

In search of Newcomb's negatives

By KEN COIN

DeWitt had many bands such as the one pictured here - but that's another story. This article is about the photographer, H.J. Newcomb.

Throughout the past few years I have brought you dozens of century-old photographs taken by a local photographer named H.J. Newcomb. The variety of his work has contributed much to our visual image of DeWitt life 100 years ago.

Now, I would like your help for any clues which might lead to a family member of his who may still have Newcomb's original negatives.

To begin your search, here's what little I know of him:

Herbert J. Newcomb was born in Michigan in 1844. He and his wife Margaret were married about 1873 and had at least three children: Mary, Warren and Laverne (in 1900 their ages were listed as 14, 7 and 3, respectively).

His name first appears in DeWitt in issues of the DeWitt Motor, where it was advertised that his



The DeWitt Cornet Band posed in the front yard of the school on Washington street. Standing (l. to r.) are George Mann, George Myers, Charles Cole, Henry Webb, Bert Mann, Arthur Moses, and Charles Webb (middle row l. to r.) Charles Siple, William Linn, William Mack, George Gross and George Pike (front row, l. to r.) George Moots, Elmer Mann, and Eddie Lederman. Ca. 1895, H.J. Newcomb, photographer. Photo courtesy of the DeWitt public Library.

"photo car" was in town. In addition to taking portraits, he was offering for sale a large view of the "New Methodist Church". Of his known photographs, all seem to date to the mid-1890's and are simply rubber stamped "H.J. Newcomb, Photographer".

It is not known if he and his family were residents of the DeWitt area during this period, but by 1899 his name first appears in Lansing city directories showing the family of Herbert J. Newcomb, photographer, living in that city on South Pine Street. They remained in Lansing until 1910, when

they moved to DeWitt Township. They took up residence on DeWitt Road in the Hurd neighborhood between Clark and Stoll roads. By this time our photographer's occupation had changed to house painter.

It's here that the clues end. The 1920 census does not include the Newcombs, nor do they again appear in the Lansing directories. By this date Herbert Newcomb would have been 76 years old - possibly dead - although there is no burial record for him nor his wife in the area cemeteries.

I have no trace of their children. Mary Laverne,

but the other son, Warren Newcomb (also a house painter) appears in 1920 to be living near Grand Ledge in Oneida Township with his wife Maud and their infant daughters, Barbara and Norma.

Got any clues?

DeWitt remembered:

Businessmen linked DeWitt and St. Johns

By KEN COIN

Back when Rip was a pup and Clinton County was formed, DeWitt (or, more specifically "Scott's") was named as the county seat. Now, at that time, anything of any progressive substance lay on the south side of the river in the village of New Albany. About all that had been developed on the north side, at "Scott's" was simply Capt. Scott's continually expanding log cabin. So, in 1841, Capt. Scott, figuring that if he was going to keep the county seat on his side of the river he'd best take action. Much to the wide-eyed amazement of his friends and family he began pacing off streets and blocks in the midst of his forest.

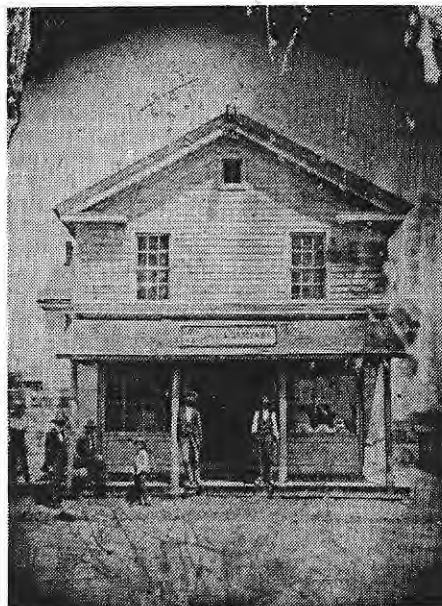
To his credit, within the next 15 years he would see much of his village become of reality with graded streets and substantial homes, shops and stores. The one pictured above was built by John Hicks, who came to DeWitt to clerk for his uncle, David Sturgis, the first merchant to establish himself in Scott's town of DeWitt.

