



# *The* TELEGRAPH

**VOLUME XLVIII Issue 4 SEPTEMBER 2022**

## **Recollections: The Reading Building**

*by Winifred Oestrike Hamilton*

When Flat Rock's third school burned, in March of 1910, plans were immediately made to build Flat Rock's fourth school. During the time until the new school was completed, classes were held in the Burden building (old Masonic Temple), I.O.O.F. Hall, Methodist Church basement, Todds Photograph Gallery, the Metler building and above the Carter Funeral Home.

At that time Cooke Street extended through what is now the football field, which was originally property belonging to the Thomas Cooke farm, and the road connected to Mill Street. The road was still there on the 1924 & 1926 maps, but was closed when the field was fenced in. It is not clear when this was done.

The original specifications, dated April 18, 1911, state: "for the erection and completion of a public school to be erected at Flat Rock, Michigan, for Fractional District No. 1, Brownstown, Berlin and Ash." It also specified that all trees should be protected. Promotion Certificates were in the name of Flat Rock Union School regardless of which township the students were from.



capacity of 125 barrels, roughly 825 gallons. The playground and swings were in front of the school. It must have been decided to use the well and outhouses from the previous school. The well was located in front, to the left of the front entrance. The outhouses were in the back, at the end of the property. A flag pole was erected on top of the tower, and a fire escape was installed, from a second story window, on the west side of the building.

In 1911 and 1912, R.W. Sprinkle was the superintendent, and Gertrude Reading was the principal. Later the school was named for Miss Reading, who taught there for many years. There were five graduates in 1911, and in 1912 there were three. Commencement, in those years, was held in the I.O.O.F. Hall. Many former students remember the old school bell. The rope hung down to the first floor, close to the steps leading to the second

Apparently Hull and Hofman, in Detroit, were the Architects. The blue print shows that on the first floor there were three class rooms, two main entrances, corridors, two stairways (one to upstairs, and one to the basement), one closet and two small exterior porches on the west side of the building. The second floor had two classrooms, separated with sliding folded doors, a reception room, principal's office, laboratory, library, dressing room, apparatus room, stairway, halls and a closet. The basement had two rooms, a boiler room, a coal room, corridor and small storage rooms. There was a tower above the roof, and the roof was slate. In the rear of the building a brick lined cistern was built underground. It had a



**FLAT ROCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PO Box 337  
FLAT ROCK, MICHIGAN 48134  
734.782.5220**



**Visit us online:  
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**FLAT ROCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**OUR MISSION**

*The Flat Rock Historical Society seeks to preserve and communicate to residents and visitors the history and spirit of those who have lived in and near the City of Flat Rock from the beginning of human habitation, or its vision, to bring our community together for the enjoyment, discovery, and learning our past to create our future.*

**NOTICE:**

*Please know that the Society calendar is subject to change. Unfortunately, the programs and museum hours are directly tied to the availability of volunteers. Without volunteers, we cannot open the buildings as frequently as we would like nor offer museum events and programs.*

**2022 CALENDAR**

MEMBERSHIP DINNER	SEPTEMBER 15TH 5:30PM
HISTORY TALK	SEPTEMBER 15TH 7PM
DIGGIN' UP LOCAL HISTORY CEMETERY TOUR	SEPTEMBER 24TH 2-8PM
FALL FLEA MARKET	OCTOBER 2TH 7-3PM
HALLOWEEN OPEN HOUSE	OCTOBER 20TH 5-8PM
MUSEUM GHOST HUNT	OCTOBER 22ND 7-11PM
STUDENT ART SHOW	NOVEMBER 4TH 5-8PM
EVENING OPEN HOUSE	NOVEMBER 17TH 5-8PM
HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE	DECEMBER 2ND 5-8PM
MEMBERSHIP HOLIDAY DINNER	DECEMBER 15TH 5PM

*Do you have your tickets for the Cemetery Tour?*

*Call the museum to order 734-782-5220*

**BAKE SALE**

Our Flat Rock Historical Society Fall Flea Market will be held on October 2nd at the Speedway. Check our Facebook page for any last minute updates. As always we need your help. Dawn Bartok and Kathy Fisk, have volunteered to manage the Country Store during this Flea Market.

Members are asked to bring their homebaked goods for the Country Store to the Hotel on Saturday, October 1st between 12 and 4 pm.

