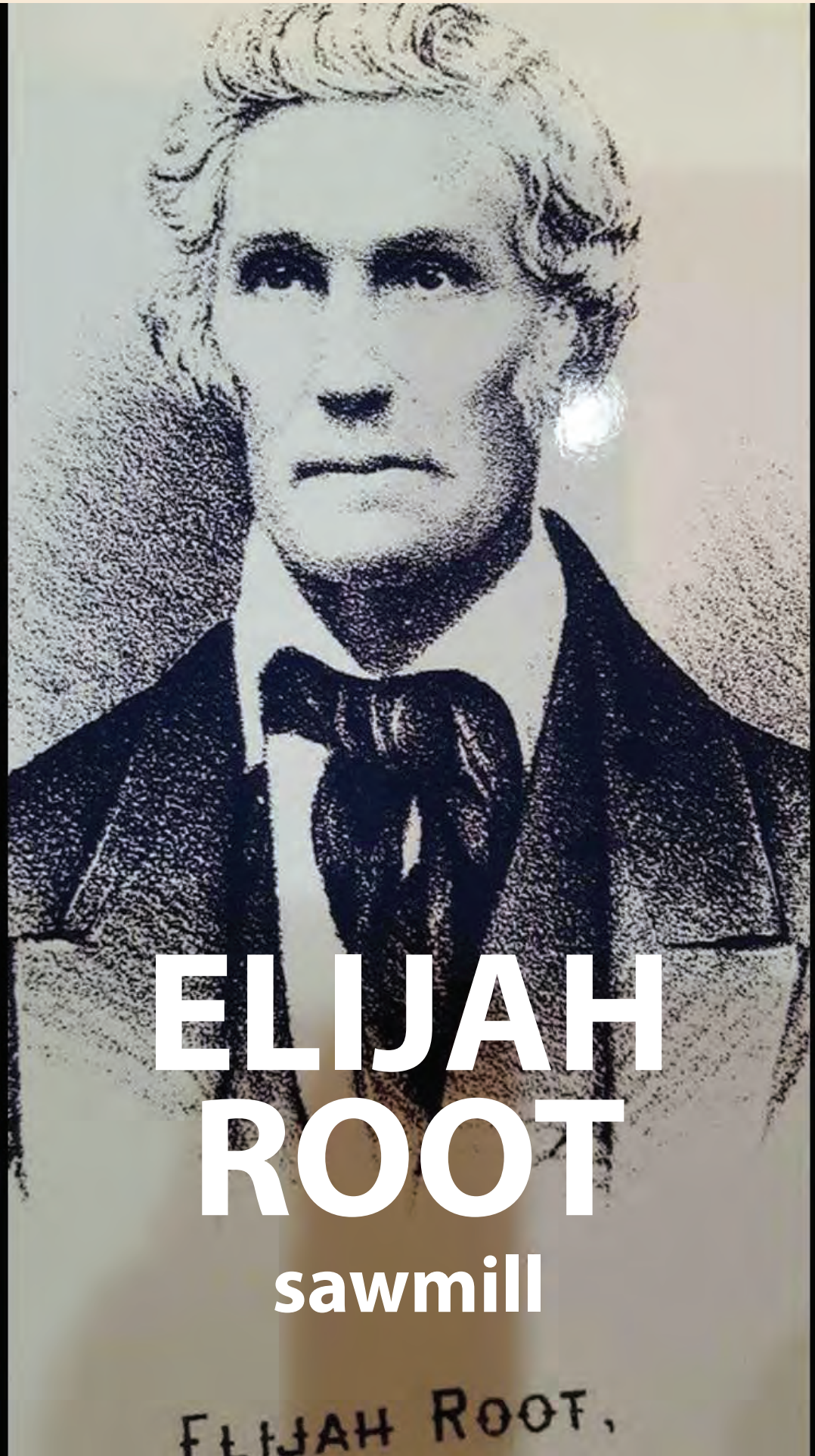
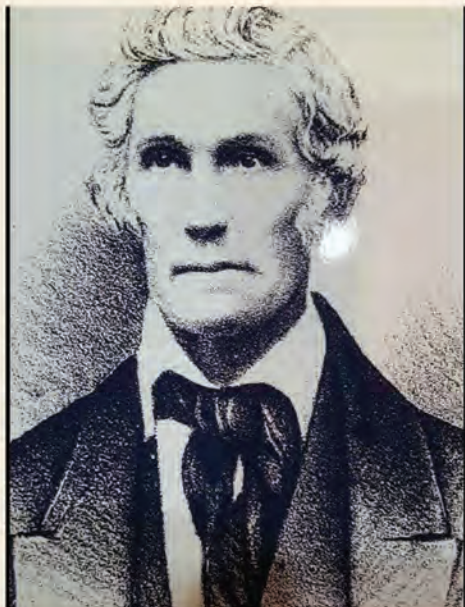


