



DeWitt girls staging a "Mock Wedding", ca. 1914. In 1914 Lorna Woodruff sent this photo to her aunt, Lucy Lorenz in Grand Junction, Colorado. Eighty years later (and through a succession of antique post card dealers) it found its way back to DeWitt.

Conveniently, Miss Woodruff clearly noted the identities for her aunt: w-Maud Rose, v-Hazel Bray, t-Norma Beadle,

s-Helen Dills, r-Miss Havens, o-Reva Treadwell, x-Lorna Woodruff (as the minister), a-Pearl Tucker (as the bride) and b-Lulu Clavey (as the groom).

Although the little flower girls (far left) is unidentified, Lorna made a special note to Aunt Lucy that "Miss Havens is the primary teacher here and was dressed up as an old farmer." Courtesy photo.

# Exploring vintage homes in DeWitt

By KEN COIN

There is something about houses and history that goes hand in hand. Anyone who's lived in an old house can't help but wonder who preceded them, who built it, what it was like when it was new. I get a lot of questions from people about the history of their homes so, this year, I'd like to take a look at the really old homes in DeWitt.

First, I need to explain some rules...

I define "really old" as somewhere in the vicinity of 130-plus years. In the town of DeWitt, this usually equates to the smaller nondescript houses tucked in between the bigger, fancier, turn-of-the-century homes (which do not qualify as "really old").

More often than not I will be using modern pictures because:

(a) I don't have many vintage pictures of these homes and;

(b) if I run an old picture of a house that has changed drastically, every-

one gets extremely confused.

I probably won't refer to these houses by the names of the present owners. My apologies to all of you who own these homes but, frankly, I don't have a clue anymore of who lives where. Besides which, unless you've lived in your old house since the invention of dirt, the rest of us know it by some other name. (That's supplemental Old House Rule, #14-c... it doesn't get your name attached to it until after you move out or are carried out".)

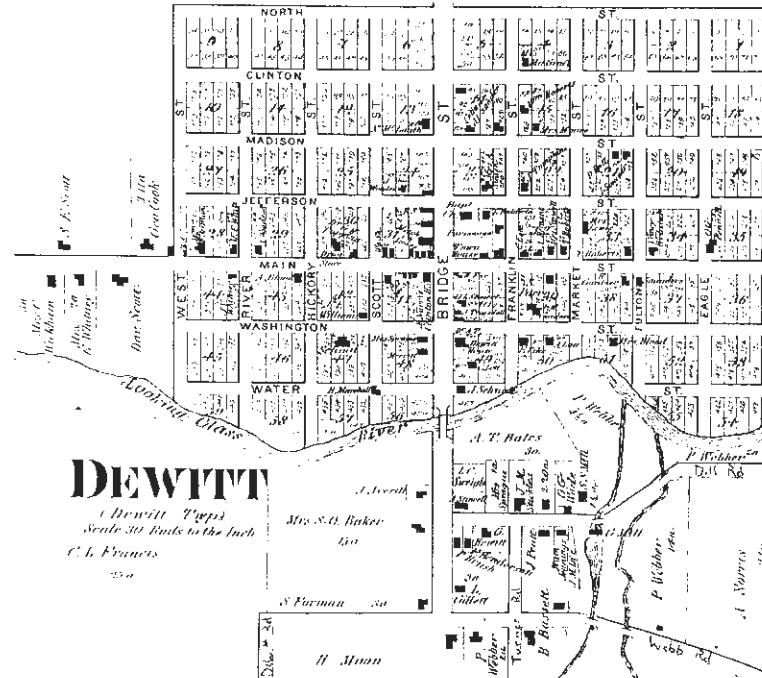
Bear in mind that many of these homes might not be the ones that you drive by and find the most interesting. But don't judge the Plain Jane's by their appearance; they are the real hidden treasures of DeWitt's history. They were built in an era when milled lumber was an expensive luxury - at outlying farms, log construction was still common place. They were built when a house of six, or even four rooms, was

extravagant and doors with hinges and knobs were a status symbol.

There is a special warmth to these old houses (well, maybe not in January, but figuratively speaking). Most all have been altered beyond recognition of their original appearance. Many have been added to, some moved around the town like chess pawns, some cut down the center and made into two but, most remarkably, they have survived an average of 140 years and been called "Home Sweet Home" by thousands of DeWitt residents.

By my calculations there are enough "really old" houses on north side of the river in the old platted village to keep this column filled until 1996. While I probably won't be able to control myself from now and again digressing into some dribble of nonsense, I hope that throughout this year you'll enjoy learning about DeWitt's oldest homes: the people who built them and the families who lived in them.

If you're new to the area and still haven't quite figured out why DeWitt is touted as "Historic", maybe these vignettes will give you a better appreciation. And if you live in one of DeWitt's oldest homes (and haven't figured out why we continue with the "Historic" bit), maybe these will instill you with a little pride in your old house, with its sagging floors, dipping roof, and crooked door frames. Ken Coin is a resident of DeWitt and the area's primary historian.



A plat map of DeWitt taken from the Atlas of Clinton County, Michigan, published by C.O. Titus, 1873. Of the nearly 100 structures noted on this map, more than 40 are still standing.

## History

# Matson and Skorich office was home to Bradfield family

By KEN COIN

Walter Hubble came to the area in 1837 as an 18-year-old member of the "Waterloo Joint-Stock Co." which founded Wacousta. He was (with perhaps a brother) a merchant there for the company until 1840 and remained a resident until 1844 when he moved to some government land he had purchased in 1836 in Essex Township (north and west of present St. Johns). He remained there only a few years before moving back south, to DeWitt, in 1846. Here he established himself in partnership with Courtland Hill in a general store on the northeast corner of Washington and Bridge (on the present site of Terranova's).

That same year (1846), Hubble purchased the lots where the Matson & Skorich offices are now located and, in 1848, built the present building as his home. He apparently arrived in DeWitt with a political reputation for, aside from his vocation as a merchant, he was elected county clerk in 1846 and held the office until 1850. He was also elected justice of the peace in 1848. His political career seems to have offered a sufficient wage for it was also in 1848 that his partnership with Courtland Hill dissolved and Hill (Bengal Township's first settler in 1837) returned to his own substantial homestead in that township.



