# MARGUERITE BERRY-JACKSON'S MAKING A HOME



1969

#### **EDITED: DEONNA TODD-GREEN**

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#### FIRST EDITION-FIRST PRINTING

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#### Introduction

"Home is where one finds it." This ancient proverb has more "Where" in the mid-nineteenth century for migrating families than it does today, especially for NEGROES moving into what might be called frontier territory. Today, all frontier territory in Michigan is resort property, sold to urban White people. "Where" could mean any of the unclear or cut-over land left by the lumbering companies.

It could also mean swampy government land overlooked by federal land promoters. Both of these types of land became welcome homelands to many free Ohio Colored families and former slaves who fled to Canada. Beginning sometime after 1860 and continuing to the turn of the twentieth century, 65 families migrated into a three-county area of mid-Michigan, from Hocking County, Ohio, and Canada.

During the developing years that followed their first settlements, a strong bond of friendship, love, trust and respect cemented these families. One only needs to attend one of the August third Saturday, "Old Settlers Reunions" at School Section Lake in Mecosta, MI to evidence the fact that a fine community relationship was born and bred in the "Old Settlers." Often as many as 600 descendants gathered on a single Saturday to pay homage to those from whom they came. They have been known to travel form New York State, the state of Washington, California, Washington DC and even as far as the Hawaiian Islands, just to be together for a single day.

An 87 year old son of an old pioneer family remembers with clarity some of the earliest Old Settlers Picnics. They were called Pioneer Picnics when I was a kid, Doc Lett tells: "One of my earliest memories of those picnics was a sound whippin I got for talking so bad about the preachers who ate up the chicken. At least 1 thought they ate it up," Doc continued. "I was swinging and having fun with some of the young boys, and my older brothers called me to come eat several times, but you know how children are. Finally one of my brothers said that the chicken was soon going to be gone, and sure enough, when I got there, it was." "Oh, I began to talk about those preachers. I'd heard my brothers use those words, and my mother was so ashamed of me and startled at what I was saying, she took me behind some bushes and whaled the tar out of me."

Many picnic afternoons are spent talking about the reasons Grandfathers and Great Grandfathers came to the area. Some were looking for timberland, others were looking for the freedom they never had. But if we conjecture today about the real reasons so many families left the free state of Ohio to travel for weeks, enduring trials of tribulation of the wilds, we would take a long look at the history of Ohio at that time. As early as 1805, Ohio had established Black Codes to discourage Negroes, free or slave, from moving into its territory. And for the next 27 years, Ohio continued to increase restrictions to hamper Negroes from exercising full citizenship. Only Negroes with visible whiteness were admitted to the voting poles. The one code that probably pushed more Negroes out of Ohio than any other factor was the law passed in April, 1827, that stated, "All Blacks must register at the county clerk's office after May 1, 1827." Negroes residing in that state at the time had to show their freed-papers, and if they met all the requirements, they would have to post a \$500 "good behavior" bond. Indiana and Illinois had similar laws discouraging Negro migration into their states.

Looking at the reasons now, one can theorize if they had that amount of money to put up for bonds----and they probably didn't have it----they might better go somewhere else and establish themselves. Certainly they had nothing to say as what "good behavior" was. Michigan seemed the likely free territory for their migration. Congress had passed the Homestead Act in 1862, and land was made available for the occupation of five years and proving-up of the land.

Thomas Cross, who arrived in Wheatland Township, Mecosta County, Michigan, in 1869, put it best when he said that they were not fleeing for the law but because of it. The exact dates are hard to come by in tracing the movement of these freedom seeking peoples. Bibles federal census and county historical records have been searched to find the earliest arrivals.

#### Grandison Norman

Grandison Norman is listed in an Isabella County Portrait and Biographical Album published by Chapman Brothers in 1884. Grandison Norman, one of eight settlers located in Rolland Township, Millbrook, January 3, 1863. At that time, he applied for a comment about a homestead grant. Following the account is a comment about other unnamed Colored families. "A number of Colored people who are industrious and enterprising have located in this township and are among its best settlers." It also stated that 60 colored families lived in and around Millbrook by 1880. One had to pay \$10 to have a biographical sketch in the Chapman book. Either the amount was a little too steep, or they didn't have it for the purpose. Little did they know then that it would have historical significance today?

