

## **“MOSSBACK” WAS APPLIED TO EARLY HOMESTEADER**

“Mossback,” the name adopted for beard-growers in Petoskey’s centennial observance, was originally applied to the homesteaders who hacked homes out of Northern Michigan forests.

Writing in the Independent Democrat, W. E. Hampton said:

“The opening of the Indian reservations, following on the heels of the panic of ’73, brought to this country hundreds of men who had lived in luxury but whom the exigencies of the times had driven from their homes in the hope of regaining lost fortunes.

“There were no roads, and if there had been, there were no horses and wagons to traverse them. The supplies had to be toted from the village and every Saturday, the ‘Mossbacks’ as they were then called, came to town with their flour sacks on their backs and bore back into the woods the supplies of pork and flour and potatoes to last the family until the week should roll around.

“Not one man in 50 had a team. And for the first year or two but little could be done in the way of clearing for this very reason.

“Many of the first settlers were at first well-dressed, for they had been well-to-do before their removal to the north woods. But in a few months their clothing began to show the trials of a tussle with the tangled hemlock and, as the stomach must be fed before the back is clothed, it was not long before the ‘regimentals,’ as the boys facetiously called them, began to put in an appearance on the streets.

“From using flour bags to carry home supplies, the hardy farmers began using them for clothing, and, as the tough sacking withstood the wear and tear of the rough life in the woods better than anything else, it became the regulation costume of the ‘mossbacks.’

“At first it looked somewhat queer to see a man walking down the street with the legend ‘Hannah Lay’s Best’ branded on the ampler part of his trousers, but when every other man got to wearing flour sack pants, it became a matter of course and you could tell the kind of flour a man used by the brand on his back.

“The more sensitive bought new bags for their regimentals, but it was an open question whether it was better to travel as ‘XXXSeamless’ or ‘Lily White.’”