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From Township to City

One day in March of 1838 Moses Austin asked the first Portage settlers to meet at his home on Austin Lake to discuss the idea of becoming a separate township rather than remaining in Pavilion Township. With the exception of Vaydor Pierce and William Bishop, Austin was about the only settler in the southern portion of the township. Eli Harrison and Moses Pike both owned land in the central portion along what is now Centre Avenue. The rest of the early pioneers lived in the northern one third, their homes for the most part facing what is now Milham Avenue. A few had built their homes in Indian Fields, on tracts in Dry Prairie or on what is now Angling Road. No doubt the majority traveled to McKee's Corners, then turned south on the most used Indian trail that is now Portage Road. Perhaps some came on horseback and others in wagons pulled by oxen or horses. Apparently all participants were in full agreement with Austin's proposal. Even his suggestion of naming the new township *Portage* had their approval.

After some discussion about the need for a separate township, the settlers drew up a request to withdraw from Pavilion Township and form their own township board under the name of Portage. This request was sent to the year old state legislature and was at once approved. In April of the same year the first township meeting was held at the home of Elijah Root, who lived near his sawmill on Portage Creek, north of the present Milham Avenue. Perhaps conditions were a bit crowded, for after electing Moses Austin chairman and Caleb Sweetland clerk they moved on to Ebenezer Stone's tavern about ten rods farther west.

After electing officers the citizens of the new township of Portage proceeded to take care of the

problems facing them. After voting to fence in the burying grounds they turned their attention to a never ending problem of early rural life, damage to property by animals. Wolves drew a bounty of five dollars each but domestic animals were also a source of destruction and annoyance to the pioneers. First of all a strict law was enacted which stipulated that all fences must be four and one half feet high with no more than four inches between the rails of the lower two and one half feet. Pathmasters were appointed as fence viewers to enforce this law, and fence viewing was also one of the duties of the overseers of roads. Elijah Root was to be poundmaster and keep stray animals in his barnyard until claimed by the owner. All boars over three months that ran at large would be forfeited to the person rounding them up. In the first six or seven years of the settlement, the pig population had multiplied very rapidly and had become a menace. There were nine pathfinders in the new township that first year but in one decade the number had increased to twenty, and in 1856 twenty-two were listed. In both 1848 and 1856 several new names appeared. Ebenezer Durkee, Francis Downey, Alonzo Bonfoey, Nathan Pike, the Bacons and the Ludingtons were listed as overseers of highways, all living in the southern half of the township. Durkee owned hundreds of acres of land and at one time served as station master and postmaster.

In spite of the increase in overseers of fences and roads, problems remained. Animals continued to stray, fences were not mended and the people in charge received many complaints. In 1842 and again in 1847 each farmer was given a brand and directed by law to brand all of his animals, a requirement ignored by some of the

farmers. About forty-two different brands were assigned to the farmers to be used on the animals' ears. By 1884 Charles Beckley was poundmaster and a busy time he must have had. One year D. C. Pierce had five black hogs invade his property. He would not turn them over to the pound until he collected twenty-five cents a piece for keeping them. About the same time Mary Cox had five heifers and two cows trample down her fields and she was quite bitter about the incident. She demanded recompense or she would keep a cow. That same year some thirty sheep and five lambs broke into an enclosure on R.B. Watson's farm. Records indicate that every type of animal strayed including bulls, horses, colts, oxen, sows, steers and dozens of pigs. Wolves also remained a problem with the bounty being raised to fifteen dollars a scalp in 1851.

Sometimes the fence viewers posted the names of the farmers whose fences were in bad repair and they were then threatened with court action. Apparently the farmers paid their fines and perhaps repaired their fences because records do not indicate their appearance before the judge, or constable, as he was called. Elijah Root almost went to court in 1850 because he had not paid the fifty dollars assessed him for that portion of the bridge across Portage Creek which crossed his land. Apparently part of the bridge was not on his property and paid for by the township; the other part crossed his land and he was charged for that section. No doubt to avoid trouble, he paid.

During these early years the township board, consisting of supervisor, clerk and treasurer, met only once a year in April. At that time the citizens of Portage met with them and voiced their complaints, demanded new laws or disagreed about the taxes they were obliged to pay. In 1857 the tax assessment for both township and county had reached \$2,167.13 and some thought this excessive. By this time with the exception of the marsh lands and some wood lots, most of the land had been turned into productive farms by permanent settlers. Fences were still a problem and animals were still escaping. In 1856 a petition had been presented to the road commissioners complaining about the very poor condition of the roads and demanding that something be done to improve them. The complaints concerned chiefly the marshy places which caused wagons and horses to bog down. The road commissioners were appointed by the township board and they, in turn, appointed the overseers of roads. The job of the overseers was to see that fences were kept in good repair and that farmers kept the section of road passing their property in acceptable condition. There were two justices of the peace whose duty was to arbitrate when necessary.

School inspectors, overseers of the poor and constables were other appointive offices. Old

records indicate that for three decades Daniel Cahill, Rossiter Howard, Vaydor Pierce, Ezra Carpenter, Harvey Booth and Elijah Root were never without a township office and often held two offices during the same year. Moses Austin, Martin Lathrop, Stephen Howard, Samuel Crooks and Ebenezer Durkee were all active in politics, and Caleb Sweetland was a school inspector as long as he remained in Portage.

The only year before the Civil War in which a special meeting of the township board was called was 1849. In May of that year Isaac Brooks received the resignation of the two road commissioners, Rossiter Howard and Isaac Chaffee. James Campbell and Charles Cutler, who were fairly new settlers, were selected at the meeting to take their places and were required to appoint all new fence viewers and road overseers. The unusual length of the meeting suggests that there were a number of disagreements. That same year a census of children counted 174 children between ages four and eighteen, and Portage Township received \$57.42 of Primary School Fund money for four school districts. Just one year later in 1850 there were 239 children of school age and \$130.33 was received from the Primary School Fund for six school districts. That year the school inspectors determined boundaries for the school districts. All through the years the township board voted money for the maintenance of the eastern and western graveyards, now known as Indian Fields and Dry Prairie Cemeteries, respectively. Every year a citizen was appointed as sexton and he was responsible for keeping the graveyard fences in repair.

During the Civil War there was a series of extra meetings of the township board. One was called to raise money for the United States government for war purposes. Another meeting was held to consider the still existing problems of fences and escaped animals. The commissioners of highways became poundmasters. They were to receive twenty-five cents for each hog impounded plus twelve and one half cents per head for feed. If the animals were not claimed within twenty-four hours, public notice in writing was to be posted in three places. After ten days the poundmaster could sell the animals and claim his fee, with any money remaining to be paid to the lawful owner.

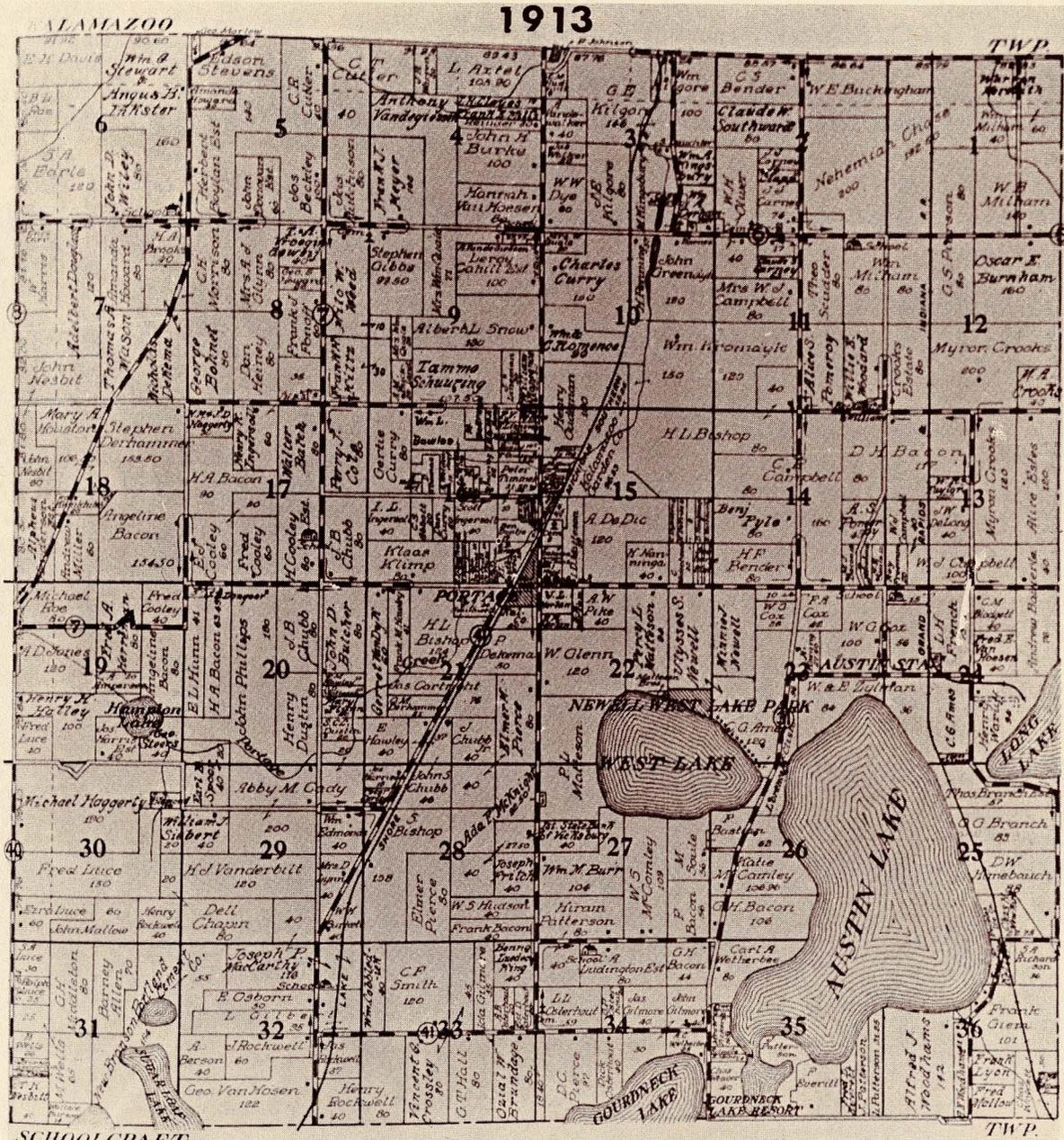
In 1864 another special meeting was held to discuss the desirability of having the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad pass through Portage. After an additional meeting to discuss the proposition, it was approved. In 1866 a meeting was held to discuss the sale of \$10,000 in railroad bonds to underwrite the project which was approved.

During the next decade, 1865-1875, there were very few new problems brought up before the township board by the citizens. In 1874 the

number of overseers of highways was increased to twenty-eight. Only Nathan Pike, John Woodard, George Middleton and John Hawkins remained from earlier lists, but Harvey Cooley and Dwight Pierce, whose fathers had served as township officials, were now active in politics. Many other new names appeared, including Ira Matteson, Sam Crooks and the Kilgores, who were all early settlers and had moved frequently from one location in the township to another. Once again in 1883 there was an increase in the number of overseers to thirty. Both Julius Matteson and William Kilgore replaced their fathers and only Stephen Howard, William Milham and Ebenezer Pike remained of the pioneers. By this time taxes

had again increased and a new law concerning roads had been passed. By keeping the road near his property scraped and in reasonable repair a farm owner could work off part of his taxes. Allen Milham relates that his father purchased a horse drawn road scraper when they became available to use on the road in front of the Milham Farm. When he was not using it he rented it to other farmers.

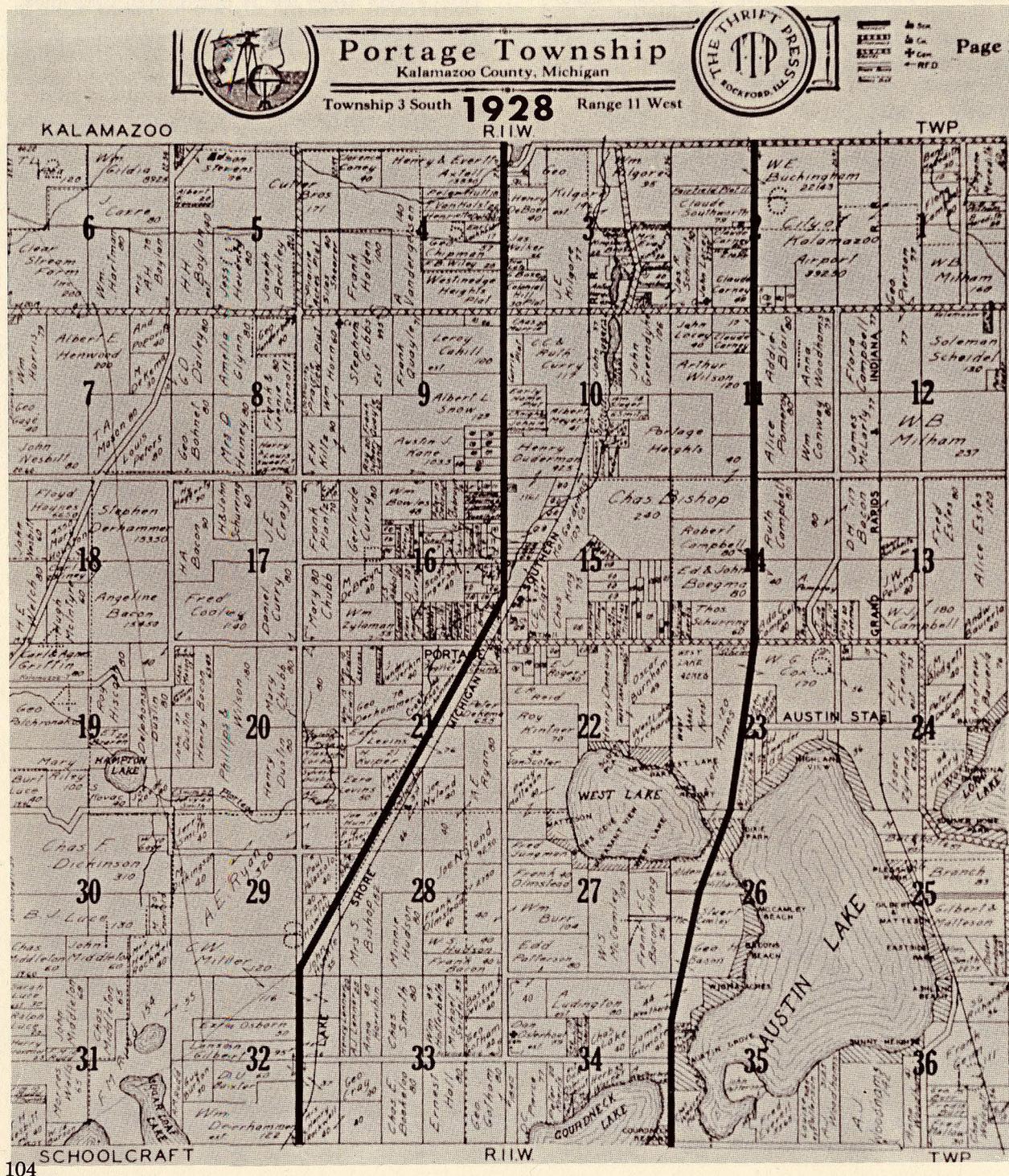
The township records from 1874 to 1921 are not available. No one in office today has any recollection of them. With the minutes beginning again in 1921 many changes are apparent from forty-seven years earlier. There is no mention of straying animals or wolves. No doubt more secure fences



had taken the place of split rail or board fences, and wolves no longer roamed in the remaining wood lots and wooded areas. The names of the township board members were new and there were many more requests from property owners often involving the graveling of roads. The road commissioners now received four dollars a day while working. Most of the meetings were held in the Town Hall, which was located on Centre Avenue near the present Masonic Lodge. Special meetings

were requested by developers of new plats and these meetings were usually in the afternoon. The three member board apparently went to inspect the plat and the road through it. In 1921 three plats were accepted and one refused. That year a special meeting was called to approve the purchase of an adding machine for \$200.

The following year, 1922, was much the same as far as the approval of new plats was concerned, but gravel for roads became a real problem. The



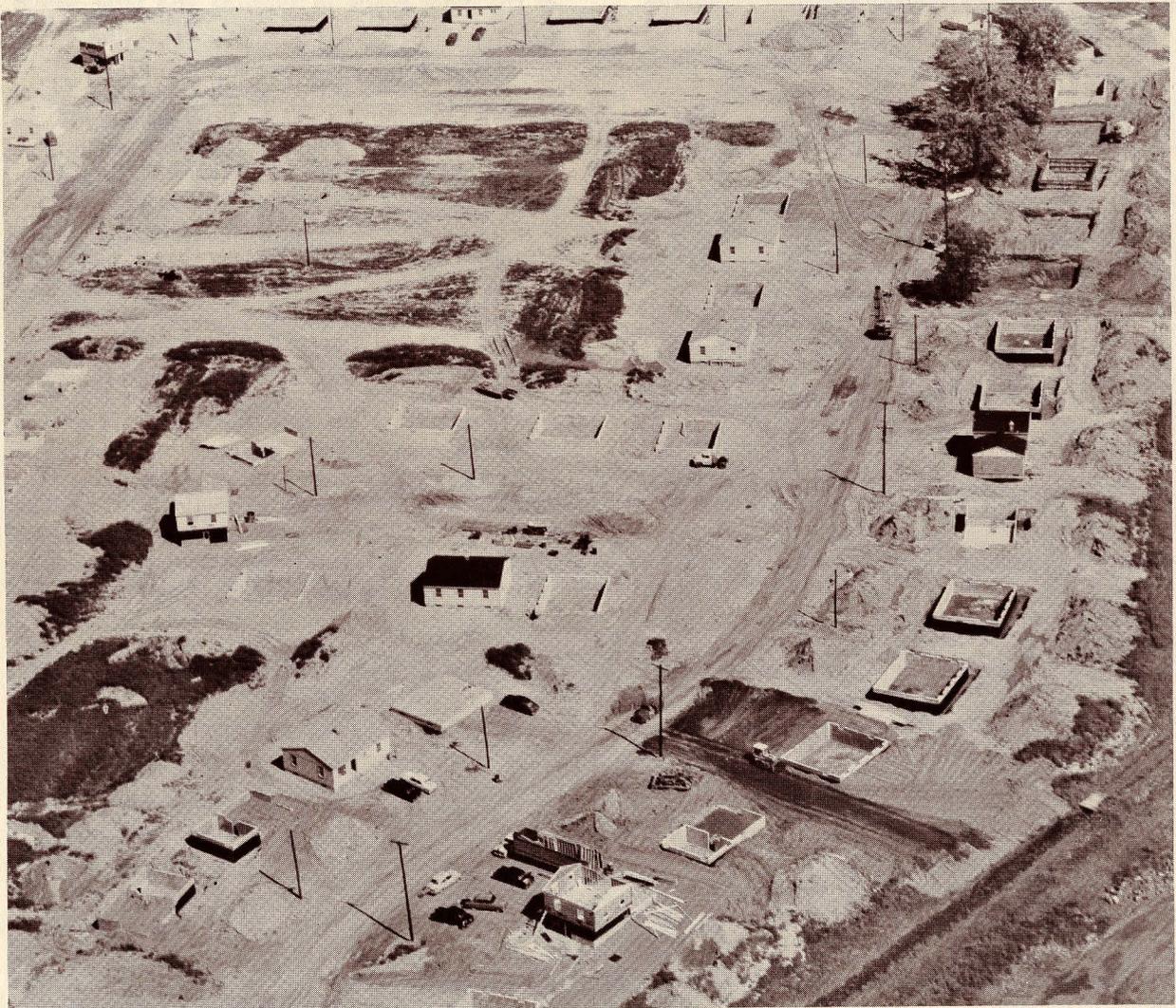
minutes state that no gravel was to be hauled from township owned pits without payment for each load. The highway fund was increased to \$3,500. The poor fund did not need money that year even though money from it was used to pay the taxes on three properties, two of them belonging to widows. After much discussion Dan Puglise received permission to operate a poolroom opposite the depot. The board stipulated that it would close at 11:00 PM; no one under eighteen years would be admitted; and no gambling, no intoxicating liquor and no profane language would be allowed. Kilgore Farms was voted out of Portage Township School District No. 2 into Kalamazoo Township Fractional School District No.6. Also in 1922 the township for the first time had to spend seventy-five dollars for a crop report required by the federal government.

In the following three years, 1924-1926, numerous plats were developed in the vicinity of the lakes. Rarely were they accepted at the first

viewing. Usually the road required more gravel or a culvert added; perhaps a tree needed to be removed or the road widened. Both Schuring & Linneman and Harm & John Schuring, Jr. had several plats accepted during these years. During the same period a law was passed that all dance halls, poolrooms and soft drink parlors needed licenses to operate. Eighteen licenses were granted in all. It was also voted that no dance halls be allowed to operate between 12:00 PM Saturday and 12:00 PM Sunday. Although the requirement for a soft drink license was soon rescinded, a liquor license law took its place; and today licensing of taverns, pubs and all establishments selling alcoholic beverages is still controlled by local government.

