



## Starr Cowbells An Early Oakland County Industry

### First Produced In Royal Oak Township in 1831

Cowbells are now mainly a collector's item but when the early settlers came into Oakland County to farm their open, unfenced lands, cowbells were a much needed and useful article in helping them keep track of their animals. Thus began Royal Oak Township's first industry.

In 1831, Orson Starr and his wife, Rhoda Gibbs Starr, came to Oakland County from Richmond, Ontario County, New York. He bought 80 acres of land for \$160.00 in the northwest corner of Section 9, Royal Oak Township and built a two-room log house on what is now the southwest corner of Rochester and Thirteen Mile Road. Just to the north of his home he constructed a factory building and began making cowbells.

Orson had learned the trade from his father, Vine Starr, who manufactured cowbells in Richmond, New York and also after settling in Avon Township.

The material used in making the bells, sheet iron, zinc and copper was purchased from wholesale metal dealers in Detroit. At the factory a metal pattern was laid on a strip of sheet iron and carefully outlined. When the whole sheet was marked, it was placed under shears, operated by hand and the rough bells cut out. The name, "O. Starr" and the size was impressed on the inside of each bell form. Later a star was substituted for the manufacturer's name.

The bells were made in eight sizes. The smallest was three and a half inches high and two and a half inches at its greatest diameter. They were used on sheep and sold for about \$3.00 a dozen. Number eight was eight inches high and six inches at its greatest diameter. The larger sizes were used on cattle and even on horses and sold for \$15.00 a dozen.

After shaping the bells, the sides were lapped over each other, holes punched along the middle of the laps and riveted together. Three holes were punched into the top. The clapper bolt to which the clapper was later attached was riveted in the center hole and each end of the yoke, or handle, was riveted in the outer holes. The entire bell was then covered with a thin coating of brass, that was made in the



Orson Starr

factory from the copper and zinc. Unless the joints were properly lapped, joined and brass coated, a tone similar to a cracked bell resulted.

The success of the brazing operation depended largely on the quality of the clay used in the firing process. Royal Oak's clay was particularly suited for that purpose. It was first finely ground in a mill operated by a horse, then mixed with manure to prevent disintegration from the intense heat of the furnace.

The cowbell was put in a clay bell-shaped form yoke end down. Strips of brass were placed along each of the outside joints, with the annular space filled with hickory bark. A smaller bell was placed in the larger bell and the annular space filled in a similar manner. The whole was then covered with a clay lid having a small opening in its center and placed in the furnace where they remained until a greenish-blue flame, from the oxidation of the zinc in the brass, appeared in the clay lid.

The bells were then removed from the furnace, placed in a container and rolled about the floor until thoroughly coated

with brass and the surplus molten metal had settled to the bottom of the clay form. They were immediately removed from the container, plunged into water, then taken from the clay form and set aside for the attachment of the clapper and a final inspection:

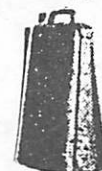
It was the care used in the finishing process that made the Starr cowbells of outstanding quality and in such great demand. Today, the Starr cowbells are prized collector's items because of their excellent tone, the available information on their method of manufacture and their identifying markings of either the name, "O. Starr" or the "star" logo.

In those earlier days, barter was commonly used in exchange for goods. Orson Starr was often required to accept his payment for the cowbells in farm produce. According to his grandson, Edwin A. Starr, one winter he had five barrels of maple syrup in his attic, in all shapes and forms, depending on the utensils in which the farmer's syrup had been poured.

Orson Starr's business did prosper and as an increasing number of settlers moved



Construction of the cowbell. Right to left riveted sides and top, with attached yoke and clapper bolt, before brazing.



Finished bell.



Side of bell, showing attached clapper.



**Fiftieth Annual Reunion of the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry held at the Oakland County Courthouse at Pontiac. The cowbell held in the hand of a veteran was taken off a cow's neck near**

**Wixom the day before the Regiment left for war, September 3, 1862. The bell was highly prized and was rung at every reunion.**

westward, large quantities of his cowbells were sold to wholesale dealers who distributed them throughout the Western States and Territories.

When he died in 1873, Orson Starr's cowbell factory closed, but it has been said that in the production of this once necessary article no one ever achieved the same fame as this Oakland County pioneer bell-maker.

One Starr cowbell found a very important place in Oakland County Civil War history. Most of the young men in the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry were from Oakland County. The Regiment organized and trained by Colonel Moses Wisner, was to leave Pontiac for active duty on the morning of September 4, 1863. The day before their departure Col. Wisner granted leave to the young soldiers to bid their

families good-bye.

