

CHAPTER XIX

LAST OF THE PAST

Before leaving the past behind, a short resume of the Governmental activities of the area should be included.

Montague Township, including what later became the Village of Montague, was a part of Oceana Township. Oceana Township contained what is now all of Montague Township, the City of Montague, Whitehall Township, and the City of Whitehall and the northern part of Blue Lake Township.

On March 24, 1874, Montague Township was organized, and the first annual meeting was held on April 10, 1874; Joseph Heald was elected the first supervisor.

It must be understood that the area known as Montague Township had a common government from 1874 until the summer of 1935. At this time, the village of Montague voted to withdraw from the township and incorporate as a city. This action resulted in producing two separate units: Montague Township and the City of Montague.

The first meeting of Montague Township after the separation was held at the home of M. S. C. Whitbeck, who had been the supervisor of the combined unit for several years. This meeting was for the purpose of selecting township officers for the new unit. Whitbeck was named supervisor, Harry Butzer as clerk, and Jessie Munson as treasurer. It should be noted that Harry Butzer served as clerk for 22 years, and has been the supervisor for the past 10 years, making a total of 32 years of service.

From the beginning Montague Township, as far as the rural section was concerned, was strictly an agricultural area. Of course, the huge Saw Mill complex made the area very industrialized.

Families living in the rural area during the first 50 years derived their living from farming. Fruit, especially apples, were a major product about the year 1900. Wheat and potatoes were produced in this area in large quantities until about 1915. The next 20 years, 1915-1935, saw a change in the type of farming. Red Kidney beans became the number one cash crop.

Dairy herds began to develop in the area at this time. The milk was all run through separators, and the cream was sold to two local creameries.

This change resulted in making the Township a very diversified area from an agricultural standpoint. Each farm had 6-10 cows, 100 laying hens, a few hogs, and several head of young cattle. The chickens, hogs, and calves were kept to use up the skim milk.

By 1935, the red kidney bean acreage dwindled to nearly zero because of low yields caused by diseases affecting this crop. The cash crop problem was solved about 1935 when Gerbers of Fremont

contracted the growing of peas. For several years peas were an important crop in the area. Today the peas are out of the picture, and cucumbers grown for the pickle industry remain as the only cash crop. These can be grown on sandy soil, and so do not compete too directly with the production of milk.

Today the cream separators are gone. Whole milk is the chief product in the township, together with one of the largest commercial vegetable and plant farms in Western Michigan. Located on the muckland along White River.

Today only 5 major herds of dairy cattle are located in the township. However, these 460 cows produce about 6 million pounds of milk each year. Needless to say, these farms constitute the best soil in the area.

One more important crop is growing today in the township. People. Forty years ago, very few people lived in the township unless they were actively engaged in farming. Today, over 400 homes exist in the area whose owners are not engaged in farming, but who choose to live out where there is more "elbow room."

A study of the history of Montague Township must not overlook the development of an industry in the area. As early as 1872, it was discovered that Muskegon County was underlaid with enormous deposits of salt. With the hope of making salt production an important industry in this area, the first deep well was started in 1872 by Mason Lumber Company of Muskegon, and drilled to a depth of 2627 feet. Mechanical pumping difficulties at this depth resulted in abandoning the hope of making Muskegon County a major salt producing area.

The hope of capitalizing on this huge deposit of salt was born again in 1951 when the Hooker Electrical Chemical Company became interested in the area. Test wells showed a huge salt deposit. After hurdling a few obstacles, such as zoning ordinances and selling the nearby residents on the idea, work was started on construction early in 1952. The plant was built, and the production of chlorine, caustic soda, and hydrogen was started March 17, 1954.

Today, after 13 years, Montague Township no longer depends on agriculture alone. This giant chemical plant and the people who live in the township and work for Hooker are a real asset to the community.

One must conclude that the Township's future looks bright. It has an excellent industrial plant. The heavy fertile soils are being well managed by a group of good young farmers. In addition each year sees more fine homes being built in the area. With this program in progress who could be pessimistic?

The first Village Council meeting of Montague was held in April, 1883, with these activities following:

A bill to provide a loan for the purchase of necessary fire apparatus, be submitted to a vote of the qualified electors of the

Village of Montague and that said vote be taken at the engine house in said Village, on Monday, the 23rd day of July, 1883.

Votes cast were 97

For the loan 75

Against the loan 22

April 7, 1884 - The committee appointed to investigate the workings of the Whitehall fire department, reported that they had conferred with the same and found they were paid a certain price while on duty, also that they have a paid engineer.

it was moved that Charles S. Dodge be appointed Chief engineer of fire department and that he be instructed to organize a fire company with the understanding that they be paid 30¢ an hour for actual services rendered, also that the sum of five dollars be allowed to the team that hauled the engine to and from a fire, also that \$2.50 be allowed for a false alarm.

