

STORY OF BEGINNING OF BUTTERNUT

In 1887 or about that time, when the T. S. & M. railroad was completed, about 15 years after the failure of the Coldwater railroad, the farmers and business men began to see what they had prophesied about the benefit a railroad would be to a community. All along the line little villages began to spring up and business began to improve. Mills, elevators, hotels, churches, residences, stores, etc were built. In the beginning, we had two passenger trains running from Muskegon to Owosso Junction, also several freight trains aday. We could ride from Butternut to Carson City for a dime. I wish to give a brief discription and history of Butternut, Carson City's sister town.

It was prophesied at the start, prosperity would be so great and building activities so increased, that both towns would come together and be one. Charles Cross, an old pioneer of New England stock, and Willie Wamsley, were the only two who lived in the residential district. Amos Dodge lived the first house south then and north of the Carson road. Asa Martin lived in the first house north of the bridge. The first depot was an old box car. J. S. Dennis, son-in-law of Mr. Cross, who was renting his farm, was a live wire in building up the town. In one end of the car was a post office; in the other end a waiting room. Mr. Dennis attended to the duties of postmaster and selling tickets. Soon after a depot and telegraph offive was built and E.C. Henty, now of Detroit, was the first operator. He held this position a long time. He also was very active in church work and a great Sunday School worker.

It was not long before Jesse built a frame building to be used for a store (where the white brick store now stands) and put in a small stock of goods. Soon after an elevator was built, and Mr. Dennis became a "potato man" and furnished seed on contract for the farmers and buying their produce. He also dealt in grain and bought apples for canning and cider, by the carload, giving 20 to 40 cents a hundred lbs., according to quality.

Through the influence of Mr. Cross and A.R. Isham, the first cheese factory was started in this vicinity, under the management of John Fitzpatrick, who got the reputation of making the best cheese in the state, the Butternut Fancy Cheese. Mr. Dennis spent part of his time travelling and advertising this brand. After this he turned his attention to a broader field in the near-by towns of the state, dealing only in potatoes and apples. After awhile his business extended to the northern part of the state; and at Brutus he bought a farm which he ran in connection with his other business.

Returning to the subject. Stores and houses were built and a church was erected on land donated by Mr. Cross; J.C. Bunnell bought out Mr. Dennis' interest in the store and ran it a short time; then one night the building and contents were mysteriously destroyed by fire. It was a heavy blow, as he was just starting in business. The people of Butternut generously donated lumber, material and labor and a two-story building was put up for him on the lot where the bank now stands. John Hudson later bought the building and it was moved over to the corner and is now occupied by Nick Petroff as a general store. It used to be used by the Maccabees, Grange, Gleaners, Ladies Aid, Church and Sunday school activities* Since the advent of the Church and Grange Hall, no meetings are now held in the upper story.

** societies*

The first grist mill stood near the bridge, and was run by Orley Martin, now of Ionia county. He was a familiar figure in Carson City at one time, hauling four cords of green wood in a wagon drawn by a large bovine, which he led. A little later Asa Martin opened up the first hardware store, (in the building now used as Post Office. Being elected Justice of the Peace about that time, he fitted up a small room in the back part to be used as a court room; he did a good business as the records will show. He held this office 28 years, and was succeeded by Ralph Lamie, and who had the first drug store. This store was the first place to have a telephone central and this business was ably taken care of by Mr. Lamie and the late J.F. Isham, who incidently, had the first farm telephone put up in his residence. A cement tile foundry was built and run for a short time, and the building is now used for a warehouse by the Butternut Elevator Co. Next Libby, McNeil & Libby put up a pickle factory, which was patronized but a few yrs. This has been built larger and makes an up-to-date building for lumber for the Elevator Co.

The hotel was built largely from lumber taken from the Crystal Grange Hall which used to be on the townline, on the corner of Claude Blanchard's farm, and was operated by Orrin Ranger. Mr. T.B. Moss was the first hotel keeper, which did a thriving business in a small building which was replaced by the present one. After Mr. Ranger moved into his building, Mr. Moss bought a lot across the street and built one for himself in competition. This is now known as the Powell building and is now abandoned. The first sawmill was located near where the stock yards are now and was run successfully for several years by Messrs. Taylor and Reed. Mr. Reed now lives in Crystal.

The first doctor locating in town was named McIntosh, who was here only a yr. He was succeeded by Dr. R.C. Lyle, son-in-law of Willis Wamsley, who at this time lives near Saginaw. H.O. Patrick was the first R.F.D. carrier and remained so until his death. After the old elevator burned, George R. Banton erected another and did business for a number of years. Ed. Rasor succeeded him for two or three years. Since then the present management has been doing business.

The Butternut bank was organized in Oct. 1906 with a good list of depositors. Mr. F.A. Phelps of Sand Lake, a private banker, was the man behind the move. Mr. E.F. Barrett of the same place was the cashier.

Mr. John Fitzpatrick ran the cheese factory for about 20 yrs. until failing health prevented, and the factory then under the leadership of a man named Campbell and later by one named Scatchia. The farmers did not get their paychecks from these men and so the factory went to the wall. Butternut suffered a great loss in losing out on the cheese factory, culvert and pickle stations. There are about 30 residences and about 100 people living in the burg, nearly all new ones.

I wish to say in conclusion that the name of Butternut was chosen by Mr. Cross. Some wanted to call it Crossville, after him, but he would not consent to it. There were a good many butternut trees in the area, and probably for that reason, the town and creek were named Butternut.

Published in Carson City Gazette
Nov. 10, 1932

E.W. Johnson

1932