



# THE WILDCAT THAT SAT DOWN ONE DAY AND ATE KENSINGTON

by: Charles H. Martinez

Although they lacked fur, fangs and claws, wildcats put the bite on many a Michigan pioneer, and during the 1830s and early 1840s, stifled the economic progress of the region. These wildcats were not animals, even though their victims thought them such, but reckless associations organized under the general banking law of 1837. This law in Michigan allowed any twelve freedmen to establish a banking association by simply making application to their county treasurer and clerk. Some fifty such entities were formed, most using borrowed cash, specie certificates, or worthless mortgages in place of actual capital.

Plenty of official looking notes were printed and distributed across southern Michigan and adjacent states. Redemption for specie was another matter, however, with many of these "banks" hidden in the forest primeval where only real wildcats could find them. The result was a financial catastrophe with land hungry settlers suffering the most. Six such shaky institutions, organized under the 1837 banking law, operated in Oakland County. A good example of their shenanigans is typified by the Bank of Kensington, once located in the northwest corner of Lyon Township.

The Bank of Kensington was founded on December 29, 1837 by six village speculators who drew other community members into their net by stock manipulation and promises of easy money. To acquire

the necessary capital the schemers acquired a certificate of deposit for \$50,000 from a Detroit bank on the good name and property of the honest investors duped into the plan. With the certificate of deposit on file in Kensington, bank inspectors recognized the local bank as legitimate and authorized it to commence operations. This the ringleaders did with a vengeance, printing up reams of notes that inspired confidence in the bank.

Unfortunately, circulation of the notes didn't spread as well as anticipated. Competition from other wildcatters and vague suspicions by local bumpkins were beginning to shrink the market. To overcome these problems, two of the organizers took



\$50,000 in newly issued notes to Milwaukee without consulting the honest bank directors. There they went on a buying spree that included jewelry, livestock, and city lots. Back home, Kensington Bank investors were getting nervous. The absence of their colleagues was troubling but a recent change in bank incorporation rules by the Michigan legislature was even more disturbing. So the investors went public with their concerns. A two hundred dollar



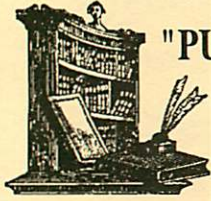
reward was offered for the return of the scoundrels or for information leading to their arrest. A Milwaukee sheriff obliged and the crooks were brought back under guard. Eventually most of the money was recovered as well.

Years ago, a pair of Bank of Kensington notes were given to our Society's Manuscript Collection. One is illustrated in this issue. The two dollar specimen displays the goddess Ceres consulting Lady Liberty as the central vignette, while Cupid and an anonymous young lady occupy two circular frames near the edges of the note. The bank president's signature, "Henry Fiske," is found on the lower right while the cashier's name, "F. Hutchinson," is missing from the lower left.

The Kensington wildcat curled up and died in 1838. No less a personage that Kingsley S. Bingham, then speaker of the Michigan house and later governor, was named receiver for the bank. The village never recovered from the scandal, being blighted by a reputation for dishonesty. In fact, an anecdote of the day was the saying that merchandise failing to reach its owner had probably "gone to Kent," the town's nickname.

The bank building was eventually converted into a Wesleyan Methodist Church before being leveled during

a periodic widening of Grand River Avenue. Most of the residents slowly moved away and the last village store disappeared around the time of the Civil War. Except for Kensington Metropark, there is little left on the map to even hint at its former site. The hopes and fears of Kensington Village have been erased by the hum of traffic on I-96 and the gentle lapping of the waves across Kent Lake.



## "PUNCHINELLO'S SECRET"

by: Mary W. Wessels,  
*Librarian*

Lillian Paull, Betty Adams, Gretchen Adler, Virginia Clohset, Rex Lamoreaux, Charles Martinez and uncounted other volunteers have established a viable research library for the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. Arranged by subject areas, it has materials on all facets and locations of Oakland County from early settler days to the present time.

