# WILLIAM WATSON

William Watson was a prosperous farmer, horse breeder, community leader, and respected  Cass County, Michigan pioneer.   As an entrepreneur within the era's horse powered transportation infrastructure, he accumulated in his stable's breeding stock some of the finest equine studs available.  William maintained a side businesses that dealt with transportation and horses.  He inherited the family homestead from his father, James Watson, and acquired other farms in Cass and Berrien County.  He served in the Civil War.  He left his children the wealth of land.  His life story provides a glimpse into Cass County's attitudes, values, horse transportation culture and businesses of the 1800s.

The extended Watson family of Wayne Township were of Scottish descent.  They trace their lineage back to the MacWatt Clan of Aberdeenshire and Lanarkshire, Scotland.  They became part of "the Great American Melting Pot," blending their unique heritage into Cass County's multi-ethnic culture.

On August 28, 1835, William Watson was born to James Watson and Grace Finlay Craig in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Scotland.  His family had sold their Renfrewshire farm land estate, and moved to Glasgow seeking employment in the factories of Scotland's early Industrial Revolution.  Disappointed with the lack of opportunity available there, they migrated to North American in 1832, arriving in1833, when William was two years old.

The Watson clan settled in rural Rome, Oneida County, New York for six years, until responding to the lure of Southwestern Michigan's land rush and many natural resources.  Oneida County is in central New York. The Watsons were farmers there, but were located where they could observe the constant migration traffic that was westward bound. Oneida County is the area where the "first shovel of earth was turned for construction of the Erie Canal" (July 4, 1817).  It was built to link central New York to Lake Erie, and as "an improved route to the west."  Oneida County is significant to Michigan residents because it was the home of George Eastman, the man "who founded the Eastman Kodak Camera Company, and revolutionized photography, placing it in the hands of the common man."  This area was, also, home to the Oneida Silverware Company, that made eating utensils.  However, it is most significant because of Fort Stanwick., a sixteen acre national historic site.  When the British invaded the United States, from Canada, after the end of the Revolutionary War (1776), this was the fort that defended our nation in the "Saratoga Campaign" (March 1777), and drove the English back to Canada. The Watson family of Wayne Township arrived in Oneida County, New York 59 years after the Saratoga Campaign.

In 1842, William Watson was age 7, when his father migrated to Wayne Township and founded "Watson Settlement" on the east edge of the "Dowagiac Swamp."  When the family sold out and moved to the rural Glenwood area of Wayne Township, they settled on Section 14, where they built their self-suffcent homestead. William attended the local rural school, then went to the town of Dowagiac, Michigan for further education.

The 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Wayne Township lists William's father, James Watson,  as age 49, and his mother Grace as age 47.  The children on the Census were sister Mary (21 years old), sister Jennet (19 years old), sister Margaret (17 years of age, sister Mary (age 12), sister Grace (age 10), brother John (8 years old), brother Alexander (age 5), and William (age 15).

The June 1860 Census recorded the Watson family consisting of  James (age 60), Grace (age 58),

"Jenny" (Jennet, age 25), John (age 17), Alexander (age 12), and William (age 22). It was at age twenty-two, in 1860, that William became engaged to be married. Early in that same year, with his father's help, he had bought his first farm parcel in Section 36 E., Lake Township, Berrien County, Michigan, and set up his own homestead.

On November 1, 1860, in Dowagiac, Michigan William Watson wed Esther Ann Smith, the daughter of a neighbor in Wayne Township. The marriage produced five children: Alice Martha Watson (1861-1983), George Watson (1864-1952), Emily I. Watson (1866-1890), Phebe J. Watson (1862-1863), and Walter E. Watson (1872-1872).

