Grandma Boyd's artistic gifts still grace DeWitt

BY KEN COIN

Nellie Boyd, at work, doing what she did best, creating a thing of beauty. Photo courtesy of John Boyd.

A few generations past, it was still a common sight in small-town DeWitt to see gray-haired grandmothers in plain cotton dresses and sunbonnets working in their gardens; walking up town to the market with their baskets in tow; chatting over the clothesline to a neighbor or marching to church in tightly-laced shoes. Nellie Boyd was no exception. She too fit into the typical mold of a simple, old-fashioned lifestyle. Grandma Boyd however, had a very special gift which set her apart.

Although her world was somewhat austere, her mind's eye saw life ablaze with colors, filled with beautiful flowers, playful animals and breathtaking landscapes. Nellie Boyd was a true artist in every sense of the word.

She was born in Mt. Vernon, Illinois during the nation's centennial in 1876. At a very young age she began dabbling with pastels and by age 12, began painting with oils. Within a few years she was working on large canvases. She continued through the years to work with oils, pastels and water colors and eventually branched out into sculpting lamps, statues, bookends and plaques.

Nellie and her husband John farmed in southern Illinois until their "retirement" in 1948. But, if retirement meant ceasing to perform your life's work, Nellie never did retire. To be nearer to their son Gratten, who was at the time an instructor at Lansing Business University, they relocated to DeWitt, making their home on the northeast corner of Bridge and Madison streets.

For the 10 years following her husband John's death in 1958, Nellie kept busy with her great loves: church, family, gardening and art. Much of her work she gave away as gifts. Some she sold. DeWitt residents were quick to realize however, that buying works from Nellie Boyd was hardly patronizing the "arts". It was considered a privilege to even be on her waiting list.

A statue of an angel in the DeWitt cemetery was crafted

One of her works which remains familiar to most DeWitt residents is the life-size statue of an angel which watches over the Boyd family plot in the DeWitt Cemetery. According to her grandson, Derwood Boyd of Lansing, the statue, made of Portland cement, was actually crafted by Grandma Boyd about 1905 and accompanied the family when they moved up from Illinois. It was soon after installed here in the cemetery where their son was buried in 1952.

Besides being a delightful person to know, Nellie Boyd was able to bring her magic of light and color into the lives of many DeWitt people. Today, nearly 30 years after her death in 1969, the walls of many area homes still project her vision of the world; a world of flowers in every hue, of kittens batting at strings and of grand, majestic vistas with endless horizons.

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

The winter home of Phineas and Abby (Cook) Freeman (Abby is standing at center) in Orange Heights, Florida. Others in the picture are undoubtedly DeWitt folk but are, as yet, unidentified. Ca. 1895, John C. Black, photographer.

Orange Heights was winter haven for DeWitt residents

Fair home was midway stopping point

BY KEN COIN

For Christmas this year, the DeWitt Library received several dozen vintage photographs from the estate of Gerald Pike, a life-long DeWitt resident who passed away last year.

His daughter Joan, who has lived in southeast Michigan for many years, felt it appropriate that some family items should remain in DeWitt. Besides the photographs, the library is also receiving nearly 100 glass-plate negatives taken in the area nearly 100 years ago by her grandfather, George Pike.

from old letters, diaries and the like, I know the Scott, Woodruff and Pearce families were among some of the other DeWitt people to hold-up at Orange Heights. Undoubtedly, there were others.

If you've followed this column for any length of time you might remember my writing about Phineas and Abigail Freeman in connection with the Civil War. They (in their youth) were the husband and wife couple who went off to war together.

In their golden years, they had a farm northwest of DeWitt (in Riley), a comfortable home in Lansing, and their cottage in Florida.

Part of the process for "going south" 100 years ago was the long train ride through the south-

DeWitt men was the ability to revisit Civil War battlefields. Phineas Freeman, a veteran of the 3rd Michigan Cavalry, visited many on his numerous trips north and south.

Bonnie Ward has a wonderful collection of stereoptican photographs which he collected as souvenirs at many of the major battlefields.

