

LANSING PUBLIC LIBRARY  
HISTORICAL COLLECTION

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## LANSING MIGHT HAVE BEEN BIDDLE CITY, BUT A PANIC CAME ALONG

Jerry and William Ford of New York State early in 1836 entered most of the south half of Section 21, Lansing Township, lying just south of the junction of the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers (but not including that junction). They are credited with having laid out Biddle City on this plat on April 11, 1836, named in honor of Major John Biddle, War of 1812 hero who was also a Territorial delegate in Congress and a historical writer "of some prominence."

Although the Ford brothers had met with some success in land promotions in the Jackson, Michigan area earlier, they were not so fortunate with Biddle City. A contributing factor undoubtedly was the financial panic which began in 1837.

Biddle City was to have comprised 48 full blocks and 17 fractional ones, and there were elaborate plans for a "church square," a "public square" and an "academy square." Some lots were sold, but there is no record of anyone ever having bought them for anything other than speculation, and no settlement of any kind was made.

Possibly through misinterpretation, a legend sprang up to the effect that the Ford brothers laid out Biddle City on a tract owned by William H. Townsend of New York state, and that they sold land belonging to Townsend. Records prove this story is absurd, although, every now and again, someone copies it more or less verbatim from "Lansing and its Yesterdays," published in 1930.

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## NEXT MEETING

Of the Society

Thursday, May 23, 1957 — 8 P.M.

Lansing Civic Center — Parlors A & B

*Featuring*

Election of Officers

Informal Reports, Discussions

This is our Annual Meeting!

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## River and Secretary of War Gave Name to Only Eaton Rapids on Earth

When you say that Eaton Rapids tends to its knitting, you speak the truth. The woolen products industry which has carried Eaton Rapids' name to the four corners of the earth, was launched in 1836 when Samuel Horner set up the weaving of blankets in his home. From this tiny beginning has grown a thriving Michigan industry, backbone of "The Only Eaton Rapids on Earth," title of the late Scott Munn's history.

Our neighbor to the south was a village long before Lansing was founded. Situated on the Grand River, Eaton Rapids was so named because fast rapids were then a feature of the river and for John Henry Eaton, Secretary of War.

THE GREATER LANSING  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

John Gray	President
George Wiskemann	1st Vice President
Mrs. Bernard Coggan	2nd Vice President
Joseph L. Druse	3rd Vice President
A. A. Elsesser	Treasurer
Eugene T. Petersen	Executive Secretary
Mrs. Howard Rouse	Recording Secretary



TRUSTEES

Clyde Anderson  
Robert Clark  
Lois Fohl  
Kenneth Wilson

Dr. Lewis Beeson  
Virginia Summers  
Chester W. Ellison  
Norman Bunker

## Trips Abroad Are Planned By Three Society Members

Trips abroad are planned by three of our members for this year. Joe Druse is going on a twelve-week trip to Europe this summer which will take him to England, France, Ireland, and Italy. During his visits in Ireland, Joe will do research on his family history.

Bill Sullivan will be leaving in August with his family for a nine-month stay in Sweden. Selected by the State Educational Program, Bill will teach American economic history at the Universities of Stockholm and Lund. Bill is also a recipient of a grant-in-aid from the American Philosophical Society this summer.

A year of following Hannibal's trails in Italy, southern France, and Spain will begin in September for Dr. William M. Seaman and his family. Dr. Seaman, Michigan State University professor of classical languages, plans to publish a pictorial history of Hannibal's 15 years of conquests in Europe.

June 17 will find Lila Colby enroute to the American University, Washington, D.C. Lila will attend the four-week course in archival management offered there in conjunction with the National Archives and Library of Congress.

If you have old records — diaries, ledgers, letters, photographs — for the Society, call Phil Mason, IV 7-5997.

## “Short History of Okemos” Feature of Open House By Friends of Library Group

One Sunday recently, the Friends of the Okemos Library welcomed guests to a library open house, the last to be held in its old quarters. The new headquarters of this Ingham County Library branch are to be in the new township building in Okemos.