What types of materials are there? Just a brief, incomplete inventory will give an overview of holdings. Books and bound newspapers, of course, are available; some with publishing dates in the 1800's. The map collection ranges from 1787 through the 1900's with plat, topographical, township, and city maps. In acid free folders are preserved manuscripts, deeds, personal records. Photographs and postcards add visual information to the collection. There are listings of grave sites in several cemeteries, marriage records, obituaries, and high school yearbooks. Last but not to be forgotten is material relating to Moses Wisner, his family, and the 22nd Michigan's gallant men in blue.

Who uses these materials? Recently students have been in the library from Lawrence Technological

University, Oakland University, Eastern Michigan University, and Oakland Community College. People from other museums have come to use materials that are only available in this library. Genealogists came both as individuals and as class members. Newspaper and television reporters request information from time to time. Many municipalities including the County of Oakland, City of Pontiac, Township of West Bloomfield, have used us as an important source. Then there have been letters from Hurricane, Utah; Poughkeepsie, New York; Austin, Texas; Auburn, Alabama; Hartland, Wisconsin plus Grand Rapids, Vassar, Lansing, Midland, and Detroit, Michigan, requested information.

Does the library need more materials? Yes, yes, yes! Yearbooks for high schools within Oakland County would help. Photographs with names and dates of families and businesses will gratefully be received. Any books or pamphlets about Oakland County history and events would be welcome additions. More cemetery grave stone readings and cemetery records are required to assist in filling genealogical inquiries. In addition to these, a blue print storage cabinet would be useful for storing maps and increasing their availability.

Please visit the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Library and explore this treasure trove. You will learn that it is not a quiet, dull place. Listen to our joyous chortles as we share an item from an old newspaper or book. Hear our triumphant "aha's" when information diligently sought is found. Join in our friendly debates on the most effective method of storage and retrieval. Help us push the walls outward to increase the storage space.

*(Why is the article titled "Punchinello's Secret"? You must visit us to learn the answer.)*

## IN MEMORIAM



**DONALD H. DAGGY**

Don Daggy, board member and past Society president, died early Sunday morning, October 15, 1995 at Crittenton Hospital in Rochester. He was 69. Death came after an eleven month struggle with cancer.

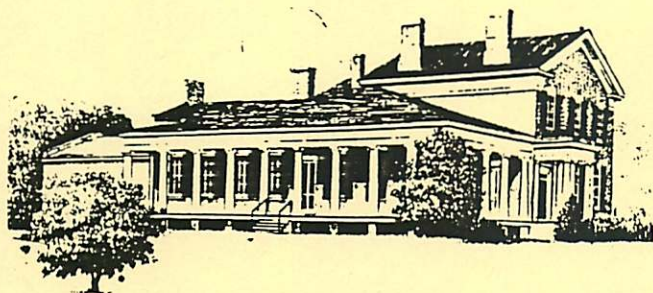
Don and his wife, Kathryn, joined this organization in 1981, following their early retirement the year before. As teachers they would pass Pine Grove on their way to and from work and were curious as to its history. Don served as president from 1984 and 1985 and board member before and after those dates.

His dedication to the Society has become legendary. No task was too great or too small for Don, it was simply a job that had to be done. Painting, woodworking, lawn cutting, maintenance of all forms were routine to him. Perhaps, Don will be fondly remembered by some for serving hot dogs and ice cream at the summer "Socials", or by others for decorating the museums at the Victorian Christmas parties. Although in pain he co-chaired the Ice Cream Social in August and was still cutting the Pine Grove lawn until six weeks before his death.

