

## Historic Homes – Pullman – Dowling - Dewitt

By Barbara Bedau Brow  
White Lake Area Historical Society



The house in the picture was built c1875 by Jesse D. Pullman on property he purchased from Edward P. Ferry in 1871. Pullman sold the house to Henry O. Bell sometime in 1883. In September 1884, Cassius D. Dowling, brother of George E. Dowling, purchased the house from Bell and it remained in the family until 1966 when it was purchased by the Ed Scharmer family, who still own it today.

Jesse D. Pullman was born in Onondaga County, New York on 17 Mar 1833. He married Hanna Louise Owen in 1854 and they moved to Chicago the following year. During their marriage, they had three children, two daughters: Grace (1858-1920) and Gertrude (1870-1930) and an unknown baby.

While in Chicago, Pullman became acquainted with Rev. W. M. Ferry and arrangements were made for him to take charge of the mill and store of Ferry & Co. at the Mouth in White River in 1859, working for Senator Thomas Ferry and Noah H. Ferry. After working for the Ferry company for three years, he decided to try his hand at farming in Oceana County for several years. Finding farm life too strenuous, he then decided to return to Chicago where he operated a grocery store for a time.

In 1867 Pullman returned to Montague and was foreman of the Ferry, Dowling & Co.'s sawmill for five years; was in charge of Heald & Co.'s mill for one year; a partner of A. B. Bowen & Co. for three years; and in 1875 went to work for Staples & Covell as foreman.

It was probably during this time period that Pullman had the house built. It first appeared on a town map dated 1877.

Pullman was an active and efficient public officer, holding many positions of trust: was Magistrate at White River for many years when they had the power of a Circuit Judge. He took an active part in the organization of the County. He was Justice of the Peace of Whitehall Township; three years on the Board of Education and two years as Director of Schools; took an active part in the organizing of the Presbyterian church in Montague; and in re-organizing the Congregational Church in Whitehall. He was highly respected by his circle of friends.

The 1880 Census shows them living on Colby Street in Whitehall. His occupation at the time was listed as lumberman.

By August 1883, Jesse D. Pullman had joined E. B. Hinchman and together they formed the wood-working firm of Pullman & Hinchman at Shelby. Edwin B. Hinchman was the son of Joseph Hinchman of Whitehall and the son-in-law of Jesse Pullman, having married his daughter Grace in 1879. The Pullman family then sold their home to Henry O. Bell and moved to Shelby.

On Tuesday, September 4, 1883, the whistle blew for the first time on the Pullman & Hinchman wood-working factory. Everything looked bright for the firm until Friday night, October 5, when, without warning, the whole factory was blown to pieces by the explosion of the large new boiler purchased from Eagle Iron Works of Detroit. From an accounting in the local paper, Pullman, who was standing in a doorway of the factory some distance from the boiler house, was struck on the head by a brick with such force that it hurled him out of the doorway onto a wood pile in the yard. Two ugly wounds were left on his head, but the injuries were not serious. Al Ferguson who was watchman that night was very seriously injured when a steam pipe struck him, and he was buried beneath the ruins of the building. Frank Johnson was knocked senseless but sustained only slight injuries. As the explosion occurred two hours after the factory shut down, no other employees were injured.

The tubular boiler was 4 ½ feet in diameter and 14 feet long with a return flue. It exploded with such force that one piece of iron weighing about 3 tons was hurled a distance of ten rods. The cause of the explosion is unknown. The men said the gauges showed plenty of water and 35 pounds of steam. It is thought that the bottom cracked letting out the water and that gases formed which ignited and caused the explosion. The building, boiler and engine were total wrecks with a loss upward of \$4,000. Much of the machinery was salvageable. Within a week's time, a workforce was clearing up the wreckage, straightening up the building and placing it in repair. A new boiler was on order and the engine was being repaired. By mid-December the long-awaited-for boilers were finally received and being put into place. Within the week the factory was back in operation.

