

Opinion

323-1711

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coin

June has long been regarded as the month for marriage, but it was not always such. June weddings are more a product of the industrial revolution and for Clinton County in particular, the age of the automobile, when weddings no longer needed to be planned around the workings of the farm.

Prior to the 1920s, most DeWitt area weddings occurred in the fall, shortly after harvest time. Other popular wedding times included the Christmas season (when it was usually convenient for families to gather together), and mid-February, often coinciding with Valentine's Day).

The following newspaper clipping describes a typical "fancy" wedding from early DeWitt:

An October Wedding Just before Snow Flies, a Happy DeWitt Pair Were United

One of the largest and most charming weddings in this vicinity took place Wednesday, Oct. 19, 1898, in the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. Varney Pearce, of Olive (currently owned by William Fedewa at 3263 W. Chadwick Road), where nearly three hundred friends assembled to witness the marriage of their eldest daughter, Altie, to Felton P. Brink, one of Olive's most estimable young men. They have both resided in Olive since childhood, consequently have many warm friends.

The home was beautifully-decorated throughout with plants and flowers, the parlors being decorated in dahlias and cosmos blossoms. The guests were received by Dr. and Mrs. (Richmond) Simmons. At 6 p.m., while the beautiful strains of Mendelssohn's wedding march was being played by Miss Lucille Scott of DeWitt, the bridal party marched into the north parlor, and stood beneath an immense floral horse-shoe, made of white dahlias, where Rev. T.W. Illman, pastor of Universalist

Local weddings in another time

Church in Bay City, performed a very beautiful and impressive ceremony. The bride and groom were attended by Varney Pearce, brother of the bride; Miss Hattie Kinney; Mark Drazer; and Miss Josephine, sister of the bride.

After the congratulations had been received, the bridal party and friends were escorted to the two spacious dining rooms, where an elaborate supper, from tastily-decorated tables, was served by eight young ladies, the Misses Webb, Pike, Kinney, Brinkerhoof, Martzke, Whitaker, Blizzard, and Randall, who were each presented with a dainty card tied with white ribbon, upon which was written the bill of fare, also the day and date, to be kept as souvenirs. At the ends of the tables presided Mrs. S. Norris, Mrs. M. Dills, Mrs. E. Dills, and Mrs. D. Rockwell, who poured the coffee for the girls to serve. The bill of fare consisted of coffee, biscuits, meats, pickles, cabbage salads, olives, ice cream, watermelon, lemon cheese, angel food cake, oranges, bannas (that's the way they spelled it!), fruit, and bride's cake. Piano music was furnished by Victor Clavey. Mr. and Mrs. Brink left for the state of New York and Niagara Falls, with the best wishes of their many friends.

— One Who Was There

A report of a similar wedding, nearly a decade earlier, was reported as follows:

"Married in Lansing, Oct. 26, 1889, Charles Cole of Riley and Jennie Van Fleet of Olive; also at the same time and place, Major Lewis of Bingham and Ida Bedell of Riley. The happy couples returned to the residence of Dey Van Fleet about five o'clock p.m. where they were met by about 35 relatives of Mr. and Mrs. C. Cole and tables loaded with the choicest kind of eatables in great abundance, to which all were invited to partake and did so in a manner highly complimentary to the eatable, judging by the amount of empty tables soon to be found.

... About 9 o'clock, Capt. Myers marched up with his company of 40 volunteers, none had to be drafted but

went freely, well armed with three guns and two milk pans and one cow bell. They played a few tunes and gave three cheers for the blushing bride, then departed for their homes feeling much better I presume, for their fun.

— Ell Cee

Besides the old custom of the shivaree, a feature of both accounts, which is now clearly outdated, is a complete tabulation of all gifts received and the names of the givers.

Trees have a history all their own

There was a song popularized in the early 1800s by the name of "Woodman, Spare That Tree." Its lyrics narrated an individual's devotion to an oak tree. It was taken to heart by the settlers of the midwest and soon became an American classic.

Do you have a favorite tree? I do, or at least I did until it was recently cut down. Actually, my favorite was two trees, a matched set, which used to stand on N. Bridge Street in front of one of the older sections of the cemetery. I don't know exactly what kind of trees they were, but their stark white bark led me to believe that they were a form of birch or at least close cousins. Their trunks were enormous, obviously of advanced age, and they looked quite stately as an accent to the white marble headstones which dot the graveyard. I was sorry to discover their absence, but I'm confident that there was a good reason behind their sudden demise.

I guess I'll have to pick a new tree; perhaps one of the mammoth oaks which line Schavey Road, south of the river. The largest among them are rare remnants of the primeval forest which originally covered the area.

In this modern age we have a very different regard for trees than did our ancestors of 150 years ago. To these pioneers, a tree stood as a sign of infinite obstacles and exhaustive effort. It is mainly this attitude which led Capt. Scott to choose the site of present-day DeWitt in which to establish a settlement. Much of this area, a century and a half ago, consisted of a large open meadow with only a scattering of oak and maple stands amid a thick, seemingly impenetrable, wilderness. This open land spared him much of the arduous task of land clearing and crops could be planted almost at once.

In the areas surrounding the Scott settlement,

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newcomers approached their laborious task with a zest that nearly reached obsession, to clear away every tree in sight. Aside from the necessary woodlot of sugar-bush, the sprouting homesteads were usually void of trees. Their use for aesthetic quality of simply for shade was almost unheard of. Even tree-lined roads were considered impractical as they tended to block out the sunlight necessary to keep the roadways dry.

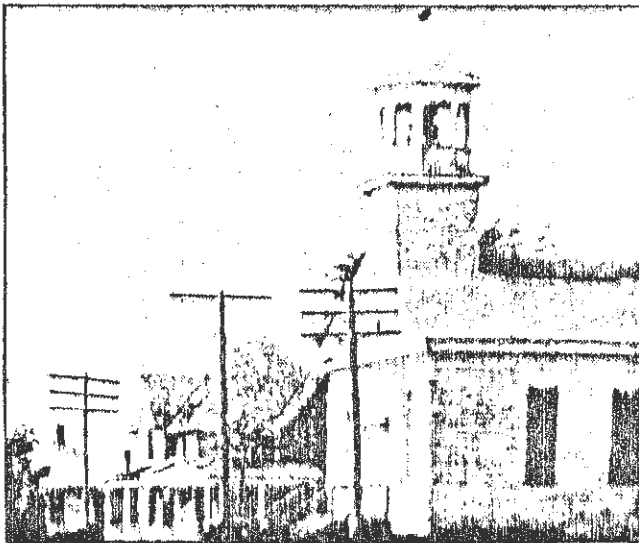
There is one exception to the above, and it is a matter still hotly debated among farmers and folklorists. To this day, though they are quickly vanishing, one can still spot an occasional open field that has a tree flourishing within its center. Now, many contend that these trees were purposely left to give shade to resting horses and field workers. Others maintain that these trees were allowed to remain because they were usually useful nut-bearing trees such as hickory, beech or butternut (walnut trees tend to sterilize the ground).

Then, there is a faction which believes that the homesteader left an occasional tree as a monument or penance to the forest which he was destroying.

Personally, I think the explanation lies in a combination of these ideas. On my wife's family homestead near Fowler, there was such a tree. Her great-great-grandfather, Charles Piggott, upon completing the clearing of his farm, allowed one large tree to remain. He encircled it with a fence to leave as a reminder to his descendants of the enormity of his accomplishments. It served this purpose admirably, as well as offering comforting shade for many future generations (of both Piggotts and field-horses).

Yes, I believe I will pick one of those oaks on Schavey Road for my new favorite tree and hopefully, if progress can be stalled, it won't have to be forfeited for the sake of an improved roadway.

Opinion



The old DeWitt Baptist Church (now Mrs. Ely's Collectibles) as it appeared at the turn of the century.

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Old Baptist records

After 1928, when the Baptist Church congregation merged with members of the Methodist Church, the record books of the Baptist's came up missing. Throughout the following years, many rumors of their existence, or lack thereof, surfaced but none were either confirmed or dispelled.

The actual record books came to light, momentarily, in 1978 at the estate auction of the late Mabel Sibley. Prior to their actual sale, however, they again disappeared. Fortunately, in the 1930s, Mrs. Sibley had taken the time to copy, in abstract form, most of the pertinent information contained in the records including the numerous membership rolls and extractions from minutes of the church society and the building trustees.

The following excerpts are but a sampling of the information contained in the copy:

May 10, 1840 — The Baptist Brethren of DeWitt assembled at Rev. J.R. Pearsall's on Sabbath ... The following brethren were present: Isaac Hewitt, Barna Allen, Gilbert Cushman, Jonathan R. Pearsall, George Pearsall, Hannah Moore, Deborah Marvin, Polly Pearsall, Fanny Hewitt, Aurilla Pearson, and Thankful Cole.

Jan. 10, 1841 — Call Bro. Clark for pastor beginning November last.

March 1, 1851 — Met at schoolhouse near Mr. Hurd's. Sister Christiana Hall (alias Allen) received by letter.

Aug. 23, 1851 — Resolved that in our judgment it is proper to move forward to build a meeting house for that use of the Baptist Denomination in DeWitt. Resolved, that we proceed to organize a Baptist Society according to law. Resolved, that we meet the 20th of Sept. next for the purpose of organizing and choosing trustees. Appointed Rev. T.W. Merrill, Bro. J.B. Clark, J.R. Pearsall, a committee to draft a subscription and to enquire where we can obtain a site for the meeting house...

April 3, 1852 — Voted to purchase of David Sturgis, a certain piece of land on the north side of the Public Square in the village of DeWitt for the purpose of building a meeting house.

July 6, 1853 — At a meeting of the Trustees of the First Baptist Church & Society, held ... at the house of J.D. Edwards in DeWitt, voted that we hire \$400 to pay David Olin for building said house and that we mortgage the said house to secure the payment of the same.

Nov. 12, 1853 — Wife of J.R. Pearsall lies lifeless today in the home of J.R. Pearsall, Clerk of Church.

Dec. 10, 1853 — Met at the meeting house for first time. A good number present.

May 9, 1858 — Withdrew hand of fellowship from Br. Hewitt and wife. Resolved, that the belfry be finished with blinds.

