



### One Hundred Years ago—1924

- \* James K. Brooker won the Bronze Medal for Pole Vaulting in the Paris Olympics.
- \* The Ellis Island Immigration Center was closed due to the small number of immigrants resulting from the Immigration Reduction Act of 1924.
- \* The Thumb Octagon Barn was built on the James Purdy Farm near Gagetown.

### **“Like Fathers - Like Sons”**

On May 26, 1831 James Brooker was born in Escott County, Ontario, Canada. He was the son of James Brooker, Jr. born in 1805 in Escott, who was the son of James Brooker born in 1780, also in Escott. Escott was a small settlement a short distance down stream from the start of the St. Lawrence River at the Eastern end of Lake Ontario. This is as far back in time that the Brooker ancestry could be traced in the records available.

History records that the Brooker surname had its origin in Normandy of Northern France, but the Brookers came to England in the Norman Conquest in 1066. It is assumed that the original American Brookers came to America from England.

In 1859 James Brooker (3rd) married Lois Thompson of Scottish descent and also of Escott. The Brookers had three children, Emeline, Addie and James D. before James the father came to Michigan to fulfill his desire to fight in the American Civil War. He was not accepted at first because he failed to meet the requirements, whether it was for physical reasons or citizenship. By the time that he qualified and was enlisted it was too late, the war was over. It seems strange that he would travel all the way to Michigan when he could have crossed the river

and enlisted in the state of New York. Maybe he had some connection in Michigan or maybe it had something to do with his nature - with his name, James.

The name, James, is derived from the name Jacob. Jacob was the grandson of the Old Testament patriarch, Abraham. Jacob wrestled with an angel for a whole night refusing to release him until the angel gave him his blessing. This persistence tells of the nature of those named Jacob and James. In today's terms, you might say they are programmed.

The family moved to Michigan in 1866 and made their residence in Ellington.

James established his trade there as a blacksmith, they operated a small store and he also farmed and lumbered his land like other settlers of the area. James became a pioneer supervisor of Ellington Township. He also held the positions of drain commissioner and Justice of the Peace. He was an avid Republican. While in Ellington the Brookers had two more daughters, Alphenra and Charlott.

In late 1888 the Brookers moved to a farm they bought on the western outskirts of Cass City. The McDonald's Restaurant now sits on the North East corner of that property.

They were active members in the Presbyterian Church. Lois Brooker passed away in 1916 and James in 1918.

James and Lois' son James D. received his basic education in Ellington, and then he enrolled in the Northern Indiana Normal School at Valparaiso where he completed a one year teaching course. He entered into the law practice of Timothy C. Quinn in Caro studying law for about twelve months. He was admitted to the bar in Detroit in 1886. He then opened his law practice in Cass City.

In 1889 he and Mary Bader were married. Like James' father, Mary's father, John Bader, was also a blacksmith.



**James D. Brooker**

During his career as a lawyer he was

very active in county affairs. He served as a circuit court commissioner, as the prosecuting attorney, on the War Board, and the Board of County Commissioners of which he was chairman for several years.

In Cass City he served as the Village Attorney, as a school board member, and as the legal advisor of the Pinney State Bank. Along with Mack Wickware they bought and operated the Cass City Enterprise Newspaper which he later sold out to his partner. He partnered with Mack's uncle, Henry Wickware, and Dr. I.A. Fritz to build the "City Block Building". The Wickwares were also born in Ontario, Canada. This building housed legal and dental offices on the upper floor. and the Post Office and Burkes Drug Store on the lower floor.



**City Block Building (today)**

That store later became Mac & Scotty's Drug Store.

James D. was also a member of the Tyler Masonic Lodge and of the Presbyterian Church. He and his wife, Mary had one son, James K. Brooker and one daughter, Marie. They built their home on the south west corner of Oak and Church Streets. That house today is the home of Mark and Angelia House.

James K. had outstanding athletic abilities and drive according to his friend and college roommate, Fred Pinney, in an earlier history paper. He was an outstanding high school athlete in baseball, football and track and in track in college. In college he concentrated on throwing the discus and pole vaulting

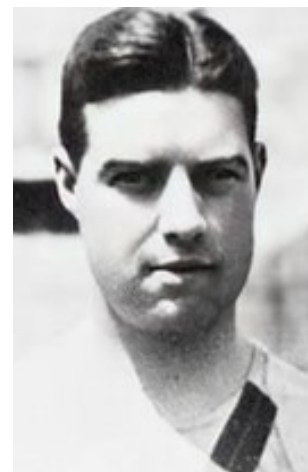
which is an unusual combination. Discus throwers need weight and strength while pole vaulters are usually tall, slender, well coordinated, fast runners with upper body strength. In addition to the physical stature and ability sports like these require a great deal of practice.

The high school didn't maintain the track facilities during the summer months so James built his own pole vaulting set up in the yard beside his home. He dug a landing pit and filled it with sawdust. He could be seen out there by himself practicing and practicing for hours on end.

James enrolled in Michigan State and after one year he transferred to the University of Michigan Law School studying to be an attorney like his father. Evidently his law studies didn't interfere with athletic interests because while there he qualified for the 1924 Olympic Games in pole vaulting to be held that year in Paris, France – **"100 years ago this year"**.

The pole vaulting sport is much different today than it was 100 years ago. The poles were made of metal, steel and aluminum. Today they are made of fiber glass and carbon fiber, which makes for a stronger, lighter and more flexible pole. The landing pits were filled with sand just like the broad jump pits so the athletes had to land on their feet to avoid injury, but still presented ankle injury vulnerability. Today pole vaulters and high jumpers land on large air filled mats which provides for a wide variety of forms going over the bar and landing into the mat. Because of these differences you can't compare the heights achieved by the previous athletes to those of today. In 1924 the gold and silver medals were won by Lee Barnes and Glen Graham of the USA both clearing 3.95 meters (12 ft. 1.5in.). Each vaulter had up to three attempts at each height, so Barnes required fewer attempts. The same must be

true of James Brooker and Henry Peterson of Denmark—both with a height of 3.9 meters (12 Ft, 9 1/2 in.) with Brooker being the winner.



**James K. Brooker**



**1924 Bronze Medal**

Winning the world Olympic Bronze Medal brought pride to his Country, State, University, Home Town and his High School.

After graduation from law school and passing his bar exam James established a successful law practice in Bay City with his office located in the Phoenix Building. He married Gwendolyn Wilson from Marlette, and they had a home on Center Avenue in Bay City. Gwendolyn was a music



teacher. It's not recorded that they had any children. Which leaves no heir with the name James Brooker.

People often assume that Brooker Street was named after James K, but that is an honor he has to share with his grandfather.