

CASS & BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES
By Jeannie Watson

JOHN WESTON HAWKS

John Weston Hawks first came to Southwestern Michigan in 1840. He was a timber industry investor, logging company executive and resident of Cass and Berrien County, Michigan. Starting as a tinsman in New York, he with other family members, realized that there was enormous potential for business success in Southwestern Michigan's virgin forests. He co-founded, with Abbot Hawks, one of the area's most successful early lumbering concerns, and helped start a tradition that lasted for generations. His role as a "timber broker," woodland speculator, surveyor, and intermediary for the logging industry parallels the development of one of Michigan's largest economic establishment; forestry and all of the hundreds of business that sprang from this Michigan resource. With zeal, as a "fire warden," he took precautions to prevent forest fires, and helped block one of Southwest Michigan's most feared natural phenomena, "tinder-box flash fires." Understanding him, offers a glimpse into the area's colorful and adventuresome logging history. His life story parallels Michigan's development as the country's leading lumber producer in that era, rivaled by no other state, and gives us a glimpse at life in those eventful days. He lived the kind of "double residency" that broke many strong men, and "survived to see the fruits of his labor come to fruition." His personal life had elements of tragedy and sadness, but still he prevailed.

Of English descent, the Hawks trace their ancestry back to Hingham Parish, Hingman, Norfolk County, England. According to Daughters of the American Revolution Archives, their ancestors John Hawkes (founder of Hadley, Massachusetts) and Elizabeth Browne (his wife), accompanied the Puritan John Winthrop Fleet to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. The family share common ancestors with President John Quincy Adams, and Adam Hawkes (founder of Saugus, Massachusetts). Through females in the family, their ancestry is traced back to a number of of New England's first settler families, like farmer Godfrey Nims (1648-1704) of Massachusetts., and English nobles, like Lord Edward King (1577-1638) who migrated to Elphin, Roscommon, Ireland.

Michigan's logging history, and John Weston Hawk's story started in the eastern states. Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania were the last northeastern states to be logged. By the late 1820s, eastern softwoods, like the White Pine, which was the wood of choice for buildings, and hardwoods like Walnut and Cherry, which were furniture makers favorite medium, were depleted. These states could no longer supply the demand for timber to eastern markets. It was Michigan's geographical location, virgin forests, and "crisscrossed network of rivers which provided convenient transportation for logs," that drew the keen interest of easterners. Before there was farming in Michigan, the logging industry started to reap the harvest of Michigan trees. By 1829, the Hawks were already in Southwestern Michigan, and eleven years later (1840) John followed the family into the great adventure, that was Michigan logging.

John Weston Hawks was born in Charlemont, Franklin County, Massachusetts on 10/5/1810 to Gershom Hawks III (1787-1864) and Hannah Weston (1786-1854). His parents had married in 1809, and produced 8 children: (1) John Weston Hawks (our subject), (2) Samuel Hawks (born 1812) who settled in Porter Township, and is buried in Bethel Cemetery, (3) Louisa Rathbone Hawks (born 1/11/1815) who married Thorn Anderson of Ghent, New York on 6/1/1833, (4) Douglas King Hawks

(born 10/19/1817) who wed Esther Streeter, (5) Hannah Maria Hawks (born 8/10/1819) who married William Ford of Lee, Massachusetts and was nicknamed "Rye,", (6) Juliette Hawks (born 12/6/1822) who wed George O. Culver of Tyringham, Massachusetts on 11/27/1844, (7) Foster Topliff Hawks (born 11/26/1825) who married Ann Lovejoy, and (8) Adeline Melissa Hawks (born 2/23/1829) who wed William Oscar Ford of Chatham New York, and died in Canaan, New York. Step brother to John was Henry Dwight Hawks (born 9/7/1832) by Gershom's second wife Hannah Rathbone.

John was educated in the local Charlemont Schools, given two years of college train, and then was apprenticed to a New York friend of his father, as was the custom of those times.

