

**HISTORICAL DEWITT** — Here's a mysterious photo from the DeWitt archives. "Historian" Ken Coin seeks more information about its contents. Courtesy photo.

## DeWitt remembered: Early DeWitt building a mystery

By KEN COIN

When Kris Spencer recently asked me if I would be interested in preparing a weekly feature of old time DeWitt photographs and history I was very surprised to realize that it had been over six years since I last shared my blasts from the past with the readers of the DeWitt-Bath Review. And what a change these past six years have brought to DeWitt.

To start this series I purposely chose a photo which recently came to light at the Paine-Gillam-Scott Museum in St. Johns. People often refer to me as DeWitt's historian; but please, that title should be reserved for little old ladies with blue hair and fragile hips. To show you what I don't know I'm going to readily admit that I know nothing about this build-

ing other than the fact that it was a "feed-mill" located on the south side of the 100 block of East Main Street, directly west of the Woodman Hall (now Keck's Appliance). And to further show my ignorance, I don't even know the purpose of a "feed mill." I would date the picture at about 1915.

If any readers have any information about this feed mill or any of the gentleman pictured here, please drop me a line, care of the DeWitt-Bath Review, P.O. Box 70, Grand Ledge, MI 48837.

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident. His historical series will be run weekly in the DeWitt-Bath Review.*

## Mystery solved

To the Editor:

I, Oliver S. Angell, a DeWitt Township resident all my life will attempt to tell what I remember about the building pictured in the DeWitt-Bath Review dated Feb. 10.

The "feed mill" or "grist mill" as it was called in the early 1900s was owned and operated by Clark Livermore (1869 to 1943).

Clark Livermore and his wife, Jessie (1880-1958 lived on Clark Road approximately 40 rods East of present US 27 highway. The house still stands on his property. They had three daughters: Grace Livermore (Ackles), Thelma Livermore (Merlington), and Ardis Livermore (Houser).

In the early 1900s there was a feed mill at DeWitt Center (Livermore Property) now corner of US 27 and Clark Road, North side.

When just a child (probably in early teens) I remember driving a team of a wagon with a small grist consisting of ear corn, oats, and wheat to be ground for animal feed. Ear corn had to be shelled before grinding. The grinding was done with a Burr Mill, two steel plates meshed together. The tighter the burr, the finer the grind. Usually fine grind for chickens and pigs, Course grind for cattle, cracked or rolled for horses.

Next, west of the "feed mill" pictured was a blacksmith shop. After unloading the grist for grinding, I took the wagon and team next door. The team was unhooked from the wagon and taken into the blacksmith shop. There the horses hoof were trimmed and fitted with steel shoes which were nailed to the horses hoof after fitting.

The blacksmith name was Calder. In the picture, I believe he might be the brawny fellow standing closest to the front door. I believe Clark Livermore is the man with his foot on a bag of grain standing on the loading dock. It is a possibility man on sidewalk talking with man I thought to be Calder could be Norris of the Norris and Eldridge Hardware. Norris and Eldridge Hardware had a storage building near

west of the blacksmith shop. The hardware store was on Bridge Street just south of the drug store at the corner of Bridge and East Main.

Oliver Angell  
Lansing



**SOUTH RILEY BELLES** — (Bottom left) Ella (Simmons) Pike, (l. to r.) Jennie (Parks) Fletcher, Alida (VanFleet) Whitaker, Estella (Cook) Dills, Regina VanFleet, and Charlotte (Moore) Burns. Courtesy photo.

## Mystery girls finally identified

By KEN COIN

Once in a great while all of the pieces fall into place and I am rewarded with the satisfaction of knowing that I outsmarted time and obscurity by discovering an insignificant yet interesting bit of historical trivia.

Some time ago, Gerald Pike, a life-long area resident, shared with me some glass negatives of pictures which his father George S. Pike took in and about DeWitt in the earliest years of this century. Among them was a picture of six middle-aged women taken about 1905. We both knew the identity of two but, try as I might, I could not find anyone who recognized the other four. It haunted me.

It was certain that they were not relatives of the two known women, so what was the connection?

And what was the need to capture the gathering for posterity?

Several years later, while cataloging some pictures at the Faye Hansen Public Library, I came across a very old picture which I had seen many times of six young women, labeled years ago by Faye Hanson as "DeWitt Belles of Long Ago." I did a quick comparison and sure enough, the two known women in the 1905 picture were indeed in the older picture as young women but the arrangement of faces was very different.

I ran the theory by Gerald Pike who agreed

that the women could be the same if arranged differently. Then, from his vast archives of family pictures, he produced a small picture of the same "Belles," obviously taken that same day in the 1870's, but in an arrangement more like the newer picture.

Of the young women in the earlier group one was identified as Alida (VanFleet) Whitaker whose granddaughter will be remembered by many old-time residents as Mabel Lee.

After conferring with my human address book (I won't mention your name, Ruth) I wrote to Mrs. Lee with copies of the two photos. She cheerfully confirmed that, yes, the same women were in both pictures but added that the caption of the earlier picture should actually read "South Riley Belles," as the women were, for the most part, from that area (north of Cutler Road and west of Airport Road).

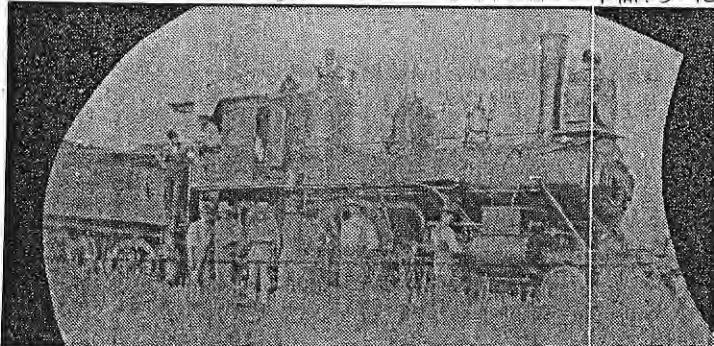
The only difference in the two poses is that in the newer picture Charlotte (Moore) Burns is seated bottom right while in the earlier, she is standing top right.

What a wonderful comparison. In the one, six young girls in the height of fashion. Having endured the hardships of Civil War in their childhoods, they have the timidity of youth in weary-looking, confident veterans of life.

*Ken Coin is a resident of DeWitt. His historical articles appear weekly in this paper.*

# DeWitt remembered: DeWitt had to wait for train

MAR. 3 1992



EARL VANFLEET shot this photo of DeWitt's first steam engine on July 27, 1901. Courtesy photo

By KEN COIN

The original plans for the Interurban called for electric trolley cars but it took several years before the lines were strung. In the meantime, the line was serviced by this small-gauge steam engine which probably impressed the locals all the more with its tall belching smokestack and gleaming brass bell.