Another souvenir Phineas acquired was a "cannon ball" or missile head which he found on one of the battle sites. It currently makes a good doorstop in my den but hopefully can be displayed someday in a nice facility along with the leather trunk which accompanied him to war. I was fortunate to purchase the trunk at an auction several years

Orange Heights, Florida. Others in the picture are undoubtedly DeWitt folk but are, as yet, unidentified. Ca. 1895, John C. Black, photographer.

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Among the photographs are several taken a century ago in Orange Heights, Florida which I found particularly interesting. Orange Heights, a small hamlet located about fifteen miles northeast of Gainesville, was a winter haven for DeWitt's well-to-do retirees at the end of the last century.

I've never taken an actual head count, but from old letters, diaries and the like, I know the Scott, Woodruff and Pearce families were among some of the other DeWitt people to hold-up at Orange Heights. Undoubtedly, there were others.

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In their golden years, they had a farm northwest of DeWitt (in Riley), a comfortable home in Lansing, and their cottage in Florida.

Part of the process for "going south" 100 years ago was the long train ride through the southern states. A popular mid-way stopping point was the Knoxville, Tennessee home of James and Agnes (Pike) Fair. She had been a DeWitt girl, married to a school administrator whose career took him to Knoxville. (David Scott, Jr. died at their home while traveling).

Part of the popularity of traveling through the south for many aged DeWitt men was the ability to revisit Civil War battlefields. Phineas Freeman, a veteran of the 3rd Michigan Cavalry, visited many on his numerous trips north and south.

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A sincere "thank-you" (and happy birthday) to Joan (Pike) Garver for her thoughtfulness in seeing that some very special items of DeWitt's heritage were allowed to remain in the community for many people to enjoy and appreciate for generations to come.

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

Do you remember when downtown DeWitt looked like this?

What is the glass room on top of the fire barn?

BY KEN COIN

Some time ago Cliff and Dorothy Hart sent me this photograph, along with a very interesting account of the beginnings of the DeWitt High School "Panthers". First, the photograph - and next time, Cliff's account of high school sports.

I wish you could see this photograph in person. It's really spectacular! Full color - so crisp it appears to have been taken yesterday. It's only by seeing the subject matter that you begin to appreciate its' age and home much this street scene has changed since it was taken in 1954.

For those of you who don't recall the street looking this way, the signpost, front and center, should give you your bearings that you're standing at the corner of Washington and Bridge looking across the street at what is now The Panther Den, Terranova's, Sam's Kitchen and the DeWitt Hardware.

Starting on the left are the buildings of Dalman Brothers Hardware. The old two-story structure as the original hardware location - the one story building to it's left was a relatively new building when this photo was taken.

Carris' Drug Store was in the building where Sam's Kitchen is now located. This building too was rather modern in 1954, having been built for Percy Carris, DeWitt's long-time pharmacist.

The old two-story wooden structure which originally housed Reed's Grocery was located directly south of the drug store. It was operated by Harry and Mary Reed for many years and they made their home on the second floor. It was torn down about 1960 after Kenny Reed moved the store's location to the former Ford garage (now the Panther's Den).

A building with a long and interesting history was the former "fire barn". It was bought in the early 1900's by Mark and Clayton Woodruff to house their new bank and shortly after the fire of 1930, it began it's life as a combination fire barn and Dutch Halterman's barbershop. For several years, the second floor housed the DeWitt Public Library. This old building was torn-down not too long after this picture was taken.

The east side of south Bridge street, 1954. Courtesy of Dorothy (Reed) Hart.

Now, if you're at all observant, you will notice the glass room (Complete with stovepipe) situated on the roof of the fire barn. I know what it is, but I'm not going to tell you until next time. I want you to mull it over for awhile....(fodder for the coffee shop).

On the far right is a peek at the Ford Garage, owned for many years by L. J. "Pete" Griswold. This building would later be rebuilt by Ken Reed into Reed's Thriftway. Still later, under Terranova's ownership, it was enlarged to the north and is currently the portion of the building which houses the Panther's Den.

Thanks to Cliff and Dorothy for sending this interesting photograph. Did you say it was "one of .....many"?

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

Historian seeking information about area families

By KEN COIN

Last summer I started yet another project; this one ɔut of necessity. I took 20 years worth of notes, cemeːery reading, crumpled bits of paper, and the like and ɪtarted compiling family group sheets for all of the ʼamilies who lived in the DeWitt area prior to 1860. Of course I'm not near being finished but at least I'm ɔff to a good start with about 500 of them completed ɪs best as I could.