In June 1884, Pullman & Hinchman who started the broom handle factory in Shelby were forced to dispose of their property to creditors and close up shop.

By 1898 the family could be found living in Kansas City, Missouri. Later they moved to Carroll County, Arkansas, where Hanna died on 8 July 1902 and Jesse died in September 1907 while living with their daughter.

Henry Owen Bell was born in New York around 1841. In 1865 he married Mary J. Fortune who was born in 1842 in Indiana. During their marriage they had six children: Jennette M. (1865-1952); Robert H. (1868-?); Bessie D. (1871-1913); Edna G. (1874-1945); John Arthur (1876-1928); and Dudley Myron (1880-1962).

In 1870 he and his wife and 2 children were living in Oceana County where he was listed as a laborer. In 1880 he and his wife and five children had moved to Montague where his occupation was listed as Lumberman. By 1900 the family had moved to Los Angeles, California, where Henry was listed as a shoemaker. Mary Bell died in Los Angeles on 23 September 1910. Henry died there on 19 Jan 1930.

Cassius Delno Dowling was the next to occupy the house. He was one of George Dowling's four younger brothers. He was born 9 Nov 1851 in Kent County, Michigan and came to Montague in 1870. He held the office of Secretary and Treasurer of the White River Log & Booming Company for many years.

On 18 December 1878, he married Mary A. Hamm (1852-1935) in Huron, Erie, Ohio. They had two daughters: Emma C. (1881-1971) and Marjorie Annie (1883-1965). Both girls graduated from Montague High School: Emma graduated in 1898 and Marjorie in 1900.

In 1889 Cassius went to Sault Ste. Marie where he went into the Real Estate and Insurance business with William Mason, but soon after he returned to Montague. He then worked in Real Estate here until he died at his home on 23 December 1915 at the age of 65 years.

His wife Mary continued to live in Montague. However, she was listed in the 1930 Census in Hasting with her daughter Emma and granddaughter Katherine. Perhaps she was just visiting that day or was boarding with her daughter Emma. Mary died at her Montague home on 30 January 1935, with her daughter Marjorie.

Marjorie Annie Dowling was born in Montague on 26 February 1883. Following graduation, she entered the teaching profession. She taught Kindergarten for one year in Montague and one year in Sturgis before moving to Grand Rapids to teach there and in North Park for many years. On 28 June 1924, she married George I. DeWitt in Grand Rapids. They had a son James Cassius DeWitt (1925-2003).

By the early 1930s, Marjorie had moved back to the area and began teaching in the Montague School system. She and her husband divorced in 1948. She had been a Kindergarten teacher for 52 years before retiring in 1957. Just before her retirement, she was chosen Muskegon County Teacher of the Year.

Marjorie enjoyed traveling and visited many of our national parks in the west and our nation's capital. She had taken a trip to Alaska, visited many parts of Canada, and spent one summer in Mexico. She also toured Europe and visited the British Isles. She also traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. And she made a yearly trip to New York to enjoy the opera and plays.

In June 1960 she began a trip which would take her to Japan, Burma, India, Egypt, Greece and several other places. In July she was involved in a plane mishap near the Philippine Islands. The pilot of the plane radioed that his wing was on fire. Minutes later he ditched the plane in the ocean. All the

passengers leaped into the water and were soon picked up by rafts from the plane. Four hours later their rafts were towed to a cove where they were loaded onto other planes and taken to Manila's International Airport and the U.S. Naval Base at Sangley Point on Manila Bay. Fifty-eight passengers were on board the plane. All were saved except for one who reportedly drowned.

Marjorie reported that she was shaken up, and had a few bruises, but was ready to resume the journey. After receiving a clean bill of health from a Manila hospital, she continued her trip, also by plane. She returned back home to Montague at the end of August where she continued to live.

Marjorie died on 23 January 1965. She and her sister Emma are buried in Oak Grove Cemetery along with their parents and others in the Dowling family plot.