Having heard the rumor (through political connections) that a railroad was being plotted through the center of the county (bypassing DeWitt to the north by several miles), Sturgis went into Bingham Township where he found none other than the state's Auditor-General, The Commissioner of the Land Office, the State Treasurer, the Deputy Attorney-General and the Chief Engineer of the proposed railroad company all flitting about trying to gobble up land before the news broke out that a railroad was making tracks that way.

They might have incorporated themselves into the partnership of Dewey, Cheatam and Howe, but they didn't and although he wasn't invited into the inner fold of this close-knit group, Sturgis was there that summer day in 1854 when they came up with the more apostolic name of St. Johns. For his part, Sturgis did get a street name in his honor.

Meanwhile, back in DeWitt, John Hicks continued to manage the Sturgis business investments and soon bought him out, after Sturgis decided that St. Johns held the better potential. Soon after his purchase, Hicks built the store pictured here and began his own business.

Although an excellent businessman, Hicks did not mix well with the general mercantile set. He had the misfortune of a disfiguring birthmark which covered most of his face and the cruel from



THIS AMBROTYPE in the DeWitt Library's collection is the oldest known photograph of DeWitt and dates to the late 1860's.

The quaint Greek Revival style store building (advertising "Root Beer, Candy and Groceries") was located on the northwest corner of Bridge and Main and was typical of many commercial buildings built in the early 1850's when DeWitt, as county seat, enjoyed a lucrative market for goods and services. It burned in the 1930 fire.

Peeking out in the left background is the first Methodist Church building. Built in 1865, I believe it was moved across the street in the 1890's (when a brick replacement was constructed) and is still standing as the nucleus of the Foo Ying restaurant. Photo courtesy of the DeWitt Library.

tier jokels dubbed him "Hog Hicks." Socially withdrawn, it is said that when in public he usually wore a veil to hide his affliction.

In 1856, with the county seat moving to St. Johns assured (nothing left to do but take a vote to make it legal), Hicks packed up his wife Eliza, sold his store in DeWitt to James Sturgis and moved to St. Johns. There he soon transformed his small business into a mini-empire which also included shipping, banking and manufacturing. He became one of the wealthiest men (the wealthiest if we're only counting honest money) in the county. His mercantile store went out of business shortly after its 100th year, but his lovely Victorian mansion is still standing on State Street (M-21), a block west of the courthouse.

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

DeWitt Remembered: Early newspapers kept DeWitt informed

By KEN COIN

Two weeks ago I touched on the subject of DeWitt during the years when it was the county seat and the boost it gave to local business. Another by-product of the county seat being located here was the establishment of weekly newspapers.

Two newspapers got their start early in DeWitt's history, the first being *The Clintonian*, which began publication in 1842 by Mark A. Child. It continued here for 15 years (later changing its name to *The Clinton Express*) until 1857, when the press office was moved to St. Johns and the name was again changed to *The North-Side Democrat*.

The second newspaper, sort of the grandfather to the *DeWitt-Bath Review*, was the *DeWitt Republican*, which was established in DeWitt in 1856 by the partnership of Hascall and Hilton. It remained in DeWitt for only about two years before it moved to St. Johns and became the *Clinton Republican* and much later, the *Clinton County News*.

Over 15 years of weekly newspapers being published in DeWitt and the saddest part is, only about six copies in all have survived; all of them in the collection of the DeWitt Public Library. But rare things turn up in odd places and I don't think Marjean Pelkey realized what a unique find she had when she recently shared with me a copy of the *DeWitt Republication* dated Sept. 30, 1857.

