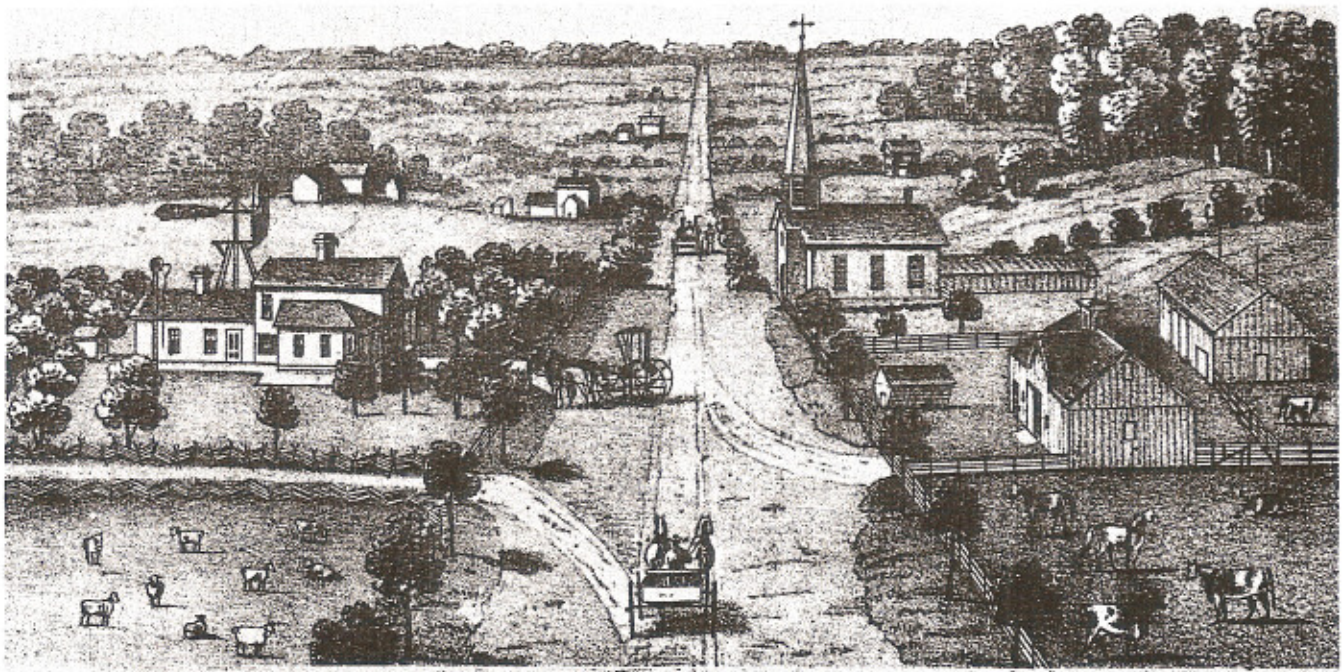
WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC

YESTERYEAR AROUND CALEDONIA STATION

No. 10 1977



FARM RESIDENCE OF RODNEY C. SESSIONS, ESQ. GAINES TP. KENT CO. MICH.

This scene is reproduced from the Kent County Historical Atlas of 1876. The first church shown here was replaced in 1898. There is considerable evidence of the horses and buggy days. Note the shed at the rear of the church which was used to keep the horses out of the hot sun and rain and cold drafts in the winter.

The house on the left is no longer there, but was replaced after a fire and is now the home of the Simeon Maier family.

This first church building was the place many important conferences of the United Brethren Church were held, at the corner of Kalamazoo Avenue and 92nd Street.

The Gaines U. B. Church has been a strong religious influence in the area all around Kalamazoo Avenue and 92nd Street since it was founded in 1858, by Rev. S. C. Buck.

Before the founding in 1858, Rev. Jacob C. Bowman who lived in the area held services in the White School now known as the Dodge School, on Kalamazoo Avenue just one mile north at 84th Street.

Elders Hamp and Hungerford were sent by the Conference to take charge of the Gaines circuit as it was called after combining it with Thornapple, Caledonia Center, and Salem circuits. Preaching was held at all these points every two weeks. It is important to note that then there were very poor roads and there was much travel by horseback. Caledonia village had not yet been started and Alaska was just becoming a thriving town.

