

## I. Harris

I. Harris came to Van Buren at age five in 1910 when it was a boom town like Dodge City with a wooden sidewalk and small wooden buildings. The only brick home belonged to the Martins, owners of the Martin General Store. The Hamlin lumber camp on the St. John River floated trees cut in winter down in log booms until the saw mill was ready for them in spring. More than 600 mill workers greeted the survivors of the log drive for a drunken brawl—all in fun—every night until tree cutting started again in the fall.

When Harris came, there was no bridge across the St. John; the ferry ran on manpower. Five cents was the fare but sometimes labor equated with the charge. "All set to help his neighbor. It was a good life," Harris recalled.

Harris remembered hanging around the back door of the restaurant with his classmates for the daily treat. Dr. Hamlin had a terrific sense of humor; he would drop pennies on his front lawn for the children. His fee for a visit was fifty cents—or nothing when he did not feel like charging anything.

Groceries were bought in bulk. Dry goods—sheets, towels, and yard goods, as well as clothing—were available. People gathered at the post office to collect their mail and to meet friends. The parlor was for weddings and funerals. Children walked to and from elementary school—no time off for storms. Boys boarded at the high school; girls went to Sacred Heart School. Food was fresh. Milk and eggs (no day-old eggs), barrels

of apples, strawberries, and blueberries were available in each house—no manufactured food in Harris's childhood home. Two nights a week the family could attend the movie house above the grocery store. Sometimes the pianist would miss his timing, and the wedding march would accompany the ship as it sank. Crying and laughing at the same time was not unusual.

Democrats and Republicans worked side by side. The Democrats wanted Harris to run for governor, but his wife wanted him home with the children. Harris was called "Frenchy Harris" because he spoke French to everyone in his harness and car business. During retirement Harris and his wife spent money and time to build Heritage Village.