If you've never perused a newspaper that old, we need to get one thing clear right off the bat: they were nothing like a modern newspaper. Local news is virtually nonexistent and even state or national news was scant. The *Clinton Republican* carried

the news of Lincoln's assassination on page three! But what they are chockfull of are advertisements from local businesses, legal notices and excellent editorials, which usually lambaste whatever or whomever irked the editor that particular week.

The following are some of the items gleaned from this newly-found newspaper:

"Mrs. AH Edwards would most respectfully invite the attention of the inhabitants of Clinton County to her splendid stock of Stoves and Tin Ware, which she will sell on as reasonable terms as can be purchased in any inland town in the state. She has the largest and most varied assortment of stoves every brought to DeWitt." (Her store was located on the west side of the 100 block of N. Bridge Street.)

"JH Bacon, MD - Office, first door south of his residence on Bridge street. Will hold himself in readiness to wait upon those of his friends in this and adjoining Towns who may wish professional services. A general supply of choice Drugs and Medicines just received." (His office and residence was in the large building constructed by Capt. Scott at the southeast corner of Washington and Bridge streets.)

"The Telegraph announces that Col. Benton is better, but does not state his disorder, which we learn to be constipation of the bowels" (This, under *National News*. Whoever Col. Benton was, I'm sure he took great comfort in knowing that the regularity of his bowels was being broadcast across the continent.)

"The County Fair - Sealed proposals will be received from the villages of DeWitt and St. Johns...for the holding of the county Fair... The

place (either St. Johns or DeWitt) that subscribes the most money...will have the Fair held at said place." (Up to this year, county fairs were held on the Public Square in DeWitt. By the way, St. Johns won - DeWitt failed to submit a bid.)

"Mother's save your children. Kemp's Vegetable Worm Pastilles. They are infallible for the cure of internal worms! The peculiar properties which belong to the Kemp's Lozengers have never before been combined in any preparation. They are attractive to the eye as a sweetmeat of delicious flavor, rapid, yet harmless in their operation, composed solely of vegetable material and require no operation, composed solely of vegetable material and require no Mercury to be taken before or after them." (That's a relief - I hate supplementing my prescriptions with a big dose of mercury!)

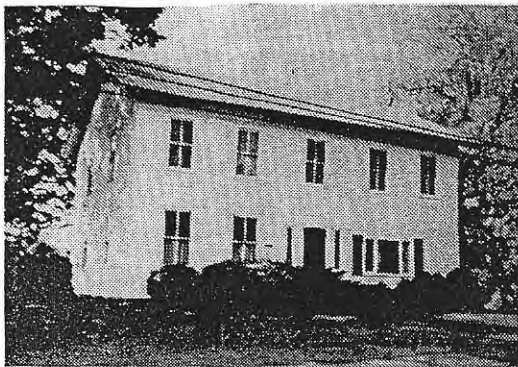
"Whereas my wife Almira E. has left my bed and board without just cause provocation, therefore this is to forbid all persons harboring or trusting her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her contracting after this date." (A common notice for an all too common situation back then.)

A special and belated thanks to Marjean Pelkey for sharing this rarity with us.

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

Historic hotel building up for sale in DeWitt

DeWitt Bath Review
Sept. 5, 1994



BY KEN COIN

While I don't intend for this column to become a glorified classified ad, the "For Sale" sign which recently sprouted in the yard of the Klaver house has caused an amazing amount of interest. The DeWitt community may well want to sit up and take notice for a very unique historic landmark is at stake and the fact that it is located in our own "Historic DeWitt" makes us all a little responsible for its future.

This imposing yet unpretentious structure at the corner of Webb and Bridge in what is now DeWitt was once the old "DeWitt Hotel" of New Albany village. Smothered in early county history, it predates most any building in central Michigan and it's unquestionably the oldest structure in Clinton County.

The "paper village" of New Albany was purchased in 1836 by George T. Clark, a speculator in Albany, New York. In 1838 he took the first steps toward developing his village by hiring, as his resident agent, Milo H. Turner of Rochester, New York, who then came here with a large stock of merchandise and opened the first store. Turner's main purpose, however, was to promote and develop the town of New Albany and sell village lots on Clark's behalf.

