

Walled Lake traces its roots back to 1825

Indian resort still restful haven

WALLED LAKE - Walled Lake residents have set aside this weekend to celebrate the 25th anniversary of becoming a city.

But Walled Lake's beginnings stretch further back than the year 1954.

It all began in June 1825, when Walter Hewitt moved from New York and built a log cabin in the area while his family stayed in Farmington. Once the cabin was completed, on what was later known as the Sidney Case farm, he returned for his family.

Hewitt explored the north side of the lake and discovered the Indian trail where the Pottawattomies traveled from the north and west from Detroit.

Walled Lake was a favorite resort for the Indians, some of whom lived there permanently on the west side of the lake. A field was cleared and was used as a camping ground for as many as 500 members of a tribe at one time.

Bela Armstrong, a New Yorker and a soldier from the War of 1812, was Walled Lake's second settler. He settled in 1826 on the land which was more recently known as the farm of Glen Buffmyer.

Dying the following year, Armstrong's was the first recorded death in the village. His widow and family remained in possession of the farm as late as 1834 when a new burial ground was established on the farm and his body was transferred to it.

Another soldier from the War of 1812, Cornelius Austin, settled in the colony in 1829, Austin, a native of New Jersey, but former resident of Indiana, lived near the Sidney Case and Tenny properties for about one year.

For the next 50 years, Austin lived near the south side of the lake. It is recorded that during this time, he saw as many as 500 Indians on the ground and was a witness to their dances, orgies and the famous Green Corn Dance. The Green Corn Dance, celebrated in the fall, was done to express their gratitude for bountiful harvests, the preservation of their lives and appreciation of the blessings of the expiring year. Austin is known to have said of the Indians, "for neighbors, you could have none better."

In 1830, Jesse Tuttle settled in the heart of the village, after moving from Pennsylvania. The land he settled is still known as the Tuttle Homestead.

Tuttle built a log house on the site, which later was changed to a tavern to serve the needs of the Indians, settlers and travelers.

The village's first trading post was opened in 1830 by two men, Prentice and King, both of

Maine. Indians supplied venison, berries, moccasins and fish to the settlers in return for salt, potatoes, flour, pork and bread.

Prentice and King consulted the Indian chief and offered to buy his daughters. They were not for sale, said the chief.

About two weeks later, Dawn and Wild Flower entered the trading post carrying food for Prentice and King -- the Indian tradition of announcing an engagement. The two couples were then married and when the Indians moved further west in 1833, the two couples joined them.

As the Indians were preparing to leave, the chief asked Austin to build a fence around the Indian burial ground in exchange for a horse. But the chief didn't produce the horse and the fence was never built.

Education became available to the settlers during the winter of 1833-1834 in a rudely constructed oak shake building manufactured by Lyman Hathorne. Built on the corner near the old Thompson residence and the cemetery, Mrs. Fanny Tuttle served as the teacher. The school was burned in 1836 and a new one was built near the center of town by James Moore.

William R. Adams built the first general store in the village near the Buffmyer residence in 1833 and became known as the first regular merchant. The store was located near the cemetery, which still stands, and made a supply of groceries, dry goods and wet goods available. Adams is said to have sold more whisky than groceries, though the whisky was "plenteously diluted with the beautiful blue water of the lake."

Soon, a rival grocery store was opened across from Tuttle residence and was operated by William Deuel. But Deuel was soon bought out by Benjamin Brown, a leader in the community. Brown built a new store on the corner of Main Street and Pontiac Road and remained in business for many years.

For years, Brown was a Justice of the Peace and any law suits were heard before him. He also served as a member of the lower House, kept the post office his store and pulled teeth as favors to the settlers.

Adjacent to the village was the farm of Hiram Barritt who was a prominent man in the politics of the county and state. "Squire Barritt," as he was known, served as the district's delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Ann Arbor in 1836. Barritt voted to accept the terms of statehood offered by the Congress, which were later rejected by the State Legislature of 1835. He also represented his district in the State Legislature in 1845 and was director of the Oakland County Agricultural Society in 1838.

During 1833, the first blacksmith, carpenter, mason and cooper came. The first cooper in Walled Lake was W. T. Banks, who built the first cooperage and supplied farmers with pails, buckets, washtubs and barrels for apples, cider, water, flour and rainwater. Godfrey was the name of the first blacksmith, but Walter Pennell seemed to be the most successful.

