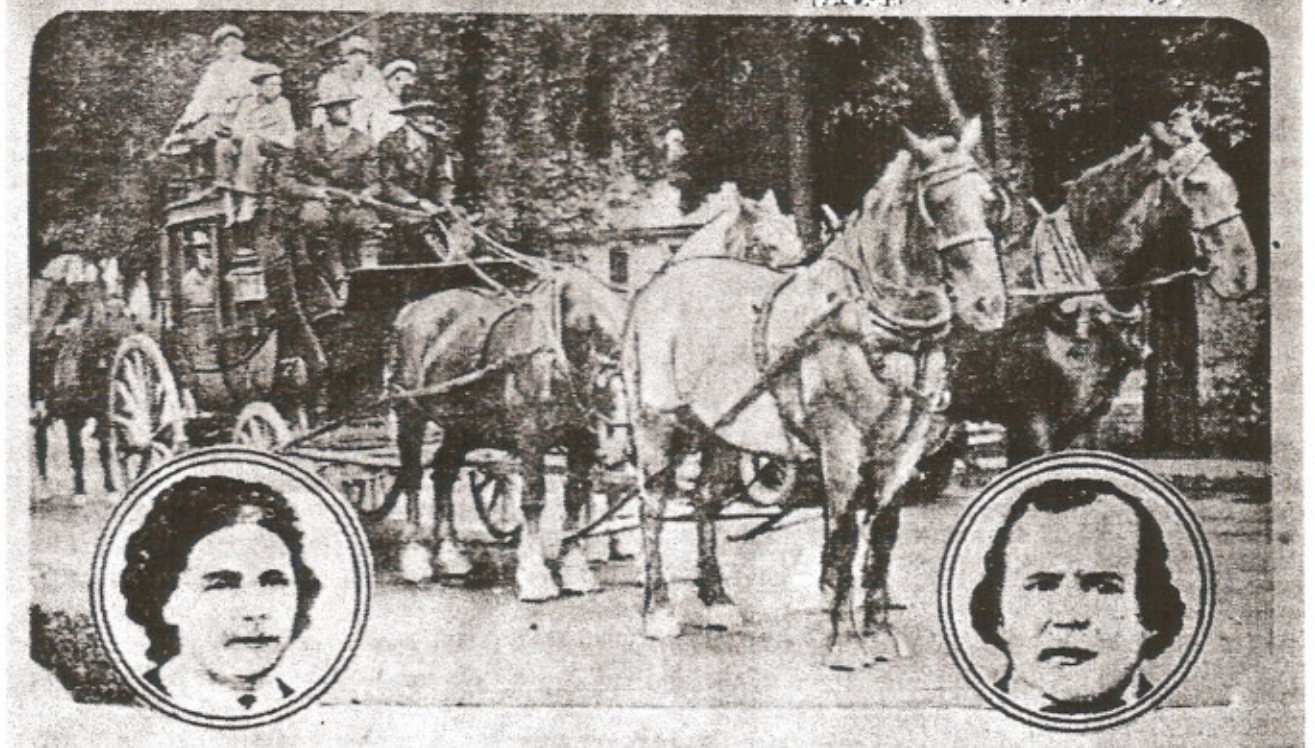
WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC

YESTERYEAR AROUND CALEDONIA STATION

No. 14 1978

Pioneers in Michigan Wilderness in '38 Made Merry at Great Thanksgiving Feast



"Yankee" Lewis and his wife, Mary, hosts at the great Thanksgiving celebration in 1838. A stage coach of the type that used to stop at the Lewis Tavern at Yankee Springs.

NEW YORK TO YANKEE SPRINGS TO ALASKA, MICHIGAN

On the afternoon of a summer day, August 26, 1836, there was seen a covered wagon containing a stalwart man of thirty-five years and five children, between the ages of two and eleven years, driving through the then unbroken wilderness of Barry County, in the Territory of Michigan.

Accompanying this wagon was a woman on horseback carefully guiding her gray saddle-horse over the rough roads of the new country. She had in this way performed nearly the whole of the journey. They had started from Weatherfield, Wyoming County, New York, three weeks before taking in Canada on their route, and expecting to settle in South Bend, Indiana, where their father had bought a tract of land of 160 acres.