During his first year here, Turner leased the newly completed saw mill on Prairie Creek from Hiram Wilcox and began construction of the "DeWitt Hotel". Turner was soon joined by his brother, Jesse Foote Turner, and together they completed the building of the hotel on what was then called "Rochester Street".

When finished, the hotel was a monstrous accomplishment for its time and place. The original two-story portion, a post and beam construction, measures 40 by 32 feet and has a large one story ell to the rear which was added sometime later (perhaps merely 140 years ago!) The simple floor plan features a wide central hall with an open walnut staircase. On the east side were two large parlors connected by wide double doors; the front "Ladies

Parlor" being noticeably more elegant with fine woodwork. On the west side was the tavern room. This hotel, like the later Clinton House, was not a tame "temperance tavern": it was annually licensed by the township to serve "spirituous and intoxicating liquors".

On the second floor were three large "chambers" and three smaller rooms, all connecting. Understand that in pioneer times renting a private room was, if possible, cost prohibitive. Lodgers did not rent rooms, they rented a space, in a bed, often with a stranger. When county court was in session, or when the county supervisors were meeting, bed space in DeWitt was at a premium. It was also recorded that in 1847, when the capital was moved from Detroit to yet-to-be-built Lansing, legislators and state workers swelled DeWitt hotels beyond capacity.

The exterior of the hotel was finished with clapboard siding (an unheard of luxury in the 1830's) with only one architectural element, a finely crafted side-lighted doorway with reeded pilasters, capped by a segmented lintel of Greek-key panels. A similar side-lighted entrance (of more modest design) is located on the south end of the hall.

When the first stage coaches bumped and rumbled through the interior of Michigan in 1839, it was here that travelers stopped for lodging and food. To the pioneers then traveling along the Pontiac-Grand River Trail who were accustomed to crude shanties along the route, this hotel at New Albany must have appeared as a palace in the wilderness when they emerged into its clearing from the surrounding forests.

By 1847, village owner George Clark came to Clinton County, bringing with him his wife Jane and two young children, and took up residence in the hotel. But in May of 1849, both George and Jane Clark died within days of one another. The settling of their estate was by far the largest and most complex undertaking the young Clinton County

Probate Court had yet faced. Appraised, the estate was estimated at excess of \$10,000 (a fortune in 1850!)

An inventory of the hotel, taken at the time, gives an interesting look at how the former hotel must have been furnished during and before the Clarks' residency. Among the outstanding features of the inventory are 45 chairs, seven looking glasses, six beds and a surprising amount of carpeting.

The auctioning of Clark's real estate began on Jan. 22, 1850 at the courthouse steps on East Main street. Milo H. Turner bought much of the property

Coin: Preserving hotel's heritage

Continued from page 6

adjacent to the mill complex on Prairie Creek and Caroline Turner (his wife) was highest bidder for the hotel, some village lots in New Albany and some acreage to the south. Although the Turners purchased much of the estate to add to their already substantial land holdings and business enterprises, they had, by this date, all but left the beckoning call of the California gold fields where they eventually became permanent settlers.

In April of 1851, Caroline Turner sold the hotel and surrounding land to Rowland VanScoy, a farmer of southern DeWitt Township. VanScoy moved his family to the hotel but remained only a short time before moving to Maple Rapids. A chance survivor from the VanScoy ownership is a gold-embossed invitation to a grand Washington's Birthday celebration "At the Assembly Room of Rowland S. VanScoy", February 22, 1853. The admission was \$1.75 but it promised "Good Music will be in Attendance".

