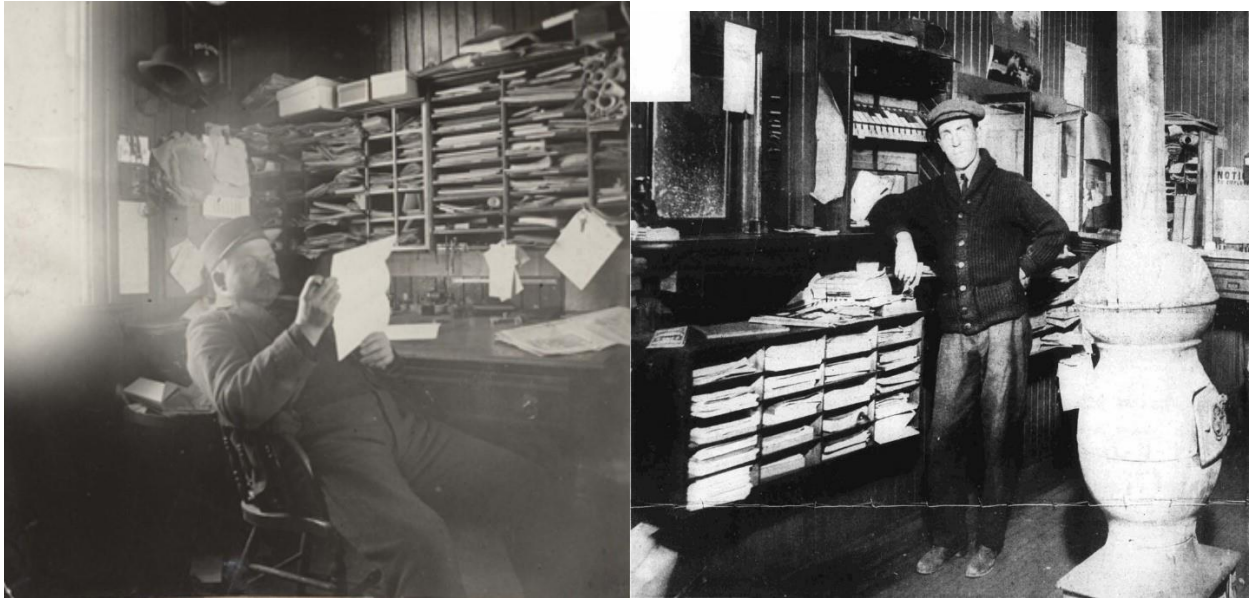


Train Stations and Station Agents
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William H. Rowe, Whitehall Station Agent (1890-98) & Earl A. Pillman, Montague Station Agent (1913-26)

The Chicago & Western Michigan was the name of the first railroad to Montague and was built in 1871. In 1900 this railroad and two others were incorporated into the Pere Marquette. The line from Montague to Pentwater was built in 1872.

Most of the railroad was built in short stages to provide transportation for lumber from cutting areas to mills. In the case of the Montague Line, it was built from St. Joseph to this area to provide shipping facilities, not only for logs, but for partially finished lumber products, as there were quite a number of processing mills in this area.

Montague and Whitehall both had their own passenger and freight station, located only about a mile apart. The Montague station which was built around 1874 stood on River at the foot of Spring Street, while the Whitehall Station was on Lake Street near the foot of Sophia Street.

On 1 Aug 1883, the Montague depot was a mass of flames and the building soon burned to the ground despite the prompt efforts of the fire department. The wooden structure which was probably worth about \$1,000 had been erected without cost to the railroad company by the Ferry Bros around 1874. Some of the freight, two trunks, and the furniture and papers of the depot were consumed. The cause of the fire was unknown, but it was believed it caught fire from burning saw-dust nearby. By mid-September, a new depot had been completed.

During the summer months, draymen from both towns met every train and they hauled the freight to its final destination. They also delivered passengers to the Franklin House, the White Lake Villa, the Mears Hotel, Rochdale resort, and other hotels in the area. During the harsh winter days, business was much less hectic.

For many years the railroad provided passenger travel service, but with the increase in buses and private cars, passenger traffic fell off, so that the service did not pay, and was discontinued.

The Pere Marquette Railroad ended regular passenger service north of Muskegon in 1926. In that same year, the company closed and tore down its passenger depots in both Montague and Whitehall and constructed a new freight-only station in Whitehall at the corner of Thompson and Hansen. The PM merged into the C&O in 1947. Forty years later the C&O was absorbed into CSX Transportation.

The station agent was a very important man in the company. He had to be highly intelligent and versatile in order to do his job properly. He was a combination telegraph operator, route calculator, accountant, cashier, and handyman. He sold tickets (usually in bunches for those passengers who had to make numerous transfers from one rail line to another, checked baggage, determined passenger and freight rates, loaded and unload freight, and sooth angry passengers when things didn't go well. He had to be able to calculate the easiest, shortest, and least expensive way to get from one point to another by rail. He also had to keep track of varying rates, a hodgepodge of state and federal laws, and a host of obscure railroad rules.

