

**“Do you Remember –“ and “Home-Coming” Interviews**  
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Did you ever hear of a man who had the insane desire to go hunting at the age of 93. Are there any Lansing residents who believe that woods and wilderness and the vast solitude of the lonesome forests will call them when they are near the century point in life? It is unusual that a man that far-along in life should feel a strong desire well up within him to cast the city with its noisy confines away from him and once more roam the woods, the only place that seems like home.

But there is just such a man in this world. He lives in Lansing at 703 N. Capitol ave. The civilization which has grown up about him presents far less attractions for this aged pioneer and hunter than the noises of the bears at night, the crackling of the underbrush betokening of the deer that was soon to fall, the soothing lap-lap of the silent canoes, as they sped up the Grand river with no tooting train and factory whistles to frighten away the quarry. This man is John Bush. He is the oldest man in the city but his heart is as young as the liveliest urchin and he longs to shoulder his muzzle-loader and take up the trail once more after the many years he has spent in watching Lansing grow. When Mr. Bush came here it was all woods with the exception of here and there a log cabin or two. The people weren't troubled with the high cost of living, thrifty housewives didn't need to worry about whether the loaf of bread purchased contained exactly 16 ounces and the city needed no curfew to keep the children off the streets at night – the wild animals were the vigilant guards then. The pioneers lived on the game they hunted and were governed by the laws they made – just laws too—the law of frontier and justice was speedily executed

for the breach thereof, no court delays and dilatory proceedings. From morning until night they were at liberty to roam the forests as they please gathering what they might. No man was a trespasser. Rather the unwritten law was along the theory of the survival of the fittest.

And now at the age of 93, the limit that few men reach this pioneer of Lansing feels the thrill of the hunter within him, hears the hounds tracking their prey, and in his dreams reaches for his musket and powder horn and slinks through the forest to his home. Yes, John Bush remembers everything that anyone remembers about Lansing and he is still wide-awake enough to describe vividly the events that happened 66 years ago when he came here. He has not been a victim of any of the fancy named diseases that have snuffed out the lives of so many of the younger generation, but instead he is so hale and hearty that he is planning a hunting trip this coming fall. He expects to hunt for deer and he expects to bring some home. He will not visit the hunting grounds that are so popular in the fall season for the reason of the danger occasioned by so many hunters gathering at that time of year. He still has his muzzleloader rifle that has brought down many a victim, his bullet pouch made of leather by his father more than 100 years ago and his father's old powder horn with the initials "O.B." and the figure of a rattlesnake carved on the side. His father's name was Oliver Bush. With this equipment the young-old hunter will sally forth this autumn to revive old times and it's a safe bet that he'll bag as many deer as the next one before he returns.

Mr. Bush has tales that would hold any adventure loving person for hours and hours and in talking he goes over the scenes so vividly that the listener expects any moment to feel a buck deer's horn prodding him in the back. The old pioneer is on the program for a speech on "Pioneer Plights" at the home-coming and is expected to be one of the most interesting numbers. He is even now writing a book of his experiences and pioneer life which will be published in the near future. An interview with the oldest Lansing resident follows.

"I came here in 1847," declared Mr. Bush. "It was on the first of September and when home-coming opens it will be exactly 66 years ago to a day. Lansing was a mass of unbroken forest at that time. There wasn't a solitary house except for two or three log houses in North Lansing on the bluff of the river. These were built by Mr. Birch who had had the job of building the mill dam. Before the mill dam was completed Birch in company with some others made an examination of some defect in the construction of the dam and in doing so they had set out in a canoe and paddle under the beams of the structure. The canoe capsized and Birch was drowned.

"I well remember the families that lived here when I came. In the fall of 45, 'Uncle' Joab Page settled here with his family of 11, and were living alone in the woods. 'Squire' Gulky was also a member of the community. They called him squire because he acted as a sort a justice of the peace. When he wasn't engaged in enforcing the law with all the majesty that he deemed fitted his dignity, he was busily engaged in peddling counterfeit money. I don't know whether there are many living now that remember the old

counterfeiting band or not. I distinctly remember that the 'Squire' was one of members. They had an establishment of the flats of the river. It was before the capitol was located. They were manufacturing counterfeit silver dollars. I remember one of them was killed when there was an explosion of some chemicals one day. Later the government got after them and they skipped the country. I forgot whether any of them were ever captured or not. At any rate they were never seen in Lansing again to my knowledge. Some people are under the impression that the counterfeiters operated in the Bogus swamp but this is an error and easily explained. You see when they heard rumors that the government was going to get them they hid their machinery and the hiding place was the Bogus swamp. I saw the machinery in the swamp myself. It consisted of a cog-wheel and a shaft. I hunted all through the swamp and that was how I came upon their outfit. But the real operations occurred on the flats of the river. The counterfeiters shanties were here when I came.

