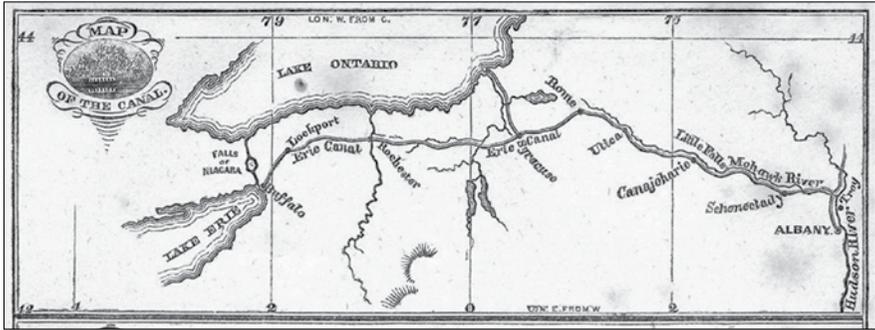




**A TRAVELER'S
DIARY**





Map of the Erie Canal, showing Buffalo at left, beside Lake Erie.
(1852 Jacob Abbott map, Library of Congress).

— — — — —
BUFFALO, NEW YORK
1835
— — — — —

June 1:

Arrived [at Buffalo] by way of the Canal at five this morning.
Breakfasted at the *City Hotel*, kept by Allen in miserable style.

Food paid for Breakfast: .37-1/2
Boots & Baggage to Steam Boat .12-1/2

HOTELS.

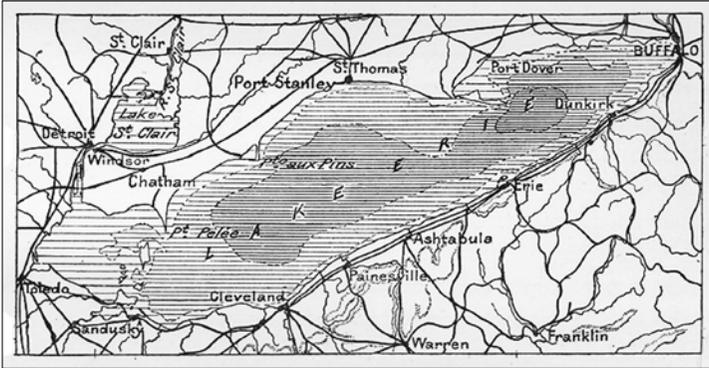
There are a great number of Hotels in the City, which the great influx of travellers renders necessary. Among the most noted of which are the American Hotel, Eagle Tavern, Mansion House, Farmer's Hotel, and City Hotel. There are several others which are kept, and conducted in a style not surpassed by any others in the western country.

Although our traveler found the City Hotel's breakfast fare lacking, this was one of the "most noted" hotels in town, according to the 1836 Buffalo City Directory.

Took passage at nine [a.m.] on board Steam Boat *Michigan* for Detroit. The *Michigan* is one of the best Boats on the Lake.

Paid Boat fare to Detroit: \$8.00.

Passed Dunkirk at twelve, passed Erie at five; 8 o'clock touched at Connyat [*Conneaut, Ashtabula County*] for wood. Connyat is in [*the northeast corner of*] Ohio, two miles from the boundary line of Pennsylvania.



An 1885 map showing Buffalo (top right); Erie; and Ashtabula (where Conneaut is located) along the southern shore of Lake Erie.

Our traveler was an early passenger on the newly-completed Erie Canal, which had been finished just ten years earlier (1825). At 363 miles in length, the Canal was considered a major engineering feat – over twice the length of canals found in Europe.

Promoters had claimed that the Erie Canal would “bind the nation,” tying the well-settled Eastern region with the largely untouched interior. And indeed it did. Later historians would emphasize the canal’s important role in facilitating settlement of the Midwest. The growing influx of white settlers also would accelerate displacement of the Native Americans who’d long called the interior regions home.