As the church grew, there was a need for a building and by 1867, the first church structure was erected on the site of the present building. The land came from the Sessions' farm now owned by Simeon Maier (9247 Kalamazoo Ave.), whose family have been members since the early 1900's. The land cost $31.50. The sanctuary cost $2760 and was dedicated during the pastorate of Rev. Hamp. On the dedication day there was a snow storm but the church was crowded. Folks walked many miles to be there.

In those days, shoes were not easily obtained, so people would carry their shoes and remove whatever kind of foot covering they had and put on their shoes before entering the church.

Under the direction of John Wolcott, there was a good choir. The first Christian Endeavor was started in 1895. A general conference was held in 1905 which brought church people from all of the midwest and Canada.

By 1898, a new building was needed. The first church was torn down and bought by Valentine Geib who lived on the farm located on the northwest corner of Hanna Lake Avenue and 92nd Street. The pews were sold for 50 cents each, and some may still be seen around this part of the country it was revealed by Mrs. Harmon Olthouse of Dutton who was a daughter of Valentine Geib. Valentine Geib was class leader of the church.

Mrs. Olthouse as a very small child remembers Bishop Wright coming from Dayton, Ohio to visit Bishop Horace T. Barnaby who lived on Kalamazoo Avenue about one half mile south of the church. Bishops Wright and Barnaby were leaders in the split of the church over secret societies. They were strong against all lodges and and brought about the split on 1889. The Gaines church was then known as the Old Constitution and the split off group as the New Constitution. The group later merged with the Evangelical and then the Methodists, now known as the United Methodist Church.

At least one of the many times Bishop Wright visited the Gaines Church, he brought along his two sons, Orville and Wilbur who in 1903 made history by being the first to fly an airplane at Kitty Hawk, N.C. These boys had a bicycle shop in Dayton and for years worked to build an airplane chiefly from the kinds of parts used in bicycles. Their father deplored the idea as useless and often preached from the pulpit that if the Lord had intended man to fly he would have provided him with wings.

The new sanctuary was dedicated in 1898 by Bishop Horace T. Barnaby during the pastorate of Rev. N. W. Miller.

This building was renovated with new plaster in 1951 by Dean Overholt. Members of the church worked to apply celotex lath sheets over the walls and helped Dean with the plastering.

For many years before 1951, the Gaines church shared a pastor with Caledonia, the last of these being Rev. Alice Griffin. In 1951, Gaines separated so as to have its own full-time pastor, Rev. Frank Moxon. In 1953, Rev. Moxon, past 80 years of age retired and Rev. Edward Gamble became the pastor until he retired from active preaching in 1955.

Then Rev. Cyril Haines, a young man from Dutton, took his first pastorate at Gaines.

In 1957, the first addition was added on the east side.

The Centennial was celebrated in 1958 with the new addition serving well to accommodate them. Many former members and friends from the tri-county area attended. Bishop Carlson preached.

After Rev. Cyril Haines in 1964, Rev. Darrell Clements became the pastor. In 1967, Rev. Richard Raab with his wife Donelle came and is the present pastor.

The church has more than doubled in membership in the last few years under Rev. Raab. A new sanctuary has been built. It was dedicated August 1973 with Bishop Duane Rheam as the speaker. Robert Weaver was the architect. It was built by Orrie Martin and Associates.

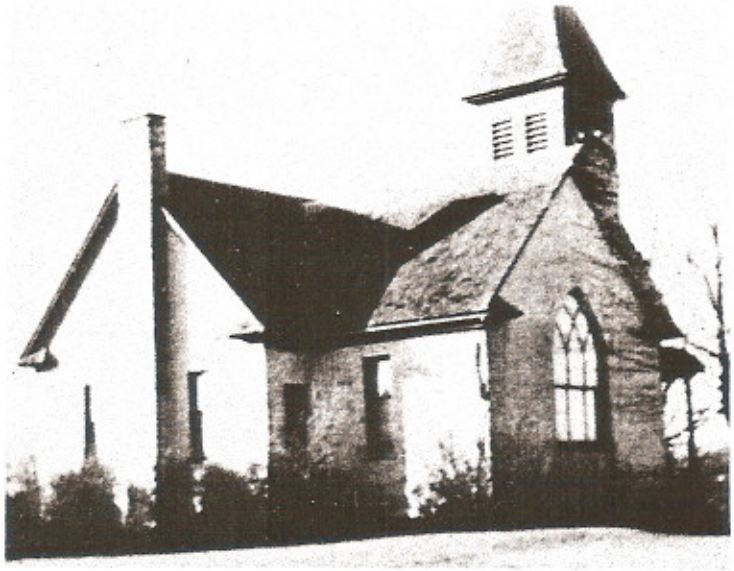
Now the membership is over one hundred and the attendance averages 150.

