

THE WAY IT WAS

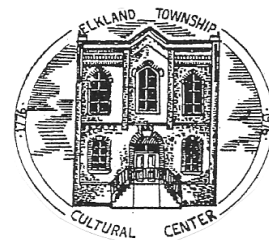
The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 31

APRIL 2022

NUMBER 2



On Monday, March 17th, a public meeting was held in the library meeting room. The program was "Identifying With Dave". Dave Ackerman was a former history teacher at Cass City. At times he would hold a contest for his students to identify people from pictures he would show on a screen of people who were prominent in shaping history. We enjoyed a similar exercise, but in a more relaxed manner with an updated version of Dave's example.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Back about the year 1900, the turn of the century, two young barbers named John Ball and Samuel Champion had a barber shop beneath the Cass City State Bank on Main Street. One day a salesman, George Rumble, from the American Tobacco Company came into their shop looking for someone who would post some advertising signs around town for a fee. Business must



have been slow that day because Sam decided that he would do it himself.

That experience sparked the idea that he could make a business of not only posting signs but also providing the service of making the signs for the sellers of various kinds of products.

He wasn't at it too long and he had developed enough business to go on his own and sell his portion of the barber shop to John.

Samuel was born in Quebec, Canada in 1869, and came to Michigan with his parents, Francis and Christina Champion when he was 15 years old. Francis was born in England and

Christina in Scotland.

Champion is an English name that means "warrior", or one who fights for a cause. Over the years the name got extended to also mean one who had defeated all of his competitors.



The business grew and prospered as the environment for advertising changed.



Automobiles were coming onto the scene, and roads were being developed. This created wide



1916 Ford

open spaces where advertising could be scene while driving. Signs were even being painted on the sides of barns. Sam had to buy a second vehicle to transport his sign making materials.



The business grew from just a few towns to covering more than thirty towns in the center of Michigan area. Over the years Sam held several different positions in the Outdoor Advertising of Michigan organization.

Sam championed the outdoor advertising business, and he also

raised some prize chickens. Raising chickens in town was common in that day but he was one of only two members in the Black Minorca Club of Michigan.

Samuel Champion passed away in 1936



leaving a son, Clifton by his first wife, Ada, and Samuel Champion two sons, Frank and Andrew, and a daughter, Edith, by his second wife, Edith.

Frank then ran a St. Louis, Michigan office of the company, and Andrew became the company's president in Cass City.

Andrew had been a champion basketball player in high school and his obituary noted that he had even played some



Andrew Champion

professional ball, but it didn't note where or for who.

Sam had as a father enjoyed taking his sons to the northern part of the state to a deer hunting camp each fall.

These experiences must have had an

effect on Andrew as he later became a champion for wildlife conservation. At one time he was a member of five separate conservation clubs in central Michigan. Andrew with a neighbor bought and dedicated a square mile section of land on Wildfowl Bay as a no hunting wildlife sanctuary. He became friends with the governor and he appointed Andrew to the Michigan Conservation Commission.



Governor Williams

Like Samuel, his father, Andrew lost his first wife, Gladys, who died of an illness at an early age in 1940. They had one son, James.

Andrew's second wife was Lucile Heron from Bay City. Lucile also became active in the business and as an artist even painted some signs herself.

The business was continuing to grow, but during the war years things got more difficult with rationing and a difficulty finding



the men to do the sign posting and painting work due to their being drafted into the service. Some sign boards were dedicated to advertising for the war effort without compensation.

In 1949 Andrew died suddenly of an heart attack. The governor attended Andrew's funeral. The governor also returned to Cass City in 1951 to speak to the Community Club.

Andrew's only son, Jim, was just finishing his education at business school in Bay City. He returned home to start work as the new president of the company.



Jim Champion

Through Jim's involvement with his father's conservation associations he visited several gun clubs and had seen the gun collections of some of the members. This sparked his interest and you might say Jim became a champion of gun collectors.

In 1945 the company purchased the Smith Poster Advertising Company of Vassar. This added fifteen new advertising towns to the company's business, and then in 1964 the company purchased the Klassen Outdoor Advertising Company of Holland making Champion one of the largest outdoor advertising companies in the state.

Jim became the president of The Outdoor Advertising Association of Michigan.

In spite of all the success the times were changing and so were the outlets for advertising. The new medium of television had entered onto the scene, first in black and white and then in color. Displaying advertising in a live form on a screen within the homes was formidable competition.

Also in 1965 from the promotion by President Johnson's wife the Highway Beautification Act was passed. Although limited in it's scope it was aimed at removing certain types of fixed signs along the nations highways. You have to wonder what Lady Bird would think of the intrusiveness of some of the advertising today with the percentage of time of TV commercials, the internet social media programs and spam e-mail,

junk mail and the pestering of telemarketers that we have today.

In 1973 the company was sold to the Dingman Advertising Company of Traverse City ending a 70 year business history in Cass City.

For a while after the company's business building and office located at the south west corner of Ale and Church Streets was used as an office for the Secretary of State, but it was rather short lived. That location is now a parking lot.

The Andrew Champion home which stood in front of the office on Main Street was moved and replaced by Jordan College, and then Baker College, and now used for medical offices for the Hills and Dales Hospital complex.

The story is not complete if a Champion involved in the business, and also with the promotion of Cass City is not recognized. Andrew's second wife, Lucile, or Grandma Champion, as she was affectionately known, was one of the forces for Cass City becoming known as "Christmas Town".



Lucile Champion Bauer

She was known for her large nativity scene with live animals, and her direction of the Christmas Pageant on a hill in the winter time. This production drew large crowds from all around. She directed plays and was the president of our Cass City Centennial celebration organization. In 1970 she was listed in "The Who's Who of American Women". She married Jim Bauer, the owner of a Bauer Candy Company in 1955.

"Opportunities seek an adventurous spirit, a Champion"