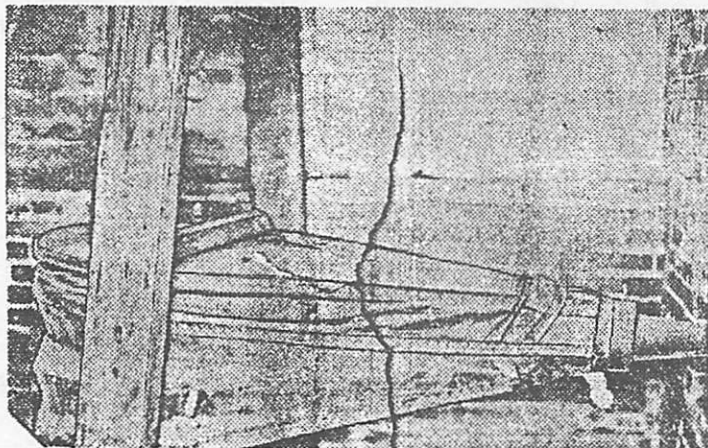
When Warren Baker and the Calhoun boys, Thomas and Walter, were returning to camp from their homes in Commerce Township, they saw by the roadside, peacefully grazing, "Uncle Sam Williams" cow. Baker suggested they confiscate her cowbell and take it along with them to war. This they did and it was rung in every camp and battle.

After the war it remained in the possession of the 22nd Regiment Veteran's organization as a prized possession and was rung at each of their reunions. When the last veteran of that Regiment had died, the Starr cowbell, along with other artifacts and memorabilia of the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Regiment, was given to the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. It is now on permanent display at the Governor Moses Wisner Historic House.



**Starr cowbell carried by soldiers of the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry during Civil War, showing the "star" and dates.**

**Engraving on back of bell. This bell was taken from a Cow's neck by members of Co. I. 22nd Mich. Vol. Infantry, Sept. 3rd, 1862 and was rung in every Camp and Battle. The Regiment was in during the War of the Rebellion.**



**Bellows that furnished the blast for the furnace where bells were brazed.**

**Materials and pictures for this article taken from The Detroit Free Press, Sunday, February 26, 1930, Royal Oak, Michigan, The Early Years. Pub. 1971, Golden Jubilee, "71 Inc.**

**Collections of Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society, Vol. II, Ed. by L.D. Avery.**

**Dunlap Scrapbook, Vol. II, Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society Collections.**



## Volunteer Recognition

In this issue of the Oakland Gazette, we are pleased to honor Marion Roush for the many hours she has donated during her long association with the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society.

Marion joined the Society in 1961 and has contributed time, energy and enthusiasm as a volunteer since 1962 -- twenty-five years of commitment! Approached to serve on the Board of Directors, she willingly agreed, and at the same time accepted the challenging role of Membership Secretary, a job she still holds. She has also preformed the duties of Board Secretary for the past ten years and at one time served on the Finance and Budget Committee.

What are some of her responsibilities? When you receive a membership offer, a copy of the Board meeting minutes, a post card reminding you of the expiration of your membership or of an upcoming Board meeting, you know that Marion has been efficiently working to keep Board members informed and the records up to date or to increase the number of Society members. She has conducted countless membership drives, once putting out a special **Gazette** in connection with this undertaking. Our expanding rolls are due in large part to Marion's efforts.

A lifetime resident of Oakland County, Marion says it was her Grandmother May-bee who long ago inspired her interest in history and genealogy. Combining this interest with a desire to participate in civic affairs, she has served on the Pontiac Historical Commission and co-chaired the committee to get historical markers placed in Pontiac for the Centennial in 1961. One disappointment occurred with the unsuccessful fight to save the Hodges House, a Pontiac hotel torn down in the 1960's despite the dedicated work of Marion and others.

In 1980 after 32 years of employment with Product Engineering Department of

## Volunteers Needed

We are urgently in need of volunteers.

Without dedicated persons who are willing to give of themselves to help us promote the preservation of our Oakland County history, the Society will not be able to continue its educational programs to the public.

We need Guides to conduct the group tours which will begin again the first of April. They should be interested in history and enjoy working with people of all ages; training will be provided.

Our office and library needs clerical help for answering the telephone, typing, working on mailings and as receptionists.

With the coming of Spring, many people with some experience in lawn and yard work or general household repairs are needed to help with the numerous maintenance chores at the Wisner Historic House and grounds.

If you have some time to give, please call the office at 338-6732 for more information.

