



WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SAD NEWS TO SHARE

It is with a sad note that we have to report the death of Rose Marie Hengesbach, wife of Ted Hengesbach aka. (St. Nick). Her obituary can be viewed at www.McGannHay.com or by just Googling her name. She led a very interesting full life and will always be remembered as the driving force and constant supporter of Ted.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

A grateful "Thank You" goes out to the family of Marie Pohl for remembering The Westphalia Area Historical Society for memorials at the time of her passing. Marie was a very interesting person to visit with; her memory of the Westphalia bank robbery was exceptional.

www.westphaliahistory.weebly.com
www.facebook.com/westphalia1836

LOTS OF UPDATES!

2021 Featured Exhibit

In a nutshell there will be none: Because of the 4th wave of COVID-19 now going through there will not be enough time to set something up for the summer. Perhaps later we might be able to open the Museum with the permanent Westphalia display for viewing.

Cemetery Walk

A brief, social-distanced, mask-wearing meeting was held with officers and Directors some time ago to discuss the possibility of a Cemetery Walk in September. The opinion was that we might be able to pull it off. A committee will be formed in the near future. In the meantime there are no plans for regular monthly meetings at this time.

It Is Still a Mystery

Who left the bag containing Michael Bengrath's 1872 diary and 1936 newspaper clippings on the Museum door knob? We know that Michael Benrgrath had a sister named Elisabeth who was married to John Trierweller. And we know that John and Elisabeth had children who were born here in Westphalia. Anna, a daughter, married John Wohlsheid, Innocent, a son. married Katherine Hayes. Catherine, a daughter, married Francis Michaelis and Michael married Anna M. Schafer. Did a grandchild or a great-grandchild of one of these named come to Michael Bengrath's hometown with a bag of history?

Early Westphalia Area Travel Routes, By Allan Pohl

When driving, biking, or even walking around the area have you ever wondered how the road system came about?

When Westphalia's founding fathers came to Clinton County in 1836, there were no local or territory/state government maintained roads in the area. There were, however, various sized footpaths used by Native Americans for trade and migration and the so-called Dexter Trail, which stretched from Detroit to Lyons (more on this later).

A section line map (of what would later become Westphalia Township) was prepared by Lucius Lyon in 1827 and is included on the next page. He surveyed the township in March and April of 1827. As you can see, the township was extremely swampy south of what is now Price Road especially over the southern half. The village of Westphalia is now located at the intersection of Sections 4, 5, 8, and 9.

A main trail, which surveyors of the time characterized as a "broad Indian trail to Detroit" was later known as the northern branch of the Grand River Trail and later Old State Road. It started in Pontiac, and ran northwest with the Shiawassee Trail until it reached Byron. There it turned west following the north side of the Looking Glass River. At Round Lake, in Victor Township, it veered northwest passing the northeast side of Muskrat Lake and continued in a westerly direction along the north side of what is now Centerline Road. The trail then veered northwest at Grange Road to a trail located midway between Parks Road and Kimball Highway. At this point the traveler could have gone west to the village of Cocoosh (west of Lyons) or continued over Stony Creek and cross the Maple River northwest of Pewamo. It then connected with the Saginaw and Grand River Trail, taking them on the north side of the Grand River to present day Grand Rapids and beyond to Lake Michigan.

One trail (see dotted line on map) branched off to the north of this trail. This route crossed Cutler Road east of Grange and ran northwest crossing into Ionia County, south of Pratt Road. The trail then followed Prairie Creek to the Grand River traveling through a sugar making site and orchard on the east side of Spaulding Road, north of David Highway.

Another Native American trail that came to be used and widened by pioneers, later became known as the "Englishman's Trail" so-called because a gentleman named John Milne formerly of London, England traveled it and built the first house in Portland Township in 1833. The route traveled west along the north side of the Looking Glass River from DeWitt to Wacousta. In 1836, Jesse Monroe extended the trail seven miles (possibly Herbison Road?) to his land in Eagle Township, including building the first bridge across the river (present day Howe Road). This route eventually joined up with the southern branch of the Grand River Trail west of Eagle.

In May of 1833, the Samuel Dexter party left Detroit for Ionia taking the northern branch of the Grand River Trail to Laingsburg. At Round Lake with the assistance of Benjamin Williams, a local trader, they left the main trail and took the side trail along the north side of the Looking Glass River to Wabwahnashseepee (present day DeWitt). From there with the assistance of the local chief's son Blackbird they traveled west until entering Riley Township in Section 35. They then cut a new trail in a

northwesterly direction until crossing the northern Grand River Trail near where Centerline and Dexter Trail roads intersect today. The rest of the route to Lyons was blazed new. This new route through Riley Township to Lyons became known as Dexter Trail.

The earliest settlers of Westphalia also had trails to get from place to place. Present day Hanses Road was likely the first, due to the first settlers purchasing land in Section 5.

The second likely was what is now Pioneer Road, built in part by David Wells in Section 36, who settled in this location in 1839. Pioneer Road originally may have been a Native American trail, though it is not documented on the survey map nor accompanying notes. Wells is also credited with cutting a trail to Portland (possibly Cutler Road?).

The Nettleton brothers extended Pioneer Road all the way to Tallman by 1851. There is some thought that the founder of DeWitt, David Scott built a road from DeWitt to Westphalia Township though no proof has yet been found. Might Cutler and Pioneer Roads be a part of this route?

Westphalia Township was created by Legislative Act on March 21, 1839. At the first township meeting a month later, Conrad Martin, Nicholas Martin, and John Hanses were appointed Highway Commissioners.

By 1864, the only roads completed within the entire township were Centerline, Price, Jones, Jason, Pratt (from the Ionia County line to Bauer Road), and Cutler. These roads as well as the future roads were built by the families of the immediate areas and in return the families were absolved of their road tax assessment. The current roads south of Pratt Road (Sections 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and south) consisted mostly of swamp land. Virtually all of the current roads in these areas were not completed until the swamps were drained. These likely were built with logs cut the width of the road and laid side by side then covered with dirt to level the road above the level of the swamp.

So the next time you travel our area roads please consider looking around. You just may see a glimpse of the past.



The two darker lines (added for this article) represent Price and Grange Roads.

To compare this map with more 'current' maps (1896 and 1976), see the inside back and front covers of the 'Brown Book' *Westphalia Area History, 1836-1976, 140 Years of Growth*.