

Looking Back #16

Morris J. & Lottie Stockman, Charlevoix Pioneers

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Museum at Harsha House
Charlevoix Historical Society

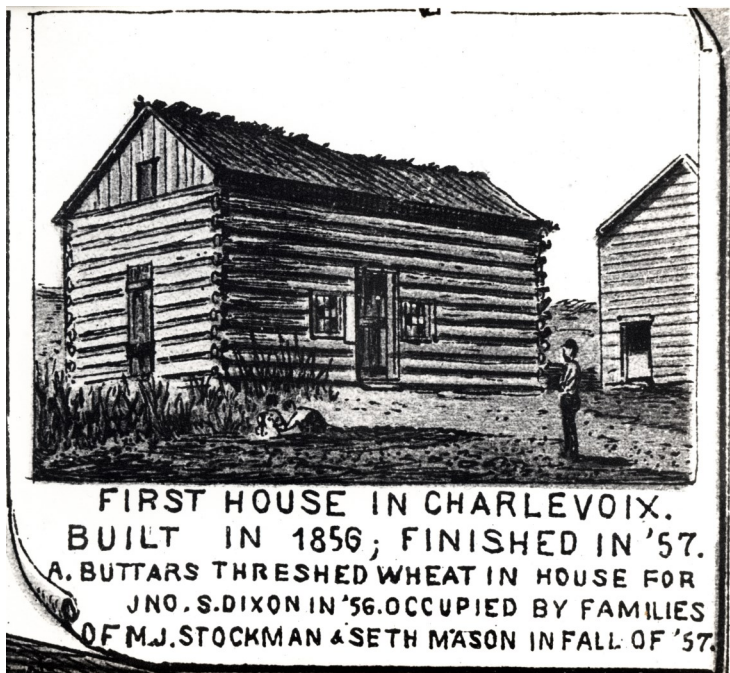


Morris J. Stockman, 1833-1921



Charlotte "Lottie" Stockman, 1833-1917

Morris J. and Lottie Stockman were two of Charlevoix's earliest pioneers. Both were born in Ohio. At age ten, Morris and his parents moved to Michigan where he began to pursue his newfound love of fishing. His long-distance relationship with Lottie during this time has yet to be discovered, for she grew up in Ohio where she became a teacher. But they were married in 1854, moved north, and lived in a fishing village on Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay for the first three years. From there, they moved to Charlevoix with Morris's sister Eliza, her husband Seth Mason, and the Masons' children in the fall of 1857. The couples were Charlevoix's third and fourth permanent settlers, after the Medad Thompsons in 1854 and the John Dixons a year later. The two families occupied an abandoned log building on the north shore of Round Lake that had been built by Dixon, where he had a young man thresh wheat for a time in 1856. The Stockmans and Masons squeezed in for a few weeks before each family found their own places. The Masons built a house across Round Lake, while Morris fell into what turned into a very fortuitous land and rudimentary house acquisition deal that had a major influence on Charlevoix's future development.



It is not known if the description on this drawing of the log structure is correct or not, for the Dixons certainly would have had their own place by 1856 without being encumbered by wheat threshing inside. There were also a few other people in town, those who came, then left after a short time without putting down roots, but who did provide themselves a place to live for the duration. A few were Mormons from the vanished, violent proto-empire of King James Strang of Beaver Island in northern Lake Michigan, who had been assassinated in 1856 and his followers dispersed. One of them was a man named May, who realized that staying here, in his homestead on the far east edge of town overlooking Lake Charlevoix, might not be a good idea, what with so much anti-Mormon sentiment still in the air.



A drawing of the former May property on what is now the Belvedere Club resort, here with Charlevoix's first schoolhouse where Lottie became the town's first schoolteacher

May let it be known that he would like to find someone who could provide his family safe passage to a port where they could connect with a steamer that would deliver them to a more friendly area. Morris volunteered. From Lottie's invaluable *Reminiscences of a Pioneer Life*, written toward the end of her life: May would give ". . . us his claim if M. J. with his sailboat, the only one of conveyance at the time, would move him and his family across the [Grand Traverse] bay to Northport. The land [occupied here by May] not being in market could not be bought, only secured by what was known as squatters' claim in those days, but living on and making improvements until such a time as we could buy it from the Government. On this claim was a small log hut without floor, window, or door. A small hole at one side had been used for a door-way or entrance. By bending down one could get inside." In other words, May paid Morris for his service not in cash or goods, but in property. After the trip to Northport, Morris continued down to Elk Rapids, the closest sawmill where he could buy lumber and other building materials. He was able to complete "one small room" before "the winter dragged slowly by." After which, more livable quarters took shape.

