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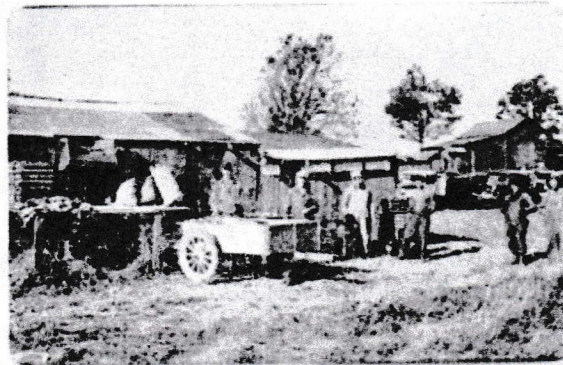
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Carl M. Veith: Laingsburg Memories – The Cidertorium

A Busy Day at the Cider Mill



This picture snapped during a busy day at the Atwood Cidertorium shows the original "shack" mill at the left before the newer, enlarged and more modern mill was built in 1938. The building sets 400 feet from Grand River. Freddy Atwood is third from the left in the white overalls.

This photo of the original Atwood's Cidertorium ran in The Laingsburg Press. A new building to house the operation was built in 1938 and, while no longer in business, still stands west of Laingsburg, on the south side of Grand River, just east of the intersection with Meridian Road.

Sunday, 02 October, 2011 Sunday, 02 October, 2011
(Editor's Note -- A short film about Atwood's Cidertorium and Fred Atwood will be shown during Carl Veith's presentation of this year's Laingsburg History Day, to be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 9, at the St. Isidore Church fellowship hall. "Personalities" is the theme for this year's History Day. Dorothy Wittchell, Gary Craig and Mike Holder will be headliners and relate stories about people they know who have been instrumental in their lives. All area history buffs are invited to attend. Any stories you would like to share that are funny, embarrassing, daring, scary, exciting, instrumental, influential, etc. about people you know (or have known) will be welcome. Photos and artifacts are welcome, too. Mayo Hurst and Bill Morley will once again join Carl as moderators.)

Atwood's Cidertorium

Halloween witches will be swooping down upon us soon---as well as goblins, pumpkins, costumes and CIDER. Ahh, cider and a doughnut or two. Who could ask for anything better this time of year than a nice cold glass of cider?

It seems just yesterday that all we needed to do was run out to Atwood's Cidertorium west of town and buy a gallon or two for fifty cents each.

The cider mill still sets on the spot where it was built on September 21, 1912 by Homer B. Atwood, but the business (and the cider) has been long gone.

I was way too young to have known Homer, but I well remember his son, Fred, who was 12 years old in 1912. Fred, or "Freddy" as he was more often called, was to eventually take over the business which continued to operate for more than 50 years.

People would come from miles around not only to buy cider, but to be entertained by the happy-go-lucky Freddy. If he was not singing, he was dancing or telling jokes and pulling pranks. He did all while continuing with his work-load. A favorite of his was to show the unsuspecting customer a nice, big red apple of which he would all of a sudden throw it on the floor and watch it bounce back up to his waiting hands---much to the surprise of his customers who had not noticed the switch for a red rubber ball.

Clever signs hung all around the mill. None of the signs said anything of true importance. For instance, a sign might read "Low Overhead" when in actuality the sign hung 10 feet above. The signs were of various sizes and colors. Each had its own clever saying and customers could keep themselves busy reading while waiting for their jug of cider or for their load of apples that they had brought in to be processed.

The original mill was just a shack and in 1938 Freddy and his father built a new structure which was larger and with more modern machinery. Freddy said he

Highlights

Obituaries & Death Notices

- * Madelyn Grace Senter
- * Dean Roland Dunham, Sr.
- * Karen L. Egres
- * Anthony "Tony" Sinicropi
- * Randy Allen Buckley
- * Bradford William Mitchell
- * Evon C. Goscinski
- * Ross A. Henry
- * Evon C. Goscinski
- * Vincent Paul Csapso
- * Carol M. Henry
- * Sara Jane Thornburg
- * Thomas Joseph Strachota
- * Gladys (Snyder) Max
- * Robert Don 'Bob' Hutchings
- * Florine R. Radee
- * Theresa Ann Ladiski
- * Nancy Dunkel
- * Reba "Peg" Lou Rummell
- * Marvin John Mills
- * Orville William Selfridge
- * Eric Max Kremer
- * Max Lyle Hott
- * J.C. Bowen
- * Darlton M. Brown
- * Lynn R. Bosom
- * Carolyn Jean Griffin
- * Arlene Marie Somers
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needed a new, catchy name for his mill. My father, Fred W., who owned the Laingsburg Press, suggested "Cidertorium". Freddy liked it and the name stuck. There were two or three other cider mills, but each had its own location and none of them were as popular or lasted as long as Atwood's.

