

WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC

YESTERYEAR AROUND CALEDONIA STATION

No. 9.

1976



CALEDONIA'S "BIG WHITE HOUSE ON THE HILL"

— Now known as Maplewine Estate

Manuel Wilson was a family man – he wanted all of his children to live at home as one big family. And they all did at one time or another – even after they were married. Possibly this is what inspired him to build such a large accomodating home.

Manuel Wilson was born in Canada, April 18, 1858. He came with his parents, Molyneaux and Eleanor (Latimer) Wilson, to this area after they purchased some wild undeveloped land later known as Wilson's Corners (100th Street and Cherry Valley).

Manuel was educated in the public schools and began his independent career as a farmer in Caledonia township. He purchased the Caledonia Elevator, which handled all kinds of grain, hay and straw, from George W. Davis. He was married September 23, 1879 to Helen Freeman who was born in Gaines township. Their four children were: Clare Wilson, who was in business with his father, his wife Martha Jones and their two children – Clare Evert, Jr. and Jeanne; Forrest Wilson who was also in business with his father, his wife Iva Henderson and their two children – Helen and Morris; Alice Wilson was the wife of Hugh Graybiel, who was the son of the first Dr. Graybiel and also a newspaperman with the Border City Star in Windsor and their children – Hugh Manuel and Richard; and Margaret (Peggy) Wilson who was the wife of Ray Nolan, of Lewistown, Montana and their daughter Alice Josephine. The young Ray Nolan was also the owner of the village drugstore and was well remembered especially by the children as it was his generous habit to give out candy. Ray Nolan attended the University of Michigan, was a tennis enthusiast, and also enjoyed jogging. Perhaps he was "born 40 years too soon" in this respect, because it has been reported that a native farmer inquired at the local store as to who was the young fellow running about the countryside so early in the morning – and with only half of his clothes on??

Plans for Manuel Wilson's home were made as early as 1875 but it was after his children were partly grown that he built the "big white house on the hill". The following excerpt was found recorded in a Caledonia newspaper, on October 30, 1903. "Manuel Wilson is laying the foundation for a fine residence in the village on the east side of Kinsey's lane. John Witmer has the contract for building the same."



MANUEL WILSON

Iva Henderson and his sister Alice Wilson wed Hugh Graybiel.

Peggy Wilson, who married Ray Nolan, was the fourth bride of the Wilson family to marry in the home. All eyes were on the brides as they came down the curved stairway and proceeded into the parlor to be married. The food was often catered in on the 7:30 train by Jandorf's of Grand Rapids. There was one humorous event recalled from Peggy Wilson's wedding of the little boy in the white satin suit who was to carry a basket of rose petals and scatter them along the path of the bride. He completely forgot to do so, and in an effort to resurrect himself, he promptly emptied the whole basket of rose petals upside down at the feet of the bride. Upon recalling his part in the wedding, he bent over bottom side up and proceeded with his hands, to scatter them far and wide.

The Wilsons were not the only family to be married in the home. The present owners, Wyatt and Jeanne Neil were also married in the parlor. Wyatt's brother, Bill Neil, and his wife, who now live in the original Hale home in Caledonia, were wed in an outdoor garden ceremony.

The Neils have a special love for the home which shows through their hard work in trying to restore the house and the many antiques that all seem to have a story of their own. On a wall in the library, which they now call the "sitting room" hangs

The home was built of quarter-sawn oak taken from the woods on Wilson's Corners. Quarter-sawing was the practice of sawing boards so that the grain runs as nearly at right angles to the width of the board as possible. This is done to prevent warping and to show the beauty of the wood grain. The home was very well insulated and recently a telephone man discovered to his dismay that installing a telephone consisted of going through a double layer of both lath and plaster.

Upon entering the big square foyer the visitors were indeed impressed with the wondrous curved oak stairway and railing, and at the bottom of the landing, a bronze statue of Pocahontas. They were also made to feel welcome by the warmth of a fireplace in the foyer and the stained glass windows that lent a certain beauty as they caught the rays of the setting sun. The fireplace wall also went through to the library giving it a double purpose. As the family dined in their dining room they enjoyed the view through the bay windows that had glass that was actually bent. The view included a family tennis court and the many plants and flowers that Mrs. Wilson so dearly loved. Some of her favorites were forget-me-nots, evening primroses and as one walked through the home, plants and vines were to be found everywhere.

