

# YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

## PAST SCENES and OLD TIMES

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY~ PUBLICATION~



Ypsilanti Historical Museum  
~ 220 N. Huron Street ~

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PIONEERS OF THE YPSILANTI AREA

"NEWSLETTER" for December, 1973

PIONEERS OF THE YPSILANTI AREA

"There are all those early memories;  
one cannot get another set; one has  
only those."

Willa Siebert Cather (1876-1947)  
From: Shadows on the Rock

The following is from the copy of a letter written by William Watts in 1836 to his family in England. The original was obtained by his son, the late B.F.Watts of Ann Arbor, upon a visit to the old family home in England. We have thought it best not to change the spelling nor the style or the letter.

William Watts was born in England June 21st, 1799 and died in Ypsilanti March 15th, 1876. His first wife was a Rachel Horner and they had ten children. His second wife was Jemima Linn, whom he married in 1838, and they had four children. He was Superintendent of Mark Norris' Cross Street Mill for sixteen years. His health failed and he went into the grocery business. His store was at 18 Cross and his home at 22 W. Cross. Benjamin, the baby mentioned, moved from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor in 1852 and with his brother, Joseph Cook Watts, went into the jewelry business at 10 S. Main, Ann Arbor.

The first part of the letter tells of the long trip, over eight weeks, in a 'sailer' from London to New York. In New York they took passage to Buffalo at \$6.25 per head (1/2 half price for children), and \$1. per hundred for the luggage. They left New York in a large tow boat fastened to a large steamer which took them 160 miles to Albany. Then by steam coach to Schenectady and a tow boat drawn by two horses to Buffalo and

and from Buffalo by boat to Detroit.

"I left my family at Detroit about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, with a few pence in my pocket, intending to walk all night, but the roads was so bad, which compelled me to stop at the tavern. They charged 3 d. for my bed.

I came to Ypsilanti about noon, 30 miles from Detroit. I went to the house of Mr. Norris the miller. I asked him for work in his mill. He said he did not want a miller at present, but thought he soon should. He offered to engage me for a month at \$22 dollars. Having no money to travel with I was glad to accept it. He said twould cost near 20 dollars to get my family and luggage to Ypsilanti, in consequence of the roads being almost impassible. What to do I did not know. I had spent the last shilling. He gave me a very excellent supper and bed, and after breakfast he told me he would send his man for my family and luggage tomorrow. I felt thankful, but had no money to pay expenses on the road. Thursday morning after breakfast I told Mr. Norris I had no money. I offered him my watch which he took and lent me 4 dollars. About 8 o'clock this morning, (Friday) I came to Detroit, and the man about noon. We loaded our luggage and traveled about 4 miles that night. We staid at a Tavern where we had an excellent supper and breakfast . They charged 1 shilling for meals and half price for the children. October 1 we came about 16 miles through such a road as you never saw. We staid at a Tavern 10 miles from Ypsilanti. Mr. Norris was on his way to Detroit, and in consequence of the rain he slept at the same place. After paying for the best supper we ever had, & dry, we laid our beds on the floor. This morning I told the

landlord we could not take breakfast as our money was all spent. He gave my wife and children some Coffe (sp) and gave me great encouragement, and told me Mr. Norris was an excellent man to work for. Just as we left the Tavern Mr. Norris gave me another Dollar, he said if the waggon (sp) broke down we might be another night on the road. We passed several broken wagons that were left in the mud, and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon we came to Ypsilanti.

I had engaged a very bad house, the only one I could get, for 3 shillings per week, until we could get a better one. Monday the 3d (sp) and two following days I served the brick layer at one of Mr. Norris' new houses. One Tuesday night another brick layer came to my house and offered me \$1.25 per day. I told him I was engaged. He had been all over the town and could not get a man. The next 14 days Mr. Norris set me to work in his Pearl Ash Mill. I boiled and baked 18 barrels of Pearl Ash. He was very pleased with it. Said it was almost the best he ever see, (he had ever seen) think is worth \$500. He gave me 6 shillings more than my wages.