Once it's down on paper, genealogy seems to take ɔn a life of it's own and it makes much more sense. Now I can clearly see with many of these families how ːied together by marriage, as siblings or as former ɪeighbors back east.

These are simply my "notes" and do not, in most ːases, include any serious research. As such, they ɪave many gaps of information. That's where you ːome in: this is an audience participation sort of ːhing. The following are just a few families that I'd ɪike to get more of a full account of. I know several of ːhese still have decedents in the area. Surely someone ɪn the family can add to the story.

Samuel and Betsey (Cushman?) Grilley. Sam was ɔorn in Conn. in 1818. He had a sister, Jane, who marːied David Dresser. I believe their mother was a sister ːo Capt. David Scott and I would very much like to ɪnow her name as a lead to finding out more about the captain. I believe Sam"s wife Betsy was a Cushman from the east side of the township. She was born in 1816, also in Conn. Both are buried in the Gunnisonville Cemetery.

John H. & Helen (Stevens) Bacon. John was born in 1822 in Niagara county, NY and was in DeWitt by 1851 when he married Capt. Scott's step-daughter, Helen Stevens. She was born about 1832, a daughter of Capt. Scott's second wife, Clarissa. John Bacon was a surgeon and the young couple played a prominent role in the DeWitt society just prior to the Civil War. About 1860 the couple moved to Lansing and shortly thereafter John went of to war as a surgeon.

He survived the conflict but died soon afterwards and is now buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, apparently alone. Helen and their two daughters, Clara and Jessie, remained in Lansing for a time and then disappeared form the records there (much like Helen's mother Clarissa did after the death of Capt. Scott). In an ongoing search for a photograph of Capt. Scott, it is highly possible Helen Bacon's descendants have one.

Alexander & Saloma (Rowland) Calder. Alexander, a native of Scotland came to America about 1821 and settled in Genessee County, NY. (A former home of the Scott family) About 1826 (I'm guessing) he was married to Saloma Rowland, a daughter of Oliver Rowland who would later come to settle in Eagle, Michigan. Alexander came to be one of the Scott family's hired men but whether he was one of the teamsters who helped them move here in 1833 or later employee, I don't know. I would however like to know. I'd like to know how he established this acquaintance with Capt. Scott. It wasn't just happenstance.

Joseph and Thomas Lee. Two graves in the DeWitt cemetery which have intrigued me since I was a child are those of these two gentlemen. Shattered and repaired ages ago, the fragmented stoned of these family are now barely legible. Yet they each honor a DeWitt pioneer, both of whom were born during the Revolutionary War are; Thomas in 1774 and Joseph in 1783.

Thomas was even a colonel in the War of 1812. The sad news? I can't find one shred of data about these two gentlemen-nothing. I assume they were brothers. and, likewise, I assume one of them was the father of George, Augustus, and Corydon Lee, merchants and New Albany "distillers". These later three gentlemen played active roles in DeWitt business, politics and society for many years. It's a shame not to have some information on the elder two.

Got anything to add to these stories? Let me hear about it.

Tapping maples a long-standing tradition for early settlers

Courtesy photo

Giving off all the appearances of a witches' coven in full swing. . . These folks are merely enjoying one of the blessings of spring-working the sugar bush. (For those of you who may not know, a "Sugar Bush" is the term used for the wooded are containing a high concentration of sugar maples.)

Season unites DeWitt community

By KEN COIN

They've been doing it in the woods around here for thousands of years. And I, for one, would really like to know about the first native American to make maple sugar, and how it came about that they figured out that maple sap, boiled for an incredibly long time, would form something

were predominately New Englanders who already had a long-standing tradition of tapping the maples. If they hadn't practiced it back, east, they surely gave it a try once they got here. Sugaring season fell during one of the pioneer's slowest (and loneliest) times of the year. It serves as a chance to gather with neighbors and for may

arguably the finest sugar bush in the county.

In the thick sugar bushes, the workers would haul sap to the sugar house or fire in buckets suspended from both ends of a wooden neck yoke. If they were available (and the woods open enough to allow it) oxen were used to haul sap. It was hard and often cold work but an activity

erences to their sugar-making activity.

