

Barry County's early history

1821-1837

In what is known as the Chicago Treaty, concluded by General Cass at Chicago, August 29, 1821, the soil of Allegan and Barry Counties was conveyed from red to white owners. In consideration for said treaty or sale of lands, the United States Government agreed to pay the Ottawa Indians a thousand dollars a year forever, besides fifteen hundred dollars a year for fifteen years, to support a blacksmith, teacher and farmer. To the Pottawattamies, the government agreed to pay five thousand dollars a year annually for twenty years, and one thousand dollars a year to support a blacksmith and teacher.

Nearly the whole of this money thus received went into the hands of the traders. If an Indian had neither money nor furs to offer, and wanted to purchase on credit, it was generally given him, unless he was known to be dishonest. On the average, they paid quite as well and as promptly as white men do at the present time. The traders always attended the payments by the U.S. Government agents, and generally received the money due them from the Indians. If he did not, or if there was a dispute about amount, the trader would sometimes take the law into his own hands and seize the money.

Barry County was established by law, with its present boundaries, on October 29, 1829; six days later it was attached to St. Joseph County as were ranges 11 and 12 in the territory of Allegan, while the rest of that territory was, for the most being, assigned to Cass County.

The first known settler to clear land in Barry County was Amasa S. Parker, a sturdy bachelor, who came in the fall of 1830 and selected a piece of land in township 1, range 10, now known as Prairieville. He built his house in the Spring of 1831, and became the first permanent white resident in the county.

Lorenzo Mudge made the first improvement in Castleton Township in 1837, having purchased the southeast quarter of section 32 on the south line of the township, where for eight months his family resided alone, his wife not seeing the face of a white woman during that period.

Nashville's early history 1836-1869

The major portion of land on which the village of Nashville is built was purchased from the government during the years of 1836-37 for purposes of speculation. From that date until 1855 no improvements whatever were made. A little later a mill was erected, as well as a few crude structures necessary to accommodate the men employed in its operation, and these remained until about 1864, the only forerunners of the future flourishing village.

IN 1865 the village was first platted by Robert B. Gregg, the survey having been completed on the second day of October by Joshua Martin. In 1866, the Grand River Valley Railroad was projected, and the preliminary survey made. In January, 1869, the first train passed over the recently completed railroad, and then began an almost unprecedented era of progress. Nashville embraces portions of the townships of Castle and Maple Grove. Only a small portion, however, is in Maple Grove, and that is outside of the thickly built part of the place. Pursuing its devious way through the central portion of the village limits is the Thornapple River, a stream which, aside from the picturesque beauty it imparts to the landscape, serves a more useful purpose in affording an excellent water power, which, for over three quarters of a century, was utilized for commercial purposes.

To the original plat the following additions have been made: the A. W. Phillips addition in September, 1866; the Orsemas Phillips addition in September, 1867; Phillip Holler's addition in October, 1870; Daniel Staley's addition in January, 1871; Alanson W. Phillips' addition in August, 1871; R. B. Gregg's addition in 1873; Orsemas Phillips' addition in October, 1875.

Nashville was named after Mr. Garaudus Nash, the chief engineer of the Grand River Valley Railroad (1869). While Nash never lived here, he suggested to the townspeople that the village be named after him, and apparently enough of the early pioneers approved of the idea for them to call this community Nashville. (This decision was made by 3 local men)

The first meeting for the election of village officers was held at the office of Lewis Durkee on Wednesday, the 7th of April, 1869, at twelve o'clock; and, the ballots having been cast, the following officers were declared elected; President, Lemuel Smith; Recorder, Leonard E. Stauffer; Treasurer, John M. Roe; Assessor, Elihu Chipman; Trustees, George A. Truman, Jacob Purkey, and Albert W. Olds.

Act of Incorporation

"The people of the State of Michigan enact: That all that tract of country situate in the town of Castleton and Maple Grove, in the County of Barry, and distinguished and designated on the Plat in the land office of the district as section thirty-five and thirty-six, and the south half of sections twenty-four and twenty-five, in town tree north, two north, of range seven west, be, and the same is hereby constituted a village corporate, to be known by the name of the Village of Nashville."

Signed
Henry P. Baldwin
Governor of Michigan
March 26, 1869

Early Harvest Festivals

The first Harvest Festival was held in 1904 and drew crowds estimated at 3,000 each of the two days. Each year the affair became a little bigger, until the early 1930's, when depression conditions put sort of a crimp on things. The annual affair continued, however, until 1941, and was stopped the next year by the war. The Harvest Festivals has had several resurgents and failings since due to interest or lack there of by the residents of the village.

From the news files we find this report of the Festival. On Thursday morning festivities opened with a concert by the Nashville Cornet band and then came sporting events and contests. A. Seymour and Ray Pennock won first and second in the boy's foot race. In the 100-yard dash Sherman Swift took first, with Orville O. Mater second. Victor Niles won the barrel race, with Ray Pennock taking second. Seth Graham, Nashville's Marathon runner, was an easy winner in the mile race. Next came a ladies wood-sawing contest, which was won by Mrs. Frank McPeck of Stony Point. Free vaudeville and trapeze acts on the big platform in the center of Main street climaxed the forenoon's events.

After dinner came the big street parade, with 27 floats, followed by a baseball game between Vermontville and Bellevue town teams. John Eubank, former star pitcher for Detroit was on the mound for Bellevue and won 8-7.

After the ball game Captain S. M. Fowler's Elk's Drill Team of Battle Creek gave an exhibition. Then there was a balloon ascension, more free acts, and in the evening band concerts and fireworks. Grand climax was a big dance.

Friday's schedule was pretty much a repetition for new acts and a big tug-of-war from the north and south sides of the Thornapple River. The north siders, captained by Charles Feighner, won. There was a second parade and the winning floats were selected by judges from Battle Creek. Then more thrilling attractions, including band concerts, more fireworks, free moving pictures and another big dance. All in all, commented News Editor Feighner, "It was a very strenuous but very satisfying week. Inasmuch as the Festival is looked forward to as an annual affair and tends to bring former residents back to their old home, the brightest and most hospitable little town in Michigan, let us continue the good work. It means hard work but we believe it is worth it."

Standpipe

Nashville's beacon since 1892 - Old Water Tower - referred to locally as the "standpipe" was located atop the big hill in Putnam Park on North Main Street. The tower was the storage tank for the village (from 1892 to 1975), first to house river water used for all purposes but for drinking. Then in the 1930's wells were put down, and drinking water was pumped into the big tower which held 85,000 gallons, 1,000 gallons for each foot. Old timers recall it was put up after a bad fire destroyed the first building which housed the Lentz Table Company. According to them, the officials from the table company said they would rebuild, if the village would provide adequate water supply.

The old tower held another fascination for many of the old timers and some not so old. Every child in town has probably been warned about not climbing up the standpipe, but many a lad, and not too few girls, have sneaked up there to scratch their initials for only the brave in heart to see.

