



historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

The publication of

THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 25

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

NUMBER 1

On Monday evening, December 17th, the Cass City Historical Society held its annual Christmas Sing-Along. The singing was led by Connie Iwankovitsch and Dotty Scollon. The piano was played by Don Greenleaf who also sang solos. The arrangements and refreshments were provided by Marge Feebish and the Friends of the Library. If you missed it you missed a good evening of good music ending with all singing, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas".

"Watchman, What of the night?" "Watchman, What of the night?" *

In 1949 Thomas Keenoy retired from his post as Cass City's Night Watchman at the age of 79, a position he had faithfully filled for 29 years.

Tom Keenoy was born in Pinconning, Ireland in 1889. He emigrated to the United States, and settled in Greenleaf Township with his parents when he was nine years of age. The extent of his education is not known, but it was probably a combination of being home schooled and self taught.



Thomas Keenoy

The Keenoys became farmers and young Tom learned the art of handling and working with teams of horses on their farm. At nineteen he married an Irish lass named Mary Ann Patrick, and they settled on their own farm and home in the same area. The family was blessed with four sons before tragedy struck. Both Mary and one son came down with tuberculous, and died. Tom was left with the farm to work, and three young, and active Irish boys to raise. He had to learn to apply a lot of fatherly love and discipline.

In time he remarried to a lady named Harriet "Hattie" Lashinger who had to be exceptional in her own right to take on such a challenge. To this marriage another son and a daughter were born. Pioneering life on the farm was hard with seven mouths to feed.

When the older boys were old enough to do some work on

the farm, Tom got a job working on a cruise ship, "The City of Cleveland", during the summer and fall months. The steamship was a side wheeler, and it carried passengers on overnight trips between the cities of Detroit, Cleveland and Buffalo, New York.

Tom got the job from the ship's captain, Archibald McLachlan, who also had his home in the Greenleaf Township area.

In time Tom worked his way



Capt. McLachlan

up from the Lookout to Helmsman to become Captain McLachlan's First Mate. As the First Mate his responsibilities included the safety and security of the passengers and crew. In this position Tom further honed his skills of taking responsibility and administering discipline.

Steam ship travel was very popular during Tom's sailing days (from about 1912 to 1922) as roads had not yet been built for motorized travel. Sailing was more dangerous than as radar and sonar was not yet invented, and they relied on the compass, radio and sea lane maps for direction. It was especially dangerous at night and during storms navigating through the lake traffic with little visibility. Buffalo was a very popular destination for honeymooners because of its close proximity to Niagara Falls.

When Tom returned home in late fall he would conduct a work bee to cut enough wood for heating their home through the winter months. In the evening when the work was done he would throw a party and a barn dance for his family and their friends who helped in the effort. He knew the value of providing entertaining activities from his working on the ship.

During this time Cass City was a rapidly growing community with more and more active businesses on Main Street with no police force to handle problems and activities at night. Tom was offered the position as the Night Marshall. This offer gave him the income and opportunity to move to town and live at home year around.

Going from the First Mate to Night Watchman was quite a transition of environment and responsibility. One of the problems was that the young people in town didn't yet have cars and enough things to do in the evenings.



The City of Cleveland



According to Tom they were not as well behaved in the early years as they were in the later years. Could it be that in later years there were no more back houses left to tip over? Tom urged the village officials to provide more facilities in the park to provide for more wholesome activities.

Being a night watchman was also a lonely job especially during the late hours of the night, and the wee hours of the morning in all kinds of weather. The street lights then didn't provide near the light that they do today. Tom appeared as tall, erect figure with an air of authority walking his beat through the darkness with his six celled flashlight, and checking all the doors of the businesses. At times would find one that a businessman had neglected to lock. He was quick to quell any disturbances and notice any evidence of vandalism that might occur. He was the only policeman in the village. A note once appeared in the Chronicle which stated -

"In Saginaw they slapped on a 15 mil tax limit, and the city had to cut the police force in two. What would happen if we had to do that to our night watchman Tom Keenoy?"

It's not known for sure if Tom ever carried a weapon other than a night stick and his six celled flashlight, or if he ever put anyone in a jail cell, although there are still two empty jail cells for that purpose under the Town Hall otherwise known as the Cultural Center.

When a call would come into the telephone office switchboard with a need for Tom's assistance the operator would flip a switch turning on a light above Wood's Drug Store as a signal. Tom, when seeing that light, would come to the pay phone nearby and call in to get the message. He would then pursue the problem.

Tom was a familiar figure to the people in town during his years, and he knew most of the people and what their business was. He also knew who the trouble makers were. But times were changing. The population was increasing and people were now driving cars instead of horses. The town was growing. In 1947 Meridith Auten made a statement which also appeared in the Chronicle—"We know about babies, but where are all these people coming from that are building houses in Cass City? It used to be if a stranger walked down the street we got Tom Keenoy out to determine who he was and what he was doing."

Another change that has taken place over the years is retirement. People didn't use to retire, but kept on working as long as they could. There were not many retirement plans for most people. In 1949 at the ripe old age of 79 Tom retired as Cass City's Night Watchman after 27 years of good and faithful service. The following year he passed away.

(Thomas W. Keenoy 1869 -1950)

*** Isaiah 21:11**