

historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

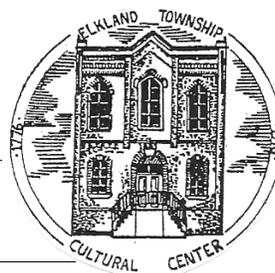
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Greetings,

The summer is almost gone—but where??? The Historical Society has had a relatively quiet summer.

Our June meeting---“Puttin’ on the Dog” and Strawberry Ice Cream was attended by 38 members and guests with a great presentation by Steve Wright, Elkland Township Sexton, and his grandson, Logan Severance who is in the process of obtaining his Boy Scout Eagle Badge. We thank them both. It was enjoyed by all.

Our August 21st meeting was held at Rawson Library. The program for the evening was presented by Ruth Steele of the Thumb Quilt Trail on “The Barn Quilts” we are seeing throughout Tuscola, Sanilac and Huron Counties. Thirty-five members and guests learned of the tremendous amount of time, effort and talent that is put into this Tri-County project. We thank Ruth for joining us.

Also, at this meeting, Barb Hutchinson, Doris Jones, and Wayne Dillon were elected to the Board of Directors of the Cass City Area Historical and Genealogy Society.

A recent project of the Society deals with cemetery memorial benches. In the past year the Society has received memorials from two families. Their request has been for memorial benches. Working with Steve Wright, Elkland Township Sexton, six such benches have been obtained and will be placed in the Veterans Memorial area just west of the Chapel. The names of those individuals will be on these benches. If this is a project you might be interested in, please contact the Historical Society or Steve Wright.

Another project that we hope to get underway in the near future is to have all of the Cass City High School annuals on the internet. This may take a while so be patient with us.

We, along with the Rawson Library, will not be having an Elkland Township Cemetery Walk this year. Attendance for this event has been great the last four years and we hope to do it again in the future.

Katie Jackson, President

The Antique Mall Location and Building Story

(Continued from the July/August Historical Letter)

Although there has been no official record found it is assumed that the Antique Mall building was built by an enterprising young mason by the name of James Henry. He migrated here from Canada and married a local girl by the name of Mattie Blades. The cement blocks of which it is built were ahead of their time and are unique to him in their design. They are like the blocks that were used in building the lower levels of Presbyterian and Evangelical United Brethren Churches of about the same time, which were recorded as having been built by him. He formed these blocks himself in his own molds. He also had a machine to form the cement bricks which were used in the upper levels of these churches and in other buildings in the community and surrounding area. He also built the former Railroad Depot and the Purdy Hardware Store in Gagetown using his cement blocks. The same blocks make up the foundation of the Purdy house at the Octagon Barn. You might see other buildings with these cement blocks around the community that were likely made by him (it was reported that he and his crew also laid the bricks for the three story Hitchcock Opera House). It had to be a difficult job constructing buildings such as these using the only the equipment available at that time, which consisted of wooden scaffolding, ropes and pails with pulleys. Later the retail businesses that operated in this store would refer to the location of their business as the

“DeWitt Cement Block”. The community lost a valuable builder when James Henry moved on to greener pastures in California.

The history may not be as complete as ideal because there are no official records of the people and businesses that rented the building over the years. The history that we have here was taken from articles and ads in the Cass City Chronicle archives.

The first business to open in the store in 1908 was the New York Department Store, which sold shoes, clothing and housewares. They had a gala opening with the ascension of several 9 foot hot air balloons with tags on them offering prizes from the store to anyone recovering them. After about two years a man named M. Kellerman took over selling similar merchandise including men and boy’s corduroy pants (knickers?).

At this point Miranda DeWitt transferred the management and ownership of the building to her daughter Lura who was now about 20 years old. Lura also became the village clerk, a position she held for many years.

In 1918 a man named L.H. Wood sold specialty flour of wheat, corn, rye and barley. It is not known if this was in conjunction with Kellerman’s business or not. Also about the same time Isaiah Waidely sold phonographs and used cars (Chevrolets and Maxwells) from this location for a brief period. In 1920 Charley Patterson bought out the business promising to give 100 cents of value for every dollar spent in his store. Charley sold dry goods, groceries and notions. Charley later went on to become the township clerk, a position he held until he was 95 years old.

In 1925 a firm called the Detroit Jobbing Company took lease of the building selling the remaining stock of Ben Benkelman’s store which closed a block to the east. Messrs. Goodman and Jahout were arrested for advertising and conducting a close-out sale without first securing a license and filing an application with the village. In settlement they had to commit to cease doing business in town.

Next came a partnership of Alex Henry, Robert “Bob” Agar, Jr. and Clifton Champion forming ABC Sales and Service, an automobile parts

sales and servicing business. Alex Henry and Cliff Champion left to tend to their respective grocery and insurance businesses. Harold Jackson joined the enterprise for a while. In 1932 Robert Agar, Jr. bought the building from Lura DeWitt, and five years later he passed away. In relatively short order the business and building were sold to a man named Ben Singley, and soon afterward to Joseph Fox. Joseph Fox sold to Leonard Damm, a man from Pigeon who would conduct an Oliver Farm Implement dealership, the most stable and longest running business of the building’s history.

Leonard’s business was called Leonard Damm and Son (Dale) Farm Implement Company. Farming was in the



The New York
Cash Department Store
Will be open for business
IN the DEWITT BLOCK
SATURDAY, MAY 5th
Get our Prices Before Buying.
Watch this space for advertisement next week.
RUSS & DURST

Two Weeks' Sale--Commencing
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28
SPECIAL PRICE ON FRESH EGGS
L. H. Wood
Cement Block, Cass City.

LEONARD DAMM & SON
Oliver - New Idea - Gehl - Wheel Horse
Phone 872-2855
Cass City
9-05-1968 Cass City Chronicle

early phase of going from horse drawn plows, cultivators and harvesters to tractor power. All farmers were upgrading, and business was good. The early equipment required more maintenance and repair than would come later, and this also meant more business. Leonard Damm and Son’s business lasted for 50 years before he retired, and during those years small family farms gave way to farms many times as large requiring equipment much larger than a small store could accommodate.

The building was next rented to Gerald and Geraldine Prieskorn in 1996 who made it into a wallpaper and paint store after acquiring the inventory from Russ and Mary Leeson’s store across the street when they retired from business. After a few years the Prieskorn’s sold the business to Steve Wright who was a painting contractor. In 2001 Steve sold the business to Carolyn Klein who had been working for him.

Paint Store sold
There are new owners at The Paint Store, but don't expect to see any major changes in the store that has been a headquarters for building owners for over a quarter century.
Gerald and Geraldine
Prieskorn announced the sale of the store to Steve Wright last week and the new owner says that customers can expect to find the same service and attention to details that they have been accustomed to.

In 2002 Dale sold the building to Anthony Jacobs for a NAPA Auto Parts Store, and it was painted NAPA Blue. This business only lasted for a few years, and in 2006 the building was sold to the Village of Cass City’s Downtown Development Authority, and the antique dealers were allowed to move in and operate there until earlier this year.



The Detroit Jobbing Co. has leased the Cement Block and will open up a general store in Cass City next week. This company was in business here in the winter of 1923-24 when they purchased the general merchandise stock of B. F. Benkelman.
5-18-1925 Cass City Chronicle

FOR SALE—A Ford pick-up in good condition and priced reasonable. A. B. C. Sales and Service.
5-24-1935 Cass City Chronicle 5-24-