

Early Area Settlers

The early settlers certainly had a difficult time clearing the land and making it tillable. There were dense forests and the winters were very harsh. Disease and the hard life of manual labor were accepted as the road to survival. The movement of settlers west to the territory was by boat, the wagon or ox cart to the area. Land could be bought for \$3-5 per acre in the 1830's. However, research of wage history for farm laborers in other parts of the country for that period indicated 30 cents per day were typical wages.⁴ Farmers only were paid for crops or livestock at harvest so income levels are very difficult to determine. The typical farm laborer earned 30 cents per day (\$624 annually with room and board). A farmer's annual income would have been very meager. Not a lot of money to support buying property, build homes, raise kids and livestock.

In 1831, James D. Van Hoevenburg was the first white person to arrive in the Somerset area. He had relocated from Niagara County New York. He settled into a log cabin he built just west Somerset Road at US 12. He sold that property to Thomas Gamble in 1834. Mr. Hoevenburg moved to Jonesville. The village of Somerset was established as Gambleville until 1840, when village was renamed Somerset, using the name of a community located in Niagara County, New York. ³

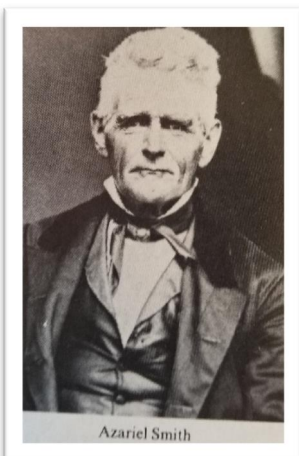
Somerset & Somerset Center, MI



Carol A. Lackey

Source: <https://www.hillsdalehistoricalsociety.org/somerset-somerset-center-mi/>

The area which is now Lake Somerset was originally one very large farm owned by Azariel Smith and his decedents. The general store at the corner of US 12 and Somerset Road was owned by Gerald Smith, son of Azariel. He was the owner of the large brick home to the west of that store.



The Smith's by far owned the largest farm area. He and his wife moved here from Bethel, PA in 1835. They purchased acreage near Somerset which extended north for almost a mile. Eventually they owned about 1,000 acres. They had sold their property over the course of time to various farmers who were founding members of the Congregational church. Also, their six children married other farm and business owners in

the area. These farms composed the area where Lake Somerset would eventually be built. In addition to the farm, a tenant house was built on Somerset Lane which is still there today, across from the old-school house.

As you would expect, many of the original residents who lived in the area married and settled throughout the area, starting businesses and contributing to the community.