On July 1, 1863, William registered for the Civil War Draft. He was mustered in October 15, 1864. Serving in the third Michigan Infantry organized out of Grand Rapids, Michigan in Company K. They were in Decatur (Alabama), Murfeesboro, Huntsville, Nashville and Indianola (Texas). He was discharged in Detroit on June 10, 1866. He returned to his family farm homestead, and started building his business ventures. He is recorded on the 1883 Civil War Pensioners List, the 1890 Veterans Schedule, and the 1910 Veterans Schedule.

William ran 5 farm or horse related ventures. Local settlements were a great revenue sources for farm commodities. Horses, their supplies and support services were in high demand during this time, as horses were the main source of transportation (no cars or internal combustion engines in that era).

William's first focus was growing staple crops that brought him a steady income. He continued to nurture those endeavors. Hay was his biggest profit maker. By 1872, when his parent's health was failing, William was asked to move back to his father's Section 14 farm in Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan, and take over the business. He did so, and then bought several more farms. By 1873 he owned land in Section 8 of Lake Township, and Section 20 of Royalton Township, Berrien County, besides his Wayne Township enterprise. He had steady customers, who depended on his harvests, and was a firmly established farmer. When his parents passed away in 1874, he inherited their Section 14 land.

Horse breeding was William's second and most favored enterprise. His expertise with these creatures was well known. The entire nation, not just Southwestern Michigan was dependent on the horse, and he took the enterprise very seriously. Buying and selling a horse was a special occasion that took forethought, careful examination, evaluation of health, pedigree concerns, performance issues, and consideration for its use. Customers would give as much care to buying their horses back then, as they do to purchasing a car today. Visits to William Watson's Wayne Township horse ranch homestead, and the negotiations that followed usually took several visits, and extreme attention to detail.

Owning a horse in Southwestern Michigan was so important that "Anti-Horse-Theft Societies" were organized in most townships. The animals were considered so vital to everyday life in that era, they were branded by the seller, and then re-branded by the buyer. Horse stealing was a major offense. When a horse was stolen, society members would spring into action, searching for robber and horse before it could be taken out of the area, or re-branded.

William specialized in AMERICAN SADDLEBREDS (for riding), DRAFT HORSES (for farm work and slowly pulling very heavy loads), HARNESS HORSES (for pulling carts, surreys, "one horse shays," carriage, and stagecoaches), and what he termed "MICHIGAN INDIAN MUSTANGS" (for herding and wrangling). He probably used these terms as a marketing term, but still they reflected the purpose for which the horse was bred and used. Horses were, also, divided into three categories: "hotbloods" referring to spirited horses capable of endurance and speed, "cold bloods" who were suitable for slow heavy work, and "warm bloods" which were cross breeds, like the mustangs.

William Watson knew a great deal about the lineage and history of local Michigan Mustangs. They

were some of the first known horses to ever walk the forests of Southwestern Michigan.  The original local Indian tribes rode these mustangs, traded them to local settlers when they arrived, and prized these mounts for their versatility.

The genetic origin of Southwest Michigan's first horses came from four main sources:  (A) SPANISH HORSES.  Horses were not native to North America, and were brought from Europe on early sailing ships.  Spain at one time claimed the eastern part of the United States, and their Spanish horses were the first to inhabit the continent.  (B) BRITISH HORSES who inter-bred with the Spanish horses.  Some of these mixed breeds escaped captivity, and became feral.  "Herds of wild horses from the eastern United States were forced west by civilization.  They reached Illinois, roamed Indiana, and made it to Michigan.  Many mustang herds ran wild and free west of the Mississippi.  Horses in Michigan, Indiana and Illinois were claimed by the indigenous Native American Indian population.  (C) "DETROIT FRENCH HORSES."  When the French occupied Michigan and Canada, their military stallions were routed through Detroit from Canada.  Horses and guns were supplied to the Indians, if they allied with the French.  These beasts were bred with the mixed breeds already present.  (D) U.S. CALVARY GERMAN "EAST FRIESIANS."  For about ten years, every year, in the late 1800s, the U.S. government bought 150 stallions per year from Germany.  Those male horses were bred with locals to improve the blood lines, and used by military personnel in Michigan, adding more diversity to the gene pool.

