

## History of Aetna, Newaygo Co. Mich.

By Terry E. Wantz

The first settlement of Aetna was established in what was Dayton Township, along the White River, in 1864 near what is now the corners of 2 Mile Rd. and Luce Ave. John Mansfield owned and operated a saw mill. He later sold the mill to Chester A. Stone. Edward Dill owned the first blacksmith shop and later sold it to M. C. Cassidy. George Miller operated the first oxen shoeing establishment there. In 1869, this area became part of Denver Township and in 1881 when Lincoln Township was established the settlement of Aetna was split between Denver and Lincoln Townships.

In 1870's Calvin M. Barnes established a store and was a dealer in Dry Goods, Groceries, Boots, Shoes, Crockery, Yankee Notions and General Merchandise. Mr. S. Stanley and Mr. Briggs were also operating a saw mill and Thomas Skellington owned a shoe business there. A post office was established under the name of Aetna with Levi W. Simons as Postmaster on the 14<sup>th</sup>. January 1870. Mr. W. A. Anderson became the Postmaster on 18<sup>th</sup>. Sept. 1871, Guy C. Pond became the Postmaster on 2<sup>nd</sup>. Sept 1872, follow by Chester A. Stone on 26<sup>th</sup>. June 1874, Calvin A. Barnes 20<sup>th</sup>. July 1877.

By 1880, the settlement was growing, beside Calvin Barnes's Store, Guy. C. Pond had a Blacksmith Shop with all kinds of blacksmithing done to order, with river work a specialty, Caster A. Stone had a General Merchandise Store, W. A. Anderson was the proprietor of White River Flouring Mills and Doud and Barnes were the proprietors of the Aetna Saw Mill and manufacturers of and dealers in lumber.

One mile south of this settlement J. Smith had a blacksmith shop and next to that was general store. In 1874 the second school house in the area was built across the road from these shops. Prior to 1874 parents in the Aetna Community who wanted their children to have some "learning" had to send them to a little log schoolhouse located one mile west and a half mile south of the new school. This first log school was located on the land that William and Sarah Dickinson had homesteaded on Warner Ave. south of One Mile Rd. The Dickinson's had a very large family and supplied the first two schools of the area with many of first pupils, several of his older children didn't attend, but among the younger ones there were: Charles, Ida Mae, Chester, George, Frank, Gertrude, Alice, John, William (Tige), Orla and Philip Dickinson. Over the years many of William and Sarah Dickinson's grandchildren and great grandchildren have also attended the Aetna schools.

Some of the other early pupils to attend the Aetna schools were Will Bunker, Arthur, Furman, Goldie, Bert, Gilbert, Almon and Horace Dake, Delas and Carrie Anderson, Bert DeHaven, Will, John, Dave and Ida DeLong, Ed, Dick and Stella Forbes, Hollis, Mildred, Riley and Lawrence Hopkins, Ada and Mary Sanborn, George, Emer and Flora Doud, Dave, Jennie, Oscar, Will, John and Jessie Westbrook, Ada and Myrtle Ravait, Laura, George and Will Miller, Andy Bird, Ed, Nellie, Arthur and Ernest Best, Dillie Peterson, Tressa Winton, Iola and John Hevel, Maude, Robert and Mertie Cornett, Ana and Johnnie Waterfield, Hugh Tozier, Albert Perkins, Otto DuBois, Tressa and Lester

Winton, Maude Cornett, Mercy Doty, and Minnie, Emma and Pearl Bruce, just to name a few of the many students.

Some of the early teachers who taught in the Aetna schools were Mary Larave, George Routson, Will Millard, Oral Hawley, Iva Doud, Frank Scott, Ada Scott, Arthur McCall, Mrs. Jim Anderson, Ada Wilbur, Zoe Graham, David Robertson, Suzie Righter, Grace Graham, Blanch Balcom, Sarah Redeiar, Romanda Carpenter, Jessie Hardy, Nora Crank, Jennie Day, and Jennie Tibbits

By the 1880's some of the larger land owner in the Aetna area were: G. W. Doud, J. F. Anderson, W. A. Anderson, S. E. Forbes, E. H. R. Forbes, Wm. Dickinson, A. Perkins, S. Stanley, J. Stanley, J. Cook and C. Peterson. By 1900's the larger land owner were: John Cornett, Wash Hall, Edwin Stone, John Westbrooks, Wm. Forbes, S. E. Forbes, Fred Sanborn, George Doud, Mrs. S. A. Bulson, Jacob Miller, William Dickinson, Celia Delong, W. A. Tozer, Charles Reed, Fred Archer, C. W. Doud, L. Stout and C. W. and G. W. Hall.