The old tinsman mentor who took John "under his wing," as an apprentice, owned a Tin Shop, and taught the lad everything he knew to be a "tinsman." When John was 19 years old, the old fellow passed away, and left the tin business to John, along with a sizable cash endowment. Tinsmen in this era were craftsmen who made useful items out of thin sheets of tin, a metal imported from England or bought from southern tin manufacturers. They and their employees manufactured by hand COFFEE TINS (metal containers with tight fitting lids used to protect coffee beans, flour and grains from insects), FOOTSTOVES (tin boxes where heated bricks were placed to warm the feet in stage coaches), TIN LANTERNS (that safely held candles), POMANDER BALLS (perforated tin balls used to hold cloves and spices for air freshening), MATCH BOXES (to keep fire match sticks dry), INK WELLS (that held "Black Indian Ink" for quill feather pens), GUN and PISTOL CASES, PLATES, TIN CUPS, TIN UTENSILS (spoons, forks and knives), LADELS (for drinking water), BARREL RIMS, TIN SIGNS (for home addresses and businesses), TIN TOYS, TIN GARDEN TOOLS, FARM IMPLEMENTS, and TIN PICTURE FRAMES. Even though John was quite young at this time, his business thrived, and all was well in his young life, until his family at home in Massachusetts fell apart. A rift occurred that he could never forgive.

According to the family story, the disagreement between John and his father, Gershom was so great that it tore the family apart, and set the stage for major changes in young John's life. Hannah Weston (1786-1854, John's mother, daughter of Jonathan Weston and Mary Polly Mather), had a best friend by the name of Hannah Rathbone (born 9/12/1796 in Ashford, Connecticut, daughter of Joseph Avery Rathbone). Miss Rathbone married a Lieutenant John Rathbone Weston (born 3/18/1873 in Willington, New York) on April 24, 1803. The Lieutenant was a relative of Hannah Weston, and a distant cousin to Miss Rathbone. Gershom Hawks (John's father) and wife Hannah Weston (John's mother) were close friends with the Lieutenant and his wife Hannah Rathbone (who did not have children). Three years after their marriage, on May 21, 1805, the Lieutenant died leaving Hannah Rathbone a widow. Hannah Weston (wife of Gershom) consoled her best friend for years, until a secret tryst was discovered between husband Gershom and the Widow. In 1832, Gershom Hawks left his wife and children, and married Widow Hannah Rathbone. John Weston Hawks could never forgive his father for abandoning his family (in favor of the the widow) or leaving his mother "as the divorced wife" (a scandalous occurrence in this era). A serious emotional estrangement developed between the father and son, and John never saw his father again, setting the stage for a drama that would occur in Michigan in the future.

In 1835, when John Weston Hawks was age 25, he married Margaret Norton Weston (a distant cousin) in Pittsfield, Otsego County, New York. After 4 years of matrimony, she died during child birth (with the child).

In 1840, a relative by the name of Henry Hawks and son Abbot, invited John (now age 30) to join him in Michigan to learn about Michigan's fledgling logging industry. The goal was to coax John W. to join the family in the logging business, and get him to invest venture capital that was needed.

Willing to investigate the lucrative possibilities, John left his New York tin enterprise in the hands of a relative and headed to Michigan. The agreement was that John would spend one year working with Henry and Abbot before a decision was made.

In the process of learning the logging business, John met a young lady. In January of 1841, John Weston Hawks was in Dowagiac, Michigan, on his way to a business meeting, when he by happenstance ran into John Sponberg (1799-1868). John Sponberg was of German and Swedish descent, and worked as a sawmill operator for Henry Hawks. He, also, ran a small Niles leather tanning business on the side. With him stood his daughter, 18 year old, Miss Lucy Ann Sponberg. According to family notes on the subject, for John Weston Hawks, it was "love at first sight," and a courtship quickly followed.

Lucy Ann Sponberg married John Weston Hawks on 11/7/1841 in Dowagiac, Michigan, and it was recorded by Cass County Marriage Liber Records of 1841. Right after the marriage, the newly weds lived with her parents, which was a common event in those days.