Saturday the 22nd I went to work in his Corn Mill where I am to remain. There are three men beside (s) me, one an Englishman. My wages is (are) \$26 per month, a house and Garden and keeping for a cow as soon as I can get one, but that must be some time first as we have our house to furnish and a large doctors ('s) bill to pay for my wife and children. Mr. Norris soon provided us a better home, he emptied his office where he used to do his writing and bought us a cooking stove. It cost 36 dollars and is the most convenient thing you ever see. (You have ever seen). He have (has) begun to build a new house for us in

a very pleasant place, not far from the Mill, and a new Rail Road will run quite past, and there is near 1/2 acre of Excellent ground for a garden. I have made one Bedstead and my Master has sent me two Bedsteads and four chairs and he have (has) sold me a Table for 2 dollars.

Mr. Norris is an Excellent man, he have (has) in about 10 years saved a large property, he came from New York State to Ypsilanti 10 years ago. He told me he was forced to borrow money to pay his Expenses on the Road. Since that time he has done Wonders. He have (has) now one of the finest farms you ever saw, he told me he had a field of wheat last year of 80 acres the finest Crop he (has) ever see (seen). It all came ripe at once and all Carted in Excelent (sp) Condition. He have (has) also a fine handsome house where he lives and several cottages beside a Corn Mill and a fine Saw Mill that work (s) night and day. There looks to be timber enough all ready Cut out to build a town, besides hundreds of large timbers laying around the saw mill. And since I have been with him he have (has) bought a large farm. It lay (s) about a hundred miles to the West, on the Great Illinois Road. He have (has) also several shares in the New Rail Road. Next summer he intends to build a new Store and also a new Water Corn Mill.

Mrs. Norris is an Excelent (sp) Woman. She engaged Rachel the first day I went to work and she has been there evry (sp) since. She is treated as one of the family and like (s) her place very much. Her Missis (sp) is fond of her. She giver (gives her) 3 shillings per week and have (has) bought her a handsome dress for the winter.

Ypsilanti is a very pleasant place. It stands on a hill on both sides of the River. The first house was built by Mr.

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Norris about ten years ago. The town is rappidly enlarging and by next Spring we expect the great Western Rail Road from Detroit will be completed which will be an Excelent thing for the town as then goods of all kinds can be brought from all parts with little expense, then we expect to get Groceries much cheaper. There is in the town 4 Taverns Several Grocery and Drapery Shps 3 blacksmith Shops one Foundery, 3 Corn Mills 3 Saw, and 2 Cooper Shops, one close by our Mill. They make all the flour barrels we use about 50 in a week, there is also a new bank now opened. There is 3 Chapels, one for the Baptist one for the Presbyterians, and one for the Methodist. We joined the Class with four others on Sunday, October 9th. We have 80 members.

Wheat is 5s, Barley 3s, Oats 2s, Indian Corn 4s, Buckwheat 3s and Potatoes 1s 6d per bushel. Clothing is dear, Shoes are Cheap. Tea 3s per pound, Candles 8d, Butter 3s, Cheese 6d, Sugar 8d very good, they are dearer now than ever was known, from the Roads being so bad which we hope will soon be prevented by the Rail Road. Beef and Mutton 3d per pound, plenty of Wood for the fire, we can have a two-horse load brought to our door for 2s 6d. Expected this will be one of the finest towns in the State in a few years. The Wheat is quite Equal to the Wheat in England and make the finest of Flour. All trades are in a flourishing State, farming appears to be the best, as Corn is high and tithes. No poor rates and but little expense, as plough the land only one and sew six pecks of wheat on an acre and harrow it in, and can sell everything they grow for ready money. We have no poor people compared with England, we have

no complaining in our streets. Every man appears to be comfortably enjoying the fruit of his labor. Day wages are 1.00 per day. Carpenters and brick layers get 2.00 per day. Here are a great many English and several from Norfolk. Two of them from near Swatham told me they often Earned 2.00 per day taking work.