June 30, 1865 — Br. Grinold & wife, Catherine Grinold received by letter from Holly.

Aug. 23, 1873 — Voted to repair meeting house and fence.

Oct. 24, 1885 — Insure church for \$1,000.

Dec. 14, 1889 — Committee appointed to secure a bell and prepare the steeple to a bell.

The abstracted copy of the Baptist record was purchased in a box-lot at Mrs. Sibley's estate auction by Dorothy Ely who subsequently donated it to the Archives of the Clinton County Historical Society. Last year the copy was edited, typed and indexed. Copies of this are now on file at both the Historical Society's archives at the DeWitt Township Hall and at the Faye Hanson Public Library.

Unfortunately, questionable spelling of names and confirmation of dates could not be checked against the original records as they are again unavailable but as it is, the abstract serves as an invaluable tool for genealogists and church and local historians. Perhaps someday the complete original record of DeWitt's pioneer church, as well as the records of other early churches, schools and organizations, will come to light, and find their place in a local repository.

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The Methodist story

The earliest religious organization in DeWitt, the Methodist-Episcopal Church, has its beginning with the circuit riders of the 1830s. The first congregation, organized by Elder Bennett in 1836, included: John and Pamela Gould, Asa and Mary Parker, Lewis and Lucinda Coburn, and Samuel Smith.

In the earliest years, the congregation met in various homes; in later years, it is believed that services were held in the village school house.

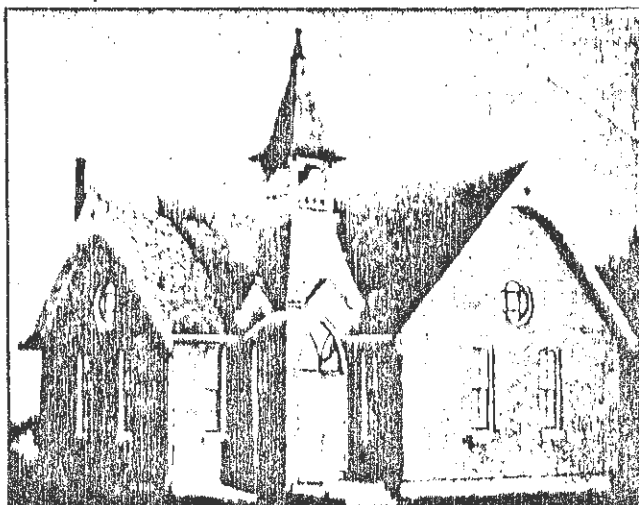
In 1846, a parsonage was built for the circuiting pastor. The exact location of this parsonage is not known, but it seems to have been on the west side of N. Franklin Street, on the Public Square. Around 1900, a new parsonage was built at 211 W. Main. This served well for many decades, but was replaced by a new one at 501 W. Washington.

About 1865, the first Methodist Church structure was built on the west side of N. Bridge Street. The site had previously been owned by John Edwards, a dealer in stoves and tin ware. His store and dwelling house had occupied the lot. This wood frame church was occupied for only 30 years before being replaced.

An item in the Clinton County Republican issue of 1896 reads: "Rod Shaw, the harness maker in DeWitt, has bought the old Methodist Church and is moving it across the street. He will convert it into a dance hall." It was not converted into a dance hall, but was sold to Homer Brazee and Willis McLough who totally rebuilt the structure and began a general store called Brazee & Co. It was the building which still stands on the north east corner of Main and Bridge Streets.

The Greek revival-style building was replaced in 1896 by a more substantial brick structure. This new church was an L-shaped building of a simple Gothic style with a small entrance and bell tower situated in the corner of the L.

On March 10, 1928, this building was destroyed by fire, after which the Baptist congregation, across the street, at once opened their doors to the Methodist membership. As a result, a good many of the later congregation joined with the Baptists and eventually formed an interdenominational church.



DESTROYED BY FIRE — This is the old Methodist Church that burned on March 10, 1928. Much of the congregation then worshipped with the Baptist church which was across the street, later forming an interdenominational church. However, some members of the Methodist Church eventually rebuilt the building on its original site. This structure is now the DeWitt Conservatory at 115 N. Bridge St.

There were, however, a good number of those who chose to hold Methodist services in the study of the parsonage on W. Main Street. With the help of insurance money and membership contributions, a new brick structure was built on the site of the former church in 1931. A large wing was added to this building 30 years later. This building, now housing the DeWitt Conservatory at 115 N. Bridge, was recently placed on the State Register of Historic Sites.

Beginning in 1967, the DeWitt Methodist and Emanuel Methodist (located on the northeast corner of Schavey and Clark Roads) initiated a practice of sharing ministers. For a long while the two congregations discussed a merger which culminated in 1970 with the two voting to join together and call themselves the Redeemer United Methodist Church.

In 1977, a new office was completed north of the former Emanuel Methodist Church.

This combined congregation is rich in history of meeting the spirited needs of a charming community for nearly 150 years.

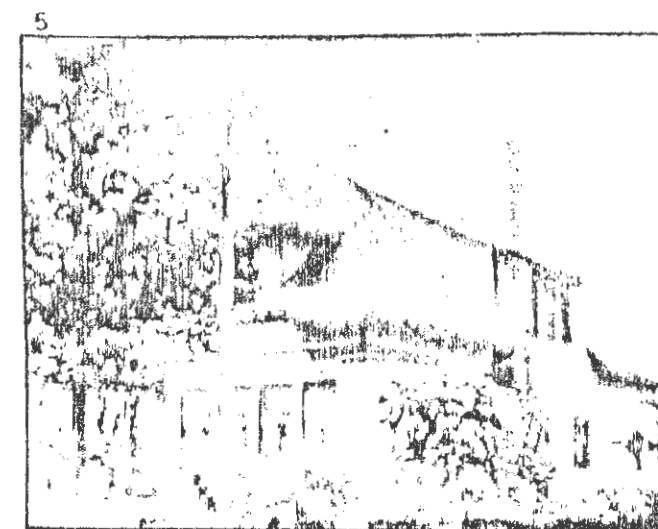
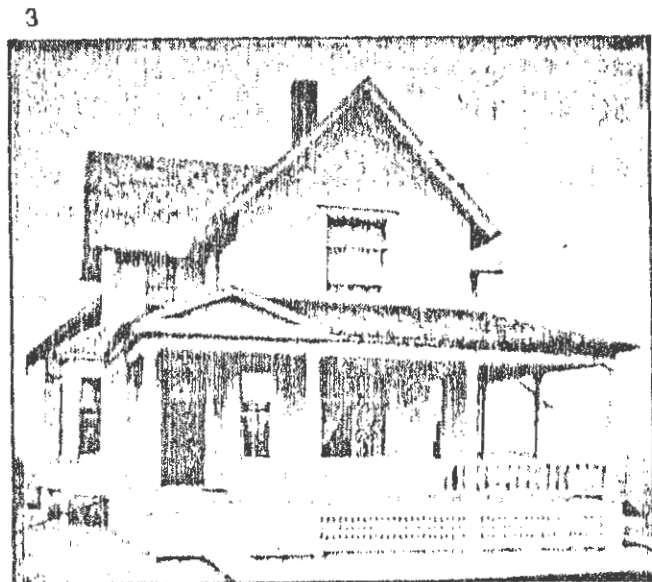
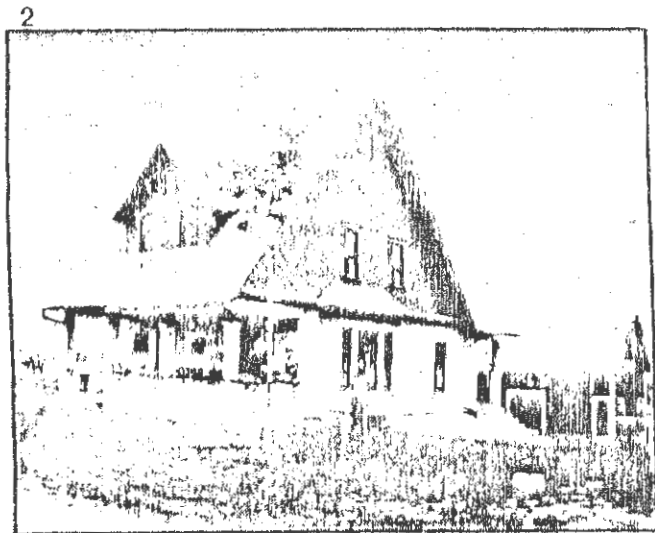
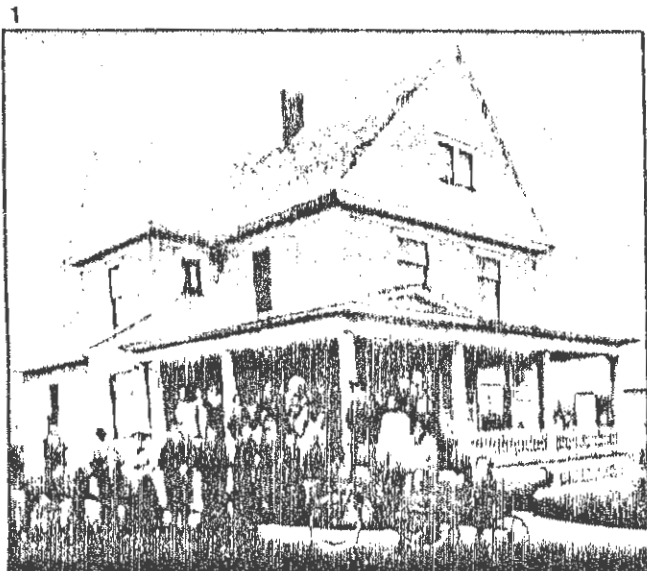
See if you know these old homes

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coin

If you think you have a good eye for detail, try to identify the houses pictured here in these old vintage photographs. All are located within the city limits of DeWitt.

Check your answers against those in next week's column.



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WITH THIS RING — DeWitt girls of 1910 perform a mock wedding. Back row left to right: Maud Rose, Hazel Bray, Norma Beadle, Helen Dills, Miss Havens, Reva Treadwell, Lorna Woodruff. Pearl Tucker was the bride and Lulu Clavey was the groom. The flower girl is unknown. The letters were drawn on the picture as a means of identifying the participants.