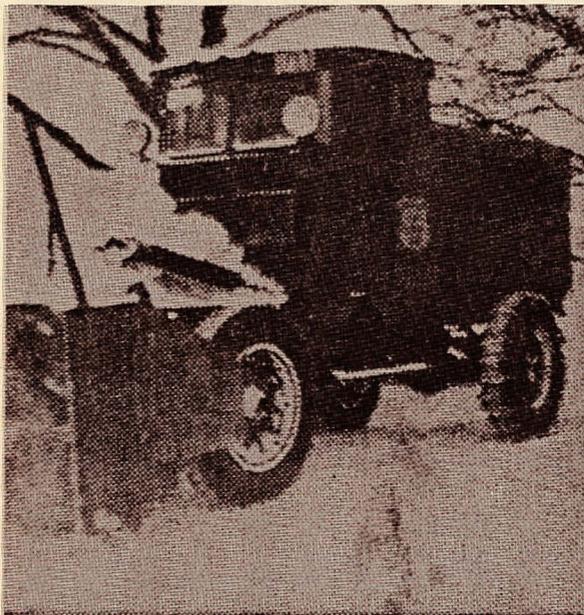
In 1929 money from the poor fund was used for the first time in several years when two widows received assistance to pay their grocery and doctor bills. Additional plats were developed and more road complaints were voiced by the citizens.

Typical plat development of Portage farmland.



Discussions were held to consider buying a gravel truck to help the road commissioners do a better job of filling in the many marshy areas. However, before any decision was made, the Town Hall was completely destroyed by fire along with nine voting booths and five ballot boxes. Unfortunately, insurance on the building had been allowed to lapse. The need for a new location in which to conduct township business led to discussions with Masonic Lodge members who had previously bought the old Grange Hall but were in the process of planning a new building. For \$3,000 in total the Lodge offered to lease the lower floor of the new building to the township for a period of ten years. When this offer was rejected, another followed of a ninety-nine year lease on the first floor if the township would pay one third of the cost of the new building which amounted to \$3,300. This offer was approved by the voters in a millage election.

During this same year, 1929, Consumers Power received permission to lay gas mains in all public highways, streets and alleys so that natural gas could be supplied to Portage citizens. This was also a year of record snowfall in Michigan and to keep roads open the township paid well over \$500 for snow plowing and also decided to order more snow fences. Cars were now using the roads instead of horse drawn sleighs, and cars did get stuck in snow drifts.



COOLING THOUGHT . . .
This is a snow plow (1936 variety) used on Westnedge during a severe snowstorm.

In 1930 the township board agreed to pay for one third of the insurance on the new Masonic Lodge, one third of repair bills and all the electricity and janitor service costs incurred by the township. The same year \$6,000 was budgeted for highways which included \$500 for snow removal. An extra two mills were voted to take care of the cemeteries and for the poor fund. The Great Depression had begun and this amount was later increased to two and one half mills. Several meetings were held on the problem of the poor and suggestions made to find work for the unemployed at one dollar a day. Only road work and wood cutting seemed to be available.

During the 1920's and into the 1930's Guy Dailey, who owned the Isaac Brooks' farm at Milham Avenue and Angling Road, was the township supervisor and William J. Campbell usually held the office of clerk or treasurer. Both men were concerned about the problems of rising road maintenance costs and providing for the poor. An agreement was reached with the county that the county road commission would assume responsibility for maintenance of thirty-five miles of the older roads in Portage and later would include the other main roads on a fee basis. However, roads in new plats still had to be approved by the township and these often failed to meet the requirements set up by the board. In 1932 the problem of aid for the poor became so acute that the board met with the four local grocers, Wolbers, Dykstra, Adams and Spencer, to ask that they stock government food. They all agreed to cooperate as long as other items would be purchased from their stores, and from then on the poor were paid in food rather than money. In spite of this, in 1933 the township had to borrow money to carry on its welfare work.

Because of the tight budget one of the first actions taken by the new board in 1934 was to reduce salaries of board members from \$2.50 to \$2.00 per meeting. Salaries of road commissioners were cut from \$4.50 to \$4.00 per day worked. The board also voted to participate in a county-wide program of relief for the poor and approved an initial amount of \$6,000 for the county relief fund. Later that year the contribution was increased by \$600. In spite of the hard times several beer and liquor licenses were approved. New plats continued to be developed but developers had to pay an eight dollar fee to have the board inspect the plat. Major roads were now the responsibility of the county road commissioners so the board sold all snow fences.

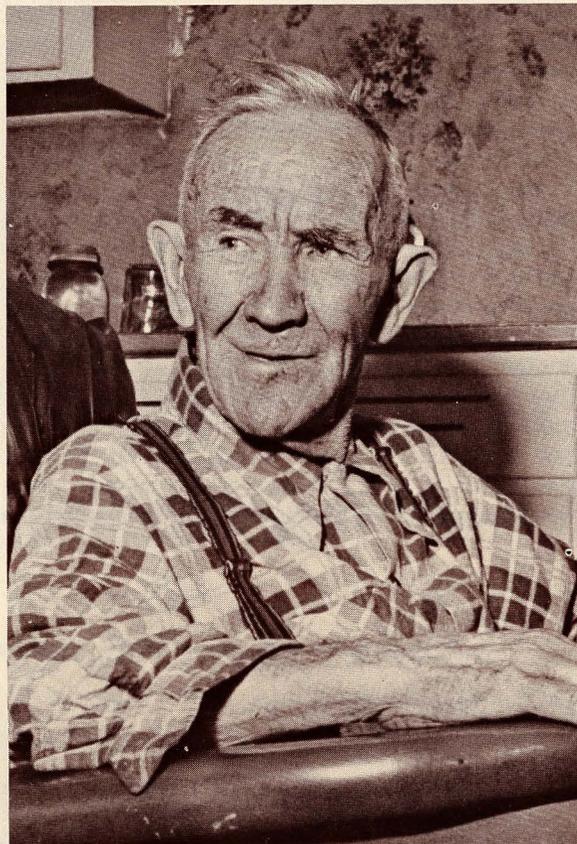
In 1936 Stuart McCamley became township supervisor, a position he held for twenty years until he was seventy-nine years old. Albert Snow was again justice of the peace along with John Visscher, elected for the first time. Most of the other officials were newcomers. Every year new

plats were approved and many beer and liquor licenses renewed.

In 1940 two permanent caretakers were hired for the cemeteries and the state highway department was asked to install traffic lights at Carpenters Corners and at Portage Road and Milham Avenue. Discussions began on purchasing fire extinguishers and other fire equipment for the township. In October the board went to Detroit to look at fire fighting equipment and in November bids were opened for a fire truck. The low bid from Helms Motor Sales of Vicksburg was accepted. In 1941 the fire station was built on Westnedge Avenue and Ernest Hall, who was caretaker of Portage Central Cemetery, became the fire chief. He held this position for only one year and in 1942 Jacob Mein was appointed chief with a staff of several volunteers. Operating procedures for the voluntary system were to be determined by the chief and he was also responsible for keeping the cemetery watered and mowed. His home was furnished by the township, including all utilities. Jake Mein, who is still Portage fire chief, is the grandson of Ben Kannegieter, one of the first celery growers in Portage. Koert Kuiper, son of another early celery grower, was assistant fire chief and his job was to relieve the chief of his duties for fifty hours each month. Today there are three fire stations, several trucks and other equipment, and twenty-two regular fireman with thirty-one volunteers. A new fire station is currently under construction on Oakland Drive just south of Milham Avenue.

While the board was determining rules and regulations for the first fire station, the members were also discussing the need for township zoning. A special election was held in July, 1941 and the citizens approved the concept of zoning by a vote

of 177 to 31. A planning board was appointed and in December its zoning plan was accepted. The following year there were so many plats up for approval and others in the process of being developed that the board felt some new measures



Stuart McCamley was active in local affairs throughout his lifetime. McCamley Field, Portage Schools' athletic complex, was named in his honor.

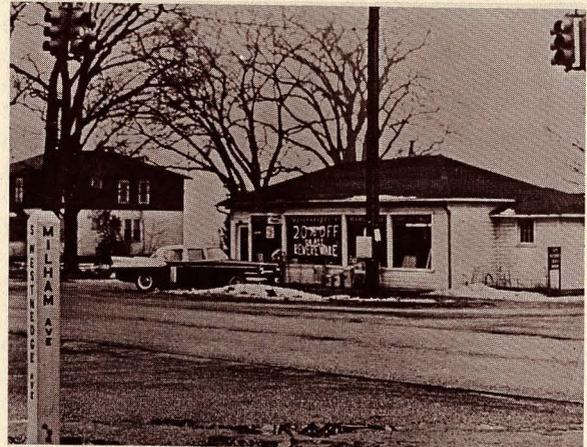
One of Portage's four cemeteries.



must be taken. One problem concerned naming the new streets, another the lack of street signs. Adequate lighting and traffic signals were also lacking. Portage was beginning to experience a phenomenal growth rate that would become even more dramatic in a few more years.

At one of its meetings in the summer of 1942, the board decided to buy posts and put up street signs. Before the posts were erected, a committee was appointed to make changes in the names of several streets. At the June 30, 1942 meeting a contract was made with Portage Concrete Company for the purchase of 250 posts at \$1.90 each. Stuart McCamley and Egbert DeVries were in charge of determining locations for the posts and having them erected. On August 6 of the same year a special meeting was held to discuss with a group of celery farmers the flooding of their celery lands because of the Old Mill Dam. In September another meeting was held about the Pratt Dam that was flooding some land. At both meetings motions were made to investigate the flooding and suggestions were offered on what to do about the dams. It is not known which street names were changed or what action was taken about the

flooding. Once again the minutes of the township board come to an abrupt halt and their whereabouts is unknown. By this time the board had



Traffic light at Milham and Westnedge (Carpenter's Corners) was one of Portage's first installed about 1940. This view looks toward future Southland Mall. Pictured is Spangler Hardware.

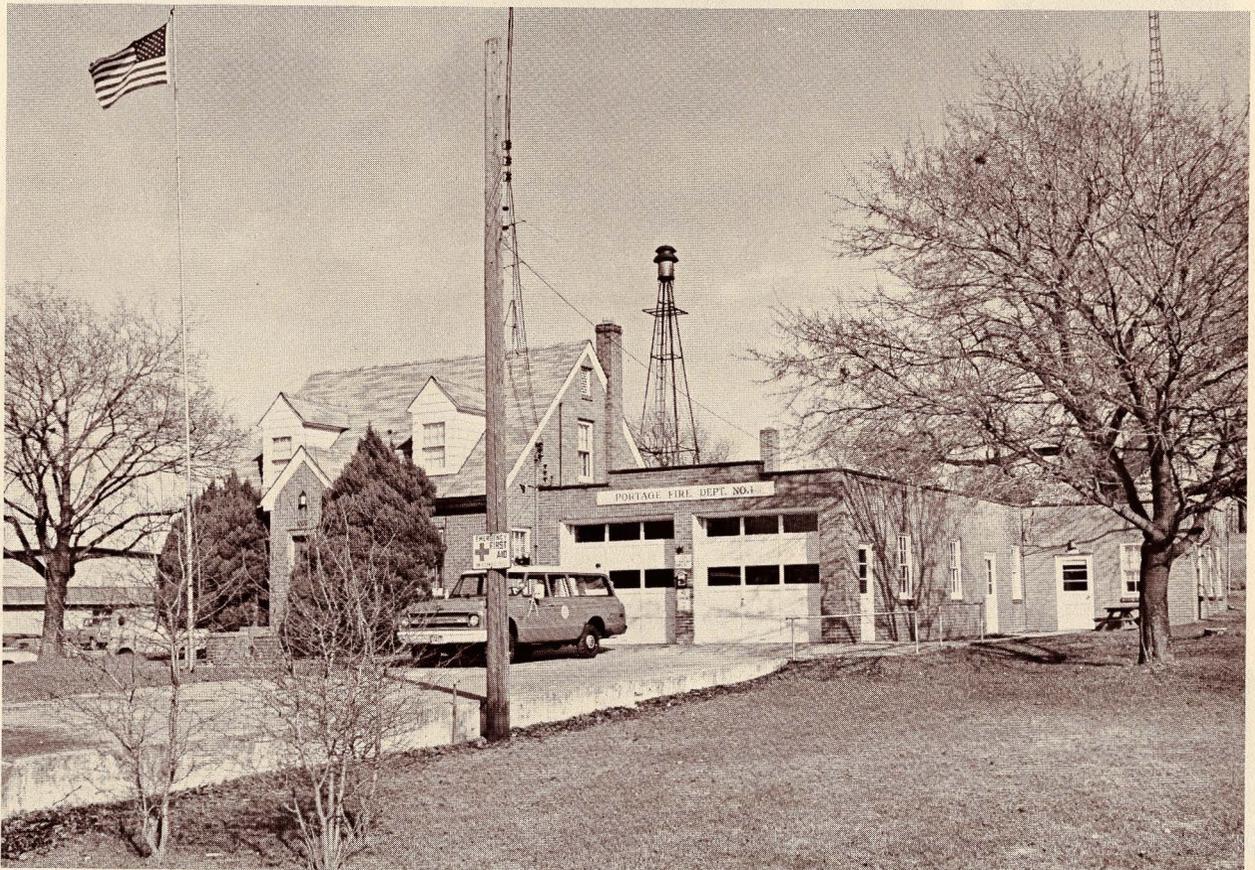
1955 picture shows two of the fire department's three pumpers with several Portage firemen.





City officials and "Sarge" with fire department pumper. From left: Chief Jake Mein, Mayor Tony Lemmer, Counselman John Schuring, City Manager David Firestone, and firefighter Billy Channells.

Portage Fire Station No. 1 built in 1941.





Portage school bus drivers receive first aid training from firemen.

Oakland Drive fire station under construction.

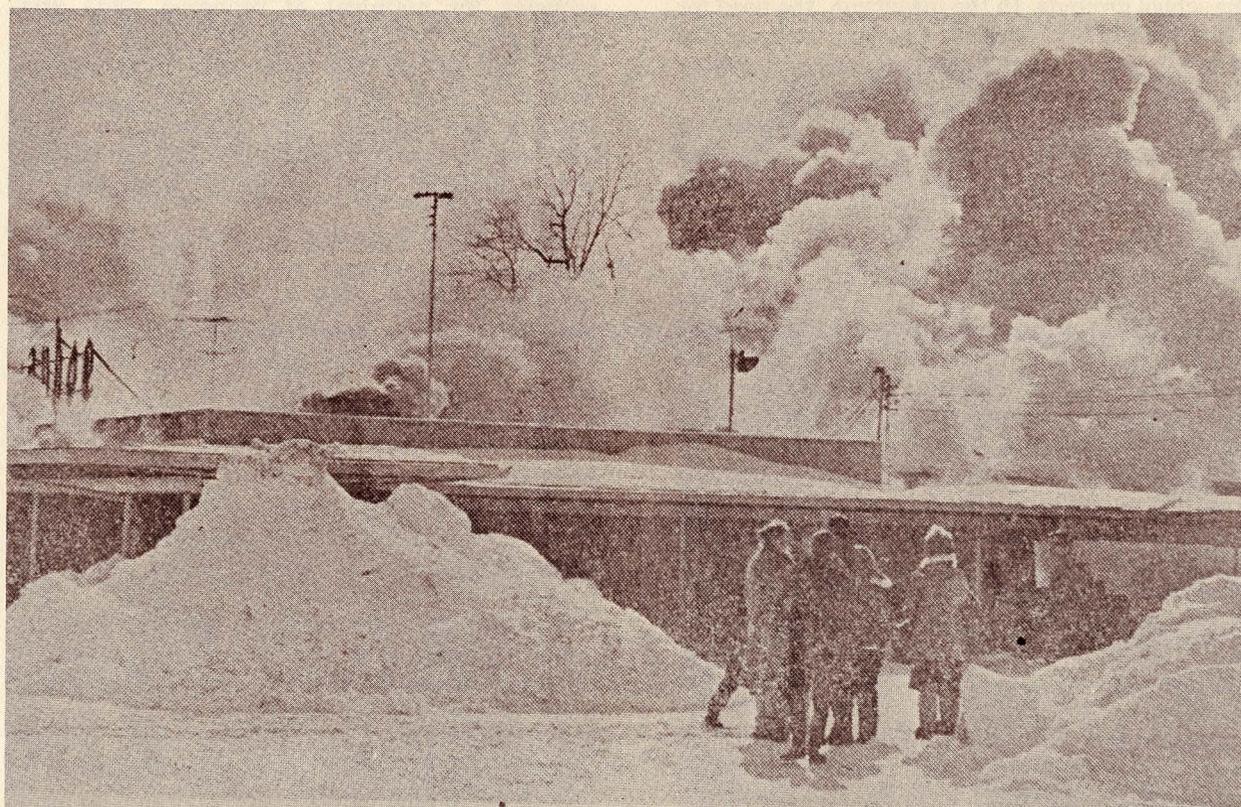


been increased to six members, i.e. supervisor, clerk, treasurer and three trustees.

After a gap from 1942 to 1956 township minutes indicate that the six members of the board were confronted with essentially the same problems, some of which had multiplied. After many years of service to the community, Stuart McCamley was defeated in the Republican primary of 1957 by John Plantefaber, who won the office of supervisor in the April election. The rapid growth of Portage had begun and would gain momentum in the years to follow, effecting great change in Portage life. One of the first things Plantefaber did was to declare that the board would meet regularly on the first and third Monday of each month. Meetings would be held in the fire station until a suitable location could be found for a new township hall by a committee appointed for that purpose. The lease of the Masonic Hall had expired because the township had failed to make rent payments, had let its share of the insurance lapse and had not kept the downstairs in good repair. Licenses for taverns, dance halls and liquor sales continued to be granted and a constant stream of requests for street lighting, paving and traffic signals was presented at board meetings. Roads were a never ending problem and were discussed at almost



John Plantefaber served as Portage's last township supervisor from 1958 until incorporation.



SMOKE BILLOWS UPWARD FROM FLAMING IVANHOE RESTAURANT IN PORTAGE
Firemen Battle Blaze in Subfreezing Temperature; Loss Estimated At \$250,000

every meeting. People demanded improvements and wanted paved roads instead of gravel ones that were full of potholes. Some of the local residents felt that the citizens would be willing to pay for road improvements. At one of his last meetings, McCamley remarked that the more improvements were made the heavier traffic would be. At the same time members of the audience demanded more speed signs, curve signs and signal lights.

With all these problems accumulating, Plante-faber appointed three committees, one to study an extension of fire department services, another to study the feasibility of operating a township police department and a third to see if there were a need for a building code. During this same year, 1957, a disaster unit was organized, a new zoning law passed, some roads staightened, a new system of bookkeeping instituted, an addition to the cemetery made and the benefits of Social Security adopted for township officers and employees. Cahill Farms, Incorporated became Southland Village and a portion of the property went to the township for another well site.

By 1958 with more and more people moving to Portage, traffic was a constant concern and street lighting and paving were in ever increasing demand. The superintendent of schools asked for a patrol service for the schools and also for marked crossings to be painted on the streets near the school grounds. In the meantime, the need for a township office remained under discussion. On May 27, 1958 a special election was held seeking citizen approval to build a new township hall and to acquire land for a township park. The vote was in favor of both projects. Bids for the new building were opened in December, after the Gemrich property on U.S. 131 South had been acquired for that purpose.

In January of 1959 more members were added to the traffic and safety commission. Lester Kinney, who was then chairman of the commission, faced a number of new problems. Some concerned Westnedge Avenue, which had become a four lane highway and was still the route of U.S. 131. Many recommendations were discussed to deal with the increasing traffic flow. Some of the trees very close to the highway were safety hazards and were removed; telephone poles were moved back; *No Parking* signs were erected; crosswalks were painted; speed zones were established; and more traffic signals were installed at dangerous intersections.

Portage continued to grow, requests for township services continued to increase and complaints were often aired at township meetings. Building permits for homes alone in the first five month of 1959 reached \$965,800, and property owners opposing the special assessments for street improvement, water main installation and

sewers were revealed to desire the improvements but dislike the cost. That same month the property where Loy Norrix High School now stands was annexed to Kalamazoo and John Plantefaber expressed his opposition to any other annexation of Portage Township property. Claus Schuring, one of the township trustees, said that he thought the township should incorporate but no one else on the board seemed in favor of the idea. At later meetings Schuring again voiced the same opinion but other members were not sympathetic. By June of 1959 home building permits climbed to \$1,032,800 exclusive of a permit issued for a new restaurant. Bids were opened for the new North Fire Station and an open house and dedication ceremony were held for the new township office which was complete with new furniture and office equipment. There were several rezoning requests from commercial firms wishing to build on Westnedge Avenue.

