

## JOHN LARKIN



This is an excerpt from the Midland Log, a quarterly journal of the Midland County Historical Society.

An abandoned cabin built originally by the American Fur Company for a trading post was all that existed at the Forks of the Tittabawassee and Pine Rivers when John Larkin arrived in 1852. During the next 20 years the progress of the city that was to grow was, in a large part, the result of the business and civic efforts of this man.

John Larkin was born in Phelps, Ontario Co., N.Y. October 10, 1826, the son of Bradford and Martha (Ellsworth) Larkin. When he was 15 he began working on a boat on the Erie Canal which had just been completed near his home and by the time he was 20 was a captain on a passenger line. The building of railroads soon ended this career, however, and having heard reports of fortunes being made by hunting and trapping he was attracted to Michigan.

With his wife, Amanda Buttles, whom he had married in August 1847 and bringing his dogs and other hunting and trapping equipment he came first to Saginaw County in 1851 and settled just below Freeland. Then in December of 1852 they moved to the "Bluffs" three miles below Midland, and in January to the present site of Midland where the Dow Main office (47 building) once stood. Although they had been preceded to the area by the Wymans, Cronkrights, Fitzhughs, Townsends and others, the Larkin cabin was the only one on the east bank of the river above Smith's Crossing and with no roads or bridges communications were few.

Larkin first purchased 52 acres where he settled and a short time later 62 acres which had been owned by the fur company in what is now the heart of town.

Apparently hunting did not satisfy Larkin's ambitions. His next enterprise and Midland's first industry was a logging company started in 1853 on the purchase of an additional 80 acres of land. His brother-in-law, E. G. Buttles, was a partner. In 1858 this business was enlarged by the construction of a mill built in company with Philo Sumner.

He tried his hand at inn-keeping too. A frame hotel was erected in 1855 about where Knepp's once stood and the year the first county election was held, all 17 qualified voters were invited to the inn for dinner. For many years thereafter it served as the meeting place for county officials.

Returning briefly to his first occupation Larkin and Sumner in 1858 built a steamboat, which was called the Midland City to make trips to Saginaw. This 25 ton adiewheeler was too heavy for the river and was replaced by the Belle Seymour which had a lighter draft and operated successfully for a time. As with his previous shipping career he was put out of business again, this time by the lumbering industry. Not only did the river become clogged with logs but this channel was ruined by the mud and debris chewed from the banks.

The Larkin Lumber firm was joined in 1877 by William Patrick and their company built the first salt works in the county in 1878. By 1888 they and other local companies had made Midland the world's largest producer of bromine, a by-product of the brine.

Larkin's public life was as varied as his business enterprises. He platted the City of Midland and is said to have given lots to a number of persons who agreed to establish businesses. He was elected County Treasurer in 1856 and served 10 terms. He was County Supervisor in 1883.

The Larkin's two children, Lewis and Eugene both died in infancy. They adopted three girls, Elizabeth who married Samuel Foster and May who married B. F. Bradley (were sisters). A younger girl, Nellie, married a Mr. Winfield of Detroit.