In 1836 the first European settlers began to move into what became Walworth County, Wisconsin. By that year the Native Americans had left this area which was then just a Territory of the United States. Early settlers came to Walworth County overland by wagons pulled by horses or oxen, by water down the Erie Canal and by boat or ship over the great lakes to ports of Milwaukee or Southport (known as Kenosha today). Then they traveled by land to what was to become Walworth County to settle there. Many of them took up farming as an occupation. They came mostly from eastern states such as Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire and mostly from the State of New York. As a result this area of what was to become the State of Wisconsin was nicknamed “Yankee Land” after those so-called “Yankee” settlers from the New York area. Farmers were quickly followed by shop keepers such as tailors, hardware store owners, blacksmiths, mill owners and general store owners all relying on each other for their livelihood.
A Cousin’s Letter Home...

Note: In each of the upcoming “Legacy’s” you will have the chance to follow the story of “Anna” as she travels to and settles in Walworth County, Wisconsin. In his letters to her cousin Benjamin back in New York, this young Yankee and her family reveal what it was like to travel down the Erie Canal, sail the Great Lakes and eventually settle down in their new home in Walworth County, Wisconsin.

Dear Cousin Ben,

Yesterday I boarded a packet boat along with father, mother and two year old brother Will for our nine or ten day trip on the Niagara traveling on the Erie Canal. As you know we are on our way to land which father staked out last year for our farm in Walworth County, Wisconsin. We are all very excited to get to our new home. Even Betsey seems to be anxious to get there. We had to wait a long time to board the boat with our belongings while other “Yankees” ahead of us loaded these things onto the boat. Father told me it cost over three dollars a person to take the canal journey but it was worth it as it cuts our travel time from twenty days by land to about nine by the canal. I heard the captain of our packet tell father the boat is over 70 feet long and will be pulled by two horses that are on the foot path running along side the entire length of the canal. They say it is about 425 miles long! We passed through several locks already and have many more ahead. We must be very careful as we pass under bridges over the canal for they are very low. We must be on guard all the time. More about our travels soon.

Your cousin,

Anna
UPON ARRIVING IN WISCONSIN

Log cabins like this one were quickly built by new settlers in Walworth County to help avoid some of the harsh winter days that lay ahead. Logs were readily available for the cutting. Cabins were small and sometimes window-less with a crude door, dirt floors and a simple fireplace to burn wood for warmth. Eventually these crude cabins were replaced by finer homes.

“YANKEELAND” ON THE MAP

Walworth County was part of “Yankeeland.” This was a name which was given to this area because of the great number of settlers who came from areas in the eastern part of the United States who were often called “Yankees.”

JOIN THE HISTORY CLUB FOR KIDS!!

JOIN WCHS HISTORY CLUB NOW— IT’S FREE

You are invited to join the Walworth County Historical Society’s History Club

All you have to do is e-mail us your name and address and we will send you:

(1) A Membership Certificate
(2) A Membership Card
(3) Two free passes to the Webster House Museum and
(4) A behind the scenes tour of our artifact collection and how artifacts are handled at the Doris M. Reinke Resource Center
Historic Photograph
From the Archives of the
Doris M. Reinke Resource Center

Milking Time
A chore often given to one of the children in the early settler’s family. Everyone did their part on the early farmstead.

JUST FOR FUN!
Help this farmer find his way back to his cabin.