Mail your subscription to "WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC", P. O. Box 1870, Caledonia, Michigan 49316. Ten issues for $5.00.

Previous issues of "WELCOME BACK" are available at Passenger Printing Service and from the subscription manager.

The following people supplied "WELCOME BACK" with photos, newspaper articles, books, stories, etc. for this issue: Mrs. Audrey Vaughn, Mr. Arthur Bowman, Mr. Keith Bowman, Mrs. Atta Olthouse, Mr. Jim E. Crumback, Mr. Alan Good, Cora L. Bauman.

The committee staff for the tenth issue has been Editor, Kenneth R. Gackler; Photo Reproduction, Jay L. Shook; Layout and Printing, Edward Passenger; Research, Mary Crumback.



This picture of the Gaines U. B. Church was on a Christmas card about 1940 by Arletta Geib (Hanna) to the Art Bowman family. This was the second building which still is in use. In 1957 an addition was built on the east side (an extension of the wing where the chimney is). In 1973 a complete new hexagonal sanctuary was erected and joined to the 1957 addition by a spacious narthex which includes the pastor's study.

"You've Come a Long Way, Baby!"

Dedicated to the Caledonia District School Board

The early pioneer concerns were with getting the area organized; their education often was limited and spelling and composition were the least of their worries. Consequently, words and names were often spelled phonetically. The following excerpts were taken from the School Board Records of Hanna Lake School District No. 8.

"Annel School Meting was caled to order by John Schantz 1903. A Letherman electet chairmon. Report rede and adopeted. V Geibe electet teler. J Kridler electet Motorater. Moshen made to raise Fiftiy doliers direct tax. Moshen to agern.

"At a spesial meting caled by the District to corect mis tak to replace Aren Lethermon to his former term oface in the place of J Kridler.

"It was moved and supported that it be excepted and adopted.

"First balot sixten voats no choise. Secon balot twenty one voats.

"Let to Peter F wood 14 cords beach and maple 16 inches long to be pild in wood shed.

"School meating of District 8. The bord preasant."