During the rest of 1959 and the following three years the various township commissions were kept busy serving the growing community. So many well fields were in operation the need was felt for a full time employee for the Water Department. Robert Frenthway, then the assistant fire chief, was hired. During the same period a consultant was hired to supply technical data to the planning board. At practically every meeting John Waroe, township engineer, reported new requests for approval of proposed plats and indicated the status of requests already in process. Throughout this time more water mains were laid; more traffic signals, stop signs and flashers were installed; more telephone poles and lines were put up; more street lighting and paving were completed; and sidewalks were laid in several areas.

There was so much business to discuss during this period that the township board often met four times a month instead of two. Special committees were appointed to study specific problems and experts were sometimes hired to make surveys or assist in setting up a building code or in planning a zoning ordinance. State help was hired to make a survey of roads and traffic conditions. The board decided to hold a special election seeking voter approval of one mill for road improvement. Other problems were being analyzed with optimism for solutions in the near future. Then the blow fell that made history.

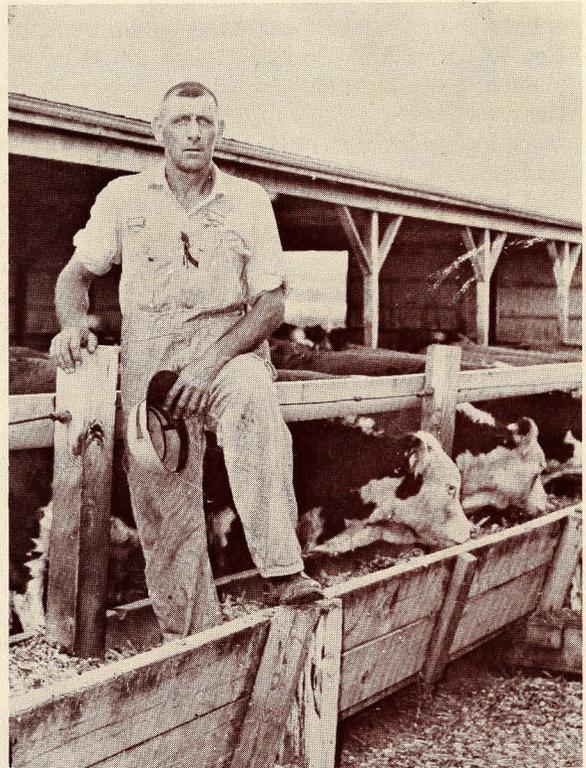
One morning in February of 1962 word came to John Plantefaber that a group of Kalamazoo citizens was seeking to annex the manufacturing plant of the Upjohn Company to the city of Kalamazoo. Whereas the Portage board usually acted with deliberation, this was one time when it sprang into action. A petition was drawn up for a vote on the incorporation of Portage as a city. While the petition was being prepared, citizens

were being drafted to circulate copies of it as soon as they were ready and secure signatures. In less than two hours 400 signatures were obtained and shortly after 12:30 P.M. the petitions were filed in the County Clerk's office.

A counter petition was soon filed by several Kalamazoo citizens and five Portage citizens seeking to bar an election to incorporate as a city. In September of 1962 the counter petition was denied by the county board of supervisors by a vote of twenty to eleven. This action was challenged in circuit court which upheld the board's decision in November of 1962. However, when Wilma Smith, township clerk, called for the special election, an injunction was filed challenging her authority to call the election. The injunction was overruled and the special election was held on February 18, 1963. An all time record number of voters turned out for the election in which 3,762 voted in favor of incorporation and 2,315 voted against it. The measure failed to pass in only Precinct One of the ten Portage precincts and 4,523 registered voters failed to cast ballots.

In the township primary held the same day, John Plantefaber again won the Republican candidacy for township supervisor and polled the largest number of votes of all candidates for the charter commission. The nine member commission went to work immediately and the charter which they drafted in many long work sessions was approved by the voters in a special election on December 16, 1963, at which time they also selected their first city council. Bernard Mein, grandson of Ben Kannegieter, who was one of the earliest Portage celery growers, became the first mayor of the city of Portage. It is interesting to note that Portage is unusual in having developed from township government to cityhood without ever having incorporated as a village.

In spite of all the lawsuits and counter lawsuits, the township board faced the usual problems during the last months of its existence. When cityhood became effective on December 31, 1963 and the new city council began to meet each Tuesday there were many old problems unresolved. In addition, the change to city status created a need for new regulations and ordinances. The city assumed responsibility for the upkeep and repair of its own streets with the exception of a few main roads still under the jurisdiction of the county road commissioners. Paul Flynn was selected as the first city manager. Professional planning consultants from Vilican-Leman & Associates, Incorporated of Southfield, Michigan developed a proposed land use plan to guide city officials. All property was reappraised by another professional firm. The water system was greatly expanded. The former township budget of one half million dollars was totally inad-



John Schuring, farmer, was active in local affairs before and after incorporation.

THE PORTAGE HERALD
CHARTER SUPPLEMENT PORTAGE, MICHIGAN NOVEMBER 21, 1963

Proposed New Charter FOR CITY OF Portage, Michigan

This 16-page section is a supplement to and part of
 the issue of The Portage Herald for November 21, 1963

Portage Charter Commission

				
<small>James A. Davenport Vice-Chairman</small>	<small>Ray DeKoen, Jr.</small>	<small>Richard James</small>	<small>Anthony H. Lemmer Secretary</small>	<small>William H. Meyer</small>
				
<small>John Plantefaber</small>	<small>Wayne Sackett</small>	<small>Robert Thomson Chairman</small>	<small>Arthur Webb</small>	

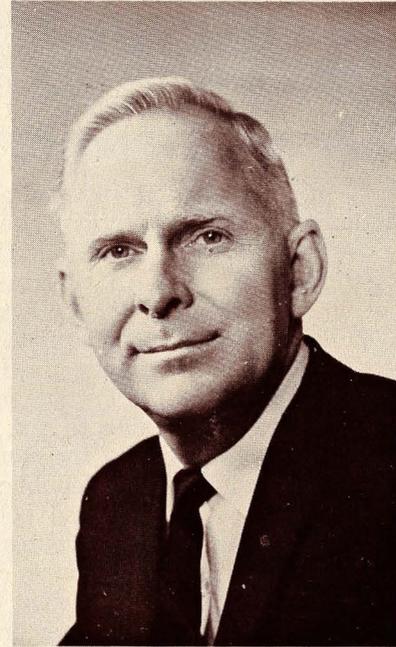
(All Charter Pictures by Bennett Studio)

equate to fund all of these additional city activities, and a rapidly growing budget resulted.

An important development for the new city was the establishment of the Portage Police Department in September, 1964, with Richard Wild as its first chief. Prior to that time, police protection had been provided to the residents of Portage Township by the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department. And, even after incorporation, a special Sheriff's Patrol of four men and two cruisers continued to provide police protection until the city was able to organize and equip its own force. The fledgling unit was first housed in one corner of City Hall and its reports were sent to the Sheriff's Department. After moving to a frame house in 1956, the department began handling its own records and operating its own communications system. Now housed in the new police and court building where a lockup is available for the first time, the Portage Police Department has grown from six men and two cruisers to a staff of forty-nine with a dozen cars. New officers receive up-to-date training at a police academy. The modern, well-equipped police force is under the leadership of George VonBehren, who became chief in 1975.

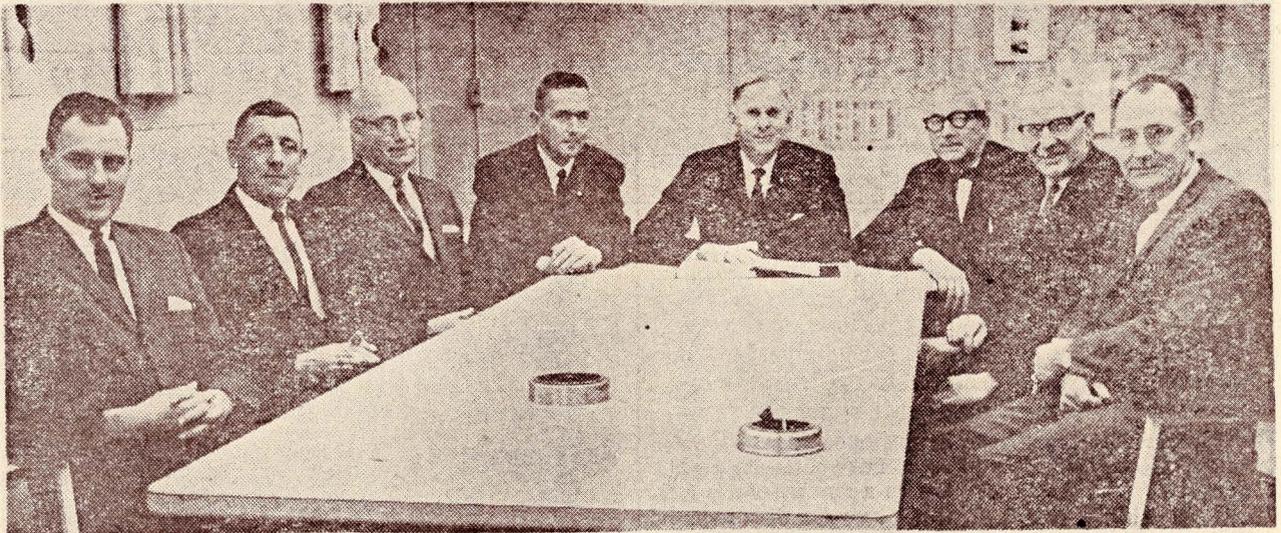
New families continued to come to Portage and demands for more services were increased. The old problems of traffic, street lighting, sewers, pavement, water, fire protection, and plat development and approval continued to come before the council. During the administrations of the first three mayors, Bernard Mein, Anthony Lem-

mer and Robert Duncan, the official business of the city was of a generally routine nature with little change except in one area. Each year the budget showed a decided increase. In many departments more staff members were needed and



Bernard "Bud" Mein, first mayor of the City of Portage.

DECEMBER 29, 1963.



FIRST CITY OFFICERS—These eight men were elected Dec. 16 to form the first administration of the City of Portage. Clockwise, they are Councilmen Jack Bartley, 29, of 6305 Avon, Michigan Bell Telephone Co. foreman; John J. Schuring, 51, of 4515 E. Centre, farmer; Okko Brouwer, 52, of 4813 Long Lake Drive, chief industrial engineer at Fuller Transmission,

and Anthony Lemmer, 38, of 1604 Osterhout, Bell Telephone lineman; Mayor Bernard Mein, 43, of 7001 S. Westnedge, housing developer; Councilmen Carroll Staffen, 49, of 1330 Osterhout, fuel distributing firm owner, and Clair Branc, 59, of 9320 S. 24th, Upjohn Co. department head, and Municipal Judge Kenneth Fricke, 45, of 5139 Merryview, attorney.



Old house at the site of the present Police-Court Building was the first home of the Portage Police.

Members of the first Portage Police Department, organized in 1965, were (front, from left) Officers Kewley, Strand, White, Coates and (back, from left) Officers Graham, McGee, Southworth and Sharp.



more appointments were made. In the current budget for 1975 expenditures exceed four million dollars including the new library. In the first issue of a newsletter to citizens, the current city manager, Donald P. Ziemke, gave a detailed account of city income and expenditures. According to LuVerne Anderson, city assessor, the state equalized valuation of Portage has increased seven per cent during 1975 to \$270,223,100. This year Anderson completed a brochure showing all city owned property in the thirty-six sections, including well sites, plats, streets, parks, fire stations, land fills and minor properties. The list is impressive and still growing though less rapidly than a few years ago. According to Lois Johnson, city clerk, the number of voting precincts has now reached nineteen which is quite a change from the original eight.

Another change for Portage was the election in November of 1973 of Betty Ongley as the first woman mayor to preside over six other council members who at present are all men. In 1975 the board of education also elected its first woman president, Gayl Werme.

Mayor Ongley made an interesting statement at the council meeting of August 12, 1975 after a letter from a citizen had been read objecting to the slogan on the welcoming signs at the city limits. She suggested that perhaps the slogan characterizing Portage might read "Crossroads of Southwestern Michigan" because both U.S. 131 and I-94 intersect within the city. This statement recalls a time long ago when the two main Indian trails formed the connecting link between the St. Joseph and Kalamazoo Rivers. The pioneers following these trails and settling in Portage were proud of their township and worked hard to improve it. In the years that followed they kept a very close bond with Kalamazoo, many of their descendants settling in the city in later years. Today some of the descendants of Kalamazoo pioneers are coming to Portage. In spite of the bitterness engendered by the events of the early sixties there is still a close relationship between the two cities. Perhaps some day they may be known as twin cities as Minneapolis and St. Paul are known. There will be no Mississippi River dividing them, only Kilgore Road, named after one of the very first Portage pioneers.

Police-Court Building completed in 1970.





Mayor Betty Lee Ongley receives joint resolution by the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives from Portage resident and State Representative Wayne B. Sackett. The resolution honored the City of Portage on its 10th anniversary, January 1, 1974.





9

Commerce, Industry and the Professions

Available historical records indicate that industry in Portage began on the northwest corner of what is now Portage Road and Milham Avenue. Known as McKee's Corners, this location boasted a blacksmith shop, a tavern, a carpenter's shop and one other business difficult to identify. Two of the businesses were owned by the McKee brothers and a third McKee had a sizeable farm on the southwest corner. This same corner was later known as Indian Fields Corners. A tavern and a blacksmith shop were basic essentials for any new settlement. The tavern keeper sheltered and supplied food for the traveler and from all accounts the old Portage Road trail was well used. There were two taverns on this trail, the other at Austin Lake. A blacksmith was an extremely welcome addition to any group of pioneers. Not only did he shoe the horses and oxen, but he sharpened the plows and the axes that were so important in the early years.

Shoeing an ox was much more difficult and time consuming than shoeing a horse. A shoe had to be made in two sections to fit the cloven hooves of the ox. The iron was somewhat thinner than for a horseshoe and the nails smaller so more nails were used. Because the ox was a huge beast, shoeing was no easy task for the blacksmith. Consequently, he charged considerably more for this job. When there were no shoeing jobs to be done the smith was kept busy making all the iron equipment needed in the log or frame houses and barns built in the 1830's and 1840's. Making fireplace cranes to hold the heavy iron pots, door latches to keep the doors firmly closed, screens and hinges for doors and barns, sledges for pounding, shovels, hoes, link chains, different types of knives and countless other tools for farmers, housewives, and carpenters, were all jobs for the blacksmith.

With harnesses, wagons and buggies, there seemed to be almost no end to the parts that could need repair. At times the blacksmith had to put new spokes into a wheel or fix the springs on the wagon box. Some of the more expensive jobs were fixing runners on sleigh or bobsled, repairing and fitting ox yokes, mending irons on a bridge and putting iron hoops around wagon wheels. For these services he received from two to four dollars. Items for which the blacksmith received less than twenty cents were mending a bucket, a hoe, a toast iron, a strap on a sled, a hinge, a brace on a wagon, a saddle, or a shovel. For four cents each, he mended a skein on a wagon or repaired a hoop. Besides all the shoeing and mending, he made numerous items to be used by carpenters. A blacksmith's account book kept in 1842 contained accounts for two carpenters with almost daily entries.

It is small wonder then that only a few years elapsed before another blacksmith along with two or three carpenters located their shops on the corner where the Southland Mall now stands. The blacksmith's name was Carpenter and the intersection of Westnedge and Milham Avenues was for years known as Carpenters Corners. Although the population had not increased greatly the pioneers who had settled were very busy at the time building homes and barns and, therefore, work for carpenters was plentiful. Some carpenters built only barns while others built both barns and houses. Harvey Booth, an early settler, built many Portage barns. John Gibbs, also an early settler, built the first barn in Portage. In a census of the late 1850's it is recorded that nine carpenters were living in Portage Township.

Eliza Root's sawmill, established in 1834, no doubt had a great deal to do with the large

amount of building going on in the township. A few of the old homes still standing in the northwest quarter of the city seem to have been built before 1850. In 1859, Stephen Howard built the first brick house in Portage on Milham Road, then known as Texas Road. It was one of the outstanding homes of the period and much planning and detail work went into its construction. All of the bricks are handmade and because there was no brickyard in the township, it is probable that a brick maker was imported expressly for this house. After the 1850's jobs for carpenters began to increase in other portions of the township. There are many homes still standing from the post Civil War period, some quite elaborate and others more modest.

Some farmers made the journey to Grand Rapids for wagon loads of plaster for their homes. Others bought their plaster from one of the many plaster haulers. Sometimes from fifteen to twenty wagon loads of plaster were seen on the Grand Rapids road in one trip. After the Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids plank road was completed in 1853, many loads of plaster found their way to Portage via that route.

A nursery established by Timothy Dunham in

1836 must have been popular with settlers. Here they could select an assortment of fruit trees and berry bushes. Although most farmers grew fruit for their own use, there is little evidence that orchards were a big business. There was one sizeable orchard between Centre Avenue and West Lake and today one fairly large orchard remains near Texas Township on the northwest side of the city. One small vineyard is still producing grapes west of Angling Road and several blueberry farms on the north side of Vanderbilt Avenue are run by the Kovach family. The soil which produced healthy corn, wheat and oats may not have been quite as good for growing fruit. Whatever the reason, grain was grown extensively and soon after the railroad began service in Portage, a grain elevator was built near the railroad station. It had several owners during the years, including the Marshan family and Porter Matteson, who sold out to the Mein family. The Meins perhaps ran the elevator longer than any other family. Many of the farmers living on the north side of the township took their grain into Kalamazoo.

Some of the smaller land owners entered into business enterprises in addition to farming. There

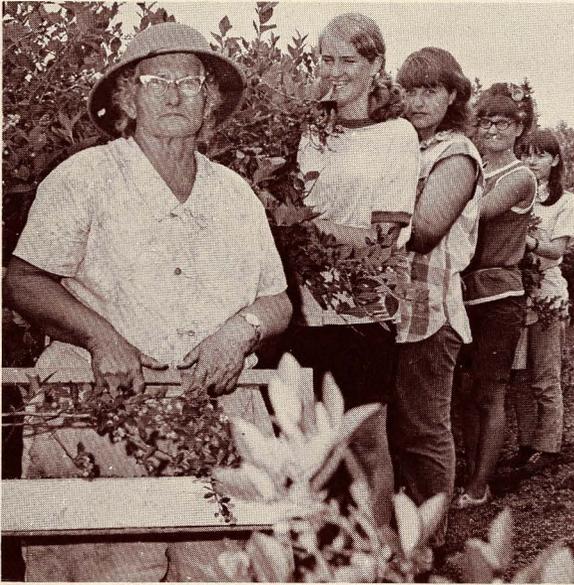
Packing grapes at Portage Center vineyard around the turn of the century.



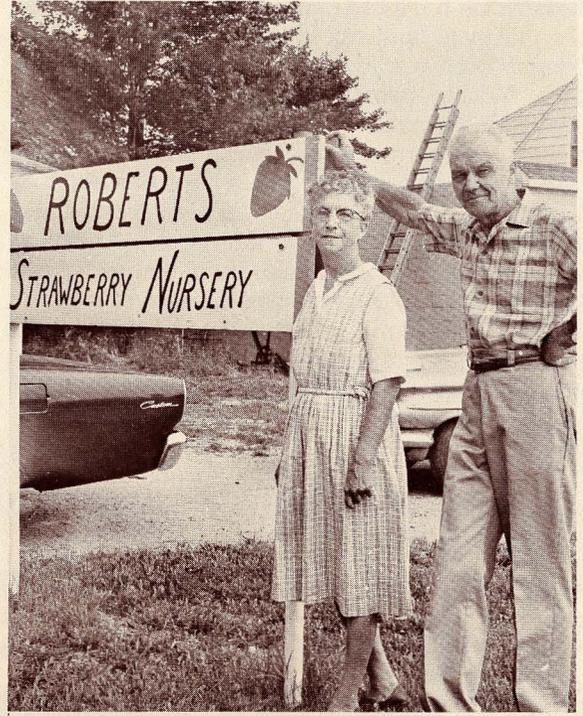
were sheep shearers, threshers, ice cutters and some settlers had large wood lots from which they cut and sold wood to schools, private families, the Grange and the Masonic Lodge. The wool from sheep was all taken to Kalamazoo, no doubt much of it going to William Cobb, a former sheep farmer

living on Portage Road in an elaborate home which is now the Beacon Club. Cobb kept his farm in Portage for several years after he went into the wool business.

While these varied business enterprises were in



Picking blueberries on the Kovach farm on Vanderbilt Road.



Processing Kovach blueberries.

