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## MILFORD'S OLDEST BLACKSMITH SHOP—BUILT IN 1857

*Milford Smithies Then and Now*

Mrs. G.S. Rowe

Two kindred trades, horse-shoeing and blacksmithing, held an important place in the industrial life of the olden days, both in the city and rural areas. With the passing of the horse and buggy their scope diminished and one by one they passed from the picture. Those shops of the olden days were usually busy places, especially in the winter, when a common sight was a long line of horses at the hitching posts waiting their turn to be sharp-shod for travel over the icy and snowy roads. The smithy, with bare and brawny arms, wearing leather apron, handling unruly horses or fashioning metal into shape on the gleaming forge, are memories of those who have reached middle life or the years beyond. In the picture of the village blacksmith by one of America's foremost poets will be perpetuated this useful figure in pioneer industrial life. The blacksmith of old was not only a skilled artisan in wood and metal and was often called upon to make articles of everyday use for farm and home, many of which are now procurable in hardware and notion stores. The allied lines of horse-shoeing and blacksmithing were often carried on by the same individual, frequently but not necessarily in the same building. Making the metal parts of vehicles, setting tires and repairing machines were all in his line and good workmen had plenty to do. With this, as with most of the pioneer industries, there was considerable barter, and the smith was expected to accept pay for his services in farm produce, merchandise, promises and sometimes cash.

This industry has an especial interest to Charles and Lew Dever from the fact that so many of their boyhood memories cluster around the old stone shop on South Main street, operated for many years by their father, the late William Dever. Inspired by this interest, the following information concerning this pioneer industry in Milford, where once the ring of the anvil was a familiar sound, has been assembled by Lew Dever. The Times is glad to have a part in its preservation as a feature of local industry.

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The Times articles of Dec. 8, 1939 and April 19, 1940 pertaining to the sale of property at the northwest corner of Main and Commerce streets to the Ford Motor Company and consequent demolition of the Cutting blacksmith shop awakened some interest and discussion as to the oldest building in the village to be used for blacksmithing and its related trades of horse-shoeing and wood-working. This appears to be the old fieldstone structure at 210 south Main street known as the Dever shop. It was built for Albert Haner in 1857 and for about 65 years continued to be used for such purposes.

Eight blacksmith shops are known to have existed in the village, and two others in the township, of which four still stand on their original location in the village, but none are now used for the original purpose. The operators were commonly referred to as blacksmiths, but they had a much wider range of activities in the way of wood-working, painting and repair of vehicles. Although the blacksmith shops, as old-timers knew them, have vanished from the community picture, the industries carried on therein survive to a considerable extent. Charlie Dever, who worked with his father for many years, continues at a shop at his residence on east Washington street. Clayton Sherwood maintains a shop at his farm on west Commerce road. The Grondin shop at the Huron on south Main street and the Henry Wright Planing Mill on west Liberty have taken over machinery and wood-work respectively that were formerly carried on by the blacksmith shops. Instead of the horses being brought to town for shoeing, Mr. Whitehead of Summit streets [sic] goes to the farms with equipment in a truck.

### **The Liberty Street Shop**

On Liberty street on the site of the Liddell residence [214 E. Liberty] once stood a two-story frame building erected sometime prior to 1871. That it was operated at that time by John Stephens and brother for horse-shoeing and blacksmithing is shown by an advertisement in the Milford Times of Aug. 19, 1871, (in possession of Arthur Wells) announcing that William Wells had taken over the blacksmithing therein. John Stephens and brother continued the carriage, woodworking and paint shop on the second floor. Vehicles were moved to and from this second floor on an outside ramp or runway often used in those days. This shop was later sold to Lyman Ogden, blacksmith and horse-shoer. His son, Myron Ogden, did the woodworking and painting upstairs and another son, Wilbur Ogden, worked for a time with his father. Later on Joshua Pearson occupied the shop. Some time before 1888 the building was bought by Thornhill brothers and moved to Main street near the railroad tracks. Here it was used as a grain elevator, was bought by Weaver & Watkins and is still in use for storage in connection with their produce business.

