

Lansing Pioneers **April 6 1901 State Republican**

When it was decided in 1847, to move the capital of Michigan away from the dangerous Canadian frontier and tuck it safely away among the forests of Ingham county. John Thomas of Oakland county was a member of the house of representatives and took part in the important discussion. We smile now at the thought of the three little towns of Windsor, Walkerville and Sandwich, with interlying stretches of farm land threatening the 12 miles of solidly build water front which faces them across the blue straits. Apprehension of a war with England was not the only reason for the change of capitol, but it was spoken of, and we have our right to smile.

Rep. Thomas, who was father of Mrs. E.R. Merrifield, was one of three commissioners appointed from the legislature to drive out into Ingham's almost untouched wilderness and select a site for the capital. They supposed with everyone else, that Lansing would lie principally upon the east side of the river, near Main st. and along the latter street toward the fair grounds. So Mr. Thomas and two other gentlemen, Daniel S. Lee and Charles P. Bush, entered into a speculation and bought the property where A.A. Piatt's power house stands, intending to build a dam and a flour mill at that point. Let it be said in passing, that the prompt energy of Mr. Seymour, who build the Seymour house and started the milling industry at North Lansing, frustrated their plans. It had another effect also; it started growth in another direction, and that portion of Lansing which was expected to be the center of the new city, was not built up for a number of years.

In October, 1848, Mr. Thomas, with his family and stock of dry goods, moved to what Mr. Merrifield calls a charming reminiscent article, "the place of great expectations." Their caravan of 12 heavily loaded wagons drove through the autumn forest to the infant capital. They made their home in a large house on the corner of River and Main sts, which had been built for a hotel. A bridge carried Main st across the river, and on the corner of Cedar st Mr. Thomas established the first dry goods store in Lansing. There was practicality nothing at "middle town," except the Hudson House, which was in the process of building, and was finished in time to accommodate some of the legislators of the secession of 1849.

The society event of the season was the opening of the Benton house, on the north west corner of Washington and Main sts. Charles P. Bush was proprietor of the new hotel, and cooks and waiters were engaged from one of the steamers plying between Detroit and Buffalo. Lansing first marriage took place at the Benton house. Mr. Bush's daughter was the bride, and, William Hinman the groom. Mrs. Merrifield was the bridesmaid, and the then secretary of state, George W. Peek, was best man.

Mrs. Merrifield has watched Lansing's growth from the city's infancy. She saw the first shanties springing up over the tract of land upon which the city stands, and has gathered spring flowers along Grand st. During one spring flood she had an experience not so pleasant to remember as the culling or the wake robins. The Main st bridge was greatly weakened by the pounding ice and had been condemned by the city officials. With her little brother and Squire Ward, Mrs. Merrifield stood on the bridge watching the swollen

waters. Suddenly the bridge shifted to the west, broke loose and began to go down. Mrs. Merrifield had barely time to jump ashore, while her brother and Mr. Ward were carried down by the bridge.