Some of the Station Agents at Whitehall Depot include:

C. F. Sollau – According to the City Directory in 1883, Christian F. Sollau was the agent for a railway station in Grand Rapids. By 1887 he had made his way to Whitehall, as his name appeared in the City Directory then, and again in 1889. Sometimes he was listed as Charles F. and sometimes C. F. When he got a cinder in his eye, which was reported in the paper in 1887, it listed him as Fred. By May 1890, he was the agent in Fruitport.

W. H. Rowe – It was announced in the local paper on 9 Jan 1890 that William H. Rowe was the new station agent for the C. & W.M. Railroad in Whitehall.

In June 1898 it was reported that he was packing up his house to move to Big Rapids. A City Directory listing in 1899 confirmed that he had “removed” to Big Rapids.

O. W. Wiley – In June 1898, Otis William Wiley came to the Whitehall depot as the station agent from Big Rapids. Otis was born on 28 Nov 1867 in Michigan. By 1900 he had moved to Grand Rapids. He married Marvillah Prosser-Wigle on 19 Dec 1904 in Detroit. He died on 8 May 1948 in Detroit.

S. L. Kinnon - Samuel L. Kinnon was the PM RR Agent in Whitehall in 1904 and 1905 according to the City Directories of that time. He and his wife Frances were living on Mears near Sophia.

In August 1905, while Agent Kinnon was at dinner, some sneak thief broke out a pane of glass in the depot window and proceeded to force open the money drawer. His efforts were to no avail as he did not get even a penny.

In early April 1906, the number of trains each day was being reduced. The trains that arrived at 10 AM and 3 PM were eliminated. This left just 2 passenger trains each day - one at 7:15 AM going south and the other going north at 8 PM. The cause of the change in service was due to a coal shortage.

By the 1910 census, the Kinnons had moved and were living in Olive, Ottawa County, Michigan.

E. D. Miller – Earl D. Miller was the station agent in May 1912, when a news item appeared in the local newspaper regarding the Whitehall depot being robbed. While Agent Miller was at dinner, someone broke into the office and took \$20 in silver from the money drawer. Agent Miller suspected two hobos who had been hanging around the depot and were there when he left for dinner. Seeing the suspects heading toward Montague, Mr. Miller telephoned Agent Wells of the Montague depot, to intercept them. The hobos were planning to board the Montague freight train heading to Muskegon. Agent Wells advised the freight trainmen who invited them to get into a box car bound for Muskegon. Being glad for a ride inside, they scrambled into the car. The door was immediately closed on them and instead of getting a free ride they found themselves prisoners. They were then turned over the Marshal Hinman of Whitehall and taken to lockup. The suspects appeared before Justice Haverkate the following morning.

Earl was born in Ohio in 1874. He married Mabel Polley on 7 Dec 1905 in Howard City. They had three daughters: Hortense (1906-1996), Jeannette (1907-1985) and Geraldine (1914-)

C. W. Wilkins – Clarence Washington Wilkins was born in Pennsylvania on 22 Feb 1889. He married Mary Josephine Ruble on 12 Jan 1911 in Chicago. In 1918 his name started appearing in the local newspaper for winning a \$25 first prize for the best kept station in the Chicago-Petoskey division.

In February 1920, both Clarence and his wife Josephine were ill with influenza, and it was necessary to get a relief agent for him. The article did not mention who replaced Clarence. Mrs. Lloyd VanSyoc (Bessie) replaced Josephine as bookkeeper.

In August 1920, Clarence purchased the John Jensen house on Mears Avenue.

In August 1922, it was announced that Clarence was leaving to take a position as sale manager with the F. J. Lewis Manufacturing Company of Chicago. They had a summer home in the area that they were going to keep but they were going to dispose of their Mears Avenue home.

By September 1922, Clarence had taken ill after working only a few days. He was confined to a hospital for a short time before returning home for a few weeks' rest. Shortly after that incident was reported Clarence had returned to Whitehall and was again working at the depot.

With the combining of several of the railroad companies and the closing of area depots in 1926, Clarence transferred to Holland where he continued to work as a traveling auditor for the railroad.

Josephine Wilkins died in December 1930 in her home state of Illinois. Clarence moved to Benton Harbor and around 1940 he married Leona Krause. He continued working for the railroad until his death in Caseville, Missouri on 18 Jan 1961. He is buried in Toluca, Illinois.

Some of the Station Agents at the Montague Depot include:

A. M. Wheeler – Audabon Melville Wheeler was listed as the railroad agent according to the 1886-1887 City Directory. He was born on 26 Feb 1855 in Michigan, and he married Adelia R. Jones in Montague on 23 Mar 1887. Very little else is known about him.

H. W. House – The first mention of Agent House was a brief item in the paper on 29 October 1891 indicating that "C. F. Sollau was covering for House so he could attend a relative's funeral in Illinois." Henry Wisner House was listed as the Railroad Agent in Montague in the City Directory in 1893. Henry

was born on 7 Nov 1846 in Steuben County, New York. He married Philena Randall on 5 Jul 1880 in Port Huron, Michigan. They had four children: Herbert (1882-1913), Margaret (1884-); Geneva (1887-1973), and Laverne (1890-1975). By 1900 they were living in Stanton. Henry died on 13 Apr 1935 in Grand Rapids.

