



NOVEMBER 27, 2019

The RECORDER

Death Notices: (see page 3)

DONALD ASHDOWN, age 90
ALAN WHEELER, age 62



Happy
Thanksgiving



Musical performance

See page 2



Historic sign restoration

See page 2



Thanksgiving

See page 3



Rotary Club of Albion

See page 3

Three Towns, a River and its Mill Ponds

By **KEN WYATT**
Contributing Writer

Albion, Concord and Homer share a unique geographic profile: The three sit along stretches of Michigan’s 178-mile-long Kalamazoo River, which empties into Lake Michigan at Saugatuck.

The river towns also share great historic significance. In the decades before white settlers arrived in the late 1820s and early ‘30s, they were part of tribal lands of the Pottawatomis, who used the river for fishing, transportation and as sites for their own villages. Then, in the early years of white settlement, pioneering families capitalized on the river by creating mills, dams and the resulting mill ponds.

Albion takes pride annually in a Festival of the Forks, which highlights its pivotal position at the union of the two branches of the river. And whereas Concord sits along the north branch of the river, Homer sits astride the south branch – both roughly nine miles to the south of Albion, and about the same distance from each other. They are a triangle of Kalamazoo River towns, related by all kinds of shared experiences.

This is a look back at some of those events, which include natural catastrophe, flooding, court litigation – and continuing debate over how the river is being tamed and managed.

Concord and its Mill Pond.

In Concord, the early years saw the development of at least three mills. The original mills are long gone, but the dam and mill pond are a continuing presence in the village. And it is never far from local discussion.

With population of just over 1,000, Concord is in a sense defined by its mill pond. Without it, the village would lose its most prominent natural feature.

One of the issues periodically raised is the possibility of a dam failure. The facility, which sits beneath the Main Street causeway over the pond, is privately owned by the Joers family. That family operates the Joers Farm Center, which is a modern descendant of the old feed mills.

There are double gates holding back waters of the river, but they consist of little more than three-inch-thick wooden timbers held in place by iron channels.

Whenever such discussions take place, long-time residents speak of a legendary dam failure that emptied the Homer Mill Pond long ago and impacted Albion downstream.

The story of that catastrophic event can be read in the Homer Public Library. One library scrapbook tells of two black days in the history of the Homer Mill Pond.

The first was the day the dam collapsed – Saturday, March 7, 1908. Fifty-eight years later, coincidentally on another Saturday – July 16, 1966 – the mill pond was deliberately drained, vanishing into the archives of history.

Homer’s Dam Collapse. An account of the dam’s collapse appears in a Homer newspaper article published in 1950. It was based on an interview with 80-year-old Lester Anderson. His birthday, he recalled, was just two days before the catastrophe, and he remembered it well.

At the time of the collapse, he was employed by the Cortright Milling Co., whose mill was on the banks of the Kalamazoo River.



March 7, 1908, this dam at Homer burst sending five feet of icy water downstream.

Courtesy photos

This historic photo shows the Homer Mill Pond Dam before it failed in March of 1908

er.

It had been a severe winter, with 28 consecutive days allowing bob sleigh and cutter travel. In early March, however, a sudden thaw and balmy weather created dangerous conditions. The ice began breaking up rapidly in the mill pond and the water steadily rose.

Anderson said all day Friday and Saturday he worked with a crew of men filling and placing sandbags along the banks of the river to strengthen the dam. Its gates were lowered as far as possible.

“Tension ran high in the village as word spread that the dam might go out at any time, and a crowd of people gathered at the pond hoping to be on hand to witness the break when the dam gave way,” according to the

article.

“It was known however, that the village itself, located on higher ground, was in no danger from the rising water.”

There were other fears, though. The New York Central railroad bridge was a short distance northwest of the pond. If the dam gave way, it was thought the railroad bridge would be swept away. Railroad crews switched two carloads of coal on the bridge to help secure it.

“Keen apprehension was also felt at Albion, eight miles to the northeast, for a flood could not be prevented there if the Homer dam failed to hold the Kalamazoo (river) ice

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A Build Albion Fellow Senior Recital Wows Audience

By **SYLVIA BENAVIDEZ**
Contributing Writer

Jontaj Wallace II has been serving the Albion community throughout his college career as a Build Albion Fellow. This program allows up to 10 students from Albion and the surrounding area to receive their tuition, room and board free in exchange for serving the Albion community. Part of his service and education was becoming the choir director at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church for one year. Dr. Philip Mason, professor of music emeritus, who spent many years teaching at Albion College, said of the November 23 concert by Wallace II, “I just thought it was one of the best student recitals we’ve ever had and I have heard a lot of student recitals at this place. He creates a kind of atmosphere no matter what he does.” Mason also stated, “The Beethoven string quartet with two marimbas and four players was terrific.” Dr. Mason attends St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and shared whether on stage or off, “He walks into a room and just lights it up.”

