

Office With A Venerable Past

by Lynne Belluscio

Mary Hamilton, former mayor of Caledonia wrote me a letter the beginning of March. She wanted to know more about the stone building in Caledonia, which has been used by the Livingston County Sheriff's Department.

Lately it has come on hard times. The building was built by Ernest Woodward on his estate, Poplar Lane, on East Main Street in LeRoy in the 1920s. Ernest had torn down his father's house, Hill-Bar to build his new home. And he built this stone office behind his house.

Ernest's father was the man who had bought the rights to Jell-O in 1899 for \$450 and the Woodward family had parlayed that investment into a million dollar business. The Woodward's sold their investment by an exchange of stock to the Postum Company and in turn, Jell-O and Postum became the first two subsidiaries of General Foods.

Ernest retired, but continued to go into the Jell-O office on North Street, almost every day. Ernest died in 1948 and his wife Eleanor died in 1955. Poplar Lane was donated to the University of Rochester with the provision that it be demolished if the University did not want to maintain it. By 1961, Poplar Lane was scheduled for demolition. John Wiley Jones, a native of LeRoy, and owner of Jones Chemical Company, decided that he would have the building moved - - stone by stone - - to Caledonia, and he would use it for his office.

Each stone was numbered and the building was dismantled. When the Woodward's main house was torn down, Jones bought walnut paneling, hardwood flooring, fireplaces, chandeliers, bay windows and doors for his new office. The new building was not large enough for his liking, so he added a small wing off the back for a bathroom and small kitchen. John Wiley Jones was so proud of his project, that he had a booklet reprinted from an article that appeared in "PEOPLE," a Pittsburgh Plate Glass publication. We have a copy in the collection.

After Jones' death, the family continued possession of the stone office, but then made arrangements for it to be used as a substation for the Livingston County Sheriffs



Department.

However, it has not been used in several years and is in need of attention.

The story that I know about, is that Ernest Woodward had the original sales contract between Pearle Bixby Wait and the Genesee Pure Food Company and it was framed and hung on the wall in his office. One day, John Skivington from Caledonia was visiting Woodward, and mentioned that there was history hanging on the wall. Woodward, gave the contract to Skivington.

At some point, John Skivington loaned John Wiley Jones the contract, because Jones had moved the original office where the contract originally hung. The contract remained in the Jones family after John's death and upon the death of his son Bob, Marge, Bob's wife discovered the old contract in some papers. With it, was the letter with the loan agreement. The letter stated that



upon Jones' death the contract was to be returned to John Skivington. At this point, both men were dead, so Marge contacted John Skivington's son, and entrusted the contract with him.

Several years ago, John contacted me and said, "You know, this really ought to be at the Historical Society." So, we have the original contract. It's

pretty illegible, because it hung on the wall of the office for so many years, but the signatures are still legible. Truly, the stone office of Ernest Woodward has a venerable past.

