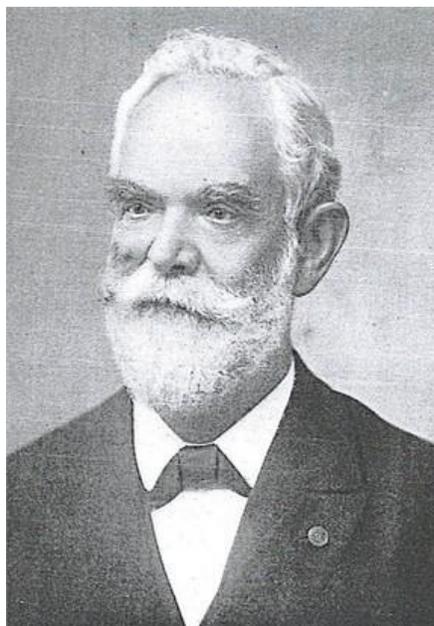


Citizens – Asa W. Slayton

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



C1898 Asa W. Slayton

Asa Walker Slayton was born in Middlesex, Yates, New York on 27 December 1830. He served during the Civil War in Co. B, 25th Reg., Michigan Infantry from 10 August 1862 until 19 Jun 1864. He held the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.

On 30 October 1865, Asa married Margery McPherson (1844-1896). During their marriage they would have five children: Ivy (1866-1935); Myrtle (1867-1910); Zena (1869-1913); Victor (1872-1949) and Flora (1876-1941).

In 1870, the census shows Asa, his wife and three of their children living in Grattan, Kent, Michigan. His occupation at the time was listed as farmer.

The 1880 census showed the Slayton family living in Whitehall with two additional children. Asa's occupation was listed as teacher.

By 1900 they had moved to Grand Rapids, where Asa was listed as a widow and his occupation was a fruit grower.

While living in Whitehall, Asa penned an article that appeared in the 1898 publication of White Lake Reminiscences. Here is a portion of the article entitled: Early Outings.

Of my school work in Whitehall, others may speak not I. Only this can I say, my labors as Principal of the Schools began in September 1876, and ended in June 1887, thirty-three consecutive terms and away only two days when called to be at the death-bed of my mother. I began with 4 rooms and 3 assistants, and ended with 8 rooms and 7 assistants; but the increase in numbers was not my fault: my last graduate was Cora Hinman who began in the infant class the term I first posed as teacher in Whitehall. Credit should be given to Miss Maggie Thompson as the first one to complete the prescribed course and to graduate in June '77. Let me just say that all of my assistants were good teachers, and all of my pupils were good children.

Soon after Thanksgiving 1876, it began snowing, and of the 60 following days 57 were stormy, so the Episcopal minister said, I have not time to count: I only know that I wielded the snow shovel much more than I did the ferule. The following February was without a cloud. The next December was mild and pleasant, and New Years Day the bus came over from Montague loaded with young chaps clad in linen coats and straw hats, perched under parasols, and vigorously fanning themselves with palm leaves.

Now for the picnicking. In 1877 our S. S. had their annual outing a day in Crabb's Grove. July 4th 1878, we chartered a tug and went to the Mouth, landing on the pier, went up the hill back of the light house and had a lap dinner, and returned home at night pleased with the trip. A few weeks later occurred the first family picnic that my family helped about. As I recall the families there were those of Mr. A. C. Ellsworth, Dr. Johnson, Elder Seaver, Mr. Hedges, Mr. Norman, Mr. Nearpass, Mr. Carleton and perhaps others. We road down on the Charlotte Gray, and landed near where the dock is now, by running the bow of the boat up into the sand, there two of us men waded ashore, gathered loose plank, rolled a log or two into the water, and soon had all safely landed. Boards were gathered and a table made on the left hand side where the road up the valley first cuts through the bank, a fire was kindled, the cloth was spread, and after grace good appetites enjoyed their first picnic dinner in the grove. After resting, and stretching, and yawning, and visiting awhile, we picked our way through the bushes over to the big lake. There we gathered some edgings, stuck four in the sand at the foot of the bluff, tied cross pieces above to which we pinned one edge of the ladies' shawls, thus making an elegant dressing room for the feminines, for people have no eyes in the top of their heads. Then we masculines retired to the privacy of the further side of a dense willow bush, and having undonned our broadcloth and donned our bathing overalls and undershirts, we all, without introductions, assembled in the water for a spatter and a splash, and a duck and a dive, and a scream and a swim, and a flounder

and a float on improvised rafts, such as mortal never knew the like before. The temperature of air and water was just perfection, and when we, reluctantly returned to earthly habits, we found that two hours had passed beyond our catching them again. We got home but never forgot that day.

The new school house was being built the Summer of '79 and I was building my house and was busy.

In the Spring of 1880 Mr. I. M. Weston, who then owned the land between the lakes, had a clearing made on the bluff on the East side and erected a pavilion there and tables for the convenience of pleasure seekers, especially dancing parties. This has been moved down near the landing and is now the waiting room. He also had piles driven and some edgings piled in for a pier at the end of the road as it comes down from the woods. That year was started the regular weekly picnics, or "Wednesday picnics," which with each succeeding one increased in numbers attending and enjoyment. Mr. Weston had a stairway built down the West bluff, and the shed-roof bath house. As all of us picnickers preferred the big lake side, we had gathered boards on the beach, built tables near where Mr. L. T. Covell's cottage now is, also scats and a sloping walk down the face of the bluff, that being much easier than stairs. Our number soon increased to 40 or 50, and the little Charlotte Gray was taxed to her utmost to carry us, and we men would wink and sit very light on our scats, and when the captain would sometimes stop on the return trip and take on a gang of dock-wallopers and start out telling us all to sit still, I had to watch Mr. Covell pretty close so he would not get out and go on afoot. It was generally agreed that we must have a bigger boat next year.

