

NORTHERN AUTO COMPANY
West of Mitchell St. Bridge
Petoskey, Emmet County, Michigan
Built 1927

Ford garage goes way of Model T

By **STEPHEN BREDE**
News-Review staff writer

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Northern Auto Co. first opened for business in December 1911, when the Model T was selling for \$590. The early cars were either driven from Detroit or shipped by rail, and some of the final assembly was done in Petoskey.

The business was founded by Owen McMahan, and also owning shares in the new company were John Galster and Alva Lovelless. The company grew to include branches throughout Northern Michigan, carrying a line of Ford automobiles, trucks and tractors. The owners also started Northern Oil & Gas Co., and ran a Firestone tire store.

Northern Auto Co. salesman Edmund Dean sold his first car for the dealership in 1919, and went on to become the company's general manager.

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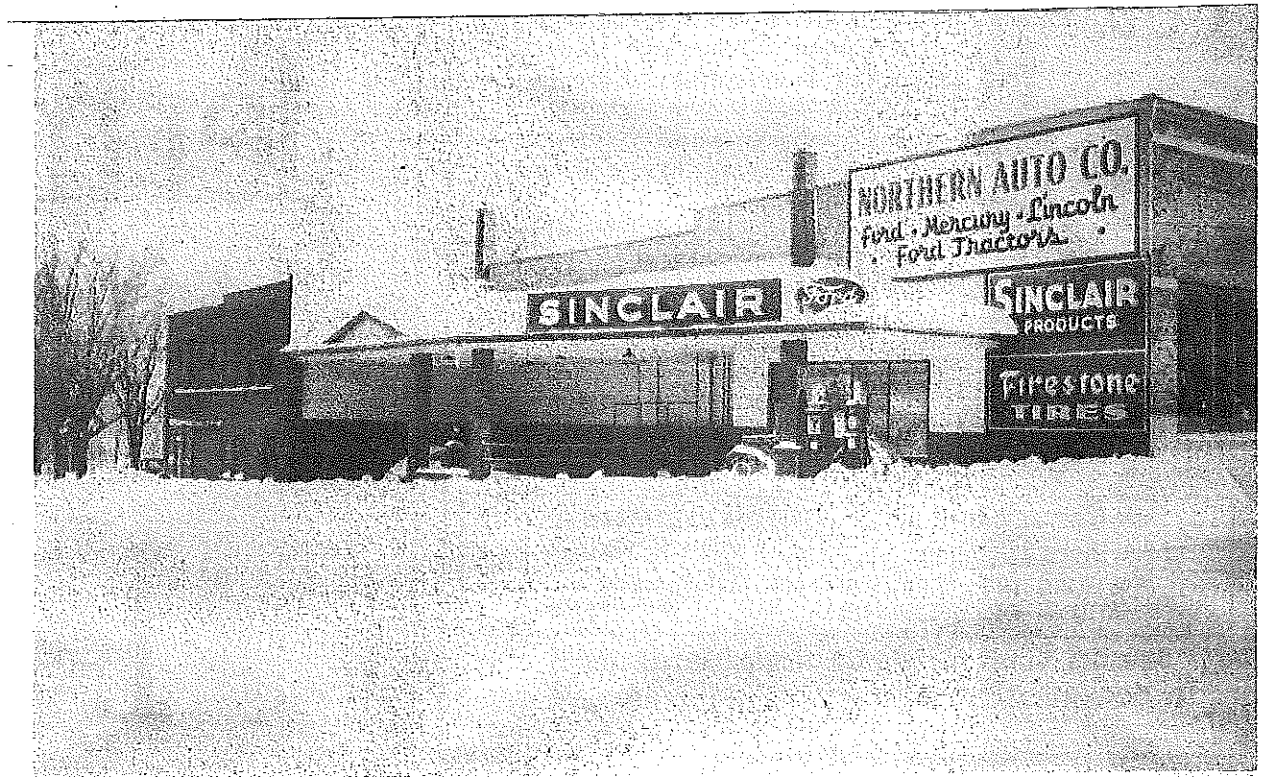


Photo courtesy of Louise Dean

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The site of the former Northern Auto Co. also was home to a Sinclair gas station, as seen in this

photo from the late 1940s. The same angle of the building shows above.

Ford garage had long history in downtown Petoskey

- Petoskey News-Review Monday, April 29, 1991

FORD

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"I think he started in the stock room," Louise Dean said of her late husband. "He learned the business from the ground up. He was an excellent salesman."

Dean said during her husband's tenure the company added to the Mitchell Street building, which

she said was a well-built structure. She said her husband leased part of the building to the A & P following a fire at the grocery.

Dean said Northern Auto Co. was sold to Richard Turner and Wayne Rose in 1974. The pair were partners in Turner Leasing Co. of Troy, and continued to operate the dealership under the new name of "Petoskey Ford."

Rose, who moved to Petoskey to manage the dealership, recalled he and Turner ran the business together for about three years

before he sold out to Turner. Rose said Petoskey Ford continued to sell cars for a couple of more years before closing, and the city was without a Ford dealership for a couple of years.

Turner eventually hooked up with developer Jeffrey DeGayer, who proposed turning the two-story building into a six-story commercial, office and residential project, which he called the 200 Centre.

The project was plagued by financial problems, and DeGayer

was finally forced to file for bankruptcy in 1983. About two-and-a-half years later, DeGayer and Turner were killed when the small plane Turner was piloting crashed near Boyne Falls.

Since the two men died in 1986 the building has been owned by Turner's estate, managed by his son, John "Jack" Turner. The building fell into disrepair, and no one is shedding tears about the demolition taking place now.

"It was ready to come down," Rose said. "I think Jack is doing

the right thing (razing the building). I feel that the property will be easier to be sold or developed."

Petoskey architect Nick White said the owner has asked him to work on numerous proposals for the property, from fast-food restaurants to high-rise condominiums.

