

Nufer Mill

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White Lake Area Historical Society



Covel, Nufer & Co. (1874-1877); Nufer & Carleton (1877-1881); W. F. Nufer (1881-1885); Burned in 1885 & was rebuilt at same location; Nufer Cedar Co. (1887-1908). Located on White Lake, north of the Tannery. (Picture Courtesy of Kathy & Carl Olson)



W. F. Nufer was one of the early settlers locating in Whitehall in 1858.

William Frederick Nufer was born in Columbus, Ohio on 14 September 1847. He moved to London, Ohio with his parents and 2 siblings, who were separated at an early age when his mother died. Nufer was “bound out” to an area farmer and his wife who provided for him the best they could at that time. He worked long and hard on the farm and even harder on his education. He attended Lebanon Business College and graduated in 1866.

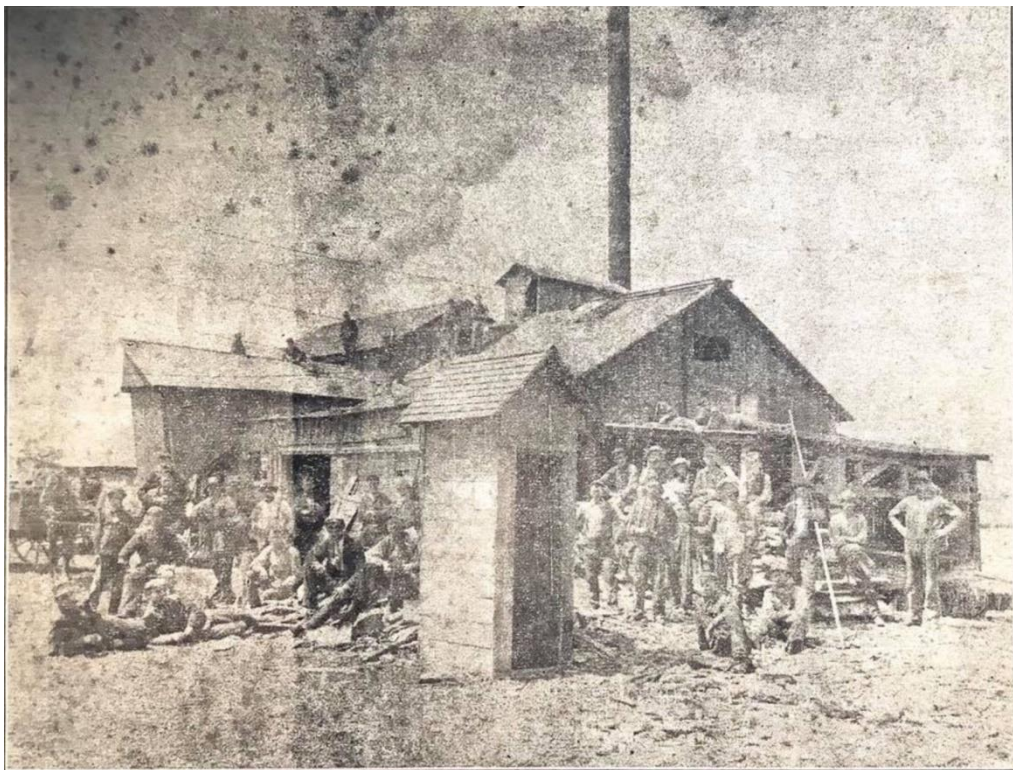
In 1866, at the age of 19, W. F. Nufer set out for Michigan, arrived in Chicago on foot and left there shortly after as a cook on a sailing ship bound for Muskegon – a trip that took 11 days. When he arrived, he secured a job at one of the local lumber mills there, and learned all aspects of the lumbering trade.

He spent one winter in the woods on the upper Muskegon River as an axeman. He later advanced to less laborious jobs such as lumber inspector and tallyman. The following winter he was put in charge of a lumber camp. With his outstanding abilities, he gained the confidence of his employers to such an extent that they entrusted him with the purchasing of the timber. After two years in Muskegon, he resigned his position and, with no means of transportation, walked through the dense woods to Whitehall.

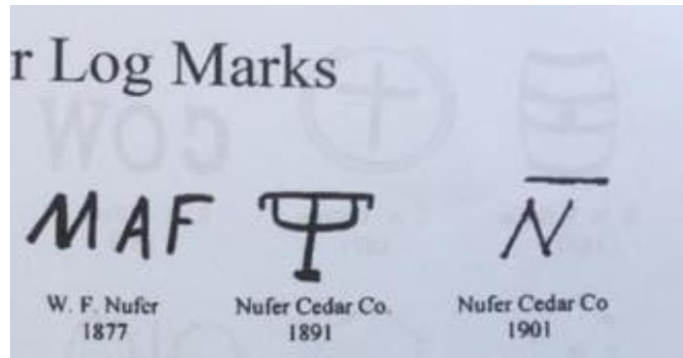
Upon his arrival, he worked as a general lumber inspector for various mills operating on White Lake. He did this line of work for several years and during the winter months spent time estimating and appraising standing timber and grading and tallying logs for the numerous mill owners .

In 1874, he decided to enter into the business of manufacturing shingles under the firm name Covell, Nufer & Co. He was the first man to make white cedar shingles as a substitute for the white pine which was used for other types of lumber and products. This partnership dissolved in 1877 and a new firm of Carleton, Nufer & Co. was created with Arthur Carleton.

In 1881, Nufer bought out Carleton and ran the business alone until 1885, when a fire destroyed his mill and several million shingles that were sold and ready to be shipped. With little insurance, the loss was devastating. Not to be deterred, and with a small savings for household expenses his wife had set aside, Nufer quickly rebuilt the mill on a much smaller scale at the original location. A new partnership was formed with his brother-in-law Jerry Sullivan and W. A. Whitman and operated as Nufer Cedar Company.



1890ca Nufer Cedar Company – located on White Lake, north of the Tannery. The building in the foreground is not a telephone booth. It's a well house containing a flowing well.



In 1892, Whitman and Sullivan sold out their interests. Nufer's two sons, William L. and Frederick W., who had been associated with the business, took on more active roles in the business. Nufer became the most widely known lumberman in Southern Michigan.

A box factory was run in connection with the shingle mill and they became one of the largest and most prosperous box manufacturers in the country, with branch factories in Petersburg, West Virginia, as well as Sharon, Woodlawn, and McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

The business of Nufer Cedar Co. and its branch plants were so successful that the mill at Whitehall was unable to supply sufficient stock. In 1903, Nufer and his son William organized the Virginia Lumber & Box Company, located in Petersburg, VA, and purchased extensive tracts of timber in Virginia and North Carolina so that their supply was practically inexhaustible at the time. In 1908, the Whitehall mill ceased making shingles.



W. F. Nufer home on Mears in Whitehall

W. F. Nufer married Miss Ellen M. McGrade in Whitehall in 1868. They had seven children. One of their sons, J. J. Nufer, invested in the building of the Nufer-Adams Playhouse which opened in 1916. W. F. Nufer died at his Whitehall home on November 25, 1911. His wife died in 1923.