

Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring historical articles and reminisces of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area.



WINTER 2006

The Perfect Underwear for Progressive People

By Jessica Williams and Laurie Turkawski

We all know the saying, “I see London, I see France...”, but do you know the story of Ypsilanti underwear and pants?

During the late 1800s and through the early 1900s, the word ‘Ypsilanti’ was known synonymously nationwide for its production of quality underwear. As one of the city’s major industries, Ypsilanti Underwear Company was known by many names during its existence. The factory manufactured and distributed an assortment of underwear including longjohns, shorts, and t-shirts.

For over fifty years, Ypsilanti Underwear Company was located along the banks of the Huron River near Forest Avenue. The factory was housed in a five-story, brick masonry building originally constructed as a woolen mill. At its height, the factory employed nearly two hundred and fifty workers, and one of the company’s major customers was Marshall Field and Company of Chicago, Illinois.

The company produced one piece underwear garments known as a “union suits”. The union suits were so popular that across the nation they became
continued on page 3



Ypsilanti Underwear Mills factory.

The memory of the Ypsilanti Underwear Company lives on in the words of an anonymous poet in admiration of the “Ypsilanti Lady”:

*A sculptor of Nymphs and Bacchantes
Omitted the coats and the panties
A kindhearted madam
Who knew that she had ‘em
Supplied them with warm Ypsilantis.*

In This Issue...

The Perfect Underwear for Progressive People _____ 1

For over 50 years in the late 1800s and early 1900s the Ypsilanti Underwear Company was located along the banks of the Huron River near Forest Avenue.

Buried Water _____ 4

It’s a classic American story, domination of the elements, and the action has been most ruthless and visionary and violent when the main players come upon water.

“Telling Stories and Swapping Lies” with the Ypsilanti Morning Coffee Group _____ 8

The Ypsilanti Morning Coffee Group has been meeting regularly for over 75 year in various locations in and around the City.

First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti – 1827-2006 _____ 9

The First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti dates back to 1827 when Ypsilanti was only four years old and services were held by two visiting ministers.

Michigan Ladder Company _____ 12

The Michigan Ladder Company will celebrate 105 years of operation in Ypsilanti this month.

Barney and Friends – Profile: Bernard (Barney) Hughes _____ 16

Barney Hughes is known as a master raconteur with a rich background of first-person history or stories just for the sake of entertainment.

Society Briefs:

From the President’s Desk _____	2
Society Board Members _____	2
Society Web Page _____	2
Museum Advisory Board Report _____	4
Fletcher White Archives _____	15
Advertising/Sponsor Application _____	18
Museum & Archive Hours _____	23
Membership Application _____	24



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From the President's Desk

By Alvin E. Rudisill

What an exciting and busy time for the Boards and Officers of the Ypsilanti Historical Society. An agreement has been signed with the City of Ypsilanti for the Ypsilanti Historical Society to purchase the property at 220 North Huron Street and we are now planning and carrying out many of the needed restoration projects on the buildings and property. Jerry Jennings, YHS Board Member and Chair of our Facilities Committee, has been busy working with volunteers and contractors on the various projects.

A contract has been let to replace all the rusted out gutters and repair and paint the soffits. Another contract has been let to replace all the lower roof coverings including porches, bay windows and the first floor office and gift shop. Jerry is now negotiating with contractors for the repair and/or replacement of the brick walls in the basement. The Historic Commission has approved the design of an addition on the North side of the Museum which will house a new entrance to the basement including stairs and a wheel chair lift. Insulation has now been installed under the roof of the attic and the attic is being prepared for use as storage for artifacts that are not currently on display in the Museum.

Denis Schmiedeke has agreed to coordinate the restoration of the Tiffany and design a back-lit display for it. The window has been transported to a restoration company and

will be returned to the Museum and placed on display in 12 to 14 weeks.

The Endowment Fund Board is busy working on a five-year fundraising program to cover the cost of purchasing the property and the many restoration projects that are being planned or are currently underway.

The Archives Advisory Board has been developing new policies and procedures for the collection, storage and use of archive files and for the eventual move to the basement of the Museum.

The Museum Advisory Board, along with many volunteers, has been busy decorating the Museum for the holidays. Make sure you attend our Quarterly Membership Meeting on December 3 (2 to 4 p.m.) to hear the "Sweet Adelines" and to view all the traditional holiday decorations.

Please put the following dates on your calendar: December 3: Quarterly Membership Meeting and Christmas Open House; December 31: New Year's Eve Jubilee; and February 11: Quarterly Membership Meeting. The February program will be a Power Point presentation entitled "Site, Situation and Settlement of Ypsilanti" by Chris Beyer, a Resident Hall Director and graduate student in the Historical Preservation program at Eastern Michigan University. *Best wishes for a joyous Holiday Season!* ■

Ypsilanti Historical Museum and Archives

Welcome!

The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Fletcher-V... Archives are organized by the Ypsilanti Historical Society... operates the museum for the city of Ypsilanti. We are all... and our membership is open to everyone, including non-... residents.

2006 Schedule of Events

Jan	Museum Closed in January
Jan 10	Archives Advisory Board Mtg (7:00 pm)
Jan 12	Endowment Advisory Board Mtg (7:00 pm)
Feb 6	Museum Advisory Board Mtg (1:00 pm)
Feb 9	Board of Trustees Mtg (3:00 pm)
Feb 19	Quarterly Membership Mtg (2:00 pm)
Mar 6	Museum Advisory Board Mtg (1:00 pm)

Ms. Virginia Davis-Brown
Adm. Board Chair
734-484-0080
[click here for a map](#)

For Information about upcoming Society events, visit us on-line at:
www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org

The Perfect Underwear for
Progressive People –
continued from front page

known as 'Ypsilantis.' Cotton, silk, and wool were the main materials used in production. Apparently, the Prince of Wales desired his own Ypsilantis and paid \$300 to get his specially made pair.

"If love grows cold, do not despair. There is always Ypsilanti Underwear." Marketing slogans for Ypsilanti Underwear were appealing and created quite a stir. The company's most daring advertisement was a painting of a fifteen-foot, curvaceous woman adorned with tightly-fitted Ypsilantis. Placed at a highly visible location, the scantily-clad woman caused a great deal of controversy with local residents, and was especially noticeable to passengers on the Michigan Central Railroad. The "Ypsilanti Lady" became a landmark celebrated throughout the Midwest.

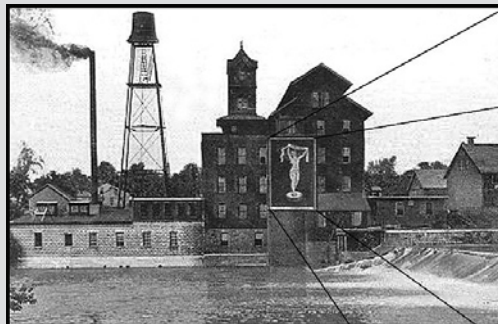
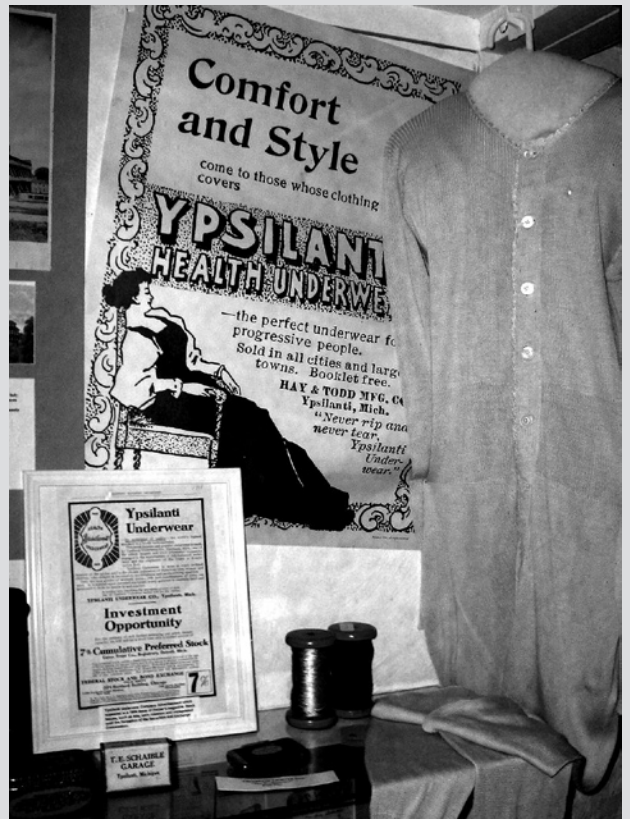
In 1906 the Ypsilanti Underwear Company was purchased by the Oakland Knitting Company, which moved here from Syracuse, New York. The company continued to make underwear until the 1920s and then it failed and ceased operations. Afterward, other manufacturers occupied the building to conduct various businesses. Unfortunately, the building was deemed a fire trap and in 1933 it was torn down. ■

Bibliography:

- "A Part of Our Heritage in the 1800s" advertisement for Ypsilanti Savings Bank, n.d.
- "Never a rip, never a tear in Ypsilanti underwear". Michigan Monthly, July 1996.
- Slat, Charles. "Fly-by-night business?" Ypsilanti Press, July 1, 1943.
- Stewart, Will. "Ypsilanti once stood for undies." Ann Arbor News, August 15, 1990.

Right: Ypsilanti Underwear on display in the YHS Museum.

Below: One of the trademarks of "Ypsilanti Underwear."



"Ypsilanti Lady"

(as seen from the Michigan Central Railroad)



In the late 1800s, the "Ypsilanti Lady" was mentioned in a Saturday Evening Post article.

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Buried Water

By Janet Kauffman

WATER IS WILD, it's outlaw. It takes topsoil, it channels serious and grand canyons, it collects in wetlands and goes no place. It stinks, it sinks, it springs. Water falls, flows, gathers, floods. Even so, human beings want to walk on it, and not get their feet wet.

A miracle's a passionate, compelling story, not the usual muck and mire. And if it takes the special effects of engineering, dredging, blasting, bridge work, drainage systems, and various metal-clad machineries to work miracles in nature, well, that's good business, too. We walk on water every day of the week in southern Michigan.

It's a classic American story - domination of the elements - and the action has been most ruthless and visionary and violent when the main players come upon water.

Water starts out simple, very clear. But as soon as it hits the ground we claim, things get murky. And you know how much we claim: every square inch.

Look at some square inches and acres around here. Ypsilanti, for instance. A narrow, funnel-down point in the Huron River Watershed, Ypsilanti has been claimed ground since the French Claim of 1809. On early maps - 1825, 1874 - the Huron River takes a sprawling turn at Ypsi, with marshes on both sides of the wide floodplain. A small stream flows into the river near Forest Avenue. A bit later, in 1907, on the delicate, hand-colored survey maps drawn up

by Gardner S. Williams, they're still there, the marshes, the stream.

But look around now. Walk around town, along Forest Avenue to the Eastern Michigan University Campus - you won't get your feet wet. That ground where the stream should be, through the middle of campus? Dry ground and sidewalks. Water, water, is not anywhere.

Except for the Huron River itself, other visible waters - the original swamps and streams - have disappeared from the city (as from almost every city), and it didn't take long, a few generations. *Miraculous* is the word people like to use when they hold Nature down for the count. The most cinematic miracles in the Bible are water ones - Moses parts the Red Sea; Jesus walks on water. But if

Report from the Museum Advisory Board

By Virginia Davis-Brown

It has been a wonderful year here at the Museum. Our special exhibits have been well accepted and we thank all of you for your support.