Another Grandison Norman, a first cousin to the one previously mentioned, and three brothers joined the Ohio Cavalry to serve as hammers in the Civil War. Grandison, his three brothers and their mother, Mary Stevens Norman, died of Typhoid Fever during the war.

Grandison received a federal grant of property in Broomfield Township, Isabella County. Since he never realized his ambition to move to Michigan, his three living brothers and a sister inherited it. Today, fourth, fifth and sixth generations of Normans live on that land and proudly show their abstracts bearing Abraham Lincoln's signature. They all trace their ancestry back to Hocking County, Ohio.

The father of Mrs. Emma Norman-Todd, herself a second cousin of the second Grandison was one of the brothers who inherited the land. "The Grand Norman that came to Michigan (We always called him uncle Grand out of respect for his age), was really my fathers first cousin.

He could read and write and was considered a pretty good businessman. He cleared the 160 acres homestead in Millbrook and sent all the logs down the Pine River to Saginaw. Because there were no local banks, he put his money in tin cans and buried it around his property. As he cleared the land, he divided and sold it" said Mrs. Todd. She continued talking.

Well, he sold the land to a man named Chapman who wanted to build a mill in Millbrook. During the digging, some of the Colored fellows dug up a can and kicked it aside. Chapman walked over later and picked up the can. They watched him open it and put the cover back on. He tucked it under his arm and walked away. You know the unusual thing about that was Chapman hadn't been able to pay his men a full pay since they had worked for him, and the next payday, they all received pay in full. Old timers always said that they believed Uncle Grand's money helped build that mill.

Emma Todd's father, Joseph (Dow) Norman and his brothers Marquis (Mark), Michael (Mike) and a sister Eliza Norman Hackley, set out to claim their inheritance in Michigan, owning some pretty good horses. Horses were prize possessions in those days because most families owned only oxen. As they made their way into Michigan, they were met one evening by some horse thieves. In the facts that followed, Joe Dow shot and fatally wounded one of the would-be robbers.

"My father stuttered, Emma Todd told, "and he could be easily identified because of it. He was the youngest boy, a good rider and strong, so the family told him to ride on ahead as fast as he could. Anyone who ever heard my father talk could never forget him."

Even though he was not a giant-of-a-man, he was known for his strength. His grandson, Oscar Norman tells that his grandfather could stand in a bushel measure and pick up a twobushel sack of wheat with his teeth and swing it upon his shoulders without touching the sack with his hands.

"That's right," Emma verified. "I've seen him do it many times, and the last time he did it, he was 60 years old. He got a kink in his neck and never tried it again either."

During those pioneer days, countless contests of strength were used as means of entertainment to the community as well as symbols of status. A running contest went for years between Joe Dow and other settlers, especially Joe Lett. A mammoth stone stood beside one of much-used byways. When either of the men passed the stone, he stopped, got out of his wagon, picked up the stone and moved it to the other side of the road. Passers-by could tell which of the tow had gone by last by the stones position of the left or right side of the road. Only one other person ever challenged the strength of these two men and that was a woman. Matte Scott showed both of them one day that she too could pick up the stone. Spectators watched her pick it up, carry it across

#### Daniel Pointer

An old bible, once belonging to Daniel Pointer records the names of other early settlers. The Pointers and their foster son, Aaron Morgan, came to Mecosta County in 1861. They too came from Hocking County, Ohio. The five families that came through at the same time were a little more than Aaron's youngest son, 85 year old Leigh Morgan could recall. "I remember my father.