March, 1854

Charlotte Newman to her parents:

Moses (Newman) and Mr.. () Harlow have been making sap buckets a few weeks back. They have made 100 and 80. They intend to get 200 done before sugar making commences.

April, 1854

William Henry Cook writes to his parents who are visiting back in New York state:

Moses (Newman) and Mr. (Albert) Harlow are making sugar. They have made about 450 pounds and are a sugaring off again this afternoon. Charlotte has gone up there to get some to eat. I wish you was all here to get some with the rest of us.

March, 1862

Amori Cook writes to his brother Henry, a soldier in the 3rd Michigan Cav:

I am trying to make sugar. (Newton) McLouth and I are working Fathers bush again this year. We tapped some yesterday and some today. . . I have (seen) a good many places where you have left marks made with your ax a good many years ago when you and I was boys and I could not help crying to think we was so separated from each other. . . I think that by this time Henry, you would like to see the old sugar bush, would you not? I wish you could come over in a day or two and get some warm sugar to eat. I know you used to like it and I guess you have not forgot how to eat it yet?

(Unfortunately, Henry had died at the camp in New Madrid, MO, five days prior to his brother writing this.)

Tapping maples a long-standing tradition for ea

Courtesy photo

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They've been doing it in the woods around here for thousands of years. And I, for one, would really like to know about the first native American to make maple sugar, and how it came about that they figured out that maple sap, boiled for an incredibly long time, would form something sweet! I'm completely fascinated by the question.

Picture it for a moment. . . with a stone drill-bit, a stick and a piece of rawhide, a native drilled holes into numerous trees. . . collected sap into a great many "pails" made of bark. . . poured these into a wooden trough and then brought the liquid to a boil by taking rocks from a fire and dropping them into the liquid (no metal pots for the natives back then. . .) No wonder they prized their sugar so much.

Early settlers to DeWitt were predominately New Englanders who already had a long-standing tradition of tapping the maples. If they hadn't practiced it back, east, they surely gave it a try once they got here. Sugaring season fell during one of the pioneer's slowest (and loneliest) times of the year. It serves as a chance to gather with neighbors and, for may, became a cash crop. Maple sugar, like summer berries, found a ready market in the large eastern cities.

When Atwell Simmons came to the Scott settlement in 1836, searching for new lands, he came with strict instructions from his wife Lovina: First, that the land included a large sugar bush. Atwell did far better with the second than the first. The homestead he chose, a large tract of land at the intersection of what is now Airport and Chadwick roads, contained what was arguably the finest sugar bush in the county.

In the thick sugar bushes, the workers would haul sap to the sugar house or fire in buckets suspended from both ends of a wooden neck yoke. If they were available (and the woods open enough to allow it) oxen were used to haul sap. It was hard and often cold work but an activity which could include the entire family and often neighboring farm formed work bees to pool their resources.

The Cook farms, directly west of the Simons homestead, was annually a floury of activities during sugaring time. They were from Vermont where sugar was considered a competitive sport! Letters from this family written in the 1850s are chuck-fill of references to their sugar-making activity.

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DeWitt Area Observer 13 April 1997 p7

Area woman acquires 150-year-old court ledger at rummage sale

BY KEN COIN

It isn't every day that one finds buried treasure so when she was looking through a box of magazines that she purchased at a rummage sale, you can imagine June Detwiler's surprise to discover a 150 year-old ledger. Even more incredible was the fact that it was a docket book of a Justice of the Peace who served in DeWitt in the 1840s. June realized its' historic value, shared it with me and has agreed that it be donated to the DeWitt Public Library for safe-keeping.

About the book, it's a small little volume - about 6 1/2" x 8" with about 50 pages filled with that nearly impossible to decipher script. But regardless of it's small size, it's chock-full of interesting insight into an important aspect of DeWitt life in the 1840s. An added boon to genealogists is the inclusion of the names of defendants, plaintiffs, attorneys and jurors.

