

The Wood Block

By Carol Gaillard



The Wood Block, a three-story brick building, built c. 1873, is located at the north end of downtown Hoosick Falls. The building is the last remaining structure built by Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Co., which was established in Hoosick Falls in the 1840s and was one of the largest farm equipment manufacturers in the United States.

In 1882, dentist Dr. C.H. Boynton had offices in the Wood Block; he used ether and gas in extractions and all work was warranted and reasonably priced. A.W. Jennings, M.D. was an eclectic and homeopathic physician and surgeon who specialized in chronic cases; all calls were promptly attended to day or night.

E. R. Estabrook was a general insurance agent with fair rates and prompt payment of losses. He represented some well-known companies. The offices were upstairs in the Wood Block in Estabrook's Photography Rooms, meaning E.R. was additionally a photographer. He also held the post of secretary to Hoosick Falls Water Supply Company housed in the Wood Block. Edwin Maxon came on as a photographer, as did James West and W.H. Estabrook as manager of the Crayon Artist Association.

William M. Archibald was at No. 6 in the Wood Block; he sold pure drugs and medicine, plus perfume and toilet articles, wines and liquors for medicinal purpose, choice cigars, artists' materials, and confectionary.

The Father Matthew Total Abstinence Society, established in 1870, had neatly furnished rooms in the Wood Block on Classic Street. While now there is no public entrance to the Wood Block on Classic Street, there was originally an arched carriageway at the rear of the Wood Block. It passed through from John Street to Classic. Today if you look carefully at the exterior of the western end of the north and south sides you can still see the outline of the brick arches. The carriageway was bricked in, creating an office space which is rented today. 200 members belonged to the society, with Reverend J.D. Waldron as the spiritual director. There was a 300-volume library with daily and weekly newspapers available. It was open every evening and often held social balls. In 1908 the society moved to Elm Street.

The Empire Order of Mutual Aid, No. 181 met the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Also meeting at the Wood Block were the Masons, VanRensselaer Lodge #400, established in 1856.

The First National Bank was started May 3, 1880, with capital of \$60,000; one of the founders was Walter A. Wood. The bank was the only one of its kind in town and was open every day except Sundays and holidays from 10am to 3pm. By 1916 the bank had capital and surplus of \$200,000, assets of over \$1,300,000, and offered safe deposit boxes. By 1931 The First National Bank had become People's First National Bank and was located at 14 and 16 Main Street.

In 1901, the Permanent Savings and Loan Association, formed in 1889, opened their office on the floor above the First National Bank.

The Rensselaer Co. Standard was published at 7 Main. It was a newspaper with a subscription rate of one year for \$1.50 paid in advance or 6 months for \$.75. Single copies were offered for sale at newsrooms.

The Marshall Brothers, John and Rudolph, were fashionable hairdressers who offered hot and cold baths, imported and domestic cigars, tobacco and pipes. They also offered ladies' shampooing done in private residences. Another dealer in cigars and tobacco was A. Garbarino, who also sold nuts, fruits, vegetables, canned goods, candies, ice cream, and lemonade.

Moon's Orchestra, with Charles F. Moon as conductor, furnished string and brass music for balls, parties, picnics, and parades. Moon was also the manager of Wood's Opera House. Connected with Wood's Opera House was the W.A. Wood Mower and Reaper Band. It was largely supported by Walter A. Wood and joined the 2nd Vermont Regiment during the Civil War. They had a valuable set of instruments and Charles F. Moon was their leader.

John Kokley, a merchant tailor, offered cutting, cleaning, and pressing of men's and ladies' clothing. Another custom tailor was A. McGowan, who cleaned, pressed and repaired clothing, made suits to order, and had a full line of samples on hand to select from. His motto was "The Best of Workmanship, Satisfaction Guaranteed." In 1901, another clothier, hatter and gent's furnisher, Ely, A.R. & C., set up shop at 5 Main Street.

In 1889 the Young Men's Christian Association took four large rooms that were fitted up in a very home-like and comfortable manner. Also in that year, William B. Putnam opened his office as a physician and surgeon. By 1923 Dr. Putnam is not listed, but Clayton Shaw, physician and surgeon is. By 1934, Robert E. Maderer is listed as a physician.

In 1923, a dentist, Walter J. Shea, took up practice in the Wood Block. Joining him in 1931 is dentist Homer Rowley.

