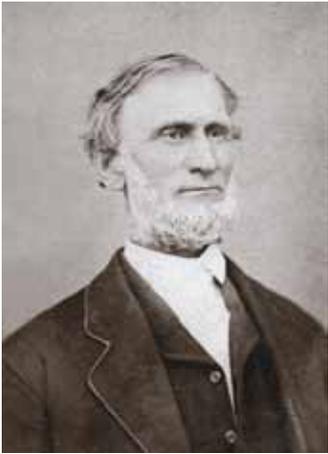


David Clarkson, a Northville History Maker

By Michele Fecht

David Clarkson was born on March 13, 1817 in Somerset County, New Jersey, but moved at the age of three with his family to Ovid, Seneca County, New York. His mother died on March 12, 1824, just a day before David's 7th birthday. His father remarried later that year.



David's father died in 1830, and the following spring, at the age of 14, David left his five siblings and stepmother to journey to Michigan with the Capt. William Dunlap party. William and Sarah Dunlap, having adopted David, brought him along to help clear the wilderness. They traveled to Buffalo on the Erie

Canal aboard the canal boat *Shark* and then across Lake Erie on the steamboat *New York* before arriving in Detroit.

In a series of pioneer sketches published in *The Northville Record* from 1874 to 1878, Clarkson described the journey to Northville. "The streets of Detroit were one continual mud hole, and the roads through the country were worse if possible." The trek from Detroit to the edge of Plymouth Township (which would become Northville) was heavily wooded, muddy marsh. It would take three days to travel approximately 30 miles.

Clarkson labored at clearing the land, building cabins, hauling goods by ox team to and from Detroit, and grinding grain at John Miller's gristmill – Northville's first gristmill and the catalyst for much of the community's growth in its early years.

In 1844 Clarkson married Sarah Ann Bradley, the daughter of Northville pioneers Harvey Stone and Maria Rose Bradley. David and Sarah had seven children, all born in Northville.

Clarkson would become one of Northville's most prominent citizens. He was a founding member of the New School Church (now located in Mill Race Village), and a Northville school board trustee. Clarkson held the title of school director in 1859 when it was decided that the village needed to construct a larger school building than the former New School Church structure which had been converted to a school after the church disbanded in 1849.

After years of preparation and fundraising, the Northville Union School opened on September 4, 1865 with Clarkson serving as a school board member and treasurer.

In addition to his community service, Clarkson's pioneer sketches in *The Northville Record*, a rare first-hand account and invaluable record of Northville's early history, are perhaps his most lasting contribution.

David Clarkson died on August 20, 1880 at the age of 63. He is buried in Oakwood Cemetery.



Photo courtesy of Troy Schmidt