The old Randolph Strickland home at 202 E. Washington, currently the law offices of Matson and Skorich.

Although this photograph was taken over 50 years ago, the house itself was, at that time, nearly 100 years old. The picture shows a unique feature original to the house, a recessed porch (on the right) which faced the west. Tending to her flower beds in the center is Jessie Bradfield; the house was "home" to the Bradfield family for many years in the middle of this century. Ca. 1939, Helen Hilts, photographer; courtesy of Dan Matson.

For Hubble, what appeared to be a political career on the rise was simply a flash in the pan. He died in the fall of 1851 at the young age of 34 and was buried in the DeWitt Cemetery.

Randolph and Mary (Gooch) Strickland bought this home soon after their marriage in 1851. (You'll remember Mary: it was her mother who had the misfortune of falling off the packet boat along the Erie Canal.) The site was conveniently located for

About 1870, the home was purchased by Elisha and Frances (Marshall) Pike, who remained here until the 1880's when they became part of the large migration of DeWitt families who relocated to the area of Wolverine, Michigan.

Except for the elimination of the porches, the house remains much as it originally did nearly 150 years ago. Several original interior doors, with thumb latch catches, remain intact. The solid structure

was built with post and beam construction and the unique hip-roof is self-supporting, offering a large second floor "chamber", originally accessed by a tiny closet staircase.

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

## DeWitt home built in 1847 is still part of old downtown

By KEN COIN

Newlyweds Cortland and Lucinda (Reese) Hill made their first appearance in DeWitt in the fall of 1837 en route to their homestead, which was to be the first settlement in Bengal Township (eight miles north and west of DeWitt). In 1846 they returned to DeWitt where Cortland set up a mercantile partnership with Walter Hubble. The following year the Hills made plans to build a new house in DeWitt on the northwest corner of Scott and Washington streets.

In the vault of the Register of Deeds office in the courthouse in St. Johns there was recently rediscovered, an old ledger which contains copies of various business contracts dating from the mid-1800's. Among them is a

contract between Cortland Hill and James W. and Jesse F. Turner for the construction of Hill's house on lot 328 of block 42. Dated June 10, 1847, for the consideration of \$460, the Turner brothers agreed to build this house. The contract is filled with details regarding the construction techniques, materials and finishing specifications.

The house was to be one and half stories, 24'x32'. Built in a braced post and beam method, the beams and corner posts were to be 8" x 10" with 2" x 5" studs (5" x 5" beside windows and doors) and 3" x 8" floor joists. All framing was to be of oak or ash including the decking boards of the roof.

The house was to have 11 windows, each of 12 panes of glass, each pane 10" x 14". It would contain eight interior doors and three exterior doors (3' x 7" x 2" thick). All floors were to be clear "matched" pine with the exception of the kitchen, which specified white ash. Eight-inch baseboards were to be finished throughout the house with beaded molding on all doors and windows. All finish lumber was to be clear pine, black walnut or butternut (a pale walnut substitute).

Extra-wide cornice

## History



114 S. Scott Street - The pioneer home of Cortland and Lucinda Hill, Bengal township's first pioneers, built in 1847

during their brief residence in DeWitt. Photograph by Jennifer Vincent.

boards and gable-end trim was to be installed in the latest Greek Revival style "to match that of (the) store built by Thomas Lewitt". One of the exterior doors was to also be finished in a high Greek style with "extra fixings" and there was to be, in addition, a "5' square portico (porch) with roof and lattis (sic.) on 2 sides".

There was to be a 9' x 32' cellar and the house would rest on 18" thick stone walls, faced with cobblestones. (Note - although the house was later raised onto a higher foundation, traces of the original cobblestone facing can still be seen at ground level from Washington

Street.)

The Hill family remained in this home only a few years, selling it to Frederick Reed. Joseph Edmond Williams, a carpenter, purchased it in the early 1860's and owned it until the end of the century. He and his wife Abby had 10 children, which filled the house to capacity. A peek inside the household in the 1880 census shows eight adults and two children living within (Praise the Lord and pass the aspirin!) Their adult children included: Edmond, George, Odgen, Nellie, Edith McClintock, Marinda Worden-Lapham, Ellen Stampfli and Eunice Vail.

## Old county jail saves life of neighbor

By KEN COIN

The unique old Clinton County Jail at 206 E. Washington has a very interesting history, but before I go into all the when's, who's and how's of its origin I'd like to diverge and simply tell a story or two regarding some of its notable past inmates.

In the early days of DeWitt there was a family who homesteaded north of the village in the township of Olive. For the sake of loyalty, I won't relate the actual family name - we'll call them the Smith family.

Mr. Smith styled himself a blacksmith, but he conducted only a limited business - not for want of customers, but more for lack of inclination. The Smith family lived in poverty, even by squalid pioneer standards. The neighboring settlers' usual charity, however, turned to indignation when it slowly became apparent that there was more to Mr. Smith than met the eye.

Beside a blacksmith, Smith was also a thief, horse-steal rustler, and prone to filing frivolous lawsuits upon his good neighbors. People soon tired of it. Some individuals, exasperated by lawful measures, others took a more direct approach by beating the tar out of Smith whenever they felt justice could be best served.

If nothing else, Smith was at least consistent, and when his mischief failed to cease, a vigilante committee was formed among the usually placid local set. An "indignation meeting" was held where, after reviewing all the options, it was decided to kill Smith. It was suggested that the men draw lots to see who would have the duty of doing him in. One settler even more fed up



The first Clinton County Jail was located at 206 E. Washington St. in DeWitt. Photo by Jennifer Vincent.

than the rest, told the group not to bother with drawing straws - he'd gladly do the job.

The vigilante committee set a plan to converge as a group on the Smith homestead, and thereby give their volunteer a chance to snuff out Smith. Disguised as Indians, the group was about to carry out their objective, when word was received that Smith had been taken into custody.

Wouldn't you know, amongst the group was some gaudy-two-shoes who spoiled everyone's fun by making tracks to DeWitt to tattle to the county sheriff. A posse had then been sent out to apprehend Smith, who was then brought to DeWitt and lodged here in the jail. If you think the vigilante committee was indignant before, now they were spitting tacks.