PIONEER, ENTREPRENEUR & PORTAGE LEADER





ELIJAH ROOT

Pioneer to Portage Leader

Constructed a sawmill in 1834, which allowed settlers to forgo constructing primitive log cabins, and instead build frame housing much earlier than typical settlement patterns of this time period.

1784
Born in Massachusetts

Moved to Genesee County, New York as a farmer and millwright

Served during the War of 1812
As a Private, First Regiment
Davis' New York Militia
May have served in the Michigan Territory

Awarded an equipment claim
of \$120 as a veteran of the War of 1812

Moved to the Michigan Territory 1832
with other pioneers settling
near Portage Creek

Located his homestead
at what is now the corner of Lover's
Lane and East Milham Avenue

1832 Appointed County Assessor

Purchased 80 acres on June 4, 1833
where he built his sawmill in 1834,
known as the Elijah Root Sawmill

Married Milicent Stone
(born on April 5, 1787)
of Shoreham, Vermont

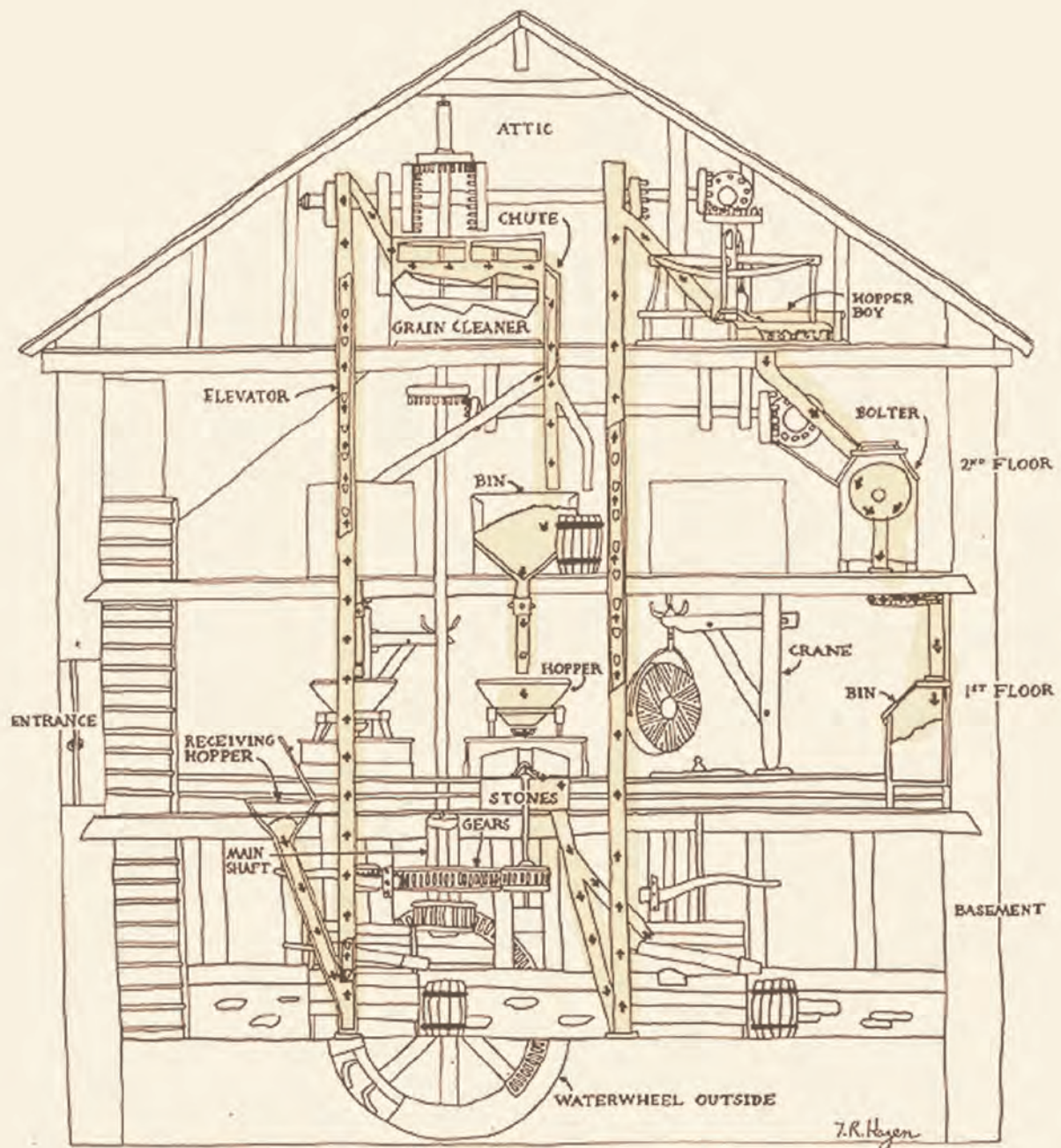
The first election in Portage Township 1838
was held at his homestead on
April 2 in which he was
appointed the first Portage
Township Supervisor