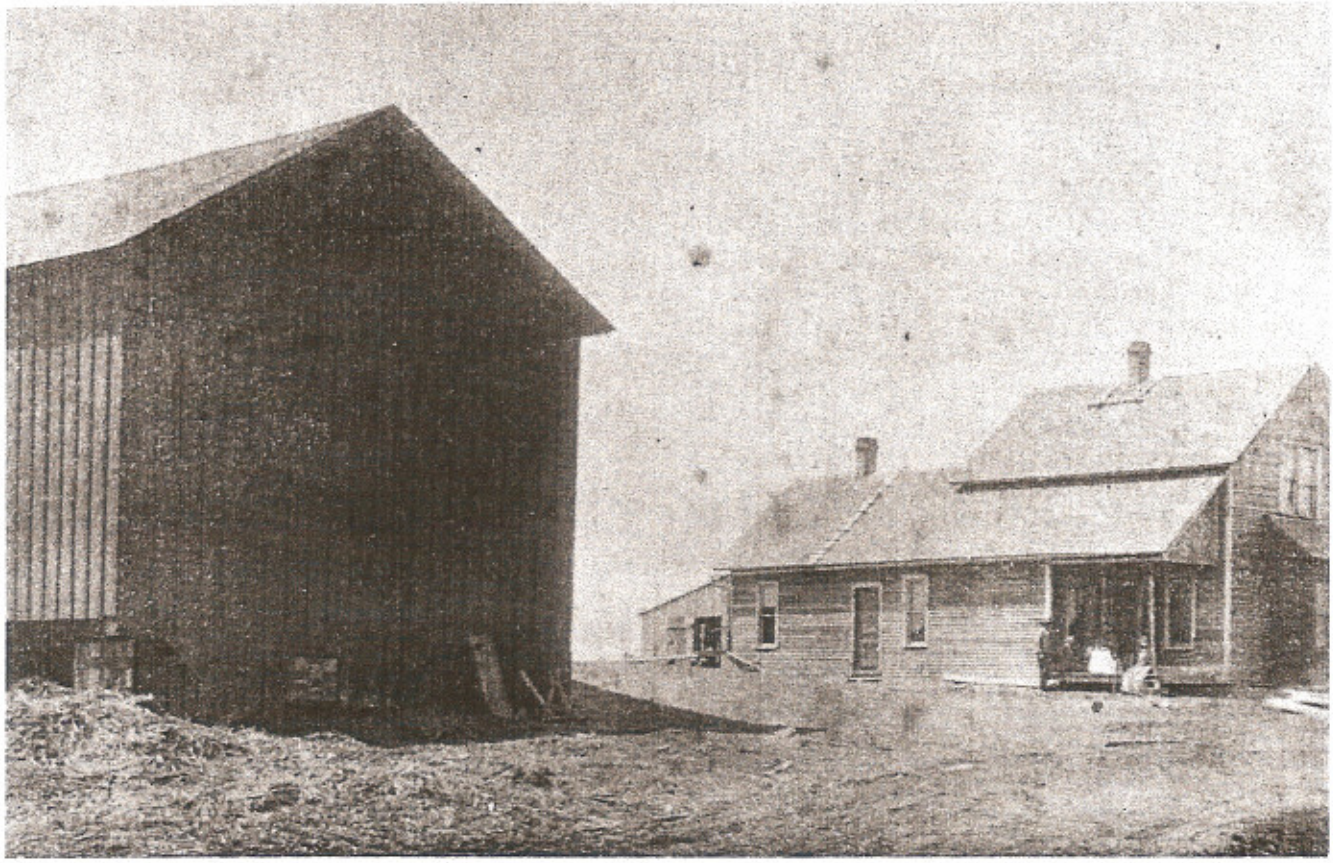
Items on the agenda for discussion at the meetings included: Contracting persons in the area to cut cords of wood and voting to fill the well with 4 feet of gravel. Teacher's salaries graduated from $30.00 per month in 1904 to $50.00 per month in 1916 to $95.00 per month in 1923. Teachers were Ora Fulton in 1904, Lucy Delweiler in 1905, Fern Rawlings in 1907, Harrison Hanna in 1909, Iva Henderson in 1911, Marguerite Hutchinson in 1912, Ollie (Johnson) later Duchow in 1916, Lucile Andrews in 1922 and Burdette White in 1923. Names of members on the School Board included: Aron Leatherman, Valentine Geib, F. J. Anderson, Frank Munford, John Schooley, John J. Schantz, Josephine Kreidler, Robert Sherington, Herman B. Hale, Otto Leatherman and Robert E. Mathewson.