All dressed up and nowhere to go, the committee decided it would be a waste of good war paint to simply go home, so they modified their plans. They swooped down on the Smith homestead and destroyed everything in sight (which, besides the log cabin, wasn't much).

It was a rousing

success, and the suggestion was quickly made that they should continue on to DeWitt, drag Smith from the jail, and string him up. A second suggestion was made that the group might get a big jug of corn squeezin's, polish it off, and then brag about their exploits. The jug won out.

The panic-stricken Smith family, upon seeing their vengeful neighbors dressed as Indians, had fled to DeWitt to seek refuge, but there was no sanctuary to be found. It wasn't that DeWitt folk lacked compassion altogether - it was just that the Smith's smelled so foul. They were turned away at every door, and eventually simply walked away.

Speaking of walking away, Smith himself soon after escaped from the jail, and he too made tracks for parts unknown. Later, it was circulated around DeWitt that he was run over by a train in the far west. Could be, but that sounds more like wishful thinking (or the corn squeezin's talking again).

*Ken Cain is a resident of DeWitt and an area historian.*

## Coin relays part two of DeWitt infamous jail history

By KEN COIN

In the frontier years DeWitt's county jail housed many outlaws. These were mostly limited to the town drunks, petty thieves, runaway children and an occasional painted lady. There were few sensational crimes in Clinton County but there was one exceptional trial.

In the summer of 1847 there occurred a very unusual murder. It happened along the Maple River, far removed from DeWitt. But as DeWitt was then the county seat, the accused was brought here to the jail to stand trial. His name is not recorded, but he was a Native American of the Saginaw tribe, whose home was along the Pine River at "the Village of the Little Pines" where St. Louis (in Gratiot County) is now located. He and a companion had been in the village of Ionia where accompanied by several others from their tribe they went on a drinking spree that lasted several days. Returning home along the Maple River, the two intoxicated men decided to camp alone for the night but had only one blanket between the two of them. In the morning one of the pair lay dead and cold with a knife in his

chest; the other warm but guilty.

After being brought to DeWitt, the accused lingered in the cellar of the jail while the county officials debated how to proceed. Sheriff Wm. F. Jenison and Prosecutor Levi Townson were well relieved when a deputation of Saginaw Indians arrived to petition for the murderer's release into their custody to be tried by them in their own time-honored fashion. Their petition was quickly granted and the accused was taken to the Pine River settlement to await a trial among his own people.

The story would probably end here if it hadn't been for a minister who chanced to enter into the picture. Rev. Manasseh Hickey, a traveling missionary to the Indians of central Michigan, happened to be in the Maple River Valley during that summer and stumbled upon an extraordinary occurrence which he recorded in amazing detail. His vivid account (from which this following synopsis was taken) is recorded in the Michigan Pioneer Collections, Vol. 4.

Rev. Hickey accompanied by his interpreter John Kahbeeje made a surprise visit to the Ojibwa

village of Chief Wabecake Makitoquet at the rapids of the Maple which was described by the pastor as a village of some 40 to 50 families. They were received in the log house of the chief but given an unusually cool reception. After an extended conversation, Kahbeeje was able to determine that the chief suspected the white minister of being something of a spy sent by the whites to pry into their affairs. Their "affair", as it turned out, was the trial of the murderer which was to be held that same day.

Although this Ojibwa band had no real connection with the Saginaw band to which the murderer and accused belonged, it was the native custom to hold "court" at the village nearest to the scene of the crime. Hence, Makitoquet's village was swelled with the families of the victim and accused as well as those of the chiefs who had come to conduct the trial. The term "trial" can be used loosely here. The accused was considered guilty from the start. This was a court to determine his sentence.

A new wigwam with a seating capacity of 200 persons had been erected for the occasion from poles and covered with bark.

After two simultaneous feasts, (one involving those associated with the murderer and one involving those associated with the victim), a procession from both feasts was made to the new wigwam for the proceedings.

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"They entered as if they were going to a funeral - all parties dressed in their regalia: blankets, leggings, moccasins tastily worked with beads and colored porcupine quills, silver bands on their arms, colored turbans on their heads, with various feathers of wild birds in their hair. The blankets of the Indians were white, red and blue. Their shirts were mostly turkey-red calico. The women had broadcloth

blankets, many of them blue, and skirts of the same material."

With the wigwam filled by the principal families, nearly 100 more spectators were seated outside in a semi-circle facing the open

doorway. The crowd, nearing 300, was completely silent. It was time to begin.

More to follow...

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

*DeWitt remembered*

# Justice wasn't exactly at the heart of famous Indian trial

KEN COIN

Along one side of the large wigwam sat the family of the deceased. The most distant relatives were positioned in the far, back corner with the widow and her children seated closest to the door. Likewise, the family of the accused were situated along the opposite wall. The last to enter was the accused, escorted by the Muskahkenene, the medicine man, Shaman of the Saginaw people.

The murderer made every effort to form a morose picture. His face was blackened with charcoal to denote sorrow; his blanket and leggings were torn with holes to show humility and regret. He and the Muskahkenene took their places in the center of the silent wigwam.

After a long period of silence, the first to speak was a member of the criminal's family. He rose and related to the audience a full account of the murder along with a statement regarding the accused's full confession to the crime. At the end of his speech, an endorsement of the criminal's entire family was affirmed with an "Ah!" The Muskahkenene then rose and took a dozen new Mackinaw blankets from the criminal's family and laid them down in front of the widow and her children.

Next, in turn, a member of the murdered chief's family rose and spoke on behalf of the deceased. He extolled the good qualities of the dead chief and of the loss to his widow, his 16-year old son and four smaller children; a loss which could not be restored by a few Mackinaw blankets. His remarks were endorsed by an "Ah!" from the accused's family, after which the Muskahkenene again brought forward gifts, this time blue broadcloth and offered it to the widow.

A fourth speaker then spoke on behalf of the chief's children. His sad oration was followed by another "Ah!" from the family.