In 1881 the Magnet came from Pentwater to run on White Lake as a ferry; before September came we often made her a full load. We had heard that the edgings had all washed out of our landing place, and we were planning for a big picnic the 4th; so three days previously my family went down to prospect and found only the piles left, and about ten feet apart was too long for steps. Clad in bathing suits, Victor and I easily measured the distance out to deep water. Next day the mill men of Whitehall soon contributed plank and timer, and the hardware men spikes; we got all loaded on a scow at noon of the 3rd, and the Magnet towed us down. With three men to help me we built a platform 16 feet square at the edge of deep water to land on, and then laid a walk 5 feet wide toward the shore. The whole length was 220 feet and darkness caught us half way there. Next morning Dallas Johnson and I hurried down on the early boat, and before the last plank was in place three boats all loaded with picnickers were pointing for our plank pier.

Heretofore we had carried drinking water with us from Whitehall or had procured it at the lighthouse. This year, I think it was, Mr. Weston had a drive well sunk at the foot of the bank

at the right hand side of the road. Water was found at 117 or 118 feet down, and it flowed a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch stream of good water for two or three years until the pipe became clogged, and in an effort to repair it was pulled apart and abandoned. Our plant pier survived the Winter and with some repairing served us the season of 1882. We took up a collection, bought a second-hand stove and located it beside a stump in our sky-covered kitchen. The Magnet served us well, although there was a "Rival" on the route, and 50 to 75 was the usual number at our weekly and often semi-weekly outings. If anyone ever went home unhappy or dissatisfied with the day's pastime, I never heard of it.

In the Spring of 1883 the ice swept away our pier completely leaving only 3 or 4 leaning piles to mark its locality. The Myrtle McClure came from Grand Haven to run on White Lake; and the Rival also was a lively name-sake. After my school work had ended for the year, I went around with a paper one day and soon had \$137 subscribed in lumber, work and money, mostly in Whitehall, and invitations to come for more if needed. I next engaged the McClure to do our towing, hired a pile-driver with its crew, also a man to help me hunt logs for piles, and next day we anchored under the eastern bluff. With the small boat we had borrowed to hunt piles in, we sounded along and soon found by going a little further South that deepwater was much nearer the shore. The pile-driver began puffing, and so did the rest of us and by the next day noon, two lines of piles reached out to 12 feet of water were completed. Next, an idle old scow was secured -- but it was not secure as we soon learned -- taken to a mill, loaded with edgings, towed down one night, and next morning when we got there to unload it we found it sunk to the bottom. Dallas Johnson had been engaged to help me. He went to the Mouth for more help and I to Green's old mill, and before night we had the edgings piled into our infant pier where they ought to be, and the water baled and pumped back into the lake where it ought to stay, and our scow towed back for another load.

Thereafter we had it loaded in the forenoon and unloaded in the afternoon if we could. Mr. Weston, then living at the Rapids, had given us permission to make any useful improvements we thought best. Well diggers were engaged and they dug and curbed a well up in the valley finding plenty of good water at 14 feet. Mr. K. F. Morse gave us a pump, and lugging drink-water from town was no longer a virtue. While waiting for edgings, Mr. Johnson and I would cut and burn brush and logs, and, in time, had the lake front of the South bluff inhabitable. While we were loading plank at the New York mill, Mr. Alley shouted at us: "Take all the plank you want; never mind counting." Picnicing had begun as soon as parties could land on the edgings, and about the first of August the pier was completed, timber and planked from end to end 159 feet. We had also built a plank walk with hand-rail down the West bluff. Every cent received had been expended, and I had 31 happy days work of my own.

While the rides up and down White Lake were always enjoyed, people began to think that the nights might be pleasant at the "Resort" as well as the days. Cottages were talked about, and presently Messrs. Staples, Covell, Phelps, Nourse and myself caused the same old scow to be loaded with building material and while we slept she played the same old trick on us again by sinking at the dock back of the Covell shingle mill. She was unloaded till her upper edge rose above water then pumped out, reloaded, towed down and unloaded before she could dive again. A team was taken around through the sand hills to haul the lumber up from the new pier; and Mr. Nourse by hiring help was the first to have a roof there beneath the sky, and to occupy his lake-side home with his family. Our stove had been stolen the previous Winter and another was taken down when work first began. More cottages were built the next year, 1884; the Cayuga came round from Detroit to stay in our lake, many lived at the resort, picnics decreased in size but increased in numbers. My own family would go down Tuesday morning, return home Saturday night for church Sunday and pick-up-day Monday; and back to the cottage again at night or early Tuesday morning. All the ferry boats then ran down the old channel to the end, and a most picturesque trip it made for us. Visiting, reading, bathing, straying to Pigeon top or the sand hills, occupied the days; the evening would find us gathered around campfires built of driftwood on the beach, parching green corn, roasting potatoes, spinning yarns, acting charades, singing songs, guessing riddles, listening to recitations, and when at last the fires burned low, a good night hymn would send us to our slumbers. Happy times! Pleasant place!