# Unique Homes Tour

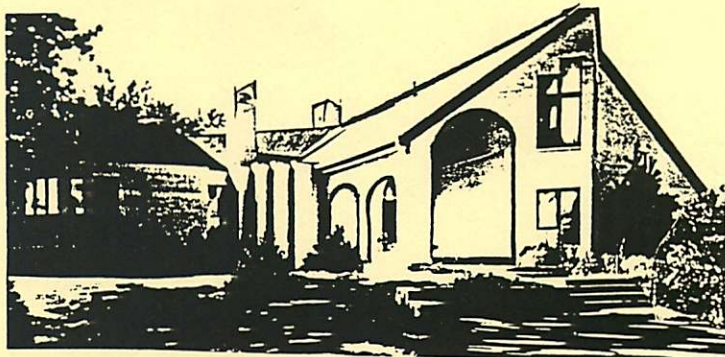
Hosted by Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society

**CIRCA 1845**  
**Governor Moses Wisner Home**  
**Pontiac, Michigan**



Headquarters of the  
Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society

**Circa 1995**  
**Gaytan Home On-The-Lake**  
**Lake Sherwood**



## History of Pine Grove

A national and state historic site, Pine Grove was the home of Michigan's Governor Moses Wisner and Angeolina his wife who lived here until her death in 1905. Wisner was elected governor of Michigan in 1858. From 1859 to 1861, except for special periods spent in Lansing, he used the house as his office and official residence.

Moses Wisner acquired 150 acres on the outskirts of town as a young attorney in 1844. Here along the edge of the Old Saginaw Trail once used by Indians and pioneers, he established a "Gentleman's Farm." Together with his wife, Angeolina, they lovingly developed an estate which included a Greek Revival style home, an orchard, barn, carriage house, extensive flower and vegetable gardens, and a stand of native pine and spruce trees.

Pine Grove became a local show-place expressing ideas of landscape artist Andrew Jackson Downing of that period.

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Departs Rochester OPC 8:30 - Returns 4:30

Full payment due at sign up.

Deadline: March 10, 1996

Mail Check to: Rochester OPC  
312 Woodward St.  
Rochester, MI 48307

For Further Information Contact:  
OPC at (810) 656-1403

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## Futuristic Home Resplendent with Interesting Antiques

This beautiful 9,000 square foot contemporary home sits on an island in Lake Sherwood, providing a focal point for the surrounding lovely homes on shore. One small roadway connects the island to the mainland, giving a moat-like appearance.

Upon entering, one is aware of a large hanging crystal icicle-like chandelier. A futuristic interior design of smoothly curved uphill and downhill pathways accommodate the wheelchair traveler and so provides a home completely accessible for physically handicapped persons, so planned by specialist architect Douglas Johnson.

Priscilla Gaytan's collections on display include: antique silver, Navajo jewelry, papier mache' artifacts, paintings, and an interesting variety of antique furniture. All this, with a picturesque view of the lake from the surrounding many banks of windows.

Upon arrival, guests will assemble in the living areas for a buffet luncheon served by the Oakland County Pioneer & Historic Society Hosts, followed by a short descriptive talk about the home before embarking upon the informal walking tour throughout the home.

## SCHEDULE - MARCH 21st, 1996

Arrival at Wisner Home	9:30	Arrival at Gaytan Home	12:30
Tour Talk	9:45	Buffet Lunch	1:30
Walking Tour	10:15-11:30	Tour Talk	1:30
Departure	11:30	Walking Tour	2:00-3:00
		Departure	3:30

Tickets \$30

(Includes Lunch & Bus Transportation)

(Portion of proceeds will help benefit Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society)

Don was born in Highland Park and raised in Huntington Woods. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Wayne State University. Don taught for many years in the Warren Consolidated School District. He also served as principal at County Line Elementary in Sterling Heights and North Elementary in Warren. Don met Kathryn in 1951 when they were both teaching.

He was also a member of the Order of the Sons of Italy in America, the Pontiac Area Association of Retired School Personnel, the American Legion, and the Drayton Plains Cribbage Club.

On October 18 following services at the A.J. Desmond Funeral Home in Royal Oak, Don was buried at the White Chapel Cemetery of Troy, Michigan. The family wishes to express its appreciation to all those who have sent cards, letters, and memorial contributions to the Society in Don's name.