From time to time it needed repairing and repainting but it stood for 83 years before being replaced by the current tower now located on Casgrove Road on the south-west side of town. But the old water tower is still a good topic for reminiscing. (For many years just the top several feet of the tower stood on the hill providing a shelter for adventurous children but was later removed by the council because it had become a hazard to the children using the park)

The Cornet Band

Organized in 1893, Nashville's first Cornet Band was one of the town's proudest possessions for several years. On Saturday nights, occasional Sunday afternoons, or whenever some special occasion offered an excuse, they would gather with their instruments and give forth with "the sweetest music this side of Heaven. That particular expression, used by Guy Lombardo's Orchestra, was frequently employed by Orno Strong, first editor of the News, in describing the performances of the group. The members were as follows: E. R. White, Charles H. Raymond, John Roe, Frank Reynolds, Eugene Cook, George Fleming, Frank Purchis, William Griffith, Henry Hafner, Austin Brooks, Frank Helm, Chris Holler, George Francis, and Al Durkee.

The First Fire Brigade

In the spring of 1882 a group of citizens got together and resolved to organize a fire department. Ever since the birth of the News four years previously, Editor Orno Strong had been agitating for such a move and it is typical of his acrid editorial style that he wrote on March 5 of that year:

"About 25 young men of the town met last night and expressed their willingness to organize and serve on a village fire brigade. They are taking steps to urge the Common council toward purchasing a fire engine and if that body can be sufficiently egged and prodded we may yet have fire protection in our otherwise praiseworthy village."

The Council was evidently prodded because about a month later it appointed a committee of three to confer with a Chicago manufacturer of fire apparatus. For a price of \$1,150 delivered, they bought a No. 1 Piano style Rumsey Fire Engine of 20-man capacity, together with hose and a dozen leather buckets. The agent, Mr. Newkirk, agreed to organize and drill the fire department and put everything in prime working order before leaving town with the money and later News items indicate that he more than kept his bargain.

On May 5, 1882, a meeting was held at the town hall and Nashville's fire department was organized. The following officers were elected: Foreman (chief) J. D. McCartney; First Assistant, Dan Smith; Second Assistant, G. B. Smith; President, Clark N. Young; Vice President, C. N. Dunham; Secretary, Frank Wolcott; Treasurer, Henry Zuschnitt; Trustees, C. W. Granger, Capt. F. T. Boise and C. L. Glasgow.

Early in June a colorful Fireman's Ball was held in the opera house under auspices of Engine and Hose Co. No. 1, netting over \$80 toward new uniforms. After the engine arrived and before Mr. Newkirk left town several drills and test runs were made and the new engine threw a seven-eighths-inch stream of water ten feet above the top of the Methodist Church steeple. And that was back in the days when the old high steeple was still standing. On the level the 400-foot hose threw a stream 130 feet.

In the late summer of 1892 the Nashville company competed with the best hose companies in the state during running contests at Hastings and missed winning a championship by only a matter of seconds. Len W. Feighner was serving as fire chief at that time and said that the men took the business very seriously. They showed up faithfully for drills and when there was an alarm it was considered an almost permanent dishonor to be late.

In 1892 Nashville bought two new hose carts, making three in all. One of them was kept in the fire house, one near the Lentz Table Factory, and the third out on the south side. The fire station was located in the same building that is used today,

although the front has been remodeled to allow a larger drive-in for modern trucks. The building was originally the Methodist Church and was moved to the spot after being damaged slightly by a fire.

Through the years many changes and improvements have come about. Up to 1947 the Fire Department was operated by the village. Then Castleton and Maple Grove Townships incorporated with the Village of Nashville into a Fire Department controlled by a Fire Board consisting of; President Cecil Barrett, Secretary Blair Hawblitz, Treasurer, Frank Scramlin, Trustees William Schantz, Russell Mead, and Rev. James Varner.

The parade held on Memorial Day starts at the north bridge on M-66 and marches to the cemetery. When it reached the Putnam Library, (now at the fire department across the road from the Library) the parade stops and a memorial service for the departed firemen (19 at the time of this writing) is held at the Old Fire Bell which was mounted in the Library yard (but is now in the Fire Department yard). In the cemetery Firemen's graves are marked and Firemen's Flags are placed on them. After the bell was put out of service, the fire department was served by Michigan Bell Telephone Co. There were 8 phones in different Firemen's homes which received fire and ambulance calls. All 8 phones rang at the same time. The person who answers first would push the button, and he could then talk to all of the other 7 who have phones. If it was a fire the switch was pulled and the siren would blow. When the phone in the fire station was picked up they would learn where the fire was and write information on the blackboards so late comers would know where to go. The first truck would then go out to the call. If the call was within the village they would flip a red light. The city truck was used in Nashville and the other truck was used outside of the village limits. Today the fire department is served through the Barry County 911 service.

Through the years the Fire Department has sponsored and helped with many activities; Harvest Festival, Maple Syrup Project, Christmas Tree Lights, direct traffic and supply ambulance on scene for football games, help at Maple Valley High School with traffic during Graduation Time.

They work with the Nashville Police Department and Barry County Sheriff's Department with accidents, drowning, and missing persons.

The Volunteer Fire Department men are constantly training so that they can better serve our community such as ladder, pump, first aid, and Civil Defense.

Most Disastrous Fire

Nashville's first big fire occurred the night of February 25, 1874. The mad ringing of the Methodist Church bell brought people out of bed and men were running crying "fire".

The Village of Nashville then was less than 10 years old and boasted about a thousand population. The business district was mainly composed of frame wooden buildings thrown up in a hurry of cheap lumber.

The fire, on that cold night in 1874, started at the rear of Phillip Holler and Son's Hardware Store, which stood fronting Main Street in a long narrow building closely paralleling Cherry Alley (located where the Pharmacy parking lot is now - 2007). Within 20 minutes after the blaze was discovered there were several hundred people on Main Street. Before the night was over almost the entire population of the town and scores of country folks were on hand to witness Nashville's first really disastrous fire. Within the course of three hours, five business places were wiped out and two families were left homeless.

Although there was no wind, the flames soon spread to the building next door north, which was owned by R. S. Brady and occupied by Ed R. White. Mr. White operated a meat market on the ground floor and he and his wife lived in an apartment above their store. They had retired for the night when the sound of shouting awakened them, and they dressed hurriedly and carried a few of their possessions into the street before the blaze enveloped their building.

Those first frame buildings had been built close together and it was only a matter of minutes before the third one was aflame. This next building, which was owned by C. C. Linsley, was occupied by C. A. Stebbins and Captain Boise, who operated a general store. They sold dry goods, groceries and many other items, including gun powder and dynamite. Salvage of their merchandise was greatly hampered by the fear of an explosion at any moment. Above their store E. J. Feighner operated a photograph studio and he lost a new camera which he valued at more than \$200.

Next building to break into flames was across the narrow alley. It was owned by C. C. Linsley and was occupied by Troutwine & Barlow as a barbershop and fancy store, with William Clark's harness shop on the second floor. Mr. Linsley lived in a small apartment at the rear of the barber shop on the ground floor.