A second plan, which never materialized, called for the tracks to continue north, beyond St. Johns, to the city of St. Louis. Legal battles ensued however, over granting an easement to cross the right of way of the Detroit, Grand Haven, and Milwaukee Railroad (the "Grand Trunk" in St. Johns and the plans

for that extended route were eventually scrapped.

After fifty years of wanting a railroad to appease the insult of being by-passed by the "Grand Trunk" line (which fostered the birth of St. Johns in the 1850's and eventually led to DeWitt losing the county seat), DeWitt's wish finally came true.

When it arrived on July 22, 1901, it brought with it the 20th century to this sleepy little village.

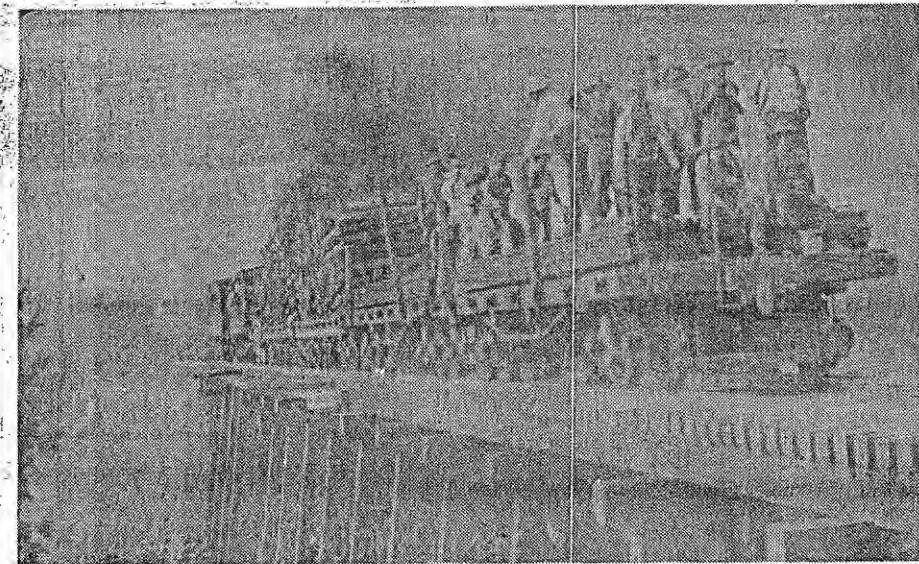
This picture was taken on that date by Earl VanFleet.

Again, a thank you to Vincent VanFleet for sharing his father's photographs with us.

Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.

6-DeWitt-Bath Review/March 16, 1992

## DeWitt Remembered The "Great Northern" train



By KEN COIN

The very first run of the "Great Northern" from Lansing to DeWitt happened July 22, 1901. Besides the passengers (all obvious lunatics to be standing on an open flat car as it passed over a bridge like that), there were several flat cars of railroad ties and track to supply the continued construction of the line further north to its destination at St. Johns.

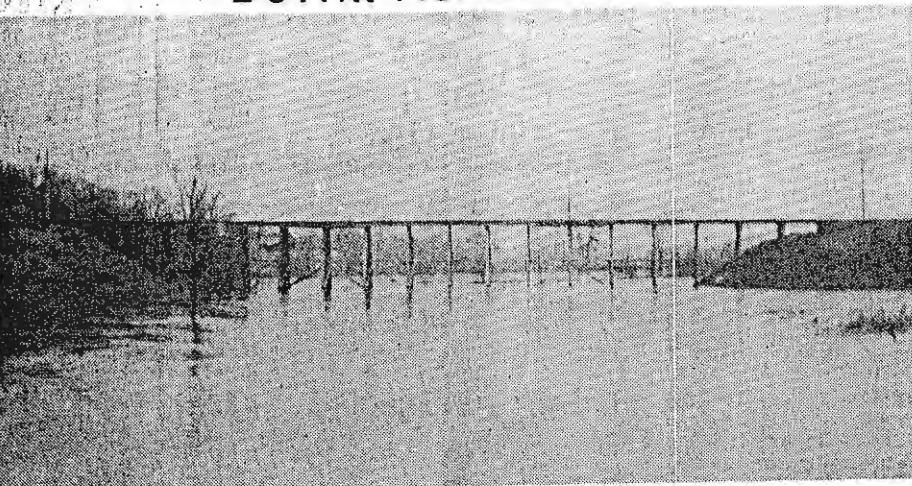
On that eventful day, Earl VanFleet took this picture of the train (we'll use the term loosely) as it crossed the trestle on its ascent into the village where it was welcomed with much fanfare by the townspeo-

ple. The bells of the schoolhouse and the community's two churches were rung long and loud and the cars were then bedecked with flags, bunting, flowers, and brooms. (Yes, brooms! I just pass along the fact folks; I can't always explain them. Perhaps if such an event were to occur today we would be expected to decorate with upright sweepers and dustbusters. I don't know.)

This and several other early pictures taken by VanFleet were sent to me a few weeks ago by his son, Vincent VanFleet of Bloomfield.

Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.

## DeWitt Remembered:



## Looking Glass trestle, 1904

I want to thank Bertha Lennemann, Goldie Moore, and Thelma Grinold for their responses to the picture of the "Feedmill." But a special thanks to Oliver Angell for writing his interesting memory of it. (See Letters to the Editor, Feb. 24). So many older residents have spoken of Calder's blacksmith shop which was located next to the feedmill, I wish I had a picture of it for this column. (That's a hint).

I know of nothing which jars the memories of DeWitt residents more than the subject of the old Interurban which connected DeWitt to Lansing and St. Johns. So, for the next few weeks I'll run some unique views (and simple commentary) of the "cars." If you immediately knew what I meant by the "cars," I'm sorry, but you're

an old-timer.

This is a view of the trestle which spanned the Looking Glass just east of the Bridge Street bridge, taken in 1904. On the right is the very edge of the high man-made grade which still backs Riverside Park; on the right, the natural high bank behind Ballard Home Center.

The picture was obviously taken during a spring flood, which reminds me: Did I miss something? Did city council pass an ordinance or something prohibiting the river from flooding? It used to do a pretty respectable job of it, but I haven't seen a good gully-wash like this since I don't know when.