The Art Show was well attended and the artists were very pleased to have a place to show their works. Thirty-three artists participated in the show. Soon after the art show it was "Lost Ypsilanti," which many people found very interesting to be able to see how Ypsilanti was in years past and what people were doing. Then it was Heritage Festival which brought many people from other areas into our museum who were not aware of what we have to offer and expressed their surprise of what a beautiful place it really is. Many have returned and brought friends to share their experience. In September it was the Quilt Exhibit with 105 quilts filling the museum. Thanks to the Ann Arbor Quilt Guild, Mrs. Elliott and her friend for loaning us the miniature quilt store, with its tiny quilts made of paper towels, and the many other tiny little objects, some as small as 1/2 inch. I am sorry if you missed it.

The Museum is now decorated for the Holiday Season. We are fortunate to have a miniature Victorian Parlor and Christmas tree with tiny decorations on display in the Ypsilanti Room. Mrs. Elliott is loaning it to us for the Holidays. You really need to come in as it is hard to believe that people can make things that small and so perfect.



The Christmas Open House will be December 3 from 2 to 4 p.m. with entertainment by the Sweet Adelines. They have gracefully volunteered to sing for us and make it an exceptional time to celebrate with friends at the Museum.

No one can forget the New Years Eve Jubilee on December 31 from 6:30 to 10 p.m. Just follow the luminaries in and sit and listen to some beautiful music played on the dulcimer. A dulcimer is an ancient instrument which is played by lightly striking wire strings with a hammer. It was the forerunner of the piano and gives a very mellow sound. Of course there will be refreshments. Please come and share the evening in a beautiful setting.

We want to thank all of you for your support through the years and we are looking forward to an exciting year with all the changes that will be going on as we accept the ownership of the Museum and Archives. This next year will bring restoration and new lighting for the Tiffany Window. Be sure to make note of that as well as the other things coming.

Have a wonderful and Blessed Holiday Season from your Museum Advisory Board. ■

God isn't on your side in these matters, if you can't single-handedly part a stream and cross it, well, you can bury it.

The place I work in Ypsilanti, Eastern Michigan University, stands on a slope falling away to the south bank of the Huron River. Around EMU, the river takes that wide, formerly swampy, turn after Leforge Road, swings around to the Forest Avenue Bridge and then runs more or less straight into Depot Town and through Riverside Park. The Huron River isn't buried, it isn't completely barred, but most students at EMU don't notice the Huron River and don't think of it as part of campus. They know the river as part of the scenery in Depot Town, east of school, where Frog Island and Riverside Parks open up the water to view.

In Depot Town, you can walk on a scaffolded wooden walkway that connects the parks and crosses over the river, under the Cross Street Bridge. It's the one place in town you can meander, get close to the churn of the water, hear it wash around the rocks there, and check out whatever debris has snagged in the brush and slung off to one side - a couple of tree stumps, clutches of cans in branches, a tire, some fishing lines.

On campus though, you don't think about water flowing nearby. Everybody drives on Huron River Drive; but at Eastern, close as the river is, Huron River Drive is a *drive*. The name becomes the road, cut off from view of the water by the Riverrain apartment complex and the Eastern Plaza mini-mall.

Most students could draw you a decent map of the campus with the streets intersecting at exact angles, but the river wouldn't be there. If you said, "Draw in the river," they'd probably have to think about it. "The Huron River," you'd say. And then they might be able to back-track the river in their minds, coming upstream from Frog Island and guessing about the turn and about what happens behind the railroad tracks, the old Peninsula Paper Company building, behind the mini-mall.

But where the river comes from - back toward Ann Arbor and Gallup Park - and where it goes-someplace after Ford Lake - that would be distant, un-mappable territory.

We're explorers now in watersheds, with no signposts and few maps or with blank territories on our maps, those drop-offs at the edges where cartographers used to draw dragons in threatening seas. We believe we know where we are. And it's true; we have some very good maps. But, it is also true - we have no idea where we are. We know road maps, not watershed maps. Not vegetation patterns. Not soil maps. Not buried water maps. An address? Most of us know the street number, the ZIP code. But who knows the watershed or its number? - The digits tracking back from outlet to large rivers to streams. The Huron River Watershed: #04090005.

For many of us living and thriving in watersheds, ecosystems, and climates, those elemental systems have become deep background, lost to our thoughts and experience. The more a place is settled and built up, the more uncharted its natural features. The lay of the land, the landscape, the fall and flow of water - they all disappear.

And if you decide not to bury water, you can blur it away, set it aside pretty completely. Just about every river, for our safety, is bridged and barred - there's no drive-by viewing. Most old style see-through pipe railings have been replaced with reinforced concrete sections, shoulder to shoulder. We drive over rivers without knowing it, without seeing their course, their width, their particular ripple. Since they are out of sight, most highway departments don't label the rivers with signs anymore. You're on a bridge, you know that, but what you're crossing - who knows? You can drive across the Midwest on interstates and not know you've crossed any river, any watershed.

Not long ago, the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland was a presence on the Ohio Turnpike. From a car on the bridge, you could look through pipe railings, dizzily, at the river below and know its strange name, maybe hum a few bars of the R.E.M. tune. The river was a clear water stripe, a twist coming out of trees, with high banks and a visible flood plain, some rocks spitting white streaks in the water. The turnpike - any driver could see - was a road built from high ground to high ground, landforms the Cuyahoga River had cut. Now, with the concrete barriers, you can't see the river, you don't know you're on a riverbank. And half the time when I drive there, even

continued on page 6

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Buried Water –
continued from page 5

though I'm determined to hum "Cuyahoga" in tribute to the river, I miss it and drive right through and feel too bad about it later to sing anything, retro-honorifically.

When we cross over water, we're safe (and sorry). It's a clear cut, straight shot. No scenic distractions. No notion of waterways, watersheds, landforms, nature. Out of sight! Out of mind! Water is wild. It obeys the invisible and elemental laws of gravity, absorption, evaporation - not human laws of boundary, possession, property. Until we get our hands and machines on it.

Water's our source, our sustenance. It bore us, it buoys us, it can bear us away. Still, we believe that we, and by law we do, *own* water. In the past, we've pretty much done what we pleased with it. In the West, with water a rarity, the story's an old time romance, an ongoing saga - with schemes to conjure up water, claim it, carry it across state lines, and marry it to dry cities and dry farms.

But in the Midwest, in southeast Michigan, where water stood around just about everywhere, such a common thing, the story has always been: ditch it, drain it, bury it, forget it.

*Ditched & Buried,
To Start With*

When I first farmed in southern Michigan, I farmed dry ground. The fields were sandy loams that drained so fast after rains I could often work the ground the same day. The only water on the farm was a stream in the woods at the back of the property. One year a sink-hole appeared in a low spot in the hayfield, and when I checked it out, dug down into it, I pulled up a chunk of broken clay tile – terra cotta, the color of the bricks of houses around here, like a shard of a flower pot.

I had no idea. I'd never seen water collect in those fields. I'd never thought about it or about Michigan soils and glaciated ground, or about its watersheds and drainage. Even though I was obsessed with weather and watched for the high cirrus clouds, drawn back like hair, a sign my grandfather caught me meant a low pressure system moving in, with rain maybe, within thirty-six hours. I farmed hay, and I

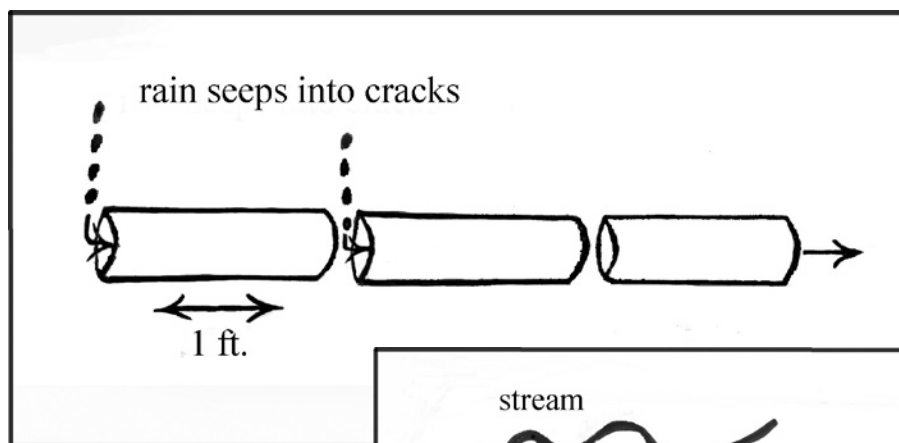


Figure 1 (above): Water from the field would seep into the uncemented joints of the drain tile.

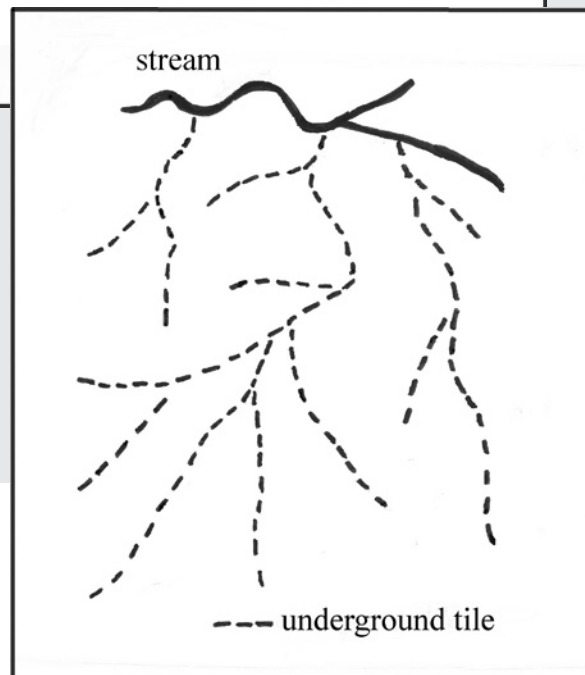


Figure 2 (right): Underground tiles formed a patchwork system of arteries leading back to rivers or streams.

had to think about rain, know when it would come and how long it would last. I watched the sky and I watched the TV.

But, I thought rain fell and flowed downhill to the stream or percolated down into groundwater somewhere, the way it did on the farm where I grew up in Pennsylvania. There, everything sank through fine clays into porous limestone or flowed downhill, you could see it, through the network of streams to the Conestoga Creek and on to the Susquehanna River.

But here in Michigan, with the complex and mixed soils, glacial hummocks, sands and gravels overlaying marls and clays, water collects. It stands around. Until somebody digs a ditch, carefully sighted down slope, lays some drainage tiles, and buries the water. On most of the farmland of Michigan now, the watershed lies underground, where water flows at terrific pace during thaws and rains. Buried, water is invisible, silent. You walk right over

it. All eighty acres of my farm were ditched and drained (see Figure 1). I had no idea. There was no record of the work, no maps. But in the years I farmed those fields, the old clay tile drainage system broke down, one tile after another. The tiles filled up with dirt or roots. Or the clay just shattered like stomped-on glass. Low spots got wet and stayed wet. Unplowed places sprouted sedges, cattails, and clumps of reeds.

When I plowed the bottomlands, I'd sometimes cut through the tops of strange gray-dirt chimneys that crayfish kicked up in wet ground. I could look straight down the chimney hole to water, six inches below the surface of the field. I was farming a bog. The tractor would push out a kind of waterbed ripple through the dirt.

In the end, it wasn't worth it, working that ground, and I quit farming the low spots. As more tiles broke, small wetlands formed, and the extent of the tiling was clear. This was a

huge water network, a watershed underground – coursing, flowing, and lying low.

