

A STORY OF THE HISTORY OF CHIPPEWA LAKE
by Virginia E. Ball, January 1968

The family were gathered in front of the open fire for a pleasant evening of relaxation and companionship. Seven - year old Carolyn was snuggled up close to her grandmother on the davenport, with three - year old Sally and twelve - year old John on the other side. Carolyn looked up at her grandmother with an affectionate smile and said, "Grandmother, please tell us a story about the old days. What was it like at Chippewa Lake when you were young?"

Well, my dear, Chippewa Lake was quite different in the old days from what it is now. It was an old lumber town. The village was built by the Chippewa Lake Lumber Company in 1883. Charles Wyman was president of the company and Harvey P. Wyman was Secretary - Treasurer. Lumbering was, of course, the big industry here then. The Chippewa Lumber Company purchased 150,000,000 feet of timber near Chippewa Lake in 1880. They also purchased the D. F. Comstock mill at Big Rapids and moved it to Chippewa Lake during the winter and commenced sawing the first of June.

Chippewa Lake lies in the southwestern part of Chippewa Township and is the largest body of water in Mecosta County. It is the source of the south branch of the Chippewa River. It covers part of sections nineteen, twenty, twenty - one, twenty - nine and thirty and is about 800 acres in area.

During the first lumbering operations, before the mills came to Chippewa Lake, dams were built in the Chippewa Lake Creek to make it navigable, so that logs could be floated down it to the mills at Saginaw.

Chippewa Lake was quite a town when the mills were here. There was a large sawmill, shingle mill, potato warehouse and a depot. A spur railroad came in here. It was a branch of the Pere Marquette. There were two hotels. The Lake House was run by John Ball and was located on that vacant lot next to Clara Nott's home. The other was the Tiffany House and was owned by Mr. and Mrs. H. A. Tiffany. There were two drug stores here. The first doctor was Dr. Clark. After he left, Dr. A. A. Patterson came and a few years later Dr. Chas Grant came. There was a livery stable and a skating rink. About 1904 the livery stable and the skating rink burned. At that time, Mrs. Wylie ran a hotel where Gordon Miller lives now and the livery stable was about where Gordon's gas station stands. Fred Honeywell ran the livery stable and he got slightly intoxicated one night and

kicked over a lantern which started the fire. They got some of the horses out and they ran back in and were burned. I was a very small child at the time but I remember how upset I was over that.

Lake Street was built up almost solid on the south side of the street and there were sidewalks the full length of it at one time. The Methodist church was on Lake Street. It burned, and for several years the Methodists had services in the town hall.

Chippewa Township was given a civil organization in 1868. John Sparks was its first supervisor. The first settlers were

Mr. and Mrs. Pollock. they located on section 6 the spring of 1865. The first marriage was that of Robert Jamison and Minnie Martiny. It was solemnized by Rev. M. R. Miner in Ionia. The first white child born in Chippewa Township was Mary McCormick, daughter of Malcolm and Catherine McCormick. She was born April 30, 1868. She later became Mrs. Tom Loucks and the mother of Velma Holt Shepherd. The old Loucks home still stands near Louck's Corner which was named for the family and is now owned by Velma's son, Glen Holt.

The first school in the Township was erected on section eight in 1870. It was known as district one. It was an old log building that was repaired so it could be used. It was one room with a fireplace for heat, wooden puncheons for desks and three-legged stools for seats. It was replaced by a new building in 1882.

Back in the early days people didn't have electric refrigeration as we do now. They used ice out of the lake for refrigeration. Many people had ice houses in which they stored the ice for use in summer. The ice was packed in thick layers of sawdust to keep it from melting. We used to make delicious ice cream and use the ice to freeze it. No picnic was complete without a big freezer of home made ice cream.

The winter of about 1900, the Belle Isle Ice Company of Detroit sent a crew of men up here to put up ice. Several ice houses were built in which to store the ice. The men worked all winter or as long as the ice lasted. The ice was marked off and cut into cakes about one foot by three feet. It was then hauled to the ice houses for storage. In the spring, another crew came and loaded it on box cars and shipped it to Detroit.

While the winter ice cutting crew was here, John Ball, proprietor of the Lake House Hotel, gave a "Sugar Off" party for the men. He brought in large pans of snow, well packed. Maple syrup was boiled until it spun a thread, then this was dropped by

spoonfuls onto the snow. After it cooled a bit, it made very delicious candy. This was called, "sugaring off". They all sat around the table, in the cozy heat of the big stove, and ate this. Some of the men played musical instruments and some of them could sing and it made for a very pleasant evening.

There used to be a passenger boat on the lake called the Raveille. Clara Nott, who still lives here and is 98 years old, was one of the first passengers to ride on it. Mrs. Nott was born about two miles south of Chippewa Lake, November 18, 1870. She was married to George Nott in 1896. Mr. Nott was the blacksmith here for many years. In the early days there were two blacksmiths here. The other blacksmith was Charlie Fry.

I called on Clara Nott just before Christmas last year. She had her Christmas tree up and covered with lights and she was all ready for Christmas. I have known Clara since I was a little girl. Her pretty white hair and the fact that she doesn't get around as well as she used to is about all that marks the passage of time. She is just as sweet, just as keen and just as interesting as ever. I have never known anyone who grew old so gracefully.

