

Elisha Wood's Tannery was a thriving Madison industry back in the 1820's

(Written in approx. 1953, includes information on many other Madison businesses; Madison tannery, monument works, blacksmith shop, onion barrel maker, hotels.)

Elisha Wood, grandfather of Norm Wood of Lake St., Madison, was born in Connecticut, Feb. 4, 1796 and at the age of 27 (in 1823) traveled by foot, carrying a satchel and cane, over a route of marked trees, to Mentor, where he worked in a distillery.

One Sunday, some time later, he walked to Madison, where he “dickered” with a Mr. Robert Dusten, to purchase the tannery, with the first payment of seven barrels of whiskey, and legend has it, that two years later Mr. Dusten died from drinking green whiskey.

After Elisha Wood was established in the tannery here, he sent for his childhood sweetheart, Polly (born Jan 13, 1808-died March 21, 1887) to come here and be married. She made the trip by stagecoach.

The couple resided in the building now used as a barn on the late Tom Barry property on Union St. They had four girls and three boys, including Sextus Elisher Wood, father of Norm Wood. The mother worked in the tannery and helped to make shoes.

Norm Wood recalls his parents telling how timid the girls and women were when they came to be measured for shoes, which were made to measure and required six months for completion from the time the hide tanning process started. They would hold their skirts over their ankles so they couldn't be measured, and often before they would consent, the mothers would promise them a pair of stockings to go with their new shoes. It was common practice in those days to exchange merchandise in payment of goods, to the extent of selling or trading a horse.

A “sweep” was used to grind the bark in the hide tanning process and the task of driving an old blind horse, ‘round and ‘round, day in and day out, fell to Norm Wood's father, Sextus, who had “every boy in town” at some time or other riding the old blind horse.

After the death of Elisha Wood, September 10, 1863, at the age of 67 years, the son, Sextus, took over the tannery. He later sold it to a Lewis Wood of Geneva, no relative. Soon, with the invention of new machinery, etc., the tannery was abandoned.

Stone from the tannery was used in the foundation of the present Hoskins Block on Main Street.

Elisha Wood and father of the late A. W. Teachout of Madison, also owned the gristmill here, a stone building located just east of the present Willowcraft. According to Mr.

Norm Wood, they lost a sum of money in one deal, in which they hauled by horses, 10 to 15,000 bushels of wheat from the Fairport Dock, ground it into flour and sold it, but finally had to take it all back when they found it had soured, the wheat having gotten damp.

Sextus and his wife, who gave property to Madison, including the present Village Park site, are buried at Fairview Cemetery.

Norm Wood was born on the present Nagy farm on Lake St., just 84 years ago today on July 24, 1869. His father, Sextus, first plowed this land, 123.5 acres at the age of 16 and last plowed it just prior to his death, at the age of ___ years. Norm Wood recalls many times, when cattle were taken from trains here and driven to the pasture on this farm, where they were kept until market prices were up!

Other interesting historical notes of Madison, cited by Mr. Norm Wood include the following:

A monument works owned by a Mr. Arnold was located in the little house now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Lexso on Eagle St., which is in connection with the Madison Garage. Several old headstones are still buried beneath the ground and some used for steppingstones at the Wood homestead.

A burying ground was also located at the northeast corner of Eagle St. on property now owned by the Kibbe and Grabski families.

Mont Preston, who lived in a brick house, the site of the present Marty home on West Main St., had a blacksmith shop on the site of the present Grabski home on Eagle St. If you have walked on West Main, you will have seen the horseshoe imprints in the sidewalk in front of the former Preston brick house, later torn down.

Many of us still remember the blacksmith shop owned by Herbey Tilden, on the site of the Frank Rose garages on West Main, but this was previously owned by Joe Harrison, who lived in the C.C. North house on River St.

A Mr. Selby who lived in the former Eland house on East Main St. had a blacksmith shop on the site of the H. Hagerdon property.

The Cooper works, where onion barrels were made, is the old building west of the Mayhew Feed & Fuel Co. on Lake St. This was operated by David Barnes, who later sold to Al Benjamin.

Mr. Norm Woods recalls three different fires in the business section. One in the east end of town occurred in 1907 and Mr. Wood recalls hauling brick from the debris down to the railroad, where it was used in the Mayhew building now leased by Perfection Pipe Nipple Co.

The home of Mr. And Mrs. Otto Erbacher, Lake St., one of the older houses in Madison, used to stand on the approximate site of Isaly's Dairy Store. One of its owners was Jack Kellogg, one time mayor of Madison.

Two different hotels stood on the site of the present Pure Oil Station and were destroyed by fire. In the first, which burned over 100 years ago, 18 or 20 horses stabled in the barns died. Sextus Wood dug the basement for the first hotel and the dirt was hauled to the present library site.

Henry Kellogg, who operated a drug store here, once resided in the present F. Priscak home on Lake St.

A wagon shop, owned and operated by Asa Turner, one of the first settlers, was located at the corner of Bates Rd. Sextus Wood bought a wagon from this shop to haul stone for the old bridge on Furnace Hill in Painesville.

Mrs. Nellie Wood, wife of Norm Wood, who is now 82 years old, was the first child baptized in the Immaculate Conception Church on Lake St.

According to another of our older and respected citizens, Mrs. Bird Walding, the present home of Mr. and Mrs. T. Penrod, on River St., was once located on the present site of the north drive of Fairview Cemetery; also that Asa Talcott, who has been dead 82 years, gave Madison Village a 99 a year lease to the cemetery drive.

Stones, just at the right of the drive of the C. Passerell home on River St., mark a spring, from which many residents obtained their drinking water.

In our quest for the older Madison houses, reported the past week were those of Richard Hupp on E. Main St. built in the 1820's, Gilbert McLean, Union St., which is recorded in an abstract of 1840, and the James Ruple house on E. Main St., 135 years old.

The Hupps report that in their recent remodeling, they found pages of an old Cleveland Plain Dealer on the walls, dated 1829.

We wish to remind our residents that Lake County was organized in March 1840 and any previous records would be in Geauga County.