The party consisted of William Lewis, Mary Goodwin, his wife, three daughters, Phoebe E., Mary M., Harriet M., a son, Calvin W., and an adopted daughter, Flavia Stone. In 1835 William had been in Illinois and Indiana. At Chicago the proprietors of the first plat had offered him two lots for the cost of drawing the papers if he would bind himself to build one house there. He could see nothing promising there that year. It seemed to him a dirty French and Indian trading post and not likely to become anything better than that, so he declined. He then purchased land near Mishawaka, Indiana and returned home. The next year he

started with his family to go there. According to his usual custom, he stopped to rest over Sunday. This time it was at Gull Corners in Kalamazoo County at a tavern kept by Timothy Mills. On Sunday in conversation with his landlord about the country and the cheap lands of the Grand River country, just coming into the market, he learned that one settler named Calvin Lewis had gone in between there and the rapids, to be next neighbor of Mills, and had established himself to the northward in the woods eighteen miles away. In moving there this man had stopped with Mills and told some particulars about himself which Mills recognized as descriptive of a brother, whose whereabouts were unknown to him for a couple of years, and whom he had feared was dead. Monday they went the eighteen miles and visited the brother.

Mary Goodwin Lewis

Calvin Lewis was located in the edge of the oak openings land on the line that had been traveled by the very few who before then had gone to the rapids of the Grand River by the southern route. It was on the great Indian Trail which had branched off from the Detroit and Chicago Indian Trail and led to the rapids of the Grand. Along this trail Pontiac, Tecumseh and the Prophet, and lesser Indian chiefs and braves had traveled.

The brother had built a log house, but it was yet without floors, doors, and windows. Here he proposed to entertain man and beast when they came along. William was pleased with the location and prospect and saw that if the beginning to be talked of Grand River Valley amounted to anything with its cheap ten shilling an acre lands, just coming into the market, there must be an extensive emigration passing this point. He himself in a certain sense was the vanguard of it. The brothers bargained, and William became the owner of the place.

In 1835 a young man by the name of Charles Paul, in company with the family of Henry Leonard, was eating a luncheon under the trees beside one of the springs. A stranger joined them and it came out in conversation that they were all from the New England States, and one of the party said,"We are all Yankees." At this suggestion Charles Paul hewed the bark off the side of an oak tree and cut the words "Yankee Springs" on it. The name clung to the place and was finally adopted by the township.

William located 1,000 acres of land there, and it soon grew to be an attractive place. He endured in common with all the early settlers the trials and privations of pioneer and frontier life and lived to see the wilderness subdued, and surrounded by all that pertains to a later civilization. Here in this thick forest, the land entirely unclaimed, they settled. The woods were filled with Indians, and their nearest white neighbor, Calvin G. Hill, was eight miles north. From Middleville to Ada, the direct route to Grand Rapids was a dense forest, an unbroken wilderness without an inhabitant. They were on the direct line of the great Indian Trail running from Detroit to Grand Rapids, but they were not alone. The fur trader and the speculator were abroad in the land, and to fill the increasing demands of the weary traveler, their little cottage of two rooms was extended, building after building, until they occupied "nine stories on the ground," seven distinct buildings in a row in the front and two additional in the back. They presented neither an imposing nor a graceful appearance, but were the hurried creation of backwoods life when there was no time to waste on architecture, symmetry, or beauty.

The fame of the place spread throughout the country and so brisk was business at the old "Mansion House," as it was called, that it was no uncommon thing for one hundred people to tarry there for a night, while sixty teams were often stabled there between sunset and sunrise.

Yankee Bill Lewis

The extreme ends of the old house were named. The one farthest north was Grand Rapids and the extreme south was Kalamazoo. The Kalamazoo was considered the best room and was furnished rather better than the others and the better class of people occupied it generally, bridal parties, etc.

Travelers witnessed the existence of that famous garden of nearly four acres. William procured from the Baptist missionary a list of Indian words he would need to transact business with them and committed it to memory. He soon had all the Indians for many miles around bringing game and fish of all sorts, cranberries, and maple sugar to him. He always bought it whether he needed it or not, so as to encourage them in keeping up the supply.

Together this husband and wife labored and toiled; their chief desire seeming to be to give happiness to those about them. With a hospitality that was proverbial and a generosity that can not be measured by ordinary methods they greeted all who came. The man without money was treated as well as the man whose pocket bulged with the currency of that day. Ministers of all denominations, irrespective of creed, were entertained free of charge but were expected to hold an evening service in the large dining room, and men were sent out to notify the neighbors to that effect.

His reputation grew. Anyone who once partook of the savory viands served at his table would always make it a point to get to Yankee Lewis' tavern for entertainment. Lewis Cass was his guest twice, Ex-Governor Felch, Ex-Governor Ransom, U.S. Senator Zach. Chandler, Senator Charles E. Stuart, Judge Pratt — and, indeed, all men of note who traveled in those days were at some time or other entertained there in the primitive style of the day. Royalty was once entertained at the Mansion House, and this occasion was memorable as being the first time that the table was set with napkins for each guest, word having been sent in advance of his coming.