I see any farm field with a different eye now. I can see what's in it, and I can guess what's under it. In Michigan, if it looks like dry ground, you can bet somebody's buried the water. I still don't know where all the tiles are on my farm. It's a patchwork system of arteries. A map of the old drainage system, the watershed underground, might look like the sketch in Figure 2.

After walking the stream in rubber boots, I spotted several outlet points of the tile, three places in the banks of the stream. In the fields, I know the main tile lines because I've broken them now, crushed the tile, and let the water collect, as part of the Federal Wetlands Reserve Program. Five huge wetlands formed - these would have been woodland swamps, in beech and maple forest, before the white settlement here. All that water restored, resurfaced. Out of sight! Acres of water on a dry farm!

In the decades that closed out the nineteenth century, almost all of southern Michigan's woodland swamps were cleared of trees and drained with clay tiles for farming. In many towns, along with the saw mill, the brick and tile works was the major industry. Nobody wrote much about it, but the southern

Michigan landscape in those days must have been nightmarish – trees cut, stumps up-rooted, brush burning in huge heaps of flame; families in fields with shovels or with animals harnessed to ditching blades, children hauling in and setting those tiles, one at a time, thousands and thousands of tiles in the trenched fields; then the work of shoveling dirt and covering it all up. Burying the water!

Today to keep a farm dry, fields are drained and re-drained with plastic tiling. The process is fairly quick, surgical, with laser transits, trenching machines, and huge rolls of yellow tiling unwinding into the ditch. But the thinking and consequence are the same: ground is a surface for farming, for human use; and water must go underground.

In towns, too, like Ypsilanti, water was ditched and buried. Water had its use, but it had its limits. To run flour mills and sawmills, the Huron River was cut into in several places, channeling water to the mill wheels and returning it to the river. Frog Island (which is not an island at the moment) was no island to begin with, until a millrace was dredged in the 1840s, cutting a good chunk of ground away from the bank. Frog Island stood apart in the river for over one hundred years, long after the mills were gone, until gradually, through the 1960s and 1970s, the millrace filled in with

years of sediment and became a dump for concrete, construction and railroad debris.

Ypsilanti is a small point, one turn, in the Huron River watershed, but it's got it all - the love and desire of water, the loathing, the ditching, and the burial.

Ditched and Buried, Again

Every water affair goes on and on. It just won't quit. Settlers drained foul swamps with clay tiles; they dredged stream banks and cut out millraces. Then, later, a real dissolution, a *thunk*, a hush of a close; civic leaders drained the city watershed and separated themselves from whole streams. The *work* it took and still takes to work these miracles. The labors of love and of machineries to bury water, walk on it, and then walk away.

Tubal Cain Owen was an entrepreneur and a believer in the Book of Revelation and a great believer in scientific principles. He was a success in most of his endeavors and businesses - shipping, milling, farming - although his belief that the Bible prophesied "flying machines" led him to construct, on scientific principles, years before the Wright brothers, an "aeroplane" in his backyard. The construction never flew, but that one failure didn't diminish T. C. Owen's faith in technology and his visions of a fantastically improved life.

Owen Creek bumbled through Tubal's lawns. On an 1874 map of Ypsilanti, Owen Creek winds around and flows more or less parallel to Forest Avenue, down to the Huron River at the railroad bridge (see Figure 3). If the creek were there now, it would run behind the I-M sports complex and down the street past Pray-Harrod and on under the Alexander music building. Of course, there's no stream, and there's no mouth of a creek down slope at the Huron River. What there *is* at that point (walk down Forest Avenue to the bridge and look north) is a 6 ½ foot reinforced concrete pipe: The Owen Outlet Drain (see Figure 4).

On early Drain Commission maps, it's the Owen *Creek* Outlet. But more recently, the maps say simply Owen Outlet. The file folder in the Washtenaw County Drain Commission office is labeled Owen Outlet. No creek no more. It's ditched, piped, buried. Done for! Like the wetlands that farmers drained and

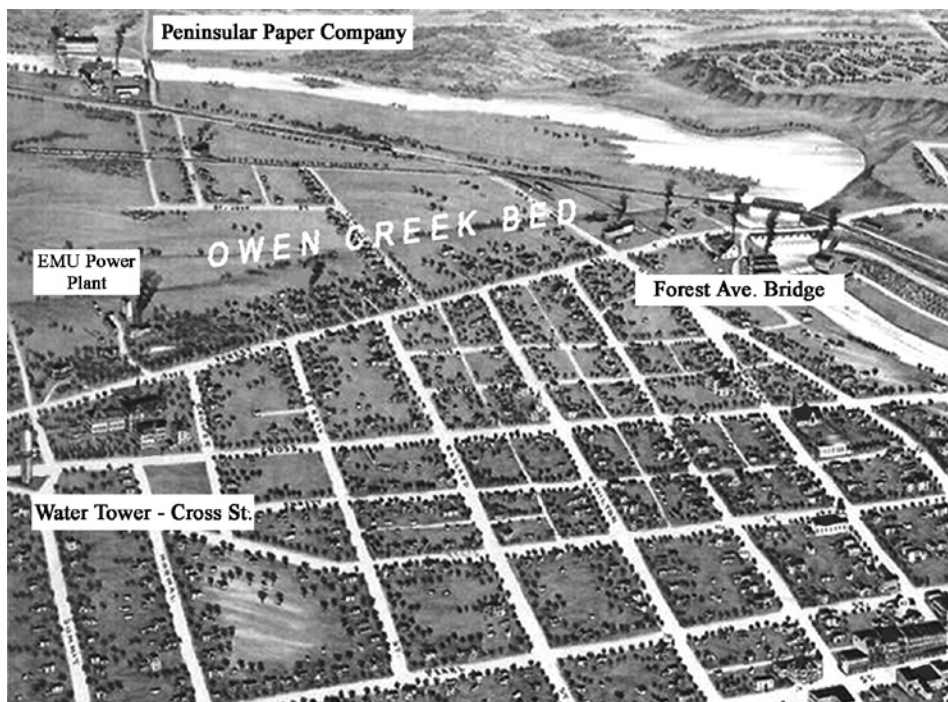


Figure 3: Owen Creek wound around and flowed more or less parallel to Forest Avenue and on down to the Huron River at the railroad bridge.

“Telling Stories and Swapping Lies” with the Ypsilanti Men’s Morning Coffee Group

Nobody seems to know when it all started but the “Every-Weekday-Morning-Since-Before-World War II-Ypsilanti Men’s Morning Coffee Group” is still going strong. The group currently meets every weekday morning from 8 to 9 a.m. at Tim Hortons restaurant at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Hewitt Road. Approximately 40 individuals are on the group’s list but on a typical morning 18-24 will show up for morning coffee. Since the topics of religion and politics are “off limits” the main activities are “telling stories” and “swapping lies.”

The group ranges in age from 51 (James Mann) to 89 (Barney Hughes). Ron Guidebeck drives in from Pinckney and Bob Willoughby drives in from Chelsea to assemble with the group. Todd Asperger, owner and manager of Tim Hortons, indicated “...the group is generally well behaved except for Barney Hughes who sometimes crosses the line and needs to be reigned in.”

Ellis Freatman has participated in the group since 1954 when the group met at the Huron Hotel, which at the time was managed by Clyde Widmayer. Bill Anhut, who later owned the Huron Hotel, believes the group may have started as early as 1924, shortly after the Huron Hotel opened. Other locations the group has frequented over the years include the Dupuis Bakery, the Tower Inn Restaurant, the Riverside Restaurant, Miller’s Ice Cream in Depot Town, and the Oasis Restaurant. The group has been meeting at Tim Horton’s Restaurant since 2003.

Ellis Freatman remembers that in 1954 other members included Carl Arvin, Dutch Augustus, Herb Bunting, Edward Deake, Al Deotte, Ray Dupuis, Dwight Hand, Howard Hand, David Henderson, Rod Hutchison, Paul Jackson, Thor Marsh, Howard Merritt, Dr. O’Hara, William Smith, Ben Sovey, Bill Stevens, George Stripp and George Weins.

At exactly 9 a.m. each morning a game called “Honest John” is played to see who has the honor of paying the morning bill. The number of members who pay \$5 depends on the number of attendees on a particular day and the “last man in” gets to select a letter of the alphabet to start the game. James Mann, local author and historian, writes up a sentence with the number of words equal to the number of \$5 payments required. For instance, if five members need to pay, then the sentence might be something like “Rain forecast in local area.” Those individuals must pay who are unfortunate enough to call out the first letter in each word (A, F, I, L or R). You are “free” for the rest of the day’s game if you



Above: The Ypsilanti Morning Coffee Group in session!

Right: James Mann, local author and historian, runs the daily “Honest John” game.



Above: Barney Hughes doing one of his “tricks” for the group.

Right: Todd Asperger, owner and manager of Tim Hortons.



call one of the letters and if you pay two days you are “free” for the rest of the week.

Anyone living within driving distance is welcome to attend the morning coffee session. The only requirement for attendance is that you have your money ready in case you are unlucky enough to call out one of the \$5 letters. However, according to Barney Hughes, “...the only requirement for membership is that you are breathing, and some current members are suspect.” ■

First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti – 1827-2006

By Kathryn J. Howard

In 1827, when Ypsilanti was only four years old, there was no organized Presbyterian church, but occasionally the town was visited by two ministers, the Rev. William Page of Ann Arbor and the Rev. N. M. Wells of Detroit. In 1829, Rev. Page organized a group of twelve members, the nucleus of the future First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti. The place of organization was in a building on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Street where the First National Bank now stands. Later, meetings were held in the "Old Red Schoolhouse" located near the southwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Adams Street, behind the Board of Commerce building.

In the fall of 1829, the Rev. William Jones became the visiting minister, including in his circuit Ypsilanti, Carpenter's Corners, Dixboro and Stoney Creek. His services came to an abrupt end in the spring of 1830 and he chose as the text for his last sermon: "Up! get ye out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city." Not an optimistic point of view at departing! In those days the church was small and the revenue very limited.

A young minister from New England arrived in Ypsilanti in June of 1830. He was the Rev. Ira Mason Wead. He was a talented man and a graduate of the University of Vermont and Andover Seminary. Rev. Wead had been recently ordained and was full of missionary zeal. He was born January 14, 1804, and was the ninth of a family of eleven. He married Caroline N. Button in May, 1830, and came at once to Ypsilanti where he preached to a group of thirteen. The Weads had four children, three girls and one boy. Rev. Wead became the permanent minister in October of 1834.

A large part of the community has been described as an irreligious, profane, whiskey-drinking and Sabbath-breaking crowd. While Rev. Wead was riding his country rounds at night, he was met by boisterous fellows and threatened with rough treatment. Sometimes the schoolhouse was stoned while he preached. His first compensation was sup-

posed to be \$400. Credit was given for a bag of potatoes or ten pounds of meat. In July, 1845, the church voted to grant him \$600 payable in quarterly installments.

In the latter part of his ministry Rev. Wead asked for a year's leave of absence because of ill health. The Rev. H. H. Sanderson supplied the pulpit during that time. Rev. Wead returned to Ypsilanti later and spent the last years of his life here. He died November 30,



First Presbyterian Church building from 1836 to 1857.

1871, and is buried in the Highland Cemetery, Lot 20, Block 28. In the chapel of the cemetery there is a Wead colored window.

