

historically speaking

## THE WAY IT WAS

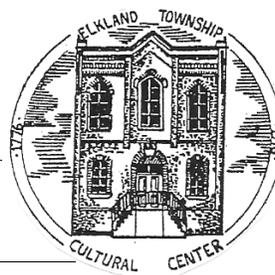
The publication of

# THE CASS CITY AREA HISTORICAL & GENEALOGY SOCIETY

VOLUME 24

MAY/JUNE 2018

NUMBER 3



Greetings! Hopefully Spring is here to stay.

The Cass City Area Historical & Genealogy Society is purchasing nine benches to put in the Elkland Township Cemetery. Four were requested by the McCoy family, two by the Prosowski family and three in memory of Kathleen Jackson. Each bench will have a plaque stating in who's memory the bench was purchased. Hopefully when the weather allows they can be installed. When they are installed take a ride around the cemetery and see these beautiful benches.

Our April meeting welcomed Mark Zmierski Tuscola County Veterans' Affairs Director. Mark spoke of the Michigan Public Act 63 of 1915, which provides for the furnishing of flag holders and United States flags for the graves of veterans for memorial purposes. The Veteran's Affairs Office is planning to have this done in all the cemeteries in Tuscola County. He brought samples of the markers to show our group. Mark is also interested in updating the Tuscola County Veterans' Memorial-Project book. A book listing all veterans and the location of their graves. Zmierski is asking for assistance from those in the communities with displaying the markers at gravesites and also with updating the Memorial-Project book. Thank you Mark for your interesting presentation.

## More News From The Past

After the last history letter came out I was reminded that Fort's Dairy also had a milk delivery route not only in Cass City, but also in Gagetown. I was also reminded that Fort's Confectionery Store did not close on Sundays as the other stores did.



Alfred Fort was born in Italy in 1892, and came to new York when a teenager. He eventually came to Pontiac and had a job working in a foundry in Pontiac as a core maker. In Pontiac he met and married Gladys Wright, a young lady from Cass City. They came to Cass City and opened a confectionery store. It was small a first operating in the lobby of the movie theatre.

The business expanded into the building

next door to the east which they eventually purchased and established their business there. The Forts started a dairy farm four and a half miles north of town with the pride of their business being their Golden Jersey Cows. The Forts had one son, Frank, and three daughters, Betty, Barbara and Shirley. Everyone in the family worked in the business to make it a success. Al died in 1948 and Gladys and Frank continued to operate the business until Frank died in 1967. Gladys then sold the business to her daughter and son-in-law, Betty and Phil Retherford.

I remember when a young lad going into Fort's Store to look around and spend my money, when I had any. It was an amazing place to kids. The first thing you saw was a large sheet metal covered table elevated in the middle like an elongated pyramid stacked

with lettuce, cabbages, celery, carrots, radishes, and other vegetables and fruits, all being kept fresh and crisp with water misting from heads above the center. Behind the table was a glass enclosed nut and peanut machine rotating slowly under a lamp revealing all the varieties of nuts being offered as you looked in. You could buy a little bag full of warm, fresh red Spanish peanuts for a nickel. Along the east wall were glass show cases of all sorts of candy. One whole case was dedicated to penny candy. There were suckers of all kinds, jaw breakers, Kits caramels, bubble gum cigars, Mary Janes, Necco Wafers, Sugar Daddies, Red Hots, Tootsie Rolls, Gum Drops, Black Jacks, licorice sticks, peppermint sticks, etc. You could also buy a box of Cracker Jacks with a prize inside for a nickel. The Fort family and Wilma Mallory, the hired girl, had lots of patience with us kids who couldn't make up our minds while leaving our finger prints on the glass case. On the west side was a soda fountain where ice cream cones, banana splits, sodas, sundaes, milk shakes were crafted. There were booths behind where you could sit and enjoy your treat. In the days before refrigeration this was a real special place.



I remember on some occasions my dad would go to Fort's and buy a carton of ice cream. The clerk would scoop it out from a large container which was packed in ice, and hand pack it into a round carton shaped like an oatmeal box. When he brought it home he would take off the cover, push the ice cream out from the bottom, and slice off chunks shaped like hockey pucks for each one of us. To us then it was a real treat.

I remember when Cass City still had its old water tower that stood on the west end of Pine Street.



Occasionally some young buck would climb up the ladder on one of its legs and paint the year he hoped to graduate on the tank above. One day I decided to try climbing up a ways. Although I had no plan to do any painting, by the time I got to the first cross beam and looked down I decided if I ever hoped to graduate there were many other things that I could be doing. I learned that later my younger sister and a couple of her partners in crime climbed higher than I did, but they got caught and ordered to "Git back down here!"

The old water tower was erected in 1924 which pleased then Fire Chief John West and his volunteer firemen. Finely they had the water pressure they needed to fight the fires. A new electric fire siren was installed on the water tower that could be heard at further distances from the fire station than the steam whistle from the Nestles Condensery. The old tower was taken down in 1966 after the new larger, modern tower was erected on a higher elevation on the north side of town. There is no problem with unauthorized people climbing this one.



I remember when the village crew didn't have backhoes and Michigan loaders for digging and back filling trenches in which lay the water and sewer lines throughout the village. Many of the trenches that contain our plumbing today



were dug by hand with pics and shovels by men with callused hands. This was hard, tiresome and dangerous work with the possibility

of having the sides cave in on you while digging in the trench, which was often times at a depth over their heads. It wasn't only the dirt from the sides caving in but also the piles of dirt close to the edge on top. There was no quick and easy of getting someone out who might suffer this misfortune. I also remember the round, black kerosene lamps, a little smaller than a bowling ball, that they would light and put on top of the gravel piles to warn people of the danger of open trenches at night.



I remember when we used to venture into the mysterious Orr's Woods

(North of the Village Park), and explore the many trails. Sometimes we would



take our lunch and eat it on "big rock" which sat on the hill overlooking the creek that flowed in the spring time. It's funny how that rock seems to have grown smaller over the years. You can still see where some guys had carved their everlasting love commitment for



certain girls in a tree many years ago, and it is still there. That's probably like

putting it on Face Book today. In the spring time the ground would be flush with wild flowers and we would run around picking large bouquets of lilies for our mothers. Somehow it seems they never made it home before they would

be wilted so badly they had to be thrown away.



"Trillium"