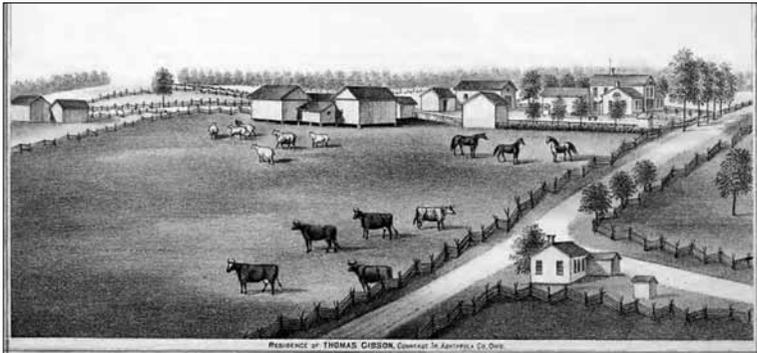
Buffalo was something of a dead-end for the Erie Canal in 1835, leading to congestion at the terminus of the canal. Although a con-

tract was let in 1831 for construction of one smaller “slip” or side-canal connecting the Canal directly with Lake Erie, a helpful network of additional slips would not be completed until the 1840s.

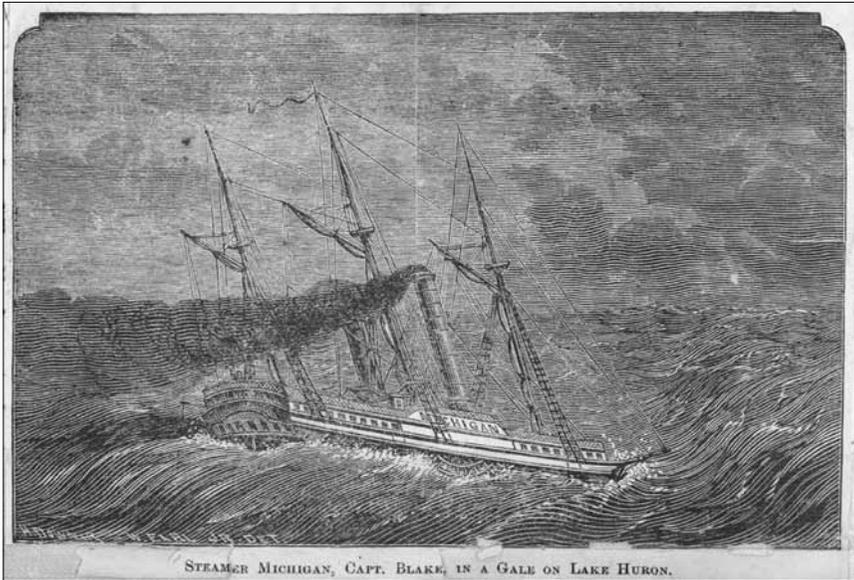
Our passenger booked steamboat passage to carry him on Lake Erie from Buffalo to Detroit, a hefty \$8.00 expense. This was the “cabin fare”; steerage would have been just \$3.00.

After leaving Buffalo, it was no coincidence that our traveler’s steamboat stopped at Conneaut, Ohio to take on wood. Conneaut Creek emptied into Lake Erie here on the southern shore, creating a good natural harbor, and the town was a regular stop for steamboats.

The first survey of the Conneaut area had been made in 1796, with European settlers beginning a permanent settlement in 1798. When our traveler arrived, the area was still in its infancy. Conneaut Village had only been incorporated in 1834, the year prior to his arrival. A second survey would soon be made in 1837.



An 1878 sketch of the residence of Thomas Gibson, one of the earliest settlers at Conneaut, Ohio, who’d arrived in the township in 1830.



The Steamer Michigan, commanded by Capt. Chesley Blake, amid a gale. (Maritime History of the Great Lakes).

June 2:

Touched at five in the morning at Fairport [*Harbor*] for wood, situated at the mouth of Grand River.

At eight, touched and remained one hour at Cleveland, [*Ohio*]. Spent the time in viewing the place, was much pleased with it. It is high and pleasantly located, business apparently good and improvements extending on both sides of the River.



Sketch of Superior Street in Cleveland, west of the Public Square, made by T. Whepley in 1833. (Library of Congress).

FIRST TRIP THIS SEASON OF THE STEAMBOAT
MICHIGAN,
TO THE UPPER LAKES.