In 1883, Calvin Barnes sold his store to Thomas Skellington and Thomas became the Postmaster of the Aetna Post Office on 3<sup>rd</sup>. Dec. 1883. Barnes then moved to Hesperia to open the first printing shop in that town.

On 13<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1889, Wash. Bulson became the Postmaster, But Sarah Bulson did the work and was called Aetna postmistress. In late 1895 or early 1896 Jesse F. White bought the store and on 6<sup>th</sup>. Feb. 1896 he became the Postmaster. In Nov. 1897, White moved his store stock and Post Office one mile south to the old general store on the corner of 1 Mile Rd. and Luce Ave., this being on the main road from Hesperia to White Cloud. Ed. Doud bought and continued to operate the general store in the old location for a while. On 29<sup>th</sup> May 1899 George W. Hall became the Aetna Post Office Postmaster. Jackson P. Bristol became the Postmaster on 13<sup>th</sup>. April 1901. A short time after Mr. and Mrs. Bristol purchased the store they sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Hall who in turn sold it to Henry Bulson. Mr. and Mrs. Bruce then purchased and operated it until their death. Del Delong then acquired the business and a few years later he tore down the old building and built a new one of cement blocks store. William H. Bulson became the Postmaster on 7<sup>th</sup>. Oct. 1903 with the office being closed on 26<sup>th</sup>. March 1904 with the mail going to Hesperia.

Somewhere along the line the old community of Aetna acquired the nickname of "Pinchtown". No one seems to know exactly when or where the title originated, Many tales have been told about it but the best known and excepted as the truth by some, is that one of the first storekeepers in Aetna, though very honest, was just a little on the parsimonious side, when weighing out a pound of crackers he would pinch one in half, if need be, in order to make one pound, Thus the name Pinchtown originated. As the years rolled by and as the post office has been move to the new location we now know as Aetna, the name Pinchtown remained with the old community. The bridge that crossed the White River there is still called by many as the Pinchtown Bridge.

Over the years beside of the stores in the two Aetna locations there have been

several small stores in the area to serve the people of area. Tozers had a store on the south-west corner of Stone Rd. and 1 Mile Rd, Stouts had a store on the south-east corner of Warner Ave. and 1 Mile Rd., Klingler had a store on the corner of Quincy Ave. and Luce Ave. and a half mile east of this store on the corner of Alger Ave.. and Quincy Ave. was store called Zaneville and Mr. & Mrs. Leo Wood ran a store on Alger Ave. near Minnie Pond. There were also some stores located in the town of Denver located two and a half mile west of first Aetna.

Samuel Mena built a logging railroad seven miles long in the area while he was lumbering for Ferry, Dowling & Co.. This railroad cross the Dowling Creek and where the railroads cross the creek he built one of the first dam on the creek. This formed a pond which later became known as Minnie Pond. The creek is sometime also called Minnie Creek. C. D. Dowling concentrated his lumbering operations in this area with putting over 15,000,000 feet of logs in White River. They had a large lumber camp just south of Minnie Pond with railroad tracks running all through the woods and over to Park City. James Alley and Co. was another large lumber company which operated in the Aetna area. Most of their logs were shipped by rail to their mill at Alleyton.

Just west of Luce Ave. and south of Jackson Rd. was where the C.C.C. camp was located and in the 1930's the C.C.C. men rebuilt the dam. Today it is almost impossible to find any trace of the once proud villages of Aetna. The railroads, schools, mills, shops, post offices, C.C.C. camp and stores are all gone, all that remain are the farms. Many new homes and have sprung up along the White River and the highways, but now tractor plow the fields and cars transport the people to the larger cities to shop instead of the horses.