

Some History about Sand Lake

Preface

The village of Sand Lake, the nucleus of which is located in sections 4 and 5 of Nelson Township, on the northern border of the county of Kent, was once believed to be destined for great growth into a thriving city. However, other, more strategically placed cities were favored, and Sand Lake was left to continue its existence, the hopes of its founders remaining forever unrealized.

The genesis of the village was in 1869, upon the discovery of its immense lumber supply and the possibilities thereof. Soon Sand Lake was a booming logging town, but like all such villages in Michigan, the lumber supply was shortly gone and land came to provide the principle means of sustenance. The following is the story of Sand Lake as a 19th Century town, when its development was at its height and hopes and dreams of large expansion were savored and flourished.

SAND LAKE: A NINETEENTH CENTURY LUMBERING TOWN

Into the territory comprising the township of Nelson, which later included within its boundaries the Village of Sand Lake, came the settlers, originating from Canada, the Eastern States, Indiana, and Ohio; their strength and skill pitted against the forces of nature to make homes in a region. Their inspection of the area brought them to the realization that Nelson Township was covered with the best quality pine and as much of it per acre as any pine belt in the state. Unfortunately, however, the area lacked the moving water necessary for harvesting the pine and, as a result, this great resource remained, for a period, untouched.

When there came the deterioration of the supply of lumber immediately accessible to these areas with the water for transport, then timber had to be extracted from land not available to rivers and streams. Transportation became the major part of harvest expense, and thus there grew a large demand for railroads. In 1867, having been given a grant of \$50, 000 from the city of Grand Rapids, The G.R. & I. Railroad began construction of lines toward the Straits of Mackinaw. When, on December 23rd of that year, the G.R. & I. engineered its first scheduled train into Cedar Springs, inaugurating a daily run out of Grand Rapids and back. The lumbering industry in Nelson Township was begun.

In 1869 the roadbed was extended through what was to become Sand Lake and thirteen miles beyond to the north. Thus, the founding of Sand Lake was initiated when the rails of the G.R. & I. were laid across Section 5 of Nelson Township. Prior to the completion of the railroad through Sand Lake, travelers rode the train to Cedar Springs, and then proceeded northward on the "state road." This road had been authorized in 1854 from

Grand Rapids to Big Rapids, Squire George Coggeshall having been contracted to build it. There was a stage that ran between the two cities until the time of the railroad. When the first trains came into the area they were loaded with machinery for the projected lumber mills; passengers were of secondary importance. The roadbed was a corridor between the pines, with wood piled at strategic locations to provide fuel for the wood burning engines. Milling machinery arrived during the year of 1869 to be set up for Robert Salisbury, and used by the same on the east side of a small shoal lake in Section 5 of Nelson, and for Shadrach Small on the south side of that same lake.

The first land purchase recorded in Section 5 of Nelson Township was that of Willard Richards in 1857, designated as NW $\frac{1}{2}$ Section 5, 295.82 acres. No further transactions were recorded until 1868, when Richards sold to Myron Richards and Robert and Russell Salisbury the N $\frac{1}{2}$ Fr. Section 5, excluding forty acres in the SE $\frac{1}{2}$ and NE $\frac{1}{2}$. Then in 1869 Shadrach Small purchased from Salisbury two and one half acres on the lake in Section 5 of Nelson that was to become known as Sand Lake.

The Platting of Sand Lake:

Robert Salisbury, perceiving that a town at the railroad right-of-way would be inevitable, proceeded to purchase, with Fred Wetmore in 1869, the NE quarter section from Myron Richards, who had procured that acreage from its original owner Willard Richards. In 1871 the village was platted by William Thornton in such a manner: The area was divided into twenty-two blocks, proceeding from the east line to the half line of the section, and then numbering back, two blocks deep each side of main street. The main street was named Lake Street, as it extended from the Sand Lake on the west to Wares Lake on the east. The village was named Sand Lake "because of the sand bar across the lake." Block 7 was left as a public square and named for Salisbury. In 1872 Riley Smith was hired by Emery Ware to plat an addition to the village on the east, extending into Section 4, and in 1876 William Thornton laid out an addition on the southeast for Frank Seeley.

