



# MARY LEWIS ON THE FRONTIER

## Building a Home

Mary Lewis and her family moved to Michigan from New York when she was four years old. Her father bought land in Barry County, halfway between the present cities of Grand Rapids and Battle Creek.

The first thing Mary's family did was to cut down trees to build a log cabin. They cut a door and windows out of the logs. The cracks between the logs were chinked, which means filled in with mud or plaster. Chinking keeps out the cold winter wind. There was no glass for windows, so a sheet of oiled paper was put in the hole to let light in. Finally, they cut wood shingles for a roof.

Mary found life exciting. In the forest and meadows around her new Michigan home, she discovered wildflowers and birds that she had never seen before. One warm fall day, she went for a ride on her pony. As she moved through the cluster of trees, she came upon a beautiful lake. The surface was like a mirror, reflecting the trees on the shore.

When Mary was older, she wrote about seeing Gun Lake. As I silently gazed, a feeling of awe stole over me. The solemn stillness of the lake and forest frightened me. I turned and fled. I never drew my rein until my home was reached."

## Early Farming

Next, the family learned to farm Michigan's land. By the time Mary's family arrived in Michigan in 1837, farms were scattered all over the state's southern counties. Every family grew or raised their own food. Chickens and cows provided eggs and milk. Deer, turkey, pigs, rabbits and other wild animals provided meat.

Mary took long trips with her father by wagon or horseback to a distant village. There they bought things they couldn't get from their land, like sugar and tea.

Settlers like Mary's father cleared the land for farming as soon as they arrived in Michigan. That meant cutting down trees, removing stumps and stones and preparing the soil. Men, women and children worked from sunrise to sunset. They could plow only one acre a day. It would take about a month to plow a small farm.

## Home Life

Everyone worked hard. For instance, mothers and daughters sewed the family's clothing by hand. Clothes and bedding had to be washed in a tub with a washboard, and then hung outside to dry. Water was brought up from a well or carried from a nearby stream. Other chores included churning butter and making bread.

By 1844, Mary's father had built a tavern, which is an establishment where drinks and food are sold, and a stagecoach stop at Yankee Springs. The stagecoach, which was a horse-drawn carriage for people and mail, would stop at Yankee Springs to rest on the long trip between Battle Creek and Grand Rapids.

It took a lot of hard work and courage for people to move to the Michigan wilderness.