The elegance of the home made it a beautiful place in which to be married and this fact did not escape the attention of the Wilson family. Margaret Wilson, an aunt of Manuel, was wed to Rice Record and later in a double ceremony Forrest Wilson wed



MRS. NANCY KINSEY,
Standing in Kinsey Lane,
the Wilson Home in the Background

civil war memorabilia belonging to Wyatt's great-grandfather. The mantel over the fireplace holds a clock once belonging to another great-grandfather of Wyatt's. The main floor bedroom has been converted to a beautiful library, where one complete wall is lined with bookcases built by Wyatt's great uncle. Tucked into a special corner is a love seat once belonging to Jeanne's great aunt. The master bedroom upstairs has 1875 Victorian wall paper - reproduced especially from that era. The bedroom furniture and trunk originally belonged to August Finkbeiner of Caledonia. The ballroom on the third floor with the hardwood floors, where they once danced until the wee hours of morning is awaiting restoration.

The Neil's family includes a nine year old son named Jon. And although there are three people who now live in the "big white house on the hill", the Neils enjoy people, get-togethers and parties, and it would seem Manuel Wilson's dream to have a home big enough for everyone is still a living reality.

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: Mr. Carl Higley, Mrs. Laurence McClatchie, Mrs. Robert Hampson, Mr. Ted Timm, Mrs. Lulu Schiedel, Mrs. Margery Kaechele, Mr. Manly C. Eldridge, Mrs. Ruth Wernette, Mrs. Rhea Cronin, Mr. Keith Bowman.

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

"M. Wilson has his elevator lighted throughout by electricity having recently put in a fifty-light dynamo, the power being furnished by the gasoline engine." (from the Caledonia News, November 20, 1903)

"The newly organized Bergy orchestra composed of Gordon Bergy, Sidney Geib, Wm. Buehler and Herbert Gale with Miss Rhea Kinsey pianist and assisted by A. B. Betzner discoursed A-1 music at the home of George Timm Sunday. The quality, style and technique induced George to say, "Come again." (from the Caledonia News, February 13, 1908)

THE I.O.O.F. LODGE

The local Caledonia lodge of the I.O.O.F. No. 251 Independent Order of Odd Fellows is now over one hundred years old. They were granted a charter February 2, 1875.

An old membership book in the possession of the lodge indicates the following five men were the charter members: Jas. H. DeTray, Gaines; Jno. S. Herner, Leighton; Albert Bowman, Caledonia; Horton S. Hammond, Gaines; and Abel Gregory, Caledonia. By the end of the first year they probably had about 25 to 30 members. Peak membership was probably enjoyed by the lodge during the 1920's when it got up as high as 125 members.

In about 1912 the local lodge in Middleville gave up their charter, so some of their members came to Caledonia.

The lodge has always owned the whole building at 129 E. Main Street, using the second floor rooms as their meeting place and leasing the first floor store space.

In the early 1920's the Odd Fellows added the Kennedy block just to the east of the original building. Joseph E. Kennedy, a Caledonia merchant who had a hardware and implement business on the south side of Main Street, put up the building in the early 1890's. The lodge members during the 1920's and 30's, besides leasing the stores on the street level, would hold dances to earn money to make the payments for the building and hall.

Some people responsible for the success of these dances were L. D. Kaechele, Leon Peet, Louis Schantz, Bob White, the Gehl Orchestra and Denny Nogles group. The dances were usually held three or four times a year. They had a dance for Thanksgiving, New Years, Pioneer Day (Feb. 22) and just after Lent.

The Odd Fellow Hall has been used by many groups for a variety of purposes, but the best known beside the dances are probably the annual meetings and picnic dinners of the Thornapple Valley Pioneer Association and the Rebekah Mother and Daughter Banquets. The Thornapple Pioneers used it every year on February 22 from 1892 to 1942 for their get togethers. The Rebekah Mother and Daughter Banquets were an annual event from about 1914 to 1946.

The present officers of the lodge are Noble Grand, Howard Gehl; Vice Noble Grand, Clarence Finkbeiner; Secretary, Carl Higley; Treasurer, Alfred Crumback; and Chaplain, Russell Therrien. Some of the best remembered Past Noble Grands have been C. F. Beeler, L. D. Kaechele, Leon Peet, Louis Schantz, Carl Higley, C.E. Cross, and Ray Aldrich.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE TIMM AND SCHRODER FAMILIES COMING TO CALEDONIA

On April 4, 1864, Charles Timm Sr., John Timm Sr. with their wives and Charles Bahs left Schwerin, Mecklenberg, Germany for the United States. Six months later on October 4, 1864 they landed in New York.