The only known local history to be sponsored and published by a Friends of the Library group, *A Short History of Okemos*, by Mrs. Ralph Stillman, was a feature of the open house. Its lively twenty pages are sprinkled with fascinating highlights of the Okemos story. Its fresh and readable text reflect the author's use of diaries still in family hands.

Mrs. Stillman's *History of the Okemos Community Church*, yet unpublished, can be used in typed copy at the Michigan Historical Commission, the State Library, and the Ingham County and Okemos branch libraries.

## SOCIETY'S ANNUAL DUES RAISED TO TWO DOLLARS

Annual dues to the Society were raised from one to two dollars by amendment to the constitution at the March meeting.

Also, provisions were made for contributing memberships of five dollars or more, and life memberships of one hundred dollars in one payment.

## Lansing Writer Contributes To New Michigan Magazine

Lansing's talented writer, Joseph Cherwinski, has two stories, “With Love” and “Portrait of a Lady,” appearing in recent issues of *Artesian*, a promising new addition to Michigan local journals. The publication's field is described as “a natural free flowing expression in the arts” with short stories, theater, art, poetry, music, photography, and recordings. Kenneth A. Ratcliff, 2223 S. Main Road, Ann Arbor, is editor and invites contributions. *Artesian* is published bimonthly. Annual subscription is three dollars.



*EATON RAPIDS' WOOL MARKET brought crowds like this to town on auction day. This picture of a scene on the main street, is an A. P. Ball photo and was obtained from Howard Rouse. It was taken in the early 1870's when Lansing's neighboring community had a long established fame throughout the world for its woolen products.*

## Lansing's Mrs. Claxton Writes Book of Poetry On Region of the Straits

Fellow member Esther Loughlin, of the State Library reports on interesting reading:

Souvenir in Song From the Straits of Mackinac by Owosso-born Elizabeth Claxton (Mrs. John), Lansing, is delightful poetry about northern Michigan. The Claxtons have a vacation cottage at Pilgrim on Lake Michigan. Memories of days there and of the little stone church overlooking the Straits, where Dr. Claxton has preached summers, merge with lore of this historic area. The attractive drawings on the cover are Mrs. Claxton's. (Copies from the author, \$1.50).

## ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY DISCUSSED AT MEETING

The St. Lawrence Seaway and some of its influences on the Great Lakes Area were discussed in an interesting program presented at the April meeting by Harris Miller, of the Michigan Department of Economic Development. Mr. Miller supplemented his remarks with a film "The Eighth Sea."

## Three Centennials to be Held in Central Michigan During Coming Summer

Three centennial celebrations are scheduled for this area in the near future. The first will be held at Elsie July 19-20-21. Weltha Bets is chairman.

August 8-9-10 are official days for the celebration of the founding of Shephard, formerly Salt River, in Isabella County.

Fowler's observance is scheduled for August 22-23-24. General chairmen of this event are Vincent George, Edward McCloy, Marion Sturgis.

## Pioneer Grocery Store In Mason Sold Butter For 20 Cents a Pound

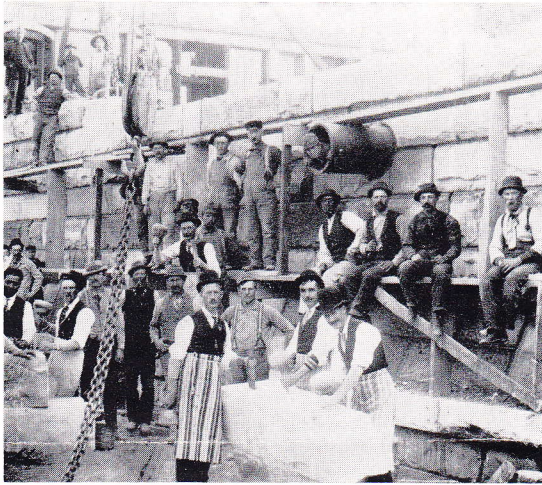
Interested in what Ingham County pioneers paid for groceries and foodstuffs in 1873? If so, come out to the Archives and examine the day book of the old Pioneer Grocery Store of Mason, Michigan, which was recently given to our society by Mrs. A. D. Courtright of Lansing.