"It's a prime piece of commercial property," White said. "I would say it would probably best be kept in retail, possibly multi-story retail with some condominiums on the top. It has a tremendous view."

"It's tough to speculate what would be the best thing there — probably the best thing would be a major retail anchor. Like Jacobson's, Milliken's or Prange's, those were some that at least looked at the property."

That's the type of use Louise Dean would like to see for the property, but until the site is cleared of 80 years of history, about the only thing certain is that downtown Petoskey has a new view of Little Traverse Bay.

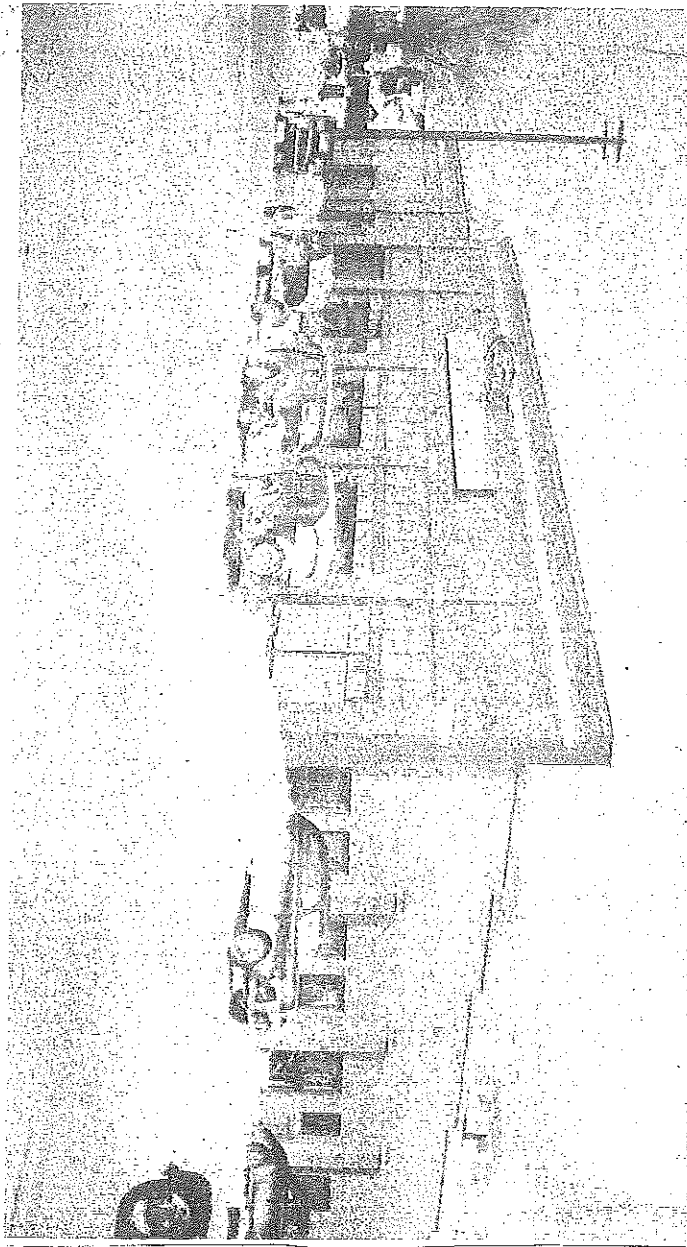


Photo courtesy of Louise Dean

The Petoskey headquarters of Northern Auto Co., circa 1947. The company was the largest Ford

Boyerne City, Charlevoix, Gaylord, Cheboygan and Rogers City. The building is in the process of