In 1850, Henry Moon also made the hazardous trip to the gold

fields of California. He remained there three years, returning to his wife and children with, says his obituary, "a snug fortune". In 1854 he purchased the hotel from VanScoy and this commodious building was just what he needed for his equally large family. He had, at the time, six children, plus his wife Susan's four children by her previous marriage. He acquired more acreage in the vicinity of the house, built barns, planted orchards and eventually improved it into one of the showplace farms of Clinton County.

In 1875, Moon retired from farming and sold the home and farm to his son Sylvester who, with his new bride of only two months, (Jennie Harper) moved into the house. Although they had no children to fill it, they continued to make it their farm home for over 30 years, selling it in 1908 to Frank and Pauline "Polly" (Yanz) Klaver. The historic old home has remained in the Klaver family since that time, eventually passing into the ownership of their son Charlie and his wife Mable.

The name of New Albany is now a unique oddity in DeWitt. The names of its streets

have been changed; the mill complex, long vanished and the surrounding land is quickly succumbing to the machines of modern development. Of New Albany in 1838, of DeWitt and all of Clinton County, only the DeWitt Hotel, a chance survivor remains as a silent monument and sole witness to the past 150-plus years of Michigan's transformation from a wilderness territory to a modern state. There aren't many Michigan towns that can boast a 156-year old stagecoach stop. And although it needs a lot of attention it'd be a pity if "Historic DeWitt" didn't know what a gem it

had until after it was gone.

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

Cemetery served as city park in early days



Easy Riders - A few town girls ready to rip up the streets. Pictured (l. to r.) are Greta (Perry) Bond, Janet (Lankford) Schulz, Donna (Wing) Merrill and Yvonne (Hickerson) Haviland. This photo was taken in the early 1940's. Courtesy photo.

By KEN COIN

I recently showed this photograph to Yvonne Haviland to confirm the names, and she not only remembered the picture but also remembered the bike ride these girls took that day some 50 years ago. Yvonne and her friends wanted to have a picnic, so they got a lunch packed (notice the tin lunch pail in Greta's hand) and the four of them sped off.

Bear in mind that DeWitt at the time had no park; didn't need one, we had the cemetery. The DeWitt girls thought nothing of going

to the cemetery to play and have lunch. Isn't that what cemeteries are for? Well, Donna (Yvonne's cousin who was just visiting and was not accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of DeWitt's recreational facilities) wasn't too keen on the idea. In fact, she was mortified at the thought of eating in the cemetery. So, she hopped back on her bike and pedaled back into town.

As to the location of this picture - I thought I'd hold out to see if any older readers could figure it out. I could just say that it was taken

behind the big old apartment house at 210 W. Main, but that would be too simple...Oh no, I've got to go way back...

Currently at the northwest corner of Scott and Main are four houses: Cowan's, Hughes' (the old Berkimer house) and the big apartment house on Main with Horak's (the blue salt-box) on Scott.

From the 1860's to the turn of the century this whole block was owned by Dr. George Topping, whose home was the current apartment house. The salt-box (then located where Hughes' house now

stands) was the doctor's office/hospital/drug store and dormitory for medical students; and a small portion of Cowan's current house sprouted later directly on the corner (I believe as a drug store operated by Dr. Topping's son).

Anyway, to make a short explanation longer: After Dr. Top-

ping's death, the property was split and about 1913, Bert Florian built the current (directly behind the girls) and selling or trading it to the Sibley Lumber Co. who rebuilt it into a rental duplex.

At about the same time, Cowan's house was built, incorporating the little building which

already stood on the site. (I believe the current house was built by Dr. Sanford, but as I write this I can envision about 30 senior citizens grumbling "No it wasn't!" so I won't say it's so.)

The girls are pictured here on a driveway,

Continued on page 7

Coin: Looking into history

Continued from page 6

which did (and still does) separate Hughes' house from the apartment house. But notice that behind them it curves back to the right and continues to Scott Street. When the property was split Dr. Topping's original driveway became a common easement for the property owners.