Answers to old DeWitt home quiz

Following are the identities of the homes pictured in last week's column.

No. 1 — Don and Lee Greene's home at 409 W. Main. It was built about 1910 for Clayton and Clara (Lorenz) Woodruff. Clayton and his brother, Mark, were the co-founders of Woodruff Bros. Bank, DeWitt's first bank.

No. 2 — Jim and Shirley Costigan's home at 124 W. Jefferson. It was built about 1910. Carl and Maud (Williams) VanFleet are believed to have been the home's first residents and it is probable that the house was built by the VanFleet brothers. The unique styling is an architectural trademark of the VanFleets.

No. 3 — Carol and Bonnie Ward's home at 203 N. Scott. It was built about 1905 for Bonnie's great uncle and aunt, Jerome and Estella (Cook) Dills as their retirement home. It was built in a style widely popularized by farmers retiring to DeWitt in the early 1900s and is nearly identical to several others in town built during the same period by friends of Mr. and Mrs. Dills. Mrs. Ward's grandparents, Marc and Maud Cutler, resided here for many years and, in fact, six generations of Mrs. Ward's family have called this their home.

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No. 4 — Doug Twiss' home and office at 204 N. Bridge. It was built about 1905 for Victor Clavey. Mr. Clavey, formerly of Olive Township, was a co-owner of Clavey and Brya, one of DeWitt's early hardware stores. He was also a notable musician and orchestra leader during the early 1900s. The exterior appearance of this house has gone virtually unchanged for the past 80 years.

No. 5 — Roger and Joan Overway's home and office at 125 N. Bridge. It was built about 1920 for Carl and Maud (Williams) VanFleet. It is probable that it was designed and built by the VanFleet family of carpenters. A large, one-story barn previously occupied the site which, during its long existence, housed a foundry, blacksmith shop and cooper shop.

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Resort was popular in early 1900s

In the early years of this century, many young people of south-central Clinton County found fun and entertainment at the Merle Beach Resort.

The Merle Beach Hotel was built in 1898 by Kittie Moore, on the north shore of Muskrat Lake, along the south side of Jason Road. The lumber for the large building was sawn the previous year by Potter's Mill at Pompeii in Gratiot County and hauled by wagon to the Olive Township building site. When completed, it was a long two story frame structure, 30 feet by 80 feet, which ran east and west with the front facing west.

The ground floor consisted of a long central hall, five bedrooms, office, kitchen, several reception rooms, and a dining room large enough to accommodate 75 people.

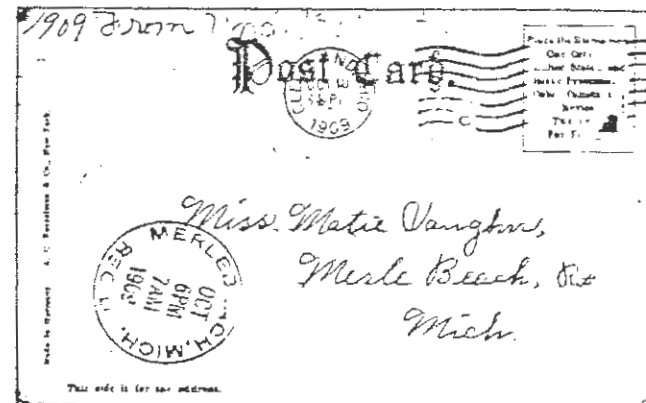
The second floor of the hotel was accessible by the inside stairway as well as two on the outside. This floor was devoted to a large dance hall with enough space for 50 squares of dancers. Four doors from this room led out onto a long balcony which encircled the building on the north, west, and east sides.

Just west of the hotel was a large stable and attached to the east of the hotel proper was an insulated icehouse.

The resort was known by some in its earlier years as Moore's Resort or Moore's Lake but the name of Merle Beach soon caught on. The name Merle is said to have been derived from the lake's bottom which is thick with marl. Some maintain that there was no connection between the two.

An artificial beach was attempted but the sand and gravel would not hold. A long dock was extended out onto the lake and for a time, a small steamboat plied the waters for short excursions around the lake.

The resort became a popular spot for family picnics



and reunions and many churches, schools, and social organizations met for picnics and outings there. But it was the dances that brought notoriety to the hotel. Public and private dances and socials had been held at "the Beach" since its beginnings, but by the 1920s, the demand for more public dances greatly increased.

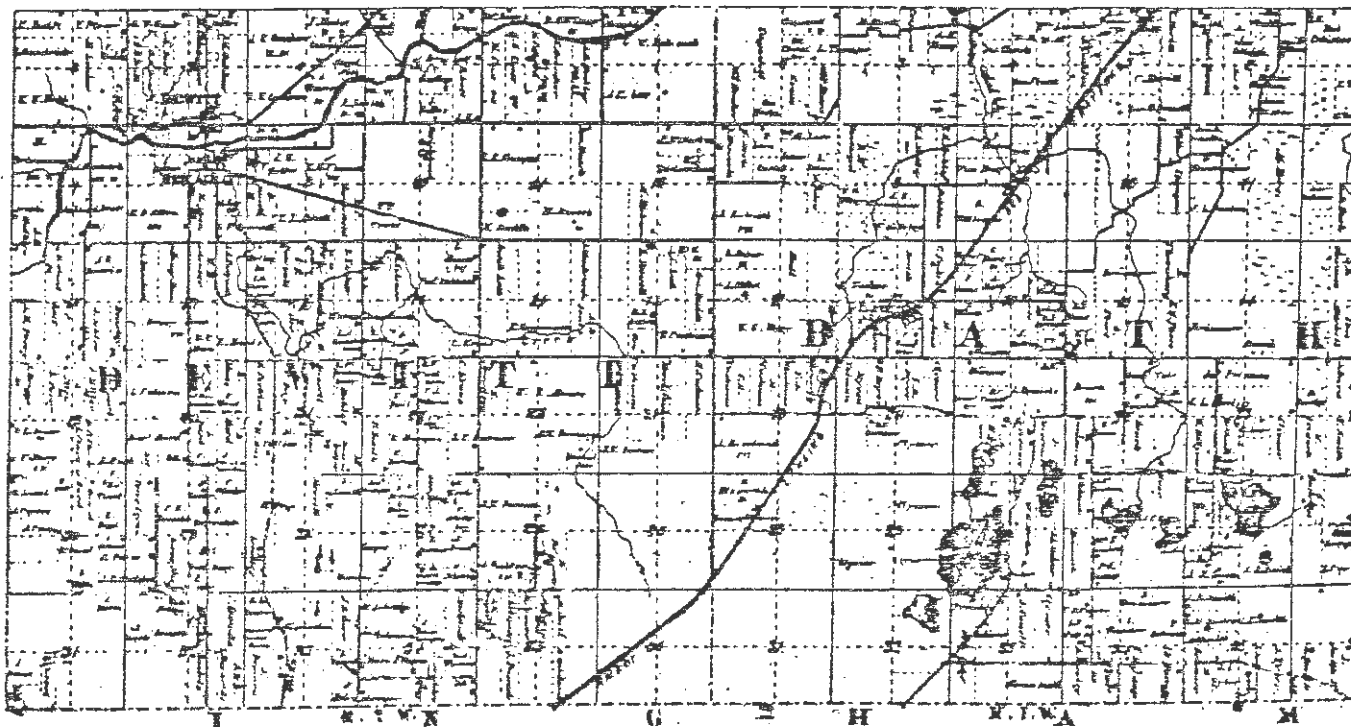
The dances usually started at 9 o'clock in the evening and lasted until 3 o'clock in the morning. Midnight dinners, likewise, became an institution.

Merle Beach retained its popularity for many years but ultimately, like all good things, it too came to pass. Dances became less frequent until eventually they were discontinued. The building fell into disrepair, was vandalized, and finally, was torn down in 1958.

But memories of the countless good times had there remain alive in the minds of many older people who dined and danced, laughed and fell in love, at The Beach.

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Old map revealing

Illustrated here is a portion of the earliest known plat map of Clinton County. It was published about 1864 by the Geil, Harley & Siverd company of Philadelphia. Unlike later plats which were usually published in book form, this plat, which also included Gratiot County, was a large wall map.

A careful study of this old map will show some of the many changes that have occurred to the lands of Bath and DeWitt Townships in the past 120 years. Some of the most noticeable are the changes in the roads.

The former Michigan Central Railroad is here labeled the "Amboy, Lansing and Traverse Railroad" and the Pere Marquette, which touches through the southwest corner of DeWitt Township, has not yet been constructed.

The southern half of DeWitt village is still called "New Albany" and Bath village is titled "Bath Station."

Although many are illegible, some family names are still very familiar today.

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By Kenneth Coln

The Scott sisters

Histories of DeWitt and its founders, Capt. David and Eunice Scott, have commonly included information regarding the accomplishments of their three sons: Sylvester, David Jr., and Charles. What was not recorded and, in fact, has gone largely unresearched, is the seemingly forgotten members of the Scott family.

In 1982, as a project for DeWitt's sesquicentennial, myself, and Dorothy Scott, an avid genealogist and a direct descendent of David and Eunice Scott family, were with much effort, correspondence, and a minimum of sources able to piece together an up-to-date family history of the three sons.

We were proud of our accomplishment but regretted that we were unable to glean any record worthy of merit for the three known daughters of David and Eunice Scott. (They are said to have had 11 children in all.) These daughters, Ellen, Sarah (called Sally), and Lamira, seemed to have lived and died without leaving any record. Even an essay of DeWitt and the Scott family, written by David Scott Jr. himself in the 1890s, mentioned only two of his sisters.

After a "stranger than truth" chance encounter with a descendent of one of these sisters, we were soon to realize that the absence of these daughters from the early written record of the Scott family and DeWitt was indeed a grave injustice.

At first we decided that their exclusion was due to the fact that they had not accompanied their parents to Clinton County in 1833. We assumed that by the late 1800s, when histories of the DeWitt area were first written, the families had probably become disassociated and that the historians and genealogists of the period were unaware of their very existence.

