

Building History - Bakeries and Other Businesses

By Barbara Bedau Brow

White Lake Area Historical Society



This building was built in 1929 to replace a much older wooden building built in the early days of the town and has served as the location of several bakeries and other businesses over the years.

The first bakery listed in the local newspapers was the City Bakery which was operated by Daws Skeels in 1877. According to an ad, the bakery was located at the foot of Colby and Lake Streets. He was born in Cambridgeshire, England in 1829 and came to the U.S. in 1857. In 1860 he was found in the census as a boarding house keeper in Muskegon. In 1876 he came to Whitehall where he was the proprietor of the only bakery in town until July 1897 when the bakery was advertised for sale. Daws Skeels died on January 7, 1901. He was survived by his wife and three children

In May 1902 it was announced that M. E. Thayer of Grand Rapids had opened a bakery, called The Whitehall Bakery, in the old Skeels building. Morris Thayer had several years' experience in this business and should prove to be a success. He was going to run a wagon to the resorts during the season. In September 1902 it was announced that The Whitehall Bakery which had been operating for the past few months, was closed due to lack of business. Mr. Thayer returned to Grand Rapids.

Corey Quackenbush started the Quackenbush Bakery in 1903. His first ads appeared in the paper in May of that year. Canadian born in 1859, he came to this area from Mt. Clements where he entered the bakery business. His younger brother Israel came to the area as well and helped him for several years. In 1914 he traded businesses with his son Edmund who was operating a bakery in Fowlerville. In 1926 he retired from the bakery business to a farm near Fowlerville.

Quackenbush Baking Co. was purchased by Heald & Pietsch in April 1923. The business then became known as the Whitehall Bakery. Their products could be found for sale in all grocers in both towns and they were known for their "Golden Krust Bread". They also operated a bakery in Shelby.

In August 1926, A. R. Heald & A. H. Pietsch sold the Whitehall Bakery to H. Yunker of Traverse City. Pietsch moved to Shelby to assist his partner Mr. Heald in the operation of the Shelby Bakery and restaurant. Yunker had purchased the business, but Heald and Pietsch retained the real estate. Heald died in Shelby in September 1927.

By August 1927, H. Yunker had sold the Whitehall Bakery to George Saupp of Hartford, MI. In late 1928, there were several ads in the paper for the bakery but without an owner or proprietor's name listed.

In January 1929, it was announced that John H. Varenhorst, owner of the Oceana-Hart Bakery, had purchased the building and business of the Whitehall Bakery from George Saupp. As soon as the weather permitted, the old building was going to be torn down and a new modern building (pictured) built at an investment of approximately \$15,000. Mr. Varenhorst was born in the Netherlands in 1877 and immigrated to the United States in 1918. He started his bakery in Hart around 1921 after having come from Detroit. At the time, he had six delivery trucks on the road and did a \$130,000 business in 1928 which made it one of the largest baking companies in Muskegon, Oceana and Mason counties. He was known for his "Sweetheart Bread".

In March 1929, the original old building was razed and replaced with the new modern building. The building has 55 feet of frontage on Colby Street and 90 feet in depth. The space was equally divided into baking sales and lunch room. At the rear of these rooms were the baking department, office, kitchen, and storeroom. The interior of the entire building was white tile.

On June 22, 1929, one of the finest bakery buildings, equipped with the most modern bakery, was completed and opened in Whitehall. The first-class restaurant that was run in connection with the bakery opened for business on June 24. The establishment was known as the "White Lake Sanitary Bakery and Lunch Room".

In October 1929 Harold Schueller announced that he had purchased the business of the White Lake Sanitary Bakery. This arrangement seemed to have been a short venture for Mr. Schueller, and the business reverted to Mr. Varenhorst.

In April 1931 Harry E. Buckley took over the restaurant in the bakery building which was then became known as Buckley's Café. Buckley had previously operated the dining room at the Colonial Inn.

It appears the bakery and lunch room was in business until around 1934. John Varenhorst died in March 1939.

In 1934, I.B. Masure, a local photographer, purchased the former Varenhorst building where he then set up his "Photo Shop" for a number of years. In 1941, he moved out of the building and relocated to the west end of Colby near the former Bank building.

James I. Summers became the proprietor of a new bakery in town in April 1935. He had made arrangements to take over the bakery half of the Masure building which he called Summer's Bakery. He

had been in the bakery business for 18 years with the last 6 years being in Evanston, IL. A full line of baked goods and pastries were baked daily as well as the famous "Golden Crust" bread.

In 1936, a new automatic doughnut machine was installed in the bakery. It could turn out uniform sized doughnuts at the rate of 40 dozen per hour, unaided by human hands, except for placing the dough in the compartment. A touch of the switch and the machine went to work. It cut, fried and removed the doughnuts. In 1941, Summers closed his shop and the family moved to Hart.

The Kroger Company had been in the area since 1932, but since no addresses appeared in any of the ads, it's hard to know where they were located. By 1935, however, they were located in the former W. C. Cotes hardware building, now the west half of Pitkins. In 1942, the Kroger Supermarket moved from the Cotes building to the Masure building. Tom Jones was the Manager of the Meat department for many years. Kroger operated at this location until they closed in 1957.