## Calendar Of Events

- March 5 7 p.m., Pontiac Art Center, Lecture by Elizabeth Sparks Adams "Lillian Drake Avery 1856-1930, Up-To-Date Woman."  
Hosted by Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society.
- March 16 Sunday, 1:00-4:00 p.m.  
Beginning of Walk-In Tours every third Sunday afternoon.
- March 19 9:30 a.m. Board of Directors Meeting, Pine Grove Carriage House.
- March 28 Closed for Good Friday.
- April 1 Wisner Historic House and Grounds open for Group Tours, Tuesday through Friday, 9:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
Call 338-6732 for Reservations.

Pontiac Division, General Motors, Marion retired as Senior Purchasing Agent. Not content to sit on the sidelines, she has continued to volunteer her time for the Society and is also an active member and past Regent of the D.A.R., current President of the Michigan Huguenot Society as well as past Recording Secretary of the National Huguenot Society. Her involvement with Children of the American Revolution fulfills a desire to work with young people.

It should come as no surprise to learn that throughout her life Marion Roush has been eager to accept a challenge and has sought variety in her many activities. We are grateful that she has chosen to give her time and talents to our Society. Her work has been invaluable and we are the richer for her dedication. —Georgene Sloan

## New Members Welcomed

We welcome the following new members. Their interest in the work of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society and its activities is deeply appreciated.

### NEW MEMBERS

Mr. and Mrs. Gerard Carlin  
Mrs. James F. Clark  
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Harrison  
Mr. and Mrs. John Ireland  
Mr. and Mrs. John Irwin  
Mrs. Edith A. Johns  
Mr. David Liddy  
Mrs. Camilla Liggett  
Mrs. Evelyn Ludowise  
Mr. and Mrs. Francis McMath  
Mrs. Clifford Powell  
Ms. Mary Snyder  
Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Sutton  
Mrs. Arnold P. Thingstad  
Mr. Norman Thomas  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Watkins  
Mr. and Mrs. Ronnie C. Voorheis  
Mr. Rodger K. Zeller

### SENIOR LIFE MEMBERS

Mrs. Elizabeth L. Broders  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Williams

### IN MEMORIAM

Mr. David Bleakley  
Mrs. Beecher Fawcett  
Mrs. Arno Hulet  
Mrs. Donald Patterson  
Mrs. Ora Porritt  
Mrs. Walter Sheffield  
Mrs. Edwin L. Tibbals, Jr.

## Down On The Farm

The Barn Museum in the Carriage House will be featuring displays of farming and farm animals in the exhibit cases when the museum opens April 1st. Also on display are some pieces of farm equipment used by farmers when agriculture was Oakland County's primary industry.

Be sure to see it when you make your first visit this Spring to the Gov. Moses Wisner Historic House and Grounds.

## Crafters Meet

The Pine Grove Crafters have been busy during the winter preparing craft items to re-stock the Potpourri Shoppe for the Spring opening.

For anyone interested in joining this group, they will be meeting in the Carriage House at 9:00 a.m. on March 12th and 26th, April 2nd, 9th, 23rd and 30th.

Call the office 338-6732 for further information.

