First Settlers
By Rick E. Goodwin
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As we celebrate the Sanford Area Sesquicentennial (1870 – 2020) we should also celebrate those pioneers who first came to the sesquicentennial areas of Averill, Edenville, Hope, Olson and Sanford and established themselves in what was then a vast wilderness. What follows is information that covers **SOME** of those early pioneers.

Townships Evolve

Before the pioneer first settlers can be discussed we need to discuss the townships of the areas and how they evolved.

Egbert Township

Midland County was organized March 29, 1850. Below the mouth of the Tobacco River [as it meets the Tittabawassee River at present day Edenville] about five miles, was the farm located by the venerable Abraham Egbert, in the year 1851. He was a Canadian, and a shrewd although eccentric man. He took great pride in the distinction of being the first pioneer of the township [of Egbert] which bore his name, and never lost an opportunity of making reference to the fact. This township [of Egbert organized in 1855] consisted of Congressional townships 16 north, 1 west and 1 and 2 east, and 15 north, 1 west. This territory now comprises [in 1884] the towns [townships] of Hope, Edenville, Warren and Jerome. When by an act of the Legislature the name was changed to Jerome, it nearly broke the old man's heart (5). David Burton was the first Supervisor of the township of Egbert (4).

Jerome Township

The Board of Supervisors [of Midland County] erected the township of Jerome in the year 1856. In 1862, a resolution was passed by that body by which townships 15, 16 and 17 north, of range 1 west, and township 16 north, of range 2 west, were added to Jerome [township]. These tracts were afterward organized into separate townships (5). The Village of Sanford resides in Jerome Township today and is named for founder Charles S. Sanford.

Lincoln Township

The township of Lincoln was organized March 20, 1861, and the first election was held at the house of Eben Wright, who, with Charles Inman and Orville Hosmer, were Judges of Election, which took place in April of 1861. Lincoln [township] was disorganized by an act of the Legislature and attached to Hope [township] in 1877. In October of the following year [1878] it was again erected [as a township], and the first election after its re-organization was held on the first Monday in April, 1879, at the residence of L. F. Smith, who, with Frank S. Stratton and Harrison Averill, were appointed Inspectors of Election (5). Averill (also known in historical circles as Averill's Station and Red Keg) resides in Lincoln Township today.

Hope Township

In the year 1871, E. J. Brewster, with a number of others, sent in a petition to the [Midland] Board of Supervisors, beseeching them to organize the township of Hope. Their prayer was granted, and the first township election was held Nov. 20, 1871, with E. J. Brewster, H. Mills and Charles Inman as Judges of Election. Hope [township] was formerly included in Midland Township, and only the territory known as 16 north and 1 east was first organized as the town [ship] of Hope. March 11, 1876, township 16 north and 2 east was detached from Midland [township] and added to Hope [township], thus making of the latter a double township. In the year 1877 the town [ship] of Lincoln was disorganized by an act of the Legislature and attached to Hope [township]; but during the following year, 1878, it was re-organized as a separate township (5).

Edenville Township

[Edenville] township was formally a part of Jerome [township]. A petition signed by David Burton and others was presented to the [Midland] county Board of Supervisors, and on the 24th day of June, 1873, that body granted the request of the petitioners and erected the township [of Edenville]. It is numbered 16 north and 1 west. The first election was held at the school-house in District No. 1, on the first Monday in April 1874. G. B. Bardwell, H. H. Morgan and John W. Swanton were the electors (5). The Village of Edenville is located in the township today and was known in its early days as Camp Sixteen reflecting its lumbering roots.

Lee Township

[Lee] township was organized Oct. 13, 1880. The first election was held at the Mallory school-house, on the 4th day of April, 1881, with Henry J. Yates, Wm. D. Watlan and Walter J. Higby as Inspectors of Elections. The petition which was presented to the [Midland] Board of Supervisors, asking them to set apart the territory known and described as number 14 north and 1 west, and call it "Lee Township," was signed by Jno. Suiter, Walter J. Higby, H. J. Yates, Hans P. Lawson, Thos. F. Baker, Hans Sersen, Geo. Spens, Wm. Dape, Dan'l Weed, Justus C. Perry, Jno. A. Mallory, S. H. Webster, Nelson Hitsman, Hezekiah Weller and Jno. Gateman (5). Olson resides in Lee Township today and is generally described as being at the intersection of 9 Mile Road and Olson Road.