THE Steamboat MICHIGAN, Captain C. BLAKE, will leave Buffalo on Friday the 19th of June next, at 9 o'clock, A. M. for Lake Michigan. The following are the ports at which she will touch during the voyage, after leaving Detroit, viz :

Mackinac, Green Bay, Milwaukee, Chicago, Michigan City, New Buffalo, St. Joseph, and Grand River,. She will also touch at the intermediate ports on Lake Erie, up and down.

The MICHIGAN has two low pressure engines of great power, and her accommodations are equal in extent and elegance to any boat now afloat. She was built principally for the upper trade, and her commander is a gentleman of experience and skill in the navigation of the western lakes. By this boat, passengers will have an opportunity of viewing all the prominent points of interest on Lakes Huron and Michigan—and will return to Buffalo, in from fifteen to seventeen days. For berths or state rooms, apply to

OLIVER NEWBERRY, *Detroit.*

BARKER & HOLT, *Buffalo.*

Buffalo, may 27, 1835.

4t sw 6

Our traveler may have found his berth aboard the Steamboat Michigan by answering an ad similar to this one in Buffalo's Democratic Free Press of June 17, 1835.

Twelve, passed a river cutter. Half past one, touched at Huron to land and receive passengers. Half past five, passed the Sisters; between those Islands Perry gained his victory 10th September 1814.

At seven, passed [Fort] Malden, beautifully situated on the Canada shore, but badly improved.

Ten [p.m.], landed at Detroit. The fare and accomodations on board of the *Michigan* were very superior. Her tonnage about 500. Commanded by Capt. Blake, who is very rough and rather ungentlemanly in his manners, but apparently perfectly competent and master of his business.

Took lodgings at the *Steam Boat Hotel*, a House badly managed, full of dirt and filth. The best and only place we could get in.

Found the Stages all engaged for two days ahead. Secured seats for the Friday morning's Stage.

Paid Stage fare to Niles – 9.50.

Cleveland was growing rapidly in 1835 when our traveler and his companions paid it a flying one-hour visit. The city's population would jump from just over a thousand souls in 1830 to 6,071 in 1840 (catapulting it to 45th in size in the nation). The year after our traveler arrived, the City of Cleveland would receive its city charter.

The "Sisters" he mentions passing are three islands, part of a group of islands at the head of Lake Erie. As he indicates, Naval Officer Oliver Hazard Perry won a famous victory over the British Navy here on September 10, 1813 during the "Battle of Lake Erie" in the War of 1812 (although our writer incorrectly gives the year of the battle as 1814). Perry's Victory & International Peace Memorial is now located on a South Bass Island, Ohio, another of these islands.

The steamboat Michigan, which our traveler found "very superior," was 472.43 tons and was captained by Capt. Chesley (or Chelsea) Blake. A tall man said to be almost a "giant" in stature,

Capt. Blake had fought in the War of 1812 and by the time our traveler met him, had become a "titan of Great Lakes shipping." But just as our traveler noted, Capt. Blake was well-known for his salty language. A contemporary would later reminisce: "Unlike most of the lake captains of those days, who were perfect gentlemen in manners and dress, he affected none of these: no courtly phrases, no ruffled shirt, no blue coat with brass buttons... his use or abuse of the King's English was somewhat phenomenal."

After Capt. Blake died of cholera in 1849, a mourner paid homage to his kind heart: "Rough as the billows whose impotent assaults on his vessel he ever laughed to scorn; with voice as hoarse as the tempest which he delighted to rule, this gallant son of the sea had withal a woman's tenderness of heart to answer the appeals of distress."

The Steamer Michigan continued on to Chicago after dropping our traveler at Detroit. As luck would have it, a copy of her manifest on that subsequent voyage has survived: see <https://images.maritimehistoryofthegreatlakes.ca/110336/data>.