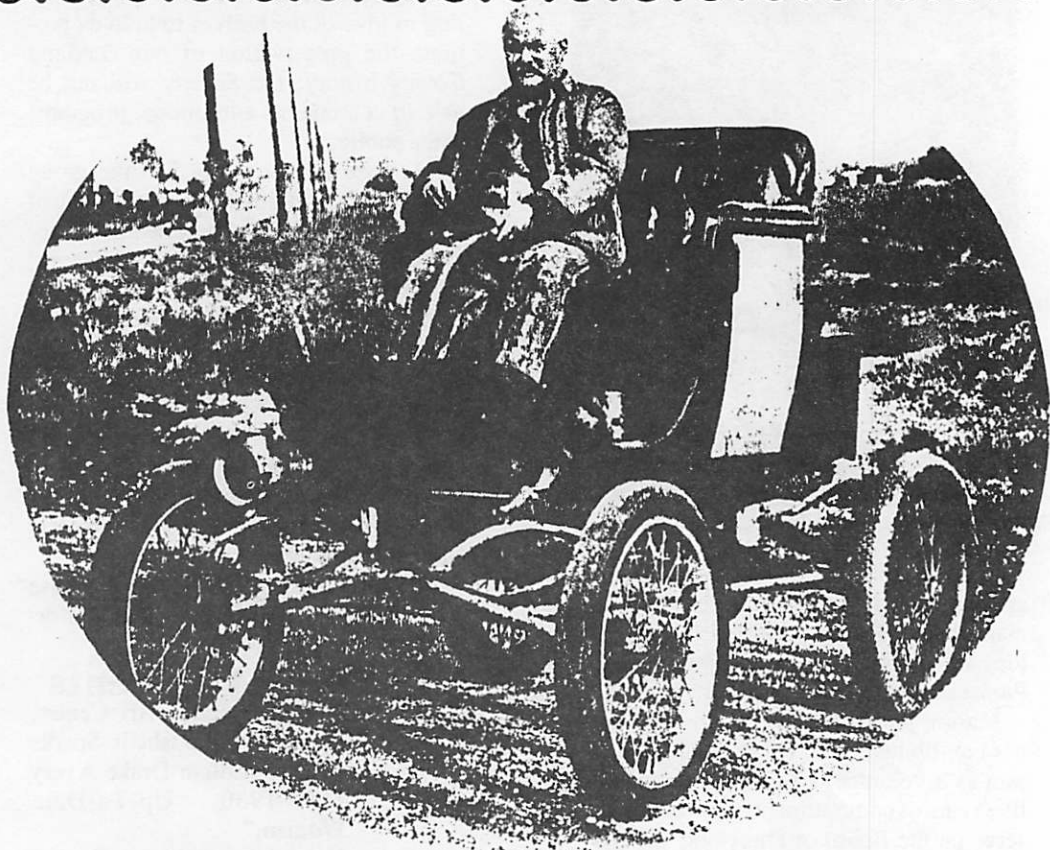
## Historic Sites In Oakland County

The Affleck House, in Bloomfield Hills, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1940, has recently been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

YESTERYEARS—“Memory like the ivy, clings to olden times and ways and things.”

## Chain of Title Covering Pine Grove 1825 - 1845 - 1945

Few historic homes in Michigan have a more interesting or romantic history than Pine Grove, the homestead of Moses and Angeolina Wisner. The first entry in the chain of title covering the property was a government entry, dated October 20, 1825, to Nathaniel W. Mack. It passed through several hands before being conveyed by Joshua and Lucinda Terry to Moses Wisner sometime after July 2, 1844, when the deed was signed and before July 22, 1845, when the deed was recorded by Moses Wisner. It remained in the Wisner family until 1945 when Florence Clark Wallace, a grand-daughter, sold it to the Oakland County Pioneer and Veterans Historical Foundation, since 1962 the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society.



Harry J. Serrell in his father's 1900 model White Steamer. It was purchased by S.J. Serrell in Cleveland in 1902 for \$1,000.00 and was driven continuously until 1909, during which time it made five round trips between Pontiac and New York.

In 1905, S.J. Serrell was fined \$10.00 for speeding 8 miles an hour in Birmingham.

## Sesquicentennial News

An Oakland County Sesquicentennial Agency has been organized to coordinate the various local organizations participating in the celebration of Michigan's admission to Statehood.

At a meeting of the Agency at the Oakland County Commissioner's Auditorium on February 4th, Ruth G. Priestley and Clarke Kimball attended as representatives of our Historical Society. Conducting the meeting, Virginia DeBenham Rodgers, Chairperson of the Agency and also a member of our Board of Directors, called on members of the various organizations that were present to tell of the plans their group was making to celebrate the occasion.

While no definite plans have yet been made for our Society's participation in this historic event, it is expected that we will be meeting to do so in the near future.

## 1876 Annual Meeting Of The Oakland County Pioneer Society

At the Annual Meeting of the Oakland County Pioneer Society, at the Courthouse in Pontiac, on Tuesday, February 22, 1876, the Secretary, James Weeks reported that there were 617 names registered in the book of the Society. It was also noted in the minutes of that annual meeting that up to 1870, 231,509 persons had emigrated from the State of New York to Michigan.

## Copper Nugget Found In Rose Township

The Pontiac Gazette for Friday, January 7, 1876 reported the following news item.

“White Lake News. Elias Doty, one mile and a half west of this place, in digging up a trench for pipe dug up some copper ore, one piece weighing seven pounds and a half. Now if anyone wants to start a stock company, I think Mr. Doty will give you a show.”

## 1886 Annual Meeting Of The Oakland County Pioneer Society

Michigan had been a State for 50 years in 1886, and at the Pioneers Annual Meeting on Monday, February 22, 1886, the following preamble and resolution, offered by Mr. Mark Walter was adopted:

“WHEREAS, this is the jubilee year of Michigan as a State, and as the last legislature has provided for and appropriated \$5,000.00 to meet the expense of a public observance of the admission of Michigan into the Union; therefore RESOLVED, that the officers of the Oakland County Pioneer Society, including Judge A.C. Baldwin, ex-President, be requested and are authorized to represent this society at the semi-centennial celebration of the admission of Michigan into the Union, to be held at Lansing June 15 and 16.”