The Mills:

The Ware brothers, Emery and Sam, were the first to see possibilities in Section 4 and so set up their mill on a small lake east of the village for the production of shingles. The lake became known as Wares Lake. Other mills included the shingle mill of Shadrach Small located at the south side of the Sand Lake; Robert Salisbury's mill on the east side of that lake; the mill owned by Frank Seeley, located on a small round lake east of the railroad just over the county line: the Cox Mill that began operations on a small lake in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 5. West of Sand Lake Peter Haifley, an Englishman, purchased the N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 6 and hauled his logs to a mill he set up on the southeast bank of the lake. D.W. Avery hauled his logs from NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 6 to his shingle mill on the outlet of the Sand Lake. Sam Haritt arrived from Canada with his family in 1871 and bought acreage in the pine of Section 6. He set up his mill between the operations of Salisbury and Haifley. Eldredge and Orr built a planing mill on the railroad right-of-way, and Morton & Lewis built long storage sheds for their shingles in that same area. Mrs. Sylvia Hartt Shattuck expresses the scene of Sand Lake in that era of the early seventies thus: "With these mills running full force the village grew rapidly though still wild and crude. For example, try to visualize the condition of the roads with heavy loads

of limber and shingles, horse drawn from all those mills to the railroad. The mud was hub deep and our sidewalks were built three or four feet from the ground with the boards running lengthwise.”

A Post Office Established:

At first, the train schedule was such that there was one train each way, each day. As soon as the line was completed to Cadillac, the road automatically became a mail carrier and mill owners along the way were designated as postmasters. Robert Salisbury was appointed the first official postmaster of Sand Lake in January of 1870, and from his mill dispensed the mail. In March of 1870, a second daily train was scheduled by the railroad. Freight was piling up, the area along the tracks was lined with shingles, and the planing mill of Eldredge and Orr was working a double shift to dress the rough lumber that was coming down the rails from the north.

Fires were a menace to the woods of Northern Kent County in the summers of 1871-1872. Fire destroyed the Cox Mill in the first of these two years, the same year as the Chicago Fire. In June of the next year the big mill of Frank Seeley, the largest mill in the area, burned to the ground, with considerable loss to local business interests as well as its owner. Seeley, securing the backing of Charles Stone, a New York industrialist, brought Robert Salisbury's mill on Sand Lake. The mill became known as the Stone & Seeley Mill. A spur of the railroad was run to the lake.

After Salisbury sold his mill and left Sand Lake, a new appointment was to be made for postmaster. Ely Chapman, a railway mail clerk, was designated postmaster temporarily. The permanent appointment was given to Lewis Swift on June 10, 1872; the office was installed in his hardware store on the northeast corner of main street.

A Schoolhouse for the Community:

In the spring of 1871 it became apparent that the population of the settlement was large enough for the creation of a new school district. Upon delineation of School District No. 9, Nelson Township, it was necessary that a director be elected and a schoolhouse erected. O.W. Avery was chosen to fill the former; and property was purchased from Robert Salisbury west of the platted village, on which was to be built Sand Lake's first schoolhouse. The building, closely surrounded by pine, was hastily constructed on a site north of Lake Street and west of Seventh Street. The first reports from the district, as recorded in annual state school records, indicate that the building was valued at \$400, with a capacity of 56 and 24 in attendance. The first teacher was Phila Van Buren of Grand Rapids. Later, in 1876, the necessity for more classroom space required the addition of another room onto the school. The director of the district, Jerome Barker, reported that the expansion gave the school a capacity of 120, making room for 8 less than were in attendance.

