

Newspapers and Publishers

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EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!!

The first newspaper in Whitehall was founded in 1870 by Benjamin Frank who ran it for about a year when he sold out to Rev. J. G. Schaefer. Although a man of ability, Schaefer had not the tack to get along quietly with his readers, he was glad to dispose of his interest to Mr. Nearpass.

The Forum is a quarto sheet of five columns, which was the form adapted by Mr. Schaefer from the seven column folio of Mr. Frank. It is Republican in politics and has a steady circulation. The office is over the Linderman's block. The Forum was furnished to offices and mail subscribers at \$2.00 a year in advance.

C. P. Nearpass was born in Concord, Michigan, on August 21, 1844, and came to Whitehall December 20, 1872. He learned his trade in The Marshall Statesman office, where he remained 5 years; then to Hastings as foreman of Journal jobbing. Two years after, he went to Kalamazoo as pressman on the Gazette, and then to the Decator Republican, after which he moved to Whitehall.

There have been four newspapers published in Montague of which The Lumberman is the only survivor (as of 1882). The first was The Syndicate by John G. Lee, issued in December 1871 and closed out by the fire of February 21, 1873. The Lumberman was next published by H. C. Sholes & Co., November 29, 1873. The Vedette was issued September 12, 1874 and lasted but a short time as a campaign sheet. The same year (1874) The Investigator appeared. The Lumberman is still vigorous and spicy under the management of Frank Bracelin, who also practices law, and has been for several years Supervisor of the town of Montague (as of 1882).

Henry C. Scholes started the Lumberman which came into possession of the Lumberman Company in 1870, of which I. M. Weston was the Manager and Otis Caldwell, Editor. Mr. Frank Bracelin of Muskegon purchased it in May 1878. It is Democratic in politics and had a bona-fide circulation of over 600.

A sheet called the Investigator was started in 1874-75 by Mr. Vangiesen, lasting 7 or 8 months. Reportedly, it was a rather scurrilous sheet.

In 1876 a sprightly paper called the Vedette, ran for three months as a campaign Democratic sheet, edited by Robert Nelson, a journalist of considerable ability. He was brother-in-law to G. E. Dowling.

The Lumberman, in the hands of Mr. Bracelin, is managed with ability and had plenty of vim and backbone.

The above information was taken from the *History of Muskegon County with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers - H. R. Page & Co., 1882 – Page 38.*

Other Editors of the Whitehall Forum were:

Ed. J. Smith (1882-1897) – Smith was the Editor of the Forum at the time of the Forum fire which happened in May 1887, and resulted in almost all previous copies of paper being burned. He remained with the paper until October 1897. Ed. Smith was married to Minnie S. Floten, daughter of H. C. Floten, in 1880. They had three children: 2 daughters Edna Dawn & Eunice Evelyn and a son Norval. In October 1897, after 16 years as Editor, the Smith family moved to Muskegon where Ed. Smith was listed as being in Real Estate. He died in July 1907.

The cost for a subscription to the Whitehall Forum during this time was \$2.00 a year.

Edwin E. (E. E.) Brown (1897-1900) – He was born in Williamston, MI in September 1868. He married Matie A. Beard in 1895 and they had a daughter Avis Marietta. Brown took over the Forum in October 1897. It appears he was still Editor thru March 1900.

Montague Woolsey (M.W.) Ripley (1900-1901) – He was the son of Montague Druggist L. G. Ripley and purchased the Whitehall Forum in April 1900. He was the Editor of the paper until May 1901 when he left to take charge of his father's drug store until he returned from Three Rivers.

During this period, the yearly subscription rate went down to \$1.25.

Dana A. Seaman (1901-1910) – Seaman was born in Casnovia, MI, in May 1863. He married Ida Chapman in Bailey in April 1889. He was appointed by R. J. MacDonald as the new manager of the paper in May 1901. While he was the Editor of the Forum, he and his wife lived on Division Street in Whitehall. They later moved to Arizona where he went into the gold mining business in the 1920s and 30s. When he died in 1950, his occupation was listed as schoolteacher.

To increase subscription purchases, the Forum Office gave away a \$50 top buggy to one of its readers. A person was blind folded and drew one number from 1000 numbered tickets and placed it in an envelope, which was sealed and placed in the Bank for safe keeping. Beginning September 20, 1902, everyone paying \$1.00 for a year's subscription would receive a numbered receipt, and when all the receipts were given out, the banker opened the envelope the number. The announcement of the winner was to be through the newspaper. The buggy could be seen at Gee and Carr. Unfortunately, the name of the winner wasn't found in the available copies of the paper – unless they didn't sell all the tickets in the first place?

