

Blendons

# OTTAWA ADVANCE

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## G.V.S.C. students unearth village

by Mike Wyngarden

In the heyday of lumbering in Michigan, the site along the Grand River near the border of Allendale and Georgetown Townships was home for 100 people and boasted all the accouterments of civilization — a schoolhouse, a boarding house, a sawmill, a general store, and a saloon.

Today, the once-thriving settlement of Blendon's Landing is a deserted grassy meadow nestled in the woods along the Grand River with no visible indication of its previous settlers.

The only signs of civilization the spot sees today are an occasional group of students from nearby Grand Valley State Colleges, who use the area as a favorite spot for outdoor parties, and a team of anthropology students from Grand Valley who are digging at the site to uncover its past.

Richard Flanders, associate professor at Grand Valley, has been taking his anthropology students to the site for the past three summers.

The site, Flanders says, is ideal for instruction. "It's a very rich

site," he said. "So much of archeology is digging in sterile sand. On this site, you hit something every time you put your shovel in the ground."

In the two pits they have dug so far, anthropology students have uncovered hundreds of items in a process that requires meticulous filtering of the sand as it is dug on a layer-by-layer basis. The finds, which are numbered and classified, include ceramic dishware from England, clay pipe stems, machine-tooled nails, and beaver teeth.

The site, Flanders says, could not have been placed at a better spot for the G.V.S.C. anthropology class. Blendon's Landing, located directly southeast of the college campus, is within walking distance of the college, and is owned by the college's Faculty Club. "Since it's on college property, we don't encounter a lot of the restrictions you have when you dig on private property," he said.

Flanders said from the items collected at the site, and from historical accounts of the area, he estimates that Blendon's Landing was first settled as a lumbering

camp around 1845.

The settlement served primarily as a transfer point for trees felled in what was then the forests of Ottawa County. The logs were transferred by rail to the landing, where they were marked and dumped into the Grand to be floated downriver to Grand Haven.

The 100 settlers believed to have lived at the site were involved in the work of transferring the logs by rail from the forests to the settlement, and rolling them down the steep banks of the river on a sluice to the water.

As the settlement grew, other functions apparently were also added at the settlement. Historical accounts of the area indicate a shipyard existed at the site at one time, and at least four schooners were built there. Carl L. Adams, the author of *River Landings and the People Who Make Them* (publisher unknown), a book about life along the Grand River in the late 1800's, documents other industries at the settlement. A kiln, whose bricks were manufactured, and a sawmill, powered by a dammed creek, also operated at the site,

according to Adams's interview with descendants of the Blendon's Landing settlers.

The settlement, according to Flanders, apparently disappeared nearly as quickly as it had been founded — the victim of a logged-out territory. "By the time of the Civil War, it was pretty well done," he said. "The end of Blendon's Landing was like the end of so many lumbering settlements: when the lumber was gone, the people disappeared."

The buildings were deserted as the lumbermen either left for greener forests in northern Michigan or farther west, according to Flanders. Some settlers also went into other occupations in the more established settlements of Grand Rapids and Grand Haven, he said.

By the 1880's, little was left of the settlement which once was home for about 100 persons, according to Adams's interviews with descendants of the pioneers. One descendant Adams interviewed for his book recalled that the deserted buildings were left standing for a time, and were occupied by Indians in the area.

Only one piece of evidence of

the settlement made it into contemporary times, according to Flanders. The two-story boarding house was apparently moved from the site to Bauer, where it stood until the late 1970's, when it fell victim to a fire, he said.

Blendon's Landing was one of a series of settlements that grew up along the Grand River in lumbering days, according to Adams.

Early records, Adams states in his book, show that at least 17 landings existed along the stretch of the Grand River from Grandville to Grand Haven. "Eye witnesses have told that the south shore of the river from Grandville to Blendon's Landing had almost a continuous stretch of log cabins with small clusters of cabins near the landings," Adams wrote. "On this section of the river . . . some six hundred people were obtaining their livelihood."

### Descendants remain

Although a large number of Blendon's Landing's residents moved on to other lumbering camps, some stayed in the area,

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)



Richard Flanders, associate professor of anthropology at Grand Valley State College, displays some of the hundreds of items anthropology students have recovered from Blendon's Landing.



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## Students unearth village

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

begetting descendants whose offspring still live in the area.

One of those who stayed in the area was Samuel Hall, a man who came from New York in the 1850's to run a blacksmith shop at Blendon's Landing. Hall is the great-great-grandfather of Sherry Schouw, a local historian and member of the Grandville Historical Commission.

Schouw said she can recall her grandfather — Hall's grandson — taking her on tours of the landing site, and describing what the settlement looked like as it was told by his grandfather.

Schouw and Flanders last week visited the barren Blendon's

Landing site and compared notes on where they believe the buildings existed in the settlement.

The combination of the ancestral connection and a love for history has kept Schouw enthralled with the settlement. "When you consider that this was a place where once a hundred people had lived, and now there's nothing, it becomes pretty fascinating.

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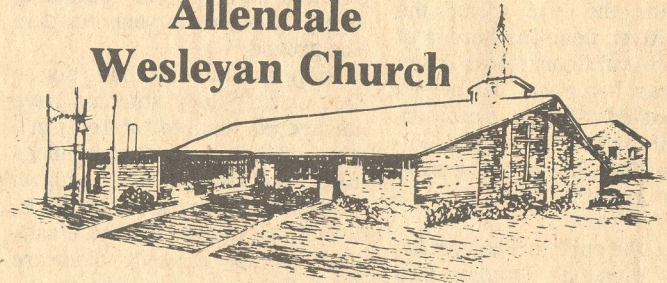
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