"Washington ave was the only street open up and it was only a short crude thoroughfare at that. I remember the first time I walked along the road now called Washington ave. I walked along from Franklin st to Michigan ave. You couldn't get a team though from Michigan to Main st. and it was hard to make your way by foot. I came here as a contractor by trade, but most of the time I spent hunting. When I came here they were building the old state house and also what is called the Franklin house in North Lansing. I worked with my father at first. He died later and I took up his trade. I was a builder and a hunter. I have built more than 65 brick buildings by contract. I have erected 20 stores in North Lansing, 15 of which were built in one summer. I built the high school building and lost \$6000 doing it. At least that's the way I figured it out. I calculated to make

\$4000 on the deal and instead lost \$2000, so I figured that I lost \$6000. That deal broke me flat almost. That was in 1872.

“The legislatures met here January 1, 1848 for the first time. I was there the day it convened. Although I have missed some convening days there hasn't been a legislature in session since that I have not attended. In the spring of '48 the settlers utilized every root and log available to keep out the mud and water from the streets. The worst place was at Ottawa and Washington. At this point there was a run of water, which completely submerged the road. Logs and planks were thrown in so as to make the way passable. Some 20 years ago a sewer was put in at this point by the city and the logs and planks were found to be in as good condition as the day they were put in there.

“When Jenison's store was built we had to go down in a gully and climb some rudely erected stairs in order to get to our work. There was a thick tamarack swamp on the east side of Washington ave from Saginaw st to Shiawassee st. Nobody would buy the land. That was the mistake made by most of us pioneers. We couldn't see far enough ahead to realize that we were rich in lands and that the people would come pouring in by the thousands later on. We used to comment on that swamp and say that it would never be fit for anything but a goose swamp. You could have bought it for almost a song then, but now it's much different. I don't know how much it would come to now but it would be more than I would want to pay at any rate.

“Hunting? Why that’s about all we used to do. I could talk to you for a week about hunting exploits. wait.”

The old pioneer disappeared in the house for a moment and came out carrying his rifle, bullet pouch, and powder horn in his arms. He seemed more at home now and after aiming across the street into an imaginary forest just to see if he could still sight a black squirrel at 30 yards he continued his tales.

“That’s the same gun I carried when I was a boy and the same bullet pouch and powder horn. It’s seen lots of service and is as good as ever. It weighs 10 pounds - the gun alone – but it don’t feel heavy. I believe I could still carry it all day and eat a hearty breakfast when I got home at night. It was nothing in those days to go without your breakfast. I often used to get out my gun in the early morning thinking to scout about before breakfast for a deer. Occasionally I came upon one and spent the day in trailing and killing him before taking a bite to eat. I am 92 years and eight months old and I think I have to thank my early pioneer training for most of these later years and the many I expect to experience in the future before I give up to the old reaper-man.

“Facts? Well I’ll tell you of a couple of deer hunting trips. We used to hunt at night frequently. The deer use to come down to the river to get water at night and we used a canoe with a torch on the bow end. I had a light black walnut canoe just like the Indians used. One night I put a big candle made out of deer tallow on the front end of the canoe and placed a screen made of peeled bark of the candle torch. This screen was for the

purpose of keeping the canoe and the hunter out of sight. The deer looks at the light and a hunter can get within good gunshot before he is apprised of his danger. This was a frequent method used by the hunters when they were unsuccessful during the day. Well this night I speak of, let me see it was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July just 60 years ago. I was on the river all night with my torch-canoe but narry a deer. It seems they weren't thirsty that night. As the gray dawn of morning approached I felt fatigued and put down the river to stow my canoe away. We had to hide our canoes then. There were too many without them and as each man made his own canoe some were much faster than others. Mine was a swift one for my father helped me make it and he was an old hand at the game. I couldn't lock the thing up so I decided to hide it in the willow marsh across the river from where our cabin was located. The willows are about where the sugar beet factory now stands. I had to take off my clothes and swim back to this bank. Just as I had divested myself of raiment and was about to push off the canoe I heard a load splashing some yards further down the river. I looked out and saw a big handsome buck deer wading across the stream. He was a big fellow and evidently hadn't heard me for he was taking his time. But to make sure I crawled on my stomach to where my gun lay and cautiously proceeded to the point where the deer struck land. I could tell by his tracks that he was leisurely walking away and I knew that he had not heard me.