A fifth and final speaker on behalf of the accused then rose and spoke frankly, addressing the fact that the murderer's family had sacrificed a great deal to buy these presents for the widow in the hopes of buying the life of

this foolish young criminal. They, for their part, had shown him forgiveness by their generosity and hoped that the widow and the family of the murdered chief could do likewise. "Ah!"

More presents were produced: broadcloth, wampum, beads and tobacco. Following this presentation there was a profound silence among those inside and outside the wigwam which lasted more than five minutes. At length, a sixth and final speaker rose and with great determination outlined the needless destruction this situation had caused in everyone's lives. "Ah!"

Once again the Muskahkenene presented more of the same sort of gifts to the widow then returned to the center of the wigwam where he again sat down next to the accused. It was now time for the Muskahkenene to bring the ceremony to closure. He took a plug of Cavendish tobacco from his fawn skin pouch and slowly filled the bowl of his large, redstone, Mississippi pipe and attached the long carved stem. Also from his pouch he brought out a small flint, a steel and a small piece of punk (shredded tinder).

He rose and addressed the entire assembly: "Brothers, we have met here before the Great Spirit, who sees us all, who knows why we are met, who sees right down into our hearts, who knows what your tongues have talked, and what your hearts have thought and he knows what these presents are that I have carried over and given to this family to make peace for this trouble. Now, if you all are true to each other and intend to settle this trouble and let this young man that has brought this trouble in our wigwams and hearts live, then I will have to strike this flint once only with this steel to light this pipe of peace. But if some of you have kept back in your hearts, thoughts and feeling contrary to peace, as you on both sides have talked, then I will have to strike this flint more than once to bring the fire to light this pipe of peace."

The assembly replied, "Ah!" in unison as the Muskahkenene held the tools above the pipe bowl. For

the first time since the proceedings began, the murderer looked up from the ground to see if the pipe would light with one strike. It did. The medicine man took a few healthy puffs to get the pipe stoked then offered it to each of the murdered chief's family within the wigwam beginning with the young son, second the widow. Only when presented with the pipe did the widow show any sign of emotion. Her rigid dignity cracked as she smoked and tears streamed down her cheeks.

Some showed signs of resistance to smoking the peace pipe and had to be offered a second or third time. These shows of abstinence added to the tension within for it was known by all that any member of the bereaved family had a full right to refuse the pipe and instead, in the full presence of all, without explanation, rise up and kill the murderer with a tomahawk.

When each of the bereaved had shared the pipe, it was then offered likewise to each of the murderer's family until at last, all had made the sign of peace. The court was closed and the murderer was allowed to live.

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

# First Clinton County jail had 4-inch thick walls

By KEN COIN

Yes, all this and he draws too. The accompanying sketch was done by yours truly for the library 20 years ago, (I kind of choked on those last three words) to give a clearer look at how the old jail may have appeared when it was new. The porch is a bit of artistic license - there may or may not have been one on the original structure.

For the past few weeks, I've passed along stories of former inmates of this historic hoosegow but the structures' value to DeWitt's heritage is enough to warrant some

serious appreciation by "Historic DeWitt." A jail building, 150 years old, is a true rarity in Michigan.

The subject of the jail first appears in the records in 1840 when money was appropriated by the newly formed county for an office building and for a jail and jailers residence. The building contracts were awarded to William H. Utley, a local builder whose bids were considered to be the lowest of any "responsible" bidder. His bid for the jail was recorded at \$1,078. The completion date was set for the fall of 1841 but when this was not accomplished, Seth Marvin was hired to finish the project.

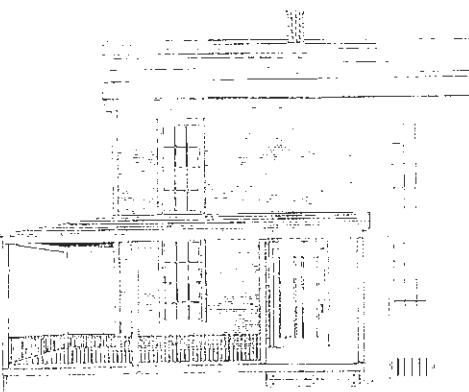


Illustration - A pen and ink drawing of what the old Clinton County Jail may have looked like in the 1840's - not far removed from its present appearance.

In 1842, the lot on Washington Street was deeded over to the county by Captain David Scott with the provision that should the county seat move from DeWitt, or should the county cease using the site for the purposes of a jail, the property would revert back to himself or his heirs. With a site secured, Marvin completed this building in the spring of 1843.

The records were not specific as to what portions of the structure were designed for jail purposes and which were left for residence, but having been in the building with an opportunity to snoop into the nooks and crannies, I believe that the southern one story portion constituted the jail cells. This portion is built like a fortress with planking on the walls, floors and ceilings. We're

not talking just inch thick planks here, these planks were/are about two feet wide and at least four inches thick, solid oak.

By my calculations, the portion left for the jailer's residence must have been the front two story portion.

Contrary to popular belief, the county sheriff did not reside here. It was usually occupied by a family; the husband being under contract as jailer and the wife as cook and laundress. There is however, evidence that the town constable may have been allowed to live here. the 1860 census shows the house occupied by Robert Daniels, constable while the contracted jailer for that time period was David Olin who lived in and operated the Clinton House tavern.

After the county seat was removed to St. Johns in 1857, the old jail remained in use by the county until 1862 when a facility was built in that town. After this date, in accordance with Captain Scott's deed, the jail lot reverted back to his heirs,

David Scott, Jr. in particular. He, in turn soon sold it as a residence to M. B. Naragon who held it a few years before selling it to Albert Lott.

Lott was a wagon maker whose shop was located on the northeast corner of Scott and Main. He was also a musician in Company H of the 27th Michigan Infantry and purchased the former jail directly after his return from duty in the Civil War. It remained his home until his death in 1896.

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

## DeWitt loses zest following Civil War

### Families leave during and following war years

By KEN COIN

In 1860, DeWitt was competing as the most vibrant community in the area. Lansing was a mere thirteen years old. St. Johns, the new county seat, less than four years old. But at 27 years old, DeWitt was already into its second generation and had long since shaken off its rough-hewn pioneer exterior. It had established churches and businesses. The school was in its third decade. There were nicely appointed hotels and comfortable taverns. The streets were graded, free of stumps and lined with comfortable homes; homes that were filled with families, young and old.