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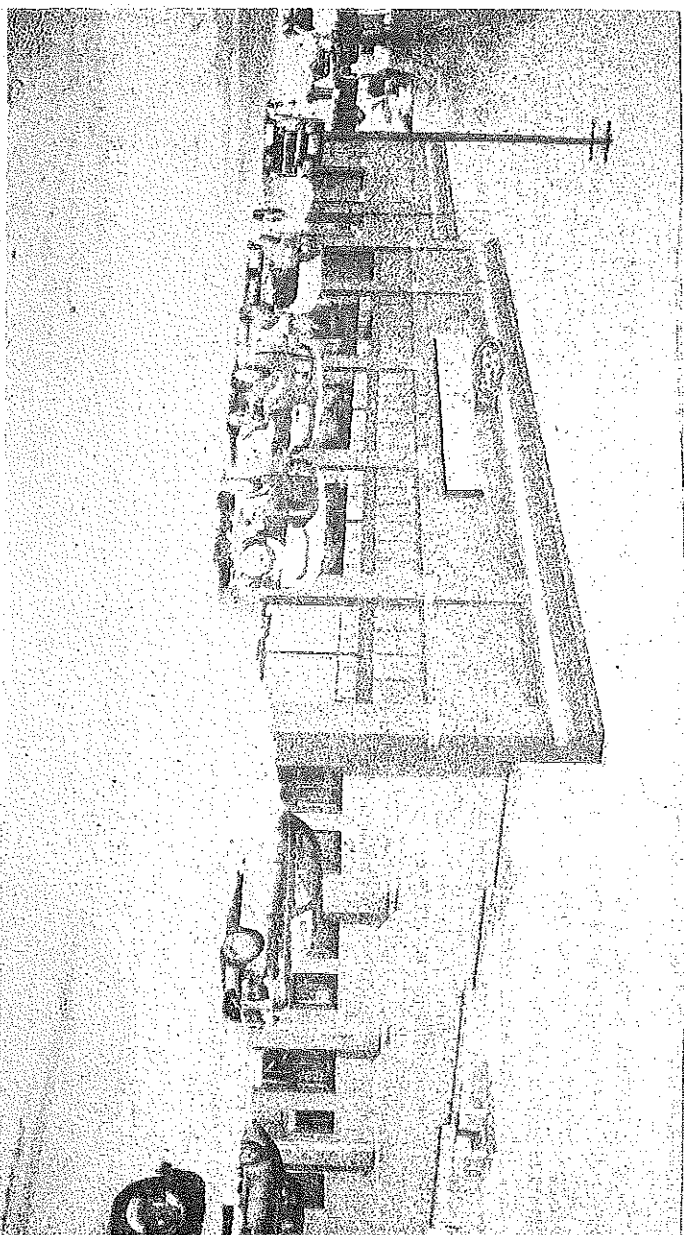
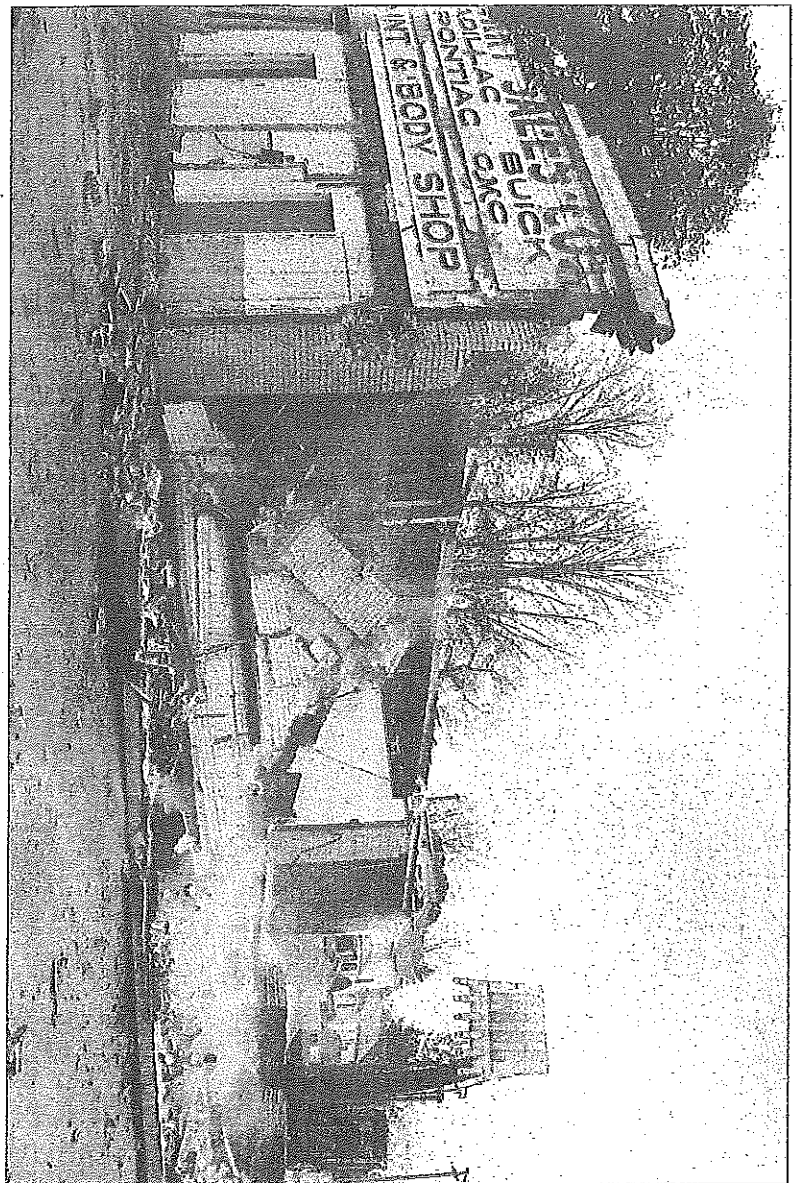


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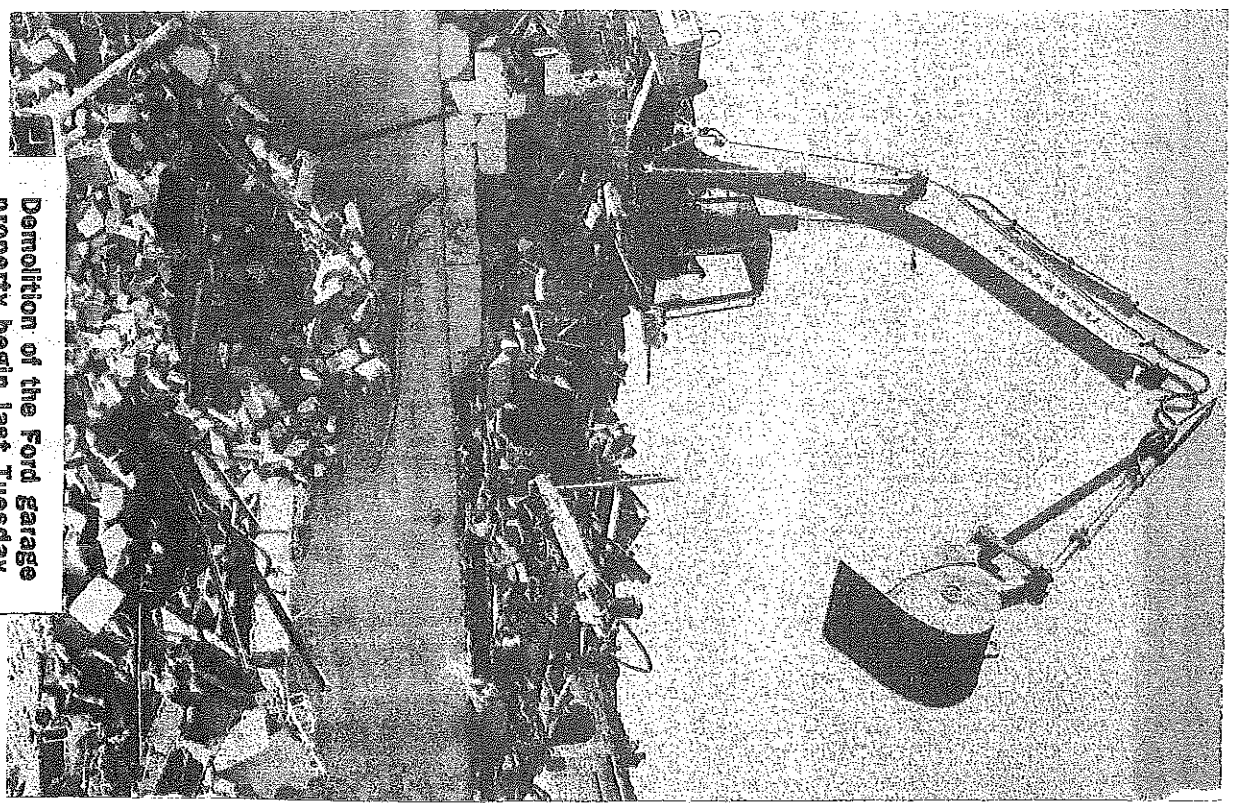
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And the walls come a tumblin' down