By this time the few level heads directing the fire fighting had decided drastic methods were necessary to save the rest of the business section. After a hurried consultation, it was decided to use dynamite with the utmost caution on the Brady building, which was already past saving, and to tear out the building which housed the news office, in an attempt to halt the spread of the flames in the other direction. With the dynamiting, glowing, burning timbers were blown a hundred feet into the air. The flying debris started a few small new fires but nothing that could get out of

control, and while bucket brigades wet down nearby buildings, the fire fighters concentrated on literally tearing apart the frame building that housed the News office. Ropes were made fast to vital points and with several hundred men and two teams of oxen straining to the task, the building was toppled over and hauled clear across the street, out of danger from flying sparks.

Before this, Orno Strong, publisher of the News, had been busy carrying his possessions out of the shop and his final achievement was the rescue of the 1,100 pound press, which was picked up bodily by about a dozen men and carried to safety. Young Strong had come to Nashville and started the News less than six months before and had estimated \$300 loss from the fire was perhaps more of a blow than that suffered by some of his neighbors. True to the traditions of his business, Editor Strong issued a newspaper two days later, and the biggest news of the week had to do with the fire. The story told in detail how, after the News building was torn down, teams of oxen hauled the larger portions away and how two lines of men were formed to pass water to the fire, while others swarmed onto the roof of D. C. Griffith's store next door and kept exposed parts covered with wet carpets and quilts. "And thus", wrote Orno Strong, "Nashville's big fire finally was checked."

Most of the residents of the town stayed up all night. Barrels of whiskey were broken open and set conveniently for anyone and everyone to partake of. Next morning, few of the sawmills could operate because of missing employees.

All in all, Nashville was lucky. Had there been a wind, the newly-built village would have been wiped out in a hurry. Naturally such a conflagration inspired talk of an organized fire department, but it took another 17 years to truly fill that need. Only after the disastrous Lentz Table Factory Fire in 1891 did the village get busy and provide an efficient water system. The late 1870's however, saw the construction of numerous fire wells, bricked in cisterns underground in the business district for storing a reserve supply of water. Some of these old cisterns exist underneath present sidewalks and streets.

The cause of the big fire was never determined although there was considerable talk at the time about its having been the work of an incendiary. The losses fell heavily upon C. c. Linsley, who owned four of the buildings and who carried no insurance. He operated a patent medicine business and carried several thousand dollars worth of liquors and medicines in his cellar for use in manufacturing processes. His total loss was estimated at \$6,000 and that of Holler & Son was set at the same figure. Holler had \$2,400 worth of insurance, however. Stebbins & Boise and Ed White also carried at least partly enough insurance, as did R. S. Brady. As for the News publisher, he carried no insurance at all.

Lakeview Cemetery

The first lot in the Nashville Lakeview Cemetery was bought by Len Strow for \$10. There are three additions in the cemetery. (Along with a Memorial Garden still under construction - 2007) The old part (OA) of the cemetery has 549 lots. The new part (NA) has 360 lots and the newer addition (XA) has 560 lots. The purchase of a lot - which has six plots - includes perpetual care. The cemetery also includes a mausoleum which was built in 1920.

When Daniel Smith, who lived in Nashville, died in 1934, he left a bequest of \$10,000 to Lakeview Cemetery to build a chapel in memory of his wife, Sylvia Teen, who died in 1908.

The Chapel was built in 1958. The bequest with interest was then \$10,985.46. The cost of building the Chapel was \$10,316.61. The balance was turned back to the village to buy government bonds. The Chapel named Teen Smith Memorial Chapel, includes the Chapel Room which will seat better than 100 people and the basement shop for cemetery equipment.

Nashville Schools

During the year 1866 it became apparent that there were a number of children in Nashville for whom educational advantages should be provided. A notice was circulated that at a time specified a "bee" would be held for the purpose of erecting a schoolhouse. The call met a prompt response, and on the day appointed, before darkness approached, the school house was in actual existence. It could hardly be commended for beauty of design but it served well the purpose for which it was erected. At first it was without a door or window panes but when a wandering cow took to spending its nights there it became necessary to build a door. The forest was so thick at the time that you couldn't see Main Street from the School. After a more spacious structure had superseded it, the former building did service as a barn on one of the neighboring streets. The first school housed thirteen children, who were under the care of Miss Aggie Smith (later Mrs. C. M. Putnam). The schoolhouse also did duty as a church and Sunday school room. Some idea of the rapid growth of the town can be obtained by the fact that by the next summer the pupils numbered 35 and increased to 56 the following winter. The next year the west side of Mr. Seaman's house was used for school and church purposes. This building was on the corner of Main and Reed Streets and was also used for lectures, singing schools, etc.

In the summer of 1867 the ground where the Kellogg Elementary School is now (currently the Alternative Ed Building) was cleared of beautiful forest trees and a two-room building erected which was then thought to be sufficient for all time - only one room was used or needed the first year. Then for seven years two teachers were employed. Then because of crowded conditions, a small building for the primary department was erected on the corner of the same lot. This soon proved inadequate and rooms were rented on Main Street and in a private house to accommodate the ever-increasing number of pupils.

During 1885, the larger building was torn down by Charles Smith. He used the lumber to build the Smith and Brooks Creamery. The primary school building was moved to the location of the Maple Valley News Office. Orno Strong was the editor at that time.

A fine modern brick school building was built in 1884-85 well equipped and eleven teachers were employed.

The first graduating class of Nashville graduated with three girls and one boy. Previous to that time the "upper room" provided a very sketchy course and it was largely through the efforts of Professor J. W. Robert that a three year high school curriculum was inaugurated. The graduates of 1887 were Alice Smith, who later married Curtis W. Pennock and was the mother of Ralph and Arthur Pennock; Alice M Downs, who later became a teacher in Chicago City Schools; Emma Barber and Clarence H. Barber, who was later a successful physician in Hastings. In 1888 the graduates were Clyde W. Francis, Myron Stanton, Lena M. Parish and Mabel L. Sellick. In 1889 the graduates were A. J. Reynolds, G. W. Gribbin, Adrian Carter,

Lida Feighner, Minnie Durham, Jennie Mills and Winnie Downs. In 1890 there were no graduates because the high school course had been changed from three to four years.

In 1891 the first class to graduate from the Nashville's four year high school was Will W. Potter who later became a lawyer and then a Supreme Court Judge, S. Wilburt SMith, Bertha Marshall, Lois Marshall, Alice McKinnis, and Greta B. Young. In 1892 the graduates were Elmer A. Griggs, Ella C. Mills, Elsie C. Mayo, Anna L. Downing and Mabel Wilcox.

In 1902 the school burned. This time the pupils were housed in the village churches. In 1902 they started to build a new brick school house. This was the brick part of the school house that was torn down in 1966.

Through the help of W. K. Kellogg Foundation, an addition was built to the building in 1936 and the name of the school was changed to Nashville W. K. Kellogg Rural Agricultural School. Then in 1950, on a new site on Fuller Street, the beginning of an elementary building was started. Additions were made in 1952, 1956, and 1964. Today (1969) the Fuller Street Elementary School contains 14 classrooms, kitchen, multi-purpose area, library and office. (additional rooms have been added since this writing).

Voters of the former Nashville and Vermontville school districts approved consolidation into the Maple Valley Schools, January 21, 1963. A bond issue approved May 13, 1963, provided funds for construction of a modern Junior-Senior High School and additions to elementary schools - Fuller Street in Nashville and Maple wood in Vermontville. A fully accredited educational program and fine school facilities are offered to residents in the area. The district covers 140 square miles. This year (1969) there are 1,853 students enrolled with 78 teachers and librarians. There are 18 buses and 2 bus mechanics. We have the services of a speech teacher, visiting nurse and two visiting teachers.