Businesses in Sand Lake in the Early Seventies:

After the village was platted, among the first two lots were Theodore Phelps, on which he built a two story hotel, called the Sand Lake House, which extended over two blocks and faced the north on the corner of Lake and Fourth Streets: John Noble, who built a three story hotel on lots 13 and 14 of block 8; Lewis Swift, eventual owner of a two story

hardware store on lot 9 of block 8, that also housed the post office; William French, who built a two story general store across from Swift's Hardware in block 14, with a connected lumber business; James Corwin, building a drug store across the street south of the park; Sam Crabb, whose big general store came to be located at the corner of Lake and Fifth streets; Rasco and Giddings, who became owners of a general store in block 15; Byron Darrin and Joel Countryman, blacksmiths and carriage makers. Other businesses that arose soon after were George Finches Barber Shop, Mrs. Stout's Millinery, Jim Simond's Shoe Store, Burches Drug Store, and "a saloon nearly every other door." Occurring at this same time was the construction of the G.R. & I. Depot west of the tracks on Lake Street.

Serving Sand Lake's medical needs were the Drs. J.H. Ludington and Oscar Baird. During these years the lumber mill workers frequently had accidents and the services of these doctors were prevailed upon often. These doctors were, in 1882, replaced by Dr. Walter J. Bruce, who came to the village to practice medicine until 1900. Sixteen years later Dr. Jacob Buursma arrived and became established in Sand Lake. Then, at the turn of the century, Drs. D.S. Griswold and George Willett came to engage in the practice of medicine at Sand Lake.

By 1874, a weekly newspaper, called the Sand Lake Journal, was established by two men, D.G. Marvin and W.E. Nyhart. It was published until 1880, when, in October of that year, The Sand Lake Weekly Enterprise took over publication under the supervision of Austin Reed and ? Leech.

Incorporation as a Village:

Sand Lake was incorporated as a village on November 15, 1878, five years after the first campaign to organize started. In the succeeding year, January 1, a slate of officers took over the business of managing the village. Peter Haifley took office as the first president of the village; John Berridge, recorder; T.I. Phelps, treasurer; W.H. Brooks, A.D. Eldredge, W. Kronkwright, Jerome Dickenson, M.L. Swift, Abner Sheets, trustees.

Sand Lake's Churches:

Early church services for the village were held in the first schoolhouse; J.V. Crandall, the Sunday School Superintendent, and Reverend Brady, a minister from Grand Rapids, conducting services. After this building was vacated in 1881, the Catholic Church purchased the property and employed it as their center of worship. Meanwhile, other congregations were establishing their places of worship in the village. The Methodist Episcopal Church building was erected in 1875, and in the following year it was dedicated.

From the Cedar Springs Clipper:

"The Methodist Episcopal Church of Sand Lake was dedicated to Almighty God on April 30th. Morning Sermon by Rev. I. Matthew 18:20. After the sermon a statement of the financial condition of the church was made by H.P. Henderson, presiding Elder of the district. The indebtedness was \$750, and the people responded in sixty minutes to a sum of \$805. This was a proud day for Sand Lake." This church burned in the fire of 1895, but was rebuilt the same year. Reuben Farnums initiated a

movement to organize a Congregational Church in Sand Lake. With the society organized under the leadership of Rev. Redcoff, lots 6, 7, 8, and 9 of block 13 were monetarily acquired and there constructed a church in the years 1878-1879. The society functioned as a religious community until 1900, when it was disbanded and its building purchased by the local chapter of the Grange.

In 1879 the Seventh Day Adventists organized a church during the September month. A series of tent meetings in the park, conducted from July to September by the Elders D.A. Wellman and G.H. Gilbert, were the prelude to its evolution. It was the decision of the society to then purchase the house and property owned by Ella Pangborn to utilize for their worship. Its location, in respect to the village, was north of the Swift Hardware and east across the street from the park, on lot 8, block 8. When a fire destroyed the house, the same fire that swept the north side of Lake Street in 1884, the congregation began immediate work toward its replacement, with each parishioner contributing labor and cash. Fortunately, through the conflagration of 1895, the church remained standing.