But, for all its promise and quaintness, DeWitt would within the next five years of the Civil War, slip into a drab stagnation that would last for decades. During these war years most families would leave and by 1865 the faces and names that made up the DeWitt community would become very different. Some left to follow the county seat to St. Johns. But, perhaps that was more often a diplomatic excuse to leave without admitting to the remaining neighbors that life in DeWitt had lost its zest. Most simply left because there was nothing remaining here for them.

For a semi-random sampling of what I'm trying to get at here, let's look in on some war era families in one of DeWitt's neighborhoods; up in the northeast part of town near Franklin and Madison streets.

On the northeast corner of that intersection stands a house which was purchased about 1860 by George W. Anderson. It

had been built about ten years earlier by Phillip Peck and went through several owners before Anderson, a young farmer from north of town, brought his family here just prior to his enlistment in company E of the 23rd Michigan Infantry. His wife spent the war years here waiting with her small children for Anderson to return. He never did. He was captured and died at Andersonville prison camp two days after Christmas in 1864.

The Anderson's new neighbors in the house next door (to the north) were Shubal and Jane Vincent. They too had been farmers north of DeWitt and although he was well past forty, Vincent defied his wife's protests and enlisted as a hospital steward in company G of the 23rd. He died of disease at the end of 1863 in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Unlike Mrs. Anderson, whose whereabouts after the war is unknown, Jane Vincent remained in this same house in DeWitt. She ultimately remarried and continued living in this house for a good many years. But she was the exception to the norm.

Their neighbor to the southeast, at the end of

Madison street was the Abram Casterline family. Like Shubal Vincent, Casterline felt a need to contribute his services and he also enlisted in the 23rd, as a hospital steward. After returning from the war he remained in for only a brief time, then sold out and moved his family to Maple Rapids.

On the western side of this neighborhood, Morgan and Cornelia Christopher, who lived at the northeast corner of Madison and

Bridge, saw two of their sons, John and George, enlist in company H of the 27th Michigan Infantry. These boys saw hard fighting throughout their service and when they mustered out in 1865 they did not return to DeWitt. Their family, like far too many others, had by that time left town.

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George Anderson purchased this house in the city of DeWitt in 1860. Photo by Jennifer Vincent.

## Coin offers workout regime to challenge fads of 1990's

By KEN COIN

Long before Jane Fonda was kind enough to demonstrate the art of exercising, many DeWitt women were able to keep their girlish figures by paying close attention to:

Aunt Drucilla's Workout Regimen (and dietary hints)

**Laundry** - Pump five gallons of cistern water into a copper boiler. Haul it to the woodshed and heat to a rolling boil on the laundry stove. Pump an additional five gallons into a galvanized washtub (one that's too wide to carry without sloshing it all down the front of you). Haul same to woodshed and place on wash bench. Bending at the waist, scrub laundry vigorously on scrub board, bend further and stretch to rinse then straighten up and feed with one hand through the wringer, all the while turning the wringer crank with opposite hand.

Repetitions: 375 times (or until laundry is complete) three hours.

**Muscle groups:** Biceps, pectorals, lower back and knuckles. Hint: Best effect if performed on Monday.

**Breakfast** - The most

important meal of the day. Begin with a large iron skillet, melt several heaping globs of bacon grease. Add first enough whole milk to produce a thick, pasty gravy. Fold in last night's left-over potatoes and few handfuls of meat (bacon works well as does fatty roast beef or ham rind). Salt to taste. Hint: If bulking up is your objective, crack in a few eggs.

**Power walking** - In a half-bushel basket, load several dozen eggs and up to ten pounds of freshly churned butter. Add ankle weights by wearing a pair of five-pound work boots. Fit the handle of the basket into the crook of your elbow (and alternate between elbows every two minutes or as fatigued). Now, pace off the half-mile into town (pace may be adjusted slower for deep mud or quickened for loose dogs). In town exchange butter and eggs for groceries. On the walk back home your pace may need adjusting depending on the perishability of your load or if your breakfast begins "working" (reread breakfast menu and think about it). Routine may be repeated if you forgot something on your shopping list.

Being madder than a

snort, the pace of this repetition will undoubtedly be quicker and more emphatic.

**Repetitions:** Once or twice in a day, several times per week.

**Muscle groups:** Calves, thighs, forearms, glutes and jaw (if you run into people you know).

**Rug beating** - Remove carpets and rugs one room at a time and carry outside. Smaller rugs may be slung over the clothesline, large area rugs weighing fifty pounds or more may be draped over a sturdy fence. Grasping a wire rug beater with one or both hands beat the tar out of each rug.

**Repetitions:** Approximately 200 forceful "thwacks" for a standard axminster rug, perhaps 20 for smaller throw rugs.

**Muscle groups:** Wrists, abdominals, deltoids, obliques, lats (you name it). While these are only a very few of Aunt Drucilla's tips, they do give you a picture of a well-rounded fitness workout before the advent of spandex. As to Aunt Drucilla? Well, she died many years ago at the advanced age of 104 from food poisoning: A fresh tossed salad with low-cal dressing.



An anonymous DeWitt woman builds her biceps by performing repetitions of "standing curls" at her clothesline. Ca. 1920, courtesy of the DeWitt Public Library.

## Community

# Many pioneers lived in DeWitt home

By KEN COIN  
Staff Writer

The histories of some of DeWitt's older homes are very exact and easy to follow. Others, this one as a case in point, seem to have gone through dozens of owners within the first few decades of their existence. There is of course a history lesson in all of this which I'll be glad to share with you.

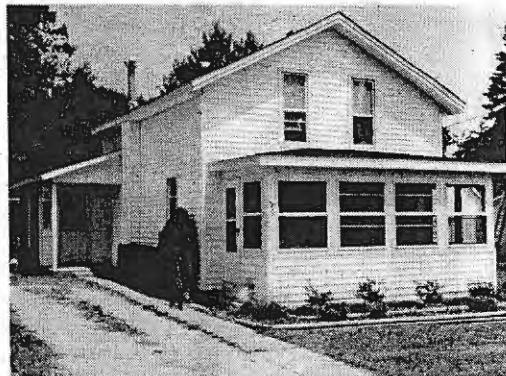
From the early 1840's to the mid-1850s (when the county seat was moved to St. Johns) there were many modest homes put up in DeWitt; built on speculation or as rentals. Most of these homes have since been demolished (in fact most did not survive past the 1920's) but a few, such as this one, are still around.

