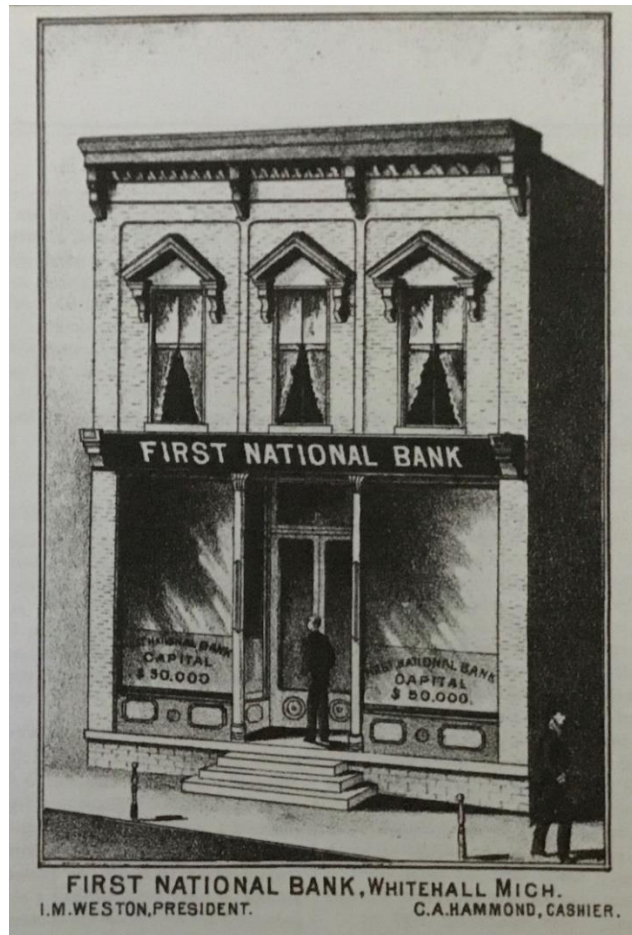


## Banking in Whitehall

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The first bank in Whitehall, was a private institution, chartered in 1869. The Exchange Bank was opened by Frank Blackmarr on November 14, 1870, with C. A. Hammond as Cashier. It is unclear where the bank was actually located.

The Lumberman's State Bank was organized on August 11, 1873, under State banking laws with a capital of \$50,000. The officers were as follows: President, Hon. John P. Cook; Vice President, Hon. Elliot T. Slocum; Cashier, Frank Blackmarr; Assistant Cashier, C. A. Hammond; Directors: Hon. John P. Cook, Hon. Elliot T. Slocum, John C. Lewis, Hon. George M. Smith, E. M. Ruggles, Frank Blackmarr, and Charles H. Cook. The new bank bought the old Exchange Bank's business.

The bank building was built in 1873, of Milwaukee brick, at a cost of \$12,000. It contained a large vault with double burglar-proof Hall doors. Inside the vault was one of Hall's latest improved burglar-proof safes, with Sargent's time lock and also a chest of iron safety deposit boxes for customers.

An early map of Whitehall dated 1877 shows the Lumberman's Bank located just west of the alley on the south side of Colby Street. The building still exists today and has its own history.

Col. William Weston purchased a controlling interest in the stock in July 1876 and was elected President. In June 1877, his son I. M. Weston succeeded Frank Blackmarr as Cashier. On July 17, 1879, I. M. Weston succeeded his father as President and principal owner of the bank, and C. A. Hammond, the former Assistant Cashier was elected Cashier.

September 1, 1879, it was re-organized as the First National Bank of Whitehall, with the same officers.

In 1881 the officers were: President, I. M. Weston; Vice President, Albert Mears; Cashier, C. A. Hammond. Directors: I. M. Weston, Albert Mears, B. F. Weston, John C. Lewis, L. G. Ripley, E. M. Ruggles and S. H. Lasley.

The official statement made to the Comptroller of the Currency on October 1, 1881, showed: Capital Stock, \$50,000; surplus and undivided earnings, \$10,151.33; cash on hand, \$44,593.47; deposits, \$152,256.89.

The bank did business for a very large area, being the only one between Muskegon and Pentwater. In October 1890, the First National Bank was reorganized as a State Bank.

In April, 1894, it was announced that the Whitehall State Saving Bank was the successor to the First National Bank of Whitehall.

On January 23, 1895, a fire was discovered in the bank building. It appeared to have started in the basement and smoldered for some time before being noticed. The floor of the counting room was burned away, and the walls and ceiling were badly burned and scorched. Original damage estimates were placed at \$1,000 which was covered by insurance. It was later adjusted to \$487.

A week later, on January 31, 1895, another fire was reported about 2:00 AM. It appeared to have originated from the chimney. It was quickly extinguished. The night watchman has to be rescued.

The Whitehall Bank closed January 2, 1897, and was taken possession of by a Mr. Sherwood of the bank commissioner's office of the State. There was a trial that ended in 1899, and the defendants were found not guilty.

In February 1898, Henry H. Terwilliger opened the Muskegon County Bank of Whitehall. This was not a national or state bank, but simply an individual or private bank operated by someone with 23 years banking experience. Terwilliger was also operating the Muskegon County Bank of Montague.

Ads for O'Donald and Morton Bankers started to appear in the newspaper in January 1900. That's when Richard H. O'Donald and Edwin R. Morton formed a private bank. O'Donald lived in Howard City. Edwin Morton, the junior partner was sent to Whitehall to take charge of the bank. Edwin lived in Whitehall on Slocum with his wife Mae.