Roderick Jackson (R. J.) MacDonald (1910-1914) – Was a practicing Attorney and Counsellor living and working in Muskegon, as well as being the Publisher of the Forum from 1910 to 1914. He was born in 1852 in New York and died in Muskegon in November 1933. While he owned the Forum, he had several gentlemen who worked for him as Forum Managers: W.W. Bristol; S. W. Garnett; Fred P. Clough; R. R. Royal.

William W. (W.W.) Bristol (1910) – Was the Forum Manager under Publisher R. J. McDonald for a short time in 1910. He retired in May 1910 due to failing eyesight. Bristol was born in 1878 and died in 1928.

Sherman W. (S.W.) Garnett (1910-) – S. W. was Managing Editor of the Forum until June 1911, when he resigned to take a job in Grand Rapids. Was born in Michigan in December 1885. He died in February 1952.

Fred P. Clough (1911-) – Replaced S. W. Garnett in 1911. By 1912 he was listed in the Grand Rapids City Directory and in 1914 he had moved on to Jackson, where he was listed as a printer.

Rex Raymond (R. R.) Royal (1912-) – Royal was listed as Manager of Forum Printing in 1912 and 1913 City Directories while MacDonald's name was listed as the Publisher. Later he was found living in Shelby and listed as Editor and Manager of a weekly paper. Rex was born in October 1889 in Shelby where he died in February 1981.

Edward D. Skeels & his son Henry (1914-1935) – E. D. Skeels purchased the Forum from R. J. MacDonald in 1914. He operated the paper in connection with his son Harry. Edward died in November 1933. His son continued with the paper until he sold it to Louis J. Berman in 1935.

During this time, the cost of a yearly subscription was raised to \$1.50.

Louis J. "Louie" Berman (1935-1961) – Was the longest serving Editor of the Forum – 25 years. Louie was born in Chicago of a Jewish family that immigrated from Russia. After attending Northwestern School of Journalism, he started his career in the early 1920s working for the Chicago Journal. Among his duties was that of covering Mafia funerals.

He married Matilda "Mattie" Ryan in 1926 and they would have 5 children. Around that same time, the Muskegon Chronicle recruited him as State Editor. He was offered \$40 a week, a good salary at the time, and he stayed for nine years.

In 1935, Berman heard about a small weekly paper for sale in Whitehall and bought it. He published his first issue of the Whitehall Forum on March 7, 1935. Berman was also a very active community leader for four decades.

Beginning in 1961 and continuing for 10 years, he was publisher of the MSU State News. As for the Forum, Berman's son Bill ran it during that time until 1965, when it was sold to Donald M. Seyferth and renamed The Interurban. Later, in 1973, it was sold to Publishers Darwin and Linda Bennett, who combined it with the Montague Observer to form the White Lake Observer.

After his first wife died in 1973, Louie married Mrs. Harriet S. Chittenden-Pierson at Sylvan Beach in 1974. Berman died in April 1980.

Some of the Locations of the Whitehall Forum: On the North side of Colby Street just East of the alley along with the Post Office (ca. 1883); on Colby East of the Mears Hotel alley in the middle of the block behind the Post office (ca. 1892); on the South side of Colby just East of the alley (ca. 1902); on Colby next to the Linderman building (ca. 1910). In 1922 it was announced that the Forum was moving to its new home in the store building formerly occupied by H. H. Olsen of the Eat Shop (the former bank building).

Other Editors of the Montague Observer were:

Frank Bracelin (1880s-1889) - Was born 28 Jul 1846 in Watson Township, Allegan County. He graduated from the University of Michigan in 1868 with a law degree and was soon after admitted to the bar in Allegan County. He married Eliza Middlesworth in Monterey, MI in 1871 and they had six children, one of whom died in infancy. He relocated to Muskegon where he continued in that profession until 1878. He then moved to Montague where he engaged in the publishing of the "Montague Lumberman" as well as carrying on in his law practice. He was elected President of the village board and served for 2 years and was 3 years on the board of school examiners. He remained in Montague until 1890 when he and his family moved to Menominee. Bracelin died in Minnesota in 1930.

Austin & Hancock, Editors and Publishers (1889-) – Charles S. Austin bought the Lumberman in 1887 and ran it for about a year. He was joined by George R. Hancock and formed Austin and Hancock. They absorbed the "Montague Times" on May 21, 1889, and the "Montague Lumberman" on May 23, 1889, and changed the name of the paper to the Montague Observer.

Charles S. (C.S.) Austin - Was born in Ohio in 1868. He married Jessie Rolland in Ohio in October 1889. They had one daughter, lone, in November 1892, who passed away in August 1893. Charles passed away in Ohio in April 1895.