Attorneys and Counselors at Law, George E. Greene and Herbert J., opened offices on the second floor. Willis E. Heaton, a Troy lawyer, whom we met before in the Cheney Block, had evening and Saturday offices in the Wood Block.

In the 1940 directory for numbers 1 – 7 Wood Block are: George S. McKearin, general insurance; George E. Greene, lawyer; the Permanent Savings and Loan Association; Homer Rowley, dentist; Clayton Shaw, physician; Walter Shea, dentist; Robert Maderer, physician; the Masonic Hall; W.H. Ely, clothing; and the Hoosick Supply Co. Inc., hardware.

In 1949 the Grand Union moved into numbers 5 – 7 Main Street; John Davidson took up 1 Main Street as a lawyer and Dr. Maderer moved to 89 Main Street next to Immaculate Conception.

In 1952, Chemical Corporation had offices in the block; they were still there in 1955 when George Dougherty, Jr. started practicing law. In 1957 more changes were made on the second-floor offices of the Wood Block. The Permanent Savings & Loan Association had occupied offices in the front northeast corner; they moved into the offices of Dr. H.S. Rowley, who had died. John Davidson took

over the Savings & Loan quarters and subsequently Attorney William H. Ivimey became an associate in the law office.

By 1960, the Permanent Savings and Loan had moved to 27 Main Street and the Grand Union had moved to 20 Main Street, paving the way for the opening of the Ben Franklin store. In 1965, numbers 1 – 7 of the Wood Block were occupied by George McKearin, insurance; John Davidson and George Holbrook, lawyers; Clayton Shaw, physician; the Masonic Hall and H. H. Sternberg Variety/ Ben Franklin.

There were some attempts at bringing a supermarket to the Wood Block. In August of 1982 the Village Food Circus was opened by Wayne Butkus and James Liles, who were both former employees of Food Circus stores in Troy. In November the owners changed the name to Falls Market. In October 1983 they closed the doors.

Wood Block Associates was a limited partner group that included Philip Dunn, Jr. as the principal investor, Robert Scott, Rolf Sternberg and several others. They purchased the building in March 1982 from an interim owner, Bill Andrick. Convenient Food Mart, who operated food markets throughout the Capital District, opened a store on the first floor.

The second floor had been made into apartments, which Wood Block Associates tore out and made into six office suites. Philip Dunn and CPA Robert Scott each had an office on the second floor. For 50 years the McKearin Insurance Agency had taken the space formally occupied by People's National Bank; now that they were no longer there, Philip wanted to see a business supply store, a men's clothing store, an art gallery or a high-end craft store take over the space.

On the third floor were two large rooms, formerly the Masonic Temple and Wood Block Opera House. Both rooms had arched ceilings about 25 feet high. Dunn wanted to see the Opera House refurbished and used for musical events. Unfortunately, Dunn died in April of 2001 and his wife Sheila inherited his partnership. Meanwhile Rolf Sternberg had been managing the building and he continued to do so.

Enter CiviCure: a 510c3 not-for-profit organization founded in 2000 as Civic and Cultural Restoration Corporation. Their mission is to revitalize the economy of Hoosick Falls through active stewardship of the community's rich heritage and rural environs and the art inspired by them. The goal of their mission is the enrichment of the greater Hoosick community by stimulating the creative economy, supporting the preservation and enhancement of the farm economy, and protecting and promoting the beauty of the natural environment while making regional and national audiences aware of the extraordinary resources of the Hoosick area as a destination for visitors.

Two of the founding members were Rolf Sternberg and Edward Gorman, who had their law offices on upper Classic Street. They worked along with others to promote Hoosick Falls and the Wood Block. Beginning in 2005, CiviCure worked with the Village of Hoosick Falls to administer a \$200,000 New York Main Street Grant. This project resulted in significant architectural renovations for more than ten buildings centered on the Main, John and Classic Street area.

In 2009, CiviCure received a \$50,000 NYS Legislative Initiative Grant to pursue the development of a

website, programs and the overall goal of acquiring the downtown anchor building, Wood Block. With the support of numerous generous donors, the Wood Block Building was purchased mortgage free by CiviCure in April 2017, at which time the deed was transferred. A ribbon cutting and open house was held on October 28, 2017.

CiviCure receive was awarded a NYS Main Street Revitalization Grant of \$200,000 in 2018. The \$150,000 in state funds was matched by \$50,000 raised by CiviCure. The funds replaced the Wood Block roof and roof structures and restored the roofline masonry that is one of the most distinctive features of the building. The job was accomplished in August of 2020.