

WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC

YESTERYEAR AROUND CALEDONIA STATION

No. 7

1976



CALEDONIA FOURTH OF JULY PARADE AROUND 1895

Leading the parade with their bikes are the Meyers boys, and the boy with the large wheel bike is Alva Meyers. The Meyers boys' father was the publisher of the local newspaper "The Caledonia News." Leona (Beeler) Vincent was in the group of small girls at the front of the parade. Caledonia always had a band, but which band is in this photo is unknown.

The house on the right in the picture is the old Joseph Kennedy home. The first building west of Lake Street is the Caledonia Hotel. Beyond the hotel is the brick Kennedy building that was built by Joseph Kennedy in 1892. Leona Vincent's father, C. F. Beeler, had his drug store in the Kennedy block.

Mrs. Vincent stated that the 4th of July celebration was held on Main Street and they always had different kinds of races. Several stores had stands out in front of their places and she remembers working in her father's as she grew older. She said Caledonia always had fire works and that she enjoyed them. She also said they used to build a platform and have Bowery dances in the afternoon and evening.



At the left are Miner and Rhea Kinsey, along with their family horse, Bess, ready to participate in a July 4th parade.

To the right is a ticket for the Independence Ball in the Widrig Hotel. The Widrig Hotel was the first hotel in Caledonia. Allen Widrig was the proprietor. It most likely stood about at 129 E. Main St. on the north side. It later was destroyed by fire.

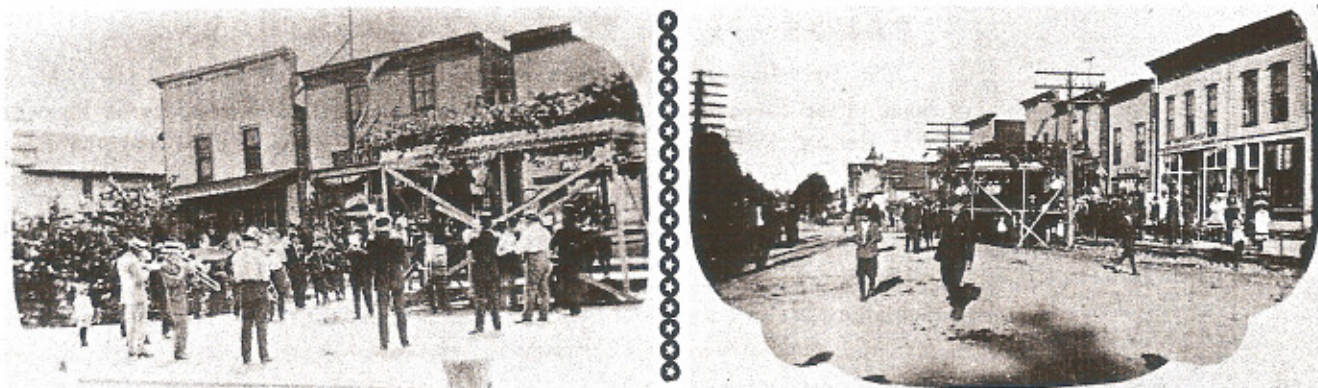


The following people supplied "WELCOME BACK" with photos, newspaper articles, books, stories, etc. for this issue: Mrs. Leona Vincent, Mrs. Harry Clemens, Mrs. Rhea Cronin, Mrs. Etta Olthouse, Mrs. Lillian Schultz, Mr. Ted Schantz, Mrs. Carl Lass, Sr., Mrs. Doris Green, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph House, Mr. Keith Bowman, Mrs. Warren Martin, and Mr. Art Bowman.

The people who have volunteered information for all issues of WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC have done so from a desire to be helpful. When there are discrepancies we trust people will understand that an oral history is not completely factual, but it is a recording of how people in our area remember certain events, people, etc. We are grateful for people who do come forward and share their wealth of information, for without their help we could not carry on this project.

The committee staff for the seventh issue has been Editor, Kenneth R. Gackler; Photo Reproduction, Jay L. Shook; Layout and Printing, Edward and Don Passenger; Research, Mary Crumback, Eve Geerligns, and Lorraine Crumback.

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This is what is meant by a bandstand, known as a "bowery". It was covered with branches to shade the speaker for the Fourth of July. The speakers for early Independence Day celebrations included politicians like Senator Hartley Russell. A part of the program was always music by the band.