Please let us know if you can help sell baked goods during the flea market. We often run out of baked goods, so we depend on you! If you are going to visit the Flea Market on Sunday, please consider supporting the Historical Society's Country Store Booth at the Speedway. The proceeds from the baked goods go directly to the society supporting artifact conservation and historic programming. Thank you in advance!

*(continued from Cover)*  
**Continued Recollections:  
 The Reading Building**  
*by Winifred Oestrike Hamilton*

floor. When the first bell rang it was time to get into class. The second time it rang the student was late. It took 4 of the younger students to ring it, although I'm sure the teachers were able to do it. The bell was taken down in the 1940s, when it was feared the rafters were too weak to support it. It was placed on the ground, by the World War I cannon, between the Reading School and the High School. The bell was approximately 3 foot tall and about 4 foot around. I have been told that it was still there at the end of World War 2, but then it disappeared. No one seems to know what happened to it.

After the High School was built, in 1926, classes were held in both buildings, and went back and forth. There have been many changes in the old building, but basically it still looks the same. It was last used as the Administration Building for the schools. The City of Flat Rock acquired it on Nov. 1, 2000. A small book could be written on this school.

## SAVE THE HISTORIC READING BUILDING!

The Flat Rock School Board is planning to tear down the historic Reading School and replace it with a parking lot. The Reading Building was built in 1911 and many generations of Flat Rock students have passed through its doors. If it is demolished, we will lose one of the few remaining historic buildings left in Flat Rock.

We are interested in pausing the demolition order and compelling the school board to consider alternative options. Ideally, finding a person or organization willing to renovate and repurpose the structure, thereby preserving it's historic integrity.

Please help us save the building by signing our petition and letting the school board know that the Reading Building is worth saving.

Stop by the Museum to sign the petition or sign at our booth at the Riverfest.

*Judy Lowe McNair*  
 1945-2022

We are sad to inform you of the passing of Judi McNair, a lifetime member, on September 9, 2022. Judi Lowe McNair, born in 1945, is the daughter of Clarence and Virginia (nee Bird) Lowe. Clarence and Virginia met at the Lowes Boarding House. Together they had three children Carole (1939-2009), Judi and son Frank (born 1948). Judi's brother Frank still resides in Flat Rock. The Lowe Family lived in the apartment house behind Bobcean's Funeral home until Judi was three years old. She had fond memories of attending Reading School from second to fifth grade, attending Flat Rock High School.

Judi McNair was a member and volunteer of the Society for over thirty years, including serving on the Executive Board for over ten years. She had a passion for local history; Judi recalled many Flat Rock historical events, and knew many who had lived them.

She volunteered at the Munger Store during the annual school visits, watching all the bright-eyed children coming in with such curiosity. It was great fun telling them stories about local folks and the importance of the Munger General Store in our community. The kids enjoyed hearing her stories and some still come back to the museum to remember their elementary school field trip. It happened one day when she showed up to volunteer in a hoop skirt and could not get out of the car with the hoop. It took three volunteers to help untangle her.

The Lowe Family attended the First Congregational Church, where Judi and Jim, her husband, still attend. Judi spoke of the soup kitchen that she and her husband helped to start many years ago and how the kitchen still exists. Judi and Jim have five children and four grandchildren.

Judi's grandparents were Frank Bird and Ella (nee Wagar) Bird. The Wagar Family, dairy farmers from New York, came to Michigan by way of the Erie Canal about 1850. Frank Bird met Ella Wagar at a picnic, where Frank purchased lunch for Ella. They sat together to eat their lunches and became a couple. They had two children, a son Warren Bird and a daughter Virginia Bird (born 1921) later married Clarence Lowe. Clarence worked as an Engineer for the railroad, his mother Bertha Greenwald Lowe owned a boarding house, which housed employees of the rail road.

Judi loved a good laugh and we will miss Judi's smiling face at our events and school visits!