After reaching Detroit, our traveler did not much care for the Steamboat Hotel, located at the corner of Woodbridge and Randolph Streets. He wasn't alone in his dissatisfaction; it had other unhappy customers as well. Amos Andrew Parker, a visitor from New Hampshire, described the dinnertime melee:

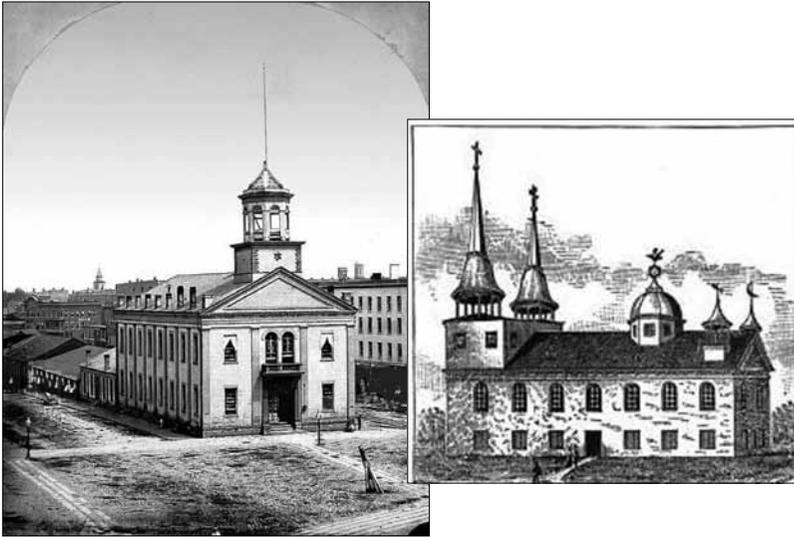
"When the bell rang for dinner, . . . [a]ll in and about the house jumped and run as if the house had been on fire, and I thought that to have been the case. I followed the multitude, and found they were only going into the hall to dinner. It was a rough and tumble game at knife and fork – and whoever got seated first, and obtained the best portion of dinner, was the best fellow. Those who came after must take care of themselves the best way they could; and were not always able to obtain a very abundant supply."

Parker also complained about the hotel's poor accommodations: "At night, I was obliged to sleep in a small room having three beds in it, take a companion, and a dirty bed." Little wonder our traveler was unimpressed with the lodgings. The Steamboat Hotel would succumb to a fire in 1837.



Malden is located near the confluence of the Detroit River and Lake Erie, on the Canadian (eastern) side of the river. Detroit is on the west side just above “Fighting Island,” near Lake St. Clair. (1826 map by John Farmer, Library of Congress).





Two of the Detroit buildings our traveler may have spotted during his visit: City Hall (left), built in 1835; and St. Anne's Catholic Church (right), whose cornerstone had been laid in 1818 at the corner of Larned and Bates Streets.



June 3:

Took a very inferior Breakfast. I walked out to view the place [Detroit, Michigan], found the business part filthy dirty.

The upper part, where the most genteel inhabitants reside, is very pleasant and has some fine dwellings with many pretty gardens.

Afternoon, crossed the Ferry to Richmond on the Canada side. It is finely situated. The inhabitants are mostly French and apparently have no idea of ever making the place better by improvements. Enterprise would make it a beautiful place.

Paid for washing & [cleaning] 2 [pair] boots - .50

The "business" section of Detroit visited by our traveler was likely West Jefferson, at the southern end of today's Financial District, and nearby Griswold Street. Some historians peg 1831 as the birth

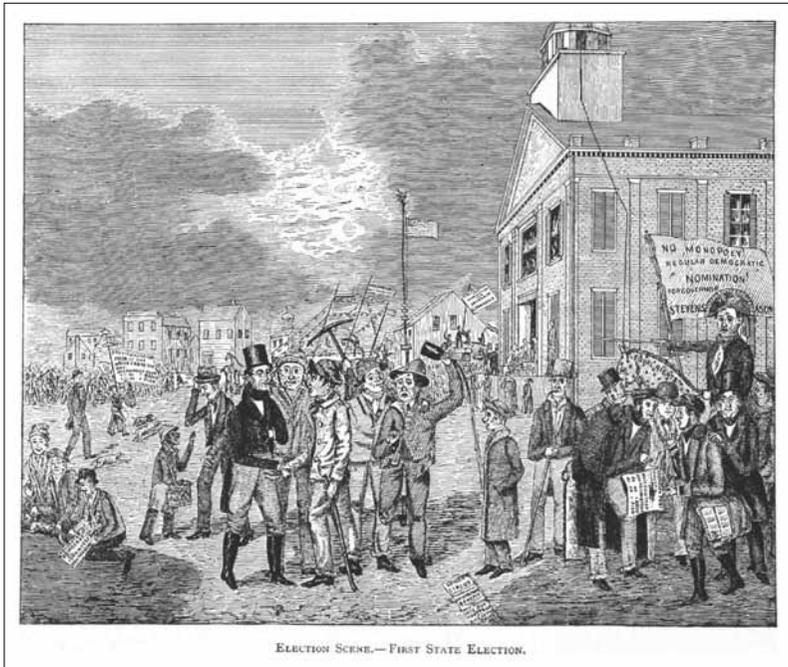
of the Financial District, when the Bank of Michigan moved to Jefferson near Woodward. Our traveler may well have passed this bank on his walk, and perhaps also the Farmers' & Mechanics' Bank, built in 1832 on Jefferson near Griswold.