Early on Wednesday morning, November 6, 1901, the bank was robbed. The robbers stole \$650 from Miss Augusta Tornblom's safety deposit box and a water bond of the village of Whitehall for \$500 payable to the bearer. They also stole M. B. Covell's team and drove toward Muskegon, where the team was recovered. Three strangers were seen in town by several individuals; however, they might not have

had anything to do with the robbery. As the bank was insured, every depositor received one hundred cents on a dollar. The bank opened for business the next day.

The State Bank of Whitehall succeeded O'Donald and Morton in 1902. The Directors of the bank at that time were: M. B. Covell, C. E. Covell, C. G. Pitkin, August Edlund and E. R. Morton. Officers were: Mark B. Covell, President; C. G. Pitkin, Vice President; and E. R. Morton, Cashier.

M. B. Covell remained President until his death in 1933. His nephew, George E. Covell succeeded him and served until his death in 1954. Joseph Ocobock served as President until the bank merged in 1957.

In January 1912, it was announced that the stockholders of the State Bank of Whitehall decided to erect a new bank building. Arrangements were made with C. E. and M. B. Covell to purchase the vacant corner lot on Colby and Mears streets opposite the C. G. Pitkin & Co's drug store. Construction began in the Spring.

The interior was carefully planned out. Along the east side were the bookkeeper's, cashier's and teller's windows with the cashier's private office in front. A ladies' writing room was in the rear on the west side. A telephone booth was located under the stairway to the director's gallery. The woodwork was mahogany and the counters and baseboards of marble. The walls were a stipple work, imitating Spanish leather.



The State Bank of Whitehall opened the doors of their new building on Tuesday morning, December 10, 1912, after a strenuous moving day on Monday.

Some trouble was encountered in handling the safe which was moved from the vault in the old building to the new one. The safe weighted over four tons and was placed on a wagon owned by Leslie Norris. The wagon gave away when pulled off a six-inch curb, and the safe went down to the pavement. It was then placed on a stone boat and moved the rest of the way without further difficulty.

From 1913 to 1925, brothers M. B. (Mark) Covell and C. E. (Charles) Covell owned the old bank building. Over the years, there were various businesses that occupied the first floor, while the second floor was rented out as a living space.

October 1913, Victor Munson had Singer Sewing Machines on display in the building.

In 1914, the White Lake Dramatic Club used the rooms over the old bank building.

September 1915 shows F. S. Watkins has a new fruit stand in the former bank building.

In December 1918, I. B. Masure bought out the restaurant business of Fred Walker that was located there. Masure just bought the business, but not the building. It's unclear how long Walker had the restaurant or what it was called. The business was then turned over to J. W. Johnson.

In 1919, John W. "Jack" Johnson opened "The Eat Shop" in the building. Johnson and his family lived upstairs over the restaurant. The restaurant was not very successful for them, so in 1920 Johnson sold the business to Herman Olsen.

In May 1925, Olsen purchased the building from the Covells. Olsen operated the restaurant until 1946 when he sold it to Connie Quint. It retained "The Eat Shop" name. When Quint closed the restaurant in 1958, Dr. Landon Lapham purchased the building. Since then, it seems the building is referred to as the Lapham Building.

In 1920 it was reported that the White Lake Gun Club had newly finished and furnished club rooms located over the old bank building.

In 1933 the bank closed for about six months. When it reopened all the depositors received all their money plus 6% interest from the time it was withheld.

In 1957, a merger took place and the State Bank became known as the Muskegon Bank and Trust Company.

By 1966, plans for expansion and relocation began to take place. A site was selected which required the removal of four historic houses to make room for the new building on Mears. The 2 ½ story Victorian home of George Covell was razed, as was the picturesque Gothic Victorian Linderman house. The Simonson's house was moved to 220 Elliott Street and the fourth house was moved to 615 E. Hanson.

Construction work on the new bank building located at 119 S. Mears began in September 1966. When the work was completed, an Open House was held on June 24, 1967.

In 1978, Muskegon Bank & Trust became First of America. In 1997, First of America bank merged with National City Bank, and in 2010, that name changed to PNC Bank.

Federal Saving and Loan built a branch office at 211 S Mears next door to the Post Office sometime during the 1960s. Through mergers, it became AmeriBank Federal Savings around 1989. Then in 1996 it was just AmeriBank. The name changed again in 2001 to Fifth Third Bank. They closed the Whitehall location around 2019.

In 1981, Shelby State Bank built a branch office on the East side of town, near the corner of Colby and Whitehall Road. They opened another branch office in Montague in 2017, after Comerica Bank moved.

Unused and mostly vacant since the bank moved out, the building was being looked at in 2006 as a possible Italian restaurant. However, that never materialized.

Finally, in January 2013, the former State Bank building was purchased by Dan & Jen Hine. It was basically an empty shell and not up to code. It was in shambles. Everything had been pulled and gutted. There wasn't a pipe, a wire, or anything. After extensive updating and renovation, it became home to Fetch Brewing Company, Muskegon County's first microbrewery which opened on September 24, 2014.

The bank vault was transformed into a seating area referred to as “The Penny Lounge”. The vault’s floor is made up entirely of heads-up pennies.



View of original bank building from a few years ago.