They came to Michigan to the home of Charles Lowe (southwest corner of Patterson and 100th Street). Mrs. John Timm Sr. was a Lowe. They lived with this family until they established homes of their own.

Charles Bahs' first wife was a sister to Mrs. Charles Timm, Sr. She died just before sailing time. Elizabeth Rochow came in her place with the two young Bahs daughters. The daughter Sophia married Charles Mervau and daughter Bertha married David Dias.

Later Charles Bahs and Elizabeth were married. One of their daughters, Minnie, married Charles Schroder. Daughter Mary married Frank King, parents of Cora King Schantz.

Charles and Sophia Timm Sr. had nine children (with spouses in parentheses): Albert died at age 4; William (Henrietta Karrer); George (Alice McCroden); Charles Jr. (Fietta Miller); John C. (Agnes Drier); Minnie (Richard E. Poff); Libbie (T. Joseph McKnight); Henry A. (Margaret Bruton); also an infant son unnamed. Their farm was located on Section 20 (8822 Kraft). About 1896 he and his son John began operating a general store (114 E. Main) known as Timm and Son. John continued the store into the 1930's. Later his son Ted converted it into the Family Tavern.

John and Christiana Timm Sr. had one daughter Carrie (William Balke). Their farm was located about 1½ miles west of Freeport on 108th Street in Section 35 of Bowne Township.

After seven years the Timm families sent for Louis and Sophia (Timm) Schroder. Sophia was a sister of Charles and John. They arrived November 18, 1871, and were met by the brothers and Fred Ruehs. They were taken to a farm east of Caledonia at 7010 100th Street once known as the Spaulding farm, just east of Harry Clemens' present farm. Later they moved to 10237 Cherry Valley. Eventually so many Schroders lived along Cherry Valley Avenue that it was called "Schroder Street" by many people.

Louis and Sophia Schroder had ten children. Their children (with spouse in parentheses) were: Anna (John Schantz); Henry (Alvena Decker); John (1. Fredrika Timm, 2. Maude Olson); Frieda (Jacob Heintz); Elizabeth (Menno Snyder); Charles (1. Myrtle Stimson, 2. Minnie Bahs); Dora (George DeVine); William (Jessie Wood); Louis; Della (Simpson Tolan).

In 1890, Henry, then 21, and John, 18, sought a loan from their father to buy a steam-powered threshing machine. They formed a partnership called the "Schroder Brothers Company". That machine revolutionized grain harvesting and the Schroder crew was hired by many farmers in the area.

William joined his brothers in operating the sawmill, clearing woods and sawing lumber throughout the area. In those days a sawmill went wherever the work was. They were at the Harper place where they had sawed 750,000 feet of lumber when the Wilson Elevator burned to the ground in 1913. The brothers moved their sawmill immediately to the Bill Schultz farm (5100 92nd Street) and cut all the lumber for the present elevator.

The brothers were well prepared when they went on these jobs. They had a shack which they took with them that would sleep six men. In the summer it was on wheels and on sleighs in the winter. Their women folk would bring their meals back to them.

The average day's cut of lumber was about 9,000 feet and it generally took two or three days cutting to have enough for a barn. Many of the barns in the Caledonia area were constructed of lumber cut and built by them.

Their interests turned to bridge building also. John directed the building of the original Kent-Barry County-line bridge, Stauffer Bridge (Alaska Ct.) and Coldwater Bridge. They excavated the cellar for the first Caledonia high school and the cistern for the fire department the hard way, before the days of steam shovels. Friends and relatives helped with the projects. Wayne Schroder, John's son, recalled helping when they raised the Methodist church for building the deferred basement and John declined payment for the work.



SCHRODER'S THRESHING CREW IN JOHN SCHRODER'S YARD - 1901
John is holding his daughter

The Schroder Brothers business continued until 1914 when Henry sold out to his brother William who continued to own and operate the threshing machine and sawmill into the early 1950's.

Henry bought his 80-acre farm (10727 Cherry Valley) in the spring of 1895 which he operated until 1946, when his granddaughter's husband (Duane White) returned from the service of his country and took over the operation of the farm.