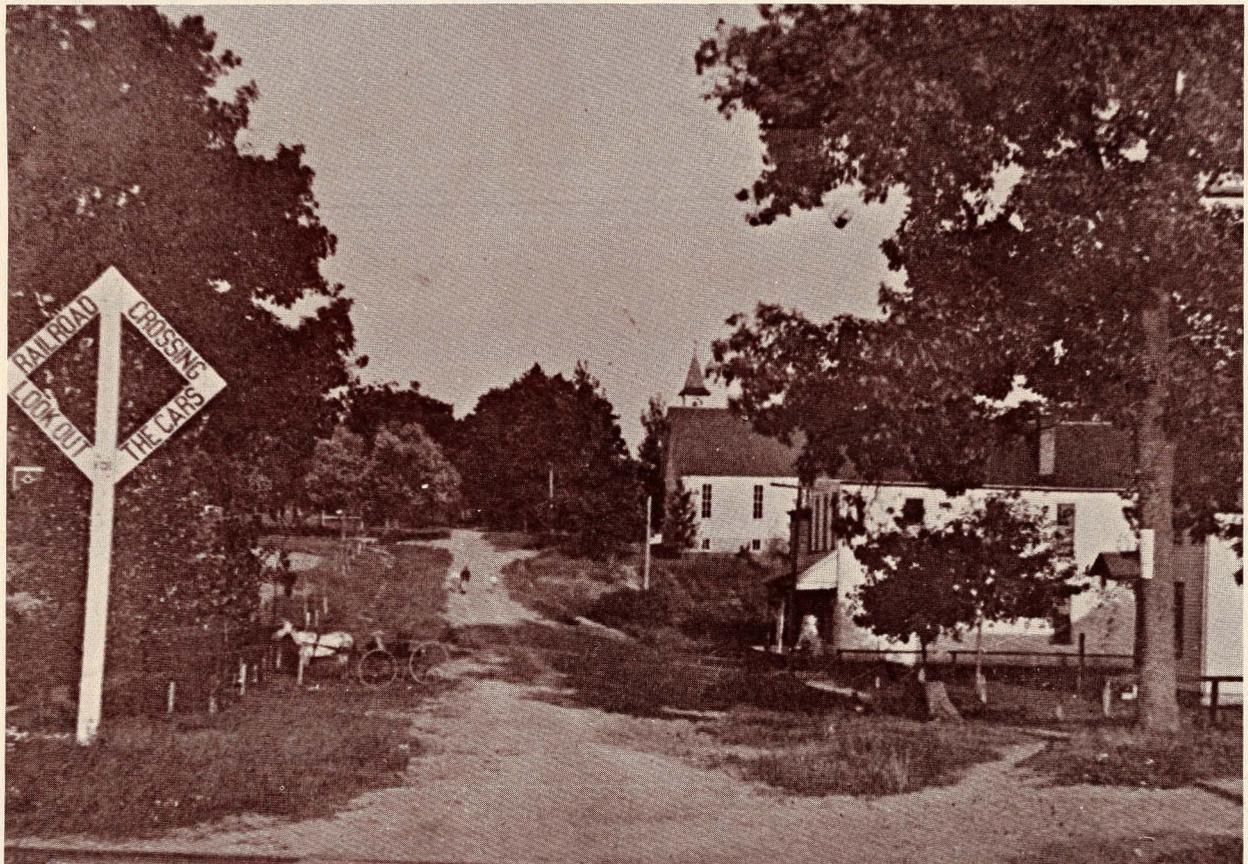
operation and carpenters were kept busy building houses, barns, woodsheds, well houses and other farm buildings, another group of settlers known as land agents was dealing in what is now called real estate. There were certain areas in Portage which changed hands with almost regular frequency. Many of the owners were well known Kalamazoo business men. According to some of the old maps and tax records, these men often bought from one fourth to a whole section at a time. Within two to four years the land was divided into smaller parcels and sold to individual owners. Two areas which changed hands almost constantly were several acres on either side of Westnedge Avenue, north of Milham Avenue and an area around Westnedge and Centre Avenues. Other properties were held from ten to fifteen years and then the owner would move to another piece of land. Some settlers owned two or three parcels of land in various sections. As has been noted before, this constant shifting about seemed to be most prevalent throughout the center of the township.

Several farms included some swampland which was useful only for grazing cattle on the driest

areas during the summer months. These swamps were thought to have little value until about the turn of the century when a group of Dutch immigrants began arriving from Kalamazoo. Many of them had seen the extensive celery farming of the Dutch who had settled in Kalamazoo. Anxious to begin on their own land but not always able to afford the price of drained marshland, they cast their eyes on the Portage marshes. With the coming of the celery farmers, business became very brisk all along Westnedge Avenue south of Milham Avenue and on both east and west Centre Avenue. Carpenters were kept more than busy building homes, celery sheds, small barns and greenhouses. Since every celery farmer owned at least one horse, the blacksmiths had plenty of work. Two general stores, a wagon shop, and a barber shop were opened at Portage Center and business was brisk.

The general store and the independent grocery have historically played an important role in the life of any growing community. Although there is no complete list available, the names of Southwell, Dykstra, Adams, Spencer, Pike, Gage and Wolbers are among the best remembered by

"Main Street" - Portage Center, ca. 1900. Pictured is Centre Avenue, looking east. On right is the Southwell home, Southwell's Portage Grocery Co. and Post Office, and Methodist Church. Horse and wagon are tied in front of Pike & Gage General Merchandise.





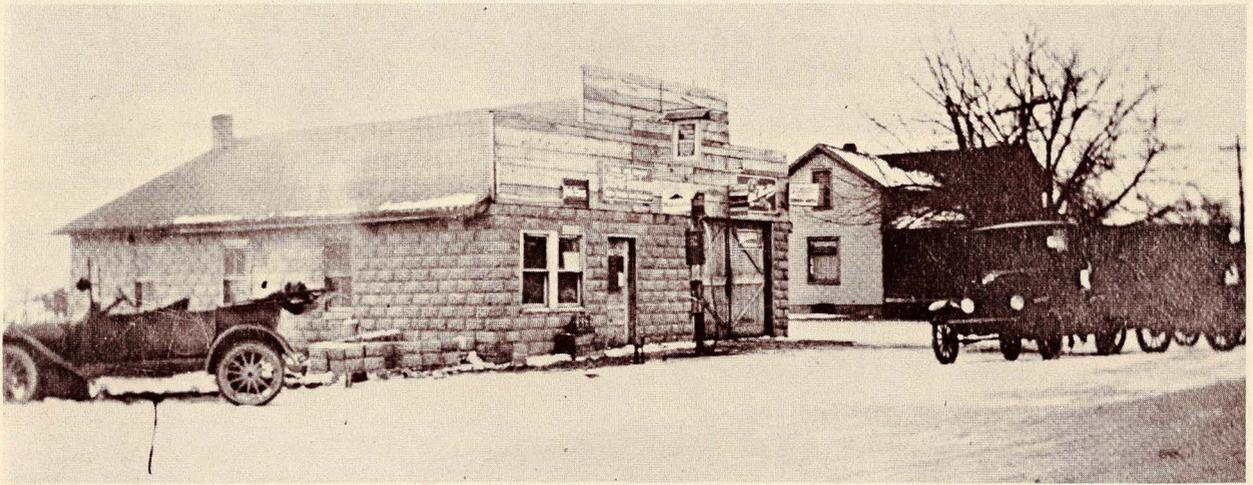
Southwell's store, ca. 1907. At one time there was a pool hall upstairs.

Postmaster F. I. Southwell in doorway.





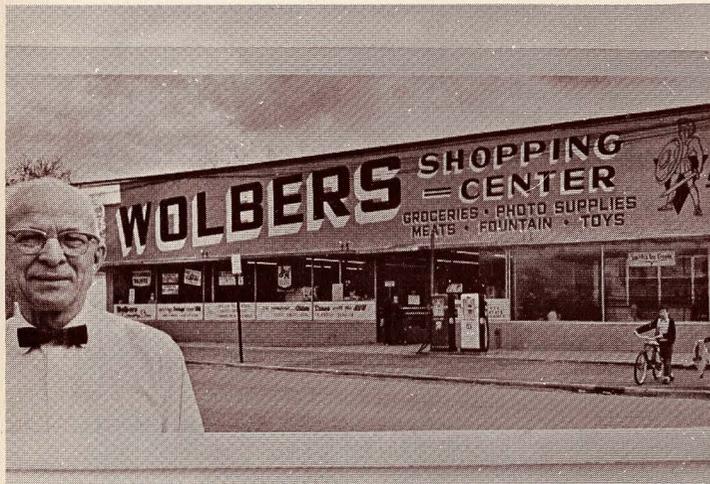
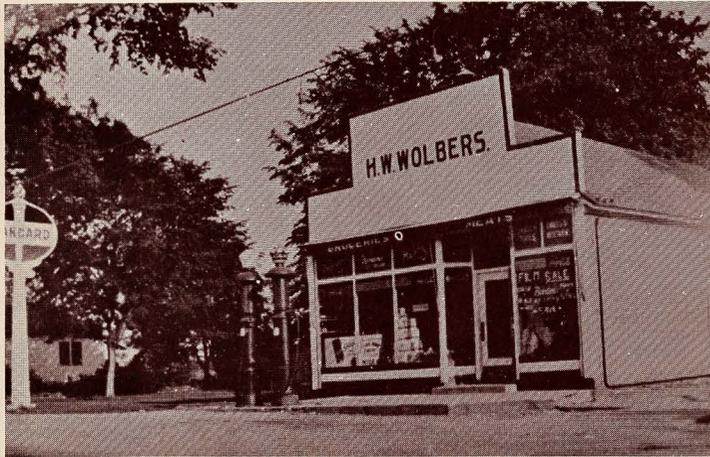
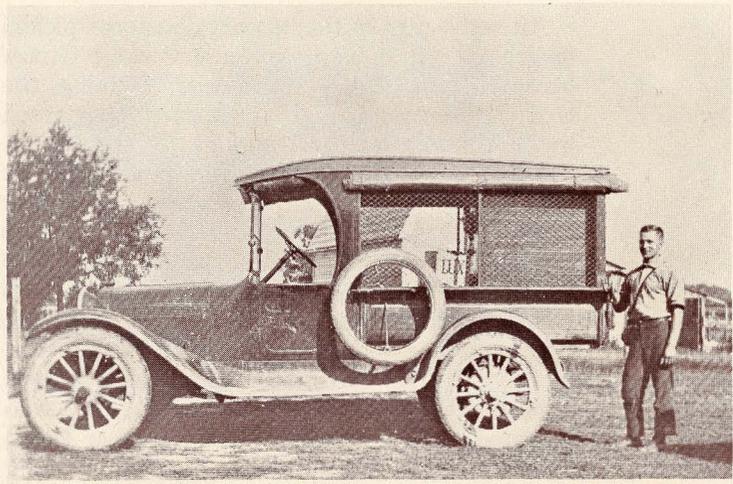
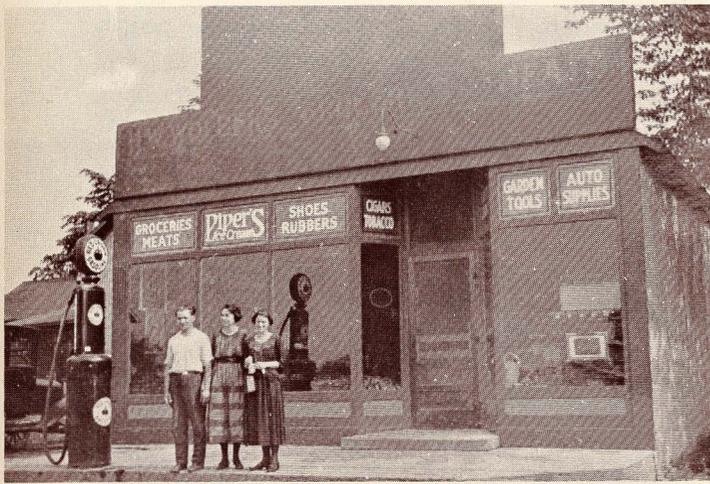
Looking east on Centre Ave. sometime before 1916 when Southwell's store burned. Smeenge's Blacksmith Shop and the Methodist Church are in the background.



Schuring's Garage, ca. 1917, on the site of the old Portage Grocery Co., now Precision Engineering, Inc. (Looking west on Centre.)



Pike and Gage General Merchandise, now Dell's TV Service. (Looking west on Centre.)



Portage citizens as family operated stores. When the Wolbers Shopping Center closed in June, 1967, it was the oldest business in Portage. Opened in 1916 as a general store selling such items as crackers from a barrel, bulk flour and button shoes, the store was operated by Etta and Henry Wolbers at the southeast corner of West-nedge and Centre Avenues. At one time, a store

nearby was owned and operated by Ebenezer Pike's son, Elmer. During the height of celery farming in Portage, Wolbers carried accounts from crop to crop with no interest charges, a service of the past but one necessary for the financial survival of the farmers and a refreshing reminder of the willingness to help one another that existed among earlier settlers.

After the turn of the century, business picked up around the railroad station at Portage Center because in the early years of celery farming, the crop was shipped to Chicago in cars refrigerated by ice cut from the various lakes in the winter. For this reason, the number of ice houses and ice cutters around the lakes increased. When ice boxes began to be used in individual homes, ice was either delivered or picked up by the farmers who owned these conveniences. Commercial fishing developed at Long Lake and some of the fishermen made their homes around the lake. Besides fishing and ice cutting, there were a number of property owners around the lakes who operated resorts. Ramona Park, Summer Home and Buckholtz Resorts were located at Long Lake. There were several smaller resorts at West Lake, including Ames, Newell and Matteson. For several years a spur of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad went to Ramona Park and it was a favorite place for outings. There was also a large dance hall there which was a popular place for

Kalamazoo, Vicksburg and Portage young people to congregate. For almost two decades they came by train or horse and buggy.

When the automobile became more common the railroad spur was abandoned but the various resorts remained popular places and proved to be good business ventures for the owners. As roads



1975 view of Centre Avenue looking east from Shaver Road. At left, Dell's TV is the site of the old Pike and Gage store and later the Portage Tavern. The building at right was Schuring's Garage, built on the site of the Portage Grocery Co.

John Smit, former partner of Smith and DeBree hardware store, was honored on his 78th birthday in 1961.



improved and the number of cars continued to increase, some owners of lake property began to build small cottages and rent them to vacationing families in the summer. Others sold lots surrounding the lakes to owners who built their own cottages. Later developers bought acreage, platted it, and built access roads to the individual sites. Once again carpenters were busy building numerous small vacation cottages for many people in Kalamazoo and surroundings. About this time the Brunson Cement Company was doing business near Sugar Loaf Lake, and the Kalamazoo Tile Company was located on Shaver Road. Both firms, no doubt, furnished materials for much local construction.

As the population of Portage continued to increase and residents bought more and more cars, many new businesses opened. Filling stations and garages replaced the blacksmiths. More schools were built. More stores and eating places began to open and some industries were established on Shaver Road. After World War II, the areas on either side of Westnedge and south of Kilgore Road began to change. The original farms had been divided into smaller holdings, but at this time real estate developers moved in. In a very short time, plat after plat was developed and many fine homes were built during the 1950's and later. The growth of these areas was soon followed by a boom in construction of permanent homes in the lakes areas. The residents of many of these homes worked in Kalamazoo but preferred to live in a suburban area or enjoyed living near a lake.

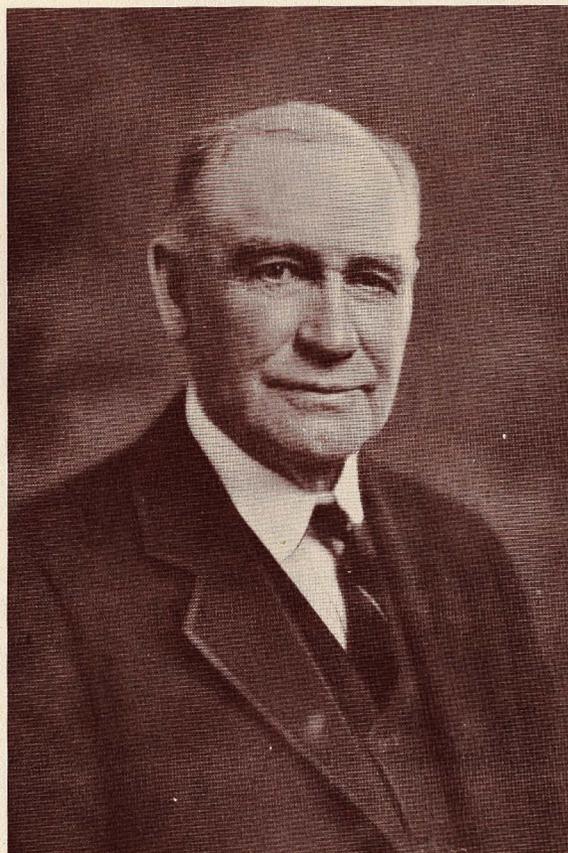
If a single event were chosen for the extent of its economic impact on the general prosperity and astonishing development of Portage since World War II, it could be summed up in one word: Upjohn. Although the Upjohn Company was founded in Kalamazoo in 1886 by Dr. William E. Upjohn and his brother, Dr. Henry U. Upjohn, the tremendous importance of the company to Portage did not develop until the 1940's. During 1945 the company gradually, and rather secretly, acquired over 1500 acres of farm land in the eastern portion of Portage Township in preparation for building a large manufacturing complex on Portage Road. The company had erected a modern building in Kalamazoo in 1936 but by 1946 the number of employees had more than doubled to nearly 2000 and expansion became necessary.

The decision to locate in Portage rather than expanding the downtown Kalamazoo facilities was made for a number of reasons. Most importantly, there was ample land available in Portage to allow for adequate parking, generous recreational facilities and almost unlimited future expansion. The farm land was considerably less expensive than prime Kalamazoo property and the tax structure in Portage at the time was more

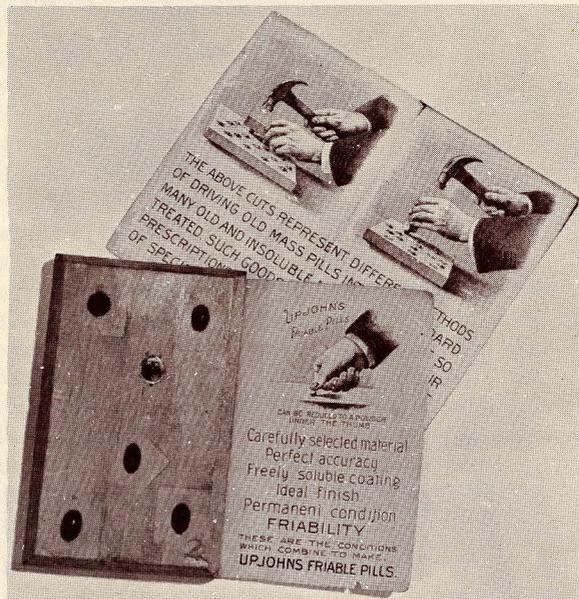


Original Upjohn factory built in Kalamazoo in 1886.

Founder, Dr. W. E. Upjohn, and his motto.



favorable. Whatever the reasons, the opening in 1948 of two smaller plants for production of



An early Upjohn Company pill die.

antibiotics and adrenal cortex drugs and the completion in 1951 of the thirty-three acre pharmaceutical production plant insured that an already growing community would experience a phenomenal boom in its population, its economy and in almost every other area of its development. These and other smaller buildings were joined in 1961 by the large and architecturally distinctive general office building containing approximately seven acres and located on the west side of Portage Road across from the plant. The enormous tax revenues from the Upjohn property have been the most important single influence in the growth of the Portage school system which is the envy of many communities. Today the Upjohn Company represents thirty-two per cent of the Portage tax base.

One interesting bit of Upjohn history concern the effect of the move to Portage on employees, most of whom at the time lived in Kalamazoo and were understandably concerned about transportation to and from the new and remote location. To assist its employees, the company purchased and began operating a fleet of buses which reached fifteen in number at the height of its unique

Upjohn Company general office building and manufacturing plant on Portage Road.



twenty-one year operation. The service was discontinued in 1970.