The part of the old Nashville W. K. Kellogg High School built in 1902 in agreement with the state Fire Marshall's requirements was torn down in 1966, leaving the section built in 1936. The south end was bricked and a few changes were made in the building. It is now called Kellogg Elementary School. It has seven classrooms, a multi-purpose room, library and office. (now houses the Maple Valley Alternative Ed school)

The Maplewood Elementary in Vermontville comprises thirteen general classrooms, two special education rooms, kitchen, multi-purpose area, library, and office area. One section of the building was constructed in 1952, the addition in 1964. (additional rooms have been added since this writing).

The Junior-Senior High School which is accredited with the University of Michigan includes attractive functional classrooms, special education room, four fully

equipped science labs, two homemaking rooms, a flexible arts and crafts area, foreign language and math labs, 9,100 book library, two commercial rooms, a vocational shop area including metal, wood shops and drafting rooms, a 426 seat auditorium, combination instrumental-vocal room, and a spacious gymnasium seating 1,550 spectators. The cafeteria and study hall serve many activities. Administration area contains superintendent and principal's offices, two general secretarial areas, health room, vault and guidance offices. (a new administration office and additional rooms have been added since this writing).

Board of education meetings are held in the Superintendent's Office the second Monday of each month 8:00 p.m. (1969) Superintendent Carroll Wolff, Principal Leon Housler, Elementary Principal Howard Yost, Board of Education: President, Reinhart Zemke; Secretary, Wallace Graham; Treasurer, Charles Viele; John Viele; Dr. Thomas Myers; Harold Hansen; Chris King.

High School Song
Written by Zadah Keyes in 1912
Oh! We are loyal students of the N.H.S.
We're proud of this, you just bet yes;
And if you will be patient we will try to show
Just why it is we're bound to say
That we all love it so,
There's many an act of courtesy
That's passed around each day
Among the faithful faculty and students bright and gay.
So now you see we still believe in chivalry of old,
And will not let it wither up, grow stagnant dead or cold.
Oh, our colors are the yellow and the blue,
We think them fine, and honest now, don't you,
We like to see them floating out on high
As we are passing by, are passing by –
So come and join us in our songs of praise
We now do raise and will in future days,
We know our love will never die for those two colors up in the sky
Which represent old Nashville High.

Nashville Post Office

The first Post Office was established in Nashville June 29, 1866. Records at the Post Office are from 1887. In 1888, Nashville was a fourth-class Post Office. Today we are a second-class Post Office. In 1903 there was a Post Officer at Ceylon which was at the corner of Butler and Curtis Roads. Maple Grove also had a Post Office at one time.

In 1887 mail boxes rented for \$.10 a quarter and in 1969 a box cost \$.90.

The first Post Office was located on the east side of Main Street. After several more moves it was finally located at its current location in 1966.

Postmasters who have served at Nashville Post Office.

John C. Palmer	June 29, 1866
Henry H Wood	Sept. 11, 1871
Horace T. Davidson	March 8, 1875
Emory Parady	Jan. 13, 1881
Myron B Brooks	Feb. 1, 1886
John Furniss	May 7, 1887
Walter S Powers	Feb 6, 1895
Leonard W. Feighner	Jan. 27, 1899
Henry C. Glasner	June 5, 1914
Pauline Lykins	July 31, 1922
Robert E. Surine	Feb. 6. 1923
Elbert V. Smith	Oct. 30, 1929
Ward Quick	April 10, 1933
Edwin C. Kraft	Dec. 11, 1933
Aaron L. Bennett	April 1, 1949
Ivan J. Babcock	July 20, 1951
J. Merle Scott	June 19, 1953
Harvey W. Wilson	March 31, 1954
Wilma F. DeCamp	May 7, 1966

Art Shows

Art and art shows have a big part in the history of Nashville. With the exception of two years, summer art shows were held in the community every year between 1949 and 1969. (after 1969 it is unknown how long the art shows were continued)

The first show was a two-day affair and was held in Central Park on August 19 and 20, 1949. Approximately 350 persons signed the guest register for this first show. It was sponsored by the Nashville Art Group Society, an organization with four members. These four ladies, Mary Holman, Helen Strong, Ada Scott and Lelia Lentz, decided they had enthusiasm for art and holding an exhibit of paintings was something they particularly wanted to do. Thirteen local artists exhibited in this first show.

Mrs. Holman was the instigator of holding clothesline art shows in Michigan and the first show in Nashville had paintings and other art work hung on clotheslines between the maple trees in the park. She had exhibited previously in West Palm Beach and at Delray, Florida. She studied in the east for many years and her seascapes and watercolors were particularly popular.

Mrs. Strong had come to Nashville seven years before this first art show. Her mother, Minnie Jarvis, was a well-known artist and had paintings in the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London. Mrs. Strong had studied art at Ontario College of Art.

Mrs. Lelia Luxmore Lentz (Carl) taught music and art in Nashville schools, and Mrs. Ada Scott (J. Mearle) studied art as a girl as a hobby.

At the third show the members of the Nashville art Club donated four paintings and these were given away at a drawing held in the park. In subsequent shows, drawings were occasionally held for paintings and art work. In the 1964 show, a total of 14 pieces of art were donated by the exhibiting artist and these were given as prizes in a drawing. At this particular show, a Mr. Harry Brown from Grand Rapids had an easel set up and did oil paintings during the show. Don Altemus, curator of the Kingman Museum in Battle Creek, also did charcoal sketches. A group of local musicians made up a German band and they strolled through the park providing music. Baskets of gladioli, donated by the village, circled the center of the park. Members of the adult oil painting class at the high school served as hosts and hostesses for the show in 1964. They wore colorful berets made by one of the members and a reception for all the exhibiting artist was held following the closing of the art show.

During the 1962 show, a representative was present from WXYZ-TV and movies were taken of the show and interviews conducted with several of the exhibiting artists. Michael Church from the Extension Services of the University of Michigan also attended the show. His comment at this show was that the entire community

should get behind the art show and publicize it and really let the state know of the show. He also commented on the high caliber of the art work exhibited. Many artists sold art work at these summer shows.

During this period of time, Mrs. Holman, who had a gallery in her home for several years, bought an old blacksmith shop on Main Street across from Putnam Library and converted this into a Gallery. She later sold the building to the Fire Department and then moved her gallery back to her own home.

The shows had experienced unusually good luck, weather wise. The show in 1961 was the first one which had to be held indoors. This show was held in the Masonic Temple, but as the weather cleared, artists moved their exhibits out on the lawns at the nearby homes.

The Opera House

The Opera House built in 1876 was used as the community social recreational center for about 50 years. It was built and owned by Elihu Chipman and M. M. Lee., later owned solely by Elihu Chipman until he died in 1902. It was then sold at auction to Willis Humphrey, who (a week later) sold it to John Furniss who passed it on to his son, Clair. It was situated west of the alley back of the old Laundromat (currently the south/east corner of the Hasting City Bank parking lot). There was a stage with dressing rooms underneath and a balcony in the back. It was heated by two wood burning stoves, one in a corner by the stage and one in the opposite corner by the balcony. It was torn down in the middle 1930's.