John was kept very busy that first year in Michigan. Before investing his own money, he wanted to learn all he could about the timber business. To do so, he began working his way up the ladder of responsibilities. He started out as a "lumber jack," felling trees with cross cut saws and transporting them on skids along icy roads to river banks. He was taught the skills of surveying timber stands. The lumber camps were rough places, mostly composed of single young men who worked from early in the morning, to late at night. It was no place for a lady, so wife Lucy Ann stayed in Dowagiac, Michigan with her parents. All timber cutting, in this era, was done during the winter months to take advantage of the icy conditions which allowed teams of draft horses, and oxen, to easily pull heavily loaded skids along iced logging roads. When the snows melted, the spring melt-offs raised the river levels and sent the waters racing forward. It was then that John joined the crews who were called "river log drivers." It was their job to control the flow of wood down the river, and break up log jams. They cleared beaver dams that were in the way, and "drove the logs" (by directing their movement) to "floating booms" (sectioned off areas where marked logs of one company were separated from that of others). The saw mills were always built "down stream," so they could be ready when the logs reached them.

That summer, John and Lucy moved to Niles, Michigan where John worked as a sawyer and mill worker, learning that part of the trade from the ground up. Water and steam powered equipment was used to strip off bark, process the trunks, and cut the logs into finished lumber. It was a strenuous dirty job, and saw dust was his constant companion.

By fall, John progressed to the financial end of the business. He worked in the lumber company office, balancing the books, negotiating with buyers, and scouting out new woodland sites. He bought forested land and arranged labor contracts for "clear cutting jobs" (removing all the trees). He had to deal with a strike in the saw mill, and a demand for higher pay in the lumber camps, which required serious negotiation. He was forced to address many other grievances. Finally, he worked his way up to his final goal, and became a "lumber broker (buying and selling timber), and a company representative." Convinced that the timber business was a sound financial investment, John, with Abbot Hawks, founded the "Hawks Timber Company," which soon merged with other investors and the Lamberts, to become the "Hawks-Lambert Lumber Company." Using funds from his tin business and his mentor's endowment inheritance as venture capital, he wagered his family's security on the enterprise. He, also, accepted a job offer for which he had proven quite proficient; lumber broker and company representative, which required many trips back east. His uncle, Henry Hawks managed the on-site lumber camps.

John's year long learning experience, also, marked the beginning of Michigan's "lumber boom." From 1840-1860, Michigan as a state doubled its saw mills, and "profits went from one million to six million dollars annually" (this was before inflation). By 1869, Michigan was producing more lumber than any other state, and shipping to every part of the country east of the Mississippi River. In 1850, when the railroad reached Dowagiac and Niles, the train became the preferred way to move local timber, and Hawks-Lambert lumber camps were reaching as far as Allegan County. The company's largest customers were New York furniture makers. In 1889, "the year of its greatest lumber production, Michigan produced 5.5 billion board feet of lumber."

In 1844-1845, after 5 years in the lumber business in Southwestern Michigan, John built Lucy a beautiful house in Niles, Michigan, and the Hawks lived the life of successful lumber company investors. It was at this time, that John made the acquaintance of George Bedford in Silver Creek Township, a highly respected local farmer, and a family friendship developed.

However, John's permanent time in Michigan was growing short. His tinsman business in Springfield, Otsego County was being neglected by relatives, and he knew he "had to go back east and straighten out the mess." He did not want to lose his position as a company representative and lumber broker. As an investor he had leverage to negotiate. It was decided that he would act as the Hawks-Lambert Lumber Company's representative in New York, making it his permanent address there, reversing his travel itinerary (traveling back and forth to Michigan from New York). In this era, all business dealings were carried out face to face by traveling to a site, or occasionally by mail. In 1845, between Michigan and New York, there were no telegraphs, railroads, telephones, teleconferencing options, radios, cell phones, televisions, bank transfers, check/draft systems, computers, or text messaging. It was not until 1850, when the railroad and telegraph reached Southwestern Michigan, that even those simple conveniences were available. Travel was the only way to do business, and cash was the single accepted revenue exchange. Between New York and Michigan it took 3 to 4 weeks of travel by stage coach, and/or steam ship voyages on Lake Erie, but no other options existed.

When preparing to return to New York in late 1845, John had his workers load hardwoods on wagons which were headed for Luma Pier and Monroe, Michigan on the shores of Lake Erie. From there the wood was placed on barges bound for Dunkirk and Buffalo, New York.

