

Citizens – H. A. Spink and the Nimble Nickle

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1880 Whitehall Birds Eye View

You gotta love a store with a name like the ‘Nimble Nickle’ which was owned by H. A. Spink. As no pictures of the store or the owner could be found, the 1880 Birds Eye View of Whitehall will give you an idea of what the town looked like at the time when it was in business.

Horatio Albert Spink was born in Henderson County, New York on 31 May 1840. By 1850 his parents and siblings had moved to Berrian County. He married Martha Jane Jaquay on 2 April 1865 in Bainbridge, Berrian Co. They had six sons and two daughters: Frank E. (1866-1946); Willet H. (1868-1942); Orrie A. (1870-1881); George D. (1873-1927); Roy E. (1877-1881); Lonnie (1879-1961); Della (1883-1958); and Una (1891-1959).

In the 1870 census, Spink and his wife and two sons were living in Niles. In April 1875 they had moved to this area and Spink was setting up his store in the spot formerly occupied by the New York Grocery firm. Only one problem – no mention of location – no address.

In July 1877, in addition to operating his store, Mr. Spink was the Town Librarian, and he reported that several parties had taken books from the library and had not returned them. The missing volumes were reported as “Sowing and Reaping”, “The Jerricho Road”, “Daniel Derondo”, and “Model Town Detective”. Don’t know if the volumes were ever returned or not. There was no further information about them in the paper.

In the census for 1880 he was listed as a postal clerk. Looks like this was in addition to his store.

Sadly, on 27 October 1881, Spink's four-year-old son Roy died from Croup and two weeks later, on 8 November, his eleven-year-old son Orrie died from Diphtheria. Both boys are buried in Oakhurst Cemetery.

In 1885 Spink advertised that his store could now manufacture pure baking powder. His mixer had a capacity of 100 pounds and was making two brands, "Spink's Cream" and "Spink's Nimble Nickel". The ingredients for the powder were procured from druggists with a 99 per cent purity guarantee. They were both being mixed under Spink's own supervision.

He also purchased a large coffee roaster in 1885. Customers will now select from a large line of the best green coffee beans, and shortly after will have their order roasted and ground. He also made arrangements with one of the large flouring mills to supply a special brand of flour in his own sacks.

According to an 1886 ad for another local business, they were going to be located next to Spink's on First Street. That was the first time a location was given.

Then in early October 1887 it was reported that H. A. Spink was compelled to turn over his grocery stock to E. M. Ruggles and H. E. Staples who were endorsers of him. It had not yet been decided if the business would continue or not. By the end of the month, however, it was reported that the Spink family was moving to North Muskegon, where they would be opening a grocery store.

In 1893 it appears that they were still in North Muskegon where he was listed as working as a janitor.

The city directory in 1897 listed the firm of Spink & Watson, made up of Horatio Spink and Edwin P. Watson. They were listed as Manufacturer's Sales Agents for Monumental Bronze Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, agents for Henry Bosch Co. wall papers of Chicago, Illinois, and merchant tailors located at 101 W. Western in Muskegon. Spink's wife was listed as managing a Boarding House at the time, which was located at 233 West Western.

The 1910 census showed Spink, his wife, son Lonnie and daughter Una living in Detroit at the home of their married daughter Della and her family.

They remained in the Detroit area where Martha Spink died on 2 February 1920. Horatio died on 26 October 1921. They are both buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Detroit.