It was the only building in Nashville where you could have any kind of entertainment. Traveling shows such as Uncle Tom's Cabin, East Lynn, etc., played there. The players stayed at the Wolcott House. Medicine Shows visited town sometimes. Many school programs, High School graduation, Alumni Banquets were held in the Opera House. Once a year the Woman's Literary Club had a big party entertaining their husbands at the Opera House. Wedding receptions and many banquets were held there. The first movies in Nashville were shown in the Opera House. It had a beautiful hardwood floor and many dances and dancing parties where held there. In fact, for many years it was also used as a roller skating rink. The chairs could very conveniently be stored in the balcony. Many old Nashville High School graduates can remember playing basketball in the Opera House. Until the new high school addition was built, it was the only place in town to play basketball.

It was said that there was hardly a night that there wasn't something held at the Opera House. In fact, it helped Nashville get groups together that wouldn't otherwise have gotten together.

It was a good place to go and have a lot of fun. People behaved and there was no rough stuff. It was truly a community center.

Putnam Library

The Putnam Public Library has an interesting history. It was started in 1923, with 300 books of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Putnam in the Putnam home which was willed to the village for that purpose. Also included was the large French clock, antique walnut chairs and the enlarged portraits of the donors.

A trust fund of \$10,000 was left to the village for maintaining the Library and another \$1,000 for remodeling.

In remodeling, a partition was taken out between the living room and a bedroom, making a large room which is the main part of the Library. Another partition was removed between the dining room and the conservatory, providing a larger children's room. The parlor remained as it was and houses the reference books, and is also the reading room.

The Women's Literary Club petitioned the village to start the Library and asked to do the work in establishing it. The Putnam Will provided that the house be left to the village for library purposes and this is to be started before a certain date, or the building would revert to their estate. The building began functioning as a library in 1923. At that time the literary Club formed a board to organize and administer the Library. It consisted of nine members, with a president, secretary and treasurer. Eva Dean was the first librarian, followed by Lucy Hinckley, Emily Hafner, Bertha McDerby, Marian (Nash) Potts, Ina Smith, and La Duska Sheldon.

The Library was supported by funds contributed by the Village of Nashville, Maple Grove Township, Castleton Township, and interest from the endowment fund given by the Putnam's. On March 18, 1949, Putnam Library received its first State Aid payment on the grant which was approved from the General Library Fund. In 1944, Mrs. Nash wrote the Director of State Aid inquiring about qualifications for a grant. One of the qualifications was that a library must have received, in its last fiscal year, an amount of money from local government units such as village or township, equal or greater than the three year average, which has been established for it. During the preceding fiscal year, Putnam Library qualified in this respect by grace of appropriations received from Castleton and Maple Grove Townships and the Village of Nashville. On May 1, 1965, the Village of Nashville passed a resolution adopting a form for establishment of a district library, whereby the Library would receive many more benefits financially. No state aid was received from 1951 to 1966.

The Board now consists of five members, two appointed by the Village Council, two by the Township Board and a representative from the Literary Club is appointed, who may sit in on meetings, but who has no legal voting powers.

In 1967 the Library received a grant from the McGregor Foundation of Detroit whereby they have a gift of \$650 for reference books in 1967, 1968, 1969.

In 1968 the Library was the recipient of a painting from Miss Betty Kuhlman of Grand Rapids, Which had a very special significance. The painting "Country Landscape", was done in 1897 by Mrs. Charles Putnam and belonged to Miss Kuhlman's mother, Mrs. William T. Kuhlman, (formerly Fern Lentz) who painted with Mrs. Putnam.

The Old Grist Mill

One of the oldest landmarks in the village and its vicinity was the old Grist Mill, (Citizens Elevator) which was located on the southeast bank of the Thornapple River. (Where Good Time Pizza is currently) The original land on both sides of the river was surveyed by John R. Pettibone, who received a Land Grant from the government on February 15, 1836, for the W 1/2 of N W 1/4 of U. S. Patent not recorded. A partition deed was given to A. Voorhees, S. Pettibone and Lyman Pettibone in 1846, but they were not recorded until 1880. Several other members of the Pettibone family were given Warranty deeds to various pieces of the land. These deeds seemed to have been passed back and forth among members of the family until 1851, apparently to clear up title and settle legal questions and descriptions to the unrecorded sections.

In June 1855, Hiram Hanchett and wife, who previously had purchased the land on the west side of the river and erected a prosperous sawmill, bought the south part of the W 1/2 of N W 1/4 south of the river and deeded it to Charles Hanchett in July of 1885. During all these years there was a brush and sand dam across the river, furnishing power to the sawmill. Many of the boards sawed during those early years furnished lumber for the first buildings in Nashville. The first road into town from the north crossed the river over the old wooden bridge located just above this dam. The grist mill on the east side of the river was built in 1881 by Peter Holler, who operated it for a few years and then sold it to Henry Feighner. Over the next few years, ownership passed through a succession of Feighners, Bairs, Johnsons and Barbers. In April of 1907, it was purchased by Frederic Louis Kyser and his wife, Marcia, for the sum of \$2,500, and became known as the Nashville Roller Mills. It was about this time that the present cement dam was constructed.

In 1916 the mill was purchased by Louis Lass and son Otto B. J. Lass. They also purchased a small parcel of land on the west side of the river just above the dam and erected their home. Along with the manufacture of hundreds of barrels of flour, the fall of the year was busy in the making of cider and apple butter. During all these years, the flour mill and cider press was run by water power.

In October 1946 the mill property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Ira James Rizor, who converted it from a flour mill to a Feed and Grain Elevator and electric motors were installed to use instead of the slower water power.

At this time part of the old wooden gears and pulleys and shafts were replaced. They continued the cider making for several years, but discontinued this service when the cement block portion of the building was added. In 1960 the Rizors sold the mill to the citizens Elevator, Inc. of Vermontville.

Except for a brief period during World War II, the "Old Grist Mill" was in continuous operation for better than a century.

The Lentz Table Co.

One of Nashville's foremost industries was founded in February, 1867 by Jacob Lentz, who learned cabinet making in his native Lyons, France.

He built a small house and workshop on the west side of Main Street and started to make picture frames and manufacture furniture. As his sons became old enough, he took them into the business. His sons Albert, Charles and Lewis came into partnership. The business flourished and by 1869, his business had grown to such proportions, they build a factory and employed 18 men.

In 1891 the factory was destroyed by fire. The Lentz family decided to form a stock company, purchased land on the Phillips property east of town, and built a new factory. (where the Maple valley Arms and Maple Valley Implement are now located on the corner of Lentz Street and Sherman Street) They soon were employing over one hundred men.

The Lentz Table Factory made very fine furniture, including tables of all kinds, stands, chairs, cupboards and commodes. They made reproductions of pieces in Kensington Museum and copies of 18th Century Antiques.

After Albert's death in 1928, the factory continued operations with L. E. Lentz as Secretary-Treasurer, Frank, Son of Albert, as Vice-President. It continued to be operated until their retirement in 1943.

