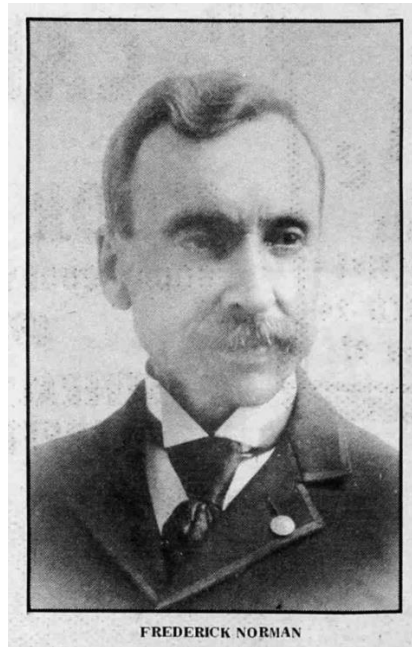


Citizens - Frederick Norman

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Frederick Norman, artist and carriage painter, lived and worked in Whitehall from 1867 until his death in 1928. He was born in Buckingham, England 15 June 1846. On 16 September 1851, at the age of five years, he arrived in New York on the ship "JAVA" with his mother and five siblings. They made their way to Jackson, Michigan and when he was eleven, they moved to Calhoun County.

Norman's interest in becoming an artist formed about the time the Civil War started. He was only 16 years old, and his parents refused to let him enlist. He departed one night and by placing a piece of wood in his oversized shoes he was able to make up the difference in height needed to get into the service.

On 23 June 1862 he enlisted in the 17th Michigan Infantry, Company H, which later received the nickname "Stonewall Regiment". The regiment left the state on 26 August 1862 and joined the Army of the Potomac. At the battle of Antietam, he was injured, went to the hospital, and was later sent home to recuperate. After a year's convalescence he then enlisted in the 9th Michigan Infantry, Company F in the Army of the Cumberland, taking part in the siege of Atlanta, and was left behind in a garrison at Chattanooga when Sherman marched to the sea. While he was there, he noticed one of the prisoners had some materials on which he could paint pictures, using his fingers and hairs tied to twigs to apply the paint as he had no brushes. Fascinated by this, Norman often watched him as he worked, determined that one day he, too would become a painter. Norman was discharged 8 December 1865.

After the war, Norman then went to Chicago where he attended business school and went into the grocery business. He also continued to study art with local painters such as Joseph Warner, a prominent painter at the time who showed him how to use a camera. He came to Whitehall in 1867 where he opened a photographic shop, but business was not good and he closed it, entering other lines of work.

Upon his arrival in Whitehall, Norman took up residence with wealthy lumberman, William F. Nufer for a while. The lumbering era was at its peak then and Nufer encouraged Norman to preserve the history of lumbering in his paintings. He painted seven pictures representing the different lumbering operations, and showed them to his friend, who bought six of them. He displayed the paintings at his home for a number of years before he remodeled and enlarged his house. Deciding on pine paneling in his living room, the paintings did not fit in with the new décor and were destined for a corner of the attic where they remained to gather dust for years.

Norman was married to Miss Willa A. Austin of Blue Lake on 25 December 1868 in Whitehall. While they were married, they had three children: Frankie (1869-1870), Alice (1872-1953) and Paul (1878-1947). Willa died in Whitehall on 12 December 1885. She was just 35 years old. On 20 April 1887 Norman married 22-year-old Mary Alice Fowler in Whitehall and they had a daughter Bernice (1891-1976).

He was an excellent carriage painter, working a number of years for Bell & Utley Carriage and Wagon Factory on Bridge St (now Thompson St) in Whitehall. He also painted signs, did interior and exterior house painting as well as furniture refinishing and upholstery. And he always painted pictures for pleasure.

In February 1887, Norman finished a landscape view of the mouth of the harbor showing the channel, light house, lifesaving station and sailing craft. The painting went on display in Linderman's store for a while before being shipped off to the owner in Missouri.

In 1891, it was reported in the local newspaper that Norman was working on a painted panel piece which was to be placed in the rear of the alter of the Swedish Lutheran Church (now Lebanon Lutheran Church).

In 1892 Fred Norman began building his own paint shop – Norman Painting Company. Other painters listed in the area around the same time were Ariel Bliss and Ole Esterling in Whitehall and A. F. Casselman and Thomas Hanks in Whitehall. According to the 1920 Census, he was listed as a painter and owned his own paint shop.

Shortly before Norman died, he was asked to display several of his oil paintings at the Furniture Centenary celebration commemorating Grand Rapids as being the furniture city. The following paintings were placed on display: The Lumber Camp, The Skidway, Hauling Logs, Running Logs, The Rollway, The River Jam, The Boom and The Saw Mill.

After Norman's death on 16 February 1928, George Covell, then president of the Whitehall Bank, remembered the paintings and although Nufer was also no longer living, persuaded his daughter Nellie Nufer Devine to donate the pictures to the bank. As the Nufer collection consisted of only 6 paintings, the bank bought the seventh one from Norman's daughter Bernice Norman Sumner, thereby keeping the series intact.

The exact number of paintings that Norman did during his lifetime is unknown. But in July 1996, nearly 40 of them were placed on exhibit for a one-day event. Fifteen of the paintings were from the bank collection and another twenty-one were from local private collections. Not all of the paintings are of the lumbering activities or the channel. Some represented his time in the Civil War while others are still lifes.

Norman was a Charter Member of the First Congregational Church. He held the offices of township and village clerk and served for 23 years as a member of the board of education, serving most of the time as secretary. In addition, he served as township supervisor for eight years and village assessor for eight years. He was elected township clerk for the last time in the spring of 1924. He was also a member of the Whitehall Lodge No. 310 F & AM, as well as the N. H. Ferry Post, G.A.R.

In May 1978 the 1-acre "Norman Park" on East River Street in Whitehall overlooking the White Lake marsh was named after Frederick Norman.