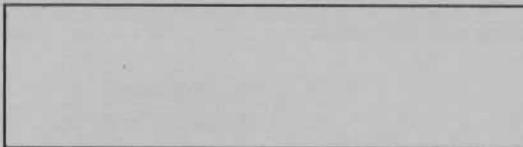


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### WOODRUFF'S MILL IN BRIGHTON TOWNSHIP

The settlers who came to Michigan Territory in the early 1830s must all be considered entrepreneurs. They came with the intention of staying (in the wilderness), developing a livelihood and assuming all the risks, management, capital and labor. Many came because there was no future for them in the east. The most for which they could hope was that, by dint of hard work, they could keep body and soul together, and even hope to improve their lives.

When Evert Woodruff, b. 1797 in Connecticut, arrived in Detroit in 1832, his wife, 28-year-old Ruby (Albright), b. 1804 in New York, was pregnant with their third child. Egbert, b. 1833, is the first white child born in the township. Today's parent finds it very difficult to imagine Ruby and Evert's life. Eight more children followed, not all of whom live to adulthood. Several are buried in the nearby Woodruff Cemetery. Hard Work soon forces tears to dry. Of those who survived, Frances married K.W. Bingham (son of Kinsley); Anna (a tea ) married George P. Dudley, described as a hero of the Civil War, and Egbert married Hester Wright.

In early spring, 1833, Woodruff selected 160 acres of Section 34 through which a modest stream full of spring melt ran from the north to empty into the Huron River.

They had come by way of the Grand River Trail; at best a two-track trail, at worst marshes and streams to ford. May 31, the family moved into a log cabin. And there they were among great oak trees where earlier great trees had stood for a millennium. The dense forest limited sight to 100'. To assure himself the stream would provide a sufficient supply to run a sawmill, Woodruff followed the stream north. Within a ½ mile, another stream entered from the west (Mann Creek). It also drained a good share of the north and west sides of the township. Woodruff Creek could be followed four miles north. Concern over riparian interests was nonexistent. Michigan was a territory into which the Federal government needed settlers to develop the area's resources.

During that summer, Woodruff built an earthen dam just south of the north section line; the sluice was about a mile long. That fall, the sawmill was built and by spring logs were being turned into lumber for boards to lay floors for upper rooms in Benjamin Blaine's log cabin. It is noted, Woodruff wouldn't cut planks for the first floor (dirt) of settlers' cabins until all had been supplied with lumber for the second floor.

In 1834, Woodruff built a three-story gristmill, with an undershot wheel, near the end of the sluice. The 1880 History of Livingston County notes, "To Mr. Woodruff, the township is largely a debtor for the enterprise he manifested in the erection of mills, which aided greatly in its development."

The building of a mill would entail the help of others; masons, carpenters and those knowledgeable of the architecture involved. His wife's nephew, Egbert Albright, had that knowledge. His father, Amos, had been a millwright in the east (1840, Amos has his mill in Howell) and Evert, a miller in New York, knew how a mill should be built.

In 1847, Evert Woodruff bought the flouring mill in Brighton, from Orson Quackenbush. Two years later he sold it to Lyman Judson. By 1850, Egbert Albright and a cousin, Chester Thompson, were living with Evert and Ruby, working hard to keep up with the demand. Tradition says both men fell in love with Sarah Cornelia Woodruff. Egbert was the lucky one in 1852. A year later, they moved to the village where Egbert and Chester bought the mill from Judson, running it successfully for the next 16 years.

At 73, Evert Woodruff died and is buried in the Old Village Cemetery. One may assume Ruby rests by his side, but available records do not confirm this. (Compiled by Marieanna Bair from census records; a manuscript donated by Colby Thompson of California; 1880 History of Livingston County; Old Village and Woodruff Cemeteries' records. Additions/corrections requested. 810/229-6402)