For fifteen years it was very rare that there was not a large number of guests gathered around the large, old-fashioned, blazing hot fire representing not only all parts of the union, but often different countries of Europe.

Mr. Lewis had the rare faculty of never forgetting a face or a name. In the earlier days he often surprised new arrivals by greeting them by name, as if old friends. Here was a man calling him familiarly by name, he had never seen before. He could hardly believe his ears. The secret of it was that often in talking over with his guests, remarks would be made about persons coming or likely to come, that he treasured up for future use and when such a person did come, he was recognized by the description, and Lewis was able to greet him as if an old acquaintence. If a person stopped there for entertainment, if only for a few minutes, and any number of years after that stopped there again, Yankee Lewis would salute by name, shake hands, and make friendly inquiries showing an interest in him. It never failed to gratify and make the guest feel at home.

Thefts and robberies were unknown, although large quantities of money were carried by travelers and it would have been an easy matter for it to change hands had there been the desire for it by designing persons. For example, every year large quantities of money were carried through from Detroit to Grand Rapids to pay the Indians at their annual payments. This money, $15,000, was conveyed through in an extra stage by a man named Lee, accompanied by an Indian interpreter named Provonsol. The money was all in specie and was carried in boxes about a foot square, very heavy. These boxes were all set in the room at the south end of the old house. There was an outside door with an old lock and key to it. Two old guns they had were set up in one corner of the room and those men probably slept without a care or thought of being robbed and went safely through from Detroit to Grand Rapids, in this simple and easy way.

Yankee Bill was a man of indomitable courage and perseverance — never discouraged — always happy and with a fund of humor, wit, and story telling rarely excelled. He was just the one to lead in settling and

establishing a new country. He planned largely and liberally, and was able with his perseverance and strong health to carry out his plans, and by his personal magnetism encouraged others to work and persevere also. He was the first to contract for carrying the United States mail through this portion of the country. In the first contract he was assisted by General Withey of Grand Rapids.

Lines of stages were put on and several coaches a day were started from these points, all meeting at Yankee Springs—the "half way house"—for refreshment of passengers and change of horses. For many years this was the only route through the woods from Battle Creek and Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids, and until the other roads were opened up it made very lively times at the old house. The Yankee Springs post office for a long time supplied the adjacent country. Letters were luxuries in those days, rare and costly. Envelopes and postage stamps were unknown. People wrote on three pages of the paper, folding it so the name could be written in the middle of the fourth, and sealing it with a wafer, directed it and then paid the twenty-five cents postage or left it to be collected by the person to whom it was addressed. Sometimes it was difficult for the old settler to produce the twenty-five cents to pay postage, and he had to earn it before he could claim his letter.

Yankee Bill and Rix Robinson built the first bridge across the Thornapple River in 1838. The road then ran on the old Indian Trail, across Scales Prairie. In 1838 he also built the first bridge across the Coldwater Stream in Section 35 in Caledonia Township. Split logs were used for flooring, pinned down by wooden pins. He, in company with some others, started in 1849 to build a plank road that was to run from Galesburg to Grand Rapids. A good deal of time, energy, and capital was expended on this scheme, but it was finally abandoned.

There was a period when the Yankee Springs property was considered very valuable, and the Rathbones in Grand Rapids wished to exchange their hotel property for Lewis's Property, not including the farm lands. This Grand Rapids property is now worth several hundred thousand dollars and is the present location on the corner of Monroe and Market streets. The other, deserted and forsaken, requires a stretch of an imagination to believe that it was ever of great importance.

Wheat and potatoes at this early date brought fabulous prices, but the table was always well supplied with the essentials and with many delicacies. Great care and attention were given to the large garden of several acres that lay across the road from the old house. Almost every vegetable and flower then heard of seemed to be grown there. The light soil, highly enriched by muck taken from the marsh, was calculated to bring them forward to speedy perfection. The most luscious fruits, melons, and vegetables were grown in abundance, all luxuriating in the new, warm soil of the valley. Arbors were filled with choice grapes, peaches ripened in the sun, and flowers, the good old-fashioned flowers of that day, grew in abundance. Celery — the first grown in Barry County — was raised there, along with tomatoes. They were first called "love apples," and were grown for their beauty, but folks soon learned to eat them. Men were constantly employed in caring for the ground. Water was supplied for use by wells dug on the grounds. Yankee Bill was a skillful caterer. Each guest who came was made to feel at home under that hospitable roof. The first Thanksgiving celebrated at Yankee Springs tavern was in the fall of 1838. Lewis sent out invitations to all the new settlers for miles around and later sent men and teams to gather them in. Mrs. Lewis meanwhile was superintending the first Thanksgiving dinner in the new country, which consisted of wild turkeys brought by the Indians from Gun Lake woods, two immense spare ribs cooked to a turn before the great open fireplace, as were turkeys. Mince pies such as only she could make, pumpkin pies, and puddings were baked in the large brick oven by the side of the kitchen fireplace. Cook stoves then were none. The turkeys and ribs were suspended by stout tow strings and slowly turned before the open fire and someone had to burn their faces while continually basting the meats with their rich gravies, brought out by the heat of the fire. Cranberries were brought by the Indians and were about the only fall berry. Not a fruit tree or berry bush had yet been planted.

