

THE WAY IT WAS

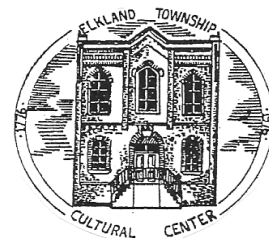
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The annual Christmas Sing-A-Long sponsored by the Society and the Friends of the Library was held Monday evening, December 12th in the Pinney Room. The singing was led by Connie Ivankovitch and the organ was played by Barbara Kirn. It was good to be able to gather together again and sing the old Christmas songs after last year's cancellation of the event because of the virus meeting restrictions.

PIONEER CRAFTSMEN ALSO CRAFTED A VILLAGE

James Hitchcock was born in 1830 in Oneida County, New York the son of Hiram and Lucinda Greenleaf Hitchcock. Both the Hitchcock and Greenleaf ancestries can be traced back to England, but earlier the Greenleaf ancestors were Huguenots that migrated to England from France to avoid religious persecution.

James, after receiving his primary education, entered into an apprenticeship under his uncle to become a tinsmith in the old country craft guild tradition. In America it was normal to learn your trade from your father or a relative. This would have been illegal before the Revolutionary War because England tried to control all the trade in the colonies.

After he had mastered his trade he purchased 40 acres of land in the Thumb of Michigan that had opened up for sale after the treaty with the Indians in 1819. He had his belongings, including the tools and materials of his trade, transported there and he began building a cabin. On his first night after felling some trees he made a bed between two logs with a tarp over him and tried to sleep, but the

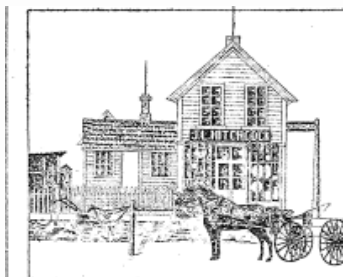
sounds of the bear, elk and smaller critters roaming around awakened him to the realization of the wildness of this territory. He finished his building roofing the cabin with his supply of tin coated iron sheets.

He then traveled back to Ohio where he married his fiancé, Caroline Turnbull, who had just finished her education to become a school teacher, and brought her back to Michigan.

Carrie taught at a school near Newberry, later named Kingston, which was a two mile walking distant away. James applied his new craft making camp kettles which he sold to the Indians. He also made various items including lanterns cooking and eating utensils for other settlers. Some of these items were sold by mail through a mailman that traveled between Port Sanilac and Vassar.

In 1864 the Hitchcocks moved to Wajamega which they assumed would become the county seat. There they built a store and residence. Carrie ran the store and James applied his trade of making tinware items for sale. He started also selling stoves up and down the Cass River which he could buy in Saginaw. This brought him as far as Cass City where he decided "this is the place" and

purchased a wooden store and residence on the North



Hitchcock's First Store in Cass City.

west corner of main and Leach Streets.

In this new store he expanded his inventory from the things he made to the things could purchase and resell to other settlers.

James also purchased property in the South west quadrant of town and subdivided it into the first and second Hitchcock Additions to the village.

His business grew and he donated a piece of his land to the village to build a town hall. The town hall was the first brick building built in town and the bricks were the first to come from the Depew kiln located in the fork of the river south of town. The building required the craftsmanship of masons and carpenters.

The village

layout was platted by a resident surveyor, Travis Leach. Travis was the son of a millwright, and had come here from New York where he received his training to become a surveyor. He designed our wide Main Street which was so excess at the time that it has been thought maybe he could foresee the town's future needs. Since that was written it was heard that Meredith Auten had revealed that his reason was so that a farmer could make a U-turn with his horses and a wagon without having to back up.

The building of the town hall began a trend of building business buildings on Main Street from the bricks made locally.

Bricks are extremely heavy and they had to be hauled up from the kiln to the building site by horses and wagons. The wagons were probably made in the Wickware Bros. shop on Main Street. This required the craftsmanship of wainwrights, wheelwrights and blacksmiths such as Elias McKim, Adam Muck and John Bader. The blacksmiths were also farriers who made and fitted horse shoes to the horses. The horses may have raised and trained by men such as Milton Hoffman or John Sugden. The horses needed harnesses that may have been made by men such as Whitson Schooley and Joe Wallace in their shops on Main Street. The growing establishment of businesses was a drawing card for bringing the surrounding farming community into town to sell their products such as eggs, cream, grain, meat and wool and to purchase the supplies and services that they needed on the farm.

In 1898 a power and water plant was built on the northwest corner of Church and Oak Streets to service the community.

James Hitchcock built the three story Hitchcock Block for his

growing business and it included the Opera House in the upper stories. The Opera House with live



The Hitchcock Block

entertainment and public programs such as graduation ceremonies brought people from all over into town. The new power plant supplied the electricity to make it possible. The carpenter work was done by Keating, Landon and Eno. This building started a brick building trend on Main Street. This trend culminated with the building of the three story Sheridan Hotel on the corner of Main and Seeger Streets which may have been to compete for claiming to be the



The Sheridan Hotel

tallest building when including its cupula on top.

The new power plant opened the need for more skilled professionals such as electricians and plumbers.

There were many skilled trade people required to complete the forming of the community such a bakers, bankers, barn builders, butchers, barrel makers (Adam Benkelman), cobblers, constables, dentists, doctors, druggists, furniture makers, grocers,

haberdashers, hotel keepers, lawyers, mechanics, millers, seamstresses (Lucy Dickinson & Alice Moore), photographers, preachers and publishers. There was once a woolen mill and a cast iron foundry in town.

This mixture of pioneers of diverse backgrounds formed together in committees that formed a village government, built a school, the churches, and lodges such as the Odd Fellows and the Masons. There was a chapter of The Grand Army of the Republic, a VFW type of organization of veterans of the Civil War. Many of the settlers of this area were veterans who came here to claim their land grants for their services in the Civil War. There are 69 known graves of Civil War veterans in the Elkland Township Cemetery, and several more in the Novesta Township Cemetery.

The people who came here were mostly immigrants or children of immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, England and France that had come here for greater freedom and opportunity. Many came through Canada and some of those were Loyalists to the British Crown and had moved to Canada to escape discrimination after the Revolutionary War.

Today family farms have been swallowed up into large enterprises, and the old craftsmen skills have been automated. Due to the work of our development corporation several fine manufacturing companies have located here providing local employment. Also a result of the recent pandemic some people can work on-line at home with new and different skill set or craft. Many purchases are made on-line and delivered to their door. Many of our old buildings are empty especially on the upper floors which handicap accessibility rules prohibit their use.