A Smallpox Epidemic in Sand Lake:

It was during the decade of the seventies that the town experienced a small pox epidemic, Sand Lake's only such occasion. According to Mrs. Shattuck, two men, seeking work at her father's mill, exposed several of the mill workers, who transmitted the diseases. The victims, among them the Noble family, were buried secretly at night in crude wooden boxes on the southeast outskirts of Sand Lake, in unmarked graves.

The Decline of Lumbering and the 1880's:

By 1878 the large mill operators had begun to leave. After suffering enormous losses from fire, many mills were forced to close down. The census of 1880 lists approximately one hundred men in the village employed in lumbering. Samuel Ware was the only one of the first lumbermen to remain in Sand Lake. George Barker bought the mill built on the outlet of Sand Lake by Shadrach Small, and Peter Haifley dismantled his big mill and moved it to Cadillac.

A new note was in the news of the 1880's. With the frantic excitement of the lumbering era giving way, a more stable, but no less strenuous, mode of living was being sought. Farmers, temporarily turned mill men, were turning again to the soil for their livelihood; their task, clearing the land of pine stumps for plowing and farming, required an enormous effort unto its own. When finally completed and the land was ready for cultivation, wheat was planted, which was the first crop to bring cash to the farmers of Sand Lake.

During the year 1880 seventeen new families moved into Sand Lake, thus creating an overcrowded school situation and the need for a new school. The district was bonded for \$2050, and land was secured on lot 10, block 16. Lumber was supplied by local mills and Gus Barrand engaged as contractor. Before beginning construction, though, it was necessary to eradicate the land of its giant stumps from the pines which had recently stood there. The first dynamite blast broke windows throughout the village, so that the contract to complete was given to Wood Simpson, with a stumping machine of his own invention.

When completed, the new building, square, of two story construction, and with belfry, was an imposing structure containing two rooms on each floor, bisected by a hallway. Its capacity was two hundred. The District Director at this time was Charles Green. The school served the area for ten years as a ten grade school, in the eleventh year becoming an eleven grade school, and then, under the supervision of G.T. Chapel, becoming a full-fledged high school in 1893.

The places of business that had become established in Sand Lake by 1880 included: The Sand Lake House, which employed a handyman, a cook, a clerk, and three domestics; B.A. Shattuck's and Cornelius (Doc) Cain's general store at the west end of block 14; the harness shop of the Bradish Brothers; the Woods Saloon; C.J. and Luther; the shoe store of Billy Barker, next to the Shattuck and Cain store; and a millinery shop owned by Margaret Butler. South of the park George Crabb and J.E. Goul remodeled the grocery and dry goods store built by Sam Crabb; Jim Corwin ran the drug store he had built when the town was first platted; and next to Corwin was the two story building, owned by Alfred and Elizabeth Giddings, that operated as a general store. The Swift Hardware had been sold to Jerome Barker; next door was the two story building owned by H.L. Carter, who there operated the undertaking, furniture, and photography businesses; Mary Richmond's Dressmaking Shop in the same block; John Butler, distributor of farm implements; William Ingalls and Joel Countryman, blacksmiths; William Black, owner of a feed store; and in this same block, the Noble Hotel. Sand Lake seemed always to be plagued by menacing fires; so much that one of the first acts of the town council had been to equip a wagon with buckets, axes, and ladders and to construct a cistern under the main street, providing a water supply that was to be relayed by manpower.

In the winter of 1879-1880 the first of a succession of fires started in the depot, which resulted in the loss of the life of Gus Lewis, a bookkeeper, and the destruction of shingle sheds in the vicinity. The depot was replaced in December, 1880, relocated on the east side of the tracks.

On the afternoon of February 14, 1881, the fire department was again called out when the roof of the big general store of Shattuck and Cain, at the northwest corner of block 14, ignited from a faulty chimney flue and threatened the entire business block. The only way possible to halt the devastation was to remove a building in its path. Consequently, a team of horses attached by hook to the front of the shoe store owned by Billy Barker, ripped the building from its foundation. The neighboring buildings were wet down with brine soaked blankets and the fire was stopped. Goods salvaged from the ruin allowed the store owners to continue business in other location until the burned buildings could be replaced, this time in brick.

