

Mills – Frank H. White

By Barbara Bedau Brow
White Lake Area Historical Society



The Frank H. White & Co. steam mill as pictured was built around 1871-72 on wooden pilings on the Montague side of White Lake between Williams and Knudsen streets. It was a small mill with one circular upright saw and employed 40 men including C. Smith, engineer; John Ohrenberger, filer; J. Hulbert and G. Henderson, head sawyers. It was able to produce 70,000 feet of product in eleven hours. The mill operated until September 1888.

Frank H. White who was born in Grand Haven, Michigan in 1843, was the oldest of six children born to Nathan White and Sarah Brittain. His father was a lumberman, and the family lived in Grand Haven. When he was 19 years old, Frank enlisted in Co. S, Michigan 14th Infantry in February 1862, and mustered out as Captain in March 1865. He came to White Lake in 1869.

On January 1, 1876, high winds during the night broke the log boom at the F. H. White and nearby D. C. Bowen mills, scattering 1,000,000 feet of logs around the upper end of the lake. After it was discovered, men were quickly put to work retrieving and securing the logs in the boom again.

On May 9, 1887, workmen of the F. H. White mill struck for higher wages and the mill shut down. The strike originated among the outside workers who had been getting ten and eleven shillings a day and

who thought they should have twelve. By noon a compromise had been reached whereby the wage of the men was raised to eleven and twelve shillings and work resumed. However, some of the inside workmen had taken advantage of the leisure time and were not in shape to resume work. So, the mill closed for the day. (1 shilling = \$0.000539 US dollar.)

Frank was a well-known citizen of the White Lake area and was closely identified with its history for many years. He was connected to the Ferry Lumber Company during all of its extensive operations on the lake. He was secretary of the White River Log and Booming Company in 1887-90.

In September 1888 the Frank H. White mill closed for good and indications were that it might be moved to Canada or out West. In March 1889, however, the old mill was torn down. E. P. Ferry expanded his milling operations to include the area where Frank White's mill had been located.

Frank was a prominent G.A.R. member and a member of the Masonic fraternity. He never married and died on 10 January 1893, in Montague at the age of 51 years. His body was sent to Grand Haven where he was buried in Lake Forest Cemetery.

One of his sisters, Clara, was married to Edward Payton (E. P.) Ferry. Another sister, Nellie, was married to Edward L. (E. L.) Dodge, whose family owned the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Whitehall. He also had 2 brothers, all of whom survived him.