Not to be confused with a mill for the making of cider, Laingsburg has had apple drying businesses at least three locations. One was at the south of the old two-story school on Williams Street at the then Oscar Johnson property. That residence was razed when Johnson sold all his land to the school for development of the original football field (now middle school). Another was at Railroad and Williams Streets on the southwest corner. A third stretched just west of the depot. Not a known fact, but reportedly the first dryer (or evaporator as owners preferred) was owned by Daniel LeBar. It has also been said that we had three apple dryers operating at one time.

The apple dryers were big business and many people (mostly women) realized a good occupation for many years. Naturally, most business was transacted in the fall.

One year about 30,000 bushels were handled. Huge mounds of apples were piled around the buildings. Machines pared the apples and after paring, apples were dropped on a table where they were trimmed and sliced and placed in vat rooms to dry. The vat rooms had large cracks in the floor and beneath these were large open fire pots on which brimstone was placed over hot coal.

The fumes from the burning brimstone bleached the apples white and dried them at the same time. Nothing was wasted! The evaporated apples were placed in cloth sacks. The parings were used for making dyes and apples too small to be pared were put into machines to be chopped to be used for making mincemeat.

Many people worked for Freddy, but three I remember most is/were brothers Glen and Gary Hagerty and Jerry Austin. Jerry lived next door with his parents, Derwin and Elsie Austin (nee Phelps). Elsie is a direct descendant of Mason Phelps, son-in-law of Peter Laing. Elsie resides at Walters subdivision.

Jerry and wife, Joanne (Brewster) purchased the Atwood property and constructed a new home, but chose to discontinue operation of the mill.

When entering the new building, the first thing you would see was the large apple press complete with the many belts and gears. To the immediate left was the apple press.

Wooden frames about six or eight inches high and approximately three or four feet square would be stacked several high after first applying a special cloth in each frame. The "cloth" would then be folded over four ways from each direction on top of the apples.

When the required amount of framed apples was ready, pressure would be applied via the press and customers would watch with mouth-watering anticipation as the fresh juice ran into a square stainless steel container. This vat had coasters and a valve at the bottom so the juice could be released by hand. Freddy would pass out samples and patrons either had their jugs filled that they had brought with them or in glass gallon jugs sold by Freddy. In the earlier days of Homer, the cider sold for 12 cents a gallon. I remember the cost was 50 cents per gallon.

After the juice was extracted, the load of frames would be wheeled on a track at upper level and each would be relieved of its load of skins by dumping out an open door. At times the pile of skins would build to great heights before being hauled away.

Freddy always bragged that you could eat off the floor of his mill. Indeed you could!

The stainless steel vats were cleaned regularly as were strainers, pails and other equipment. He always preached that nothing was to ever hit the floor---as if it would matter because of the cleanliness. Each year he gave the place another coat of paint in apple colors---red, green and yellow.

The Cidertorium had a capacity of 50 barrels a day. He processed about 50,000 gallons a year and in his 50 years in business he estimated 2,500,000 gallons produced.

His entertainment prowess came naturally because he also had his own band and he was an accomplished billiards player. In his band, he played the drums and his billiards playing began at age 10 when an uncle taught him the game. He entered tournaments and exhibitions all over the country. He competed with "big names" such as professional billiards Hall of Famer Willie Mosconi. He did not always lose to them either. Never take Freddy on in a "sure fire" billiards bet because you would always lose.

Every fall carloads of school kids and their teachers would come from miles around to partake of the cider and witness the antics of Freddy Atwood.

I have said many times that "some things change and some things should never change". The Cidertorium and Freddy Atwood is in the "never change" category.

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* Theresa Ann Ladiski

* Nancy Dunkel

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