

Elsie

In 1836 the Craven family settled on the Maple River and built a saw mill. They platted out a village known as Craven's Mills about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile west of where Elsie is today and several stores were created.



Craven Grist Mill

When the railroad came through east of Craven's Mills, the Village of Elsie was platted in 1857 as a railroad station town. Most of the residents of Craven's Mills moved to Elsie.

Elsie was named for Elsie Amelia Tillotson. She was the daughter of Franklin Tillotson and the first child born in the town. Tillotson was the first postmaster of Elsie.



Elsie Depot

By 1880 the village had three general stores, a hardware store, a grocery, a drug store, two shoe stores, two taverns, and a cheese factory. It officially became a village in 1885.







General Store



Hankins Brothers Elevator

Dairy products became an early industry in Elsie. Many local farmers raised cows and needed a place to sell their milk. A cheese factory was built in the late 1860's. By the early 1900's milk and milk products were processed in a large Elsie plant. In 1929 the milk plant was bought by the Detroit Creamery Company. They closed the plant and moved the business to Ovid.



Cheese Factory

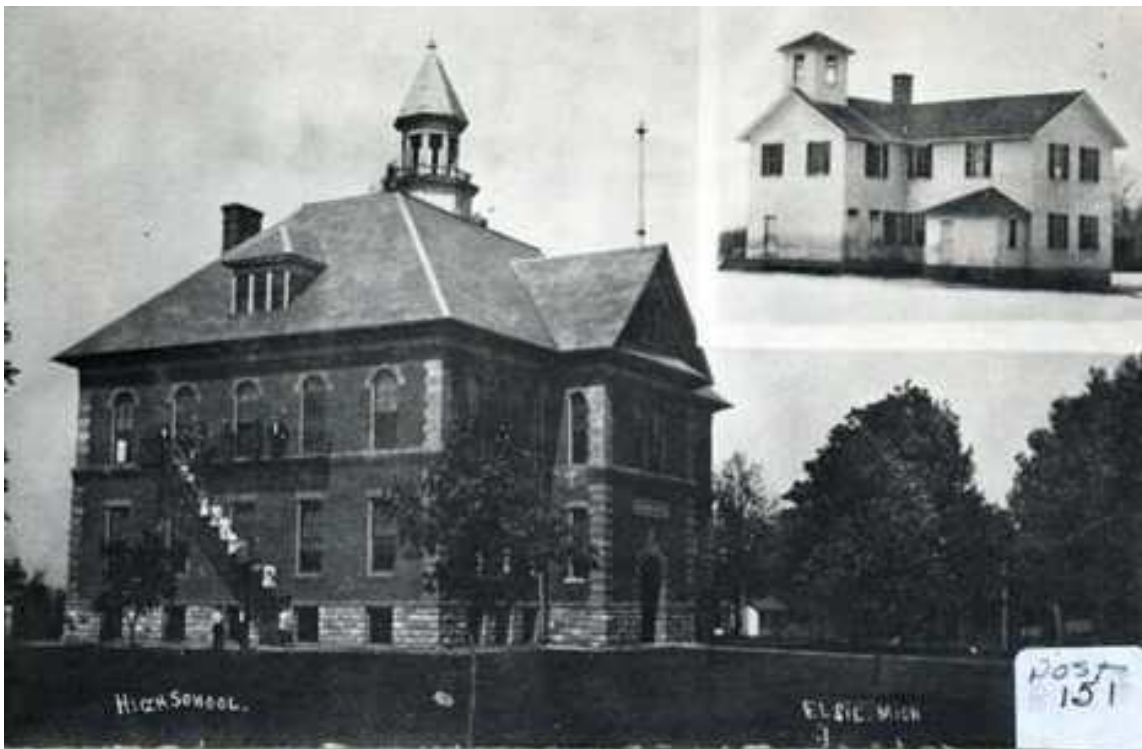


Eckenberg Milk Plant c1913

One of the largest dairy farms in the United States is in Elsie. The Green Meadows farm began with a single cow in 1917. Today they own 7,000 acres and have 9,500 cattle.

Elsie the cow statue is on Main Street. It isn't a cow. It's a bull. Elsie was built as a black angus bull. When it was bought by the town it was painted as a black and white Holstein.

Elsie has a dairy festival every year in July.



The first school in Elsie was held in the Little Red Schoolhouse. In 1868 it was replaced by the frame building in the upper righthand corner. This building was replaced by the brick building in 1903 and was added on to several times when more space was needed.

In 1965 Elsie joined with Ovid to form the Ovid-Elsie Schools.