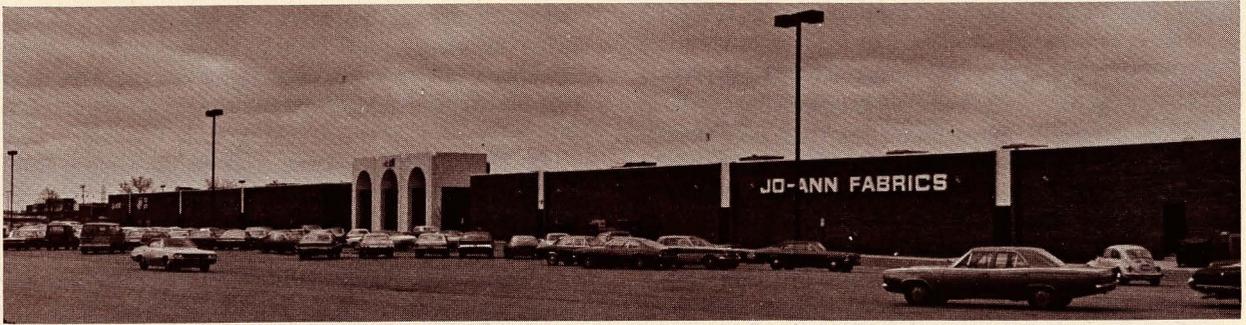
Many of Upjohn's early products became almost household words, e.g., Phenolax, Cheracol, and Kaopectate. Today, these familiar products have been joined by a host of modern pharmaceuticals which have made Upjohn one of the largest ethical drug manufacturers in the world. In addition, the company has expanded into extensive manufacture of chemical and agricultural products on an international scale as well as acquiring other diversified operations. Upjohn is active in other parts of Kalamazoo County besides Portage. In downtown Kalamazoo, a large scien-

tific staff conducts pharmaceutical research to improve existing products and develop new ones. In Richland Township, the Agricultural Division operates from its headquarters on extensive farmlands.

In 1975, total corporate sales exceeded \$890 million; research expenditures reached a new high of almost \$79 million; net earnings topped \$66 million; and the number of employees worldwide passed 17,500. At the beginning of 1976, Upjohn employed about 4200 people in the Portage complex and an additional 1500 in other Kalamazoo facilities. Although records do not indicate the number of employees who live in Portage, it

Farm which is now the site of Meijer Thrifty Acres.





Southland Mall is the largest shopping center in Portage.

may be assumed that the company provides employment for an impressive number of Portage residents. Its 1975 property tax payment on its Portage holdings of over \$4.5 million was more than seventeen times the second place industry (see Appendix).

The completion of Interstate 94 through the northern part of Portage Township in 1959 further stimulated growth of the community. It promoted industrial and commercial development by improving access for transportation of raw materials, finished products and all kinds of business supplies. Once again real estate boomed; motels instead of taverns were built along Westnedge Avenue; new plats and roads came into being almost overnight; and new schools continued to be needed.

The 1975 Business Directory for the city lists thirty-three industries presently operating in modern Portage. They are located in several industrial zones, with the largest number on Shaver Road and other concentrations on Vanderbilt Road, East Kilgore Road, Lovers Lane, Sprinkle Road, Portage Road and East Milham Avenue. The Upjohn Company, the Shakespeare Company, Burdix, Mol Bee, Inc., Roto Finish, W.-L Molding, Ronningen-Petter Company, Bunting Brass, and Kalamazoo Spring Corporation all appear in the list of the top twenty-five Portage taxpayers (see Appendix). It is interesting to note that the three industries located on Lovers Lane stand very near the site of the old Elijah Root sawmill, one of the earliest business ventures in Portage.

Reflecting still expanding residential and business areas of the city, the number of enterprises dealing in building supplies is thirty and there are more than twenty builders and contractors. There is no doubt that the number of service stations (about forty) and other auto-related businesses (almost twenty) far exceeds the number of blacksmiths of an earlier day. The number of service stations is more than equaled by the number of restaurants, and it is doubtful that there is a street in Kalamazoo County that displays more

eating places than Westnedge Avenue with over twenty. Four of the six motels in Portage are also found on Westnedge.

Stores of all kinds abound along Westnedge Avenue and Portage Road and are scattered in other areas. Supermarkets have long replaced the general store, although there are still a few family operated markets and take out stores. The largest shopping center in Portage is unquestionably the Southland Mall, which houses numerous small and medium sized shops as well as two supermarkets and a large branch of Gilmore's department store.

There is a wide variety of business enterprises and professional services existing in today's Portage, including thirty beauty and barber shops, over one hundred clothing, sporting good, home furnishings and related stores, five financial institutions at nine locations, seven insurance agencies, six accounting firms, five advertising and five engineering firms, two funeral homes, and fifteen real estate agencies. Indeed the real estate agents are still busy, as in earlier days, buying and selling the remaining land in Portage, which is geographically one of the largest incorporated cities in Michigan.

There is no record of a physician practicing in Portage until the days of Dr. A. E. Henwood, who provided medical care for at least some Portagers from about the 1920's in his Milham Avenue home, built by pioneer Stephen Howard and presently owned by the Van Ripper family. Other citizens no doubt went to Kalamazoo when they needed medical attention and a sizeable number went to doctors in Vicksburg. Today there are fifteen dentists, four optometrists, two chiropractic physicians, two osteopathic physicians, one podiatrist and nine medical physicians. Six of the medical doctors practice at the Portage Medical Clinic on E. Centre Avenue. The clinic was established by Dr. R. Keith Currier in 1950 in a building on Portage Road across from the Upjohn Company. Dr. Currier selected that location in anticipation of the development of a company town on the land surrounding the new

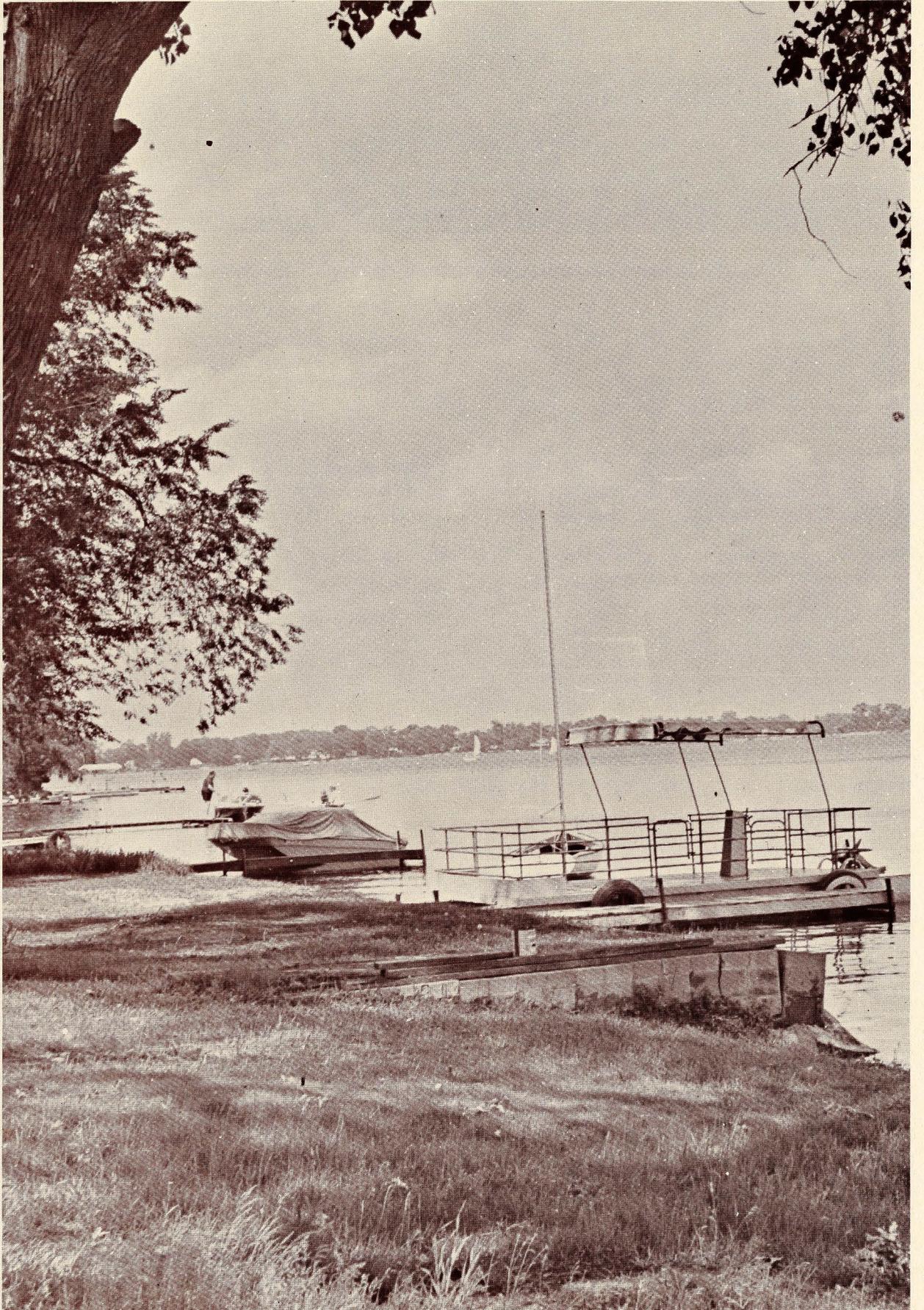
manufacturing complex. Although plans for an Upjohn residential community were discarded, the growth of Portage supported a thriving medical practice and necessitated gradually increasing the staff to its present level.

Historically, animals have always played an important role in Portage life. Today there are four animal hospitals, an unusual number for a

city of some 38,000. No doubt the veterinarians cater to dogs and cats, other pets and a growing number of riding horses. No longer are they concerned with the ox, the plow horse and the milk cow. Such beasts, once so important to the agricultural community, have almost all disappeared from the fast-growing city.

Traffic congestion comes to Portage—the “Neon Jungle” on S. Westnedge Ave.





10

Transportation and Recreation

The history of Portage began with the Indians when they discovered that the best route between the St. Joseph and Kalamazoo Rivers led directly through the forested and swampy area which is now the city of Portage. Instead of one major trail, there were three and several minor paths that may have been hunting paths through the trees. What is now Angling Road was named by the first surveyors when they encountered the curvy and twisting path. Many of the paths followed the curves of Portage Creek or crossed it at different intersections. Milham Avenue, following along Dry Prairie, seems to have been the straightest path of all. At one time it had three names: the western part was called Texas Road; the center section was Carpenters Corners Road; and the eastern third was Milham Road. The main trail seems to have been what is now Portage Road, going between the lakes and then twisting and turning over higher ground. Not only did it lead to the Kalamazoo River, but it led directly to Indian Fields, one of the largest Indian villages in this part of Michigan.

At this point in time it would be difficult to estimate how many years the Potawatomes trod with moccasined feet over the well worn trails and paths. Perhaps the earlier mound builders had used the same routes centuries before them. Evidence that these ancient peoples once inhabited the territory was found near Indian Fields when the pioneers arrived but all the mounds have long since disappeared. Today airplanes glide over the hard topped area where Indians once put up their wigwams and grew corn, pumpkins and squash. No remnant of their culture remains, but here and there an old hickory or walnut tree is still standing, its nuts dropping to the ground in the fall. The squirrels that gather these nuts may be

the descendants of the squirrels that helped to provide meat for Indians and pioneers long ago.

When the pioneers arrived, one of their first priorities for transportation was to widen the existing trails. A covered wagon had difficulty passing between the trees and bushes lining the trails. This was true especially of the lesser trails or paths that led through the forest. Some old journals state that it was sometimes easier to drive the oxen through the oak openings than along the trail. There are still some oak openings remaining in Portage today. As a rule they are found on fairly level ground and have considerable space between the trees.

When Portage became a township the first pathfinders were appointed. Their name described them accurately for they were to choose the most suitable paths to be made into roads leading past the farms of the pioneers. In the first group of pathfinders there were only seven men, all living north of what is now Milham Avenue with the exception of Moses Austin. No doubt Austin had the job of finding suitable roads in the southern part of the township. Pathfinders worked closely with the three elected road commissioners. In addition to finding paths they were responsible for widening the paths, cutting down trees and digging out bushes. They were either paid a pittance for their work or excused from paying taxes. In 1841 there were eleven pathfinders, by then called pathmasters, and four lived in the southern part of the township, giving evidence of the southerly growth of Portage. By the following year the pathmasters were called overseers of highways which by today's standards for roadways seems an overstatement. Even such an exalted title did not deter the early pioneers from complaining to their public officials about the

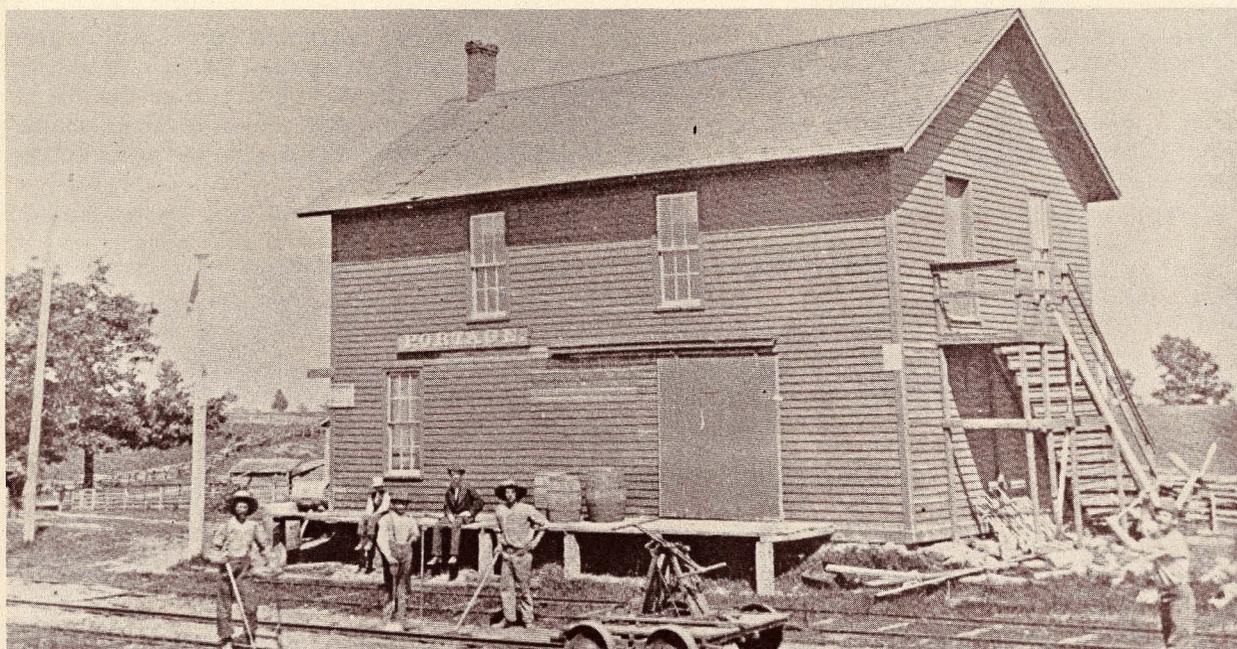
roads when they did not meet expectations. Although without equipment excepting shovel and hoe, the overseers of highways were expected by early settlers to provide smooth roads without ruts, tree stumps or high weeds. Among other reasons, the pioneers needed good roads to transport their produce to market, to reach the gristmill to have corn ground into cornmeal and to visit the taverns found in the township from its earliest days.

The Kalamazoo and Three Rivers Plank-Road

Company was chartered in 1848 and the road was constructed first between Kalamazoo and Schoolcraft, passing through Portage approximately along the present route of Shaver Road. This road greatly increased ease of transportation for farmers, merchants and the general citizenry and was used extensively until the completion of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway in 1871, after which it was gradually abandoned as a commercial operation. A second company built and began operating the plank road from Kalama-

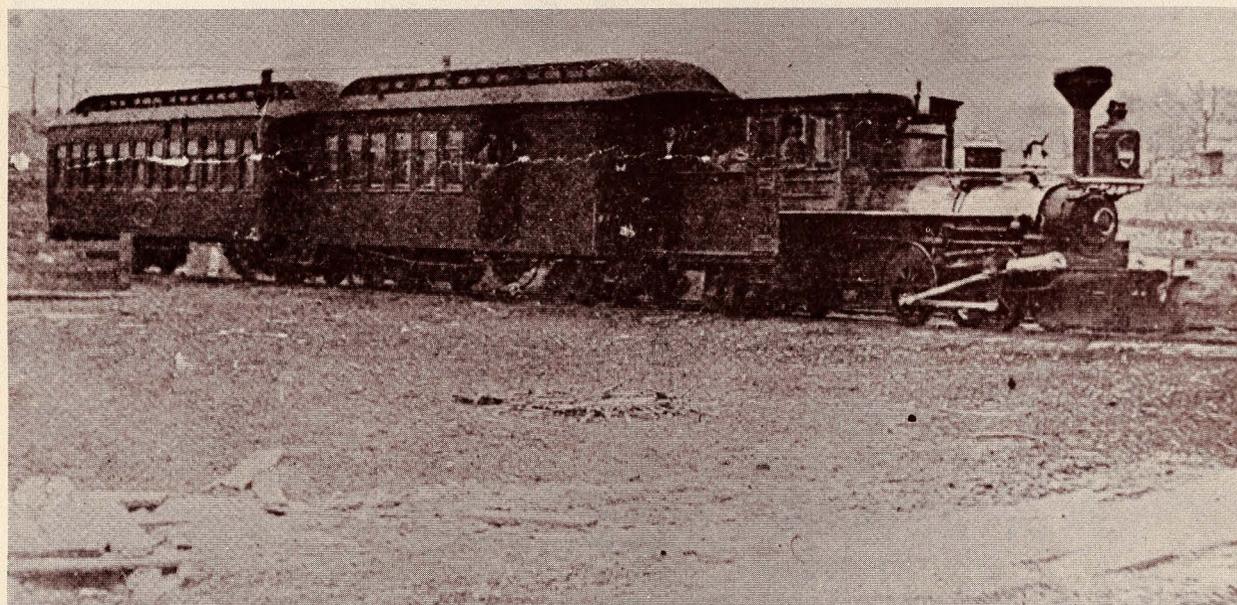
Portage's changing roads - Westnedge at Centre looking north at the turn of the century and in 1976. The second house in both pictures was the birthplace of Hazel Wood Dontje in 1899.





Portage Depot, 1875 - This was the building which served as depot for the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad, now part of the Pennsylvania Central system. The line was built from Three Rivers to Kalamazoo in 1866-67 and reduced the stagecoach business which once covered the route. The Pennsylvania Central line on the east side of the city was once known as the Grand Rapids and Indiana system.

The first passenger train on the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad passed through Portage in 1869.



FIRST PASSENGER TRAIN ON L. S. & M. S. R. R. INTO ALLEGAN, MICH., 1869.

zoo to Grand Rapids in 1852 and 1853. Today, commercial transportation interests in Portage include the Pennsylvania Central Railroad, which serves Portage industry along two tracks through different parts of the city. In addition, Dillon's Austin Lake Airport provides private airport

facilities; and, of course, the Kalamazoo Municipal Airport is located on a large plot of land once a part of Portage Township and though now owned by Kalamazoo it is surrounded on three sides by the city of Portage.

Moses Austin, who built his log cabin-tavern on Austin lake, is believed to have been the first person in the area to actually run his tavern as a hotel. For years it was no doubt the most popular place in the community for entertainment. Old records report that not only was the food superb but there was always entertainment and fun to be had at Austin's tavern and Austin, himself, is described as an extremely genial and pleasant host. His selling the property to John Hawkins and moving to Kalamazoo to enter business with his son must have been regretted by Portage citizens.

Ebenezer Stone's tavern at Carpenters Corners seems to have been another popular gathering place although not as well known as the one at Austin Lake. No doubt it was a much smaller establishment and perhaps was used as a meeting place for farmers in the vicinity. They may have gathered here while having their horses shod or some repair work done to the farm machinery at Carpenter's blacksmith shop.

When the stagecoach began serving Portage, Daniel Lathrop built quite an imposing hotel at Portage Center north of the present intersection of Westnedge and Centre Avenues and not far from

An early tavern in Portage Center.



Shipping celery from Portage depot - 1905.





Celery ready to load at railroad siding south of Centre. At left is Mershon and Waring Feed and Coal Co. Note the Methodist Church at Centre and Westnedge in the background.

1975 view of the feed mill and loading area.



