

Businesses – Jewelers

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C1880 – A. C. Kuster, Jewelers and Stationer, Wall Paper in Whitehall

Montague and Whitehall both had their share of jewelry stores over the years. Several old maps of Montague from 1883 to 1902 indicate that there was a jewelry store in the Ripley Block right on the corner of Ferry & Bridge (aka Dowling) next to what is now Lipka's Drug Store.

Whitehall jewelry shops appeared to be at various locations in town and sometimes they carried a lot more than just jewelry. A couple of businesses started out in Montague and moved across the river to Whitehall in later years.

William Harlo Ruggles opened a jewelry shop in Whitehall around 1870 and continued until 1880. He was the son of Harlow and Maria (ne Miller) Ruggles and was born in New York in 1837. William married Elizabeth Flinn in Grand Haven in 1857. They would later divorce and remarried again in Whitehall in 1869. They had two children. William also conducted a photographic business in town as well. He died in Whitehall on 22 May 1882.

Very little seems to be known about George P. Freeman. It appears that he was born in New York around 1838. He married a woman named Josephine Treat. The earliest ad that was found for him in Whitehall was in October 1874. In addition to jewelry, he also handled books and stationery. Shortly after he opened, he announced that he had hired R. L. Dockeray as a watchmaker and engraver. By 1879 he had moved his shop to the Mears block where he remained until 1880. George always had a very prominent weekly ad on the first page of the Whitehall Forum right under the date and they ceased to appear beginning in January 1880. It seems that about that time, George went out west to Colorado, where he died on 8 June 1880, just two months after arriving in that area.

George B. Walker set up a jewelry shop in “Sturtevant’s store” in Whitehall according to a newspaper article from June 1875. It stated that he will be doing all kinds of clocks, watches, and jewelry repairs. George had been living in the village for about a year and was previously working for George P. Freeman in his book and jewelry store. A brief item appeared in the local paper on 22 August 1879 indicating that George B. had lost a child at the age of 1 year 1 month from “Summer’s Complaint”. Further investigation revealed it was a son named George. It’s unclear how long George B. remained in business in Whitehall as there doesn’t seem to be any other information about him after that.

A. Charles Kuster was a “Dealer in Watches, Clocks, and Jewelry, Silver Ware, Spectacles, and Fancy Goods. Also headquarters for School Books, stationery, and Wallpaper, Curtains, Fixtures, Legal Blanks, etc. Particular attention paid to Repairing Watches, Clocks and Jewelry.” In February 1880 he advertised as the successor to George P. Freeman with his store in the Mears Block on Colby Street. Surprisingly, for that time, several of his ads actually listed an address of 221 Colby Street. However, that would not be the current address today.

Kuster was born in Rock County, Wisconsin in 1855. He married Miss Ida M. Bliss of Plainsville, Michigan, on 28 February 1878, and they came to the area shortly after. In August 1880 it was reported that he bought a house on Mears owned by R. VanKuren for his residence. In 1882 he was having a residence erected on the bluff overlooking the Lake on Mears Street next to Slocum Park. And then there was no further information about them.

Elias C. Raber came to the Montague area around 1879. He was a watchmaker born in Ohio in 1851. He had married Ella L. Osborn in Sturgis, St. Joseph, Michigan on 15 April 1875. They had a son George. It does not appear that they stayed in the area very long, however.

Frank Mangold was born in Friesing, Bavaria, on 2 April 1849. At the age of 12 he left school and went to Mosburg to learn the watch making trade. He served as an apprentice for three years before moving to Erding, as small village near where he was born. He worked at his trade from place to place until 6 October 1870, when he entered the army enlisting in the King of Bavaria’s own corps. He was honorably discharged on 31 July 1873. In October of that year he came to America, staying a short time in New York before coming to Montague where his brother John had settled 5 years before. On April 11, 1875, Frank married Louisa Schrader and they had 7 children, six sons and a daughter.

For several years, Frank worked in the mills and lumber camps and flour mill. Then in 1882 he opened a jewelry business in Whitehall. In September 1890 a second fire devastated the town and Mangold and many others lost their businesses. Based on a map from 1901, it appears that he set up his business on the corner of Colby and Thompson in the general area where Big John’s Pizza is now located. During that time, his ads indicated that he was the only jeweler in White Lake. In 1905 his ads indicated that he was “The Reliable Jeweler”. He continued in business until his death on 11 November 1911.