The factory stood idle for many years until it was sold to Plycoma.

Michigan Central Railroad

In 1866 the Grand River Valley Railroad was projected and the preliminary survey made. In January, 1869, the first train passed over the recently-completed railroad and then began an almost unprecedented era of progress.

The first depot was in the building on the south side of the tracks with a ticket office in one end and the freight and express offices occupying the remainder of the buildings. In 1904 a brick depot was built on the north side of the tracks. This building is now owned by the V. F. W.

At one time the local office employed two telegraph operators, a ticket agent, baggage men and freight agent but as other means of transportation developed, these duties were all given to one man and later the depot was closed. Railroad excursions would attract several hundred local people. The 20 foot square baggage room often used to be piled to the ceiling and the 20 by 40 foot waiting room was often jammed with people.

As the years passed, passenger service decreased; and finally the Bee Liner was the only passenger service but eventually even this service stopped altogether. As of 1969 Several freight trains still ran through town every day. (Years later, this train route was put out of service - the track was eventually taken out and is now used as a walking trail)

The Nashville News

In September of 1873, some five years after the village of Nashville was chartered, a young fellow named Mr. Orno Strong came through the town, liked the looks of the village, and, convinced that it was going to grow to a big city on the banks of the Thornapple, decided to start a newspaper. Strong, as his name indicated, was a strong man, at least strong in character and he wrote in the salty vernacular of the day, but at the same time with the more or less stilted journalese of the time.

In his original issue, Volume 1, Number 1, dated October 3, 1873, Strong said: "We shall weep with those that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice; in fact, we shall hold ourselves prepared to carry said weeping and rejoicing to any extent required.

"We will talk up the merits of the village until they will not only be known to the people of this vicinity, but will be caught up and reflected, like the light of the morning over the whole land, and will make Nashville so plain and well known to the outside world that a wayfaring man, though a fool, will know her ways and walk therein."

Strong went on to say he selected Nashville as a base of operations because he thought that the inhabitants had the vim and energy to push her ahead and make her a "flourishing city on the banks of the Thornapple where now 1,000 people call their home. We shall do our share to bring about that desirable result."

Strong then said: "We have set our stakes and hung our banner on the outer walls of the building opposite the post office and there you can find us, both early and late." He ended by saying, "With our best bow after having spoke our little piece, we submit the news to the public."

The paper flourished under Strong. He wrote with a verve and vigor of the times. Nashville, at that time, was growing and growing fast. The people and the town were young. This vigor was reflected in Strong's writing. Orno did not pull punches. He called a spade a spade. He warned the population in his initial issue that he was going to print everything in the way of news that he thought was news. Some of the things he thought newsworthy, others apparently did not. In the issues of the first 15 years of the News under Orno Strong, there is more than one reference to the fact that the editor had been horse-whipped or otherwise treated to physical violence. Strong was not adverse to coming right out in print and calling a man a liar, using names and specific information. On more than one occasion he printed wedding stories with an addendum that the happy couple would be making a birth announcement within a matter of a few days.

For 15 years, Strong held forth in Nashville and then in the year 1888, he sold the paper to Len W. Feighner, an employee of his and he, Strong moved to Oregon.

The paper, under Feighner, remained as salty and humorous as it had under Strong. Feighner, however, tempered his humor with kindness and refrained from some of the out-and-out scandalous remarks that Strong had been inclined to use. If the paper under Strong was somewhat salty, it also did a bit of moving. In 1873 it was started in an office on the west side of Main Street, across from what was then the post office. The office was moved to several locations on Main Street and then sometime before 1888 was moved into a schoolhouse which was the 1969 site of the Nashville News on Maple Street.

Len Feighner's grandson, Leonard Kane, says that his grandfather told him that his first week's pay for working for Orno Strong was a pair of shoes. Len Feighner not only owned the paper for 40 years, the longest period anyone has owned it, he was also without doubt the best-known of the editors and publishers of the Nashville News. Feighner was very active in the Michigan Press Association and was instrumental in its early growth. He served as a Field Secretary for Michigan Press Association and also served as the President of that association. In addition to his newspaper work, Feighner served as the postmaster of Nashville. For several years he served in the Michigan State Legislature; he was often a member of the School Board of Nashville and was the guiding hand in the Len Feighner Agency, a newspaper brokerage that was still flourishing in 1969 under the guidance of Mr. Woodard Smith of Mt. Pleasant.

The News was sold in 1928 to A. B. McClure who operated it for only three years before he sold to Willard St. Clair and Mary Kellogg Gloster. The Gloster's, both newspaper people, owned and operated a newspaper in Levering, Michigan. Mr. Gloster was a printer by trade. Mrs. Gloster had worked with the Adrian Daily Telegram as a reporter. They operated the newspaper through the lean and hungry years of the depression when there was practically no advertising, very little news, a minimum of money and no doubt, heartache galore. The Gloster's edited and published the paper for 10 years, from 1931 to 1941.

In September of 1941 the Nashville News was acquired by Don and Zelna Hinderliter who, with their family, moved to Nashville and became a part of the community. The Hinderliter's guided the paper through the years of the Second World War Their children grew up in Nashville and went to school here.

The one man connected with the News office longer than any other, the one who could be called "Mr. Nashville News" if anyone could was Clarence O. Mason. "Ab" started working for the Nashville News when Len Feighner was the publisher. Ab came with the News in 1909 and worked continuously in various capacities until his death in 1956. Ab, during his tenure on the News, covered every job of the operation. Ab knew the machinery intimately. He knew the subscribers intimately. For pretty close to 47 years, Ab Mason was the backbone of the Nashville News. Don Hinderliter said when Ab Mason died in the fall of 1956 that much of the flavor and the fun of running a newspaper died with him.

The Hinderliter's sold the newspaper in December of 1956 to John and Amy Boughton, who moved here from Adrian, Michigan. The Boughton's converted the newspaper from a letterpress to an offset printing process and added the subscription list of the Vermontville Echo to it and changed the name to the Maple Valley News to include both communities. The Nashville News, only four years younger than the town, celebrated its centennial in 1973.

Maple Syrup Association

Back in 1917, when sugar was scarce and expensive, Len W. Feighner, long-time editor of the Nashville News, wrote an editorial urging that the hundreds of maple trees in the village be tapped and the sap be turned into the precious sweetening. Somehow the idea failed to materialize, and by another spring the war had ended.

The years slipped by and Mr. Feighner sold the newspaper in 1928, after more than forty years as its editor; but he continued to make Nashville his home and his first and foremost concern. Came the year 1942 and America was again at war and sugar rationing was again in force. Len Feighner, now past eighty, but still Nashville's Number One booster, once again "wrote a piece for the paper".

Early in January of 1942 his "piece" appeared in the paper, suggesting that the maples that line the streets of Nashville be turned into a huge sugarbush as a community project. When the sap began to run that spring, the idea had become a reality. John Hamp, who was the high school Agricultural teacher at that time, with the help of village president Earl Olmstead, J. Mearle Scott, Ralph Devine, George Marshall and Elmer Gillette, soon had the project organized and underway. Scott, Devine, Marshall, and Gillette loaned buckets, spiles and "know-how". Otto Lass of the Nashville Roller Mills loaned an evaporator and space was found in the old Farmer's Cooperative Creamery for the evaporating room. Gail Lykins and his twin sons Charles and Sherman installed the evaporator and the community was turned into one big sugarbush.