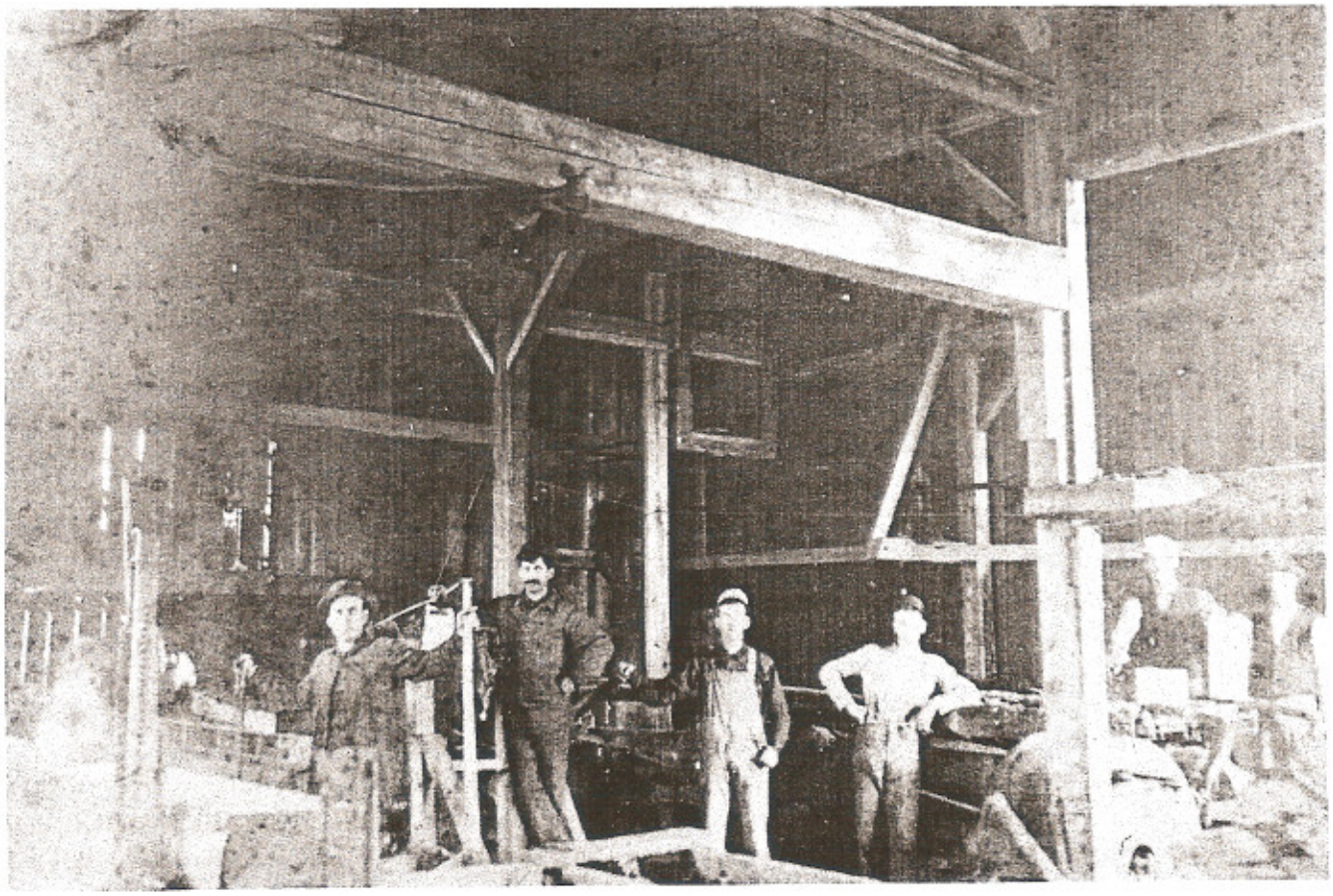
Expenditures included money paid out for: chalk 10¢, cleaning the school house $2.50, piling wood in shed $1.00, mowing school yard $1.50, cleaning well $1.00, painting fence $1.50 and $1.39 for coal in 1916.

The same year repairs to the school house came to $51.34 and $25.00 for plastering building and chimney. On January 4, 1917 a check was written to Wenger & Clemens in the amount of $110.03 for furnace and accessories.

Family names registered on the school roll during these years included: Geib, Farnham, McConnell, Sherington, Hale, Brower, Anderson, Kreidler, Bowman, Weda, Kelley, Hanna, Leatherman, Nogle, Schooley, Johnson, Wenger, Blosser, Cradler, McLeanthan, Phil, and Mathewson.

This article is not meant in any way to be critical of these minor errors but in hopes it might bring back good memories, maybe a few laughs and some of the enjoyment we experienced reading through all the beautifully handwritten pages. We are ever grateful to these early pioneers who strove to do their best and without their effort we would not be where we are today.





Top picture, opposite page: Aaron Good home in 1892 and bank barn in Dutton before the sawmill was built next to the barn.

Lower picture, opposite page: Inside sawmill at Dutton in 1900. Standing at the saw lever is Aaron Good and next to him is Art Klingman. The third man is unknown. Earl Blain has his arm resting on the heading sawmill, Jay Lynn is the operator of the heading mill and Wm. Blosser is standing by his side as helper.

Top picture, above: Aaron Good Saw and Heading Mill. In this mill Nelson Good sawed slabs when he had to stand on a box 6" high to reach the saw handle. Later at 19 he was head sawyer. This mill burned down about 1911 along with the home looking from the south.