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.*

## DeWitt Remembered:



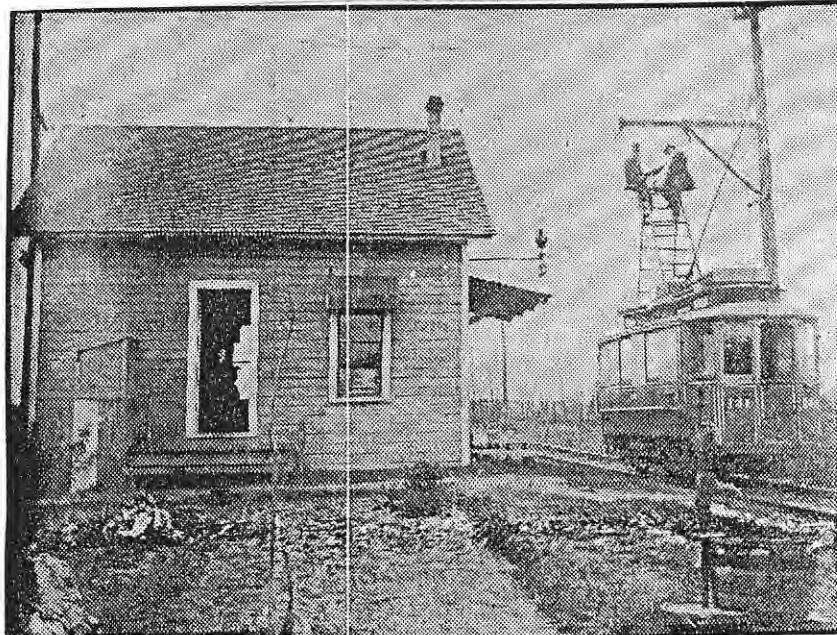
## Interurban continues trek

By KEN COIN

In the days of the Interurban the roads of the county had no official names as they do now. At nearly every mile along the route of the tracks the crossings were given a name; usually in honor of a local family. North of DeWitt there was Town Line Crossing (Cutler Road), Clayton's Crossing (Chadwick Road), Locher's Crossing (Locher Road), Alward Lake (Alward Road), Schwab's Crossing (Pratt Road), Merle Beach (Jason Road)...and so on, up to St. Johns. South of DeWitt there was Dunham's Crossing (Herbison Road), Moots' Crossing (Clark Road), Briggs' Crossing (State Road), County Line (Sheridan Road), and North Lansing.

The route of the Interurban south of DeWitt generally followed a curving line somewhat parallel to (and to the east of) Turner Road. The route through DeWitt and on north was laid out much more straightforward. Through town it followed the full length of Franklin Street and continued north along the back of the cemetery. As it crossed through Parker's pond it veered to the east, righting itself as it came to Cutler Road. From there it continued on a straight shot through Olive and the southern portion of Bingham townships until it reached the fairgrounds on the southern edge of St. Johns.

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt area resident and the area's primary historian.*



## Coin disagrees with location of station

APR 1 1982

By KEN COIN

(The reader will please not be distracted by the sight of two grown men fiddling with high voltage wires while seated teeter-totter fashion on a board placed atop a stepladder which has been set-up upon the roof of a mobile streetcar!).

Many of the crossings along the Interurban route had small waiting stations. The one pictured above has caused much discussion and is often identified as the Valley Farms Station. I disagree with the consensus and place it at the intersection of Clark and Myers roads as the waiting station or "Depot" which is noted on county plat books of the period. Its purpose was to serve Bath residents who used the "cars."

Most waiting stations were smaller and can be better com-

pared to the enclosed benches we see along city bus lines. These small stations were not provided by the railroad company but were put up and maintained by local residents.

Around 1900 a group of rural women in southern Olive Township got together with the intent of raising money to build waiting stations at Clayton's (Chadwick Road) and Locher's crossings. They had themselves a fine time, ultimately achieved their goal, disbanded the group and waited in their stations. By 1915, Millie Norris, regretting the loss of a good thing, invited the former members (plus some new neighbors) to a reunion at which time they reorganized themselves into the "DeWitt-Olive Sunshine Club."

Monthly meetings were held somewhat alternately between members' homes in

DeWitt or Olive. If in Olive, the DeWitt ladies would meet at the depot on Franklin Street and ride the cars to Olive. If in DeWitt, the Olive ladies would meet in the comfort of their own creation at the crossing before boarding the southbound "car."

Aside from their individual quests for experiencing the perfect Jello fantasy or stalking the elusive lay-down loner at Eucher, their newfound purpose was the production of infant clothing for the poor and making tied crazy quilts for families who "burned-out." The club also produced at least one "good" pieced or appliqued quilt top each year on which each member's name was embroidered.

For want of a waiting station, a tradition was born which lasted into the 1970s.

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.*

April 13 '92

## DeWitt remembered:

### Cemetery towers traced by Coin

By KEN COIN

Whether or not you have ever been to the DeWitt cemetery, if you've driven by you probably couldn't help but notice the nearly twin towers of granite which mark the plots of the VanScoy and the Heck families.

Rowland S. VanScoy was born in Dutchess County, N.Y., Nov. 22, 1814, a son of Rowland and Rachael (Drew) VanScoy. In 1839 he married Ruth Bissell and in that same year settled in DeWitt Township in the vicinity of Capital City Airport. They purchased their homestead of 160 acres from the government at about \$3 per acre and within a 15-year period had expanded their land holdings to approximately 400 acres.

In the early 1850s, the VanScoy family, which now includes two daughters, Rachael and Caroline, moved to the village of DeWitt and occupied George Clark's former "DeWitt Hotel" on top of the hill at the corner of Webb and Bridge (later the Klaver farm). Ruth VanScoy died in DeWitt in 1852 and was buried in the DeWitt cemetery. Rowland soon after remarried and in 1854 moved to Essex Township, settling southeast of Maple Rapids on a large tract of land known in pioneer days as "Benedict's Plains." He did very well for himself in his new location growing liquor hops which he shipped to France. At the time of his death in 1890, his "magnificent estate" totaled nearly 1,900 acres.

Besides Rowland and Ruth VanScoy, this monument marks the burial place of Rowland's second wife, Ann (Bissell) VanScoy, and an unnamed granddaughter (an infant