By the time William Watson decided to breed Michigan Indian Mustangs, this mixed bloodline had been thoroughly tested by the Native American Potawatomi of Southwestern Michigan.   Michigan Indian Mustangs had stamina, were "bartered or captured between tribes," were valued for speed, and had been bred by the Indians for intelligence.  The American Indians, in the process of taming feral horses, over generations, became some of "the best horsemen the world has even known."  William included these mustangs in his stables, as they were perfect for herding Michigan cows, wrangling steers, and running down wayward farm animals.

William Watson's third business venture involved leather harnesses, tack, and saddles.  He hired a man to live at his ranch full time, and make these leather goods. He sold leather bridles, halters, reins, bits, cinches, stirrups, lead ropes, and hackamores (braided rawhide that fit around a horse's nose ending with a heel knot under its chin).  His saddles were custom made to fit the rider and horse.

The fourth enterprise he was involved with was a stud service.  For a fee, his high bred stallions serviced mares in heat.  Having a reputation as a good breeder, brought the added benefit of revenue from other owners, who wanted to do the same.  A healthy stallion could produce a lot of colts.

William's fifth money-maker existed out of necessity.  He was a blacksmith, but it was not by choice.  Horses had to be shoed.  The horse's shoes and nails had to be made from scratch (no convenient chain stores).  Hoofs had to be filed, injuries repaired, and illnesses treated (few veterinarians back then).  "Gelding" (castration of male horses) was often needed for work horses to make them docile.  Less prepared neighbors would ask for his help when their horses were ill of needed shoes, and he never could ignore a horse in need.  He eventually hired a man to help with this side-line business.

William's interest in horses was not unique, but rather part of a much larger transportation infrastructure.  By understanding this era's horse culture, William's lifestyle and business choices make more sense.  In the daily life of this era, if one wanted to travel, transport heavy loads, or accomplish difficult tasks, there were few alternatives. The train came to Dowagiac, Michigan in 1848, but it was limited to long distance travel and freight shipping.  The "horseless carriage" (automobile) would not be invented until 1908, and the first Ford Model T car was not driven off a Detroit assembly line for public use until 1915.  William spent his entire life, never knowing what it was like to ride in an automobile.  His generation traveled, and worked, using the energy and power of horses.  Out of necessity,  every state had a finely tuned support system for horses, and Southwest Michigan was no exception.

Self-sufficient farms had horses that plowed the fields, pulled the hay wagons at harvest, moved the farm carts, and provided rotational power when wind and water sources were low.  Horses "free ranged" on natural grasses, foraged hedge rows, and were "let out to pasture" to graze.  Portions of every farm were devoted to growing oats, other grains, alfalfa hay, sorghum fodder, corn, beets, and other food sources for horses.

Horses were indispensable for travel.  Every self-respecting person had his or her own horse, and knew how to ride.  Horses pulled covered wagons, stages coaches, fire department wagons, and carriages.  Horse were used to draw milk wagons, and post office mail carts.  Early loggers depended on draft horses to pull skids loaded with logs, on icy roads to rivers.  Wagon trains, pulled by horses, transported crops and a variety of goods to Southwest Michigan settlements.  There was a livery stable in every town, hitching posts on every street, and complimentary horse watering troughs in front of most trading posts.  Horse manure was common on most dirt roads and streets; its removal considered a necessary part of everyday life.

Horses were used for recreation, as well as work, as settlers rode for the sheer joy of the experience, or guided their "matched pair," high stepping coach horses down the road for all their neighbors to admire.  Owning fine, well-bred, healthy horses in the 1800s and early 1900s was a status symbol and indication of wealth.  Horses are admirable, magnificent creatures.  Powerfully built, strong, "sure of footed," and capable of great loyalty.  Genuine affection existed between a horse and his owner.  Well card for horses could live for twenty plus years, and became part of lives of the people who depended upon them.