The tables were spread and the guests came from their homes in the woods to enjoy this banquet prepared for them in so hospitable a manner and, while all must have remembered the parents and homes so recently left by them, it was not their way to mourn for what they had not, but to enjoy fully what they had which they did in a way that would astonish the dyspeptic of today.

It began to snow, the first of the season, but the harder it snowed the livelier grew the party. An old violin was pulled out of some corner and all began dancing and kept it up until morning, when breakfast was prepared for them, after which they were conveyed back to their homes and so passed the first Thanksgiving in the old Mansion House at Yankee Springs.

The political campaign of 1840 made a hot time in the old house. Pole and flag raising and stump

speaking were the order of the day, but the doings on the Fourth of July, 1846, beat everything on record before or since. A tamarack pole was spliced until it was of the desired length and a flag was flung from it to the breeze with much hurrahing from the crowd that had collected from everywhere and filled the road front before the old house from hill to hill. Twenty-six girls, all in white representing the states, then twenty-six in number, and a Goddess of Liberty in red, white, and blue, were loaded into a monster wagon drawn by twenty-six yoke of oxen. A girl for each state and a yoke of oxen for each girl! They went above the hill to form the procession and came down into the crowd in fine style.

Lewis was ten years in advance of the Michigan Central Railroad. He heard rumors of its approach, but so slow was it coming that the old stage coach kept right along its undisputed way for many years. The road started from Detroit in 1836, when Michigan was a territory. It reached Kalamazoo on February 21, 1846, and in May of 1852 it reached Chicago.

Yankee Bill Lewis represented the counties of Allegan and Barry in the State Legislature in Detroit in 1846. That was the last winter the Legislature convened in Detroit. Some feared that the frivolities of the gay city might affect the manners and morals of the members of that day, and so voted that Lansing, forty miles from any railroad in the heart of the forest of Ingham County, should henceforth witness the assembling together of that august body.

One and a half miles west of the old stage trail in Caledonia Township, there is an epitaph on a white marble slab in the front center of the Alaska Cemetery:

William Lewis
Died
Sept. 16, 1853
Age 51 Years
7 Mos. & 12 Days

Here lies the man who carried on the Mansion House, that famous hostelry renowned from Maine to California for its genial host and its comfortable home-like hospitality. A dwelling of seven log houses, built somewhat along the lines of ranch-houses in the Southwest. This place afforded lodgement and meals for innumerable travelers during the early years when it was kept in operation by the Lewis family.

The interment at Alaska Cemetery was the third burial for this doughty pioneer. His remains were first buried up on the hilltop a short distance south of the Mansion House in Yankee Springs, and his fine wife, Mary Goodwin Lewis, tried to keep the famous hostelry open to the public with the aid of her son, Calvin. At this time much of the original thousand acres taken up by Yankee Bill from the Territorial Government had been parted with; there had been a rather loosely drawn document whereby Yankee Bill had allowed Jasper Parish to put improvements on the land. In time the improvements had grown in size and value while the receipts from the Mansion House had fallen off, as private capitalists had built some 46 plank roadbeds across the state to encourage travelers to visit projects they were promoting. During much of this time, Yankee Bill was serving his constituents as a State Legislator at the capital in Detroit.

As the Lewis family's holdings were shrinking, they finally lost title to the land where he was originally buried. His widow still hoping to stay in Yankee Springs and carry on the once-prosperous business, had him disinterred and a new commital was made in the old Yankee Springs Cemetery a short distance further south.

Beside Yankee Bill's grave at Alaska Cemetery is a white marble slab. The marker is for his wife who lived thirty-five years after her husband's demise.