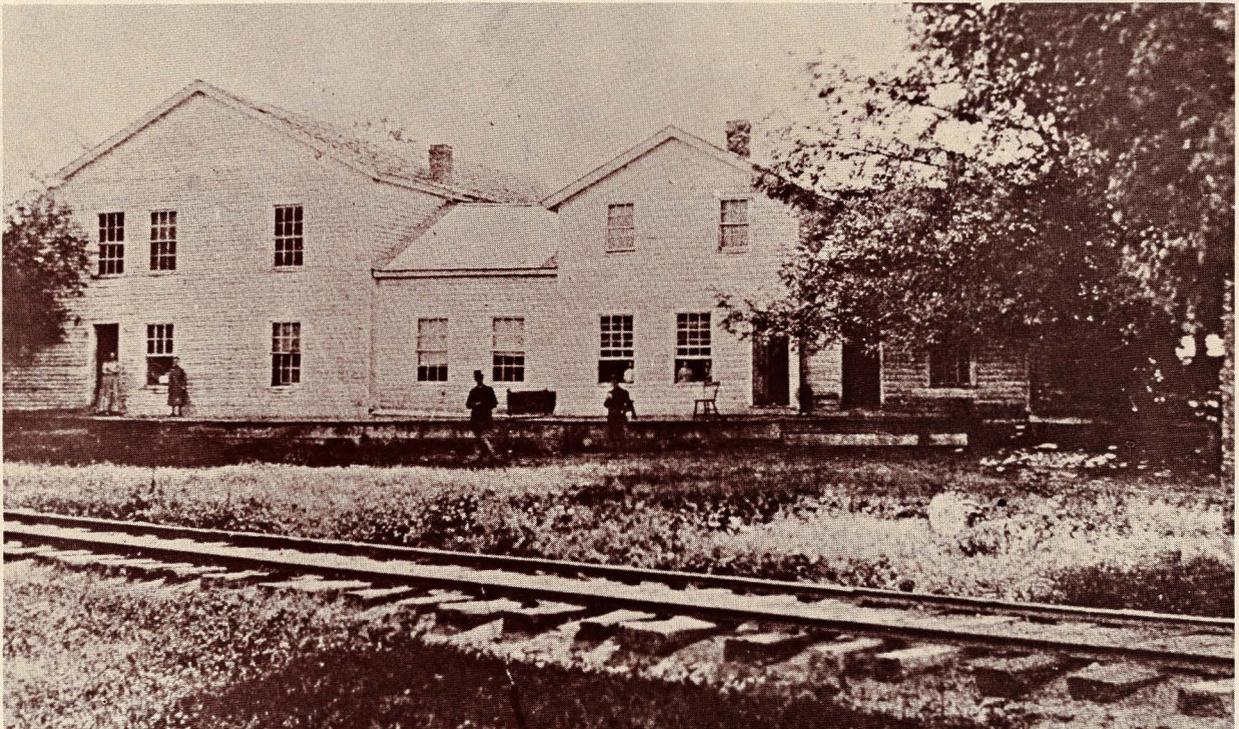
the tollhouse for the plank road. The old tavern that stood near the spot had proved inadequate. Not only was the area around Portage Center developing but more and more traveling men were coming to Portage selling the newest in farm equipment, seeds and a few comforts for the home. They needed an adequate place to stay and the new hotel more than met their requirements. Lathrop built a large ballroom for dances on the top floor and this drew young people from all over the country. Hay rides in the summer and sleigh rides in the winter would end up at the hotel where an excellent meal was served. The evening often ended in square dancing. When Lathrop sold the hotel to his successor, Clinton Bacon, the good times continued. It was a sad day for Portage when in 1886 the old hotel burned down.

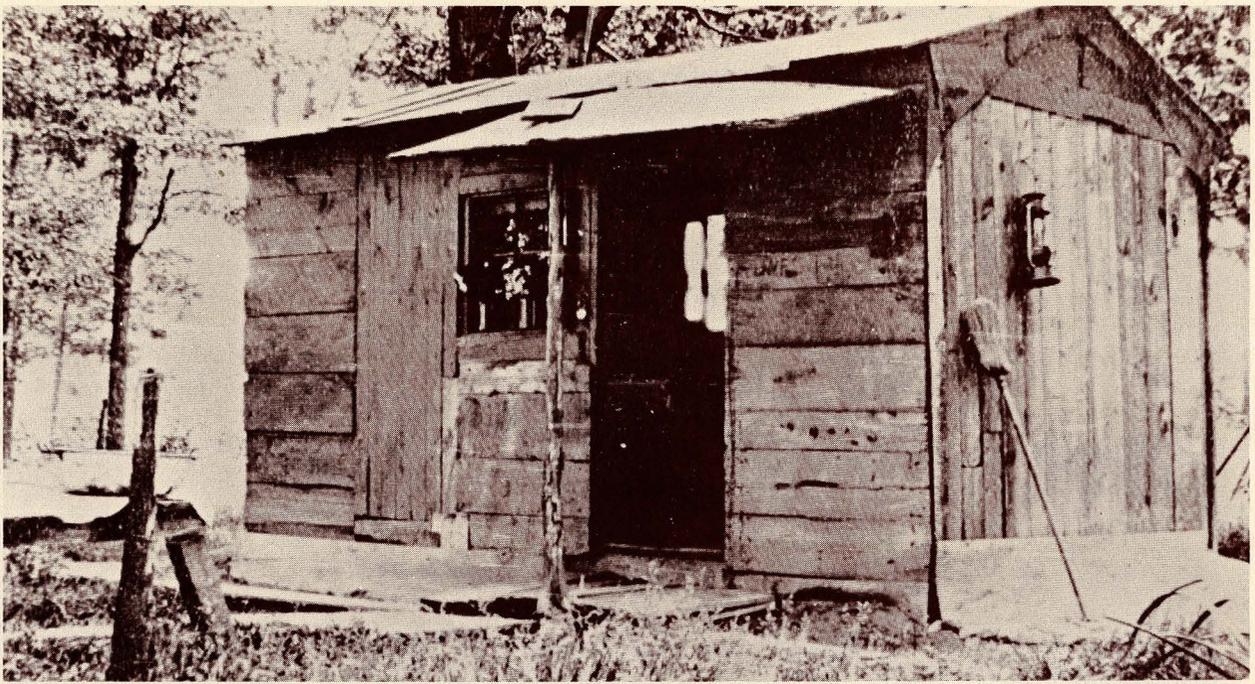
In a way the old tavern and hotel keepers set a pattern for recreation in Portage. There is no record of the lakes being used for recreational purposes until toward the end of the nineteenth century when recreational use of West, Long, Austin and Gourdneck Lakes gradually began to develop. Here and there small resorts began to appear and rowboats were rented for fishing. Often the boats were rented to picknickers wanting a leisurely ride on the lake. Private vacation cottages were built on small lake lots, and when not in use some were rented by their enterprising owners to friends for a week or two of vacation.

Ramona Park at Long Lake was probably the largest resort with a huge dance hall, picnic tables and a refreshment stand. Summer Home and Ames Resorts were other popular places for out-of-town people. A spur of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad took merrymakers to the resorts on Long Lake. Countless picnics were held at these places during the summer. Some of Portage's older citizens remember the pioneer, Sunday School, family and school picnics held at the resorts.

With the coming of the automobile the use of Portage lakes did not diminish. In fact, as soon as the roads became well gravelled and later hard topped, the number of summer cottages increased rapidly. Later on some of them were winterized and used as year around homes. In recent years many substantial homes have been built and a large percentage are occupied the year around. Today there is ice fishing as well as summer fishing and rowboats, canoes, power boats and water skis all occupy their share of the waters. Ramona Park now belongs to the city and is continually being developed to better serve the citizens of Portage. There are also several other city parks, a commercial golf course on Oakland Drive, two large bowling alleys, two roller skating rinks, a drive-in theatre and a movie theatre for leisure activities. Many recreational opportunities in Kalamazoo are also enjoyed by Portagers.

The Lathrop Hotel was built in the 1850's and burned in 1886.





Fannie's Abode - early 1900's. Summer cabin belonging to Fannie McGovern, one of the first on the south side of West Lake.

A picnic at the Lake. Front from left: Dontje boy, Lowell Matteson, Lettie Matteson and kids, a friend of Harriet's, Bess Southwell, Harriet Friedel, and Laura Gould. Back from left: Tom Southwell, Porter Matteson, J. Herlong, F. I. Southwell and Hazel Wood Dontje.





Take me out to the ball game - two early Portage teams.



Because Portage is adjacent to Kalamazoo, the culturally oriented recreation of its citizens has developed through participation in the rich and varied cultural life of the larger city. The membership rosters of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, the Kalamazoo Junior Symphony Orchestra (one of the few youth organizations of its kind in the nation), the Kalamazoo Civic Players including the Junior Civic Players, the Gilmore Art Center, the Kalamazoo Nature Center and numer-

ous other organizations include large numbers of Portage residents. In addition, many Portagers attend the fine performances and art exhibits offered by Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, Nazareth College and Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

Although parks and recreational centers have multiplied, the number of taverns and eating places in Portage has shown even more astonishing growth. It would be a waste of time to count

These pictures were taken by Clyde Bacon in 1908. The car belonged to Minnie Newell and accident occurred on Portage road where Upjohn's now stands. This is looking north.





Members of the Portage City Council for 1976 are (seated, from left) Kurt Stern, Thomas Centilla, Mayor Betty Lee Ongley, Mayor Pro-Tempore Engel Corstange, (standing) Elmer Adams, Thomas Bloom, City Manager Donald Ziemke, and Donald Hinga.

them all as new ones seem to appear almost overnight. A visitor to Portage can find almost any type of restaurant from the well known franchised chains which operate all across the country to the more deluxe dining rooms where leisurely meals are served. In many of the expensive restaurants private dining rooms are available for large gatherings. Taverns still thrive as in earlier days and every year the city council continues to renew licenses and now and then issue a new one.

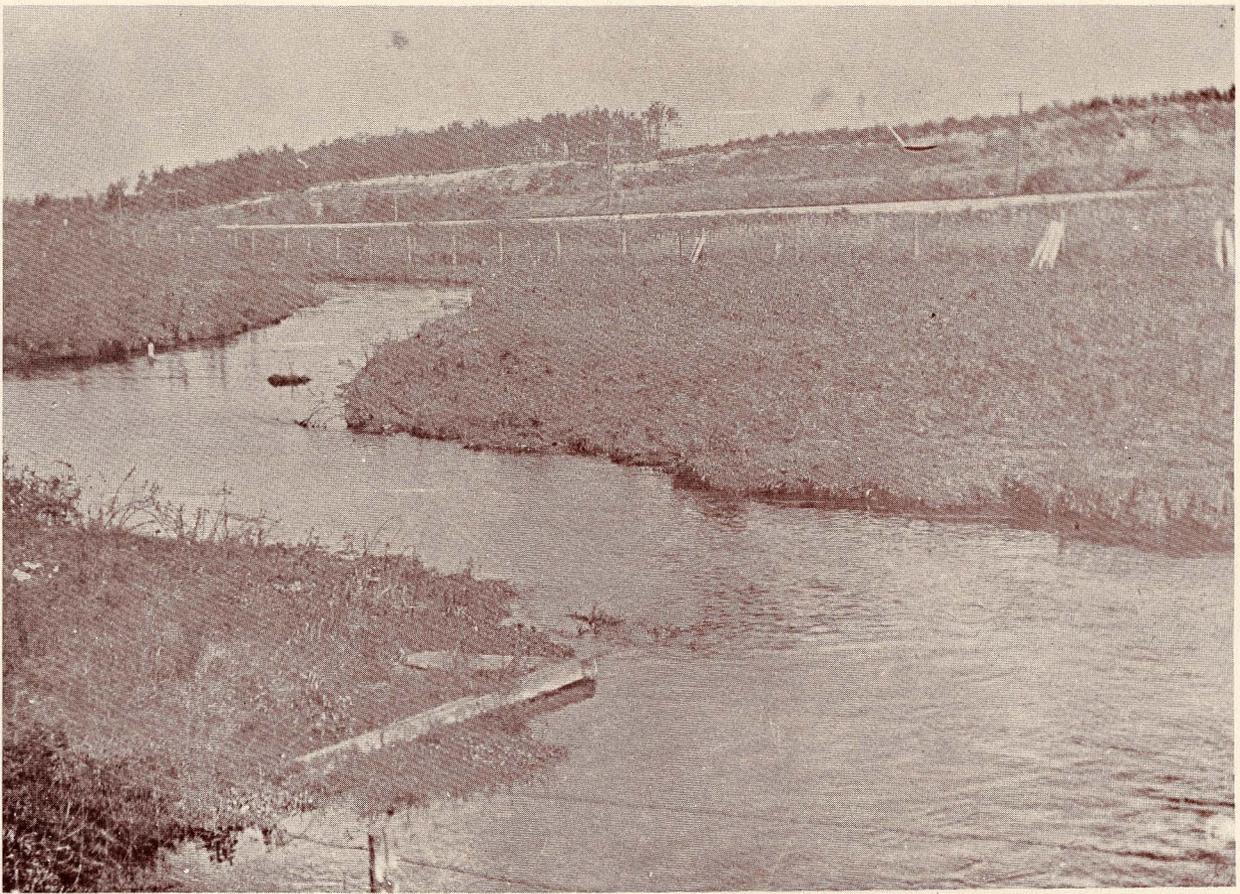
It would be difficult to determine how far customers travel to dine in Portage restaurants, but most eating establishments are only minutes away from major highways. As in the days of old, Portage is the connecting link between cities in the area. U.S. 131 offers fast transportation north and south and today connects the two rivers so important to the Indians by fast highway instead of twisting, curving trail. It is doubtful if travelers today give the rivers a second glance as they cross the concrete bridges over the St. Joseph at Constantine and the Kalamazoo at Plainwell. The two large midwestern cities of Detroit and Chicago are connected by Interstate 94, with Portage located about midway. Originally they were connected by the old Territorial Road, later known as U.S. 12.

All day long and far into the night the big trucks and cars rush along these two major highways. During quiet evenings the roar of their tires can be heard by present day citizens of Portage and Kalamazoo. Other busy roads are shared by these two neighboring cities. Perhaps the most frequently traveled are the old Indian trails that once heard only the soft whisper of moccasins which trod the curving paths through the forest. The trails became roads which are paved now so that even the sound made by the crunch of gravel under the wagon wheels and

horses' hoofs has long since disappeared. With the exception of what is now Portage Road, most of the curves have also vanished. An imaginative citizen driving along Portage Road can still visualize the old trail that was used so frequently by the Potawatomies and the first hardy pioneers.

During the rush hours the old Indian trails carry a never ending stream of traffic: Kalamazoo citizens coming to Portage and Portage citizens going to Kalamazoo. It would be impossible to estimate how many residents of the two cities travel back and forth one or more times each day. When evening falls intercourse between the cities continues with the sharing of such amenities as those offered by the cultural opportunities of Kalamazoo and the recreational facilities in Portage.

Portage, beloved by the Potawatomies and settled in the 1830's by the pioneers, seems to have reached the point of fulfilling its heritage. The wandering creek, a few of its wooded areas and many of its scenic beauties will be preserved for posterity. The Portage Bicentennial Committee has chosen for its project to develop a city park for several miles along Portage Creek. A gigantic but worthwhile undertaking! In 1980 Portage can celebrate its first 150 years of settlement. Eight years later the city can commemorate the 150th birthday of the organization of Portage Township. No doubt it will take all of these years to make the Bicentennial Park a reality. If the park is completed, Portage will gain a unique position among cities. It will have preserved for future generations the stream that carried countless Indians from one great river to another. No doubt this monument will create in future residents a pride of citizenship in a city that was never a village.

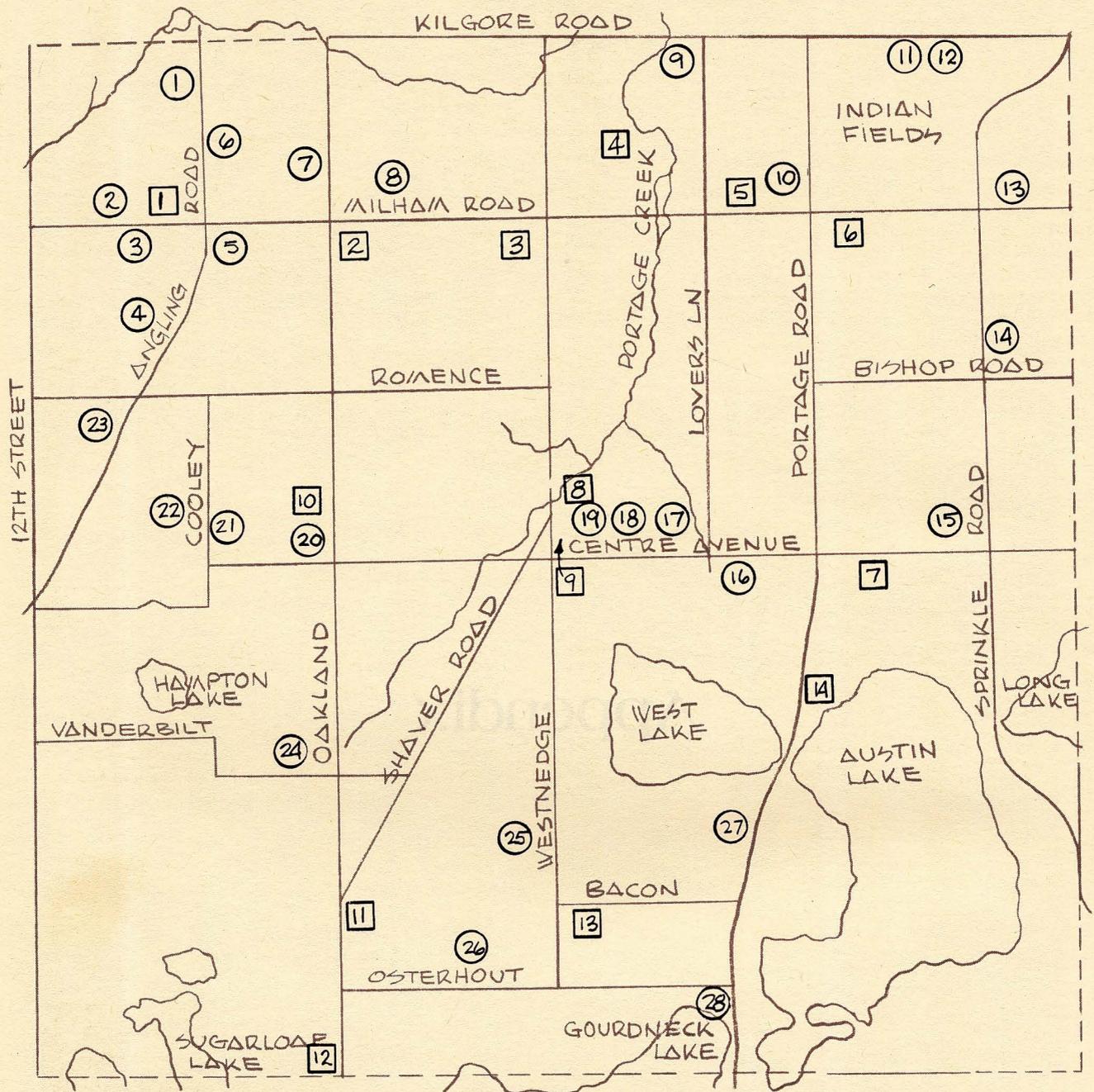


The proposed Portage Creek Park will follow the meandering stream pictured here in the early 1900's and in 1976. The earlier photo was taken from the bridge on Westnedge across from Portage Plaza. Note the railroad track in the background.



Appendix

Historic Homes of Portage



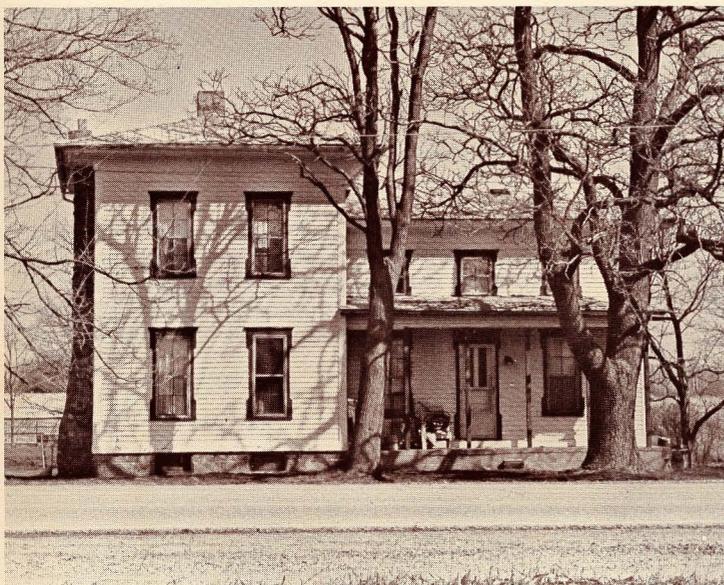
Circled numbers are historic homes

Boxed numbers are other points of interest

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1 5260 Angling Road | 15 7804 Sprinkle Road | * 1 District No. 3 School (Brooks later Dailey) | * 8 Lathrop Hotel |
| 2 3910 W. Milham Avenue | 16 1612 E. Centre Avenue | 2 Dry Prairie Cemetery | * 9 District No. 5 School (Portage Center) |
| 3 3821 W. Milham Avenue | 17 1221 E. Centre Avenue | * 3 District No. 2 School (Carpenters Corners) | * 10 District No. 4 School |
| 4 6638 Angling Road | 18 515 E. Centre Avenue | * 4 Elijah Root Sawmill | 11 District No. 8 School (Prairie Edge) |
| 5 3221 W. Milham Avenue | 19 309 E. Centre Avenue | 5 Indian Fields Cemetery | * 12 Plank Road Toll House |
| 6 5719 Angling Road | 20 7910 Oakland Drive | * 6 District No. 1 School (Indian Fields, later Rockne) | 13 District No. 7 (Lake Center) |
| 7 5720 Oakland Drive | 21 7737 Cooley Drive | 7 District No. 6 School (Pershing) | * 14 Austin's Tavern |
| 8 1324 W. Milham Avenue | 22 7706 Cooley Drive | | |
| 9 5136 Lovers Lane | 23 7138 Angling Road | | |
| 10 5830 Portage Road | 24 2112 Vanderbilt Avenue | | |
| 11 3512 E. Kilgore Road | 25 9426 S. Westnedge Avenue | | |
| 12 3602 E. Kilgore Road | 26 922 W. Osterhout Avenue | | |
| 13 4415 E. Milham Avenue | 27 9616 Portage Road | | |
| 14 4130 Bishop Avenue | 28 10630 Portage Road | | |

*No longer in existence

5260 Angling Road — Built sometime in the late 1850's after William Gibbs returned from gold mining in California. Gibbs had enough gold nuggets to buy 160 acres of land in section 6, build a house and buy a large tract of government land in Kansas. His wife, Jennetta Prouty Gibbs, was an enthusiastic gardener and the home, known as Oak Grove, had a beautiful garden as well as a conservatory for house plants. The property is now owned by R. E. Eddy.