With the aid of some fifty or more boys and girls who washed buckets, tapped trees, collected sap and pasted labels - and with two old pros like Menno "Peck" Wenger and Aubry Murray to do the boiling - about two hundred gallons of syrup were made that first season. It sold for \$2.50 per gallon and the profits were used for the summer recreation project. The second year the Maple Syrup Committee purchased about \$450 worth of equipment, including a 3' x 8' evaporator, 670 buckets, 1,000 spiles and a large collecting tank. With the permission of the Village Council the new evaporator was set up in the old pumping station just north of the river bridge. The 1943 season was fairly good and approximately 285 gallons of syrup were sold at \$3.25 per gallon.

In 1944 a bigger evaporator, 3' x 12', was purchased and the smaller one was sold. It had been planned to buy a boiler and boil with steam but none could be found. A total of 519 gallons of syrup were sold at \$3.39 per gallon. Twenty gallons were saved until fall, made into half pound cakes of sugar and enclosed in the Christmas box that went to each service man from the community. One reason for the increased yield in 1944 was the deal made with Forrest Fiebach, a nearby farmer. The community project boiled Mr. Fiebach's sap for half and thus gained 77 gallons of syrup.

An so it went - each year new improvements were made, and experience being a good teacher, many lessons in the art of making maple syrup were learned. About 1957 the present "Sugar Shanty" was built just west of the old Water Works in Putnam Park. This building is of cement block construction with a cement floor, lots of windows for light, a hinged roof for the escape of steam and storage room. It is equipped with hot and cold running water and several big storage tanks, and a 5' by 16' arch and pan as the evaporator is called.

In 1966, because of the inability to find anyone to cut and furnish good firewood at a reasonable price, no trees were tapped and no syrup was made. However, in 1967 a small group of interested citizens, not wishing to see this project die, met and elected new officers. A new 5 burner gas unit was purchased and installed, workers were contacted, and the village was back in the maple syrup business. This burner eliminates the "backbreaking" use of wood to stoke the fires, the all-night boiling sessions, and has cut the boiling time down to about half. The latest piece of new equipment was the purchase of an automatic takeoff in 1968. This little gadget and the burners have more than paid for themselves, not only in convenience, but because of their quality control factor.

The 1968 season netted a profit to the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, two churches, and Volunteer Fire Department and several other organizations, of \$1,297.57 plus a goodly balance in the Association checking account. Over and above this, one worker donated his wages of \$480 to be used for the purchase of thirty (30) new maple trees for the village to be set in place of those trees which have had to be destroyed. These trees were planted in the spring of 1969.

During the years a guest book has been kept at the Sugar Shanty for registering all visitors - and believe me, there have been thousands. A good many foreign exchange students have received their first taste of this "lickin' good" product of old Mother Nature and many pictures of the process and a good many quart cans have found their way to our friends across the sea. On any given weekend when the sap is running and a big cloud of steam hangs low over the north side of town, the population is swelled by several hundred visitors who come to watch, taste and buy the golden syrup.

ALL THIS BECAUSE ONE MAN HAD A DREAM!

The Violin Maker

In the quiet of this town dedicated to the farming community around it and to light industry, was located one of the few shops in the U.S. where the most delicate of musical instruments - the violin - was created in its entirety from wood, gut and horsehair and where artists of the strings could find the hands and cunning to repair violins that have been damaged.

The man whose talents made this possible was A. Ernfried "Halley" Halvarson, who with his friend and co-worker, William Meyers, established a violin business here in 1936.

For 22 years the two men worked together on repair, creation of instruments and allied activities, until in 1958 Mr. Meyers sold his interest in the property and business to Mr. Halvarson. Mr. Meyers and his wife lived a few doors away until he passed away in 1964.

The big brick residence that housed Mr. Halvarson, and his wife and the shop was built by a Nashville physician (Dr. Um. H. Young - in 1870). It had the room to accommodate the many friends and customers who visited, often staying for music sessions, as well as the shop located in the basement. The more valuable were stored in a large safe in the house, although the bank vault on Main street once sheltered a Stradivarius violin between working sessions years ago.

Mr. Halvarson came to the U.S. from Malung, Sweeden, in 1923 to visit a foreign county. He stayed, and although he made three trips back to Sweden, he had no desire to return to live.

A background in violin making and repair gave him his living. For years he worked in Chicago until he and Mr. Meyers who was a salesman for the same firm, looked around for a place to get out into the country and have a business of their own.

The basement shop housed blocks of maple from the Tyrol and spruce from "the Alps". A violinist could order an instrument and choose the pieces desired; mild wood or strong, wide or narrow swirls in the grain. The pieces were cut out by machine then the hands took over the work. Mr. Halvarson made every part of the violin. "The hands of the violin maker are the determining factor, " said Mr. Halvarson. "The qualities of a good violin are the tone. It must be an instrument that plays easily, responds easily, and must have a quality of refinement".

The hand working has much to do with the quality of tone of the finished instrument. In a violin are 98 separate parts to be mated for grain and thickness. Many hours of painstaking toil go into the sides, scroll and inserts trimming the top of the violin.

When World War II broke out, the supply of violin bridges was cut off from Germany, nearly the only source. Meyers and Halvarson made what they needed by hand, then devised a machine to produce bridges. Their annual bridge output was 75,000 to 100,000. Fine seasoned maple from Barry and Eaton Counties went into bridges that sold throughout the U.S. At one time 2,500 bridges per day were made in the shop.

Strings, too, are part of the final product, and much work goes into their creation. Mr. Halvarson used only unbleached long, white horsehair for his bows and a white horse with a fine long tail was a valuable and fast disappearing source. Others may have used bleached horsehair, but such did not satisfy Mr. Halvarson.

Violin making and repair was not an easy art to learn. After 5 years, a workman was still a novice at repair work.

Mr. Halvarson was recognized as one of the finest bow makers in the U.S. One of his specialties was to duplicate any bow. He was written up in "Dictionary of Contemporary Violin and Bow Makers", written by an Englishman and published in England. H was also written up in "Bows for Musical Instruments". He produced custom bows, not only duplicating famous old bows, but making bows to the precise requirements of individuals. All parts applied to these bows were made in Mr. Halvarson's shop.

Nashville Dam and Mill Pond

“One of the oldest landmarks in the village and its vicinity is the Old Grist Mill, now known as the Citizens Elevator, located on the southeast bank of the Thornapple River. The original land on both sides of the river was surveyed by John R. Pettibone, who received a land grant from the government of February 15, 1836, for the W1/2 of NW1/4 of U.S. Patent not recorded. A partition deed was given to A. Voorhees, S. Pettibone and Lyman Pettibone in 1846, but they were not recorded until 1880. Several other members of the Pettibone family were given Warranty deeds to various pieces of the land. These deeds seem to have been passed back and forth among members of the family until 1851, apparently to clear up title and settle legal questions and descriptions to the unrecorded sections. In June, 1855, Hiram Hanchett and wife, who previously purchased the land on the west side of the river and erected a prosperous sawmill, bought the south part of the W1/2 of NW1/4 south of the river and deeded it to Charles Hanchett in July of 1885. During all these years there was a brush and sand dam across the river, furnishing power to the sawmill. Many of the boards sawed during those early years furnished lumber for the first buildings in Nashville. The first road into town from the north crossed the river over the old wooden bridge located just above this dam.”