They used to haul big loads of logs on sleighs across the lake to the mill. I remember when Charlie Whitman's team went through the ice. They unhitched the horses from the load and put a rope around their necks so they would float, then hitched another team on and hauled them out. They were pretty white horses with pink noses.

The Chippewa Grange was an organization of some importance at one time. It was started in 1874, with a membership of twenty - five. They had a hall built in 1879. In 1904 the Grange disorganized and the building was sold. There also used to be a chapter of Modern Woodmen of America and one of Royal Neighbors here. They had their meetings in the Town Hall.

Forest fires came through here in 1890 and again in 1897. Both fires did a lot of damage to the standing timber. When the lumber was all gone, the mills moved away and a lot of people went with them. The day the mill shut down, they tied down the whistle and let it blow to take the steam out of the boilers.

In 1904 Rural Free Delivery was established with William Jensen as the first mail carrier.

In 1906 the telephone line was put through and that same year, the railroad was taken out. No one knew they were going to take out the railroad. The train came in as usual on Sunday morning and, when the train went out, they took the tracks up. That was quite a blow to the village.

There were several bad fires here. There was a hotel on the vacant lot next to Clara Nott's home that burned in 1909. There was another bad fire in 1915. The general store, that had been formerly owned by H. G. Ward and Ernest Sweet and was now owned by Elmer Forbes, burned along with the hardware owned by R. G. Abbey & Son, the grocery store owned by H. A. Tiffany & Son and a dwelling house owned by Mrs. Schofield. That was a tragic day for Chippewa Lake. However, the town survived and life went on as usual.

Our church was built by the Chippewa Lake Lumber Company about 1895. For many years it was Congregational. About 1917 or 1918, several families moved away from Chippewa Lake and the village and church went into sort of a slump. For a few years the church didn't have a regular pastor but only had services on special occasions. The church was taken over by the Methodists in 1921. Rev. DeVinney was District Superintendent at that time. For many years the Women's society of the church was known as the Ladies' Aid Society. Mrs. Clayton Zuse, whose husband was pastor here from 1940 to 1945, organized our present W.S.C.S. in October, 1940.

I was born in a log house about a mile and a half east of here. It was quite a large log house, as houses went in those days. At that time nearly everyone had the floors of their home covered with rag carpet. The rags had to be cut in thin strips and sewed together and woven to make the carpet. How well I remember the good times we had sewing the rags for our carpet. A lot of young people would gather at our house in the evening and sew rags, eat popcorn and sing. When the rags were all sewed and wound into balls, mother took them to Mrs. Foot and she wove our carpet. We covered the floor with straw and put the carpet over it and tacked it down. When we had it all stretched and tacked down, we thought it was just beautiful. I have seen oriental rugs in later years that didn't look nearly as beautiful to me as that rag carpet did then.

You youngsters have never known the joy of sleeping in a bed that had, instead of a mattress, a strawtick and a feather bed. That is what we had when I was your age. We used to fill the strawtick with fresh straw in the fall and put a thick feather bed over it. The first night, after we filled the strawtick, the bed was so high we could hardly climb into it. After we had slept on it awhile, it got packed down a bit. The first night was always a thrill. The smell of the fresh straw, and the warmth of the soft feather bed, made for a perfect night's sleep.

I suppose you youngsters think life was pretty dull here

years ago but really it wasn't. I believe we had more fun then than you young people do now.

We used to build a big bonfire down by the lake and have skating parties at night. Sometimes all the young people in the neighborhood would gather at our home, with their sleds, and we would go coasting. Mother would have a big kettle of vegetable soup on the old heating stove to keep it warm for us when we came in hungry as bears. I wish I could have something now that would taste as delicious as that did then.

Then there were taffy pulls and the sleigh ride parties with a string of bells around each horse to add to the gayety. We would put a lot of straw in the bottom of the bobsleigh, with some warm blankets over it, and some over us, and with two or three hot foot stones at our feet, we were very warm and cozy. There is a big soap stone up in the attic now that has been on a lot of sleigh ride parties.

Every year before the hunting season opened, all the hunters in the neighborhood would get together and choose up sides. There was lots of game here then, although we didn't have deer here at that time. Each kind of game counted so many points. They would all get up at the crack of dawn the morning the season opened and start out. When they brought in their kill at night and totaled up their points, the side with the most points won and the other side had to put on the game supper. These suppers were usually held upstairs in the Town Hall. After supper, Cliff Sparks would tune up his fiddle and we would have a square dance. Those hunting parties were something we looked forward to from one year to the next.

The village got electricity in 1931. That was a big thrill. Before that, everyone lighted their homes with oil lamps and candles. When we think of all that electricity does for us now, we wonder how we ever got along without it.

When I get to thinking of the past and some of the good times I had when I was young, this old rhyme comes to my mind. I don't know who wrote it but it goes something like this:

I am fully aware that my youth has been spent,
My get-up-and-go has got up and went,
But I don't really mind, as I think with a grin,
Of all the nice places my get-up has been.

By the looks of the clock, I think it is time for me to stop reminiscing and for you youngsters to get to bed. I may be a representative of the past but you represent the future and you must get your sleep.

So, "Good night, my darlings, and pleasant dreams."