

MICHIGAN TANNERY & EXTRACT COMPANY

KEGOMIC, EMMET COUNTY, MICHIGAN

KEGOMIC

The Forgotten Village

of the

Michigan Tannery
and Extract Company

1885-1952

by

DAVID W. BARTON

1999

David W. Barton
5-26-00

KEGOMIC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	PAGE	1.
2.	KEGOMIC VILLAGE'S BEGINNING	PAGE	2.
3.	KEGOMIC VILLAGE AT AN EARLIER TIME (Figure-2)	PAGE	4.
4.	A VIEW FROM LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY (Figure-3)	PAGE	5.
5.	HOW HIDES ARE TANNED	PAGE	7.
6.	THE BOARDING HOUSE (Figure-4)	PAGE	8.
7.	THE COMPANY STORE AND OFFICE (Figure-5)	PAGE	9.
8.	THE MANAGER'S HOUSE (Figure-6)	PAGE	10.
9.	THE COMPANY HOUSES (Figure-7)	PAGE	11.
10.	THE BASEBALL TEAM	PAGE	12.
	" " " (Figure-8)	"	13.
11.	81 WORKERS IN 1926	PAGE	14.
	" " " " (Figure-9)	"	15.
12.	THE DECLINING YEARS	PAGE	16.
	(Figure-10) 36 Cords of Wood	"	17.
13.	KEGOMIC TODAY	PAGE	18.
	" " (Figure-11) Map	"	19.
14.	FAREWELL TO KEGOMIC VILLAGE (Figure-12)	PAGE	20.
15.	CHRONOLOGY OF KEGOMIC	PAGE	21.
16.	SOURCES OF INFORMATION (numbers referenced in text)	PAGE	22.
17.	POEM: KEGOMIC THE FORGOTTEN VILLAGE	PG.	23.



KEGOMIC TANKERY @ EARLY 1900's



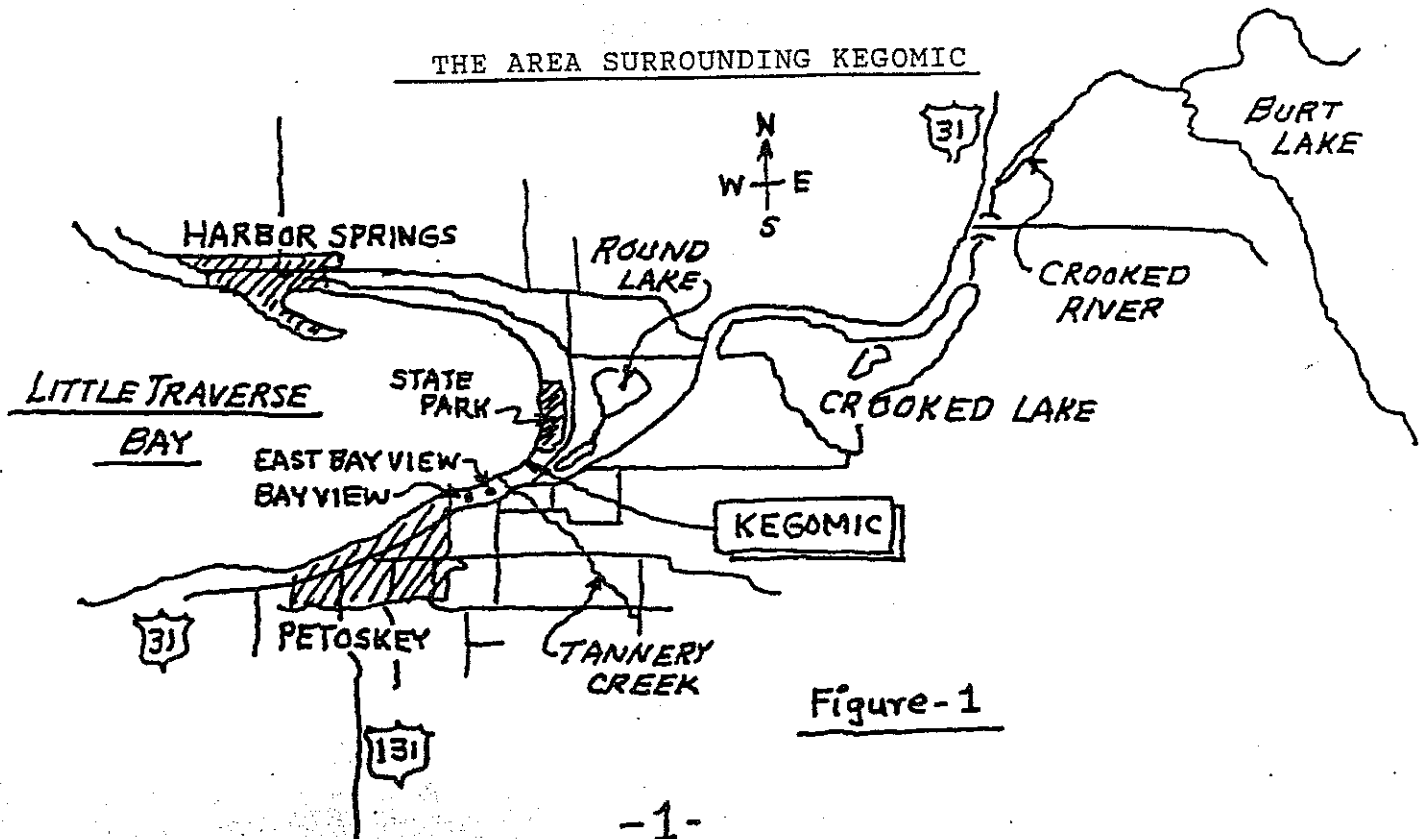
INTRODUCTION

So few people are familiar with the word, KEGOMIC, it seems best to define this Indian word and then orient where this area is located before any of this story is told.

In the booklet titled, "The Lure of Kegomic" (10), the Indian name Kegomic can mean several things: Fish Town is one, setting sun is another and Place of portage is another. All three of these fit the location of the Kegomic Village that this story is about. We know that different portages to the Inland Water Route by way of Mud Lake, Round Lake and Crooked Lake were made along the East and Southeast shores of Little Traverse Bay. Over the years, these portage points changed as the shifting sand dunes filled or obstructed the nearby streams.

Kegomic is located along the southeastern shore of Little Traverse Bay. At one time it covered the land of the Petoskey State Park, the Tannery Creek Condominiums and the commercial area on the north side of US-31 from the corner of M-119 westward to Rice Street in what used to be called "Edgewater" and later was known as East Bay view. Several of the company houses actually went into Edgewater I am told. Kegomic included what is now Glen's Shopping Plaza and which started out as Giantway Shopping Plaza.

Unlike its name, Kegomic was not an Indian Village but a factory village about three miles east of Petoskey. It started in 1885 and lasted until 1952 when the factory was officially shut down (11). The factory was ranked as Petoskey's oldest industrial plant (8). However, there seems to be a discrepancy in the date the factory was started. (i.e. 1867 as the paper stated versus the more believable 1885) In either case, the Tannery would still be one of Petoskey's oldest plants. Figure-1 shows the area surrounding Kegomic.



KEGOMIC VILLAGE'S BEGINNING

The two Rice brothers, W.W. and B.B., already had tanneries in the East. While visiting Petoskey, they observed the abundant source Hemlock trees needed for the tanning bark. The availability of both water and railroad transportation made this an ideal location for another factory. Railroad service to Petoskey had been available since 1874.

So on March 17, 1885 the brothers established the W.W. Rice Leather Company at Kegomic (8,9). Production was naturally small that year as much construction in the village was required. By 1901, the output was 800 pieces of shoe leather per day. William Wirt Rice had since died, so his son, George, was manager(11). Their main offices were in Boston, Massachusetts.

The leather Tanning Factory consisted of a water tower for the water and pressure needed, a power house to supply the needed electricity, steam and hot water, a machine shop to make and repair the equipment, storage buildings for the incoming hides, and the buildings where the soaking, tanning, scaping, drying and rolling took place. In addition the Company furnished a company office with living quarters upstairs for the superintendant, a company general store and post office, a boarding house for single employees and 32 company houses for families to live in.(11) Of course a number of employees lived in the nearby surrounding area.

Figure-2 is a larger scale map of the village area showing what is believed to be what it looked like in the early days. An un-named dirt road paralleled US-31. Along this road to the west of the creek were 16 company houses with two or three extending into the Edgewater Plat area. To the east of the creek, on a dirt road going north to the factory were 7 more houses. Nine other house were scattered in the village including the larger house for the plant manager. To the west of the intersection of the roads near the factory, was located the Boarding House. Across the street from it were the Company Office and General Store. Close by to the south and east were a barn and a community well where the residents could get their water. A baseball diamond was located to the south of these.

There were no trash pick-ups in those days, so to the east was a path leading to the village "dump". Across the railroad tracks to the north were two very large ponds or holding basins. Sludge and spent liquor from the tanning vats were pumped to these ponds so the settling action could rid the mixture of skin, hair, blood and bark before the liquid would flow into the bay. Of course the stain from the tannic acid did not settle-out but flowed with the liquor into the bay. The water in Little Traverse Bay near the Tannery became so polluted and discolored, that swimmers avoided that area for many years. When the wind was from the southeast, neighboring summer residents complained about the awful odors from the settling ponds due to the decaying remains from the animal hides.

A small dam was built with a foot path across its top in the creek. This made a nice pond located behind the boarding house. From the dam water flowed under an auto bridge near the manager's house then through a culvert under the railroad tracks, and finally into the bay.

Helen Pater (7) provided two snapshots of what the company houses looked like just prior to their being torn down. These were two story frame houses built for single families. There were basements but no central heat. Space heaters or stoves burning wood or coal were used for cooking and heating. Sometimes the stove would be moved out to a rear summer kitchen in the summer to be cooler. That rear area is probably where the washing and bathing took place. There were no inside bathrooms. Water had to be carried from the community well for cooking and bathing. Living at Kegomic was very spartan in those early days.