He said the Gingrichs of Remus came through when my folks did. In fact, the cemetery my folks gave, the first half-acre for an adjoined by cemetery property given by the Gingrichs. All of their folks were first buried there, but were later removed and placed in the Catholic Cemetery near Remus. But their name and the Pointers is all I can remember. Leigh produced a newspaper clipping of his father's death. My dad was born in Nelsonville, Ohio, on June 1, 1844, he read and died on October 23, 1920. He lived in the village of Mecosta for 59 years. The same old bible belonging to Aaron's foster parents also substantiates Leigh's father's birth and death. Leigh Morgan is alert and lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The cemetery mentioned earlier was called Morgan's Burying Grounds, for years. Today it is recorded in county records as the Wheatland Cemetery. Strolling through it, one can count as many as five or six generations of families buried in various plots. According to the news clipping, Aaron Morgan was considered an active community worker in the Mecosta area. He and several Colored families built the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church that once stood proudly in the village.

One of the largest monuments in the cemetery bears the name of Daniel Branson. He was an ex--slave, born in Alabama and migrated state by state to Canada, later coming to Mecosta and purchasing 40 acres of land. The only dates connected to "Uncle" Daniel are on his tombstone and bear the birth date 1820 and his death. 1901. When he came or how he came is unknown.

One of the stories that Daniel told over and over again, and is till remembered by the remaining few old timers, was when he saw stars fall on Alabama. In his migratory travels, he carried the plate and cup given to him by his master. It was the only plate he ever ate on and the only cup he ever drank from, after it was given to him. Both plate and cup are intact, belonging to Mrs. Clarence Hill of Grand Rapids, whose Grandfather, John Bracey helped care for the old man in his last days.

#### John Cummins (Cummings)

Most of the people coming to the three-county area in those early days were either relatives or neighbors back in Ohio or Canada. Possibly another of the five families who came at the time of the Pointers were the Morgans, Gingrichs (White), and the John Cummins Family. Since Daniel Pointer's wife was formerly Millie Cummins and daughters of John. The Pointer bible gives John's birth date as 1799, born in Virginia, and died in "Great Peace", in 1882. Re -reading the bible dates are for most: One date found in an old forgotten burying ground north of the village of Millbrook. It was known as Cummin's Plot. Still readable on one of the upright markers is the name of Marquis Norman, who died June 28, 1880, at the age of 50. Marquis married Joan Cummins and fathered 10 children.

In the same pasture burying plot can be seen crumbling stones marking the graves of other Norman and Cummins. It was common in those days to use one marker for several members of a family. On one such tombstone are these names: John Norman who died September 1864, at 3 years of age: Susan Frances Norman died 1865, at 2 years of age.

One of John Cummins Grandsons, Charlie Green, of Blanchard, has in his family bible the date and death of his mother, Susan Cummins-Green. My mother was born in Ohio in 1859 and came to Millbrook in 1862, when she was three years old. My mother was on of 17 children, Charlie relates. Ten of them lived to be grown, but they lost seven in a diphtheria epidemic one year. My mother told me that my Grandfather would come from burying one of the children to find that another had died. Charlie continued to tell about his Grandfather and his fathers homestead. His father, Oscar, who was white, went to the Civil War as a substitute for Philip Blanchard, for whom the village of Blanchard is named. "Philip Blanchard deeded our homestead to my father for his services and my oldest brother was named Philip from him," Charlie said.

William Cummins and Harriet Flowers, Charlie's grandparents, have the longest lineage of any of the Colored families from the two counties. "It would be hard to tell who all the great and great-great grandchildren are." Charlie tried to remember, then concluded, "You know, we've lost some to the other side." (passing-for-White) Drawing up a genealogy tree of the ones that could be named are 173, and that was just down through the grandchildren.

An interesting note in searching the records of evidence is the facts except for the mention of three names in the previous county records: Isaac Jacobs, Jefferson Fitzgerald, William Bruce and Catherine Tanner all lived in Leonard, Isabella County.

As late as March 1969, a research team from Central Michigan University made a survey of Millbrook. Among the questions ask was the nationality of the ancestors in the community.

The postmistress told the team the majority of the descendants came for England. When they called at the Charlie Green home, he named from 40 to 100 families of Negroid descent that lived or had lived in the area since the Civil War. It is difficult to understand why more that 10 years after the emancipation, the swarthy specter uncomfortable----or could they have changed their ancestry?

