

## Historic Houses – Clark-Phelps-Briggs et al

By Barbara Bedau Brow  
White Lake Area Historical Society



C1877 – 116 West Slocum, Whitehall

According to a real estate listing in March 2020, the house consists of four bedrooms, two baths, and 7,300 sq ft living area, and was built around 1880 but it is believed to have been built a bit earlier and was not that large to begin with.

In 1996, the house appeared in a Walking Tour Booklet of some of Whitehall's Historic Structures, and it gave some clues as to who some of its previous owners were. With that information in hand, let's see what more we can find out about the people who called this house home.

An 1877 Whitehall map published by F. W. Beers & Co. is the earliest map to show a dwelling at this location and listed for C. W. Clark. There have been several additions made to the house over all the years.

Calvin Wesley Clark was born in Dover, Ohio in 1844. He came to this area with his widowed mother and two sisters, Phoebe and Rhoda, in 1862. In 1864, C. W. Clark was listed as a carpenter and joiner, so it is very possible that it was during this time that he could have built the house.

On 28 March 1866 Clark married Sarah Thompson, daughter of A. M. Thompson in Oceana, Muskegon County, and shortly after they were found to be living in Whitehall. It is believed that they were the first people to live in the house. During their marriage, they had two daughters: Jessie Emily and Helen May; and they adopted two boys listed as J.B. and Albert.

In 1877 the Clark property was listed on the Tax Sale list for unpaid taxes that year. In January 1878 it was reported that Calvin Clark exchanged his property in Whitehall for a farm near Lawrence owned by W. A. Phelps. Clark then proceeded to build a dwelling house on the farm property with hopes of having it completed by the middle of April.

William A. Phelps was born in Lawrence, Van Buren, MI in October 1844. He married Nancy Andrews, daughter of Samuel Andrews in Hartford, Van Buren, MI on 6 February 1867 and they had two children: Charles A. (1869-1950) and Maude (1871-1939). They moved to Montague in 1871 where W. A. Phelps engaged in the mercantile business but was burned out in 1873. He then tried his hand in the insurance business for about a year. He finally settled on the business of selling ties, bark, handles and shingles and traveling from Whitehall, Pentwater and Ludington.

In April 1878, it was reported that W. A. Phelps was making improvements to the dwelling house he had purchased from C. W. Clark. One of the improvements to the property was the building of a picket fence along the front of the property.

Sometime between 1878 and 1889 W.A. Phelps sold the house at 116 West Slocum to Charles E. Briggs. In 1893 W. A. Phelps was listed as living in Grand Rapids where he died in January 1914 and is buried.

By 1880, C. W. Clark and his wife Sarah had moved back to Whitehall and were living with her father A. M. Thompson on Colby Street, according to the census for that year. In August 1898, their daughter Jessie married former local resident Arthur Smith at her parents' Whitehall home. Jessie and Arthur both graduated from Whitehall High School in 1895.

In 1889 the City Council ordered a water station to be constructed at the foot of Slocum Street.

In 1901, Calvin Clark reportedly traded some property he had located near the water mill for some Mancelona property and moved once again. In August 1903, his wife Sarah died in Mancelona. She was brought back to Whitehall where she was buried in Oakhurst Cemetery.

Calvin Clark then married Sarah Mann Rockefeller in Mancelona in December 1904. They moved back to the Whitehall area but shortly after they divorced. In October 1907, Calvin married Gertrude (ne Worden) Streeter. They lived on Streeter Street and Lake during their marriage. She died in July 1923. Calvin died in April 1924 at his daughter Jessie's home in Marengo, Ohio where he was spending the winter. He is buried next to his first wife Sarah in Oakhurst Cemetery.

Charles E. Briggs was born in East Wilson, New York on 27 March 1859. He married Octavia L. Andrews, daughter of Samuel Andrews in 1884 and they had three children: Samuel G. (1885-?), Ethel Louise (1887-1888), and Ralph E. (1889-1962). Prior to 1889, they were living in Whitehall. In 1891 C. E Briggs purchased the house of his father-in-law Samuel Andrews. Briggs was a traveling representative of The Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York. In 1893 C. E. Briggs was elected President of the Village of Whitehall. He was also supervising the construction of a sewer line from the residence of H. E. Staples and connecting it with his own residence on Slocum, as Staples and Briggs were neighbors.

In 1896 it was announced in the Whitehall Forum that John M. and William Harrison McConnell of the Eagle Tannery had bought the Briggs house on the bluff opposite the water station. A large addition was being added to the house to accommodate two or three families and other improvements were made.

In April 1897 it was reported that Mrs. Briggs was moving out of her house on Slocum and into her house in Livingston and the McConnell's were getting things in shape to enlarge and remodel the Slocum Street house.

By the middle of June, the framework was up, and it was ready for the roof. By August the carpenters were finished and returned to Grand Rapids. An article from that time reported that the house is now large and beautiful architecturally and is fitted throughout with modern conveniences. Situated with a most charming view of the lake, there is not a more desirable residence in town."