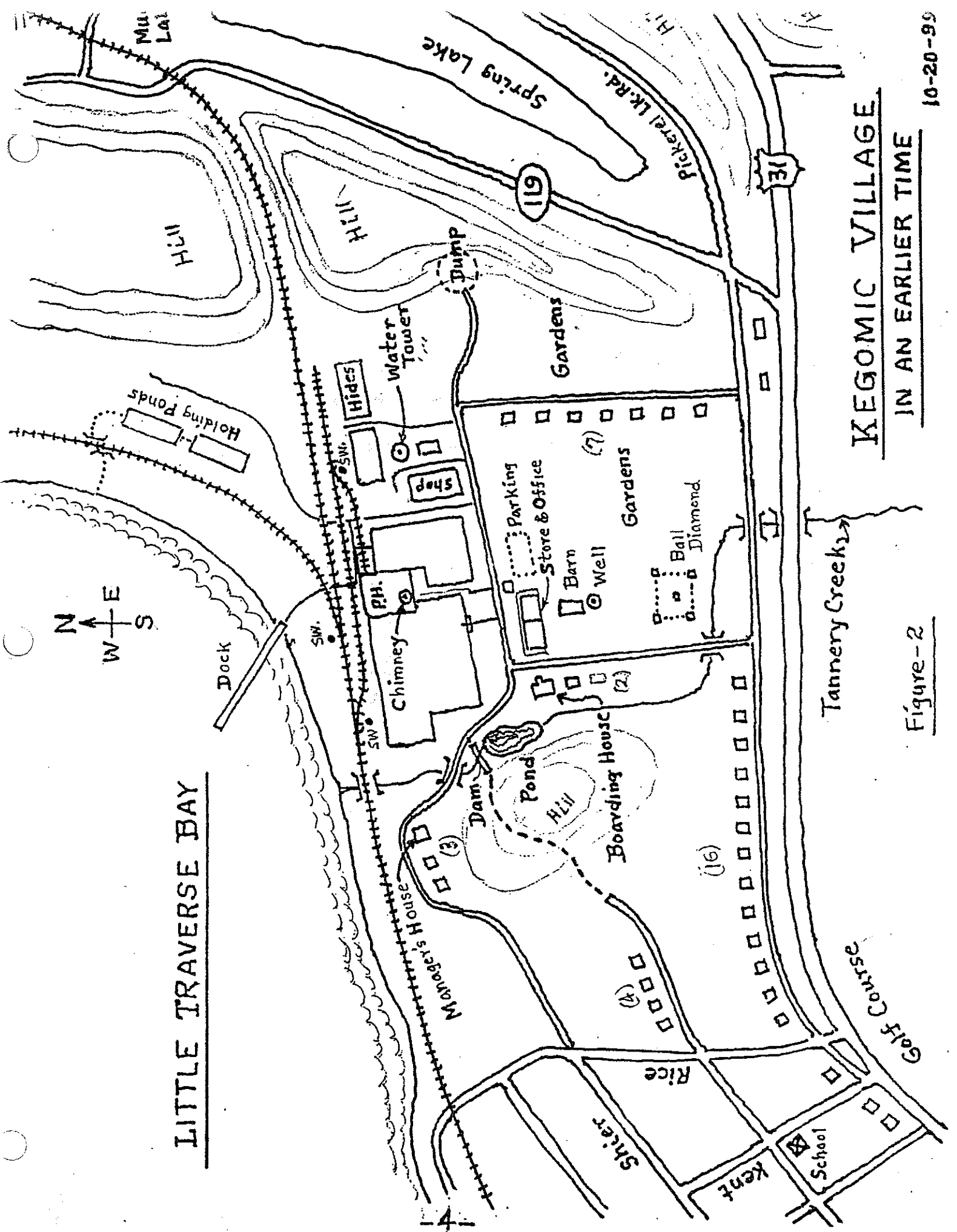
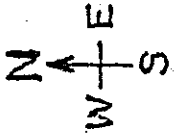
About 1938 the company made some improvements. Foundations and sills were repaired as needed and white asphalt shingles covered the previous green painted siding. This may have improved the warmth in the winter as these old house did not enjoy today's insulation. Roofs were also repaired. Perhaps the best improvement was the wiring of the houses and the addition of electricity. The R.E.A. had finally come to Kegomic (11).

In 1941 Kegomic's population was 155 workers. If the boarding house had 10-15 roomers, and each home had one worker, then from 42-47 of the employees lived in the village. The rest must have lived nearby.

In Edgewater was a two room school for the children. Both Helen Pater and Faye Frycynski recall going to school there for grades 1 thru 4. After that children had to walk or eventually be bused to Petoskey for higher grades. I'm told that it was quite an event when the local school buses agreed to carry the Catholic children to their parochial schools.

With the Kegomic Village close to the Petoskey- Bay View Golf Course, summer employment was available to those young boys interested in golf caddying. They could walk across the road to their jobs. Some of these boys became very good golfers. One even became a golf pro at the Walloon Country Club in later years(5). The pro was Ed Kelbel, son of John who worked at the tannery for many years.

LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY



KEGOMIC VILLAGE

IN AN EARLIER TIME

Figure - 2

A VIEW FROM LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY

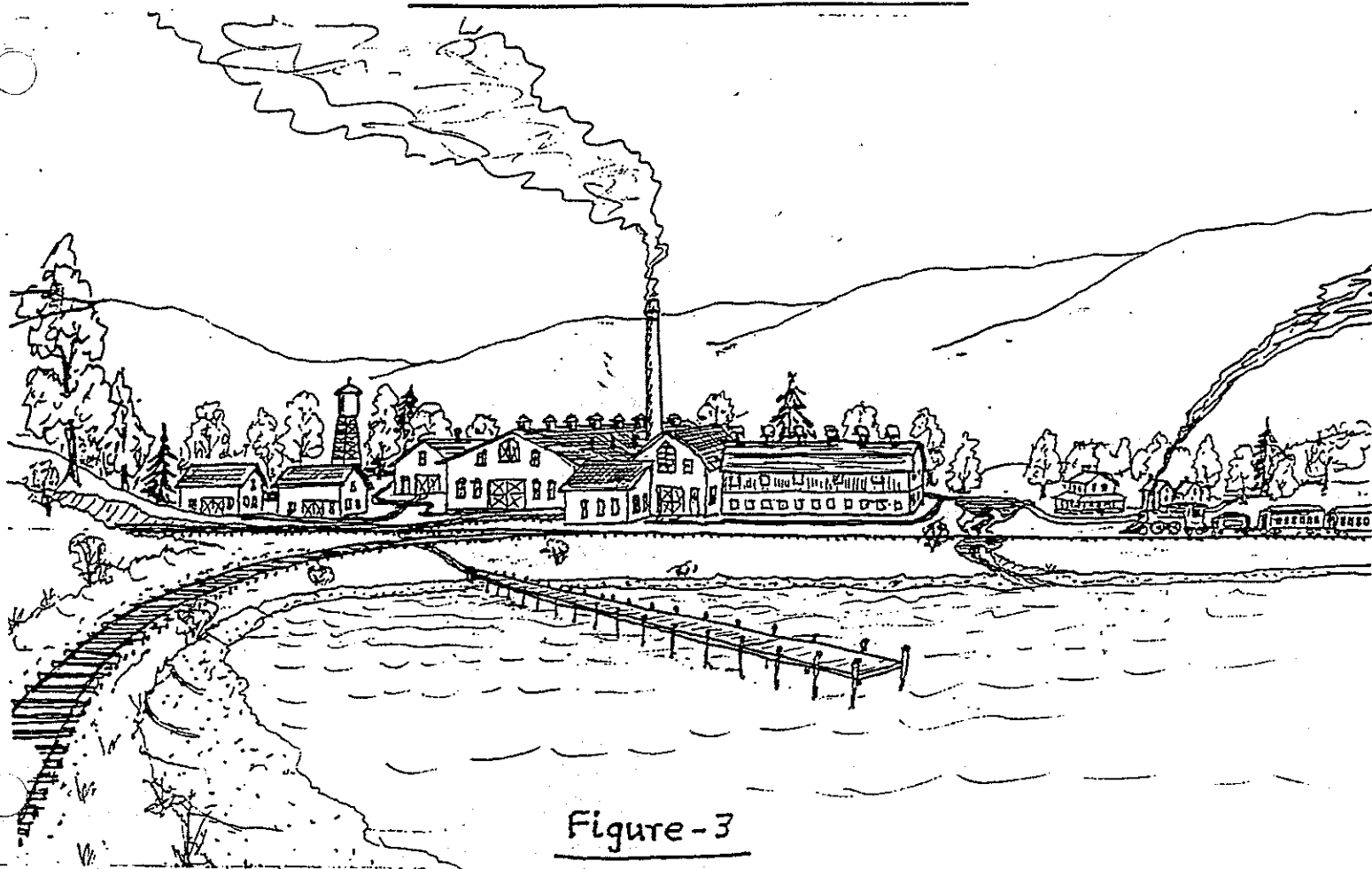


Figure-3

A view of Kegomic was sketched by me.
It contains interesting things for you to see.
There may be mistakes, but this view is to share,
Memories will come back for those who lived there.

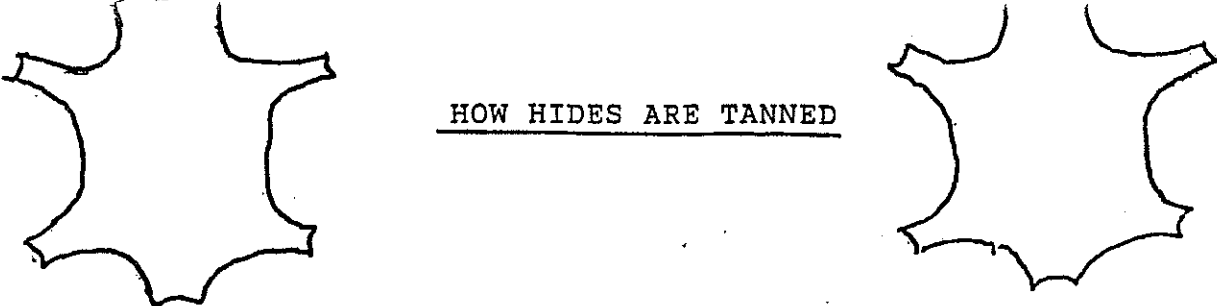
Found in the corner of Little Traverse Bay,
Kegomic is nearly forgotten today.
The following comments will be a brief tour,
As I lead the way through this simple picture.

Based on pictures from Bob Steele and talks with James Still, I have made this imaginary picture looking south from the bay towards what the Kegomic factory may have looked like in the early days. Let's now go on a tour of the picture, Figure-3.

1. In the foreground is the old dock reaching out to the deeper water where larger boats could be moored. We know the dock was built but what its purpose was is still questionable. Bob Steele recalls that the dock was wiped out by storm in 1936. Because it was never rebuilt, suggests that it was not necessary for the tanning of hides. What I believe may have been the purpose is for a place for boats to bring the needed supplies when the village was constructed. Lumber, bricks, cement, windows and boilers, electric dynamos and plumbing could have come to keep the construction going. The concrete abutments for the dock can still be seen toppled in the sand at the shore.

