

Milford Moments in Time

By Joyce M. Clark

Along with the holidays, summer seems to be the perfect time for us to visit with our extended families. And the typical way we visit during this time of year is by attending a family reunion. According to a 2001 survey conducted by Bruskin Research, approximately 62% of America attends some form of family reunion.

Each family reunion, however, can be much more than playing games and seeing relatives. It is a great time to pull the generations together and share a little common history. For the Potts family, one of Milford's first settlers, this is also true.

If you ever attended a Potts Family Reunion, or were within ear-shot of one, you will hear people asking, "are you a Potts or a Pan?". According to Bob Potts, sixth generation, you are a Potts if you are a direct descendent. The *Pans* are the spouses who marry into the family.

During the reunion, you might also here how back in the fall of 1832, William Potts and his eldest son William II arrived in Milford from Newark, England. They staked their claim, made a small clearing in the wild forest, built a log house, and waited for the rest of the family to arrive. The log house was next to the Huron River (off of what is now known as Burns Road) since the river was a primary mode of transportation.

On March 10, 1833 Mary Ann Weaver (William's wife) and their five other children (Mary Ann, Robert, Francis, Susan, and John) left England to join the family. The family took the steamer Courrer to Yarmouth and then headed to London. From London they boarded the Samuel Robison for New York, finally arriving in Milford on May 17, 1833.

The Potts family was and continues to be a hardy line of settlers. Stanley Potts was a fifth generation Potts from the Francis line. In the early 1920's Stan quit the 8th grade to support his mother and two sisters. His first jobs were farming. One of those was working the old Godwin Sod farm then located on 10 Mile road east of Milford Road. As he grew up, he became a block layer and wet plasterer, eventually honing his tool and die skills (self taught).

Stan and his wife Edith Irene Cash had three children (Bob who lives near Milford, Zella Mae who lives in Fenton, and Ruth Ann who lives in Brighton). Stan and Edith passed along the hardy Potts gene to their children.

After moving the family around a bit, Stan's family settled in New Hudson behind what is now the New Hudson Elementary School (down the street from

the New Hudson Post Office on Grand River). The time was the mid 1930's, also known as the Depression.

The family hand dug a 24 x 24 foot Michigan basement. A Michigan basement in this case means a dirt floor with block walls. They pulled tar paper over the top and lived in the basement for approximately two years while the upstairs was finished. The upstairs frame came from an old gravel pit weigh station and was completed as money and time allowed.

The Michigan basement had a kitchen with a hand-pump for water. The rest of the area included space for sleeping. One particularly cold winter the family broke up an old grand piano they had tried to sell and used it for firewood. The lid of the grand piano however, became the door to the future attic. During the Depression, the family lived off the land by hunting, fishing, farming, and canning what they could.

After the Depression, and as the family grew up, additions were added to the home. The first addition was off of the south side that incorporated two bedrooms followed by a kitchen on the first floor. Thirteen years from the original move-in date, Bob, Zella, and Ruth Ann dug the footings for the bathroom that would finally become part of the house. Up to this point, the family used a couple of water closets (out houses). The laundry room and garage were the last items to join the house.

When Bob Potts was eight years old he helped support the family as most kids did during the Depression and war years. His job was to milk a cow on the John Gambel Raspberry farm while his Dad (Stan) worked the fields. During picking season, they would start out a 3:00 am and head down to Detroit's Eastern Market to sell their berries.

As Bob grew, he took on various odd jobs. One of those jobs was to dig graves at the New Hudson Cemetery. At that time, the graves were dug by hand and took about six to eight hours. In the winter time, he would build a little fire on top of the gravesite to thaw the ground. He would dig as far as he could, and then build another fire to continue the thawing process.

Bob joined the service in 1957 and worked as an MP (military police). In 1963 he joined the Oakland County Sheriff's Department as a deputy, from which he is now retired. He and his sisters still own the family homestead in New Hudson. All three often look back, not in amazement at how they lived, but with warm memories. And they all look forward to the next family reunion.

2007 is the 175th Anniversary of Milford and in celebration of this major milestone, we are asking you to share some of your stories with the rest of the community. If you have a little Milford history to pass along, please contact Sue Bullard, Milford Historical Society President, 248.685.7308 or milfordhistory@yahoo.com. The Milford Historical Society is happy to document your story and share it with others.



Caption: The 1897 Potts family reunion.