

Father's day for a chief

By DAVID JONES

A very special father lived and died in DeWitt once. On this Father's Day, you might like to know about him. His name was Okemos. He was a chief of the Chippewas.

The DeWitt area was the winter camping grounds for Okemos, his family, and his band. Even as late as 1858, when he died, the Chippewas could find thick woods in DeWitt, many deer, much privacy, and easy access to the clear Looking Glass, which had trout, turtles, muskrats, and all the wildlife possible. The Looking Glass was also a convenient link, by canoe, to the Grand River and Lake Michigan going west, or to Knagg's Bridge and points east.

As a matter of family, Knagg's Bridge was dear to Okemos because there, near a salt lick, in 1775 or so, he was born.

What kind of a father was Okemos? We know he had three children, two

sons and a daughter. The daughter died young — say, in her 20s. Okemos and his family mourned her deeply.

His sons survived the old chief. The ne'er-do-well son, Johnny, was a drunk. However, James Jackson Ogemaw took to farming. (Ogemaw is another way to spell Okemos.) James Jackson's grandson, Edmund Fisher, is a builder in Bay City.

Okemos learned certain values from his father and handed them down to his children. One was patience. Another was cleverness. We have an account of Okemos and a white man from Lansing when they once took a canoe up the Red Cedar River. It was night. They carried burning torches, and they were very quiet. Some five miles east of Lansing, they stopped paddling and drifted downriver. They surprised three deer swimming. The torches hypnotized the animals — a form of jacklighting — so they were able to club and kill two of them.

Another value, or virtue, Okemos taught his family was bravery. The Chippewas were fierce fighters. They always wore their hair short so no enemy could grab them fast in battle. The ochre they smeared — a red earth — on their faces made them look fearful, and also hid wounds. That way, no enemy could see them bleeding and know them vulnerable.

How did they live? Edmund Fisher showed me. The Chippewas had perfected one form of wigwam, easy to build, simple to repair, and quickly disassembled. (It was the women's job to keep the wigwam — from start to finish.)

You take green aspen shoots and strip all the leaves off them. Drive stakes in an oval in the ground (any size you like). Tie one end of a shoot to a stake with rawhide thongs. Because the shoot is green, it will be pliable until it dries. Take the free

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ends of two tied shoots from opposite sides of the oval, bend them together into an arch, and tie them. Add horizontal shoots to the several arches you create all around the oval. The result: a firm shell. Leave a smoke hole in the roof for your fire inside. A good home. Can be enlarged at will; can be packed onto a sled in half an hour. This is how Okemos came and went from DeWitt.

Incidentally, Okemos's brand of insect repellent was smoke. Just that. You would sit in a small wigwam and burn aspen branches until the whole chamber filled with smoke. When you couldn't stand it any more and burst outdoors, you'd have a layer of aspen grease on your skin.

We know one thing Okemos showed his children how to make was the Chippewa flute. A short pipe, you played it vertically, like a clarinet. Another little toy Okemos would fashion — one is in the MSU Museum — was a basket made of rushes, with corn kernels inside to be rattled, all so small a child could hide it in tented hands.

There was a special trick to fishing that Okemos surely taught. You'll find, to this day, potholes in the Looking Glass. The Chippewas would find such, cut down trees to box them off, and then cheerfully spear the fish trapped within.

Some superstitions were also passed along. The Chippewas thought the number four particularly lucky. They made their canoes to lengths of multiples of four feet. They wore four layers of clothing. And the lucky totem, the clan sign, for Okemos was the bear.

DeWitt was a good place to have a family. It was central. When the Looking Glass, and all Michigan rivers, froze over, you had to get around the state on trails. A very old trail ran both ways east and west from DeWitt along the riverbank. Another trail ran south, among the porcupines, snakes, and wolves, to the Grand River, with its trail. In an emergency, you could

march the width of Michigan in two days.

This happened once, in 1800. An Indiana Shawnee named Elkhart and his tribe wanted to muscle in on the rich hunting and fishing land of Michigan. The Chippewas grouped to fight him; the call for help went out. Okemos, from DeWitt, chief Wasso, from Owosso, and their men hurried two days and nights without sleep to somewhere near Three Rivers. They joined Chief Pokagon and his braves. They took up war clubs — pieces of sycamore as long as your forearm, with a rock like your fist bound on by thongs. Excellent weapons to crack skulls with. Then, they lay out in ambush.

No one has written records of that battle. Probably they took no prisoners. But the result was that Elkhart was outgeneralled, out-fought, and driven back forever into Indiana.

Papa Okemos was a short man, about five feet four. He had type O blood, as did all Chippewas until the white man came. He had a low voice, a big jaw he liked to jut out, and a hunting knife always in his belt. He was also shrewd. Robert Deveraux told me that when Okemos was a very old man, he spoke once to a settler at DeWitt. They were standing looking around the woods that Okemos loved so well. Okemos slashed the air with his hand. "White man come," he said, "chop,

chop." And so it would be.

