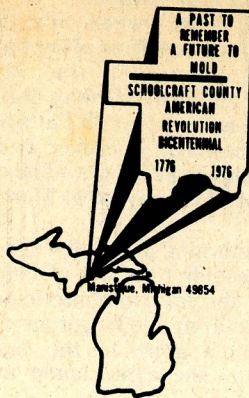


BICENTENNIAL SERIES

A history of Thompson Twp. & Village of Thompson

Mrs. Hasell Osterhout



(Editors note: This is the second in a series of articles dealing with the history of the village and township of Thompson. The article concerns the early transportation and public utilities in that area. The next in the series will be on the schools of the township.)

The earliest transportation in the area was by sailboat, generally for longer distances, or by trail horse. It was some time until the township roads were built.

After the land was cleared the roadway was smoothed with a grader drawn by seven teams of horses. Because of the heavy pull of the grader the teams were rotated with the lead team being moved to the rear and each of the other teams moving up in the line.

The teams were also put to use in the winter pulling snow rollers to pack the snow on the roadway.

Over the water, the tug Anderson provided round trip transportation to Manistique for 50 cents.

Much later, in the early 1930's, Mrs. Pearl Squires Olsen, granddaughter of early pioneer Abraham Brown, was instrumental in locating U.S.-2 along its present route. During the public hearings in Manistique held by the Michigan Highway Commission prior to construction in 1934, Mrs. Olsen figured notably in the hearings as she battled two prominent area businessmen to have the highway located along the scenic route by the lake rather than farther north.

In the early years of Thompson among the public utilities were oil torches which served as street lights. These were placed along Main Street only. Boardwalks lined some of the streets. The sole telephone was installed in late 1890 in the lumber company office.

Mother nature with a little help, provided our early water system for the town. The water for much of the village came from the flowing well north of the present fish hatchery ponds. The water was then piped to several public locations, some of which were covered with well houses.

Along with this we had a rain barrel and trough to catch the rain water. The eaves trough to catch the water was made by nailing two six inch boards together in a V shape that would catch the water and channel it to the barrel. This "soft" water

was used for baths, laundry and other domestic uses.

Early in 1930 the first attempt to bring electricity to Thompson was made when the hatchery requested service from the Wisconsin-Michigan Power Company. A survey was conducted by the company on the feasibility of extending the lines from the Cooks station to Thompson. For lack of interest in obtaining service the project was tabled.

In 1933 an electrician conducted another survey and got people interested in the convenience of electricity. In that first year of service resort owners, schools, and the townhall paid about \$15 per month. Farmers paid about \$4 per month and residential users \$2.

In 1934 someone wishing electrical service could buy and have a 30 foot utility pole installed for less than \$10. Today the same costs over \$110.

To run the line the eight and one-half miles from Cooks to Thompson cost just over \$9,000 in 1934. Today, depending upon terrain, costs for just one mile of the same type of line is over \$8,500. The first private home to receive service was the Joseph Hursh home on M-149 across from the hatchery.

Some of the earliest mail delivery to Thompson was made in 1868 when a young girl brought the mail from Garden to Manistique by horseback. The girl was 16 year-old Elizabeth Allen of Garden.

The mail was brought by boat from Escanaba to Garden where she loaded it in two saddle bags and road single horse trail to Manistique. She would then travel to Indian Lake where she would spend the night with a band of Chippewas who lived in the area of the Indian Lake Golf and Country Club.

From there Miss Allen would continue her journey, skirting the shore of Indian Lake and continuing to the plains of Thompson Township. There she would meet O. Miller who picked up the mail for Thompson.

Born in 1852 in Rochester, New York on a canal boat, she was one of the first white children in Garden. She was later married three times and mothered 13 girls and two boys. Her last marriage was to John Stark, who made fish barrels at his homestead a couple miles west of Thompson on the lakeshore.