

HARVILAND AND BETSEY ALDRICH THAYER, NEW HAMPSHIRE TO MICHIGAN

Submitted by (author) Nancy Thayer Ross

Nathaniel Thayer b. 1640 Thornbury, England, d. 1723 Taunton, MA (65 yr)

Jonathan, b. 1658 Taunton, MA, d. 1778 (93 yr)

Mephisbosheth, b. Jun 1741, d. 1805 Woodstock, Ct (64 yr)

Levi, b.1770 Woodstock, CT, d. 1847 Lisbon/Sugar Hill NH (76 yr)

Harviland, b. 1794 Lisbon/Sugar Hill, d. 1874 Gobles, MI (80 yr)

m. Betsey Aldrich, b. 26 Jun 1795, Grafton, NH, d. 8 Feb 1891, Gobles, MI (95)

Charles Aldrich, b. 24 Aug 1830, Cayuga City, NY, d. 1896 Gobles, MI (66 yr)

m. Elizabeth Myers, b. 1834, NY, d. 30 Jan 1905, Gobles, MI (71)

Oscar Lewis, b. Mar 1857, Allegan City, MI, d. 12 Apr 1922, Allegan City, MI (65)

m. Laura Randall, b. 21 Mar 1861, Ohio, d. 1932, Ann Arbor, MI (70)

Lyle Thayer, b. 5 Oct 1901, Allegan City, MI, d. 27 Apr 1968, Ann Arbor, MI (66)

m. Louise Lenore Smith, b. 11 Apr 1906, d. 30 Jan 1956 Ann Arbor, MI (50)

Curiosity about my family's history intensified for me in 2001 after an early summer visit to Northern New Hampshire. There I found the grave stone of my gr-gr-gr-grandfather, Levi Thayer, medical doctor, surgeon, and farmer, standing in a beautifully kept, tree filled, terraced graveyard, elevated slightly above the little New England town of Sugar Hill. The clean slate surface, free of moss or lichen, was engraved with a weeping tree and the words: Levi Thayer, Died March 31, 1847 Aged 76 Years.

Back home in Maine, I focused on Levi's eldest child, Harviland Thayer, who left Sugar Hill in 1816 and, after a 20 year stay in Cayuga County, NY, moved his family to southwestern Michigan. The craggy mountains, the views, the beautiful New England-ness of Sugar Hill must have been in stark contrast to the thickly forested, flat, barely populated landscape of Van Buren County, Michigan, when he and Betsey Aldrich, my gr-gr-gr-grandmother, arrived there as pioneers in 1837 and began my Michigan heritage.

In 1816, the newlywed couple, Harviland Thayer and Betsey Aldrich, set out from Sugar Hill, Grafton Notch, NH. If they left in February, following their marriage on 4 Feb, 1816, the roads would have been covered with snow and ice, making a horse drawn vehicle glide fairly easily over the rocks and tree stumps dominating the poor roads. If they left in spring, mud would have plagued their progress: the deep ruts cut into the roads by wagons were impossibly deep and wet, upsetting carriages and wagons as a matter of course. Summer would have been difficult in this "the year without a summer," (see below), but the roads would have been most passable. In autumn the roads would have been all right and the changing colors of the White Mountains spectacular as they made their way south.

A stagecoach? A chaise? A farm wagon filled with housekeeping gifts from their wedding? Did they each ride a horse, her side-saddle as was the fashion? However they traveled, they must have stayed at inns which were placed every 3 or 4 miles along the crude roads. These inns were sometimes rough places, but the traveler had little choice than to stop when the light was failing, as it was not safe to be out after dark along roads cut through wilderness. The quality of offerings varied greatly from inn to inn.

1816 was "the year without a summer;" and may be one reason they left. Hundreds of people left New England that year, their subsistence farms threatened with crop failures, the temperatures dreadfully cold,

and with frosts every few weeks. Some even ate their seed potatoes for the summer's planting out of desperation. The eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora in 1815 is held partly responsible for the disastrous year. Reports estimate Tambora as the worst volcanic event in 10,000 years, filling the sky with debris, dust and gasses that entered the stratosphere and affected the weather worldwide for years afterwards. The northeast was hard hit.

CAYUGA COUNTY, NEW YORK

Harviland and Betsey headed either south through the White Mountains or west toward the Connecticut River and then south. They were on their way to Cayuga County, New York, a rich farming area bordering Lake Erie and not far from what would become the Erie Canal, an area unfortunately also affected by the bad weather.

According to the birth record of their first child we know Harviland and Betsey were in Butler, Cayuga County, NY, in January 1917. Betsey, probably pregnant during the arduous journey from New Hampshire, gave birth to Lydia, on 19 Jan 1817.

There were seven more (live) Thayer births between 1819 and 1834.