In 1884, only three years later, the town was again beset by fire. At 2:30 a.m. Monday, September 22, a terrific electrical storm broke the heat wave that enveloped the area. The hardware store that Jerome Barker had recently purchased was struck by lightning, and the strong west wind drove the flames from the burning building into the wooden structures next to it. Before the flames were brought under control, the entire block was

destroyed, including the Adventist Church building on the back of the block and the Countryman Blacksmith Shop on the opposite corner. It was a drenching rain that finally subdued the fire. An irreparable loss was the destruction of the township records, which had been in the office of the supervisor, John Berredge, and the treasurer, Wellington Rasco, and of the village records, lost in the office of W.H. Gill.

The “Gay Nineties”:

The year 1890 marked the passing of the lumber harvest as anyone’s means of existence. The big pine had disappeared and all of those who had operated its removal had moved to new scenes; many from Sand Lake moving to Woodville in upper Newaygo County. Discards of second grade timber were being picked up by the shingle mills. The only memento of the industry’s existence in the region was the completely denuded countryside.

Sand Lake, to keep pace with the “Gay 90’s.” sought elegance among the women. Mrs. Butler’s Millinery Shop carrying the latest in styles, and culture for the entire town. There were frequent plays, concerts, and recitals, offered by church choirs, cornet bands, and piano students.

A severe interruption to the steady pace of the community and the contentment of the times was on the occasion of May 2, 1895, when fire swept Sand Lake for the fourth time. A spring that had been unusually windy, with only a small amount of precipitation, carried within it a May month that began hot and dry. Hence, on the second, when a passing train left embers in a pile of refuse outside the livery stable that stood next to the tracks, an uncontrollable blaze was soon underway. Before the owners, Levi McDonald and Dave Walker, could extinguish the flames, they had spread to the tinder dry boards of the barn. The hot dry south wind carried sparks directly into the wooden roofs of the business district and before long the roof of the Sand Lake House began to smolder. The burning embers, being carried by the wind, had soon traveled across the street, and set those buildings afire. Residents, in anticipation of what was to successively occur, moved their personal property into the park for safekeeping. However, the flames raged across the park as well, destroying several of the homes located there and the Methodist Church. The village that at noon had been a normal contented little hamlet, its women cleaning house, its school preparing for commencement and its men making gardens, was by 3:00 that afternoon a smoldering ruin. From surrounding areas people arrived to survey the devastation.

In the aftermath of destruction, the necessity of goods, household, and grocery, was great. To satiate this need J.E. Goul the next day ordered a carload of such supplies from Grand Rapids and dispensed them from his elevator. The process of rebuilding the town began immediately, and only required a year for its completion. By 1896 twenty-four places of businesses, all built of brick, were again established and operating as parts of the community. They included the blacksmiths shops of A.P. Peck, D.M. Tuttle, and H. Bowhall; the office of John Berridge, Supervisor and attorney; Charles Brook’s barber and jewelry shop; undertaking and furniture businesses operated by T.J. Blanchard; W.H. Brook’s saloon; the store of M.J. Butler; G.W. Empie’s wagon shop; the store owned by

Alfred Giddings; the Lattimer Hotel; the shoemaker shop owned by D.B. Hill; the lumber and grain businesses of Goul and Brayman; G.B. McDonald Produce; the Moody & Pringle Hardware; the drug store of F.W. Pollock; the F.E. Shattuck, general store; the shoemaker shop of George Willett; W.H. Parker's furniture store; the meat market owned by C.E. Tucker; and N.M. Wilson Drugs. In addition, the fire had left untouched Sand Lake's Elevator. Owned cooperatively by J.E. Goul and J.A. Brayman and situated on Oak Street at the railroad, it was, from the year 1891, a large contributor to Sand Lake's economy. Grains, beans, and later potatoes from the area's fertile fields were carried to and dispensed from this building.