While it is true that none of Capt. Scott's daughters are known to have ever lived in the DeWitt area, it is the next generation of the family in which the real mystery here begins to develop.

Ellen Scott, the eldest of the daughters, married a man named Perry, apparently even before the Scott family moved to Ann Arbor from New York state in 1825. They are thought to have lived in the area near Komeo, but their son, Norman Perry, is believed to have lived in DeWitt. His wife, Alice Webster, is speculated to have been the Alice who was a daughter of Parker Webber, owner of the DeWitt Mills from 1850 to the late 1800s.

Sarah (Sally) Scott was married in 1827 to a prosperous Washtenaw County miller and farmer, Rufus Knight. She died in June 1833, three months prior to her parents' departure for Clinton County. She left a husband and at least three young children: David, Harriet, and Sarah. Another son, Sylvester, died in infancy.

The youngest Scott daughter, Lamira (sometimes called Elnira), did not accompany her parents to Clinton County in September 1833. Instead, she chose to remain at Ann Arbor in the Knight household, to help in the raising of her late sisters' children. She eventually married Rufus Knight and together they had two daughters, Mary and Electa.

Rufus and Lamira Knight bought substantial amounts of property in the DeWitt area from various members of the Scott family. By 1842, they had accumulated close to 200 acres in Olive and DeWitt Townships.

David Knight, the son of Rufus and Sarah, is known to have taken up residence on the aforementioned land by 1864 and has been placed in the DeWitt area as early as 1852 when he was married to Susan Phillips of Eagle Township, and 1853, when he became a charter member of the Clinton County Agricultural and Horticultural Society.

He was regarded among the prosperous and well-respected farmers of Clinton County, being involved with various social and political organizations. His family retained a respected social position in the DeWitt area for several generations, were friends and contemporaries of their Scott cousins and were often mentioned in companionship with the Scotts in the "Local Brevities" of the county newspaper. Yet, when it came to recording the history of the area and of the Scott family, they were unduly neglected.

A team of avid genealogists is currently combing yet untapped sources to research the family and descendants of David Knight. Their aim is to set the record straight about the "forgotten family" of Capt. David and Eunice Scott. So, if you yourself are a descendent of the Knight family which long ago lived in the northeast corner of DeWitt Township, these genealogists are looking for you.

Opinion

Local history from newspapers

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By Kenneth Coin

Have you ever cleaned out a dresser drawer or blanket chest and found an old newspaper laid out in its bottom? It's yellowed and dirty but still it draws your attention. First of all, you probably looked at the date to see just how long it's been since that drawer or chest has been cleaned properly. Then, as if by instinct, you start to read it. You look at the ads and laugh at the pre-inflation prices, check to see what movies were playing at the theaters, and if it is a local paper, you read the brevities of what was happening in town. All of this reminds you of how fast time slips by.

Newspapers seem to have a magical capability of taking us back into the past, simply through the use of the written word. And for the local past, nothing is more diverse and nostalgic than those infamous old "Local Brevities."

The Clinton Express, Nov. 19, 1853:

Miss Ann Cain would respectfully inform the ladies of DeWitt and vicinity, that she has just received a full assortment of Fashionable Bonnet Trimmings, and trusts she will be able to give satisfaction to all who may favor her with their patronage.

Whereas my wife Eunice Ann has left by bed and board without cause or provocation, this is therefore to forbid all persons from harboring or trusting her on my account as I shall pay no debts of her contracting after this date, June 11, 1853. Alfred C. Russell.

Married: In Olive on the 18 inst., by Uziel R. Owen, Esq., Mr. Harvey Wilcox to Miss Eliza C. Ennest, all of Olive.

The DeWitt Republican, July 9, 1856:

We have two daily lines of stages running from

Jackson via Lansing and the other running to Owosso, the present terminus of the Detroit and Wilwaukee railroad, with which it connects.

The Clinton Republican, Mar. 4, 1864:

The DeWitt Cornet Band, numbering about eight men, has enlisted in the company of Mounted Rifles now being raised in this and adjoining countries and were mustered at Ovid on Tuesday. It is understood that they will serve as a Brigade Band.

June 24, 1864:

Lucinda Hurd Topping died at her home in DeWitt on June 17. Mr. Wellings, a student in the office of Dr. Topping was startled by shrieks proceeding from the house. On looking out, he saw Mrs. Topping in the yard enveloped in flames...

Mar. 4, 1881:

The pupils in fractional school district No. 10 Watertown and DeWitt, recently visited a "shadow catcher" at Lansing and were photographed in a group, standing in the street.

The St. Johns Manufacturing Company are building a fine farm house for E. Pennell near DeWitt Village.

The DeWitt News, Nov. 15, 1894:

Charles Bauerly is able to be about on crutches and is getting along as fast as could be expected.

Chas. Webb came home from St. Johns last week on account of the Small Pox there.

Chas. Webb returned to St. Johns the fore part of the week.

A fire at Bath last Friday did some damage to a building belonging to Robert Christa. By quick response of the townsmen the fire was soon extinguished.

Someone stuffed the ballot boxes with Republican tickets. The voters were the guilty parties and they are still at large. No arrests made.

Miss Gertie Gunnison closed a successful term of school at the Brown school house last Saturday.

The patrons of the school would have been pleased to keep her the coming winter but her health would not permit of her teaching through the winter season.

Excerpts of Gunnisonville history

The following are excerpts, taken from an essay of Gunnisonville history, written by Alta (Gunnison) Pierce in 1939. The many sources for her work included published histories of Clinton County as well as numerous recollections from many pioneer families including her own.

"I believe my grandfather, Elihu Gunnison (1803-1877), was the first settler in what is now called Gunnisonville. He had come to Dixboro, Washtenaw County, from New Bury, New Hampshire, his birthplace, about 1829. He married my grandmother, Ruth Ann Pryer (1815-1895), there at Dixboro, March 11, 1833, she having come to Michigan from Alexander, New York in 1931.

Sometime in 1835, Grandfather walked to Kalamazoo where the land office was then situated, and took up two eighties of land on section 14, DeWitt Township, from the government. In the fall of 1835, he came here and built a shack on the place and in January 1836, he and Grandmother and Uncle Alfred Gunnison, then six months old, came here to live ... Sometime later, in 1836, Grandfather took up two more eighties just east of the Whitney Bridge in what is now Victor Township and moved ... Grandmother never liked it there ... so they

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moved back ...

"The early highways were only Indian trails and the most important one was known as the Grand River trail, later called the Pontiac and Grand River road ... It was over this road that Grandpa and Grandma Gunnison came by ox team and sled in January 1836. They had to go to DeWitt to cross the river then back to their cabin in the wilderness. He had to mark trees to guide him on his way from DeWitt.

There must have been an Indian trail from Grandfather's toward Bug Hill for one of the traditional stories in our family is about Grandfather starting out for DeWitt over this trail with a large pail of eggs. He was astride a pony with only a blanket for a saddle and a rope across the pony's back and tied to make stirrups. Some noise or movement in the woods startled the pony and she jumped sideways, throwing Grandfather off and, unluckily, his knee landed in the pail of eggs and you can imagine the result. He had to return home, no trading eggs for provisions that day.

"In the old days they called the hill north of the church 'Bug Hill.' A man by the name of Bugbee or Bugsby was killed there by a falling tree, hence the nickname. From the corners to the creek east of Lee Dunham's home was called 'Pig Lane' because Bill Moore let his hogs run in the road so much. From the creek on, to Cushman's corners, was called 'Crow Ridge.' From the pavement corner to the Sam Smith hill was called 'Sauger Holler' and the half-mile road to the south, to past the Gregory place, was called 'Badger Holler.'

"When the Civil War broke out there was no railroads into Lansing. The old 'Ramshorn' (the Michigan Central R.R.) had been built from Owosso as far as Bath and there was where the soldiers had to entrain. When the first contingent left Lansing, they marched soldiers north to the Gunnisonville corners then east to Bath, and my father said the line reached from 'Gil' Cushman's place to where the Fred Angell house is now.

"The Gunnisonville Band was organized in the spring of 1890 by George Moots, and John Henry Creyts was the drum major ... About a year after they were organized, a band stand was built on the southwest corner of the intersection, just over the fence and about level with the top in Mr. Kraus' field. Band concerts were given there every Saturday night during the summer.

"I haven't been able to find out just how or when the name 'Gunnisonville' originated, but in the record book of the Sons of Temperance, I found under the date of March 23, 1888 ... the word Gunnisonville in quotation marks. Also, we know that the post office was located at Gunnisonville as soon as Boyden Hubbard completed his store and he was appointed Post Master. Some say that was in 1889 and others that it was in 1890. Before and up to the time the church was dedicated anyway, it was known as Gunnison's Corners. Others who had the store after Mr. Hubbard were Herman Kraus, Ora Henderson, Herman Keyes, Robert Ballard, and Dan Benjamin up to 1912 when it closed. The post office was discontinued in 1900 and rural delivery was instituted. Gunnisonville was on route 5, Lansing, and G.C. Allen was the first carrier. Nov. 1, 1900 was the first day he covered the route.

"I understand that the first buggy in Gunnisonville was owned by Major Olin. The first top-buggy was owned by my grandfather, Elihu Gunnison. The first automobile in the community was a Buick, owned by Thomas Stampfly."

Opinion

323-1711

Story of pioneer's trip to DeWitt

On Aug. 25, 1877, at a basket picnic of the Clinton County Pioneer Society, Mrs. Oliva (Stowell) Baker read aloud a long essay to the crowd of pioneer families which had gathered on the Indian Green at DeWitt. Her oration included many of her own personal experiences, as well as a recounting of her family's arduous journey from the state of New York to the wilderness of Michigan territory.

The following is an excerpt from her speech:

"In May, 1836, we commenced the journey in company with two other families, neighbors, taking the wagon route through Canada, traveling with the heavy lumbering wagons used 41 years ago. We were 21 days making the journey to Ann Arbor, and of the 21, it rained 15. Our party numbered 17 persons, including children of all ages.