The horse infrastructure involved humanitarian concerns.  As a society, Southwest Michigan did care for its horses.  Beating a horse was considered one of the worst of actions possible, something an honorable man never did.  Cruelty to a horse, or neglect, could be the cause of a fist fight in defense of the animal.  Laws were enacted to protect horses.

One family story that survived about William Watson involved one of his farmhands.  The fellow had ridden a horse hard, a long distance, in the hot weather of mid-summer, so that it was lathered, breathing deep, and sweating.  In his rush to get to other business, the worker left the horse tied to the barn hitching post for hours in the blazing sun.  The fellow forgot that the poor creature was standing there without complaint, suffering in the heat.  One of William's rules was that before quitting work for the day, or after a long ride, the rider had to "stable" his horse.  This meant leading it to its barn stall, watering it, feeding it, brushing down the horses coat to remove the sweat, and cooling it.  Leaving a hard worked, lathered, thirsty horse in the hot sun was tantamount to causing heat stroke, and possibly death.  Even worse, the horse suffered horribly under these conditions.  When William discovered the horse tied to the post in the hot sun, head down to the ground, breathing labored, sweating profusely, and in great distress, he knew exactly what had happened.  He immediately took the animal into the barn, performed the necessary procedure to  save it from heat exhaustion, and then went looking for the worker.  The farmhand was fired on the spot.  William Watson loved horses, and could not stand to see them suffer.

Sadly, there was an even darker side to early Southwest Michigan's horse culture that William despised.  Unwanted horses, or those who outlived their usefulness, were often "taken to the glue factory."  These magnificent, loyal creatures, who served man so dutifully, were slaughtered for their hooves, which were made into animal glue.  The carcasses were stripped of their hides for the making of horsehide leather gloves, boots and jackets.  They were butchered for their meat, then used for human food, and to feed dogs. There was a practice among some early fruit growers that involved the shooting of an old horse, and burying it in the orchard beneath a newly planted tree; using the carcass as fertilizer.  Poorly run slaughter houses left the stench of blood and death in containment yards, and horses would bolt in fear, anticipating their fate, "when led to the slaughter."  Horse whips were used by horse owners who had little conscience.  Pain and fear were considered an acceptable control practices by some.  Horse lovers, like William Watson, disapproved of these practices, preferring to use positive rewards, kindness, persistence, and gentle persuasion.  He valued the trust and loyalty of a good horse.

Will and his family appear on the 1880 and 1900 U.S. Federal Census, for Wayne Township, In 1896, based on the Cass County Plat Maps, Willliam Watson still owned 107.42 acres in Section 14, Wayne Township.  His brother John had 80 acres in Section 13, and 40 acres in Section 12 of Wayne Township.  Brother Alexander had 80 acres in Section 12, 58 acres in Section 14, and 40 acres in Section 23 of Wayne Township.  In 1905, seven years before his death, Cassopolis Court House Deed Liber Book 6 & 7, show that William made a series of land deed transfers, as grantor, to his adult children, in Section 14, 23 and 36.

William Watson died in 1912, at age 77 and was buried with his wife in South Wayne Chapel Cemetery, Wayne Township, Cass County, Michigan.  In 1912 and 1913 at the Cass County Court House, Land Estate Will Transfers were recorded, in which he gave the last of his property to his children.

In conclusion, William Watson was a successful Wayne Township farmer, horse breeder, and entrepreneur.  Inheriting a farm from his father, he expanded the enterprise, and increased his revenue sources to impressive proportions.  He ran several businesses that were part of his era's equine culture.  As a true lover of horses, who raised Michigan Indian Mustangs, and other breed horses, he was a well known source for some of the finest local horse flesh available.  He was a respected, honorable, and responsible member of the community. William Watson earned his placed in local history.

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## RESEARCH

-Watson/Smith/Page Family Tree
-Page/Watson Family Oral History Notes of 1973
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