

The time is the year of 1882. Take a ride in a horse and buggy down Johnson St. from U.S. 23 N. Try to imagine: NO CARS, just horses and buggies, horses and carts, horses, and bicycles and people on foot.

There is no college and no student center. Carts pulled by horses are hauling white sand to various building sites from a huge sand pit believed the site of the present student center and the college.

Down Chisholm Street at the bridge, the road is made of cedar post set in the ground. At the corner of Chisholm and Second Avenue, where the Royal Knights building now sits, is the general store. They sell all kinds of things, from mittens and boots to a piece of chewing tobacco cut from a long bar or coffee hand-ground by means of a coffee grinder. The grinder on the counter has wheels on either side nearly 3 ft. in diameter.

Ladies wear long dresses and men wear almost the same styles as they do today. Suspenders over the shoulders.

Horses hitching posts are all along the streets.

Travel on around the corner and over to 421 S. Sixth. Gregoire Bleau and his wife Georgina live here.

Gregoire built the house himself with the help of his sons and other relatives, carpenters who worked with him and were contracted by him from then on in and around Alpena and neighboring towns. Omar, Alfred, Ferdinand, Edward, Homer, John, Marcellus, and Marcellus Jr. are a few of the carpenters who worked in that group.

It was common in those days for a family to teach and hand down the family trade from one generation to the next. Many of these carpenters — also lived in the same household with Gregory. This seems reasonable, too, since there were few houses and no unions to improve a working man's welfare.

These men helped construct St. Bernard Church and steeple, the cement plant, and many other buildings.

Gregory died in 1889 shortly after being overcome by heat on a roof job. He was only 54. He had come to Alpena from Lachine, Ontario, Canada, just seven years previous.

He had left his home town in Canada where he ran a small grocery store and also a carpentry business to start a new life here in Alpena when Alpena was an infant of a town — 55 years old.

Omar was 19 years old when he came from Canada with his dad, Gregory, in 1882. Omar lived at 421 S. Sixth until he married Octave Lafave in 1886. He built a home for himself



GREGORY BLEAU

and his wife on Cavanaugh Street. Omar was a spry little Frenchman who had learned carpentry from his father and did that kind of work all his life.

Octave and Omar had two sons, George and Joseph. George died in 1919 during the terrible influenza epidemic in Alpena. Joseph, 84, has lived in Alpena all his life.

Octave died when George was only 2½. There was no Welfare Dept. like today. And there was no choice but to take care of themselves the best way they could.

For a while, Joseph stayed at his Aunt Eupheme Sylvester's place with her and her husband and children while Omar built a new home for his sister in exchange for some small cash and the care of his small son. This house still stands at 621 Adam. There's a little barn in back of this house where the Sylvesters kept a cow. Although the house has been remodeled much since, the little barn out in back remains a reminder of the past. Oh! If only it could talk!

There were others who helped care for Joseph. Mr. & Mrs. Felix Prieur of 902 Ninth hired Omar to work on the building of a new home for them under the same kind of agreement as with the Sylvesters. This house still stands...looking good.

Omar remarried around 1910 to Ellen Goyer and did some remodeling at her house on 625 Sable. The side dormer is of his handiwork. This house has been well cared for through

the years. A garage has been added which was not there originally. No garage was there when Joe lived there with his father and new step-mother. They didn't need a garage. The sidewalk was of wood resembling a small boat dock.

The little side entrance is still in the same place where, Joe remembers, many a day, coming home from St. Bernard School, climbing the little stairs, opening the door, and quietly going in. His stepmother, much loved by Joseph, would be sewing, as she was a dressmaker. Some days she would be on her knees silently saying her rosary — perhaps for her own son, Francis, who was serving in World War I. (That war took Francis' life. His name is imprinted on the monument on the Alpena Court House lawn.)

Vacation time was nice now for Joe. Ellen took him to Canada to visit relatives. Ellen and Joseph would take the D & C passenger steamer "City of Alpena" at the dock in Thunder Bay River and go to Port Huron. From there they would go over to Canada. The whole trip took a couple of days.

Riding on the passenger boat was a treat. Elegant stairways led from the main floor to an upper deck. Dining, sleeping, and lounging areas were comfortable and inviting. The boat carried other freight such as livestock or whatever needed to be transported. This cargo was below the passengers' quarters. The Detroit and Cleveland line went as far south as Cleveland, making many stops along the way.

However, Joseph was not to have the companionship, care, and protection of Ellen for very long. She died before Joseph was 15, in 1918.

From then on Joseph was mostly alone until he met and married Mabel Johnson.

Mabel and Joe had 13 children: Ellen, Willieoma, Wilbur, Marie, Joan, Joseph, Mary, Margaret, Catherine, Barbara, Mark, David, and Linda. They lived at 1015 Long Lake Ave. most of their married life.

Mabel did so much with so little.

Automatic washing machine? No way! Mabel got her first electric washer only after the birth of her fifth child.

Electric refrigerator? No way! Mabel had an ice box. She put a chunk of ice in the top part and caught the water in a pan underneath. Indoor plumbing and running water — that came later. For some time, Mabel and Joe were glad to have a sink, a hand pump indoors, and an outhouse. Life was hard.

The children went to St. Anne School. There were no buses to accommodate them since they were inside the city limits, even though it took little legs more than 30 minutes to walk that distance.

Mabel died in 1986, continues to reside in shared so many years. By Willie

Have water in our... He has and 22