Such was one unusual DeWitt father. He died Dec. 5, 1858, and his family buried him near Portland.

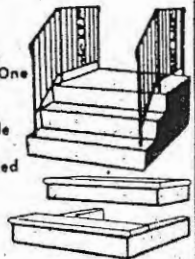
College news

Several Clinton County students were initiated into the national Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi at Central Michigan University. Phi Kappa Phi recognizes superior scholarship in all academic disciplines.

Inductees include: Marc Judge of DeWitt; Dave Koenigsknecht, Vicky Feldpausch, and Susan Armbrustmacher of Fowler; and Carol Hufnagel and Ann Pung of St. Johns.

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Chief Okemos frequented area around DeWitt

By KEN COIN

Last week I mentioned the Indian camp at "Lowery Plains" and although very little has been documented, it was the scene of a singular event which gives it a significance in Michigan's Indian history.

The land currently located at the southeast and southwest corners of Krepps and Round Lake Roads (in sections 1 and 2 of DeWitt Township) was purchased from the government in 1835 and '36 by "Captain" John Lowery (or Lowry). Lowery, assumed to have been an officer in the War of 1812, was a resident of Watertown Township and had purchased this government land as an investment. Although he did not live here, the DeWitt lands soon took on the name "Lowery Plains" by the locals.

The term "Plains" was a designation given to what were thought to be natural clearings, a rarity in this heavily timbered area. In actuality, most of the natural plains were merely areas which had for years been under cultivation by local Indians.

In 1837, Dr. Hiram Stowell (Clinton County's first probate judge) came up from Ann Arbor with his family and for a time lived in a log cabin on Lowery Plains, located on the south side of the Looking Glass. It is from the writings of Stowell's daughter, Olivia, that I first learned of Chief Okemos' death which occurred there years after her own departure.

Her chronicles fail to make any mention of the status of the camp during her childhood there, but judging from the numerous ancient stone relics found on the old Keyes farm (located on the south side of the Looking Glass) it must have been a well-used site for many years prior to the arrival of the whites.

In 1858, with the onset of another winter, Chief Okemos, one of Michigan's most celebrated Indian leaders, was nearing his end. A common sight in greater Lansing, the newspaper had reported that his health was failing. Area photographers clamored for a chance to photograph the battle-scarred hero. A participant in Tecumseh's great uprising, he also fought with the British during the War of 1812.

Okemos was born about 1770-80 at the Indian village of Ketchewandaugoning near what is now the town of Bancroft. His youth and much of his adulthood were spent at this village but the encroachment of the whites after the 1830's forced Okemos and his "mixed" band to relocate. The area they chose later became the village which took on his name — Okemos.

By the 1850's disease and whiskey had decimated his small band and to add insult to injury, they were again losing their fishing and hunting grounds to white settlers and also the state's new college. Dams along the rivers and the quick introduction of water pollution added to the decline of fish and game for the "Red Cedar band".

Local historians noted that the camp at Lowery Plains on the Looking Glass was Okemos' "favorite" hunting grounds. I would put it more realistically that it was probably Okemos' last alternative. But perhaps it was his "favorite", it was after all not too far by river from the place of his birth and in all probability he had come here in his youth.



OKEMOS.

CHIEF OKEMOS, from a lithograph published in Ensign's 1880 History of Shiawassee and Clinton Counties. Courtesy photo.

the funeral of Okemos' daughter in 1852 for which there is an account. The Chatterton family who lived near the Okemos settlement attended the night-time ceremony for the daughter at which the mourning Indians danced about the campfire until dawn. A drum, constructed from a deer hide stretched over the end of a hollow log, kept the cadence intended to attract the Great Spirit to the girl's lifeless body. The Chatterton's provided a coffin for the girl but the Indians objected to the nailing down of the lid as "she could not get out".

The day following Okemos' death his small band made a procession into DeWitt with their Chief's body on a crude sled. At DeWitt they purchased necessities for Okemos' afterlife: tobacco, gun powder and bullets. They also purchased a coffin in which they placed his wrapped body.

That night (the 6th) the procession entered Wacousta and the casket was placed in the hotel livery barn. The following day the procession concluded their trek, arriving at the ancient village of Shimnecon (often spelled with many variations near Portland where the Looking Glass and Grand Rivers converge).

Why was he buried here? His biographers make no mention of any kinship with the Looking Glass Indians (although I suspect there was some and the only clue they give is that his daughter (mentioned above) had been buried here in 1852. But whether that was based on kinship or an association with the Indian mission and school at Shimnecon is still unknown. ("The Indians living at this mission had been removed by the government to the Isabella reservation two years prior to Okemos' death.")