Nearby, as our traveler noted, was an upper-class residential district, which would eventually be absorbed by the Financial District as it grew. Judge McDonnell's residence in the 1830s, for example, was at the northwest corner of Fort and Shelby Streets.

What our traveler called 'Richmond' on the Canadian side was likely really the town of Windsor, Ontario, a small French settlement established in 1749. (There's a 'Sandwich' neighborhood on Windsor's west side, so perhaps our traveler confused "wich" and "rich".) Only 300 people would live in Windsor as late as 1846, so the population was likely even smaller in 1835, when our diarist paid his visit by ferry.



1881 map showing the Canadian town of Windsor and the Sandwich neighborhood, directly across the river from Detroit. (Wikipedia).



Young Stevens Mason, just 23 years old, was elected Michigan's first governor in October, 1835, during the same election that approved the proposed state constitution.



June 4:

Visited Convention which meets here [*Detroit*] for forming Constitution for the State.

Paid board, Steam Boat Hotel – 2.25

Detroit had been incorporated as a city in 1815. But Michigan was still only a territory, not yet a state, when our traveler paid his visit in 1835.

The state's constitutional Convention mentioned by our traveler was held at the Territorial Capitol in Detroit (the Territorial Court-house, built in 1828). Sessions of this Convention would last three

more weeks, until June 24, 1835, when the 91 delegates approved the draft constitution.

Michigan voters would approve that proposed constitution a few months later, on October 5, 1835. But the U.S. Congress refused to officially admit Michigan as a state until a boundary dispute with next-door Ohio was resolved. The disputed strip of land at Michigan's southern border included the important port city of Toledo. The property in dispute was known as the 'Toledo Strip.'



The Territorial Courthouse in Detroit, built in 1824, is where delegates met in 1835 for the state's Constitutional Convention, and where our diarist paid a visit to hear the proceedings. The central tower is similar to that of Detroit's City Hall, built in 1835 (see previous pages).

Matters grew heated. Competing laws were passed, and state militias were called up. The thorny boundary dispute festered on for another full year, until Gov. Mason finally agreed to cede the disputed strip of land to Ohio, gaining in exchange the western two-thirds of the Upper Peninsula for Michigan. Not everyone liked this solution, however. And according to some scholars, there may have been a bit of political funny business in the December, 1836 Convention in Ann Arbor, during which Mason's hand-picked delegates finally approved the compromise.

Michigan finally was admitted as the 26th state in the Union on January 26, 1837.





Humorous illustration of a stagecoach ride by J. Ross Browne, 1861.

June 5 (Friday):

Five in the morning, took [*the*] Stage for Niles, [*Michigan*].
Breakfasted eight miles from Detroit.

Traveled all day on a most horrid Road – this section is low and unhealthy.

Reached Ypsilantia [*Ypsilanti*], 32 miles from Detroit, and dined at half past five.

Dinner & Breakfast - .75

Continued on all night. Road growing worse all the time. Part of the time had to go on foot, nearly knee-deep in mud.

Ypsilanti is west of Detroit, on the west bank of the Huron River. The spot was originally a Native American river crossing and camp

site. In 1809, three French explorers built a trading post there. And in 1825, three local settlers laid out a townsite plat. It was named for a contemporary Greek freedom-fighter who'd successfully held off the Turkish army with his small forces, despite being greatly outnumbered.