John served as Caledonia township highway commissioner and member of the Caledonia school board for years. He owned a farm next to Henry at 10659 Cherry Valley Avenue.

The first Timm and Schroder Reunion was held in 1899 at the home of John Timm, Sr. at Freeport. The following year, 1900, it was held at the Charles Timm, Sr. home. The following story was printed in the Caledonia News in 1901.

"The third annual reunion of the Timm and Schroder families was held at the home of Lewis Schroder last Sunday, August 31. Relatives began to arrive about 9 o'clock with well filled baskets to delight the hungry. After dinner a meeting was called, Charles Mervau acting as chairman, while the following officers were elected: Committee on arrangement, Charles Mervau, John Timm of Freeport, and Mrs. Henry Schroder; Secretary, John Timm and Treasurer, Lewis Schroder.

At about 5 o'clock supper was served; ice cream, weena wust and cigars, after which all prepared for their departure wishing that they might all meet again next year at Charles Timm, Sr. After all expenses were paid there was a balance of \$2.52 in the treasury.

Hon. William F. McKnight of Grand Rapids was present."



SCHRODER PORTABLE SAWMILL
ON THE HARPER FARM
(Now Oscar Kaechele Place)

"It is not many people who can claim the distinction of having a tree toad pass through them, but such is the case with little Teddy Timm, the four-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. John C. Timm. It is not known how or when Mr. Toad gained access to the inner recesses of Teddy's anatomy but the family was down to the river Tuesday and Teddy had a serious choking spell and many think that then was the time when the act was committed. The final act was Wednesday morning after Teddy and the toad had put in a very sleepless night. The toad looked as though he had been badly used but was still alive and is now all puffed up over the notoriety he had gained, but probably doesn't wish for any more happy returns of the day."

(from the Caledonia News, August 28, 1903)

Editor's Note: Mr. Teddy Timm, still living in the Caledonia area, attests that this was a true story.

"Timm's store, which is being extended up another story for living rooms above, will make a great improvement in the looks of the block."

(from the Caledonia News, November 28, 1902)

"Scheidel, Snyder and Co. are very busy these days manufacturing hay racks."

(from the Caledonia News, June 22, 1900)

"Henry Schroder made a trip to Grand Rapids in the interest of the Schroder portable saw-mill. This week their work will be transferred from the O'Loughlin farm to that of David Dias in Leighton."

(from the Caledonia News, March 11, 1909)

"Another Business Change. H. Snyder has sold his saw, plane and cider mill to John and Henry Schroder. After a siege of general repairing the mill will be placed in running operation to its fullest capacity and the new firm solicit the patronage of the surrounding vicinity."

(from the Caledonia News, January 9, 1913)



THE LOUIS SCHRODER FAMILY
Standing (left to right):
William, Charles, Elizabeth,
Frieda, John, Henry, Anna, Della
Seated (left to right):
Louis, Sophia, Louis, Dora



Mr. and Mrs. John Timm, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Schroder and
Mr. Charles Timm at John Timm home one mile east of Freeport

THE ELDRIDGE FAMILY

Clark and Sarah Eldridge came to Michigan in about 1850 taking the boat from Buffalo to Detroit and from there to Kalamazoo by rail. They had at that time a family of eight girls and three boys. Five girls were married: Judy, Mary Ann, Becky, Sally Ann and Alzada. They brought six children with them: Edward, Charles Jay, Dan, Mila, Ruth and Caroline. Edward worked that summer at Hiram Arnolds earning money to start farming on the place they bought in the center of Section 8 of Caledonia Township. Dave and Mary Ann Cole had come two years previous and settled on Section 12 of Gaines Township. The Coles had traded the place for a tax claim and later lost it on some other claim.

Charles Jay Eldridge was born in Jefferson county, New York in 1844. He came at the age of 8 to Caledonia accompanied by his mother, brothers and sisters. He was married to Eunice Camela Porter who was born in Hyde Park, Pennsylvania on September 17, 1855. She had come to Michigan at the age of eight with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Porter. On May 6, 1872 they were married and located on a farm at the northeast corner of Cherry Valley and 76th Street, where he had built a log house for the family. In 1893 he built a frame house of timber taken from the farm. He often told stories of skidding logs down the Thornapple River to the Grand River and other activities of pioneer life.