“About 30 rods farther on his track led to a clear space. I couldn't see him from the thicket so I stepped out into a clean spot and there he stood not over 15 feet away looking at me in wonderment. He stood stock still for an instant. Evidently it was the first time he had seen a nude hunter. As I raised my gun, however, he bounded across the space. I

fired and he winced but kept on running with me in close pursuit. He ran out of sight behind a bush. I went around and saw he try to jump over a high log that stuck up in his path. He landed square on top of the log – dead. I was naked and had no knife so I had to go back to my canoe. I dressed myself and went back and dragged him to the river, got him into the canoe and brought him to town. I got that deer just north of where the School for the Blind is now located.

“The woods were full of them then. Deer, wild turkey, partridge, all kinds of game. I sometimes had as many as 28 deer ahead of me in a drove. The venison sold cheap then and there was little money to be made hunting. We hunted to live and for the sport we got out of it. Hunting and trapping were the popular pastimes in those days.

“I remember another time I shot a big buck deer down where the wheelbarrow factory now stands. We had some men working on a building at the time. I always took my rifle to work with me so that I could bag some game if the chances were good. I also used to shoot black squirrels on the way to and from my work. Well the time I mention I was out hunting for squirrel not deer. It was all wood around here then. Suddenly I heard a loud splashing in the river. I was near the edge of the bank and as I looked out into the bed of the stream I saw a buck, his graceful antlers sweeping the sky majestically, swimming down the stream directly toward me. I waited until he was within five rods of me and then fired. I missed and he swung quickly around and started fro the opposite bank. I was pretty mad for I thought I could put a black squirrel’s eyes out at a distance. I got my gun loaded as quickly as possible and pulled as he was ready to take to the other shore. I fired

again and he flatten out in the water, his head on the bank of the river. I went over to him and discovered that the bullet had entered the butt of his ear. This is a fatal spot to aim at and I had hit it three times as far away as my first shot.

“Before I got to the deer though two dogs jumped out of the bushes and tried to haul him ashore. I drove the dogs away and swam with the deer in tow across the river. That is quite a little trick in itself. I wonder if there are many living in Lansing that have ever swam across a river towing a dead deer? Well I got across anyway and procured a wagon from an old man who was picking up wood. I carted the deer into my brother-in-law’s place where I was then boarding. Two men were working for me at the time and we just started skinning the buck. I was just started on one leg when I looked up and saw an Indian skulking along the road. It was just about dusk. The Indian turned and came in through the gate. He saw us working away at the deer and approached. It was John Okemos, son of the old chief. When he reached us he said in broken English.

“Umph! Killum deer”

“Yes’ I said ‘John we kill deer. What of it?’

“Me shootem deer,’ answered John.

“No I says John, I guess not.’

“Yes, me shootem. Big marsh. Me start him at sunrise.’

“And John made a semi-circle with his arm indicating that he had trailed the buck the distance of more then four miles. John had traced the deer to me and said the deer was on his way back home. Then he stepped up to the deer and showed me where the hair and skin had been grazed on the deer’s belly. The Indian’s bullet hadn’t injured the deer at all

but the Indian and his dogs had followed the animal all day long. In those days the rule was that the man who drew first blood on any animal was entitled to one-fourth the venison and the hide in addition.

“Well if you help me skin him I’ll make it right with you ‘John.’ He helped and I gave him his quarter of the venison, three shillings in money and invited him to supper. He had been hunting all day and a white man’s meal appealed to his hungry soul. He accepted the invitation and ate more than any three men I ever saw. But he went away satisfied. I knew John well. He married into a Chippewa family and later had some matrimonial troubles. John was an Ottawa. The Okemos settlements were at Chumican, 20 miles from Lansing and at Okemos. Old Okemos was a bright Indian. Some say he was 105 years old but I think that is a mistake. I knew him well. He was a warrior all the way through. He was left twice on the battlefield for dead. Once he went with a party of 20 Indians to help the British under General Brock in their siege against Fort Croghan in the War of 1812. I have often heard my father tell of the chief. Fort Croghan was located where Fremont Ohio now is. The Indian party got in the woods near the fort when they saw a troop of American Cavalry coming. Okemos saw that the cavalry were too much for him and as he used to say himself when telling of the incident afterward, ‘we hid up a heap quick.’ The cavalry got partly past when one of the young braves fired a shot. That revealed the hiding place and the cavalry turned and charged into the brush. The Indians were all cut down. Okemos was wounded and lay quiet until darkness fell. Then he gave an Indian signal an owl hoot, it was a signal for all those pretending to be dead to get up. His half brother was the only member of the band who was not dead. He was wounded but

answered the call and together they crawled to the river where they washed their wounds and made their way back home to Chumican. He was there 14 months recovering from his wounds and then joined General Brock's army in Canada. He was in the battle of the Thames when General Harrison met and defeated the British and the Indians. On that occasion Okemos was again left on the battlefield for dead. He was as sly as he was tough.