### **The Joshua Pearson Shop**

Out on his farm (now the John Sinnock farm on the south side of General Motors road) Joshua Pearson, about 1864, erected a small frame building. Here Josh, as he was familiarly known throughout the countryside, operated a horse-shoeing and blacksmithing business until about 1885.

### **John Grierson, Sr., Shop**

Another farmer who plied his trade as blacksmith and horse-shoer in the rural area was John Grierson, Sr. His farm was a mile or so south of what was long known as "Prior's Corners" and is now the home of Will Sands. The date of the erection of the shop was not learned. It was torn down years ago.

### **The Stone Shop on North Main**

Milford folks of today know it as the "Blakely Recreation," but before its transformation it was known far and wide as a blacksmith shop with quite a long list of owners and operators, the last of whom was the late Richard Forbes. Who built it and when does not appear, save that the Hibbards were owners in the early days as were subsequently A.H. Hungerford, Daniel Lee and G.R. Lee. A deed dated March 16, 1861, conveyed the property from David Stephens to George O. Cutting, who used it for blacksmithing and horse-shoeing until June 1881, when he bought the lot and erected the building recently demolished. [Between these, from 1876 to 1881, he had a shop just south of 514 N. Main.] With him in the stone shop was associated P.C. Slougher, who "made and repaired carriages, cutters and light farm wagons," says Sanford Arms. The Beers Atlas of the early seventies shows P.C. Slougher as owner of the building at that time and in 1881 it was conveyed to Vowles & Orvis of farm implement fame. But it is not on record that it was ever used in connection with that business. Cutting's successor there was Richard Forbes in the early eighties, who with his sons, Tom and Ferry, conducted the business for many a year.

### **William Dever Shops**

Only a few of the oldest residents have memories of a building that occupied a site just south of the present railroad crossing on west Liberty street. The date of its erection and prior ownership are unknown, save that the property (described as "Lot 6, block 1 of Phelps Addition") was bought Nov. 9, 1867, from Edwin L. Bennett by William Dever, who operated a blacksmith shop therein until the summer of 1871, when it was bought by the Holly, Wayne & Monroe Railroad, the predecessor of the Pere Marquette. William Dever and Thos. Russell were partners there in 1868 and 1869. The building was then taken down to make way for the railroad.

William Dever then purchased in 1871 the stone shop at 210 south Main street, which he

continued to occupy, except for wood-working, until his death in 1915. This building has a history of 83 years, having been built in 1857 by Calvin Green for Albert Haner for blacksmithing and kindred uses. After Mr. Dever's death, his son, Chas. Dever, carried on until May, 1920. The shop is now vacant and the only remaining blacksmith shop in the village is the one at the Chas. Dever residence in South Milford. One of the relics of its early days is an old-time leather bellows, not now in use, however, having been superceded by one of the newer small fan-blowers.

### **The Wakely Shop**

On the east side of Main street just south of the Huron river stood the two-story frame building erected about 1863 by Archibald Wakely, and here were made the wagons, buggies, bob-sleigh [sic] and cutters of the Wakely line—a thriving industry of the pre-automobile period. The late Elmer Avery was here employed as a painter before he went into the photograph business. In October, 1871, Mr. Wakely expanded operations by building an addition at the east side for horse-shoeing and blacksmithing and his first employe was William Dever. This department was later housed in a two-story addition on the north side. Will W. Wakely was long associated with his father in the conduct of this business and carried on for about five years after the father's death in 1917. These buildings were demolished in 1938-39 after a long period of vacancy.

### **The Pearson-Greer-Wells Shop**

On west Commerce street at the foot of the hill and just east of the railroad viaduct stand two frame buildings that go far back in Milford history. One was erected sometime before 1864 and so far as known, Robert Pearson was the first blacksmith and horse-shoer to occupy it. After him came Robert Greer, Lyman Calkins and finally William Wells. In its present use as Kinney's Garage it has followed the trend from horse and buggy to motor transportation. A little east of the shop stands the house which Pearson occupied. In the seventies lived the Greer family and later it was the abode of "Uncle Innes." An eccentric local character that no one who knew him will ever forget.