Harriet, 5 May 1819

Levi Washington 24 Sept 1821

Lucinda 8 Dec 1823

Abigail 5 Apr 1826

Charles A, 24 Aug 1830 (author's gr-grandfather)

Jane C. b. 1832

The 1820 Federal Census for Cayuga City, NY, lists Harviland as head of house with two female children under the age of 5, which would be Lydia (3) and Harriet (1) plus his wife Betsey.

The 1830 Federal Census lists Harviland as head of house, plus Betsey, the children Lydia, Harriet, and Lucinda (7), Charles (infant), and an adult male between 20 and 30, perhaps a hired man.

In a deed dated 8 Apr 1832, Ira Smith sells a parcel of land (54 acres in Brutus, NY) to Harviland and Betsey for \$438.

Three years later, 21 May 1835, the Thayer's sell the same parcel in Brutus back to Mr. Smith for \$400, a loss of \$38. Betsey signs this deed with "her mark." A month earlier the eldest daughter, Lydia, marries David Loveland.

ON TO MICHIGAN

In 1836, the family moved from New York to White Pigeon, Michigan (Ensign and Co. 1880). "Harviland Thayer, a native of New Hampshire, who afterwards became one of the prominent men in this township, (note: Bloomingdale Twp) came here first in the fall of 1839, and purchasing lands situated on section 34, partly completed a dwelling house thereon. He was then residing in White Pigeon whither he had removed from Cayuga Co., N.Y. in 1836. On the 3rd of March, 1840, his family arrived here in the woods and began improvements, in the near vicinity of which many of his descendants still live." (Note: three generations later my father, Lyle Thayer, was born not far away.)

In 1836, on route to Michigan, the children were aged 19, 17, 15, 13, 10, 6, 4 and 2. Harviland was 42, Betsey 41. Philo, the last child, was born the following year, in Mottville, Michigan.

Both White Pigeon and Montville are on the Great Sauk Trail; an Indian trail between Detroit and Chicago, a trail cum primitive roadway used by the westward pioneers. The Thayer's and their children may have taken the Erie Canal to Buffalo, then a steamship to Detroit and the Great Sauk Trail to their new home(s) in the southwest corner of Michigan, a route many pioneers took.

To offer an idea of what such a move was like, a writer describes his own introduction to Michigan in 1852, (Nash): *"In 1852, my father sold his property and removed his family to the wilderness of Michigan, with an old-time covered wagon, and one-horse buggy for my mother...We crossed Lake Erie from Cleveland to Detroit and soon were on the way to our new Wonderland..."*

"On we went, over logs, mud, rough roads, day after day, with my precious loving sisters huddled close to my sides for fear of being bounced over the sides of the wagon...what a contrast it was - from the old Ohio homeland to a log house in the deep woods of Michigan!...It was before shoes, cloaks, and overcoats came into use. Cowhide shoes and boots were the only kind to be had and shawls and home-made clothes that mother made. ..The Winter meant hard work, to chop ten or fifteen acres of heavy timber.... plenty of wild duck in the forest, deer, turkey, and smaller game in plenty." He was reporting on events a few miles north and 16 years later than the Thayer adventure.

When Harviland and Betsey arrived in Michigan, only one third of the lower peninsula had been surveyed and made available for sale. From 1835, immigration began in earnest to this wilderness state, mostly people of means from nearby states who were looking for cheap land to farm or to found cities and towns. Land sold for \$1.25 an acre. The estimated population at this time was 150,000. These were boom times until the banks failed, partly because of land speculation and partly bank fraud, and partly due to a national bank panic. 1838 was very hard on nearly everyone, even some with large spreads of land had no cash to feed their families. In 1839, there was an epidemic of malaria. The Thayer's seem to have prospered, however, for in that year Harviland bought 40 acres of land in Van Buren County, Michigan. The next year he bought 40 more acres. Soon, two of the daughters and their spouses bought neighboring sections, as did Levi Washington their son.

Three of the Thayer children married into the Bloomingdale County pioneer Myers family: Lucinda m. Mallory Myers, Abigail m. Reuben Myers and Charles A., (author's gr-grandfather) m. Elizabeth Myers.

Harviland, his son Charles A, and Charles' son Oscar Lewis were all to become successful farmers within this same area. My father, Lyle Thayer, left the farm to attend the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He graduated and married my mother, Louise L. Smith, on the same June day in 1925. My brother Stuart (b. 1926) and I (b. 1933) were born in Ann Arbor.

Harviland died in Gobles, MI, 18 Dec 1874 aged 80 years. Betsey died in Gobles 8 Feb, 1891 aged 95 years. They are buried in Robinson Cemetery, Gobles, MI, under the same headstone.

Many thanks to: town clerks, web sites, government sources and my brother, Stuart Leroy Thayer, circus historian, who got me started in all this in the first place. Corrections, criticisms, additions, questions are most welcome: Nancy Thayer Ross, 182 Old Brunswick Rd., Bath, ME 04530 or rossart@gwi.net

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