Remus was the home of another branch of the John Cummin's tree. Joseph Cummins and Ester (Cummins) Lett owned much of the once swampy lands that is now school and rail-road property. Someone suggested that thy name the town Esterville, because Ester Cummins. Aunt East, as she was known, had either given or sold so much of the family property to the town of Remus. The Cummin's surname, also known: Cummin, Cummins and Cummings are of the same ancestry. Some claim to be White and some claim Black descent.

#### Thomas Cross

On the State Road, north of Remus, in 1969, the Thomas Cross, James Cross, James Guy and Alexander Harper families homesteaded land. Tom Cross was born in Loundon County, Virginia in 1826. He left the most profound mark in the area of all the early Colored settlers in Michigan. A deeply religious man, he found four Disciples of Christ and organized a church in the fall of his arrival. The first meeting was held in the Gingrich School. The entire congregation made up of the four. By 1870, two more were added and Tom became the elder and Alex Harper was elected Deacon.

In August of this year (1969), the church, now called the Wheatland Church of Christ, will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Descendants still sit on the pews made from on tree, cut in the clearing of the Cross homestead. Tom served the church he formed until his death in 1897 and without pay. His son, Amos and Grandson, Arthur have been keepers of the flock and the guardians of the church these past 69 years. Arthur (now deceased) will be in charge of the 100<sup>th</sup> celebration.

Because Tom Cross longed to read the bible and had had little or no formal educational training, he built a school across for the church and all the Colored children in the entire community received their early training. The appetite to learn was transmitted to the grand-children on Thomas. Three of them, Homer, Arthur and Roscoe attended Ferris Institute in its formative days. Arthur became the first Black rural mail-carrier in the state of Michigan. When he retired in May 1961, he had served 43 years as a rural carrier in his community

Eighty acres was the usual amount of land anyone bought at first. This amount was what Isaac Berry and Lucy Millard Barry bought when they arrived form Canada in 1877. Isaac walked to Michigan in 1858 from Missouri, but knowing that he could be picked up and returned, he went to Canada. There he married Lucy Esther Millard, a neighbor's daughter, whom he had known in Missouri. She and her family had migrated from New York, then to Michigan before settling in Missouri. In Canada, Isaac met two friends form his boyhood state of Kentucky----Stephen Todd and Absalom Johnson. All three had been slaves in Kentucky. Stephen served as a substitute in the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment of U.S. Black Volunteers. He tried to run away four times before serving in the war, for which he was promised his freedom.

The Berry's and the Todd's came through in ox-drawn covered wagons. The Todd's stopped in Remus and the Berry's went on to Morton Township, Mecosta County, where Webers' Lumber Camp was selling "slashin" land for \$1.25 an acre. Isaac sent word back to the Johnson's, and the next year they came to the community they called Little River.

While the Little Muskegon River flowed through the lands they bought, the place in Canada they had left was also called Little River, so the new settlers felt right at home and Little River er seemed more than appropriate. Living there when they arrived was the Madison Robinson Family.

Aunt Sarah Robinson and Daniel Pointer's sister had followed her brother's family form Ohio. Madison had suggested that he'd like having some new neighbors. All of their property adjoined around School Section Lake.

The Berry's first home was one of the abandoned lumber shanties left by the Webers' Camp. Late one night, John H. Berry Sr.—Isaac's youngest, now 87 year old son----tells of a loud pounding and rattling on the latched door. Isaac rose to find members of an Indian tribe standing outside demanding that he get out of their home. The Chippewa Tribes were holding and Pow-Wow near Saginaw during the late summer and had returned to settle down before winter set in.

With the persuasion of Isaac and his two older sons, William and Ike Jr., and the brandishing of guns convinced the Indians they had bought the land. The Indians moved down to the. Forks of the west branch of the Little Muskegon River, where they settled and became good friends of the new Colored families. In fact, intermarriage became common later. It was also common for the Colored families to feed the Indians during hard winters. Many times they would trudge through knee-deep snow to a colored neighbor, walk in without knocking and remark----"Indian got no corn."

#### Thomas Guy

The wealthiest families to establish themselves in these parts were the Guys--Thomas and his brothers William and Moses, sons Henry, Charles and Frank. This family had been fortunate in finding their particular land, for it was covered with rock elm, a special hardwood used in the building of ships, at that time. Tom built one of the most beautiful homes in the entire community. Each child had his own room with his name engraved on a plaque on the door. To even have a room was considered a luxury.