**Elijah and Milicent
had at least nine children:**
Polly, Betsey, Eliza, Charles,
Sarah, Martha, Chauncey,
Lucy, and Marietta

Appointed Poundmaster 1838
(government position responsible for
feeding and maintaining stray livestock)

Elected Overseer of the Poor
1839-1841
1844-1848
1850-1851

Died in April 1861
in Portage Township



FLOUR MILL OPERATION

(using a millstone)

ELIJAH ROOT SAWMILL & the Plank Road

The idea of a plank road began in the early 1840s, when entrepreneurs realized that residents of Three Rivers, Schoolcraft and the surrounding communities needed an easy way to transport their goods to Kalamazoo which was a stop on the Michigan Central Railway, which ran from Detroit to Chicago.

At this time, the roads in these communities were nothing more than hard packed dirt trails. Any significant rain would turn these paths into veritable bogs making the movement of goods difficult.

In early 1848, the Kalamazoo and Three Rivers Plank Road Company was chartered with the intention of building a wooden road from Three Rivers to Kalamazoo. The route chosen brought the road through the very heart of the new township of Portage.

The plank road made an unusual deviation onto Milham Road from its northerly course along South Westnedge Avenue. The road turned right onto Milham Avenue and then turned left onto Lover's Lane before continuing into Kalamazoo proper. It is likely that the road jogged to intersect with the Elijah Root Sawmill which was supplying cut planks for the wooden road.

The plank road would stay in use for roughly twenty years until being made obsolete by the arrival of a North/South rail line through the community. Today, nothing remains of the original plank road.

Route of the plank road:

North on Oakland Drive to Shaver Road then to South Westnedge Avenue. Turns east on Milham Road to Lover's Lane, then north into Portage Road into downtown Kalamazoo.



Portage Center Hotel stood along the Plank Road (today's South Westnedge Avenue) at the site where the Portage Center Cemetery is today.

WHAT IS A PLANK ROAD?

A plank road is a roadway that is made entirely out of wood. To construct the road, wooden runners are laid in the direction the road is to travel. The easiest way to imagine these runners is to think of railroad tracks made of wood. Laid on top of these runners were wooden planks that were then fixed to the runners via iron spikes. Most plank roads were considered toll roads. This meant that if you traveled on the plank road you would be required to stop every so often and pay a fee for the privilege and convenience of using the road.