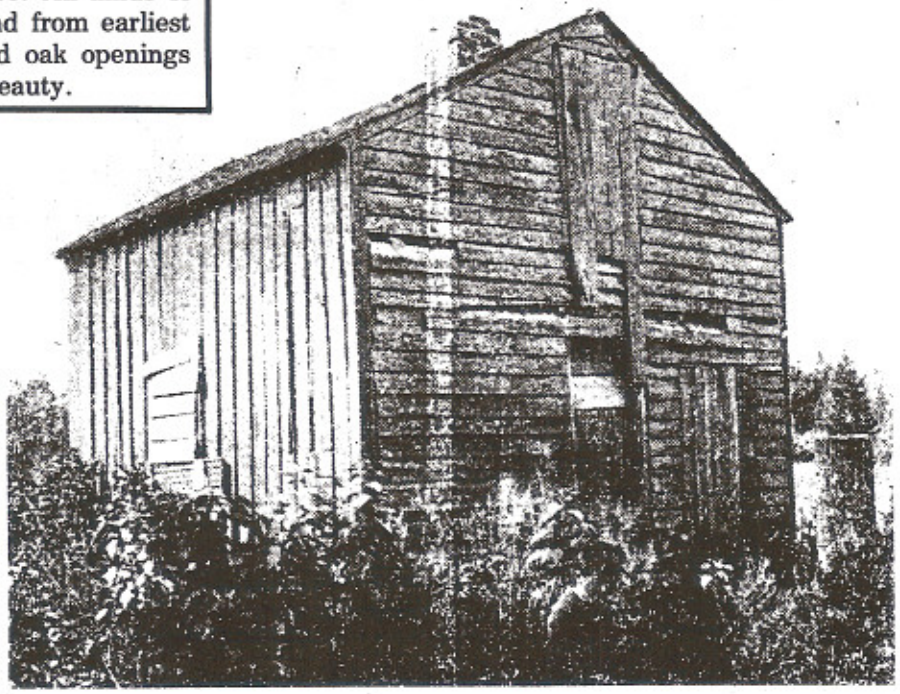
Mary C. Mills
Died
March 1, 1888
Age
82 Yrs., 10 Mos., & 8 Days

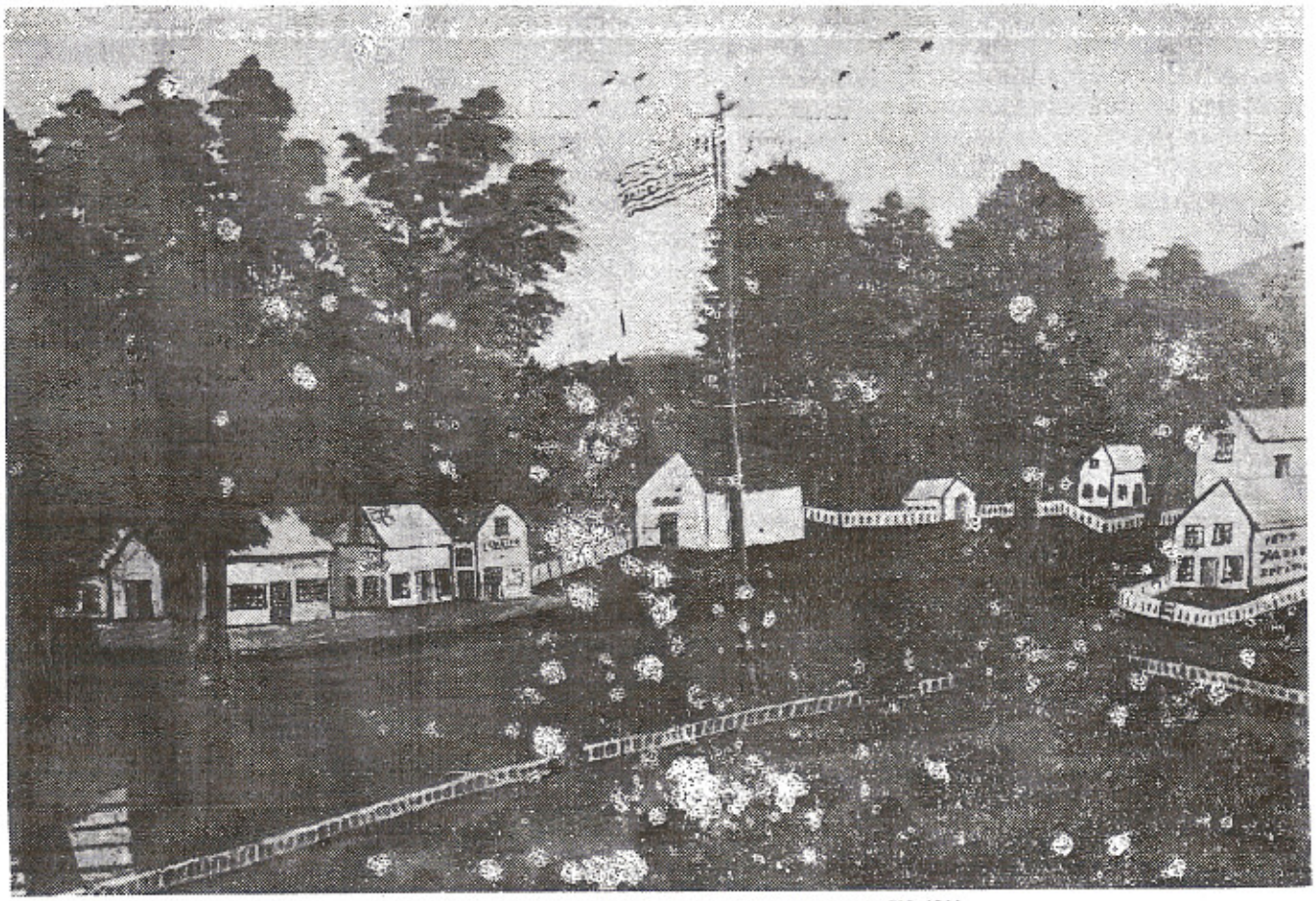
During one of Yankee Bill's sojourns in Detroit as a State Legislator, the leisurely conduct of the affairs of state and social life took quite some time, and he arrived home to learn tht his daughter, Phoebe, was now Mrs. Edward Campau. The Lewis Family was now intermarried with the famous Campau family of Grand Rapids, and someone other than Yankee Bill had officiated in his stead while giving away the bride. This made him hopping mad, but only for a short time, then like a good tavernkeeper he treated the whole house and laughed about it as a huge joke on himself for not suspecting such an event as this to happen since young Edward had been quite a frequent caller.

