

CHAPTER VII

CITY OF MONTAGUE

The first dwelling on the site of the future village of Montague was the home and blacksmith shop of Nathan Sargent which he built in 1850. The land on which Montague now stands was first owned by Rogers and Sargent, afterwards by A. Knudson, then by G. W. Franklin and later by Ferry and Dowling.

In 1861 Noah Ferry then managing the Ferry Stream Mill at the Mouth settlement laid out the plans for the Village of Montague which was to be so named in Honor of his father, the Rev. William Montague Ferry.

In the summer of 1862 a number of men resident at and near White River were anxious to respond to their country's call in the Civil War and join the Blue forces. At a meeting July 23, 1862, he was called to lead this group, and he said he would go and "stand by you til the last." That evening 82 men entered into the United States Army with Noah as Captain, H. Hefferman as 1st Lieutenant and E. C. Dicey as 2nd Lieutenant. Next day they had 102 men and were Co. F of 5th Michigan Cavalry. Noah was promoted to Major and Dicey to Captain, they led their men into bloody battles.

Major Ferry fell in battle near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, about 4 o'clock on July 3, 1863. At the hour of his temporary burial, his elder brother, William Montague Ferry, Jr., was accompanying General Grant into Vicksburg; and his younger brother, Edward P. Ferry, was delivering an oration in Montague. From General Custer's Official Report of August 22, 1863: "Among the killed, I regret to record the name of Major N. H. Ferry of 5th Michigan Cavalry who fell while heroically cheering on his men." He had picked up a musket of one of his fallen men, was loading and a bullet through his head felled him. At his death his property reverted to his father, Rev. William Montague Ferry.

In 1864 the Knudsen Brothers built the first store building in the new Village of Montague.

The Village was located and platted in 1865. Sometime in this same period, Ferry and Dowling built the building now known as Nesbit's Thriftway Market. It was first used as a mill office and general store.

Behind the store, was a warehouse where boats docked. Just at the rear of this building, the Red Mill of Ferry and Dowling stood, lumber was piled behind it. Years ago, there was a public scale beside the building on the Dowling Street side, which was used for weighing loads of hay, etc. Whoever owned the store did

the weighing. Until recently, a stairway went up to the second story on the Dowling Street side.

The first post office in Montague was established in 1867 with O. R. Goodno as post master who served until 1875 when he was succeeded by Harry B. Strong and in 1877 Henry Becker took over, with the office located in a very inferior building opposite the Ferry-Dowling office.

In 1870 the rapidly growing Village of Montague took on a metropolitan air with the building of the Montague House by Ferry and Dowling. The Muskegon Enterprise issue of February 10, 1871, carried this description: "At Montague all is enthusiasm over the pride of the village, the new grand hotel erected and being completed by Messrs Ferry Dowling and Company under supervision of Cap't S. S. Barrows, the design for which was furnished by George C. Garsay of Chicago. The hotel fronts on the street that crosses the lake and Ferry St. which is the principal one of the village. It is built in the form of an L having frontage of 138 ft. on both streets: is 40 feet in width and 4 stories high. From the basement to the roof is 58 feet.

The main entrance is on the angle at the corner of the street and is furnished in most approved style. Inside we enter the lobby with the clerk's office at the left inside which is an enunciator connecting with all the dormitories of the building. The ladies reception room is just beyond the clerk's office, 12 x 12 ft. which is entered by a door opening into Ferry St. and one opening into the main hall. Near this are two parlors for private receptions, one 8 x 16 and the other 10 x 16 ft. On this floor also is a commodious gentlemen's reading room 13 x 21 feet in size to be appropriately furnished beyond which at the end of the corridor is the dining room. This is 30 x 50 feet lighted with ten large windows. In connection with the dining room is a closet for dishes, a carving room, with steam heater, a dumb waiter, etc.

The cook room, laundry, etc. are in the basement in the part fronting on Bridge St. In the Ferry St. basement part are the billard room, saloon, and barber shop, all of ample dimensions. On the second and third floors are suites of rooms and single rooms with most of second floor being suites. These are all large, comfortable, and pleasant; especially the west ones from which is a fine view of White Lake and the village of Whitehall. The fourth floor is devoted to smaller rooms. In this story is a large tank from which all the rooms are supplied with hot and cold water. The well is in the basement and is about 60 ft. deep and the water of the purest. The water is raised to the tanks by force pumps. Among other conveniences the hotel is furnished with two bathrooms, one for ladies and one for men.

Just east of the hotel and adjoining it is H. P. Dowling's new four story building 50 x 80 ft. two stories at street and basement, second floor for offices and third fitted out with a hall the full size of the building 50 x 80 ft. and a good height making it one of the best halls in Western Michigan.

It is expected the hotel will open about Feb. 22. The prospective proprietor is Mr. Kirkland, formerly of the Railroad House, Grand Haven, and its proprietor's name will be sufficient evidence of its excellence. The rooms on the second floor are all well furnished in black walnut. The dining room is well provided for, colored servants are in attendance, prepared to furnish almost anything except coffee for dinner."

The year 1871 saw the beginning of the newspaper business in Montague in December of that year, Mr. John G. Lee, brought out the first issue of "The Syndicate."

The pride of Montague was short lived for in February of 1873, fire, the spectre of the forest lands completely destroyed the Montague House, and wrote finis to the fledging newspaper, the Syndicate.