"About this time [the end of the decade] there was quite a colony of people, and with children running wild, with no church or school, after the Summer's work was over, the Fall crops gathered, the talk then was that a school should be started. . . . The first move after selecting the location . . . was built in one day [on the Stockman property] and ready for occupancy. It was built of rough logs, sixteen feet square, shake roof. An old rusty box stove was resurrected by some one with two legs, blocks and stone used for the other two; rude door with a string; between the logs the holes were filled with moss and mud. That was our school house in 1861."

"Next was a teacher. Their choice fell on me, and I accepted the position at one dollar per week." Lottie went on to describe her duties and the various difficulties she faced, especially the financial issues. She continued in the position alone until other teachers joined in a few years later, then participated on a part-time basis.



The late-1860s Stockman house at 110 Park Avenue at State Street, across from the Congregational Church

Toward the end of the decade, the Stockmans obtained a downtown lot and decided to build on it, at the corner of Park Avenue and State Street. This would eliminate the always uncomfortable trip into town through the forest, over nonexistent roads or streets, or hiking over the often unstable ice of a winterbound Round Lake. From 1911 to 1915, Charlevoix's renowned builder in stone, Earl Young, lived in the house directly behind them, and they became good friends. This is how Earl described the very tall and very short pair, who could often have a prickly relationship:

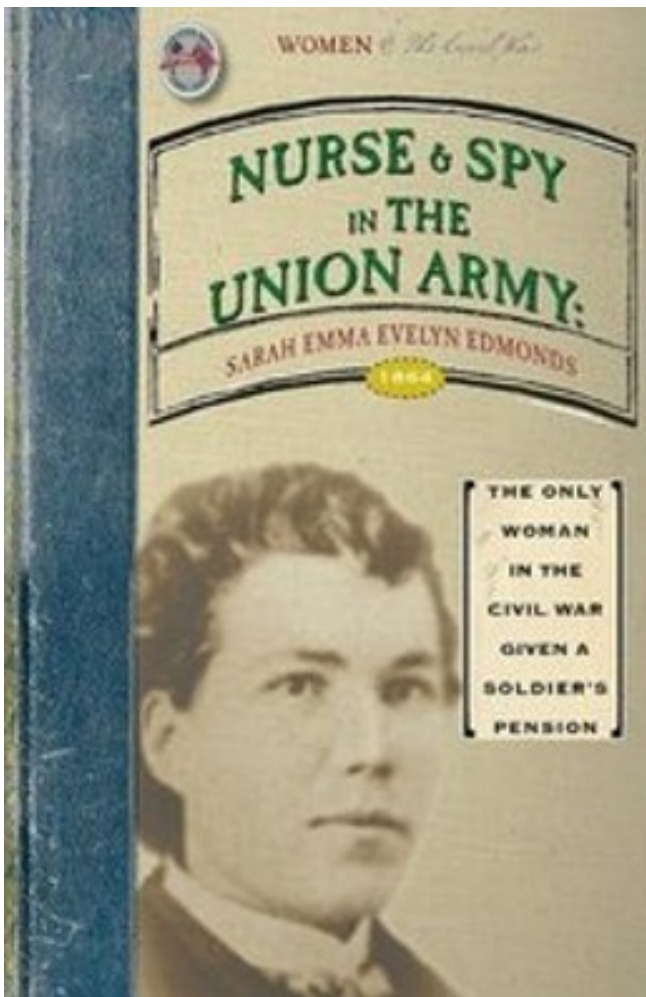
"Just before taking this picture (right) in the side yard of the Stockman's house on the corner of Park Avenue and State Street, which joined the back yard of our home facing State Street, I said to Uncle Morris, 'If you move over closer to Aunt Lottie I can get a better picture.' She snapped right back, 'Let him stay where he is—he's close enough now.'"



Earl Young again: "Both Uncle Morris and Aunt Lottie had such outstanding personalities of their own that, in order to appreciate the contrasts, one had to see them together. This was somewhat difficult because, going to church or any place else, Uncle Morris inevitably was always just a few steps ahead of Aunt Lottie, which didn't seem to bother either one of them. He was extremely tall, straight as a ram-rod, and I cannot ever remember seeing Uncle Morris anyplace, except in their home, when he was not wearing a derby hat. Even when working in the tin shop (he always considered himself a tinsmith by trade) he would be wearing a collar and tie, and always his derby hat. Aunt Lottie was just as straight in her carriage but only about half as tall, and although a tiny bit of a woman, she was full of vitality and civic interest."