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

— An Editorial

The Pine Grove research library has been characterized occasionally by patrons and newspaper reporters as a "Jewel in the Society's crown." Since the mid-seventies, Lillian Paull has been at the library helm, directing the operation and along with Virginia Clohset, manuscript chairperson, contributing mightily to its success. Indexing, cataloging, and assisting researchers with their seemingly endless questions have been among Lillian's routine duties. These she has discharged so faithfully and competently that the library has gained the outstanding reputation as a reservoir of Oakland County history.

This summer, Lillian suffered a fall at home that meant

hospitalization and an extended convalescent period at Canterbury on the Lake, an assisted care facility in Waterford. Now back home, she faces an additional period of therapy and support from friends and professional community health workers. We hope she will be able to return to Pine Grove. We miss her kindness and inspiration. We also wish her the Season's best and a happy ninety-fifth birthday that will also occur this December.

During the intervening months, your operations manager faced the inevitable and painful proposition of finding the right person to carry on the tradition. The person chosen was Mary Wessels, a professional librarian, whose credentials will be outlined in a future *Gazette*. Her article, "Punchinello's Secret," will be found in this issue.

We are convinced that it takes more than bricks, mortar, books, and shelving to make a library. It requires a head librarian with a vision, devotion to a cause, and a penchant for hard work to fulfill that vision. Quite frankly, Lillian Paull — not the Pine Grove library — has been the real "jewel in the Society's crown."

## MEMBER PROFILE

FRANCES G.  
Mc EVOY



### BIRTHPLACE:

St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Pontiac

### PRESENT HOME:

Birmingham, Michigan

### EDUCATION:

Associate Degree in Liberal Arts from Oakland Community College

### MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE:

Two and one-third years' service in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War

### HOBBIES:

Genealogical research, raising

raspberries, and traveling with my husband, Don. We like to visit places in the U.S. and Europe where our ancestors lived. Along the way we can observe the historic sights and ruins, and see how our ancestors fit into history.

### GOALS:

I hope to finish entering my 16 years of successful genealogical research into my computer program by the first of the year so I can start digging deeper into the areas that need more illumination.

## NEW MEMBERS

Marguerite Brugos, *Rochester Hills*

Jerry Miller, *Rochester*

William Newman, *Pontiac*

Bernadette Zemenick (*Life Member*), *Birmingham*

## ACCESSIONS TO OUR COLLECTION

Rex Lamoreaux — Illustrated charts of Great Lakes vessels and shipwrecks, area postcards, and high school yearbooks

Emerson Gravelin — Put-in-Bay / Franklin Cornet band broadside

Martin E. Flynn — Movie camera, projector, lights and screen

Mary Lou Callaway — Printed material on proposed extension of Northwestern Highway, given to Mary Lou by Henry Moses, former West Bloomfield developer and planning commissioner

Joyce Little — Books, sheet music, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings donated in the name of Lenore Stuart Slonaker

Russell B. Franzen — One copy of *Squabble City: The Story of the Court House and the People Who Fought It* (1992)

Jack Moore — A pair of German bank notes, inflationary currency (c. 1923)

Steve Weikal (County of Oakland) — Four U.S. national flags and five veterans' banners

## NEWS NOTES

On Tuesday, March 21, 1996 an "Unique Homes Tour" is being sponsored by the Society. Featured are Pine Grove and the beautiful 9,000 square foot contemporary home of board member, Priscilla Gaytan. The latter residence, situated on an island in Lake Sherwood, Commerce Township, has its interior resplendent with beautiful antiques. Tickets are \$30.00 per person which includes lunch and bus transportation. Deadline for registration is March 10. Further information can be obtained by contacting O.P.C. at (810) 656-1403.

For those members who have been kind enough to send clippings to our library on historical subjects relative to Oakland County and southeastern Michigan, please keep them coming! We only ask that you send us either the entire page on which the story appears or just the article itself. If you choose the latter course, write on the clipping's margin the name of the newspaper, the date, and the page involved. Such information constitutes critical source data that scholars expect.