## FALL FLEA MARKET - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2<sup>ND</sup>



CONTINUATION OF  
**THE HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF FLAT ROCK**  
 COMPILED BY LOUIS BECKLEY (1951)

*Introduction by Lesley Gilliland Harkai*

*Last year we had republished sections of this compilation, this is a continuation. We have had such a positive response from our readers that we are going to continue with this serialization of this compilation. Recall The History of the Village of Flat Rock was compiled by Louis Beckley, a surveyor employed by Wayne County in 1951. This compiled work included multiple source documents and a series of articles authored by Freeland Garretson. These articles had been published by Garretson in the "Flat Rock News" in 1897 and are mostly recollections by one of the areas oldest residents.*

*FRHS has recently scanned the work in its entirety with Optical Character Recognition and have arrived at this digital version of this historical work. Since it has been seventy years since the original compilation, we thought we would share the sections from Freeland Garretson's articles. Please keep in mind that this was written in 1897 and as such, has its historical context preserved complete with antiquated spelling and grammatical anomalies. There are some transcriber notes set-off by italics in square brackets for clarity and modern context.*

**FLAT ROCK OF 60 YEARS AGO**

*Written and Prepared by Freeland Garretson, 1897*

**XIV**

Looking back over our history of the early days in the vicinity of Flat Rock, we find some little incidents that have escaped our recollection, which would probably be interesting to the readers of the News.

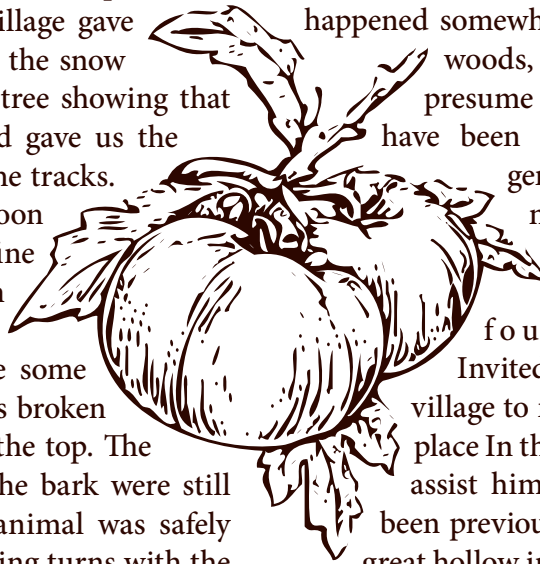
It was in one of the warm days of February when the snow of the winter had begun to melt and the wild animals that had been housed or holed up during the cold winter were making ready for a departure from their winter quarters, when some person coming in to the village gave notice that he had discovered a track in the snow and a scratch of the bark upon a large tree showing that some animal had climbed the tree, and gave us the location of the spot where he had seen the tracks. Several of the boys of the village soon assembled in anticipation of a fine afternoon's sport. With several axes upon our shoulders we soon departed for the place indicated. It was a large elm tree some three feet across at the butt. The top was broken off and a large hole could be seen near the top. The track in the snow and the scratch on the bark were still visible, and we were positive that the animal was safely caged in the highest part of the tree. Taking turns with the axes, we soon commenced cutting at the large tree, which was found to be hollow. A couple of dogs had accompanied the party, who kept a steady watch for the tree to fall. After an hour or two of hard work the tree top began to move, the butt began to crack, and down it came with a crash.

The dogs were in the tree top when it struck the ground, and a large sized raccoon was soon caught by one of the dogs, then four more, making five altogether of fullgrown animals of the same kind, half stunned by the fall, were brought out of the tree top. We arrived home with our game

before night, the animals were dressed and skins dried ready for market. "Tom Short", an Indian on the reserve heretofore mentioned in our history, hearing of our adventure among the coons, came down to the village and purchased all the "coonskins", paying us \$1.50 apiece for them, and he sold them in Canada. The prize money was divided up among us boys in a very amiable division.

Another incident of an entirely different character happened somewhere near the same spot in the wild woods, but at another time of the year. We presume that the wild bees and wild honey have been found in the wild woods in all generations. At the time to which we now refer, it was late in the fall of the year before the winter snows had come. A neighbor living three or four miles away in the woods had invited a party of young people of the village to meet him in the evening at a certain place in the woods a mile or two out of town, to assist him in cutting a "bee-tree" which had been previously found. It was a large tree with a great hollow in the top. It was long after dark when we arrived on the grounds, where had been brought tubs, pails, and boxes.

The weather was quite chilly and a fire had been built a few rods away, around which the waiting party were sitting. Several armfuls of hickory bark were gathered, to be used in making lights. After an hour of steady work by the choppers, who knew by the way the tree leaned which way it would fall, at last it came down, crunching to the ground. The hollow tree had opened, and there, by the comb and strained honey in all its sweetness joined assistance of the



*(continued)*

hickory bark torches, you could see the together with the rubbish of the tree topj but all hands fell to and gathered up the fragments by the tubful and pailsful. A number of the younger kids had followed us to the woods, many of whom had filled themselves with sweetness until they could hold no more. This party was given more for pleasure than profit by the old neighbor who invited us, but several of the citizens' families had honey for use for months afterwards.