When I say modest, it's really a diplomatic way of saying inexpensive for the time in which they were built. The building material was often seconds and scrap from the sawmill; the building methods were not as sound as the heavy post and beam construction of occupant-built homes; and the finishing took the heavy classic Greek lines and either reduced or eliminated

them.

The end result was a very serviceable and spacious home for its date in time, often on desirable lots. But the object here was not to build an elaborate home but to simply fill the need for quick and temporary housing. It was the desirable locations of most of these homes which often led to their early demise. Some were built in the northeast quarter of town (many of which remain) but the majority, at least nine, were built along East Main. Of these only two remain (the other being directly west of city hall). The rest were later torn down or (like the old Pennell home directly across the street from Baumgardners) successfully incorporated into a larger home at the turn of the century.

The early taxpayers of the Baumgardner's home, beginning with David Dresser in 1845, reads like a who's who of early DeWitt pioneers. 1846 - Hiram Wilcox, the county's first Circuit Court Judge and builder of the county's first saw mill. 1847 - pioneer merchant Walter Hubble. 1849 - pioneer attorney Joab Baker. 1850 - pioneer attorney Christopher Leffingwell. 1854 - Matthew Houston, shoemaker. 1859 - James Albright, master carpenter.



One hundred and fifty years old this year - the home of Ron and Tammy Baumgardner at 211 E. Main. Courtesy photo.

# Cash Bristol ... corrupting DeWitt

By KEN COIN

By the summer of 1917, without putting it to an official vote, the residents of DeWitt were of the unanimous opinion (if such a thing is possible) that young Cash Bristol was about the wildest thing to ever rip up a cloud of dust on the streets of DeWitt. With nickel-plated eyes and enough white ivory in his mouth to resurface the keyboard of an upright baby grand, his solid frame oozed a dangerous combination of mischief and virility. Cash had high expectations of going places quickly in this life. Trouble was, he just couldn't seem to find the right road out of town.

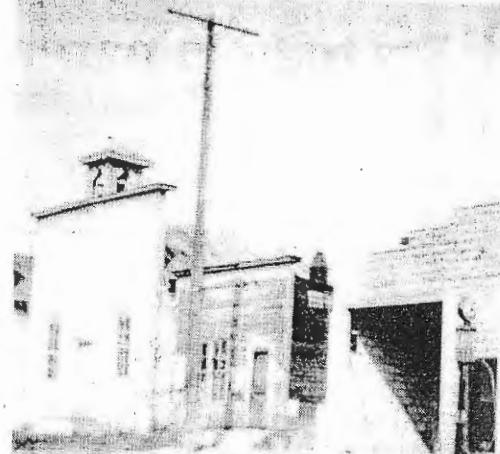
Residents found it hard to dislike someone with so much obvious charisma but with such a reputation preceding him, he was already credited with somehow being responsible for everything from the sinking of the Lusitania to the San Francisco earthquake! DeWitt mothers cried at the thought of him corrupting their sons while fathers cried at the thought of him corrupting their daughters.

The public opinion of Cash Bristol took a sudden turn for the better that autumn when postmaster Ray Derham discovered Cash's draft notice while sorting the day's mail. Within hours, the switchboard at the telephone office was lit-up like a Christmas tree as every party-line discussed this new twist. Cash Bristol a doughboy? What better

way to give the Kaiser what he had coming? Soon even the DeWitt Mother's Club was knitting soldier socks a little slower - what was the use? Cash would soon be putting an end to this nonsense in Europe. The general hubbub of Cash's potential for his country didn't stop until the last hanky was waved at the interurban depot when he left town for the troop ship which would sail him to instant victory.

Well, it took Cash about a year to end things in Europe; longer than most people expected, but then, "that's the military for ya." During that time his letters to the folks back home rarely spoke of his exploits. "Secret missions", "Top Secret", "Behind enemy lines" were among the townfolk's reasons for his lack of detail. And when he returned from single-handedly winning the war he was given a hero's welcome. Mothers set him up as a role model for their own sons. Fathers practically shoved their blushing daughters into his arms. The township board watched its mail; expecting any day a letter from Congress begging for the privilege of erecting a Cash Bristol monument in the center of the four corners.

With all his new-found fame, poor Cash didn't know how to act - literally. He was, after all, the same old wild Cash. His little field trip to Europe had, if anything only broadened his horizons and plummeted his morals. Truth to tell, as a hospital guard in Paris the closest he got to



On the northside of East Main, tucked in between the old DeWitt Township Hall and Glenn Cole's garage, was the old pool hall. Courtesy photo.

any battlefield was the result of an interpretation problem one evening under the Eiffel Tower with a couple of professional Parisian "sidewalk hostesses." So, when he could no longer avoid the pressing questions from the local gents, he agreed to a specific evening at the pool hall where he would give the boys, if not what they asked for, at least an evening they wouldn't soon forget.

The pool hall was filled beyond its capacity when Cash greeted the assembled men. Behind him a patched outing sheet was tacked to the wall, covering the assortment of tobacco advertisements. Near the front door a large "magic lantern" projector had been set upon a high pedestal; its small kerosene lamp shooting bits of light from everyone one of the projector's cracks and holes. This caused some discussion among the assembly but it was when Cash ordered the teenage boys to leave, the shutters to be closed

and the door to be guarded that the men began to wonder just what they had gotten themselves into.

Cash looked almost sullen as he explained that the horrors of his recent exploits were still too fresh in his mind for him to discuss. Instead he would share with them a little something he picked up in a Paris novelty shop. His

## Bristol

Continued from page 8

large toothy smile quickly reappeared as he slipped the first of the small glass plates into the lantern and motioned for the lights to be switched off.

