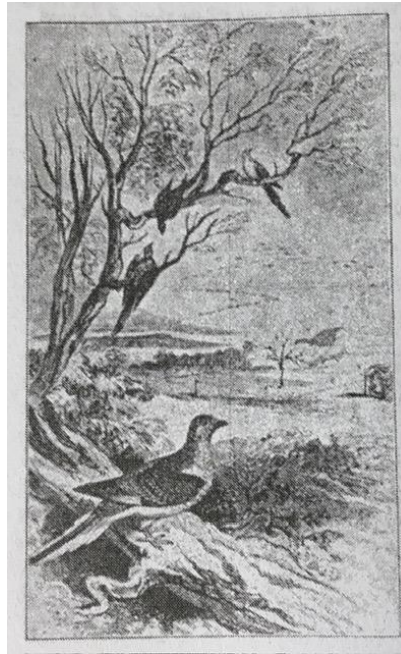


Hunting and Fishing
By G. T. W., Whitehall

Submitted by Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



The following is another of the articles written by a former local area resident and published in the “White Lake Reminiscences” booklet in 1898.

In the early sixties, while yet a young lad, my parents moved to White Lake and located near what is called Carleton Creek, then a dense wilderness. I was a child of nature, loving the woods and delighting in a rod and line. Then it was with rimless straw hat and bare feet, with my pocket full of bait, I would steal away in the early morning light to White River and catch my basket full of fish, and return home in time to have mother cook my beauties for breakfast. The river then abounded with fish of all kinds, from the tiny minnow to the mammoth muskellunge.

The greatest of all sport was fishing by torch-light, and well I remember my delight when invited by the Fogg boys to go with them on such an expedition. My boyish eyes bulged out with astonishment as awe-stricken I sat in the canoe and saw the stick of pitch pine lighted, and placed in the prow of the boat to blind the fish. My, what a catch! There were black bass, pike, pickerel and bull-heads, but in time this got to be a common thing.

Speaking of muskellunge reminds me of an incident that occurred in afteryears. Coming home one day shortly after bringing my wife to Whitehall I found the doors locked and the curtains down. Calling my wife by name I was surprised to have the door cautiously opened

and to be told to come in quick when the door was again quickly locked. "What is the matter?" I exclaimed, "Why are you shut in this warm day?" Pale as a ghost she whispered, "Indians". The town is full of them. Two great big Indians just went by with the largest fish I ever saw. They had a pole through its head and the ends of the pole on their shoulders and then it dragged on the ground, it must have been a young whale." I told her it was a muskellunge, and when I got to the bottom of the matter two Indians and a squaw were all she had seen that day. How I laughed at her, but they were the first Indians the poor woman had ever seen.

In later years the streams have been planted by the State with speckled trout and other varieties of fish. A law was passed that they should not be molested for a period of three years. It is now lawful to catch trout from May first to September first. Game wardens were also appointed to see that the law was enforced. Among the first appointed were Dr. Kenyon, Messrs. Whitman, Brock and Haverkate. I was called upon at one time by Mr. Brock to go with him up the river in search of law breakers. As we were skulking along in the brush watching the river a man jumped and ran, leaving his trout on the river bank. He was too quick for us, and when we turned laughing for home, I slyly picked up the trout and slipped them in Brock's pocket; when we got to Montague I accused him of taking them and told him if he threw them away I would complain of him; he said if I did, he would murder me "by gum I will."

In an early day the woods were full of wild game of all kinds, the black bear, deer, fox, wild cat and lynx. The wolf, too, often made night hideous as they howled around the settler's cabin. It was no uncommon thing to see the deer browsing in sight of your door, or even come to the house to eat potato parings thrown out in the yard. I have killed many deer myself but could never bring myself to shoot one while eating so near our door. Frequently we would go out and shoot a deer in the morning in order to have venison for breakfast as that was the only fresh meat we had. I have killed as many as five deer in one day.

The bear was common in those days and harmless if left alone. A stranger came one day and wished me to show him some land, he thought of purchasing. He stood looking at the timber when I pointed back, he turned to look. Instantly his hair began to rise on his head, for there stood a block bear raised up on his haunches, he soon dropped down and ambled away into the woods. Our land-looker said, "Let us go home, I think I will look somewhere else" and I guess he did for I never saw him again.

The wild pigeons were also plentiful, and catching and shipping them was at one time a prosperous business, in which many were engaged, myself among the number. They had their nestlings in the swamps around White Lake and vicinity. Pigeon Hill on the shore of Lake Michigan received its name from the fact that the birds in flying over would be but a few feet from the ground and people were accustomed to go there and kill them in great numbers with clubs and poles. I have often shipped as high as ten crates a day, a crate containing from four to five dozen birds. To catch them the beds were made in the vicinity of the feeding grounds, strewing them with wheat. A net was then set with spring poles at

each end, and a stool pigeon to decoy them on the bed. The net was then sprung over them. The catch would sometime be as high as twenty dozen. I have frequently made as high as twenty-five dollars in one day.

The bull frog that makes night hideous with his croaking, was also another source of making money. They were caught with hook and line, and crated the same as pigeons. We realized from seventy-five cents to one fifty a dozen. I have made as high as ten dollars a day at this business.

Much money was also made in trapping on White River which once literally swarmed with muskrat, mink and otter. A good muskrat skin would bring from fifteen to forty cents; a mink from one to five dollars, and an otter from six to eighteen dollars. I have caught otter that measured six feet in length. A good trapper has been known to clear from ten to fifteen dollars in one night, and make as high as eight hundred in one season.

But all things are changed. Where once roamed the wild deer and Indian, free and unmolested cultivated farms and beautiful homes may be found. The log-cabin and river men's shanties are no more.

It may be of interest to some to know that the Trading Post derived its name from the fact that the French traders were accustomed to visit there at certain seasons of the year to buy furs from the Indians. In 1859 Mr. Chas. Johnson located there and remained many years. The spot where now stands Whitehall was once the feeding ground for the deer.

Nearly all of the first settlers have gone to their eternal home but there will always be a tender spot in my heart for those who remain to remind us of the past.

Footnote:

After doing some "hunting" and "fishing" of historical records, it is believed that the writer of the original article, G. T. W., was George T. Walker, as he is the only person with the those initials who was living in the area prior to the printing of "White Lake Reminiscences" in 1898. With what little information that could be found, it appears that George was born in Michigan in mid-August 1848. The 1887 City Directory showed him as a laborer living in Whitehall. In the City Directory for 1889 he was listed as a policeman. By 1893 he was listed under "Village Officers" as Deputy Marshall. He was married and they may have had two sons. There does not appear to be any further local connection in 1900 or beyond.

As for the Fogg boys who were also mentioned in the article, but not specifically by name, there were three Fogg brothers living in the Oceana County area during this time. They were Ebenezer Frank (1841-1922), Oscar Eugene (1844-1935) and James Herman (1848-1932). Perhaps these are the fishing buddies of G. T. W.