2. A single railroad track is seen to the left which follows the shore around to Harbor Springs. That "Dummy Train" service started in 1880. Then in 1905 the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad added a second track around the bay to handle the frequent trips back and forth between Petoskey and Harbor Springs. The switching was done manually near the tannery. Not visible in Figure-3 but shown in Figure-2 are the railroad sidings which permitted hide to be put into the storehouses on the left and for finished leather to be loaded for shipment in the small building in front of the power house. (center of picture)
3. On the far right a passenger train is approaching the Tannery Creek culvert and the Manager's house can be seen behind and to the left of the engine. The culvert remains even though the tracks no longer exist; and the creek still trickles into the bay. Helen Pater recalls that the train ride to Petoskey cost 5¢.
4. To the south of the culvert can be seen the automobile bridge with the road leading to the factory. Just beyond the bridge, but not visible in the picture, is the small dam with footpath over it which forms a pond behind the boarding house. Tannery Creek starts-up in the hills beyond Mitchell Street and wanders down past the Golf Course to the Pirates Cove miniature golf course at US-31. Then it goes under the highway, past the east side of the current Bank-One and follows along the shopping center en route to the bay.
5. To the left of the creek is a long building with a barn type roof containing many ventilation funnels. Among other things, the building has many of the tanning vats.
6. Connected to the left is the powerhouse with the tall smokestack. It contains the furnaces, boilers, generators, pumps and controls to make the factory operate. In front of the powerhouse is the shipping building into which a freight car can be moved to get loaded. Another item, not visible but important, coal carrying freight cars could be stopped opposite the powerhouse and the coal dumped down onto a chute-like conveyer to carry the coal into the boiler room and furnaces. Workers would clean up spillage with shovels.

7. To the left of center, the large building is for more of the tanning process; but I don't know its name.
8. To the left and further back is the machine shop. This shop made and repaired the factory's mechanical equipment. It was very important to have the self sufficiency of this machine shop at hand.
9. The water tower is prominently shown on the left; and in front of the watertower are two storage building for animal hides. These hides came all the way from the Argentine in South America.
10. Finally on the very left, the cut through the hill shows where the tracks run towards Crooked Lake and Mackinaw City. The distant hills are those over which Mitchell Street runs.



HOW HIDES ARE TANNED

Hides usually refer to the skins of cows and horses while Skins refer to smaller animals like calves, pigs and sheep (13). These mammals have three layers to their hides: 1. Epidermis or a thin outer layer, 2. Corium or Dermis, the thick central layer and 3. Subcutaneous the inner fatty layer. The Corium makes the leather after the other two layers are removed. Accomplishing all of this is what a Tannery does.

A tanning agent displaces water from between the protein fibers and cements these fibers together to form leather. There is a rolling process which helps press these fibres together also. A Tanning Factory can choose any one of three tanning agents to operate:

1. Vegetable Tannin (Tannic Acid) from th bark of Oak trees or Hemlock trees. This is a natural process.
2. Chemical Salts like chromium sulphate.
3. Fish or animal oils often used by the Indians.

To prevent decay in the fresh hides, which starts very quickly, they are cured by dehydration then salted or pickled with acids before shipping to the tannery. When received at the tannery, they are first soaked to remove water soluble materials and to restore their original shape. The hair is loosened by a process called liming and then removed by hand or by machine scraping. The extraneous flesh or tissues (i.e. the inner and outer layers) are removed by machine. Finally the hides are washed, de-limed, bated and pickled before rolling and drying to finish the leather. This process can take many weeks or even months to complete.

When we read that the tannery completed 600 hides per day, we must remember that the job wasn't done in one day. These 600 hides started the process months before they came off the production line. Only by loading the vats every day for months in advance, can this final daily production be realized. When the tannery closed their doors in 1952, soaking had to be stopped the year before.

I suspect that when the Tannery sold some of the property to the City of Petoskey for the Park, the supply of Hemlock had been depleted. They started using a chemical process which hastened the tanning procedure. They must have stopped using the settling ponds about that time too, if a park were planned by the city.

THE BOARDING HOUSE

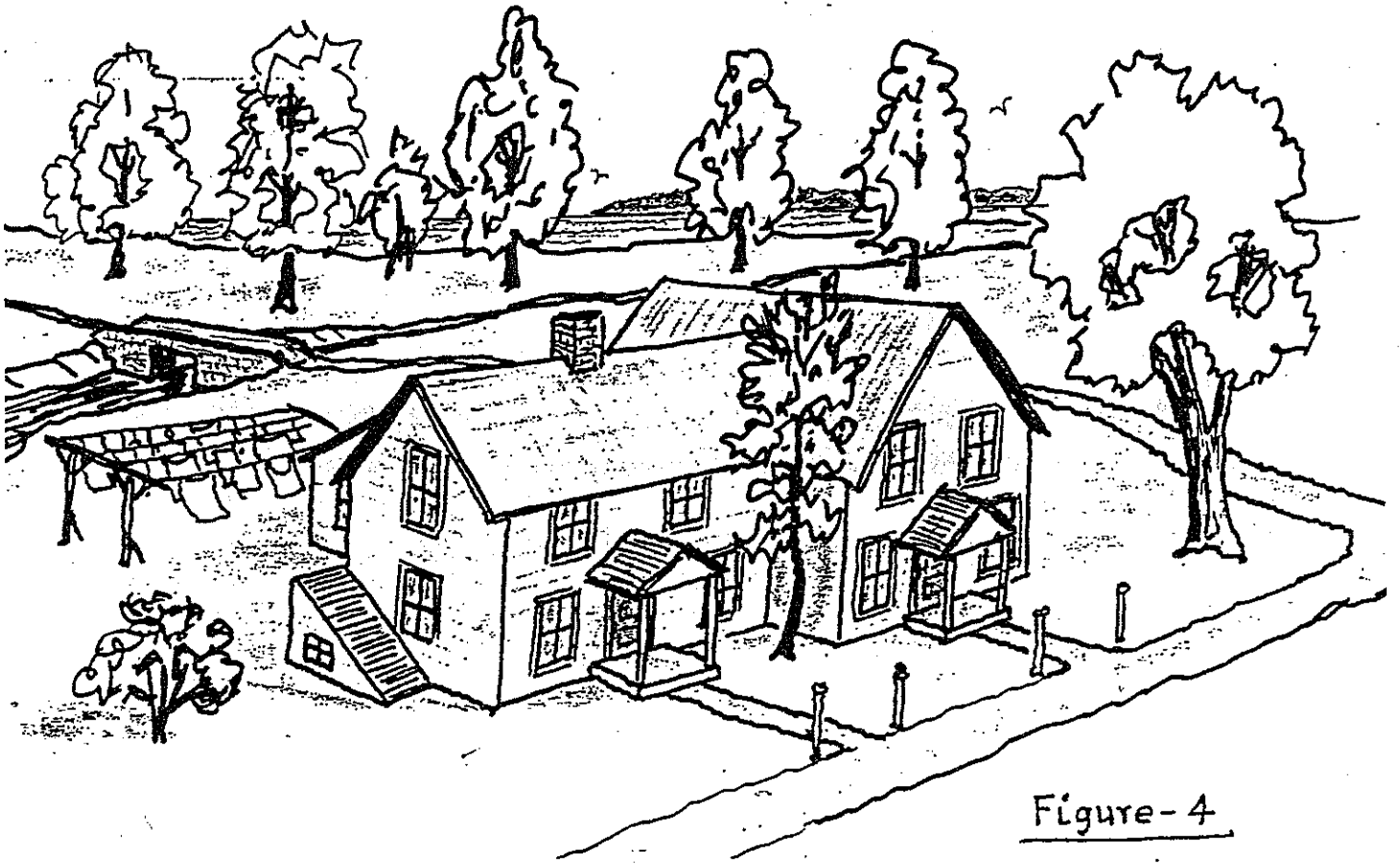


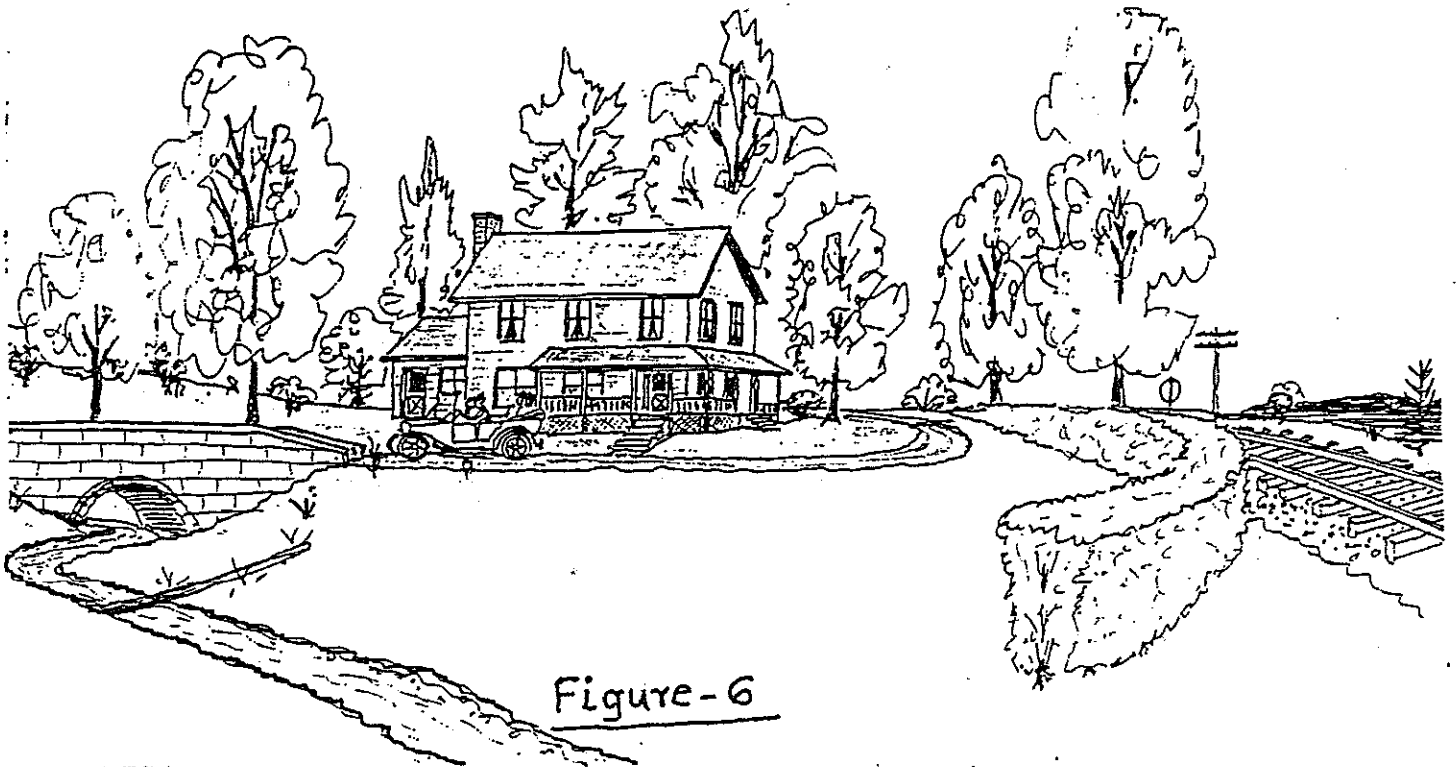
Figure-4

Based on seeing a beautiful watercolor painting belonging to Betty Still Grant, this sketch labeled Figure-4 illustrates the Boarding House run for many years by Betty's grandmother, Mrs Herman. The painting was done by local artist, Bill Bodine, who at one time had his studio up over Symons General Store in Petoskey. The painting was given to Betty's mother by Dale and Nancy Kuebler for the retirement gift when she retired.