Fire committee be instructed to look up the most suitable locations for cisterns on both hills.

March, 1885 - Frank H. White, elected President served two years.

April 28, 1887 - President William A. Whitman.

A petition with fifty signers from among the W. C. T. U. and others was read urging the enforcement of the laws regulating the business of the liquor sellers.

June 17, 1887 - The assessment toll of the Village was certified to the Council by the Board of Review, and a motion was made and carried that a tax equal to three-fourths of one per cent of the total Valuation be raised for highway and general purposes.

March 1888 George M Duram elected President

March 1889 George R. Hancock elected President

March 1890 William E. Osman elected President

March 1891 Warren A. Austin elected President

March 1892 George C. Thompson elected President.

March 1893 William J. Mason elected President served two

years.

August 29, 1893 - Moved and supported that the President Trustees Dickenson and Gardiner be appointed a committee to confer with the Township Board in reference to bridges within the Village, to ascertain who should build and keep in repair such bridges.

September 26, 1893 - The President, as chairman of committee appointed to confer with Township Board in reference to bridges inside Corporation, reported that the Township had charge of six bridges as follows: The one on Ferry Street by engineer house, the one in front of Iron Works, the bridge or bridges on Bridge Street, and the one on road to Healdtown crossing Coon Creek, the one near Dowling Park, and the one crossing Coon Creek on the road leading to Fair Grounds. The report was accepted and adopted.

March, 1895 - George E. Gardiner elected President.

March, 1896 - George H. Mason elected President served two years.

March, 1898 - Thomas J. McKinstery elected President served three years.

April 9, 1900 - Motion was made and supported that the proposition of the Ladies Improvement Society to furnish a street lamp, if the Village would care for same, be accepted, motion carried.

March, 1901 - William E. Osman elected President served three terms.

Motion made and supported that when the Township builds an Iron Bridge on Cook Street at Dowling Park, said bridge to be 100 feet long and built according to the plans submitted by the Grand Rapids Bridge Company. The Village will build approaches to same.

An election was held April 9, 1902, for the purpose of purchasing ground for a Public Park for the Village of Montague, said Bonds in the amount of \$6,000.00 interest 4 1/2 per cent payable semi-annually. 159 votes were cast, 158 in favor and 1 against. The land purchased was all of Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 Original Plat of Village of Montague.

March, 1904 - George H. Mason elected President.

May 26, 1904 - The Village of Montague purchased Block "A" from the Board of Trade for the sum of \$2,000.00.

March, 1908 - William Lipka elected President.

March, 1910 - William Thieman elected President.

June 13, 1910 - Cement sidewalk was ordered built from Maple Grove School to Wilcox Street, this to include Iron Bridge across Coon Creek, cost of bridge, \$475.00.

March, 1912 - George H. Smith elected President and served seven years.

June 14, 1916 - Motion was made to send Mr. William Osman to Washington as a representative for the Village of Montague, in the interest of the White Lake Harbor.

December 10, 1917 - An ordinance was adopted that the President and Trustees shall receive a compensation at the rate of \$1.00 per regular meeting and not to exceed \$25.00 in any one year, as per law passed by the legislation of the State of Michigan, on April 13, 1917.

March, 1924 - Axel C. Johnson elected President, served two years.

March, 1926 - Henry Eicke elected President, served three years.

1927 - The Village of Montague voted to Bond the Village for \$30,000.00 for a water system, mains and standpipe.

May 14, 1928 - A special election was held for the purchase of complete street lighting equipment, of the Village of Montague, for the sum of \$850.00. 81 votes were cast, 77 for and 4 against.

September 26, 1928 - The Village of Montague voted to become a member of Michigan Municipal League.

March, 1929 - Axel C. Johnson elected President, served six years.

March, 1934 - George H. Smith elected President, served two years, and in 1935 was elected Mayor under new charter.

March, 1935 - A special election was held for the purpose of voting on the incorporation of the Village of Montague, as a fifth class city. There were 339 votes cast, 234 for and 104 against.

Charter commission elected - Adolph Anderson, Adolph Eicke, Stanley Huston, Axel C. Johnson, Fred Hinman, George H. Smith, Paul Medberry, Charles Ohrenberger and C. A. Wilke.

June 3, 1935 - The election to adopt the charter was held. 226 votes cast, 139 for and 87 against.