By late 1845, John and Lucy arrived in Springfield, Otsego County, New York just in time for their first child to be born. Between trips to Michigan, his 3 other children came into the world. The four children were: George Weston Hawks (1845-1910) who later married Martha Bedford, Sarah Hawks (1846-1853) who died of respirator failure at age 7, John N. Hawks (1849-1929) who later married Jane Bedford, Lydia Conklin and Nora Bell Reynolds, and Ann Hawks (born 1850). John, also, raised two nephews who had lost their parents, Daniel Clark (born 1832) and William Clark (born 1849) who married Ann Low.

Reviving the Tinsman Business took time, requiring long hours, additional workers and apprentices to turn around his tin item output and sagging sales. Lucy often accompanied her husband on his trips to Michigan, and sometimes the children would come. On other occasions in New York, the children were cared for by Lucy's parents (who had moved back there), John's mother Hannah Weston, or John's brother, Foster, and his wife. When in Michigan, they would stay with family friends, the Bedfords, or in the house John still kept in Niles.

The U.S. Federal Census of 1850 and 1860 records John's young family during those two specific dates, and documents his formal residency in New York. However, it fails to identify, in the

same time frame, the 14 years he traveled every six months to Michigan bringing orders, contracts, and satchels of cash to pay for lumber purchases. On his return trips, he brought hardwoods to New York's furniture industry. On the original 1850 U.S. Federal Census, the records show, that he was living next to his brother Foster Topliff Hawks (born 11/26/1826) who was a match maker (kind that starts fires) and sister-in-law Ann Lovejoy in New York.

John served as a fire warden in Michigan during the few months every year he lived there. He could not resist making his own investments, outside of the company's business. John bought speculative timber rights in the Porter, Beechwood, Volinia, Wakelee and Newberg areas of Cass County. He would arrive in Niles, Michigan, handle his lumber brokerage business requirements and then refocus his efforts. Days were spent surveying, supervising the cutting of firebreaks, and creating fire roads that gave access to his personally owned forests. Every area of Michigan, by necessity, had fire wardens who tended to their own townships. If you were a woodlot owner, soon or later the responsibility fell upon your shoulders.

Few realize the condition of Michigan in the 1800s. When forests were "clear cut" the brush, tree limbs and stumps would be left behind as rubbish, and dry out. When Michigan's hot dry summers came, the refuse formed "tinder box" areas just waiting to burst into flame. Once a wild summer forest fire caught on the wind, it would spread to neighboring forests, threaten lives, destroy homesteads, ruin animal habitats, and endanger towns. The only way to guard against these fires was to create cleared lines of defense that the fire could not easily travel across. Today, men with John's energetic drive to complete so many tasks would be called "workaholics."

U.S. IRS Tax Assessment records show that John paid his personal income taxes in New York in 1862 in District 29, and in 1865 in District 4, Springfield, Otsego County, New York.

In 1866 the Hawks-Lambert Lumber Company of Niles, Michigan purchased timberland rights in the vicinity of Covert, Michigan, set up a saw mill, and kept a lumber camp there for 3 years. Many board feet of prime hardwoods were transferred with John to New York.

In 1868, weary from so much travel to Michigan, John sold his New York tin business, and moved the family permanently back to Michigan. He had retained the family's Niles home, and welcomed the chance to cease double residency, and the maintenance of two houses. Wife Lucy Ann was happy to see her husband, finally, find time to slow down his fast paced life. Both sons George W. and John N. were working for their father's company in management positions. Daughter Ann was still living at home, and Sarah had already passed away. Nephew Daniel Clark had married, then moved out of the house, and nephew William Clark was acting as John's assistant.

From 1868-1869, the Hawks family spent many happy hours with their friends, the George Bedfords in Silver Creek Township, Cass County, Michigan. Love bloomed between John's son, George W. Hawk (age 24) and Miss Martha Bedford (age 21), and they were married in Cass County on March 4, 1869. At the same time, John's second son John N. Hawks (age 20) courted Miss "Jennie" Jane Elizabeth Bedford (age 18), and they married on October 5, 1869 in Niles, Michigan. The families were quite pleased with the matches of their children.

