

Clinton County Historical Society Archives

Chronology of an Address History

ADDRESS: 201 E. Gibbs Street

CITY: St. Johns

ZIP CODE: 48879

TOWNSHIP: Bingham

YEAR BUILT: 1853

BUILDER/DESIGNER: Mr. Smith

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: SEC 9, T7N-R2W, A PARCEL OF LAND 186 1/2 FT N & S BY 118 1/4 FT E & W OUT OF SW COR OF E 33 ACRES OF S 1/2 OF NW 1/4 THEREOF.

PARCEL NUMBER: 300-009-200-090-00

OWNERS (by year):

1853	Mr. Smith	It was a farm house
1894	William Holton	Brick Mfg.
1929	Lewis Cool	
1938	Bruno Mazzolini	
1944	Leah Cook, Matron	Children's Home
1957	Mrs. Edwin Nobis, Matron	Children's Home
1964	Kenneth Catlin	Private Home
2019	Rebecca Schack	

The First Children's Home:



On January 15, 1921 Clinton County purchased a house and grounds at 102 W. Baldwin in St. Johns. The property was formerly owned by Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Stephans and adjoined the land where the county jail and sheriff's residence were then located on the west side of Clinton Avenue south of McConnell.

The Baldwin Street house became the county home for children who were orphaned or whose parents were unable physically or financially to give them proper care. It was also a home for neglected or abused children. Sometimes it housed children who had gotten into trouble with the law, but those children were usually sent to the State Industrial School for Boys in Lansing or to the State Industrial House for Girls in Adrian.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles R. Dyke were appointed superintendent and matron of the new facility on Baldwin, then known as the Children's detention Home. Mr. Dyke, who had served as a deputy sheriff, became the Clinton County agent of the State Welfare Commission.

The State Constitution of 1909 had given probate courts original jurisdiction in all cases of juvenile delinquents and dependents, so the Home was under the jurisdiction of Judge J. Charles Flynn, the judge of probate for Clinton County at the time.

Mr. Dyke became ill and died in 1928. The Dykes were succeeded by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Miller who served a few years and were followed by William J and Leah Cook. Mr. Cook served for about ten years and died in 1941. His duties were assumed by Mrs. Cook.

By this time the term "detention" had been dropped, and the institution was sometimes called the Children's Home and sometimes the Juvenile Home. The building at 102 W. Baldwin Street was an ordinary house, and the atmosphere there was homelike rather than institutional.



By 1944 the original home had become too crowded, so the county purchased the large red brick house and grounds at 201 E. Gibbs from Bruno Mazzolini. A fire escape was added to the outside of the house, making it look somewhat institutional; but the quarters were more spacious and there was ample room for outdoor recreation.

Children of elementary school age who lived at the home had always attended old Central School. Now they had a little greater distance to walk, but they attended Perrin-Palmer School which was new and modern at the time.

Mrs. Leah Etta Cook was associated with the Children's Home for about twenty-five years. She died on November 3, 1956 at the age of 74. In February 1957 Mrs. Edwin Nobis assumed her responsibilities.

State standards eventually forced the county to give consideration to more modern and secure quarters. The county bought some property just south of Clinton Memorial Hospital, extending between Oakland and Swegles Streets. In 1961 a new facility was built at 1004 S. Swegles and was occupied early in 1962. Mrs. Nobis retired in 1973 after sixteen and one-half years of service.

- Hyla Bross
1980 History of Clinton County, Michigan

Research from Alice Murphy:

William and Leah Cook ran the county detention home at 100 W Baldwin in 1940. It was rented. There were 9 children living there. 18 year old foster daughter Wilma Dobins helped with housework and 15 year old Lucille Fitch helped with mess.

Others were Alta Black 13, Onalee Rumbaugh 11, Helen Rumbaugh 9, William Rumbaugh 13, Charles K...turka 12, Victor Pope 13 and Andrew Beard 7.

The Rumbaughs, Victor and Alta all grew up to have productive lives. I could not find the others. All parents were farmers with large families and these children were some of the youngest. Sad stories probably of very poor parents giving up their kids, at least for awhile?

Leah was Grandma Cook as she lived at 201 E Gibbs in 1949 as a county welfare agent. She died in 1956.