

“Do You Remember –“ and “Home-Coming” Interviews
August 23, 1913

“Grading of Washington ave was as great an undertaking for the city of Lansing during the late fifties as was the construction of the Panama canal by the nation of the present generation’ said Allison A. Nichols, treasurer of the board of education, and former merchant who recounted several incidents in the early history of Lansing which were recalled by home-coming reminiscences.

“Thompson and Hunter were contractors for the grading project. They were without government support in the enterprise and went broke financially as did several of their backers. I worked on the job and had the distinction of being one of the most popular men (small boys) on the job. I was given an ovation every morning before I could get my coat off, I would be hailed with Nicholas, Nicholas: water, water.”

“I remember one hot day after the close of school, that I went to see the contractors and applied for a job. They looked me over and remarked that I was rather small but asked if I thought I could carry water 10 hours a day. I replied that I could and asked them what they would pay. Hunter said that 40 cents a day ought to be enough for a little shaver like me, but Thompson said that they would pay me 50 cents if I would work all day, so I went to work.

“My first task was to locate the nearest wells as the work proceeded for the entire distance from Franklin ave to Main st. There was no city water supply at that time and

not every house had a well. I worked my full six days and during Saturday I thought all day of the \$3 coming to me, which was big money for a boy in those days. On account of the scarcity of money, payment was made by orders on stores. When I approached the paymaster my heart sank when he asked if I would take an order on a store. But I answered No sir, and he gave me the largest week's wages I had ever earned.

“Wages in the fifties averaged from \$1,00 to \$2,25 a day and high cost of living was a word unknown. Board was obtained at \$1,75 to \$2,25 a week and board always included lodging and frequently washing and mending.

One Man Beat Eleven

“I have been interested in reading the accounts by former mayors of the early municipal affairs of Lansing,” continues Mr. Nichols. “It reminds me of the time when I was president of the board of education in 1893 Eleven members of the board thought we ought to have an addition to the high school building or remodel the then inadequate structure. Mr. Randall now of Houghton, was the single opponent to the plan.

We called a meeting of citizens at Mead's hall, which was the largest in the city at that time. This building will also be remembered by many as the opera house in which many of the old time plays were given. Our purpose was to ask the citizens to vote money for the improvement at this school meeting.

“Randall, who was an active opponent, got busy and distributed circulars the night before praising the present facilities and making the point that the high school which the city than had was good enough. The auditorium was completely filled and we had not gone far into the meeting when it was made plain (plain) to the other 11 that Randall had us beaten. The proposition for an enlarged school building was voted down.

“We had many a stormy session of the school board that year. Many who were members will recall one occasion in particular, one, which ex Mayor C.J. Davis and Mr. Randall nearly came to blows, when Davis threatened to impeach Randall. I hope Mr. Randall will return for the home-coming so that we may show him our splendid new high school Building.



“It was during the war that the old Methodist church was dedicated, said Mr. Nichols in reply to an inquiry regarding the old structure which formerly housed the Central Methodist congregation. The occasion of the dedication was a memorable one, the legislature then meeting was adjourned in order to permit senators and representatives to hear Bishop Simpson at that time one of the nation’s greatest speakers. The structure was the city’s first brick church, and was erected on the present site of the Tussing building in 1863.

“There were but the two schools in this part of the city at that time including the Townsend st school and Central. Misses Roger’s Female college was considered a spendid (splendid) institution, but my only acquaintance with it was in a social way. It was customary for the college to keep open house Saturday night and the boys were not slow to take advantage of the few social opportunities which were offered in those days.”