On October 4, 1830, a religious society was organized under Territorial Statute and called the First Congregational Society of Ypsilanti. Ezra Carpenter, Elias M. Skinner, Salmon Champion, Timothy Darling, Jacob Bacon and Arden H. Ballard were the first trustees. In August, 1832, the question arose as to the form of government the new church would adopt, whether Presbyterian or Congregational. It was voted 19 to 4 to adopt the

Presbyterian form and the church was then known as the First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti. Ezra Carpenter, Jacob Bacon, Mason Hatfield and James Loomis were the first elders and from that date a regular sessional record has been kept.

In 1832, plans were started for building a church and nearly four years later, on November 23, 1836, the First Presbyterian Church building was dedicated to the service of God. It was located near the corner of Adams and Pearson Streets, behind Cleary College. When the framework of the building was ready it was difficult to obtain the help of enough men to raise it without dispensing whiskey. When part of the frame was up the wind blew it down. It was said that when that happened the wicked

ones in the vicinity sent up a shout of triumph "in sympathy with the Prince of the Powers of the Air." The work of raising the timbers of the spire was difficult in that few men could be found who dared work so high.

The Rev. Edward Marsh supplied the pulpit from 1847-1849. At a congregational meeting December 13, 1848, a resolution was adopted to limit the term of eldership. This system of term eldership has continued since that date. Two elders were elected yearly for a term of three years.

continued on page 10

First Presbyterian Church of
Ypsilanti – 1827-2006 –
continued from page 9

In January, 1850, the Rev. Ebenezer Cheever of Tecumseh, Michigan, became the minister. He remained until February, 1854, when he was dismissed at his own request. The Rev. Gustavius L. Foster accepted the pastorate in October 1854. The supply pastor after Rev. Cheever's resignation had been Rev. John D. Pierce. During this same fall a subscription was started to secure a new church building. The sum of \$1,100 was raised and lots were bought at Washington and Emmet streets on which the present church building was later erected.

A committee was appointed in January 1855, to aid the trustees in procuring plans for the new building and to issue a subscription to a building fund. In June 1856, the committee submitted plans and specifications that had been prepared by George S. Greene of Detroit. It also made a favorable report in regard to finances. The congregation deemed the time propitious for building. Mark Norris, W. B. Hewitt and I. N. Conklin were chosen to constitute, with the trustees, a building committee and were authorized to proceed at once with construction.

The corner stakes of the new church were set on June 13, 1856, and on July 29 a building contract was signed with John Ferrier. The work progressed satisfactorily and the church, completed and furnished, was dedicated September 23, 1857. The cost was \$12,000 of which \$3,500 was to be paid within ninety

“A large part of the community has been described as an irreligious, profane, whiskey-drinking and Sabbath-breaking crowd.”

days of the date of signature. The contract was signed with seal by Lyman D. Norris, chairman and Daniel B. Greene, clerk of the Society, and the contractor, John Ferrier. Dedication services were led by the Rev. R. A. Crampton. The sermon was by the Rev. G. L. Foster and the prayer by the Rev. S. D. Chapen. That evening, Rev. Foster was installed as the pastor of the church. The sermon was by

the Rev. C. C. Curtis of Adrian; the installing prayer by the Rev. H. Elmer of Chelsea; the charge to the congregation by the Rev. Ira M. Wead of Chicago.

The church building was a rectangular structure on the lines of the present main building, but with a single, heavy square tower over the entrance. The high spire proved unstable and was eventually removed.

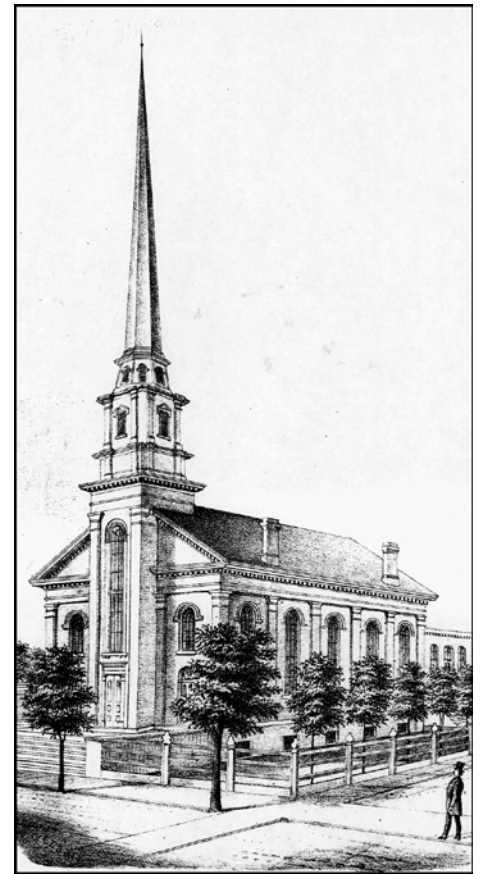
Rev. Foster asked to be dismissed in September 1862, to accept a call to the Presbyterian Church in Coldwater. Prof. Joseph Estabrook, superintendent of the Ypsilanti Public Schools and a member of the faculty of the Michigan State Normal College, supplied the pulpit during the interim. He established a young people's prayer meeting that afterward became the Christian Endeavor Society.

In July, 1863, the Rev. George P. Tindall of Indianapolis was called to the pastorate. The opening of his ministry found the church in excellent condition. In October of that year a committee reported that the church was debt-free and suggested that a surplus of cash and pledges on hand might be used for the purchase of an organ. The suggestion was accepted, the organ was purchased, and a vote of thanks was given to the committee for the work done.

Rev. Tindall accepted a call to Flint in December 1875, and was succeeded in October 1876, by the Rev. John M. Richmond of Columbus, Ohio. He, in turn, was succeeded in 1882 by Rev. William A. McCorkle, D.D. whose salary was \$1,800 a year and

the manse. In 1881 the church had bought a house on the corner of Washtenaw Avenue and Adams Street to be used as a manse.

During the administrations of the Reverends Tindall, Richmond, and McCorkle, the membership of the church was at its highest peak. In April, 1880, the church membership was 560 and the Sunday School enrollment



First Presbyterian Church building from 1857 to 1898.

450. It was during this period that several members of the church asked for dismissal for the purpose of forming a Congregational Church. From its first organization in Ypsilanti the Presbyterian Church had included a few Congregationalists, an arrangement quite in accordance with the close relationship of the two denominations. The first financial organization connected with the church was known as The Congregational Society. Eventually, the number of members became such that a demand arose for a distinct Congregational organization.

That organization took effect October 4, 1881, and the separation was accomplished with complete harmony. After that, the name First Congregational Society of Ypsilanti by act number 283 of the local acts of 1883 of the Legislature of Michigan, which act was approved and given immediate effect on April 22, 1883.

Rev. McCorkle's resignation became effective September 1, 1888. Prof. W. H. Brooks, instructor of Latin and Greek at the Michigan State Normal College supplied the pulpit for

a year and was followed by the Rev. George Harkens. The Rev. Henry M. Morey, D.D. of Marshall, Michigan, became the minister on September 16, 1889, with a salary of \$1,600 and the manse. The sum of \$50 was appropriated for his moving expenses to Ypsilanti. During Dr. Morey's ministry the Christian Endeavor Society was organized and was a great success. This ministry ended in October 1895.

The following year, 1896, the Rev. Robert K. Wharton of Bravis Dam, Wisconsin, accepted the call to the church. The salary of \$1,500 was payable in monthly installments and the contract included use of the manse, \$100 to defray the expenses of moving, and four weeks Sabbath vacation each year. In 1898 reconstruction of the church building was begun and rededication took place in September of 1899. Nothing remained of the old church but the walls of the auditorium. The present church is a brick structure of semi-Gothic architecture, with double towers and beautiful Tiffany windows.

Sunday, September 24, 1899, the First Presbyterian Church Society took possession of their newly completed edifice with praise and prayer and solemnly dedicated it to the worship of God. William H. Lay, treasurer of

the church read this report: \$35,155.53 Total. The dedicatory service was held at 3 p.m. The Rev. J. M. Gelston of Ann Arbor, moderator of the Michigan Synod preached an appropriate sermon touching upon practical Christian living as the best way to serve God. The pastor, the Rev. R. K. Wharton, and the people took the vows of dedication. Throughout the day very fine music added to the beauty and impressiveness of the service. The new \$3,500 organ, built by Jardine and Company of New York, and presented to the church by the Ladies' Aid Society, was skillfully handled by Miss Mary Van Dusen, who had long been organist of the church.

In April, 1904, Rev. Wharton resigned because of ill health. He left with the love and admiration of the congregation and was succeeded by Rev. Charles C. McIntyre who served until April 1907. Another brief term of ministry was that of the Rev. Cyrus M. Creighton who occupied the pulpit from June 1907 until December of 1911. From 1912 to 1914 the Rev. Roy W. Hamilton followed Rev. Creighton, but after 18 months left to take charge of student work in Ann Arbor. He became professor of English at Alma College, then president of Alma, and later returned to his professorship at the same institution. At *continued on page 18*



First Presbyterian Church building from 1899 to the present.

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Michigan Ladder Company - America's Oldest Ladder Manufacturer!

By Marcia Phillips

Michigan Ladder Company has been making ladders in the sprawling wooden building down by Frog Island for 105 years this month, ever since it began there in December of 1901. While historic changes occurred all around it and under its own roof, it persisted in simply manufacturing quality products. It served as a quiet witness to the surging changes around it. The delivery wagons became trucks. Automobiles, including Preston Tucker's prototype, sped increasingly faster past its doors. B-24 bomber planes took their first test flights out of Willow Run over its roof before taking off for Europe to win World War II. The trains roared past, and then came less frequently. Other businesses grew and declined, and sometimes disappeared. But Michigan Ladder Company outlasted all these changes and survived cycles in its own industry to become the oldest ladder company in the United States today. It is quite an achievement for a company with modest beginnings.

On December 3, 1901, at the beginning of the new Twentieth Century, three men formed the Michigan Ladder Company with several thousand dollars of their own money and help from the City of Ypsilanti. The city had been negotiating with the Newton & Haggerty Ladder Company of Detroit to locate here following a September 1901 \$12,000 bond election, but that deal fell through. Three entrepreneurs no doubt saw an opportunity to take advantage of the city's goodwill and quickly created a business of the same nature. The city agreed to provide land for five years, at a great location near the Huron River and the railroad depot, if the principals invested \$3,000 from their pockets and promised to hire at least ten men for the next five years.

The three founders, Melvin Lewis, A.G. Huston and Edgar S. Geer, became the first officers of the company, at the salary of \$1.50 a day, and its driving force, although they knew precious little about making ladders other than Lewis holding a newly issued patent. They met the challenge though and the

land at 12 East Forest Avenue, and the facility they built there, would become the company's permanent location. The April 30, 1903 edition of the *Ypsilantian* reported that the company was doing a "...rushing business, having orders for ladders several weeks ahead." On February 19, 1907 (five years and two months after the company's founding) the headline on the front page of the *Ypsilanti Daily Press* read "Ladder Co. Wins Success" and the accompanying story told how the town council directed the mayor to execute a deed to Michigan Ladder for their property.



Michigan Ladder Company – 1916.

Huston sold out his interest within the first few years, due to conflicts over product development according to the *Ypsilanti Daily Press*, to A. E. Lewis who remained with the company for many years. Edgar Geer (who was a first cousin to Lewis' wife Mary) also sold his shares of ownership and tragically died in a fall off scaffolding on a home improvement site the next year; perhaps he should have used a Michigan Ladder.