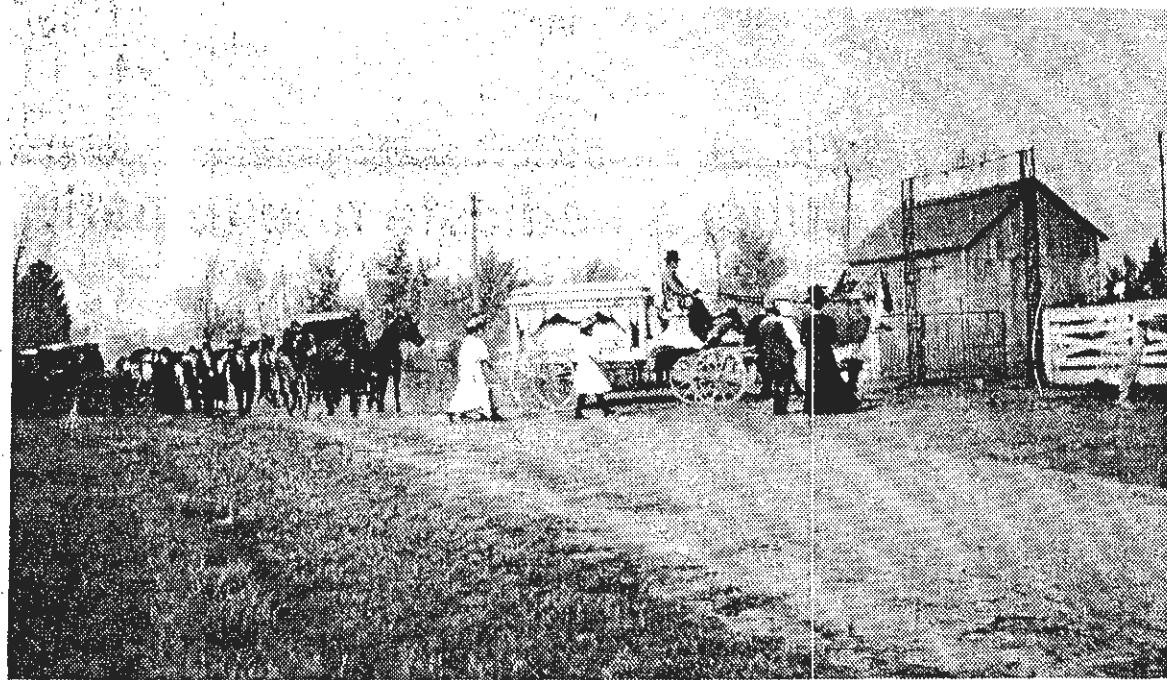
daughter of S.B. and Rachael ((VanScoy)) McPherson).

The near twin of this monument, located in section "B," marks the burial place of VanScoy's other daughter Caroline and her husband, William Heck. It was said of Caroline that she "possesses a rare degree of intelligence and capability, having had her faculties developed by careful training." In 1891 that was intended as a compliment, but somehow in 1992 that reads as somewhat of an insult.

Although the VanScoy-McPherson-Heck families all spent the majority of their lives in the Maple Rapids area, they kept close ties to DeWitt. Later generations of the Heck family reestablished themselves in DeWitt, continuing the operation of Rowland VanScoy's old farm here which has been passed down through the generations to the present and is now the home of Dean and Bertha (Heck) Crane, located at the intersection of DeWitt and State roads.

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## DeWitt remembered:



A funeral procession in 1908.

## Funeral humor has its place

By KEN COIN

I'll admit it. I'm one of those people who appreciate funeral humor. I can't help it, I inherited it from my grandmothers. Some grandmothers delight their grandchildren with stories of the first time they rode in an automobile; my grandmother Coin delighted me with a story of Leona Burhart's funeral where a pallbearer slipped on the porch steps and took five more (six counting Leona) down with him. Leona had what you might call an "out of casket experience" with six grown men scrambling down the sidewalk to catch her before she skidded out into traffic.

This week's article has really nothing to do with DeWitt except that it is a newspaper clipping found in an old scrapbook of a local resident.

### Crash at a Funeral Living and Dead Piled in a Promiscuous Heap

Fostoria, Mich. March 15, 1895 — The breaking of a floor in a small house during the funeral service of Mrs. J. Thompson led

to the the living and the dead being piled up together in a promiscuous heap. The body was laid out in the parlor of the little house and the services had been nearly completed when, without warning, the entire floor gave way and all the occupants, with the corpse, two stoves in which fire were burning, and the furniture of the room were precipitated into the cellar, eight feet below.

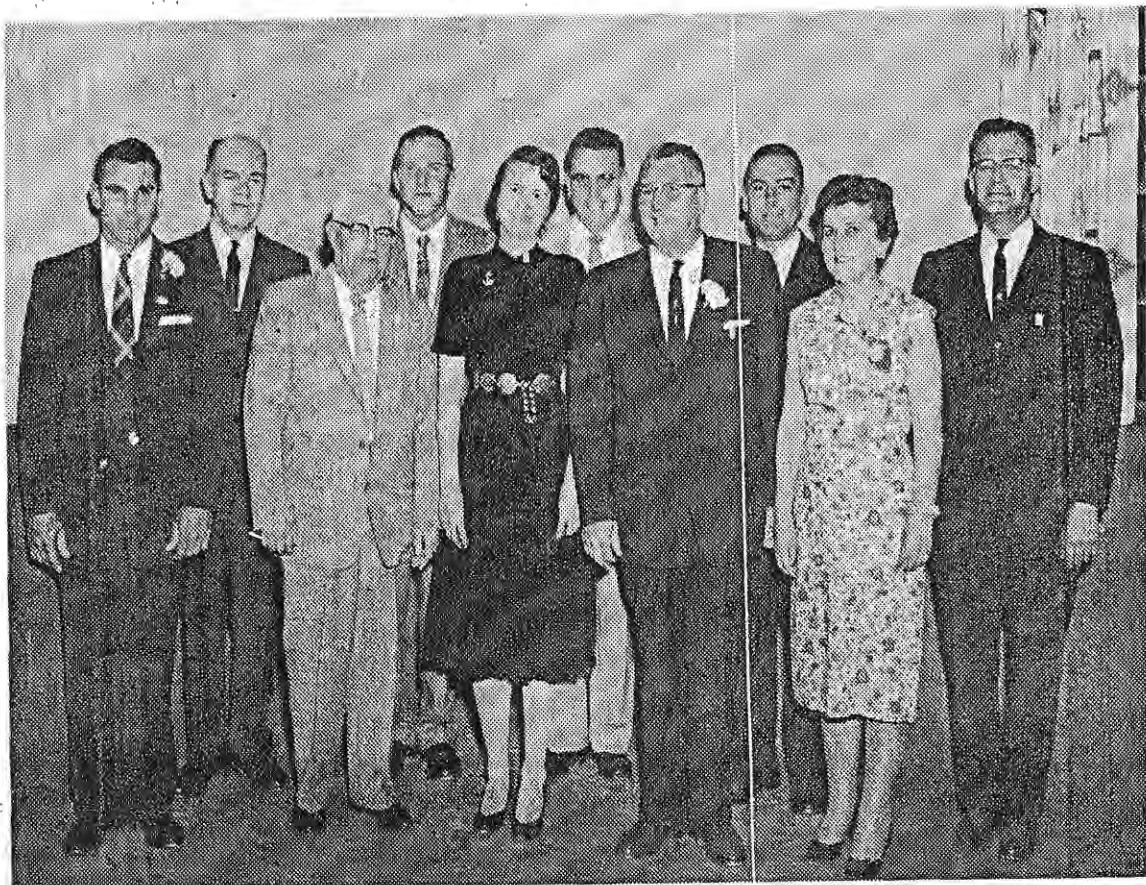
#### Terror-Stricken Nightmare

The terror-stricken mourners became frantic in their endeavors to release themselves, and the cries of the injured and the fear that the ruins would take fire from the stoves rendered the situation exciting. Ropes and ladders were quickly brought and the imprisoned ones were released. The coffin was split open by the fall, and the body of the dead woman was scratched and bruised. There seems to be some mystery about the giving way of the floor, as the house was very strongly built. The funeral continued after the excitement had subsided.