Instantly, there she was, "Naughty Nellie" in all her chubby Rubenesque glory, for all to see (though somewhat distorted by the lumpy texture of the flannel sheet). And see they did! In a moment of ear-splitting silence Bob Dills swallowed hard. Les Stoddard swallowed his chaw. Delmar Williams swallowed his new bridgework only to be cut down by Newell-Bennett who swallowed his entire tongue! Nelson Trout tried to spit his chaw into a nearby spittoon. But unable to take his eyes off Nellie, he managed only to shoot it straight across the room, yet with enough velocity to sink the eight ball nicely into a corner pocket.

Charlie Jones reflected for a moment on the frayed tobacco card of Lillian Russell wearing only a corset and stockings that he carried in his pocket. It paled now, in comparison. Del-

mar Williams thought about his sainted mother and instantly coughed his bridgework right back up. Old Jim Losey knew he hadn't seen the likes of this spectacle since the summer of '63 when he accidentally stumbled into Mama Hattie's House of Delights outside of Gettysburg!

It wasn't until the third or fourth slide that the group decided it was okay to exhale. By the seventh slide the smiling Cash Bristol was trying to organize them into a whistling frenzy when a loud fracas at the door produced a very angry delegation of wives; small in number but obviously at an advantage in both stature and determination. Faster than it took for the electricity to reach the overhead lights, husbands were being dragged out by their ears.

Without getting a chance to show the full dozen of his Naughty Nellie slides, "town hero" Cash Bristol (again without an official vote) was returned to "town scourge". Fame, as they say, is fleeting.

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

## Builder of the Clinton House in DeWitt remains a mystery

By KEN COIN

The story of DeWitt's famous Clinton House is one that's been told and retold so often that I haven't much touched on it in this column. While I plan to do that in the future, this installment is merely to pass along some new information which I recently found.

For years the late Faye Hanson tried in vain to uncover who the actual builder of the large inn might have been. All she was ever able to come up with from older residents was that the contractor was a man by the name of "Gerry" (first name? last name?) and that he was a ship builder on the great lakes. While all that may or may not be true, I prefer more positive proof.

But first, to bring everyone up to speed - the Clinton House was a hotel and stage stop on the old Pontiac-Grand River Road. It was built for Capt. David Scott, DeWitt's founder in the years 1841-42 and was situated where the gas station is now located at the intersection of Main and Bridge. At the time it was

built it was the largest building in central Michigan and received much notoriety.

But who really built it? Well, I recently came across a business contract which at least tells who the captain was hiring as laborers for this enormous project. In an obscure book at the county Register of Deeds office (a book which contains a variety of odd contracts) there is recorded:

### "Miscellaneous Deed #1"

A contract between David Scott of DeWitt and John Dunneback of Westphalia dated Aug. 15, 1841.

"John Dunneback is to dress, match and lay in the best style the two upper floors (the second floor and the third floor ballroom) in the House now erecting by the said David Scott, of pine. Also to match and lay the lower (first) floor of oak and to plain (plane) the two Dining Rooms, to be done in a workman like manner, all of which is to be done as soon as expedient. The said David Scott is to furnish shop and lumber for said floors, to board the said Dunneback and to pay him when the

work is done one dollar and seventy-five cents for every square or 100 feet of flooring."

As an aside for all the Westphalians now transplanted in DeWitt, John Dunneback was born in Niedermarpe/Westphalia, Germany in 1813 and came to America in 1836. He worked for a time at the new sawmill at Lyons and while living there married Katharina Thome. When she came with her parents to Clinton County in 1838 her father brought the first pair of oxen to the Westphalia settlement, for which he was given the nickname "Oschenlaus".

The Dunnebacks lived briefly in Detroit where John worked at a brewery before returning to Clinton County 1840. Their homestead was located just east of Westphalia village. They had three children before Katharina died in 1843 of a "schlangen-gebissen" (snake bite). John married a second time, to Anna Maria Heinlein of Westphalia in 1844 and they had nine children together.

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



The Clinton House Hotel, on the southwest corner of Bridge and Main streets, as it appeared at the turn of the century, when it was popularly known as "Joe's Tavern". The long porch was a recent addition when this picture was taken. Courtesy photo.

## Community

DeWitt-Bath Review

## Bertha Lennemann was one of DeWitt's "Grand Old Ladies"

By Ken Coin

Last week DeWitt lost one of its finest assets with the passing of Bertha Lennemann; truly one of the last of DeWitt's "Grand Old Ladies". Now, I know she would protest at such a pretentious title but grand old ladies and fine old gentlemen being somewhat of a rare commodity these days, it would do us well to take note of them whenever possible.

We did take note of Bertha Lennemann in 1982, when the City of DeWitt proclaimed her its first annual "Citizen of the

Year". Though barely five foot tall, Bertha came through head and shoulders above all others. Having spent the better part of her life behind the scenes of community affairs, she was genuinely surprised that anyone had taken note of her contributions. That was her mode of operation - do what you can, when it's needed, without recognition.

Bertha was born on a Maple Rapids farm in 1902. Her parents, Carl and Minnie Staub spent many years as tenant farmers until the winter of 1912 when they purchased

the old Norris farm two miles north of DeWitt on Chadwick Road. After a March snowfall they moved their belongings down from Maple Rapids to DeWitt with two teams of draft horses and two bob sleighs - two trips for all their household furnishings, livestock, tools and grain. Her father drove one team while Bertha's two older brothers, Jim and Tom drove the other.

For several years Bertha attended the one-room Brown School north of town, followed by two years at DeWitt, graduating (10th grade) with the

class of 1917 and later attended Lansing Business University.

In 1923 she was married to John "Jack" Lennemann who died in 1976. For over fifty years she made her home on Scott Street, raising four children and contributing what she could for the betterment of her church and community.

I had the very great pleasure of knowing Bertha as a neighbor, an aunt and a friend. If you did not know her I would hope that in your own lifetime you would know at least one person equally kind, gentle and optimistic. The sheer joy of her conversations is what I'll remember most for it was ingrained deep within her to continually seek out the good and leave fault where it lay, for others to find.

Of history, local and family, she was not much of a storyteller but she could add such clarity to scenes and events of long ago and personal details of people long passed away.