The boarding house must have had a sitting room for the residents as well as the important dining area. In addition there must have been a large kitchen plus a large area with stove for the continual laundering of bedding and towels from the boarders. I imagined that a shed type addition might be at the rear of the house and have shown that as well as the laundry on the clotheslines drying in the back yard. Beyond the laundry can be seen the dam and small pond behind the house; and in the far distance a suggestion of the bay is given.

Certainly the boarding house gave employment to wives or older girls living in the village. There would be cooks, dining waitresses, general cleaning help and laundry workers. Similar to the General Store, located across the street, the boarding house would be another center for local information exchanges. Hitching posts are shown in the front yard by the dirt road where horses could be tied during visits to the house. Note too an outside entrance to another sitting area in the basement of the house.

THE MANAGER'S HOUSE



This sketch has re-created the Manager's House in its correct setting based on a photograph provided by Bob Steele. How many and who all the managers were, I do not know. However, between 1913 and 1925 this was the home of Mr. & Mrs Henry Sik. They had come from Sweden and it was here that their daughter Ranghild Sik was born. Later on Ranghild married Mr. Broman and gave birth to Carlie (Broman) Steele and Janet (Broman) Van Lente. It is interesting to note that Bob and Carlie now summer at the Tannery Creek Condominiums in the area where Carlie and her mother were born.

It is believed that to the west beyond this house were two more of the company single family houses as have been pictured elsewhere. These three residents probably shared the same water pump which was behind the manager's house. These houses had a fine view of Little Traverse Bay as they faced north, The large hedge, possibly privet, in the frontyards screened the railroad tracks from view.

A small pipe can be seen in the sketch passing over the creek alongside of the bridge. This is a steam pipe which went to the manager's house. Undoubtedly, the manager had a 'perk' the rest of the people didn't have ...steam heat in the cold weather !

THE COMPANY STORE AND OFFICE

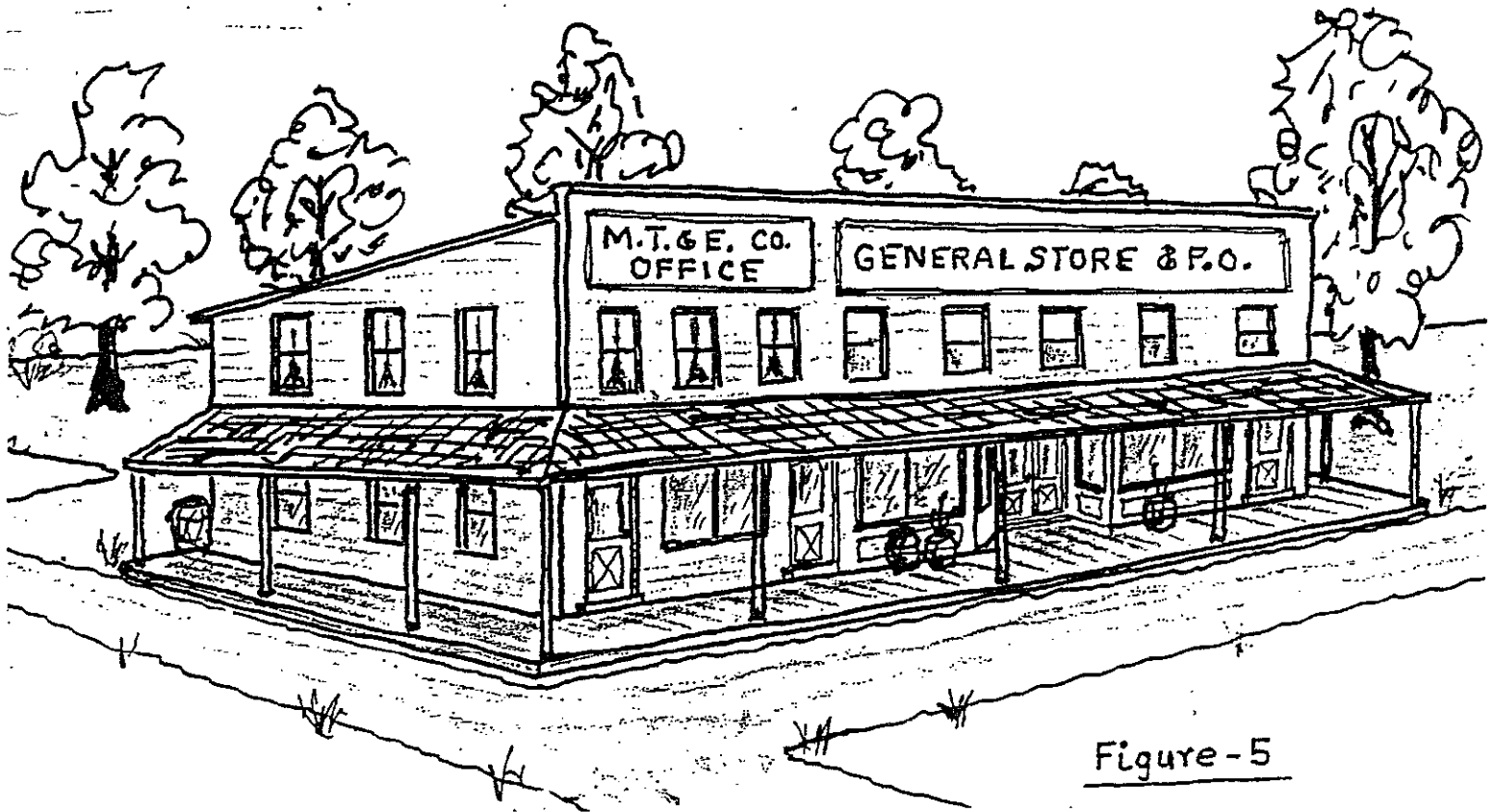
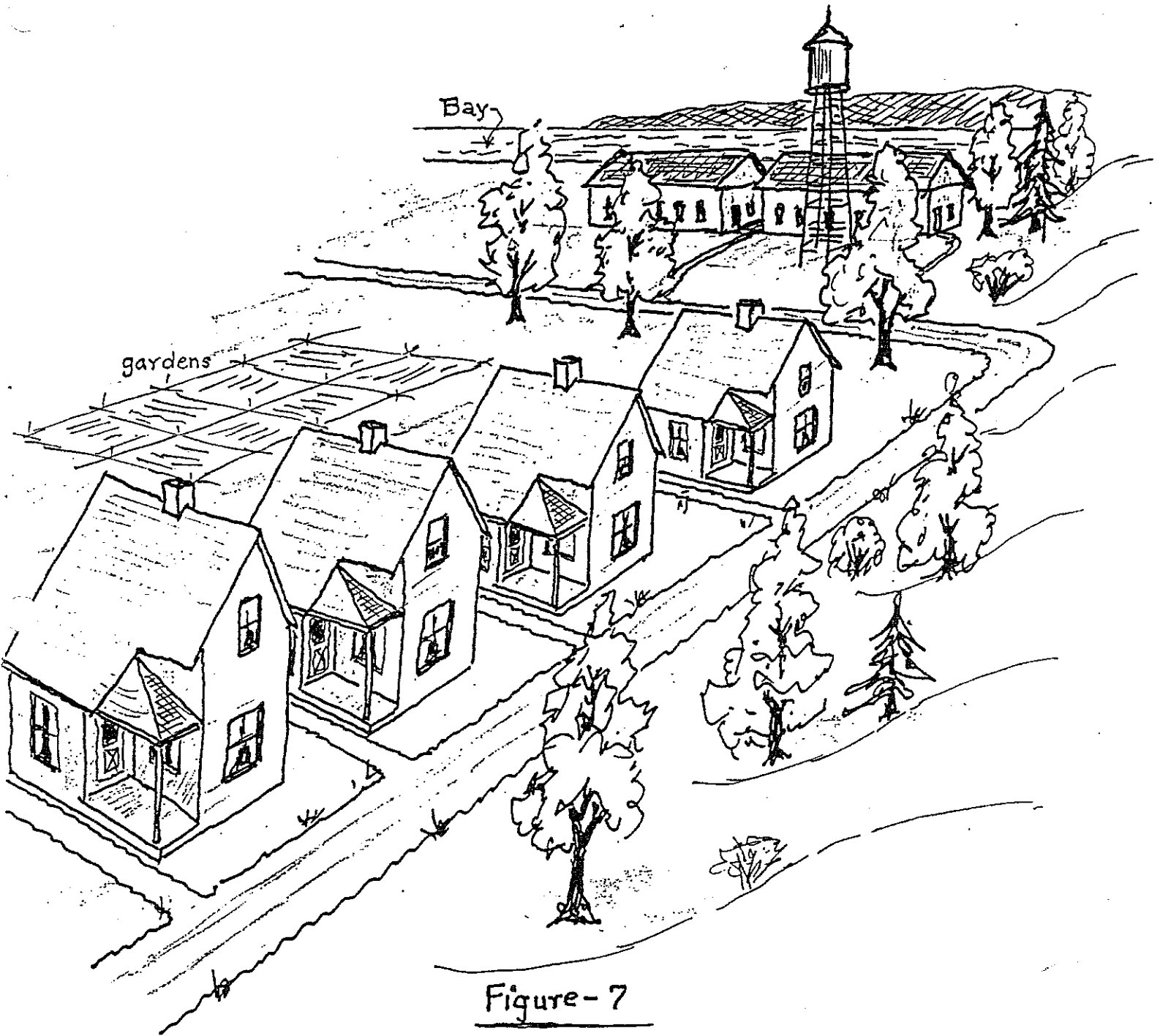


Figure - 5

Figure-5 shows what is imagined that the company store and business office looked like. I have been told that the two were built together and that a porch ran around three sides (16). We also know that the superintendant lived up over the office which he occupied. Not shown but to the right of the store and further back from the road were located two structures: One was a barn where perhaps horses could be kept during the winter as well as some wagons. The other was the community well where the residents came to get their supply of water for cooking, laundry and bathing. The well may have had the traditional crank operated windless to raise the water bucket, or perhaps it had the long pivoting pole called a wellsweep to raise the water buckets while giving counterweight to the water by a heavy end of the sweep at the short end..