Michigan is reconed a very fine State very Excelent and very fine timber. There is plenty of land to sell about 100 miles West and the price is 1.25 or 5s 2d per acre the same as in Illinois. The two States Join. We are according to the map about 400 miles from Mr. Read, 250 acrost this state to Chicago the first town in Ill. and then 150 southwest. Here is a Mr. Wilson from England one of the first settlers in Ypsilanti, he lives 3 miles from the town and frequently come to the Mill, he have lived here 11 years and have saved a great deal of money, but cannot save it fast enough, he intend to move to Ill. as soon as he can sell out to an advantage. He says he cannot raise so much Cattel nor grow so much corn as in Illois where the Climate is more temprate. Others say Michigan is quite equal to Illinois and hundreds have settled there this season. Tell Mr. Charles Cooper of Mattask there is plenty of room for him and his family. We very much want a good shoemaker. Tell him I am glad I am here, I like America, I like Michigan, I like Y psilanti, I like my Neighbors they are very friendly. I like my Master and I like my employment and for these reasons I am glad I am not in England. I should be very glad if you could send me a few pounds to buy a cow, as we are loosing every week for want of money to buy one as

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the keep with us cost us nothing. You can pay it into a bank in London which I think Mr. Windham will do for you and get their receipt and send to me, then I can take it to Detroit, but if Farmsby come you had better send it by him if you spare any. If not I hope I shall get through. I hope I shall see Farmsby and as many of the family as like to come. I will give him a home until he can get one, hope he will leave early in March as possible. I have no doubt if he come early he will save money enough to buy a farm, he can get employment as a Cooper or a Carpenter, as a great deal of building will be next summer, and they are not very partickular, he may have 6s per day and his board. Let him bring plenty of Clothing as tis near double the price here. Will thank him to bring me a good piece of Bever-teen and a good piece of Cord, and I will pay him when he come. If he can let him bring some Cuttings of the gooseberry and Currents, and some Sweede and white turnip seed Cabbage and Colliflower seed, and what flower seed he can get as I have 1/2 acre of Excelent ground for Gardening.

I had begun to write you several weeks back, but in consequence of my Children being unwell and also my wife being confined I was forced to write my letter over again. I thank God my health is excelent, the Climate suit me well, and our Children since their sickness are all of them getting very healthy and very hearty. The baby, I should have told you in the first part of my letter, is a sweet little boy. His name is to be Benjamin. He is a very healthy Child and the quietest Child we ever had, but I am sorry to inform you that my wife still remain in a very weak State. She has a very bad cough and can



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eat very little and is so weak that she can scarcely keep from her bed.

Sometime have past away since I could write a line on this sheete, and circumstances are very much altered. I have now the Meloncholly tidings to Send you that My Wife is no more in this World. She has left me and my helpless Children behind and is now where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. I will now endeavor to give you a short account of her sickness and death. When she had been confined five weeks, I and my family removed to our new house and Mrs. Norris took my wife and the baby and Betsey to her house, Still hoping that She would soon get better. Mrs. Norris waited on my wife herself, and nursed her as she would her own Child. She had everything that Could be thought of for her Comfort but all in vain , but still she kept getting weaker. She wished to Come home to her family. Mr. Norris sent her home in his carriage. As soon as She was home and the Neighbors knew it, presents came from all parts. Mrs. Showerman the Class Leader's wife came and took the baby, another lady took the next younger and they have them at present. My Wife had everything sent to her that could be thought of. One day three fat chickens and preserved peaches, apple tarts and many other things were sent to her. She enjoyed them very much. Two doctors attended her. They said she would soon get better. For a few days she felt herself better and eat pretty hearty. Her Cough was better and the pain in her side was gone and we hoped that she would soon get well, but the next day which was Thursday she appeared much weaker, and on Friday she had 4 doctors attending her.