The Society wishes to acknowledge the active role played by our younger colleagues who have been toiling away in the office or library this autumn. These part-time helpers are: Michele Marie Lundgreen who holds a B.S. degree in Humanities from Mankato State University in Minnesota; John Pearson, who attends Eastern Michigan University and is serving an internship at our museum; and Mike Dennie, an Oakland University anthropology student, who has helped us on past "digs" and has an article scheduled for this issue

## THINKING OF YOU THINKING OF US

The cost of preserving history, a cause to which this county-wide Society is dedicated, has risen dramatically in recent years. Everything from the price of postage stamps to the investment in materials necessary to conserve our fragile past have climbed. Maintenance of the Wisner house and grounds is more expensive than ever before, as the Society must now pay for certain services which until recently have been generously provided by volunteer labor.

As a result, we have been forced to modestly raise our dues in some instances and eliminate certain categories. Here is the new dues schedule effective January 1, 1996.

Individual Member .....	\$20.00
Family .....	\$50.00
Senior Member (62 & over) .....	\$15.00
Student Member (18 & under) .....	\$10.00
Patron .....	\$75.00
Benefactor .....	\$100.00
Life Member .....	\$200.00
Life Couple .....	\$300.00
Organization (Non-Profit) .....	\$50.00
Business Member .....	\$150.00

Memberships, except "Life", are for one year.

Remember, contributions and bequests to the Society, including memorials, assure the continuing restoration of its properties and the promotion of Oakland County's irreplaceable historical heritage. As charitable donations, such contributions allow the donor to take income tax deductions.

When making a contribution, please indicate on the "memo" portion of your check whether it is for payment of dues, a memorial, an

event such as a Victorian Open House, etc. Thank you.

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## OFFICERS, 1995

President .....	Gretchen Adler
1st V.P. ....	Kitty Daggy
2nd V.P. ....	Clarke Kimball
Secretary .....	Mariam Foxman
Treasurer .....	Dan Carmichael
Resident Agent .....	Ed Adler

## EDITORIAL STAFF

Co-editor .....	Charles Martinez
Co-editor .....	Don O'Brien
Assoc. Editor .....	Ross Callaway

You will note there has been a change in our editorial staff since the summer issue. Pauline Harrison, who has long served as editor, has now been asked by President Adler to devote more time to the vital area of membership recruitment. Pauline will also continue as chairperson of the Society's extensive Clothing and Linen collection. With her intelligence, enthusiasm, and commitment to problem solving, we know she will make a success of this challenge as she has in every other responsibility given her.

For the immediate future the Oakland Gazette will be managed under the co-editorship of Charlie Martinez and Don O'Brien. The former has undertaken responsibility for this number while the latter is out of town.

*Note:* The bookmark prepared by the Membership Committee and included in this mailing contains the "old" dues structure which expires January 1, 1995.

# FROM FIRE TO FOUNDRY:

## The History of Metal Working in Pontiac

by Michael Dennie

When early man discovered fire little did he imagine the technology that would be spawned from this simple discovery. The early usage of fire was strictly limited to that of heating the living environment, protection against wandering nocturnal carnivores, and for the preparation of food. Once this breakthrough became fully integrated into society, it was many millennium until the next advancement in the use of fire.

Beginning at about 10,000 B.C. the first of three metal ages began in Anatolia, which is known as Turkey today. This first era was known as the Chalcolithic Period, or the Copper Age. It was characterized, until around 5,000 B.C., by the use of cold hammered copper. Beginning around 5,000 B.C. the introduction of ore smelting in Tepe Yahya, Iran revolutionized this era and ushered in the Bronze Age. In North America copper was beginning to be mined in the Lake Superior region starting around 4,000 B.C. and ended around 1,500 B.C.