(A) Rossiter & Julia Howard Home, 5719 Angling Road - Built 1838 (B) William & Henrietta Welch Home (Stuart Manor) Celery Flats Historical Area - Built 1846 (C) Prairie Edge One Room School, Celery Flats Historical Area - Built 1856 (D) David J. & Mary Smith Home (Beacon Club) 5830 Portage Road - Built mid 1850s

ELIJAH ROOT SAWMILL & Historic Homes Today

Along the Portage Creek, north of Milham Avenue, stands the ruins of a mill, mill race and spillway. These ruins are from an important chapter in the history of the City of Portage and are attributed to one of the earliest settlers in the community, Mr. Elijah Root. Sometime in the year 1833, Elijah Root arrived in this area settling near the Portage Creek in the vicinity of the Milham Avenue and Lover's Lane intersection. At that time, Michigan was a mere Territory and Portage was a part of Brady Township.

Seeing the number of settlers arriving in the area and realizing the importance of being able to process logs into useable lumber, Elijah Root decided to construct a sawmill on the creek. Along with building the sawmill Elijah Root dammed the river to create a millrace to power his new business venture, a race that can still be seen today.

This sawmill contributed to the construction of buildings in the burgeoning community such as those shown above. The sawmill was also utilized in the construction of the plank road that ran from Three Rivers through Portage and into Kalamazoo.



THE MILL SITE

Elijah Root passed away in 1861 just as the American Civil War was beginning, leaving his property, including the mill, to his son Chauncey. At some point in time the mill location was moved and it is likely that during Chauncey's ownership, he moved the mill from the west side of the creek to the east side, and about one-hundred yards further north where a large new gristmill was constructed in the Mansard Style of architecture. What is unclear is whether Chauncey ran only the gristmill taking advantage of Portage's agrarian climate or if he ran both the sawmill and gristmill together.

After 1869, the mill passed through several hands, including I. Parker and J.K. Gilbert and finally, to Corydon McCrumb. According to Mr. McCrumb's obituary from the Kalamazoo Gazette, he was born on July 14th, 1856 and passed away in 1941 at the age of 85. He "had been the owner of the Red Cider Mill on Lover's Lane for 35 years previous to disposing of it."

The large mill would eventually be abandoned and sometime in the 1950's or 1960's it was razed leaving only the foundation, the mill race, spillway and various artifacts indicating a prominent business had once stood there. Today these silent ruins stand in mute testimony to a business venture that helped make Portage what it is today, a natural place to move!



ELIJAH ROOT MILL OWNERSHIP

1834

Sawmill constructed by Elijah Root, mill location was on the west side of Portage Creek

1836

Warren Beckwith moved to Michigan and built a blacksmith shop at the sawmill, which a fire destroyed two years later.

Prior to 1861

Sawmill was rebuilt on the east side of Portage Creek at its current location

1861

Owned by Chauncey Root, upon the death of his father Elijah Root

1873

Ownership changed to I. Parker

1890

Ownership changed to J.K. Gilbert

1905

C.S. McCrumb purchased the site and converted the structure to a cider mill known as the "Red Cider Mill". It would remain in operation until 1940.

1950

Records show only remnants of the mill structure as seen today

2003

City of Portage purchased the land for the Portage Creek Bicentennial Trail development



MILLSTONE, 19TH CENTURY

The millstone on display here is one of the actual stones used at the Portage Mill during its one-hundred plus years of operation, as early as 1835. The stone was originally used for grinding wheat and other grains into useable products such as flour or corn meal. The process of grinding involves two stones, one stationary, known as a base or bed-stone, and one that is movable, known as the runner stone, which turns or spins above the bed-stone thus creating the grinding motion. This stone is most likely the runner stone.

The millstone on display here was most likely imported from the Marne Valley in northern France. Known as a Burrstone, this stone is manufactured utilizing multiple pieces of quartz that are then cemented together and bound with iron bands around a central stone hub. Often there were slots in the bands to allow for the lifting of the heavy stone.

The discovery of this stone last year, has added to the history of the Portage Mill which was only known from past records as the site for the Elijah Root Saw Mill and the Red Cider Mill. We now know that the mill was used for fine wheat grinding to make white flour after the original sawmill, most likely in the mid to late nineteenth century. High end white flour was very desirable and expensive to purchase at the time this stone would have been in use. French stones like these were the most desirable milling stones in Europe and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.