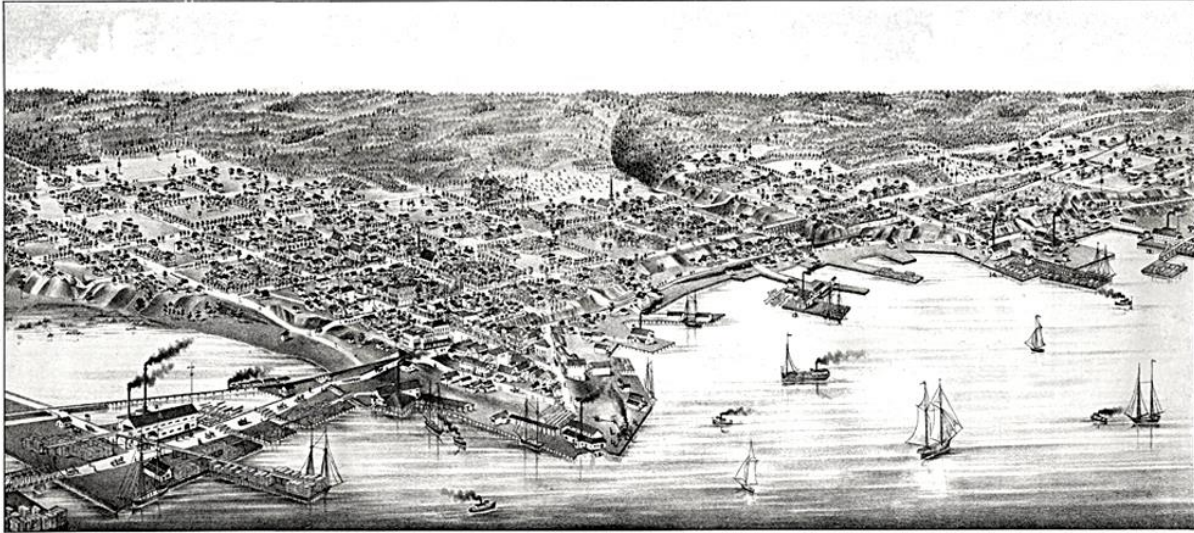


First Things First - in Whitehall

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WIDE EYE VIEW OF
WHITE HALL
MICHIGAN
1860

Over the years, there have been several lists of “Firsts” that have been printed. They all seem to cover the same time period and end about the same time. Some additional “Firsts” have been added to update the list. There are probably other things that could be added as well.

1837, April – The first sawmill on White Lake was a water-powered mill built by Charles Mears on a pond at what is now known as the “Lyon’s Den”.

1838, Early – Charles Mears built a small sloop which he named “The Ranger”. She could carry approximately 15,000 feet of lumber. In spite of her small size, she was seaworthy and sailed between Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Michigan shore for years.

1846 – The first permanent settlers to arrive here were Mr. & Mrs. John D. Hanson. Their children were the first white children born at White Lake. They moved from Whitehall to Claybanks in 1856.

1849 – The first house was built by Capt. John D. Hanson on what was once known as Cork Point – at the foot of Colby Street – now Goodrich Park.

1856 – The first steam-powered mill was built by Hall & Whitaker for Staples and Covell on an acre of ground they leased from Capt. Hanson. This is now Covell Park.

1859 – Whitehall was platted as the Village of Mears by Messrs. Charles Mears and Giles Slocum. The plat was approved in 1860.

1859 – The first general store was built by Charles Mears at the foot of Colby Street. He also built a warehouse next to it, both of which were used for many years. D. Leitch, William Spriggs, J. D. Sturtevant and Mr. Gregg were the successive managers of the store. It was sold to Albert Mears on August 1, 1861.

1861 – The first school district was formed as District No. 1, Mears. Classes were held upstairs over a store building.

1862 – The first post office was established with Albert Mears as the first postmaster. Mail was carried on foot from Muskegon. S. C. Hall was the first mail carrier.

1862, Summer – The first stage line was opened by Gale Nichols.

