

Historic Homes – Nufer Residence

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William Frederick Nufer was one of the early settlers locating in Whitehall in 1858. His career as a lumberman began on the upper Muskegon River in the employ of a Muskegon lumbering company operating there and spent a winter in the woods as an axeman. He advanced to the less laborious jobs of inspecting and tallying lumber and was given charge of a camp. After two years, he returned to Muskegon, resigned his position, and, with no other means of transportation, walked through the dense forests to Whitehall, where he opened an office as general lumber inspector for the various mills operating on White Lake and the White River.

In 1874 he decided to enter the manufacturing field making shingles and organized a company along with Mark B. Covell under the name of Covell and Nufer Company. After three years he disposed of his interests in the Covell-Nufer Co. and organized a shingle company with Arthur Carleton under the name Nufer and Carleton. He erected his second mill which operated until 1881. Then he purchased the Carleton interests and operated under the firm name of W. F. Nufer until 1885, when his mill was completely destroyed by fire. His plant was not insured and his savings of 20 years were wiped out in a matter of minutes.

With a small savings from household expenses which his wife had laid aside from time to time, he was able to start up again in a very small way. In 1887 he organized The Nufer Cedar Company with his brother-in-law Jerry Sullivan and W. A. Whitman. Two years later he and Mr. Sullivan purchased Mr. Whitman's interest, and in 1892 Mr. Sullivan sold his interest in the company to Mr. Nufer. Nufer's two sons, William L. and Frederick W., both took on more active roles in the company, joining their father, and he became one of the most widely known lumbermen in southern Michigan. In 1895 his extensive timber holdings forced him to broaden his business and branch out into other areas including Pennsylvania and Virginia.

In 1898 the manufacturing of boxes along with shingles was undertaken. In the manufacturing of boxes in which to ship canned goods, soft wood was needed rather than hardwood. Softwood was not obtainable here but was available in the southern states, thus the Virginia Lumber and Box Company was organized in 1907 and plants began operating in Petersburg, VA., and North and South Carolina. The local mill remained in operation until 1915 when the supply of hardwood was exhausted. Timber was available in the Upper Peninsula, so the plant was moved to Marquette where it operated for a number of years. In 1915 the offices of the company moved to Pittsburgh. The business had expanded considerably and sheet and tin boxes were also being made.

William Frederick Nufer was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1847. He married Miss Ellen M. McGrade in Whitehall in July 1868. They lived on Lake Street for a while just below the Nufer property on Mears which they purchased that same year. They had seven children, two of the girls died in infancy and another when she was 8 years. Three sons, Frederick, William and Julius and a daughter Nellie were still living when W. F. Nufer died in 1911. His wife died in 1923.

The youngest son, Julius Jeremiah Nufer, sometimes referred to as "J.J." or "Jim", was born in the house on Mears in Whitehall on April 7, 1878. He attended Whitehall High School graduating in 1894 from the largest class at the time with 10 members. After graduation, Nufer taught at the Sumner school in White River for a year before entering Albion College. In those days, Whitehall's school was not credited and students wishing to enter college had to take a two-year preparatory course at a small Michigan college before entering the university of their choice. Eventually he would attend the University of Michigan graduating in 1903 and accepted a job as general manager of athletics and coach of all the teams at Albion. The next year he took a similar position at Purdue University except he was assistant football coach.

J.J. Nufer returned to Whitehall and assisted in the operation of the Nufer Cedar Company becoming Treasurer of the company.

He was active in the White Lake Dramatic Club along with Charles P. Seager, Frank Adams and others. In March 1915 Nufer announced that a new Opera House was a sure thing for town of Whitehall. A site was selected and construction began. When completed, the Nufer-Adams Playhouse opened in September 1916.

Nufer joined the Army in 1918 serving as Captain of Co. F. 10th Battalion, 20th Engineers. Following the service, he moved to Petersburg, VA for a time and then to Pittsburgh, PA where he worked in the

lumber business. He remained there until 1935 when he returned to the family home in Whitehall residing with his married sister Nellie and her husband John J. Devine. Nufer and his brother-in-law formed the Whitehall Bowl Mill.

J. J. Nufer died in Whitehall on 25 June 1949 and is buried in Oakhurst Cemetery in the family plot.