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# DeWitt remembered:

April 21 1982



**MAYOR'S EXCHANGE DAY, 1960, IN DEWITT** — Pictured (l. to r.) \*Richard Keck, \*William Dalman, Clerk Ray Price, \*Gerald Deline, Treasurer Marilyn Coin, \*Donald Steavens, Mr. Mayor from Elsewhere, Jim White, Mrs. Mayor from Elsewhere, and \*Bill Overholt. (\* village council).

## DeWitt was like Mayberry in 1960

By KEN COIN

Initially I hesitated running this photo as it's much newer than the ones I usually prefer. But, after contemplating it awhile and letting it talk to me I realized that in terms of its remoteness to the present it, just like the other pictures, represents a DeWitt light-years removed from the present.

In the 1960s we watched the Andy Griffith Show on our black and white Motorola television and we all got the biggest bang out of the way Andy and Aunt Bea talked, and Barney and Otis T...why they were just too funny. We didn't know that 24 million other households across the country thought the entire way of life in Mayberry was comical.

At the time this picture was taken the village had one building (the former fire station on Bridge Street) which served as fire barn, council room, and clerk's office. The police station was wherever Charlie Anderson happened to be; the Justice of the Peace was in Roy Decker's front room and the treasurer's office was a filing cabinet in my mother's dining room.

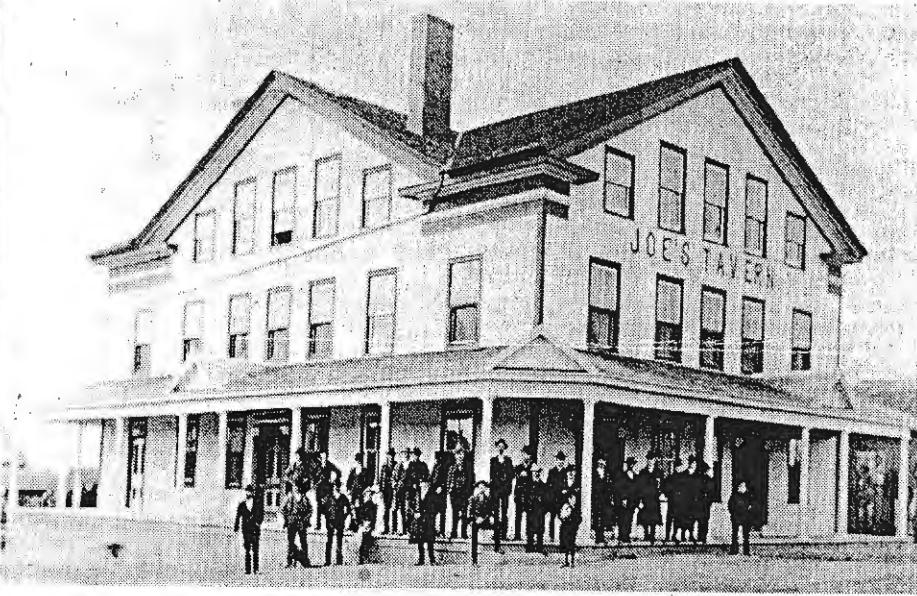
It was so simple.

No, we didn't think Mayberry itself was very funny; just the way they all talked. (Well...OK...maybe the idea of Sarah the switch-board operator was sort of backwards and funny. Our phone numbers may have been only four digits but at least we could dial them direct).

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.*

May 4 '92

## DeWitt remembered:



### 'Joe's Tavern', built in 1848 still stands proudly today

By KEN COIN

"Joe's Tavern" — In 1906 the following caption was given to this photograph: "The above picture shows Joe's Tavern, the hotel at DeWitt, which was built by Captain Scott in 1842. A few years ago Joe Bard bought the place and has remodeled it throughout, making a modern up-to-date hotel. It has water, electric lights, and sewer connections, and the traveler finds not many so well equipped places."

Recently, Thelma Grinold was kind enough to share with me a copy of a 1906 Golden Anniversary of the former Clinton Republican (an ancestor to the DeWitt-Bath Review) celebrating St. Johns' 50th year. One page of the paper was devoted to DeWitt and Bath; their history and their present (1906) state of affairs.

The pretty little village of DeWitt is located on the banks of the Looking Glass River, at the intersection of the Suburban railroad. The country is gently rolling, with fine farm buildings and since the advent of the electric railroad, the village has made many substantial improvements. New houses and walks have been built and there has been much civic pride manifested through the efforts of a local improvement association. Formerly the county seat, a thriving village before St. Johns existed, had fate ordered the Grand Trunk built through the village instead of 13 miles north, it might have been a substantial city today. As it is, it is a pleasant place to live in, and will no doubt continue to grow as the years go by."

The following is the business directory of 1906 along with (for most) the date the business was established — Home Brazee and Co., Gen. Mdse., 1897; Woodruff Bros., bank, 1904; Dr. W.G. Wight, 1906; Dr. (Richmond) Simmons, 1878; Chas. W. Webb Postmaster/Jeweler, 1896; F(rank) P. Rose, Harness Shop, 1905; J. (Loy) Simmons, Drugs, 1904; W.M. Turbush, Blacksmith,

1882; Dr. J.E. Jaynes, Drugs, 1879; Floyd Williams, Gen. Mdse., 1904; D.D. Watling, Meat Market, 1905; G.A. Williams, Gen. Mdse., 1902; John E. Wood Furniture, Undertaking, 1904; Clavey and Brya, Gen. Hardware, 1897; Geo. W. Gross, Implements, 1903; L.W. Sibley, creamery, 1897; L.W. Sibley, lumber yard, 1904; Wm. McCloud, blacksmith; Chas. L. Terwilliger, lunch room; N.A. Bennett, lunch and pool room; Ed Chadwick, repair shop; and Dey VanFleet, feed mill.

Now, stay with me folks. From the top I'll try to briefly tell you where each was located in 1906. An \* means the building is still standing.

