

Building History – Schmidt - Hartwig Building

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



C2016 – Left to Right - Schmidt-Hartwig Building and the Ohrenberger 1930 Building

The building pictured on the left might be one of the oldest commercial buildings still standing in the city of Montague. However, this is not the first building to be built at this spot.

The first building at this location was built by John Little, who purchased the property in 1868 for \$150 from Edward P. Ferry and built a saloon and boarding house, referred to as the Norwegian Boarding House.

The Montague House hotel was built next to it in 1870 at the location of the present Lipka block. When the Montague House hotel burned on 23 February 1873, it was reported that it took several buildings on both sides of Ferry Street and a boarding house at the bottom of the hill. The only building at the bottom of the hill between the Montague House and Water Street was John Little's boarding house and saloon.

A new building was built at the location between 25 February and 27 June 1873. John Little and his wife Mary sold the land to Ernst Schmidt in June 1873 for \$850.

John Little was born in Canada around 1836. His wife Mary was born in Ireland around the same time. They had two children: a daughter Ellen (1857-1941) and a son John Edward (1863-1929). By the 1880 census, daughter Ellen was married and John, his wife and son had moved to Richland, Montcalm, where John died on 17 April 1893.

According to a map from 1877, this building was identified as F. G. Schmidt Boarding and Saloon, but was actually Ernst G. Schmidt.

On 12 April 1880 Ernst G. Schmidt and his wife Katrina sold the property to Anton Menges and Joseph Ohrenberger.

Ernst Gustav Schmidt was born in Germany on 18 May 1835. According to the 1870 census, he and his wife Catherine (1841-1929) were living in White River with 6 of their children: Henry (1857-1932); Rosa (1859-1938); Catherine (1861-); Joseph (1866-1892); Frederick (1868-1948); and Ernestina (1869-1951). By the 1880 census they had returned to Wisconsin, and were living in Milwaukee where another son Ernst (1874-1960) had been added to the family. Ernst G. Schmidt died in Marshfield, Wisconsin on 28 May 1896.

A map from 1883 showed the former Schmidt building was now listed as a Meat Shop. There was a warehouse next to the building and an icehouse behind it in the alley. The Ohrenberger building completed the block but was only about two-thirds the size that it would later become.

In 1892, it was still listed as a Meat shop. The warehouse next door had now become a cold storage building, and the icehouse remained in the alley. Ohrenberger's saloon and hardware store had been enlarged and took up the rest of the block.

In October 1896, the building was still listed as a Meat shop, and all the rest of the buildings remained unchanged.

In March 1900, R. A. Nesbit announced that he was establishing a feed store in the building formerly occupied by James Reavey in the same business, and James was working as a night watchman at the foundry. However, plans seemed to have changed a bit, as Chris Degen established a Feed store there in April 1900 instead. And R. Nesbit reportedly bought the bakery business of a Mrs. Pino instead.

In August 1900, Ohrenberger renovated the cold storage building, adjacent to his saloon and the former Schmidt building, and converted it to a store building. In October 1900, Frank Fink moved his barbershop into that space.

A map from 1902 showed a Feed Store located in the former Schmidt building. This is most likely Chris Degen's Feed store.

In 1906 Joe Watkins resigned from Brooks Brothers meat market, owned by Frank & Fred Brooks on Ferry Street, and went into the meat business for himself in the building next to the Ohrenberger block, opening as the Union Meat Market. Frank Wanamaker also left Brooks meat market and went to work for Watkins.

A map from 1910 confirmed that it was occupied by a Meat Shop, probably the Union Meat Market, and seems to have continued as such for several more years.

On June 11, 1925, it was announced that Otto Hartwig, former meat cutter at Ohrenberger's market on Ferry Street, bought the building next to Gasahl's barber shop, which was located in the building formerly occupied by Reavey's feed store. Hartwig was fixing up the space for a meat market.

In March 1930, at the time of the Ohrenberger Block fire, Otto Hartwig was still operating his meat market from this building. He remained there until December 1936 when he announced that he would be moving to Chicago where he had already purchased another meat market. Hartwig then

sold the building to Charles E. Hardy, a well-known resident and experienced butcher who had taken over the shop.

In May 1938, Mr. & Mrs. Harold Lundquist purchased the Hardy Market from Mr. & Mrs. Charles E. Hardy.

In 1940, Harold Christensen purchased the Hartwig building next to the A&P branch store for his new meat store – Christy’s Market. He had worked for A. L. Ainger meat market in Whitehall for five years and previously for his father in Chicago. In the fall of 1950 Christy’s market closed and they took an extended vacation to visit their son who was in the service stationed in Texas at the time. The grocery and meat market reopened again in February 1951.

Then in June 1953, Jack Banninga leased the former Christy’s market building and opened a meat market under the name White Lake Market. Ronald Weeks joined Banninga as a partner in the market. The store opened on 29 June 1953. The store was a meat market only and did not carry a line of groceries as the previous owner had. In July 1954 the following ad appeared: “After much thought and discussion we have come to the conclusion that hardware should be bought in a hardware store, drugs in a drugstore, and meat in a meat market. Therefore, we have stopped selling BEER, so we can give you 100% satisfactory service on our meats.” Sometime after, Banninga closed the store and went to work for Taft Nesbit where he had worked before.

In November 1954 the White Lake Meat Market opened under new management of brothers Robert and William Townsend. Both brothers had meat market experience having worked for several years for Bazley meat market on Western Avenue in Muskegon. It’s unclear how long they were in business. William later went to work for Hooker Chemical for 28 years.

Unfortunately, over the years, businesses came and went and not all of them made it into the local newspapers.

From around 2002 to 2015 it was occupied by Paisley Place, which “carried teas, ‘tiques, art and locally crafted treasures”. The building received the White Lake Area Historical Society Award in 2008 for restoration and improvements. Paisley Place left the Schmidt building, moved into the former bank building, and joined Sweet Annie’s which was owned by Angela Pope Heur.

In September 2016 a Grand Opening was held for the Baby Bears Children’s Boutique. They were in business there until July 2017 when they moved to other locations in the Muskegon and Spring Lake areas.

The Wicker Chicken resale shop was opened by co-owners and operators Linda Mosher and her daughter Kylie Trent of Hesperia and friend Deserai Reichard of Fremont at this location in November 2017. It continues to operate there today.