In 1870, Hawks-Lambert contracted with a Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama land owner to buy his extensive Oak and Hickory forests. Buyers back east were waiting for the hardwoods, and time was of the essence. John Weston Hawks had brokered the lucrative deal, a lot of money was to be made, and he was obligated to see the harvest through. His sons George and John N. were going to manage the lumberjacks, logging sites, lumber camp, labor and shipment logistics. Young

nephew William Clark was to assist John.

Innovations in logging now made summer woodlot work easier. "Big wheel" wagons and temporary "narrow track trains" were used to transport logs cut deep in the forests, eliminating the need for winter ice skids. Logging camp life had evolved through the years with labor negotiations, and now were decent civilized environments, suitable even for the accompanying wives of owners and managers. Contracts even included clauses for appropriate behavior, and sanctions for violations.

A crew was dispersed to the Alabama logging site to build temporary shelters for the families and personnel. A bunkhouse, a cook shanty, a barn, a blacksmith shop, a camp office, and a supply store, all made of logs felled on site, were constructed. Expected profits were so gratifying that creature comforts were not overlooked. With all "the comforts of home" prepared, months of hard work ahead, and the young people looking forward to the adventure, the Hawks family followed their lumberjacks to Lauderdale County. For the women, the trip took on a vacation atmosphere. The coming experience was likened to a "summer lake camp experience," full of constant activity and ever changing events.

The Hawks arrived in Florence, Lauderdale County, Alabama just in time to get caught on the June 16, 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Township 1, Range 12. The pristine lumber camp was waiting for them and the crew was assembling. The U.S. Federal Census recorded the adventure: John Weston Hawks, wife Lucy, son George W. (wife Martha stayed at home with her parents), son John N. with his wife Jane, daughter Ann and nephew William Clark are listed.

Soon the Hawks-Lambert Logging Camp was a bustle of activity. Oak and Hickory logs were felled with practiced efficiency, as twelve foot long cross cut saws created "mountains of saw dust." Tall block and tackle pulley system loaders, with their swinging arms, were used to move logs to their means of transportation. Small steamed powered locomotives could be heard throughout the forest, rumbling along narrow temporary train tracks, carrying logs from interior woodlots. Other logs were loaded onto sturdy wagons pulled by large draft horses and oxen. Timber was carefully checked, counted, labeled, and separated according to grade. As soon as a load of logs was launched toward Florence, Alabama's train station in town, another shipment in need of processing took its place, while John oversaw the operations.

Lucy, daughter-in-law Jane Bedford, and daughter Ann served their men dinner on linen table cloths and china each night. They spent their days reading novels, painting and sewing "needle-point." They explored the lakes and streams, avoided work sites, and enjoyed the pristine beauty of the woodland. Fines were given to any man using foul language in front of the ladies, or daring to approach the lake when the females were swimming.

By the time the snow fell, a well exercised crew, management, and the Hawks family had completed their tasks and went back to Cass County, Michigan. With an exciting adventure under their belts, and their banks accounts nicely padded, life went back to normal.

John spent the next ten years in semi-retirement living in Silver Creek Township with wife Lucy, leaving much of the running of his share of the business to his sons and nephews. He became a gentleman farmer, visited his favored leased farm acreage often, spent time with grandchildren, and enjoyed his extended family. With the number of surrounding forests reduced in size due to early logging, and in need of time to replenish themselves, western Cass County became a home base for sending logging camps to other areas, or coaxing local farmers to part with their still

remaining woodlots. All was not "sunshine and roses," however.

To John Weston Hawks' horror, he had to "watch history repeat itself." Son, John N., became involved in a scandal that hurt his wife Jane badly. When father John W. took a position on the issue that he felt was most honorable, a rift developed between his son and himself. Though the circumstances were different than what happened between John W. and his father Gershom, the results were the same. The argument escalated to the point of estrangement, and John N. left the state never to return. Father and son never talked to one another again, and John W. lived with the sorrow.