Melvin Lewis would remain the company's president for the next 45 years and watch many changes occur. Deliveries in horse drawn wag-

ons would be replaced by railroad cars, when a railroad siding was built from the plant to the adjacent Michigan Central Railroad tracks in 1917, and then trucks. The original wood clad building would serve its purpose well but would be added onto 25 times for needed storage and assembly lines. The power would be generated by a railroad boiler and later electricity would be brought into the building. Ladders, initially the only product produced, would be joined by toys, ironing boards, boats and ping pong tables, only eventually to be reduced back to just ladders. Climbing upward would become what Michigan Ladder Company did longest and best.

Melvin Lewis' patent for an extension ladder with the first automatic locking catch would set the standard for safety that has ever since been a benchmark for innovation in the com-

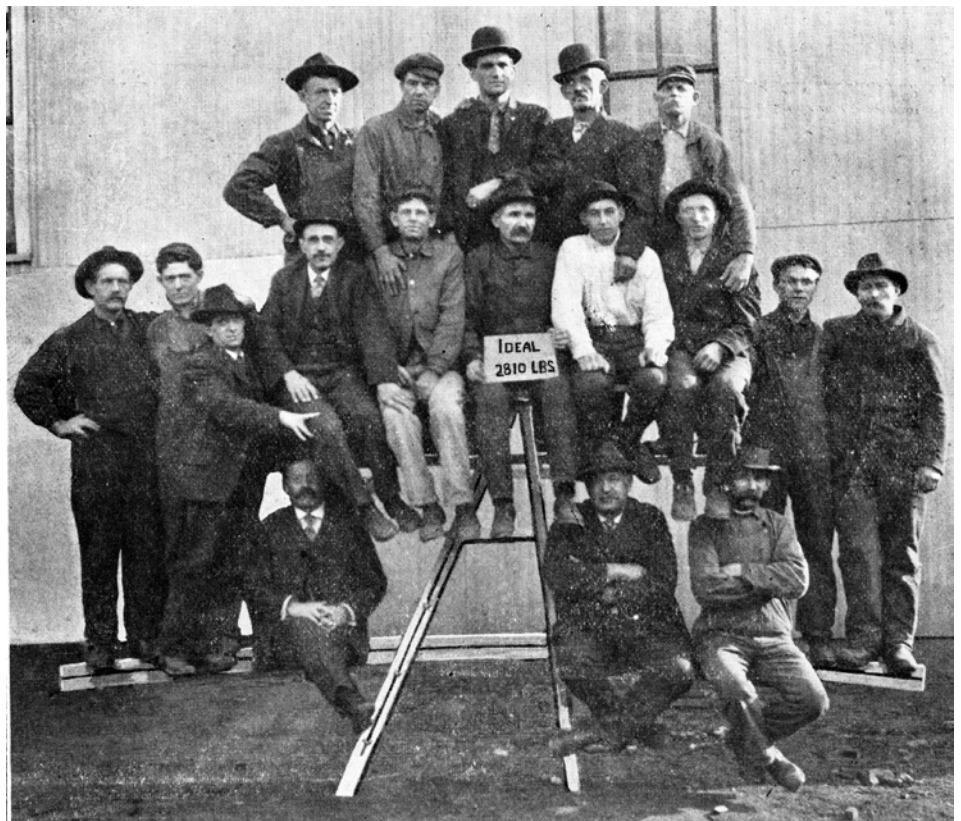
pany. Simple ladder designs were adapted to meet consumer needs, such as the pointed fruit picking ladder designed to lodge between tree limbs, so popular in orchards in western Michigan. Ladders of varying heights and with unique features were developed to meet and exceed industry standards. A circa 1953 news report claimed that "over a mile" of ladders were produced each working day. While wooden ladders have continuously been made individually and by hand at Michigan Ladder Company, the line has also expanded to include ladders made of aluminum and fiberglass.

The ladder business was originally a seasonal market, with production lasting only ten months a year, so Michigan Ladder (who prided itself in never having to lay off workers, not even during the Great Depression of the 1930s) made other products as well. Soon the lumber from the surrounding area was being fashioned into ironing boards and “Kiddie” toys and boats and even a portable diving board. No doubt its most famous sideline was the ping pong table named “The Detroitier.” These tables went around the world literally when the United States Navy bought hundreds for shipboard entertainment. The Harlem Globetrotters likewise carried them around the nation, in four pieces each, to be set up for halftime competitions. It even made the movies. “The Detroitier” that Tom Hanks’ character played on in *Forrest Gump* was made here on Forest Avenue.

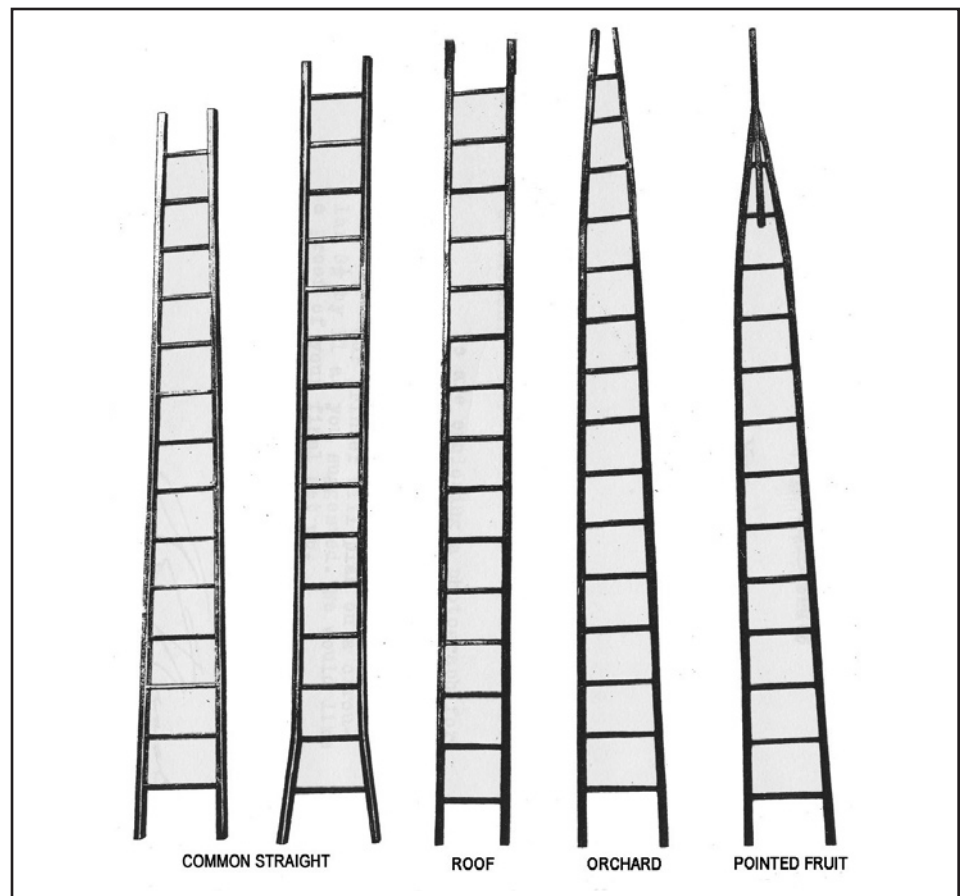
Michigan Ladders were strong if anything. From the quality of wood used to the larger than normal rivets (often painted red to emphasize strength), these ladders were built to hold anyone or anything. Early promotional photographs pictured the staff perched on a ladder to demonstrate its sturdiness. Even a car weighing 3,000 pounds was mounted upon a mechanic’s step ladder. The proof of Michigan Ladder’s strength was in the pictures, long before occupational safety became a buzzword.

Strength also was present in the executive offices where, remarkably, only three men were president over the course of a century. Melvin Lewis (1866-1957), who without any formal training seemed to have a talent for invention and held numerous ladder patents over the course of his long life, began as president in 1901 and held the office until his retirement in 1945 at the age of 79. Arthur Nissly (1897-1967) came to work for Michigan Ladder Company in the 1930s, after earning a degree in business and working for Paine Webber until the stock market crash. He would bring his business acumen to the company as vice-president and then president, until a heart attack at the Christmas staff party caused his death in 1967. His son Bob Nissly (who began his career at Michigan Ladder as a youngster smoking between the lumber piles) had earned a degree in engineering and was already on the staff when he assumed the presidency in 1967 upon his father’s demise.

continued on page 14



Demonstration of the strength of a ladder made by the Michigan Ladder Company – 1909.



Early ladder designs.

Michigan Ladder Company –
continued from page 13

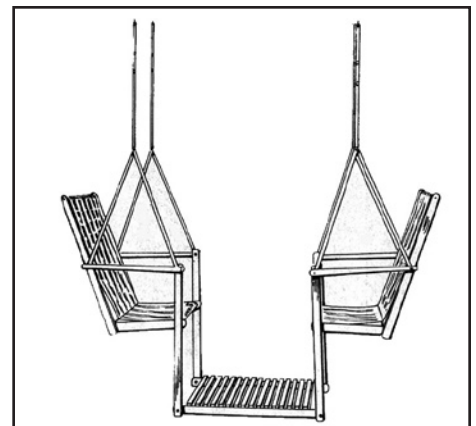
He would lead the enterprise until his retirement in 2005, after overseeing multiple expansions of the physical facility and the purchase of several other ladder companies. Bob also became a leader in consumer product safety testing on the national level. Tom Harrison became the new president upon Bob's retirement. Strength also resides in longtime employees like Dave Korzuck (39 years), Bob Hoernschemeyer (36 years), Gail Smith (30 years), Melvin Carter (29 years), Scott Bruneau (29 years), Buddy Castle (28 years), and Rick Wheeler (27 years). The workforce has had a longevity that mirrors the extension ladders they make.

For the first four decades of its existence, company salesmen sold ladders to individual retail operations in an ever widening area, including eventually all of the mid western and eastern United States. World War II brought such demand from the government that it became the sole customer for a while. After the war, distribution was changed to the wholesale market using sales representatives. Inventories have been maintained in nineteen locations around the country and exported to Latin and South America as well as the Middle and Far East. By its centennial in 2001, Michigan Ladder Company had returned to making only ladders and produced more than 250,000

a year in 450 different forms. While Michigan Ladder Company ladders cannot be purchased in large home improvement stores like Lowe's and Home Depot, it is still possible to buy one at the company office on Forest Avenue and take home a piece of local history.

The list of loyal customers during the Twentieth Century includes the United States Government, Ford Motor Company, General Motors, United States Steel, Boeing, and Montgomery Ward. Target store shelves are restocked by workers standing on Michigan Ladders. Many buildings, like the new McNamara Terminal at Detroit Metro Airport, utilized the company's ladders in their construction. Indeed, much of the nation has been built on the steps of Michigan Ladders.

Technology has changed rapidly during the Twentieth Century, but the ladder has remained a simple, essential tool. Three men recognized this in 1901 and laid the foundation for a company that would build upon it and remain an American family owned business well into its second century. Michigan Ladder Company has made a contribution to each era with every ladder it made. It flexed with industry cycles and cultural changes to outlast its competition and make ladders longer than any other ladder company in the United States today. Always rising to the challenge, one step at a time, has paid off for the Michigan Ladder Company and the local community it has served so well. ■



Other products made by Michigan Ladder Company.

A graphic advertisement for Historical Research Services. It features a white house-shaped outline on a black background. Inside the house, the words "HIDDEN TREASURE" are written in bold, uppercase letters. Below this, a magnifying glass is shown, with the words "Historical Research Services" written inside its lens. At the bottom left, it says "House Histories" and "Business Histories". At the bottom right, it says "Marcia Phillips" and "(734)276-2499".