They said they had little hope. It appeared to them to be a very quick Consumption. She continued much the same until half past 12 that night. Her speech began to fail and she breathed very short, but did not appear to have any pain. Two of her Neighbors were sitting up with her. They called me to her bedside and I soon found she was dying. I spoke to her several times and she tried to speak, but I could not understand her. I thought if that was dying, I should never more fear the pains of death. She appeared to have no pain, but gently, and I thought Sweetly, breathed her last breath and gave up the ghost. My prayer to God was, let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like hers. She died in peace, and is now far from this world of grief and sin with God eternal shut in. She died on Saturday morning at half past one, Dec 24th, 1836, and was buried on Christmas day, Sunday the 25th, in the most Respectful manner. The Custome here is to bury the dead the second day. She was taken to the Chapel in a carriage and I and my children followed in Mr. Norris's carriage and Mr. N. and Mrs. N. and family, and two other carriages beside, and a number of friends on feet. The corpse stood near the pulpit, while one of the travelling preachers preached her funeral. After she was burried, we returned to our homes the same way we went.

The neighbors are very kind and Mrs. Norris has took Joseph home to her house and send him to School. I was forced to take Rachel home to keep house, but I appear to have no home. I feel like one that is left alone. My wife and myself had been counting how comfortable we should be in our new Situation, but alas, my Expectations are out off, my hopes are blasted. I

should be glad if Elizabeth and Sophia would come with Farnesby, as I want some one to guide my Children. I will find them both a good home. I will give them their board for looking after the Children and they may earn a great deal of money. They can have plenty of work. They get 6 or 7 shillings for making a dress. Hope they will not be afraid to come. Here is a very fruitful country, a very healthy Climate and a very pleasant situation, and everything to make them Comfortable, hope I may expect them. I hope for the sake of the dear Children I shall not be disappointed. Let them come from London in the American line of packets. It will cost them 5 pound 4s 6d, but they will Sail on the day appointed and will go in half the time and better accommodation. Bring plenty of flour and beef suite, Tea and Sugar, Cheese and Butter, and some salt pork for their passage. When they get to New York, let them leave the same afternoon, take their passage in a tow boat to Buffalo. That will cost them two and one half dollars. Get some provisions for two days, as you can get more on the way. When you get to Buffalo, take passage in a steam boat for Detroit. That will cost three dollars. Take some provision when you come to Detroit. If the Rail Road is finished that will bring you down to my house, where the Coaches stop, if not, you can come by the Stage Coach that run every day. I shall be glad to see as Many more of the family as like to come. If any of your Brother's family like to come, I shall be glad to see them. I hope you will write to me directly and let me Know who is coming. There is thousands upon thousands acres of land you ever saw for 5s 2 1/2d per acre. Timber land or Meadow land

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all at one price. The Climate is much the same as in England. The ground is hardly covered with snow, the frost is pretty sharp, with a fine, clear, healthy air.

Give my kind love to all the family. Hope I shall one day see them all in America. Government have now one hundred million dollars of Money that they have no use for. This is and must remain the finest Country in all the world. Mr. Norris is no Miller himself! He like me very much. He has spoken very highly of me. I have the Chief care of the Mill. I have an Excelent place, such a one as you cannot find in England, and most likely can keep it as long as I like. I can have two other places and more wages, but I am satisfied. I must Conclude by saying that I hope to see a large part of the family next spring, and that I and all my Children are hearty and well, and that I still remain

Your affectionate son-in-law

WM WATTS

The copy of this letter was given to the Archives of the Ypsilanti Museum some years ago by the Michigan Historical Collection, Ann Arbor.

## JOTHAN AND AURILLA STEVENS GOODELL

This reminisce was written in 1931 by Rilla Dunlap, neice of Aurilla Goodell, for a Goodell family reunion and a copy of the original article was recently given to the Museum Archives by Mr. J. Williams of Owosso, Michigan.

"Aurilla Stevens Goodell was my mother's sister. My mother died when I was eighteen months old. My father broke up housekeeping to go to California to work in the gold mines. I was taken to your grandmother's with an older sister when nearly three, raised with and as one of the family.

Aurilla Stevens was born in the town of Painted Post, Steuben County, New York State, the oldest of a family of four. She came to Michigan with some neighbors when a young woman, leaving her father, mother, brothers and sisters. Quite an undertaking I should say. From Detroit she rode an Indian pony to what is now Ypsilanti, following an Indian trail of notches cut in the trees.

At that time Ypsilanti consisted of one large log house, termed Woodruff's Tavern, and some half-dozen smaller cabin homes.