Bowman family picture taken about 1900. This includes ten of the fourteen children. Two were deceased by then, one was in Canada and the other one went on to Washington.

Back row left to right: Elias Bowman, Nancy (Bowman) Dodge, Simon Bowman, Sally (Bowman)Clemens,Owen Bowman

Front row left to right: Isaac Bowman, Maria (Bowman) Kolb,Lea (Bowman) Clemens, Wendel Bowman, Joseph Bowman

The Bowmans - The Beginning of Many

Many of the Bowman families and their descendants in the Caledonia area can be traced back to have migrated from the low countries of Europe and Switzerland as early as 1500 and 1600. Again, during the early 1700's, because of religious convictions they came to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Most of the Amish and Mennonites refused to fight in the war but they did furnish horses, wagons and drivers for the military service. When some were left stranded because of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, they managed to take their families to Canada. It was at that time the Bowman family moved to Waterloo County, Kitchener, Ontario. There they found good timber and farmland. Later, during the Civil War when the Canadian-American money exchange rate was $3.00 of American money for $1.00 of Canadian, many came to this area from Canada and tripled their wealth.

Elias Bowman with his wife Maria (Clemens) Bowman and their fourteen children were one of the families coming here about 1860. They settled on the farm later known as the Heier Brothers farm. (5258 92nd Street) Later Elias bought each of his six sons 120 acres of farmland in Gaines township at $1.25 per acre.

Elias the father was a blacksmith and his son Joseph C. was a carpenter, so when a younger member of the family was married, the whole family turned out and together they built a set of buildings for each one. Many of the original houses and barns are still in use.

Joseph C., the oldest son, had the farm that is west of Caledonia now owned by Hugh Ward and the rest of his farm was the muck farmland beside it. (3392 100th Street) His grandson, Orval Bowman is the father of Marion Finkbeiner and Robert Bowman, who is the principal of Caledonia Elementary School.

Jacob C., the second son of Elias, was owner of a sawmill. It was located on the west bank of the Thorn-

apple River at the end of 94th Street. It was known as Ford's Landing where a ferry was once located. Jacob was injured in an accident at the sawmill putting a belt on a pulley. As it caught his left arm the bone was broken and splintered and it soon became infected. In spite of this, a cast was put on and gangrene set in. They amputated first at the elbow and then at the shoulder and within a week he was dead at the age of 39. He left a widow and several children. One of them was Ellen (Bowman) Geib who was Atta Olthouse's mother.

Wendel C., the third son, had his farm where Frank Martin now lives. (2397 100th Street) His children are Elo, Luella (Gehl), Mary (Pender), Chet, Wendel, Ben, Lizzie, Ada and Nellie. Albert and Joe Bruebaker were his stepsons. Forest Long is his grandson and also father of Wendel Long.

Aaron C. the fourth son's farm was on 92nd Street where Robert Martin lives. (2168 92nd Street) His wife was Barbara Bechtel and their children were Austin and Otto Bowman. Collin died in infancy. Aaron was a grandfather to Keith and Floyd Bowman. Recently Ellen Bowman, widow of Noel, who was the son of Otto Bowman, came back through Switzerland on her return from an African missionary tour of duty. She found a bonafide ancestor who was a Swiss baron and he had a real castle. She also found his headstone in a cemetery that stated he lived and died during the 1600's.

Owen C. Bowman, son number five, lived on the northwest corner of 92nd Street and Kalamazoo Avenue which was later owned by John Young.

Elias C. Bowman, the sixth son, lived on the northwest corner of 100th Street and Hanna Lake in the area where Art Bowman and his daughter Ardis Burgess live.

Simon C. Bowman, the youngest child, lived on the place now owned by Louis DeVries on 92nd Street (2670 92nd Street), just east of the Robert Martin farm.

Daughter Nancy was the wife of Owen Dodge and lived where the Schoenborn Orchard and brick school house is. (8559 Kalamazoo Avenue) It replaced a wood building known as Dodge's College. That was the beginning of all the Dodges in the area.