Charles Jay and Eunice Eldridge had nine children (with spouses in parentheses): Ruth (William H. Miller); Daisy (Bordon Tupper); Charles Ray; Nettie (Claude Henry); Eva (Arthur W. Menzies); Ivah (John Raab); Genevive (Orrie Dawson); Margery (Fred Kaechele); Manly C. (Ruth E. Deming).

After 45 years on the farm they retired to a home in LaBarge where they lived for two years. Then they purchased a home on Hammond Avenue in Dutton where they lived the rest of their lives.



CHARLES JAY AND EUNICE
(PORTER) ELDRIDGE ON THEIR
50th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY
1922



ELDRIDGE HOUSE BUILT IN 1893
Charles Jay Eldridge, Manly, Ruth Miller, Ivah Raab, Eva Menzies, Lavern



DO YOU REMEMBER . . . ?

Reminiscence of a farm boy



In the days before Kent County roads were named as streets and avenues, perhaps in the 1930's and before, people had designated certain roads with a "local color;" like "Kelley Hill" was just north of 92nd Street on Kalamazoo Avenue. This was a testing ground for early automobiles, first if they could climb it at all, and later to see if they could climb it in high gear. In Caledonia Township the hill just south of the intersection of 84th Street and Alaska Avenue was known as "Hank Timm's Hill." It was also used as a "measuring stick." About two miles of 76th Street in the area south of Dutton was known as "French Street" because many of the early settlers were from France, the Mervaus and Monsaus. The two miles south of Caledonia on Cherry Valley were referred to as "Schroder Street" because most of the residents were Schroders.

The first farm south of Caledonia on the west side of Cherry Valley Avenue was the Louis Schroder place. As his family grew up and married, many of them bought farms there. It was quite a sight those days to see them working together in the fields, threshing and generally cooperating. In the summer during the threshing season Henry, John and later Bill owned a threshing rig of which John once said, "We threshed every job for eight miles." One thing about the Schroders that the women liked particularly was that if they told you they would be at your place at a certain day and hour they were there then and not later - it might be earlier. In those days when the women fed the crews of usually 12 or more men, the ladies appreciated timeliness because it meant the meal would be served as they planned and not have to be carried over for a day or more, because there were few if any ice refrigerators in those days. Delays meant much more hurried cooking and baking. O, yes, life was much different then. Each meal was a "Sunday dinner."

In those days the farmers hauled the bundled grain to the barn for dry storage until the threshing machines came along later, perhaps as long as three months. Then after the threshing season was over, the Schroders took to the woods with their sawmill and a cook shanty and usually a bunkwagon for the men, or sleeper as it was called. Later the Schroder sawmill was located permanently on Kinsey Avenue near Lake Street. Then for a time in the fall they had a cider mill too.

John Schroder was for a number of years highway commissioner in Caledonia Township. It was for parts of the year a full time job because only local people worked on the road "working out" their road tax, and of course all the work was by hand or horse power, gravel boxes on lumber wagons (dump boards), slip and wheel scrapers and horse drawn graders. The roads were scraped usually once in the spring and sometimes once in the fall. As the taxpayers were allowed to dump gravel on the roads to work out their taxes, a story is told of what happened to 100th Street, which at one time went straight through joining Duncan Lake Avenue to Kraft Avenue. This section, sometimes referred to as "Tamarack Swamp," was extremely marshy and boggy and very difficult to maintain. One night after a large amount of gravel had been placed at one end of the road, the people living in that area heard a tremendous groan, and the weight of the gravel on one end completely turned the road upside down. It was found that there was a large body of water underneath and efforts to continue having a road were forgotten.

The snow drifted roads in the winter were sometimes opened by driving cattle along the road. It wasn't unusual to have the entire neighborhood turn out to shovel the big drifts and the teams to go through first to "break out" the roads before the sleighs with wood and logs came along. With the passing of the rail fences the roads didn't seem to drift in so much, and about 50 years ago the county began taking care of the roads with their then big equipment, and began grading and snowplowing some roads almost daily.

The good old days were different than now. There was a big exodus of farm boys to towns and cities because they resented low wages, long hours and the hard work of caring for farm animals. With World War II the power machinery began to appear and still more farmers left for town. These farmers were always in demand in the labor market because employers knew that those farm boys could and would get things done for them.

