

Honey Creek, “Down by yet Old Mill Stream...”

Elizabeth Colone

The little creek, as yet unnamed, meandered from its source in the west to reach the small valley between two hills in what would one day be known as the Village of Pinckney. It widened, deepened and filled until it formed a pond, a living gift, so to speak, waiting for the pioneers to discover it. William Kirtland, founder of the village, bought land surrounding the pond from first settler, Solomon Peterson, in 1835. In 1836 Kirtland built a flour mill, a blessing to the farmers in the area. A dam was built at the east end of the pond to power the mill. The first grist was ground in 1837. Raising wheat for the mill became a popular crop for cash as well as daily bread. The mill was a successful project even though the Panic of 1837 slowed progress and Kirtland moved back to his home State of New York.

The creek moved along, known at various times as Pinckney Creek, Portage Creek and finally as Honey Creek. The mill continued to operate, grinding, albeit slowly, until 1918. In 1920 Henry Ford, of the Motor Company, purchased the mill and waterway to add to his collection of mills and streams. For reasons not clearly known, he razed the mill in 1920 instead of restoring it as he did other properties in southeast Michigan.

The Village continued to grow modestly and the creek and the pond served it in all seasons. I can speak for it from 1923 to 1993. I believe the streams of this kind are priceless. My father, who came to America from a long line of flour millers along the Danube River in Europe, told me that he thought a river or a creek, as opposed to a lake, paralleled life...living and moving as a person going through life, stopping now and then to help, to rest, to reflect, before moving on to this destiny.

The gifts from the streams are priceless. I have enjoyed so many of them: fishing, swimming (at the old dam site), ice skating, ice fishing, rowing, wading or just sitting on the banks. As school children we thrilled to the annual event of ice harvesting on the Mill Pond.

Before Edison brought electricity to the Village, storing ice for the summer season was very important. Ice harvesting was an important industry into the 1920's. As an adult I have read that just as sunshine and rain were necessary to raise crops, two factors were needed for the ice crop...at least twenty-four to forty-eight hours of zero/sub-zero weather and NO SNOW. Miraculously, these conditions were met year after year. At dawn on the first day all available manpower in the Village was ready with teams of horses, bob-sleds, gas-powered saws and ropes. The ice was cut into huge blocks and quickly moved into Stan Carr's ice house on the north bank of the pond, packed solidly in saw dust and harsh hay to keep until warm weather.

Warm weather brought a lot of activity to the pond where the top of the dam served as a diving platform for the old swimming hole. We bought a cottage on the pond in 1944 (now our year-round home) and continued to enjoy all the seasons while raising four sons. As little boys they sailed toy boats on long kite-strings reaching from one side of the pond to the other. One beautiful Sunday afternoon in July of 1947 they “anchored” their boats to come in for dinner. Minutes later we heard screams in the neighborhood and dashed out in time to see the pond disappearing. The dam had burst and, booming like Niagara, the water was rushing off to the east. A small house on S. Howell Street suffered damage as did the pavement. Fish, turtles and heretofore unknown creatures littered the surrounding grounds.

It was several weeks before the excitement died down. The Village Council named a committee to go to Detroit to talk to the powers-that-be at the Ford Foundation about the situation. I was a member of the 3-person

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committee authorized to offer the Company \$3,500.00 for the “remains”. The men we spoke to were noncommittal...more like bored. As a woman, I couldn't resist a last word. I asked if they might even consider donating the property to the Village, which would honor it as a memorial to the benefactor. He answered: “The old man is gone and WE at Ford Foundation are only interested in money”.

A local realtor later bought the property but did nothing with it until the late 1980's, when some of the land was sold for a neat little subdivision. The rest has “gone back to Nature” abounding with wildlife, water lily, cattails, peepers and birds, a nice touch of nature that many communities do not have. I think William Kirtland would love it...as we do. Honey Creek goes on to meet the HURON RIVER as always.