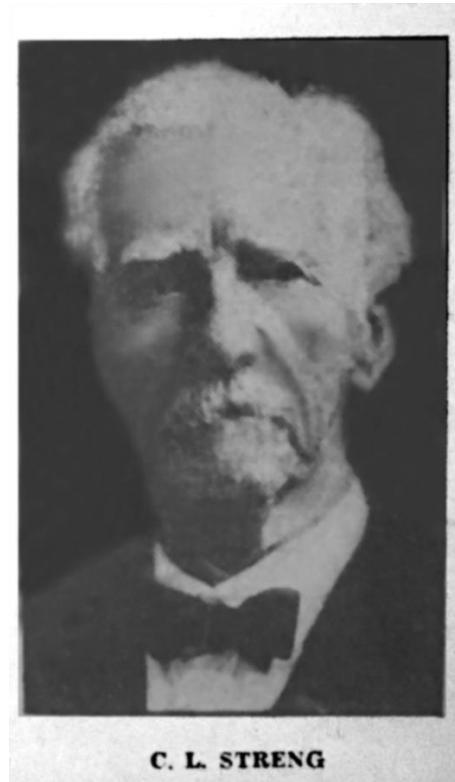


Citizens - C. L. Stren

By Barbara Bedau Brow
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On February 1, 1868, Christian Louis Stren began his first work in Montague as a bookkeeper for the Ferry Dowling Lumber Company.

C.L. Stren was born in the Province of Utrecht, Holland, 11 July 1834. He came to America with his family in 1847 on a sailing boat that required six weeks in the Atlantic Ocean and another week by water from the coast to Milwaukee. His family then came to Michigan and first settled on a farm in Saugatuck where his father died in 1848. Then they moved to Holland where his mother died in 1856.

The first job C. L. had was when he was about 14 years old, and he carried mail to a saw mill twice a week. The mill was three miles distance from the town and the round trip was six miles, for which he was paid six cents a day.

He then worked as a clerk for Henry D. Post, the postmaster in Holland, who was also the proprietor of the General Store. When the panic of 1857 occurred, the town was demoralized, and the wages were ruined.

At the time, Stren was getting \$300 a year salary from Post, who struck a deal with him. Post gave Stren a watch for a month's work. It was a very good watch. And with the \$40 he had saved, Stren lived nicely through the winter.

In the Spring, Streng went to work for his brother-in-law, Charles Pfaff, in his store. There he got board for clerking for him. Later he received board and an \$8 a month salary. When Pfaff became Sheriff, he wanted Streng to buy him out. All he had to do was pay off the \$2,000 the store owed. He succeeded in the buyout, and from 1860 to 1867 conducted the business with some success.

By June 1861, C. L. had married Helena Sackers in Holland, Michigan. They had four children: John C. (1862-1931); Johanna (1864-1876); Maria (1866-1913); and Henry Peter (1868-1933). His wife Helena died in 1876.

He enlisted in the Civil War in July 1863.

In 1864, while shipping a boat-load of goods from Chicago for the store, the boat was lost and its cargo went to the bottom, seriously crippling business. In 1867, the burning of the store completed his financial ruin, and he was left to begin over again. Streng decided that Holland was not very profitable, so he moved to Grand Haven.

In Grand Haven, Streng engaged as head clerk for the firm of Squires & Osgood, a general store. This gave promise of being a good job, but the failure of this firm at the end of six months left him seeking other employment.

In 1868, Streng then took a horse and sleigh to Montague where he soon had secured the position of bookkeeper for Ferry, Dowling & Co., at \$300 a year. From 1868 until 1883 he continued in that position, and when the E. P. Ferry Lumber Company was reorganized, he was elected Secretary. He remained with them one year, after which he resigned, because it required Sunday work.

Streng had married for the second time to Mary A. Harting on 24 December 1877 in Grand Rapids. They had three children: Charles (1878-1901); Henrietta (1881-1955); and Frederick (1855-1954). His wife Mary died in Montague on 22 December 1918. She is buried in Oak Grove Cemetery along with their sons.

In the Spring of 1884, he then took the census of Montague before leaving for Grand Rapids where he was employed in the private office of I. M. Weston and for a time was bookkeeper in the Fourth National Bank of Grand Rapids.

In the Spring of 1885, he returned to Montague and chose to engage in the dry-goods business, and from small beginnings built up a large and rapidly increasing trade and was in business until 1907. He also had a store in Holland, MI, which was managed by his son, Henry P. Streng.

In November 1901 it was reported that Mrs. Streng had purchased from Mrs. Anna Dowling the handsome brick block which Streng's Emporium had occupied for many years. Besides two spacious store fronts there were pleasant rooms overhead which were being used by the Odd Fellows Lodge. The building being described was located next to the bank on the corner of Ferry Street and Dowling and is now all part of Figgs Boutique.

In June 1907, C. L. sold his Montague business to the Potter Bros of Chicago. William F. and Joseph S. Potter owned 17 dry goods stores in various towns in Illinois and Wisconsin. Joseph S. Potter, junior partner in the business, oversaw the new store in Montague.

With the passing of his second wife, C. L. moved to Kalamazoo in 1918 and lived with his son Henry, where he died on 13 March 1931 at the age of 96 years. His body was brought back to Montague for burial in Oak Grove Cemetery on Monday, 16 March.

A telegram was sent on Friday to his son John who was living in Portland, Oregon, informing him of his father's passing. A telegraphed reply was received on Saturday indicating John's inability to attend. Then a few hours later another telegram was received that told of John's death in an automobile accident that day. The body of the son was cremated, and the ashes were buried next to his father in Block 84, Lot 2 East, Plot 1, in Oak Grove Cemetery. There is no marker for either C. L. or his son John.