Throughout several decades of DeWitt's earliest years a continuing problem was that of "cash flow": there was none. Goods and services were exchanged routinely on a barter and credit system. To confound this, "notes" (I.O.U.s) were often transferred to be held by another individual or applied towards another's line of credit. In all, it was a bookkeeper's nightmare keeping tabs on who was in debt to whom for what, which is why some of the surviving business ledgers of the period read like protracted story problems.

Out of this jumble, a necessary byproduct was the Justice's Court which was about the equivalent of todays' Small Claims Court. When we read on a prisoner's resume that he once was a Justice of the Peace we should never limit our mental picture to the kindly old man who performed an occasional wedding ceremony in his front parlor. These men were kept constantly busy with the suits brought on by unpaid creditors.

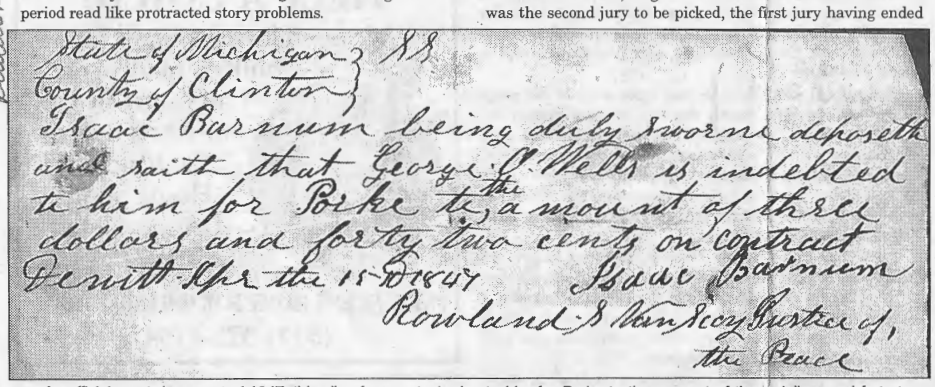
The ledger at hand was started in 1846 and ends in 1890 and was the docket of Rowland VanScoy. What the entries do not tell us (unfortunately) are the actual complaints filed, only the amount contested, the plaintiff and defendant and possible witnesses and a jury was adjourned to reconvene at the schoolhouse (for want of an actual courthouse).

We also get an idea from this how juries were picked (and I do mean "picked"), duties of the town constable and jailer and how judgments were executed. There is also at least one misdemeanor charge on the docket, an assault case which evidently stemmed from a dispute over the ownership of the saw mill in New Albany. The jury "selected" by constable Elisha Pike included: William W. Webb, David Scott Jr., William H. Case, Jonathan R. Pearsall, Johnson Green, Parker Webber, David Scott, James M. Estes, Herod Morton, Daniel B. Johnson, Augustus Lee and Morris S. Allen. This was the second jury to be picked, the first jury having ended in a deadlock two days previous.

DeWitt being a small community in pioneer times, the role of the Justice could easily be reversed. In one case Rowland VanScoy was also the plaintiff along with Henry Chappel in a suit against Barber (also known as "Barna") Allen. Needless to say, Allen motioned that VanScoy disqualified himself and the case was turned over to Justice William HeWitt.

If you should see June Detwiler you might want to mention to her just how darn nice it was of her to share this marvelous little book with the community.

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



State of Michigan } ss
County of Clinton }
Isaac Barnum being duly sworne deposeth and saith that George O. Wells is indebted to him for Porke to the amount of three dollars and forty two cents on contract
Dewitt Apr the 15 D 1847 Isaac Barnum
Rowland S VanScoy Justice of the Peace

An official court document of 1847, this slip of paper, tucked into the docket book of Justice Rowland VanScoy is a complaint filed by Isaac Barnum stating that "George O. Wells in indebted to him for Porke to the amount of three dollars and forty two cents." When the case was called for trial, Barnum failed to appear and ended up owing $1.26 for the cost of the suit.

Wood letter gives insight into DeWitt life in the late 1800s

BY KEN COIN

Courtesy photo

Hiram A. Simmons, taken about the time of this letter to his friend, Joshua Wood. Courtesy of the late Gerald S. Pike and the DeWitt Public Library.

Some time ago, Thomas Schupbach mailed me photocopies of several very old letter dealing with an early DeWitt resident, Joshua Thomas Wood. Now, while many old letter often drone on about "everyone's sick, the cow died, we ran out of beans, please send money" these letters were unusual in that they dealt with a little known piece of Americana known as the "Orphan Trains".