1862 – The first hotel was moved here by Peter Hobler from the Trading Post on White River. It was named the Union Hotel and stood at the foot of Colby. It burned January 1, 1870.

1863 – The first blacksmith and wagon shop were started by Thompson and Covell. They hired M. M. Robinson to manage the business and later sold it to him.

1863 – The first church was the Congregational Church, organized by P. R. VanFrank. The first meetings were held in the log houses.

1864, May – The first fire department was organized with H. E. Staples as perpetual chief.

1864 – The first schoolhouse, the “White School”, was built on the southeast corner of Division and Slocum Streets. It was later used as a residence.

1864 – The first bridge between Whitehall and Montague was built as a swing bridge by W. H. Parks. It was built as such to allow lumber schooners to pass.

1865 – The first saloon was opened and operated by William M. Simons.

1865 – The first lawyer was Duane Thompson, who arrived that year and set up shop.

1865 – The first doctor was Dr. J. A. Wheeler, who came to Whitehall after having lived at “The Mouth” since 1856. He was followed by E. M. Ruggles in 1867, J. A. Wheeler in 1868, and Dr. J. H. Sandburg in 1875.

1865, Fall – The first drug store was owned by Dr. Zerah Mizner and located in William Weston’s old barn.

1866 – The tannery was founded as the Eagle Tannery. It was sold to Austin & Freeman in 1868, to Michigan Leather Co. in 1870, and to Eagle Tanning Works in 1871. It closed in 2000. Cleanup of the tannery bay was completed in 2003. The tannery’s last remaining structure, a 110-foot brick tower originally used for water, was removed from the site in August 2007.

1867 – A petition was circulated in town and enough signatures obtained to change the name. Several names were suggested but were already in use in the State, so the choice was left up to Rep. Israel E. Carleton who picked the name “Whitehall”.

1867 – The Village of Whitehall was incorporated. It was described as a flourishing village of 1,000 inhabitants, with ten sawmills, six stores, three hotels and one tannery. The first President of the village was Albert Mears.

1867 – The first telegraph office opened. P. I. Hedges was the operator.

1867 – The first bookstore was started by J. W. Crombie and sold to George P. Freeman in 1871.

1867 – The first hardware store was owned by Thompson and Pemberton. They sold it to P. Morse & Son in 1869.

1867 – Construction on the substructure of the channel began.

1869 – The first furniture store was Moog & Hill. It was established by George J. Moog.

1869, October 28 – The first newspaper, the Whitehall Forum, was issued on this date. The editor was Ben Frank.

1870 – The first brick block was built by Dexter P. Glazer on the southeast corner of Mears and Colby. It was sold to Albert T. Linderman in 1876 and is sometimes referred to as the Linderman Building. It is still in use today, by The General Store and Northland Insurance.

1870, February – Purchase of fire equipment. 100 cedar pails, eight ladders 3-16 foot, 2-20 foot, 1-25 foot, 2-30 foot, a brand to mark equipment, 150 feet 1 1/4-inch rope, 3 axe handles.

1870, September 5 – The Booming Log Company was organized. S. T. Cone was the first President, followed by C. H. Cook, Joseph Heald and D. C. Bowen.

1870, October 29 - The first train of railway cars entered Whitehall. Paul Hedges was the first station agent, succeeded by C. W. Redfern. Charles J. Otis was agent in 1882.

1870, November – The first bank was opened by Frank Blackmarr. It was called the Exchange Bank and it operated until 1873.

1871 – The new Channel to Lake Michigan was completed.

1871, May – Hiram Staples was elected village president.

1871 – The first machine shop of Rodgers & Cooper. It burned in 1873.

1872 – The first church built was the Congregational.

1873 – The Lumberman’s State Bank was organized, and a bank building was constructed. The building is still in existence today and referred to as the Lapham Building.

1874, March 24 – Whitehall Township was formed.

1874 – At the time, this was probably considered the greatest building year of the village when the following buildings and others, valued at around \$240,000, were erected: Staples & Covell's mill, \$50,000; Covell & Nufer's shingle mill, \$10,000; Norris & Green's shingle mill, \$15,000; the bank, \$28,000; Congregational church, \$20,000; Lutheran church, \$3,000; Catholic church, \$3,000; Episcopal church, \$6,000; engine house, \$8,000; and others.

