

Early Day in Lansing Recalled by Local Man

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Editor's note: This is the last of a series of three articles on Lansing and Lansingites of many years ago as written by Charles J. Opdyke, a resident of this city since 1893. The writer is personally acquainted with most of the persons referred to in his story.

By Charles J. Opdyke

One of the first horseless carriages to be seen on Lansing streets was the one manufactured by Ranson E. Olds. One Sunday afternoon Mr. Olds drove his machine on the sidewalk on W Ottawa st to the residence of Arthur C. Stebbins on the corner of Sycamore and Ottawa sts, and I well remember the crowd of curious men and boys who gathered to look at the contraption known then as a "horseless carriage."

A.A Piatt and Bros. Owned and operated a handle manufacturing plant located on the old capitol grounds. Wm K Prudden sold real estate and boarded at the Hudson House. Wm H. McKale was a constable and boarded at 320 S. Capitol av. Herbert E. John sold groceries under the firm name of Johnson and Foley. George Kneal was a teamster before he became a contractor and Michael Hughes was a section foreman for the Grand Trunk railroad.

Jocab Melius was one of Lansing's oldest policemen, also Jim Black former molder, and Oria Bachus a former coachman, and Frank Lippincott. Henry Moore, one of the old time peace officers of Lansing, use to operate a cigar store and Wm S. Wright formerly foreman for the W.S. George & Company, former grocer with Foley & Wright, became one of the deputy sheriffs on Ingham county and also was a U.S. marshal.

Horse Drawn Hacks

John Carr, and also the firm of Adams & Porter, used to furnish horse drawn hacks to carry passengers from the depots to the hotels. One of Lansing's oldest meat markets was owned by Frederick W Bertch and another by the Banghart Brothers of North Lansing. Burr Morgan used to clerk for Wells Jewelry firm, later forming a partnership know as Wells and Morgan Jewelers. Another of the older jewelry firms was that of Bela P. Richmond, J.J. Heath was a watchmaker and later owned a jewelry store.

O. M Barnes was president of the Lansing National Bank in 1883, and John Herrmann, a merchant tailor. John Herrmann's Sons are still doing business in the same location of N. Washington av. A.O. Taylor worked as a carpenter years ago, and in later years opened a grocery store at 400 S. Washington av. Elgin Mifflin, Sr., sold ladies' and gents' furnishings at 105 N. Washington av. C Alsdorf and Son were proprietors of a drug store at 102 N. Washington av.

Adam Foerster was proprietor of the Grand River Brewery and also carried on an ice business. Daniels and Ellis were proprietors of the Up River Ice company, and did a big

business in Lansing. William T. Algate was one of Lansing early bakers, making bread and cookies and selling from his wagon. His bakery was located at 404 S. Sycamore st.

Sold Real Estate

Seymour Foster, former postmaster of Lansing was selling real estate in 1883 and was located in the old post office building now known as the Dodge block, at the corner of Washington-av and Ottawa-st.

Warren S. (Banty) Abels was a detective in Lansing for many years and for several years was with the Michigan Central railroad as detective. Solomon Ackerman, whom nearly everybody in Lansing knew in years past, was a mason by trade. In later years he worked at cistern cleaning and roof repair. Frank L. Henderson owned and operated a machine shop next to the old Armory building on S. Capitol-av, and did a general line of machine work and repairing. White and Castle were an old firm of contractors in Lansing many years ago.

Hugo Delfs, now chief of the Lansing fire department, used to sell cigars and tobacco in his store on S. Washington-av. John P. Sanford was formerly Lansing's chief of police and it seems only just a few years ago when the firm of Willson and Jordan was doing business in a one-store building located at the corner of Washington-av and Ottawa-st selling wagons, buggies, delivery vans and harness.

William G. Titus was one of the oldest insurance men of the city, doing a general insurance business here for many years. Another of the old factories of Lansing was that of the Kneeland Crystal creamery, which was located on the site of the present freight office of the Michigan Central Railroad. C.L. Kneeland and Guy Renyx were at the head of this firm.

Church Started

It was about 39 years ago when the First Baptist church started at the corner of Ionia and Capitol av. This church was built of hewn stone and stands today as a monument to the skill of the early masons and builders. My farther did a great deal of the pressed brick laying on the building. The first brick pavement of the city was laid from Ottawa st to Shiawassee st on Capitol av, being just two blocks in length. When sleighing was good in the winter, it was a common site to see cutter races over this two-block stretch of pavement. W.K. Prudden was one of the men who used to race horses there.