Another daughter, Lea, married Christian Clemens and lived on the county line where Myrtle McCarty now lives. (3049 108th Street) She was the mother of Allan Betzner who was the child of her first husband. Other children of hers were Lizzie (Bingaman), Oscar, Alvin, Simon, and Mae (Clemens) Brewer.

It is interesting to note all the sons were given the middle initial of C after the Mother's maiden name of Clemens. This was done in accordance with the Mennonite tradition.

The Bowman family was very instrumental in building and organizing the first Gaines United Brethren Church. It was a frame building with a tall steeple. The original bell is now on the current church and the clock from the first church is in Art Bowman's possession. The second church was built of brick and Otto Bowman was the building chairman. Art Bowman attended the dedication in the year 1898. In the very beginning the church membership consisted mostly of Bowmans and a few Bechtels.

Elias Bowman born May 28, 1809 and Maria (Clemens) Bowman born July 12, 1811. Note the ear horn in Maria's hand used to help her hear. Also note the cane in Elias' hand. Both the ear horn and cane are still in existence today.

Some of the artifacts still in the area that once belonged to the Bowmans long ago include a German Bible in which the family history has been carefully recorded. It now belongs to Helen (Bowman) Robinette, a daughter of Keith Bowman. A rare and unusual folding bed that is hand carved and very ornate and cannot be found in any antique journals belongs to Walt and Ethel Bowman. They are Keith Bowman's son and daughter-in-law who reside in California. The bed is believed to have originated in Kitchener, Ontario where others have been found like it. A very old and intricate needlepoint signed at the bottom "Barbara Bechtel age 12" is being preserved in a picture frame to keep the material from deteriorating. Maria (Clemens) Bowman, the mother, was deaf and to help her to hear better she used what they called an ear horn. The ear horn now belongs to Orval Bowman. The cane that was used by the father, Elias Bowman, is also still in existence and belongs to Keith Bowman.

Over the years, the Bowman family had family reunions that began as winter picnics in the various homes and then because the homes were not large enough to accommodate sometimes 150 or more they became summer picnics. Gradually they began tapering off into smaller groups like the Geib and Dodge family reunions. Until the Bowman reunions disbanded there were still many descendants in the area but for the most part they have left for other localities nearby and many have gone to other states where you may find them in almost every line of occupation.

Both Elias Bowman and his wife Maria are buried in the Gaines Cemetery. Their daughter Catharine who died at the age of 17 on May 9, 1868 was the first person to be buried there. If you look in the southwest corner of the cemetery you will find a marble slab laid by Art Bowman of 100th Street to replace the original broken one. Inscription on the stone attests to the fact she was indeed the first person buried there. It was a noble deed, representative of the feelings of the many Bowmans who care a great deal about not only the "beginning of the Bowmans, but also the longevity of the Bowmans."

FRENCH STREET – DUTTON
–Now known as 76th Street

As many people are not acquainted with this very beautiful place, although it may be familiar to some of the readers, I will try to give a brief history of it. The name which it bears originated from the kind of people who settled on it. French Street is located one mile north and one mile west of Gaines Center, known as Leatherman's corners, and runs three miles east to the Michigan Central railroad. French Street was first settled by John Wood in the year 1845. It was nothing but a solid forest then, and he had to cut his road ahead of the wagon so they could get through. In about three years afterwards the French people came and located here; they cleared up the forests and made very beautiful homes for themselves and their children. The first school was held in a private house, and when there got to be too many children for this old way, they built a schoolhouse, known as the Solomon School. So a few more years rolled by, and the people began to think what a grand place this would make, and so they must have a church, which was built about 22 years ago. Sunday school is held every Sunday, and the Rev. Miller preaches every two weeks, on Sunday evening. Some think that they need a store, and I think that it would be nice to have a street car on French Street. The roads are of the best, have been carefully graded and then graveled, which makes very nice roads for all kinds of travel. It is reached by rural mail route No. 1, which makes it very nice to get their daily mail. One of the finest places is F. Brewer's. It is on a hill, one-half mile from Leatherman's corners, and anyone can stand there and see about four miles east, six miles west, and two miles south. He has a fine house, and a horse barn which he built in 1899 that cannot be beat. He also has many other buildings, and as fine a sugar bush as anyone ever saw. Now I will stop here, and if anyone wants to know how beautiful it is on French Street, they are invited to make it a visit at most any time of the year.