Mrs. Mary Lewis had gone in after years to live with her daughter, Phoebe, and her son-in-law, Edward Campau, in their log hut on the north end of Campau Lake in Caledonia Township. This log hut was later rebuilt into a large frame hotel,

dance hall, and place for picnics, where people of means could while away their leisure. All kinds of wild flowers grew in abundance, and from earliest spring until autumn the glades and oak openings were literally carpeted with lavish beauty.

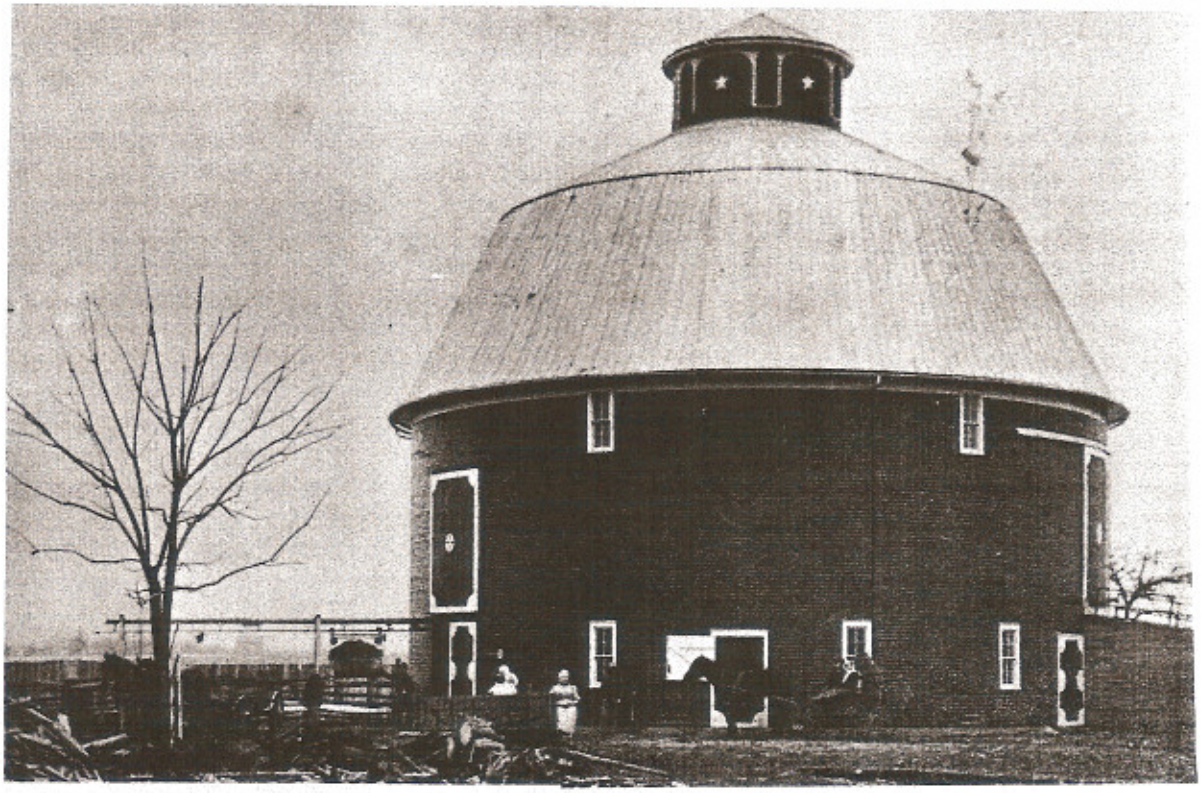
The photograph at the right, taken many years later, shows what then remained of one of the nine buildings of the "Mansion House."