“He returned to the settlement around Lansing and when he got well he went to Detroit to the commanding officer and said: ‘Me fight heap nuff! Me fight Shemokeyman no more.’ Shemokeyman was his word for American. Yes, Okemos was also a fine orator in his Indian tongue. He could make a great speech and held a position of influence. He made a speech at the treaty of Mackinaw that carried them all the way, both the Americans and the Indians. In his battles for home and country he displayed a patriotism that has always been admired. He was a small man 5 feet 6 inches in height but well built. He was keenly sensitive as to his treatment by the whites. I've had my hand on his head lots of time and I can't compare the feeling to anything but the feeling of a rough iron-wood knot it was cut up so with many scars.

“I loved the pioneer life. I was born a pioneer in Orleans county N.Y. on January 1, 1821. Western New York was a wild country then. We lived there until I was five years old when my father concluded to come to Michigan. We landed in Detroit by way of the Erie Canal and Lake Erie in May 1826, 87 years ago. That seems a long time ago to you but it doesn't to me. Detroit then had about 1600 inhabitants. We lived there during the summer

and then in October moved to Ypsilanti, which was a little cluster of groceries and wood shacks in the forest. Father built a log cabin on the banks of the river on the trail where the wild Indians use to pass. We lived in that neighborhood six years and then went back to New York. When I can again to the west it was to settle in Lansing just 66 years ago.

“It has all changed so since then, from a mass of wilderness to a city of civilization. It grew slow in the woods. The first year or two there were two or three log houses between Michigan and Franklin sts but the rest was all woods. We used to go from North Lansing to ‘Middletown’ to vote. There was always strife between the settlers of the different parts. I was brought up a wig. We used to hold caucuses when there wouldn’t be more than a corporal’s guard turning out to attend. The northsiders would come home from the polls swearing mad when things didn’t go just the way they desired. Then they would call an indignation meeting and make speeches against Middletown and Uppertown saying they haven’t been given a fair show and so on. The uprising would invariable subside and everything would quiet down until the next election.

“The town grew slowly. Vast places were then contracted to be cleared and for two or three years the cleared places grew up in fireweeds and thistles as high as a man’s head. Then came the Civil War. Several hundred volunteers went away from Lansing and the surrounding country. Lansing grew by stages but its great development has been in the last 10 years. In the early days I was a hunter and a trapper on the shores of Ontario, Erie and Superior, in the woods with the whites and the Indians. For the last three or four years I have been canvassing for books. It is a slightly different life, isn’t it. I’ll take the

woods for mine. I am 92 years eight months old and have spent most of my time in the woods. Everything was cheap. Two dollars a day was big pay. The woods were full of game. Eggs were six and seven cents a dozen, butter sold at twelve cents a pound. I once bought 300 hogs at 20 shillings a hundred. There was better cooking. The housewives of today can't compete with the cooking of our mothers and grandmothers. We had plenty of time to eat and sleep and hunt. Land! We could hunt all day long, year in and year out, and never kill one-tenth of the game that roamed the woods and ravines.

"I have been in five different political campaigns during my time. The republican committee hired me to stump the state. I have made speeches from Lake Erie to Superior as a laboring man. But give me the beauty of the forest at autumn time when the leaves are bronzed and the whole scene reeks with splendor. Old Okemos use to tell me a story when I was a boy about a fierce battle the Indians had when every brave was slain. Every time I see the forest with its vari-colored foliage at autumn time I seem to see the shades of those old warriors resting there in the quiet and solitude of their surroundings.

"In the wild woods in the midst of solitude and silence. I've been lost in the woods many times but I always found my way out. I was never lonesome there with the tall trees for company. I enjoyed it all. Give me my rifle and hand-axe and the woods and I'll be happy. I enjoyed camping out. In the coldest of winters we could fix a comfortable sleeping place in less than 30 minutes. My greatest desire now is to go up north and hunt. All is confusion now, with factory whistles screaming the blatant calls to work, and people, people everywhere.

“I still have my muzzle-loader as you see and my powder-horn and bullet poach which my father made more than 100 years ago. Sometime ago I took them down off the wall just to try myself out for I expect to take a hunting trip this fall. I paced off 15 yards from a piece of paper two inches square. The first shot cut the corner of the target and the second struck just off the edge of the paper. Both shots would have killed a black squirrel.”

The old pioneer hunter bowed his head and was lost in thought for a moment. “Yes give me back my woods.” He murmured. “I can hear the tall hemlocks calling and I can’t find them there. Give me back the woods.”