Charles Ohrenberger, Sr., recalled that during the terrible blaze the Ferry, Dowling office and store directly across the street was saved by men throwing snowballs at the building. The disaster of the Montague House led to the construction of one of the longer lasting landmarks of the Montague scene, in the same year as the fire, George Franklin and Henry Dowling built the Franklin House.

For many years it was considered the finest hotel this side of Chicago. It was a place of note in this area ever since except when shut-down for a few years. Grand opening for the hotel was in 1874. Festive events took place in the 3rd floor ballroom. Behind the hotel was a horse barn with an elevated boardwalk leading to the hotel. An ice house also was in the rear. Separate wood stoves furnished heat for each guest room in the hotel, also for all other rooms.

One of the earliest proprietors was a pompous and picturesque person known about the place as "Colonel" Watson.

Following the Civil War a former Virginian born a slave, Isaac W. Bird became the hotel manager. Records show Mr. Bird was taken into the Confederate army and later escaped and joined the Union forces for the remainder of the war.

Perhaps the lesson learned by the loss of the Montague House led the business leaders of the town to realize however constant was the threat of fire to a lumbering community, at any rate in October 25, 1873, the first Montague Fire Department was organized. It was a volunteer department whose principle stockholders were: Ferry Dowling Company, S. H. Lasley and Company, Burrows and

Jones, Wilson and Hendries, C. H. Cook, Heald, Murphy and Crepin, F. H. White and Company, Mason Brothers, M. Dodge and Son and Partridge Brothers. The engine was an excellent one "Montague No. 1" of Clapp and Jones Manufacture. The hose would stand a pressure of 175 pounds. There were also two hose companies and a hand engine.

The following were the first officers: J. Heald, President; O. R. Goodno, Secretary; Malcolm Hendrie, Treasurer; and H. P. Dowling, Chief Engineer a few years later D. C. Bowen became President. The above organizers were businessmen and saw mill companies and they paid for the equipment.

In 1874, L. G. Ripley came to the White Lake area and established a drug store in the old bank building on the corner of Ferry and Dowling Streets and later moved to the Franklin House block.

In 1876, L. G. Ripley built the present Lipka block and moved his drug store there.

April 1883-The first election of officers of the Village of Montague was held.

President	Henry O. Bell
Trustee's 2 years	James D. Wilson, Wm. J. Mason
	Ernest E. Crepin
1 year	F. E. Jones, W. A. Austin, Louis
	Louis Ham
Clerk	George M. Dodge
Treasurer	S. H. Lasley
Assessor	C. E. Burrows
St. Commissioner	M. Downey
Constable	H. J. Dykhuis

First meeting of Village Council May 21, 1883.

Committee presented two Ordinances, Sidewalk and Crosswalk and disorderly persons for adoption, same was adopted.

Street commissioner was instructed to notify the property owners along Church and Dowling Streets to construct within the next 30 days a sidewalk 6 feet wide of 2" pine or hemlock lumber nailed to three 4 x 4" stringers with 20d nails, at least 6 nails to each plank.

Prior to the building of the present harbor, all commerce in and out of the lake had to pass through the Old Channel, and this fact contributed greatly towards making the settlement there the leading center on the lake. Moreover, the Old Channel was a favorite harbor of refuge in those days to the many sailing vessels that plied Lake Michigan.

The cost and delay in getting lumber from the White Lake mills

to market was always a problem to the mill operator's. Because of the shallow winding old channel, lumber had to be rafted down the lake and lightered aboard the deep water sailing vessels anchored in Lake Michigan off the old mouth. Even the harbor improvements, the slab piers put in by Noah Ferry in 1855 at the old mouth were soon insufficient for the demand for larger ships and better loading methods. In 1870, the U. S. Government cut through the narrows separating White Lake from Lake Michigan and built a deep water channel and light house, the death knell was sounded for the Old Mouth Village.

With the diversion of the current away from the Old Channel, all of the activities ceased and the village declined until today there are few vestiges of it remaining.

The cemetery at the top of the high bluff that overlooks the upper end of the Old Channel, the city of its dead where lie buried many of the early pioneers of this section, is the most important memorial we have.

The oldest settler buried there is Quis-Mo-Qua, an Ottawa woman born in an Indian settlement on Grand River, who came to White Lake when a little girl. Her birth was believed to be in 1787, and she died December 12, 1897. She married an Ottawa Indian who chose the surname of Anderson. Their daughter, She-Ka-Gaw, married a man named Armstrong, and descendants of their two sons, Thomas and George, still live in the White Lake Area. Another old timer buried there is Captain William Robinson, the first lighthouse keeper of White Lake. He was the father of Mrs. William Murray. His grave lies in a shady secluded spot with most of the ground covered with myrtle just off Old Channel Trail.

One can still find remnants of the old edging docks that lined the banks of the Old Channel that once were stacked high with lumber, and at which rafts of logs were made up to be poled along the beach to Grand Haven for sale, or hauled by oxen, and where the old lighters were loaded with lumber to be conveyed out to the schooners at anchor in deep water because the old mouth was too shallow to permit them to come in. One can even find the bed of the old Ferry Mill.

The Old Channel Inn was once the site of the Ferry store, back of it in among the sand dunes is the old Eason home. To the north on top of the hill is the Bruce home. On the high bluff overlooking the Channel and Lake Michigan is the Weber home, built by John Welsh, who was a member of the firm of Welsh, Heald, Crepin and Murphy, who operated the Ferry Mill for a time. Back in among the oaks that have since come in to replace the pine, near the cemetery, is the Hamilton House which was first a boarding house for the men who worked in the mill.

PANZL'S VARIETY
Helen & Arnold Panzl