Elijah Armstrong, Jr. is Wallace’s Uncle stated, “It was amazing to see him do everything he has been finally practicing all these years for and express himself. The music was awesome.” O’ Shea Swinton a close friend of Wallace II said, “I just love to see how hard he has worked on this. Every day (Every time) I see him perform, it reminds me of when he was younger, how passionate he was about his music.” Swinton emphasized, “That’s all I see when I see him play is his passion, his hard work.”

Wallace II began the concert with “My Lady White” by David Maslanka on the marimba as a solo piece. Albion College Staff Accom-

panist, Nicholas Laban who also played piano later in the concert, said of Wallace’s performance, “He is such a sensitive player on the marimba and he brought out so many shades of the harmonies and told the story very beautifully and I think that was my favorite.” The concert then had another highlight moment of many when Wallace II played a Marimba Duet, “2 + 1” with his teacher Daniel McDonald. His talents were not limited to one instrument, Wallace II sings and during the concert also had three percussion solos on the snare drum, “Three Dances” composed by Warren Benson. During the concert, Morgan Pross, a fellow student, Lewis Eastmead and musician Nathan Schulte also assisted in the Goodrich Chapel Performance.

Commenting on his performance on his senior recital at Goodrich Chapel, “It was the best I have ever played.” He continued, “It was very fulfilling to have a four-year experience here and to end it on such a high note.” His favorite piece to perform was “My Lady White” for a very personal reason. “I did not tell anyone, but I dedicated it to my close friend Zak. Him and I worked in the tour guide office together this entire summer and every day until what happened and I wanted it to be in memory of him.” Zachary Winston was an Albion College student and basketball player who passed away on November 9 by stepping in front of a train near Erie Street in Albion.

Wallace II knew that the Build Albion Fellow program would be hard work but he shared, “I love my community. I love Albion and I would not rather go anywhere else then Albion College if it meant that I could serve my community and that is exactly what it has been.” He said the program taught him about time



Photos by Sylvia Benavidez

Jontaj Wallace II standing next to the Marimba, the instrument he loves to bring to life.

management and that he “needed to be clear about the service that he asked of people.” In the future, he hopes to teach music. “I will have my teaching degree by the end of the spring.” He is attracted to becoming a music teacher because “I think there is something uniquely human about music. For us to have the unique opportunity to teach children about it and later to let them be adults and experience music is just something special.”

What does Wallace’s teaching future look

like? Dr. Lia Jensen-Abbott Wallace II Music Theory teacher commented on her student, “For Taj, he was always excited to learn the academic side of music as well as what he was performing. He’s one of those rare people that really works intentionally to put that all together. Everything he does is with one hundred percent intensity and musicality. We are all so proud at what he has accomplished, and maybe not even what he has accomplished, but the potential about what he will accomplish in his future.”

Thanksgiving comes early for one Albion congregation

By **SYLVIA BENAVIDEZ**
Contributing Writer

For one church family in Albion, Thanksgiving came a little early. Build Them on the Rock Ministries hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for their congregation and for the community this last Saturday at their location, 305 E. Porter Street. Tables were covered with tender turkey, meatballs, gravy, salads of all kinds, green beans, broccoli in cheese sauce, macaroni and cheese, buns, the list goes on along with pies, cookies, and cakes for dessert. Much of the meal was donated by church members, with Family Fare and a visiting church from Detroit donating funds to help make the dinner happen for the community.

Pastor Carol Brown who is the lead minister for Build Them on the Rock Ministries stated, “The Lord had put it up on my heart and prompted on the people’s heart that sometimes people don’t get a chance to get a Thanksgiving meal.” Whatever the reason people may miss having a meal on the actual day of Thanksgiving Pastor Brown didn’t want anyone to miss the chance to sit down with their neighbor in

Albion. Said Pastor Brown, “I think it brings healing to people. Bringing people together and just eating together and breaking bread together and fellowship.”

People at the meal not only enjoyed the meal, but were thankful for this holiday for various reasons. April Porter from Albion said, “I am thankful that God remembers me and that Thanksgiving brings us closer together.” Her husband, James Porter, shared that he was, “Thankful to be alive and breathing.” Also enjoying the meal was Rashod Brown of Albion who shared his thoughts on Thanksgiving by stating, “It’s supposed to be a time when family comes together. We celebrate and give thanks for everything we have either achieved over the year or for the thing that we’ve become better about ourself.” Roneldo Johnson a Deacon for Build Them On The Rock Ministries believes that “Thanksgiving is important so we can come together and show love to another.” He added, “You can help someone that is hungry or needs encouragement.”

Pastor Brown’s husband and co-pastor Victor Brown explained that this year they are especially grateful for their church in which



Photos by Sylvia Benavidez

Build Them on the Rock Church members and neighbors enjoy a Thanksgiving meal together before the holiday rush begins.

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