Michael Tucker –Tucker was born 28 Apr 1852 in Nova Scotia. At the age of 12 years his parents and brother Dennis moved to Waverly, NY where he lost both of his parents. Growing to manhood, he took up the study of telegraphy and secured a position as telegrapher operator in the West for about 8 years. Returning to New York, he met and married Sarah Beverly (1852-1911) at Gowanad, NY, 23 Sept 1875. They had a son Clarence B (1882-1951) who followed in his father's footsteps working as an agent for the RR.

Michael moved his family to Hesperia around 1887 where he engaged in the lumbering business for a few months before he was offered a position with the Chicago West Michigan Railway Company at Fremont. Two years later he was transferred and handled the following stations as agent for the Pere Marquette: Mears, Shelby, Montague and Jenison. Michael Tucker was reassigned to Jenison in February 1911. He was replaced by C. S. Wilkins. A Farewell Party was held by the Tucker's friends in early February. Tucker was given two months' vacation by the railroad if he wanted it. It's unclear if he took the time or not.

Sarah Tucker died on 1 October 1911. In 1920 Tucker was living with his married son and family in Golden, Oceana, MI. He suffered a stroke and died on 28 March 1928 in Shelby. Michael Tucker and his wife Sarah are both buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.

C. S. Wilkins – In January 1911 it was announced that C. S. Wilkins had transferred from Jenison to Montague. He immediately took charge of the station, the book and accounts, finding them to be correct and all in order. Mrs. Wilkins assisted him until he got acquainted with the new order of things. He appeared to be quite a hustler as well as pleasing and courteous. After the Tucker's had packed up their personal belongings, and moved to Jenison, the Wilkins' moved into the Tucker house. It does not appear, however, that Wilkins remained very long as the Montague railroad agent. By March 1911, it was reported that O. N. Wells was the new agent.

O. N. Wells – In March 1911, Orlin Newton Wells became the new railroad agent for Montague. It was reported then that he went to Evanston, Indiana, to get his wife and 3 children, and they were settling into their new home in the former Tucker house.

Orlin Newton Wells was born 25 Jan 1880 in Elk Prairie, Jefferson County, Illinois. He married Letta Potter on 18 August 1903 in Owensville, Illinois. They had three children before coming to Montague: Dorothy (1904-1998); Hilda (1906-1996); Walton (1909-1982). A fourth child, Winona (1912-2000), was born in Montague.

By the Spring of 1913, Orlin had left the employment of the railroad and was the Secretary and Manager of the Montague Mill & Supply Company. That position did not last long, and he and his family moved to Zeeland, where he went back to work for the railroad again.

Orlin and his wife divorced on 3 Feb 1937. He continued working for the railroad for the rest of his life. He died 18 Sep 1971 in Holland. His wife had remarried in 1944 and she died in Holland in 1963. They are buried in Pilgrim Home Cemetery in Holland, Michigan.

E. A. Pillman – Station Agent from 1912 to 1926 when the Montague and Whitehall depots were closed and he was transferred to Helena, Michigan.

Earl Alfred Pillman was born on 6 Apr 1889 in Porter, Indiana. He married Ruzena Johanna Stewart on 4 Nov 1911 in Charlevoix, Michigan.

Pillman took over the Montague station in 1912 when the former agent, O. N. Wells resigned to take a job as secretary and manager of the Montague Flour Mill.

In October 1914, the Pere Marquette Railroad company eliminated the services of George Wing, who carried the mail between the depot and the post office. By eliminating this position, it now required the station agent to leave the station to make the trip to the post office. This left no one to look after business at the depot and consequently patrons wanting freight and express services suffered the inconveniences.

Six passenger trains and four freight trains came into Montague every day and although Pillman's duties were scheduled for an 8-hour day he seldom made it in less than 12.

There were three stoves in the depot that had to have fires built – one for each of the two waiting rooms and one for the office. Pillman had to be on duty by 7 a.m. to get the fires started. If the temperature was zero, Pillman would freeze until about 11 a.m. and the waiting passengers never did get sufficient heat. You will find one of the depot's last stoves, like the one pictured, in the Montague Museum.

Pillman's wife taught the 8th grade at Montague school during this time, later serving as principal and also three years as superintendent.

Earl died on 7 August 1978 in Traverse City, as did his wife on 3 May 1979. They are buried in Sunset Hill Cemetery in East Jordan, Charlevoix, Michigan.

In 1931 the Goodrich Transit Company ended all the steamship service to White Lake. After that, the closest passenger depot was in Muskegon and travelers had to use buses or automobiles to get back and forth from Muskegon to White Lake.

Over the years, and after much back and forth with the railroad company, they eventually donated the depot to the community in 1978. Renovations then took place, and it became home to the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce in 1981. The caboose, which was built in 1924 by the Standard Steel Company, was purchased from the Muskegon Railroad Historical Society, and added to the landscape in 1987. The train track that ran along the side the depot was removed in 1998 and the area is now part of the bike-walking trail.