A basement level auto garage (directly behind Greta's head) was added to the old salt-box. But as it was only a few feet from the

lot line, this latest word in attached garages was only accessible by using the common driveway. Likewise, Dr. Topping's huge old carriage barn straddled the lot lines and was used by several of the property owners until it was torn down

and replaced by Bert Florian (around 1916) with the current barn on the Hughes' property.

Ken Coin is a resident of DeWitt and the area's primary historian. His column appears here twice monthly.



The Women's Auxiliary to the KKK? No, just a harmless group of "Royal Neighbors" posed in front of the old Judge Hiram Stowell house at the northeast corner of Main and Franklin. Ca. 1918, Mark Norris photograph.

Meet the Royal Neighbors

By KEN COIN

Modesty, Faith, Courage, Unselfishness and Endurance, that's what the banners of the DeWitt Royal Neighbors proclaimed. Quite a lot to live up to.

The members pictured here include: (standing l. to r.) Blanche VanDyke (obviously the "Queen" because she's sporting the crown), Belle Knapp, Hazel Farrier, Nina Yanz, Martha Blizzard, Mattie Spayde, Mary Smally, Edith Wagner, Kate Gillett and Francis Mann. Seated (l. to r.) are Hannah Stanton, Minnie Staub, Ida Mae Norris, Grace Hammond, Matie Staub and Lottie Martzke.

The DeWitt Royal Neighbors, Camp #432, was organized in 1896 as a women's auxiliary to the Modern Woodmen, which was a national fraternal organization. They began with 26 charter members; Martha Simmons, Helen Rouse and Kate

Gillett being the first officers. In the early years both groups met at rented sites in town, until 1898 when they built a new hall on the southwest corner of Main and Franklin (now Keck's Appliance).

The organization did much to promote entertainment and social activities in the community.

Their theatrical productions, drawing on local talent, were always well received. And as the demand for community dances, the mainstay of local entertainment, shifted from the ballroom of the old Clinton House hotel to the smaller but more modern Grange and Woodman halls, the

Royal Neighbors competed well with the Grange ladies in offering meals and refreshments in conjunction with their dances.

As with so many other turn-of-the-century organizations in DeWitt, the Royal Neighbors, having outlasted its original purpose, disbanded some years ago.

If any readers should happened to have the record books for these or other area organizations in their possession, it would be nice to see that copies were made and placed on file at the DeWitt Library.

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

Another chapter in the chronicle of the Scott family



Alta and Lenna Scott - Real life melodrama with tragic ending. Photos courtesy of Ken Coin.

By KEN COIN

By Another DeWitt "Founders Day" has recently passed and in lieu of my droning on about how DeWitt was founded, I'd simply continue with another chapter in the chronicle of the Scott.

Lenna and Ethel, daughters of James and Mary Scott, were born in DeWitt in the early 1870's. After the death of their mother on Christmas Day, 1875, it seemed only natural that the little ones should go to their grandparents' home until their father could find them a new mother. The little girls are doted on by their grandparents, David and Mary Scott. "Indulged" said some; "Spoiled rotten!" maintained others. But as they grew older - well-educated, well-dressed and well-mannered, they were well-received among the smart social sets of DeWitt and Lansing. But there was dark side to their formative years - the absence of their father.

James Scott remarried in 1880, to Sarah Throop, but the newlyweds did not bring the girls back into their new home. Within a few years the couple had begun a young family; still the girls were not called for. In 1884, James and Sarah moved with their children to Wolverine. Lenna and Alta did not go along but remained behind, still at the home of their grandparents.

In 1892, their grandmother Scott, who had raised the young ladies since they were toddlers, suddenly died. It was a tremendous shock to the grandfather, who began to show signs of failing health. It was soon time

for the girls to reverse the tables and begin caring for him. In 1895, while spending the winter at Knoxville, Tennessee with his niece, Agnes (Pike) Fair, David Scott died, leaving Lenna and Alta, both unmarried, to fend for themselves.

