

07/30/2019

One of the historical and archaeological questions that we've been trying to solve involves the original pioneer, Timothy Warner. We know that Timothy purchased his first plot of land, 80 acres on Pleasant Valley Rd, in 1841. His biography indicates that his parents returned to New York a few years after they arrived in 1837. It was presumed that they left around the time he bought his property in 1841. Since Timothy wasn't married until 1846/7, one wonders how he made ends meet alone given the hardships of pioneer life. A newly discovered obituary on Timothy, different than one that ran in the Brighton Argus, seems to shed light on this question. The obituary, found by a Livingston Co NY historian in the Livingston Republican, specifically notes that his parents returned after four years. It also mentions that after they left, he lived with another pioneer, Melzer Bird. Bird lived in the area known as Pleasant Valley, not far from the property that became known as the "north woods" to the Warner family and regarded as the location of first settlement by the Warners. The obituary also indicates that when Timothy married Lucretia Jones, they moved in with Melzer but left shortly after to build a home on the property that he had purchased and paid for. Not only is this interesting from a historic standpoint but also gives important clues to archaeological research that occupation didn't occur until at least five years after the purchase of the Warner farm in 1841. This might explain why recovered ceramics with identified registered patterns ("Tessino"-1846, "Medici"-1847) begins in 1846 instead of several years earlier with the exception of "Bologna" by William Adams that dates from 1835 to 1840.

Further research on Melzer Bird yields another interesting clue. We know from family stories and dendrochronological analysis that the Warner house was built in 1855. Who, though, was the actual builder? Clearly Timothy Warner would have had involvement in the construction of his own house. In fact, a family story indicated that Timothy's son, George, was tasked with carrying nails when he was 7 years old. Timothy wouldn't have been able to build a timber frame structure with just his growing family. Pioneer farmers often would hire a carpenter that determined the size and number of logs needed. The farmer would harvest the trees and prep them typically in the winter. Come spring, the carpenter would return to direct the construction/assembly process and oversee the finer details. The 1880 History of Livingston County, MI notes that Melzer was responsible for the construction of over 100 structures in the township and vicinity. Though not specifically noted, it would seem that given Timothy's close relationship with Melzer that he would call on him to help or advise in the construction of the Warner house in 1855. It would also seem no stretch of the imagination that 20 something Timothy would have assisted Melzer with construction in exchange for room/board or perhaps to even earn cash. In 1879, a brief newspaper (Livingston Republican) mention indicates "Timothy Warren, of the same place, is preparing to build a good frame house for the use of his son." Though the last name is misspelled, there is no doubt this refers to Timothy Warner, as his son, George, was getting married in a week and was moving to what became known as the "other farm". As George was over 30 at the time, it seems significant that the mention lists Timothy as constructing a house for his son instead of just George himself.

A big thank you goes out to Chuck Hoover and his wife, Karen, for donation of a 1920s pedestal cast iron tub. The tub is quite literally a perfect fit for the bathroom currently under renovation. Kerry and I really enjoyed the tour they gave us of their historic Greek Revival home built in 1848 when we visited to see the tub. It was interesting to compare the Warner Greek Revival with theirs, as they have certainly made a commitment to historic preservation. I was especially impressed with so many original components including original doors, latches, floor boards, siding, windows, hand hewn log beams, and brick flooring in the cellar. The site was recently the focus of archaeological excavation by the Castle Museum yielding artifacts from when a log cabin stood on the property. Not only did they donate the tub, but they later personally delivered it all the way down from Saginaw to Brighton. We had a great time talking with them and showing them around the house and Hicks school.

I also want to thank Audrey Baize, a Warner family member, for the donation of old photos that were formerly at the Warner farm. Original photos are a critical component to the research of the family and play a key role in telling stories about the life of the family, many of which are on display in the house.

The Warner Homestead hosted the Pleasant Valley Social Club meeting last month. The group of ladies from the Brighton area have been meeting on a regular basis for decades and my great grandmother, Laura Fuller-Warner, was a founding member. Many members of the club over the years were friends with several generations of the Warner family. My wife, Kerry, created a nice Victorian setting to compliment the potluck luncheon. I gave a presentation on the Warner family in the Hicks school, however, most, if not all of them probably knew more about aspects of the family than I did. One interesting anecdote included the installation of running water in the kitchen. Although this is something that we all take for granted now, imagine that most of your life you had to walk outside and pump water by hand regardless of the weather conditions. Needless to say, it was the subject of excitement when running water was installed prompting my great grandmother to call some of her friends over to witness.