. Duga; 1872, Oliver I. Watkins; 1873, John W. Nicholson; 1876, Oliver I. Watkins; 1877, Alvin C. Davis; 1879, Aaron Norton; 1885, Oliver I. Watkins; 1887, Johnson M. Giffin; 1891, Oliver I. Watkins;

1893, Frank McArthur; 1895, John G. Hessler; 1897, Manley Whitten; 1900, James McGinnis; 1902, Frank McArthur; 1906, C. Kent Jakeway; 1911, Elmer G. Storey; 1913, Edwin L. Brooks; 1916, C. Kent Jakeway, present incumbent.

Luther K. Madison was born April 16, 1824, in the old-fashioned New Hampshire village of Hill, Merrimac County, lying a few miles north of Concord, on the Pemigewasset River, which flows from the never failing springs of the White Mountains. When he was yet an infant in arms he was brought across the Green Mountains by his parents, who established themselves at the then growing young city of Rochester, N. Y. The tide of emigration being then to Michigan, the father, in 1830, joined the flood and for a time was in business in Detroit, soon, however, settling in Utica, Macomb County, where for many years he conducted a popular hostelry. In 1846 Luther K accompanied his brother, Brooks W. B. Madison, to Grattan, securing government land. His first habitation was the usual small log house, with mud and stick chimney, home-made in its every appointment, even to its doors and the shelves on pegs for the accommodation of the household ware. Mr. Madison followed farming during all of his active career and died in Grattan township, Nov. 11, 1896.

George D. Wood was born in Delaware County, Ohio, in 1830. In 1837 the family located in Calhoun County, Michigan, and in 1847 settled in Grattan township, where the father had located land, in 1843, on Sections 15 and 22. George D. Wood entered Olivet College at the age of sixteen with the design of fitting for a professional career, but his father becoming

incapacitated for business, the son was obliged to relinquish his plans and took charge of the family homestead, where his active life was spent. He was also active in the affairs of the township and served as supervisor and also as clerk. He enlisted in his country's service in Company F, Second Michigan Malt, and was with the regiment three years, the last year serving as ordnance sergeant.

Salsbury Mason was a native of New York, born in 1820, and died in 1881. From his boyhood his energies were devoted to agricultural pursuits. He first located in Grattan township, purchasing from the state 120 acres of land, and became prosperous and influential. He removed to Wyoming township in 1866, there residing the remainder of his days. He served as supervisor and treasurer of Grattan and was ever a friend of the public schools.

Oliver I. Watkins was born in Italy, Yates County, New York, Jan. 11, 1831, and was a son of Jared Watkins, who has been mentioned in these pages as one of the very early pioneers of Grattan township. He was educated in the old-style school house, but improved his leisure hours by reading standard literary works, history, and such other volumes as had a tendency to develop and ripen his intellect. He held at different times all the minor offices of his township and held the record of the longest service as supervisor, filling that office nine years. He was justice of the peace twenty-seven years, and in 1862 and 1863 served as township treasurer.