News from the Fletcher-White Archives

By Gerry Pety

What an eventful fall and early winter we have had at the Ypsilanti Historical Society. By now you should have heard that we now own both the Museum and the building that houses our Archives. Great work by the YHS board and Al Rudisill, our YHS president, in acquiring these historic structures! Now the positive changes that were spoken of by the YHS in the past will finally become a reality.

We have had more visitors and regulars at the archives than ever before, even when you consider the EMU students that flocked here for Professor Ligibel's class last year. This year, the archives have been inundated by people searching for family genealogy, home histories, and just about every aspect of Ypsilanti history. We have also been helping people find information on the history of Willow Run and "Bomber Village." This research is being carried out to study the cultural, plant work and what it was like living in government housing during World War II. Willow Run Village was the bare essentials in housing to say the least, and a testament to what the "Greatest Generation" suffered on the home front to help win that war. I often wonder if we could fight and win a war today if we had to live like those people did!

"By now you should have heard that we now own both the Museum and the building that houses our Archives."

Thank goodness we have some help from our new intern from Eastern Michigan's Historic Preservation program, Laurie Turkawski. Laurie brings an impressive list of credentials to the work we do here and is a real help in the organization that is a necessary part of good archival stewardship. George Ridenour, our volunteer who lives just down the street from us, comes over on Sundays and helps with the long-term file and collections areas of the archives. George has the patience to catalog and organize the papers from the late Mr. Isaac Conklin, who lived in the latter half of the 19th century. Mr. Conklin was able to accumulate quite a fortune here in Ypsilanti and was associated with many of the late 19th century luminaries in this area.

Thank you to those people who have contributed items. Mr. David Novak brought us maps of the French Claims, and a number of Ypsilanti High School yearbooks from the 1930's. Ms. Janice Anschuetz (the unofficial mayor of Peckville) gave us an original North half of the Ypsilanti Plat Map of 1900. I never knew that it existed in this large venue and it is presented in an aerial view/plat map format. We also have had a financial contributor at the archives who wishes to remain anonymous. Thank you all for your contributions! And thank you to all who have contributed to our work at the Fletcher-White Archives over the last few years.

Finally, we still have a few 1890 Ypsilanti Heritage Maps in the 25 by 34 inch format. These impressive maps would make great Christmas gifts for the person who has everything and would certainly look impressive over anyone's fireplace mantle. They come in a very sturdy mailing tube for storage until framed and they are priced at \$37.50 each and available at either the Museum gift shop or here at the Archives. ■

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Barney and Friends - Profile: Bernard (Barney) Hughes

By Tom Dodd

"Respect your elders," our folks told us when we were tots, "and listen to what they have to say; they won't be around forever, you know." That admonition is brought into sharp focus by the life and times - and stories - of Barney Hughes.

At 89 years, Hughes is the oldest member of his group of friends in Ypsilanti. Called by some a "legend in his own mind," Hughes maintains a rigorous schedule and rises daily to inform those with foggier memories of

diminished the observation of his birthday. "Oh, mine was a very popular birthday for everybody; I just let my schoolmates know that they had the next two weeks off - in my honor!"

Hughes lived at 611 St. John Street his first 23 years. The Hughes house was at the edge of town, and he remembers how there was nothing but rich farmland from the Normal School to Ann Arbor. The house on St. John backed up to what was then called Sleepy

rocket landed on his dad's garage and sheds, the City fire department showed up, noted the municipal lot line and left the scene. The garage and sheds burned to the ground and Joe Hughes was at City Council the next week. "What about a fire at the paper plant?" he asked. "Would you let that Township property burn to the ground, as well?" Council decided to let the City fire hoses stretch into Township fires, but the trucks had to remain within the City.

At sixteen, Barney served as the "muscle" when he made collections for his father's plumbing company. Father Joe had the biggest plumbing company in town with thirteen employees. "He did the pipes for both Roosevelt and Lincoln Schools,"



things long forgotten or, perhaps, never known. Hughes's life story is both local and profound, and he's good for a real belly laugh at every turn. Whether it's his Tuesday night ladies' martini group, the euchre club, or the morning coffee group where he is the longest attending member, Hughes makes connections on a daily basis all around the town.

In all his contacts in Ypsilanti, Barney Hughes is known as a master raconteur with a rich background of first-person history or stories just for the sake of entertainment. He comes to it naturally: Hughes remembers his grandfather telling of hearing the "days-long rumble of the battle" from Gettysburg in 1863. "Grandpa was eleven or twelve years old at that time," remembers Hughes, "and they lived east of Pittsburgh."

Born in Ypsilanti on Christmas Day, 1917, Bernard Hughes says the holiday never

"In all his contacts in Ypsilanti, Barney Hughes is known as a master raconteur with a rich background of first-person history or stories just for the sake of entertainment."

Hollow, later absorbed by Eastern Michigan University. A dormitory now occupies the same space.

Being on the border between the City and Township, he remembers rich detail about the neighborhood. When a Fourth of July

Hughes remembers. Just before the Great Depression, he got the contract to handle Timken oil conversions and everyone wanted theirs installed. "They purchased them on time and, when the bad times came along," says Hughes, "so many could not pay their installment that dad went bankrupt." Before the collapse, it was Barney's job to make the rounds of those behind in their payments and he remembers some of those interactions in embarrassingly sharp detail.

Hughes claims to be 3/4 Irish and can prove it with his theme-related stories done in burlesque dialect. He notes how his other quarter is German - a trait no one disputes. Hughes is a life-long member of St. John's Catholic Church, and can regale any crowd with Catholic jokes of the Pat 'n' Mike variety. Hughes claims to have been made a "Monsignor," about five years ago when Father Ed placed a purple hat on his

head, took his picture, and conferred the honorarium.

This morning, Hughes has greeted each coffee drinker personally as they arrive. "Mornin' Frank." "Hiya, Bill." No one goes unnoticed. Sensing that the day's attendance is at its Zenith and he will not be interrupted by the "Honest John" game that decides who pays the bill, Hughes rises with mock seriousness and walks to the center of the long table of coffee clubbers. Anticipating another reading, his comrades begin banging their cups on the tabletop. "Stifle yourself," intones Hughes. "Stifle yourself." He begins the morning's homily: It's another of those chestnuts about "McGillicuddy" conversing with "Father O'Hoolihan." These stories float over such issues as misunderstandings of the faith, sexual inadequacy, and golf. Any religious reference is broad enough for a fallen-away Unitarian to understand, and the sexual references are as innocent as Bob Hope punch lines at a D.A.R. convention. References to golf are often the string that holds the whole thing together. At story's end, there is genuine laughter from about a third of the group; another third comment derisively with "Heard it before," "Not funny," or just shake their heads; the final third is busy asking others to repeat the story since their hearing aids are still at home on the nightstand. Hughes accepts all responses with mock grace, smiles with the rehearsed modesty of one who has just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and returns to his seat.

After marriage to Eileen, the Hughes family lived at 9 Wallace Boulevard where they raised five children, "all college educated and successful in their careers," Hughes notes. Add fourteen grandchildren and three great grandchildren, and it is clear the Hughes story-telling tradition will continue for some time.

For most of his adult career, Hughes owned Hughes Realty and got to know virtually every property in the community. His gregarious and friendly style seemed perfectly suited to matching his clients with living spaces. He knew the territory better than most people in the business and Ypsilanti was his oyster.

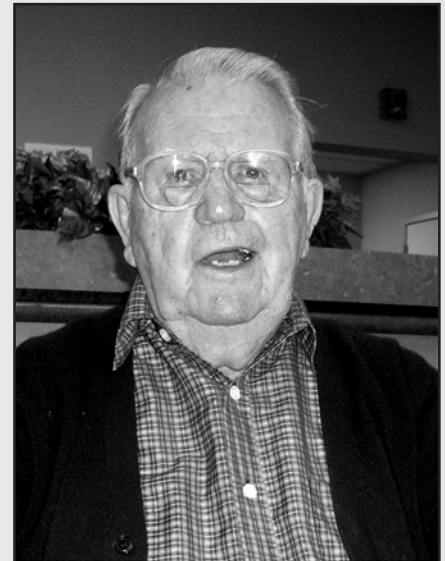


J. Bernard Hughes - 1936

Football: 1,2,3,4
Comedy: 2
Athletics: 1,2,3,4
Band: 1,2,3 (President)
Sem. Staff: 3,4
Latin Club: 1
Student Council: 3,4
Tennis: 4

Barney and Eileen spent the winter of 2005 with their daughter in California, but he kept in touch with his coffee group buddies via snail mail, always comparing the California coffee, weather, friends, and surroundings to what he knows so well in Ypsilanti. Even in his absence for several months, he was able to keep the stories coming. Hughes complained, "Nobody in California ever heard of Euchre." He does not mention the ratio of Catholics to other faiths there, but it is clear the California culture cannot measure up to Ypsilanti's.

At 89, Hughes has lots of stories to tell and Ypsilanti's rich history is a vital part of his first-person repertoire. Stop in at Tim Hortons on West Michigan Avenue at Hewitt Road any weekday morning at 8 a.m., or learn to play rudimentary Euchre and you are sure to hear this repository of local history share his treasures with all who will listen. But don't stop by for the Tuesday martini parties. "Those are MY girls," Barney Hughes says of the widows and single women from his neighborhood. ■



J. Bernard Hughes - 2006

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No Office
No Credit
No Money
No Email Address
No Cell Phone
No iPod



Some of Barney's friends believe he was the inspiration for the creation of the purple dinosaur cartoon character.

First Presbyterian Church of
Ypsilanti – 1827-2006 –
continued from page 11

the recommendation of Hamilton, the Rev. Edwin M. Mulock became minister from January 1914 to March 1916.

In order to stimulate interest and thereby increase attendance, Rev. Elliott was granted the privilege of showing both motion and still pictures. However, the hoped for ends were not attained because of opposition on the part of a considerable number of the members to the showing of moving pictures in the church.

A group of young mothers met November 10, 1923, at the manse with Mrs. Carl H. Elliott to organize a group to be known as the Young Matrons' Guild. The succeeding minister was the Rev. S. Conger Hathaway of Plymouth, Michigan. He was elected on September 28, 1925, and installed on November 4, 1925. His salary was \$3,000 and the manse. Miss Luenna Hall was engaged as director of religious education for one year in 1927. At a special meeting of the congregation on October 28, 1929, Rev. Hathaway's

resignation was accepted. The Rev. David Porter supplied the pulpit and on February 20, 1931, was elected minister at a salary of \$2,100. The newly organized Women's Union met on April 1, 1937.

On November 17, 1939, Rev. Porter requested that his resignation become effective March 31, 1940. At a called congregational meeting held on May 12, 1940, the nominating committee

"In 1829, Rev. Page organized a group of twelve members, the nucleus of the future First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti."

of twelve, unanimously recommended Rev. Raymon Burns Bair of Rockford, Ohio, as the pastor of the church. The salary was \$1,800 and the manse. The membership and finances of the church were at a low ebb at the time of Rev. Bair's arrival. The Rev. R. B. Bair and his family arrived in Ypsilanti on June 20, 1940.

Rev. Bair served the First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti longer than any minister in the history of the church. From the beginning of Rev. Bair's ministry there was a decided improvement in the spiritual life of the church, generated no doubt, by his own clear vision, natural leadership, and the sense of permanency he created. The effectiveness of his hard work of seventeen years, both in the church and the community was evidenced in the size of the church membership, totaling 598, and in the planned program of modernization.

A group of energetic young people made the church choir one of the finest in the city and the young married couples of the church assumed many church responsibilities. Fifty-five new members were added to the church roll and 16 were reinstated during Rev. Bair's first year in Ypsilanti. The community grew rapidly during the years of World War II and as a result, 310 new members were added to the membership of the First Presbyterian Church in the period between July, 1940, and July, 1948.