"We crossed the Niagara River at Lewiston, a few miles below the falls on a ferry propelled by horse power; and here commenced the hardships that only ended with years of toil and privations to those fathers and mothers. I remember one day in particular of that journey, child as I was, we traveled where the country was so flat that the road was under water, except the brush and poles that had been thrown in from time to time, thereby making it barely passible. As the heavy wheels of our wagons rolled and crushed along the catfish and others of the flny tribe which with the high water, had floated up from the lakes and rivers, came to the surface, some torn and bleeding while others fled in terror to deeper water.

"A little further on, one of the horses tired out and laid down in the harness; and soon after this trouble was removed, we reached what seemed an impassible barrier. The road laid deep under water and a bridge was gone, having left not even a landmark by which a stranger might be guided. But here too, we found help in a time of need, as before. Several men were stationed near, whose business it was to take the lines, knowing the way to drive out into the lake, reaching a safe landing. I remember that father preferred to keep the lines in his own hands and follow the pilots for he said his horses knew his voice and would obey him best. It was water overhead and water underfoot. Even the god of day seemed wading in water, and at last dropped down in the west, out of sight into a watery bed.

"I think the bright anticipations of the elders of our little band must have been somewhat dimmed by this tedious journey in a strange land, amongst strange faces and customs, knowing that the end must be stranger still. We carried our provisions with us, as was the custom, stopping at traveler's houses or inns ... for the nights, obtaining lodgings and the privilege of setting our food upon their tables, and making our own tea and coffee, thereby dining upon many luxuries that we could not have found at hotels even in Canada at that time. At last we reached Windsor, taking the ferry for Detroit. At that time, as I remember, Detroit was a gloomy, muddy, French village.

"A few miles more and we reached Ann Arbor, the place of our destination. That beautiful city of today was but a small inland village then, divided by a small belt of forest, and called upper and lower town; and where now stands the great halls of learning, I gathered the wild berries. We stayed through the sum-

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By Kenneth Coin

mer. It was a very sickly season and we soon made the acquaintance of him who called himself 'ague.' We did not like this stranger, but he proved to be one of the officious class we never can avoid.

"Father finally decided to come to Clinton County and try the experiment of clearing off a new farm. Having made the necessary arrangements he, in company with Capt. Lowry, a heavy land owner and speculator, and two hired men, came on for the purpose of building a house upon a tract of wild land containing 505 acres owned by said Lowry, situated four miles east of this village (DeWitt), on the south bank of the Looking Glass River.

"The house was finished, a task that did not require much mechanical skill, but a vast amount of patience and perserverance. The body was laid up of rough logs, shakes for a roof, and not once board in the whole construction. The chimney, built without jaws, was laid up of sticks in mud for mortar, and way up in the flue was placed a cross pole to which a lug-pole was attached and to the lug-pole was attached a chain where there hung several iron hooks resembling a long letter S upon which were hung the dinner pot or kettle.

"When the work was thus far completed, father came back after us, and again we commenced the journey westward on the seventh day of January 1837. We reached the house of our nearest neighbor to be, Welcome J. Partlow. The cordial welcome extended us that night by strangers made us feel that we were not destitute of human sympathy, even in the wilderness. After a night's rest and a sumptuous breakfast, we were carefully reloaded into our sleigh for the last three miles of our protracted journey. It was a cold morning — snow deep and no tracks. We were obliged to cross the river on the ice, for there were no bridges. The ice, always treacherous in the Looking Glass river owing to the numerous springs along its banks, let one of our sleighs through, doing little damage, however, except in frightening us, wetting the salt and sugar, and drowning the cat and chickens. It was a short work to reach the house which was built on the river bank for the convenience of water.

"After four years of toil, father left the farm with its 90 acres of improved land, intending to go to Portland, but through the influence of Capt. Scott he became a permanent resident of this village (DeWitt)."

Upon his removal to the village of DeWitt, Dr. Stowell built an impressive Greek revival style home at the northeast corner of Main and Franklin Streets, which in later years became the "Boston House" hotel.

Oliva married a young attorney, Joab Baker, and for many years they lived in the home now owned by Edwin Reed at 502 S. Bridge.

Opinion

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By Kenneth Coin

A special person

Occasionally it is important for a community to take stock of its human resources and exclaim its gratitude for outstanding contributions. In some instances, this can lead to a very precarious predicament, but for those residents who are familiar with DeWitt area happenings for the past few decades will know that this community owes a great debt of gratitude to Arthur Newman.

His genuine concern, involvement and predictable smile have all helped to make this town a nicer, safer place to live in.

The community will have an opportunity to show its appreciation to Art, on the occasion of his retirement as Chief of the Fire Department, by attending an open house given in his honor. The open house, sponsored by the city of DeWitt and the Fire Department, will be Sunday afternoon, Oct. 6, at the Memorial Building.

Arthur F. Newman was born in Olive Township, Nov. 22, 1922, the youngest son of Newton and Bernice (Pierce) Newman. He grew up in the DeWitt area and graduated from DeWitt High School in the class of 1941. On Valentine's Day of the following year, he was married in Lansing to Jean Halterman, the daughter of Glenn "Dutch" and Vedah (Schifele) Halterman.



Arthur Newman

Art was employed for a time by the Rosevale Packing Co. until January 1943, when he was called into the service of his country. He served in the 35th infantry division in the European Theatre until Nov. 5, 1945. Upon his return to the states and to his home town, he was appointed Postmaster, a position he held until his retirement in 1976.

As an active member of the community, his affiliations and credits are numerous. He is a member of the DeWitt Lodge No. 272 F&AM; a charter member of the DeWitt Lions Club; a member of the former DeWitt Businessmen's Association; the National Association of Postmasters, retired; a former DeWitt councilman; and was a member of DeWitt's Charter Committee which activated DeWitt's change in status in 1965 from a village to a city.

In 1941, Art joined the DeWitt Fire Department and, with exception of his absence during World War II, has remained faithfully active since. He has held the position of chief, with the exception of one year, since 1967.

Not to be overlooked, Jean, too has been very active in community affairs. She is a member of the DeWitt Chapter No. 30 OES; has been chairwoman of the semi-annual DeWitt Bloodmobile; and was formerly active in area Scouts. She is a longstanding member of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Fire Department and has served well in all offices of that organization. (Her father will be remembered by older residents as an active member of the DeWitt Fire Department for over 50 years.)

Art and Jean have made their home at 113 Dill since 1946. They have one son, Brent, who following a family tradition, is also with the Fire Department.

Do yourself and your community a favor by stopping in and offering a shake of the hand, a pat on the back, and a sincere thank you to Art for a job well done, Oct. 6, at the Memorial Building.

Opinion

Poetry can be a source of history

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coln

Poetry is not often thought of as a source for local history, but now and again something comes along which, if not specifically but in a general sense, adds to our understanding of the attitudes and opinions of a past lifestyle.

The Cook family of Riley township remains unique among the area pioneers if only for the fact that hundreds of their day to day correspondences have survived to the present day. The majority of the writings date from 1841 to the end of the Civil War. The letters themselves lend a great deal of information as to the state of affairs in the DeWitt area during that period. But also included among the letters are a number of poems and song lyrics which are important in their own right.

Handwriting comparisons have attributed most of these songs and poems to a brother and sister, Joseph and Abigail, children of Joseph and Charlotte (Herrick) Cook. While handwriting alone cannot positively attribute authorship, the local subject matter in the following three poems does indicate a strong possibility that at least these three were the works of the young Cooks.

While letters are almost always written with the intent of being read by anyone (as was the custom in those days to pass along letters from house to house within a neighborhood or sometimes, even reading them aloud at the post office) poems were often a private expression of one's true feelings, written without a sense of censorship or reprisal.

Of the following, one was concerning a snooping, gossipy neighbor; one about the piousness of a local anti-liquor social organization; and the third, simply a short ditty about wasting money on drink.

"DeWitt, Clinton Co., Michigan"

There is a lodge of scaly-wags, that stifle themselves the Sons, Of Temperence they make their brags, saying "We are the temperate ones." But their works each day doth them betray, and plain it does appear, That they take delight each Saturday night, With whiskey, rum and beer.

Though they pretend they never touch, nor taste one drink of gin But off' we think they take to much, rum and brandy flog. For its every week they all must meet, with their brandy, rum and beer, For its their delight each Saturday night, all seasons of the year.

Oh, how they strut and swell and blow, with their regallas on, Some scaly scamps there is we know, that there is many a one, For each Saturday night they all unite, with their whlskey, rum and beer. O, its their delight each Saturday night, all seasons of the year.

And there is a section of Cadetts, that wear the clout on squair, and Dauters too with pantaletts, that round their legs they wear. The Sons each week and Dauters meet, each others charms to share, O, its their delight any sort of a night, all seasons of the year.

"The Riley Buster"

(Riley Township)

There is a woman in our town, she walks the streets for pleasure, She puffs and blows out all she knows, and a little more for leisure. She walks the streets from house to house, she is always in a fluster, All the folks about the town call her the Riley Buster.

Long walks at night is her delight, around her neighbor's dwelling, And there she staid for two long hours, to hear what they were telling. 'Twas on a could and dreary night, I very well remember, As any night that ever blow'd, in frosty could December. When at my door I say a sight, which put me in a fluster, I straight-way caught it in my arms, it was the Riley Buster. At first she tried with all her might, to free herself from this chille glare, I asked the cause of her being there, she answered quick, "To hear Moses swear!"

