



Clinton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 174

Saint Johns, Michigan 48879

November, 1986

"The Clinton Independent"

Lew Walling, 95, remembers

By RICH WERTZ
Editor

"I can remember the early days, we'd go up there on Saturday nights and sit on the hitching posts," says Lew Walling.

Now a resident of Elsie, Walling was born in St. Johns in 1891. He attended school at Perrin-Palmer, shoveled sugar beets, farmed extensively in Clinton County, helped build North Clinton Avenue, saw his first car in St. Johns and attended the first movie theatre in St. Johns.

"It cost a dime to sit in a chair," he says. "That's all it was — a big empty room with chairs that weren't connected to each other."

When he was about seven years old, he saw his first automobile — and in 1921 he bought his first automobile.

"It was a Brisco," he says. "It had just one light, in front. Cost a little less than \$500 brand new."

AND HE REMEMBERS the work people used to do then.

"Good hard work, I guess, is the reason I've lived so long," he says.

He remembers helping his father, who owned several teams of horses, haul dirt when North Clinton Avenue was being built.

"That was probably in 1908 or 1909," he says. "I don't even know what they paid — probably four or five dollars a day for team, wagon and man."



Lew Walling: 'We'd go up there on Saturday nights and sit on the hitching posts'

For another period of time he worked loading sugar beets, first loading them onto a wagon, then onto a railroad boxcar.

"I done a lot of that," he says. "Got 20 cents a ton. We used to load 40 tons a day."

He had a reputation for working fast and hard.

"A man came in and worked half a day," he

says. "Said he couldn't shovel beets no more."

As for himself, he says, he remembered what his father used to say — "He said you have two speeds — fast and faster."

For two years he worked for a farmer in Bannister.

"I came to Bannister in 1910, just before Christmas," he recalls. "I worked for two years for

the same man. He turned out to be my brother-in-law."

THAT WAS BECAUSE he married Francella Cook, the sister of the wife of the man for whom he worked.

But first he went out west.

"That was when it was 'Go west, young man,'" says Walling's daughter, Mrs. Leo Demming, who lives in Cariand, Michigan.

He worked in South Dakota as a farm hand and as a pool hall cook making flapjacks.

"He can still flip 'em," says his daughter.

He returned to Bannister in 1916 and married Francella.

"I started farming for myself and I've been farming ever since," he says. "I raised a lot of sugar beets and three daughters."

Francella died in 1962.

"Since then I've been keeping a bachelor's life," he says.

And he still works hard, says his daughter. He keeps his own house, mows his own lawn and recently finished painting his house.

He still drives his car during daylight hours to visit family members — his younger brother, Marion Walling, lives on French Road near St. Johns and he has daughters in Ovid and Owosso.

As a matter of fact, when he was 75 years old, he drove to Alaska.

"Drove a Ford," he says, "a little over 10,000 miles."

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