The old manse was so much in need of repairs that it was decided to sell it and purchase a more modern home. In 1943, the Board of

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Trustees sold the old manse for \$6,000 and in July of that same year bought the Elmer A. Lyman property for \$10,500.

September, 1943, marked the opening of the kitchenette on the second floor. In December, 1944, the Women's Union sponsored the first Candlelight service. This has become a traditional affair, initiated in 1944 by Mrs. K. B. Pester (1892-1948).

During 1944 the primary department was remodeled and painted and the organ motor in the basement was repaired. In 1945, a stoker was installed, the hot-air furnace was modernized and new registers and a new circulating fan were installed. From 1947-1949 many details of repair, redecoration and remodeling were taken care of throughout the church building. The floors and the pews in the sanctuary were refinished and new carpeting purchased in 1949.

In February, 1949, the Women's Union agreed to change the name of the organization to Women's Association to conform to the name used in the associations of women in the churches of the Detroit Presbyterial Society and in the national organization of women's work.

Plans for the major remodeling and repair of the church were underway in 1950 and at this time the church was incorporated. Six persons were elected to act as the first Board of Trustees of the corporate body and were authorized to execute a mortgage in the amount of \$20,000. In 1953 this amount was increased to \$25,000 to cover the expenses of remodeling the basement under the sanctuary for new Sunday school rooms.

The new basement was completed in the late summer of 1953 and an open house was held on Sunday, November 1, 1953. There are four classrooms and a worship room, choir music room, kindergarten, two rest rooms, two offices and a new entrance into the basement from the Washington Street side. Thirty-eight hundred square feet of space at the cost of approximately \$20,000 is the result of the basement's reclamation. Additional improvements to the church in the early '50's included a new heating plant, overhaul of the organ, and lowering and remodeling the choir loft. A new Board of Deacons was created which gives valuable aid to accomplishing many

church duties at the present time.

The one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti was observed on October 3, 1954, by a special Sunday morning service followed by a church dinner. Many former members and other interested people attended the service and had dinner along with members of the congregation.

A building fund had been established several years before by the yearly canvassing of the membership, and by the end of 1956 the building mortgage was paid off. Such detailing of accomplishments in the way of material gains, as has been related in the preceding paragraphs, is less than half the picture of the growth of the church during Rev. Bair's ministry. It serves, however, as an indication of the increased interest in the life of the church by its members. It was the feeling of the minister that the spirit of the church membership is "ninety-nine percent unity, which is most unusual."

As the church entered its one hundredth year in this location, with its two towers newly cleaned and repaired (September, 1956) and its bills paid, remodeling of the chapel was underway in order to form additional space for the overcrowded Sunday school. There was a commemorative service during the centennial year. In 1957-1958 the remodeling of the North wing chapel took place. The Chapel was completely renovated and made into two stories. A chapel, church offices and four classrooms on the main floor, and four classrooms and a worship center on the second floor. This was at a cost of \$45,000. At this time the church could accommodate 1,200 for two church services and 800 for Sunday school. Average attendance at this time was between 300 and 400. The kitchen was also renovated.

In 1959 the Rev. Vigil Jensen and family came to our parish as assistant minister. His duties were to oversee our Christian Education Program. Rev. Jensen was with us two years. From the fall of 1960 to 1965 Mrs. Grace Cornish served as Christian Education Director. In 1962 Rev. Raymon Bair announced his retirement, after twenty-two years of faithful, productive service. Attendance had reached a record high during his years. His pastorate was longer than any other minister. He was honored with the title of Pastor Emeritus. Rev. *continued on page 20*

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First Presbyterian Church of
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continued from page 19

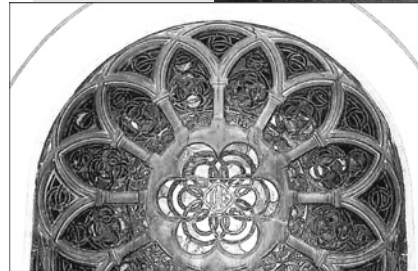
and Mrs. Bair continued to make their home in Ypsilanti. Rev. Bair passed away on March 3, 1977. The church had an interim minister during October, 1962, through July, 1963, Rev. Robert Larson, who was studying at the University of Michigan.

In August of 1963 Rev. Laurence N. Woodruff and family came to our parish from Wooster, Ohio. In February of 1965, the church purchased rental property on North Huron Street, which joined the present property on Washington Street. It was purchased for \$43,000. This was used as rental property for some time, after which it was to be a future parking lot. The property was more of a burden than an income and it was soon torn down and a parking lot was completed in 1967 at a cost of \$30,000.

Miss Dorothy Specht joined our church staff as director of Christian Education in 1965. She left in 1967 to further her education and later became an ordained minister. Her ordination was held in our church April 23, 1972. From 1967 to 1972, a Young Mothers Program was held in our church under the supervision and control of the Washtenaw County Intermediate School Board. This was a service to the community for unwed mothers to further their education. This also was a local mission for our church.

In 1967, Mrs. Betty Anderson came to our church as director of Christian Education. Betty stayed until 1969. In 1968, the church made a decision to sell our manse on Washtenaw Avenue and gave the minister a living allowance. This still continues.

During 1969, a new fellowship was started by the Board of Deacons in sponsoring an after church coffee hour. This brings fellowship and friendship to our church family. During 1969, summertime worship with the First Congregational Church started. For July and August each year since the congregations united, one month services are held in one church, and the other in the other church. Each minister presides at the visiting church. This provides an annual vacation for the ministers.



Left: Rose Window in the balcony.

*Right:
Renovated
Sanctuary
and new
pipe organ
– 2000.*



In 1969, our church was faced with an important decision. Major repairs would have to be made if we were to continue to use our present building. We were told by consultants the cost would be \$82,837.80, to get “our house in order.” The decision was made to proceed with the renovation. This meant a commitment to stay at this location for another generation. Members came through and made five-year pledges to the building fund and the entire debt was paid off in the five years.

Rev. Edward Craxton joined our staff as Assistant Pastor in June 1972, but stayed only until February, 1973, when he received a call to join the staff of the First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham. He enriched many of our lives in his short stay.

In 1973, there was the purchase of property facing Emmet Street and North Huron Street. This took in the Towner and Stuart property and gave us protection and room for future expansion. It was made possible through the estate of the late Lucille Ross Elliott, whose husband served the church as minister from 1920-1925.

Since 1973 to the present, mission support has become more significant at home and abroad. Such has been brought to the attention of the congregation by the Local and General Mission Committees. Other committees that contribute to the life of the church are Worship, Support and Interpretation, and Christian Education. The latter plans programs of general interest that are given following the Sunday Services. There are active Junior and

Senior High groups with planned programs of interest to each group. During the years, the congregation has assisted the community in many ways. A family from Viet Nam received aid in adjusting to life here. “Meals on Wheels,” a project that delivers prepared food to shut-ins is partially supported by this congregation. Various members have assisted with the Red Cross Blood Bank that has been held periodically in our church. The Deacons conducted services at the Parkview Extended Care Convalescent Center. The residents of a foster care home have been helped by planned entertainment and by supplies furnished. We had a part in celebrating our country’s Bicentennial and conducted tours of the church. Members helped with yearly planning, yearly hosted Vacation Bible School, in cooperation with the Baptist, Methodist, and St. Phillip’s Lutheran churches.

Improvements were made in the church and on the church grounds. The three towers were cleaned and painted in 1978 at a cost of \$10,650, and new carpeting was installed in the elementary school department. Through money from the estate of Donald M. Silkworth, a smoke alarm system was installed and dedicated to his memory. Thirty robes were purchased for the Children’s Choir, which was under the direction of Mrs. Claude Shell. The social rooms redecorated by the Women’s Association and a Sunday school room on the second floor has been remodeled and renovated. The Rose Window was covered with Lexan glass for protection, and the balcony in the sanctuary carpeted, along with the renovation of the North entrance. The sidewalks

in front of the church were repaired, and the parking lot was sealed and coated. This latter project was done by the Senior High group. The social rooms were recarpeted using funds obtained from the sale of 150 shares of Hoover NSK Bearing, Inc. stock. In 1978, the sanctuary was completely rewired and new lighting installed to add to the original fixtures. This was done by the Kent Electric Company at a cost of \$18,200. Electric sound equipment was also installed. Many of the aforementioned projects were made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Harry Hammond. The members of the Women's Association have donated tireless hours of work, thoughtful planning, and financial help. As if to be in readiness for the Sesquicentennial, the sanctuary was redecorated in the spring of 1979. A special gift to the church, in the form of an electronic system for the bell, was sponsored by the Sesquicentennial Committee.

The passing of our faithful organist Carroll Curtis in 1976, after serving for thirty years, was memorialized by renovating and improving the organ. Mr. Ronald Miller was hired as church organist in June, 1976. Under the capable direction of Mr. Harlous Wilson, the choir provided inspirational music to the worship services.

At his family's request, a marble and stone tablet bearing the church's name was installed in front of the church as a memorial to Rev. Raymon B. Bair. This was installed in 1979. The church was designated in 1976 as a Historical Structure by the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation and a marker, so stating was placed on the front of the building. Later the Department of Interior, National Park Service designated the entire block surrounding the church as a part of the Historic District.

Mrs. Herbert Cornish (Grace) resigned in January 1978, after holding the position of Director of Christian Education since 1975. Mrs. Erik Pedersen was hired for the position.

A framed lithoprint of the church was given to Mr. Robert Lee, April 3, 1978, for his diligent volunteer work on the church property for several years.

Rev. Laurence Woodruff continued his ever-faithful service to the congregation and its progress. Many of the accomplishments of the past 16 years were due to his leadership

and devotion. Members contributed hours of labor and financial aid to the church, and we regret that not all could be given due credit during this time.

From 1979 the church grew in numbers and spiritual and Christian fellowship. During the following years, many changes occurred in our church services and our participation in Presbyterian and Presbytery through our leadership from the Synod of Detroit, of which we are part. Our Christian Education grew under Janice Pedersen. A large youth choir continued. Our Music Services with organist Ronald Miller and Music Director Harlous Wilson grew to a choir of 30 members. Before Mr. Wilson became director in 1979, Barbara Weiss (Mrs. Jack Weiss) was music director for many years.

A complete modern kitchen was also realized through the generosity of Mr. Harry Hammond, in the time period of the seventies. In the 80's many more changes occurred. In 1983-84 an elevator was built in the back tower area to accommodate the handicapped. In 1988 a Memorial Garden was developed at the back of the church property. A Memorial Committee maintains the gardens.

In 1985 Gerri Stocking became Church Secretary. In 1988, with her wonderful musical talents, Barbara Weiss organized our Bells Choir. She directed it until 2005. Mr. Wilson retired in 1990. Mr. William Boggs became Music Director in the 1990s and through his musical talents, personality and reputation with the Ypsilanti High School Chamber Singers, our choir continued to grow with many non-church members joining. They gave many concerts in our church. William (Bill) stayed with us until 1998. Mrs. Ruth Ann Wagoner became Music Director and stayed three years. Dr. Gordon McQuere, Department Head of the Music Department at Eastern Michigan University became Music Director in 1994. Dr. McQuere left as Music Director in 2002.