"Calder's"

When old I had a fortune I thought twould ne'er be sunk I spent it all to Calder's The night that I got drunk

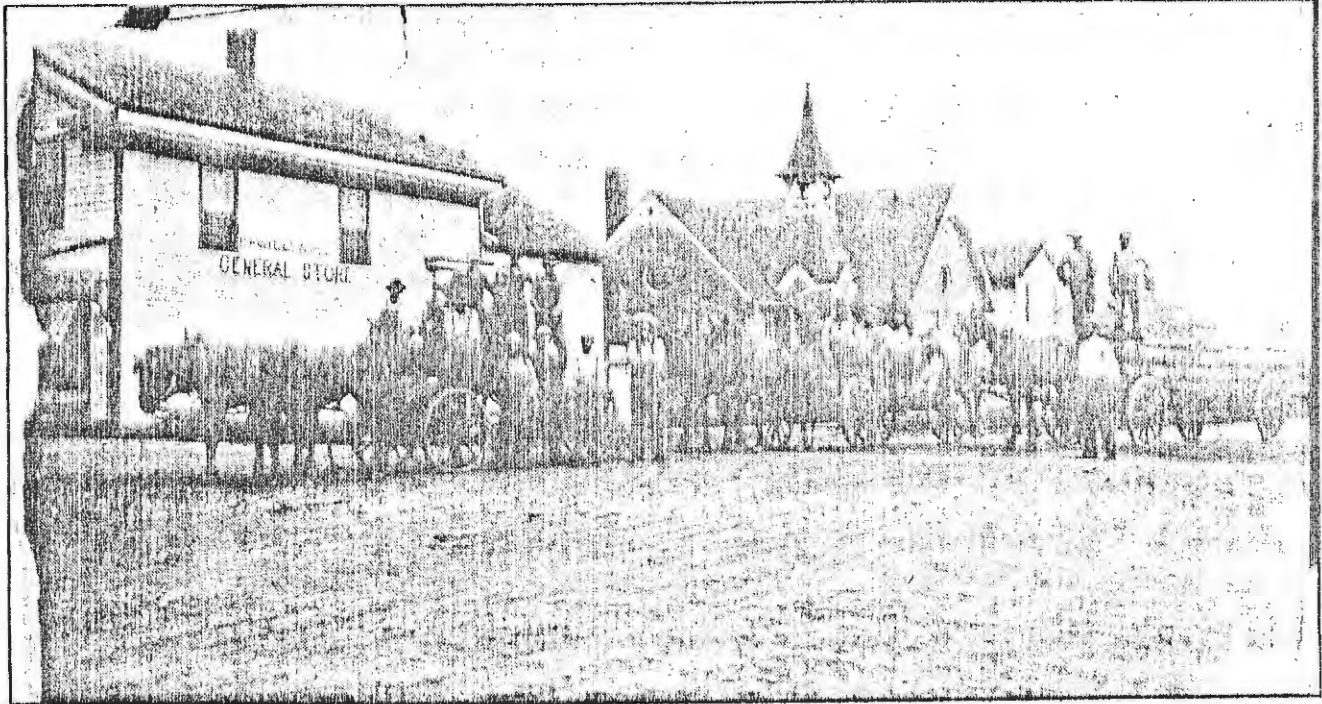
So early the next morning My head was rackt with pain My heart was filled with sorrow So I jaw'd at it again.

Now, while neither of them even came close to being good spellers, and none of this is the stuff that poet laureates are made of, these, along with the others, do give a great deal of insight into subjects not commonly found in local history records.

Opinion

323-1711

When the telephone came to city



OPERATOR, I'D LIKE TO PLACE A CALL ... to DeWitt. That became possible after these telephone linemen came and did their job. They are shown here they day they arrived at the main intersection in DeWitt, in 1905.

An item in the Lansing Journal, dated Aug. 3, 1905:

"Work on the construction of a new telephone line from Lansing to DeWitt was commenced today by the Bell Telephone Company. An exchange is to be put in a general store in that village and a certain number of free messages to Lansing will be allowed to each subscriber."

The DeWitt area was originally serviced by the Laingsburg Telephone Company, a small operation, organized on June 23, 1903. At the first board meeting it was voted that the secretary-treasurer would receive an annual salary of \$720. The president and vice-president were to receive no salary.

In August, 1904, it was voted to increase the capital stock of the company (originally set at \$25,000) and to expend \$2,245 for new construction. It is believed that DeWitt received its first phone lines following that move.

By 1906, Clayton C. Woodruff of DeWitt and F.J. Glass of Bath were added to the board of directors. The company itself, still based in Laingsburg, moved in that year from the "old laundry building" to the "old bakery building".

Company records list the following DeWitt area stockholders from the years 1905 thru 1908: Clayton C. Woodruff, Mark T. Woodruff, Mary Sieb, Elmer E. Lankton, Frank Locher, Bryon S. Well, Mark Norris, Theodore Brya, George Scott, John Wetherell, J.B. Howe, Peter Halterman, Ambrose Smith and Eva VanFleet.

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Clayton C. Woodruff served on the board of directors from 1906 to 1917, and it was by his suggestion that in 1909 the company purchased the "German Extension Line" near DeWitt, thus connecting another large rural section to the system.

DeWitt's first known telephone directory, published in 1918, lists over 250 farms, 75 town residences, and 32 businesses and public buildings, all equipped with telephones. This directory also included a page of instructions on the proper way to speak into a telephone.

DeWitt's telephone service changed in 1908 from the Laingsburg Telephone Company to the Central Michigan Telephone Company. In 1930, this changed to the short-lived Michigan Home Telephone Company which gave way in 1931 to the Michigan Associated Telephone Company. DeWitt has been serviced by the present General Telephone Company of Michigan since 1952.

Telephone offices (switchboard offices) in DeWitt have been housed in the building at 126 W. Main (now the Family Barber Shop), the old Stowell house which stood at 203 E. Main, and its present location on West Main.

Opinion

323-1711

Don't build 'em like they used to

Whether or not you are a lover of old buildings, few can deny an appreciation for the manner or soundness with which they were constructed.

Having lived in the same old house for nearly thirty years, I have seen almost the entire structure stripped of all exterior siding and interior plaster; leaving only the basic framework to behold. It is a constant amazement to me that such a structure could be constructed at all without the advantage of modern power tools. And whereas we are accustomed to working with easily-managable pine, the carpenters of old worked with hard, heavy timbers of oad and walnut.

The first structures built in this area were, by necessity, crude log structures. There were soon replaced as time and manpower allowed, by more substantial log structures.

Although log construction was still in practice up into the 1860's in rural regions, the introduction of the sawmill to DeWitt in 1836 offered sawn lumber to area pioneers at a fairly early date.

Even with sawn lumber available the use of logs, incorporated with frame construction, remained a common building method for several decades. Small logs with flattened sides were often used as a cheaper and more readily available source for floor joists, rafters, and occasionally, wall studs. This practice remained common and practical for rural areas up into the late 1800's.

Large hand-hewn beams of dramatic proportions, often measuring ten inches square and larger, remained a standard (opposed to mill-cut) and can easily be detected by the absence of vertical or circular saw marks and the presence of gouges and hack marks made by ax and adz. Such beams were usually restricted to use beneath floor level. The exception to this rule is found in rare early example of "post and beam" construction. This mode of building, of which there are only a few examples left in this area, was usually limited to large structures and, in fact, remained a common method of barn building up into this century.

A noticeable trait of early building techniques incorporated with the use of sill beams and girders, is the method of attaching the upright wall studs to the sill beam with mortice and tenon joints. The outward side of the beam would be notched vertically, two inches wide and two inches deep, to the full measure of the beam. This notch could then accomodate a companion projection fashioned from the end of each stud. If the stud used was a four by four (or larger), commonly used for window and door openings, the joints would be correspon-

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dingly wider.

A perfect example of this method is currently on display on the south outside wall of Mrs. Ely's Collectables on N. Bridge street. Here, the bottom rows of siding have been removed exposing the original construction of this 1850's building as well as evidence of its 1940's remodeling.

Ground level floor joists, whether of log or sawn timber, were likewise held in place using this method of notching the sill beam.

In these early years, the use of subflooring was virtually unheard of. One layer of planks, usually of tongue-and-groove oak, was laid crosswise to the joists. These planks, often a full inch thick, ranged in widths from four to twelve inches, sometimes wider.

Random-width planking (also an inch thick and seldom cut to square) was used for roof boards. These planks were nailed to the two by four rafters in an apparent haphazard manner. They served a dual purpose as a base on which to nail shingles and as a stabilizer for the rafters. They were usually mill seconds, unfit for finishing into flooring or other purposes, and were often used without the use of any form of sheathing.

As I stated earlier, I am amazed by the ability of the early carpenters but what I find even more amazing is the fact that my house has withstood its past one hundred and thirty years. Throughout its history it has been cut open and patched back together by nearly every owner. Its interior and exterior both has been added to and subtracted from time and time again. Once, it was even lifted up, put on rollers and dragged cross-lots. Yet, it remains strong and sound (I hope!), a credit to the anonymous carpenters of the 1850's who constructed it.

Opinion

Inside of homes is focus

Last week we took a look at the construction techniques of early DeWitt buildings. This week, a look inside to see how they were finished on the interior.

As in most things, economics and owner preference often dictated the manner in which a home's interior was finished. Just like today, one's station in life, likes, dislikes, and ambition played an important part of determining the quality of one's dwelling.

The typical plank floors (mentioned last week) were usually of oak or ash, though sometimes a less expensive softwood was used for second story flooring. These, regardless of the wood used, were rarely given any type of paint or natural finish. Instead, practicality determined that the wood remain bare for regular scrubbing with soap and water. Paint was costly and though durable, could not withstand the harsh lye (wood ash) used in the making of soap.

Carpeting in bed chambers and sitting rooms was more common than we might expect, even in the most modest of homes. These rugs, usually laid wall to wall, were locally made from wool rags (cotton was substituted in later years) woven into brightly striped runners. The runners were then cut to length and sewn together to the desired width.

Sometimes too, in the more affluent homes, a commercially manufactured ingrain carpet might be procured for the "best" parlor. The drawback of these, in the minds of the settlers, were their lack of vibrant colors; a big minus which caused many well-to-do pioneers to remain faithful to the colorful "homemade" carpets.

Another durable floor covering, commonly used during this period, were painted "floorcloths", made of a heavy canvas material. These had much the look of more modern oil cloth and sported either hand-painted geometric patterns or stencilled designs. Unlike the wall-to-wall carpets, they were reduced to the size of area rugs and were often reserved for eating areas, although their use, especially in smaller sizes, could be applied to any room of the house.

Today we take plastered walls for granted. But in the mid-19th century, especially in remote areas like DeWitt, plaster was a luxury. Many were the pioneers who weathered the harsh Michigan winters with the walls of their modest dwelling devoid of any wall covering; only the wall studs and exterior siding to protect them from the elements. In cases like this, as money or material allowed, the "walls" would be papered with anything (newsapers, store paper, wallpaper, etc.) in an effort to block drafts and give it a more pleasant appearance.

