

Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan (1906)
pg. 111

FURNISHED BY HON. R. E. ROBERTS, OF DETROIT

Hon. James Witherell, in a letter to a friend in Vermont, dated Detroit, Feb. 3d, 1812, records his observation of the effect of an earthquake here on the 23d of Jan., 1812, the first and only one of which there is any record or account. There not being any newspaper published here at the time, the event was not chronicled. Judge W. said, "the earthquake occurred in the morning at 30 minutes past eight o'clock as I sat reading by the fire at Col. Watson's. I felt an unusual sensation; I thought something must be the matter with me. I felt an agitation that I could not account for. But I soon observed that the walls of the house were in motion north and south. I got up, stepped to a bedroom door and asked my daughter if she perceived that the house trembled. She replied that she did, and thought someone was shaking her bedstead. I then discovered that a small looking-glass which was hanging on the wall, was swinging to and fro several inches, and the shade trees in the yard were waving considerably north and south.

Dr. Brown informed me that his stove oscillated very much, and that a cradle was set rocking smartly, though there was no one near it. A little girl who had crossed the lake in a vessel last fall, tottered about and called out, 'Oh, mother, we are in the vessel again!' Cook's house shook more than most others, probably because it was higher and the frame new and stronger. The ice in the river was split for several miles. A Frenchman at Grosse Pointe says his bowl of mush and milk was spilt.

Judge W. also relates a strange event that occurred at Orchard Lake on the 17th Dec., 1811, at which time the whole interior of Michigan was a wilderness, untrodden except by Indians, Indian traders, and wild beasts. Judge W. said: "The Indians said the waters of the lake began to boil, bubble, and foam, and roll about as though they had been in a large kettle over a hot fire, and that in a few minutes up came great numbers of turtles, and hurried to the shore, upon which they had a great turtle feast".