Benjamin F. Simons was one of Lansing oldest merchants and conducted a general dry goods store in the same location of the present-day firm of Simons Dry Goods company. Louis Beck is another merchant who has been in business in Lansing for many years. Frank Arbaugh has also been a merchant in this city for many years. The firm name used to be Cameron and Arbaugh; later it was Cameron, Arbaugh and Cameron, and this firm was located in two buildings, one for dry goods and one for shoes. These buildings were on the same location as the present five-story department store of Arbaugh's.

Henry R. Pattengill was an outstanding character among Lansing's oldest residents and was very genial sort of man who it was always a pleasure to meet. Mr. Pattengill published the old school song knapsack and the Timely Topics which all of us remember for nearly 40 years back.

Formed Partnership

Schuyler S. Olds and O.C. Tompkins formed a partnership many years ago and both men owned extensive copper mining interests. Edward Cahill was a pioneer attorney in the city of Lansing and was practicing law here in 1882. Those were the good old days when we used to attend the fair at the old fair grounds, now the Olds Motor Works, and where half-mile horse races were held. Lansing had cobblestone pavements, wooden sidewalks, gas street lights, several horse-drawn bus lines and stage coaches, passenger steamers plying up and down the river, and wooden bridges of the Grand river.

The State Republican was printed by the Darius B. Thorpe Printing company located in a red-painted wooden structure about three stories high on the site of the Y.M.C.A., next to the post office building. The new state office building property used to be a professional baseball park and show grounds. Moores park was known as Belvidere park and most of it was used as cow pastures. Westmoreland was open country and farm land and a row of wooden shacks stood where the new Olds hotel is now located.

Played Hand Organ

One of the old-timers whom hundreds of Lansing people will never forget was a blind man who used to make his living playing and old hand organ on the streets. I do not know this man's name, but to remember that for several years he sat on the sidewalks of the business district and all of the popular tunes of the day. No one knows just how good a living this old man made with his music, but there is no question but that he certainly made hundreds of us kids happy. The Elks lodge bought him a fine new hand organ with a support, or one leg, for holding the instrument so that the old gentleman could play it while standing. Many of the old tunes which brought gladness to our hearts were played by this blind man, such as, "Sweet Rosie O'Grady," "Sweet Maria," "Sidewalks of New York," "After the Ball," "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree," and "In the Good Old Summer Time."

Street fakers were common on the street corners at night, their wagons lit up with large gasoline torch and drawing a crowd by singing a song and playing a banjo or guitar. After the crowd had collected one man would start selling some low-priced article and work the people up to a fever of excitement. These street corner merchants would most always sell a big lot of their razors, shears, knives and various other gimcracks, many of the people buying while under stress of excitement and regretting their purchase after they had reached home and cooled off.

Street corner preachers are now almost a thing of the past, probably due to a great extent to the ever-increasing number of automobiles crowding the streets and using up all the curb space, thus crowding out the soap box lecture and undenominational preacher.

Drew Crowds

Homer Cornell was one of the best salesmen of those old times and how many Lansing people will remember attending his first-night show, held in a large tent. This concert company always put on a very good show for a reasonable price. After the show had been under way for some time, they would start selling their famous Banyan medication, often selling hundreds of bottles in one night. Next would come the Ho-ang-nan, (I am not sure of the correct spelling) and hundreds of bottles of this medication would also be sold. Then the show would start up again. These medicine shows always attracted capacity crowds especially when Homer Cornell was running the show.

“Doc” Lovejoy was another character whom I shall never forget. When I first moved to Lansing I met “Doc” on the street one night when he was playing the “bones” and singing a song. I stood in open-eyed wonder and lid fashion paid homage to this man who could literally ‘make dem bones’ talk. I was nearly as tall as “Doc,” who was a small man. I became very well acquainted with “Doc” as the years sped by, and always enjoyed watching him rattle the bones. “Doc” always had an interested crowd of people, both young and old, who gathered to hear him play and sing. “Doc” never had an unkind word for anyone and I know many men living in Lansing who knew “Doc” when they were still kids and who miss seeing him on the streets. Times have changed and customs too, and the old character are among those missing. The street faker, the organ grinder, and his penny gatherings monkey, the Italian and his pole climbing bear, the street corner preacher, most of the medicine shows, the great free street parade, and the old time string quartets, and are faded into the dim past, and we see and hear then no more.