CALEDONIA BANDS

Allan Bowman Betzner was born in 1860, the son of Samuel and Leah (Bowman) Betzner. After the death of her first husband Leah Betzner later came from Ontario to Michigan with Allan and her daughter Elizabeth, and married Christian Clemens. To this union the following children were born: Alvin Bowman Clemens, Oscar Bowman Clemens, Simon Bowman Clemens and May Bowman Clemens. Their mother's maiden name of Bowman was given to all the children, as this was a popular custom among the Mennonite people.

The two brothers Allan Bowman Betzner and Simon Bowman Clemens, who had the same mother, found they were very musically inclined, as was the whole family, and formed many of the bands in this area.

The Caledonia Band began in 1887 with Allan Betzner as the first leader. Later in 1912 Simon Clemens was listed as the leader. The musical groups that were formed went under other names such as the Caledonia Cornet Band with Allan Betzner featured on the cornet. At one time they were known as the Betzner and Clemens Orchestra. Simon Clemens conducted a school of dancing in the I.O.O.F. Hall about 1908, with the waltz, two-step and barn dancing being in vogue at that time.

Allan Betzner married Alice Whitney who was the sister of Chet Whitney, one of the early publishers of the Caledonia newspaper. Alice (Whitney) Betzner was an accomplished piano player and went about the country with a horse and buggy giving piano lessons.

Allan Betzner had a real estate and fire insurance office in Caledonia and was also a notary public. Many people will remember the large black safe that stood in his office first on the north side of the street next to the Caledonia Locker and later in the lawyer's office across the street. The name Allan B. Betzner was printed in large gold letters and it stood close to the window.

The Betznors resided on Church Street in Caledonia and their daughter Doris (Betzner) Green, who now lives in Grand Rapids, recalls growing up there. Mrs. Green still has her mother's piano, enjoys playing it and has been a music teacher for several years. She has two sons, Gordon and Allan Green. Allan is also pursuing a musical career.

It seems that the musical talent is passed from generation to generation as a heritage of appreciation for one of the finer arts of life.



Do you recall the square dancing in the Grange Halls, maybe at Bowne Centre, Caledonia or Whitneyville? The Odd Fellows Hall, then known as Kennedy's Hall, was a popular place to square dance too. Some of the square dance callers included George Geib, Henry Holly, Minor Cook who sang them and at one time played a violin. He also had his own orchestra with Ernest Forbes of Cascade. Bud Skinner (Harold Skinner's grandfather) also called square dances and played a fiddle.



Austin and Otto Bowman who played in the first Gaines Band during the 1880's to 1900 in their band uniforms. (Taken from a tintype)

BANDS – QUARTETS – ORCHESTRAS

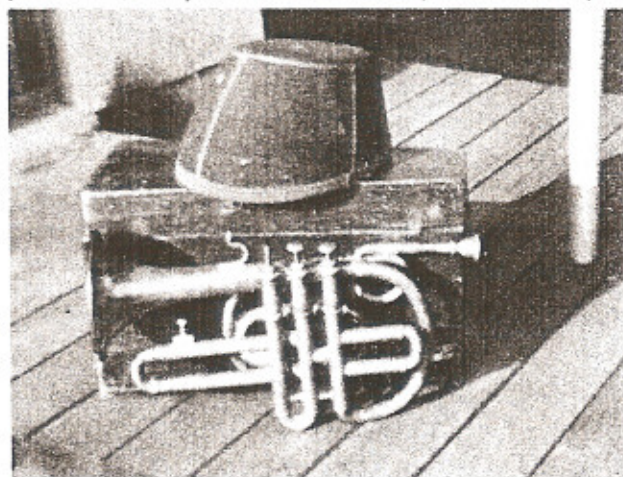
The first Gaines Band began in the 1880's and was led by LeRoy Allen. Some of the fifteen to eighteen members included Otto Bowman, Byron Bowman, Will Baling, Austin Bowman, Bert Blaine, Melvin Ryno, Albert and Joe Bruebaker, Allan Betzner, Elo Bowman, Roland Kelley, J. Lewis Barnaby and Verne Dodge. LeRoy Allen, who was Luella Martin's father, played the cornet. Otto Bowman played the baritone horn. His son Carl Bowman majored in music and plays in a large symphony orchestra in New York City. He also arranges and publishes his own anthems. Will Baling, who played bass horn, was Lawrence Hanna's grandfather. Austin Bowman, who played the bass drum and E flat alto horn, started as a teenager at the age of sixteen. He is the father of Keith Bowman. Bert Blaine played the clarinet. Melvin Ryno, who lived in Austin Wood's place, played the E flat cornet shown in the photograph. This was an excellent band and they took many first places in the small band competitions at Rome City, Indiana, and the Kent County Fair.