\*Brazee's — N/E corner Main and Bridge; Woodruff's — north half of Terranova's; Dr. Wight — never heard of him (must come late and left early); \*Dr. Simmons — N/E corner Main and Scott; Webb's — S. side W. Main next to Dr. Young's; Rose's — S side W Main, Dr. Young's; \*Simmons' Drugs — Family barbershop; Turbush Blacksmith — N/E corner Main and Wilson??; \*Jayne's Drugs — S side W Main real estate office; Floyd Williams' — not sure; Watling's — Terranova's side parking lot; G.A. Williams' — N/W corner Main and Bridge; Wood's — N side W Main parking lot between barbershop and caterer; \*Clavey and Brya — E side S Bridge between Hardware and Sam's; Gross' — N/W corner Main and Franklin??; \*Sibley Creamery — W side S Market (behind Kevin Smith's); \*Sibley Lumber — S side E Washington, Ballard Home Center; McCloud Blacksmith — don't know; Terwilliger's — S side W Main, (west half of Dr. Young's); Bennett's — N side E Main, west parking lot of Anne Rae's; Chadwick's — don't know; and VanFleet's — S side E Main.

Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.

May 11, 1992

# DeWitt remembered: 1906 Charity Pearse essay faulty

By KEN COIN

Last week I shared with you an excerpt from an old newspaper regarding DeWitt in 1906. Excuse my bad manners; I mentioned Thelma Grinold but failed to thank her. Thank you, Thelma!

That was a lesson in courtesy. Always say "Thank you." But this week's article is actually a lesson in history — don't believe everything you read.

My main concern when agreeing to write a column was that I might write something that is incorrect. Now, I have no problem admitting that I'm wrong, but I do have a problem with writing something incorrect which is taken by the public as truth and goes uncorrected.

Case in point — the 1906 newspaper which Thelma shared. It contains an article (essay style) written by Charity L. Pearce (1848-1919). I had seen the article before, and pasted into several old scrapbooks but I never knew where it came from. I have always had the greatest regard for Mrs. Pearce's abilities (80 to 100 years ago) as both a record keeper for many area organizations as well as her detailed accounts of area happenings as DeWitt's correspondent (under the pen name of "Nonsense") to the county newspaper. She was also an accurate local historian — Not!

What she did in her essay of the founding of DeWitt was to actually rewrite a more obscure essay written several years earlier by David Scott, a son of Captain David Scott who founded DeWitt. That alone I can live with but she fell into the trap so prevalent at the turn of the century and that was to embellish the story, making it just a tad more dramatic than the original. (The original being about as exciting as a jar of mayonnaise). This too I can deal with. These are the venial sins. But then, the unforgivable, she interwove fragments of other stories. Gasp.



DEWITT POST OFFICE — 1906 — The post office in DeWitt in 1906 as it appeared in the Clinton Republican Golden Anniversary edition. Charles W. Webb is standing in the doorway.

Now I'm sure that this was all done with innocent intentions and who knows, maybe she was merely a victim of an editorial hatchet job (no offense, Al). But, whatever the case, her version of DeWitt's founding has now been clipped and saved, read and believed, and itself plagiarized by generations of school children (and being one of them, I know this for a fact).

The sad irony is she could just as well have written her own story as a daughter of a pioneer family and left David Scott's story stand as his own. As proficient a writer as she was, she undoubtedly could have written a fascinating story.

So, if you happen to come across her essay in your grandmother's scrapbook, read it, but don't believe it. And as for my articles? The same. Enjoy them. But if you want to judge their accuracy — go to the source.

Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.

January 14, 1982

DeWitt remembered:

# They sure don't write obits like they used to in 1910

By KEN COIN

This past winter Arleta Cutler moved back to Scott street after a rural hiatus of, what Arleta? Forty years? In the course of her packing and unpacking she sorted through some scrapbooks and such and passed some clippings my way pertaining to her late husband's ancestors.

I'm printing this obituary in its entirety as a lost art form which has gone the same route as story telling and letter writing.

*Editors note: The following obituary appears here as it appeared in the original publication.*

"Oldest Pioneer of Riley is Dead."

Mrs. Amori B. Cook Answers Summons Friday Night, At Age of 74 Years.

Had Lived in Same House Since 1953.

Came with Parents to Clinton County When That Section Was Unbroken Wilderness.

DeWitt, July 23, (1910) — The oldest pioneer of Riley Township, Mrs. Amori B. Cook, who had lived practically her entire 74 years in that place, died at her home at 11 o'clock Friday evening. Since her marriage in 1853, Mrs. Cook had lived continuously in the house to which she had been brought as a bride, and previous to that time had resided with her parents but a short distance away. No one was better known throughout Clinton County. For many years she had borne the distinction of having been the longest resident of Riley Township, and her death will be marked with real regret on the part of both the older and the younger population of the county.

Comparitively sudden was her death. On Monday last the deceased was stricken with paralysis. On Wednesday she became unconscious, and from then on slept her life away.

Amina Simmons was born in Salem, Mich., July 3, 1836. In November of the same year she came with her parents (Atwell and Lovina Simmons) to Riley Township, then unbroken wilderness, where her father gradually cleared the land and built his home. She was married to Amori B. Cook in September, 1853, who still survives her.

Besides her husband, the deceased is survived by three daughters, Mrs. Jerome



Amori B. and Amina (Simmons) Cook, ca. 1865  
Photo courtesy of Gerald Pike.

Dills, of DeWitt, Mrs. D.S. Pike, of DeWitt, and Mrs. Ida Randall, residing at home, and by two granddaughters, Mrs. Marcus Cutler, of Lansing, and Mrs. George Pike, of Olive. Four great-grandchildren also survive her. Mrs. Cook is the last of her father's family.

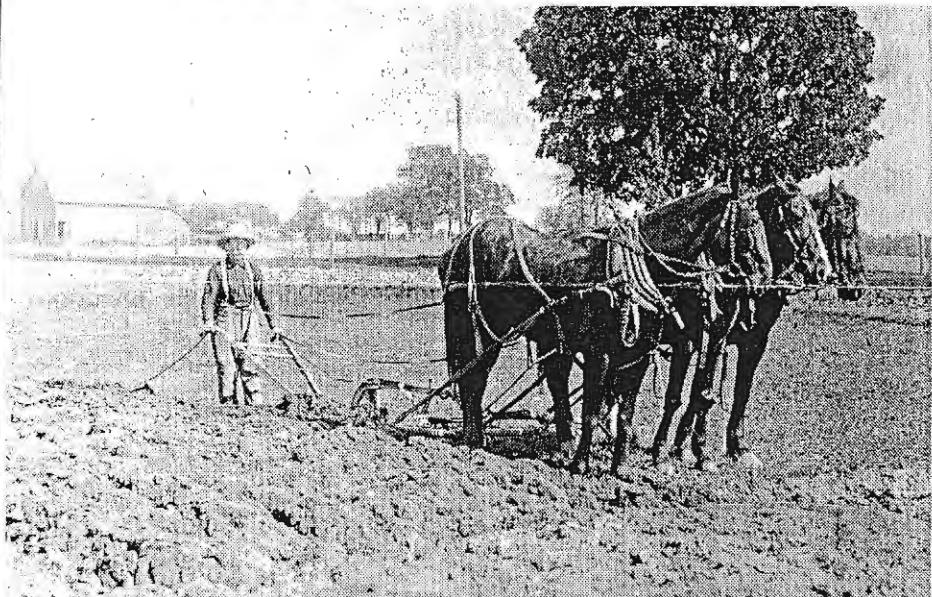
During her long life Mrs. Cook was very active. She was a charter member of South Riley grange, and was a member of Clinton County Pioneer Society. She was not a church member, but a Universalist in faith.

