

THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOLUME 37

NOVEMBER 2023

NUMBER 4



On Wednesday, June 28th, the Historical Society hosted a program presented by Mike Fornes from Mackinaw on the Grand Hotel on Mackinaw Island. If you have ever stayed there you know what a magnificent hotel and organization this establishment is along with the special rooms, gardens and history—including the filming of a movie, “Somewhere in Time”. There is a book, authored by Mike, which includes many stories and pictures about the hotel and its organization in the library.



Going Once ...Going Twice ... SOLD!!

Jacob Henry Striffler was born in 1851 in Lancaster, New York. Lancaster is located east of Buffalo. He was the son of Henry and Elizabeth Striffler who had come to the United States from Alsace Loraine. Alsace was a small strip of land between Germany, France and Switzerland, and is now a part of France. Striffler is a Swiss name.

Jake's education in Lancaster not only included the “Three Rs” but how to apply what he learned in school. Lancaster was an incubator for new businesses started by craftsmen who brought their skills with them from the Old Country. Lancaster had a glass factory, a tannery, a soap factory, an iron foundry, saw mills, planning mills, a furniture factory, a church organ factory, two breweries and a brick factory,



Jacob Henry Striffler

They bought a piece of farm land on the east side of town that stretched out into part of which is now the township cemetery. He eventually built a stately brick home on the north west

ry, and a carriage factory. It's not known what work he engaged in before coming to Cass City but he learned the value of many things, how they worked and what they were worth. This was basic knowledge for a budding auctioneer. He not only learned about the products, but also learned about the people who needed, bought and used these products. He learned what it was that influenced them. It's likely that he witnessed many auction sales in Lancaster and maybe worked some himself.

Jake married Sophia Helwig in Lancaster at the age of 29. Sophia's parents had come to Lancaster from Germany. Jake and Sophia decided to move to Cass City maybe following his uncle John Striffler who was one of the earliest settlers in the community.

During Jake's



Former Striffler Home

corner of that property.

The Strifflers had one son, Calvin, and four daughters, Margaret, Lillian, Ida and Laura.

Jacob farmed his land and also built a farm implement, supply and repair dealership business on Main Street where the Parkway drive-thru business is today. One of his early newspaper ads listed road graders, threshing machines, Champion mowers and binders, cultivators, plows and four car loads of wagons. He also sold general farming supplies such as wire fencing. In those days there were no tractors and all equipment was horse drawn. Eventually it became a John Deere dealership which continued and was owned and operated for many years by new owners including Arnold Copeland, Cliff Ryan and John Marshall.

During Jake's



Sophia Striffler

early days he kept his connections with friends in Lancaster which probably enabled him to buy some items of equipment which would otherwise be difficult to get.

Cass City once had a cast iron foundry operated by a man named Martin Dew who became ill and passed away at an early age. The main product manufactured there was walk behind plows and they were sold and shipped out by the railroad to distant customers around the country. Jake stepped in and managed the foundry for a while to keep it going. With the advent of tractors the market for walk behind plows went away and the foundry eventually ceased operation.

There is a fine sample of a Cass City three bottom plow on display in the loft of the Octagon Barn.

In the early days of the community much of the business was centered on farming. Farms were much smaller - 40, 60 and 80 acres divided off in fields separated with fence rows. The livestock grazed in the fields and there were no milking machines. Equipment then was very crude and also much smaller by today's standards. As people upgraded they sold their old items and they needed a market for their used materials and equipment. Auction sales were common occurrences.

Auction sales were not only a

Auction Sale
 THURSDAY, NOV 5, 1908
FREE LUNCH AT NOON

Matched team Clydesdale brood mares	Set leather fly nets
Brood mare, 13 years old	Set bob-slights
Gelding, 6 yrs. old	1000-lb. set Buffalo scales
Gelding, 1 yr old	240-lb. Set scales
Belgian mare, 2 yrs old	60-gal. Galvanized oil tank
Sucking colt 13 Cows	Scotch root cutter
Thoroughbred Shorthorn bull	Cauldron kettle Bean picker
10 Young cattle	

J. H. Striffler
Auctioneer

market for used items and livestock but a very important social event. An ad would be placed in the newspaper in a previous week or two itemizing the items for sale and the names of the seller and the auc-

tioner.

An auctioneer's skills were critical. He had to know the real value of the items he was selling. His reputation was at stake. He had to get a fair price for his customers, the sellers, but also for his other customers, the buyers. He had to know what price he should try to get. In addition to that he had to keep it interesting and entertaining. Whole families would come to these social events. He also had to maintain sharp alertness to catch the various ways people indicated their bids especially when certain bidders didn't want other bidders to know who had the bid. Getting competition going between bidders by talking up the items was the way to have a successful sale.

Each auctioneer would develop his own auction chant and keep the chatter going and things moving to keep his bidders alert. He would have to talk up the value of the items by pointing out the various positive features—bidders needed a little time to think it over.

Sometimes when there was a large sale with many attendees and bidders it would be difficult for one auctioneer to handle a sale by himself. There were times when he would need a bid spotter and also at times you would need a break from keeping the chatter going. There was another popular auctioneer at the time named Robert McCullough with whom Jake would often team up on a sale. McCullough was the father of Mac and Scotty McCullough. They operated Mac and Scotty's Drug Store here in town for many years.

An auctioneer would need someone to clerk the sale, catch the name of the buyer and collect the purchase money. Quite often this person would be someone who worked for the bank.

In addition to his business Jake was very community minded. He served as a township supervisor, the road commissioner and treasurer, and also as a village trustee and

president. He was also a bank director of the Cass City State Bank. His family was very active in church, school and social activities.

With the development of the gasoline powered engine tractors and automobiles became available to the public. Jake teamed up with Henry Wettlaufer and opened a dealership for Mertz, Patterson and CarterCar automobiles located where the Quaker Maid Store is today. He later attained a Studdebaker dealership and drove one himself.

A friend back in Lancaster at that time was unable to get a car negotiated a deal with him—if Jake could get him a car he would give a fine



Jacob Striffler Horse Carriage

horse carriage and he would only have to pay for the cost of the freight to have it shipped. The cost was \$13.00. That carriage was later donated to the Cass City Historical Society by his granddaughter, Eleanor Dillman. The carriage was restored by the society and featured in Fourth of July parades over the years. It is currently stored in the car garage at the Octagon Barn.

The old time auction sale is almost an event of the past giving way to on-line capabilities including web sites such as eBay. On rare occasions we may attend an auction conducted by the Osen-towskis, Travis and Marty. Some of us can still remember hearing the auction chants of auctioneers such as Arnold Copeland, Boyd Tait, Lorn (Slim) Hillaker and others.

Jake suffered from ill health in his final years and died in 1925. Sophia passed away the following year.

This ended the pre-automobile era in Cass City's history.