The second Gaines Band formed in the early 1900's with a merging of the members between the first and second band. The second band was possibly led by Simon Clemens or Allan Betzner and some of the members included: Alvin Clemens, who was also in the Furniture City Band, Oscar Clemens, who was a partner in Clemens & Gingrich, one of the first power silo companies, Otis Vreeland, Don Allen, Chester Allen and Verne Dodge. Alvin Clemens was the clarinet player, and was one of the best in Grand Rapids. Later he was a member of the Shrine Band. Oscar Clemens, his brother, played the bass horn and also played in the Shrine Band. Otis Vreeland was a very large man and was remembered to be as comical as he was large. He was a top musician and played the clarinet and violin. Don Allen was organizer of the Maple City Four, a quartet that later sang on WLS from Chicago. He taught music at Harvey, Illinois, High School all his teaching career. This band also won many band tournaments. Some of the other bands didn't even try because they knew this one would win.

The third Gaines Band started a little later with Simon Clemens again as the leader. Members included: Horace Geib who played the clarinet, Frank Geib of Martin on the cornet, Ray Rawlings, Hibbard Hale the trumpet player and bugler in the A.E.F. WWI, "Art" Hale, Henry Brown, Lloyd Brown, Floyd "Doc" Overholt, Will DeMann, Roland Dodge on cornet, Buell Hunsberger of Florida played baritone and George Yonker of Freeport was on bass.

The fourth band with Simon Clemens as leader included Pete Longstreet, Irving Yonker, who is now a missionary for the UB Church, Bob Riggs, John King of Leighton, a cornet player, the Roy Dodge "boys", and many Overholts including, Dean "Dick" Overholt, Vernon "Toots" Overholt and Lawrence "Mose" Overholt.

This is not a record of all those in the area with musical talents, and we are sure there are many others who have not been reported. But it has been a cross-section of a few and an attempt to give an idea of how it was to those who aren't old enough to remember, and to those who do, maybe bring back a few fond memories. History has been defined as HIS STORY. Every historian records history through his terms and interpretation of his story. This is our story in an attempt to record some of the musical history of our area.



This is Melvin Ryno's cornet and band hat used in the first Gaines Band between 1880 and 1900. The square front bill is missing. This now belongs to Walt Bowman of California.

QUARTETS WERE NUMEROUS IN THE AREA TOO

The quartet from Leighton Township, south of Green Lake could put on an entire evening's performance completely unaccompanied. The four included Floyd Watkins, Harvey Wiggins, Leonard Lessden and Emery Jones, who was also a reader and very good at reciting poems. Emery had a favorite about a mother-in-law and all that it took to keep her quiet and happy - like letting her split the wood - milk the cows . . etc. He was father to Lenore (Jones) Steeby.

Another quartet included Boyd McWhinney, Vern Loring, Frank Denise, and N. C. Thomas. Boyd McWhinney was a very good 1st tenor and was often encouraged to go "big time". His son is Gordon McWhinney of Middleville. Vern Loring was Gertrude Higley's father. N. C. or Nathan Thomas was a well known auctioneer who was booked ahead three months in advance for auctions that were held daily. Articles that were sold in large bundles for a quarter would be worth a fortune now to antique dealers. N. C. Thomas, who was the son of A. D. Thomas, an early pioneer, started out originally as buttermaker in Caledonia, graduated from Michigan State College, moved to Wayland, and later returned to Caledonia as postmaster. He was also partner in the Thomas & Vincent General Store in Caledonia. The group sang for many Old Pioneer meetings. Their favorite included a song about a "bald headed man at the end of a row - head so hard his hair wouldn't grow!" Another favorite song was the one about "a bird on a limb, limb on a tree, tree in the ground and the green grass grew all around," etc. It was real harmony and we now would call it barbershop singing.

The Gaines U.B. Church had a quartet in great demand, with Frela Brown, Art Bowman and two excellent bass singers, Bert Allen and Roy Dodge.

The Gaines U.B. Church also had an orchestra group in the middle 20's and 30's with Alice (Maier) Burgess on the drums, Dean "Dick" Overholt - trumpet, Frela Brown - violin, Alman Overholt - violin, Doris (Maier) Bergy - saxophone, J. L. Barnaby, Austin Wood, and Pauline Bowman on piano. The church had another group known as "The Old Time Singing School," an evangelistic revival group that gave programs for about two years in an effort raise money to decorate the church. Members of this group included Art and Hazel Bowman, Mrs. Riggs, Mabel Dennison, Elizabeth Sherk, Cora Allen, Bert Allen, Austin Bowman, Keith Bowman and Pauline Bowman, Mrs. Frela Brown and others. One of the favorite songs was "Come Where the Lillies Bloom," featuring much close harmony and a bass solo usually sung by Austin Bowman. Another favorite was "Don't Give Up the Farm, Boys."