Some of the Pioneers

Averill area (Lincoln Township)

Averill was given a post office named Averill's Station named for its first postmaster, Harrison Averill, on September 30, 1868, with the name shortened to Averill on June 2, 1883 (6).

Harrison Averill was born April 1, 1813, at London, Canada (the first white child born there). He was a lumberman and lived at Otterville, Canada, Grand Haven, Frankfort, Averill Station and Millington, Michigan. He married at Otterville, Oxford, County, Ontario, Canada, Mahala Fox (1815 – 1849). He married second, Emily Hewitt (who died in 1885). Harrison Averill died July 16, 1887 at Millington, Michigan, where he is buried. It was he who gave the right away to the Flint & Pere Marquette Railway for the railroad to go through what we know today as Averill, Michigan, it being named in his honor originally as Averill's Station. Harrison with his first wife, Mahala, had six children. Their child Alida married Alonzo Hawley in 1866 at Averill Station, Michigan most likely dating the Harrison Averill family's arrival to the Averill area to at least 1866. Harrison S. Averill was appointed postmaster of Averill's Station on September 30, 1868 (6). By 1880 the family is living in Geneva Township. Midland County and Harrison is working in a sawmill (1).

Amelia and George Postal.
Photo courtesy of Diana Richardson.

George Postal (who was married to Ameila Snyder (1838 – 1907) was born July 12, 1835 and died February 17, 1869 in a drowning accident. He is buried in the Jerome Township Cemetery. The Postal family were early settlers to the Averill area as George's daughter's obituary in the **Midland Republican** newspaper of May 9, 1935 attests: "Mrs. Lewis J. Valentine of Averill, 73, died Tuesday morning. Born April 16, 1862 at Averill, Louisa Postal lived her entire life in the same home and related many times how the first train to run over the Pere Marquette tracks from Averill to Midland carried her father's body for burial in the Midland cemetery [he is now buried in the Old Jerome Township Cemetery]. Amelia (Snyder) Postal, George's wife and mother of Louisa, had died on February 22, 1907. Amelia was a sister to Dora (Snyder) Allswede (1839 – 1927) and Adolph Snyder (1841 – 1926). Amelia, Dora and Adolph were all born in Germany and immigrated to the United States circa 1858 and shortly after that all arrived in the Averill area (1). A note on George Postal's death and burial. George was first buried in the cemetery in Midland (later to be Revere Park on West Main Street). When that cemetery in Midland was discontinued in 1889 he was exhumed (and his tombstone moved) and buried in what is known today as the Old Jerome Township Cemetery in Sanford. He was not buried in Sanford to begin with at the time of his death in 1869 as the Sanford Cemetery did not yet exist.

Eben Wright was born in Addison, Vermont on May 14, 1800 and is found in the Averill area in the 1870 US census as a farmer with wife Harriet. Eben dies in Hope, Michigan on September 25, 1886 and is buried in the Hope Cemetery (1).

Charles Inman is found in the 1870 US census near Averill with wife Malvina, and children Erwin, Loella, Oscar and Winslow. Charles, a farmer, was born in New York State on August 30, 1827 and he died September 18, 1911 in Midland County and was laid to rest in the Jerome Township Cemetery. Before his death he had been living with his son Oscar (1). The **Midland Republican** newspaper of September 21, 1911 said his wife had died 9 years before he did, at 4 years old he came with his parents to Macomb County, Michigan, and in

1860 he came to Midland County, first to Hope then in 1877 to his farm near Averill and that he had held various township offices and represented both Hope and Lincoln townships over the years on the county Board of Supervisors.

Edenville area (Edenville Township)

Edenville was given a post office on March 16, 1868 and Henry Church was its first postmaster who named it Edenville because of its natural beauty (6).