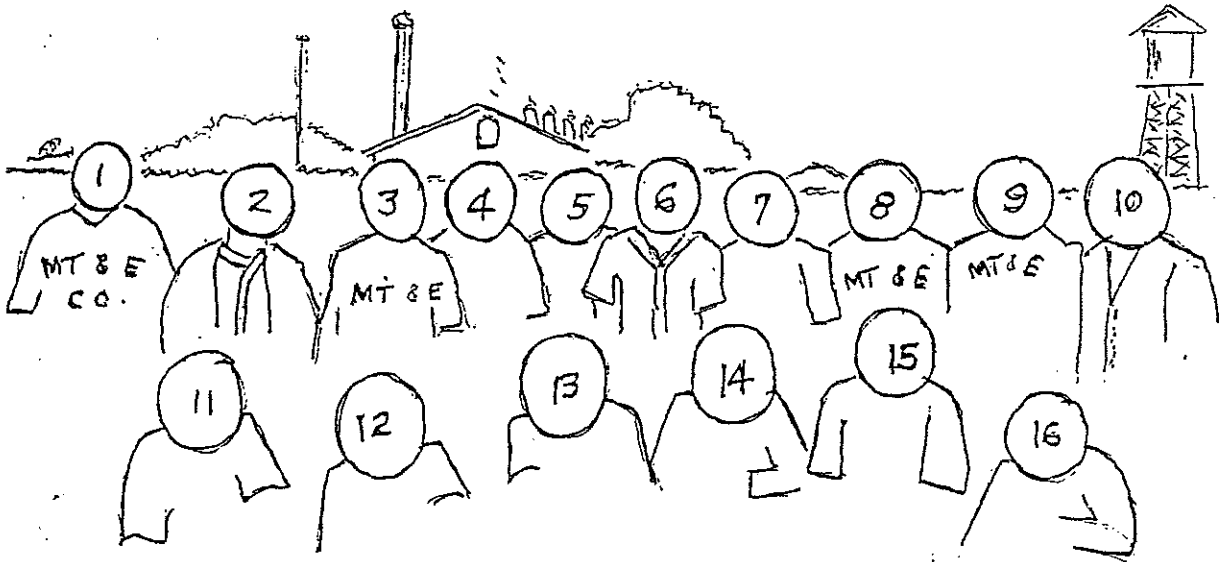
It is believed that the area over the store was a large vacant room accessed by the door and stairway shown on the far right of the store. I am told that on occasion, dances were held up in that room. It would also have served as the place to hold general meetings of the residents or even visitors to the tannery.

THE COMPANY HOUSES



THE M.T. & E.CO. BASEBALL TEAM

Figure-6 is a photo of the Michigan Tannery and Extract Company's Baseball Team. It was taken about 1930-35 and the trophy being displayed is believed to be won at the Emmet County Fair Playoff. In the background looking to the north can be seen the chimney of the powerhouse with the water tower to the far right. They were standing in the field to the east of the company store. Below the players of the team are identified:



- | | |
|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Zar Zaremski | 9. Arnold Jepsen |
| 2. Roy Zimmerman | 10. Clarence Strand |
| 3. Don Baker | 11. Sheridan Dashner |
| 4. Steve Kelbel | 12. Ed Webber |
| 5. George Rolis | 13. John Kelbel |
| 6. Jack Campbell | 14. Ralph Bader (mgr.) |
| 7. Glen Grossman | 15. Max Sheroski |
| 8. Louie Fettig | 16. John Schmoltd |

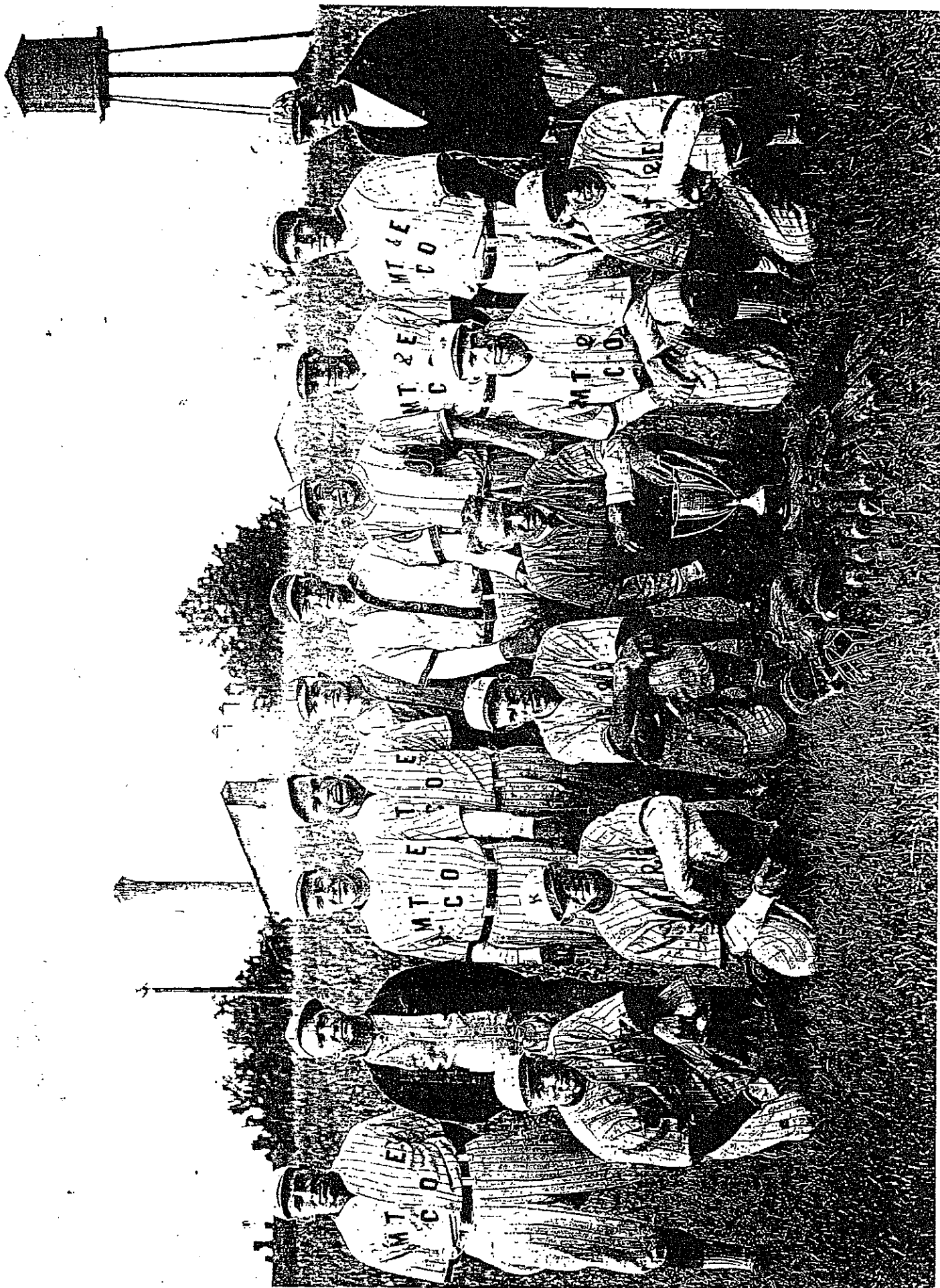


Figure - 6

81-WORKERS IN 1926

FIGURE 9 Is a fold-out photograph taken in 1926 of a group of the tannery workers. The picture was taken looking north towards the bay at the back side of the tannery. Barely discernible at the far left, you may notice a part of the manager's house. Along the lower half of the long wooden building and difficult to see are a long row of windows. In that part of the building are many vats according to John Still (15). The brick portion of the building has the main entrance doors. A steam line can be seen between this building and the one to the right which is also brick. Both have a multitude of ventilation chimneys or funnels to carry off fumes and odors from the tanning process. The small brick structure behind worker number 70 is the fire station. Behind worker no. 53 the tip of the powerhouse chimney can just be seen.

The peak employment of the tannery was 175 people, while the average around 1946 was 125 (8). With only 81 workers in the photograph, it might indicate that there was another shift not available when the group was assembled.

The tannery started out as the W.W. RICE LEATHER CO. in 1885, then in 1911 the MICHIGAN TANNERY AND EXTRACT CO. took over. In 1938 the HOWES LEATHER CO. became the parent company until the plant closed. It has not been too clear as to what the "extract" was in the company name; but it has been suggested that the ingredients for glue could be what it was.

THE DECLINING YEARS

Sometime in 1951, ten years after the start of World War II, was the start of the declining years. The Union had come in and was demanding higher wages. The freight costs both from the source of hides in South America and to the various shoe factories which used the leather had increased. But there was no chance of raising the price of the leather to cover these increased costs. With the introduction of synthetic leather, such as "neolite", the market for shoe leather had fallen sharply. Coupled with these two problems was the fact that the supply of hemlock trees had been exhausted and the company had had to use higher cost chemicals to do the job of tanning even before this time. Thus all of these factors spelled DOOM for the factory and its employees. In June of 1952 they officially closed the doors.