The Old Century's Close and the New Century's Entrance:

By the turn of the century the population of Sand Lake had become stable. The village was a unit of society in itself, always conscious of the problems of the farmers, who were its primary customers. The railroad was still a vital component; for, after the shingle sheds and planing mills along the tracks had been dismantled, potato buyers took over the right-of-way and the train managed the shipment of the potato crop. Potatoes would come into town by the wagon loads, sometimes lining the business district waiting to be weighed in at the warehouses. In their reliance upon the potato crop for profit and sustenance, the farming denizens of Sand Lake were again turning to the surrounding natural resources, as they had for the thirty-one years that had passed since the town's founding. Constantly seeking a new means for earning a livelihood was the way in which Sand Lake continued its development and prosperity. The hopes that the village would one day become a city of importance were ever present, and the possibility of extinguishing its existence altogether was a nonentity. Sand Lake in the nineteenth century was continually prosperous, as indicated by its numerous sawmills in the early years, by its constant rapid growth, and its sustained prosperity with farming. Mrs. Shattuck had her own way of expressing the dominant sentiments of citizens toward each other and their town in that era: "However with our friendly times, our troubles and our heartaches, we needed each other and the seeds of human kindness that were sown in those days will always linger."

APPENDIX A

Letter from Phila Van Buren, first teacher in Sand Lake, on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the school.

On May 15, 1871, Mr. Avery, who was director in this district, came to my home in Grand Rapids and said that they had just built a new schoolhouse and they wished to employ a teacher for the school. After talking with him for some time I consented to go. May 23 I took the train to Sand Lake, arriving about four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Nettleton meeting me at the station.

The schoolhouse was built of rough boards, not even sided as I remember. It had been built hastily, a great many families having moved into the district who had children. The fathers worked in the saw mills on the lake. There were four lumber and shingle mills on the lake. One was named by Mr. Hartt, the father of Cicero who now owns the resort at Whitefish Lake. The others were owned by Mr. Avery, the director, Mr. Salisbury, and Mr. Haifley. Mr. Avery decided to have me board with his aunt, Mrs. Marino, a widow lady who had a maiden daughter.

May 24 at nine o'clock I called my school to order, having twenty-four pupils present. My diary says they were all well-behaved children and gave very good attention. The first Sunday I was in Sand Lake they held Sunday School in the schoolhouse. Of course the teacher was asked to take a class. They were a class of young ladies about my own age and naturally I felt a little embarrassed but tried to do the best I could. Monday, my diary says, I had six more pupils and Tuesday three more. Tuesday I was invited to go on a tour of inspection over Mr. Avery's saw mill. It was quite a curiosity to me as I had never visited a saw mill. I had several boat rides on the lake, one young in particular, who was very kind, used to take me out quite often.

While I was teaching in Sand Lake a new station house was built by the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad. When it was completed a dance was given in the station to celebrate the occasion and I attended this dance. We danced the Virginia Reel and all the old fashioned square dances. The Fox Trot, Bunny Hug, and other present-day dances were unheard of at that time.

Among the pupils who attended my school were Ella Hartt, now Mrs. Hartt Bradish, Sylvia Hartt, now Mrs. Frank Shattuck, and Cicero Hartt. The first day Ella Hartt came with her hand in a sling. She was a very studious girl and afterwards became a teacher here in Sand Lake, teaching in the primary grade six years.

The Ware children, whose father owned a mill on Ware's Lake just east of the village, were my pupils; also the Welch children, Erma and Edgar, May and Warren Pierce, and the Overly children, who lived next to the schoolhouse. There were others whose names I do not recall.

In those days teachers were supposed to adhere strictly to Biblical instruction with regard to sparing the rod and spoiling the child. I remember I punished one boy for fighting whose father afterwards visited me threatening dire vengeance if it happened again. On the whole I enjoyed my summer school of 1871 with the Sand Lake people very much. I was entertained at their homes upon different occasions and they made it very pleasant for me.

-copy of a letter written in 1921