



## YANKEES COME TO MICHIGAN

During the 1830s, the population of Michigan grew quickly. In 1830, 27,000 people lived in Michigan. By 1840, more than 212,000 people lived here. Most “Yankees,” or people from the East coast, arrived in Detroit. What was life like as they headed into the wilderness?

Getting to the land they planned to live on was challenging. Newcomers found muddy roads, rocky trails, and no bridges, which made crossing even the smallest creek a problem. Fallen trees, getting lost, and wild animals also caused problems.

### How They Got Here

People coming into Michigan traveled along poorly maintained dirt roads that followed the routes of Indian trails. After traveling on one of these early muddy, hole-filled roads, someone wrote that she had been “jolted to a jelly.”

Many other people, especially those coming from New York, arrived in Michigan by boat. They started their journey on the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal looked like a small river; it was four feet deep and forty-two feet wide, but it stretched 363 miles across New York state. Passengers traveled on flatboats – large wooden boats that looked like a box. These flatboats were pulled by horses that walked along the edge of the canal.

During the day, passengers remained on the boat’s deck. They sang or talked with each other. At night, travelers slept in the cabin. It was not a pleasant place to sleep. The straw-padded bunks were often dirty and smelled. The cabin’s door and windows were closed to keep out mosquitoes and the bad smells of the canal. That left the cabin hot and stuffy.

Erie Canal flatboats traveled about two miles per hour and cost passengers about half a penny a mile. When flatboats reached Buffalo, New York, passengers boarded steamboats for the three-day journey across Lake Erie to Detroit.

### Building A Home

Once the family got to their land, they made a shanty to live in until their home could be built. Between 50-60 trees had to be cut down to build a small, temporary cabin. They filled gaps in the logs with small strips of wood and mud called chinking. The roof was made of shingles sliced from logs. Smaller logs held down the shingles because nails were not available. A doorway and a

window had to be cut in the logs. A door was made from split logs, and since glass was not available, greased paper covered the window.

Families added a fireplace for heating and since matches were unavailable (they were invented in 1826, but not easy to get) once the fire was lit, it was kept burning. There were no walls dividing the cabin, so bedrooms were set off with a blanket.

Wild animals were a nuisance, but the worst pest was the mosquito. Since Michigan was very wet, there were a lot of mosquitoes. People suffered from ague, which is a fever and chills caused by mosquito bites. Ague was not always fatal, but it left people feeling sick.

This type of life did not last long. By 1850, roads and cities became more common, and houses began to replace log cabins.