A piece of local history comes down Tuesday afternoon, as the front of the old Bay Buick building on Mitchell Street is demolished to make way for a mini-mall project. The building located west of the Mitchell Street bridge was originally built in 1927. The sign shown on the left side of the photo hasn't been seen since 1954, when an addition was built on it. (NEWS-REVIEW photo by G. Randall Goss)



Demolition of the Ford Garage property began last Tuesday. Heavy equipment was in place throughout the week removing the back of the building first and then removing the facade. The photo above shows its location and the part of the building where a gas station once was located as shown in the old photo below. Photo at right shows the demolition in action.

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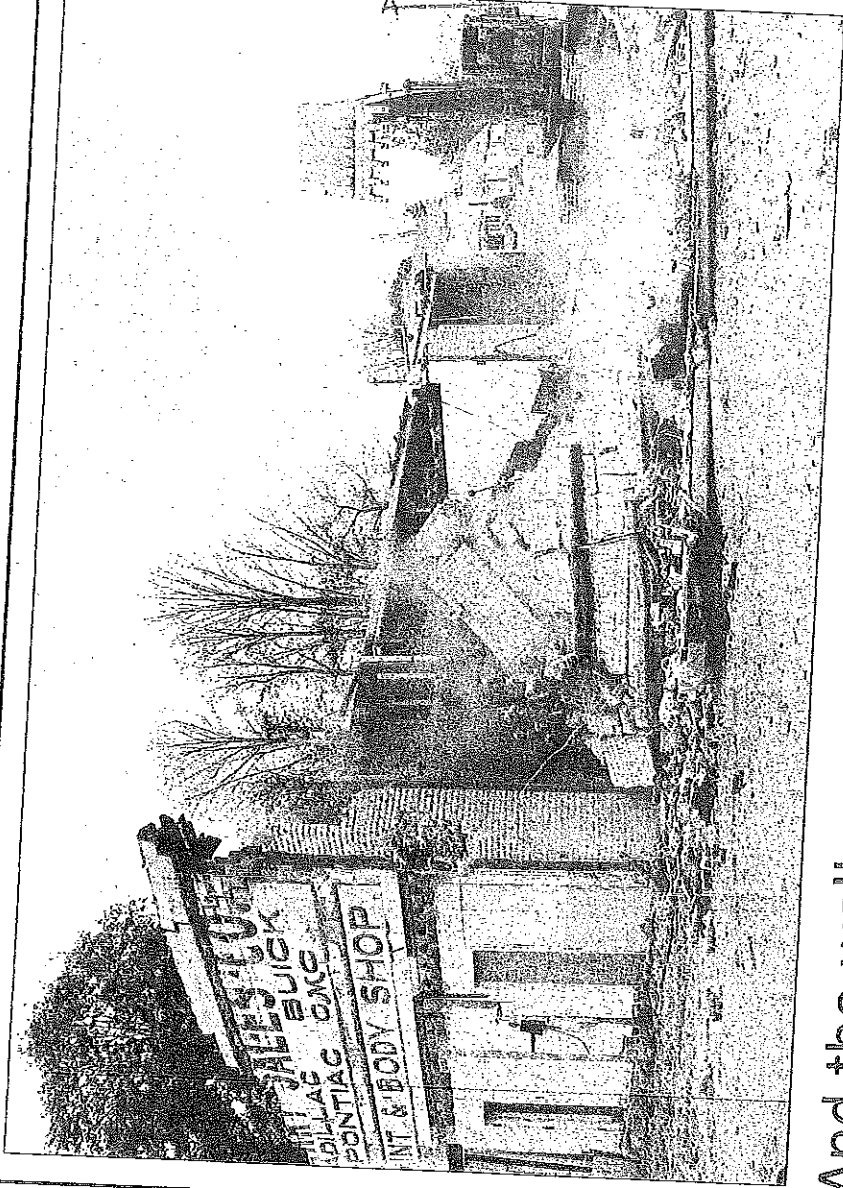
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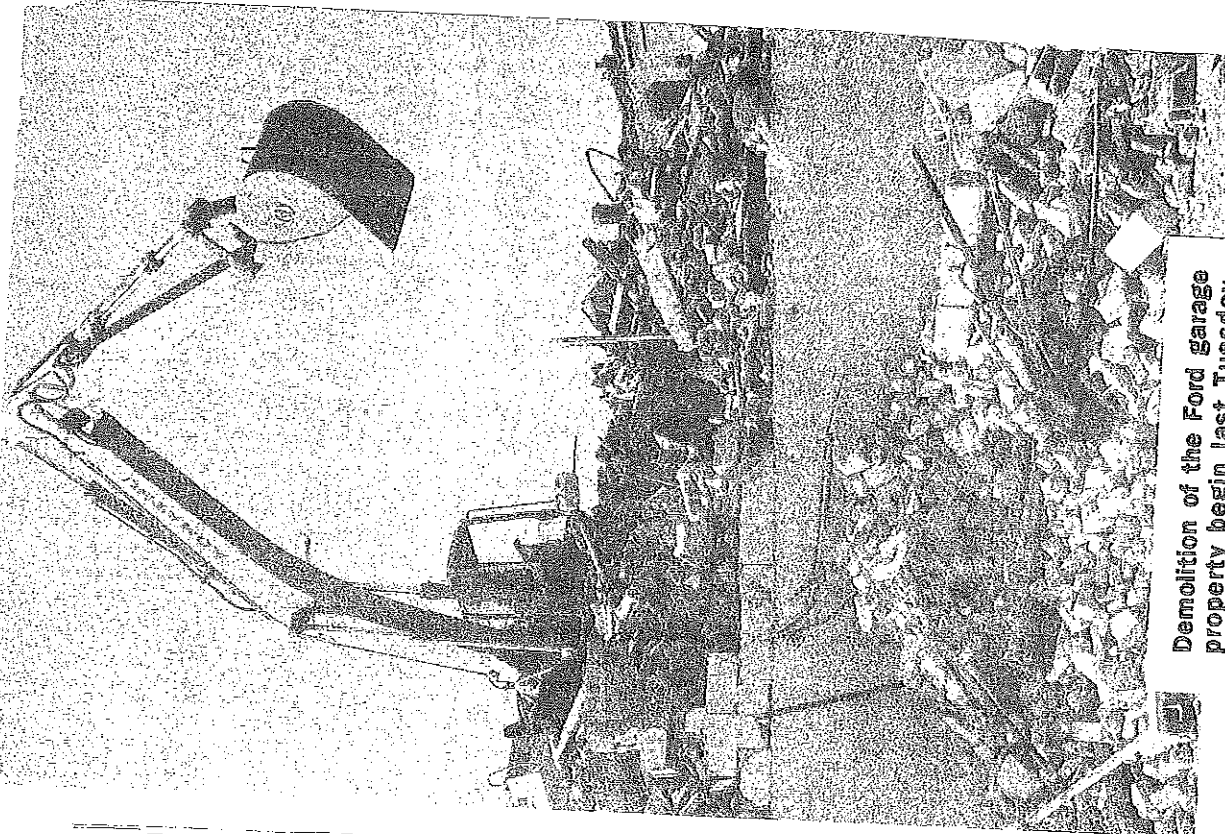
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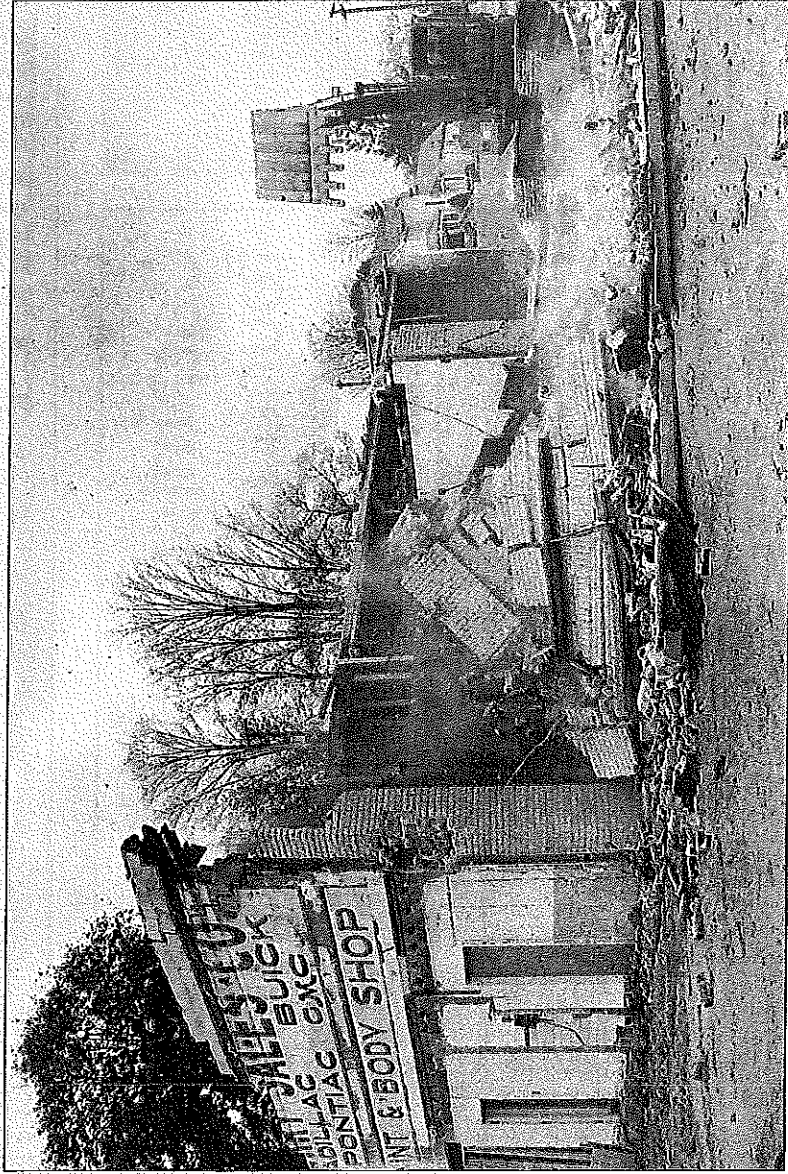


