

Old Time Resident Who Recalls the Indians Here

So many changes have taken place in Lansing in the last 56 years that it is almost impossible to begin to tell of them, according to Nelson A. Madden who has lived continuously in Lansing since 1847. Mr. Madden came here with his father, R.C. Madden from Delta Mills west of the city, when he was only two years old. Mr. Madden's father was the first justice of the peace in Lansing according to his statement.

At that time and for years after, much of what is now the best and finest portion of the city was covered with swamps. The ground on which the city hall is located was originally a swamp according to Mr. Madden and he himself remembers when the principal thing in site at that spot was a splendid crop of cat tails. The marsh there was a favorite nesting place for wild ducks, and Mr. Madden states that he gathered eggs there shortly before he enlisted in the Civil War. Another spot that was a swamp at that time was the present site of the public market on Turner Street. All the ground there has been filled in during the last 50 years, according to Mr. Madden, although the older residents can remember when they would never have dreamed of such a thing as a market being held at that particular location.

In the early days Indians were frequent visitors to the city, and often made themselves very conspicuous. The name of Okemos is now most frequently mentioned of the Indians who lived near Lansing at that time, but nevertheless there were many others whose names are remembered by a few persons. Among these are two individuals who were styled by the settlers "Old Shank" and "Come Again". Names then were assigned because of some apparent characteristic. It is related that Mr. "Come Again" had the propensity for frequently coming again to the places where he was well treated and hence the title. He had a great liking for bread and milk, an exceptionally strange thing to be on the diet of an Indian warrior. Civilization evidently proved attractive to this particular redskin. White bread at the time was apt to be a scarce article and the Indian was not always fed with his favorite food upon his visits to the city.

The Indians had two camps, one located northeast of the city and another south of the race track, which is east of the city, on the banks of the Red Cedar. The small Indian boys would frequently come to town bring their bows and arrows, and liked nothing so much as to shoot pennies from sticks with their primitive weapons to the amusement of the crowd. Many of them were amazingly accurate and they often won coins which bystanders would often put up as the marks.

Wild game at that time was plentiful, and Mr. Madden remembers when an uncle John B. Sweet, once shot a bear within what is now the city proper of Lansing. The animal fled to the north, and in pursuing it his uncle shot a deer which he happened to see, proving that game was more plentiful in this vicinity at an early day when it now is anywhere in the state.

No such thing as local option found favor when the city was first started, although saloons were not over plentiful at first. The first saloon was opened by Charles Wilt in what is now North Lansing. In this connection, Mr. Madden states that as he remembers it, the first man to become sufficiently intoxicated to warrant his being taken in tow by the city marshall was one Nicholas Welch, a town character who was familiarly known by the nickname of 'Old Kalamazoo'. The city marshall at the time was James Baker.

Lawn mowing was not accomplished at regular intervals when the city was young, and it was the custom every year to sell at public auction the hay crop around the old state capitol. The person bidding in the crop had to remove it promptly and leave the grounds in good condition under legal penalty.

The text of the above article is either from the Lansing Journal or the State Republican, probably around 1903. The text is exactly as it appeared in the article and no attempted has been made to correct the grammar or update the language.