George Rattle Hancock - Born in 1854 in Tennessee; lived in Grand Haven in 1880 and worked as a Signal Observer with the US Military. George married Kate H. Ferry, daughter of Wm. Montague Ferry, in 1882. By 1889, he was a partner in the George R. Hancock & Co, composed of David D. Erwin, George R. Hancock & George E. Gardiner, and they were listed as Proprietors of the Montague Roller Mill. He was a partner with E. P. Ferry at one time. In 1900 he and his family moved to Salt Lak City, Utah, where he entered the mining business. George died in 1928 in Utah.

Oscar H. (O.H.) Austin - Listed as Editor and Publisher in 1890 until November 1894. It is believed that he was the brother of Charles S. Austin and took over some of the responsibilities of the paper for him. Austin married Clara V. Spears in February 1889 in Ohio. They had a son Harrold in who died of meningitis in 1892 at the age of three years. In November 1894 the paper was turned over to Ed. J. Phelan. Oscar died in March 1895 in Ashley, OH. He was just 30 years old.

Edward James (Ed. J.) Phelan (1894-97) – Edward worked as a clothing cutter (tailor) for his brother T. E. Phelan. He married Harriet V. Wilcox in Hart in June 1892. They had two daughters. In November 1894 he took over the operations of the Montague Observer. He sold the paper in 1897 and went back to work for his brother. Phelan left the Montague area for California with his family in January 1900. He became involved in the mining business for a while. He died in Los Angeles, California in August 1932.

Charles C. Coors (1897-99) – Charles was born in White River Township in 1862 and attended the German school. He learned the printing trade and for a number of years was employed by the

Montague Lumberman, then published by Frank Bracelin. He was a pastor for a number of years before returning to Montague where he purchased the Montague Observer from Ed. J. Phelan in 1897. After a few years, he sold the Observer to Edwin Brown who in turn sold it to H. C. Floten. Coors married Sophia Munson in 1889. She passed away in 1904 and in 1907 Mr. Coors then married Julia White. Charles Coors died in December 1934, survived by his wife and two sons.

Edwin E. (E.E.) Brown (1898-99) – There are no Montague Observers available for 1898. The only information we have about him being editor is what appeared in the 1899 City Directory. Brown's name was listed in there 1899 as Proprietor of the Montague Observer. His name, however, was also found on copies of the Whitehall Forum during that time. If he owned the Observer, too, it looks like there was a quick turnaround of owners during that time.

The subscription rate for the newspaper during this time was \$1.00 per year, payable in advance.

Hans C. (H.C.) Floten (1899-1935) – H. C. Floten was born in Norway in May 1870. He immigrated with his parents and siblings to Oceana County in 1870. He reportedly purchased the Observer sometime in 1898. He married Ethelwyn Whalley in 1899. She died in 1932 and a year later in September 1933 Floten married Edith Clark, a former teacher in the local school during the early days. Floten retired from the newspaper business in 1935 after 37 years. At that time, he leased the paper to G. E. Larkin. Floten died in May 1939.

George Elsworth (Geo E.) Larkin (1935-1942) – George Larkin was born in Big Rapids in 1905. He came to Whitehall and was working for the Whitehall Forum in the 1930s. He purchased the Montague Observer in January 1935.

In March 1942, Larkin sold the Observer to Ralph L. Higgins, of the Muskegon County Printing Company. He was an experienced printer and newspaperman with some 20 years connected to the profession. For five years, Higgins had been employed as foreman and mechanical manager of the Whitehall Forum. Higgins became the owner and publisher of the Montague Observer.

Larkin was married and they had several children. They moved to Punta Gorda, Florida, where he died in 1991.

In February 1935, it was announced that the subscription price was going to increase to \$1.50 effective April 1. But, if you renewed your subscription for two years, you could get both years at the old rate of just \$1.00.

Ray L. (R. L.) Wright (1942- July 1945) – Ray Wright and his wife were selected by Ralph Higgins as general manager and editors of the Montague Observer in 1942. Ray was a 17-year employee of Dana Printing in Muskegon. His wife was a former Muskegon Chronicle staff member. The mechanical apparatus was moved to the Whitehall Forum office at that time. Both Ray and his wife wrote a column in the paper and took active parts in local civic affairs. Ray sold his interest in the paper to Fred Gigax July 1, 1945.

Frederick Robert "Fred" Gigax (1945-1973) – On July 5, 1945, it was announced that Frederick Gigax of East Lansing was the new Editor of the Montague Observer. Gigax was the founder and publisher of the East Lansing-Meridian News and purchased the Wright's interest.

Gigax was active in many local area organizations over the years and served as the Justice of the Peace from 1950 to 1957. Fred was born the 18 February 1888 in Springfield Township, Ohio. He died on Jun 15, 1978, in Swanton, OH while visiting relatives. He had been married and had two sons.