Abraham Egbert was the first settler in the township [in 1851], and first Justice of the Peace. David Burton, Daniel Bowman and Aaron Havens settled here in 1855. Sylvester Erway was elected Edenville Township's first supervisor. Thomas Gransden was chosen treasurer; John Swanton, clerk; and H. H. Morgan, highway commissioner. Sylvester Erway ran a shingle mill, [his wife being] Juliette Bowman, daughter of Daniel and Jane T. Dempster Bowman, who'd settled in Edenville [Township] in 1855. The Erway's daughter, Hilah, was the first white girl born in Edenville Township, 1856 (4).

Only a couple of days later, the first white boy was born there [in Edenville Township]: James O. Rooker, son of James A. and Mary Ann (Shier) [Rooker], who had migrated from Canada to Saginaw [Michigan] and on to Edenville [Township] in 1855 (4).

Alvin and Laura Ann (Holmes) Marsh moved to Edenville [township] soon after Alvin built for John Larkin the first frame structure in Midland City, 1855. Their son, Royal, and his family lived on the farm purchased by Alvin from Aaron Havens of Hope [Township] in 1861, for 59 years (4).

John W. Swanton came to Edenville [township] in 1867. Although wounded in the Civil War he survived to farm in Edenville [Township] and raise a family with his wife, Catherine (Brown) Swanton. Swanton served as [Edenville] township clerk for many years, and Postmaster (4).

Henry Church, married to Esther Bowman, who opened the first Edenville [Township] hotel in 1863, platted the village [of Edenville] in 1878 (4).

[Other] early settlers included the families of Aaron Havens, Albert Erway, Benjamin Lee, Nelson Hunter, Daniel E. Grover, Philip Flock, Jacob Hagar, John Hoose, Zenas Weaver, G. B. Bardwell, Cartys and Hickses. Dr. Elmer A. Rockwell and Dr. S. C. Williams were early physicians in the [Edenville] area (4).

The early settlers depended on a stage run and river transportation. The "Belle Seymour" traveled up the [Tittabawassee] river form Saginaw weekly. A steam barge, the "Aura of Edenville," brought lumber from Edenville to Sanford (4)

Sylvester Erway was elected the first supervisor. Thomas Gransden was chosen treasurer; John Swanton, clerk; and H. H. Morgan, highway commissioner. Daniel and Jane Bowman settled here in 1855 as did James and Mary Ann Rooker (4).

The David and Emeline (Copeland) Burton family arrived in Edenville Township in March of 1855. With their children they had come first from Maine to Dexter, Michigan in 1851. David Burton was the first Supervisor of Egbert Township (5).

Alexander and Carrie (Burton) Raymond were pioneer settlers of both Edenville and Hope Township. Photo via Ancestry.com.

Alexander J. Raymond (1838 – 1909) was married to **Carrie A. Burton** (1844 – 1914) on February 14, 1864 while he was on furlough from the Civil War. Carrie was the daughter of Edenville Township pioneers David and Emeline Burton. Alexander, born in Wayne County, Michigan, had first come to Edenville Township in September of 1854 and commenced working in the woods for Tift Jerome. In the spring of 1860 he bought 80 acres of land in Edenville Township paying 25 cents an acre. Mustering out of the Civil War on July 25, 1865 he returned to his farm in Edenville Township. Later he bought land in Hope Township and is also considered a pioneer of that township. Four of Alexander and Carrie's children were born in Edenville Township and their last five children were born in Hope Township. The Raymond's moved west in 1891 and were also considered pioneers of Washington County, Oregon where they both died and are buried. Henry Raymond (1840 – 1922), Alexander's brother, was also an early arriver to Edenville Township having come in May of 1860. Henry moved to Hope Township in 1867, and he too, is an early settler of both townships. Henry, like his brother, moved to Oregon in the late 1890's (with wife Rosaltha Erway) (1) (5).