An initial survey was done in 1825 for a new road that would connect Detroit with Chicago, known (of course) as the "Chicago Road." It started as a military effort to connect the forts at both ends. But settlers and travelers soon eagerly made use of it as well.

Commercial stagecoach service was already available from Detroit to Ypsilanti by 1830. By the end of 1835, when the Chicago Road was finished, the Western Stage Company had two stages leaving Detroit every day, with the entire journey to Chicago taking four and a half days.

But when our traveler made his journey, bids had just closed for work on the new Chicago Road, so the road wasn't yet complete.

The early roadway our traveler followed wasn't in great condition, as he noted in his diary. Even when the entire Chicago Road was eventually finished later that same year, much of it was "little

Road Contracts.

CONTRACTS for constructing the road leading from Detroit to Chicago, commencing at the 136th mile stake, and from thence to the Indiana line, including the sections heretofore let, will be offered at public auction, and sold to the lowest bidder, at the house of Mr. Sherwood, Edwardsburgh, on Thursday the 4th of June next. The road, except which passes over low ground, will be constructed in the following manner, to wit: To be opened 100 feet wide; of which 30 feet are to be grubbed, the grubholes filled, and the ground made level and cleared of timber, stones, brush &c; 21 feet on each side, to be low chopped, and the remainder to be chopped to suit the contractor. Contracts for the bridges over Crooked and Christain creeks will be let; and if there are sufficient funds, for that over the St. Joseph River. ~~Advertisements of exhibition~~ on the day of sale. The usual security for the performance of the contracts will be required. Five per cent per month will be deducted for every month which shall elapse, between the 20th of December next (when the contracts are to be completed) and their actual completion.

E. S. SIBLEY, Lieut. on Eng. Duty.
Detroit, May 5, 1835. 3w2

The publisher of the White Pigeon Statesman is requested to insert the above bill sale, and forward his bill to this office.

Democratic Free Press, May 6, 1835.

more than an unimproved trail," as one later historian would say, "making a trip over it an unforgettable and an uncomfortable experience." That certainly seemed to be the case for our traveler!

If our diarist had waited another three years, he would have found his journey far easier. A railroad line connected Detroit with Ypsilanti in 1838.

STAGES.
TERRITORIAL ROAD, (Western Route.)
For Ann Arbor, Jacksonburgh, Marshall, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph,—the mail stage leaves sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, at 12 o'clock, M. and the accommodation stage on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, at 5 o'clock, P M
Office, Corner of Jefferson & Woodward Avenues.

EASTERN ROUTE,
For Buffalo via Monroe, Manhattan, Toledo, Maumee City, Perrysburgh, & Sandusky—a mail stage leaves every morning at 5 o'clock:
Office, Corner of Jefferson & Woodward Avenues.

WESTERN ROUTE,
For Chicago via Ypsilanti, Saline, Clinton, Tecumseh, Jonesville, Coldwater, White Pigeon, Niles, Michigan City, &c—a stage leaves on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, at 5 o'clock in the morning, and on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 12 o'clock, M

BOARDMAN & SALT MARSH, }
GILLIS & HUGHES, } *Proprietors.*
JONES & BROWNE, }
ROBERT FORSYTHE, }

Office, Corner Jefferson & Woodward Avenues.

DETROIT.

WESTERN STAGE CO.



*Office, Woodward Avenue,
Corner of Jefferson Avenue.*

Three daily Lines of Stages leave the office of the Western Stage company;—one via Ypsilanti, Tecumseh Jonesville, White Pigeon, Niles, Michigan City to Chicago, through in four and a half days—one via Plymouth, Ann Arbor, Jacksonburgh, and Marshall to Kalamazoo, through in two days and a half—one via Monroe Toledo, Perrysburgh to Lower Sandusky, through in two days. Extras furnished on all of the above roads at the shortest notice.

JAMES L. GILLIS
Treasurer of the Western Stage Co.

A partial listing of stages in the Detroit City Directory for 1837. (Two additional stage lines, identified on a subsequent directory page, served Flint River and Ft. Gratiot.)

Our traveler evidently took the 5 a.m. stage by Western Stage Co. for his journey to Ypsilanti and beyond.

