

## The Leonard Grain Company

The following item appeared in *The Winsted Evening Citizen* on November 23 1929. It brought back a flood of memories of fifty and sixty years ago:

**Leonard Concern Buys Real Estate of Grain Company.** *[All Colebrook residents, especially those living in Colebrook River and Robertsville knew this mill, once a well-known landmark and business on Rt. 8 next to the present-day sewage plant. There were three large grain companies in Winsted: The Leonard Grain Co., Manchester's Grain Co., located on Main Street across from the YMCA, and Holley's, located at the foot of Lake Street where the parking lot is for the industrial building that once housed the Winsted Edged Tool Co.]*

After listing all names of the parties buying and selling this property, the article goes on to say:

“The property includes the grist mill on North Main Street with the water privilege, flowage rights and one acre of land and the storage building on Rowley Street near the old East Winsted freight station.

This is one of the oldest mill properties in town and was long known as F. Woodruff & Sons, the sons being Alfred and Stanley. The firm did business here for a half-century or more.

The mill site was first erected in 1814 as a scythe works by Halsey Barr, who continued there until 1853 when he sold his shop to Rand E. Woodall, who erected the present mill. Mr. Barr lived on the west side of the road, as have many of the millers since that time. The entrance to Forest View Cemetery is a memorial to Alfred Woodruff, one of the millers. C. R. Leonard, who has had charge of the feed business, bought it about 1914. Previous to that, he had been a jeweler.”

In the early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the State Highway Dept. re-aligning the curve in Route 8 that once lay between the miller's house and the mill. All that remains of the mill is the foundation stones for the dam that once backed up the water used to supply power to the grinding stones. This manifests itself as a straight line of stones stretching from one side of the river to the other. Because there was an insufficient drop in elevation to allow for either an overshot or undershot wheel, this mill employed a turbine, which was a horizontal wheel only three or perhaps four feet in diameter, if my memory serves me. As small as this wheel seemed, it was sufficiently powerful that the miller was not able to operate more than one type of grinding stone at a time, as the vibrations it put into motion would have more than likely knocked down the old mill. Clarence Osborn, the miller, showed me what would happen if two stones were engaged at the same time once, and several years accumulation of dust that had been clinging to the many interior surfaces immediately cascaded down throughout the entire building, rendering the air unfit to be breathed for several minutes!

The last miller to operate this mill was Clarence Osborn. Clarence was universally known and well liked. He was never seen without his white painter's cap carrying the words in

bright red letters, "*Park & Pollard Feeds*". He was a native of Hartland, and spoke with our local dialect remembered by old-timers, and all but unknown by today's society.

The mill had ceased operations about 1950 and was torn down after the 1955 Flood. The miller's house was torn down in 2002 to make room for the realignment of Rt. 8. Clarence liked to sit on his front porch after a long day's work and watch the traffic passing by. He always said that he had the very best of both worlds living in this house, as it was at the very end of the water line, with the last fire hydrant nearby. He was thus out in the country (which he wanted) and still had all the conveniences of city life, but not the city (which he didn't want).

The main office for the Leonard Grain Co. was located on the ground floor of the building now owned by, and incorporated into the Northwest Bank at the east end of town. The building referred to in the newspaper article near the East Winsted freight Station was located on the elevated ground behind SCASCO's fuel storage tanks. There was a railroad siding in front of this building, and when a carload of grain came in, everyone had to pitch in and get that freight car unloaded that same day, if possible. The reason for the rush was that those cars cost the consignee money for each day they sat on the spur.

Today, all grain comes in 50 lb. bags, but in those days, all weighed 100 lbs. Some of the men who worked for Leonard were able to carry 4 bags at a time, one under each arm and one on each shoulder (the last two placed there by a second worker). Men like Earl Roraback, Elton Godenzi and Izzi Jasmin were in this category. Most carried two, or perhaps three at a time. There were handcarts on which were stacked five bags; high school boys often operated these. This pace was kept up until the entire car was unloaded; then everybody sat down and rested. When the 7:00 PM train arrived, that car had better be ready to leave!

Of the many customers the Leonard Grain Co. had, probably the Jewish community in New Boston constituted the most unique group. There were several dairy farms along Rt. 57 that were owned and operated by Jewish farmers who were part of a "back to the earth" movement that had taken place in the early years of the twentieth century by European Jews who had settled in the New York metropolitan area. Sandisfield, Mass was one of the sites chosen. Out of several, I can remember only two family names at the moment: Kliner and Pinsky. Grain deliveries (and sometimes medicines from Sceery & Ivory's Drugstore, located next to Leonard's office) were made on Fridays. On rare occasions, the members of the synagogue in New Boston failed to have enough members present to have a minion (or quorum) and in such cases would press my father, who worked for Leonard during World War II, and drove that route, into service. My father, when he was in high school, had worked in a store owned by a Jewish family who had two sons about his age, and as a consequence, had learned Yiddish and was familiar with some aspects of the Jewish religion, and as he was known by all of the farmers in New Boston, he would sometimes be flagged down as he was returning to Winsted in the empty grain truck to sit in until important business could be culminated. This is one aspect of our agricultural community not generally known. It was not a big deal, but it shows the cooperation that existed in the area during the war years.

So often when we pass an old or abandoned site, we will say something like: “If only that old place could talk!” Here are a few of those words from Clarence Osborn and the old mill on North Main Street.