

## White Lake Inn

*By Barbara Bedau Brow*

White Lake Area Historical Society



Sometimes referred to as the Kison Building or Sadler Block, this structure was constructed with financing from George Dowling in 1880. It was built of sand brick by Emil Kroll, one of the leading bricklayers in the area at the time. Its original purpose seems to have been a saloon, although there were already 13 saloons in Montague at the time.

The first tenant was William Kison. F. W. Sadler had a real estate office in the building and eventually became the owner.

The building also housed the White Furniture Store which had a three foot firewall between the store and the saloon. There was also a full basement.

The next occupant was Lewis Rosen who operated a men's clothing store. He also carried a line of women's clothes and some china.

After being thoroughly renovated inside and out, the building took on a new identity in July 1912 when the White Lake Inn was opened by Charles Shierstadt. Bright colored awnings shaded the windows and made a very impressive appearance in town. The office was conveniently located on the corner of the building and there was a spacious dining room and a well-equipped kitchen on the main floor. Off the

office there was a quiet waiting room and next to it was a sample room for traveling men to display their sample goods. Upstairs was a large ladies parlor with a piano, lounges and easy chairs for guests. The bedrooms were all large and well-appointed with brass beds and splendid views of White Lake.

The building had steam heat and was lighted by acetylene gas. The rates were \$2.00 per day.

However, it was a struggle for the White Lake Inn with competition from the well-established Frankl in House Hotel, which had been around since 1873, and was well known throughout western Michigan for its elegance.

Charles Shierstadt sold the White Lake Inn in 1915 to Jesse Garner of Grand Rapids and it was operated by Mrs. Adah Hayes and her daughter Dorothy.

In May 1917, electric lights were being installed at the White Lake Inn, replacing the acetylene gas lights.

In 1918 the building was painted brown with white trim.

The management of the hotel changed hands in 1920, when Mrs. Charles Lambert, sister of Mrs. Adah Hayes, and E. J. Fisher teamed up and formed a partnership to operate the hotel.

In May 1921, the Masonic Lodge purchased the hotel from the estate of Mrs. Adah Hayes for \$4,400. The second floor was remodeled with Lodge rooms and a banquet hall. The lower level was rented out for store purposes. The Masonic Lodge occupied the space until 1975 when their new lodge was built on Dowling & Whitbeck.

The Coffee Shop Restaurant was opened by Mr. & Mrs. Guy Smith in June 1922. In addition to lunches and short orders, they served ice cream and soft drinks.

Mrs. Patton opened the "Canary Tea Room" there in 1923.

Lawrence Electronics occupied a space in the building from 1924-1944.

From 1926 to 1951, the Post Office occupied the space on the corner of the building.

Dr. Martha Goltz had an office in the building from 1928 until 1951 when she moved into the newly constructed Professional Building on Ferry Street. She retired in 1962.

In 1940, the building once again received a new coat of paint. This time it was painted ivory with tan trim.

Clarence Botten opened a jewelry store in the building in August 1945, in the space formerly occupied by Lawrence Electronics. In May 1952, Theodore Inman bought out Botten and operated his own jewelry business there until 1954 when he moved to Whitehall.

On October 29-31, 1974, the White Lake Area Jaycees turned the building into a "House of Horrors" for a 3-night fun-filled event. The event was so successful that year that it was held the following year as well.

Other businesses who occupied spaces in the building over the years included a Teen Center, a carpet store.

After being vacant for several years, the structure was in a dangerous state of disrepair. When US-31 was going to be widened, eight feet of the building would have to be removed. In October 1978, the old White Lake Inn-Masonic Lodge building was town down.

The area once occupied by the White Lake Inn, on the corner of Water and Dowling, is now home to the World's Largest Operating Weathervane and Ellenwood Park.