

historically speaking

## THE WAY IT WAS

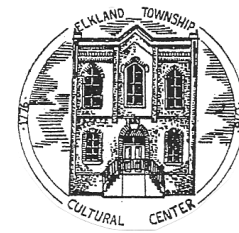
The publication of

# THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 28

April 2021

NUMBER 2



There have been no recent Historical Society meetings due to virus restrictions.



### Social Distancing Is Nothing New

Many of the men and women who first came to this area were victims of a form of social distancing in their old country. Those pioneers who developed our community came here to escape social discrimination for religious and ethnic reasons. Many of them came from England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany. Here they overcame their differences, learned to work together, and built a new, thriving community out of the wilderness.

Many Civil War veterans who came here had received land grants for their service. They developed the farming lands surrounding the village. There are over sixty Civil War veterans buried in the Elkland Township Cemetery.

It was an age when people earned their living with their personal skills and

craftmanship. The lumbermen that felled the trees, sawed and planed them into boards for construction. Carpenters and masons built homes, barns, stores and other buildings. Farmers cleared and tilled the land, and raised their crops. They also raised the livestock. Horsemen bred and trained the horses which were the primary source of power for heavy work and transportation. There were wainwrights, cartwrights and wheelwrights that built the wagons for moving materials and carriages for personal travel. This required input from the harness makers and blacksmiths. Cobblers made and repaired the shoes. Coopers made the barrels to store perishable goods such as flour to keep it dry and away from critters. Tinsmiths made cooking utensils and stoves. Tailors and seamstresses made the clothing. One lady, Ella Vance, made a living making ladies hats. Women didn't go to church without having their heads covered.<sup>1</sup> They not only covered but decorated them.

They all worked together to build churches, schools, streets and roads. All this required also the help from bankers, surveyors and doctors.

Much more could be told, but it is amazing to realize that

people from very disparate and socially distant backgrounds could come together in an unplanned way to build a self contained, socially close community from scratch.

As time went on advancing technology in transportation to other communities grew first with the coming of the railroad, and then the automobile. An electric power plant was built and a water tower was erected to supply the town with electric power and running water. The sewer system with a waste water facility was built. Additions to the village were added and new homes were being built. The milk condensery was built providing employment for many people, a market for the dairy farmers and a business for milk haulers. Main Street became filled with stores, banks, gas stations, restaurants, barber and beauty shops, car dealerships and a movie theater.

There was a time when on all the stores were open and busy on Friday nights, and it seemed like everybody came to town. Parking places would be filled. People walked up and down the streets doing their shopping and visiting in the different stores. Teenagers who could get the car made trips back and forth on Main Street with u-turns

at each end. Steve Orto and Bill McKinley were keeping an eye on them from the patrol car. Some people just sat in their cars and enjoyed the activity. Some enjoyed meeting and talking with their neighbors, friends, and with the merchants and clerks in the stores.

Both men's and women's service clubs were formed for social and community service purposes. These clubs and societies have maintained much of the social activity within the community over the years. The Women's Study Club started the library which was moved to various locations over the years until the Rawson Memorial Library was built. It has provided a major source of community activity.

There was a time when the businesses sponsored summer softball league teams which played their games on the north end of the football field under the lights. The bleachers would be filled with fans watching and hollering for their teams such as Baldy's Sunoco playing Wallace Corners or Bullis Plumbers playing Local 83. You could see Elwyn Helwig pitch against Moose Wiley, and Carl Kolb hit one clear out of park to the football bleachers.

The merchants also sponsored bowling league teams for both men and women which packed the bowling alley on league nights.

There was a time when the Cass City Community Club sponsored pot-luck suppers in the old high school gymnasium for a night of entertainment. A play such as "The Womanless Wedding" would be presented or a barbershop quartet contest, or a hypnotist's show.

There was also a time when that gym was largest and best in the Thumb, and the high school basketball tournaments would be held there. Every seat including those on the stage and in the balcony were filled and standing

room to overflowing.

At one time Cass City became known as "Christmas Town" when people erected Christmas displays in their front yards encouraged by the elaborate activated paper mache displays created by Lloyd Vyse. Grandma (Champion) Bauer had a large manger scene in her front lawn with live animals including a donkey. This began the practice of putting Christmas decorations on the light poles on Main Street. A Christmas pageant was enacted on a hill north of the park and people came from miles around to witness it. This production required the whole community to come together to make it successful in the winter time.

In 1965 our community conducted our Centennial celebration and it seemed like everyone in the community got involved in one way or another. We named ourselves "The Pacesetters Of The Thumb". The old Town Hall was remodeled and renamed "The Cass City Cultural Center". Governor George and Lenore Romney came to dedicate it, and to cut the ribbon. The men formed chapters of the "Brothers of the Brush" with a beard growing contest and other activities such a rope pulling contests in which the losers were pulled through a blast of water from a fire hose. The ladies organized in chapters of the Centennial Belles. Square dancers caravanned to surrounding towns where they danced in their streets to promote the coming celebration. Old fashioned clothes were in style for everyone and a large historical pageant "From Wilderness To Wonders", was enacted on a large stage on the football field including a cast of hundreds .

These activities of our history are examples of the social closeness of our community's past, and how they contributed quality of life.

With the inception of large super

retail stores that bypass the wholesaler, and open in the county seats the smaller specialized retail stores in the surrounding communities are being priced out of business leaving many locations empty.

If you shop at a WalMart you might meet and talk to someone you know, and then again you likely will not. That makes for a rather unsatisfying trip. If you shop in one of our local stores you're much more likely to meet friends you know, which makes up for the social distancing requirements now in force.

Have you noticed that even with our masks on we can still recognize people? Sometimes it's just seeing their eyes or hearing their voice. It's amazing how unique and special friends are. Sometimes it's a special presence about them. When we don't have these relationships it seems we can grow a little more critical and negative. This can destroy our sense of community.

Maybe there is a hidden danger in "Virtual Schooling" for our children, "working from home", and "Zoom" meetings" that will short change our personal relationships. Children in school learn to get along with others, and make friends and memories that sometimes last a lifetime.

According to the Barbara Streisand song —



People,  
 People who need people are  
 the luckiest people in the world.  
 We're like children needing other  
 children,  
 and letting our grown-up pride hide  
 all our need inside  
 acting more like children than  
 children

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1 Corinthians 11:5