### **The Honeywell-Bailey Shop**

Another of the north Main street shops and a busy place in its time, was what was best known as the Dan Bailey shop, just north of the Standard Oil station. The date of the erection of this frame building is lacking, [It was built by Joseph Vowles in 1876 and occupied by George Cutting until he built his brick shop across the street in 1881.] but it is known to have been occupied by blacksmith John Honeywell in 1875. After him came Daniel Bailey, who had the assistance of his sons, Will and Frank, until his death in 1907. The boys carried on together until they disposed of the building for other purposes in 1926. Will Bailey continued at his trade as health permitted until his death in 1932. The building is now occupied by an auto supply shop.

### **The G.O. Cutting Shop**

This brick building at the northwest corner of Main and Commerce street was erected by the late George Otis Cutting in 1881 and its south half was used by him as a blacksmith shop until his death a quarter century or so later. Its recent demolition opens a lovely vista of the Ford Carburetor plant, its landscaped grounds and the Pettibone creek basin. The north half of the building was for years the Council room, the village voting place, a justice courtroom, and home of one of the village fire companies. After G.A. [sic] Cutting's retirement, Watson Honeywell, a son of John Honeywell, was in business in this shop.

Workers in the various shops other than those mentioned were Peter Copp, Robert Drouillard, W.W. Ballard, Abram L. Smith, Alex McLain as well as many of the journeyman smiths, always going and coming. Peter Copp at one time had shops at Highland and Holly. Robert Drouillard had one at Hartland after leaving Milford.

Information in the compilation of the above has been contributed by Clarence Pearson of Garden Grove, Calif., A.C. Wells of New Hudson, S.A. Arms, F.S. Hubbell, Fred Potts, Mr. and Mrs. G.F. Hill, P, Johnson, Charles Dever, Miss Anna Schoenemann, Mrs. W.H. Barley of Fairport, N.Y., the late D. Boyle and W.W. Wakely, and Chas. Price.

Mrs. Hill recalls that a special rack for shoeing oxen was used in the Wells shop, as an ox cannot bend hind legs as does a horse and on account of split hooves, two pieces of shoe are required for each foot.

William Wells, mentioned previously in this article, was a craftsman of the old school, and with his wife and four of their children arrived here from their native England in the summer of 1870. (Five children were born to them in America and of this family there survive but two. Mrs. W.H. Barley and Miss Bessie Wells of Fairport, N.Y.) In those days boys learned a trade thoroughly in the hard way and in England Mr. Wells served seven years as an apprentice, starting when he was so small that he had to stand on a box in order to work properly at the anvil. He spent 26 years at the forge in Milford—at the Liberty street shop for a time with Dan Bailey and later in his own shop on Commerce street. Then for four years he was in Central

America being selected for his ability to do difficult forge work for a large American concern operating in the forests of Nicaragua. His last work in Michigan was when nearing seventy years of age he was employed by the Detroit United Railway in rebuilding car trucks. If him the master mechanic said he was one of the best blacksmiths that ever stood before an anvil.

Another of the master artisans whose youthful years were devoted to acquiring his trade in the hard way was William Dever, whose death in 1915 closed a career of 78 years. Born in Philadelphia in 1837 he was apprenticed at a tender age to a New Jersey blacksmith on a farm and later had his own shops at Newtown and Allentown, N.J. He was employed as a general blacksmith during the Civil War by the government at Washington, D.C. At the close of the conflict he came to Novi and Walled Lake for short periods, working at his trade for the Larcoms of West Novi and for the Pennells at Walled Lake, coming to Milford in 1867.

Mrs. Clara Carter, a daughter of Robert Pearson, is still living at Sheridan, Montcalm county, and her memories go back to the days when her father operated the shop at the foot of the Commerce ??????. her birthplace was the house on Union street now occupied by Donald Miller.

Note by Barbara Young:

A man named Foreman had a log house and blacksmith shop north of present E. Huron street and east of present S. Main street before 1836. One source says “on the southeast corner of Water and South Main streets.”