Herbert H. Ashman was born in Pennsylvania to Richard and Mary Jane (ne Loraine) Ashman on 25 December 1858. He found his way to Whitehall where he opened a Jewelry and Book store in 1883. His ads indicated that his “Jewelry department is complete. Consisting of the latest styles of chains, charms, lockets, necklaces as well as a new line of Albums and plus box papeterie, etc., etc.” He also sold wallpaper. It does not appear that he stayed long in the area before returning to Pennsylvania where several of his siblings were living.

William H. Ricaby had a shop in Montague from the early 1880s until 1892. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1854. He married Mary Elizabeth Bell on 2 October 1876 in Berrien County. They had three children: Mabel (1878-1887), George (1884-1950), and a stillborn baby girl in 1888. Daughter Mabel died on 3 March 1887, from scarlet fever at the age of 9 years.

On Thursday evening, 16 October 1884, a fire broke out in the building which housed Miss Gibbon's millinery and the Burrows & Jones Opera House on Ferry Street. The alarm was given and departments from both towns responded. Despite their best efforts, the fire spread west to the C. D. Dowling building and then into the Ripley block and some half dozen stores.

When the fire reached Morse & Bell's hardware, a number of dynamite cartridges exploded, breaking the windows in all the neighboring buildings and the shock was felt across the river in Whitehall. By Friday morning, the west wall of the Ripley block had been saved intact while everything else was rendered to a heap of smoldering ruins. The losses amounted to nearly \$80,000, a majority of which were covered by insurance. Ricaby's loss on goods was \$500 which was covered. Ripley immediately rebuilt his block.

In January 1892 it was announced in the local newspaper that William Ricaby was moving his shop to a bigger location in the city of Belding.

Max Jennings came to town and on 17 March 1892, announced the location of his jewelry shop in the storeroom formerly occupied by W. H. Ricaby in the Ripley Block, corner of Ferry and Bridge.

Jennings was born 7 July 1853 in Ionia the son of Julius and Elsie (ne Kidd) Jennings. He married Jennie Burton 22 April 1878 in Montcalm, Michigan. They had 2 children: Nellie and Treeby.

After a couple of years in business here, he returned to Algonac in 1894 where he opened his jewelry store as well as served as Mayor for four terms. He died in Algonac in 1943.

Rupert S. Calkin was born in Iowa on 25 December 1869, the son of Daniel and Esther M. (ne Finney) Calkins. An August 1894 ad in the paper indicated that he was located at Borst House, opposite Dr. Williamson's in Montague.

Borst House appears to have been the residence of Charles W. Borst and his wife Cornelia J. Borst. Charles was listed as a lawyer and Cornelia owned a millinery shop. They appeared to be in town from 1887 until 1896.

By November 1894 Calkin's ads indicated he was located in the former Jennings store, corner of Ferry and Bridge Streets (aka Dowling).

Rupert married Rachel Bisel, the daughter of David and Mary J. (ne Stine) Bisel on 23 August 1899, in Montague.

The 1900 Census indicated that he was in the grocery business in Montague. A City Directory listing for the same year listed him as a Jeweler and Manager of the Michigan Telephone Company. His business and residence were the same – on Ferry Street – so perhaps he was living in an apartment over the Ripley building. He closed his grocery business in February 1901 and William Kison bought all his stock.

In March 1910 R. S. Calkin moved his jewelry stock into the library room where he closed out the remainder of his stock and settled up his affairs before leaving about April 1. At that time, Mr. & Mrs.

Calkin were making their home on Meade Street with Rev. R. J. Slee, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church, his wife Rosie and their 7-year old daughter Lois.

Later in 1910 they were living in Yakima, Washington, where he was back in the jewelry and watch making business. Rupert died in Los Angeles on 12 September 1954.

John Mangold was born 22 February 1876 in Montague the son of Frank and Louise (ne Schroeder) Mangold. He married Gesiene Caroline Cordes on 5 January 1902 in Montague and soon after they moved to Whitehall. They had two sons and a daughter.