## XV

The living of the early settlers was generally of the most simple character. Very few of the knickknacks or garden vegetables were found upon the table. The wild leeks and onions in the woods and the native wild plum and sour winter grapes were the usual condiment. The early residents had not yet begun to set out their orchards or vineyards, and the fruit and vegetables which are now found so plentiful in the markets had found no way of transportation into this new country.

The first tomatoes I ever saw growing were in the garden of John Cooke just below the village. They looked ripe and beautiful but were at that time considered poison by most people, and I dare not touch them.

Cherry Islands, in Lake Erie a short distance below Gibraltar, furnished us all the cherries we had in those days, and several times in the season myself and other boys have spent the day roaming over these Islands, which were covered by old Indian orchards of apple trees and clusters of cherry trees. Usually the birds had been there before us to take their share of the fruit, but our day's sport was made up by a few cool baths in Lake Erie before we returned home.

These islands are now covered by beautiful farms and residences owned by Detroit businessmen. An old Indian orchard was situated on the mainland on the farms now owned by Luther Wood and Henry Hanchett, one mile west of Gibraltar. Here we would generally find a few knotty and knurly apples of natural growth, but they were the best that could be found in this wild country.

Here among these Islands, hid away among the bushes, some old boatman in his hut was ever ready, for a small sum, to carry over to the opposite shore any article of produce or a calf or pig which a resident on shore wanted to smuggle over and bring back the returns without being caught at it or

without paying duty, it being several miles across among the numerous islands to Malden on the Canada shore. For several years afterwards this portion of the lake front bore a hard reputation, and many acts of depredation were traced to this vicinity) but the wheels of time and progress of civilization have changed the character of the neighborhood to that of one of the pleasantest places in Southern Michigan.

## XVI

We next wish to say something in regard to a tract of land lying north of Flat Rock, several thousand acres which for many years were considered not worth the taxes. It extended nearly up to the village of Dearborn. It contained hills of sand and deep mire and marshes, apparently worthless except for natural growth of cranberries and whortleberries. It finally got into the hands of speculators, laws were passed for the drainage of these lands, and they were finally thrown upon the market, producing many excellent farms.

These lands for many years afterwards supplied the people of the surrounding neighborhood in providing means for their subsistence by picking the berries and sending them to the markets. Within the last 25 years we have seen from 20 to 30 wagonloads of men, women, and children in a day going through the village on their way to the berry picking grounds and returning in the evening with many bushels gathered.

An incident which happened among the berry pickers of this vicinity some 30 or 40 years ago will easily bear relating. It was known that the huckleberries were very plentiful on the prairies a few miles north of the village, and several of the first families of the village had made up their minds to take a day off for berry picking and a basket picnic. Wagons, seated for the occasion, were loaded up and started for the grounds. After unhitching the teams and pitching the tents, word came from across the marsh that the berries were abundant over there. A team was soon hitched up again and several of the old couples of the company got aboard with the driver, to be taken to the best pickings. It was one of those wet seasons and the marshes were covered with water, but

*(continued on page 7)*


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## Did You Know?

Many organizations meet in the Historic Smith Hotel. However, Society Members can also rent the Smith Hotel for small gatherings such as wedding showers and anniversary parties. Call the museum for more information on rentals.

## The Bear Clan Base Ball Club Flat Rock's Vintage Baseball Team

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai



The **Bear Clan Base Ball Club** is Flat Rock's Hometown Vintage Base Ball Team. They play against other area vintage base ball teams and abide by base ball game rules from 1860. Our home field is at Huroc Park.

Recently, our team was invited to play the **Gettysburg National 19th Century Base Ball Championship** against teams from across the nation. Much to the surprise of many, the Bear Clan **WON!!!**

Please check out the Fans of the Bear Clan Base Ball Club Facebook page and give them a LIKE. Look for next season's schedule. Congratulations to the Bear Clan for an awesome season!



## Flat Rock School Photos & Yearbooks Wanted

We are in the process of going through our class photos and yearbook collection to scan for preservation. Unfortunately we have discovered that we are missing some years. If you have a class photo, yearbook or Green & Gold Magazine from any of these years, we would appreciate if you could lend it to the museum to be scanned. All photos and yearbooks will be scanned and returned back to their owner!