John Harris (1815 – 1904) and wife **Julia** (1819 – 1889) moved to the area in about 1865. Their daughter's family moved to the area in May of 1867 and consisted of the parents, **Anna (Harris)** (1839 – 1882) and husband **Michael Nolan** (? – 1914). Anna and Michael's family grew to include children Clifford, Orville
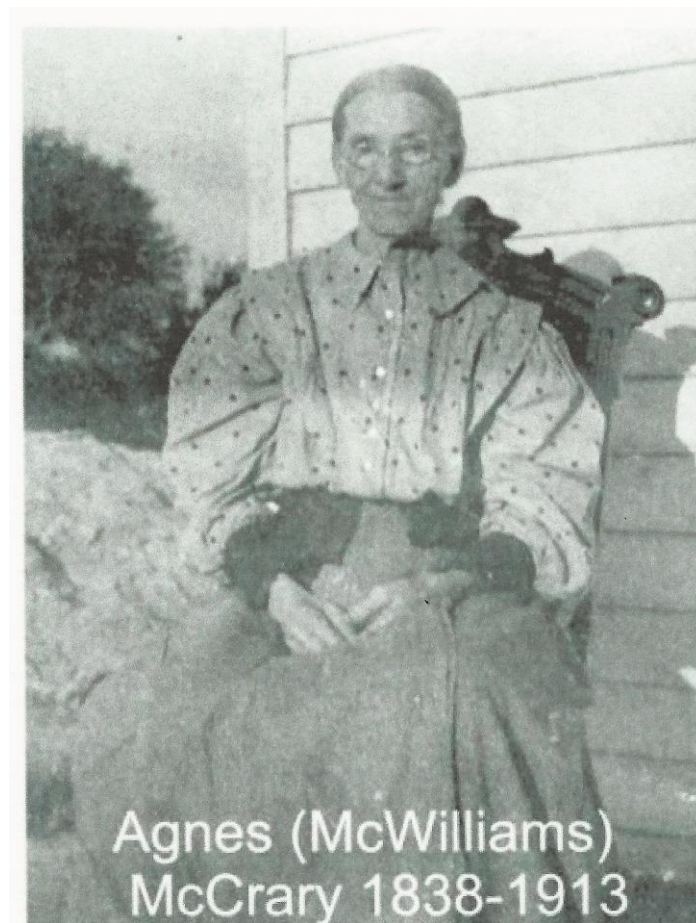
(1859 – 1940), Herbert (1861 – 1940), Elmer (1863 – 1945), Florence (1864 – 1892) and Cora (1868 – 1950) (1) (7).

Hope area (Hope Township)

Hope was given a post office on May 19, 1871, with Marshall Carr as its first postmaster; named by its citizens (6).

The first settlers of Hope [township] were Orrin Maltby and Joseph Rooker, who located on section 15 [of the future township] in 1856. Wm. McCrary settled in 1856, on section 22 [of the future township]. The first marriage that occurred in [the future township of] Hope was that of Silas Wright and Louisa Erway, in 1860. Clyde Hosner's was the first male birth, occurring in the fall of 1861. The first female birth was that of Sibyl Wright, in 1861 (4).

[Some other early] Hope settlers included the families Raymond [see the Edenville section for more on the Raymond family], Goff, Havens, Card, Inman, Wisner, Dunning, Mills, Schearer, Gleckler, Frazer, Wilcox, Braley, Wendt, Weaver and McWilliams (4)

Agnes (McWilliams) McCrary and husband William
were early settlers in the future township of Hope.
Photo via Ancestry.com.

Agnes and William McCrary. William (1824 – 1912) was born in 1824 in County Antrim, Ireland. As a young boy he came with his parents to Canada. He came to Michigan in 1853 and on January 12, 1857 he and his wife and child, Ida Mary (born in Ingham County, Michigan, June 20, 1856), came to Midland County

boarding for one year with the David Burton family in what is known today as Edenville Township. He built a log home and cleared land in what would be the future Hope Township. On November 24, 1854 he had married Agnes McWilliams (1838 – 1913). Their son Ferdinand was born January 20, 1860 in what was known then as Jerome Township. Agnes was the sister of another early Hope settler, Hugh McWilliams (1). The McCrary family farm in Hope Township was passed from generation to generation over the years and in 1961 the farmstead was named a Michigan Centennial Farm.