Funeral arrangements are not yet completed. The services will be held at the family home Monday afternoon and interment will be at DeWitt Cemetery.

Thank you Arleta, for making these available. These obituaries, along with several hundred of others, are on file at the Faye Hanson Public Library — all arranged alphabetically in book form for your necrological pleasure.

Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.

## DeWitt remembered:



ELIM CUTLER with his plow and team in South Riley Township about 1900. Photo courtesy of Bonnie Cutler Ward.

## Coin offers grandfather's rules of thumb for planting

By KEN COIN

When I was a kid I remember many discussions over Grandma's dinner table of subjects way beyond my grasp but one of the hardest for me to fathom was the idea of planting by the moon. I was such a moron, I actually thought my great-grandfather went out after dark to plow and plant. It was only in more recent years, after making a complete fool of myself, that I realized the rules of planting by the moon applied to the phases of the moon and that the planting actually took place during daylight hours. He was an excellent farmer and someone paid him a great compliment once by telling me, "Carl was the best farmer I ever worked for. He not only knew all the rules of planting by the moon but he also knew when the moon was wrong."

Once I got it all sorted out I wrote down "Carl Staub's Rules for Planting by the Moon." (Not to be confused with "Planting in the Dark.")

1. Plant beans when the horns of the moon point upward. No climbing plants should be sowed when the horns point down.
2. Plant peas in the new of the moon and all you will get is flowers.
3. Rule of thumb — If it grows above ground, plant it in a new or "waxing" moon. If it grows below ground, plant it in a dark or "waning" moon.
4. Plow under thistles and the like on a full moon and they won't grow back.
5. A blurry moon means "water": don't plant. Corn will be smutty and potatoes will get large, but rot.
6. "Harvest-Moon" is too late for the market.

Great-grandpa was Pennsylvania German and you should understand that they had rules and superstitions for just about every

aspect of life. These are the same people who brought us, "Der schnuppe los zu waerre, rich dreimol in der schu." (Translation, "To cure a cold, sniff three times into your shoe.") Those listed above were the few which rural DeWitt of 1912 found acceptable.

Some other agricultural "rules" common to his culture which he probably knew but forgot (or tried once and was politely asked not to repeat) include:

"To be successful in raising flowering plants, steal the slips."

"Flax will grow tall if you show it your buttocks."

"A woman will loose her husband if she transplants parsley."

"When sowing radish seeds repeat: 'As long as my arm and as big as my backside.'"

"Cutworms will not destroy the young corn if the ploughshare is greased with doughnut fat before beginning to plough."

"Never thank anyone for plants for the garden; they will not grow if you do."

"Urinate into the hole where you expect to plant parsley or it won't grow."

It's logic such as this that makes me say, "I'm Pennsylvania-German and I can't help it."

P.S. Attention DeWitt natives, shame on all of you. Only one person, Bonnie Parker (a relative new-comer I might add) questioned the headline of my article May 4. Joe's Tavern was built in 1842, not 1848 and "still stands proudly today"??? To Bonnie and the rest, you can stop driving around town looking for it. It stood on the southwest corner of Bridge and Main but burned to the ground in 1930. I didn't happen to read the article or I would have corrected it a while ago. I don't have to read these things; that's your job.

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.*

# DeWitt cemetery has veterans from wars dating back to 1812

By KEN COIN

Last week many of us followed the parade to the DeWitt cemetery to witness the time-honored Memorial Day (or "Decoration Day" as many of us were taught) service. There was a light turnout this year; a small but intimate grouping of old-timers and a dash of fresh new faces.

While the service may not offer a lot in the way of pomp and circumstance, for most of us, that's just the way we prefer it.

I'll have mine plain, thank you.

If you like your Memorial Day with more pageantry, go to Arlington National Cemetery. I hear they put on quite a show.

As one of the speakers, John Spoelma, expressed our gratitude to the city for the site of the new veteran's monument, it occurred to me that many people probably wouldn't know about the "old" monument it replaced.

In section "D" (one of the cemetery's original sections), lot #56, there stands a now decrepit monument of cement and marble, badly cracked and once garishly painted silver. (Whose bright idea was that?). The white marble tablet, inset into the cement, reads:

UNKNOWN DEAD  
SOLDIERS & SAILORS  
OF THE WAR OF  
1861-1865  
ERECTED BY  
G.A.R. & W.R.C.

GAR stands for Grand Army of the Republic, a national Civil War veterans organization.

WRC stands for Women's Relief Corps, the wives or woman's auxiliary to the GAR.

This lot in the cemetery was owned by the George W. Anderson, Post #58 of the GAR, which was active in DeWitt from 1882 to 1909.

This old monument has long-since outlived its purpose and yet, while hardly worth repairing, they can't very well just take it out back and shoot it. Maybe, like old soldiers, it will "just fade away."

I have yet to locate any mention of when the first "Decoration Day" was observed in DeWitt, but written reminiscences of long-dead residents tell that the day was organized into pretty much an all-day occasion with a church service preceding the parade to the cemetery, followed by a day of picnics, horse races on Main Street, and the like.

So, next Memorial Day when you can't decide



Old monument to the "Unknown Dead" as it sits in the DeWitt cemetery. Courtesy photo.

whether to turn on the furnace or put on another sweater, make plans to go to the cemetery for a little unpretentious patriotism. The parade always starts about 10 a.m., give or take an hour. Come early and wander around.

When we think of Memorial Day we usually think of veterans from this century but, believe me, this cemetery's got a lot more to offer. It has several from the Spanish American War, more from the Civil War than you could count in a day, at least one from Michigan's "Toledo War", a few from our war with Mexico (1840's), over a dozen from the War of 1812, and, believe it or not, I got a letter recently from a lady in California who wants me to help her verify that William Cole, a veteran of the American Revolution who moved to DeWitt in 1835, may also be buried here.

June 19

## DeWitt remembered:



DEWITT'S CLASS OF 1922 — Pictured are (back row, l. to r.) Mildred Weismiller, Dow Devreux, Lorna Clark, G.A. Buchan (principal), Edna Clark, Archie Kowalk, (front row) Wilhelmina Easton, Minnie Loroff, Lucille Steinhardt, Lawrence Feighting, Marguerite Parks, Grace Zischke, and Edna Roosa.