Book

Elsie 1857-2007: One Hundred and Fifty Years in the Life of a Community by Diane Saylor

Centennial History

The Village of Elsie by Lloyd Craven

In this year of 1957, it has been one hundred years since Elsie was platted as a village and, in commemoration of its Centennial various forms of entertainment and observances for the occasion are planned.

The first settlement in this vicinity was made in 1836 about three fourths of a mile west of the present village where West Main street crosses the Maple River. Thos. Craven Sr., with his sons, Robert E., Isaac, Joseph, Thos., Jr., and daughter, Rebecca, accompanied by their families, reached this location from their previous home in Delaware County, Ohio, after a long tiresome journey with oxen over mostly Indian trails, as there were no roads in this part of the state at that time. Dense forests of hard wood with occasional small tracts of white pine covered the area hereabouts. Mingled with the timber were many, many swamps and the early settlers suffered intensely from ague or "shakes" as it was called, due to the wet, humid climate.

The Cravens acquired some 640 acres from the United States government during the presidency of Martin Van Buren. Some of this lay south along the river from the above mentioned point, and Thomas, Sr., built his home directly across the road from the Joe Kelley farm. This home was torn down and moved away several years ago. Isaac Craven's home was built on the hill just south of the present feed mill and elevator on the river. It is still standing as the residence of Reg. Crosson. Next to the east came the home of Robt. E. Craven (this was the first frame building erected in this community) and this site is now occupied by the new home of Mrs. Harold Smith. Across the road from Isaac's place was the residence of Joseph Craven, which is still standing.

Robert Craven constructed a saw mill just northeast of the present feed mill. Later, he erected another dam and saw mill about a mile north on the northwest side of the Craddock bridge. He also cleared and built the original river road from here to the Colony or Mapleton as it was called at that time. Some of the lumber for the wooden capitol building at Lansing was hauled from these mills. He held township and county offices and was the first representative from Clinton county to the state legislature.

At the time of the Craven settlement, this region was a vast wilderness inhabited by the wild animals of the forest, and the Saginaw Chippewa Indians. Luckily, these Indians were friendly and the children of the early settlers often played with the native Indian children. Hunting occupied the Indians principally and their pelts and furs were traded to the few French traders who occasionally plied the Maple and other rivers in their canoes. Saginaw was the center of this trade, which had

developed before 1812, when Bolieu and Tremble established posts there, followed by Louis Campau, Chochios, Knaggs and others. In 1826, Geo. Campau opened a trading post at Maple Rapids. In 1845 Saggee's Camps was located on the banks of the Maple River in a grove of oaks on the Arthur Cobb farm now owned by R. D. Martin. The Indians, in traveling between Saginaw, Maple Rapids and Grand Rapids often used the trail that passed this camp.

Soon following the Cravens to this community came Liberty Carter, Geo. W. Lewis, Joshua Cobb, Oliver Hicks, the Finchs, Blayneys, Bennetts, Galligans, Lettst, Staffords, J. Durfee, and Aaron Sickels, Hiram Curtis, Wm. Warner, The Linmans, Alpheus Beebe, Franklin Tillotson, Wm. L. Tillotson and Kingston Wooll. Later settlers were the Bates', Chases, VanDeusens, Nethaways, Dunhams, Williams and others. In the community today are still descendants of some of the above families.

The Cravens were hopeful of a village here and named the site Cravens' Mills and platted a few lots. Alpheus Beebe built a store and afterwards sold it to the Sickels Brothers. Mr. Beebe also built a wagon shop and a tavern. Hiram Curtis constructed a cabinet shop and many of the old pioneers were buried in coffins of his make. The red schoolhouse, which was the first school in the community was built in 1850 about 12 rods west of the Waldo Schwanbeck property. Beyond and on the same side of the road was Mr. Beebe's tavern.

Sickels Brothers moved their store three-fourths of a mile east to their farm and on June 18, 1857, recorded the plat of the village, naming it Elsie, in compliment to one of **Franklin Tillotson's daughters**, who was the first child born in the village. The second child to be born on the site of the new village was Julia Lewis, the grandmother of Kelley, Fred and Lewis Carter.