The day book, which covers the years 1873 and 1874, lists food purchases, customers, and prices. Eggs sold at 14¢ a dozen; sugar 11¢ per lb.; butter 20¢ per lb.; molasses 60¢ a gallon, ham 13¢ per lb. and a bottle of beer 15¢. Although some paid in cash, most customers charged their purchases and many brought in farm produce to pay their grocery bills.

## MEMBERS TOLD OF ORIGIN OF LANSING BY DARLING

The intricate behind-the-scenes political maneuvers to locate the capitol at Lansing was told by Birt Darling at the Society's March meeting.

According to the speaker, the selection of Lansing — which was then an unbroken wilderness — was due to the astute leadership of James Seymour, a New York land speculator, who owned much of Lansing. Sketches of some of Lansing's early pioneers were also given by Mr. Darling.



LANSING'S OLD POST OFFICE and later the City Hall Annex will be torn down soon. When this picture was taken, it was just going up. The building was completed in 1893 by a crew of craftsmen who apparently included derby hats and stiff collars among their working togs. The picture is from the Edmonds Collection.

## EDWIN BOOTH OPENED OPERA HOUSE ON SITE OF GLADMER THEATER

Located at the site of the Gladmer Theater was Lansing's first modern theatre, "Buck's Opera House." It was built in 1872 by Buck, Cowles, and Elliott, and although ornate and gaudy by present-day standards, it was considered one of the best of its kind in the state at that time. With a packed house of 1,100 Lansingites, the theatre opened on March 1, 1873, with a thrilling performance of Macbeth by the famous 19th century actor, Edwin Booth. In the years that followed, America's top actors and actresses performed on its stage.

In the 1890's James J. Baird bought out the Buck interest, and its name changed to Baird's Opera House. Under the new management the theatre was renovated and enlarged and became Lansing's leading show place. Later it was sold to Fred J. Williams and Frank Stahl who adopted the name of Gladmer from the first part of the names of their children, Gladys Williams and Merritt Stahl.

## Miniature Biography of Vice President Reveals Number of Skills, Talents

When Blanche Coggan says, "Drop by, we'll talk about it over a cup of coffee," you can be sure of three things: an exciting Coggan idea is brewing, you'll come away with a job to do, and you'll have a good time doing it.

We proudly launch this series of miniature biographies of our trustees with Mrs. Coggan. Just a year ago, she wrote, promoted, and produced the fine historical pageant telling the story of 120 years in Marble School community, fringing present-day East Lansing. Called "Marble Community's Version of Washington Irving," by Birt Darling, Blanche Coggan is quick to point generously to the part every person and group played in the pageant's success. Discovering and inspiring a community's talents, however, is her particular gift.

Born on a cattle ranch in Colorado, Mrs. Coggan "loves every memory of it," with a father who was a minister, a judge and a farmer, and her mother "a home builder who wrote for her own pleasure." She taught in Michigan and Indiana before her marriage to Bernard Coggan. Majoring in music and psychology, she has a Master's Degree from Michigan State University.

The Coggans live in the remodeled John P. Marble farm home, where her hobbies are re-designing her home and grounds, traveling, and collecting semi-precious stones.

Oldest son, Bernard, Jr., is manager of the Convair-San Diego plant of Continental Airways; Forrest, manager of To Yo Za Theatre of the Far East, helped direct the Marble story; Ramona is secretary to Dr. J. I. Denison of M.S.U.

Besides "Out of the Past — Into the Future," the Marble pageant, Mrs. Coggan has published a science fiction novel, "When God Quit," writes poetry, and teaches piano.

In odd moments, B. C. and her membership committee find time to operate her famous "telephone tree," which asks you and me to circle our society's next meeting on the family calendar.