She hired out to Woodruffs to card and spin. In those days people had to spin and weave cloth for their clothing; cloth made from flax or woven from wool, whichever they were fortunate enough to have. How much later her parents and family came, I do not know, but they settled about Cheasening and St. Charles.

Now here is where your grandfather Goodell appeared upon the scene. One year after her coming to Ypsilanti, he came.

I do not know just what part of New York State was his home. At that time he was a widower and left three children back there with friends, Joel, Ancel and Ambrose. His work at that time was what they called making shake, using them to roof their homes with. After cutting logs the right length and splitting them as thin as possible, holding them on a wooden business they made called a horse, with drawing knife they were shaved down thin enough to use.

After being acquainted one year, Aurilla Stevens and Jathan Goodell were married, (1826 at Woodruff's Grove), came out about five miles northeast of Ypsilanti, bought the eighty acres of land later owned by their late grandson, M. Austin Kanouse, buying it from the government at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, where they lived their remaining years, died and were buried from their old home.

Their first home was a one room log shanty they built after chopping a clearing for it. A fireplace was built of stone and mud in one end and that was where they did their cooking. Their floor was boards split from logs as thin as possible. Their first meal was eaten sitting on what floor was lain with their dishes and food between them, their feet resting on the ground. Their dishes consisted of a few cracked plates, old knives and forks given them by the Woodruffs where she worked.

Their first bed was built with holes bored in the logs, poles put in with legs fastened in, strips of Basswood bark peeled from trees lain on, their blankets lain over them. I have heard her say for three years to keep her warm when she went out was a square of flannel for a shawl.

Bears, wolves, and wild turkeys were plentiful, and Indians but friendly. Your grandfather was quite an expert in curing the hides of animals he killed, which helped them out. Their first brooms were made from a hickory stick, selecting a smooth stick, of the right size, peeling the bark, then placing one end of it in warm water, holding it in the vice with his foot, he would peel down little fine shavings, leaving them fastened near the end. When this brush was large enough, he would tie them tight over the end with a leather thong, then shave off the upper part for a right sized handle for a broom.

They fenced a little yard around the house with bars to protect themselves. I have heard her say, in spending the evening at Pines (Benjamin Pine and his wife, Mary, were neighbors), the wolves would follow them home. Could see their tracks in the frost on the bars in the morning. In felling a tree, it struck one corner of the house, knocking their gun down and damaging it so they could not use it. A very large bear got in the enclosure. Jothan told her to watch it while he ran to Pines and borrowed a gun. She climbed a ladder and went on top of the house. It came and put its feet on the rounds of the ladder then went a little out of sight. She climbed down, grabbed an axe, got in and closed the door and said if it tried to get in the window she would chop its feet off. They did not get it that time, but did later. A very large bear. They had a trough with soap grease covered over. One night he came and they heard him. He got their soap grease and a small pig the same night.

With grease scraps and lye made from ashes they made their own soap. Years later they had a neighbor living across from

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them. I have heard your grandmother tell it many times. This neighbor had a nice long handled skimmer hanging up, bright, shining and new. She said she often wished she had one like it. Well they made a trough of soap, had it under a shed covered over. They went out one morning and found most of their soap was gone. But lying right there was the skimmer covered with soap. She took it in, washed it and hung it up in plain sight. No one came to claim it, so she had the skimmer.

In speaking of hard winters, I remember their telling at that time they had gotten quite a start. A piece of ground cleared corn planted and a garden. At that time they had one cow and a heifer calf. There came a hard frost in July killing everything. He had to fell trees for his stock to browse to keep them alive through the winter.

How long they lived in the log cabin, I do not know. My first recollections are of a frame house, old and weatherbeaten, two large rooms, one bedroom off the west room, a large pantry off the east, two large fireplaces, one in each room. The girls had the bed room, old people a bed in the west room. Mine was a little trundle bed, shoved under the bed in the morning, pulled out at night.