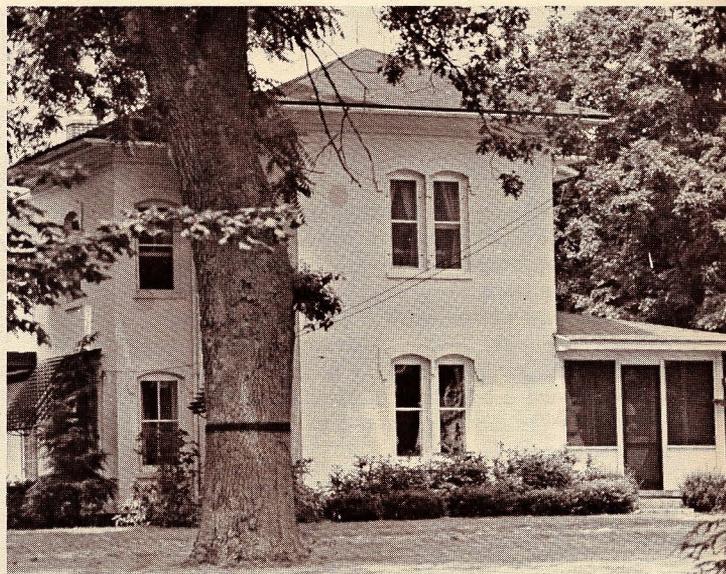


3910 W. Milham Avenue — Built by Stephen Howard between 1870 and 1875 for his son, George. The Howard family occupied the house for almost 50 years. William Hartman was the second owner and the property now belongs to Margaret Redmond. Her granddaughter and family are currently occupying the house.

3821 W. Milham Avenue — Built by Stephen Howard, very early pioneer settler, in 1859. Constructed using hand-hewn oak timbers, cut by Howard himself, for the basement and barn and handmade bricks, it was probably the first brick house in Portage. When completion was delayed by the Civil War, the family allowed dances to be held there to raise money for the purchase of local soldiers' uniforms. No doubt the people pictured are Stephen and his family who lived in the home until the 1920's. It was then occupied by Dr. Albert Henwood and his family. The present owners are Dr. & Mrs. Charles Van Riper.

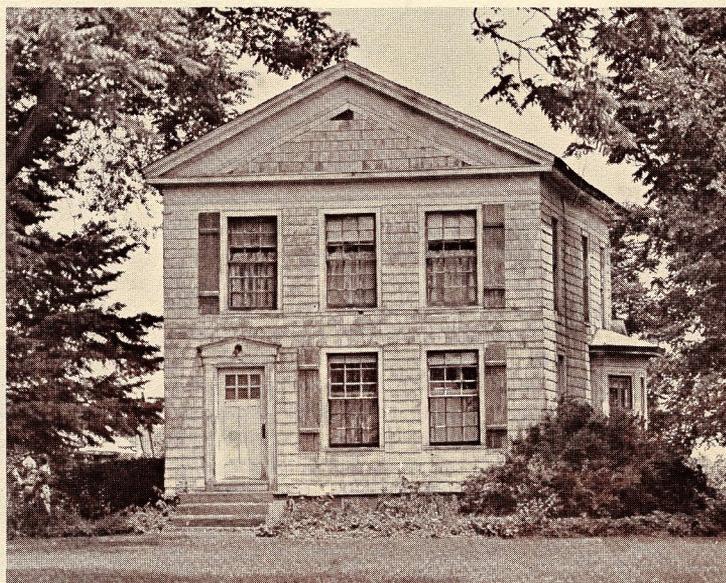


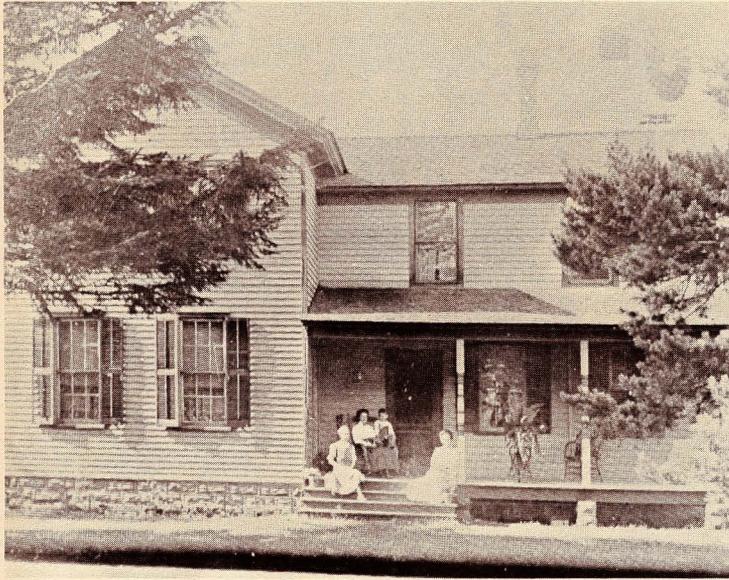
6638 Angling Road — Built by Albert and Harriet Howard Brooks about 1870. This house was the showplace of the area. The parlor was furnished with a golden flowered Aubusson carpet, the drapes were heavy gold velvet and the furniture was of highly polished cherry and mahogany with horsehair covered settee and chairs. The room was used only on very special occasions for distinguished visitors. After her husband died, Mrs. Brooks lived there for a number of years and ran the farm with the help of a hired man. Later the farm was used as a nursery and the Wedel family occupied the house.



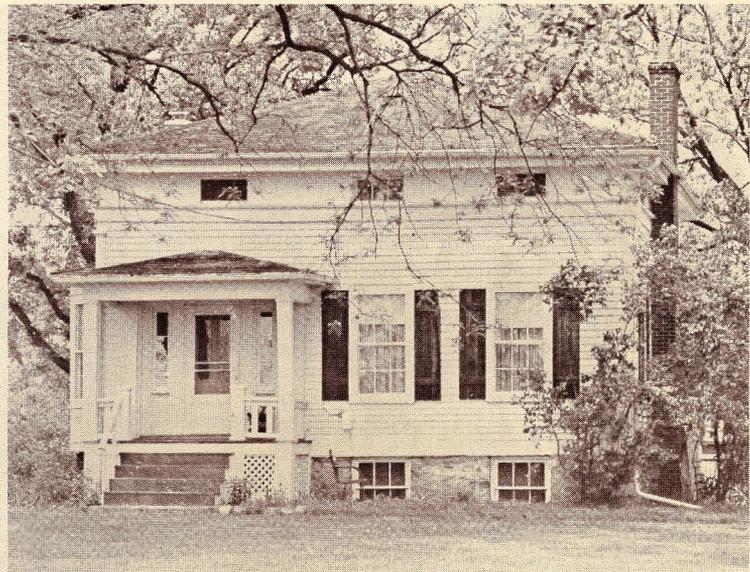
3221 W. Milham Avenue — Built by Isaac Brooks, probably soon after he settled in Portage in 1835. The barn is adjacent to the Brooks' house which is still standing, though greatly remodeled. The house was later occupied by the Guy Dailey family.

5719 Angling Road — Built by John E. Howard and his son Stephen after they came to Portage in 1832. Probably the oldest house in Portage. Mr. Howard lived here until his death and his son Rossiter continued to occupy the house until 1862. William Boylan from Texas Township became the next owner and the Boylan family owned the property until 1975, when it was purchased by Rod O'Brien. Mr. & Mrs. Elmer Bishop lived in the house and managed the farm for over 50 years.

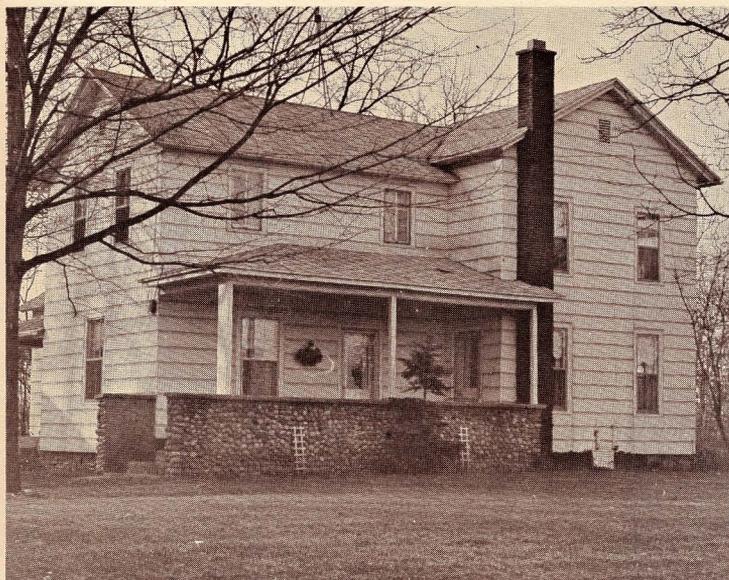




5720 Oakland Drive — Built by Joseph Beckley sometime in the 1850's and occupied by the Beckley family for three generations, this is the second house built on the farm by Beckley after he settled there in 1836. Joseph Beckley, Jr. was perhaps the longest occupant. Today the house has been divided into apartments and is owned by Dale Kramer. The picture is an old one belonging to the Beckley family.



1324 W. Milham Avenue — Located on land granted by the government in 1840, this house was reportedly built sometime before 1860. Well constructed with 22-inch thick walls, the property has been owned by Dr. Robert L. DeLong since 1963.



5136 Lovers Lane — Built about mid-nineteenth century by William Kilgore. His grandson, Herschel, and his wife now occupy the house which is surrounded by approximately 20 acres of the original farm. Kilgore is one of the few pioneer descendants, if not the only one, who still occupies the old homestead on farmland cleared over 150 years ago. The interior of the home has been extensively modernized.



5830 Portage Road — Built by David Smith sometime in the 1850's. One of the more elaborate Greek Revival homes, it was later occupied by Smith's son Jefferson. He sold the farm to William Cobb, wealthy sheep farmer who owned the house for over 50 years. The Carney family from Kalamazoo was the next owner. Presently the location of the Beacon Club, the property is now owned by Jack Thurman.

3512 E. Kilgore Road — Built by David Meredith in the 1850's, this house illustrates the Greek Revival style of architecture. The Meredith farm was in the family for three generations from David, who settled in 1849, through his son, Warren, and grandsons, Ben and Eugene. The house is unoccupied.

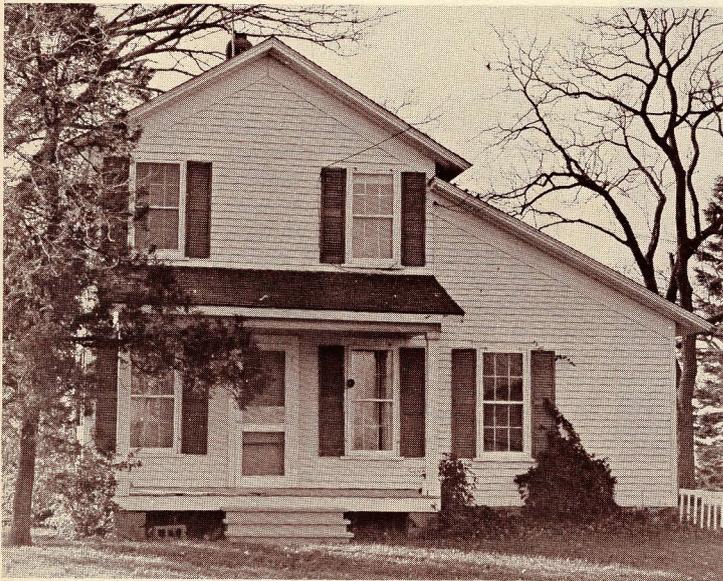


3602 E. Kilgore Road — Built by David Meredith about 1880, this house was first occupied by Meredith's son, Warren, and family and was later used as a tenant house. It is now owned by Mrs. Muriel Wooden.

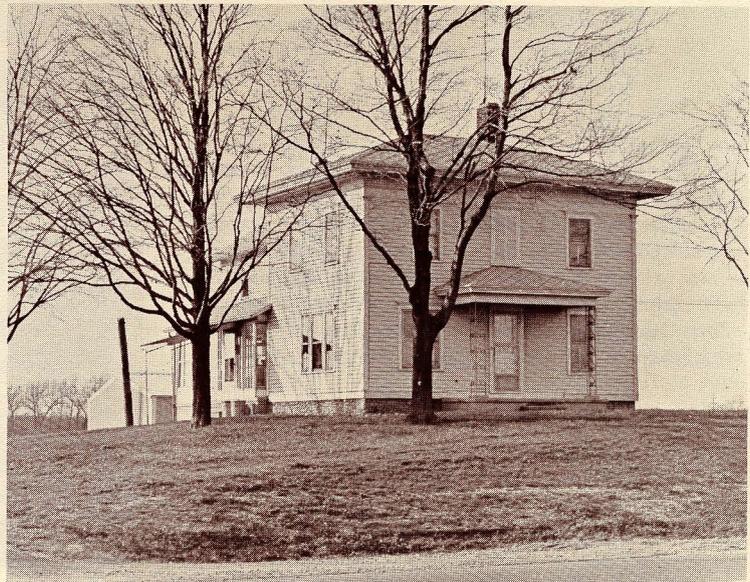
4415 E. Milham Avenue — Built about 1890 by William Milham, father of Allan Milham, this is one of the very few examples of Victorian architecture built in Portage toward the close of the 19th century. The property on which the house stands was at that time a very productive farm.



4130 Bishop Avenue — Built by one of the Crooks brothers between 1860 and 1870, this house is located on the original Crooks farm settled in the mid-1830's and is a typical farmhouse of the period. Allan Milham owns the farm at present, and while not a Portage resident, he is one of the few descendants of early pioneers still owning Portage farmland under cultivation. Milham's ancestors include Joseph and Clarissa Sweetland Beckley and John Milham, who were very early settlers of the 1830's.



7804 Sprinkle Road — Built by William Campbell, early Portage settler. According to his great-granddaughter, Patricia Hagerman, the rear annex containing the kitchen was built around part of the old log house that the family occupied for a number of years. William Campbell, Jr. lived in the homestead well into the 1930's and ran a productive farm. The Campbell family ownership extended over almost a century. The property is now owned by H. A. Tarnow.

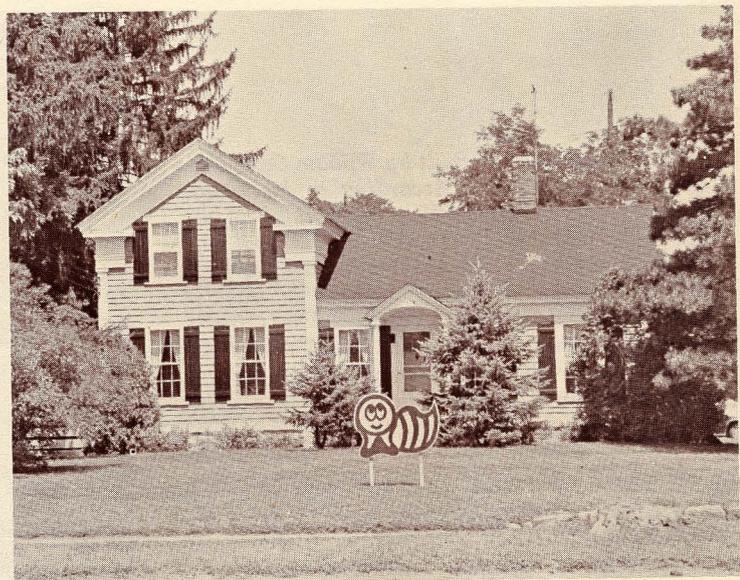


1612 E. Centre Avenue — For well over fifty years this land was owned by Moses Pike's son and grandson Nathan S. Pike and Nathan G. Pike. Somewhere around the turn of the century, Joseph T. Newell purchased 169 acres of the land and erected the present colonial type home. It was in turn inherited by his son U. S. Newell and his wife Belle Sweetland Newell. The couple was well-known for their hospitality and many social gatherings were held in their home. It is now owned by the Charles Cook family.



1221 E. Centre Avenue — Built by Daniel M. Smith before the Civil War on a 160-acre tract purchased in the 1850's, this house is in the style of a typical Michigan farmhouse. Square nails which were made by blacksmiths can be found in the original beams which have been put together in barn-like construction. Although much of the surrounding land was swampy, Smith farmed for a number of years and the property was later owned by Fred Cox. With the advent of celery farming in Portage, the land was divided and sold for numerous celery farms. Mr. & Mrs. Donald McKinley have owned the home since 1959.

515 E. Centre Avenue — Built sometime before 1860. This house is typical of numerous Michigan farmhouses built following the Greek Revival architectural style and described as temple shape with an ell. The house was probably built by D. M. Smith, an early owner of the property and later occupied by the George Pike family. Present owners are Mr. & Mrs. Richard Resh.



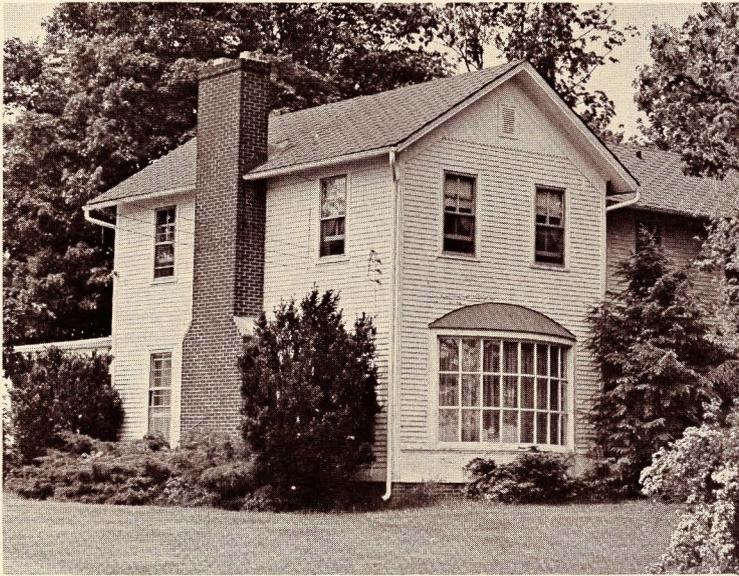


309 E. Centre Avenue — Built about 1878 by Ira D. Matteson, uncle of Porter Matteson, on land entered in 1836 by pioneer Henry Tuttle. Brick for the double brick walls was hauled by wagon team from Mendon and the daughter of the kiln owner managed the team riding astride one of the horses. The Charles Warren family became the sixth owner of the home in 1934 at which time the interior was modernized. In 1975 Mrs. Warren, who lives there with her daughter, Eleanor, sold a portion of the property to the City of Portage for the new library. The building overlooks a grove of pine trees planted by another of the Warren's daughters, Mrs. Betty Wolbers and her sister, Dr. Mary Lou Warren.

7910 Oakland Drive — Built by Harvey Cooley, son of Arad Cooley, Between 1870 and 1880. The house was inherited by Gertrude Cooley Curry, wife of Daniel Curry, then occupied by Albert Curry and now owned by Mrs. Hattie Miller. According to Mrs. Ruth Clementz, granddaughter of Harvey Cooley, some of the trees still on the property were there when it was cleared for building and farming purposes.