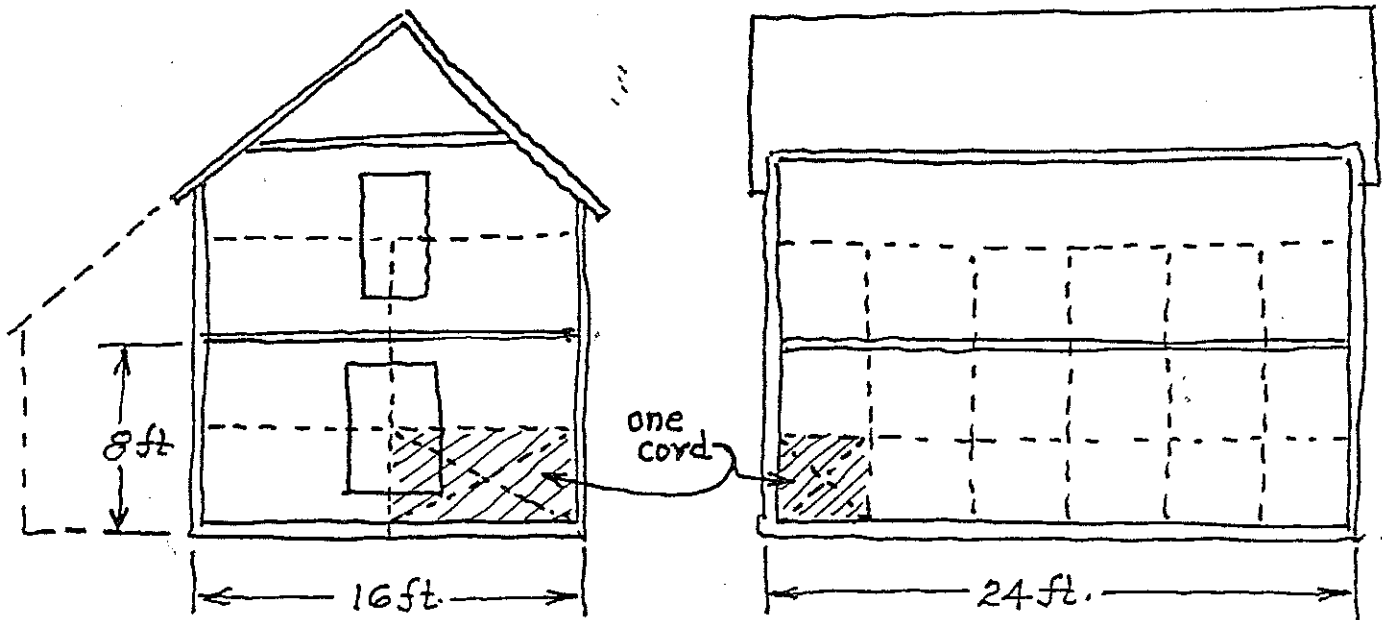
The using up of hemlock trees should not have been a surprise to anyone. Each day the tannery was consuming from 30 to 35 cords of hemlock bark. Figure-10 was made to emphasize just how much wood that really meant. Using my estimated size of the company house in Kegomic, it was determined that a bit over 35 cords of wood, from which the bark was removed, would fill a house from floor to ceiling downstairs and half of the upstairs as well ! That was a lot of trees destroyed which were never replanted. (Fortunately, 45 years later we can see that hemlocks are beginning to reappear)

After 1952, employees left for other jobs. The factory buildings were useless and the houses were left without care or maintenance. The land to the north was sold to the city of Petoskey for their park and what equipment could be used elsewhere was either sold or transferred to other tanneries. For a time, some of the houses continued to be rented by families; but as the decay continued, the fire department used some of them for practice in putting out fires. The factory buildings were razed in 1963 and the last house made its exit in 1974.

An interesting footnote to this...When John Still got out of the Navy in 1966, he was employed by the company hired to raze the factory. So he witnessed the demise of the very place he had lived as a young boy. In the process he was able to salvage some of the beams from the buildings as well as bricks which he used in the construction of his home.

36 CORDS IS A LOT OF WOOD

One Cord is equal to a stack of wood
4-feet high by 4-feet deep and 8-feet long.



A typical single family Company House

24 Cords fills downstairs floor-to-ceiling

12 Cords fills upstairs half-way to ceiling.

36 Total Cords (a 'bit' over the 30-35 per day)

Figure-10

KEGOMIC AREA TODAY

Figure-11 covers the very same area of land as is shown in Figure-2 which was Kegomic Village at an earlier time. This sketch shows the Kegomic area as it looks today. Some of the highlights are described.

To the west side, Glen's Shopping Plaza has replaced the original Giantway Plaza. Giantway originally developed the Kegomic property. Their earth moving equipment leveled the hill which was behind the manager's house. That hill was probably why the road, now called Old Tannery Creek Road, didn't continue to the factory but became a foot path around it. Note that the first street to the west of the shopping center is RICE, named after the owners of the first tannery.

Along the bay, the train tracks have all been removed and are getting quite overgrown. Whether or not that bed will become a bicycle path is yet to be determined. The tracks around the bay to Harbor Springs have been gone since the 1960's. The Harbor-Petoskey Road M-119, formerly M-131, was straightened-out in the place where the tracks once headed north to Crooked Lake and Mackinaw.

Tannery Creek still trickles into the bay; but it is getting choked with vegetation, fallen trees and trash dumped there by thoughtless people. A pretty park like area could possibly be made along its banks between US-31 and the bay without interfering with the Tannery Creek Condominiums.

The large holding ponds have long since been filled and are now part of the State Park's Camping Sites. Any trace of the smell and stain [s] now gone as far as we know.

Along US-31 from the Plaza to the corner of M-119 are many commercial developments on both sides. Trees seem to screen that "fast food alley" from the view from the condominiums. The condominiums are an asset to the community by keeping a residential rather than commercial atmosphere to the property. Tannery Creek has about 29 homesites and a community swimming pool which overlooks the Little Traverse Bay. The views of the bay from the condos are spectacular.

LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY

KEGOMIC AREA TODAY

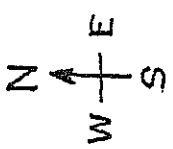
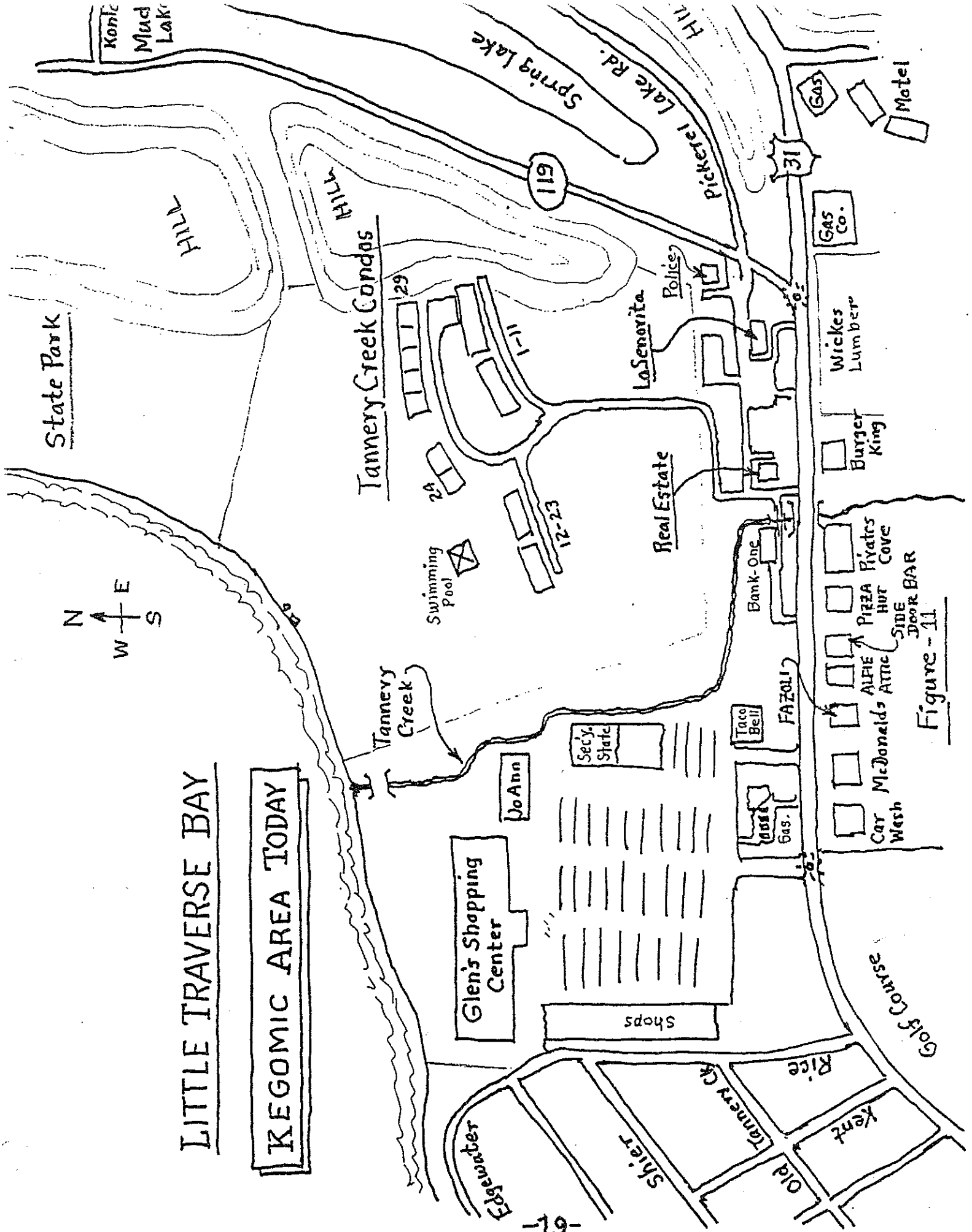


Figure - 11

FAREWELL TO KEGOMIC VILLAGE



Figure- 12.

To Kegomic Village this sketch says, "farewell".
In condominiums retirees now dwell.
The commercial development is hidden by trees,
And traffic noise is lessened by the westerly breeze.

The old settling ponds are now a campsite.
Vacationers enjoy camping both day and night.
People on the beach now are seldom aware,
Of the neighboring village which once was there.

With stones on the south shore, barefooters don't seek,
To explore the outlet of Tannery Creek.
Just a few can recall the old railroad bed,
Where rails and ties once were, there is grass instead.

A once prosperous village is long since gone.
Some previous residents still carry on.
Let us hope these pictures will help memories revive,
And keep Kegomic Village's History alive.

In case this farewell is too sad for some,
Rejoice, a new era has now begun.
So stand up and smile and do not be meek,
Give a warm welcome to Tannery Creek !