At this remote spot, out of sight from the curiosity of the whites, Okemos was laid to rest — but not for long. It was widely reported that his remains were later unearthed by relic hunters and placed in a glass case by a private individual for the public's viewing/pleasure. The assumed site of his burial remained unmarked until 1921, when a large engraved boulder was placed there by the S.T. Mason chapter of

Lifestyle

323-1711

Long-ago veterans had local ties

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ther is known.

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

Henry Chappell (also spelled Chappel) is believed to have been an early settler south and west of DeWitt. He died here on May 2, 1861, at the age of 72 and was originally buried in the former Goodrich cemetery on Schavey road. His grave, along with several others, was removed to the DeWitt cemetery at a later date.

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

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

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

Historic DeWitt

By Kenneth Coin

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

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

Coin

whom she made her home the last years of her life. She leaves thirteen grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren.

In the year 1865 Mr. and Mrs. George Oliver moved to Watertown and have been pioneers of Clinton county, having located in their farm three-quarters of a mile east of Watertown Center and lived on the same farm forty-nine years. Mr. Oliver passed away fourteen years ago.

This family was an exceptionally united one and their home ties were closely drawn. Mr. and Mrs. Oliver were members of the Wacousta M. E. church during their entire residence here, and lived the teachings of true christianity in their every day life.

Mrs. Oliver was ninety years old the 15th of March and her passing was gentle and calm. Her sweet womanly influence will be felt in her community for many years to come and although always quiet and retiring her presence will be greatly missed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Oliver, who have tenderly cared for her during the last years of her life.

The funeral services were held in the late home at 10:30 Friday a.m., Rev J. E. Foote of Grand Ledge officiating. Interment was made in the family lot in the Wacousta cemetery.

Card of Thanks.

We desire to extend our thanks to our neighbors and friends for their kindness and sympathy to us in the loss of our beloved mother.—Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Oliver and family, Peter Oliver, Mrs. D. H. Cronkite, George R. Oliver, Mrs. Phebe S. Newsome, Mrs. W. W. Brower, Mrs. Louis J. Holbrook.

OBITUARY.

Mrs. George Oliver died at her home in Watertown, Tuesday, March 31, 1914, at 4 o'clock a. m. Rebecca Clow was born March 15, 1824, in Elizabethtown, Ontario, where she spent her girlhood. August 30, 1848 she was united in marriage to George Oliver of Youngs, Ont., at Elizabethtown, by Rev. James Gardiner. To this union seven children were born, all of whom are living: Peter, of Lansing, Ellen of Wacousta, Geo. R. of Gowen, Phebe of Mancelona, Thressa of St. Louis, Margaret of St. Johns and Albert W, who lived on the home farm, and with

Osgood.

W. L. Osgood, a well known business man of DeWitt, died at the home of his son in Detroit last Friday, aged about 70 years. His remains were interred at DeWitt Tuesday. Mr. Osgood was formerly the proprietor of the DeWitt mills.

DEATH CLAIMS RILEY WOMAN

Many Attend Last Rites for
Mrs. Gottfried F. Ottmar, 1941
Aged 71, April 2nd

Mrs. Gottfried F. Ottmar, 71, well known and highly esteemed Riley township woman, passed away at her home Wednesday, April 2, after an illness of about two weeks. Funeral services were held at the residence at 2 o'clock Saturday afternoon, with a friend of the family, Rev. Dr. Bishop of Lansing, for 21 years pastor of Plymouth Congregational church, now retired, officiating. Burial was made in the Boughton cemetery beside her only child who died 42 years ago.

Daisy Ruth Hildreth was born in Riley Dec. 7, 1868. In early childhood she developed a very sweet voice and sang at Christmas exercises, Sunday school picnics and entertainments while sitting on her father's knee. When grown to young womanhood she taught music to nearly all the children in the neighborhood and sang at funerals. Many fine musicians got their early training in music from her teaching.

On Nov. 3 1897, she was married to G. F. Ottmar. After spending a few weeks on a wedding trip in the west they settled on the farm where she died. In 1915 they took a trip to the Pacific coast and all through the western states. All these years she enjoyed unusually good health, and never had a doctor until she suffered a stroke March 23, 1941. A few days after that she was stricken a second time and never recovered.

She is survived by her husband, one sister, Mrs. Lula Burns of St. Johns; one nephew, Howard Keeny, of Davison, Mich.; a few cousins and a host of friends who mourn her passing. The floral tributes were many and in spite of the almost impassable roads, it was one of the largest funerals ever held in the community.