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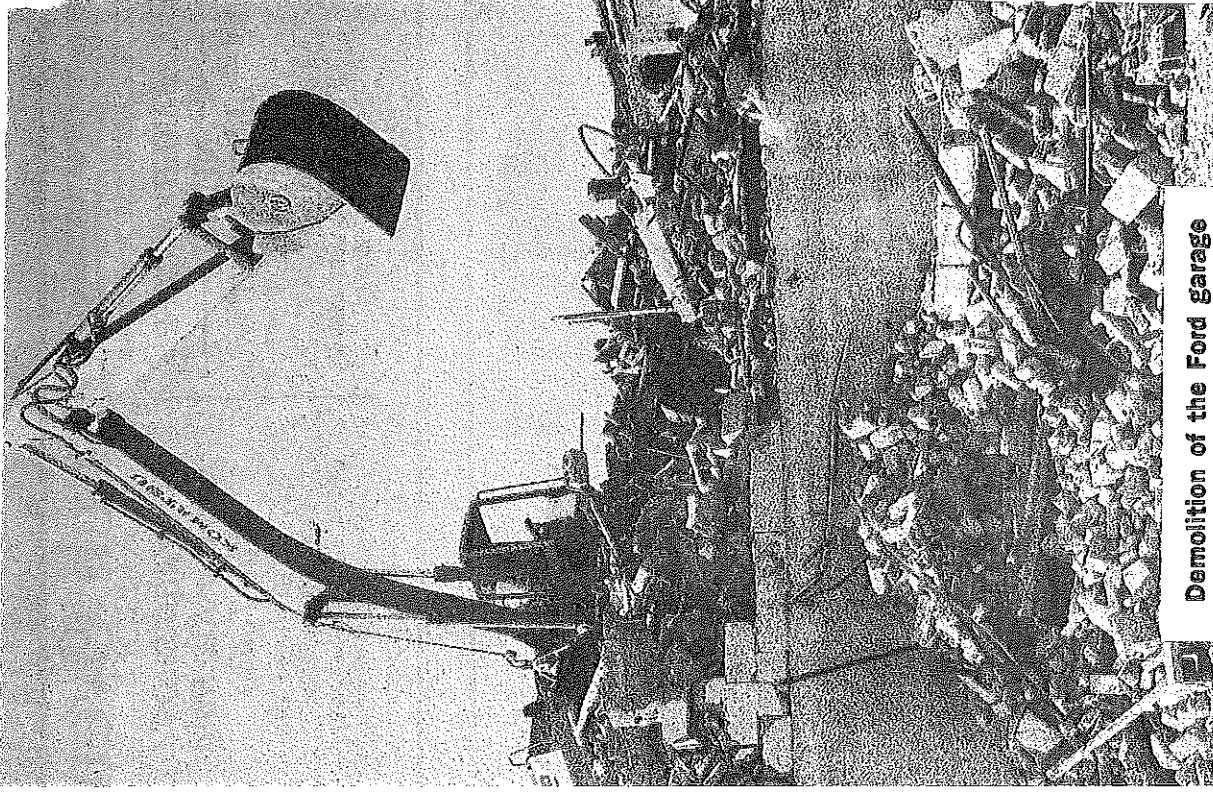


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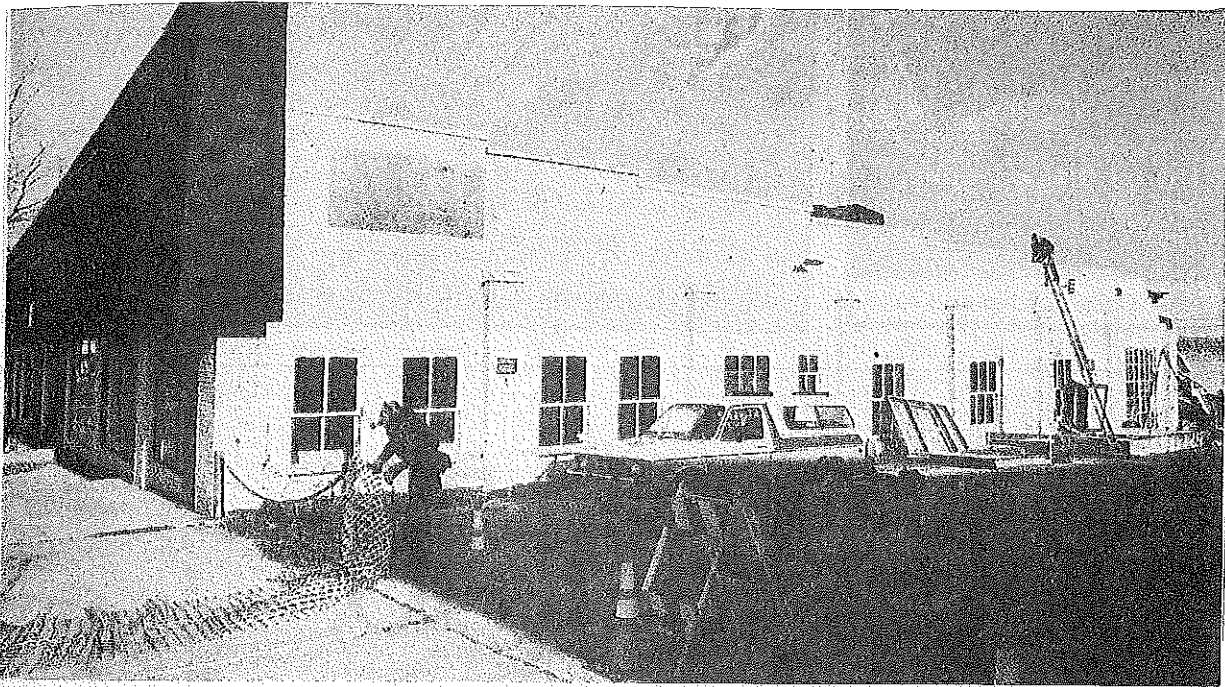


