



Welcome to the
Rochester/Avon
Historical Society

WILLIAM GRAHAM

A son of a member of the party of first white settlers to establish a home in Oakland County and a first cousin of the first white child born in this county – that is the distinction of William Graham, who although 89 years old, lives in his large, rambling house on the South Hill here.

Graham, who looks and acts like a hale man of 70, had Chippewa Indians as his playmates in his youth, recalls that on his first trip to Detroit, made when he was 6 years old, and two days were required to make the journey from Rochester, and remembers the first wood burning locomotive, 'The Detroit', which ran – or rather leisurely ambled – over the old Pontiac and Detroit Railroads.

Although the present Rochester Road and the Crooks Road had been cleared at that time, about 1845, they weren't much to brag about. The Crooks road was used because it followed the highest ground and you weren't so likely to get stuck in the mud.

"Beyond Royal Oak there were a few road houses. One of these, at about the Nine mile Road, was operated by a man by the name of Rose."

"To go to Detroit meant rising at about 3 o'clock in the morning. We would be on the road at daybreak and get to the tavern at the Five Mile Road and Woodward Road at dusk. Here we stayed overnight. The next day we would get to Detroit by noon. The first house was at Grand Circus Park. We went to a hotel – I think it was the Standard – on Cadillac Square, back of where the old Pontchartrain used to stand."

"We put our horse up there, obtained a room and were given supper and breakfast for \$1. It took a day to sell our flour, wheat and other products. Then at daybreak we started for home and because the wagon was empty we were able to get there about 9 o'clock at night."

"Indians were plentiful and I recall that at one time we had 18 families of Chippewa's living on our farm. They came to work at harvest and liked our property because there was wood there that was especially good for use in weaving baskets."

"My father used to get along well with the Indians and talked their language as well as they could. Although some people thought the Indians were entirely lawless, they had their own tribal laws, which were strictly enforced. Horse thieves were given unusually severe treatment. Of course, the Indians had no jails and whipping was the punishment they prescribed. They often called on my father, a powerful man, to administer these whippings and I have known of him walking 20 miles to give the deserved stripes to some miscreant," Graham recounts.

Apparently the Grahams were a race of sturdy men and the red men had just cause to hold them in respect. Oakland county histories record that Alexander Graham, an uncle of William, struggled for an hour with an unusually troublesome Indian and subdued him. The Indian according to the custom of the race after he was beaten, pulled his blanket over his head and sat quietly waiting for the white man to dispatch him with a blow from the tomahawk. Alexander pulled the blanket aside and told the Indian to go but nevermore to appear in that section. The history says the Indian went and was never seen again.

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William's grandfather, James, Revolutionary Soldier, lived to the age of 88, despite the hardships of life.

Farmers in Avon Township speak with respect of the strength of William when he was young. At one time it is recorded he held the front end of a 1,300 pound machine alone so that blocks might be placed beneath it. He matured slowly and was 35 years old before fully grown. At 89 now he has the appearance of a man who can expect another twenty years of life. Each

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