In 1880, with John's failing health, he and Lucy had to make a change. Unlike today's custom of going to assisted care centers or retirement homes, in that era, when patriarchs and matriarchs of a family began their decline, they moved in with younger family members. The extended family of the Hawks/Bedfords/Conklins/Garretts/Gilberts, who had intermarried, took care of their own; it had always been that way. They all maintained a strong sense of togetherness. It was, also, a social custom of the times, and a matter of practicality. In that era, the young felt it was their duty to protect their aging relatives, and the relative's wealth that had been generated over a life time, from unscrupulous manipulators. Rarely were the old left to flounder.

After a family conference, it was decided that relatives Gilbert Conklin and wife Maria Bedford had the space needed in their home for boarding John and Lucy. In this case, at this time in history, their son George W. had a full house, with no room to spare, as his children were still at home. Ann had married and left the state. The 1880 U.S. Federal Census, for Silver Creek Township, recorded the arrangement.

In 1888, frail and hard of hearing, John Weston Hawks (age 78) decided he wanted to visit one of his logging company's camp sites, for the last time. Insisting his son George W. take him to Allegan, Michigan. They made the long trip in a horse and buggy, with George W. driving. A picnic basket had been packed, the weather was sunny, and old John W. was having "one of his better days." It was a long trip, with many stops along the way.

Using his cane, John W. would slowly wonder through the forest in the camp, watch the young muscular lumberjacks cut down trees, and inhale the smell of saw dust. He missed his youth, and the life he had once lived. Son George W. spent several days there with his father, giving the old man a chance to reminisce and enjoy himself.

George W., who usually escorted his father around the site, was called to the camp office to help solve a problem. John W. promised to stay in the blacksmith shop and wait for his son. As time passed, aging John's mind wondered, and for some reason he decided to go back into the forest. When George returned to get his father, the old man was gone. Searching the surrounding area, he found his patriarch off in the distance watching the felling of a tree. As the lumberjacks yelled "timber" and ran, the huge giant deciduous listed to the right, then careened, snapping at a forty-five degree angle in its descent toward old John W.. Realizing what was happening, George W. started yelling at his father to run, and he, himself, raced as fast as he could to save his father. The tree was called a "widow-maker" (having many twisting branches that off set the center of balance, making its fall path unpredictable). Try as he might to escape, Old John was not fast enough, and he met a crushing death.

Grandson Guy Wesley Hawks (who was age 15 when his grandfather John W. died) left a note saying that John W. was cremated, and that his urn sat on Uncle George W.'s fireplace mantel for

years. It was further stated that, after Grandmother Lucy Ann died and was interned at Indian Lake Cemetery, George W. took his father's ashes, and buried them in front of her grave stone himself. However, there are no official cemetery records verifying this statement. Cass County, Michigan Probate Records (Calendar G, Wills/Pet/Bands/Letters, #22, pg. 295) confirm the legal probating of the will in 1889, but make no mention of the cremation or burial.

In conclusion, John Weston Hawks was a tinsman, logger, lumberjack, river log driver, and surveyor. He was a sawyer, saw mill operator, timber office manager, and timber scout. John served as a lumber broker, buyer, labor negotiator and timber company representative. His life story parallels the development of Michigan's logging industry. Though his time was sometimes filled with sadness and regret, he lived a full and colorful existence. He helped found a family logging enterprise that lasted for generations. In the end, he died where he had lived, in Michigan's mighty forests. John Weston Hawks has earned his place in Cass and Berrien County, Michigan history.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: A slight contradiction about John Weston Hawks' mother exists in published genealogies. In 1898, John Clark Cooley published his "Rathbone Genealogy" leading one to assume that 2nd wife Hannah Rathbone, was the mother of Gershom Hawks' children (not 1st wife Hannah Weston, as others claimed). Genealogists for "John Hawkes of Hadley, Massachusetts Descendants," writer/researcher Imogene Hawks Lane, and the "Adam Hawks Association" have held fast to the assertion that Hannah Weston was the mother of John Weston Hawks. Guy Wesley Hawks, the grandson of John W. was a teenager when his grandfather died. Guy addressed the Rathbone presentation, in 1930, leaving family notes on the subject. He said, "Grandfather knew whom his own mother was and she was Hannah Weston." The parentage of the rest of the children, according to family notes, are given in this article. Genealogy is a discipline full of discrepancies, and subject to interpretation, despite writers good faith, especially when old official documents are vague.

RESEARCH

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