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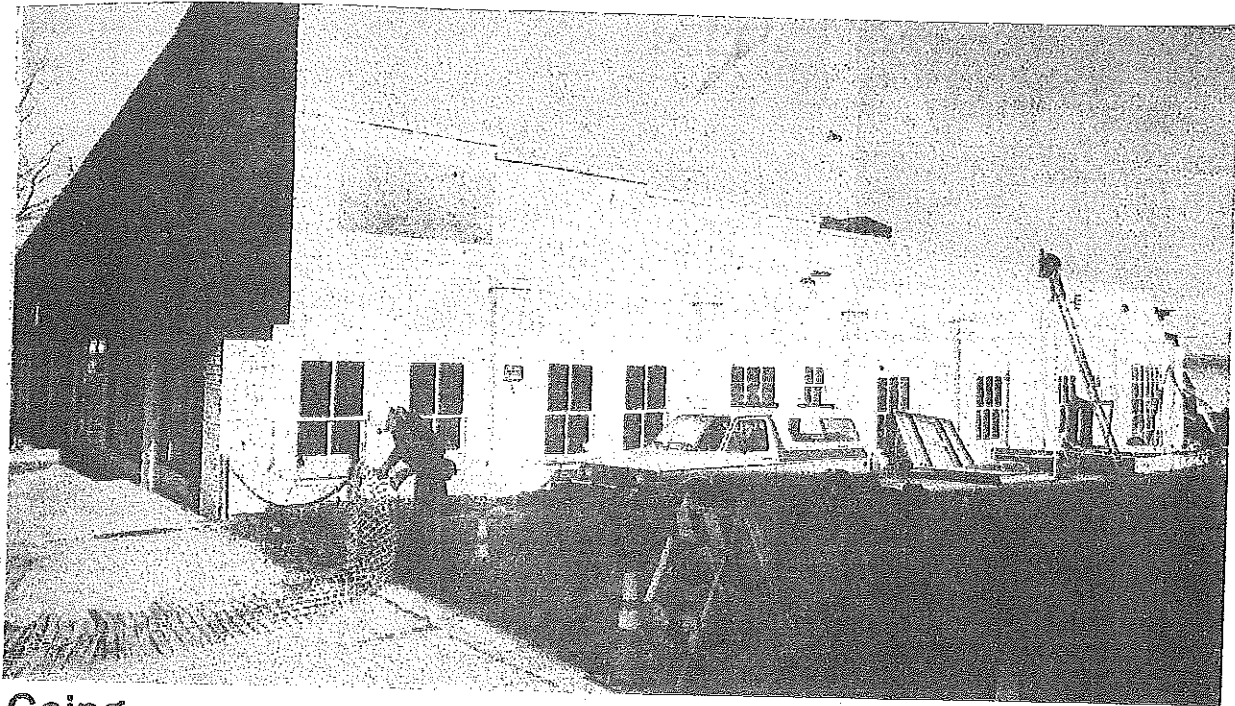
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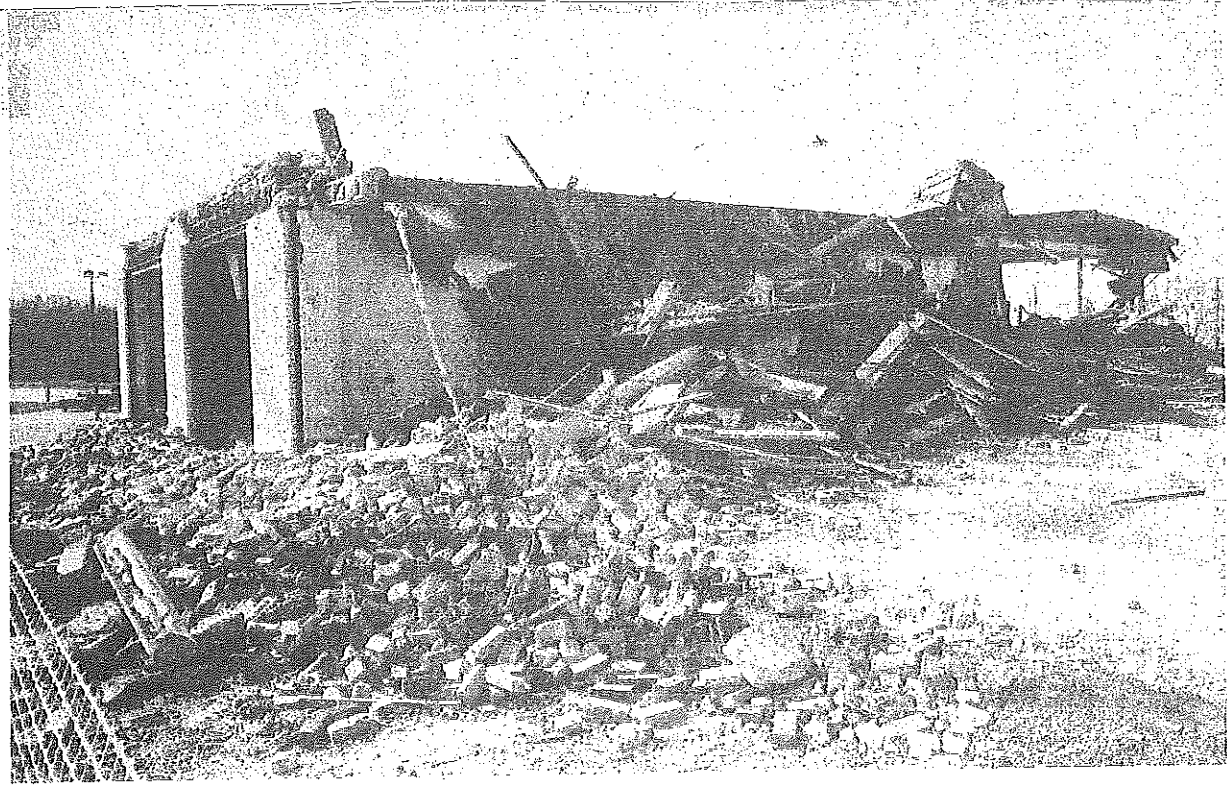
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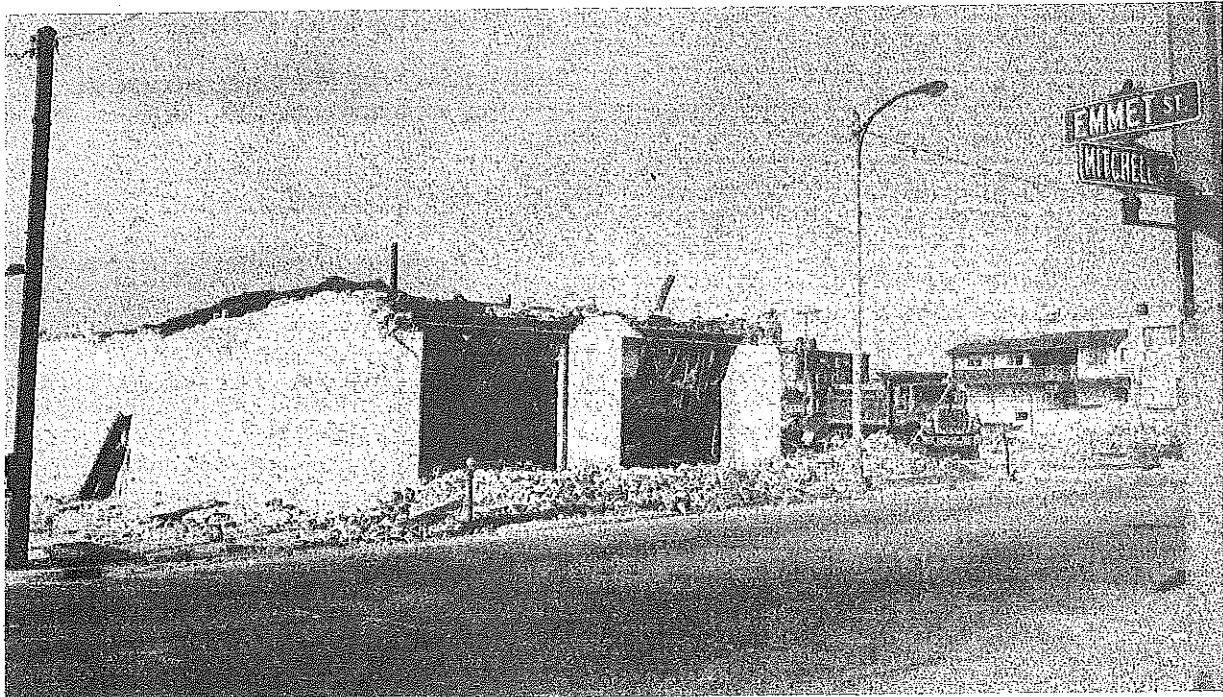