John took over the jewelry store of his father, Frank Mangold, in 1912 and developed quite a reputation for some of the jewelry pieces he created. His store was located where the Post Office was first located on Colby by the alley (now part of Pub 111). He closed the shop in 1929 but continued doing watch repair and making jewelry at his home. In 1932 he went to work at the Whitehall Leather Company and remained with them until his retirement in 1954.

Mangold served as village treasurer of Whitehall for two terms and served 24 years in the Whitehall Volunteer Fire Department. He died quietly while taking a nap at the home of his son John on 23 January 1958.

Fred A. Bull came to Whitehall from Muskegon in August 1927. He opened a jewelry store in the C. G. Pitkin Annex building. In addition to being a jeweler, he was also the village treasurer. Fred was born in Vermont on 23 September 1868. He married Charlotte Sweeney in Illinois in 1889 and they had a daughter Marion (1904-1988). Charlotte died in 1921.

Being in poor health for several weeks, Fred was rushed to Hackley Hospital where he died on 6 January 1929 at the age of 60 years. He was survived by his daughter, Mrs. Frank Meister of Muskegon Heights.

In August 1945 Clarence Botten announced that he would be opening a jewelry store in the Masonic building next door to the Post Office which was located on the corner of Water and Dowling Streets in Montague. He had previously operated a jewelry store in Ravenna and had 12 years' experience in watch repair. His father was also assisting him in the store.

Clarence Daniel Botten was the son of James and Mabel (ne May) Botten. He was born in Chicago on 9 December 1909. Botten married Mary Drake on 18 October 1941 in Muskegon.

In May 1952 T. L. "Ted" Inman purchased the Botten jewelry store. Ted had operated a store on Pine Street in Muskegon for 7 years before coming to Montague. Two years later, in February 1954, Inman announced that he was moving his jewelry store to 110 E. Colby, the former location of Meinert's real estate office east of Funnell's Barber Shop. He remained at this location until the Spring of 1960 when he lost his lease due to the expansion of Dowker Drug Store next door. Inman's moved to South Haven where Ted set up another business and where he died on 4 October 2008.

Theodore Lowell "Ted" Inman was born on 6 September 1910 in Rockford, Michigan to Schuyler and Myrtle (ne Lowell) Inman. He married Edna Cline in Muskegon on 28 February 1930, and they had two sons.

Harry George Mitchell opened the Time Shop in 1954 which was located at 106 Professional Building on Ferry Street. He sold and repaired watches and clocks as well as selling costume jewelry. In 1956 the

store name was changed to Mitchell Jewelry. In January 1966, Mitchell added another room to his shop which provided him with a large display area as well as a workshop.

In 1969 Mitchell relocated to the former Whitehall Heating and Plumbing building located at 118 East Colby just west of what is now Home Services. In 1976, Bell Furniture expanded their business into that building which was then referred to as the Mitchell Building. Mitchell then moved his shop to what was a small red building located at 909 E. Colby, across from the former White Sands (now Gary's Restaurant). In March 1985, at the age of 73 years, Mitchell closed his business.

Harry George Mitchell was born on 30 November 1911 in Pennsylvania. He married Catherine S. Heilig in Chicago in 1946. He died in Lapeer on 7 December 1994.

Gale's Jewelry opened in May 1981 in the former Tate's Shoes and Apparel shop at 105 W. Colby (now Posh by Pitkin). At the time, Douglas and Thelma Gale were joined by two of their sons, Matthew and Paul. They also had stores in Hart and Shelby. The Shelby store closed in the early 1990s leaving them with the Hart and Whitehall stores.

Part of the reason for the decline in small jewelry stores was the rise of super stores like Meijers, Target and Walmart, who sold all the same things some jewelry stores did. It was difficult to compete with their high operating and advertising budgets. Also, while the super stores sold watches and jewelry, they often did not repair them. Customers would come in with merchandise that they bought elsewhere to be repaired. Sometimes they would get upset if it could not be fixed due to the quality of the merchandise.

Societal changes also played a part in the decline of independent jewelry stores. People dress more casually so there is no need to embellish your outfits with some "bling". Fewer people were asking for fine china and glassware and silverware on their "Bridal Registry" when they get married. Most homes no longer have a formal dining room. People no longer have a need for fancy tableware and are more prone to casual dining - even using plastic ware and paper plates for gatherings.

Gales closed their store in Whitehall in October 2008 and retired to spend more time with their family.