"He was extremely tall, straight as a ram-rod . . .," here wearing his Civil War veteran's cap in 1884



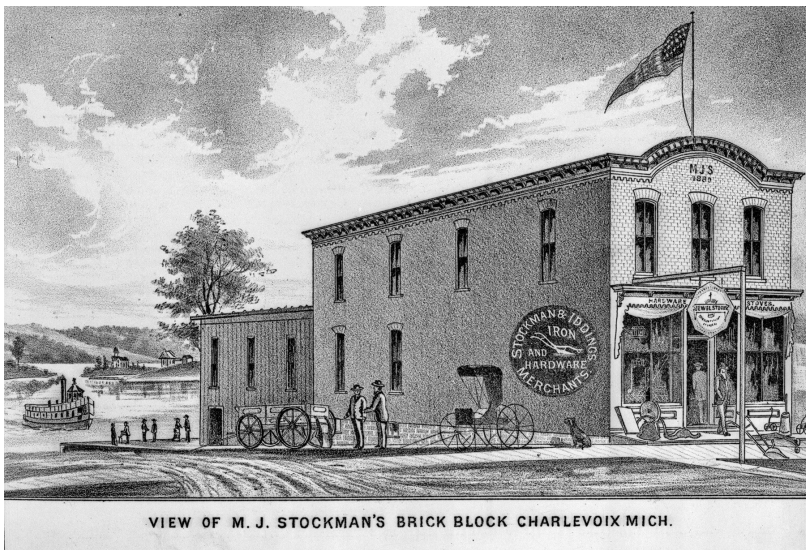
An interesting sidelight of the construction of 110 Park Avenue: In the late 1860s, a couple arrived in town named Linus and Sara Edmonds Seeley. It isn't known why they came here. In 1869, Linus helped build Morris's house. For ardent Civil War buffs, the name Sara Edmonds should be instantly recognizable, because she was one of the women who served as a man in the first years of the Civil War. Her name appears in almost every account of this unique chapter of the conflict. While in Charlevoix, Sara was probably giving thought to and perhaps taking notes for her story, maybe starting to write it, because after the Seeleys left, it all came together. Her autobiography, titled "Nurse and Spy in the Union Army—The Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battlefields" was published under her maiden name in 1875. The book went on to sell a staggering 175,000 copies, the profits from which she donated back to support needy Civil War veterans and their families. And, she was the only woman who served in that war who received a government pension.

Morris J. Stockman's 1881 hardware store, the first brick structure on Bridge Street, at the Clinton Street intersection, now East Park



The aftermath of the May episode came in the late 1870s. Morris and Lottie had moved into the Park Avenue house in 1869, which left their first house and the outgrown first school overlooking Lake Charlevoix vacant. Morris did a little gentleman farming on the property but otherwise kept quiet about it. Then, in 1875, a resort community called Bay View was founded by Methodists just outside nearby Petoskey and the Charlevoix city fathers quickly realized the potential. Morris stepped up to offer twenty-five of his acres for \$625 to any organization that had the means and willingness to improve the property. The Baptists of the Kalamazoo and northern Indiana area got wind of the offer, sent a delegation north to investigate in 1878, and decided the Stockman location outshined any other in the area. By the end of the year, six cottages had been built, the beginning of the Belvedere Club's long, influential, and fruitful relationship that has been such a decades-long part of the fabric of Charlevoix. A simple, helpful gesture had had huge consequences.

Three years later, Morris built the first brick building on Bridge Street at the Clinton Street corner, a highly successful hardware store that soon brought in partner Harvey Lee Iddings. Morris later decided to downsize, sold his share to Harvey, and reopened his first love, a tin shop, on Bridge Street next to Frank Wood's barber shop, featured in the previous Looking Back. There he remained until a three-year illness that ended his life in 1921. Earl Young said of his lifelong friends, "The Stockmans came to Charlevoix together and spent over sixty years serving in many ways and being part of the community."



VIEW OF M. J. STOCKMAN'S BRICK BLOCK CHARLEVOIX MICH.

1884 lithograph of Stockman & Iddings, Merchants of Iron and Hardware



Morris's tin shop, on the left