In October 1957, Val-U Hall was opened by D. M. Holdren of Muskegon as proprietor. Holden was associated with the Homer Hayden operation in West Michigan for many years. The new establishment handled a variety of merchandise but mostly clothing and was operated on the self-serve, discount house operations with a low markup. The Grand Opening was held on October 24, 1957, in the former Masure/Kroger building.

In 1963 Val-U Hall began a remodeling program with Tony Graulau as the Manager. Display windows were changed, a rear entrance was added, dressing rooms were built as well as new flooring and paint inside and out.

By June 1966, Paul Jensen was conducting his hardware business in this building for a while after moving out of the Goody Goody Court.

One of the first discount variety stores called Depend-On was opened in the building after Jensen closed out. Al Fexton operated the store from around 1972 to 74.

In August 1974 Bill and Fay Clark of Northville became the new owners of the former Depend-On store and changed the name to Clark's Sav-On Center. In November 1975, the Clarks were granted a beer and wine takeout license. Clarks sold the business to John and Donna Heringa in 1984 who operated it for about three years before moving on.

In January 1987 the Clark's Sav-On Center was sold the business to Mike Gautraud, owner of the Edgewood Pharmacy, which was located at the Wesco Convenience store on Whitehall Road. Bill Clark retained ownership of the building. Jay and Michille Goodrich were the new managers.

Hunt's Hardware moved from Montague to Whitehall in April 1994. Before moving, they built a 40x82 foot addition to the rear of the building. Jeff Cockerill and Dick and Pete Hunt were the owners of the hardware store at the time of the expansion and relocation. Rufus "Bart" and Marg Hunt originally opened the hardware store in Montague in April 1946. In the 1950's George and Leonard Hunt were the owners. In April 2022, Jeff and Cindy Cockerill sold Hunt Hardware and it became Gill-Roy's Hardware.

Over the years, there have been several other bakeries that set up shops at various locations in town.

In 1914, Robert Muehler of Chicago purchased the Haverkate building located just east of the Linderman block, to start the White Lake Bakery. Muehler's early ads indicated he was offering "Purity Bread, the kind Mother used to make." Later he was selling "Mother's Bread". From some of his ads, it appeared that the bakery was only opened for the summer months – June, July and August. In March 1919, it was announced that the bakery was to open on April 1. Muehler then rented the bakery to Henry DeRoller in June 1920. It appears, however, that DeRoller was only here for about a year before moving to Grand Rapids where he owned and operated a bakery until the 1940s.

Harry A. Davis leased the former White Lake Grocery building which had been operated by Charles Kern. Davis had planned to open a bakery in January 1945, but the Office of Price Administration (OPA) did not feel a bakery was necessary in Whitehall at the time and, therefore, did not approve the rationing points. Eventually, in June 1945, Davis was able to open The Village Pastry Shop in the building which is now Posh. Ads for The Village Pastry Shop stopped appearing in the local paper around 1952.

On the 22nd of March 1952, Mr. & Mrs. Bert C. Cross of Kalkaska opened their new bakery the Goody Goody Court next to Anderson's Hardware. Cross' Bakery was at this location until 1962 when it was announced that they were returning to Kalkaska and would be wintering in Arizona.

On the 5th of May 1949, George and Robert Ziegler's Green Lantern Bakery opened in connection with the Green Lantern Trailer Park, which was located on Alice and U.S. 31, ½ mile south of Whitehall. In September 1952, Philip and Irene Tocco had bought the bakery and Irene opened her beauty salon there. The trailer park was sold to Herman Bosma. Mr. & Mrs. George Zeigler and Mr. & Mrs. Robert Zeigler then left for Florida.

When Plumb's Super Market opened in June 1955, Cole's Bakery was located inside the store in the southwest corner of the building.

Dan & Mary Jane Morat took over the former Cross Bakery in October 1963 and named it Morat's Bakery. Dan is a 3rd generation baker. His grandfather managed a bakery during the 1930's on Colby Street where Hunt's Hardware is now located. Later he purchased a bakery in Hart which Dan's father and uncle owned before Dan bought it in 1973.

In 1970 the retail portion of the bakery moved to Colby Street in the former Dowker's Drug Store and it became The Coffee Shop. Morat sold the Coffee Shop to Jim Rigby in 1975.

In 1980 Morat built a 2,400 sq. ft. baking facility behind The Coffee Shop. John & Becky Wahr became partners in 1981. In 1984, the bakery was expanded and it became Morat's Bakery and Dessert Shop. They closed the Coffee Shop location on Colby then. In 2001 Morat's Bakery moved from Whitehall to Mears.

Robinson Bake Shop_on Mears was started by Stuart and Gloria Robinson in October 1978. They had previously operated bakeries in Skokie and in Florida. Stuart loved the area ever since he spent his summers here as a boy back in 1939. He was the fourth generation to go into the bakery business. It all started with his great grandfather who immigrated from Scotland and opened a bakery in Chicago around the time of the great Chicago fire. In the Spring of 1987, the Robinson's sold the Bake Shop to Chuck and Lucille Michael who continued to operate it for a short time.

The most recent bakery to come to town was Goober's Bakery, which originally opened on Grand Haven Road in Muskegon in 1992. They opened a branch store in Whitehall on January 14, 2021, which was located at 3311 East Colby. Unfortunately, they struggled with staffing issues due to the pandemic and ended up closing July 27, 2021.