John Milton McConnell was born in Ohio in November 1829. He married Francie Vail in Illinois in 1875. His brother William Harrison, a widower, was also living with them. Between 1900 and 1910 the McConnell's had moved to Iowa. John died there on 11 December 1916 and his brother William died there on 13 July 1917.

In November 1899 it was reported in the local paper that Dr. Charles F. Smith and Doctor V. A. Chapman have formed a partnership and will make the two villages their field of practice. Dr. Smith established an office in Whitehall, while Dr. Chapman will attend to the practice in Montague.

In March 1908 Dr. Charles F. Smith and his family moved into the McConnell residence. Charles Franklin Smith was born on 7 May 1874 in Medina, OH. He graduated from John Hopkins University. During the Spanish-American War he served in the medical corps as a lieutenant and was three years in the Philippines. In 1916 he served as Captain in the medical corps on the Mexican border and held the same commission during the World War. Around 1918 he moved to Muskegon from Whitehall. He married Miss E. Vernia Whitbeck of Montague in Lynnhaven, FL on 26 May 1920. She survived him when he died in November 1923.

The next known person to occupy the house was Dr. Henry Samuel Cole, an Ear, Nose & Throat specialist. He came to the area around 1911 and had a very successful practice. He was born on 28 July 1879 in Gratiot, Lafayette County, Wisconsin. He served in the Spanish-American War with Company E, First Wisconsin volunteers and in the Wisconsin National Guards. He also served as Captain of Company G, Third Michigan Infantry. He was the Whitehall Village President for four terms. He went to Washington DC in 1916 to plead for government support to keep the White Lake Channel open and in good repair. In December 1917 he received a commission as Captain of the U.S. Medical Corp and reported to Ft. Riley, Kansas.

Cole married Mary Zerna Cram in Chicago, Illinois on 24 February 1903. They came to the area with their two children, a daughter Dorcy (1905-1979) and a son John (1907-1914) in November 1911. In addition to taking over Dr. Smith's practice, he also moved into the Smith house. In March 1913, Dr. Henry S. Cole was elected Village President a position he held for four terms. His wife Mary died 1 February 1914 at the age of 34 and their 6-year-old son John died two weeks later, on 15 February 1914. They are buried in Oakhurst Cemetery.

In March 1915, Dr. Cole announced his plans to open a health haven at Ben Mac Dhui, the former Dowie estate on White Lake. His plans include both a health resort and a golf course. However, the plans were never carried out.

In 1916 Dr. Cole married Blanche Crim. In December 1917 he was assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, as Captain. Military life was not new to him as he had previously served his country in the Spanish American War as a volunteer in Company E, 1<sup>st</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers. Later he served in the Wisconsin National Guards and then as Captain of Company G, 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry. He did not return to the Whitehall area following his military assignment, living instead in New York, Missouri, and Florida. His second wife survived him when he died 8 November 1944 in Clearwater, Florida. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Dr. James H. Barnard was born Benzonia on 21 March 1864 and came to the Whitehall area in September 1918 from Cadillac, to take over the practice of Dr. C. Frederick Smith of Whitehall. Barnard was married to Ethel May Alexander in Ontario, Canada in 1903. She was born in London, England on 31 October 1875. They had two sons: George (1904-1979) and James (1907-1958). Dr. Barnard died in a local hospital in Muskegon on 15 June 1926. His wife Ethel, a trained nurse, worked in her profession and in the summer months she operated a tourist home. She died at her home in March 1940. They are both buried in Oakhurst Cemetery along with their son James who died in 1958.

Oliver Royce Byma appears to be the next to occupy the house from 1945 to 1972. Oliver was born in Saginaw in 1906. He married Mildred Street in Chesaning in 1920. They had four children: Douglas, Jeanette, George & Linda. They moved to the Whitehall area in 1945 where Oliver was a teacher and basketball coach at Whitehall District Schools until he retired in 1958. After their children were grown, they moved to a smaller house at 515 E. River Street. Byma died from complications from Parkinson's in 1978. Mildred remarried in 1981 to Don Clark who died in 1998. At the age of 92 Mildred was a resident of the Clark Retirement Community in Grand Rapids where she died on 3 July 2002.

From 1972 through 1991, Cal and Katey Halberg lived in the house and used some of the other buildings for their antique business known as the "Pack Rats". Cal Halberg was born 23 June 1931 in Kalamazoo. He married Katey Bard in 1971. On March 31, 1987, Cal Halberg died in Shelby at the age of 55. His wife continued to operate the antique business at 116 W. Slocum, celebrating 20 years in business at that location. In October 1991 a month-long moving sale was held from October 25 to November 23. Following the close of the sale, Katey moved her business to 116 Spring Street where she continued to operate a business under the name Memory Lane Antique Mall until October 1998.

Jean VanNetten and Marjie Bronsick acquired the house and property and opened "The Shoppe on the Hill" in September 2001. The business was open 3 days a week during November and December that year. Sometime later, the business closed, and the house was put up for sale.

A recent real estate search of the address indicates that the 4 bedroom, 2 bath, 7300 sq ft house has once again been sold. It will be interesting to see what new history will be added.