Now enters into the picture, a Creole from New Orleans named Placide Reynes'. I haven't a clue where or how he connected up with Lenna Scott but they met and were engaged to be married. In

1896 the Scott sisters went to New Orleans to meet his family and be introduced to Creole society. But the trip did not go as planned. No sooner had the girls arrived when Alta, then 24, became ill and died suddenly.

Instead of the long engagement she had planned, Lenna hurriedly married and stayed in New Orleans where Placide had a jewelry store. From this point, things went from bad to worse. Within a few years Placide shot himself.

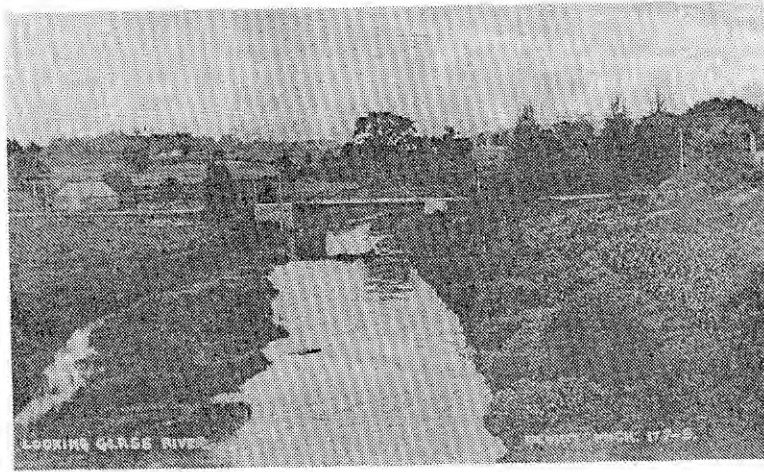
Some might have called it suicide, but they would have been quickly corrected by the loyal family who maintained that a gun in the hand and a hole in the brain does not automatically equal suicide.

Having experienced quite enough of New Orleans, Lenna returned to Michigan. Family accounts do not state where she lived or how she supported herself, only that she was a gifted musician and, for a time, a milliner.

But let's recap here: within a matter of a few years Lenna lost the

woman who raised her, the man who raised her, her sister and constant companion and finally her husband. What to do? Lenna went insane. She spent the last half of her life (over 40 years) within the walls of the State Hospital at Traverse City. Following her death in 1957, she was at last reunited with the father who had given her up when she was three years old by being buried with him in the cemetery at Wolverine.

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



The Looking Glass River (evidently at low tide) around the turn of the century appears more like a marshy little creek as it passes under the Bridge Street bridge.

The iron bridge, constructed about 1900, remained in use until the early 1960's. If there is any sense to be made from the following nonsense, it's important to know that the bridge had low upright iron trusses.

The one on the east side of the structure was set back from the edge to accommodate a walkway; giving the bridge the appearance that it was set somewhat into the roadway. And, as evidenced by an occasional driver, it was. Courtesy photo.

Coin relays infamous DeWitt "biker" story

By KEN COIN

The belief exists in every DeWitt child that, starting at either the stop light or at the corner of Bridge and Webb, if they could just pedal down Bridge Street fast enough they should be able to easily glide up the hill on the other side. When I was a kid and bikes came in one size (large)...and had two speeds (sitting or standing)...we made many attempts, fueled on by..."The Legend of the Kid Who Almost Made it."

It was one of those too hot Dog Days and quite a crowd of kids had collected at the river. Some were playing at Riverside Park; some were asking for a nasty infection by wading in the river while the rougher crowd was hanging-out on the bridge, dangling from the walkway or climbing on the iron trusses. About every half-hour some lost motorist looking for the highway would rumble over the old bridge; but other than that, Bridge Street was empty.

