

Albert H. Crane

Albert is a Crane subject in this story because the selective service board determined that as a farmer, he would stay on the home front during WWII to raise food for the country and service men, even though he was classified 1A. Albert also owns the Harrison Hutchins home where-in "Hutchins" is the main subject of this book.



Albert H. Crane was born in 1917 to Henry Blakeslee and Muriel E. (Smith) Crane. He has Brothers Edward H., John Calvin, and Robert C.; and Sisters Shirley L., Emily K. and Elizabeth E. Edward died about 1935 at age of 19. John Calvin died while training with the WWII air force in Florida. Bob came home from the navy in 1951.



Albert graduated from Fennville high school in 1935. In school, Albert remembers that Red Hutchins was frequently late for school, even though he lived right behind the school. The janitor would keep the bell ringing in the morning long enough for Red to run out the door while still dressing on the way.

During the war years Albert planted 20 acres to beans behind the house. Fruit was picked and delivered to Michigan Fruit Cannery and the Fruit Exchange after it grew and was nurtured through the seasons of the years by Albert and other Crane family members. A firm in Detroit wanted

apples delivered fresh and ready for shipment to destinations all over the nation.

Albert had the apples packed in special paper lined crates and drove to Detroit in the early hours of the day and was waiting at the firms doors when it opened. He would sleepily drive home to do it all over again.



To help pick the fruit during 1944 and 1945, Cranes and other farmers, drove to Camp Lakeview near Allegan and transported German War prisoners to orchards to work for the day and then drove them back. The prisoners were paid 5¢ and hour where their rewards were used for toothpaste etc. See Page 54.

LaVerne worked on Crane's orchards several times during his high school years. He especially remembers picking cherries on Dick Crane's farm and also working by moving crates around in his cold storage houses supporting the apple graders. Also on the Wadsworth farm, just around the corner from U.S.'s, he picked up apples destined for the cider mill in Fennville. The cider mill was owned by H.J. Heinz Co. and managed by his uncle Keith Hutchins. LaVerne shoveled apples in to a shoot with flowing water that carried apples to the grinder. Apple juice was turned into vinegar by straining it through 25 foot high tanks filled with apple wood shavings. LaVerne tried to take on the job of cleaning out the used shavings after they had the juice run through them but the vinegar fumes were too strong for him. You could stay in the tank no more than 5 minutes at a time.

The Crane family came to the Fennville area in 1874 from Battle Creek. Dwight and Lydia Crane came with their two sons and one daughter; John H., Dwight R. and Emma E. (Swartz). John H. decided to turn his attention to fruit and soon owned sixty-three acres of land devoted

to raising fruit. He also rented his parents farm of one hundred and twenty acres, fifty of which were devoted to the raising fruit. The remainder was used for general farming purposes.



John H. made a study of the fruit business and thoroughly understood all the details connected with the care and cultivation of fruit, so the products of his farm found a good market place, owing to their superior quality and flavor. He became one of the largest shippers of Fennville. John constructed modern and substantial buildings and soon became one of the model country homes in Allegan County.

In February of 1887, John H. married Hattie Blakeslee, daughter of Henry and Irene (Fenn) Blakeslee. Hattie was the first child born in a frame house in Fennville. The house was the property of her grandfather, E. M. Fenn, the village being named for him.

Hattie's father and Mr. Atwater, who came from the east, owned the land on which Fennville now stands, besides much of the surrounding district. John and Hattie Crane had seven children. Five were Ethel M., U. S., Lydia I., Henry Blakeslee, and Berneth R. Dwight died in 1894 at the age of 65. U.S. inherited the 63 area farm and other farm sections.

Albert H. and Henry Blakeslee became the main Crane farms in the 40's and later Henry Blakeslee's sons Albert and Bob. In 1972 Bob opened Crane's Orchard Pie Pantry



Restaurant which exists behind the buildings shown above. Albert's house, left, is the well maintained house of Harrison Hutchins who settled this area around 1837.

The original house is pictured below. This house is constructed to support two families.