Before the time of radio and television one source of entertainment included dancing to some of the local dance orchestras, such as Simon Clemens and Otis Vreeland's, which was very good and in great demand. Another well known dance orchestra that traveled around in this area was the family group headed by the father J. L. Barnaby who played the fiddle. Wayne Barnaby played the cornet, Bill Barnaby - drum, Lorena Barnaby - piano, and Jeanette Barnaby on saxophone. (Mrs. Marlo Crocker, Barlow Lake.)

In Simon Gehl's Orchestra, Simon played the violin. He had been nicknamed "Skimmer," probably because he was the champion butter maker in many contests at Caledonia. Simon's son Howard "Boots" Gehl was the drummer, Kenneth and Keith Gehl played saxophone and Lorraine Gehl accompanied on the piano.

Another popular orchestra of the later era was the Bartels, Mr. and Mrs. Bartel and their son Fred.



About 1908 a chorus of "very fine" male singers was common in Caledonia, known as the Bum's Chorus. They were noted for keeping the town awake, or awakening citizens after they had fallen asleep, usually choosing the wee hours of the morning to show their talent. Some of the favorite songs were "Sweet Adeline," "Down by the Old Mill Stream," "K-K-Latoe," "The Bird on Nellie's Hat" and "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree." They usually began their entertainment on Main Street, grouped together in the stairways of the I.O.O.F. Hall and Telephone office.



THE BUM'S CHORUS - 1908
 Walter Seibert, Roy Konkle,
 Gordon Bergy, Burdette Lybarker



A MUSICAL FAMILY
 Oscar B. Clemens, Alice (Whitney) Betzner, Simon B. Clemens, his wife
 Nina Clemens, Alvin B. Clemens, Allan B. Betzner



MANDOLIN CLUB - Taken at Mrs. Hubbard's
 Back Row: Hazel Rowland, Jennie Belle LaFever, Mrs. Elmer Hale,
 Florence Miller, Alice Wilson, Ira Henderson, Helen Sherk
 Second Row: Eliza McConnell, Rhea Kinsey, Mrs. Hubbard, Tommy Cat,
 Arlie Kinsey, Hattie White, Essie Stauffer, Timmy Cat
 Front Row: Peggy Wilson, Marian Clark

Mrs. Grace Hubbard, wife of Dr. H. C. Hubbard, organized a Mandolin Club about 1905. This club consisted of mandolins, guitars, violins, octarinos, and piano, and at one time had 14 members. Mrs. Hubbard asked no compensation for teaching them how to play these instruments, but spent time with them for the mere joy she received. They met at her home for practice once a week, and three or four times during the winter gave concerts in such places as Dutton, Corning, Moline, Byron Center and Middleville. The proceeds received from the concerts were not measured in money, reported one of the group, "as all we asked was a delicious supper served by the society of the church, lodge or club where we performed. Of course we really did need a big meal after being out in the cold so long and being transported in a sleigh."



Can you remember listening to the three talented ladies who played on the same piano all at once? They are Mrs. Warren Martin (Luella), Mrs. Keith Bowman (Pauline), and Mrs. Dean Overholt (Almah). They have played for various events around the community including many Farm Bureau meetings. They began playing together about forty years ago, and still do occasionally when they can get together with Almah Overholt who now lives in Florida. Luella Martin also played for Gaines United Brethren Church for twenty years. They are all accomplished pianists in themselves.

KRAFT SCHOOL — CALEDONIA TOWNSHIP

GEROULD SCHOOL DISTRICT #5 TO A FOUR UNIT APARTMENT BUILDING

A meeting was called by Lyman Gerould on the 3rd of February, 1855, to form a new school district. It was to be called the Gerould School, District No. 5, Caledonia Township. Later it was to be known as the Kraft School.

At the meeting it was voted that Lyman Gerould be the Director, Sheldon Barlow the Moderator, Harry Green to be assessor. They established a site on the Gerould farm (southeast side of Kraft and 68th Street) where they built a log school house, to be completed by June 1856. They raised \$6.00 for the purchase of a table, chair and Webster's Dictionary.