In an Isabella County historical book published by B.F. Bowen and Company and owned by the Woodruff family in Shepherd, Michigan, Charlie Guy is listed as having been elected to several township offices. He is recorded as having served exceptionally well as school assessor.

Tom Guy was called the poor man's granary. He seldom sold his livestock, but slaughtered ----especially the hogs. They were smoked and used for payment to the men he hired in clearing his land. Every man who worked for him was glad to see Tom walk into his 16x20 smoke house and come out with a piece of smoked ham or shoulder as payment for a days work.

In 1868, the Thomas Squires family moved into the Blanchard area. Their daughter Rebecca, who lived to be 103 years old, was five years old when her father journeyed by ox cart into the wild territory. Rebecca grew up and married Owen Lovejoy Tate, son of another pioneer. Their two daughters, Irma (deceased) and Velma (deceased) (Oscar) Norman, still live near the old family home and Irma won a citation for writing the history of the Squires, Tates and Guys, for the 100th anniversary of Isabella County, in 1960.

Family ties and friendships grew and roots went deep. Even today when descendants of these fine provincial people die in some far away city, they are brought back to be buried in one of the original burying plots. OLD MAN STEEL----That's all anyone ever called him---- after moving from Mecosta to the Ionia area, carried on his shoulders, in a homemade casket, the body of his child, to bury her in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Mecosta.

It took the disasters, wars, heartaches, or tragedies seem to be the ties that bound these plain, dear people together.' Distances were and are never too great to travel to see a sick or dying old neighbor or friend. Joys are shared and congratulations are extended to the great and great-great grandchildren for the many honors that have come their way, in most every walk of life. For the community has produced soldiers who have been prisoners of war and received medals, scholars, ministers, businessmen, musicians, professional base-ball players, farmers and a judge, who all had humble beginnings in this community, within a community.

Here has been and still is a living example of the commandment:

LOVE YE ONE ANOTHER, AND YOU WILL FULFILL YOUR OWN PROPHESY!

### Prophesy By: William Todd

Listen my friends while I relate, The story of a man, who died an awful death; He suffered the sins of the world you see, That was fulfilling the prophesy.

He cures the lame, halt, sick and blind, He tried the hearts of all men to find; But of course you know, that never could be Or it wouldn't have fulfilled the prophesy.

They took him and nailed him to an old rugged cross, And lifted him up high aloft; So the people could scoff and scorn at his agony; That was fulfilling the prophesy.

They took him down and laid him in Joseph's tomb, we've got him now they said, I presume, as they placed the soldiers around the tomb, To hold him there forever more. Now my friends you an plainly see, that was fulfilling the prophesy.

Early in the morn on the third day The soldiers fell like dead they say, For the Master spoke with a mighty roar; And angels came and rolled the stone from the door. Now my friends you can farther see that was fulfilling the prophesy.

Then our Savior walked out, His hands both free; He had conquered death and the grave you see: And an angel sat on the stone they say, To show the women where their Savior had laid. Now my friends you can plainly see that's fulfilling the prophesy.

> The apostles said to Heaven He has gone. To set with his Father on the pearly white throne. To intercede for the people you see That's fulfilling the prophesy.

> > I know that all who, His will does do, Straight to Heaven, their souls will go, There with their Father forever to be, That fulfills the prophesy.

## The Escape of Isaac Berry - by Katy Pointer

My father was a slave born in Kentucky. When his master died, his slaves were divided out among his children. My grandmother and all of her children fell to one of the girls, who married James Pratt from Missouri and went there with her slaves, near St Louis. My father, Isaac Berry, ran away when he was 27 in 1859.

This Jim Pratt was a poor man and a gambler, and he would hire out his slaves. But it was the understanding that Mrs. Pratt's slaves wasn't ever to be whipped. My father farmed with the other slaves; one of his sisters cooked in the big house, the other cooked for the slaves. They had to cut all the nice meat off the ham and give the bones to the slaves — hog heads and things like that, hambone, and cornbread — it was hearty food of course. The white folks had biscuits, but not the slaves. I can remember my father telling this to illustrate how different our life was to his.

