



historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

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The Cass City Historical Society and the Friends of the Library met on Monday evening, Dec. 16th, in the library meeting room to sponsor the annual Community Christmas Sing-a-long. The music was led by Connie Iwankovitch (standing), Scott Mills and Dotty Scolon. The organ was played by Barbara Kirn. A good time was had by all who came out singing the traditional Christmas songs and carols, and enjoying the refreshments of cookies, punch and coffee.



Soldier, Surveyor, Servant



Travis Leach

Travis Francis Leach was born March 25, 1838 in Steuben County, New York, the son of Solomon and Paulina Travis Leach. Solomon Leach was a millwright, which at that time likely meant he was a precision carpenter that made and maintained wooden gears and shafts for flour mills that were powered by either wind or water.

Travis got his basic education in the local school system until he was 13 years of age.³

It is not known what happened to his father, Solomon, as Paulina Travis later married Inman J. B. McKenney in 1849. To that marriage two children were born, Edward in 1851, and Paulina in 1854. Also in 1854 the family moved to Michigan and settled in what was to become Ellington Township.

For the first few years in Ellington the family was busy building a home, clearing the land, cutting timber in the winter and raising crops in the summer. Other neighbors were few and far between. There were no roads except a lumber trail along the river. The nearest post office was in Vassar, and the nearest place to buy supplies was in East Saginaw, which was then just becoming a village.⁴

Mr. McKenney was an ordained Methodist Episcopal minister. At the laying of the cornerstone of the first M.E. Church in Cass City the

opening ritual was read by him after which he also delivered the very first sermon in Cass City at that event.²

In 1860 Travis married Emily Thomas from neighboring Columbia Township. Their daughter Lila was born in 1862.

In 1864 Travis enlisted in Company B of the Michigan 23rd Infantry, and was later transferred to the 28th Infantry Division.

Travis fought in both the Battle of Nashville and the Battle of Columbus, Georgia. The Battle of Columbus was considered the last battle of the Civil War. He was discharged in 1866. He returned home and trained to become a surveyor. His son, Cloud



Union Infantryman

(Claude?) was born in 1867.³

On Nov. 26, 1924 this article appeared in the Cass City Chronicle:

Surveyor Insisted on Wide Streets

When you look down the newly paved Main Street which has just been completed do you wonder why Cass City has one of the widest business streets of any village in the state. Was it wisely planned by early officials or did the land owner simply tell the surveyor to make her “wide and handsome”?

G. A. Striffler, local business man, grew reminiscent the other day and related a little history regarding Cass City’s Main Street, which seems to be the most reasonable explanation that has been advanced. He has a tale from the early settlers and simply told of the incident as it was related to him.

John C. Seeger was the owner of the land which forms the original plat of Cass City and which embraces the territory extending from Grant Street on the east to West Street on the west, and from Main Street south to Houghton Street. Mr. Seeger was accidentally killed while hunting elk in a swamp near Cass City and his was the first body of a white man to be buried in Elkland township.

In preparing plans for the original site of Cass City, which consisted of eight blocks, the late Andrew Seeger, administrator of the estate, in 1868 engaged Travis Leach, now deceased, then a resident of Elkland Township, as a surveyor to determine the location of the streets and alleys. Mr. Leach suggested that Main and Seeger Streets be made 99 feet wide. Mr. Seeger, accustomed to lumber roads of those early days in this community thought it a waste of land to use so much space for a village street and wanted it narrower. But Mr. Leach was adamant in firmness, the streets must be 99 feet in width or Mr.

Seeger could get another surveyor. Surveyors were anything but plentiful in Michigan in those days and Mr. Leach had his way—a fact which all have been thankful for since that day as they viewed the spacious Main and Seeger Streets of Cass City and its other wide thoroughfares.²

* * * *

The article mentions that the north and south street on the east end of the original plat was named Grant Street, which now is Maple Street. A story heard is that during prohibition the Women’s Christian Temperance Union didn’t like the idea that President Grant liked to “tip the bottle” so they got the name of the street changed to Maple Street. However, one street that retains its original name is the one honoring Travis.



While living in Elkland Township Travis served as the highway commissioner, and as a township supervisor. He was one of the original members that established the Tyler Lodge of Free Masons in Cass City.²

In 1877 Travis sold out his belongings and moved with his family to Texas. While living there his work of surveying took him to other states of Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

Cloud Leach appears on the 1870 census as being 4 years old, but does not appear on the 1880 census when he would have been 14.¹ It is

not known if something happened to him, or if this was just an omission on the census. No further reference could be found about him except in Travis’ obituary in 1914, it states Cloud at that time was a rancher in New Mexico.¹ Travis’ wife, Emily passed away in New Mexico in 1883.

Travis had a cattle ranch in Gray, Texas and he also served as the District Surveyor there. He also served two years as a judge in Wheeler County, Texas.³

In 1886 Travis sold his ranch, and he and his daughter, Lila, moved back to Michigan to the original family farm in Ellington Township.

The following year he married Annette Richardson, a school teacher from Almer township.

In 1890 he was elected and served in the state legislature in Lansing in the Peoples Party representing our district. He also served as a Grange representative for the state.

His troubles were not over as in June of 1905 a tornado came though this area, destroyed his barn and did severe damage to his house, which he had to have restored and rebuilt.²

On April 22, 1914 Travis Francis Leach passed away in his home from pneumonia ending a long and distinguished career of service to his communities and his country.¹

It is amazing to realize that a young man at a time when he had never seen an automobile or a truck, 150 years ago, could have had the foresight to provide us today with the convenience of having a main street wide enough to accommodate two wide sidewalks, two lanes of parking, and four lanes of traffic.

1 Ancestry.com

2 Cass City Chronicle

3 Portrait & Biographic Record, Chapman Bros., Chicago, 1892

4 History of Tuscola & Bay Counties, H.R. Page & Co., Chicago, 1893