By 1950 the price of a single copy was 7 cents or \$2.50 per year. You could also get a 6-month subscription for \$1.50. Around 1960, the price had increased to 8 cents a single copy; \$4.00 per year; or \$2.50 for 6 months.

The White Lake Observer

Darwin Bennett (Nov 1973-1981) - On May 31, 1973, it was announced that Darwin Bennett of Lansing had bought and merged the Montague Observer with Norman Karsten's The Shopping News. In addition to purchasing the Observer, he also purchased the Whitehall Forum and combined the papers into The White Lake Observer. Bennett was a veteran newspaperman with more than 10-years' experience in Michigan dailies and weeklies.

In November 1973, the White Lake Forum and the Northshore Interurban were also sold to Darwin Bennett. The announcement was made by the Interurban Publisher Donald F. Seyferth. Mrs. Elenore Seaman, former associate editor of The Interurban was retained by Bennett and served in a similar position.

At that time The Observer was operated out of offices at 8674 Ferry Street with a circulation of 16,000. Copies were mailed Free to homes in Muskegon & Oceana counties. If you lived outside of these counties, it would cost you \$8.50 for a yearly subscription.

Bennett and his wife, Linda, and their two children Rebecca and Donald lived on Pauline Street.

Some of the Locations of the Observer: Over Hoffman's Drug Store in the Ripley Block (1892-99). After the Telephone Co & Observer fire in May 1899, it was relocated for a very short time in the Franklin Hotel; then moved to the annex next to Walter Nelson/Sweet-Nesbit building across the street from the Muskegon County Bank. In 1924 it was location next to C. A. Wiard's furniture store. In 1927, for 2 months the Observer was printed by the Whitehall Forum. Mrs. F. J. Lynch was in charge of the paper at the time while the editor and others were out of town. In the 1970s until 1984, it was located at 8674 Ferry Street.

The White Lake Beacon

On April 13, 1983, the first issue of the White Lake Beacon rolled off the presses. Maxine Huggard & Richard Lound, two of the owners of the Oceana's Herald-Journal started the Beacon in Whitehall and named it in honor of the White Lake lighthouse, a landmark in this area. In the beginning it was mailed free to the homes served by Whitehall, Montague, and Rothbury post offices, and to rural routes served by the Twin Lake and North Muskegon post offices. It was also available on newsstands at a cost of 25 cents per single copy. Greg Means served as the Editor from its beginning until April 13, 2020.

In late 1999, the White Lake Beacon, part of the Lound & Huggard holdings, was sold to the Ludington Daily News, owned by David Jackson. Jackson, his brother and two sisters established Shoreline Media, Inc., which included the Beacon, the Oceana's Herald-Journal, and the weekly shopper, The Freeway. The Beacon was first located at 116 S. Division in Whitehall. In July 1990, it moved to the corner of Elizabeth and Spring, where it remained until 2020. The Beacon's Whitehall office closed in 2020 and it is now operated from the Oceana's Herald-Journal office in Hart, MI.

Following the retirement of Jim Young in May 2017, Ray McGrew became the White Lake Beacon Publisher, and held that position until October 2022. The newly named Publisher is Mike Hrycko. Andy Roberts was named Beacon Editor in September 2022. Subscription rates are still payable in advance: E-Edition rates are \$68.00 a year. Postal delivery within Muskegon County is \$71.00 per year. Outside of the area the rate is \$87.10 per year.

In the early days of the newspaper business no one thought it was important to keep papers for historical purposes. If there were any extra copies of the newspapers, they were probably sold to be used as insulation in the walls, under the floors, and up in attics of homes.

Any early editions of either the Lumberman or the Montague Observer going back to 1876, that might have been around, were destroyed in the May 13, 1899, fire in the Ripley Block. Additionally, many early issues of the Whitehall Forum were destroyed with one of the fires in 1881, 1887 or 1890.

It wasn't until 1945, that the Observer staff started keeping what newspapers call a "morgue" which consisted of clippings of newspaper stories of events and important personal news.

In August 1974, Norman Ullman, City Councilman and U.S. Government teacher at Whitehall High School, with the assistance of Lou Berman, well-known civic leader and editor of the Whitehall Forum were instrumental in getting boxes of Montague Observers microfilmed. In the Fall of 2012, the Montague Observers were digitized and are now available for viewing, along with the Whitehall Forum, through the White Lake Community Library website.

It's pretty certain that the early publishers of almost 150 years ago never dreamt that people would still be reading their newspapers. Or that you would be able to read them on your iPhones, iPads, and computers. Wonder what the next 150 years will bring?