CHRONOLOGY OF KEGOMIC

- 1855 Indian Treaty of Detroit was signed.
- 1860 After a 5 year wait for the Indians to make their choice of land, the land was available for the white man to purchase.
- 1873 Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad (GR&I) reached Petoskey.
- 1874 Regular train service came to Petoskey.
- 1880 The first dummy train connected to Harbor Springs.
- 1885 March 17 W.W. RICE Leather Company was founded.(10)
- 1898 The Brewery was built on M-131 now M-119.
- 1901 Rice production was 800 pieces of shoe leather per day. Rice's son became manager.
- 1905 GR & I laid double tracks to Harbor Springs.
- 1911 Michigan Tannery and Extract Co. took over the Tannery. (subsidiary of Howe Leather Co.)
- 1934 MT&E sold park land to City of Petoskey. Later it was sold to State for the State Park.
- 1936 A big storm wiped out the dock.
- 1938 MT&E did upgrade on houses and the REA brought in electricity.
- 1941 MT&E employed 130 men and village population was 155. Factory tanned 600 hides per day.
- 1951 Factory stopped soaking hides.
- 1952 In June the factory officially closed.
- 1961 Howe Leather Co. sold the property.
- 1963 The factory was razed
- 1968 Property was being offered for about \$140,000.
- 19__ Giantway built shopping plaza.
- 1974 The last buildings (houses ?) were burned.
- 1989 Tannery Alumni held reunion at the Little Traverse Historical Museum.
- 19__ Glen's took over the shopping plaza.
- 1999 David Barton started collection of notes for the Kegomic Village.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

(Addresses are Petoskey unless noted)

1. Bob and Carlie Steele
1235 US-31 North
Tannery Creek Condos Unit #15
2. Petoskey Public Library
451 East Mitchell Street
3. Ms. Candice Eaton
Little Traverse Historical Society
100 Depot Court
4. Little Traverse Bay Band Odawa Indians
1345 US-31 North
5. James and Pat Kelbel
399 South Division
6. John Kelbel (age 92 Uncle of James)
Bortz Health Care
1500 Spring Street (US-131)
7. John and Helen Pater
1034 Hoffman
8. "Petoskey News Review" Nov. 29, 1951
9. "Emmet County Independent Democrat" Feb. 28, 1902
10. Laura Parkey's "Lure of Kegomic"
11. Elnora Lee's article in the "Petoskey News Review"
Friday June 13, 1986 pg.5
12. Gerald and Faye Frycynski
1113 Klondike
13. Encyclopedia Brittanica, 11:546 & 7:225
14. Dale and Nancy Kuebler
1231 Turbush Avenue
15. John and Still
476 Pickerel Lake Road
16. Betty Still Grant (John's sister)
147 Fletcher Road
- 17.
- 18.

KEGOMIC-The Forgotten Village

On the southeast shore of Little Traverse Bay,
Is the area the Indians called KE-GO-MIC.
Few recall its factory village today,
The buildings are gone which were once made of brick.

Many hides were tanned there to make leather shoes.
A small creek was on hand for water and steam.
Hemlocks were near for the factory to use,
And Tannery Creek became the name of the stream.

In those days few people ,if any, owned a car,
And the nearest large town was four miles away.
Thus for workers to commute, it was too far,
So houses were built inwhich families could stay.

For single workers a boarding house was made,
Followed soon by a Company owned store.
In single homes Tannery Management stayed.
A two-room school was built neighboring the shore.

Thus a factory village was beginning,
But many towns people looked-down at the place.
The odors there were many times sickening,
It was too spartan and was lacking grace.

The tannery work was hard- the pay was low.
The housing was adequate and rent was free.
It made jobs for sixty-seven years or so,
But the factory's demise was soon to be.

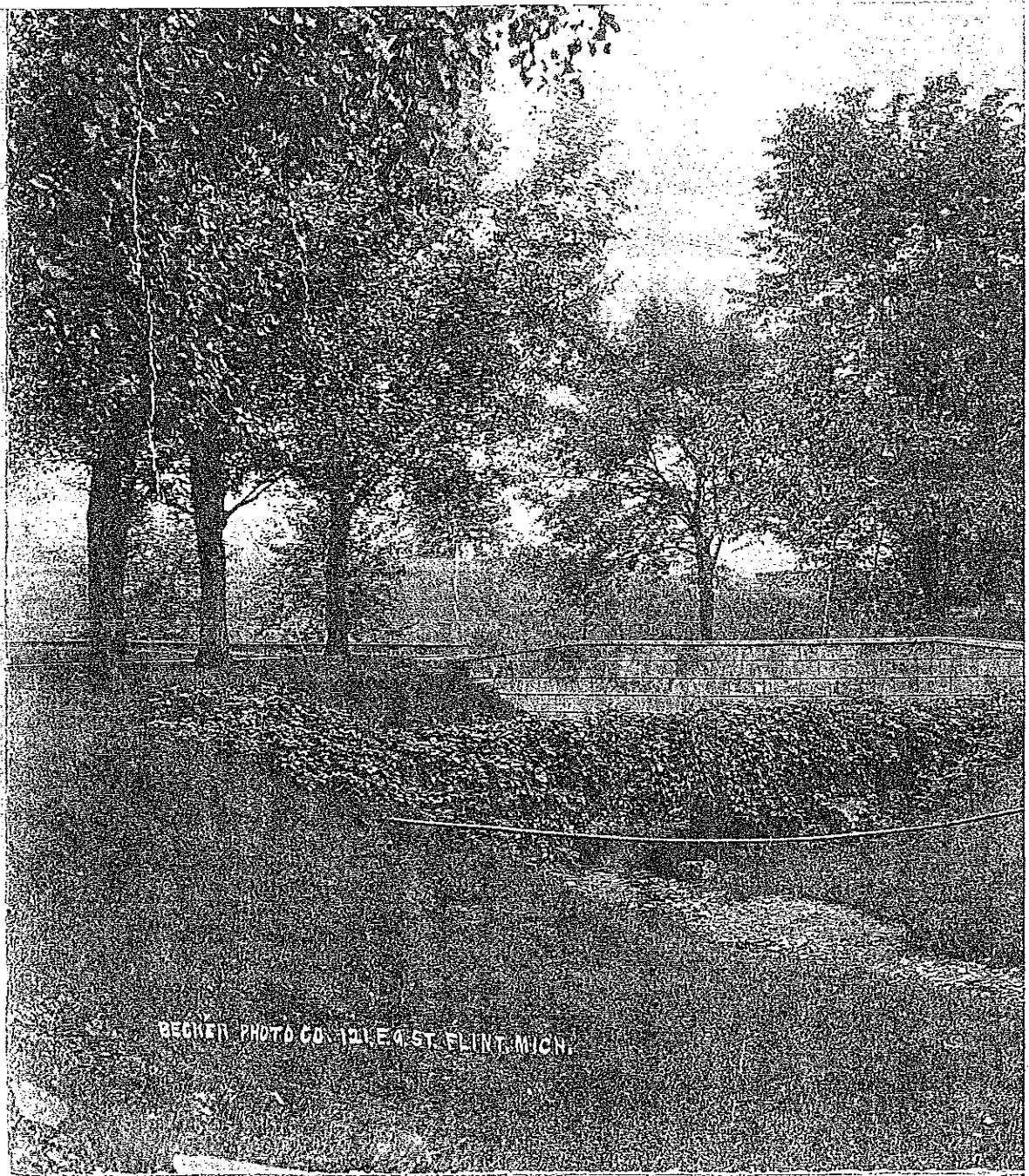
Synthetic shoe soles caused the market to drop.
Labor and material costs continued to rise.
Increased shipping expenses would not stop.
These factors caused the Tannery's demise.

In nineteen fifty-two the plant closed the door.
The main plant was razed later in sixty-three.
The last village buildings burned in seventy-four,
KEGOMIC Village finally ceased to be.

Fine Condominiums have replaced the old housing.
A Shopping Center is screened to the west.
Tannery Creek is grown-over but still running.
KE-GO-MIC Village is finally at rest.

D.W. Barton
8-8-99





THE BRIDGE OVER TANNERY CREEK -
STILL THERE TODAY { BUT IT DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE THIS TODAY! -- }

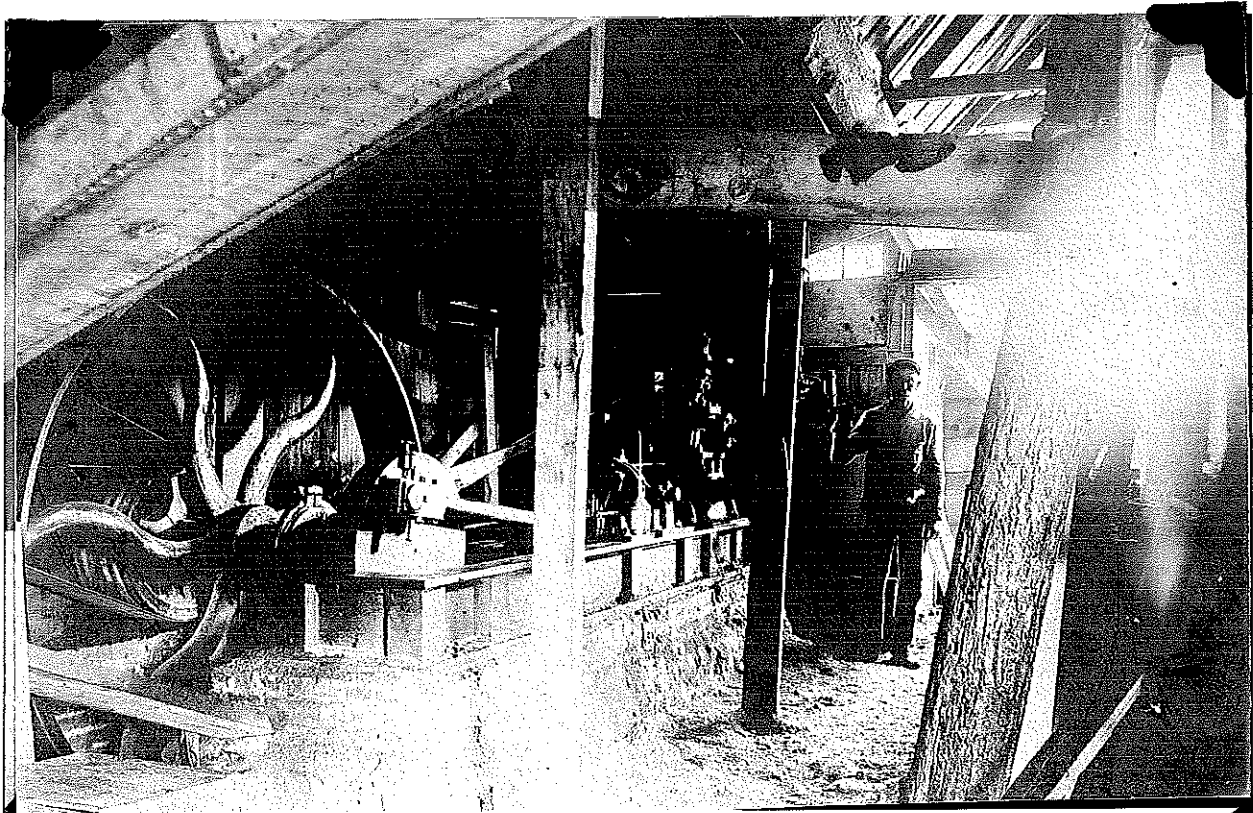
NEXT TO GLEN'S - EAST SIDE - OVERGROWN
TODAY - BUT WITH LEAVES OFF TREES ROAD
IT CAN BE SEEN WELL 10-25-2000

Ed Kelbel, Sr. grew up in Petoskey, Tannery Creek to be precise. Here is how son Ed, Jr. described it:

"Their family of five children and parents lived in 'Kegomic' in the old Tannery Creek Co. housing where Glen's Market in Bay View is today. His and all the other tannery houses had no indoor plumbing nor insulation, just an outhouse and warm blankets. He said there were many winter mornings when he woke up and there was snow covering his bed blanket from the wind blowing snow in overnight. They just had a pot bellied stove for heating and cooking.