Rev. Laurence Woodruff retired in December 1997 after 34 years of loyal Christian service. Rev. Eldon Beery came as interim minister and was with us until December 1999. Rev. Keith Geiselman was installed as our minister January 2000. In this period of time, 2000, the complete renovation of the Sanctuary began and plans made for a new pipe organ. The

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renovation of the Sanctuary is finished but the organ has not been completed. The Sanctuary podium, platform and choir loft were removed and a larger and lower chancel was built for choir, podium and organ. During this time painting, refinishing of pews, new carpeting, lighting and a sound system were installed. The renovated Sanctuary is very beautiful. Mr. Lincoln Poley was the architect and Phoenix Construction the contractor.

Recently, Ms. Paula Seo became Music Director and Rev. Maggie Shreve joined us as Associate Pastor in 2006. As the church congregation and its leaders enter the 2007 year, their hope is that the Love of Christ, Peace and Hope be with us and the entire World.

The Historical Records of this church are now in the Bentley Historical Library on the campus of the University of Michigan. ■

I acknowledge the assistance of previous historians of the church. Kathryn J. Howard

Buried Water –
continued from page 7

tiled underground, many streams and some rivers - the Grand River in Jackson, for instance - were buried in Michigan towns, to facilitate city construction, to control the storm water and flooding caused by that construction.

Gulf air might build up in weather systems and dump on EMU, but the rain that falls no longer follows the watershed topography into Owen Creek; it's channeled underground in the Owen Outlet Drain. Grates in parking lots and cuts in sidewalks collect water into a network of buried streams and tributaries. But in spite of the extent of storm drains - or because of their miraculous invisibility - buried water remains somehow mysterious, a hidden knowledge. Who knows where the water goes? A few engineers!

Not many people in Ypsilanti know. The map of the storm drains on file in the Ypsilanti Office of Public Works was drawn in 1960! It's a beautiful yellowed map, frayed all around, with a few penciled additions. "They told me to guard this with my life," the woman said who set it out on a table. "It's the only map we've got." "Nothing more recent? How do they know where to fix these things?" "Well, some of these guys have worked here a long time."

Buried water's a mystery. Cultish! Out of sight! Secret, forgotten, hushed up. Did somebody say *repressed*? At EMU, drawings of the campus's storm drains, including the Owen Outlet Drain right down the middle, date from 1970, before the Alexander Music Hall was built on top of the drain. If you put your ear to the ground during spring thaws, could you catch a murmur? A hum?

Talking to people at Eastern, Dan Klenczar, then project manager for EMU's physical plant, knew about Owen Creek. He was the only person I found who knew that there had been a creek on campus and that the creek had been put in a drain. He wasn't sure when. The County Drain Commission knew the date of construction, 1929. Seventy years ago. Nobody knew why, although "construction, probably," "expansion" was a good guess.

In some places seventy years would be recent history. But here, and in the United States generally, landscape memory is short-term memory. And when we bury water, the first thing we want to do is forget it. Still, sometimes old names carry watershed history. Check out a map of the Huron River watershed. Ypsilanti's the base of a bottleneck. The watershed narrows there between two hills; and the river starts to pour itself out toward Lake Erie. At this point in the watershed, you can literally see from one side of it to the other.

From the hill with the Ypsi water tower, on Summit Street, you can sight across to the other side - the old Highland Cemetery and, beyond that, Prospect Road. The names recall what the settlers and early surveyors knew. What we've forgotten.

On the other sides of these hills, water flows away through other watersheds, finds different rivers and different outlets to Lake Erie. Without a map, who would know? We count on the names, Summit, Highland. But what if the name shifts - Owen Creek Outlet to Owen Outlet? The creek is gone from the maps, gone from the name. Out of sight! Out of mind!

When it comes to water, we've lost our senses. We bury water. We forget we bury it. Who buried Owen Creek? It wasn't Tubal Cain Owen. The stream fit into his lavish and sweeping design of the property. And nobody then knew the scientific principles for the construction of pipe big enough to hold the stream. By the time Tubal died in 1913, the state of Michigan was anxious to purchase the land, to allow the Normal School, now EMU, to expand. EMU's president, Charles McKenny, argued that the Owen enterprises, though in competent hands with Owen's son, could become "a serious menace" if passed on to other interests.

The Owen family resisted sale of the property and battled the state in court, but they lost; and not long after World War I, the Normal School gained title to all the property, including the well, the stream, the homestead, the old factory buildings. The place would be cleared to make way for, one after the other, buildings on the expanding campus: Roosevelt, Jones-Goddard, Pray-Harrold, the IM building, Downing, Quirk, and Alexander Hall.

About the time of the Owen buyout, in the spring of 1918, another event may have contributed to the fate of Owen Creek. With heavy snows and a sudden thaw that year, the Huron River flooded through Ypsilanti, breaking both Superior and Peninsular Dams and inundating the low-lying parts of town. No doubt Owen Creek flooded as well. As a consequence, the Washtenaw County Drain Commission began a series of storm drain constructions along Owen Creek, first a short drain near the source, in 1922, and then an extension drain in 1925. The main section of

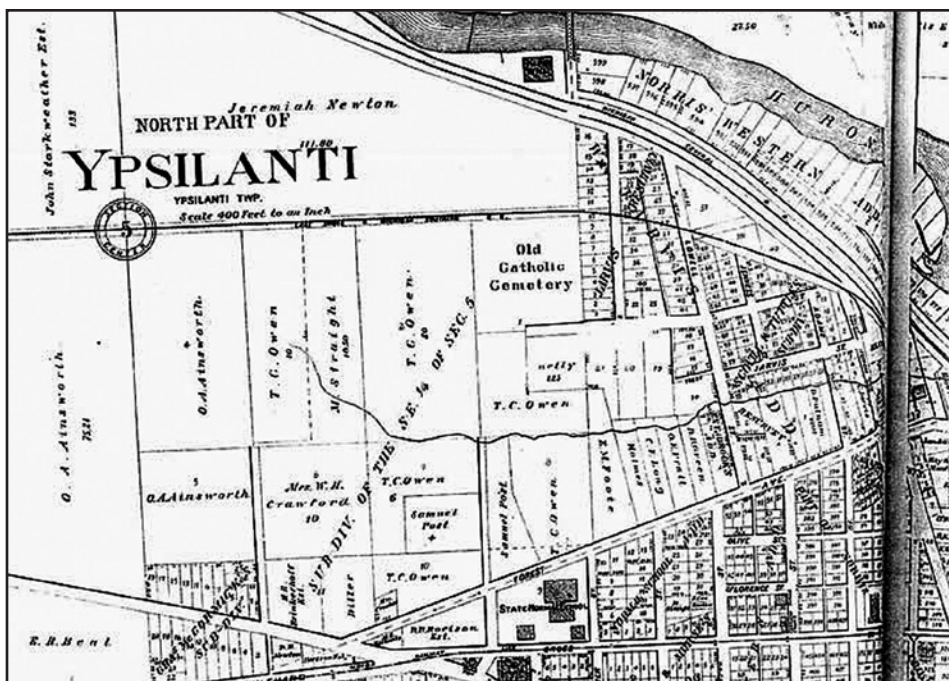


Figure 4: Early map of Ypsilanti showing the meandering of Owen Creek through what is now Eastern Michigan University.

Owen Creek remained intact, though, flowing all the way through the campus and into the Huron River.

In the end, it wasn't fear of flood so much as love of power - the power of light that buried Owen Creek. In May 1929, Clayton Deare, the Washtenaw County drain commissioner, wrote a letter to Michigan's governor, Fred W. Green, asking for state funds to cover drain work on the state's property at the Normal School. He wrote, "As you formerly lived in Ypsilanti, you will probably recall the old creek that empties into the Huron River near the Lake Shore Freight Depot [Forest Avenue]. A petition has been filed with me to enclose this drain. It passes in between houses and continues on up through the Normal property. I have talked with President McKenny who stated they would like the drain enclosed on part of the State Property for the reason that they intend to build a new power house on the spot where this creek now lies."

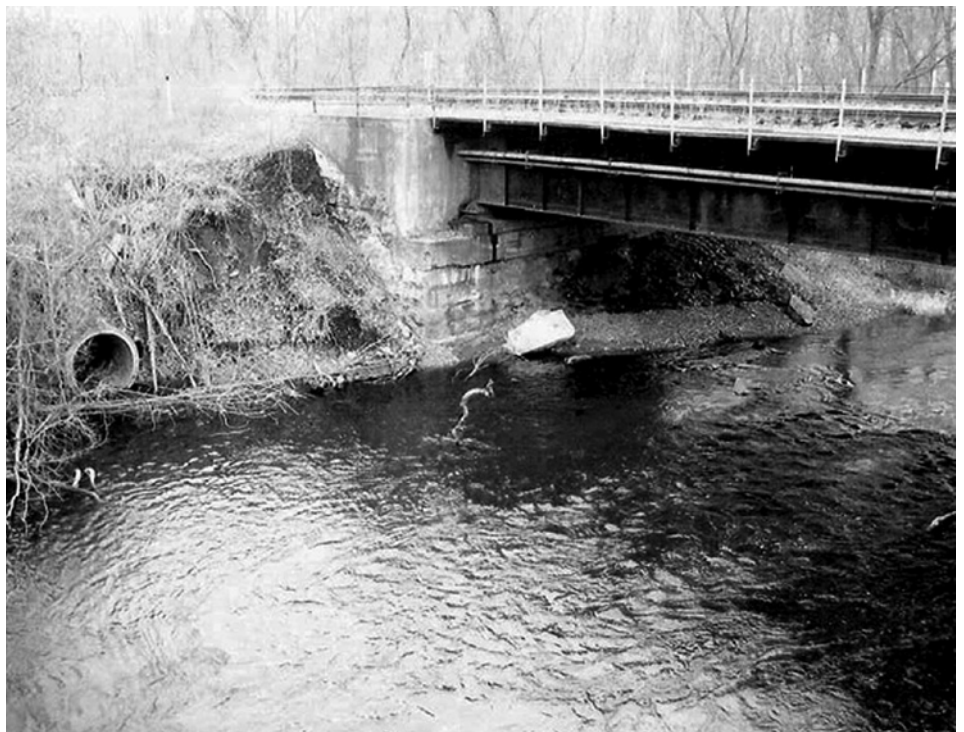


Figure 5: The Owen Outlet Drain near the Forest Avenue Bridge.

A power plant it would be. And continues to be on the spot where the creek now lies buried. The Washtenaw County Drain Commission put out a call for bids on the Owen Creek Outlet Drain, specifying pre-cast reinforced concrete pipe, 6 feet 6 inches in diameter, for a drain that would follow "the general course of a creek, at some places being in the present creek bed and in other places in a new course."

Water and power! Power and light! To have light, we ditch and drain a creek. Or dam a river. We walk on water. We run on water. We have the power to do what we want. On the

slopes and streets of Ypsilanti, water falls and it disappears. It goes underground. We forget all about the sprawl and the spray of water, its name, its course through the watershed, its stink or its skid over rocks, the body-roll turns, and then we forget we've forgotten.

The maps of water and watersheds are ancient - rare, as recondite, as maps of the psyche. Memory fails, and fast.

It may be a miracle to walk on water. Make that wishy-washy stream look like ground. Tame it. Shut it up, shut it down. Forget it.

But, Lethe, remember, that river of forgetfulness, we cross over into hell. And then if we bury the river! There it is - we forget we've forgotten. The place may be tillable, arable, a good site for a power plant, but how will we know where we are when the water's buried and there's no map? What kind of miracle is it, if we don't know we're walking on water? ■

Note: "Buried Water" first appeared, in a slightly different form, in The Huron River; Voices from the Watershed, edited by John Knott and Keith Taylor (Univ. of Michigan Press, 2000).

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