

historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

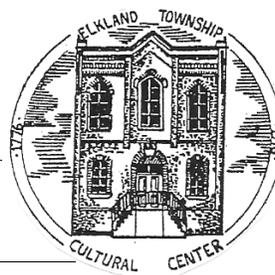
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Names, Names, Names!

Where do they come from? What do they mean?

The Cass City Historical Society met Wednesday Evening, April 17, in the library meeting room. Several members of the Thumb Area Antique Auto Club presented an interesting program. They told about the origin of the club and all the activities of the club including trips and shows. They take a lot of pride in their work, and they provide a very important role in preserving the history of the automobile in American life.

all the county records, but one night Peter Bush and Indian Dave stole the records and transported them by canoe up the Cass River to Caro.¹



Our State - MICHIGAN

There are a couple of slightly different stories as to how the name originated, but most attribute the name to an original source as coming from an Algonquian Chippewa word "Michi-gama" meaning big water.¹



Our County, TUSCOLA

Tuscola is a name attributed to Henry Schoolcraft, a geographer, and geologist, who worked with Governor Cass and the native American cultures, and who also led an expedition to find the source of the Mississippi River. The name was adapted from a Chippewa word, "Tusci", which means flat land, or level country.¹



Our County Seat, CARO

According to "The History of Caro", Caro's post office was originally called Tuscola Center because it was located in the center of the county, but the settlement itself was called Centerville. In an effort to settle on one name the name of Novesta was accepted, but later changed to Caro after the city of Cairo in Egypt with a slightly different spelling. This was the suggestion of William Sherman. The name, Cairo, comes from an Arabic word al-Qahirah, which means "the victorious". Caro's first victory came in 1866 over Vassar to become the county seat. Vassar had

The Village of WAHJAMEGA

Wahjamega is a strange sounding name that makes you wonder what it means. Was it an Indian name? Did it have anything to do with the state hospital for epilepsy that was located there? It turns out that it is just acronym made from the initials of three men who started the town by setting up a saw mill on the Cass River which flows through the area. Their names were William A, Heartt, James A, Montgomery, and Edgar George Avery.³ This combination for a name doesn't lend itself to having any specific meaning, but it could be said it represents friendship and team work.

Our Town, CASS CITY.

Our town or spot on the map was known as Big Fork by the Indians from the fork in the river just south of town. The name of Cass City was suggested by an early lumberman and our first merchant, Nathaniel



Clark.² Governor Lewis Cass had just passed away a few years before. Governor Cass had a long history of service to our country including serving as a general in the War of 1812, governor of the state, and the negotiator of several Indian treaties including the Saginaw Treaty of 1819 which opened the land we live on for settlement. Cass also served as the senator from Michigan and as the Secretary of State. The surname Cass is an Anglo Saxon occupational name for a man who builds cases or chests, but Cass City was named after the man and not the meaning of his name. Lewis Cass was a leader who was forward looking and ambitious to make a difference, and that gives us something to live up to.



NOVESTA TOWNSHIP

Novesta Township was originally a part of Elkland Township that doesn't need any explanation as to what its name once meant, but doesn't any longer. Novesta in its early days before motorized travel was somewhat land-locked by the Cass River making it difficult to travel either north to Cass City or west to Caro. Some early bridges were built but often got washed away in the spring thaw.

The story goes that the township supervisors gathered around the stove in Caro at the store of Farley Craw to select a name for the township. Mr. Craw looked at the name on the door of the stove which was Vesta No. with a number behind. He suggested that they put the "No" first and call it Novesta.¹ The name was accepted, but little did they know that the name had already been tried once before for the town of Caro. The reason for the stove being named Vesta was because it is the name of the Roman goddess of



the hearth and home, which could mean that Novesta is a warm and homey place to live.



The Town of DEFORD

The story of Deford cannot be told without telling the story about the railroad, the Pontiac, Oxford and Northern which was affectionately known as "The Polly Ann". When the railroad first came through there wasn't much there but a store operated by Elmer Bruce. The railroad named the station Bruce, and the main street (Deckerville Road) is still named Bruce. It is said that an early settler named Arthur Newton founded the town in 1884. Because the Polly Ann was the only way to travel then, he often took the train up to Caseville for the weekend. In Caseville he would stay at the Deford Hotel which was run by Paul Deford with whom he became very good friends, and he named Deford after his friend. From that story you could say Deford means "Good Friend" or a friendly town.

The Deford Hotel still exists in Caseville although now it is a "Back to Back Chiropractic Clinic". It was moved from its original place on the shore to a mile north of town.⁴



Former Deford Hotel

The Pontiac, Oxford and Northern Railroad

The track was put in service in 1889 and ran from Pontiac north to Caseville, which was almost 100 miles exactly. As well as the towns already mentioned it also connected Kingston, Wilmot, Gagetown, Owendale, and Pigeon. This opened up the "Thumb" to the rest of the world. A person could board the train to the rest of the world. A person could board the train at any point along this route and travel to Pontiac, and from there board another train and travel as far as California or New

York. This also made it possible for merchandise to be shipped in, and for local products to be shipped out. Elevators, coal sheds, power houses and the condensery in Cass City were built next to the tracks. This was a boon for the dairy and crop farmers. The Cass City Foundry was able to ship out horse drawn plows. Big Chief coal was shipped in from Unionville which became the main source of heat for homes and businesses as well as for the electric power plant. This freed up the ability to travel both in and out. Arthur Newton wasn't the only one to travel to Caseville



on the weekends. Cass City had a whole colony of people who built cabins there.

This era lasted for at least 20 years before roads, bridges and motor travel were developed to compete with the railroad. Then the profitability of the railroad began to wane along with its maintenance. P O and N began to be known as Poor, Old and Neglected. The line was sold to The Grand Trunk Railway in 1909.



The Polly Ann at Deford

¹ Wikipedia ² Cass City Chronicle 5/28/1909

³ Michigan Place Names –Wayne State University Press

⁴ Celebrating 150 Years, Huron County, Michigan

Novesta Township Cemetery Committee is cleaning up Cemetery records. We are searching to find descendants of several families that have purchased graves in the Cemetery years ago. The list is large so if you feel you may be descendants of those who have purchased such graves please contact us at novestatownshipclerk@gmail.com or call Pennie Rienas @ 989-872-2792 or Kim Michalski @ 989-670-8847