Wooden planks or tongue and groove lumber (often with a decorative planed bead) was commonly used in modest homes as a substitute for costly plaster. It had its advantages in this region in that it was not only cheaper, but easier to install and required less upkeep. It also tended to hold up better than plaster when applied to poorly heated or totally unheated rooms. Its drawbacks included its natural tendencies to shrink, crack, and emit sap. In some cases, these wooden walls (and ceilings) were painted but it was not uncommon for the wood to remain exposed without any form of treatment. (In my own home, the wooden walls of the second floor were left unpainted from the 1850's to well

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By Kenneth Coin

into the turn of the century.)

Plastered walls, as stated earlier, were the most expensive option for DeWitt's pioneer homeowners. Here, the lath had to be hand-split and the plastering process involved costly materials and much labor. Its advantages, however, far outweighed the practice of using wood.

Though sometimes painted, plastered walls were most often left natural or had pigments added to the finishing coat to give the wall a soft tint of color. Early letters and diaries also mention the apparently common practice of "lime washing"; a refreshing yet less expensive alternative to paint.

On a national scale, wallpaper was often recommended by domestic journalists of the period as being a cheerful addition to a room and at less cost than paint. Its early appearance in this locale has not been documented. To date, no mention of it has been found in the advertisements of local newspapers prior to the Civil War; nor was wallpaper listed in the estate inventory of Geo. T. Clark's general store in New Albany (DeWitt), taken in 1850. Perhaps DeWitt residents took heed to the authors of the popular builder's guide of 1856 (Village and Farm Cottages) which admonished the use of wallpaper as being "exorbitant of infectious matter, and sometimes harbors vermin." And if that were not enough, "...accumulated layers of paste have themselves become putrescent, breeding fatal disease."

Although Clinton County's forest abounded with seemingly unlimited supplies of enormous walnut, cherry, butternut, chestnut, maple and oak trees (to name but a few of the cabinet maker's favorites), it was softwood, of pine, poplar, birch or bass which was unanimously used for interior trim. Woodwork, from the modest to the most elaborate, was almost always painted, which negated the need for better wood. The exception to this rule was staircases, which were often constructed of fine hardwoods.

The Greek revival style of architecture which remained popular in this area from the 1830's thru the 1860's mandated that ornamentation (including interior and exterior trim) be restrained to the confines of the ancient classic orders. In an attempt to accent the pure and honest simplicity of the style, woodwork was most often painted white or another light solid color. As in all aspects of society, however, there were deviates who, for personal preference, chose to imitate nature and apply the popular artistry of "graining" to their woodwork. Instead of using the abundant hardwoods at hand, a professional grainer (usually an itinerant artist) would be hired to ply his combs and feathers for the layers of wet paint to reproduce the fanciful graining found in natural wood. Even to the strict adherents of the Greek revival style this technique was deemed suitable for use on the doors of their own residences.

Opinion

Furnishings of settlers were few

Using a small amount of detective work and a lot of common sense, it is not difficult to determine what an old house or building may have appeared like over a century ago. Original construction and decorative techniques, no matter how well hidden, can usually be discerned from more modern changes. But to determine how and with what a house was furnished, now that's a different story.

The first settlers of the DeWitt area, regardless of their means, were seldom able to bring with them much in the line of household furnishings. Occasionally a small piece of practical furniture or perhaps an heirloom might be accommodated in the wagon box for the long rough trip, but the settlers' first priority, if they were at all intelligent, was that of survival. This meant that food, tools, seed, and other provisions took top preference above frivolous things such as furnishings. Their initial crude shacks were usually too small anyway to accommodate the humans, let alone any furniture.

When their lifestyles and living quarters could accommodate it, furniture could be crafted by the pioneers themselves, purchased from one of the local cabinet-makers, or shipped in by wagon from one of the distant markets such as Pontiac or Ann Arbor. This last option was prohibitively expensive and many pioneers probably chose the middle option, the local cabinetmaker, as a source of plain yet sturdy (and surprisingly, often well crafted) furniture.

But this still does not answer the question of what the pioneers put in their houses. Few conventional sources give any account of the interior possessions of the pioneers. Charlotte E. (Cook) Newman reported to her relatives by letter in 1855 that her husband, Moses Newman, had what the settlers wanted: "Joseph, Moses and Riley are at work in the Cabinet Shop this summer, Moses says he can fit you out with a set of household furniture in the course of a season, such as tables, chairs, stands, bedsteads, bureaus, lounges and wagon hubs if you like...."

The best records of the contents of the pioneers homes are the rare estate inventories which are found among the early probate court records. One of the most fascinating of these is that taken in 1850 following the deaths of George and Jane Clark whose home still stands at 102 Webb St. The detailed account gives a complete listing of the entire stock of Mr. Clark's general stores, the one located in New Albany next to his home and the other at the Rochester Colony in Duplain Township. Though not as detailed as the store inventories, the account of the contents of the Clarks' home, the former "DeWitt Hotel," offers us a unique glimpse into one of DeWitt's more affluent early households as well as one of its first inns.

The inventory is listed here in its entirety, along with additional notes and explanations.

"Household, Furniture & Provisions": 2 part. barrels Flour, \$2.50; 2 jugs, 8 crocks, 1 churn, \$1.50; 1 clothes bar, \$.25; 8 tin pans at 8¢, \$.64; 2 crocks, dishes, \$.50; 2 washbowls and 1 coffee mill, \$.25; 2 washtubs, \$.50; 1 brass kettle (tea kettle), \$2.00; 1 cooking stove and fur-

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By Kenneth Coln

niture (furniture+stove equipment) \$8.00; 12 chairs, \$3.00; 1 cradle, 1 clock, \$1.75; 1 looking glass (mirror), \$1.50; 1 washstand, 2 tables and curtains, \$4.00; 1 half cott. (cotton) carpet and lot table crockery in cupboard, \$2.50; 1 glass lamp and waterpail, \$.37; 2 vases and glass lamps, \$1.25; 2 ottomans (couches), 1 picture and 1 rug, \$1.50; 7 cane bottom chairs, \$3.50; 1 large Bible, \$1.00; 1 table, \$2.00; 1 looking glass, \$2.50; 1 watch, \$3.00; 1 carpet in front room, \$7.50; 3 shades (window shades — yes, they had them even back then.), \$3.00; 9 prs. sheets, \$4.50; 11 prs. pillow cases at 9¢, \$.99; 1 table spread, \$.50; 12 yards carpet in front hall, \$2.25; Stair carpet, \$2.25; 1 bed (bed+mattress), bedstead and bedding, \$6.50; 1 dressing table, \$1.50; 10 quilts and counterpanes (counterpane+coverlet), \$6.20; 1 crib, \$2.00; 3 blankets, \$1.15; 1 counterpane, \$1.50; 2 new and 2 old table cloths, \$2.00; 5 towels, \$.38; 2 trunks, \$2.50; Clothing of deceased, \$10.00; 9 chairs and 1 dressing table \$4.25; 1 light stand and red carpet \$2.75; 2 beds, bedding and 1 bedstead \$11.00; 1 looking glass and 5 jars (probably slop jars), \$2.60; 1 bedstead and 6 chairs, \$3.50; 1 crick (?), 1 bed and 2 pillows, \$5.00; 1 stove and pipe, \$4.00; 1 bed, bedding and bedstead, \$6.50; 1 light stand, \$1.00; 2 broken looking glasses, \$.50; 2 broken looking glasses, \$1.50; 11 chairs, \$1.00; 10 window curtains, \$1.20; and 1 valance (possibly for a testerbed), \$.50. Total: \$148.14.

Although the inventory does not specify the relationship of the furnishings to the rooms they occupied, one can, without too much difficulty, imagine themselves following David Sturgis and Morris Allen (the appraisers) as they go through the house.

It is interesting to note that there was an obvious lack of case furniture (chests of drawers, bureaus, etc.) that could account for the storage of even the basic linens, bedding and clothing that are listed. The only items listed which could be considered for storage purposes are the two trunks (listed prior to "clothing of deceased") and the dish cupboard (which was probably a permanent fixture as it is only mentioned as a point of reference ("...crookery in cupboard")).

On the other hand, did you count the outrageous number of chairs listed? Don't bother counting, there are 45 listed, 26 of them listed within the five bedrooms evident here. It is possible that a number of them were situated within the large hallway or that there was an "assembly room" of sorts located in the house which was used during the building's years as a hotel.

Among the other noticable absences here are the lack of books (only one, a Bible is listed), wall decorations (only one picture is cited), silverware, lighting (only three lamps are listed for a house of this size) or items of entertainment, all of which we take for granted in our modern households.

Burial grounds yield local history

In the early years of DeWitt, many area homesteads established their own burial grounds, especially in areas where neighboring homesteads were bonded together by social, family or religious ties. Of these, very little information can be gleaned except from scant family records or oral tradition.

The following histories are of a few known cemeteries which, either public or privately owned, are now defunct and no longer exist in the visual sense although some or all of their original burials may still be intact. The cemeteries mentioned here do not by any means constitute a complete list as it is unlikely that a complete listing of all former area graveyards will or could ever be compiled.

Simmons Burial Site

One burial is known to have been upon the homestead of Atwell and Livona (Knapp) Simmons which was located on the northwest corner of Airport and Chadwick roads in Riley Township. This burial was that of Mrs. Simmons' mother, Polly (Hines) Knapp who died March 25, 1848. It was located on the west side of Airport Road, a short distance north of the corners. The only record of this site comes from a narrative written many years ago by Mrs. Knapp's great-great-granddaughter, Agnes (Pike) Steinhardt:

"When I was still a child, I remember watching my father, Millard F. Pike, assisted by Ira and Mark Knapp, open this grave and gather up the few remains, only the skull and a few other bones of this once active woman. These were placed in a small wooden box, together with a few nails and screws, all that remained of the coffin, and were taken to the DeWitt cemetery where they were reinterred on the Atwell Simmons lot and the tombstone was once again set in place."

It is possible that there were additional burials here including that of Sara (Simmons) Sherman, who died August 7, 1849. She was a sister to Atwell Simmons, and her tombstone is now located next to that of Polly Knapp in the DeWitt Cemetery.