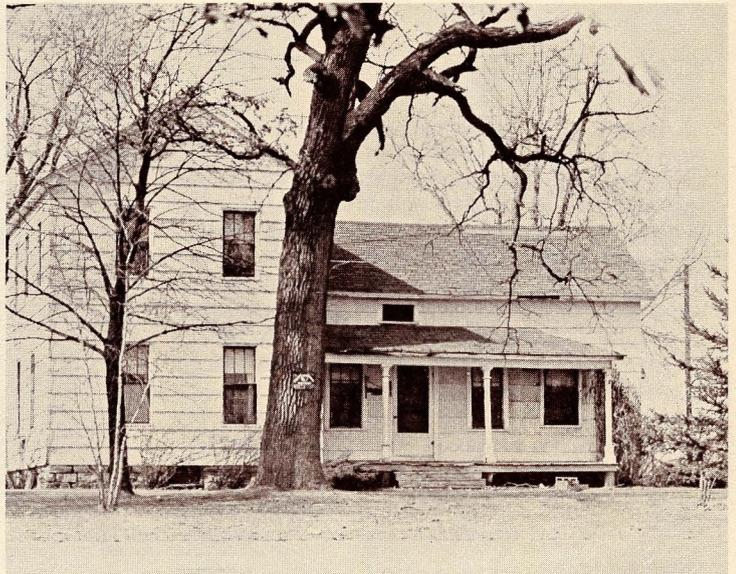


7737 Cooley Drive — Built by Edwin Cooley, son of Thomas Cooley, early pioneer settler. Edwin Cooley went to Denver about 1864 to try his hand at gold mining. After a short time, he mined enough nuggets of gold to purchase some land in Arkansas and then returned to Portage. He acquired an 80-acre farm and built this substantial home and a barn that is still standing. Later the farm was increased to 140 acres and owned by his son Fred well into the 20th century. It is now owned by Scope, Inc. and occupied by Robert Stautz.



7706 Cooley Drive — Built sometime between 1850 and 1860 by Martin Bacon and later occupied by his son, George. The house remained in the Bacon family until the 1930's. Now the property of Scope, Inc. and occupied by H. A. Youngblood, the house has been extensively remodeled.

7138 Angling Road — Built by Thomas Houston about 1860. This typical Michigan farm house is on farmland obtained from one of the numerous land agents who speculated in land in Kalamazoo County. Owned by the descendants of the family until 1976 when it was sold to John Gomolak.



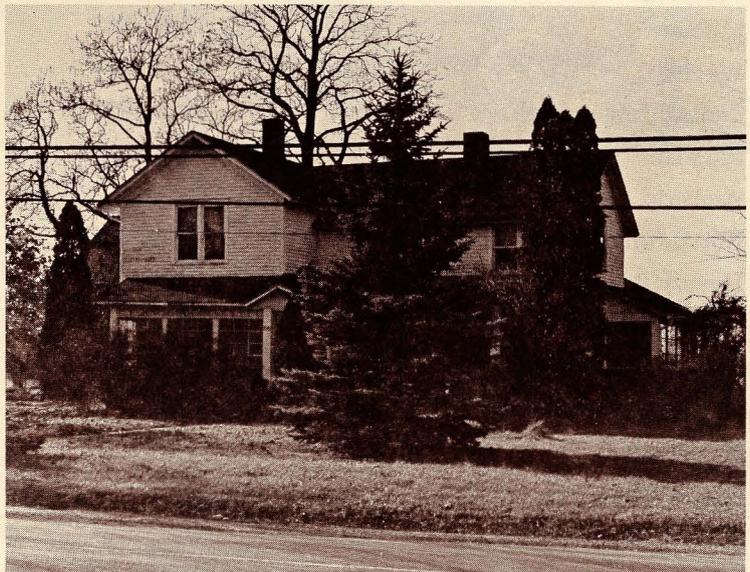
2112 Vanderbilt Avenue — Built about 1879 by Henry Vanderbilt after he moved here from New York and married Anna Cady, a native of Portage. They lived here for over 50 years. Present owners are Verlan and Norma VanRheenen.

9426 S. Westnedge Avenue — Built between 1870 and 1880 by Julius Matteson. Porter Matteson was born in the house and lived there until he was grown. The property later became well known as the Morren poultry farm. The house has since been divided into apartments.



922 W. Osterhout Avenue — One of the first in the southern part of Portage Township, this home was built between 1850 and 1860 by William Smith after he and his family had settled in section 33 in the mid-1840's. The farm was owned by the Smiths for four generations and at one time was known as a Centennial farm. The present owner is Mrs. Phyllis Ettwein, who bought the property in 1958 from a Smith descendent.

9616 Portage Road — Residence of the McCamley family for many years, this home stands on a farm bought by Daniel McCamley about 1870. It is now occupied by Stuart McCamley, whose father was township supervisor for many years and very active in local affairs.





10630 Portage Road — Originally built by the Wetherbee family and occupied by the family for a number of years. Mr. Wetherbee was an active citizen in township affairs. The house has been beautifully modernized and now belongs to Kenneth Bertolissi.

CONSTRUCTION OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN PORTAGE

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

School	Initial Construction	Additions
Central Administration	1922	1924, 1928, 1947, 1974
Lake Center Elementary	1928	1951, 1956, 1960, 1967, 1975
Central High School	1949	1954, 1959, 1967, 1971, 1976
Pershing	1951	1961, 1967
Milham	1951	1956, 1967
Waylee	1955	1962, 1974
Central Junior High	1957	1973, 1974
Ramona	1958	
Amberly	1960	
North Junior High	1961	1973, 1976
Haverhill	1962	
Angling Road	1963	
Lexington Green	1965	
Northern High School	1965	1967
Woodland	1968	
Central Elementary	1969	
West Junior High School	1972	

School year	Enrollment
1948-49	1,471
1949-50	1,692
1950-51	1,787
1951-52	1,978
1952-53	2,241
1953-54	2,429
1954-55	2,782
1955-56	3,093
1956-57	3,587
1957-58	4,120
1958-59	4,777
1959-60	5,571
1960-61	6,348
1961-62	7,121
1962-63	7,983
1963-64	8,478
1964-65	8,918
1965-66	9,450
1966-67	9,831
1967-68	10,414
1968-69	10,727
1969-70	10,854
1970-71	10,932
1971-72	10,991
1972-73	10,975
1973-74	10,979
1974-75	10,902
1975-76	10,866
1976-77 (Est.)	10,640

FIRST PORTAGE TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS ELECTED IN 1838

Supervisor	Elijah Root
Town Clerk	Caleb Sweetland
Assessors	Martin Lathrop, James S. Chaffee, Rossiter Howard
Collector	Chester Crooks
Justices of the Peace	Ebenezer Stone, Caleb Sweetland
Highway Commissioners	Thomas J. Chaffee, Stephen Howard, F. W. Dunham
School Inspectors	Caleb Sweetland, Stephen Howard, T. W. Dunham
Constables	Chester Crooks, Chauncey Root
Overseers of Poor	Thomas J. Chaffee, Joseph Eastland
Pathmasters	Allison Kinne, Lowell Goodrich, Elijah Root, Enoch French, Jonas Woodard, Moses Austin, Elias Stone

TOP TWENTY BUSINESSES & INDUSTRIES BY ASSESSED VALUATION

1. The Upjohn Company
2. Consumers Power Company
3. Shakespeare Company
4. Meijer Thrifty Acres
5. Village Green Properties Incorporated
6. Milham Meadows
7. University Custom Homes
8. Burdax
9. IBM Corporation
10. Mol Bee Incorporated
11. Roto-Finish Company
12. Independence Village Apartments
13. Jewel-Osco
14. Great Lakes Computer Center Incorporated
15. The W-L Molding Company
16. The Villas of Southland
17. The General Electric Company
18. Ronnigen-Petter Company
19. Bunting Brass & Bronze Company
20. K Mart Discount Stores

PORTAGE HISTORY AT A GLANCE

- | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1817 | Governor Cass signs a treaty with the Indians which gives Indian land around Portage and Kalamazoo to the U.S. government. | 1837 | Michigan becomes a state, and the United States enters its first big depression. |
| 1825 | Erie Canal opens, making it easier for settlers to reach Michigan territory. | 1837 | Cyrus McCormick moves his McCormick Reaper Factory to Chicago and more reapers become available, so that farmer's work is greatly eased. |
| 1830 | William Bishop makes the first entry in the books of Brady Township, soon to become Portage Township and eventually, the City of Portage. | 1838 | There are about 20 families living in Portage Township. In March the first township meeting is held in the home of Moses Austin. |
| 1830 | A man named Herring builds a crude log cabin on the west side of Brady Township. | 1838 | Settlers withdraw from Pavilion Township and organize Portage Township. |
| 1831 | Caleb Sweetland and the three Cooley brothers, Thomas, Arad, and Benjamin, arrive from New York State on an exploring trip and decide to settle on Dry Prairie, west of what is now the Kalamazoo Municipal Airport. Other settlers will soon follow. | 1840 | Indians are deported from area and sent further west. Chief Pokagon and his group remain in Portage area. |
| 1832-33 | Elijah Root and Caleb Sweetland arrange first school classes. | 1840 | Franklin heating stoves and cook stoves are in general use in Portage homes. |
| 1833 | Moses Austin arrives and settles on the northwest side of what is now called Austin Lake. | 1846 | First railroad train from the East arrives in Kalamazoo. |
| 1833 | Church services are conducted in Indian Fields School District #1. | 1848 | Kalamazoo and Three Rivers Plank Road Company is established. |
| 1834 | A sawmill and a gristmill are in operation in Portage and the U. S. land office moves from White Pigeon to Kalamazoo. | 1850 | There are 120 families living in Portage Township, including seven carpenters, three blacksmiths, and a bricklayer. There are six schools with a total of 240 students. |
| 1834 | Crude schoolhouse is built on south side of Milham Avenue, east of Portage Road. | 1853 | Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids Plank Road is completed. |
| 1835 | By this year, two-thirds of the northern half of Portage Township has been entered at the government land office. | 1856 | First celery is grown in Kalamazoo area. |
| 1836 | Timothy Dunham starts a nursery with fruit trees and berry bushes which he brought by ox team from Ohio. | 1856 | Schoolhouse District #8 (Prairie Edge) is erected on Oakland Drive south of Shaver Road. |
| 1836 | More land is sold and entered in the Kalamazoo Land Office than in any other land office in the United States. | 1856 | Brick schoolhouse known as Indian Fields School is erected on south side of Milham Avenue, east of Portage Road. |
| | | 1857 | Tax assessment has reached \$2,167.13. |
| | | 1859 | First brick house is built on Milham Road by Stephen Howard. |

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| 1863 | Kalamazoo County Farmers Mutual Insurance Company is organized. | 1928 | District #7 opens a two-room school — Lake Center Primary School. |
| 1866 | Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad is completed through Portage. | 1929 | Consumers Power Company is given permission to lay gas mains in Portage streets. |
| 1871 | Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad is completed through Portage. | 1930 | New Masonic Hall is built on Centre Avenue. |
| 1872 | A printed advertising flyer appears which is later to become the Montgomery Ward catalog. | 1931-32 | Baseball and track teams win county titles. |
| 1876 | Masonic lodge is established. | 1931-32 | Basketball team wins county, district, regional and state championships. |
| 1884 | Fourteen windmill factories are operating in Kalamazoo. | 1932 | School enrollment reaches 381 with 18 teachers. |
| 1885-1900 | First Dutch families arrive and begin growing celery. | 1934 | Salaries of township board members are cut due to lack of funds. |
| 1886 | Lathrop Hotel burns. | 1936 | Stuart McCamley is elected township supervisor. |
| 1900 | More than 3,000 acres of drained muck land are in celery production; there are more than 200 celery growers and 25 shippers. | 1940 | First traffic lights are installed at Milham and Westnedge (Carpenters Corners) and at Portage and Milham. |
| 1902 | Methodist Church is erected on southwest corner of Centre and Westnedge. | 1941 | Central Fire Station is built on Westnedge and Jake Mein is named fire chief. |
| 1902 | Reformed Church services are held each Wednesday evening in District #5 schoolhouse. | 1942 | Permanent street signs are erected in Portage. |
| 1903 | First resident pastor arrives from Iowa for Reformed Church. | 1945 | The Upjohn Company acquires 1,500 acres on Portage Road. |
| 1910 | Reformed Church sanctuary is completed. | 1946 | Portage schools are consolidated and reorganized as Portage Township Schools. |
| 1910 | Twenty horse sheds are built for Methodist Church at a cost of \$350.00 | 1947 | Varl Wilkinson becomes superintendent of schools. |
| 1916 | Wolber's General Store opens. | 1948 | The Upjohn Company opens Portage plant. |
| 1920 | District #5 School (Portage Center) becomes a teacher training center for Western State Normal College. | 1949 | Portage High School, later to be known as Portage Central High School, opens. |
| 1922 | Portage Agricultural School opens with five teachers and 183 students. | 1950 | Dr. R. Keith Currier establishes Portage Medical Clinic. |
| 1924 | Electric lights are installed in Methodist church. | 1950 | Portage First Reformed Church erects new building. |
| 1924-26 | Early plats are developed in vicinity of lakes. | 1957 | John Plantefaber is elected township supervisor. |
| 1925 | Band program begins in school and PTA is organized. | 1960 | Friends of the Library organized. |

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| 1961 | The Upjohn Company office building opens on Portage Road. | 1970 | George Conti is appointed superintendent of schools. |
| 1962 | Portage Public Library opens on Milham Avenue. | 1971 | School enrollment reaches 10,991, a high water mark. |
| 1963 | Portage is incorporated as a city. | 1973 | Betty Lee Ongley elected mayor. |
| 1963 | Bernard Mein becomes first mayor of Portage. | 1974 | Donald Ziemke is appointed city manager. |
| 1963 | Portage Township Schools become Portage Public Schools. | 1975 | George VonBehren becomes chief of police. |
| 1964 | Portage Police Department is established. | 1975 | Business directory lists 33 industries operating in Portage. |
| 1965 | Portage Northern High School is opened. | 1975 | State Equalized Valuation reaches \$270,223,100. |
| 1966 | Frank Hemphill is appointed city librarian. | 1976 | Portage Public Library will open new building. |
| 1967 | Wolbers store closes after fifty years on the same site and under the same ownership. | 1976 | New fire station will open on Oakland Drive. |

PORTAGE CHURCHES - 1976

BEREAN BAPTIST CHURCH, 7813 South Twelfth Street. First met at Amberly Elementary School on January 12, 1969. Have been at present location since August, 1970, have a membership of 330, and plan to build a new sanctuary as soon as possible.

BETHLEHEM ASSEMBLY OF GOD, 7835 Lovers Lane.

CHAPEL HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 2209 Romence Road. First met on October 15, 1961, at Portage North Junior High School in the Little Theater. Moved to present address August 14, 1966. Beginning with a charter membership of 86, the congregation has grown to 360 and is looking forward to building a sanctuary next to the fellowship hall.

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING (EPISCOPAL), 2600 Vincent Drive. First met at Angling Road School in April, 1967, and moved to the present location May, 1969. Built at a cost of more than \$1,600,000, The Cathedral is the seat of the Diocese of Western Michigan.

FAITH REFORMED CHURCH, 308 West Milham Avenue. First ministered to the Carpenters Corners' area children prior to World War II by busing youngsters to Trinity Church, then meeting in a home and finally building a church at the present site in 1948. The new sanctuary was erected in 1954.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF PORTAGE, 1105 East Centre Avenue.

FIRST CHURCH OF GOD, 1917 East Centre Avenue.

FIRST CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE, 5625 Oakland Drive. First met in a hall on North Rose Street in Kalamazoo on November 18, 1924. After meeting in five different locations in Kalamazoo, the congregation bought 10 acres on Oakland Drive in 1960, where a parsonage and fellowship hall were built. Present church was completed in 1964.

FIRST REFORMED CHURCH OF PORTAGE, 7905 South Westnedge Avenue. (See chapter 7)

FIRST MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH,
2202 Ramona Avenue.

FULL GOSPEL COMMUNITY CHURCH, 5329
Chamberlain Street.

GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH, 3600 Milham
Avenue. First met at Milham School in 1963 and
moved to present location in 1969.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES PORTAGE CON-
GREGATION, 7415 Oakland Drive.

LAKE CENTER BIBLE CHURCH, 805 East
Osterhout Avenue. The congregation first met
October 17, 1937 at Lake Center School, moved to
Portage Road and Bacon in 1948 and to present
location in November of 1962.

LEXINGTON GREEN CHRISTIAN RE-
FORMED CHURCH, 5828 Cheshire Street. First
met in the Lexington Green Elementary School
March 6, 1966 and moved to present location
September 17, 1970.

LORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH, 9420
Portage Road. First met at Lake Center School in
October, 1966, and moved to present location
May 28, 1969.

MAPLEVIEW BAPTIST CHURCH, 10601
Shaver Road.

NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH, 2615 Kalarama
Avenue.

OAKLAND DRIVE CHURCH OF CHRIST,
7331 Oakland Drive.

PORTAGE CHRISTIAN REFORMED
CHURCH, 10010 Portage Road. First meeting
was at the present location in February of 1966.

PORTAGE CONGREGATIONAL UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST, 2713 West Milham
Avenue. First met at Haverhill School September
9, 1962, and moved to present location September
10, 1967. A new educational wing, which houses a
weekday nursery school, was completed in 1975.

PORTAGE FIRST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH, 8740 South Westnedge Avenue. (See
chapter 7)

PORTAGE FREE METHODIST CHURCH,
1715 West Centre Avenue.

PRAIRIE EDGE CHRISTIAN REFORMED
CHURCH, 9316 Oakland Drive. First met on
April 2, 1937 in the old Prairie Edge School on
Oakland, south of Shaver. Later used a one room
chapel on Oakland, and this building was later
used for chicken processing and then housed
Great Lakes Graphic Arts. Building at the
present location was built in 1956 and remodeled
and enlarged in 1969.

PRINCE OF PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH,
1747 West Milham Avenue. First met at present
location March 31, 1963, with 213 people in
attendance. An education wing was added in
1967; membership in 1975 was 706.

SAINT BARNABAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
929 East Centre Avenue. First met at Ramona
Lane School on March 6, 1960, as a mission of St.
Lukes Church, Kalamazoo. First service in the
present building was April 20, 1962.

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA CHURCH,
1150 West Centre Avenue. First met at Portage
Central Junior High in August, 1966, and moved
to the present location in 1970.

SAINT JAMES EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH, 2381 Romence Road. First met in 1967
at Amberly Elementary School and moved to
present location in 1974.

SAINT MICHAEL LUTHERAN CHURCH,
7211 Oakland Drive.

SOUTHRIDGE REFORMED CHURCH, 1819
Romence Road. First met October 9, 1960 at
Amberly School and moved to present location in
1963.

WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
1515 Helen Avenue. First met in June, 1957, at
Milwood School and moved to present location
July, 1961. Beginning with 222 charter members,
the Church now has 520 members.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD, Angling
Road School. First met at Angling Road School
December, 1969, and remain at the same location.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

To give some idea of the scope of this history project from a research standpoint, the following list of sources of information is included. Countless hours were spent exploring these sources.

Books concerning life in the 19th century

Available history books concerning Kalamazoo County

Newspaper clippings (unfortunately not always accurate)

Old diaries

Township meeting records (some missing)

Old district school minutes from three districts, 2, 7 & 8 (others not available)

School materials from newspaper clippings

Material written by former superintendents of Agricultural School

Old country school books from Kalamazoo Public Library

Michigan Historical collections (sections on Kalamazoo County)

Genealogical records (Magazines of Kalamazoo County)

Material on individuals from Kalamazoo Museum

Old tax records from 1849

Federal census records from 1840 to 1900

Agricultural records giving descriptions of farms, stock and valuation (productivity)

City surveys (2)

County clerk

County register of deeds

County probate court

County records of original government land entries

Cemetery records

Abstracts from homes given by private individuals

Old church records and present day membership records

Interviews with area residents including many senior citizens

Collection of pictures of private individuals — homes, schools, old pioneers, etc.
(always returned after photographed)

Kalamazoo City and County directories

Biographical sketches of pioneer citizens

About the Editor



A native of Dallas, Texas, Posie Tomlinson was a 1949 graduate of Hockaday Preparatory School. Two years at Grinnell College in Iowa and one year at the University of Nebraska, followed. After her college years she held Civil Service positions in both California and London, England, prior to moving to Portage in 1956 when her husband, Dick, joined The Upjohn Company. Although their roots are not deep in the Portage community, they are nonetheless firmly fixed. Their three sons were born here. Bill, the eldest, is an alumnus of Portage Northern High School and a student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Steve is a student at Northern High School, and Charles is at North Junior High School.

Well known through her community activities, Posie epitomizes the philosophy that a citizen ought to be in partnership with his or her community. She has performed volunteer work in several of the Portage School libraries and served on various community boards. She has also spent many hours tutoring students with language disabilities.

That *Portage and Its Past* has become a reality is due in large part to the countless hours Posie has spent in editing the manuscript, selecting illustrations and supervising layout. As a source of inspiration to others, and through her untiring efforts, she has, in this book, contributed immeasurably to preserving the heritage of the Portage community.

Ted Vliek,
1976

