

Isaac Berry 1877

Isaac Berry (1832-1914) was born to a slave mother in Garrard County, Kentucky, one of nine children. Isaac was the kitchen boy in the master's "big house". When his master died, he, his mother, brothers and sisters were inherited by the master's daughter, Julie Ann Pratt. The family was moved to Marion County, Missouri, the home of Julie Ann and her husband, James.

Because the Pratts were poor, the family was rented out on a yearly basis to new migrant land owners. Isaac grew up to be a good oxen handler and brought a high rental as a sod-buster on the prairie.

Jim Pratt was a Mississippi riverboat gambler and paid his gambling debts by whatever means possible. He had sold Harvey, Isaac's brother, to pay one of his debts.

When Jim told Julie Ann that Isaac could bring whatever price on the slave market she asked, she gave Isaac permission to run away—if he could make it. In the spring of 1859, he left Missouri and headed for Canada. He arrived three weeks after, having some difficulties at Saline, Michigan. He was aided by the "free" colored residents there and sent on his way. Jim Pratt followed him to Detroit and a reward of \$500.00 was offered for his capture.

Isaac was later joined by a young girl he had met in Missouri, Lucy Esther Millard (1838-1929). She had been born in Wayne County, New York and had migrated to Michigan with her parents at an early age. After her mother died in Plymouth, Michigan, the father, Nelson Millard moved his family to the area of Palmyra, Missouri.

Lucy and Isaac were married in Windsor, Canada in August 1859, and to this union were born: William Albert, Isaac, Jr., Mary Clarissa (Kate), Louis Harvey, Benjamin Nelson, Lucy Jane (Lou), Melinda Diane (Minnie) and John Henry. Minnie and John were born at School Section Lake.

The Berrys came to Mecosta from Canada in a covered wagon in May 1877 and settled at School Section Lake, now Mecosta County Park. They purchased the "cut over" pine land for \$1.25 per acre.

Their first home was the abandoned lumber shanties. When fall came, the Chippewa band of Indians, who had been occupying the shanties, returned from a summer encampment at Saginaw and demanded in the middle of the night that the Berrys get out of their houses and off their land. "Your grandfather and the boys had to produce his deed "talking paper" and guns to persuade the Indians to leave," Lucy told her grandchildren.

The Indians turned out to be good friends and neighbors and joined the Berrys, Absalom John-

sons, Tom Pointers, Madison Robinsons, Gab Letts and Frank O'Shinskis in building the first log school house at Little River.

In those days, ten families were necessary for a community to establish a school.

—Marguerite Berry Jackson



John H. and Melinda Diane Berry, born at School Section Lake, and their parents, Lucy Esther and Isaac Berry, Sr.



The Berry Boys: John H., Louis H., Benjamin N., William A. and Isaac, Jr.