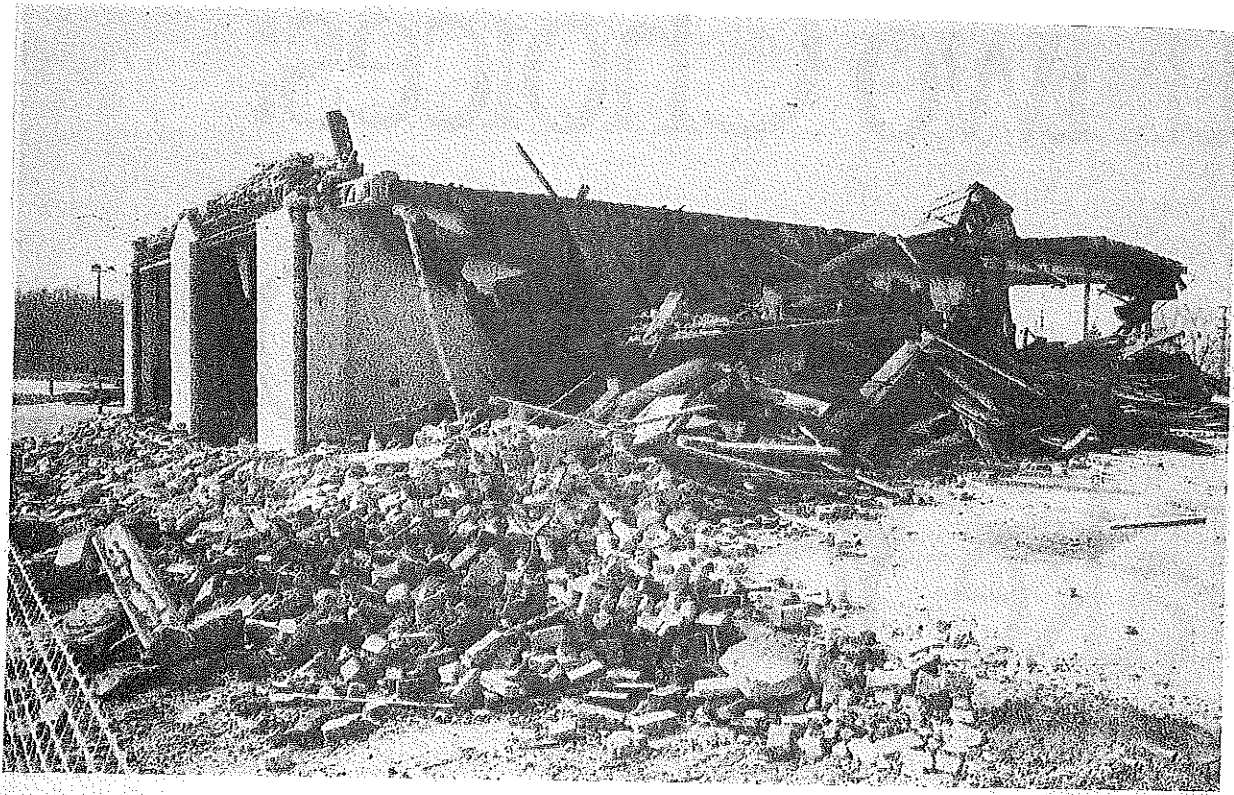
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Petoskey eyesore demolished





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