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WHEN KENT WAS A "LIVE TOWN"

Some of the History of Kensington Village As Told by the late L.D. Lovewell, South Lyon Pioneer

In looking through some old newspaper clippings, the Times came across the following article written by the late L.D. Lovewell of South Lyon (father of L.W. Lovewell), and published in the South Lyon Herald. It was full of interest to us and we thought it might be equally so to many of our readers.

What is left of the bank building of which the article speaks may be seen by the motorist as he speeds along Grand River, on the north side of the highway at the east boundary of Livingston county. It is now but a ruin with its crumbling walls, sunken roof and paneless windows, a relic of "the town that was."

But few readers of the Herald are aware that in the northeast corner of Lyon township, a village known as Kensington, where but four families now reside was once a thriving village doing in many lines more business than is done now in South Lyon.

A large saw mill, three hotels, three general stores, two large shoe shops, (as all shoes were made by hand), five blacksmith shops, the first Baptist Church in this part of the state, two brick yards located just north of Kensington. The only brick building left in Kensington which for many years has been used by A. Wooton for a granary was built and used for the bank of Kensington, which under what was known as the the "Wild Cat" banking laws of Michigan was authorized to issue bank notes which for a time were as good as gold.

The land plotted for this village was over a mile square, lots selling for fancy prices. It was expected this was to be a city. Among the many who invested in lots were a number of men from the east with means. One man that I knew well sold for a small price, he told me, a farm in what is now the center of Buffalo to come west and invest in a live town. He died poor. The Grand River turnpike was laid out as a government road from Detroit to Grand Rapids, later transferred to the company that operated it for a long time as a toll road. It was a plank road from Detroit to Lansing.

Among the many men who helped for a time to make this town a success were N.F. Butterfield, who for many years kept a shoe shop and store; John Daily, who came from New York with a good capital and for many years kept the brick store on the east side which was lately torn down, he was also postmaster for many years and distributed mail for a large portion of the county. No post office when I was a boy at Green Oak and but little mail at South Lyon. Here we had a tri-weekly mail. The two Crouse brothers, who for many years kept a large store and after wards moved to Hartland; W.A. Dwight was an active man and one of the officers in the bank and other enterprises; another merchant was Chas. Cogswell. W. Gates was the village Justice. Many stories I have listened to of the trials before him. The attorney whose name was often mentioned was R.S. Bingham, afterwards governor for four years, U.S. Senator at the time of his death in 1861, and whose home many of our readers know to be the present home of Sidney Smith of Green Oak.

The two doctors that dispersed quinine and calomel were Drs. Curtis and Wells. They said they had all they could do as this part of Michigan was very unhealthy. Ague and typhoid were prevalent. The first settlement was in 1831, it growing rapidly until 1840. My first acquaintance with Kensington was in 1853, then there were as many as 50 houses besides many and many hearth stones left, where once dwelt people of as bright hopes as you and I have. It would make one think of Goldsmith's description of the deserted village, "Fair Auburn, loveliest village of the plain" for the lake and bluffs on the north and the Huron river running through the center of the village made it one of the most desirable locations for a village I have seen in this part of the state. This was before any railroads were built in Michigan, and the string of teams that were bringing in the people that were coming in from the eastern states to settle in Livingston, Ingham and the other western counties were immense. Also the wonderful amount of farm produce that went down the pike, the same wagons bringing back great loads of supplies for the farm, store and shops was something to remember.

I can well remember when a boy seeing over 100 teams in a string. What seemed to me a great stage line two four-horses coaches each way every day, besides the extras that often had to be used were in operation. But, presto change, the bank failed, the dam went out, men failed in business, the re-action which is sure to follow too rapid growth came.

Many men left their homes and a good share of the town was sold for taxes; many good homes were abandoned. The material made good kindling wood for filling the jacks we used in spearing fish (we did not have gasoline then).

The building of the D.L. & N. road stopped the travel on the pike so that the history of Kensington exists as a tradition. The old cemetery in Kensington I often visit, it contains the remains of many that did what they could to transform a wilderness into a live town, and though they failed to realize all they strove for, one should feel that the pioneers of a new country are worthy of great respect, for they are the ones that make the way for those that come after them.