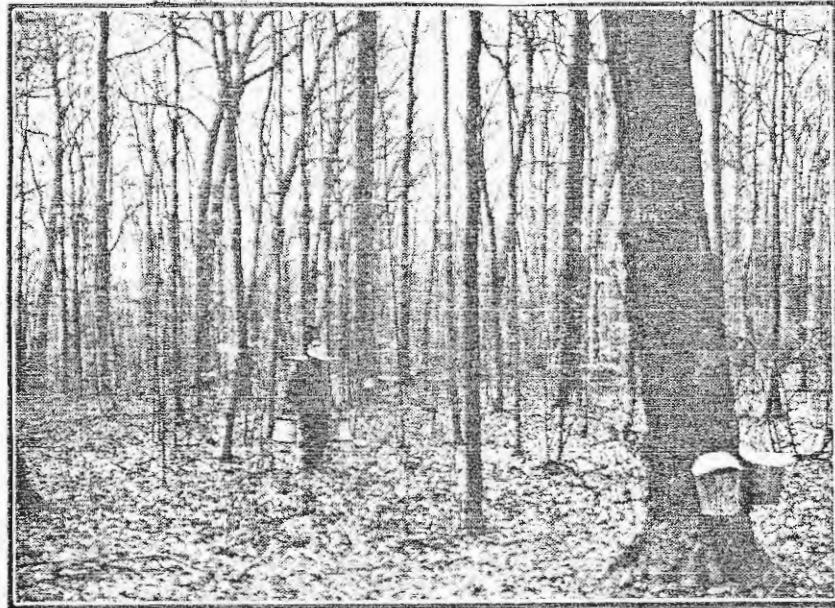
Ottmar

County Republican-News, St. Johns, Michigan—August 12, 1926

Prize Winning Farm Parade Float and Man Who Made it



From a standpoint of beauty, other floats in the farm parade last week Tuesday, may have surpassed the one pictured above. The judges, however, decided the Log Cabin best portrayed the pioneer idea and it was awarded first prize. In the foreground is Gottfried Ottmar, prominent Riley farmer who built it over a Ford truck.



G. F. Ottmar, who lives west of St. Johns, believes in attractive advertising. When he bought a tract of maple timber two years ago and prepared to make maple syrup he wanted a distinctive label for the syrup cans. The above picture, showing him carrying sap buckets with an old fashioned shoulder yoke is a part of the label. Mr. Ottmar, however, uses modern methods in handling and processing his products.—K. H.

Ottmar

Aug 31 1964

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R. O. Overholt

DEWITT — Funeral services will be held Thursday, Sept. 3, at 2 p.m. at the DeWitt Community Church for Ralph O. (Bill) Overholt, 40, prominent DeWitt resident of 104 N. Bridge Street. Rev Daniel Kelin will officiate and burial will be in the DeWitt Cemetery. Friends may call at the Vincent-Rummell Funeral Home until Thursday noon.

Mr Overholt died Monday at Harper Hospital in Detroit following massive open heart surgery.

HE WAS owner and operator of DeWitt Laundryland and was a former partner in the L. J. Griswold Ford Agency for 10 years and associated with Carman Adams, Inc.

He was a member of the DeWitt Community Church and its board of trustees, of DeWitt Lodge 272 F & AM, DeWitt Village Planning Commission, a past president of the DeWitt Lions Club, Parent Teacher Association and Bliss Memorial Association. He had served several terms on the DeWitt village council and

had received a 10-year Veteran Award in scouting.

HE WAS born in Petoskey, May 1, 1915, a son of Lawrence and Nettie Noel Overholt. He attended Bliss elementary schools, graduated from Pellston High School and attended Michigan State University. He had resided in DeWitt 27 years.

On April 7, 1940, he married Ruth C. Marzke, who survives.

ALSO surviving are a daughter, Dessalee; two sons, John and Richard, all at home; four sisters, Miss Treva E. Overholt, in Mexico, Mrs Kathryn Hart of Clayton, Mrs Leona Campbell of St. Louis, Mo., Mrs Marjorie Cassidy of Levering; two brothers, Leon of Traverse City and Harold of Grand Rapids.

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The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
 He leadeth me beside the still waters.
 He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the
 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of
 the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
 for thou art with me, Thy rod and
 thy staff they comfort me.
 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence
 of mine enemies: thou anointest my head
 with oil: my cup runneth over.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life: and I will
 dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
 Twenty-third Psalm

in memory of
 Ralph O. (Bill) Overholt

date of birth

May 1, 1915

date of death

August 31, 1964

services

DEWITT COMMUNITY CHURCH

Thursday, September 3, 1964
 2:00 p.m.

clergyman

Rev. Daniel Kelin

DeWitt Community Church

Mrs. Wilma Reed, Organist

interment

DeWitt Cemetery

DeWitt, Michigan

bearers

Richard Keck Donald Reed

Lawrence Feightling

John Reust Virgil Zeeb

John Hiatt

Funeral Arrangements by
 Vincent-Rummell Funeral Home