The origin of the village was due to the wise foresight and unsparing efforts of J. Durkee Sickels and his brother, William, who were partners in the firm of Sickels Brothers. They with their parents and other brothers and sisters came to Michigan from Palmyra, New York in 1836 and settled on a farm near Northville, Michigan. In 1847 J. Durfee Sickels reached the settlement on the river here. He served the township in several offices as well as being postmaster for several years and was one of the original trustees of the Methodist Church. He was a man much loved and respected in the village. His most laborious service given to the public was the supervision of the building of the state road extending from the center of Ovid township, twenty miles through Duplain, Elba and Hamilton townships to reach valuable timber lands there. In the village this road is called Ovid street. William Sickels came here in 1856 and established the first postoffice in the new village with **Franklin Tillotson as postmaster**. Mr. Sickels served Clinton County as Register of Deeds and Judge of Probate. He with Sheldon Wight also founded the village of Sickels in Gratiot county in 1873, where he later made his home.

The original plat of the village extended from what is now Ovid street to Knowlton street and from Maple to Pine street. Additions were made to the east of Ovid Street and north of East Main street by **Franklin Tillotson** May 24, 1858 and by Jonathon Hicks, June 23, 1858 comprising land south of East Main and east of South Ovid streets. Also by Elijah Cobb, July 26, 1876; Levi Randall and Kingston Wooll being associated with Mr. Cobb, June 26, 1870 and B. D. Hicks, June 23, 1871, all being for land north of West Main and West of North Ovid Streets. **Mr. Tillotson's home was a log house situated on North Ovid street across from the present high school.** Mr. Jonathan

Hicks lived in a log house where Dr. Slagh's home is now located. Mr. Cobb's home was where R. D. Martin now lives on West Main street. The Levi Randall residence is now the home of Boyd Williams on West Pine street. Across the street was the home of Kingston Wooll, which is also occupied.

On the site of the present State Savings Bank, was the home of Rev. George W. Lewis, which was no doubt the first house in the village. This was a log cabin and the property was purchased a little later by J. Durfee Sickels and some of his children were born there, eldest of whom was the late Mrs. L. G. Bates, mother of Dr. Bion L. Bates of Ovid. Oliver Hicks' home was a log house, where now stands Orlo Mead's residence at 441 West Main street. The home of Joshua Cobb was located down the lane of Joe Clark's new residence at 402 West Main; while his son, Lyman Cobb's place is the farm home of Rep. Andrew Cobb on East Main, which has been in the family over one hundred years.

In 1855 about all the buildings that were to comprise the village were three or four log houses. The Sickels Brothers store stood about where the village hall is located. Aaron Sickels, who came with his brother, J. Durfee Sickels, to the settlement at the river went into partnership with E. W. Cobb and started a second store in 1858 on the corner where the Wooley Hardware store is located. The following year D. B. Fox built a tavern on the southeast corner of West Main and Knowlton streets, where the S. J. Keys home stands. A bee was held and the red school house was moved at this time with the help of fourteen yoke of oxen from the old location to a site at the edge of the clearing, where is now the home of Lloyd D. Craven on the west side of North Ovid street between Oak and Elm streets. A. E. Gray, who had blacksmithed at Craven's Mill, opened a shop in the village and Farrell & Son started a chair factory that employed four men. Two years later it failed. The post office received mail from Mapleton and later from Ovid. In 1865 E. W. Gay built his wagon shop on the site of the present Oddfellow building. The first bakery was owned by Rice and Lucy Beebe and stood on the site occupied by the Mrs. Amy Litchfield home. Also in 1867 Geo. W. Doty built a hotel on the present bank corner. A large addition was made to it in later years, and this hostelry served the village until about 1921 when it was torn down to make way for the bank building. In its early days, the hotel had a ball room on the second floor, which was the scene of many dances and in its dining room, banquets and suppers were held. Elsie had only one well for many years and this was located on the Main four corners.

The village cemetery was given to the community in 1851 by Joshua Cobb, who was the first to be buried there, dying that same year. A stroll thru its paths will reveal on the stone markers and monuments, all of the early and even later settlers of this area. About 1890 the village purchased land, where is now located Riverside cemetery and Luther Eddy and Ira A. Eddy were hired to plat it out in lots and roadways.

The site of our high school was purchased in 1868 and a two story ell shaped building was erected by M. W. Kelley, consisting of five rooms, each room heated by a large stove. Twelve grades were taught but no formal graduation took place until 1887. The first graduating class was composed of Huldah-Eddy Elliott, Chas. Gruver, Deda Sokels-Rankin, Hattie Tillotson-Maynard, Meda McCombs-Wooley, Maude Doyle Dennis, Maurice Lewis, George Sexton and Leon L. Tyler. Mr. Tyler is the only one of this class living and resides at Niles, Michigan.