Listed below are the years we are missing:

### Yearbooks Wanted

1925 • 1926 • 1927 • 1929 • 1930 • 1931 • 1932 • 1933 • 1934  
1935 • 1939 • 1940 • 1941 • 1942 • 1943 • 1944 • 1945  
1946 • 1947 • 1948 • 1949 • 1962 • 1963 • 1967 • 1968 • 1973  
1974 • 1981 • 1985 • 1986 • 1987 • 1988 • 1989 • 1990 • 1991  
1992 • 1993 • 1994 • 1995 • 1996 • 1997 • 1998 • 1999 • 2005  
2007 • 2008 • 2013 • 2014 • 2015 • 2016 • 2017 • 2018 • 2019

### Class Photos Wanted

1900 • 1901 • 1902 • 1903 • 1904 • 1905 • 1906 • 1907  
1908 • 1909 • 1912 • 1913 • 1914 • 1915 • 1917 • 1920  
1921 • 1922 • 1925 • 1927 • 1929 • 1947 • 1950 • 1952 •  
1953 • 1954 • 1955 • 1958 • 1968 • 1969 • 1970 • 1971  
• 1972 • 1974 • 1975 • 1976 • 1977 • 1978 • 1979



# GRATITUDE

*We would like to thank the following (and hope we didn't miss anyone):*

To Jean and Kevin Walker for chairing and manning the rummage sale.

To Bruce Chapin, for managing the sign letters, picking up the stuff from John's Garage and looking at the lawnmower.

To Steve Sassack for storing the fire truck.

To all the cooks who brought dishes to the membership meeting.

To Susan Laura for the antique wedding dress.

To Lila for donating the antique parasol and the wick trimmers.

To Joe Bruce for helping us to price the rummage sale.

To Marti, our new volunteer, thanks for helping out.

***Thank you to our  
New Members!***

***David & Jamie Bass  
Martha Clay***

*(continued from page 5)*

## THE HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF FLAT ROCK

the driver instead of going around the marsh concluded to go through it, the distance being much shorter. All went well until the wagon reached near the center of the marsh, where the water and mud was about two feet in depth. Here the horses became detached from the wagon, leaving the load of passengers in a predicament—several rods of water and mud to either shore. We will not disclose the names of the old couples, as nearly all of them have long since passed away. To relieve them from their present difficulty, it was decided as the best and only way, for each man in the crowd to get out in the water, take his wife upon his shoulders and carry her to the opposite shore. This was rather a singular and difficult operation, as in some instances the better half's avoirdupois was many pounds more than her carrier. Thus the day was spent. The company made a joyful time of it, for the weather was warm and pleasant. Their baskets and pails were well filled with berries. Their "plc-nlc" in the woods was well enjoyed, and all returned home having spent a very pleasant day. The writer of this article will substantiate the truth of the above statement, as he was one of the party who went berry picking and became foundered in the marshes, many years ago.

## Flat Rock Historical Society Membership Application

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

☐ New Member ☐ Renewal Membership No. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City

\_\_\_\_\_  
State

\_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP

@ \_\_\_\_\_  
Email 1 Address

@ \_\_\_\_\_  
Email 2 Address

☐ Landline

☐ Cell

☐ Texting

(\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone #

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Please tell us a little about your connection  
to Flat Rock or interests on the line above.*

CHOOSE ONE:

☐ \$10 Individual Annual Dues (July-June)

☐ \$15 Family Annual Dues (July-June)

☐ \$5 Student Membership

☐ \$100 Life Membership (per person)

Make checks payable to: "FRHS"  
Mail application & check/money order to:

**Flat Rock Historical Society**

PO Box 337

Flat Rock, MI 48134

For Office Use Only:

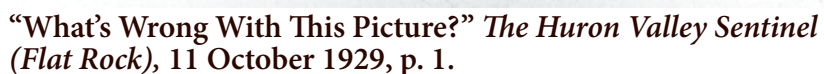
☐ Scan

☐ PastPerfect

☐ MailChimp



## Vintage Cartoons from the Hometown Paper



Annual membership dues are due for the 2022-2023 membership year. Our membership year mirrors our fiscal year July 1st - June 30th. Dues can be mailed, brought to the museum office, given to any board member. We are working to restore the online link for membership as well. Thanks to you all!!!