April, 1939 - Dr. C. A. Wilke elected Mayor, served four years.

April 28, 1943 - The city purchased property from Dr. B. A. Hamilton for Municipal Park for the sum of \$5,000.00.

June 23, 1943 - At a regular meeting of the City Council the property purchased from Dr. Hamilton was named "Medbury Park."

August 23, 1944 - Motion was made and carried that City Engineer Alfred E. Hansen be authorized to draw up preliminary plans for a Sanitary Sewer System, plans to be submitted before October 1, 1944, to the Post War Planning Commission. Cost to be \$3,500.00, State to reimburse City 50% of the expense.

August 21, 1946 - Zoning Ordinance was adopted.

April, 1947 - Edward Scharmer was elected Mayor, served six years.

June 16, 1947 - Mrs. Harry W. Block, President of the Friends of the Library, requested permission to move the Library into the Councilroom, and the request was granted.

July 17, 1947 - An Ordinance creating the City of Montague Planning Commission and defining its powers and duties was adopted.

August 20, 1947 - City engineer, Alfred E. Hansen was instructed to draw up a master plan for the City of Montague water system.

November 17, 1947 - An ordinance called a Traffic Ordinance was adopted.

December 4, 1950 - An Ordinance Creating and Establishing The Street Names and the numbering of houses in the City of Montague was adopted.

March 21, 1953 - An ordinance was adopted, providing for the Rehabilitation and Extension of the Water Supply System of the City of Montague, estimated cost to be \$70,000.00.

February 6, 1956 - An ordinance to grant the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company a permit to lay, maintain, operate and use gas pipes in the City of Montague was adopted.

April 23, 1956 - A special election was held to grant Michigan Consolidated Gas Company a franchise; yes 105, no 2.

September 4, 1956 - Curfew Ordinance was adopted.

November, 1958 - George Dillabaugh appointed Mayor.

April, 1959 - George Dillabaugh was elected Mayor, served four terms.

May 5, 1960 - An ordinance to provide for the Construction and Improvement of the Water Supply System for the City of Montague, to refund the outstanding Water Revenue Bonds, cost of same \$370,000.00.

August 9, 1960 - Bids were opened for sale of bonds.

September 25, 1961 - Bids let for fire station, cost for same \$15,000.00.

April 14, 1962 - Open house was held at new fire station.

March 1, 1965 - The City Council adopted the slogan "Progress Our Hobby, Friendship Our Habit."

April, 1965 - Herbert A. Jacobs elected Mayor.

March 20, 1967 - An Ordinance to adopt a Revision and Codification of Ordinances of the City of Montague, Entitled the Montague City Code, was adopted.

April, 1967 - Henry M. Hunt was elected Mayor.

In September of 1960, an event occurred that put the City of Montague on the front pages of every newspaper in America and was carried in most of the foreign countries. Over television and radio the whole world heard the name of Montague.

Pandemonium broke loose in Montague on an evening in September, 1960. Eighty million people were watching a two hour telecast of the Miss America finals. When Bert Parks named Miss Nancy Anne Fleming as the new Miss America for 1961, our normally quiet town vibrated with excitement and pride. There were those amongst us who expressed no surprise at the final results of the contest. Nancy Anne broke all the "myths" about beauty contest winners. She was born on May 20, 1942, in Muskegon, Michigan. The oldest of six children born to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fleming, she graduated from Montague High School with an "A" average, winning four scholarships. Nancy was not only an honor student, but had designed and made her own clothing from the age of nine years. She is a very proficient cook and had spent two summers as a life guard at the Montague Bathing Beach. Nancy had always been a leader during her school years, and a friendly, happy young lady.

When Nancy came home on October 28, 1960, it was a gala occasion in Muskegon County. A parade was held in her honor. It began in Muskegon Heights, continuing through Muskegon, North Muskegon, Whitehall, and ending at the Montague Memorial Football Field. There were 18 high school bands in the parade. Beginning at the Montague-Whitehall Causeway Bridge, the parade was telecast live. In addition to the bands, there were many floats, and celebrities included. In all, there were approximately 100 units. Some of the well known persons attending were Senator Phillip Hart, and the new Senator Robert P. Griffin.

At 3:30 p.m., a program was held on the Memorial Field. High-

lighting the program was a rendition of the "Miss America Song" played by the combined bands of 1,000 musicians. They were directed by Carl Bjerregaard, who was then band director of Montague High. That evening a testimonial dinner was held at the Montague High School Gymnasium. Nancy left Montague and went on to a wonderful year touring and representing her country as a lovely, intelligent Miss America.