Someone had given my father a little colt, and Mrs. Pratt said he could raise it himself. It was a natural "racker" – that's the way horses were taught to run. Everybody rode horseback down there. Jim Pratt sold the "racker" to pay a gambling debt. Then Mrs. Pratt called my father aside and told him, "I'm afraid Mr. Pratt will sell you too one day, down the river, and if you can run away, and think you can get away, you have my permission to go."

My father was a great hunter for deer and wild turkeys, and he sold them to a lady in St. Louis who kept a hotel. She gave him a dollar and a half for a deer saddle, and then the rest of the deer he took back to Jim Pratt's folks to help feed the slaves. That way he saved up money enough to buy is food when he ran away. He had a friend, Albert Campbell, a free colored youngster, in Quincy, Illinois, who arranged to help him get across the Mississippi River by boat.

A white man had taught my father to play on the violin. He'd play "The Devil's Dream" and things like that – the colored people was great for dancing – and often when he went to play at the dance he wouldn't be back until Monday morning early. And there was nothing said so long as he got back in time. So he told Jim Pratt he was going to play at the dance and left the farm Saturday night. He got a colored man to ride with him to the place where Albert Campbell would meet him with the boat. When he reached the Mississippi, which was quite a ways from the farm, the water was so high over the bank the boat couldn't get to him though he could see their light, and they could see his light.

Isaac hid in the brush along the river away from the landing, walked Saturday night and Sunday, without anything to eat. Then a white man came along in a boat with his wife and two children, a boy and a girl. They were coming down the Mississippi. My father told them that he was working in Quincy and had to get across and offered them a five-dollar gold piece.

That a lot of money then. It was the wife who said, "Let's carry him across or he'll lose his job; we can wait for breakfast." He helped row the boat across to Quincy. They'd had sent the bloodhounds after him, if he hadn't crossed the river.

He got on the railroad and started walking. There was a \$500 dollar reward for him dead or alive. Someone left a newspaper on the seat on the train when my mother come later on and she seen it. Jim Pratt followed him too, clear to Detroit. He came to a little country store and waited until kind of late, then pulled his hat down over his face and went in and bought a loaf of bread and some cheese – or sometimes only crackers. You see he didn't know how he'd have to be saving of his money.

He walked along the tracks and hid in the daylight. Only once in all the time did he step in the daylight to wash and shave in a little river and two white men stopped and asked him where he was going and where he was form. He told them he was going to Michigan City, and that he would sell his life dear, though they was two against one. You see he was afraid; he'd been afraid all of his life. He laid out his razor – it was a long blade with a handle – and his revolver. And they said they wasn't going to bother him.

He walked to Ypsilanti on the railroad. His shoes was all wore out, and his socks, and his feet got all swelled up, and his legs all swelled up. Sometimes when I think about it I want to cry, a human being getting treated that way. When he got to Ypsilanti he met a colored man going to work; he had his dinner pail with him. And he asked my father, "Are you a runaway slave?" And my father said, "It's none of your business what I am." He was wore out with people asking him questions.

The other man said, "I can see from your shoes that you've come a long way. You see that house up the railroad a ways—that's where I live. You go there and tell my wife to give you breakfast, and then you go to bed and stay there till I come home. I'll be home at six o'clock." So he went on to the house, and the old lady took care of him, and he went to bed and slept all day—he said his feet and legs were so sore. He was walking three weeks. That night the house couldn't hold all the colored people that came there. And they gave him carpet slippers and socks and took up a collection and gave him quite a lot of money. In the morning one old fellow took him down to the railroad and said, "You get a ticket for Detroit, and when you get there take a ferry to Canada, just about a mile across the lake, and then you'll be under the lion's paw."

When he got to Windsor, he looked up Aunt Celia Flenoy, a little black woman who was Albert Campbell's aunt. She got him a room with a colored man, and he got work on the street, at fifty cents a day. "I'm a free man now," he said (pp 88-9).





