"Petoskey Bay View Golf Course was right across the street and he and almost all the 'tannery kids' caddied and learned how to play at Bay View.

"This was in the 1940s when times were tough and the 'Kegomic tannery people' were certainly that way as well. But, I have had many conversations with my dad and uncles over the years, and to this day, they say they loved how they grew up and wouldn't change a thing."



Manson Arthur Shearer - Michigan Tanning & Extract Co. - Kegomic

Patricia Devers

Victim; 8 Lose

All in Blaze

Fire, believed to have started from an overheated kitchen wood and coal stove, claimed the life of Patricia Devers, 17, sophomore at Petoskey Xavier St. Francis high school, and hospitalized her grandmother today shortly after 8:30 a.m. in Kegonic, according to state police and the Emmet sheriff's department who are continuing an investigation today. Fire left six children, the father and grandmother homeless, all personal effects were lost.

Patricia and her 11 year old sister, Rita, were asleep in the north upstairs bedroom of the two-story wood frame house and were awakened by the smell of smoke. Both rushed to the window where Rita jumped to safety. She looked back and saw Pat at the window but a huge puff of smoke engulfed her and she went back into the room, according to Emmet undersheriff Dick Zink.

Dad Goes Up Ladder

Allen, age 12, was playing outside at the time and ran across the street to call the Resort-Bear Creek Fire Department and his father, Robert Devers, 42, who was at work at Fletch's Garage.

The father and a friend of Pat's Mitchell Brown, 18, R-2, Petoskey, went into the house and upstairs where they found Pat badly burned, on the bed. They brought her out of the burning house and she was taken to Little Traverse Hospital where she was pronounced dead on arrival.

The grandmother, Mary Wagley, 72, was taken to Lockwood General Hospital where she is being treated for shock and burns, according to police.

Extracted from
Petoskey News-Review
Saturday, April 18, 1964

The grandmother, Mary Wagley, 72, was taken to Lockwood General Hospital where she is being treated for shock and burns, according to police.

On the first floor, Anne, 14, and Margaret, 15, were still asleep when the fire broke out but escaped out the front door. Cindy, 4, was playing inside the house and Mrs. Wagley, was in the front room in bed, according to police.

Receive Minor Burns

Some of the children inside the house received minor burns when they went back inside trying to get the others out.

All the children are being taken care of at a neighbor's house, police said.

Started Fire in Stove

The father, Robert Devers, said he built a small fire in the kitchen stove at 7:15 a.m. and Allen was with him at the time. He checked the fire before he left for work at 8 a.m. and Allen went outside to play.

The entire inside of the house was gutted by flames with the bulk of the burned area around the kitchen which is located in the back or north side beneath the bedroom where Patricia and Rita were sleeping.

There was another heating stove located in the front room of the house.

Fire Chief Dale Kuebler said he received the call at about 8:40 and the house was engulfed in smoke at the time he arrived. Firemen used smoke masks to get inside at the source of the flames.

The mother is presently living in Grand Rapids, police said.

The house is one of several owned by Wayne Smith, Porter Vaughan and Jack Zaiger.

Plan Drives to Aid Kegomic Fire Victims

At least two drives have been launched to raise funds for the family of Robert Devers, Kegomic, victims of a fire Saturday which killed Patricia, 17, one of the children and destroyed virtually everything they owned.

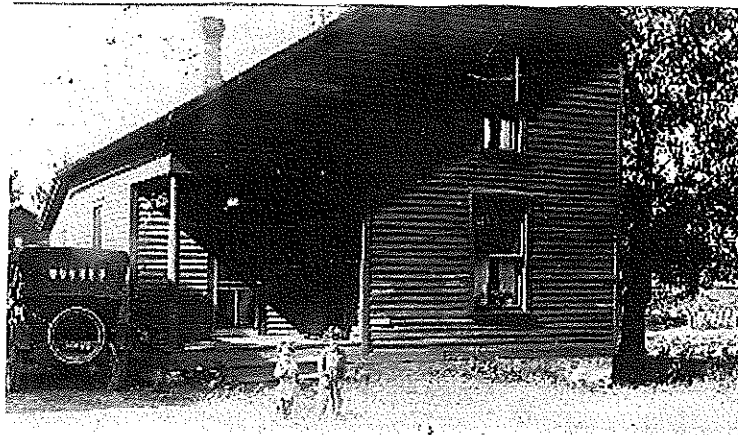
Mr. and Mrs. Ray Petrowski, S. Howard rd., sent a check to the News-Review with a note expressing their sympathy. "We sincerely hope the people in Petoskey will do what they can to help financially to help offset their terrible losses," the note said.

Circle 12 of the St. Francis Altar Society is planning a card party at St. Francis Parish Hall Thursday, April 30, at 8 p.m. with door prizes and refreshments. All pro-

ceeds will be sent to the family. Tickets may be secured from Mrs. Francis Valade, Mrs. James Gibson, jr., Mrs. August Huybrechts, Mrs. William Giles, Mrs. Joseph Beer, Mrs. Ronald Locke or Mrs. James McPeak.

The Kiwanis Foundation is also looking into ways to assist.

St. Francis parish is conducting a clothing drive for the Devers family which includes the six children here and the grandmother.



Tannery House Circa 1922

FOUR "TANNERY HOUSES" PUT TO TORCH LAST NIGHT

By Ken Bakewell

The face of Kegomic is ever changing these days.

And with the change comes an end to the last remnants of the once bustling tannery era.

Last night Petoskey, Springvale, Resort and Bear Creek Townships were on the scene of the old W.W. Rice Leather Co. housing complex to burn four abandoned dwellings.

The area is being cleared to permit construction of a shopping center complex.

During the height of the leather making days, there were 30 company houses rented at a minimal fee by the employees. A larger dwelling was the residence of the superintendent.

The houses of frame construction, having at least two bedrooms, were built in the late 1890's.

Originally owned by the W.W. Rice Leather Co. the tannery was sold in 1911 to the Michigan Tanning and Extract Co. Howes Leather Co., of Boston, took over the tanning operations in the early 1940's with the company name remaining the same.

At the peak of production during World War II, there were some 160 employees processing 800 hides daily. The hides came to Kegomic from throughout the United States and South America prior to the war.

Sole leather was shipped nationwide and to foreign countries. After World War II the foreign market was eliminated with these countries tanning their own leather.

Eventually foreign countries were sending leather and its by-products into the United States at a cost cheaper than the American tanneries could compete with.

This was the prime reason for the Kegomic tannery to cease operations in 1951. Last year the Howes tannery at Boyne City went out of business caused by the foreign market competition.

Another reason that led to the shutdown at Kegomic by the Howes firm was the vast amount of leather substitutes that were being marketed.

Extracted from Petoskey News-Review
dated April 1, 1970



THE PASSING SCENE -- Firemen of Petoskey, Springvale, Resort and Bear Creek Townships last night burned four houses in what was once the 30-dwelling complex of the Michigan Tanning and Extract Co., at Kegomic, that ceased operations in 1951. The land where the tannery and houses were situated is being cleared to enable construction of a shopping center. More photos on back page. (NEWS photo by Ken Bakewell)

KEGOMIC FADED INTO HISTORY

By Elnora Lee, Petoskey
Editor:

The renewed interest in local history has caused the request of a brief published summary of my "The Kegomic Community," written in 1941 while Kegomic was at its peak. There is also a tape: "A Tour of the Tannery" given by Henry Maxwell at the Historical Society program in 1974. I have also compiled researched history manuscripts: "Reminiscing Petoskey's Early Parks," "Our Cannon on Wheels" {in City-County Building foyer}, scrapbooks of Petoskey's history {including industry on the river} and "Pioneer Picnic Park" {historical site}, Center Township.

Kegomic was a factory village {1885-1952} at the present location of Giantway Plaza and Tannery Creek Development, about three miles easterly from Petoskey.

The Rice brothers, W.W. and B.B., had tanneries in the East. While visiting the Petoskey area, they observed many hemlock trees for tanning bark. Land was bought and buildings started in 1885, with a small production that year. By 1901 the output was 800 pieces of shoe sole leather a day. William Wirt Rice had died so his son, George was manager.

Through Kegomic the railroad tracks were one block from the bay. Except for a few warehouses, the village laid between the tracks and U.S. 31 highway, occupying a space of two blocks wide and half mile long. The main office was in Boston.

Hard, dried cow hides from Buenos Aires, Argentina, arrived here by freight car loads to begin the process of changing hides into shoe sole leather. First the soaking in lime water

vats prepared hide for hair removal. It then went through a series of vats to be changed into leather, bleached, oiled, hung to dry, then rolled through heavy machines, baled and shipped. The by-product was glue.

It took 30 to 35 cords daily of tan bark. That process took five to six months. After the hemlock trees were exhausted, compounds and acids were used. The new method reduced the time element to four to six weeks. All materials had to be shipped in and all leather shipped out by train. Employed in 1941 were 130 men who tanned 1,600 hides of hides into leather each day.

Besides the plant there were the company store, the plant office, a boarding house, and 32 company houses for the workers and families. The houses were all built on the same pattern and painted green with red trim. Sixteen lined the north side of the highway west of the creek, nine others were scattered in that area. East of the creek on the far road going to the plant was another row of seven.

About 1938 the company repaired the houses with new foundations, sills and roofs if needed. All received white asphalt shingle siding. The houses were wired for electricity. R.E.A. had come through. Living for the renters was improved. The tax valuation was \$120,000. Kegomic's population in 1941 was 155. Other workers lived in Petoskey and nearby areas.

There was a two-room school, white frame building, one block west of Kegomic in Edgewater for 43 elementary pupils through the fourth grade. The larger children walked to schools in Petoskey.

Across the street to the east, built in 1939, was the Edgewater mission for the American Union Sunday School. The group of several faiths had outgrown the school house when attendance reached 100.

Kegomic also had a scout troop, a baseball team and field.

According to Laura Parkey's "Lure of Kegomic," the Indian name, Kegomic, can mean fish town, setting sun, or a place of portage {to the inland water route}.

After World War II the union had come in, demanding higher wages. With high freight charges and artificial shoe material competition, the tannery had to close. They quit soaking hides in 1951 and shut down permanently in June 1952. There had been several changes in ownership in those 67 years. Howes Leather company sold the land in 1961. The plant was razed in 1963 and the last of the buildings burned in 1974. An era had passed into memory and history.

Thank you for printing this so the new generation might know more local history.

Extracted from Petoskey News-Review
Dated Friday, June 13, 1986, page 5