The next era in metallurgy was known as the Bronze Age. This era began in the Tigris - Euphrates River Valley, ancient Mesopotamia, around 3,500 B.C. and lasted until about 1,500 B.C. The use of bronze, a combination of tin and copper, was instrumental in the advancement of agriculture, and also warfare in Asia Minor and Europe. In the New World bronze was utilized in only two cultural areas: the Aztec of central Mexico and The Moche of southern Equador and Peru.

Finally around 1,500 B.C. the Hittites in Asia Minor began smelting iron. Though iron was employed by the Mesopotamians around 2,700 B.C. the use of iron was severely restricted due to the early refining process. The Hittites used a charcoal-fired furnace that produced iron in a spongy mass. This mass was hammered and fired repeatedly until wrought iron was produced, then the black smith would take the iron and shape it.

Between 400 B.C. and A.D. 400 iron was used for weapons, gates, fences, and for decoration, then iron use went into steady decline until the beginning of the 16th century. Overnight the iron industry went from bell casting and wrought iron decorations to cannons and rifle barrels. This was due to the perfecting of the casting technique.

During the mid 18th century new technology was introduced into iron production. The first innovation was the use of coke by Abraham Darby. With coke, hotter temperatures were achieved and a purer form of iron was produced. In turn, other

improvements were made in the building of furnaces and the use of different ore compositions.

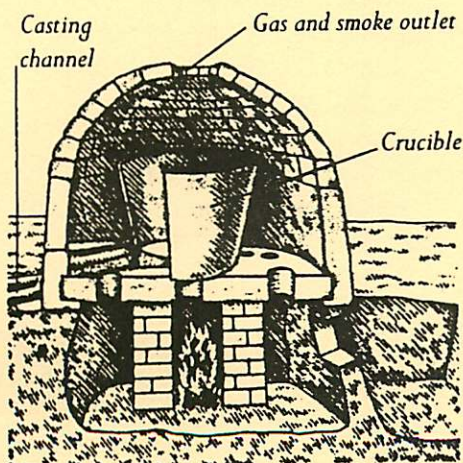
In 1850, British industrialist Henry Bessemer gave birth to the modern iron foundry. His new process injected oxygen into molten iron which gave the foundry control over the carbon content. Bessemer brought this technology to the United States in 1864 and set up his first furnace in Wyandotte, Michigan. Though small, it was able to produce two tons of molten iron at one time.

Here, in Pontiac, the foundries were constructed and torn down with the changing industrial climate in Oakland County and southeastern Michigan. These foundries ranged in size from a small blacksmith's forge to the large blast furnaces found in the local automobile plants.

From 1819 to 1834 the city's main ironworkers were the "olde village smithe", and the first two blacksmiths were Harvey Williams and Elisha Gardner. They mainly repaired wheels, shoed horses, and repaired broken plows and threshing equipment.

In 1834, George Allen dissolved his partnership with a Mr. Merrill, both owners of The Birmingham

Foundry and set up a foundry in Pontiac. This business was located on the south side of West Pike and Saginaw and specialized in casting ploughs. In 1838, George Allen took on a partner named James Andrews, who in 1840 bought out George Allen and continued as sole proprietor until 1870. In 1870, John Dawson bought the foundry from James Andrews and ran it until about 1890 when the



This furnace, circ. 1,000 B.C. China, is typical of technology used from the late Copper Era to the middle 17th century.

operation was sold to Ephrim Howland. Mr. Howland continued with the foundry until about 1915 when it was acquired by the Pontiac Foundry & Machine Company. The latter continued at the West Pike location until about 1922 when the foundry was closed down permanently. This business with all of its improvements was a functional forge, at the same location, for almost 90 years.