YANKEE SPRINGS TAVERN AS IT APPEARED IN 1844

The above illustration was reproduced from the photograph of a painting made that year, by an artist whose name is now unknown. This is possibly the only known picture of Yankee Bill's tavern made at the height of its popularity. It clearly shows that this popular hostelry of the stage coach days was, in reality, a small community of frame buildings.



THE ROUND BARN:
A SPECIAL LANDMARK FOR MILES AROUND

How many times have you heard or referred to: "You know, just west, or just east, of the round barn on 92nd Street"?

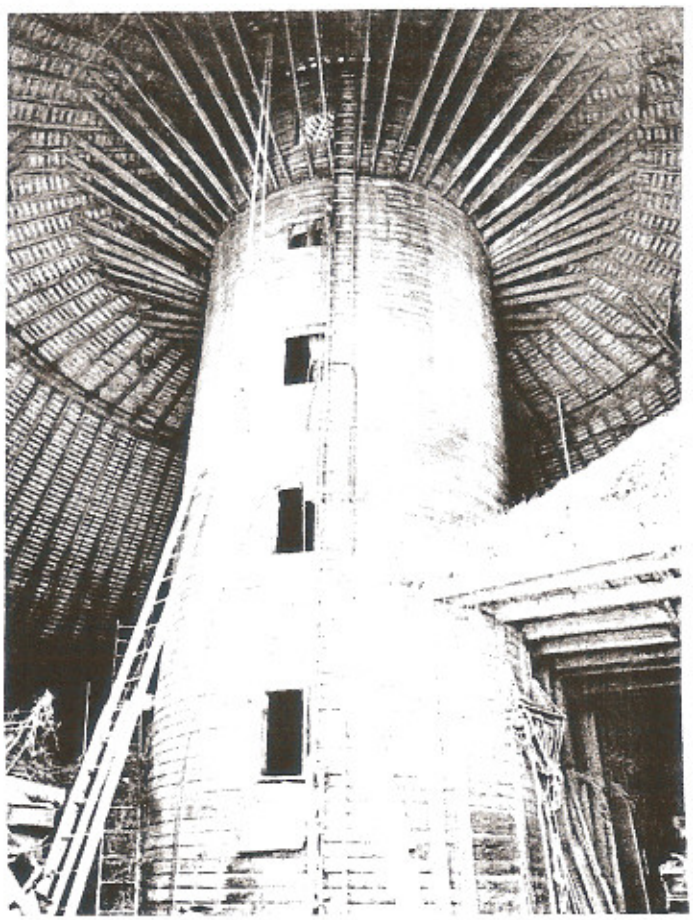
In this day when barns are fast vanishing we are lucky to be living in an area where many of these landmarks still exist. Barns date back 300 years in North America. A hundred years ago, 85 out of every 100 persons in Canada and the United States lived on a farm. Today the same figures are true for those who live in cities. Like those who attended quilting bees and baked homemade bread, the people who knew how to build barns have passed into oblivion. They are gone, and most of their splendid buildings soon will be. A man's barn bespoke his worth as a man.

There are many kinds of barns, some with interiors arranged with nave and aisles like a church, thatched roofs, Dutch barns, English barns, and some with gaily-painted hex signs by the Pennsylvania Dutch "chust for nice." But the really special and rare barn is the round barn.

Such a barn exists on 92nd Street just west of Alden Nash Road. It is owned by Sylvester Boulard, Jr., and he is proud of his barn!

The Boulard family dates back to before 1876, having settled south of Alto, (76th Street) on 100 acres of land. After coming here from Canada, Sylvester's grandfather, Martin Boulard (Beauleart as it was spelled then), lived in Detroit for a while and worked as a tailor. He was in great demand, not only for his talent as a tailor, but because he could speak French and German and converse with the French Canadian customers. It was in 1884 that Sylvester Boulard, Sr., Martin's son, and his wife Mary Elizabeth (Porritt) settled on the location of where the round barn is today.