Pearsall Cemetery

The numerous graves of the Pearsall family in lots 96 and 100 of section E in the DeWitt cemetery are not original to that cemetery, but the place of their origin has not yet been determined. The vast homesteads of the Pearsall family lay along the east side of Turner Road and ran nearly the full distance from Webb Road to Clark Road. In light of the location of their homes, it is entirely possible that their burials were originally made in the cemetery recorded by Alta (Gunnison) Pierce in 1935 as having been located at the intersection of U.S. 27 and Clark Road (then called Livermore Corners). This can somewhat be substantiated by the fact that at least three of these corners were homesteaded by families, which like the Pearsalls, were founders or at least very early members of DeWitt's pioneer Baptist church. This connection, although circumstantial, should not be overlooked as religion, then as now, was a great force in bonding together friends and families.

It is also highly possible that due to the large number of surviving stones, and the fact that they all bear the Pearsall name, that this family like so many others, had their own private burial ground located somewhere on their property.

The Goodrich Cemetery (or Oliver Cemetery)

The Goodrich cemetery, formerly located one half mile south of Howe Road on the east side of Schavey, is perhaps one of the best recorded of DeWitt's early cemeteries. Yet, despite its frequent mention in early township minutes, there remain many unanswered questions regarding its origin and its subsequent abandonment.

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In 1843, Franklin and Jerusha Oliver sold to the township of DeWitt, their "Buryal Ground" which was described as "commencing on the east line of the road that crosses the Looking Glass river near the house now occupied by Alanson Goodrich (Schavey Road) at the east and west quarter section line where it crosses said road, 8 rods east, then 10 rods south then west to the road, then north...one half acre." This is, in fact, the same description as shown on early plat maps as the cemetery known as the "Goodrich".

The puzzle here comes from the township records of 1845 where it was moved to purchase land adjacent to the village cemetery "the same size and shape of the burial ground on the farm previously owned by Franklin Oliver, deceased." As a result of this decision, additional land was purchased for the village cemetery from Ephriam Utley.

Although it remained known as the Goodrich cemetery for many years, there is no evidence of any of that family having been buried there. This is likewise true of their predecessors, the Olivers (of whom no graves have been documented). There is one large monument in the DeWitt cemetery for the Goodrich family, but whether it originally stood in the cemetery which bore their name is unknown.

No mention has been located in the township records to indicate in what year DeWitt township abandoned the Goodrich and arranged for its removal to the village. It is known that Theodore Schoewe (later changed to Schavey) acquired the former Goodrich farm from Thomas Parr in about 1875. It can be assumed that the cemetery was removed after that date, for the only graves known to have been removed were reinterred next to the Schoewe plot in the DeWitt Cemetery (lots 70 and 117 of section C). Mention of the Goodrich had also ceased in the township minutes by the mid-1880's.

The present cemetery in the city of DeWitt is by far one of the oldest in mid Michigan and yet, the records of its development is virtually nonexistent. The sexton's records, too, are very minimal, as they only date back to the early 1930's, leaving nearly a century and a vast number of unmarked graves unaccounted for. It is therefore important that the records of these early obscure burial grounds be researched in order to supplement much of the lost history of the DeWitt area. It is also important to record, in terms of local history and genealogy, that many of the graves now in the cemeteries of DeWitt Township (DeWitt, Hurd and Gunnisonville) were originally interred elsewhere, in the outlying areas of DeWitt.

Livermore Corners Site

As stated earlier, a cemetery of unknown origin or name was reported in an essay by Alta (Gunnison) Pierce in 1935. It states briefly: "There was once a cemetery at Livermore Corner, across from where B. adley's Oil Station is now..."

Although she does not specify on which of the four corners this cemetery was located, the southeast corner can be discounted as it contained the 1935 service station to which she referred. Perhaps some reader can help supply more information as to the existence of this former graveyard.

Nov. 11, 1985

Lifestyle

323-1711

Long-ago veterans had local ties

There were many veterans of the War of 1812 who came to the DeWitt area in the early years of its settlement. Some stayed briefly before moving on, others remained and eventually died here. Several became prominent settlers while others lived out an obscure life; their former military service unrecorded.

Unlike veterans of all later wars (with the exception of the war with Mexico, 1846-48) veterans of the War of 1812 formed no local organizations. As a result, much of the information of these men's military past has been forgotten. Likewise, even many of the names have been lost.

The following are some veterans of this war who have a recorded association with early DeWitt.

Perhaps the most notable veteran of early DeWitt was its founder, Capt. David Scott. He was born in Litchfield, Conn., Nov. 1, 1779, and was reportedly a captain in the 23rd U.S. Infantry. He married Eunice Forbes of Shoreham, Vt., in 1801. They settled at DeWitt in 1833 and it was here that he died, May 7, 1851. He and his wife are buried in the DeWitt cemetery.

Col. Thomas Lee was born Dec. 20, 1774, in Hudson, N.Y. He came to DeWitt at a relatively early date but no information concerning his life here has been confirmed. His wife's maiden name was Asenath Winants and they had at least one son, George W. Lee. Col. Lee died at DeWitt, Dec. 2, 1852, and is buried in the DeWitt cemetery.

Barna Allen (also recorded as Burma or Barney Allen) was born in Washington Co., N.Y., Nov. 12, 1786 (?). He settled south and west of DeWitt in 1837 and was among the earliest members of the DeWitt Baptist Church in 1842. He died March 4, 1847, and is buried in the DeWitt cemetery beside his wife, Betsey (Heath) Allen who died in 1841. Their son George W. Allen became a prominent settler of section 19, this township.

The tombstone of Enos Silsbe in the DeWitt cemetery has been engraved (at a later date) "PVT. N.Y. Militia, War of 1812." He died Nov. 7, 1845, at the age of 48. He is buried with his wife, Abigail, and two daughters who died at an early age. Other than these facts, nothing fur-

ther is known.

David Olin Sr. came to DeWitt at an early date, reportedly in 1837. His name is frequently mentioned in the early histories of this area but as he had a son by the same name it is nearly impossible to distinguish who is being credited. David Sr. is credited with building the Baptist Meeting House on north Bridge street and one of the early schools at Gunnison's corners. He is also listed among the early owners of DeWitt's Clinton House hotel. He died here on August 25, 1857, at the age of 62, and is buried in the DeWitt cemetery.

Henry Chappell (also spelled Chappel) is believed to have been an early settler south and west of DeWitt. He died here on May 29, 1861, at the age of 72 and was originally buried in the former Goodrich cemetery on Schavey road. His grave, along with several others, was removed to the DeWitt cemetery at a later date.

James Stickles, an early settler of southern DeWitt township, died August 26, 1876, at the age of 79. He is said to have been buried in the Hurd cemetery beside his wife Lucy.

Daniel Ferguson Jr. (1794-1864) is believed to have come to the DeWitt settlement in 1834 along with his father, Daniel Sr. and several brothers. Most of this large family, including Daniel Jr., eventually settled in Olive township near Muskrat Lake. Specific references to him are confusing due to he and his father having the same name. He was probably buried in either the Alward or Merrihew cemeteries, though no connection to either has been located.

Dr. Hiram Stowell (whose veteran status has not yet been firmly established) was a native of Cayuga Co.,

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N.Y. He and his family came to DeWitt in 1837 and settled on the Looking Glass river, several miles upriver from the Scott settlement. He was elected Clinton county's first Judge of Probate in 1839 and afterwards came to the village of DeWitt where he built an impressive home on the northeast corner of Main and Franklin. He died here on August 25, 1857, at the age of 62 and was buried in the DeWitt cemetery.

According to records of the Daughters of 1812, Porter Briggs is said to have lived in the DeWitt area but this has not been confirmed by local records. It is possible that he was connected with the later Briggs family of southern DeWitt township.

Opinion

323-1711

Researching "ordinary" people

After all is said and done, DeWitt's history remains simply a story of human experience, of the toil and pleasure, the affluence and deprivation, the disappointments and dreams, the ordinary and the unusual in the lives of the people who worked its fields, walked its streets, and dwelt in its homes.

DeWitt has always been an ordinary town populated by ordinary people. A few became wealthy, most did not. Few of those who lived here ever gained any sort of fame beyond the local level; mostly they were known only to their neighbors and family. Their lives for the most part left little mark outside this community.

It is rather a simple matter to research the lives of rich or famous people. The impact of their lives on history is usually well recorded and their personal papers well preserved. This is not so for the great majority of people who once lived in DeWitt. Their ordinary history is more difficult to discover. Few letters or diaries which have survived to the present are publicly available to tell us of the day to day experience of DeWitt's "ordinary people". Most often we today must sift through second hand accounts like this column, written by novices like myself, in order to catch a glimpse of life in DeWitt's early years.

Over a year ago, when I was asked to compose a weekly column of DeWitt's past, it was with great reluctance that I accepted the challenge. I have always view-

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ed such articles with a great deal of reservation for, regardless of their accuracy, such articles are prone to be clipped and saved and thus, in time, left uncorrected, become viewed as unshakable facts of history. That may, in fact, be nothing more than a fanciful tale of assumption, riddled with error or misleading information.

More often than not, these inaccuracies are born innocent enough; a simple explanation to a confusing question or a vivid imagination combined with a fragmented memory. I once had someone go so far as to demand that I was totally wrong about something I had written of the Lansing to St. Johns railroad, the "Interurban". She based her facts on a crystal-clear recollection of riding the Interurban in her youth all the way north to Ithaca. Now, I don't claim to have a monopoly on historical knowledge, but I do know that if she rode "cars" to Ithaca, it must have jumped the tracks in St. Johns and completed the journey on dirt roads.

There are basically two approaches to writing history-related articles for publication. One is to entertain the public by reviewing popular topics, the other is to educate the public with heretofore unknown information. Being more motivated by the latter approach, I have sought over the past year to provide new topics as well as occasionally offering fresh insight into old themes.

I would like to thank all those who provided me with assistance, offering to share with me (and eventually the rest of you) their memories, photographs, and family papers. I would especially like to thank all of you who wrote or phoned with your appreciation for my touching on subjects or people that held a special place in your memories. As the only source of compensation for my efforts, your expressions of gratitude made me feel amply compensated.