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SHOEMAKER RAKE AND HANDLE FACTORY

Beatrice Haskin Mattice

The hills of southern Schoharie County have many streams, and in the early days dams would be made to power water wheels for small industries. On the smaller streams were gristmills that ground buckwheat and rye flour and cornmeal; also carding and knitting mills, furniture-making shops, cider mills, tanneries, and numerous sawmills as the country was growing and everyone was building. The mills were all powered by waterwheels and operated only when there was sufficient water in the creeks.

One interesting industry was the Shoemaker Rake and Handle Factory, on a small stream about 1/2 mile from the hamlet of Conesville on Champlin Road. Abram and Weidman Shoemaker and Roswell Freese manufactured hand rakes and handles here from 1851–1875. This mill was powered by a dam and waterwheel. One man in 1854 bought 24,284 broom handles at 8 1/2 cents each. The great-grandson of Mr. Shoemaker, Lloyd Austin 1902–1986, told that as long as hand rakes were used, the “Shoemaker Rake” was superior to all others. These were hand rakes for haying with wooden teeth.

The day book of this operation shows all entries in lovely old-fashioned script, and tells of the day’s work they did earning themselves \$1 each day: bunch broom handles, work at rakes, dress logs, work dam, churn handles, hoe handles, horse rake teeth, hop poles, sawing timber, sawing horse rakes, sawing ox yoke timber, dig ditch, rake bows, hewing timber for Hunter, turning rake handles, and turning rake bows. Another interesting item was making “scythe snath.” A scythe was a back-breaking implement used to cut the hay, a long handle with a narrow blade of about 2 or 3 feet. The scythe was actually the blade and the snath was the handle. It was also noted: “3 days shinglin’ to Wider Layman’s.”

Nearby down on the Manorkill, Lewis P. Mattice had a sawmill, near the present recreation field by the Fire Hall. Several entries told the Shoemakers must have used this mill occasionally. Payment was made to Mr. Mattice for, “youse of sawmill one knight” and “youse of oxen to draw lumber.” Lyman Snyder sawed out 41 fellys and 175 fellys (a felly is the rim of a wheel supported by spokes) that would be used by the several wheelwrights in the area. Another entry was: “cash to go to Massachusetts \$4.93” (possibly to deliver handles or to see customers).

Some local people who bought rakes or handles were: Daniel Mackey who had a store in Gilboa village May

26, 1852, 1 doz. best rakes \$2.25; July 13 1 doz. poor rakes \$1.50. Other customers were Giles H. Phelps, a store in West Conesville or Manorkill; Bartholomew, a cooper bought 1/2 doz. churn handles; Simeon Bartley fork handle .18; and Lott Tousley 6 mop handles .54. L.P. and J.W. Mattice, Roley Phelps, William Frisbee, and Edward Layman were among the customers. There are about 50 other names in the book. Polley Williams must have needed a handle or two as she is listed as a credit by spinning "15 rin 15 nots."

Albert Jackson was a purchaser of large amounts in 1854. Between January 1 and April 17 he bought 24,284 broom handles @ 8 1/2 cents each. Jacob Smith bought two bunches of shingles and 177 feet of hemlock boards for a total of \$6.54. Then, he worked 7 1/2 days in haying for \$11.25 to pay off the bill. Earlier he bought more shingles, nails, spikes and lumber. (Jacob Smith 1825–1883 was my great-great grandfather, and he must have been building a house or barn.)

Occasional workers included Charles Dunken, George Gordon, Benet Beach, B.S. Richmyer, Stryker Richmyer, Wash Brink, W.P. Richtmyer, and Oren Hulbert. William D. Hinman was hired April 20, 1870 at \$20 a month. He took a day off from work to go to Camp Meeting at Gilboa; another 1/2 day to attend a sale in Gilboa. Albert Through the years, another worker was hired for \$8 a month; and another \$16 a month. A. Richtmyer paid his bill with two pigs.

William Mattice sold them 400 fish \$4.00; 14 shad \$2.10; cost to "fetch up" 2 barrels flour \$2.00; cash to pay for flour \$3.80; to fetch up 2 sacks salt \$2.00; 1 plow point .38; to draw tub butter .40. I would say this was a trip down the 'pike to Catskill, taking the butter to be sold, perhaps a load of rakes, and returning with the fish, etc. Abram Shoemaker, to draw rakes to Catskill and fetch up 1 sack salt \$7.00. Some entries are in shillings.

They bought ash, hickory, basswood, oak and some hemlock logs from local landowners: Iram Humphrey, Win Richtmyer, Roley Phelps, William Richtmyer, Nelson Hinman, Lyman Snyder, Cornelius Sherman, Riett, Samuel Mulford, Shard Travis, Margaret Schermerhorn, Jacob Richtmyer, Gerry Humphrey, Catherine Patrie, Rhodes Smith, A. W. Brand, and Jacob Layman. Payments for the logs were sometimes \$2.50 or \$5.00. One entry was James Storey 10 hickory trees and drawing same, \$2.50. In 1859 Mr. Freese moved to a farm on what is now Beaver Hill Road, South Mountain.

In 1875 the Shoemakers moved to Middleburgh after the disastrous flood of early June 1874 wiped out their business.



Beatrice Mattice is the prolific historian for the Town of Conesville who has contributed to the New York Roots Web site, is the author of *She Walked These Hills Before Us*, and has written a number of articles and small treatises. She loves music and plays the organ at Gilboa's Methodist Church.

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