Sylvester, Jr., and his brother Ward remember as children when they began building the barn in March of 1907, and by June it had hay in it and room for 36 head of



cattle. The round barn contains 38,000 board feet and was decided upon because it was thought to have more room for less money.

A tour of the inside can prove just as intriguing as the outside — especially when Sylvester says he has just one cow and suddenly you come upon another which looks so similar that you realize you've just gone the complete circle!

At one time, Sylvester, Sr., was a Holstein breeder and the barn housed a considerable Holstein herd. Many harnesses hanging on the wall attest to the day when they also raised horses. There are now some sheep, the one cow, and an extraordinary "Shetland Mule". The "Shetland Mule" is a cross between a Shetland pony and a Mexican donkey. The mule, named Jack, has what Sylvester calls a whistle, and sounds like a blend of a whinny and a hee-haw. The unusual noise once brought new neighbors from down the road just to see what kind of animal could possibly be emitting such a noise!

Climbing the narrow and steep steps to the second floor allows viewing the silo that rises up the center like a big pillar (Pictured on the preceding page). Although it appears open, the bottom third has concrete inside to form a seal. The rest of the silo is used for ventilation so moisture won't collect. The beams form a circle underneath, made of 1" and ½" boards laminated together forming one solid beam six inches thick. There is also a curved metal hay track used with slings to carry hay around behind the silo. Silage as well as hay was dropped through a trap door to the basement below.

A fanning mill, also on the second floor, was used to clean the grain before planting it in the spring or fall. It contained one blower and two sieves. The blower was used to sift the chaff from the grain, and the sieves gleaned the grain from any foreign seeds. It took about a half day of hand-cranking to clean enough grain to plant a field of twenty acres. This could have been comparable to the many hours spent by the women hand-cranking their washing machines.

Further around the second floor is a smaller old barn that was attached to the east side of the round barn. It was moved from the other side of the yard where a large windmill still stands. The smaller barn is believed to have been built before 1884. Some of the beams still have the bark on them and some are marked by the adz, a tool used to shape them square.

It is believed the last frame barn built in this area is Laurence Hanna's, built in 1940 by the Schroeder Brothers.

GRAND RAPIDS DIVISION—GOING WEST.

Stations.	Pacific Express,	Mail.	G. Rapids Express.
Grand Rapids,	6.00 a m	3.00 p m	10.15 p m
Bowen,		2.43	10.02
Dutton,	5.15	2.34	9.53
Caledonia,	4.57	2.22	9.43
Parmelee,		2.15	9.35
Middleville,	4.35	2.07	9.32
Irving.	4.22	2.00	9.08
Hastings,	4.09	1.45	9.08
Quimby,		1.36	9.00
Morgan,	3.40	1.30	8.55
Nashville,	3.25	1.47	9.05
Vermontville,	3.15	1.40	8.57
Chester,	2.57	1.25	8.43
Charlotte,	2.40	1.15	8.30
Eaton Rapids,	2.10	12.50	8.06
Onondaga,	1.50	12.36	7.50
Rives Junction,	1.15	12.22	7.35
Jackson,	12.45	11.45	7.10
Detroit,	9.15 p m	9.05 a m	4.00

MICHIGAN CENTRAL

The Niagara Falls Route.

Through Coaches and Sleeping Cars to and from Grand Rapids and Detroit. All trains connect in the same depot at Detroit with trains on Canada Southern division.

H. B. LEDYARD, Pres. & Gen. Man.g. Detroit.
E. C. BROWN, Gen. Sup't. Jackson.
O. B. RUGGLES, Gen. Pass. & T'k't Chicago.
JOSEPH CARRY, Agent. Caledonia.

GOING EAST.

Stations.	Detroit Express.	Day Express.	Atlantic Express.
Grand Rapids,	6.15 a m	1.10 p m	10.15 p m
Bowen,	6.27	1.23	10.30
Dutton,	6.33	1.32	10.40
Caledonia,	6.45	1.40	10.54
Parmelee,	6.48	1.45	11.00
Middleville,	6.53	1.51	11.10
Irving.	6.48	1.30	
Hastings,	7.13	2.15	12.40
Quimby,		1.52	
Morgan,	7.17	2.00	
Nashville.	7.27	2.09	11.54
Vermontville.	7.34	2.17	12.02
Chester.	7.46	2.30	
Charlotte.	7.57	2.42	12.43 a m
Eaton Rapids,	8.17	3.05	1.18
Onondaga,	8.30	3.17	1.45
Rives Junction,	8.44	3.32	2.15
Jackson,	9.10	4.10	2.55
Detroit,	11.45	6.45	6.00

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