The hoodlums on the bridge were the first to hear the hum of the bike as it came purring down

the street from uptown. It was a big red Huffy with lots of chrome and a fake gas tank between the seat and the handlebars. The puffy whitewall tires seemed to float on the pavement and two playing cards, secured with clothespins, made the spokes sing like a harp. All in all it was quite a street package and everyone was so taken by it that they failed to take notice of the rider as it sputtered across the bridge. But the biker hollered back to his audience, "I'm gonna do it!" and everyone on the bridge knew exactly what he meant.

The kids in the river came scrambling to shore flicking bloodsuckers off their calves and the kids at the park shimmied up the monkey bars for a better view. The boys on the bridge watched as the biker cleared the top of the hill and circled around in front of Charlie Kalver's. Without making a stop the rider threw his chest to the handlebars and began pedaling back down the hill. Faster and faster...past Mable Sibley's his wheels were like twin buzz saws and the whirring playing

cards were getting whipped to shreds.

Faster and faster... as he cleared Wilcox's the cards gave out leaving only mute stubs. Never before had DeWitt kids seen such speed! They knew this was it: they were witnesses to history and this was the kid who was going to make it! So intent were they that no one noticed the Rosevale truck coming down the hill behind them. Faster and faster...only the biker saw the oncoming threat and he veered a little to the right as he approached the bridge. But, alas, a little too far to the right...still pedaling

(faster and faster) he hit the iron truss that seemed to jut out into the street. Up the slanted side of the truss he rocketed, so fast that as he flew off the peak he broke the sound barrier and burst into flames!

The kids scoured the area hoping to find clues to the biker's identity, but all that was recovered was a valve stem and the two clothespinned card stubs, Jack of Diamonds and the Ace of Spades. Throughout the last weeks of summer the kids read the *DeWitt Advertiser* and listened in on the party lines hoping to discover who was missing, but came up with nothing. When school started in the fall (and everyone was present and accounted for) it was agreed that their mysterious hero, "The kid who almost made it", must have been loner, a prince of the pavement...just passing through.

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



The old McLouth place, currently the home of Roger and Phyllis Griffin at 303 N. Bridge Street. Ca. 1930, courtesy of the DeWitt Public Library.

McLouth the old home pictured here remained vacant or rented for a number of years. It was their granddaughter (the only surviving child of Willis and Josephine) who revitalized the home. Merle McLouth and her first husband, William Kraas, bought the Sibley Lumber Co. in DeWitt around 1920. At about the same time they built a home across the street from the old home-stand.

See Coin, page 19

McLouth history dates back to mid-1800's in DeWitt

By KEN COIN

Recently the Griffins have been cleaning out the attic of their landmark home and have been passing along some McLouth family papers to be placed in the library's local history collection. The following is a brief account of the family who made this their home for nearly 100 years.

In 1856, Newton and Emily (Hathaway) McLouth came up from Lenawee County and settled on a homestead four miles north of DeWitt in Riley Township. Shortly after the Civil War they moved to the DeWitt area, this time purchasing the former Morgan Christopher farm (at that time the farmland north of Madison street and west of Bridge).

The house pictured above was built for the McLouths in 1871 and substantial barns were added to the property in 1873 and 1888. A modern operation, it became one the showplace farms of the area. Besides farming and stock raising, Newton McLouth became actively engaged in land dealings and at one time owned five area farms totaling over 550 acres.

The McLouths had only two children, twin sons, William and Willis, born in 1856. William died when only five years old and the remaining child, Willis, eventually joined in business partnership with his father. In 1881 Willis married Josephine Holmes, a local teacher. They purchased and rebuilt a house

across the street (currently the home of Dave and Peggy Haviland at 314 N. Bridge) where they remained for over 50 years.

Willis continued much of his father's land interests after the latter's death and was also a long-time partner in the DeWitt Mill and later became partners with two DeWitt merchants, Homer Brazee and John E. Jayne. In later years he was manager of DeWitt's Kraas Lumber and Coal Co. (owned by his daughter Merle). He and Josephine were charter members of the Masons and Eastern Star and active members of the old Clinton County Pioneer Society.

After the deaths of Newton and Emily