

Alleyton

In 1872 a business man from New York, having bought 5,000 acres of timber near Whitehall, MI, bought more land near what is now called White Cloud. James Alley and his crews began clearing the land near a small lake and soon formed a community they called Alleyton.

In 1880 Alleyton, with a population of 464, was the third largest community in Newaygo County. Among other buildings in the town there were the James Alley and Co. saw and shingle mill, the James Alley and Co. office building, the Boarding House, stable, and saloon. A fire in March 1882 burned 47 buildings.

Today we wonder about rockets, space stations, and solar-powered cars but in 1879 people must have wondered about the trains that came to Alleyton to carry lumber from Newaygo County to Grand Rapids and Muskegon. James Alley bought the first locomotive made in Lima, Ohio. This was a special small train called a narrow-gage train. It was built to run through the thick pine forests of lumbering places.

Lumbering was tricky before the trains. Floating, or running, the logs down the little White River took a lot of doing. Every few miles a dam five or six feet high was built forming pools. Logs were cut mostly in the winter when swamps were frozen and logs could be hauled on sleds across the snow. They were piled along the banks of the river and rolled into the river when the water was high in the spring. To run the logs, the first dam was closed making a large pool of water. When the pond reached the height of the dam, the logs were rolled in and the dam opened. The water and logs rushed down the stream to the next dam which was now closed. The water filled this pond, the dam was opened, and the logs floated to the next dam. This was very much like the locks at Sault St. Marie, MI. There were several of these dams from Morgan, now called White Cloud, all the way to White Lake. The dams also supplied water power to operate the saw mills.

The narrow-gage trains made things much easier for the lumbermen. They could run anywhere the track was laid and at any time of the year. This made lumbering faster and people didn't have to wait so long to get their wood products.

But, all too soon the trees had all been cut and lumbering in New York County came to an end. Now the two passenger railroad lines, one from Muskegon and one from Grand Rapids carrying lumber from up north and passengers from the cities, stopped in White Cloud where the railroads crossed. White Cloud began to grow.

Alleyton is almost gone today. It is a ghost town where old-timers claim that on Saturday night you can still hear the sounds of fiddles, dancing, and happy times of 100 years ago.