

Wife's Delight

by Lynne Belluscio

GED and Sandy Brady stopped by yesterday with an interesting piece of paper. It was discovered in the kitchen wall of their house on South Street. They weren't too sure what it was. I believe it is a label for the top of a flour barrel from the C.F. Prentice Flour Mill that was located on Mill Street. I showed them another label that I recently purchased on eBay for "Wife's Delight" flour. And in our archives we have a paper bag for "Ethel" flour.

The Prentice Mill was located next to the creek north of the post office, about where the park is now. This was the site of the old Platt and Stoddard Mill that was built in 1802. When Jacob LeRoy came to town in 1822, he enlarged the old mill and in 1865 (or 1866 depending on which history book you read).

Charles Prentice purchased the mill. At that time it was a seven "burr" mill which indicates that there were seven sets of "burrstones" that ground the flour. Burrstone was a special type of stone, often imported from France, that was used to grind flour. One of the old stones lies on the ground just off the porch behind LeRoy House.

Shortly after Prentice bought the mill, there were a lot of changes taking place in the flour industry. The early pioneers grew varieties of soft wheat. It had very little gluten, which would be like using cake flour today and it did not rise well. But in the 1860s, farmers were beginning to grow hard winter wheat introduced from Europe. This was a better wheat for making bread flour but it was too hard to be ground between burrstones, so a

new type of milling machinery was introduced. The hard wheat was milled between porcelain rollers - - thus roller mills, as written on C.F. Prentice's labels.

At first, some mills used the old burrstones to crush the wheat and then it was processed into flour with the porcelain rollers. Flour had to be "bolted" or sifted to remove the bran - the outside of the kernel of wheat. The bran would absorb moisture and made flour moldy and full of mildew. Unbolted flour was known as whole wheat flour. Sylvester Graham, a 19th century health food proponent, preferred to use only whole wheat flour, which became known as Graham flour - - - thus Graham crackers.

Today, whole wheat flour is made by adding bran back into the bolted and bleached flour. In the 19th century, millers would often throw the bran into the creek. There were different qualities of flour. The middle quality was often sold as "midlins" or Red Dog.

On the 1897, Sanbourn Insurance map of LeRoy, showing Mill Street and the Prentice Mill, it mentions that there were 14 sets of rollers and two run of stones so perhaps Prentice was crushing the wheat with the burrstones and then milling into flour with the porcelain rollers. The map also indicates that the mill was operated by water power, unless the water was too low and then apparently the steam engine was used.

In the basement of the four story mill was a packer, a sheller and a smutter. The smutter removed dust and "smut" from the grains of wheat before it was milled. On the first floor were 14 sets of

"rolls" or rollers and 2 run of stone and 1 packer. The second floor contained a bran duster, 3 purifiers, 10 bolts, 1 blower, and two dust collectors. The "bolts" were bolting machines, which sifted the ground flour through a series of silk screens, separating out the various grades of flour. The third floor had a dust collector, three bolts, 2 scalpers, 3 purifiers and 1 smutter. The scalper was used to remove foreign objects such as stones from the grain which would damage the burrstones and the rollers. On the fourth floor were a 1 cent reel, one separator and the tops of the elevators.

The Prentice Mill had a capacity of 200 barrels of flour per day and 200 barrels of animal feed. On November 23, 1895 one of the boilers exploded and severely scalded one of the engineers. After the death of Mr. Prentice, the mill ceased operation in 1912. It had been known as the LeRoy Power and Milling Company, but

then had been sold to a "foreign company", the Genesee Light and Power Company" who wanted to build a power transfer station on the site but because of water rights issues, they decided to dispose of the property. The building was sold to the LeRoy Crushed Stone and Limestone Company and after demolition; the huge wooden beams were removed to build trestles and shoring at the limestone quarry. The cornerstone from the mill "Herman LeRoy 1822" was removed and placed in the wall of Ernest Woodward's garden.



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