Beginning in 1836, specifically with the March 10, 1836 issue of the Pontiac Courier, the first advertisement for the Pontiac Furnace appeared. The advertisement read as follows:

Ploughs -- Ploughs  
At the  
Pontiac Furnace

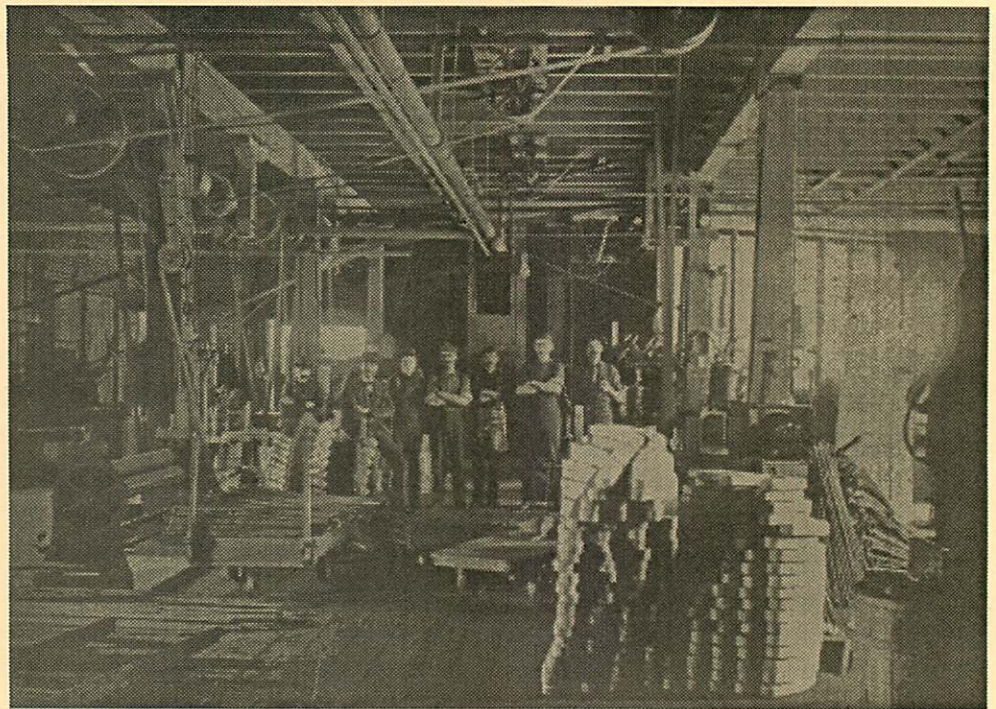
The subscribers have on hand and are constantly manufacturing PLOUGHS of various description and most IMPROVED patterns. They are also prepared to manufacture CASTINGS of every description at the shortest notice, and on the most "reasonable" terms.

Pontiac March 10, 1836 Geo. Allen & Co.

During the 1870's and the 1880's Pontiac could boast of having three foundries. The biggest was W.D. King & Co. located on Orchard Lake just west of the railroad tracks. Here they casted and repaired ploughs, repaired reapers and threshers, and made iron fencing for cemeteries and residential properties.

In March of 1875, W.D. King expanded his ironworks facility. This was reported in The Pontiac Weekly Bill Poster issue dated March 31, 1875 and read as follows:

W.D. King and Co. are making a general overhaul of the foundry. A new and powerful engine has been put in, a sixty foot chimney is to be erected for the boiler flues, the



Interior shot, circa. 1900, of the Howland Manufacturing Co. located at 25-35 West Pike Street.

smelting is to be enlarged and improved, and other changes for the better are in the making. Since it has become known that threshing and other machine repairs are made at W.D. King & Co. business has largely increased, and the contract for the iron for the asylum having been awarded the, more facilities were found necessary.

Starting in the mid-1890's, Pontiac was down to only one foundry, Howland's on W. Pike. This trend continued until about 1915 when Pontiac had three foundries once again due to the growing automobile industry in here. Their numbers rose to as many as five by the mid 1960's. But in the 1970's and early 1980's the number of foundries dwindled to one. This was due to rising oil prices in the 1970's and the automobile slump in the 1980's. By the late 1980's the last foundry, The Pontiac Motor foundry at Joslyn and Montcalm, closed its doors forever. This marked the end of a piece of Pontiac's history, a legacy that lasted for about 170 years, and has left the door open for a new future for Pontiac to explore.

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