Joshua Wood was not an orphan (neither were most of the boys shipped out of the eastern cities after the Civil War to supply a farm labor shortage in the near and far west) but his story itself will have to wait, - I have a lot of research to do on the matter.

But, for now, one of the letters to Joshua was from a friend in DeWitt, Hiram A. Simmons who offered up for "Josh" a report of some of the happenings in the DeWitt area. The following excerpts are supplemented with my editing (in brackets):

Res. of G.W. Scott
DeWitt, Mich.
(The Henning farm on Norris Rd.)
Sun., Jan. 28, 1877

Friend Josh,

....I am going to school in DeWitt this winter...(He was 20 years old! Was he going to a "select school", finishing high school late, or teaching?) *So I cannot tell you much about the* (Muskrat) *Lake vicinity. They had quite a scare at the Hall Christmas....so many came there to the Christmas Tree that the floor began to give way, it created quite a panic, but they were more scared than hurt.* (Notice he terms it "the Christmas Tree". In those days Christmas trees were seldom part of a household's holiday celebration. The trimming and lighting of a tree was usually a community event held in a public building).

I hear that they have been having protracted meetings (evangelical revivals of great duration) *at the Muskrat and VanDyke schoolhouses and that they are getting a good many converts, among other Mrs. Chas. Furgason and Cora Rathbun. Being so far away I have, as yet, not been.*

I saw Uncle Jo, his wife (Joseph and Evelyn [Merchant] Tucker) *and boy...also Mrs.* (William) *Merchant. New Years at our house.*

I spent Christmas at a Ball, New Years at home and boarding place (Mr. Scott's) *and I like it here and also like the school, although we have been having a little trouble lately on acct. Of tardiness...The school mistress of the lower rooms had a law suit yesterday for whipping a scholar but won the case easy enough.* (Really!?)

We have had quite a considerable snow here this winter. Have had good sleighing over a month. (Good snow was important for good transportation which equated to "good times", socially) *It has been warm for three days and a few more such will spoil it though.*

I came near forgetting that I had got a brother-in-law, (his sister Ella married Millard F. Pike) *it came off the 18th. I cannot think of anything more to write, only I would like to see you. How long have you been gone anyway?*

Your Friend,
H. A. Simmons

P.S. Come old fellow, send me your picture so I can see whether you have changed much or not.

Hiram's friendship with Josh undoubtedly stemmed from his mother's connection with the Merchant family who raised Josh as a foster-son. In fact, the man I believe to be Josh's foster-father, William Merchant, eventually married (in his golden years) Hiram's widowed grandmother Lucy (Smith) Tucker. But we'll save the interesting details of Josh's life until another time.

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

Joshua Woods came to DeWitt by way of the orphan train

BY KEN COIN

It was a situation Dickens would have loved to expound on. Following the Civil War, eastern orphanages were full to capacity with wholesale charity and social reform a dream of the future. On the flip-side, the western frontier was unrolling in leaps and bounds, filling with young couples in need of instant families (i.e. free services).

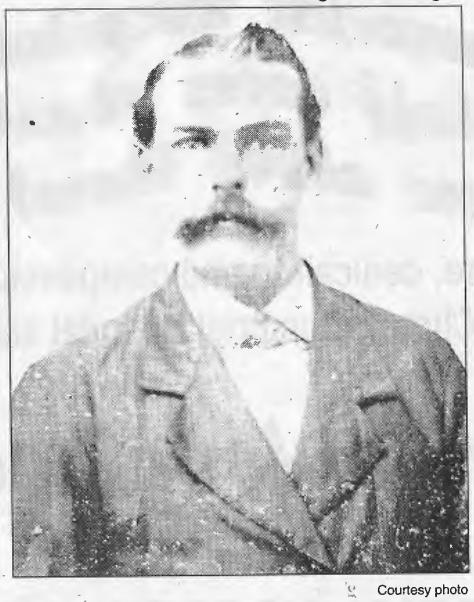
It was a match made in heaven facilitated by the expanding railroads who relied on the success of the western frontier to boost their business interests. Thus was born the notion to empty the orphanages in New York City by simply shipping the children west on what would become known as "Orphan Trains".