## *Class of 1922 celebrates its 70th anniversary this year*

By KEN COIN

Just in case the class of 1922 doesn't celebrate its 70th anniversary, the event won't go unnoticed. In viewing the above photograph, please take special notice of the young ladies' nearly identical dresses. Fashion peer pressure is nothing new.

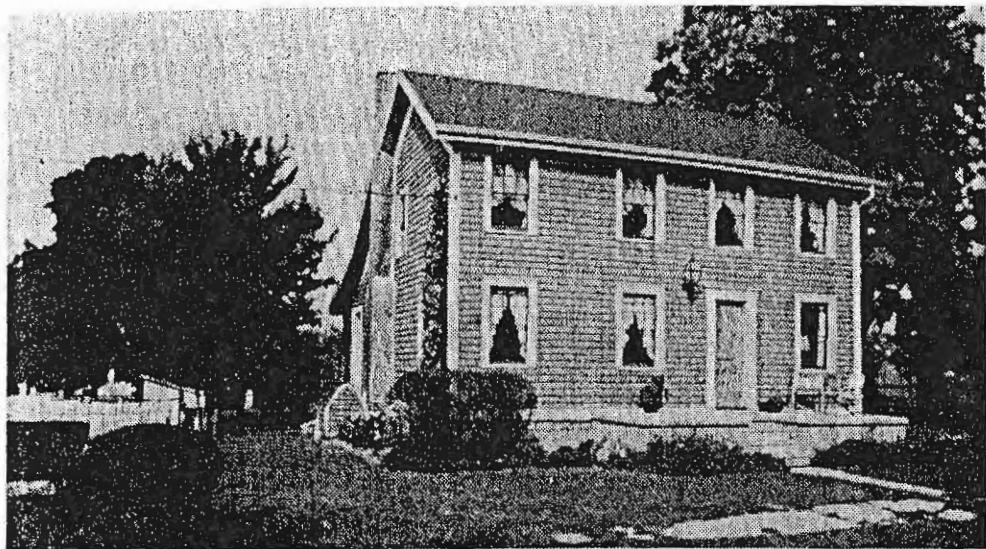
In 1922, DeWitt's school was still considered a "Union" school by state standards. Tenth grade was the highest grade and all the grades (first through 10th) were housed in the old brick building which preceded the present Fuerstenau building.

During this time the country school only offered education through the eighth grade and many rural students wishing to complete one or two higher grades came to DeWitt.

For students wishing to continue their education beyond the 10th grade there were options of completing 11th and 12th grade in Lansing or St. Johns, or of attending "Normal" at either Old Central in Lansing (now part of Lansing Community College's campus) or at Central High in St. Johns.

Hats off to the class of 1922!

*Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the area's primary historian.*



THE FORMER COIN HOUSE AT 109 N. SCOTT — In pioneer times it was located at 204 W. Main and used as a home, offices, infirmary, and drug store of Dr. G. W. Topping. Courtesy photo.

June 22  
1992

## Ghosts and goblins in DeWitt?

By KEN COIN

When I was growing up there were three things which were never spoke of in our house: number one remains "unspeakable"; number two was how Grandpa's car got on Harter's front porch; and number three...the ghost upstairs.

But, now that the house has been sold, its reputation is Paul Horak's problem. Sorry Paul, but there just wasn't a blank on the "Buy/Sell Agreement" which addressed ghouls and apparitions.

I won't go into any details but suffice to say if you spent much time in a certain room upstairs you knew you weren't alone. No green slime or anything Hollywood, just a certainty that you were being watched. Beyond that, I know what I saw and given enough time and psychotherapy, I'll get over it.

Who was this specter in real life? The following excerpts are from an obituary in the Clinton Republican from June of 1864. To set the scene, it was during the Civil War, the "house" referred to here was the one pictured above, then located on Main street. It was at that time the home of Dr. G.W. Topping, his 28-year-old wife, Lucinda and their two young daughters.

"A cloud of gloom was cast over the pleasant village of DeWitt when the sad intelligence of Mrs. Topping's untimely death became known. On the 17th (of June, 1864), Mr. Wellings, a student in the office of Dr. Topping, was startled by shrieks proceeding from the house. On looking out he saw Mrs. T. in the yard, enveloped in

flames. Before he could reach her however, her clothing was entirely consumed — scarcely a fragment being left; and she had fallen to the ground, insensible. She was taken into the house where she showed signs of life. Messengers were at once dispatched for Dr. Topping... (who) soon arrived, but the flames had done their fatal work too surely; nothing could save her life. She lingered about three hours, in a state of apparent insensibility, and then her spirit took flight to the better land.

"Mrs. T. was alone in the house at the time of the accident; it is supposed her clothing caught fire from the stove while she was engaged in her household duties.

"Mrs. T. was the daughter of one of our old citizens, Daniel Hurd, Esq. She was born at Castille, N.Y. Upon her parents emigrating to Michigan when she was ten years of age, she was adopted by her uncle, Ziba Hurd, with whom she lived until 1855, when she came to Michigan... until her marriage with Dr. Topping in 1856.

"She leaves two little daughters, aged four and six, thus suddenly bereft of a mother's care and love. No more will her hands be busied there in deeds of wifely and motherly kindness; no more will she soothe her infants to rest with the tenderness of a young mother's love; no more in that home circle will her voice, and smile, and all thoughtful deeds for those who are so dear to her, shed light and joy. She has gone.

Fraud not!  
Ken Coin is a DeWitt resident and the areas primary historian.

June 29 '72

## DeWitt remembered:



Boaters on Alward Lake, 1904. Courtesy photo.

## Alward Lake was the sight of popular resort years ago

Located about four miles north of DeWitt, Alward Lakes takes its name from the family of Henry Alward and established itself on the northeast corner of DeWitt and Alward Roads prior to the mid-1850's.

About 1892, Arthur St. Clair, a St. Johns native, purchased acreage on the northwest corner of Alward and Loomis roads. This property had a large (but very swampy) frontage on Alward Lake which St. Clair soon cleared, filled, and landscaped into a park-like grove.

Over the years he continued to improve the "resort" by constructing a bath house, filling in a sand beach and offering boats for fishing or "spooning".

In 1900, St. Clair was married to Sarah Ladyman and together they had two children Carrie and William. Mrs. St. Clair died in the Influenza epidemic which returned with the Doughboys and swept the country in 1918.

When the line for the Interurban was laid out in 1900, its course ran right alongside the Alward Resort property which, after the completion of the railroad, enhanced his business tremendously, leaving its rival resort, Merle Beach, in a scramble to remain competitive.

St. Clair died in 1929. The resort continued to be updated and was last owned and operated as such by the DeYoung's in the 1960's.