It was voted to have eight months of school to be taught by a female teacher. Each scholar was to furnish one cord of wood. Later the school district bought the wood from Mr. Riordian for \$1.10 a cord. On May 17, 1864, Jacob Schantz Sr. bought the Gerould farm where the school was located. Jacob Schantz, Jr., father of Ted Schantz and Lillian House, went to this school. According to Ted Schantz the log school was used for 32 years, that is until 1888. Some of the teachers that taught in the log school and their wages per month were: 1876 Ellen Clark \$30, 1877 Kate Troy \$30, 1878 Mary Bergy \$30, 1879 Lily Robsin \$25, 1888 Mary Cavanaugh \$20.

In 1888 District No. 5 had a school meeting and voted to build a new school. Jacob Schantz was paid \$6 to level a site for the new building. Members of the building committee were George Kraft, Patrick Egan, and Henry Schantz. School board members were: Director, George Kraft; Moderator, Jacob Schantz Jr.; Assessor, John Maves. Henry Snyder was the builder. It was to be completed in 1889 at a cost of \$850.

In 1890 Patrick Egan furnished wood for 95 cents a cord, in 1891 James Riordian furnished wood for 83-1/3 cents a cord. In 1897 Jacob Schantz was elected director for a term of 3 years. In 1898 Zim Wenger was elected moderator. In 1899 at the school meeting it was voted to buy a bell, not to cost more than \$20. In 1905 it was voted to deposit school money in the State Bank of Caledonia. In 1908 it was voted to have eight months of school instead of nine. The following were on the School board during later years: George Kraft, A. W. Good, Zim Wenger, Jacob Schantz, Jr., J. S. Pierce, Patrick Egan, John Maves, Gottlieb Minkus, Henry Schantz, C. Homrich, J. P. Murphy, Leo Fitch, William Nulty, and Ted Schantz.

The following is a list of teachers and their wages per month. 1895 Eli Good \$30, 1896 Jennie Patterson \$30, 1898 Lillian Moore \$28, 1899 Milton Kraft \$25, 1901 Ward Bowman \$26, 1902 Milton Barnaby \$31, 1903 Robert Compton \$30, 1903 Ida Wenger \$30, 1904 Robert Mervau \$38, 1905 Lawrence Bridegan \$36, 1906 Lydia Kraft \$30, 1907 Miss V. Pierce \$35, 1908 Emma Ruehs \$35, 1909 Edward Potted \$40, 1911 Jessie Diefenbaker \$45, 1921 Mary Loring \$100, 1922 Mary Loring \$90, 1923 Lillian House \$75, 1924 Berdie Snyder \$85, Florence Buer \$90, 1926 Minetta Snyder \$90, 1927 Anna Schantz \$90, 1928 Mrs. A. Cook \$90, 1929 Loretta Hanna \$100, 1932 Addie Bechtel \$50.

In 1939 the Arthur C. Finkbeiner Post No. 305 Caledonia American Legion purchased the school building. They had it moved to the site by Emmons Lake and the Caledonia Lakeside Park. The land was granted to Jacob Kinsey by the Military Service of the United States in 1853. This land was purchased by the Caledonia American Legion Post in 1936. They sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Tape in 1939 who then sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Herman Hale the same year.

Before the school was moved to Caledonia Amos Schultz dynamited the steps away. First it was placed on skids and loaded on a truck that brought it to the village site. The Schroder Brothers Team was used to move it the final distance.

The American Legion planned on using it for meetings. They never did use it for this purpose so it remained empty until 1945. In 1945 Mr. and Mrs. Warren Tape and Mr. and Mrs. Amos Schultz as Tape and Schultz purchased it for a storage room. In 1946 the Schultzes purchased the Tapes' interest in the building and continued to use it while they were in the Ford Tractor business.

In 1951 the Schultzes started to build a 4 family apartment building with Peter Datema, Sr. as the contractor. Henry Molenaar did all the interior decorating, Lawrence Timmers did the electrical work, and Amos Schultz the heating and plumbing. Harry Tubergen painted the outside of the building which stands 40 feet high. In August 1952 the three upper apartments were finished and tenants moved in. The lower apartment was completed in 1954.

KRAFT SCHOOL – CALEDONIA TOWNSHIP



1910



1976



1933

STUDENTS AT GEROULD SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

First row: Hazel Sarver, Joyce Herman,
Avis Schantz, Mathilda Kluige, Gerald
Orcutt, Dorothy Wisnieski.

Second row: Merle Lass, Russell
Sarver, Ward Schantz, Ralph Fischer,
Helen Kluige, Bill Dodge, Louise
Dodge.

Third row: Gerald Homrich, Lewis
Wisnieski, Edward Wisnieski, Violet
Cohen, Harold Fischer, Jr. Sarver,
Lester Jahnke.

Mrs. Addie Bechtel was the teacher.