“As near as can be determined from the original abstract, the present mill on the east side of the river was built about 1865 by Peter Holler, who operated it for a few years and then sold it to Henry Feighner. In the next few years, ownership passed through a succession of Feighners, Bairs, Johnsons and Barbers. In April of 1907, it was purchased by Fredric Louis Kyser and his wife, Marcia, for the sum of \$2,500, and became known as the Nashville Roller Mills. Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser [sic] were the parents of the late Edwin L. Kane. It was probably about this time that the present cement dam was constructed.”

The first settlers in Nashville lived north of the Thornapple River in what is now Putnam Park. Charles Hanchett and his brother Hiram were already operating a crude sawmill when Henry Feighners arrived there in 1854.”

“October 21, 1966 Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall and U. S. Representative Paul H. Todd with Udall at the bow and Todd in the stern of a canoe led five huffing canoe loads of newsmen on a rustic tour of the Thornapple River here. They paddled about a mile to view the Thornapple, an old Indian highway which residents hope to improve for recreational use. Udall’s reception on the banks of the Thornapple River included some 80 persons including village, city and federal officials. . .

Mr. Udall said that he was heartened and glad to see the concern of the people of this community for the river. He added that the Thornapple River could have a great future for people who plan ahead. He said that the river was much cleaner

than the Kalamazoo and people here should not fail to take full advantage of its recreational facilities.”

There is an article in the Hastings Home Journal of Sept. 25th, purporting to have been written from Nashville, one paragraph of which aims at instructing the reader of the Journal as to the sanitary condition of our village, -- deserves special notice. If the writer had taken a little more pains to inform himself before penning this paragraph, he might have offered the Journal readers more reliable information on the subject than he did.

He says: “Our town has the name, and justly too, of being in an unhealthy location. With the mill pond on the north, and Quaker Brook flats to the west, there is no reason why it should not be unhealthy.”

Now, the facts are that the mill pond lies almost directly east, from which direction the winds seldom blow, and hence could not affect the health, and the flats of Quaker brook, so far as they have any worthy of mention, lie directly south east, and could not affect the health of the place from the direction of their locality and distance from town.

NOTE: The Nashville Dam was removed in 2009 and replaced with a weir system with grants from the Fish & Wildlife, Inland Fisheries, and donations from Barry Conservation District. The Mill pond was drained and the river returned to its natural state.

The Wolcott House

The Wolcott House was built by Charles Wolcott (local hardware owner). The Wolcott House was located on the east side of Main Street on the corner of Church Street. The building was nicely planned and located. It had a porch the length of the building about three steps high, and what a temptation that was for school children to walk the length of the lower step and they were never told they could not do so. There were plenty of chairs for the guest on the porch. The yard was kept clean.

The managers were Cap and Kate Bowen and daughter, but extra help was needed, especially when show troops came. The building was well kept and delicious meals were served in the dining room.

It was said of it: "They were reasonable in price" - "The Hotel was built to last several generations" - "It was patronized especially by the traveling salesmen".

All poems on this page were written and donated to the Centennial by the 7th grade Michigan History students of Maple Valley Junior High. (1969) Teacher Mrs. Hilda Baas.

AN IDEAL TOWN

I'd hat to live in the city,
With all its problems there.
Where children fight against teachers,
And teachers live in despair.
Where police are not thought of with honor.
And garbage is thrown all around.
The fires were set and all raging,
And fear was felt to abound.
But in a small village it's different
Students and teachers are friends.
Nashville is home, its people all nice,
Where love, pride and honor all blend.

Kathleen Wall

NASHVILLE

N is for Nashville that shines so bright
A is for all of the people in sight.
S is for all of our wonderful stores.
H is for hi! That we never ignore.
V is for friendly village.
I is for the Indians, to live here was their privilege.
L is for the street lights that shine above.
L is for Thornapple Lake where we have fun.

Nancy Huckendubler

NASHVILLE

Nashville is a very nice place.
The people are of a wonderful race.
The town has been for one hundred years.
When I think of it, it almost brings tears.

I never want to leave this place.
Because my memories can never be erased.

Linda Sherman

NASHVILLE

Nashville is a cheerful town.
People who live there should not frown.
What about the maple trees?
People who tap them should be pleased.
Don't forget the Centennial now.
It will start with a great big pow wow.

Randy Fowler

NASHVILLE'S CENTENIAL

For one hundred years this day has waited.
Ever since Nashville as a town was stated.
It had a store where people used money,
To buy clothes and food and maybe even honey.
In those days ev'ry girl wore a long dress,
And families helped their friends when they were in a mess.
On the Centennial as this day is known,
We'll celebrate the birthday of my home.

Kathy Curtis

THE THORNAPPLE RIVER

It flows along for many a mile,
Flowing along in beautiful style,
Flowing along through many a glen
Joined by a streamlet now and then.
Flowing till it reaches that beautiful lake
By the Thornapple bushes-named for their sake.
Flowing along through the beautiful land,
Flowing along to reach the Grand.
Still it flows on as in the days of yore,
But the Indian rides on the raid no more.
The blackbirds still sing on Thornapple's shore
Where the Indian roamed in days of yore.
The woods are now so sad and lone,
Where the Indian once could call his home.
The Jacksnipe still, as in days of yore,
Feeds along the rock-bound shore.
You can hear the call of the Whippoorwill
As the moon peeps over the distant hill,
Where the Indian once Hi His Glee was blessed
Who long ago have gone to rest.

Herbert R. Eaton

NASHVILLE

N is for Nash after which this town was named.
A is for Ackett's Store for which this town is famed.
S is for syrup which comes from maple trees.

H is for honey which comes from the bees.
V is for village which Nashville is called.
I is for Indians-who lived here so long.
L is for lots of snow we had one year.
L is for lakes which are not far from here.
E is for elevator that grinds the farmer's grain.

Dawn Belson

NASHVILLE

Nashville's place is peace
Where friendship and neighbors never cease.
Farmers come with crops of corn,
Always happy, never forlorn.
Yes, that's Nashville, take a look,
All laid out like a story book.

Edward Behrndt

NASHVILLE

Nashville is the greatest.
Nashville is the best.
Nashville's a hundred years old.
I think it needs a rest.
With all those stores and industry
It's busy as can be.

Brenda Shapley

CHRISTMAS TIME

Nashville is a peaceful town
With cheerful people all around.
The decorations are so neat along
The sidewalks and the streets.
Santa Claus comes each year,
Bringing candy and good cheer.
The stores are full of toys inside.
It makes a person swell with pride.
I like to live in this peaceful town
With happy people all around.

David Bolton

These writings were taken from a history compiled by the Nashville Centennial Committee in 1969 for the Village of Nashville's Centennial Birthday.