

Lansing Pioneers

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J.W. Barker, 613 Capitol ave north, is one of Lansing's earliest residents. He first saw the capital city from a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen, in which he had driven 17 miles from the west. He then lived in Onedia township, Clinton {Eaton} county. His brother, who resided in Lansing and taught the first school here, had sent a messenger to the Oneida farm with the news of his wife's death. Mr. Barker and his sister started in the ox cart for Lansing. Ten miles west of the city, at what was called the Canada settlement, they entered the virgin forest, driving along primitive road made by cutting out the underbrush. After leaving the little settlement they saw no other house until they reached the log hotel standing on the corner of Washington ave and Washtenaw st, where the Palace Laundry is today.

Mr. Barker was born in 1829 in Genesee county, N.Y. His boyhood was spent there attending school and in farm work, and at the age of 15 he moved with his father to the farm 17 miles west of this city. In 1848 he came to Lansing, living with his brother of Washington ave north near Maple st. His first work in Lansing was grubbing stumps C.T. Allen from Washington ave from which trees had been cut to mark the future highway. During the first winter he also helped to clear the present capitol square. He then learned the trade of mason under John A. Bush. At that time there lived on the present site of A.M. Donsereaux's store Miss Elsie Malden, whose family came to Lansing from Detroit, driving in wagons out Grand River ave. In 1854 Mr. Barker and she were married.

Mrs. Barker also tells many interesting reminiscences of the young city. Lansing was divided into three centers; "Upper Town," near the junction of the Grand and Cedar; "Middle Town," at the crossing of Michigan and Washington aves, and "Lower Town," at North Lansing, where the dam had created an industrial point. All the stores were at Upper Town, and the obtaining of a paper of pins necessitated a long walk out

Washington ave, climbing over logs and through underbrush where Main st now lies, and across a wooden bridge to the eastern bank of the river.

On day the Malden family heard that a woman named Teetter was seriously ill with consumption in a cabin deep in the woods west of town. Desiring to offer their help they inquired the way to the cabin and were told to start west from the log hotel, and follow the blazed trees which marked the path through the forest. This they did, and found the Teetter home standing where now is the corner of Washtenaw and Sycamore sts.

In 1857 Mr. Barker built his present home. In 1870 he engaged in the grocery business which he carried on successfully until 1893, when he sold his stock and retired from active business life.