Notices in local newspapers preceded the arrival of the trains and at stops of sufficient population, the children were unloaded and paraded before the gathering of locals. Interested parties could ask questions of the children, examine them much as they might a horse, and if they found a child of their liking, were well on their way home with a new family member within a few hours.

Joshua T. Wood was one of those children displayed on the siding of the depot Street. This orphanage, operated by the *American Female Guardian Society* remained his home until he was shipped west on an orphan train. The *Home for the Friendless* was one of the early participants in the "placing out" experiment.

When he got off the train, St. Johns was a new town, little more than ten years since its founding and young Joshua probably marveled at its rough-like atmosphere. So far from home, standing beside the tracks while the local citizenry scrutinized him, he undoubtedly wondered if he'd ever see his father and sister again. How could they ever find him in a place as remote as this?

In the summer of 1874, Mrs. Spaulding (one of the home managers) wrote to Joshua to apprise him of some news. His sister had married and moved to England and his father had remarried (but still unemployed) and was living three blocks from the orphanage with a new wife and child. He was planning to relocate to California where he had a sister in New Castle and had expressed a desire to the orphanage managers that Joshua join him. An error in Joshua's birth record had been discovered which meant that he had now



Courtesy photo

Joshua T. Wood - His life's journey from New York City's *Home for the Friendless* at a young age led him across the continent to California. Courtesy of Joshua Wood's granddaughter, Margaret Tipton.

letter from his uncle Daniel McDonald, a bottle maker in New York City, it appears that Joshua's father died about 1878, but whether in California or New York is unknown.

By the early 1880's, the youthful appeal of California had apparently worn thin. Joshua was back at DeWitt living in his old neighborhood near Muskrat Lake. In 1883 he family. There Joshua died in 1901 at the age of forty-eight, leaving a wife (widowed for the second time) and four young children.

Oddly enough, my article a few weeks back giving excerpts of Hiram Simmons letter to Joshua brought several responses. Some of Wood's descendants read the article and were curious to know more about his mysterious background. Interestingly, although the Wood family left DeWitt more than one hundred years ago, some descendants have made their way back here - proof to all the new DeWitt residents that although you may think you're "new" to DeWitt it's possible you simply "returned" home.

Again, a special thank you to Thomas Schupbach of DeWitt for bringing these old documents of Joshua Wood to light - Also to Wood's descendants: Kathy Johnston, Lisa Judge and Ken and Jan Wood of DeWitt and Margaret Tipton of Fowler for their interest.

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

their business interests. Thus was born the notion to empty the orphanages in New York City by simply shipping the children west on what would become known as "Orphan Trains".

Notices in local newspapers preceded the arrival of the trains and at stops of sufficient population, the children were unloaded and paraded before the gathering of locals. Interested parties could ask questions of the children, examine them much as they might a horse, and if they found a child of their liking, were well on their way home with a new family member within a few hours.

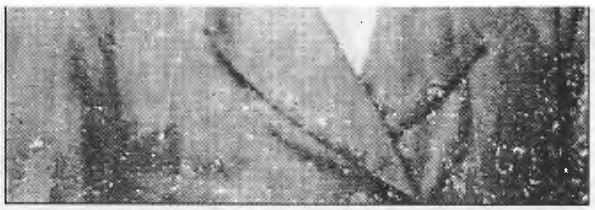
Joshua T. Wood was one of those children displayed on the siding of the depot in St. Johns. He was selected from the crowd of young hopefuls by William Merchant, an established farmer whose homestead was north of DeWitt, just west of Muskrat Lake. Aside from his possible benevolence, Merchant's own children were mostly grown and on their own. An extra set of hands on the farm would certainly come in handy. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Joshua's fate at being "placed out" was seemingly a positive experience.

Joshua had been born in New York City in 1853. His mother died when he was young and he was then sent to the *Home for the Friendless* on 30th

him, he undoubtedly wondered if he'd ever see his father and sister again. How could they ever find him in a place as remote as this?

