

## Building History – Ferry-Dowling to Sweet-Nesbit

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*Ferry-Dowling - Lasley store. Some of those pictured have been identified as: 2<sup>nd</sup> from the left George Dowling; the woman is Mrs. Dowling; the man to her left is a Mr. Churchill who clerked in the store at the time; the man at the extreme right is S. H. Lasley, Proprietor at the time.*

The above building was built around 1865-66 by Ferry Dowling & Company, former lumbermill owners, and was used as their mill office. At the time of the picture, part of the building was rented out to S. H. Lasley who operated a general merchandise store for them. He was the first merchant in the building and later he became the owner.

The white box to the left of the building is the “public scales” used mainly for weighing loads of hay. Whoever ran the store would also do the weighing.

In 1872 the building was saved from a fire by men throwing snowballs at the building’s wooden walls during the fire which destroyed the nearby Montague House.

S. H. Lasley operated a business from this store from 1873 until early 1886 when he closed the store and took a job as a cashier in the bank in Whitehall.

George H. Mason bought the store building in 1886 and operated a general dry goods store from this location until 1896. His general dry goods store was featured in a newspaper item in February 1890. It reported that on October 1, 1888, Mason adopted the "cash before delivery" plan, stuck to it, and now there is no buying done at his store unless the customer has the money. This system enabled him to pay cash for his goods and give the customer prices which are marked down to bedrock.

William Sweet worked as a clerk in the store for George Mason. Sweet also worked summers for Mason at the store at Michillinda (former location of the Lakeside Inn) from 1896 to 1900.

From 1899 to 1901, Nevin Hendrie owned the building. During that time, Walter E. Nelson and his sister Nina, children of George H. Nelson & Co. of Whitehall, acquired the stock of George Mason and set up a store in Montague for about a couple of years. William Sweet continued to work at the store for the Nelsons.

In May 1899 the Montague Observer moved into an annex that had been built on the south side of the building. The Observer had recently been burned out of their previous location on the second floor in the Ripley block. This first floor location next to Nelson's was more convenient for patrons doing business with the newspaper.

For about 20 years the upstairs of the building was used by the Masonic Lodge as their hall until they moved to the former White Lake Inn building on the corner of Water and Bridge now Dowling.

On March 1, 1901, William Sweet purchased the stock, fixtures and business from George H. Nelson & W. E. Nelson.

In April 1901, Nevin Hendrie sold his block on Ferry Street, occupied by William Sweet and the Montague Observer office to Misses Anna E. and Minnie M. Ohrenberger for \$2,000. They owned the building until 1923.

In November 1923, William E. Sweet and his son Fred bought the large frame building which was occupied by their general store and the Observer office.

In October 1948, Taft Nesbit purchased the former William Sweet store which Sweet had occupied for about 47 years.

On 14 October 1948, Taft Nesbit moved his Quality Market from its location in the 1930 Ohrenberger building to the building formerly occupied by William Sweet.

In October 1951, the second floor of the Nesbit building was removed, as it had not been used for several years. He also changed the entrance to the store from Ferry Street to the corner of Ferry and Dowling.

In July 1952, Nesbit added on a 40x100 foot addition to the south side of the building up to the alley which, when completed nearly doubled the size of the store.

Nesbit operated the store until February 1969 when he sold out to James Bailey, a Muskegon businessman. The building still belonged to Taft Nesbit. Bob Conroy, meatcutter for Nesbit, managed

the store for Bailey. By September 1969 the store, now called Dee's Market, changed from a grocery store to a party store. As a retail liquor license went with the store the plan was to continue that business.

In April 1970, James Smith who had a furniture store in Hart, planned to open a similar store in Montague. The vacant Nesbit building made a great option. He purchased the building and planned a retail store as well as a place to assemble the furniture, which comes crated or knocked down. In December 1970, however, James W. Smith Furniture closed and the building was put up for sale.

May 1971 saw George Bennett of Whitehall and Hiram Rebedew of Muskegon purchasing the former Nesbit building with plans to open the Sanitary Carpet Service. They had been in business on Ottawa Street in Muskegon for several years. It appears they were in business at the Montague location until around 1975.

Several other owners and businesses were in and out of the building over the remaining years. The City of Montague owned the building from 2014 until it was finally torn down in May 2015.



*The former Nesbit building shortly before it was torn down in May 2015*