1874 – The first fire engine was purchased by Whitehall. Montague had purchased one in 1873.

1875 – The lighthouse was built on the south side of the channel. The light was automated in 1945. It was decommissioned in 1960. It opened as a museum by Fruitland Township in 1970. In 2012, the board of the Sable Point Lighthouse Keepers Association signed an agreement with Fruitland Township to operate the gift shop and museum at the White River Light Station.

1875 – St. James Catholic Church was built in Whitehall. That winter it was towed across White Lake on skids to the corner of Sheridan and Williams Street in Montague.

1875 – The climax in the number of area saloons was reached: Whitehall had twenty-two and Montague had thirteen.

1878 – The first brick school was built. It demolished in July 1960.

1878 – The first activity at Weston's Grove (Sylvan Beach) began under the leadership of Prof. A. W. Slayton. The first summer cottages were built there in 1883.

1879, April – Albert Mears is contemplating construction of a brick building on the Southwest corner of Mears and Colby (where Pitkin's is now located).

1882 – The first theatre building was the Opera House, built by E. M. Ruggles with brick from his Whitehall brickyard. It was destroyed in the Fire of 1890.

1888 – The first paving on Colby and Mears were cedar blocks laid end to end.

1890 - The first waterworks plant was built.

1893, Aug – The first public drinking fountains were installed on the corner of Colby and Mears by Pitkin's and at Marshall's corner. Not quite sure where that was.

1895 - Michillinda Association and Sylvan Beach Association were both formed.

1896 – The first electric lights came into existence. By 1898, Nelson & Company, Gee & Carr, and T. B. Widoe Clothing all had electricity in their places of business.

1898 – The first telephone line came to Whitehall from Muskegon by the Citizens Telephone Company. And the first telephone was placed in Pitkin's drug store.

1900 – The first automobile in Whitehall was an electric vehicle owned by A. T. Linderman. An Olds was owned by Dr. James DeNike in 1904.

1901, October 1 – The first Rural Routes were established by the Whitehall Post Office.

1902 – The first block of cement sidewalk was on Mears in front of the Linderman and Covell houses.

1906 – The first chemical company came to the area. Royaline/Roykross Chemical Company manufactured a preparation for keeping down dust when sweeping. They were located in the building that was built as the former H. J. Heinz salting house. It was located on Lake Street between Elliott and Alice streets near the Nufer Cedar Company Box Factory. Roykross operated in the area until 1909-10.

1910, November 30 – Arch lights were installed on Colby Street. They were installed at the corner of Colby and Division; across Colby between Moog Hardware and the Mears Hotel (now Hokey Pokey & CatchMark); at the corner of Colby and Mears; across Colby from Mangold's Jewelry and the telephone office (Now Pub 111 just east of the alley); and Colby street just west of the RR Tunnel (Colby & Thompson). They were provided by the generosity of the businessmen in Whitehall.

1912 - Pfister and Vogel Leather Company of Milwaukee, WI purchased Eagle Tanning. A New Jersey man opened Ottawa Leather Company in Grand Haven in May 1915, merging Eagle Tanning Company into Eagle-Ottawa Company.

1917 – The first trucks were purchased by Saul Morin and Tom Thompson.

1924 – Home of the first female lawyer in Muskegon County; elected Probate Judge of Muskegon County (1925-1937); first female State Representative (1938); first woman in Congress elected to the House of Representatives (1950-1957). That woman was Ruth Thompson.

1935 - The "Tannery Gym" was built and served the community for athletics and social events. In 1944, General Shoe Company (Genesco) purchased the Eagle-Ottawa plant.

1936 – The first sewage plant was built.

1943 – Whitehall officially became a city.

1956, June – Parking meters were installed along Colby Street after several years of on-again off-again talks. Then City Manager John E. Kane deposited the first nickel in the parking meter on June 29, 1956. They were removed in June 1973.