

Jacob Lemon: Vicksburg's Stagecoach Pioneer

Jacob Lemon's son, Frank Lemon, developed a portion of the family farm into what we now know as Lemon Park on Indian Lake. From the turn of the century through the 1940's, Lemon Park was a popular summer resort complete with hotel, dance hall, baseball fields, picnic areas, and a merry-go-round.

Jacob Lemon came of hardy English stock. He was born in the state of New York in 1815. It was a hard life the boy grew up into, going to work when he was eight years of age, and later providing for his widowed mother and family. In the spring of 1835, at the age of 20, he started out to win his way in the West. His personal possessions were \$2.50 and a linen knapsack containing one suit of homemade clothes. On their way he lived on crackers and bologna, and journeying by foot and canal boat, eventually landed in Detroit. He and his two companions then struck out on foot to Ann Arbor, where Lemon found work.

In December of 1835 Jacob Lemon went back to Detroit and obtained a job with a new stagecoach firm formed to carry mail and passengers from Detroit to Chicago and intermediate points. With a coach and four horses he drove to Chicago—the first such trip ever made—going where there were no roads, through swamps and mud, forests and brush. This route traveled through, and stopped at, McKain's Corners, located at the present-day intersection of "S" Avenue and 34th Street. The stagecoach business eventually caused this little settlement to grow into a major commercial area complete with hotel, school, dance hall, post office, livery stable, blacksmith shop and other services. McKain's Corners thrived until the advent of the railroads in the 1870's, which essentially marked the end of the stagecoach era.

In some places a crude "corduroy road" had been laid down by placing logs width-wise, side-by-side, to make a firmer footing for stage coaches and wagons. They were used in those areas where the mud was so bad that without the logs the route would have been impassable. Outside the Vicksburg Museum today you can see two logs dug up from in front of the high school on Highway Street during road construction there. Evidently there was once a corduroy road along the southern edge of the village, which was in an early day the edge of a swamp.

Jacob Lemon remained on the Detroit-Chicago route until the fall of 1836, when he took a job with another stage line in Illinois, eventually making the acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln.

He came to Kalamazoo County in the early 1840's and in 1843 pre-empted a tract of eighty acres in the south half of the northwest quarter of section 25, which belonged to the Pottawatomie Indian reservation, and built a small log house on it for his family. Because the pre-emption money had to be paid in one year, he traveled through Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Louisiana, in search of driving jobs to raise the money to pay for his land.

He returned to his Brady homestead in 1844 and paid off his debt. He cleared the forest, converting a veritable wilderness into a beautiful farm. By 1880 Mr. Lemon owned 400 acres complete with a large and elegant house and many well-arranged outbuildings.

In 1901, Jacob's son, Frank, at the request of his friends, opened up some of his land for the resort on Indian Lake known as Lemon Park. Here friends from Vicksburg spent their summers, and later, after the railroad came through, great groups from nearby towns held get-togethers there. It was the setting for big railroad company picnics -- with trains bringing special coaches from Port Huron, Detroit and Chicago so that their employees and their families could spend the day swimming, playing baseball, picnicking and socializing.

Twice married, Jacob Lemon was the father of 16 children, served as township Supervisor in 1865, was a member of the school board of Tiffany School, and was a Mason. At the time of his death in 1900, he was the oldest living settler in Brady Township.

Jacob Lemon's house stands today, in 1998, on the northeast corner of "TU" Avenue and 26th Street, and Lemon Park is currently owned by Jacob's great-grandson, Dick Crawford.

■ *By Maggie Snyder for the Commercial-Express, 1998*