Next to Pennell's shop was a smaller shop. The sign above the door said, "John Severance.

Boots and shoes," The cobbler inside the repair shop was crippled. Being a shoemaker, with legs unequal in length, he built up a shoe for his right foot by adding layer upon layer of sole leather to the heel and sole.

Near Penwell's shop was the hardware store. Behind on Liberty Street was Dr. James Hoyt's office in an apothecary shop. The building was 15 by 20-feet and the doctor served as his own druggist. A large assortment white bottles with black labels lined the walls and contained cures with the names printed in Latin.

Dr. James M. Hoyt settled In Commerce in 1839 after graduating from Geneva Medical College In New York. Two years later, he settled In Walled Lake. It Is recorded that "there is no citizen of this village community who was esteemed more highly as a man and physician." The doctor supplied his own medicines. When he was unable to obtain the medicines, he was compelled to seek domestic remedies. For quinine he made a tea from poplar and ironwood bark; for calomel, he made an extract from butternut bark; for astringents, he made a decoction from the inner bark of the white and yellow oak; for nervine, he used the root of the Lady slipper; and for opium he used assafoetida.

The physician was a prominent man In the county and leading citizen of the village community. He served as supervisor of the township, township clerk, school inspector and state Senator. The Sixth Senatorial District, largely Republican, elected him, a lifelong Democrat, on his merit as a state Senator. Dr. Hoyt was chairman of the committee on asylums In the Senate.

Dr. Erwin A. Chapman was the successor of Dr. Hoyt. A member of the County and State Medical Association of the American Medical Association, he was also associated with the Northville State Savings Bank, of which he was vice president at the time of his death.

In 1840, Harmon Pettibone erected a large frame building in the village and dubbed it the "Pioneer Inn." Peabody became owner of the Inn in 1872 and changed the name to the "Peabody House." He advertised "hotel and summer resort; boats and fishing tackle; board reasonable."

To the east of the hotel was the home of D.M. Tyler, who served as the village's only stone and brick mason.

The community's first "pettifogger," neither trained or admitted to law, but a practitioner anyway, was Joseph G. Farr. Farr practiced in the Justice Courts for about 10 years before he was admitted to the Oakland County Bar in 1845.

The village was first platted by Jesse Tuttle in 1836 after he settled on the corner of Main Street and Pontiac Road. The plat of 1813 indicates the streets Tuttle named, many of which are still used today.

As the village began to grow, settlers continued to open their homes to strangers who planned on settling on the land. The new man would make a clearing, chop trees and cut logs 20 by 18 feet for a house. On "raising day" neighbors would gather to help the new family assemble their home. The standard home was 20 by 18 feet with a door and window on either side with the fireplace on one end.

During this time the staple crops were corn, oats, potatoes and wheat. Wheat was considered the money crop of the state.

The self-rake McCormick reaper appeared on the scene and was a boon to farmers everywhere, including the village. The first thresher used by the community was a one-horse treadmill thresher operated by Seeley Harger of West Bloomfield Township.

Apples became a popular crop grown by former residents of New York. The first recorded orchard in the village is said to have been planted by Eliphat Hungerford in 1831.

It is recorded that in 1815 Oakland County produced more apples than any other county in the state. The popular fruit was stored in cellars and kept until January or February, when children would eat them raw or roasted. Those who did not own cellars or did not have sufficient space for storing them would scrape out a basin or pit, fill it with apples or potatoes, pile it full and cover it with marsh grass two or three feet high. The little mounds covering the fruits and vegetables were common in the early days of the community.

While the early settlers had few foods to eat, they usually had great quantities of what was available. Mush and milk supplemented by wild berries was the supper dish and tea, coffee and sugar were luxuries. The main sweetener in those days was honey and maple syrup. The coffee, known as crust coffee, was made from wheat or rye browned, steeped, and served hot.

Between 1861 and 1873, the years of and surrounding the Civil War, were prosperous ones for farmers in the grain-growing states. The lack of labor was offset by improvements of farm machinery and inventions.

The prosperity of the farmers of Walled Lake was evidenced by their new houses, barns, tool sheds, well-bred animals and farm equipment.

Large white houses were another sign of prosperity. Owners of some of them were Matthew McCoy, Jacob Taylor, James Evans, Henry Banks, John Dolbear, John Smith, James Welfare, the Rev. Enoch Welch, Hiram Jones, Amos Bentley and Edwin Erwin.

