

# Looking Back #15

## The Bridge Street/ Park Avenue Corner

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The Park Avenue/Bridge Street intersection has always been one of downtown's busiest. As the first righthand corner south of the lower channel bridge, much of Bridge Street's US31 traffic turns here to access State Street and the rest of what has long been known as "the valley" that stretches west all the way out to the hospital, Lakeshore Drive, and South Point. It was the first intersection to be developed after the cutting of the channels in 1869 that opened Charlevoix to both national and international commerce. Many, many businesses have come and gone in this area.

The photo above shows a visit of Michigan governor Josiah Begole in August, 1884. He's the gentleman sitting in the carriage at left, hatless, with a healthy shock of snow-white hair. Just to his right is the long, horizontal Bank of Charlevoix sign, on today's Berkshire Hathaway Real Estate. It was the first bank in Charlevoix County, established at this corner in 1882, where it remained until 1885 when it built a new one on the Clinton Street corner where Harwood & Gold is today. But the bank folded in 1893 due to serious financial malfeasance that scandalized the county.



1890, the era of wood plank sidewalks, gas street lanterns, and no paved Bridge Street

Once the bank moved out, the builder of what became known as the “Bartholomew Block” (of commercial spaces), Lemuel Bartholomew, moved his hardware store from down near Antrim Street into the bank’s space, in partnership with Forrest Blanchard. Two more stores took up the footage to the south. Behind the awning, in the middle of the ‘block,’ sat Beaman’s Drug Store. Next to that was Frank Wood’s barbershop with rentable bath facilities upstairs. Also up there was the Charlevoix Cigar Company whose horizontal, torpedo-shaped sign can be seen atop the striped barber pole. Oddly enough, over the two righthand stores was what was called an opera house, a theater that seated 600, installed four years before the competitor Lewis Grand Opera was built bedside the lower channel a block away beside the lower channel. Apartments later replaced the theater.

During an early period, a watering trough for horses stood in front of Wood’s. One time, cattle raised on Beaver Island were brought over by boat and unloaded in the usual place on Round Lake. Sniffing the fresh well water, they didn’t have to be herded up to Bridge Street. According to local builder Earl Young, “Being on the boat for several hours—surrounded by water but not a drop to drink, the first thing those animals wanted was water. Up to Bridge Street, along the same street from the dock as today, up and over the steps in front of Gellick’s saloon, they were all headed by smell or instinct for the long oval watering trough in front of Frank Wood’s barbershop. They could not get around the trough at one time, even crowding on the sidewalk, and the water could not last and did not flow fast enough even to supply the needs of the first ones. The result was a near-stampede of crowding cattle waiting to drink, crowding the street and sidewalk, in spite of any efforts of the cattle buyer, his men and dogs. Captain Campbell had little difficulty washing down the decks of the *Beaver* (his boat that transported the animals) with hot water and steam hose, but it was nearly two weeks before the merchants, with the assistance of several members of the fire department and the fire hose, had the block of Bridge Street cleared of the influence of the cattle.” Meaning, of course, their droppings. Afterwards, the cattle were herded across the bridge, then east down Dixon Avenue to the railroad depot for shipment out.



After the hardware store moved again, another drug-store occupied the corner, right next to Beaman's, here under the ownership of Floyd Fessenden in 1922. The object in the pavement at bottom of the photo is a "traffic button," which was meant to help drivers negotiate corners.

Also 1922. Mr. Fessenden called his pharmacy "Pills and Things." He would remain here for another three years until tragedy struck.



A Century ago, at about 3:30 a.m. on a bitterly cold Sunday, March 1, 1925, fire destroyed much of the Bartholomew block. A tenant in an upstairs apartment awoke to what he thought were explosions in the basement of the middle store. He roused other tenants, and nobody was harmed, but many of their possessions were destroyed.

The street level stores suffered mainly from smoke and water damage. As can be seen in the photo, the roof and its cornice were completely burned off the two southerly units. The weather was so cold that the firemen's spray-soaked clothes were encased in ice. Mr. Fessenden was able to save a good portion of his stock, moving it to L. P. Adams' cigar store and pool room on the opposite corner, seen in the lower right of the photo on the previous page. But his loss totaled an estimated \$15,000, fortunately fully covered. Today that would be about \$273,000.



Mr. Fessenden was able immediately to take out a one-year lease on a recently vacated store at the corner of Mason Street in the Masonic building, to which he moved the day after the fire. But for some reason, he never moved back, and remained there until he sold the business in 1942 to pharmacists John Schroeder and J. W. Hovey.



The damaged "block" was rebuilt and restored, but without its classically accented cornice. This sequence is how the building looked when photographed by Earl Young on a very early morning in 1934. At top, his real estate advertising took up most of the Park Avenue first storey, while just beyond it, at the alley, he hired the Congregational Church minister, who had an artistic sideline, to paint his potted history of Charlevoix, not entirely without errors. It lasted there for years.



In the middle, the Dahlquist 5- and 10-cent store now occupied the corner, next to the restored Jacobs' grocery store that had been damaged in the fire, recently Jeannine Wallace's Shop of the Gulls.

At bottom, the Polly-Kay women's and children's clothing store, beside the Kroger grocery store, in what is today the Elements gift store in a separate building.



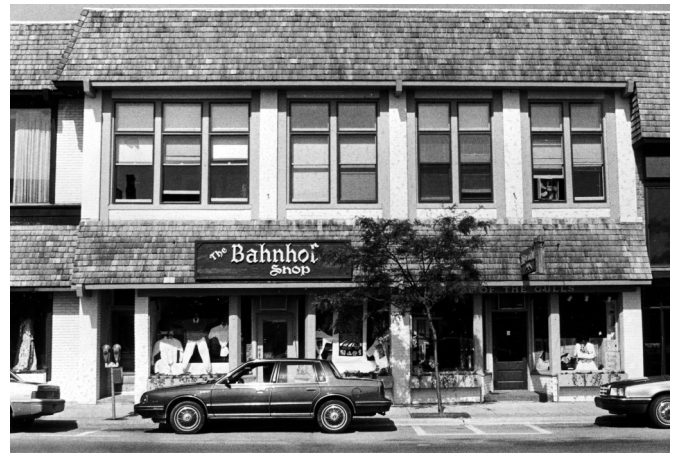
A 1940s view, with the same tenants in the buildings, now two separate structures without the connecting cornice ever since the rebuilding (see previous page).



A Charlevoix Courier-proof photo of what was known as the Birkrandt building being demolished in the 1960s to make way for the brick structure there now.



1970s, with faux-French fishing village facade cladding



1980s—Bahnhof winter sports store and the Shop of the Gulls

# The Bridge Street/Park Avenue corner—an overview



1890s



Early 1920s



1970s