In the summer of 1874, Mrs. Spaulding (one of the home managers) wrote to Joshua to apprise him of some news. His sister had married and moved to England and his father had remarried (but still unemployed) and was living three blocks from the orphanage with a new wife and child. He was planning to relocate to California where he had a sister in New Castle and had expressed a desire to the orphanage managers that Joshua join him. An error in Joshua's birth record had been discovered which meant that he had now reached his majority and was free to set out on his own.

Eventually, Joshua did make the journey to California to meet up with his father. He ultimately took up 160 acres of government land in Placer county where his aunt and uncle lived. In another surviving



Courtesy photo

Joshua T. Wood - His life's journey from New York City's *Home for the Friendless* at a young age led him across the continent to California. Courtesy of Joshua Wood's granddaughter, Margaret Tipton.

letter from his uncle Daniel McDonald, a bottle maker in New York City, it appears that Joshua's father died about 1878, but whether in California or New York is unknown.

By the early 1880's, the youthful appeal of California had apparently worn thin. Joshua was back at DeWitt living in his old neighborhood near Muskrat Lake. In 1883 he married Julia Zada Peet Mott, a young widow from Dallas Township (near Fowler) with old family connections to DeWitt and the Muskrat Lake neighborhood. They moved to Lebanon Township in the northwest corner of the county where they farmed and began raising their family. There Joshua died in 1901 at the age of forty-eight, leaving a wife (widowed for the second time) and four young children.

Oddly enough, my article a few weeks back giving excerpts of Hiram Simmons letter to Joshua

Going home is not always so easy

Former DeWitt resident makes pilgrimage to hometown

By KEN COIN

Thomas Wolfe was correct in his poignant observation: "You can't go home again." This needle of truth weaves its garish thread throughout the fabric of our lives, often pausing in its journey to poke at us all, to draw blood and reminding us of the futility of trying to disprove the theory. Home, like time itself, remains ever elusive, running in tandem beyond grasp. Triumphs in our lives are measured not in successes at capturing either, but in the chase and how close our attempts fared.

And where is your Home? Is it a house? A neighborhood? A family unit? Is your Home in the past, the present or an ideal for the future? Or does your notion of home change with the seasons of your life?

I had the pleasure of a special guest a few weeks a go. An elderly man stopped by my house in search of his Home. Harry Pitchford called DeWitt his home many, many years back. Following opportunity, he left DeWitt 61 years ago and was now making a pilgrimage of sorts back Home, looking for the friend of his youth.

We talked of many things. Harry had made some good use of his time away from Home. A veteran of WWII, he saw action at Guadalcanal, married, raised a family. In later years he became a world traveler, seeing first-hand places that many people of his generation can scarcely imagine. This year he decided to take a trip Home, from California back to DeWitt.

He found a DeWitt far removed from what he knew in 1936, but took it all in stride that DeWitt, along with the rest of the world, was quickly changing. One of his boyhood homes, the old Shooltz farm on Turner Road has long disappeared to make way for the freeway overpass. Another Home, the horse farm at the southwest corner of Herbison and DeWitt roads was looking more active and prosperous than remembered.

The Home he was really looking for consisted of friends of his youth. But as he ran down a substantial list of names, it became readily apparent that time had taken his Home away. He asked about Ford Schavey; the White brothers, Tom and Bob; the Reed boys, Don and Kenny; Arnold Tucker ... his list went on and on, but each inquiry brought the same response, "gone". There was no one at Home.

Initially I felt very bad for Harry, he had traveled so far only to find that he'd outlived his boyhood chums. But, as an enviable concession, he left with his memory of his friends intact. In his mind his pals could remain forever young. By not remaining in DeWitt he was able to avoid watching them grow old. He did not have to witness the unfair hand that life dealt to some of his friends that he was spared seeing the undignified ens that few would experience. His disappointment may have stung but his memories were preserved.

By contrast, from the view of someone who chose to remain at Home in DeWitt, Thomas Wolfe's observation is just as applicable. The coarse threads of Home and time constantly tug and chafe. It is a great fallacy that those with courage and gumption leave Home while those who remain are taking the easy way through life. For those of us who stay, we take our daily dose of change, and with tremendous fortitude, strive to keep our vision of Home untarnished.

"May it e'ver be so humble, there's no place like Home."

Ken Coin is one of DeWitt's primary historians.