They were a hard working couple and frugal. He did not believe much in higher education, reading writing and arithmetic being the essentials. I think for years they made most of their money raising blooded cattle and horses. Always managed to have a farm for his sons when they married, daughters had money. He was a great reader himself, as far as news of the times was concerned. He never went to church. On Sunday afternoon the



Bible was the book they read the most. Never allowed any work done on the Sabbath except that which was essential. I do not think he ever had a law suit. His work was as good as his bond any time. I never remember his having any trouble with his neighbors. Never heard him use an oath, his loudest word when angry was "dum it".

Eight children were born to them. Mary, who lived to be three, William, Hart, Aurilla, Pike, Harriett, Solon and Henry.

Jothan Goodell was born in 1798, died July 24th, 1871 - aged 73 years.

Aurilla Stevens Goodell was born in the year 1803, died January 28th, 1880, aged 77 years and five months."

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When Jothan Goodell died the COMMERCIAL, July 29, 1871, made special mention of his passing:

Mr. Goodell was one of the first settler in the Township of Superior \*. He lived on the farm he bought at Government prices forty-six years ago, and with his own hands he cleared the land, and made it one of the best farms in the County. Honest and industrious he went down like a shock of corn fully ripe.

The section of Washtenaw County where Jothan and Aurilla lived was originally called Panama Township. The WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORY FOR 1881 says:

#### ORGANIZATION OF SUPERIOR

In the history of Ypsilanti it will be shown that the district now known as Superior formed a portion of that township. On June 30, 1828, the Legislative Council enacted: 'That from and after the passage of this act, all that part of the township of Ypsilanti lying north, including township numbered 1 and 2 south, range number 7 east, in the county of Washtenaw

be, and the same is, hereby set off as a township, by name PANAMA, and that the first township meeting be held at the house of John McCormick; provided, that nothing of this act shall affect the assessment or collection of taxes heretofore assessed in the township of Ypsilanti.' This new division comprised the present townships of Salem and Superior. In 1831, under authority given by the act of the Legislative Council, the people of the southern part of Panama organized the township of Superior. Henry Kimmel gave it its present name.

John McCormick died in 1833. He came to Michigan in 1825 from Steuben County, New York. Henry Kimmel (1784-1865) came about 1825 from Stoyestown, Somerset County, Pennsylvania. He was a neighbor of the Goodell family. We do not know why Panama Township was so named - or who named it. Obviously, Henry Kimmel felt his township was 'Superior'.

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A little more about the Goodell family. In 1917 Solon Goodell, son of Jothan, wrote to Mrs. Patrick R. Cleary as follows:

...My father Jothan Goodell and grandfather Leyman Stevens came to Michigan in 1824 in the employ of one Godfroy. They helped pole a flat boat up the Huron River all the way from Lake Erie with a loan of goods and landed finally at a point about where an old tannery was built known as Howlands tannery... Father brought three small boys, son of a former wife and they stayed about one year and were sent back to Watertown (New York) where they came from. In 1848, they visited Michigan, grown men, one of them on his way to California, and the boys wished to see the place where they had landed on the Huron River. Father took them and the other family that he had acquired in his lumber wagon and drove to Ypsilanti and pointed to the place. I remember father saying, 'there was no rail

road bridge there, boys, when we came'. Then father drove to the place where he last camped, by the way they poled the boat by day and went ashore at night. The last camp was, as father stated, a place called Woodruff's Grove....I will say from memory that father continued in the employ of Mr. Godfroy for one year. Mother was employed by the Woodruff family as a domestic...

Salon Goodell (1840-1920) from Denton was State Representative and State Senator two terms each - and was also the grandfather of our member, Miss Ada Holmes.



MARK NORRIS  
(1796-1862)

William Watts' friend and employer.

Came, with his family, to Ypsilanti in 1828. One of the first Trustees of the Village of Ypsilanti. Postmaster from 1829 to 1837.

" Mr. Norris was an enterprising and energetic man, and up to the time of his death, had probably bought and sold, built and improved, more than any man in Washtenaw County."

fr. Washtenaw County History,  
1881

AURILLA STEVENS GOODELL  
(1802-1880)

She was going to cut the toes off a bear with her axe if the bear tried to get into her house.