Olson area (Lee Township)

John B. Moore became the first postmaster of Olson on April 5, 1899, succeeded by storekeeper L. P. Larsen in 1904, the office operating until January 15, 1913 (6).

An article by Don Marquardt ran in the **Sanford Express** newspaper on July 17, 1975 telling of his interview with Elva (Larsen) Smith. It tells of the Olson area history, including early settlers, as Elva knew it. Here is the article in its entirety: "History of Olson – This past Sunday evening I [Don Marquardt] had the pleasure of visiting with Mr. and Mrs. Ken Smith of Olson. The purpose of the visit was to gather a bit of information on the history of Olson. Mrs. Smith had taken the time to write down the material for me, I am very grateful for her assistance.

This is the early history of Olson given to me by my folks, Mr. and Mrs. L. P. Larsen. My mother, Mary Pauline Sorensen, was born here February 4, 1884. My father was born in Denmark November 27, 1876, but came here in 1880 from Chicago. I will give it to you in parts.

Early Settlers of Olson. My grandfather, Nels P. Larsen, settled on a homestead in Section 8 in 1880. Others were George England, Milo Brighton, John Grace, Ren Davis, Kurt Waltz, and Henry Yates. Elmer Peek moved here in 1900. Carl Tohm came in 1887. Dad often told us of playing with the Indian children. They had a camp on Carl Creek. Some of the families still here of the older settlers are Peek, Higby, Larsen, Tohm and Hoon's.

Lee Township. Up to the year of 1881 Homer and Lee were one township which was called Homer. Then a petition was signed to organize Lee Township. The first supervisor was Mr. Davis. The first tax roll was written in 1882. Up to 1916 there were thirty-four tax rolls written and from 1916 L. P. Larsen wrote thirty-five. The Lee Town Hall was built in 1907 as Olson had no church until later years. There has been a number of funerals held in the town hall.

Schools. The log school was built about 1870 and burned in 1895. Pearl Zimmerman was the teacher at the time. The new school was built in 1896 by Amos Turney and Son of Homer Township for $300.00. Frank Zimmerman taught here in 1900 for $18.00 per month. In 1904 Mrs. Cora Knapp's funeral was held at the school as Olson had no church or town hall at that time. In the fall of 1947 our school started on half day sessions and continued until 1950 when they built the new two-room school which continued until 1966. At that time we went in with the Bullock Creek school system. In 1969 Lee Township bought the property and are now using it for a town hall.

Church. From 1902 and some before Church and Sunday school was held at the school house until in October 1945, there was a group got together and elected a building committee consisting of William Catlin, L. P. Larsen, and Ken Smith. They took pledges for funds to build a church and in July 1946, the Church was completed on a piece of ground donated by Mr. and Mrs. L. P. Larsen. The Church was organized with 26 charter members and was dedicated July 28, 1946, with afternoon and evening services; Reverend George Agin being the pastor.

Post Office. The Post Office was put in the store in about 1896. John Moore was the first Postmaster. The Post Office had to have a name. Each name Mr. Moore sent in to the U. S. Postal Department, they would already have that name. So one night they had a meeting to pick a name for the Post Office and one of the ladies, Mrs. Jake Larsen, said to name it Olson after her father. Mr. Moore sent the name of Olson in and it was accepted. Mr. Carl Tohm was the first mail carrier. Herman Tohm, Emery Hoon and Solon Plummer were some of the other mail carriers. At times they walked to Sanford and carried the mail. Other postmasters were Frank Hoon and George England, L. P. Larsen from 1904 to 1913. At that time [in 1913] they took it out [the post office] and started the Midland, Route 5. Frank Hagel was the first mail carrier. In later years Sanford came in from the north and turned west at the store. The mail was delivered on this route every other day and in 1950 they began to deliver mail six days a week.

Store. The store was built where our present town hall is now on Section 10 by Rube Morris. This store was moved four times and in 1904 L. P. Larsen bought it from George England. In 1924 he built the present store on the same location [the store was on the northeast corner of present day 9 Mile Road and Olson Road] . The Olson store has been in the Larsen family for seventy-one years. Ethel Larsen McGraw and her husband had it from 1936 until 1942 when the Ken Smith's [and his wife Elva (Larsen) Smith] took over and have owned it since."