J. F. Hasty erected a stove and shoox factory just south of the village in 1870 employing thirty men. The building burned the next year and was rebuilt on the property just east of the Roy Vincent farm. Mr. Hasty was a man of considerable wealth and built the home now owned by E. K. Hawes. He had a large keg and barrel factory in Detroit and owned extensive timber holdings in Arkansas. The employment of so many men gave an impetus to an increase in the population of the village.

In 1872 Mr. LaMott G. Bates, long a leading and successful merchant here, became a partner of Mr. Hasty in the mercantile business under the name of J. F. Hasty & Company. Later Mr. Bates bought out the interest of Mr. Hasty and continued the business under his own name at the same location, which store building was on the northwest corner of Main and Ovid streets. About 1890 Mr. Bates bought the property across Ovid street on the northeast corner. This store building was moved to the back of the lot and on its previous site he constructed, a large brick store where he further developed an extensive trade. In 1897 he took his son Clyde as a partner and they continued the business several years until failing health compelled the father to retire to a well earned rest. Clyde took in as partner Geo. L. Carter, under the firm name of Bates & Carter, and later Mr. Carter and Benj. Steere formed a partnership under the name of Carter & Steere, buying out Mr. Bates' interest in the business. The building was finally sold to the J. A. Byerly company and Carterer & Steere moved into the Odd Fellow building, where Dancers dry goods business is now located.

In 1858 J. Durfee and Wm. Sickels sold their store business to Aaron Durfee and in 1860 M. B. Kelley succeeded Cobb & Sickels. In 1865 Kelley Bros. and Johnson launched out in a new big frame store which was located on the northwest corner of Main and Ovid streets. In 1902 it was moved to its present address on West Main street and is used by Robt. Baker for electrical appliances at the present time. Kelley Brothers and Johnson also in 1865 built the grist mill at the river and completed the old log dam there that gave way to the present concrete dam about 1916. In 1870 they built a planing mill and in connection with considerable timberland interests, carried on a large business. Their grist mill occupied part of the site of the saw mill which they had purchased from the estate of Robt. E. Craven. Of late years, the grist mill was remodeled into a feed, grain and bean elevator and business is carried on as the Farmers Elevator with Merle Green and Earl Brown as owners.

It was in the late sixties that Sheldon and I. G. Eddy established the first cheese factory here, and in 1876 M. S. Doyle purchased the business. In 1879 it is recorded that he manufactured 68,700 pounds of cheese. His factory was located on the southeast corner of Pine and First streets.. Mr. Doyle also built the first brick store building in the village and carried on a mercantile business for a time. It was not until 1890 that milk was received on Sundays as it was considered a violation of the Sabbath for the farmers to bring in milk on that day. On the second floor of this building was a roller skating rink, which was used by the young and old of that time. It was in 1908 that Boyd W. Doyle, son of M. S. Doyle, together with others, had the old factory torn down and a new large concrete plant constructed on the southeast corner of Elm and Second streets. Several different companies operated here in the milk field and all kinds of dairy products were made, including pancake flour, which at one time had a wide acceptance in the consumer food market. At one time daily shipments of pancake flour in carload lots went out of this plant. At the peak of its business there were over 100 persons employed. In 1929 the Detroit Creamery Company became the owners

of the property and had the buildings razed so as to concentrate their business in Ovid where they had extensive building accommodations.

Without doubt the oldest firm in Elsie operating almost continuously under the same family control is the Wooley Hardware. It was started in 1880 by J. B. Wooley and L. B. Downey. Mr. Downey sold his interest to J. B. Wooley and his son B. M. Wooley and the firm became J. B. Wooley & Son. Later they sold the business to Crell & Pierce, and finally Mr. Crell bought out his partner and carried on the business under the name of H. B. Crell Hardware. The business was taken over by B. M. Wooley in 1933 and is still operating (as of this writing) under his ownership. His son Jim has been associated with him since 1948, and Mrs. B. M. Wooley takes an active part in conducting the business. Mr. Wooley has been one of the the most prudent and ambitious man in business here and his name is held in regard and respect through out the community. L. B Downey went into the hardware business himself, taking in his son Ray and they carried on many years.

The first doctor to practice in this region was Dr. Wm. B. Watson, who in 1839 came to Mapleton, now Duplain, later moving his office to his home on the river road where his great grandson Frank now resides. Elsie's first resident physician was a Dr. Taugerson, a Texan, who only stayed a few months. Dr. E. V. Chase moved from Ovid to Elsie in 1860 and practiced here until 1880 when he entered the drug store business. He continued as druggist until about the time of his death in 1910. He held public office in the village and also served as a Representative for two terms from this district.