

~ Sitka ~

by Terry E. Wantz

Sitka is located on the township's line between Sheridan and Bridgeton Townships. Its was first called "Sugar Bush" because of the existence of forest of hard maple trees, which of course were tapped and the collected sap made into maple syrup and sugar.

A post office was established there just one year after the Alaska purchase of 1867, it was named "Sitka" after Sitka, Alaska, on December 14, 1868, with Holly E. Crawford as Postmaster. On February 2nd, 1885 the post office was discontinued and the mail went to Holton. On Dec. 15, 1891, the office was re-established with Holly E. Crawford as Postmaster again. Joseph Zerlaut, Jr. was Postmaster when it was discontinued Oct. 31, 1901 when Rural Free Delivery went into effect. In that year two rural routes were established, one from Fremont, R.F.D. #3 and one from Holton R.F.D. #2. Mail was brought from Holton by members of the Badeaux family who also carried mail to the McLean Post Office. Hans Sorensen was the first rural mail carrier on Route #2, Holton and Frank Bacon was one of the first from Fremont.

Among the early settlers were: John Achenbach, Seymour S. Burling, George Cotham, Thomas Curdy, Robert and E. T. Jibson, Christopher and Robert Kempf, Carl Lehman, Joseph Martin, Charles McKie, Christ Marshall, Frank and Fred Matthews, Dennis Miller, T. B. Ruggles, Fred Ruprecht, Narzis Steiner, John Weiler, Henry Wilder, William, John and Fred Young and Henry, Joseph A. and Joseph Jr. Zerlaut.

The lighter soil in this area also produced many white pines which were used for the building of many homes and farm building for the used of the early pioneers. As they clear their lands for farming and after they used all of the logs and lumber which they need they begin to sell the logs to the large lumber companies. A tram road was built to transport logs to the Jibson's Rollaway. The logs were loaded on a cart and a horse walked on each side of the tram, hauling the logs to the rollaway. This tram road extender from north and east of Sitka, west of what is now Dickinson Rd., and south across country to the Jibson's Rollaway.

The rollaway was a very steep bank on the west side of Brook Creek where the logs were released into the creek and floated down to the Muskegon River. Farther down the creek a dam was built. This was used to deepen the water to float the logs. After the logs reached the Muskegon River they were floated down to the saw mills located on Muskegon Lake. Some of these logs would become imbedded in the sides of the river. As late as 1906 a company known as The Muskegon Booming Company put a machine known as a "log lifter" in the river to pull these stuck logs or "dead heads" as they were called, out.

There were two school in the area. The Kempf's School (also known as Matthews School) and the Jibson's School. The first Kempf school was located across the road from the Christopher Kempf farm. Its was relocated on a site purchased from the Fred Matthews farm and a brick building built there. Water was carried to the school from the nearby Will Young farm for many years. The Jibson's school was built on the southwest corner of the Robert Jibson farm. In 1883 the school house burned down and a new school was built. Before these school were built school was held in a log house known as the Sox house which was across the road from the Edward Ruprecht farm. For several years Sunday School and Church were also held here.

In about 1892 the young men of the community organized a band, with Fayette Crawford as leader. They furnished music at various activities in the surrounding area. For transportation away from home they used two teams of horses hitched to their band wagon, which had a long seat on each side of the wagon box. Member of the band were: Fayette Crawford - (the leader), Guy, Jay, Perrin and Ruben Crawford, Martin, Prince and Tom Jibson, Fred Ruggles, Fred and Henry Wilde, William Young and Frank, George, Henry and Joseph Zerlaut.

In about 1901 the young men of the neighborhood organized a baseball team and play on the Cotham farm, later owned by Harold Zerlaut. They play other teams in the surrounding area. In the picture are (back row, left to right) Frank Carr, Wiley Tietsort, Pearl Buck and Arnt Meyers. (center, left to right) Ernie Jensen, Raymond Kempf and Roy Tietsort (Front row) Walter Hanson and Charles Kempf.

In June of 1902 a cyclone (tornado) dipped down about two miles west of Sitka, took a strip less than a mile wide and extended about four or five miles easterly to the Fenk Tietsort place. Several home and building were destroyed Matteson was the storekeeper at that time and he and his family were trapped under the building. The blacksmith was killed under his building. He was last seen holding onto a plow in front of the store. It blew down several chimneys and uprooted many large fruit and shade trees. The road west of Sitka where it was most severe was made almost impassable by broken limbs and trees.

There was dance hall built in the field on the Trumbull property across the road from the Henry Zerlaut farm. It consisted merely of a floor with a roof over it, sometimes called "The Bowery." The Sitka Grange meeting were held in the Crawford home until the Grange Hall was built on the southwest corner of Holly Crawford farm. The site was deeded to the Grange in 1911. When the grange ceased to excite the property reverted back to the original owners. It was again deeded to the community in 1945 for a Community Hall.