Note – Ken and Elva Smith retired from running the Olson store in 1982. Ken died in 1987 and Elva donated the Olson Store to the Sanford Area Historical Society in 1993 where the store resides, restored, now for all to enjoy. Elva (Larsen) Smith who tells us the history of early Lee township settlers and the Olson area died on May 13, 2011 at the age of 99 years.

Carl Tohm (1858 – 1928), who Elva Smith mentions above as coming to the area in 1887, had departed Germany on the ship Sprite for North America on April 12, 1884. With Carl were his wife Johanna (they had married in 1881) and their young son Herman (1881 – 1945). Carl and Johanna, as well as their first born Herman, were all born in West Prussia (Germany) (1).

The Spitnale farm was declared a Michigan Centennial Farm in 2015 and is located just south of Olson on 9 Mile Road. Rick E. Goodwin photo.

George England (1846 - ?) was in the Olson area before Lee Township was formed. He settled on what is today Section 2 of Lee Township in 1875. A veteran of the Civil War he was discharged September 22, 1865.

He was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Anson Sanford Post #44 and served as an officer of the GAR over the years, still holding an officer position in 1905.

He married first Martha Jane Knowles (1846 – 1877) in 1866 at Macomb, Michigan. After her death in 1877 in what was then Homer Township (later to be Lee Township) he married second Alzora Thatcher (1853 – 1901) in 1878 at Detroit. George was a farmer and served the area as a Constable.

Although George's death date has yet to be determined, both he and his second wife, Alzora, are buried in the Jerome Township cemetery at Sanford (1) (5).

Sanford area (Jerome Township)

Jay F. Hamilton became the first postmaster of Sanfordville on June 23, 1871, with its name shortened to Sanford on July 13, 1871 (6).

Geo. Butts was the first settler in the township, and located on section 25 [of the township]; Charles S. Sanford came next, locating on section 24 [of the township], where the village [of Sanford] named in his honor now stands (5).

George Butts was born about 1824 n the State of New York and was married to Lomenda. They may have had a child Emely. The family appears to have lived in Kendall, New York in 1850 per the United States Census (1). It is unclear how or exactly when they (or even if all of them) came to Midland County. George was listed as a common laborer while living in Jerome Township with his wife in 1870 (but no children are listed in their household). By 1880 George and Lomenda are living in Warren Township of Midland County, but the trail goes cold after that and the final resting place of George Butts, the first settler of Jerome Township, is unknown at this time (1).

Charles S. Sanford was born to Peleg P. and Annie (Skiff) Sanford on April 27, 1816 in Madison County, New York. Charles middle name, Skiff, comes from his mother's maiden name. His mother had been born in Massachusetts, and his father in the State of New York. Both parents died in Painseville, Ohio. It was in 1864 that he purchased 1,000 acres of pine land in Midland County, Michigan, and 213 acres where Sanford is located today. He made the purchase of Benjamin Dean, and the later tract was then known as the "Salt-Springs Reserve." It is thought that Charles S. Sanford located here in May of 1864, built a log cabin near the mouth of the Salt River (as it flows into the Tittabawassee River) and the rest is history (5). Charles S. Sanford died October 23, 1907 at Sanford and is buried in the Jerome Township Cemetery (1).

Sources for this story were:

(1) Ancestry.com

(2) Upper Tittabawassee River Boom Towns by Stan Berriman 1970

(3) Sanford Area Centennial 1870 – 1970 Souvenir Picture Album by Ruth Dancer and Betty Maynard 1970

(4) Salt of the Earth A History of Midland County Michigan by Dorothy Langdon Yates 1987

(5) Portrait and Biographical Album of Midland County, Mich., Chapman Brothers 1884

(6) Michigan Place Names by Walter Romig, L.H.D. 1973

(7) In Memory of The Camp Sixteeners – Some Realities of the Early Lumbering Days by Herbert Nolan circa 1938