Bertha constantly reminded me that as family and community change, life remains the same. We are all part of a continuing spiral where little children go full circle to become elderly grandparents. And along the way, it is the blessing of life, for those who are able, to help others struggling with that journey.

The last time I talked with Bertha she told me that she had lately been thinking about a childhood friend. When she was about eight years old this girlfriend took sick and died. Bertha was naturally upset that her playmate had died, but numbed

when she was told that she was to be one of the pall bearers.

"Can you imagine it?", she asked me, still surprised 65 years later. "Six little girls no older than ten carrying her coffin." She said that throughout her life she had occasionally reflected on that childhood incident, always puzzled by why she was asked and how she managed to do it. "Her folks asked...so, I did it," she concluded.

That could well sum up Bertha's philosophy of life regardless of the circumstance, do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, without thought of recognition. Well done, Bertha ... a very fine piece of work.

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



A sleepy-eyed little girl - on her grandmother's lap - Ninety productive years later her life would come full circle. Bertha (Staub) Lennemann with her grandparents, William and Elora Vause; brother, Jim Staub and aunt, Edna Vause. Courtesy photo.



House divided - The home at 510 W. Main in DeWitt (left) was formed by combining two wings that were removed from the home at 506 W. Main (right). Photo by Jennifer Vincent.

## DeWitt house was home for lawyer DeWitt C. Chapin in mid-1800's

By KEN COIN

Among the earliest lawyers to make their appearance in the frontier settlement of DeWitt was a father and son team, Theodore and DeWitt C. Chapin. They came from Lockport, N.Y. in 1839 and established a successful practice here in the village. The location of their office or residence from this early period had not been found.

DeWitt Chapin was elected county clerk in 1842, a position he held for two years. Soon afterwards, he and his father moved to Ionia and later still to Allegan when the elder Chapin died. About 1853, DeWitt C. Chapin returned to DeWitt with his young family and reestablished his successful practice here. It was recorded that although he was not a "profound lawyer", he was "an excellent pleader before a jury". In 1856 he was again elected county clerk, a position he held until 1862.

Upon his return to DeWitt in the early 1850s, Chapin purchased some acreage on the west side of town, just outside the platted village, on the north side of Main Street. Here, around 1854, he built a large home in keeping with his professional status. The main two-story por-

tion of the house (currently 506 W. Main) was flanked on both the east and west sides with one-story wings (currently the house at 510 W. Main). These wings were somewhat set back from the main structure to allow for porches which faced the street.

Many structures by this date were being constructed with "balloon framing" but Chapin's home was built in the older post and beam method. The entire building was finished in the then popular Greek Revival styling. The main portion of the house undoubtedly had a large formal entrance set to the side and facing the street. Behind this would have been an entrance and stair hall.

Although situated outside of the village itself, this home was never part of a farm. It sat on three acres of land which would have contained a garden plot, fruit trees, stable, chicken coupe and other outbuildings necessary for an efficient home.

In the mid-1860s the Chapin family left DeWitt again and moved to Gratiot County where DeWitt set up another law practice and again entered local politics. He died there in 1874.

By 1860 the Chapin home had been purchased by George W. Cook, a

retired farmer. Little is known of Cook besides the fact that he lived in this house for 25 years with at least three different wives: Loretta, Clarissa and Electa. Born in Massachusetts in 1803, he died at this home in 1885.

At the turn of the century the house was purchased by Homer and Carrie Brazee. Brazee, in partnership with Willis McLouth, was both a miller at the DeWitt mill on Prairie Creek and a general merchant for a number of years at the northeast corner of Bridge and Main.

During their ownership the Brazees, who had no children, extensively altered the old home by removing the wings, raising the house onto a modern basement and adding a two-story addition to the west side. The two detached wings were moved to a lot west of the house and joined together to form the long, narrow, one-story house at 510 W. Main.

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

## Furgason's 50th wedding anniversary captured on film

Lived in the old Williams home at the corner of Washington and Scott

By KEN COIN

Several years ago I was fortunate enough to purchase a large quantity of vintage photographs of an old DeWitt family from a St. Johns antiques dealer.

Before donating them to the DeWitt Library, I did a little detective work and found that they had once belonged to Floyd and Olive (Averill) Furgason who lived in DeWitt many years ago.

Some were of easily recognizable scenes but most, such as the one pictured here, were group pictures, family pictures.

I did my best to put names to the old faces but a few, including this one, eluded me. I knew that the older couple seated in the center of the picture were James and Ellen (Keeney) Furgason; but the other folks? Ellen's sporting a sizable corsage so I figured it was some special occasion.

Well, I hadn't done anything further with the photographs for several years when the story behind this picture found me. It's true what they say: "The easiest way to find something is to stop looking for it."

I was recently at the Library of Michigan going through reels of microfilmed county newspapers, looking for something else completely, when I spotted a write-up regarding a 50th wedding anniversary celebration of the Furgasons.

I discovered this picture was taken on that occasion and includes Ellen's siblings; Carrie (Keeney) Groger, Joseph, James, Nicholas, Alanson and Edward Keeney (plus a few sister-in-laws to round it out). Besides being her 50th anniversary, the day was also Ellen's 72nd birthday.

The Furgasons were married in 1864 following James' return from the Civil War. They lived for a time near Ellen's family homestead at Cambridge, Lenawee county and in 1880 came to South Riley where several of Ellen's siblings had previously migrated.

By 1885, medical problems resulting from his war service forced James' to retire from farming and the couple moved to DeWitt.



A meeting of the Keeney Family - The 50th wedding anniversary of James and Ellen (Keeney) Furgason, taken at the Furgason home at 215 S. Scott St., August 21, 1914.

Photographer unknown, courtesy of the DeWitt Public Library.

They purchased the old Williams home at the corner of Washington and Scott (see Feb. 27, 1995) where they remained until their deaths in 1915.

While I could find no one living who remembered James and Ellen Furgason, the names of their eight children and spouses should ring familiar with some of our older residents: Finis (married Francis McArthur and Lola Miller), Feron (married Grace Baldwin), Floyd (married Olive Averill), Effie Ellen (Mrs. Clark Lankton), Edith (Mrs. Clarence Lankton), Ettie (Mrs. Cash Baldwin), Charles and Elsie (the latter two died young).

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