In 1870, James D. Bateman was admitted to the bar and practiced in the village.

Walled Lake also served as the home of the Hon. Joseph B. Moore, Judge in the Supreme Court of Michigan, an attorney at law of national reputation. Moore had a "reputation for ability and learning and unswerving integrity." Hillsdale College conferred the honorary degree of bachelor of arts on Justice Moore in 1879 and the doctor of the laws degree in 1903.

In the 1870s and for many years later, the town pump stood at the intersection of Liberty and Main streets. It was at the center of the village, which boasted 40 families at the time. The pump stood on an eight-inch platform and an old tin cup was nailed to the side so passers-by, school children, the blacksmith, shoemaker, grocer and workers of the sawmill could take a drink from the cup.

Peddlers frequented the town. One such person was Charley Smart, who bartered tinware

for old rags, which he collected for the paper mill in Ypsilanti. He is said to have had a high box wagon equipped with doors on the sides that opened into compartments full of tin basins, tin pails, tin cups and tin utensils. The upper deck had an iron pail and was piled high with large gunny sacks full of rags. The rags were packed in bags that usually weighed about 25 pounds. It is reported that ♦Charley was different from most other rag peddlers; he was honest and gave weight; he was a Christian peddler.♦

After completion of the Michigan Air Line Railway through Walled Lake, many tramps appeared, begging for food and beds to sleep in. They fraternized with one another, marked the gate posts of homes where they were given ♦hand-outs♦ so the next tramp would know where to stop.

The prime cause for the lack of growth in Walled Lake, which consisted of 400 residents after 50 years, was attributed to the lack of markets for farmers to sell their goods. Detroit was a good market, but it was inaccessible as there were no roads. During the winter, farmers would attempt to travel to Detroit, if the sleighing was good. Therefore, Pontiac was the prime marketplace for Walled Lake farmers.

Then, in 1862, the Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad ran trains from Holly to Flint. In 1870, trains ran from Flint through Milford, Wixom, Novi, Wayne to Monroe, which gave access to Detroit over the Michigan Central Railway from Wayne. Since Wixom was only three miles, farmers used to haul their goods to the village where a warehouse was operated. Drovers such as Mr. Spencer bought the farmers♦ fat cattle, sheep and hogs and shipped from Wixom. The village then became a strong rival of Walled Lake because it furnished a market.

In 1883, Walled Lake became a shipping point when the Michigan Air Line of the Grand Trunk Railway System was constructed from Pontiac to Jackson and ran about a half-mile from Walled Lake. Wixom and Shelby then set up a branch warehouse at the Walled Lake station and purchased the farmers♦ produce.

A lumber yard was then opened by Robert Carnes and Stephen Gage and a partner became grocers.

In the meantime, the Eastern Michigan Asylum for the Insane was erected in Pontiac, bringing hundreds of laborers into the area. In 1877, Colonel J. Summer Rogers opened the Michigan Military Academy in Orchard Lake. By contracting with future deliveries, the academy and asylum added much to the market facilities of Walled Lake.

With the growth of industry in cities and no more farms to divide, the young boys moved to the cities for jobs.

In 1877, Walled Lake♦s population was at 400 and the center of the village consisted of the town pump, the Pioneer Inn, a general store, Mrs. Cozad♦s grist mill, a cider factory, a cooper shop, two blacksmiths, a sawmill and a Baptist and Methodist church.

By World War I, Walled Lake was at the crossroads of Michigan.

Steve Gage's Grocery Store served as the first telephone connection in Walled Lake, which had one line and one phone to be used for emergencies.

When man began to move on wheels, Walled Lake experienced its beginning as a summer resort for the white man. The Casino, a dance hall built by Judd Taylor Sr., brought in big name bands and entertainment-seekers.

In the late 1920s an amusement park was built and housing developments like Cenaqua Shores were built on the south side of the lake. Selling for about \$350, the lots were 40 and 50 feet. Summer cottages were built on the lots and now most have been replaced or refurbished to provide year-round dwellings for the approximately 4,500 residents.

In recent years, Walled Lake has not seen much change.

Many descendants of the earliest settlers of Walled Lake have remained in the city over the years which serves as an indication that they probably will for years to come.

West Oakland Press Gazette

Thursday, September 6, 1979

p. E1-E2